



Legislature still doesn't look like California

Women, Asians, Hispanics and younger people are underrepresented

BY MATT LEVIN, ELIZABETH CASTILLO AND JOHN OSBORN D'AGOSTINO / CALmatters

There are still more white men named James or Jim in the California Legislature than African-American and Asian-American women combined. Throw in some white Robs, Bobs and Roberts, and you have a pretty sizable “JimBob” caucus with a membership larger than the number of Republican women, openly gay or lesbian legislators, or women from any party under the age of 40.

While California prides itself on diversity, in many ways the Legislature looks more like the California of 30 years ago than the California of today.

Women make major gains, but California trails other states. After a year in which sexual misconduct allegations led to calls for both parties to run more female candidates, women made significant gains in the November election.

California opens 2019 with 36 women in the Legislature—a near record (the previous high was 37 at the end of 2006). Nearly 60 percent of all newly elected California lawmakers are women, mirroring a surge in successful female candidacies across the country.

But California's statehouse still falls far short of equal gender representation. While women account for 31 percent of legislators, they make up a little more than half of voting-age Californians.

Male-dominated politics are hardly unique. More than 75 percent of the new Congress is male. But California still trails many other states, including some of its more conservative neighbors. Oregon and Arizona each have a higher proportion of women in their legislatures than California, while Nevada recently made history as the first state to elect a legislature with a female majority.

Nearly 1 in 10 voting-age Californians is a woman with Asian-American or Pacific Islander heritage. That's a bigger proportion than the state's entire voting-age African-American population, male and female.

But only 1 in 118 California legislators is an Asian-American woman—Ling Ling Chang, a

Taiwanese Republican senator from eastern Los Angeles County who won her seat in the June recall of a Democratic legislator. She'll likely face a tough re-election battle in 2020.

Chang is also one of only five non-white Republicans in the Legislature, all of whom are Asian American or Pacific Islander. Of the near-record-low 30 Republicans in the Legislature, 21 are white males. There are no Latino, African-American or openly gay or lesbian GOP legislators.

Latinos may be the largest ethnic group in all of California, but they are far from a plurality in the Legislature.

Even with six new Latino lawmakers elected in November, they account for just about 20 percent of the 2019 legislative class.

As of 2017, nearly 40 percent of all Californians identified as Latino.

Those awaiting a more visible presence of the “sleeping giant” of California politics can take partial solace in the state's demographic future. Non-Hispanic whites still make up a larger proportion of Californians older than 18 than do Latinos. But Latinos in their 20s, 30s and 40s outnumber whites in the same age groups, as do Latinos under the age of 18.

Roughly 40 percent of California's voting-age population is under the age of 40. But state lawmakers tend to skew significantly older. Only 14 percent are in their 30s, and none are in their 20s.

Another noticeably absent bloc of Californians from state office: people who make less than six figures. California has the highest compensation for state legislators of any state in the country, at \$107,000 per year. The 2017 median income of a California household? \$70,000. □

The Legislature looks more like the California of 30 years ago than the California of today.

This is an abridged version of the full story, which is available at CALmatters.org—a nonprofit, nonpartisan media venture explaining California policies and politics.

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