

# SHIFT THE SOUTH:

WHY CHANGE  
CAN'T WAIT FOR  
WOMEN AND  
GIRLS OF COLOR



# PRESIDENT'S *Message*

The Women's Foundation of the South debuted in August of 2021 with a vision, a true passion for change, and an immutable commitment to addressing the urgent issues affecting women and girls of color in the South. Shift the South highlights the need to drive more just policies, deepen executive, legislative, and judicial representation.

Since then, we have worked to establish meaningful relationships on the ground with women of color who lead nonprofits serving women and girls of color and doing critical work across our pillars of health, economic security, and power building. Focused on healing justice, we have grown our work intentionally, one state at a time. This report provides context to the conditions in which these incredible leaders work and their communities endure within the first seven states of our ground game.

The South holds a unique position in the rich and complex tapestry of America's history. In this region of deep roots and complex legacies, women of color have forged their strength in the face of formidable challenges. From the cotton fields of Georgia and the bayous of Louisiana to the Black Belt states of Alabama and Tennessee, and the border cities and rural towns of Texas and Mississippi, these women - Black, Indigenous, Immigrant, and women of color have endured, thrived, and led their families, their sisters, and their communities.

Dr. DuBois's declaration, "as the South goes, so goes the nation," is more than a statement. It is the call to action of our time. In leading WFS, I am guided by two principles: "Freedom is never really won. You earn it and win it in every generation "(Coretta Scott King)" and the Seventh

Generation Principle, an ancient Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) philosophy that teaches us that the decisions we make today should create a sustainable world for seven generations into the future. These two principles must guide our actions as we aim to create and fight for a more just and equitable society.

We are at a critical juncture in the history of our nation. Yes, our political climate is divisive, and our very democracy is at stake. Yet, we continue to navigate racial reckoning and elusive social justice on multiple fronts. In so much, we are cognizant of how the profound and pervasive impact of social determinants – the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age – dictate the health and well-being of our society. In Shift The South, we examine undeniable evidence that detrimental social determinants are especially egregious for women of color in the South. These determinants include socioeconomic status, education, physical environment, employment, social support networks, protection under the law, and access to quality healthcare – inclusive of women's wellness and reproductive health. Each of these factors profoundly influences the opportunities available to women and girls of color, determining their overall quality of life and that of generations to come. The intricate intersectionality of race and these issues cannot be ignored.

As our work grows in the region, we are deeply troubled about devastating regressive legislation that threatens the health, wealth, and power of all communities, especially women and girls of color and gender expansive people in the South. To be clear, these rollbacks are not isolated events. Often, they are legislating intolerance and



create conditions that deepen poverty and jeopardize health and well-being. The urgency of this moment cannot be overstated.

We are steadfast in our mission to support women and girls of color in the South, including gender-expansive people, because women of color are a powerful force for good and for change. Shift The South highlights the need to drive more just policies, deepen legislative and judicial representation, and simultaneously showcase the need for your support in rewriting the narrative of women and girls of color in the South. Leveraging investment to lift up women and girls of color in the South means empowering them to live lives of promise and prosperity,

recognizing that they are also the architects of solutions.

We are calling on everyone to get involved. Your voice matters. Your vote matters. Your leadership matters. Your support matters. The future generations of women and girls of color matter. Together, we will Shift the South.

We are most grateful to our data and research partners, Women's Funding Network, in partnership with the Institute for Women's and Policy Research, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the Tulane University John Lewis School of Public Administration, and strut AGENCY.



# GOALS

Simply put, we want our work to **HEAL**:

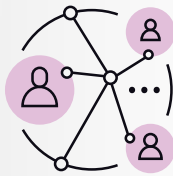


## Hasten

Change for Women, Girls, and Gender Expansive People of Color.

1

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## Entrust

Southern Women, Girls, and Gender Expansive People of Color with robust investment.

2

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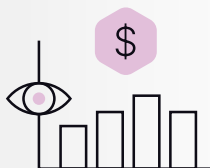


## Amplify

stories, policy solutions, and innovations, correcting the narrative about southern Women, Girls, and Gender Expansive People of Color.

3

# A



## Leverage

Investments and the support of national, regional, public, and individual partners to advance our mission on behalf of Women, Girls, and Gender Expansive People of Color.

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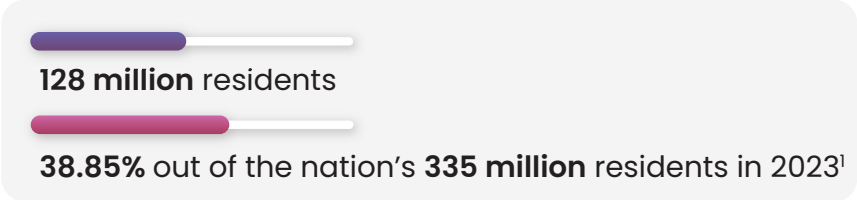




WOMEN OF COLOR:

# A Growing Force in the South

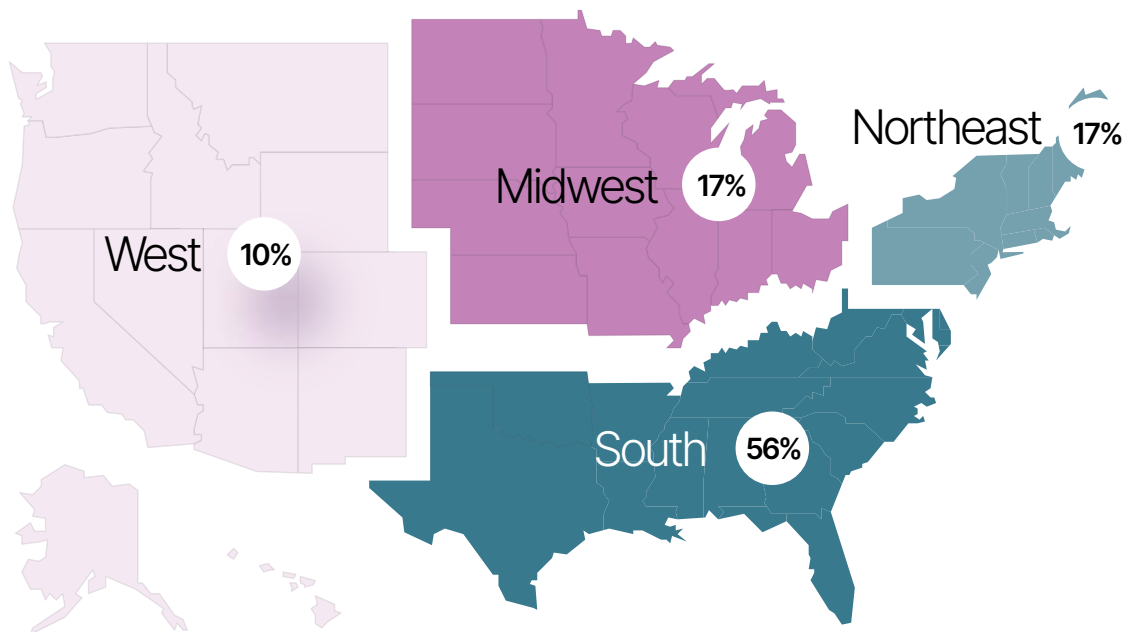
The U.S. South is the most populous region in the country with an estimated



It is also the fastest growing region, with an estimated annual population growth rate of 1%, compared to other regions which are experiencing stagnant or slightly declining population growth.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, nine of the nation's 15 fastest growing cities were in the South.<sup>3</sup>

The US South is also becoming more diverse given the huge and increasing number of people of color residing in the region. The US is experiencing a great migration of Black people to the South, with 56 % of Black people now residing in the South per the Pew Research report.<sup>4</sup> Since the mid-1990s, African Americans have been moving back into Southern cities such as Atlanta and Dallas.<sup>5</sup>

Percentage (%) of African Americans in US Regions



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of the 2022 American Community Survey (IPUMS).



## Black net migration: Metro areas with largest gains and losses, 1965 - 1970, 1995 - 2000, and 2015 - 2020<sup>6</sup>

1965-1970		1995-2000		2015-2020*	
<b>Greatest Gains</b>					
Los Angeles	55,943	Atlanta	114,478	Atlanta	68,835
Detroit	54,766	Dallas	39,360	Dallas	32,895
Washington, D.C.	34,365	Charlotte, N.C.	23,313	Phoenix	31,355
San Francisco	24,699	Orlando, Fla.	20,222	Las Vegas	30,180
Philadelphia	24,601	Las Vegas	18,912	Houston	27,165
<b>Greatest Losses</b>					
Birmingham, Ala.	-12,177	New York	-193,063	New York	-301,430
Memphis, Tenn.	-8,498	Chicago	-59,282	Chicago	-114,890
Mobile, Ala.	-8,017	Los Angeles	-38,833	Los Angeles	-60,505
Pittsburgh	-5,003	San Francisco	-30,616	Miami	-56,190
New Orleans	-4,886	Detroit	-15,095	Washington, D.C.	-35,565

\* 2015-2020 Net Migration represents 5X the annual estimated net migration for the 2015-2020 period based on the 2016-2020 American Community Survey.

Note: Metro area names are abbreviated.

Source: William H. Frey analysis of decennial U.S. censuses, 1970 and 2000; Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2016-2020.

The population of other non-White, non-Black ethnicities is also growing as the South is a destination for many immigrants coming to the U.S.



Texas is the second highest destination for immigrants with a total of **1,027,000** immigrants arriving between 2010 and 2021.



Georgia is the ninth highest with **225,000** immigrants arriving between 2010 and 2022.<sup>8</sup>



Tennessee has the **seventh highest** growth rate in immigrant population between 2010 and 2022, with a 36% growth.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, the presence and power of women of color have increased significantly in the U.S. South.<sup>10</sup> Out of the 42.3 million women of color in the United States, 41.5% live in the South.<sup>11</sup> The Center for American Progress notes that since 2000, the citizen voting-age population (CVAP) of women of color has increased by 59%, representing a gain of more than 13.5 million potential votes.<sup>12</sup> Three Southern states are among the top five states where the CVAP of Black women has grown most significantly. Today, Black women constitute 38% of the female CVAP in Mississippi, 33% of the female CVAP in Georgia, and 27% of the female CVAP in Alabama.<sup>13</sup>

The power of the LGBTQ+ population has also risen significantly. The LGBTQ+ population has more than doubled in the last twelve years from 3.5% in 2012 to 7.6% in 2024.<sup>14</sup> People of color constitute almost half of those who self-identify as LGBTQ+.<sup>15</sup> Based on the UCLA Williams Institute LGBT at the Intersection of Race series, 47.7% of LGBTQ+ people identify as non-White.

Given that a growing population of people of color are moving or immigrating to the South, the LGBTQ+ population in the South is growing as well. The South surpassed other regions in terms of its share of LGBTQ+ people, with roughly 4.5% of its population identifying as LGBTQ+, approximately 3.87 million people.<sup>16</sup> For example, 4.5% of Georgia's population identify as LGBTQ+.<sup>17</sup>



Source: <https://thegavoice.com/news/georgia/the-south-boasts-the-highest-lgbtq-population-in-the-nation-according-to-williams-institute/>



These population trends point towards the rising power of people of color in the South. Some see this increase in power as an opportunity for more dynamism and innovation from the most populous region in the country, which in turn would benefit the whole nation. However, others see this inevitable trend as a threat to the status quo.

There is a need to mobilize communities of color in the U.S. South so that they can own their growing power in this nation, advocate for the policies that address the issues that they care about and that affect their lives, and vote in government leaders that will fight for these policies in the legislative and executive bodies.

Many of the nonprofit and movement leaders that have been mobilizing communities of color in the U.S. South to address the various issues that these communities face - whether the issue is housing justice, economic justice, environmental justice, or criminal justice - are women of color. This shows the opportunity for further support of women of color nonprofit and movement leaders as they help communities of color in the U.S. South own and leverage their rightful power.

# Painting the Realities of Women and Girls of Color in the South

## Social Determinants of Health



**Health**



**Wealth**



**Power**

Our three pillars reflect our understanding of how Social Determinants of Health in the South consistently fall below the national average for communities of color, with women and girls being impacted the most. The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (USDHHS) defines these determinants as

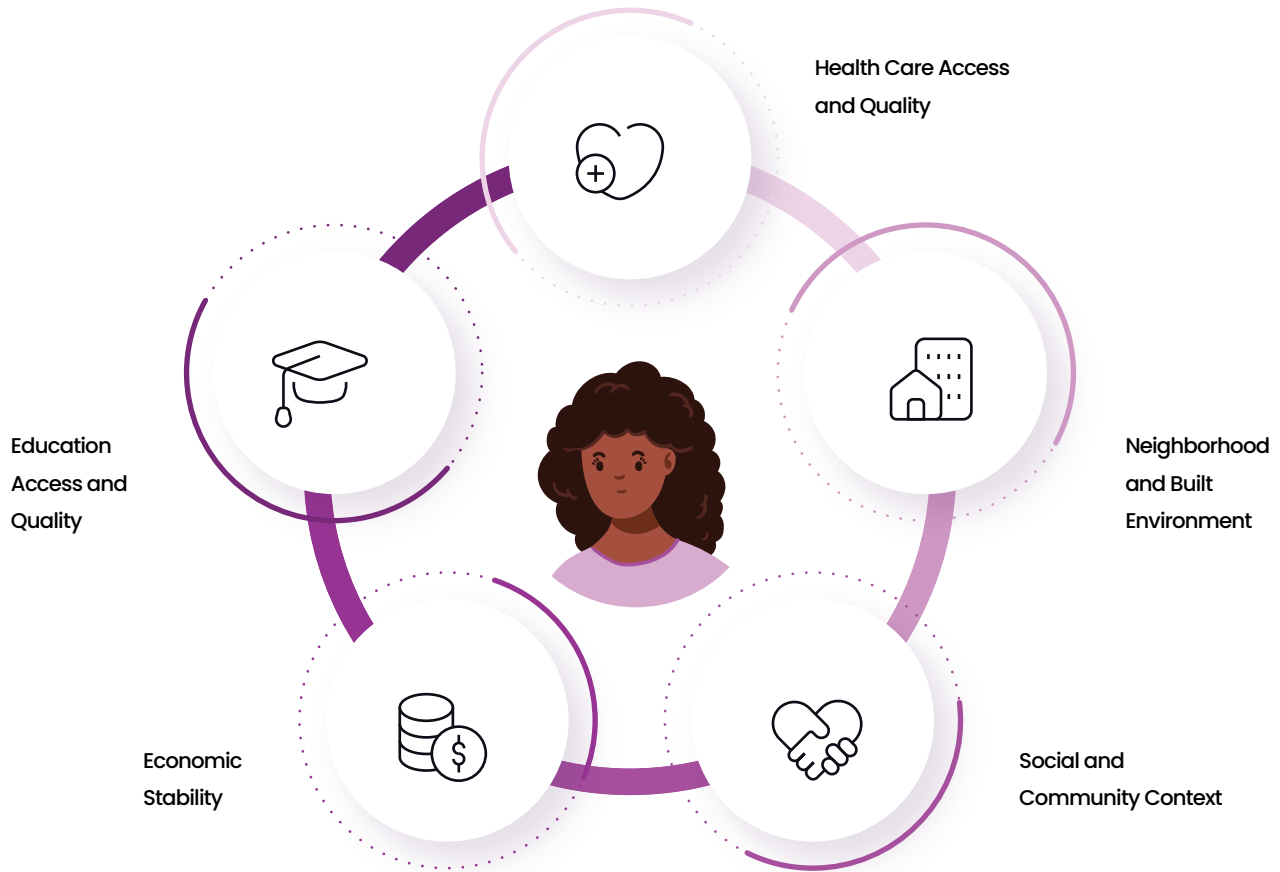


the conditions in the environments where people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks.<sup>18</sup>





The social determinants of health coalesce to impact HEALTH, WEALTH, & POWER in amplified ways for women and girls of color, particularly as they relate to women's wellness and reproductive health. These determinants also lead to major health disparities and inequities. The social determinants of health are grouped into five areas: <sup>19</sup>



From: USDH, "Healthy People 2030" Report



## Economic Stability

**Helping people earn regular incomes will enable them to fulfill their health needs and position them to build wealth.**

One in ten people lives in poverty in the United States.<sup>20</sup> People who live in poverty normally cannot afford health care, housing, and healthy food. Those with regular employment are more likely to build wealth and more likely to be healthy. However, many find obtaining and retaining a job challenging. Career counseling, employment programs, and access to quality childcare opportunities can increase the number of people who find and retain jobs. Moreover, policies that increase home ownership, decrease the cost of housing, and support households in paying for food, education and healthcare can improve health, well-being, and economic security.



## Education Access & Quality

**Increasing educational opportunities and helping children and adolescents do well in school will lead to them leading longer and healthier lives.**

Access to quality early care and education is vital for children to have a good start in life. Children and adolescents of color, especially those from low-income families, often face systemic and environmental challenges that make it difficult to excel in school. Moreover, the stress of living in poverty can affect the development of a child's brain. Achievement in reading and math are key indicators of student success and increase the likelihood of high school graduation and college entry. Overall, children and adolescents from low-income families reach these benchmarks at lower rates than their peers. This correlation implies that they are more likely to experience health challenges such as diabetes and heart disease, and less likely to gain safe and meaningful employment. Investments in early care and education initiatives that aid children and adolescents perform well in school and assist their families pay for college can have long-term health benefits.



## Healthcare Access & Quality

**It is critical to increase access to comprehensive, high-quality healthcare services. Approximately one in ten people in the U.S. do not have health insurance and are blocked from accessing the healthcare services that they need.**<sup>21</sup>

Interventions to increase the number of people who have health insurance are critical for making sure more people get necessary healthcare services, like prevention and treatment for chronic illnesses.<sup>22</sup> There are times when people do not get the healthcare services that they may need to lead healthier lives because they do not have a primary care provider or because they live in rural communities too far away from facilities. Strategies to improve access to health care professionals and better in-person and remote communication can help more people get the care they need.<sup>23</sup> A critical strategy to improve access to health care is increasing access to Medicaid for people who fall within the health insurance coverage gap.



## Neighborhood & Built Environment

**Building neighborhoods and environments that promote safety and health have a positive impact on people's health, well-being, and longevity.**

Many people in this country live in neighborhoods with unsafe water or air, high rates of violence, and other safety and health risks. Unfortunately, these neighborhoods are disproportionately home to low-income and BIPOC communities. This reality correlates with other factors to exacerbate deeper inequalities like harmful work environments with loud noises, toxins, or secondhand smoke. Additionally, the increasingly limited availability of safe, affordable housing in many communities is often an insurmountable challenge to low-income people, especially women who are single heads of households. Policy reform and interventions at the local, state, and federal levels can help fill in the gaps and change outcomes. For example, increasing green spaces and opportunities for biking and walking in neighborhoods can increase safety and help improve health and quality of life.



## Social & Community Context

**Improving people's interactions and relationships with family, friends, co-workers, and community members can have a positive effect on their health and well-being.** <sup>24</sup>

Many face problems and dangers beyond their control such as racial discrimination and unsafe neighborhoods. <sup>25</sup> Experiencing these problems can have a negative impact on their health and safety throughout their lives. Strategies to help people get the community and social support they need are important for increasing health and well-being.<sup>26</sup>



## Significance of Intersectionality

As this report paints the realities that women and girls of color in the South face, it is strikingly clear how the social determinants of health lead to inequitable outcomes for women and girls of color, especially in the area of reproductive health. We believe that shifting the South requires a deep understanding of how applying intersectionality to our work fully empowers the communities we serve and builds sustained impact. Intersectionality is integral to the lived experience of women and girls of color. It is an invitation to look past internalized racism, misogyny/misogynoir, gender discrimination and anti-LGBTQ rhetoric and work towards a truly equitable and just future.

The reality of intersectionality is this: the more marginalized the individual or group, the worse the outcomes. Given this, the need for change on various levels - policy, financial, and programmatic - has never been more urgent.

As we press on in the face of increasing political opposition to equity, diversity, and inclusion, we lift up the harsh experiences of women and girls of color and LGBTQ+ people in the South, who are disproportionately impacted and put at risk by polarizing legislation and cultural attitudes.

## Why We Need Intersectionality to Shift the South



Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It's not simply that there's a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LGBTQ problem there. Many times, that framework erases what happens to people who are subject to all of these things.

Kimberle Crenshaw



There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives.

Audre Lourde



# WFS Positions Intersectionality

The reality of intersectionality is this: the more marginalized the individual or group, the worse the outcomes. Given this, the need for change on various levels - policy, financial, and programmatic - has never been more urgent.

We see the three pillars of our work- HEALTH, WEALTH, and POWER as immutably intertwined. We view these areas as not only key to changing outcomes for women and girls of color in the South, but as interconnected issues that cannot and must not be separated. One of the most important aspects of our work, and how we practice intersectionality is through the selection of our grantees partners and our strategic partnerships. We understand that the work of our grantee partners is often intersectional in nature and multi-faceted. For example, one of our grantees whose mission is focused on reproductive health also operates a food bank because the community it serves faces food insecurity, an issue linked to economic disparities. Those same economic disparities that create hunger also lead to poor health and lack of access to medical care. For nonprofits serving women, girls, and families of color, being mission-focused also equates to being mission-responsive to create change.

Positioning intersectionality involves:

- Analyzing power systems.
- Addressing intersecting oppressions.
- Centering and engaging the most marginalized in our society.
- Joining together across issues and identities.

We also expressly acknowledge the cultural erasure often experienced by women and girls of color across the LGBTQ spectrum. The cultural structures and mores that would position the issues of straight cis-gendered women as most visible, and thereby most important, are addressed through our deliberate inclusion of marginalized LGBTQ communities within the populations we serve.

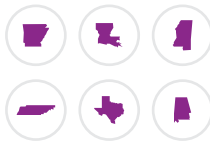
Since 2021, we've brought our innovative programs to Louisiana, Mississippi, Georgia and Texas. Over the next two years, we hope to expand our footprint to bring these programs to Arkansas, Tennessee, and Alabama. In this year's report, we'll be exploring the issues impacting the HEALTH, WEALTH, and POWER of women and girls of color in these states. As the first seven states in our imprint, we are intentionally focused on their challenges, the stories of their communities, and how our work can sustainably change outcomes.



## Health

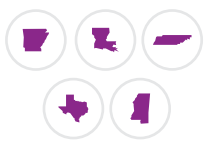
### Reproductive Rights and Healthcare

The overturning of Roe vs. Wade by the U.S. Supreme Court has led to an attack on reproductive rights and healthcare in many conservative States, mainly in the South.



In six out of the seven focus states – Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, Texas, and Alabama, abortion is illegal.<sup>22</sup> Five of these states had trigger bans in place that took into effect once Roe vs. Wade was overturned.

Trigger bans are abortion bans which were passed since Roe vs. Wade was decided that are intended to ban abortion entirely if the Supreme Court limited or overturned Roe or if a federal Constitutional amendment prohibited abortion.<sup>23</sup> This has negatively affected the fertility treatment access, gender-affirming care, and the overall healthcare provider ecosystem in these states.<sup>26</sup>



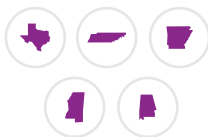
In most of the focus states, limited sex education exists at schools has led to higher incidences of sexually transmitted infections and unintended pregnancy. In Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Alabama, sex education is not mandated.<sup>24</sup> In all seven states, the need for consent to have sex is not discussed.<sup>25</sup> Five out of the seven states do not include the topic of contraception in sex education.<sup>26</sup>

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/ 7



The lack of access to contraception leads to higher rates of unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections in the South, which in turn can contribute to the higher poverty rates in these Southern states. Additionally, the lack of access to pre-natal care and long distances to birthing hospitals in the South have resulted in higher incidences of maternal deaths and infant deaths. Four out of the seven states have a higher percentage of counties that are maternity care deserts as compared to the national average of 32.6% of counties that are a maternity care desert.<sup>27</sup> Maternity care deserts are areas without access to birthing facilities or maternity care providers.<sup>28</sup>

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All of these challenging realities in the South is compounded by the fact that five out of the seven focus states have not passed expanded Medicaid which exacerbates the aforementioned healthcare-related realities that women and girls of color have to deal with among those who fall within the coverage gap – households that make too much to qualify for Medicaid but do not earn enough to afford health insurance.<sup>29</sup>

Multiple abortion bans and restrictions have been implemented across the South. Here's a snapshot of the landscape in our current 7 state footprint:

- › Six states – all except for Georgia – have total bans and telemedicine bans in place.
- › Six out of seven have method bans.
- › All seven states in our imprint have an abortion ban after 20 or 22 weeks since the Last Menstrual Period (LMP).
- › Research shows that abortion bans throughout the country will contribute to the rise of maternal deaths by 24%.<sup>30</sup> For Black women, deaths would rise by 39%.<sup>31</sup> Georgia will see one of the highest rises in deaths, with an estimated 29% increase.<sup>32</sup>



# Types of Abortion Bans by State<sup>33</sup>

	Alabama	Arkansas	Georgia	Louisiana	Mississippi	Tennessee	Texas
Abortion Bans							
Pre-Roe Ban	X	X	0		X		/
Telemedicine Ban	/	/		/	/	/	/
Trigger Ban					/	/	/
Gestational Ban							
6 week LMP			/	X	0	/	/
12 week LMP		0					
15 week LMP			X	/			
18 week LMP		0					
20-22 week LMP	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
Viability	/	/		/	/		/
Total Ban	/	/		/	/	/	/
Total Ban		0					
COVID Abortion Ban	X	X		X		X	X
Method Ban	0	/	/	/	/	/	/
Method Ban		0					
Reason Ban		/		/	/	/	
Texas SB8 copycat ban							/
Abortion Protections	No Protection	No Protection	No Protection	No Protection	No Protection	No Protection	No Protection

**Legend:**

/ - Law is in effect

X - Law is not in effect

0 - Law is enjoined

Shaded Box - Not Applicable to the State





# Abortion Ban Glossary <sup>34</sup>

- Pre-Roe Ban – Once Roe made abortion bans unenforceable in 1973, most states repealed their existing bans. However, some states and territories never revoked their pre-Roe abortion bans. These states could try to revive these bans now that the Supreme Court has overturned Roe.
- Trigger Ban - These are bans that were passed since Roe was decided. They are intended to ban abortion entirely if the Supreme Court overturned or limited Roe or if a federal Constitutional amendment banned abortion.
- Pre-viability Gestational Bans – These are laws that ban abortion before viability. These laws were unconstitutional under Roe. Gestational age is counted in weeks either from fertilization or from the last menstrual cycle (LMP).
- Method Ban – These are laws that disallow a particular method of abortion care, most commonly dilation and evacuation (D&E) procedures and dilation and extraction (D&X) procedures.
- Reason Ban – These are laws that ban abortion if potentially sought or sought for a particular reason. These bans normally name race, sex, and genetic anomaly as prohibited reasons. But, there is no evidence that pregnant people are seeking abortion care because of the race or sex of their fetus.
- SB8 Copycat – These are laws fashioned after Texas SB8, the private rights of action law that took effect in Sept. 2021. Private rights of action laws authorize anyone in the public to sue abortion providers and people who aid others to access care.

## Sex Education

Banning and restricting reproductive rights also correlates with higher incidences of sexually transmitted infections and unintended pregnancies due, in part, to incomprehensive sex education. In all seven of our focus states, the need for consent is not present in any education materials.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, five out of the seven states do not include the topic of contraception in sex education.<sup>36</sup>

## Snapshot of Sex Education By State, 2023<sup>37</sup>

	Alabama	Arkansas	Georgia	Louisiana	Mississippi	Tennessee	Texas
Mandated sex education	X	X	/	X	/	/	X
Needs to be medically accurate	X		X		X	/	
Needs to be culturally appropriate	X		X	X	X	/	X
Includes sexual orientation	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Includes info about healthy relationships	X	/	X	/	X	X	X
Discusses consent	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Includes info about contraception	/	X	X	X	X	X	
Teaches refusal skills & personal boundaries	/	/	/	X		/	
Includes dating and sexual violence prevention	/	/	/	/	/	/	/

### Contraceptive Deserts

A contraceptive desert is an area where residents lack reasonable access in their county to a health center that offers the full range of contraceptive methods. There is a high percentage of women living in contraceptive deserts in our region, contributing to higher rates of sexually transmitted infections and unintended pregnancies.

## Percentage of Women in Contraceptive Deserts by State<sup>38</sup>

	% of women in contraceptive deserts
Mississippi	35%
Arkansas	32.9%
Louisiana	32%
Alabama	31.6%
Georgia	31.4%
Tennessee	31.4%
Texas	30.3%

## Sexually Transmitted Infections and Unintended Pregnancies

All seven WFS focus states had higher rates of chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis for women higher than the national average, though Texas had rates closer to the national average.

## Chlamydia Infections Among Women by State (2022)<sup>39</sup>

2022 U.S. Rate for Chlamydia among women	621.2 per 100K
(#1) Louisiana	1030.7 per 100K
(#2) Mississippi	1031.5 per 100K
(#5) Georgia	840.6 per 100K
(#6) Alabama	799.6 per 100K
(#8) Arkansas	815.4 per 100K
(#12) Tennessee	683.9 per 100K
(# 16) Texas	662.5 per 100K

## Gonorrhea Infections Among Women by State (2022)<sup>40</sup>

2022 U.S. Rate for Gonorrhea among women	152.1 per 100K
(#1) Mississippi	352.6 per 100K
(#3) Louisiana	284 per 100K
(#5) Georgia	230.7 per 100K
(#7) Alabama	238.3 per 100K
(#11) Tennessee	192.8 per 100K
(#14) Arkansas	215.6 per 100K
(#17) Texas	159.7 per 100K

## Syphilis Infections Among Women by State (2022)<sup>41</sup>

2022 U.S. Rate for Syphilis among women	8.7 per 100K
(#3) Arkansas	27.9 per 100K
(#5) Mississippi	22.2 per 100K
(#9) Louisiana	16.9 per 100K
(#13) Alabama	13.3 per 100K
(#20) Georgia	9.0 per 100K
(#24) Tennessee	8.9 per 100K
(#26) Texas	8.8 per 100K

## HIV Infections

HIV is a critical health reality in the South. In 2022, nearly half of all new HIV infections were in the South at 49%, and five of our seven focus states are in the top ten for HIV rates nationwide. These numbers indicate that there is a public health crisis in the region, and due to intersecting issues, women of color are disproportionately impacted.



- Women reporting heterosexual contact accounted for 15% (4,900) of estimated new HIV infections, more than double the number of men reporting heterosexual contact, who accounted for 7% (2,100) of estimated new HIV infections. <sup>43</sup>
- Black/African American people made up 37 % of estimated new infections, even though they make up 12% of the population. <sup>44</sup>
- Hispanic/Latinos make up 33% of estimated new infections. <sup>45</sup>
- In 2022, 2% of new HIV diagnoses (928) were among the transgender community. Transgender women accounted for most of these new HIV diagnoses at 2% (869). <sup>46</sup>
- In 2022, gay, bisexual, and other men who reported male-to-male sexual contact still account for most estimated HIV infections at 67% (21,400) of the 31,800 estimated new HIV infections. <sup>47</sup> People reporting heterosexual contact accounted for 22% (7,000) of the 31,800 estimated new HIV infections. <sup>48</sup>
- The HIV rates for women of color in the seven states were higher than the national rate.

## HIV Rates Among Women of Color by State (2020)<sup>49</sup>

2020 U.S. Rate for HIV among women of color	8.7 per 100K
(#2) Georgia	22.1 per 100K
(#3) Mississippi	18.7 per 100K
(#5) Louisiana	16.2 per 100K
(#8) Texas	14.8 per 100K
(#9) Alabama	14.1 per 100K
(#15) Tennessee	11.1 per 100K
(#22) Arkansas	9.6 per 100K

# Unintended Pregnancies

Overall, the South has higher rates of unintended pregnancies as compared to the national median. Louisiana and Tennessee have the highest rates with a proportion of 43% of pregnancies, wanted later or not wanted at all. <sup>50</sup>

Among pregnancies to women ages 15-44 by state, the proportion wanted later or not wanted, 2017 <sup>51</sup>

U.S. Median	36
Louisiana	43
Tennessee*	43
Georgia	41
Alabama	40
Mississippi*	40
Texas*	39
Arkansas*	39

-95% uncertainty interval



# Maternity Care Deserts and Prenatal Care Access

Maternity care deserts are areas without access to birthing facilities or maternity care providers. Four out of our seven focus states have a higher percentage of counties that are maternity care deserts as compared to the national average of 32.6% of counties that are maternity care deserts.<sup>52</sup> Alabama, Tennessee, and Mississippi have an alarming percentage of women with no birthing hospitals within 30 minutes.<sup>53</sup> This lack of access to prenatal care contributes to higher maternal and infant mortality rates in these states.



## Maternity Care Desserts and Prenatal care Access by State

	% of parishes/counties which are maternity care deserts <sup>54</sup>	% of women with no birthing hospitals within 30 minutes <sup>55</sup>	Increase in likelihood that BIPOC women in high poverty areas don't receive adequate prenatal care (%) <sup>56</sup>
Louisiana	26.6	12.1	16
Alabama	34.3	27.9	24
Arkansas	45.3	15.9	28
Georgia	24.6	15.8	39
Tennessee	32.6	27	14
Texas	46.5	4.6	44
Mississippi	51	24.3	23



# Maternity and Infant Mortality

Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee have some of the highest maternal mortality rates in the country. The same can be said for infant mortality rates in Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Georgia, which report some of the highest infant mortality rates in the country.

## Maternal and Infant Mortality Rates by State

	Maternal mortality rate per 100K live births (2021) <sup>57</sup>	Infant mortality rate per 1,000 live births (provisional 2022) <sup>58</sup>
Alabama	56.8	6.69
Arkansas	52.8	7.67
Georgia	49.2	7.07
Louisiana	60.9	7.37
Mississippi	82.5	9.11
Tennessee	62.4	6.61
Texas	43.9	5.72
United States	32.9	5.60

# Contraception Access Policies

Reproductive health is layered, but we know that access to contraceptives gives patients freedom in family planning as well as other related health conditions. Lack of insurance and awareness block access, particularly for women of color in low-income communities across the South.<sup>59</sup> According to the Center for American Progress, twenty-two states have extended the limits of contraceptive quantities dispensed at one time to cover up to one year of certain forms of contraceptives such as the pill, ring, and patch. Four out of seven of our focus states have introduced or passed legislation to extend the supply of contraceptives. Additionally, both Arkansas and Tennessee have passed legislation allowing pharmacists to prescribe contraceptives without a prescription from a medical provider. Both policies represent progress in expanding contraceptive access at the state level.

## Extended Supply of Contraceptives<sup>60</sup>

Louisiana	Allows for an initial contraceptive prescription of 6 months Accessible to Medicaid patients only HB 557, passed June 2022, active Jan. 2023
Mississippi	Policy is pending Passed state House of Representatives on March 14, 2024
Tennessee	Passed in January 2024 Becomes effective January 2025 No initial period Medicaid patients only
Texas	Passed in 2023 Started in January 2024 There is a 3-month initial period Medicaid with a fee

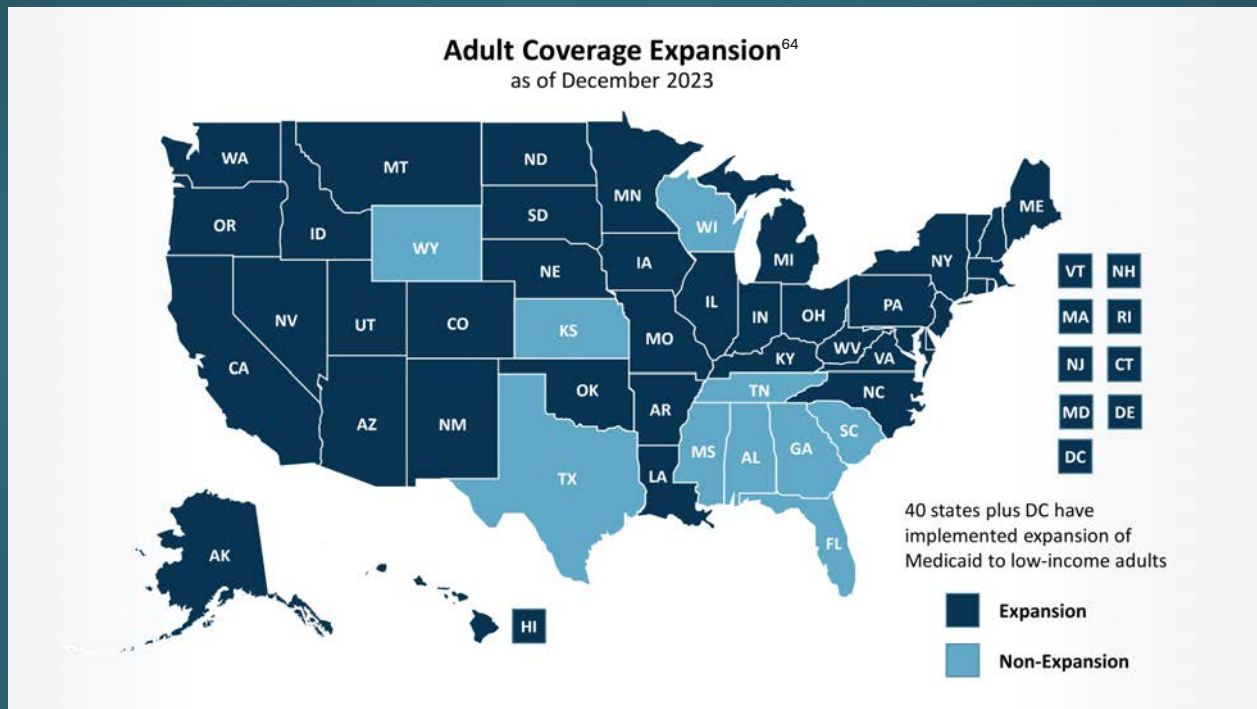
## Pharmacist Prescribing Contraception<sup>61</sup>

Arkansas	Act 408 - Allows pharmacists to prescribe oral contraceptives to patients 18 years or older Limited grant funding to pay pharmacists Can't prescribe more than 6 months to those who have not been to primary care doctor for 6 months or more
Tennessee	Passed in 2016 in Tennessee Allows pharmacists to prescribe self-administered hormonal birth control Includes pill, patch, ring, injection

# New Developments in Reproductive Care

The implementation of policies such as the Extended Supply of Contraceptives policies and Pharmacist Prescribing of Contraception have the potential to significantly improve reproductive health outcomes for women of color in Southern states. Research has shown that 12-month extended contraceptive access reduced undesired pregnancy rates by about 30% compared with 1- or 3-month supplies.<sup>62</sup>

Barriers to reproductive healthcare in the South are compounded by the fact that five out of the seven focus states – Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Texas – have not passed Medicaid Expansion made possible through the Affordable Care Act.<sup>63</sup> This decision effectively blocks millions of women from access to affordable care, an experience felt deepest by those who fall within what experts call the coverage gap – households that make too much to qualify for Medicaid but do not earn enough to afford health insurance.





The deliberate refusal to expand Medicaid in the South transcends mere policy failure; it is a glaring endorsement of systemic oppression, devastating Black women. With shuttered rural hospitals and profound gaps in uninsured despair, states like Alabama, Mississippi, South Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee have become 'silent killer zones' that deepen inequalities. Such moral outrage demands our immediate and undivided attention. We must dismantle these barriers with relentless resolve, ensuring every woman in the South receives the health coverage she deserves.

– Adimika Meadows Arthur  
Executive Director and CEO, HealthTech for Medicaid (HT4M)



# WEALTH

Wealth, or economic status, is a key indicator for overall quality of life. The roots of that inequality are intersectional and determined by many factors, including race and ethnicity, disability, access to education and age. The impact of the national gender pay gap reveals that the odds are uniquely stacked against women. In 2022, women earned an average of 82 percent of what men earned based on an analysis of median hourly earnings of both full and part-time workers – just 84 cents to every dollar earned by men.<sup>65</sup> Southern women earn even less, around 78 cents on average.<sup>66</sup>



## Wealth

Poverty rates in five of the seven focus states are up to 7% higher than the national poverty rate. Manifestations of these high poverty rates can be seen in the areas of food and housing insecurity.<sup>67</sup> Five of the seven focus states - Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, Texas, and Alabama - fall in the top ten states with the highest percentage of households with low or very low food security.<sup>68</sup> Of the 17 states in the U.S. that have housing insecurity rates of 15% and above, three are among the seven focus states - Louisiana (15%), Mississippi (15%) and Georgia (16%)



Moreover, for women and girls of color in these states, poverty is starker because of the gender pay disparity that exists nationally. In 2022, women earned an average of 82 % of what men earned based on an analysis of median hourly earnings of both full, and part-time workers.<sup>69</sup>

## Poverty Rates and Food Insecurity Rates by State

	Poverty Rate, 2022 <sup>70</sup>	Food Insecurity, % of US Households with Low or Very Low Security (2019-2021) <sup>71</sup>
Alabama	16.2	13.1
Arkansas	16.8	15
Georgia	12.7	9.9
Louisiana	18.6	14.5
Mississippi	19.1	15.3
Tennessee	13.3	11.2
Texas	14	13.7
United States	11.5	



Here's a quick look at how economic insecurity is experienced in cities and areas within some of the seven focus states through the lens of food and housing insecurity.

FOOD INSECURITY

**Jackson, MS**

- The state of Mississippi leads the nation in high rates of food insecurity even though it is a leader in agriculture.<sup>72</sup>
- With an average of one supermarket for every 190.5 square miles in the Lower Mississippi Delta, more than 70% of low-income residents in the Delta have to travel at least 30 miles to purchase groceries—limiting their immediate options to food bought in gas stations or convenience stores.<sup>73</sup>
- Jackson, MS has over 70 fast food restaurants, 150 gas stations, but only has around 20 grocery stores and many of them lack fresh produce. Less than 5% of them contain locally grown fresh produce.<sup>74</sup>

**New Orleans, LA**

- In Louisiana, approximately 640,540 people, or 1 in 7 people, are food insecure and 236,010 of these people are children.<sup>75</sup>
- More than 17 % of New Orleans households were food insecure in 2020, one of the worst food insecurity figures in Louisiana.<sup>76</sup>


**Dallas, TX**

- Over 27% of children under 18 in Dallas live in households that have experienced food insecurity in the past year.<sup>77</sup>

**Atlanta, GA**

- One out of seven children in the metro Atlanta area were identified as food insecure prior to the pandemic.<sup>78</sup> However due to COVID 19 and its after effects, food insecurity for children has now gone up by around 20%.<sup>79</sup>



 Housing insecurity was most common in the South, particularly in Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas. These same states had very high levels of food insecurity. Among the 15 largest metropolitan areas, Miami and Houston had the highest levels of both housing and food insecurity.

– Center for Economic & Policy Research



### Jackson, MS

- 31% of renter households in Mississippi are extremely low income.<sup>80</sup>
- There is a shortage of 54,241 affordable and available rental homes for extremely low-income renters in Mississippi.<sup>81</sup>
- A total of 54% of Mississippi's population lives in rural areas with large concentrations of the population residing within the Mississippi Delta region. Despite low housing costs in rural areas, residents often struggle to afford their homes due to extremely low incomes. Additionally, many homes lack essential sanitation infrastructure, resulting in unreliable sewage and water systems.<sup>82</sup>
- After Hurricane Katrina, Congress allocated \$5.5 billion in Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to Mississippi. Mississippi officials promptly requested a waiver from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), which was swiftly approved. This waiver allowed the state to bypass the requirement to prioritize low-income housing in redevelopment efforts.<sup>83</sup>

### New Orleans, LA

- New Orleans only has 47 affordable housing units for every 100 renters who are extremely and very low-income residents.<sup>84</sup>
- In 2021, the median monthly rent in New Orleans increased to \$1,082, while the median annual income, when adjusted for inflation, dropped by nearly \$4,000 compared to 2019.<sup>85</sup>

### Dallas, TX

- According to United Way of Dallas, “the 2022 Point-in-Time Homeless (PIT) Count found that on any given night there are 4,410 individuals experiencing homelessness in Dallas and Collin counties (almost 4,000 in Dallas County and a little more than 400 in Collin County).”<sup>86</sup>



- The number of chronically homeless individuals has more than doubled from just over 500 in 2019 and 2020 to over 1,000 in 2022.<sup>87</sup> People experiencing homelessness endure prolonged periods without stable housing, which can lead to or worsen mental and physical health issues. This trend aligns with national data, showing a more than 40% increase in chronic homelessness since 2016, reversing a previous decline.<sup>88</sup>
- Additionally, 22% of those who found permanent housing returned to homelessness within two years, up from 17% in 2019.<sup>89</sup> This increase highlights the growing challenge of rising housing costs outpacing incomes, making it difficult for vulnerable families to sustain their housing.

### **Atlanta, GA**

- In 2022, the total number of people experiencing homelessness was 2,017<sup>90</sup>
- Since 2020, homelessness has decreased by 38%, primarily due to temporary measures implemented to curb the spread of COVID-19.<sup>91</sup>
- In Atlanta, the median rent for a one-bedroom apartment unit is approximately \$1,500.<sup>92</sup>
- In Metro Atlanta, more than 50% of workers have an income of less than \$40,000 per year.<sup>93</sup>

## Judicial Rulings That Impact Wealth-Building

One blow to efforts to overcome the wealth disparities in our nation is the repeal of Affirmative Action. Rolling back the access to higher education for young people of color significantly decreases their chances of obtaining higher wages.

In June 2023, the Supreme Court issued its ruling in *Students for Fair Admissions Inc. v. University of North Carolina* and *Students for Fair Admissions Inc. v. President & Fellows of Harvard College* — ending affirmative action in college admissions and reversing 45 years of legal precedent. We have yet to see the ripple effect of this ruling by the numbers. However, it is certain that this will further entrench discriminatory practices and has the potential of reversing some of the considerable gains women of color, and black women in particular, have made in education.

According to the American Association of University Women:



21% of Black women and 20% of Latinas complete an associate or bachelor's degree by the age of 29.<sup>95</sup>

Among Black students in higher education, women are more likely than men to earn degrees: Black women get 64.1% of bachelor's degrees, 71.5% of master's degrees, and 65.9% of doctoral, medical, and dental degrees.<sup>96</sup>

The repeal of Affirmative Action has also led to a backlash in the business sector, with many companies choosing to limit or eliminate Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion programs and salaried positions. Most notably, the ruling opened the door to new legal challenges against funds and programs aimed at empowering communities of color like the lawsuit against the Fearless Fund.

The Fearless Fund, a Black-owned venture capital firm founded by Black women to address the profound gap in venture capital funding for women of color, and its foundation were sued for their small business grant program that awards \$20,000 grants to Black women entrepreneurs.<sup>97</sup> In June 2024, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit stopped the Fearless Fund, ruling that this program likely violates Title 42 of the U.S. Code, which prohibits racial discrimination and ensures equal rights in awarding and enforcing contracts.<sup>98</sup>

Women of color have been the fastest-growing group of business owners in the U.S.<sup>99</sup> However, they have experienced challenges in accessing capital and needed resources to grow their businesses.<sup>100</sup> According to Crunchbase data, Black female startup founders only received 0.34 % of total venture capital in the country in 2021. In 2022, women of color business founders only received 0.39 % of venture capital investments."<sup>101</sup>



Ignoring race will not equalize a society that is racially unequal...What was true in the 1860s, and again in 1954, is true today: Equality requires acknowledgment of inequality.

– Justice Sonia Sotomayor, Dissent, *Students for Fair Admissions Inc. v. University of North Carolina and Students for Fair Admissions Inc. v. President & Fellows of Harvard College*<sup>23</sup>



# Representation Is The Next Revolution

We know that Representation is the Next Revolution. As more women of color settle in the South, representation must – at minimum – keep up; and we must have legislators who can appropriately advocate to change the conditions for women of color in the South. We must confront a truth that is as old as the nation itself: the justice system is not blind. It sees people of color—and it taxes, exploits, and impoverishes them in the name of law and order through the oppressive system of judicial fees and fines that disproportionately impacts communities of color.

We must recognize what these fees and fines truly represent. They are not merely administrative costs or minor inconveniences; they are the price of freedom, the cost of dignity, and a modern-day form of economic subjugation. A single, simple infraction, like a traffic ticket, can spiral into a mountain of debt, triggering a cascade of consequences that can last a lifetime. These fees and fines are a hidden tax on poverty. They are a tax on being Black, on being Brown, on being anything other than white and wealthy in America. They are a tax on living in neighborhoods where policing is more aggressive, on having a name that sounds foreign, on being anything that deviates from the norm set by those in power.

Moreover, what happens when these fees cannot be paid? The economic security of families is shaken, and the system tightens its grip. Licenses are suspended, jail time is possible, employers must be notified, invoking reputational stigma, jobs are lost, families are torn apart, and the cycle of poverty becomes entrenched. It is nothing short of a form of economic enslavement.



# Power

The repeal of Affirmative Action has given way to more policies of intolerance towards people of color and LGBTQIA being legislated, especially in the South.



In three of the seven focus states – Arkansas, Mississippi and Georgia, laws banning or limiting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives have been introduced<sup>102</sup>.

In Alabama, a bill has passed at least one legislative chamber<sup>103</sup>.

In Texas and Tennessee, laws banning or limiting DEI have been enacted<sup>104</sup>.

Greater women of color (WOC) representation in the local, state and federal legislatures and the judiciary are critical to realize just policies and application of the law for individuals in a manner that advances health, wealth, and power of Southern women, girls, and gender expansive people.

Their representation is about more than just numbers. In addition to having legislative and judicial bodies that accurately reflect the demographics of the communities they serve, the lived experiences of WOC officials and judges give power to their representation through rulings and policies tilted toward justice and equity. Bias on the bench has proven historically to be a barrier for communities of color. With more WOC serving at the state and federal levels, gains can be made that ameliorate or destroy social inequities that are reinforced by unjust laws, policing, and policy.



New York City mayor Fiorello La Guardia appointed the first Black woman judge in the U.S., Jane Bolin, in 1939. It would take another 27 years for a federal court to appoint its first Black woman, Constance Baker Motley, in 1966. Fifty-six years later, in 2022, President Joe Biden nominated and confirmed Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson as the first Black woman to serve on the Supreme Court



The number of women in state legislature has quintupled since 1971, with 32.7% of the 7,386 seats going to women.<sup>105</sup> However, 70% of these seats are occupied by white women.<sup>106</sup> In the bottom ten states for women's participation in state legislatures, five of the seven focus states are included – Tennessee, Louisiana, Arkansas, Alabama, and Mississippi.<sup>107</sup>



The percentage of women of color Supreme Court judges in the seven focus states is significantly less than the percentage of women of color in that state.<sup>108</sup> In fact, in Tennessee, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Alabama, where women of color between ages 18 and 64 constitute 29-30% of the state population, there are no Supreme Court justices who are women of color.<sup>109</sup>

# Representation by the Numbers

## State

In state legislatures nationwide, 25 states currently have women of color elected officials; yet, only three focus states—Georgia (2), Texas (5), and Alabama (1)— have legislative representation from women of color.<sup>110</sup> No Southern state ranks among the top ten for highest legislative representation by women.<sup>111</sup> However, five of the seven focus states—Mississippi, Tennessee, Alabama, Louisiana, and Arkansas—are among the ten states with the lowest representation by women.<sup>112</sup>

The lack of representation of women of color is starkly seen in the executive branch of state governments. At the gubernatorial level, only twelve of the fifty U.S. states currently have women governors.<sup>113</sup> None of them are women of color. Only one governor identifies as a gender expansive person. Only two out of the seven focus states - Alabama and Arkansas - have women governors.<sup>114</sup> Throughout U.S. history, only three women of color have ever been elected to serve as state governors. There has never been a Black woman elected to the post.

## Local

The deficit of women executive leaders continues on the mayoral level. Even though the proportion of women mayors or officials that perform mayoral functions in cities, towns and civil districts with more than 30,000 people more than doubled from 1988 at 11.6% to 2024 at 26.8%.<sup>116</sup> Women, at 50.4% of the population in 2024, are still underrepresented. All seven states' proportion of women mayors were below the national proportion of women mayors, including Alabama and Mississippi who have no women mayors for cities and towns with more than 30,000 residents.<sup>117</sup> In 2018, Mayor Latoya Cantrell became the first woman to be elected mayor of New Orleans and became one of four Black mayors in the city's history. In 2017, Mayor Sharon Broome became the first African American woman mayor of Baton Rouge.

## Federal

Vice President Kamala Harris is the only woman, and more specifically the only Black and South Asian woman, who has held federal elective executive office.

- To date, 47 Article III federal courts have had no women of color on the bench and historically all-male courts still exist throughout the country.<sup>119</sup>



## Percentage of Mayors who are Women by State (2023)<sup>118</sup>

	No. of women mayor or official performing mayoral functions in a city, town, and civil district with a population above 30,000 (as of the 2023 Census estimate)	Percentage of women who are mayors or officials with mayoral
Arkansas	3	20%
Alabama	0	0
Georgia	8	18.2%
Louisiana	3	23.1%
Mississippi	0	0
Tennessee	4	14.8%
Texas	14	11.6%

## Percentages of Women, People of Color, Women of Color and People Identifying as LGBTQ in the U.S. Fifth Circuit<sup>127</sup>

U.S. Fifth Circuit	People of color %	Women %	Women of Color %	Identify as LGBTQ %
Sitting district and circuit court judges	25	24	8	0
Active district and circuit court judges	33	27	12	0



**Percentages of Women, People of Color, Women of Color and People Identifying as LGBTQ in the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals<sup>128</sup>**

U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals	People of color %	Women %	Women of Color %	Identify as LGBTQ %
Sitting district and circuit court judges	35	23	0	0
Active district and circuit court judges	19	25	0	0

**Percentage Point Gap in the racial, ethnic, and gender diversity of the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals as compared to the general population<sup>129</sup>**

U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals	People of color	Women
Sitting district and circuit court judges	40	27.5
Active district and circuit court judges	36	25.5



## Percentage of People of Color & Number of Women of Color Serving in U.S. District Courts by State<sup>130</sup>

	% of People of Color* <sup>^</sup> (2019 Estimates)	No. of Women of Color Serving in U.S. District Courts <sup>^</sup> (as of Nov. 2019)
Alabama	34.6%	0
Arkansas	27.9%	0
Georgia	48.0%	2
Mississippi	43.4%	1
Louisiana	41.2%	1
Tennessee	26.4%	0
Texas	58.9%	9**

\* People of Color are people of non-white races and ethnicities including people with multiple races

\*\*Assumes that the Southern District of Texas has 19 judgeships and have 5 women of color who are active judges

<sup>^</sup> Population estimates are based on the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey's 1-year estimates

A Center for American Progress report studied the lack of female judges, judges of color, and judges self-identifying as LGBTQ across the entire federal judiciary. That report shows that judges with different life experiences and different backgrounds offer invaluable and unique perspectives to bear on the cases they face.<sup>120</sup> Diversity in the federal judiciary offers real benefits for litigants including greater fairness in judicial decisions. Note that the data from this report was regarding the judiciary as of November 18, 2019.

The Fifth Circuit's Jurisdiction comprises Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas, three among seven of our focus states. The 5th Circuit is unique in terms of its general population in that people of color make up a majority of the jurisdiction's general population.<sup>121</sup> People of color make up 55 % of the population.<sup>122</sup> Women make up 50.5 % of the general population.<sup>123</sup>

With people of color and women forming the majority of the population in the U.S. Fifth Circuit, the representation of these groups are not commensurate to the judges both sitting and active in the U.S. Fifth Circuit. For example, **there is a 30 point difference between the percentage of people of color in the Fifth Circuit's general population and the sitting district and circuit court of judges.**<sup>124</sup> There is a 26.5 point difference between the women in the general population and the women who are sitting district and circuit court judges.<sup>125</sup>

**The trend worsens for the Fifth Circuit's Court of Appeals, where there is a 40 point difference between the percentage of people of color in the general population and people of color who are sitting district and circuit court judges** and a 27.5 point difference between the percentage of women in the general population and women who are sitting district and circuit court judges.<sup>126</sup>

Finally, in the seven focus states where a sizable proportion of people of color reside, there is an underrepresentation of women of color in the U.S. District Courts except for the Western, Northern, and Southern Districts of Texas.



# Voting

Population shifts and an increasing number of people of color in the South make our region increasingly important during national elections. The 2020 presidential election revealed that Georgia and Texas have become the new swing states in the region. As the power of people of color rises, there have historically been efforts to limit their voting power through gerrymandering, even as the Census shows that non-White populations continue to grow. But, the good news is that organizations and lawmakers are fighting these policies.

- For example, in Alabama, which is 66 % White and 34 % Black, past efforts tried to pack Black voters into one district even when they could have had two congressional districts.<sup>131</sup> A federal court found that this legislation violated Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act and ordered Alabama to draw a second congressional district for Black voters.<sup>132</sup>
- Louisiana had a similar victory, though potentially temporary when the Supreme Court upheld a new congressional redistricting plan that ordered the drawing of a second majority-Black district for the 2024 election cycle.<sup>133</sup>

The South has a deep tradition of collaboration and grassroots organizing to challenge systemic inequalities. From the beginning, women of color have always been at the center of these movements and continue to lead these efforts today. WFS understands the importance of funding power building efforts led by women of color to ensure marginalized communities and people of color can exercise their right to vote. To date, WFS has invested in nearly 20 nonprofits led by women of color who are leading power building movements in Louisiana, Georgia, Texas, and Mississippi.

These organizations are on the ground mobilizing the power of the communities they serve through organizing and policy advocacy with far less resources than their white counterparts yet are making significant strides during unprecedented times. A few of these power building organizations are featured below:



# SO MUCH IS AT STAKE



## The Call To Action

So much is at stake if we stay silent and do not act. The rights of women and girls of color are at stake. Their livelihoods are at stake. Their families are at stake. Their well-being and futures are at stake. What are we leaving to the next generation?

Their futures depend on what we do today. How we create working infrastructures in our communities through voting and grassroots organizing is our gift to them and a legacy pioneered by women leaders of color across the spectrum. We must continue to dare to lead and cultivate new futures through representation and innovative solutions.

Through the Shift the South report, Women's Foundation of the South seeks to amplify policies that increase the HEALTH, WEALTH, and POWER of women and girls of color and to deepen investment into movements in the South that seek to improve conditions for women and girls of color.

The Women's Foundation of the South supports the following policies and efforts, which we believe will uplift the lives of women and girls of color in the South:

0 1

Critical investments in social determinants of health that influence maternal health outcomes, like early care and education, housing, transportation, nutrition, and safety.

0 2

Expansion of Medicaid to cover families that fall within the coverage gap.

0 3

Increased access to birth workers by increasing Medicaid benefits and/or insurance coverage to allow for doula and/or midwifery care reimbursement.

0 4

Extend WIC benefits and Medicaid coverage through the first year of postpartum and breastfeeding periods.

0 5

Increased leadership of women of color at the local, state, and federal levels both in legislative, judicial, and executive bodies.

0 6

Access to gender-affirming care.

0 7

Equal pay for equal work for all genders across race.

0 8

Adoption of family leave with pay.

0 9

Required comprehensive sex education in public schools.

1 0

Increased access to contraception and pre-natal care.

1 1

Body autonomy and safe access to abortion, especially in cases when it is medically necessary or when a person or child has experienced rape or incest.



We encourage philanthropic actors, policymakers, and non-profit and movement leaders to read the **Shift the South: Why Change Can't Wait for Women & Girls of Color**, to determine how they can lift the health and well-being, economic security, and agency of women and girls of color in the South. Nonprofits that serve women and girls of color produce so much positive impact for our nation's communities, but only get 0.5% of philanthropic funding.<sup>134</sup> This needs to change.

Shift the South: Why Change Can't Wait for Women & Girls of Color has proudly been released on

WOMEN'S EQUALITY DAY  
AUGUST 26, 2024



To receive newsletter.



# BE INSPIRED



What the people want is simple: they want an America as good as its promise—that as a nation we live up to our historical promise of equality of opportunity.

— Rep. Barbara Jordan, first Southern Black woman elected to the United States House of Representatives



We're the last to really come to the table to be able to have a voice. And now that we are starting to build into this practice of voting and participating in the national electoral process, we're also recognizing that we can not only now vote, but we can also run and become a voice

— Rep. Paulette Jordan, Indigenous politician and activist



There's frequently a very low baseline of awareness that our conversations can be totally dominated by basic education. If we can get individuals and organizations to a place of cultural knowledge where they understand the need for action and understanding, we can advance the conversation further.

— Sarah Eagle Heart, Indigenous Activist, storyteller, philanthropist



Over the years, I've been asked why I didn't hold back as the 'model minority' stereotype dictates, to avoid being the nail that sticks out. Here's why: I've always believed that if you can possibly make a positive difference in this world, why wouldn't any caring person do so? We have the power of our voices. If not now, when?



— Helen Zia, Asian American Journalist and Activist



I believe that love is the most powerful force for change in the world. I often compare great campaigns to great love affairs because they're an incredible container for transformation. You can change policy, but you also change relationships and people in the process.



— Ai-jen Poo, co-founder and executive director of the National Domestic Workers Alliance



They'll tell you you're too loud, that you need to wait your turn and ask the right people for permission. Do it anyway.



— Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Latina & youngest woman ever elected to congress



If the system is broken, my inclination is to fix it rather than to fight it.



—Justice Sonia Sotomayor, First Hispanic Supreme Court Justice



We do need women in civic life. We do need women to run for office, to be in political office. We need a feminist to be at the table when decisions are being made so that the right decisions will be made.



— Dolores Huerta, Latina labor activist and co-founder of the National Farmworkers Association



We cannot afford to be tired or cynical. The cost is too great to let someone else write our story or erase our progress.



— Stacey Abrams, first Black female major-party gubernatorial nominee



At present, our country needs women's idealism and determination, perhaps more in politics than anywhere else. Women in this country must become revolutionaries. We must refuse to accept the old, the traditional roles and stereotypes...We must replace the old, negative thoughts about our femininity with positive thoughts and positive action affirming it, and more.....



The one thing you've got going: Your one vote.



— Shirley Chisholm, first Black woman elected to Congress & first Black to run for a major party's nomination for President



# NOTES

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- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid.
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- 5 William H. Frey analysis of decennial U.S. census 1970 and 2000. U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2016-2020.
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