

## POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT STATUS FACT SHEET

[The Rhode Island Women's Well-Being Index](#) provides a comprehensive, composite measure of how women are faring, broken down by city/town and county where such data is available. Based on a similar index created by the [CA Budget & Policy Center](#), the RI Index encompasses five "dimensions"- Health, Personal Safety, Employment & Earnings, Economic Security, and Political Empowerment - each of which is made up of several indicators. Data by race and ethnicity is currently not available. This fact sheet shows the latest statewide data for the Political Empowerment Status Indicator, ranking cities/towns or counties where possible. All of the data is from 2020.

Due to their distinct role in their families and communities, women bring a unique and valuable perspective to policymaking and the political process. By casting a vote or holding public office, women can voice their priorities and concerns across various issues and challenges. These include securing affordable childcare or quality education for their children, keeping their families healthy and safe, and earning a fair income sufficient to make ends meet and help their families thrive. When women engage in the political process, it increases the chances that issues typically of concern to women come to the forefront during electoral, legislative, and budget deliberations.

Although women make up more than half of the U.S. population, they are not proportionately represented at the decision-making tables in business and government, where priorities are set, and resources are allocated that affect all of our lives. In 2021, women hold 23.7% of U.S. Congressional seats and 30.3% of statewide elective executive offices. Even in Rhode Island, where we have a record 45.1% of women in our state legislature, we still have a way to go before achieving equity in office, including the representation that reflects our community's diversity. Our goal should always be to achieve gender and racial equity for all elected and appointed positions within our state.

<b>Political Empowerment Indicator</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>National</b>
Percentage of women who voted in the 2020 general election	50.8%	58.5%
Percentage of city council members for incorporated cities in the county who are women	33.2%	53.0%
Percentage of appointed state judges who are women	30.5%	34.0%
Percentage of state legislators for the county who are women	34.7%	24.9%

## VOTING

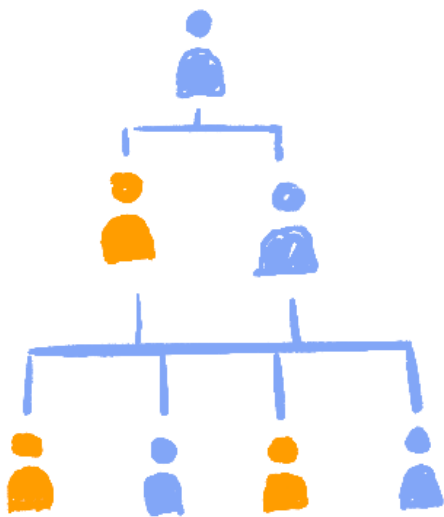
The right to vote is the cornerstone of representative democracy and, therefore, an equitable society.

*Percentage of women who voted in the 2020 general election ranked by city/town, with 1 = Best and areas in orange below the state average.*

City/Town	Value	Rank
RHODE ISLAND	51%	
Cranston	51%	1
North Smithfield	50%	2
Newport	50%	2
Pawtucket	49%	3
Smithfield	48%	4
Richmond	47%	5
Johnston	47%	5
Woonsocket	46%	6
Warwick	46%	6
Warwick	46%	6
Warren	46%	6
Cumberland	44%	7
East Providence	44%	7
Lincoln	43%	8
East Greenwich	43%	8
Providence	42%	9
Exeter	42%	9
Middletown	41%	10
Coventry	40%	11
North Kingstown	40%	11
Jamestown	40%	11
West Warwick	40%	11
Portsmouth	40%	11
Barrington	40%	11
North Providence	39%	12
Westerly	38%	13
South Kingstown	38%	13
West Greenwich	37%	14
Central Falls	35%	15
Glocester	34%	16
Hopkinton	34%	16
Tiverton	34%	16
Scituate	34%	16
Charlestown	33%	17
Narragansett	33%	17
Bristol	32%	18
Block Island	32%	18
Foster	31%	19
Little Compton	30%	20
Burrillville	30%	20

## CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS

*Percentage of city council members for incorporated cities in the county who are women ranked by city/town with 1 = Best and areas in orange below the state average.*



City/Town	Value	Rank
RHODE ISLAND	33%	
Newport	89%	1
Charlestown	80%	2
Coventry	60%	3
Hopkinton	60%	3
North Kingstown	60%	3
Smithfield	60%	3
Tiverton	60%	3
Providence	53%	4
Middletown	43%	5
Westerly	43%	5
Barrington	40%	6
East Greenwich	40%	6
Foster	40%	6
Jamestown	40%	6
North Smithfield	40%	6
Central Falls	29%	7
Portsmouth	29%	7
Scituate	29%	7
Cumberland	25%	8
Pawtucket	22%	9
Bristol	20%	10
East Providence	20%	10
Glocester	20%	10
Johnston	20%	10
Lincoln	20%	10
Narragansett	20%	10
Block Island	20%	10
Richmond	20%	10
South Kingstown	20%	10
West Greenwich	20%	10
West Warwick	20%	10
Warren	20%	10
Burrillville	14%	11
Warwick	14%	11
Woonsocket	14%	11
Cranston	11%	12

## APPOINTED STATE JUDGES

Women judges bring their lived experience of complex family relationships and obligations to their actions. They tend to have a more comprehensive and empathetic perspective, not only on the legal basis for action but also on the people's consequences. Women judges bring a gender lens to their lived experiences in a highly male-dominated profession. Getting a more comprehensive and empathetic perspective to the bench, women judges provide a more holistic approach to our justice administration.

In terms of representation at all levels of the judiciary and on policy-making judicial councils, achieving equality for women judges should be our goal. The entry of women judges into spaces from which they have been historically excluded will help our judiciary be more transparent, inclusive, and representative of the people whose lives they impact.

*Percentage of appointed state judges are women ranked by city/town with 1=Best and areas in orange that are lower than the state average.*

City/Town	Value	Rank
RHODE ISLAND	31%	
Foster	100%	1
Glocester	100%	1
Hopkinton	100%	1
North Providence	100%	1
Richmond	100%	1
Pawtucket	67%	2
Charlestown	50%	3
Coventry	50%	3
Jamestown	50%	3
Johnston	50%	3
Providence	41%	4
Bristol	33%	5
North Kingstown	33%	5
Narragansett	33%	5
Cranston	23%	5
Barrington	0%	6
Burrillville	0%	6
Central Falls	0%	6
Cumberland	0%	6
East Greenwich	0%	6
Exeter	0%	6
Lincoln	0%	6
Middletown	0%	6
North Smithfield	0%	6
Newport	0%	6
Portsmouth	0%	6
South Kingstown	0%	6
Scituate	0%	6
Smithfield	0%	6
Tiverton	0%	6
West Greenwich	0%	6
West Warwick	0%	6
Warren	0%	6
Westerly	0%	6
Woonsocket	0%	6
Block Island	0%	6

## STATE LEGISLATORS

Percentage of state legislators who are women ranked by county with 1=Best and areas in orange below the state average.

County	Value	Rank
RHODE ISLAND	35%	
Bristol	67%	1
Newport	50%	2
Kent	40%	3
Washington	39%	4
Providence	24%	5

### OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Although not included in this index at this time, an ongoing study managed by the Latino Policy Institute in coordination with Roger Williams University students indicates a lack of gender and racial diversity amongst boards and commissions throughout the State of Rhode Island and its cities and towns. These organizations provide direction and recommendations to local government and are meant to be reflective of the community's voice. It is often unclear what openings are available on boards and commissions and what the process is to apply for those openings.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Make permanent the temporary changes to Rhode Island's voting laws that were enacted during the 2020 pandemic, including:
  - requiring the Secretary of State to send a mail ballot application to every registered voter in Rhode Island;
  - waiving the requirement for a voter casting a mail ballot to obtain the signature of two witnesses or one notary public;
  - requiring drop boxes placed in all communities where voters can safely and securely deposit their mail ballots and provide 20 days of early voting for voters to vote in-person, but not on election day.
- Make childcare an allowable campaign expense for candidates for office.
- Provide childcare at the polls while parents are waiting in line to vote.
- Mandate the slate for candidates for appointed positions should reflect the state's racial and gender diversity before any appointments are made.
- Mandate transparency in the board and commission appointment process at the state and local levels, so it is clear when openings are available and what the application process is. Information should be easily available and public.