

THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN NORTH CAROLINA POLITICS



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Politics is often referred to as the last “glass ceiling.” The 2016 presidential election confirmed that statement as Donald Trump defeated Hillary Clinton, who most experts thought was the prohibitive favorite after the conventions.

The years since 2016 have been a mixed bag for women in politics. The number of women keeps increasing in Congress, a woman of color was elected as Vice President in 2020, and 31 women serve as mayors in the 100 largest cities in the country. On the other hand, the number of women governors has declined, women politicians are often the target for misogynistic attacks, and North Carolina has lost ground in some key areas in terms of women’s representation.

Women make up 51 percent of the population in the state and almost 50.3 percent of the voters in North Carolina. Despite the persistent demographic advantage, women have always been underrepresented in appointed and elected offices in North Carolina. In some urban areas around the state, women are the majority of elected officeholders. The Asheville City Council and the Durham County Board of Commissioners currently consist of all women.

In other areas of the state, particularly in some rural areas east of I-95 and west of I-85, women officeholders are much rarer. There are city councils, county boards of commissioners, and school boards without any women at the table.

Since the last *Status of Women in North Carolina Politics* report in 2018, there have been some modest gains for women. Fewer appointed boards and commissions lack women’s voices, more women serve as judges, and the General Assembly has the most women serving in its history.

This report not only documents the situation for women as voters, candidates, appointed officials, and elected officials in North Carolina, but it provides more analysis of factors that contribute to this continued underrepresentation. New analysis in this report reveals that:

- Black women and women of color are significantly underrepresented, as compared to their white counterparts, especially in suburban areas of the state.
- Fundraising in competitive races is not a reason why women candidates lose.
- The type of electoral district—at large vs. district—is a key factor in electing women generally and Black women and women of color specifically.

This report, as were its predecessors, is meant to be a wakeup call for North Carolina politics. As we strive to be a truly representative democracy, women, who are a majority of the state’s citizens, need a bigger place at the political table.

HISTORY OF WOMEN IN NORTH CAROLINA POLITICS

HISTORY

The history of women serving in North Carolina political offices in significant numbers is relatively recent – within the last 30 years. Before the 1980s, women serving in elected offices and prominent appointed offices were rare. This pattern was not unique to North Carolina. The first woman to serve in Congress was Jeannette Rankin of Montana, who was elected in 1917. It was not until the 1980s that women held a full five percent of the seats in Congress on a consistent basis.

Likewise, the first woman elected as a state's governor, Nellie Tayloe Ross of Wyoming, was elected in 1925 to replace her deceased husband. Yet, it wasn't until 1975 that the first woman was elected on her own – Ellen Grasso of Connecticut – instead of as a replacement for her spouse. Currently, only eight states have woman governors (Alabama, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Michigan, New Mexico, Oregon, and South Dakota) and 22 states have never had a woman as governor.

North Carolina's history of electing women to office mirrors that of the nation and, in many ways, the state is typical of the struggle of women, particularly in the Southeast, to achieve a critical mass necessary to fundamentally transform the governing or policy-making processes.

Some of the early pioneers in women's politics in North Carolina came from its mountain counties. Lillian Exum Clement of Asheville was the first woman elected to the General Assembly in 1920, winning her primary contest before the 19th Amendment passed, thus giving women in North Carolina and the nation the right to vote. The first woman elected to a state legislature in the South, Clement became a one-term Democratic member of the North Carolina House of Representatives, where she introduced 17 bills. Like several other women pioneers in elected office, Clement's tenure was very short, as she chose not to run for reelection, in part as a result of marrying E. Eller Stafford in 1921.

Also from Western North Carolina, Jackson County native Getrude Dills McKee was the first woman elected to the North Carolina Senate in 1930. McKee had a long history of public service before being elected to the General Assembly; she served on the Jackson County Board of Education and the North Carolina Commission on Education, as well as many other civic organizations. McKee served three full terms and was elected to the fourth in 1948, but passed away soon after the election.

At the federal level, Eliza Jane Pratt was the first woman from North Carolina to serve in Congress, winning a special election in 1946 to replace Representative William Burgin, who passed away in office. A Democrat, Pratt had previously worked as a legislative assistant to Burgin, and she chose not to run in the 1946 general election. After serving six months in the House, Pratt returned to administrative assistant positions in the federal government and eventually became the legislative assistant for Representative A. Paul Kitchen from North Carolina's 8th district.

After Pratt ended her short tenure in Congress, it was almost a half century before Eva Clayton was elected to the United States House of Representatives. Clayton, who won a special election to succeed the unexpired term of Walter Jones, Sr., was the first African American elected to represent North Carolina in Congress since Reconstruction and served until 2003. It was during Clayton's tenure in office that other women from North Carolina were elected to Congress.

Republican Elizabeth Dole became the first woman to serve in the US Senate from North Carolina, winning election in 2002. She brought a long history of public service into her role as senator, having served as Secretary of Transportation in the Reagan Administration and Secretary of Labor in the George H.W. Bush administration. In 2008, she lost her reelection bid to Democrat Kay Hagan.

North Carolina became one of 26 states to have a woman governor in 2008, when it elected Democrat Beverly Perdue as the state's chief executive. She succeeded Mike Easley, with whom she served as Lt. Governor for two terms. In serving in the state's executive branch, Perdue joined seven other women who have served in a variety of Council of State positions. It was Elaine Marshall who became the first woman elected statewide to a Council of State position when she beat Richard Petty in 1996 and won the Secretary of State position, where she still serves.

In the judiciary, Rocky Mount native Susie Sharp was a pioneer for women in North Carolina and the nation. The only woman in her University of North Carolina School of Law class, Sharp was appointed to the Superior Court by Governor Kerr Scott in 1949, making her the first woman in the state to be a judge. In 1962 Governor Terry Sanford appointed Sharp as Associate Justice on the North Carolina Supreme Court, another first, and in 1974, Sharp garnered 74 percent of the statewide vote to become the first woman elected to a Chief Justice role for a state court

Commissioner Brenda Howerton

A 13-year member of the Durham County Board



of Commissioners and current board chair, Brenda Howerton said her sole goal of getting elected was to “take the focus off of me and turn it to fighting for the people” of her community.

An accomplished political leader, Howerton

said her greatest honor was from the North Carolina Early Education Coalition, which honored her with the 2020 Baby Advocate Award for promoting programs for the youngest members of her community. It was not the award itself that was most significant, but the work that she and fellow commissioners put in to help the children that mattered most. “The reason I do what I do is to fight for the children,” said Howerton.

Before running for office for the first time, Howerton had a long history in the Durham community, working as a community organizer and activist. When she decided to file for office the first time, she had two motivations. First, running “had to do with children and people in the community who did not have a

voice. It had to do with women who felt that they were not enough.” The second motivation was from her family. When she first mentioned wanting to run for office and expressed doubts, it was her granddaughter who reminded her of her passion and effectiveness in making change. “You have been kicking booty!” her granddaughter said.

Howerton considers mentoring other women who have the desire for public service to be an important part of her job. “There were many times in which I was the only woman in the room,” Howerton said, “Women always provide leadership in their families and communities and I encourage them to seek office, like I did.”

When asked about important advice for women considering appointed or elected office, Howerton was quick to respond, “you have to take care of yourself, as well as your community.”

Being chair of the Durham County Board of Commissioners, although listed as a part-time position, commands more than a full-time schedule. “In order to effectively represent my community, attend all the meetings I have, and deal with complex issues in county government, I have to take some time to recharge,” Howerton said.

in the country. Senator Sam Ervin even recommended to President Richard Nixon that Sharp become the first woman appointed to the United States Supreme Court, but Nixon rejected his suggestion (Hayes, 2008).

These are but a few of the political milestones for women in North Carolina politics. At the local level, Isabella Cannon was elected as mayor of Raleigh in 1977 at the age of 73. Known as “the little old lady in tennis shoes,” Cannon was the first woman mayor of a major city in North Carolina.

These and other women who have blazed political trails throughout North Carolina are remarkable in their own right. The larger story is that, despite the successes of these and other women and North Carolina’s reputation as a progressive state for much of the 20th Century, progress has been slow for achieving equality.

WOMEN AS VOTERS IN NORTH CAROLINA

When the future 19th Amendment was being debated in North Carolina in 1920, many groups were aligned against giving women the right to vote. Democrats, particularly in eastern North Carolina, many churches, and the textile industry thought that giving women the right to vote would have many consequences, such as suffrage being fully extended to African Americans or damage to the institution of marriage. A sign hanging over the Hotel Raleigh in the summer of 1920 expressed the sentiment of these groups: “Politics are bad for women and women are bad for politics.”

Beginning in the middle and latter parts of the 20th century, women have become a numerical majority of voters in North Carolina and have become a political force at the ballot box, often determining the outcome of key elections in the state. Voting is the major way in which women shape public policy in the state.

Much credit has been given to women voters nationally in terms of helping Democrats take back the White House, maintain a small majority in the US House of Representatives, and gain functional control of the US Senate. Although women make up over 50% of North Carolina’s registered voters, Republican candidates in North Carolina, including presidential candidate Donald Trump and US Senate candidate Thom Tillis—won despite strong turnout among women voters.

The story about women voters in North Carolina is a complex one. Voter registration patterns show that women in the urban areas of North Carolina are continuing to register as Democrat or unaffiliated, while women in the more rural parts of the state are registering as Republican more frequently. This helps explain voting patterns that we see in elections and ones that should continue as we head into the 2022 and 2024 election cycles.

Voter Registration

It has long been the case that women of voting age have outnumbered men in North Carolina. Chart 1 below demonstrates that women, as a percentage of registered voters, are continuing to increase as we get further into the 21st century.

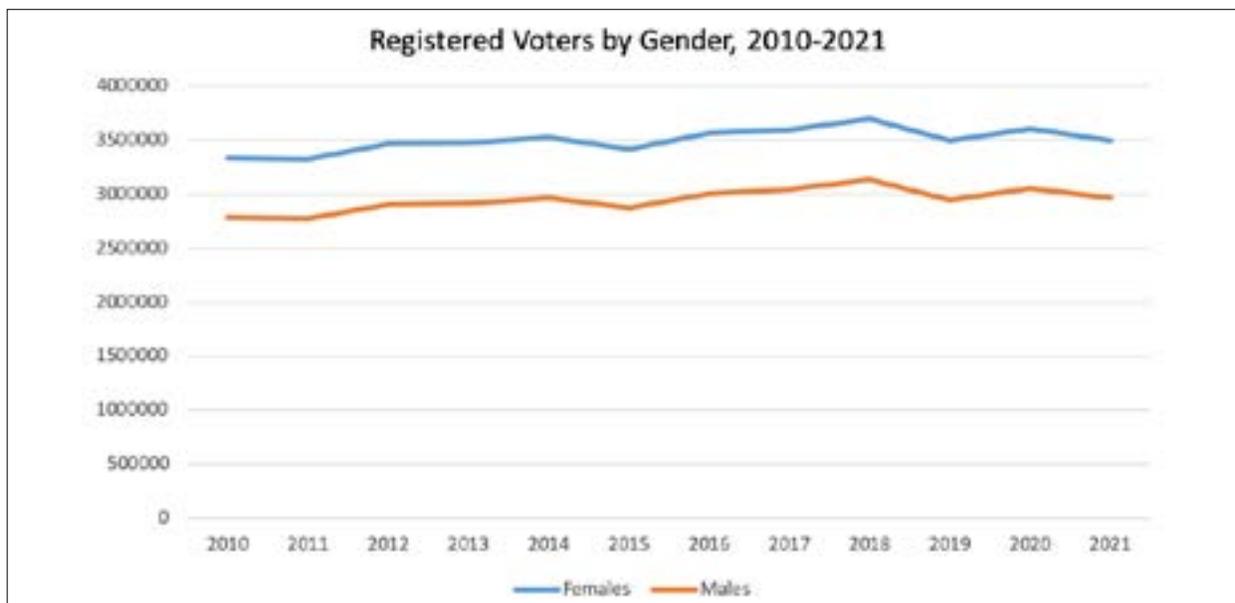


Chart 1: Men and Women Registered Voters

Source: NC Board of Elections

The gap between registered men and women voters is currently just over 530,000, but as Chart 1 on page 8 shows, the gap is relatively constant with women comprising a slight majority of voters.

There are differences around the state with some counties having a relatively higher percentage of its registered voters as women. Below are the top and bottom five counties in terms of percentage of women voters, as well as the winning margin of the major party presidential candidate in 2020:

Top 5 Counties for Registered Women

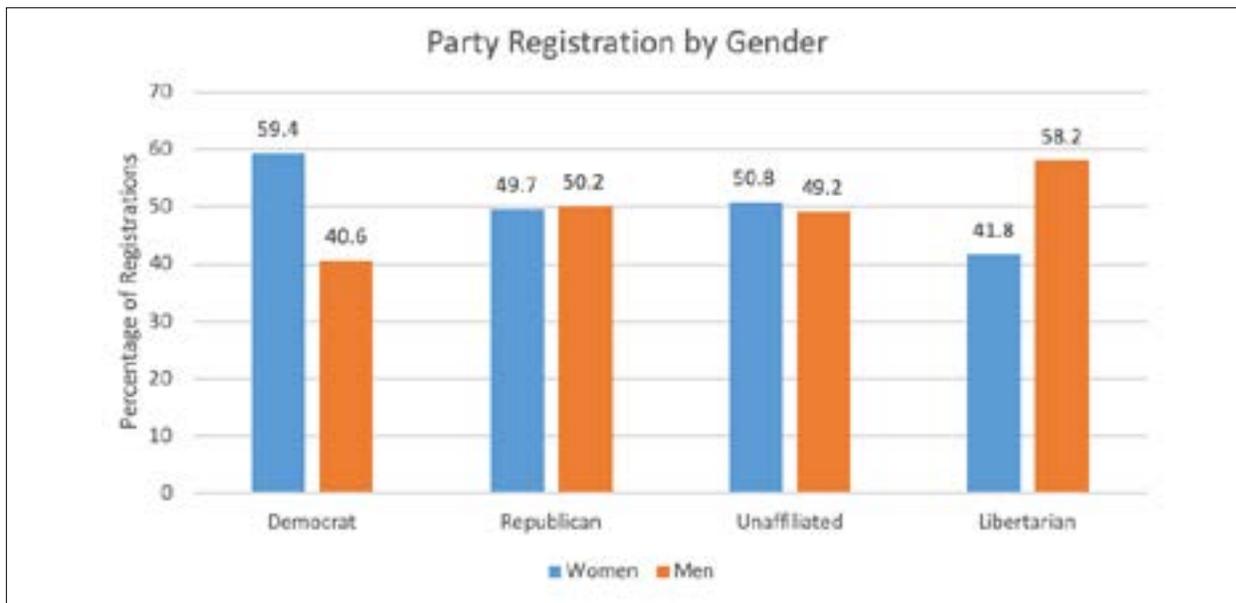
- 1. Edgecombe 57% (Biden +27%)
- 2. Hertford 56% (Biden +34%)
- 3. Scotland 56% (Trump +2%)
- 4. Vance 56% (Biden +19%)
- 5. Durham 56% (Biden +62%)

Bottom 5 Counties for Registered Women

- 1. Currituck 51% (Trump +46%)
- 2. Madison 51% (Trump +23%)
- 3. Graham 51% (Trump +60%)
- 4. Alleghany 52% (Trump +50%)
- 5. Yancey 52% (Trump +33%)

As the numbers above indicate, many of the counties with the greatest number of registered women favor Democrats, like Joe Biden, while counties with relatively fewer numbers of registered women generally support Republicans.

Although women voters have outnumbered men voters for decades and there are places in North Carolina with a higher concentration of women voters, there are other issues that more completely explain North Carolina’s political climate. The topic of **gender gap** in partisan registrations helps explain why Democratic candidates generally perform better with women voters than men voters, as the chart below demonstrates.



	Democrat	Republican	Unaffiliated	Libertarian	Total
Women	1,686,710	1,160,997	1,228,675	18,488	4,094,870
Men	1,151,513	1,171,825	1,189,859	25,745	3,538,942

Chart 2: Women and Party Registrations in North Carolina

Source: North Carolina Board of Elections, July 31, 2021.

Voter Turnout

The 2020 general election produced a record turnout among voters in North Carolina, at least in recent history with an overall turnout of over 75 percent of registered voters. Women voters, as is traditionally the case, turned out in higher numbers than did males. The election results from 2020, however, may have mystified many as Republican candidates did well—with the exception of the governor’s race and some other council of state races—which seemed to belie the conventional wisdom about the gender gap.

A further examination of women voters in 2020 revealed that, while women voted in very high numbers, not all groups of women voters turned out in equally strong numbers with many Republican-leaning groups outperforming their Democratic-leaning groups, producing a strong year for Republican candidates.

North Carolina Women Compared to Women Around the Country

Voter turnout is the percentage of those registered that actually vote. At the national level, the turnout for women has exceeded that of men in every presidential election since 1980. In non-presidential election years, or midterm election years, women have turned out at a higher percentage than have men. With one exception—2010—women have voted at higher rates than men over the last decade.

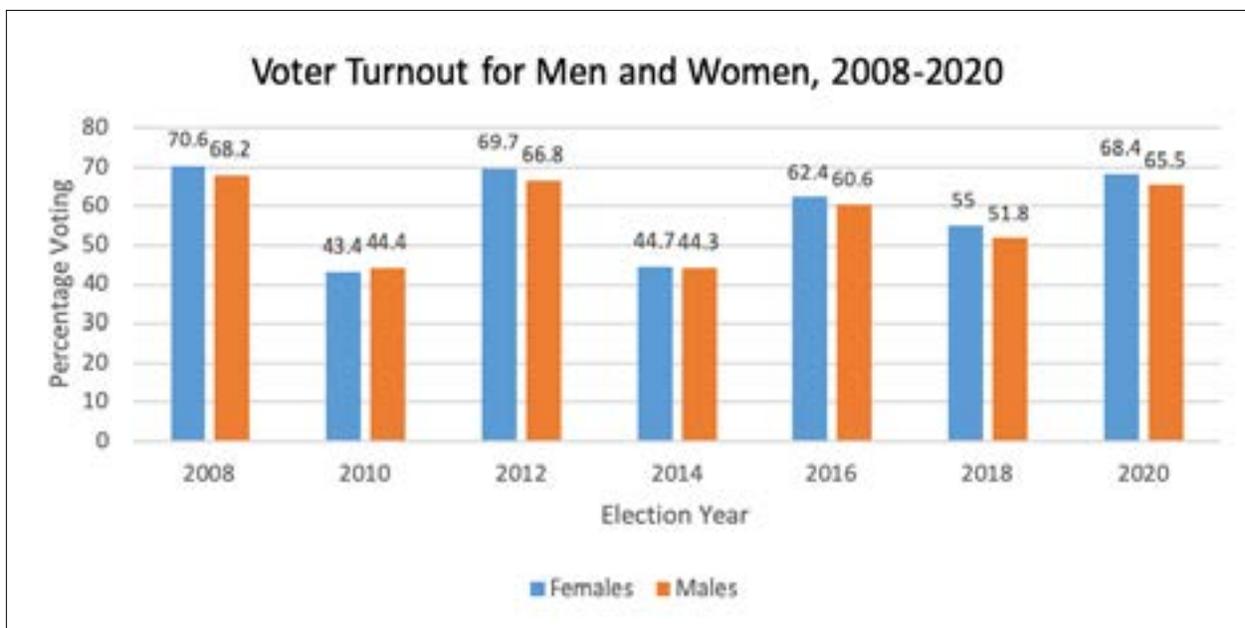


Chart 3: Voter Turnout for Men and Women in the US, 2008-2020

Source: US Census

As a point of comparison, 76.5 percent of the women registered in North Carolina voted in the 2020 presidential election. In the election, 73.5 percent of registered men voted. It is also worth noting that 75.1 percent of registered Democrats turned out to vote, while 81.6 percent of registered Republicans and 69.8 percent of registered unaffiliated voters turned out (North Carolina Board of Elections 2020).

Although overall turnout is an important statistic in North Carolina, it is important to break down the turnout into different demographic groups. As Democracy NC reported—in Chart 4 on page 11—in their analysis of the 2020 vote, women had a higher turnout than men among Black, Hispanic, and White voters.

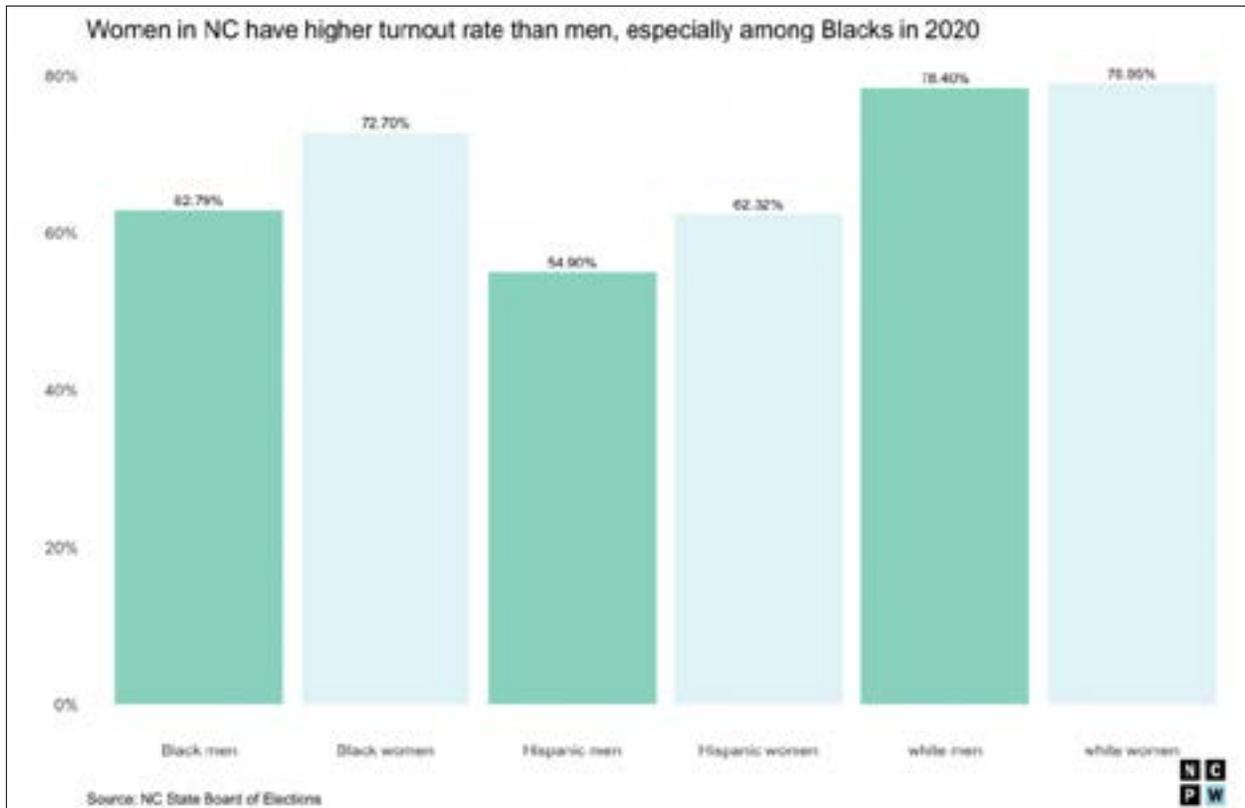


Chart 4: 2020 Turnout for Men and Women in Different Ethnic and Racial Groups

Gender Gap in Voting Behavior

Not only is the number of women voting relative to men important, but it is also important to look at voting tendencies. Over the last 20 years, there has been discussion and research into the gender gap in voting. Since the election of Bill Clinton to the presidency in 1992, there has been a profound schism in voting behavior with a majority of women supporting Democratic presidential candidates and a majority of men supporting Republican presidential candidates.

The gender gap has many causes, but research supports the perception that Democrats favor policy positions held by a majority of women. In a recent Pew Research poll (2012), there were significant gender differences in terms of women favoring a more activist government, more social programs for the disadvantaged, fewer restrictions on abortion, support of same-sex marriage, and protections for the environment. Furthermore, the women who supported these policy positions felt that Democratic candidates held positions on these and other issues that were similar to their own.

In North Carolina, the profound gender gap has been more recent with the majority of women voting for Barack Obama for president in 2008 and 2012, rather than the Republican opponent, according to exit poll data (NY Times 2008 and 2012). Likewise in 2016, the gap increased with more women supporting Hillary Clinton over Donald Trump than they had supported previous Democratic presidential candidates (NY Times 2016).

	2004		2008		2012		2016		2020	
Men	Bush	60%	McCain	56%	Romney	54%	Trump	56%	Trump	54%
	Kerry	38%	Obama	43%	Obama	45%	Clinton	38%	Biden	45%
Women	Bush	54%	McCain	44%	Romney	49%	Trump	45%	Trump	46%
	Kerry	46%	Obama	55%	Obama	51%	Clinton	52%	Biden	53%

Table 1: Exit Poll Results for Presidential Vote by Gender

Source: NY Times

As the table above demonstrates, the gender gap in the 2020 presidential votes was not as pronounced as it was in 2008, the last time a Democratic candidate for president carried the state. Further examination of the exit poll data reveals some interesting findings about gender and voting, as the Table 2 below shows:

	White Men (29%)	White Women (36%)	Black Men (9%)	Black Women (14%)	Latino Men (3%)	Latino Women (3%)	All other races (7%)
Biden	30%	35%	91%	93%	39%	76%	52%
Trump	69%	64%	8%	6%	59%	22%	43%

Table 2: Exit Poll Results by Race, Ethnicity, and Gender

Source: NY Times

Although Joe Biden won large majorities of the votes of Black women and Latina women, the large number of white women voters that voted almost two-to-one for Trump surely helped Trump and other Republican candidates win races in North Carolina. As Chart 4 demonstrated, white women had a higher turnout than either Black or Hispanic women. It appears as though both groups of minority women voters would have needed turnout closer to 80 percent in order to have moved the presidential, senatorial, or other key races that Republicans won in the other direction.

Conclusion

Women voters, because of their numbers and overall turnout, are key to electoral success in North Carolina. North Carolina women voters, however, may not be like voters in other states. According to the Congressional Election Survey (CAWP 2020), nationally there is about a 12-point advantage for Democratic candidates over Republican candidates among all women voters. Among white women voters, the gap is five points in favor of Republican candidates.

Among white women voters, in particular, it may be the case that education level is the dividing line between voters that favor Democrats and voters that favor Republicans. According to the NC Demography Center, just over 32 percent of women in North Carolina have earned a bachelor’s degree or higher.

There are many other complexities within women voters in North Carolina. Geography, age, and income are correlated with their voting preferences. The bottom line is that North Carolina women voters are far from the monolithic group that they are often portrayed.

WOMEN AS CANDIDATES IN NORTH CAROLINA

The Challenges of Getting Women into Public Service

The number of women entering appointed and elected office has slowly increased over time, but not to the same degree as women entering professions such as law or medicine. In these areas many structural barriers have been reduced or removed, such as those related to admissions practices of law and medical schools. There are no such structural barriers to women seeking public service offices, but there are many factors affecting women considering a career, or even part-time service, as an elected or appointed officeholder. Women still bear most of the childcare and senior care responsibilities in society, making it difficult to find the time to squeeze public service into their busy lives. Also, because women tend to find professional success somewhat later in their lives and relatively few political positions in the state pay a full-time salary, the economic realities of running and serving are real. These realities, however, do not explain fully why few women seek appointed and elected office in North Carolina.

A generation ago, there were widely held beliefs about why so few women ran for office. Up until the late 1970s and early 1980s, there was evidence of overt discrimination against women running for office and electoral gatekeepers making it very difficult for women to run for office (Githens and Prestage, 1977; Kirkpatrick, 1974). The climate of overt discrimination is increasingly uncommon (Woods, 2000). Even some of the most widely held stereotypes, such as the idea women cannot raise money to the same degree as men, an important indicator of electoral success, have been disproven (Cook, 1998; Fox, 2010; Lawless and Pearson, 2008).

Given that many barriers to electoral success have been reduced or eliminated, there are still challenges women must overcome to achieve gender equity in office holding.

The most obvious reason for slow growth in the number of women officeholders is the incumbency advantage. The fact that men hold a significant majority of political offices in the country and state and, historically, incumbents win 70-95 percent of the time, depending on the office, make it difficult for women to quickly change the numbers. Also, women are just recently moving into the professions considered to be the natural pipelines to political office; thus, there is a lag between more women becoming lawyers, business executives, and other occupations that more likely lead to political careers and running for offices (Lawless and Fox, 2010).

The largest challenge, however, is in the motivation women have to enter politics. Political scientists Jennifer Lawless and Richard Fox argue women are successful in achieving political office if they actively seek out offices (Lawless and Fox, 2012). Their research on the political pipeline demonstrates women are half as likely as men to see themselves in office and half as likely again to take any steps to seek the office.

One issue is women's self-perception. Men are 60 percent more likely to see themselves as well qualified for political office. Even highly qualified women often do not see themselves as suitable for office as even less qualified men. This self-perception, coupled with the research finding that women are encouraged to run for office about 40 percent less frequently than equally qualified men—by elected officeholders, party officials, friends, and family members—illustrates another reason why women across the nation and in North Carolina are outnumbered on the ballot by a 3-to-1 margin.

In recent years there has been an increased focus on a concept that political scientists call **election adversity** (Kanthak and Woon 2014). This is the idea that the process of campaigning is so challenging—emotionally, financially, and physically—many people simply do not want to run for office. Kanthak and Woon argue that women are more election adverse than men and as state and local races become more expensive and negative, there is no wonder the political parties have more challenges recruiting qualified candidates, including women.

For the last two decades, however, women have won offices at an increasing rate, particularly in open seat elections. To put it bluntly, in a majority of cases, when women run, women win.

The 2020 Primary and General Election Ballots in North Carolina

The situation described by Lawless and Fox delineates the difficulty for increasing the number of women in elected office in North Carolina. Women were almost one-third of the candidates in the general election of 2020 (756 out of 2,339 candidates). This was a large increase over 2016, when women were just over one-quarter of all candidates. As with previous election cycles, when women ran, women won—winning over 60% of the races. Likewise, in the 2020 primary elections, more women ran and won their seats than in 2016. Just over 30 percent of the ballot positions were held by women.

Table 1 below breaks down the 2020 primary and general election statistics for women in North Carolina:

Office	Percentage of Women Candidates		Percentage of Women Winning Race	
	Primary	General Election	Primary	General Election
Federal	18%	29%	29%	50%
Council of State	25%	32%	42%	43%
NC Senate	26%	27%	55%	55%
NC House	28%	28%	63%	39%
District Attorney	50%	50%	20%	100%
County Offices*	33%	50%	34%	65%
Judicial	36%	39%	40%	86%
Average	31%	33%	49%	64%

Table 1: Women Candidates in the 2020 Primary and General Elections

Source: NC Board of Elections

*This includes county offices and some municipal elections in the communities that hold them in even years.

The 2020 Ballot in North Carolina

Congressional races

Women continue expanding their numbers in the United States Congress with 144 women being sworn in to the 117th Congress on the House side and 26 in the US Senate (one House member and two Senators resigned to join the Biden administration prior to January 18, 2021). Part of the reason for these high numbers had to do with the number of women candidates running in 2020. A total of 319 women were on the general election ballot (298 for House seats and 21 for Senate seats)—a 20% increase over 2018. The partisan divide in terms of women candidates continued in 2020 with two-thirds of the women candidates for the House and Senate being Democrats (216 D; 103 R).

In addition to setting a record for the number of women elected to Congress, the results of the 2020 election set a record for the number of women of color serving in the Congress with 52 women, or 9.2%, of the House and Senate being with Black (24), Latina (14), Asian Pacific Islander (10), Native American (1), Middle Eastern/Northern African (1), and multi-racial (2).

Women on the 2020 North Carolina ballots for Congress also set a record. In Table 2 (below), the 2020 ballot had 20 women running for Congress, as compared to the previous high number of 19 in 2016. Although only a modest increase from the last presidential year election, 2020 produced twelve women who ran in the primary election for House and Senate, with eight women being on the General Election ballot (Republicans Sandy Smith (District 1),

and Virginia Foxx (District 5); Democrats Deborah Ross (District 2), Kathy Manning (District 6), Patricia Timmons-Goodson (District 8), Cynthia Wallace (District 9), and Alma Adams (District 12); and Green Party member Tamara Zwinak (District 11)).

	2008	2010	2012	2014	2016	2018	2020
Women running in primary	5	10	6	10	13	10	12
Women running in general election	4	4	5	6	6	6	8

Table 2: Women Running for NC Congressional Seats

Although just a slight increase over 2016, the number of women running for North Carolina Congressional seats in 2020 reflects the national trend. The number of women of color also dramatically increased in NC, as four women (5 Black women and 1 Hispanic woman) ran for the House (Alma Adams, Patricia Timmons-Goodson, Monika Johnson-Hostler, Cynthia Wallace, and Laura Pichardo) and one Black woman (Ericka Smith) ran for the US Senate.

Legislative races

In 2020, 98 women appeared on the General Election ballot for the NC House and NC Senate—a record number of candidates.

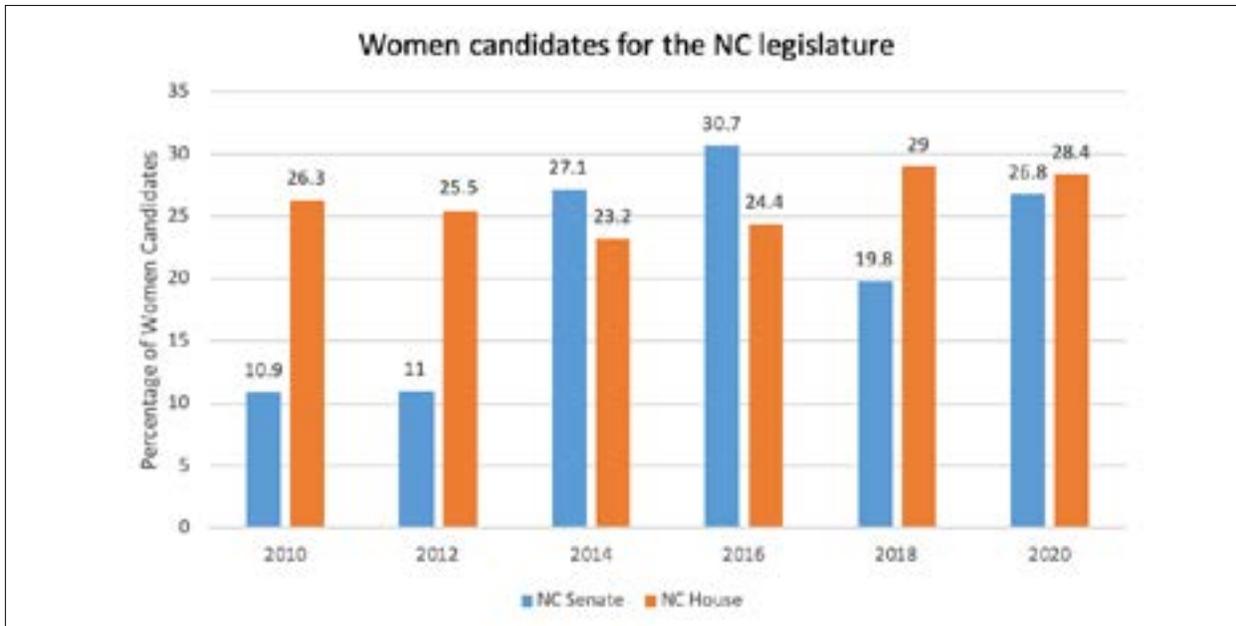


Chart 1: Women Candidates for NC Legislature

Although the chart above indicates that the number of women legislative candidates has not grown significantly over the past four election cycles, the fact that more women are serving in the legislature indicates that the women candidates are better positioned for success. There has been some growth in the number of women of color running for the legislature, as five candidates ran for the NC Senate (four won) and nine women of color ran for the NC House (7 won).

STATUS OF WOMEN IN NORTH CAROLINA POLITICS

Over 70 percent (71.7%) of all the women legislative candidates are Democrats, but this is not unusual in North Carolina as 70 percent of the candidates in 2014 and just under 70 percent of the candidates in 2016 were Democrat. In 2018, just under two-thirds of the candidates were Democrats.

Geographically, most of the women running for legislative seats are in urban (39.5%) and suburban (26.7%) districts, with just over a third of women (33.7%) running in rural districts. This urban-suburban-rural divide is also consistent with elections since 2010 in the state.

Although more women ran in urban districts, than in suburban or rural districts, there were two factors that affected the success of women candidates more than any other: the partisan nature of the district and incumbency.

One of the issues restricting the number of women serving in the legislature is the lack of competitive districts. Only 14 of the 50 Senate districts and 27 of the 120 House districts are competitive, according to the Civitas Partisan Index. Republican women were more successful in Republican-leaning districts and Democratic women were more successful in Democratic-leaning districts.

Table 3 (below) shows 15 competitive Senate races (CPI<=5) and the outcomes of each race, including the winner's margin of victory.

2020 NC Senate Civitas Partisan Index Competitive Districts

District	CPI	Rating	Officeholder Party	2019-20 Senator	2020 Opponent	Outcome
1	R+2	Lean Republican	R	Bob Steinburg (R)	Tess Judge (D)	Steinburg +10
5	D+4	Lean Democrat	D	Don Davis (D)	Karen Kozel (R)	Davis +10
7	R+2	Lean Republican	R	Jim Perry (R)	Donna Lake (D)	Perry +10
9	D+0	Toss up	D	Harper Peterson (D)	Michael Lee (R)	Lee +1
11	R+2	Lean Republican	R	Rick Horner	Lisa Stone Barnes (R) Allen Wellons (D)	Barnes +10
13	D+2	Lean Democrat	R	Danny Earl Britt, Jr. (R)	Barbara Yates-Lockamy (D)	Britt+27
17	D+1	Toss up	D	Sam Searcy (D)	Mark Cavaliero (R)	Searcy +6
18	D+2	Lean Democrat	R	John M. Alexander, Jr.	Larry Norman (R) Sarah Crawford (D)	Crawford +8
19	D+3	Lean Democrat	D	Kirk deViere (D)	Welsey Meredith (R)	deViere +3
24	R+4	Lean Republican	R	Rick Gunn	Amy Galey (R) J.D. Wooten (D)	Galey +5
25	R+4	Lean Republican	R	Tom McInnis (R)	Helen Probst-Mills (D)	McInnis +19
27	D+0	Toss up	D	Michael Garrett (D)	Sebastian King (R)	Garrett +9
31	R+4	Lean Republican	R	Joyce Krawiec (R)	Terri LeGrand (D)	Krawiec +6
37	D+2	Lean Democrat	D	Jeff Jackson (D)	Sonja Nichols (R)	Jackson +13

Table 3: Women Running in Competitive NC Senate Districts in 2020

In NC Senate races, male incumbents won six races against women challengers by an average margin of almost 15

points. More significantly, male incumbents—Bob Steinburg, Don Davis, Jim Perry, Danny Britt, Tom McInnis, and Jeff Jackson—overperformed their district partisan ratings by an average of 12.2 points. The lone woman incumbent who ran against a man—Joyce Krawiec—won her race by 6 points and only outperformed her district partisan average by 2 points. Three women ran against men in open seat elections in these competitive districts—Lisa Barnes, Sarah Crawford, and Amy Galey—who won by an average of just over 7 points and outperformed their district by an average of 5 points.

In Table 4 (below), the 27 competitive NC House races (Civitas CPI rating ≤ 5) are listed with the outcome in the last column. Fourteen of the races featured at least one woman candidate, including two open seat races, in NC 43 and NC 82, with two women running against one another.

2020 NC House Civitas Partisan Index Competitive Races

District	CPI	Rating	Officeholder Party	2019-20 Representative	2020 Opponent(s)	Outcome
1	D+1	Toss up	R	Edward C. Goodwin (R)	Emily Nicholson (D)	Goodwin +9
2	R+4	Lean Republican	R	Larry Yarborough (R)	Cindy Deporter (D)	Yarborough +21
7	R+4	Lean Republican	R	Lisa Stone Barnes	Matthew Winslow (R) Phil Stover (D)	Winslow +17
9	D+1	Toss up	R	Perrin Jones (R)	Brian Farkas (D)	Farkas +2
12	R+1	Toss up	R	Chris Humphrey (R)	Virginia Cox-Daugherty (D)	Humphrey +9
22	R+2	Lean Republican	R	William D. Brisson (R)	Albert Kirby (D)	Brisson +15
24	D+5	Lean Democrat	D	Jean Farmer-Butterfield	Linda Cooper Suggs (D) Mick Rankin (R)	Cooper-Suggs +5
35	D+1	Toss up	D	Terence Everitt (D)	Fred Von Cannon (R)	Everitt +5
36	D+1	Toss up	D	Julie von Haefen (D)	Kim Coley (R)	Von Haefen +10
37	R+3	Lean Republican	D	Sydney Batch (D)	Erin Pare (R)	Pare +3.5
40	D+2	Lean Democrat	D	Joe John (D)	Gerard Falzon (R)	John +13
43	D+1	Toss up	D	Elmer Floyd	Dianne Wheatley (R) Kimberly Hardy (D)	Wheatley +3
45	D+1	Toss up	R	John Szoka (R)	Frances Jacksonn (D)	Szoka +1.5
46	D+1	Toss up	R	Brenden H. Jones (R)	Tim Heath (D)	Jones +21
47	D+4	Lean Democrat	D	Charles Graham (D)	Olivia Oxendine (R)	Graham +5
51	R+3	Lean Republican	R	John Sauls (R)	Jason Cain (D)	Sauls +14.5
55	R+5	Lean Republican	R	Mark Brody (R)	Gloria Overcash (D)	Brody +16.5
59	R+3	Lean Republican	R	Jon Hardister (R)	Nicole Quick (D)	Hardister +4.5
63	D+1	Toss up	R	Stephen M. Ross (R)	Ricky Hurtado (D)	Hurtado +1

STATUS OF WOMEN IN NORTH CAROLINA POLITICS

District	CPI	Rating	Officeholder Party	2019-20 Representative	2020 Opponent(s)	Outcome
66	R+2	Lean Republican	D	Scott T. Brewer (D)	Ben Moss (R)	Moss +19
82	R+4	Lean Republican	R	Linda P. Johnson	Kristen Baker (R) Amy Steele (D)	Baker +6
93	R+3	Lean Republican	D	C. Ray Russell (D)	Ray Pickett (R)	Russell +6
98	R+5	Lean Republican	D	Christy Clark (D)	John Bradford (R)	Bradford +3
103	R+0	Toss up	D	Rachel Hunt (D)	Bill Brawley (R)	Hunt +9
104	R+1	Toss up	D	Brandon Lofton (D)	Don Pomeroy (R)	Lofton +7
105	D+1	Toss up	D	Wesley Harris (D)	Amy Bynum (R)	Harris +9
119	R+2	Lean Republican	D	Joe Sam Queen (D)	Mike Clampitt (R)	Clampitt +9

Table 4: Women Running in Competitive NC House Districts in 2020

In NC House races, male incumbents running against a woman challenger won by an average of 10.4 points in these competitive races. Women incumbents won two races—Julie Von Haefen and Rachel Hunt—against male challengers, but lost two races—one against a male challenger—John Bradford—and the other against a female challenger—Erin Pare. Both losing women incumbents were Democrats in districts that leaned Republican. The strong turnout of Republican voters in NC in 2020 were key for the Republican challengers taking those two seats.

Judicial races

Historically, women have run in consistently high numbers for judicial offices (Supreme Court, Court of Appeals, Superior Court, and District Court). In 2020, the number of women candidates rebounded strongly from 2018 with the number of women running hitting a historic high with over 40 percent, as Chart 2 (below) demonstrates:

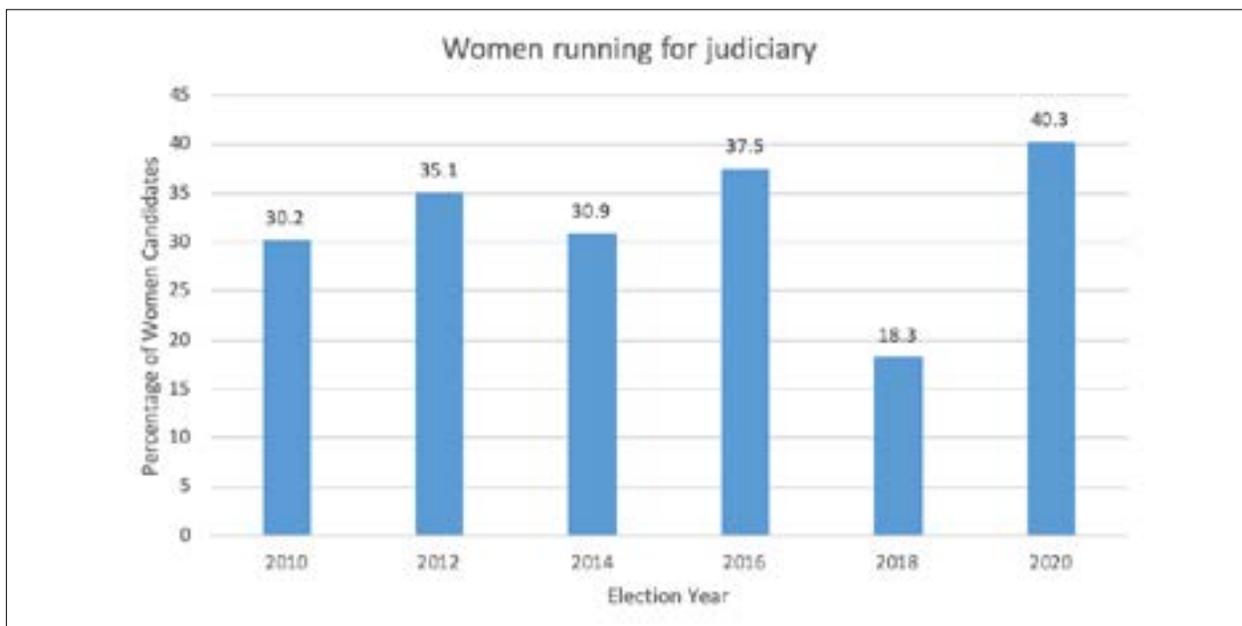


Chart 2: Women Running for the NC Judiciary

To further examine the judicial races across the four levels of the judiciary (District Court, Superior Court, County of Appeals, and Supreme Court), Table 5 (below) shows women are especially successful when running for the District Court in North Carolina with women winning almost 80 percent (78.7%) of the races in which they are candidates. Although not as successful in the Supreme Court and Court of Appeals races, women candidates were also very successful in the Superior Court races with women candidates winning just over 71 percent of the races in which they competed.

	Total	Women Candidates	Winning Women Candidates
Supreme Court	6	3	1
Court of Appeals	10	3	1
Superior Court	24	7	5
District Court	181	89	70

Table 5: Women Candidates Running and Winning Judicial Races in 2020

County and Municipal

A large majority of the 2020 candidates running in North Carolina were at the county or municipal level with races being contests for boards of county commissioners, boards of education, soil and water conservation commissioner, and a small number of city and town council positions. Overall, women make up 28.1 percent of the candidates running for these offices, but the percentage of women varies widely, depending on the office sought, as shown in the following table.

However, as Table 5 indicates, women win a very high percentage of races in which they are candidates for the respective offices.

Office	Percentage of Women Candidates	Percentage of Women Candidates Winning Races
Board of County Commissioners	26.7%	63.4%
Board of Education	40.2%	62%
Clerk of Superior Court	100%	100%
Register of Deeds	77.8%	97%
Soil and Water Conservation Commissioner	11%	62%
Sanitary District Supervisor	14%	50%
City and Town Councils	26.5%	78%

Table 5: Women Running and Winning County and Municipal Races in 2020

The women candidates for these offices were predominately white women with relatively few candidates for these county and local offices, as the chart below shows. Only the Register of Deeds offices attracted a number of Black women and women of color candidates that is close to approximating the percentage of women in North Carolina in these categories.

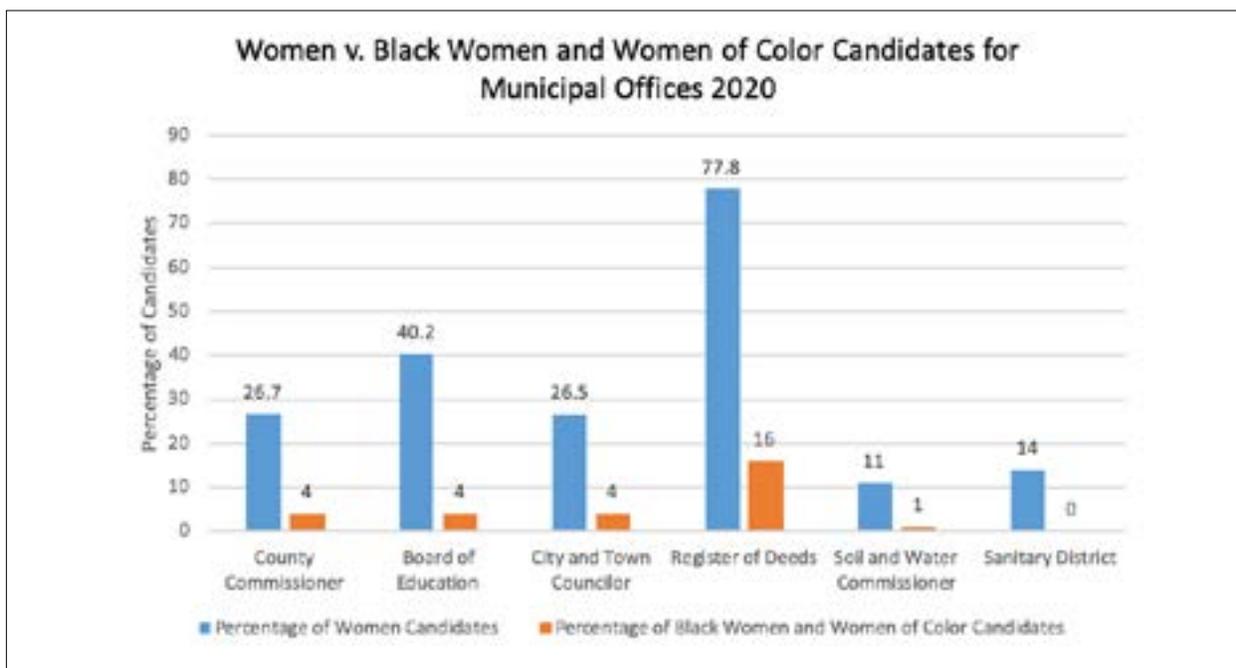


Chart 3: Black Women and Women of Color Running for County and Municipal Races in 2020

County Commissioners

One office—county commissioners—has been traditionally one of the most underrepresented elected offices in the state. Over the past 20 years, over 40 percent of the counties have had no women serving as county commissioners. A direct cause of this underrepresentation is the low number of candidates that run for the office. In 2020, just over one-quarter of the candidates around the state were women. Further analysis, as illustrated in Table 6 below, indicates women candidates for county commissioner vary widely depending on the type of county¹.

	Rural Counties	Urban Counties	Suburban Counties
Percentage of Women Candidates	21%	38%	32%

Table 6: Geographical Location of Women Candidates for County Commissioner in 2020

In the 15 urban counties in the state, just under 40% of the candidates were women, while in the 20 suburban counties, just under a third of the candidates were women. It is in the 65 rural counties of the state where the greatest

¹ The counties are categorized as follows. Rural counties: Alexander, Alleghany, Anson, Ashe, Avery, Beaufort, Bertie, Bladen, Burke, Caldwell, Camden, Caswell, Cherokee, Chowan, Clay, Cleveland, Columbus, Currituck, Duplin, Gates, Graham, Granville, Greene, Halifax, Harnett, Haywood, Hertford, Hoke, Hyde, Jackson, Jones, Lenoir, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, Martin, Mitchell, Montgomery, Northampton, Pamlico, Pasquotank, Perquimans, Person, Polk, Randolph, Richmond, Robeson, Rockingham, Rutherford, Sampson, Scotland, Stanly, Stokes, Surry, Swain, Transylvania, Tyrell, Vance, Warren, Washington, Wilkes, Yadkin, and Yancey. Urban counties: Buncombe, Craven, Cumberland, Durham, Forsyth, Gaston, Guilford, Mecklenburg, Nash, New Hanover, Onslow, Pitt, Wake, Watauga, and Wayne. Suburban counties: Alamance, Brunswick, Cabarrus, Carteret, Catawba, Chatham, Dare, Davidson, Davie, Edgecombe, Franklin, Henderson, Iredell, Johnston, Lee, McDowell, Moore, Orange, Pender, Rowan, and Union.

underrepresentation of women as candidates exists, with just over one-in-five candidates being women. There were 24 counties that had no women running for county commissioner (21 rural and three suburban). On the other hand, all of the candidates for county commissioner in Durham County and Pamlico County were women.

The other significant issue with county commissioner candidates is the underrepresentation of Black women and women of color who run for this office. Only 4.7% of the candidates statewide were minority women. In the urban counties, just over 6% of the candidates for county commissioner were Black women or women of color. In rural counties, just over 4% were minority women, but in the suburban counties, just 2% of the candidates were Black women or women of color.

It is worth noting, however, that women running for county commissioner won a significant proportion of their races—62% of the women who ran, won. This includes over three quarters of those who ran in urban counties, 62% of those who ran in rural counties, and 39% of those who ran in suburban counties.

Winning Democratic women candidates for county commissioner outnumbered winning Republican women candidates two-to-one, but, given that twice as many Democratic women ran for county commissioner, this illustrates that Republican women win proportionately as often as Democratic women candidates. In fact, in suburban counties, winning Republican candidates outnumbered winning Democratic candidates (women) two-to-one.

Boards of Education

In the last few years, Boards of Education have become increasingly politicized with a range of topics regarding curricular issues (e.g., how race is approached in social studies classes) to the health of staff and students (e.g., mask mandates) making school board membership and, therefore, school board races much more prominent and divisive than a generation ago. Even though not all of the 115 boards of education in North Carolina had elections in 2020, the number of candidates overall for the races was high—483 for the 88 contests.

Women made up just over 40% of the candidates for school board seats with no women running in 13 of the contests. On the other hand, in 22 of the contests, women were at least half of the candidates. When women candidates were on the ballot, they won 62% of the races.

One issue in terms of school board candidates is the lack of minority women. Only 4% of the candidates in 2020 were Black women and women of color (only 10% of all the women candidates).

Other county and municipal races

Because of election calendars, only 39 of the over 500 municipalities—cities and towns—in North Carolina held elections in 2020. A majority hold their elections in odd-numbered years. Many of the communities that held municipal elections in the state last year were smaller communities in rural counties (e.g., Montgomery and Stanly counties), however Asheville and Winston-Salem also held municipal elections.

The total percentage of women candidates for municipal offices in 2020 was just over 25 percent. The cities and towns in the two urban counties—Buncombe and Forsyth—had very successful races for women candidates. In Buncombe County, two of the three women running for city council won, which led to Asheville having its first all-women city council. Three other towns in Buncombe County—Biltmore Forest, Black Mountain, and Montreat—all had a majority of their women candidates win races for town councils. Likewise, in Winston-Salem, all three women running for city council won their respective races.

Unlike the races in more urban counties, fewer women ran for and won races in towns in more rural counties.

Campaign Fundraising

One often-cited reason why there are relatively few women candidates is the difficulty in fundraising. This stereotype has existed for decades and, even as late as 2018, journalists at the *New York Times* and other media outlets were writing about women breaking most of the barriers in politics, except for being good fundraisers (Zernike 2018). Academic research suggests otherwise (Burrell 2008 & Werner 2007). They found that at both the federal and state levels, women candidates, especially when they are equally situated to that of male candidates (e.g., competitive race, similar qualifications and experience, etc.) fare well and sometimes exceed that of male candidates.

An examination of the 2020 races in North Carolina revealed women can and do raise money that can lead to successful campaigns. In Table 6 (below), we used races for the General Assembly to make the point. We used competitive races, using the Civitas Partisan Index (<= 5%) to compare men and women candidates and their fundraising efforts in these races. We averaged the fundraising totals for men and women as incumbent candidates, challenging candidates, and in open seat elections.

NC House	Incumbent Men Candidates	Incumbent Women Candidates
	\$431,666	\$806,483
NC House	Challenger Men Candidates	Challenger Women Candidates
	\$301,630	\$353,266
NC House	Open Seat Men Candidates	Open Seat Women Candidates
	\$632,921	\$29,473*
NC Senate	Incumbent Men Candidates	Incumbent Women Candidates
	\$764,070	\$1,537,332
	Challenger Men Candidates	Challenger Women Candidates
	**	\$1,270,676
	Open Seat Men Candidates	Open Seat Women Candidates
	\$1,197,492	\$1,137,756

Table 6: Fundraising Totals for Men and Women Running for Competitive Legislative Seats in 2020

*There was only one male—Larry Norman in NC Senate 18—running in an open seat election.

** There were no men challenging incumbent women in competitive races for NC Senate.

As the data indicate, women are effective political fundraisers. It should be acknowledged that the sources of funds for these races includes funds raised by the candidates themselves, contributions from PACs and other candidates, and contributions directly from political parties and party-affiliated organizations.

Conclusion

The primary reason for the large gap between the number of men and women who run for office in North Carolina is a significant gap in political ambition. Put briefly, men and women do not have equal interest in seeking elected office. As Fox and Lawless (2014) argue, while men’s interest in running for political office has remained steady since 2000, women’s interest has dropped. According to their research, only 14 percent of women express any interest in running for political office at some point in the future, while over 23 percent of men state a similar ambition. As Fox and Lawless point out, these differences hold across political party, income level, age, race, profession, and region.

Although the number of women candidates in 2020 increased modestly from 2020, there continues to be a marked difference in the gender composition on the ballot. This decrease in women's political ambition in the state must be examined against the political realities that women are effective political leaders in North Carolina and elsewhere and that they have the abilities, such as in fundraising, to make them successful candidates. It is also critical to examine the fundamental causes for this declining ambition when it appears as though more women are running for office in many other states.

Fox and Lawless identify three significant barriers to women's candidate emergence:

1. **Gendered perceptions of the qualifications to run for office and of the electoral environment.** Men are 60 percent more likely than women to assess themselves as "very qualified" to run for office. Women are twice as likely to consider themselves as "not at all qualified." These differences exist even when women report equal knowledge of the political process and policy issue, have similar experience in volunteering for political campaigns or attending public meetings, and have equivalent experiences such as serving on nonprofit boards. In addition to differences in perceived qualifications to run for office, women are more likely to perceive the electoral environment as biased against women, even when voters suggest otherwise.
2. **Gendered patterns of political recruitment.** Women are encouraged to run significantly less often than men. Overall women are 40 percent less likely to be encouraged by political actors — elected officials, party officials, or political activists — than are men. Equally important, according to Fox and Lawless, is that women are 25 percent less likely to be encouraged by friends, professional colleagues, and family members to run for office than are men.
3. **Gendered household roles and responsibilities.** Women continue to bear most of the household and childcare responsibilities in relationships and, as scholar Duerst-Lahti (2005) argues, "women may now think about running for office, but they probably think about it while making up the bed."

Other research reveals a variety of other factors that affect this difference in political ambition. Fox and Lawless (2013) state that men and women are exposed to less political information and discussion while in high school and college and are, therefore, socialized to be less interested in seeking political office. This finding reflects the research of political scientist Bruce Bimber (1999) who argues that women 18-24 see a significant decline in their interest in and exposure to politics, leading to a "lost generation" of women who do not regain their political interest until their mid-to-late 30s.

As reflected in the next section of this report, fewer women serve in elected offices in rural parts of the state. As Fox and Lawless and other researchers suggest, places in North Carolina without many women serving in elected office are unlikely to have many women step forward to run for office, thus creating a vicious cycle.

Two other factors have become more prominent in recent years that affect women's political ambitions—**hostile sexism** and the **negative partisanship** in politics generally. Hostile sexism is the blatant resentment expressed toward women. In our survey research at the Meredith Poll, we have found an increased amount of hostile sexism heading into the 2020 elections (Meredith Poll, February 2020), including among groups—Democratic voters and young voters—that stereotypically are perceived as the most supportive of women candidates. Likewise, the Meredith Poll has found increasing amounts of negative partisanship among North Carolina Voters (Meredith Poll, 2017-2020) with more North Carolinians comfortable with publicly expressing the negativity toward political candidates, even

Esther Manheimer



Esther Manheimer occupies a unique position in North Carolina. She is a mayor and serves with an all-women city council in Asheville. First elected to city council in 2009, Manheimer was elected mayor in 2013. After the

2020 elections when four women candidates joined Manheim and two other incumbent women councilors, Asheville became the first city in the state to be governed entirely by women.

When asked about why Asheville citizens decided to place their governance solely in the hands of women, Manheimer said she did not know why, but said that “it could have been the caliber of the candidates in this last race. I am honored to serve with such a capable group of women, it is a real pleasure.”

Since Manheimer served on the Asheville City Council with men before serving with only women, she reflected on the differences. “It’s more collaborative, more team oriented, and less competition to take credit,” she said.

An attorney in private practice with a family, Manheimer says that public service is a challenge for

women. The mayor of Asheville, like most mayors, is a part-time position and she has to keep her legal practice going and spend meaningful time with her family. Manheimer said, “I can’t drop my career while I am serving and, of course, family is a constant (rewarding) demand.”

Before she ran for city council, Manheimer served on several local boards and commissions to, as she said, “stay involved in public service.” Her work on the boards and commissions was noticed: “I was approached by a few folks in the community who were familiar with my board work, from there I found others who were able to help inform my decision to run.”

When asked about advice for other women considering running for city council or another local office, Manheimer said, “The decision to run needs to be thoroughly thought through and I would encourage potential candidates to talk to those who have run and lost, those who have run and won, and learn from them.”

Manheimer cautioned women considering running for office that she experienced people she never met criticizing her and judging her on her appearance. These critics, however, were the minority, since the citizens of Asheville have kept her in office for well over a decade and have only added other women to the governing mix.

at the local level. Anecdotally, many women who have come through candidate training programs have expressed pessimism about filing for office, stating “it is too hostile out there.”

The academic research and data from the candidacies of women in North Carolina elections demonstrate that existing practices for getting more women to run are simply not enough. There needs to be a concerted effort to change the political culture of North Carolina, and recommendations for beginning this process will be made at the end of this report.

WOMEN IN ELECTED OFFICES IN NORTH CAROLINA

There are almost 5,000 elected officeholders in North Carolina. A few, such as Governor and United States Senator, are prominent and get a great deal of attention from citizens. Most, however, are at the county or city level, and those officeholders are known to relatively few citizens.

Across the spectrum of political offices in North Carolina, some elected offices, such as county sheriff, are virtually barren of women, while other offices, such as Clerk of Superior Court or Register of Deeds, have strong majorities of women. This lack of uniformity of representation extends to the urban and rural areas of the state. Urban areas, like the Triangle and Charlotte, have a good number of women serving in almost every type of elected office. Rural areas are often a different story with few, if any, women serving in offices, especially policy-making positions.

The data about women serving in elected offices in North Carolina point to the need for more women candidates for all offices in the state. Women candidates – both Democrat and Republican – do well when they run, especially in statewide races. As the previous section on women candidates demonstrates, there are places and races in which no women run, and new solutions are needed in these locations.

Congress

Since North Carolina elected Eliza Jane Pratt to the United States House of Representatives in 1946, ten women have served in Congress. Although the first two women elected to Congress were Democrats, the history of women in the North Carolina delegation demonstrates that North Carolina is indeed a “purple state” in terms of being almost equally divided between voters who favor Democrats or Republicans. The current Congressional delegation features three Democrats (Alma Adams, Kathy Manning, and Deborah Ross) and one Republican woman (Virginia Foxx). On the statewide level, voters elected Republican Elizabeth Dole to the U.S. Senate in a midterm election and Democrat Kay Hagan in a presidential election year.

Name and Party Affiliation	Office	Term
Kathy Manning (D)	US House	2021-present
Deborah Ross (D)	US House	2021-present
Alma Adams (D)	US House	2014-present
Kay Hagan (D)	US Senate	2009-2015
Virginia Foxx (R)	US House	2005-present
Renee Ellmers (R)	US House	2011-2017
Sue Myrick (R)	US House	2005-2013
Elizabeth Dole (R)	US Senate	2003-2009
Eva M. Clayton (D) ¹	US House	1992-2003
Eliza Jane Pratt (D) ²	US House	1946-1947

Table 1: History of Women in the North Carolina Congressional Delegation

¹ Eva Clayton won a regular election to fill a vacancy and a special election to fill a complete term on the same day. She was the first African American elected to serve in Congress from North Carolina since Reconstruction.

² Eliza Jane Pratt won an election to fill an unexpired term.

STATUS OF WOMEN IN NORTH CAROLINA POLITICS

North Carolina's four-woman delegation in the House of Representatives is above the national average (30.8 percent v. 26.7 percent). Ten states (Arkansas, Idaho, Kentucky, Maryland, Montana, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Utah, and Vermont) currently have no women in their Congressional delegations and Vermont has never had a woman serve in Congress. Compared to many of its fellow Southeastern states, North Carolina ranks favorably— ahead of Virginia, South Carolina, and Tennessee, equal to that of Georgia, and behind Florida. The 2020 election had a record number of women candidates for Congressional offices in North Carolina.

In recent years, Congress has become more dysfunctional, passing fewer bills into law than in previous historical periods. Also, both the House and Senate's way of conducting business in committee meetings and on the respective floors has degenerated with partisan bickering and little policy discussion being the norm, rather than the exception. Research by Dahlrup (2007) and others suggest that, if more women were elected to legislative bodies like the House and Senate, then the legislative bodies would function more effectively. Dahlrup suggests a threshold of 30 percent is necessary for women to exert their influence. However, research by Manzo and McLennan (2017) suggest the threshold might be as high as 50 percent.

In this era of extreme polarization in Congress, more women could increase the chances for actual bi-partisanship on some issues. As Swers (2013) argues, women are more aggressive advocates for legislation affecting women, children, and families, even across party lines. She goes on to argue that the presence of more women in a deliberative body on all issues affects the quality of debate and decision-making, even among men. Consequently, legislators rely less on their talking points and ideological positions and have more substantive debates on the merits of issues when more women are present. This effect is supported by other researchers who studied legislators' deliberations about abortion, defense, and social welfare programs (Hawkesworth, 2003, Dodson, 2006, Swers, 2007).

This argument is not supported by all researchers, as Lawless (2019) argues women can be as polarized and divisive as men. Clearly there are examples of women in Congress on both sides of the aisle that demonstrate women may be as partisan as men in terms of how they legislate. Examining the voting records of the North Carolina delegation in the current Congressional session, in Table 2 below, reveals the idea that women may work across the aisle more than men is no longer valid.

District	Member	Percentage of time voting with President Biden
1	G.K. Butterfield (D)	100%
2	Deborah Ross (D)	100%
3	Greg Murphy (R)	11.1%
4	David Price (D)	100%
5	Virginia Foxx (R)	8.1%
6	Kathy Manning (D)	100%
7	David Rouzer (R)	7.9%
8	Richard Hudson (R)	15.8%
9	Dan Bishop (R)	10.5%
10	Patrick McHenry (R)	11.1%
11	Madison Cawthorn (R)	8.3%
12	Alma Adams (D)	100%
13	Ted Budd (R)	5.3%

Table 2: Partisan Voting Record of Current NC Members of Congress, as of October 1, 2020

Source: 538

Although the Biden administration is less than one year into its term, the Democrats in the delegation, including the three women, consistently support President Biden’s position on legislation. Republican members of the NC delegation strongly oppose the Biden administration’s policy positions, but the one woman, Virginia Foxx, is one of the staunchest opponents of President Biden’s positions.

The issue of increasing women in North Carolina’s congressional delegation is similar to that of increasing women’s representation in other political offices. Only twelve women (of 59 candidates) ran in the primary elections for congressional seats from North Carolina and eight women (out of 28 candidates) were on the general election ballot. This fact illustrates the fundamental issue in the state that relatively few women run for elected offices, but they are likely to win when they run. Given the incumbency advantage for U.S. House races and the politically gerrymandered districts in these races, it is not likely that significantly more women will run until retirements or resignations create open seat elections, as they have in the past.

The North Carolina House delegation is evenly split between new members (Kathy Manning and Deborah Ross) and long-serving members (Alma Adams and Virginia Foxx). Adams, in her fourth term, has leadership positions on several committees on agriculture and labor and is one of the assistant whips in the House Democratic Caucus. Foxx was first elected in 2004 and also serves in leadership roles on committees on education, government oversight, and labor. She has served in leadership roles in the House Republican Conference.

Executive Branch

North Carolina has a strong recent history of electing women to statewide executive leadership positions. Elaine Marshall was the first woman elected to the Council of State in 1996 when she won the Secretary of State office. Since then, eight other women have been elected or appointed to executive positions, including governor. There are ten elected positions in the executive branch of North Carolina¹.

Name	Position	Term
Cathy Truitt (R)	Superintendent of Public Instruction	2021-present
Janet Cowell (D)	State Treasurer	2009-2017
Beth Wood (D)	State Auditor	2009-present
June Atkinson (D)	State Superintendent of Public Instruction	2005-2017
Cherie Berry (R)	Commissioner of Labor	2001-2020
Elaine Marshall (D)	Secretary of State	1997-present
Beverly Perdue (D)	Governor Lt. Governor	2009-2013 2001-2009
Patricia Willoughby (D) ²	State Superintendent of Public Instruction	2004-2005
Meg Scott Phipps (D)	Commissioner of Agriculture	2001-2003

Table 3: History of Women on the NC Council of State

¹ Governor, Lt. Governor, Secretary of State, Attorney General, Commissioner of Agriculture, Commissioner of Insurance, Commissioner of Labor, State Auditor, State Treasurer, and Superintendent of Public Instruction.

² Patricia N. Willoughby was appointed to fill the unexpired term of Mike Ward.

Nationally, women comprise just over 30 percent of the 310 elected state executive positions (CAWP 2021) with 51 Democratic women, 41 Republican women, and two unaffiliated women serving. Of the women serving in the 50 states, 18, or just over 19 percent, are women of color. For the last 15 years, North Carolina has exceeded the national average of women serving in the executive branch, primarily because of the longevity of Council of State members like Elaine Marshall and Beth Wood. Although a Black man—Lt. Governor Mark Robinson—serves on the Council of State, North Carolina has not had a Black woman or woman of color serve on the Council of State.

The success of women being elected to Council of State offices in North Carolina can be attributed to the fact that more women run for these offices than they do for legislative offices – 31 percent v. 24 percent – and that women have a greater chance of winning in statewide races than in some districts in the state.

Legislative Branch

Between 1979 and 1993, the number of women serving in the 50 U.S. state legislatures doubled. Although North Carolina did not see the same growth in the number of women legislators, the percentage of women in the General Assembly grew by over 50 percent. Since 1993, both at the state and national levels, the growth rate of women serving as legislators slowed until 2017, when women serving in state legislatures grew significantly nationally, but much slower in North Carolina. In 2017, as Chart 1 below shows, North Carolina was at the national average in terms of women legislators, but since then, North Carolina has fallen to the bottom third of all states.

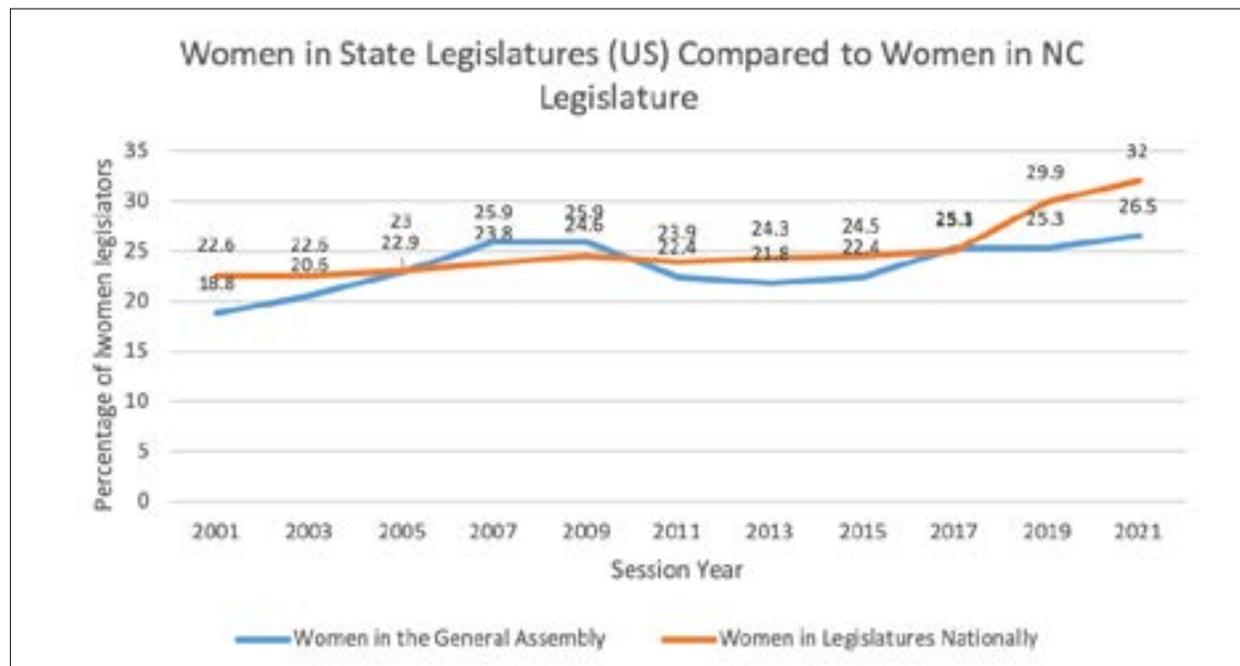


Chart 1: Women in NC Legislature Compared to Women in State Legislatures

These slow gains have happened at the same time women earned graduate and professional degrees at an increasing rate and/or were moving up the corporate ladder. In 2016, for example, women became the majority of the students in law schools (American Bar Association 2018).

As stated earlier in this report, the reason for the slow growth in women serving in the General Assembly is that the number of women candidates has grown very slowly. In 2014, just over 24 percent of the candidates for NC House

and Senate seats were women and in 2020 the number grew to 27.9 percent. Nationally, the percentage of women candidates for state legislative seats was **32 percent**.

One other reason for the leveling off of women in the legislature is the loss of multi-member districts in North Carolina. Until the redistricting after the 2000 Census, North Carolina, like other states had multiple representatives elected from one geographic region. These districts have been consistently demonstrated to be associated with higher numbers of women state legislators (Arceneaux, 2001; Carroll; 1994; Hogan, 2001). Darcy, Welch, and Clark (1994) argue that parties and voters in multimember districts use this opportunity to seek representational balance by sex.

For over a decade, Republicans have performed well in races across the state, taking over control of the legislature in 2011. For much of that decade, the number of Republican women elected to the General Assembly grew—to the point in 2017 that the number of Democratic and Republican women was almost equal. The elections of 2018 and 2020 reversed those gains by Republican women. Despite Republicans barely losing their super-majority status in 2018 and doing well in legislative elections in 2020, the number of Republican women hovered at around the two-decade average, as Chart 2 below shows:

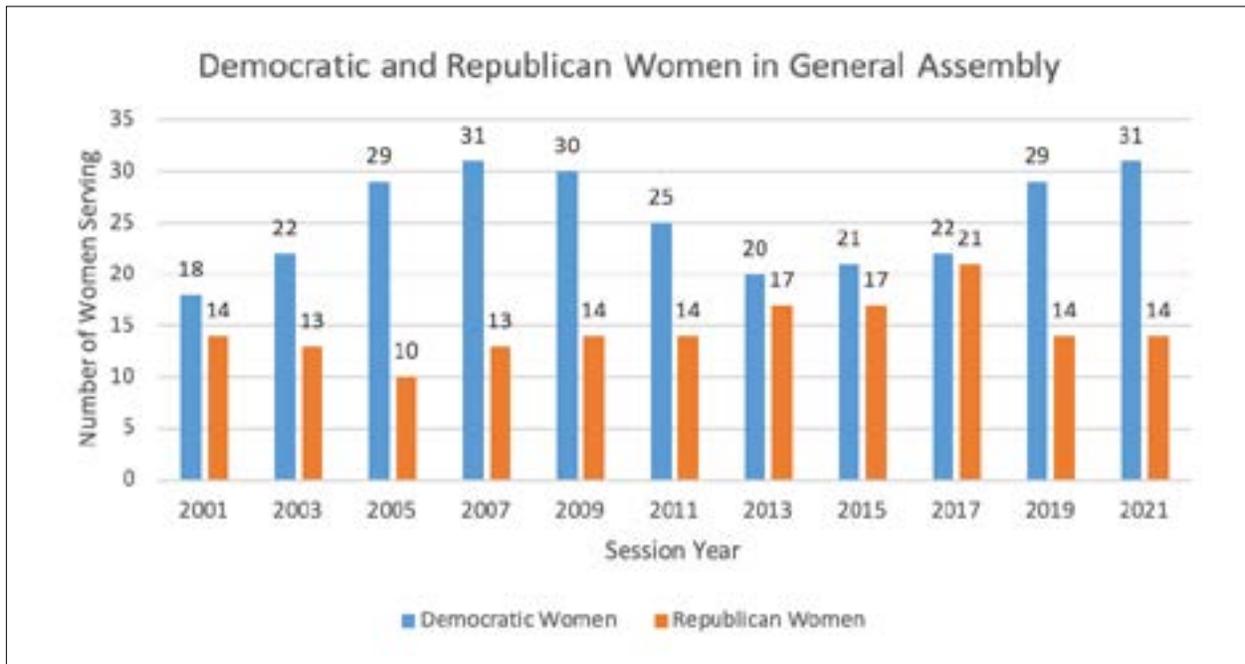
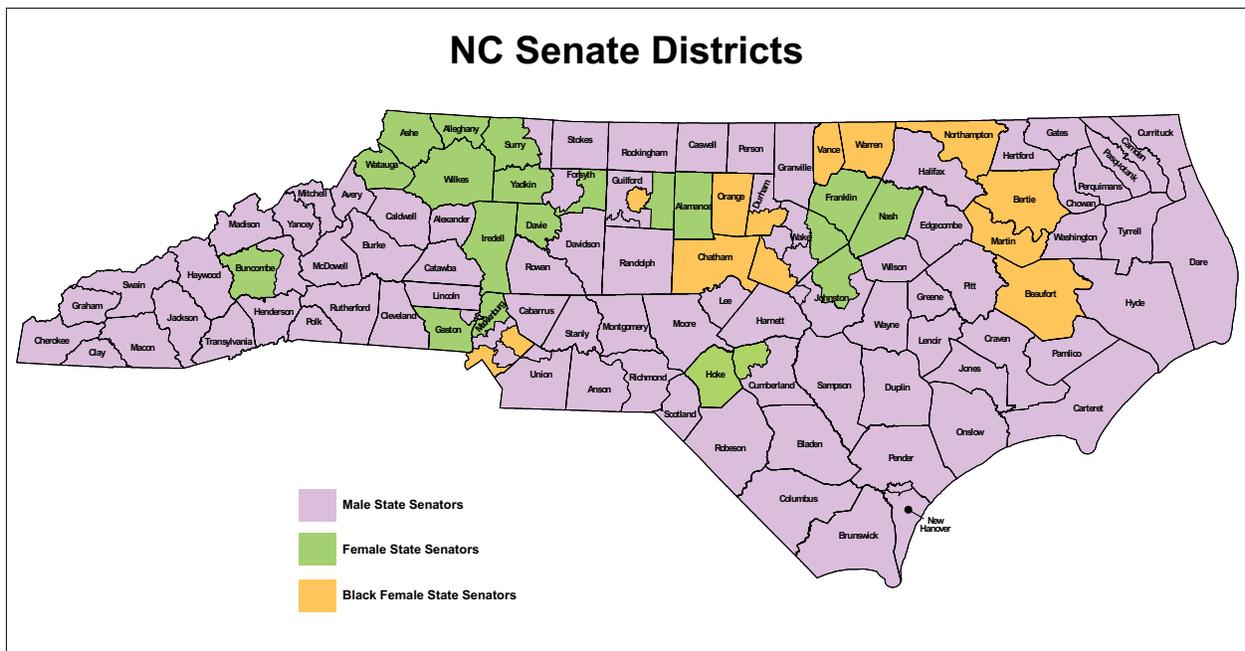
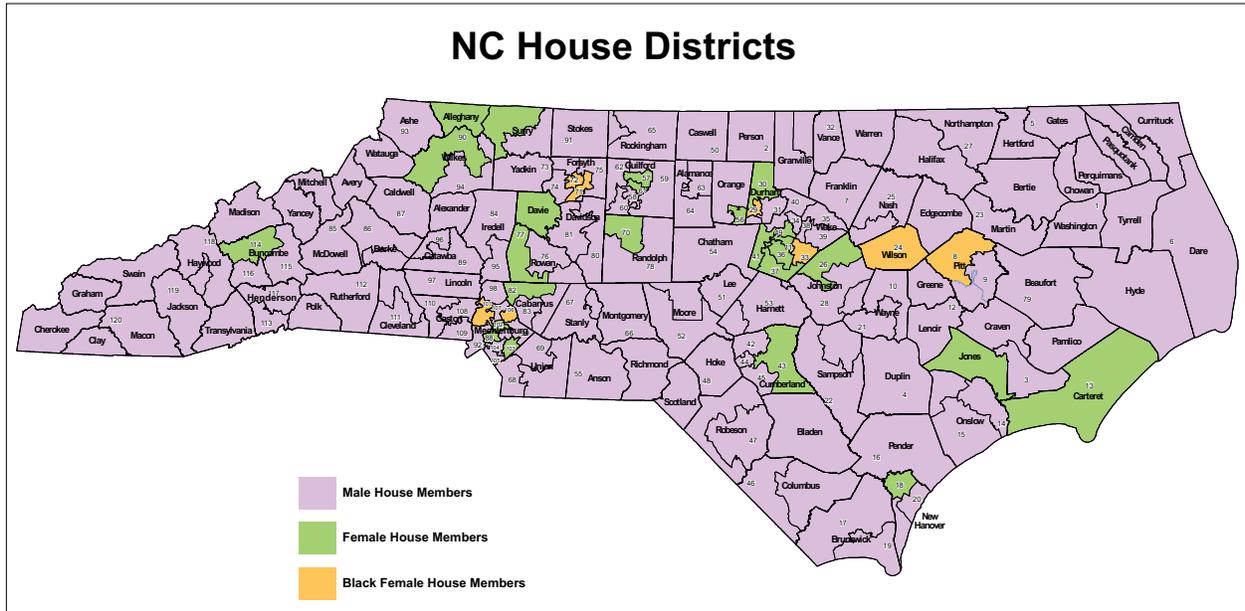


Chart 2: Democratic Women and Republican Women in NC Legislature

An examination of the geographic homes of women serving in the North Carolina General Assembly reveals that far more women serve from urban or suburban legislative districts than from rural districts. In the maps below, there are clusters of women serving in both the North Carolina House and North Carolina Senate.



In the North Carolina House, women from urban and suburban counties – particularly Durham, Guilford, Forsyth, Mecklenburg, and Wake counties – outnumbered women legislators from rural counties over 2.5 to 1. The women serving are also heavily concentrated within the I-85 to I-95 areas of the state, as demonstrated by the following figure.

Although the urban-rural disparity is not as pronounced in the North Carolina Senate, the number of women serving from urban and suburban counties is twice that of women from rural counties.

Senator Amy Galey

Recently sworn in, Senator Amy Galey (R-Alamance) credits her four years of experience on the Alamance County Board of Commissioners for helping her transition to the General Assembly. “It’s been incredibly useful to have that local government experience,” said Galey, “Everything we do comes back down to local stuff.”

First elected in 2016, Galey said the issue of zoning in Alamance County was what prompted her to run: “The local issue of growth caused me to think about running . . . It appeared to me that nobody in local government was talking about growth or how to manage growth.”

“When I decided to run, I literally knew no active members in my party (Republican),” said Galey. “The first meeting I went to after I filed was to the Alamance Republican Women and it was one the hardest things I have ever done. . . I thought they would be chilly to

me, but I was wrong. Everyone was so nice.”

After her first year on the Board of Commissioners, Galey decided she was ready to chair the board. “I called up two members and said I was ready to be chair. I called the current chair and told him.” In reflecting on the decision to run for the first time and on her rapid rise to leadership on the Alamance County Board of Commissioners, Galey offered advice to all women thinking about public service: “You have to go with your gut and you can’t second guess yourself.” Also, to succeed in politics, Galey says “You have to be willing to have difficult conversations.”

“Women have the life training to serve in elected office,” Galey argued, “because they are sisters, daughters, mothers, and friends. When you run for office and serve in office, you will draw on all those experiences you have and on all those relationships and you will have the people skills to be effective.”

One of the newest members of the General Assembly, Amy Galey demonstrates that women can impact their local communities and the state in a short period of time.

Beyond the basic disparity in membership or even where women who serve in the state legislature come from is the fact that women members rarely serve in leadership roles. Across the nation, women in legislatures hold 25.7 percent of the leadership position,¹ including two senate presidents and seven house speakers (CAWP, 2021). North Carolina has eight women in leadership positions (23%): Speaker Pro Tempore Sarah Stevens, Deputy Majority Whip Representative Pat McElraft, Joint Caucus Liaison Representative Pat Hurley, Deputy Democratic Leader Representative Gale Adcock, Democratic Whips Representative Deb Butler and Susan Fisher, Freshman Caucus Co-Chair Vernetta Alston, and, in the Senate, Majority Leader Senator Kathy Harrington.

In addition to the modest gains by women serving in the General Assembly and the increased number of women serving in leadership roles in the legislature, another gain has been in the increased number of Black Women and women of color in the state legislature. Nationally, minority women make up 8.2% of all people serving in state legislatures, and 26.7% of all women serving are of color. North Carolina exceeds both figures with 8.8% of the House and Senate consisting of Black Women and women of color and one-third of all the women serving in the legislature are minority women. Although women of color are still underrepresented, as compared to the North Carolina population, the growth over the last two decades is positive.

¹ These leadership positions include presidents and presidents pro tempore of the senate, as well as house speakers and speakers pro tempore. Also included are majority and minority leaders of both the house and senate.

The North Carolina legislature is important for shaping public policies that affect daily lives of North Carolinians. Women in the General Assembly have important roles in shaping policies such as education, transportation, and social welfare. Studies have shown that women influence the policymaking and decision-making processes of state legislatures. Their presence in the legislature even affects the political participation of women in the state (Burns, Schlozman, and Verba, 2001).

For these reasons, the continued gender disparity in the General Assembly underscores the importance of continuing recruitment efforts to encourage women to run for these offices, particularly in the rural parts of the state.

Judicial Branch

Judges

Presidential, congressional, gubernatorial, and state legislative races command most of the attention from the media and voters, but in recent election years, some of the most hotly contested races in North Carolina have been for judicial offices. In 2014 and 2016, races for the Supreme Court attracted a great deal of money and attention. The three races for the North Carolina Supreme Court followed the same trend as they were some of the most tightly contested races on the 2020. The race for Chief Justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court between Democrat Cheri Beasley and Republican Paul Newby ended up in a 412-vote victory for Newby after a lengthy recount process. The other two races were very close as well with Phil Berger, Jr. defeating incumbent justice Lucy Inman by just under 70,000 votes and challenger Tamara Barringer defeating incumbent Mark Davis by just over 120,000 votes (out of over 5.2 million votes cast).

As in North Carolina, 37 other states elect judges. These officials make important decisions every day about public policies in North Carolina, and these offices have been the place where women have made the greatest strides toward gender equity in elected offices in the state.

Nationally, women made up 35 percent of all state judgeships in 2021 (NAWJ 2021) with 24 states, including North Carolina, exceeding the national average. North Carolina's gender representation at the appellate (Supreme Court and Court of Appeals) and district court levels is among the highest in the nation, with only the smaller number of women serving as Superior Court judges (18%), being problematic.

The North Carolina Court System has elected judges in four types of courts – two at the trial level and two at the appeals level.

- There are 271 district court judges in North Carolina and these judges hear cases in criminal, smaller civil, juvenile, and family law. Of the district court judges in North Carolina, 144 are women (53%).
- More serious criminal matters – primarily felonies – are heard by 109 superior court judges in the state as well as larger civil cases. Only 19 of these judges are women (17%).
- The first level in the appellate court system is the North Carolina Court of Appeals, where five of the 15 judges are women (33%).
- The top appellate court in the state is the North Carolina Supreme Court, where three of the seven justices are women (43%).

The higher percentage of women serving on the Supreme Court and Court of Appeals reflects the relative success of

women running for statewide races, as opposed to districts. The large number of female district court judges support what Frederick and Streb (2008) contend are voters' positive stereotypes about women judges, including that they are more fair and would render justice in a more impartial manner than men.

District Attorneys

District Attorneys are elected representatives of the state and prosecute criminal and some juvenile cases in District and Superior Court. There are 39 district attorneys in North Carolina, 12 of whom are women (3 Democrats, 7 Republican, and 1 unaffiliated). This number is an increase of one woman since 2018. It is double that of 2015, when only six women were elected as district attorneys.

Clerks of Superior Court

Voters elect a Clerk of Superior Court in each county of North Carolina. Although clerks are primarily responsible for the administrative functioning of the superior and district courts, the clerks have a number of judicial functions, such as hearing probate cases and, in some situations, adoptions and competency hearings. Historically in the state, women have held a larger percentage of these elected positions than most others in the state, primarily because of the stereotypical association of women to administrative positions.

Of the 100 Clerks of Court, 54 are women in North Carolina. This represents a decrease of five women since 2018.

Sheriff

The county sheriff in North Carolina is an elected official who serves as the top law enforcement officer of a county. The only requirement for running for sheriff is that the person cannot be a felon.

Historically, few women have sought the position of county sheriff in North Carolina. Currently, Paula Dance of Pitt County is the only elected sheriff in North Carolina.

Local Offices

As women have increased their educational and occupational credentials for politics, according to eligibility pool theory (Assendelft 2014), women are more likely to enter politics. A basic premise of this theory is that women's entry-level political participation expands the eligibility pool of women prepared for and interested in pursuing positions at the state or national levels.

This idea of creating a pipeline for women seeking higher office has been challenged by researchers (Deckman, 2007; Carrol and Sanbonmatsu, 2010). These and other scholars argue there is a gender difference in terms of the motivation men and women have for seeking office that makes this "stepping stone" idea less relevant to women. Most women decide to run for office because they want to fix a problem in their community, not necessarily because they are striving for the power of higher office. Women in local offices have much longer tenures in these offices than do men, often serving their entire public service careers on, for example, the county school board without ever desiring to seek a higher office.

Barriers to elected office at the local level are often considered to be less significant than those at the state or federal level. First, there are more opportunities in North Carolina. Almost 90 percent of the elected offices in North Carolina are at the county or municipal level. In addition, many of these races are nonpartisan, have little media coverage, and are less expensive than races for other offices. Most of the positions are part-time and do not require women (or their families) to relocate.

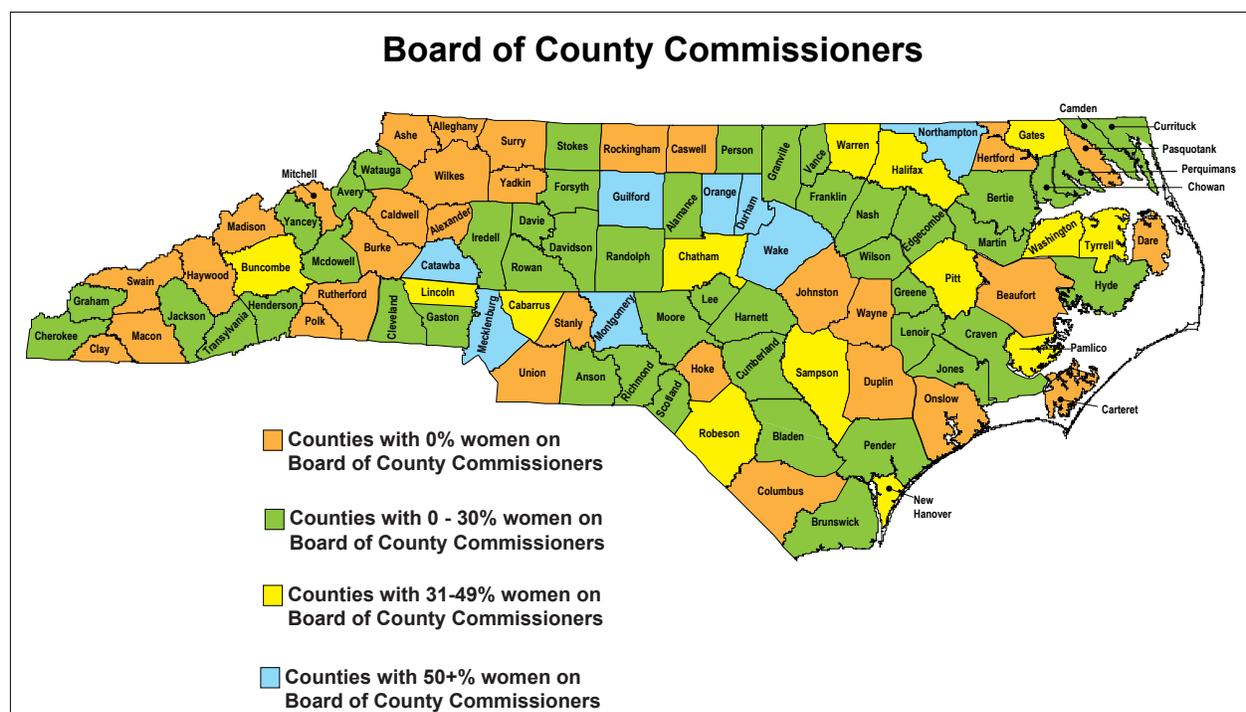
However, despite the lower barriers to running, underrepresentation is still a significant issue for women in local offices. In some instances, the number of women serving in these offices has stalled or even declined over the last decade. It is also the case that the clearest divide between urban and rural North Carolina exists. In urban areas, women are well represented on boards of county commissioners, city and town councils, and school boards. In some rural areas of North Carolina, women are completely absent in these local offices.

County Offices

The legislative branch of local government in all 100 North Carolina counties is the board of county commissioners. These boards are very powerful in the state as they set property tax rates and approve spending on a wide range of services including safety and public education. Across the state, the boards range in size and how the commissioners are elected – at-large or by district – and even in terms of how the board chair is selected.

Women are estimated to hold between 25-30 percent of council positions – county, as well as city and town – across the nation. Women are greatly underrepresented on the boards of county commissioners in North Carolina. During the 2010s there was a significant decline in the number of women serving on boards of county commissions, dropping from 16 percent in 2016 to a decade-low 14.7 percent in 2018. The 2020 election, however, significantly reversed that trend and, now, 22 percent of all county commissioners are women.

In 2018, almost half of North Carolina counties (46) had no women serving as county commissioners. That number has gone down significantly as a result of the 2020 election. Now, 31 counties are represented only by men at the county commissioner level. Despite those gains, a large majority of counties in North Carolina—78—have either no or just one or two women on their boards of county commissions, with relatively few counties—seven—having achieved gender parity on their boards. As the map below indicates, men control the great number of boards:



As demonstrated in the map, there are seven counties—Catawba, Durham, Guilford, Mecklenburg, Montgomery, Northampton, Orange, and Wake—with at least half of the board members being women. That is an increase over 2018, when there were just three boards with gender parity. One county board—Durham County—became the first county in North Carolina with an all-woman board of county commissioners.

As is the case in most elected offices in North Carolina, Democratic women outnumber Republican women over 2-to-1 (85 Democratic women, 41 Republican women, and 2 unaffiliated women).

In terms of minority women serving on boards of county commissioners, Black women and women of color make up 8.3 percent of all county commissioners. Also, 38.3% of all women commissioners were minority women. All but one of the forty-nine minority women commissioners are Democrats—the other is unaffiliated. Therefore, the partisan makeup of the county is a strong predictor of whether Black women or women of color are elected as county commissioners.

One other factor affects the likelihood of women candidates being elected to the board of county commissioners throughout North Carolina, as well as whether minority women are more likely to be elected. That factor is the election method used in the county.

County	Number of Commissioners	Number of Women Commissioners	Number of Black Women and Women of Color Commissioners	Election Methods
Alamance	5	1		al
Alexander	5	0		al
Alleghany	5	0		al
Anson	7	1	1	d
Ashe	5	0		al
Avery	5	1		al
Beaufort	7	0		l ¹
Bertie	5	1		dal
Bladen	9	1	1	m ²
Brunswick	5	1		dal
Buncombe	7	3		cda ³
Burke	5	0		al
Cabarrus	5	2		al
Caldwell	5	0		al
Camden	5	1		dal
Carteret	7	0		dal
Caswell	7	0		cda
Catawba	5	3		al
Chatham	5	2	1	dal
Cherokee	5	1		dal
Chowan	7	1		cda ⁴
Clay	5	0		al
Cleveland	5	1		al

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County	Number of Commissioners	Number of Women Commissioners	Number of Black Women and Women of Color Commissioners	Election Methods
Columbus	7	0		d
Craven	7	2	1	d ⁵
Cumberland	7	2	2	cda
Currituck	7	2		cdal
Dare	7	0		dal
Davidson	7	1		al
Davie	5	1		al
Duplin	5	0		d
Durham	5	5	3	al
Edgecombe	7	2	2	d
Forsyth	7	2	1	cda ⁶
Franklin	7	1	1	cda
Gaston	7	1		dal
Gates	5	2	1	dal
Graham	5	1		al ⁷
Granville	7	1		d
Greene	5	1		al
Guilford	9	5	2	cda
Halifax	6	2	1	cda
Harnett	5	1	1	d
Haywood	5	0		al
Henderson	5	1		dal
Hertford	5	0		dal
Hoke	5	0		al
Hyde	5	1	1	dal
Iredell	5	1		al
Jackson	5	1		dal ³
Johnston	7	0		dal
Jones	7	2		d ¹²
Lee	7	1		cda
Lenoir	7	2		cda
Lincoln	5	2		al
Macon	5	0		dal
Madison	5	0		al
Martin	5	1	1	j ⁸
McDowell	5	1		al
Mecklenburg	9	7	3	cda
Mitchell	5	0		al
Montgomery	5	4	1	cda

STATUS OF WOMEN IN NORTH CAROLINA POLITICS

County	Number of Commissioners	Number of Women Commissioners	Number of Black Women and Women of Color Commissioners	Election Methods
Moore	5	1		dal
Nash	7	2		d
New Hanover	5	2		al
Northampton	5	3	3	al
Onslow	7	0		al ¹¹
Orange	7	5	2	cdal
Pamlico	7	3		cdal
Pasquotank	7	0		cdal
Pender	5	1		dal
Perquimans	6	1	1	l ¹
Person	5	1		al
Pitt	9	4	2	d ⁹
Polk	5	0		al
Randolph	5	1		dal
Richmond	7	1		al
Robeson	8	4	4	d
Rockingham	5	0		al
Rowan	5	1		al
Rutherford	5	0		dal
Sampson	5	2	1	d
Scotland	7	2	1	dal
Stanly	7	0		al
Stokes	5	1		al
Surry	5	0		dal
Swain	5	0		al ³
Transylvania	5	1		al
Tyrrell	5	2	2	l/al ¹⁰
Union	5	0		al
Vance	7	2	2	d
Wake	7	4	2	dal
Warren	5	2	2	dal
Washington	5	2	2	cda
Watauga	5	1		dal
Wayne	7	0		cda
Wilkes	5	0		al
Wilson	7	2	2	d
Yadkin	5	0		al
Yancey	5	1		al

Table 4: County Commissioners and Election Methods

TABLE ABBREVIATIONS **Election method and descriptions:**

al = All commissioners nominated and elected at large (pure at large).

d = All commissioners nominated and elected by district (pure district).

dal = Residence in district required, but nominated and elected at-large.

l = Limited voting plan.

cda = Combination of pure district and pure at large seats.

cdal = Combination of pure at large seats with some seats requiring residency in districts, but still nominated/elected at large.

S = If S appears beside length of term, means not all seats are up for election in the same year.

TABLE FOOTNOTES

¹ Limited voting system. Candidates file as a group for open seats and voters may vote for only 1 candidate. Both primary and general election results are determined by plurality.

² Six members elected to numbered seats from 3 2-member districts; 3 at-large members elected concurrently. Primary result is determined by plurality, with each voter limited to 1 vote.

³ Chair elected separately.

⁴ Six members elected to numbered seats from 3 2-member districts for staggered 4-year terms; at-large member elected for 4-year term.

⁵ Two members nominated and elected by district; 5 nominated by district and elected at large across the 5 remaining districts.

⁶ One 2-member district; 1 4-member district; 1 at-large member.

⁷ Member elected with highest number of votes serves as chair.

⁸ Limited voting plan. One 2-member district; 1 3-member district. Voters in 2-member district may vote for only 1 candidate. Voters in 3-member district may vote for 2 candidates.

⁹ Six single-member districts; 3 consolidated districts formed by combining single-member districts.

¹⁰ Commissioners are elected at-large with a limited voting plan. Primaries are conducted on a partisan basis, with the top vote-getters in each party moving to the general election.

¹¹ Voters in Onslow County approved referendum in 2016 to add two Board seats, to be elected in 2018, increasing the Board from 5 to 7 members.

¹² Effective in 2018, the Jones County board increased from 5 to 7 members, elected by district.

Source: North Carolina Association of County Commissioners

As the table above demonstrates, minority women are almost four times more likely to be elected in counties that use some form of districts (either elected from a district or must reside in a district before running at-large) than counties that elect their county commissioners at large only. There are exceptions, of course, like Durham County, which uses an at-large system.

The impact of electoral districts on electing women of color is particularly noticeable in rural counties, which tend to primarily elect Republicans. Counties such as Anson, Craven, and Harnett are strong Republican counties, but have Democratic minority women serving on their boards of county commissioners and use a district system. This finding supports research done in the political science field about the importance of electoral systems for electing minorities (Meier et al 2005; Tounstine & Valdini 2008; and Abbott & Magazinnik 2020).

The question of gender equity at the county level is particularly important given the nature of the issues that boards of county commissioners debate. Spending on education, health, public safety, child and senior care are just some of the issues where women are not shaping the debate in almost half of North Carolina's counties. The issue, as

discussed in the previous section on women candidates, is that few women run for county commissioner—just over 24 percent of the candidates in 2020 were women. And, in 24 counties, including 21 counties designated as rural counties, there were no women candidates for county commissioner. By contrast, all counties designated as urban counties had at least one woman candidate for county commissioner with a majority of the candidates in Durham and Mecklenburg counties being women.

Register of Deeds

Each county in North Carolina has a register of deeds, an elected official that oversees recording and keeping important records for citizens of the county. The office manages vital records – births, deaths, marriages, etc. – and also property transactions.

Candidates for register of deeds are elected through partisan elections, although the office rarely deals with partisan issues. Historically, this office has attracted more women candidates because it is perceived as less prestigious than other elected offices and is not a stepping-stone to higher office in most cases. The average service for women in this position is eight years, although five women have been serving over 20 years in this position.

Since 2000, 75 percent of registers of deeds have been women. In 2021, 74 of the 100 counties have women in that position. Fifteen of the registers of deeds are women of color.

Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisor

After the Dust Bowl of the 1930s, there was pressure on North Carolina to pass legislation setting up a government agency and independent political unit to oversee soil and water conservation efforts. The N.C. General Statute 139 established the political office of Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisor, an elected position in 96 districts. There are 95 county districts in North Carolina, along with a five-county district – the Albemarle District with the remaining counties – Camden, Chowan, Currituck, Pasquotank and Perquimans. There are three elected positions per district, as well as two appointed positions.

The exception is the Albemarle District with 15 elected supervisors. These races are nonpartisan, and the supervisors establish conservation priorities for the district and advise how to spend federal, state, and local funds on these priorities.

Historically, these offices get little media or public attention, and the campaigns tend to be conducted with little publicity.

Currently 14 percent of the Soil and Water Conservation Commissioners are women, with 16 of these being appointed positions and 29 being elected. Only 2 percent of the soil and water commissioners are Black women or women of color.

Municipal Offices

As with boards of county commissioners, city and town councils in North Carolina would appear to be good opportunities for women to serve in elected offices. Most municipal elections in North Carolina are nonpartisan. City and town councils have nonpartisan reputations, attracting a diverse group of less experienced politicians who want to work on issues in which ideology plays a smaller role than in state legislative offices. Issues such as economic development, public safety, and quality of life issues are often seen as attractive to community leaders with no aspirations for higher office (Beck, 1991).

Nationally, women comprise approximately 30.5 percent of city council members (CAWP 2021). This is an increase of five percentage points over 2012, showing that across the nation, the number of women serving on their municipal

councils is increasing. It is also the case nationally that more women serve on the councils of medium and larger cities and fewer in smaller communities.

In North Carolina, just over 3,100 people serve on city and town councils. Of those aldermen, commissioners, and councilors, 28.8 percent are women—a slight increase over the 27.4 percent from 2018. Of these municipal councils and boards, 15.9% had no women serving on them. These were primarily smaller towns, with a few larger towns and cities, like Clinton, included. On the other hand, 9.2 percent of the boards and councils had a majority of women. Some were larger cities—like Asheville and Greensboro—but this list also included smaller towns like Lucana and Maysville.

Mayors

The vast majority of municipalities in the United States and North Carolina have the position of mayor. Municipalities vary in their selection of the mayor based on the size and structure of the city council and whether there is a hired city or town manager.

As of March 2021, according to the Center for American Women in Politics, 25.1 percent of mayors of cities larger than 30,000 residents were women (CAWP 2021). In North Carolina's cities of over 30,000 people, 20.6 percent of the 34 cities have a woman mayor. For all North Carolina cities, 21 percent have women mayors.

The three largest cities in the state—Charlotte, Greensboro, and Raleigh—all have women mayors¹, a development that the U.S. Conference of Mayors has noted that is becoming a national trend. In 2021, 31 of the largest 100 cities in the nation are led by women mayors, a large increase from over a decade ago when 12 of the same cities had a female mayor and an increase of over 40 percent since 2018.

School Board

Most school boards in the United States are elected, including all 114 school boards in North Carolina. Historically, in the country and state, school boards have been elected offices that have had a higher percentage of women serving than in other offices.

Two theories suggest that women have greater opportunities and successes running for school board positions than other elected offices. First, school board positions are less prestigious, thus making the seats less desirable and less competitive (MacManus et al., 2006). Second, women are considered to have natural credibility in the area of education policy as mothers, teachers, and childcare providers (Bers, 1978). Typically, school board positions are seen as attracting a different sort of officeholder – those interested more in policy or social impact than politics or a political career (Deckman, 2007).

Deckman argues that school board positions, because they are typically perceived as “apolitical,” do not become a pipeline for women seeking other political offices. Her research demonstrates that 76 percent of the women serving on school boards have no interest in running for higher office.

Recently, school boards have become highly political around issues such as mask mandates, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the teaching of race in the public schools. As Wake County Board of Education member Karen Carter—in her profile—admits, she has seen the partisan nature of school board meetings change over time.

Nationally, about 40 percent of school board members are women. In North Carolina, 44.3 percent of school board

¹ Vi Lyles of Charlotte, Nancy Vaughan of Greensboro, and MaryAnne Baldwin of Raleigh

members in 2021 are women, a slight increase from 43.6 percent of school boards in 2018.

Despite the relatively long history of women serving on school boards in North Carolina and the perception that women are more credible in educational policy, there remains a gap between the number of women serving on school boards in rural, urban, and suburban counties, as the chart below demonstrates.

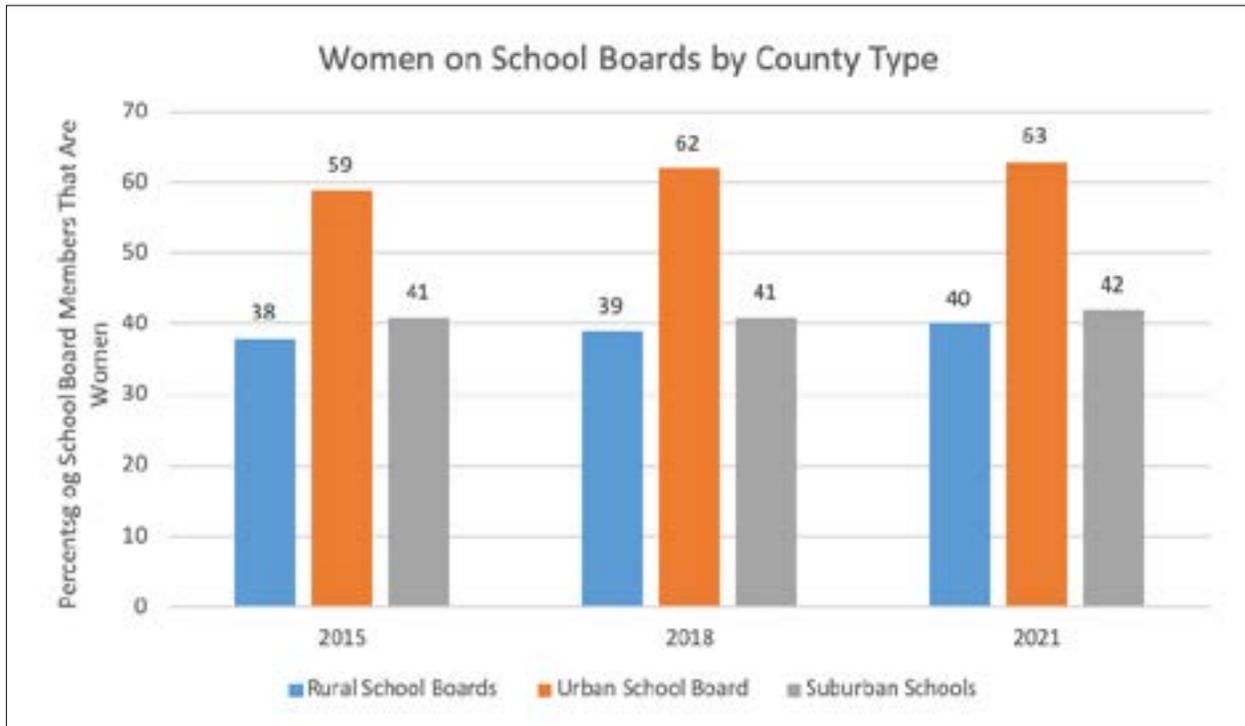


Chart 3: Women on Boards of Education

The slight growth in the number of women serving on school boards since 2015 has come primarily from school boards located in urban counties. Rural counties in North Carolina still have a strong majority of men dictating policy in their respective districts, as do suburban districts.

In terms of minority women representation, board of education positions are the most diverse of any elected position in the state. Black women and women of color make up 15.6 percent of school board members (35.2% of the women). Over 85 percent of the Black women and women of color serving on boards of education are from urban and rural county school systems in the state with just under 15 percent serving on suburban school boards.

Although women do make up a small majority of the total school board members in North Carolina, 73 percent of the school boards in the state have women comprising at least 30 percent of their members, meeting the threshold established by Dahlrup for women’s leadership style and policy perspectives to potentially influence how the boards operate. There are four school districts—Bladen, Haywood, Iredell, Watauga—that have no women serving on their boards of education. At the same time, the Hoke County Board of Education consists of all women.

There is still a rural-urban divide in terms of women’s membership on school boards, but this difference is less than other offices. On rural boards of education, 67 percent of the boards meet that 30 percent threshold, including Stokes

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County which has a board of all women. On urban boards of education 88.2 percent of these bodies meet that threshold.

Conclusion

There is a wide disparity in terms of women serving in elected office. At one end of the spectrum are positions such as Register of Deeds, Clerk of Superior Court, and school board member, where women are close to or at gender parity. In other elected positions around the state—including major policy making positions in the General Assembly or on county boards of commissioners, women are significantly underrepresented.

There is also a wide disparity at the county and municipal levels in terms of representation for policy-making bodies. The table below shows each county and the percentage of women serving as county commissioners, city or town councilors, or school board members.

County	Percentage of Women
Orange	69
Durham	63
Guilford	58
Vance	54
Buncombe	51
Currituck	50
Washington	48
Lincoln	47
Warren	46
Caswell	45
Anson	44
Mecklenburg	42
Martin	41
Tyrrell	41
Northampton	40
Wake	40
Pitt	40
Yancey	40
Montgomery	39
Jones	38
Franklin	38
Person	37
Cumberland	37
Sampson	37
Halifax	36
Edgecombe	36
Wilson	36
Gates	36
Greene	36

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County	Percentage of Women
Wilkes	36
Nash	36
Hoke	35
Randolph	34
Granville	34
Jackson	33
Robeson	33
Hertford	32
Forsyth	32
Lee	32
Transylvania	32
Bertie	31
Chatham	31
Davidson	31
Craven	31
Hyde	30
Perquimans	30
Stokes	30
Pamlico	30
Henderson	30
Haywood	29
Gaston	29
Moore	29
Union	29
Catawba	28
Rockingham	28
Brunswick	28
Davie	28
Polk	27
Richmond	27
Alamance	27
Madison	27
Swain	27
Rowan	27
New Hanover	26
Mitchell	26
Pender	26
Avery	26
Iredell	25
Macon	25
Scotland	25

STATUS OF WOMEN IN NORTH CAROLINA POLITICS

County	Percentage of Women
Stanly	25
Watauga	25
Duplin	25
Dare	24
Cleveland	23
McDowell	23
Rutherford	23
Columbus	22
Lenoir	22
Surry	22
Yadkin	22
Clay	21
Pasquotank	21
Caldwell	21
Camden	21
Wayne	21
Cherokee	21
Graham	21
Cabarrus	20
Harnett	20
Onslow	20
Chowan	29
Alleghany	29
Ashe	19
Bladen	19
Burke	17
Carteret	17
Beaufort	16
Johnston	13
Alexander	12

Table 5: Women Serving in Local Policy-making Offices by County

As the table demonstrates, there are six counties in the state in which women comprise a majority of the policy-making positions at the local level. While it might be expected that counties with large urban populations such as Durham and Guilford might have a majority of women in these positions, there are some smaller counties with no large urban areas, like Currituck and Vance counties, that also have a majority of women in policy-making positions.

It is the counties at the bottom of the list with fewer than one-in-five policy-making positions being held by women that is more troubling. Although counties like Ashe and Alexander are small rural counties with a history of women serving in elected positions, other counties on the bottom end of the spectrum are more confounding. Johnston County, for example, is a fast-growing suburban county near Raleigh and one might expect it to reflect the political situation of its neighboring county—Wake County, which has three times the number of women serving in policy-making positions.

The most shocking fact is that there are a significant number of municipalities and counties that have no women representing them in policy making positions. Just under 16 percent of the cities and towns, as well as 31 percent of the counties have only men in policy-making positions. The problem is most acute in rural North Carolina and, instead of seeing things improve in terms of gender parity as we get well into the 21st century, these patterns are fully entrenched.

WOMEN IN APPOINTED OFFICES IN NORTH CAROLINA

Appointed offices exist at the local and state level in North Carolina. Counties have a wide range of boards and commissions ranging from the Alcohol Beverage Control Board to the Historic Preservation Board. Wake County, for example, has over sixty appointed boards or commissions. The State of North Carolina has over 340 (n=341) boards and commissions. Some of these boards advise the governor or leaders in the General Assembly, while others regulate professions, such as dentists, lawyers, or certified public accountants; still others make policy, such as the University of North Carolina Board of Governors.

Most of these boards and commissions—around 75%—are advisory. They are important for lawmakers as these appointed officeholders make recommendations for new laws, regulations, and budgets in the areas they oversee.

Kim Duffley



As a teenager, Kim Duffley always knew she wanted to help people, but never imagined that, years later, she would be serving on one of North Carolina’s Power Boards—the North Carolina Utilities Commission. A YMCA

lifeguard, Duffley found herself working with a teenager paralyzed in an accident by a drunk driver. She said: “I knew then that I wanted to continue helping people.”

Duffley’s journey to the Utilities Commission from her first job as a lifeguard took many years, but once she “discovered her passion,” Duffley has worked diligently to position herself to be one of seven appointed commissioners who regulate the rates and services of all investor-owned public utilities in the state, like Duke Energy.

A Mercer University School of Law graduate, Duffley’s first public service position was in the Environmental Division of the NC Department of Justice. There she was sent to a state energy conference where she was “fascinated by the issues and realized that the industry was going to experience rapid change over the next several decades.”

It was then she realized she wanted to go even further in understanding energy regulation. “So, I positioned myself by working hard and doing a good

job. I also volunteered for assignments and attended many industry conferences to stay informed on the current issues facing utility regulation and to meet others within the industry of utility regulation,” Duffley said.

Professionally, Duffley moved into a staff attorney position with the Utilities Commission and, in 2019, was appointed by Governor Roy Cooper to the commissioner position. Given the new energy bill signed into law by Governor Cooper in 2021 and the increasing demands for reliable and clean energy, Duffley knows how important her role is on the Utilities Commission.

When asked what advice she would give other women who want to serve on a state-level board or commission, Duffley said: “I encourage a woman to really research what public interest that she wants to serve and find the organizations that match her goals. Once she determines what Commissions or Boards that can make a difference to her area of public service interest, she should then take action.”

Looking back, Kim Duffley now recognizes how that first lifeguard job led to her public service career, but the path to the Utilities Commission took hard work and the support of family and friends. “My main support has been from my husband, Peter and my two great children, John and Emily Paige,” she said. “I am forever grateful for their steadfast encouragement. I also received a tremendous amount of support from my close friends and colleagues.”

Many of these boards and commissions have relatively small demand for appointments, and some have unfilled seats from year-to-year.

A much smaller group of boards and commissions, often referred to as “Power Boards,” have policy-making authority. These are highly sought-after appointments and are often reserved for political allies to the appointing officials. These boards and commissions get a great deal of public and media scrutiny.

Although appointed board and commission members have less power than members of the General Assembly, these boards and commissions are important for gender representation for two major reasons. First, they do have power in their respective areas. Licensing boards, for example, set standards for professions from nursing to electrolysis technicians. Power boards, such as the North Carolina Utilities Commission or the University of North Carolina Board of Governors, affect the rates consumers and students pay. Without women advocates on these power boards, important perspectives are easily ignored.

Second, appointed boards and commissions are often launching pads for women who want to run for elected office. Sanbonmatsu, Carrol, and Walsh (2009) found that 65% of women who eventually run for office began their public careers by serving in appointed office. This is not the case for men.

There are several reasons for the underrepresentation of women in appointed office. Sidorsky (2015) argues that there are political ambition differences between men and women, so fewer women apply for appointments. Carson and Lubensky (2009) contend that there is an “old boy network” among appointing officials, meaning men will tend to appoint other men, particularly to the more powerful boards and commissions. Research on North Carolina appointments (Manzo and McLennan 2018) suggests that gender favoritism may not be that strong, but other factors, such as appointing officials showing favoritism to graduates of the same college or university that they graduated from may be shaping the NC boards and commissions.

These issues are not unique to North Carolina. Many states across the country have tried to remedy the underrepresentation issue by passing laws about appointing women. Iowa passed a law requiring gender parity in boards and commissions appointments. North Carolina, along with over two dozen other states, has passed a law recommending gender parity. This law, passed in 1999, affects only state-level boards and commissions and regulates who can make appointments, as well as the appointment process itself. One statute, § 143-157.1, states:

The legislature recognizes the importance of gender balance, and getting the best-qualified people to serve, on statutorily created state decision-making or regulatory boards, commissions, councils, or committees. To create diversity:

1. appointing authorities should select people to serve who accurately reflect the proportion that each gender represented in the state population as stated in the most recent federal decennial census. (But no one may be removed from a board or commission for the sole purpose of creating diversity.)
2. multiple appointing authorities must consult with each other to achieve this balance.
3. appointing authorities must annually report to the secretary of the state (a copy goes to the governor, House speaker, and Senate president) the number of appointments made by gender during the preceding year.
4. Each appointing authority must designate a person to retain copies of all applications for appointment, including information on each applicant’s gender and make them available for public inspection.

If the size of the board or commission precludes an accurate representation of appointment by gender, the appointing authority should conform as possible.

Despite appointments made since the law’s adoption, North Carolina has not achieved gender parity.

Women’s Representation on Boards and Commissions

Overall, women are underrepresented on state level boards and commissions. Women hold 38.5% of the positions on state boards and commissions, an **increase** from 2018, when 32.5% of the positions on all state-level boards and commissions were held by women. There are three boards on which women hold all of the seats- the Council for Women, the Dietetics/Nutrition Commission, and the Soil and Water Conservation Commission.

On the other hand, there are 16 boards and commissions that have no women members. Most of these are licensing boards for professions that have traditionally been associated with men, such as the Electrical Contractors Board, the Fire and Rescue Commission, and Plumbing Board. The good news is, since 2018, the number of boards and commissions that have no women members has dropped significantly—from 34 to 16.

As Figure 1 below shows, as the number of women serving on state-level boards and commissions has grown, so has their influence in these appointed offices. As the political science literature suggests, women need to achieve a critical mass in order to have their ideas heard and their leadership exerted. Many researchers believe that threshold number to be 30% of the seats must be held before women are a potent force, but as our research (McLennan and Manzo 2017) indicates, women have to achieve gender parity for their ideas and leadership style to begin influencing the entire appointed board or commission.

As Figure 1 demonstrates, the percentage of boards and commissions with at least 50% of women members has improved significantly over the last four years.

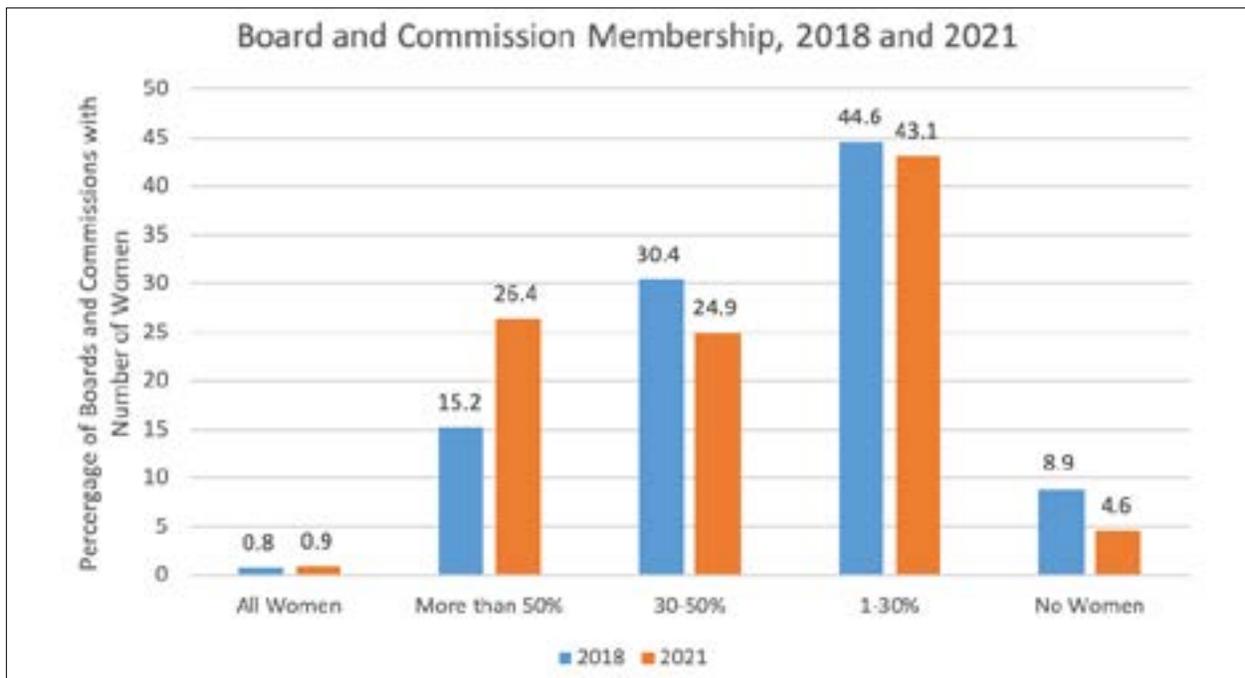


Figure 1

Power Boards

An examination of Power Boards in North Carolina reveals a similar pattern to boards and commission membership more generally. Women membership on these Power Boards have improved over the last four years, but women have not achieved parity with men overall. Just less than one-third of the membership on Power Boards is women, but on two boards—the Education Board and the Social Services Board—women are a majority of members. These two areas are traditionally considered to be more “women’s issues,” as opposed to issues like economic development or crime control.

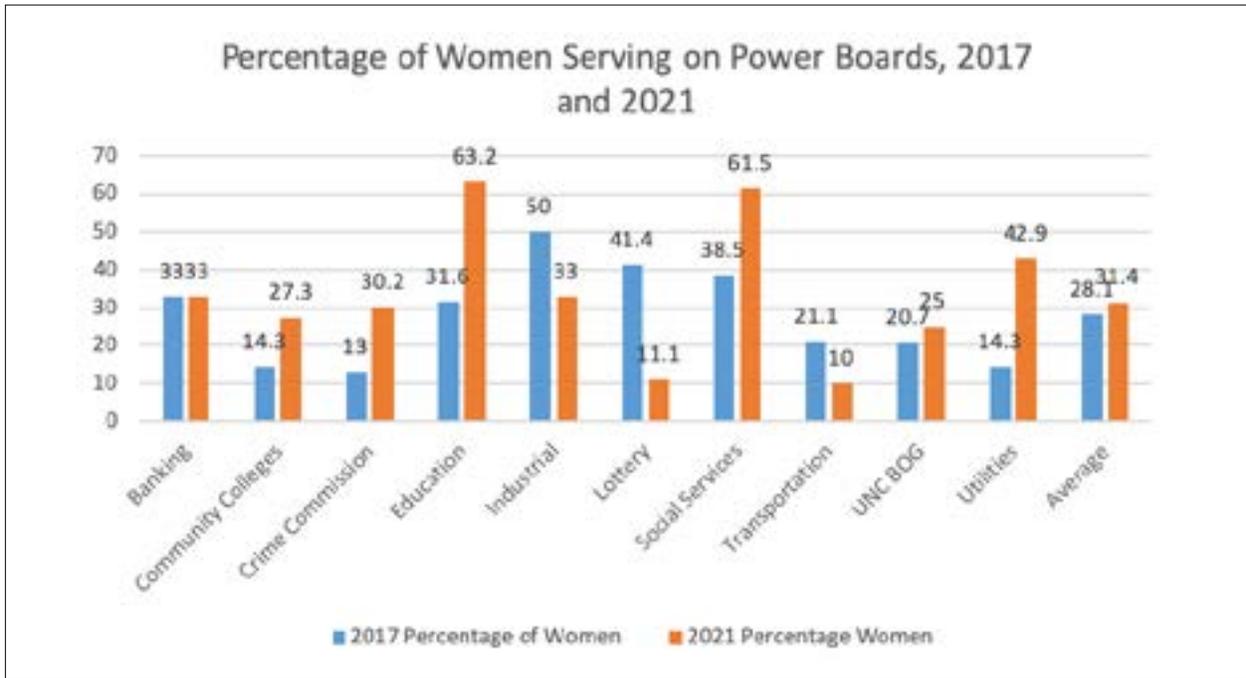


Figure 2

In taking an even longer view—over the last two decades—the data reveal a pattern of uneven growth in the number of women serving on these influential boards and commissions. As Figure 3 below shows (from 1999, 2009, 2013, 2017, and 2021). The late 1990s, when the law was passed to encourage gender parity on board and commission membership, no single appointed office in the list had membership in which women had achieved parity, but in 2021, women are the majority on two boards.

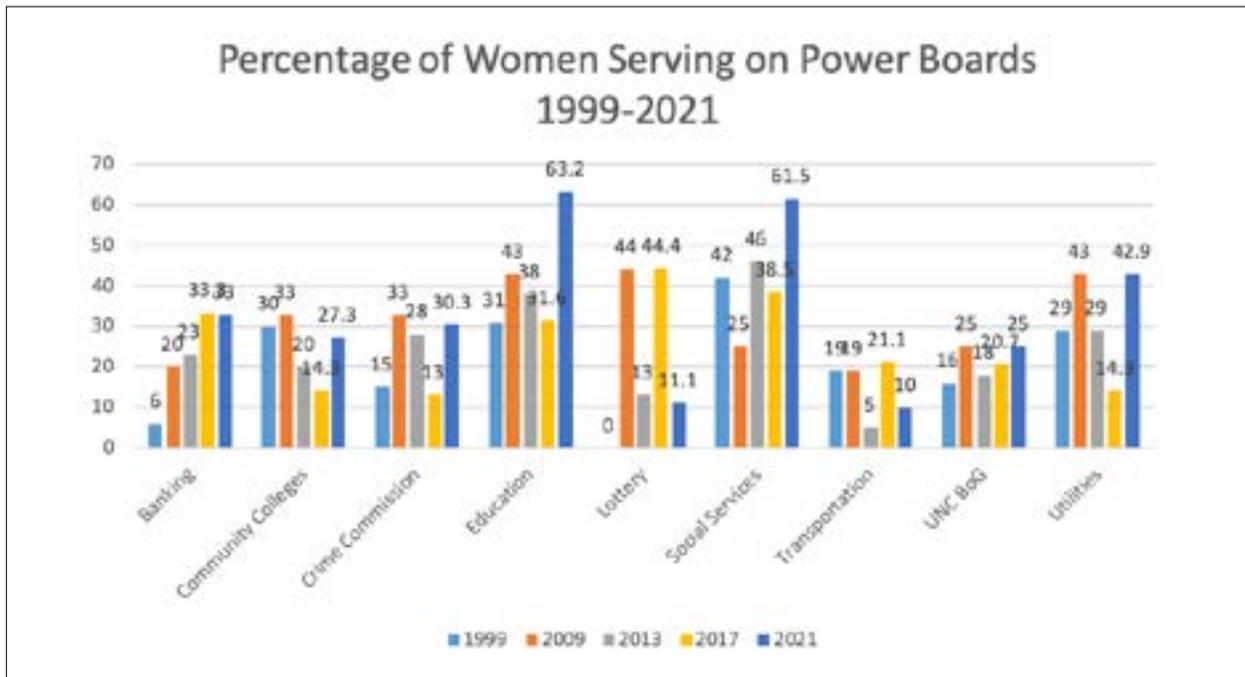


Figure 3

More concerning than the lack of gender parity on all the Power Boards, is the representation of Black women and women of color. As the 2020 Census revealed, the percentage of North Carolinians identifying as white-only has dropped to just over 60%, with an increasing number of people identifying as other races or ethnicities, or as multi-racial. As the figures in Figure 4 indicate, the ratio of Black women and women of color to white women is low.

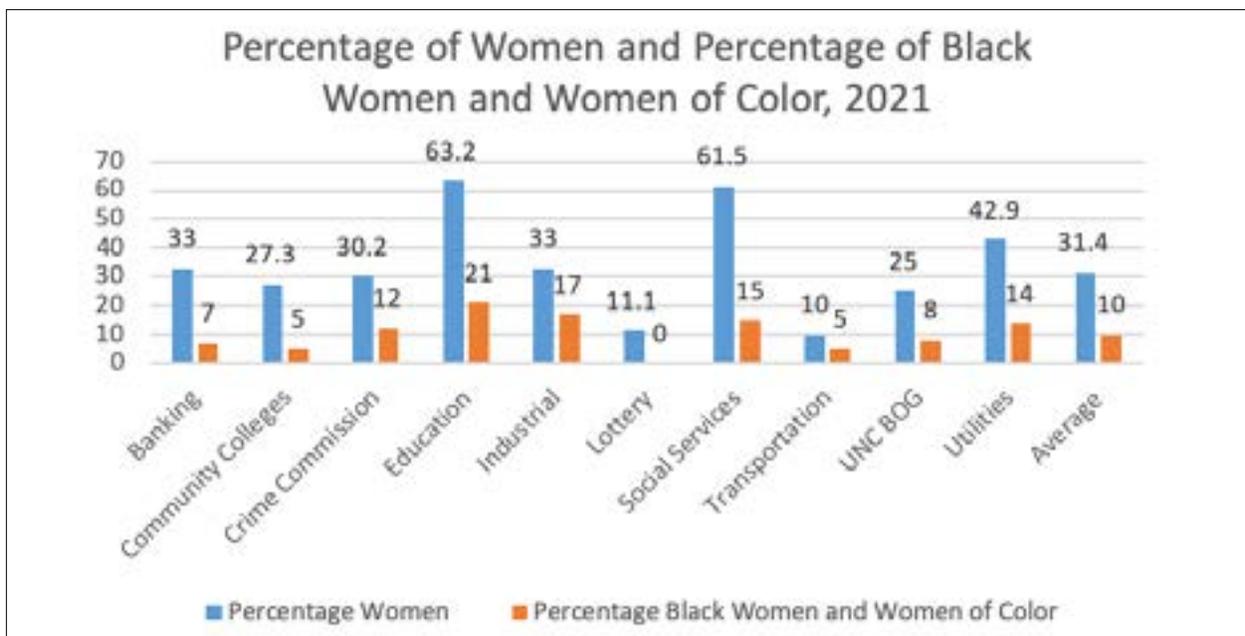


Figure 4

Conclusions

If anything, the trend of the number of women serving on boards and commissions, including Power Boards, reflects the same trend as women holding elected offices in North Carolina. After a drop in the number of women serving at the end of the last decade, there has been a slight rebound of women being appointed. Women continue to be underrepresented on all but a handful of boards and commissions and the situation for Black women and women of color is even more acute.

A further examination of the results shown in the figures above indicate that there are only marginal differences when Democrats and Republicans control the appointments. The governor of North Carolina has a lot of influence in the composition of boards and commissions. While there have been increases in the number of women serving in selected boards and commissions in Governor Roy Cooper's administration, as compared to his Republican predecessor, Governor Pat McCrory, the correlation between the party of the governor and the appointment of women is weak, at best. The same can be said of other major appointing officials, the Speaker of the North Carolina House and the President Pro Tempore of the North Carolina Senate.

If there are no major differences among Democratic and Republican appointing officials in terms of the lack of gender parity, another possible explanation is that women simply do not apply in sufficient numbers for openings, even when qualified. As Sidorsky (2015) argues, there is an ambition gap between men and women seeking appointed offices, especially the higher profile ones. As Manzo and McLennan (2018) have found through surveys and interviews with potential applicants for boards and commissions, women, who may be imminently qualified, still doubt their abilities and are uncertain that they would be appointed, even after being encouraged by a government official or another person of prominence.

The results demonstrate some consistent truths about women on Power Boards. First is that men are overrepresented on Power Boards. Second, appointment patterns and membership on Power Boards have changed little, which demonstrates a fundamental weakness in the system across time and different political parties in charge of appointments. Third, there have been few changes in terms of the types of Power Boards most likely to have more women members, suggesting that even among Power Boards, there is a pecking order.

These results are particularly interesting in North Carolina because, in 1999, the General Assembly passed and Governor Easley signed a law, **Reports on gender-proportionate appointments to statutorily created decision-making regulatory bodies**, encouraging the state to achieve gender parity in appointments to state boards and commissions. It appears as though this law has little teeth in terms of causing appointing officials, like the governor or speaker of the state house, to recruit qualified women to boards and commissions.

One possible solution might be to adopt a law like Iowa has that mandates gender parity on state boards. This law, passed in 1987, has produced results, as shown in Figure 5 in the next page:

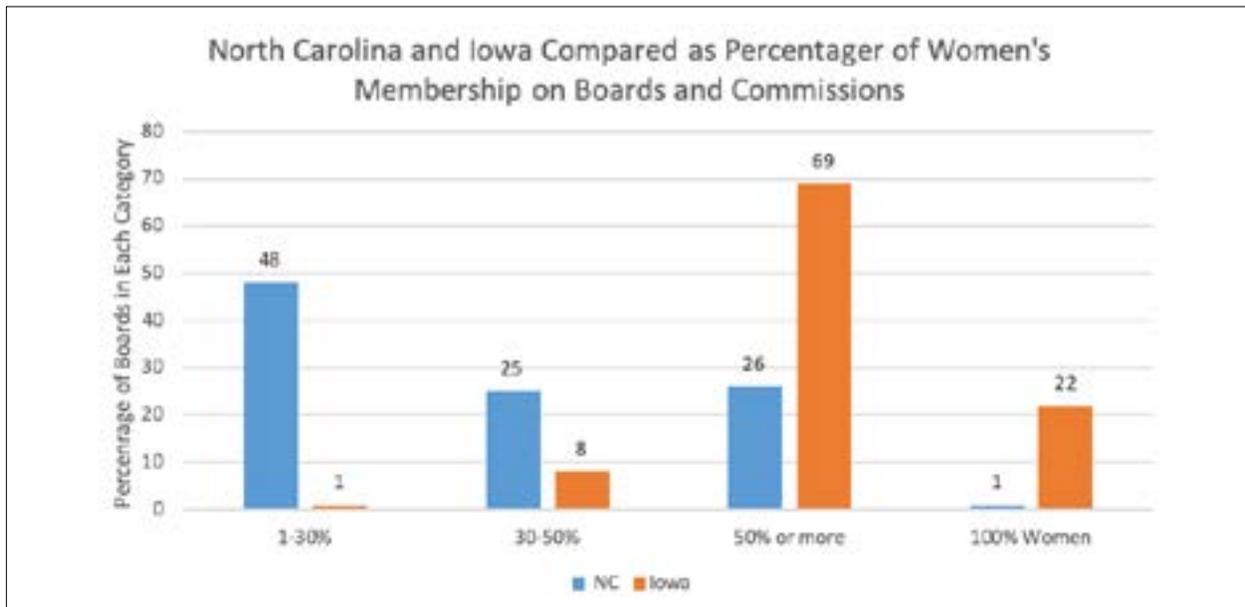


Figure 5

Since appointed offices, like boards and commissions, are important in-and-of-themselves, and are the springboard for many women to seek elected offices at the local and state level, this continued disparity in terms of women's representation has short and long term implications for North Carolina. In the short run, it means women's perspectives may not be sufficiently heard on policy issues and professional qualifications. In the long run, we may be narrowing the pipeline for women serving in elected policy-making positions.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The 2021 *Status of Women in North Carolina* report may be surprising to some and disappointing to others. It does show improvement in women serving in some elected offices, such as Congress and the NC Courts. However, it also shows that women in North Carolina continue to lag behind their counterparts nationally in terms of representation.

For those of us who study gender and politics, the results are hardly surprising. The fundamentals of North Carolina politics for women have changed little in recent years. Campaigns for many offices—not just high-profile offices like governor or Congress—have become more time consuming, expensive, and negative. The idea of “election aversion” is something that affects many qualified people, not just women, who decide running for office is just not worth it.

North Carolina, especially in many rural areas, has a very traditional political culture that makes it more difficult for women to run for and serve in office. In many communities across the state, not only are there no women currently serving in any offices, but there never have been. Women in those communities who aspire to serve in an appointed or elected office have no role models or mentors in their communities.

Even the idea of candidate recruitment is challenging for political parties. As we know from academic research, women candidates are cultivated over time and the parties often work with a tight schedule and limited resources for recruiting across all one hundred counties.

There are positives about the 2020 election cycle and beyond. More women of color are running, as well as younger women. The number of Black women and women of color serving in offices, like mayor, has improved. There is also good news about political fundraising. When good women candidates run for offices in which they are competitive, they can raise money as well as or better than similarly situated men.

With both the negatives and positives contained in this report, the following recommendations should be adopted so the next decade really improves the situation for women in North Carolina politics.

Media Recommendations

1. Too many stories in North Carolina media outlets reflect a frame that is not realistic. During the 2018 and 2020 election cycles, news stories often framed women voters as the saviors for Democratic politicians. Many stories addressed the gender gap between men and women. Although this gap is significant, women voters are not a monolith. Many close races in North Carolina featured women voting for Republican candidates and helping them win races. Media stories about women voters and women politicians need to understand the complexities that exist and not cover both groups in stereotypical ways.
2. More stories should focus on the ways in which women govern. There are examples across the state of women majority boards, commissions, and councils. Comparing how those bodies function, in comparison to male majority ones, would be fresh and useful. The Durham County Board of Commissioners, the Asheville City Council, and the Hoke County Board of Education are all composed of women members. Coverage of these bodies could provide valuable insight into political leadership.
3. Stories about women political leaders often focus too much on what these women lack, rather than what they bring to the table. Women who succeed in politics often have to overcome challenges that men do not. The number of single parent women on boards of education, city councils, and even the legislature should be the focus of stories dealing with perseverance and work-life balance.

Lawmakers and Political Parties

1. The current law encouraging gender parity on appointed boards and commissions is toothless and should be enforced or replaced.
2. Funds need to be appropriated for improvements to recruiting more women to serve on state boards and commissions. The process of qualified women finding openings and then applying for them is simply too difficult. Too many women report not knowing where to look or apply for appointments in which they are qualified.
3. Political parties should establish mentoring programs for prospective women candidates, particularly in underserved areas of the state. Connecting women who have served in office with women who are thinking about running is a low cost, high return investment for the parties.

Advocacy and Political Action Groups

1. There are many organizations across the state that work toward gender parity. On college and university campuses, women's centers and women's studies programs raise important issues about gender equality, but often do not work toward building political power for their students.
2. Similarly, there are women's groups in the state who advocate for a variety of issues—the Equal Rights Amendment, better access to health care, or nonpartisan gerrymander to name a few—who would also be well served by doing more candidate recruitment and training, especially in rural North Carolina. These organizations can do a better job of reaching out to younger women, including those on college campuses, to build mentoring relationships.
3. There are too few opportunities for women, especially in rural areas of the state, to get the training necessary to seek appointed or elected offices. While there are organizations like Lillian's List and the Institute of Political Leadership with long histories of candidate development and newer organizations like the Voices of Change Institute, these organizations can barely make a dent in addressing women's underrepresentation.

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