

# Gender inequality across US states revealed by new tool

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Researchers have developed and validated a new tool for comparing gender inequality among different regions of a country, highlighting links between gender inequality, well-being, and participation in the

#MeToo movement within the US. Bruno Gabriel Salvador Casara of New York University Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates and colleagues present the tool and findings in the open-access journal *PLOS ONE* on July 17, 2024.

Gender inequality is a persistent worldwide problem with [negative impacts](#) for women and for society in general. To assess [gender disparities](#), the United Nations and other groups typically favor a scoring system known as the Gender Inequality Index, which incorporates measurements of women's [reproductive health](#), social and political empowerment, and participation in the labor market. However, this tool is designed to measure gender inequality only at the resolution of an entire country.

To enable within-country comparisons, Salvador Casara and colleagues adapted the Gender Inequality Index for state-level resolution. They demonstrated the new tool's effectiveness by analyzing gender-inequality dynamics among states within the US.

They found that US states were "substantially gender-unequal overall." Arkansas, Louisiana and Oklahoma scored highest for gender inequality, while Massachusetts, California and Maine scored lowest.

States with a higher index score—indicating greater gender inequality at the expense of women—tended to score lower on measures of women's wellness, including [life satisfaction](#), financial well-being, and feeling safe. Men in these states also tended to have somewhat lower financial well-being, in line with prior research linking gender inequality with overall poorer economic growth.

## Gender Inequality Index

### Reproductive health

1. Maternal mortality rate (CDC, 2016)
2. Adolescent mothers rate (Martin, Hamilton, Osterman, Driscoll and Drake, 2018)

### Empowerment

1. Population with secondary education (Center for American Women and Politics, 2016)
2. Female and male shares of parliamentary seats (Gallup, 2019)

### Labour Market

1. Female and male Labour force participation rates (United States Census Bureau, 2016)

Dimensions and indicators of the Gender Inequality Index. Credit: Salvador Casara et al., 2024, *PLOS ONE*, CC-BY 4.0 ([creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/))

The researchers also used Twitter data to test the link between gender inequality and involvement in the #MeToo movement, which pushed for greater awareness of sexual abuse and violence against women. They found that states with higher inequality scores tended to generate fewer tweets with the #MeToo hashtag, suggesting that greater gender inequality may diminish awareness and activism around #MeToo issues.

In addition, states with more conservative political leanings tended to have higher [gender inequality](#) scores.

The researchers call for further research to deepen understanding of the implications of their findings. Meanwhile, they note, their analysis demonstrates that the state-level Gender Inequality Index could be a valuable tool for policymakers and advocates to study and address

gender disparities within specific regions of a country.

**More information:** Unveiling gender inequality in the US: Testing validity of a state-level measure of gender inequality and its relationship with feminist online collective action on Twitter, *PLoS ONE* (2024).

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