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Women in the United States Congress: Historical Overview, Tables, and Discussion

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Women in the United States Congress: Historical Overview, Tables, and Discussion

Abstract

A record 102 women currently serve in the 113th Congress: 82 in the House (63 Democrats and 19 Republicans) and 20 in the Senate (16 Democrats and 4 Republicans). One hundred one women were initially sworn in to the 113th Congress—1 female Republican House Member has since resigned, and 2 Democratic House Members have been elected. This is higher than the previous record number of 95 women who were initially elected to the 111th Congress.

- The first woman elected to Congress was Representative Jeannette Rankin (R- MT, 1917-1919, 1941-1943). The first woman to serve in the Senate was Rebecca Latimer Felton (D-GA). She was appointed in 1922 and served for only one day. Hattie Caraway (D-AR, 1931-1945) was the first Senator to succeed her husband and the first woman elected to a six-year Senate term.
- A total of 298 women have served in Congress, 194 Democrats and 104 Republicans. Of these women, 254 (165 Democrats, 89 Republicans) have served only in the House of Representatives; 34 (21 Democrats, 13 Republicans) have served only in the Senate; and 10 (8 Democrats, 2 Republicans) have served in both houses. These figures include 4 non-voting Delegates, 1 each from Guam, Hawaii, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.
- A total of 33 African American women have served in Congress (1 in the Senate, 32 in the House), including 17 serving in the 113th Congress. Ten Hispanic women have been elected to the House; nine serve in the 113th Congress. Nine Asian Pacific American women have served in Congress (8 in the House, 1 in both the House and Senate), including seven in the 113th Congress.
- Nineteen women in the House, and 10 women in the Senate, have chaired committees. In the 113th Congress, 1 woman chairs a House committee, and 5 women chair Senate committees, with 1 female Senator chairing two committees.

This report includes a discussion of the impact of women in Congress as well as historical information, including the number and percentage of women in Congress over time, means of entry to Congress, comparisons to international and state legislatures, records for tenure, firsts for women in Congress, women in leadership, and African American and Asian Pacific American women in Congress. The report may reflect data at the beginning or end of each Congress, or changes during a Congress. See the notes throughout the report for information on the currency of the data.

Keywords

women, Congress, state legislature, House of Representatives, Senate

Comments

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Informing the legislative debate since 1914

Women in the United States Congress: Historical Overview, Tables, and Discussion

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Summary

A record 102 women currently serve in the 113th Congress: 82 in the House (63 Democrats and 19 Republicans) and 20 in the Senate (16 Democrats and 4 Republicans). One hundred one women were initially sworn in to the 113th Congress—1 female Republican House Member has since resigned, and 2 Democratic House Members have been elected. This is higher than the previous record number of 95 women who were initially elected to the 111th Congress.

- The first woman elected to Congress was Representative Jeannette Rankin (R-MT, 1917-1919, 1941-1943). The first woman to serve in the Senate was Rebecca Latimer Felton (D-GA). She was appointed in 1922 and served for only one day. Hattie Caraway (D-AR, 1931-1945) was the first Senator to succeed her husband and the first woman elected to a six-year Senate term.
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- A total of 33 African American women have served in Congress (1 in the Senate, 32 in the House), including 17 serving in the 113th Congress. Ten Hispanic women have been elected to the House; nine serve in the 113th Congress. Nine Asian Pacific American women have served in Congress (8 in the House, 1 in both the House and Senate), including seven in the 113th Congress.
- Nineteen women in the House, and 10 women in the Senate, have chaired committees. In the 113th Congress, 1 woman chairs a House committee, and 5 women chair Senate committees, with 1 female Senator chairing two committees.

This report includes a discussion of the impact of women in Congress as well as historical information, including the number and percentage of women in Congress over time, means of entry to Congress, comparisons to international and state legislatures, records for tenure, firsts for women in Congress, women in leadership, and African American and Asian Pacific American women in Congress. The report may reflect data at the beginning or end of each Congress, or changes during a Congress. See the notes throughout the report for information on the currency of the data.

For additional biographical information, including the names, committee assignments, dates of service, listings by Congress and state, and (for Representatives) congressional districts of the 297 women who have served in Congress, see CRS Report RL30261, *Women in the United States Congress, 1917-2013: Biographical and Committee Assignment Information, and Listings by State and Congress*, by Jennifer E. Manning and Ida A. Brudnick.

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Introduction

Two hundred ninety-eight women have been elected or appointed to the U.S. Congress.¹ Jeannette Rankin (R-MT), elected on November 9, 1916, to the 65th Congress (1917-1919), has the distinction of being the first woman to serve in Congress.²

Since Rankin's election, 297 additional women have served in Congress, as detailed in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Number of Women Members of Congress: 1917-Present

	Total Women	Senate Service Only	House Service Only (including Delegates)	Delegates ^a	Both Chambers
Total	298	34	254	4	10
Democrats	194	21	165	3	8
Republicans	104	13	89	1	2

Source: U.S. Congress, House, Office of History and Preservation, *Women in Congress, 1917-2006* (Washington: GPO, 2006), <http://history.house.gov/Exhibition-and-Publications/WIC/Women-in-Congress>. The web version of this publication includes current information and is continually updated.

- a. The total number of female Members of the House includes one Delegate to the House of Representatives from Hawaii prior to statehood, one from the District of Columbia, one from Guam, and one from the U.S. Virgin Islands.

In the 113th Congress, 102 women serve, as detailed in **Table 2**.³

Table 2. Number of Women Members of the 113th Congress

	Total Women	Senate	House (including Delegates)	Delegates
Total	102 (18.8% of total members) ^a	20 (20% of total members)	82 (18.6% of total members)	3 ^b
Democrats	78	16	62	3
Republicans	23	4	19	0

Source: U.S. Congress, House, Office of History and Preservation, *Women in Congress, 1917-2006* (Washington: GPO, 2006), <http://history.house.gov/Exhibition-and-Publications/WIC/Women-in-Congress>.

¹ For additional information on the women who have served in Congress, please refer to U.S. Congress, House, Office of History and Preservation, *Women in Congress, 1917-2006* (Washington: GPO, 2006), at <http://history.house.gov/Exhibition-and-Publications/WIC/Women-in-Congress>. The web version of this publication includes current information and is continually updated.

² Rep. Rankin served from 1917 to 1919 and from 1941 to 1943. Rep. Rankin was also the only Member of Congress to vote against America's entry into both World Wars.

³ The 113th Congress began with 101 women Members. One female Republican Representative has since resigned, and two female Democratic Representatives have been elected. Information in this section is current as of the date of the report.

Notes: The 113th Congress began with 101 women Members. One woman Republican Representative has since resigned, and two women Democratic Representatives have been elected. Information in this table is current as of the date of the report.

- a. Not including Delegates, women currently hold 79 (18.1%) seats in the House of Representatives and 20 (20%) seats in the Senate, totaling 98 (18.5%) of the 535 voting seats in the 113th Congress.
- b. Three of the women who serve in the House are Delegates, representing the District of Columbia, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands; all are Democrats.

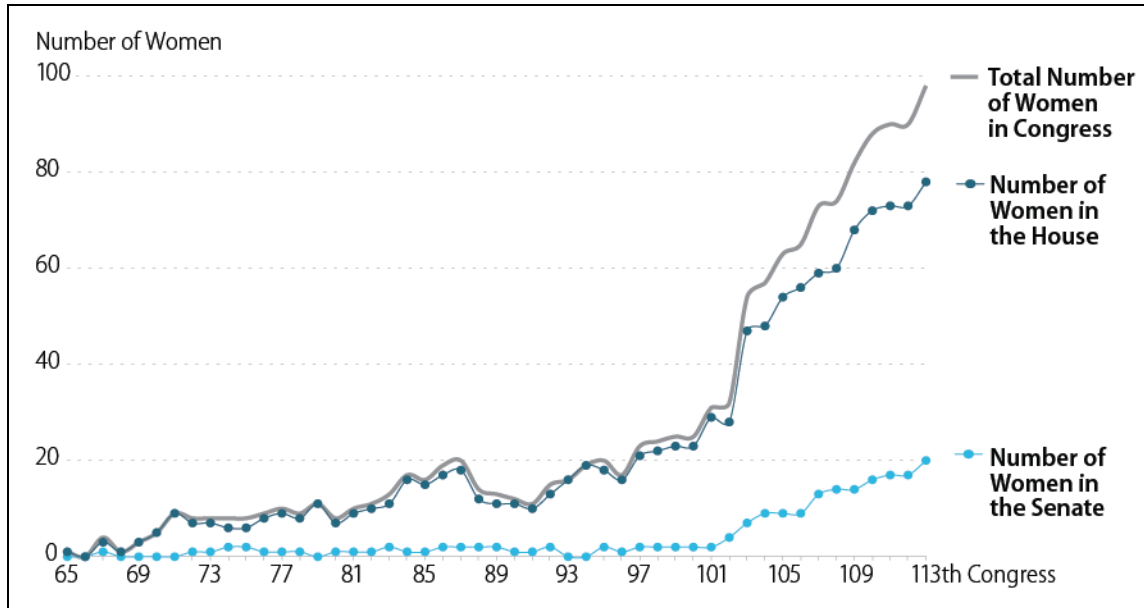
This report includes a discussion of the impact of women in Congress as well as historical information, including the number and percent of women in Congress over time, means of entry to Congress, comparisons to international and state legislatures, records for tenure, firsts for women in Congress, women in leadership, and African American and Asian Pacific American women in Congress. For additional biographical information, including the names, committee assignments, dates of service, listings by Congress and state, and (for Representatives) congressional districts of the 297 women who have served in Congress, see CRS Report RL30261, *Women in the United States Congress, 1917-2013: Biographical and Committee Assignment Information, and Listings by State and Congress*, by Jennifer E. Manning and Ida A. Brudnick.

Historical Overview of Women in Congress

Since the 65th Congress (1917-1918), the number of women serving in Congress increased incrementally, and on a few occasions decreased. The largest increase occurred in the 103rd Congress (1993-1994), when the total number of women in the House and Senate serving at one time rose from 32 in the 102nd Congress to 54, an increase of nearly 69%. The 1992 election came to be known popularly as the “Year of the Woman” due to the large electoral increase of women in Congress.⁴

⁴ *The Year of the Woman: Myths and Realities*, ed. Elizabeth Adell Cook, Sue Thomas, and Clyde Wilcox (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994).

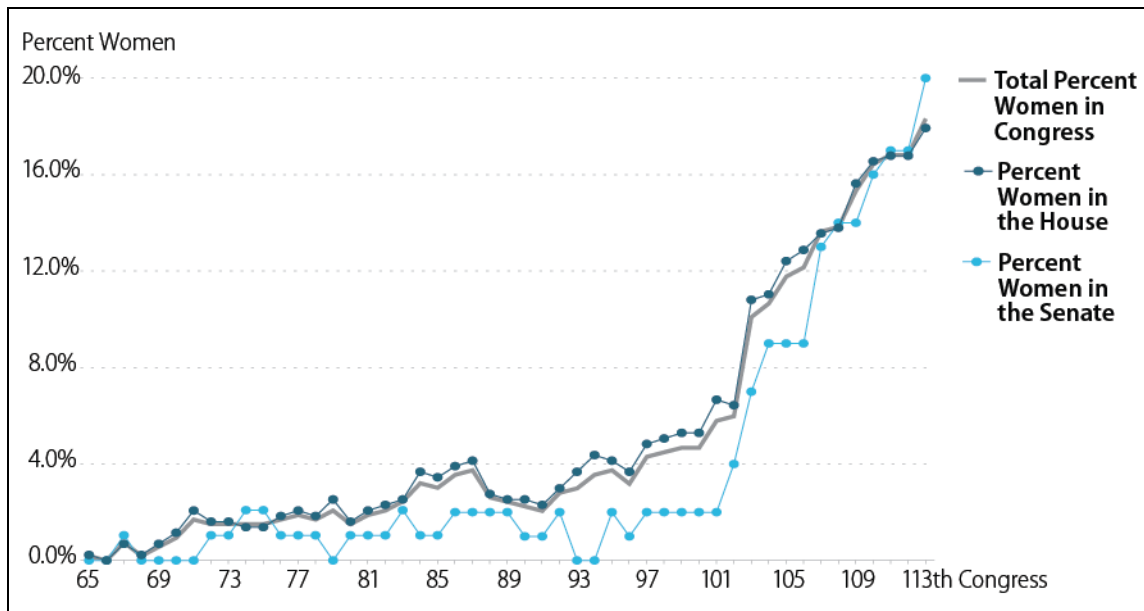
Figure 1. Number of Women by Congress: 1917-2013



Source: “Women in the U.S. Congress 2013” fact sheet, Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University. Figure compiled by CRS.

Notes: Delegates are not included in the data. The factsheet indicates that “table for Congresses prior to the Current one shows maximum number of women elected or appointed to serve in that Congress at one time. Some filled out unexpired terms and some were never sworn in.” Data for the 113th Congress are for the beginning of the Congress.

Figure 2. Percentage of Women by Congress: 1917-2013



Source: “Women in the U.S. Congress 2013” fact sheet, Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University. Figure compiled by CRS.

Notes: Delegates are not included in the data. The factsheet indicates that “table for Congresses prior to the Current one shows maximum number of women elected or appointed to serve in that Congress at one time.

Some filled out unexpired terms and some were never sworn in.” Data for the 113th Congress are for the beginning of the Congress.

Table 3. Total Number of Women in Each Congress: 1917-2013
(Including Delegates and Members who Served only a Portion of the Congress)

Congress	House	Senate	Total House and Senate
65 th (1917-1918) ^a	1	0	1
66 th (1919-1920)	0	0	0
67 th (1921-1922)	3	1	4
68 th (1923-1924)	1	0	1
69 th (1925-1926) ^b	3	0	3
70 th (1927-1928) ^c	5	0	5
71 st (1929-1930)	9	0	9
72 nd (1931-1932) ^d	7	1	8
73 rd (1933-1934)	7	1	8
74 th (1935-1936)	6	2	8
75 th (1937-1938) ^e	6	3	9
76 th (1939-1940) ^f	8	1	9
77 th (1941-1942) ^g	9	1	10
78 th (1943-1944) ^h	8	1	9
79 th (1945-1946) ⁱ	11	0	11
80 th (1947-1948) ^j	7	1	8
81 st (1949-1950) ^k	9	1	10
82 nd (1951-1952) ^l	10	1	11
83 rd (1953-1954) ^m	12	3	15
84 th (1955-1956) ⁿ	17	1	18
85 th (1957-1958)	15	1	16
86 th (1959-1960) ^o	17	2	19
87 th (1961-1962) ^p	18	2	20
88 th (1963-1964) ^q	12	2	14
89 th (1965-1966)	11	2	13
90 th (1967-1968)	11	1	12
91 st (1969-1970)	10	1	11
92 nd (1971-1972) ^r	13	2	15
93 rd (1973-1974) ^s	16	0	16
94 th (1975-1976)	19	0	19
95 th (1977-1978) ^t	18	3	21
96 th (1979-1980) ^u	16	2	18

Congress	House	Senate	Total House and Senate
97 th (1981-1982) ^v	21	2	23
98 th (1983-1984) ^w	22	2	24
99 th (1985-1986) ^x	23	2	25
100 th (1987-1988) ^y	24	2	26
101 st (1989-1990) ^z	29	2	31
102 nd (1991-1992) ^{aa}	30	4	34
103 rd (1993-1994)	48	7	55
104 th (1995-1996)	50	9	59
105 th (1997-1998) ^{bb}	57	9	66
106 th (1999-2000)	58	9	67
107 th (2001-2002) ^{cc}	62	14	76
108 th (2003-2004) ^{dd}	63	14	77
109 th (2005-2006)	71	14	85
110 th (2007-2008) ^a	79	16	95
111 th (2009-2010) ^a	79	17	96
112 th (2011-2012) ^a	79	17	96
113 th (2013-2014) ^{hh}	82	20	102

Source: CRS summary, based on <http://history.house.gov/Exhibition-and-Publications/WIC/Women-in-Congress/>.

Notes: Numbers include delegates. For simplification, Congresses are listed in two-year increments. Pursuant to the 20th Amendment to the Constitution, which was ratified January 23, 1933, “the terms of Senators and Representatives at noon on the 3rd day of January.” For specific dates, see “Dates of Sessions of the Congress, present-1789,” at <http://www.senate.gov/reference/Sessions/sessionDates.htm>.

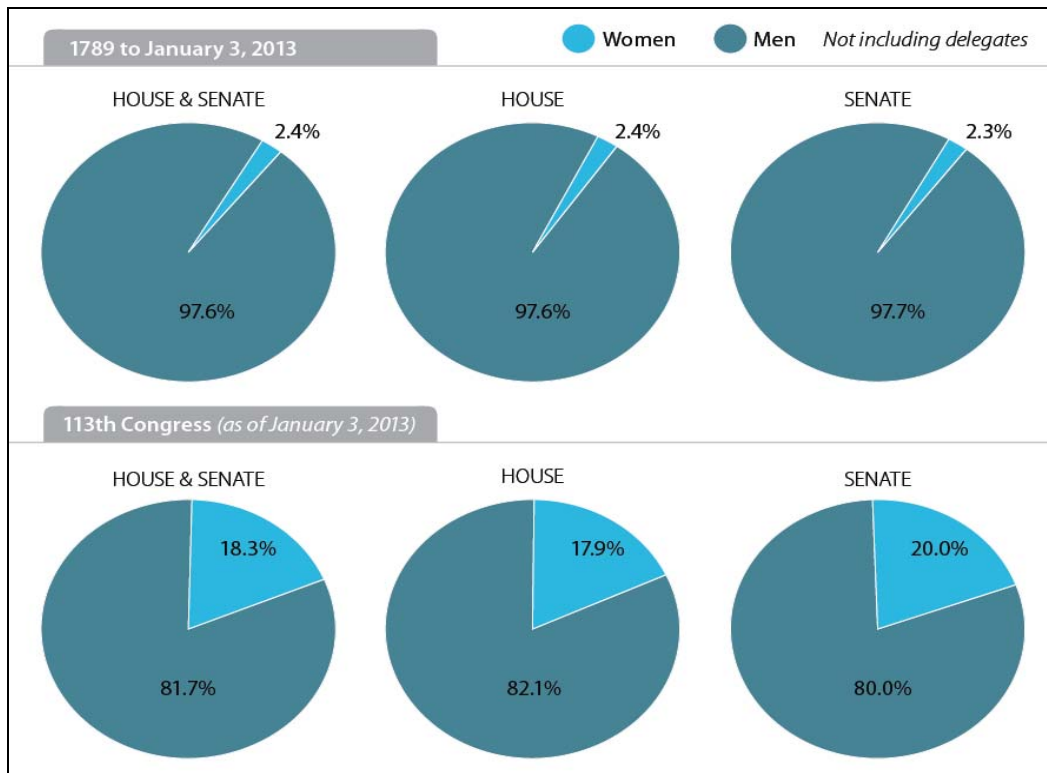
- a. Includes two House Members who were elected to fill a vacancy and one Senator who was appointed to fill a vacancy.
- b. Includes two House Members who were elected to fill a vacancy.
- c. Includes one House Member who was elected to fill a vacancy.
- d. Includes one House Member who was elected to fill a vacancy and one Senator who was appointed to fill a vacancy.
- e. Includes one House Member who was elected to fill a vacancy, one Senator who was elected to fill a vacancy, and one Senator who was appointed to fill a vacancy.
- f. Includes four House Members who were elected to fill a vacancy.
- g. Includes two House Members who were elected to fill a vacancy.
- h. Includes one House Member who was elected to fill a vacancy.
- i. Includes two House Members who were elected to fill a vacancy.
- j. Includes one Senator who was appointed to fill a vacancy.
- k. Includes one House Member who was elected to fill a vacancy.
- l. Includes two House Members who were elected to fill a vacancy.

- m. Includes one House Member who was elected to fill a vacancy, one Senator who was appointed to fill a vacancy, and one Senator who was elected to fill that vacancy.
- n. Includes one House Member who was elected to fill a vacancy.
- o. Includes one House Member who died and one House Member elected to fill a vacancy.
- p. Includes three House Members who were elected to fill a vacancy.
- q. Includes one House Member who was elected to fill a vacancy.
- r. Includes one House Member who was elected to fill a vacancy and one Senator appointed to fill a vacancy.
- s. Includes two House Members who were elected to fill a vacancy.
- t. Includes two Senators who were appointed to fill a vacancy.
- u. Includes one House Member-elect whose seat was declared vacant due to an incapacitating illness, and one House member who was elected to fill a vacancy.
- v. Includes three House Members who were elected to a vacancy.
- w. Includes one House Member who was elected to fill a vacancy.
- x. Includes one House Member who was elected to fill a vacancy.
- y. Includes one House Member who died.
- z. Includes four House Members who were elected to fill a vacancy.
- aa. Includes one House Member and one Senator elected to fill a vacancy and one Senator who was appointed to fill a vacancy.
- bb. Includes one House Member who resigned and four House Members who were elected to fill a vacancy.
- cc. Includes one House Member who died and one House Member who was elected to fill a vacancy.
- dd. Includes one House Member who was elected to fill a vacancy.
- ee. Includes four House Members who died and four House Members who were elected to fill a vacancy.
- ff. Includes two House Members who resigned, one House Member who was elected to fill a vacancy, one Senator who resigned, and one Senator initially elected to the House and then appointed to the Senate.
- gg. Includes one House Member who resigned and four House Members who were elected to fill a vacancy.
- hh. Includes one House Member who resigned and two House Members who were elected to fill a vacancy.

Despite increases in the number of women serving in Congress over time, **Figure 3** shows that, according to the House and Senate historical offices, 2.4% of the voting Members in U.S. history, as of the beginning of the 113th Congress, have been women. The gender composition at the beginning of the 113th Congress was 18.3% female.

- Of the total, 1,948 Senators who have served since 1789, 44 (2.3%) have been female.
- Of the 10,815 Representatives (including those who served in both chambers but not including delegates), 260 (2.4%) have been female.
- Of the 12,101 persons (not including delegates), who have served in Congress, 294 (2.4%) have been female.

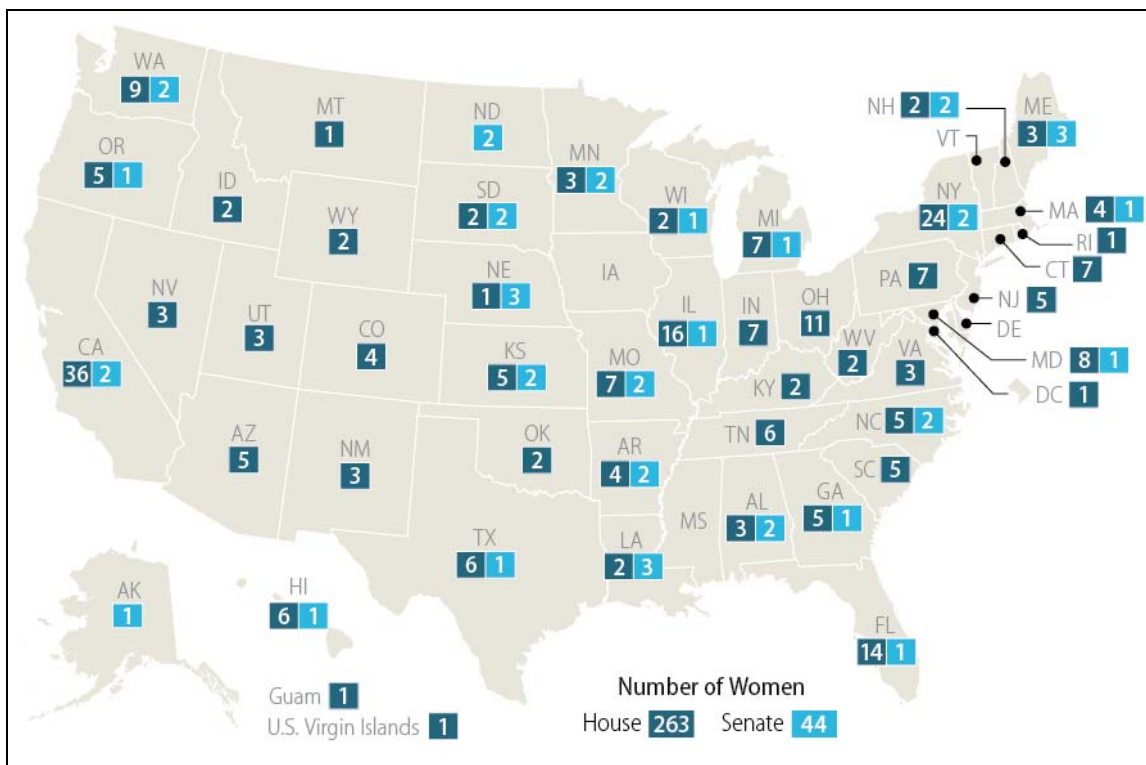
Figure 3. Women in Congress: Percentage of Members Since 1789 and in the 113th Congress



Source: Senate Historical Office, *Senators of the United States*, February 1, 2013, chronological list. Available at <http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/resources/pdf/chronlist.pdf>; and, House of Representatives, *Total Members of the House and State Representation, 1789 to January 3, 2013*, <http://history.house.gov/Institution/Total-Members/Total-Members/>. This information is updated once per Congress.

Notes: Delegates are not included in the data. Numbers for the 113th Congress are for the beginning of the Congress.

Figure 4. Number of Women in the House and Senate by State, District or Territory, 1789 – Present



Source: CRS summary, based on <http://history.house.gov/Exhibition-and-Publications/WIC/Women-in-Congress/>. Numbers include Delegates and reflect the beginning of the 113th Congress.

How Women Enter Congress

Pursuant to Article I, Section 2, clause 4 of the U.S. Constitution, all Representatives enter office through election, even those who enter after a seat becomes open during a Congress.⁵ By contrast, the Seventeenth Amendment to the Constitution, which was ratified on April 8, 1913, gives state legislatures the option to empower governors to fill Senate vacancies by temporary appointment.⁶

The 44 women who have served in the Senate entered initially through three different routes:

- 25 entered through regularly scheduled elections,
- 14 were appointed to unexpired terms, and
- 5 were elected by special election.

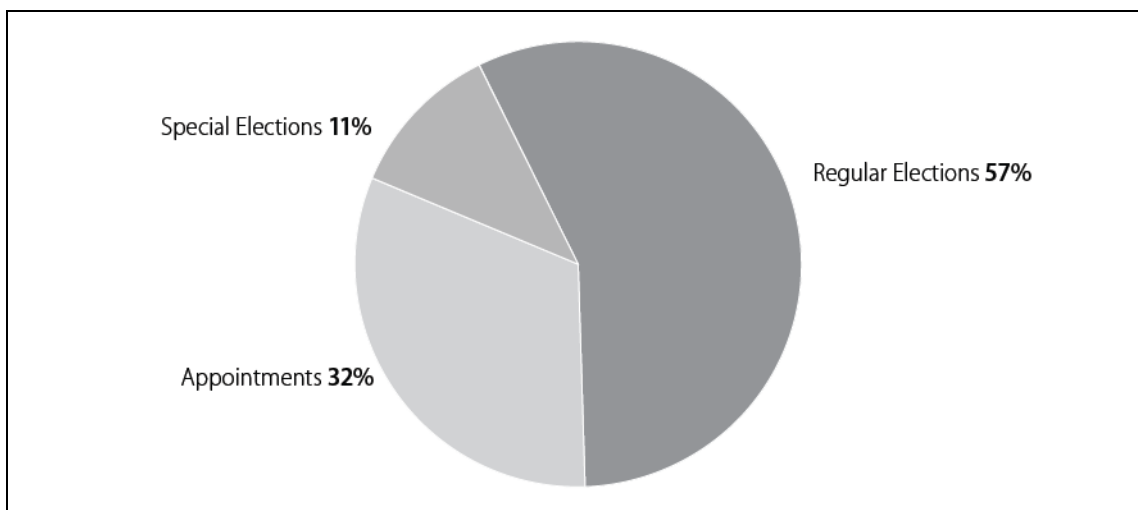
⁵ “[W]hen vacancies happen in the Representation from any State, the Executive Authority thereof shall issue Writs of Election to fill such Vacancies.” Article I, Section 2, clause 4 of the U.S. Constitution.

⁶ Prior to the ratification of this amendment, Senators were chosen pursuant to Article I, Section 3, of the Constitution. For additional information, see http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/briefing/Direct_Election_Senators.htm.

As **Figure 5** shows, approximately 68% of all women who have served in the Senate initially entered Senate service by winning an election. A little less than one-third (32%) of women entered the Senate initially through an appointment. Of the 14 women who were appointed to the Senate, 4 served more than one year, with 3 of those women serving in more than one Congress.

Since the ratification of the Seventeenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1913, nine years prior to the first appointment of a woman to fill a Senate vacancy, 193 Senators have been appointed.⁷ Of these appointees, 93% (179) have been men. While 32% of the female Senators have been appointed, 22% of the 814 male Senators sworn in since January 1, 1913, have been appointed.⁸

Figure 5. Women’s Initial Entrance to the Senate: Regular Elections, Special Elections, and Appointments to Unexpired Terms



Source: Figure compiled by CRS based on descriptions in the Biographical Directory of the United States Congress (<http://bioguide.congress.gov/biosearch/biosearch.asp>).

Women in Congress as Compared with Women in Other Legislative Bodies

International Perspective

The total percentage of voting female representation in Congress (18.3%) is slightly lower than averages of female representation in other countries. As of February 1, 2013, women represented 20.4% of national legislative seats (both houses) across the entire world. The Inter-Parliamentary

⁷ Source: “Appointed Senators” list available at http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/briefing/senators_appointed.htm.

⁸ Total number of Senators since January 1, 1913, was derived from the Senate’s “Senators of the United States 1789-present: a chronological list of senators since the First Congress in 1789,” available at <http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/resources/pdf/chronlist.pdf>. Senators are listed by date of initial service. The total number of new Senators was determined by rank as of July 16, 2013. Members who served non-consecutive terms are only counted once.

Union (IPU), which maintains a database of worldwide female representation, ranked the United States 77th worldwide. The Nordic countries (Sweden, Iceland, Finland, Denmark, and Norway) lead the world regionally with 42.0% female representation in national legislatures.⁹ Rwanda and Andorra have the only national legislatures in the world with a majority of women holding seats (56.3% and 50.0%, respectively) in the lower (or only) chamber.¹⁰

State-House Perspective

The percentage of women in Congress also lags behind the percentage of women holding seats in state legislatures. According to the Center for American Women and Politics, in 2013, of the total 7,382 seats in state legislatures, women hold 1,783 (24.2%). The center also has calculated that “410, or 20.8%, of the 1,972 state senate seats and 1,373, or 25.4%, of the 5,411 state house seats” are held by women.¹¹ Across the 50 states, the total seats held by women range from 11.8% in Louisiana to 41.0% in Colorado.¹²

Since the beginning of the 92nd Congress (1971-1972), the first Congress for which comparative state legislature data are available,¹³ the total percentage of women in state legislatures has eclipsed the percentage of women in Congress (see **Figure 6**). The greatest disparity between the percentages of female voting representation in state legislatures as compared with Congress occurred in the early 1990s, when women comprised 6.0% of the total Congress in the 102nd Congress (1991-1992), but 18.3% of state legislatures in 1991. The gap has since narrowed. In 2013, 18.3% of the total voting Members of Congress are women, as compared with 24.2% in state legislatures.

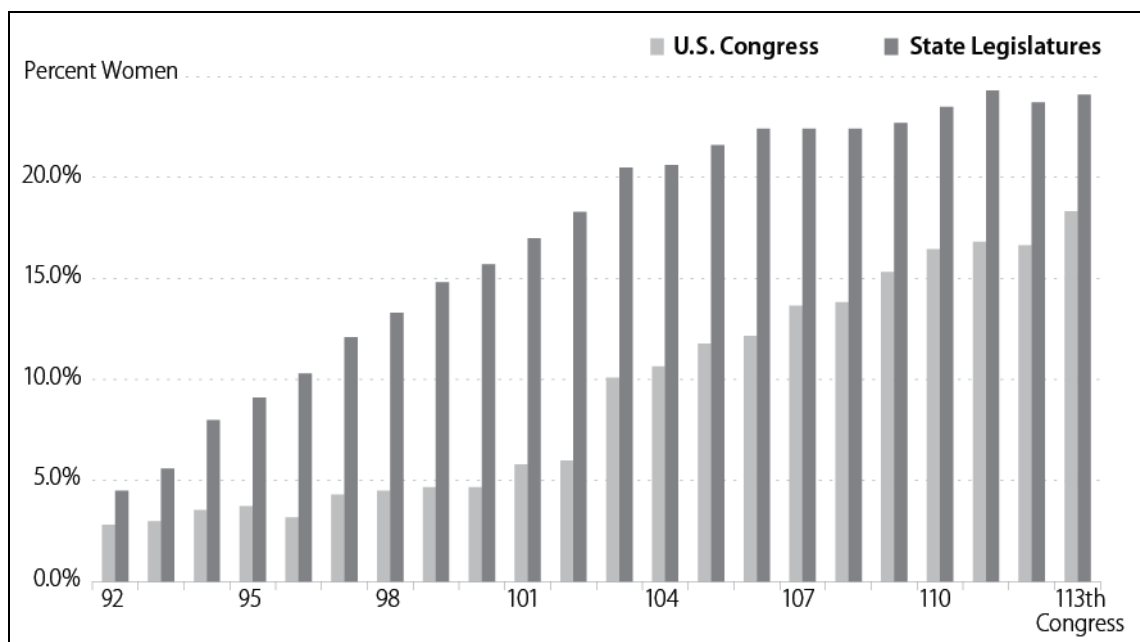
⁹ Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Women in National Parliaments*, situation as of 1st February 2013, at <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>, and regional averages at <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/arc/world010213.htm>. See also the archive of historical data at <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world-arc.htm>, and current data at <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>. This data will be updated once per Congress.

¹⁰ For more information on the female majority in Rwanda’s legislature, see Josh Ruxin, “When It Comes to Women Lawmakers, Rwanda Leads the World,” *New York Times*, October 7, 2008; see also, Frank C. Thames and Margaret S. Williams, *Contagious Representation: Women’s Political Representation in Democracies around the World* (New York University Press: New York, 2013).

¹¹ Available at http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast_facts/levels_of_office/state_legislature.php.

¹² Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University, *Women in State Legislatures 2013*, January 2013, at http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast_facts/levels_of_office/documents/stleg.pdf.

¹³ The Center for American Women and Politics provides data for state legislatures for odd-numbered years. Congressional data show the maximum number of women elected or appointed to serve in that Congress at one time during that Congress.

Figure 6. Women in Congress and State Legislatures: 1971-2013

Source: State legislatures information from: Fact Sheet, “Women in State Legislatures 2013,” Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University. Figures compiled by CRS.

Notes: Data include upper and lower chambers. Delegates are not included in the data. The fact sheet indicates that the “table for Congresses prior to the current one shows maximum number of women elected or appointed to serve in that Congress at one time. Some filled out unexpired terms and some were never sworn in.” Data for the 113th Congress are for the beginning of the Congress.

Assessing the Effect of Women in Congress

In the past three decades, scholars of Congress have published dozens of articles and books examining whether the growing number of elected women in Congress has affected the operations of the institution or its legislative outcomes. Common questions in the scholarly literature include is female legislative behavior distinct? Are women effective legislators in Congress? Has the larger cohort of women in Congress altered the policymaking process in substantial ways? This section provides a brief overview of the empirical analysis available to answer these questions.

Legislative Behavior

Numerous studies have demonstrated that the legislative behavior of female Members differs from their male counterparts. By virtue of their gender, some scholars argue that female Members of Congress “descriptively represent” a significant portion of the country’s population, namely women.¹⁴ But scholars have asked repeatedly whether such descriptive representation has also

¹⁴ Hanna Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967). Pitkin offers four concepts of representation in her seminal work. Descriptive representation concerns the degree to which a representative resembles those individuals he or she represents.

translated into “substantive representation.”¹⁵ In other words, are female Members of Congress more likely to address the interests or policy preferences of women?

Evidence shows that female Members are more likely to serve as policy entrepreneurs concerning issues often characterized as most important to women.¹⁶ In particular, women are more likely to sponsor, co-sponsor, or assume other leadership roles on legislation dealing with “women’s issues.”¹⁷ These roles may include leading committee and floor debate.¹⁸ In an attempt to control for district-specific characteristics and effects, other researchers show that when female Members replace males in the same congressional district, these women sponsor more women’s issues bills and speak more frequently on the House floor about women than the men who previously held their seat.¹⁹

Female Members are more likely to speak on the House floor, giving proportionately more one-minute speeches than their male counterparts and speaking more often during policy debates. Even when district characteristics, ideology, and seniority of the Member were considered, gender still remained an important predictor of speech frequency on the House floor.²⁰ When speaking on the House floor, female Members of both parties more frequently talk about women and women’s issues than their male co-partisans.²¹

Numerous studies have been on female Members and roll call voting behavior. Consistently, this literature has demonstrated that female legislators tend to vote more “liberally” than men.²² However, more recent evidence examining longitudinal roll-call voting behavior suggests that

¹⁵ According to Pitkin, substantive representation concerns whether the representative advances the policy preferences or best interests of those individuals he or she represents.

¹⁶ Policy entrepreneurs are individuals inside or outside government who work to implement or promote new policy ideas. See Michael Mintrom, “Policy Entrepreneurs and the Diffusion of Innovation,” *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 41 (July 1997), p. 739.

¹⁷ Studies characterize “women’s issues” differently. The term often includes women’s rights, economic status, health, and safety. Sometimes included are children’s issues, education, social welfare, and the environment. In other studies, “women’s issues” are explicitly defined in more feminist terms, such as policies that advocate pro-choice abortion positions. See Beth Reingold, “Women as Office Holders: Descriptive and Substantive Representation,” paper presented at the Political Women and American Democracy Conference, University of Notre Dame, May 25-27, 2006, p. 6.

¹⁸ Michele L. Swers, *The Difference Women Make: The Policy Impact of Women in Congress* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Katherine Cramer Walsh, “Enlarging Representation: Women Bring Marginalized Perspectives to Floor Debate in the House of Representatives,” in *Women Transforming Congress*, ed. Cindy Simon Rosenthal (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), pp. 370-396.

¹⁹ Jessica C. Gerrity, Tracy Osborn, and Jeannette Morehouse Mendez, “Women and Representation: A Different View of the District?” *Politics & Gender*, vol. 3 (June 2007), pp. 179-200.

²⁰ For example, in the 109th Congress, women averaged 14.9 one-minute speeches whereas men averaged 6.5 speeches, a statistical difference at the .002 probability level. Kathryn Pearson and Logan Dancy, “Elevating Women’s Voices in Congress: Speech Participation in the House of Representatives,” *Political Research Quarterly*, vol. 64 (December 2011), pp. 910-923.

²¹ Kathryn Pearson and Logan Dancy, “Speaking for the Underrepresented in the House of Representatives: Voicing Women’s Interests in a Partisan Era,” *Politics & Gender*, vol. 7 (December 2011), pp. 493-519.

²² For example, see Jocelyn Jones Evans, *Women, Partisanship and the Congress* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005); Michele L. Swers, “Are Women More Likely to Vote For Women’s Issue Bills than Their Male Colleagues?” *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, vol. 23 (1995), pp. 435-448. All voting studies use DW-NOMINATE scores, which measure ideological voting behavior of Members of Congress over time on two dimensions. DW-NOMINATE scores are the most widely used measure of analyzing Congressional voting behavior longitudinally. For access to the data, see <http://voteview.com/>.

such an ideological gender divide may be waning. Since the 108th Congress, Republican women's ideological voting patterns have exhibited no statistically significant difference in comparison to Republican men's voting scores. Democratic women have maintained slightly more liberal voting behaviors when compared with Democratic men.²³ Furthermore, another study demonstrated that when a woman succeeds a man or a man succeeds a woman in a given congressional district, there is no change in ideological voting scores in that seat from one Congress to the next.²⁴

Legislative Effectiveness

Using a variety of measures, scholars have attempted to determine the “effectiveness” of female legislators, particularly in comparison to male legislators. Based upon evidence which suggests that the path to election may be more difficult for women than men²⁵ and that women who run for Congress have greater political experience than their male challengers,²⁶ some researchers have theorized that women may outperform men in Congress. For example, while controlling for numerous other factors including district-level characteristics, an empirical model demonstrates that women deliver approximately 9% more federal spending to their districts than men. Women also sponsor approximately 3 more bills per Congress than men and cosponsor 26 more bills per Congress.²⁷

Another study took a different view of effectiveness and examined the rate of sponsored bills that became law and the number of House floor amendments that were accepted to appropriations bills. After controlling for other key variables, the effect of gender on legislative effectiveness was not statistically significant, although the average success ratio (known as “hit-rate”) for both measures was lower for female Members than their male counterparts.²⁸ When seniority and other institutional leadership positions were taken into account, no empirical difference in success ratios existed between men and women in the House.

Recent research suggests that female legislators may be more effective in some political and institutional situations. A study focused on the House concluded that women in the minority party are more successful in legislating than minority party men.²⁹ The collaborative approach espoused by many female legislators³⁰ may work to their advantage when women find themselves in the

²³ Brian Frederick, “Are Female House Members Still More Liberal in a Polarized Era? The Conditional Nature of the Relationship Between Descriptive and Substantive Representation,” *Congress & the Presidency*, vol. 36 (2009), pp. 181-202. See Figure 1 on page 185, in particular.

²⁴ Dennis Simon, “The Roll Call Behavior of Men and Women in the U.S. House of Representatives, 1937-2008,” *Politics & Gender*, vol. 6 (June 2010), pp. 225-246.

²⁵ See, for example, Jennifer Lawless and Kathryn Pearson, “The Primary Reason for Women's Underrepresentation? Reevaluating the Conventional Wisdom,” *Journal of Politics*, vol. 70 (2008), pp. 67-82.

²⁶ Kathryn Pearson and Eric McGhee, “Why Women Should Win More Often Than Men: Reassessing Gender Bias in U.S. House Elections,” Unpublished manuscript, University of Minnesota.

²⁷ Sarah Anzia and Christopher Berry, “The Jackie (and Jill) Robinson Effect: Why Do Congresswomen Outperform Congressmen?” *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 55 (July 2011), pp. 478-493.

²⁸ Alana Jeydel and Andrew J. Taylor, “Are Women Legislators Less Effective? Evidence from the U.S. House in the 103rd-105th Congress,” *Political Research Quarterly*, vol. 56 (March 2003), pp. 19-27.

²⁹ Craig Volden, Alan Wiseman, and Dana Wittmer, “When Are Women More Effective Lawmakers Than Men?” *American Journal of Political Science*, April, 2013, pp. 326-341, available at <http://www.batten.virginia.edu/content/faculty-research/publications/when-are-women-more-effective-lawmakers-men>.

³⁰ Cindy Simon Rosenthal, *When Women Lead: Integrative Leadership in State Legislatures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

minority party. Typically, the willingness to compromise or build consensus significantly improves the likelihood of minority party legislative advancement.

Finally, legislative effectiveness may influence female Members of Congress in one important way. Data indicate that a gender dynamic affected by legislative effectiveness may influence voluntary retirement decisions of female Members in the House of Representatives. According to the evidence, women are 40% more likely than men to retire from the House when they cease to increase their legislative effectiveness. In short, when women reach a “career ceiling” in the House, they turn more frequently to retirement than their male counterparts.³¹ This leads to average shorter tenures in Congress for women in comparison to men.

Impact of Women on Policy and Congress

While many scholars have focused on determining how female Members of Congress behave differently than their male counterparts, less attention has been focused on assessing the policy or institutional impact of increased numbers of women in Congress. However, some preliminary assessments have been made in this regard.

Several scholars have shown that women in Congress devote considerable time and resources to ensure that legislative provisions directly affecting women and families have prevailed in behind the scenes negotiations.³² Other evidence suggests that female Members have affected the early stages of the policymaking process in committee negotiations. Increased numbers of women in Congress have likely improved chances for women to influence policy outcomes at both the subcommittee and committee levels.³³ Regardless of which party maintained the majority in Congress, one study concluded that female Members of Congress as a cohort have affected legislative outcomes in numerous instances.³⁴

There is less scholarly evidence to support the hypothesis that the growing number of female Members has affected the institutional operations of Congress itself. At the state legislative level, research suggests that female committee chairs are more consensual, cooperative, and inclusive than their male colleagues.³⁵ However, an examination of Senate committee assignments found no evidence that increased numbers of female Senators resulted in women sitting on more

³¹ Members who reach a “career ceiling” have served a long tenure in the House but have not accrued positions of power, either in leadership or in committees. Jennifer L. Lawless and Sean M. Theriault, “Will She Stay or Will She Go? Career Ceilings and Women’s Retirement from the U.S. Congress,” *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, vol. 30 (November 2005), pp. 581-596.

³² Debra Dodson, *The Impact of Women in Congress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Swers, *The Difference Women Make*.

³³ Noelle Norton, “Transforming Policy from the Inside: Participation in Committee,” in *Women Transforming Congress*, ed. Cindy Simon Rosenthal (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), pp. 316-340. For specific examples concerning how women affected policies in committee, see pp. 332-337.

³⁴ Mary Hawkesworth, Kathleen Casey, Krista Jenkins, and Katherine Kleeman, *Legislating By and For Women: A Comparison of the 103rd and 104th Congresses*, Center for American Women and Politics, 2001, available at <http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/research/topics/documents/CongReport103-104.pdf>. The authors examine legislative case studies in the policy areas of crime, women’s health, health care, health insurance reform, reproductive rights, and welfare reform. The findings were compiled from interviews with female Members who served in those two Congresses.

³⁵ Cindy Simon Rosenthal, “A View of Their Own: Women’s Committee Leadership Styles and State Legislatures,” *Policy Studies Journal*, vol. 25 (1997), pp. 585-600.

powerful committees³⁶ and that lack of widespread female committee leadership in Congress thus far has prevented a comprehensive replication of this research at the federal level.

In short, the belief that a growing number of women in Congress would affect the institution in observable and substantive ways may be more complicated than originally theorized. One study that attempted to assess the impact of women in Congress cautiously concluded that while women may transform political institutions, they also may “be transformed by them and the larger political environment.”³⁷ In other words, it may prove difficult for social scientists to measure the impact of increased numbers of elected female Members on Congress because a causal relationship could exist in both directions.

Female Election Firsts in Congress

- **First woman elected to Congress.** Representative Jeannette Rankin (R-MT, 1917-1919, 1941-1943).
- **First woman to serve in the Senate.** Rebecca Latimer Felton (D-GA) was appointed in 1922 to fill the unexpired term of a Senator who had died in office. In addition to being the first female Senator, Mrs. Felton holds two other Senate records. Her tenure in the Senate remains the shortest ever (one day), and, at the age of 87, she is the oldest person ever to begin Senate service.
- **First woman to succeed her spouse in the Senate and also the first female initially elected to a full six-year term.** Hattie Caraway (D-AR, 1931-1945) was first appointed in 1931 to fill the vacancy caused by the death of her husband, Thaddeus H. Caraway (D-AR, House, 1913-1921; Senate, 1921-1931), and then was subsequently elected to two six-year terms.
- **First woman elected to the Senate without having first been appointed to serve in that body and first woman to serve in both houses of Congress.** Margaret Chase Smith (R-ME) was elected to the Senate and served from January 3, 1949, until January 3, 1973. She had previously served in the House (June 3, 1940, to January 3, 1949).
- **First woman elected to the Senate without first having been elected to the House or having been elected or appointed to fill an unexpired Senate term.** Nancy Landon Kassebaum (R-KS, 1979-1997).
- **First woman elected Speaker of the House.** As Speaker of the House in the 110th and 111th Congresses (2007-2010), Nancy Pelosi held the highest position of leadership ever by a woman in the U.S. government.

³⁶ A Committee Power Index (CPI) was used in the study. Laura W. Arnold and Barbara M. King, “Women, Committees, and Institutional Change in the Senate,” in *Women Transforming Congress*, ed. Cindy Simon Rosenthal (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), pp. 284-315.

³⁷ Dodson, *The Impact of Women in Congress*, p. 249.

Records for Length of Service

- **Longest total length of service by a woman in Congress.** Currently serving Senator Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) holds this record (36 years and counting, 10 of which were spent in the House). On March 17, 2012, Senator Mikulski surpassed the record previously held by Edith Nourse Rogers (R-MA).
- **Longest length of service by a woman in the House.** Representative Rogers served in the House for 35 years, from June 25, 1925, until her death on September 10, 1960. Representative Rogers continues to hold the record for length of House service by a woman.
- **Longest length of service by a woman in the Senate.** Senator Mikulski also holds the record for length of Senate service by a woman (26 years and counting). In January 2011, she broke the service record previously held by Senator Margaret Chase Smith (R-ME), who served 24 years in the Senate and 8.6 years in the House.

Women Who Have Served In Both Houses

Margaret Chase Smith (R-ME) was the first of eight women to serve in both houses of Congress, as well as the first woman elected to the Senate without first having been elected or appointed to fill a vacant Senate seat. Senator Smith was first elected to the House to fill the vacancy caused by the death of her husband (Clyde Smith, R-ME, 1937-1940), and she served from June 10, 1940, until January 3, 1949, when she began her Senate service. When Senator Smith left the Senate on January 3, 1973, she had served longer than any other woman.

Barbara Mikulski (D-MD), Barbara Boxer (D-CA), Olympia Snowe (R-ME), Blanche Lambert Lincoln (D-AR), Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), Maria Cantwell (D-WA), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Mazie Hirono (D-HI), and Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) are the other women who have served in both houses. All but Lincoln and Snowe are Members of the 113th Congress. Of these Members, Senators Lincoln and Cantwell were the only ones not still serving in the House when elected to the Senate, and Senator Gillibrand is the only one to have been appointed to the Senate while serving in the House.

Women Who Have Served in Party Leadership Positions³⁸

A number of women in Congress, listed in **Table 4**, have held positions in their party's leadership.³⁹ Former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) held the highest position of leadership

³⁸ For additional information, refer to CRS Report RL30567, *Party Leaders in the United States Congress, 1789-2013*, by Valerie Heitshusen. Limited information on the leadership positions held by women in Congress can also be found in the individual entries contained in this report.

³⁹ U.S. Congress, House, Office of History and Preservation, <http://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/WIC/Historical-Data/Women-Elected-to-Party-Leadership/>.

ever held by a woman in the U.S. government. As Speaker of the House in the 110th and 111th Congresses, she was second in the line of succession for the presidency. In the 108th, 109th, 112th, and 113th Congresses, she was elected the House Democratic leader. Previously, Representative Pelosi was elected House Democratic whip, in the 107th Congress, on October 10, 2001, effective January 15, 2002. She was also the first woman nominated to be Speaker of the House. Senator Margaret Chase Smith (R-ME), chair of the Senate Republican Conference from 1967 to 1972, holds the Senate record for the highest, as well as first, leadership position held by a female Senator. The first woman Member to be elected to any party leadership position was Chase Going Woodhouse (D-CT), who served as House Democratic Caucus Secretary in the 81st Congress (1949-50).

Table 4. Selected Congressional Party Leadership Positions Held by Women

Position	Member	Congresses
Speaker of the House	Nancy Pelosi (D-CA)	110 th -111 th (2007-2010)
House Democratic Leader	Nancy Pelosi (D-CA)	108 th -109 th , 112 th -113 th (2003-2006, 2011-present)
House Democratic Whip	Nancy Pelosi (D-CA)	107 th (2001-2002)
Chief Deputy Democratic Whip	Terri Sewell (D-AL)	113 th (2013- present)
	Diana DeGette (D-CO)	112 th - 113 th (2011-present)
	Janice Schakowsky (D-IL)	112 th - 113 th (2011-present)
	Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-FL)	112 th - 113 th (2011-present)
	Maxine Waters (D-CA)	106 th -110 th (1999-2008)
House Democratic Caucus Vice Chair	Barbara Kennelly (D-CT)	104 th -105 th (1995-1998)
	Mary Rose Oakar (D-OH)	100 th (1987-1988)
House Democratic Caucus Secretary ^a	Mary Rose Oakar (D-OH)	99 th (1985-1986)
	Geraldine Ferraro (D-NY)	97 th - 98 th (1981-1984)
	Shirley Chisholm (D-NY)	95 th - 96 th (1977-80)
	Patsy Mink (D-HI)	94 th (1975-76)
	Leonor Kretzer Sullivan (D-MO)	86 th - 87 th (1959-1962), 88 th , 2 nd session- 93 rd (1964-1974)
	Edna Flannery Kelly (D-NY)	83 rd - 84 th (1953-1956), 88 th , 1 st session (1963)
	Chase Going Woodhouse (D-CT)	81 st (1949-1950)
House Republican Conference Chair	Cathy McMorris Rogers (R-WA)	113 th (2013-present)
	Deborah Pryce (R-OH)	108 th - 109 th (2003-2006)

Position	Member	Congresses
House Republican Conference Vice Chair	Lynn Jenkins (R-KS)	113 th (2013-present)
	Cathy McMorris Rogers (R-WA)	111 th -112 th (2009-2012)
	Deborah Pryce (R-OH)	107 th (2000-2002)
	Kay Granger (R-TX)	110 th (2007-2008)
	Tillie Fowler (R-FL)	106 th (1999-2000)
	Jennifer Dunn (R-WA)	105 th (1997-1998)
	Susan Molinari (R-NY)	104 th -105 th (1995- Aug. 1997)
House Republican Conference Secretary	Lynn Martin (R-IL)	99 th -100 th (1985-1988)
	Virginia Foxx (R-NC)	113 th (2013-present)
	Barbara Cubin (R-WY)	107 th (2001-2002)
	Deborah Pryce (R-OH)	106 th (1999-2000)
Senate Republican Conference Chair	Barbara Vucanovich (R-NV)	104 th (1995-1996)
	Margaret Chase Smith (R-ME)	90 th - 92 nd (1967-1972)
	Lisa Murkowski (R-AK)	111 th (2009-2010)
Senate Republican Conference Vice Chair ^b	Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX)	107 th - 109 th (2001-2006)
	Patty Murray (D-WA)	110 th -113 th (2007-present)
Senate Democratic Caucus Secretary	Debbie Stabenow (D-MI)	109 th (2005-2006)
	Barbara Mikulski (D-MD)	104 th - 108 th (1995-2004)
	Barbara Boxer (D-CA)	110 th - 113 th (2007-present)

Source: U.S. Congress, House, Office of History and Preservation, <http://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/WIC/Historical-Data/Women-Elected-to-Party-Leadership/> and CRS Report RL30567, *Party Leaders in the United States Congress, 1789-2013*, by Valerie Heitshusen.

- a. The title of this position changed from “Secretary” to “Vice Chair” with the 100th Congress.
- b. This position was previously known as the Conference Secretary.

Women and Leadership of Congressional Committees

As chair of the Senate Enrolled Bills Committee (73rd-78th Congresses), Hattie Caraway was the first woman to chair any congressional committee. As chair of the House District of Columbia Committee (72nd-74th Congresses), Mary T. Norton was the first woman to chair a House committee.

Thirty-two women, 19 in the House and 13 in the Senate, have chaired congressional committees.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ For additional information, refer to the “Women Who Have Chaired Congressional Committees in the U.S. House, (continued...)”

In the 113th Congress, there are nine committees led by women: one standing committee in the House and six standing and two select committees in the Senate, with one woman chairing two Senate Committees:

Table 5. Committees Chaired by Women, 113th Congress

Committee	Chair
House Committee on House Administration	Candice Miller (R-MI)
Senate Committee on Agriculture	Debbie Stabenow (D-MI)
Senate Committee on Appropriations	Barbara Milkulski (D-MD)
Senate Committee on the Budget	Patty Murray (D-WA)
Senate Committee on Indian Affairs	Maria Cantwell (D-WA)
Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship	Mary Landrieu (D-LA)
Senate Select Committee on Ethics	Barbara Boxer (D-CA)
Senate Select Committee on Intelligence	Dianne Feinstein (D-CA)

Source: “Women Who Have Chaired Congressional Committees in the U.S. House, 1923-present” table of the *Women in Congress* website at <http://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/WIC/Historical-Data/Women-Chairs-of-Congressional-Committees/>.

African American Women in Congress

Sixteen African American women serve in the 113th Congress, one more than in the past two Congresses. A record number of 17 African American women were elected to the House in the 110th Congress, although 14 was the highest number to serve at any one time due to deaths and special elections.⁴¹

A total of 33 African American women, all Democrats, have served in Congress. The first was Representative Shirley Chisholm (D-NY, 1969-1983). Senator Carol Moseley-Braun (D-IL, 1993-1999) is the only African American woman to have served in the Senate. The African American women Members of the 113th Congress are listed in **Table 6**.

(...continued)

1923-present” table of the *Women in Congress* website at <http://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/WIC/Historical-Data/Women-Chairs-of-Congressional-Committees/>.

⁴¹ Rep. Juanita Millender-McDonald (D-CA, 1996-2007) died on April 22, 2007, and was replaced by Rep. Laura Richardson (D-CA, 2007-2012); Rep. Julia Carson (D-IN, 1997-2007) died on December 15, 2007, and was replaced by her grandson, Rep. André Carson (D-IN, 2008-present) on March 13, 2008; Rep. Albert Wynn (D-MD, 1993-2008) resigned on May 31, 2008, and was replaced by Rep. Donna Edwards (D-MD, 2008-present); and Rep. Stephanie Tubbs Jones (D-OH, 1999-2008) died on August 20, 2008, and was replaced by Rep. Marcia L. Fudge (D-OH, 2008-present) on November 19, 2008.

Table 6. African American Women in the 113th Congress

(All are House Members; including Delegates and Members who Served only a Portion of the Congress)

Karen Bass (D-CA)	Marcia Fudge (D-OH)	Barbara Lee (D-CA)	Maxine Waters (D-CA)
Corinne Brown (D-FL)	Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX)	Gwen Moore (D-WI)	Frederica Wilson (D-FL)
Yvette Clarke (D-NY)	Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)	Laura Richardson (D-CA)	Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) [Delegate]
Donna Edwards (D-MD)	Robin Kelly (D-IL) ^a	Terri Sewell (D-AL)	Donna Christensen (D-VI) [Delegate]

Source: U.S. Congress, House, Office of History and Preservation, <http://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/WIC/Historical-Data/Women-of-Color-in-Congress/>.

a. Member did not serve the entire Congress or was elected in a special election.

Asian Pacific American Women in Congress

Patsy Mink (D-HI), who served in the House from 1965 to 1977 and again from 1990 to 2002, was the first of nine Asian Pacific American women to serve in Congress. Mazie Hirono (D-HI) is the first Asian Pacific American woman to serve in both the House and Senate.

Table 7. Asian Pacific American Women in the 113th Congress

(All House Members except for Senator Hirono)

Sen. Mazie Hirono (D-HI)	Judy Chu (D-CA)	Colleen Hanabusa (D-HI)
	Tammy Duckworth (D-IL)	Doris O. Matsui (D-CA)
	Tulsi Gabbard (D-HI)	Grace Meng (D-NY)

Source: U.S. Congress, House, Office of History and Preservation, <http://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/WIC/Historical-Data/Women-of-Color-in-Congress/>.

Hispanic Women in Congress

Ten Hispanic women have served in Congress, all in the House, and nine of them serve in the 113th Congress. Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL, 1989-present) is the first Cuban American and first Hispanic woman to serve in Congress. Nydia Velázquez (D-NY, 1993-present) is the first Puerto Rican-born woman to serve in Congress. Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-CA, 1993-present) is the first Mexican American woman to serve.

Table 8. Hispanic Women in the 113th Congress

(All are House Members)

Michelle Lujan Grisham (D-NM)	Gloria Negrete McLeod (D-CA)	Linda Sánchez (D-CA) ^a
Jamie Herrera Beutler (R-WA)	Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL)	Loretta Sanchez (D-CA) ^a
Grace Flores Napolitano (D-CA)	Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-CA)	Nydia Velázquez (D-NY)

Source: U.S. Congress, House, Office of History and Preservation, at <http://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/WIC/Historical-Data/Women-of-Color-in-Congress/>.

- a. Representatives Loretta Sanchez and Linda Sánchez are sisters. Linda Sánchez uses an accent in her last name; Loretta Sanchez does not.

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