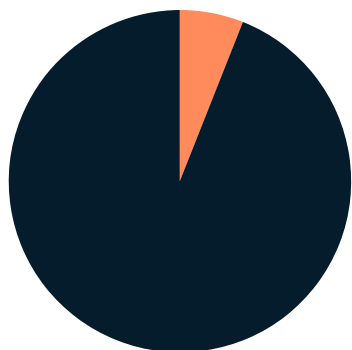


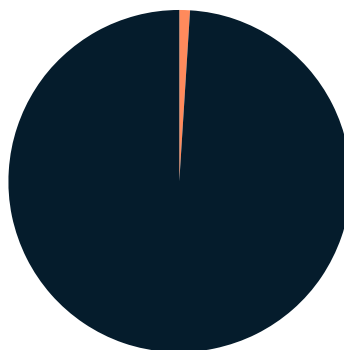
#advance AAPI power

**Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI)
Political Leadership
May 2021**

Representing over 50 nations of origin, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are ethnically, linguistically, and culturally varied. Yet despite this broad diversity, our research finds one thing in common among AAPI people: **extreme under-representation in elected office.**



**AAPI people
are 6.1% of the
US population**



**AAPI elected officials
are 0.9% of
US elected leaders**

As of mid-2020

As AAPI leaders claim victory with the bipartisan passage of the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act, we honor Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month by exploring the status of AAPI elected officials, whose history tellingly starts with two non-voting members from the Philippines joining Congress in 1907, and reaches a high water mark with the election of Kamala Harris as Vice President.



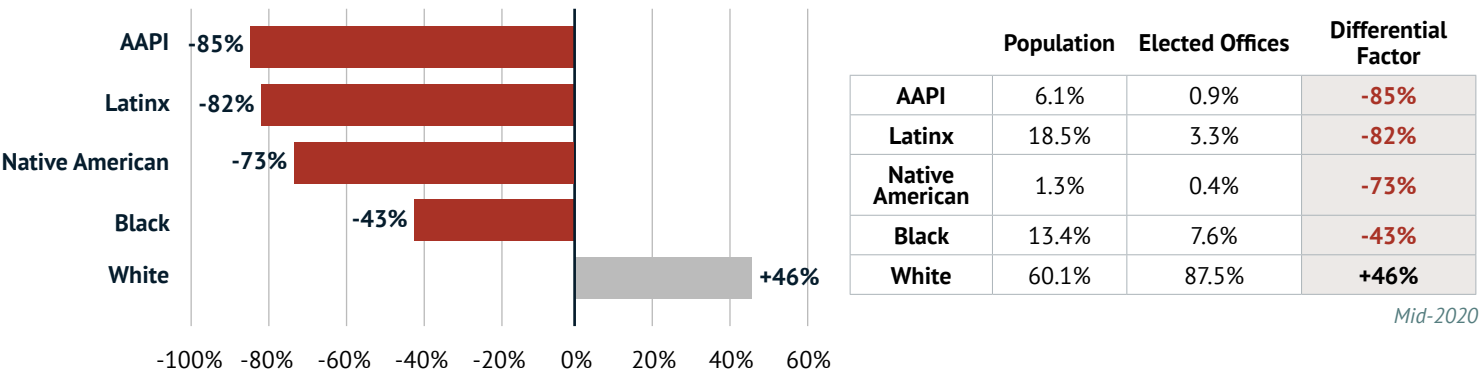
Bold AAPI Leaders Are Catalyzing Change

While silences and erasures are an ongoing theme in the data, the voices of today's AAPI leaders resonate with impacts far exceeding their modest numbers.

- ✓ The country's two current AAPI senators, **Mazie Hirono (HI)** and **Tammy Duckworth (IL)**, are prominent progressive advocates. Hirono earned headlines for her unapologetic questioning of Supreme Court nominees Kavanaugh and Comey Barrett, and Duckworth is heralded for her bold positions on women's rights and racial justice.
- ✓ Congressional politics are being transformed by leaders like **Pramila Jayapal (WA)**, Chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus; **Ted Lieu (CA)**, chosen by his colleagues as a 2021 impeachment manager; and **Mark Takano (CA)**, our first openly gay AAPI Congressman.
- ✓ California's newly-appointed Attorney General, **Rob Bonta**, is a former legislator known for confronting law enforcement and promoting criminal justice reforms. He is the state's first Filipino American AG.
- ✓ In Hawaii, **Maui's majority-AAPI women County Council earned international recognition** when its 2020 feminist COVID recovery plan – the nation's only economic recovery plan to elevate gender equity – was adopted in Maui, Hawaii, and Kauai.

Asian Americans Are Gravely Under-Represented

The “model minority” narrative positioning Asian Americans as more successful and deserving than other people of color masks an ironic truth: When it comes to holding elected office, the AAPI community is at once America’s fastest growing demographic, and its most poorly represented. AAPI people are under-represented in the political system by a factor of -85 percent (the differential in political representation relative to their population numbers). By contrast, the differential factor for white Americans is +46 percent.



AAPI Candidates Are Highly Electable

The 2021 US Congress includes Senators Mazie Hirono and Tammy Duckworth, and 15 AAPI representatives.

Mostly Democrats, the AAPI representatives are nearly evenly split between men and women. Close to half won elections in majority-white districts. In fact, only Ro Khanna (CA) and Kaiiali’l Kahele (HI) represent majority AAPI districts, and 8 of the 15 were seated after defeating white men. AAPI leaders ably draw voters of all races in a wide range of districts, belying the common assumption that candidates of color are most “electable” among voters who match their demographic.

Like their federal counterparts, AAPI state legislators are found in a broad range of districts, representing all demographic groups. One third of the nation’s 152 AAPI state legislators represent majority-white districts, and just 17% represent majority-AAPI districts. In total, AAPI state legislators are found in 31 states.

“The exclusion of Asian Americans from political power mirrors the history of AAPI exclusion and erasure from American society. But AAPI communities are winning visibility and power, and AAPI leaders are winning elections and reshaping politics, from city halls to Congress and the Vice President’s office. The success of AAPI officeholders in districts of widely varying demographics underscores the reality that voters of all kinds want a change from the old boys’ club still dominating politics. **When voters are given the chance to vote for new leaders from communities long excluded from power, they do so.**

Brenda Choresi Carter

Director
Reflective Democracy Campaign



Mapping AAPI Elected Leadership

2020 National Snapshot

Our snapshot shows AAPI people are most visible in federal office. Nationwide, the AAPI community is better represented in city-level offices than in state legislatures or statewide office. AAPI women are better represented in Congress and statewide offices, while AAPI men hold an advantage in state legislatures, and county and city offices.

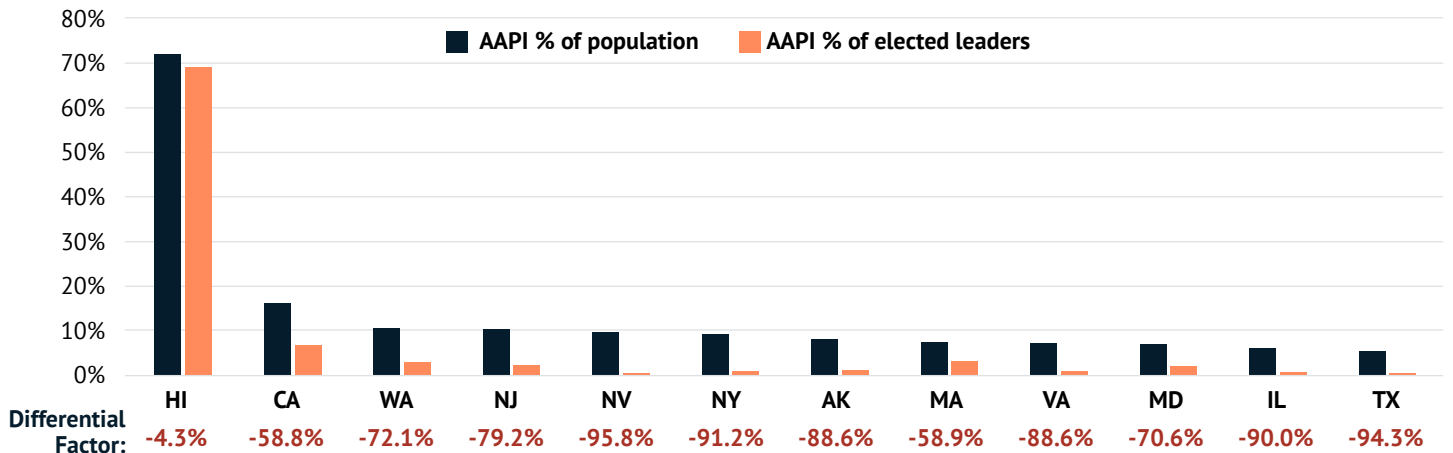
	All Offices	Federal	Statewide	State Legislature	County	City
AAPI Women	0.34%	1.5%	1.0%	0.7%	0.2%	1%
AAPI Men	0.54%	1.3%	0.6%	1.4%	0.3%	1.4%
AAPI All	0.9%	2.8%	1.6%	2.1%	0.5%	2.4%
Differential Factor vs. AAPI Census @ 6.1%	-85%	-54%	-74%	-66%	-92%	-61%

Mid-2020

2020 Snapshots of High-Proportion AAPI States & Cities

Federal, Statewide, State Legislature, and County Offices

Most states with significant concentrations of AAPI people are seriously deficient in AAPI political representation. The only state whose share of AAPI elected officials approximates its share of AAPI people is Hawaii.



Mid-2020

“ In states with significant AAPI populations, with the exception of Hawaii, AAPIs are under-represented in elected office even when we make up as much as 10 percent of the population. As a result, governments are unable to adequately serve vulnerable AAPI communities with cultural competency and with language access.

Madalene Xuan-Trang Mielke

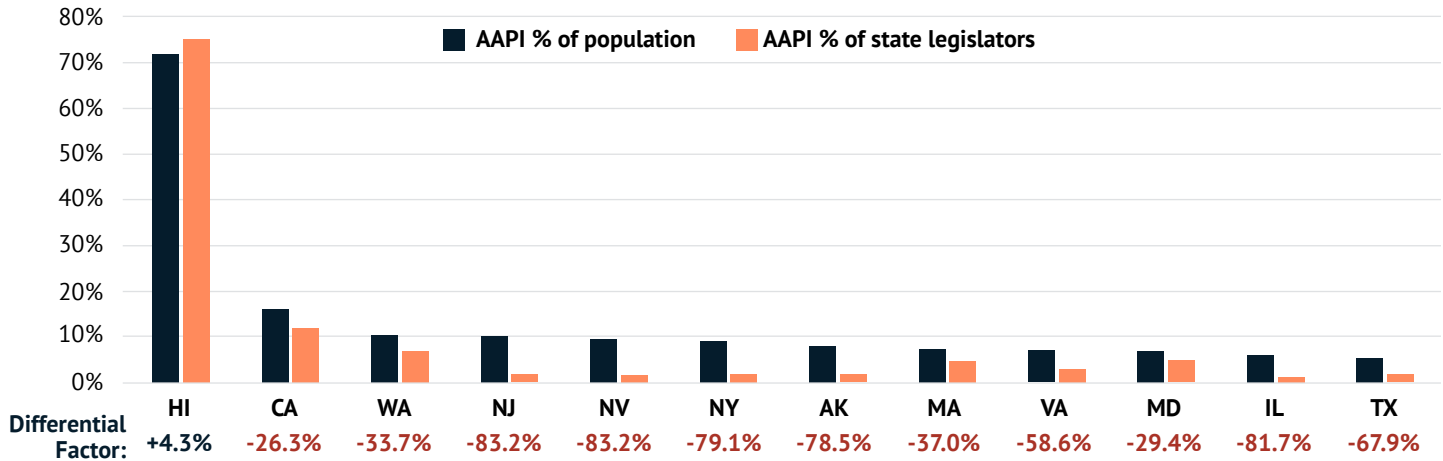
President & CEO

Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies (APAICS)



State Legislatures Only

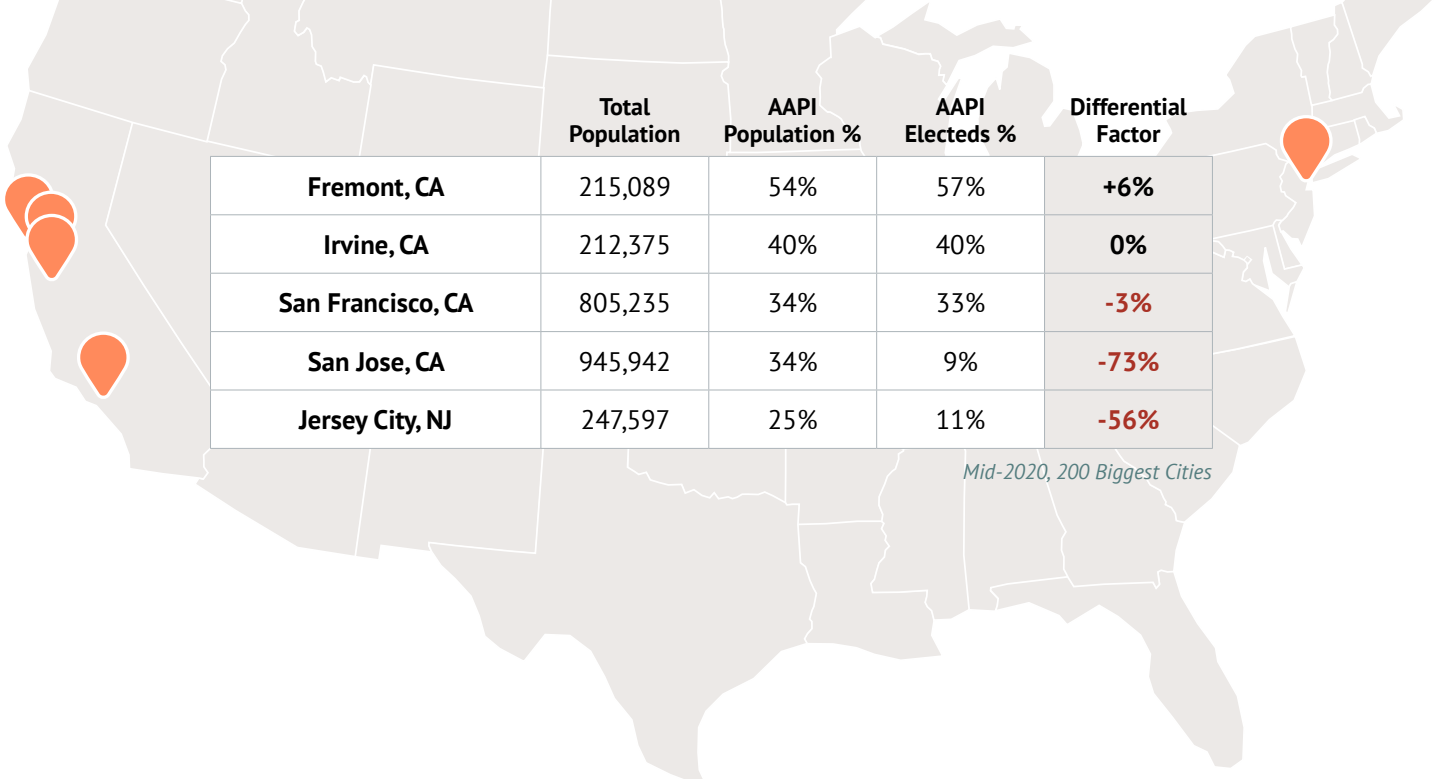
AAPi political representation in these states tends to improve when measuring state legislatures alone. Hawaii, California, Maryland, and Washington elect AAPi state legislators in percentages relatively close or equal to their AAPi population share. At the other end of the spectrum, New Jersey and Nevada have the nation's 4th and 5th largest AAPi population shares, but New Jersey has just two AAPi state legislators, and Nevada has one.



Mid-2020

City Government

Of the five large American cities with the highest concentrations of AAPi residents, three have roughly proportional AAPi elected leadership at the city level. However, San Jose, the city with the fourth highest share of AAPi residents, has scant AAPi representation.



Mid-2020, 200 Biggest Cities

AAPJ Invisibility in the Criminal Justice Sector is a National Crisis

Throughout much of the prison system, AAPJ incarcerated people are categorized as “Other,” rendering them nearly invisible in the criminal justice sphere. Where data exists, causes for concern run parallel.



In 1990s California, as the AAPJ prisoner population swelled by 250%, Asian American juveniles were more than twice as likely to be tried as adults as white juveniles charged with the same offense.

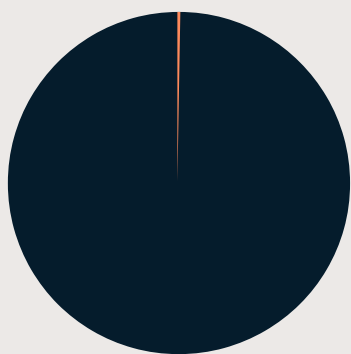


A 2017 study found that in Hawaii, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders are subject to over-policing, and are incarcerated at four times the rate of whites.

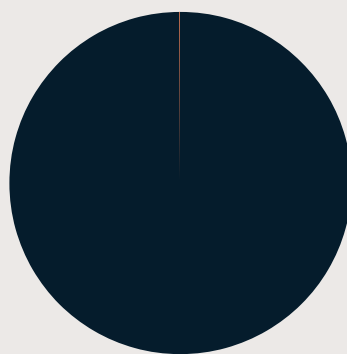


Across the country, Southeast Asian Americans are at least three times more likely than other immigrants to be deported due to past criminal convictions.

Against this backdrop, the absence of AAPJ officials in elected criminal justice roles is alarming. Of 2,539 elected prosecutors across the nation in 2020, the Campaign identified only six who were Asian American or Pacific Islander. And despite the heavy involvement of elected sheriffs in deportations, our 2020 data showed only two AAPJ sheriffs among the country’s 3,035 sheriffs.



AAPJ people are only .24% of elected prosecutors



AAPJ people are only .07% of county sheriffs

Mid-2020

“The literal erasure of AAPJ identity throughout much of the U.S. prison system is symptomatic of larger structural issues. AAPJ communities around the country are being policed, punished, and deported at increasing rates. The people making and carrying out the political choices that affect AAPJ communities don’t reflect them. It is imperative that this change.

Premal Dharja

Executive Director

Institute to End Mass Incarceration, Harvard Law School



About the Reflective Democracy Campaign

The [Reflective Democracy Campaign](#) reports on, funds, and organizes the movement for a democracy whose leaders fully reflect the diversity of the American people. We are the only resource for comprehensive data and analysis on the race and gender of elected officials and candidates at the federal, state, county, and city levels. Our data sets, reports, and other resources are freely available at [WhoLeadsUs](#).

Contact the Campaign for more data and analysis on the demographics of political power. Data on specific ethnicities, levels of office, and/or geographies is available, as well as analysis about election gains by women and people of color, and on the persistent white male overrepresentation distorting our democracy.

For more information, please write to hello@wholeads.us and follow us on Twitter [@WhoLeadsUs](#).

Our recent reports include:

- **Black Representation in Turbulent Times:** Even as white nationalism exploded during the Trump era, [Black leaders made historic gains](#) at the ballot box.
- **Power Shift in America's Cities:** Dramatic gains by women and people of color are [changing the face of power](#) in America's largest cities.
- **Exposing the Criminal Justice System:** Our reports on America's [sheriffs](#) and [elected prosecutors](#) explore the broken demographics of a system foundationally biased against people of color, and harmful to women and families in crisis.

Research Credits

RDC gratefully acknowledges the following organizations for their research:

Asian Americans Advancing Justice – LA (AAAJ-LA), *Asian Americans & Pacific Islanders Behind Bars*, December 2015, <https://advancingjustice-la.org/sites/default/files/18877%20AAPIs%20Behind%20Bars.pdf>

Urban Institute, *Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, a missing minority in criminal justice data*, May 2017, <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/asian-americans-and-pacific-islanders-missing-minority-criminal-justice-data>

Photo Credits

Page 2: Philippine delegation in Congress (No. 3). Benito Legarda and Pablo Ocampo, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, no known restrictions; [Pablo Ocampo, Resident Commissioner to the United States from the Philippine Islands] / G. V. Buck, Wash. D.C., Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, no known restrictions; “Kamala Harris” by Office of Senator Kamala Harris, public domain;

Page 3: Official portrait of U.S. Senator Mazie Hirono (D-HI), United States Senate, public domain; Official portrait of U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-Illinois) by U.S. Senate Photographic Studio / Renee Bouchard, public domain; Official portrait of U.S. Congressman Ro Khanna, by U.S. Congress/Eric Connolly, public domain; Official Portrait of Representative Kai Kahele by House Creative Committee, public domain;

Page 4: Photo by Jason Leung on Unsplash

Page 6: Photo by Jason Leung on Unsplash

