Women’s Representation in South Carolina

Parity Ranking: 32nd of 50
Score of 15: Ten points for the election of Governor Nikki Haley, 3 points for the percentage state legislative seats held by women, and 2 for the mayor of Mount Pleasant.

Quick Fact
In 2012, Katrina Shealy became the first woman elected to the South Carolina senate in five years. The 46-seat state senate had been the nation’s only all-male state legislative chamber. South Carolina also has not elected a woman to Congress since 1990.

Trending
South Carolina experienced a drop in the percentage of its state legislative seats held by women in the early 2000s, but has now recovered to its 1993 level of 12.9% women. In 2013, South Carolina relinquished its place as the state with the lowest percentage of state legislative seats held by women to Louisiana.

Notable Recent Elections
In a 2013 special House election Elizabeth Colbert-Busch (D), sister of comedian Stephen Colbert, ran against Mark Sanford (R), the controversial former governor. Sanford won the general election with 54% of the vote.

Levels of Government

Statewide Executives
Female governors: Nikki Haley (2010-present)
Current female statewide elected executives: 1 of 9 (governor)
Number of women to have held statewide elected executive office: 4

Congress
U.S. Senate: 0 of 2 seats are held by women
U.S. House: 0 of 7 seats are held by women
In its history, South Carolina has elected five women to Congress, four of whom were elected in special elections to fill vacancies caused by the deaths of their husbands.

State Legislature
Percentage women: 12.9%
Rankings: 49th of 50
Senate: 1 of 46 (2.2%) are women
House: 21 of 124 (16.9%) are women
Method of election: Single-member districts

Local
One of South Carolina’s five largest cities with elected mayors has a woman mayor: Mount Pleasant.

Elections to Watch
Nikki Haley, South Carolina’s first woman governor, is up for re-election in 2014. She will likely face male challengers in her primary and general elections. Both U.S. Senate seats are up as well. Sen. Lindsey Graham faces a highly competitive primary; challengers include Nancy Mace, the first woman to graduate from The Citadel, the Military College of South Carolina. No U.S. House race is expected to be competitive in the general election.

Words of Wisdom
“When I first decided to run for the statehouse against a 30-year incumbent, I walked into a boardroom [full of his supporters] and said, ‘I’m Nikki Haley, and I’m running for state senate.’” A man said, “We think you’re a nice young lady. And if you get out of this race, we’ll make sure you get a good appointment.” And I said, “I’m running, and I’m going to win. So please tell your friend that if he decides to get out of the race, I’ll be more than happy to consider him for a position.” - Nikki Haley, governor of South Carolina

State legislative data and historical information at all levels from the Center for American Women and Politics, Rutgers University.