



Women's Political Representation and Legislative Achievements: How Women Are Changing State Legislatures

Women made great strides in political representation in 2018. There has been significant media attention devoted to the historic gains women made in Congress, but the shift in political representation the states was equally significant. Women's representation in state legislatures increased by more than three points in 2018 (from 25.4 percent to 28.9 percent of all state legislative seats).¹ Nevada became the first majority women legislature and Colorado approached gender parity, with a legislature that is 47 percent women.² Although often presented as a non-partisan phenomenon, the gains in women's representation across the board were due to Democratic women candidates' victories. Democratic women gained about 300 state legislative seats in 2018, while the number of Republican women state legislators declined by just over 40.³

More than a year out from the "year of the woman," the National Women's Law Center (NWLC) and Quorum examined the impact of this changing representation in the states. In this fact sheet, we present new data on women's state legislative achievements, including that women state legislators introduced and enacted more legislation than men over the past two legislative sessions.

Background

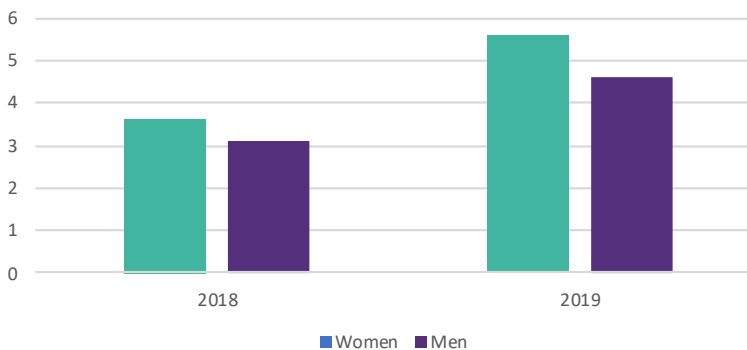
In 2015, [Quorum](#), a public affairs software platform that helps public affairs professionals with stakeholder engagement, legislative tracking, and grassroots advocacy, conducted an analysis of relationships and policymaking among members of Congress.⁴ They found that women members of Congress were more effective legislators than men: women were more likely to see their bills passed and work across the aisle than their male counterparts.⁵

Recently, NWLC partnered with Quorum to conduct similar state-based analyses. Multiple studies have found that women candidates are, on average, of higher quality and have more experience in elected office than men.⁶ But because women tend to draw a greater number of primary challengers⁷ and experience fundraising challenges,⁸ they also have to work harder than men to get elected.

NWLC and Quorum examined how gender differences in candidates translate into performance on the job and whether there are differences in men and women state legislators' legislative achievements. Because women's representation varies greatly across the states – from 13.4 percent of state legislators in West Virginia to 52.4 percent in Nevada – we also examined whether the gender composition of the legislature affects women's legislative achievements – and legislative achievements, overall.

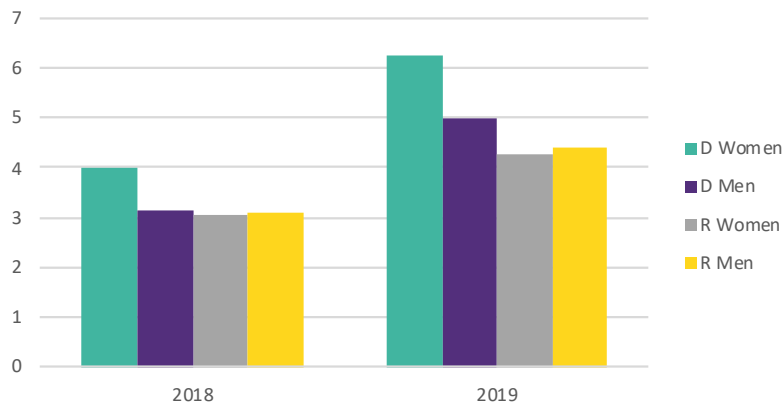
Findings

Over the last two legislative sessions, women state legislators achieved more legislative victories than men. They introduced more bills* and saw more of their legislation enacted than their male counterparts.



- **In 2018:** Women saw 3.6 of their introduced bills enacted; men saw 3.1 of their introduced bills enacted.
- **In 2019:** Women saw 5.6 of their introduced bills enacted; men saw 4.6 of their introduced bills enacted.

Democratic women state legislators, in particular, achieved more legislative victories than any other group of legislators. In 2018 and 2019, Democratic women enacted more bills than Democratic men, Republican men, and Republican women.



Democratic women were the most likely group of legislators in 2019 to champion legislation that supports women and their families – and get that legislation passed.

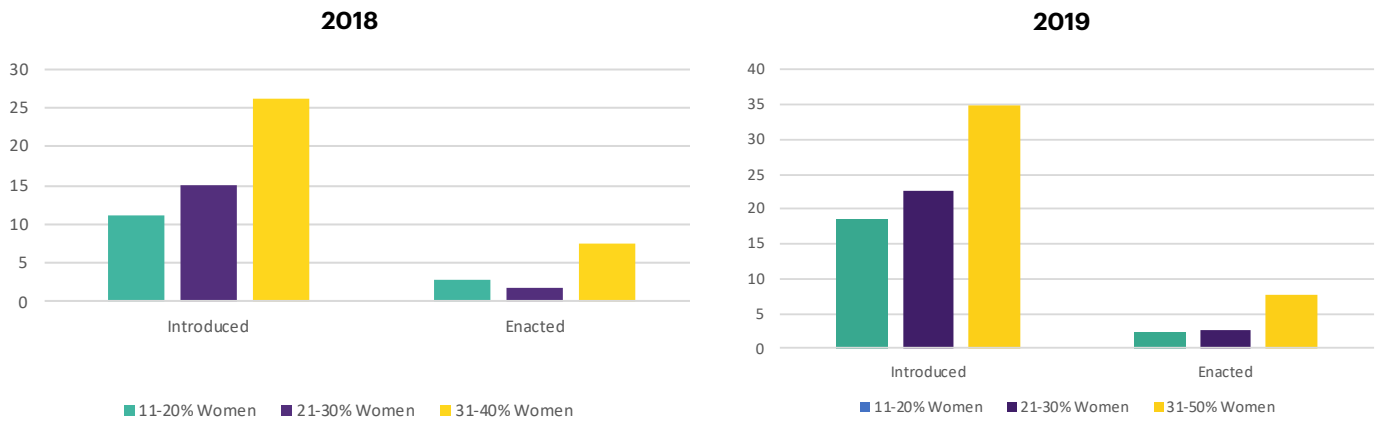
Democratic women more likely to introduce and enact bills on*:

- Paid family leave
- Child care
- Sexual harassment
- Minimum wage

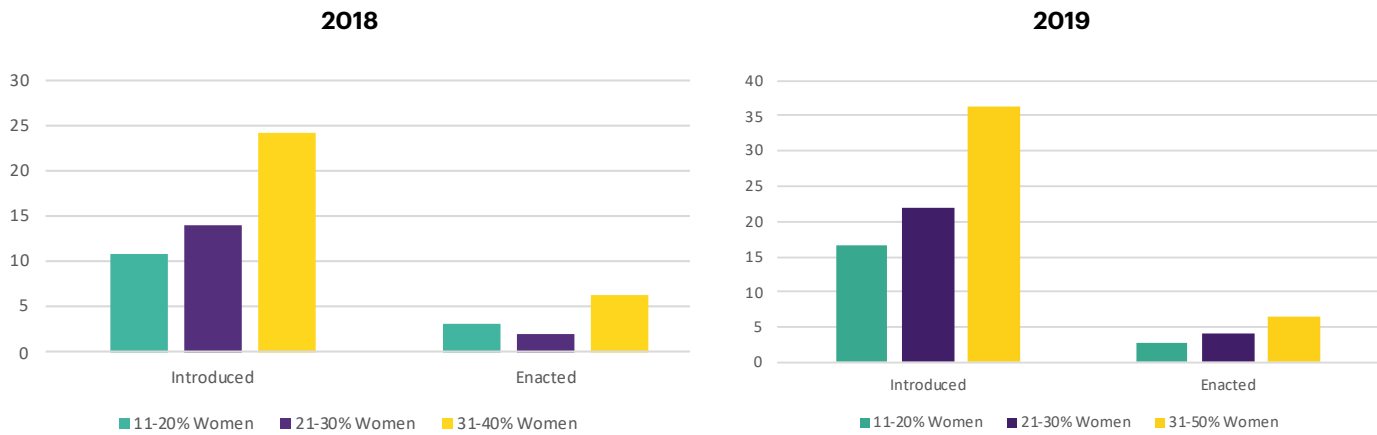
* In 2018, Democratic women were more likely to introduce bills on child care, paid sick leave, sexual harassment, and the minimum wage. They were also more likely than Democratic men, Republican men, and Republican women to see their bills enacted on child care and sexual harassment.

Greater levels of women’s representation led to greater legislative achievements – for women legislators and state legislators, overall.

- **Women serving in legislatures** with greater representation of women introduced and enacted more legislation than women serving in legislatures with lower levels of women’s representation.



- Interestingly, that pattern was not limited to women. **All legislators serving in legislatures** with greater representation of women introduced and enacted more legislation than did legislators serving in legislatures that were less gender balanced.



1 Center for American Women and Politics, *Women in State Legislatures 2019*, available at <https://cawp.rutgers.edu/women-state-legislature-2019> (last visited December 17, 2019).
 2 In 2018, Democratic women were more likely to introduce bills on child care, paid sick leave, sexual harassment, and the minimum wage. They were also more likely than Democratic men, Republican men, and Republican women to see their bills enacted on child care and sexual harassment.
 3 *Id.*
 4 Dittmar, Kelly, *Unfinished Business: Women Running in 2018 and Beyond*. Center for American Women and Politics (2019), available at https://womenrun.rutgers.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Unfinished-Business_Full.pdf
 5 Rebecca Ruiz, *Want to end partisan gridlock? Elect More Women*. Mashable, February 19, 2015, available at <https://mashable.com/2015/02/19/female-legislators-more-effective/>
 6 Dittmar, supra note 3, at 43.
 7 *Id.*
 8 *Id.*
 9 *Id.*, at 52.