

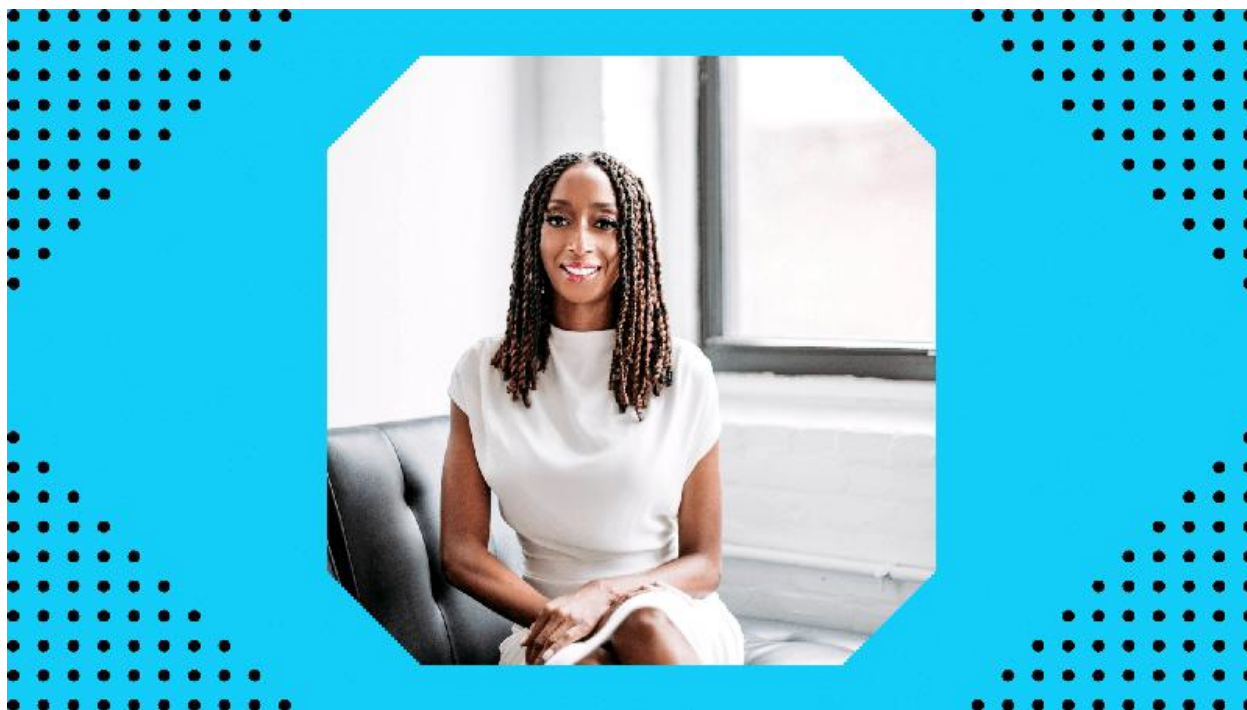
PUTTING MORE CRACKS IN THAT GLASS CEILING

A POLITICAL DIVIDE THAT LEAVES WOMEN UNDERREPRESENTED

Se Lever/Emerge America 2020

The political divide in this country is profound, and the upcoming midterms will determine a great deal about the direction we will take as a nation, specifically the rights afforded to women. With a gaping disparity of women in public office, it was time to look at the data and really polarize just how gaping that disparity is. Only 31% of legislators are women. The U.S. ranks 75th out of 193 countries in female elected officials in national legislatures or parliaments. At the state level, only 31% of legislators are women, with just 8.2% of legislative offices held by women of color. Representation in this country is sorely lacking.

However, one national non-profit political organization, **Emerge America**, has been working to increase the number of female Democrats for over twenty years. Their record of success is undeniable. Today, I spoke with the President of that organization, **A'shanti F. Gholar**, about the organization's mission, its training programs, and how you, the reader, can run for office!



Lauren Flick: Tell me more about the mission of Emerge?

Gholar: Emerge's mission is to recruit and train Democratic women to run for office and change the face of politics and our country. We were started in 2002 by a group of women in the Bay Area, California, who saw the lack of women in elected office and wanted to help. The goal was to create training programs to demystify what it takes to run for office. By 2005, Emerge became a national organization, and now, 20 years later, we have 27 state affiliates and have trained women in 46 states and territories. We've trained 5,000 women to run for office, over half of whom have run, and more than 1,000 are serving in elected offices.

Flick: It's incredible work your organization is doing for this country. I see on your website that your 'Signature Program' is a six-month, 70-hour training course to give women the skills they need to run and win. Tell me what that training entails.

Gholar: The Signature Program is an intensive 70-hour workshop, meeting one weekend a month for six months. Participants receive training on topics ranging from public speaking to fundraising and campaign strategy. We also offer a condensed version for active candidates—two-and-a-half days for a crash course in running for office.

Flick: With the recent overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, and the climate of extremism on the Right, let's talk about the importance of the upcoming midterms. Can you give me an idea of how you see the landscape for Democrats this November?

Gholar: I don't view things by cycle; every year is an election year. However, this year's races are crucial, especially with abortion rights now in the hands of the states. People are paying attention to races they might have overlooked, like Attorney General and judges, who play critical roles in determining the legality and consequences of abortion.

Flick: Are there specific races and candidates you want to spotlight?

Gholar: Emerge has alums running in some of the most competitive races in the country. In Arizona, **Secretary of State Katie Hobbs** is running for Governor. In Georgia, **State Sen. Jen Jordan** is running for Attorney General, pledging not to enforce the state's restrictive abortion laws. **Becca Balint**, an Emerge alum, won Vermont's At-Large Congressional Seat, marking a historic first for both women and LGBTQ+ representation in Vermont.

Flick: A lot of folks think the federal level is where the impact is, but it's important to fortify the states with Democratic leadership. If someone reading this wanted to take your training and run for office, what should they know?

Gholar: They should first know why they want to run and which issue compels them. It's important to research where they can be most effective—like running for school board if they care about education, instead of city council. We teach the process: how to file, how to collect signatures, how to build a campaign team, and crucially, how to fundraise. Most first-time candidates, especially women, can be outspent two to one.

Flick: Speaking of money, I don't suppose all this training is free?

Gholar: No, but no woman is ever turned away due to an inability to pay. We raise funds to cover most of the program's cost, and scholarships are available. Women also often fundraise their tuition as a way to prepare for campaign fundraising. The program provides an education in running for office, and women build strong bonds within the "Emerge sisterhood," supporting each other on their political journeys.

Flick: Anything you'd like to let readers reflect on when deciding to run for office?

Gholar: The biggest myth is that you need certain qualities to run for office. The most important quality is the desire to make change. If you have that, you're ready. At Emerge, we can teach the rest. Women are electable, as evidenced by the numerous women in elected office. In 2022, Emerge alums had over 450 primary wins and 575 candidates on the ballot, with a 78% win rate. Women in office advocate for democratic principles like equality and fairness, tackling issues like healthcare, education, and the economy. I encourage your readers to visit the Emerge website, explore the training opportunities, sign up for emails, and follow us on social media. We offer free training and feature conversations with alums who are currently in office or running for office.