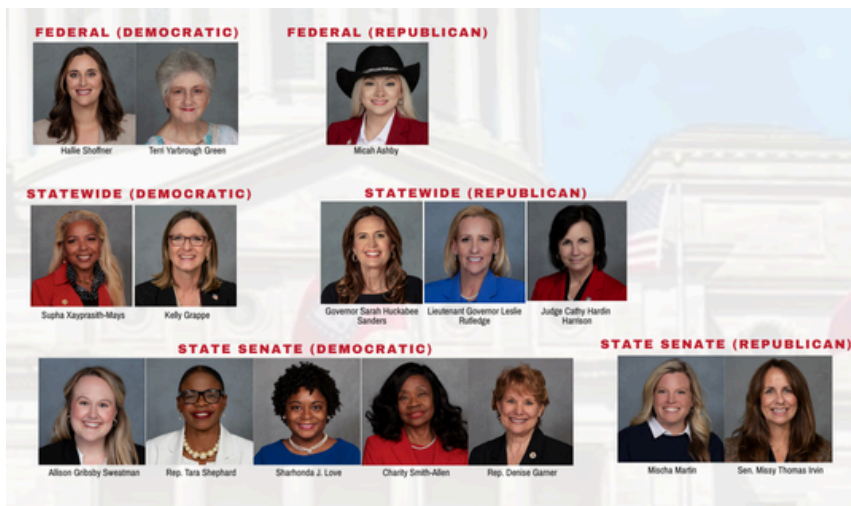


AR Politics 101

December 2025 Edition

Surge of Women Candidates Jump into Arkansas Races for 2026



Arkansas is seeing a major jump in women stepping into political races this year. A whopping 118 women have filed to run in the 2026 elections, which is up from 103 in 2024 and 101 in 2022. Even though the overall number is rising, women make up 29% of all candidates, slightly down from 31% in 2024. In 2022, women accounted for 26%.

So, while there are some ups and downs, the big picture is clear: more women are stepping up every cycle.

PARTY BREAKDOWN

Democratic women continue to make up a much larger share of their party's candidates. Over the past three elections, more than 40% of Democratic hopefuls have been women. Republican women, by comparison, average about 17%. For nonpartisan judicial races, women account for roughly a third of the field.

This year:

- 33 out of 75 Democratic candidates are women (44%)
- 28 out of 148 Republican candidates are women (19%)
- 57 out of 175 nonpartisan (not tied to a political party) judicial candidates (32%)

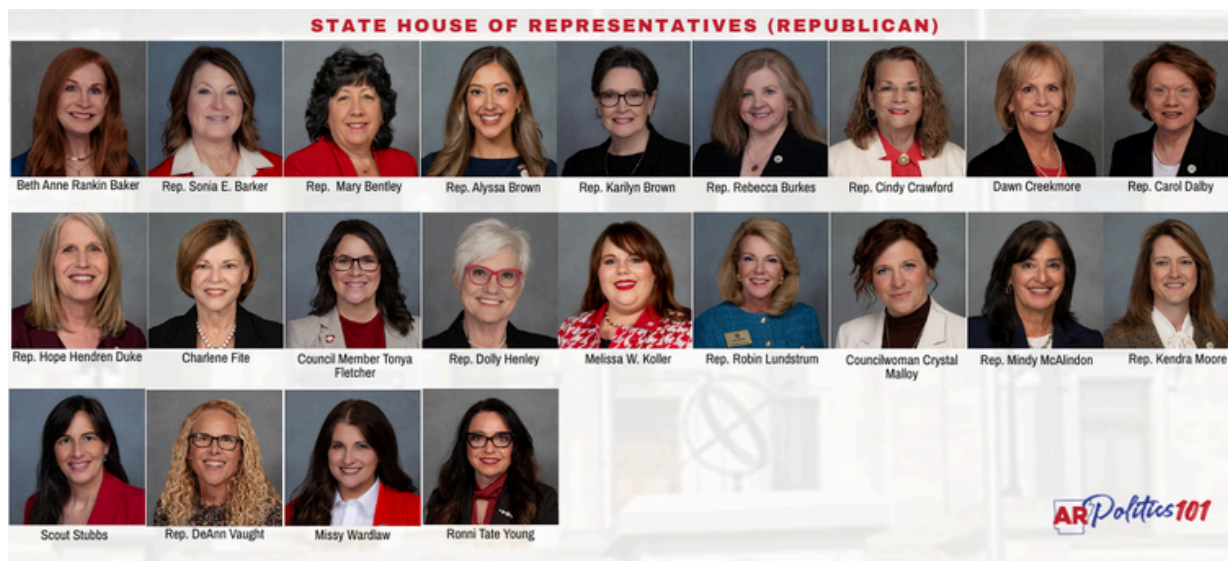
Almost half (47%) of the women running this year are incumbents seeking another term, and three-fourths are running unopposed. Here's how it breaks down for incumbents overall:

- 11% of Democratic incumbents are women
- 29% of Republican incumbents are women
- 60% of incumbents are judges and prosecuting attorneys



Over 100 races featuring women will be held across Arkansas, including 19 primaries. Here's how it breaks down by party affiliation:

- 28 races feature Democratic women, 9 primaries with 3 (State Rep Districts 35 and 72, and Senate District 15), where women face off
- 26 races feature Republican women, 10 primaries with 2 (State Rep Districts 24 and 46) with all-women contests
- 50 judicial races include women, 4 judgeships, 2 prosecutor seats have women running against each other



Key Races to Watch

US Senate

In 2020, Sen. Tom Cotton won reelection with 67% of the vote against a single Libertarian challenger. The 2026 race is shaping up to be more competitive. Two Republicans, Micah Ashby of Bradford and Jeb Little of Harrison, are challenging him in the primary.

On the Democratic side, Hallie Shoffner, a sixth-generation farmer from Newport, is gaining attention. She'll first face Lewisville Mayor Ethan Dunbar in the primary before potentially moving on to the general election.



Senate District 15

This open Little Rock seat has drawn an all-women Democratic primary, featuring:

- Rep. Tara Shephard (D-Little Rock)
- ShaRhonda Love, healthcare advocate and wife of outgoing Sen. Fred Love
- Charity Smith-Allen, educator and wife of outgoing Rep. Fred Allen

If no candidate earns a majority, this race could head to a runoff on March 31. With no Republicans or independents running, the primary winner will claim the seat.

House District 24

Two Republican women are competing for the seat vacated by Rep. Brad Hall (R-Rudy), who withdrew after filing:

- Former Rep. Charlene Fite of Van Buren, returning after six terms
- Melissa Koller, a small-business owner from Alma

The winner will face Democrat Ryan Inchauspe of Rudy in November.

Court of Appeals Associate Judge District 3, Position 1

Two candidates are running for the high court seat vacated by retiring Judge Robert Gladwin including one woman:

- Judge Sarah Capp, 7th Judicial District Court Judge (Franklin and Johnson counties)
- Brandon Carter, prosecuting attorney from Springdale

Prosecuting Attorney, District 11 West

With Prosecuting Attorney Kyle Hunter stepping down, four candidates have entered the race, including two women:

- Karres Manning Center, Chief Deputy Prosecutor
- Evelyn Moorehead, Pine Bluff attorney

They're joined by Mirsha King, attorney, and Joe West, Deputy Prosecutor. With such a crowded field, this race will most likely head to a runoff in November.

Looking Ahead

As the March 3, 2026 primary nears, Arkansans are gearing up for a pivotal election cycle. Each party will select its nominee, and voters can choose Democratic, Republican, or nonpartisan ballots. For judicial races, the primary election serves as the general election. With numerous competitive races and the potential for runoffs, this election will help shape Arkansas's leadership for years to come. Partisan runoffs occur four weeks after the election, and nonpartisan judicial runoffs coincide with the general election.

Make sure your voter registration is up to date by checking VoterView on the Arkansas Secretary of State's website and take part in this important moment for Arkansas democracy.

ArPolitics101 is a nonpartisan voter education initiative dedicated to informing, educating, and empowering Arkansans to participate in the voting process. Connect with us on Facebook, Instagram, and X @arpolitics101. Email us at arpolitics101@gmail.com.