

Pink Granite

GENDER PARITY IN THE TEXAS LEGISLATURE

2003 - 2017

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INTRODUCTION

With rising focus on gender parity in politics, Texas has followed suit with an increased role for women in private sector political roles. In the last 14 years, the Texas Senate has doubled the number of women among its ranks, although at 26% remains short of representative of the population it serves. Meanwhile, the Texas House of Representatives remains stagnant in the number of women running for office, actually losing female representation over the past 14 years.

Overall the Texas legislature lags the national average of women in state legislatures by approximately 5%.

“The simple reason is that women do not run for office as often as men do. When we do, we often win.”

*- Senator Judith Zaffirini
longest serving woman in the Texas Senate*

OBJECTIVE

The intent of this work is to provide an analysis of the current state of gender parity in the Texas Legislature, identify how gender parity has changed since the 78th Legislative Session, and note the challenges and opportunities that remain in bringing balance to the state's most influential governing body.

METHODOLOGY

Lobbying and election statistics have been pulled from the previous 15 years of public records from the Texas Ethics Commission while comments on the role of women in the legislature have been developed through a compilation of news articles, first hand interviews and political insider rankings and awards.

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RESULTS & DISCUSSION

2003

30 Women in the Texas House of Representatives – 20%

- 18% of Candidates in 2002 election were female.
- Women in Texas House were 22% less likely to draw a major party opponent than their male counterparts. (40% vs. 62%)

4 Women in the Texas Senate – 13%

- 14% of Candidates in 2002 election were female.
- All 4 incumbent female Senators faced no major party opposition to their re-election contrary, to their male counterparts, 36% of which faced opposition from a major party candidate.

In the Lobby...

- 27% of Registered Lobbyists are women.
- Capitol Inside's *Lobbyist Power Rankings* places 8 women among state's top 50 lobbyists.

2017

29 Women in the Texas House of Representatives – 19% (-1)

- 21% of Candidates in 2016 election were female. (+3)
- Women in Texas House were 27% more likely to draw a major party opponent than their male counterparts. (51% vs. 78%)

8 Women in the Texas Senate – 26% (+13)

- 29% of Candidates in 2016 election were female. (+15)
- All 4 incumbent female Senators faced no major party opposition to their re-election contrary, to their male counterparts, 35% (-1) of which faced opposition from a major party candidate.

In the Lobby...

- 36% of Registered Lobbyists are women. (+9)
- Capitol Inside's *Lobbyist Power Rankings* places 13 women among state's top 50 lobbyists. (+5)

Women comprise a higher percentage of membership within the legislature's public health, health, and human services policy committees, than within the body as a whole.

19% of the Texas House is female, yet 36% of the House Committee on Public Health, and 44% of the House Committee on Human Services members are women.

26% of the Texas Senate is female, yet 33% of the Senate Committee on Health members are women.

1.6%

Total percentage of gender parity growth among elected members of the Texas Legislature over 15 years.

CONCLUSIONS

Much work remains for electing women to the Texas Legislature, especially to the Texas House where gender parity is declining. When women choose to run for office they often win – however women are not running for the Texas House. Additionally, many of the gains made in the Texas Senate can be attributed to female House Members making a run for the upper chamber – while the House often struggles to refill those seats with female lawmakers.

While it is difficult to recruit women to run for the Texas House, the challenge does not end, as incumbent women are more likely than their male counterparts to face political challengers. But again, they often win.

In 2017, female lawmakers made up a higher percentage of the bodies' health policy committees than their representation at large. Female lawmakers also advocated for the successful passage of legislation to study maternal death rates in the state and to increase screenings for postpartum depression. Efforts to require vaccines against HPV and to provide teen mothers with birth control were defeated, but promoted by women in the Texas House.

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No financial support to disclose.

RECOMMENDED READING

Bruce Davidson, "Traditional' Texas still lagging in women in politics, April 1, 2017. <http://bit.ly/2vkuRhI>

Alex Ura and Jolie McCullough, "Once Again, the Texas Legislature is mostly white, male, middle-aged." The Texas Tribune, January 9, 2017. <http://bit.ly/2i5QQnm>

Becky Fogel, New Web Series Highlights Women in Texas Politics, The Texas Standard. February 10, 2017. <http://bit.ly/2fSDmvp>

Handbook of Texas Online, Judith N. McArthur, *Women and Politics*. <http://bit.ly/2fM3K6t>

PINK GRANITE TEXAS, Poster Author's website devoted to promoting the role of women in Texas Politics and Policy. www.pinkgranitetexas.com/interviews

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