

BGR Deep Dives: Women in Government

By Ellen Brown and Halie Daniels

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In 2022, 36 states held gubernatorial elections and nine new governors were elected. Members in 88 of the country's 99 state legislative chambers were up for election across 46 states. Democrats defended every single legislative chamber in their control – a feat not accomplished by the president's party during a midterm election since 1934. Aside from Democrats' unexpectedly strong election night performance, the United States elected a record number of women governors and legislators.

Governors & Statewide Races

Twelve women will serve as Governor in 2023 in Alabama, Arkansas, Arizona, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Massachusetts, New Mexico, Michigan, New York, Oregon, and South Dakota. This breaks the record set in 2004 when nine women were serving in the state's top office. Nine of those women are Democrats, while three are Republicans.

Three states will see women in their Governors offices for the first time in history: Sarah Huckabee-Sanders in Arkansas, Kathy Hochul in New York, and Maura Healey in Massachusetts. Three of Michigan's four statewide elected officials are women. All three — Gov. Gretchen Whitmer (D), Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson (D), and Attorney General Dana Nessel (D) — won re-election to second terms in November.

Down ballot from the gubernatorial races, 20 women will take control of Lt. Governor offices nationwide in 2023. Nine of each state's most powerful attorney, the Office of the Attorney General, will see a woman at the helm.

State Legislators

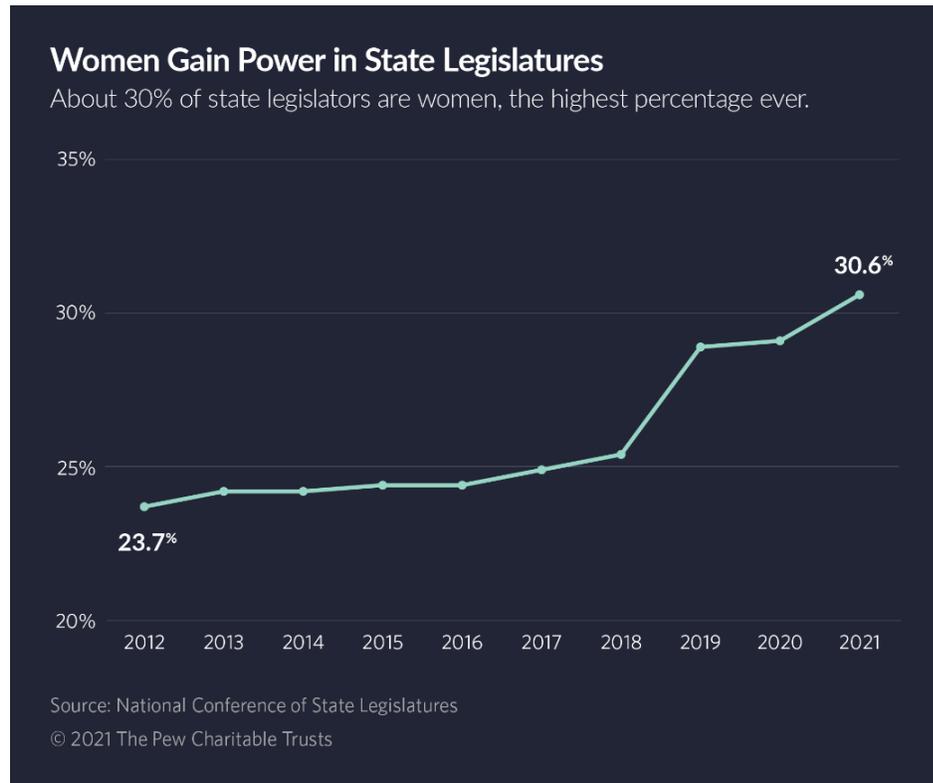
The percentage of women serving in state legislatures continues to rise, with an exceptionally sharp increase over the last five years. In 2023, women will make up 32.2% of all legislators.

While many leadership elections are still weeks away, it is clear that women have also accelerated in leadership positions. In 2022, 88 women – 66 Democrats and 22 Republicans – served in leadership positions in statehouses across the country, according to the Center for American Women and Politics.

This election cycle saw several "firsts" for women in office. Upon inauguration in early 2023, Michigan will install the first woman to lead the Michigan Senate. For the first time in Pennsylvania history, a Democratic majority will elevate a woman and only the second Black person to head the state House. Historic gains for women were also realized in the state Houses of Maine and Colorado, which will be run by all-female leadership teams. With such gains, Colorado becomes only the second state, after Nevada, to boast a legislature with more female members than men. Finally, two of the top leaders in the Delaware House are women for the first time.

The increase in women in state legislatures, especially in leadership positions, allows women to have a more significant role in shaping policy agendas and outcomes in their states. Female legislators aren't just

focusing on “women’s issues,” like abortion and childcare, but rather ensuring their female constituents are being represented in all legislation.



A [2020 study](#) by the National Women’s Law Center found that female legislators in states with more representation by women introduced and passed more bills than those in states with smaller numbers of women. Male legislators were also more productive in introducing and passing bills in statehouses with more women than those less balanced. In the states where women now maintain control of either the executive and or are a

majority in their legislative branches, state policy will likely focus on the following:

1. Health Care / Reproductive Healthcare
2. Crime
3. Education and Learning Loss

Healthcare / Reproductive Rights: Healthcare activity will primarily focus on affordability, mental health, and telehealth in a post-pandemic delivery of care. Party control of a state’s executive and legislative branches will largely dictate its reproductive rights agenda. Democratically controlled states will see a push to further protect abortion rights and increase maternal health funding; in Republican-controlled states, we will see additional efforts to limit abortion access.

Crime: Regardless of party control, state policy to address rising crime rates will likely be front and center on many states’ legislative agendas this next year. Specifically, legislatures will be tackling public safety funding, criminal justice reform, gun control, and community reentry policies.

Education and Learning Loss: The detrimental impacts of the global pandemic will continue to be felt for years, but one measurable deficit that has already manifested itself is education and learning loss. Studies have shown that remote learning has led to significant losses in achievement for students, with blue states and low-income areas suffering the worst losses. States are predicted to prioritize funding and policies to reverse learning loss in the upcoming year.

A comprehensive analysis of all the issues legislators will focus on in 2023 can be found [here](#).

About the Authors:



Halie Daniels joined BGR in April 2022, after almost six years in the Office of the Texas Attorney General. As an Assistant Attorney General, Halie spent most of her time working on complex civil litigation matters, with an emphasis on healthcare litigation and federal overreach. As a *Senior Associate* on the State and Local Advocacy Team, Halie helps clients navigate all levels of state government, including Governors, Attorney Generals, and top Agency officials.



Ellen Brown joined the firm in 2018. In her current role, she supports the firm's State & Local team, providing comprehensive legislative and political reports and analyses while working alongside state and local governments, Congress, the White House, federal agencies, and political committees. Prior to joining BGR, Ellen worked as a Legislative Aide in the Virginia General Assembly.