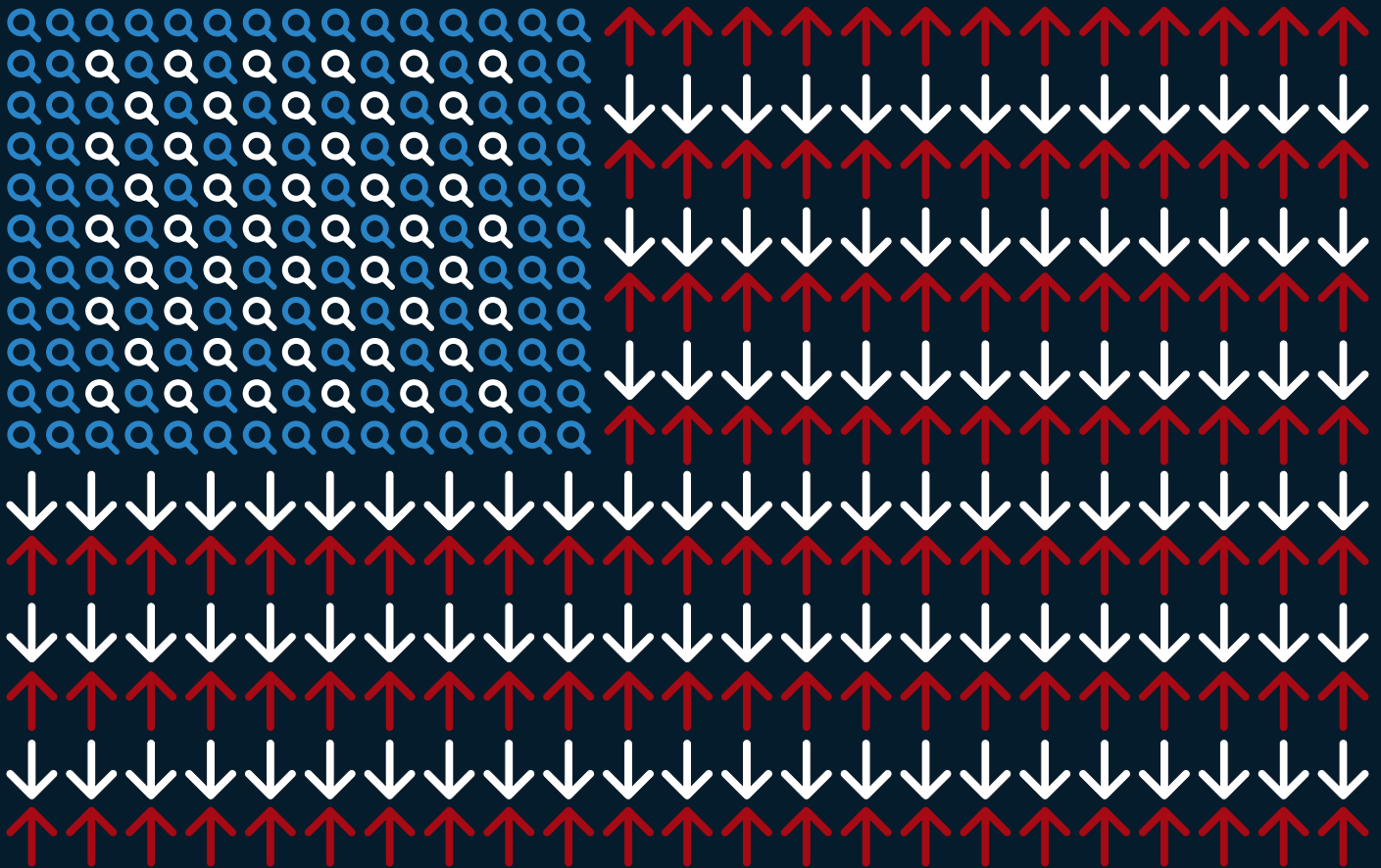


# Reflective Democracy Essentials: What You Need to Know Right Now

September 2024



# Understanding the demographics of political power is essential to understanding the dynamics of the upcoming historic election.

This report — our first longitudinal study examining a full decade of data on race, gender, and elections — finds that even as white men remain vastly over-represented in elected office, women and people of color are making meaningful inroads towards a multi-racial, gender-balanced government.

## ***What You Need to Know Right Now*** includes:

- 1** A ten-year trend that dismantles common assumptions about “electability,” yet is largely ignored by pundits
- 2** Coast-to-coast findings on the shifting demographics of state legislators
- 3** A focused look at women elected to executive office
- 4** Changes to the demographics of power in the seven states widely considered “battleground states” by the media
- 5** An emerging demographic divergence between our two major parties
- 6** A post-*Dobbs* snapshot of legislators by gender in states banning and protecting abortion






# 1 Rethinking “Electability”





















**Make no mistake: White men still dominate American politics. At 30 percent of the population, they hold 56 percent of elected offices at the state and federal levels. This may be why many political observers maintain that white male candidates are more “electable” than anyone else.**

**But the data suggest a reappraisal is in order.**

When we ran the numbers ten years ago, white men held 65 percent of state and federal seats. Women were a dismal 19 percent of Congress and one quarter of state legislators. Since then, both women and people of color have made remarkable gains.

-  Women are now 29 percent of Congress and 34 percent of state legislators, with women of color doubling their share of seats at both levels, and more than doubling in state cabinet positions.
-  Men of color also added seats at every office level.
-  In fact, the only demographic that’s *lost* seats in the last ten years is white men, with decreases at every level: federal, state cabinet, and state legislature.

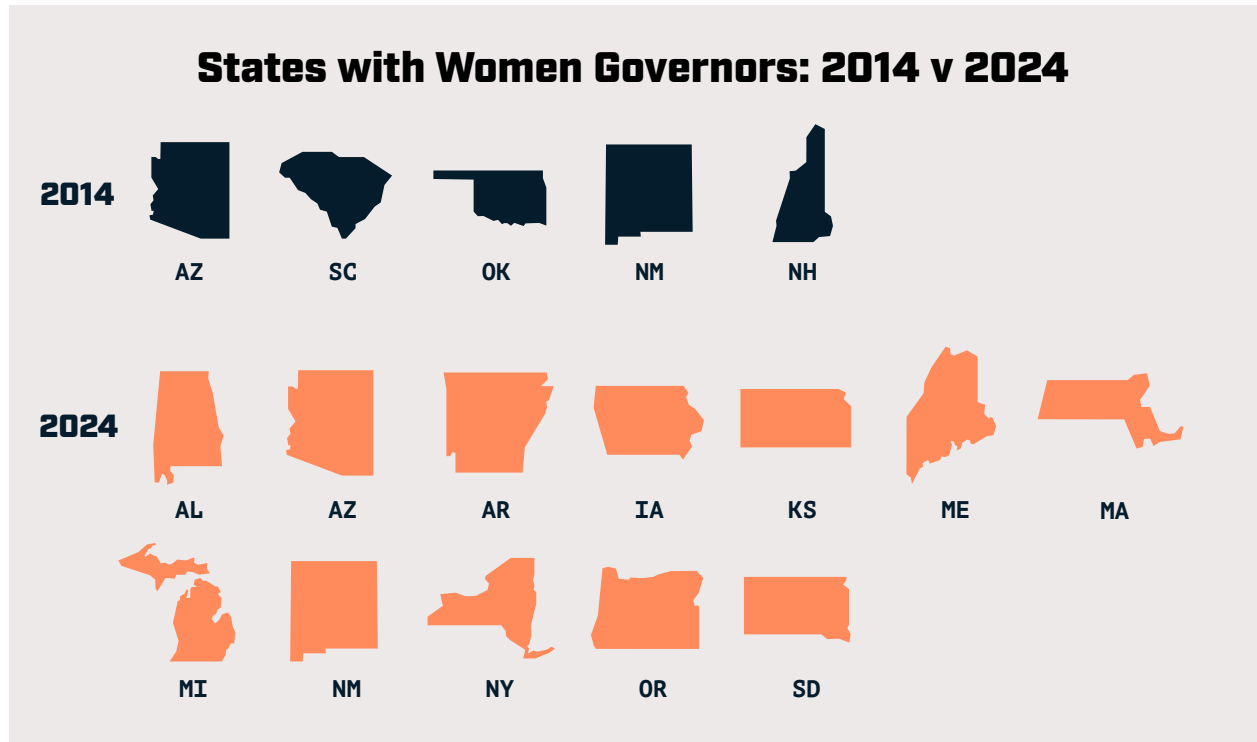
## Demographic Changes in Elected Officials: 2014 vs 2024

	 Federal			 State Cabinet			 State Legislature			 All		
	2014	2024		2014	2024		2014	2024		2014	2024	
<b>Women of Color</b>	6%	12%		3%	7%		5%	10%		5%	10%	
<b>White Women</b>	13%	17%		20%	25%		20%	24%		20%	23%	
<b>Men of Color</b>	11%	15%		5%	11%		10%	11%		10%	11%	
<b>White Men</b>	71%	57%		72%	57%		65%	56%		65%	56%	
<b>Total</b>	100%	100%		100%	100%		100%	100%		100%	100%	

## 2 Where Women Lead

The conventional wisdom used to be that voters might trust women as legislators, but not as executive leaders. Secretary of State? Attorney General? Governor? Elected cabinet roles and above were a bridge too far.

Today, 67 million Americans look to women as their governors. From Arkansas to Oregon, Michigan to Massachusetts, women currently govern twelve states, up from five states in 2014.



### Women Elected to Cabinet Roles

In 2024, women hold cabinet positions (lieutenant governor, secretary of state, attorney general, and treasurer) in 43 states and constitute 32 percent of state cabinet offices, up from 23 percent in 2014. Among them, women of color occupy cabinet seats in 16 states, up from six states in 2014.

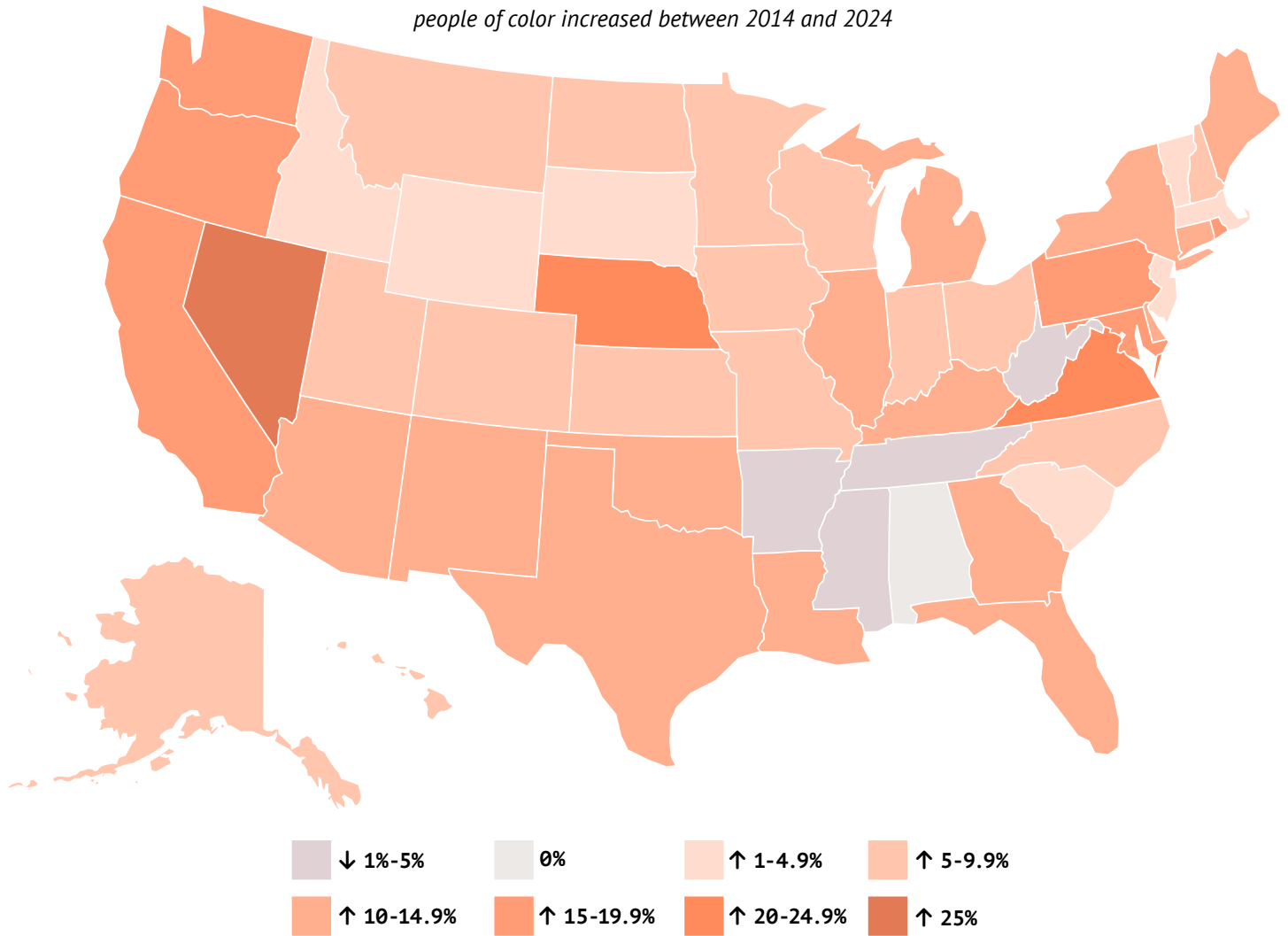
# 3 States of Change

Across all regions of the country, the demographics of state legislatures have shifted dramatically in the past ten years. Today, state legislators in 45 states are more reflective of their constituents than ten years ago. The greatest gains by women and/or people of color occurred in Nevada, Nebraska, Virginia, and Maryland.

Even as the 2016 election appeared to signal the ascendancy of the traditional white male politician, a funny thing happened during the midterms: In 2018, voters elected more women and people of color into state legislatures than at any other time in American history.

## A Decade of Reflective Growth in State Legislatures

*In all but five states, seats held by women and people of color increased between 2014 and 2024*



Decrease/Increase in Seats Held by Women and People of Color

# 4 Seven States in the Spotlight

With a presidential contest quickly approaching, so-called “battleground states” are under scrutiny by the media. Do the demographic trends found across the nation hold true in these seven states?

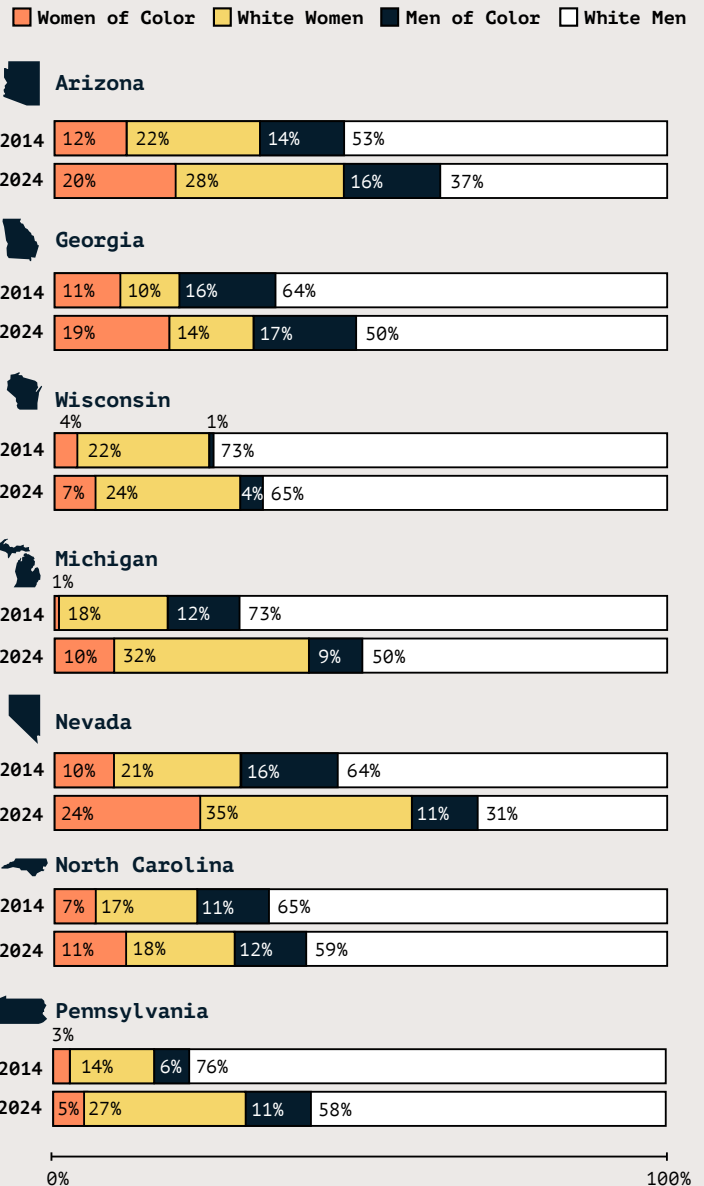
Broadly speaking, a decade of data on the states currently under the microscope finds a realignment in the demographics of power echoing larger trends.

In all seven states, women and people of color made gains in representation, and white men lost some of their power.

Three battleground state populations are more or less evenly divided by race: Nevada is 55% people of color; Georgia 50%, and Arizona 47%. Despite significant electoral gains, people of color remain under-represented in all three.

Of the seven states, Nevada saw the most seismic shifts in the demographics of power. From 2014 to 2024, white men lost more than half of their seats; women increased from 31% to 59% of elected leaders; and people of color increased from 17% to 35%. (Notably, white men remain overrepresented: at 23% of Nevadans, they hold over 30% of seats.)

## Representation in States Under the Spotlight



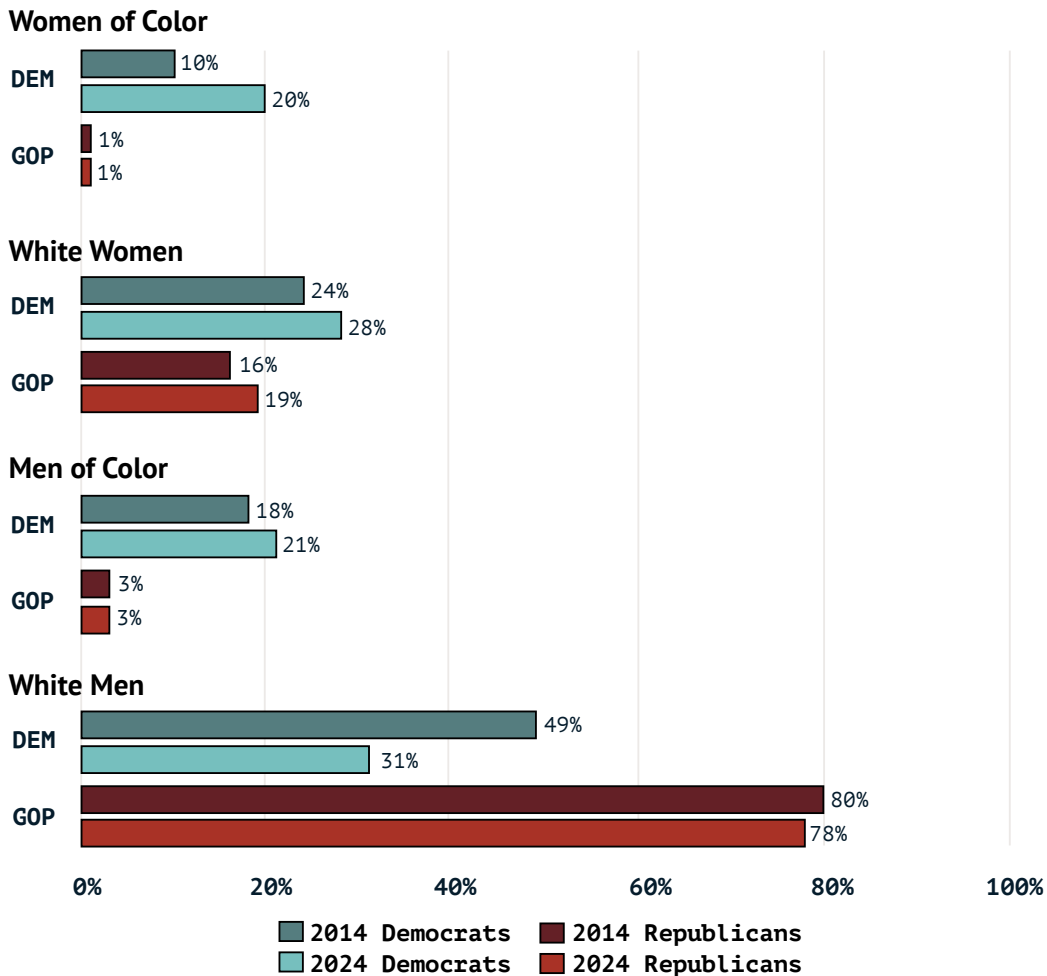
# 5 Demographics by Party Affiliation

The past decade saw a great demographic divergence between America’s two major parties.

- From 2014 to 2024, the aggregate race and gender of Democratic elected officials came into alignment with national census figures, while Republican demographics – which favor white men by wide margins – stayed more or less constant.
- Over this ten-year period, women of color elected as Democrats doubled, while the GOP saw no increase. Today, women of all races make up 48 percent of Democratic electeds, and 20 percent of Republicans.
- At 40 percent of the American population, people of color constitute 41 percent of Democratic electeds at all levels of office combined, and white men – who are 30 percent of the population – make up 31 percent of Democrats. Republican elected leaders, meanwhile, are 80 percent white men, roughly on par with the party’s 2014 demographics.

## Demographic Changes to the Two Major Parties

All Electeds, 2014 v 2024





# The Political Demographics of Abortion Ban States

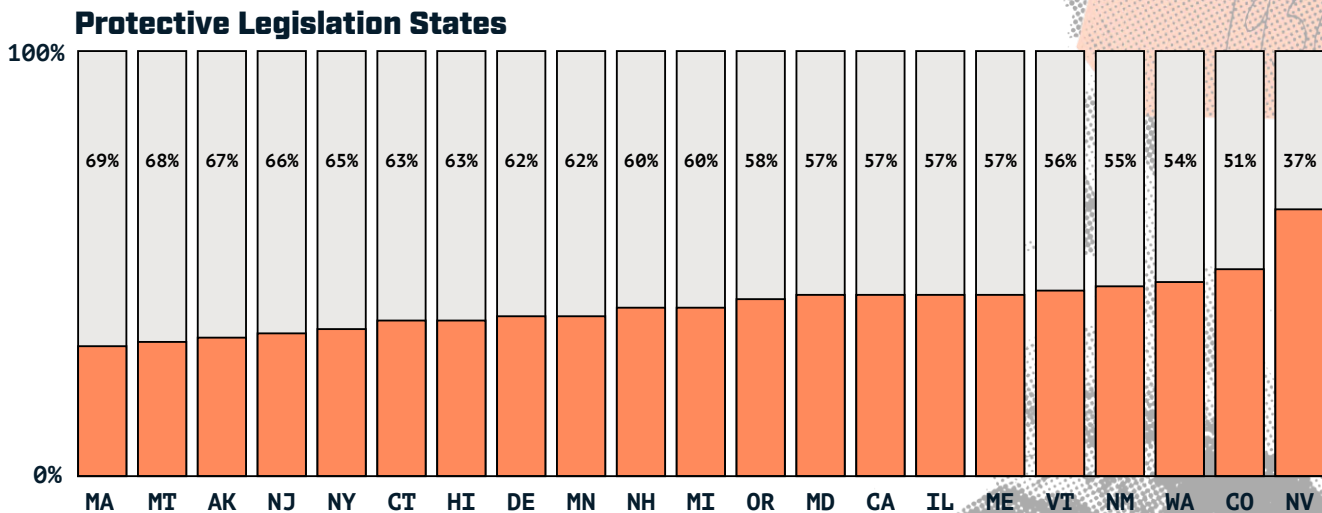
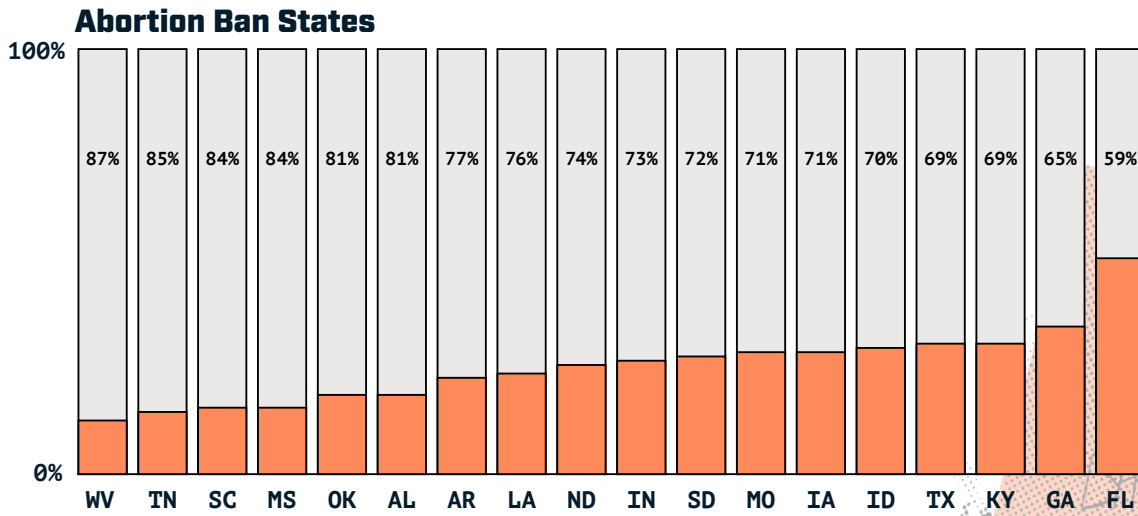
Since *Roe v. Wade* was overturned in 2022, abortion has dominated both headlines and legislative sessions across the land.

As of August, 2024, 18 states have passed abortion bans, while 21 states have passed measures which, to varying degrees, protect the rights of people seeking and providing abortions.

Notably, the percentage of women is significantly lower in legislatures which have banned abortion than in those which have passed protections. On average, women are 25 percent of legislators in abortion ban states. State legislatures that have protected abortion rights are, on average, 37 percent women.

## State Legislatures by Gender

Men Women





# About the Reflective Democracy Campaign

The Reflective Democracy Campaign reports on, funds, and organizes the movement for a democracy whose leaders fully reflect the diversity of the American people. We are the only resource for comprehensive data and analysis on the race and gender of elected officials and candidates at the federal, state, county, and city levels. Our data sets, reports, and other resources are freely available at [WhoLeadsUs](https://WhoLeadsUs.com).

## Our recent research includes:

- **Abortion Bans and Minority Rule:** The Supreme Court asserted that the *Dobbs* decision overruling *Roe v. Wade* returns the power to decide for or against abortion “to the people and their elected representatives.” [In fact, the decision delivers the power to white men.](#)
- **System Failure: What the 2020 Primary Elections reveal about our democracy:** While primaries are viewed as robustly competitive, [we found a pattern of systemic gridlock fortifying white male minority rule.](#)

**Contact the Campaign for more data and analysis on the demographics of political power.** Data on specific ethnicities, levels of office, and/or geographies is available, as well as analysis about election gains by women and people of color, and on the persistent white male overrepresentation distorting our democracy.

For more information, please write to [hello@wholeads.us](mailto:hello@wholeads.us) and follow us on X [@WhoLeadsUs](https://twitter.com/WhoLeadsUs).

## Reflective Democracy Campaign Methodology

Our research team individually researches each candidate and officeholder's race and gender based on information available online. Whenever possible, self-identification is prioritized. Where self-identification is not available, our team analyzes information available via online sources, including photographs, biographical details, etc.

## Research Credits

We are grateful to the [Guttmacher Institute](#) for its outstanding research on abortion rights.

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