



LONE STAR PARITY PROJECT

**STATE OF THE
TEXAS
WOMAN
2021**



INTRODUCTION

The Lone Star Parity Project is a 501(c)(3) nonpartisan nonprofit dedicated to sharing the research and stories of women and femmes in Texas politics with a goal of educating the public regarding political parity across all levels of government. Our main goals are to share the advice and stories of participants, aggregate and analyze historical election research, compile qualitative attributes, and implement regional specific solutions throughout Texas.



LONE STAR *Parity* PROJECT





IMPORTANT DEFINITIONS: What do these words mean?

Texas Politics: When we use the term “Texas politics”, our entity is referring to any changes entering or resulting from activism in the political sphere of Texas. This includes work that is accomplished outside of Texas state barriers so long as it affects or impact persons from Texas. When we use the term “politics”, this is not limited to public officials or candidates. We are charged with the duty to gain the perspective of people who are outside of the formal structure of Texas government to gather clarity and insight on the political process. Additionally, we do not limit our research to the traditional understanding of “Texans”; we include any people who are born, raised, or currently reside in Texas, regardless of their background.

Femmes: For the purpose of our entity, femmes is defined as a person who presents and acts in a traditionally feminine manner. “Feminine manner” is a self-identifying quality that is also inclusive, but not limited to, transitioning, transgender, questioning, non-binary, gender fluid, and gender non-conforming persons.

Intersectional: Intersectionality is the cross-section of various identities, both physical and non-physical, that a person identifies with. An intersectional woman is a woman or femme that identifies with a variety of communities and interests.

Near Parity: The term “near parity” is our own coined term which indicates that an entity is *close* to reaching an equal state of representation between men and women. For report purposes, near parity will represent areas with women serving in 40%-50% of all elected offices in a given area.

Parity: The term “political parity” refers to an equal state of representation for intersectional women and femmes across all levels of government. We view an “equal state of representation” as a proportional number of women and men elected that actively represent the interests of the community from which they hail. Percentage wise, this would mean women serving at 50%.



BACKGROUND

The State of Texas lacks in political representation for intersectional women, ranking in the bottom half of states in terms of women’s representation in elected office. Without fair and active representation in the political process, women’s voices are muted from key decision-making opportunities.

ISSUE: Why is gender parity important to Texas politics?

Women make up a quarter of elected office in Texas.



Women have a greater difficulty in seeking federal public office than statewide positions. A woman did not represent Texas in United States Congress until 1966. Only one woman has ever served as a U.S. Senator for Texas. At the statewide level, women serve in a slightly greater percentage of office. Only two women have served as a Texas Governor, both being Democrats. Women have held around 20% of elected seats in both the Texas House of Representatives and Texas Senate since 1992, the first coined "Year of the Woman."ⁱ

Texas ranks 37th out of 50 in the United States for women’s representation.



The percentage of women serving in Texas public office meets the national average at 24%. Women of color serve at an even lower rate. Though the Lone Star state does not rank in the bottom 10 states like Wyoming at 16%, it has a long climb towards political parity. Currently, only Nevada has women serving in elected office at parity. In addition, Texas is home to 13 of the largest cities in the United States yet only one, Fort Worth, is governed by a female mayor.ⁱⁱ

There are barriers preventing women from winning that men do not face.



Women candidates face far greater obstacles during a campaign for public office than their male counterparts. Research indicates that women face greater scrutiny from media, especially for topics including family life and clothing. Compounding this, women also suffer from not gaining equal campaign media coverage compared to men. Women also tend to face greater difficulties if they take part in a partisan race. Women who either represent the Democratic or Republican party will eventually face opposition from the party itself and other nominated candidates.ⁱⁱⁱ



SOLUTION: How will Lone Star Parity Project answer the call for political parity?

Our long-term goal is to see more women and femmes elected to public office in Texas. Through the use of our two branches, research and features, we are attempting to disrupt the status quo of public office in the Lone Star State. We work fervently to bring more information to women+ regarding the resources and successful trends that can be used for future candidacies across the political spectrum.

Research: Within our research branch, we aggregate multiple sources of data into one singular database that provides new insight into local political representation in the State of Texas. This database includes present and past trends related to women running and winning seats in elected office. We study races from the federal to the local level, including primaries and primary runoffs to produce analysis and patterns based on these numbers. In addition, we have information on parity in appointed positions and student governments on college campuses. We use this historic knowledge to interpret how it affects future candidates and how we can help women and femmes interested in running for office succeed.

Features: Within our features branch, we humanize the stories of women and femmes involved in politics across the State of Texas. We share leadership journeys of folks who are self-proclaimed activists, student political leaders, party affiliates, associated non-profiters, candidates, and elected officials. Our wide variety of feature subjects gives us the opportunity to interview and understand the stories surrounding the leaders in politics at all levels. By sharing these stories, we are breaking down the barrier that women and femmes face in political media: they are not only overlooked but rarely have their stories shared regarding quality aspects of their campaign, their experiences, and their lives.

The combination: Combining our quantitative results from our research with the qualitative insight shared in our features allows us to witness a larger and more vibrant picture that is “women and femmes in Texas politics.” We are able to provide tailored information for each geographic region of Texas for women+ across all partisan identities that gives insight into the best tips, practices, and advice when running for office. Our tailored information provides a measuring stick and path for increasing the number of women and femmes serving in office in the Lone Star State.



OVERVIEW



Drive-thru voting location in Harris County



Congresswoman Beth Van Duyne, TX-24 (left) and Candace Valenzuela (right)



Justice Jane Bland (left) swearing in to the Texas Supreme Court in 2019

2020 presented new challenges that changed the landscape of Texas politics. The COVID-19 pandemic forced the general election into new approaches, seen with expansive mail-in and drive-thru voting mechanisms. Many candidates, elected officials, and activists chose to shift their messaging to an online-only platform. This did not deter voters.

Almost 17 million Texans were registered to vote this year—the most registered voters that the state has ever seen.^{iv} Texas also witnessed the highest voter turnout it had seen in 28 years following the November 3rd general election.

Texans elected Beth Van Duyne (R) in 2020—the first new Republican woman in 24 years to represent Texas in the United States Congress. She ran in one of the most expensive and resource-driven congressional races against Candace Valenzuela (D) who, if elected, would have become the first Afro-Latina in Congress.^v

Van Duyne will join Congressmember Kay Granger (R) and a record number of women in the United States Congress, including the largest number of Republican women and women of color.^{vi}

In Texas, there were 62 county, state, and federal-level seats that witnessed head-to-head women campaigns, giving each seat a 100% chance of a woman being elected.

Additionally, Texas Supreme Court Justice Jane Bland (R) secured more votes in the November 2020 election than *any* other candidate in Texas history. Bland secured 6.5 million votes, breaking 55% of all votes in an increasingly competitive state. She secured 87,551 more votes than U.S. Senator John Cornyn.



RESEARCH

Within our research branch, our team works diligently to uncover both historical and current trends in elected rates for women and femmes. By combining past and present statistical analysis, we provide insight into what the future of Texas politics holds.

COMPARISON TO 2018: Was 2018 an anomaly or trend?

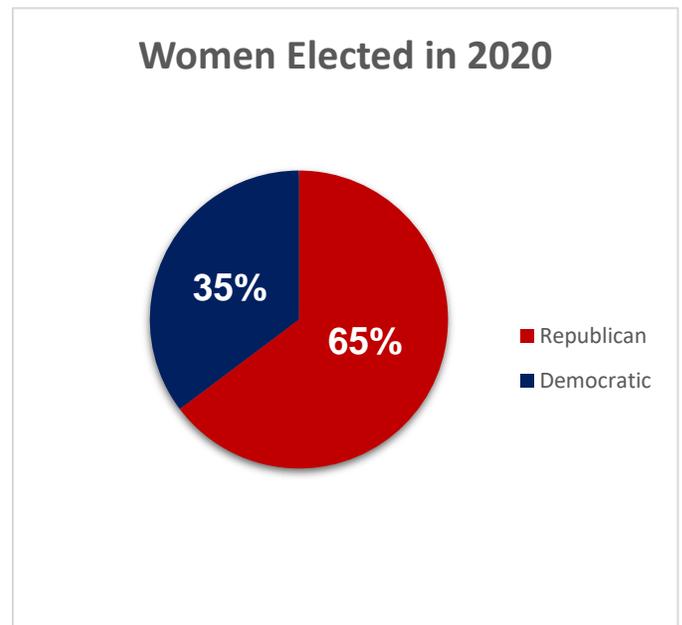
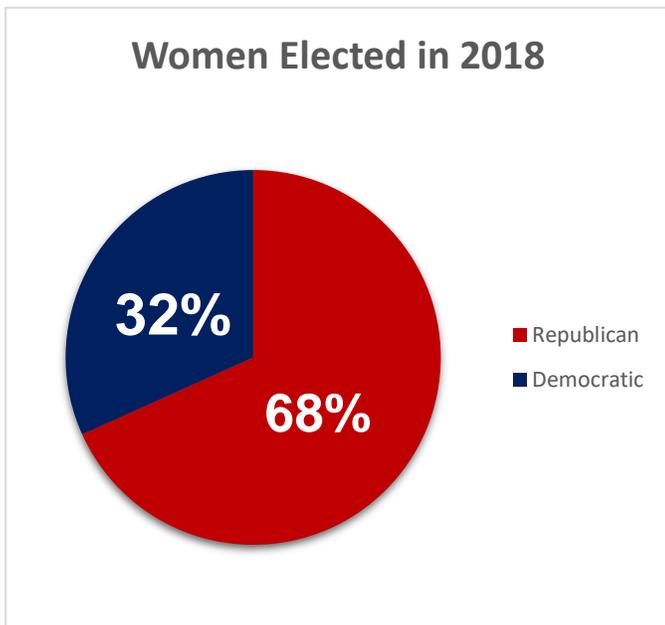
Without more context, there is still uncertainty in calling 2018 a trend of upwards representation for women. While local level gains were made in 2018, it seems like women lost ground in 2020. This is partially explained through different positions up for re-election in 2020 than 2018. But the facts remain and cannot be ignored: parity continues to be a dream, not a reality. Here is our comparison of key 2018 stats:

Filings

22% of filers were women in 2020 compared to 36% in 2018. Women’s hesitance to file for public office is the first implicit barrier that affects lower representation.

Election Results

In 2018, 1,213 total women were elected. In 2020, 570 total women were elected. The near identical split between party representation in 2018 and 2020 closely reflects the state's local partisan elections split of 75/25, while higher offices trend toward 50/50. Regardless of partisanship, more women running means a bigger slice of pie. And that's good for everyone.





Top 10 Counties

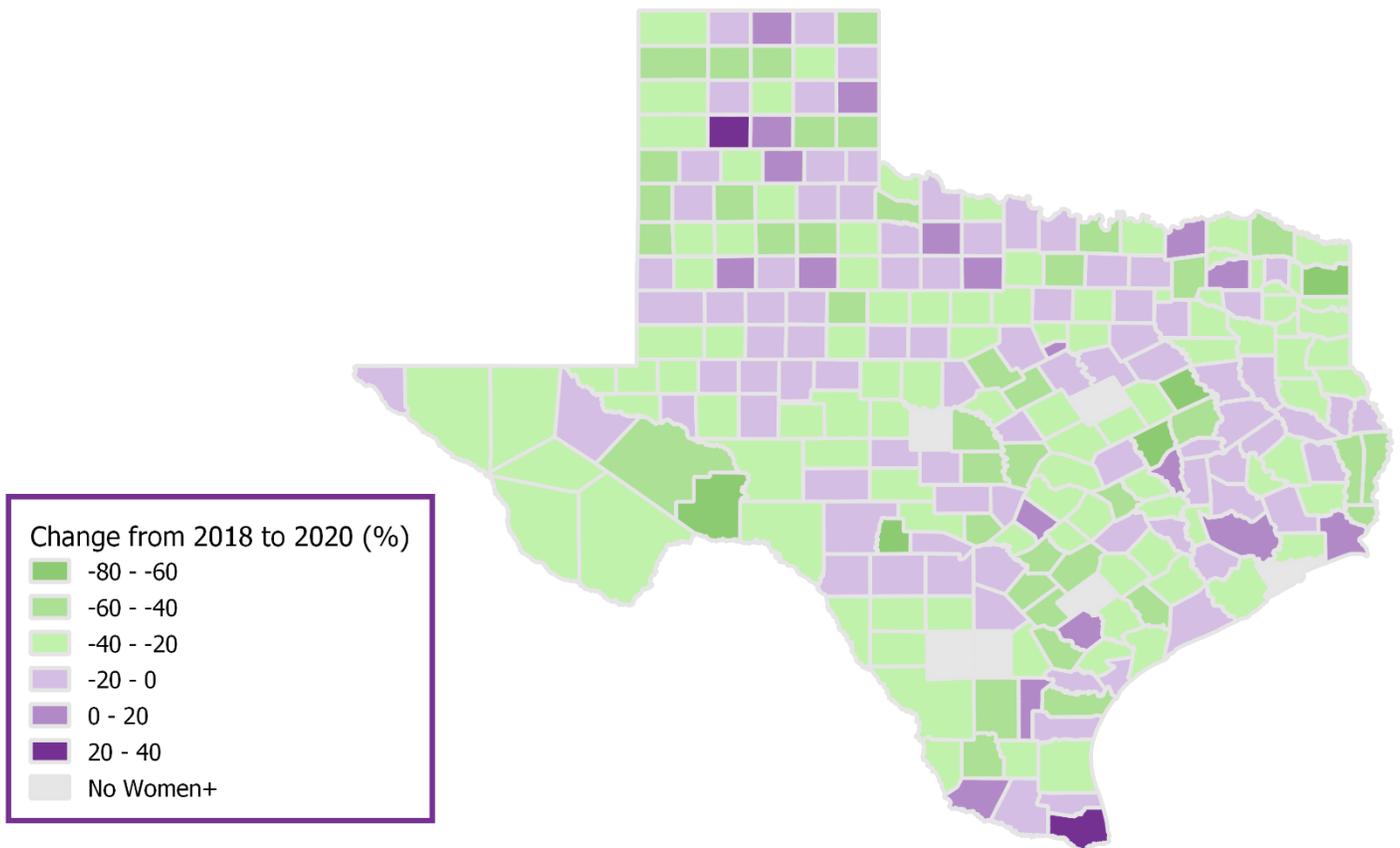
These counties elected the most women comparative to the number of elected seats. Travis County was the only county to maintain its top 10 ranking from 2018.

County	% of elected office held by women in 2018
Cass	81.8%
Freestone	80.0%
Irion	75.0%
Terrell	75.0%
Travis	71.4%
Terry	71.4%
Bee	70.0%
Parmer	70.0%
Duval	70.0%
Falls	66.7%

County	% of elected office held by women in 2020
Armstrong	60.0%
Lynn	60.0%
Sherman	60.0%
Dallas	50.0%
Glasscock	50.0%
Kennedy	50.0%
McCulloch	50.0%
Randall	50.0%
Travis	50.0%
San Patricio	45.5%

County Changes

Below is a map that shows the changes in percent of women serving in office for each county from 2018 to 2020. Most counties decreased in the percentage of women that won elected seats in 2020.





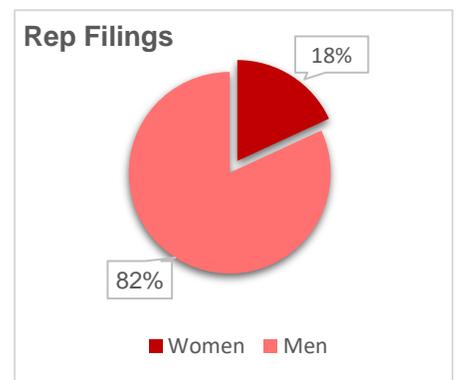
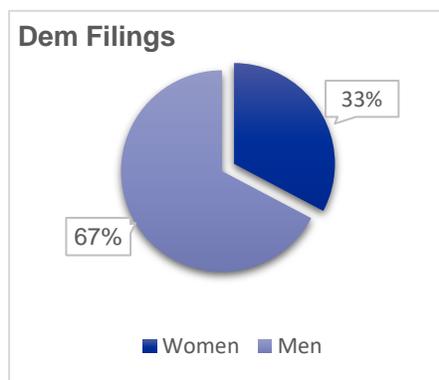
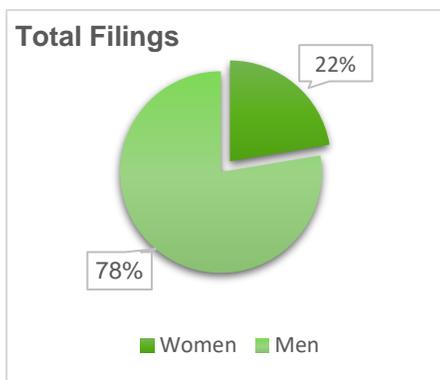
CURRENT TRENDS: What is happening in the Lone Star state?

After two years of data compilation, we are able to provide novel analysis that gives a deeper understanding of gender political parity — and what it will take to reach it — here in Texas. This is the *second* report we have produced that visualizes an aggregated representation of parity research down to county-level seats from all 254 counties in the Lone Star State.

QUANTITATIVE DATA POINTS

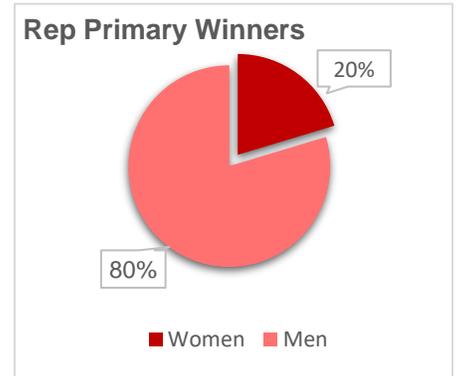
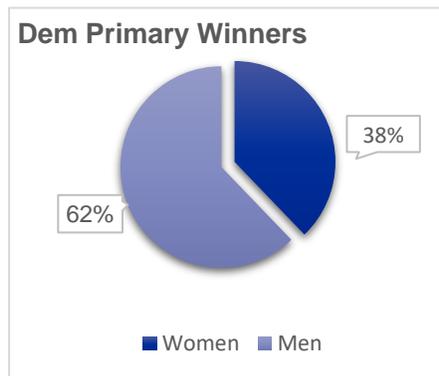
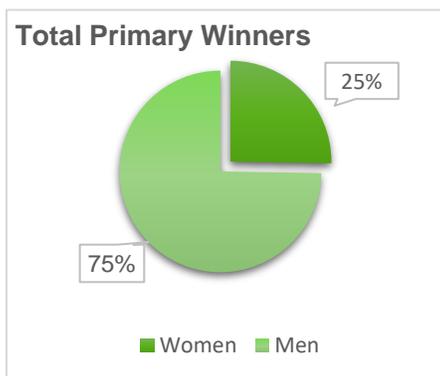
Filings in 2020

During the 2020 election cycle, 1,091 women filed to run for office while 3,788 men filed. This can also be roughly said as: for every woman that runs for office, 3.5 men also run. The gap in the number of women versus men *filing* for office is comparable to the gap in the number of women versus men *winning* elected seats. This indicates that when women run, they win at the same rate.



Primary Elections 2020

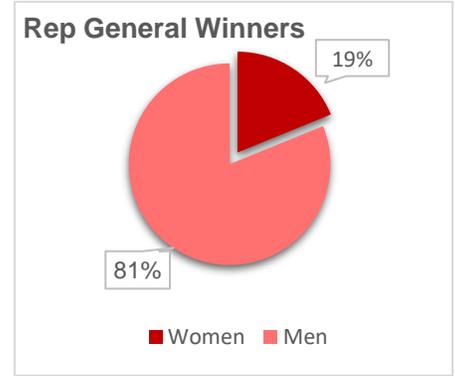
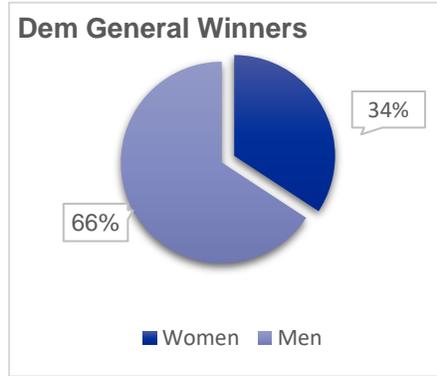
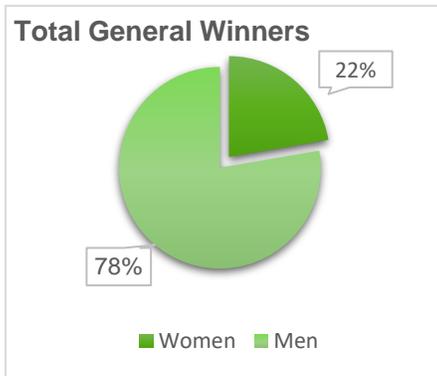
Primary elections only exist in partisan elections, meaning candidates who run for a specific political party. Women make up 25% of primary winners, and 19% of primary losers. Democratic and Republican women both see an increase in the percentage of women who *win* their primaries from the percentage of women who file.





General Elections 2020

In total, 570 women were elected in 2020. This means that over half of the total women who filed to run for office *won*. Of all elected women, 64.74% were Republican and 35.26% were Democrats. Republican women won at a higher rate than Democratic women in their general elections. This indicates that women running as Republicans in a partisan general election are more likely to win than women running as Democrats. Partisan elections tend to occur for county-level, statewide, and federal elected offices.



By Individual

Over 1,000 women filed to run for office at the county level or higher in the State of Texas in 2020, only making up 22.36% of total people filing for office. 570 women ended up securing an elected seat, totaling 22.29% of people who won an elected county-level or higher seat in 2020. There were more Republican women filing, winning primaries, and becoming elected than Democratic women. This pattern by party is the same for men and tracks with the partisan makeup of local elections in Texas.

	Total Women	% of Women	Total Men	% of Men
Total Filed	1,091	22.36%	3,788	77.64%
Total Primary Winners	213	25.27%	630	74.73%
Total General Winners	570	22.29%	1,987	77.71%

	Total Dem. Women	% of Dem. Women	Total Dem. Men	% of Dem. Men
Total Filed	472	32.73%	970	67.27%
Total Primary Winners	90	37.82%	148	62.18%
Total General Winners	201	34.24%	386	65.76%

	Total Rep. Women	% of Rep. Women	Total Rep. Men	% of Rep. Men
Total Filed	591	33.67%	2,671	81.88%
Total Primary Winners	123	37.02%	1482	79.67%
Total General Winners	369	37.95%	1,591	81.17%



By Office

Below is a breakdown of parity statistics based on the type of elected office. It is important to keep in mind that each county in Texas provides their own unique variety of elected positions, based upon their chartering documents.

Elected Offices At or Above Parity	# of Women Elected (2020)	% of Women Elected (2020)
Judge, County Civil Court at Law	1	100.0%
District Clerk	8	80.0%
Judge, Criminal District Court	4	80.0%
County Tax Assessor-Collector	182	76.2%
County Treasurer	3	60.0%
Chief Justice, State Court of Appeals	4	57.1%
Judge, County Court at Law	13	54.2%
County Clerk	2	50.0%
Judge, County Criminal Court at Law	2	50.0%
Member, State Board of Education	4	50.0%

There are 10 elected offices in Texas that have women serving at or above parity—meaning 50% or more of these seats are filled by women. We see women elected at parity in county offices that are less visible, but just as essential, like Tax Assessor-Collector, District, Clerk, Treasurer, and County Clerk. Higher profile positions like County Judge, County Commissioner, State Representative, and Congressional Representative, continue to have the lowest parity percentages.

Most Populous Elected Offices	# of Available Offices (2020)	% of Women Elected (2020)
County Tax Assessor-Collector	239	76.2%
District Judge	226	40.7%
Justice of the Peace	69	37.7%
District Attorney	81	33.3%
State Representative	150	25.3%
County Attorney	198	24.2%
United States Representative	36	19.4%
County Commissioner	525	9.3%
County Constable	647	5.3%
Sheriff	246	4.9%

The most populous offices are elected offices that have the largest number of seats available across Texas. With more seats available for election, it would be assumed that women have more opportunities to be elected into these roles, however, that is rarely the case. Why are women not running for these offices?

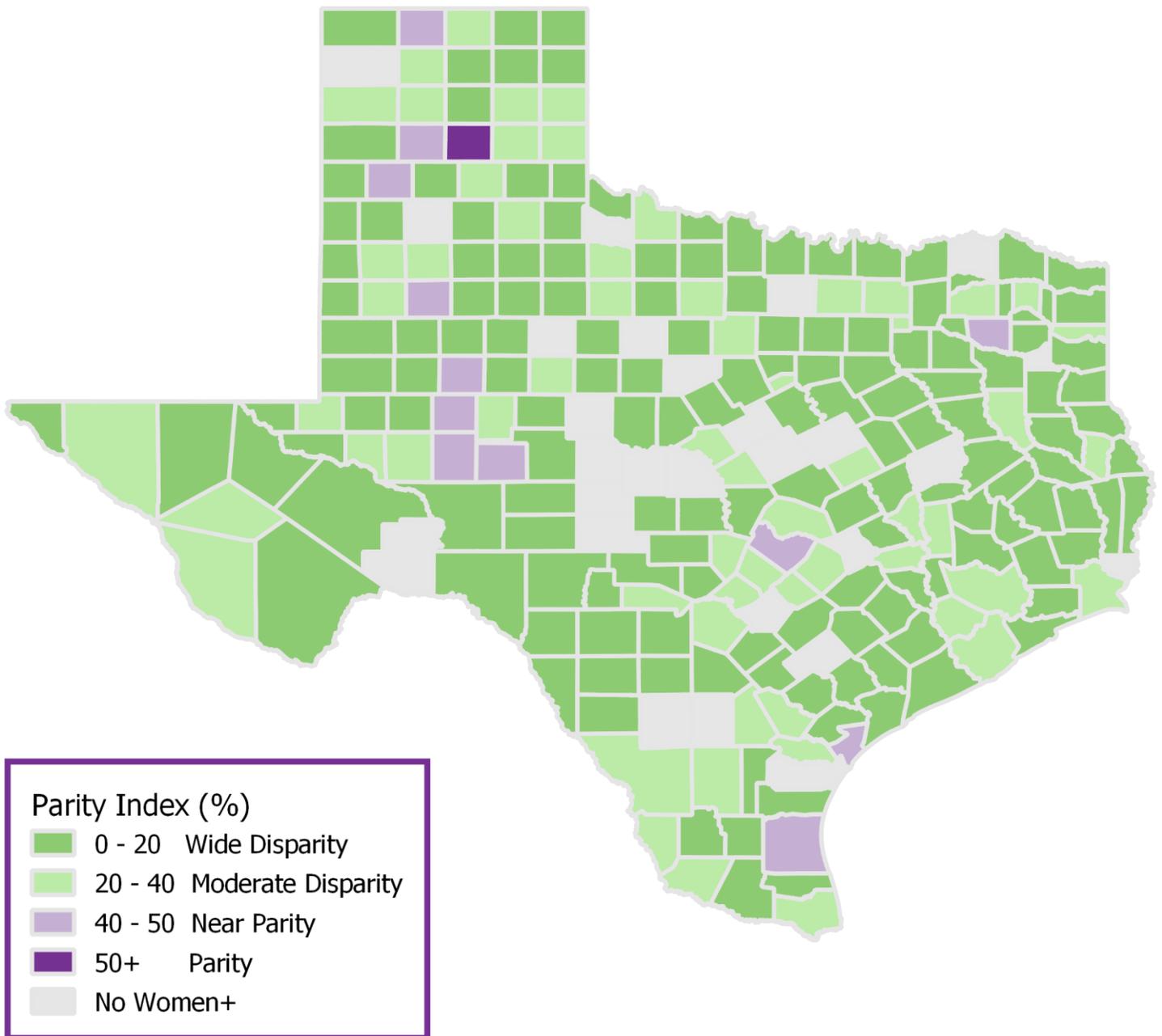


By County

Filing Parity Statistics by County:

Did women make up 50% of the people in your county who filed to run for office?

Out of 254 counties, there were 22 counties that saw 0 women file for candidacy and only 1 county that had filing parity. It is not enough until every county has women running at parity.

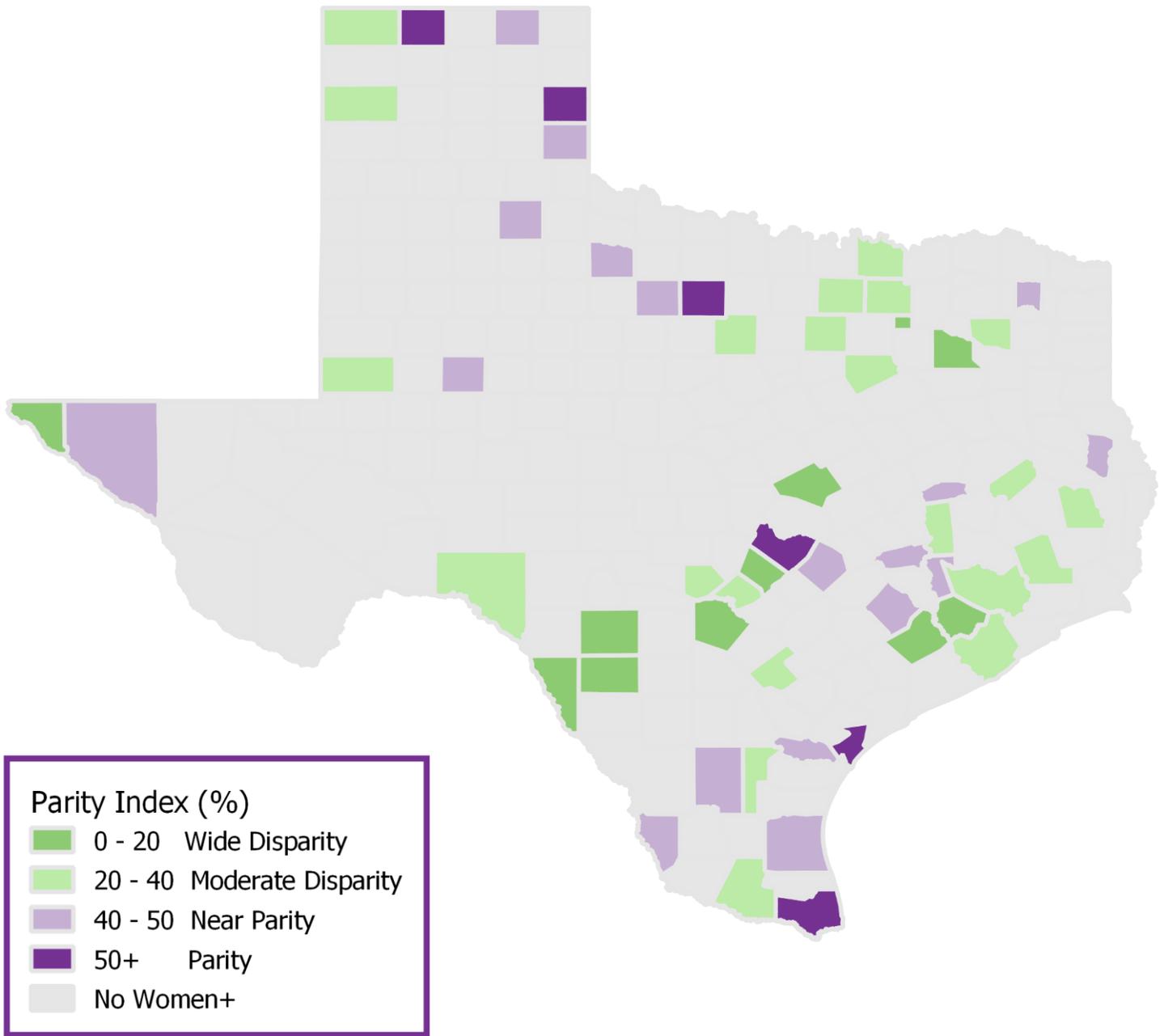




Primary Election Parity Statistics by County:

Did women make up 50% of the people in your county who won their primary election?

Nearly half of counties had zero women run in a primary. This may indicate that the women who file are unopposed, incumbents, or that women are unwilling to enter a race that already has a candidate with the same partisan identity.

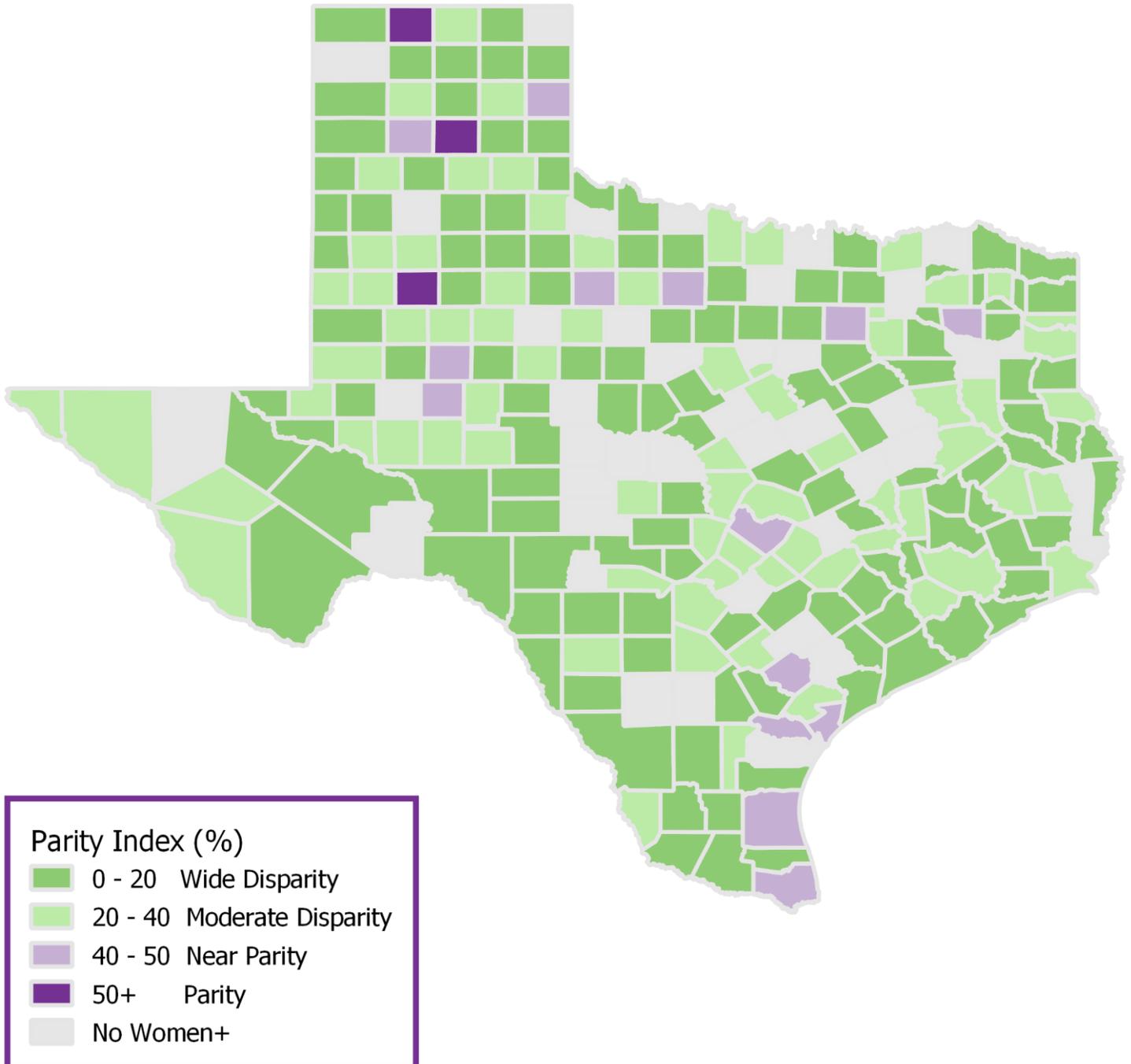




General Election Parity Statistics by County:

Did women make up 50% of the people in your county who won their general election?

Out of 254 counties, only 9 counties elected women at parity and an additional 17 counties are near parity. 21.3% of all women elected in 2020 come from these near parity or at parity counties.





QUALITATIVE DATA POINTS

Each time we interview someone for our Features branch, we gather important qualitative data points, shedding light on the underlying characteristics of women and femmes in the Texas political sphere.



The inspiration to enter politics stemmed from the 2016 election

A majority of the women we interviewed indicated that the 2016 election cycle inspired them to become involved in politics. This was a pattern exemplified across Democrats, Republicans, and nonpartisan folks alike. Most of the candidates we interviewed further indicated that the hateful rhetoric shared during the election cycle motivated them to run for office.



Our moms are our first role models

Almost *all* of the women we featured said that their mom was their first role model. Interviewees looked up to their moms for their strength, determination, and passion. We heard the stories of moms who studied all night after working all day, who raised children as a single parent, and who advocated for others in the community.



Education and healthcare were the top community concerns

The top two issues facing interviewees' communities were based in education and healthcare. The education related issues included student debt mitigation and school district transparency. The healthcare related issues centered around the accessibility of healthcare. Women across the political spectrum prioritized these issues.



Most common piece of advice: "Just do it."

When asked what advice our interviewees had for women aspiring to enter politics, the most common phrase was "just do it." Interviewees encourage young women to follow their dreams and jump head-first into politics, regardless of their fears. Most interviewees compared their experience running for office or starting a movement as a "leap of faith."



COVID-19 created an era of virtual campaigning

Running for office in 2020 looked drastically different because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Most candidates cited that they had to shift their campaigning efforts to online-only platforms to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Our elected interviewees were created new avenues of accessibility to constituents like virtual townhalls, online court hearings, and video call office hours.



FEATURES

We interviewed sixty-one incredible women and femmes, sharing the stories of student activists, elected officials, campaign gurus, and candidates alike. With each interview, we capture key qualitative data points that present trends specific to different geographic locations of Texas. While each feature shared the incredible stories of political women and femmes in and from Texas, some features stood out for their historic capacity or inspiring qualities.

YOUNG CHANGEMAKERS: The next generation of activists



Andrea Flores was the first Latina elected as Senior Class President at Texas A&M. Now, she is the youngest commissioner for Dallas County’s Zoning Commission.



Haley Ariyibi embodies what it means to be authentically herself, all while serving as the Speaker of the Senate as UT Arlington. She is the first Black woman to be elected to this role.



Misaki Collins serves as the youngest commissioner for Irving’s Planning and Zoning Commission. She volunteered with March to the Polls in the 2020 election.



Anahí Ponce is an El Paso-based frontera activist who founded the leadership organization Chicas de Chuco. She is studying for her doctorate in Mexican American studies at UT.



Vanessa Diosdado was the youngest candidate and only Hispanic woman running to represent Sulphur Springs City Council at only twenty years old.



Ariana Rodriguez founded Islander Feminists, advocated for sex ed awareness and brought free menstrual hygiene products to Texas A&M at Corpus Christi.



POLITICAL ICONS: Well-known names in the Texas political scene



Averie Bishop was the first Asian American Miss Lufkin and Miss Dallas. She founded the Tulong Foundation, an organization that provides resources to girls in the Philippines.



Lavinia Masters is the namesake for Texas HB 8, a law rededicating state funds to testing backlogged rape kits. Successfully, the Act passed in its first legislative session.



Priscilla Yeveirino is a cofounder of the Sunrise Movement and introduced Senator Sanders during his first and final rallies of his presidential campaign in 2020.



Armetta Lashun created WISE (We're in Search of Equality), an organization dedicated to gender woman studies. She was also a speaker at Black Lives Matter rallies in Dallas.



Este Poder Team (Emily Pinal Oviedo, Lina Ortega, and Belen Iniguez) raise awareness on fundamental issues affecting communities of color in rural Texas.



Adryana Aldeen is a frequent political analyst of NBC Universal-Telemundo, Univision and CNN Español, becoming a revered conservative activist.



Cecilia Silva works for ReflectUs, served as Speaker of the Senate while at UT Arlington, and advocated for free menstrual products on campus.



Melissa Alfaro is a co-founder of the Hey Chica movement. She made headlines during the 2020 election when she hosted a pop-up voter initiative with sixteen elected Latinas.



BALLOT BREAKERS: Candidates who shaped Texas politics this term



Genevieve Collins was a first-time candidate who ran for United States Congressional District 32. She defeated four other men in the Republican primary election.



Sima Ladjevardian was a candidate for United States Congressional District 2. She would have been the first Iranian immigrant elected to Congress from Texas.



Cydnei Drake ran for Carrollton-Farmers Branch ISD. If elected, she would have become the first trustee from Irving, a city within the district.



MJ Hegar ran for United States Senate. She was also the namesake for a class action opposing the Department of Defense bar against women in ground combat units.



Chrysta Castañeda ran as the Democratic nominee for the Texas Railroad Commission, drawing experience from her careers as an industrial engineer and oil & gas attorney.



Phyllis Martinez Gonzalez presided over the Title IV-D Court located in El Paso, Texas for the past seven years. She recently ran for the 383rd Judicial District.



Veronica Carbajal ran for Mayor of El Paso, following in her great grandfather's footsteps, who was a mayor in a rural town in Mexico. She ran while working as an attorney.



Staci Williams presides over the 101st District Court in Dallas, ran for Texas Supreme Court, Place 7, and founded the Citizen's Civil Academy to expose folks to civil court.



THE HONORABLES: Public officials who represent the Lone Star state



Jasmine Crockett serves as the Representative for Texas House District 100 in the Dallas area. She first ran for office at the young age of twenty-eight.



Cristal Retana is a first-generation American and only the second Latina elected to Farmers Branch City Council, despite half of the population being Hispanic.



Lindsey Wynne was appointed as a District Court Judge in Collin County by Governor Greg Abbott. She secured her second term following the 2020 election.



Erin Nowell serves as a Justice for Texas Fifth District Court of Appeals, Place 5. Her father's murder sparked her passion for justice and politics, leading to a legal career.



Vanessa Fuentes serves on Austin City Council—a race that she won by a landslide against three other opponents. She was the only woman to run for a seat in her district.



Jessica González serves in the Texas House of Representatives, District 104. She was a founding member of the Texas LGBTQ Caucus.



Andrea Bouressa was appointed as a District Court Judge in Collin County by Governor Greg Abbott. She also secured her second term following the 2020 election.



Ann Zadeh represents District 9 on the Fort Worth City Council, a position she has held for the past six years. When she first ran, Ann was a first-time candidate.



CONCLUSION

Trends found in the State of the Texas Woman 2021 indicate that Texas is not nearing parity as quickly as expected. Based on data collected from 2016 through 2020, Texas has achieved incremental gains. The strides women made in the 2018 election mirrors the 1992 election when the United States — and Texas — witnessed a spike in women's representation. However, women are observing the same stagnation that we experienced following the 1992 election.

We do see clusters of parity that exist in certain offices and within a significant number of counties. But at the county level, 384 out of the 2,004 available 2020 seats are held by women. This means women only hold 19.2% of elected countywide office. The state district and statewide level fair better for parity representation, with 185 out of the 553 available seats held by women, or 33.5%.

Republican women have more potential to be elected, with 76.65% of offices being held by Republicans. Republican women also have a 62.4% success rate when they do run, an advantage over their Democrat counterparts that sit at 42.6%. Both success rates run several percentage points higher than their male rivals.

For every woman that ran in 2020, 3.47 men did, with women having slightly more likelihood of winning. Women need to run at parity to win at parity.

Lone Star Parity Project is conducting groundbreaking research on the Texas judiciary system. We are the leading entity tracking judicial representation down to the county level. With the limited number of judges and justices this cycle, it's hard to draw any one conclusion, although some show potential in near parity numbers. The complexity of the Texas judicial system adds layers of analysis, with certain positions and levels showing converse trends to each other.

We are continually expanding our research into future and past election cycles. As of now, we have gathered data from the 2016 election cycle onward and have plans to continue mining historical data. We are actively analyzing statewide appointee trends as far back as 1995, when George W. Bush served as the Governor of Texas. Currently, our research includes county-level, statewide, state district, and federal elected offices in Texas. We are also looking to expand down to the city level election information, as well as other district positions, such as water districts and school boards in conjunction with partner organizations.

Find more of our research at lonestarparityproject.org or on social media at @lonestarparity. Better solutions start with parity. Join us.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Lone Star Parity Project cannot express its full gratitude to the incredible team that brings these reports to the public. Without the essential determination and diligence of the LSPP team, this report would not have been possible. Thank you to the following:

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TECHNICAL NOTE

All raw data information is sourced from the Texas Secretary of State website, the Association of Counties, the individual county election websites, and individually contacted county election offices.

ENDNOTES

i "Texas." Center for American Women in Politics, www.cawp.rutgers.edu/state_fact_sheets/tx

ii "Largest US Cities By Population," *Top 1,000 Largest Cities In The US | 2016 Population Data*, www.biggestuscities.com/

iii "Women in Government: A Comparison of Local and Statewide Political Candidacy," www.researchgate.com

iv "Turnout and Voter Registration Figures (1970-current)," Texas Secretary of State, www.sos.state.tx.us

v "Texas District 24 2020 Race," Open Secrets – Center for Responsive Politics, www.opensecrets.org

vi "Record number of house GOP women just one of many 'firsts' for 117th Congress," Roll Call, www.rollcall.com