



## **A PROFILE OF LATINO ELECTED OFFICIALS IN THE UNITED STATES AND THEIR PROGRESS SINCE 1996**

The growth in the number of Latino elected officials in the United States is one sign of the political progress of the Latino population. This progress is due partly to the increasing ability of the Latino community to translate its population growth into increased political participation. Initiatives to mobilize Latino voters and encourage their engagement in the political process have contributed greatly to the growth of the Latino electorate. However, the ability of Latino elected officials to gain and retain public office also reflects their success in the effective representation of all voters - both Latino and non-Latino.

### **LATINO ELECTED OFFICIALS IN 2007**

At the beginning of June 2007, there were 5,129 Latinos serving in elected office nationwide.<sup>1</sup> As the following table indicates, while there are Latino elected officials serving at virtually all levels of government, fully two-thirds (68%) are either municipal or school board officials.

#### **Latino Elected Officials by Level of Office: 2007**

<u>Level of Office</u>	<u>Number</u>
Federal	26
Statewide Officials (including Governor)	6
State Legislators	238
County Officials	512
Municipal Officials	1,640
Judicial/Law Enforcement Officials	685
School Board/Education Officials	1,847
Special District Officials	<u>175</u>
Total	<u>5,129</u>

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<sup>1</sup> Generally, the data on Latino elected officials in this *Profile* reflect those who were in office as of June 2007 (for State Senators and Representatives) or as of January 2007 (for all other elected officials).

## STATE DISTRIBUTION

Latino elected officials serve in 43 of the nation's 50 states. Nearly half (42% serve in Texas). Most Latino elected officials (96%) serve in states or regions that are traditional centers of Latino population including California and the Southwest, Florida, New Jersey, New York and Illinois.

### Latino Elected Officials by State: 2007

<u>State</u>	<u>Number</u>
Texas	2,170
California	1,163
New Mexico	657
Arizona	354
Colorado	160
Florida	131
New Jersey	103
Illinois	97
New York	64
Other states	<u>230</u>
Total	<u>5,129</u>

## GENDER

Nearly three-quarters of Latino elected officials are male (69%), and 31% are female.

### Latino Elected Officials by Gender: 2007

<u>Gender</u>	<u>Number</u>
Male	3,555
Female	<u>1,574</u>
Total	<u>5,129</u>

The level of representation of Latinas at higher offices in the United States is greater than the level for all female officeholders. For example, 16.1% of all U.S. Representatives are female; however, 30.4% of the Latinos in the House are women. According to the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University, women hold 21.5% of the nation's State Senate seats and 24.2% of the State lower house seats. In comparison, Latinas comprise 33.3% of the Latino State Senators, and 25.4% of the Latino State lower house members.

## PARTY AFFILIATION

Nearly three-quarters (73%) of Latino elected officials are not publicly affiliated with either major political party or serve in offices that are elected on a non-partisan basis. Only 27% of Latino elected officials serve in partisan offices or are publicly affiliated with either major political party; of these, 91% are Democrat and 9% are Republican.

### Latino Elected Officials by Party Affiliation: 2007

<u>Party Affiliation</u>	<u>Number</u>
Non-partisan/Unaffiliated	3,751
Democrat	1,254
Republican	<u>124</u>
Total	<u>5,129</u>

## A COMPARISON OF LATINO ELECTED OFFICIALS: 1996 AND 2007

The number of Latino elected officials has grown significantly over the past ten years. In 1996, there were 3,743 Latinos serving in elected office. By 2007, that number had grown by nearly 1,386 to 5,129 – a 37% increase.

### Latino Elected Officials by Level of Office: 1996 and 2007

<u>Level of Office</u>	<u>1996</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>Change</u>
Federal	17	26	52.9%
Statewide Officials (including Governor)	6	6	-
State Legislators	156	238	52.5%
County Officials	358	512	43.0%
Municipal Officials	1,295	1,640	26.6%
Judicial/Law Enforcement Officials	546	685	25.5%
School Board/Education Officials	1,240	1,847	49.0%
Special District Officials	125	175	40.0%

The trends with respect to Latinos serving in offices that are elected statewide are of interest. In 1996, there were no Latinos serving in the United States Senate. Five of the six Latino state officials were serving in New Mexico, including three Corporation Commissioners, the Secretary of State and the State Auditor. The other state official was the Texas Attorney General. In 2007, there are now three Latino U.S. Senators: one in Colorado, one in Florida, and one in New Jersey. In New Mexico, Latinos are now also serving as Governor and Secretary of State. Other Latinos now serving in state office include the Superintendents of Public Instruction in Idaho and Oregon. In Texas, one of the statewide Railroad Commissioners is Latino.

The growth of Latinos serving in statewide offices demonstrates the increasing ability of Latinos to win elections in statewide campaigns where they must attract votes from a significant number of non-Latino voters. This is particularly true for the officials serving in states such as Colorado, Florida, Idaho, New Jersey, and Oregon where less than 25% of the state's population is Latino.

## STATE GROWTH

In both 1996 and 2007, Latino elected officials tended to be concentrated in the Southwest – in both years, the top five states with the largest number of Latino elected officials were Texas, California, New Mexico, Arizona and Colorado. However, there was rapid growth in states outside the Southwest, including Illinois, New Jersey, and states which have emerging Latino populations. In 1996, Latino elected officials served in 34 states; by 2007, that number had increased to 43.

### Latino Elected Officials by State: 1996 and 2007

<u>State</u>	<u>1996</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>Change</u>
Texas	1,687	2,170	28.6%
California	693	1,163	67.8%
New Mexico	623	657	5.5%
Arizona	298	354	18.8%
Colorado	161	160	- 0.6%
Florida	72	131	81.9%
New Jersey	33	103	212.1%
Illinois	41	97	136.5%
New York	40	64	60.0%
Other states	95	230	142.1%

The increasing number of Latino elected officials in states outside the traditional areas of Latino population concentration is due both to the growth of the Latino population in those states, and the development of mobilization efforts and political infrastructures that helped Latinos gain office. In 1996, there were no Latino elected officials in Alaska, Georgia, Kentucky, New Hampshire, Missouri, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Carolina or Virginia; by 2007, Georgia had eight, New Hampshire and Virginia had three, Kentucky and Missouri had two, and Alaska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, and South Carolina each had one. Other states with significant gains in Latino elected officials between 1996 and 2007 include Connecticut (from 13 to 27), Maryland (from 2 to 10), Massachusetts (from 8 to 19); Michigan (from 4 to 16); Nevada (from 5 to 10); Oregon (from 1 to 12); Pennsylvania (from 6 to 12); Rhode Island (from 1 to 7); and Wisconsin (from 2 to 11).

## GENDER

Between 1996 and 2007, the number of Latina elected officials grew faster than the number of male Latino officials – the number of Latinas increased by 74%, compared to 25% for male Latinos. As a result, the Latina share of all Latino elected officials grew from 24% in 1996 to 31% in 2007.

### Latino Elected Officials by Gender: 1996 and 2007

	1996		2007	
	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Male	2,836	75.8%	3,555	69.3%
Female	907	24.2%	1,574	30.7%

## CONCLUSION

The comparison of Latino elected officials in 1996 and 2007 reveals some trends that are likely to continue in the future – the overall growth in the number of Latino elected officials nationwide, the increase of Latino elected officials in “emerging population” states, and the continued progress of Latinas in elected office. The comparison also suggests some future challenges for the Latino community and some milestones that have yet to be attained. There are currently only three Latinos in the U.S. Senate, and only one Latino Governor (New Mexico’s Bill Richardson).

In 2008, Latinos will reach a new political milestone with New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson running as the first viable Latino candidate for U.S. President from a major political party. The 2008 election cycle also offers new opportunities for Latino progress, with potential Latino gains in the U.S. House of Representatives and state legislatures.

However, future Latino political progress will not just occur automatically as the Latino population continues to grow. The Latino community must continue the successful empowerment strategies of the past three decades. We must promote U.S. citizenship for the four to five million Latino legal permanent residents who are currently eligible to naturalize. We must mobilize Latino citizens to cast their ballots through effective voter registration and engagement efforts. We must develop the political infrastructure to support future Latino leaders throughout the country. The success of these efforts is critical for our nation as a whole. Latino political progress does not just mean that more Latinos have the opportunity to share their talents and skills by serving in elected office – it also means that our nation’s democracy remains truly representative and vital.

## METHODOLOGY

Compilation and verification of data about Latino elected officials: Since 1984, the NALEO Educational Fund has conducted an annual verification to ascertain the number of Latino elected officials nationwide. As part of this enumeration process, we re-verify Latino elected officials identified during the last annual verification. The NALEO Educational Fund also identifies officeholders through the state and local government directories, World Wide Websites on the Internet, newspapers' listings of national and local election results, and membership lists of national and state organizations. Additionally, we learn of Latino elected officials through our own constituency services and civic engagement programs. We also arrange for the review of our lists of Latino elected officials in certain jurisdictions, by Board members, local civic leaders, representatives of community-based organizations, and other stakeholders.

While the NALEO Educational Fund believes its compilation of information about Latino elected officials is the most comprehensive conducted in the United States, our data are subject to certain limitations. First, to some extent we rely on Spanish surnames to help identify potential Latino elected officials, and we may not initially identify an individual without a Spanish surname as potentially being Latino. However, once we identify individuals as potentially being Latino, we conduct a verification to definitively ascertain that they are Latino, regardless of their surname.

Additionally, because of the large number of local jurisdictions, and the frequency with which they hold elections, it is not possible for the NALEO Educational Fund to review the election results of every local jurisdiction in the nation. As noted above, much of verification process involves re-verifying information about Latinos currently serving in office, and compiling information about any changes in the jurisdictions in which they serve. Thus, our verification process is more effective at identifying Latino elected officials in local jurisdictions where Latinos are currently serving in office than in identifying newly-elected officials in local jurisdictions where no Latinos currently serve. We have partly addressed this limitation by compiling information from the lists maintained by the Latino or Hispanic caucuses of local election official professional associations, such as the Hispanic Elected Local Officials of the National League of Cities, or the Hispanic Caucus of the National School Board Association.

Comparability of data between 1996 and 2007: There are certain changes in electoral procedures, the classification of elected officials, and our verification process which affects the comparability of data on Latino elected officials between 1996 and 2007. First, we continue to make improvements in our verification process which enable us to enhance our identification of Latino elected officials. In particular, the review of our lists of Latino elected officials by stakeholders in certain jurisdictions has greatly improved our identification of Latino officeholders in those areas. The greater availability of jurisdiction websites with information about elected officials has also assisted us in better identification of Latino officeholders. Thus, the increase in the number of Latino elected officials in some jurisdictions between 1996 and 2007 may not only reflect the political progress of Latinos in those areas, but also our enhanced verification capabilities.

In 1996, the Corporation Commissioners of New Mexico were elected on a statewide basis at large and are included in our 1996 data as "statewide officials." In 2006, the responsibilities held by Corporation Commissioners are now held by New Mexico's Public Regulation Commissioners, and the Public Regulation Commissioners are elected in individual districts. Thus, in 2006, Public Regulation Commissioners are now classified as "special district officials."

In 1996, the NALEO Educational Fund classified Texas county judges as "judicial/law enforcement officials." Starting in 2000, the NALEO Educational Fund began to classify those judges as "county officials" based on the nature of their county administrative and executive responsibilities.

In 2004, New York City replaced its community school boards with 32 community education councils, each governing a community school district. Members of the public elected representatives to the community school boards, and in 1996, those representatives were included as Latino elected officials. Members of the new community education councils are selected by either officers of the community school district's parent and parent-teacher associations; the borough president; or the community superintendent. Thus, we no longer classify community education councilmembers as elected officials. In 1996, we included 37 Latino New York City community school board members. As a result of the replacement of the school boards with educational councils, the comparison of 1996 and 2007 Latino elected officials in New York may somewhat understate the full extent of the increase in Latino elected officials between those years.

Additionally, for the purposes of this fact sheet, the NALEO Educational Fund has not included the number of Latino Chicago local school councilmembers (LSC's) in its data on Latino elected officials. The number of LSC's fluctuates widely from year to year, and the inclusion in the statistics in this fact sheet could distort the comparability of data between different states and between different time periods.