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**Data Point: 2018, A Year of the Woman Like 1992?**

1992 has long been labeled the “Year of the Woman,” a nod to the record numbers of women who ran and won that year, particularly at the congressional level. What factors contributed to the unusual nature of 1992? Are those factors in evidence today?

- **Number of women candidates:** One reason for women’s history-making success in 1992 is that so many women ran. Twenty-nine women filed for Senate seats, and 11 won their primaries; 222 filed for House seats, and 106 won their primaries. Both of these numbers surpassed previous records by considerable margins. At the time, there were three women serving in the Senate and 47 women serving in the House.

In 2018, we are once again seeing a strong turnout of women candidates, many fueled by anger at the 2016 presidential election and subsequent events. Currently, there are 3 (2D, 1R) filed candidates and 47 (29D, 18R) likely candidates for the Senate and 67 (53D, 14R) filed candidates and 329 (263D, 66R) likely candidates for the House. In comparison to 1992, there are currently 22 women serving in the Senate and 84 women serving in the House.

	<b>2018 Candidates*</b>	<b>Previous Record*</b>
<b>Senate</b>	50 (31D, 19R)	2016: 40 (28D, 12R)
<b>House</b>	396 (316D, 80R)	2012: 298 (190D, 108R)

\*Includes filed and likely candidate numbers. Previous records refer to filed candidates.

- **Number of open seats available:** Open seats (no incumbent running) are the most winnable races for newcomers. Incumbents typically win 90 percent of the time or more, although the 2017 Virginia state legislative elections were an exception to that rule. In 1992, there were eight open Senate seats and 65 open House seats, unusually large numbers signifying a rare opportunity for gains by newcomers.

In 2018, there are three open Senate seats and 45 open House seats. Women are running in 43 of those open seats (three in the Senate and 40 in the House). Moreover, the 2017 Virginia experience, in which 30% of the Democratic women challengers won their election, suggests that challenging incumbents, particularly in this volatile political climate, may be more viable than in the past.

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At this point in 2018, about 23% of potential women candidates for the House are running for open seats. In 1992, 36% of women primary candidates for the House ran in open seat districts. A larger proportion of women candidates are challengers in 2018 (59%) than in 1992 (51%). Incumbents make up 19% of potential women House candidates in 2018, compared to about 13% in 1992 primary elections.

- **Men behaving badly:** Many factors contributed to the surge in women's candidacies in 1992, but one of the most widely discussed was women's reaction to the Senate Judiciary Committee's insulting and dismissive treatment of Anita Hill when she testified about being sexually harassed by Clarence Thomas. Women saw a young Black woman being disrespected by a committee comprised entirely of older, white men. At the time, there were only two women in the entire Senate. That experience was fresh in the public mind when the 1992 elections occurred, and women mobilized to secure greater political power.

Stories of sexual harassment and assault, whether in entertainment, the media, sports or politics, were omnipresent in 2017, and are one factor driving women's political mobilization during the 2018 election cycle. While the track record for electing women is far better today than it was in 1992, women remain significantly underrepresented, constituting no more than about a quarter of elected officials at any level. With thousands of women expressing interest in running for office and seeking out political training in the wake of the 2016 presidential elections, the pool of potential candidates has grown dramatically. As vacancies have occurred – created not only by retirements or officeholders seeking other posts, but also by men driven out because of malfeasance – women have lined up, ready to take their places. Moreover, when men leave office (voluntarily or not) because of corruption or bad behavior, those with the power to fill their seats temporarily or influence the nomination process often turn to women, bowing to a perception that women are less corruptible or more virtuous.

### **About CAWP**

The Center for American Women and Politics, a unit of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University-New Brunswick, is nationally recognized as the leading source of scholarly research and current data about American women's political participation. Its mission is to promote greater knowledge and understanding about women's participation in politics and government and to enhance women's influence and leadership in public life. CAWP's education and outreach programs translate research findings into action, addressing women's underrepresentation in political leadership with effective, imaginative programs serving a variety of audiences. As the world has watched Americans considering female candidates for the nation's highest offices, CAWP's over four decades of analyzing and interpreting women's participation in American politics have provided a foundation and context for the discussion.