

# Voting And Civic Engagement Among Utah Women: A 2019 Update

09/04/2019

In 2016, the Utah Women & Leadership Project (UWLP) released a research snapshot called “Voting and Civic Engagement Among Utah Women,” the first in the Utah Women Stats research snapshot series. At the time, despite having a strong history of women’s political and civic involvement, Utah had fallen to the bottom of national rankings in terms of women’s political participation. That same year, due in part to having a woman presidential candidate from a major party for the first time, women’s political engagement was a critically important topic throughout the country. The first day of the Trump administration in 2017, hundreds of thousands of women marched in Washington DC and in numerous other cities across the nation, including Salt Lake City,<sup>4</sup> protesting and seeking to raise awareness of various issues. Since that time, the level of political engagement among women in Utah and the US has stayed relatively high, as has civic engagement, which is a critical element of change for municipalities, counties, and states across the nation.

## Women Voters in Utah and the US

Women in Utah have a strong history of political engagement; in fact, Utah was the first place where US women voted under an equal suffrage law, in 1870. Utah was also the first state to elect a female state senator (who beat her own husband in that election), and as recently as 1992, Utah women had the highest voter turnout in the nation at 76%. However, over the following years, Utah women’s voting rates took a dramatic downturn, and in 2006 Utah ranked 51st in the nation (50 states plus Washington DC) for the percentage of women voting (all percentages in this report refer to the adult population, ages 18+). Utah’s national ranking in this category stayed near the bottom for the next several elections, but in 2016 Utah women climbed to 35th in terms of voting, and in 2018 took a substantial jump to 11th in the nation (see Table 1 for rankings of eligible voters). The high turnout in the midterm election of 2018 (which occurred among both men and women in Utah) was likely due to a closely contested US House race and several high-profile ballot initiatives.

## Exit Polls and Other Surveys

In addition to census data, which are indispensable in terms of understanding women’s voting behaviors, other data, including exit polls and opinion surveys, can also yield valuable information. The Utah Colleges Exit Poll has been collecting data since 1982 on voters’ thoughts and voting choices on Election Day. The 2016 presidential election was particularly notable in part because both major candidates were among the least popular in history. In fact, in the 2016 Utah Colleges Exit Poll, 37.2% of women and 38.7% of men responded that they were mainly voting against the opponent of the candidate they chose, rather than voting for their candidate. These polls revealed other interesting correlations that emerged along gender lines in terms of which factors influenced voters’ choices in 2016.

Women were more likely than men to say that government regulation, national security, illegal immigration, and Obamacare were “very important” in deciding how to cast their votes. Further, Utah women showed a somewhat greater distrust in the election process overall; women were more likely than men to respond that they were “not at all confident” their vote was counted correctly in the general election, whereas men were more likely than women to respond that they were “very confident.” Finally, and not surprisingly, Utah women were more likely to say that regardless of how they felt about Hillary Clinton personally, that the election of a woman as president would be “very important” in American history (43.6% of women vs. 30.9% of men replied “very important”). Conversely, 26.0% of men and 20.1% of women responded that electing the first female president would be “not at all important.”

## Volunteering and Civic Engagements

In addition to voting and advocating for public policy, one of the key ways citizens can become involved in their communities is through volunteer work. For the past 13 years in a row, Utah has ranked first in the nation for percentage of residents who regularly volunteer, at 51% (a full 20 points higher than the national average of 30.3%). Nationally, women’s volunteer rates are six percentage points higher than men’s (27.8% vs. 21.8%), and this gap seems to hold in Utah as well. A 2013 report from UServeUtah showed Utah women’s rates above men’s: 46% versus 40.1%. Utah also ranks first in the nation for its parent volunteer rate, at 63.5%. Utah rankings solely for mothers are unavailable, but nationwide, 43.2% of

all mothers volunteer, and, more specifically, 46.7% of working mothers volunteer. When Utah voters were asked about the election of a woman president, 43.6 of female respondents said it would be “very important” in American history, versus 30.9% of male respondents.

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The following post is adapted from the Research Snapshot [Voting and Civic Engagement Among Utah Women: A 2019 Update](#), published September 4, 2017.