

Parity Index: Measuring Women's Representation in the States

There are many possible methodologies for ranking women's representation in elected office. A simple way to measure women's representation in a state is to look at the composition of its state legislature. By that measure, Colorado, with its 41% female legislature, ranks highest, and Louisiana, with its 11.8% female legislature, ranks lowest. However, we wanted to examine the representation of women in all levels of government, giving particular weight to the offices that matter the most to voters, such as governor, member of Congress, and mayor, and to see how each state compared to each other.

In our Parity Index, states earned a given number of points based on whether men or women hold various elected offices. We developed our score based on the following: each state's three most recent gubernatorial elections; their other current statewide elected executives; the winners of their four most recent U.S. Senate elections; the percentage of their U.S. House delegation that is female; the proportion of state legislative seats held by women and the gender of their speakers of the house and senate presidents; and the number of women mayors or county executives in the five largest local jurisdictions (counties or cities) in the state with elections for those offices.

We scored states on a scale of 0 to 100. If a state has a score lower than 50, women are underrepresented in elected office in that state, and if it has a score above 50, men are underrepresented. A state with a score of 50, which means that men have earned 50% of the points and women have earned the other 50%, has achieved parity, especially if the state can maintain a score near 50 for several election cycles. No state achieved a score above 50 in 2013, and the average state had a score of only 18.

Visit www.representation2020.com/parity-index.html to download our spreadsheet calculating each state's Parity Score and Ranking.

Calculating Components of the Parity Index

Statewide Elected Executives (30 points total)

We base 30% of a state's Parity Index score on its statewide elected executive officials, including governor. Offices are weighted comparatively based on their importance.

For the single-seat office of governor, we count the last three elections to give ourselves a clearer picture of whether a woman is likely to become governor in the state. If a state's only statewide elected executive is governor (as is the case in Maine, New Hampshire, and Tennessee), then the last gubernatorial election is worth 15 points and the preceding two are worth 7.5 points each. If a state's only elected executive other than the governor is the lieutenant governor (as is the case in Alaska, Hawaii, and New Jersey), then a woman winning the most recent gubernatorial election would be worth 12.5 points and the winners from the two preceding gubernatorial elections would be worth 6.25 points each. The remaining five points are divided between the three most recent elections for lieutenant governor – 2.5 points for the most recent election, and 1.25 each for the two preceding elections.

In states with three or more statewide elected executives, 10 points are awarded for electing a woman in the last gubernatorial election, and 5 points are awarded each for electing a woman in the two previous gubernatorial elections. The remaining 10 points are awarded based on the number of women holding non-gubernatorial elected executive positions (even if the person

currently holding that office was appointed). Half a point is awarded for each elected superintendent of public instruction and commissioner if the office is single-seat, or for the popularly elected president of a commission if the commission includes multiple commissioners. Commissions with an appointed rather than elected president or chair are excluded from the tally.

The remaining points are allocated for the offices of lieutenant governor, secretary of state, attorney general, treasurer, and auditor/comptroller. Points are weighted so that the first three offices are always worth twice as many points as the last two. For example, if a state had each of the five positions listed above, but no elected commissioners, then a state would receive 2.5 points for a woman lieutenant governor and 1.25 points for a woman state treasurer.

U.S. Congress (30 points total)

Congressional representation is also worth 30% of the Parity Index score. 30 points are divided between the U.S. House and the U.S. Senate. A state with six or more representatives in the House could receive as many as 15 points based on the percentage of its House delegation that is female. For example, if a state's House delegation were half female, then the state would receive 7.5 points (half of 15). The remaining points would be allocated based on how many times women have won in the state's last four Senate elections. 5 points are awarded if a woman won one of the last two elections, and 2.5 are awarded if a woman won one of the two before that. A state like California, where women won all of the last four elections, would receive the full 15 points, whereas a state like Massachusetts, where a woman won only the most recent election, would receive 5 points.

In order to account for potentially large fluctuations in the percentage of women in U.S. House delegations with fewer than six members, we adjusted how many points these House delegations would be worth in the Parity Index. States with five representatives could earn a total of 14 points for its House delegation and 16 points for its senators, while a state with four representatives could earn a total of 13 points for its House delegation and 17 points for its senators, etc. Then, in states with one or two House members, we included a point allocation similar to the one used for gubernatorial elections. States receive half the available points for the number of women elected to the House from the state in 2012, and then a quarter each for the 2010 and 2008 elections. For example, a state like Wyoming – where a woman won the single House seat in 2008, 2010, and 2012 – would receive a total of 10 points for those elections (5 points for 2012 and 2.5 points each for 2008 and 2010), and would then have 20 points available for its last four senate elections.

State Legislature (30 points total)

As state legislatures often serve as a launching pad for men and women who are elected to higher office, they are also worth 30% of the Parity Score. Fourteen points each are allocated based on the percentages of seats held by women in the state house and senate. For example, if a state's house is comprised of 25% women, then it would receive 3.5 points. A state also earns an additional point each for having a woman as house speaker or senate president (or senate president pro tempore if the senate president is the lieutenant governor).

Local Executives (10 points total)

We believe local elections matter for women as well. Therefore, we award two points for each woman mayor or county executive in the five largest local jurisdictions with elected executives in the state.

Example

North Carolina ranks 7th in the nation with a score of 29.

Office	Points Received	Explanation
Governor	5 (of 20)	NC received no points for its current governor, but it did receive five points for the single term of Gov. Bev Perdue (2009-2013).
Other Elected Statewide Executives	5 (of 10)	Five of NC's nine non-gubernatorial statewide elected executive positions are held by women. Half a point each is awarded for the superintendent of public instruction and the commissioner of labor. Two point are awarded for the lt. governor, and one point each for the treasurer and auditor.
U.S. Senate	7.5 (of 15)	Because NC has more than five representatives in the U.S. House, it can receive a total of 15 points for U.S. senators. NC received twice as many points for current Senator Kay Hagan as for former Senator Elizabeth Dole, for a total of 7.5 points (5 for Hagan and 2.5 for Dole).
U.S. House of Representatives	2.3 (of 15)	NC received 2.3 points out of 15, as only 2 of its 13 U.S. representatives are women.
State Legislature	5.6 (of 30)	2.2 points for the women in the State Senate and 3.4 for the women in the House. No points awarded for speaker of the house or senate president.
Local Executives	4 (of 10)	2 points each for the mayors of Raleigh (Nancy McFarlane) and Greensboro (Nancy Vaughan).
Total	29 (of 100)	Rounded from 29.4

The Parity Index over Time: 1993 – 2013

Calculating Parity Index scores using data from 1993, 2003, and 2013 provides insights into the evolution of women's representation in each state. The results of these calculations are presented in the table on page 31. Overall, the scores mirror the evolution of women's representation in state legislatures and in Congress, showing only gradual progress. The median parity ranking rose from 9.5 in 1993 to 12.1 in 2003, to 15.8 in 2013, far short of the 50 point mark.

Eighteen states made double-digit improvements to their parity scores between 1993 and 2013. The greatest improvement occurred in New Hampshire, where an absence of women in Congress or the Governor's mansion in the years leading up to 1993 led to a score of 13.3 and a ranking of 16th. As of 2013, all four of the state's congressional offices and the governorship are held by women, pushing the state's score up to a total of 47.4, the highest total in the country, and five points ahead of second place Washington.

While many states have made strong advances towards gender parity in government in the last two decades, this progress has been offset by declines elsewhere. Between 1993 and 2013, gender parity scores declined in 10 of the 50 states. Since 2003, parity scores have declined in 15 states. One such state is Kansas, which in 1993 had both a woman governor and a woman U.S. senator, contributing to its parity score of 36.9, the highest in the nation. By 2013, Kansas' score had declined 14.9 points to 22. Though this score is still high enough to secure Kansas' 14th place rank in the 2013 Parity Index, it represents the largest decline in women's representation in any state over the last 20 years.

	1993		2003		2013	
	State Ranking	Gender Parity Score	State Ranking	Gender Parity Score	State Ranking	Gender Parity Score
Alabama	50	2.0	49	3.6	36	12.0
Alaska	18	11.1	40	7.5	12	23.6
Arizona	12	15.3	3	29.1	5	33.8
Arkansas	37	5.9	32	10.1	43	9.6
California	3	23.6	1	36.1	4	34.1
Colorado	9	16.2	15	17.6	29	15.8
Connecticut	20	10.7	17	17.0	9	26.6
Delaware	34	6.4	7	23.8	34	13.9
Florida	32	8.1	25	12.2	17	18.8
Georgia	39	5.7	33	9.8	44	9.6
Hawaii	29	8.9	6	26.3	3	39.6
Idaho	11	15.7	31	10.3	42	10.4
Illinois	17	11.4	14	18.1	19	18.1
Indiana	27	9.0	34	9.6	33	14.0
Iowa	42	5.3	41	7.3	40	10.9
Kansas	1	36.9	8	22.4	14	22.0
Kentucky	26	9.1	42	7.2	47	7.5
Louisiana	41	5.3	21	14.4	28	15.7
Maine	15	13.4	2	35.3	10	25.7
Maryland	5	20.0	9	21.7	15	21.2
Massachusetts	30	8.6	30	10.3	16	20.6
Michigan	33	7.0	5	27.6	8	27.4
Minnesota	21	10.5	23	13.3	6	30.9
Mississippi	38	5.8	48	4.3	48	6.4
Missouri	40	5.3	26	12.1	23	16.6
Montana	28	9.0	10	20.9	38	11.9
Nebraska	4	20.2	43	6.9	27	15.7
Nevada	25	9.8	18	16.2	18	18.6
New Hampshire	16	13.3	11	20.9	1	47.4
New Jersey	48	3.8	13	18.4	24	16.1
New Mexico	19	10.8	19	16.0	11	24.4
New York	24	9.9	20	14.8	20	17.1
North Carolina	22	10.4	27	11.6	7	29.4
North Dakota	35	6.1	46	5.4	35	12.9
Ohio	13	14.7	35	9.2	37	12.0
Oklahoma	47	3.8	47	4.8	25	15.9
Oregon	2	27.8	22	14.1	13	23.3
Pennsylvania	49	3.4	44	6.5	46	9.0
Rhode Island	10	15.9	37	7.9	31	14.7
South Carolina	46	4.1	50	2.9	32	14.7
South Dakota	14	14.4	45	5.6	26	15.8
Tennessee	45	4.2	36	8.3	45	9.4
Texas	6	19.8	16	17.4	30	15.1
Utah	44	4.3	39	7.7	49	5.7
Vermont	7	19.4	29	11.5	39	11.4
Virginia	43	4.3	38	7.8	50	4.5
Washington	8	17.7	4	28.9	2	42.5
West Virginia	36	5.9	28	11.5	41	10.5
Wisconsin	23	10.2	24	12.6	22	16.8
Wyoming	31	8.4	12	19.1	21	16.8