



Latina Representation in California Government

2023





Foreword

California's leadership does not fully represent the rich diversity of its population.

More than 40 percent of Californians are Latino, yet despite recent historic gains in the state legislature and in congress, at no level of government is the Latino community adequately represented. Latinas who comprise 20 percent of the state's population are similarly lagging in equitable representation, with only the State Legislature reflecting approximate parity with the Latina population of California.

One in every five Californians identify as Latina, yet Latinas remain under-represented in the U.S. Senate, on the judicial bench, in statewide offices, and at the local and county level. California has never elected a Latina U.S. Senator. California has never seen a Latina serve as a Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Secretary of State, Attorney General, State Controller, State Treasurer, Insurance Commissioner, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, or on the State Board of Equalization. Our under-representation extends to influential appointed board and commission positions. A HOPE analysis of appointments made by the Governor's office between January and October 2023 showed that only 9.6% of appointees were Latinas. Just 2 % of water board seats are held by Latinas, and on influential Governor appointed commissions such as the California Public Utilities Commission, Latina representation is non-existent.¹ We know that one of the strongest and most viable pathways to elected office is often by serving on local board and commissions. A lack of representation at this level reflects a deeply flawed and unjust system.

Ensuring our elected and appointed officials reflect the diversity of the state's population will create a stronger California by strengthening our democracy and providing the next generation of Leaders the opportunity to solve for the pressing problems facing our communities. A 2022 study *Hispanas Organized for Political Equality (HOPE)* conducted in partnership with the USC Equity Research Institute² has shown that Latinas bring forward and advocate for issues that matter to historically marginalized communities and tend to lead with racial equity and economic justice in mind. Latinas connect their experiences as descendants of immigrants or immigrants themselves and coming from primarily working-class backgrounds to their work, community engagement, and commitment to see through structural changes for communities of color.

¹ The first Latina to serve on the CPUC was Cathrine Sandoval in 2011. She was followed by Martha Guzman Aceves (2016-2021). Another Latina has not been appointed to the CPUC since

² *Leading with HOPE: Supporting Latina Leaders for a Better California*, USC Equity Research Institute (2022) <https://www.latinas.org/leadingwithhope>

Foreword

Our research found that this is also true for Latinas as voters. The share of U.S.-born and naturalized Latina voters was higher than the share of Latinos at during the 2020 election, and Latinas are more likely to turn out to vote than their male counterparts (68% vs. 63%). Latinas are deeply invested in the issues impacting their communities and their political participation drives change and builds community power.

Latina leadership benefits the entire state, and more must be done to increase Latina representation at all levels. For more than three decades, HOPE has been dedicated to building and strengthening a Latina leadership pipeline in public and private sectors so that one day we can see our mission of securing economic and political parity for Latinas realized.

“How would California benefit from more Latina political leadership? In states with the highest percentages of women representatives, women introduce and pass more priority bills dealing with issues related to women, children, and families than men in their states, as well as more than their female counterparts in low representation legislatures. In general, gender makes a difference: As for Latinas, a study exploring perceived differences in the priorities and policy successes between Latinas and Latinos credited Latinas with expanding the types of issues seen as priorities by Hispanic/Latino caucuses.”

Leading with HOPE: Supporting Latina Leaders for a Better California (2022)

We know that it is not just the responsibility of Latinas to increase their own representation. Organizations and leaders with the authority to prioritize the training of Latinas and increasing access leadership opportunities must take on a share of that work. Data is a powerful tool in closing equity gaps and HOPE is committed to shining a light on where disparities exist so that we can work together eliminate them.

This report aims to highlight where Latinas have made important gains in representation and pinpoint where Latinas continue to face severe underrepresentation so that we can strengthen the pathways to Latina leadership in California. Particularly as we see under-representation at the highest levels of policymaking, we must also heed the numbers in our cities, counties, schools, and other bodies as we look ahead to the future of Latina representation in our halls of government.

We present this report in honor of the trailblazing women who have broken down barriers for Latinas as elected leaders, and to those who have fought to increase our numbers at all levels of Government

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Hispanas Organized for Political Equality

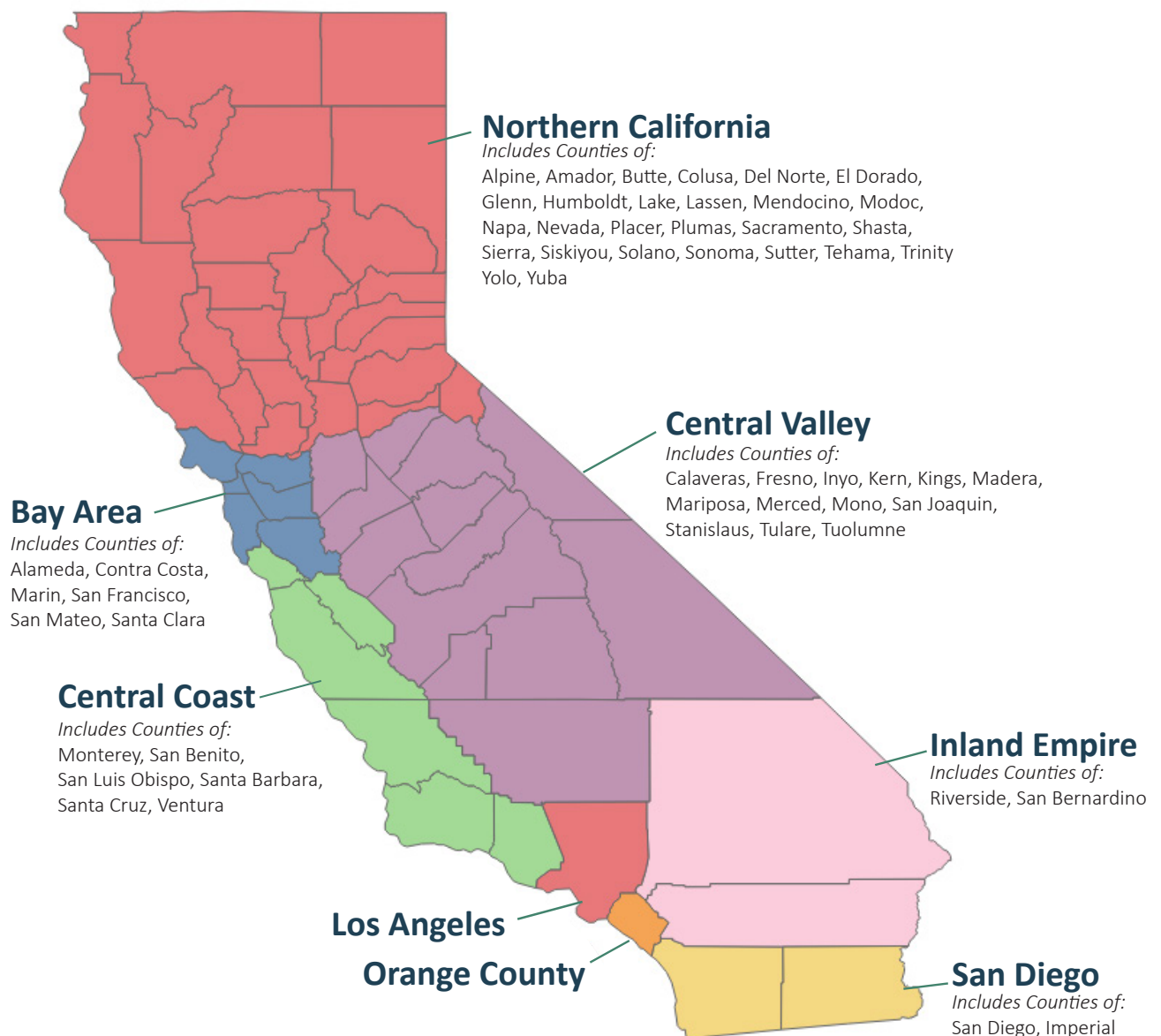
About HOPE

Hispanas Organized for Political Equality® (HOPE) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization committed to ensuring political and economic parity for Latinas through leadership, advocacy, and education to benefit all communities and the status of women.

HOPE® 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 30 years. To date, HOPE's innovative programming has served more than 60,000 Latinas and touched the lives of several thousand more through our advocacy efforts.

HOPE operates across California in eight regions, as detailed below. The findings of this report will, in part, be presented as reflections of these core areas of the state.

HOPE Regions



Overview

There are 7.8 million Latinas living in California, equal to 20% of the state's population. In a review of nearly 5,000 elected officeholders across all levels of government, however, this report reveals that representation continues to lag behind 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.

Latinas hold just 4 of 52 congressional seats -- all in Southern California and one of whom has announced her retirement at the conclusion of the current term.

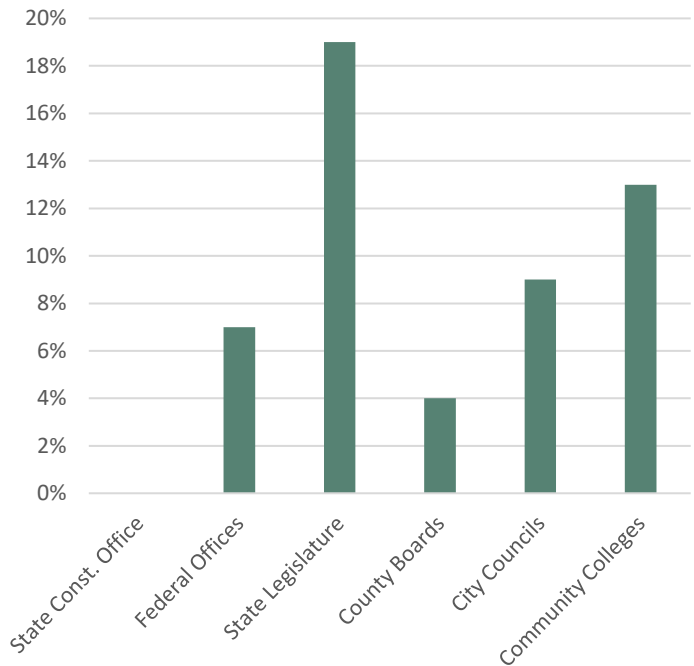
There is reason for optimism. Significant gains have been made by women and Latinas specifically at the city council and school board levels, driving increased representation on these bodies and building a strong bench of officials who may run for higher office in the future.

Our 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.

We have also found growing Latina power in the Central Valley and on the Central Coast, where again Latinos and Latinas hold strong voter registration numbers.

We offer 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.

Latina Representation in California State, Federal & Local Government



The Latino Electorate

Latinos represent nearly 30% of registered voters in California, but have consistently lagged in overall turnout. Like most groups, Latinos have seen rising voter participation in recent years, driven partly by politics and also by notable changes in how the state handles voter registration, vote-by-mail and other factors. Studies have shown that these measures have not yet increased Latino overall share of the electorate.

Nearly two-thirds (62%) of all Latino registrants live in just five counties – Los Angeles, San Diego, Riverside, San Bernardino and Orange. Those same counties account for just over half (54%) of all voters.

And though the Latino vote is heavily concentrated in these five counties, none of them hold a Latino-majority electorate. In Los Angeles, where Latinos are 48% of the population, they represent just 38% of registered voters, and in the November 2022 election Latinos were just 28% of votes cast in the state’s largest county.

Latinas are playing a leading role in changing this dynamic.

In that same November 2022 general election, Latinas outperformed their male counterparts in all but Alpine County, where they fell short of a majority by a single vote. Latinas outvoted male Latinos in Los Angeles County 54% to 46%, and statewide Latinas outperformed male Latinos by nearly 9%.

Latinas also outnumber male Latinos on the voter registration rolls in every county of the state except Alpine (population 890) and Sierra (population 2,094) counties.

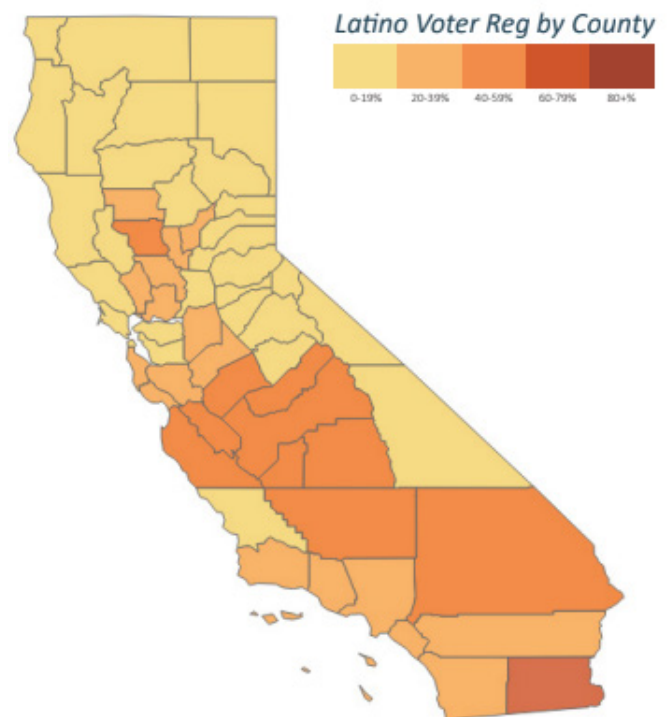
The following pages will detail how Latinas are represented in varying levels of state, local and

federal government. Unfortunately, despite rising participation and engagement, in most areas, representation is severely lagging both population and voter participation.

And while these numbers have significant room to grow, there are encouraging signs that Latino and Latina representation is increasing in communities across the state. There is much work left to be done, but these local officeholders are gaining the experience to ultimately run for higher office.

The Latino electorate is also much younger than other ethnic groups. Nearly half of Latino voters (47.7%) are under the age of 40 – versus just 33% of other voters.

Latino Voter Registration: Percentage of Total Registrants by County



Voter registration and turnout data was provided by L2 Data. www.L2-data.com.



State Constitutional Offices

*Latina
Representation* **0%**

Of the dozen California State Constitutional Offices, five are held by women, three are held by Latino men including one Afro-Latino. **No California State Constitutional Offices are currently held by a Latina.**

No Latino has held the office of Governor in California since Romualdo Pacheco served briefly in 1875 before becoming the first Latino to serve in the U.S. Congress. Pacheco also served in the U.S. Senate and as the State's Treasurer and Lieutenant Governor.

Abel Maldonado is the last Latino (and last Republican) to hold the office of Lieutenant Governor, a six-month stint from April 2010 to January 2011. No Latina has ever held the office.

The Controller and Treasurer offices are both held by women of color, Malia Cohen and Fiona Ma. No Latino has held either office since José Guadalupe Estudillo served as Treasurer in the 1870s, and no Latina has held either office.

Tony Thurmond, who is Afro-Latino, currently serves as California's Superintendent of Public Instruction. No Latina has held that position. Notably, in 2019, Lupita Cortez Alcalá was appointed as the first Latina Chief Deputy Superintendent for the California Department of Education.

Antonio Vasquez chairs the State Board of Equalization. Elected in 2018, he is the first and only Latino ever elected to the BOE. No Latina has ever held this position.



Federal Offices

Latina Representation **7%**

Nationally, there are more Latinos than ever in Congress with 48 members constituting nearly 11% of the body.

Similarly, 11 of the 100 U.S. Senators are Latino, including California’s first ever Latino Senator Alex Padilla. Just one Latina has served in the U.S. Senate – Catherine Cortez Masto of Nevada, who just won re-election.

As of 2023, California is sending 15 Latino members to the U.S. House of Representatives, including four Latinas – Nanette Díaz Barragán, Grace Napolitano, Linda Sánchez, and Norma Torres. With four Latina congressional members (of 52) and no Senators, Latinas comprise roughly 7% of California’s total delegation to Washington D.C.

Los Angeles County is home to all 4 Latina Congresswomen. Orange County has one

representative with Rep. Linda Sánchez, whose district mostly covers Los Angeles County, but also includes the O.C. city of La Habra.

The Inland Empire is the only other region with Latina representation in Congress. Rep. Norma Torres currently represents mostly the Inland Empire, but also the City of Pomona in Los Angeles County.

The Central Valley has no Latina congressional representation.

Peer Leadership
The Congressional Hispanic Caucus is chaired by a California Latina, Nanette Díaz Barragán.

The California Latino Legislative Caucus is also currently led by two Latinas: Assemblymember Sabrina Cervantes and Senator Lena Gonzalez who serve as Caucus Chair and Vice Chair, respectively.

Latinas in the U.S. House





State Legislature

Latina Representation **19%**

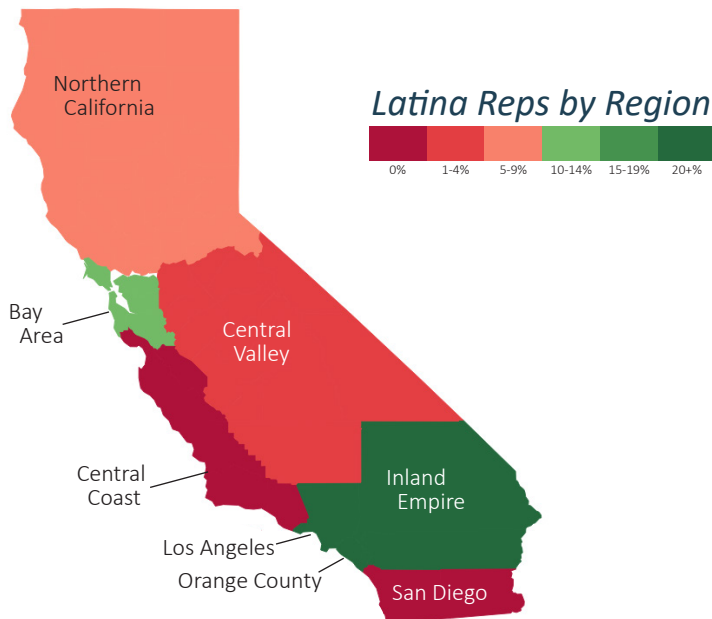
Women now hold 50 of the 120 seats in the California State Legislature, the largest number ever. Much of those gains are due in large part to women of color running and winning – now 29 seats in both chambers. Latinas specifically make up 23 of those seats. This is the most of any group of women, and more than male Latinos, who hold 15 seats across both houses.

The year 2023 saw the passing of Gloria Molina, who in 1982 was the first Latina elected to the California State Assembly. She was shortly followed in the State Legislature by numerous other trailblazing Latinas, many of whom still hold office today – such as Hilda Solis, the first Latina elected to the State Senate.

Gains have not always been steady. At the start of 2015 there were 23 Latino state legislators. Only 5 of those were women and all of those women were members of the lower house, the State Assembly.

2016 marked a shift in momentum and an era that has since seen race after race where Latinas secure multiple senate seats every election cycle. A third of the assembly and senate seats that cover the Central Valley are now represented by Latinas -- 80% of the state senators representing the Central Valley are Latina. However, a third (33%) of the assemblymembers representing Orange County are Latina, the highest percentage of any region.

Latinas in the State Assembly



Latinas in the State Senate





County Government

Latina Representation **4%**

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. That number is double what it was in 2015 showing impressive gains across 4 election cycles.

Latinas also contributed a majority of the gains for Latino representation for county supervisors, which has increased 31% in the last 8 years.

Leading the County

Elected in 2022, Humboldt County Supervisor Natalie Arroyo is the first Latina on the board.

San Mateo, which had no Latino county supervisors in 2015, now has one with Noelia Corzo, who is not only the first Latina to sit on the board, but is also now the only woman on the board.

Following an intense 2020 race, San Diego Supervisor Nora Vargas, a HOPE Leadership Institute alumna, became the first Latina, first woman of color and first immigrant to serve in this capacity in the near 200-year history of the county.

In 2017, Belia Ramos, also a HOPE Leadership Institute alumna, began serving as the first Latina elected to the Napa County Board of Supervisors.

Santa Clara is the only county with more than one Latina on the board of supervisors. Sylvia Arenas, who won election in 2022, joins Cindy Chavez on the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors.

Latina County Supervisors



CITY HALL

City Government

Latina Representation **9%**

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.

Among the trailblazers is Mayor Valerie Amezcua who in 2022 became the first woman and first Latina elected to the citywide office in Santa Ana's 153-year history.

Also in 2022, Hydee Feldstein Soto became the first woman and first Latina to serve as Los Angeles City Attorney. Latinas are making gains in smaller municipalities as well. In 2020, the City of Gridley, with a population under 7,400, elected its first Latina councilwoman with Catalina Sanchez.

At the council level, part of the change is driven by changes in the election system. Since 2015, more than 160 cities have shifted from an at-large to a by-district voting system driven by threats of legal action for alleged California Voting Rights Act violations that was deemed to be the cause for the lack of Latino representation in these cities.

In a by-district system the municipality is virtually split up into multiple sections with a single council member being elected from and by voters in that established district.

Across the 2016, 2018, and 2020 election cycles, 75 new Latino council members and mayors were elected to office in these newly districted cities, more than doubling the Latino representation.

Latina Mayors & Councilmembers



K-12 School Districts¹

Latina Representation **20%**

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 outpacing their male counterparts at the K-12 school board level.

Latinas hold at least 13% of school board seats in all regions except Orange County. In Los Angeles County and the Central Coast, Latinas are roughly 30% of all members.

In 1987, Leticia Quezada became the first Latina elected to the Los Angeles Unified School District Board. The state's largest and the nation's second largest school district -- itself accounting for nearly 10% of all California students -- now has three Latina board members.

In 1990, Dr. Mary Barreto became the first Latina elected to the board of the Oxnard Elementary School District. At the time of her election she was the first Latino trustee elected in nearly 20 years to a district that was 70% Latino. More than three decades after this monumental election, the Oxnard School District has an all-Latina school board, the only one in our dataset.

Montebello Unified and Lennox School District in L.A. County have four Latinas on each of their school boards. The fifth member for both school boards is a Latino man.

Of the six million K-12 students who attend California public schools, nearly 56% are Latino.

Latina School Board Members



¹This report analyzed school districts with at least 5,000 Latino student enrollees, approximately 200 total districts with nearly 1,000 representatives serving more than 2.47 million K-12 Latino students.



Water Boards¹

Latina
Representation **2%**

There are more than 1,200 water special districts and regulatory bodies in California. These vary widely in their scope and structure. Some are directly elected and others are governed by their county board of supervisors or city council while others are appointed bodies.

Our analysis 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.

Women in general appear to be vastly underrepresented on water boards. Our research found just 16% of all board members were women, and just one in four of these were women of color.



Community Colleges

Latina
Representation **13%**

Latinos comprise 46% of the more than 1.8 million community college students in California.

Nearly 450 elected officials sit on the 72 community college district boards of trustees across the state. Women slightly outnumber men on these boards, holding 51% of all seats.

Our research finds at least 13% of all community college officials are Latina, or roughly one in four of the women serving.

In the 2018-2019 academic school year, 72% (1,002,127) of Latino undergraduates enrolled in one of California's 116 community college campuses.² According to the Campaign for College Opportunity, "California's community colleges remain the single most important system of higher education that impacts Latinx students."

¹ This report analyzed 138 of the largest independent water agencies among the state's more than 1,200 water boards.

² Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) (2021), 12-month enrollment component (2018-2019), Table: EFFY2019

Conclusions

Latina Representation is Lacking Across the State

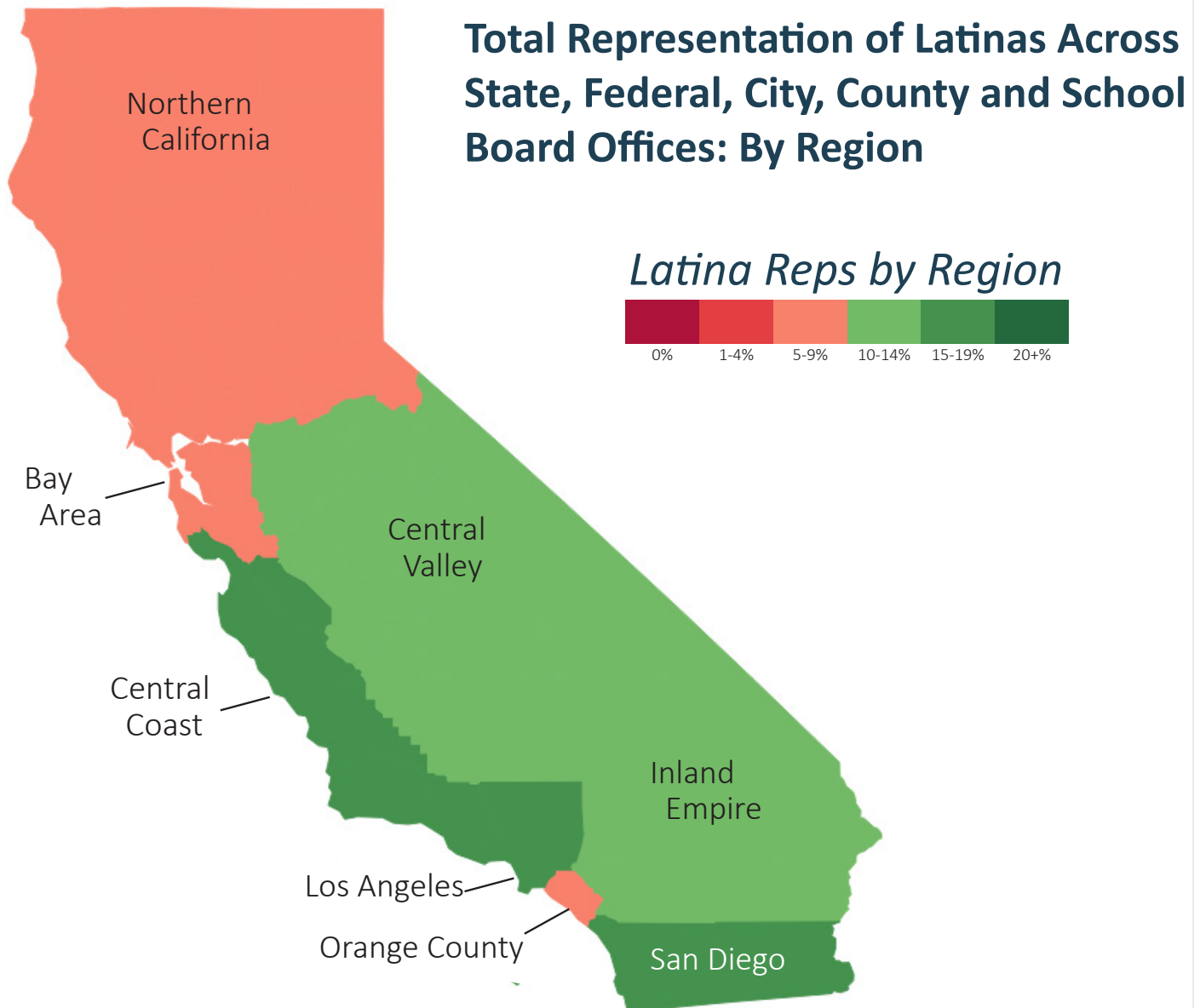
This report researched nearly 5,000 elected offices from local boards all the way to state and federal officeholders.

Latinas constitute roughly 20% of California's population. Looking at state, federal, city, county and school boards, Latinas hold a little more than 11% of all offices. 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.

There is High Potential for Parity

If Latina voices are missing from our government, how can we ensure the needs of our communities are being met?

Much progress has been made, but there is much work to do. To achieve parity, Latinas will need to double their representation on city councils and elect five times the number of county supervisors. In order to have a strong democracy, we must ensure diverse and representative government leadership.



Conclusions

Pathways are Vital

Few state and federal representatives attain those offices without first serving in local government. Of the 23 Latina state legislators currently serving in California, 13 previously served in local government, including 9 who served on city councils and 4 on school boards – one of whom also served on a local water board. Three of the four serving Latina congress members served on a city council prior to federal office.

These are the traditional pathways, and 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 Need Increased Representation

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

Of the 26 Latinas currently serving in California's congressional and legislative delegations:

12 previously served on a city council

4 previously served on a local school board

1 served on a water board

4 were part of the labor movement

Additional members worked as staff members to elected officials at varying levels of government, and some held key appointed positions in their local government. None served on a county board of supervisors.

County Supervisor Offices are Underrepresented

With the exception of water boards, where there is a stunning lack of diversity in general, county boards of supervisors have tremendous need to grow with respect to Latina representation.

Just 12 Latinas sit on the nearly 300 county board seats statewide. With essential roles to play in family wellness, mental health, public safety and other core policy issues, these seats should see increased attention. Notably, none of the Latinas currently serving in state or federal office served in county office, and the lack of a “bench” of county-level representatives is problematic especially in rural areas where there are fewer city offices to serve as a springboard.

Notes & Methodology

This report analyzed nearly 5,000 elected officeholders across California state, federal and local government – including its 52 congressional seats, 2 U.S. senate seats, 12 state constitutional offices, 120 state legislative seats, 296 county supervisor seats, more than 2,500 mayors and city councilmembers, 444 community college board members, as well as nearly 600 members of its largest water boards and 940 school board members from more than 160 school districts. 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.

Analysis and conclusions on voting and representation trends were contributed by GrassrootsLab, who also completed the visualizations and design of the final report.

Voter registration and turnout data was provided by L2 Data. www.L2-data.com.



latinas.org

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