LATINA NEW AMERICANS IN STATE POLITICS

Representation, Progress, and Barriers

NEW AMERICAN LEADERS

LATINAS REPRESENT

Who Are Latina New Americans?

Latina New Americans are **changing the face of American politics**. These women are running, and winning, in elections across the country, yet data on their representation has often been limited or overlooked. Many also face significant structural and cultural barriers, and some have run strong campaigns without securing a seat. Each candidacy, whether victorious or not, builds visibility, shifts narratives, and paves the way for future leaders. The following fact sheet provides concrete numbers and comparisons that advocates, policymakers, and community members can use to identify gaps, target resources, and build stronger pipelines for Latina New American leadership.

Latina New Americans are women who identify as **Latina** and are **either first-generation immigrants** (born outside of the United States) or **second-generation immigrants** (born in the U.S. to at least one immigrant parent). Latina New Americans bring unique perspectives shaped by migration stories, often times bilingualism, and deep community ties, which are perspectives that strengthen policymaking and better reflect the lived realities of the communities they serve.

People Like Us: Running as New American Leaders
Moderator: Ghida Dagher

Rep. Elizabeth Velasco
Councilmember Giselle Martinez
School Board Member Cristina Diaz-Torres

Washington, D.C.

GET READY TO RUN, WIN & LEAD

Rep. Elizabeth Velasco

LATINA NEW AMERICANS ARE CHANGING THE FACE OF AMERICAN POLITICS

New American Leaders (NAL) tracks first- and second-generation Americans across the political spectrum, measuring representation and progress in elected office.

Latinas Represent works to increase the number and diversity of Latinas in public leadership, tracking Latina candidates and officeholders nationwide.

Together, these organizations collect, analyze, and share data to inform efforts aimed at making American democracy more inclusive and representative.

LET'S DIVE IN!

How Latina New Americans Compare to Non-New American Latinas

When looking at all Latina candidates for state legislatures in 2024, **235 Latinas** ran in general elections. Of these, 99 were non-New American Latinas (women who identify as Latina but do not identify as first- or second-generation immigrants) and 136 were Latina New Americans. Non-New American Latinas had a primary win rate of **90.91%** and a general election win rate of **76.40%**. Latina New Americans, by comparison, had lower win rates—**81.62%** in primaries and **72.07%** in general elections. The full Latina category, which includes both groups, had an **86.38%** primary win rate and **75.74%** general win rate.

These **differences point to the additional barriers that Latina New Americans face in running for and winning office**, barriers that often include smaller donor networks, fewer connections to established political infrastructure, and the challenge of campaigning in communities where language access and cultural representation are still lacking.

2024 General Election Number of Candidates by New American Status

NEW AMERICAN LATINAS — 136

NON-NEW AMERICAN LATINAS — 99

General Election Win Rate by New American Status

NEW AMERICAN LATINAS — 72.07%
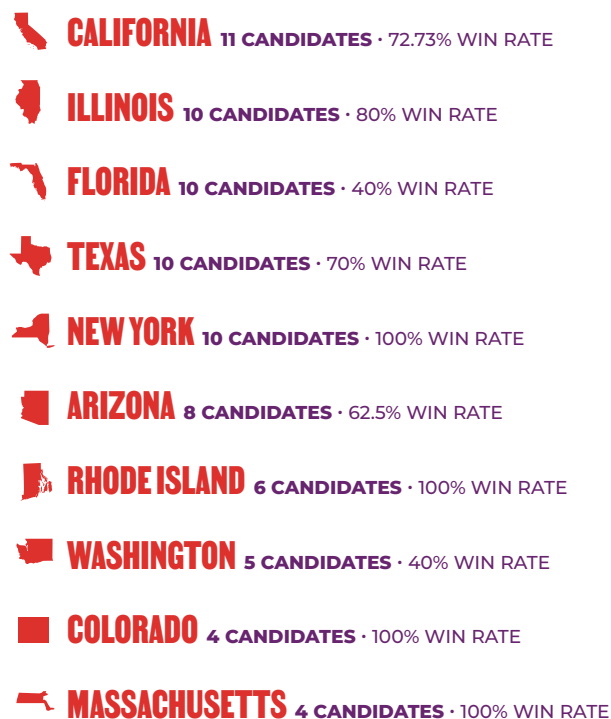
NON-NEW AMERICAN LATINAS — 76.4%

Breaking Ground in State Legislatures

Across the United States, Latina New Americans are stepping into state legislative races in unprecedented numbers. In 2024 alone, **136 Latina New American candidates** appeared on the general election ballot, and had one of the largest showings of immigrant women in state legislative races to date. Their candidacies brought new energy to political landscapes in states as varied as Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Kentucky, and Vermont, reflecting the breadth of communities they aim to serve.

Latina New Americans' presence is reshaping the political map. In states like **New York** and **Rhode Island**, Latina New Americans achieved a perfect general election win rate, while in states such as **Florida** and **Washington**, their victories came against steeper odds.

As Latina New Americans broaden their footprint across states, the next section contextualizes that momentum by comparing electoral outcomes among New American women by race and ethnicity, clarifying strengths, gaps, and where Latina New Americans fall relative to their peers.

States With the Most New American Candidates in the 2024 General Election

CALIFORNIA 11 CANDIDATES · 72.73% WIN RATE

ILLINOIS 10 CANDIDATES · 80% WIN RATE

FLORIDA 10 CANDIDATES · 40% WIN RATE

TEXAS 10 CANDIDATES · 70% WIN RATE

NEW YORK 10 CANDIDATES · 100% WIN RATE

ARIZONA 8 CANDIDATES · 62.5% WIN RATE

RHODE ISLAND 6 CANDIDATES · 100% WIN RATE

WASHINGTON 5 CANDIDATES · 40% WIN RATE

COLORADO 4 CANDIDATES · 100% WIN RATE

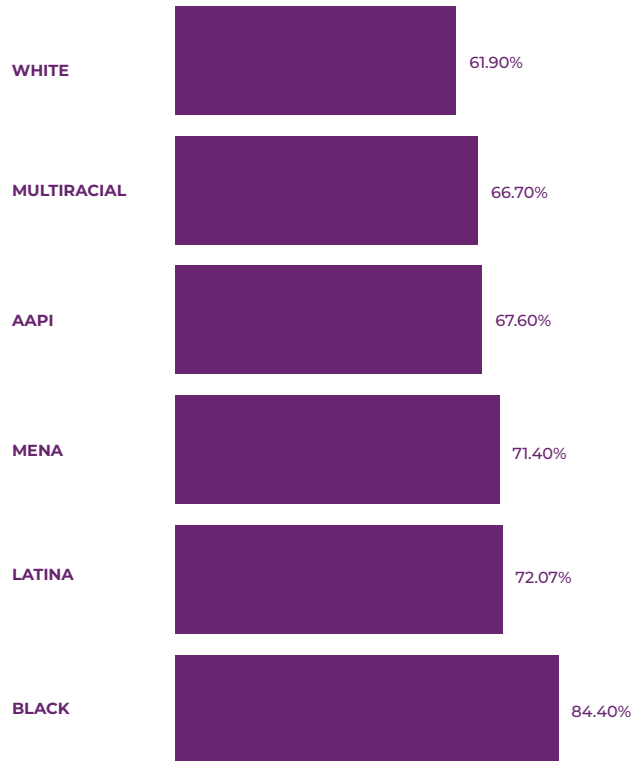**MASSACHUSETTS** 4 CANDIDATES · 100% WIN RATE

Racial and Ethnic Comparisons Among New American Women

Latina New Americans' general election win rate (72.07%) placed them second among all tracked racial and ethnic groups of New American women, behind only Black New American women candidates, who had an 84.4% general win rate. Other groups included AAPI women (67.6%), MENA women (71.4%), multiracial women (66.7%), and White women (61.9%).

The comparative data show that when Latina New Americans run, they are **highly competitive** at the ballot box, underscoring the importance of investing in and supporting Latina New American leaders within local communities to ensure more of these candidates step forward and win.

Racial and Ethnic Win Rate in the 2024 General Election

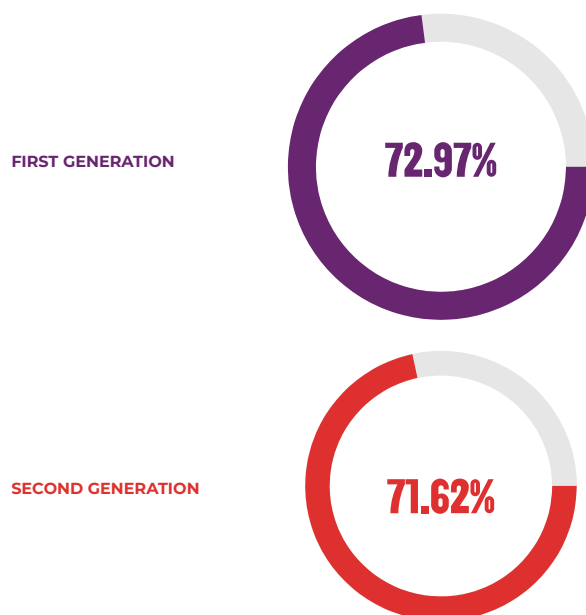| Group	Win Rate
WHITE	61.90%
MULTIRACIAL	66.70%
AAPI	67.60%
MENA	71.40%
LATINA	72.07%
BLACK	84.40%

Diverse Origins and Generations

Latina New Americans trace their heritage to dozens of countries. **The largest share of candidates in 2024 had roots in Mexico** (63 candidates, 69.84% win rate), followed by Cuba (12 candidates, 41.67%), Colombia (7 candidates, 85.71%), and the Dominican Republic (7 candidates, 100%). Generationally, both first-generation and second-generation Latina New Americans found paths to victory, though **first-generation candidates saw slightly higher general election win rates** (72.97%) compared to second-generation candidates (71.62%).

Historically, NAL has found that second-generation New Americans tend to outperform first-generation candidates, as first-generation candidates often face additional barriers when running for office. However, this trend does not hold for Latina New Americans, suggesting unique strengths and resilience within this group that may offset the challenges typically experienced by first-generation candidates.

2024 General Election Win Rate by Immigrant Generation

FIRST GENERATION 72.97%

SECOND GENERATION 71.62%

Parties, Power and Incumbency

Latina New Americans run in both major political parties, though nearly **four out of five candidates in 2024 ran as Democrats**. Incumbency remained one of the strongest predictors of success: primary win rates for incumbents were nearly 99%, compared to 62% for non-incumbents

This incumbency advantage highlights the challenge of breaking into office for first-time candidates, especially those without the backing of established political networks.

FOUR OUT OF FIVE LATINA NEW AMERICAN CANDIDATES IN 2024 RAN AS DEMOCRATS

Barriers on the Ballot

From fundraising gaps to underrepresentation in political networks, **Latina New Americans often face systemic obstacles that impact their campaigns**. Lower general election win rates reflect:

- Fundraising gaps and access to capital. Many Latina New American candidates rely on grassroots fundraising, second jobs, or personal sacrifices to stay afloat, while lacking access to major donor networks.
- Limited institutional support. Candidates often receive little backing from Latino or broader political organizations, leaving them isolated in competitive races.
- Bias and questions of legitimacy. Latina New Americans often face skepticism about their citizenship, qualifications, or even their motives for running, particularly when they challenge established power structures.
- Identity-based challenges. Former candidates described how being perceived as "too Latina" in some contexts or "not Latina enough" in others created barriers to connecting with multiple communities.

These barriers shape the lived experiences of Latina New American candidates. The following page lifts up their voices, highlighting how they navigated these challenges and what lessons they carry forward for future leaders.

Latina New American Candidate Perspectives

Latina New American candidates who ran for office but were not successful shared what inspired them to run, the barriers they faced, and the lessons they carry forward. Their voices reveal the challenges and the resilience that shape the path to leadership.

Adalina Capuli Merello
GA, State House District 56 Candidate, 2024

Adalina Merello ran for the Georgia House of Representatives in 2024 after her representative switched parties, a decision she felt betrayed constituents. She quickly built momentum, raising $20,000 in just ten weeks and knocking on over 3,000 doors. Though her campaign ultimately fell short, she reflects candidly on the identity-based challenges she faced. "Although my message was egalitarian, I think on a superficial level being a light-skinned Latina hurt my campaign," she noted. Despite her dedication, she received little backing from Latino endorsement groups. "There was no support from Latino endorsement groups for my campaign. It hurt." Looking back, she emphasized that access to financial resources remains one of the greatest hurdles for Latina New American candidates, limiting their ability to sustain competitive campaigns.

Patricia Campos-Medina, Ph.D.
NJ, US Senate Candidate, 2024

Patricia Campos-Medina, Ph.D. ran for the U.S. Senate in New Jersey in 2024 because she believed it was vital for young Latinas to see leaders who looked like them. "We cannot be what we cannot see," she said. "I was inspired to run for the US Senate because Latinos contribute billions of dollars to the NJ economy, we are 21% of the population, and yet we only have 5% political representation." With this underrepresentation in mind, Campos-Medina built a diverse grassroots coalition and shared her story as the daughter of immigrant low-wage workers, which resonated with voters and helped her place second in the race. Yet she also highlighted the steep fundraising challenges faced by first-time Latina candidates: "We also need to raise the consciousness of Latino entrepreneurs and business leaders to invest in Latino candidates and help us build a network of support for building a Latino political class that will advance influence for our Latino community." For Campos-Medina, the message is clear: "We must not wait to be asked to run; we must step up and say, I am ready to lead."

Suzette Espinosa-Cruz
WA, Renton School Board Candidate, 2019

Suzette Espinosa-Cruz decided to run for the Renton school board in 2019 after years of fighting for her son's special education needs and helping other immigrant mothers who faced the same barriers. "I was inspired to run because of them because they asked me to step up in leadership," she explained, noting that she wanted to ensure families had a voice in a system that often excluded them. Although she did not win her race, Espinosa-Cruz's campaign emphasized authenticity and inclusion: she spoke in English and Spanish, greeted voters in Somali and Arabic, and held meet-and-greets at immigrant-owned businesses. Fundraising was one of the most challenging tasks. "I needed to be creative and lean on my friends, family, and community to sell tamales. I had to work a second job to be able to supplement my donations." Despite these obstacles, she points to youth engagement as her proudest accomplishment, saying, "I am most proud of getting youth involved in the process."

Raquel Terán
AZ, US House District 3 Candidate, 2024

Raquel Terán ran for Congress in 2024, inspired by the realities of the immigration system and motivated by her role as a mother. "I was inspired to run because of our broken immigration system, the same system that separates hardworking families, increases enforcement, and creates fear in our communities," she explained. Although she lost her Democratic primary by just 39 votes, Terán is proud she never compromised her values: "They tried to stop me from getting to Congress, but I am proud that as a Latina, I never compromised. I put people first, always." Her identity shaped every part of her campaign, "Our campaign was full of cultura—our food, our music, our stories. I wanted people to see me and know: you don't have to compromise who you are to lead. Sticking to your values also means sticking to your identity." She also faced unique challenges, including having her citizenship questioned twice and being dismissed as "just an activist," but leaned on family and community support to carry her forward. As she advises other Latina New Americans: "Don't wait for permission. Run as yourself, with your full values intact."

Looking Forward to the 2025 Election Cycle

The 2025 elections are already shaping the next chapter for Latina New American representation. In **New Jersey** and **Virginia**, candidates such as Rosy Bagolie, Alixon Collazos, and Elizabeth Guzman have advanced past their primaries and are headed to the general election. Every candidacy, whether successful or not, helps build a pipeline of leaders and builds a bridge for those who follow.

Disclaimer: This research is intended for educational purposes. It does not equal an endorsement of any elected official, party affiliation, or political views. Latinas Represent and our fiscal sponsor, Moore Impact, do not endorse candidates for public office.

Why This Work Matters

Latina New Americans are proving that when they run, they win. **Their campaigns bring new voices, perspectives, and solutions into public leadership**, helping state legislatures better reflect the communities they serve. While first-generation candidates often face steeper barriers to entry, Latina New Americans have shown unique strengths and resilience that help them succeed at the ballot box.

Supporting these candidates through **training, mentorship, and policy changes** is key to ensuring more Latina New Americans step forward, compete, and win. Both New American Leaders and Latinas Represent offer programs that prepare Latina New American leaders to launch and sustain successful campaigns. NAL's Ready to Lead® and Ready to Win® trainings equip future candidates and campaign staff with essential skills in messaging, targeting, fundraising, and embracing one's heritage, while Rising to Run provides New American women who have previously run for office with the tools and support to run again successfully. Latinas Represent's Campaign Master Class equips Latinas with the knowledge and tools to launch successful campaigns, using an inclusive and intersectional lens rooted in community experience. Beyond training, Latinas Represent takes a holistic, 360-degree approach to leadership development—combining research, storytelling, and tailored support for elected officials. This approach directly addresses the barriers Latinas face in politics, ensuring that Latinas not only run but also thrive once in office.

By directly investing in New American Leaders and Latinas Represent or supporting Latina New American leaders in your local community, you help build a more inclusive, responsive, and representative democracy.

LEARN MORE

★ **NEW AMERICAN LEADERS** (NAL) is the only nationwide, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering first- and second-generation Americans to run for, win, and lead in public office. Through training, research, and leadership support, NAL builds inclusive democracy and ensures public leadership reflects America's diversity.

NewAmericanLeaders.org
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★ **LATINAS REPRESENT**, a fiscally sponsored project of Moore Impact, is the political home for Latinas seeking public service opportunities. We honor the uniqueness of Latina experiences across the country, uplifting and celebrating our communities' diversity. Through our four pillars of work— capacity building, research, storytelling, and support—we are creating new norms in public service and strengthening the ecosystem of organizations championing Latinas. Together, we are connecting Latinas to the resources they need to transform their communities and our democracy.

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