



OXFAM REPORT

BEST AND WORST STATES TO WORK IN AMERICA

2019 BEST STATES TO WORK INDEX



OXFAM
America

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2019 BEST STATES TO WORK INDEX

Labor laws at the state level are vitally important to workers and their families. In an effort to understand the differences between states and to rank them, Oxfam built an index of labor and employment policies of all 50 states (and Washington, DC) in 2018. The result was the Best States to Work Index (BSWI).

Oxfam has updated the database for 2019, logging any policy changes that happened over the year; this report provides an overview of rankings, and changes.

ONLINE INTERACTIVE MAP OF THE INDEX

Please visit the Oxfam website for a fully interactive version of the Best States to Work Index. The map features visualizations of the scores and rankings, and provides access to the spreadsheet containing the full data sets.

www.oxfamamerica.org/statemap2019

INTRODUCTION

Every state in the nation has jobs that pay low wages—but also keep the economic engine running: cooking, cashiering, and caring for young and old. The work is vital, demanding, and round-the-clock.

However, the workers who do this labor in the US are too often undervalued—stretched to the max and undercompensated, struggling to pay the bills and raise families. Women, people of color, and immigrants and refugees are disproportionately represented in this workforce, and bear the heaviest burden.

Labor laws are intended to help, by addressing the imbalance of power between workers and employers. They determine minimum wages, mandate safe conditions, and protect rights to organize and speak out.

Historically, the federal government has taken the most significant action to pass laws that protect workers. For example, when President Roosevelt signed the first federal minimum wage law in 1938, it was a vital move to establish a wage floor for workers across the country. Employers had been paying far less than the mandated 25 cents an hour, and workers were languishing.

As the years have marched on, however, the landscape in Congress and the administration has changed dramatically. Today, federal labor laws and standards are, at best, at a standstill; in many cases, agencies and departments are being dismantled or reoriented toward the interests of big corporations rather than workers. In just one glaring example, the federal minimum wage, which has not been raised from \$7.25 an hour in over a decade, now puts a family of two officially under the poverty level.

Fortunately, state and local governments understand the urgency for action, and the benefits of supporting workers; most states have passed laws that exceed frozen federal policies. For example, 30 states have raised their minimum wage (from \$7.50 in New Mexico to \$14 in the District of Columbia); states have also protected the right to organize, ensured paid sick leave, established accommodations for pregnancy, and more.

These state laws can make a huge difference in compensation and conditions on the job, and can play a large role in quality of life for working families. Low-wage workers are keenly aware of these differences: \$480 a week (at \$12 an hour) goes much farther than \$290 a week (at \$7.25 an hour); paid sick leave is a huge boon to working parents.

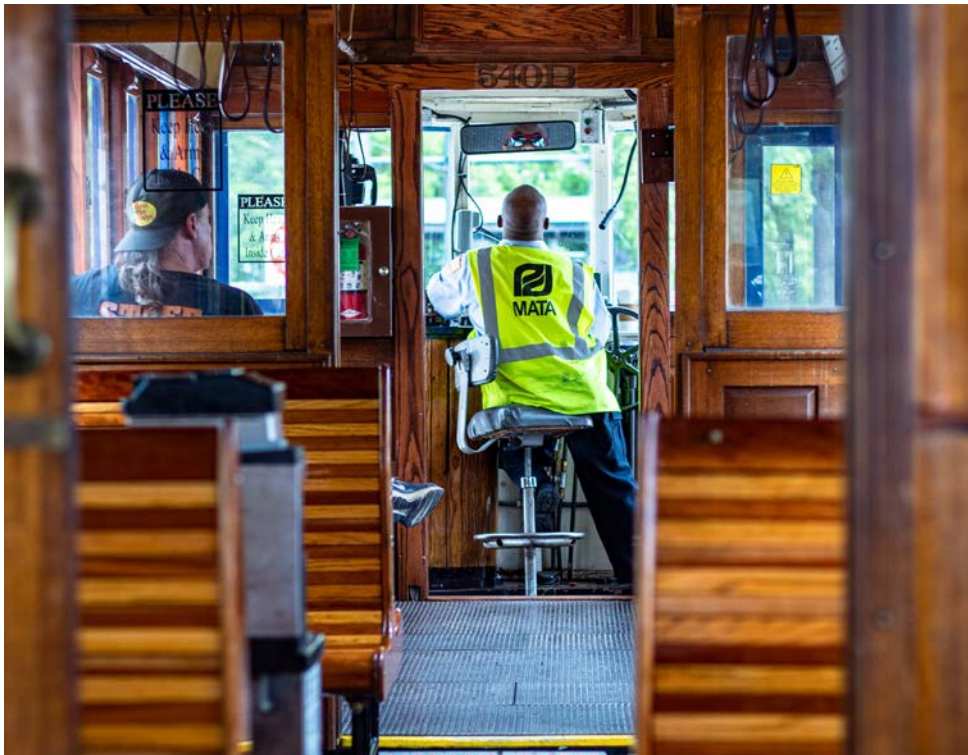
In 2018, Oxfam decided it was time to survey the states across the country, and to catalog the many laws and policies that have such a dramatic effect on workers' lives. The result was the Best States to Work Index (BSWI), which was published as an interactive map, and as a report. The index scored the states, and ranked them from best (No. 1) to worst (No. 51).

The BSWI is a sophisticated measure of a state's labor geography; it has three dimensions, 11 policy areas, and 20 data points, and calculates out a score from 0 to 100. The major policy areas are:

- **Wage policies:** Is the minimum wage close to a living wage¹? Does the state allow localities to set their own minimum wages?
- **Worker protection policies:** Among the many laws included, it considers: Are workers able to take paid time off when ill? Are there legal protections against sexual harassment? Do women receive appropriate accommodations during and after pregnancy?
- **Right to organize policies:** Does the state have “right-to-work” laws that inhibit unions and discourage union organizing? Do public sector workers have rights to bargain collectively and negotiate wages?

The table on the next page provides rankings and scores by dimension. The sections that follow explore each dimension in depth.

For the full database with scores on each element, please refer to the [Oxfam website](#). For full information on the methodology, please refer to the [Methodology document](#).



1 A public transit driver in Memphis, TN, which ranks No. 43 in the BSWI. The state has “right-to-work” laws which suppress unions, and the minimum wage has not been raised above the federal wage of \$7.25. Photo: Joshua J. Cotten

¹ The index considers the ratio of the state minimum wage in relation to the “living wage” for a family of four with one wage earner, and refers to the MIT Living Wage Calculator.

Table 1: The Best States to Work Index, July 2019

State	Index Ranking	Overall Score	Wage Dimension	Worker Protection Dimension	Right to Organize Dimension	Index Ranking 2018
District of Columbia	1	96.76	100.00	90.28	100.00	1
California	2	90.32	79.30	91.67	100.00	3
Washington	3	89.36	97.24	70.83	100.00	2
Massachusetts	4	85.24	72.37	83.33	100.00	4
Maine	5	83.99	97.80	54.17	100.00	8
Oregon	6	82.03	62.75	83.33	100.00	6
Rhode Island	7	79.78	62.94	76.39	100.00	7
Vermont	8	79.22	62.67	75.00	100.00	5
Connecticut	9	74.15	43.27	79.17	100.00	9
Minnesota	10	74.12	73.74	48.61	100.00	10
New York	11	73.60	51.36	69.44	100.00	11
New Jersey	12	71.80	37.61	77.78	100.00	13
Maryland	13	70.55	58.88	52.78	100.00	12
Colorado	14	70.21	82.86	44.44	83.33	15
Illinois	15	63.41	45.78	44.44	100.00	14
Delaware	16	61.74	35.23	50.00	100.00	17
Hawaii	17	58.50	21.33	54.17	100.00	19
New Mexico	18	56.91	40.18	30.56	100.00	16
Alaska	19	55.51	44.31	22.22	100.00	18
Ohio	20	54.82	42.24	22.22	100.00	20
Arizona	21	51.71	94.00	38.89	22.22	22
Nebraska	22	49.47	42.87	38.89	66.67	21
New Hampshire	23	49.36	9.89	38.19	100.00	23
Pennsylvania	24	46.09	16.04	22.22	100.00	24
West Virginia	25	44.87	48.48	30.56	55.56	29
Missouri	26	40.23	31.79	22.22	66.67	37
Montana	27	40.05	29.19	24.31	66.67	25
Michigan	28	38.38	54.03	27.78	33.33	27
Indiana	29	38.12	17.12	30.56	66.67	26
Kentucky	30	36.46	17.70	30.56	61.11	30
South Dakota	31	35.78	51.79	22.22	33.33	28
Arkansas	32	35.51	53.74	30.56	22.22	32
Nevada	33	32.65	28.50	36.11	33.33	31
Wyoming	34	31.25	15.99	22.22	55.56	33
Texas	35	30.00	12.21	22.22	55.56	34
Utah	36	27.90	11.49	38.89	33.33	35
Florida	37	27.28	26.29	22.22	33.33	36
Oklahoma	38	26.42	15.37	30.56	33.33	40
Wisconsin	39	24.75	14.52	26.39	33.33	38
Iowa	40	24.46	15.73	24.31	33.33	39
Kansas	41	23.47	14.87	22.22	33.33	41
Louisiana	42	23.16	12.55	40.28	16.67	42
Tennessee	43	21.64	21.16	32.64	11.11	43
North Dakota	44	21.29	16.66	30.56	16.67	44
Idaho	45	20.00	9.99	22.22	27.78	45
South Carolina	46	14.38	12.60	30.56	0.00	46
North Carolina	47	11.82	13.23	22.22	0.00	47
Georgia	48	11.48	9.43	13.89	11.11	48
Alabama	49	7.75	17.70	5.56	0.00	49
Mississippi	50	7.18	15.99	0.00	5.56	50
Virginia	51	1.85	0.00	5.56	0.00	51

WHAT DOES THE INDEX TELL US?

While the BSWI is a complex database with hundreds of data points and weighting formulas, in the end it comes down to a simple question: Do workers encounter positive or negative workplace conditions?

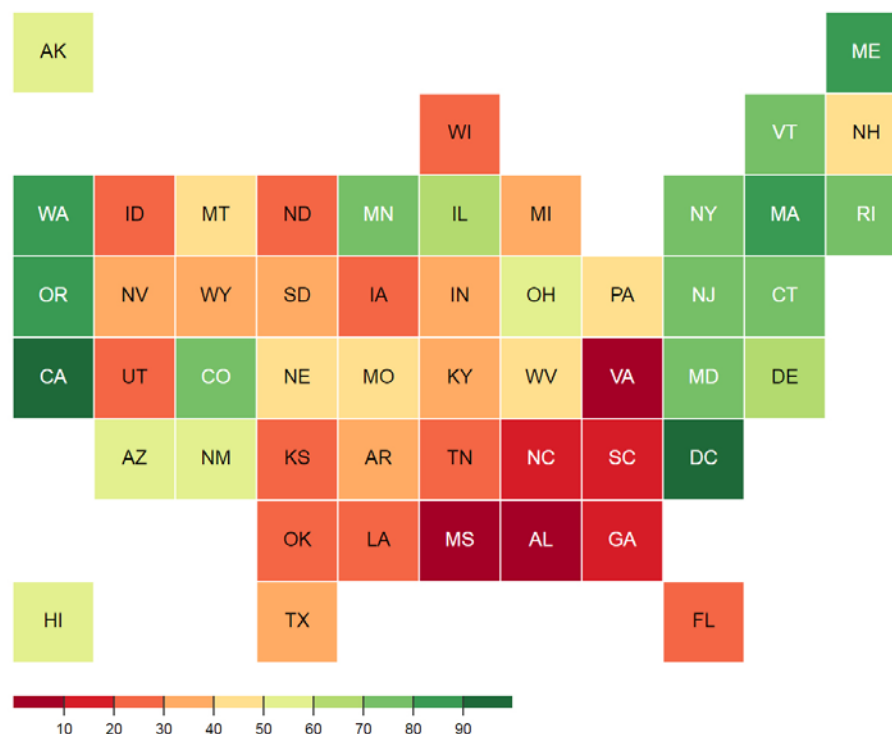
Oxfam believes that the state scores reflect daily reality for millions of workers; seemingly abstract ratings translate into take-home wages and rights.

For example, the minimum wage in DC is \$14 an hour, which means a full-time worker earns more than \$29,000 annually. In neighboring Virginia, the minimum is \$7.25, which means that a worker earns just over \$15,000 annually. As all costs of living have climbed steadily over the ten years since the federal wage was last raised, the worker earning \$290 a week is struggling just to meet basic needs.

In California, workers have protections regarding sexual harassment, accommodations for pregnancy, regulations on scheduling demands, and mandated paid sick and family leave. In Virginia, there is no guarantee around accommodations for pregnancy, no mandated paid sick leave, and no legislative support for best practices in work schedules.

All these policies add up to more equitable workplace practices. Oxfam maintains that working families fare better when they earn higher wages, have rights to organize, and enjoy protections around paid leave and family supports.

Figure 1: Overall Best States to Work Index scoring, July 2019



TRENDS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

The BSWI reveals several illuminating trends and patterns among the states:

- **State labor policies vary dramatically across the US.** BSWI scores range from 1.85 (Virginia) to 96.76 (DC), with scores spread out along a spectrum.
- **Regions show distinct patterns—to a point.** While states within the four Census regions tend to score close to each other (for example, states in the Northeast score much higher than states in the South), several bordering states stand in marked contrast to each other. For example, Idaho (No. 45) is adjacent to Washington (No. 3); Wisconsin (No. 39) is next to Minnesota (No. 10).
- **Virginia continues to come out last, while Washington, DC stays at the top.** Virginia has the lowest ratio of minimum wage to a living wage (.261, 26 percent of what is needed to sustain a family), and only a basic equal pay law among all the labor laws included within the index.
- **The best states to work have positive economic and social conditions.** Oxfam researched several quality-of-life indicators, and found telling correlations:

states with high BSWI scores have higher rates of life expectancy, median income, GDP per capita, and labor force participation, and lower rates of infant mortality and poverty.²

- **Even the highest state minimum wage is not enough to support a family.** According to a simple ratio of the minimum wage to a living wage, no state minimum wage reaches even half of a living wage for a family of four with one parent working (the closest is Washington, DC, where the minimum wage is 44 percent of the living wage).
- **Workers need more robust protections at the state and federal level.** While most states have passed basic laws on equal pay and sexual harassment, few have passed paid sick leave, paid family leave, or fair scheduling laws.

DEVELOPMENTS IN 2019

The most significant changes in the BSWI over the past year happened in the middle (of the index and of the country).

- Of particular note, **Missouri** jumped from No. 37 to No. 26 (11 spots), reflecting two significant changes that were a direct result of the electorate voting in defiance of the state legislature. In August 2018, 67.5 percent voted to strike down the state's "right-to-work" law, which was passed by the legislature in 2017. In November 2018, voters passed Proposition B, to raise the minimum wage each year until it reaches \$12 in 2023. For years, the Republican legislature voted down proposals to raise the wage; moreover, the legislature overturned efforts by St. Louis and Kansas City to enact their own minimum wage laws.
- In another conservative state, **Arkansas** voters passed Issue 5 in November 2018, raising the state minimum wage over the next three years. The bump from \$8.50 to \$9.25 pushed Arkansas up in the Wage Dimension by seven spots.
- **West Virginia** rose from No. 29 to No. 25 (four spots), largely as a result of a circuit judge overturning "right-to-work" legislation (passed in 2016) earlier this year. In addition, while the state minimum wage did not rise from \$8.75, the living wage actually decreased (from \$23.34 to \$23.20), which improved the ratio.
- **Indiana** and **South Dakota** both dropped by three spots in the rankings, largely because of increases in the living wage amount offset by no or small increases in the state minimum wage.

² While correlation is not causality, the evidence suggests that these policies are not damaging to the economy or the health of the population, and may, in fact, support them. At the very least, the lack of any clear negative economic impact and the strong evidence of positive impacts on measures of well-being indicate that more states should pursue these policies.

At the top of the index, state rankings shuffled somewhat.

- **California** moved from No. 3 to No. 2 (with a score of 90.32), largely as a result of a dollar bump in the minimum wage (to \$12), which changed the ratio to the living wage. **Washington** dropped to a very close No. 3 (with a score of 89.36); the minimum wage in that state increased by only 50 cents.³
- Of note, **Maine** jumped from No. 8 to No. 5; the minimum wage increased by a dollar (to \$11), and new legislation was passed regarding pregnant worker accommodation and salary history (in the private sector).
- **Vermont** dropped from No. 5 to No. 8; the minimum wage increased by only 28 cents.

At the bottom of the index, 11 states saw few changes in policies, and no changes in rankings. This is unfortunate news for workers in these states, as they continue to face low minimum wages (\$7.25 an hour), scant protections, and restrictions on rights to organize. These conditions continue to have correlations with low quality-of-life indicators, and speak to the urgent need for federal action.

- **Virginia** remains at the bottom, with an unchanged score of 1.85; the other nine saw slight changes in their scores, but not their rankings.

Why the District of Columbia is included in the BSWI

While Washington, DC is not technically a state (it is a federal district), Oxfam has chosen to include it in the BSWI for several reasons. First, the number of people employed is significant: the workforce in DC measures roughly 800,000—larger than the total population of four states (Wyoming, Vermont, Alaska, and North Dakota).

Second, since the goal is to measure laws that protect workers at a higher level than the federal government, it's notable that DC has developed its own case law outside of federal law. Third, a substantial majority of voters in DC have indicated they want the district to become a state (79 percent approval in a 2016 referendum).

If there were an index that measured cities against one another, it's likely that DC would not rank at the top (though it would have a high score). For example, the minimum wage in San Francisco (in the state that is at the top of the BSWI) is \$15.

³ While the total score is based on 20 items across three dimensions, some items are weighted much more heavily in the final calculation; the ratio of minimum wage to living wage accounts for a full quarter of the final score, and so plays a major role in scores and rankings.



2 While the job of personal care aide is vitally important (and the fastest growing job in the country), it pays low wages and often involves exhausting work. Photo: Jacob Lund

HOW CAN POLICYMAKERS USE THE BSWI?

The BSWI can be useful in several ways to the policy community. First, it allows a state to evaluate its labor policy, and it **provides guidance as to the types of legislation the state government may approve in order to improve its treatment of workers**. States may gain inspiration from neighboring states or states ranking just above them.

Second, **the research can guide policymakers and advocates toward the states where the most work is required**. Overall, states found at the bottom of the BSWI need greater efforts to advance labor legislation.

Third, **the index provides insight into states where resistance to further advances in labor policy should be the weakest**. States that score highly in two dimensions may face less resistance to the third dimension.

THE THREE POLICY AREAS

DIMENSION 1: WAGES

In the ten years since the federal minimum wage last was raised, the value of \$7.25 an hour has steadily declined, and has kept the wage floor depressed in many sectors. In response, most states (and many cities) have taken action to support workers by raising their wages. In spite of these efforts, however, the US continues to have the largest concentration of low-wage workers in the world, and millions of working families live in poverty.¹

The Wage Dimension of the BSWI has two data points. One is the minimum wage in relation to the living wage (both vary by state, in some cases dramatically). The other is whether or not the state allows local governments to raise their own minimum wages. The BSWI calculates and assigns a score from 0 to 100; 100 means that the state has the highest ratio of a minimum wage to a living wage, and allows localities to legislate their own minimum wage increases; a score of 0 means the state has the lowest ratio and denies rights to localities to raise wages.

It's important to note that a high score does NOT mean that the state minimum wage is equivalent to (or even near) an actual living wage; the closest is DC at 44 percent.

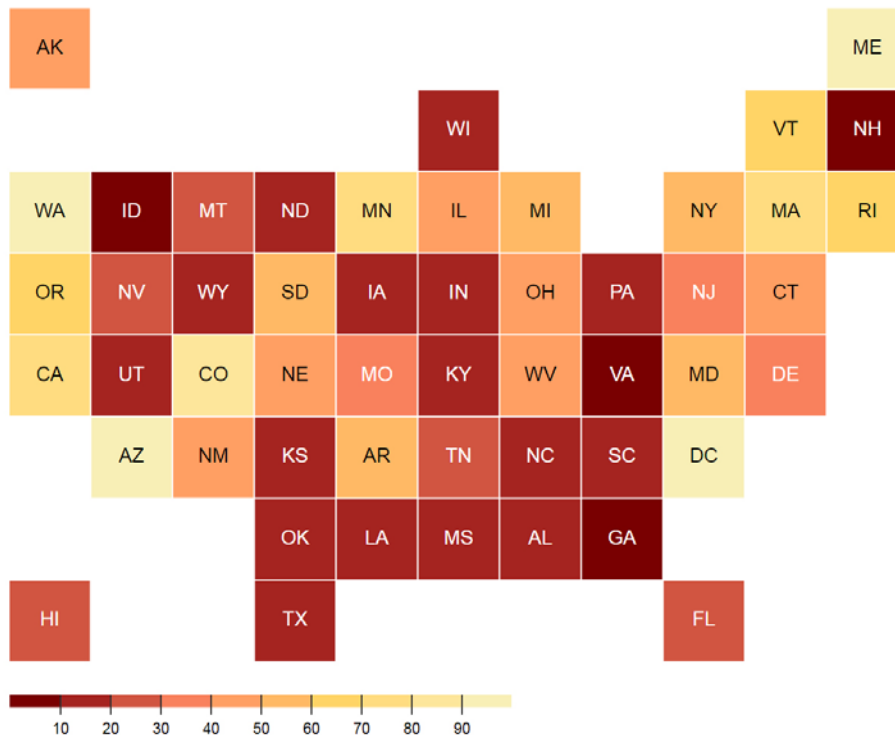
Table 2: Ranking and scores for the Wage Dimension, July 2019

State	Wage Ranking	Wage Score	State	Wage Ranking	Wage Score
District of Columbia	1	100.00	Montana	27	29.19
Maine	2	97.80	Nevada	28	28.50
Washington	3	97.24	Florida	29	26.29
Arizona	4	94.00	Hawaii	30	21.33
Colorado	5	82.86	Tennessee	31	21.16
California	6	79.30	Alabama	32	17.70
Minnesota	7	73.74	Kentucky	32	17.70
Massachusetts	8	72.37	Indiana	34	17.12
Rhode Island	9	62.94	North Dakota	35	16.66
Oregon	10	62.75	Pennsylvania	36	16.04
Vermont	11	62.67	Mississippi	37	15.99
Maryland	12	58.88	Wyoming	37	15.99
Michigan	13	54.03	Iowa	39	15.73
Arkansas	14	53.74	Oklahoma	40	15.37
South Dakota	15	51.79	Kansas	41	14.87
New York	16	51.36	Wisconsin	42	14.52
West Virginia	17	48.48	North Carolina	43	13.23
Illinois	18	45.78	South Carolina	44	12.60
Alaska	19	44.31	Louisiana	45	12.55
Connecticut	20	43.27	Texas	46	12.21
Nebraska	21	42.87	Utah	47	11.49
Ohio	22	42.24	Idaho	48	9.99
New Mexico	23	40.18	New Hampshire	49	9.89
New Jersey	24	37.61	Georgia	50	9.43
Delaware	25	35.23	Virginia	51	0.00
Missouri	26	31.79			

The rankings offer a stark illustration of how bordering states can have dramatic differences in wage policies. For example, Maine is No. 2, while next door New Hampshire is near the bottom (No. 49). The minimum wage in Maine is \$11 (44 percent of the living wage), and the state allows localities to raise their own wages. In New Hampshire, the wage has not been raised above the federal minimum of \$7.25 (28 percent of the living wage), and local governments are not allowed to raise their minimum wages.

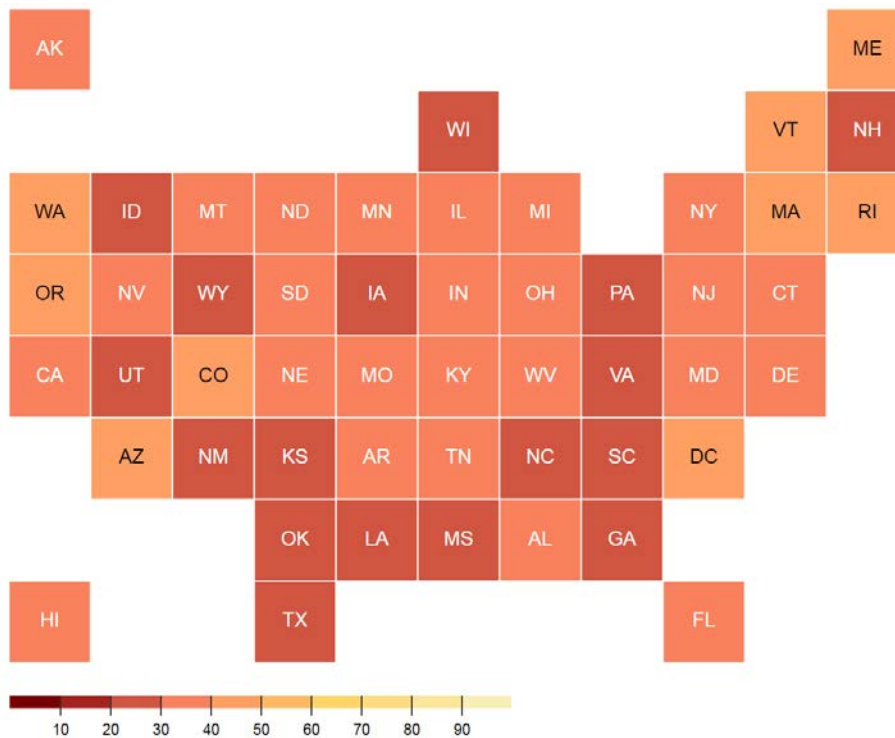
The following maps illustrate the overall wage scores; and then the reality of the inadequate ratio of minimum to living wage.

Figure 2: Wage Dimension by state



The overall wage score ranges from 0 to 100, and reflects two factors: the ratio of minimum wage to living wage and whether the state allows localities to raise their wages. States with the lowest scores (under 10) are darkest: Virginia, Georgia, New Hampshire, and Idaho. Each has a minimum wage of \$7.25 and denies local control of the minimum wage.

Figure 3: Minimum wage/living wage ratio by state



This map shows the ratio of minimum wage to living wage; you can see that the scale of colors is substantially more narrow than the map above. Numbers range from 26 percent to 44 percent; in other words, not one state pays a wage that is even half of what a worker would need to earn to support a family.



3 Workers in fast food restaurants earn some of the lowest wages in the US, and often deal with unpredictable schedules and difficult hours. Photo: Sunshine Seeds

DIMENSION 2: WORKER PROTECTION

“Worker protection” refers to laws that support various real-life needs of workers and their families. These laws are especially important to women, parents, and caretakers, as they seek to balance demands of work and family. If a worker falls ill, will they need to report to work or risk missing vital hours and pay? Will a worker be called into work on an hour’s notice? If a worker is sexually harassed, can they seek protection?

The laws include paid family leave, protection from sexual harassment, equal pay, sick leave, fair scheduling, and pregnancy protections, and the right for breastfeeding mothers to pump in the workplace.

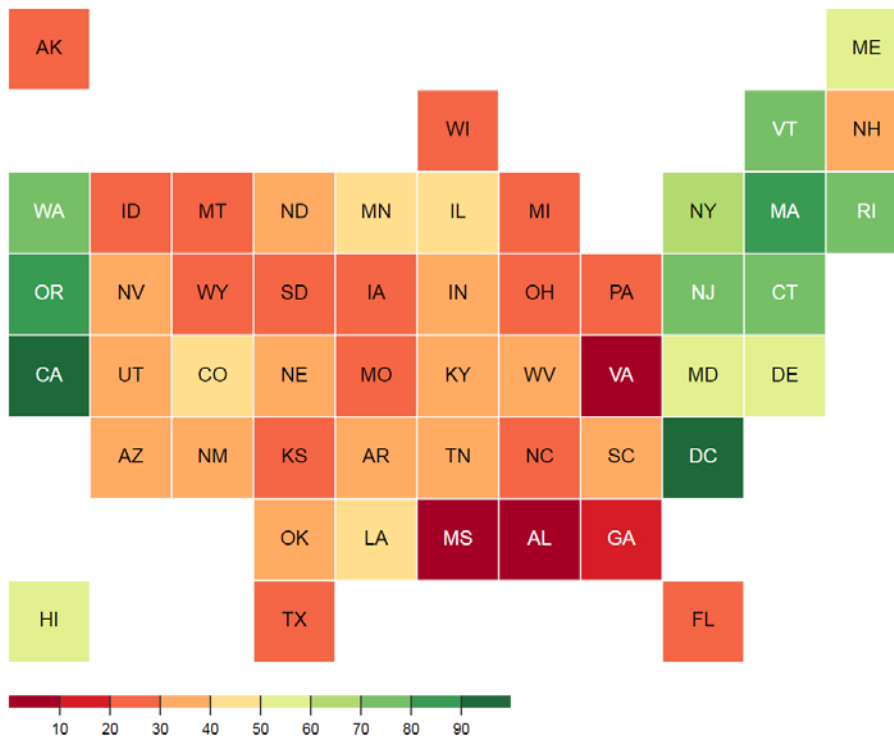
Table 3: Ranking and scores for the Worker Protection Dimension, 2019

State	Protection Ranking	Protection Score	State	Protection Ranking	Protection Score
California	1	91.67	Kentucky	25	30.56
District of Columbia	2	90.28	New Mexico	25	30.56
Massachusetts	3	83.33	North Dakota	25	30.56
Oregon	3	83.33	Oklahoma	25	30.56
Connecticut	5	79.17	South Carolina	25	30.56
New Jersey	6	77.78	West Virginia	25	30.56
Rhode Island	7	76.39	Michigan	33	27.78
Vermont	8	75.00	Wisconsin	34	26.39
Washington	9	70.83	Iowa	35	24.31
New York	10	69.44	Montana	35	24.31
Hawaii	11	54.17	Alaska	37	22.22
Maine	11	54.17	Florida	37	22.22
Maryland	13	52.78	Idaho	37	22.22
Delaware	14	50.00	Kansas	37	22.22
Minnesota	15	48.61	Missouri	37	22.22
Colorado	16	44.44	North Carolina	37	22.22
Illinois	16	44.44	Ohio	37	22.22
Louisiana	18	40.28	Pennsylvania	37	22.22
Arizona	19	38.89	South Dakota	37	22.22
Nebraska	19	38.89	Texas	37	22.22
Utah	19	38.89	Wyoming	37	22.22
New Hampshire	22	38.19	Georgia	48	13.89
Nevada	23	36.11	Alabama	49	5.56
Tennessee	24	32.64	Virginia	49	5.56
Arkansas	25	30.56	Mississippi	51	0.00
Indiana	25	30.56			

California scores best in this category, with DC close behind. At the bottom, Mississippi is now the only state with a score of 0; it offers *none* of the protections that are included in the index, and stands as one of the last two states in the country without an equal pay law (along with Alabama).

Alabama did step up in the last year, passing a law guaranteeing pay secrecy (which increased its score to 5.56).

Figure 4: Worker Protection Dimension by state



Regional differences are quite stark in this dimension; states in the Northeast and West offer much more robust protections for workers.



4 Since many retailers are now open 24/7, workers are called in every hour of the day, sometimes on short notice. Photo: FG Trade

DIMENSION 3: RIGHT TO ORGANIZE

When workers act collectively, they have more strength. Historically, unions have played a crucial role in supporting workers in the US; they protect rights to speak out about problems, bargain for higher wages, and provide various legal protections.

This dimension includes laws that help or discourage workers from acting together. When a state has a “right-to-work” law, it’s much more difficult for unions to organize, and to thrive. The index also measures whether public employees have the ability to bargain for wages collectively, and the availability of project labor agreements for government contracts.

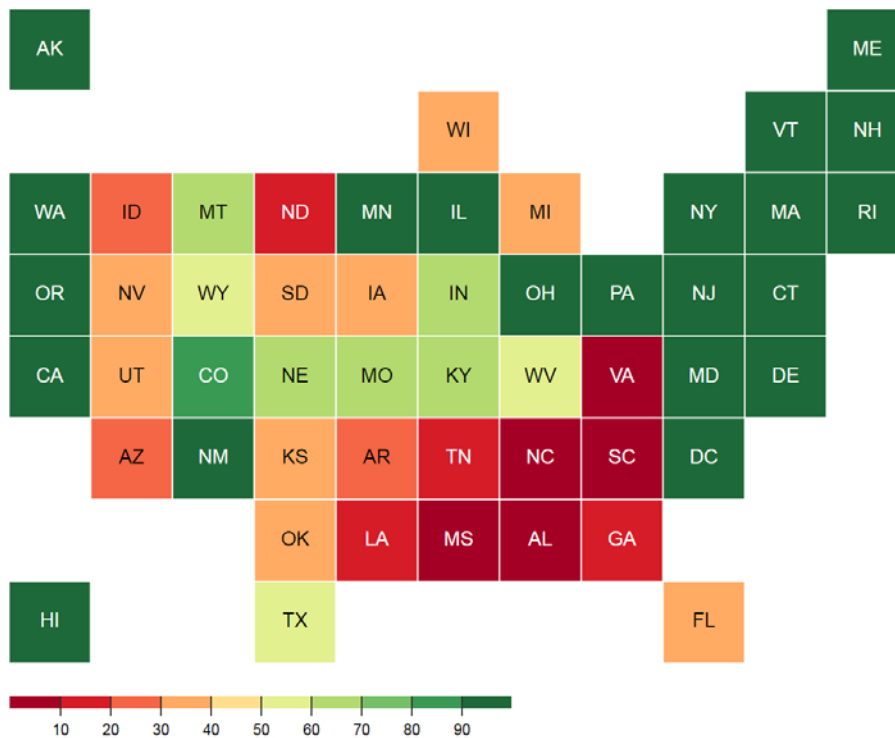
Table 4: Ranking and scores for the Right to Organize Dimension, 2019

State	Organize Ranking	Organize Index	State	Organize Ranking	Organize Index
Alaska	1	100.00	Kentucky	27	61.11
California	1	100.00	Texas	28	55.56
Connecticut	1	100.00	West Virginia	28	55.56
Delaware	1	100.00	Wyoming	28	55.56
District of Columbia	1	100.00	Florida	31	33.33
Hawaii	1	100.00	Iowa	31	33.33
Illinois	1	100.00	Kansas	31	33.33
Maine	1	100.00	Michigan	31	33.33
Maryland	1	100.00	Nevada	31	33.33
Massachusetts	1	100.00	Oklahoma	31	33.33
Minnesota	1	100.00	South Dakota	31	33.33
New Hampshire	1	100.00	Utah	31	33.33
New Jersey	1	100.00	Wisconsin	31	33.33
New Mexico	1	100.00	Idaho	40	27.78
New York	1	100.00	Arizona	41	22.22
Ohio	1	100.00	Arkansas	41	22.22
Oregon	1	100.00	Louisiana	43	16.67
Pennsylvania	1	100.00	North Dakota	43	16.67
Rhode Island	1	100.00	Georgia	45	11.11
Vermont	1	100.00	Tennessee	45	11.11
Washington	1	100.00	Mississippi	47	5.56
Colorado	22	83.33	Alabama	48	0.00
Indiana	23	66.67	North Carolina	48	0.00
Missouri	23	66.67	South Carolina	48	0.00
Montana	23	66.67	Virginia	48	0.00
Nebraska	23	66.67			

Again this year, 21 states have a perfect score of 100. At the bottom, four states have no legislation to support the right to organize: Virginia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Alabama.⁴ In other words, they are all “right-to-work” states, prohibit project labor agreements, and do not allow public workers (teachers, police officers, and firefighters) to engage in collective bargaining and negotiating wages.

⁴ In the 2018 BSWI, Oxfam interpreted the Alabama law around teachers’ right to organize differently, and gave the state credit; our interpretation changed this year.

Figure 5: The Right to Organize Dimension by state



Regional contrasts are stark when it comes to rights to organize; 21 states have a perfect score, while states in the South offer few, if any, rights.

HOW DOES IT ADD UP?

IS A BEST STATE TO WORK A BEST STATE TO LIVE?

Oxfam maintains that ensuring better compensation and conditions for workers translates into better quality of life, as well as a healthier economy for a state.

However, not everyone agrees. Some analysts and leaders have argued that labor laws could have harmful effects on workers and businesses, and opponents of labor legislation claim that the states with the least regulation are actually the best places to do business.²

In 2018, to determine whether there is a relationship between a state's score on the BSWI and the well-being of its people, Oxfam ran several simple correlations with economic and social indicators. **Overall, the data showed a correlation between high scores on the BSWI and desirable economic and social indicators.**³

Specifically, Oxfam found a moderate correlation between a state's ranking in the index against rates of poverty, infant mortality, life expectancy, median income, GDP per capita, and labor force participation.

For 2019, the correlations remained largely the same. Two of the most important indicators are included here.

Since the most recent data available for these indicators is from 2017, Oxfam backdated the BSWI to 2017 as well (meaning that it includes legislation up to September of 2017).

About Correlations

Correlations show the relationship between two variables, either positive or negative. The result of a correlation is called the *correlation coefficient* (or "r"); this number ranges from -1 to $+1$. The closer it is to $+1$ or -1 , the more closely the two variables are related. The closer it is to 0 , the less likely a correlation.

As a rule of thumb, a strong positive correlation is above 0.7 ; a strong negative correlation is below -0.7 ; a moderate correlation is between 0.3 and 0.7 (or -0.3 and -0.7); and a weak correlation is between 0.1 and 0.3 (or -0.1 and -0.3).

A note of caution: While the strength of a correlation indicates how closely associated two variables are, it does not establish causality. In fact, there may or may not be causality, or reverse causality, or even bidirectional causality.

Figure 6: Correlation of the Best States to Work Index with median household income by state, 2017



Correlation coefficient: 0.5927

Source: US Census Bureau data, 2017.

<https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-income-households.html>

Note: Virginia is an outlier, in part due to proximity to Washington, DC and federal government contracting; correlation coefficient is 0.6582 when Virginia is removed.

The BSWI is moderately correlated with median income. According to a simple correlation, for every one-point increase in the BSWI, the median income of a given state increases by approximately \$250. It increases to nearly \$275 for each point if one removes Virginia, which is a notable outlier given its proximity to Washington, DC and government contracting.

Figure 7: Correlation of the Best States to Work Index with infant mortality rate per 1,000 live births by state, 2017



Correlation coefficient: -0.5711

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2017.

https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/sosmap/infant_mortality_rates/infant_mortality.htm

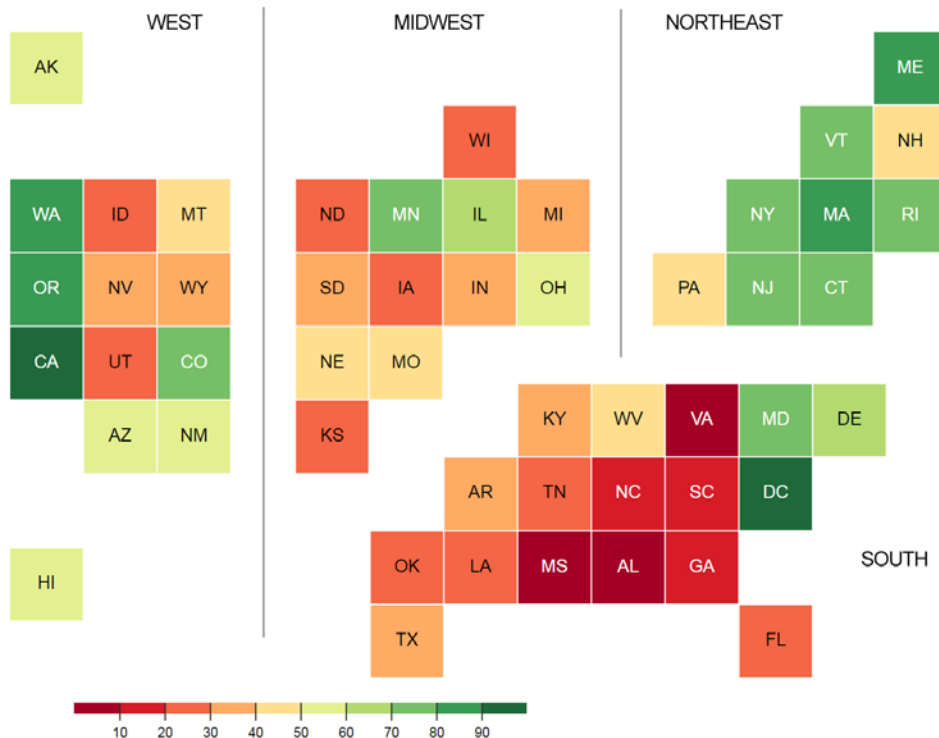
The infant mortality rate, commonly used to indicate the overall health of a population, has correlations with states' rankings in the BSWI. For every increase of 35 points in the BSWI, the infant mortality rate per 1,000 births decreases by one (a significant shift given the number of children born in each state).

In 2017, the state with the lowest infant mortality rate was Massachusetts, which reported 3.7 deaths per 1,000 births; it ranked No. 3 in the BSWI with a score of 85.85. In stark contrast, Mississippi had the highest rate, at 8.6 infant deaths per 1,000 births (over double the rate in Massachusetts); its BSWI score was 7.11.

REGIONAL ANALYSIS

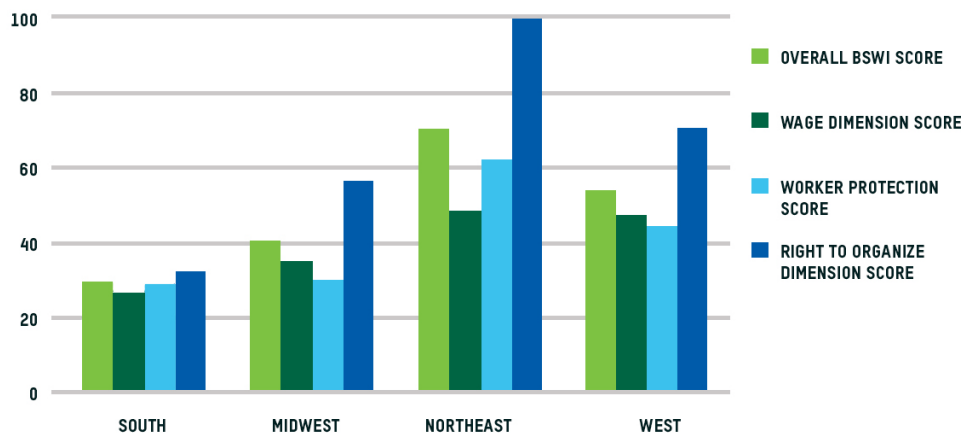
As you can see from the map below, there are distinct regional differences in state labor laws.

Figure 8: Index scores by state, 2019



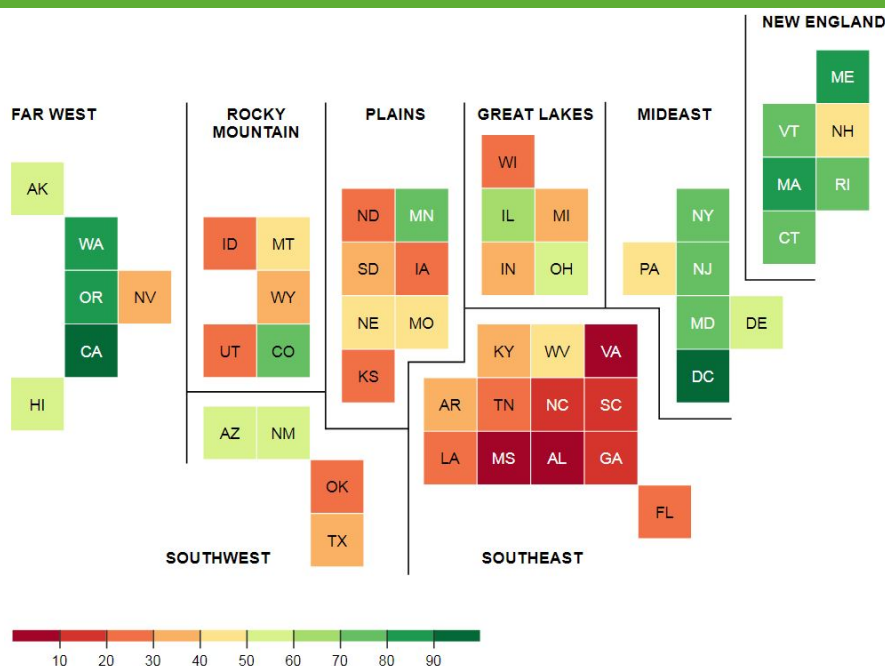
The four areas defined by the US census (South, Northeast, Midwest, and West) are illustrated, and the differences in colors are stark.

Figure 9: BSWI and the three dimensions by region, 2019



This chart shows the overall scores (in light green), and each of the dimension scores for the region. The South has the lowest overall score, and low scores in each policy area. The Northeast scores the highest overall, and highest in each of the policy areas.

Figure 10: BSWI scores by US Bureau of Economic Analysis region, 2019



Mapping the states according to the US Bureau of Economic Analysis illustrates regional differences in even greater contrast. The Southeast is marked by colors at the low end of the scale, while the Far West, Mideast, and New England regions are at the high end.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Ranking as a best state to work means it's more likely that working families and the economy are thriving in that state. Oxfam maintains that states should do more to create a positive and supportive landscape for workers.

In addition, it's long past time for Congress and the administration to take steps at the federal level to improve compensation and conditions for workers.

1. **Increase the minimum wage at the state level, and empower local governments to raise minimum wages.**
2. **Improve protections for workers.** Specifically, states should:
 - Strengthen equal pay laws
 - Provide workplace protections for pregnant and breastfeeding workers
 - Ensure job-protected paid family and medical leave
 - Guarantee paid sick days
 - Ensure fair scheduling for workers
 - Protect against sexual harassment
3. **Repeal laws that undermine workers' freedom to bargain collectively.** States must restore workers' ability to organize and bargain collectively by overturning "right-to-work" laws. Moreover, states should repeal bans on project labor agreements for government contracts.
4. **Preserve collective bargaining for public sector workers.** State and local governments employ millions of people in the US.⁴ The Supreme Court decision *Janus v. AFSCME Council 31* weakens the bargaining power of unions across the country, even in states that support collective bargaining of government employees. States must work to find innovative ways to preserve the financial solvency of public sector unions in this new policy landscape.

SOURCES AND APPENDICES

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND DATA SOURCES

Please refer to the [2018 edition of the report](#) for a full list of relevant works.

APPENDIX 1: METHODOLOGY

All data is based on laws and policies in effect as of July 1, 2019.

The index is based on state policies in three dimensions; each accounts for a third of the final overall score. [View full spreadsheets of the data.](#)

Wage policies

Do workers earn a living wage that is sufficient to provide for them and their families? This dimension includes two areas:

- The ratio of the actual state minimum wage in relation to the “living wage” for a family of four with one wage earner. The living wage figure is from the MIT Living Wage Calculator.⁵
- Whether or not the state allows localities to implement their own minimum wage laws.⁶

Worker protection policies

This dimension considers the quality of life for workers, especially women and parents. The policies include:

- Protections for women who are pregnant and breastfeeding.
- Mandates for equal pay, pay secrecy, and no salary history.
- Leave for non-FMLA (Family and Medical Leave Act) workers because of less time on the job; leave longer than federal FMLA.
- Mandate for paid sick leave.
- Protections around flexible scheduling, reporting pay, split-shift pay, advance notice.
- Protections around sexual harassment.

Right to organize policies

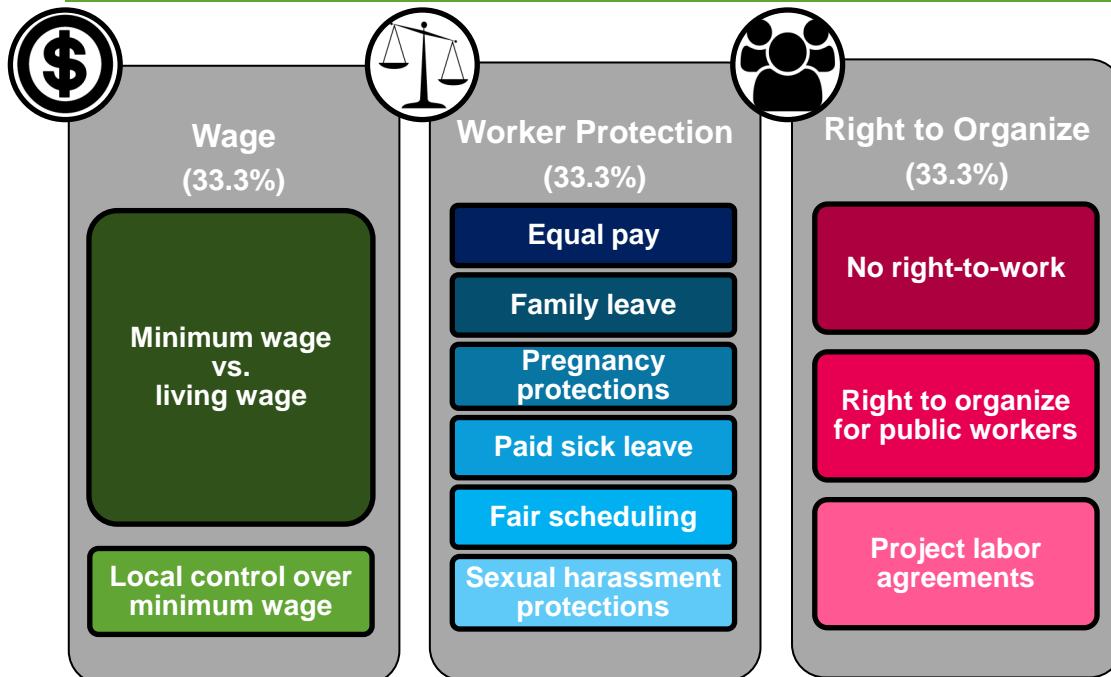
Do workers have the right to organize and sustain a trade union?

- Does the state have a so-called “right-to-work” law (which suppresses union activity)?

- Do public employees (teachers, police, firefighters) have rights to collective bargaining and wage negotiation?
- Are project labor agreements for government contracts available?

The selection of these areas stems from three justifications: values and principles, strong evidence of a beneficial impact, and public support.

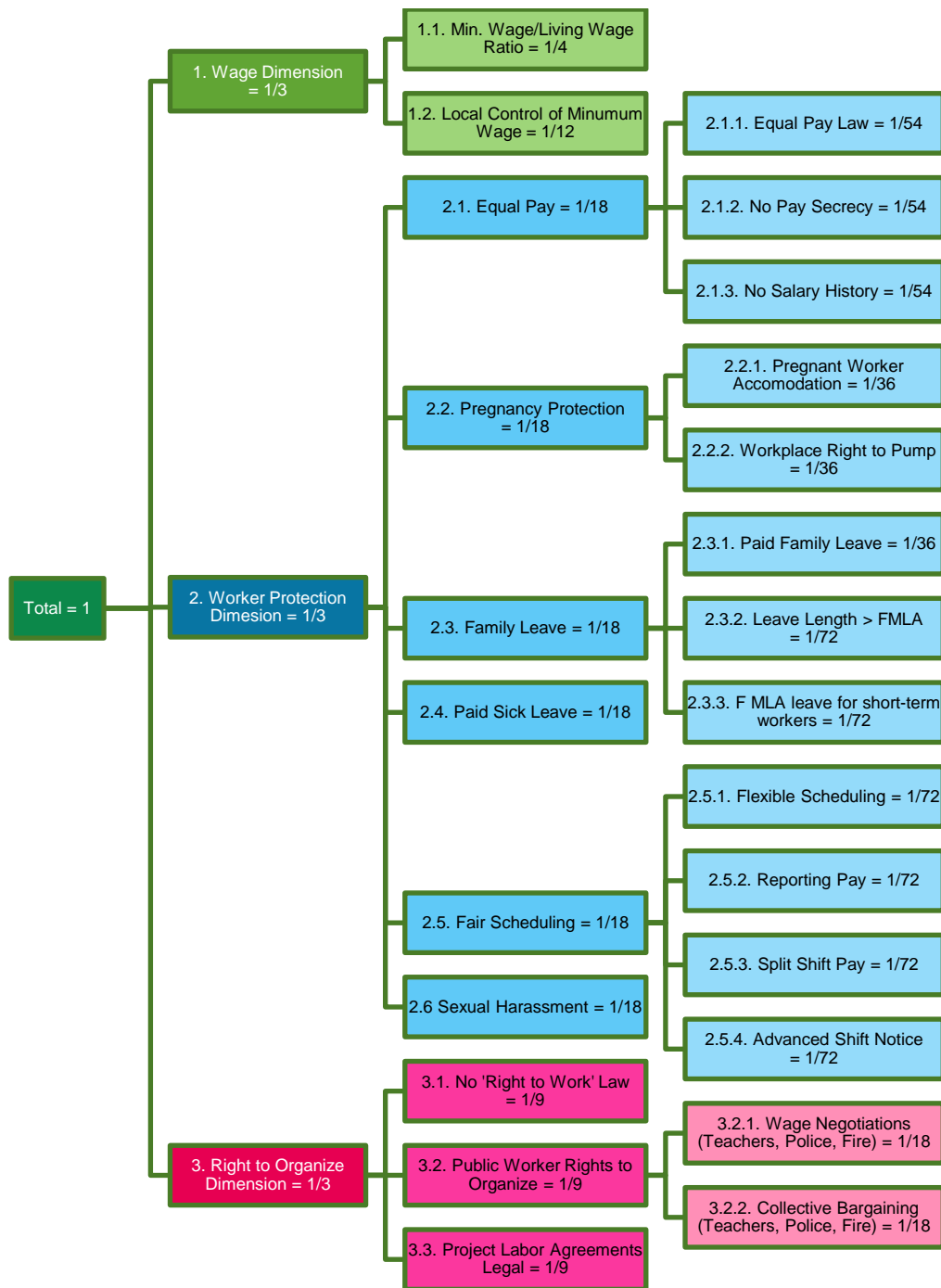
Figure 11: Best States to Work Index component breakdown



Note: Within each major dimension, submetrics are weighted equally, except in the Wage Dimension where the “minimum wage versus living wage” to “local control over minimum wage” ratio is three to one.

Our team weighed each dimension—**Wage**, **Worker Protection**, and the **Right to Organize**—equally in the index. Then, within each area, our team selected from two to six policy indicators, for a total of 11.

APPENDIX 2: DIAGRAM OF INDEX COMPONENTS



APPENDIX 3: INDEX COMPONENT SOURCES

1. Wage Dimension

1.1.1. MIT Living Wage: <http://livingwage.mit.edu>

1.1.2. Minimum Wage: <http://www.ncsl.org/research/labor-and-employment/state-minimum-wage-chart.aspx>

1.2. Local Control of Minimum Wage:

https://ballotpedia.org/Labor_preemption_conflicts_between_state_and_local_government

2. Worker Protection Dimensions

2.1.1. Private Sector Worker Accommodation: <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/workplace/pregnancy-discrimination/reasonable-accommodations-for-pregnant-workers-state-laws.pdf>

2.1.2. Private Sector Right to Pump: <http://www.ncsl.org/research/health/breastfeeding-state-laws.aspx>

2.2.1. Basic Equal Pay Laws: <https://www.aauw.org/resource/state-equal-pay-laws/>

2.2.2. Pay Transparency:

- https://www.dol.gov/wb/equalpay/equalpay_txt.htm
- https://www.capitol.hawaii.gov/session2018/bills/SB2351_CD1_.pdf

2.2.3. No Private Sector Salary History:

- https://www.seyfarth.com/dir_docs/publications/Seyfarth-50StatePayEquityDesktopReference-2019.pdf
- <http://alisondb.legislature.state.al.us/ALISON/SearchableInstruments/2019RS/PrintFiles/HB225-enr.pdf>
- https://www.capitol.hawaii.gov/session2018/bills/SB2351_CD1_.PDF
- <https://mainelegislature.org/legis/bills/getPDF.asp?paper=SP0090&item=3&snum=129>
- <http://lawfilesext.leg.wa.gov/biennium/2019-20/Pdf/Bills/House%20Passed%20Legislature/1696-S.PL.pdf#page=1>

2.3.1.1. Job-protected leave for non-FMLA workers:

<http://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/workplace/raising-expectations-2018.pdf>

2.3.1.2. Job-protected leave longer than federal FMLA:

<http://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/workplace/raising-expectations-2018.pdf>

2.3.2. Paid Family Leave: <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/workplace/paid-leave/state-paid-family-leave-laws.pdf>

2.4. Paid Sick Leave: <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/workplace/paid-sick-days/paid-sick-days-statutes.pdf>

2.5. Fair Scheduling: www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/workplace-fairness/equal-opportunity/schedules-that-work-act-fact-sheet.pdf;

2.5.3 Split Shift Pay:

- <https://apps.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=357-28-190>
- <https://olis.leg.state.or.us/liz/2017R1/Downloads/MeasureDocument/SB828>

3. Right to Organize Dimension

3.1. Right to Work: inputs provided by the AFL-CIO

- 2.1.1. Collective Bargaining for Teachers: <https://www.nctq.org/contract-database/collectiveBargaining>
- 3.2.1.2. Collective Bargaining for Police: https://www.commonwealthfoundation.org/state_labor_laws/
- 3.2.1.3. Collective Bargaining for Firefighters: https://www.commonwealthfoundation.org/state_labor_laws/
- 3.2.2. Wage Negotiation: https://www.commonwealthfoundation.org/state_labor_laws/
- 3.3. Project Labor Agreements: inputs provided by the AFL-CIO

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Oxfam is an international confederation of 20 organizations networked in more than 90 countries as part of a global movement for change to build a future free from the injustice of poverty:

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Oxfam Ireland
Oxfam Italy
Oxfam Japan
Oxfam Mexico
Oxfam New Zealand
Oxfam Novib (Netherlands)
Oxfam-Québec
Oxfam South Africa

NOTES

¹ “Low-wage workers in the United States also fare very poorly by international standards, as the OECD’s recent Employment Outlook report reminds us. In the United States, according to the OECD, 25.3 percent of workers had “low-pay”—earning less than two-thirds of the median wage—which was the *highest* incidence of low-pay work among the twenty-six countries surveyed and far higher than the OECD average of 16.3 percent. In fact,... low-wage workers fare worse in the United States than any other OECD nation.”

Economic Policy Institute, September 4, 2014, Lawrence Mishel

The United States Leads in Low-Wage Work and the Lowest Wages for Low-Wage Workers

<https://www.epi.org/blog/united-states-leads-wage-work-lowest-wages/>

² [1] Jardim, E. et al. *Minimum Wage Increases, Wages, and Low Wage Employment: Evidence from Seattle*. National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper 23532: 2018.

[2] Sherk, J. *Right to Work Increases Jobs and Choices*. Heritage Foundation WebMemo No. 3411: 2011.

³ *The Best States to Work Index: A Guide to Labor Policy in US States*, Oxfam America, 2018. https://policy-practice.oxfamamerica.org/static/media/files/Best_States_to_Work_Index.pdf

⁴ Bureau of Labor Statistics. *Seasonally adjusted employment: Government, aggregate*. Data: 2018.

⁵ MIT Living Wage Calculator. <http://livingwage.mit.edu>

⁶ Local control over the minimum wage is based on Input provided by the National Employment Law Project.

COVER: As online retailing has grown in recent years, so has the need for workers to staff and manage warehouses. Workers face low wages, arduous conditions, and demanding schedules (including overnight shifts). State labor laws establish guidelines for compensation and conditions at the local level. *Photo: StockRocket*



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