

Girls Inc. She Votes is an educational, non-partisan initiative that gives girls the skills and confidence to envision themselves as both future voters and future candidates.

Begun in 2004, this biennial project helps girls understand the American political system and prepares them for a life as engaged citizens. Through Girls Inc. She Votes, girls get hands-on experience with voting, and learn about voter registration, the importance of women in politics, who represents them at various levels of office, and how to run campaigns.

In the fall of 2012, 56 local Girls Inc. affiliates around the country participated in She Votes. They enabled 4424 girls to cast ballots in the Girls Inc. Mock Election, in which girls cast votes for the real presidential candidates and often for down-ticket races like U.S. Senate, governor, and mayor.

Each Girls Inc. affiliate conducts She Votes and the Mock Election differently. For example, at Girls Inc. of Jacksonville girls also voted on issues pertinent to them. One question on the ballot asked girls whether school vending machines should sell soda (yes) and whether Girls Inc. should allow boys to enroll (no). Girls at Girls Inc. of Lynn, MA voted against legalization of medical marijuana.

Girls Inc. of Central Alabama girls learned about voter registration and filled out the state of Alabama official voter registration forms. Girls Inc. of Kingsport, TN had two girls "stand-in" as Barack Obama and Mitt Romney for a Presidential debate, with girls in the audience asking questions. Girls Inc. of Southwestern Connecticut met the mayor and got a tour of City Hall.



"When I turn 18, I will vote for my ancestors who couldn't and the women that couldn't."

- Gabriel, age 11

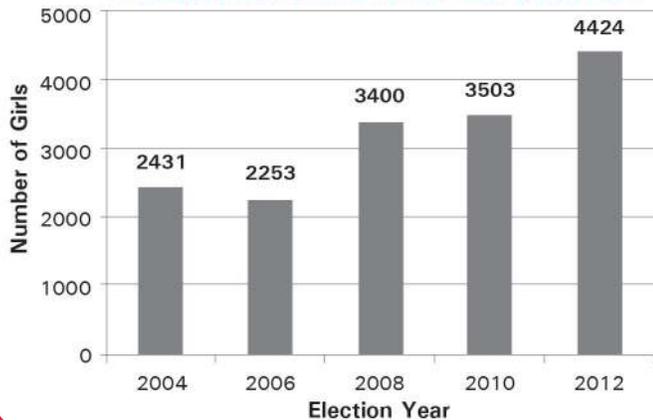


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Girls Inc. Mock Election



“I feel good [about the mock election], because since we can’t vote until 18, it gives us a preview of what it’s like.”

- Zuemie, age 11

Many affiliates invited political candidates and other officials to speak to the girls. At Girls Inc. of Carpinteria, CA, candidates running for local office read their favorite books to girls and answered questions they had about voting and politics. Girls spoke to candidates for the School Board, Fire Board, and Water District, and probed them about voting rights and running for office. U.S. Senator Kelly Ayotte (R-NH), Senate candidate Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), and Gubernatorial candidate Maggie Hassan (D-NH) also spoke to Girls Inc. girls this fall, along with an array of county clerks, mayors, and others. At Girls Inc. of Sarasota, FL, girls ran for Mayor, Vice Mayor, Historian, Secretary, and Treasurer themselves, complete with speeches. In order to strengthen girls’ understanding of office, these newly elected officials will serve



one-year terms and then face reelection. For this project, Girls Inc. of Sarasota partnered with the local county supervisor of elections and a local judge, who swore the girls into office.

This year, inspired by the work of Nonprofit VOTE, Girls Inc. added a parent outreach component to She Votes. Staff created a parent “take-home card” that informs parents about the program and reassures them of its nonpartisan nature. The card, which came in both English and Spanish, has a space for girls to track their age for each coming election until they finally turn 18 and can vote in a real election. The take-home card also reminds parents to be good civic role models by voting themselves and taking their daughter to the polls with them.

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To generate excitement and participation among local affiliates, staff at the national level printed “I Voted” stickers and offered them for free to any participating affiliates. Girls Inc. also publicized resources from Nonprofit VOTE, and sent bi-weekly email reminders about voter registration, how to host a debate-watch party, and the anniversary of the 19th Amendment.

The mock election and the entire She Votes program attracted a record number of participants this year. The program helped girls uncover their leadership potential, giving them the opportunity to see themselves as active participants in their communities. Their enthusiasm is contagious, and extends to adults in their lives, and to their future selves.



circumstances, need champions on such issues as education, health, Title IX, and juvenile justice. Girls Inc. She Votes helps girls and local staff understand their power—and responsibility—to elect leaders that represent their views. They gain confidence in their knowledge of the political process, and even develop relationships with locally-elected officials.

The Mock Election came out of a body of research concluding that voting behavior is, in part, a gradually acquired habit. Girls Inc. wanted to start that habit out early—increasing the chances that girls will vote at age 18. In addition, one of the strongest indicators that a young adult will vote is parent voting behavior. Since many Girls Inc. parents may not vote due to inflexible work hours, immigrant status, transportation barriers, or other factors, Girls Inc. wants to model good voting behavior for girls to follow.

To keep the momentum in 2006, a Congressional mid-term election, staff created a She Votes Ballot Initiative for all girls to vote on. The ballot question concerned mandatory P.E., and was voted on by 2253 girls.

In 2008, with generous support from the Brico Fund, Girls Inc. developed a She Votes



Origins of Girls Inc. She Votes

Girls Inc. She Votes was started by the Girls Inc. Public Policy Office in 2004 to address the under-representation of women in U.S. politics. Advocacy is widely embraced by local Girls Inc. affiliates, who know that girls need a voice in public policy debates. Girls, especially those in difficult economic

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Activity Guide with a set of activities concerning women in politics, savvy voting, and running for office. Activities cover suffrage, deconstructing campaign commercials, registering to vote, and raising money. Appendices include a sample press release, sample speaker invitation letter, and legal considerations for nonprofits.

Women in Public Office

A look at the makeup of the 112th U.S. Congress provides a snapshot of women's political underrepresentation. In Congress in 2012, women held just 90 of the 535 seats or 16.8%. Twenty states had no women in their Congressional delegations, and no women of color served in the Senate. In 2011, just 24% of state legislators were women. South Carolina had no women in its state legislature.

The 2012 elections increased the number of women in the House to a record 78 and in the Senate to a record 20, the largest jump since 1992, the "year of the woman." However, this still constitutes only 18% of Congress. Mazie Hirono, the Senator from Hawaii, will be the only woman of color in the Senate, and only the second in history, after Carol Moseley Braun (D-IL) served from 1993-1996. The number of women governors declined from six to five.

In contrast, women have dominated the electorate for years. Since 1980, the proportion of eligible women who vote in presidential elections has surpassed that of eligible men, while the number of female voters has exceeded male voters since 1984. However, women are less likely to contribute to political campaigns, to contact their elected officials, and to declare themselves interested in public affairs at all.

In conclusion, while women are slowly increasing their representation at various levels of public office, women—especially women of color—are still drastically underrepresented and many women avoid claiming a strong political voice. Girls Inc. She Votes exists to help change this dynamic.



*"I like voting, I like
talking about politics!"*

- Ciara, age 11

About Girls Inc.

Girls Inc. inspires all girls to be strong, smart, and bold through life-changing programs and experiences that help girls navigate gender, economic, and social barriers. Research-based curricula, delivered by trained, mentoring professionals in a positive all-girl environment equip girls to achieve academically; lead healthy and physically active lives; manage money; navigate media messages; and discover an interest in science, technology, engineering, and math. The network of local Girls Inc. nonprofit organizations serves 125,000 girls ages 6 - 18 annually across the United States and Canada. Learn more about our programs and advocacy at www.girlsinc.org.