

Running from Office

Why Young Americans Are Turned Off to Politics

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What do these things have in common?

Lice

Brussel sprouts

Colonoscopies

Used-car salesmen

Root canals

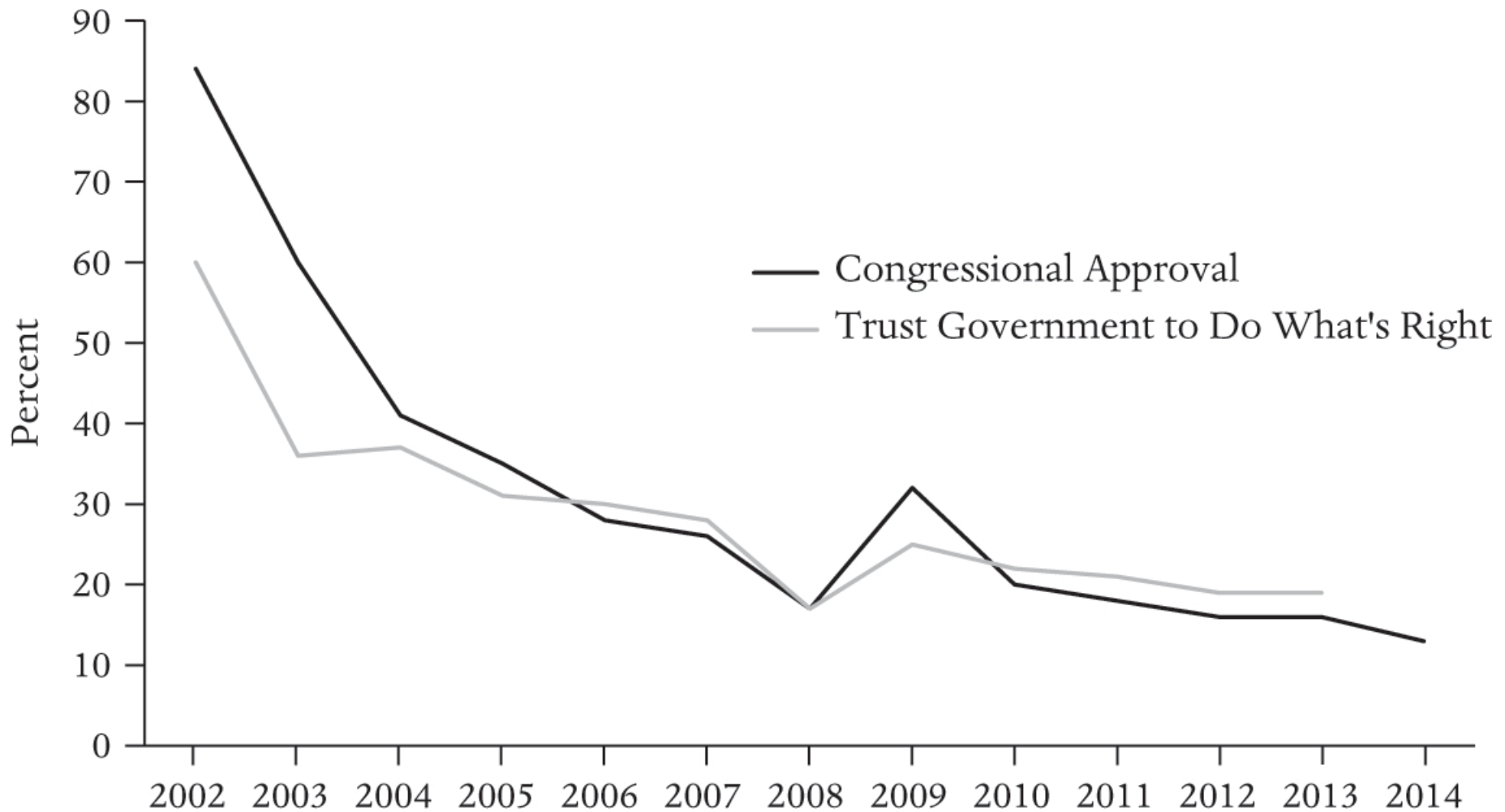
Traffic jams

Political pundits

Cockroaches

Donald Trump

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



What are the consequences?

- What does it mean when people perceive Congress as getting little done?
- What does it mean when people don't think that politicians are honest, hardworking people?
- What are the broader implications for the next generation?

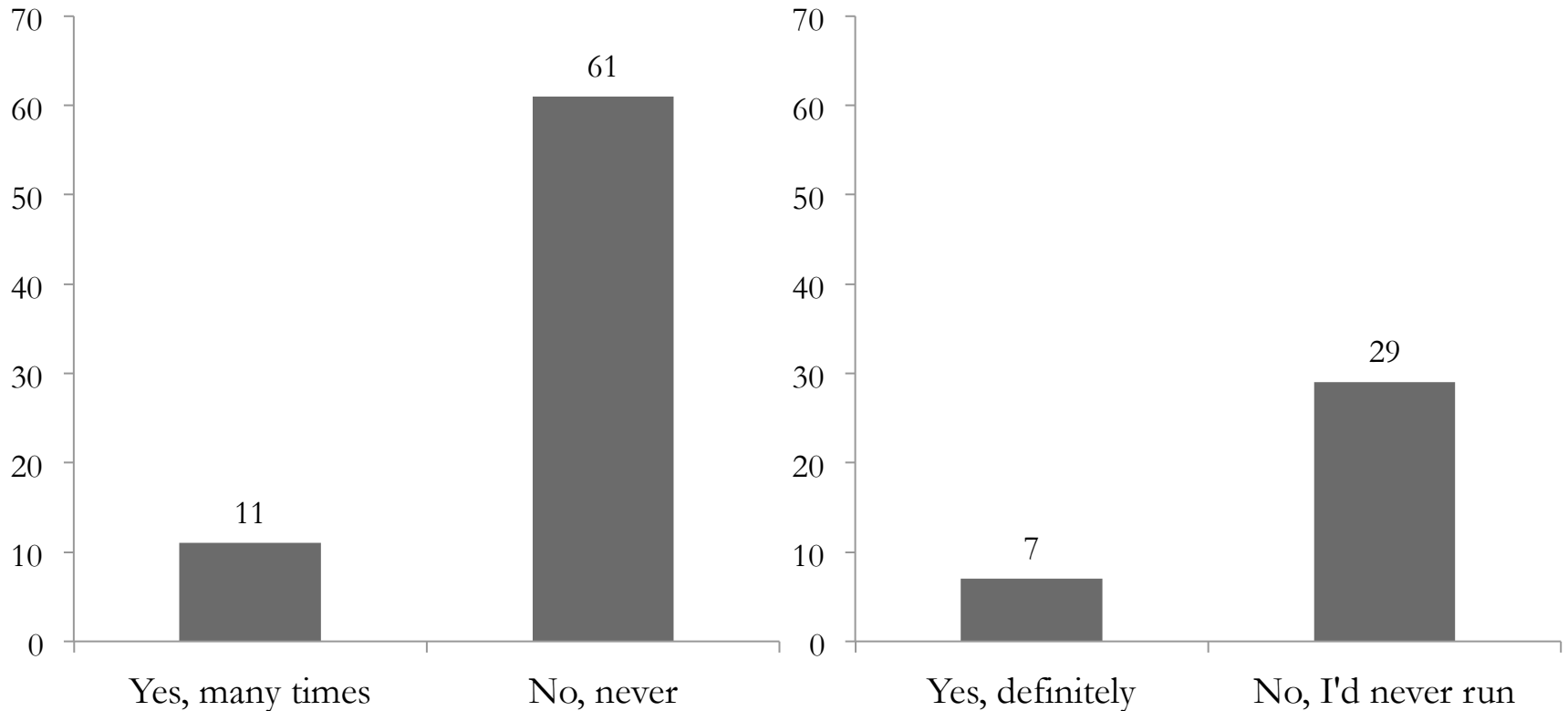
A Few Details

- Received National Science Foundation funding
- Contracted with GfK / Knowledge Networks to obtain a national random sample
- September 27 – October 16, 2012
 - Surveyed 4,200 high school and college students (ages 13 – 25).
- July and August 2013
 - Conducted in-depth phone interviews with 115 survey respondents.

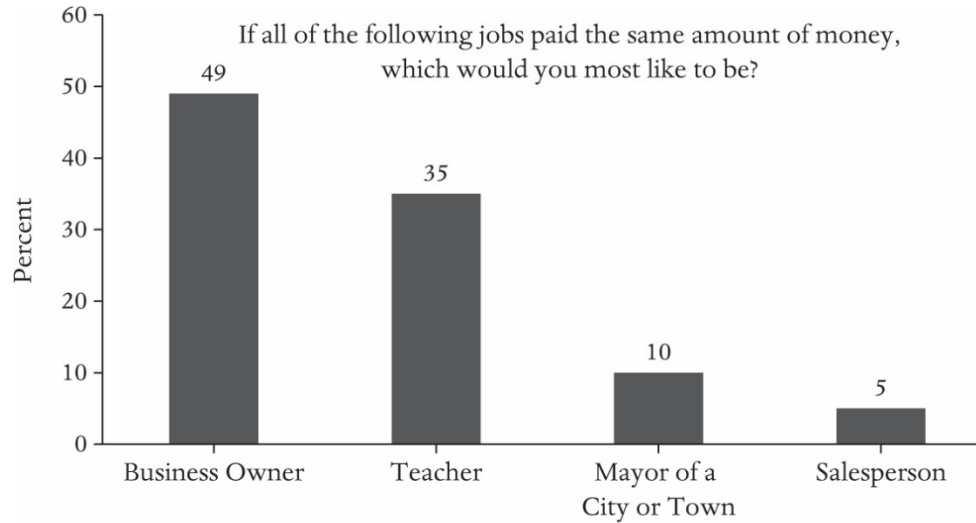
Young People's Interest in Running for Office

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

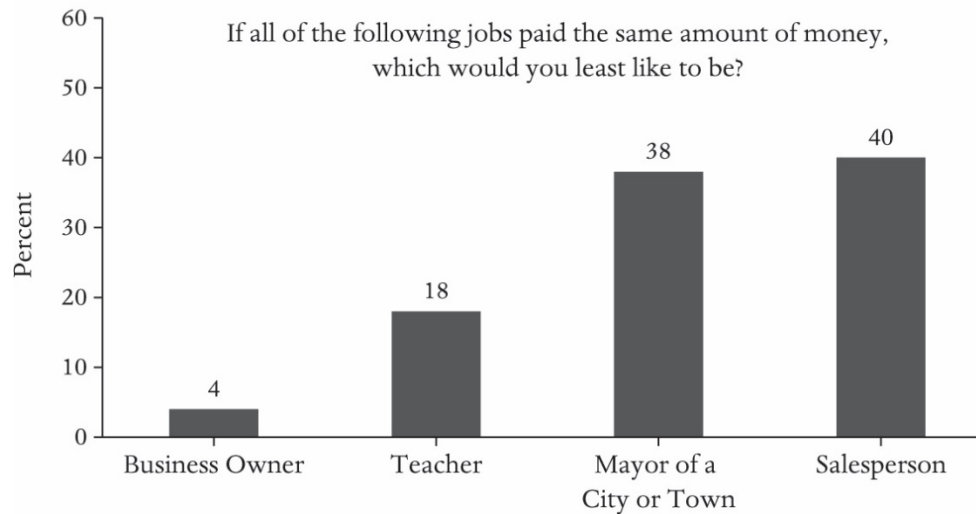
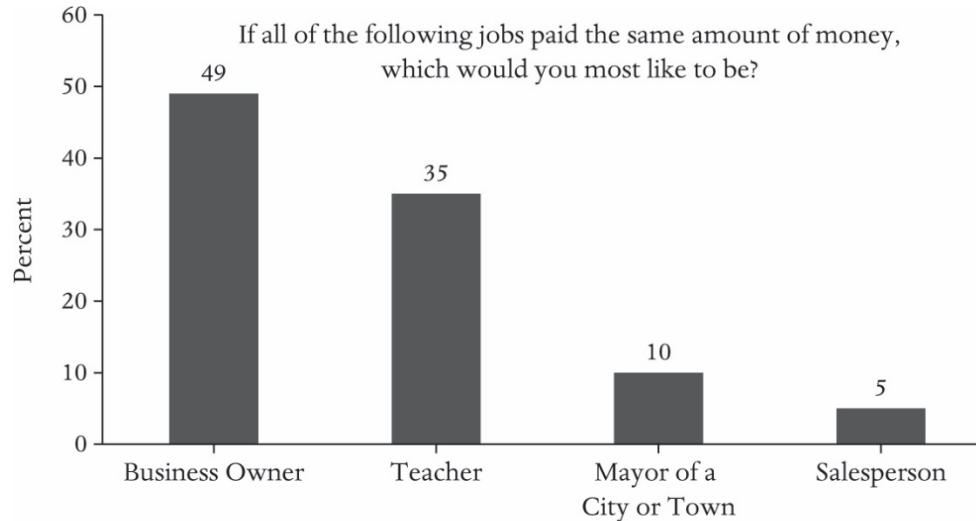
Even if you've never thought about it, could you see yourself running for office one day?



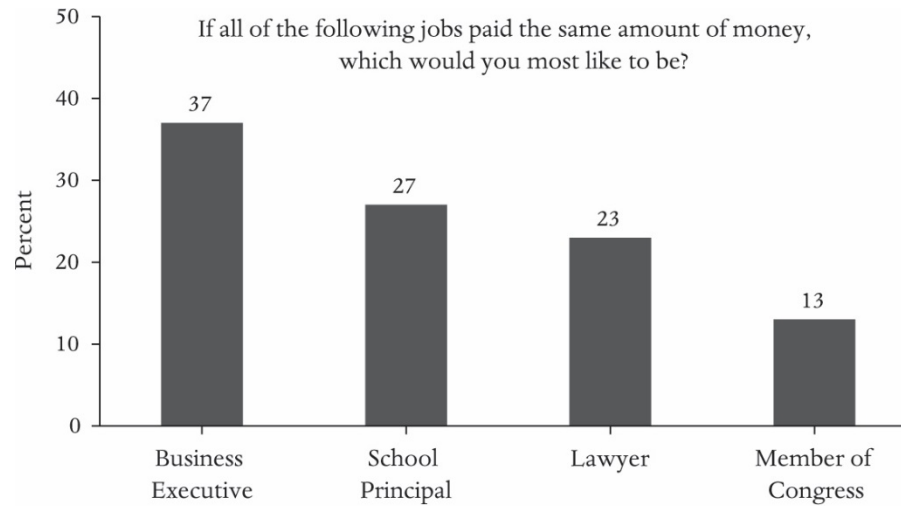
Young People's Attitudes toward Being a Mayor



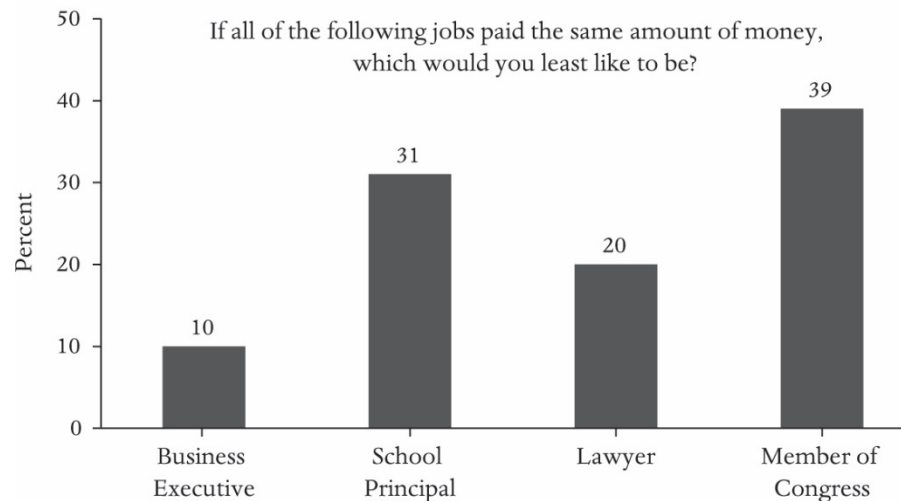
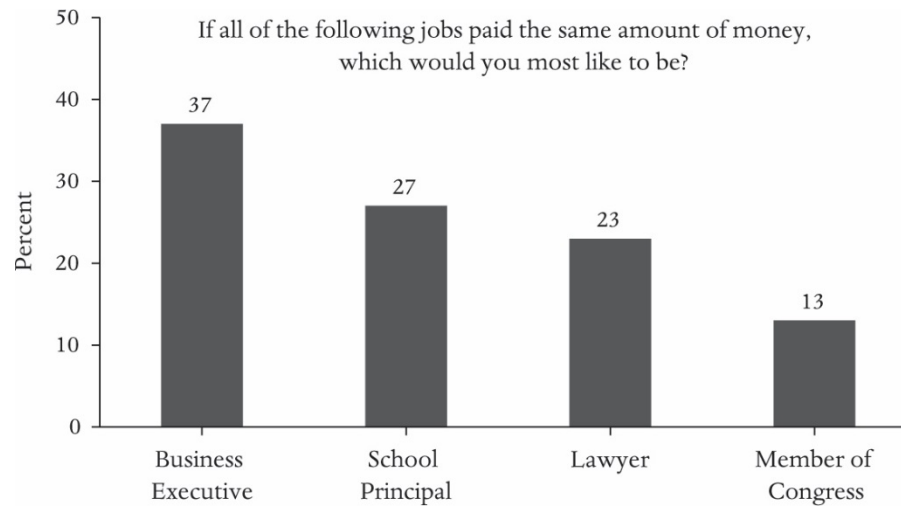
Young People's Attitudes toward Being a Mayor



Young People's Attitudes toward Being a Member of Congress



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

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

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

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

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

Political Engagement in Young People's Families

Politics in the Household

My parents often talk about politics.	25 %
We often talk about politics at mealtime.	21

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Political Discussion with Parents

Speaks with parent about politics rarely or never.	51
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Political Activity with Parents

Went to vote with parents.	26
Watched any election coverage with parents.	37
Shared a story on email, Facebook, etc.	20

Not So Political Family Discussions

They never really wanted to talk about government stuff . . . And when it did come up, they were always saying that the system was too broken to pay attention to.

– Jane, high school junior

Not So Political Family Discussions

We have big debates at dinner about important issues. But we often end up condemning the whole government system for being so ridiculous.

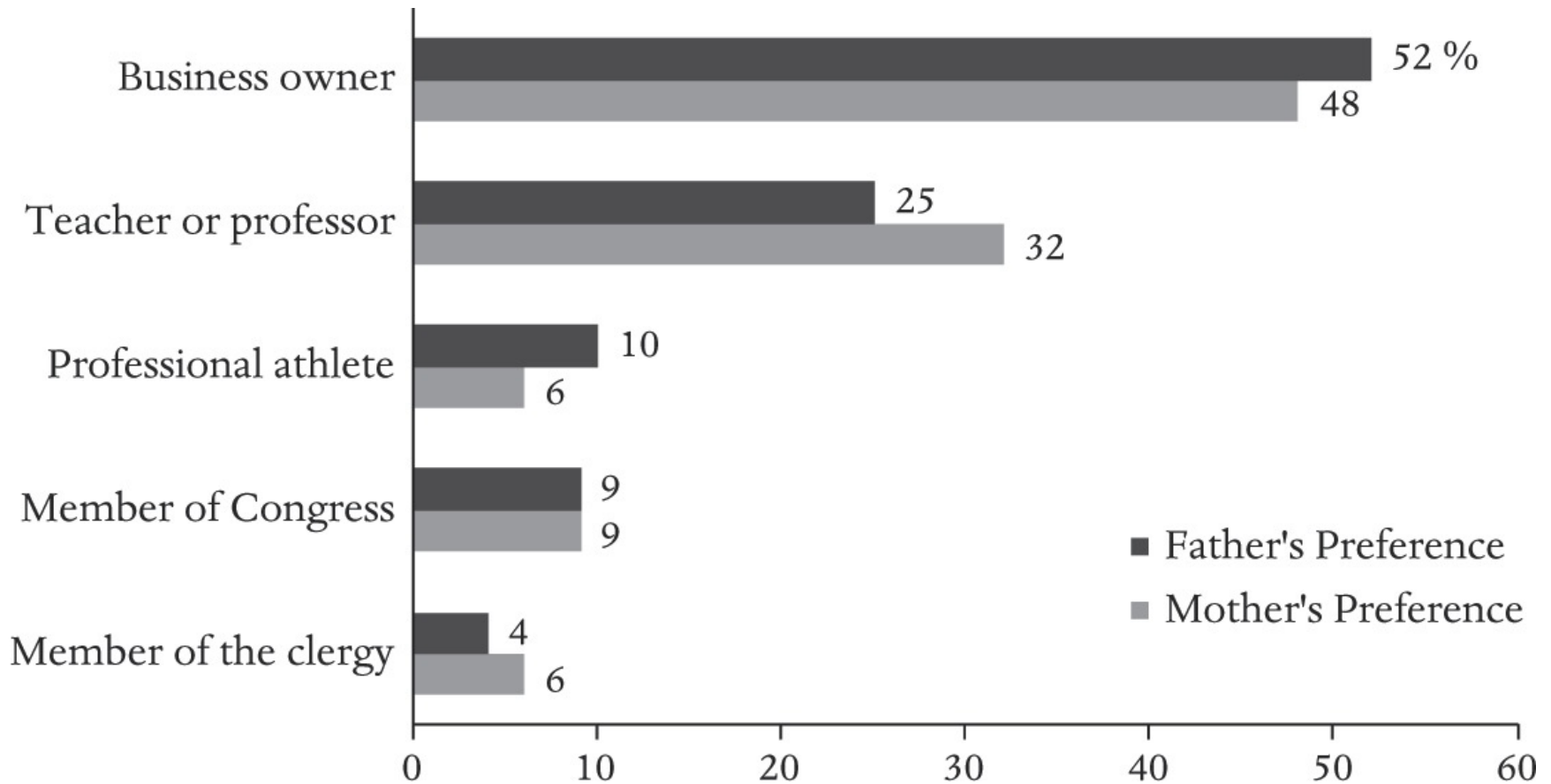
– Lizbeth, college senior

Not So Political Family Discussions

What would we have talked about? A bunch of guys fighting with each other and not getting anything done?

– Tatiana, college junior

What do your parents want you to be?



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

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

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

Young People's Political Engagement at School

	High School	College
Political Exposure at School		
Took a government class.	27 %	69 %
Saw a politician as a guest speaker.	19	29

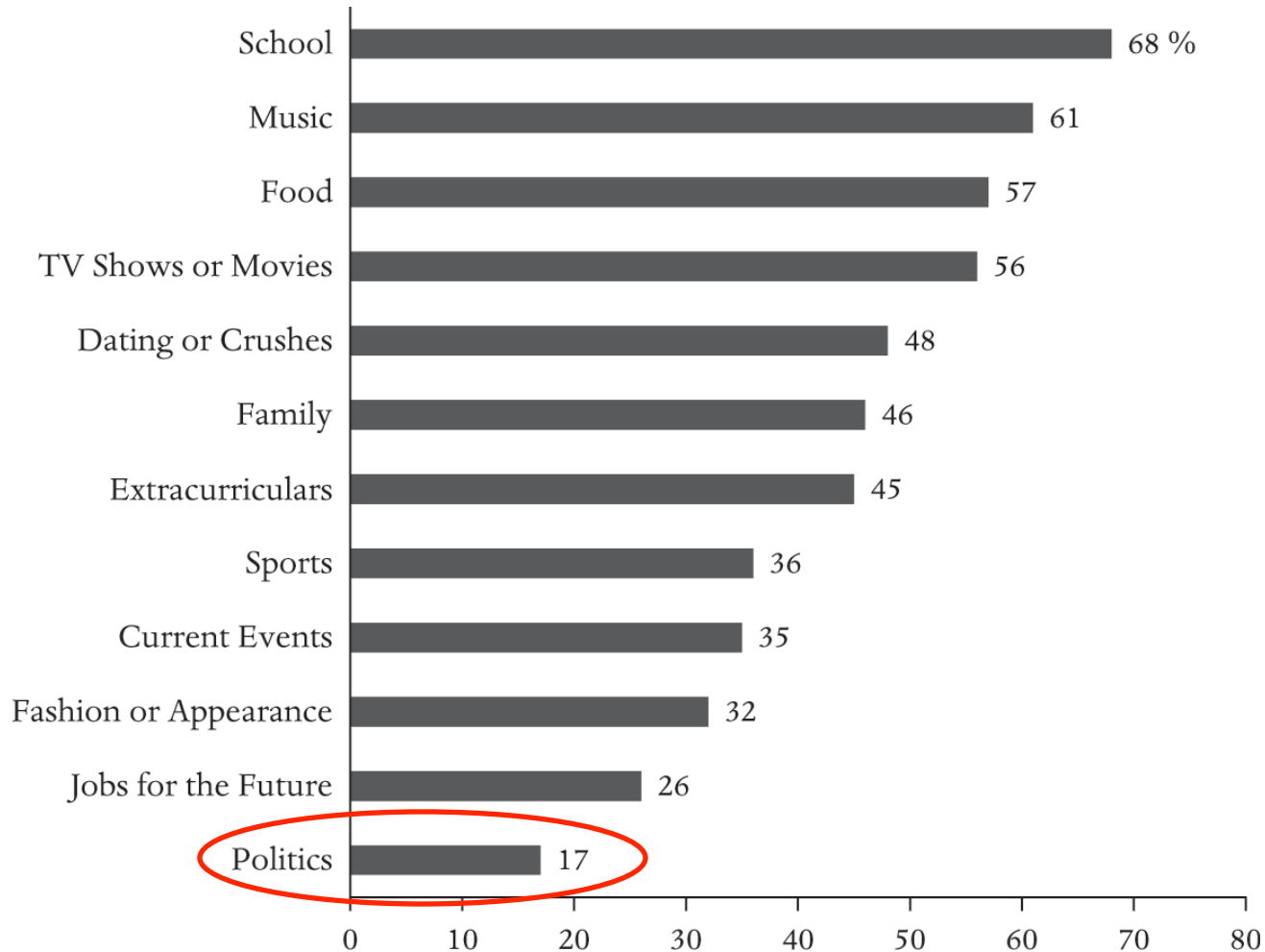
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At least once a week	36	32

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Interest in Politics among Classmates		
Not interested	65	37
Very interested	9	21

Topics Young People Discuss with Their Friends



Talk about politics with my friends? No thanks.

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.

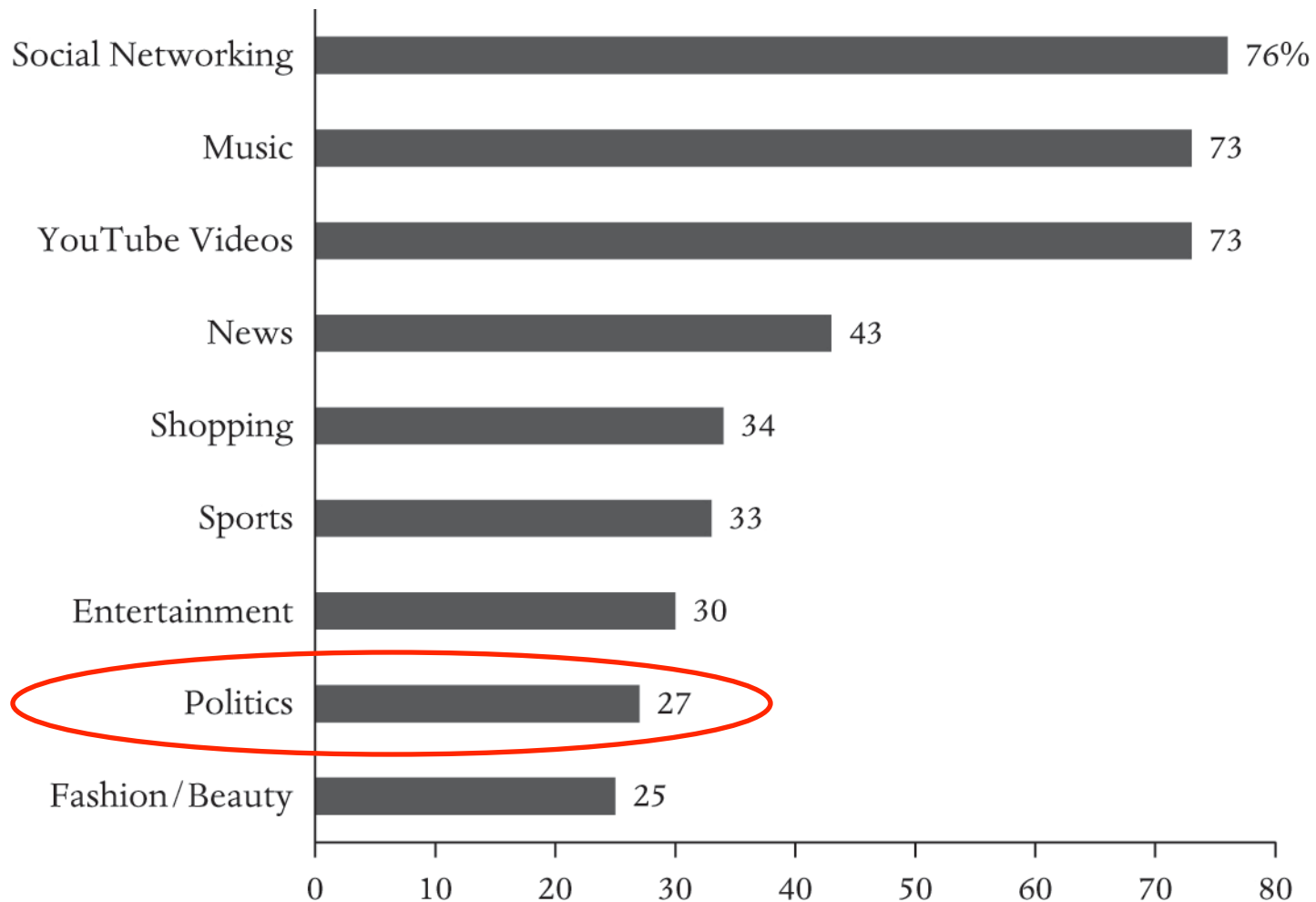
– Ashley, college senior

Talk about politics with my friends? No thanks.

The government isn't effective . . . It's depressing to talk about it. It kills the mood.

– Julian, college junior

Types of Websites Young People Visit



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

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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*

Self-Interested, Dishonest, Corrupt Politicians

Politicians have to lie all the time. That is what politicians do. Politicians just suck.

– *Derek*, high school junior

Self-Interested, Dishonest, Corrupt Politicians

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.

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.

A Silver Lining? Not Tuned Out, Just Turned Off



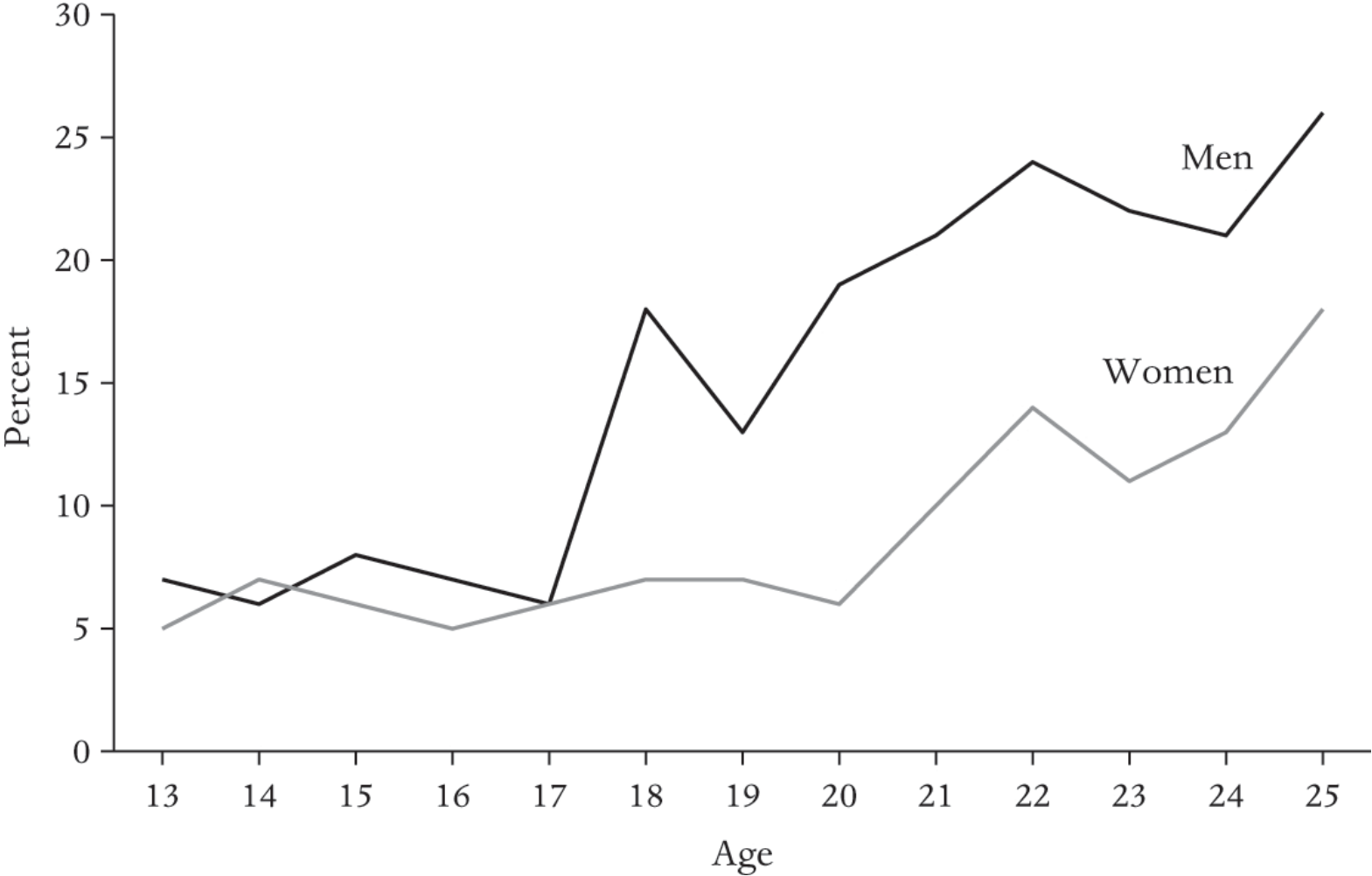
What can we do about this?

- There are **500,000** elected offices in this country.

Incentivizing Political Aptitude

- 5 Components of College Admissions
 - high school grades
 - standardized test scores
 - extra-curricular activities
 - personal essays
 - letters of recommendation
- In Oklahoma and Arizona, **3%** of high school students could pass a citizenship test.

Target College Women



There's (Not) an App for That

- **81%** of people under the age of 25 sleep with their phone next to them on the bed.
- **74%** report reaching for their smartphones as the first thing they do when they wake up.
- **97%** of teens regularly use smartphones in the bathroom to check messages.

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