

When Women Lead

*A Decade of Women's Environmental
Voting Records in Congress*

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Questions about this report?

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A Message from our Executive Director

Since the moment of Rachel’s Network’s founding, we have observed first-hand that potent possibilities are unleashed when women work collaboratively to accomplish shared goals. It is in that spirit that we endeavor to support and acknowledge the women who not only achieve the highest levels of elected office, but also serve as passionate agents of change and stewards of the earth. Our members are living evidence that, as women, we can lead the fight to protect our health and the environment.

Rachel’s Network has long promoted the idea that women are uniquely positioned as environmental stewards, and that women in policy-making positions will vote to protect the environment more often than their male counterparts. This report equips us to make that claim with certainty. A telling study of women as agents of change on environmental issues, this investigation demonstrates that women in Congress are indeed leading the charge to preserve environmental integrity and public health. I am proud to present the second edition of this report and know you will find it a valuable resource.



Thu Pham

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About Rachel's Network

Rachel's Network is a national 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that builds productive alliances among women philanthropists who care deeply about the environment, health, and women's leadership. Founded in 2000, the Network promotes women's leadership, both in the environmental community and in government, using peer networking to maximize our influence. As part of our Women's Networking Initiative, the Connecting to Congress program engages Network members in the legislative processes to advocate for sound environmental policies and connect them to women Members of Congress who share our values.

About the League of Conservation Voters' National Environmental Scorecard

The League of Conservation Voters (LCV) has published a *National Environmental Scorecard* every Congress since 1970, the year it was founded by leaders of the environmental movement following the first Earth Day. LCV works to turn environmental values into national priorities. The *National Environmental Scorecard* provides objective, factual information about the most important environmental legislation considered and the corresponding voting records of all members for each year. The *Scorecard* represents the consensus of experts from nearly 20 respected environmental and conservation organizations who selected the key votes on which members of Congress should be graded. Issues include energy, global warming, environmental health and safety protections, public lands and wildlife conservation, and spending for environmental programs. Each year, the *Scorecard* presents members of Congress with a real choice and helps distinguish which legislators are working for environmental protection.

About the Methodology

This analysis compares the environmental voting records of Congresswomen and Congressmen each year from the 107th through the 111th Congresses (2001 to 2010) as reflected by the score assigned by the League of Conservation Voters' *National Environmental Scorecards*. This report analysis excludes Delegates to the U.S. House as they are non-voting members and do not receive LCV scores. This is notable due to the high percent of Delegates who are female. In the breakdown by party, our analysis also excludes Independents. A previous Rachel's Network report, completed in 2003, compiled similar LCV data from the years 1983 through 2002. Highlights from the earlier report, as well as a graphic representation of the number of women in Congress from 1916 to 2011, are included in the appendix. Historical data regarding women in Congress was drawn from the U.S. House of Representatives Office of the Clerk as well as the Center for American Women in Politics at Rutgers University. All analysis was conducted by Rachel's Network staff.

Executive Summary

Women have provided a unique voice in public policy throughout history. Although women continue to be severely underrepresented in Congress, those who hold a seat in our nation's highest elected offices share a perspective on issues that is often distinct from that of their male peers. Women's presence in Congress provides policy solutions to a large scope of domestic and global challenges.

Women in Congress are often considered champions of issues such as health care, child care, family services, drug abuse, and domestic violence. However, the influence of women in Congress is far more broad than this narrow set of concerns. On environmental issues, for instance, women tend to support clean air, clean water, and overall environmental protections within the aim of promoting public health and resource conservation for future generations. Adding more women's voices to the U.S. Congress would represent an advance for both women's movement and for environmental champions.

This analysis covers environmental voting records of women in Congress in comparison with men for the 107th through the 111th Congresses (2001 to 2010), as reflected by scores assigned by the League of Conservation Voters' *National Environmental Scorecards*. The study demonstrates that women, overall and regardless of party, vote consistently more in favor of environmental protections and policies than men in Congress. An impressive 34 out of the 40 instances studied show women earning a higher LCV score than men, when broken down by party. In the U.S. House of Representatives, women scored anywhere between 15 to 30 points higher than men. In the U.S. Senate women scored an average of 66.1 percent, whereas men scored 45.4 percent.

These findings reinforce the results of a previous study that was commissioned by Rachel's Network in 2003, and reveals that similar results hold true for the past thirty years. In both the House and Senate, women scored consistently better than men in every Congress since 1987. Correspondingly, within each party, women outscored their male peers the majority of the time, at times by more than double. Through their voices and their votes, women in Congress are strong and consistent advocates for national environmental policies and protections.



Introduction

Like many success stories of civic engagement, the rise of women in Congress has evolved gradually but dramatically over the last century. From a complete lack of representation in Congress in 1916, when suffrage was not yet a legal right, women had advanced to the uppermost tiers of party leadership by the start of the 21st century.

Over the past nine decades, women have made major progress in overcoming obstacles to participation in the political process, increasing their representation in Congress, and strengthening their voices on important issues in the process. A total of 274 women have served in the U.S. Congress since 1916 — 39 in the Senate and 235 in the House. While we can justifiably take pride in the gains women have made since 1916, our enthusiasm must be tempered by the fact that women's representation in fact decreased slightly in the 112th Congress, and it remains at 17 percent. Ninety-one of the 274 women who have served in Congress are current Members — 74 in the House and 17 in the Senate.

When examining the role of women in Congress, there are many lenses through which one might measure their influence in the legislature, and in particular, in the environmental arena. Some questions include:

- *Have women changed the way Congress conducts its business, or have they modified their behavior and votes to conform to the institution?*
- *Where do Congresswomen stand on environmental issues compared with their male peers?*
- *Have the environmental votes of the women Senators differed from those of women Representatives?*
- *What impact has women's presence in Congress had on environmental issues?*

Women legislators have the capacity and the commitment to shape national environmental policy. Tracking the LCV *National Environmental Scorecard* by gender reveals women's support for the health of our planet and burgeoning leadership on these urgent issues.

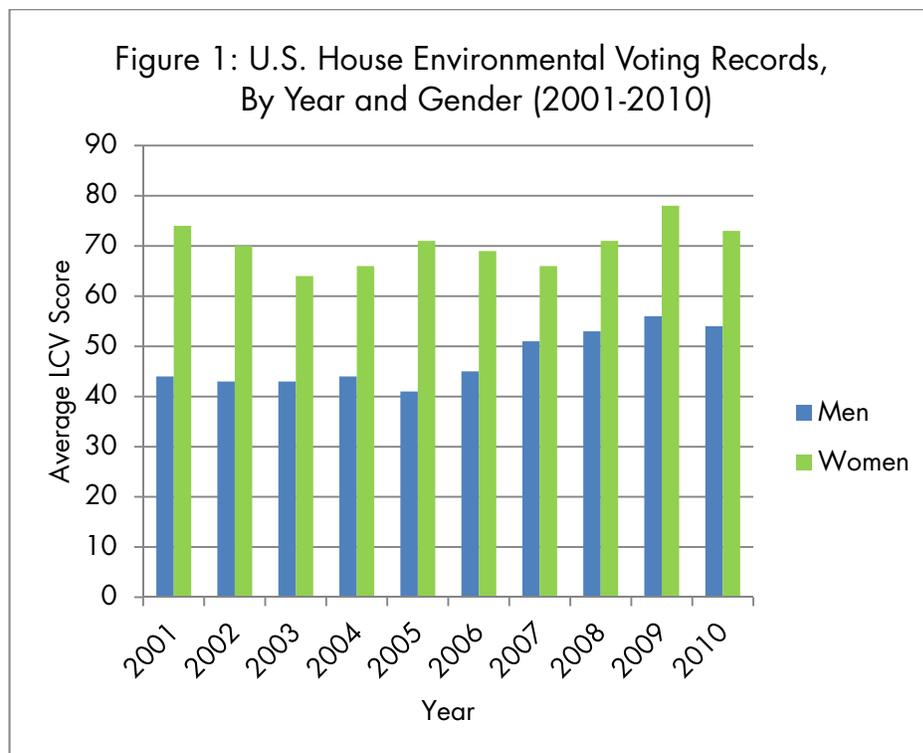
Leading By Example

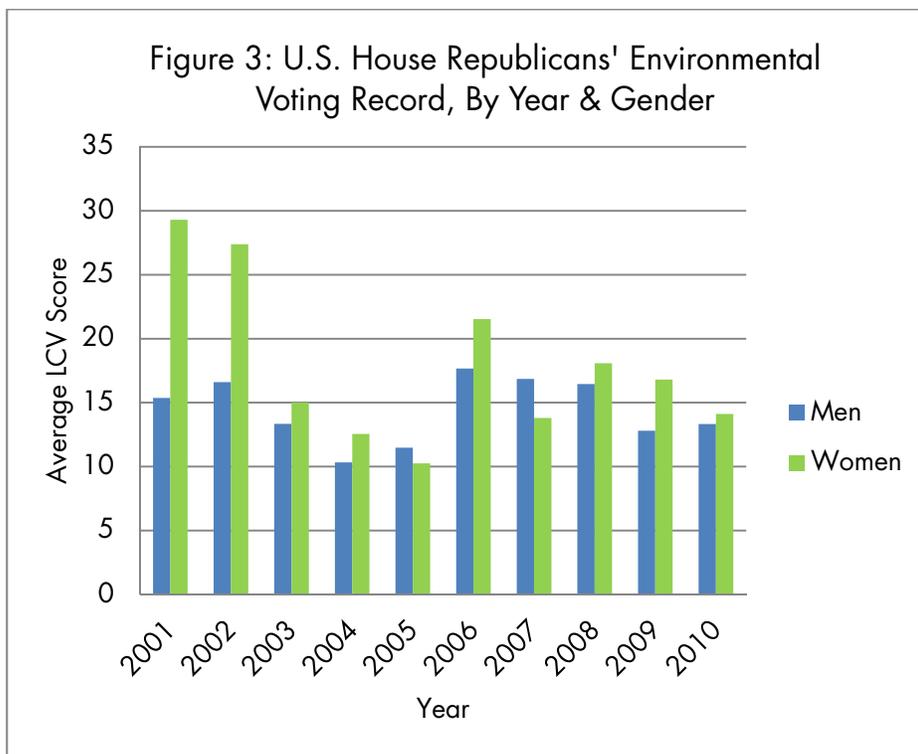
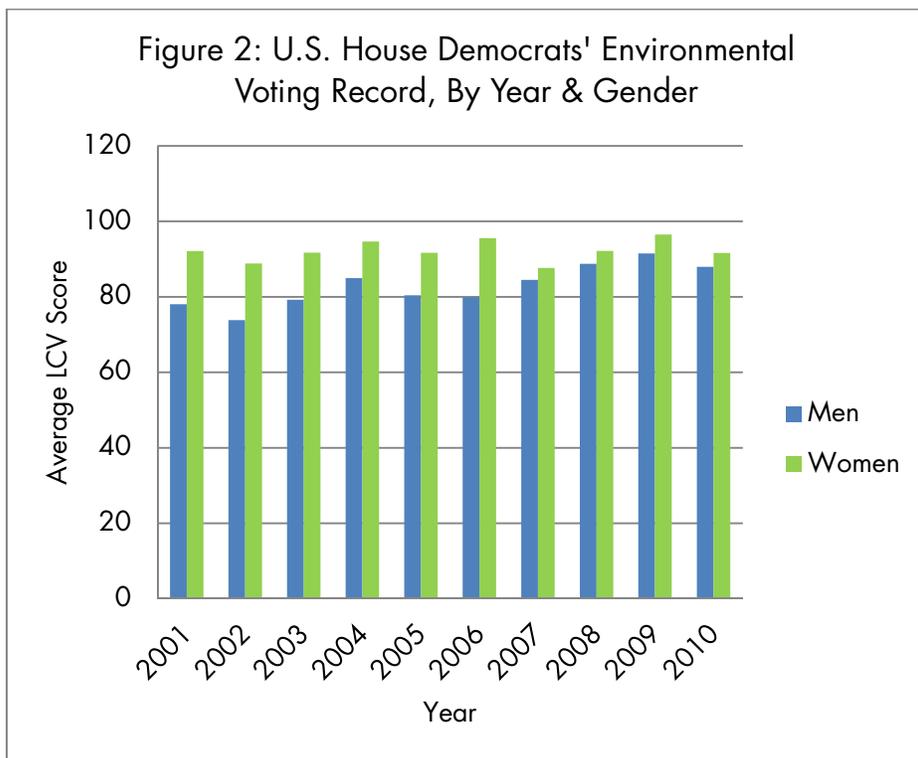
Women in Congress have shown a disposition for pro-environment voting. In both the House and Senate, women scored consistently better than men in each year studied, save a few anomalies. Some of this difference is attributable to partisanship — the fact that there are more women Democrats in both houses of Congress than there are women Republicans, and over the past decade Democrats tend to favor pro-environmental policies. Nonetheless, the difference in voting patterns still persists when gender is isolated within each political party. Only six out of 40 instances exist in the data when men earned a higher score than women on the LCV scorecard, as broken down by party. In an increasingly partisan environment, these demonstrable votes against the status quo offer an important evidence of Congresswomen's distinct priorities, despite pressure to vote in lockstep with their peers.

U.S. House of Representatives

An analysis of voting patterns for men and women serving in the U.S. House of Representatives revealed a pronounced difference between genders. Across the board, women outscored men in Congress on any given year on environmental issues. As seen in Figure 1, Congresswomen scored consistently between 15 to 30 points higher in LCV’s voting analysis than their male colleagues. Even when parsed out by party in addition to gender, women Democrats and Republicans in the House earned higher LCV scores than their male peers (see Figures 2 and 3) in every year since 2001. The gender disparity in the House was more pronounced than the Senate.

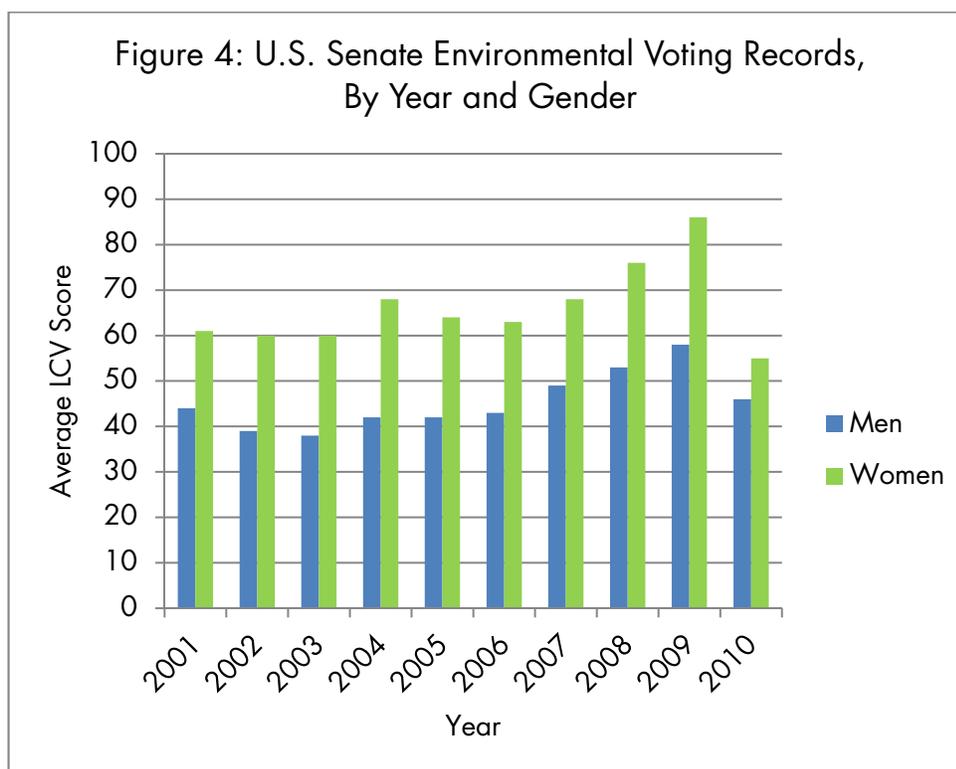
The average LCV score for Congresswomen was 70.2 percent over the course of the 10-year period, compared to 47.4 percent for men. Thus, women scored 48 percent higher during the period analyzed. Democratic women scored better in each of the past ten years (Figure 2) and Republican women scored better in eight of the past ten years (Figure 3). Notably, the gap between Republican men and women narrowed after the 2004 election cycle, which could be attributable to increased partisan pressures.

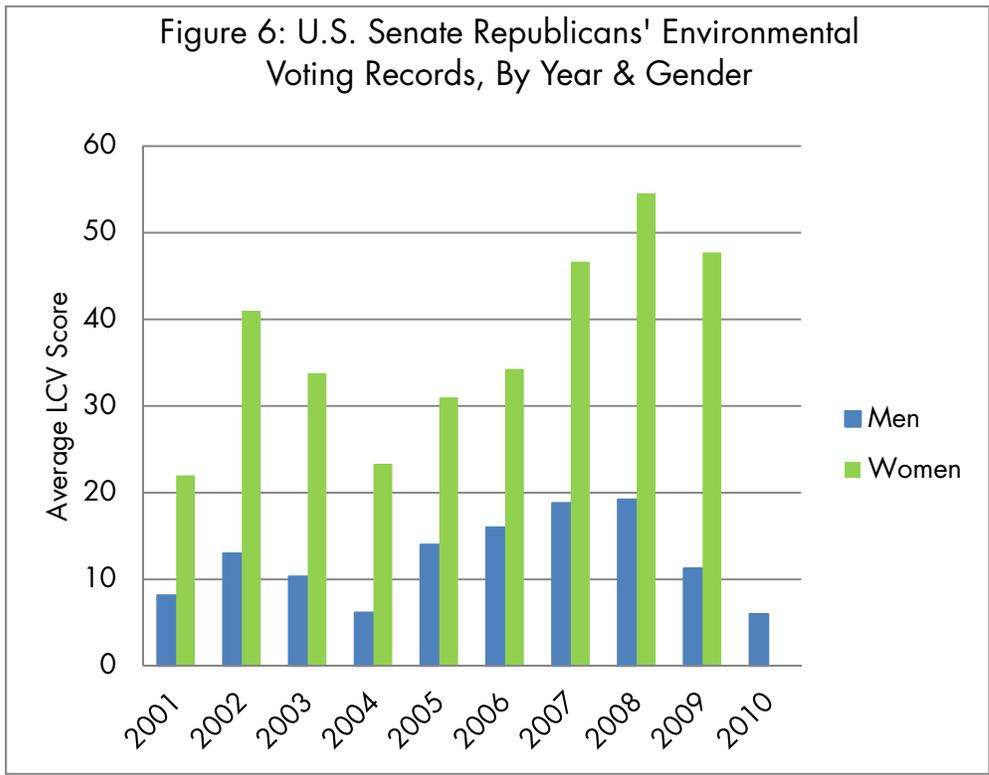
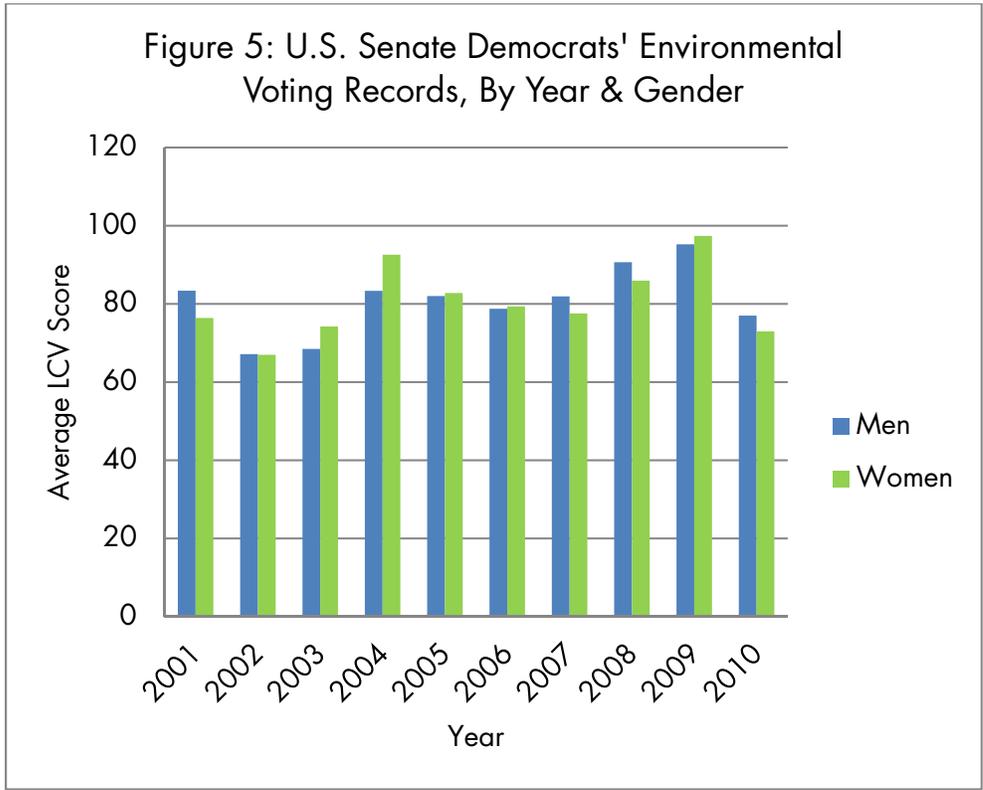




U.S. Senate

In the Senate, the average score disparity between men and women during the period analyzed was also consistent: women scored an average of 66.1 percent, whereas men scored 45.4 percent. As seen in Figure 4, each year from 2001 to 2010 shows more pro-environment average scores for women than men. The contrast is particularly stark among Republicans; Republican women Senators' scores were dramatically higher than those of their male counterparts in the last decade (Figure 6), while the discrepancy is less pronounced among Democrats (Figure 5). Although the gender differences for Republican women is great, it is also based on a notably small sample size, with only 4 or 5 Republican women serving in the Senate during this period. As seen in Figure 6, the 2010 scores were an anomaly, based on a small pool of votes, due to the fact that the Senate took up very few pieces of environmental legislation in that year. Nonetheless, Republican women Senators earned a score of zero from LCV in 2010, and an exception to the seemingly powerful trend over the preceding years.





Conclusion

The need for greater representation of women in public office has never been as urgent as it is today. Since the election of the first woman to the U.S. House, Jeanette Rankin, in 1917, only 274 women have served in the U.S. Congress. With women accounting for only 23 percent of state legislators and 17 percent of Congress, the United States ranks 73rd in the world in gender parity in governance, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union. The U.S. has a long road ahead before reaching gender parity, based on the rate of increase that is shown over the past near-century (Figures 7 and 8).

As this report demonstrates, the lack of representation by women in our legislature is a detriment to women's equality as well as a hindrance to progress on many other urgent issues. The lack of gender parity in Congress reflects a barrier to better environmental policy. The impact of women's presence in Congress has only just begun to shape how business is conducted on Capitol Hill. As we have seen, women have been known to break rank from their peers and resist voting in lockstep with their male counterparts on the issues that matter to their communities.

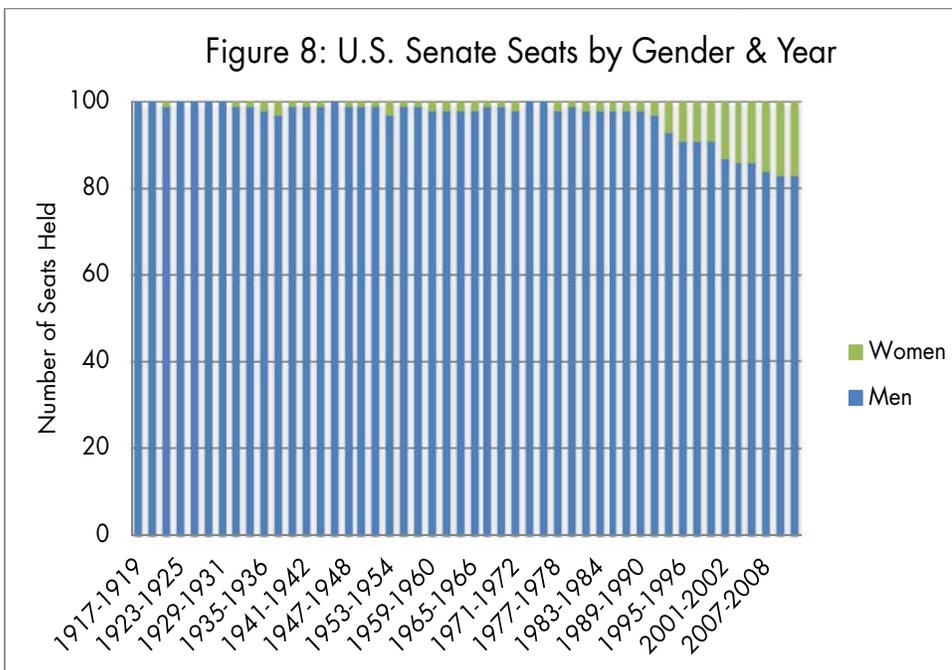
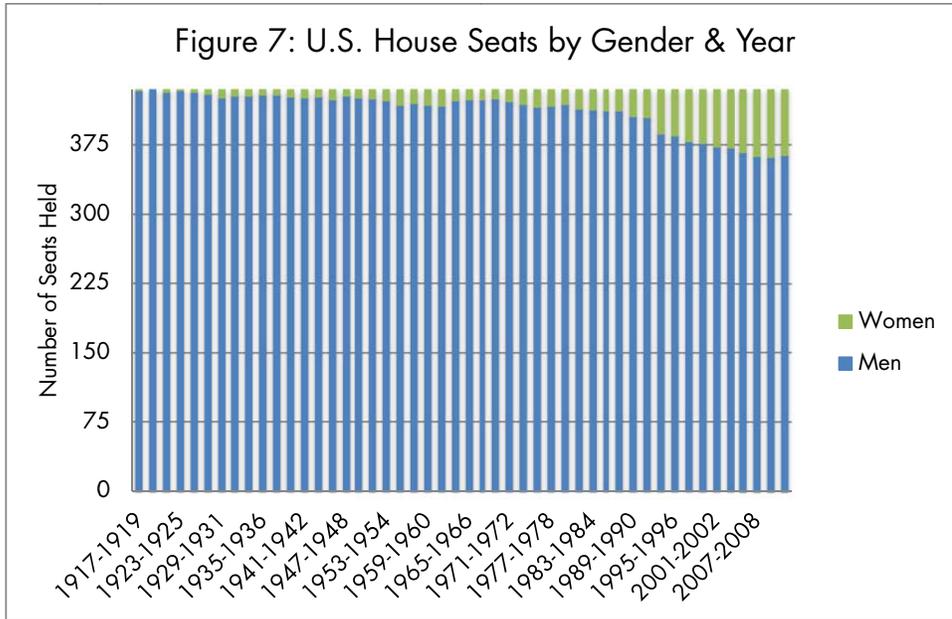
The environmental movement is directly adversely impacted by the low level of women's representation in Congress. As such, it is in environmental community's best interest not only to voice their concerns on pressing environmental policies needed to lead us into a prosperous and sustainable 21st century, but also to encourage women to run for public office. Amplifying women's voices in the U.S. Congress would advance both the women's and conservation movements.

To accelerate this transformation, Rachel's Network has joined forces with an innovative campaign, The 2012 Project. Rutgers University's Center for Women in Politics founded The 2012 Project as a strategic effort to engage women from a variety of non-traditional backgrounds, such as finance, science, technology, energy, health, environment, small business, and international affairs, and encourage them to enter the political pipeline. As potential candidates gear up for the 2012 election cycle, Rachel's Network has partnered with The 2012 Project to identify qualified women in the environmental field to run for state and federal office. By connecting influential constituencies and strengthening emerging leaders, we can forge ahead to create a more representative legislative branch and protect our planet.

Appendix

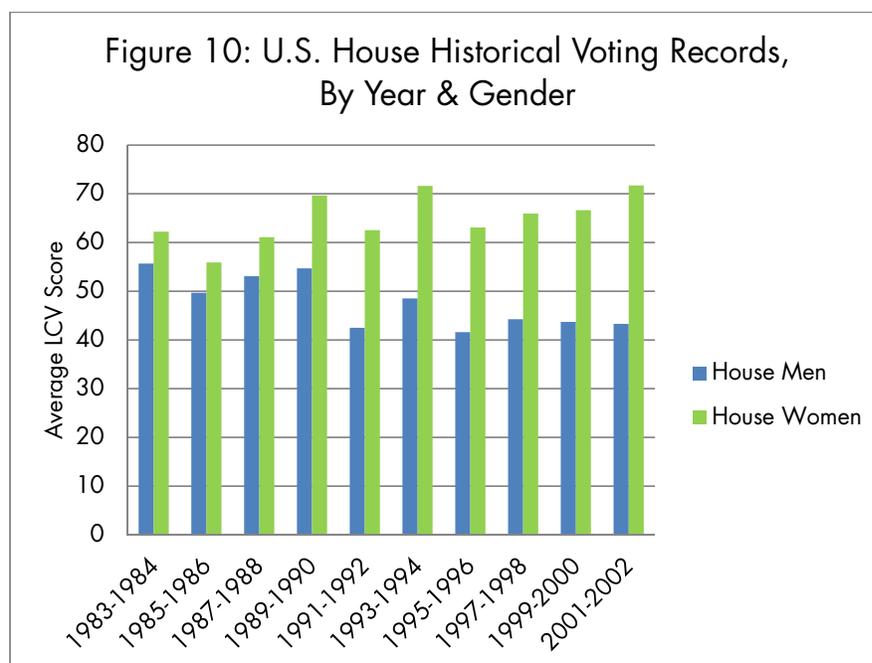
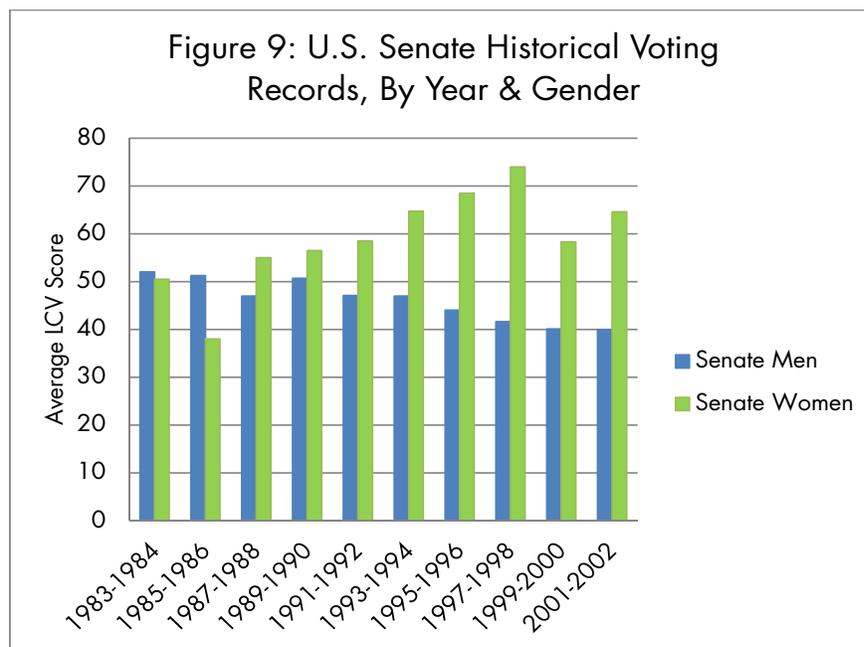
Gender in Congress

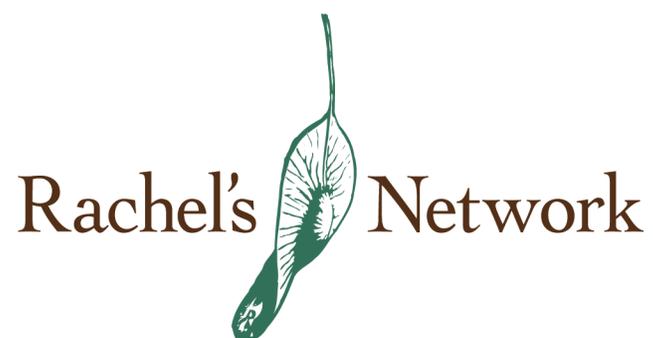
To provide further context for this report, Figures 7 and 8 provide a graphic depiction of the number of women in Congress since the election of the first woman in 1917 through the present. As demonstrated by these graphs, there are far more men than women in Congress, and in determining averages, this gap weighs each woman's vote more heavily.



Historical Data

The trend of pro-environment women’s votes is not unique to the past decade. Figures 9 and 10 from the 2003 report, covering data from 1983 to 2002, illustrate the same findings. Women’s voting records were reliably pro-environment overall as compared with the men in Congress. Although this is a trend that fluctuates in strength by Congress, as opposed to increasing or decreasing over time, the data have been consistent. This earlier report evaluated LCV scores for each two-year Congress rather than by individual year, because from 1983 to 1988, the League of Conservation Voters Scorecards were produced at the conclusion of each Congress. In 2001, LCV began producing scorecards annually. As such, the two reports cannot be directly compared.





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