

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Politics is often referred to as the last “glass ceiling.” The 2016 presidential election confirmed that statement as Donald Trump defeated Hillary Clinton, who most experts thought was the prohibitive favorite after the conventions.

The years since 2016 have been a mixed bag for women in politics. The number of women keeps increasing in Congress, a woman of color was elected as Vice President in 2020, and 31 women serve as mayors in the 100 largest cities in the country. On the other hand, the number of women governors has declined, women politicians are often the target for misogynistic attacks, and North Carolina has lost ground in some key areas in terms of women’s representation.

Women make up 51 percent of the population in the state and almost 50.3 percent of the voters in North Carolina. Despite the persistent demographic advantage, women have always been underrepresented in appointed and elected offices in North Carolina. In some urban areas around the state, women are the majority of elected officeholders. The Asheville City Council and the Durham County Board of Commissioners currently consist of all women.

In other areas of the state, particularly in some rural areas east of I-95 and west of I-85, women officeholders are much rarer. There are city councils, county boards of commissioners, and school boards without any women at the table.

Since the last *Status of Women in North Carolina Politics* report in 2018, there have been some modest gains for women. Fewer appointed boards and commissions lack women’s voices, more women serve as judges, and the General Assembly has the most women serving in its history.

This report not only documents the situation for women as voters, candidates, appointed officials, and elected officials in North Carolina, but it provides more analysis of factors that contribute to this continued underrepresentation. New analysis in this report reveals that:

- Black women and women of color are significantly underrepresented, as compared to their white counterparts, especially in suburban areas of the state.
- Fundraising in competitive races is not a reason why women candidates lose.
- The type of electoral district—at large vs. district—is a key factor in electing women generally and Black women and women of color specifically.

This report, as were its predecessors, is meant to be a wakeup call for North Carolina politics. As we strive to be a truly representative democracy, women, who are a majority of the state’s citizens, need a bigger place at the political table.