

# Will Women Lose Ground in National Politics in 2010?

Despite Record Number of Women Candidates, Fewer May Hold Office After Nov. 2

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If you believe [Sarah Palin](#), a "stampede of pink elephants" is about to storm the country as part of an election year sweep by women in national politics.

Record numbers of women filed to run for the [U.S. House and Senate](#) during the primaries, and a record-tying 10 will appear on ballots for governor in eight states.

While it's likely that [female candidates](#) will make inroads in some corners this year, the net result for women in national elective office could be a loss, experts say.

"For the first time in 30 years, we could see a decline in the number of women in Congress," said Debbie Walsh, who runs the nonpartisan [Center for American Women in Politics](#) at Rutgers University, which tracks female candidates nationwide.

A bleak election outlook for [Democrats and incumbents](#), which includes a majority of women on ballots this year, has set the stage for women to give back some seats to men, particularly in swing districts where Democratic women were swept up in the excitement surrounding President Obama in 2008 or elected during a down year for Republicans in 2006.

## 2010 Election Maps: Follow the Senate, House and Governors' Races

Seventeen women currently serve in the U.S. Senate.

And while 11 are not up for re-election this year, women need to win six seats to maintain their presence, a number that seems far from guaranteed.

[Sens. Kirsten Gillibrand](#) of New York and [Barbara Mikulski](#) of Maryland -- Democratic incumbents -- and Republican candidate [Kelly Ayotte](#) of New Hampshire, are likely to defeat their male challengers Nov. 2.

But with less than a week to go, female candidates in 10 other Senate races face less certain prospects, according to the latest ABC News ratings on the races.

Republicans [Linda McMahon](#) of Connecticut and [Christine O'Donnell](#) of Delaware are trailing in the polls, while female Democratic candidates from North Carolina to Iowa, Missouri and Arkansas also appear to be in trouble. Nevada Republican [Sharon Angle](#) and Washington Sen. [Patty Murray](#) are both locked in tight races that are too close to call.

Meanwhile, 91 Democratic women and 47 Republican women are running for the U.S. House, which many

political prognosticators believe will ultimately come under Republican control.

## House Could Lose Female Reps

"A few new Republican women may be elected this time, and the number of Republican women may go up by a few," said Walsh, "but we're not talking about a big increase."

Of the 73 women currently serving in the 435-member House chamber, 56 are Democrats and 17 are Republicans. A bigger loss for Democrats, coupled with a modest gain by Republicans, could yield the overall decrease in female representation, Walsh said.

The outlook for women holding gubernatorial offices is also mixed this year.

Despite a record-tying number of candidates -- five Democrats and five Republicans -- running in eight states nationwide, women could potentially hold fewer governorships in 2011 than they do now.

Six women currently serve as governors, and two will continue to serve into 2011.

Historic races in [Oklahoma](#) and [New Mexico](#), where female candidates are going head-to-head for the chance to become their state's first female governor, mean two certain pickups for women.

Republican [Nikki Haley](#) appears poised to make history in South Carolina as the state's first woman and Indian-American governor, and Arizona Gov. [Jan Brewer](#), the only female gubernatorial incumbent running this year, is on track for another term.

But [Meg Whitman](#) of California, [Alex Sink](#) of Florida, [Libby Mitchell](#) of Maine and [Leslie Petersen](#) of Wyoming face less certain prospects.

What does all of this mean?

"You can't make a trend out of one year," said Walsh. "2012 will be the year when the playing field is most level because of redistricting. ... If we don't do something -- and I mean that collectively -- this disparity will continue. This could be a bad year in the sense that the numbers go down, but our good years aren't that great either."