

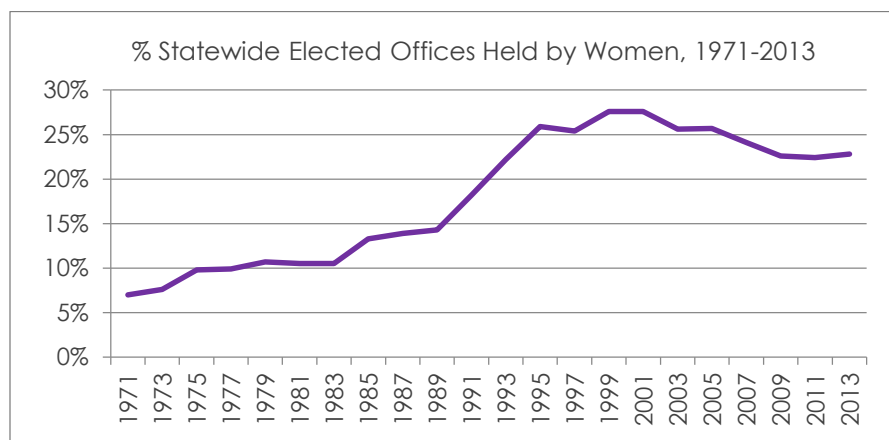
## Featured Analysis

### Stalled Progress in State Elections since the "Year of the Woman"

In the 1992 election, dubbed the “Year of the Woman,” a record number of women turned out to the polls and helped elect four new female U.S. senators and 24 new female members of the U.S. House of Representatives, the largest ever increase in the number of female federal legislators in our nation’s history. Women also made big gains at the state level, increasing their presence in state legislatures by 2.2 percentage points.<sup>i</sup>

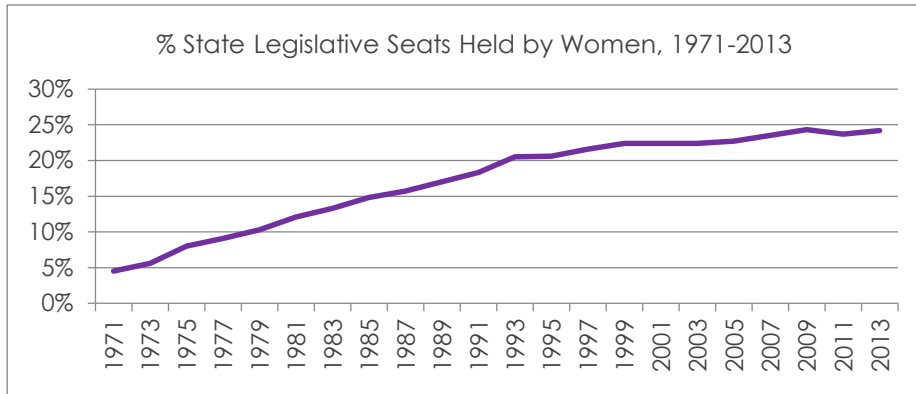
This dramatic increase in the representation of women was brought on in part by the controversy surrounding the 1991 testimony of University of Oklahoma law professor Anita Hill, who accused Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas of sexual harassment before a Senate Judiciary Committee that was conspicuously devoid of women. At the time, women held only two of 100 U.S. Senate seats. Many expected the 1992 election to be a turning point for women’s representation in the United States, believing that this new class of congresswomen and state legislators would inspire other women to follow in their footsteps.

While progress has indeed continued in the intervening decades – we now have 20 women serving in the Senate and 79 serving as voting members in the House – the advancement toward gender parity in elected office has been slower than expected, especially at the state level. As the following charts illustrate, the Year of the Woman did not mark the beginning of a revolution in women’s representation at the state level, but rather the start of a period in which the growth in number of female officeholders slowed appreciably. For example, women have made negligible gains in statewide executive positions in the last two decades, rising only from 22.2% in 1993 to 22.8% in 2013.<sup>ii</sup>



Source: Center for American Women and Politics, Rutgers University

Women’s representation in state legislatures has also advanced at a disappointing pace. In the twenty years before the Year of the Woman, the percentage of state legislative seats held by women grew steadily, from 5.6% in 1973 to 20.5% in 1993. In the twenty years since, this figure has risen only slightly, to 24.3% following the 2013 elections.<sup>iii</sup>

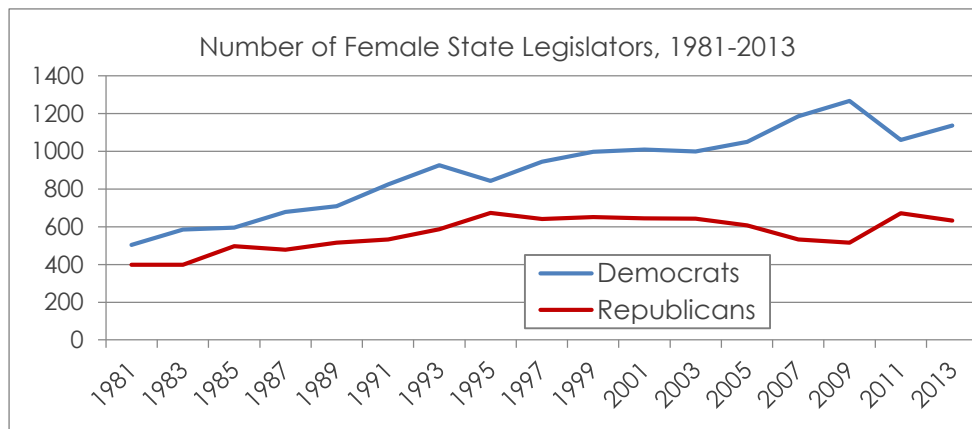


Source: Center for American Women and Politics, Rutgers University

The slow growth in the number of women serving as state legislators is especially significant because of the effect it can have on women’s representation at the federal level and in statewide office. State legislatures have been an important stepping stone in the political careers of nearly half of all members of Congress.<sup>iv</sup> Increasing the number of women with state legislative experience will enlarge the pool of potential female candidates for congressional seats and other higher offices. In order for women to be more involved in national politics, they need to be more involved in state and local politics first.

### **The Relative Progress of Women in the Two Major Parties**

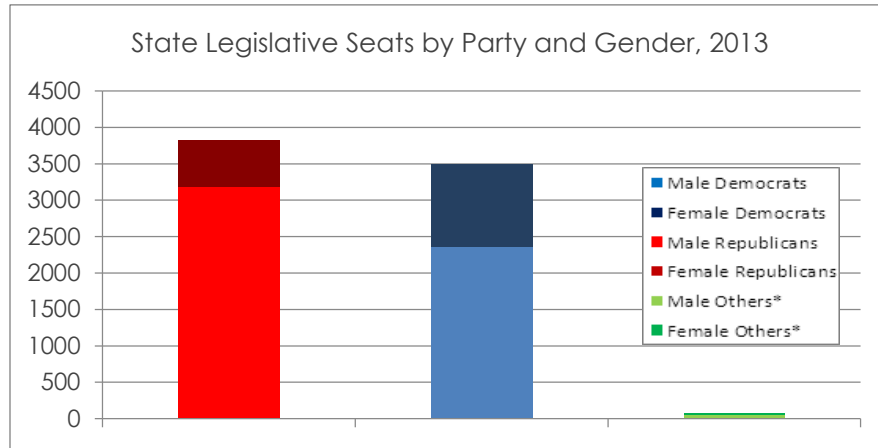
The slow pace of advancement for women in state legislatures is due in part to the diverging fortunes women have faced in the two major political parties. The chart below shows the number of Democratic and Republican women in state legislatures since 1981. As we can see, the number of female state legislators from both parties rose steadily from 1981 to the Year of the Woman in 1992.



Source: Center for American Women and Politics, Rutgers University

However, with the “Republican Revolution” midterm elections in 1994, in which Republicans picked up 472 additional legislative seats and won control of 20 new state legislatures, the two parties began to diverge. Democratic women were able to recover from their party’s broader losses in 1994 and continue to consistently increase their numbers, from 843 in 1995, to 1,267 in 2009. The number of Republican female state legislators actually declined over the same period, falling from 673 in 1995 to just 516 in 2009, and then increasing back up to 636 in 2013.

This pattern of gains for Democratic women and stagnation or losses for Republican women has held steady for most of the last twenty years, despite numerous swings between the two parties in elections nationally. Even now, after the Republicans' sweeping victories in 2010, Democratic women outnumber Republican women in state legislatures by a margin of 1,140 to 636, despite Republicans' overall advantage in state legislative seats (3,185 to 2,356).<sup>v</sup>



\* "Other" category includes Nebraska's non-partisan legislature

Source: Center for American Women and Politics, Rutgers University

Today, Democratic state legislators are nearly twice as likely as Republican state legislators to be female (32.5% to 16.6%). Therefore, while it is crucial to increase women's representation in state legislatures overall, it is especially important to increase the number of Republican women in these bodies.

In statewide elected executive positions the parties are balanced: 37 Democratic women and 36 Republican women currently hold such offices. In fact, Republican female governors now outnumber Democratic female governors four to one. However, since a majority of statewide elected executive positions are held by Republicans, women are better represented among Democratic elected statewide executives than Republican elected statewide executives overall.

### **State-by-State: The Effects of Partisanship and Electoral Structure**

States vary widely in their percentage of state legislative seats held by women, from 41.1% in Vermont to 11.8% in Louisiana. As the table on page 9 illustrates, most of the legislatures with the lowest levels of women's representation are heavily Republican, while many of those with the highest levels are heavily Democratic. Among the five states with the lowest levels of women's representation and the five states with the highest levels, only Republican Arizona, with the third highest percentage of women legislators in the country – 35.6% – is inconsistent with this trend. Arizona's high level of women's representation is likely bolstered by its use of multi-member districts in its House of Representatives. And even in Arizona, 11 of the 19 women in the House are Democrats (meaning that almost half of the 24 Democrats in the House are women), and 7 of the 13 women in the Senate are Democrats (meaning that more than half of the 13 Democrats in the Senate are women).<sup>vi</sup>

Rank	State	Female State House Members	Female State Senators	% Women Following 2013 Elections	% Women 1993
1	<i>Vermont</i>	64 (of 150)	9 (of 30)	41.1%	33.9%
2	Colorado	28 (of 65)	13 (of 35)	41.0%	35.0%
3	<i>Arizona</i>	19 (of 60)	13 (of 30)	35.6%	33.3%
4	Minnesota	45 (of 134)	23 (of 67)	33.8%	27.4%
5	<i>New Hamp.</i>	133 (of 400)	9 (of 24)	33.5%	33.5%
6	Illinois	42 (of 118)	15 (of 59)	32.2%	23.2%
7	Hawaii	16 (of 51)	8 (of 25)	31.6%	23.7%
8	<i>Washington</i>	28 (of 98)	17 (of 49)	30.6%	39.5%
9	<i>Maryland</i>	46 (of 141)	11 (of 47)	30.3%	24.5%
10	<i>New Jersey</i>	26 (of 80)	10 (of 40)	30.0%	12.5%
11	Maine	47 (of 151)	8 (of 35)	29.6%	31.7%
12	Connecticut	46 (of 151)	9 (of 36)	29.4%	25.1%
13	Oregon	18 (of 60)	8 (of 30)	28.9%	27.8%
14	Nevada	14 (of 42)	4 (of 21)	28.6%	27.0%
15	Alaska	13 (of 40)	4 (of 20)	28.3%	21.7%
16	Montana	32 (of 100)	10 (of 50)	28.0%	20.0%
17	New Mexico	25 (of 70)	6 (of 42)	27.7%	19.6%
18	Rhode Island	22 (of 75)	9 (of 38)	27.4%	24.7%
19	California	21 (of 80)	11 (of 40)	26.7%	22.5%
20	Massachusetts	39 (160)	13 (of 40)	26.0%	23.0%
21	Delaware	10 (of 41)	6 (of 21)	25.8%	14.5%
22	<i>Idaho</i>	22 (of 70)	5 (of 35)	25.7%	30.5%
23	Florida	28 (of 120)	12 (of 40)	25.0%	17.4%
24	Wisconsin	24 (of 99)	9 (of 33)	25.0%	27.3%
25	Kansas	27 (of 125)	12 (of 40)	23.6%	29.1%
26	Ohio	23 (of 99)	8 (of 33)	23.5%	21.2%
27	Iowa	25 (of 100)	10 (of 50)	23.3%	14.7%
28	Georgia	46 (of 180)	8 (of 56)	22.9%	17.4%
29	New York	37 (of 150)	10 (of 63)	22.1%	16.6%
30	<i>South Dakota</i>	17 (of 70)	6 (of 35)	21.9%	20.0%
31	Missouri	38 (of 163)	5 (of 34)	21.8%	18.8%
32	North Carolina	29 (of 120)	8 (of 50)	21.8%	18.2%
33	Texas	31 (of 150)	7 (of 31)	21.0%	16.0%
34	Indiana	23 (of 100)	8 (of 50)	20.7%	19.3%
35	Nebraska	-	10 (of 49)	20.4%	20.4%
36	Michigan	24 (of 110)	4 (of 38)	18.9%	20.3%
37	Kentucky	18 (of 100)	7 (of 38)	18.1%	5.1%
38	Mississippi	23 (of 122)	8 (of 52)	17.8%	10.9%
39	Pennsylvania	37 (of 203)	8 (of 50)	17.8%	9.9%
40	Arkansas	17 (of 100)	6 (of 35)	17.0%	10.4%
41	<i>North Dakota</i>	16 (of 94)	8 (of 47)	17.0%	16.3%
42 (tie)	Tennessee	15 (of 99)	7 (of 33)	16.7%	12.1%
42 (tie)	Wyoming	13 (of 60)	2 (of 30)	16.7%	24.4%
44	Virginia	17 (of 100)	6 (of 40)	16.4%	12.1%
45	<i>West Virginia</i>	21 (of 100)	1 (of 34)	16.4%	16.4%
46	Utah	12 (of 75)	5 (of 29)	16.4%	13.5%

Rank	State	Female State House Members	Female State Senators	% Women Following 2013 Elections	% Women 1993
47	Alabama	14 (of 105)	5 (of 35)	13.6%	5.7%
48	Oklahoma	16 (of 101)	4 (of 48)	13.4%	8.7%
49	South Carolina	21 (of 124)	1 (of 46)	12.9%	12.9%
50	Louisiana	13 (of 105)	4 (of 39)	11.8%	7.6%

\*Red cells indicate a body controlled by Republicans, blue cells indicate a body controlled by Democrats, and yellow cells indicate Nebraska's non-partisan, unicameral legislature.

*Italics indicate that a state uses multi-member districts to elect at least one of its state legislative chambers.*

Source: Center for American Women and Politics, Rutgers University (Dec. 2013)

Other indications of how partisan differences contribute to the slow advancement of women's representation in state legislatures can be found in the states where the percentage of seats held by women has declined since the middle of the 1990s, when overall progress began to slow. Seven states fit this description – Kansas, Washington, Wyoming, Idaho, Maine, Wisconsin, and Michigan – but the decline has been significant (4% or greater) in only four of them. Of these, three (Kansas, Wyoming, and Idaho) are western states with legislatures that have become increasingly dominated by Republicans over the last two decades.

State	1993 Percentage	2013 Percentage	Difference
Washington	39.5%	30.6%	-8.9%
Wyoming	24.4%	16.7%	-7.7%
Kansas	20.1%	23.6%	-5.5%
Idaho	30.5%	25.7%	-4.8%
Wisconsin	27.3%	25.0%	-2.3%
Maine	31.7%	29.6%	-2.1%
Michigan	20.3%	18.9%	-1.4%

Source: Center for American Women and Politics, Rutgers University (Dec. 2013)

Although women's representation in Idaho's state legislature has declined significantly, it is still well above that in states that have trended similarly Republican. This is likely due in part to Idaho's use of multi-member districts to elect its House of Representatives. Meanwhile, the repeal of a multi-member district system in 1990 in Wyoming has likely contributed to the significant decline in women's representation there. Wyoming's legislature now ranks among the lowest in the nation for the percentage of its seats held by women, when in the 1980s it ranked among the highest.

Many southern states have also experienced a sharp rise in the number of Republicans in their state legislatures, but without a significant drop in the representation of women. In most cases, this can be explained by the scarcity of women in these legislatures to begin with. Most Southern states have made modest gains in women's representation but remain near the bottom of the list nationally.

Washington State's inclusion on the list of states with the greatest declines in women's representation is mostly due to the high bar it set at the beginning of the examined period: in 1993, 39.5% of its legislators were women, the highest percentage in the country at the time. Despite its decline, Washington's legislature still ranked 8<sup>th</sup> nationwide in December 2013. As in Arizona and Idaho, women's representation in Washington's legislature is likely bolstered by its use of multi-member districts.

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- <sup>i</sup> Facts on Women in State Legislatures 2013. (2013, Aug. 13). *Center for American Women and Politics, Rutgers University*. [http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast\\_facts/levels\\_of\\_office/documents/stleg.pdf](http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast_facts/levels_of_office/documents/stleg.pdf), Facts on Women in Statewide Elective Executive Office 2013. (2013, Aug.19). *Center for American Women and Politics, Rutgers University*. [http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast\\_facts/levels\\_of\\_office/documents/stwide.pdf](http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast_facts/levels_of_office/documents/stwide.pdf)
- <sup>ii</sup> Facts on Women in Statewide Elective Executive Office 2013. (2013, August 19). *Center for American Women and Politics, Rutgers University*. [http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast\\_facts/levels\\_of\\_office/documents/stwide.pdf](http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast_facts/levels_of_office/documents/stwide.pdf)
- <sup>iii</sup> Facts on Women in State Legislatures 2013. (2013, August 13). *Center for American Women and Politics, Rutgers University*. [http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast\\_facts/levels\\_of\\_office/documents/stleg.pdf](http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast_facts/levels_of_office/documents/stleg.pdf)
- <sup>iv</sup> Former State Legislators in Congress. *National Conference of State Legislators*. Retrieved August 21, 2013, from <http://www.ncsl.org/legislatures-elections/state-federal/former-state-legislators-in-congress.aspx>
- <sup>v</sup> Party Composition of State Legislators. *National Conference of State Legislators*. Retrieved September 16, 2013, from <http://www.ncsl.org/legislatures-elections/elections/statevote-charts.aspx>
- <sup>vi</sup> Member Roster, Arizona State Legislature. Retrieved October 23, 2013 from <http://www.azleg.gov/MemberRoster.asp>