18–19-year-olds are more likely than 15–17-year-olds to have abortions. One would expect younger teenagers to be more likely to resolve pregnancies by abortion, given the level of financial and social support they need from their families and society to raise children. Among industrialized countries with data, the United States is the only one in which younger adolescents are not substantially more likely than older ones to terminate pregnancies by abortion.\(^{30}\)

Although birthrates have fallen among U.S. teenagers, they are still high in comparison with rates in other developed countries; even the rate for non-Hispanic white teenagers, who have the lowest rate among U.S. 15–19-year-olds (38 per 1,000), is higher than rates elsewhere in the developed world. In a few states, however, rates are comparable to those in other English-speaking countries, while still higher than those in Germany, France, Italy and Scandinavia. Similarly, the adolescent abortion rate is higher in the United States than in other countries, but the rate for non-Hispanic white teenagers is within the range of other English-speaking countries’ rates, and the rate among non-Hispanic white teenagers in several states is comparable to or only slightly higher than the rates in the developed countries with the lowest rates.\(^{31}\)

Teenage pregnancy rates, birthrates and abortion rates at the state level fall into distinct regional patterns (Figure 1). The states with the highest pregnancy rates (100 or more per 1,000) are generally in the South or Southwest; the exceptions are California, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Missouri, Nevada and New York. The lowest pregnancy rates (below 80) are concentrated in the North Central and Northeast regions. With the exception of Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, the states with pregnancy rates below 80 per 1,000 have no cities of population greater than 400,000.

Birthrates are even more geographically distinct. The highest rates (59–102 per 1,000) are found across the southern third of the country plus Alaska, California and Nevada. The lowest rates (29–43 per 1,000) are in the Northeast and North Central states, and a band of states with intermediate rates extends across the country. It appears that the social conservatism that is characteristic of Southern states does not protect against early pregnancy and childbearing. Massachusetts, on the other hand, is considered one of the most liberal states, yet is well below the national average in teenage pregnancy and has one of the lowest adolescent birthrates.