



# Black Women in American Politics

# 2023

 **HIGHER  
HEIGHTS**  
Leadership Fund

**CAWP** CENTER FOR AMERICAN  
WOMEN AND POLITICS  
RESEARCH + EDUCATION = CHANGE

**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 under-representation 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).

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## ON THE COVER

- U.S. Representative Jasmine Crockett (TX-30)
- U.S. Representative Sydney Kamlager-Dove (CA-37)
- U.S. Representative Valerie Foushee (NC-04)
- U.S. Representative Jennifer McClellan (VA-04)
- U.S. Representative Summer Lee (PA-12)
- U.S. Representative Emilia Sykes (OH-13)



For nearly a decade, Higher Heights and the Center for American Women and Politics have teamed up to report on the status of Black women in American politics. In that period, Black women have seen representational gains across all levels of office, including in the federal executive, and achieved milestones as candidates and officeholders within states and nationwide. But the underrepresentation of Black women persists, and our organizations remain committed to documenting, analyzing, and addressing disparities in both political presence and power.

The 2022 election illuminated these realities. Record numbers of Black women ran for congressional and statewide elective executive offices and, as a result of the election, a record number of Black women now serve in Congress, in statewide elective executive office, and in state legislatures. Still, despite a record number of Black women running for and winning major-party nominations for the U.S. Senate and governor in 2022, last year's election did not remedy the lack of Black women's representation at either level. More work needs to be done to both understand and address the hurdles that these women confronted en route to top statewide offices. This will be immediately important as we look ahead to 2024, when Black women will compete for especially opportune open Senate seats, and to 2026, when the bulk of gubernatorial offices will be contested.

This report provides a foundation for this work, offering an overview of Black women's political representation today and over the past decade, as well as indicators of how Black women fared in the most recent election.

As the numbers below illustrate:

- A record number of Black women serve in congressional, statewide elective executive, and state legislative offices in 2023, with important gains made and milestones achieved over the past decade. Since 2020, Black women have ascended to the vice presidency and the U.S. Supreme Court.
- Still, despite being 7.7% of the population, Black women are less than 6% of officeholders in Congress, statewide elective executive offices, and state legislatures. They are eight of the mayors in the nation's 100 most populous cities.
- A record number of Black women ran for the U.S. House, U.S. Senate, and statewide elective executive offices – including governor – in 2022, and a record number of Black women were nominees for the U.S. Senate, statewide executive offices, and governor. These candidacies translated into record-level officeholding at multiple levels, but no Black women serve in the U.S. Senate today and no Black woman has ever served as governor.
- Between 2022 and 2023, Black women's state legislative representation remained nearly equal, though a record number of Black women currently lead state legislative chambers.
- Black women won big-city mayoral elections in Los Angeles, California and North Las Vegas, Nevada in 2022, and a Black woman is poised to be elected mayor of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in November 2023.

There remains vast opportunity for growth in the number of Black women running and winning at all levels of office. The 2023 and 2024 elections offer immediate occasions for harnessing Black women's political power both at the ballot box as voters and on the ballot as candidates.

A photograph of Kamala Harris, the first Black woman to serve as Vice President of the United States, waving her right hand. She is wearing a dark suit jacket, a necklace, and a small American flag pin on her lapel. To her right, a man in a dark suit and a black face mask is partially visible, looking towards her. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be an outdoor event with other people and structures.

# Black Women in the Federal Executive

Kamala 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. She has already – with President Joe Biden – launched her bid for re-election in 2024 to remain the highest-ranking Black woman in U.S. politics.

Harris' nomination as Joe Biden's running mate in the 2020 election 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 in 2020 and will be so again in the 2024 election. 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, three Black women currently serve in Biden's Cabinet. Former U.S. Representative Marcia Fudge serves as secretary of Housing and Urban Development, Linda Thomas-Greenfield serves as U.N. ambassador, and Shalanda Young serves as director of the Office of Management and Budget. Before Cecilia Rouse left her position as the chair of the Council of Economic Advisors in March 2023, the Biden Cabinet included the largest number of Black women serving concurrently in any presidential Cabinet (5).



# Black Women as Congressional Candidates and Officeholders

Black women have made notable gains in congressional representation over the past decade, not only increasing their overall numbers but also expanding the sites for representation to new states and diverse district types. The newest Black congresswomen have entered office younger, on average, than the Black women who have preceded them, and last year's non-incumbent Black women winners demonstrated the potential for an especially quick path from state legislative to congressional office. While a record number of Black women were nominees for the U.S. Senate in 2022, none were successful. Continued work is necessary to understand and address the barriers that Black women face in Senate contests.



## Black Women in the 118th Congress

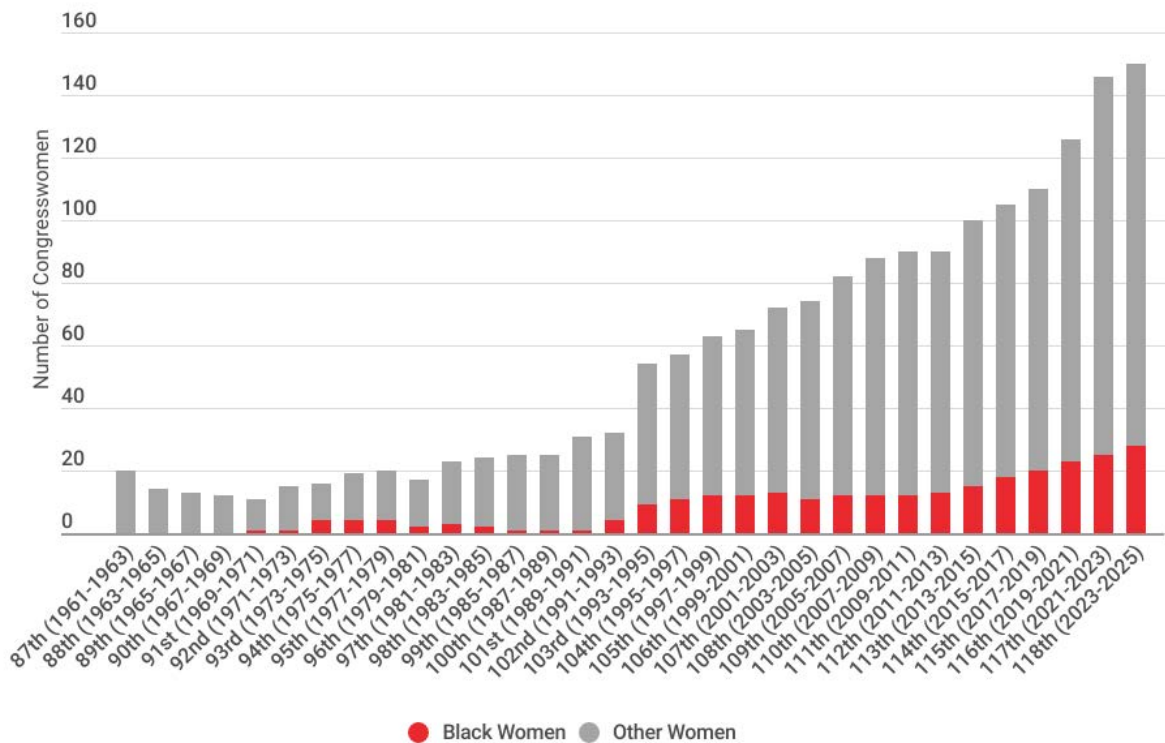
- 28 (28D) Black women currently serve as voting members of Congress, all serving in the U.S. House.<sup>1</sup> This marks a record high for Black women's representation in the U.S. Congress overall, as well as in the U.S. House specifically. In addition, 2 (2D) Black women serve as non-voting delegates. All Black congresswomen are Democrats.
- Black women are 5.2% of all members of Congress, 10.8% of all Democrats in Congress, 18.7% of all women in Congress, and 45.9% of Black members of Congress. They are 6.4% of all members of the House, 22.4% of all women in the House, 48.3% of Black members of the House, and 13.2% of Democrats in the House. No Black women currently serve in the U.S. Senate.<sup>2</sup>
- Since Shirley Chisholm (D-NY) became the first Black woman elected to Congress in 1968, 55 (54D, 1R) Black women have served as voting members of Congress from 23 states; 53 (52D, 1R) Black women have served in the House and 2 (2D) Black women have served in the Senate. In addition, 3 (3D) Black women have served as non-voting delegates from Washington, D.C. and the U.S. Virgin Islands. 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.

<sup>1</sup> Representative Marilyn Strickland (D-WA) identifies as multiracial, 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/>. Non-voting delegates are not included in these counts.

# Black Women in Congress

1961-Present



Data do not include non-voting delegates. Counts reflect end-of-session number of officeholders except for the 118th count, which reflects officeholders as of June 2023.

## Paths to Office

- Of the 28 current Black women representatives, at least 21 (75%) previously served in state legislative and/or local elective offices; 16 (57.1%) previously served in state legislatures and at least 9 (32.1%) held local elective offices before serving in Congress. Four current Black congresswomen previously served in *both* state legislative and local elective offices: Representatives Alma Adams (D-NC), Valerie Foushee (D-NC), Sydney Kamlager-Dove (D-CA), and Frederica Wilson (D-FL).
- All five Black women elected to Congress for the first time in 2022 – Jasmine Crockett (D-TX), Valerie Foushee (D-NC), Sydney Kamlager-Dove (D-CA), Summer Lee (D-PA), and Emilia Sykes (D-OH) – ascended from state legislative positions, including three women – Crockett, Kamlager-Dove, and Lee – who were elected to the state legislature for the first time since 2018. In addition, Jennifer McClellan (D-VA) served 17 years in the Virginia State Legislature before winning her special election to the U.S. House in late February 2023.
- McClellan joins two other Black women – Shontel Brown (D-OH) and Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick (D-FL) – who won off-cycle special elections to the U.S. House since 2021. Both Brown and Cherfilus-McCormick won re-election to full terms in election 2022.
- At least 7 (25%) current Black women members previously served as professional staff to elected officials, including statewide executive, state legislative, and congressional officeholders.
- The average age at which Black women have entered Congress has declined in recent years. Among all Black women who have entered Congress since 2018, the average age of entry is 46 years old. In contrast, the average age at entry for all Black women who entered prior to 2018 (both current and former officeholders) is 52 years old.

## *Institutional Leadership*

■ In the 118th Congress, Black women hold one-quarter of House Democratic leadership positions, including co-chair of the Democratic Policy and Communication Committee (Lauren Underwood), co-chair of the Democratic Steering Committee (Barbara Lee), freshman leadership representative (Jasmine Crockett), and chief deputy whips (Sheila Jackson Lee, Terri Sewell, and Marilyn Strickland). Of these positions, just one – Democratic Policy and Communication Committee co-chair (Underwood) – is elected by members of the House Democratic Caucus. Underwood is just the [second](#) Black woman to be elected to Democratic leadership by the full caucus; Shirley Chisholm was elected Democratic Caucus secretary in 1977. The freshman leadership representative (Crockett) is elected by freshman Democratic members. All other posts are appointed by Democratic leadership.

■ U.S. Representative Maxine Waters (D-CA) is currently the only Black woman serving as ranking member of one of the 20 standing committees in the U.S. House. She has served as the lead Democrat on the Financial Services Committee since 2013.

■ Black women are 12 of 105 (11.4%) Democratic ranking members on U.S. House subcommittees in the 118th Congress.<sup>3</sup>

## **Black Women as Congressional Candidates in Election 2022**

### *U.S. House*

■ 134 (105D, 29R) Black women ran for the U.S. House in 2022, representing 23% of all women House candidates and 6.4% of all House candidates (women and men) in 2022.

- 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 117 (89D, 28R) in 2020.
- Black women were 32.6% of Democratic women candidates and 12.1% of all Democratic candidates for the U.S. House in 2022. They were 11.1% of Republican women candidates and just 2.4% of all Republicans who ran for the U.S. House in 2022.

■ 56 (50D, 6R) Black women won nominations for the U.S. House in 2022, representing 21.5% of all women nominees and 6.7% of all nominees (women and men) who made it to the general election for House seats in 2022.

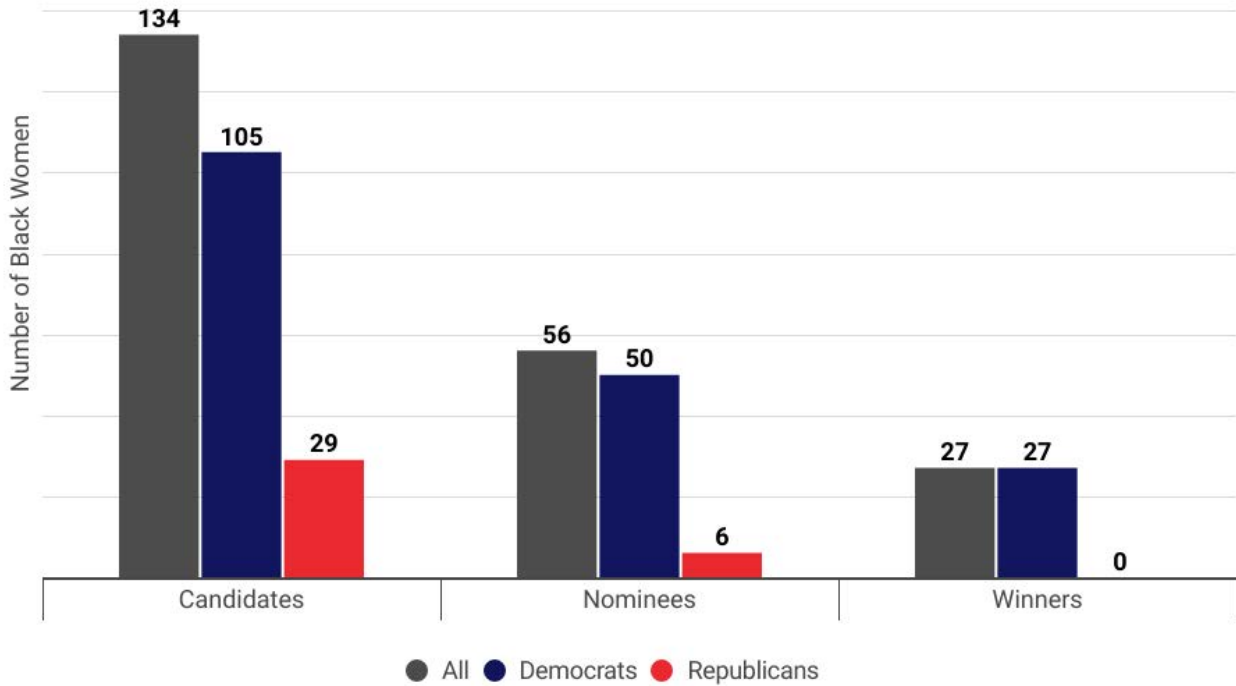
- This does not mark a high for Black women U.S. House nominees; a record high 61 (48D, 13R) Black women were U.S. House nominees in election 2020.
- Black women were 28.1% of Democratic women nominees and 12% of all Democratic nominees for the U.S. House in 2022. They were 7.3% of Republican women House nominees and just 1.4% of all Republican House nominees in 2022.

<sup>3</sup>This includes the subcommittee leadership of both Black women delegates, Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) and Stacey Plaskett (D-VI).



# Black Women Candidates, Nominees, and Winners

## U.S. House, 2022



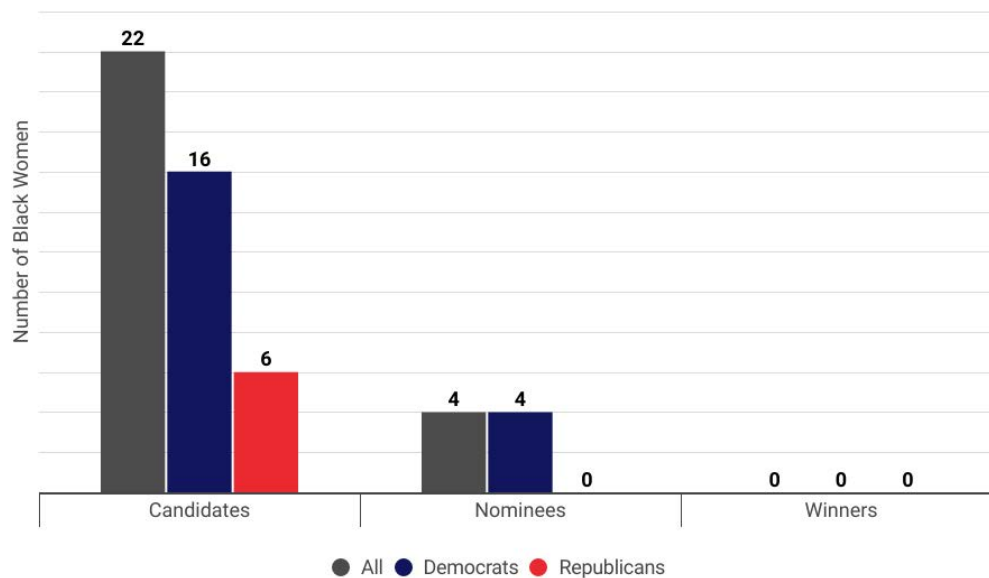
Counts include only major-party candidates and do not include candidates for non-voting positions in the U.S. House.

■ 27 Black women – all Democrats – won full terms for U.S. House seats in the 2022 election, including five non-incumbents. The new Black women members of Congress are:

- **Jasmine Crockett (D, TX-30)** replaced long-time Texas Congresswoman Eddie Bernice Johnson in the U.S. House. Prior to serving in Congress, Crockett served in the Texas State House of Representatives (2021-2023).
- **Valerie Foushee (D, NC-04)** filled an open seat to become the third Black woman to represent North Carolina in Congress. Prior to serving in Congress, Foushee served in the North Carolina State Senate (2013-2023) and North Carolina State House of Representatives (2013). She was also elected to the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools Board and Orange County Board of Commissioners.
- **Sydney Kamlager-Dove (D, CA-37)** replaced Congresswoman Karen Bass – who won her bid to become mayor of Los Angeles – in the U.S. House. Prior to serving in Congress, Kamlager-Dove served as a member of the California State Senate (2021-2023) and the California State Assembly (2018-2021). She also served on the board of trustees for the Los Angeles Community College District.
- **Summer Lee (D, PA-12)** is the first Black woman and the first woman of color in Congress from Pennsylvania. Prior to serving in Congress, Lee served in the Pennsylvania State House of Representatives (2019-2022).
- **Emilia Sykes (D, OH-13)** filled an open seat to become the fifth Black woman to represent Ohio in Congress. Prior to serving in Congress, Sykes served in the Ohio State House of Representatives (2015-2022), where she served as House minority leader from 2019 to 2021.

■ Black women were 21.8% of all women House winners and 6.2% of all House winners (women and men) in election 2022. They were 29.7% of Democratic women and 12.7% of all Democrats who won House seats in 2022 but 0% of Republican winners.

## Black Women Candidates, Nominees, and Winners U.S. Senate, 2022



Counts include only major-party candidates.

### U.S. Senate

- 22 (16D, 6R) Black women ran for the U.S. Senate in 2022, representing 31.4% of all women Senate candidates and 6.8% of all Senate candidates (women and men) in 2022.
  - This marks the highest number of Black women U.S. Senate candidates since CAWP has kept this data (from 2004 to present); the next highest number of Black women candidates was 13 (9D, 4R) in 2020.
  - Black women were 50% of Democratic women candidates and 13.2% of all Democratic candidates for the U.S. Senate in 2022. They were 15.8% of Republican women candidates and just 3% of all Republicans who ran for the U.S. Senate in 2022.
- There were four Black women nominees, all Democrats, for the U.S. Senate in 2022. This marks the highest number of Black women U.S. Senate nominees since CAWP has kept this data (from 2004 to present). All were defeated in the general election.
  - **Cheri Beasley (D-NC)** was the Democratic nominee in North Carolina’s open-seat Senate contest, where she was defeated by Republican Ted Budd. The departing incumbent of this seat was a Republican. Prior to her U.S. Senate bid, Beasley served as an associate justice (2012-2019) and the chief justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court (2019-2020), the first Black woman to hold the position of chief justice.
  - **Val Demings (D-FL)** was the Democratic nominee in Florida’s Senate contest, where she was defeated by Republican incumbent Senator Marco Rubio. Prior to her U.S. Senate bid, Demings served three terms in the U.S. House (2017-2023).
  - **Natalie James (D-AR)** was the Democratic nominee in Arkansas’ Senate contest, where she was defeated by Republican incumbent Senator John Boozman. Prior to her U.S. Senate bid, James was appointed land bank commissioner in Little Rock, Arkansas.
  - **Krystle Matthews (D-SC)** was the Democratic nominee in South Carolina’s Senate contest, where she was defeated by Republican incumbent Senator Tim Scott. Prior to her U.S. Senate bid, Matthews served two terms in the South Carolina House of Representatives (2018-2022).
- No Black woman has served in the U.S. Senate since January 2021.

# Black Women as Statewide Elective Executive Candidates and Officeholders

Statewide elective executive offices, of which there are 310 nationwide, remain the site for Black women's starkest underrepresentation. Even though over 40% of all Black women who have ever held statewide elective executive offices are currently serving, Black women still hold just 3.2% of all these posts across the United States. There remains a ceiling on Black women's representation at the statewide executive level — 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. Three Black women, including Abrams, were gubernatorial nominees in election 2022, but all were defeated in the general election. 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 Elective Executive Office in 2023

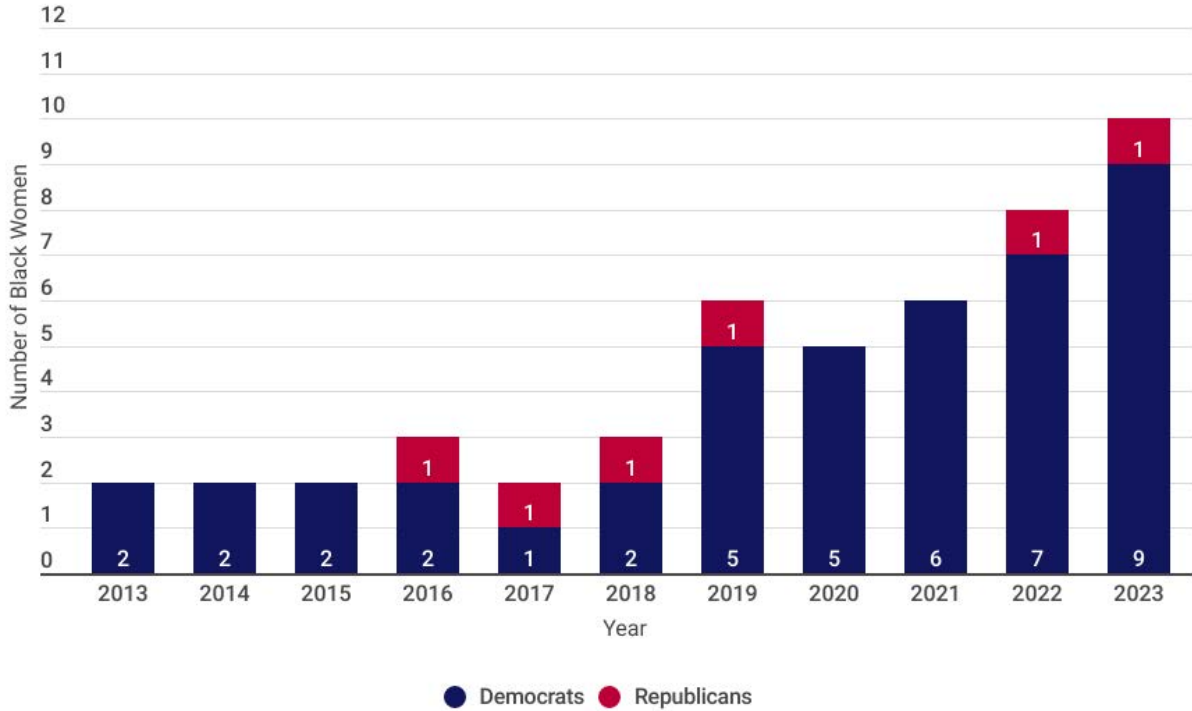
- A record 10 (9D, 1R) Black women currently serve in statewide elective executive office; Andrea Campbell (D) is the attorney general of Massachusetts, Malia Cohen (D) is the controller of California, Letitia “Tish” James (D) is the attorney general of New York, Sabina Matos (D) is the lieutenant governor of Rhode Island, Sheila Oliver (D) is the lieutenant governor of New Jersey, Winsome Sears (R) is the lieutenant governor of Virginia, Juliana Stratton (D) is the lieutenant governor of Illinois, Stephanie Thomas (D) is the secretary of state of Connecticut, Shirley Weber (D) is the secretary of state of California, and Lydia York (D) is the auditor of Delaware.<sup>4</sup>
- Together, these women represent 10.4% (10 of 96) of all women statewide elective executive officials and 3.2% (10 of 310) of all statewide elective executive officials in the United States.
  - Of the 10 Black women currently holding statewide elective executive offices, five are the first Black woman to serve in any office elected statewide (including U.S. Senate) in their states and all are the first Black woman to serve in their specific offices.
- Just 23 Black women have ever held statewide elective executive offices in 16 states.
  - Of these 23 Black women, 15 have been the first Black woman to serve in any office elected statewide (including U.S. Senate) in their states and all but one of 23 have been the first Black woman to serve in their specific offices.
- No Black woman has ever been elected governor.

<sup>4</sup> Lieutenant Governor Sabina Matos (D-RI) identifies as Afro-Latina.

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

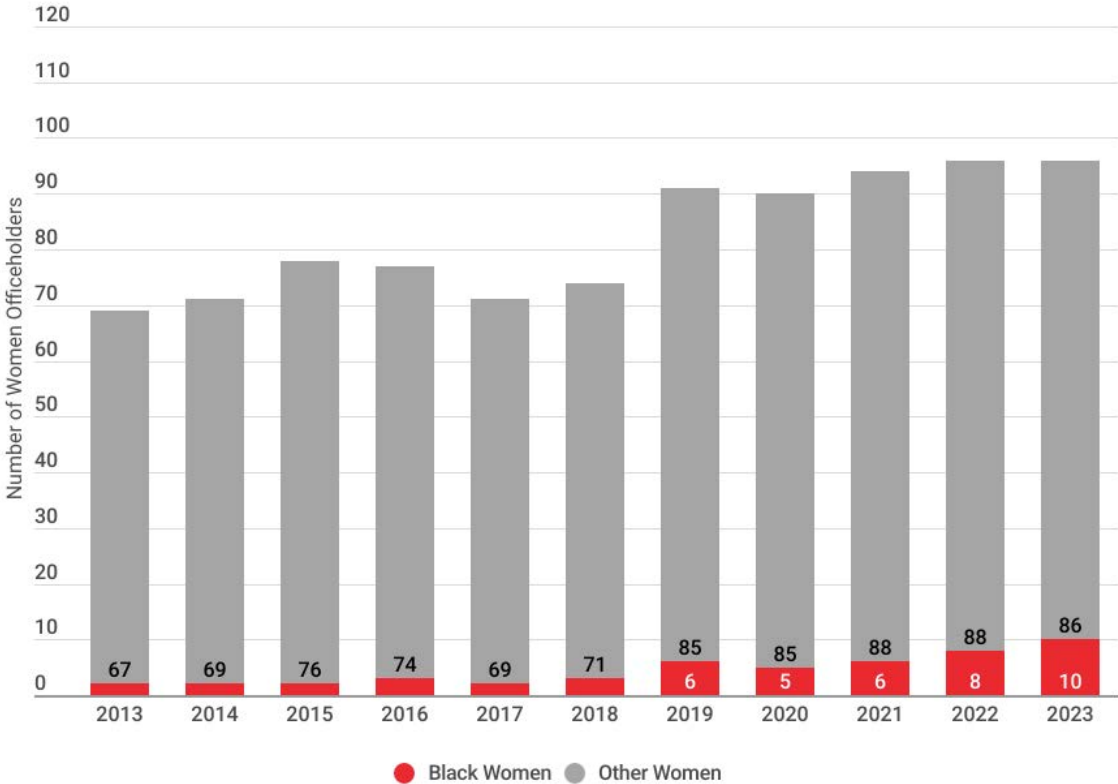
Name	State	Office	Party	Dates of Service
Velvlea "Vel" Phillips	WI	Secretary of State	D	1979-1983
Pamela Carter	IN	Attorney General	D	1993-1997
Vikki Buckley	CO	Secretary of State	R	1995-1999
Denise Nappier	CT	Treasurer	D	1999-2019
Karen Freeman-Wilson	IN	Attorney General	D	2000-2001
Jennette Bradley	OH	Lieutenant Governor	R	2003-2005
		Treasurer	R	2005-2007
Velda Jones Potter	DE	Treasurer	D	2009-2011
Sandra D. Kennedy	AZ	Corporation Commissioner	D	2009-2013; 2019-2023
Jennifer Carroll	FL	Lieutenant Governor	R	2011-2013
Kamala Harris	CA	Attorney General	D	2011-2017
Jean Hampton	KY	Lieutenant Governor	R	2015-2019
Sheila Oliver	NJ	Lieutenant Governor	D	2018-Present
Carolyn Stanford Taylor	WI	Sup. of Public Instruction	D	2019-2021
Juliana Stratton	IL	Lieutenant Governor	D	2019-Present
Letitia "Tish" James	NY	Attorney General	D	2019-Present
Natalie Braswell	CT	Comptroller	D	2021-2023
Shirley Weber	CA	Secretary of State	D	2021-Present
Sabina Matos	RI	Lieutenant Governor	D	2021-Present
Winsome Sears	VA	Lieutenant Governor	R	2022-Present
Malia Cohen	CA	Controller	D	2023-Present
Stephanie Thomas	CT	Secretary of State	D	2023-Present
Lydia York	DE	Auditor	D	2023-Present
Andrea Campbell	MA	Attorney General	D	2023-Present

# Black Women in Statewide Elective Executive Office 2013-2023



Counts reflect end-of-year number of Black women officeholders except for 2023, which reflects officeholders as of June 2023.

# Black Women in Statewide Elective Executive Office 2013-2023



Counts reflect end-of-year number of women officeholders except for 2023, which reflects officeholders as of June 2023.

## Paths to Office

■ Of the 10 current Black women statewide elective executives, all but one have previously served in state legislative and/or local elective office; five (50%) previously served in state legislatures and six (60%) held local elective offices before holding their current office. Two current Black women statewide elective executives previously served in *both* state legislative and local elective offices: Shirley Weber (D-CA) and Sheila Oliver (D-NJ).

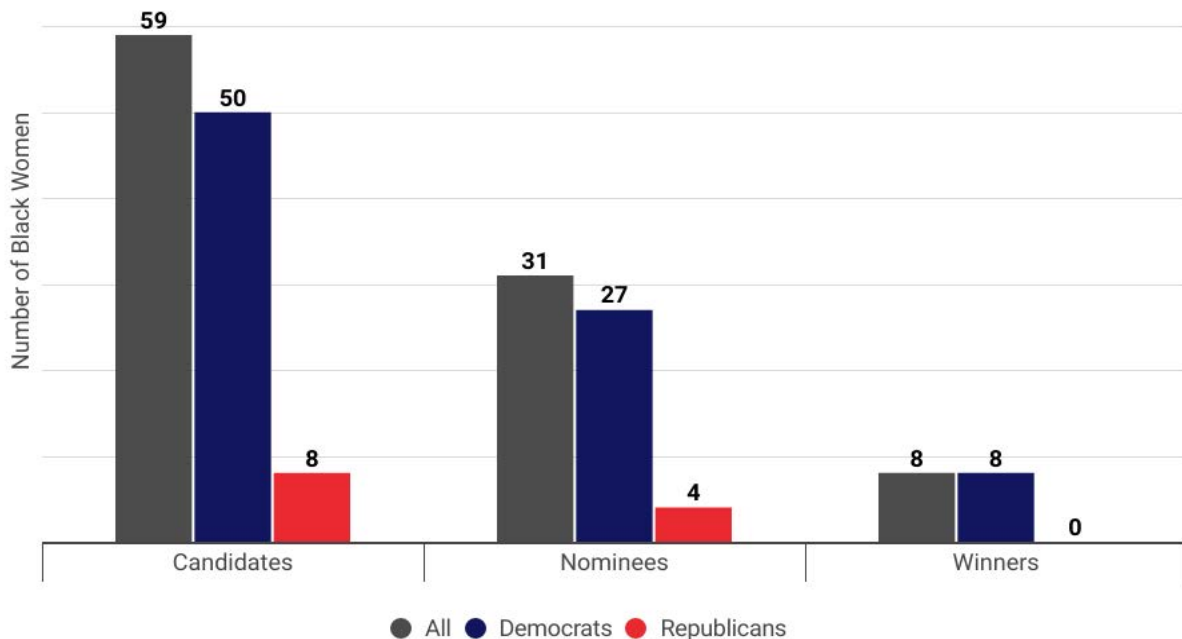
■ Of the four Black women elected for the first time in 2022, two (50%) previously held municipal elective offices: Attorney General Andrea Campbell (D-MA) previously served three terms on the Boston City Council (including one term as council president) and Controller Malia Cohen (D-CA) served for eight years on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors (including six months as president of the board) and four years on the California State Board of Equalization. One of four (25%) newly-elected Black women statewide executives – Secretary of State Stephanie Thomas (D-CT) – previously served in state legislative office; Thomas spent one term in the Connecticut House of Representatives.

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

■ 59 (50D, 8R, 1NP) Black women were candidates for statewide elective executive offices in 2022, representing 20.8% of all women candidates and 6.3% of all candidates (men and women) who ran at this level of office in 2022.

- This marks the highest number of Black women statewide executive candidates since CAWP has kept this data (from 2004 to present); the next highest number of Black women candidates was 35 (32D, 3R) in 2018.
- Black women were 32.5% of Democratic women candidates and 13.3% of all Democratic candidates for statewide elective executive offices in 2022. They were 6.3% of Republican women candidates and 1.4% of all Republicans who ran for statewide elective executive offices in 2022.

## Black Women Candidates, Nominees, and Winners Statewide Elective Executive Offices, 2022



Counts include only major-party candidates.



CAMPBELL



THOMAS



YORK



COHEN

■ 31 (27D, 4R) Black women won nominations for statewide elective executive offices in 2022, representing 21.5% of all women nominees and 8% of all nominees (men and women) who made it to the general election at this level of office in 2022.

- This marks the highest number of Black women statewide executive nominees since CAWP has kept this data (from 2004 to present); the next highest number of Black women nominees was 16 (15D, 1R) in 2018.
- Black women were 30% of Democratic women nominees and 14.9% of all Democratic nominees for statewide elective executive offices in 2022. They were 7.7% of Republican women nominees and 2% of all Republican nominees for statewide elective executive offices in 2022.

■ 8 (8D) Black women won statewide executive elections in 2022. The new Black women elected to statewide executive office include:

- **Andrea Campbell (D, MA Attorney General)** became the first Black woman elected statewide in Massachusetts. Prior to serving as attorney general, Campbell served as a member of the Boston City Council (2016-2022), including serving as president of the Boston City Council from 2018 to 2020.
- **Malia Cohen (D, CA Controller)** became the first Black woman to serve as California state controller. Prior to serving as controller, Cohen served on the California State Board of Equalization (2019-2023). She also served on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors (2011-2019), including serving as president of the Board of Supervisors from 2018 to 2019.
- **Stephanie Thomas (D, CT Secretary of State)** became the first Black woman to serve as secretary of state of Connecticut. Prior to serving as secretary of state, Thomas served as a member of the Connecticut House of Representatives (2021-2023).
- **Lydia York (D, DE Auditor)** became the first Black woman to serve as Delaware state auditor. Prior to serving as auditor, York worked in both law and finance.

■ Black women were 11.9% of all women winners of statewide executive elections and 3.9% of all statewide executive winners (women and men) in election 2022. They were 19.5% of Democratic women and 9.2% of all Democrats who won statewide executive offices in 2022 but 0% of Republican winners.

# Black Women as State Legislative Candidates and Officeholders

Black women reached a record high in state legislative representation in 2023. But 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 their 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 2023

- As of May 2023, 372 (367D, 3R, 2Ind) Black women serve as state legislators nationwide, including 282 (280D, 1R, 1Ind) Black women members of state houses and 90 (87D, 2R, 1Ind) Black women members of state senates.
- Black women are 5% of all state legislators and 15.4% of all women state legislators nationwide. They are 5.2% of members of state houses and 15.5% of women in state houses; 4.6% of state senators and 15.2% of women state senators. Black women are 11.2% of all Democratic state legislators and 0.1% of all Republican state legislators in the U.S.
- Within the past decade, Black women have increased their representation as a percentage of all legislators from 3.3% in 2013 to 5% in 2023. In the same period, Black women have become a larger proportion of all women state legislators; they were 13.5% of women state legislators in 2013 and are 15.4% of all women state legislators in 2023.

## State Legislative Leadership

- 15 (15D) Black women hold state legislative leadership posts (including speaker, speaker pro tem, majority leader, minority leader) as of February 2023. Of them, 6 (6D) Black women lead their legislative chamber, a record high.<sup>5</sup>
- Just 8 (8D) Black women have ever held the top leadership position of a state legislative chamber.

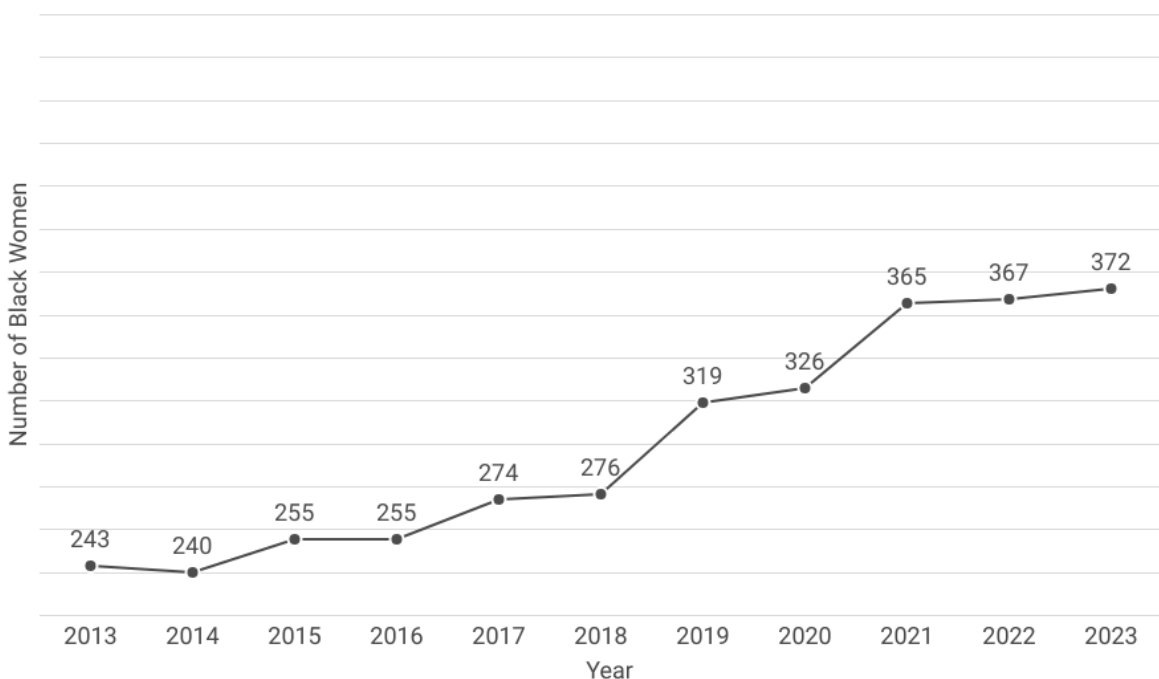
## Black Women in State Legislative Chamber Leadership (Majority Party)

State	Position	Name	Party	Years in Leadership
CA	Speaker of the House	Karen Bass	D	2008-2010
NJ	Speaker of the House	Sheila Oliver	D	2010-2014
MD	Speaker of the House	Adrienne Jones	D	2019-Present
NY	Senate President Pro Tempore	Andrea Stewart-Cousins	D	2019-Present
VA	Senate President Pro Tempore	Louise Lucas	D	2020-Present
ME	Speaker of the House	Rachel Talbot Ross	D	2022-Present
PA	Speaker of the House	Joanna E. McClinton	D	2023-Present
NV	Senate President Pro Tempore	Pat Spearman	D	2023-Present

<sup>5</sup> State Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins (D-NY) currently serves as both senate majority leader and senate president pro-tempore.

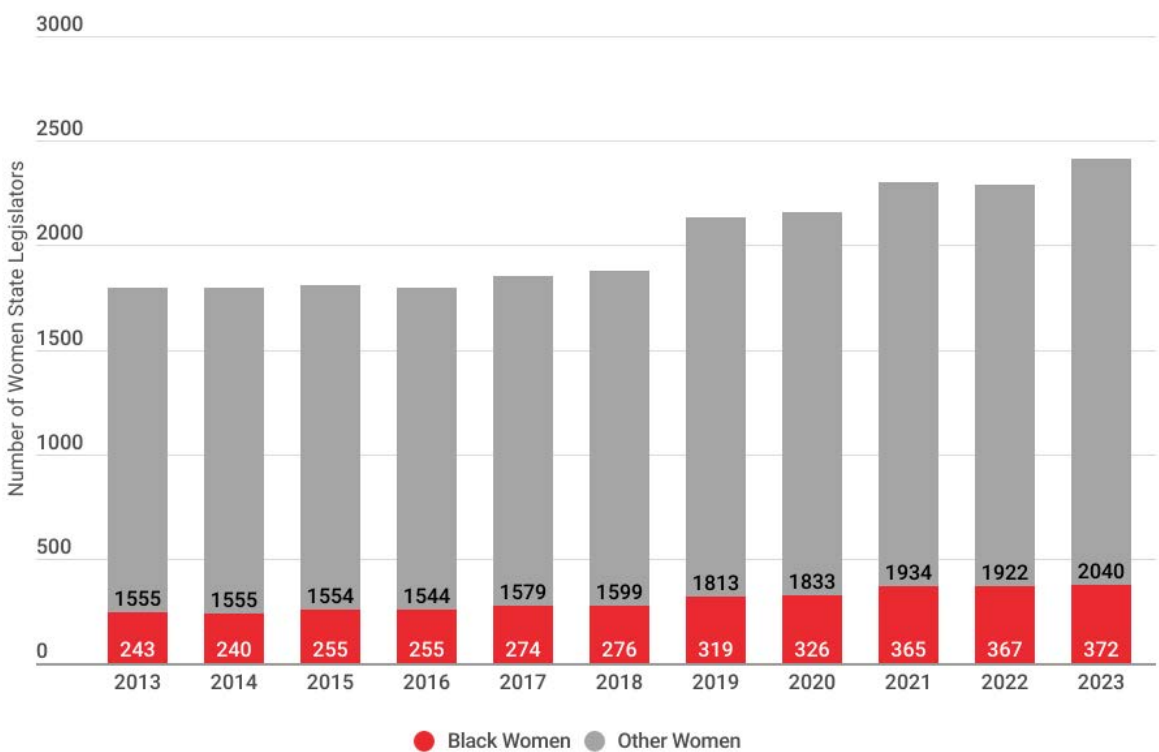


## Black Women in State Legislatures 2013-2023



Counts reflect end-of-year number of Black women state legislators except for 2023, which reflects officeholders as of May 2023.

## Black Women in State Legislatures 2013-2023



Counts reflect end-of-year number of Black women state legislators except for 2023, which reflects officeholders as of May 2023.

## Representation by State

■ The top five states for Black women’s state legislative representation are: Maryland (18.1%), Delaware (17.7%), Georgia (17.4%), Nevada (12.7%), and New York (11.7%). Maryland and Georgia are also among the top five states for Black women’s representation in the population. In addition, Black women are the top legislative leaders in the Maryland House, Nevada Senate, and New York Senate.

■ Currently, no Black women serve in legislatures in six states: Arizona, Nebraska, Hawaii, South Dakota, Idaho, and Montana. Based on available data, no Black woman has ever served in the South Dakota State Legislature.

■ When comparing Black women as a percentage of all state legislators to the percentage of Black women in the state’s population:

- 24 state legislatures fall short of equal representation of Black women in the population and in the legislature.<sup>6</sup> The starkest disparities in representation are evident in Mississippi, Louisiana, and South Carolina, where the gap between legislative and population representation is ten percentage points or more. Each of these state legislatures have Republican majorities in both chambers, demonstrating the influence of party control on Black women’s representation.
- The state legislative representation of Black women nearly matches (+/- 1%) Black women’s percentage of the state population in 19 states.
- Finally, Black women’s representation in the state legislature exceeds their representation in the population in seven states, with Black women faring particularly well – as related to representation in the state’s population – in Nevada, Colorado, and Delaware.

■ Black women are more than 50% of women state legislators in two states: Alabama and Georgia. In both states, Black women are over 25% of all women in the state population. Despite this high level of representation, all Black women state legislators in these states serve in the minority party.

## 2022 Election Results

■ The number of Black women state legislators stayed almost exactly level between Election Day 2022 and January 2023 (+1), with Black remaining 5% of all state legislators.

■ Despite the stasis in Black women’s representation from 2022 to 2023, 73 (71D, 2R) non-incumbent Black women took state legislative office at the start of 2023.

<sup>6</sup>This count includes states where the percentage of women in the state legislature is at least one percentage point lower than the percentage of women in the state population.



Speaker  
Joanna  
McClinton  
(D-PA)

## Black Women in State Legislatures 2023

State	Number of Black Women Legislators	Number of Women Legislators	Number of State Legislators	Black Women as Percent of All Women State Legislators	Black Women as Percent of All State Legislators	Black Women as Percent of State Population
AK	2	20	60	10.0%	3.3%	2.5%
AL	13	24	140	54.2%	9.3%	14.8%
AR	7	31	135	22.6%	5.2%	8.7%
AZ	0	42	90	0.0%	0.0%	3.3%
CA	5	50	120	10.0%	4.2%	3.9%
CO	8	50	100	16.0%	8.0%	2.8%
CT	7	71	187	9.9%	3.7%	7.4%
DE	11	23	62	47.8%	17.7%	13.4%
FL	17	66	160	25.8%	10.6%	9.5%
GA	41	81	236	50.6%	17.4%	18.3%
HI	0	28	76	0.0%	0.0%	1.5%
IA	2	44	150	4.5%	1.3%	2.6%
ID	0	32	105	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%
IL	13	73	177	17.8%	7.3%	8.3%
IN	8	39	150	20.5%	5.3%	6.0%
KS	3	50	165	6.0%	1.8%	3.8%
KY	3	41	138	7.3%	2.2%	5.0%
LA	9	28	144	32.1%	6.3%	17.8%
MA	4	63	200	6.3%	2.0%	5.5%
MD	34	80	188	42.5%	18.1%	17.7%
ME	4	82	186	4.9%	2.2%	1.1%
MI	11	59	148	18.6%	7.4%	8.1%
MN	8	76	201	10.5%	4.0%	4.3%
MO	12	57	197	21.1%	6.1%	6.8%
MS	10	25	174	40.0%	5.7%	20.5%
MT	0	48	150	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%
NC	17	50	170	34.0%	10.0%	12.6%
ND	1	35	141	2.9%	0.7%	1.9%
NE	0	18	49	0.0%	0.0%	3.2%
NH	2	161	424	1.2%	0.5%	1.2%
NJ	12	42	120	28.6%	10.0%	8.7%
NM	2	50	112	4.0%	1.8%	1.7%
NV	8	39	63	20.5%	12.7%	6.3%
NY	25	73	213	34.2%	11.7%	10.2%
OH	7	38	132	18.4%	5.3%	7.7%
OK	2	29	149	6.9%	1.3%	4.8%
OR	1	38	90	2.6%	1.1%	1.6%
PA	10	80	253	12.5%	4.0%	7.1%
RI	4	49	113	8.2%	3.5%	5.4%
SC	7	25	170	28.0%	4.1%	14.8%
SD	0	30	105	0.0%	0.0%	1.4%
TN	4	19	132	21.1%	3.0%	9.5%
TX	10	54	181	18.5%	5.5%	7.3%
UT	1	26	104	3.8%	1.0%	1.0%
VA	11	47	140	23.4%	7.9%	11.2%
VT	1	81	180	1.2%	0.6%	1.0%
WA	8	68	147	11.8%	5.4%	2.9%
WI	5	41	132	12.2%	3.8%	4.0%
WV	1	16	134	6.3%	0.7%	2.3%
WY	1	20	93	5.0%	1.1%	0.9%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>372</b>	<b>2412</b>	<b>7386</b>	<b>15.4%</b>	<b>5.0%</b>	<b>7.7%</b>

Data as of May 2023

# Black Women as Mayoral Candidates and Officeholders

Black women now hold the top executive post in eight of the 100 most populous cities, matching their proportion of the U.S. population. Six of the current big-city Black women mayors have taken office in the past five years, with four Black women taking office since 2021. 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 2023

- Eight Black women currently serve as mayors of the top 100 most populous cities in the U.S.: Karen Bass (Los Angeles, CA), Muriel Bowser (Washington, DC), London Breed (San Francisco, CA), LaToya Cantrell (New Orleans, LA), Pamela Goynes-Brown (North Las Vegas, NV), Tishaura Jones (St. Louis, MO), Elaine O'Neal (Durham, NC), and Vi Alexander Lyles (Charlotte, NC).
- 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, 15 more Black women have served as big-city mayors.

## Black Women as Mayoral Candidates in 2022 and 2023

- Two new Black women became mayors in the nation's 100 largest cities (by population) in 2022.
  - **Karen Bass (D)** became the first woman mayor of Los Angeles, California – the second most populous city in the U.S. – on December 12, 2022. Bass previously served in the U.S. House of Representatives (2011-2022) and California State Assembly (2004-2010). During her tenure in the California State Assembly, Bass served as speaker of the Assembly (2008-2010). She is the first Black woman to lead a state legislative chamber in the United States.
  - **Pamela Goynes-Brown (D)** became the mayor of North Las Vegas, NV December 1, 2022. She is the first Black woman and the first Black person to serve in this role. Before becoming mayor, Goynes-Brown served for more than a decade on the North Las Vegas City Council, where she served twice as mayor pro-tempore.
- In May 2023, **Cherelle Parker (D)** won the Democratic nomination for mayor of Philadelphia. She is heavily favored to win the November general election and would be sworn in as the first woman mayor of the city in January 2024. Prior to her mayoral bid, Parker served over six years on the Philadelphia City Council and ten years in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives.
- Black women may also increase their numbers among big-city mayors as a result of elections in 2023. Black women have already announced candidacies in mayoral contests in major cities such as Houston, Memphis, Nashville, Philadelphia, and Wichita. Charlotte, North Carolina Mayor Vi Lyles is also expected to campaign to retain her post in 2023.

# Looking Ahead



Municipal, state legislative, congressional, and statewide executive elections in 2023 offer immediate opportunities for Black women's electoral success. In addition to big-city mayoral contests, there are at least three Black women, including Lieutenant Governor Sabina Matos (D-RI), currently running in the special election in Rhode Island's first congressional district. If one of these women is successful, they would become the first Black woman to represent the state in Congress. Black women are also candidates for statewide elective executive office in Kentucky and Mississippi this year. Most recently, state Representative Pamela Stevenson (D-KY) won the Democratic nomination for attorney general of Kentucky. If successful in November, she would become the first woman attorney general of Kentucky. Finally, Black women will compete in state legislative elections in Louisiana, Mississippi, New Jersey, and Virginia in 2023.

From Kamala Harris' position on the presidential ticket to the reliability and importance of Black women voters in determining electoral results, Black women will play essential roles as both candidates and voters in the 2024 elections. More than a year before Election Day, Black women have already launched candidacies in key open-seat contests for the U.S. Senate in California, Delaware, Maryland, and Michigan.

As we anticipate these elections, we will continue our work to ensure that Black women's political power reflects their presence and power in American society. 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 recruiting and supporting Black women candidates to non-majority-minority districts at the state and federal level, U.S. Senate seats, and statewide elective 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 ideas 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.

