

Voting and Civic Engagement Among Utah Women: What Utahns Need to Know

RESEARCH SUMMARY

UTAH WOMEN & LEADERSHIP Project

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Utah has a strong culture of civic engagement, leading the country with volunteer work and community service. Utah women are at the center, contributing to their communities formally and informally. In Utah's early history, women were highly engaged politically; Utah women were the first in the U.S. to vote in 1870. Utah was also the first state to elect a female state senator, and as recently as 1992, Utah women had the highest voter turnout in the nation. However, there is work to do. By 2006, Utah women's voting rates plummeted to 51st and was 33rd in 2020. Despite being half of Utah's population, women's representation in political and top community leadership roles is below national averages.

WHO VOTES

Both nationally and in Utah, women vote at slightly higher rates than men. Many factors correlate with a woman's likelihood of voting. Voting rates for women increase with educational attainment and are also associated with marital status and race and ethnicity. Specifically, voting rates range from 55% among high school graduates to 83% among women with advanced degrees; from 56% among never-married women to 67% among divorced women and 74% among married women; and from 53% among Hispanic or Latina women to 63% among Black women and 72% among White, non-Hispanic women.

REPRESENTATION

Including the perspectives and leadership of women in government improves communities and benefits all Utahns. Although Utah women are running for office, they are underrepresented at all levels of government. Women make up 17% of Utah's Congressional delegation, 40% of statewide executive offices, 30% of state legislative seats, 24% of county commission and council seats, 23% of mayoral offices, and 31% of city council seats. Utah has never elected a woman as Governor or a U.S. Senator.

WHY THIS MATTERS

"When women and men lead together, organizations, communities, individuals, and families benefit. By empowering more women to take active roles in their communities, we can create a more inclusive, equitable, and thriving Utah for generations to come."

*Dr. Susan R. Madsen,
UWLP Founding Director*

CIVIC INVOLVEMENT

Utah women participate civically in many ways, including sharing their views through boycotting, protesting, contacting the press, and lobbying or interacting with politicians. 12% of Utahns attend public meetings, exceeding the national average of 9%. Utah women generally understand how to participate in civic activities and engage in efforts that contribute to community well-being, with older, more educated, and higher-income women reporting higher levels of participation. The placement of Dr. Martha Hughes Cannon's statue in the U.S. National Statuary Hall following a seven-year campaign by legislators, women's nonprofits, Girl Scout troops, and individual citizens, highlights the impact of sustained civic engagement.

BENEFITS OF WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION:

- A wider range of issues are addressed.
- More funding is brought back to Congressional districts.
- Female constituents are more involved with female candidates and officials.
- Improved health outcomes result for all.

POLICY PRIORITIES

Utah women share many policy priorities with men, while also placing greater emphasis on issues that directly affect families, communities, and quality of life. Understanding these priorities can help policymakers and community leaders better address the concerns and needs of women across the state.

Research on Utah women's policy priorities shows a strong focus on economic stability, effective governance, and community well-being. Housing affordability, inflation, and elected officials listening to voters rank among women's highest concerns, along with government overreach, political division, K-12 education, environmental issues such as water and air quality, and state and local taxes.

Utah women placed greater emphasis on homelessness and women's rights, while men were more likely to prioritize crime and immigration. These priorities suggest that Utah women are focused on both immediate economic challenges and the long-term health and stability of their communities. Overall, Utah women's policy priorities reflect a broad interest in creating healthy, resilient communities where individuals and families can thrive.



VOLUNTEERING

One vital aspect of civic engagement, and an aspect where Utah truly shines, is volunteer work and community service. Nationally, women are more likely than men to participate in formal volunteering, highlighting the important role women play in strengthening communities. Utah has the highest rate of residents engaged in both formal and informal volunteering, with 68% of Utahns volunteering informally and 47% volunteering through an organization or program. Utahns volunteer twice as many hours as the lowest-ranked state in volunteerism. Formal volunteer efforts generate an estimated \$3.8 billion in economic value.

Beyond volunteering their time, Utahns are highly engaged in charitable giving. Utah has consistently ranked as the most charitable state in the nation, with residents donating at rates well above the national average. 64% of Utahns donated to nonpolitical organizations, compared with 49% nationally. Many donations remain within the state, reflecting a strong commitment to addressing local community needs.

EMPOWERING WOMEN TO SHAPE UTAH'S FUTURE

Encourage informed voting and representation. Increase awareness of the barriers Utah women and girls face so voters can make informed decisions and support candidates and leaders who understand and prioritize solutions to these issues.

Strengthen partnerships that increase women's civic participation. Educational institutions, government entities, nonprofit organizations, faith-based groups, and community organizations can collaborate to fund, promote, and expand initiatives that encourage women's voter participation, volunteerism, and community involvement.

Increase women's representation in leadership and decision-making roles. Support pathways that prepare and encourage women to serve in elected office, boards and commissions, nonprofit leadership, and other positions where they can contribute to policies and decisions that affect Utah communities.

Build a culture of shared leadership and listening. Encourage elected officials, candidates, business leaders, and community leaders (women and men alike) to actively listen to women's experiences and engage in efforts that advance the well-being of Utah women and girls. When women and men lead together, communities, organizations, and families benefit.

ENCOURAGE VOTING AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

By empowering more women and girls to take active roles in their communities, we can create a more inclusive, equitable, and thriving Utah for generations to come. See below for calls to action and resources to encourage women and girls' increased political and civic involvement.

Data Sources: UWLP Policy Brief No. 64 (2025), UWLP Research Snapshot No. 59 (2025)

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- **Learn More:** Explore resources in the UWLP Political & Civic Representation [Resource Kit](#).
- **Review:** Find goals, perceptions, and community partners on the Political & Civic Representation Spoke [webpage](#).
- **Get Involved:** Connect to the grassroots movement happening within [A Bolder Way Forward](#).
- **Take Action:** Help move the needle and discover additional [Calls to Action](#) for individuals, groups, organizations, and communities.



Participate in trainings and workshops focused on civic engagement and advocacy. Share these opportunities with women you know.



Nominate qualified women to serve on municipal, county, and state boards, commissions, and committees. Review UWLP's [Boards and Commissions](#) webpage.



Encourage three women each month within your sphere of influence to run for public elected office at the local or state level. Share resources.

Learn more at www.utwomen.org

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