



## CHAPTER 1 | Political Participation

### Introduction

The equal participation of women in politics and government is integral to building strong communities and a vibrant democracy in which women and men can thrive. By voting, running for office, and engaging in civil society as leaders and activists, women shape laws, policies, and decision-making in ways that reflect their interests and needs, as well as those of their families and communities. Voters' and candidates' voting behaviors, political party identification, and policy priorities differ by race and gender (Brown-Dean et al. 2015; Dittmar 2014). A report by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies found that race is a more significant factor in voter decision-making than party identification, political ideology, income level, or education level (Brown-Dean et al. 2015). Public opinion polling also shows that women express different political preferences from men, even in the context of the recent recession and recovery when the economy and jobs topped the list of priorities for both women and men. A poll conducted by the Pew Research Center (2012) found that women express concern about issues such as education, health care, birth control, abortion, the environment, and Medicare at higher rates than men.

Women of color's engagement in the political process—both through voting and running for office—is essential to ensuring that issues are addressed in ways that reflect their needs. Research indicates that women in elected office make the concerns of women, children, and families integral to their policy agendas (Gerrity, Osborn, and Mendez 2007; Swers 2013). Similarly, research suggests that elected officials belonging to minority racial and ethnic groups are more likely than their white counterparts to emphasize the interests of women and minorities in their discussions of public policies (Fraga et al. 2006; Gershon 2008; Orey et al. 2006). Two studies have found that legislators who are women of color are more likely to introduce and successfully pass progressive policy bills that center the needs of minority groups and women than other legislators (Fraga et al. 2006; Orey et al. 2006).

The continued population growth in the South brings with it a growing significance in national politics, with the South's share of seats in the U.S. House of Representatives growing from 35.4 percent of total seats in 2000 to 37 percent after the 2010 Census (compared with 18 percent for the Northeast, 22 percent for the Midwest, and 23 percent for the West; Burnett 2011).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Census defines the South as Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia, which is different from how the South is defined in this report.

Women in the South, however, have low levels of political participation overall, especially when it comes to the number of women and women of color in elected office. Southern women do generally have higher rates of voter registration and turnout when compared with women nationally and black women voted at higher rates than women of any other race or ethnicity in the 2012 elections.

Women of color in the southern United States, however, have historically faced barriers to equal political participation.<sup>2</sup> Until the Voting Rights Act of 1965, black women in the South were often legally prevented from voting through poll taxes, literacy tests, and other racialized measures to prevent equal participation (Brown-Dean et al. 2015).

Today, women of color constitute a growing force in the electorate and inform policymaking at all levels of

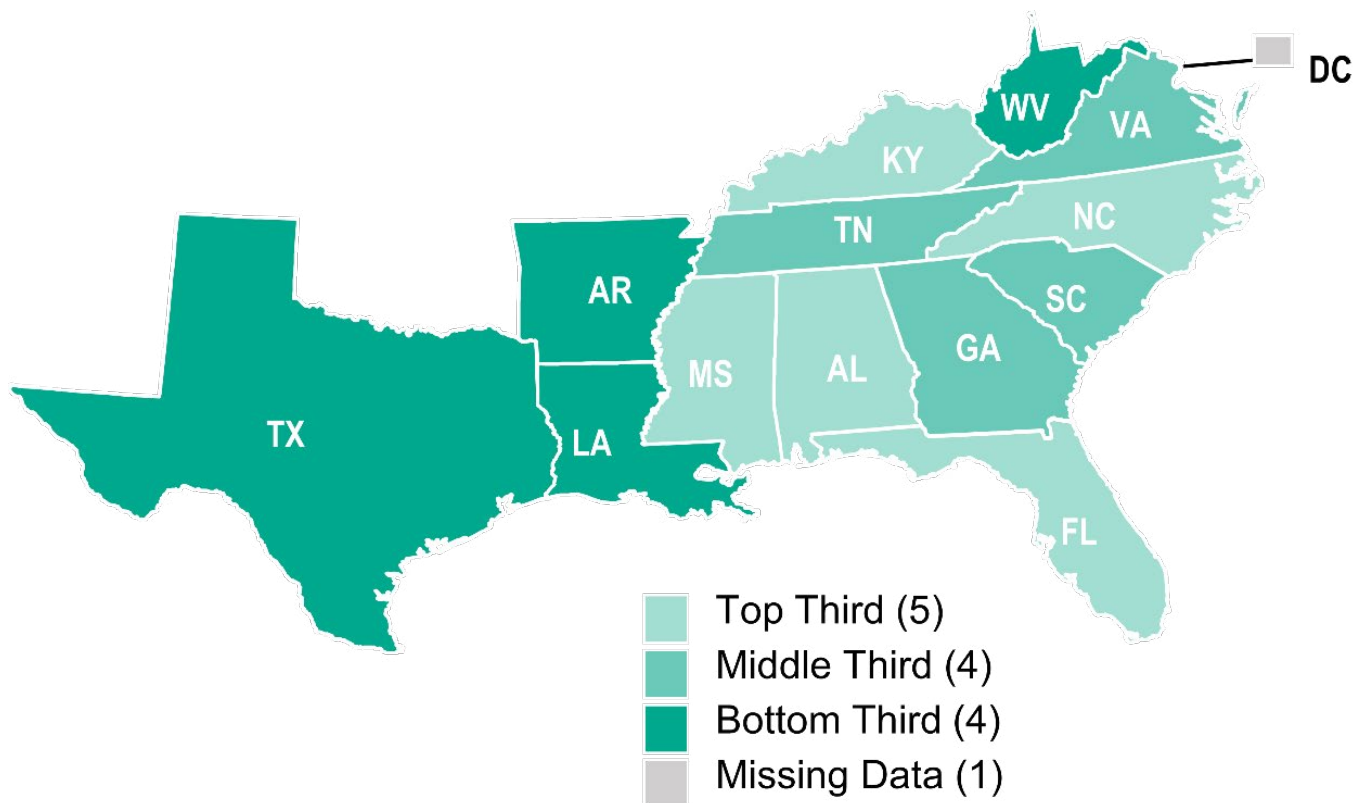
government. Yet, women of color continue to be significantly underrepresented in government throughout the entire nation, especially in the South. This chapter presents data on several aspects of women of color’s involvement in the political process in the South.

## The Political Participation Composite Score

The Political Participation Composite Index combines four component indicators of women’s political status: voter registration, voter turnout, representation in elected office, and women’s institutional resources. Across the 13 southern states, composite scores range from a high of 1.56 to a low of -5.99 (Table 1.1), with higher scores reflecting a stronger performance in

Map 1.1

### Political Participation Composite Index—South



Note: For methodology and sources, see Appendix A1. Calculated by the Institute for Women’s Policy Research.

<sup>2</sup> In this report, southern states include Alabama, Arkansas, the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. Throughout the report, the District of Columbia will be referred to as a state, although it is technically a jurisdiction.

<sup>3</sup> The District of Columbia is excluded from the Composite Index because it is excluded from the women in elected office index, due to its city council not adequately reflecting state offices and to its lack of national representatives with full voting power.

this area of women’s status and receiving higher letter grades.<sup>3</sup> No state in the South receives a grade higher than a C-.

- Among the southern states, North Carolina has the best score (1.56) for women’s overall levels of political participation. It also ranks first in the South (but just 25<sup>th</sup> in the nation overall) for women in elected office and is in the top one-third among the southern states for all other component indicators. North Carolina ranks 14<sup>th</sup> in the nation overall on the Political Participation Composite Index and receives C- for its grade (Map 1.1).

- Arkansas has the lowest levels of women’s political participation in the South. Though it comes in third regionally for women in elected office, it ranks in the bottom third for women’s voter registration, women’s voter turnout, and institutional resources in the state. Arkansas ranks 49<sup>th</sup> in the nation overall on the Political Participation Composite Index.
- Generally, the southern states have low levels of women’s political participation, with nine of the 13 southern states ranked in the bottom third of all states nationally.

Table 1.1

### How the South Measures Up: Women’s Status on the Political Participation Composite Index and Its Components

State	Composite Index				Women in Elected Office Index			Percent of Women Registered to Vote, 2012/2014 Average			Percent of Women Who Voted, 2012/2014 Average			Women’s Institutional Resources Index		
	Score	National Rank	Regional Rank	Grade	Score	National Rank	Regional Rank	Percent	National Rank	Regional Rank	Percent	National Rank	Regional Rank	Score	National Rank	Regional Rank
Alabama	-3.30	36	5	D–	1.22	44	9	69.7%	16	7	51.6%	25	7	1.50	10	5
Arkansas	-5.99	49	13	F	1.46	38	3	63.0%	41	12	44.9%	41	12	0.50	38	14
District of Columbia	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	70.9%	15	6	57.8%	11	3	1.00	27	10
Florida	-0.51	23	2	D+	1.95	26	2	60.0%	43	13	48.8%	37	10	2.00	1	1
Georgia	-4.25	42	8	D–	1.03	49	12	65.0%	34	11	51.3%	27	9	2.00	1	1
Kentucky	-2.52	34	4	D	1.09	47	11	71.9%	9	3	53.1%	21	6	2.00	1	1
Louisiana	-4.68	45	10	D–	0.56	50	13	75.3%	3	2	59.6%	7	1	1.50	10	5
Mississippi	-1.05	26	3	D+	1.24	42	7	80.8%	1	1	59.6%	7	1	1.00	27	10
North Carolina	1.56	14	1	C–	1.98	25	1	71.2%	12	5	55.3%	13	4	1.50	10	5
South Carolina	-3.35	37	6	D–	1.24	42	8	71.5%	11	4	54.6%	16	5	1.00	27	10
Tennessee	-3.45	39	7	D–	1.40	39	4	67.7%	24	8	46.8%	38	11	1.50	10	5
Texas	-5.87	47	11	F	1.27	41	6	56.9%	46	14	40.9%	48	13	2.00	1	1
Virginia	-4.44	43	9	D–	1.10	46	10	66.9%	26	9	51.6%	25	7	1.50	10	5
West Virginia	-5.91	48	12	F	1.36	40	5	65.2%	32	10	40.6%	49	14	1.00	27	10
<b>United States</b>								<b>64.1%</b>			<b>49.1%</b>			<b>1.50</b>	<b>(median)</b>	

Notes: N/A: The District of Columbia is not included in the women in elected office index and Composite Index ranking. Women’s voter registration and turnout is the average percent (for the presidential and congressional elections of 2012 and 2014) of all women aged 18 and older (in the civilian noninstitutionalized population) who reported registering and voting, including noncitizens who are ineligible. IWPR selected the larger population base for this indicator because the inability of noncitizens to register accurately reflects the lack of political voice for this population. See Appendix A1 for methodology and sources. Calculated by the Institute for Women’s Policy Research.

## Trends in Women’s Political Participation

Between 2004 and 2015, the number and share of women of color in elected office increased in many states. In some states, this increase surpassed the increase in the number of women in elected office overall (Dittmar 2014).

Rates of women’s voter registration and turnout have also fluctuated over time. For example, the percentages of women who registered to vote and who voted in the combined 2012/2014 elections were lower than in the combined 1998/2000 elections (Caiazza et al. 2004).<sup>4</sup> However, women’s voter turnout increased across racial and ethnic groups and was higher in the 2012 presidential election than in 2000 (Center for American Women and Politics 2015a). This increase was greatest among black women’s voter turnout, which was 59.7 percent in 2000 and 70.1 percent in 2012 (Center for American Women and Politics 2015a). The importance of women of color’s voter registration and turnout is an emerging focus in the political arena as women of color comprise a growing

share of potential American voters. Women of color represent 74 percent of the growth in eligible women voters since 2000 (Harris 2014).

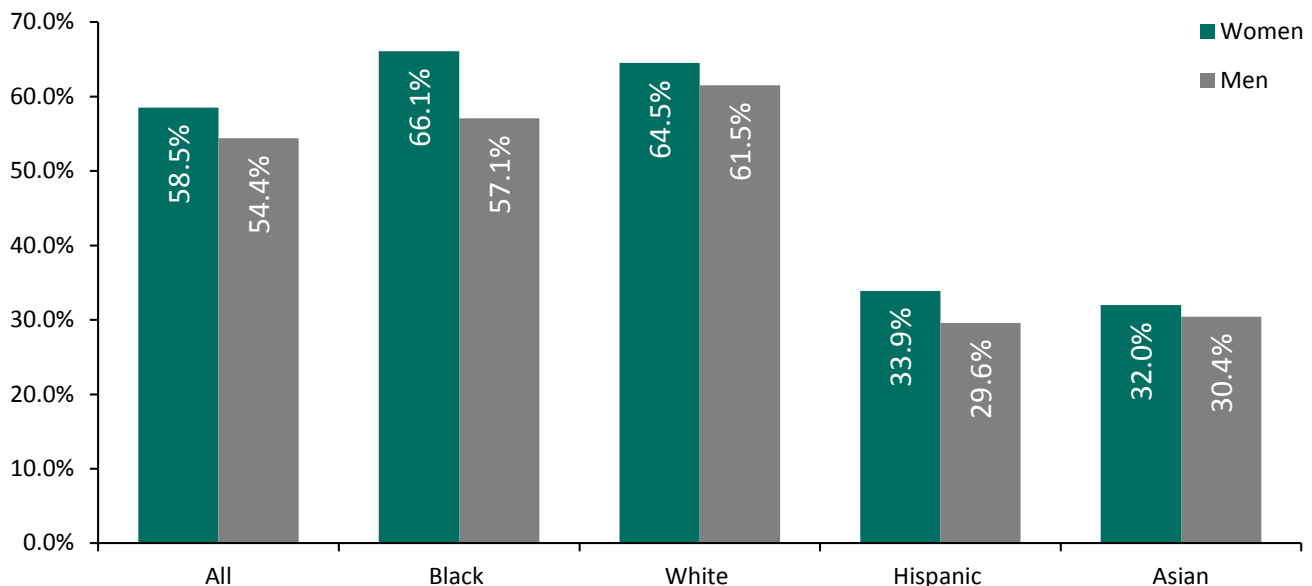
## Voter Registration and Turnout

Voting is a critical way for women to express their concerns and ensure that their priorities are taken into account in public policy debates and decisions. Although women in the United States were denied the right to vote until 1920 and many black women were denied the right to vote until 1965, women and women of color have a significant voice in deciding the outcomes of U.S. political elections today (Harris 2014).

In the nation as a whole, women make up a majority of registered voters and have voted since 1980 at higher rates in presidential elections than men (Center for American Women and Politics 2015a). In the 2012 general election, 67.0 percent of women were registered to vote and 58.5 percent voted, compared with 63.1 percent and 54.4 percent of men (U.S. Department of Commerce 2013).<sup>5</sup> Registration and

Figure 1.1.

### Voter Turnout for Women and Men by Race and Ethnicity, United States, 2012



Note: White does not include individuals of Hispanic origin. Black and Asian may include individuals of Hispanic origin. Hispanic includes individuals of all races. Asians do not include Pacific Islanders. Published rates from the U.S. Census Bureau are not available for Native American women.

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce (2013).

<sup>4</sup> For a more in-depth look at trends in voter registration and turnout nationally, see Hess et al. (2015).

<sup>5</sup> In this chapter, women’s voter registration and turnout is the average percent (for the presidential and congressional elections of 2012 and 2014) of all women aged 18 and older (in the civilian noninstitutionalized population) who reported registering and voting, including noncitizens who are ineligible. IWPR selected the larger population base for this indicator because the inability of noncitizens to register accurately reflects the lack of political voice for this population.



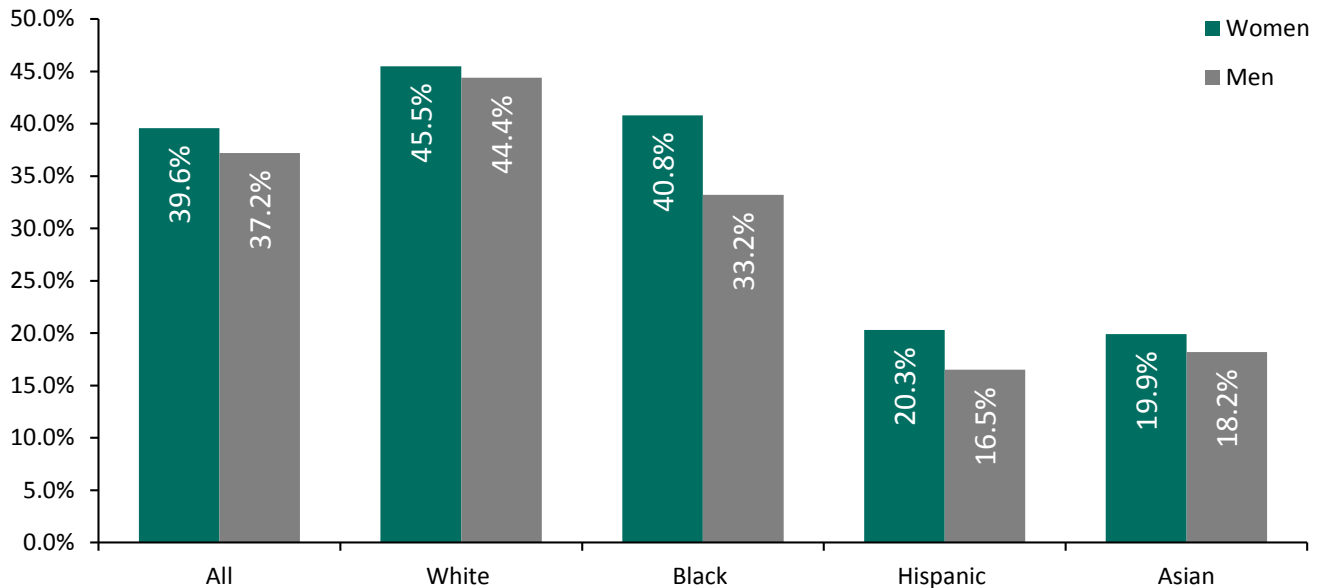
turnout are higher for both women and men in presidential election years than in midterm election years: nationally in the 2014 midterm election, 61.2 percent of women were registered to vote and 39.6 percent voted, compared with 57.2 percent of men who registered to vote and 37.2 percent who cast a ballot (U.S. Department of Commerce 2015).

Women’s voter registration and turnout also vary by race and ethnicity nationally.<sup>6</sup> In the last two presidential elections, black women had the highest voting rate among women from all racial and ethnic groups.

In the 2014 midterm elections, non-Hispanic white women had the highest voter turnout rate among women of each racial and ethnic group at 45.5 percent, followed by black women (40.8 percent). Hispanic women and Asian women voted at rates about half as high as black women (20.3 percent and 19.9 percent, respectively). In both the 2012 and 2014 elections, women of each racial and ethnic group voted at higher rates than their male counterparts (Figures 1.1 and 1.2).

Figure 1.2.

### Voter Turnout for Women and Men by Race and Ethnicity, United States, 2014



Note: White does not include individuals of Hispanic origin. Black and Asian may include individuals of Hispanic origin. Hispanic includes individuals of all races. Asians do not include Pacific Islanders. Published rates from the U.S. Census Bureau are not available for Native American women.

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce (2015).

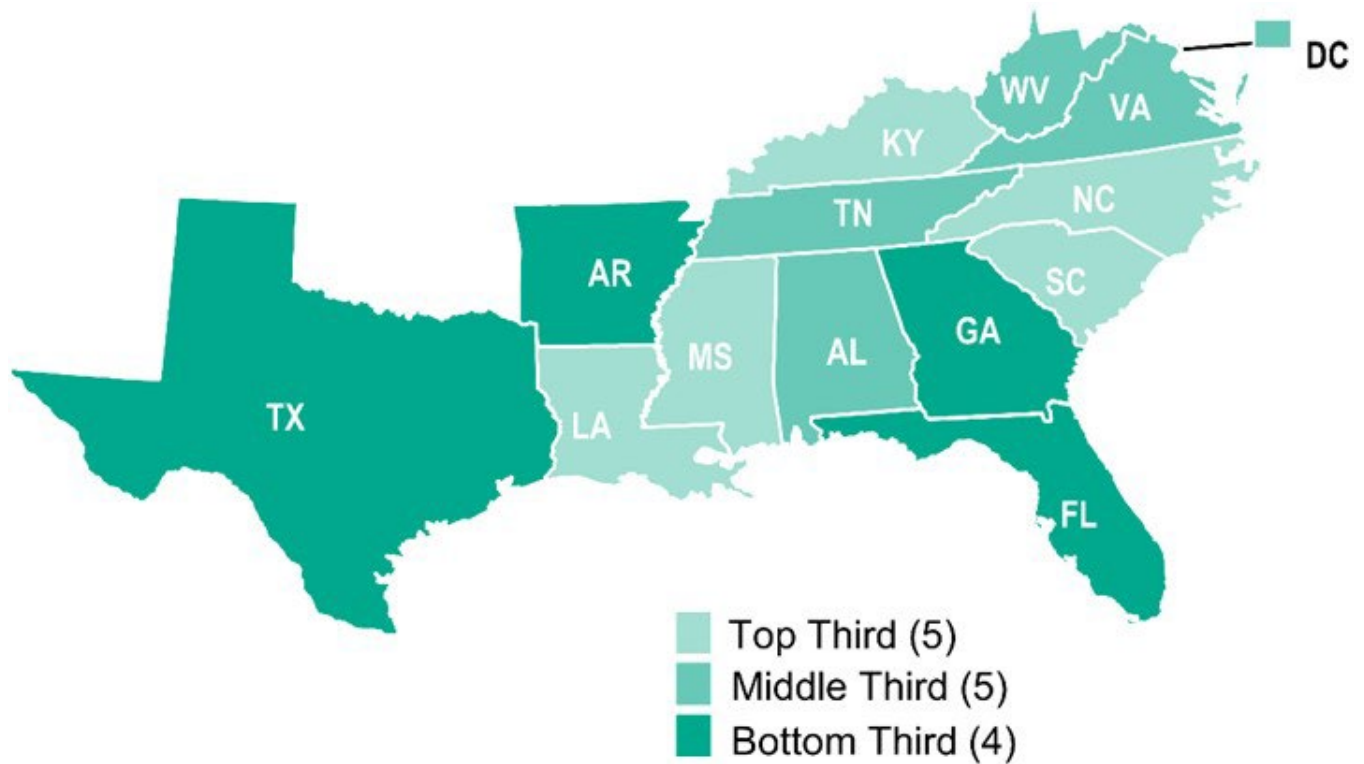
Women’s voter registration rates also vary across the southern states (Map 1.2).

- Mississippi has the highest voter registration rates both nationally and in the South for women in 2012 and 2014 combined (80.8 percent; Table 1.1). Louisiana and Kentucky also have high voter registration rates for women in 2012 and 2014 combined (75.3 percent and 71.9 percent respectively), ranking second and third in the South and also placing within the top ten states nationally.

- Seven of the southern states rank in the top third nationally for voter registration and 11 have higher rates of women who are registered to vote than the national average (64.1 percent) for 2012 and 2014 combined.
- The bottom three southern states, Texas, Florida, and Arkansas, all place among the ten states nationally with the lowest voter registration rates for women in 2012 and 2014 combined.

<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, data on voter registration and turnout by gender and race and ethnicity are not available by state or region. All data on voter registration and turnout by gender and race/ethnicity are national data. Asian does not include Pacific Islanders.

## Women’s Voter Registration in the South, 2012 and 2014 Combined



Note: Average percent of all women aged 18 and older who reported registering for the congressional and presidential elections of 2012 and 2014.

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce (2013; 2015).

Compiled by the Institute of Women’s Policy Research.

Women’s voter turnout also varies among the southern states (Map 1.3).

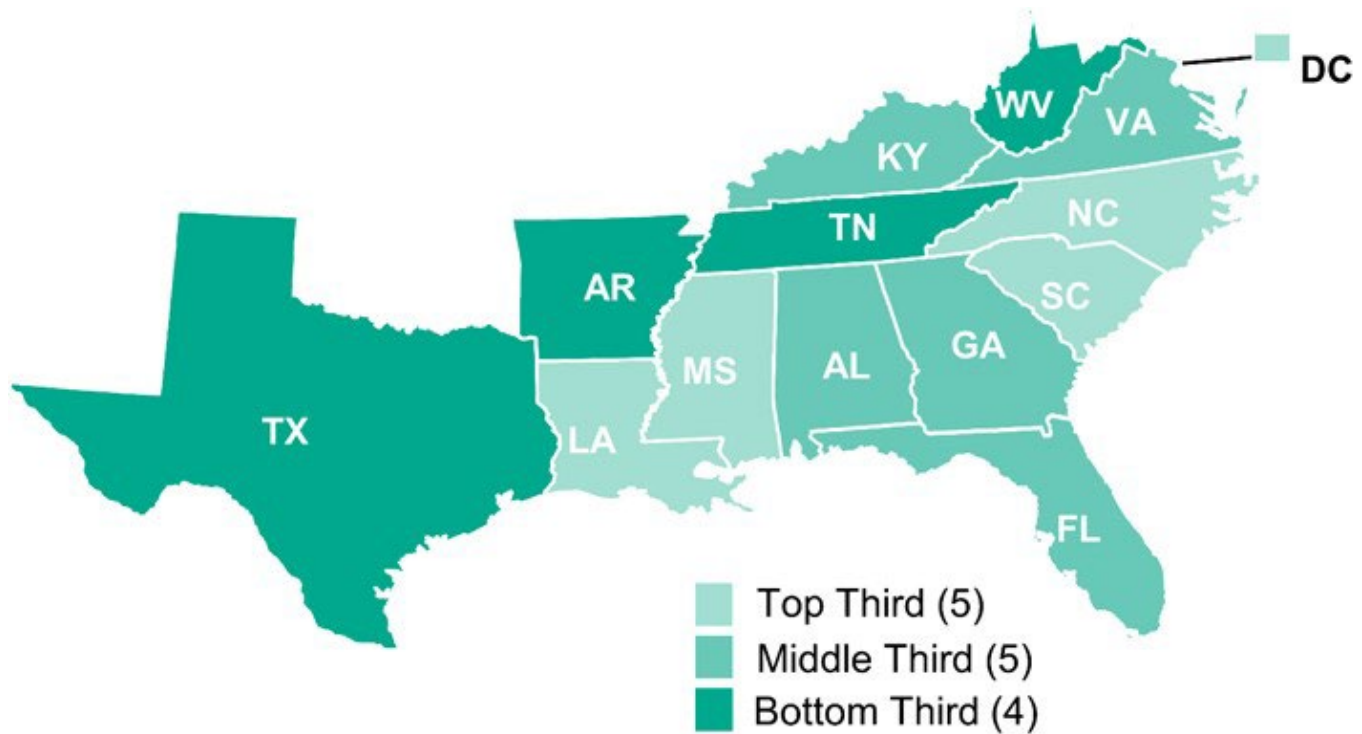
- At 59.6 percent, Louisiana and Mississippi have the highest women’s voter turnout in 2012/2014 and place within the top ten states nationally. They are closely followed by the District of Columbia (57.8 percent), which ranks 11th nationally.
- West Virginia has the lowest voter turnout rate among women during 2012/2014 in the South and the second lowest in the country (40.6 percent). Texas and Arkansas also place at the bottom both regionally and nationally with some of the lowest voter turnout among women in 2012/2014 (40.9 and 44.9 percent, respectively).
- Overall, 10 of the southern states have higher women’s voter turnout than the United States average (49.1 percent).

## The Women in Elected Office Index

### *Women of Color in Elected Office*

- The interests of women of color tend to be prioritized most when women and communities of color are represented in political office (Fraga et al. 2006; Orey et al. 2006). Although women of color have become increasingly active in U.S. politics, they continue to be underrepresented relative to their share of the overall population. Women of color constitute approximately 18 percent of the population aged 18 and older, but hold only 6.2 percent of seats in Congress, 5.4 percent of seats in state legislatures, and 2.6 percent of statewide elective executive positions (Center for American Women and Politics 2015b).

### Women's Voter Turnout in the South, 2012 and 2014 Combined



Note: Average percent of all women aged 18 and older who reported registering for the congressional and presidential elections of 2012 and 2014.

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce (2013; 2015).

Compiled by the Institute of Women's Policy Research.

- In 2015, only one member of the U.S. Senate out of 20 female members and 100 members is a woman of color (Senator Mazie Hirono from Hawaii; (Center for American Women and Politics 2015b; Center for American Women and Politics 2015c). In 2004, there were no women of color in the U.S. Senate (Caiazza et al. 2004).
- Out of the 435 members of the U.S. House of Representatives in 2015, 84 members are women (19.3 percent) and 32 are women of color (7.4 percent; (Center for American Women and Politics 2015b; Center for American Women and Politics 2015c). This reflects a slight increase since 2004, when women held 13.8 percent of seats in the U.S. House of Representatives and women of color held 4.1 percent (Caiazza et al. 2004; Center for American Women and Politics 2015b).
- In 2015, women held 24.4 percent of seats in state legislatures across the country, compared with 22.5 percent in 2004 (Caiazza et al. 2004; Center for American Women and Politics 2015b). The share of seats held by women of color has also increased, from 4.1 percent (306 of 7,383 seats) in 2004 to 5.4 percent in 2015 (396 of 7,383 seats).<sup>7</sup>
- In 2015, eight women of color held statewide elected executive office positions across the country (2.6 percent), compared with only five women of color (1.6 percent) in 2004 (Caiazza et al. 2004; Center for American Women and Politics 2015b).

#### ***How the Southern States Compare: Women in Elected Office***

The Women in Elected Office Index measures women's representation at state and national levels of gov-

<sup>7</sup> For the purpose of calculating the share, the total number of women of color in state legislatures (396) includes 5 women who identify as multiracial (Center for American Women and Politics 2015b).

## FOCUS ON: The Impact of Voter Identification Laws on Women in the South

Though the right to vote has been regarded as one of the fundamental principles of American democracy, many states have recently introduced and passed a variety of voting restrictions, including new state voter identification laws. Although these laws are passed under the guise of decreasing in-person voter fraud, actual instances of voter fraud are often greatly exaggerated (Levitt 2007). In reality, voter identification laws make it more difficult for some citizens to vote, especially those who are low income, older, minorities, and/or married women who have changed their names (Brennan Center for Social Justice 2006; Gaskins and Iyer 2012; Sobel 2014).

Though voter identification laws have only recently garnered national attention, efforts to suppress the vote in the South — especially of minority populations — can be traced back to the late 1800s. Southern states passed a variety of laws such as poll taxes, literacy tests, and record-keeping requirements between 1890 and 1910 that effectively disenfranchised the majority of the black population. Many of these laws were in place until the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was passed (Brown-Dean et al. 2015; Kousser 1974), one year after the Equal Rights Act of 1964 and Fannie Lou Hamer's historic campaign at the Democratic Convention in Atlantic City in 1964, where Hamer brought national attention to both the obstacles African Americans faced when attempting to register to vote and the civil rights struggle in Mississippi.

In 2005, both Georgia and Indiana introduced the country's first strict voter identification laws, requiring identification to vote rather than requesting it. Since then, the number of states that have imposed strict identification laws — for both non-photo and photo identification — has grown to 11 (National Conference of State Legislatures 2015). This likely has to do with the Supreme Court's decision in 2013 that struck down Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act, which was meant to prevent racial discrimination in voting by requiring states to receive federal approval before changing election laws (Liptak 2013). Without Section 4, states can change their election laws without oversight.

As of 2016, 36 states have passed voter identification laws, 33 of which are in effect. Of the 14 southern states, 11 have state voter identification laws that were in effect as of 2014: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia (National Conference of State Legislatures 2015):

- In 2013, Alabama state legislators introduced a voter identification law that requires an ID with a photo. If a voter does not have a photo ID, they can cast only a provisional ballot unless identified by two election officials as an eligible voter. However, in November 2015, Alabama lawmakers severely restricted access to 31 Department of Motor Vehicle offices throughout the state — mostly concentrated in rural, mostly black counties — by limiting their hours of operation to only one day each month. This is problematic because most Alabama voters use their driver's license to vote. Though there are other options to get identification, such as from each county's Board of Registrar's office or from a mobile identification unit, these alternatives often do not accommodate individuals with full-time jobs or those who do not have easy access to transportation (Ollstein 2015).
- In North Carolina, voters must show an unexpired North Carolina driver's license, a North Carolina special identification card, a U.S. passport, or a U.S. military identification card in order to vote. While this law is scheduled to go into effect in 2016 (National Conference of State Legislatures 2015), a lawsuit challenging the new rule is still pending in federal court (Blinder and Otterbourg 2016; Horwitz 2016).
- In Texas, a federal district court determined that Texas's voter identification law intentionally discriminated against black and Latino voters. The court found that supporters of the law knew it would disproportionately affect voters of color, but a court of appeals — though it affirmed the district court's decision — challenged the notion that supporters knew the law was discriminatory. The appeals court ruled that part of the voter identification law cannot be enforced (Smith 2015).



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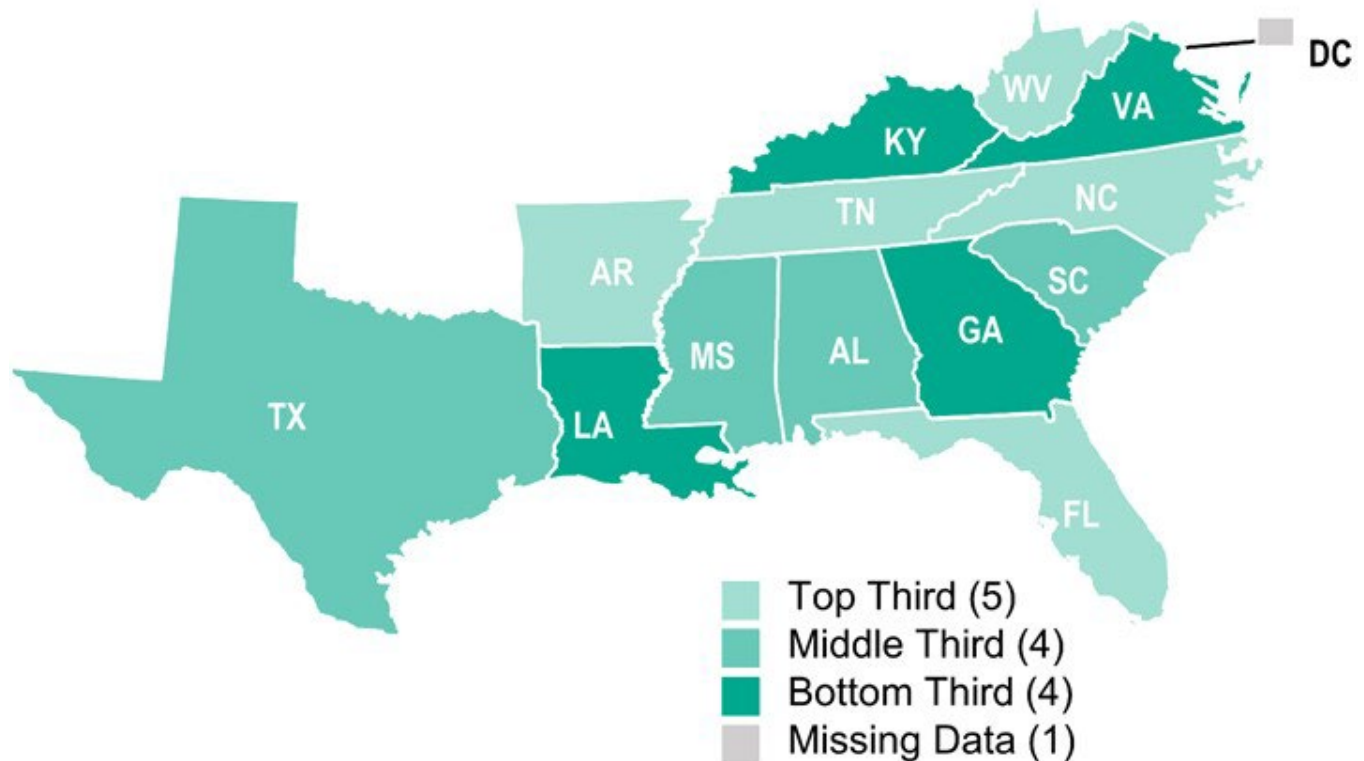
- North Carolina has the highest regional score on the elected office index. However, it places only 25th overall in the nation (Table 1.1; Map 1.4).
- The states with the worst scores on women in elected office are concentrated in the South, with

all of the southern states ranking in the bottom third nationally.

- Louisiana has both the lowest score in the South and in the nation, followed by Georgia. Six additional southern states (Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia) place within the bottom ten for women in elected office in the country.

Map 1.4.

### Women in Elected Office in the South, 2015



Note: Index of share of state and national elected officials who are women, 2015. Sources: Center for American Women and Politics (2015b; 2015c; 2015d; 2015e). Calculated by the Institute for Women’s Policy Research.

### *Women in the U.S. Congress*

As of November 2015, women held 104 of 535 seats in the U.S. Congress (19.4 percent), and women of color held 33 of 535 seats (6.2 percent; Center for American Women and Politics 2015b; Center for American Women and Politics 2015b). Only one of the 20 women in the U.S. Senate is a woman of color; 32 of the 84 women in the U.S. House of Representatives are women of color (Center for American Women and Politics 2015c). The numbers of women of color in the U.S. House of Representatives from the southern states are especially low.

- Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and West Virginia have no

representatives who are women in the U.S. House of Representatives (Appendix Table B1.1; Appendix Table B1.3).

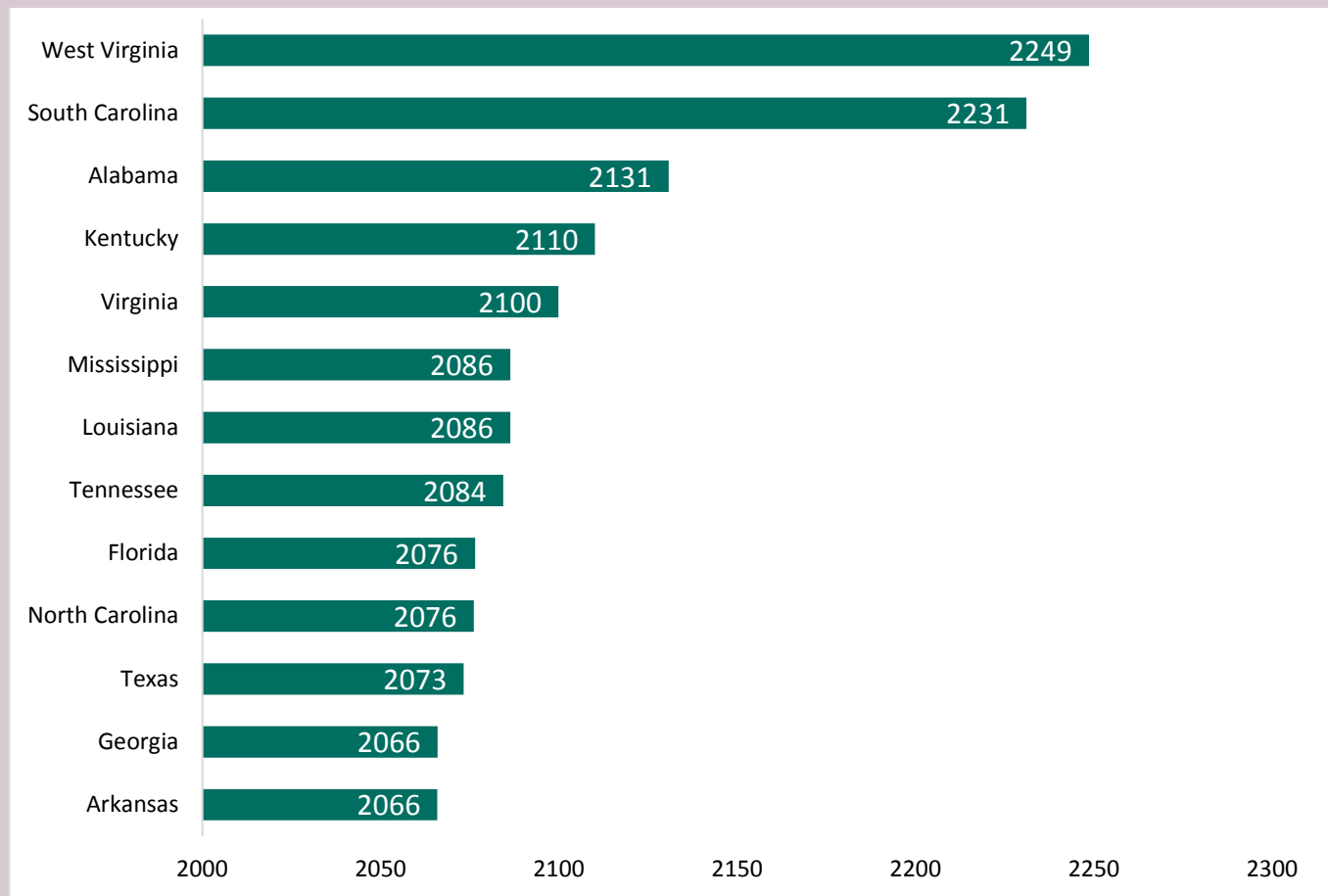
- Women constitute just 12.2 percent of representatives to the U.S. House of Representatives from the southern states (Appendix Table B1.3). In all other states, women constitute 22.9 percent of representatives.
- Among the southern states, only Alabama, Florida, North Carolina, and Texas have representatives to the U.S. House of Representatives who are women of color. Though women of color account for at least half of the female representatives to the U.S. House of Representatives in Alabama and Texas,

## FOCUS ON: Projected Year When Parity in State Legislatures Will Be Achieved in the South

In 2015, women held 19.4 percent of seats (104 of 535) in the U.S. Congress, representing an all-time high for the United States (Center for American Women and Politics 2015d). Yet, women are still significantly underrepresented relative to their share of the population. If progress in equal gender representation in Congress continues to move at the current rate of change since 1960, women will not achieve equal representation until 2117 (Hess et al. 2015). As shown in Figure 1.3, progress in parity in state legislatures in the South varies widely from state to state. At the rate of change since 1975, Arkansas and Georgia are projected to reach parity within their respective state legislatures first (both in 2066), followed by Texas in 2073 and North Carolina and Florida in 2076. Ten of the 13 southern states are projected to achieve parity in their state legislatures before parity is reached in the U.S. Congress. However, if progress in West Virginia and South Carolina continues at the same rate, both will have to wait over 200 years to reach parity in their state legislatures.

Figure 1.3.

### Projected Year for Reaching Political Parity in State Legislatures in the South



Note: Linear projection for states based on the rates of progress reaching parity since 1975.

Source: IWPR calculations based on Center for American Women and Politics (2015e).

these two states only have three women of color representatives combined. In the southern states, only 4.8 percent of state representatives to the U.S. House of Representatives are women of color, which is lower than the United States average or the non-South average (7.4 and 8.7 percent, respectively).

- Out of the 20 women in the U.S. Senate, only one is from a southern state (West Virginia; Appendix Table B1.1).
- Only two women of color have ever served in the U.S. Senate (Center for American Women and Politics 2015f). No southern state has ever elected a woman of color to the U.S. Senate.

### ***Women in State Legislatures***

Women's representation in state legislatures is progressing at different speeds in states across the nation. As of 2015, there were no states in which women held half of the seats in either the state senate or the state house or assembly.

While nationally 24.4 percent of state legislators are women, women account for only 18.4 percent of state legislators in the southern states (Appendix Table B1.4). Florida is the only southern state in which women hold a higher share of seats in state legislatures (25 percent) than the national average (24.4 percent). In the non-southern states, 26.8 percent of state legislators are women. Seven out of the ten worst states in terms of women's share of state legislators are in the South (Center for American Women and Politics 2015e).

- While only 5.4 percent of representatives in state legislatures are women of color nationally, 6.7 percent of representatives in state legislatures in the southern states are women of color. In the non-southern states, women of color make up only 4.8 percent of state legislators. The southern states with the largest share of women of color in state legislatures include Georgia (11.9 percent), Texas (9.9 percent), and Alabama and Mississippi

(8.6 percent; Center for American Women and Politics 2015g).

- Among the southern states, Kentucky—which has no women of color in the state legislature—has the lowest proportion of seats held by women of color, followed by West Virginia, where women of color hold only 0.7 percent of all seats in the state legislature (Center for American Women and Politics 2015g).
- Nearly half (48 percent) of black female state legislators in the United States serve in the southern states (Center for American Women and Politics 2015g).

### ***Women in Statewide Elected Executive Office***

- As of November 2015, six women serve as governors across the country (Appendix Table B1.2). One is from South Carolina and is also one of the first of two women of color to serve as a governor in the United States (Center for American Women and Politics 2015h).

- Excluding governors, women hold 27.1 percent of statewide elected executive offices in the United States (Appendix Table B1.2). Among the southern states, women hold 20.7 percent of statewide elected executive offices, aside from governorships. Three of the 10 states in the nation that do not have women in statewide elected executive office positions are southern states: Georgia, Louisiana, and Virginia (Center for American Women and Politics 2015d).<sup>8</sup>

- Nationally, there are six women of color in statewide elected executive office aside from governorships: two Hispanic women, one black woman, one Asian woman, one Native American woman, and one multiracial woman (Center for American Women and Politics 2015b). Among the southern states, there are no women of color in statewide elected executive offices aside from the South Carolina governorship.

<sup>8</sup> These numbers do not include Maine, New Hampshire, and Tennessee, which do not have statewide elected executive offices aside from governorships. See Appendix A1: Methodology for a complete list of offices included and excluded from the statewide elected executive office data.

## Women’s Institutional Resources

In addition to women’s voting and election to local, state, and federal offices, institutional resources dedicated to helping women succeed in the political arena and to promoting and prioritizing women’s policy issues play a key role in connecting women constituents to policymakers. Such resources include campaign trainings for women, women’s Political Action Committees (PACs), women’s commissions, and state chapters of the National Women’s Political Caucus (NWPC). These institutional resources serve to amplify the voices of women in government and increase the access of women, their families, and their communities to decision makers on the policy issues that matter most to them. Institutional resources and statewide associations also provide peer support systems for female elected officials and establish informal networks that can help them navigate a political system that remains predominantly male (Strimling 1986).

Women of color have even more limited access to supports that would help them run for office, severely restricting their political participation and leadership throughout the United States (Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013; Dittmar 2015). While institutional resources geared toward recruiting and supporting women of color in particular can help improve their political representation, there are few supports targeted specifically at increasing the political representation of women of color. The Center for Women in Politics runs three national programs—Elección Latina, Run Sister Run, and Rising Stars—as part of their diversity initiative of Ready to Run that are specifically geared toward supporting Latina, black, and Asian women (Center for American Women and Politics 2016). Additionally, Higher Heights for America and its sister organization, Higher Heights Leadership Fund, work to analyze and support black women’s leadership and political engagement at all levels (Higher Heights for America 2016). Other organizations, such as YWCA and the Black Women’s Health Imperative, do important work on issues of central importance to women of color within the policy world in addition to their work on the general empowerment of women of color in the South.

Campaign trainings for women provide valuable insight into running a successful campaign and strengthen the pipeline to higher office. One study found that nine in ten women who participated in a training before running found it extremely helpful; many also believed that campaign trainings should be expanded to be more women-centric so as to address the issue of “campaigning-while-female” (Baer and Hartmann 2014). Experienced women candidates also expressed a need for a range of candidate training, from running for one’s first office to running for a seat in one’s congressional delegation, which as a national office requires the candidate to learn a new range of skills. Most training, however, seems to be aimed at encouraging women to run for their first office.

Political action committees (PACs) raise and spend money for the purpose of electing and defeating candidates. A PAC may give directly to a candidate committee, a national party committee, or another PAC, within the contribution limits (Open Secrets 2015). A women’s PAC may be critical to supplying a female candidate with the campaign contributions she needs to launch a successful campaign. A women’s PAC may also bolster candidates who support women-friendly policy and legislation. In 2015, there were 23 national and 67 state or local PACs or donor networks that either gave money primarily to women candidates or had a primarily female donor base (Center for American Women and Politics 2015i).

A commission for women is typically established by legislation or executive order and works to prioritize issues that may disproportionately affect women’s lives (National Conference of State Legislatures 2014). In many states across the nation, women’s commissions—which can operate at the city, county, or state level—strive to identify inequities in laws, policies, and practices and recommend changes to address them. Women’s commissions may engage in a variety of activities to benefit women in their geographic areas, such as conducting research on issues affecting the lives of women and families, holding briefings to educate the public and legislators on these issues, developing a legislative agenda, and advocating for gender balance in leadership throughout both the public and private sectors (Cecilia Zamora, National Association of Com-



## FOCUS ON: Representation2020's Gender Parity Index

Representation2020, a non-profit organization housed by FairVote, works to improve the fairness and functionality of U.S. elections. Representation2020 recently released their report, *The State of Women's Representation 2015-2016*, which contains its 2015 Gender Parity Scores for all 50 U.S. states (not including the District of Columbia; Representation2020 2015). The Gender Parity Index is designed to show how well women are represented in each state's statewide and local elected offices.

Their Gender Parity Index combines scores calculated for each state's women's representation in U.S. Congress, state executive office, state legislature, and local executives. Scores for each of these categories are weighted evenly, with the exception of the local executive score, which is weighted as one third of the other scores. Scores for each of these categories are determined by the proportion of women currently serving in those elected seats and by examining how many of those seats are available in that state. The scores also give credit based on multiple past election results.

With the exception of North Carolina and South Carolina, all of the southern states ranked in the bottom half of all U.S. states in 2015, with most in the bottom 10:

- 
13. North Carolina
  22. South Carolina
  28. Florida
  36. Arkansas
  38. West Virginia
  39. Louisiana
  40. Alabama
  42. Texas
  43. Tennessee
  44. Kentucky
  48. Virginia
  49. Georgia
  50. Mississippi
- 

Because Representation2020 gives credit to states that elected women to office based on past election results, their Gender Parity Index differs somewhat from the rankings for southern states in this report. Though the southern states generally rank at the bottom nationally on both the Gender Parity Index and the Women in Elected Office Index, some southern states—most notably Louisiana and South Carolina—are ranked much higher on the Gender Parity Index than on the Women in Elected Office Index (see Table 1.1). Additionally, no southern state ranks in the top half nationally in IWPR's report. While the Gender Parity Index gives a broader understanding of how well women are represented in each state in recent years, this report gives a more immediate picture of the current state of women in elected office in the United States, so as to be able to accurately track the gains and losses of women in elected office by year in each state.

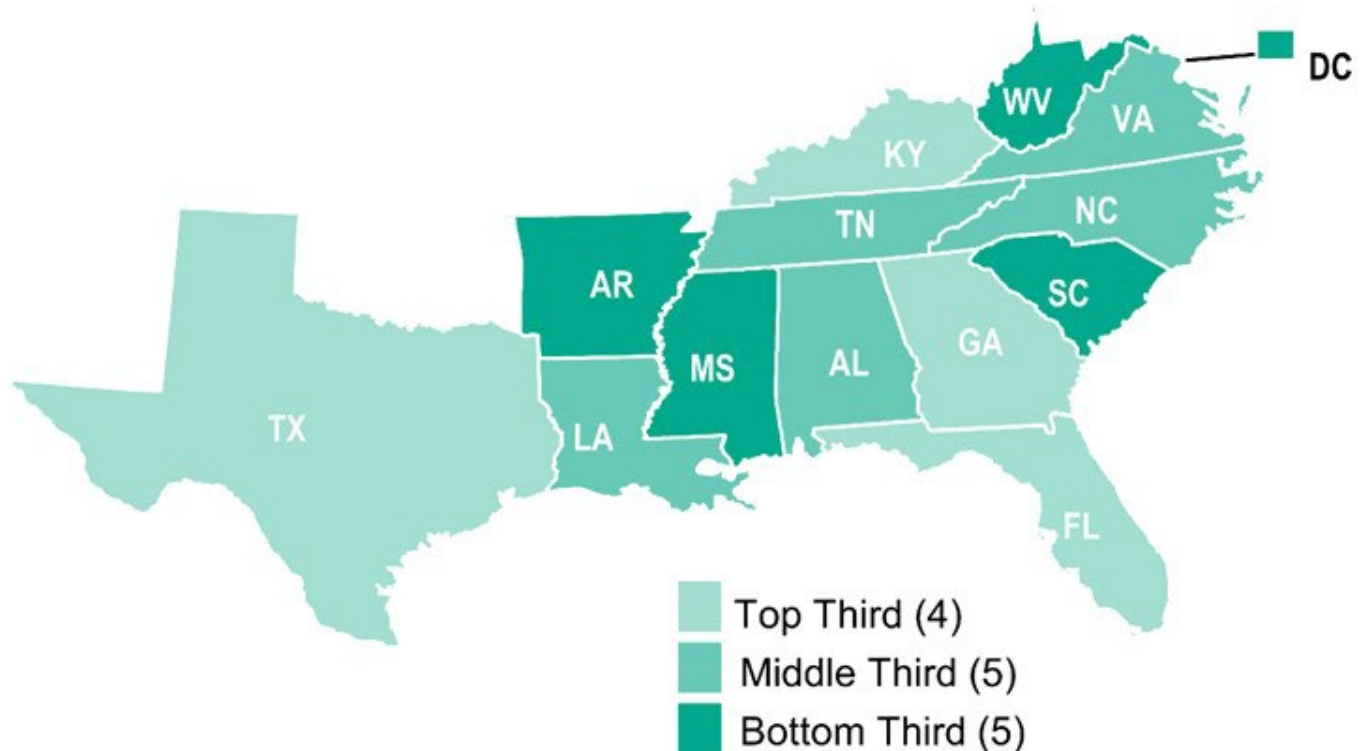
missions for Women, personal communication, May 1, 2015).

The National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC) is a multi-partisan, grassroots organization dedicated to increasing the number of women who run for office and who are elected or appointed into leadership positions (National Women's Political Caucus 2016). The NWPC has state and local chapters that work with women in their communities to provide institutional support by recruiting women to run for office, endorsing women candidates, helping them raise campaign contributions, and providing them with campaign trainings (National Women's Political Caucus 2016).

- Among the southern states, all states except Tennessee have state-level campaign trainings for women. Nine of the 14 southern states have a women's PAC and six have chapters of the National Women's Political Caucus. All of the southern states except Arkansas and Virginia have a women's commission.
- Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, and Texas all receive the highest score possible for institutional resources (2.00; Table 1.1; Map 1.5).
- While Arkansas is the only southern state to score a 0.50 (with only one institutional resource for

Map 1.5.

### Women's Institutional Resources in the South



Note: Ranking of states based on their number of institutional resources for women.

Source: Center for American Women and Politics (2015i); National Conference of State Legislatures (2014); National Women's Political Caucus (2015).

Calculated by the Institute of Women's Policy Research.

women), The District of Columbia, Mississippi, South Carolina, and West Virginia also fall at the bottom of the regional (and national) rankings with only two institutional resources for women each.

## Conclusion

Women, especially women of color, continue to lag behind men when it comes to political participation and leadership in the South. Although there are some resources available to promote women's civic engagement and political participation, progress in advancing women's political status continues to move at a glacial pace. This pace is even slower for women of color in the South, who—with the exception of voter

registration and turnout—continue to be vastly underrepresented in government, especially in comparison to their share of the overall population. It is also not encouraging to note that the southern states are continuing to pass and enact voter identification laws that will only hinder the progress that has been made in this area. One way to further increase women of color's political voice in the South would be to increase pathways to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, increasing the ability of non-citizens to participate in political processes. Efforts to ensure equal access to electoral processes for all women, to recruit more women – especially women of color – to run for office, and to increase their success as candidates and office holders, will be crucial to increasing the representation of women in the South in the coming years.





## Appendix A1:

# Methodology

### *Calculating the Composite Index*

This Composite Index reflects four areas of political participation: voter registration; voter turnout; women in elected office, including state legislatures, statewide elected office, and positions in the U.S. Congress; and institutional resources available to women, including a commission for women, a campaign training for women, a women's PAC, and a state chapter of the National Women's Political Caucus.

To construct this Composite Index, each of the component indicators was standardized to remove the effects of different units of measurement for each state's score on the resulting Composite Index. Each component was standardized by subtracting the mean value for all 50 states from the observed value for a state and dividing the difference by the standard deviation for the United States as a whole. The standardized scores were then given different weights. Voter registration and voter turnout were each given a weight of 1.0. The indicator for women in elected office is itself a composite reflecting different levels of office-holding and was given a weight of 4.0 (in the first two series of *Status of Women in the States* reports, published in 1996 and 1998, this indicator was given a weight of 3.0, but since 2000 it has been weighted at 4.0). The last component indicator, women's institutional resources, is also a composite of scores indicating the presence or absence of each of four resources, and received a weight of 1.0. The resulting weighted, standardized values for each of the four component indicators were summed for each state to create a composite score. The states were then ranked from the highest to the lowest score.

To grade the states on this Composite Index, values for each of the components were set at desired levels to produce an "ideal score." Women's voter registration and voter turnout were each set at the value of the highest state for these components; each component of the composite index for women in elected office was set as if 50 percent of elected officials were wom-

en; and scores for institutional resources for women assumed that the ideal state had each of the four resources. Each state's score was then compared with the ideal score to determine its grade.

**WOMEN'S VOTER REGISTRATION:** This component indicator is the average percent (for the presidential and congressional elections of 2012 and 2014) of all women aged 18 and older (in the civilian noninstitutionalized population) who reported registering, including noncitizens who are ineligible. IWPR selected the larger population base for this indicator because the inability of noncitizens to register accurately reflects the lack of political voice for this population. Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census 2013 and 2015, based on the Current Population Survey.

**WOMEN'S VOTER TURNOUT:** This component indicator is the average percent (for the presidential and congressional elections of 2012 and 2014) of all women aged 18 and older (in the civilian noninstitutionalized population) who reported voting, including noncitizens who are ineligible. IWPR selected the larger population base for this indicator because the lack of voting by noncitizens accurately reflects the lack of political voice for this population. Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census 2013 and 2015, based on the Current Population Survey.

**WOMEN IN ELECTED OFFICE:** This index has four components and reflects office-holding at the state and national levels as of December 2015. For each state, the proportion of office-holders who are women was computed for four levels: state representatives; state senators; statewide elected executive officials and U.S. representatives; and U.S. senators and governors. The percent values were then converted to scores that ranged from 0 to 1 by dividing the observed value for each state by the highest value for all states. The scores were then weighted according to the degree of political influence of the position: state representatives were given a weight of 1.0, state senators were given a weight of 1.25, statewide executive elected officials (except governors) and U.S. representatives were each given a weight of 1.5, and U.S. senators and state governors were each given a weight of 1.75.<sup>9</sup> The resulting weighted scores for the four components were added to yield the total score on this index for each state. The highest score of any

9 Data on statewide elective executive offices include: Attorney General, Secretary of State, State Treasurer/Chief Financial Officer, State Auditor, State Comptroller/Controller, Chief State Education Official (title varies from state to state), and Commissioners (of insurance, labor, corporation, agriculture and commerce, public service, public utilities, and railroad). Data do not include officials in appointive state cabinet-level positions; officials elected to executive posts by the legislature; officials elected as commissioners or board members from districts rather than statewide; members of the judicial branch; or elected members of university Boards of Trustees or Boards of Education.

state for this office-holding index is 4.58. These scores were then used to rank the states on the indicator for women in elected office. Sources: Data were compiled by IWPR from the Center for American Women and Politics (2015b; 2015c; 2015d; 2015e; 2015h).

**WOMEN'S INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES:** This index measures the number of institutional resources for women available in the state from a maximum of four, including a commission for women (established by legislation or executive order), a campaign training program for women, a women's political action committee (PAC), and a state chapter of the National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC). In order to score the states, each of the four components for this indi-

cator was weighted equally at 0.5 points, for a total of 2.0 points. These scores were then used to rank the states on the indicator for resources available to women. In 2002 and 2004, the institutional resources indicator measured whether a state had a commission for women (established by legislation or executive order) and a legislative caucus for women (organized by women legislators in either or both houses of the state legislature). In earlier years (1996 and 1998) a third resource, a women's economic agenda project, was also included in this indicator. Sources: Data were compiled by IWPR from the Center for American Women and Politics 2015i; National Conference of State Legislatures 2014; and National Women's Political Caucus 2015.

Appendix B1:

# Political Participation Tables

Appendix Table B1.1.

## Women in the U.S. Congress Representing the South, 2015

State	Number of U.S. Senators Who Are Women	Proportion of U.S. Representatives Who Are Women
Alabama	0	28.6%
Arkansas	0	0.0%
Florida	0	25.9%
Georgia	0	0.0%
Kentucky	0	0.0%
Louisiana	0	0.0%
Mississippi	0	0.0%
North Carolina	0	23.1%
South Carolina	0	0.0%
Tennessee	0	22.2%
Texas	0	8.3%
Virginia	0	9.1%
West Virginia	1	0.0%
<b>United States</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>19.3%</b>

Sources: Data on U.S. Senators are from Center for American Women and Politics (2015c). Data on U.S. Representatives are from Center for American Women and Politics (2015d).

Compiled by the Institute for Women's Policy Research.

Appendix Table B1.2.

## Women in State Government in the South, 2015

State	Proportion of State Senators Who Are Women	Proportion of State Representatives Who Are Women	Proportion of Statewide Elected Executive Offices Held by Women	Number of Governors Who Are Women
Alabama	11.4%	15.2%	22.2%	0
Arkansas	20.0%	20.0%	33.3%	0
Florida	30.0%	23.3%	25.0%	0
Georgia	16.1%	26.1%	0.0%	0
Kentucky	10.5%	19.0%	33.3%	0
Louisiana	10.3%	12.4%	0.0%	0
Mississippi	15.4%	18.0%	28.6%	0
North Carolina	24.0%	21.7%	55.6%	0
South Carolina	4.3%	17.7%	12.5%	1
Tennessee	18.2%	17.2%	N/A	0
Texas	22.6%	19.3%	12.5%	0
Virginia	20.0%	16.0%	0.0%	0
West Virginia	2.9%	19.0%	20.0%	0
<b>United States</b>	<b>22.3%</b>	<b>25.2%</b>	<b>27.1%</b>	<b>6</b>

Notes: Data on women in statewide elected executive offices do not include governorships. Tennessee does not have a statewide elected executive office aside from the governorship.

Sources: Center for American Women and Politics (2015h; 2015e).

Compiled by the Institute for Women's Policy Research.



Appendix Table B1.3.

## Women in the U.S. House of Representatives, by Race/Ethnicity, Southern State, and South/Non-South, 2015

State	Proportion Women	All Representatives	All Women	White	Hispanic	Black	Asian/ Pacific Islander	Native American	Other Race or Two or More Races
Alabama	28.6%	7	2	1	0	1	0	0	0
Arkansas	0.0%	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Florida	25.9%	27	7	4	1	2	0	0	0
Georgia	0.0%	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kentucky	0.0%	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Louisiana	0.0%	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mississippi	0.0%	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
North Carolina	23.1%	13	3	2	0	1	0	0	0
South Carolina	0.0%	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tennessee	22.2%	9	2	2	0	0	0	0	0
Texas	8.3%	36	3	1	0	2	0	0	0
Virginia	9.1%	11	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
West Virginia	0.0%	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Southern States</b>	<b>12.2%</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>All Other States</b>	<b>22.9%</b>	<b>288</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>United States</b>	<b>19.3%</b>	<b>435</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

Sources: Data on women of color are from Center for American Women and Politics (2015b); data on all women are from Center for American Women and Politics (2015b).

Compiled by the Institute for Women's Policy Research.

Appendix Table B1.4.

## Women in State Legislatures, by Race/ Ethnicity, Southern State, and South/Non-South, 2015

State	Proportion Women	All Legislators	All Women	White	Hispanic	Black	Asian/ Pacific Islander	Native American	Other Race or Two or More Races
Alabama	14.3%	140	20	8	0	12	0	0	0
Arkansas	20.0%	135	27	23	0	4	0	0	0
Florida	25.0%	160	40	27	3	10	0	0	0
Georgia	23.7%	236	56	28	0	28	0	0	0
Kentucky	16.7%	138	23	23	0	0	0	0	0
Louisiana	11.8%	144	17	8	0	9	0	0	0
Mississippi	17.2%	174	30	15	0	15	0	0	0
North Carolina	22.4%	170	38	25	1	12	0	0	0
South Carolina	14.1%	170	24	17	0	7	0	0	0
Tennessee	17.4%	132	23	15	1	7	0	0	0
Texas	19.9%	181	36	18	9	8	1	0	0
Virginia	17.1%	140	24	14	0	10	0	0	0
West Virginia	14.9%	134	20	19	0	1	0	0	0
<b>Southern States</b>	<b>18.4%</b>	<b>2,054</b>	<b>378</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>All Other States</b>	<b>26.8%</b>	<b>5,329</b>	<b>1,426</b>	<b>1,167</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>United States</b>	<b>24.4%</b>	<b>7,383</b>	<b>1,804</b>	<b>1,407</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>257</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>5</b>

Sources: Data on women of color are from Center for American Women and Politics (2015g); data on all women are from Center for American Women and Politics 2015e.

Compiled by the institute for Women's Policy Research.



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# Millennial Women

Millennial women<sup>1</sup> face a variety of unique challenges as a result of their coming of age at a time when student debt reached all-time highs and employment opportunities were in short supply, resulting in a generation of women who are highly educated, but still economically vulnerable. This is equally true for millennial women, especially women of color, in the South, making it exceedingly difficult for millennial women to become economically stable. While the millennial generation is faring better than their predecessors in some respects—such as gender earnings equality—in other areas—such as unemployment—millennial women in the South are faring worse, leaving many millennial women and millennial women of color in poverty.

In the southern states, 31.4 percent of women are under the age of 35, a similar share to that in all other states (31.5 percent; see Appendix Table 8.1 for state data).<sup>2</sup> The proportion of women under 35 also varies by race and ethnicity in the South; 47.7 percent of women of another race or two or more races and 41.5 percent of Hispanic women in the South are under the age of 35, while just 27.0 percent of white southern women are under age 35.

- Millennial women in the South have a lower labor force participation rate (66.1 percent) compared with millennial women in all other states (69 percent) and southern millennial men (72.1 percent). The gap in labor force participation between millennial women and men in the South (6 percentage points) is also greater than the gap between millennial women and men in all other states (4.7 percentage points). Black millennial women have the highest labor force participation rate among all southern millennial women (69.7 percent), while Native American millennial women have the lowest (54.3 percent).
- Millennial women in the South work in managerial or professional occupations (33.4 percent) at similar rates to millennial women in all other states (34.9 percent). In the South, a greater proportion of millennial women work in managerial or professional occupations compared with millennial men (23.6 percent). Among southern millennial women, Hispanic women have the lowest share of women working in managerial or professional occupations (23.5 percent), followed by black women (25.7 percent). Millennial Asian/Pacific Islander women have the highest percentage of women working in managerial or professional occupations in the South (50.0 percent), followed by white women (38.7 percent).
- Millennial women in the South fare better than millennial women in all other states when it comes to the gender wage gap. Millennial women working full-time year-round in the South earn 93.8 percent of southern millennial men's earnings, compared with millennial women in all other states who earn 88.9 percent of non-southern millennial men's earnings. Gender differences in earnings also exist across racial and ethnic groups. Millennial Asian/Pacific Islander women in the South actually earn 119.2 percent of southern white millennial men's earnings. On the other hand, the largest wage gap among all racial and ethnic groups of women in the South can be seen between Hispanic and black millennial women and white millennial men (both earn 69.6 cents on the dollar compared with white millennial men). Though the wage gap is narrower between southern millennial women and men, millennial women and men in the South earn less than their counterparts in all other states (\$30,000 and \$32,000, respectively versus \$32,000 and \$36,000, respectively).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Millennials are defined here as those aged 16-34 as of 2014 unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> In this report, southern states include Alabama, Arkansas, the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. Earnings, labor force participation, poverty, and health insurance are IWPR calculations based on 2014, and for data by race/ethnicity, 2012-2014 American Community Survey microdata. Health data are IWPR analysis of 2014 and, for data by race/ethnicity, 2012-2014 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System microdata.

<sup>3</sup> Based on the median annual earnings for those who work full-time year-round.

<sup>4</sup> For all health data, millennial women are defined as those aged 18-34 as of 2014.

- Southern millennial women aged 25-34 are more likely to have a bachelor's degree (33.6 percent) compared with southern millennial men (25.4 percent), but less likely compared with millennial women in all other states (39.5 percent). Though Hispanic millennial women in the South have the lowest proportion of women with bachelor's degrees when compared with other racial and ethnic groups in the South (19.2 percent), they are more likely to hold advanced degrees than Hispanic millennial women in all other states (17.6 percent). Fewer white and black millennial women in the South have bachelor's degrees (40.3 and 23.2 percent, respectively) than their counterparts in other states (46.1 and 25.7 percent, respectively). Asian/Pacific Islander millennial women have the highest proportion of women with bachelor's degrees both in the South and in all other states (65.7 and 62.9 percent, respectively).
- Millennial women in the South are much more likely to live in poverty (23.3 percent) than both their male counterparts (16.2 percent) and millennial women in all other states (19.8 percent). Among all millennial women in the South, black women have the highest poverty rate (32.7 percent), followed by Hispanic women (27.5 percent). Asian/Pacific Islander women and white women have the lowest rates of poverty among southern millennial women (15.7 percent and 18.3 percent, respectively). White, Hispanic, and black millennial women in the south also have higher poverty rates than their female counterparts in all other states (16.0, 25.6, and 30.2 percent, respectively for millennial women in all other states).
- Millennial women<sup>4</sup> in the South carry health insurance at considerably lower levels than millennial women in all other states (76.6 percent and 85.5 percent, respectively). Additionally, the percentage of millennial women with health insurance in the South (76.6 percent) is lower than the overall percentage of southern women with health insurance (78.0 percent for women aged 18-64). Among all racial and ethnic groups of millennial women in the South, white women have the highest rate of health insurance coverage (83.3 percent), followed by Asian/Pacific Islander women (82.1 percent). Hispanic women have substantially lower health insurance coverage, at 58.3 percent.
- Younger women tend to fare better on indicators of health than older women. Among southern women aged 18 to 34, two percent of millennial women in the South have ever been told they have diabetes, compared with 11.4 percent of all southern women. On the other hand, just 1.7 percent of millennial women in all other states have been told they have diabetes, and 1.5 percent of millennial men in the South have been told they have diabetes. Native American women and black women have the highest incidence rates of diabetes (3.3 percent and 2.9 percent, respectively), while Asian/Pacific Islander women have the lowest rate (0.2 percent). Additionally, when it comes to HIV prevention, millennial women in the South are much more likely to be tested for HIV (56.6 percent) compared with millennial women from all other states (46.9 percent).
- Smoking is more common among millennial women in the South (18.8 percent) than among millennial women in all other states (16.1 percent). Among southern millennial women, Native American women, white women, and women who identify as another race or two or more races have the highest percentages of women who currently smoke (31.7 percent, 25.2 percent, and 23.1 percent, respectively).
- On a positive note, binge drinking is less common among millennial women in the South (16.4 percent), compared with millennial women in all other states (20.4 percent). Among southern millennial women, the percentage of women who binge drink is highest among white women (18.6 percent) and women who identify as another race or two or more races (17.7 percent). The percentage of millennial women who binge drink is lowest among black women (12.5 percent) and Native American women (12.8 percent).