

Women's Representation in New Jersey

Parity Ranking: 24th of 50

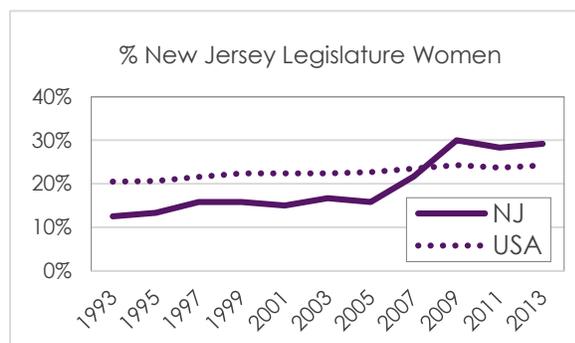
Score of 16: Five points for Lt. Gov. Kim Gaudagno, the first person to every hold the position. 8 points for the percentage of state legislators who are women, 1 point for speaker of the house, and 2 points for Bergen County Executive Kathleen Donovan.

Quick Fact

In the November 2013 legislative elections in New Jersey, 67 women were on the ballot, the most in the state's history.

Trending

For years New Jersey lagged behind the national average in the percentage of its state legislative seats held by women. After elections in 2007 and 2009, however, the number of female legislators nearly doubled, from 19 in 2005 to 36 in 2009.



Source: Center for American Women and Politics, Rutgers University.

Levels of Government

Statewide Executives

Female governors: Christine Todd Whitman (1994-2001)

Current female statewide elected executives: 1 of 2 (lieutenant governor)

Number of women to have held statewide elected executive office: 2

Congress

U.S. Senate: 0 of 2 seats held by women

U.S. House: 0 of 12 seats held by women

In its history, New Jersey has elected 5 women to the House and none to the Senate.

State Legislature

Percentage women: 30.0%

Rankings: 10th of 50

Senate: 10 of 40 (25%) are women

House: 26 of 80 (32.5%) are women

Method of election: Each district elects one state senator and two assembly members

Local

Only one of New Jersey's five largest cities and counties with elected executives has a woman executive: Bergen County, the largest county in the state.

Words of Wisdom

"I don't say the world will be perfect if it's run by women but we can't do much worse than the guys have."— Christine Todd Whitman, former governor of New Jersey

“Preparedness Meets Opportunity” in New Jersey

Between 2004 and 2011, the number of women in New Jersey’s state legislature nearly doubled, from 19 to 35, lifting New Jersey’s ranking from 43rd to 12th for the percentage of its state legislative seats held by women. Today, it ranks 10th. Susan Carroll and Kelly Dittmar from the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University (CAWP) give credit to a combination of factors for this unusual increase, which they call “preparedness meets opportunity.”

For several decades, CAWP and other organizations have worked to raise awareness of the underrepresentation of women in New Jersey politics and have trained women to successfully run for office. These training programs, combined with an increase in women entering the political pipeline at the municipal level and an interest from several Democratic and Republican women legislators in actively recruiting and supporting women candidates, resulted in a sharp rise in the number of women running for open seats and being appointed to fill vacant seats when opportunities arose. As one woman legislator explained to Carroll and Dittmar, “I often say if I haven’t left a few trouble makers behind, then everything I’ve done is for naught...One of my goals in life is to make sure I’ve left some noisy, mouthy women behind me.”

Such opportunities were plentiful between 2004 and 2011, when New Jersey was hit with a series of scandals. Of the 30 women who entered the legislature or advanced to the senate during that period, 14 won elections to open seats and 12 were appointed to vacant seats by county parties at special party conventions. Eight women took over seats that had been vacated due to charges of corruption or scandal. Nine of the 26 women appointed or elected were Republican.

Joe Cryan, chair of the Democratic State Committee from 2006 to 2009, was instrumental in this increase, demonstrating the importance of party commitment to women’s representation. Under Cryan’s leadership, the state party instituted a one-day training program for women called STEP-UP. Additionally, Cryan advocated

for the appointment of women whenever vacancies occurred.

Dramatic increases in women’s representation like the one seen in New Jersey don’t “just happen.” It takes the recruiting and training of women candidates at all levels of government, as well as earning the commitment of parties and elected officials to support women candidates. We hope to see efforts like those in New Jersey replicated in other states in the coming years, so that once opportunities for to run for office present themselves, women will be ready.

Notable Recent Elections

In 2013, state Senator Barbara Buono (D) challenged incumbent Governor Chris Christie (R), ultimately losing by 22 points. Both Christie’s and Buono’s running mates were women: labor leader Milly Silva (D) and Lt. Governor Kim Guadagno (R), who is also currently serving as Secretary of State.

The major parties nominated men for the October 2013 special election for U.S. Senate; Cory Booker (D) won the seat and is favored to keep it in 2014. New Jersey’s all-male U.S. House delegation is expected to retain all of its seats in 2014, although Republicans Frank LoBiondo and Jon Runyan represent potentially competitive districts.



Democratic gubernatorial candidate Barbara Buono