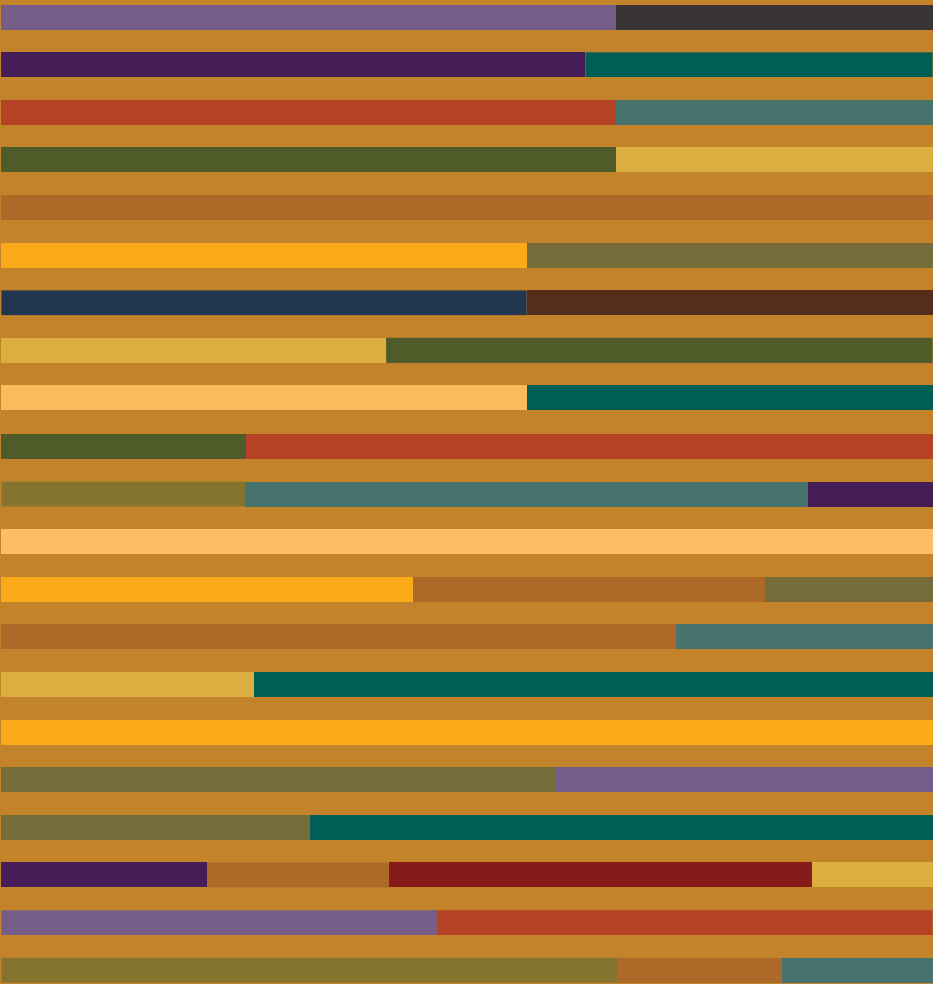


# Ahead of the Majority: Foregrounding Women of Color

An in-depth analysis of the women of color electorate in 2018





The title of this report, “Ahead of the Majority: Foregrounding Women of Color” is inspired by a quote from the late Patsy Takemoto Mink, the first woman of color elected to Congress.

**“It is easy enough to vote right and be consistently with the majority. But it is more often more important to be ahead of the majority and this means being willing to cut the first furrow in the ground and stand alone for a while if necessary.”**

During her thirteen terms in Congress, Mink was the author of landmark laws that advanced equal rights including the “Title IX Amendment of the Higher Education Act” (posthumously renamed the Patsy T. Mink Equal Opportunity in Education Act), which prohibits gender discrimination in any education program or activity receiving federal funding.

Patsy Mink’s personal experience of discrimination and racial segregation fueled her lifelong dedication to challenge and overturn the laws set by the dominant political establishment. Thus while communities of color may now be emerging as a demographic majority today, the use of the word “Majority” in the title of the report is in reference to a “historical Majority” that has dictated a White centered, one dimensional approach to civic engagement and research analysis.



## **Table of Contents**

<b>1</b>	<b>Executive Summary</b>
	Key Findings
	Recommendations to Funding Institutions and Donors
<b>5</b>	<b>Introduction</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Women of Color and the Changing US Electorate</b>
	Voter Registration and Turnout Over Time
	Voter Registration and Turnout in 2018
	Key Issues in 2018
	Participation in 2018
	Mobilization in 2018
<b>17</b>	<b>The Work of Women of Color in 2018</b>
	Women of Color Talk About the Work
<b>23</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>
	Acknowledgments
	References and Further Readings

# Ahead of the Majority: Foregrounding Women of Color

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2018 midterms were both foreseeable and unprecedented. Typical of many midterm elections, party control of Congress changed hands in 2018, signaling the electorate's rejection of the Trump administration's agenda for the past two years. At the same time, atypical of midterm elections, 2018 also saw an extraordinary increase in voter mobilization and turnout, what observers called a "Blue Wave." Furthermore, this was a sea of change in American politics led by women of color. In this report, we recognize the term "women of color"<sup>1</sup> inclusively, to encompass women who are Black, Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI)<sup>2</sup>, Latina, Native American, Arab American, and Middle Eastern. At the same time, given the availability of quality data, most of the analysis in the report is generally limited to women from the first three of these racial groups.

This report spotlights the 2018 midterms, but also sets this key moment against the backdrop of movements for change since 2008 and beyond. This is a story of Black women on the frontlines of democratic demands for progressive change and social justice turning out to the polls<sup>3</sup>. It is also a story that is magnified and made more impactful because in 2018 Latinas and AAPI women joined in and showed up in greater numbers and shared similar viewpoints. Together, 2018 marked a milestone of women of color reaching their potential as a powerful electorate.

*Ahead of the Majority* examines the role of women of color in the 2018 midterm elections. By focusing on Black, Latina, and AAPI women<sup>4</sup> (and, where data are

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<sup>1</sup> We recognize that this characterization is not inclusive of genderqueer, non-binary, and gender non-conforming individuals and that more qualitative data and research is needed to competently reflect these communities.

<sup>2</sup> AAPIs include people of East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, the Philippines, and the Pacific Islands.

<sup>3</sup> "Trump Drove Black Voters to the Polls – to Choose Democrats" (US News), and "Black Girl Magic" (Guardian)

<sup>4</sup> Where data is available for AAPIs, they are reported and referred to as AAPI. Similarly where data is only available for Asian Americans, the reports uses that terminology.



available, Native American women), the report fills two critical gaps in the reporting and discussion of election results. First, the story of women of color (and not just women or voters of color) takes center stage with an explicitly intersectional point of view. The importance of centering “intersectionality” is credited to Kimberlé Crenshaw’s pioneering 1989 essay that first surfaced the multiple, overlapping bases of oppression uniquely experienced by Black women: “Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated.”<sup>5</sup> Second, to take that perspective, the report examines both existing data sources like the Current Population Survey (CPS) Voter Supplement and original data collected in the 2018 American Election Eve Poll (hereinafter Eve Poll). This combination of an intersectional lens and original data yields rich insights into the voting behavior, policy preferences, and pivotal impact of women of color often ignored in election postscripts.

*Ahead of the Majority* also provides a critical counter-narrative to the common accounts of White women voters who buttressed the Trump presidency and Republican agenda. For instance, media accounts of the role of White women in buckling down to support Trump and the Republican agenda were well touted in newsmagazine titles like *ELLE Magazine*’s “It’s ‘the Year of the Woman,’ No Thanks to White Women,”<sup>6</sup> “Why Do White Women Keep Voting for the GOP and Against Their Own Interests?” in *Vogue*,<sup>7</sup> and “The Betrayal of White Women Voters: In Pivotal Races, They Still Backed the GOP” on *Vox*.<sup>8</sup> Instead, the data shows that in 2018, White women broke with their historical voting patterns, getting behind the shift in party control of Congress.

In our own conversations with women of color leaders and organizers that were active in 2018, we knew that we were witnessing a radically changing civic engagement field. These experiences could be best told through a report such as this that examines the activism and leadership role women of color played, particularly Black women, during the 2018 midterm elections and daily in their communities. This in-depth analysis of women of color serves as a **springboard for agenda setting and discussions on the potential for substantive policy change when strategies and resources are centered around and promote the leadership and engagement of Native American women, Black women, AAPI women, and Latinas.**

<sup>5</sup> Crenshaw, Kimberlé Williams. (1989). “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics.” *University of Chicago Law Forum*, p. 140.

<sup>6</sup> Stoeffel, K. (2018, November 8). “It’s ‘The Year of the Woman,’ No Thanks to White Women.” *ELLE Magazine*, <https://www.elle.com/culture/career-politics/a24844186/2018-midterms-White-women-voters/>.

<sup>7</sup> Ruiz, M. (2018, November 8). “Why Do White Women Keep Voting for the GOP and against Their Own Interests?” *Vogue Magazine*, <https://www.vogue.com/article/White-women-voters-conservative-trump-gop-problem>.

<sup>8</sup> Lindsey, T. B. (2018, November 9). “The Betrayal of White Women Voters: In Pivotal State Races, They Still Backed the GOP.” *Vox*, <https://www.vox.com/first-person/2018/11/9/18075390/election-2018-midterms-White-women-voters>.

## Key Findings

- **Women of color are poised to play a pivotal role in the 2020 elections, shaping policy through a variety of civic engagement activities.** Since 2008, the population of women of color has increased by 18% while their voter registration rates have jumped by 25%, thus contributing to the changing makeup of the American electorate.
- **Women of color were central to the unprecedented Midterm turnout.** Overall, turnout in 2018 increased by a whopping 30 million more voters than in 2014, representing a 33% increase. Most significantly, turnout among women of color increased 37% of which AAPI women showed up to the polls at an increase of 48%, Black women at 37%, and Latinas at 51%.
- **2018 turnout was fueled by women mobilizing friends and family.** Most voters in 2018 talked to and encouraged friends and family to vote. Black women led the way with 84% mobilizing friends and family, followed by 76% of AAPI women, 72% of Native American women, 70% of Latinas, and 66% of White women.
- **Mobilization in 2018 was unprecedented for a midterm election.** Voters in 2018 were contacted to register and turnout at rates comparable to, if not exceeding, mobilization in presidential election years. Nonpartisan community groups were especially involved and targeted outreach to communities of color. The rates of being contacted were the lowest for White Americans (just 32% for White men) and the highest among African Americans (55%) and AAPIs (54%).
- **People of color engaged voters beyond the ballot box, especially in grassroots political activism and mass protests.** An extraordinarily high estimate of one of eight Americans engaged in protest politics in 2018. Participation in protests was highest among Black men (24%), Native American women (21%), and Native American men (18%).
- **Regardless of race, men and women have different issue priorities.** Women prioritize healthcare, gun violence, and race relations/racism whereas men prioritize the economy/jobs, border security, and government spending and taxes. Among women, there are differences in the ranking of issue priorities. While for Native American, Latina, and AAPI women immigration is viewed as an important issue area, for White women border security, more than immigration, is stated as an issue of importance.



## Recommendations to Funding Institutions and Donors

The potential of women of color as constituents, voters, organizers, leaders, and visionaries is encumbered by the historic and persistent underinvestment by philanthropy in nonprofit organizations and initiatives designed to educate, organize, and develop women of color.<sup>9,10</sup> Similarly, political spending by parties are disproportionately directed toward White consultants and dedicated to reaching White voters.<sup>11,12</sup> In spite of this underinvestment, women of color are growing in vote share and taking on more leadership to mobilize and lead others as well as advocate for critical quality-of-life issues in greater numbers. In other words, philanthropy would be wise to reassess their return on investment calculator and make a course correction by supporting more women of color leading or serving organizations.

Women of color have multiple identities—they are people of color and are women, but they may also be immigrants and refugees, LGBTQ, and low income. These identities are not ranked but intersect. As Kimberlé Crenshaw said of the need to be inclusive of those who are intersectionally marginalized, “when they enter, we all enter.” For this reason it is important to support women of color-led organizing and civic engagement and to recognize that these entities advance social justice on a range of issues from reproductive rights, quality healthcare, and worker rights to environmental justice, immigrant rights, and criminal justice reform. Further, investments should concentrate on the following: (1) base building and leadership development that contributes to transformative growth; (2) research and learnings to expand the field of knowledge; (3) expanded election administration and voting rights advocacy and education that addresses long-standing cases of discrimination as well as the rise of voter suppression; and (4) organizational development that supports infrastructure creation.

<sup>9</sup> The National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy’s analysis based on Foundation Center data found that while foundation assets increased 68% from \$476 billion to \$798 billion, in the decade from 2003 to 2013, support for work that explicitly benefited people of color, women and girls, the elderly, and other underserved communities by the nation’s largest foundations increased 15%, while foundation support for efforts that engage underserved communities in finding long-term solutions to injustice and inequities rose 10%.

<sup>10</sup> Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy (AAPIP) released its groundbreaking report, “Invisible and in Need” in 1992 with the alarming statistic that 0.2% of the total foundation giving (amounting to \$19 billion) during a seven-year period support AAPI communities. In 2015, AAPIP found little had changed with foundation giving to Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander communities hovering at 0.3% for the past twenty-five years.

<sup>11</sup> The Fannie Lou Hamer Report found that over two cycles the Democratic Party awarded \$514 million in contracts, 97% to White consultants and 83% to White men.

<sup>12</sup> Phillips, S. (2018). *Brown Is the New White: How the Demographic Revolution Has Created a New American Majority*. New York City: The New Press. Phillips reports that of the first \$200 million spent by political expenditure operations in 2016, almost none was dedicated toward outreach to Black voters.

## INTRODUCTION

The 2018 elections saw the highest turnout rates in a midterm election since 1914, the greatest number of women and most diverse Congress elected into office (including a record number of twenty AAPIs, the largest freshman class in fifty years, and the youngest cohort of newly elected members of Congress, with eleven under thirty-five years of age). There were also some firsts: the first Muslim American woman and Native American woman elected. Pieced together, these headlines offer a richer telling of what is happening on the ground, which we will overlook if post-election analyses continue to (1) assume that the electorate is a White monolith with only basic variations in age and gender and (2) rely on the conventional methods for gathering data on the remarkably diverse American electorate. **In fact, the 2018 midterm results demonstrate that communities of color are activated, unhappy with the current direction of the country, and no longer waiting for entrenched powers to make the change they want to see in this country.**

The most recent American Community Survey estimates the total US population at 321 million. Native Americans make nearly 7 million, Black Americans more than 47 million, Latinx more than 57 million, and AAPIs at 22 million.<sup>13</sup> For communities of color and distinct subgroups, be they LGBTQ, immigrants and refugees, or religious minority groups, data gathered and analyzed about their communities have been flawed from undercounts and misidentifications to insufficient tools and culturally incompetent analyses. This report seeks to disentangle this disconnect between mainstream demographic data reports and the reality of the lives led by communities of color. But so much more needs to be studied and explored, *and* in partnership with grassroots communities. Native American communities in particular are often overlooked and marginalized and perceived as geographically isolated on tribal lands or invisible even when they live with us. Further disaggregated data is a rallying cry for AAPIs as it would reveal the alarming areas of need in the community and undermine the prevailing model minority myth that the population is economically successful, politically apathetic, and more socially assimilated with White dominant culture.

Given these caveats and considerations, in the text that follows we share some key demographic data on communities of color, which indicates the common issues and problems facing all groups. Although the indicators below only reflect data by race/ethnicity (and not by gender or other characteristics), they help to provide additional context about the unique and shared challenges across communities of color.

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<sup>13</sup> US Census Bureau. (2017). "Annual Estimates of the Resident Population: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2017," <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk>.

- Compared to 13% of the general US population, 33% of Latinx; 20% of Native Americans; and 34%, 39%, and 40% of Laotians, Cambodians, and Hmong adults, respectively<sup>14</sup> did not graduate from high school.
- Compared to the 15% of the US population, 27% of Native Americans, 25% of African Americans, 22% of Latinx, 38% of Burmese, 26% of Hmong, 25% of Bangladeshis, and 19% of Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (NHPIS) live in poverty.
- Compared to 11% of the non-senior adult US population, 30% of Latinx, 28% of Native Americans, 23% of Korean Americans, and 17% of African Americans are uninsured.
- African Americans make up one-third of the total correctional population and are incarcerated at more than five times the rate of Whites.<sup>15</sup> Between 2002 and 2010, the incarceration rate of NHPIS increased 144%, and more published disaggregated data on the incarceration rates of NHPIS is needed to understand the full impact of the criminal justice system on this community.<sup>16</sup>
- One-third of Latinx and AAPs are Limited English Proficient and 74% of AAPs speak a language other than English at home.
- More than a third of the Latinx population are immigrants and nearly two-thirds of Asians in the United States are immigrants. In terms of the undocumented population, undocumented immigrants from Mexico make up about half of the 11 million undocumented persons in the United States and one out of eight AAPs are undocumented.

*Ahead of the Majority* showcases research on demographic trends and polling data from the 2018 midterm elections, coupled with reflections from women of color on the ground. In particular, it highlights new findings from the 2018 Eve Poll, an original survey that presents a unique opportunity to go beyond the usual analysis that either focuses solely on one identity dimension like race, gender, or class differences in voting patterns or highlights only a “White and” demographic, such as White women voters or White working-class voters. Instead, this report capitalizes on the Eve Poll in an explicitly intersectional analysis that emphasizes commonalities

<sup>14</sup> Southeast Asian Resource Center (2013). “Overview of Southeast Asian Educational Challenges,” <http://www.searac.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Overview-of-Southeast-Asian-Educational-Challenges-Why-Are-Southeast-Asian-American-Students-Falling-Behind.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Criminal Justice Fact Sheet. Retrieved from: <http://www.naacp.org/criminal-justice-fact-sheet/>.

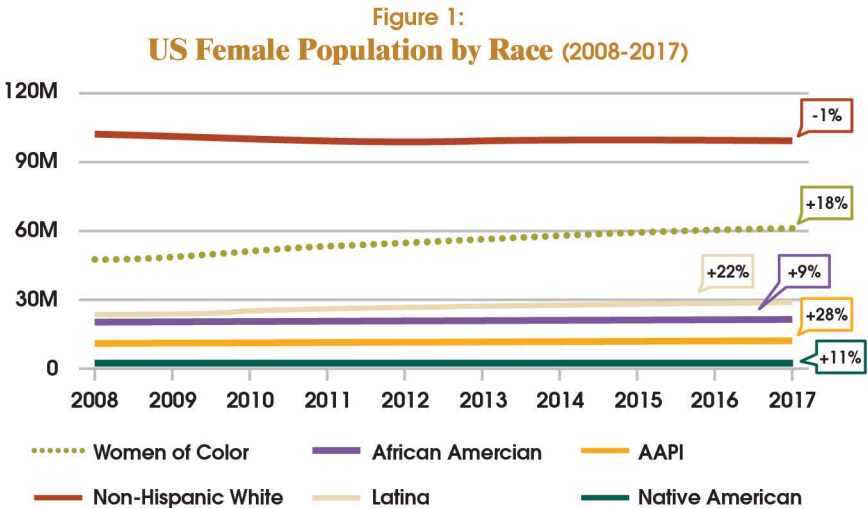
<sup>16</sup> Empowering Pacific Islander Communities and Asian Americans Advancing Justice (2014). “A Community of Contrasts: Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in the United States,” [https://www.advancingjustice-la.org/sites/default/files/A\\_Community\\_of\\_Contrasts\\_NHPI\\_US\\_2014.pdf](https://www.advancingjustice-la.org/sites/default/files/A_Community_of_Contrasts_NHPI_US_2014.pdf).

and contrasts in the political engagement of women of color—African American, Latina, Asian American, and Native American. In doing so, we present a fuller and clearer picture of the success of civic engagement in 2018.

This report is broken up into two sections. The first section covers the changing electorate as reflected in voter registration and turnout over time and delves into key issues and trends in voter participation and mobilization in 2018. The second section includes reflections and lessons learned from women of color who organized and led mobilizations in 2018.

## WOMEN OF COLOR & THE CHANGING US ELECTORATE

The US electorate is becoming more and more diverse and, with that change, so too has the women’s vote. Comparing general population numbers in the United States over the last decade of the American Community Survey (2008–2017), **the population of non-Hispanic White women has decreased 1% (Figure 1). Over the same period, women of color have increased by 18% in total numbers.** (color bold, not italics) Broken down into subgroups the total population of African American women has increased 9%, of Native American women 11%, and the numbers of Latinas and AAPI women have increased 22% and 28%, respectively.



### Voter Registration and Turnout Over Time

These sweeping demographic shifts translate into changes in the US electorate: who are registered to vote and which Americans have cast ballots in recent elections. The 2020 presidential election is on the immediate horizon and because it’s a time when turnout is high and serves as a consistent comparison, the data presented in this section are for recent presidential elections. For this section, we begin with data

on voter registration and turnout from the biennial CPS Voting and Registration Supplement.<sup>17</sup> In terms of total numbers of women registered to vote and who turn out to vote, the two figures show changes between the 2008 election of Barack Obama and the 2016 election of Donald Trump. Between 2008 and 2016, the total number of White women registered increased by roughly 1 million, or a 2% increase. For women of color the number registered to vote over the same period increased by more than 4.6 million, or a 25% increase (Figure 2). The increase for African American women is roughly 1.5 million additional registered voters for a 15% increase; for Latinas the figures are an increase of 2.1 million additional registered voters, a 35% increase from 2008; and for Asian American women, the increase in registered voters was nearly 1 million, or a 48% increase from 2008 (Figure 3).

Figure 2:

### Women's Voter Registration Total in Millions by Race (2008-2016)

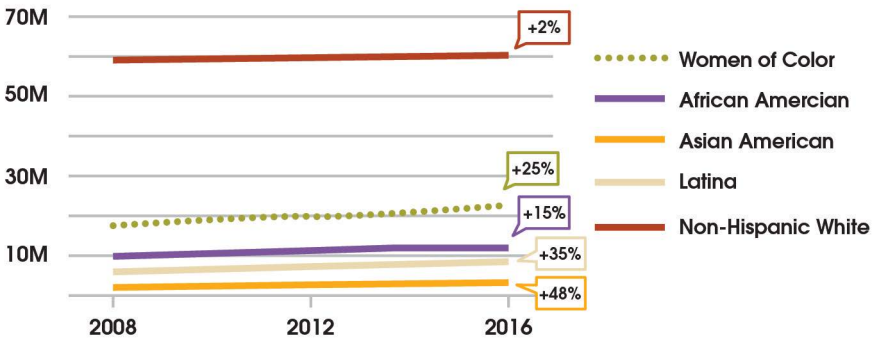
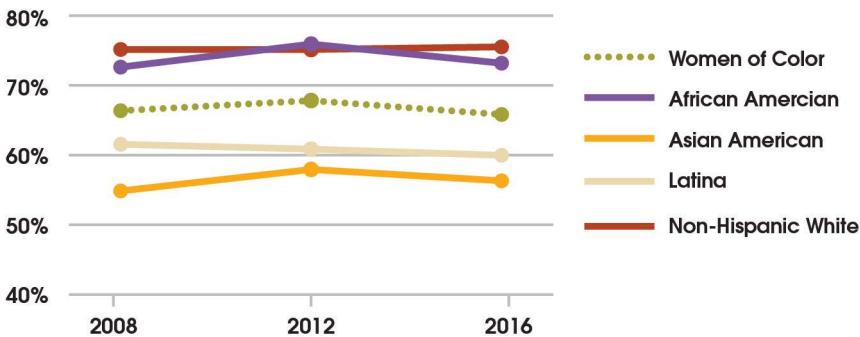


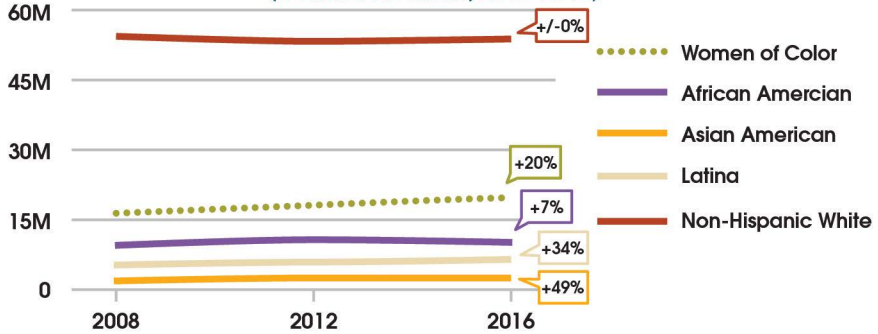
Figure 3:

### Women's Voter Registration Rates by Race (2008-2016)

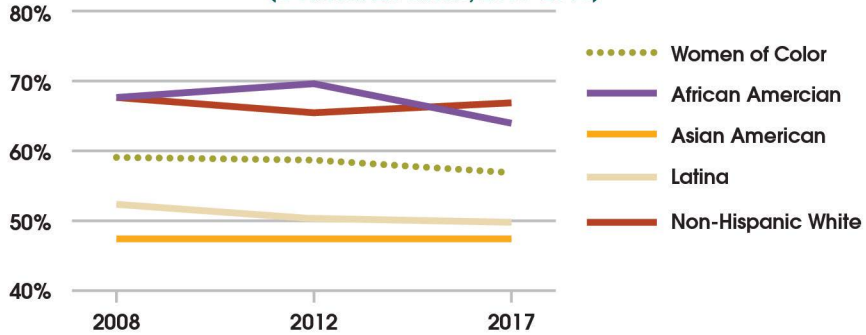


<sup>17</sup> US Census Bureau. (2019). "Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2018," <https://www.census.gov/topics/public-sector/voting.html>.

**Figure 4:**  
**Women's Voter Turnout Totals in Millions by Race**  
(General Elections, 2008-2016)



**Figure 5:**  
**Women's Voter Turnout Rates by Race**  
(General Elections, 2008-2016)



The overall trends in terms of voter turnout are similar. Between 2008 and 2016, the total number of White women who turned out to vote is essentially unchanged (at roughly 53 million voters in both 2008 and 2016). The big jumps in total numbers of voters between the two elections are found for women of color, who increase from more than 16 million in 2008 to less than 20 million in 2016 for a total increase of roughly 3.3 million women voters of color (Figure 4), or a 20% increase. The biggest increases among women of color are for Latinas and Asian American women, whose total numbers increase by 34% and 49%, respectively. The total number of African American women voting in 2016 represents a 7% jump from 2008.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> These numbers are even more pronounced if we compare changes between the 2000 presidential election and 2016. The total number of White non-Hispanic women voters over this stretch of elections increases a modest 13%, while the participation of women of color increases 64%. For African American women, the total numbers increase 33%, for Latinas the increase is 109%, and for Asian American women, it is 145%.

In terms of rates, the 2012 election saw a notable increase in the turnout rates for Black women coupled with modest decreases in rates for White women and Latinas. Then in 2016, these shifts were upturned as turnout rates for Black women decreased from 70% to 64% while turnout for White women, Asian American women, and Latinas held more or less steady (Figure 5). Between 2008 and 2016, there is an overall drop-off in turnout rates for women of color from 59% to 56%.

### Voter Registration and Turnout in 2018

The 2018 election upended these modest shifts in turnout rates between presidential election years with a dramatic shift between 2018 and the previous midterm elections in 2014. The real story going into the next election, then, is whether 2018 is a harbinger of equally dramatic increases in voter mobilization in 2020. Midterm elections are notable for marked declines in voter participation compared to presidential election years. Moreover, the turnout gap between presidential and midterm elections has steadily grown over the last two decades, and especially so for Latinx and Asian American citizens. **The policies implemented by the Trump administration and the mobilization of women and communities of color changed all that, and dramatically.**

Figures 6 and 7 show comparisons in voter registration and voter turnout rates between 2014 and 2018. Increases in voter registrations rates in 2018 are present for

Figure 6:  
Women's Voter Registration Rates by Race (2014-2018)

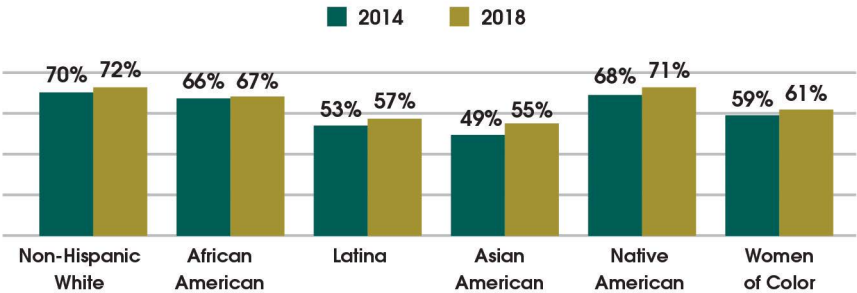
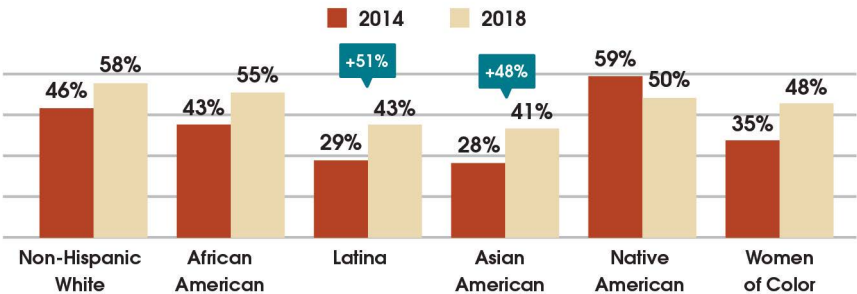


Figure 7:  
Women's Voter Turnout Rates by Race (General Elections, 2014-2018)





every gender-race group shown previously but, for the most part, the increases are modest. For women of color combined, the rates of voter registration increased from 59% in 2014 to 61% in 2018. Notable exceptions to this story of modest increases in voter registration, however, are Latinas and Asian American women, who increased in their registration rates between 2014 and 2018 from 53% to 57% for Latinas and from 49% to 55% Asian American women.

The lead story of mobilization in 2018, notably, is turnout more so than voter registration. Recently released data from the 2018 CPS Voter Supplement show that **voter mobilization in terms of turnout in 2018 is quite unprecedented**, especially among Latinx and Asian American women. Overall, turnout in 2018 as a percentage of the voter eligible population increased nearly 33% compared to the 2014 midterms. While CPS figures are estimates, they suggest that a whopping 30 million more Americans voted in 2018 than in 2014, with an increase of roughly 16 million more women voters and 14 million more men.<sup>19</sup> For Latinx and Asian American women, the increase in the percent of eligible voters who turned out in 2018 was 51% and 48% higher than their turnout numbers in 2014, respectively.

To put these numbers in some perspective, **the total numbers of Latina and Asian American women who voted in the 2018 midterms exceeded their total voting numbers in the 2012 presidential election and came close to their total numbers in 2016**. Turnout increased 28% for African American women and 37% for all women of color. Turnout in 2018 was also dramatically higher among White women voters, at 26% compared to 2014 levels. While there are some shortcomings to any dataset, the biennial CPS supplements on voter registration and turnout are considered close to a “gold standard” benchmark on electoral participation. Nevertheless, these trends and the magnitude of increase in turnout is reflected in other data as well, with Catalist showing, for example, a comparable percentage point increase in AAPI turnout overall to those reported by CPS.

## Key Issues in 2018

What issues were foremost on voters’ minds going into the 2018 midterms? To discover which issues were especially salient, Eve Poll respondents were asked, “Thinking about the 2018 election, what are the most important issues facing your community that our politicians should address?” and allowed to give up to two responses. The twelve most commonly identified issues are shown in Figure 8 for men and women. There are a few notable gender differences: women care more than men about healthcare (36% to 30%), gun violence (13% to 9%), and race relations/racism

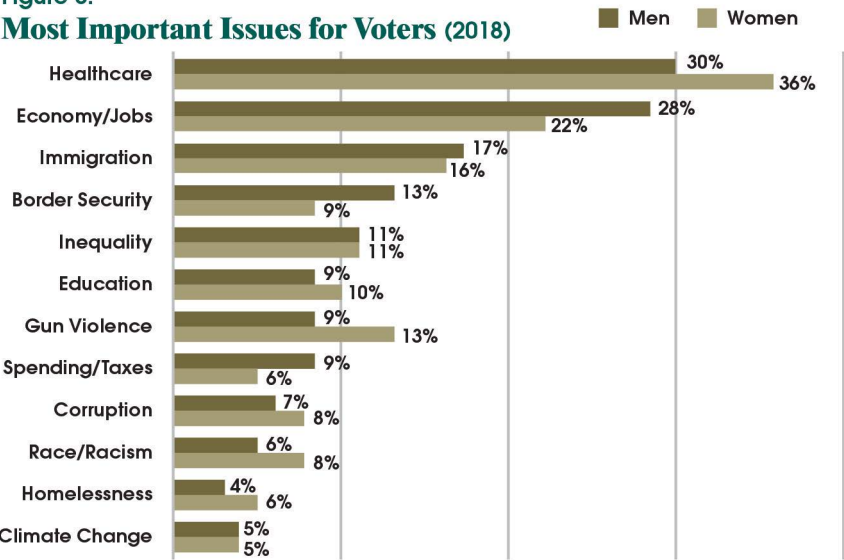
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<sup>19</sup> The registration and turnout estimates are based on survey respondent self-reports, which often biases estimates toward overreporting; there is a growing trend toward item nonresponse that is nonrandom; missing data from item nonresponse (or other source) are coded as no-voters; interviews are only conducted in English and Spanish; survey sampling frames that exclude certain institutionalized populations; and so on. As one point of comparison on these potential limitations, there is roughly a 30% gap between CPS estimates of the total number of Americans registered to vote (in 2018, CPS estimates 153 million registered) and Catalist counts based on postelection voter files (for 2018, Catalist counts are more than 200 million registered). Regardless, despite the shortcomings of each dataset in terms of total numbers, rates of change and trends appear roughly consistent.

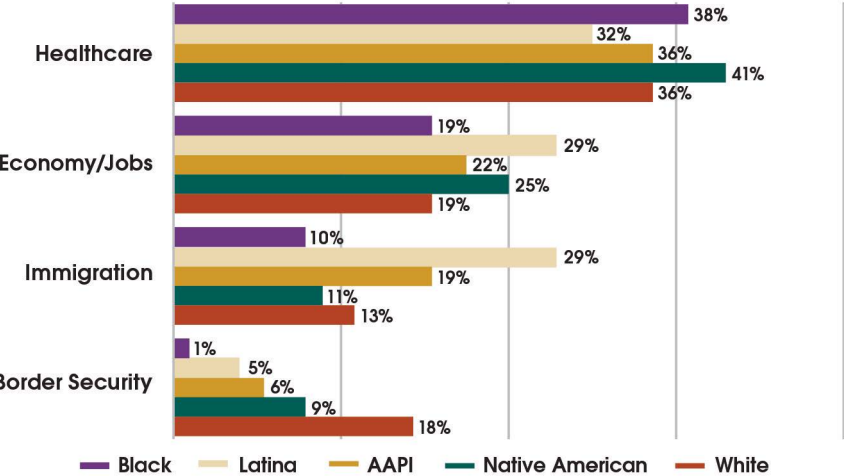
(8% to 6%); men care more than women about the economy (28% to 22%), border security (13% to 9%), and government spending and taxes (9% to 6%).

The results also show some key differences between women on issue salience. For all groups of women voters, healthcare is the most commonly mentioned “most important” issue (Figure 9). Beyond healthcare, the economy is much likelier to be mentioned as “most important” by Latina voters (29%), with Native American women not too far behind (25%). Latina voters are also far more likely to mention immigration reform as a salient issue (also 29%), with AAPI women as the next

**Figure 8:**  
**Most Important Issues for Voters (2018)**

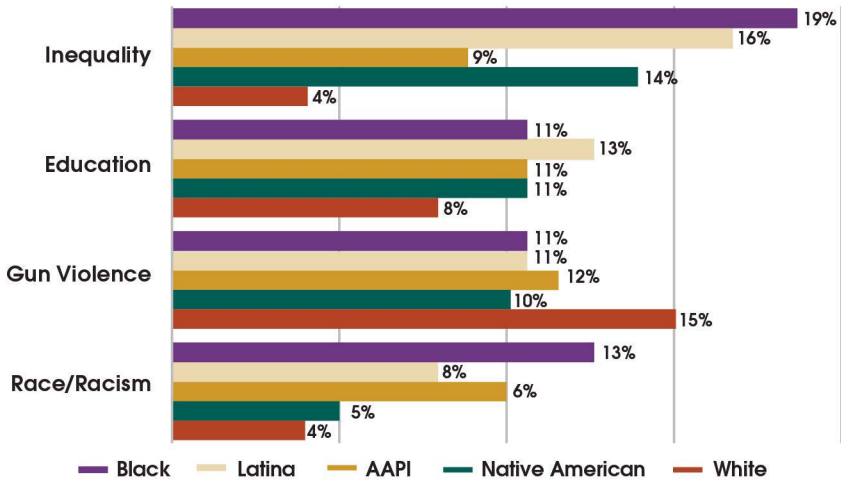


**Figure 9:**  
**“Most Important” Issues for Women Voters (2018)**



most likely to mention the issue (19%). By contrast, White women were more likely than any other group to mention border security as a most important issue (18%). Beyond these four most commonly mentioned issues, the Eve Poll finds several other contrasts in issue salience. African American women were especially likely to mention inequality and race relations as most important (Figure 10). While only 11% of all women in the survey mentioned inequality, for African American women the figure is 19%; similarly, 13% of African American women named race and racism as most important, compared to only 8% of all women in the survey.

**Figure 10:**  
**Other “Most Important” Issues for Women Voters (2018)**



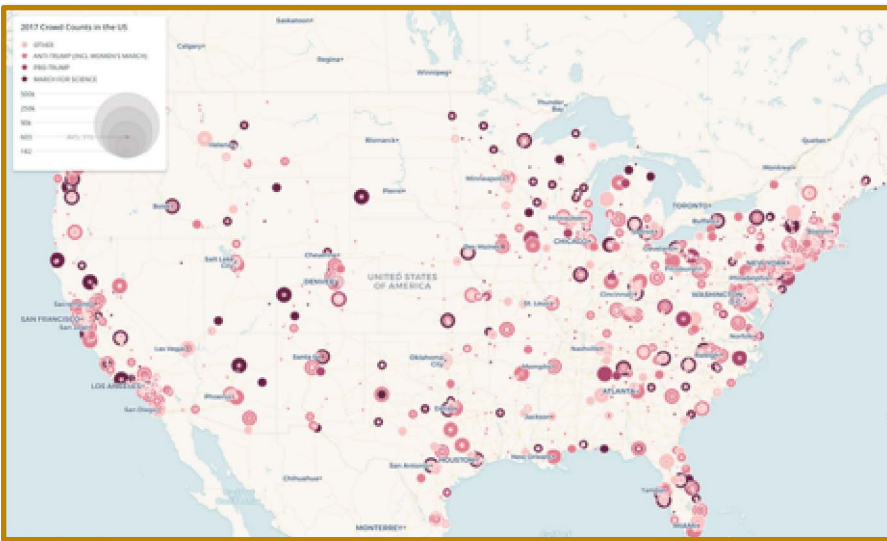
## Participation in 2018

The 2018 midterm elections also saw a remarkable level of activity among voters who encouraged their friends and family members to register and turn out to vote, especially among women of color. The 2016 election of Donald Trump to the presidency of the United States marked not only a pivotal moment in electoral history but also sparked an outpouring of protests against his presidency. The rise of social movement activism and protest politics was punctuated by the Women’s March on Washington on January 21, 2017, when an estimated 470,000 people convened by the National Mall and between 3 to 5 million people throughout the country took to the streets.<sup>20</sup> This Women’s March has become an annual uprising with mass protests in January 2018 and 2019 as well. As scholars have noted, moreover, they have been distinctly intersectional in character, bringing together women and men

<sup>20</sup> Crowd estimates are from the Crowd Counting Consortium project by Erica Chenoweth and Jeremy Pressman. See Kaveh Waddell, “The Exhausting Work of Tallying America’s Largest Project,” *The Atlantic* (January 23, 2017) and the original data available at [https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1xa0iLqYKz8x9Yc\\_rfhtmSOJQ2EGGeUVjvV4A8LslaxY/htmlview?sle=true#gid=0](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1xa0iLqYKz8x9Yc_rfhtmSOJQ2EGGeUVjvV4A8LslaxY/htmlview?sle=true#gid=0).

organized around a diverse range of interests from women's rights and reproductive rights to the environment, racial justice, healthcare, LGBTQ rights, and equality generally.<sup>21</sup> In fact, as Figure 11 shows, protests for and against President Trump and his policies have been organized in all sizes and throughout the nation since 2017. The eruption of mass protests since 2016 is an especially powerful reminder that politics is not just about elections and is not just a one-way street of politics and policies imposed on the people. Rather politics and policies have consequences and can generate a vigorous, transformative response between election campaigns and outside of the corridors of government. Accordingly, it is important to go beyond an analysis of women of color as voters and examine their engagement and mobilizing beyond the ballot box in the 2018 midterms. Specifically, in this report, we surface the impact of two modes of political participation that are especially interesting: participation in protests; what might be called "lateral mobilization" – ordinary Americans talking with friends and family to encourage their participation in the mid-terms.<sup>22</sup>

**Figure 11:**  
**Geography of Protest Marches in 2017**



<sup>21</sup> Fisher, Dana, Dawn Dow, and Rashawn Ray. (2017). "Intersectionality Takes It to the Streets: Mobilizing across Diverse Interests for the Women's March." *Science Advances* (September 20), <http://advances.sciencemag.org/>.

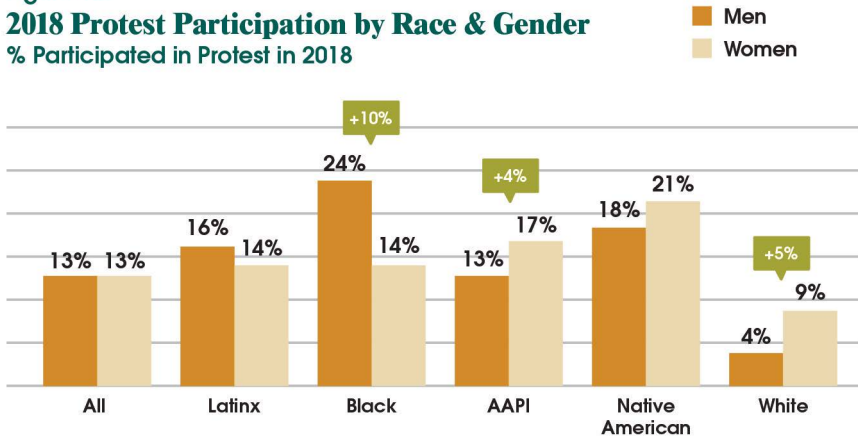
<sup>22</sup> We refer to this as "lateral mobilization" in the report to differentiate interpersonal participation from "vertical," top-down mobilization driven by candidates, campaigns, and nonpartisan organizations. We do not mean to imply, however, that these are always cases of voters deciding, on their own, to reach out to friends and family members about registering and voting. Candidates, campaigns, and community organizations who reach out to voters often urge them to reach out to others as well, and the data from the Eve Poll show that 79% of 2018 voters who had been contacted by a candidate, campaign, or some nonpartisan organization also reported contacting friends and family members about registering and voting; for 2018 voters who were not contacted by an organization or campaign, the rates of self-mobilization were significantly lower, at 61%.

Specifically, respondents were asked, “Have you done any of the following activities related to the 2018 election? ... Encouraged your friends or family to register or vote.... Attended a protest or demonstration against someone or an issue.” The Eve Poll overall estimates that more than one in eight Americans engaged in protest politics in 2018. There are some gender and race differences in protest participation (Figure 12). Most notably, African American men were significantly likelier to engage in protests than any other group (24%), followed by Native American women (21%), Native American men (18%), and Asian American women (17%). Only an estimated 4% of White men and 9% of White women reported participating in a protest.

**Figure 12:**

### **2018 Protest Participation by Race & Gender**

**% Participated in Protest in 2018**



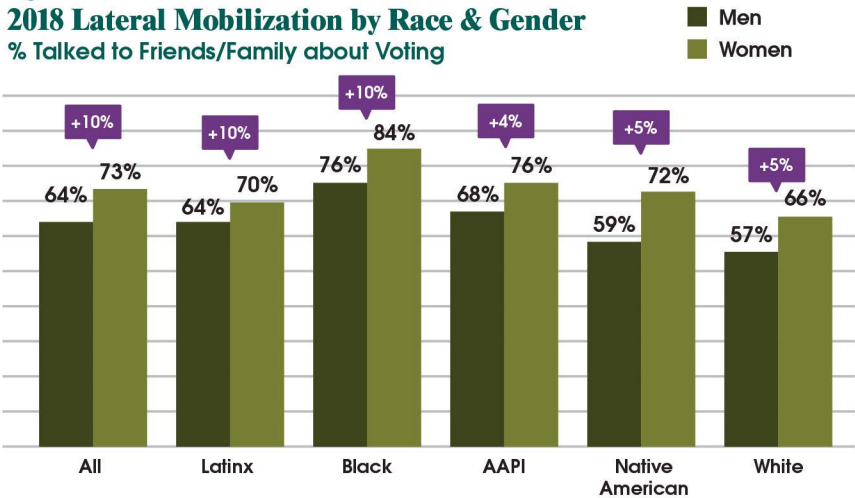
To put these 2018 numbers in some perspective, we can compare these with several different questions about protest participation in the American National Election Studies (ANES). The closest item in the ANES was asked in 2016: “During the past 12 months, have you joined in a protest march, rally, or demonstration, or have you not done this in the past 12 months?” To this question, only 3.4% of all respondents reported engaging in protest, with no statistically discernible difference between men and women in their likelihood of protest. In 2012, respondents were asked about a longer four-year time frame and even then only 5.6% reported participating in protests. And in 2008, ANES respondents were asked if they ever joined in a protest or demonstration. Only in that most encompassing version do the rates of protest participation from the ANES exceed reported protest participation around the 2018 midterms, with 19% of ANES respondents in 2008 indicating they had ever engaged in a protest or demonstration.<sup>23</sup> Within this context, it is apparent that Americans across all groups were much more engaged in protest politics in 2018 than in the past.

<sup>23</sup> The question wording in the 2012 ANES was “During the past 4 years, have you joined in a protest march, rally, or demonstration, or have you not done this in the past 4 years?” and the 2008 ANES asked, “Now we will ask you about your past. Have you ever done this, or have you never done it? Joined in a protest march, rally, or demonstration.”

## Mobilization in 2018

The 2018 midterm elections also saw a remarkable degree of lateral mobilization among Americans, especially women of color. The Eve Poll shows that 73% of all women who voted and 64% of all men who voted reported talking with friends and family to encourage their engagement in the midterms (Figure 13). The extent of lateral mobilization is highest among African American women at 84%, followed by AAPI, Native American, and Latinx women voters at 76%, 72%, and 70%, respectively. White men were least likely to report self-mobilizing, at 57%. On this mode of political engagement, there is no directly comparable question in the ANES. The ANES does, however, ask its respondents whether they had talked to others about “why they should vote for or against one of the parties or candidates.” To this question, between 2008 and 2016, the numbers range from 37% to 42%, with a slightly lower range for women in the ANES of 35% to 41% and even slightly lower levels for women of color. Once again, 2018 appears to be a watershed year for both electoral and nonelectoral engagement, especially for women of color.

**Figure 13:**  
**2018 Lateral Mobilization by Race & Gender**  
% Talked to Friends/Family about Voting



A final aspect of the 2018 midterms that we examine from the Eve Poll is the role of organized mobilization, whether from a campaign, a political party, or some other group.<sup>24</sup> Here too, the overall rates of organized voter registration and turnout efforts were extraordinarily high for a midterm election. The Eve Poll showed that 43% of men and an even higher rate of 46% of women reported being contacted about registering to vote or voting (Figure 14). Moreover, unlike typical midterm elections, the 2018 midterms flipped the script on the rate and role of mobilization. The Eve Poll showed that rates of being contacted were the lowest for White

<sup>24</sup> Question wording: “Over the past few months, did anyone from a campaign, political party, or some other group like a community organization ask you to vote or register to vote?”

Americans (just 32% for White men) and the highest among African Americans (55%) and AAPIs (54%). While women overall were more likely to be contacted, most of this gender difference is attributable to the gap between White women (38% were contacted) and White men (only 32%).

There are also differences in who contacted voters in 2018. The Eve Poll asked respondents who said they were mobilized whether the contact was from a party candidate or campaign, or from a group other than a partisan candidate or campaign, such as a community-based organization. The data show a strikingly high 44% of 2018 voters who were mobilized reported contact from a group unaffiliated with a political party (Figure 15). Overall, men were slightly more likely to have been contacted by nonpartisan groups than women; Blacks and Latinx were most likely to have been contacted, while Whites were least likely. These numbers from the Eve Poll buttress the experience of community-based organizations on the ground that carried out an unprecedented range of nonpartisan civic engagement activities to reach voters who were new, low propensity, or historically less contacted. In the following text we spotlight the activities of groups affiliated with the AAPI Civic Engagement Fund and Groundswell Fund as well as insights from some of the women leaders and organizers.

Figure 14:  
**Voter Mobilization by Race & Gender**  
% Contacted about Voting

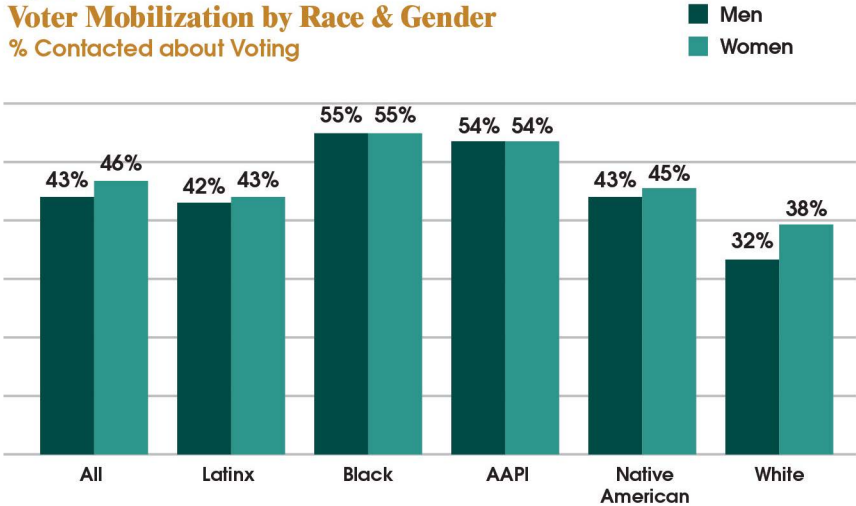
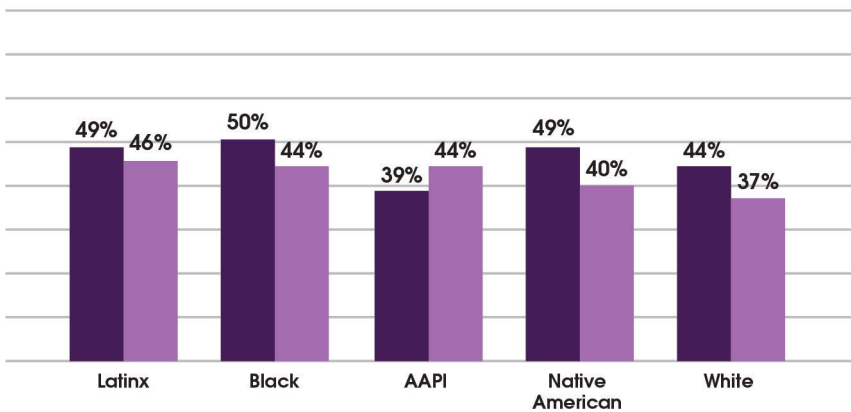




Figure 15:  
**2018 Mobilization by Nonpartisan Organization**  
 % Contacted by Nonpartisan Organization



## THE WORK OF WOMEN OF COLOR IN 2018

### AAPI Civic Engagement Fund

In 2018, the AAPI Civic Engagement Fund supported twenty-one AAPI nonpartisan charitable organizations in seventeen states: California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, New York, Nevada, North Carolina, Rhode Island, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington State, and Wisconsin. Seventeen (81%) are led by women as executive or co-executive directors; fifteen (71%) also had women leading the civic engagement programs. All these leaders and organizers come from the very community that the organization is focused on empowering. The groups asserted themselves as the designers of the methods that would best reach and speak to their community day in and day out, instead of relying on outside strategists who parachute into communities for surgical campaign victories.

The groups focused more on live conversations and less on robocalls for their nonpartisan civic engagement activities. They sought to connect these tactics to relationship building and developing the organizing skills and leadership of everyday community members, who may not have formal titles in the organization. More often than not, these community leaders were women in the household who pay attention to the needs of their family from enrolling in school to maintaining medical checkups. They are the original influencers of the family and when supported can be the drivers that make sure family members obtain citizenship, register to vote, and turn out to vote on Election Day.

Finally, **these groups demonstrated competency in reaching their community but also their power in the numbers they turned out.** The groups collectively registered more than 78,000 voters; contacted more than 215,000 voters by phone and door canvassing; sent more than 204,000 texts and 440,000 mailers; mobilized more than 10,000 people to electoral forums; and gathered more than 18,000 pledge to votes. Compared to 2014, AAPI groups significantly amplified their activities four-, five-, and, in some cases, ninefold.

### **Groundswell Fund**

In 2018, Groundswell Fund dedicated \$5.6 million in resources (including grant dollars, skill building, database access and support, and staff and coaching consultations) to build the organizing and civic engagement infrastructure needed to power the reproductive justice movement.<sup>25</sup> Groundswell Fund launched the Integrated Voter Engagement (IVE) program pilot in 2012 in response to a request from grantees. The approach goes beyond just mobilizing voters to the polls during an election year, and centers on intersectional organizing that is year-round and transformational by utilizing traditional civic engagement tools in culturally competent ways. By the end of the pilot in 2012, the first IVE cohort had made a total of 1,000 voter contacts; the 2018 cohort of twenty organizations contacted more than 150,000 voters, up 92% from the 78,792 contacts made by fifteen grantees in 2017.

### **Women of Color Talk About the Work**

The AAPI Civic Engagement Fund and the Groundswell Fund spoke to women of color organizers and leaders on their reflections of 2018 and how it will inform their work in 2020. Before sharing specific learnings, all began by talking about the essential and often unrecognized leadership of women that is both powerful and foundational to a community.

#### **Janeen Comenote**

#### **Executive Director, National Urban Indian Family Coalition (NUIFC)**

*NUIFC sustains Indigenous culture and advocates for American Indians living in urban areas through partnerships with Urban Indian organizations, research, and services.*

**Making the Invisible Visible** “The greatest issue our people face is invisibility. We are categorized as “other” which erases our inherent sovereignty as a people. Seeing ourselves reflected, active, and engaged in the body politic is immeasurably important. American Indians get less than one-tenth of one percent of philanthropic funding. All communities of color need to be civically engaged and resourced, and when any of us is left out, we are doing a disservice to all of us.

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<sup>25</sup> More information about Groundswell Fund’s Capacity Building programs can be found at [https://groundswellfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/GSF-Capacity-Building-Report-2018\\_web.pdf](https://groundswellfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/GSF-Capacity-Building-Report-2018_web.pdf).

The 2018 midterm election was historic for several reasons. The election of three urban Native women, two to Congress and one as the Lt. Governor of Minnesota was a watershed moment. The Native population is diverse, geographically dispersed, and difficult to identify. Racially and culturally specific service organizations are key civic centers for the community. For the first time we received resources to support 17 groups; the majority of which are led by women. They conducted nonpartisan activities such as phone banking, candidate forums and pow wows, and robust social media campaigns to encourage members of the Native community to vote.”

### **LaTosha Brown**

#### **Co-founder, Black Voters Matter Capacity Building Institute**

*The goal of Black Voters Matter Capacity Building Institute is to increase power in marginalized, predominantly Black communities through providing training and support to community-based organizations.*

**Investing in Black Women** “Leadership and supporting leadership is not a new concept. We know how to do that: pour in support and resources and investment. To lift and center the leadership of Black women and women of color, you make substantial investment in the leadership development, you provide resources for opportunities for women of color to have, you create fellowships to be a part of high-level leadership personal development, and you support institutions that support Black women. The bottom line is if we’re really trusting Black women, then invest in Black women.”

### **Tavae Samuelu**

#### **Executive Director, Empowering Pacific Islander Communities**

*Empowering Pacific Islander Communities advances social justice by engaging NHPI communities through culturally relevant advocacy, research, and development.*

**Building Leadership In NHPI Communities** “Culturally many of us come from matriarchies. Women have always been leaders and the trusted messengers. They are the ones mobilizing and making decisions that are holistic and culturally aligned. Our Pacific Islander Leaders of Tomorrow program has always been majority young women and this time around we have made sure that leadership development was tied to civic engagement. It’s because we don’t just want our people to vote. We ask them to think about what are the issues that you care about that will get your to vote as a way to achieve change.”

## **Andrea Mercado**

### **Executive Director, New Florida Majority Education Fund**

*The New Florida Majority-Education Fund (NewFM-EF) is an independent nonpartisan 501(c)(3) multiracial, community-centered racial justice organization dedicated to creating an inclusive, equitable, and just Florida by building up the unified power of the state's historically marginalized groups.*

**Trust in Women of Color Leadership** “I encourage philanthropy to trust Black women, to support women of color leadership, to trust in our ideas with resources that give us the flexibility to be responsive to the political moment and the quickly changing political conditions. With your support, we can make our ideas and dreams come to life, but we need you to come in early, and stick with us and know that you are going to be behind us for the long haul.”

## **Huong Nguyen**

### **Community Engagement Director, New Mexico Asian Family Center**

*New Mexico Asian Family Center is the only organization in the state providing culturally tailored programs and services to support the development of a Pan AAPI community that advocates for and supports itself.*

**Doing the Work Year-Round** “We learned that building trust is essential for community mobilization work. We hosted meet and greets with both gubernatorial candidates so the community could ask questions and get answers directly from candidates. This was the first election we got involved in at this level so we needed to do a lot of education and organizing. We created a community-only space the day before so we could listen to our community and organize with them. But we found that even the candidates were nervous because they had never interacted with Asian community before. One candidate's staff was even contacting us numerous times in advance asking us what kinds of questions and topics the candidate should expect. Since the elections, we have been continuing to engage our community. We met with the new Governor and want to establish a Task Force to ensure Asian representation across state government, center community voices, and support year-round civic engagement.”

## **Silvia Henriquez - Co-director, All\* Above All**

*All\* Above All unites organizations and individuals to build support for lifting bans that deny abortion coverage.*

**Centering Women of Color** “At All\* Above All, we utilize the issue of abortion access and coverage and we do that through reproductive justice strategies. That means that women of color leadership is at the center. Because we are women of color doing this work, we show up with our entire selves. That allows us to make connections around economic justice, immigrant justice when we are still talking about the issue of abortion.”

**Kabzuag Vaj - Co-executive Director, Freedom, Inc.**

*Freedom, Inc engages low-income communities of color in Dane County, Wisconsin to create healthy communities by campaigning against the root causes of violence, creating their own definitions of identity and resiliency, and becoming agents of change.*

**Relational Organizing** “In small towns, it matters even if you have one person of color, especially a woman who is elected. It will impact the lives of the community. We reached out to everyone but the target is women, queer folx,<sup>26</sup> and young people. In Janesville we talked to 600 Cambodians; that’s the whole community. We were able to engage a whole community by just targeting women, young people, and queer folx; in turn they brought their families and communities.”

**Susan Cheng, Youth Organizing Manager  
& Nara Kim, Campaign Manager, Korean Resource Center**

*The Korean Resource Center empowers low-income, immigrant, AAPI, and communities of color in Southern California through a holistic model of integrating services, education, culture, organizing, and coalition building to improve the lives of the individual and community*

**Developing Young Women** “Our work in Orange County was led by women of color; from being campaign managers to field leads on college campuses. They could hone in on the tactic but also saw the bigger picture. They were personally motivated to make sure communities paid attention. There is great emotional labor involved in developing people. Our success is in creating space as much as it is about building skills. In developing the leadership of young women, it’s important to not just go forward, but to stop and assess how people are feeling. The learning culture can be demeaning and we need to diversify training methods because there are different types of leaders. However a person shows their leadership, give them the autonomy to run a project their way.”

**Vetnah Monessar - Executive Director, EMGAGE Florida**

*EMGAGE Florida works to engage, educate, and empower Muslim, South Asian, and Arab American (MASA) communities through educational events, voter engagement activities, and leadership development to create a community of equitable, knowledgeable, and motivated citizens.*

**Working Locally** “2018 was the first time that our community got into local races, not just Presidential elections. We hosted a town hall at the Muhammad Ali mosque on the restoration of voting rights and over 700 people showed up. Kids, parents, all kinds of people were excited and asked a lot of questions. It was emotional for me to watch because it showed that the community really wanted to be involved and given the opportunity they would show up.”

<sup>26</sup> This term is used to be explicitly inclusive of LGBTQ, gender non-conforming, and non-binary people.

## CONCLUSION

Our current climate of polarization and incivility, coupled to policies that are endangering the lives and livelihoods of marginalized and minoritized communities in America, create extraordinary challenges and opportunities for our democratic politics. At moments like this, those most directly impacted best understand the urgency for change and action. **The 2018 midterm elections were such a moment of extraordinary levels of mobilization, with communities mobilizing on their own and together.** We at the AAPI Civic Engagement Fund and Groundswell Fund support and are witness to a growing movement of women of color-led community organizations that work in collaboration with low-income families, immigrants and refugees, Muslim Americans, youth, and LGBTQ individuals. These leaders proudly claim mottos such as “our community is our campaign,”<sup>27</sup> and mount nonpartisan grassroots voter empowerment tactics that allow them to remain their full selves.

Post-Obama, the mainstream has put great attention on the election of Trump and the rise of far-right extremist sentiments and policies. But, this period has also engendered the resurgence of an activism that is both urgent and visionary and that practices intersectionalism. Continuing on the path of seeking incremental gains, relying on political parties, bypassing cultural transformation, and overlooking the leadership of women of color are all losing strategies. It is time to support independent community-based organizations led by those who recognize the need for structural and cultural transformations. As we look to 2020, *Ahead of the Majority* tells us that, as they grow in numbers, it would be strategic to situate women of color at the nexus and as the core constituency to motivate, influence, and persuade.

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<sup>27</sup> Freedom Inc (Madison, WI) and Mekong NYC (Bronx, NY).

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The AAPI Civic Engagement Fund was established in 2014 with the mission to foster a culture of civic participation within AAPI communities by supporting the growth of AAPI groups as organizational movement and power-building leaders that achieve specific policy, systems, and transformational change.

**[www.aapifund.org](http://www.aapifund.org)**

Groundswell Fund strengthens US movements for reproductive and social justice by resourcing intersectional grassroots organizing and centering the leadership of Black women, indigenous women, and other women of color, including transgender women of color. **[www.groundswellfund.org](http://www.groundswellfund.org)**



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