



# The Chisholm Effect:

**Black Women  
in American  
Politics 2018**



**CAWP** CENTER FOR AMERICAN  
WOMEN AND POLITICS

**RUTGERS**

Eagleton Institute of Politics

# FOREWARD

By Kamala Harris (D-CA), U.S. Senator

It's been 50 years since former U.S. Rep. Shirley Chisholm (D-NY) became the first Black woman elected to U.S. Congress. Her arrival on the national political stage was validation that our centuries-long work to claim seats at our country's most powerful decision-making tables was not in vain. Chisholm's salient, constant voice on behalf of disenfranchised Americans was a clarion call for Black women to continue pushing toward representational parity and for leadership that will work to realize our country's founding principals of equity and opportunity for all.

In the decades since, Black women have hurdled seemingly insurmountable challenges in our march toward full political representation. And while we have yet to reach this goal, *The Chisholm Effect: Black Women in American Politics 2018* shows we continue to make important political gains even as our country struggles against some the most regressive, dangerous leadership and policies propagated since before Chisholm's emergence.

Among other facts, this status update—provided each year by Higher Heights Leadership Fund and the Center for American Women and Politics—highlights gains made in 2017 in the number of Black women holding statewide elected executive office and serving as mayors of the top 100 most populated U.S. cities. It also details how Black women remained energized during an off-election year, ultimately playing critical roles in organizing voters and casting decisive ballots in hotly contested races in Alabama, New Jersey and Virginia.

The gains we are seeing today are a direct result of Black women's brilliant strategy, tireless work and bravery in the face of conditions that are often unfair and sometimes dangerous. This determined push forward finds us at a moment when Black women are central to a strategy for potential progressive gains in 2018. History has shown that we are one of our country's most powerful, important leadership assets—particularly during moments of crisis. Certainly that was the case when Chisholm won office in 1968, a year marked by one of the most turbulent periods of racial strife and anti-war protest in American history. In response, Chisholm spent her time in Congress working on behalf of veterans, women, and minority education and employment opportunities.

This year, we should all be buoyed by the Chisholm effect, which spawned generations of Black women determined to and successful at breaking political glass ceilings. There's an opportunity in the coming months for Black women to build on these gains by taking decisive action to increase our political representation and provide America with leadership that is powerful, connected and lasting. The information shared in this status update provides an essential snapshot that is useful in understanding where we are making gains, and, more importantly, where the opportunities are for us to claim new seats at decision-making tables.



Headlines over the past few months have highlighted the increase in women's candidacies for political office nationwide, with many questioning whether 2018 will be another "Year of the Woman" in American politics. In order to assess women's political advancement this year, it's important to take stock of women's representation ahead of this fall's election. In this update, we outline the status of Black women in American politics at the start of 2018. As the numbers below illustrate:

Despite being  
**7.3%**  
of the population...

... Black women are less than

**5%**

of officeholders elected to statewide executive offices, Congress, and state legislatures

They are  
**5**  
of the mayors in the nation's  
**100**  
most populous cities

Less than  
**1%**  
of all statewide elected executive officials are Black Women

Just  
**12**  
Black women have ever held statewide elected executive offices

...and  
**0**  
Black women  
have ever been elected governor

# CURRENT NUMBERS

## Statewide Elected Executive Office

- ◆ 3 black women currently serve in statewide elected executive office; Jenean Hampton (R) is the Lieutenant Governor of Kentucky, Sheila Oliver (D) is the Lieutenant Governor of New Jersey, and Denise Nappier (D) is the State Treasurer of Connecticut. Together, these women represent 4.2% (3 of 71) of all women statewide elected executive officials and 0.96% (3 of 312) of all statewide elected executive officials in the United States.
- ◆ Just 12 Black women have ever held statewide elected executive offices in 11 states.
- ◆ No Black woman has ever been elected governor.

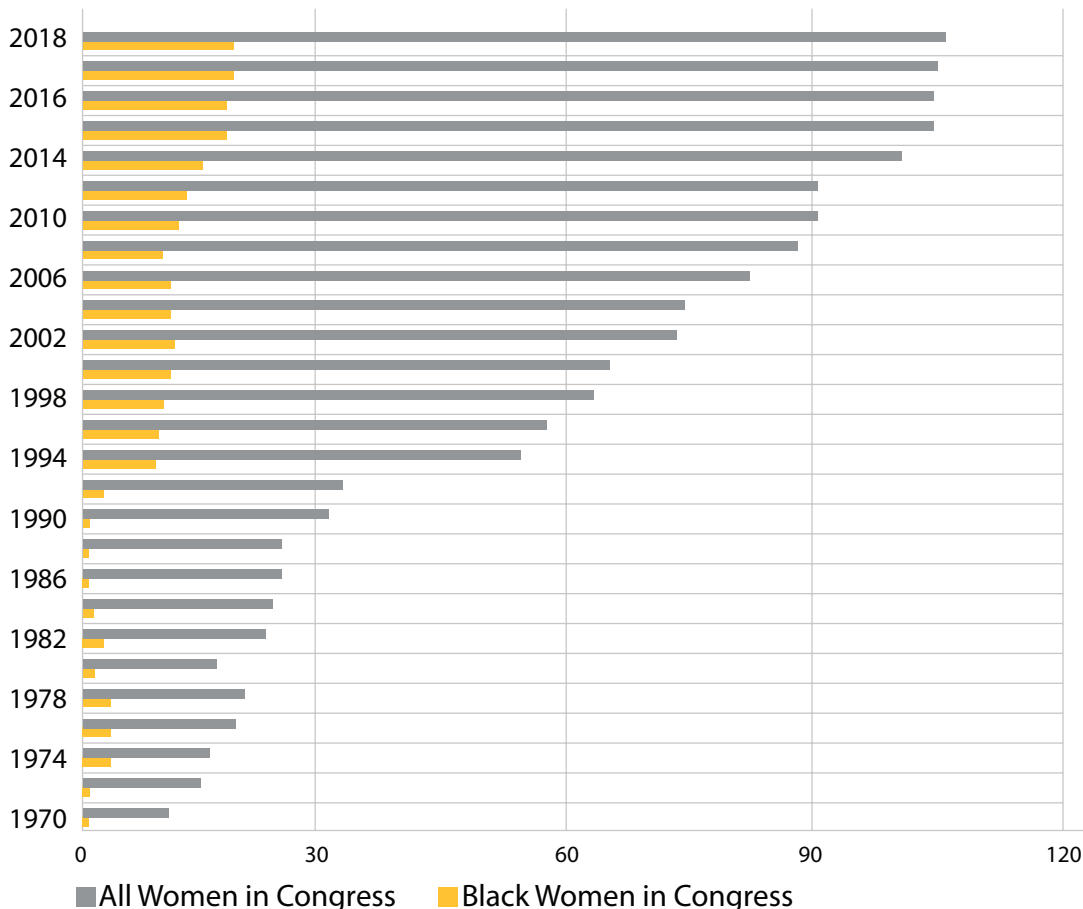
### Black Women Who Have Ever Held Statewide Elected Executive Office

Name	State	Office	Years of Service
Velvalea "Vel" Phillips (D)	WI	Sec. of State	1979-1982
Pamela Carter (D)	IN	Atty. General	1993-1997
Vikki Buckley (R)	CO	Sec. of State	1995-1999
Denise Nappier (D)	CT	St. Treasurer	1999-Present
Karen Freeman-Wilson (D)	IN	Atty. General	2000-2001
Jennette Bradley (R)	OH	Lt. Governor	2003-2005
Jennette Bradley (R)	OH	St. Treasurer	2005-2007
Velda Jones Potter (D)	DE	St. Treasurer	2009-2011
Sandra D. Kennedy (D)	AZ	Corp. Comm.	2009-2013
Jennifer Carroll (R)	FL	Lt. Governor	2011-2013
Kamala Harris (D)	CA	Atty. General	2011-2017
Jenean Hampton (R)	KY	Lt. Governor	2011-Present
Sheila Oliver (D)	NJ	Lt. Governor	2018-Present

## Congress

- ◆ 19 black women currently serve in Congress, including 18 Black women representatives and 1 black woman senator. <sup>1</sup> In addition, 2 Black women serve as non-voting delegates. All but one representative – Mia Love (R-UT) – are Democrats.
- ◆ Black women are 3.6% of all members of Congress, 7.5% of all Democrats in Congress, 17.9% of all women in Congress, and 38.8% of Black members of Congress. They are 4.1% of all members of the House, 21.4% of all women in the House and 39.1% of Black members of the House; 1% of all members of the Senate, 4.5% of all women in the Senate, and 33.3% of Black members of the Senate; and 8.8% of Democrats in the House and 2.2% of Democrats in the Senate. <sup>2</sup>
- ◆ Since Shirley Chisholm (D-NY) became the first black woman elected to Congress in 1968, 38 black women have served in Congress from 16 states; 36 (35D, 1R) black women have served in the House and 2 (2D) black women have served in the Senate.

### Black Women in Congress, 1970-Present

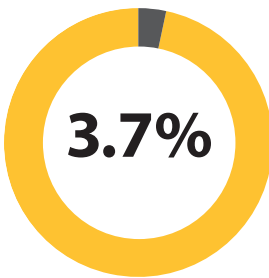


<sup>1</sup>Senator Kamala Harris (D-CA) identifies as multi-racial, both African American and Asian American. <sup>2</sup>These data do not include non-voting delegates.

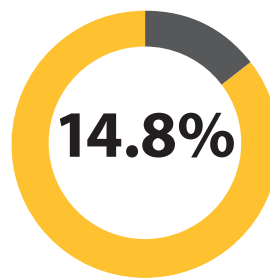
## State Legislature

◆ As of February 19, 2018, 276 (273D, 3R) Black women serve as state legislators nationwide, including 207 (205D, 2R) Black women members of state houses and 69 (68D, 1R) Black women members of state senates.

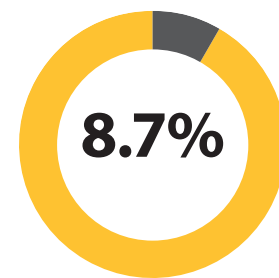
◆ Black women are **3.7%** of all state legislators and **14.8%** of all women state legislators nationwide. They are **3.8%** of members of state houses and **14.5%** of women in state houses; **3.5%** of state senators and **15.5%** of women state senators; and **8.7%** of all Democratic state legislators in the U.S.



**State  
Legislators**



**Women  
State Legislators**



**Democratic  
State Legislators**

◆ Within the past two decades, Black women have increased their representation as a percentage of all legislators from 2.3% in 1998 to 3.7% today. 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 1998 and are 14.8% of all women state legislators today.

## Black Women in State Legislatures, 2018

State	Number of Black Women	Number of Women	Number of Legislators	Percent of Women in State Legislatures	Percent of All State Legislatures
AK	0	18	60	0.0%	0.0%
AL	13	21	140	61.9%	9.3%
AR	4	25	135	16.0%	3.0%
AZ	1	36	90	2.8%	1.1%
CA	3	27	120	11.1%	2.5%
CO	5	38	100	13.2%	5.0%
CT	4	51	187	7.8%	2.1%
DE	2	13	62	15.4%	3.2%
FL	9	41	160	22.0%	5.6%
GA	31	63	236	49.2%	13.1%
HI	0	22	76	0.0%	0.0%
IA	3	34	150	8.8%	2.0%
ID	1	32	105	3.1%	1.0%
IL	15	63	177	23.8%	8.5%
IN	4	30	150	13.3%	2.7%
KS	4	47	165	8.5%	2.4%
KY	1	23	138	4.3%	0.7%
LA	8	22	144	36.4%	5.6%
MA	1	50	200	2.0%	0.5%
MD	20	60	188	33.3%	10.6%
ME	1	63	186	1.6%	0.5%
MI	7	37	148	18.9%	4.7%
MN	3	66	201	4.5%	1.5%
MO	7	45	197	15.6%	3.6%
MS	13	26	174	50.0%	7.5%
MT	0	42	150	0.0%	0.0%
NC	13	43	170	30.2%	7.6%
ND	0	26	141	0.0%	0.0%
NE	0	13	49	0.0%	0.0%
NH	2	126	424	1.6%	0.5%
NJ	10	35	120	28.6%	8.3%
NM	2	34	112	5.9%	1.8%
NV	4	24	63	16.7%	6.3%
NY	19	59	213	32.2%	8.9%
OH	10	29	132	34.5%	7.6%
OK	2	21	149	9.5%	1.3%
OR	2	30	90	6.7%	2.2%
PA	8	48	253	16.7%	3.2%
RI	2	35	113	5.7%	1.8%
SC	9	27	170	33.3%	5.3%
SD	0	21	105	0.0%	0.0%
TN	7	21	132	33.3%	5.3%
TX	9	37	181	24.3%	5.0%
UT	1	21	104	4.8%	1.0%
VA	11	38	140	28.9%	7.9%
VT	1	72	180	1.4%	0.6%
WA	1	55	147	1.8%	0.7%
WI	2	32	132	6.3%	1.5%
WV	1	19	134	5.3%	0.7%
WY	0	10	90	0.0%	0.0%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>1871</b>	<b>7383</b>	<b>14.8</b>	<b>3.7%</b>

## Mayors



Muriel Bowser



Catherine Pugh



Sharon Weston  
Broome



Vi Alexander Lyles



Keisha Lance  
Bottoms

◆ Five Black women currently serve as mayors of the top 100 largest cities in the U.S.: Muriel Bowser (Washington, DC), Catherine Pugh (Baltimore, MD), Sharon Weston Broome (Baton Rouge, LA), Vi Alexander Lyles (Charlotte, NC), and Keisha Lance Bottoms (Atlanta, GA).

◆ In the last five years, 8 Black women have been elected mayor in the 100 most populous cities in the United States.

## 2017 HIGHLIGHTS

### Statewide Elected Executive Office

◆ Only two states held statewide executive elections in 2017. In New Jersey, Sheila Oliver (D) was elected Lieutenant Governor. She is the first woman of color to serve in statewide elected executive office in New Jersey, and the first Democratic Black woman Lieutenant Governor elected nationwide.

### Congress

◆ According to data from TargetSmart, Black women turned out to vote at the highest rate of all race/gender groups in Alabama's special U.S. Senate election in 2017; 48.2% of Black women voted, compared to 41.3% of white men, 39.6% of Black men, and 36.9% of white women. According to the exit poll, 98% of Black women voted for Democrat Doug Jones, contributing significantly to his success on Election Day.



## State Legislature

- ◆ In the past year, state legislative elections in New Jersey and Virginia, as well as special elections and appointments, have yielded a net increase of 10 Black women state legislators nationwide.

## Mayors

- ◆ In 2017, three of the nation's 100 largest cities elected or appointed Black women as mayors for the first time. Vi Alexander Lyles was elected mayor of Charlotte, NC in November 2017; she took office in December 2017. Latoya Cantrell was elected as the first woman mayor of New Orleans, LA in November 2017; she will take office in May 2018. Finally, London Breed was appointed acting mayor of San Francisco, CA in December 2017, after the death of Mayor Ed Lee; in January 2018, she was replaced. In December 2017, Keisha Lance Bottoms was elected as the second Black woman mayor of Atlanta, GA.

## Looking Ahead

The 2018 election provides a ripe opportunity to harness and expand Black women's political power, both as voters and candidates.

- ◆ Black women voters can play a key role in electoral outcomes when they turn out to vote. Nationally, Black women voted at the highest rates of any race and gender group in both the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections. If Alabama's special election is a guide, Black women appear mobilized to turn out in high numbers again in 2018.
- ◆ Amidst the "surge" of women running for office in 2018 are Black women candidates at all levels of elective office. Black women have the potential to make history in the 2018 elections. For example, if successful, gubernatorial candidate Stacey Abrams (D-GA) would become the first Black woman governor in the United States.

In addition to mobilizing and supporting Black women in 2018, the work to ensure that Black women's political power reflects their presence and power in American society entails:

- ◆ Harnessing the energy of Black women engaged in advocacy, community engagement, and public leadership to demand and support Black women candidates for elected office.
- ◆ Expanding 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.
- ◆ Addressing 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.

Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm, the first Black woman elected to Congress, said,

*“At present, our country needs women’s idealism and determination, perhaps more in politics than anywhere else.”*

Her words ring true today, and organizations like Higher Heights and the Center for American Women and Politics will continue our work to be sure that Black women have seats at all tables of governance. We will continue to identify challenges confronting Black women in politics, create environments for Black women to successfully navigate (and disrupt) U.S. political institutions, and foster the support infrastructure necessary to translate Black women's political engagement and resilience into formal political representation.

### 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 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 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 over four 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)