



The Experiences of LGBTQ+ Women Candidates

A REPORT FROM THE *WHEN WE RUN* SURVEY

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LGBTQ+ women continue to be underrepresented among LGBTQ+ elected officials in the United States, with 501 currently serving, representing just 39.1% of LGBTQ+ elected officials nationwide.¹ While most LGBTQ+ candidates face significant and unique challenges on the campaign trail, this report brief highlights the challenges LGBTQ+ women face at higher rates than gay and bisexual men, according to survey data from LGBTQ+ Victory Institute and Loyola Marymount University's 2023 *When We Run* report – the largest survey of LGBTQ+ elected officials in U.S. history.

LGBTQ+ women face obstacles at greater rates than gay and bisexual men even before entering the race – and these disparities continue in various ways on the campaign trail. This report brief shows women are more likely to be discouraged to run and worry more about harassment or attacks on the trail. When running, they are more likely to be attacked for their personal appearance and their gender identity, while voters and media often fail to treat their candidacies fairly. For trans women, these obstacles are even more widespread.

Included in this brief are the statistically significant differences (unless otherwise noted) in experiences between LGBTQ+ women and gay and bisexual men when running for office, as found in data from the *When We Run* report.

Insights: *Before the Campaign Trail*

- ▼ More than one in four LGBTQ+ women (27.2%) were discouraged to run because of their gender or gender identity – a rate four times higher than gay and bisexual men (7.1%). This experience was particularly common for trans women – with one in three (35.7%) discouraged to run because of their gender identity compared to 25.2% of lesbian, bisexual and queer cisgender women.
- ▼ LGBTQ+ women worried about harassment or attacks before running in higher proportions (83.7%) than gay and bisexual men (77.4%) – a potentially significant deterrent for running for office. The share of lesbian, bisexual and queer cisgender women worrying about harassment or attacks (84%) was similar to that of trans women (82.1%).³

Insights: *On the Campaign Trail*

- ▼ LGBTQ+ women were more likely than men to be attacked for their personal appearance on the campaign trail. Four in ten LGBTQ+ women (40.1%) faced attacks based on their appearance or the way they dress, compared to 27.8% of gay and bisexual men. LGBTQ+ women were also attacked more frequently than men for their personal appearance. More than one in ten (10.9%) LGBTQ+ women received attacks based on their appearance at least weekly, compared to 4.1% of gay and bisexual men. A higher share of lesbian, bisexual and queer cisgender women (42%) reported being attacked for their appearance than trans women (32.1%).⁴

- ▼ LGBTQ+ women were more likely than men to face prejudice because of their gender identity. Among LGBTQ+ women, 15% faced prejudice because of their gender identity, compared to 2.3% of gay and bisexual men. Trans women faced the most prejudice because of their gender identity, with about one in three (32.1%) experiencing it, and 10.9% of lesbian, bisexual and queer women experiencing it.
- ▼ LGBTQ+ women were more likely to face gender-based violence on the campaign trail. One in 20 (5.4%) LGBTQ+ women said they actually experienced gender-based violence during their campaign, compared to 1.9% of gay and bisexual men. Among trans women, 7.1% faced gender-based violence during their campaign, while one in twenty (5%) lesbian, bisexual and queer cisgender women faced that violence.
- ▼ LGBTQ+ women reported difficulty being taken seriously at higher rates than men. Between one in four and one in three (28.6%) LGBTQ+ women said difficulty being taken seriously during the campaign was a top challenge, compared to about one in five (21.4%) gay and bisexual men. This challenge was especially severe for trans women, with 32.1% facing difficulty being taken seriously, compared to 27.7% of lesbian, bisexual and queer cisgender women.
- ▼ LGBTQ+ women faced media challenging their qualifications to a larger degree than men. Among lesbian, bisexual, and queer cisgender women, 16% experienced media challenging their qualifications, compared to 10.5% of gay and bisexual men.

¹According to the Out for America map, on March 8, 2024, lesbian, bisexual, and queer cisgender women held 36.3% of positions held by LGBTQ+ elected officials and trans women 3.0%.

²For the 2023 report, *When We Run: The Motivations, Experiences and Challenges of LGBTQ+ Candidates in the United States*, Loyola Marymount University's LGBTQ+ Politics Research Initiative and LGBTQ+ Victory Institute conducted the largest survey of LGBTQ+ candidates in U.S. history to learn about the experiences and challenges of LGBTQ+ candidates. Of the 474 LGBTQ+ survey respondents who ran for office between 2018 and 2022, 119 identified as cisgender women and 28 as transgender women. The full report, authored by Gabriele Magni and Elliot Imse, can be accessed at <https://victoryinstitute.org/resource/when-we-run-the-motivations-experiences-and-challenges-of-lgbtq-candidates-in-the-united-states/>

³This difference is not statistically significant.

⁴This difference is not statistically significant.

The **LGBTQ+ Politics Research Initiative at Loyola Marymount University** advances the study of the political behavior of LGBTQ+ individuals, fosters conversations with LGBTQ+ leaders and offers research opportunities to students.

Through research, trainings and leadership programs, **LGBTQ+ Victory Institute** works around the world to increase LGBTQ+ representation and participation in the political process.

