The Best and Worst States Overall for Women in 2004

This Fact Sheet is based on findings from The Status of Women in the States report for 2004, a national overview report that presents and analyzes data for all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

Overall, the best state for women is Vermont. Women’s status is also high in Connecticut, and Minnesota and Washington also fare well, rounding out the best states for women. Only these four states met the two criteria for being among the top states for women: 1) ranking in the top ten on at least one composite index of women’s status, and 2) never appearing in the bottom half of all states on any composite index (see Appendix II of The Status of Women in the States for details). Oregon received an honorable mention because it ranked in the top half of all states on all of the composite indices but never ranked in the top ten of all states.

In contrast, the worst state for women is Mississippi. Women’s status is also low in South Carolina and Kentucky, followed by Arkansas and Oklahoma, which are tied at 47th. Tennessee and Texas round out the seven worst states for women. Each of these states ranks in the bottom ten on at least one composite index of women’s status and never appears in the top half of all states on any composite index (see Appendix II of The Status of Women in the States for details). Florida received a dishonorable mention because it ranked below the midpoint of all states on each of the composite indices, yet never ranked in the bottom ten of all states for any composite.
The Best and Worst States for Women in 2004: Politics, Economics, Reproductive Rights, Health

Women's progress has involved both great achievements and significant shortfalls. Many U.S. women are seeing important changes in their lives and access to political, economic, and social rights. Not all women, however, enjoy access to the country’s political and economic resources, nor are they sharing equally in the fruits of progress. Women do not enjoy equality with men and lack many of the legal guarantees that would enable them to achieve it.

The rankings for each of the composite indices presented below were calculated by combining data on several indicators of women's status in each of the five areas. These data were used to compare women in each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia (see Appendix II of The Status of Women in the States report for details).

## Political Participation (Excludes the District of Columbia)

**TOP FIVE**
1. WASHINGTON
2. MICHIGAN
3. CALIFORNIA
4. CONNECTICUT
5. MAINE

**BOTTOM FIVE**
50. NEW JERSEY
49. TENNESSEE
48. SOUTH DAKOTA
47. PENNSYLVANIA
46. WEST VIRGINIA

## Employment and Earnings

**TOP FIVE**
1. DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
2. MARYLAND
3. ALASKA
4. MASSACHUSETTS
5. CONNECTICUT

**BOTTOM FIVE**
51. WEST VIRGINIA
50. LOUISIANA
49. ALABAMA
48. IDAHO
47. MISSISSIPPI

## Social and Economic Autonomy

**TOP FIVE**
1. MARYLAND
2. DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
3. MASSACHUSETTS
4. COLORADO
5. CONNECTICUT

**BOTTOM FIVE**
51. MISSISSIPPI
50. ARKANSAS
49. LOUISIANA
48. WEST VIRGINIA
47. ALABAMA

## Reproductive Rights

**TOP FIVE**
1. HAWAII
2. VERMONT
3. CONNECTICUT
4. NEW JERSEY
5. NEW YORK

**BOTTOM FIVE**
51. MISSISSIPPI
50. SOUTH DAKOTA
49. NORTH DAKOTA
48. NEBRASKA
47. IDAHO

## Health and Well-Being

**TOP FIVE**
1. UTAH
2. MINNESOTA
3. SOUTH DAKOTA
4. NORTH DAKOTA
5. HAWAII

**BOTTOM FIVE**
51. DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
50. KENTUCKY
49. MISSISSIPPI
48. WEST VIRGINIA
47. LOUISIANA

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The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) is a scientific research organization dedicated to informing and stimulating the debate on public policy issues of critical importance to women and their families. IWPR focuses on issues of poverty and welfare, employment and earnings, work and family, health and safety, and women’s civic and political participation.

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Contact the Institute for Women’s Policy Research at (202) 785-5100, www.iwpr.org, or iwpr@iwpr.org, for information about publications and membership.