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For Immediate Release

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**Measuring Success: Women in 2020 Legislative Elections  
A Center for American Women and Politics Report**

Measuring women’s electoral success means placing 2020 outcomes into historical and contemporary context. That is the work done in a new report released today by the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP), a unit of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University. In [Measuring Success: Women in 2020 Legislative Elections](#), CAWP breaks down 2020 congressional and state legislative data by gender, race, and party; puts this data into historical context, with specific comparisons to the 2018 election; analyzes women candidates’ paths to office and strategies for success; and looks ahead to what 2020 election outcomes mean for the future of women in American politics.

Women’s political success in 2020 was not limited to the presidential level. After a record year for women’s political progress in 2018, the 2020 election marked continued advancement for women in waging candidacies and winning elections at the congressional and state legislative levels. Unlike the historic victories for Democratic women in 2018, women’s legislative gains in 2020 were concentrated among Republicans. After a year of decline in representation across levels of office in 2018, Republican women rebounded in 2020 elections to reach new highs in legislative representation in 2021. Still, they continue to be the minority of women and of Republican legislators.

Key takeaways from *Measuring Success* include:

**2020 was a record year for women’s legislative candidacies and success.**

- A record number of women and women of color ran for the U.S. Congress and were general election nominees for congressional and state legislative offices in 2020, and they serve at record levels in Congress and in state legislatures in 2021. However, women have not achieved parity with men in candidate pools and among officeholders.

**Understanding the gender story of 2020 requires evaluating it within the context of 2018.**

- The gains for women in election 2018 were concentrated among Democratic women at every level of office, while the number of Republican women declined in the U.S. Congress and in state legislatures nationwide, leading some Republican women leaders and activists to define the crisis of Republican women’s underrepresentation immediately after the 2018 election.
- Republican women made up for 2018 losses in election 2020, and they were responsible for more of the increase in women candidates, nominees, and officeholders in election 2020 than were Democrats.
- Republican women also won the majority of seats that flipped from Democrat to Republican, narrowing the margin of Democratic control. In 2018, women won the majority of House seats that flipped from Republican to Democrat, which was especially consequential in changing House majority control from the Republican to Democratic Party.
- Republican women candidates in 2020 utilized the language of urgency and threat – including perceived threats to President Trump and his agenda by Democrats elected in 2018 – in

outlining their motivation to run for office. In 2018, Democratic women were more likely than Republican women to use this language – citing perceived threats of President Trump and Republicans’ legislative control – to describe what motivated them to run.

- Many Republican women candidates in 2020 presented themselves in direct contrast and opposition to Democratic women, especially progressive women of color who first won office in 2018.
- Despite the Republican rebound, Democratic women remained a majority of women candidates and nominees across levels of office, and in 2021 they continue to significantly outnumber Republican women officeholders by *at least two-to-one* in the U.S. House, U.S. Senate, and in state legislatures.

**In 2020, women candidates contributed to reimagining candidacy and proved that they are not monolithic, while some of their strategies revealed persistent gender and intersectional biases in electoral politics.**

- Women running in 2020 embraced gender and intersectional identities as electoral assets instead of hurdles to overcome en route to Election Day, emphasizing the importance of diverse representation.
- At the same time, some women candidates continued to adopt or co-opt stereotypically masculine imagery and rhetoric to prove masculine credentials for officeholding.
- In presenting themselves in contrast to Democratic incumbent women officeholders, Republican women provided a clear reminder that women are not monolithic in their political beliefs, positions, or priorities. But the targeting of freshman women of color by Republicans both capitalized upon and reinforced gendered and racialized tropes as a strategy to achieve electoral advantage.

Read the full report, with detailed analysis, data visualizations, and what to watch for in future elections, [here](#), and learn more through the report’s [executive summary](#). Find the most up-to-date information about women officeholders at our [Women in Elective Office 2021](#) fact sheet.

*Measuring Success* was written with support from Pivotal Ventures, an investment and incubation company founded by Melinda Gates.

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## **About CAWP**

The [Center for American Women and Politics](#) (CAWP), a unit of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, is nationally recognized as the leading source of scholarly research and current data about women’s political participation in the United States. Its mission is to promote greater knowledge and understanding about the role of women in American politics, enhance women’s influence in public life, and expand the diversity of women in politics and government. CAWP’s education and outreach programs translate research findings into action, addressing women’s underrepresentation in political leadership with effective, intersectional, and imaginative programs serving a variety of audiences. As the world has watched Americans considering female candidates for the

nation's highest offices, CAWP's five decades of analyzing and interpreting women's participation in American politics have provided a foundation and context for the discussion.