



Black Women in American Politics 2019

 **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

About the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP)

The Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP), a unit of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, is nationally recognized as the leading source of scholarly research and current data about American women's political participation. Its mission is to promote greater knowledge and understanding about women's participation in politics and government and to enhance women's influence and leadership in public life. CAWP's education and outreach programs translate research findings into action, addressing women's under-representation in political leadership with effective, imaginative programs serving a variety of audiences. As the world has watched Americans considering female candidates for the nation's highest offices, CAWP's nearly 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

The 2018 elections ushered in a new class of women officeholders across all levels of office. Black women shared in those successes, while also contributing significantly as voters to overall gains for Democratic candidates. As we look ahead to another monumental election cycle in 2020, it's important to take stock of Black women's political successes, the persistent hurdles they faced in the 2018 cycle, 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 December 2019, one year ahead of the 2020 election. As the numbers below illustrate:

- A record number of Black women currently serve in Congress, after a record number of women won nominations for the U.S. House in the 2018 election.
- Between 2018 and 2019, Black women saw the largest gain in representation at the state legislative level since 1994. In 2019, a record number of Black women serve in state legislative office.
- Black women made important and historic gains in the 2018 election, but the resulting changes in their political representation remain incremental.



“I stand before you today to repudiate the ridiculous notion that the American people will not vote for qualified candidates simply because he is not white or because she is not a male.”

— *Congresswoman Shirely Chisholm*



■ While the number of Black women in statewide elected executive office doubled between 2018 and 2019 (from three to six), Black women remain severely underrepresented as officeholders at the statewide executive level, holding just 1.9% of these positions as of November 2019. Just 15 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. These data illuminate that opportunity to expand Black women’s political power, in addition to raising questions about what motivates Black women to run and what conditions facilitate or hinder their success. In an election year where offices will be contested at all levels, evaluating the current status and experiences of Black women in American politics is key to promoting progress.

Harnessing Black women’s political power is also done at the ballot box. Black women voters will be essential to Democrats’ chances of winning back the White House in 2020. As both candidates and voters, Black women are poised to continue to harness and demand political power in another historic election year.





Black Women as Congressional Candidates and Officeholders

A record number of Black women serve in Congress as a result of the 2018 election, in which Black women made history as nominees and winners. Black women were elected to Congress for the first time from 3 states in election 2018, and 4 of 5 freshman Black women members of the 116th Congress (2019-2021) were elected in majority-White districts. While 2018 highlighted new sites for Black women's advancement in congressional representation, it also revealed the persistent underrepresentation of Black women as U.S. Senate candidates and officeholders. Moreover, Black women's congressional representation remains concentrated among Democrats. In 2018, the only Black Republican woman to serve in Congress was defeated in her bid for re-election to the U.S. House.

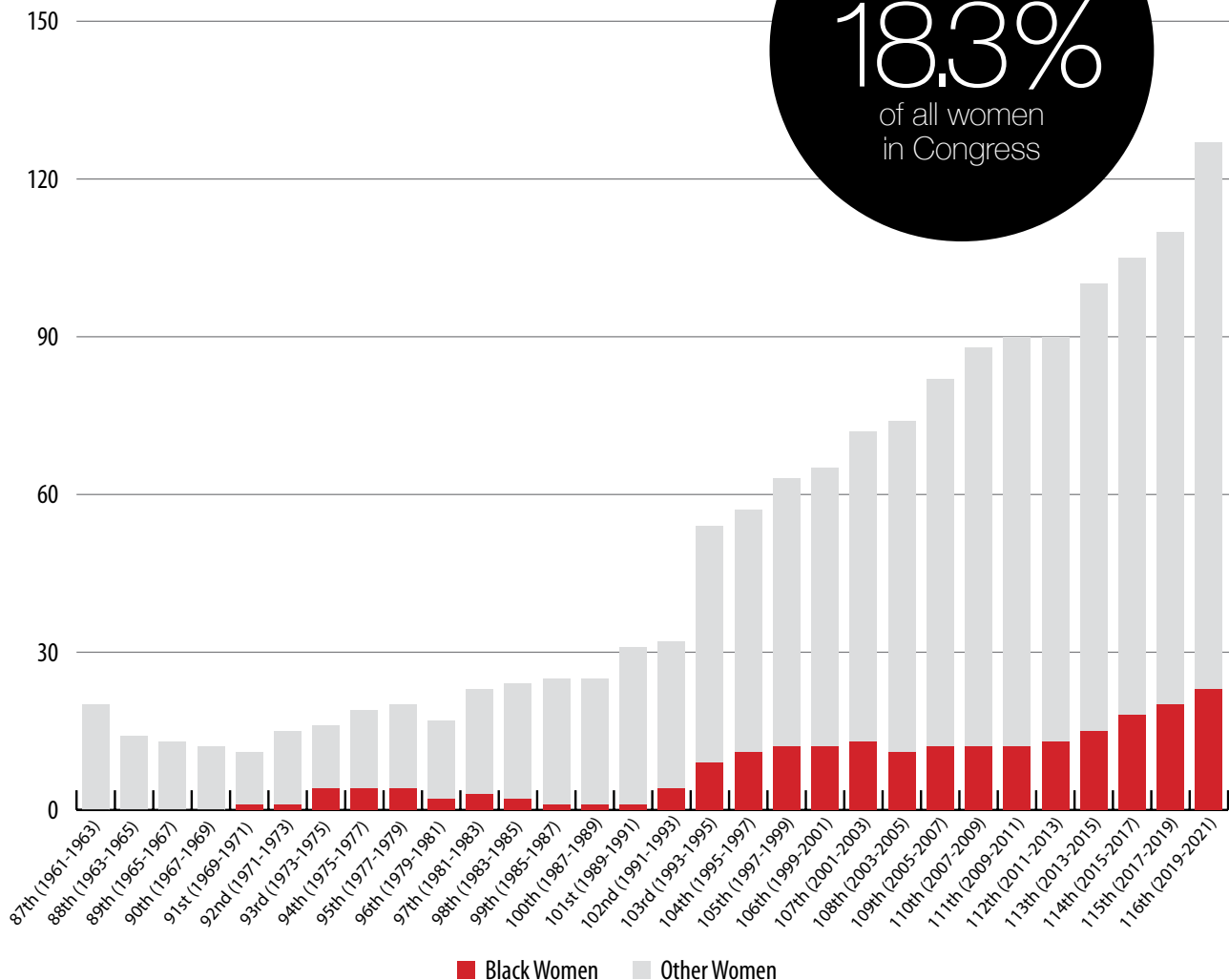
Black Women in the 116th Congress

■ 23 Black women currently serve in Congress, including 22 Black women representatives and 1 Black woman senator.¹ In addition, 2 Black women serve as non-voting delegates. All Black congresswomen are Democrats.

■ Black women are 4.3% of all members of Congress, 8.3% of all Democrats in Congress, 18.3% of all women in Congress, and 41.8% of Black members of Congress. They are 5.1% of all members of the House, 21.8% of all women in the House, and 42.3% of Black members of the House; 1% of all members of the Senate, 4% of all women in the Senate, and 33.3% of Black members of the Senate; and 9.4% of Democrats in the House and 2.2% of Democrats in the Senate.²

■ Since Shirley Chisholm (D-NY) became the first Black woman elected to Congress in 1968, 44 Black women have served in Congress from 19 states; 42 (41D, 1R) Black women have served in the House and 2 (2D) Black women have served in the Senate.

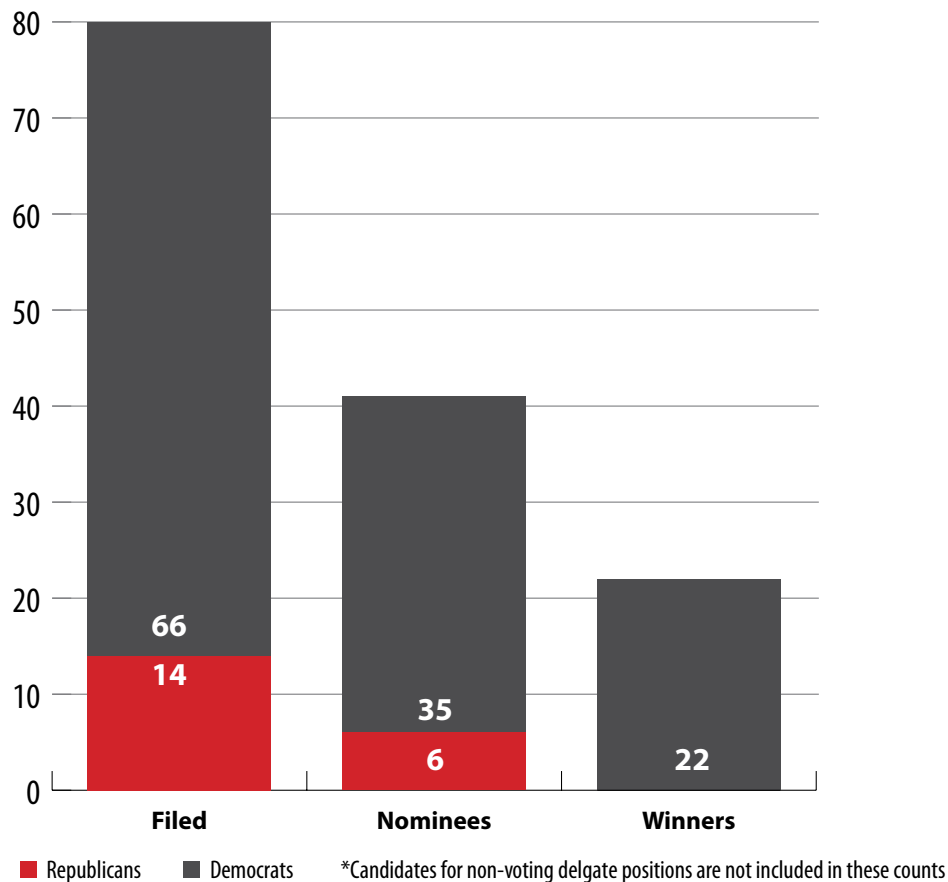
Black Women in Congress 1961-Present



¹Senator Kamala Harris (D-CA) identifies as multi-racial, both African American and Asian American.

²These data do not include non-voting delegates.

Black Women Candidates for the U.S. House 2018



Black Women As Congressional Candidates in Election 2018

U.S. House

■ 80 (66D, 14R) Black women ran for the U.S. House in 2018, representing 16.8% of all women House candidates and 4.1% of all House candidates (women and men) in 2018.

- Black women were 18.5% of Democratic women candidates and 6% of all Democratic candidates for the U.S. House in 2018. They were 11.7% of Republican women candidates, but just 1.6% of all Republicans who ran for the U.S. House in 2018.

■ 41 (35D, 6R) Black women won nominations for the U.S. House in 2018, representing 17.5% of all women nominees and 5% of all nominees (women and men) who made it to the general election for House seats in 2018.

- 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 29 in 2014.
- Black women were 19.2% of Democratic women nominees and 8.2% of all Democratic nominees for the U.S. House in 2018. They were 11.5% of Republican women House nominees, but just 1.5% of all Republican House nominees in 2018.

■ 22 Black women – all Democrats – won full terms for U.S. House seats in the 2018 election, including 5 non-incumbents. In addition, Brenda Jones (D-MI13) won a special election to fill out the remainder of Rep. John Conyers' term in the 115th Congress (ending January 2019). Among these winners were:



Pressley



Hayes



Omar



McBath



Underwood

- The first Black congresswomen from Connecticut (Jahana Hayes), Massachusetts (Ayanna Pressley), and Minnesota (Ilhan Omar).
- One of the first Muslim women elected to Congress: Ilhan Omar (D-MN05).
- Two of 21 Democratic women who defeated Republican incumbents in 2018: Lucy McBath (D-GA06) and Lauren Underwood (D-IL14)

■ Black women were 21.6% of all women House winners and 5.1% of all House winners (women and men) in election 2018. They were 24.7% of Democratic women and 9.4% of all Democrats who won House seats in 2018, but 0% of Republican winners.

- In 2018, the only Black Republican woman serving in the U.S. House – Mia Love (R-UT04) – was defeated in the general election.

■ 4 of the 5 non-incumbent Black women to win U.S. House seats won in majority-White districts, challenging doubts about Black women’s viability outside of majority-minority electorates. In contrast, just 1 of 17 incumbent Black women House members won re-election in a majority-White district.³ This shift in where Black women are winning should encourage candidates and practitioners alike to expand perceptions of opportune sites for Black women’s electoral success.

U.S. Senate

■ 8 (6D, 2R) Black women ran for the U.S. Senate in 2018, representing 15.1% of all women Senate candidates and 3.1% of all Senate candidates (women and men) in 2018.

- Black women were 19.4% of Democratic women candidates and 6.3% of all Democratic candidates for the U.S. Senate in 2018. They were 9.1% of Republican women candidates, but just 1.3% of all Republicans who ran for the U.S. Senate in 2018.

■ There were no Black women nominees for the U.S. Senate in 2018, ensuring that the number of Black women Senators to ever serve would stand at two. That includes current Senator Kamala Harris (D-CA), who was not up for re-election in 2018.

- Including 2018, there were no Black women nominees for the U.S. Senate in four of the past seven congressional election cycles (since 2004).

³This does not include Representative Joyce Beatty (D-OH), whose district is 49.9% White, according to the U.S. Census 1-year estimates for 2017 from the American Community Survey.



Black Women as Statewide Elected Executive Candidates and Officeholders

Statewide elected executive offices, of which there are 311 nationwide, remain the site for Black women's starkest underrepresentation. Even though 40% of all Black women who have ever held statewide elected executive offices were serving in 2019, Black women 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, but Stacey Abrams (D-GA) placed a crack in that ceiling in election 2018 by becoming the first Black woman nominee for governor in the U.S. Pushing back against doubts of 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.



Hampton



Oliver



Stratton



James



Stanford Taylor



Kennedy

Black Women in Statewide Elected Executive Office in 2019

- 6 Black women served in statewide elected executive office as of November 2019; Jenean Hampton (R) was the Lieutenant Governor of Kentucky (her term ended on December 10, 2019), Sheila Oliver (D) is the Lieutenant Governor of New Jersey, Juliana Stratton (D) is the Lieutenant Governor of Illinois, Letitia "Tish" James (D) is the Attorney General of New York, Carolyn Stanford Taylor (D) is the Superintendent of Public Instruction in Wisconsin, and Sandra Kennedy (D) is a Corporation Commissioner in Arizona. Together, these women represented 6.6% (6 of 91) of all women statewide elected executive officials and 1.9% (6 of 311) of all statewide elected executive officials in the United States.
- Just 15 Black women have ever held statewide elected executive offices in 13 states.
- No Black woman has ever been elected governor.

Black Women Who Have Ever Held Statewide Elected Executive Office

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



Black Women as Candidates for Statewide Elected Executive Office in 2018

■ 35 (32D, 3R) Black women were candidates for statewide elected executive offices in 2018, representing 14.1% of all women candidates and 4% of all candidates (men and women) who ran at this level of office in 2018.

- Black women were 21.6% of Democratic women candidates and 7.5% of all Democratic candidates for statewide elected executive offices in 2018. In contrast, they were just 3% of Republican women candidates and less than 1% of all Republicans who ran for statewide elected executive offices in 2018.

■ 16 (15D, 1R) Black women won nominations for statewide elected executive offices in 2018, representing 12.3% of all women nominees and 4% of all nominees (men and women) who made it to the general election at this level of office in 2018.

- Black women were 18.1% of Democratic women candidates and 7.8% of all Democratic nominees for statewide elected executive offices in 2018. In contrast, they were just 2.2% of Republican women nominees and less than 1% of all Republican nominees for statewide elected executive offices in 2018.

- Stacey Abrams (D-GA) made history as the first Black woman to win a major party nomination for governor in 2018.

■ Just 3 Black women – all Democrats – won statewide executive elections in 2018: Lieutenant Governor Julianna Stratton (D-IL) and Attorney General Letitia “Tish” James (D-NY) became the first Black women elected in statewide executive contests in their respective states, and Sandra Kennedy (D-AZ) won re-election as one of Arizona’s corporation commissioners. James is the first Black woman ever elected statewide in New York. Stratton, James, and Kennedy joined two other Black women – Lieutenant Governors Jenean Hampton (R-KY) and Sheila Oliver (D-NJ) – who were not up for re-election in 2018.

- While Black women made up 18.1% of all Democratic women nominees for statewide elected executive offices in 2018, they represent just 7.7% of all Democratic women winners. Likewise, while they were 7.8% of all Democratic nominees at this level of office, they were just 3.4% of Democratic winners in 2018.

- In January 2019, Carolyn Stanford Taylor (D-WI) was appointed Superintendent of Public Instruction of Wisconsin, the state’s top education official, upon the inauguration of Governor Tony Evers (D), who previously held the position. No other Black woman has served as Superintendent of Public Instruction in a state where that office is won by election.

Black women are

14.9%

of all women state
legislators nationwide

Black Women as State Legislative Candidates and Officeholders

While the gains for Black women in state legislatures have been relatively steady for more than two decades, the rise in Black women's state legislative representation from 2018 to 2019 was greater than any since 1994. There still remains significant opportunity 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 population, but notable gains for Black women at this level of office have implications for state-level policymaking and for building a larger pool of potential candidates for higher offices.

Black Women in State Legislatures in 2019

■ As of October 21, 2019, 317 Black women serve as state legislators nationwide, including 243 Black women members of state houses and 74 Black women members of state senates. Fewer than 1% of Black women state legislators are Republicans.

■ Black women are 4.3% of all state legislators and 14.9% of all women state legislators nationwide. They are 4.5% of members of state houses and 15% of women in state houses; 3.8% of state senators and 14.5% of women state senators; and 9.1% of all Democratic state legislators in the U.S.

■ Within the past two decades, Black women have increased their representation as a percentage of all legislators from 2.3% in 1999 to 4.3% in 2019. In the same period, Black women have become a larger proportion of all women state legislators; they were 10.3% of women state legislators in 1999 and are nearly 15% of all women state legislators in 2019.

■ 9 Black women hold state legislative leadership posts (including Speaker, Speaker Pro Tem, Majority Leader, Minority Leader) in fall 2019. In May 2019, Maryland State Delegate Adrienne Jones (D) became the first Black woman Speaker of the Maryland House.

Black Women in State Legislatures

2019

State	Number of Black Women	Number of Women	Number of State Legislators	Percent of All Women State Legislators	Percent of All State Legislators
AK	2	23	60	8.7%	3.3%
AL	15	22	140	68.2%	10.7%
AR	5	32	135	15.6%	3.7%
AZ	1	35	90	2.9%	1.1%
CA	4	37	120	10.8%	3.3%
CO	5	47	100	10.6%	5.0%
CT	6	62	187	9.7%	3.2%
DE	5	15	62	33.3%	8.1%
FL	13	48	160	27.1%	8.1%
GA	36	72	236	50.0%	15.3%
HI	0	24	76	0.0%	0.0%
IA	2	44	150	4.5%	1.3%
ID	1	33	105	3.0%	1.0%
IL	11	63	177	17.5%	6.2%
IN	6	38	150	15.8%	4.0%
KS	4	46	165	8.7%	2.4%
KY	1	30	138	3.3%	0.7%
LA	9	22	144	40.9%	6.3%
MA	3	57	200	5.3%	1.5%
MD	27	73	188	37.0%	14.4%
ME	1	71	186	1.4%	0.5%
MI	11	53	148	20.8%	7.4%
MN	3	64	201	4.7%	1.5%
MO	8	47	197	17.0%	4.1%
MS	11	24	174	45.8%	6.3%
MT	0	45	150	0.0%	0.0%
NC	13	43	170	30.2%	7.6%
ND	0	31	141	0.0%	0.0%
NE	0	14	49	0.0%	0.0%
NH	3	145	424	2.1%	0.7%
NJ	11	37	120	29.7%	9.2%
NM	2	40	112	5.0%	1.8%
NV	6	33	63	18.2%	9.5%
NY	19	69	213	27.5%	8.9%
OH	10	36	132	27.8%	7.6%
OK	3	32	149	9.4%	2.0%
OR	1	38	90	2.6%	1.1%
PA	9	67	253	13.4%	3.6%
RI	3	43	113	7.0%	2.7%
SC	11	28	170	39.3%	6.5%
SD	0	25	105	0.0%	0.0%
TN	6	20	132	30.0%	4.5%
TX	9	42	181	21.4%	5.0%
UT	1	25	104	4.0%	1.0%
VA	11	37	140	29.7%	7.9%
VT	0	72	180	0.0%	0.0%
WA	3	60	147	5.0%	2.0%
WI	3	36	132	8.3%	2.3%
WV	2	19	134	10.5%	1.5%
WY	1	14	90	7.1%	1.1%
Totals	317	2133	7383	14.9%	4.3%

*Data as of October 21, 2019



Black Women as State Legislative Candidates in 2018

- Black women saw the largest gain in representation at the state legislative level since 1994 between 2018 and 2019 – a 0.6 percentage point increase from 3.7% to 4.3% of all state legislators, thanks mostly to the 2018 elections. Over 40 new Black women were elected to state legislatures nationwide.
- In 2018, Black women were elected to state legislatures in two states – Alaska and Wyoming – that had no Black women legislators serving at the time of the election. Black women had served in both states’ legislatures prior to 2018.
- While Black women gained representation at the state legislative level between 2018 and 2019, fewer than 5 Black women serve in more than half of all state legislatures.

Black Women as Mayoral Candidates and Officeholders

“I am proud to be the first Black woman mayor of a major U.S. city, but will be even prouder when our elected officials across levels of office better reflect the constituencies they serve.”

—Lottie Shackelford,
Former Mayor of Little Rock, AR.

In just 5 years, Black women have more than tripled their mayoral representation in the nation’s 100 most populous cities. Black women now hold the top executive post in 7 of these cities, nearly matching their proportion of the U.S. population. While these gains began before 2018, 2 Black women became mayors of major U.S. cities 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 2019

- 7 Black women currently serve as mayors of the top 100 largest cities in the U.S.: Muriel Bowser (Washington, DC), Sharon Weston Broome (Baton Rouge, LA), Vi Alexander Lyles (Charlotte, NC), Keisha Lance Bottoms (Atlanta, GA), LaToya Cantrell (New Orleans, LA), London Breed (San Francisco, CA), and Lori Lightfoot (Chicago, IL).
- In the last five years, 10 Black women have been elected mayor in the 100 most populous cities in the United States. In 2014, just 2 Black women were serving as mayors of these cities, compared to 7 today.

Black Women as Mayoral Candidates in 2019

- Black women won mayoral elections in two of the nation’s 100 largest cities (by population) in the summer of 2019.
 - Lori Lightfoot (D) became the first woman, first Black woman, and first openly LGBTQ person, to be elected Mayor of Chicago, IL. Two Black women – Lightfoot and Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle (D) – competed in the city’s non-partisan runoff election for the mayoral seat in April 2019, all but ensuring that the city would elect a Black woman to its top executive office for the first time.
 - London Breed (D) was elected Mayor of San Francisco, CA in a June 2019 special election. She is the first Black woman and the second woman to serve as San Francisco’s mayor Breed previously served as the Acting Mayor of San Francisco from December 2017 to January 2018, following the death of the previous mayor.

Looking Ahead

In an election cycle where Democratic women made historic gains across levels of office, Black women were key players in that success – both as candidates and voters. The 2020 election will provide another opportunity for Black women to close the gap between their representation in the population and their power in elected office. Already in the 2020 cycle, we witnessed Senator Kamala Harris – just the third Black woman to compete for a major party presidential nomination – rise to the top tier in a crowded Democratic field of presidential candidates. While Harris dropped out of the race before the first primary votes were cast, she continually pushed voters and insiders alike to reimagine what is possible at the executive level. Harris told crowds on the campaign trail, “I have faith in the American people to know that we will never be burdened by the assumptions of who can do what based on who historically has done it.” Keeping that faith will be vital to advancing Black women’s representation at all levels of office.

The support of Black women voters will be vital to candidates seeking victory in 2020, particularly for Democrats. Nationally, Black women voted at the highest rates of any race and gender group in both the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections, and 96% voted for Barack Obama. In 2016, Black women voted at the second-highest rate of all groups 94% voted for Hillary Clinton. The reliability of Black women as Democratic voters cannot be taken for granted, however. In a [2017 letter](#) to Democratic National Committee (DNC) Chairman Tom Perez, more than two dozen prominent Black women activists, elected officials, and community leaders – including Higher Heights co-founders and board members, called on the party to do better to engage and include Black women in organizing and agenda-setting. The 2020 election will provide another test for the Democratic Party to better address Black women’s concerns and harness Black women’s electoral power as voters and candidates.

Amidst another historic election, the work to ensure that Black women’s political power reflects their presence and power in American society will continue. 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.

