



## POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

### TOP LINE NATIONAL FINDINGS

- **No state received higher than a B+** on IWPR's Political Participation Composite Index, which measures women's voter registration and turnout, representation in elected office, and state-based institutional resources. Most states scored poorly on the Women in Elected Office Index.
- At the federal level, the number of women in the U.S. Congress has reached an all-time high. Since 2004, the number of women in the U.S. House of Representatives has increased from 60 to 84 and the number of women in the U.S. Senate has increased from 14 to 20. Still, the share of seats held by women in the U.S. Congress is well below women's share of the overall population.
  - At the current rate of progress, **women will not hold an equal share of seats with men in the U.S. Congress until 2117.**
- Since 2004, the last time the Political Participation Composite Index was calculated, **the share of women in state legislatures increased** from 22.5 percent in 2004 to 24.2 percent in 2015, but **the number of women in statewide elected executive office declined** from 81 (of 315) in 2004 to 78 (of 317) in 2015.
  - New Hampshire received the highest grade (B+) on the overall Political Participation Composite Index, a vast improvement since 2004, when it received a D. The state made substantial gains on the Women in Elected Office Index, jumping from 42<sup>nd</sup> in 2004 to first on the 2015 index.
- Between the 1998/2000 elections and the 2010/2012 elections, **women's voter registration** increased in 26 states and decreased in 24 states and the District of Columbia, while **women's voter turnout** increased in 30 states and decreased in 20 states and the District of Columbia.
  - In 2012, **women's voter turnout was higher than men's in all but two states.**
  - In 2012, **black and white women had the highest voting rates** among the total female voting age population (66.1 percent and 64.5 percent, respectively), which were **twice as high as the voting rates for Hispanic women and Asian women** (33.9 percent and 32.0 percent, respectively).

### BEST AND WORST STATES ON WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

	Rank	Grade		Rank	Grade
New Hampshire	1	B+	Utah	50	F
Minnesota	2	B	Texas	49	F
Maine	3	B	West Virginia	48	F
Washington	4	B	Arkansas	47	F
Massachusetts	5	B-	Louisiana	46	D-

- **Women's political participation is highest overall in the New England states** (with New Hampshire, Maine, and Massachusetts all in the top ten states), **the Midwest** (with Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa ranking in the top ten), and **the Pacific West** (with California, Oregon, and Washington also among the ten best-ranking states).
- **Women's political participation is lowest overall in the South.** Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia all rank in the bottom ten.

## VOTER REGISTRATION

### Best & Worst States: Women's Voter Registration, 2010 and 2012 Combined

	Percent Registered	Rank		Percent Registered	Rank
Mississippi	80.8%	1	Hawaii	52.3%	51
Louisiana	76.9%	2	California	53.8%	50
Maine	76.8%	3	Nevada	56.2%	49
Wisconsin	74.9%	4	Texas	57.8%	48
Vermont	74.2%	5	New York	59.2%	47

- Nationally, **women are more likely to be registered to vote than men.** In the 2010 midterm election, 61.5 percent of women were registered to vote, compared with 57.9 percent of men. In the 2012 general election, 67.0 percent of women were registered to vote, compared with 63.1 percent of men.
  - In 26 states, women's average voter registration increased between the 1998/2000 elections and the 2010/2012 elections, while in 24 states and the District of Columbia women's average voter registration decreased.
  - The state with the largest increase in women's voter registration was Mississippi (6.0 percentage points) and the state with the greatest decrease was North Dakota (17.4 percentage points).
- **Mississippi and Louisiana had the highest voter registration rates** for women in 2010 and 2012 combined at 80.8 percent and 76.9 percent, respectively. Six states in the Midwest—Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin were also in the top ten.
- **Women's voter registration is lowest overall in the western part of the United States.** Hawaii had the lowest reported women's voter registration rate in 2010/2012 at 52.3 percent, followed by California (53.8 percent) and Nevada (56.2 percent). Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah also rank in the bottom ten.
- In 2010, the state with the greatest gender gap in voter registration was Mississippi, where women's voter registration exceeded men's by 9.5 percentage points. **In 2012, South Carolina had the largest gender gap in voter registration**, with a rate for women that was 8.4 percentage points higher than the rate for men.

## VOTER TURNOUT

### Best & Worst States: Women's Voter Turnout, 2010 and 2012 Combined

	Percent Voted	Rank		Percent Voted	Rank
Wisconsin	64.8%	1	Texas	40.9%	51
Maine	64.3%	2	California	44.7%	50
Mississippi	63.3%	3	Hawaii	45.1%	49
Minnesota	63.0%	4	Nevada	45.4%	46
Iowa	60.2%	5	Utah	45.4%	46
			West Virginia	45.4%	46

- **Women in the United States are also more likely to vote than men.** In the 2010 midterm election, 42.7 percent of women voted, compared with 40.9 percent of men. In the 2012 general election, 58.5 percent of women voted, compared with 54.4 percent of men.
- Women's voting rates vary across the largest racial and ethnic groups.
  - In 2012, **black and white women had the highest voting rates** among the total female voting age population, at 66.1 percent and 64.5 percent, respectively, which is approximately **twice as high as the rates for Hispanic women** (33.9 percent) and Asian women (32.0 percent).

- **Young women have a much lower voting rate than older women.** In the 2012 election, 41.3 percent of women aged 18–24 voted, compared with 58.5 percent of adult women overall. Women aged 65–74 had the highest voting rate in 2012 at 70.1 percent, followed by women aged 75 years and older (65.6 percent), women aged 45–64 years (65.0 percent), and women aged 25–44 years (52.6 percent).
- **Wisconsin had the highest women’s voter turnout** in the country in 2010/2012 at 64.8 percent, followed by Maine (64.3 percent) and Mississippi (63.3 percent).
- **Women’s voter turnout was lowest in Texas** in 2010/2012, where only 40.9 percent of women reported voting. Voter turnout in Texas was substantially lower than in the second and third worst states, California (44.7 percent) and Hawaii (45.1 percent).
- In 2012, **women’s voter turnout was higher than men’s in all but two states.** The largest difference in voter turnout was in South Carolina where women’s turnout was higher than men’s by 10.6 percentage points.
- **In 30 states, women’s voter turnout increased** between the 1998/2000 elections and the 2010/2012 elections, while in 20 states and the District of Columbia their voter turnout decreased. The state with the largest increases in women’s voter turnout was Mississippi (10.8 percentage points) and the state with the greatest decrease was Alaska (7.8 points).
- As of March 2015, **34 states had passed voter identification laws.** Women, especially low-income, older, minority, and married women, may be particularly affected by stringent voter identification laws.

## WOMEN IN ELECTED OFFICE

### Best & Worst States: Women in Elected Office, 2015

	Composite Score	Rank		Composite Score	Rank
New Hampshire	4.58	1	Louisiana	0.58	50
Washington	3.45	2	Georgia	1.01	49
California	3.38	3	Pennsylvania	1.02	48
Maine	3.15	4	Virginia	1.12	47
Minnesota	3.12	5	Kentucky	1.13	46

- The Women in Elected Office index measures women’s representation at state and national levels of government: the U.S. Congress, statewide elective offices, and state legislatures.
- **The states with the highest scores are in New England** – Connecticut, New Hampshire, Maine, and Massachusetts all rank in the top ten. **Eight of the bottom ten states on women in elected office are in the South** (Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia).
  - New Hampshire’s substantial gains place it first on the Women in Elected Office Index (up from 42nd place in 2004). Three of its four Congressional seats (both Senators and one of two representatives) are held by women. It ranks sixth for women in its state senate and is in the top third for women in its lower house. New Hampshire also has a woman governor.
  - Since 2004, **27 states improved their score on women in elected office.** New Hampshire, New Jersey, and Rhode Island all more than doubled their score.
  - In that same time, **23 states declined in women’s representation,** with Louisiana seeing the biggest decline at -77.7 percent.

### Women in the U.S. Congress

- At the federal level, the number of women in the U.S. Congress has reached an all-time high. Since 2004, the number of women the U.S. House of Representatives has increased from 60 to 84 and the number of women

in the U.S. Senate has increased from 14 to 20. Still, the share of seats held by women in the U.S. Congress is well below women's share of the overall population.

- As of March 2015, **women held just 19.4 percent of seats in the U.S. Congress.** Since 2004, the share of female representatives increased in 21 states, decreased in 7, and stayed the same in 22, while the share of female senators increased in 10 states, decreased in 5, and stayed the same in 35.
- There are only 5 states— Hawaii, Maine, New Hampshire, South Dakota, and Wyoming—where women constitute at least half of the state's representatives to the U.S. House of Representatives. **Eighteen states have no female representatives.**
- **Three states have never sent a woman to either the U.S. House or the Senate:** Delaware, Mississippi, and Vermont.

### Women in State Legislatures and Statewide Elected Office

- As of March 2015, women held 24.2 percent of seats in the nation's state legislatures, and 24.6 percent of statewide elective executive offices. **There were no states in which women held half of the seats in either the state senate or the state house or assembly.**
- The share of state senate seats held by women is largest in Arizona (43.3 percent) and lowest in South Carolina (2.2 percent). The share of seats in the state house or assembly held by women is largest in Colorado (46.2 percent) and lowest in Oklahoma (12.9 percent).
- Between 2004 and 2015, the share of state senate seats held by women increased in 27 states and decreased in 16 states. In the same time frame, the share of state house or assembly seats held by women increased in 32 states and decreased in 17.

### Women of Color in Elected Office

- **Women of color**—who constitute approximately 18 percent of the population aged 18 and older—hold about 6.2 percent of seats in the U.S. Congress, 5.3 percent of seats in state legislatures, and 2.8 percent of statewide elective executive positions.
- **There is only one woman of color – Senator Mazie Hirono of Hawaii – serving in the U.S. Senate.**
- **California** has the most women of color in the House (10 of its 53 representatives).
- **Hawaii has the greatest proportion of women of color in the state legislature** (19.7 percent).
- **Five states have no women of color serving in their state legislatures** (Kentucky, Maine, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming).
- **Only 2 governors – Nikki Haley of South Carolina and Susana Martinez of New Mexico – are women of color.**

## ABOUT POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Women's Political Participation is the final in a seven part series from the *Status of Women in the States: 2015* report. The 2015 release analyzes new data and uses information from previous reports to track trends over time and analyze where states have declined, improved, or stayed the same since the last national report in 2004. The full report and additional data are available on the website ([www.statusofwomendata.org](http://www.statusofwomendata.org)), including additional breakdowns by race/ethnicity.

## ABOUT THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE STATES

The *Status of Women in the States*, a project of the Institute for Women's Policy Research since 1996, analyzes women's status in each state and the nation overall on seven different topic areas: Employment & Earnings, Poverty & Opportunity, Violence & Safety, Health & Well-Being, Reproductive Rights, Political Participation, and Work & Family. Data on Violence & Safety and Work & Family are new additions to the 2015 edition. Since the first *Status of Women in the States* release, the reports have been used to increase community and private investment in programs and enhance policies that improve outcomes for women throughout the United States. The project is supported by the Ford Foundation, the American Federation of Teachers, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the Women's Funding Network, as well as other organizations.