

# Women Representation Among Top Appointed Officials in Local Government

*New data on the gender composition of local government top appointed officials reveals fewer than one in three local leaders are women.*



Contributing Authors: Ayenna Cagaanan, Christine Dean, Nathan Lee

Press Contact: Nathan Lee, (618) 319-3404, [nathanlee@civicpulse.org](mailto:nathanlee@civicpulse.org)

## Introduction

Despite increasing attention on the pursuit of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) at all levels of government, DEI efforts at the local government level have been constrained by the lack of standardized open-source data. This is because the United States has historically lacked centralized information on the hundreds of thousands of individuals leading our township, municipal, and county governments.

CivicPulse is taking a major step toward resolving this issue. Taking advantage of recent developments in data collection and probabilistic name-based gender coding, we have developed a rigorous methodology that can provide dynamically updated benchmarks on the gender composition of the local government top appointed officials (e.g., manager, administrator, etc.) for all municipalities, townships, and counties with populations of 1,000 or more.

The associated interactive tools—released in partnership with the Engaging Local Government Leaders (ELGL) network as part of the Diversity Dashboard—allows users to explore how the gender composition of local government officials varies across geographies and over time. Below we identify and contextualize four key findings from these data:

**Finding 1. Fewer than one out of three local government top appointed officials are women.** As of 2022, there are 9,505 local governments serving communities of 1,000 or more with a top appointed official. Of these, only 29% are women. By comparison, [according to the Bureau of Labor and Statistics](#), women now make up almost half of the workforce (47%).

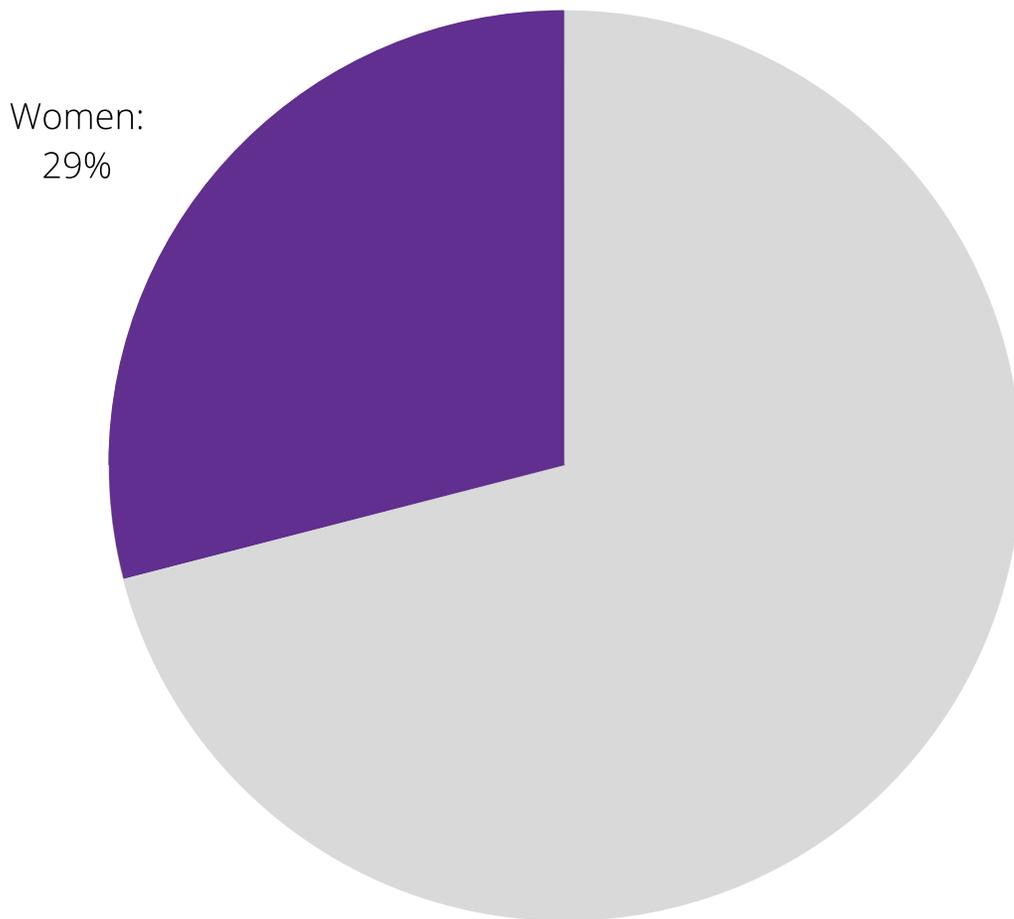


Figure 1. **National Percentage of Local Top Appointed Officials Who Are Women.** The 2022 national average is 29% for local government top appointed officials serving communities of 1,000 or more. This estimate is based on the gender coding of more than 9,500 records.

Source: **CivicPulse** (March 2022)

**Finding 2. The percentage of top appointed officials has been rising slowly since 2013.** In 2013, 22% of top appointed local government officials were women. Since then, that percentage has been growing at a rate of less than one percent per year. At that rate of change, we will not reach gender parity among local government leaders until 2048.

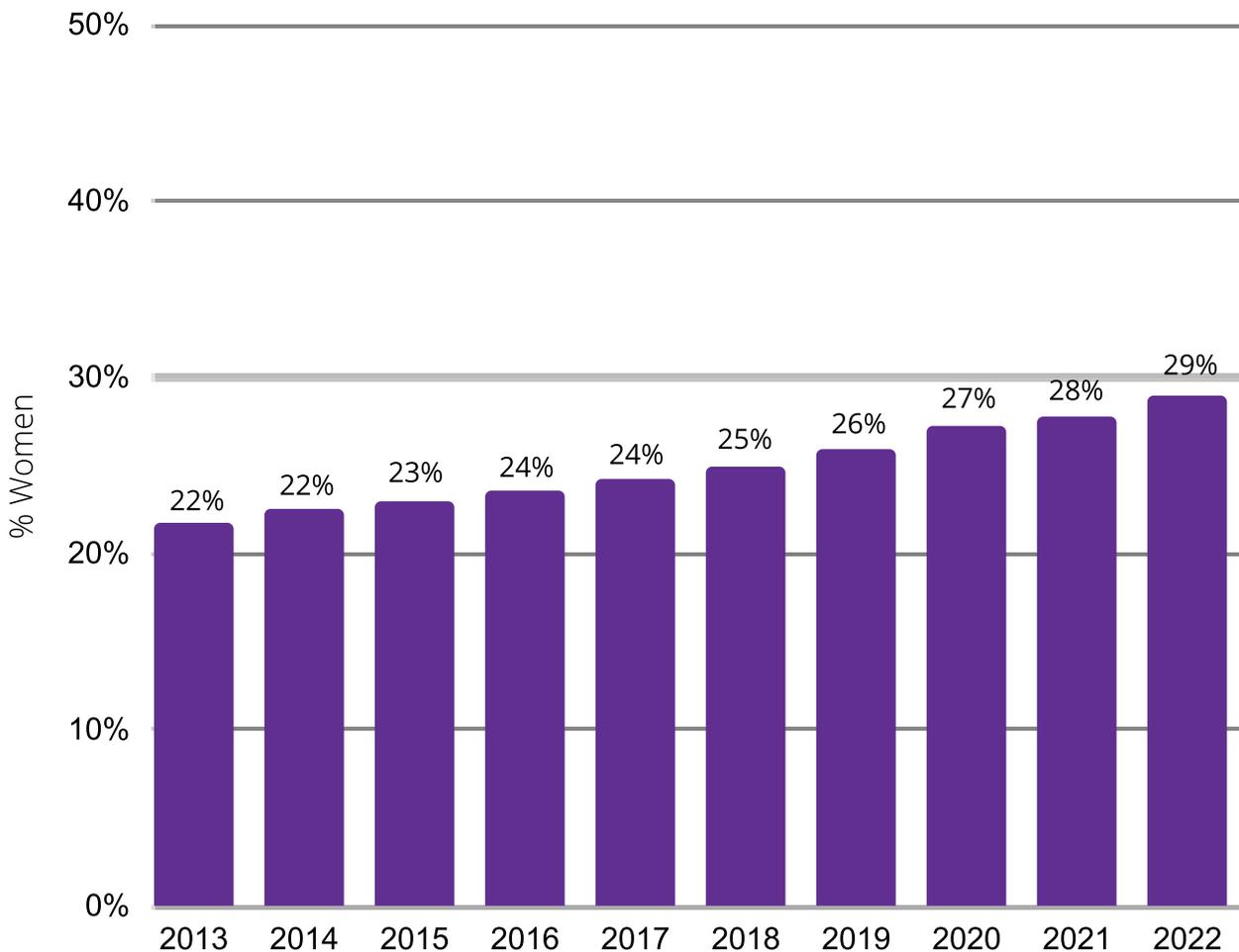


Figure 2. **Percentage of Local Top Appointed Officials Who Are Women by Year.** The percentage of women top appointed officials increased gradually from 22% in 2013 to 29% in 2022.

Source: [CivicPulse](#) (March 2022)

**Finding 3. Local governments with smaller populations are more likely to have women leaders.** The local governments most likely to have women appointed leaders are those serving the smallest communities (1,000 to 5,000 people). Of the 3,469 top appointed officials in this group, 38% of them are women. By comparison, only 24% of the 6,008 top appointed officials serving communities of 5,000 or more are women.

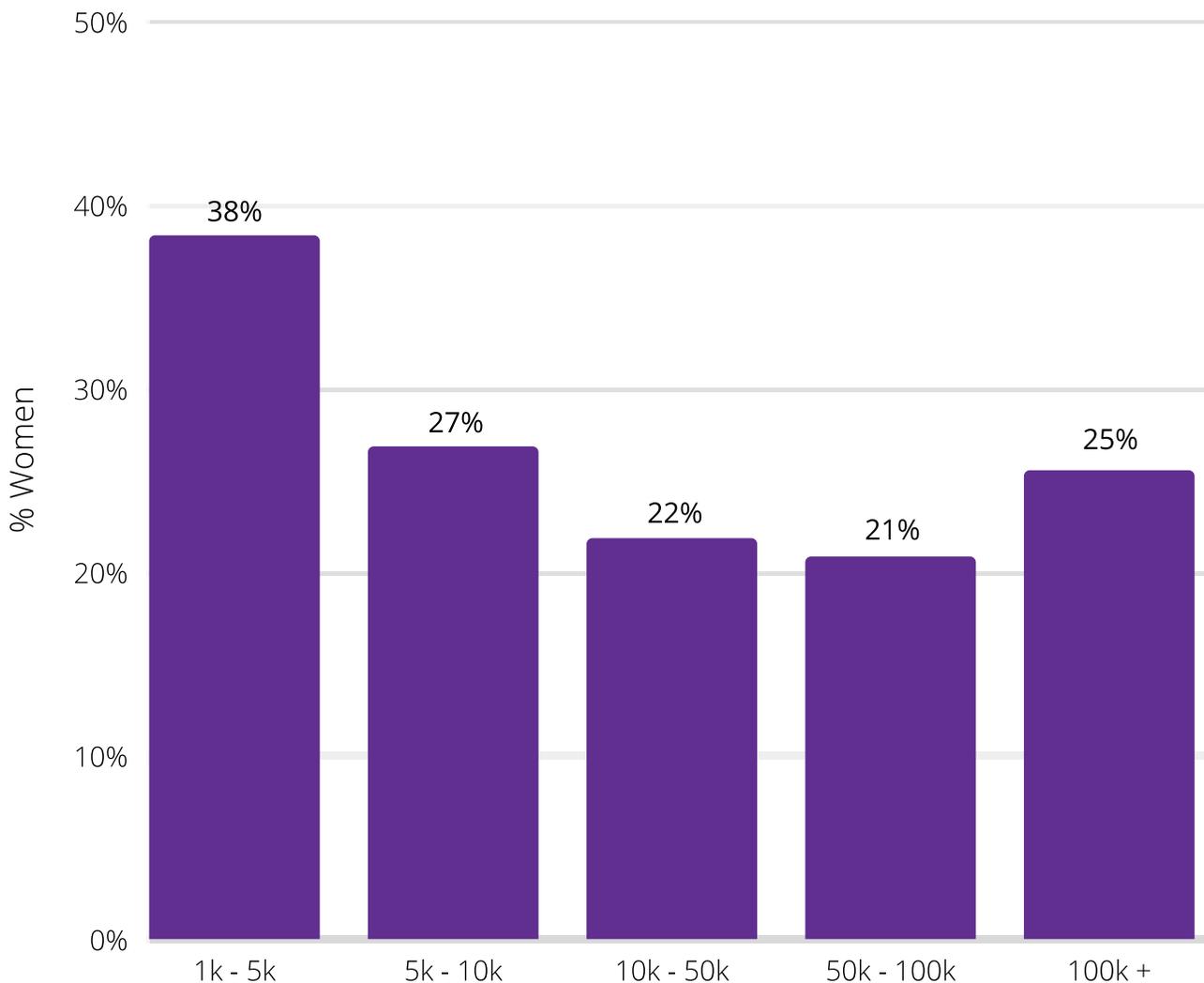


Figure 3. **Percentage of Top Appointed Officials Who Are Women by Local Government Size.** The local governments serving the smallest communities (1-5k) are also the most likely to have women leaders.

Source: [CivicPulse](#) (March 2022)

**Finding 4. Alabama is the only state that has reached gender parity in the composition of local government top appointed officials.** 57% of the 109 local governments with top appointed officials in Alabama are led by women. The next closest states are Idaho (48% of 33 governments), West Virginia (47% of 73 governments), New Hampshire (45% of 162 governments), and Maine (43% of 208 governments).

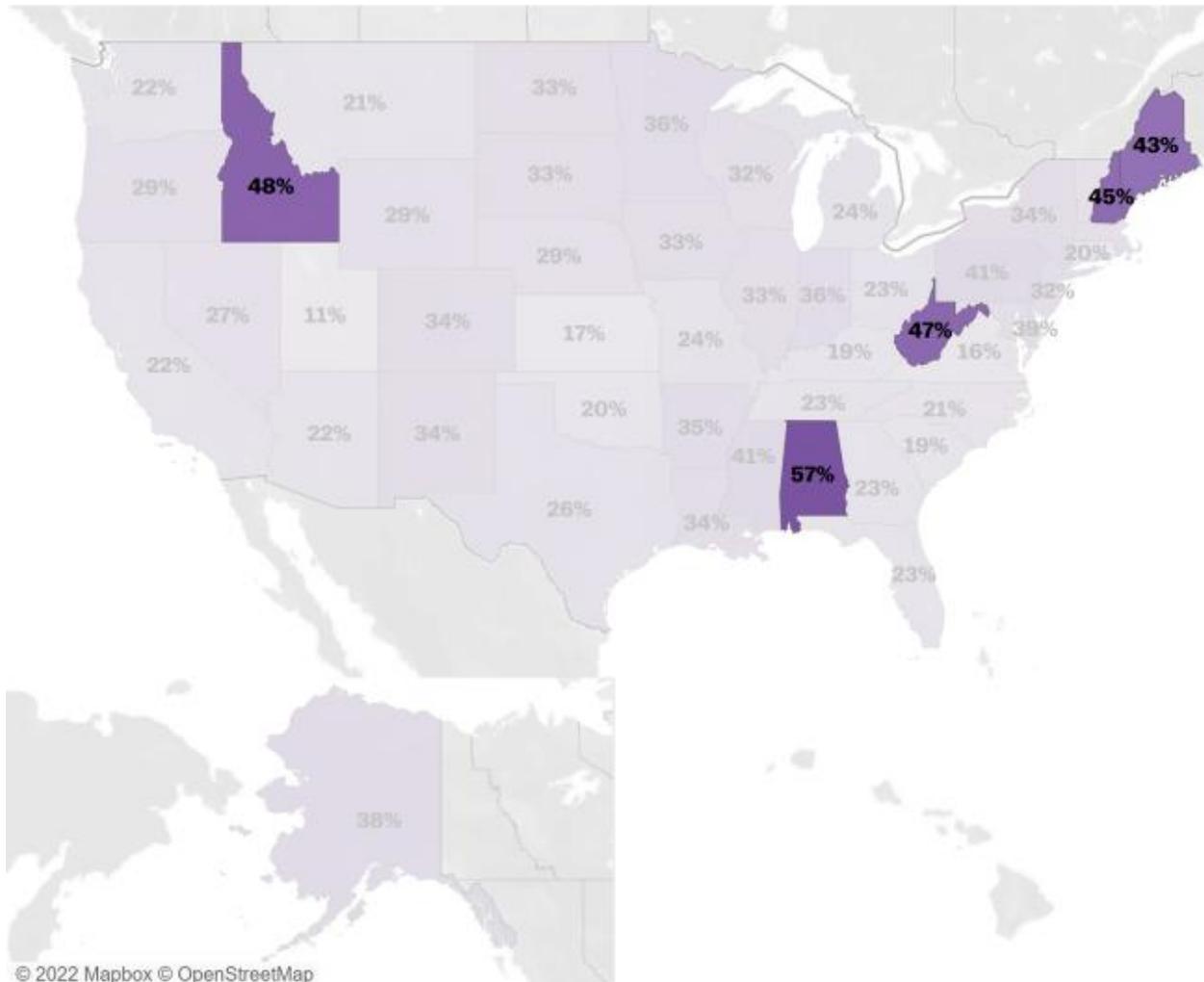


Figure 4. **5 States With The Highest Percentage of Local Top Appointed Officials Who Are Women.** Alabama currently has the highest percentage of women top appointed officials (57%), followed by Idaho (48%), West Virginia (47%), New Hampshire (45%), and Maine (43%).

Source: [CivicPulse](#) (March 2022)

---

## Conclusion

Although women have taken many strides toward equality in society, women are still largely underrepresented in local government leadership. While things are changing, it is slow progress. It is also apparent that the representation varies greatly from state to state and by community size. We hope that providing these findings, open-source data, and the associated [interactive tools](#) will facilitate more informed, evidence-based discourse on this important issue.

## Methodology

The data underlying this report and the associated tools is derived from a comprehensive list of local government leaders developed by Power Almanac. The Power Almanac team creates a record for each government in the Census of Governments with a population of 1,000 or more.

Whether a person is a top appointed official is not based on a person's title but rather an assessment of their duties and responsibilities. To be considered a top appointed official in this dataset, a person must be appointed by the elected governing body and be responsible for running the day-to-day operations of the government. Common titles for these roles include "manager" or "administrator."

The gender coding was completed by comparing the first name of each official to historical records from the Social Security Administration baby name data. In this probabilistic name-based gender coding, if the probability is greater than 97% that a name is associated with a specific gender, then that gender is assigned to that record. This methodology is then independently verified against self-reported survey data for select officials.

Using this methodology, 92% of all records from Power Almanac were gender coded. This means that 8% of records have yet to be coded. Moreover, 3% of records may be miscoded, including if a leader identifies as nonbinary.

CivicPulse and ELGL both recognize that gender is a spectrum. To address our gender coding limitations, community members can review individual gender-coded records through our [lookup table](#) and [submit a request](#) to update one of our records if it is not coded or incorrectly coded.

## Acknowledgements

This report was developed in consultation with Engaging Local Government Leaders. This work was made possible with financial support from Qualtrics, data from Power Almanac, and student support from Rochester Institute of Technology's Department of Public Policy.

