

Study: Women underrepresented in state government

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Although more women serve in state legislatures than ever before, they are underrepresented compared with their percentage of the population, a study finds.

Women constituted 54 percent of voters in the 2008 elections but only 24 percent of state legislators, according to a report from the Center for American Women and Politics, a unit of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University. In addition, after nearly 30 years of steady increases, the number of women state legislators leveled off in the past decade.

The report, "Poised to Run: Women's Pathways to the State Legislatures," concludes more can be done by political parties, organizations and women themselves.

Highlights of the study are:

Women need to be encouraged to run for office -- and are more likely than men to run for office because they were recruited rather than deciding to run on their own

Women candidates need to attract support from political parties; those who reach the legislature usually do so with party support

Organizations are encouraging women to run for office, but they could be more active in candidate recruitment

The pool of women candidates is larger than commonly believed

More funding and training can help women win

Researchers conducted a nationwide survey that compared women and men in legislatures, examining their decisions to seek office, previous political experiences, and personal backgrounds. The project was funded by leadership matching grant from the Barbara Lee Family Foundation, project grants from the Susie Tompkins Buell Foundation and Wendy Mackenzie, as well as support from other donors.