



# FROM VOICES TO ACTION:

## FOLLOW BLACK WOMEN SURVEY REPORT

**COMMUNITY  
VOICES  
HEARD**

**AUGUST 2024**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## **FOLLOW BLACK WOMEN WAS DEVELOPED FROM THE VISIONARY LEADERSHIP OF TWO SELF-IDENTIFYING BLACK WOMEN IN NEW YORK STATE LEADING THE STATEWIDE ORGANIZATION, COMMUNITY VOICES HEARD (CVH).**

In New York State, Black women lead change through their civic engagement and their advocacy about political issues. On a national scale, Black women have been paving the way in civic engagement. The Biden-Harris 2020 election was a demonstration of the power of the civic engagement of Black women. The 2021 Center for American Women and Politics report on Black women illuminates that the civic engagement of Black women resulted in the success of the Biden-Harris ticket.<sup>1</sup> This was a significant gain for Black women political leaders, with Kamala Harris as the first woman – and a Black and South Asian woman – sworn in as Vice President. With these gains over the last few years, more Black women also ran for Congress, and state legislative representation for Black women increased. Many elections nationally have relied on the voter turnout of Black women.

Despite the powerhouses that Black women are, the research demonstrates that frequently, Black women are not listened to, or attention is not given to their needs. Black Women Best, developed by the Roosevelt Institute, promotes a political vision that centers on the needs of Black women.<sup>2</sup> The leadership of CVH felt compelled to center the political vision of Black women across New York State to launch a statewide campaign to engage with Black women to understand what social issues are of value to them. This data will inform a policy agenda that CVH will carry out. The research also tells us when you listen to and engage with the most disadvantaged groups to solve social challenges, the impact goes far beyond the group it intended to serve.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.higherheightsleadershipfund.org/report/reach-higher-black-women-in-american-politics-2021-2/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://rooseveltinstitute.org/publications/black-women-best-the-framework-we-need-for-an-equitable-economy/>

Black women in America have documented political power that uniquely positions them as participants and political leaders. History shows that Black women vote, are politically engaged, and bring others along. According to the Center for American Progress Women of Color report (2019), there are at least 15 million voting-age Black women voters, and that number continues to grow. With this growth, Black women are one of the most active populations of voters. As they become even more politically engaged, this presents a profound opportunity to meaningfully engage Black women to grow into political leaders who run for office. Secondly, we must establish pathways and pipelines for Black women to access strategic training that prepares them for a life in public service through organizing. Third, We must create clear pathways for Black women to be successful in a political career and harness their political power. Lastly, we must position Black women to develop networks, identify funding, and attract support to lead politically.

Community Voices Heard set out to engage with Black women as civic leaders. In the American sociopolitical environment, where Black women’s civic engagement is shaping the political landscape, the perspective and vision of Black women must be included in the political context. Seeing this need, CVH took the initiative to engage Black women in a way that allows them to shape a political agenda. CVH has conducted two statewide surveys for Black women. The survey results demonstrate that Black women in New York State are concerned with various



**CVH LAUNCHED THE FOLLOW BLACK WOMEN PROJECT IN 2019 TO SHIFT FROM THE MERE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF BLACK WOMEN AS THE WHEELS FOR POLITICAL MOVEMENTS TO EMPOWERING THEM AS THE DRIVERS FOR PUBLIC POLICY.**



issues affecting their lives, family, and community. Based on the survey, the top concerns were reading skills for school-aged children, mental health, counseling and support services, and safe and accessible transportation. In addition, housing affordability for older adults. Also, Black women are most likely to vote for candidates who care about their issues, such as housing, education, public safety, and women's rights.

CVH launched the Follow Black Women Project in 2019 as a 5-year initiative to shift from the mere acknowledgment of Black women as the wheels for political movements to empowering them as the drivers for public policy and governance. The Follow Black Women project will serve as an organizing recruitment and learning tool supporting CVH's long-term effort to build a base of Black women across the state. The project and its three-pronged approach have positive implications for movement and power-building, issue campaigns, and the political fortitude of Black women and their communities well beyond the five years of this campaign.



# ORGANIZATION OVERVIEW

## **COMMUNITY VOICES HEARD (CVH) WAS FOUNDED IN 1994 AND IS THE LARGEST BLACK-LED ORGANIZING INSTITUTION IN NEW YORK STATE.**

We are a member-led, multi-racial organization principally comprised of women of color and low-income New Yorkers. Through grassroots organizing, leadership development, policy changes, and new models of direct democracy, CVH is creating a truly equitable New York State.

CVH is an organization of low-income people, predominantly women of color, working to build power in New York City and the State to improve the lives of our families and communities. We are working to accomplish this through a multi-pronged strategy, including public education, grassroots organizing, leadership development, training low-income people about their rights, political education, civic engagement, and direct-action issue campaigns. With four chapters around the state, we work locally and statewide on issues affecting low-income families' lives and livelihoods.

CVH's current areas of work include (1) Economic Security, (2) Participatory Democracy, and (3) Housing Justice. We fill a crucial gap in that our organization connects public policy with grassroots organizing and leadership development. We have consistently



**WE ARE A MEMBER-LED, MULTI-RACIAL ORGANIZATION PRINCIPALLY COMPRISED OF WOMEN OF COLOR AND LOW-INCOME NEW YORKERS.**



been the organization that brings low-income people's voices and leadership to the forefront of strategizing constructive solutions and organizing from an economic justice perspective.

CVH has transitioned from a single-issue, NYC-based, grassroots community organizing group into a multi-issue, statewide organization of low-income families, taking on new issues and new strategies.

### **CVH works towards its goals with four key strategies:**



#### **BASE BUILDING**

By using a multi-issue, multi-generational, and multi-cultural base building approach, we actively increase the number of impacted community members joining the fight for social change for their community.

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#### **LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

Through leadership development, CVH empowers member-leaders to organize their neighbors and build collective power to achieve systemic change.

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#### **STRATEGIC CAMPAIGNS**

In true participatory-action form, CVH members and staff organizers research and share lived experiences, bringing unique and authentic perspectives to the issues and ways to tackle change.

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#### **ACTIONS**

Within each campaign, creative and non-violent demonstrations bring to light, on a public platform, the issues faced by people most affected by the decision-making of those in power.

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## THE BIRTH OF FOLLOW BLACK WOMEN

CVH launched Follow Black Women (FBW) as a 5-year initiative to shift from the mere acknowledgment of Black women as the wheels for political movements and move to empower them as the drivers for public policy and governance. The Follow Black Women project will serve as an organizing recruitment and learning tool supporting CVH's long-term effort to build a base of Black women across the state. The project and its three-pronged approach have positive implications for movement and power-building, issue campaigns, and the political fortitude of Black women and their communities, well beyond the 5 years of this campaign.



## OUR CURRENT WORK

CVH began as a single-issue, single-location organization and has since expanded to include multiple issues and chapters. We currently have chapters in New York City, Yonkers, Newburgh, Beacon, and Poughkeepsie are working on the following campaigns and projects.



## 01 — FINANCIAL SECURITY

Our work combating policies and practices that limit wages ensure New Yorkers are not forced to choose between paying rent and paying for childcare, medication, or food. We make sure women of color are paid fairly and equitably, whether they work in retail or a corporate c-suite. We ensure our families not only have enough money to cover the basics, but to live abundantly.

## 02 — PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

We work to center the lived experiences of low-income and working people in policymaking to create a fully participatory democracy. We ensure our voices are in the rooms where voting happens and laws are made. We promote citizen engagement in the democratic process year-round. We fight to regulate corporate and big money in politics so that our voices drive the policy conversation.

## 03 — HOUSING JUSTICE

CVH works relentlessly so that every New York family has a safe home that they are proud of and that doesn't break the bank. We work to elect politicians who put tenants first, and we hold real estate developers, bankers, and negligent landlords accountable. We build tenant power and fight for safe, decent, and truly affordable housing.



# PROJECT COMPONENTS

## SURVEY

A vital component of the Follow Black Women project is the Survey for the Frontlines. This survey was disseminated to 5,000 New York State residents who identify as Black women and asked about political issues they care about. These surveys were administered in person, online, at community events, through door knocking, and at sister circle events. Survey respondents were then invited to participate in virtual and in-person Sister Circles, roundtable discussions, and house meetings. The content of these meetings will be informed by their borough or city within New York and critical themes, political issues, and concerns voiced through the survey data.

## BASE BUILDING

After compiling 5,000 surveys and drawing out key findings from the data, the second phase of this project will focus on base building. The project serves a central need for the social justice movement by helping to map relationships and networks. It also serves to build the leadership of this critical demographic within the organizing ecosystem.

Network mapping is a multifaceted approach to deepen relationships with respondents, their professional and personal networks, and community businesses.

Furthermore, it provides an opportunity to recruit, train, and mentor a new generation of Black women organizers from this base and through college recruitment efforts.



**IT PROVIDES AN OPPORTUNITY TO RECRUIT, TRAIN, AND MENTOR A NEW GENERATION OF BLACK WOMEN ORGANIZERS.**

## TRAINING AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

CVH will develop and facilitate a Follow Black Women organizing fellowship through our Ella Baker School for Community Organizing to train Black women to build issue campaigns that advance racial, social, and economic justice within their communities. This 3-day intensive course will take place twice a year; a group of proven members will go deep on Power, Self-Interest, One to Ones, Base Building, Campaign Development, and developing an analysis of what brought us to this place and the power we need to build to fight it.

This fellowship builds on our quarterly 1-day intensive Ella Baker trainings and coaches participants to build powerful, strategic campaigns to fight for structural change. We also understand the power of collaboration and plan to partner with community organizations and groups within the organizing ecosystem to employ our cohort of organizers after completing the fellowship.

Ella Baker was a radical Black woman who believed in grassroots organizing, leadership development, and direct action. She was able to connect the struggles of oppressed people to build power and transform communities. Ella invested in local community members by constantly developing them in groups and having them practice what was learned. This is the foundation for developing leaders at CVH, and we are taking it to the next level with the Follow Black Women organizing fellowship.

### **OUR COMMUNITIES NEED THE NEXT GENERATION OF ELLA BAKERS. WE NEED TRUE, AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP FROM THE BASES IN WHICH WE ORGANIZE.**

We see that when those impacted are not building the power to shift narratives, policies, and politicians, our communities suffer and remain powerless. Through this fellowship, Black women can reclaim their power.



# FOLLOW BLACK WOMEN: PHASE 1

**IN PHASE ONE OF THE FOLLOW BLACK WOMEN (FBW) PROJECT, COMMUNITY VOICES HEARD ADMINISTERED A SURVEY ACROSS NEW YORK STATE WITH THREE GUIDING FRAMEWORKS:**

- 01** — Acknowledging Black women as a driver of policy and governance in civic life,
- 02** — Developing a robust infrastructure led by Black women that results in New York policy reform, and
- 03** — Cultivating a new generation of informed Black women organizers governing policy and reform across New York State.

Follow Black Women aims to position Black women as the drivers of policy and governance, create an infrastructure for deep organizing Black women for successful policy reforms, and cultivate the next generation of Black women organizers. The statewide survey of self-identified Black women in New York resulted in 2,303 respondents. Phase 1 survey results will be highlighted below under survey analysis.





## FOLLOW BLACK WOMEN ACTIVITIES

Follow Black Women has engaged hundreds of women across the state of New York in both virtual and in-person events to foster greater engagement and hear directly from women in the community to ensure that the survey outcomes align with the issues women are discussing. During phase one, CVH hosted the following Follow Black Women engagements from 2019 to 2021:

2,303 surveys completed

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Black Women Roundtable with Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, where more than 250 Black women engaged the sitting senator in policy discussion

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Black Women Clergy Breakfast, organizing faith-based leaders to discuss and support the project

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Multiple virtual Sisters Circles, which served as a much-needed space for Black women to come together and check on one another during the COVID pandemic

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A Seat at the Table, a virtual discussion and Vice Presidential debate watch party

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Follow Black Women Townhall with Senator Chuck Schumer, which 183 Black women attended, including survey respondents from across New York State

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Follow Black Women NYC Mayoral Townhall for and by Black women with over 500 attendees who joined us live on Zoom and Facebook

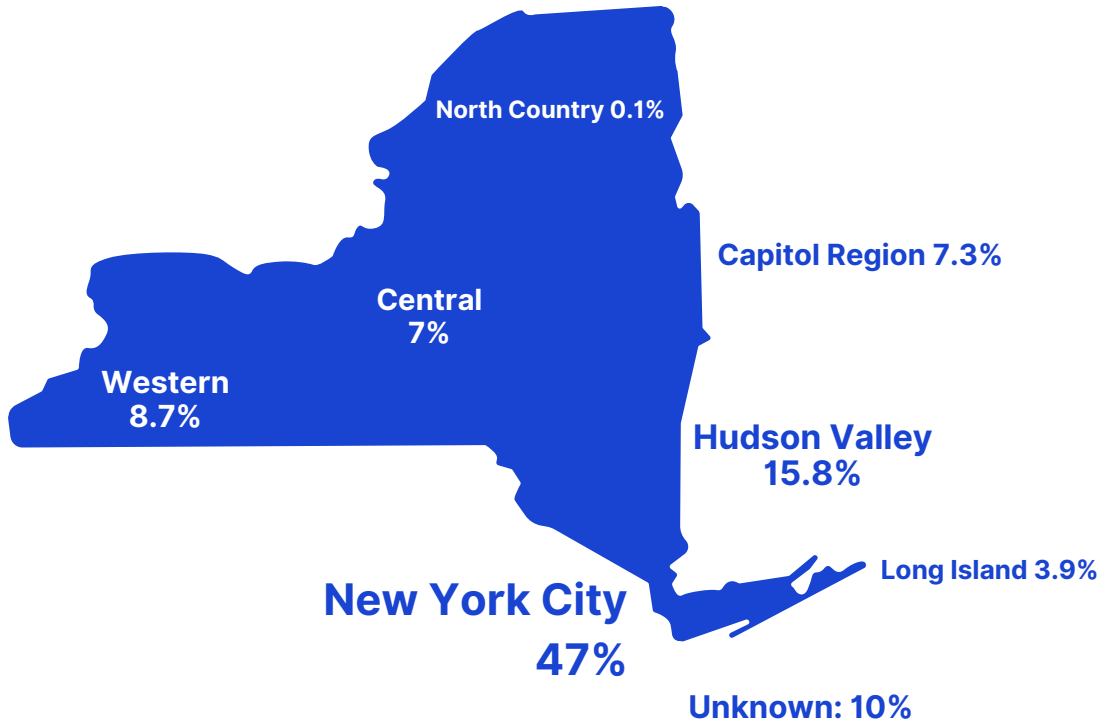


# FOLLOW BLACK WOMEN PHASE 1 SURVEY ANALYSIS

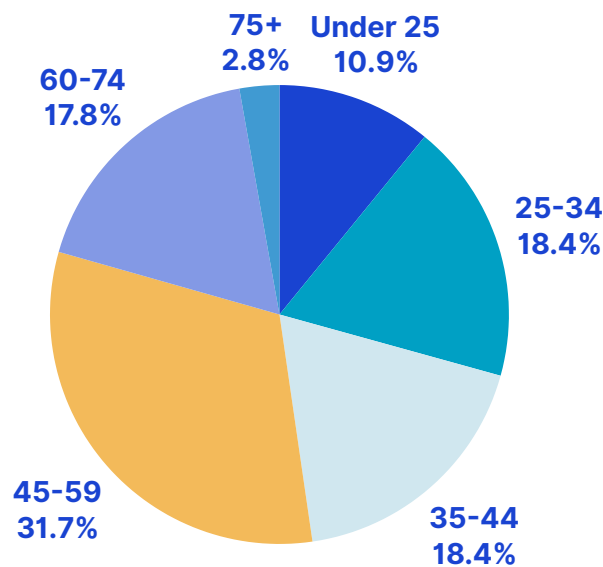
PHASE 1 TOTAL RESPONDENTS: 2,303

## DEMOGRAPHICS

### REGION



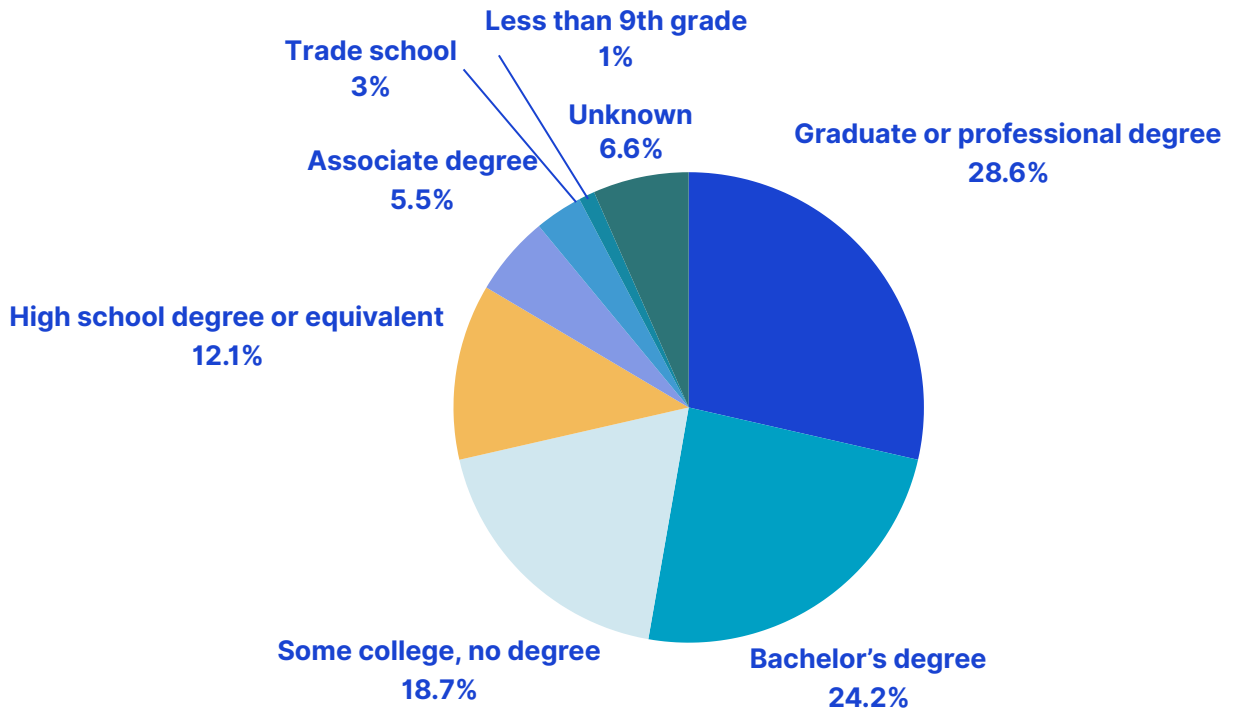
### AGE



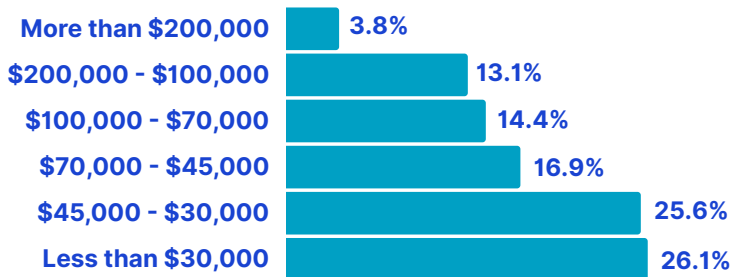
# FOLLOW BLACK WOMEN PHASE 1 SURVEY ANALYSIS

## DEMOGRAPHICS – CONTINUED

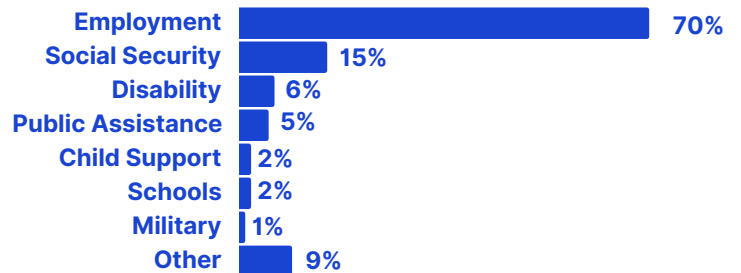
### EDUCATION LEVEL



### ANNUAL INCOME



### INCOME SOURCES



\*Multiple forms of income reported.



## FOLLOW BLACK WOMEN PHASE 1 SURVEY FINDINGS

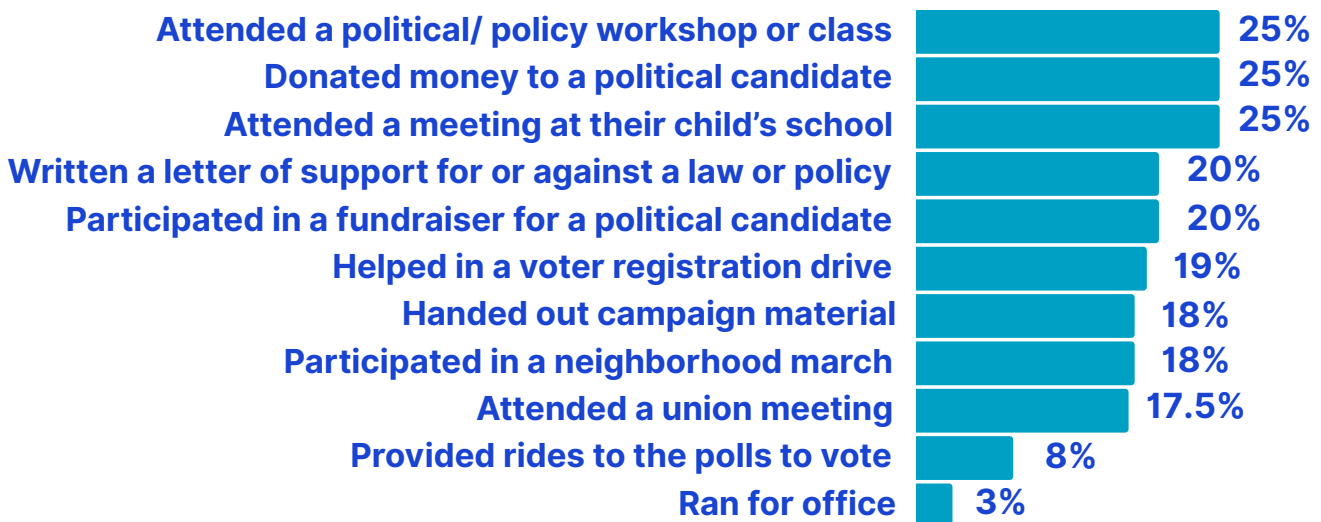
### CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

We asked the survey participants if they voted in any election in the past ten years, and 85% of the participants had voted. The majority of these voters were between the ages of 30-60. Somewhat concerning, 26.5% of survey respondents ages 18-29 had NOT voted in the past ten years, and 30% did NOT vote in any local elections between 2016-2019. However, some of these respondents (6.5%) were not of voting age and were not eligible to vote.

Participants, however, reported that they participated in civic life. 66% reported that they have talked to family or friends about politics, 57% reported that they have signed a petition, 41% reported that they have participated civically through their employment, and 29% reported that they have attended a protest or demonstration.

Nevertheless, respondents feel strongly that there are barriers to participation in civic life, with 50% reporting this sentiment. Some of the other data worth noting about Black women's involvement in civic life is as follows:

#### PARTICIPATION IN CIVIC LIFE

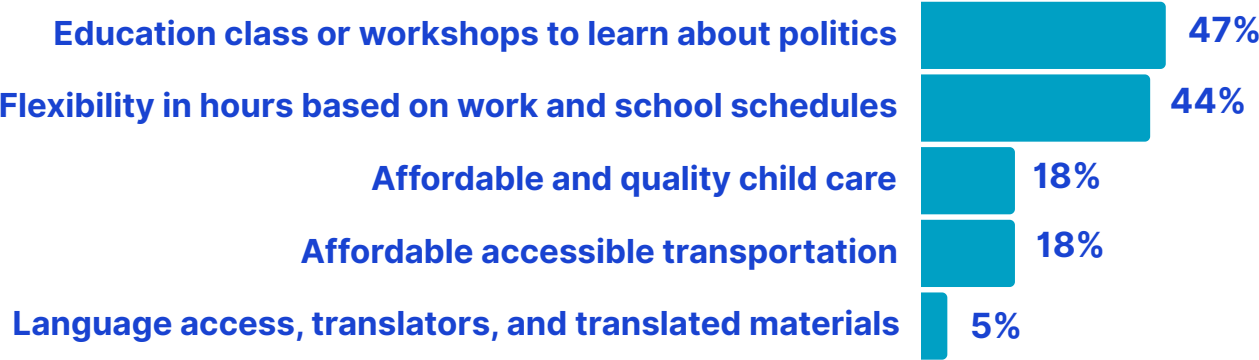


\*Participants could report on multiple items on the survey.



When participants were asked what support would make them likely to participate in civic life, respondents reported the following:

**SUPPORT TO PARTICIPATE IN CIVIC LIFE**



The top three **policy priorities** for Black women were:

- 01 — Education
- 02 — Housing
- 03 — Healthcare

The top three **policy issues** for Black women were:

- 01 — Lack of affordable housing.
- 02 — Failing schools that do not adequately prepare children.
- 03 — Low wages that make them unable to provide for their families adequately. Black women are often the primary providers for their families and extended family or community.

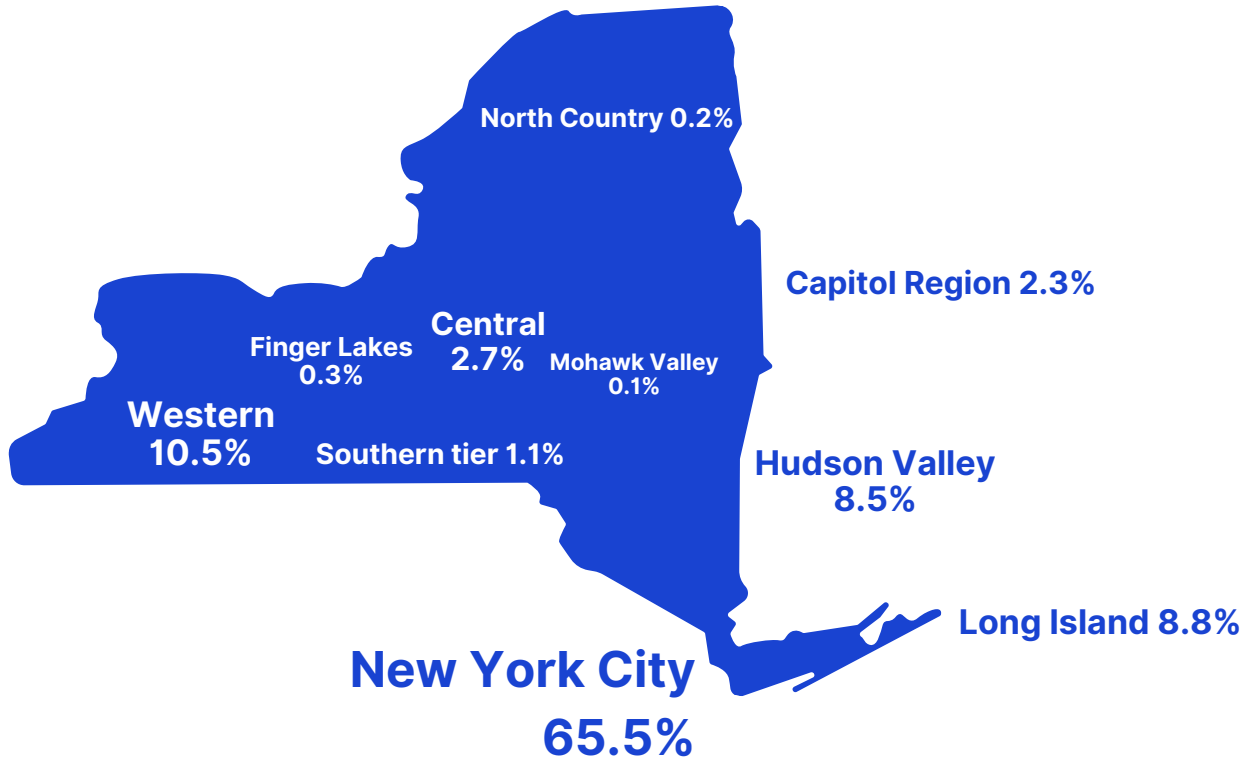


# FOLLOW BLACK WOMEN: PHASE 2

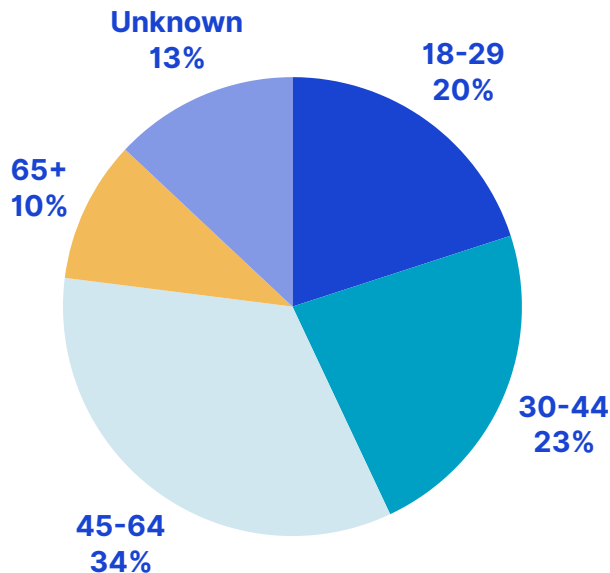
PHASE 2 TOTAL RESPONDENTS: 3,036

## DEMOGRAPHICS

### REGION



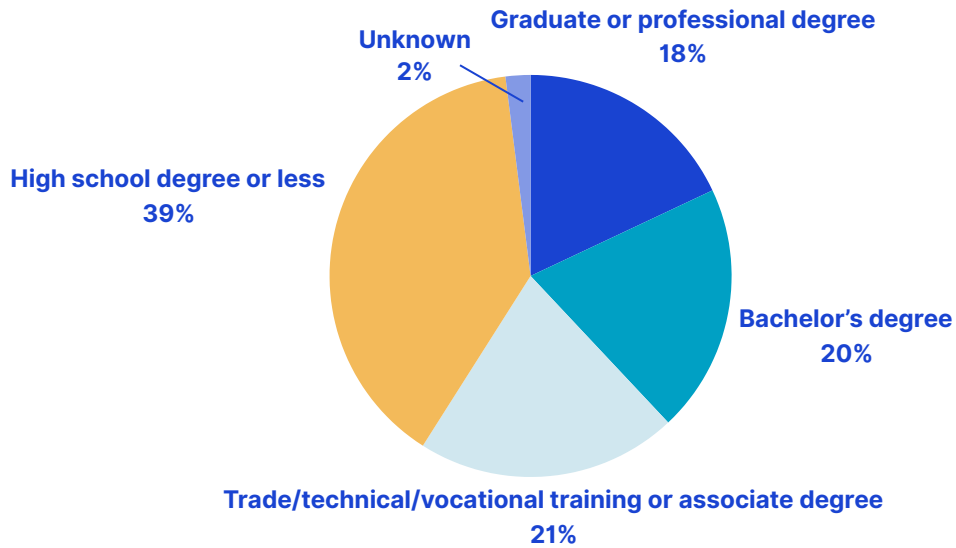
### AGE



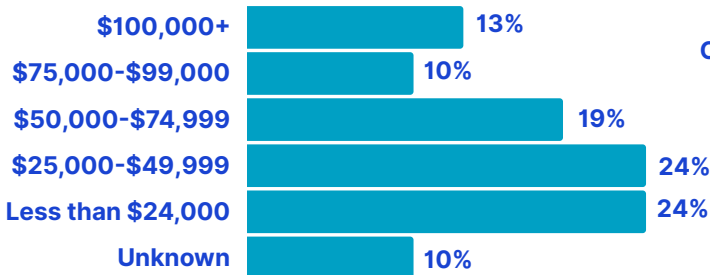
# FOLLOW BLACK WOMEN PHASE 2 SURVEY ANALYSIS

## DEMOGRAPHICS – CONTINUED

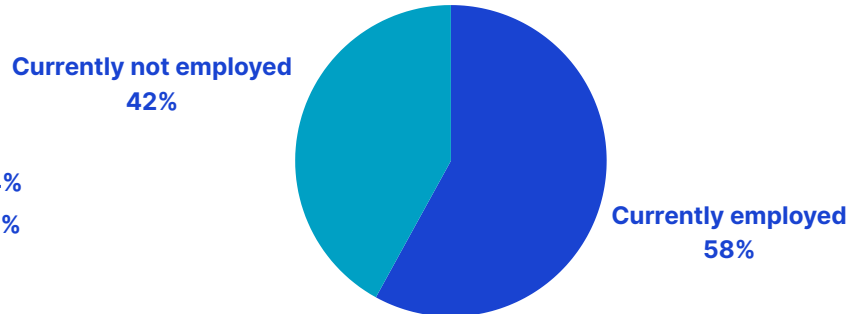
### EDUCATION LEVEL



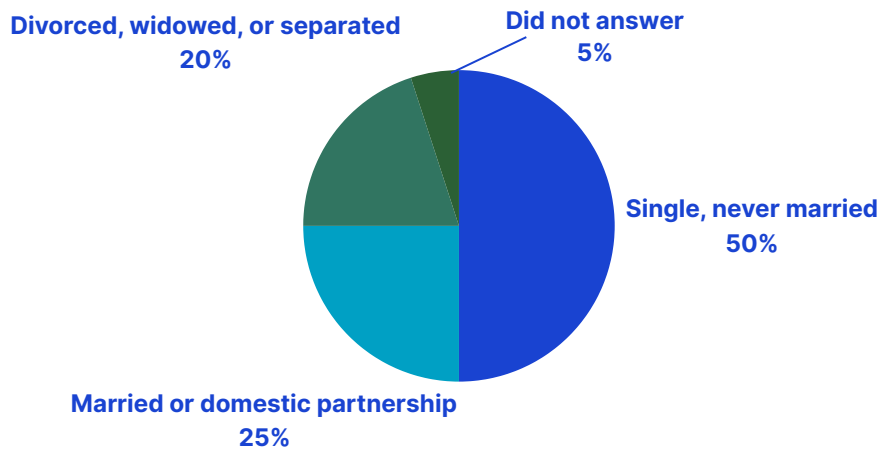
### ANNUAL INCOME



### EMPLOYMENT STATUS



### MARITAL STATUS




## FOLLOW BLACK WOMEN PHASE 2 SURVEY FINDINGS

The second survey focused on identifying what was important in educating schoolchildren, college students, workforce development, housing, and voting priorities. The participants rated each area on a scale of importance. The significant areas with high percentages are outlined in these areas. Multiple areas are significant, emphasizing that the issue areas are not single-issued. The critical issues touch on affordability, skill attainment, safety, workforce training, support for post-secondary education, housing pathways, and the issues that inform how Black women who responded will vote.

### EDUCATION – SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN RATED “EXTREMELY IMPORTANT”

**85%** Reading skills for school-aged children 

**78%** Free or affordable early childhood education (preschool and pre-kindergarten) 

**82%** Mental health, counseling and support services 

**70%** Youth employment and youth workforce development 


**79%** Safe and accessible transportation 

### EDUCATION – COLLEGE AND THE WORKFORCE RATED “EXTREMELY IMPORTANT”

**73%** Free skills training for graduating high school seniors 

**67%** Free college tuition 

**70%** Student loan forgiveness 

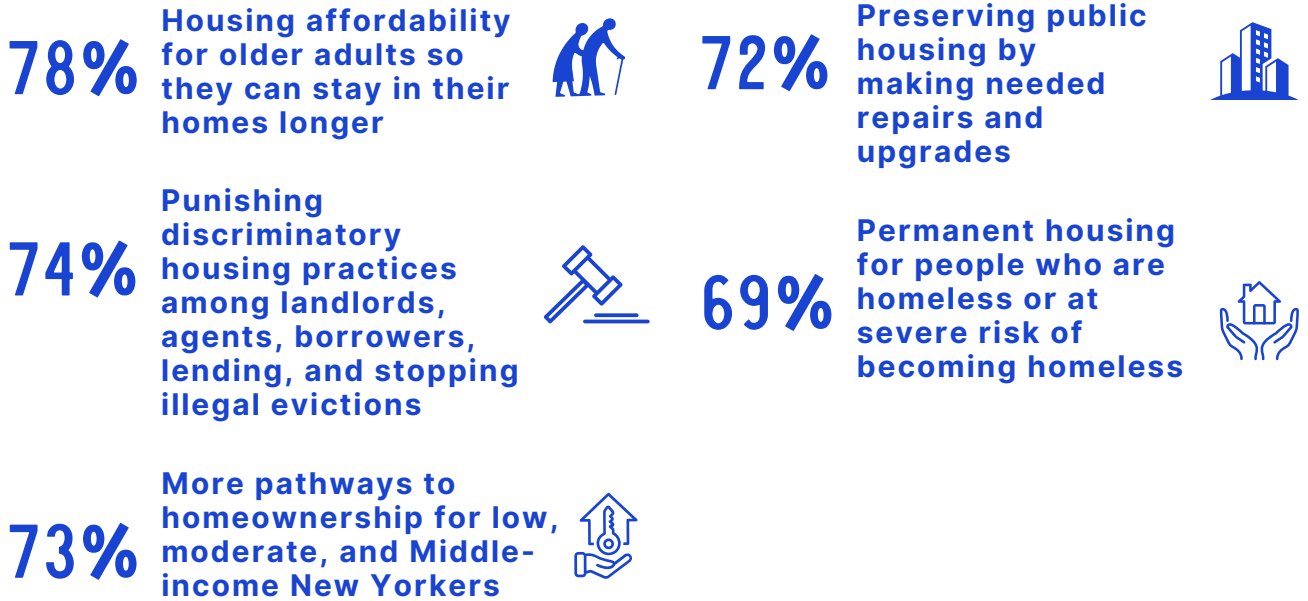
**61%** Free laptops for all college students and a Wi-Fi connection 

**69%** More scholarships for advanced degrees 

\*Participants could report on multiple items on the survey.

## HOUSING

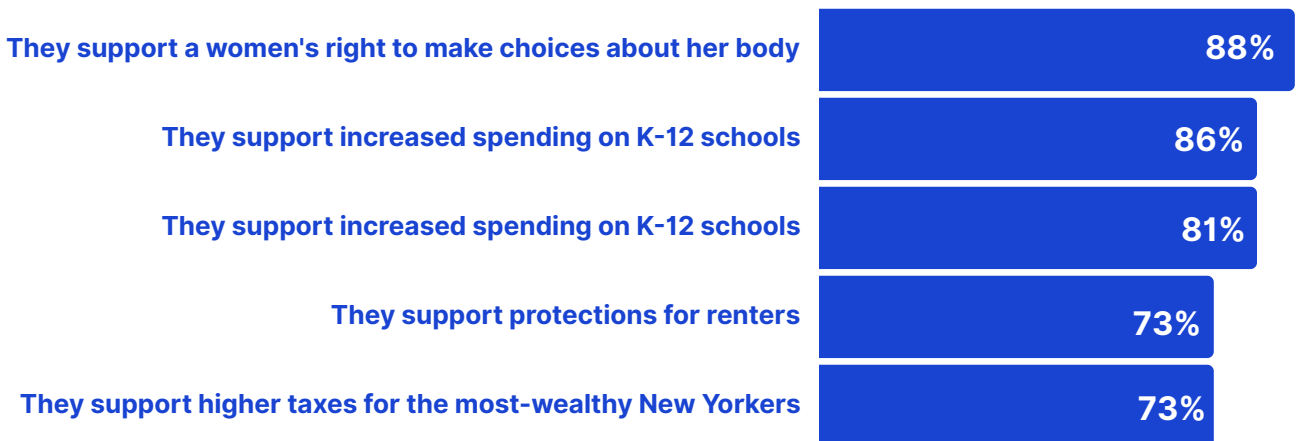
### RATED “EXTREMELY IMPORTANT”



\*Participants could report on multiple items on the survey.

## VOTING PRIORITIES

When voting for a candidate seeking elected office, which of the following would make you most likely vote for them?



\*Participants could choose multiple answers.



# CONCLUSION

## **IN PHASE 1 OF THE SURVEY, WE LEARNED THERE IS ROOM TO ENGAGE BLACK WOMEN VOTERS UNDER 30,**

although some respondents were not eligible to vote. Their representation as respondents implies room for further engagement and presents an opportunity for political education and empowerment. With barriers to civic participation, there are opportunities to create intentional spaces to fit political engagement into the lives of busy Black women. Notably, the critical political issues for Black women identified in phase 1 of the survey are education, housing, and health care. It is vital to discuss these issues in ways that resonate with Black women's daily lives and experiences in New York.

In phase 2 of the survey, our focus was on education, housing, and voting priorities. The education focus pertained to school-aged children, college, and the workforce. Black women identified many priorities as extremely important. The findings of both surveys have started to inform CVH's work. In particular, there has been a shift in voter education to focus on particular populations. CVH has also conducted one-on-one civics training and used the survey to facilitate discussions about important issues that emerged from the survey. CVH established a Follow Black Women Council composed of nine CVH members who are responsible for creating and identifying potential statewide bills focused on the survey findings.

CVH will continue to build the infrastructure for training Black women and organizing them to drive policy reform. In the second half of this year, we will deeply engage in a series of Follow Black Women events that are thoughtfully designed to inspire, mobilize, and uplift our community as we approach the pivotal 2024 presidential election. These events will bring us together for powerful moments of connection and action – from Election Watch events to dynamic discussions – where we will explore the urgent issues facing our communities. We will also unite through hands-on efforts like phone banking sessions, with a focus on safeguarding our democracy and ensuring that our



voices are heard. We will amplify Follow Black Women across social media as we work to understand the pulse of our members regarding key political developments. These events and outreach are not just gatherings; they are a movement, a collective journey toward a more just and equitable future.

The results of the surveys will continue to provide a baseline for Follow Black Women, which will inform the work in key areas, including base building, leadership development, and stakeholder engagement.



# FUNDERS

## THANK YOU TO OUR FOLLOW BLACK WOMEN FUNDERS!

- Brooklyn Community Bail Fund
- Ford Foundation
- North Star Fund
- Open Society Foundation
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## REPORT WRITTEN BY DMG GROUP L.L.C.





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