



THE ELECTABILITY MYTH

The Shifting Demographics of Political Power in America

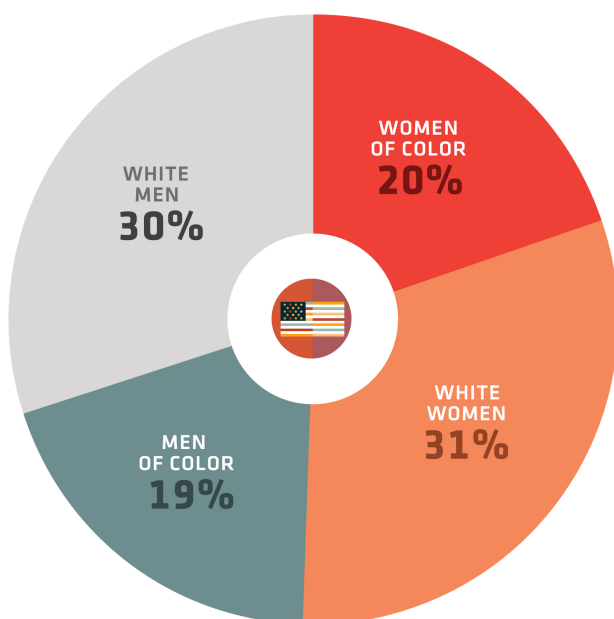
June 2019

ABOUT OUR WORK

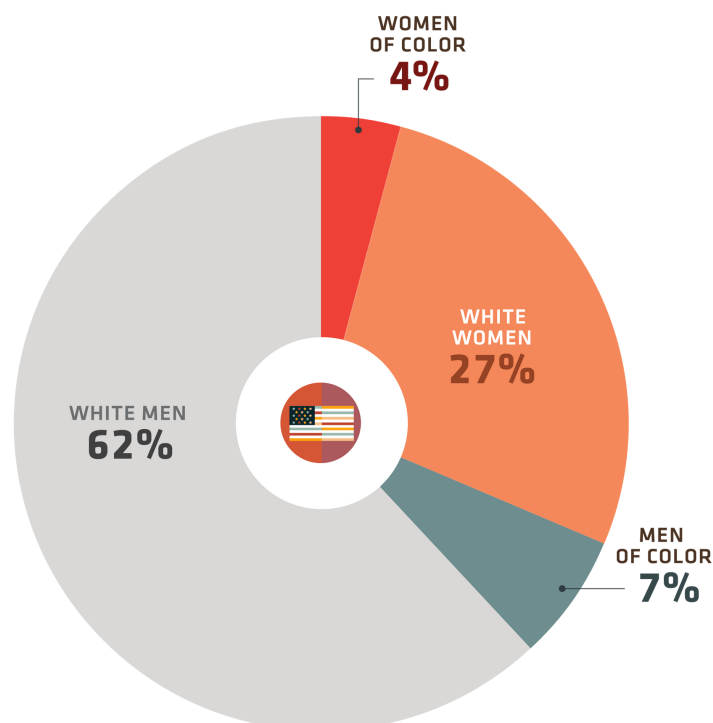
Since 2014, the **Reflective Democracy Campaign** has maintained the country's only comprehensive database of candidates and elected officials by race and gender, offering ground-breaking insights on the demographics of power in America. Our findings measure how far we've come — and how far we have to go — to achieve a democracy that reflects all Americans, where women of all races and men of color have a fair share of seats at the table of power.

2019: Demographics of Political Power

US Census



US Elected Officials



Throughout this report, with the exception of "In America's Big Cities, Women Are Making Mayoral Inroads," our findings refer to data at the federal, state and county levels. Additional data on cities is available at [WhoLeads.Us](https://www.wholeads.us).

THE ELECTABILITY MYTH

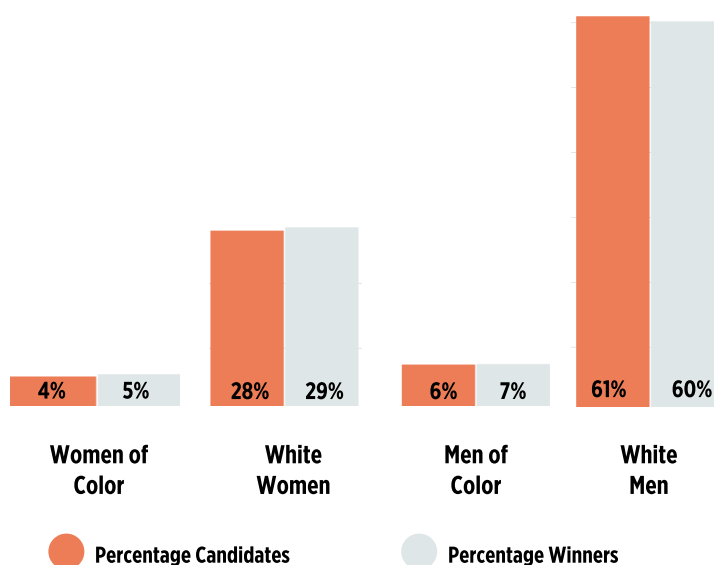
The Shifting Demographics of Political Power in America

With a historically diverse range of Presidential candidates already campaigning for 2020, “electability” dominates the national conversation. Yet in a political system dominated by white men, electability is a loaded term. So we decided to run the numbers to separate myth from fact on exactly who is electable.

We looked at the race and gender of 33,854 candidates up and down the ballot in the 2018 elections, as well as 44,900 current elected officials, and determined who is winning elections in the 21st century. Our findings? Voters are avidly pursuing a democracy whose leadership reflects today’s America, not the Old Boys’ Club too often crowding the table.

There’s no mistaking that white men dominate politics. At 30% of the population, they hold 62% of elected offices at the local, state, and federal level – more than double their share. But while white men may still have a monopoly hold on elected office, they do not hold a monopoly on electability. In 2015, our research found that when they’re on the ballot, women of all races and men of color win elections at the same rates as white men. Running the data on the 2018 elections confirms it: white men’s electability advantage is a myth.

2018: Who Ran, Who Won?



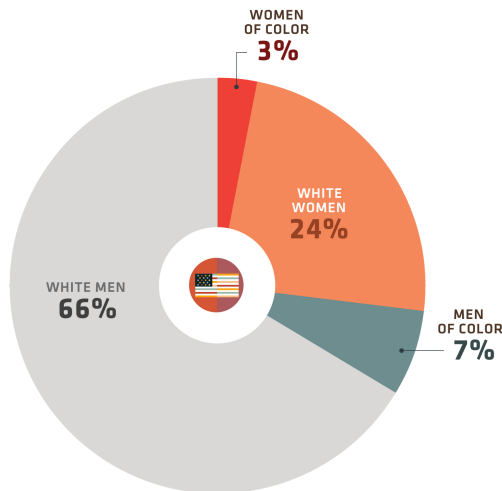
It's Time To Redefine "Electability"

Today's "electability" debate is occurring against an historic yet overlooked upheaval in the demographics of American political power. In recent years, women of all races and men of color have gained positions in federal, statewide, and state legislative offices, effecting a decrease in white male representation across the entire political system.

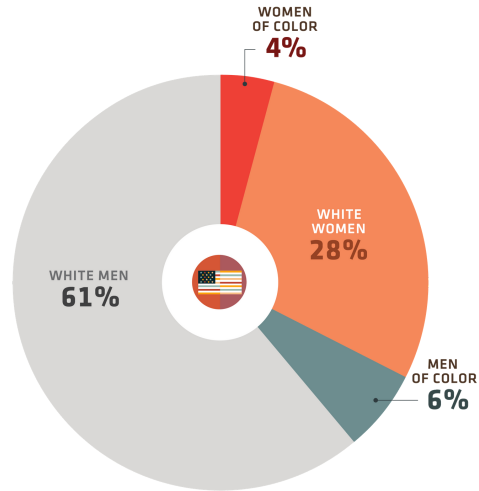
- Women are claiming a record-breaking share of political power at the federal, state, and local levels, chipping away at white male over-representation.
- Women of color – the most under-represented group – are rising quickly as candidates and officeholders, driving steady progress for all people of color.
- Women of all races are making significant gains as state level officeholders and mayors of big cities.
- The rate of increase for women on the ballot and in office accelerated sharply after the 2016 election, particularly for women of color.
- While both major political parties field candidates who are disproportionately white and male, inroads by people of color – women and men alike – have made the Democratic Party significantly more reflective of the American people.

Women Candidates Reached Historic Highs In 2018

2012: US Candidates



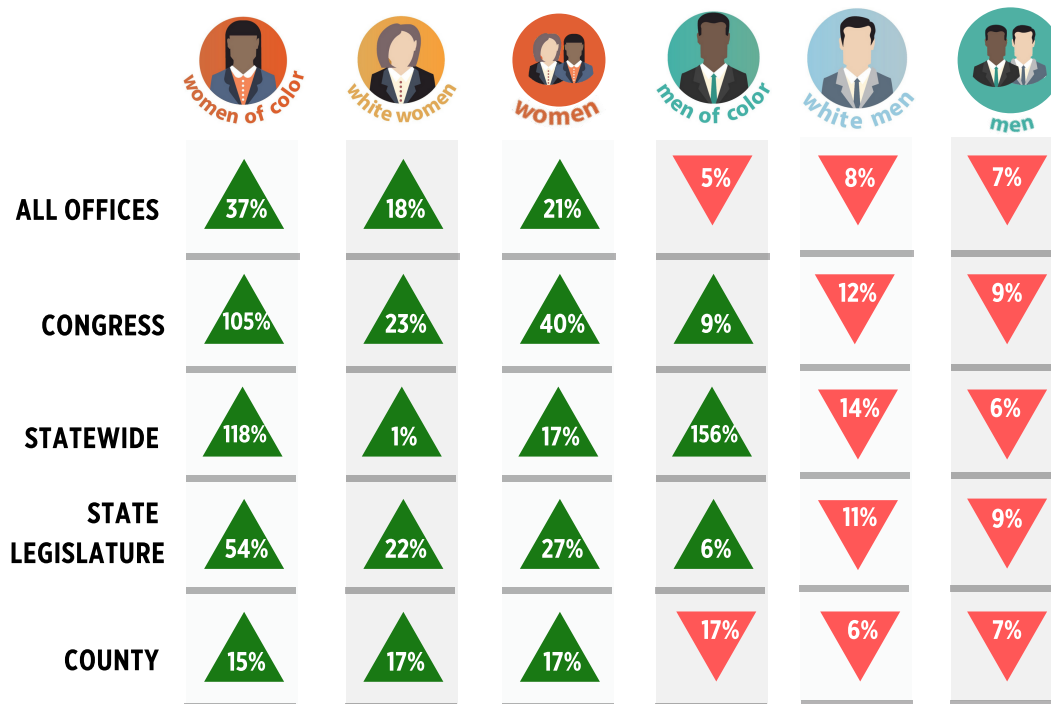
2018: US Candidates



Across local, state, and federal levels, the share of female candidates on the general election ballot increased sharply, indicating rising success in primary contests. The chart below shows the rate of change between 2012 and 2018 for all demographics and levels of office. Particularly noteworthy are the increases of women as candidates for Congress and State Legislature.

The Playing Field Shifts

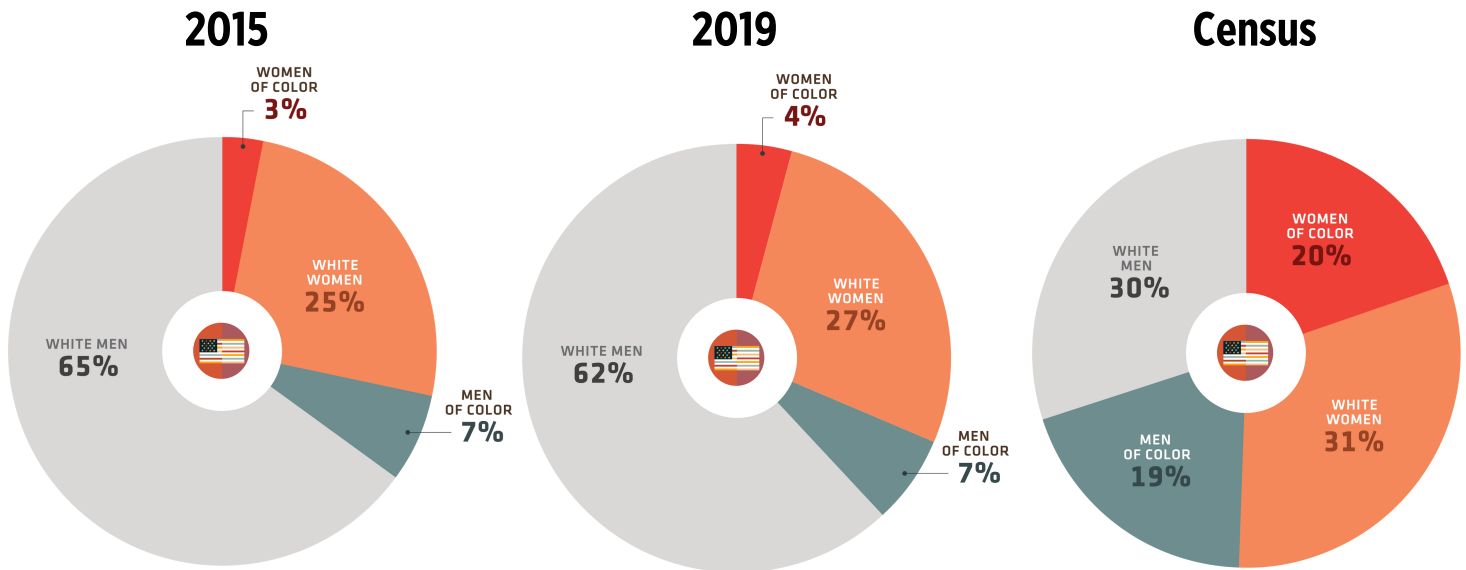
Rates of Change for Candidate Demographics, 2012-2018



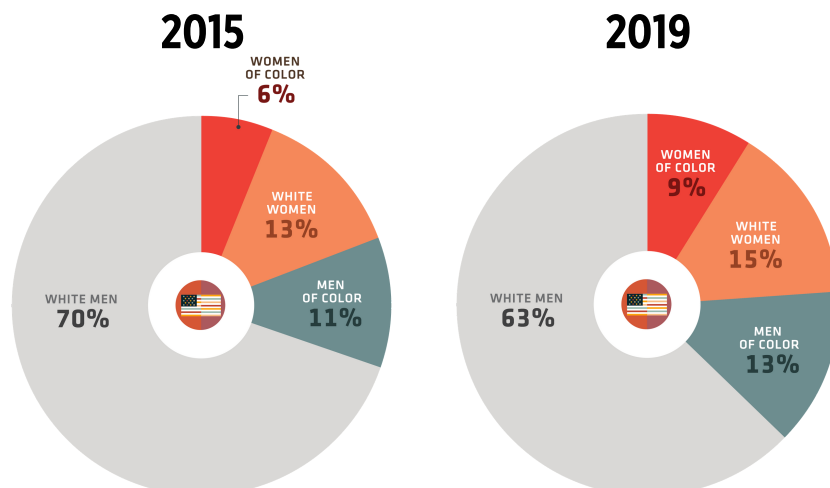
Women Have Increased Sharply At All Levels Of Office Nationwide

The increase in women candidates on the ballot in 2018 translated into more women in elected office in 2019. Across local, state, and federal races, women in elected office have increased from 28% to 31%, a rate of increase of 10% since 2015.

All Elected Officials



Congressional Office

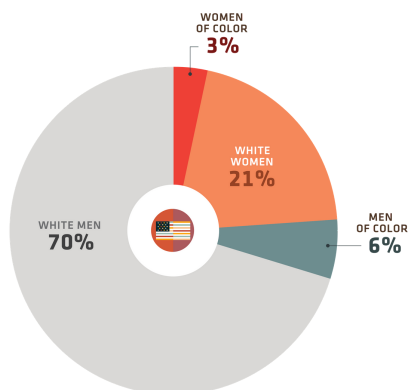


Congressional seats held by women increased by 23% from 2015 to 2019.

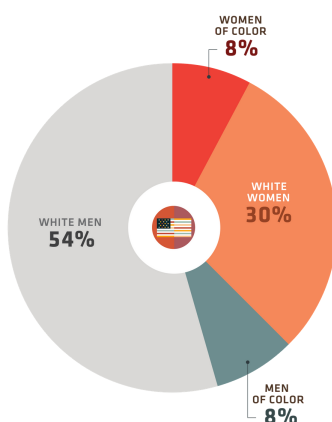


Statewide Office

2015



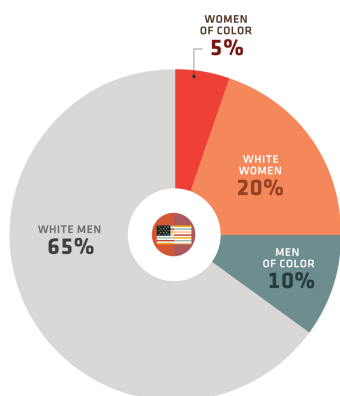
2019



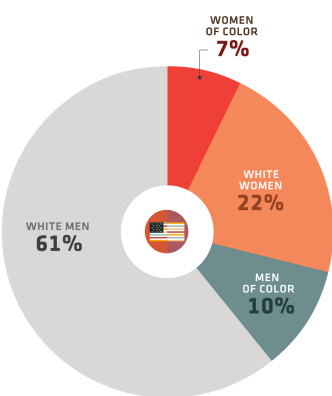
Women's share of statewide executive offices increased by 57%. Today 38% of the nation's statewide executive leaders – including governors, attorneys general, and treasurers – are women.

State Legislature

2015



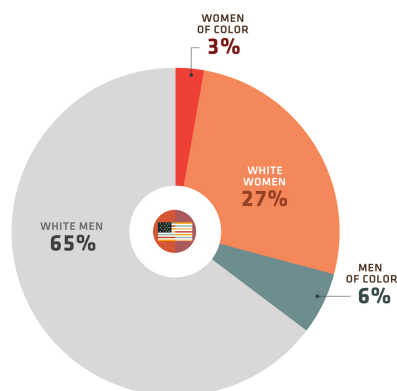
2019



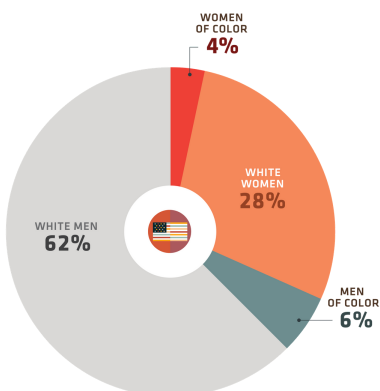
In state legislatures, women have increased their share of seats by 15%.

County Level Office

2015



2019



At the county level, female elected officials have increased by 9%.

Women of Color Are Driving Progress

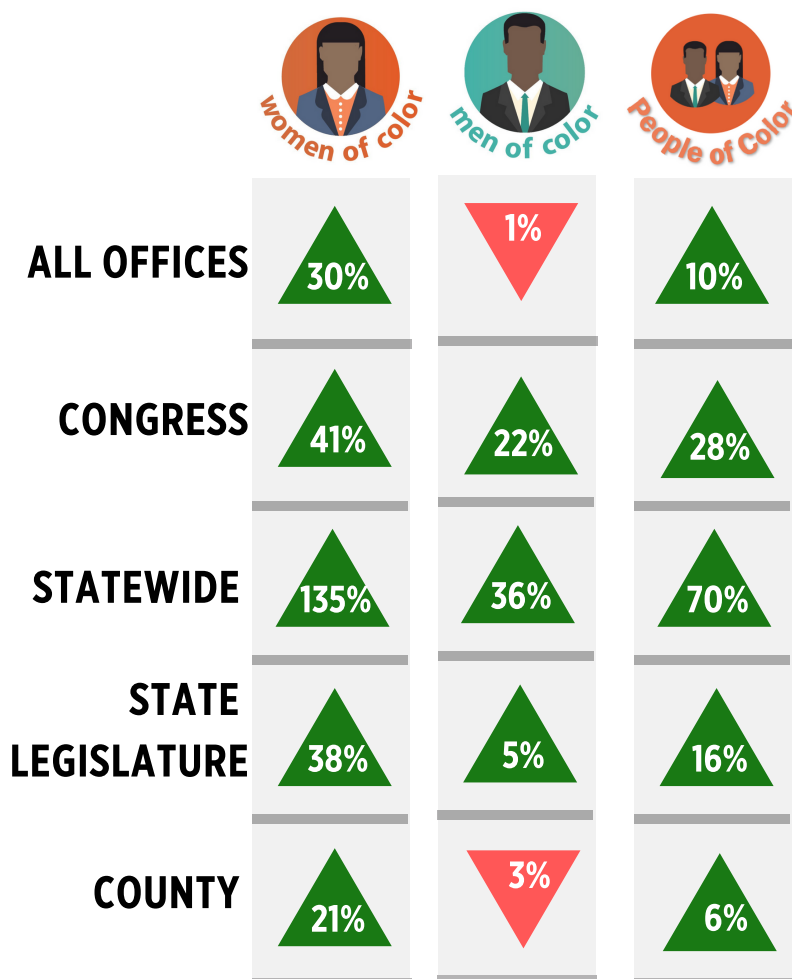
At 20% of the population, women of color are severely under-represented – holding only 4% of all elected offices – and face notable institutional barriers to running for office. Yet our data indicates both improved access to the ballot and significant voter appeal.

Since 2015, women of color have increased dramatically as both candidates and elected officials across all levels of office, driving an overall increase in the representation of people of color. Especially noteworthy are their 40% increase in Congressional seats and 38% increase in State Legislature seats.

At 7% of elected representatives, men of color have stronger representation than their female counterparts, but they have gained seats at a rate of only 0.5% since 2015, compared with a striking 30% increase among women of color.

Power Shift

Women of Color Drive Increase in Elected Officials of Color, 2015-2019

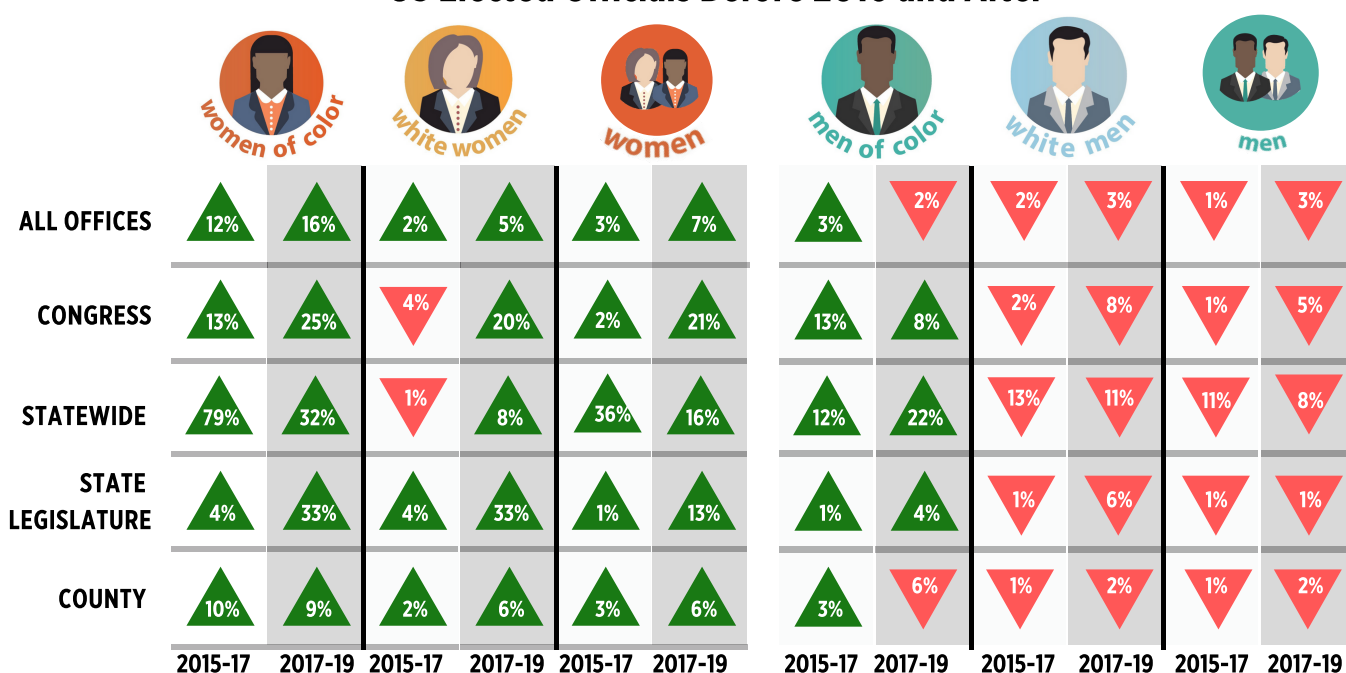


Did the 2016 Election Outcome Super-Charge The Pace of Change?

Following the 2016 election, the pace of demographic change in American politics accelerated across a range of key metrics.

- Women's share of elected seats in local, state, and federal office increased slightly between 2015 and 2017. In the next election cycle, the rate of change doubled.
- The rate of growth for women in Congress virtually exploded, from a weak increase between 2015 and 2017 to an increase of 21% between 2017 and 2019.
- While state legislators who are women of color increased by only 4% from 2015 to 2017, they increased by 33% from 2017 to 2019.
- White men's share of state legislative seats declined by 0.6% from 2015 to 2017. From 2017-2019, the rate of decline increased tenfold to 6%.
- Across all levels of government, the decrease in white male politicians accelerated after 2016.

Accelerating Shifts in the Demographics of Power US Elected Officials Before 2016 and After



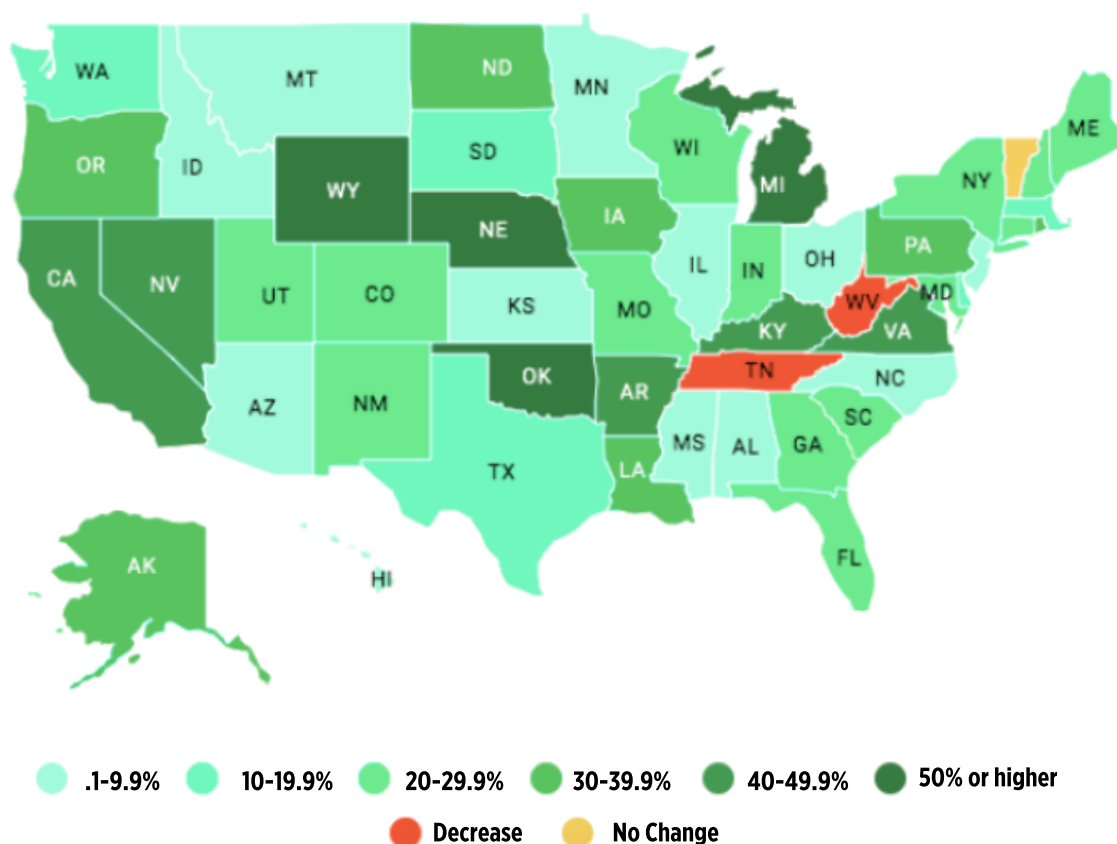
This chart shows the rate of change for each demographic group and office level between 2015 and 2017, and then again between 2017 and 2019.

In State Legislatures, 2018 Was A Wave Election For Women

The 2018 general election saw an increase in women state legislators in all but 3 of 50 states, creating a dramatic before-and-after snapshot.

- In 4 states – Wyoming, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Michigan – women legislators increased at a rate of 50% or greater.
- In 4 more states, women increased by 40%-45%. This includes our nation's most populous state, California, where women grew from 21% to 31% of state legislators, a striking 44% rate of change.
- In 25 more states, including Washington, Texas, Louisiana, and Pennsylvania, women increased by 10-36%.
- Before the 2018 election, only 2 states – Colorado and Vermont – had 40% or more women legislators. Today there are 5, including Nevada's majority-female legislature.

2017 - 2019: Women Increase Representation in State Legislatures from Coast to Coast

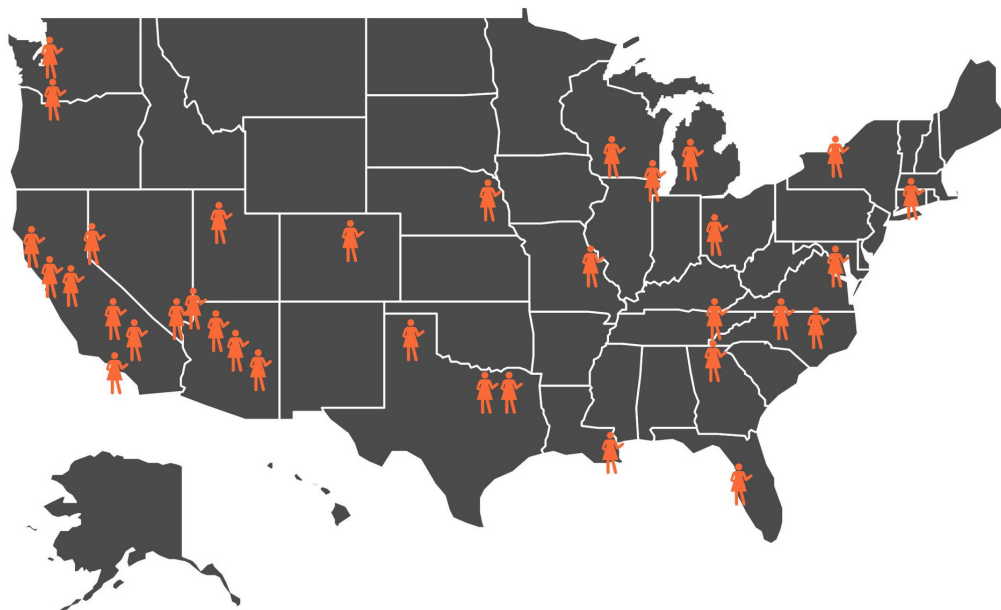


In America's Big Cities, Women Are Making Mayoral Inroads

A powerful minority holds sway in big city government, and it's white men. At only 20% of the population of our major cities, they constitute over 60% of mayors. Yet women of all races and men of color are on the rise in this key executive role.

- 51 of America's 200 most populous cities are led by mayors of color: 38 men and 13 women. Despite their low numbers, women of color hold some serious executive office clout, with 4 of our 25 largest cities led by African American women: Chicago, Charlotte, San Francisco, and Washington, DC.
- 40 of America's 200 most populous cities are led by women, including Fort Worth, Las Vegas, New Orleans, and Seattle.
- Among mayors of the country's 25 largest cities, women of color are the second-most represented group. White men hold 14 of the top spots, women of color hold 4, and white women and men of color each hold 3.
- Of the 40 big city women mayors currently in office, 34 replaced male mayors.

Cross Country Change: Current Women Mayors Who Replaced Men



Phoenix, AZ
Gilbert, AZ
Peoria, AZ
Bakersfield, CA
Fremont, CA

San Francisco, CA
Fontana, CA
Irvine, CA
Hayward, CA
Thornton, CO

New Haven, CT
Washington, DC
Tampa, FL
Atlanta, GA
Chicago, IL

New Orleans, LA
Grand Rapids, MI
St. Louis, MO
Raleigh, NC
Greensboro, NC

Maha, NE
Las Vegas, NV
Henderson, NV
Reno, NV
Rochester, NY

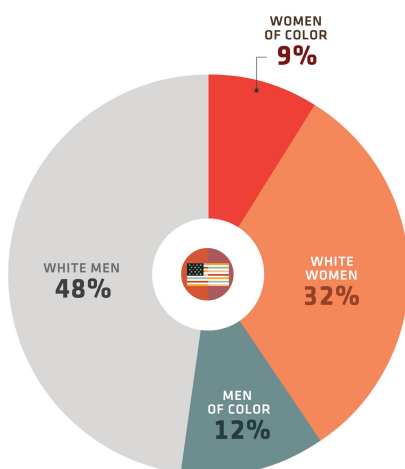
Dayton, OH
Knoxville, TN
Fort Worth, TX
Garland, TX
Amarillo, TX

Salt Lake City, UT
Seattle, WA
Vancouver, WA
Madison, WI

Barriers to Reflective Democracy: Political Parties

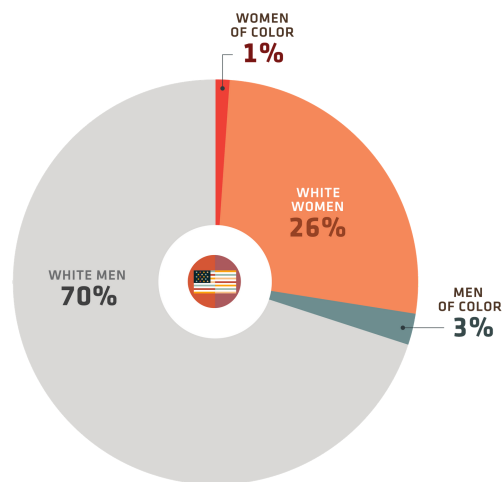
Both major political parties fall far short of fielding candidates who reflect the American people, but Democratic candidates have become significantly more reflective than Republican candidates. While the Democratic Party ran more women of all races and men of color in 2018 than in 2012, progress among Republican candidates was uneven. While white women increased significantly, men of color declined as a share of Republican candidates and women of color remained a tiny fraction, hovering just over 1%.

The Partisan Divide

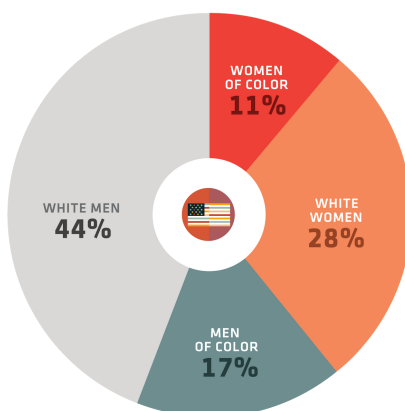


Democrats

**Candidates by Party:
2018 Demographics**

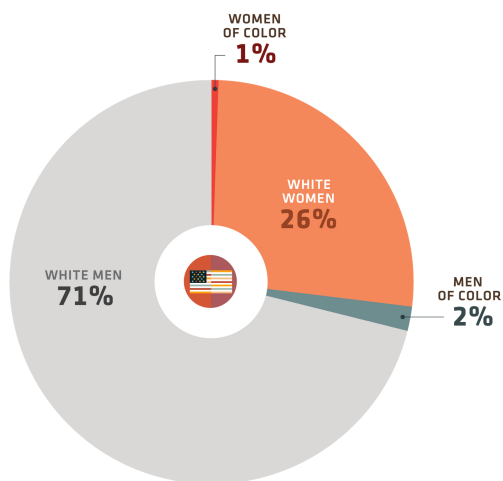


Republicans



Democrats

**Elected Officials By Party:
2019 Demographics**

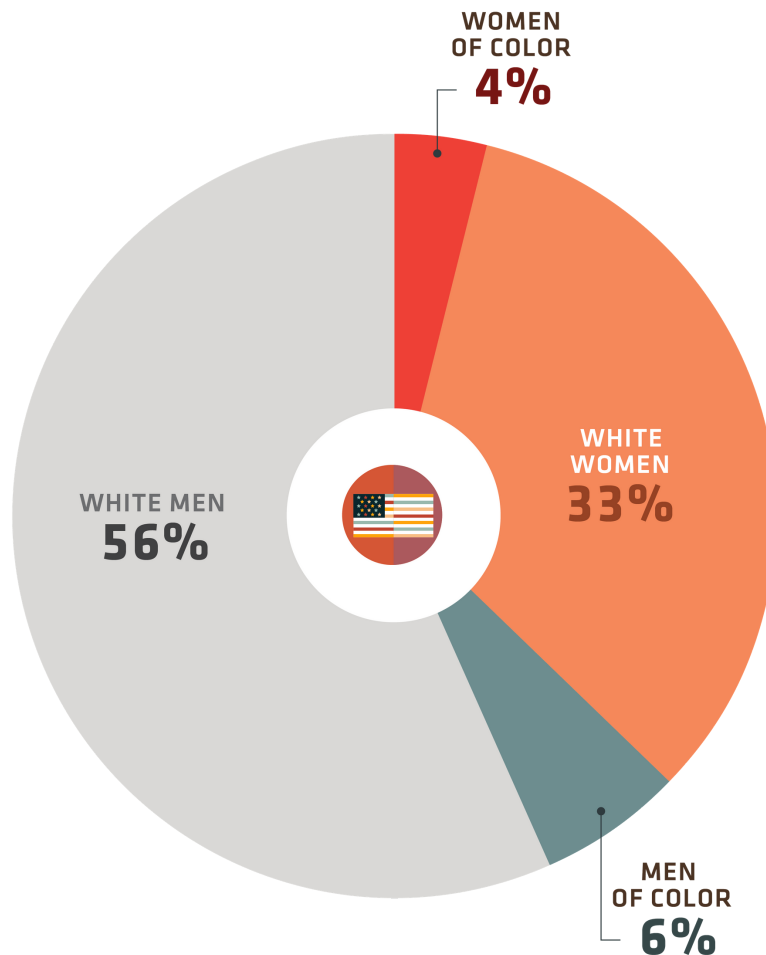


Republicans

Barriers To Reflective Democracy: Uncontested Elections

In the November 2018 general election, over half of all contests had only one candidate. These unopposed candidates were overwhelmingly white and male. Since 2015, when we started tracking candidates running unopposed, their numbers have remained constant, creating a persistent roadblock to improved representation for men of color and women of all races. These uncontested races have been primarily at the county level, but not exclusively. In 2018, 68% of uncontested races were at the county level and 26% were at the state legislature level.

Unopposed Candidates: 2018 Demographics



When Reflective Candidates Are On The Ballot, They Win

We have a long way to go before all Americans see themselves reflected in the representatives making crucial policy choices about our lives. At 51% of the population, women still make up less than one quarter of Congress, and millions live in states where men hold over three quarters of legislative seats. People of color, who are 40% of Americans, hold only 11% of elected seats. White men still overwhelmingly control political power, holding elected office at double the rate of their population.

But white male over-representation is not about their superior pull with voters. When voters have the opportunity to vote for women of all races and men of color, they choose them at the same rates as white men. Accordingly, the wider range of candidates on the ballot in 2018 resulted in more reflective elected leaders in 2019.

A number of entrenched barriers continue to protect the starkly unbalanced demographics of political power in America, such as political parties and other gatekeepers, the power of incumbency, and the economic realities of running for and holding office. However, the pace of change gathered significant momentum in the 2018 election. When the voters speak, they leave no doubt that white male “electability” is myth, not fact.

Methodology

Reflective Democracy Campaign: Electeds Dataset					
	Total	Federal	Statewide	State Leg	County
Women of Color	2044	48	23	477	1183
White Women	11825	79	77	1522	9580
Men of Color	3233	70	32	695	1972
White Men	27142	332	212	4274	21032

Reflective Democracy Campaign: Candidates Dataset					
	Total	Federal	Statewide	State Leg	County
Women of Color	1510	97	50	651	561
White Women	8908	222	132	2841	5469
Men of Color	2195	152	68	885	874
White Men	19459	774	400	6407	16785

This analysis is built on top of the Ballot Information Project and Governance Project datasets maintained by the Center for Technology and Civic Life (CTCL). Race and gender data for candidates and elected officials has been aggregated over the past five years by CTCL in the following ways:

- Existing Research and Public Information - In cases where a candidate or official had previously self-identified by race or gender through a state- or third-party-administered interview, survey or personal statement, this information was matched to their existing record in our system and integrated into the analysis.
- Email and Phone Surveys - CTCL staff conducted multiple surveys, asking candidates and officials with available contact information to self-identify their race and gender.
- Voter File Matching - If self-identifying information was unavailable, CTCL worked with TargetSmart Communications' augmented commercial voter files. Using publicly available information from campaign finance and filing documents, candidates and elected officials were matched to their state's list of registered voters and to the enhanced TargetSmart file.
- Race/Gender Modeling - In states that do not track race on their voter registration form, a likely race and gender was modeled for each voter based on a proprietary mix of geographic, demographic and other factors. In our test sample of nearly 1000 candidates and elected officials for whom both self-identified and modeled race were available, the modeled race was found to be accurate 95% of the time. (The gender model was accurate 99% of the time in a similarly sized sample.) While voter file matching may introduce some errors at the individual level, we have high confidence in the aggregated numbers. To help ensure the highest accuracy of the data, please submit reports about incorrect or incomplete information via this form.

About The Campaign



We fund and spearhead innovative efforts to help women and people of color gain their fair share of seats at the table.

The [Reflective Democracy Campaign](#) investigates and disrupts the demographics of power in the United States. Our groundbreaking research and analysis have led the national conversation about race, gender, and politics, shining a light on both the stark imbalances distorting our democracy and the current wave of victories by candidates who reflect the American people.

Our data and opinion research on race, gender, and American politics have generated coast-to-coast headlines and sparked activism against the structural barriers keeping people of color and women from the halls of power. Our data, reports, infographic toolkit, and other resources are available to researchers, journalists, activists, and fellow funders at [WhoLeads.Us](#).

Our Reflective Democracy Innovator grants support a wide range of organizing, activism, and capacity-building by leaders and organizations committed to changing the face of power. Our 2019 grants focus on building political power in local communities to realize the potential of leaders who reflect their communities. Our research grants have yielded break-through findings about the systemic barriers that maintain the status quo— and innovative strategies for dismantling them.

The Reflective Democracy Campaign was founded by the [Women Donors Network](#) in 2014 on the belief that we won't achieve democracy until all of us are reflected in the halls of power. Now we're at the forefront of the growing movement for leaders who truly reflect the American people.

To learn more about the Campaign and to access our data, reports, infographics, and other resources go to [WhoLeads.Us](#).



For Media Inquiries Contact:

Berlin Rosen

Nick Kauzlarich

202-800-9010

reflectivedemocracy@berlinrosen.com



ReflectiveDemocracy



@WhoLeadsUs



hello@WhoLeads.us