



Voices. Votes. Leadership.

The Status of Black Women in American Politics

**A report by the Center for American Women
& Politics for Higher Heights Leadership Fund**

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HEIGHTS**

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Center for American
Women and Politics

2015

**“At present, our country
needs women's idealism and
determination, perhaps more in
politics than anywhere else.”**

Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm



About Higher Heights

Higher Heights is the only organization dedicated solely to harnessing Black women's political power and leadership potential to overcome barriers to political participation and increase Black women's participation in civic processes. Higher Heights Leadership Fund, a 501(c)(3), is investing in a long-term strategy to expand and support Black women's leadership pipeline at all levels and strengthen their civic participation beyond just Election Day. Learn more at [**www.HigherHeightsLeadershipFund.org**](http://www.HigherHeightsLeadershipFund.org)

About The Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP)

The Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP), a unit of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, is nationally recognized as the leading source of scholarly research and current data about American women's political participation. Its mission is to promote greater knowledge and understanding about women's participation in politics and government and to enhance women's influence and leadership in public life. CAWP's education and outreach programs translate research findings into action, addressing women's under-representation in political leadership with effective, imaginative programs serving a variety of audiences. As the world has watched Americans considering female candidates for the nation's highest offices, CAWP's over four decades of analyzing and interpreting women's participation in American politics have provided a foundation and context for the discussion. Learn more at [**www.cawp.rutgers.edu**](http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu)

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Table Of Contents

Executive Summary	i-ii
Introduction	1-3
Black Women Running And Winning	3-4
Congress	5-11
Statewide Elected Executive Office	12-16
State Legislatures	17-22
Mayors	23-24
Black Women In The Electorate	24-26
2015 Elections	27
Looking Ahead: Black Women in 2016	27-28
Conclusion	29
Sources	30-33
Appendices	34-36

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

VOICES

Throughout the country, Black women are leading efforts to promote positive social change, preserve and improve their communities, and prevent the perpetuation of violence and inequality. Black women's influence extends to educational, business, and economic spheres, where they have expanded both their presence and power. Despite these efforts and advancements, new research finds that Black women's voices are the most likely to be overlooked in governmental policy-making.

But Black women are not only protesting outside of political institutions, they are leading the fight for fair treatment from the inside. Black women continue to increase their political representation, using their formal power to bring diverse perspectives, priorities, and experiences to policy debates, including giving necessary attention to the voices that may otherwise be left out of political dialogue.

Black women have been a part of every great movement in American history even if they weren't always given a voice.

When women of color aren't given the opportunity to live up to their God-given potential, we all lose out on their talents; we're not as good a country as we can be. We might miss out on the next Mae Jemison or Ursula Burns or Serena Williams or Michelle Obama. We want everybody to be on the field. We can't afford to leave some folks off the field.

- President Barack Obama, September 21, 2015

Prioritizing the political empowerment of Black women requires identifying and taking advantage of electoral opportunities to advance Black women's political leadership, as well as harnessing the power of Black women's votes. Increasing Black women's representation is not only a matter of democratic fairness, but essential to engaging new constituencies, elevating policy dialogue, and promoting policy priorities, perspectives, and solutions that may be lost if Black women's votes, voices, and leadership are absent from American politics.

VOTES

Black women have registered and voted at higher rates than their male counterparts in every election since 1998. Moreover, they surpassed all other race and gender subgroups in voter turnout in 2008 and 2012. Black women also turned out to vote at a rate seven percentage points higher than their Black male counterparts in the 2014 midterm elections, outnumbering Black men at the polls by over two million and turning out at the highest rate among any non-white group.

As the most reliable Democratic voters in the past two presidential elections, Black women are an essential part of the winning coalition that any Democratic candidate will need to win in 2016. Harnessing that power by turning out the vote and tying those votes to policy demands and priorities can ensure that Black women's voices will not only be heard from outside of government, but can move further to the center of political debates and decision-making that are so influential in the lived experiences of Black women throughout the United States.

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

Put simply, the perspectives and priorities of Black women cannot be fully expressed without the representation of Black women in office. Once in office, Black women champion the interests of Black citizens and underrepresented populations, supporting progressive agendas around education, health care, and economic development. There is additional evidence that Black women politicians better engage and inspire Black citizens to participate in politics. Moreover, they typically represent more diverse communities than their non-Black counterparts.

Black women made some notable gains in the 2014 elections, representing one-fifth of new Democrats, nearly one-third of new women, and five of six new Black members – including delegates – elected to the 114th Congress in November 2014. However, despite being 7.4% of the U.S. population, Black women are just 3.4% of Congress, less than 1% of statewide elected executive officials, 3.5% of state legislators, and 1.9% of mayors in cities with populations over 30,000. Four Black women serve as mayors in the 100 largest cities in the United States. Historically, only 35 Black women from 15 states have *ever* served in the U.S. Congress, only 10 Black women from 9 states have *ever* served in statewide elected executive offices, and three states have still never elected a Black woman to their state legislature.

Black women's representational growth has occurred primarily in the past two decades. Of the 35 Black women who have served in Congress, 28 (80%) have entered since 1993. Of the 10 Black women who have served in statewide elected executive office, all but one has entered since 1993. Since 1994, the growth in Black state legislators can be wholly attributed to Black women, who have increased their numbers by nearly 50%. Two Black women have served as Speakers of State Houses since 2008. The first big-city Black woman mayor was not elected until 1987 and at least eight more Black women have led big cities in the past thirteen years.

This trend will only continue upward as more Black women run and the sites for recruitment and candidacy expand. Black women's legislative representational growth to date has been primarily in majority-minority districts, leaving much opportunity for growth outside of those districts, which are limited in number and vulnerable to legal challenges. Taking advantage of such opportunities will require Black women to confront distinct hurdles to political participation.

Black women are less likely to be encouraged to run for office, and are more likely to be discouraged from running, than Black men and white women. Black women also navigate race and gender stereotypes, and the intersections therein, while running for and serving in office. Finally, Black women represent less affluent districts and are less likely to be part of moneyed networks, posing hurdles to fundraising.

Black women have proven their capacity to overcome these hurdles and, even more, capitalize upon the distinct advantages that they bring to candidacy and officeholding. Black women's confidence and political experiences in community work and activism have contributed to their political ambition and success. As candidates and officeholders, Black women engage and draw from multiple communities of voters and constituents. Finally, the recent history of Black women's political progress means that there is much progress left to make; Black women face great opportunities for growth in political voice and representation, especially if the infrastructure to support that growth is further put into place.

INTRODUCTION: VOICES, VOTES, AND LEADERSHIP

Black women have been a part of every great movement in American history even if they weren't always given a voice.

When women of color aren't given the opportunity to live up to their God-given potential, we all lose out on their talents; we're not as good a country as we can be. We might miss out on the next Mae Jemison or Ursula Burns or Serena Williams or Michelle Obama. We want everybody to be on the field. We can't afford to leave some folks off the field.

- President Barack Obama, September 21, 2015

In his speech to the Congressional Black Caucus in September 2015, President Barack Obama focused on the centrality of Black women to the major fights for equal rights in the 20th century, telling the audience that “all of us are beneficiaries of a long line of strong Black women who helped carry this country forward.” One of those women – Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm (D-NY) – stated decades earlier, “At present, our country needs women's idealism and determination, perhaps more in politics than anywhere else.” This statement rings true today, as Black women remain on the front lines for social progress in the 21st century. Black women – both in and out of elected office – have advocated and agitated for social change that addresses the disempowerment of the Black community and the invisibility of women there. #BlackLivesMatter, a movement launched by three Black women in 2012, has become a mantra for change, mobilizing citizens across the United States to fight for a new reality.¹ In illuminating and contending police brutality against the Black community, Black women have also emphasized the importance of giving voice to Black women's experiences, evident in the 2015 report and campaign to #SayHerName.² But Black women are not only protesting outside of political institutions; they are leading the fight for fair treatment from the inside. When the city of Ferguson, Missouri held its first election since Michael Brown's death, Ella Jones was one of two Black members elected to a six-member council that had – until then – had only one Black member, despite the city's population being over 67% Black. And when the city of Baltimore confronted the reality of and outrage over Freddie Gray's death while in police custody, it was District Attorney Marilyn Mosby – among the one percent of all elected prosecutors in the U.S. who are women of color³ – who stood at the podium to tell both residents and police, “I heard your calls for ‘no justice, no peace.’” Unlike lead prosecutors in similar cases nationwide, she swiftly filed charges against the six police officers involved in Gray's arrest.

Black women also stood up for equal rights both inside and outside of South Carolina's legislature in the fight to take down the confederate flag after the murders of nine people at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, including State Senator Clementa Pinckney. While Black women like State Representative Mia McLeod fought to garner votes in the legislature, Black women led protests on capitol grounds, including Bree Newsome's scaling of the Capitol flagpole to take the flag down herself.

These women are not alone. Throughout the country, Black women are leading efforts to promote positive social change, preserve and improve their communities, and prevent the perpetuation of violence and inequality. Despite these efforts, new research from Zoltan L. Hajnal, John Griffin, Brian Newman, and David

¹ Alicia Garza, with Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi, launched #BlackLivesMatter as a call to action after Travon Martin's death in 2012.

² Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw and Andrea J. Ritchie authored the #SayHerName report with Rachel Anspach and Rachel Gilmer. Crenshaw's Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies at Columbia University was a major collaborator in the effort.

³ Women Donor's Network. 2015. *Justice for All?* Available: <http://wholeads.us/justice/>

Searle (2015) finds that Black women's voices are the most likely to be overlooked in governmental policy-making. In their conclusion, the authors ask whether the solution to unequal policy responsiveness to the Black community more broadly requires electing more Blacks to office. This report illuminates the underrepresentation of Black women in elective office as perpetuating the marginalization of Black women's voices. Black women's political empowerment and advancement require identifying and taking advantage of electoral opportunities to raise Black women's voices in politics and policymaking, including harnessing the power of Black women's votes and advancing Black women's political leadership. The 2016 election represents one of those key opportunities, requiring attention, organization, and strategy to maximize Black women's influence and electoral success.

Power in Numbers

Despite the growing electoral and economic imprint of America's 23 million Black women, they have struggled to harness the political power necessary to overcome gaps in elected leadership and make sure their voices are heard on important policy debates like those around civil rights, economic justice, and reproductive justice. Political representation – from the voting booth to elected office – is critical to changing policies that negatively impact Black women, their families, and their communities.

Black women represent one-fifth of new Democrats, nearly one-third of new women, and five of six new Black members – including delegates – elected to the 114th Congress in November 2014. Alma Adams (D-NC) became the 100th woman in Congress upon her special election to fill a vacant seat for the remainder of the 113th Congress. Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-NJ) and Mia Love (R-UT) both became the first Black women to represent their states in Congress in January 2015. Love also made history as the first Black Republican woman to serve in Congress, winning her seat in the same year that Utah elected its first Black woman – Representative Sandra Hollins (D) – to the state legislature. Love and Coleman were both elected outside of majority-minority districts, debunking skepticism of Black women's viability among majority-White constituencies and opening the door to new sites for candidate recruitment. According to the U.S. Census, Black women also turned out to vote at a rate seven percentage points higher than their Black male counterparts in the 2014 midterm elections, outnumbering Black men at the polls by over two million and turning out at the highest rate among any non-White group.

Black women's empowerment is not only evident, nor only important, in the political sphere. Recent statistics on educational attainment from the U.S. Census show that Black women under forty are outpacing their Black male counterparts in earning bachelor's and advanced degrees. In business, Black women are the fastest growing group of entrepreneurs in the United States; according to a 2015 report from American Express Open, the number of businesses owned by Black women grew by 322% from 1997 to 2015, a rate more than four times greater than the rate of increase among all women during the same period (74%). The same report finds that firms owned by African-American women employ close to 300,000 workers nationally and generate \$52.6 billion in revenue (AEO 2015). Black women also have significant influence over the spending decisions of Black consumers, whose current buying power is greater than ever at \$1 trillion (Nielsen 2015).

This advancement in educational, business, economic, and political leadership comes in the face of continued disparities in Black women's experiences and access to power in U.S. society relative to men and White women. According to a poll conducted for the *Ms. Foundation* in May 2015, 46% of Americans disagree with the statement that "women of color have equal opportunities in work, life, and politics as White women" (14). Seventy percent of Black women disagree with the same statement, indicating that first-hand experiences conflict with outside assessments of a level playing field. Those distinct experiences are detailed in the latest

report from the Black Women’s Roundtable, which finds Black women in 2015 continue to face significant disparities in health, safety, and economic well-being. Black women are more likely to suffer from maternal mortality,⁴ are more than three times as likely to be murdered,⁵ and are twice as likely to be poor as White women.⁶ Even in the recovery, Black women’s unemployment rate is greatest among all women in 2015,⁷ and the gender gap in wages remains larger for Black women, who earn 63 cents for every dollar earned by a White man (AAUW 2015). Moreover, according to the latest data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey, Black women college graduates earn, on average, just over half of what White male college graduates earn. While Black women have progressed in business ownership, they occupy just 5.3 percent of managerial and professional positions in corporations (Warner 2014). Finally, despite Black women’s political successes at the congressional level in 2014, the proportion of Black women in statewide executive and state legislative offices remained nearly level after Election Day.

BLACK WOMEN RUNNING AND WINNING

While not extensive, the literature on Black women’s political representation provides important insights into Black women’s paths to office, challenges and opportunities on the campaign trail, and experiences and impact as legislators. Numerous studies demonstrate that the pathways women of color take to public office are somewhat different from those of non-Hispanic White women. In their survey of state legislators, Carroll and Sanbonmatsu (2013) find that women of color confront additional obstacles beyond those faced by White women running for political office.⁸ They are less likely to be encouraged to run and more likely to be discouraged from running. More specifically, women of color are less likely to be recruited to run, and recruitment matters more for women than for men (Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013). Party leaders’ doubts about candidate electability present an additional challenge to women of color in recruitment and securing campaign resources from the political establishment to help launch a candidacy, especially outside of majority-minority districts (Sanbonmatsu 2006). Shames’ (2014) research further highlights the potential deterrents to candidacy for women of color well-situated to run, finding them among the most likely to perceive running for office as having high costs and low rewards.

Once candidates, women of color are more likely than White women to face primary competition and report fundraising as a hurdle on their paths to elected office (Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013). Previous research has also found that Black candidates often raise less money, rely more often on small donations, and are more likely to need to seek campaign donations from outside of their districts, which are less affluent – on average – than those of White candidates (Singh 1998; Theilmann and Wilhite 1989).

Despite winning at comparable rates to men, women are also evaluated differently than male candidates by voters and treated differently than men by media, forcing women candidates to navigate gender in different ways in campaign strategy. Those challenges on the campaign trail are often exacerbated for women of color, who face gender *and* race-based stereotypes as well as unique, intersectional stereotypes related to their multiple politically-salient identities.⁹ Some scholars have emphasized that Black women are “doubly

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Pregnancy Mortality Surveillance System

⁵ Violence Policy Center. 2015. *Black Homicide and Victimization in the United States*

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (2012)

⁷ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Household Survey (October 2015)

⁸ For the remainder of this analysis, the use of “White women” will refer to non-Hispanic White women.

⁹ Those challenges continue once in office, as Nadia Brown details in her 2014 book on Black women in state legislators, as well as in her recent article on the politics of appearance for Black women legislators (Brown 2014).

disadvantaged” by these expectations, noting negative stereotypes about personality traits, competence, and leadership ability rooted in both racism and sexism (Clayton and Stallings 2000; Gamble 2010; Gay and Tate 2001; Githens and Prestage 1977; Harris-Perry 2011; Hill Collins 2000; McConaughy and White 2011).

However, Smooth (2014) describes how Black women have fared better than expected as candidates, based on these perceived disadvantages and compounding sociodemographic indicators of political integration. In fact, Black women have outpaced Black men and White women in increasing political representation over the past two decades (Hardy-Fanta et al. 2006; Orey et al. 2006; Smooth 2014). Smooth (2014) credits greater levels of political confidence and ambition for this “paradox of participation” among Black women, drawing upon research demonstrating how Black women’s historical roles in movement politics, a longer tradition of simultaneous public and private sphere work, community leadership, and religious networks have provided foundations for and routes toward political success (Darcy and Hadley 1988; Frederick 2013; Kaba and Ward 2009; Tate 2003).

The factors predicting electoral success for Black women have been different from those for White women and Black men. First, Black women are advantaged by their ability to engage, empathize with, and draw support from multiple communities of voters (Smooth 2014; Philpot and Walton 2007). Like their male counterparts, they have also found particular success in majority-minority districts (Scola 2006). On the other hand, multi-member districts have benefited Black and White women, but men of color appear to fare better in smaller, single-district systems (Darcy, Hadley, and Kirksey 1997; Trounstein and Valdin 2008). Thus, increasing Black women’s representation means navigating a political opportunity structure – including potential advantages and disadvantages – that differs from the opportunity structure faced by other candidates of color and women candidates.

Increasing the numbers of women of color in office is not just a matter of democratic fairness and descriptive representation, but also has substantive effects on legislative policy and citizens’ political engagement. Once in office, women of color may continue to face challenges within the institutional power structure at the intersections of race and gender, as well as feeling a sense of responsibility to multiple constituencies (Brown 2014; Carroll 2003; Hawkesworth 2003; Smooth 2001). However, Black women overcome these challenges to champion the interests of both African Americans and women, supporting progressive agendas around education, health care, and economic development that differ somewhat from Black male and White female colleagues (Barrett 2001; Bratton, Haynie, and Reingold 2008; Brown 2014; Orey et al. 2006). In her study of Black women legislators, Brown (2014) finds that Black women’s personal backgrounds and multiple identities influence their legislative policy preferences in ways that demonstrate both intragroup variation and commonalities rooted, at least in part, in their experiences at the intersection of race and gender. Put simply, the perspectives and priorities of Black women cannot be fully expressed without the representation of Black women in office.

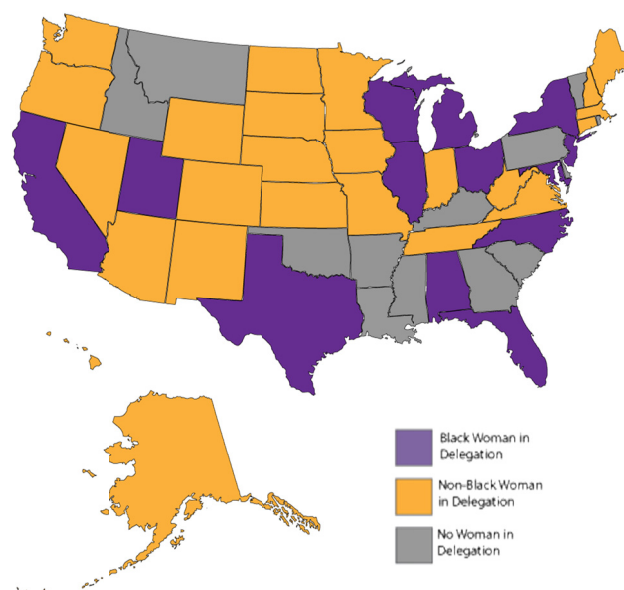
Finally, there is some evidence that Black women politicians better engage and inspire Black citizens to participate in politics (Gay 2001; Pinderhughes 1987; Tate 1991; 2003). Stokes-Brown and Dolan (2010) found that Black female candidates for Congress increased Black women’s likelihood of political proselytizing and voting, as well as increasing the non-monetary forms of participation among all women. This “role model effect” can have significant impact in engaging and encouraging more Black women to run for office, as well strengthening a political community of Black women to support them.

CONGRESS

Current Officeholders

Eighteen Black women from thirteen states serve in the 114th Congress (2015-2017), in addition to two Black female non-voting delegates from Washington, D.C. and the U.S. Virgin Islands (see Figure 1). Seventeen of eighteen Black female members in the current congress are Democrats in the House of Representatives. No Black women currently serve in the U.S. Senate. Despite making up 7.4% of the U.S. population, Black women are only 3.4% of members of Congress and 4.1% of members of the U.S. House.¹⁰ However, Black women are well represented among Black members of Congress. As Table 1 shows, Black women are 21.4% of all female representatives. They are 40.9% of Black representatives. In comparison, White women are only 15.7% of White representatives and Latinas are 20.6% of Latino/a representatives. Of the 12 Asian/Pacific Islanders who serve in the U.S. House, 5 – or 41.7% – are women.¹¹ Black women make up 9% of Democratic representatives and over a quarter (27.4%) of all Democratic female representatives. Their presence has contributed to creating the most diverse Democratic caucus in House history, where women and minority members are the majority of Democratic representatives.¹²

Figure 1. Current Congresswomen, by State



Source: Center for American Women and Politics

Table 1. Current Congresswomen, by Race, Party, and Chamber

	White		Black		Latina		Asian/Pacific Islander	
	Democrats	Republicans	Democrats	Republicans	Democrats	Republicans	Democrats	Republicans
House	33	19	17	1	7	2	5	0
Senate	13	6	0	0	0	0	1	0
Total	46	25	17	1	7	2	6	0

Source: Center for American Women and Politics

Black congresswomen serve on 16 of the House's 21 standing committees and are the ranking Democratic members on three full committees (Financial Services - Maxine Waters; Science, Space, and Technology – Eddie Bernice Johnson; Veterans Affairs – Corinne Brown) and ten subcommittees. In addition, Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) is the ranking member on the Highways and Transit subcommittee of the House's Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. Of the House's "power committees," Black women are absent from

¹⁰ These counts do not include delegates. Population numbers based on U.S. Census Bureau July 2013 estimate.

¹¹ According to the Congressional Research Service, Representative Bobby Scott (D-VA) identifies as both Black and Asian American. He is included in totals for each group here.

¹² Together, 62 women (including 29 women of color) and 44 minority men serve in the House Democratic Caucus, representing 56% of the 188 Democratic representatives.

Table 2. Congressional District Characteristics, Current Congresswomen

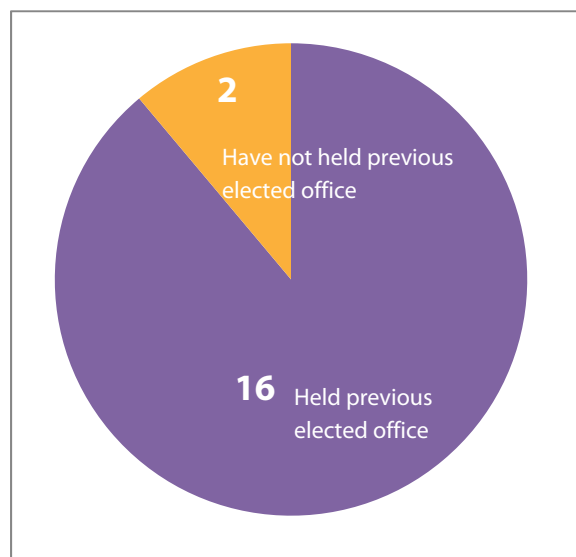
	Black Women	Non-Black Women
Race		
Black	40.3%	7.3%
White	44.4%	71.8%
Education		
Not High School Graduate	16.6%	13.4%
High School Graduate or Higher	83.4%	86.1%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	27.7%	32.7%
2014 Vote	76.1%	65%
2012 Vote for Barack Obama	75.7%	56%
Median Household Income	\$46,968	\$60,507

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau; *Congressional Quarterly*

NOTE: Numbers reflect average values for each group of members of Congress, not including delegates.

two: Rules and Ways and Means. Black women's influence within the House is strongly tied to the Democratic Party's fortunes. Because all Black women members but one, who is in her first term, are in the House minority, no Black women chair any congressional committees.¹³ Ten women serve in Democratic and Republican Party leadership positions in the House, including two black women. Terri Sewell (D-AL) is a Democratic Chief Deputy Whip and Donna Edwards (D-MD) serves as a co-chair of the Democratic Steering and Policy Committee. Sewell and Edwards are the only women of color in party leadership positions in the House or Senate. Seven women have chaired the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), with the last woman - Representative Marcia Fudge (D-OH) - holding the post in the 113th Congress.

Black congresswomen represent more diverse districts than non-Black women (see Table 2).¹⁴ Most significantly, 14 of the 18 Black female representatives in the 114th Congress represent majority-minority districts, consistent with historical trends of electoral success and minority representation in Congress (see below). Nearly half – 8 of 18 - of the Black women serving represent majority-Black districts and only four women – Joyce Beatty (D-OH), Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-NJ), Mia Love (R-UT), Gwen Moore (D-WI) – represent majority-White congressional districts. In all, 25 majority-minority congressional districts are represented by female members, with four districts represented by White women (Janice Hahn, CA-44; Zoe Lofgren, CA-19; Nancy Pelosi, CA-12; Jackie Speier, CA-14).¹⁵ Due in part to the strong presence of minority voters, Black women represent districts that, on average, voted strongly for Barack Obama in 2012 (see Table 3). They also received, on average, higher vote totals than other women members in their last elections; Black women representatives received an average 76% of the vote in their districts, compared to 65% for all non-Black women representatives.

Figure 2. Previous Elected Office, Current Black Congresswomen

Source: Center for American Women and Politics

¹³ Only one woman, Candice Miller (R-MI) chairs a House committee (House Administration), who is White, and one White woman, Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), chairs the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

¹⁴ Black men and women represent similar types of districts that share similar demographic characteristics. However, an analysis in 2010 found that Black women's congressional districts have a slightly lower proportion of Black citizens and a slightly higher proportion of Latinos than Black men's districts. The average income in Black women's districts is also slightly lower than the average income in Black men's districts (Palmer and Simon 2012).

¹⁵ Three Asian/Pacific Islander and four Latinas represent majority-minority congressional districts.

The average tenure of the sitting Black women members of Congress is about nine years.¹⁶ Representative Maxine Waters (D-CA) and Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) are the longest-serving Black women serving in the 114th Congress, each in her 24th year of service. They are also the longest-serving Black congresswomen ever. Even before coming to Congress, 16 of the 18 current Black congresswomen held some previous elected office, including eleven who served in their states' legislatures (see Figure 2).

The personal characteristics of today's Black congresswoman do not differ significantly from non-Black women members in regard to age or motherhood (see Table 3). The youngest Black woman in the 114th Congress is Representative Mia Love (R-UT), who is 39 years old. Representative Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX) is the oldest Black woman at 78 years old.¹⁷ Sixteen congresswomen have no children, including three Black women members, but the average number of children among all congresswomen is two.¹⁸

In her 2003 book *Black Faces in the Mirror*, Katherine Tate notes that marital status is the most striking demographic difference of Black women in Congress compared with non-Black women members; she found that only a third of Black women serving in the 106th Congress were married when they were elected to office, compared to majorities of White women, Asian/Pacific Islander women, and Latinas. The same significant difference persists in the 114th Congress, where just under 40% of Black women members are married, compared to 73.1% of White women, 60% of Asian/Pacific Islander women, and 77.8% of Latinas in Congress. This difference is reflective, in part, of the lower percentage of Black women in the population who are married.¹⁹ Moreover, it demonstrates that Black women members bring more diverse familial experiences to both campaigning and governing, challenging traditional norms of familial structure and gender roles. This is true not only of the current class of Black congresswomen, but also of the Black women who have served in Congress over the past 47 years.

Historical Officeholders

Thirty-five Black women from 15 states have served in the U.S. Congress, in addition to one Black female non-voting delegate from Washington, D.C. and two Black female non-voting delegates from the U.S. Virgin Islands (see Figure 3). Only one Black woman, Carol Moseley Braun (D-IL), has ever served in the U.S. Senate, and all but one Black congresswomen (including all three delegates) have been Democrats. Black women make up 11.4% of all 307 women who have ever served in Congress, 64.8% of all 54 congresswomen of color, and 25% of all 140 Black members of Congress (see Figure 5).²⁰ Of the six female delegates who have also served in the House, three are Black women.

Table 3. Personal Characteristics, Current Congresswomen

	Black Women	Non-Black Women
Average Age	63	59
Marital Status		
Married	38.9%	72.7%
Unmarried	61.1%	27.3%
Average Number of Children	2	2

Sources: Center for American Women and Politics; *Congressional Quarterly*; The Almanac of American Politics, *National Journal*

NOTE: Numbers reflect average values for each group of members of Congress, not including delegates.

¹⁶ The average tenure of Black women members is 9.5 years when delegates are included and 9.2 years when delegates are excluded.

¹⁷ Representative Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX) will turn 79 years old on December 3, 2015.

¹⁸ The average number of children is consistent at 2 children per member when delegates are included.

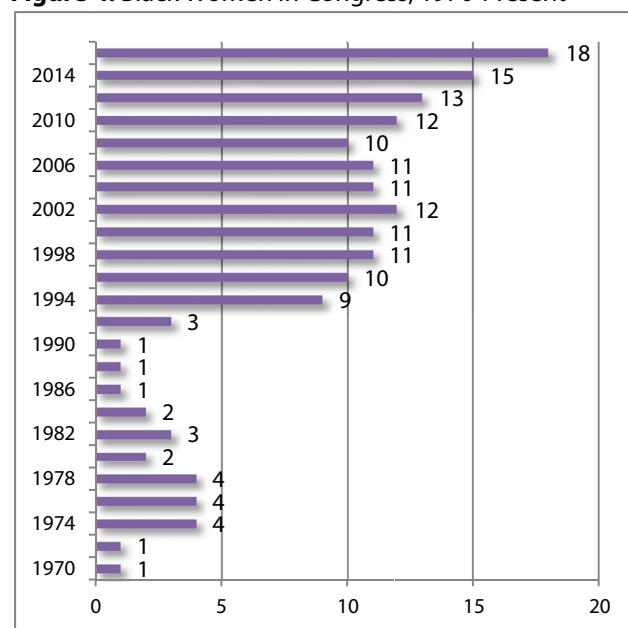
¹⁹ According to the U.S. Census 2014 estimates, 33% of Black women are married compared to 51% of all women in the United States.

²⁰ Mazie Hirono, the only woman of color to serve in both House and Senate, is only counted once in these calculations. In total, 54 women of color have served in the House and 2 women of color have served in the Senate. Calculations include elected and appointed members. Finally, Tim Scott, the first Black men to serve in both House and Senate, is also counted only once among Black congressmen.

While three states (DE, MS, VT) have still never sent a woman to Congress, 32 states have never elected a woman of color to Congress and 35 states have never had a Black woman in their congressional delegation. Black men, however, have represented 25 states in Congress over time, including 12 states that have never elected a Black woman: CT, LA, MA, MN, MS, MO, NV, OK, PA, SC, TN, VA.²⁴ Utah and Wisconsin are the only states that have elected a Black woman, but no Black men, to Congress. Four women – Katie Hall (D-IN), Barbara Jordan (D-TX), Mia Love (R-UT) and Gwen Moore (D-WI) – have been the first Black members of Congress from their states, but only Delegates Donna Christensen (D-VI) and Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) are the first congresswomen to represent their constituencies. One

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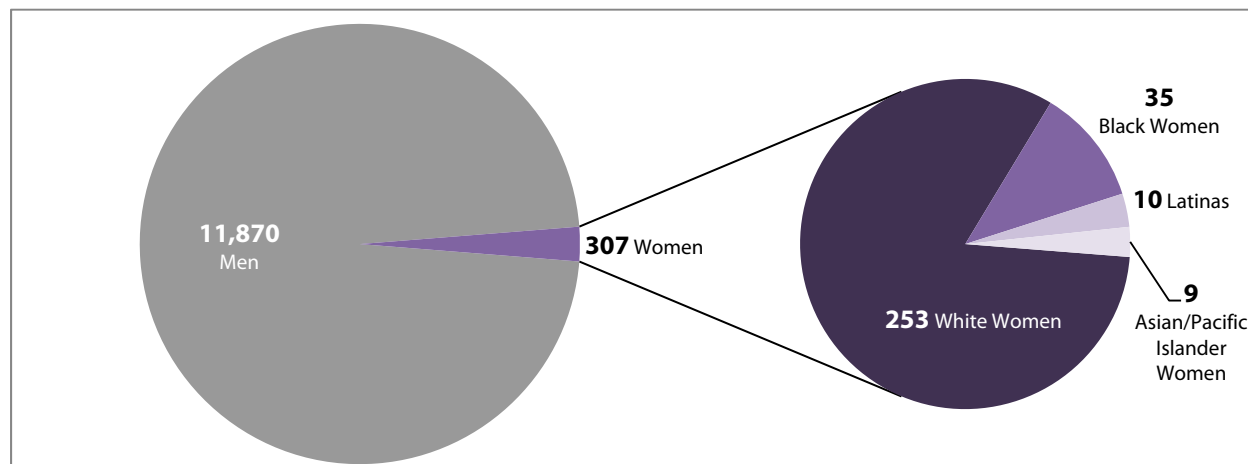
Figure 4. Black Women in Congress, 1970-Present



²⁴ Data on Black members of Congress (current and historic) is from the Office of the Historian at the U.S. House of Representatives.

delegate (Eleanor Holmes Norton, D-DC) and six of the 18 current Black Representatives – Corinne Brown (D-FL), Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-NJ), Donna Edwards (D-MD), Mia Love (D-UT), Gwen Moore (D-WI), and Terri Sewell (D-AL) – are the first Black women to represent their states and constituencies.²⁵ Finally, of the 35 Black women who have served in the House, six have been the second Black women representing their congressional districts; in five of those cases, a Black woman directly succeeded another Black woman member.²⁶ One current delegate, Stacey Plaskett (D-VI), succeeded another Black woman.

Figure 5. Historical Members of Congress, by Gender and Race



Sources: Center for American Women and Politics; U.S. House of Representatives, Office of the Historian

Congressional Candidates

In order to increase their representation in Congress, Black women must run and win. In congressional elections between 2000 and 2014, 168 nominees for House and Senate seats and 15 nominees for Delegate were Black women (see Figure 6). Black women's nominations represent 14.6% of all female House nominations and just over 55% of nominations of all women of color in the House in this period.²⁷ Only four, or 4.3%, of female Senate nominations between 2000 and 2014 were of Black women. Sadly, those four nominations still represent two-thirds of all Senate nominations of all women of color (6) in the same period, and no Black female nominee was elected. Accounting for incumbent women and multiple-time nominees, 79 individual Black women – 53 Democrats and 26 Republicans – have reached general election House and Senate ballots in the past eight congressional election cycles; three more Black female Democrats have been Delegate nominees, and two of them have been multiple-time nominees. Representative Denise Majette (D-GA) is the only Black woman since 2000 to be both a House and Senate nominee.²⁸

Black women were more likely to run as incumbents than challengers in House races between 2000 and 2014. In those years, Black women were 10% of female House nominees who challenged incumbent members and 18.1%

²⁵ Representatives Corrine Brown and Carrie Meek were elected to the Florida congressional delegation in 1993, sharing the title of first Black women elected from their state.

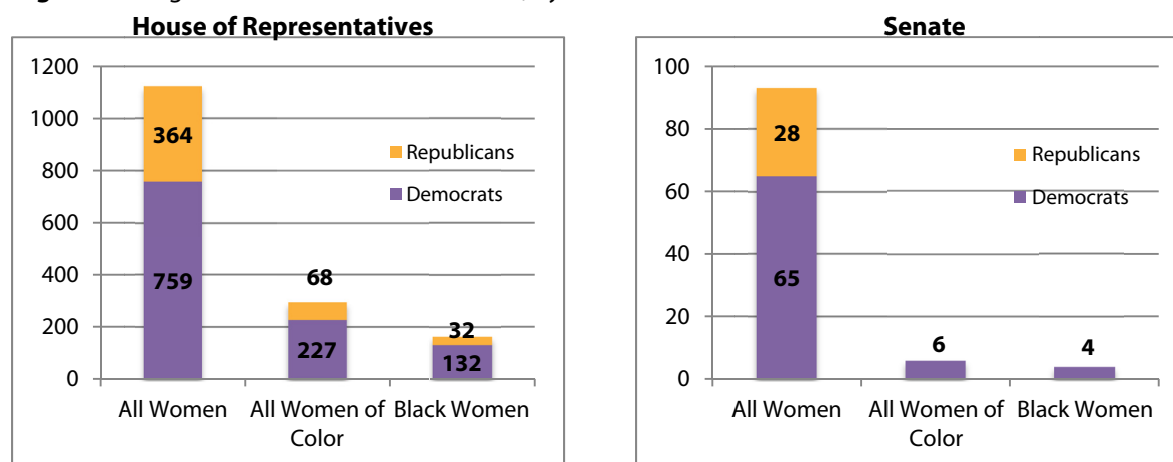
²⁶ These pairs include Diane Watson to Karen Bass (CA-33), Juanita Millender to Laura Richardson (CA-37), Cynthia McKinney to Denise Majette (GA-4), and Barbara-Rose Collins to Carolyn Kilpatrick (MI-15, MI-13). Two Black women – Carrie Meek and Frederica Wilson – have also served in Florida's 17th District, but not sequentially.

²⁷ Delegates not included unless noted.

²⁸ Majette's candidacies for the House and the Senate are counted separately in the total number of Black women nominees (80).

of female House incumbent nominees.²⁹ In open seat contests, 17.7% of female House nominees since 2000 have been Black women.

Figure 6. Congressional Nominees 2000-2014, by Gender and Race



Source: Center for American Women and Politics, delegates not included

Across all types of House races in this period, Black women nominees had a win rate of 64.6%, significantly higher than the win rate for White women nominees (46.5%). When the Delegate nominees are included, Black women's win rate over this period rises to 67.6% among House nominees. Black women fared much better as Democratic nominees, with 79.5% of Black female Democratic nominees for Representative (81.6% of Black female Democratic nominees for Representative and Delegate combined) winning their races. This rate of success was significantly higher than that of White female Democratic House nominees for Representative (43.4%) and White female Democratic House nominees for Representative and Delegate combined (44.1%). Among all female Democratic House nominees for Representative, Black women's greater rate of success can be attributed mainly to their higher win rates in open seat contests; 76.2% of Black female Democratic House nominees from 2000-2014 won open seat contests, compared to 31.9% of White female Democratic House nominees (see Table 4). Black women have fared poorly as Republican candidates, with only one Black Republican women ever winning a seat in Congress. In 2014, Mia Love – a Black female Republican from Utah and former mayor of Saratoga Springs – became the first Black Republican woman in Congress, winning an open seat contest for Utah's 4th congressional district.

Finally, as mentioned above, Black women nominees have also benefitted from running in majority-minority districts. In these districts, winning the Democratic nomination is often the most significant hurdle

Table 4. Election Win Rates for House Democratic Women, by Race and Seat Status, 2000-2014

	Black Women	White Women	Latinas	Asian-Pacific Islander Women
Challengers	0	5.5%	0	66.7%
Incumbents	97.8%	93.3%	100%	100%
Open Seat Candidates	76.2%	31.9%	83.3%	83.3%

Source: Center for American Women and Politics, delegates not included

²⁹ One Black woman incumbent candidate who challenged an incumbent male after redistricting is counted as an incumbent candidate, not a challenger, in these measures.

for candidates. Once nominees, Democratic candidates have a high likelihood of electoral success. Between 2000 and 2014, about 75% of House nominations of Black women were in majority-minority districts. Of those, only 18.7% were Republicans who lost on Election Day. Ninety-four percent of the Democratic nominees in majority-minority districts won and 76.5% of Black women nominees for open seats in majority-minority districts were successful. The concentration of Black women candidates in majority-minority districts helps to explain their higher rates of electoral success, but also highlights the potential opportunity for Black women to expand their target sites for winning congressional nominations and seats. The Supreme Court decision, *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013), which invalidated a key provision of the Voting Rights Act and threatens the protection of majority-minority districts, increases the importance of encouraging and supporting Black women candidates in a wider range of districts.

Party Leadership

Only two Black women, both Democrats, hold top leadership positions at the major party congressional campaign committees going into the 2016 cycle (DSCC, NRSC, DCCC, NRCC). Representative Terri Sewell (D-AL) is a Vice Chair of the DCCC Business Council, and Representative Gwen Moore (D-WI) serves as a Vice Chair on the DCCC Tribal Engagement and Active Members program; both positions are part of the outreach council on the DCCC's Finance Committee. No Black women hold leadership positions at either party's Senate campaign committee or the National Republican Congressional Committee. No Black woman has ever chaired a congressional campaign committee, a position through which elected leaders can significantly influence candidate recruitment, party messaging, and allocation of support to candidates in congressional elections.

In 2015, two Black women hold leadership positions at a party's national committee. Donna Brazile serves as the Vice Chair of Voter Registration and Participation at the Democratic National Committee (DNC) and Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake is DNC Secretary. Prior to holding her current post, Brazile was Chair of the DNC's Voting Rights Institute. No Black women have ever served as Chairwoman to either the Democratic or Republican National Committees.

ALMA ADAMS BECOMES THE 100TH WOMAN IN THE 113TH CONGRESS

On November 4, 2014, Alma Adams (D-NC) won a special election to fill a vacant seat to become the 100th woman elected to the 113th Congress. Adams, a former state legislator, city councilmember, and art history professor, was sworn in on November 12, 2014. This marked the first time that 100 women had ever served simultaneously in the U.S. Congress. When the 114th Congress opened in January 2015, 104 women held office, reaching a new milestone for women's congressional representation.



STATEWIDE ELECTED EXECUTIVE OFFICE

Current Officeholders

In 2015, Black women hold only two, or 0.6%, of the 312 statewide elected executive offices across the United States.³⁰ They are 2.6% of all 77 women and 25% of all 8 women of color holding statewide elected executive offices. Denise Nappier (D-CT) serves as Connecticut's State Treasurer and Kamala Harris (D-CA) is California's Attorney General.³¹ Both women made history when elected statewide. Elected in 1998, Denise Nappier became the first Black woman to be elected State Treasurer in the United States, as well as the first (and still only) Black woman elected statewide in Connecticut (see Figure 7). Kamala Harris, who won her race for Attorney General in 2010, is the first woman, first African American, and first South Asian to serve as Attorney General in California (see Figure 8).

Figure 7. Current Black Women Statewide Elected Executive Officials, by State

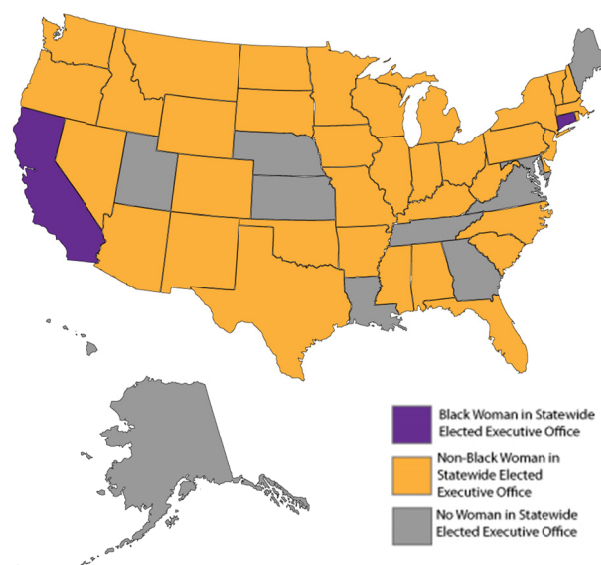


Figure 8. Current Black Women Statewide Elected Executive Officials

Source: Center for American Women and Politics

Kamala Harris

Attorney General, California
2011-Present

Kamala Harris is the first woman, the first African American, and the first South Asian to hold the office of Attorney General in the history of California. She was elected in 2010 and re-elected in 2014.

Before being elected Attorney General, Harris served two terms as District Attorney of San Francisco from 2003 to 2007. She began her career in the Alameda County District Attorney's Office, where she specialized in prosecuting child sexual assault cases. In 1998, she joined the San Francisco District Attorney's Office, where she led the Career Criminal Unit. She also served as the head of the San Francisco City Attorney's Division on Children and Families.

Harris is author of the book *Smart on Crime: A Career Prosecutor's Plan to Make Us Safer*. She is running for the U.S. Senate in 2016.

Harris received her B.A. from Howard University, and her law degree from the University of California, Hastings College of the Law in 1989.



Party: Democrat

Age: 51

Previous Elected Office:
District Attorney of San Francisco

Denise Nappier

State Treasurer, Connecticut
1999-Present

Denise Lynn Nappier is the first African-American woman elected to serve as a State Treasurer in the United States and the first African-American woman elected to a statewide office in Connecticut. Elected in 1993 and re-elected in 2002, 2006, 2010, and 2014, Treasurer Nappier is also the only woman to be elected Treasurer in Connecticut history.

Before being elected to statewide office, Nappier was elected to five terms as the Hartford City Treasurer. Before that, Nappier built her citywide reputation as the executive director of the Hartford Riverfront Recapture, where she was responsible for the renovation of the city's transportation infrastructure surrounding the riverfront between Hartford and East Hartford.

Nappier received her B.A. from Virginia State University in 1973 and her M.S. in City Planning in 1975 from the University of Cincinnati. She also holds honorary degrees from Teikyo Post University, Trinity College, Briarwood College, University of Hartford and Saint Joseph College.



Party: Democrat

Age: 64

Previous Elected Office:
Hartford City Treasurer

³⁰ These figures do not include: officials in appointive state cabinet-level positions; officials elected to executive posts by the legislature; officials elected as commissioners or board members from districts rather than statewide; members of the judicial branch; or elected members of university Boards of Trustees or Boards of Education.

³¹ Kamala Harris identifies as multiracial – both African American and Asian American.

Historical Officeholders

The first Black woman elected to a statewide elected executive office was Secretary of State Vel Phillips (D-WI) in 1979. Since then, nine more Black women – six Democrats and three Republicans – have served in statewide elected executive office (see Table 5). Jennette Bradley (R-OH) is the only Black woman to hold two different statewide elected executive offices – Lieutenant Governor and State Treasurer. Black women have held 1.9% of the 576 statewide elected

executive positions held by women and 29.7% of the 37 positions held by women of color since 1893.

Accounting for women who have held multiple offices, Black women represent 2% of the 506 women who have ever held at least one statewide elected executive post. Unlike the Black women in Congress, the partisan diversity among Black women in statewide elected executive posts has resulted in relatively even, albeit very low, representation by party over time; Black women have held 1.5% of all statewide elected executive positions held by Republican women and 2.3% of all positions held by Democratic women since 1893.

Black women have served in statewide elected executive offices in nine states. Wisconsin was the first state to elect a Black woman to statewide executive office and Indiana is the only state that has had more than one Black woman in a statewide executive post (see Table 5). In comparison, women of color have served in statewide elective executive office in 19 states, and at least one woman has held a statewide elected executive post in 49 states. (Maine, with only one executive position elected statewide, is the only state that has not yet elected any women to statewide executive office.) As Table 5 shows, there have been no Black women governors. The first women of color to become governors were Nikki Haley (R-SC) and Susana Martinez (R-NM) in 2011. The dearth of Black women in lower statewide executive offices may affect the likelihood of electing a Black woman governor. Of the 37 women governors to date, 25 – or 67.6% – previously held another statewide executive office. And just as statewide executive posts are a potential pipeline to gubernatorial office, governors are frequently included in the pool of potential recruits for presidential runs.³²

Table 5. Black Women in Statewide Elected Executive Office

Name	State	Office	Years of Service
Vel R. Phillips (D)	WI	Secretary of State	1979-1982
Pamela Carter (D)	IN	Attorney General	1993-1997
Vikki Buckley (R)	CO	Secretary of State	1995-1999
Denise Nappier (D)	CT	State Treasurer	1999-Present
Karen Freeman-Wilson (D)	IN	Attorney General	2000-2001
Jennette Bradley (R)	OH	Lieutenant Governor	2003-2005
		State Treasurer	2005-2007
Sandra Kennedy (D)	AZ	Corporation Commissioner	2009-2013
Velda Jones-Potter (D)	DE	State Treasurer	2009-2011
Jennifer Carroll (R)	FL	Lieutenant Governor	2011-2013
Kamala Harris (D)	CA	Attorney General	2011-Present

Source: Center for American Women and Politics

³² Twenty of the 44 U.S. Presidents have been governors.

A BLACK WOMAN PRESIDENT?

To date, only two Black women – both members of Congress - have made major-party bids for the U.S. presidency. In 1972, **Shirley Chisholm** became the first Black woman to have her name placed into nomination at a national party convention, as well as the first woman and the first Black person to have her name placed in nomination for the presidency at a Democratic National Convention. Chisholm is frequently cited for noting that she ran because “someone had to do it first,” fully aware of the improbability of succeeding (Chisholm 1973, 3). Thirty years later, **Carol Moseley- Braun** became the second Black woman to launch a major party bid for the presidency, describing herself as a serious candidate with her sights set on the Democratic nomination. As a former Senator, member of the Illinois State House, and U.S. Ambassador, Moseley-Braun brought credentials to the 2004 race that matched or exceeded those of many of her male opponents. Still, she struggled to gain momentum and dropped out of the race before competing in any state primaries. While neither woman was successful and both faced similar challenges due to both their race and gender, comparing both candidacies reveals at least some evolution in the perceptions of a Black woman’s probability of being elected president between 1972 and 2003 (McClain, Carter, and Brady 2008). The election of Barack Obama in 2008 and the significant attention to the potential for the first female president in 2016 may indicate even greater readiness for candidates who do not fit the mold of the White men who have held the office for 219 years. Increasing the number of Black women elected to statewide offices – both senate and gubernatorial – is one route toward increasing the pool of potential Black women candidates for the presidency.

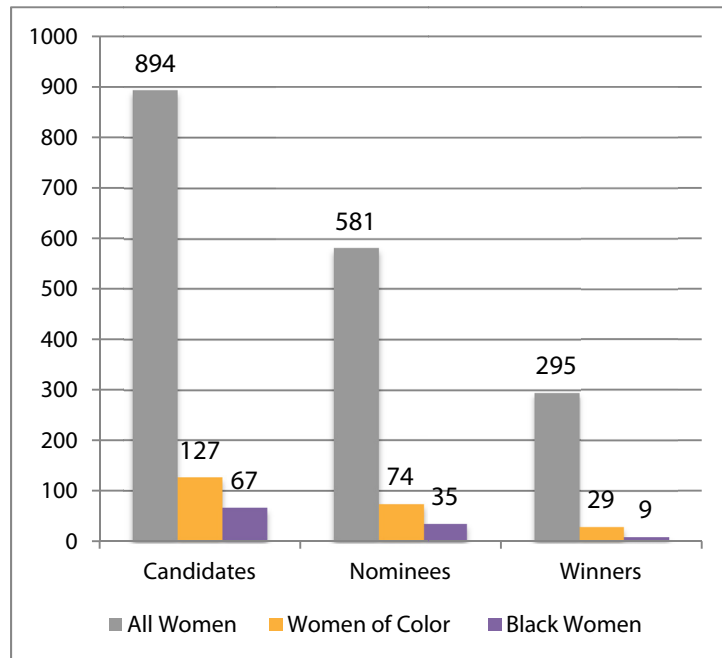


BLACK WOMEN IN PRESIDENTIAL CABINETS

Patricia Roberts Harris became the first Black woman appointed to a presidential cabinet in 1977. She served as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development under President Jimmy Carter until 1979, when she became Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare. Since then, only six more Black women have been appointed to cabinet or cabinet-level positions in presidential administrations. **Hazel O’Leary** served as Secretary of Energy during President Bill Clinton’s first term (1993-1997); **Alexis Herman** was Secretary of Labor during President Clinton’s second term (1997-2001); and **Condoleezza Rice** was Secretary of State for President George W. Bush’s second term in office (2005-2009), having served previously as his National Security Advisor (2001-2005). When President Barack Obama took office in 2009, he appointed two Black women to cabinet level positions: **Lisa Jackson** served as Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency until February 2013, and **Susan Rice** was the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations until July 2013, when she became President Obama’s National Security Advisor. In 2015, **Loretta Lynch** was confirmed as the first Black woman to serve as the nation’s Attorney General.

Statewide Executive Office Candidates

Figure 9. Women in State Executive Office Elections, 2000-2014



Source: Center for American Women and Politics

Sanbonmatsu (2013) identifies the particular challenge of achieving statewide elected executive office for women of color, noting that they appear to be overlooked for these posts. This finding is evident in Black women's underrepresentation among statewide executive officeholders and candidates. The election of Black women to statewide executive offices has occurred only rarely, and in recent history. In fact, six of the ten Black women who have served in statewide elected executive posts entered office since 2000. In that time, 57 Black women have been candidates for statewide elected executive offices nationwide, 27 Black women have become nominees, and five women have won statewide executive office.³³ Some of these Black women are multiple-time candidates and nominees, whether as incumbents or candidates for different statewide executive offices. Thus, 67 statewide executive candidates and 35

nominees since 2000 have been Black women. Black women statewide executive candidates represent 7.5% of all women statewide executive candidates and 52.8% of all women of color statewide executive candidates between 2000 and 2014.³⁴ Black women's presence declines slightly among primary winners, representing only 6% of all female nominees and 47.3% of all women of color nominees for statewide executive office (see Figure 9). In this period, no Black woman won her party's nomination for the gubernatorial ballot, leaving the election of the first Black woman governor as history still to be made.

Unlike in Congress, the rates of electoral success of Black women candidates and nominees for statewide executive offices are lower than the win rates for White women and women overall for statewide posts. Less than fifteen percent (13.4%) of Black women candidates for statewide executive offices were winners between 2000 and 2014, compared to 33% of all women candidates. While over half of Black women candidates made it through their primaries, only 25.7% of Black women nominees were successful on Election Day, compared to 50.8% of all women nominees. This trend persists among Democratic women candidates for statewide executive office. However, while nearly all Black women candidates (86.6%) and nominees (94.3%) for statewide executive office since 2000 have been Democrats, two of the nine Republican candidates – Jennifer Carroll (R-FL) and Jennette Bradley (R-OH) – represent just under one-third of the number of Black women to hold statewide elected executive office in this period. Finally, Black women's lower win rates at the statewide executive level are evident among challengers, incumbents, and open seat candidates, though – consistent with all women – Black women candidates fare best as incumbents and in open seat races (see Table 6).

³³ Karen Freeman-Wilson (D-IN) was appointed Attorney general in 2000 and Velda Jones Potter (D-DE) was appointed State Treasurer in 2009. Denise Nappier (D-CT) is included among winners since 2000, but as an incumbent winner who was first elected State Treasurer in 1998.

³⁴ These calculations count all candidacies, not individual women candidates. Also, 20 candidates without race identification are included in total count of women candidates.

Interestingly, there was a significant rise in the number of Black women candidates for statewide elected executive offices in 2014. Twenty-six Black women ran for these offices in 2014, double the previous high of 13 Black women candidates in 2010. Only half of those 2014 candidates made it through their primaries, and just two – the only incumbent Black women

running – won on Election Day: Attorney General Kamala Harris (D-CA) and State Treasurer Denise Nappier (D-CT). In 2010, when 13 Black women ran for statewide elected executive office, nine Black women became nominees and three won their elections, including one incumbent and two non-incumbents. These data make evident the need to support and encourage Black women to enter statewide contests, but also to position more Black women in winnable races. Increasing the numbers of competitive Black women candidates for statewide elected executive offices is critical to the advancement of Black women in politics.

Table 6. Election Win Rates for Women Statewide Executive Candidates 2000-2014, by Race and Seat Status

	All Women	All Women of Color	Black Women
Challengers	7.0%	2.8%	0.0%
Incumbents	84.4%	73.7%	55.6%
Open Seat Candidates	26.0%	19.4%	10.0%

Source: Center for American Women and Politics

BLACK WOMEN DOMINATE GEORGIA'S DEMOCRATIC BALLOT FOR STATEWIDE OFFICE IN 2014

In 2014, Black women were nominees for five of the eight statewide elected executive positions on Georgia's ballot. Black women were Democratic challengers in four races for lieutenant governor (Connie Stokes), secretary of state (Doreen Carter), insurance commissioner (Liz Johnson), and labor commissioner (Robbin Shipp). Valarie Wilson was the Democratic nominee in the open seat contest for state school superintendent. None of these women was successful in her statewide bid, but their dominance on the Democratic ticket was historic. Georgia's Black women nominees also represented nearly 40% of all Black women nominees for statewide elected executive office in 2014, contributing significantly to the rise in overall numbers of Black women on statewide ballots.

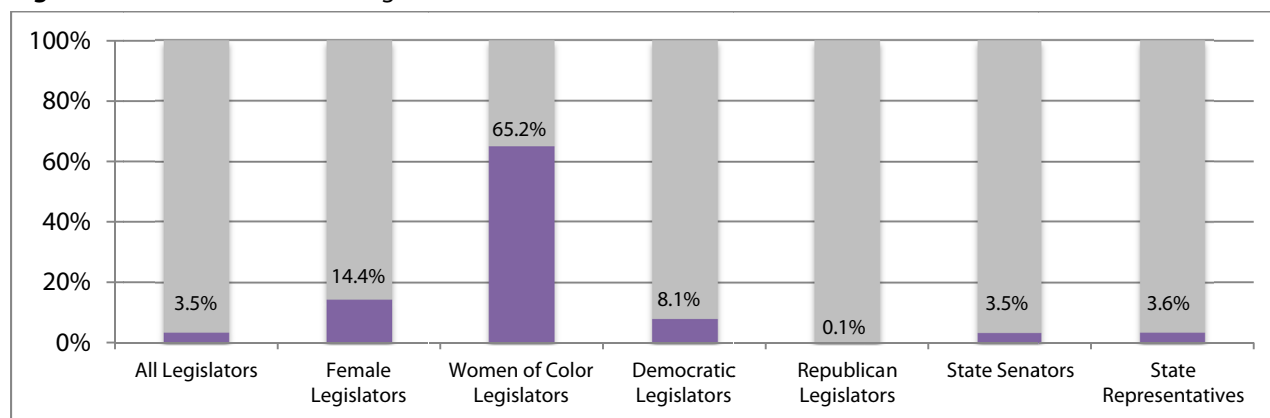
STATE LEGISLATURES

Current Officeholders

As of November 2015,³⁵ 260 Black women serve in 40 state legislatures across the United States. Of those 260, 256 are Democrats, three are Republicans, and one serves in a non-partisan legislature; 68 are state senators and 192 serve in their states' lower chambers. Black women are 3.5% of all state legislators, 14.4% of all women state legislators, and 65.2% of all women of color state legislators (see Figure 10). They are slightly better represented in state senates than in state houses among women and women of color, but represent 3.4% of all state senators and 3.5% of all state representatives nationwide. Table 7 lists the representation of Black women by state; Georgia and Maryland, with Black women holding more than 10% of the seats, lead the other states (see Table 7). In Georgia, where Black women are 17.4% of the population, they hold 11.9% of state legislative seats. In Maryland, Black women are 17% of the population and 10.1% of state legislators. Mississippi is the state with the largest presence of Black women in its population (20.2%), but ranks fourth in Black women's state legislative representation (8.6%). Black women are at least half of all women legislators in Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Mississippi.

Black women nearly doubled their numbers – from 10 to 19 – in the New York state legislature from 2014 to 2015. Most of that increase occurred in the New York State Assembly, where Black women went from holding 4.7% (7 of 150) to 10% (15 of 150) of seats. The number of Black women also doubled – from two to five – in the Michigan House of Representatives from 2014 to 2015, though their representation there is still just 4.5%.

Figure 10. Black Women State Legislators 2015



Sources: Center for American Women and Politics; National Conference of State Legislatures

There are no Black women state legislators in 10 states as of November 2015, including Alaska, Arizona, Hawaii, Kentucky, Maine, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Washington, and Wyoming.³⁶ More specifically, there are no Black women serving in 21 state senates and 12 state houses or assemblies throughout the country (see Table 7). In reflecting their presence in the state population, Louisiana and South Carolina join Mississippi among the states that fare worst in their representation of Black women. While Black women are 17.5% of the Louisiana's resident population, they hold only 6.3% of state legislative seats. In South Carolina, Black women are 15.3% of the resident population, but hold just 4.1% of state legislative seats. This underrepresentation is

³⁵ All calculations of current state legislators were updated as of November 10, 2015.

³⁶ Both Arizona and Wyoming went from having one to zero Black women legislators from 2014 to 2015.

Table 7. Black Women State Legislators 2015, by State and Chamber

State	Black Women Representatives	Black Women Senators	Total Black Women Legislators	Percent of All Legislators	Percent of State Resident Population
Georgia	22	6	28	11.86	17.37
Maryland	13	6	19	10.11	16.97
New York	15	4	19	8.92	10.18
Mississippi	14	1	15	8.62	20.19
Alabama	9	3	12	8.57	14.63
Illinois	9	5	14	7.91	8.27
Virginia	7	3	10	7.14	10.99
North Carolina	7	5	12	7.06	12.36
New Jersey	5	3	8	6.67	8.41
Florida	7	3	10	6.25	9.28
Louisiana	6	3	9	6.25	17.47
Ohio	5	3	8	6.06	7.26
Tennessee	6	1	7	5.30	9.48
Missouri	7	3	10	5.08	6.70
Texas	8	0	8	4.42	6.85
South Carolina	6	1	7	4.12	15.27
Indiana	4	2	6	4.00	5.52
Michigan	5	0	5	3.38	8.08
California	3	1	4	3.33	3.87
Delaware	1	1	2	3.23	12.64
Nevada	1	1	2	3.17	5.30
Pennsylvania	7	1	8	3.16	6.63
Colorado	3	0	3	3.00	2.62
Arkansas	1	3	4	2.96	8.58
Iowa	4	0	4	2.67	2.07
Kansas	3	1	4	2.42	3.71
Wisconsin	1	2	3	2.27	3.81
Connecticut	3	1	4	2.14	6.69
Nebraska	N/A	1	1	2.04	2.90
New Mexico	2	0	2	1.79	1.52
Oklahoma	1	1	2	1.34	4.64
Oregon	0	1	1	1.11	1.38
Massachusetts	1	1	2	1.00	4.90
Utah	1	0	1	0.96	0.88
Idaho	0	1	1	0.95	0.59
Rhode Island	1	0	1	0.88	4.72
West Virginia	1	0	1	0.75	2.10
Vermont	1	0	1	0.56	0.85
Minnesota	1	0	1	0.50	3.46
New Hampshire	1	0	1	0.24	0.94
Arizona	0	0	0	0.00	2.79
Washington	0	0	0	0.00	2.57
Montana	0	0	0	0.00	0.46
Maine	0	0	0	0.00	0.89
Hawaii	0	0	0	0.00	1.56
Alaska	0	0	0	0.00	2.39
South Dakota	0	0	0	0.00	1.05
North Dakota	0	0	0	0.00	1.12
Kentucky	0	0	0	0.00	4.66
Wyoming	0	0	0	0.00	0.91

Sources: Center for American Women and Politics; National Conference of State Legislatures; U.S. Census Bureau

consistent among all women in these states; Mississippi ranks 41st, South Carolina ranks 47th, and Louisiana ranks last in the nation for women's state legislative representation overall, with women holding just 11.8% of seats.

Black women are the *only* women of color in 13 state legislatures: AL, AR, DE, GA, IA, LA, MO, MS, NE OH, SC, VA, and WV. There are only five states – AK, AZ, HI, MT, and WA – where Black women are *not* among the women of color currently serving in the state legislature. Black women's legislative representation is strongly Democratic across states. Black women are 85.7% of all Democratic women in the Alabama legislature, and represent over 50% of Democratic women in eight other state legislatures: MS (83.3%), TN (77.8%), GA (75.7%), LA (75%), NC (57.1%), SC (53.9%), VA (52.6%), FL (52.6%). These data highlight the great potential for Black women to play influential roles within the Democratic Party and demonstrate how Black women's influence is intimately tied to the Democratic Party's majority status within legislatures.

Gaining legislative leadership positions is essential to increasing Black women's legislative influence. There are no Black women, or women of color, among the 14 women who currently head state legislative chambers as Senate presidents or Speakers of the House.³⁷ Of the 57 women in all legislative leadership posts today, 6 – or 10.5% – are Black women.³⁸ Two-thirds of the Black women in leadership serve in the senate and one-third serve in the house.

Of the 436 women who serve as chairs of standing committees within their state legislatures, 39 (or 8.9%) are Black women. These positions empower legislators to help set policy agendas and guide legislative debates and discussion. Thus, increasing Black women's political power necessitates expanding not only Black women's political representation, but also Black women's political leadership, within state legislatures nationwide.

Finally, Black women's political power at the state level – whether in state legislatures or statewide offices – is also shaped by their influence in state political parties. As of August 2015, only one Black woman, Representative Karen Carter Peterson (D-LA), chairs her state party. In addition, Anita Bonds chairs the Democratic Party in the District of Columbia. Peterson is just one of 26 female state party chairs (3.8%) and 17 female Democratic state party chairs (5.9%). Eleven Black women serve as Democratic vice chairs, representing 35.5% of all female Democratic state party vice chairs.

Historical Officeholders

In the past two decades, a total of 546 Black women have served as state legislators.³⁹ Ninety-seven percent of all Black women legislators in this period have been Democrats, and 2.4% have been Republicans (see Figure 11). About twelve percent of Black women who have served as state legislators since 1994 have served in both their states' upper and lower chambers during this period; 74.2% have served in state houses only and 13.6% have served in state senates only (see Figure 12). The largest number of Black women state legislators serving simultaneously is 260, the number of women currently serving in 2015. As Figure 13 shows, the number of Black women state legislators is up from 168 Black women serving simultaneously twenty years ago.

³⁷ Senate presidents pro-tem are included as chamber leaders in states where that is the top leadership post.

³⁸ Leadership positions include: senate presidents and presidents pro tempore; house speakers and speakers pro tempore; majority and minority leaders of the senate and house as listed in *2015 State Legislative Leaders (National Conference of State Legislatures)*. When the position of senate president is filled by the lieutenant governor, it is not included in these totals. The National Conference of State Legislatures, which publishes the legislative leadership directory limits its listings to these top positions, regardless of what other leadership slots a state may have.

³⁹ Comprehensive state legislative data by race and gender is only available from 1994 to present from the Center for American Women and Politics and from 1994 to 2013 from the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies.

Over the past two decades, Black women have steadily increased as a proportion of all women and all Black legislators. In 1995, Black women were 11% of all women and 29.4% of all Black state legislators. By the end of 2013, when the last available data on all Black legislators was reported, Black women were 13.7% of all women and 37.9% of all Black state legislators nationwide. Today, Black women are 14.4% of all women state legislators. As Smooth (2014) and others have emphasized, much of the growth in Black representation at the state legislative level over the past two decades can be attributed to Black women's growing presence in state houses and senates. In fact, while 403 Black men served in state legislatures in 1995, only 397 Black men served in 2013. As a proportion of all state legislators, Black men's representation has remained flat in the past 20 years, while Black women's representation has grown (see Figure 13). State legislative representation of women and Black legislators dipped in 2010 due to Republican successes nationwide. Black women's representation, however, held steady amidst those electoral hits to Democrats.

Figure 11. Black Women State Legislatures 1994-2015, by Party

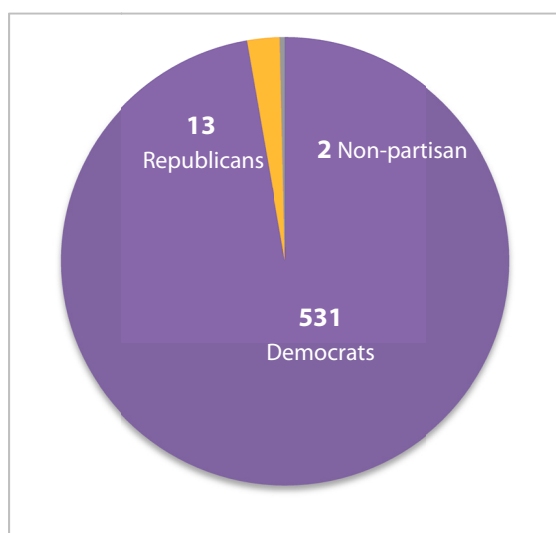
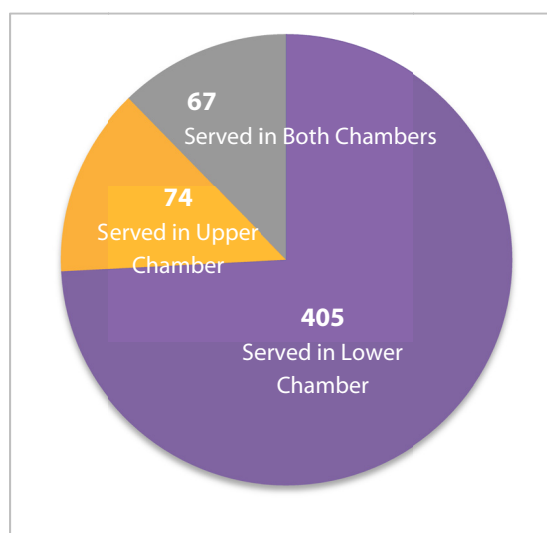


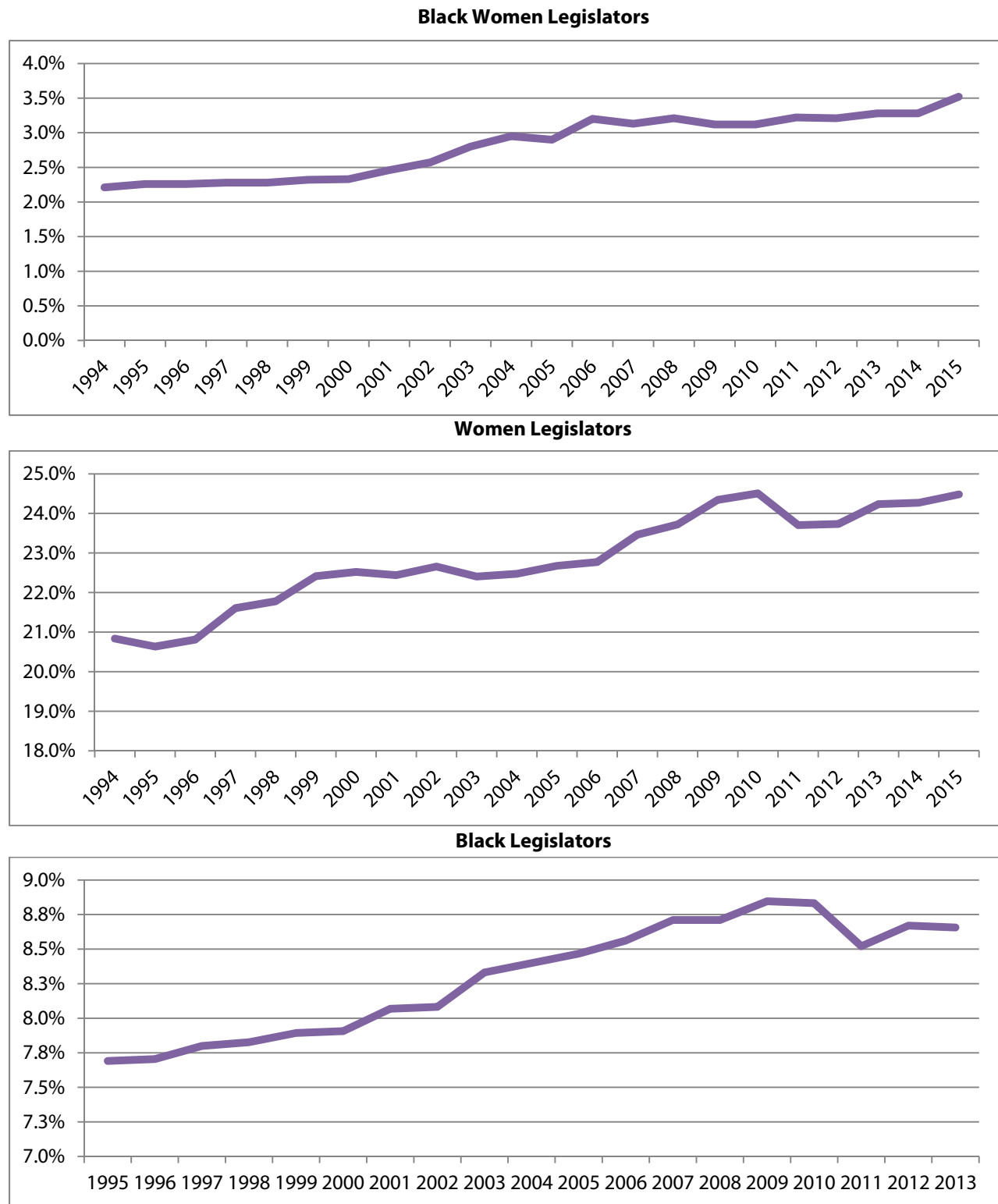
Figure 12. Black Women State Legislatures 1994-2015, by Chamber



Source: Center for American Women and Politics

Five of the ten states that have no Black women state legislators in 2015 – HI, ME, MT, ND, and SD – have had no Black women legislators since 1994. Only one Black woman has served in each of five states – AK, ID, KY, UT, and WY – in the past two decades. Finally, Georgia has elected the greatest number of Black women to its state legislature over the past two decades, with 54 women serving in the Georgia legislature since 1994. Maryland is the state with the next highest number of Black women legislators – 40 – serving between 1994 and 2015. Together, these 94 women from two states represent just over 17% of all Black women state legislators serving nationwide since 1994.

Black women have earned top leadership posts at the state legislative level. The first Black woman to lead her state chamber was Karen Bass (D-CA) in 2008, who became the first Black woman Speaker of the California Assembly. In 2010, Sheila Oliver (D-NJ) became the second Black woman to lead a state legislative chamber as Speaker of the New Jersey Assembly. No Black woman has ever led a state senate. Two of the current Black women in Congress held leadership posts in their state legislatures before running for the U.S. House; Representative Karen Bass (D-CA) and Representative Joyce Beatty (D-OH), who was the Ohio State House Minority Leader from 2007 to 2009. These women demonstrate the value of leadership positions as pathways to higher office.

Figure 13. Trends in State Legislative Representation 1994-2015, by Race and Gender

Sources: Center for American Women and Politics; Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies

Finally, while the first Black woman did not enter Congress until 1969, the first Black woman to ever serve in a state legislature, Minnie Buckingham Harper, was appointed to the West Virginia State House in 1929. Nearly ten years later, Crystal Dreda Bird Faust (D-PA) became the first Black woman *elected* to a state legislature. Table 8 lists the first Black women legislators elected in each state, demonstrating that Black women's legislative representation is a relatively recent historical phenomenon in many states. In fact, five of the Black women currently serving in state legislatures are the first to be elected in their states. Based on available public records, there are three states that have yet to elect their first Black women legislators: Maine, North Dakota, and South Dakota. While Black women's state legislative representation is trending upward, these data indicate that opportunities vary by state.

Table 8. First Black Women State Legislators, by State

State	Name	Year Entered	Office
AK	Bettye Davis	1990	State House
AL	Louphenia Thomas	1977	State House
AZ	Ethel Maynard	1966	State House
AR	Irma Hunter Brown	1981	State House
CA	Yvonne Brathwaite Burke	1967	State House
CO	Arie Taylor	1973	State House
CT	Margaret E. Morton	1973	State House
DE	Henrietta Johnson	1970	State House
FL	Gwen Sawyer Cherry	1971	State House
GA	Grace Towns Hamilton	1966	State House
HI	Helene (Hilyer) Hale	2001	State House
ID	Cherie Buckner-Webb*	2010	State House
IL	Floy Clements	1959	State House
IN	Julia Carson	1973	State House
IA	Willie Stevenson Glanton	1965	State House
KS	Barbara Ballard*	1993	State House
KY	Amelia Tucker Moore	1962	State House
LA	Dorothy Mae Taylor	1972	State House
ME	No Black woman legislator to date		
MD	Verda F. Welcome and Irma George Dixon	1959	State House
MA	Doris Bunte	1973	State House
MI	Charline Rainey White	1951	State House
MN	Neva Walker	2001	State House
MO	DeVerne Lee Calloway	1963	State House
MS	Alyce Clark*	1986	State House
MT	Geraldine W. Travis	1974	State House
NE	JoAnn Maxey	1977	Unicameral
NV	Bernice Mathews	1995	State Senate
NH	Diane Long	1987	State House
NJ	Madaline A. Williams	1958	State House
NM	Sheryl Williams Stapleton*	1996	State House
NY	Bessie A. Buchanan	1954	State House
NC	Annie Brown Kennedy	1979	State House
ND	No Black woman legislator to date		
OH	Helen Rankin	1978	State House
OK	Hannah Diggs Atkins	1969	State House
OR	Margaret Carter	1985	State House
PA	Crystal Dreda Bird Fauset	1939	State House
RI	Maria Lopes	1989	State House
SC	Juanita Willmon-Goggins	1975	State House
SD	No Black woman legislator to date		
TN	Dorothy Lavinia Brown	1967	State House
TX	Barbara Jordan	1967	State Senate
UT	Sandra Hollins*	2015	State House
VT	Louvenia Dorsey Bright	1992	State House
VA	Yvonne B. Miller	1984	State House
WA	Peggy Joan Maxie	1971	State House
WI	Marcia P. Coggs	1977	State House
WV	Elizabeth Simpson Drewry	1951	State House
WY	Harriett Elizabeth Byrd Papers	1981	State House

Information is as comprehensive as possible via data collected by the Center for American Women and Politics from state public records and legislative archives or histories in each state.

*Currently serving

MAYORS

Current Officeholders

The data available on U.S. mayors is more limited than data for other electoral offices presented above, due to the nation's vast number and variety of municipalities. No comprehensive list of all women mayors exists, but Smith (2013) does report that Ellen Walker Craig-Jones was the first Black woman ever elected mayor in a U.S. municipality, taking office in 1971 in Urbancrest, Ohio. Black women's mayoral representation since then can be roughly gauged by their presence in some of the largest municipalities nationwide. As of November 2015, 27 Black women are mayors in cities with populations over 30,000, serving in 17 different states and the District of Columbia. They represent 1.9% of all mayors, 10.5% of all female mayors, and 62.8% of all women of color mayors in cities of this size. Four Black women currently hold top municipal posts in America's 100 largest cities. Ivy Taylor has served as mayor of San Antonio, Texas – the 8th largest city in the U.S. – since July 2014. Only one woman mayor heads a city larger than San Antonio in 2015: Mayor Annise Parker (Houston, TX). Washington, DC (ranked 23rd in size) Mayor Muriel Bowser took office in January 2015, and Paula Hicks-Hudson became mayor of Toledo, Ohio (ranked 70th in size) in February 2015. Stephanie Rawlings-Blake has served as mayor of Baltimore, Maryland – the 25th largest city in the U.S. – since 2010. Rawlings-Blake was also named the President of the U.S. Conference of Mayors in June 2015, becoming the first Black woman to ever hold that position. In all, 18 women mayors make the top 100 list, including six women of color. Still, women are only 18.3% of all major city (population >30,000) mayors, and Black women represent just under 2% of those posts.

Figure 14. Black Woman Mayors 2015 (cities with populations over 30,000)



Sources: Center for American Women and Politics; U.S. Conference of Mayors
NOTE: Full list of current Black women mayors and cities in Appendix C, updated as of November 10, 2015

Eight Black women, including the four current Black women listed above, have led cities among the nation's 100 largest since 2002.⁴⁰ In fact, Sheila Dixon preceded Mayor Rawlings-Blake as the mayor of Baltimore. Taking office in 2002, Shirley Franklin was the first woman mayor of Atlanta, GA and the first Black woman elected mayor of a major southern city, one that ranked in the top ten in terms of population during her decade-long tenure. Before 2002, Lottie Shackelford was the first Black woman to be elected mayor of one of the nation's 100 most populous cities, becoming Mayor of Little Rock, AR in 1987. Since 2002, 66 Black women have served as mayors in cities with populations over 30,000, representing 6.8% of all women mayors and 41.5% of all women of color mayors in cities with populations over 30,000 in the past 13 years.⁴¹ With over 1400 cities of this size nationwide, these numbers indicate that there is much opportunity for advancing women's, and Black women's, representation in municipal leadership throughout the United States. And, as the next section will show, there

⁴⁰ Mayors are included in this count if their cities were ranked among the top 100 largest cities in the United States at any point during their tenure as mayor.

⁴¹ These numbers include mayors sworn in during November 2015, but not mayors elected in 2015 to be sworn in after November 2015.

are important questions about how to translate Black women's demonstrated commitment to their local communities into political officeholding.

BLACK WOMEN IN THE ELECTORATE

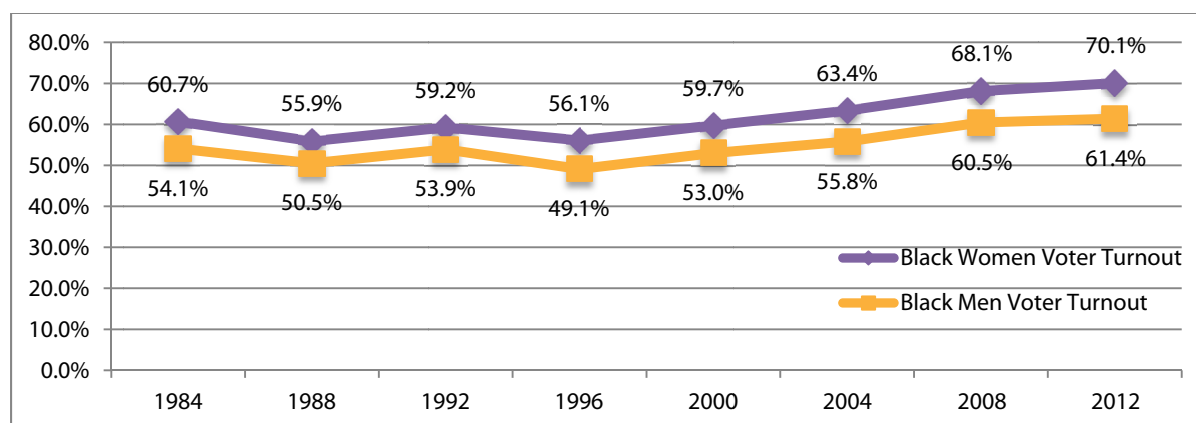
Measuring Black women's political participation outside of elected office depends on how political participation is defined. Standard models and measures of political participation – including traditional measures like political giving to candidates, working for a party, or attending a political meeting – have historically shown greater participation among men than women in each racial subgroup (ANES 2014; Burns, Schlozman and Verba 2001). However, more recent surveys demonstrate that this gender gap is more isolated to the non-Hispanic White population with relatively few gender differences in political activity between men and women of color (Conway 2008). Moreover, the traditional indicators of participation are often exclusive of the political activities that women of color undertake through work in local communities, churches, and through labor organizing (Cohen 2003, 2005; Junn 1997; Sanbonmatsu 2015). Expanding definitions of what is “political” to include activism and community engagement better recognizes the extra-institutional political contributions of women of color, especially Black women, while also helping to identify a broader swath of potential candidates (Beckwith 1986; Hardy-Fanta 1995; Junn 1997). Finally, Black women's involvement and leadership in social movement politics from slavery through civil rights until the present has provided the politicization and drive to participate more formally in local, state, and national politics as voters and elected officials (Brown 1992; Cole and Stewart 1996; Davis 1971; Giddings 1984; Junn 1997).

Table 9. Black Voter Registration 1998-2014

	Black Men	Black Women
2014	59.7%	66.4%
2012	69.4%	76.2%
2010	59.0%	65.9%
2008	66.2%	72.4%
2006	56.7%	64.3%
2004	64.7%	71.9%
2002	57.6%	66.2%
2000	63.9%	70.3%
1998	60.4%	66.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, uses “Black alone” category

Figure 15. Black Voter Turnout 1984-2012



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, uses “Black alone” category

On at least one measure of formal – or traditional – political participation, Black women have surpassed their Black male peers and men and women of all other races. Black women have registered and voted at higher rates

than their male counterparts in every election since 1998 (see Table 9 and Figure 15).⁴² Since then, the highest percentage of eligible Black women voters registered for any one election was in 2012, when 76.2% of Black women were registered (see Table 9). In the same year, 69.4% of Black men were registered to vote. The difference in Black men and women's registration rate has been between 5.8 and 8.6 points, with Black women registering at a higher rate in each of the past nine election cycles.

Table 11 displays the gender gap in voter turnout by race in each presidential election since 1984, revealing that Black women have outvoted Black men in every cycle. In the 2014 midterm elections, Black women outvoted their Black male counterparts by 7.4 percentage points; 43% of Black women and 35.6% of Black men turned out to vote. Unlike the previous two presidential cycles, Black women did not vote at higher rates than non-Hispanic White men (45.2%) or women (46.3%) in 2014, but still remained the most reliable voters among people of color (see Table 10).

Table 10. Voter Turnout 2014, by Race and Gender

	Women	Men
Black	43.0%	35.6%
White, non-Hispanic	46.3%	45.2%
Latino/a	28.7%	25.2%
Asian/Pacific Islander	28.1%	26.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, uses "Black alone" category

In 2008 and 2012, Black women's rate of voting exceeded all other race/gender subgroups for the first time in U.S. history. Just over 70% of eligible Black women voters – or 10.44 million - reported voting in 2012, compared to 61.4% (7.4 million) of eligible Black men voters and 65.6% (51.8 million) of non-Hispanic White women (see Table 11). The 2012 election was also the first since 1996 in which Black voters, men and women combined, voted at a higher rate than non-Hispanic White voters.

Table 11. Voter Turnout 1984-2012, by Race and Gender

	Black Women	Black Men	White, non-Hispanic Women	White, non-Hispanic Men	Latinas	Latinos	Asian/Pacific Islander Women	Asian/Pacific Islander Men
2012	70.1%	61.4%	65.6%	62.6%	49.8%	46.0%	48.5%	46.0%
2008	68.1%	60.5%	67.9%	64.2%	51.8%	47.9%	47.5%	47.6%
2004	63.4%	55.8%	68.4%	65.9%	49.4%	44.8%	46.2%	42.0%
2000	59.7%	53.0%	63.0%	60.6%	46.1%	43.9%	42.5%	44.3%
1996	56.1%	49.1%	60.6%	58.5%	46.4%	41.3%		
1992	59.2%	53.9%	67.8%	66.4%	49.4%	47.0%		
1988	55.9%	50.5%	62.5%	61.2%	46.3%	45.5%		
1984	60.7%	54.1%	64.2%	62.8%	48.6%	47.2%		

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, uses "alone" categories for each racial subgroup

NOTE: Because of changes in the Current Population Survey race categories starting in 2003, data from 2004-2012 is not directly comparable with data from previous years. No data for the Asian/Pacific Islander population is available prior to 2000. See more detail on race categories at www.census.gov.

Not only did Black women turn out at the highest numbers in 2008 and 2012, but they voted overwhelmingly for President Barack Obama, causing many to credit Black women for his success and for the persistence of a presidential voting gender gap in which women are more likely than men to favor the Democratic candidate (e.g. Smooth 2014).⁴³ In both years, 96% of Black women voted for President Obama, while the majority of non-

⁴² Census Data on voting is only available for the eligible voting population (citizens) by race/ethnic categories since 1984.

⁴³ The gender gap in voting is the difference in the percentage of women and men who support a given candidate, generally the leading or winning candidate. A gender gap in voting for presidential nominees, whereby women are more likely than men to vote for the Democratic candidate, has been evident since 1980. For more details, see <http://cawp.rutgers.edu/facts/voters>.

Hispanic White Women voted for his Republican opponents. Still, as Table 12 shows, a gender gap persisted among Black and White voters alike in nearly all presidential elections since 1992. The smallest gender gap among Black Americans was in 2008, when Black men were only one percentage point less likely than Black women to vote for President Obama.

Beyond their influence at the presidential level, Black women have also been the most reliable voters for Democratic members of Congress. In a 2014 national exit poll, 91% of Black women and 86% of Black men reported voting for a Democrat for the U.S. House. Despite strong Republican success in statewide races, Black women voted overwhelmingly Democratic in the most competitive races. In the few statewide contests where Democrats won – including Michigan’s Senate race and Pennsylvania’s gubernatorial election, 90% or more of Black women supported the winning candidate.

Table 12. Vote Choice 1984-2012, by Race and Gender

Year	Presidential Candidates	Whites		Blacks		Latinos	
		Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
2012	Barack Obama (D)	42%	35%	96%	87%	76%	65%
	Mitt Romney (R)	56%	62%	3%	11%	23%	33%
2008	Barack Obama (D)	46%	41%	96%	95%	68%	64%
	John McCain (R)	53%	57%	3%	5%	30%	33%
2004	George W. Bush (R)	55%	62%	10%	13%	N/A ¹	
	John Kerry (D)	44%	37%	N/A ¹			
2000	George W. Bush (R)	49%	60%	6%	12%	N/A ²	
	Al Gore (D)	48%	36%	94%	85%		
1996	Bill Clinton (D)	48%	38%	89%	58%	78%	65%
	Bob Dole (R)	43%	49%	8%	16%	17%	25%
1992	Bill Clinton (D)	41%	37%	87%	78%	N/A ²	
	George H.W. Bush (R)	41%	40%	8%	13%		

Sources: National Exit Poll data reported for 2004, 2008, & 2012 elections by CNN, 1992& 2000 by Pomper (2001), and 1996 by Hardy-Fanta (1997).

¹ Reports of 2004 exit poll data do not include gender breakdown for Latinos or Democratic vote choice.

² Reports of 2000 and 1992 exit poll data do not include gender breakdown for Latinos.

Black women were similarly vital to Democratic successes in 2012. In a 2012 national exit poll, 94% of Black women and 86% of Black men reported voting for a Democrat for the U.S. House. In key 2012 U.S. Senate races in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Virginia – all presidential battleground states where exit polls were taken – 94% of Black women voted for Democratic winners, while majorities of non-Hispanic White women in those states voted for the Republican nominees. Five-point gender gaps between Black women and Black men were evident in both Pennsylvania and Virginia, proving that Black women were particularly integral in re-electing Senators Bob Casey (D-PA) and Tim Kaine (D-VA). Black women similarly helped to provide the margin of victory for gubernatorial and Senate candidates in 2013, 2010, and 2008. This recent evidence of Black women voters’ preferences in statewide and federal elections, in addition to their continued growth and reliability in voter turnout, demonstrates their key importance as Democratic voters and constituents.

2015 ELECTIONS

State legislative elections were held in three states – MS, NJ, and VA – on November 3, 2015.⁴⁴ Initial results show little change in the numbers of Black women legislators in these states. New Jersey will gain one new Black woman legislator in their next session. Three new Black women will serve in Mississippi in 2015, representing the majority of new women elected in a year when the total number of women in the legislature is slated to decline. In Virginia, Black women are two of five new women who will take office in January 2015, when the overall representation of women will increase slightly from 24 to 27 members of 140 across both chambers.

Elections for statewide elected executive offices were held in two states – KY and MS – on November 3, 2015. Addie Green (D), a Black woman, was defeated as a challenger to incumbent Cindy Hyde-Smith in Mississippi's election for Commissioner of Agriculture. In Kentucky, however, Republican Jenean Hampton was elected Lieutenant Governor, becoming the first Black statewide officeholder in Kentucky and the first Republican woman elected to statewide elected executive office in the state. Hampton, who will take office in January 2016, will be Kentucky's fourth female Lieutenant Governor and one of three Black women holding statewide elected executive office nationwide.

LOOKING AHEAD: BLACK WOMEN IN 2016

Black women voters will necessarily play an important role in the 2016 elections, from the presidential level down. Because Black women have topped all other race and gender groups in turnout in the past two presidential cycles, Democratic candidates and campaigns will rely on their votes to secure their base. Likewise, Republican candidates and campaigns may seek to chip away at the Democratic stronghold among Black women voters, creating potential opportunities for Black women to inform the dialogue among conservatives. Most significantly, Democrats will seek to maintain the levels of engagement evident in the Black community in 2008 and 2012, when the historic election and re-election of a Black president motivated many Black voters – male and female – to participate. Seeking positive trends in both their share of the Black vote and overall turnout among Black voters, candidates will need to make direct appeals on the issues most important to the Black community. Black women's voices are vital in the conversation and among those making demands on candidates.

Black women also represent a significant portion of the Rising American Electorate (RAE), an estimated 125 million eligible voters – composed of unmarried women, people of color, and people under 30 years old. Black women sit at the intersection of these groups, representing just over half of the 27.9 million eligible Black voters and 19% of all eligible unmarried women voters (Lake and Harville 2015).⁴⁵ They also represent the most active and dependable contingent of the RAE, contributing to its growing influence and playing an essential role in building coalitions across RAE groups to influence electoral outcomes in future races.

A recent survey of likely Black women voters from *Essence* and the Black Women's Roundtable found that Black women are taking an active interest in the upcoming 2016 Presidential election and seek a candidate that will address issues that can improve their quality of life. According to the survey, the top three most important issues for Black women are affordable healthcare, living wage jobs, and college affordability (*Essence* 2015). Candidates'

⁴⁴ Louisiana holds statewide and state legislative elections on November 21, 2015.

⁴⁵ These calculations are drawn from U.S. Census Bureau data reported in November 2014. For the latest data on the Rising American Electorate, see the latest research from the Voter Participation Center: <http://www.voterparticipation.org/>.

strategies to address these economic issues will influence Black women's engagement and vote choice.

Not only will Black women cast ballots on Election Day 2016, but many will be on the ballot. The 2016 election is shaping up to be a year of significant opportunity for Black women candidates, some of whom have already thrown their hats in the ring in some of the most competitive races of the cycle. As of November 10, 2015, five Black women are candidates for the U.S. Senate, 36 Black women are running for U.S. House seats, and four Black women have announced that they are running for statewide elected executive posts nationwide.⁴⁶ Seventeen of these women are incumbents who are likely to win re-election to their congressional and statewide seats.

Among the twelve challengers, some have the potential to take advantage of vulnerable incumbents. For example, two Black women are vying for the Democratic nomination in Florida's 10th congressional district, one that is viewed as a likely Democratic pick-up. Val Demings, vying for the nomination this year, lost to incumbent Daniel Webster by less than four percent in 2012.

Open seat contests provide the greatest opportunity for Black women running in 2016. As of November 2015, five U.S. Senate seats will be open in the 2016 cycle and 24 House members have decided they will not run for re-election next November. Eleven Black women have announced their intentions to run for those open seats, including four Black women running for the U.S. Senate and seven running for open House seats. Democrats Donna Edwards (MD) and Kamala Harris (CA) are both poised to be strong nominees for open U.S. Senate seats in their states. In Florida, Pam Keith is vying for the Democratic nomination for an open U.S. Senate seat, joining a crowded field of Democrats including Congressmen Patrick Murphy and Alan Grayson. If successful, these women will make history on multiple fronts. All three would be the first women of color elected to the U.S. Senate from their respective states, in addition to joining the very small number of women of color ever to serve in the nation's upper chamber. In fact, if two of these women are successful in 2016, they would double the number of women of color who have ever served in the U.S. Senate. Andrea Zopp, a Democrat seeking the U.S. Senate nomination to challenge Senator Mark Kirk (R-IL), is also in a highly competitive race in which she could, if elected, make history as the second Black woman that Illinois has sent to the U.S. Senate.⁴⁷ Joyce Dickerson is also running as a Democratic challenger to Republican Senator Tim Scott in South Carolina. If any of these Black women candidates are elected to the U.S. Senate, it would be the first time since 1999 that a Black woman served in the Senate.

At the statewide elected executive level, two Black women – one Republican and one Democrat – have put their names forward as candidates for open seats, both in Missouri. Republican Bev Randles, if elected Lieutenant Governor, and Democrat Robin Smith, if elected Secretary of State, could become the first Black person or people elected statewide in Missouri.

While it is too early in the election season to provide a complete picture of Black women's candidacies and their potential for electoral success, the candidacies announced to date have the potential to make history and advance Black women's leadership across multiple levels of office.

⁴⁶ Before official filing deadlines, the Center for American Women and Politics lists candidates as "potential" based on information from at least two of the following sources: *Campaigns and Elections*; *House Race Hotline*; *CQ Politics Daily*; *Politics1.com*; *The Hill*; *Roll Call*; *Politico*; *Real Clear Politics*; and local newspapers in many states.

⁴⁷ Zopp is competing for the Democratic nomination against another woman of color, Representative Tammy Duckworth.

CONCLUSION

Since our first report on the Status of Black Women in American Politics in June 2014, Black women have increased their presence in political leadership roles, raised their voices amidst essential policy debates, and used their votes to influence outcomes in the 2014 elections. Black women hold significant – and expanding – economic and political influence today. But how do they harness that power at the ballot box *and* on the ballot? What are the steps necessary to advancing Black women’s political representation to reflect their presence in the population? Focusing on recruitment and support will maximize opportunities for Black women to win, in addition to expanding the sites for these opportunities beyond majority-minority districts at the state and federal level. Even when not elected, how do Black women leverage the power of their votes to make sure that their voices do not go unheard in policy debates and decision-making?

A first step in harnessing the power of Black women’s votes is ensuring that they recognize that power. As the most reliable Democratic voters in the past two presidential elections, Black women are an essential part to the winning coalition that any Democratic candidate will need to win in 2016. Tying those votes to policy demands and priorities can ensure that Black women’s voices will not only be heard from outside of government, but can move further to the center of political debates and decision-making. Prioritizing the political empowerment of Black women as citizens, candidates, and elected officials is not only a matter of democratic fairness, but essential to engaging new constituencies, elevating policy dialogue, and promoting policy priorities, perspectives, and solutions that may be lost if Black women’s voices, votes, and leadership are absent from American politics.

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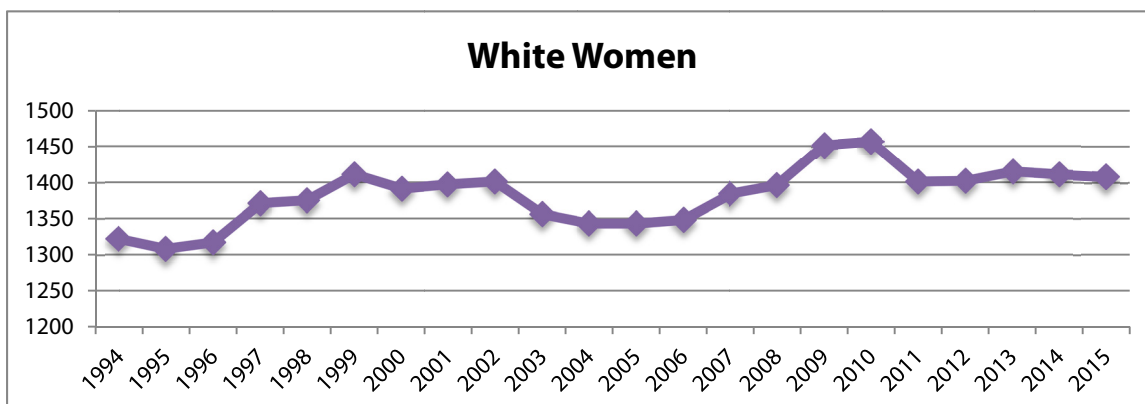
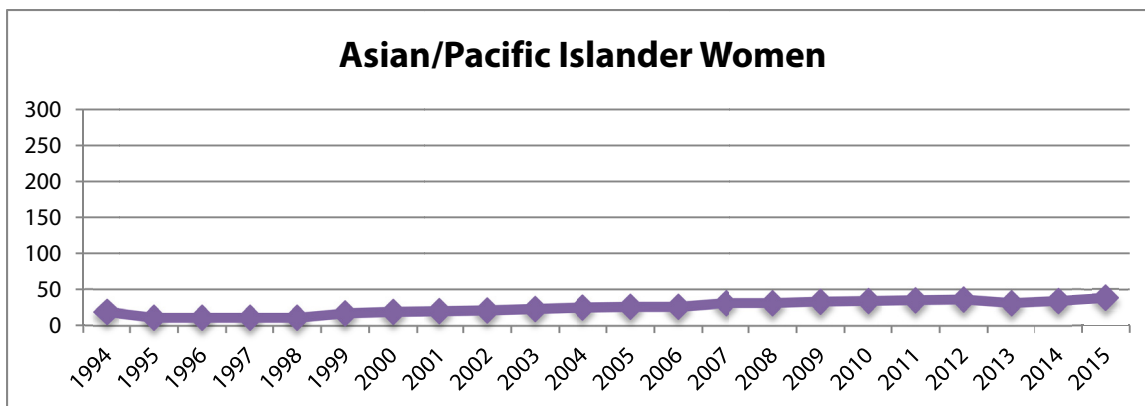
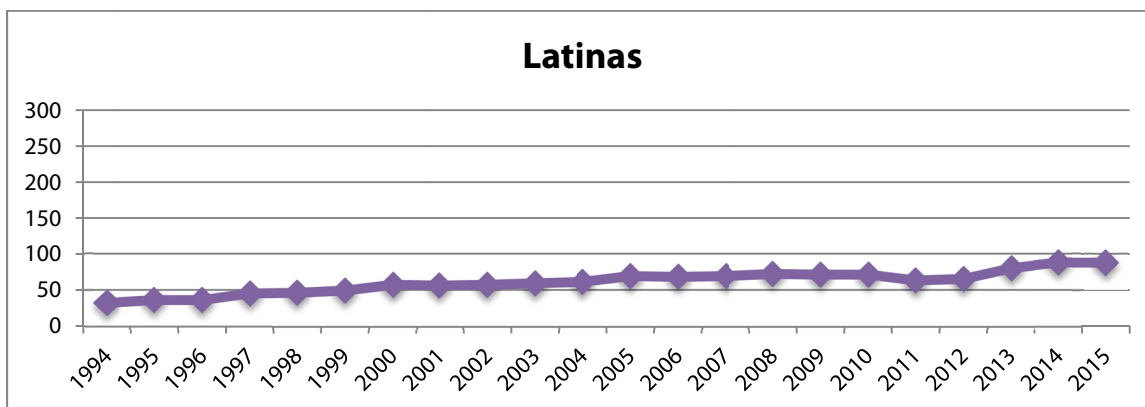
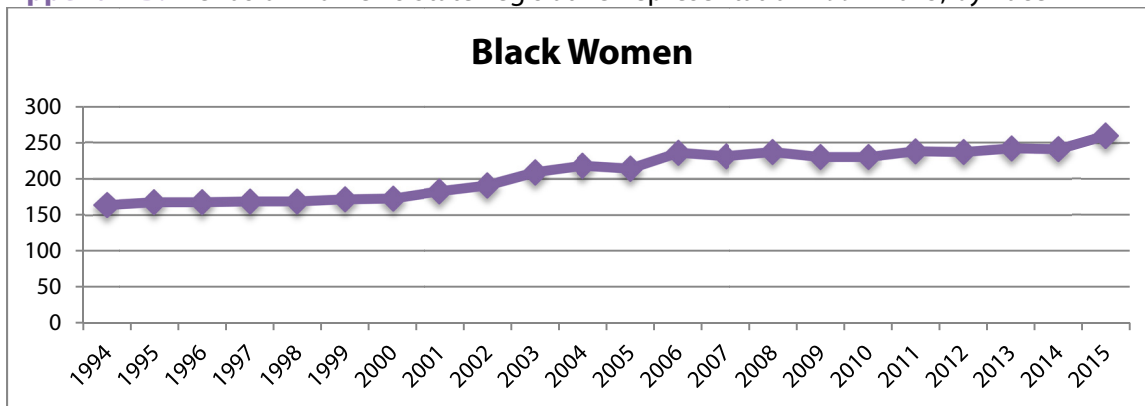
APPENDICES

Appendix A: All Black Congresswomen

State	Name	Chamber	Party	Years Served
AL	Terri Sewell	House	D	2011-Present
CA	Maxine Waters	House	D	1991-Present
CA	Barbara Lee	House	D	1998-Present
CA	Karen Bass	House	D	2011-Present
CA	Yvonne Brathwaite Burke	House	D	1973-1978
CA	Juanita Millender-McDonald	House	D	1996-2007
CA	Diane Watson	House	D	2001-2010
CA	Laura Richardson	House	D	2007-2012
FL	Corrine Brown	House	D	1993-Present
FL	Frederica Wilson	House	D	2011-Present
FL	Carrie P. Meek	House	D	1993-2002
GA	Cynthia McKinney	House	D	1993-2006
GA	Denise Majette	House	D	2003-2004
IL	Robin Kelly	House	D	2013-Present
IL	Cardiss Collins	House	D	1973-1996
IL	Carol Moseley Braun	Senate	D	1993-1998
IN	Katie Hall	House	D	1982-1984
IN	Julia Carson	House	D	1997-2007
MD	Donna Edwards	House	D	2009-Present
MI	Brenda Lawrence	House	D	2015-Present
MI	Barbara-Rose Collins	House	D	1991-1996
MI	Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick	House	D	1997-2010
NC	Alma Adams	House	D	2014-Present
NC	Eva M. Clayton	House	D	1993-2002
NJ	Bonnie Watson Coleman	House	D	2015-Present
NY	Yvette Clarke	House	D	2007-Present
NY	Shirley Chisholm	House	D	1969-1982
OH	Marcia Fudge	House	D	2009-Present
OH	Joyce Beatty	House	D	2013 - Present
OH	Stephanie Tubbs Jones	House	D	1999-2008
TX	Eddie Bernice Johnson	House	D	1993-Present
TX	Sheila Jackson Lee	House	D	2009-Present
TX	Barbara C. Jordan	House	D	1973-1978
UT	Mia Love	House	R	2015-Present
WI	Gwen Moore	House	D	2005-Present
Non-Voting Members				
DC	Eleanor Holmes Norton	Delegate	D	1991-Present
VI	Stacey Plaskett	Delegate	D	2015-Present
VI	Donna Christensen	Delegate	D	1997-2015

Source: Center for American Women and Politics

Appendix B: Trends of Women's State Legislative Representation 1994-2015, by Race



Appendix C: Black Women Mayors 2015 (in cities with populations over 30,000)

Name	City	State	Population	Rank
Ivy R. Taylor	San Antonio	TX	1327407	8
Muriel Bowser	Washington	DC	646449	23
Stephanie C. Rawlings-Blake	Baltimore	MD	620961	25
Paula Hicks-Hudson	Toledo	OH	287208	70
Lovely A. Warren	Rochester	NY	210565	103
Ollie S. Tyler	Shreveport	LA	199311	116
Marilyn Strickland	Tacoma	WA	198397	118
Acquanetta Warren	Fontana	CA	196069	121
Edna Jackson	Savannah	GA	136286	192
Toni Harp	New Haven	CT	129779	200
Karen Weaver	Flint	MI	102434	281
Deborah Robertson	Rialto	CA	99171	298
Aja Brown	Compton	CA	96455	312
Karen M. Freeman-Wilson	Gary	IN	80294	408
Dorothy Hubbard	Albany	GA	77434	421
Dana L. Redd	Camden	NJ	77344	423
Elizabeth B. Kautz	Burnsville	MN	60306	598
Deirdre Waterman	Pontiac	MI	59515	609
Deloris 'Bobbie' Prince	Port Arthur	TX	53818	707
Rita Sanders	Bellevue	NE	50137	766
Barbara A. Wallace	Washington Township	NJ	48559	801
Debra S. Dagwan	Barnstable	MA	45193	877
C. Kim Bracey	York	PA	43718	905
Carrie Tergin	Jefferson City	MO	43079	916
Lizette P. Parker	Teaneck Township	NJ	39776	1008
Jannquell Peters	East Point	GA	33712	1211
Debbie Franklin	Banning	CA	30310	1376

Source: U.S. Conference of Mayors; Center for American Women and Politics



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