

Women in Tennessee Elections

August 18, 2020 marked the 100th anniversary of the ratification of the 19th Amendment. The date is an important civic milestone in America's history, and one especially near and dear in Tennessee, which was the final and decisive state to vote in favor of the amendment's adoption, providing millions of women across the country access to the ballot box for the very first time.

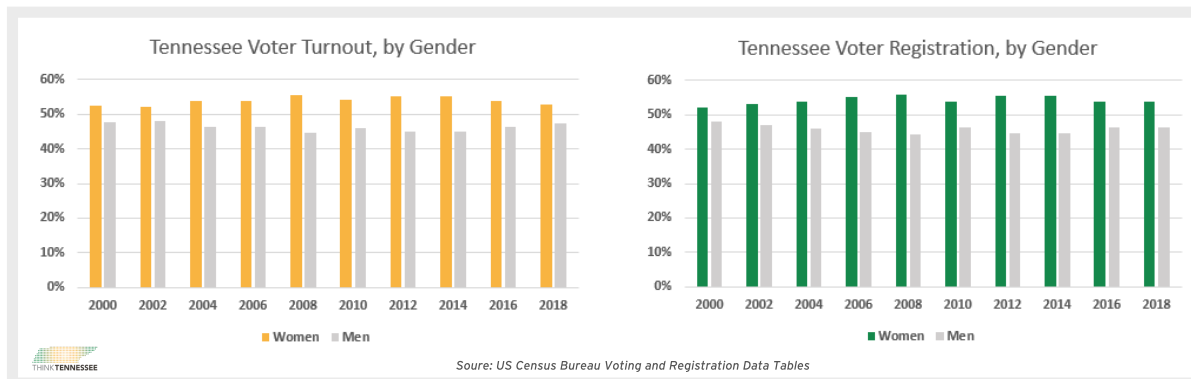
A century on, how has the right to vote impacted Tennessee women's political representation at the ballot box and in elected office?

State and local trends show that women typically outnumber men in both voter registration and turnout. And over time, this power in the voting booth has translated into growing power for women in elected office, though to a lesser extent than in most other states.

Women in the Electorate

Statewide

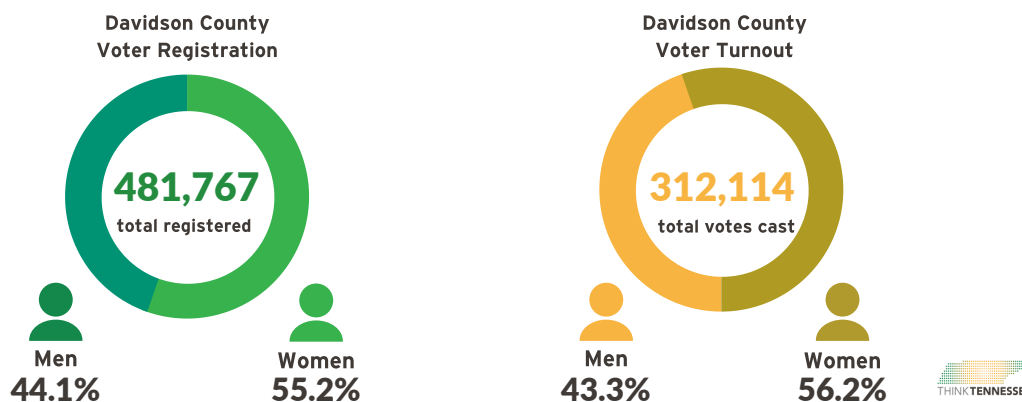
Tennessee women account for 51.2% of the state's total population.(i) Thus, it comes as little surprise that they also consistently constitute a larger proportion of registered and actual voters in recent federal elections relative to men. But the rates cannot be explained by population alone. For instance, differences were most pronounced in 2008, where women accounted for 55.7% of registered voters and 55.5% of voters casting a ballot, approximately 11 percentage points higher than men in both cases.(ii)



Davidson County

Women also make up just over half -- 51.8% -- of the population of Davidson County.(iii) In November 2020, Davidson County voters reflected historic statewide trends with women in the majority of both registered voters and voters casting ballots.(iv)

November 3, 2020 General Election



Women in Political Leadership

How has Tennessee women's power at the ballot box affected their representation in elected office? Tennessee elects a lower rate of women to the state legislature than most other states, though progress in some areas, like Davidson County, has led to more equitable local representation.

Statewide

Of the 32 statewide positions that are elected, 25% are held by women. Tennessee elected its first female representative to the U.S. Senate in 2018 and is one of just 20 states that has never elected a female governor.(v)

Tennessee Women in Statewide Elected Office, 2021



Executive

Governor: 0 out of 1 (0%)

Judicial

Supreme Court: 3 out of 5 (60%)

Court of Appeals: 2 out of 12 (16.7%)

Court of Criminal Appeals: 2 out of 12 (16.7%)

Legislative (Federal)

U.S. Senate: 1 out of 2 (50%)

Over the past 20 years, women have made up an average of 16.9% of Tennessee's elected state legislators, and today, women hold 16.7% of the seats in the General Assembly.(vi) That rate is significantly lower than most other states, where on average, 30.9% of elected state legislators in 2021 are women.(vii) Currently, women of color comprise 4.5% of the statewide legislative body (3 members in the Senate and 3 members in the House).

Women Legislators in the 112th Tennessee General Assembly



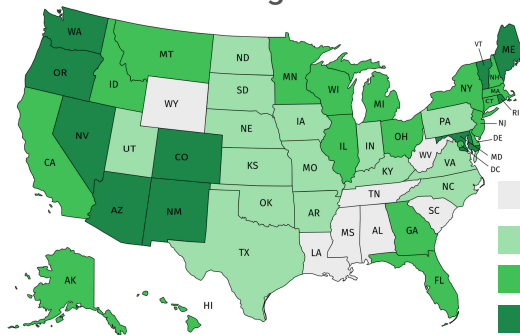
14 out of 99
Representatives



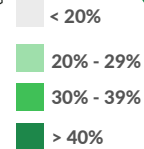
8 out of 33
Senators



Percentage of Women State Legislators, 2021



48th in the % of women in the state legislature:
16.7%



Davidson County

Women make up a larger share of elected offices in Davidson County than in the state as a whole. Of the 73 elected offices in Davidson County today, 54.8% are held by women, with the City Council split 50/50 between men and women.(viii) Nashville's first female city council member assumed her position in 1953, though it was not until 1971 that the first woman was elected to the position without it first being vacated by the death of a husband. (ix) The city elected its first female mayor in 2015.

Davidson County Women in Elected Office, 2021



Metro Council

50% women

20 of 40 seats held by women

23% women of color

9 of 40 seats held by women of color



School Board

89% women

8 of 9 seats held by women

56% women of color

5 of 9 seats held by women of color



Countywide Offices*

53% women

16 of 30 seats held by women

33% women of color

10 of 30 seats held by women of color



General Assembly Delegation

14% women

2 of 14 total Senate (2) and House (0) seats held by women

7% women of color

1 of 14 total Senate (1) and House (0) seats held by women of color

*Countywide offices include: Mayor; Vice Mayor; At-Large Council Seats; Chancery Court Chancellor; Criminal Court Judge; Public Defender; County Trustee; General Sessions Judge; Sheriff; Circuit, Criminal and Juvenile Court Clerks; County Clerk; Register of Deeds; Criminal Court Judge, Div 2 and General Session Judge Div 10.



Notes

- (i) U.S. Census Bureau. (July 2019). Quick Facts Population Estimates. See <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/TN,US/PST045219>.
- (ii) U.S. Census Bureau Voting and Registration. (2000-2018). The Census collects data on characteristics of American voters after every national election through the Current Population Survey. The data are estimated projections based on self-reported voting behavior.
- (iii) U.S. Census Bureau. (July 2019). Quick Facts Population Estimates. See <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/nashvilledavidsonbalancetennessee,davidsoncountytennessee/PST045219>.
- (iv) Davidson County Election Commission.
- (v) Center for American Women and Politics. (2021). Facts, State by State Information. See <https://cawp.rutgers.edu/state-by-state>.
- (vi) Center for American Women and Politics. (2021). State Fact Sheet - Tennessee. See https://cawp.rutgers.edu/state_fact_sheets/tn.
- (vii) Center for American Women and Politics. (2021). Women in State Legislature 2021. See <https://cawp.rutgers.edu/women-state-legislature-2021>.
- (viii) At-large Councilmembers appear in both the "Metro Council" and "Countywide Offices" tally.
- (ix) Jessica Bliss. (September 22, 2015). Metro Council's female pioneers paved way for Megan Barry. The Tennessean. See <https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/2015/09/22/metro-councils-female-pioneers-paved-way-megan-barry/72641618/>.