



EAGLETON INSTITUTE OF POLITICS

CENTER FOR AMERICAN WOMEN AND POLITICS

## **WOMEN STATE LEGISLATORS: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE**

### **Highlights and Major Findings**

**Women legislators and their male colleagues recognize that women legislators have a major impact on the extent to which women's interests are represented in state legislatures.**

A large majority of both female and male legislators agree that women legislators have a special responsibility to represent women's concerns within the legislature, that the increased presence of women has made a difference in the extent to which legislators consider how legislation will affect women as a group, and that the growth in numbers of women legislators has had an impact on the number of bills passed dealing specifically with problems faced by women.

**Women legislators as well as their male colleagues perceive that women legislators have provided increased access to the legislature for groups (other than women) that have traditionally been disadvantaged in American society.**

A large majority of women legislators, as well as a majority of male legislators, agree that the increased presence of women in the legislature has made a difference in the extent to which the economically disadvantaged have access to legislatures and the extent to which legislatures are sympathetic to the concerns of racial and ethnic minority groups.

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**Women legislators and their male colleagues differ in their attitudes on public policy issues, with women in both parties more likely to support liberal or moderate positions on a variety of issues.**

Women legislators are more likely than men to favor:

- harsher penalties for hate crimes
- legally recognized civil unions for gay and lesbian couples
- laws permitting minors to obtain legal abortions without parental consent.

Women lawmakers are also more likely than their male counterparts to oppose:

- overturning Roe versus Wade
- government-funded school vouchers
- the death penalty
- a constitutional amendment to permit prayer in public schools.

A majority of women and men in legislatures oppose racial preferences in job hiring and school admissions and a ban on handguns, with fewer women opposed than men.

**Women legislators of both parties are more likely than male legislators of either party to work on legislation specifically intended to benefit women.**

Substantially more women legislators than men report that they worked on legislation during the current session where the bill itself or specific provisions of the bill were intended to help women. More Democratic women than Democratic men report having worked on a bill to benefit women during the current legislative session. Similarly, more Republican women than Republican men have worked on such legislation. Most striking, as was true in 1988, Republican women are more likely than Democratic men to have worked on legislation to help women.

**Most women legislators maintain relationships with women's organizations outside the legislature and work with other women inside the legislature.**

Large majorities of women legislators belong to one or more major national women's organization and were supported by at least one women's organization during their last election. Most women legislators report that women in their legislatures meet together to discuss legislation that affects women, either formally through a women's caucus or informally on a bipartisan or partisan basis, and most women legislators attend at least some of these meetings.

**Women state legislators are less likely to belong to traditional women's organizations, but slightly more likely to belong to feminist organizations than they were in 1988.**

The proportions of women legislators who belong to the League of Women Voters, Business and Professional Women, and the American Association of University Women have declined substantially since 1988. Over the same period, the proportions of women legislators who belong to the Women's Political Caucus and the National Organization for Women have increased slightly.

**Women legislators who belong to women's organizations and women legislators who meet formally or informally with other women in their legislature are more likely than other women legislators to work on legislation that benefits women.**

The more memberships in women's organizations that women legislators have, the more likely they are, during the most recent legislative session, to have worked on a bill intended to help women. Similarly, women who meet with other women in their legislatures—whether formally through a women's caucus

or informally on a bipartisan or partisan basis—are considerably more likely than other women legislators to have worked on legislation to benefit women.

**Women legislators are better educated and more frequently have historically male occupations than they did in 1988, but they are still older and less likely to be attorneys than their male colleagues.**

A majority of women legislators have attended graduate school or received professional education beyond college—a notable increase since 1988. However, women legislators in 2001 continue, as they did in 1988, to be older than their male colleagues. And although more women legislators have historically male occupations than in 1988, women legislators continue to be less likely than men to have occupations in law and agriculture and more likely to have occupational experience in female-dominated fields such as education and health care.

**Women legislators are less likely than men in legislatures to plan to leave their legislative seats within the next five years. Among those who plan to leave, women are more likely than men to groom successors and to identify women as their successors.**

Women in legislatures are less likely than men to think they will leave their seats during the next five years. Among the state legislators who see themselves as likely to give up their seats within the next five years, women are more likely than men to have someone in mind as a potential successor and to be actively helping to prepare or position this person to run. Women state legislators are also more likely than male legislators to have a woman in mind as their successor.

## **Demographics of Women in State Legislatures**

Across the country, 1,663 women served in state legislatures in March 2001. The number of women holding office in state legislatures has grown over the past decade, although the overall increase was not as dramatic during the 1990s as it had been during the previous two decades. In 1988, there were 1,176 women in state legislatures, accounting for 15.8% of all legislators. The percent of women legislators climbed to 20.6% in 1995 and reached 22.5% in 2000 before declining slightly to 22.4% in 2001.

The upper chambers of state legislatures, in particular, now include significantly more women than a decade ago. Between 1988 and 2001, the number of women state senators almost doubled from 230 to 396. In 2001, women make up almost as large a proportion of state senators (20.0%) as they do of state representatives (23.2%).

### **Personal Characteristics of Women State Legislators**

Women legislators have even stronger credentials in 2001 than in 1988. For example, women legislators are better educated than those who held office in the late 1980s. Fifty-three percent of women legislators in 2001 have attended graduate or professional school, compared with 43% in 1988.

Women (34%) are less likely than men (66%) to hold another job while serving in the state legislature. Nevertheless, 94% of women legislators in 2001 have at some time worked in a job outside of public office, a modest increase from the 90% recorded in 1988.

There has been a slight shift toward historically male jobs among women legislators. As Table 1 shows, women legislators in 2001 are more likely to have been self-employed or business owners and less likely to have worked in clerical or secretarial jobs than was true for women legislators in 1988.

Nevertheless, as Table 1 shows, women legislators continue in 2001, as they did in 1988, to come disproportionately from traditional women’s fields, such as elementary or secondary education or nursing, and are still much less likely than their male colleagues to be attorneys or farmers.

Notwithstanding the increased number of women attending law schools, women legislators are about as likely to be attorneys in 2001 as they were in 1988.

There is a widespread perception that more young women are running for office nowadays; yet women legislators are older on average than they were in 1988. Significantly more women legislators in 2001 (74%) than in 1988 (58%) are 50 years of age or older.

The women are also older than the men. Only about a quarter (24%) of the women legislators are under the age of 50, in contrast to 39% of male legislators.

Just as the average age of women legislators has increased over the past decade, so too has the average age at which woman legislators entered the state house or state senate. On average, a woman serving as a state senator in 2001 started in her current position at age 50, up slightly from an average age of 48 in 1988. Similarly the average age of entry for women state representatives has increased from 45 to 49 since 1988. Men remain significantly more likely than women to begin serving at a relatively young age. About three in 10 male state senators (28%) and state representatives (30%) entered their current positions when they were under 40 years of age. This compares with only 11% of women state senators and 14% of women state representatives.

As was true in 1988, women in 2001 still seem to delay their political careers because of family responsibilities. In addition to the fact that women legislators are older than the men with whom they serve, they are far less likely to have young children. Only 17% of women legislators, compared with 36% of men, have children under age 18. Similarly, only 2% of women legislators, compared with 13% of men, have children less than six years of age. Clearly, combining parenting with a political career is still more difficult for women than for men.

Women legislators are far less likely than their male colleagues to be married (69% vs. 87%), a difference that has not changed since 1988.

In general, the religious preferences of women legislators today are similar to those of their male colleagues and to those of women who served in 1988. A majority of women legislators are Protestant (62%) and a sizable minority are Catholic (22%). The most striking gender difference is that fewer women (14%) than men (20%) are evangelical or “born-again” Christians. Women legislators are also notably less likely (16%) than men (28%) to identify themselves as “Christian conservatives.”

<b>Table 1: Changes in the Personal Characteristics of women Legislators Since 1988</b>			
	2001		1988
	% Women	% Men	% Women
<b>Age</b>			
Under 50	24	39	40
50 - 64	56	41	48
65 or older	18	19	10
<b>Education</b>			
High school graduate or less	5	7	7
Some college	17	13	21
College graduate	24	29	28
Graduate/professional school	53	50	43
<b>Employment</b>			
Total worked outside the home	94	N/A	90
School teacher/administrator	22	7	22
Self-employed/own business	11	14	7
Attorney	10	19	8
Nurse/healthcare professional	8	1	6
Clerical/secretary	3	*	10
Farmer	1	11	1

In addition to being older and better educated, women legislators in 2001 are also a more racially and ethnically diverse group. According to the most recent information compiled by CAWP, women of color now account for 16.0% of all women legislators, up from 10.9% in 1988.

### **Political Characteristics of Women State Legislators**

Despite some changes in the demographics of women legislators over the past decade, women legislators in 2001 are similar politically to the women who served in the late 1980s.

Data collected by CAWP show that the party affiliation of women legislators has changed very little over the years. In 2001, Democratic women in state legislatures outnumber Republican women by a margin of 1,007 to 645 (61% to 39%). In 1988, Democrats outnumbered Republicans by a similar margin (58% to 41%). The party affiliation of women lawmakers varies only slightly by chamber.

When asked to describe their political ideology, Democratic women (40%) are more likely than Democratic men (23%) to describe themselves as liberals. Almost half of Democratic women (49%) call themselves moderates while only a few (11%) say they are conservatives. These proportions are similar to those found for women state legislators in 1988.

In contrast to Democratic women who are more liberal than Democratic male legislators, Republican women legislators closely resemble Republican men in their political ideology. Fifty-six percent of Republican women, compared with 64% of Republican men, describe themselves as conservatives. A more modest 39% of Republican women legislators identify as moderates, and very few (1%) call themselves liberals. The 56% of Republican women in 2001 who self-identify as conservatives represents a substantial increase over the 43% who described themselves as conservatives in 1988.

Women legislators (43%) are much more likely than men in legislatures (17%) to self-identify as “feminists.” This gender difference is apparent within both parties, although Democratic women (57%) are considerably more likely than Republican women (15%) to identify with the feminist label. Women legislators are as likely to identify with the feminist label in 2001 as they were in 1988, although identification with the feminist label has declined among Republican women legislators (from 27% in 1988 to 15% in 2001).

### **Connections to Women Inside and Outside the Legislature**

Relationships with other women legislators and the organized women’s community are important sources of political support for women lawmakers. Women of both parties are more likely than men to get campaign help from women’s organizations outside the legislature. Most women legislators are members of at least one women’s organization outside the legislature, and many work collectively with other women within their legislatures on issues that are of particular interest to women.

### **Support For Women Candidates For Public Office**

Women legislators in 2001 are as likely as women legislators in 1988 to be supported by women’s organizations, and they are more likely than their male colleagues to get campaign support from women’s groups. Altogether, 65% of women legislators, compared with 45% of men, say they were supported by at least one women’s organization during their last election. As Table 2 shows, more women than men report receiving support from the National Organization for Women (NOW), the Women’s Political Caucus (WPC), and other women’s organizations.

Women legislators of both parties are more likely than men of *either* party to be supported by women’s organizations. Fifty-three percent of Republican women say they received support from a women’s organization in the last election. Although this figure is lower than that for Democratic women (71%), it is much higher than the proportion of Republican men (41%) and slightly higher than the proportion of Democratic men (49%) who report that they received support from a women’s group.

	Percent Received Support	
	Women %	Men %
Did you receive support from...?		
National Organization for Women	25	14
Women’s Political Caucus	26	11
Any other women’s organizations	56	36

As might be expected, women who describe themselves as liberals, feminists, and Democrats are more likely than other legislators to say they were supported by women’s organizations. For example, 48% of women legislators who describe themselves as liberals, compared with 23% of moderates and 5% of conservatives, report that they received support from NOW in the last election. Similarly, 36% of Democratic women, but only 6% of Republican women, say they received support from the Women’s Political Caucus in the last election.

### **Membership in Women’s Organizations Outside the Legislature**

Women legislators show a strong connection to women’s organizations outside the legislature in 2001, just as they did in 1988. However, membership in specific groups has changed somewhat since 1988. Altogether, 73% of women legislators are members of at least one of the eight women’s organizations asked about in the survey, and the typical woman legislator is a

	Percent Yes, a Member	
	<u>2001</u>	<u>1988</u>
Women’s Political Caucus (WPC)	34	29
National Organization for Women (NOW)	26	22
A feminist group other than NOW or WPC	21	24
League of Women Voters (LWV)	29	40
Business and Professional Women (BPW)	18	30
American Association of University Women (AAUW)	13	21
A sorority	19	N/A
A conservative women’s group which is unaffiliated with either political party	7	N/A

member of two of these groups. More women legislators in 2001 than in 1988 are members of the Women’s Political Caucus (WPC) and the National Organization for Women (NOW). However, notably fewer are members of the League of Women Voters (LWV), the American Association of University Women (AAUW), and Business and Professional Women (BPW).

In 1988, women legislators who belonged to women’s organizations were more likely than other women legislators to have worked on legislation aimed at helping women. The same is true in 2001. The more memberships women legislators have in women’s organizations, the more likely they are to say that in the most recent session they worked on a bill intended to help women in particular.

Women who belong to three or more women’s organizations are especially likely to distinguish themselves from those who have few or no memberships in such groups. These legislators with strong ties to the organized women’s community are more likely than other women lawmakers to feel strongly

that women legislators have a special responsibility to represent women’s concerns within the legislature (61% vs. 36%), to say that the increased number of women in their legislature has made it easier for women legislators to work together (62% vs. 44%), and to try to attend meetings of their legislature’s women’s caucus (58% vs. 35%). Perhaps those legislators who care most about working on legislation to benefit women are more likely than other women to join women’s organizations, or perhaps legislators’ ties to women’s organizations strengthen their commitment to work with and for women. In either case, a strong connection exists between memberships in women’s groups and women legislators’ commitment to working on behalf of women within the legislature.

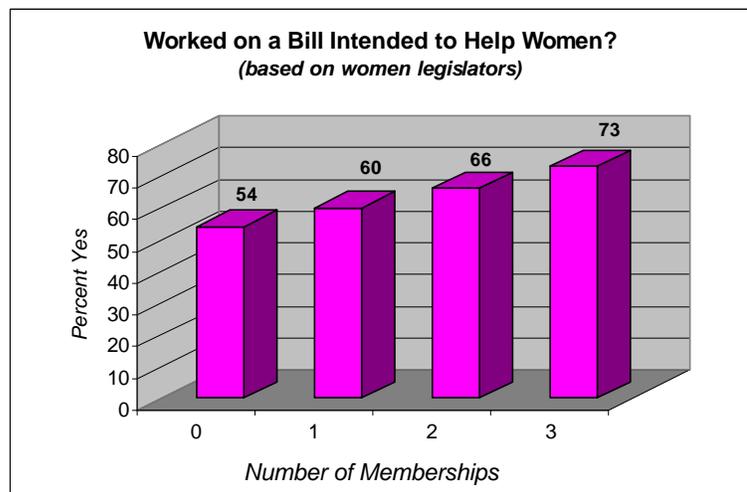
### Affiliations with Women Inside the Legislature

As they did in 1988, women legislators in 2001 report strong connections to women inside as well as outside the legislature. Fifty-four percent of women report that there is a formal women’s caucus open to women legislators of both parties in their house of the legislature, about the same proportion that reported having a formal women’s caucus in 1988 (51%). Among those legislators who say that there is no formal women’s caucus in their legislature, 41% report that women in their legislature nevertheless met together informally during the current session on a bipartisan basis, and 45% say they met together on a partisan basis, to discuss legislation that affected women.

According to the reports of women legislators, formal women’s caucuses seem to be more active in 2001 than they were in 1988. In 1988, 31% of women who reported serving in a legislature with a formal women’s caucus said that the caucus met “many times” during the current session; that proportion increased to 47% in 2001.

Large proportions of women legislators participate in the formal and informal meetings of women legislators that take place in their legislatures. Of the women legislators who report that the women in their legislatures meet either formally through caucuses or informally on a bipartisan or partisan basis, an overwhelming 82% say they attended at least some of these meetings.

Similarly, a large majority (87%) of women legislators agree with the statement that “women legislators are often very helpful to me in building support for bills I think are important.” Nearly half (49%) of women legislators report that the increase in the number of women serving in their legislatures in recent years has made it easier for women legislators to work together.



The commitment of women legislators to acting on behalf of women does seem to be enhanced when they are involved with formal women’s caucuses or when they attend informal policy-oriented meetings of women within their legislatures. As was true in 1988, women who meet with other women in their legislatures—whether formally through a women’s caucus or informally on a bipartisan or partisan basis—are somewhat more likely (64%) than those who do not (57%) to report working on a bill aimed at helping women.

## **Attitudes Toward and Impact on Policy**

Women and men in legislatures differ in their attitudes about public policy issues. Within both parties, women are more likely than men to support more liberal or moderate positions on a variety of issues, including abortion, hate crimes, civil unions for gays and lesbians, and racial preferences in job hiring and school admissions.

In addition, women legislators of both parties and all political ideologies believe they have a responsibility to advocate for legislation that reflects the interests and concerns of women. Male legislators are far less likely than women to see this as a special responsibility of women lawmakers, but they also are far less likely than women to champion such legislation themselves.

### **Public Policy Attitudes of State Legislators**

Women and men in state legislatures have different attitudes on many, although not all, public policy issues. In general, women are more likely than men to express liberal or feminist attitudes. Specifically, women are more likely than men to favor harsher penalties for hate crimes (72% vs. 58%), to support legally recognized civil unions for gay and lesbian couples (54% vs. 25%), and to favor allowing minors to obtain legal abortions without parental consent (53% vs. 29%). Women lawmakers are also more likely than their male counterparts to oppose overturning Roe versus Wade (77% vs. 60%), to disapprove of government-funded school vouchers (72% vs. 55%), to oppose the death penalty (56% vs. 34%), and to disapprove of a constitutional amendment to permit prayer in public schools (56% vs. 41%). A majority of women and men in legislatures oppose racial preferences in job hiring and school admissions (50% vs. 73%) and a ban on handguns (57% vs. 86%), with fewer women opposed than men.

This gender gap in views on policy issues is evident in both political parties. Democratic women legislators are more likely than Democratic men to support liberal and feminist policy positions. Similarly, on several issues, Republican women express less conservative attitudes than Republican men. Democratic women legislators in particular have more liberal and feminist attitudes than their male counterparts on most policy issues, as Table 1 shows. By large margins, more Democratic women than Democratic men approve of a ban on possession of handguns, favor legally recognized civil unions for gay and lesbian couples, support allowing minors to obtain legal abortions without parental consent, and favor racial preferences in job hiring and school admissions. In addition, Democratic women are more likely than their male counterparts to oppose the death penalty, to disapprove of overturning Roe versus Wade, and to oppose a constitutional amendment to permit prayer in public schools. Similar differences between Democratic women and men were also evident in 1988.

Similarly, Republican women legislators in 2001 express less conservative policy attitudes on several issues than Republican men. As Table 1 shows, fewer Republican women than men support the death penalty or school vouchers. In addition, while overwhelming majorities of both Republican women and men take conservative positions on racial preferences in job hiring and school admissions (83% vs. 91%) and legally recognized civil unions for gay and lesbian couples (78% vs. 85%), the Republican women are somewhat less conservative than the men.

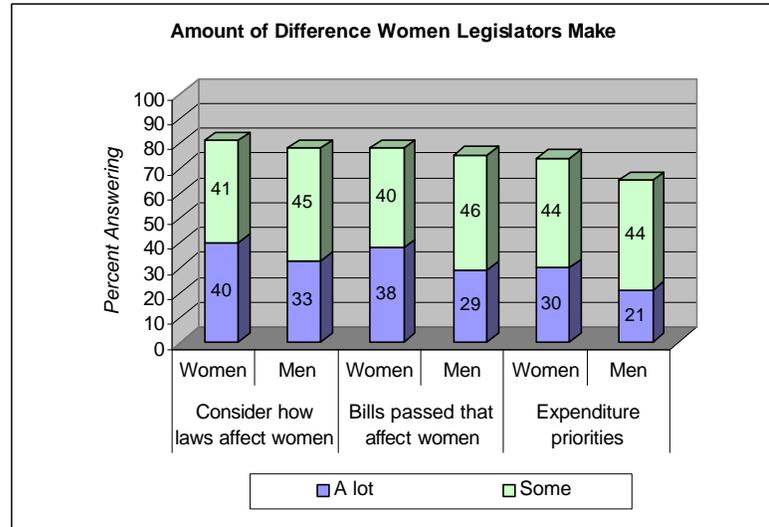
Compared with Republican women legislators in 1988, Republican women legislators in 2001 are somewhat more conservative in their views. In 1988, Republican women legislators expressed views on policy issues similar to those of Democratic men, whose attitudes were more liberal than policy attitudes of Republican men. In contrast, in 2001, Republican women's policy attitudes are more conservative across all issues than those of Democratic men. (See Table 4.)

	<b>Table 4: Policy Opinions of Legislators by Gender and Party Identification</b>			
	Percent Who Agree/Favor			
	Democrats		Republicans	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Do you strongly agree, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly? Minors should be able to obtain a legal abortion without parental consent	72	45	18	17
I would like to see the United States Supreme Court overturn the Roe versus Wade decision which made abortion legal during the first three months of pregnancy	6	15	42	49
The death penalty should be an option as a punishment for those who commit murder	27	41	66	78
If left alone, except for essential regulations, the private sector can find ways to solve our economic problems	33	35	87	89
Would you strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose this proposal? A law that would provide harsher penalties for hate crimes	88	83	45	40
A law that would allow gay and lesbian couples to legally form civil unions, giving them some of the legal rights of married couples	74	45	15	11
A law giving parents government-funded school vouchers to pay for tuition at the public, private or religious school of their choice	7	9	55	65
A constitutional amendment to permit prayer in the public schools	23	36	70	66
A law which would allow your state to give preferences in job hiring and school admission on the basis of race	58	43	9	6
A law banning the possession of handguns except by the police and other authorized persons	54	25	10	3

### **Perceptions of Women Lawmakers' Impact on Legislation**

As was true in 1988, women lawmakers in 2001 believe the increased presence of women in the legislature is having a major impact on the way lawmakers think about legislation and the types of bills that are passed, and most of their male colleagues agree. More than three-quarters of women and men in legislatures say the increased presence of women has made a difference in the extent to which legislators consider how legislation will affect women as a group as well as in the number of bills passed dealing specifically with the problems faced by women. Seventy-four percent of women and 65% of male legislators also believe the increased number of women has had an impact on expenditure priorities for the state.

Large majorities of both women and men in legislatures think that as the numbers of women legislators have grown, legislatures have been more likely to consider how legislation will affect women as a group. The women lawmakers are somewhat more likely than men to think the increased number of women has made *a lot* of difference (40% vs. 33%). Similarly, women are more likely than men to believe that the increased presence of women has made *a lot* of difference in the number of bills passed that deal specifically with women (38% vs. 29%) and in expenditure priorities for the state (30% vs. 21%). Similar gender differences on these questions existed in 1988.



### Legislation to Help Women

Even more so than in 1988, women legislators in 2001 believe they have a special responsibility to represent women’s interests in the legislative process. Most women legislators continue to take this responsibility seriously, reporting that they have worked on a bill in the most recent legislative session intended, at least in part, to help women in particular. As was true in 1988, those most likely to feel a special responsibility to represent women are Democrats, liberals, and self-identified feminists. Nevertheless, women legislators of both parties and all ideologies tend to feel this special responsibility and are much more likely than their male counterparts to say they have been involved with legislation targeted at helping women.

The proportion of women lawmakers who agree that “women legislators have a special responsibility to represent women’s concerns within the legislature” has increased significantly from 74% in 1988 to 85% in 2001. While men less often than women agree with this statement, male legislators increasingly appreciate the fact that their female colleagues shoulder an additional representational responsibility. Fifty-five percent of male legislators in 2001 endorse the statement that women legislators have a special responsibility to represent women’s concerns, up from 45% in 1988.

Among certain subgroups of women lawmakers, agreement that women legislators have a special responsibility to represent women’s concerns is almost universal. These subgroups include self-described feminists (96%), liberals (97%), Democrats (93%), and women of color (93%). Nevertheless, a sizable majority of non-feminists (76%), white women (83%), moderates (90%), and Republicans (69%) also feel a special responsibility to represent women’s concerns in the legislature.

When it comes to legislation to help women, women legislators do more than talk; they also act. About two-thirds of women legislators, compared with only about four in 10 men, report that they worked on legislation where the bill itself or specific provisions of the bill were intended to benefit women. These gender differences are very similar to those found in 1988. Similarly, about one in six women legislators in 2001 reports that a bill designed to help women was her top legislative priority during the most recent session of the legislature, about the same proportion as in 1988.

In both parties, more women than men actively promote legislation to help women, and Republican women are more likely than Democratic men to work on such legislation. Proportionately more

Democratic women (66%) than Democratic men (48%) report having worked on a bill to help women during the current legislative session. Similarly, more Republican women (58%) than Republican men (35%) have worked on such legislation. Most striking, as was true in 1988, Republican women (58%) are more likely than Democratic men (48%) to have worked on legislation to help women.

Among men and women who call themselves feminists, in the most recent legislative session, 53% of male legislators, compared with 69% of female legislators, have worked on legislation they view as designed to help women.

### Impact on the Legislative Process

Women lawmakers believe their presence in the legislature has a significant impact on the governmental process, especially in providing access to the legislature for segments of the public that have traditionally been disadvantaged in American society. A majority of male legislators also acknowledge that women have made a difference in the legislative process, although fewer men than women share this view.

In addition, most women lawmakers believe they work harder than men; despite their effort, many also believe that women are not accorded equal influence in the legislature. In contrast, male lawmakers generally perceive women as having equal status with men in the legislature.

### Women’s Impact on Ways of Conducting Business

Large majorities of women legislators, as well as majorities of men believe that the increased presence of women serving in their legislature has made a difference in how lawmakers conduct themselves on the floor of the legislature, in the extent to which the legislature is sympathetic to the concerns of racial and ethnic groups, and in the extent to which the economically disadvantaged have access to the legislature.

A majority of women legislators and a sizable minority of men agree that women have had an impact in making the work of the legislature more public. Similarly, a large majority of the women (67%) and a substantial minority of men (31%) agree with the statement, “The men in my legislature socialize a lot more with lobbyists than the women do.”

These findings parallel those for women and men who served in the state legislatures in 1988. In 1988, as in 2001, majorities of women and somewhat smaller majorities or sizable minorities of men believed that the increased presence of women had made a difference in the conduct of legislators on the floor, the access of the economically disadvantaged to the legislature, and the extent to which legislative business is conducted in public. In 1988 a majority of women and a sizable minority of men also believed that men socialize with lobbyists more than women do.

**Table 5: Impact of Women’s Presence on the Legislative Process**

**How much of a difference has the increased presence of women in your house made in...?**

	% Saying A Lot/ Some Difference	
	<u>Women</u>	<u>Men</u>
<i>The extent to which the legislature is sympathetic to the concerns of racial and ethnic minority groups?</i>	69	62
<i>The way legislators conduct themselves on the floor of the legislature?</i>	69	55
<i>The extent to which the economically disadvantaged have access to the legislature?</i>	71	53
<i>The extent to which legislative business is conducted in public view rather than behind closed doors?</i>	56	33

## The Working Environment for Women Legislators

A large majority of women legislators (74%) believe that women in their legislatures work harder than their male colleagues. However, only about a quarter of the men (28%) agree. A similar gender gap in perceptions about whether women work harder was also apparent among legislators in 1988.

Women and men in legislatures also disagree, although to a lesser extent, about how equitably women legislators are treated by their male colleagues. As Table 6 shows, majorities of women, as well as men, agree that the leaders in their legislatures are as likely to consult with the women as the men in making important decisions. Similarly, majorities of both genders believe that the men in their legislature are supportive of having more women in leadership positions.

Nevertheless, substantially more women than men think that women are less likely to be consulted on important decisions and supported for leadership positions.

	Women %	Men %
<b>The women in my legislature work harder than the men</b>		
Agree	74	28
Disagree	20	60
<b>The leaders in my legislature are as likely to consult with the women in the legislature as the men when making important decisions</b>		
Agree	58	79
Disagree	40	17
<b>Most men in my legislature are supportive of moving women into leadership positions</b>		
Agree	56	80
Disagree	42	15

## Connections with Constituents

Women legislators appear somewhat more likely than men to rely on and value the input of their constituents. When asked what factor would most influence their vote on a controversial bill, somewhat more women would rely most on their own convictions than on the attitudes of their constituents.

Nevertheless, compared with men, women are notably more likely to report that the attitudes of their constituents would be the most important consideration in determining how they would vote (42% vs. 33%).

As another indication that women legislators may be somewhat more constituent-oriented than their male colleagues, 49% of women legislators, compared with 39% of men legislators, report that “concerned citizens” were very helpful in working on their personal top priority bill in the most recent session of the legislature. A similar difference between female and male lawmakers was evident in 1988.

	2001	
	Women	Men
<b>Which of the following considerations would probably be most important in determining how you would vote?</b>		
	%	%
The position your party’s leaders in the legislature take on the bill.	2	1
The attitudes of your constituents	42	33
Your own convictions.	49	59
The recommendation of the committee which considered the bill.	4	5

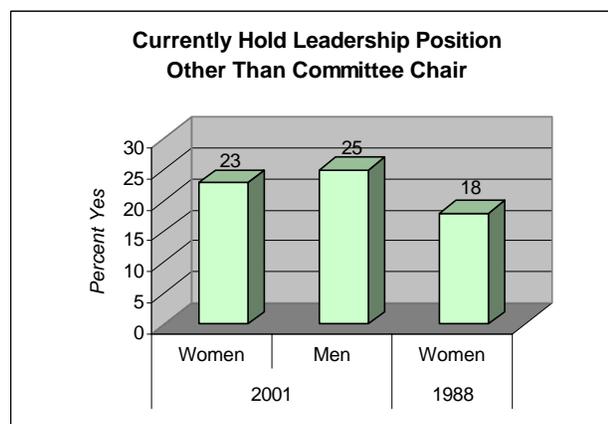
## Political Ambition and Plans for the Future

Women in legislatures are as politically ambitious as their male colleagues. Women are as likely as men to aspire to another political office as well as to leadership positions within their legislatures. Women legislators are less likely than their male colleagues to plan to leave their legislative seats in the near future, are more likely to have a successor in mind, and are more likely to have identified a woman as the person they would like to see succeed them.

### Ambitions for Leadership and Higher Office

Women state legislators are about as likely as their male colleagues to aspire to high political office, although women are slightly more likely than men to aspire to higher-level legislative offices (Congress) and slightly less likely to aspire to higher-level executive positions (governor or president). As was true in 1988, about equal proportions of female (38%) and male (37%) legislators in 2001 report that they would like to hold another elective or appointive political office someday. Among those legislators who have future office-holding aspirations, women legislators are slightly more likely than their male colleagues to say that U.S. Senator (10% vs. 7%) or U.S. Representative (13% vs. 8%) is the highest public office they would like to hold. In contrast, women legislators are slightly less likely than men to set their sights on serving ultimately as governors of their states (8% vs. 12%). Similarly, while very few legislators of either gender aspire to be President of the United States, fewer women than men (1% vs. 4%) identify the presidency as the highest office they would like to hold.

Women legislators are as ambitious as their male colleagues in aspiring to leadership positions in the legislature. Almost a quarter of women legislators—just slightly more women legislators in 2001 than in 1988—report that they currently hold a leadership position other than committee chair in their legislature. Among those legislators who are not currently legislative leaders, similar proportions of women and men (44% vs. 46%) aspire to legislative leadership positions. Women and men who serve as state representatives are equally likely to say they aspire to the highest position in their chamber—speaker of the house (14% of the women and 15% of the men). Women state senators are only slightly less likely than male state senators to want to be state senate president or president pro tem (13% vs. 17%).



## Plans for the Future

Women legislators are less likely than their male colleagues to plan to leave their legislative seats in the near future. Less than half (45%) of women legislators, compared with a majority (56%) of the men, have plans to step down within the next five years. Of course, women in states that have implemented term limits or will begin to do so by 2004 are much more likely than women in other states to anticipate leaving their seats soon (61% vs. 39%).

**Table 8: Plans For Future in the Legislature**

Do you expect to leave your seat in the next 5 years?	<u>Women</u>	<u>Men</u>
	%	%
Yes	45	56
No	40	33
Don't know	15	11

Women legislators who are thinking about leaving their seats within five years are more likely than their male counterparts to say that they have a successor in mind (51% vs. 38%) and that they are actively helping to prepare or position this person to run (38% vs. 22%). Women legislators who anticipate leaving office also are much more likely than their male counterparts to have a woman in mind as their successor (27% vs. 11%).

### A Methodological Note

During the spring and summer of 2001, CAWP conducted a nationwide survey of state legislators. Five samples of legislators were drawn: (1) the population of all women state senators (n=396); (2) a systematic sample of one-half of women state representatives (n=718); (3) a systematic sample of male state senators (n=396); (4) a systematic sample of male state representatives (n=718); and (5) the population of all African American women state representatives not included in the systematic sample of representatives (n=84). The number of men sampled from each state house or senate was proportional to the number of women serving in that state chamber. This was to ensure that we actually compared women and men who served in similar political circumstances, rather than comparing women and men from states with very different political and legislative environments. Under the management of Princeton Survey Research Associates, a telephone interview of approximately one-half hour was attempted with each of the legislators, resulting in the following response rates: 56% for female senators; 58% for female representatives; 40% for male senators; 49% for male representatives. Respondents and non-respondents do not differ significantly in their party affiliation, the one variable for which data are available for all sampled legislators. The results presented for female and male legislators have been weighted to ensure that the pooled sample of women state legislators is representative of the population from which it was drawn and to produce a sample of men that matches the women's sample. Results from 1988 are based on research that employed an identical sampling design with even higher response rates.