



***Women Lag as Local Leaders:  
A Report on the Status of Women in New York State's Local Governments  
November 2006***

The Anthony Center's 2006 survey of women elected to local office in New York State's 57 counties and 5 largest cities shows little progress statewide, but pockets of strong momentum in several counties and cities, including the state's largest city, New York City.

**General Findings**

In its first survey in 2002, the Center found that women made up 16.6% of legislative seats in New York State and 29% of city council seats in the state's five largest cities, New York City, Albany, Syracuse, Rochester and Buffalo. One woman served as a county executive and no woman was mayor of any of New York's five largest cities. A follow-up survey in 2004 found virtually no change.

The 2006 survey reflects changes since New York State's 2005 local elections. Since 2002, the number of women serving in New York's 57 county legislatures has increased from 16.6% to 17.4%, just a .8% increase. The average and median number of women serving is 3, a figure unchanged from 2002. Six counties have no women serving. Among New York's five largest cities, the total number of women serving on city/common councils has increased by one, from 29 to 30 today, or, from 30.21% to 31.25%.

**Leadership**

This slow overall progress of women's election to New York's local governments is modestly offset by an increase in the number of women serving in leadership positions, including the election of the first woman to serve as Speaker of the New York City Council, Christine Quinn.

In 2002, only one county, Rensselaer, had elected a woman as county executive. In 2006, two more counties, Broome and Monroe, have elected women as county executive. (In Broome County, Barbara Fiala; in Monroe County, Maggie Brooks; in Rensselaer County, Kathleen Jimino.)

Since 2002, two more women (from 4 to 6) have been elected as presidents or presiding officers of their county legislatures. (Cortland, Erie, Nassau, Rockland, Schenectady and Washington Counties.) 4 out of 5 cities have women serving as president/speaker of the their city councils. (New York City, Albany, Syracuse and Rochester.)

In a new measure of leadership for 2006, the Center found that 11 counties have elected women to serve as district attorneys, a critical executive law enforcement role. (Columbia, Essex, Fulton, Jefferson, Nassau, Rensselaer, St. Lawrence, Tompkins, Warren, Westchester and Yates Counties.)

### **2006 Report Card on Women's Progress**

The 2006 report goes beyond a simply survey to include a **Report Card on Women's Progress**. **The Report Card** focuses attention on how well counties and cities have done in achieving a "critical mass" (35% or more) of women serving on their legislative bodies. Communities winning an **"A"** have gone beyond electing a few token women to realize a level participation that should allow women's values, beliefs and life experiences to modify the traditional political culture of governmental bodies.

Grades have been assigned to counties and cities based on the percentage of women serving on their legislatures and city councils. An **"A"** is assigned to the two counties (Dutchess and Westchester) and one city (New York City) that have reached or exceeded the 35% "critical mass" threshold. Other grades used include: **"B"** (women at 25-34.99%); **"C"** (women at 20-24.99%); **"U"**, or **Unsatisfactory**, (women at 19.99%-1%) or **"F"** (no women).

**The Report Card** also assesses the progress a community has made in electing women locally. A **plus (+)** is assigned to counties or cities where women's numbers have increased since 2002/04; a **minus (-)** is assigned to counties that have lost representation.

Only two counties and one city were awarded the highest grade possible, an **A+**. (Dutchess and Westchester Counties and New York City.) 7 counties were awarded a **B+**, a grade that acknowledges a growing and solid representation by women. (Erie, Essex, Genesee, Nassau, Otsego, Sullivan and Wyoming Counties.)

But, a disappointing majority of counties – 31 – received either a **U (unsatisfactory)** or an **F** for the small number or absolute absence of women serving. Two of those counties – Monroe and Suffolk – are among New York's most populous counties. (For example, 2004 population estimates put the number of women in Suffolk County at 749,263; only 3 of Suffolk's 18 legislators are women.)

In all, women's numbers have grown in 23 counties. (Cattaraugus, Cayuga, Chemung, Cortland, Dutchess, Erie, Essex, Genesee, Herkimer, Livingston, Madison, Nassau, Niagara, Otsego, Rockland, St. Lawrence, Saratoga, Schoharie, Seneca, Sullivan, Washington, Westchester and Wyoming Counties.) Women's numbers have decreased in 16 counties. (Albany, Allegany, Broome, Chautauqua, Delaware, Fulton, Greene, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lewis, Onondaga, Ontario, Oswego, Schenectady, Schulyer and Suffolk Counties.) In the remaining 18 counties, there has been no change in the number of women serving.

Two cities, Buffalo and Syracuse, have seen a decrease in the number of women serving. Of New York's five largest cities, only Buffalo received an **Unsatisfactory** grade; women hold only 10% of its city council seats.

### **Critical Mass**

Women already serving in local governments often intuitively echo research in sociology and political science that shows that when a minority serves in numbers large enough to be a "critical mass," they support each others' experiences, beliefs and values. Where women serve in large enough percentages, their governments' work may turn to issues especially relevant to women's lives, including: domestic violence, child protective services, foster care, health care and women's poverty.

As Chile's new leader, President Michelle Bachelet, explained when she appointed women as half of her ministers, under-secretaries and regional government officials, "when there are a few women in politics, politics changes women, but when there are many women, it is politics that change . . . Today's citizens want societies that are more open, more diverse, and more inclusive. With more women in positions of leadership, we will be able to advance that ideal. " (In a June 2006 speech to the White House Project, Washington, D.C.)

### **Comparisons**

Women in New York's county legislatures continue to serve in numbers well below their share of New York's population. Their share of seats is also lower than women's participation in New York's congressional delegation and state legislature. Only women's numbers in the U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate fall below 17.3%, women's share of county legislative seats.

- The 2000 U.S. Census data show that women make up 51.8% of New York State's population and 52.7% of residents of voting age, 18 years and older.
- In 2006, women make up 22.6% of New York State's 109<sup>th</sup> Congressional delegation.

- In 2006, 48, or 22.6%, out of the 212 state legislative seats in New York State are held by women
- In 2006, women make up 15.4% (67 of the 435 seats) in the U.S. House of Representatives and 14% of the seats in the United States Senate.

### **2006 Findings:**

- Overall, in New York State, only 172 out of 989 individuals serving in county legislatures/board of supervisors, or 17.4% are women in 2006.
- In 2006, the average number of women serving at the county legislative level is only 3.
- In 2006, the median number of women in a county legislature or board of supervisors is only 3, the same surveys in 2002 and 2004.
- In 2006, 37 of all the counties surveyed have 3 or fewer women serving at the legislative level. In 2002/04, 41 counties had 3 or fewer women serving.
- The number of women serving as a percentage of all available county legislative seats in New York State has increased from 16.6% before the 2005 elections to 17.4% in 2006.
- Dutchess County has the largest percentage of women serving, at 40% (10/25 members). Westchester follows with 35.29%, followed by a tie between Erie, Genesee, Sullivan and Tompkins Counties with 33.33%.
- Allegany, Franklin, Hamilton, Orleans, Steuben and Warren counties have no women serving.
- Among New York State's five largest cities, the total number of women serving on city/common Councils has increased by one, from 29 before the 2005 elections to 30 today.
- The percentage of women serving on the city/common councils of New York State's five largest cities has increased from 30.21% before the 2005 elections to 31.25% today.
- None of New York State's five largest cities has a woman serving as mayor.
- Among cities, New York City has the highest percentage of women serving with 18/51 seats, or 35.29%, occupied by women.
- Among the five largest cities - Albany, Buffalo, New York City, Rochester and Syracuse - women hold 31.25% of all the City Council seats.
- 4 out of the 5 City Councils have women serving as president/speaker.
- None of the five largest cities have women serving as mayor.

**Report compiled by the Anthony Center for Women's Leadership  
at the University of Rochester  
Nora Bredes, Director  
Julianne Nigro and Adam Bink, Student Interns**