

Background and Objectives

- Dominant research on political ambition focuses mainly on white men and women; intersection of race and gender is underexplored.
- Existing studies emphasize legislative office, leaving judicial pathways largely unexamined.
- Women of color are increasingly represented in judicial roles, but their motivations and barriers remain unclear.
- This study investigates how intersecting identities shape access to and experiences within judicial office.

Data and Methods

- Qualitative Interviews: Semi-structured interviews (-45 min) with Louisiana judges
 - Examining motivations, race- and gender-specific barriers, and perceptions of judicial culture
 - Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed thematically.
- Quantitative Data: Louisiana Secretary of State candidate database (1982–2025).
 - Judicial dataset: 2,121 candidates (state judge, prosecutor, DA, etc.)
 - Legislative dataset: 831 candidates (governor, state rep, etc.). Data includes parish, party, race, and gender.

Data and Methods

Political Ambition & Gender Socialization

- Women are less likely than men to express early political ambition, even with similar credentials.
- Barriers include gender role socialization, lower political confidence, family responsibilities, and lack of role models.
- Ambition gap is larger for women of color due to compounded racial and gender socialization.
- Perceptions of politics as conflict-driven and masculine can deter women; framing politics as community service helps narrow the gap.

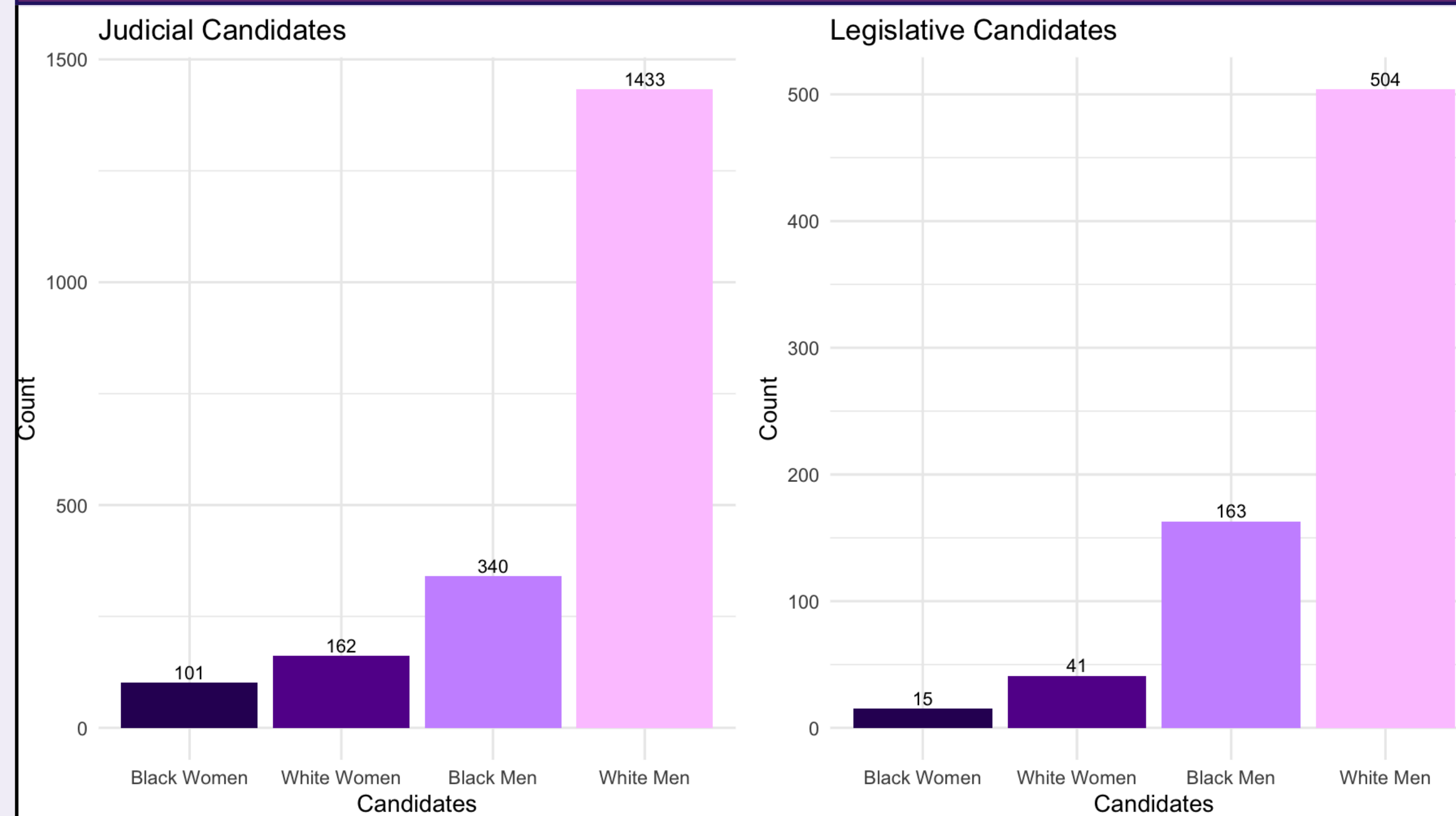
Intersectionality

- Black and Latina women often express community-centered political ambition linked to activism and social justice.
- Political ambition is shaped by identity performances and cultural narratives (e.g., “strong Black woman”).
- Traditional factors that help white women (incumbency, party support) may have little effect for women of color.
- Recruitment efforts must address institutional perception, as exclusionary or unresponsive environments discourage participation.

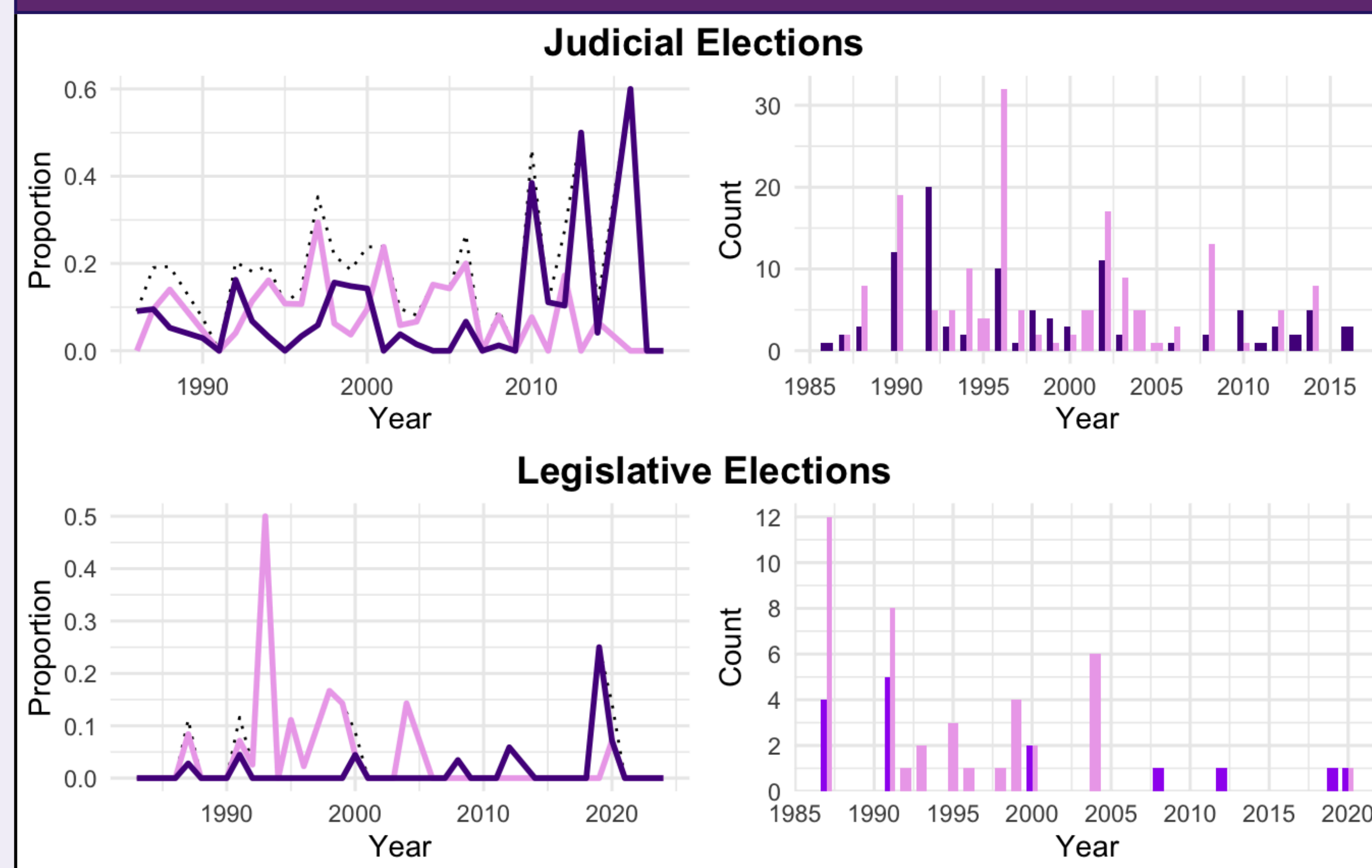
Stereotypes and Structural Barriers

- Women of color face persistent stereotype-driven challenges, especially in roles demanding impartiality and authority.
- Dual stereotypes (strong/leadership + intelligent/selfless) create a double bind; assertiveness may be penalized.
- Women of color often have stronger qualifications than peers but still face lower ratings or recognition.
- Systemic bias reinforces the need to exceed traditional standards to gain access to judicial roles.

Overall Gender and Race Distribution



Women Candidates by Race



Descriptive Analysis

Judicial Candidates:

- White men dominate: 1,433 candidates; Black men: 340; white women: 162; Black women: 101.
- Reflects entrenched power structures favoring historically dominant groups and lower political ambition among women of color.
- Peaks in women candidates occur around 1990, 2000, 2010, and 2015, influenced by visible role models and shifts in perceptions of judicial power.
- Black women occasionally reach counts similar to white women (e.g., 1990, 2015) but remain low overall, highlighting higher barriers and intersectional motivations.

Legislative Candidates:

- White men: 504; Black men: 163; white women: 41; Black women: 15.
- Representation is even lower than in judicial elections, suggesting greater barriers for women and racial minorities
- Slight increases in certain years (1990, 2020) sometimes show Black women surpassing white women, reflecting context-dependent decisions to run.
- Legislative term limits and open seats may influence these fluctuations.

Trends & Implications:

- Judicial elections show higher overall representation for women, especially Black women, than legislative races.
- Persistent disparities reflect intersectional challenges: gendered perceptions of power, stereotypes assigning mixed masculine/feminine traits, and need for more robust qualifications.

Recommendations

- Reshape institutional cultures to better support women of color in both judicial and legislative offices.
- Dismantle stereotypes that create double standards or discourage political ambition among women of color.
- Encourage intersectional research across states and political arenas to better understand barriers and pathways for women of color.

Qualitative Analysis

- Motivations if women of color stem from identity, moral principles, and a commitment to justice and community service.
- Early influences included strong female role models in her family; judicial aspirations were long-term and intentional.
- Strong emphasis on grassroots engagement and understanding the community she serves; her campaign success highlights the value of local involvement.
- Navigates community tensions around policing and systemic inequalities, fostering dialogue and accessibility.
- Contrasts with peers in judicial culture, which often prioritizes self-preservation over public service.

Conclusion

- Women of color remain underrepresented overall but are more present in judicial than legislative elections.
- Judicial roles align with motivations of moral clarity, community service, and ethical leadership.
- Legislative office presents higher barriers due to partisan politics, donor networks, and heightened scrutiny.
- Expand mentorship and visibility of women of color as role models to encourage candidacy.
- Findings highlight the need for intersectional, relational, and justice-oriented frameworks of political ambition.

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