



**SCHOLARS**  
STRATEGY NETWORK

## Why We Need More Women of Color in Government

**Beth Reingold**, Emory University

**Kerry Haynie**, Duke University

**Kirsten Widner**, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Record numbers of women of color have run for and been elected to office in recent years. Increasing diversity in elected office is better for democracy because it enhances feelings of belonging and representation for previously excluded groups. Further, a substantial body of political science research suggests that elected women prioritize different policy areas than their male peers, and people of color prioritize different policy areas than their white peers. However, less is known about whether or how women of color differ from white women or from men of color in terms of the policies they prioritize when they hold office. To find out, we compared the bills introduced by all legislators in 15 different state legislatures in two years – 1997 and 2005 – to examine how the combination of race and gender shaped the issues legislators chose to champion. We find that women of color, particularly Black women and Latinas, are uniquely attuned to the needs of multiple and multiply marginalized groups.