



Reaching Higher:  
**Black  
Women**  
in American Politics  
2021

 **HIGHER  
HEIGHTS**  
Leadership Fund

**CAWP** CENTER FOR AMERICAN  
WOMEN AND POLITICS

**RUTGERS**  
Eagleton Institute of Politics

# About Higher Heights Leadership Fund

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 the 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 women's political participation in the United States. Its mission is to promote greater knowledge and understanding about the role of women in American politics, enhance women's influence in public life, and expand the diversity of women in politics and government. CAWP's education and outreach programs translate research findings into action, addressing women's underrepresentation in political leadership with effective, intersectional, and imaginative programs serving a variety of audiences. As the world has watched Americans considering female candidates for the nation's highest offices, CAWP's five 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).

The 2020 election marked a major milestone in Black women's political leadership. Kamala Harris became the first woman, the first Black person, and the first South Asian person on a major-party general election presidential ballot, as well as the first woman, the first Black person, and the first South Asian person to win the vice presidency. Black women also found success across other levels of office, in addition to playing pivotal roles in voter mobilization and voter turnout.

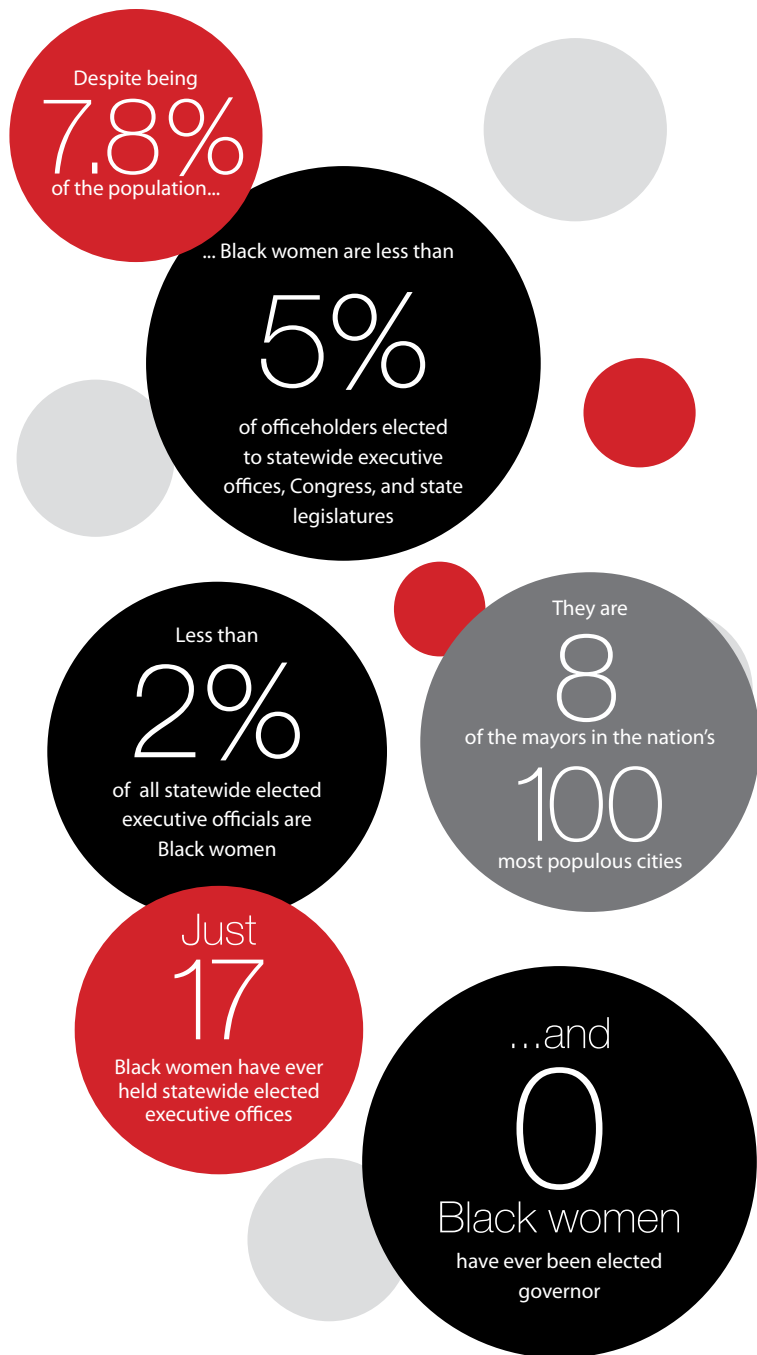
As we look ahead to the midterm elections, which offer greater opportunities for Black women's gains in statewide offices where they remain especially underrepresented, it's important to take stock of Black women's political successes, the persistent hurdles they faced in the 2020 cycle, the outlook for the 2022 election, and the current levels of Black women's representation nationwide. In this update, we outline the status of Black women in American politics as of fall 2021, one year ahead of the 2022 election. As the numbers below illustrate:

- A record number of Black women ran for and won congressional offices in 2020, but Black women's congressional representation is not at a record high. Most acutely, no Black women currently serve in the U.S. Senate.

- Between 2020 and 2021, Black women's state legislative representation increased, though not as much as it did after the 2018 election. Black women reached a record high in state legislative representation in 2021.

- Despite being 7.8% of the population, Black women are less than 5% of officeholders elected to statewide executive offices, Congress, and state legislatures. They are 8 of the mayors in the nation's 100 most populous cities.

- Black women remain severely underrepresented as officeholders at the statewide executive level, holding just 1.9% of these positions.



- Just 17 Black women have ever held statewide elected executive offices, and no Black woman has ever been elected governor despite the first-ever major party nomination of a Black woman for governor in election 2018.

Even where their numbers have increased, there is still vast opportunity for growth in the number of Black women running and winning at all levels of office. The 2022 elections offer an immediate occasion for harnessing Black women's political power both at the ballot box as voters and on the ballot as candidates.



## Black Women in the Federal Executive

**K**amala Harris was sworn in as the first woman, the first Black, and the first South Asian vice president of the United States on January 20, 2021. Her nomination as Joe Biden’s running mate came after her own presidential bid, which she launched in January 2019 and ended in December 2019. Harris was one of six women who sought the Democratic presidential nomination. She joined just two other Black women – Shirley Chisholm (D) and Carol Moseley Braun (D) – who have previously competed for a major-party presidential nomination. Before her presidential bid, Harris served as just the second Black woman in the U.S. Senate (2017-2021). In 2010, she was elected as California’s attorney general, becoming the first Black woman elected statewide in California. Harris served as attorney general from 2011 to 2017.

Black women were critical to the realization and success of the Biden-Harris ticket. As Biden’s nomination became imminent, Black women leaders spearheaded efforts to [lobby](#) for a Black woman running mate. Black women voters were also crucial to the ticket’s success; in addition to leading efforts to combat voter suppression and increase voter turnout, Black women were the most reliable voters for Biden and Harris. More than [two-thirds](#) of Black women turned out to vote in the 2020 presidential election – the third-highest rate of any race-gender group, and [90% or more](#) of Black women voters cast their ballots for the Democratic ticket.

In addition to Harris, Biden selected three Black women to serve in his Cabinet. Former U.S. Representative Marcia Fudge serves as secretary of Housing and Urban Development, Cecilia Rouse serves as the chair of the Council of Economic Advisors, and Linda Thomas-Greenfield serves as U.N. ambassador. Shalanda Young, who was confirmed as deputy director of the Office of Management and Budget, is serving concurrently as the acting director of the Office of Management and Budget. This represents the largest number of Black women serving concurrently in any presidential Cabinet.

# Black Women as Congressional Candidates and Officeholders

**B**lack women ran for Congress in record numbers and were elected to Congress for the first time from two states in election 2020. But the 2020 election revealed the persistent underrepresentation of Black women as U.S. Senate candidates and officeholders. Moreover, Black women's congressional representation remains concentrated among Democrats. More specifically, in a year where Republican women made up the majority of women newcomers to Congress, no Republican women winners were Black.

## Black Women in the 117th Congress

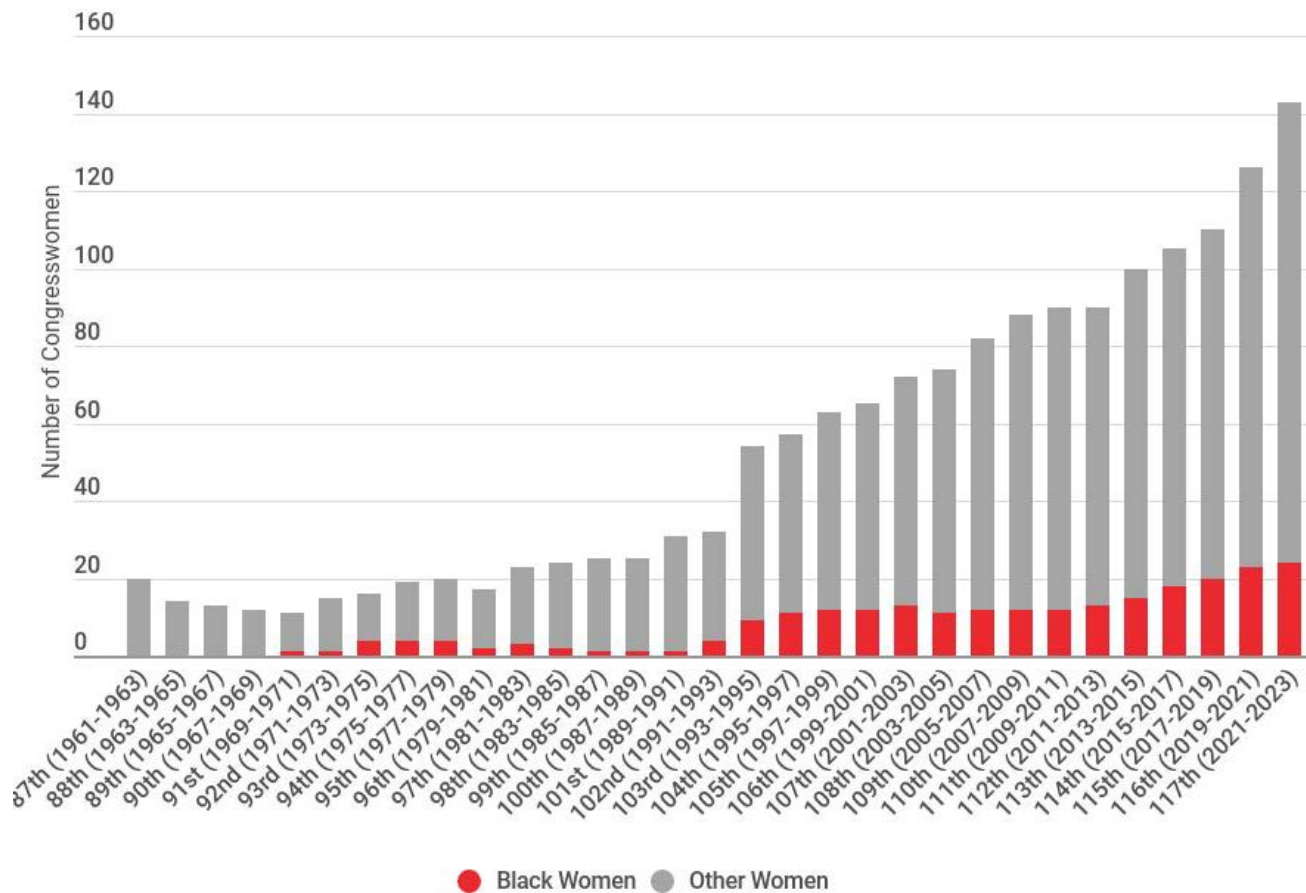
- 24 Black women currently serve in Congress, all serving in the U.S. House.<sup>1</sup> In addition, 2 Black women serve as non-voting delegates. All Black congresswomen are Democrats. For a brief period at the start of the 117th Congress, Black women hit a new record for congressional representation; between January 3, 2021 – when new members were sworn in– and January 18, 2021 – when Kamala Harris resigned her U.S. Senate seat – a record 26 Black women served in Congress. When Representative Marcia Fudge (D-OH) left office in March 2021 to become secretary of Housing and Urban Development, the number of Black women in Congress dropped to 24, which is still one more Black woman than served in Congress at the end of 2020.
- Black women are 4.5% of all members of Congress, 9% of all Democrats in Congress, 16.8% of all women in Congress, and 39.3% of Black members of Congress. They are 5.5% of all members of the House, 20.2% of all women in the House, 41.4% of Black members of the House, and 10.9% of Democrats in the House. No Black women currently serve in the U.S. Senate.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Representative Marilyn Strickland (D-WA) identifies as multi-racial, both Black and Korean-American.

<sup>2</sup> Total number of Black members of Congress from the U.S. House Office of the Historian and Office of the Clerk. Available: <https://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/BAIC/Historical-Data/Black-American-Representatives-and-Senators-by-Congress/>.

# Black Women in Congress

1961-Present



Data do not include non-voting delegates and represent officeholders in the 117th Congress as of September 2021.

■ Since Shirley Chisholm (D-NY) became the first Black woman elected to Congress in 1968 47 Black women have served in Congress from 21 states; 45 (44D, 1R) Black women have served in the House and 2 (2D) Black women have served in the Senate. The only Black Republican woman to serve in Congress was Mia Love (R, UT-04), who served in the U.S. House from 2015 to 2019.

■ Two Black women, Shontel Brown (D) and Laverne Gore (R), will compete on November 2, 2021 to fill Secretary Fudge’s U.S. House seat in Ohio’s 11th congressional district. A victory for either woman will increase the number of Black women in the Congress to 25, the percentage of Black women in Congress to 4.7%, and the total number of Black women who have ever served in Congress to 48.

■ Three Black women – Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick, Barbara Sharief, and Priscilla Taylor – are also running in the November 2, 2021 Democratic primary to compete in the January 11, 2022 special election for Florida’s 20th congressional district. If successful, they would complete the remainder of former U.S. Representative Alcee Hastings’ (D) term.



**Cori Bush (D, MO-01)**



**Marilyn Strickland (D, WA-10)**



**Nikema Williams (D, GA-05)**

## **Black Women as Congressional Candidates in Election 2020**

### *U.S. House*

■ 117 (89D, 28R) Black women ran for the U.S. House in 2020, representing 20.1% of all women House candidates and 5.8% of all House candidates (women and men) in 2020.

- This marks the highest number of Black women U.S. House candidates since CAWP has kept this data (from 2004 to present); the next highest number of Black women candidates was 80 in 2018.
- Black women were 25% of Democratic women candidates and 9.4% of all Democratic candidates for the U.S. House in 2020. They were 12.3% of Republican women candidates, but just 2.6% of all Republicans who ran for the U.S. House in 2020.

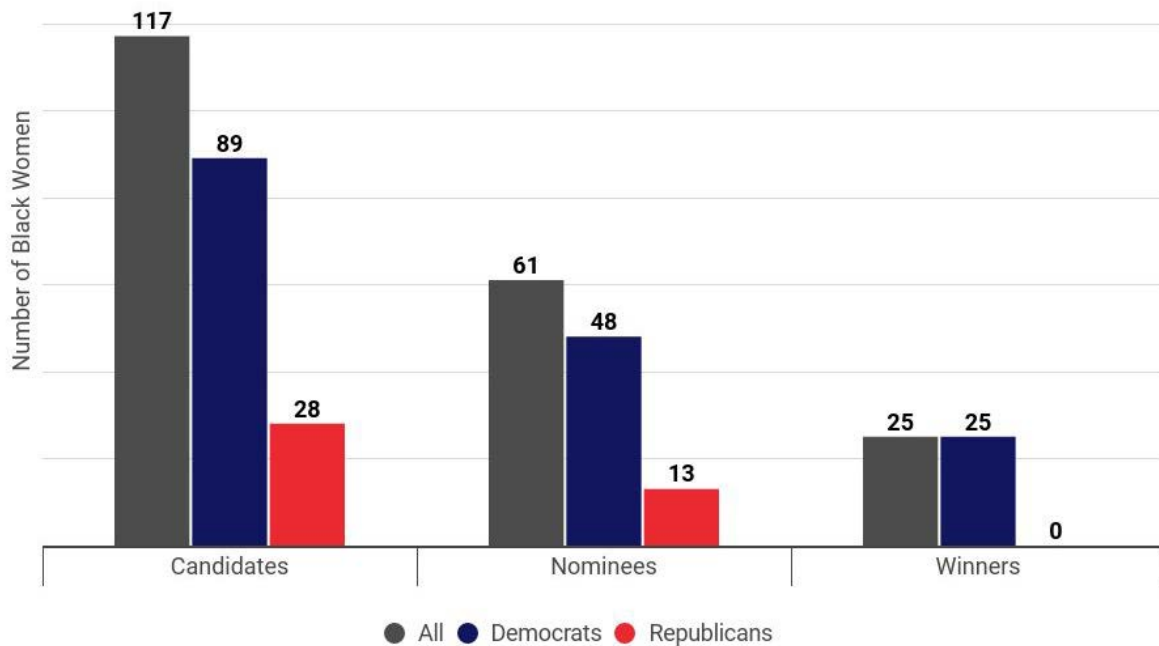
■ 61 (48D, 13R) Black women won nominations for the U.S. House in 2020, representing 20.5% of all women nominees and 7.2% of all nominees (women and men) who made it to the general election for House seats in 2020.

- This also marks the highest number of Black women U.S. House nominees since CAWP has kept this data (from 2004 to present); the next highest number of Black women nominees was 41 in 2018.
- Black women were 23.5% of Democratic women nominees and 11.2% of all Democratic nominees for the U.S. House in 2020. They were 13.8% of Republican women House nominees, but just 3.1% of all Republican House nominees in 2018.

■ 25 Black women – all Democrats – won full terms for U.S. House seats in the 2020 election, including three non-incumbents. The new Black women members of Congress include:

- **Cori Bush (D, MO-01)**, who is the first Black woman and the first woman of color in Congress from Missouri. Bush is a registered nurse and pastor, and she has been active in Black Lives Matter activism since 2014. After losing her primary bid against incumbent Representative William “Lacy” Clay for the same seat in 2018, Bush defeated Clay by about three points in the 2020 Democratic primary.
- **Marilyn Strickland (D, WA-10)**, who is the first Black woman in Congress from Washington state. Strickland identifies as multi-racial — both Black and Korean-American. Prior to serving in Congress, Strickland served as Mayor of Tacoma, Washington (2010-2018). Strickland is one of the first three Korean-American women to serve in the U.S. Congress.
- **Nikema Williams (D, GA-05)**, who replaced long-time congressman and civil rights icon John Lewis in the U.S. House. Upon Lewis’ death in July 2020, Williams was selected to replace him on the general election ballot. Prior to serving in Congress, Williams served as a member of the Georgia State Senate (2017-2020) and chair of the Georgia Democratic Party (2013, 2019-Present).

## Black Women Candidates, Nominees, and Winners U.S. House, 2020



Counts include only major-party candidates and do not include candidates for non-voting positions in the U.S. House.

■ Black women were 21% of all women House winners and 5.7% of all House winners (women and men) in election 2020. They were 28.1% of Democratic women and 11.3% of all Democrats who won House seats in 2020 but 0% of Republican winners.

■ One of three non-incumbent Black women to win U.S. House seats – Marilyn Strickland (D, WA-10) – won in a majority-white district, challenging doubts about Black women’s viability outside of majority-minority electorates. In 2020 overall, 6 of 25 Black women winners were successful in majority-white districts. These data should encourage candidates and practitioners alike to expand perceptions of opportune sites for Black women’s electoral success.

### U.S. Senate

■ 13 (9D, 4R) Black women ran for the U.S. Senate in 2020, representing 21.7% of all women Senate candidates and 5.2% of all Senate candidates (women and men) in 2020.

- Black women were 24.3% of Democratic women candidates and 7.7% of all Democratic candidates for the U.S. Senate in 2020. They were 17.4% of Republican women candidates, but just 3% of all Republicans who ran for the U.S. Senate in 2020.

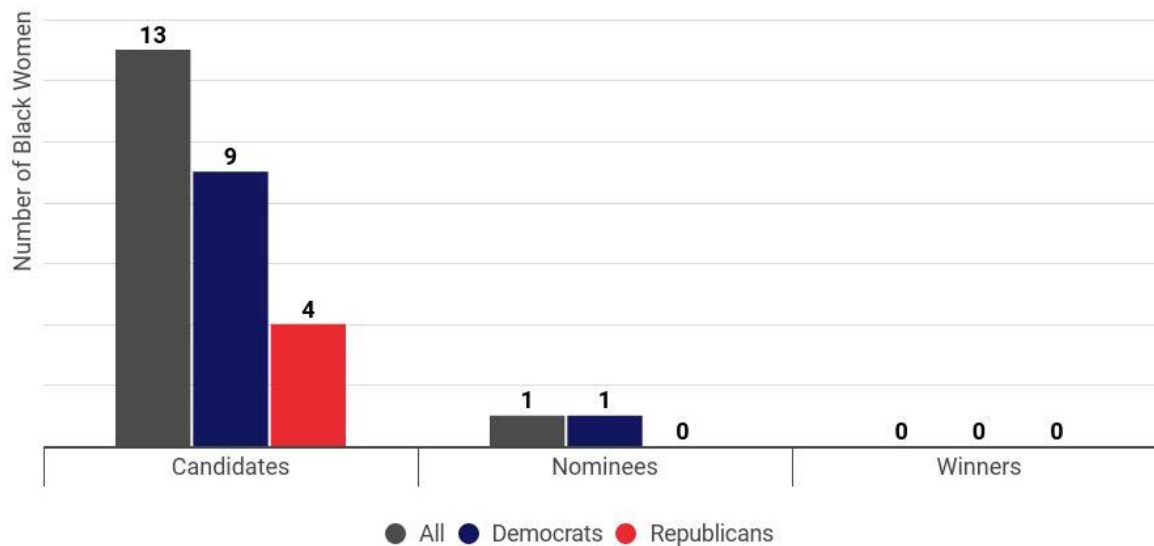
■ There was just one Black woman nominee for the U.S. Senate in 2020: Marquita Bradshaw (D-TN) was the Democratic nominee in Tennessee’s open-seat contest for the U.S. Senate. She was defeated in the general election.

■ Kamala Harris (D-CA), the only Black woman senator as of November 2020, was not up for re-election last year. However, due to her ascension to the vice presidency, no Black women serve in the U.S. Senate.



## Black Women Candidates, Nominees, and Winners

### U.S. Senate, 2020



Counts include only major-party candidates.

### Black Women as Congressional Candidates in Election 2022

The record high for Black women major-party candidates for U.S. Senate is 13, set in the 2020 election. As of September 2021, more than that many Black women have already announced major-party Senate bids, indicating that a new record for Black women candidates for the U.S. Senate will be set in the 2022 cycle. At least four Black women have announced candidacies in North Carolina's open-seat Senate contest, including former Chief Justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court Cheri Beasley (D), Tyron, NC Mayor Pro Tempore Chrelle Booker (D), scholar Constance Johnson (D), and former North Carolina State Senator Erica Smith (D). Veteran and conservative commentator Kathy Barnette (R-PA), consumer protection attorney and organizer Morgan Harper (D-OH), and college professor Gena Ross (D-MO) are seeking party nominations for open seats in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Missouri, respectively. U.S. Representative Val Demings (D-FL) is waging one of the most high-profile challenges to an incumbent in 2022, seeking the Democratic nomination to challenge Senator Marco Rubio (R-FL) in Florida's U.S. Senate election. Black women are also running in both Indiana and South Carolina as Democrats seeking their party's nomination to challenge sitting Republican incumbent senators. And Black women have also announced candidacies as primary or potential general election challengers in Arkansas, California, Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, and Wisconsin.



Imperfect though we may be, I believe we are a great country... And part of what makes us great are our democratic institutions that protect our fundamental ideals – freedom of religion and the rule of law, protection from discrimination based on national origin, freedom of the press, and a 200-year history as a nation built by immigrants.”

*– U.S. Senator Kamala Harris (D-CA),  
a child of two immigrant parents*

The record high for Black women major-party candidates for U.S. House is 117, set in the 2020 election. The number of Black women who have already announced House candidacies with more than a year until Election Day remains short of that record as of September 2021 but is likely to increase over the coming months. Among the Black women who have already announced are two sitting state legislators; Florida State Representative Michele Rayner (D) is running for the open seat (FL-13) created by incumbent Representative Charlie Crist’s decision to run for governor, and Kentucky State Representative Attica Scott (D) is running for the open seat (KY-3) created by incumbent Representative John Yarmuth’s (D-KY) decision to retire. If successful, Scott would be the first Black woman to represent Kentucky in Congress. Other announced candidates are seeking to become the first Black women to represent Arkansas, Iowa, Oregon, and Tennessee in Congress. At least 12 Black Republican women have announced House candidacies. No Black Republican women currently serve in Congress.

# Black Women as Statewide Elected Executive Candidates and Officeholders

**S**tatewide elected executive offices, of which there are 310 nationwide, remain the site for Black women's starkest underrepresentation. Even though more than one-third of all Black women who have ever held statewide elected executive offices are currently serving, Black women still hold less than 2% of all these posts across the United States. There remains a ceiling on Black women's representation at the statewide executive level as no Black woman has ever served as governor. It was not until 2018 that Stacey Abrams (D-GA) became the first Black woman major-party nominee for governor in the U.S. Pushing back against doubts about Black women's viability in statewide and executive offices is important to motivating potential candidates, expanding recruitment of Black women, and proving Black women's capacity for success at this level.

## Black Women in Statewide Elected Executive Office in 2021

- 6 Black women currently serve in statewide elected executive office; Sheila Oliver (D) is the lieutenant governor of New Jersey, Juliana Stratton (D) is the lieutenant governor of Illinois, Sabina Matos (D) is the lieutenant governor of Rhode Island, Letitia "Tish" James (D) is the attorney general of New York, Shirley Weber (D) is the secretary of state of California, and Sandra Kennedy (D) is a corporation commissioner in Arizona.<sup>3</sup> Together, these women represent 6.4% (6 of 94) of all women statewide elected executive officials and 1.9% (6 of 310) of all statewide elected executive officials in the United States.
- Just 17 Black women have ever held statewide elected executive offices in 14 states.
- No Black woman has ever been elected governor.

<sup>3</sup> Lieutenant Governor Sabina Matos (D-RI) identifies as Afro-Latina.



Shirley Chisholm became the first Black woman elected to Congress 52 years ago. Today, I became the first Black woman elected to represent Missouri in Congress. It's 2020. I shouldn't be the first, but I am honored to carry this responsibility."

– U.S. Representative Cori Bush (D-MO)

## Black Women Who Have Ever Held Statewide Elected Executive Office

Name	State	Office	Party	Dates of Service
Velvalea "Vel" Phillips	WI	Secretary of State	D	1979-1983
Pamela Carter	IN	Attorney General	D	1993-1997
Vikki Buckley	CO	Secretary of State	R	1995-1999
Denise Nappier	CT	State Treasurer	D	1999-2019
Karen Freeman-Wilson	IN	Attorney General	D	2000-2001
Jennette Bradley	OH	Lieutenant Governor	R	2003-2005
Jennette Bradley	OH	State Treasurer	R	2005-2007
Velda Jones Potter	DE	State Treasurer	D	2009-2011
Sandra D. Kennedy	AZ	Corporation Commissioner	D	2009-2013; 2019-Present
Jennifer Carroll	FL	Lieutenant Governor	R	2011-2013
Kamala Harris	CA	Attorney General	D	2011-2017
Jenean Hampton	KY	Lieutenant Governor	R	2015-2019
Sheila Oliver	NJ	Lieutenant Governor	D	2018-Present
Letitia "Tish" James	NY	Attorney General	D	2019-Present
Juliana Stratton	IL	Lieutenant Governor	D	2019-Present
Carolyn Stanford Taylor	WI	Superintendent of Public Instruction	D	2019-2021
Shirley Weber	CA	Secretary of State	D	2021-Present
Sabina Matos	RI	Lieutenant Governor	D	2021-Present

## Black Women as Candidates for Statewide Elected Executive Office in 2020 and 2021

■ 11 (9D, 2R) Black women were candidates for statewide elected executive offices in 2020, representing 13.8% of all women candidates and 3.5% of all candidates (men and women) who ran at this level of office in 2020.

- Black women were 20.5% of Democratic women candidates and 6.7% of all Democratic candidates for statewide elected executive offices in 2020. They were 5.9% of Republican women candidates and 1.2% of all Republicans who ran for statewide elected executive offices in 2020.

■ 5 (4D, 1R) Black women won nominations for statewide elected executive offices in 2020, representing 10.6% of all women nominees and 3.5% of all nominees (men and women) who made it to the general election at this level of office in 2020.

- Black women were 14.3% of Democratic women candidates and 5.9% of all Democratic nominees for statewide elected executive offices in 2020. They were 5.9% of Republican women nominees and 1.4% of all Republican nominees for statewide elected executive offices in 2020.

■ No Black women won statewide executive elections in 2020. However, two Black women were appointed to statewide elective executive offices in early 2021. Shirley Weber (D-CA) was appointed as California's secretary of state after the sitting officeholder was selected to fill Kamala Harris' seat in the U.S. Senate. Sabina Matos (D-RI) – who is Afro-Latina – became lieutenant governor of Rhode Island after the sitting officeholder ascended to the governorship due to Gina Raimondo's appointment to the Biden Cabinet.

■ In 2021, two Black women – State Delegate Jennifer Carroll Foy (D) and State Senator Jennifer McClellan (D) – ran for the Democratic nomination for governor of Virginia. They were defeated by former Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe. Two Black women – State Delegate Hala Ayala (D), who identifies as Afro-Latina, Lebanese, and Irish, and former State Delegate Winsome Sears (R) – are major-party nominees for lieutenant governor. Either woman will become the first woman of color elected statewide in Virginia.

## Black Women as Candidates for Statewide Elected Executive Office in 2022

The record high for Black women major-party candidates for statewide elected executive office is 35, set in the 2018 election. The number of Black women who have already announced statewide executive candidacies with about a year until Election Day remains short of that record but is likely to increase. However, it appears likely that a record number of Black women will run for governor – an office no Black woman has ever held – in the 2022 election. Six Black women ran for governor in 2018, a record high. As of September 2021, at least 5 Black women have announced gubernatorial candidacies in this cycle. They include State Senator Mia McLeod (D-SC), former State Senator Connie Johnson (D-OK), Harvard Professor Danielle Allen (D-MA), Democratic activist and businessowner Deidre DeJear (D-IA), and educator Deirdre Gilbert (D-TX). All of these announced candidates – if they remain in their contests – are seeking to challenge incumbent Republican governors. If Stacey Abrams (D-GA) chooses to run again in 2022, she would also challenge Republican incumbent Governor Brian Kemp.



It is the highest honor to officially begin my time as the Attorney General for the great state of New York. I made a commitment to use the rule of law to protect the rights and advance the interests of all New Yorkers, and I will never waver in upholding that promise. New Yorkers in every corner of our state must know that they have a champion fighting for them every day.”

– Attorney General Tish James (D-NY)

# Black Women as State Legislative Candidates and Officeholders

**B**lack women reached a record high in state legislative representation in 2021, thanks to notable gains as a result of the 2020 election. Still, there remain significant opportunities for growth in Black women’s state legislative representation, as well as better matching between Black women’s proportion of state legislatures and proportion of state populations. Black women’s representation at this level of office has implications for state-level policymaking and for building a larger pool of potential candidates for higher offices.

## Black Women in State Legislatures in 2021

- As of September 2021, 354 (351D, 3R) Black women serve as state legislators nationwide, including 272 (270D, 2R) Black women members of state houses and 82 (81D, 1R) Black women members of state senates.
- Black women are 4.8% of all state legislators and 15.5% of all women state legislators nationwide. They are 5% of members of state houses and 15.7% of women in state houses; 4.2% of state senators and 14.7% of women state senators. Black women are 10.7% of all Democratic state legislators; and 0.1% of all Republican state legislators in the U.S.<sup>4</sup>
- Within the past two decades, Black women have increased their representation as a percentage of all legislators from 2.6% in 2001 to 4.8% in 2021. In the same period, Black women have become a larger proportion of all women state legislators; they were 11.3% of women state legislators in 2001 and are 15.5% of all women state legislators in 2021.
- 12 (12D) Black women hold state legislative leadership posts (including speaker, speaker pro tem, majority leader, minority leader) in fall 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Partisan breakdown of all state legislators from the National Conference of State Legislatures. Available: <https://www.ncsl.org/research/about-state-legislatures/partisan-composition.aspx> (accessed September 2021).

# Black Women in State Legislatures 2021

State	Number of Black Women	Number of Women	Number of State Legislators	Black Women as Percent of All Women State Legislators	Black Women as Percent of All State Legislators
AK	1	18	60	5.6%	1.7%
AL	15	23	140	65.2%	10.7%
AR	7	31	135	22.6%	5.2%
AZ	0	39	90	0.0%	0.0%
CA	4	39	120	10.3%	3.3%
CO	6	45	100	13.3%	6.0%
CT	6	63	187	9.5%	3.2%
DE	8	19	62	42.1%	12.9%
FL	14	55	160	25.5%	8.8%
GA	40	79	236	50.6%	16.9%
HI	0	26	76	0.0%	0.0%
IA	2	43	150	4.7%	1.3%
ID	0	33	105	0.0%	0.0%
IL	14	71	177	19.7%	7.9%
IN	7	37	150	18.9%	4.7%
KS	4	49	165	8.2%	2.4%
KY	2	37	138	5.4%	1.4%
LA	8	27	144	29.6%	5.6%
MA	4	62	200	6.5%	2.0%
MD	30	78	188	38.5%	16.0%
ME	1	81	186	1.2%	0.5%
MI	13	53	148	24.5%	8.8%
MN	5	72	201	6.9%	2.5%
MO	9	52	197	17.3%	4.6%
MS	12	27	174	44.4%	6.9%
MT	0	49	150	0.0%	0.0%
NC	15	45	170	33.3%	8.8%
ND	0	32	141	0.0%	0.0%
NE	0	13	49	0.0%	0.0%
NH	3	151	424	2.0%	0.7%
NJ	11	37	120	29.7%	9.2%
NM	2	49	112	4.1%	1.8%
NV	7	38	63	18.4%	11.1%
NY	22	73	213	30.1%	10.3%
OH	8	40	132	20.0%	6.1%
OK	3	31	149	9.7%	2.0%
OR	1	41	90	2.4%	1.1%
PA	8	74	253	10.8%	3.2%
RI	7	50	113	14.0%	6.2%
SC	13	30	170	43.3%	7.6%
SD	0	30	105	0.0%	0.0%
TN	6	23	132	26.1%	4.5%
TX	10	48	181	20.8%	5.5%
UT	1	25	104	4.0%	1.0%
VA	12	42	140	28.6%	8.6%
VT	0	76	180	0.0%	0.0%
WA	6	61	147	9.8%	4.1%
WI	5	41	132	12.2%	3.8%
WV	1	16	134	6.3%	0.7%
WY	1	16	90	6.3%	1.1%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>354</b>	<b>2290</b>	<b>7383</b>	<b>15.5%</b>	<b>4.8%</b>

\*Data as of September 2021

## Black Women as State Legislative Candidates in 2020 and 2021

- The net gain for Black women in state legislative representation between Election Day 2020 and January 2021 was small, with Black women moving from 4.4% to 4.7% of all state legislators. Still, 59 (59D) non-incumbent Black women won 2020 contests to take state legislative office at the start of 2021.
- Between 2020 and 2021, two states – Arizona and Idaho – returned to having no Black women in their state legislatures due to electoral loss and retirement.
- While Black women gained representation at the state legislative level between 2020 and 2021, eight states currently have no Black women state legislators and another 14 states have fewer than 5 Black women in their state legislatures.
- State legislative elections will be held in New Jersey and Virginia on November 2, 2021, offering an immediate opportunity for change in Black women’s state legislative representation. Jennifer Carroll Foy resigned her seat in the Virginia House of Delegates to run for the Democratic nomination for governor in 2021.

## Black Women as State Legislative Candidates in 2022

In 2022, elections will be held for seats in 88 state legislative chambers across 46 states. While it is too early to predict the representation of Black women on state legislative ballots, the distinct dynamics of the cycle are worth noting. The 2022 elections will be conducted using new electoral maps in most states, shaping opportunities and competitiveness in state legislative elections.

# Black Women as Mayoral Candidates and Officeholders

**B**lack women now hold the top executive post in 8 of the 100 most populous cities, matching their proportion of the U.S. population. All but one of the current big-city Black women mayors have taken office in the past four years, with two Black women taking office in the last year alone. While Black women’s executive representation remains low at the statewide level, the success for Black women executives in major U.S. cities is important in re-imagining executive political leadership across all levels.

## Black Women Mayors in 2021

- Eight Black women currently serve as mayors of the top 100 most populous cities in the U.S.: Muriel Bowser (Washington, DC), Vi Alexander Lyles (Charlotte, NC), Keisha Lance Bottoms (Atlanta, GA), LaToya Cantrell (New Orleans, LA), London Breed (San Francisco, CA), Lori Lightfoot (Chicago, IL), Kim Janey (Boston, MA), and Tishaura Jones (St. Louis, MO).<sup>5</sup>
- Just one Black woman served as mayor of one of the top 100 most populous cities in the United States when we released our first report on the status of Black women in American politics in June 2014. Since then, 12 more Black women have served as big-city mayors.

<sup>5</sup> Kim Janey serves as acting mayor of Boston. She ran unsuccessfully for a full term as mayor in this year’s mayoral election.





I will not stay silent when I spot racism. I will not stay silent when I spot homophobia or transphobia. I will not stay silent when I spot xenophobia. I will not stay silent when I spot religious intolerance. I will not stay silent when I spot any injustice.”

– Mayor Tishaura O. Jones (St. Louis, MO)

## Black Women as Mayoral Candidates in 2021

- Black women became mayors in two of the nation’s 100 largest cities (by population) in 2021.
  - Kim Janey (D) became the first woman and first Black mayor of Boston, MA on March 24, 2021. She serves as acting mayor, ascending to the role after former Mayor Marty Walsh entered the Biden administration. Janey ran for a full term as mayor, but she was defeated in a preliminary election in September 2021. Also defeated in that election was Boston City Councilwoman Andrea Campbell.
  - Tishaura Jones (D) was elected mayor of St. Louis, MO on April 6, 2021 and was sworn in on April 20, 2021. She is the first Black woman and the second woman to serve as St. Louis’ mayor.
- Multiple Black women, including Dianna Morales, Jocelyn Taylor, and Maya Wiley, were defeated in the Democratic primary for mayor of New York, NY in June 2021.
- Multiple Black women will be on big-city mayoral general election ballots on November 2, 2021.
  - India Walton (D) won the Democratic primary to become mayor of Buffalo, NY in June 2021. She is favored to win in the general election on November 2, 2021. She defeated her party’s four-term incumbent mayor in the primary election and he is waging a write-in campaign against her in the general election.
  - Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms (D) has decided not to run for re-election this year in Atlanta, GA. Two Black women, Atlanta City Council President Felicia Moore and Kirsten Elise Dunn, are running to replace her in the November 2, 2021 election.
  - Dora Jones-Robinson is running in St. Paul, MN and Elaine O’Neal is the lone active candidate on the ballot in Durham, NC in November 2, 2021 mayoral elections.
- Mayor LaToya Cantrell (D) is running for re-election in New Orleans, LA on November 13, 2021.

## Black Women as Mayoral Candidates in 2022

Charlotte, NC Mayor Vi Lyles is expected to campaign to retain her post in 2022. Black women may also increase their numbers among big-city mayors, with major mayoral contests being held nationwide next year. Especially notable is current U.S. Representative Karen Bass’ (D-CA) recent announcement that she is running for Mayor of Los Angeles, CA in 2022 instead of running for re-election to the U.S. House.

# Looking Ahead

**B**lack women continued to close the gap between their representation in the population and their power in elected office in 2020, most notably breaking a glass ceiling at the federal executive level. Black women also proved again to be among the most reliable and important voters and mobilizers for Democratic candidates in 2020. In what will be another pivotal election in 2022, Black women will leverage that political power as both voters and candidates. Already, the numbers of Black women declaring candidacies for statewide contests – especially for U.S. Senate and governor – are notable and necessary to remedy the complete lack of representation of Black women in these offices.

Our work to ensure that Black women’s political power reflects their presence and power in American society will persist in 2022 and beyond. Our organizations and others like ours will continue our efforts to:

- Harness the energy of Black women engaged in advocacy, community engagement, and public leadership to demand and support Black women candidates for elected office.
- Expand the sites for recruitment and support of Black women candidates to non-majority minority districts at the state and federal level, U.S. Senate seats, and statewide elected executive offices.
- Address barriers that impede Black women’s entry or success in political institutions, whether they be party gatekeepers, disparities in financial resources, or constrained ideals of what it looks like to be a candidate or officeholder.

To learn more and to join in these efforts, visit [Higher Heights](#) and the [Center for American Women and Politics](#), follow us on social media, and sign up for our newsletters.

