



**Moving Wisconsin Forward, 2015**  
**AN ANALYSIS OF WISCONSIN WOMEN IN ELECTED OFFICE**  
**Updated Statistics and 10-Year Trends**

Wisconsin Women's Council  
Alverno College Research Center for Women and Girls

We thank the following organizations for their assistance and support in compiling data for this report:

League of Wisconsin Municipalities  
Wisconsin Association of School Boards  
Wisconsin Clerks of Circuit Courts Association  
Wisconsin Counties Association  
Wisconsin County Clerks Association  
Wisconsin County Treasurers Association  
Wisconsin Office of State Courts  
Wisconsin Register of Deeds Association  
Wisconsin Sheriffs & Deputy Sheriffs Association  
Wisconsin Towns Association

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The **Wisconsin Women's Council** is state government's statutory commission on the status of women. Since 1983, the Council has carried out programs and research to identify and develop solutions to barriers that prevent women in Wisconsin from participating fully and equally in all aspects of life. Council Members are appointed by the Governor and legislative leaders.

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The **Alverno College Research Center for Women and Girls** generates and applies research, develops curricula, prepares evaluation tools and conducts outreach for the purpose of supporting and inspiring initiatives to improve the lives of women and girls locally and nationally.

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# HIGHLIGHTS

This Report is the third in a series (2005, 2010 and 2015) benchmarking women serving in elected office in Wisconsin. With 10 years of data, we have the opportunity to look at changes and trends over the decade in women's presence in elected offices at the executive, legislative and judicial branches of state government and in local government, including cities, villages, towns and school districts. Beyond the statistics, we hope this report serves as a catalyst for additional research on barriers and opportunities to women serving in and running for office, and for advocates working to identify, develop and recruit women to seek elected office across Wisconsin.

- **23% of elected officials in Wisconsin are women—up from 20% in 2005.**
- **3,100 women hold elected office in Wisconsin, across all levels of government, up from 2,800 in 2005—a nearly 10% increase.**

## Percent of Elected Offices Held by Women, by Level of Government

	2005	2015
Overall	20	23
Executive*	39	25
Legislative	26	25
Judiciary	16	19
Local	20	23
Tribal	42	42

\*State Executive Officers and Governor's Cabinet (appointed)

## WOMEN REMAIN A MINORITY OF OFFICE-HOLDERS AT ALL LEVELS OF STATE & LOCAL GOVERNMENT.

Only one in four Legislators and one of the six elected State Executives is a woman. At the local level, about one in four city council members, one in eight mayors and one in five county board members are women.

## 94% OF WOMEN HOLDING ELECTED OFFICE IN WISCONSIN CAN BE FOUND IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT.

While high profile offices such as the State Legislators and Executives often come to mind when talking about elections and elected offices, most elected offices are found in Local Government. For this study, we reviewed nearly 14,000 elected offices, statewide. Of these, 94% are in local government, principally, governing boards such as County Boards and City Councils.

## MANY LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT SAW SMALL GROWTH (2% TO 3%), WHILE STATEWIDE OFFICES DID NOT.

**Increases:** The share of women serving on City Councils, Village, Town and School Board Members, Circuit Court Judges, or Mayors increased over the period. The share of women in the high courts saw the most growth, particularly the Supreme Court. There has also been an increase in the overall share of women holding leadership positions.

**Unchanged or declining:** The share of women State Legislators, Municipal Court Judges, and County Board Members remained largely unchanged. The Executive Branch—with a small number of elected offices—had a reduction in the number of high level positions held by women.

## WISCONSIN LOOKS LIKE ITS NEIGHBORS.

Wisconsin looks much like its Midwestern neighbors (Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan and Minnesota) with respect to women serving at the highest levels of state government. Among these states, Wisconsin ranks third for the percent of legislative seats held by women, first for the percent of seats on the State Supreme Court held by women; and only two states have more women in State Executive Offices than Wisconsin.

## INTRODUCTION

*Moving WI Forward* is the result of a partnership between the Wisconsin Women's Council and Alverno College Research Center for Women and Girls. We compiled information on nearly 14,000 elected offices across state and local governments in Wisconsin, including the state legislature, state courts, and county, city, village, town, and school boards. This report is the third in a series benchmarking women in elected office in Wisconsin, with previous reports in 2005 and 2010.

This report is unique in Wisconsin in collecting data and reporting on women in local government. In discussing women and public office, the focus is usually on state and national offices. In fact, nine out of 10 women serving in elected office in Wisconsin are found in local government. Whether in the State Legislature or City Hall, understanding and advancing women's leadership, and creating a community where women and men can lead together, is critical to Wisconsin's social and economic future.

Women make up 50 percent of the state population yet represent only 23 percent of elected officials. By tracking these data over the past decade, it is clear that we have seen little change in the share of Wisconsin women holding elected office. As we move into the next decade, these new benchmarks will provide the means to track women's progress and offer local communities important information for increasing diversity in local government and building the pipeline of women for higher offices in our federal, state and local governments.

We also hope this report will serve as a catalyst for additional research. These findings raise a variety of important questions, such as why more women do not run for office and, among those who do, why and where they choose to serve.

By bringing more qualified women to the political table, we don't just make our government more representative of our population, we add diverse perspectives and insights to the decision-making process. Increasing the number of women in all levels of government throughout the state is a must as we seek innovation and fresh ideas to make government more efficient and accountable and work to ensure our public policies are robust and reflective of the goals and values of all of our citizens.

Christine Lidbury  
Executive Director  
Wisconsin Women's Council

Jill Desmond  
Interim Director  
Alverno College, Research  
Center for Women and Girls

## UPS AND DOWNS: 2005-2015

### Thumbs Up

**Small but widespread progress.** Over the past decade, most levels of government in Wisconsin saw an increase of at least 2% to 3% in the share of elected offices held by women.

**Moving toward parity.** In 2015, women account for 71% of Wisconsin Supreme Court Justices and nearly 40% of Court of Appeals Judges and Wisconsin School Board Members.

**Leadership.** Women make up an estimated 14% of leadership positions across levels of government, up from an estimated 10% in 2005.

### Thumbs Down

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

**75%** of Town Boards

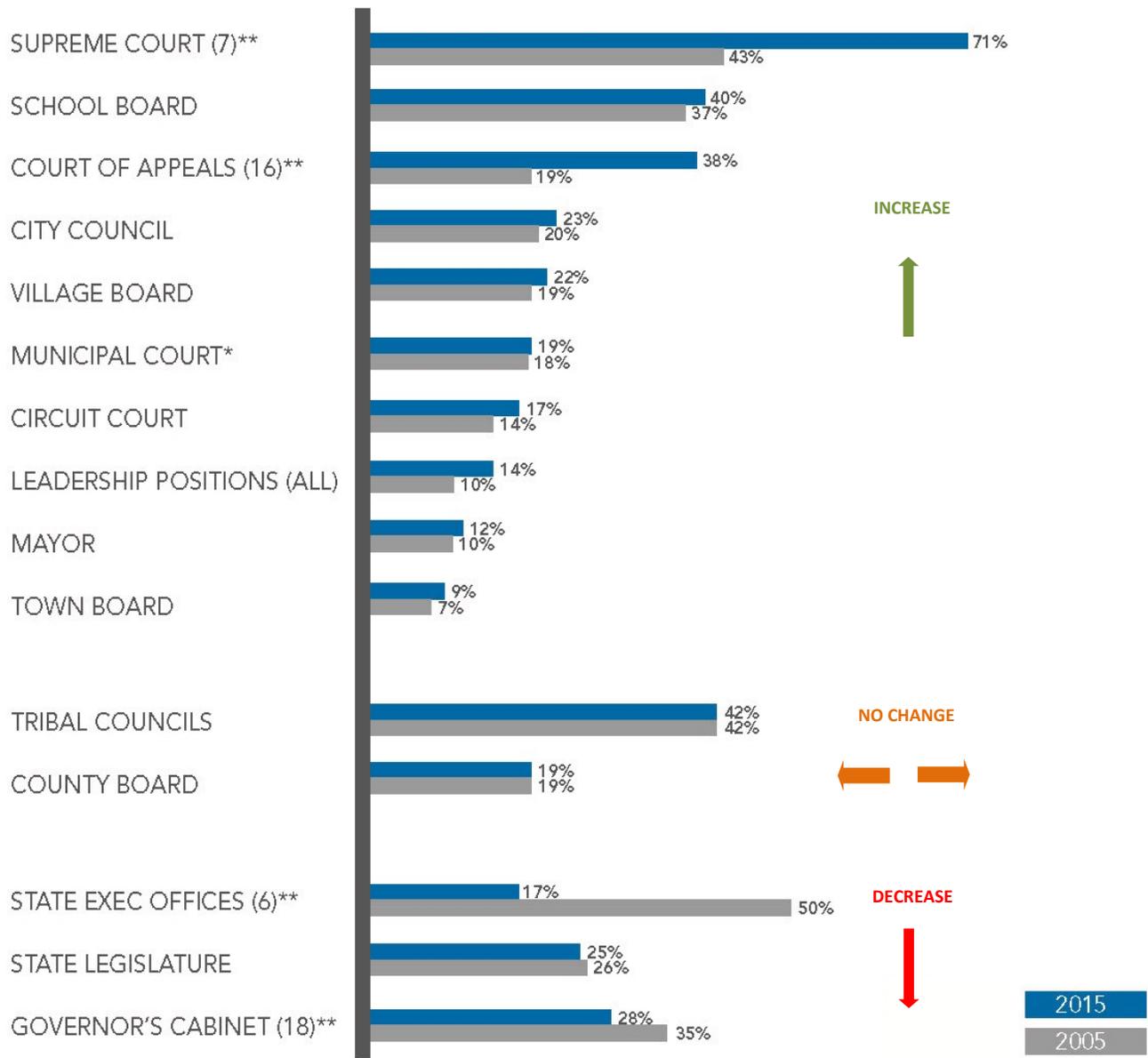
**25%** of Village Boards

**16%** of City Councils

**4%** of School Boards

# SHARE OF ELECTED OFFICES HELD BY WOMEN

by Level of Government — Ten-Year Trends, 2005-2015



\*2010 to 2015, data not collected in 2005 report. \*\*Results should be viewed with caution. With only a small number of offices, a small change in gender balance – even one or two seats – may appear as a large percentage change.

“Women make 85% of consumer household decisions, but few decisions have a bigger impact on a family’s budget than how to vote. Female elected officials add the kitchen-table common sense we need in government. As frequent family Chief Financial Officers and the breadwinners in 4 of 10 American families, I salute all those women who find a balance of family, work, and household obligations to also pursue and serve in public office.”

*Lieutenant Governor Rebecca Kleefisch*

# STATE EXECUTIVE

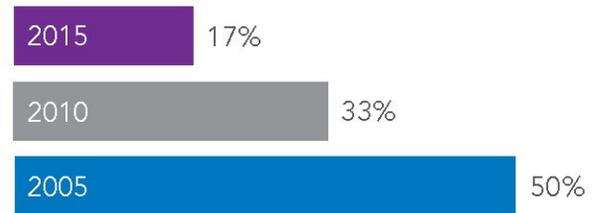
Women hold **one of six** State Executive Offices.



**17%** of State Elected Offices,  
down from **50%** in 2005.\*

Wisconsin has six Executive Officers: Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, Secretary of State, State Treasurer and Superintendent of Public Instruction. Currently, only the office of Lieutenant Governor is held by a woman (the third woman in state history to do so). In 2005, women held three seats: Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General and Superintendent of Public Instruction.

## STATE EXECUTIVES



\*Results should be viewed with caution. With only a small number of offices, a change in gender balance—even one or two seats—may appear as a large percentage change.

# STATE LEGISLATURE

Women hold **one in four** Legislative seats.



Women hold **25%** of Legislative seats,  
largely unchanged from **26%** in 2005

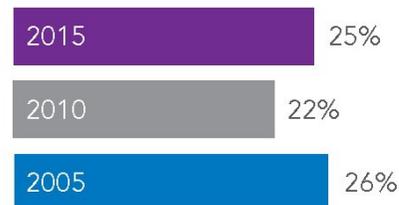
Overall, the share of women in the Legislature is largely unchanged over the past decade. The current level of 25% remains below the peak level of 37% in 1989 and 2003. Women's representation in the Legislature has fluctuated around the 25% level for a quarter century. By party, there are 11 Republicans and 23 Democrats.

Women have gained ground in the State Senate—33% of seats, up from 24% in 2005; while losing ground in the Assembly—22% of seats, down from 26% in 2005.

Women also have seen gains in leadership positions,\*\* including the first woman to serve as Senate President (2010), and near parity among Majority, Minority, and Caucus Leadership.

\*\*Senate President, President Pro Tem, Speaker and Speaker Pro Tem.

## STATE LEGISLATORS



**Nationally,  
24.3% of state  
legislators are  
women.**

*Center for American  
Women & Politics*

**“We continue to see many talented and intelligent women stepping up to lead, whether it is in public service, business or within their communities. In order to increase those numbers, we need to further empower women and create new opportunities to ensure that balancing life, family and work is possible.”**

*Senate Democratic Leader  
Jennifer Shilling (D-La Crosse)*

# TRIBAL COUNCIL

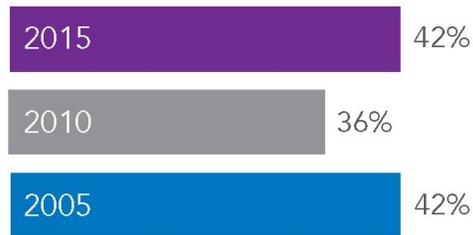
Women hold about **two in five** Tribal Council seats.



Women hold **42%** of Tribal Council and **9%** of Tribal Chair/President seats, compared to **42%** and **28%**, respectively in 2005.

A larger share of Tribal governing body seats are held by women than for any other state and local governing body in Wisconsin. The number of Tribes with a woman serving as Tribal Chair or President has declined from three women in 2005 and 2010, to one in 2015.

## TRIBAL COUNCILS



Wisconsin is home to 11 sovereign **tribal governments**. Each Tribe operates with a governing Council or Legislature, ranging in size from 5 to 14 members (average 8).

# WISCONSIN COUNTIES

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



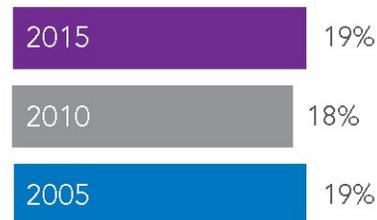
Women hold **19%** of County Board seats, unchanged from **19%** in 2005, and **15%** of the Board Chair seats, nearly double the **8%** in 2005.

Wisconsin has 72 Counties, each with an elected County Board, with a total of more than 1,600 County Board seats. County Boards vary considerably in the number of elected members, ranging from 7 to 36 (average 22).

There are also 11 elected County Executives statewide, of which one is female (Portage County).

There are also six elected County Constitutional Offices. Of these, women make up 75-94% of County Clerks, Treasurers, Registers of Deeds and Clerks of the Courts; but only 11% of District Attorneys and 1% of Sheriffs (Pierce County has the state's only female Sheriff). Registers of Deeds and Clerks of the Court had the largest increase in women elected to the office.

## COUNTY BOARDS



### New in 2015!

Over 90% of counties now have two or more female members and all 72 Counties have at least one woman on the County Board.

*Counties in Wisconsin. Local government provide many essential services such as social services, emergency services including fire and medical response, land use regulation, and criminal justice. Cities, villages and towns must cooperate with or reply on counties for these functions. Source: UW-Extension website, lgc.uwex.edu.*

“Lieutenant Governor Rebecca Kleefisch has often said that women don’t look in the mirror and see a political candidate staring back at them. I agree — women are capable of and take on so much, but often don’t see political success and leadership in the mirror’s reflection until someone else points it out, convincing them to place a bet on themselves.”

Deanna Alexander  
Milwaukee County Supervisor  
Republican Women of Greater Milwaukee

# CITY COUNCILS

Women hold about **one in four** City Council seats.

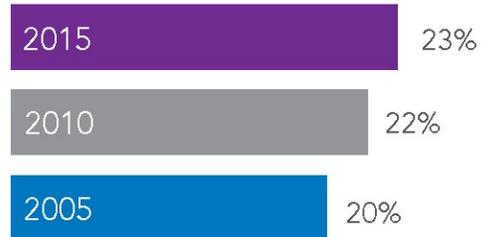


Women hold **23%** of City Council seats, increasing steadily from **20%** in 2005.

Wisconsin has 190 cities, including about 1,450 City Council seats and 181 Mayors. City Council sizes vary by municipality, from 4 to 20 (average 8).

Thirty-one Wisconsin cities (**16%** or one in six) have **no women on the City Council**—representing nearly 400,000 people. Three of the state's largest cities Green Bay (0 women), Milwaukee (1) and Kenosha (1) have no or low representation of women on the City Council.

## CITY COUNCILS



*Cities and villages in Wisconsin are incorporated municipalities that provide a full range of services to persons and properties within their boundaries, including street maintenance and snow plowing, sewer, water and electricity, police and fire protection, garbage collection, libraries, parks and recreation, zoning and planning, and public transportation. Source: League of Wisconsin Municipalities website, [www.lwm-info.org](http://www.lwm-info.org).*

# MAYORS

Women hold about **one in eight** Mayoral seats.



Women hold **12%** of Mayor seats, up from **10%** in 2005—half the rate for City Council members.

Nationally, 18% of mayors in U.S. cities with populations over 30,000 are women, compared to 4% in Wisconsin (representing only 1 of 23 cities—Wauwatosa). Wisconsin has 190 cities, including 181 Mayors,

## MAYORS



**“I think more women serve on the City Council in Eau Claire than a decade ago because there is a woman Chief Elected Officer – the Council President. Whether they want to topple her, or join her, women watch and learn about power from her. They see how women's leadership leaves an indelible stamp on a city, and they want that too.”**

*Kerry Kincaid  
President, Eau Claire City Council*

# SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Women hold about **two in five** School Board seats.



School Boards remain the level of government where women are most likely to serve. Women hold **40%** of School Board seats, up from **37%** in 2005. Women make up 29% of School Board Presidents, the same as in 2005. *School Board sizes range from 3 to 11 members (average 7).* **Four percent** of Wisconsin's 425 School Boards have **no women members** — unchanged since 2005.

## SCHOOL BOARDS



*School Districts* administer, finance, and determine attendance eligibility for area elementary and/or secondary education. Source: WI Department of Public Instruction, [www.dpi.wi.gov](http://www.dpi.wi.gov).

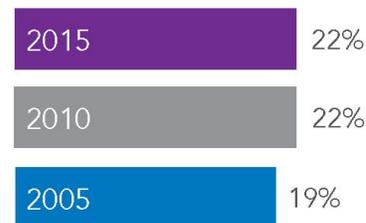
# VILLAGE BOARDS

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



**22%** of Village Trustees are women, up from **19%** in 2005. Women hold 11% of Village Board President seats, up from 9% in 2005. Village Board sizes range from 3 to 10 members (average 6). **One-quarter** (over 100) of Wisconsin's 408 Village Boards have **no women members**—unchanged

## VILLAGE BOARDS



*About Villages:* see *Cities*.

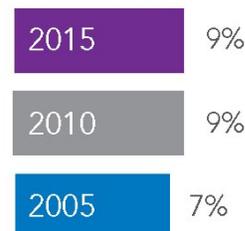
# TOWNS

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



Town Boards are the least likely among Wisconsin local governing bodies to have gender diversity. **9%** of Town Supervisors are women, up from **7%** in 2005. Women make up 5% of Town Board Presidents, up from 4% in 2005. Town Boards have 3 or 5 members. **Three-quarters** of the state's 1,250 Town Boards have **no women members** - unchanged since 2005. *Towns operate local polling places, property tax procedures, ensure fire protection and ambulance service, recycling and local highway maintenance.* Source: [www.wisctowns.com](http://www.wisctowns.com)

## TOWN BOARDS



“This study confirms that equality for women is not a done deal in Wisconsin. At Emerge, we believe government should look like the people it is tasked with representing, and that women's voices need to be heard at all levels of government. We're here to make sure someone is asking women to run and providing the resources necessary to win.”

*Erin Forrest  
Executive Director  
Emerge Wisconsin*

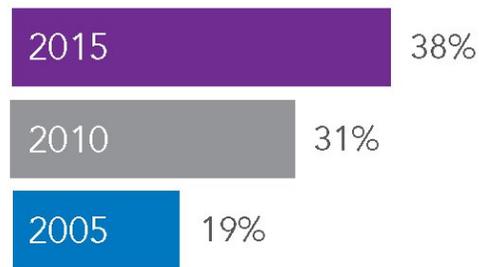
## COURT OF APPEALS

Women hold about **two in five** Appellate Court Judgeships.



Women make up **38%** of the Judges on the Court of Appeals, double the share of **19%** in 2005.

### APPELLATE COURT JUDGE



*The **Court of Appeals** is the state's intermediate appellate court. The court is composed of 16 judges from four districts. The Court currently has one vacant seat, formerly held by Judge Rebecca Bradley who was recently appointed to the State Supreme Court.*

## CIRCUIT COURTS

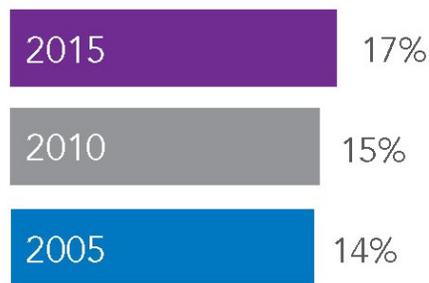
Women hold about **one in six** Judgeships in the Circuit Court.



Women account for **17%** of Circuit Court Judges, a steady increase from **14%** in 2005.

No women serve in any of the ten Circuit Court leadership seats of Chief or Presiding Judge, the same as in 2005, but down from one woman in 2010.

### CIRCUIT COURT JUDGE



*The **Circuit Courts** are the state's trial courts. A list of 247 Circuit Court Judges was analyzed for this report.*

## MUNICIPAL COURTS

Women hold about **one in five** Judgeships on Municipal Courts.



Women account for **19%** of Municipal Court Judges, up slightly from **18%** in 2010.

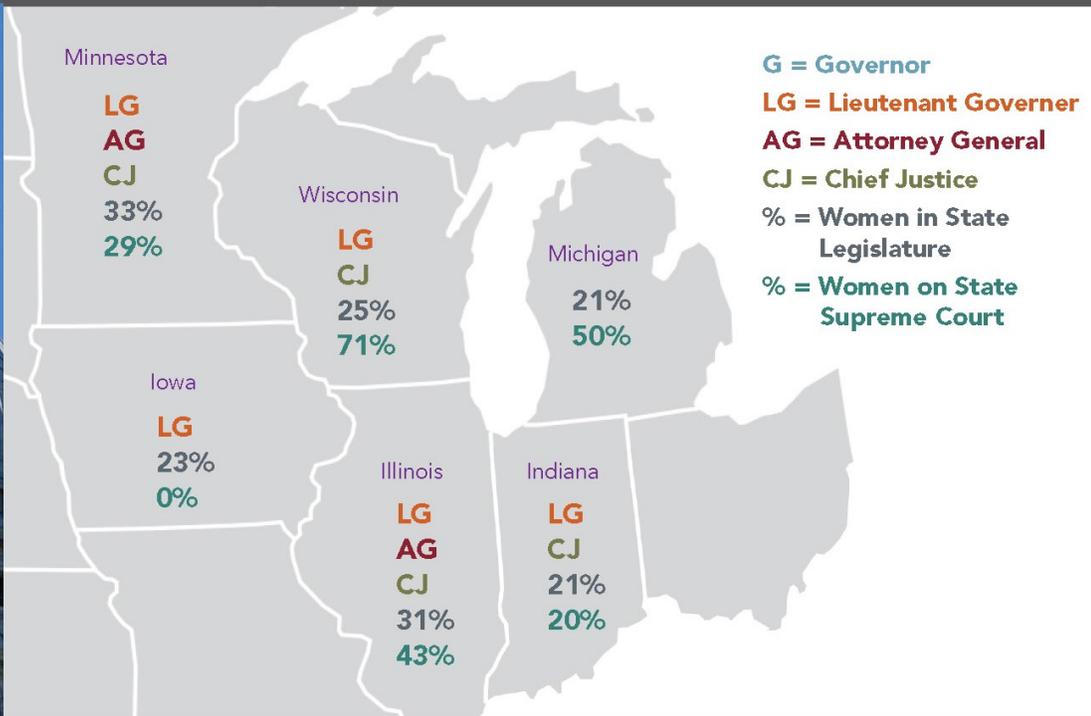
Data on Municipal Judges were not collected in 2005.

### MUNICIPAL COURT JUDGE



*The majority of **Municipal Court** cases involve traffic, parking, and ordinance matters, e.g., first-time drunken driving offenses, juvenile matters, such as truancy, underage drinking, drug offenses and curfew violations. A list of 251 Municipal Court Judges was reviewed for this report. Source: [www.wicourts.gov](http://www.wicourts.gov)*

# HOW WISCONSIN COMPARES REGIONALLY



Women in Top Executive, Legislative and Judicial Offices, Midwest Region

## STATE SUPREME COURT

Women hold **five of seven** seats on the Wisconsin Supreme Court, including Chief Justice.

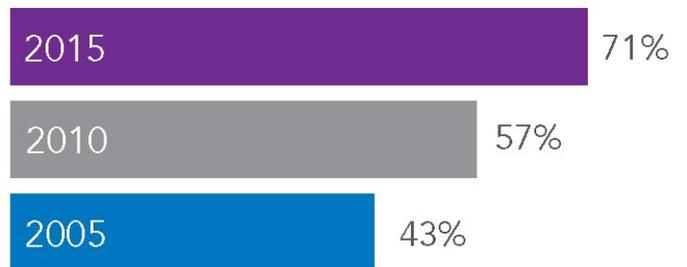


Women make up the majority of Supreme Court Justices—**71%**, up from **43%** in 2005. The Supreme Court has had a female Chief Justice since 1996.

Women are at or near parity among Justices and Judges in Wisconsin's Supreme and Appellate courts—more than double the share of women serving as Judges in the Circuit and Municipal Court systems.

*The Wisconsin Supreme Court, composed of seven justices, is the state's highest court. It has appellate jurisdiction over all Wisconsin courts, discretion to determine which appeals it will hear, and administrative and regulatory authority over all Wisconsin courts and the practice of law in the state.*

### SUPREME COURT JUDGE



“Since 1919 when Wisconsin ratified the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment giving women the right to vote, women have responded by assuming responsibility and leadership roles in visible public offices. Today, the Wisconsin judiciary is becoming one of the most gender diverse of elected government in Wisconsin. I view the encouragement of capable women of our state to become involved in leadership roles at all levels of governance as an invested asset in Wisconsin's future.”

*Chief Justice Patience Roggensack  
Wisconsin Supreme Court*



Women's Council  
·Wisconsin·

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

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