The gender and racial identities of our elected representatives influence how they govern.

 Democracies in which political officeholders reflect the identities of the populations they represent have many benefits, from bringing more diverse views and experiences to political agendas, to spending on priorities that are more widely shared. For example, research on state legislatures has shown that in addition to representing their districts and their parties, Black state legislators are more likely to support legislation aimed at reducing racial discrimination and improving the socioeconomic status of African Americans, while women legislators do the same for women. Moreover, each lends support to the interests of the other.\(^1\) How inclusive is Minnesota’s democracy? How far has the state come, and what goals must we set to ensure that Minnesota’s residents are fairly represented?

To answer these questions, we analyze data on Minnesota elections over the past two decades to show trends in women’s, Native peoples’, and racial and ethnic minorities’ candidacy and representation in elected offices. The data shows important progress, but also work still to be done. In this fact sheet, we track the proportion of Minnesota women and men that have run for and been elected to all levels of office – federal, statewide, state legislature, county, and municipal. Because race and ethnicity are more difficult to verify, we include race and ethnicity only for those elected to federal office, statewide executive office, the state legislature, and the Twin Cities municipal elections.\(^2\)

\[\text{Trending Towards Inclusion}\]

\textbf{Since the year 2000, we see an upward trend of women, Native Americans, and people of color elected to public office in Minnesota, but different patterns for each.}

\textbf{After years of little change, since 2018 the numbers of women elected in Minnesota have increased significantly.}

In the first years of the century, between 2002 and 2006, the number of women elected to federal office, statewide executive office, and the state legislature combined rose from about 28% to 36%. Their numbers then flat-lined for the next eight years (between 2008 and 2016) at between 28% and 33% of officeholders before rising again in 2018.

\textit{In 2022, women represented 38% of those elected to federal and state offices combined in Minnesota.}

\[\text{When women run, they win.}\]

Research shows when women candidates run, their chances of winning are as good as those of male candidates. Factors such as incumbency, ideological match with constituents, and primary competition outweigh gender.\(^4\) However, women who run for office tend to be more qualified than the men they run against and overcome discrimination at the ballot box. When women and men candidates have the same qualifications, women’s chances of winning drop.\(^5\)
Gender Parity in Minnesota’s Federal Delegation

Minnesota is one of eleven states to have gender parity or greater in their federal delegation in 2023. Following the 2018 election, five out of the ten members of the Minnesota federal delegation – the Congress people and Senators sent by Minnesotans to Washington D.C. – were women. This included three of eight House representatives and two Senators.

- Minnesota’s eight-members of the U.S. House of Representatives first reached gender parity in 2020, with four women and four men. Minnesota is currently one of 18 states and territories to achieve gender parity or greater for their House of Representatives delegates.
- Since 2018, both Minnesota U.S. Senate seats have been held by women. Currently, four states have all-woman senate delegations: Minnesota, Nevada, New Hampshire, and Washington.

Democrats have run women candidates for Minnesota’s federal delegation more often than Republicans. The first woman from Minnesota elected to the U.S. Congress was Democratic Farmer Labor party (DFL) Representative Coya Knudson in 1955. It was not until 2006 that Minnesota Republicans sent a woman to the U.S. Congress – Representative Michele Bachman. Only the DFL has nominated women for the U.S. Senate seats, and each time they have won.

Native Americans and people of color are underrepresented in the federal delegation. Only one current member of the federal delegation is a person of color – Ilhan Omar (DFL) of the 5th Congressional District is Black. Omar was preceded in office by African American Keith Ellison (DFL). Minnesota has never had a non-white senator.

The numbers of Native Americans and people of color elected to federal and state offices have increased significantly only in the last few years. Between 2000-2014, just 2-5% of elected officials in these offices identified as Native American or a person of color. This number began to rise in 2016, eventually reaching 16% in 2022. These proportions are getting closer to the 20% of adult residents who identify as Native American or a person of color in the state. Since 2016, at least half of these representatives have been women.
Statewide Elected Offices

Election to statewide executive office is a greater challenge for historically marginalized groups than other elected offices. To win, candidates must garner the support of the majority of voters from across the entire state – not just a district. For Native American candidates and candidates of color in Minnesota, this means gaining the support of a voting population that is about 80% white. We focus on Governor and Lieutenant Governor (which are elected on the same ticket), Attorney General, State Auditor, and Secretary of State.

Between 2000 and 2022, white women won election to these statewide offices eleven times and white men nine times. Only one Native person and one Black person has ever been elected to statewide office in the state – to the Lieutenant Governor and Attorney General offices respectively, and each has won two terms. Only white men have held the top executive position – the Governor’s office.

The Minnesota Legislature

The Minnesota Legislature has become more reflective of Minnesotans in the last decade. After incremental change between 2000 and 2014, since 2016, Minnesotans have elected significantly more Native Americans, people of color, and women.

After a decade of decline, since 2018 women’s representation in the Minnesota Legislature has been on the rise. The numbers of women elected to the Minnesota Legislature increased from 2000 to 2006 from 29% of the legislative seats to 35%. Then, for the next decade (from 2006 to 2016) women lost ground - their numbers dropped to 31% in 2016. In 2018, the number of women in the legislature rose to 36% and in 2022 women’s representation hit an all-time high of 39%.
The Minnesota Legislature has become significantly more reflective of the state’s racial and ethnic composition since 2016. The number of Minnesotans that identify as Native American or a person of color has increased from 10% of the state’s population in the year 2000, to 20% in 2020. Between 2000 and 2014, the Minnesota Legislature barely represented these groups – the total proportion of legislators of color never exceeded 5% until 2016. Beginning in 2016, the legislature has become more reflective of the state. In 2022, Minnesotans elected the most ethnically and racially diverse legislature in history, with 16% of legislators identifying as Native American or a person of color. More than half of these legislators since 2016 have been Native women or women of color (between 52% and 56%).

**Metro and Greater Minnesota Comparisons**

More women run for the state legislature in metro districts than in Greater Minnesota, but women in Greater Minnesota are closing the candidate gap. For the past 22 years, women in metro districts have constituted a greater share of candidates and elected legislators than women from Greater Minnesota districts. However, the number of women candidates running for Greater Minnesota seats has increased more quickly than women candidates for metro seats. Between 2000 and 2022, women running in metro Minnesota districts increased by 27% (from 32% of all metro district candidates to 44%). Women candidates from Greater Minnesota districts increased from 18% to 33% – a 45% increase in women candidates over this period.
Native legislators and legislators of color are predominantly elected to the Minnesota Legislature from the metro area. From 2000 to 2010, Greater Minnesota elected no individuals that identified as Native or as a person of color, while districts with at least 50% of their population in metro areas elected 4-8% Native and people of color legislators. In 2022, 7% of Greater Minnesota’s state legislators were Native or people of color. In the Metro, 28% of Minnesota legislators were Native or people of color in the same year.

**Party Matters**

The DFL has supported more women candidates for the Minnesota Legislature than the Republican party. Forty percent of DFL candidates and 24% of Republican candidates have been women since 2000. The proportion of female DFL candidates has steadily increased since 2000, breaking 50% for the first time in 2022 (52%). For Republicans, 2020 marked the highest proportion of women candidates fielded (28%).

The proportion of women among Republicans elected to the Minnesota Legislature has yet to break 30%. The most Republican women state legislators served in 2012, when they comprised 27% of representatives from their party. In the 2023 Minnesota Legislature, women comprised 21% of Republican legislators, and 54% of DFL legislators.

**Minnesota Legislature: Women Candidates and Elected by Major Party**

Women as a proportion of candidates within each party

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**FIRSTS IN THE MINNESOTA LEGISLATURE**

- **John Francis Wheaton (R):** First known African American to serve in the Minnesota Legislature (House), in 1899.
- **Sue Metzger Dickey Hough (R), Mabeth Hurd Paige (R), Myrtle Agnes Cain (Famer-Labor) (all of Minneapolis) and Hannah Jensen Kempfer (Independent) (of Otter Tail County)**
  First four women to serve in the Minnesota Legislature, 1923.
- **B. Robert Lewis (DFL)**
- **Allan Spear (DFL)**
  First openly gay member of the Minnesota Legislature (Senate), 1973.
- **Conrado M. “Conrad” Vega (DFL)**
  First known Latino (Mexican) to serve in the Minnesota Legislature (Senate), 1977.
- **Harold Raymond “Skip” Finn (DFL)**
  First known Native man (Leech Lake Band of Chippewa) to serve in the Minnesota Legislature (Senate), 1992.
- **Edwina Garcia (DFL)**
  First known Latina to serve in the Minnesota Legislature (House), 1991.
- **Satveer S. Chaudhary (DFL)**
  First known Asian American member of the Minnesota Legislature, 1996.
- **Neva Walker (DFL)**
- **Mee Moua (DFL)**
- **Susan Allen (DFL)**
  First known Native woman (Lakota, Dakota, And Anishinaabe) to serve in the Minnesota Legislature (House), 2012.
- **Alicia Kozlowski (DFL)**
  First known non-binary member of the Minnesota Legislature (House), 2023.
- **Leigh Finke (DFL)**
  First known transgender person to serve in the Minnesota Legislature (House), 2023.
Historically, the DFL has fielded more Native Americans and people of color for state legislative seats than the Republican party. Beginning in 2016, this party gap has increased. Since 2000, 122 Native American and people of color from the DFL have been elected, compared to 20 Native American and people of color Republican state legislators. Currently, 5% of Republican legislators identify as Native or a person of color, compared to 26% of the DFL.

**County Governments**

For county governments, we focus on county commissioners, attorneys, and sheriffs. We compiled information on gender only – not race or ethnicity – beginning in 2006.

**From 2006 to 2022, women – candidates and elected – to commissioner seats and county attorneys offices have been steadily increasing.** The 2022 elections resulted in women holding 33% of all county attorney offices, and 20% of all county commissioner seats. Women sheriffs, however, have not increased since 2006. In fact, in 2006, 4% of county sheriffs in the state were women, and that number dropped to 2% in 2022.
Fewer women running for rural county commissioner seats is driving down the overall numbers of women county commissioners. In the metro area, women are close to attaining parity, having won 47% of metro area county commissioner seats in 2022.

**COUNTY FIRSTS**

- **John Lyght**  
  First African American to serve as sheriff (Cook County), 1973.
- **Rafael Ortega**  
  First Latino to serve on a county board (Ramsey County), 1995.
- **Terese Amazi**  
  First elected female sheriff (Mower County), 2002.
- **Toni Carter**  
  First African American county commissioner (Ramsey County) and first African American county board chair, 2006.
- **David Hutchinson**  
  First open LGBTQ+ sheriff (Hennepin County), 2019.
- **Mandy Meisner**  
  First Asian American county commissioner (Anoka County), 2020.
- **Dawanna Witt**  
  First African American woman to serve as sheriff (Hennepin County), 2023.
- **Mai Chong Xiong**  
  First Hmong county commissioner (Ramsey County), 2023.

**Municipal Governments**

City councils in cities with a population of 30,000 or greater are trending toward gender parity. The pattern for women mayors has been less consistent. In 2019, 52% of all council seats in these cities were held by women, and 62% in 2021, before dropping to 42% in 2022. We counted women mayors in all cities with a population of 10,000 or greater. Women mayors hit a high point in 2015, when women comprised 40% of mayors of these cities. In 2022, they comprised 32%.
Mayoral Elections

City size does not necessarily correlate with gender parity in mayoral candidacy. A mere 18% of the 100 largest cities have achieved gender parity in candidates for the highest position in municipal government. The most populous cities, St. Paul and Minneapolis, are not among these. In Minneapolis, women comprised just 15% of mayoral candidates between 2011 and 2022. Among Minnesota's cities with a population 10,000 or greater, 29 have not had a woman candidate for mayor since 2011.23

Fewer women mayoral candidates mean fewer are elected. Less than one-third (29) of the 100 largest cities have elected a woman mayor between 2011-2022.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>% Women Candidates</th>
<th>Women Candidates of Total Elections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Savage</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>4 of 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maplewood</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>7 of 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoreview</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>7 of 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otsego</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>4 of 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richfield</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>3 of 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hope</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>3 of 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hastings</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>3 of 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Municipal Firsts

- Brian Coyle: First openly gay man to serve on the Minneapolis City Council, 1984.
- Sharon Sayles Belton: First African American and first woman to serve as mayor of Minneapolis, 1994.
- Phillip Cunningham: First out transgender man of color to serve on the Minneapolis City Council, and any public office in the United States, 2018.
- Maria Regan Gonzalez: First Latina mayor in Minnesota. Served from 2018.27

Council Elections

Women candidates for council seats fare better than mayoral candidates.24 As of 2023, 16 of Minnesota's 32 largest municipalities have achieved or exceeded gender parity among their council members, with 50% or more women council members.26 Maple Grove's four-person council is entirely women.

Cities moving toward gender parity:
- Only four of the 32 largest cities in the state have had 50% or more women candidates for their city council over time: Maplewood (63%), Brooklyn Center (52%), Maple Grove (51%), and Richfield (50%).
- Seven of the 32 largest cities between 2011 and 2022 have had half or more women council members: Brooklyn Center and Maple Grove (75%), Woodbury (67%) Maplewood (57%), Inver Grove Heights (50%) St. Louis Park (50%) and Edina (50%).

Cities with the fewest women candidates and elected:
- The fewest women ran for council in Lakeville (9%), Bloomington (15%), Shakopee (20%), Blaine (21%), and Coon Rapids (22%).
- From 2011-2022, the five worst cities for women's representation on city councils have been: Bloomington (14%), Coon Rapids (22%), St Cloud (23%), Cottage Grove (23%), and Rochester (24%).
## Twin Cities Mayoral Elections

**Minneapolis:** Women have comprised 15% of mayoral candidates and have been one of three mayors elected.26

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election Year</th>
<th>Candidates</th>
<th>Women Candidates</th>
<th>% Women Candidates</th>
<th>Women Elected</th>
<th>Native Am/POC Elected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**St. Paul:** Women have comprised 18% of mayoral candidates, but none have won. In 2017, St. Paul elected its first African American mayor, Melvin Carter, who previously served in the city council.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election Year</th>
<th>Candidates</th>
<th>Women Candidates</th>
<th>% Women Candidates</th>
<th>Women Elected</th>
<th>Native Am/POC Elected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Twin Cities City Council Elections

**Minneapolis:** Minneapolis has a 13-member city council. Between 2013 and 2021, 33% of candidates and 46% of council members have been women. Racial and ethnic diversity in the Minneapolis City Council has been increasing in recent elections, to a majority of members identifying as non-white in 2021 (62%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election Year</th>
<th>Candidates</th>
<th>Women Candidates</th>
<th>% Women Candidates</th>
<th>Women Elected</th>
<th>% Women Elected</th>
<th>Native Am/POC Elected</th>
<th>% Native Am/POC Elected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**St. Paul:** St. Paul’s city council has seven members. Between 2011 and 2019, 38% of city council candidates and 43% of council members have been women. The Council significantly increased its representation of people of color in 2019, when three council members of color were elected.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election Year</th>
<th>Candidates</th>
<th>Women Candidates</th>
<th>% Women Candidates</th>
<th>Women Elected</th>
<th>% Women Elected</th>
<th>Native Am/POC Elected</th>
<th>% Native Am/POC Elected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Policies to Encourage Inclusive Representation

- **Candidate training programs are crucial for candidates from historically marginalized communities.** It takes knowledge, networks, and funding to run a successful political campaign. Candidate training programs provide valuable information, technical skills, access to networks, and the confidence boost that many historically marginalized individuals need to decide to run, and to win.\(^{28}\)

- **Political action groups can direct resources to candidates where it will make the most impact.** The data we present suggests greater attention is merited to rural Minnesota and offices in which women are underrepresented, such as county government.

- **Party policies and norms matter.** While U.S. parties do not control candidate selection, they are crucial in recruiting and endorsing candidates. When party elites develop party rules and norms that facilitate inclusion, more candidates from diverse backgrounds are willing to run.

- **Institute ranked choice voting more widely.** Several Minnesota municipalities use ranked choice voting. One study has found that ranked choice voting – which eliminates the “wasted vote” dilemma faced by voters – facilitates the election of greater numbers of Native Americans and people of color, and women of color specifically.\(^{29}\)

- **Create multi-member electoral districts.** Research shows that women are more likely to win in multi-member districts. Put simply, when voters have more than one seat to elect, they are more willing to “risk” a vote on a less traditional candidate.\(^{30}\) In 1984, one fourth of lower state houses and one in twelve upper state houses had multi-member districts.\(^{31}\) These numbers have decreased because some states used multi-member districts as a means to dilute the vote of marginalized racial and ethnic groups – violating the Voting Rights Act. If instituted simultaneously with safeguards against gerrymandering (such as independent redistricting commissions), multi-member districts could significantly increase the election of women, Native Americans, and people of color.
Minnesota at a Glance

- In 2021, Minnesota was the 22nd most populous state in the U.S. with about 5.7 million residents. Females represent 49.9% of the state's population, and males 50.1%.  
- Just over half of Minnesotans live in the Twin Cities metro area. About 55.2% live in the Twin Cities metro and 44.8% in Greater Minnesota.  
- The percentage of Minnesota households with a same-sex married couple was 0.49%. Just over 8% of adults aged 18 and over identify as Lesbian, Bisexual or Transgender (LGBT).  
- Minnesota's racial and ethnic composition is 79% white and 21% non-white including 6.4% Black, 5.5% Latinx, 4.9% Asian, 3.4% other or multiple, and 0.9% Native American.

About the Fact Sheet

This fact sheet was prepared by Jenna Hoge, Masters of Public Policy student at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs and Dr. Christina Ewig, Director of the Center on Women, Gender and Public Policy. It was made possible by financial support of the Carlson Family Foundation and the Humphrey School of Public Affairs. © 2023 Center on Women, Gender, and Public Policy, University of Minnesota