



Research-in-Brief

Overview of the Status of Women in the States

Women's progress over the past century has involved both great achievements and significant shortfalls. Many U.S. women are witnessing real improvements in their economic, political, and social status. Not all women, however, enjoy equal access to the country's political, social, and economic resources, nor are they sharing equally in the fruits of progress or prosperity. Women by no means enjoy equality with men, and they still lack many of the legal guarantees that would allow them to achieve it.

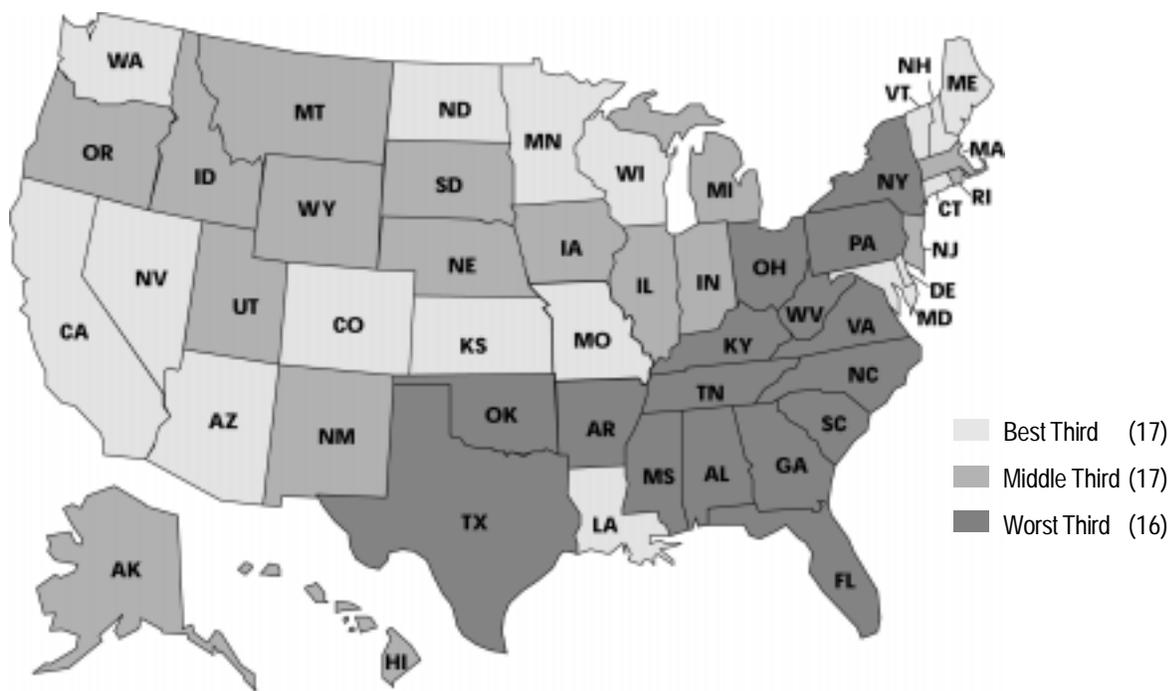
This fact sheet describes how selected measures of women's rights and equality vary among the states. It summarizes data from the IWPR report, *The Status of Women in the States*, 3rd edition, which presents data for each state on 30 component indicators as well as five composite indices that capture the states' rankings in each of the five domains: Political Participation, Employment and Earnings, Economic Autonomy, Reproductive Rights, and Health and Well-Being.

Despite higher rankings for some states, women have not achieved equality with men in any state, and even those states with better policies for women do not ensure equal rights for women. Women in the United States still face significant problems that demand attention from policymakers, advocates, and researchers concerned with women's status. IWPR's report provides baseline measures that will allow them to identify remaining barriers to women's equality in each state.

Political Participation

The political participation composite index combines four aspects of women's political status: voter registration, voter turnout, representation in elected office, and women's institutional resources. These components vary widely among the states. In addition, states' rankings often vary widely for each part of the composite index.

Map I. Political Participation Composite Index



Note: For methodology and sources, see Appendix II of *The Status of Women in the States*.

While women have historically been less likely than men to be employed in professional and managerial occupations, their presence is increasing in these fields, so that today they are more likely than men to have occupations that are classified as professional or managerial. In some states, the change is more pronounced than in others.

- More than 20 percentage points divide the District of Columbia, with the highest percentage of all women working in these fields (46.3 percent), from Idaho, with the lowest (25.9 percent).
- The District of Columbia, California, Colorado, Washington, and several New England states score well in terms of the wage gap, the level of female earnings, and women's representation in professional and managerial occupations.

The fourth component of this index, women's labor force participation, exhibits slightly different trends. The percentage of women in the labor force is highest in many states among the Mountain and northern Midwestern regions.

Economic Autonomy

The economic autonomy composite index combines four indicators of women's ability to exercise control over their economic lives: health insurance, college education, business ownership, and poverty rates. Overall, more women earn college degrees and start their own businesses today than ever before. However, more women lack health insurance than in years past, and more women than men live in poverty in the United States.

- Generally women in the Northeast and the West are most likely to have the resources associated with economic autonomy.
- Some states, such as Vermont, have higher percentages of college-educated women, women with health insurance, and women business owners, and smaller percentages of women in poverty.
- High proportions of women-owned businesses are generally clustered in the western states, while high scores on other components of the economic autonomy composite index are not, suggesting that additional factors influence business ownership.

Reproductive Rights

The reproductive rights composite index incorporates each state's scores on nine component indicators. The states' scores on this composite vary widely.

- Some states, such as Vermont, Maryland, and Hawai'i, rank well on most components of the index and on the composite index itself.

- Others, such as Mississippi, South Dakota, and North Dakota, rank poorly on the composite indicator as well as on each component of the index.
- Still other states, such as Florida, Iowa and New Hampshire, show a more mixed commitment to reproductive rights, ranking well on some and poorly on others.

In all states, reproductive rights are challenged, and women need to continue to defend and expand their access to reproductive choice.

Health and Well-Being

The health and well-being composite index includes each state's scores on nine indicators of women's health status. States' scores on this composite index vary widely as well.

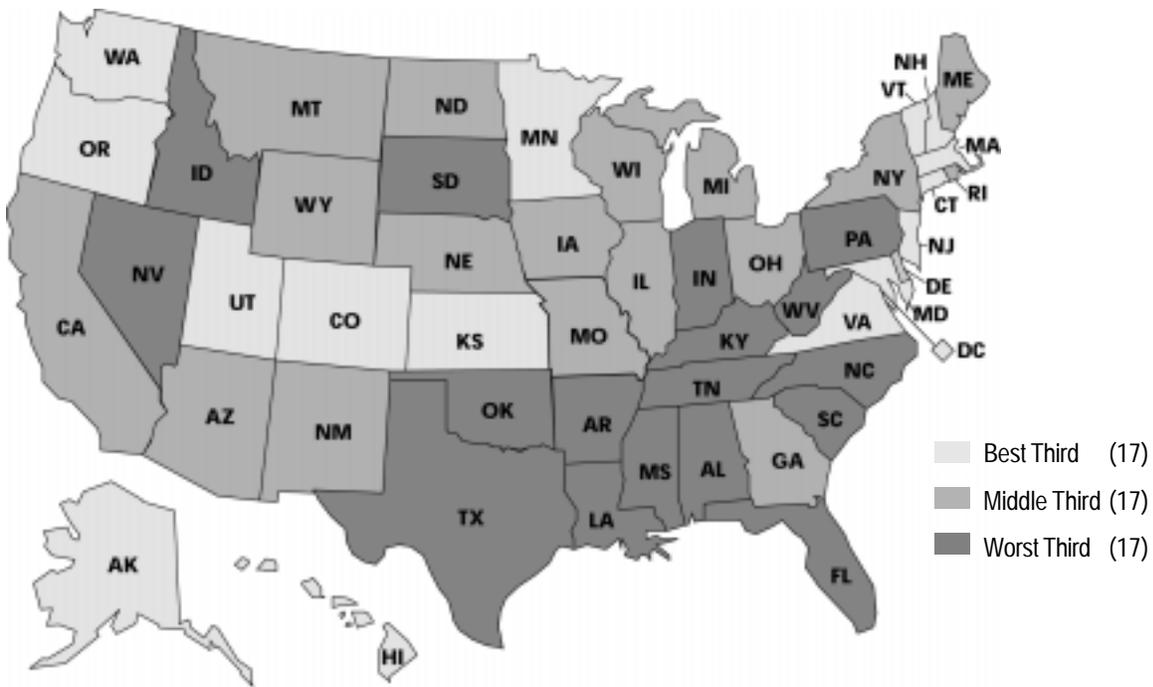
- Overall, states in the Mountain and northern Midwestern regions rank well, while states in the Southeast fare poorly.
- Women in Hawai'i have particularly good health status when compared to women in other states. Hawai'i ranked in the top five states on nearly half of the indicators of health and well-being.
- In contrast, New York ranked in the bottom five states on four of the indicators.
- Notably, women's health status across the states displays similar trends to patterns of health insurance coverage. Hawai'i ranks first in health insurance coverage.

The Best and Worst States Overall

Together, all five indices show that women's status is highest in Connecticut and Vermont. Each ranks in the top ten on four of the five composite indices and in the top third on all the composite indices. Women in Washington also fared well, as the state ranks in the top ten on three composite indices and in the top third on all of them. Hawai'i ranks in the top ten on three and in the top third on four, while Colorado, Minnesota, and New Hampshire rank in the top ten on two and in the top third on four. Finally, Alaska ranks in the top ten on two of the composite indices. In each of these states, women's status does not fall below the midpoint for all states on any of the composite indices of women's status.

In contrast, women's status is lowest in Mississippi, which ranks in the bottom ten on four out of the five composite indices and falls in the bottom third on all of them. Women's status is also low in Alabama and Tennessee, which rank in the bottom ten on three of five and in the bottom third on all of the composite indices. In Arkansas, Kentucky and South Carolina, women's status is in the bottom ten on three indices and in the bottom third on four. Oklahoma ranks in the bottom ten on two of five and in the bottom third on all five. Finally, in

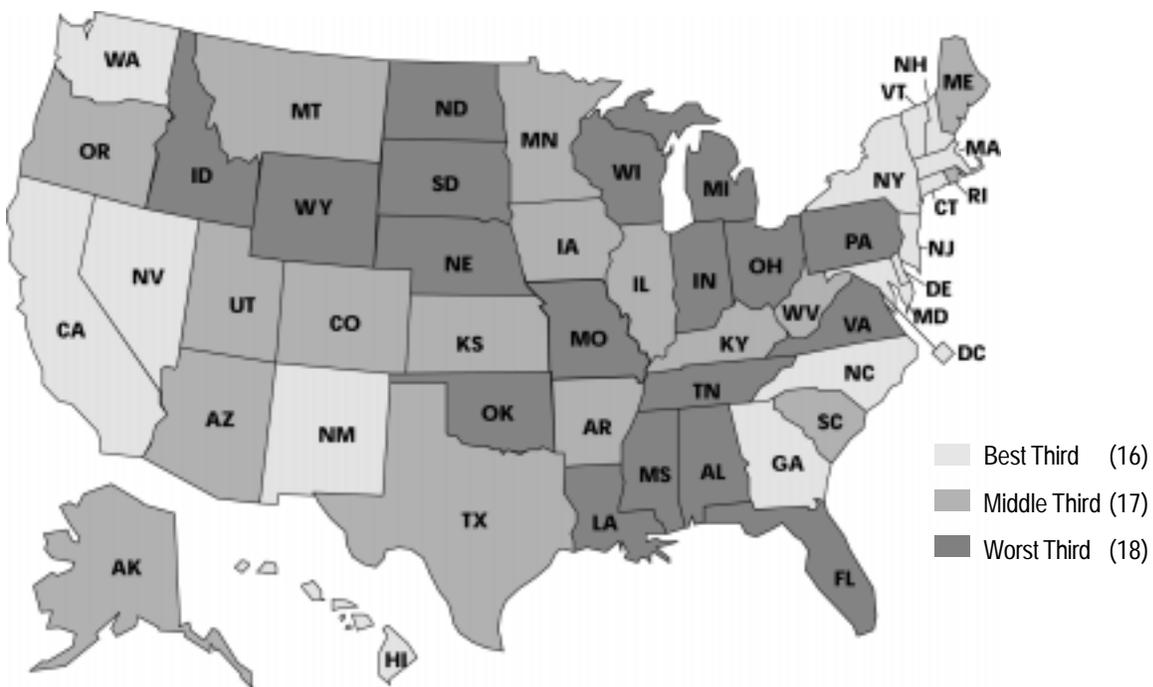
Map 3. Economic Autonomy Composite Index



Note: For methodology and sources, see Appendix II of *The Status of Women in the States*.

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Map 4. Reproductive Rights Composite Index



Note: For methodology and sources, see Appendix II of *The Status of Women in the States*.

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Map 5. Health and Well-Being Composite Index



Note: For methodology and sources, see Appendix II of *The Status of Women in the States*.

Florida women's status is in the bottom third on four of the five composite indices, and in Pennsylvania it is in the bottom third on three. In none of these states does women's status rank in the top half of all states on any of the composite indices of women's status.

The Status of Women in the States report discusses states' rankings on each of the five composite indices and their components in greater detail. It describes trends over the past four years in several of the areas examined by *The Status of Women in the States* project. The report also provides a Women's Resources and Rights Checklist, which outlines legislative provisions and other resources states can provide for women. In addition, a set of policy recommendations for improving women's status are included in the Conclusion of the report.

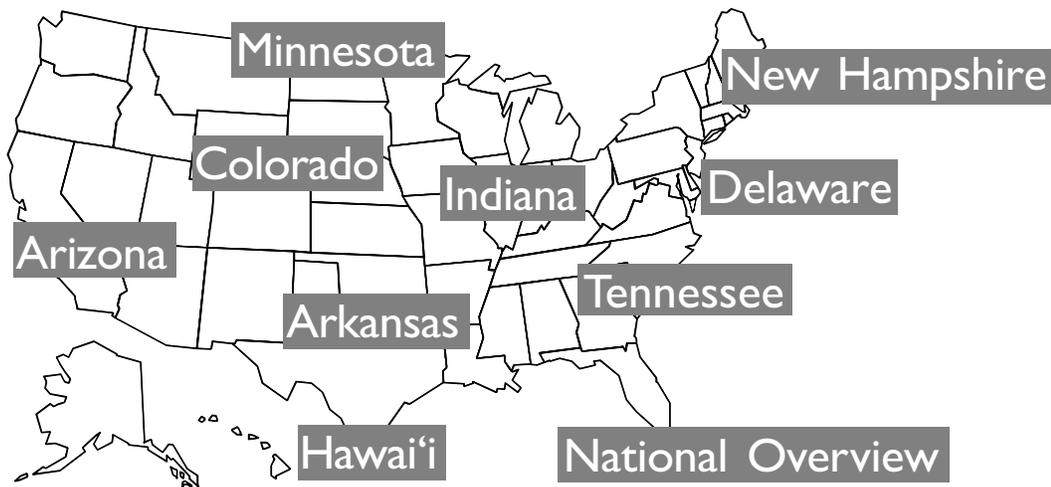
Appendices to the report provide basic data on age, race, marital status, and other demographic information for women in the United States; information on the methodology and sources used to develop the indices; the scores and ranks on all the

component indicators and composite indices for all 50 states and the District of Columbia; a list of national organizations that can provide further information on the topics addressed in this report; and a list of references cited in this report.

The Status of Women in the States is part of an ongoing research project conducted by the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) to establish baseline measures of the status of women in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The effort is part of a larger IWPR Economic Policy Education Program, funded primarily by the Ford Foundation, with additional funding by the Motorola Corporation, by Kristie Graham and the Stocker Foundation, by the Minnesota Women's Foundation, and by the Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation. The project is intended to improve the ability of advocates and policymakers at the state level to address women's economic issues. The first two series of reports were released in 1996 and 1998 and included a summary national report and 24 state reports. This third series includes nine states as well as an update of the national report.

For more information on IWPR reports or membership, please call (202) 785-5100, or visit our website at <http://www.iwpr.org>

The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) is a public policy research organization dedicated to informing and stimulating the debate on public policy issues of critical importance to women and their families. IWPR focuses on poverty and welfare, employment and earnings, work and family issues, the economic and social aspects of health care and domestic violence, and women's civic and political participation. IWPR's work is supported by foundation grants, government grants and contracts, donations from individuals, and contributions from organizations. IWPR is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization.



The Institute for Women's Policy Research presents
The Status of Women in the States 2000

IWPR has released the third edition of a series of reports which examine the status of women across the nation. Find out how your state ranks relative to its neighbors and the country as a whole. The series includes nine state-specific reports and one national report. Each report contains rankings for all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Copies of *The Status of Women in the States* reports can be ordered on-line at www.iwpr.org, or by using the form below

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