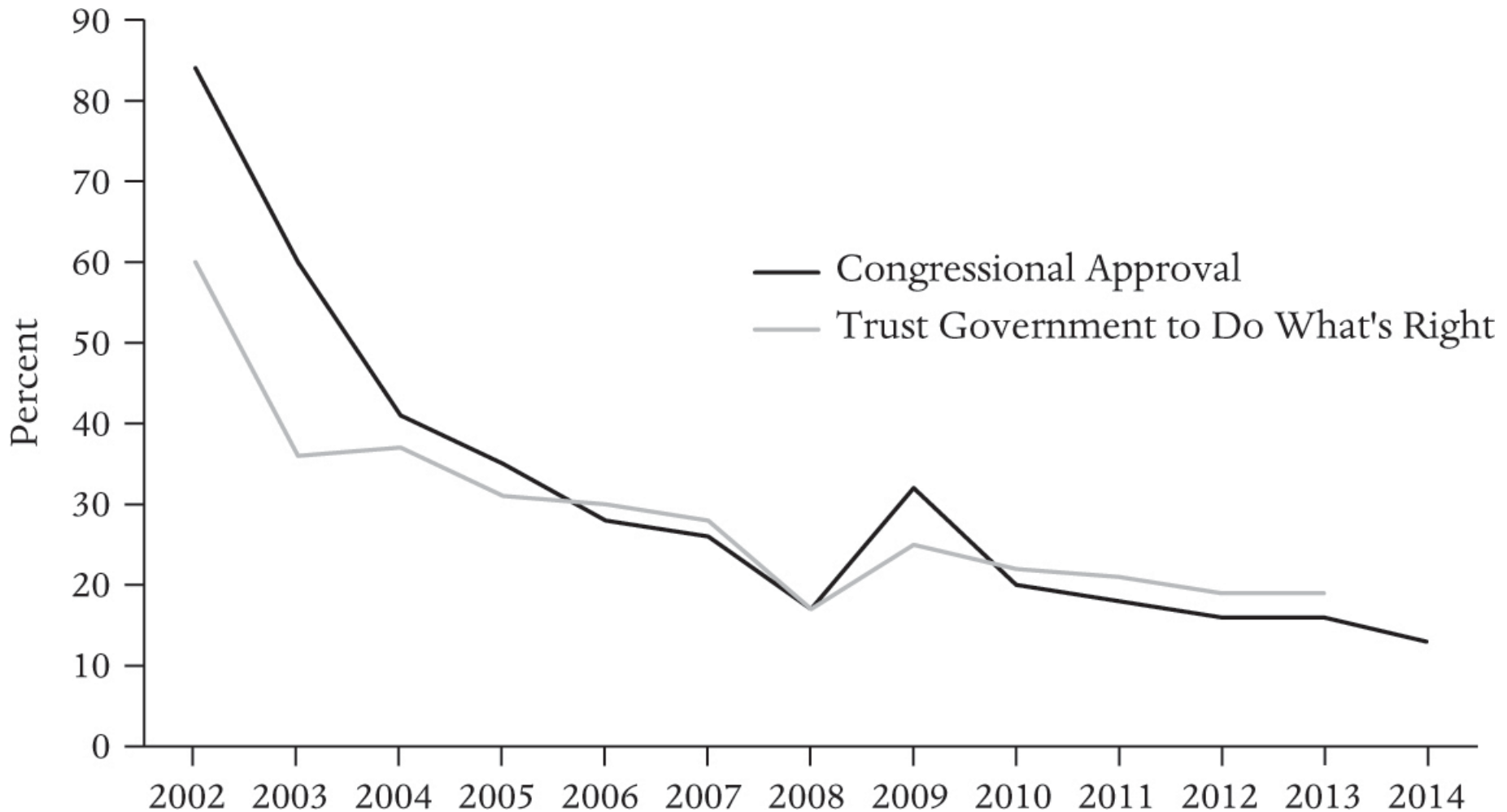


Running from Office

Why Young Americans Are Turned Off to Politics

Richard L. Fox
Loyola Marymount University
Los Angeles, California

Trust in the Federal Government and Congressional Approval, 2002 – 2014



Relative Popularity of the U.S. Congress

Rank Higher than Congress

	Margin
Lice	+48 %
Brussel sprouts	+46
Colonoscopies	+27
Used-car salesmen	+25
Root canals	+24
Traffic jams	+22
France	+9
Political pundits	+3
Cockroaches	+2
Donald Trump	+2

Rank Lower than Congress

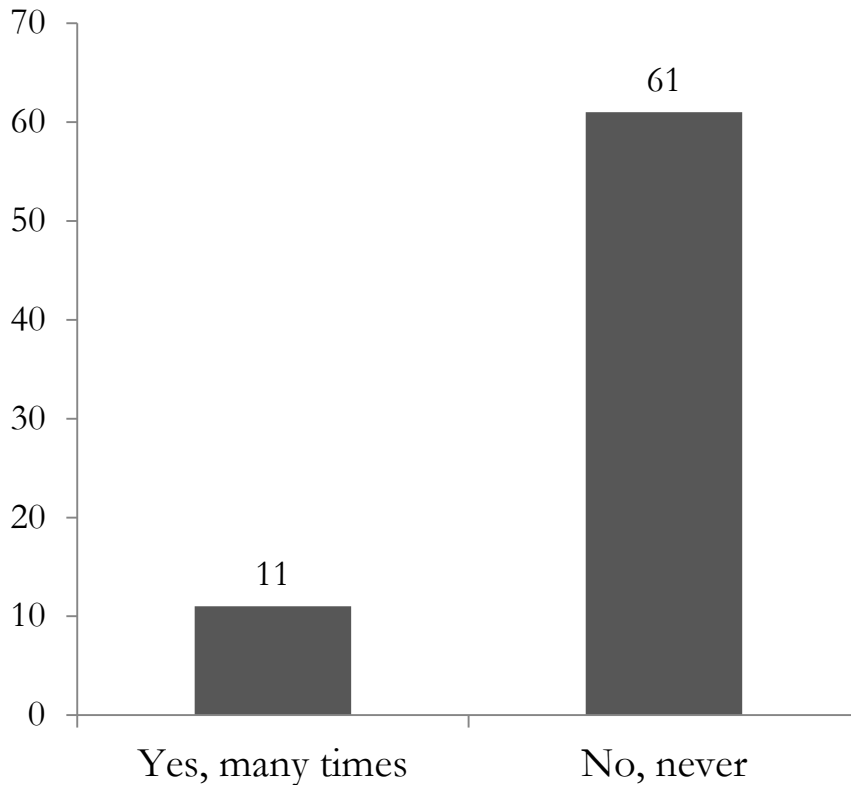
	Margin
Lindsay Lohan	-4 %
Telemarketers	-10
The Kardashians	-13
John Edwards	-16
Fidel Castro	-22
Gonorrhoea	-25
Ebola	-28
Communism	-34
North Korea	-35
Meth labs	-39

Are there consequences for young people?

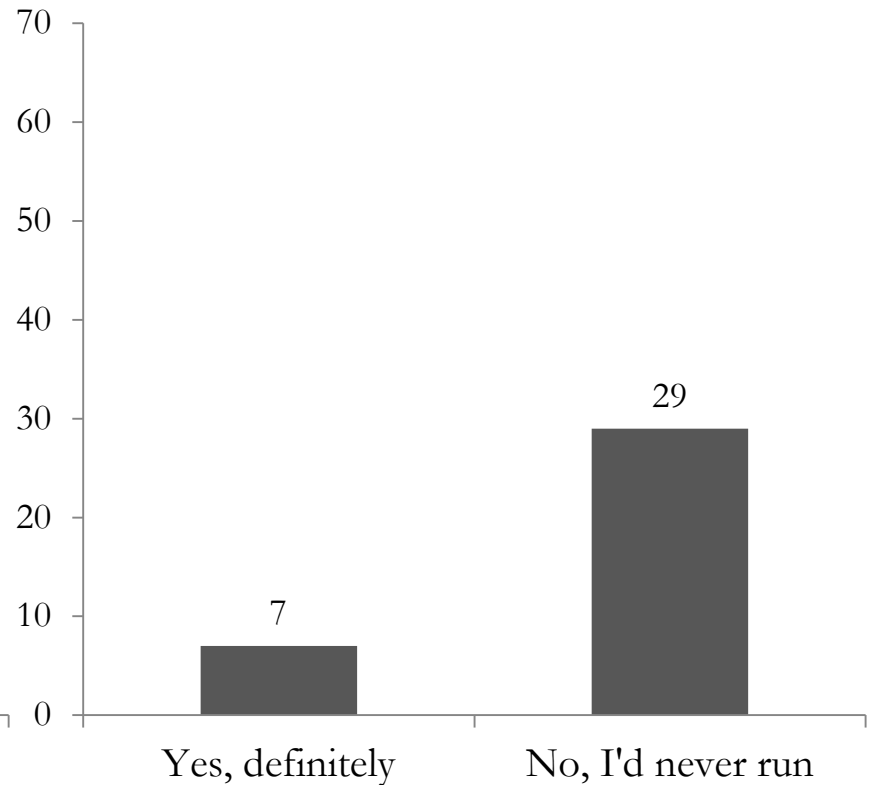
- High school and college students' career goals are excellent predictors of their occupations later in life.
- From September 27 – October 16, 2012, we surveyed a national random sample of young Americans (through GfK Custom Research LLC):
 - 2,163 high school students (ages 13 to 17)
 - 2,117 full-time college students (ages 18 to 25)
- In July and August 2013, we conducted in-depth phone interviews with 115 survey respondents.

Young People's Interest in Running for Office

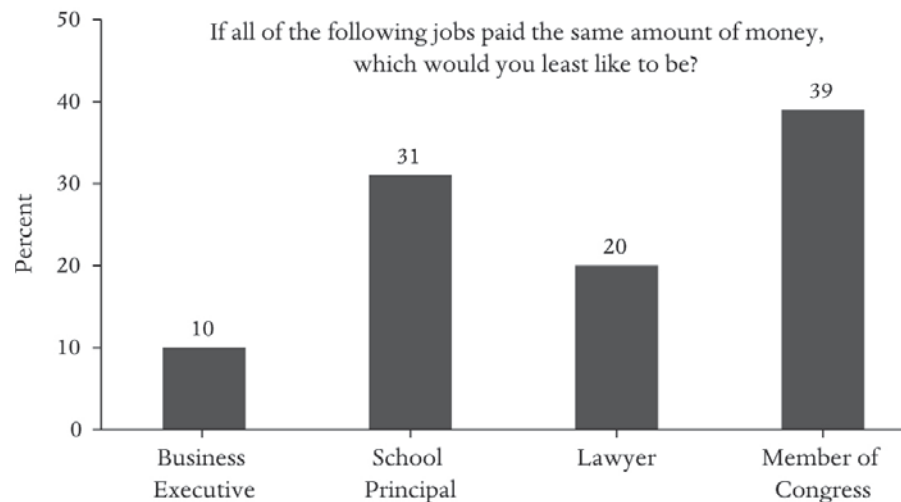
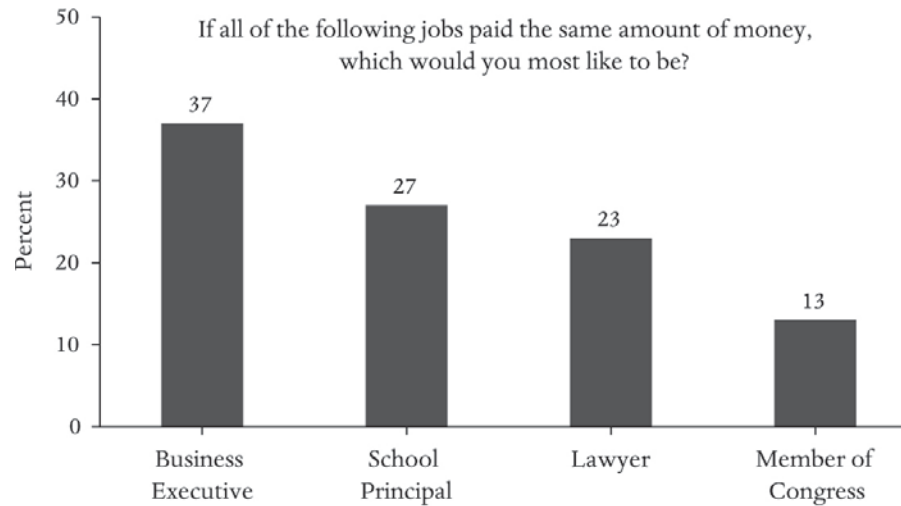
Have you ever thought that, someday, when you're older, you might want to run for a political office?



Even if you've never thought about it, could you see yourself running for office one day?



Young People's Attitudes toward Being a Member of Congress



Would you ever consider a career as a . . . ?

1. Business owner
2. Teacher
3. Artist
4. Doctor
5. Scientist
6. Nurse
7. Charity work
8. Military
9. Lawyer
10. Journalist
11. Police Officer
12. Professional Athlete
13. Secretary
14. Mechanic
15. Salesperson
16. Construction
- 17. Mayor**
- 18. Member of Congress**
- 19. President**
20. Electrician

What do you want to be when you grow up? Not a politician!

People in politics, they are squirrely. They say they're going to do something, but they don't do it. I don't want to be part of that.

– Charlotte, high school junior from Texas

I am going into farming. Politics is for people who like to bang their heads against the wall. I'd rather milk cows than run for office.

– Thornton, college senior from New York

By the time you're done with politics, your hair has turned grey. I want to keep my hair not grey. I don't even want to think about a career in politics.

– Franklin, college sophomore from Iowa

Explanation 1: Not Under My Roof

Politics in Contemporary American Families

Family Member Who Encouraged a Run

Parent	26 %
Grandparent	11
Aunt or Uncle	7
Brother or Sister	7

Frequency of Encouragement to Run

Mother has never mentioned it.	72
Father has never mentioned it.	74
Mother has suggested it a number of times.	5
Father has suggested it a number of times.	6

How would your parents feel about you being in Congress someday?

My parents just wouldn't want that for me. They would want me to do something that would make me happy.

– Gavin, high school senior

[My Dad] knows a lot about people in Congress and he doesn't like them. I don't think he'd be pleased because he didn't raise me to be like them.

– Becca, high school sophomore

My Mom would probably be fine with it. But I am sure that if she could choose, she'd want me to do something else. She knows I can do more than that.

– Sidney, high school sophomore

Explanation 2: #GovernmentSucks

How Young People Experience Politics

Today the Senate swore in a record 20 female senators. Yep, the women said they're very excited, and look forward to proving they can accomplish just as little as male senators.

– Jimmy Fallon, January 2013

A top geneticist at Stanford says human intelligence is declining. You know what that means? We are seeing Congress at its smartest and most effective right now.

– Jay Leno, February 2013

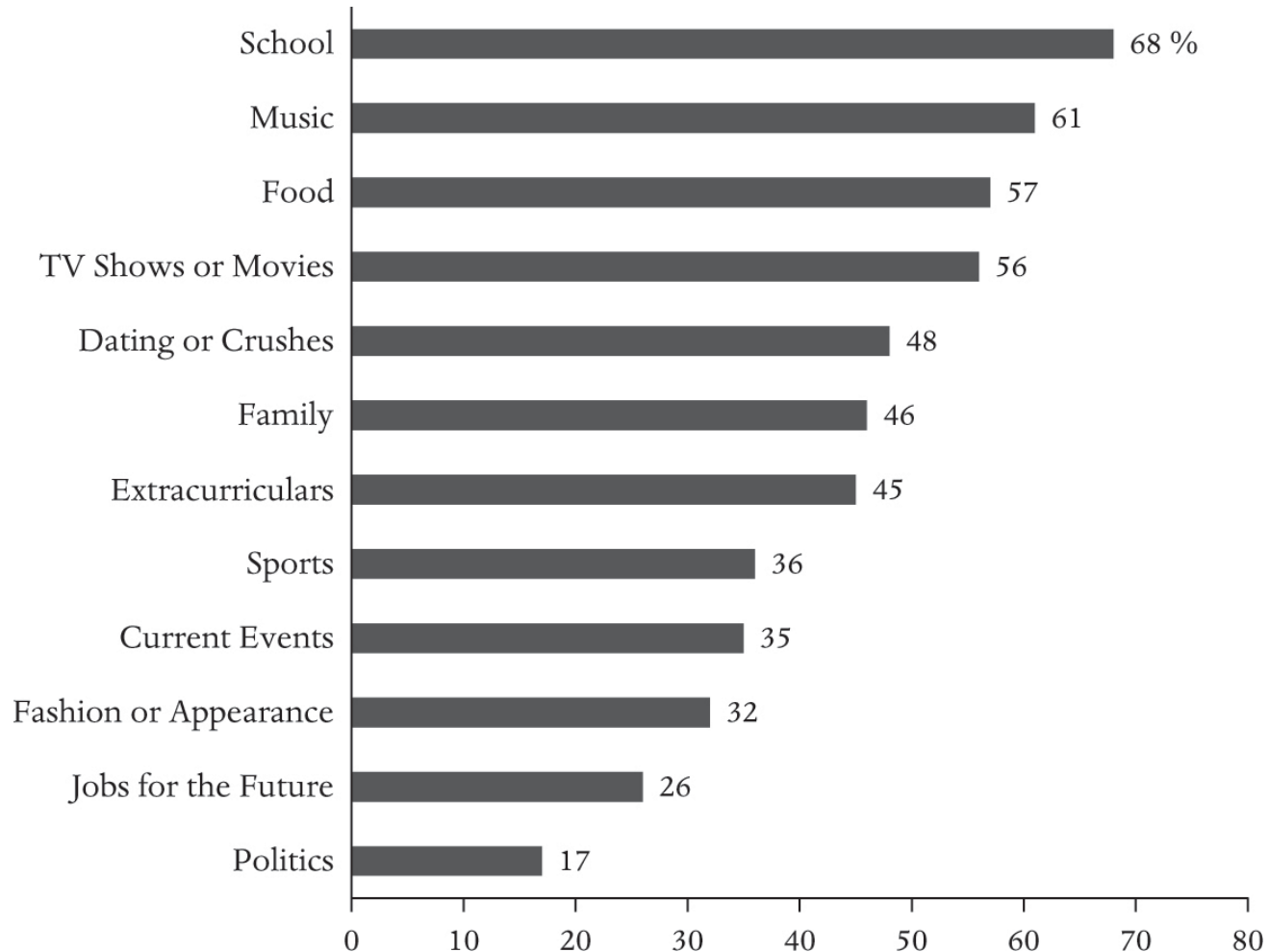
I'm not saying this Congress is bad at its job. I'm just saying that this Congress is equivalent to a skunk with its head in a jar of Skippy peanut butter.

– Jon Stewart, July 2011

Young People's Political Engagement at School

	High School	College
Political Exposure at School		
Took a government or political science class.	27 %	69 %
Saw a politician as a guest speaker.	19	29
Contacted a political leader as part of a class assignment.	9	15
Political Discussion in Classes at School		
Never	6	8
Rarely	25	26
A few times a month	33	33
At least once a week	36	32
Interest in Politics among Classmates		
Not interested	19	9
A little interested	46	26
Interested	27	44
Very interested	9	21

Topics Young People Discuss with Their Friends



Talk about politics with my friends? No thanks.

Most of my friends don't care about things outside the texting world. . . We don't care about politics. We focus on other things.

– Rebecca, high school sophomore

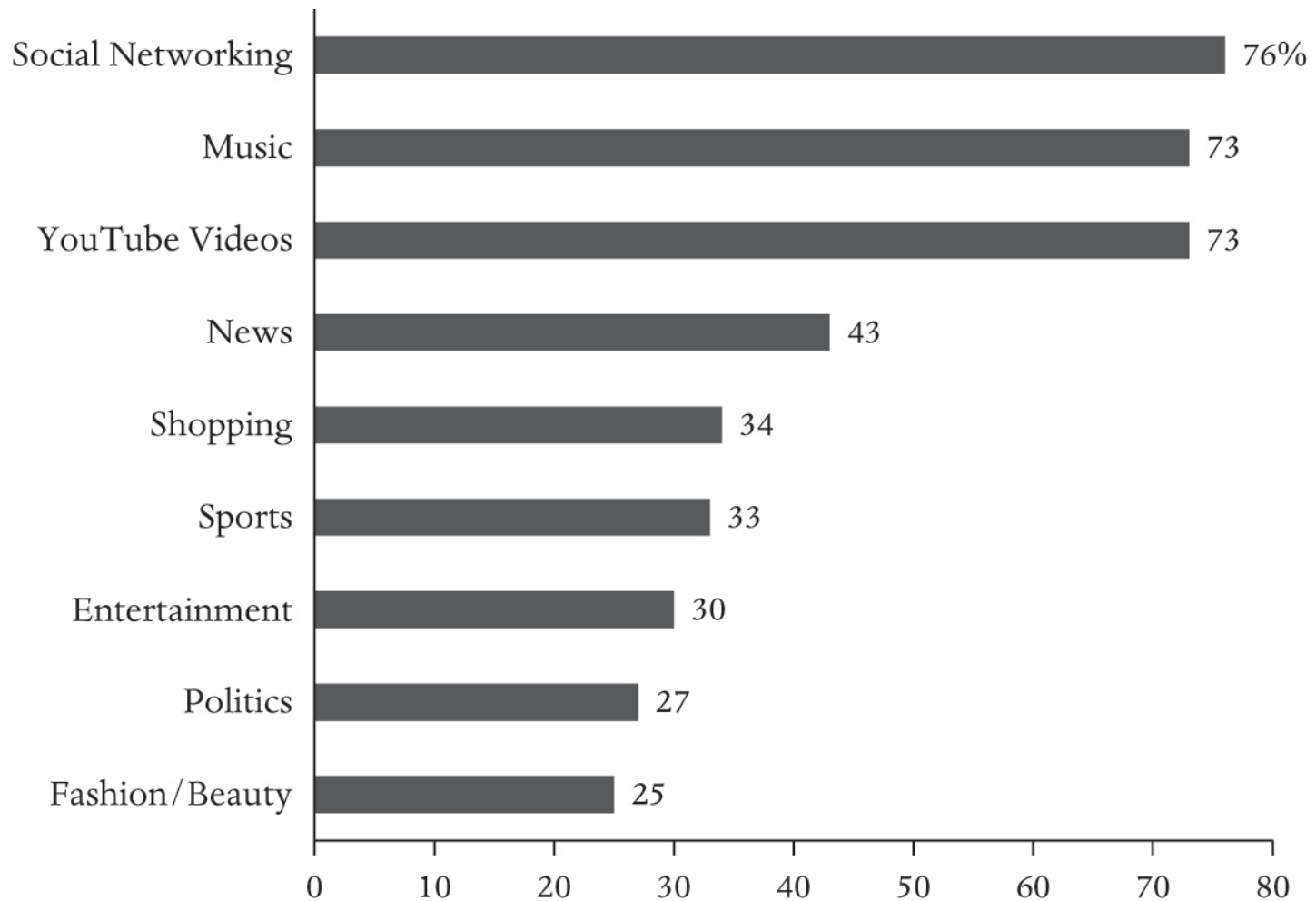
If I bring up anything more specific than a simple political fact – like, hey, Obama won the election – my friends are like, 'I don't follow.' And then that makes me want to tell them that this is our country and that they should care. But then they'll think I'm being antagonistic, so I don't do it.

– Ashley, college senior

The government isn't effective . . . It's depressing to follow. So, we don't."

– Mary, college junior

Types of Websites Young People Visit



Explanation 3: Be a Politician? But I'm Not a Corrupt Liar Only Out for Myself



Young People's Attitudes toward Politicians

Positive Attributes

Willing to stand up for what they believe	27 %
Smart and hardworking	21
Interested in wanting to help people	15
Ordinary people	12

Negative Attributes

Dishonest	42
Happy being the center of attention	38
Argumentative	38
Only out for themselves	36

Self-interested, Dishonest, Corrupt Politicians

Congress is filled with old men who are getting very little done . . . They are just self-interested incumbents who are constantly worried about reelection.

– *Juan, college junior*

Politicians have to lie all the time. That is what politicians do. I think everyone who runs in an election is a lying sack of shit. Politicians just suck.

– *Derek, high school junior*

They start out effective, but then they change . . . They probably had good intentions at the beginning, but the system feeds their egos, it makes them do bad things.

– *Anjelica, college sophomore*

But More Politics Means More Ambition

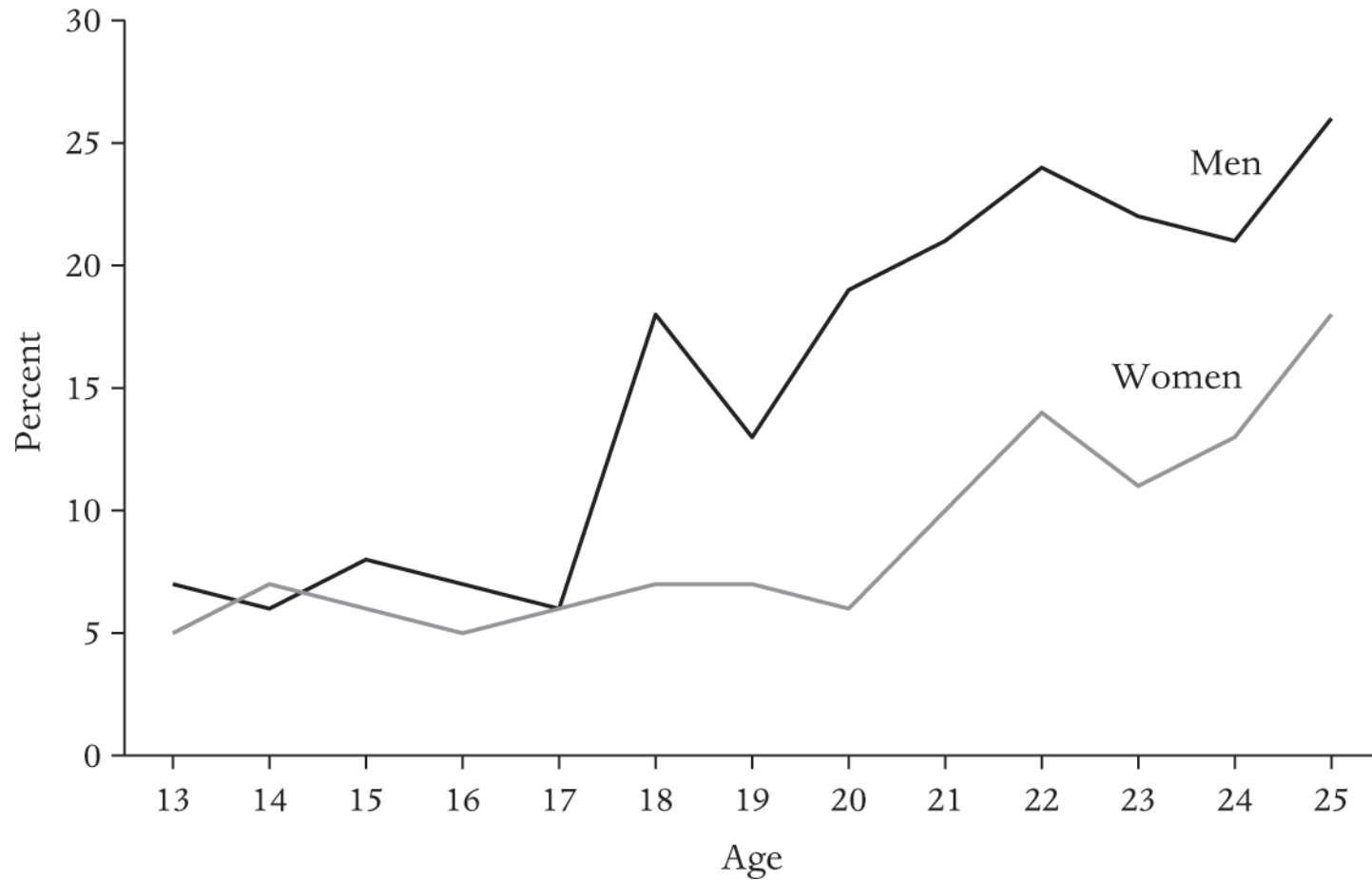
- If you talk about politics with your parents, you're **4 times** more likely to think about running.
- If your parents suggested it, you're **6 times** more likely.
- If you talk about politics even just once a week with your friends, you're **5 times** more likely.
- If you visit political websites regularly, you're **7 times** more likely.
- If you think that politicians have positive attributes, you're **5 times** more likely to think about running for office.

Charting a New Course?

5 Ways To Inspire Young People to Run for Office

- YouLead Initiative
- PlayStation for Politics
 - High school and college students average about 14 hours of video game play every week.
- Political Aptitude for College Admissions
 - In OK and AZ, only 3% of high school students would pass a citizenship test.
- GoRun App
 - There are 500,000 elected offices in the U.S. And there's no central clearinghouse that identifies them.
- College Programs Targeted at Young Women

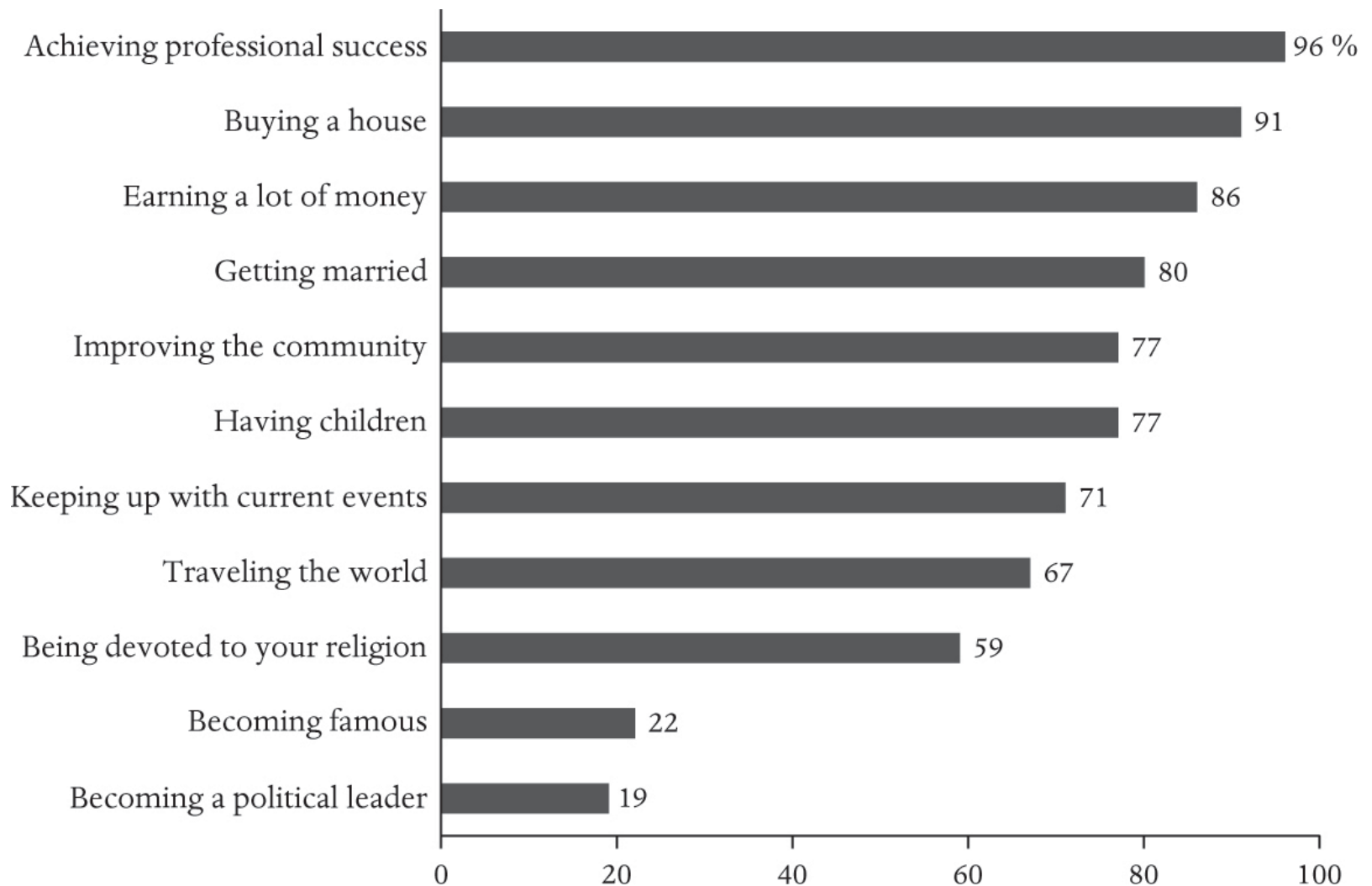
The Gender Gap in Political Ambition, by Age



Conclusions: The Bad News

- 89% of young people have written off the idea of running for office. Ever.
- Most families do not prioritize politics. And when they do talk about it, conversations are often about contempt, inefficiency, and ineffectiveness.
- At school, with friends and peers, and through the media, young people avoid exposure to politics. The little they do see and hear tends to be negative, confrontational, and divisive.
- Young people are so turned off by politicians that running for office does not even occur to them as a way to apply their leadership abilities.

Young People's Goals for the Future



Conclusions: The Good News

- Young people have the skills, potential, and desire to make the country and the world a better place.
- They just need see that running for office is a worthwhile way to do it.

