

THE STATUS OF

# BLACK WOMEN

IN AMERICAN POLITICS

A REPORT BY THE CENTER FOR AMERICAN WOMEN AND POLITICS FOR HIGHER HEIGHTS LEADERSHIP FUND



### **ABOUT HIGHER HEIGHTS**

Higher Heights is building a national infrastructure to harness Black women's political power and leadership potential. Headquartered in New York, NY, Higher Heights Leadership Fund, a national 501(c)(3) organization and its sister organization Higher Heights for America 501(c)(4) is investing in a long-term strategy to expand and support a Black women's leadership pipeline at all levels and strengthen their civic participation beyond just Election Day. For additional information, please visit [www.higherheightsforamerica.org](http://www.higherheightsforamerica.org).

### **ABOUT THE CENTER FOR AMERICAN WOMEN AND POLITICS (CAWP)**

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. For additional information, please visit [www.cawp.rutgers.edu](http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu).

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	ii-iii
INTRODUCTION	1
BLACK WOMEN RUNNING AND WINNING	2-19
CONGRESS	4-9
STATEWIDE ELECTED EXECUTIVE OFFICE	10-13
STATE LEGISLATURES	14-18
MAYORS	19
BLACK WOMEN IN THE ELECTORATE	20-22
CONCLUSION	22-23
SOURCES	23-26
APPENDICES	27-29

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## BLACK WOMEN ARE CRITICAL FOR IMPROVING COMMUNITIES.

- Black women drive the economic and electoral power of Black communities nationwide.
  - » Black women drive spending of 85 cents to every dollar in the Black community.
  - » Black women are 58.6% of the voters in Black communities.
- 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.
- Once in office, Black women champion the interests of Black citizens and underrepresented populations, supporting progressive agendas around education, health care, and economic development.
- Black women typically represented more diverse and urban communities than their non-Black counterparts.

## BLACK WOMEN ARE UNDERREPRESENTED AT ALL LEVELS OF POLITICAL OFFICE.

- Black women are 7.4% of the U.S. population and 7.8% of the electorate. However, there are only 14 Black women in Congress (2.6%), 2 Black women in statewide elected executive office, 241 Black women in state legislatures (3.3%), and 26 Black women mayors in cities with populations over 30,000 (1.9%). Only one Black woman serves as mayor of one of the 100 largest cities in the United States.
- Black women are 52.2% of the Black population and 58.6% of the Black electorate. However, they represent just 34.1% of Black members of Congress, 25% of Black statewide elected executive officials, and 37.7% of Black state legislators.
- Historically, only 31 Black women from only 13 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 four states have still never elected a Black woman to their state legislature.
- While better represented among congressional candidates, Black women are significantly underrepresented as candidates and nominees for statewide offices that are often feeders for gubernatorial, or even presidential, bids.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## BLACK WOMEN CONFRONT DISTINCT POLITICAL REALITIES.

- Black women face 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 men and white women.
- Black women navigate race and gender stereotypes, and the intersections therein, while running for and serving in office.
  - » Black women represent less affluent districts and are less likely to be part of moneyed networks, posing hurdles to fundraising.

Black women bring distinct advantages to candidacy and officeholding.

- » Black women's confidence and political experiences in community work and activism has contributed to their political ambition and success.
- » Black women engage and draw from multiple communities of voters as candidates and officeholders.

## BLACK WOMEN FACE GREAT OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH IN POLITICAL VOICE AND REPRESENTATION.

- Black women engage and inspire Black citizens to participate in politics, acting as role models for more Black women to run for office.
- Black women's representational growth has occurred primarily in the past two decades, with the trend likely to continue upward as more Black women run.
  - » Of the 31 Black women who have served in Congress, 24 (77%) have entered since 1993.
  - » Of the 10 Black women who have served in statewide elected executive office, 9 have 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 18 more Black women have led big cities in the past twelve years.
- Black women's legislative representational growth to date has been primarily in majority-minority districts, leaving much opportunity for growth outside of these districts, which are limited in number and vulnerable to legal challenges.
- As the most reliable Democratic voters in congressional, statewide, and presidential contests in recent elections, Black women's political voice has been particularly strong and influential in Democratic politics.



# INTRODUCTION

**“TO BE IN THE MARGIN IS TO BE PART OF THE WHOLE BUT OUTSIDE THE MAIN BODY.”**

BELL HOOKS,  
FROM MARGIN TO CENTER (1984)

In 1984, bell hooks released the first edition of *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, noting the unique situatedness of Black women as both marginalized via culture, institutions, and law, and central to American society. In the same year, Paula Giddings published *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*, where she illustrated the experience of Black women at the margins of Black and women’s movements, while crediting their centrality to successful outcomes of each. Both of these texts provide essential frames through which to examine Black women’s political participation. In evaluating the progress of Black women in the thirty years since their publication, we must ask how far Black women have come in moving from the margins of American politics to the central locations of political decision-making and power. This report evaluates the status of Black women in American politics, providing both a current snapshot of Black women’s representation and participation and historical context and trends for comparison. The findings illuminate important progress as well as the work remaining to amplify Black women’s voices in American politics as citizens, candidates, and elected officials.

Black women’s political progress runs parallel to advancements in education and professional leadership. From 2000 to 2010, Black women increased their share of advanced degrees earned

among Black students, earning 71% of master’s and 65% of doctoral degrees conferred on Black students (NCES 2012). According to the Center for American Progress, Black women-owned businesses are the fastest-growing segment of the women-owned business market, starting up at a rate six times higher than the national average (Guerra 2013). However, as in politics, Black women remain underrepresented at the highest levels of corporate leadership and, contrary to progressive trends, they remain overrepresented in the lowest-earning and least secure jobs, as well as among the unemployed, uninsured, and impoverished. In 2013, 10.5% of Black women were unemployed and nearly one-third of Black women were in poverty. Black women earn 64 cents to the dollar compared to white, non-Hispanic men, 14 cents lower than non-Hispanic white women. Black women also lag behind white women in educational progress and confront additional health challenges. In 2010, 21.4% of Black women had a bachelor’s degree or higher compared to 30% of white women (Guerra 2013). They are also four times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than any other racial group and more likely than white women to be uninsured (HHS 2011; Guerra 2013).

To maximize their influence and address these disparities in labor, education, economic security, and health, Black women need to expand their political power and influence. To do so, they must navigate today’s political reality at the intersection of race and gender, recognizing that the terrain they face – as well as the contributions they offer – are distinctive from those of white women, Black men, and other women of color<sup>1</sup>. This report provides baseline measures, highlights potential opportunities, and acts as a call to action for groups like the Higher Heights Leadership Fund who seek to advance Black women’s political leadership.

<sup>1</sup> For more on intersectionality as a theoretical argument and as an empirical approach to research analysis, see Crenshaw (1989; 1991), Hancock (2007), Smooth (2006; 2013), and Jordan-Zachary (2007). This scholarship emphasizes the interconnectedness of social identity categories such as race, gender, class, and sexuality in shaping the experiences, preferences, and behaviors of institutional actors.

## 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.<sup>2</sup> 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 that 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 are more likely than their male counterparts to face primary competition and report fundraising as a hurdle on their paths to elected office (Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013). Previous research has also pointed to racial differences in fundraising, noting 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).

An initial look into fundraising disparities between Black men and women in Congress indicates that Black women may struggle even more than their male counterparts to raise comparable amounts of money. In the 2012 election cycle, Black male members of the Congressional Black Caucus raised an average of \$1,015,821, while Black female members of the CBC raised \$781,763.<sup>3</sup> The gender gap in fundraising is greater when looking only at open seat contests (see Table 1). According to the data from the Center for Responsive Politics, Black male House winners raised an average of \$1,448,192 in 2012, compared to the \$812,493 raised by the sole Black female House winner of an open seat that year (Joyce Beatty, D-OH). While this data is limited by the small numbers of Black winners in the 2012 cycle, it reveals that the financial playing field may be particularly uneven for Black women. While political organizations like EMILY’s List have countered gender-based challenges in fundraising for women candidates, few organizations exist to provide necessary fundraising support to Black candidates specifically.

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

**Table 1.** Average Total Contributions to Congressional Black Caucus Members in 2012, by gender

	Black Women <sup>1</sup>	Black Men
<b>Overall Average</b>	\$781,763	\$1,015,821
Incumbent Winners	\$779,202	\$935,367
Open Seat Winners <sup>2</sup>	\$812,493	\$1,448,192

Source: Center for Responsive Politics

<sup>1</sup> Delegates from Washington, DC and the Virgin Islands are not included.

<sup>2</sup> Only three Black men and one Black woman won open House seats in 2012.

<sup>2</sup> For the remainder of this analysis, the use of “white women” will refer to non-Hispanic white women.

<sup>3</sup> Fundraising data is from the Center for Responsive Politics. This average does not include fundraising totals for Black women delegates from Washington, DC and the Virgin Islands.

multiple politically-salient identities. Some scholars have emphasized that Black women are “doubly 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 Valdinì 2008). Thus, increasing Black women’s representation means navigating a political opportunity structure – including potential advantages and disadvantages – that differs from the opportunity structure other candidates of color and women candidates face.

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 exploration 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 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.





**Table 3.** Congressional District Characteristics

	Black Women	Non-Black Women
<b>Population</b>		
Urban	97%	86%
Rural	3%	14%
<b>Race</b>		
Black	43%	7%
White	41%	73%
<b>Education</b>		
Not High School Graduate	19%	15%
High School Graduate or Higher	81%	85%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	30%	31%
<b>2012 Voter Turnout (VAP)</b>	53%	52%
<b>2012 Vote</b>	80%	63%
<b>2012 Vote for Barack Obama</b>	80%	59%
<b>Median Household Income</b>	\$42,122	\$55,734

Source: The Almanac of American Politics, *National Journal*  
 NOTE: Numbers reflect average values for each group of members of Congress.

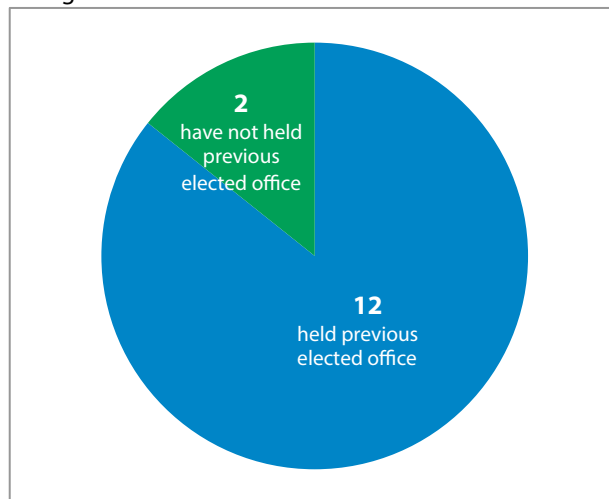
last elections; Black women representatives received an average 72% of the vote in their districts compared to 63% for all non-Black women representatives.

The average tenure of the sitting Black women members of Congress, including delegates, is over a decade (11.2 years). Representative Maxine Waters (D-CA) and Delegate Eleanor Holmes-Norton (D-DC) are the longest-serving Black women serving in the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress, each in her 23<sup>rd</sup> year of service. They will surpass the late Representative Cardiss Collins (D-IL; 1973-1997) as the longest-serving Black congresswomen ever in June 2014. Even before coming to Congress, 12 of the 14 current Black congresswomen held some previous elected office, including nine who served in their states' legislatures (see Figure 2). Delegate Donna Christensen (D-VI) was the appointed Commissioner of Health for the U.S. Virgin Islands before coming to Congress.

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 women in the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress are

Black congresswomen represent more diverse and more urban districts than non-Black women (see Table 3).<sup>7</sup> Most significantly, 12 of the 14 Black female representatives in the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress represent majority-minority districts, consistent with historical trends of electoral success and minority representation in Congress (see below). Half of the Black women serving represent majority-Black districts and only two women – Joyce Beatty (D-OH) and Gwen Moore (D-WI) – represent majority-white congressional districts. In all, 19 majority-minority congressional districts are represented by female members, with only one district (CA-44) represented by a white woman (Janice Hahn).<sup>8</sup> Due in part to the strong presence of minority voters, Black women represent districts that, on average, voted strongly for Barack Obama in 2008 and 2012 (see Table 3). They also received, on average, higher vote totals than other women members in their

**Figure 2.** Previous Elected Office, Current Black Congresswomen



Source: Center for American Women and Politics

<sup>7</sup> 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).

<sup>8</sup> Four Asian/Pacific Islander and 2 Hispanic women represent majority-minority congressional districts.

Representatives Yvette Clarke (D-NY) and Terri Sewell (D-AL), both 49 years old. Representative Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX) is the oldest Black woman at 78 years old. Eighteen congresswomen have no children, including two Black women members, but the average number of children among all congresswomen is two.

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 non-Black women members; she finds that only a third of Black women serving in the 106<sup>th</sup> 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 113<sup>th</sup> Congress, where just under 30% of Black women members are married, compared to 76.8% of white women, 71.4% 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.<sup>9</sup> 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 45 years.

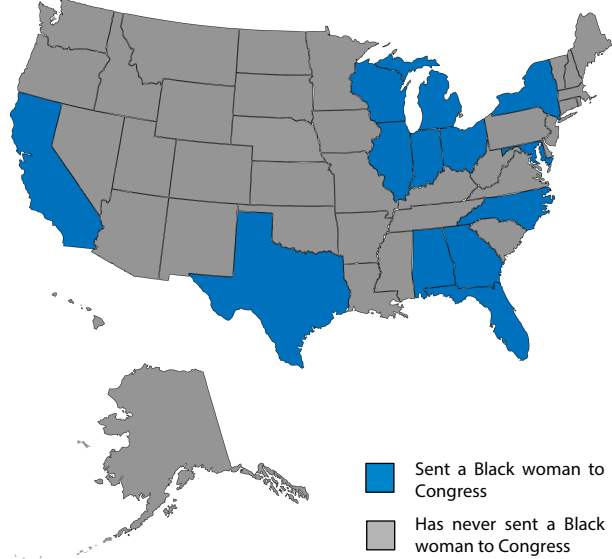
**Table 4.** Personal Characteristics

	Black Women	Non-Black Women
<b>Average Age</b>	63	59
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Married	28.6%	76.5%
Unmarried	71.4%	23.5%
<b>Average Number of Children</b>	2	2

Sources: Center for American Women and Politics; The Almanac of American Politics, *National Journal*  
 NOTE: Numbers reflect average values for each group of members of Congress.

### Historical Officeholders

**Figure 3.** Black Congresswomen 1968-Present, by State



Source: Center for American Women and Politics

Thirty-one Black women from 13 states have served in the U.S. Congress, in addition to two Black female non-voting delegates from Washington, D.C. and 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 Black congresswomen (including both delegates) have been Democrats. Black women make up 10.5% of all 294 women who have ever served in Congress, 62% of all 50 congresswomen of color, and 22.8% of all 136 Black members of Congress (see Figures 4 and 5).<sup>10</sup> Of the four female delegates who have also served in the House, two are Black women.

The first Black woman elected to Congress was Shirley Chisholm (D-NY) in 1968, elected four years after Patsy Mink (D-HI) became the first woman of color elected to Congress and a half century after Jeannette Rankin (D-MT) became the first woman elected to Congress in 1917. The first Black men entered Congress in 1870,

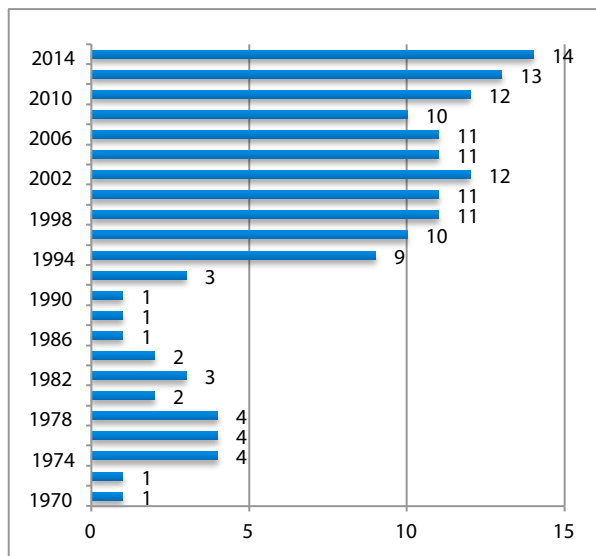
<sup>9</sup> According to the U.S. Census, 41.4% of Black women are married compared to 55.1% of all women in the United States.

<sup>10</sup> Mazie Hirono, the only woman of color to serve in both House and Senate, is only counted once in these calculations. In total, 49 women of color have served in the House and 2 women of color have served in the Senate. Calculations included 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.

nearly one hundred years before Chisholm took her seat.<sup>11</sup> Of the 13 Black members of Congress who founded the Congressional Black Caucus in 1971, only one (Chisholm) was a woman. Two years later, three more Black women were elected to the House. The Voting Rights Act and the creation of majority-minority districts have been critical to Black women’s gains. As Figure 4 shows, the number of Black women in office did not increase significantly until 1992, when the creation of 12 new majority-Black districts in the South resulted in 12 new Black members of the House, including five new Black congresswomen (Clayton and Stallings 2000).<sup>12</sup> Since then, much of the increase in Black members of Congress can be attributed to Black women’s electoral success (Smooth 2014). The greatest numbers of Black women and all women of color serving simultaneously are 14 and 30 - respectively, both achieved in the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress.<sup>13</sup>

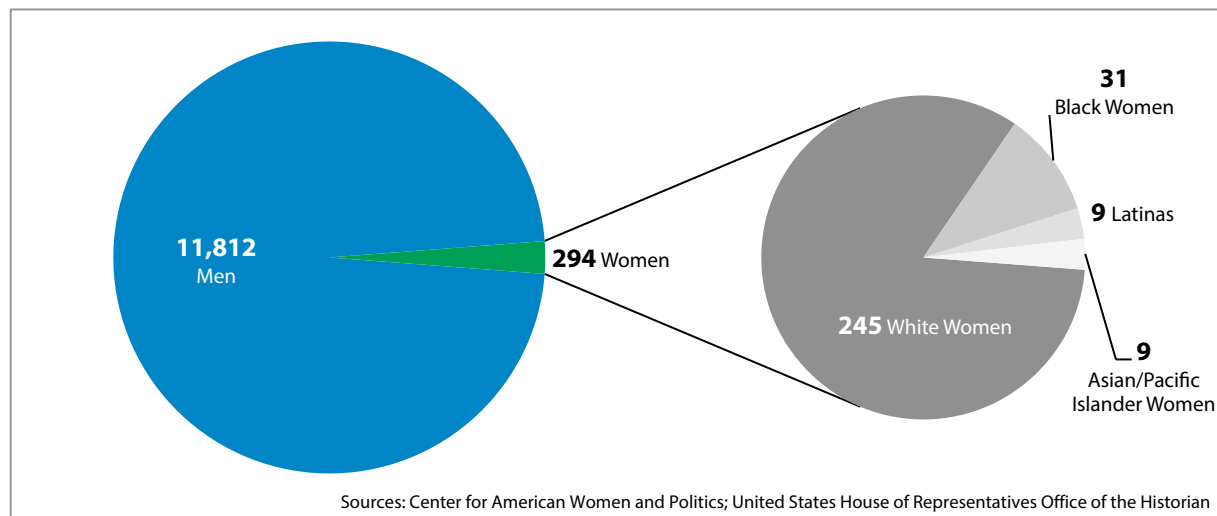
While four states have still never sent a woman to Congress, 35 states have never elected a woman of color to Congress and 37 states have never had a Black woman in their congressional delegation. Black men, however, have represented 25 states in Congress over time, including 13 states that have never elected a Black woman: CT, LA, MA, MN, MS, MO, NJ, NV, OK, PA, SC, TN, VA.<sup>14</sup> Wisconsin is the only state that has elected a Black woman, but no Black men, to Congress. Three women – Katie Hall (D-IN), Barbara Jordan (D-TX), and Gwen Moore (D-WI) – have been the first Black

**Figure 4.** Black Women in Congress, 1970-Present



Source: Center for American Women and Politics

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



Sources: Center for American Women and Politics; United States House of Representatives Office of the Historian

<sup>11</sup> Three Black men entered Congress in 1870: Representative Jefferson Long (GA), Representative Joseph H. Rainey (SC), and Senator Hiram Rhodes Revels (MS).

<sup>12</sup> The total number of majority-minority districts doubled from 26 to 52 in post-1990 redistricting. This jump is credited in part to congressional amendments to Section 2 the Voting Rights Act to remove intent to discriminate as a criterion for proving vote-related discrimination, and to the Supreme Court’s decision in *Thornberg v. Gingles* (1986) to bar vote dilution under redistricting even if one could not prove discriminatory intent (Keele and White 2011).

<sup>13</sup> This does not include delegates.

<sup>14</sup> Data on Black members of Congress (current and historic) is from the Congressional Research Service.

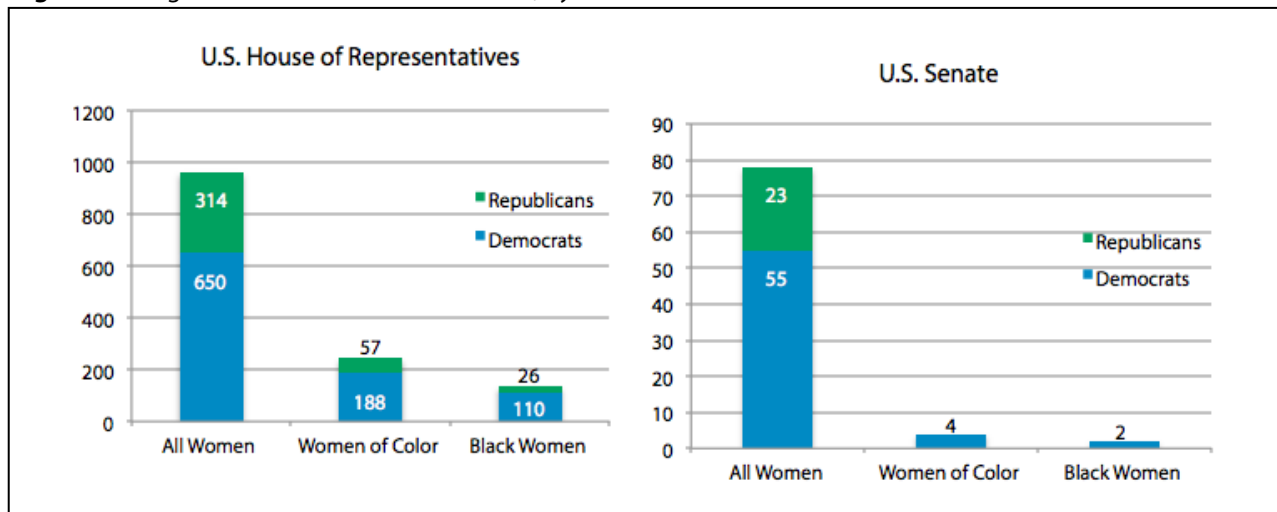
members of Congress from their states, but only Delegates Donna Christensen (D-VI) and Eleanor Holmes-Norton (D-DC) are the first congresswomen to represent their constituencies. Both delegates and four of the 14 current Black Representatives – Corinne Brown (D-FL), Donna Edwards (D-MD), Gwen Moore (D-WI), and Terri Sewell (D-AL) – are the first Black women to represent their states and constituencies.<sup>15</sup> Finally, of the 30 Black women who have served in the House, six have been the second Black women representing their congressional district; in five of those cases, a Black woman directly succeeded another Black woman member.<sup>16</sup>

### Congressional Candidates

In order to increase their representation in Congress, Black women must run and win. In congressional elections between 2000 and 2012, 138 nominees for House and Senate seats and 12 nominees for Delegate were Black women (see Figure 6). Black women’s nominations represent 14.1% of all female House nominations and just over 55% of nominations of all women of color in the House in this period. Only two, or 2.6%, of female Senate nominations between 2000 and 2012 were of Black women. Sadly, those two nominations still represent half of all Senate nominations of all women of color (4) in the same period, and neither Black female nominee was elected. Accounting for incumbent women and multiple-time nominees, 66 individual Black women – 43 Democrats and 23 Republicans – have reached general election House and Senate ballots in the past six congressional election cycles; two more Black female Democrats have been multiple-time Delegate nominees. Representative Denise Majette (D-GA) is the only Black woman since 2000 to be both a House and Senate nominee.

Black women were more likely to run as incumbents than challengers in House races between 2000 and 2012. In those years, Black women were 9.4% of female House nominees who challenged incumbent members and 18.1% of female House incumbent nominees. In open seat contests, 15.5% of female House nominees since 2000 have been Black women.

**Figure 6.** Congressional Candidates 2000-2012, by Gender and Race



Source: Center for American Women and Politics

Across all types of House races in this period, Black women nominees had a win rate of 65.2%, significantly higher than white women nominees. When the Delegate nominees are included, Black women’s win rate over this period rises to 68% among House nominees. Black women fared much better as Democratic nominees, with

<sup>15</sup> 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.

<sup>16</sup> 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 17<sup>th</sup> District, but not sequentially.



82.6% of Black female Democratic nominees for Representative and Delegate winning their races. This rate of success was significantly higher than that of white female Democratic House nominees. However, among all female Democratic House nominees, Black women’s greater rate of success can be attributed mainly to their higher win rates in open seat contests; 68.8% of Black female Democratic House nominees from 2000–2012 won open seat contests, compared to 32.3% of white female Democratic House nominees (see Table 5). Black women have fared poorly as Republican candidates, with no Black Republican women ever winning a seat in Congress. In 2012, Mia Love – a Black female Republican from Utah and former mayor of Saratoga Springs – nearly became the first Black Republican woman in Congress, losing to Democratic incumbent Jim Matheson by less than 1000 votes on Election Day. Love is running for Utah’s 4<sup>th</sup> congressional district seat again in 2014, taking advantage of Matheson’s decision not to run for re-election.

Finally, as mentioned above, Black women nominees have also benefitted from running in majority-minority districts. In these districts, winning the

**Table 5. Election Win Rates for House Democratic Women, by Race and Seat Status**

	Black Women	White Women	Latinas	Asian-Pacific Islander Women
<b>Challengers</b>	0	5.9%	0	66.7%
<b>Incumbents</b>	98.5%	92.7%	100%	100%
<b>Open Seat Candidates</b>	68.8%	32.3%	75%	83.3%

Source: Center for American Women and Politics

Democratic nomination is often the most significant hurdle for candidates. Once nominees, Democratic candidates have a high likelihood of electoral success. Between 2000 and 2012, about 75% of House nominations of Black women were in majority-minority districts. Of those, only 15.7% were Republican challengers who lost on Election Day. Ninety-five percent of the Democratic nominees won and 83.3% 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, 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 leadership positions at the major party congressional campaign committees going into the 2014 cycle (DSCC, NRSC, DCCC, NRCC). Representative Donna Edwards (D-MD) is the Chair of the Recruitment Committee at the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) and Representative Terri Sewell (D-AL) is a Vice Chair of the Finance Committee at the DCCC, as well as Vice Chair of the DCCC Business Council. 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.

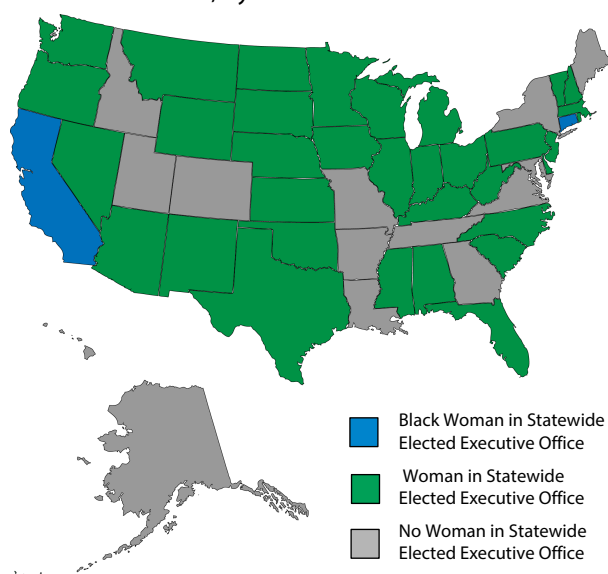
In 2014, two Black women hold leadership positions at a party’s national committee. Donna Brazile serves as the Vice Chair of Voter Registration and Participation and Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake serves as the Secretary of the Democratic National Committee. Prior to holding this post, Brazile was Chair of the DNC’s Voting Rights Institute. No Black women have ever served as Chairwoman to either the Democratic or Republican National Committee.

# Statewide Elected Executive Office

## Current Officeholders



In 2014, Black women hold only two, or 0.6%, of the 318 statewide elected executive offices across the United States.<sup>17</sup> They are 2.7% of all 74 women, 28.6% of all 7 women of color, and 25% of all 8 African Americans holding statewide elected executive offices.<sup>18</sup> Denise Nappier (D-CT) serves as Connecticut’s State Treasurer and Kamala Harris (D-CA) is California’s Attorney General.<sup>19</sup> Both women made history when elected statewide. Elected in 1998, Denise Nappier became the first woman and 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 7).

**Figure 8.** Current Black Women Statewide Elected Executive Officials, by State



Source: Center for American Women and Politics

**Figure 7.** Current Black Women Statewide Elected Executive Officials

<p><b>Denise Nappier</b> State Treasurer, Connecticut 1999-Present</p> <p>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 1998 and re-elected in 2002, 2006 and 2010, Treasurer Nappier is also the only woman to be elected Treasurer in Connecticut history.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>  <p><b>Party:</b> Democrat <b>Age:</b> 62 <b>Previous Elected Office:</b> Hartford City Treasurer</p>	<p><b>Kamala Harris</b> Attorney General, California 2011-Present</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Harris is author of the book <i>Smart on Crime: A Career Prosecutor’s Plan to Make Us Safer</i>.</p> <p>Harris received her B.A. from Howard University, and her law degree from the University of California, Hastings College of the Law in 1989.</p>  <p><b>Party:</b> Democrat <b>Age:</b> 49 <b>Previous Elected Office:</b> District Attorney of San Francisco</p>
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<sup>17</sup> 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.

<sup>18</sup> All data on Black elected officials is from the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies (2013).

<sup>19</sup> 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 1978. Since then, nine more Black women – six Democrats and three Republicans – have served in statewide elected executive office (see Table 6). 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 1.8% of the

551 statewide elected executive positions held by women and 27.8% of the 36 positions held by women of color since 1893. Accounting for women who have held multiple offices, Black women represent 2.1% of the 475 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 1.6% of all statewide elected executive positions held by Republican women and 2% of all positions held by Democratic women, since 1893.

Black women have served in statewide elected executive offices in nine states, and Indiana is the only state that has had more than one Black women in a statewide executive post (see Figure 8).<sup>20</sup> In comparison, women of color have served in statewide elective executive office in 15 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

**Table 6.** Black Women in Statewide Elected Executive Office

Name	State	Office	Years of Service
Vel 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

### 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.

<sup>20</sup> Two Black female Attorneys General have served in Indiana, one succeeding the other from 1993-2001. Karen Freeman-Wilson was appointed to fill the remainder of Pamela Carter’s term when she was appointed to become State Treasurer in 2000.

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 35 women governors to date, 23 – or 66% – 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.<sup>21</sup>

### Statewide Executive Office Candidates

The election of Black women to statewide executive offices has occurred only rarely, and in recent history. In fact, six of the nine Black women who have served in statewide elected executive posts entered office since 2000. In that time, 34 Black women have been candidates for statewide elected executive offices nationwide, 18 Black women have become nominees, and five women have won statewide executive office.<sup>22</sup> Some of these Black women are multiple-time candidates and nominees, whether as incumbents or candidates for different statewide executive offices. Thus, 40 statewide executive candidates and 22 nominees since 2000 have been Black women. Black women statewide executive candidates represent 5.5% of all women statewide executive candidates and 51.9% of all women of color statewide executive candidates between 2000 and 2013. Black women’s presence declines among primary winners, representing only 4.6% of all female nominees and 48.9% 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. As Table 7 shows,

just under one-fifth of Black women candidates for statewide executive offices were winners between 2000 and 2013, compared to 34.2% of all women candidates.

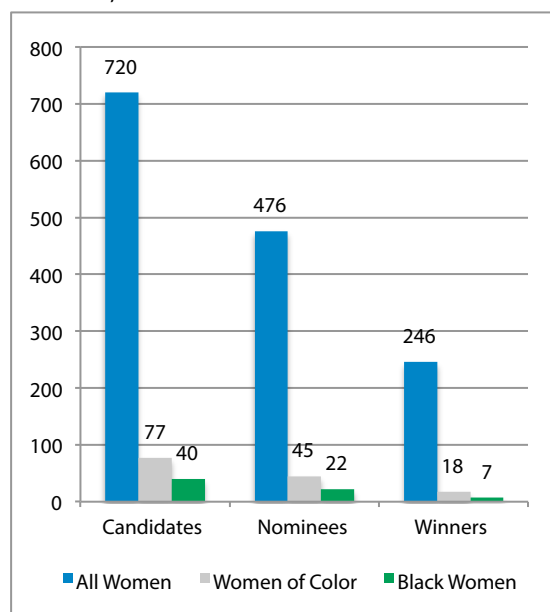
**Table 7.** Election Win Rates for Women Statewide Executive Candidates 2000-2013, by Race and Seat Status

	All Women	All Women of Color	Black Women
<b>Challengers</b>	9.5%	4.8%	0.0%
<b>Incumbents</b>	81.7%	61.5%	42.8%
<b>Open Seat Candidates</b>	26.2%	20.9%	18.2%

Source: Center for American Women and Politics

candidates for statewide executive office. However, while nearly all Black women candidates (88%) and

**Figure 9.** Women in State Executive Office Elections, 2000-2013



Source: Center for American Women and Politics

While over half of Black women candidates made it through their primaries, only 31.8% of Black women nominees were successful on Election Day, compared to 51.7% of all women nominees. This trend persists among Democratic women

candidates for statewide executive office. However, while nearly all Black women candidates (88%) and

<sup>21</sup> Twenty of the 44 U.S. Presidents have been governors.

<sup>22</sup> 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.

nominees (91%) for statewide executive office since 2000 have been Democrats, two of the five Republican candidates – Jennifer Carroll (R-FL) and Jennette Bradley (R-OH) – represent 40% of Black women winners 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. Positioning more Black women for statewide office and supporting and encouraging Black women to enter these contests is critical to the advancement of Black women in politics.

### 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 five 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.

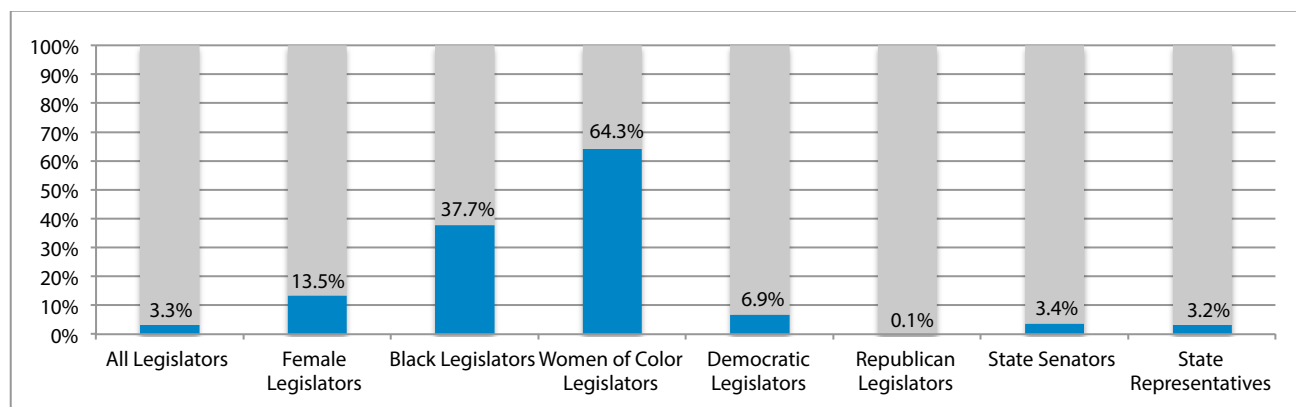


## State Legislatures

### Current Officeholders

As of May 2014, 241 Black women serve in 40 state legislatures across the United States. Of those 241, 236 are Democrats, four are Republicans, and one serves in a non-partisan legislature; 67 are state senators and 174 serve in their states' lower chambers. Black women are 3.3% of all state legislators, 13.5% of all women state legislators, 64.3% of all women of color state legislators, and 37.7% of all Black state legislators (see Figure 10). They are slightly better represented in state senates than in state houses within each of these groups. 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 16.4% of the population, they hold 11.4% of state legislative seats. In Maryland, Black women are 16% of the population and 10.1% of state legislators. Mississippi is the state with the largest presence of Black women in its population (19.7%), but ranks third in Black women's state legislative representation (8.6%). Black women are nearly 50% of Black state legislators in both Georgia (43.5%) and Maryland (43.2%). While Mississippi has the greatest presence of Black women in its population, only 32% of Black legislators in Mississippi's state legislature are women. Black women are more than half of all women legislators in Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi and Louisiana.

**Figure 10.** Black Women State Legislators 2014



Sources: Center for American Women and Politics; Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies; National Conference of State Legislatures;

There are no Black women state legislators in 10 states as of May 2014, including Alaska, Hawaii, Kentucky, Maine, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont, and Washington. Of those states, only Kentucky and Washington have any Black members in their state legislatures. More specifically, there are no Black women serving in 21 state senates and 15 state houses or assemblies throughout the country (see Table 8). In reflecting their presence in the state population, South Carolina fares worst of all in its representation of Black women. While Black women are 14.9% of the state's resident population, they hold only 2.9% of state legislative seats, and no Black women serve in South Carolina's state senate. Black men fare better in South Carolina, representing 19.4% of state legislators, but South Carolina ranks below 48 states for women's representation overall, with only 12.9% of all legislative seats held by women. Delaware also ranks in the top ten states for the percentage of Black women in its population (11.5%), but seventeenth in terms of Black women's representation in the legislature (3.2%). Finally, while Black women are over half of all women legislators in Alabama, the dismal representation of women in the state legislature (13.6%) contributes to the disparity between Black women's representation in the legislature (5.7%) and in the electorate (14.1%).

In half of the state legislatures, Black women make up a greater share of Democratic legislators than their proportion of the state's population. For example, 34.6% of Georgia's Democratic state legislators are Black

**Table 8. Black Women State Legislators 2014**

State	Black Women Representatives	Black Women Senators	Total Black Women Legislators	Percent of All Legislators	Percent of State Resident Population
Georgia	21	6	27	11.4%	16.4%
Maryland	13	6	19	10.1%	16.0%
Mississippi	14	1	15	8.6%	19.7%
North Carolina	9	4	13	7.6%	11.6%
New Jersey	6	3	9	7.5%	7.7%
Virginia	8	2	10	7.1%	10.3%
Florida	8	3	11	6.9%	8.5%
Louisiana	6	3	9	6.3%	16.9%
Illinois	6	5	11	6.2%	7.9%
Ohio	4	4	8	6.1%	6.5%
Alabama	7	3	10	5.7%	14.1%
Tennessee	5	2	7	5.3%	8.9%
Missouri	7	3	10	5.1%	6.1%
Texas	9	0	9	5.0%	6.3%
New York	7	3	10	4.7%	9.4%
Indiana	3	2	5	3.3%	4.8%
Delaware	1	1	2	3.2%	11.5%
Nevada	1	1	2	3.2%	4.2%
Pennsylvania	6	2	8	3.2%	5.9%
South Carolina	5	0	5	2.9%	14.9%
Iowa	4	0	4	2.7%	1.4%
California	2	1	3	2.5%	3.4%
Kansas	3	1	4	2.4%	3.0%
Wisconsin	1	2	3	2.3%	3.3%
Arkansas	0	3	3	2.2%	8.2%
Nebraska	0	1	1	2.0%	2.3%
Colorado	2	0	2	2.0%	2.0%
New Mexico	2	0	2	1.8%	1.1%
West Virginia	2	0	2	1.5%	1.6%
Michigan	2	0	2	1.4%	7.5%
Oklahoma	1	1	2	1.3%	3.8%
Arizona	0	1	1	1.1%	2.1%
Oregon	0	1	1	1.1%	0.9%
Wyoming	1	0	1	1.1%	0.4%
Connecticut	2	0	2	1.1%	5.7%
Massachusetts	1	1	2	1.0%	4.0%
Idaho	0	1	1	1.0%	0.3%
Rhode Island	1	0	1	0.9%	3.6%
New Hampshire	3	0	3	0.7%	0.5%
Minnesota	1	0	1	0.5%	2.6%
Kentucky	0	0	0	0.0%	4.0%
Washington	0	0	0	0.0%	1.7%
Alaska	0	0	0	0.0%	1.5%
Hawaii	0	0	0	0.0%	0.6%
Maine	0	0	0	0.0%	0.5%
Utah	0	0	0	0.0%	0.5%
South Dakota	0	0	0	0.0%	0.5%
North Dakota	0	0	0	0.0%	0.5%
Vermont	0	0	0	0.0%	0.5%
Montana	0	0	0	0.0%	0.2%

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

women, while Black women are only 14.6% of the state's population. Moreover, Black women are 75% of the Democratic women in the Georgia state legislature. In North Carolina, 21.7% of Democratic state legislators are Black women and Black women are 11.6% of the state's residents. Nearly 70% of female Democratic state legislators in North Carolina are Black. Mississippi tops all other states in the proportion of Democratic women legislators who are Black; 15 of 18 (83.3%) Democratic women legislators are Black. Thus, with great potential for

playing influential roles within the Democratic Party, 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 among the 16 women, and one woman of color, who currently head state legislative chambers as Senate presidents or Speakers of the House. Of the 60 women in all legislative leadership posts today, 8 – or 13.3% – are Black women.<sup>23</sup> Half of the Black women in leadership serve in the senate and half serve in the house.

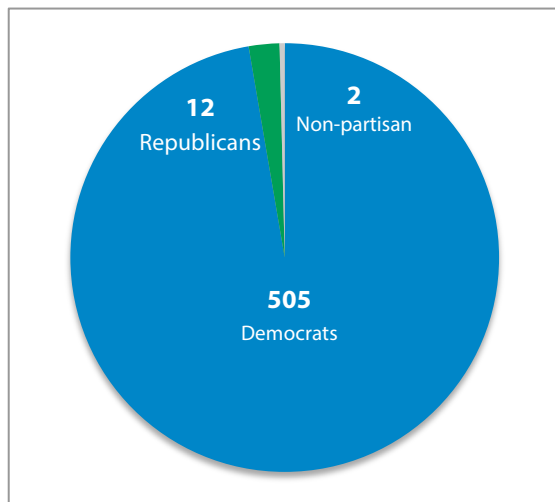
Of the 402 women who serve as chairs of standing committees within their state legislatures, 41 (or 10.2%) are Black women. These positions empower legislators to help set policy agendas and guide legislative debates and discussion. Thus, increasing Black women's political power necessitates not only expanding 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. In April 2014, only two Black women chair their state parties: Representative Karen Carter Peterson (D-LA) and Yvette Lewis (D-MD). In addition, Anita Bonds chairs the Democratic Party in the District of Columbia. These women represent 11.8% of all female state party chairs (17) and 20% of all female Democratic state party chairs (10). Ten more Black women serve as Democratic vice chairs, representing 25.6% of all female Democratic state party vice chairs.

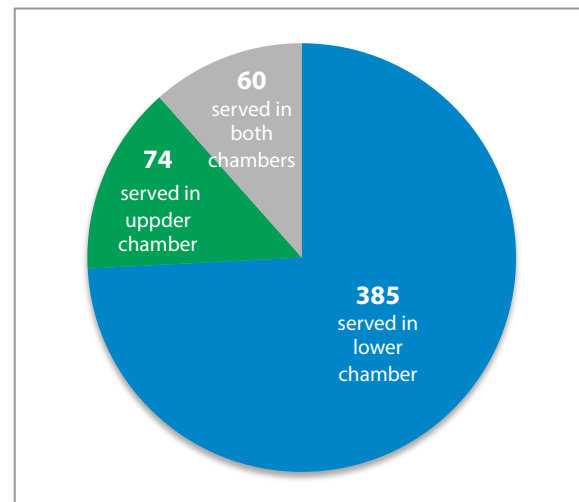
### Historical Officeholders

In the past two decades, a total of 519 Black women have served as state legislators.<sup>24</sup> Ninety-seven percent of all Black women legislators in this period have been Democrats, and 2.3% 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 14.3% have served in state senates only (see Figure 12). The largest number of Black women state legislators serving

**Figure 11.** Black Women State Legislatures 1994-2014, by Party



**Figure 12.** Black Women State Legislatures 1994-2014, by Chamber



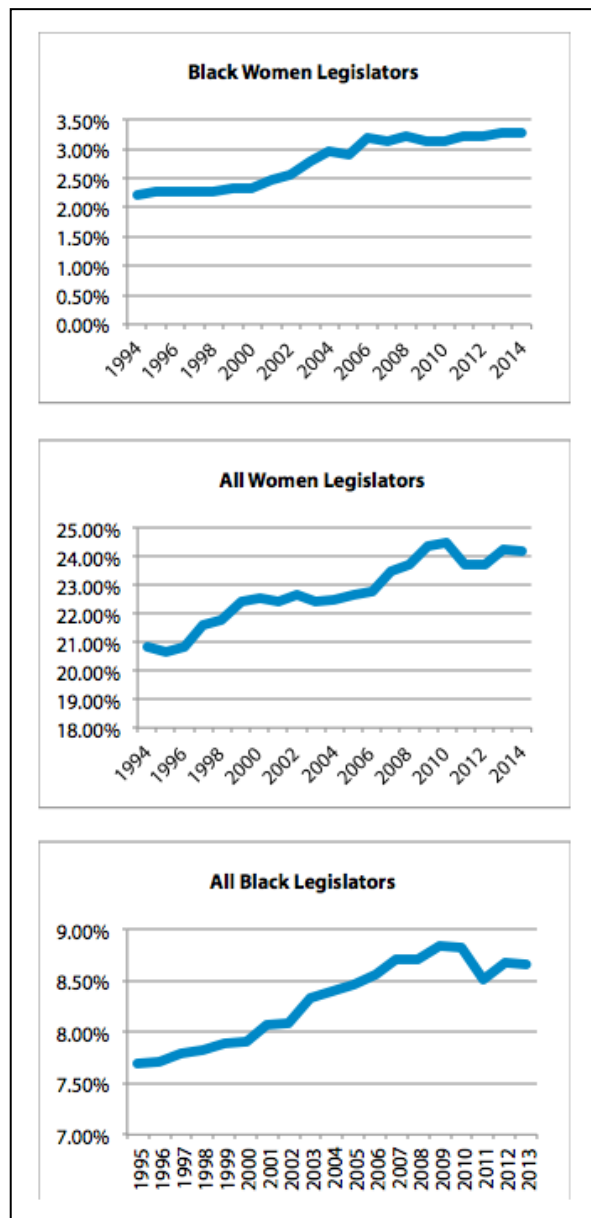
Source: Center for American Women and Politics

<sup>23</sup> 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 State Legislative Leadership, Committees and Staff 2014. When the position of senate president is filled by the lieutenant governor, it is not included in these totals. The Council of State Governments, which publishes that directory, formerly listed all leadership positions so designated in each state; it now limits its listings to these top positions, regardless of what other leadership slots a state may have.

<sup>24</sup> Comprehensive state legislative data by race and gender is only available from 1994 to present from the Center for American Women and Politics and the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies.

simultaneously is 242, the number of women who served in 2013. The number of Black women state legislators is up from 164 Black women serving simultaneously twenty years ago.

**Figure 13.** Trends in State Legislative Representation 1994-2014, by Race and Gender



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

13 house leadership posts. Two of the current Black women in Congress held leadership posts in their state legislatures before running for the U.S. House, including 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 utility of leadership positions as pathways to higher office.

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 10.9% of all women

and 29.4% of all Black state legislators. By the end of 2013, Black women were 13.5% of all women and 37.9% of all Black state legislators nationwide. 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 serve today. 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.

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.

Five of the ten states that have no Black women state legislators in 2014 – Hawaii, Maine, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Utah – have had no Black women legislators since 1994. Only one Black woman has served in Vermont and in Wyoming in the past two decades. Finally, Georgia is the state with the greatest number of Black women legislators serving simultaneously, with 27 Black women serving in both 2013 and 2014.

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. Black women have held 22 of 196 legislative leadership positions ever held by women in state legislatures, including 9 senate and

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 9 lists the first Black women legislators elected in each state, demonstrating that Black women’s legislative representation is a relatively recent historical advancement in many states. In fact, three of the Black women currently serving in state legislatures are the first to be elected in their states (see Table 8). Based on available public records, there are four states that have yet to elect their first Black women legislators: Maine, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Utah. While Black women’s state legislative representation is trending upward, these data indicate that opportunities vary by state.

**Table 9.** 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	No Black woman legislator to date		
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

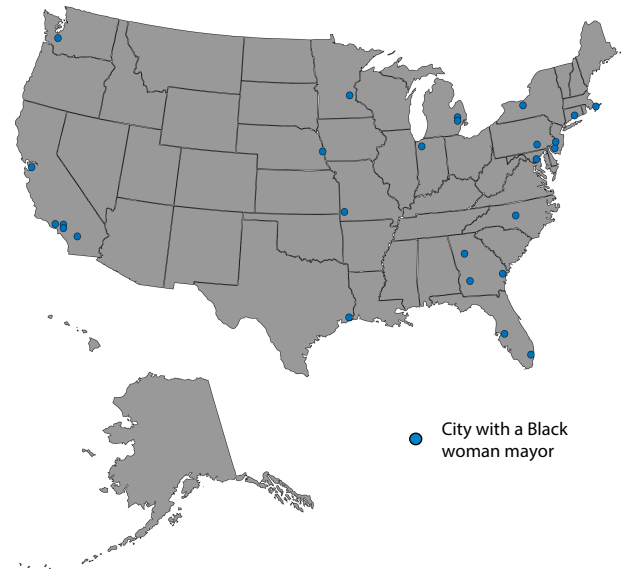
## Current Officeholders

The data available on U.S. mayors is more limited than the 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 January 2014, 26 Black women are mayors in cities with populations over 30,000, serving in 17 different states. They represent 1.9% of all mayors, 10.4% of all female mayors, and 56.5% of all women of color mayors in cities of this size. Only one Black woman currently holds a top municipal post in one of America's 100 largest cities. Stephanie Rawlings-Blake has served as mayor of Baltimore, Maryland – the 26<sup>th</sup> largest city in the U.S. - since 2010. Only two women mayors head cities larger than Baltimore in 2014: Mayors Annise Parker (Houston, TX) and Betsy Price (Fort Worth, TX).

Ten more women mayors make the top 100 list, including two more women of color. Still, women are only 13% of all major city mayors, and Black women represent just 1% of those posts.

Nineteen Black women, including Mayor Rawlings-Blake, have led cities among the nation's 100 largest since 2002.<sup>25</sup> In fact, Sheila Dixon preceded Mayor Rawlings-Blake as the Mayor of Baltimore. Taking office in 2002, Atlanta Mayor 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. 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, Black women have been 11% of all 173 women – and 57.6% of all 33 women of color - who have served as mayors in the 100 most populous U.S. cities. In the same period, 68 Black women have served as mayors in cities with populations over 30,000, representing 7.7% of all women mayors and 46.9% of all women of color mayors in cities with populations over 30,000 in the past 12 years. With over 1300 U.S. 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 are important questions about how to translate Black women's demonstrated commitment to their local communities into political officeholding.

**Figure 14.** Black Woman Mayors 2014 (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.

<sup>25</sup> 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.

## 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 (CAWP 2012; Cohen 2003, 2005; Junn 1997). 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 1994; Cole and Stewart 1996; Davis 1971; Giddings 1984; Junn 1997).

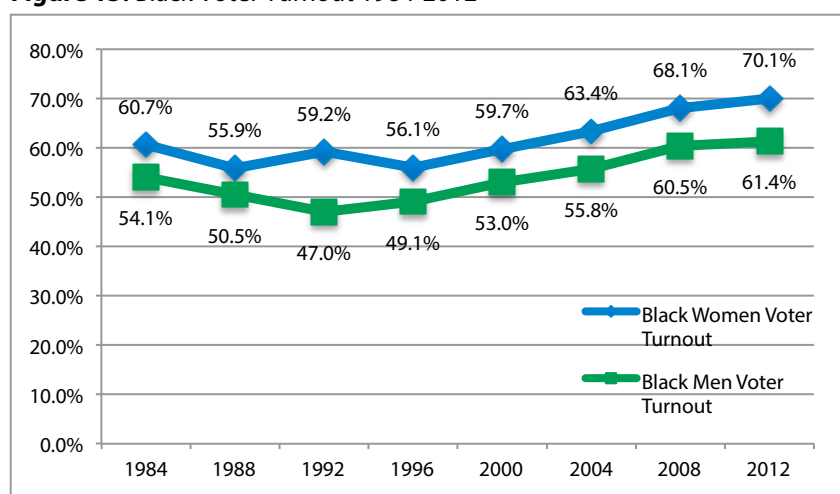
**Table 10.** Black Voter Registration 1998-2012

	Black Men	Black Women
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

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 10 and Figure 15).<sup>26</sup> Since then, the highest percentage of eligible Black women

**Figure 15.** Black Voter Turnout 1984-2012



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey

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 eight election cycles.

Figure 15 displays the gender gap in voter turnout by race in each election since 1984, again revealing that Black women have outvoted Black men in every cycle. In 2008 and 2012, Black women’s rate of voting exceeded all other race x gender subgroups for the first time in U.S. history.

<sup>26</sup> Census Data on voting is only available for the eligible voting population (citizens) by race/ethnic categories since 1984.

Just over 70% of eligible Black women voters – or 10.44 million - reported voting in 2012, compared to 61.4% (7.38 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, voted at a higher rate than non-Hispanic White voters and accounted for a larger percentage of votes cast (13.4%) than their share of the eligible voting electorate (12.5%). Black women, just under seven percent of the eligible electorate, were eight percent of the 2012 electorate. Before 2008, only non-Hispanic White women voters outvoted Black women.

**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
<b>2012</b>	70.1%	61.4%	65.6%	62.6%	49.8%	46.0%	48.5%	46.0%
<b>2008</b>	68.1%	60.5%	67.9%	64.2%	51.8%	47.9%	47.5%	47.6%
<b>2004</b>	63.4%	55.8%	68.4%	65.9%	49.4%	44.8%	46.3%	42.0%
<b>2000</b>	59.7%	53.0%	63.0%	60.6%	46.1%	43.9%	42.5%	44.3%
<b>1996</b>	56.1%	49.1%	60.6%	58.5%	46.5%	41.3%		
<b>1992</b>	59.2%	47.0%	67.8%	66.4%	49.4%	53.9%		
<b>1988</b>	55.9%	50.5%	62.5%	61.2%	46.3%	45.5%		
<b>1984</b>	60.7%	54.1%	64.2%	62.8%	48.6%	47.3%		

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey

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](http://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

**Table 12. Voter Turnout 1984-2012, by Race and Gender**

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

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

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

(e.g. Smooth 2014).<sup>27</sup> In both years, 96% of Black women voted for President Obama, while the majority of non-Hispanic White Women voted for his Republican opponents. Still, as Table 12 shows, a gender gap persisted

<sup>27</sup> 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 [www.cawp.rutgers.edu/research/topics/voting\\_behavior.php](http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/research/topics/voting_behavior.php).

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 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 Ohio and Virginia, proving that Black women were particularly integral in re-electing Senators Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and Tim Kaine (D-VA). Black women similarly helped to carry the margin of victory for Senate candidates in 2010 and 2008. In gubernatorial contests, Black women voters' influence has been similarly significant. In the 2013 gubernatorial election in Virginia, 91% of Black women voters voted for Democratic winner Terry McAuliffe, while 54% of non-Hispanic White women voters voted for Republican Ken Cuccinelli. In 2012, Jay Nixon became governor of Missouri with 95% of Black women's support, compared to only 88% of Black men and 48% of White women. 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.

Finally, Black women represent a significant portion of the Rising American Electorate (RAE), an estimated 115 million eligible voters – and nearly half of the electorate – 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 26.9 million eligible Black voters and 19% of all eligible unmarried women voters (Lake, Ulibarri, and Treptow 2013).<sup>28</sup> 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.

## CONCLUSION

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Black women are not only making their voices heard at the ballot box, but continue to lead their male counterparts in consumer presence and spending. Some experts estimate that Black women influence how 85 cents of every dollar is spent by Blacks, a number less shocking when paired with the fact that women are the primary breadwinners in over half – 53.3% - of Black households.<sup>29</sup> With the spending power of Black Americans expected to rise to 1.3 trillion dollars by 2017, Black women hold significant – and expanding – economic and political influence today.<sup>30</sup> Still, despite this power, Black women remain far underrepresented in political officeholding at every level. This report outlines historical trends of Black women's representation that indicate both progress – albeit slow – and opportunity. While Black women have made gains—particularly in local offices, state legislatures, and the U.S. House, their success in statewide offices, the presidency, and beyond majority-minority districts is lacking. Maximizing opportunity will require concerted and informed efforts to recruit, support, and elect Black women at all levels of political office. In doing so, 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-

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<sup>28</sup> For the latest data on the Rising American Electorate, see the latest research from the Voter Participation Center: <http://www.voterparticipation.org/>

<sup>29</sup> Guerra 2013. Also see Steven Barboza, "The Black Female: Misunderstood Consumer." Available: <http://madamenoire.com/101510/the-black-female-misunderstood-super-consumer/>

<sup>30</sup> See Jeffrey M. Humphries (2012), *The Multicultural Economy 2012* (Selig Center for Economic Growth, Terry College of Business, University of Georgia, 2012).

making that are so influential in the lived experiences of Black women constituents throughout the United States to better communities of all races nationwide.

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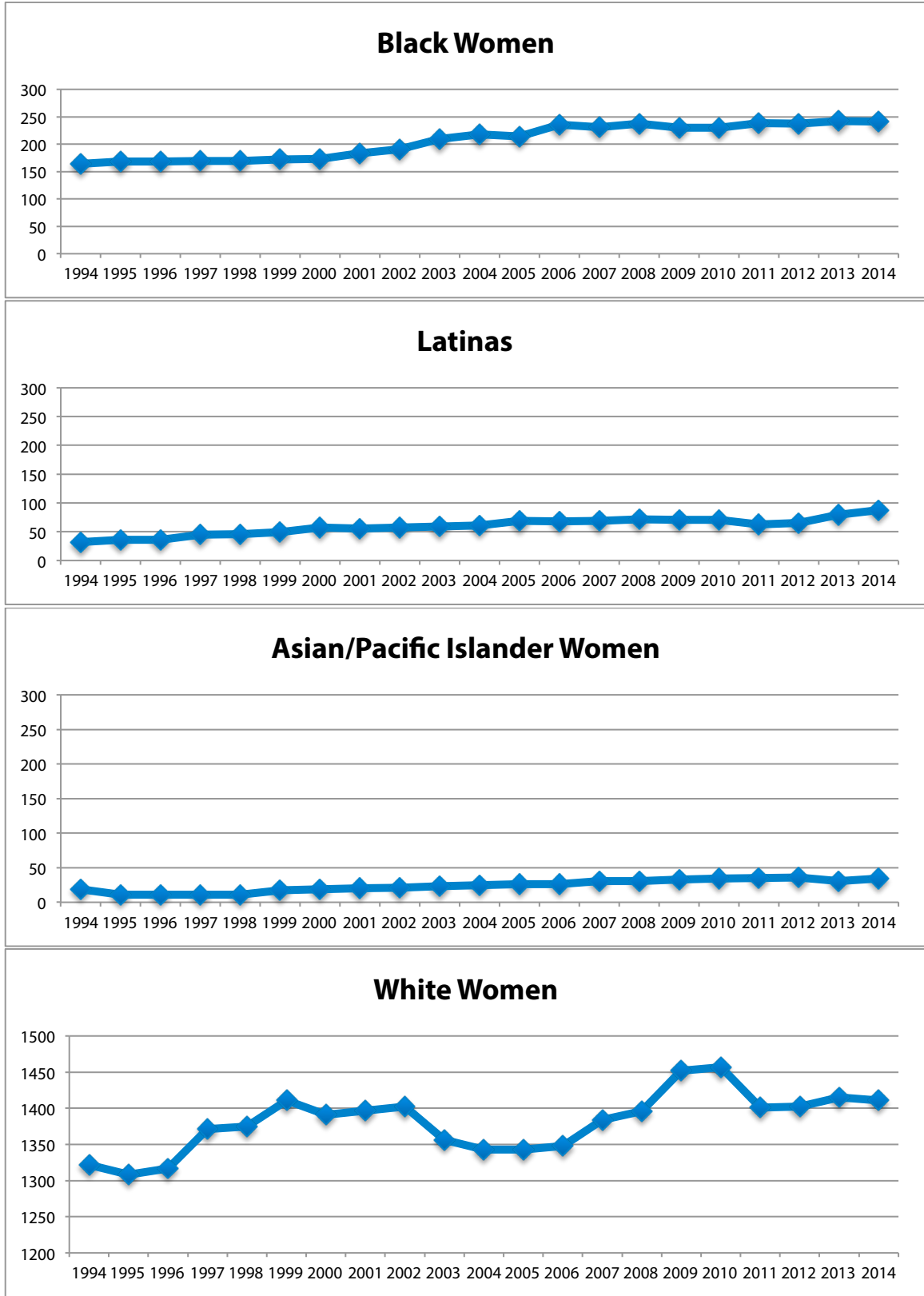
## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: All Black Congresswomen

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

Source: Center for American Women and Politics

**Appendix B:** Trends of Women’s State Legislative Representation 1994-2014, by Race



Source: Center for American Women and Politics  
NOTE: Data reflects total number of women state legislators by race and year.

**Appendix C: Black Women Mayors 2014 (in cities with populations over 30,000)**

<b>Name</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Rank</b>
<b>Stephanie Rawlings-Blake</b>	Baltimore	MD	620,961	26
<b>Lovely Warren</b>	Rochester	NY	210,532	103
<b>Marilyn Strickland</b>	Tacoma	WA	198,397	118
<b>Acquanetta Warren</b>	Fontana	CA	196,069	121
<b>Edna Jackson</b>	Savannah	GA	136,286	189
<b>Toni Harp</b>	New Haven	CT	129,779	196
<b>Bernita Sims</b>	High Point	NC	104,371	267
<b>Deborah Robertson</b>	Rialto	CA	99,171	294
<b>Aja Brown</b>	Compton	CA	96,455	307
<b>Karen M. Freeman-Wilson</b>	Gary	IN	80,294	401
<b>Dorothy Hubbard</b>	Albany	GA	77,434	414
<b>Dana L. Redd</b>	Camden	NJ	77,344	416
<b>Marie Gilmore</b>	Alameda	CA	73,812	453
<b>Brenda L. Lawrence</b>	Southfield	MI	71,739	467
<b>Elizabeth B. Kautz</b>	Burnsville	MN	60,306	588
<b>Deidre Waterman</b>	Pontiac	MI	59,515	598
<b>Lucie M. Tondreau</b>	North Miami	FL	58,786	608
<b>Deloris 'Bobbie' Prince</b>	Port Arthur	TX	53,818	695
<b>Melodee Colbert-Kean</b>	Joplin	MO	50,150	750
<b>Rita Sanders</b>	Bellevue	NE	50,137	751
<b>Barbara A. Wallace</b>	Washington Township	NJ	48,559	786
<b>Debra S. Dagwan</b>	Barnstable	MA	45,193	856
<b>C. Kim Bracey</b>	York	PA	43,718	884
<b>Mary Thomas Mathis</b>	Plant City	FL	35,903	1100
<b>Jannquell Peters</b>	East Point	GA	33,712	1174
<b>Debbie Franklin</b>	Banning	CA	30,310	1334

Sources: Center for American Women and Politics; U.S. Conference of Mayors  
NOTE: Data as of January 2014.





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