

The Status of Women in Utah Politics: A 2023 Update

Although Utah has a rich heritage of women’s involvement in voting, advocacy, and various types of political participation, for decades Utah has lagged behind most states in terms of women running for and serving in elected political roles. To track progress, the Utah Women & Leadership Project (UWLP) began reporting on the status of women in Utah politics in 2014, with updates in 2017, 2021, 2022, and now 2023. Although strides have been made in increasing the number of women serving in political roles in recent years, there is still work to be done. Research continues to confirm that when both men and women serve together in communities, counties, and states, all residents are better served and are more likely to thrive.¹ Overall, while Utah women have continuously gained elected seats since 2014, Utah still ranks last in WalletHub’s “Best & Worst States for Women’s Equality”² (with four of 17 key indicators being focused on political empowerment) and 46th of 50 states on the Represent Women’s “Gender Parity Index,”³ which measures women’s political representation.

This report updates the research and policy brief titled “[The Status of Women in Utah Politics: A 2022 Update](#)” and provides both Utah and national data for the following seven areas: Congress, statewide executive offices, state legislatures, counties, mayors, city councils, and boards of education. The brief concludes with a summary of findings and a brief discussion of why more women do not run for public office.

Congress

National

The most current 2023 data show that, at the national level, women hold 27.9% of seats (149 of 535) in the 118th US Congress.⁴ In the US Senate, 25.0% of the 100 seats (one more than last year) are held by women (15 D, 9 R, 1 Ind).⁵ In the US House of Representatives, a record 28.5% (124 of 435, four more than last year) of seats are held by women, 73.4% of whom are Democrats (91 D, 33 R). Both Democrats and Republicans increased by two seats,⁶ continuing the trend of record numbers of Republican women serving in the 118th US Congress.⁷

In the 118th Congress, 41 of the 50 states have at least one woman serving in Congress, leaving 9 states with no women serving in their congressional delegation (there were 10 such states in 2022); Utah is on this list.⁸ Also, four female delegates represent the District of Columbia, the Virgin Islands, American Samoa, and Puerto Rico in the US House.⁹

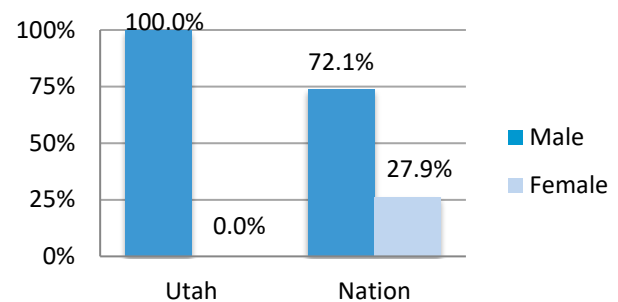
Every state has now elected a woman to serve in Congress. Vermont finally dropped from the list, electing its first female representative in 2022.¹⁰ In addition, the 118th Congress has the highest number of women of color in US history with 58

serving, meaning more than a third of all women in Congress are women of color.¹¹ The first Korean-American woman was elected to Congress in 2020.¹² Finally, in 2021 Kamala Harris began her term as the first woman elected vice president. She is the first Black and the first South Asian citizen to hold that office.

Utah

Utah has six seats in its national delegation, two senators and four representatives. None of Utah’s congressional seats are currently held by women. The most recent woman in Utah’s congressional delegation was Mia Love, who served in the US House of Representatives from 2015 to 2019.¹³ Love was the first Utah woman elected to Congress since 1995. Figure 1 compares Utah with the national average in terms of congressional seats by gender.

Figure 1: 118th US Congress by Gender (Utah vs. Nation)



Only four Utah women have served in Congress since Utah’s statehood in 1896: Rep. Reva Z. Beck Bosone (1949–1953), Rep. Karen Shepherd (1993–1995), Rep. Enid Greene Waldholtz (1995–1997), and Rep. Mia Love (2015–2019).¹⁴ Two of the four served one two-year term. Utah has never elected a woman to serve in the US Senate.

Statewide Executive Offices

National

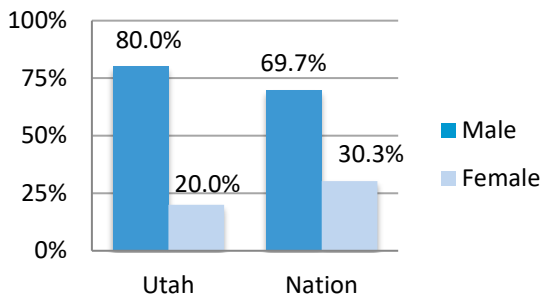
At the national level, 2023 data show that women now hold 30.3% (94 of 310) of the statewide executive offices (SEO) (52 D, 40 R, 2 NP), one more than in our last brief.¹⁵ At the close of 2022, 49 women (30 D, 19 R) had served as governors in 32 states.¹⁶ In 2023, a record number of women (12) are simultaneously serving as governor.¹⁷ The 12 states that have a female governor are Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Mexico, New York, Oregon and South Dakota (8 D, 4 R), while 21 states have female lieutenant governors (13 D, 8 R).¹⁸ In 2023, 10 of the 50 (20.0%) state attorney general seats in the US were held by women (7 D, 3 R). Finally, 10 (20.0%) secretary of state seats,

8 (16.0%) state treasurer seats, and 8 (16.0%) state auditor seats in the country are held by women.¹⁹

Utah

There is currently one woman serving in Utah Statewide Executive Office (SEO), as Deidre Henderson won the 2020 election for lieutenant governor. Of the five statewide offices that were up for election in 2020—governor/lieutenant governor, attorney general, state auditor, and state treasurer—both the Democrat and Republican parties nominated a female candidate for lieutenant governor. Figure 2 compares Utah with the national average in terms of SEO by gender.

Figure 2: Statewide Executive Office Seats by Gender (Utah vs. Nation)



Throughout its history, Utah has never elected a woman to serve as governor. However, Utah has had one female governor and two lieutenant governors. Olene Walker served as lieutenant governor to Mike Leavitt from 1993–2003, until he was nominated to serve as the Secretary of the US Department of Health & Human Services. Walker was then appointed as governor to serve until the end of Leavitt’s term (2003–2005). The only other woman to serve in a Utah statewide officer role was Jan Graham (D), who was attorney general from 1993–2001.²⁰

State Legislatures

National

According to the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) at Rutgers, a record-breaking 2,416 women are serving in state legislatures in 2023 (32.7%, 119 added since the last brief).²¹ Overall, the percentage of women in state legislatures has increased through the years as follows:

1971: 4.5%	2013: 24.2%
1981: 12.1%	2015: 24.3%
1991: 18.3%	2017: 24.8%
2001: 22.4%	2020: 29.3%
2011: 23.7%	2023: 32.7%

By the end of 2022, our neighboring states of Nevada and Colorado set the national highs for women in their legislatures (60.3% and 50.0%, respectively), followed by Arizona (47.8%), Washington (46.3%), Vermont (45.0%), New Mexico (44.6%), Rhode Island (44.2%), Maine (44.1%), Oregon (42.2%), and Maryland (42.0%). The ten states with the lowest percentages were ranked as follows: West Virginia (11.9%),

Tennessee (14.4%), South Carolina (14.7%), Mississippi (14.9%), Alabama (17.1%), Louisiana (19.4%), Oklahoma (19.5%), Wyoming (22.2%), Arkansas (23.7%), and North Dakota (24.1%).²² Notably, Utah is no longer included in the bottom 10. Interestingly, Democrats make up 65.6% of the total number of women elected in legislatures.

Utah

In 2023, Utah was ranked 40th in the nation in terms of women serving in the state legislature, a ranking that fell from 32nd in 2020.²³ In 2023, 20.7% of the Utah senators are female: 6 of 29 (5 D, 1 R), and 28.0% of the House of Representatives, or 21 of 75 (9 D, 12 R). Overall, in 2023, 26.0% (27 of 104) of Utah legislators are women, the same number who served in 2022.²⁴ Figure 3 compares Utah to the national average in terms of Utah state legislative seats by gender.

Figure 3: State Legislative Seats by Gender (Utah vs. Nation)

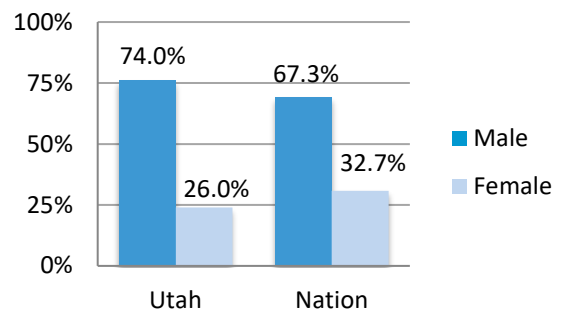


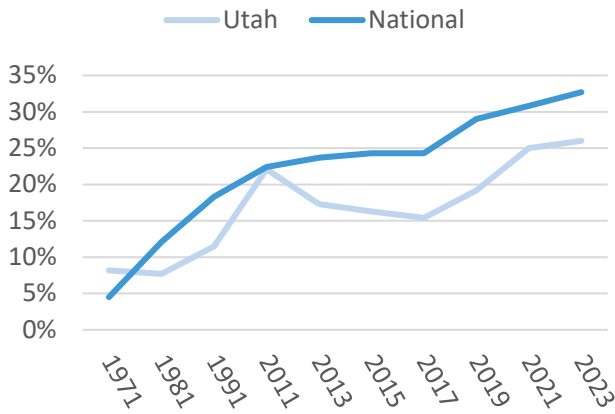
Table 1 illustrates the Utah state legislature numbers and percentages since 1971 by party and gender. Interestingly, in 1971, 8.2% of Utah state legislators were women, while only 4.5% of seats were held by women nationally. By 1981, Utah had slipped below the national average. In Utah, although female legislators are more likely to be Democrat than Republican, Republican women have gained four seats since 2021.

Table 1: Female Utah State Legislators²⁵

Year	Democrat	Republican	Total	%	Rank
1971	7	1	8	8.2	-
1981	4	4	8	7.7	36
1991	6	6	12	11.5	40
2001	12	11	23	22.1	26
2011	12	6	18	17.3	43
2013	11	6	17	16.3	46
2015	10	6	16	15.4	44
2017	12	8	20	19.2	35
2019	16	10	26	25.0	35
2021	16	9	25	24.0	40
2023	14	13	27	26.0	40

The trendline for the share of women serving in Utah’s state legislature has steadily increased since 2015 (see Figure 4 for a comparison of this national versus Utah trend).

Figure 4: Female State Legislature Trends



In 2022, five states had women serving as Speakers of the House of Representatives, which was down two from the previous brief.²⁶ In terms of the 2023 leadership in Utah, five of the 11 leadership positions in the House of Representatives are held by women. One is held by a woman Republican, Majority Assistant Whip Karianne Lisonbee, and all four of the minority leadership are women Democrats: Minority Leader Angela Romero, Minority Whip Jennifer Dailey-Provost, Minority Assistant Whip Sandra Hollins, and Minority Caucus Manager Rosemary T. Lesser (three more than 2022).²⁷ Similarly, the Senate 11 leadership positions, five of which are held by women. One is held by a woman Republican, Majority Whip Ann Millner, and all four of the minority leadership are women Democrats: Minority Leader Luz Escamilla, Minority Whip Kathleen Riebe, Minority Assistant Whip Jen Plumb, and Minority Caucus Manager Stephanie Pitcher.²⁸

Counties

County government also plays an important organizational role in the state. The National Associations of Counties (NACo) points out that counties deal heavily with transportation and infrastructure, community health, criminal justice, and public safety.²⁹ In addition, counties oversee important community issues such as agriculture, workforce development, energy, land use, and education.³⁰ Working with NACo's research team, we were able to collect data from the most recent gender study they conducted of county elected officials in 2015. According to NACo, women made up 12.7% of county boards and just 7.8% of county executives. Interestingly, women held 38.2% of elected county row officer seats (e.g., clerk, auditor, treasurer, recorder, assessor, sheriff, controller, district attorney, register of wills, coroner). Overall, in 2015, women made up 24.8% of elected county seats nationally.³¹

Utah

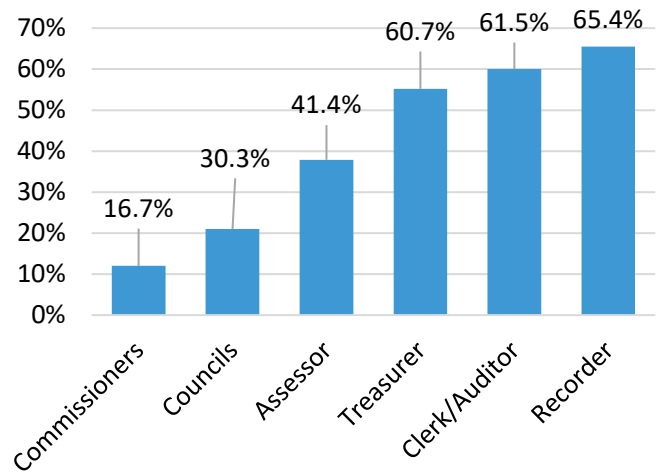
For Utah, we collected 2023 county data from links listed on the Utah Association of Counties website. Of the 29 counties in Utah, 24 have elected commissioners, while five have elected county councils (Cache, Salt Lake, Summit, Tooele, and Wasatch). In addition, each county elects a clerk/auditor, treasurer, recorder, and assessor. In 2023, of the 78 county commissioners in Utah, 65 (83.3%) are men, and 13 (16.7%)

are women. The women serve in the counties of Beaver, Davis, Duchesne, Grand, Iron, Kane, Millard, San Juan, Uintah, Utah, and Weber. In the five county councils, there is a total of 33 seats; 23 (69.7%) of the council members are men, while 10 (30.3%) are women; all of the women serve in Cache, Salt Lake, and Summit counties.

Additional elected county positions for 2023 revealed that, of the 39 county clerk/auditor seats, 24 (61.5%) are held by women and 15 (38.5%) by men. There are more than 29 positions, as some counties split the position of clerk and auditor, while most combine the two into one position. For county treasurer, 17 (60.7%) of the seats are held by women. Women hold 17 of 26 (65.4%) county recorder seats, 12 of 29 (41.4%) county assessor seats, two of 29 attorney seats (6.9%), zero of 9 surveyor seats, and only one county (Salt Lake) has a female sheriff (3.4%). A comparison of current data to that of 2022 show that women gained nine net county seats in 2023.

Overall, the legislative bodies of county commissions and councils in Utah are overwhelmingly held by men (79.3%), while 53.4% of the predominately full-time elected positions of clerk/auditor, treasurer, recorder, and assessor are held by women. See Figure 5 for a summary of county offices held by Utah women in 2023.

Figure 5: County Seats Held by Utah Women



Because there are no recent national gender data available, we are unable to compare Utah to the nation in terms of county elected posts held by women.

Mayors

Nation

According to the National Foundation for Women Legislators,³² the number of women serving as mayors, city councilors, and county commissioners is slightly on the rise. As of August 2022, the percentage of female mayors of cities with a population of at least 30,000 increased to 26.0%, a 4.0% increase since 2019.³³ Among the 100 largest cities in the US, 33 had women mayors in 2023, an increase from 27 in 2019.³⁴ In 2023, 91 (27.5%) of the 331 US cities with a population over 100,000 had women mayors.³⁵

Utah

No municipal elections were held in 2022, so data for the *Mayor* and *City Councils* sections remain the same as our 2022 update. Of the 252 municipalities in Utah, 60 have women mayors (23.8%), reflecting a 6.5% increase from the 17.3% reported in 2021, and a 14.7% increase from 2017. Of the 60, 34 mayors govern a population of at least 30,000, and 13 of them (38.2%) are female (up from 10 in 2021).³⁶ Notably, 3 of the 4 Utah cities that have populations over 100,000 are led by women. Most female mayors in Utah serve cities with populations of 10,000 or less (see Table 2).

Table 2: Women Mayors in Utah by Population

Municipality Population	No. of Female Mayors	Total No. of Mayors	% of Female Mayors
100,000+	3	4	75.0%
65,000–99,999	4	7	57.1%
30,000–64,999	6	23	26.1%
10,000–29,999	10	28	35.7%
1,000–9,999	14	84	16.7%
1–999	23	106	21.7%
Total	60	252	23.8%

City Councils

Nation

The National League of Cities (NLC) no longer tracks gender data and has not for years. *Next City* reported that the overall share of women city council members in the 15 largest cities in the US declined from 33.0% in 2010 to 30.0% in 2016.³⁷ For the 2022 update we used data from Represent Women and found that, among the largest 100 US cities in 2020, the average percentage of women on city councils with single-member districts (mirroring the vast majority of city and town councils in Utah) was 39.4%, up from 32.0% in 2019.³⁸ In terms of more national historical data on city councils, the NLC reported that representation of women on US city councils increased between 1989 and 2001 and that the proportion of women grew from 21.0% to 25.0% in small cities, 25.0% to 36.0% in medium-sized cities, and 33.0% to 36.0% in large cities.³⁹ However, between 1979 and 1989, there was a drop in gender diversity on city councils from 32.0% to 26.0%.

Utah

For our 2022 update, we collected data from every municipality in the state that had a council (N=254). We gathered information from websites, and then emails and calls were made to obtain the data that were not available online.⁴⁰ In Utah, 29.8% of city/town council seats were held by women in 2022, nearly the same as in 2021, at 29.3% (see Table 3). City councils from the four largest cities in Utah are 38.5% female. In 2022, all other population ranges have between 24.6% and 40.0% women serving in these positions, compared to between 17.4% and 36.4% in 2021. This shows some progress.

Table 3: Women Council Members in Utah by Municipality Population

Municipality Population	No. of Females	Total No. of Seats	% of Females
100,000+	10	26	38.5%
65,000–99,999	16	40	40.0%
30,000–64,999	41	116	35.3%
10,000–29,999	56	141	39.7%
1,000–9,999	104	423	24.6%
1–999	124	433	28.6%
Total	351	1,179	29.8%

Our 2022 analysis shows that there are 44 councils with no women (down from 47 in 2021). Of these councils, 54.5% are from municipalities with populations of 1–999, and 38.6% are from municipalities with populations of 1,000–9,999. The four largest city councils include women members: West Valley City with one woman serving (20.0%) and Salt Lake City, Provo, and West Jordan each with three women serving (42.9%). The seven cities with populations of 65,000–99,999 each have one or more women members on their councils. Cities with populations of 30,000–64,999 show a range of representation, with only one municipality (Saratoga Springs) having zero women members. For cities with a population of 10,000–29,999, only two have no women (Hurricane and Vernal). Of municipalities with populations of 1,000–9,999, 17 have no women, and six have councils with 50.0% or more women (Sunset, Providence, Hooper, Fruit Heights, Helper, and Uintah). The story is similar for councils representing populations of 1–999, where 24 have no female representation, but 10 have 75.0% female council members.

The 2022 analysis showed that 106 councils in Utah have one woman serving, 73 have two women, 28 have three, and none have all seats held by women. Overall, 29.8% of all council members in Utah municipalities are female, which puts Utah below the national average of data gathered historically in 1979 (32.0%),⁴¹ 2016 (30.0–33.0%), and 2019 (32.0%).

In 2021, four cities and towns elected their first female mayors: North Logan, West Valley City, Park City, and Parowan.⁴² Only one town or city in Utah’s history has had an all-female mayor and city council. According to *Southern Utah News*, “Kanab made history in 1912, when its newly-elected mayor and city council took the oath of office making it the first time in the history of the United States where the town board and mayor were entirely comprised of women.”⁴³ Between 2021 and 2022, the following municipal councils increased seats held by women: Woodruff went from zero to three of four seats held by women, while Vineyard, Circleville, Rocky Ridge, and Tabiona went from one seat to three of four seats held by women. In addition, the following councils are now majority women: South Salt Lake (6 of 7), Murray (4 of 5), Cleveland, Alta, Clarkston, Koosharem, and Millcreek (3 of 4). Both Vineyard and South Salt Lake also have female mayors.

Boards of Education

Nation

In January 2014, the National Association of State Boards of Education provided a list of each state's board of education membership by gender.⁴⁴ In 2014, 48.6% of state board members across the country were female. The states with the highest percentages of females at that time were Colorado (85.0%), South Dakota (78.0%), Alabama and Nebraska (75.0%), and Louisiana (72.0%). The states with the lowest percentages were Missouri (16.7%), Mississippi (22.2%), and Oklahoma and West Virginia (25.0%).

Historical national data of school district board gender makeup is sparse. A 2002 report stated that 38.9% of board seats nationally were held by women at that time, with larger districts having higher percentages than smaller districts.⁴⁵ Studies by the National School Boards Association (NSBA) reported that in 2010, 44.0% of school district board seats across the US were held by women compared to 49.0% in 2018.⁴⁶ As of 2020, NSBA data show that among the 100 largest school districts in the US, 66.0% of school board members were women. In 10 of those districts, 100% of members are women; in 31 districts, more than 80.0% were women; and in 52 more than 70.0% of members are women.⁴⁷

Utah

In 2017, 11 of 15 (73.3%) State Board of Education elected seats in Utah were held by women; thus, Utah ranked among the highest states nationally. However, by 2023 that number declined slightly to 10 of 15 (66.7%).⁴⁸ Currently, the Utah State Charter School Board of Education has 5 of 7 (71.4%) seats held by women, but these positions are appointed.⁴⁹

Utah has 41 school districts, and each district has an elected board of education, typically comprised of either 5 or 7 seats. In 2023, based on their websites, there are 235 total district board of education elected seats, and women held 128 (54.5%, up from 47.6% in 2021). Both Ogden and Provo City have 100% women, while Alpine, Granite, Juab, and Murray school districts have at least 80.0% female representation. Box Elder and San Juan have 75.0% female representation, and Canyons, Davis, Nebo, and Tooele have 71.4%. Ten other districts also have more than 50.0% female representation, while an additional 11 hovered around 40.0%. One district is 28.6%, six at 20.0%, with Rich school district having no women (in the last brief there were four). The larger districts appear to have more women, and the districts that have no women tend to be in rural areas. Yet, some rural districts do have a strong percentage of women serving. Overall, Utah is most likely aligned with the national average for women holding district board seats.

Summary

Overall, these results show some progress in more women serving in public office. Yet, there is still work to be done. Here is a summary of these findings:

- *US Congress*: 0.0% of the Utah delegation to Congress is female, compared to 27.9% nationally.
- *SEO*: 20.0% of the Utah SEO seats are held by women, compared to 30.3% nationally.
- *State Legislature*: 26.0% of Utah State legislators are women, compared to 32.7% nationally.
- *Counties*: 20.7% of Utah county commission and council seats are held by women, compared to 38.8% of the predominately full-time elected positions of clerk/auditor, treasurer, recorder, assessor, attorney, surveyor, and sheriff.
- *Mayors*: 23.8% of Utah mayors are now women, which is a 6.5% increase from 2021 and a 14.7% increase from 2017. More of Utah's larger cities are being led by women (up to 13 from 3 in 2017).
- *City Councils*: 29.8% of council members in Utah municipalities are female, which puts Utah below the national average of 32.0%.
- *Boards of Education*: Utah is at least average, if not slightly above, the national average for women holding district board seats.

Conclusion

The last few years have been record-setting years for women running for office across the country, and we are seeing some slight progress in Utah as well. When more women run, more women win. Through the years, the lack of women running for office has been one of many challenges related to why Utah does not have more women serving in elected public office. While we believe the tide is turning, understanding and removing the barriers women face when running for public office in Utah are critical to moving forward. In other UWLP reports, we have explored several factors accounting for why more women do not run for office, including societal attitudes, poor treatment of female candidates who do run, biases in party politics toward traditional practices that keep women from running and networking, and the way women are treated by the media (see "[An Analysis of Utah Media: Women & Politics](#)"). For recommendations on how to move the needle in Utah so that more women will run and serve in these roles, see this 2021 brief, "[Perceptions of Women Elected Officials in Utah: Challenges, Benefits, and Lessons Learned](#)," as well as other UWLP [research and policy briefs](#), [snapshots](#), and [resources](#).

This brief has summarized available research on the status of women in Utah politics. It provides a detailed look at the past and current state of affairs and, as with the previous briefs, should be beneficial as a benchmark for measuring improvement in years to come. It was also written as a *call to action* for Utah residents and leaders to do more to encourage and support future efforts to diversify voices on Utah's Capitol Hill and in cities, towns, and counties around the state. Although there has been some progress in recent years, we encourage Utah leaders and residents to do more to implement and support these efforts.

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- ⁴¹ National League of Cities. (n.d.).
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