



GENDER POLITICS

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Overview

This section highlights 2013 data on women's political leadership positions in the U.S., along with a few recent papers that explore barriers to women's greater political participation. Subsections include:

- Women elected/appointed to national office (globally and in the U.S.)
- Gender and seniority in U.S. executive and legislative branches
- Gender representation among state and city officeholders
- Beyond numbers: Challenges to shaping gender and political participation

Today, women occupy 22.8 percent of all political and governmental leadership positions, according to a 2013 [report](#) by Colorado Women's College. Representation of women in the 2013 U.S. Congress is at a historical high—20 percent in the Senate and 18.2 percent in the House of Representatives. And yet, despite the fact that women make up approximately 51 percent of the U.S. population, they represented only 18 percent of Congress, 24 percent of state legislators, 10 percent of governors, and 12 percent of mayors of major cities in 2013. The figures are lower for women of color.

The mixed results are reflected in the U.S.'s ranking in the [Global Gender Gap Report](#), which assesses female-to-male achievement ratios in four categories: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment. While the U.S. ranked 23rd overall (out of 136 countries) when all four categories were averaged, its rank sank to 60th when looking solely at political empowerment and the gender gap.

The four countries ranked highest for closing the gender gap overall (Iceland, Finland, Norway, and Sweden) were also ranked highest for closing the politics gender gap; likewise, all of the countries ranked in the top 10 overall for closing the gender gap also ranked in the top 16 for closing the politics gender gap.

Further, although women’s voter turnout is strong, they still face numerous obstacles that erode their ability to vote or vie for public office to greater effect. While gender is a factor, so too are marital status, race/ethnicity, social class, etc. As voters, women are treated often as a monolithic bloc; as politicians, they tend to be characterized more by **personality traits** than by experience or stances on issues.

A note about our information sources: We have incorporated many resources in developing this edition of Gender Stat, including existing research and analysis from experts in academic, policy, and NGO/NPO organizations. Among others, they include the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University’s Eagleton Institute, Colorado Women’s College, the World Economic Forum, the Congressional Research Service, and the Inter-Parliamentary Union. A complete list of sources used is available at the end of this publication.

By the Numbers: Women as Political Actors

Women in Elected/Appointed Political Office

Globally

The **Global Gender Gap Report** shows that 18 countries around the world were led by women as president or prime minister in 2013. In all, 40 countries have had female heads of state. Historically, more women (five) have led Switzerland than any other country in the world. The next closest are South Korea, Haiti, Sri Lanka, Finland, and Lithuania, which have each had three female leaders. Bangladesh, Guyana, Iceland, India, Ireland, Israel, Liberia, Philippines, New Zealand, and São Tomé and Príncipe have each had two. The U.S. has never elected a woman to head the country, nor has either of the major political parties nominated a woman as their candidate for president.

Women heads of state in office in 2013 globally (elected & appointed)*

([Worldwide Guide to Women in Leadership](#))

Country

	Office/Name	Term
Germany	Chancellor Angela Merkel	Nov. 22, 2005–Present
Liberia	President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf	Jan. 16, 2006–Present
Argentina	President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner	Dec. 10, 2007–Present
Bangladesh	Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wazed	Jan. 6, 2009–Present
Iceland	Prime Minister Jóhanna Sigurdardóttir	Feb. 1, 2009–May 23, 2013
Lithuania	President Dalia Grybauskaitė	July 12, 2009–Present
Costa Rica	President Laura Chinchilla	May 8, 2010–Present
Trinidad and Tobago	Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar	May 26, 2010–Present
Australia	Prime Minister Julia Gillard	June 24, 2010–June 27, 2013
Brazil	President Dilma Rousseff	Jan. 1, 2011–Present
Kosovo	President Atifete Jahjaga	Apr. 7, 2011–Present

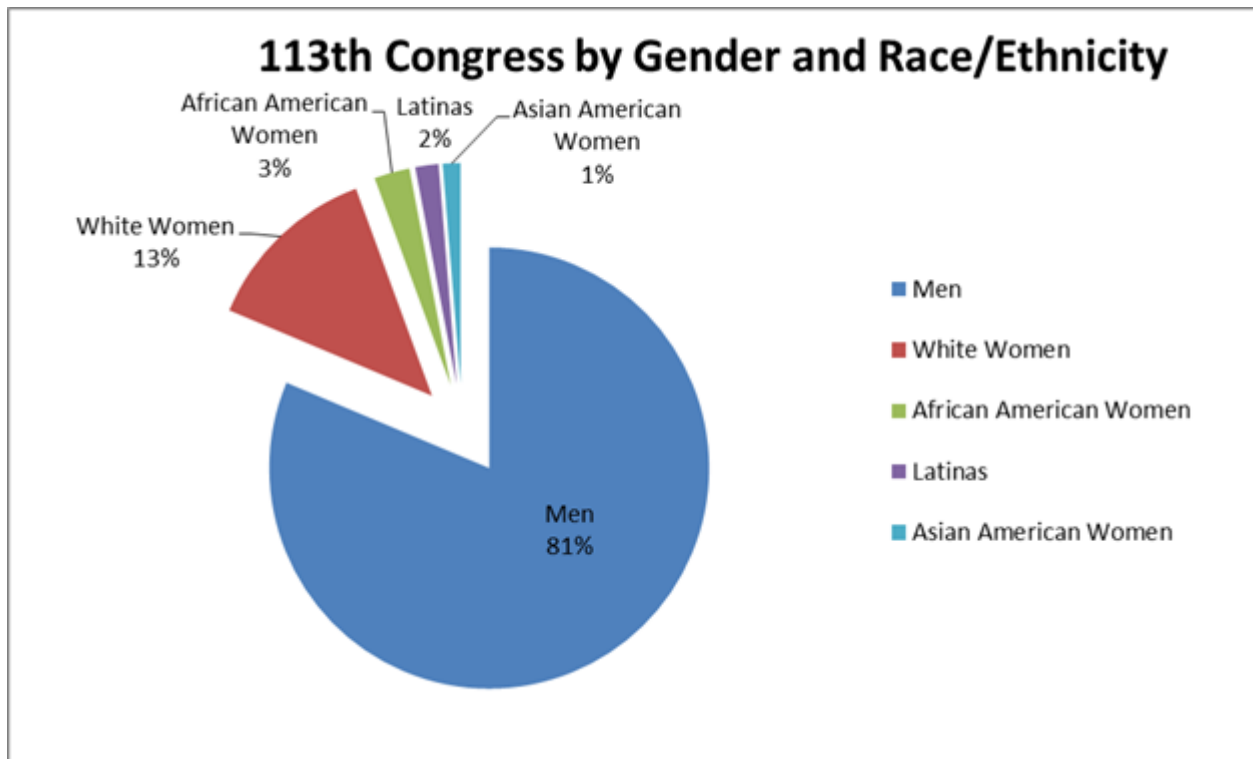
Thailand	Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra	Aug. 8, 2011–Present
Denmark	Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt	Oct. 3, 2011–Present
Jamaica	Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller	Jan. 5, 2012–Present
Malawi	President Joyce Banda	Apr. 7, 2012–Present
South Korea	President Park Geun-hye	Feb. 25, 2013–Present
Slovenia	Prime Minister Alenka Bratušek	Mar. 20, 2013–Present
Cyprus (North)	Prime Minister Sibel Siber	June 13, 2013–September 2, 2013

* President-elect Michelle Bachelet (Chile): Presidency March 11, 2006--March 11, 2010; President-elect since December 15, 2013

In the U.S.

Federal Elected Offices and High Level Appointments

(Center for American Women and Politics)



Gender Composition of Congress by Chamber:

(Congressional Research Service, as of December 2013)

	Total Seats	Women Total	White Women	Women of Color
Congress	535	99 18.5%	69 12.9%	30 5.6%
Senate	100	20 20%	19 19%	1 1%
House	435	79 18.2%	50 11.5%	29 6.7%

According to the National Women’s Political Caucus, at one end of the gender and politics spectrum, New Hampshire was the first state to have its Congressional and gubernatorial officeholders be all women. At the other end, no women have ever represented Delaware, Iowa, Mississippi, or Vermont in either house of Congress.

The U.S., unlike many of its peer nations, does not use quotas as a means of increasing the number of women represented in publicly elected office. The [Quota Project](#) confirms that in 2013, 51 countries used voluntary political party quotas wherein individual political parties set a minimum percentage or number of women candidates to participate in elections. When cross-referenced with the Global Gender Gap Report, it appears that four of the five countries identified as having the smallest gender gap globally (Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and Philippines) have also implemented voluntary political party quotas.

Internationally, on average women represented **21.4 percent** of members of national legislative bodies in 2013. The World Economic Forum’s [Global Gender Gap Report](#) shows that the U.S. ranks 76th out of 132 countries for the ratio of female to male officeholders in parliament. Cuba ranks first with a ratio of 49 women to 51 men in its primary legislative body. Yemen and Qatar, both with a ratio of 0 women to 100 men, ranked 131st and 132nd, respectively. The following [chart](#) by the Inter-Parliamentary Union gives a region-by-region perspective:

Women in National Parliaments, by Regional Averages
(Inter-Parliamentary Union)

Region	Single House or lower House	Upper House or Senate	Both Houses combined
Nordic countries	42.0%	N/A	N/A
Europe - OSCE member countries including Nordic countries	24.6%	22.6%	24.2%
Americas	24.2%	23.8%	24.1%
Europe - OSCE member countries excluding Nordic countries	23.0%	22.6%	22.9%
Sub-Saharan Africa	21.1%	18.7%	21.7%
Asia	19.1%	13.8%	18.5%
Arab States	17.8%	7.7%	15.9%
Pacific	13.1%	38.6%	15.9%

Seniority in the U.S.

Executive-level seniority

During President Obama's first term, women comprised 30 percent of his cabinet. The same is true for his **second term**: among 23 cabinet and cabinet-level appointed positions, seven (or 30 percent) are held by women.

Cabinet Officers

- Secretary of the Interior: Sally Jewell
- Secretary of Commerce: Penny Pritzker
- Secretary of Health and Human Services: Kathleen Sebelius

Cabinet-Level Officers

- Director of the Office of Management and Budget: Sylvia Mathews Burwell
- Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency: Gina McCarthy
- Ambassador to the United Nations: Samantha Power
- Administrator of the Small Business Administration: Acting Administrator Jeanne Hulit

Other women in high-level positions serving the Executive Branch are: Valerie Jarrett (Senior Advisor), Latifa Lyles (Acting Director of the Women's Bureau, Department of Labor), Cecilia Muñoz (Director, Domestic Policy Council), Julia Pierson (Director, U.S. Secret Service), Susan E. Rice (National Security Advisor), Nancy Sutley (Chairwoman of the White House Council on Environmental Quality), Mary Jo White (Chairwoman of the Securities and Exchange Commission), and Edith Ramirez (Chairwoman of the Federal Trade Commission). In addition, the Senate is expected to confirm the nomination of Janet Yellen (Vice Chair of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System) to be the first female chair of the Federal Reserve in January 2014.

Congressional seniority

Seniority, ranking membership, and committee membership play tremendous roles in effectively moving legislative agendas forward; however, female politicians are not represented on powerful committees or in chairperson roles. According to a report by Colorado Women's College of the University of Denver:

There were four chairwomen among 20 Senate committees in 2012:

- Agriculture: Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D-MI)
- Environment and Public Works: Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-CA)
- Small Business and Entrepreneurship: Sen. Mary Landrieu (D-LA)
- Veterans Affairs: Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA)

There was one chairwoman among 20 committees in the House of Representative 2012:

- Foreign Affairs – Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL)

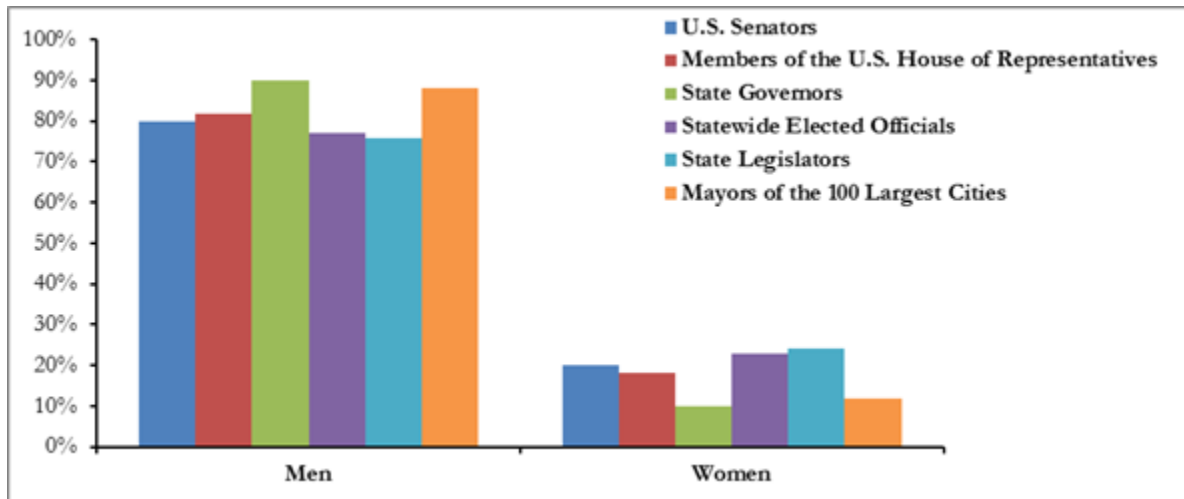
The most powerful committees—House Appropriations, Ways and Means, Rules, Budget, Energy and Commerce—did not have any women in leadership positions.

State and City-Level Offices

Numbers are trending up for women elected to the U.S. Congress. Yet, as the following chart shows, over the past ten years, the percentage of women holding statewide and citywide office has stalled or decreased.

Women in National, State, and City Office 2013

(Center for American Women and Politics 2013)



Women in National, State, and City Office 2003 and 2013

(Center for American Women and Politics, 2003 and 2013)

	Percentage Women in 2003	Percentage Women in 2013
U.S. Senators	14%	20%
Members of the U.S. House of Representatives	13.6%	18.2%
State Governors	14%	10%
Statewide Elected Officials	25.6%	23%
State Legislators	22.4%	24.3%
Mayors of the 100 Largest Cities	14%	12%

State Legislators by Gender

(Center for American Women and Politics, 2013)

	Total	Total women officeholders		White women officeholders		Women of color officeholders	
State Legislators in 2012	7,383	1,789	24.3%	1,422	19.3%	369	5%
State Senate	1,972	411	20.8%	316	16%	94	4.8%
State Assembly	5,411	1,378	25.5%	1,106	20.4%	275	5.1%
Statewide elected executives	318	73	23%	62	19.5%	11	3.5%

State-Level Elected Officials

(Center for American Women and Politics, 2013 and National Association of Women Judges, 2013)

	Total	Men		Women	
	officeholders	officeholders		officeholders	officeholders
Governors	50	45	90%	5	10%
Lieutenant Governors	44 (50 - 6)*	34	77%	10	23%
State Attorney General	50	42	84%	8	16%
Secretaries of State	47	36	77%	11	23%
State Treasurer/Chief Financial Officer	49	42	86%	7	14%
State Comptroller/Controller	50	47	94%	3	6%

* Only 44 states have Lieutenant Governors

City-Level Elected Officials

(Center for American Women and Politics, 2013)

	Total	Men	Percentage Men	Women	Percentage Women
Mayors of cities w/ populations over 30,000	1,341	1,099	82%	242	18%
Mayors of cities w/ populations over 100,000	281	241	85.8%	40	14.2%
Mayors of 100 largest cities	100	88	88%	12	12%

Judicial Appointments

Currently, three women serve as Supreme Court Justices, the most at any one time in U.S. history. Since its inception, only four women have been appointed out of a total 119 justices. In the federal judiciary system, there are 341 female judges and 314 judges of color, and about 26 percent of federal judgeship positions were held by women in 2012.

State-Level Elected Officials: Judges

(Center for American Women and Politics, 2013 and National Association of Women Judges, 2013)

	Total state judges	Male judges		Female judges	
State Court Judges in the U.S.	17,871	12,662	71%	5,209	29%
State Final Appellate Jurisdiction Courts	362	237	65%	125	35%
State Intermediate Appellate Jurisdiction Courts	974	648	67%	326	33%
State General Jurisdiction Courts	11,314	8,224	73%	3,090	27%
State Limited and Special Jurisdiction Courts	5,221	3,553	68%	1,668	32%

Beyond the Numbers: Women as Political Participants

A few studies and reports on gender and political participation (as voters and candidates) were published in 2013. They include:

- The Center for American Progress released “A Dual Disenfranchisement: 2013 Update,” which delves into voting rates for women of color. Their analysis of the 2012 election found a moderate balance in the way white women voted—42 percent for President Obama and 56 percent for Mitt Romney. Among African American women and Latina voters, the contrast was stark: 96 percent and 76 percent voted for President Obama, respectively; at the same time, 3 percent of African American women and 23 percent of Latinas voted for Romney. Like white women, women of color out-voted men of their respective race/ethnic groups in 2012, and they also faced various challenges in exercising their right to vote. The report looks at many barriers to voting (**workday** voting, **costs** associated with travel to polling stations, felony disenfranchisement, naturalization and registration requirements, rules and regulations, **voter ID laws**, limits on early voting, elimination of same-day voter registration, reduction of accessible polling sites, etc.) and how they impact women of color’s voter participation and civic engagement.
- There is an increasing sense that politics in general and elections in particular are weighted toward the wealthy. The 2010 *Citizens United* ruling significantly amplified the political “voice” of the wealthy. Concerns about money’s ultimate influence on public policy are central to skepticism regarding the rise in spending and growth of Super PACs in American politics. If money is an expression of political voice, more money may mean a louder voice in debates about public policy priorities and decisions. According to a **recent report**, the majority of Americans do not share the views of the political elite: the largest political donors are more likely to be wealthy, white, and male, and are more conservative than average Americans, especially on economic matters. The researchers say of these donors, “Turning your megaphone up to eleven won’t always mean you get your way—but it sure increases your chances, and it sure makes it hard to hear the rest of us.” Thus, those most likely to give political money and those giving the most money have—at the least—a greater chance of being heard and responded to in today’s political debates.
- Jennifer L. Lawless and Richard L. Fox, the authors of *Girls Just Wanna Not Run: The Gender Gap in Young Americans’ Political Ambition*, believe that a socialized “ambition gap” turns women and girls away from the idea of running for office well before the beginning of their careers. Although levels of political ambitions and interests seem to be similar among male and female high-school students, when college-aged women are asked about which jobs they find to be appealing, barring income as a factor, they report teaching to be more appealing (42 percent) than becoming a mayor (8 percent) and becoming a business executive to be more appealing (33 percent) than a member of Congress (11 percent). However, the complexity of assessing causal factors in explaining women’s lack of political ambitions—and hence, women’s under-representation—does not end here. Lawless and Fox also found that young men are simply socialized to enter the political arena more than their female counterparts. Young men are encouraged to think about politics as a plausible career path by their parents, while young women are exposed less to political information and discussions, whether at home or in school. Crucially, young women are much less likely to be encouraged to run for office or to believe that they can be qualified to do so than young men.
- A few 2013 studies released look at the role gender-stereotyped socialization and sexism play in women’s political participation. One, “**Traits versus Issues: How Female Candidates Shape Coverage of Senate and Gubernatorial Races**,” for example, found that female candidates had a harder time convincing voters to evaluate them by their merits and issues rather than their **traits**, such as appearance and styles of presentation. Another, “**Measuring Stereotypes of Female Politicians**,” showed that female politicians get caught in a double bind women in corporate leadership positions know all too well: they are perceived simultaneously as not possessing **stereotypical** female characteristics (e.g., compassionate, sensitive, nice, etc.) and as lacking stereotypical male characteristics (e.g., leadership, competence, assertiveness, charisma, etc.).

- Nonprofit vote.org released an analysis of the biennial U.S. Census survey. Among other things, the report highlighted the 15 percent gap—the smallest it has been in the last four presidential elections—in voter turnout for the 2012 presidential campaign between lower income and higher income households: voter turnout for households of less than \$50,000/year income was 62 percent, compared to 77 percent of those of more than \$75,000/year.
- According to the Center for Responsive Politics, candidates, political parties, and outside groups spent approximately [\\$2.3 billion](#) on the 2012 U.S. presidential race alone. Reasons cited for why U.S. elections costs are so high included the larger number of offices and shorter term lengths (hence more campaigns) than most other democracies; a candidate-centered electoral system that focuses more on individual candidates than their parties; and the prevalence of TV and airwave-based campaign tools, which are expensive. By contrast, Germany's September 2013 federal election, in which Angela Merkel won re-election, cost approximately [\\$93 million](#), much of it coming from public financing. The U.K. spent about [£31.5 million](#) (\$48 million USD) for its 2010 general election; the U.S. spent about [\\$3.6 billion](#) that year. Outside the U.S., other democracies tightly regulate and monitor election spending. For example, candidates in the U.K are barred from purchasing television or radio time. Public financing is fully integrated into the election systems in countries such as Denmark, Finland, Germany, Mexico, Sweden, and Turkey, to name a few. In Norway, political parties are funded primarily by the government—[74 percent in 2012](#)—to reduce their reliance on big donors and corporations.

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