

Glass Ceiling Persists in New York Government

by {ga=rfauss}

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Photo by [Jo Freeman Co.](#) Mary Anne Krupsak (left), pictured here with U.S. Rep. Bella Abzug, was the state's New York's first women statewide elected official, serving in the largely ceremonial post of lieutenant governor. After charging she was shut out of substantive policy-making, Krupsak ran against her boss, Gov. Hugh Carey, for the top job and lost.

On Nov. 2, 2010, New Yorkers elected candidates for state government and in doing so, probably unbeknownst to themselves, they reduced the number of female state legislators. Women hold no major leadership posts in the legislature and none of the four statewide offices, although one of New York's U.S. senators -- [Kirsten Gillibrand](#) -- is a woman.

New York State gave women the right to vote in 1917 -- three years before the [19th Amendment](#) to the U.S. Constitution was enacted -- and has had many leaders for women's suffrage such as Susan B. Anthony and the organizers of the Seneca Falls Convention . Today, however, New York lags behind other states in terms of the representation of women in government, both in elected and appointed positions.

Experts disagree about what accounts for the glass ceiling in New York politics, although, as with everything else in politics, money seems to be one factor.

State Legislature -- Start of the Pipeline

State legislative office, particularly in the lower house or assembly, is considered to be a stepping stone to higher office, either statewide or federal. In the State Assembly elections last fall in New York, four female members did not seek re-election: Republican [Dede Scozzafava](#) , and Democrats

[Susan John](#)

,
[Joan Christensen](#)

and

[Ann-Margaret Carrozza](#)

. In two districts, women --

[Claudia Tenney](#)

, a Republican, and

[Aravella Simotas](#)

, a Democrat -- took over from male legislators who sought other office. Two female Assembly members lost their bids for re-election -- Democrats

[Francine Delmonte](#)

and

[Ginny Fields](#)

. This leaves the Assembly today with 37 women representatives, or about 25 percent of seats.

Women picked up only one seat in the State Senate in 2010, despite a concerted effort by the Senate Democrats to run women against male Republican incumbents. A Republican -- [Patricia a Ritchie](#)

of St. Lawrence -- was the only new female candidate elected, defeating incumbent Democrat

[Darrel Aubertine](#)

. The Senate Democratic Campaign Committee in last fall's elections formed

[16% & Rising](#)

-- so named because only 16 percent of seats (10 total) in the State Senate were held by women -- and sought to elect female Democrats, challenging incumbent male Republican legislators. Despite this effort, none of the campaign's 12 female candidate succeeded in the election. In total, women today hold 11 of the 62 Senate seats, or about 18 percent.

For the senate races, money appears to have been a major factor. Despite the purported Democratic effort to elect women candidates, the 12 Democratic female challengers had a total

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bankroll of about \$2 million, and the male incumbents or candidates who ultimately won had a total of about \$7 million. The men were helped by state campaign law, which allows candidates to roll over money left over from past campaigns into their next race. In most cases, the men had a substantial balance from previous elections, while their female challengers had to raise the vast majority of funds in 2010. In Senate District 55 in Monroe County, which was the closest of the 12 senate races with a female Democratic challenger, Republican Sen. [James Alesi](#)

won with only a 6 percent

[margin of victory](#)

against Democratic challenger

[Mary Wilmot](#)

. Wilmot raised over \$600,000 in contributions, while Alesi had a bankroll of just over \$1 million.

Despite a new legislature taking office this month, men continue to hold all the majority and minority leader positions in the Senate. Democratic Sen. [Liz Krueger](#) of Manhattan was thought to be in the running

[for deputy minority leader](#)

after the former deputy,

[Jeff Klein](#)

,

[left](#)

the Democratic conference to join the Independent Caucus, but ultimately the post went to Sen.

[Neil Breslin](#)

. The deputy majority leader position in the Assembly, however, is held by a woman:

[Vivian Cook](#)

.

Higher State Office

Last year New Yorkers elected only one woman in a statewide race -- Gillibrand -- out of a total of five races. Gillibrand, who was first elected in 2006 to the House of Representatives, now holds the seat formerly held by Hillary Rodham Clinton, the first woman to hold one of New York's U.S. Senate seats. No woman has ever having held the state offices of governor, comptroller, or attorney general in New York, though women but have been elected to the largely ceremonial position of lieutenant governor on the ticket with governor.

The first woman elected to statewide office, [Mary Anne Krupsak](#), served as lieutenant governor to Hugh Carey from 1975 to 1978. Amid reports that she felt ostracized from the administration, she then

[ccessfully ran](#)

against Carey.

[unsu](#)

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Since then, two other women have been elected as lieutenant governor, [Betsy McCaughey Ross](#) and [Mary Donohue](#), both of whom served with Republican Gov. George Pataki. Like Krupsak with Carey, Ross felt [shut out](#) by Pataki and ultimately switched parties and ran against Pataki on the Liberal Party line for governor.

This year, only one woman even sought statewide office on a major party ticket: Nassau District Attorney [Kathleen Rice](#), who ran for the Democratic nomination for attorney general. She lost to [Eric Schneiderman](#).

Appointments to State Government

The underrepresentation of women extends beyond elected government. The Center for Women in Government and Civil Society at Rockefeller College, SUNY Albany conducted a [nationwide study](#) on women holding gubernatorial appointments, examining the change in representation from 1997 to 2007. While New York improved during this time period, doubling the number of women agency heads, it remains 29th in the nation for women appointed policy leaders with 33.8 percent of positions held by women.

While Gov. Andrew Cuomo still is making appointments to agencies and his own staff, so far women have accounted for six of the 14 permanent [administration or agency appointments](#). They include: Elizabeth Glazer, as deputy secretary for public safety; Dede Scozzafava, deputy secretary for local government at the [Department of State](#)

;

[Joan McDonald](#)

, commissioner of the state

[Department of Transportation](#)

;

[Yomika S. Bennett](#)

, assistant secretary of transportation;

[Leecia Eve](#)

as senior vice president and counsel to the

[Empire State Development Corp.](#)

; and

[Mitra Hormozi](#)

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, chairperson of the

[Commission on Public Integrity](#)

. Six other Cuomo staffers who

[continued on from the campaign](#)

are men, including his chief of staff, counselor to the governor, executive deputy secretary, director of state operations, communications director, and deputy secretary for policy and programs.

A National Comparison

While women hold far fewer seats than men in most governments, in most respects New York still falls a bit below average. For example, as of January 2011, women make up 22.6 percent of legislators in New York State. According to the National Conference of State Legislators, women are 23.4 percent of all state legislators nationwide.

Nationally, 2010 women lost seats after a leveling off over the last few cycles, according to the [National Conference of State Legislatures](#)

. Colorado, which in 1893 became the

[first legislature in the world](#)

to elect women representatives, today has the highest ratio of female representatives in its state legislature, with 41 percent of seats held by women. Vermont holds the next highest ratio, with 37.8 percent of seats held by women.

According to the [Center for American Women in Politics](#) at Rutgers University, the total number of women governors in 2011 is six (two Democrats, four Republicans). Three new Republican women governors were elected last year:

[Susana Martinez](#)

(New Mexico);

[Mary Fallin](#)

(Oklahoma) and

[Nikki Haley](#)

(South Carolina). Martinez, a Latina, and Haley, an Indian-American, are the first two women of color to serve as governors. They join re-elected women governors

[Jan Brewer](#)

(Republican of Arizona) and Democrats

[Beverly Perdue](#)

of North Carolina and

[Christine Gregoire](#)

of Washington. Twenty-four states, including New York, have never had a woman governor.

Women's Issues

Studies indicate that women tend to focus on different issue areas than men and often give voice to underrepresented groups. They are more [likely to work](#) on women's rights, health care, children and families, education and housing than their male counterparts. That is not to say, however, that women do not work on other issues, such as the economy, taxation, and infrastructure.

Krueger believes that women's unique experiences mean that they view issues differently. "Women are living longer and ending up in poverty at the end of their lives more than men, and women disproportionately end up being primary caretakers for children and aging parents," she said. "The more people that are at the table making decisions that actually come with these diverse personal experiences, the more you will see change in policy and budget decisions about the priorities of the state."

Regardless of the issues, studies also indicate that women have a different leadership style than men, one that may be more in line with what voters say they want. A [Pew study](#) indicates that the voters believe women are more likely to keep government honest, and a [survey of women representatives](#) by the Center for American Women in Politics finds that women are more likely than men to conduct business in public view.

Behind the Gender Gap

While money plays a role in the shortage of women in the state, other factors may come into play as well. For example, Colorado's relatively high percentage of women may be due to its long history with women's enfranchisement. In a recent [article](#) in the New York Times, author Rebecca Traister noted that, in general, Western states have proved more receptive to women politicians than Eastern ones.

In 2010, women may have fared particularly poorly -- and not only in New York -- because many of the women seeking office were Democrats in a particularly strong year for Republicans. The major focus of the election was on congressional races, where turnout was higher for Republicans than Democrats. Krueger, who was involved in the 16% and Rising initiative, believes that voters' attention to congressional races may have hurt Democratic state legislative candidates. "Bottom of the ticket races are disproportionately impacted by what's happening at the national level," said Krueger. "Many of the women were running in districts where

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overlapping Democratic congressmen lost their seats."

But overall, it seems that there simply are not enough women running. "The total number of female candidates has stayed the same for past several election cycles," said Katie Ziegler, program manager of the [Women's Legislative Network](#) of the National Conference. "Studies have shown that there is no longer gender bias at the ballot. The factor now is that women aren't running."

Research also indicates that women are more likely than men to be asked to run for office instead of deciding on their own. This indicates that recruitment is key to increasing women's representation. The political parties, as well as independent political organizations, many which also conduct trainings such as [Emily's List](#), generally do this.

It may take more coaxing than in the past to get women to run for office, given today's political climate. "One of reasons that we're finding fewer women are running is the tainted perception that politics is not an honorable profession; we need to encourage the best and brightest to become our elected representatives," said Krueger.

Those women who are persuaded to run may not decide soon enough. One independent political committee that supported Democratic women senate candidates in New York, the [Eleanor Roosevelt Legacy Committee](#), believes that while money was an important factor influencing the races' outcomes, time was too. "Something overlooked as a factor is time -- some candidates didn't decide until late in the game to make that decision to be a candidate, which is one resource you can never get back," said Brette McSweeney, the committee's executive director.

While the number of female candidates running last fall was unprecedented, McSweeney believes that the effort was not wasted. "The loss in November is not a defeat for all time.," she said. "The candidates know that they are laying the groundwork for themselves or another female candidate to run in the future."

Ziegler agrees. "Success breed success," she said. "With more attention on women in office, other women may be more likely step up as candidates and those already in office may be more likely to recruit women for their own or other seats."

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