

## Introduction

Nearly 100 years ago, American women gained the right to vote with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment. This victory came after a decades-long struggle to amend the U.S. Constitution so that women could never be barred from the polls on the basis of their gender. Today, the right of women to participate in the political process that their forbearers fought so bravely to secure has largely been obtained. For more than two decades, more women have registered to vote than men, and women's voter turnout has exceeded men's in every presidential and midterm election.<sup>i</sup> Most recently, 7.8 million more women than men voted in the 2012 presidential election.<sup>ii</sup>

Despite women's robust participation in the electoral process, women's representation at all levels of American government remains startlingly low, and what was once a slow but steady advance at the state and national level has almost completely stalled. As the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University reports, there are only five female governors in office, and only 12 of our nation's 100 largest cities have female mayors. Additionally, in 2013 women comprised only 18.3% of Congress and 24.3% of state legislatures. And as the Inter-Parliamentary Union reports, the United States lags behind 96 other nations for the percentage of the lower house of its national legislature that is female – a steep decline from its 58<sup>th</sup> place rank in 1998.<sup>iii</sup> We must do better.

Representation 2020, an all-partisan project of the voting rights and electoral reform group FairVote, is working to raise awareness of the underrepresentation of women in elected office and to highlight the often-overlooked structural barriers to the representation of women. While there have been impressive efforts to increase the number of women running for elected office, many of which we highlight in the full edition of this report, we hope to broaden the discussion by including new and innovative strategies to address the underrepresentation of women in government.

We base our research and advocacy on our 2020 Pledge, which individuals and organizations can sign to demonstrate their support for reforms that would increase women's representation in American politics. The measures we most support to achieve gender parity in elected office are those to:

1. *Combat gender stereotypes and sexism in politics and in the media, which can both affect voters' views of women candidates and discourage women from running for office;*
2. *Support organizations that recruit, train, and fund women candidates;*
3. *Challenge political actors to encourage more women to run for high-profile offices, especially executive offices like president, governor, and mayor;*
4. *Encourage political parties to enact rules that promote the active recruitment of female candidates, especially at the local and state level;*
5. *Establish election systems that will increase the number of women running for and being elected to public office, such as multi-seat legislative districts with fair representation voting;*
6. *Ensure that legislative rules, procedures, and culture are not biased against women serving in office.*

The first three points in our pledge are frequently mentioned in discussions on how to increase women's representation. We support these measures and believe they should be continued. Therefore, the full edition of this report highlights efforts by groups and individuals to combat gender stereotypes and increase the recruitment of female candidates.

The second three points of our pledge set Representation 2020 apart from other groups that work to increase women's representation. We seek to raise awareness of how political actors can implement changes in rules and structures in order to increase the number of women running for office and being elected. We show how political parties can enact measures to increase the active recruitment of female candidates, as is often done in other nations. We propose the adoption of fair representation voting systems (candidate-based, American forms of proportional representation), which would both increase the number of women running for and being elected to public office. We also show why legislatures should alter their practices that might negatively affect the ability of female elected officials to stay in office and rise to positions of leadership.

When we call for gender parity in representation, we do not mean to suggest that men and women should be rigidly confined to holding half of the elected offices in each state and in Congress. Rather, gender parity will be achieved when a woman is as likely as a man to hold any elected office. We believe that gender parity is possible, and that it will come decades or even centuries sooner if the country embraces the goal of gender parity and supports the steps outlined in our 2020 Pledge.

*The State of Women's Representation 2013-2014* is the first in a series of annual reports leading to the year 2020, the centennial of the Nineteenth Amendment. Our reports will summarize and analyze women's representation in all fifty states and monitor indicators of change in the six areas of our 2020 Pledge. We also introduce our Parity Index, which allows us to quantify the status of women's representation in all 50 states and to measure progress in the years ahead. With true parity, the average Parity Index score among states would be 50. In 2013, no state had a score above 50, and half of states had scores below 16.

This report will be updated every year and released on Women's Equality Day (August 26) in order to highlight changes in women's representation across the nation and to report on developments relating to the six points of our 2020 Pledge. We encourage anyone with suggestions or information on efforts to increase women's representation to contact us at [info@representation2020.com](mailto:info@representation2020.com) or (301) 270-4616.

### **Get Involved!**

Representation 2020 hopes that our annual reports trigger both dialogue and change. We encourage you to use this report to spark a discussion in your community about ways to increase the number of women in elected office. We hope that you will take concrete actions to ensure that women receive fair representation in government. Spread the word about family-friendly legislative practices, pro-parity party rules, and the effects of multimember districts with fair representation voting, and inform us of your progress. Speak with female elected officials about changes they would like to see in their legislatures. Encourage women in your community to run for office. To get involved with Representation 2020's movement for gender parity in elected office, sign our 2020 Pledge at [www.representation2020.com/2020-pledge.html](http://www.representation2020.com/2020-pledge.html).

## Acknowledgments

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Those who contributed directly to the researching for and writing of this report include the following past and present staff members, fellows, and interns at FairVote: Cynthia Terrell, our program chair, who first envisioned Representation 2020; Andrea Levien, the report's supervisor, editor, and lead author; Patricia Hart, who launched Representation 2020; Rob Richie, FairVote's executive director, who contributed insights, analysis, and editorial assistance; Elizabeth Hudler, Devin McCarthy, Mollie Haley, Drew Spencer, Dania Korkor, and Andrew Douglas, who provided editorial assistance and analysis; and interns Amel Yagoub, Savanna Richie, Sara Helmi, and Danielle Moise, who took on substantive roles in research and writing.

We wanted to give a special thanks to eight members of Representation 2020's Leadership Circle, listed in the report's appendix. Marie Wilson, a long-time champion of women's representation at the Ms. Foundation and the White House Project, has been a stalwart supporter of this project. She narrates our video, which is posted at Representation2020.com and is being released in conjunction with this report. Wilson joined pollster Celinda Lake and fellow Leadership Circle member Laura Liswood for an insightful forum on a preliminary edition of this report at one of FairVote's Democracy Next forums organized with NYUDialogues. Law professor and Maryland State Senator Jamie Raskin brought his usual energy and passion to writing the report's foreword. The Mary Wohlford Foundation played an essential role in funding a FairVote fellow to devote most of her time to Representation 2020 for the past two years.

Finally, we want to thank the many people, past and present, who have done so much to advance equality in American politics, first in suffrage and now in representation. We stand on their legacy and current achievement, and it is to them we dedicate this first *State of Women's Representation* report.

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<sup>i</sup> Gender Differences in Voter Turnout. (2011, Nov.). *Center for American Women and Politics, Rutgers University*. Retrieved October 29, 2013 from [http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast\\_facts/voters/documents/genderdiff.pdf](http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast_facts/voters/documents/genderdiff.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> Election Results: 2012 Election Center. (2013, Aug. 3). *CNN*. <http://www.cnn.com/election/2012/results>

<sup>iii</sup> Women in Parliaments: World Classification. (2013, Sept.) *Inter-Parliamentary Union*. <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>