

# THE STATUS OF BLACK WOMEN IN AMERICAN POLITICS



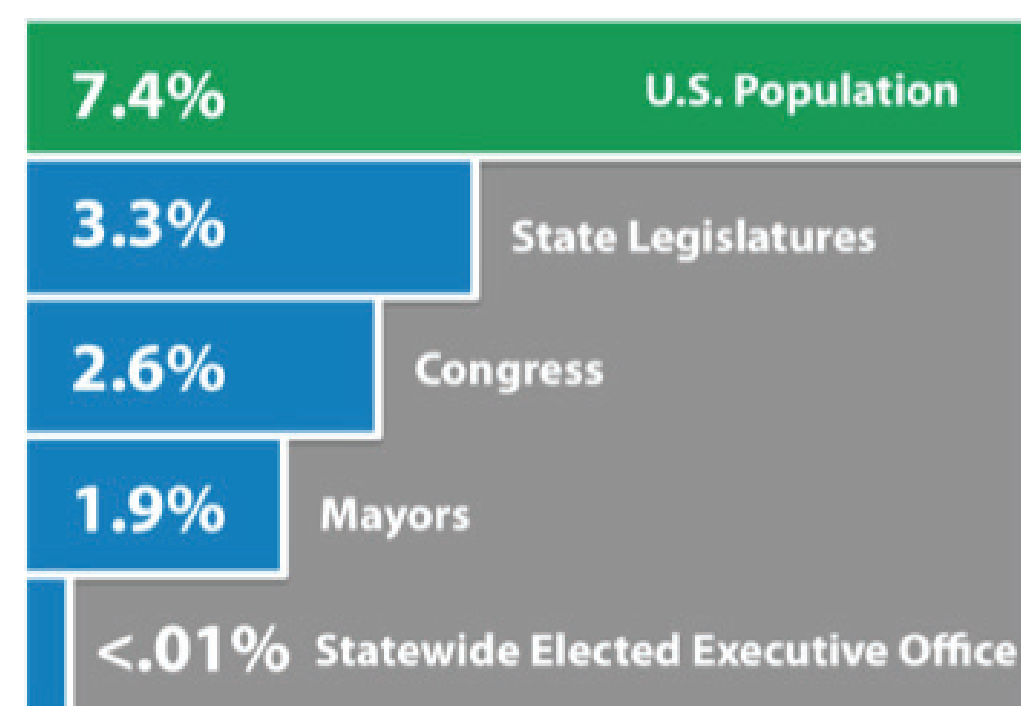
A REPORT BY THE CENTER FOR AMERICAN WOMEN AND POLITICS AND  
HIGHER HEIGHTS LEADERSHIP FUND  
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## BLACK WOMEN ARE CRITICAL FOR IMPROVING COMMUNITIES.

- Black women drive the economic and electoral power of Black communities nationwide.
  - » Black women drive spending of 85 cents to every dollar in the Black community.
  - » Black women are 58.6% of the voters in Black communities.
- Black women have registered and voted at higher rates than their male counterparts in every election since 1998. Moreover, they surpassed all other race and gender subgroups in voter turnout in 2008 and 2012.
- Once in office, Black women champion the interests of Black citizens and underrepresented populations, supporting progressive agendas around education, health care, and economic development.
- Black women typically represented more diverse and urban communities than their non-Black counterparts.

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

- Black women are 7.4% of the U.S. population and 7.8% of the electorate. However, there are only 14 Black women in Congress (2.6%), 2 Black women in statewide elected executive office, 241 Black women in state legislatures (3.3%), and 26 Black women mayors in cities with populations over 30,000 (1.9%). Only one Black woman serves as mayor of one of the 100 largest cities in the United States.
- Black women are 52.2% of the Black population and 58.6% of the Black electorate. However, they represent just 34.1% of Black members of Congress, 25% of Black statewide elected executive officials, and 37.7% of Black state legislators.
- Historically, only 31 Black women from only 13 states have ever served in the U.S. Congress, only 10 Black women from 9 states have ever served in statewide elected executive offices, and four states have still never elected a Black woman to their state legislature.
- While better represented among congressional candidates, Black women are significantly underrepresented as candidates and nominees for statewide offices that are often feeders for gubernatorial, or even presidential, bids.



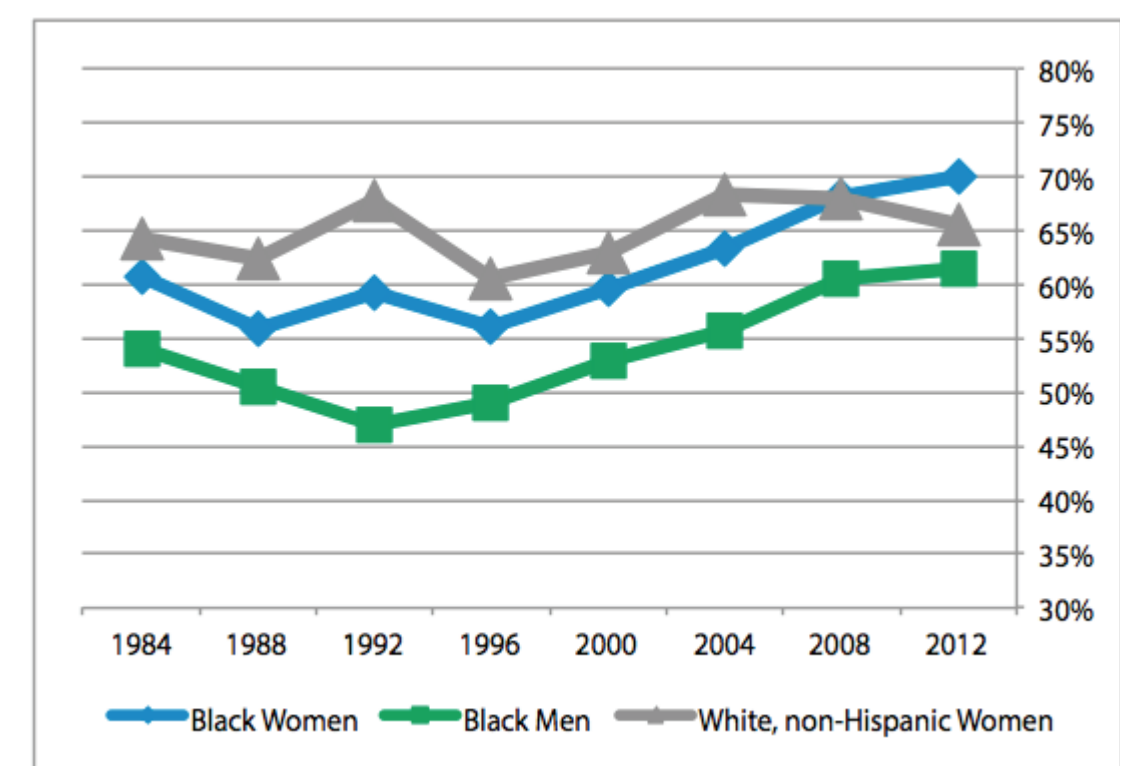
## BLACK WOMEN CONFRONT DISTINCT POLITICAL REALITIES.

- Black women face distinct hurdles to political participation.
  - » Black women are less likely to be encouraged to run for office, and are more likely to be discouraged from running, than Black men and white women.
  - » Black women navigate race and gender stereotypes, and the intersections therein, while running for and serving in office.
  - » Black women represent less affluent districts and are less likely to be part of moneyed networks, posing hurdles to fundraising.
- Black women bring distinct advantages to candidacy and officeholding.
  - » Black women's confidence and political experiences in community work and activism has contributed to their political ambition and success.
  - » Black women engage and draw from multiple communities of voters as candidates and officeholders.

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

- Black women engage and inspire Black citizens to participate in politics, acting as role models for more Black women to run for office.
- Black women’s representational growth has occurred primarily in the past two decades, with the trend likely to continue upward as more Black women run.
  - » Of the 31 Black women who have served in Congress, 24 (77%) have entered since 1993.
  - » Of the 10 Black women who have served in statewide elected executive office, 9 have entered since 1993.
  - » Since 1994, the growth in Black state legislators can be wholly attributed to Black women, who have increased their numbers by nearly 50%. Two Black women have served as Speakers of State Houses since 2008.
  - » The first big-city Black woman mayor was not elected until 1987 and at least 18 more Black women have led big cities in the past twelve years.
- Black women’s legislative representational growth to date has been primarily in majority-minority districts, leaving much opportunity for growth outside of these districts, which are limited in number and vulnerable to legal challenges.

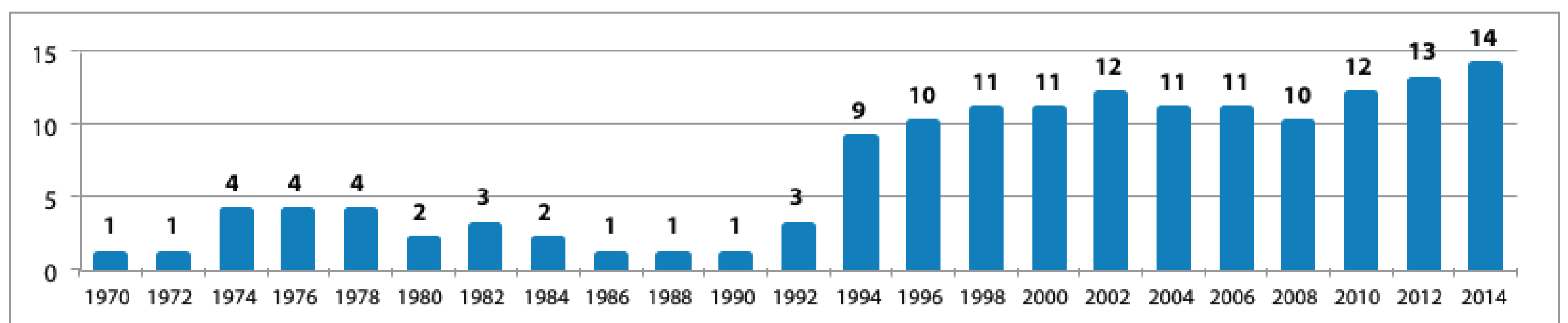
**Voter Turnout by Race and Gender, 1970-Present**



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

Black women have registered and voted at higher rates than their male counterparts in every election since 1998. Moreover, they surpassed all other race and gender subgroups in voter turnout in 2008 and 2012. As the most reliable Democratic voters in congressional, statewide, and presidential contests in recent elections, Black women’s political voice has been particularly strong and influential in Democratic politics.

**Black Women in Congress, 1970 - Present**



Source: Center for American Women and Politics