



## **New HOPE Report on Latinas in California Government Uncovers Important Gains and the Need for More Latina Representation in Public Office**

*The report is an assessment of the current state of representation for the nearly 8 million Latinas living in California, and a conversation starter for how to foster future leaders.*

---

LOS ANGELES, CA – November 30, 2023 – Today, Hispanas Organized for Political Equality (HOPE) released the Latina Representation Report for the State of California, an analysis on the status of Latina representation in elected office in California. In a review of nearly 5,000 elected officeholders across all levels of government, this report reveals that representation continues to lag Latinas’ population growth – especially at the highest levels of government. Latinas hold no statewide seats and have yet to see a representative hold constitutional office in California, despite representing 20% of the state’s population. HOPE offers this report as an assessment of the current state of representation for the nearly 8 million Latinas living in California, and as a conversation starter for how to foster future leaders.

“How can we ensure the needs of our communities are being met if Latina voices are missing from our government?” said Helen Torres, CEO of HOPE. “Our report uplifts the incredible gains Latinas have made in public office and uncover exactly where Latina voices are missing so we can build a stronger and more responsive democracy that reflects our community’s needs.”

“While lack of Latina representation is pervasive, the report finds several reasons for optimism. Significant gains have been made by women and Latinas specifically at the city council and school board levels, driving increased representation on these bodies and building a strong bench of officials who may run for higher office in the future,” said Felipa Penaloza, lead researcher on the report.

The report also found significant strength in Los Angeles, where the largest number of Latinos are registered in California, and where Latinas hold relative parity between their population and representation at all levels of government except City Council. There is also growing Latina power in the Central Valley and on the Central Coast, where again Latinos and Latinas hold strong voter registration numbers.

### **Key research findings include:**

#### **Latina representation lags at the top: There are 0 Latinas represented in the State’s Constitutional Officers and just 7% of Federal Offices are Held by Latinas.**

- Of the dozen California State Constitutional Offices, five are held by women, three are held by Latino men including one Afro-Latino. None are currently Latina.
- California is currently sending 15 Latino members to the House of Representatives, including four Latinas – all representing Southern California and one of whom has announced her retirement at the conclusion of the current term. With four Latina congressional members (of 52) and no Senators, Latinas comprise roughly 7% of California’s total delegation to Washington D.C.

#### **Latinas are driving parity at the State Legislature where they represent 19% of elected officeholders.**

- Women now hold 50 of the 120 seats in the California State Legislature, the largest number ever. Much of those gains are due in large part to women of color running and winning – now 29 seats in both chambers.

Latinas specifically make up 23 of those seats. This is the most of any group of women, and more than male Latinos, who hold 15 seats across both houses.

**Gains in local government with vast room for growth: Latinas represent just 4% of County Supervisors and 9% of City Government Seats are Held by Latinas.**

- Men still occupy 70% of Supervisor seats across California's 58 counties. However, since 2015 women have increased their representation by almost a third -- with 30% of those gains achieved by Latina candidates. Latinas still only make up 4% of all county supervisors in California (12 Latinas sit on the nearly 300 County Board Seats Statewide). That number is double what it was in 2015 showing impressive gains across 4 election cycles.
- Women have seen dramatic gains in city government over that last three election cycles and have risen from fewer than one in four mayors and councilmembers to now roughly 40% of all city offices in California.
- Latinas specifically comprise only 9% of the more than 2,500 city seats but have in many ways led the way on increased representation for both women and Latinos in local office.

**Latinas are Well Represented on School Board Seats at 20%, have made gains on community College Boards, yet remain severely under-represented on Water Boards.**

- Latinas represent 20% of school board seats among K-12 districts with more than 5,000 Hispanic students enrolled -- the best represented level of government for Latinas in this study. Latino men only comprise 17% of school board members, meaning Latinas are also out pacing their male counterparts at the K-12 School board level.
- 13% of all Community College officials are Latina, or roughly one in four of the women serving.
- Our analysis of Water Boards focused on 138 of the largest municipal, county and irrigation Districts statewide. Of the 541 current board members on these bodies, we found just 13 Latinas holding elected office -- roughly 2% of the examined offices.

**Key takeaways and conclusions:**

While much work remains to reach equitable representation for Latinas, this report showcases how there are regions and levels of government where an extremely strong foundation is being built. To achieve parity, Latinas will need to double their representation on city councils, elect six times the number of County Supervisors, grow seats both in the state assembly and congress, and see at least one Latina elected to a statewide constitutional office.

**Pathways are vital to Latina representation.**

- Few State and Federal representatives attain those offices without first serving in local government. Fostering representation and success at the local level is critical to building the next generation of state and national leaders.
- We should also foster and pay attention to other avenues to elected office. Several sitting Latina legislators were prominent labor leaders, others held key appointed positions in local government agencies, or senior staff positions for other elected officials.

## **School Boards are a Notable Success Story.**

- Latinas are best represented at the local level on School Boards. In our Analysis of the Top 200 Districts by Latino enrollment, we found nearly 200 Latinas sitting on the roughly 900 seats. In Los Angeles, nearly 30 percent of the board members we researched were Latina. Only Orange County stood out as a region with significant underrepresentation.

## **The Inland Empire and Orange County lag behind other regions.**

- While Southern California has produced notable Latina leaders in the state legislature and congress, much of that is centered in Los Angeles and Latinas are significantly under-represented at the county, municipal and school board levels in the Inland Empire and Orange County.

This report was produced in partnership with GrassrootsLab, a research and data firm based in Sacramento and Long Beach. This report analyzed nearly 5,000 elected officeholders across California state, federal and local government. The data is current as of Spring 2023 and reflects results of elections held in November 2022 and an array of appointments made in early weeks of 2023.

## **About Hispanas Organized for Political Equality (HOPE)**

HOPE® is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that has focused on empowering our communities through advocacy, Latina leadership training, and increasing knowledge on the contributions Latinas have made to advance the status of women for the past 33 years. To date, HOPE's innovative programming has served 65,000 Latinas nationwide and touched the lives of several thousand more through advocacy and research efforts. For more information on HOPE, please visit [www.Latinas.org](http://www.Latinas.org).

###