

25

YEARS

Women's Council
· Wisconsin ·

Moving Wisconsin Forward:

An Analysis of Wisconsin Women in Elected Office

2010



an introduction from
CONGRESSWOMAN TAMMY BALDWIN

In 1925, Wisconsin Assemblymen Helen Thompson, Helen Brooks, and Mildred Barber took their seats in the Capitol—the first women elected to our state legislature. Assemblyman Barber recalled that “the men didn’t resent us too much,” though adding that, in that era of Prohibition, some clearly disapproved of Assemblyman Brooks’ membership in the Women’s Christian Temperance Union!

Women are not a monolithic group. A common anatomy doesn’t necessarily mean a common ideology. Yet, we have what Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) calls “the ties that bind.” A research paper published in 2000 by the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers confirms that, “Most of the women in Congress, regardless of party or ideology or race or ethnicity, believe as Rosa DeLauro does, that there are ties that bind women together across divisions of geography, philosophy, class, and color.”

As women we bring our life experiences to the job. We can effect change because we prioritize issues as we know them, as we understand them; and, because of that, having a seat at the table matters.

The late Wisconsin State Representative Midge Miller was more succinct when she told a group of women lobbying at the Capitol on child care issues, “If you just elected people to office who knew this stuff, you wouldn’t have to do any lobbying!”

Women also bring a different style to governing. Our approach to problem solving, our interest in achieving consensus, our concern with detail, and, notably, our ability to talk about the world as something other than a sports or war metaphor are all more good reasons why having a seat at the table matters.

When George Mallory was asked why he wanted to climb Mt. Everest, he answered simply, “Because it is there.” So when people ask, “Why should women get involved in politics?” my answer is equally simple: “Because we are here.” Because this is our world as much as it is theirs and if we care about how our community affairs, our national affairs, and our world affairs are conducted, we must assume responsibility and leadership.

I salute the Wisconsin Women’s Council for its 25 years of advocacy to improve the status of women in our great state. This report showcases those Wisconsin women elected to public office. May it serve to inspire and encourage all those who wish to follow.

Tammy Baldwin



Women hold **one in four** elected offices in state and tribal government in Wisconsin.



Women continue to hold some of Wisconsin's most visible public offices, including Lieutenant Governor and Chief Justice of the Wisconsin Supreme Court. We find, however, that women hold fewer positions in state government than they did five years ago—25% in 2010, compared to 28% in 2005.¹



A notable gain in the recent period is the addition of a 4th seat held by a woman on the Wisconsin Supreme Court. The Court, which has had a female Chief Justice for more than a decade, is now majority female.



Women's representation in the Wisconsin State Legislature has declined markedly since 2005—from 34 women in 2005 to 29 women in 2010. After the 2009 elections, women's participation in the State Legislature fell to its lowest level in more than two decades. The number of women in the State Assembly has decreased in each of the last two elections. Only 21 women have served in the Wisconsin State Senate in the state's history and most had prior experience serving in the State Assembly.² This highlights the importance of a pipeline of women in elected offices in state and local government if we expect to expand diversity in our governing bodies.

Women's representation in the U.S. Congress has grown steadily over the past two decades. In total, 90 of the 535 seats (17%) are held by women, including 17% of U.S. Senate seats and 17% of seats in the House of Representatives.³ In the history of our state, Wisconsin has sent only two women to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives: Tammy Baldwin (1998) and Gwen Moore (2004). Wisconsin has never elected a woman to serve in the U.S. Senate.

Women political leaders in Wisconsin's Tribal governments fare better with more than one-third (36%) of Tribal Council/Governing Board seats held by women. This makes Wisconsin's Tribal Councils/Governing Boards among the most gender diverse levels of state and local government leadership in Wisconsin.

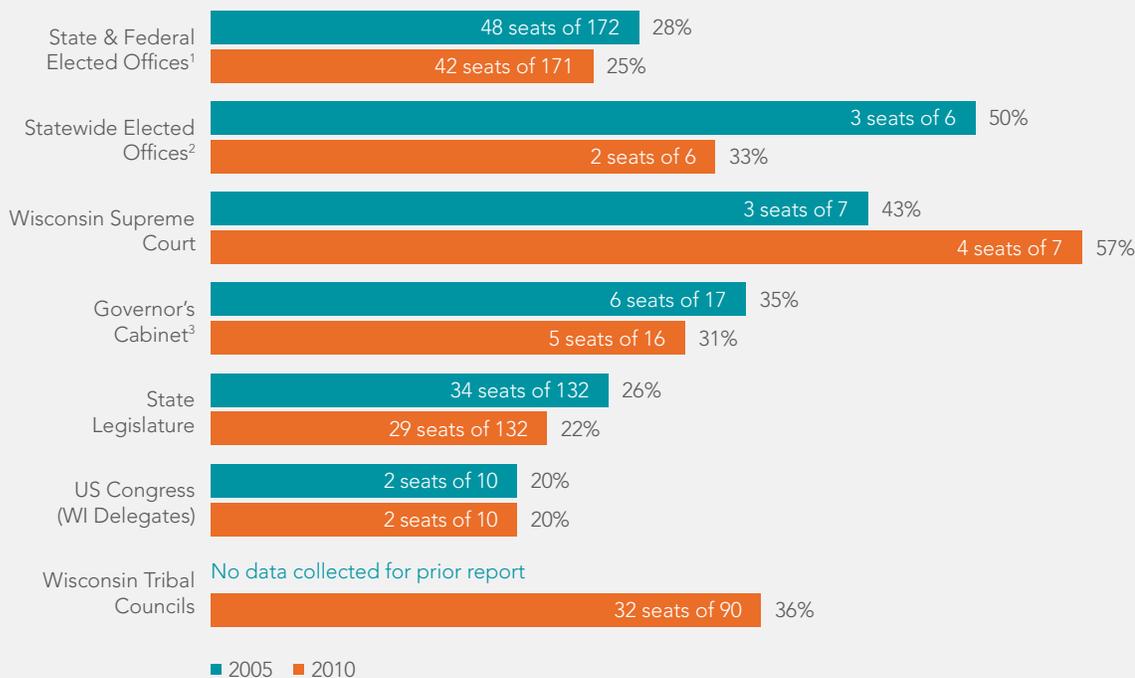
Very little data are available on representation by women of color in state and local elected office. In general, however, representation is quite low. In the Wisconsin State Legislature, for example, only 3% of members are women from racial and ethnic minority groups (e.g., African American, Hispanic, Native American, Asian), compared to 5% of state legislators nationwide.³

¹The year 2005 is the first year that data on women in elected office in state and local government were collected by the Women's Council and the earliest year for which data are available for women's participation in most elected offices in Wisconsin.

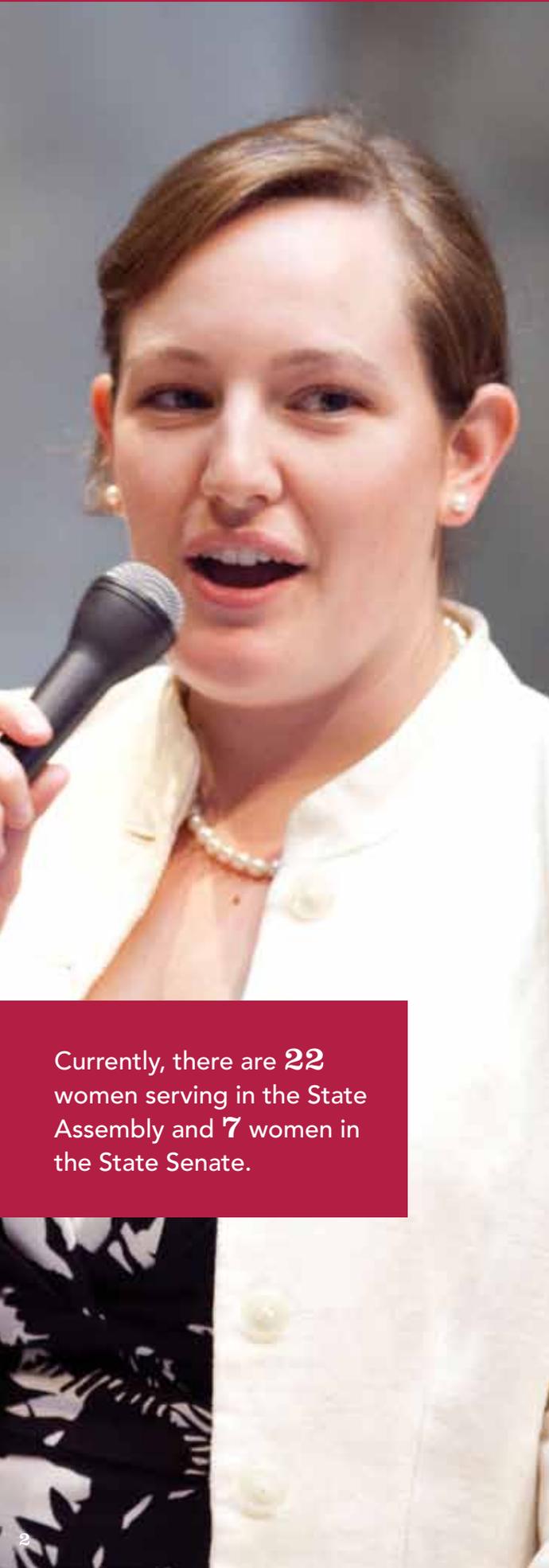
²Wisconsin Legislative Reference Bureau, *Wisconsin Women Legislators—A Historical List, Brief 09-3, January 2009.*

³Center for American Women & Politics (CAWP), *Women in the U.S. Congress 2010, Fact Sheet, 01/2010.*

Women in State, Tribal & Federal Offices, 2005 to 2010



¹Excluding Tribal Councils. ²Statewide Offices: Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, Secretary of State, State Treasurer and Superintendent of Public Instruction. ³Members of the Governor's Cabinet are the appointed heads of state government departments and agencies.



Currently, there are **22** women serving in the State Assembly and **7** women in the State Senate.



Women hold **one in five** seats in the Wisconsin Senate and Assembly.



Women hold 29 (22%) of the 132 seats in the Wisconsin State Legislature, down from peaks of 37 women in the years 1989 and 2003.



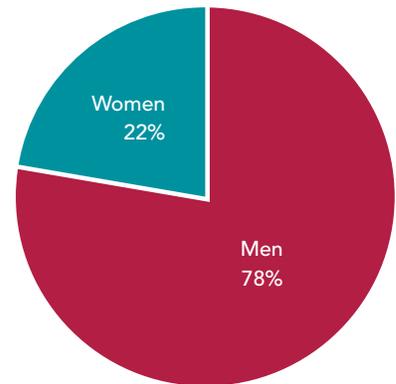
The most women ever serving in either house were 32 in the State Assembly in 1989 and 11 in the State Senate in 1999 and 2001. Currently, there are 22 women serving in the State Assembly and 7 women in the State Senate.



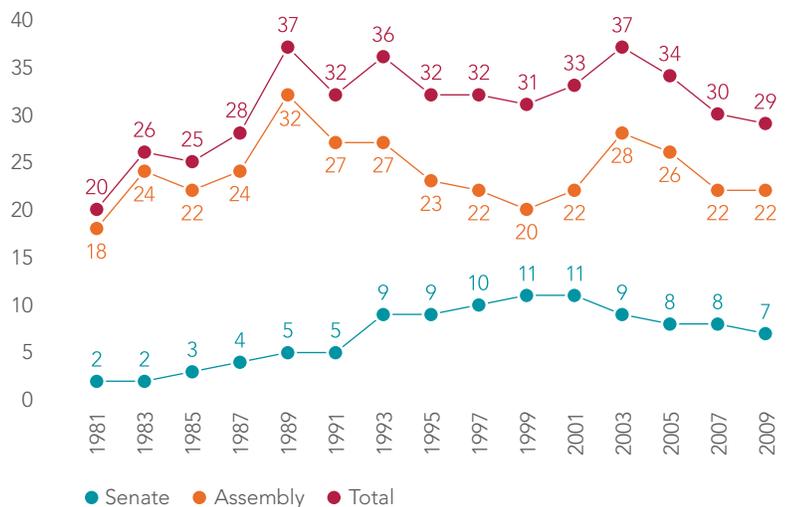
Nonetheless, in the last election, when women ran for Assembly open seats, they won 75% of the time. When women serving in the Senate and Assembly ran as incumbents in contested races they won every time.



Wisconsin State Legislature, 2009



Number of Women in the Wisconsin State Legislature, 1981–2009



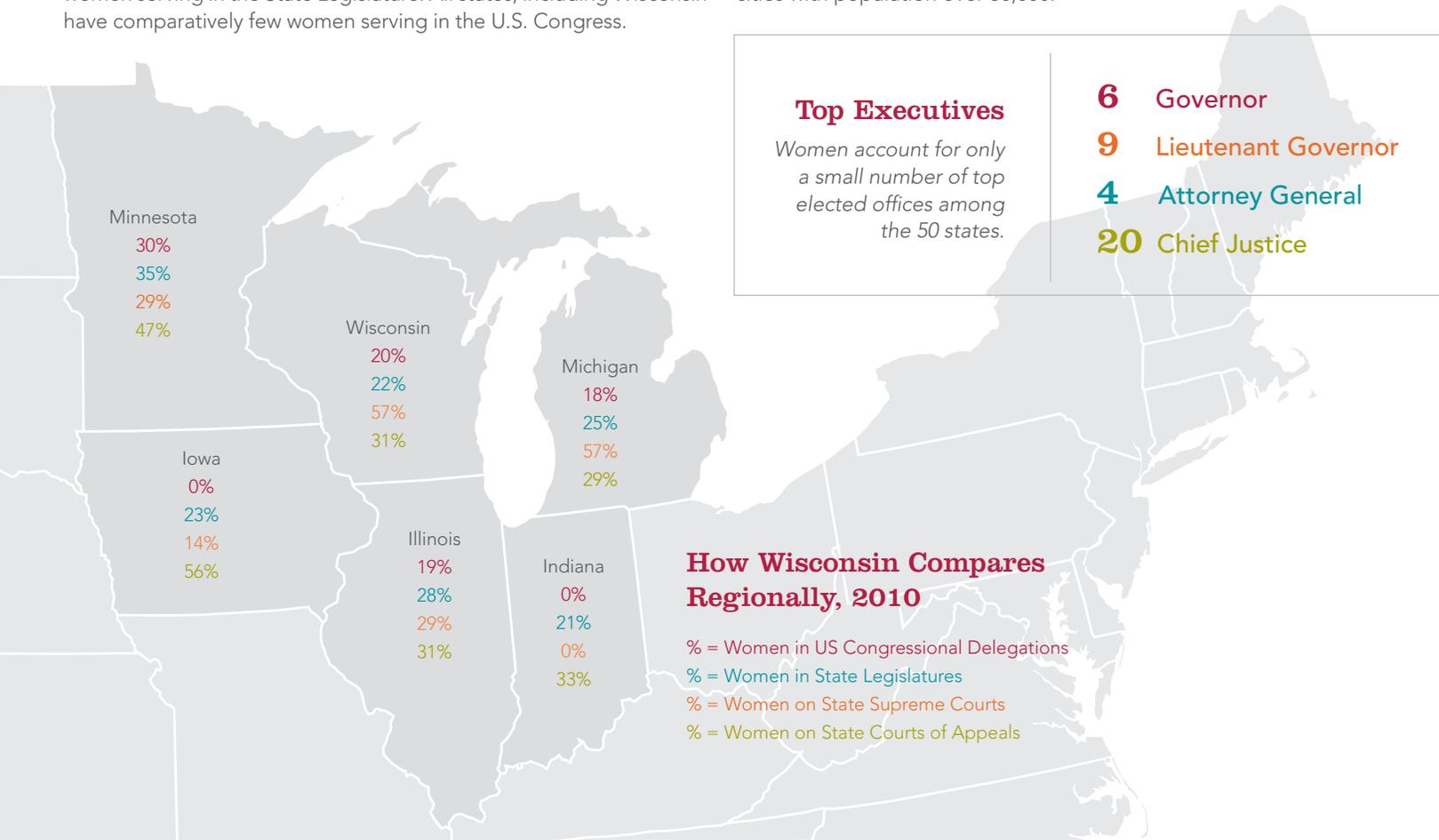
*There are a total of 132 seats in the WI State Legislature (33 Senate & 99 Assembly). Source for historical figures: WI Legislative Reference Bureau.

State Representative Helen Kelda Roys (pictured)

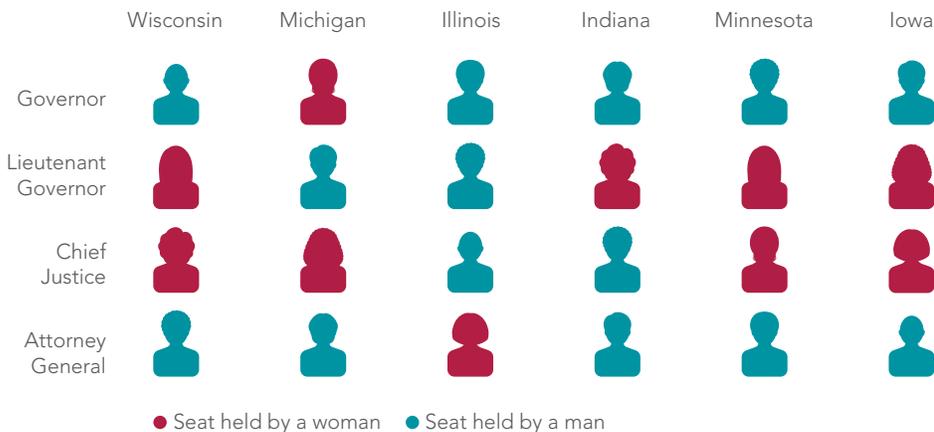
How does Wisconsin compare?

The map below shows how Wisconsin compares to other Midwestern states, including Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan and Minnesota. Wisconsin leads, with Minnesota, for the share of women serving on the State Supreme Court. It is in the lower third, however, for the share of women serving in the State Legislature. All states, including Wisconsin have comparatively few women serving in the U.S. Congress.

Comparative data across states on women in local elected office are not available. We do know that nationally, among cities with populations greater than 30,000, women make up 17.5% of mayors. In Wisconsin, only two women (10%) serve as mayors among the 20 cities with population over 30,000.



Women in Top State Elected Offices, 2010

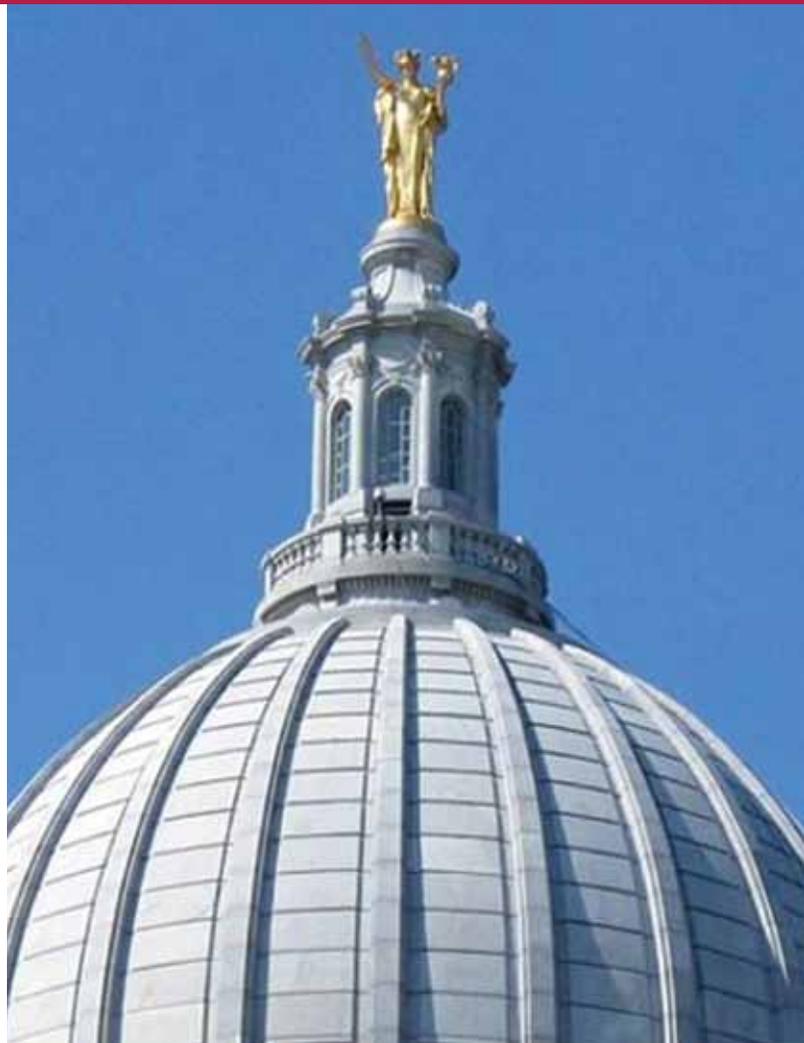




SUMMARY FINDINGS

From 2005 to 2010, there has been **mixed progress** in increasing women's representation in state and local elected office in Wisconsin.

- + Increases are notable for women serving on Town, Village and School Boards and City Councils. Though the percent change is small, it represents a net increase of 225 seats, showing that women are increasingly seeking and gaining seats on these local governing bodies.
- + Women continue to hold some of the most visible offices in state government including Lieutenant Governor and Chief Justice of the Wisconsin Supreme Court. More than half of the Justices on the Wisconsin Supreme Court are female.
- + In 2005, three of Wisconsin's largest cities—Milwaukee, Green Bay and Janesville—had no women on the City Council. Women now hold City Council seats in all of these municipalities. In fact, in 2010, all Wisconsin cities with a population of 50,000 or greater have at least one women serving on the City Council.
- Women's representation on County Boards has decreased steadily since 2005, though this reduction is due, in part, to a reduction in the size of several County Boards over the period.
- In the Wisconsin State Legislature, women's presence as State Senators and Representatives has fallen to its lowest level in two decades.



Wisconsin Women Political Firsts

1919



Wisconsin becomes the first state to ratify the 19th Amendment giving women the vote. The Wisconsin Women's Suffrage Association was formed 50 years earlier, in 1869—the year the Wisconsin legislature passed a law allowing women to run for school boards and other elective school offices, though they still could not vote in school board elections until 1884!



1957

Dena Smith becomes Wisconsin's first female State Treasurer. Initially appointed to fill a vacancy caused by her husband's death, she was subsequently elected to the office.

1973



Virginia Hart becomes the first woman appointed to a Governor's Cabinet post in Wisconsin as Secretary of the Department of Regulations and Licensing.

Governor's Commission on the Status of Women was voted its first budget by the Legislature: \$20,000 per year.

Barbara Thompson becomes the first woman elected as Wisconsin's State Superintendent of Education.

1979

Governor Dreyfus vows to "croak" the Governor's Commission on the Status of Women and closes down the Commission.

Vel Phillips, elected Wisconsin's Secretary of State, becomes the first African American woman in the nation elected to a statewide office.



1925

Mildred Barber, Hellen Brooks, and Helen Thompson become the first three women elected "assemblymen." Since 1925, 95 women have served in the Wisconsin State Assembly.

1948

Ruth Bachhuber Doyle becomes the 4th generation of her family to serve in the State Assembly—following her father, grandfather and great-grandfather.

1964



The Governor's Commission on the Status of Women is established, with Kay Clarenbach as Chairman, following the Wisconsin Conference on the Changing Status of Women.

1976

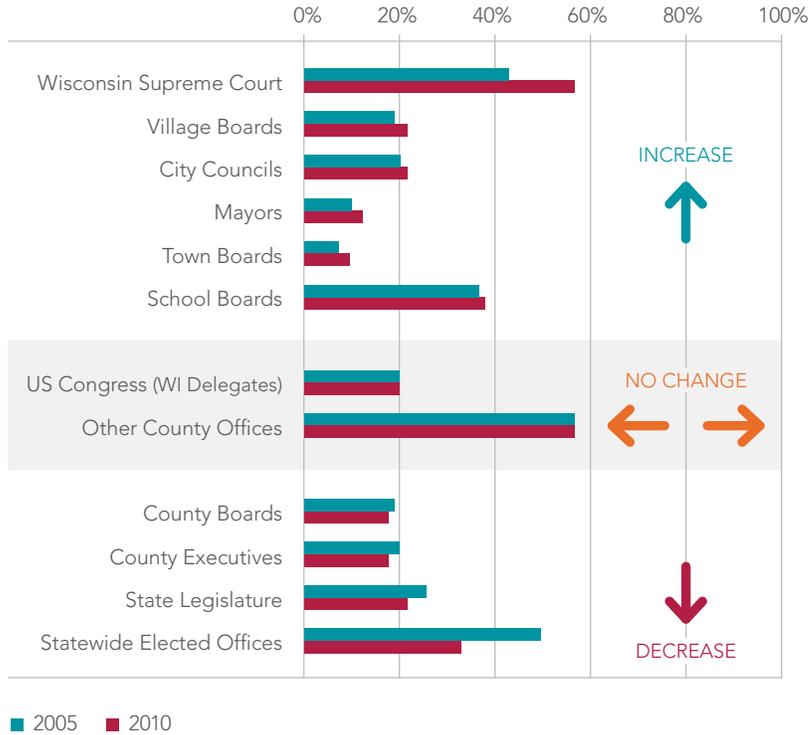


Shirley Abrahamson becomes Wisconsin's first female Supreme Court Justice. Since that time, six women have served on the state Supreme Court.

1975

Kathryn Morrison becomes the first woman elected to the State Senate. Since 1975, 21 women have served in the Wisconsin State Senate (most of whom also served in the State Assembly).

Share of Women in Elected Office in Wisconsin, 2005 to 2010



There are still **no women** on many local governing boards, including:

74% of Town Boards (937 of 1,258)

24% of Village Boards (96 of 404)

15% of City Councils (29 of 190)

5% of School Boards (23 of 427)

4% of County Boards (3 of 72)



1983

Wisconsin Women's Council formed as a permanent state agency governed by a bipartisan Board appointed by the Governor and Legislative Leaders.



1996

Shirley Abrahamson becomes Wisconsin's first female Supreme Court Chief Justice and continues to serve in that capacity.



2002

Barbara Lawton becomes the first woman elected as Wisconsin's Lieutenant Governor.

Peg Laughtenschlager becomes the first woman elected as Wisconsin's Attorney General.

Governor Jim Doyle's Cabinet recognized as the most diverse in Wisconsin history and among the most diverse in the Nation.

2004

Gwen Moore becomes Wisconsin's first African American Congresswoman, elected to the U.S. House of Representatives.



1993

Wisconsin Glass Ceiling Commission created to recommend measures to ensure that the state's economy takes full advantage of the talents of Wisconsin women and minorities.



1998

Tammy Baldwin becomes Wisconsin's first Congresswoman, elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. No woman has yet to be elected to the U.S. Senate.



2001

State Senator Margaret Farrow is appointed to the Office of Lieutenant Governor becoming the first woman to serve in that Office in Wisconsin.

2003

Senator Mary Panzer becomes the state Senate's first female Majority Leader.

2005

Judge Kitty Brennan becomes the first female Chief Judge of Wisconsin's First Judicial District (Milwaukee County).





Women hold about **one in five** County Board seats.

Women hold **18%** of County Board seats, down slightly from **19%** in 2005.¹

County Boards are the only level of government showing a decline in gender diversity since 2005. While it is encouraging that about 40% of Wisconsin's County Boards have five or more women members, this figure is down from 50% in 2005. It is also notable that in 2005 all of Wisconsin's 72 counties had at least one female board member, while in 2010 there are three counties (Iowa, Pierce and Price) with no women on their County Boards. The share of women serving as County Board Chair declined from 11% (8 Boards) in 2005 to 8% (6 Boards) in 2010.



Another important elected position in County government is that of County Executive. Wisconsin currently has 11 County Executives (up from 10 in 2005), of which two are female (serving Dane and Portage Counties).



Women hold about **one in five** City Council and **one in eight** Mayoral seats.

Cities had modest increases since 2005, both in women serving on City Councils and as Mayors. Progress can be seen, particularly, in the number of City Councils where women account for one-third or more of Council Members. In 2010, 30% of City Councils are one-third or more female, up from only 11% in 2005. Nonetheless, among Wisconsin's 190 City Councils, 15% (29 Councils) have no women members, down from 21% (39 Councils) in 2005.



Progress can also be found among the state's 10 largest cities, which now all have at least one female City Council member. In 2005, several major Wisconsin cities, including Milwaukee, Green Bay and Janesville, had no women serving on their City Councils.



Wisconsin has 181 City Mayors, of which 12% (21) are women, an increase from 10% (18) in 2005. It is interesting to note, however, that among larger Wisconsin cities—such as the 20 cities with a population of 30,000 or greater—there are only two females Mayors (Wauwatosa and West Bend).

Women hold **22%** of City Council seats & **12%** of Mayoral seats, up slightly from **20%** & **10%** respectively in 2005.

¹Several County Boards significantly downsized in recent years, reducing the overall number of board seats and correspondingly the number of seats held by women.

TOWNS, VILLAGES & SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Women hold about **one in five** Village Board seats.

Village Boards show the most progress in increasing gender diversity. In 2010, 22% of Village Board seats were held by women, up from 19% in 2005. One-quarter of all Village Boards still have no women members. It is encouraging however, that an equal proportion (25%) of Village Boards are one-third or more female. Moreover, the share of women serving as Village Board President increased from 9% (38 Boards) in 2005 to 14% (55 Boards) in 2010.

Women hold **22%** of Village Board seats, up slightly from **19%** in 2005

Women hold **one in ten** Town Board seats.

Town Boards are the least likely among the local governing bodies in Wisconsin to have gender diversity. In 2010, nearly three-quarters of Wisconsin's 1,250 Town Boards have no women members. This is largely unchanged from 2005. Women serve as town board Chair in only 5% of Town Boards. Nonetheless, there has been some progress. In 2010, women hold 9% of Town Board seats, compared to 7% in 2005.

Women hold **9%** of Town Board seats, up slightly from **7%** in 2005.

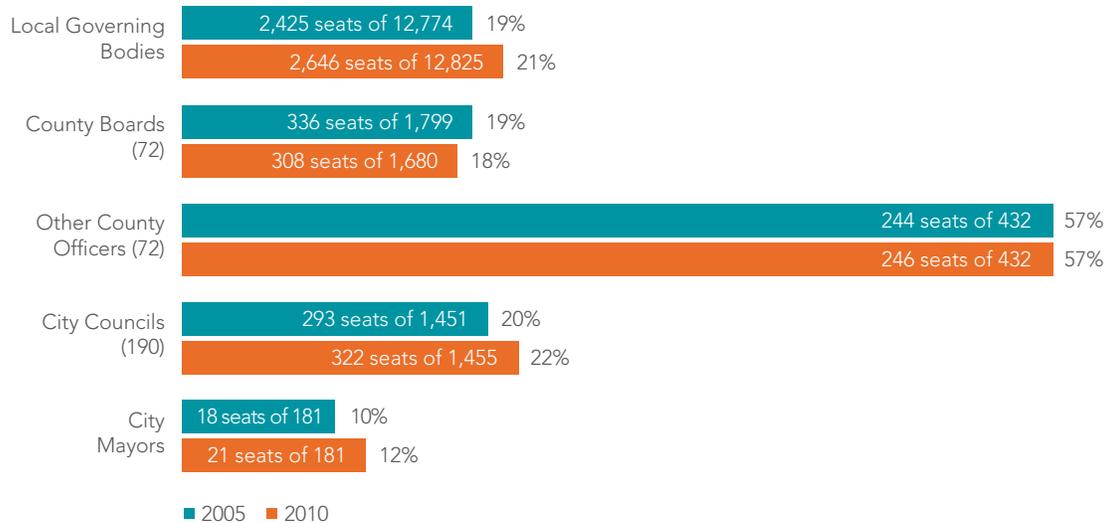
Women hold more than **one in three** School Board seats.

School Boards remain the level of government where women are most likely to serve. Moreover, women account for over one-third of the members in 60% of Wisconsin School Boards. Women make up 29% of School Board Presidents, unchanged from 2005. Nonetheless, there are School Boards in Wisconsin with no women members. In 2010, 5% (23) of School Boards had now women on their board, up slightly from 4% (19) in 2005.

Women hold **38%** of School Board seats, up slightly from **37%** in 2005

Counties are also home to several other important elected offices. Among Clerks of the Courts, County Clerks, County Treasurers and Registers of Deeds, women hold the great majority—between 75% and 90%—of seats. However, they are found in low numbers, if at all, in the offices of District Attorney (11%) and Sheriff (1%).

Women Elected Office Holders in Wisconsin County & City Governments, 2005 to 2010

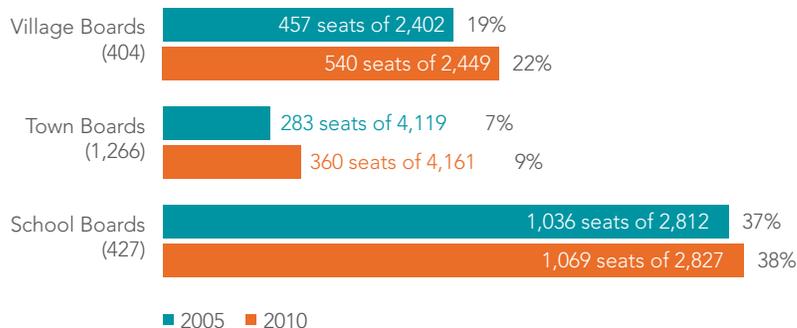


Alderdwoman Milele Coggs, Milwaukee City Council (pictured)



Leadership Women hold only about one in ten leadership positions in the elected bodies of Wisconsin local governments. Nonetheless, gains since 2005 are seen for many leadership positions, including for women serving as City Council, Village and Town Board Presidents and as Mayors.

Women Elected Office Holders in Wisconsin Towns, Villages and School District Boards, 2005 to 2010



The number in parenthesis is the number of local government units (e.g., Wisconsin has 404 villages).

Jennifer Morales, former Milwaukee County School Board Member (pictured)



Women hold **one in six** judicial seats.

At 57% female, the Wisconsin Supreme Court is one of the most gender diverse office of elected government in Wisconsin. The Court is now majority female, with women holding 4 of the 7 seats and has had a female Chief Justice for more than a decade.



Women are represented in greater numbers at the higher levels of the Wisconsin judiciary. The Supreme Court's female majority falls to 31% for the Wisconsin Court of Appeals, 18% for the Wisconsin Municipal Courts and 14% for the Circuit Courts.



Leadership in the judiciary (e.g., Chief Judge, Presiding Judge, etc.) follows the same trend. Women hold two of five (40%) leadership positions on the state Appellate Court, but only one out of 10 (10%) in the Circuit Courts.



Despite the comparatively small share of women in the lower courts, women are well represented in the legal profession. Nationally, women made up 31% of lawyers in 2009 and 47% of students awarded law degrees in 2008-2009.¹ In Wisconsin, women account for nearly 32% (7,500) of the 23,000 attorneys licensed in the State of Wisconsin.²



Judges & Justices

Women serve in greater numbers at the higher levels of the court system.

57% Supreme Court

31% Court of Appeals

18% Municipal Courts

14% Circuit Courts

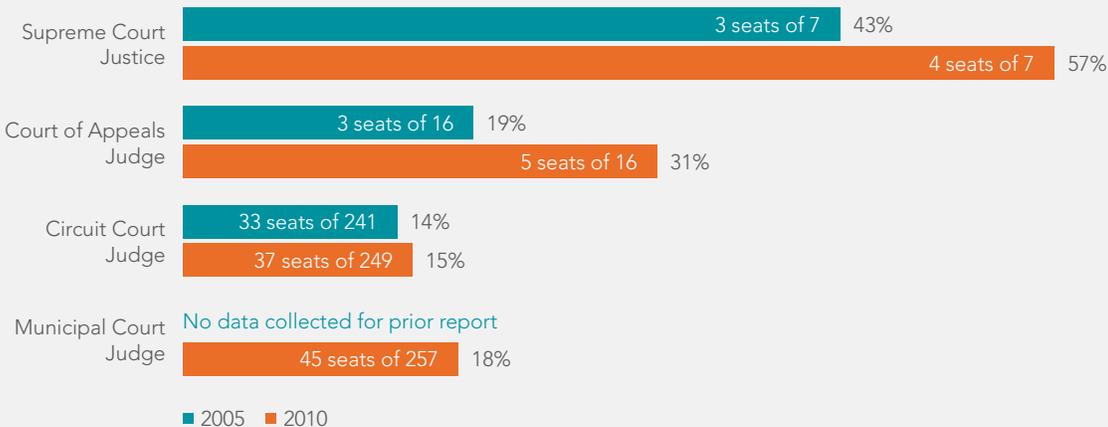
¹American Bar Association, *Commission on Women in the Profession, A Current Glance at Women in the Law 2009*, November 2009

²Wisconsin Bar Association



Chief Justice Shirley Abrahamson (pictured)

Women in the Wisconsin Judiciary, 2010



CONCLUDING REMARKS

Women first held elected office on local school boards more than 140 years ago. They have served in our State Legislature since 1925. Today, over 3,000 Wisconsin women serve in elected office among federal, state, local and tribal governments. This is a tremendous achievement for women across our state and new women enter the political arena every year. Nevertheless, women continue to be underrepresented in nearly every elected office in Wisconsin. The findings in this report give hope, however, that progress is being made toward increasing gender diversity, particularly in local governments.

Of concern is the back-sliding in the important gains women have made in the past two decades to establish their place in state elected offices, including our state legislature. It is important to recognize that many of these gains are recent. Wisconsin first elected a woman to Congress in 1998 and it is only since 2002 that women have been elected to high-level, statewide offices such as Lieutenant Governor and Attorney General.

We often think of state and federal elected offices—Governor, Senate, Assembly and Congress—as the policy makers that influence the taxes we pay, the public benefits and programs we receive and the social and economic climate of our state. In fact, it is local government officials that make many of the decisions and oversee programs that affect our everyday lives: from property tax rates to public health protections; law enforcement; zoning and local residential and business development; and the number of teachers in classrooms.

National studies on the impact of women in state legislatures found differences—a gender gap—between female and male office holders.¹ Researchers found that women spent more time on equity issues related to the economically disadvantaged and rights for women and children. Female legislators gave higher priority to policies related to education, domestic violence legislation, anti-drunk driving initiatives, as well as, economic issues such as child care,

family leave, child support and women's health. They also found that female state legislators receive more constituent requests and are persistent in following through for the constituents they serve.

Issue identification is only part of the story. Research also shows that women and men often operate differently inside government. In particular, women officials were more likely to bring citizens into the political process. Women were more responsive to groups previously denied full access to the policy-making process and more likely to increase access to the legislative process for the economically disadvantaged.

Not surprisingly, research from corporate America shows that diversity, in all forms, contributes to improved governance and stewardship. Corporations that embrace diversity are more open to thinking in a broad way about their mission, more connected to their customers and more open to new approaches to how and why they operate. The same holds true in the public sector. Pressures on the public sector to streamline, cut taxes and continue to provide increasing levels of services have never been greater. Many of these trade-offs will come in areas of education, health care and human services.

And yet, little information exists on the thousands of individuals who hold elected offices in local governments. There is almost no information on the share of these elected offices held by persons of color. This represents a large gap in understanding women's political participation and leadership, and in the pipeline of women for higher offices in state and local government. In 2005, the Wisconsin Women's Council began collecting data on women in local elected office for our state. We hope the this work will inform and encourage civic-minded women to consider running for and supporting other women seeking elected office. Who represents us and the face of leadership across our state should matter to every Wisconsin citizen.

¹See "Who Me? What We Know About Why Women Don't Run for Political Office", Wisconsin Women's Council, 2007 (www.womenscouncil.wi.gov)

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Statements of fact and opinion are made on the responsibility of the Wisconsin Women's Council alone and do not necessarily represent the views of organizations and individuals listed in the report. No endorsement by such organizations or individuals is given or implied.

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• **Building bridges to improve the status of women in Wisconsin** •

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