

A close-up portrait of a Black woman with voluminous, curly, reddish-brown hair. She is looking slightly upwards and to the right with a thoughtful expression. She is wearing a red top and a colorful beaded earring. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light color.

Black Women in the U.S. 2020: Priorities, Policy and Power



*The Power of Black Women's Leadership to
Move a Justice Agenda Forward
in the 2020 Decade*



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Executive Summary

Black Women in the United States, 2020, is the seventh annual report by the Black Women's Roundtable which specifically examines the overall conditions and policy concerns of Black women throughout the nation. This year's report comes at a particularly precarious moment in our history. We find ourselves immersed in a time of extreme political divisiveness, growing economic peril, and potentially facing a world-wide health crisis. Simultaneously, we are in the midst of an especially consequential Presidential election. One with both far-reaching national political implications, but also, as it is occurring in congruence with the 2020 Decennial Census, state-level down-ballot impacts will color electoral district composition for the next decade, thus significantly impacting Black political representation and power for the next ten years. With all of these dire consequences hanging in the balance, this year's report is especially vital as it uncovers and centers the concerns, condition, and political power of Black women at this watershed moment. The following is a selection of this year's key findings:

The Black Woman's Vote Leads the Way in Presidential Politics

- Black women voters have consistently outpaced overall turnout in recent presidential elections by an average of 6.7 percent.
- In 2008, Black women outperformed other demographic groups, voting at a record 68.1 percent turnout for the first Black president of the United States. In 2012, Black women did it again, voting in historic numbers at 70.1 percent, which was the highest voter turnout of any other group, voting out of concern to protect the passage of the Affordable Healthcare Act of 2010 and continue the advancement of criminal justice reform. In 2016, Black women maintained their voting strength at 63.7 percent.
- In 2020, the Black vote in the South, anchored by the Black Women's vote, changed the very trajectory of the Democratic Primary Race. And not only did Black voters turnout in historically large numbers, even exceeding 2008 Obama turn-out levels in places like South Carolina & Virginia, but when looking at issues

that were most important to Primary voters in the South, one thing was clear, the number one issue for Black voters are issues related to race.

- According to 2020 Primary Exit Polling, throughout the South, the issue of Race Relations was the issue that mattered most to Democratic Primary Voters that voted for Joe Biden in every Southern state, being was most important to voters in Alabama (69%) and Virginia (60%). And for each state, this issue was of a greater concern to Biden voters than Health Care, Climate Change or Income Inequality.
- Conversely, for Sanders voters, the issue of race relations was the least important issue impacting their vote. And was especially unimportant to voters in Alabama (8%) and South Carolina (12%). As a result, it seems clear, those Southern voters who are most concerned about improving issues related to race in America overwhelming coalesced around the Joe Biden candidacy and was seemingly a key factor related to his victories in that region.

Black Women Sound the Alarm on Growing Racism and Hate Crimes

- Black women cited racism and the rise in hate crimes as the top concern that they believe threatens themselves and their families in the most recent Black Women's Roundtable/Essence Magazine Power of the SisterVote Poll. This concern is far from baseless.
- According to FBI crime statistics for four years in a row, the number of hate crimes in America have continuously increased, including a near record breaking jump in the year immediately following the previous Presidential election, with Black people being the most likely racial group to have been on the receiving end of such crimes.
- In 2017, the nation experienced the largest increase in hate crimes that we've seen in 25 years, and in 2018, roughly half of the nation's 30 largest cities experienced increases in hate crime activity, that for them, reached a decade high.
- Researchers out of Clemson and Texas A&M University have found that generally speaking, when racially intolerant Americans believe that democracy will benefit people of color, they actually abandon their commitment to democracy altogether in favor of authoritarian rule. As such, counteracting growing hate in America must become a national imperative. Not only for turning back the increasing prevalence of violent hate crime activity throughout the US, but also to preserve the Union as we know it all together.

Black Women's Wage Gap Increasing Under Trump

- The Black women's wage gap has grown under the Trump Administration. In comparing the gap in weekly wages between Black women and White women in the last two years of the Obama Administration and the first two years of the Trump Administration, an interesting picture unfolds. While wage differentials between the two groups of women were overall lower and decreasing by

the end of the Obama Administration, those gaps have grown substantially under the Trump Administration, jumping from a differential of \$113 per week in median earnings under the last year of the Obama Administration, to a differential of \$171 per week by the second year of the Trump Administration.

- When examining wage gaps in the same time period in comparison to the earnings of white men, Black women experience a weekly earnings wage gap of \$295 by the last year of the Obama Administration, that gap grew to a \$341 weekly wage gap by the second year of the Trump Administration.

Economic Justice Remains Elusive for Black Women Impacted by Race and Gender Discrimination

- Black women experience an intersectional wage gap, one that reflects the unique, compounding effects of how race and gender are perceived together. So while Black women working full-time, year-round earn just 62 cents for every dollar earned by white men working full-time, year-round, wage gaps are also found when Black women's earnings are compared to both white women and Black men, as Black women's earnings are just 79 percent of white women's earnings and 86 percent of Black male earnings respectively.
- Black women cannot educate their way into equal pay. In fact, although Black women's wages increase with higher levels of education, their wage gap also gets wider as educational attainment goes up.
- To secure equal pay for Black women, there must be a focus on combatting discrimination and minimizing bias which includes addressing systemic biases within institutional structures that perpetuate stereotypes about Black women and limit advancement opportunities, end the devaluation of Black women's work and stop the occupational segregation that steers Black women into lower paying jobs. Also critical is the need to focus on ways to increase wages and improve job quality overall.
- Black women especially likely to enter their retirement years economically insecure in spite of educational attainment. Single Black women 60 years of age or older with a college degree have merely \$11,000 in wealth as compared to \$384,400 in wealth for single white women 60 years of age or older with a college degree. However, those Black women who are ultimately best situated for retirement are those who are both married and who hold a Bachelor's Degree.
- For Black women on the economic fringes, especially those who enter their retirement years having to navigate life without a spouse, access to Pension benefits and Social Security are especially critical for staying economically above water and being equipped to live their golden years with a modicum of dignity and independence.

Black Women Progressive Prosecutors Under Attack for Doing Their Jobs

- Black women progressive prosecutors have seemingly been uniquely targeted for attack. They've received death threats and hate messages with racially charged language, have been attacked by police unions, Governors, and the current U.S. President, and some have had their powers limited or removed all together.
- When Florida State's Attorney Aramis Ayala announced that she would not be seeking the death penalty, the Governor moved death penalty cases from her district.
- After dropping charges against actor, Jussie Smollett, Kim Foxx, the Chicago district attorney received death threats. Ayala received a noose after her decision not to seek the death penalty. And during the Freddie Gray trial, Marilyn Mosby was the subject of death threats, hate mail, and protests at her house, and information about her children was circulated to the public.
- St. Louis' Kim Gardner excluding 22 St. Louis Police officers from presenting cases to her office after racist Facebook posts were discovered, and pushed for a new trial for a man who appears to have been wrongfully convicted. Gardner has been the subject of grand jury probe; racial attacks; hate mail; attacked by Attorney General Barr & the St. Louis police union. She has subsequently filed a federal civil rights lawsuit against the city, police union, and others who have aggressively fought her efforts to institute meaningful criminal justice reforms.

Racial Bias Calls for Swift Action to Address Maternal Mortality Disparities Impacting Black Women Gaining Traction in Several States

- Black women in the US are dying from complications related to pregnancy and childbirth at a rate nearly [three to four times higher](#)¹ than that of their white counterparts. The reasons for this are myriad and include lack of health insurance coverage, lack of access to care, and pervasive racism.
- According to [analysis from](#) NARAL Pro-Choice America, legislation meant to address the challenge of maternal mortality is growing across the nation, with over 20 measures seeking to address maternal mortality passed in 2019 alone, making it “the most prolific trend in pro-choice legislation” of the year.
- In October 2019, California Governor Gavin Newsom [signed](#) the [Dignity in Pregnancy and Childbirth Act \(SB 464\)](#) into law. This law requires perinatal care providers in California to undergo “an evidence-based implicit bias program” with refresher courses at least every two years. California's new law also requires the State Department of Public Health “to track and publish data on pregnancy-related death and ever maternal morbidity” as a strategy to address maternal mortality disparities in the state.

- Medical experts like the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists [have noted](#) that “The racial and ethnic disparities in women’s health (including higher rates of preterm birth, maternal mortality, and breast, cervical, and endometrial cancer deaths among Black women) cannot be reversed without addressing racial bias, both implicit and explicit,” so laws like California’s are a crucial step in the right direction.

Paid Leave Finally a Possibility for Black Women and Families

- Currently, fewer than 19% of employees have access to paid family leave through their employers. And only 40% have access to medical leave for self-care. Of the 60% eligible for the [Family and Medical Leave Act](#), many can’t afford to take it because it is unpaid. Given the high cost of [zero weeks](#) of paid leave, the public has shown overwhelming support for a sound solution: a social insurance fund that pools small contributions from employees and employers to offer portable benefits to all working people. African American and Latinx workers are among the groups least likely to have access to parental leave, compared with non-Hispanic white workers.
- Currently, there is one bill that covers all of the reasons for care and aims to include all families. That bill is the [Family and Medical Leave Insurance \(FAMILY\) Act \(R\)](#) and it builds on years of experience in the states. California, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and New York have been successfully operating these social insurance funds for years. Four more states—Washington, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Oregon—and the District of Columbia are following suit.

Black Women Suffer Unique Levels of Exposure to Violence

- African American and African Caribbean women experience intimate partner abuse at a rate of about 40%. That is significantly higher than the rates reported by white women (31%), Hispanic women (30%) or Asian Pacific Islander women (15%).
- The Centers for Disease Control reports that Black and American Indian/Alaska Native women have the highest rates of homicide, and that over half of these homicides are related to intimate partner violence. In 2017, Black females were murdered by males at a rate more than twice as high as white females: 2.55 per 100,000 versus 1.13 per 100,000.
- Trans women were nearly twice as likely to experience sexual violence as other survivors of violence, and reported experiencing harassment, discrimination and police violence as well.
- Trans women of color constituted 40% of the hate violence homicides in 2017. In 2019, of the 22 known homicides of transgender people, 91% of the victims were Black women.

Black Women & Girls Most Likely to Be Subjected to Modern-Day Slavery

- In the United States, there are more than 600,000 to 800,000 people being trafficked annually across international borders. Victims can be found in schools, places of worship, malls and neighborhoods, trapped in an endless cycle of despair. The State Department reports there are 24.9 million modern-day slaves in the world.
- Girls from the African diaspora are more likely to be trafficked as they represent 40 percent of sex trafficking victims within the United States, while Caucasians made up 25.6 percent of sex trafficking victims, followed by Hispanics at 23.9 percent, Asians at 4.3 percent and others at 5.8 percent
- The International Labour Organization estimates that the human sex trafficking industry generates nearly \$150 billion in revenues. This exploitative system sadly profits off the welfare, stolen dignities and systemic abuses of its victims.
- Major risk factors that put Black girls at greater risk of being recruited as sex workers include living in socially identified high risk neighborhoods, being poor and/or uneducated, having inadequate job skills, and lacking strong social networks.

Voter Suppression in the Digital Age Offer a New and Growing Threat

- During the 2016 election, no single group of Americans was targeted more by Kremlin-linked disinformation campaigns than African Americans. Many of the digital voter suppression campaigns targeting African Americans focus on disinformation (false information about the candidates or the time, place, and manner of voting), calls to boycott the election, and voter intimidation or threats.
- Digital voter suppression campaigns increased during the 2018 mid-term elections. During the 2018 election cycle, an estimated \$900 million was spent in digital political advertising, which is 2.5 times more than what was spent for online political advertisements in the 2014 mid-term elections. Distributed throughout Facebook and Twitter, these messages were largely targeted to African Americans with the specific aim to discourage or prevent African Americans from voting.
- There are currently five online campaigns targeting black voters. Many use issues important to the black community. Some examples are reparations, immigration, criminal justice and climate change. Many encourage black voters not to vote for Democrats. Others tell them to vote but don't vote for the Presidential option on the ballot.
- Black women are alarmed at the US Senate's absent sense of urgency related to securing our democratic election process. While the U.S. House of Representatives have passed several bills aimed at protecting our democracy and several bipartisan bills have been proposed in the Senate to defend our democracy from foreign interference, the Senate has failed to pass any of these bills into law.

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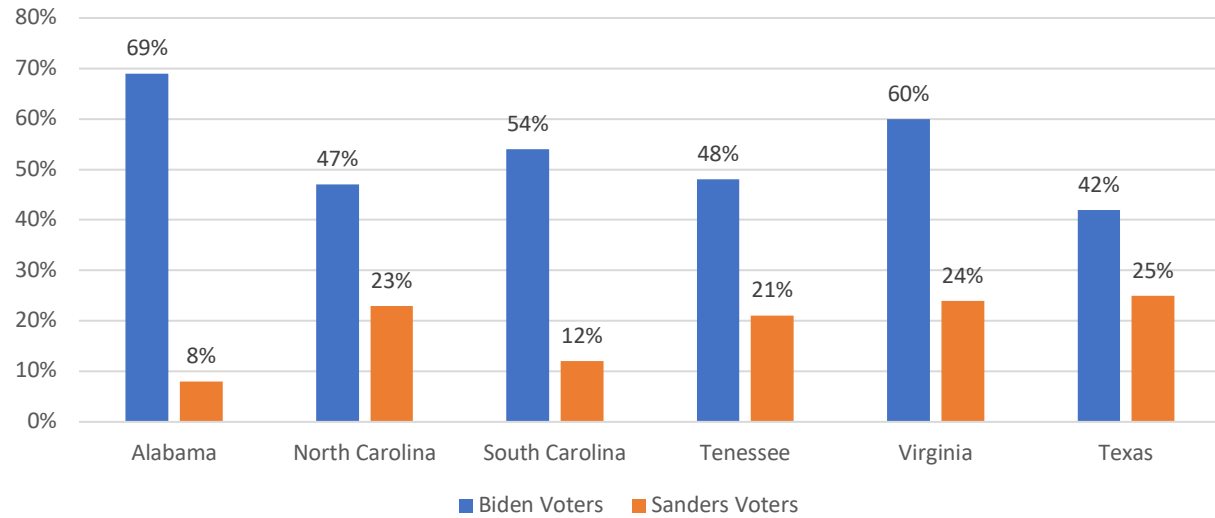
Key Charts & Tables

2020 Primary Voters in Southern States: Which Issue Mattered Most to Your Vote? by Percent Black Vote

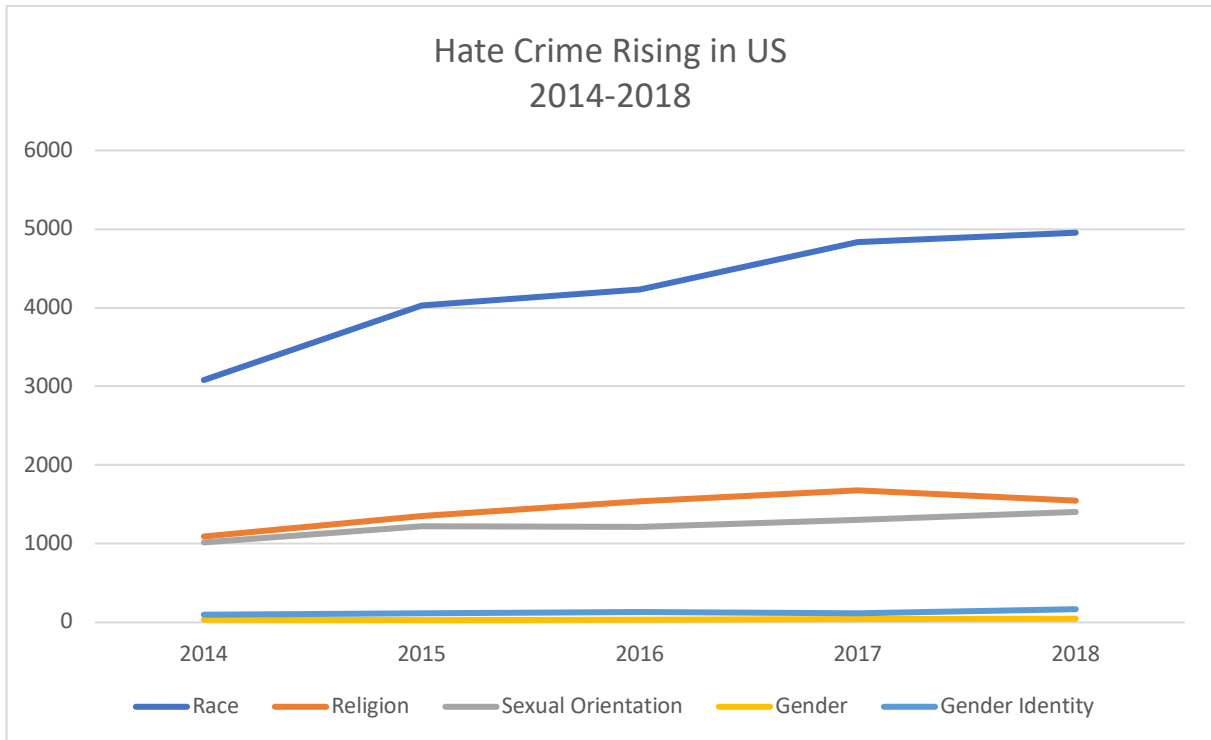
State	Biden				% BLK Vote	Sanders				% BLK Vote
	Race Relations	Health Care	Climate Change	Income inequality		Race Relations	Health Care	Climate Change	Income inequality	
AL	69%	62%	64%	53%	72%	8%	15%	26%	26%	10%
NC	47%	43%	36%	39%	62%	23%	26%	23%	25%	17%
SC	54%	50%	41%	45%	61%	12%	22%	18%	23%	17%
TN	48%	43%	34%	37%	57%	21%	27%	29%	25%	19%
VA	60%	55%	53%	44%	69%	24%	21%	22%	28%	17%
TX	42%	34%	31%	26%	58%	25%	32%	29%	32%	15%

Source: CNN 2020 Democratic Primary Exit Polls

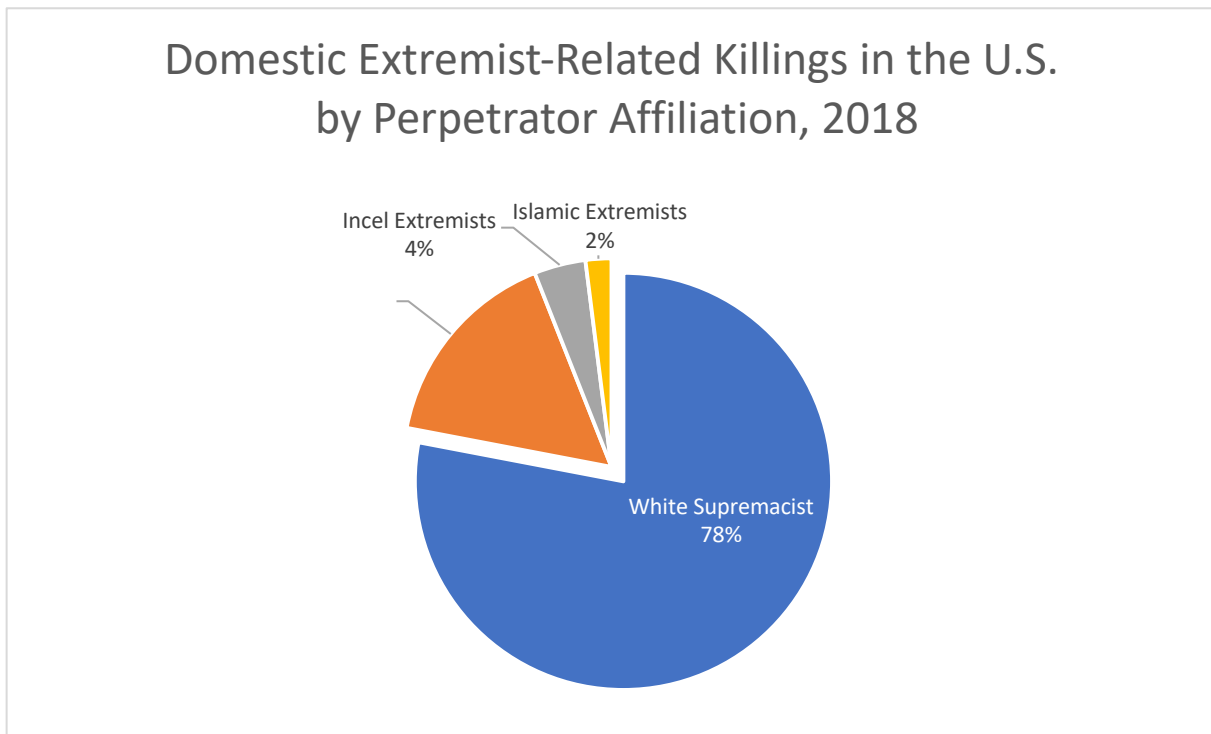
Biden & Sanders Voters Who Say Race Relations is The Issue that Mattered Most to Their Vote



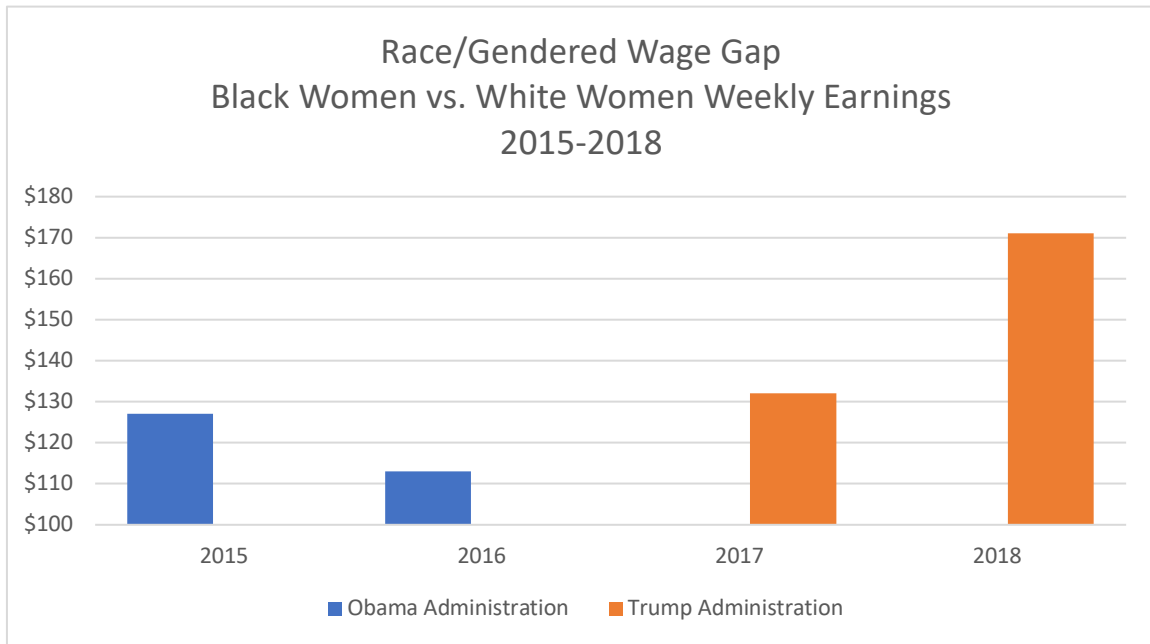
Source: CNN 2020 Democratic Primary Exit Polls



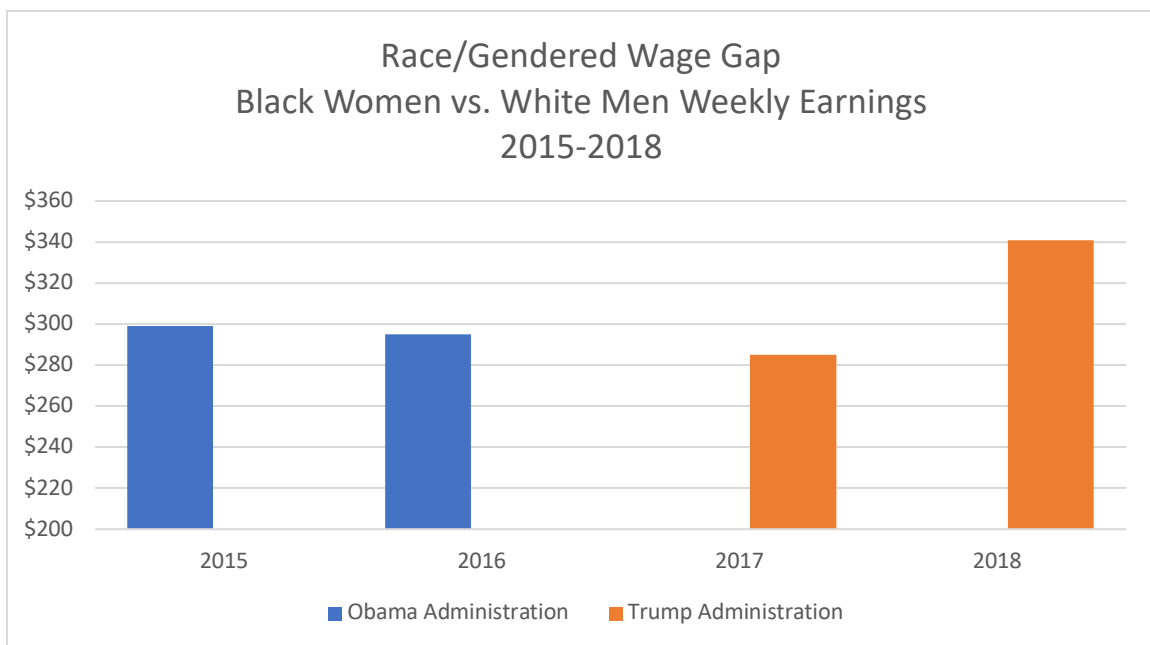
Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports, 2014-2017



Source: Anti-Defamation League



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Median Weekly Earnings, Employed Full Time, Wage and Salary Workers, 2015-2019 Data, Q2.



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Median Wealth of Women 60+ by Family Structure, Education and Race, 2013

	No Bachelor's Degree		Bachelor's Degree	
	Black	White	Black	White
Married	\$89,500	\$344,700	\$424,000	\$778,000
Single	\$12,000	\$60,000	\$11,000	\$384,000

Source: *Women, Race, & Wealth. Volume 1, January 2017, Research Brief Series*

Selected Prosecutors, Actions They Have Undertaken and Attacks Received

Prosecutor	Jurisdiction	Examples of Significant Actions	Attacks
Aramis Ayala	Orange & Osceola counties, FL	Announced that her office would not pursue the death penalty in all cases	Cases removed from her office; budget cuts, threats
Marilyn Mosby	Baltimore, MD	Brought prosecution charges against police officers in Freddie Gray case; tried to vacate old convictions of individuals with marijuana possession	Death threats, hate mail, protests, actions blocked by courts
Kim Foxx	Cook County, IL	Dropped charges against actor Jussie Smollett; declined to prosecute misdemeanor traffic offenses for failure to pay tickets	Special prosecutor appointed on Smollett case, attacked by Trump, A.G. Barr, police union
Kim Gardner	St. Louis, MO	Brought charges against the governor; excluded 22 St. Louis Police officers from presenting cases to her office after racist Facebook posts	Was subject of grand jury probe; racial attacks; hate mail; attacked by A.G. Barr & police union
Rachel Rollins	Suffolk County, MA	Dismisses or diverts certain low-level misdemeanor charges	Criticized by police union and public safety secretary

Stephanie Morales	Portsmouth, VA	Obtained conviction of a police officer in shooting of unarmed man.	Home address published; criticized for making family video, “Booty Poppin”
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ⁱ <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/health/reports/black-womens-maternal-health.html>