

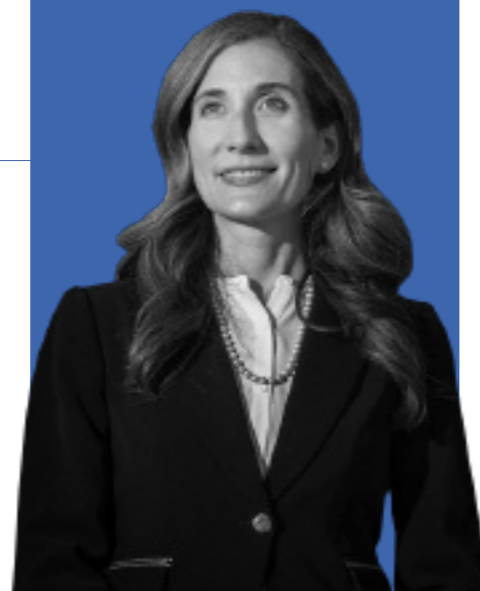


Lisa J. Pino

Lisa J. Pino is an American Latina attorney in the United States, and the Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Civil Rights at the U.S. Department of Agriculture where she served as a Presidential Appointee for President Barack Obama's Administration.

Pino began her service at USDA in 2009 upon her appointment as the first Latina Deputy Administrator of the USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). She is an award recipient for her public service including the 2013 U.S.-Spain Young Leader Award and 2013 Horquilla Award by Arizona State University's Los Diablos Association. In 2010, the Hispanic Scholarship Fund selected her as their 2010 Brillante Alumni Hall of Fame Award.

Most recently, she was the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Civil Rights at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in Washington, D.C. where she served as a member of President Barack Obama's Administration.



U.S. LATINAS AND POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

Lisa J. Pino

In order to examine the political leadership of American Latinas in the United States, one must first examine American women in politics. Leaders as they say are born not made, and have certain undeniable qualities that distinguish them from the pack. Nevertheless, the ability for women to augment their voice in the American political landscape and thus, also influence the world, continues to be an area of growth and need as the state of American women becomes more vulnerable due to economic instability. For Latina politicians, there is an urgent need for more Hispanic women in U.S. elected office as issues such as comprehensive immigration reform, health care, and education remain top priorities for U.S. Latinas.

Political American women of power have come a long way. While Americans wait to hear whether Hillary Clinton will announce her candidacy for the 2016 U.S. Presidential election, or whether Wendy Davis will become the next Governor of Texas, a recent report¹ unveiled startling news about the state of women in America today.

The Shriver Report, a nonprofit media initiative founded by Maria Shriver to modernize America's relationship to women, recently

released a financial status report on women in the United States. The report found that a third of American women are living in poverty, and that two thirds of minimum wage earners in the U.S. are women. Overall, the report cites that 100 million Americans, virtually a third of Americans, are either living in poverty or on the brink of poverty. 70% of these vulnerable individuals are women and their children. Altogether, in regard to the current state of American women and their political leadership, the need for current and future elected officials to address those issues of greatest concern to women will increase. From wage inequality to reproductive rights to education, political leadership in America will hinge on the policies politicians adopt in answer to their female voters, whether the elected official is female or not.

One critical mechanism needed for women, including American Latinas, to obtain more political power and gain gender equity is wage equity. As the Shriver Report indicates, the average American woman earns 77 cents for every dollar that a man earns. The average African American woman earns 64 cents for every dollar and Latinas earn only 55 cents for every dollar that a man earns. When



these wage disparities continue, the road for more Latinas to participate in politics becomes more complex due to the impact that finances might have on one's ability to fundraise, leave current employment in order to campaign, or pursue prospective donors.

Nevertheless, when identifying what characteristics the most powerful female American politicians have in common, certain themes emerge, whether Democrat or Republican. These bonds include the importance of family, education, and health care even if the candidates disagree as to what role government should be in these policy arenas. For instance, First Lady Michelle Obama announced the Let's Move! initiative in 2010 with the goal of ending childhood obesity within this generation of children. Minority Leader of the U.S. House of Representatives, Democrat Nancy Pelosi and the first woman Speaker of the House in history, is a champion of equal wages for women while she is also a grandmother, mother, and loves dark chocolate. On the Republican side, although Sarah Palin and Michele Bachmann are less visible today than during their respective runs for U.S. President and Vice President, they too are visible mothers, wives, and grandmothers in the public eye.

2012 was a record year for American women in the U.S. Congress. Women hold 99 of the 535 seats in the U.S. Congress according to the Center for American Women and Politics, constituting 20% of seats in the U.S. House of Representatives and 18.2% of the seats in the House of Representatives. Most of these women hail from California and New York, the most populated states. Aside from the gap of women representing enough women voters in the U.S., only 30% of the 98 women in the U.S. Congress are women of color, and altogether only nine U.S. Congresswomen are Latina.

While the U.S. Congress statistics for women fare are improving, the number of women elected as Governors still lags. The 2014 election later this fall includes five states that will see Democratic women run for office and four

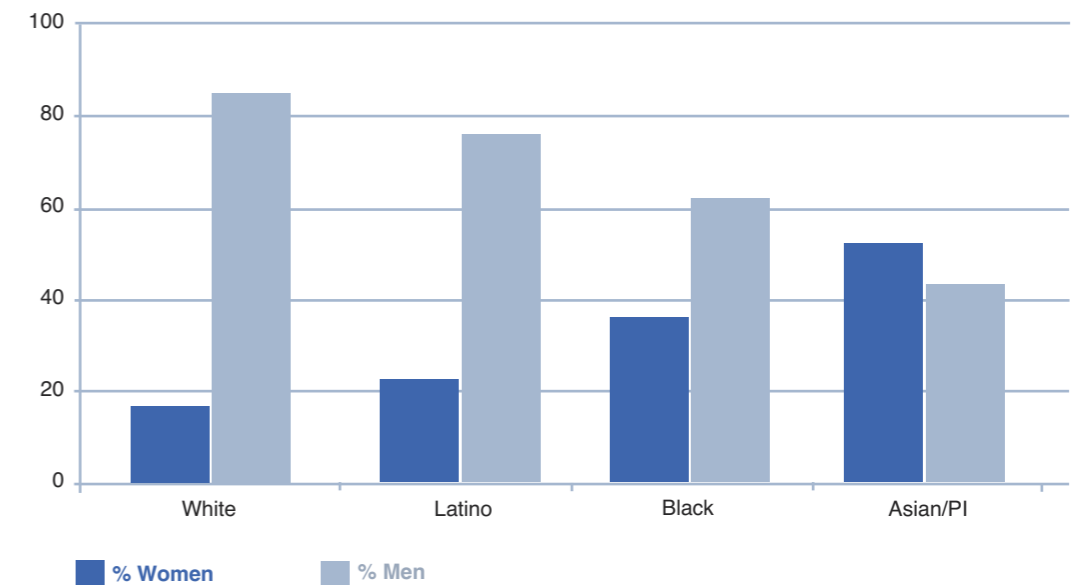
First Lady Michelle Obama announced the Let's Move! initiative in 2010 with the goal of ending childhood obesity within this generation of children

women incumbents who will run for another gubernatorial term. Emily Schultheis describes in *Politico* magazine that Debbie Walsh, Director of the Center for American Women in Politics, states the potential for more women to become involved in politics.

In Washington, D.C., women play a significant role and are influencing American politics in President Obama's Administration. Since President Obama took office in 2009, he has appointed women in high-level executive branch posts, as Supreme Court Justices, and in key positions in both the White House and at federal agency posts to serve his Administration. Cabinet members of the Administration include Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius, Former Secretary of U.S. Labor Hilda Solis, and Former Secretary of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano. Recent Cabinet appointments include U.S. Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewel, U.S. Secretary of Commerce Penny Pritzker, and United States Mission to the United Nations Ambassador Samantha Power. In the White House, the President relies upon key advisors such as Senior Advisor Valerie Jarrett, and Domestic Policy Council Director and Latina leader Cecilia Muñoz.

In 2009, President Obama shaped history by selecting the first Hispanic woman to the bench of the U.S. Supreme Court, Justice Sonia Sotomayor. Sotomayor is a fierce role model for women and Hispanics alike, and the

113th Congress by Race/Ethnicity and Gender



Source: Latino Decisions Website.

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“Wise Latina” has a loyal following. Although as Justice she cannot play any role in politics to preserve her duty to remain impartial as a Justice, she still influences the world of Washington as an esteemed member of the Supreme Court.

While the appointment of Justice Sotomayor continues to have a positive influence in the presence of Latinas who have national influence, there are still far too few Latinas in the U.S. Congress and in elected office. When

Latinos comprise one of the fastest growing demographics in the nation, and as the U.S. transitions into a non-white majority, the gap of women of color in office, including Latinas, remains high.

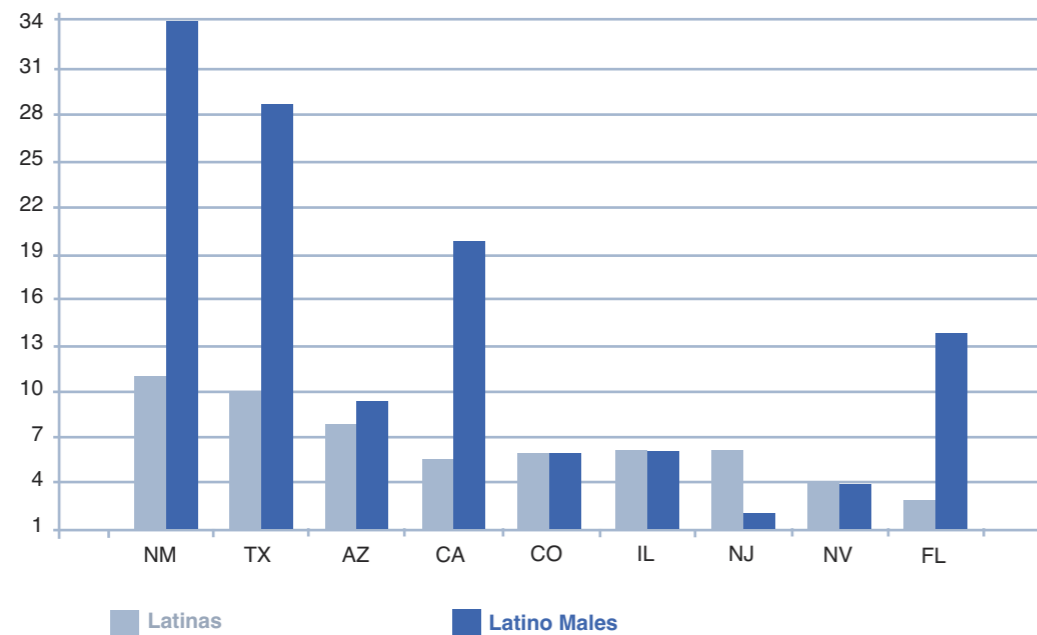
In September 2013, NBC Latino writer Maria Camila Bernal profiled a new book that highlights how more Latinas are entering U.S. politics. Dr. Christina Bejarano, author of *The Latina Advantage: Gender, Race, and Political Success* (2013)² cites the growing number of Latinas running for elected office, which is promising. As stated, of the 535 members of the U.S. Congress, there are 98 women. 9 women are Latina, 14 women are African American and 7 women are Asian American or Pacific Islander.

Bernal also describes how author Bejarano shares more information on Latina participation in state politics at the state legislature. 81 Latinas comprise the 1,788 women in U.S. state legislatures. Of the 24%

² Bejarano, C. *The Latina Advantage: Gender, Race, and Political Success*. University of Texas Press, 2013..



2013 Latino State Legislators by State

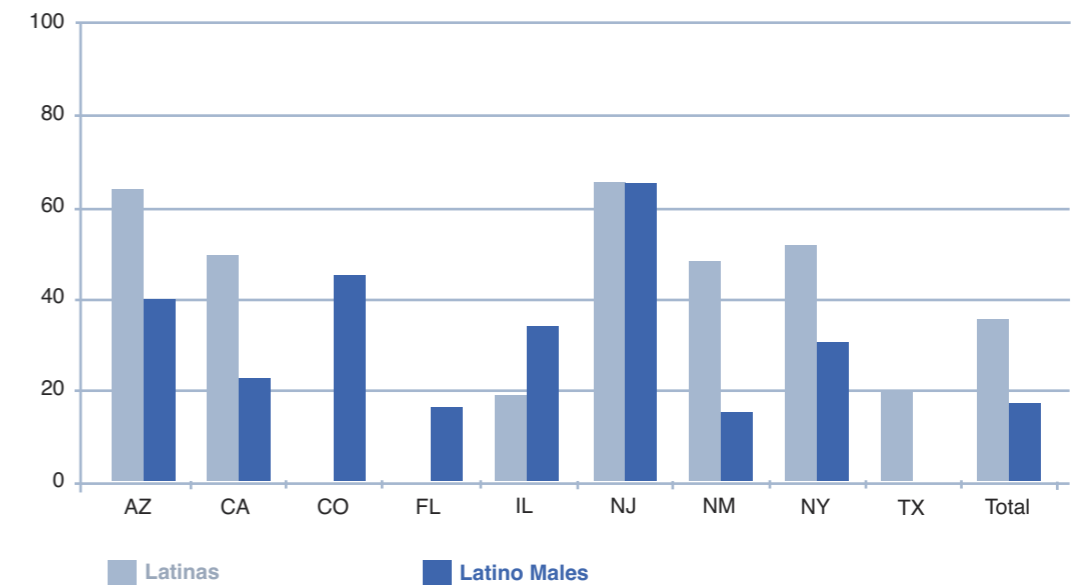


Source: Latino Decisions Website.

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The promising trends that Bejarano reveal in her book posit that Latina candidates and officials attract a greater diversity of voters, which includes support from non-Latinas. The influence of these Latina candidates is critical at a time when U.S. Latinos are facing hurdles in economic wealth, educational college completion rates, and economic security. Similarly, Latina candidates tend to be more qualified in preparation for their careers, and Latinas can gain from both attracting women and minority voters.

2009 Latino State House Members From Non-Majority Latino Districts



Source: Latino Decisions Website.

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Bejarano describes the history of Latinas in U.S. Congress began when the first Latina member, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, a Cuban American from Florida, was elected in 1989. Although the growth of additional Latina voters seems slow, the gains made in Congress increased by 500% and the number of Latinas in the state legislature level grew by 280%. The pace of Latina representation on the local level is slow but improving.

The growth of Latina members in Congress from the last election is inspiring. In

2011, of the 28 Latino members of the U.S. Congress only seven were Latinas (from California, Florida, New York and Washington). Today, Latinas comprise 9 elected seats in the U.S. Congress and the Governor of New Mexico Susana Martinez became the first Latina elected as governor in the U.S. and the state's first woman governor.

As Bejarano states in *The Latina Advantage*:

"[The ability for Latinas to run for office] includes questions about the state-level factors that can influence Latina political office-holding across the country, with an analysis of the 2005 and 2009 state legislatures. The presence of Latina legislators is larger for the states that have a higher minority population and more Hispanic owned businesses. Overall, the results point to a different set of state-level factors to explain Latina political variation, which does not fit the traditional models used to explain the variation of women in general or minority women in particular. For instance, Latina legislators are



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generally more likely than their male counterparts to represent districts with less than 50 percent Latino populations. This finding highlights the ability of Latinas to attract more diverse voter coalitions. In addition, Latina legislators are not significantly disadvantaged in terms of the amount of campaign contributions they collect compared to their male counterparts.”³

For Latinas who are interested in obtaining the skills and training of running for office, there are several leadership training programs for women in the United States, both bipartisan and partisan, that offer leadership and networking opportunities to encourage women to run for office. The only national program that offers a program specifically for Latinas operates in California and is known as the Hispanas Organized for Political Equity or HOPE.

A successful recruiting program for Latinas interested in the political process, HOPE serves the support and education to encourage Latinas to run for office. The leadership program runs over the course of nine months and involves components ranging from academic seminars, group presentations, field trips, advocacy days, as well as health, education, and economic empowerment offerings. Programs such as HOPE provide the tools needed for Latinas who will benefit from the opportunity to learn about becoming a political candidate, and offers a network of support from other women. The confidence and network of these support groups can play a critical means for Latinas to seriously consider running for

office when fundraising, seeking volunteers, and strategizing political campaigns requires significant work and resources. With a graduate network exceeding 400 alumni, HOPE and similar leadership programs offer the opportunity to Latinas to engage in the political process.

If the participation of Latinas in the political candidacy process increases, then the American electorate will continue to shift toward the Latino vote. Latinas who are effective candidates will also engage non-Latino voters, and non-Latino votes are often needed to win support in increasingly competitive districts. Thus, the participation of Latinas in the political process not only influences the Latino electorate, but influences the American vote. If role model Latinas are in the public eye and serve as an option for voters, reflecting the values, issues, and priorities of Latino voters, then perhaps Latina elected officials will inspire other Latinos to further engage in the political process by voting.

The Pew Hispanic Research Center in November 2012 issued an analysis that found Latinos comprise 10% of the electorate. This is an increase from 9% in 2008 and 8% in 2004.⁴ The report also found that the Latino vote is playing an increasingly important role in battleground states such as Florida, Colorado, and in the 2016 U.S. Presidential election, Texas. Interestingly, the issues most important to Latino voters reflect the issues that are of most concern to general voters: the economy, health care, the federal budget deficit, and foreign policy.⁵ The Pew report also found that although immigration remains of top concern to Latino voters, less than two thirds of Latino voters agreed that immigrants should have the opportunity to apply for lawful status whereas 28% stated that those immigrants should instead be deported. Lastly, the 2012 Presidential election demonstrated that 71% of Latinos voted for President Obama and 27% voted for Republican candidate Mitt Romney.

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By 2050, Latinos are expected to comprise 25% of the U.S. population, an increase from the current 16% of the U.S. population. As the Latino population will continue to grow, the Latino community's engagement in the political process is increasingly important. Latinas represent half of the U.S. Latino population and influence how the Latino community will grow in coming years during a critical time for the Latino vote.

The issues that remain important to Latina voters will remain important to Latina candidates and elected officials. These issues are education, health care, and safety for children and families, and equal rights and equal pay for women. Nevertheless, Latino engagement in the political process will grow from the influence of advocacy in public policy, an increasing role in education, immigration, economic equity, and civil rights. Latinas more than ever are getting involved at both the local and national level to remove barriers to access, and strengthen

opportunities for equal pay, rights, and access.

For more Latinas to succeed in political office, these candidates will need to appeal to both Latinos and non-Latinos voters. Although Latinos comprise 15% of the U.S. population, Latino voter participation is low compared to Latino voter eligibility. During the 2012 U.S. Presidential election, over 70% of Latino voters voted for President Barack Obama. The turnout of the Hispanic vote will be closely watched in the 2016 U.S. Presidential election, as both Democrats and Republicans understand their need to appeal to an increasingly diverse voter profile as America shifts toward a non-white majority.

One key trend that will continue to influence the American voting block is how each month 50,000 Latino youth turn 18 and almost all are thus eligible to vote. U.S. Latinos, whose average age of 26 is significantly younger than the general population in America, are joining the eligible voter pool at high rates. As their number increases, the U.S. Latino vote will grow in power and influence.

A well regarded U.S. non-profit organization whose mission is to expand the number of Latino voters in the U.S. is the Washington, D.C. based organization Voto Latino. President and CEO Maria Teresa Peterson has led this successful organization that has already registered more than 200,000 Latino youths. As the Latino youth population grows, their influence as they reach voting age will shift the U.S. vote and ability for more Latinas to run for elected office.

According to the Pew Hispanic Research Center, Latinos could grow their vote by a significant rate if they registered and voted at the rate of their eligibility and potential. Voto Latino has been influential and successful by engaging youth in the political process and leveraging technology to engage teens through different vehicles such as social media. This motivation of youth, which in turn can influence the family and friends, encourages Hispanic civic engagement in the political process.

³ Bejarano, C. Latino Decisions. Web. Last Access: 2013/13/09.

⁴ Latino Voters in the 2012 Election”. Pew Research Hispanic Trends Model. Website. Last access: 2012/11/07

⁵ Ibid.



According to Tommi Pryor in “Reaching the Hispanic Vote- A Major Political Force”, Associated Press writer Laura Wides-Munoz and the Pew Hispanic Research Center’s study determine that online engagement is the most effective means for engaging Latino youths in the political process.⁶ Pew’s report determined that the 56% of U.S. Hispanics who are online might be low compared to the 71% of non-Hispanic whites and 60% of non-Hispanic blacks who are online, yet the number of online Latinos is still significantly increasing. Pryor shares that Voto Latino’s strategies for effective civic engagement include social media and mobile texting to reach young Latinos online. Pryor quotes Lee Vann, CEO of Captura Group, stating that “U.S. Latinos comprise the fastest-growing segment of online users and outpace the overall U.S. market by 15 times”.⁷

Given the rising trends of the growing power of the young Latino voter and the need for more women and Latinas as elected officials, Republicans and Democrats will continue to lure women and Hispanic voters in the upcoming elections. After the 2012 U.S. Presidential election, both parties were aware of the importance of building the votes of youth and women, and the rising influence of the Latino vote.

While the U.S. Latino vote still evolves, the Latino vote lags behind although the Latino turnout for the 2010 election represented 6.9% of all voters, an increase from the 5.8% of 2006 voters according to the Pew Hispanic Center.⁸ Thus, while the ability of Latinos to influence the vote has critical potential, Latino voter turnout rate is not as high as its voter eligibility rate.

Writer Michael Muskal emphasizes the growth of the Latino voter as Latinos eligible to vote “grew significantly from 13.2 million in

2000 to 21.3 million in 2010”.⁹ Latinos comprise 16% of the U.S. population as the 2010 census reported 50.5 millions Latinos in the country although Latinos constitute only 10% of eligible American voters. Muskal distinguishes how 42.7% of the nation's Latino population is eligible to vote, but 77.7% of whites, 67.2% of blacks are eligible, and 52.8% of Asians are eligible to vote according to the Pew Hispanic Research Center.¹⁰ Additionally, voting rates vary according to country of origin as Pew cites that 49.3% of Cuban origin voted in 2010, compared with 29.6% of those of Puerto Rican origin and 28.7% of Mexican origin.¹¹

In 2008, a new U.S. Political Action Committee formed to inspire and support Latinas to run for office know as PODER PAC. The Founders, Catherine Pino and Ingrid Duran, founded the PAC to support Latina candidates for office and connect them to a national network of Latina leaders. Although young, the PODER PAC has been successful in motivating Latinas to be active in political campaigning. More recently, a new initiative known as #LatinasRepresent by the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda and Political Parity is launching in 2014 to encourage more Latinas to run for office.

Latinas remain underrepresented in the U.S. Congress as no Latina has ever served in the U.S. Senate, only one Latina has ever served as Governor of a State, only 1% of Latina state senators and legislators are Latina, and of 320 statewide executive offices, only 5 are Latina. Moreover, of the 435 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives, 78 seats belong to women, but just 9 seats belong to Latinas.¹²

The Latinas who are most known leaders are Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, the Governor of New Mexico

The ability for a Latina to be able to succeed financially despite the costs of running a campaign and then serving in office on these lower salaries is difficult as Latinas already earn significantly less than average to the dollar

Susana Martinez, and the 9 members of the U.S. House of Representatives. As Sara Inés Calderón wrote in her 2012 article, “Why Are There Not More Latinas in Congress”, Latina elected officials shared that success requires planning ahead and sacrificing coordination across economics, organization, and culture.¹³

Indisputably, economics is a key factor as the salary of the elected official in office such as state legislature is low. Additionally, serving in state legislatures like Texas and Arizona are part-time employment.¹⁴ The ability for a Latina to be able to succeed financially despite the costs of running a campaign and then serving in office on these lower salaries is difficult as Latinas already earn significantly less than average to the dollar.

Calderon cites a second barrier of organization as a barrier to more Latinas being in office. A successful candidate must have the fundraising and organizing skills to run a campaign and remain in office.¹⁵

The third barrier for more Latinas to be in political office involves Latino culture¹⁶. As Latinas we are not often encouraged to be assertive, but that confidence is critical when running for office and campaigning. Calderón quotes a moving story from Leticia Van De Putte who was raising her children when running for office in Texas, but received criticism from other Latinas who questioned her about her motherhood while running a campaign. The sacrifices that women make for work and while balancing the needs and pressures of family has become a normal part of everyday life for women in the 21st century. Hopefully Latinas will continue to make strides, and organizations and efforts that encourage them to persevere will also flourish.

As a Latina who was fortunate enough to have had the privilege and honor of serving in President Barack Obama’s Administration at the U.S. Department of Agriculture for 4.5 years, I am proud that I represented Latinas in my role while also encouraging other young women to become involved and reach for their dreams. As the first Latina Deputy Administrator of the USDA SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), I had the opportunity to add value to my role in numerous ways as a Latina who had completed community work for over a decade. I also had the chance to speak to Latinas all over the nation, whether in high school or college, or mothers, grandmothers, entrepreneurs, politicians, activists, and more.

Latinas represent a powerful force in the U.S., and Latinas have just begun. The Nielson Report describes Latinas as a \$1.2 trillion market, and by 2060, a third of women in the U.S. will be Latina. For shifting education, career, and income levels, the power and influence of Latinas is surely on the rise. If Latinas can leverage this growth into a social movement as many already are, then the representation of Latinas in elected office has a future that certainly looks bright.

¹³ Calderón, S. I. “Why Are There Not More Latinas in Congress?” Mamiverse. Website. 06/10/2012. Last access: 2012/11/27.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

⁶ Prior, T. “Reaching The Hispanic Vote - A Major Political Force”. Winning Campaigns. Website. Last access: 2012/11/07

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ “The Latino Electorate: A Widening Gap between Voters and the Larger Hispanic Population in the U.S.” Pew Research Center. Website. Last access: 2012/11/07

⁹ Muskal, M. “Pew analysis: Latino voters are many - but not as many as they could be.” Los Angeles Times. Website. 2011/04/26. Last access: 2012/11/07.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² See the visual banner from the new #LatinasRepresent campaign with sources from the Center for American Progress and U.S. Census Bureau.