



Breaking Barriers for Black Women Candidates

A Discussion of Systemic
Challenges and Opportunities

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RepresentWomen is a 501c3 nonpartisan nonprofit committed to researching, understanding, and championing evidence-based solutions that support a healthy democracy with gender-balanced representation in elected and appointed positions at every level of government. We advocate for systemic reforms to the recruitment process and voting systems and collect, analyze, and disseminate data that specifically focuses on understanding disparities in political participation among women at the federal, state, and local levels of government.

Breaking Barriers for Black Women Candidates: A Discussion of Systemic Challenges and Opportunities is the first installment in a new series that outlines the systems-level and candidate-level factors impacting Black women's political participation and representation in U.S. politics. The following brief explores the influence of party recruitment, campaign funding, and voting systems in shaping opportunities for Black women to run successful campaigns and win elections. By identifying the systemic barriers Black women political candidates face, we can create a future where more women can [RUN](#) and [WIN](#). Stay tuned for future installments in this series that will explore barriers and opportunities for ensuring Black women can [SERVE](#) and [LEAD](#).

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Notes & Acknowledgements:

(1) Data on women in national, state, and local offices – past and present – is courtesy of the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) at Rutgers University.

(2) Data on campaign finance contributions is courtesy of OpenSecrets.

(3) U.S. population data is courtesy of the U.S. Census Bureau.

(4) The release of this brief does not signify the end of our research on Black women in U.S. politics. We are still collecting information about the barriers that they face and plan to examine further many of the themes discussed in this brief with upcoming research projects. We appreciate feedback from our partners, political researchers, and anyone with a vested interest in the work of RepresentWomen.

Opening Letter

Being the second Black woman in Portland, Maine's history that has been elected to the city council is double-sided. On the one hand, it's one of the greatest achievements of my life, and on the other, it's one of the most mentally and emotionally challenging experiences I've ever had. I regularly think about all the sacrifices Black women have made and the violence they have endured so I could be awarded this opportunity. I often think of the first Black woman elected to the council in our city, who said, "It's important to be the first, just make sure you're not the last," about Black women in office.

I am so grateful for this opportunity to be a leader of my city, especially because the institution of government has never been designed for people who look like me. It's an honor to be an elected official who has broken many historical barriers, and I'll never take it for granted. I also recognize what a privilege it is that Maine is the first state in our nation to use ranked choice voting.

During my tenure, there has been racism, sexism, and ageism. There have been death threats and hate mail sent to my personal address. I've had my photo and personal information put on a website specifically for threats of violence. I've had photos of my family put on a website specifically for threats of violence. I've endured a multitude of racial slurs being shouted during public comment, a time that is meant for our community to make their voice heard on policy items.

There have been times I've made a comment inside council chambers, only to have a male colleague say the exact same thing and receive praise for it. There's a lack of a living wage for elected officials, making effective policy creation extremely difficult based on limited capacity due to our full-time jobs. We also don't have term limits. One of the previous councilors served *24 years* in the same seat. So, while I feel extremely lucky to be in this space, it's still contingent on which councilors decide to run, or not to run, for re-election.

The reality is we won't make it very far if the framework we serve in is still inherently biased, racist, sexist, and filled with significant barriers. I want to enthusiastically look at another Black woman and tell her she should run for office - and I can't do that if we don't address not only the things that stop us from running for office in the first place but also the barriers that stop us from remaining in office after our term is up.

There are steps we can take to ensure that Black women not only hold public office but feel supported while serving. We must focus on continued and intentional systems change that dismantles the barriers that have harmed so many of us. We don't have a democracy without Black women, and I look forward to creating an environment where more of us have a chance to run, win, serve, and lead. I refuse to be the last.

Sincerely,

Victoria Pelletier

*Portland City Council Member and
RepresentWomen National Partnerships Manager*

Executive Summary

Black women have historically been, and continue to be, underrepresented at every level of government in the United States for cultural and structural reasons. Among these are biases, misogynoir, and flawed political practices. Increasing Black women's political power and representation requires equitable access to political and financial resources and reform to our antiquated voting system.

This brief surveys three key barriers Black women face when running for office: the current criteria of political party recruitment, exclusionary funding practices, and plurality voting. We then propose actionable avenues for change to expand opportunities for Black women in politics and ameliorate our democracy.

Our key takeaways are as follows:

- 1. Early investment by political parties advances Black women in politics.**
This involves setting candidate recruitment targets and quotas along with implementing networking and mentorship initiatives in partnership with candidate organizations.
- 2. Donors should adopt gender and race-balanced funding measures** to fund Black women's campaigns. PACs and donors can model these initiatives after those already existing in other industries.
- 3. Public financing programs (PFPs) empower Black women candidates to run competitive campaigns** by amplifying small-dollar donations and limiting the impact of big money.
- 4. Ranked choice voting (RCV) creates opportunities for Black women candidates** by eliminating split votes and enabling non-status quo candidates to lead viable campaigns.
 - a. Proportional ranked choice voting (PRCV) enhances these opportunities** by allowing communities to elect candidates in proportion to their percentage of the population.

Introduction

Shirley Chisholm, the first Black woman elected to the United States Congress and to seek a major party's nomination in a presidential election, believed that the government must represent the country's diversity.¹ Chisholm contended that Black women are granted fewer opportunities to run for office because they are viewed as non-traditional candidates.² She remarked that "In the end, anti-Black, anti-female, and all forms of discrimination are equivalent to the same thing: anti-humanism."³

Black women face obstacles to fair representation that stem from ethno-racial discrimination and gender-based prejudice. These forms of misogynoir occur societally and within political spaces. Their impact is heightened by the fact that the U.S. political system has built its foundations on white patriarchy, which inherently fails to account for the challenges faced by Black women who want to participate in politics.⁴ Although a record-breaking number of Black women ran and won in recent elections, they remain underrepresented at all levels of government, showing a need to understand the specific barriers that they face.⁵

"Breaking Barriers for Black Women Candidates: A Discussion of Systemic Challenges and Opportunities" is the first installment in a new series where we aim to identify the candidate-level and systems-level factors impacting Black women's political participation and representation in the U.S. This brief explores the influence of party recruitment, campaign funding, and voting systems in shaping opportunities for Black women to run successful campaigns. Our research involved interviewing Black women in politics and political advocacy about the themes discussed throughout this brief, such as party biases, inequitable funding, and racial inequality. By identifying the systemic barriers Black women candidates face, we can work towards creating a future where more women can [RUN](#) and [WIN](#). Stay tuned for future installments in this series that will explore barriers and opportunities for ensuring Black women can [SERVE](#) and [LEAD](#).

¹ Barbara Winslow. "Shirley Chisholm: Catalyst for Change" *The Journal of African American History* ([July 2004](#)).

² Zing Tsjeng and Zhi Ying Tsjeng. "Forgotten Women: The Leaders" Cassell Illustrated, Octopus Publishing Group ([March 2018](#)).

³ Rajini Vaidyanathan. "Before Hillary Clinton, there was Shirley Chisholm." *BBC News*, Washington ([January 2016](#)).

⁴ Nadia E. Brown. "Political Participation of Women of Color: An Intersectional Analysis" *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy* ([October 2014](#)); Also discussed during her interview.

⁵ Lisa Garcíá Bedolla, Katherine Tate, and Janelle Wong. "14 Indelible Effects: The Impact of Women of Color in the U.S. Congress" in Sue Thomas and Clyde Wilcox (eds), *Women and Elective Office: Past, Present, and Future*, 3rd edition, Oxford University Press ([January 2014](#)).

The State of Black Women in U.S. Politics in 2024

According to the U.S. Census, Black women make up 8% of the population and are on track to grow in the coming years.⁶ Women who self-identify as Black represent a disproportionately low percentage of appointed and elected officials. Racially equitable changes must be implemented to have a representative democracy.

Office	Number of Black Women	Total Number of Women
Federal Executive	1	1
Congress (voting members only)	29	151
Statewide Executive	11	99
State Legislature	383	2,420
Mayors (100 most populated cities)	8	34

Figure 1 shows the current number of Black women electeds serving at each level of the U.S. government. Source: [Center for American Women and Politics](#) (January 2024).

Vice President Kamala Harris is the only Black and South Asian-American woman elected to the federal executive branch.⁷ There are 29 Black women in Congress, 28 of whom serve in the U.S. House.⁸ Recently appointed Laphonza Butler (D-CA) is only the third Black woman to serve as a U.S. Senator and currently the only Black woman in the U.S. Senate.⁹ There are two Black women U.S Delegates.¹⁰ Only 5% of the 118th Congress are Black women and, historically, only 0.4% of all members of Congress have been Black women since the legislative body’s formation in 1789.¹¹

Black women’s prospects for political representation are greatest at the state level.¹² There are 11 (4%) Black women serving in statewide elective executive positions out of 97 total positions (10D, 1R).¹³ A Black woman has never been governor of any state.¹⁴

⁶ United States Census Bureau. “National Population by Characteristics: 2020-2022” ([Accessed September 2023](#)).

⁷ Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP). “Black Women in Elective Office” ([Accessed September 2023](#)).

⁸ All 28 are Democrats. Ibid.

⁹ Maeve Reston and Annabelle Timsit. “Laphonza Butler sworn in as the third Black female senator in history” *The Washington Post* ([October 2023](#)).

¹⁰ District of Columbia and the U.S. Virgin Islands; CAWP. “Black Women in Elective Office” ([Accessed September 2023](#)).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Jazmine Ulloa. “More Black Women Run for Office, but Prospects Fade the Higher They Go” *The New York Times* ([March 2023](#)).

¹³ CAWP. “History of Women Governors” ([Accessed October 2023](#)).

¹⁴ CAWP. “Black Women in Elective Office” ([Accessed September 2023](#)).

Barriers and Solutions to Black Women's Political Participation

Several viable strategies can be implemented to address the gender and race-based barriers that impact Black women's ability to run for office and win elections. Our research shows that candidate-level and systems-level solutions are required to increase women's political participation at all levels of government. This brief explores political party recruitment, inequitable funding, and voting system design.

Barrier: Political Party Recruitment

Party recruitment of Black women is crucial because political party endorsements are advantageous to candidates who receive support and detrimental to those they do not select. Parties recruit and select candidates based on factors like party loyalty, popularity, and preparedness.¹⁵ The Republican Party rarely recruits Black women; this may be because the majority of women who support the party are non-Black.¹⁶ In 2022, one hundred thirty-six Republican women nominees were seeking federal and state office; only 10 were Black women.¹⁷

The Democratic Party has a better track record of nominating diverse candidates but has still routinely supported white men and women over Black women candidates. In Maryland's 2015 Senate race, Democratic Party leaders endorsed Rep. Chris Van Hollen over Rep. Donna Edwards despite their almost identical voting records and support from progressive groups.¹⁸ Van Hollen ran reductive campaign advertisements depicting Edwards as an angry Black woman, questioning her integrity, and attacking her appearance.¹⁹ Following the loss, Edwards drew attention to party leaders calling Van Hollen a "strong white man" and "born to do the job."²⁰

To fill the gap left by parties, PACs and political organizations have stepped up to endorse Democratic candidates who are seen as too out of the ordinary or unlikely to win races. Organizations such as Justice Democrats have endorsed promising Black women like Rep. Ayanna Pressley (D-MA). In 2018, Pressley joined the growing list of Black women candidates to win their races and become influential in U.S. politics.²¹

¹⁵ Alex Furlin. "How Are Candidates Recruited to Run for Office?" Good Party ([September 2023](#)).

¹⁶ Rachael Bade. "GOP women's record-breaking success reflects party's major shift on recruiting and supporting female candidates" *The Washington Post* ([December 2020](#)); Pew Research Center. "Trends in Party Affiliation Among Demographic Groups" ([March 2018](#)).

¹⁷ National Federation of Republican Women. "Candidates - 2022" ([Accessed January 2024](#)).

¹⁸ Arelis R. Hernández. "Reid endorses Van Hollen in Md. Senate race" *The Washington Post* ([March 2015](#)).

¹⁹ Rachel Weiner. "Chris Van Hollen Attacks Donna Edwards In Ad" *The Washington Post* ([April 2016](#)).

²⁰ Donna Edwards. "The Problem Keeping America From Being The Democracy It Should Be" *Cosmopolitan* ([May 2016](#)).

²¹ Alex Samuels and Nathaniel Rakich. "What 'The Squad' Tells Us About Progressives' Ability To Win Voters Of Color" *FiveThirtyEight* ([November 2021](#)).

Solution: Gender and Race-Balanced Recruitment Targets and Quotas

Political parties play a key role in elevating and advancing candidates throughout the election process.²² To allow voters to select from a representative and diverse pool, parties must address the biases in candidate selection processes and introduce gender and race-balanced recruitment targets and quotas. Parties must also serve as connectors by creating opportunities for Black women candidates to network with influential donors, recruit volunteers, and promote their campaigns.

In 2017, Black women in politics wrote an open letter to then-Democratic National Committee (DNC) Chair Tom Perez, bringing the party's neglect of Black women to light and requesting a meeting to get the party to invest more actively in Black women as political leaders.²³ Strategist Donna Brazile and political entities like the Maryland Black Caucus Foundation have similarly highlighted the need to recruit more Black women to run for elected office.²⁴

Steps Political Parties Can Take

Early investment by parties is critical to building a strong pipeline of viable Black women candidates. By recruiting Black women to run for entry-level county and precinct positions, parties would create opportunities for Black women to run for higher levels of office with party support. However, this does not diminish that Black women have shown their ability to lead at all levels of government, with women such as Mayor Cherelle Parker (D-Philadelphia, PA), Rep. Lucy McBath (D-GA), and Rep. Lauren Underwood (D-IL) having become effective and respected elected leaders.

Candidate organizations such as The Black Women's Roundtable, Emerge, EMILY's List, Higher Heights for America PAC, and IGNITE create a blueprint for the actions parties can take to level the playing field for candidates. Initiatives that allow Black women candidates and electeds to connect, such as mentorship programs and networking forums, provide support systems for Black women that span beyond one election cycle.

Political parties should build broad and representative coalitions by meeting with and learning from candidate organizations. Uplifting Black women in the political sphere will strengthen parties, allowing them to expand their base and create policy platforms derived from lived rather than assumed experiences.

²² RepresentWomen. "Women Running: Gender balanced funding and recruitment targets" ([Accessed January 2024](#)).

²³ NBC News. "Open Letter to DNC Chair" ([May 2017](#)).

²⁴ Civic Innovation Center, University of Maryland School of Public Policy. "Donna Brazile Discusses Black Political Empowerment Following the 2020 Election" ([February 2021](#)).

Barrier: Racially Inequitable Funding

Individual donors, PACs, and political parties generally fund Black women’s campaigns less than those of white women.²⁵ CAWP’s 2019-2022 data indicates that as many as 39% of incumbent Black women state house candidates and 44% of state senate candidates faced an opponent who was "monetarily competitive."²⁶ Research by RepresentWomen and OpenSecrets found it takes more money for women to win elections, particularly for women running as challengers or for an open seat.²⁷

Race and Gender Group	Amount Raised by PACs	Amount Raised by Large Individual Donors	Amount Raised by Small Individual Donors	Average Total Amount Raised
Black Women	\$18,285	\$161,104	\$121,116	\$309,665
White Women	\$18,224	\$527,408	\$184,687	\$829,092

Figure 2 shows the average amounts raised by Black and White women challengers and open-seat candidates in the 2020 Congressional primaries. Source: [OpenSecrets](#).

In 2022, Stacey Abrams and Val Demings lost highly competitive races despite independently raising over \$100 million and \$70 million, respectively.²⁸ This proved their viability, but the party still saw them as non-traditional. The Democratic Party failed to supply both women with additional funding at critical junctures in their campaigns despite raising \$1.4 billion for the election cycle, leading to both candidates’ electoral defeats and showing that party funding is crucial to winning.²⁹

Even further, Black women rely more on small-dollar donations than their white counterparts.³⁰ In 2023, Angela Alsobrooks raised more money from individual donations than her opponent, David Trone, in Maryland’s U.S. Senate Democratic primary.³¹ Trone, who reported earning an annual salary of up to \$14 million, pulled 98% of the \$10 million he raised from his personal accounts.³² Most Black women cannot pull millions of dollars from their accounts like wealthy candidates such as Trone and must have access to equitable funding.

²⁵ Grace Haley and Sarah Bryner. “Which Women Can Run? The Fundraising Gap in the 2020 Elections’ Competitive Primaries” OpenSecrets ([June 2021](#)).

²⁶ Kira Sanbonmatsu. “The Donor Gap: Raising Women’s Political Voices” CAWP ([October 2023](#)).

²⁷ Cynthia Richie Terrell and Maura Reilly, with Courtney Lamendola, Corinne Bennett, Jordan Westendorf, Mckenna Donegan, and Marilyn Harbert. “PACs and Donors: Agents of Change for Women’s Representation” RepresentWomen ([June 2020](#)).

²⁸ Mini Racker. “Two Black Women Are Making Strong Bids for Senate. Some Say the Democratic Party Has Failed Them” *Time Magazine* ([November 2022](#)).

²⁹ Ibid; OpenSecrets. “Democratic Party Fundraising Overview” ([Accessed January 2024](#)).

³⁰ Grace Haley and Sarah Bryner. “Which Women Can Run?” OpenSecrets ([June 2021](#)).

³¹ Shifra Dayak. “Trone leads fundraising in US Senate race in Maryland, but trails in individual donations” Capital News Service, Herald-Mail Media ([December 2023](#)).

³² Bill Turque. “In a field of rich congressional candidates, this wine magnate is the richest” *The Washington Post* ([March 2016](#)).

Solution 1: Gender and Race-Balanced Funding

To remedy these systemic inequities, donors and PACs must actively commit to allocating funds to Black women's campaigns.³³ National parties should incentivize state and local parties to fund more Black women candidates. Gender-balanced funding initiatives are not uncommon and are already used across industries.³⁴ The African Women Impact Fund started a gender-inclusive initiative after discovering that women-run businesses are given only 7% of all investment funding.³⁵

Filling the gap left by large dollar donors are groups such as chapters of the Black sorority Delta Sigma Theta, which helps Black women fundraise through soliciting donations from alumni networks, and launched D4Women in Action: DST for African American Women for Political Power to build a pipeline of Black women to public service.³⁶ The group has endorsed Black women candidates like Angela Alsobrooks (D-MD), Barbara Lee (D-CA), and Lisa Blunt Rochester (D-DE).

Solution 2: Public Financing Programs (PFPs)

Public financing programs (PFPs), where small-dollar donations are amplified by government dollars, allow non-traditional candidates to lead competitive campaigns. PFPs improve candidate-donor engagement by incentivizing candidates to rely on voters rather than big money and special interest groups.³⁷ Higher Heights Co-Founder Kimberly Peeler-Allen confirmed this, stating that candidates must spend more time courting high-dollar donors rather than with their constituents so that they can secure re-election and continue to serve those same constituents.

Individual, small-donor public financing programs (PFPs) may also help to resolve gendered and racial disparities in financing Black women's campaigns, particularly at the local levels of government.³⁸ PFPs provide matches as high as 9:1 in Denver, CO, and 8:1 in New York, NY, where candidates who opt in receive nine or eight dollars for every one dollar that qualifies for campaign contributions.³⁹

³³ Federal Election Commission. "Making Disbursements as a PAC" ([Accessed January 2024](#)); OpenSecrets. "Contribution Limits: 2024" ([Accessed January 2024](#)).

³⁴ International Finance Corporation, Oliver Wyman, and Rock Creek. "Report: Moving Toward Gender Balance in Private Equity and Venture Capital" ([March 2019](#)); Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. "Toolkit for Mainstreaming and Implementing Gender Equality" ([Accessed January 2024](#)).

³⁵ PR Newswire. "African Women Impact Fund launches with USD\$60 million commitment to drive an inclusive investment environment" ([September 2022](#)).

³⁶ PR Newswire. "Delta For Women in Action (D4 Women in Action) Announces Full Slate of Endorsed Candidates for the 2020 Election" ([October 2020](#)).

³⁷ Courtney Lamendola, Steph Scaglia, and Paige Chan. "Why Women Won in 2021" RepresentWomen ([September 2022](#)).

³⁸ Chisun Lee, Gregory Clark, and Nirali Vyas. "Small Donor Public Financing Could Advance Race and Gender Equity in Congress" Brennan Center for Justice ([October 2020](#)).

³⁹ Office of the Clerk and Recorder. "The Fair Elections Fund," Denver ([Accessed February 2024](#)); NYC Campaign Finance Board "Matching Funds Program" ([Accessed February 2024](#)).

Barrier: Plurality Voting

Plurality voting systems declare the candidate who receives the most votes as the winner, even if they fail to secure majority support.⁴⁰ This disadvantages Black women, who are often stereotyped as less electable and lacking leadership skills that are attributed to white candidates.⁴¹ Plurality voting compounds these negative effects because political parties and voters are incentivized to vote strategically and support safe, status-quo candidates to increase their chances of winning.

Another concern is vote splitting, which can result in a political minority win. Black women have frequently reported being told to wait their turn by party leaders worried about candidates they consider to be less competitive spoiling the election.⁴² City of Glenarden Mayor Cashenna Cross told us, "Black women [candidates] have developed a 'hospitality mentality' because we have been told to wait our turn for so long. They think we have got to wait for somebody to invite us to the table."⁴³

Solution 1: Ranked Choice Voting (RCV)

Implementing ranked choice voting (RCV) would mitigate these issues by leveling the playing field, allowing more candidates to run and more non-traditional candidates to win.⁴⁴ Under RCV, voters rank candidates based on preference, meaning that multiple Black women can be on the ballot without splitting the vote.⁴⁵ RCV boosts voter turnout, fosters greater interaction between candidates and voters, and eradicates the need for expensive runoff elections.⁴⁶

Throughout the U.S., 50 jurisdictions use RCV.⁴⁷ Among them is San Francisco, CA, which elected London Breed as its first Black woman mayor in 2018.⁴⁸ Although RCV is just one step in removing the multitude of barriers Black women face when running for office, dismantling our antiquated, plurality voting system is a critical step in creating more opportunities for Black women to run and win.

⁴⁰ Rachel Hutchinson. "Fewest Votes Wins: Plurality Victories in 2022 Primaries" FairVote ([October 2022](#)).

⁴¹ Marlette Jackson and Paria Rajai. "Does Your Definition of Leadership Exclude Women of Color?" Harvard Business Review ([January 2021](#)).

⁴² Julianne Malveaux. "No More 'Wait Your Turn' Politics" *Richmond Free Press* ([July 2018](#)).

⁴³ Cross represents a city where Black women hold [4 out of 7 seats](#) on the City Council.

⁴⁴ Alexandra Copper and Ruth Greenwood. "The Civic Benefits of Ranked Choice Voting: Eight Ways Adopting Ranked Choice Voting Can Improve Voting and Elections." Campaign Legal Center ([August 2018](#)).

⁴⁵ Deb Otis and Nora Dell. "Ranked Choice Voting Elections Benefit Candidates and Voters of Color" FairVote ([May 2021](#)).

⁴⁶ FairVote. "Research and Data on RCV in Practice" ([Accessed January 2024](#)).

⁴⁷ FairVote. "Ranked Choice Voting Information" ([Accessed January 2024](#)).

⁴⁸ Daniella Cheslow. "San Francisco Elects City's First African-American Female Mayor" NPR ([June 2018](#)).

Highlight: Black Women's Representation in RCV Cities

Berkeley, Oakland, San Francisco, and San Leandro, CA, adopted RCV in the early 2000s, becoming early adopters of the system.⁴⁹ RCV remains in place today, and Black women representing these cities include eight-term Berkeley Councilmember and former Vice Mayor Maudelle Shirek, Oakland Councilmember Treva Reid, and San Leandro's first African American councilmember, Surlene Grant. In Oakland, Black voters have been more likely to rank candidates than white voters, showing positive engagement with RCV.⁵⁰

New York City held its first RCV elections in 2021, resulting in its most diverse city council ever, including 10 Black women, four Afro-Latinas, and a Black woman speaker.⁵¹ RepresentWomen evaluated the impact of NYC's first woman and woman of color majority council in our [Impact Analysis of NYC's Woman Majority Council](#).⁵²

Solution 2: Proportional Ranked Choice Voting (PRCV)

Proportional ranked choice voting (PRCV) is a multi-winner voting system that permits voters to rank candidates by preference.⁵³ PRCV is advantageous to Black women candidates because this multi-winner system means more seats are available and, thus, more opportunities for Black women to win. The use of PRCV in Cambridge, MA, has resulted in a more representative city council.⁵⁴

Majority-Black districts have been shown to elect Black candidates in proportion to their percentage of the population.⁵⁵ PRCV has yielded representative outcomes in cities like Arden, DE, and Minneapolis, MN.⁵⁶ To increase the number of Black women in local offices, cities with high Black populations should be the primary targets of electoral reformers looking to implement PRCV. As voting rights expert Lani Guinier asserted, "51% of the people should not get 100% of the power."⁵⁷

⁴⁹ Sarah John. "The Impact of Ranked Choice Voting on Representation: How Ranked Choice Voting Affects Women and People of Color in California" RepresentWomen ([August 2016](#)).

⁵⁰ Deb Otis and Sabrina Laverty. "Ranked Choice Voting Elections Benefit Candidates and Voters of Color: 2024 Update" FairVote ([January 2024](#)).

⁵¹ Courtney Lamendola, Steph Scaglia, and Paige Chan. "Why Women Won in 2021" RepresentWomen ([September 2022](#)).

⁵² Steph Scaglia. "Women in Power: Impact Analysis of NYC's Woman Majority Council" RepresentWomen ([July 2023](#)).

⁵³ Steph Scaglia and Courtney Lamendola. "Proportional Ranked Choice Voting: Promoting Fair Elections and Removing Barriers for Women in U.S. Politics" RepresentWomen ([October 2023](#)).

⁵⁴ Deb Otis. "Proportional RCV in Cambridge, Massachusetts" FairVote ([October 2022](#)).

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ RepresentWomen collects and maintains data on outcomes for women in RCV and PRCV elections. For more information, please contact info@representwomen.org.

⁵⁷ Lani Guinier. *The Tyranny of the Majority: Fundamental Fairness in Representative Democracy*. New York: Free Press of Glencoe ([June 1994](#)).

Conclusion

For Black women to run and win equitably, we must dismantle the candidate-level and systems-level obstacles they face. Political parties play key roles in candidate recruitment and should invest early in Black women. PACs, donors, and public financing programs can decrease the impact of large-dollar donations and put power back in the hands of voters. RCV or PRCV should also be implemented to create fairer elections and more representative outcomes.

A representative government fosters trust between voters and elected officials. Having more Black women elected increases the likelihood that challenges faced by Black communities are addressed by representatives who can relate to their lived experiences and have a vested interest in implementing effective policy solutions. For Black women, seeing themselves in government combats misogynoir and reinforces the fact that they are capable and worthy decision-makers.

Our research on Black women in politics is part of a broader dialogue on equity and race in U.S. politics. Our elected officials should reflect the diversity of all 50 states, but Black women remain underrepresented at every level of government. Reforming our current system and implementing actionable changes is critical to increasing Black women's role in U.S. governance.

Takeaways

- 1. Early investment by political parties advances Black women in politics.**
This involves setting candidate recruitment targets and quotas and implementing networking and mentorship initiatives in partnership with candidate organizations.
- 2. Donors should adopt gender and race-balanced funding measures** to fund Black women's campaigns. PACs and donors can model these initiatives after those already existing in other industries.
- 3. Public financing programs (PFPs) empower Black women candidates to run competitive campaigns** by amplifying small-dollar donations and limiting the impact of big money.
- 4. Ranked choice voting (RCV) creates opportunities for Black women candidates** by eliminating split votes and enabling non-status quo candidates to lead viable campaigns.
 - a. PRCV enhances these opportunities** by allowing communities to elect candidates in proportion to their percentage of the population.



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