

Women's Representation in Washington

Parity Ranking: 2nd of 50

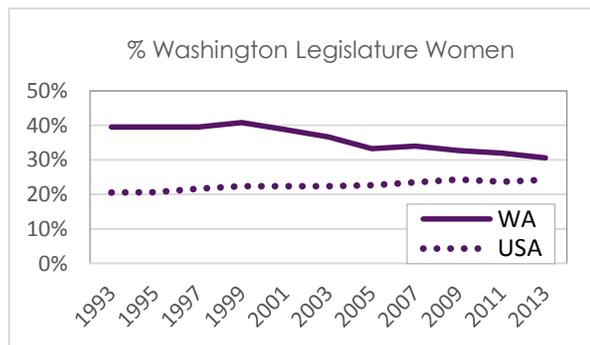
Score of 42: Ten points for former Governor Christine Gregoire's two terms, 2 points for the secretary of state, 15 points for Senators Murray and Cantwell's two most recent terms, 4.5 for the percentage of U.S. House members who are women, 8.5 for the percentage of state legislators who are women, and 2 points for Pierce County Executive Pat McCarthy.

Quick Fact

Washington was the first state to have two women U.S. senators and a woman governor simultaneously.

Trending

Women's representation in Washington's state legislature has fallen almost ten percentage points in the last twenty years. In 1994, the legislature was 40.1% women; today, the legislature is 30.6% women.



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

Levels of Government

Statewide Executives

Female governors: Dixy Lee Ray (1977-1981), Christine Gregoire (2005-2013)

Current female statewide elected executives: 1 of 9 (secretary of state)

Number of women to have held statewide elected executive office: 10

Congress

U.S. Senate: 2 of 2 seats held by women, Patty Murray (1993-present), Maria Cantwell (2001-present)

U.S. House: 3 of 10 woman

In its history, Washington has elected nine women to the House and two to the Senate.

State Legislature

Percentage women: 30.6%

Rankings: 8th of 50

Senate: 17 of 49 (34.7%) are women

House: 28 of 98 (28.6%) are women

Method of election: The State House uses two-seat districts elected with numbered posts, while the State Senate uses single-member districts.

Local

One of Washington's five largest cities and counties with elected executives has a woman county executive: Pierce County, the second largest county in the state.

Words of Wisdom

"I was looking out at what was in front of me. And it was just great. I mean, when I first came here, there were six of us. And today I was just looking out at this roomful of us." – Patty Murray, U.S. senator from Washington

The Use of Multi-Member Districts in Washington State

Washington ranks eighth for its percentage of state legislators who are women (30.6%), and has maintained a percentage between 30% and 40% women for two decades.

Washington is also one of ten states that use multi-member districts, an electoral structure that has been shown to improve women's chances of running for and winning elected office. In multi-member districts, constituents elect multiple legislators from a single district to represent them, instead of electing just one.

Washington elects its House of Representatives through the use of 49 two-member districts with numbered post voting, which means that the two seats in each district are elected as separate offices. The same district elects a state senator as well.



Of the 98 members of the Washington House of Representatives, 28 are women. 24 of the female state house members were elected in districts alongside a male house member. Research suggests that the use of MMDs encourages the election of female candidates because it provides constituents with the option to vote for both male and female candidates and puts pressure on parties to run one candidate of each gender in a district.

Increasing the district size from two and switching from a numbered post system to at-large elections using fair representation voting systems would likely further enhance women's representation in the state legislature.

Elections to Watch

In 2014, Washington's two Republican congresswomen are expected to be re-elected by large margins. Democratic congresswoman Suzan DelBene is also favored, but represents a more competitive district. Elections for governor and U.S. senator will not be held until 2016.

Notable Recent Elections

In a 2013 special election for state senate, Rep. Jan Angel (R) defeated appointed Democratic incumbent Nathan Schlicher, allowing Republicans to maintain control of the chamber. While Tacoma Mayor Marilyn Strickland ran for a second term unopposed, Seattle's non-partisan general election for mayor featured two male candidates.

In 2012, Senator Maria Cantwell (D) cruised to re-election against Republican Michael Baumgartner. Rep. Suzan DelBene (D) won a competitive open seat election in Washington's 1st congressional district.

Balancing Service in Congress with Motherhood in Washington State

Congresswoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers, 44, is the highest ranking Republican woman in Congress, serving as the Chair of the House Republican Conference. First elected in 2004, Rep McMorris Rodgers married Brian Rodgers in 2006. She has had two children while in office, becoming the first member of Congress in more than a decade to give birth while in office and the first in history to give birth to two children. In July 2013, she announced a third pregnancy.

The state's other female Republican U.S. representative, Jaime Herrera Beutler, is the second youngest woman in the House and first Latina member from Washington. She is Chair of the Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues, and is a Vice-Chair of the National Republican Congressional Committee. In July 2013, she gave birth to her first child, a daughter.