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New Mexico to Elect First Female Governor in Third-Ever 2-Woman Gubernatorial Race

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In 1986, Nebraska's gubernatorial race between Republican Kay Orr and Democrat Helen Boosalis made history as [the first match-up between two women for the governor's seat](#). It would take another 16 years before it happened again, this time in Hawaii as Republican Linda Lingle ran against Democrat Mazie Hirono in 2002.

Third time's the charm. This fall, New Mexico becomes the third state to have two women as major party candidates, and the winner will be the state's first female governor. The current Lieutenant Governor, Diane Denish, heads up the Democratic ticket while Susana Martinez, a district attorney, is the Republican choice. If Denish wins, she'll be the first Democrat elected in a two-woman gubernatorial race; Governors Orr and Lingle were both Republicans.

Both Denish and Martinez have male running mates, and the Republican ticket features two Hispanic candidates as governor and lieutenant governor -- a possible drawing card as the [Santa Fe New Mexican](#) theorizes:

Asked whether having a Hispanic gubernatorial ticket will help Republicans make inroads into the Hispanic vote, [Brian] Sanderoff [president of Research and Polling Inc.] said in an interview Tuesday, "It sure can't hurt." He said having a woman and a Hispanic at the top of the ticket creates "energy" and positive "symbolism" for the GOP. "Sometimes the Republican ticket is seen as not being that diverse," he said.

Party affiliation aside, the fact that a woman will be governor in New Mexico next year speaks to the larger issue of [female leadership](#) at the highest levels of government. As [Jill Lawrence notes at Politics Daily](#):

What jumps out...is the paucity of all-women governor's races compared to other offices. There have been eight female match-ups for the Senate and dozens for House seats. This is not good news for women because...most presidents these days...come from governor's mansions. (Just for a start, think George W. Bush, Bill Clinton, Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter).

There are currently six women governors....There would have been eight if Sarah Palin had not resigned last year as Alaska governor and Kathleen Sebelius of Kansas had not become Obama's secretary of health and human services. That would have tied the all-time high of eight female governors in 2006, says [the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) at Rutgers University] director Debbie Walsh.

"This is clearly the road to the White House and we don't have a lot of women walking that path," Walsh said in an interview.

In 2008, [CAWP reported the following statistics](#) on female gubernatorial candidates and women governors:

- States with gubernatorial races - 11
- States with women in the race - 4 (4D)
- Women candidates - 4
- Female incumbents - 1 (1D, 2R)
- Female challengers - 2 (3D, 1R)
- Women running for open seats - 1
- Women currently serving as governors - 8

The record for largest number of female candidates running for governor was 10, set in 1994 and again met in 2002 and 2006.