



When Women Lead

Women's Environmental Voting Records in Congress:
An Update, 2006-2015



Acknowledgements

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About Rachel's Network

Rachel's Network is a vibrant community of women at the intersection of environmental advocacy, philanthropy, and women's leadership. With a mission to promote women as agents of change dedicated to the stewardship of the earth, we meet with cutting-edge thinkers, build productive alliances, and connect with savvy, like-minded women to strengthen our leadership and impact.

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Laura Munley Capponi, Erica Flock, and New Heights Communications
Thu Pham, Advisor
Erica Flock and Lucian Florian, Web Design
Mason Phillips, Graphic Design

Rachel's Network
1200 18th St NW, Suite 910
Washington, DC 20036
www.rachelsnetwork.org
info@rachelsnetwork.org

Introduction

The 2016 election illuminated the challenges that American women face in running for federal office. Not only did the first woman presidential candidate from a major political party lose, the United States made no progress in increasing the number of women in Congress.¹ Two years earlier, in 2014, women had surpassed more than 100 seats for the first time in history²; a symbolic milestone in the long struggle for women's equality in US government. Yet with 2016's stalled progress, it will take more than a century at our current rate for our legislature to achieve equal representation.³

Statistics conveyed by organizations like the Center for American Women in Politics⁴ and the Institute for Women's Policy Research highlight this disparity: women comprise roughly 51 percent of the population and 53 percent of the electorate but only 20 percent of Congress. Women are not the only constituency impacted by unequal representation – our entire policymaking process suffers.

"We need to have more women in Congress — we need more consensus-builders, we need people who will listen more, who are less ego-driven and partisan. I really believe if you had 51 percent women in Congress, the whole dynamic would change."

– Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand
(D-NY)

Since 2000, Rachel's Network has made the case that gender disparity in government not only stymies equality, it has serious implications for environmental policy as well.

In previous iterations of *When Women Lead* (in [2003](#) and [2011](#)), we analyzed the voting records of federal legislators going as far back as 1983 using League of Conservation Voters (LCV) Environmental Scorecard data. We found that women in Congress vote for legislation supporting clean air, clean water, renewable energy, climate action, and public health much more often than their male counterparts (and similarly vote more often against legislation that would roll back these protections).

This update brings our analysis up to the present. After comparing annual LCV scores each year from 2006-2015, we again found that **women legislators vote for environmental protections more often than their male counterparts in both the House and Senate.**

Climate change, pollution, food and energy insecurity, chemical safety, and biodiversity loss have become urgent global concerns that threaten lives and livelihoods in the US. **If we want to make progress on protecting the environment and public health, we should help elect more women to public office, and support them during their tenure.**

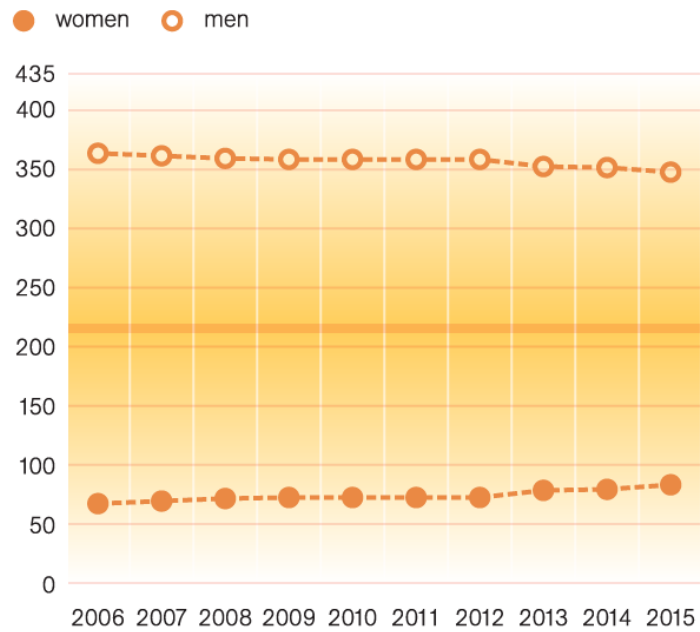
¹ Laura Cohn, "[The U.S. Made Zero Progress in Adding Women to Congress](#)," *Fortune*, November 21, 2016.

² Sheryl Gay Stolberg, "[More Women Than Ever in Congress, but With Less Power Than Before](#)," *New York Times*, February 2, 2015.

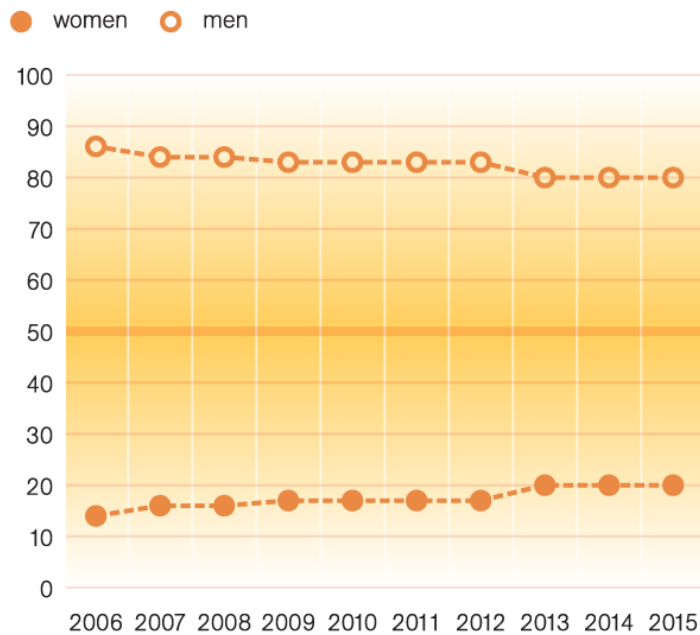
³ Nia-Malika Henderson, "[Women will reach political parity in 2121. Why will it take so long?](#)" *Washington Post*, May 22, 2014.

⁴ "[Current Numbers](#)," Center for American Women and Politics

Number of Women and Men in Office by Year U.S. House, 2006–2015



Number of Women and Men in Office by Year U.S. Senate, 2006–2015



Women's Environmental Voting Records by Chamber

Whether Congress is considering land conservation, climate change education, clean water protections, or renewable energy investment, women are voting more often than men for legislation that protects our planet and our children's health.

Our analysis also suggests that women help to shift Congress's approach to environmental policymaking, particularly in their adherence to **bipartisanship** and **solutions**.

House of Representatives

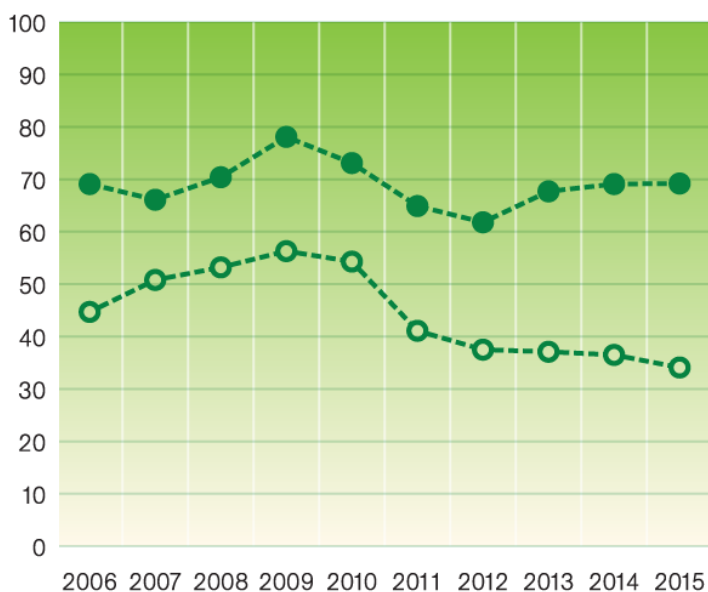
Since 2006, women in the House of Representatives have consistently outvoted their male colleagues on environmental protection. **The average LCV score of women in the House over the ten year period was 69 compared to 44.6 among men.** Women in the House of Representatives also outscored men in the House every year over the ten-year period studied.

In addition, over 40 percent of the representatives earning perfect LCV scores (100) in 2015 were women: **Anna Eshoo, Julia Brownley, Judy Chu, Nancy Pelosi, Linda Sánchez, Lucille Roybal-Allard, and Janice Hahn (CA); Diana DeGette (CO); Elizabeth Esty (CT); Lois Frankel (FL); Jan Schakowsky (IL); Chellie Pingree (ME); Donna Edwards (MD); Katherine Clark (MA); Bonnie Watson Coleman (NJ); and Nydia Velázquez, Yvette Clarke, and Nita Lowey (NY).** In 2016, 37 percent of the LCV scores of 100 were women including **Barbara Lee, Jackie Speier, Zoe Lofgren, Norma Torres and Susan Davis (CA); Kathy Castor and Debbie Wasserman Schultz (FL); Colleen Hanabusa and Tulsi Gabbard (HI); Niki Tsongas (MA); Brenda Lawrence (MI); Betty McCollum (MN); Michelle Lujan Grisham (NM); Grace Meng and Louise Slaughter (NY); Alma Adams (NC); Joyce Beatty, Marcy Kaptur, and Marcia Fudge (OH); and Suzanne Bonamici (OR).**

Environmental Scores by Year and Gender

U.S. House, 2006–2015

● women ○ men



Data: League of Conservation Voters Scorecard

Congressional environmental leaders include women such as Representatives **Barbara Lee (D-CA)** and **Kathy Castor (D-FL)**. Representative Lee introduced legislation that would [hire veterans for green jobs](#), secured grants for energy efficiency and STEM education, and help establish the Safe Climate Caucus in 2013. Representative Castor led efforts to advance energy conservation and protect our vulnerable coastlines.

Such examples are hardly unique. Democratic women in the House of Representatives not only lead Congress in environmental protection, they outscored fellow Democratic men in every year studied, averaging an LCV score of 90.1 over the ten year period compared to 86 from men.

Republican women, too, support environmental protection more often than their male Republican colleagues. Representative **Ileana Ros-Lehtinen** (R-FL), a member of the House since 1989, is a vocal supporter of bipartisan climate action. In addition to joining the House Climate Solutions Caucus in 2015 to develop policies addressing climate change, she introduced legislation that calls for coral reef conservation in the face of ocean acidification, The Conserving Our Reefs and Livelihoods (CORAL) Act of 2016.

Senate

The average LCV score of women Senators from 2006-2015 was **70.6** compared to **48** from their male counterparts. Women Senators also outscored men in the Senate every year over the ten-year period studied.

While women comprised only 20 percent of the Senate, they made up 32 percent of the LCV scores of 100 in 2015, with perfect votes from **Tammy Baldwin** (WI), **Mazie Hirono** (HI), **Kirsten Gillibrand** (NY), **Amy Klobuchar** (MN), **Debbie Stabenow** (MI), **Elizabeth Warren** (MA), and **Barbara Boxer** (CA). In 2016, women comprised 27 percent of perfect scores with nine senators including **Maria Cantwell** (WA), **Patty Murray** (WA) and **Jeanne Shaheen** (NH).

“As a new parent, I feel a particular responsibility to act in the face of overwhelming scientific consensus about global climate change.”

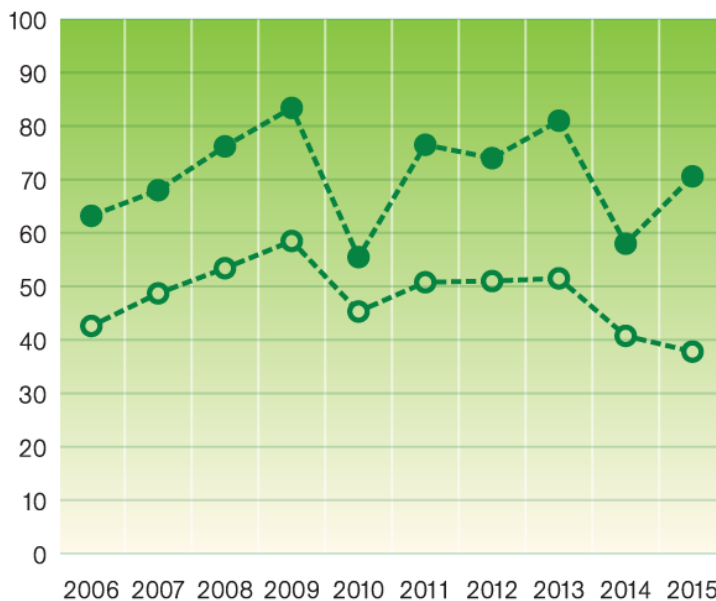
– Senator **Tammy Duckworth** (D-IL)

Senator **Jeanne Shaheen**'s support for clean energy and water conservation goes back to her years as New Hampshire's first woman governor. In April 2015, President Obama signed her bipartisan legislation, the Energy Efficiency Improvement Act of 2015. The law reduces pollution by encouraging commercial buildings to be more energy-efficient and requiring federally-leased buildings to disclose their energy consumption data.

Environmental Scores by Year and Gender

U.S. Senate, 2006–2015

● women ○ men



Data: League of Conservation Voters Scorecard



Republican woman also lead on environmental protection. Senator **Susan Collins** (R-ME) and Former Senator **Olympia Snowe** (R-ME), hold matching lifetime LCV scores of 65, putting them near the 10-year average for all women Senators. Both women voted for public land protections, water conservation, clean energy and climate change funding, and more.

Women also lead with bipartisan efforts to policymaking. The Energy Policy Modernization Act of 2016, approved in the Senate, was a legislative effort led by two women from across the aisle: Senators **Lisa Murkowski** (R-AK) and **Maria Cantwell** (D-WA).

Conclusion: Electing More Women Promotes Environmental Protection



Following the inaugural *When Women Lead* report in 2003, our two subsequent updates have provided evidence that reinforce the same conclusion: women members of Congress have, on average, better environmental voting records than men.

Since efforts to advance environmental and conservation legislation have become more partisan in recent years,⁵ one of the reasons for women's higher overall scores is the simple fact that women legislators are more likely to be Democrats. Of the 104 women serving in the 115th Congress, for example, 75 percent are Democrats.⁶ The deepening partisan gender gap and its implications were highlighted in the Political Parity report, "[Clearing the Primary Hurdles](#)."

Despite this partisanship, however, Republican women continue to support environmental protection more often than their male Republican colleagues. Republican women in the Senate averaged a higher LCV score than their male colleagues in the Senate over the ten-year period studied: 32.4 compared to 12.1 from men. This trend also exists in the House: Averaging over the ten-year period, Republican women in the House had a higher LCV score than their male colleagues at 11.6 over 11.1, respectively.

The data show a deep-rooted gender disparity that has repercussions for environmental policymaking and highlights the critical need for more women in Congress. The United States ranks 97th in the world for women's representation in its national legislature.⁷ Republican women are the most underrepresented, comprising only five percent of Congress.

Our report is not without limitations: low sample sizes for women in Senate (both parties) and House Republican women limit the statistical significance of the findings. However, the longitudinal nature of the data—going back to 1983 with the same conclusions—reflects a clear trend that offsets this limitation.

For over 30 years, women members of Congress have voted in favor of stronger environmental laws and policies to protect our nation's air, water, land, oceans, and biodiversity. As our country faces immense environmental challenges in the years ahead, **it's more important than ever that women are given a clear path to Congress.**

⁵ Lucia Graves, "[The GOP's Worst Environmental Voting Record in Decades](#)," *The Atlantic*, Feb 11, 2014

⁶ Center for American Women and Politics, "[Women in the U.S. Congress 2017](#)," February 21, 2017.

⁷ Inter-Parliamentary Union, "[Women in National Parliaments](#)," August 1, 2016.

Ten Steps to Support and Increase the Number of Women in Congress

Closing the gender gap *and* make a difference for the environment is achievable by following these suggestions from fellow advocates:

1. **Recruit women** from all backgrounds and at all levels of government to seek public office. [She Should Run's](#) Ask a Woman to Run program has encouraged over 100,000 women to consider running for elective office and [VoteRunLead](#) trains women for political leadership.
2. **Advocate equal representation of women at all levels of government**, including executive office appointments, local boards and commissions, and legislative bodies. [Rachel's Action Network's](#) membership supports and engages these women environmental champions.
3. **Pass electoral reform** that increases the likelihood of women running for office. [Representation2020](#) recommends multi-member legislative districts with constituency-based proportional voting systems, which creates a fairer, more representative voting system.
4. **Address gender bias in the operation of legislatures** through tools like women's caucuses, leadership roles for women on important committees, and policies that recognize the demands of legislators with children ([Representation2020](#)).
5. **Encourage political parties to support women.** For Democrats and progressives, check out groups like [Emily's List](#) and [EmergeAmerica](#). For Republicans and conservatives, see the [National Federation of Republican Women](#) and [Maggie's List](#).
6. **Call out biased coverage of women** candidates and politicians in the media through [Political Parity's](#) Name It. Change It. campaign.
7. **Get out the vote for women and the environment.** Unmarried women, people of color, and millennials are now the majority of eligible voters. Groups like the [Voter Participation Center](#) and the [Environmental Voter Project](#) are helping get them to the polls.
8. **Thank environmental leaders in Congress.** [Visit the League of Conservation Voters Scorecard](#) to find the best actors and call them to encourage their continued leadership.
9. **Train the next generation of women leaders.** [IGNITE](#) trains young women from high schools, colleges, and universities across the United States to think critically about policy and understand where the levers of power to make change reside.
10. **Spread the word.** Share this report with friends and colleagues to educate others on the importance of electing women to Congress. Visit our website at whenwomenlead.rachelsnetwork.org.

"We've got to get more women to run. We need to be strategic and identify women to run in open seats at every level of leadership. And once those women are recruited, we need to make sure that they have the support, financial and otherwise, to be successful."

– Debbie Walsh, Director,
Center for American
Women and Politics