



REPRESENT 2020: TOWARD A BETTER VISION FOR DEMOCRACY

A Scorecard for Immigrant Leadership in America



The NEW AMERICAN
LEADERS PROJECT 2014

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Acknowledgements

This report includes preliminary data collected by Christian Phillips, with generous support from the University of California at Berkeley. Tyler Reny collected all additional research. The report was written and conceived by Tyler Reny and Sayu Bhojwani, with input from Aparna Kumar. Shalini Matani and Amanda Church provided editorial input and Creative Science Labs designed the report.

Message from the President and Founder

One of America's most popular and heralded traits is our identity as a nation of immigrants. It's a proud history, as it should be; many of this nation's great accomplishments can be traced to the ingenuity and toil of immigrant newcomers. At NALP, the immigrant journey isn't confined to the gates of rousing citizenship ceremonies but embraces a firm commitment to integrate new Americans into their communities and into government.

In fact, government is the linchpin for immigrants to access the full opportunity of America – economic mobility, education, healthcare, affordable housing, small-business support. We firmly believe that the better immigrants are represented in government, the better their specific needs are met in these arenas. From California to Michigan to New York, immigrants in elected office have championed ESL classes, municipal ID cards, and state Offices of New Americans. These are steps in the right direction, but we believe the nation is primed for, and indeed needs more. Why?

Because immigrants and immigration affect an overwhelming majority of American citizens, not just those who are born outside of the United States. Take a moment to survey how America truly lives now: multiracial neighborhoods, interracial marriages, and diverse households. The United States now has a multicultural majority as well as a large immigrant population.

This report demonstrates how big the representation gap is between the leaders in our state legislatures and the residents they represent. To reach representational parity by 2020, every state needs to elect more Asian American and Latino legislators. This is not only a question of parity, but also one of policy. With representatives who understand the heterogeneity of the American experience, we can have policies that reflect the needs of our diverse demographics. We knew there was a gap; we just didn't know the extent of it. Now we, and you, do. Join us in embracing the responsibility to foster more immigrant leadership and create a promising vision for the year 2020 and beyond.

Sincerely yours,

Sayu Bhojwani

About This Report

As the only nonprofit in the country that trains first- and second-generation immigrants to run for office, the New American Leaders Project (NALP) recognizes that America has a long way to go in ensuring that the voices of all its citizens are heard. One important step is making sure that state legislatures are more representative of the emerging majority. In fact, not a single state in the nation has a state legislature that equitably reflects its population. **This report underscores the strong link between representation and equitable policy and grades states based on the degree to which their state legislatures truly reflect their populace.** It shows the good, the bad, and the ugly and can inform responses from advocates, political parties, and state governments on how to increase the diversity of legislatures and bring more new voices and perspectives into the political process.

A New Golden Age

Between 2000 and 2010, the United States experienced an influx of almost 13.9 *million* new immigrants. The total foreign-born population now exceeds 40 million immigrants, about 13 percent of the total population of the United States. In terms of sheer numbers, 40 million is *nearly three times larger* than the size of the foreign-born population during the golden age of American immigration in the early 20th century.¹ By 2043, the number of non-white Americans will exceed their white, non-Hispanic counterparts.² Since 2011, more babies have been born to non-white parents than to white parents.³ By some accounts, the tipping point toward a multicultural majority occurred in August 2014, as the majority of Americans are either multiracial, in racially mixed couples, or living in multiethnic areas.⁴ **What does this new golden age of immigration mean for American democracy?**

Our country's elected bodies have been slow to adapt to the steadily changing demographics. Although the number of Latino and Asian American elected officials increases each election cycle, elected bodies are still tragically under representative of the population at large. While Latinos and Asian Americans comprise over 22 percent of the general population in the United States (almost one in every four people) they hold *fewer than 2 percent* of the more than 500,000 elected positions nationwide, from county commissioners, to school boards, to mayors, to Congress. That means just one in 50 elected officials nationwide is Latino or Asian American.⁵

Getting from pale, male, and stale to diverse, dynamic, and responsive is important not just for demographic reasons. Closing the representation gap matters: it goes straight to the health, legitimacy, and efficacy of our representative democracy. **More diverse candidates on the ballot can boost voter participation, and more diverse representation can lead to a more welcoming immigrant and immigration policy, which in turn bolsters our economy.** Working with allies, these diverse elected officials support the ideals of American democracy through their legislative priorities. As Americans by choice, first-generation immigrants have strong allegiances to the democratic process.

¹ <http://www.census.gov/prod/2012pubs/acs-19.pdf>

² http://usnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/06/13/18934111-census-white-majority-in-us-gone-by-2043?lite

³ <http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/race/news/2012/05/18/11581/the-top-10-facts-about-children-of-color-in-the-united-states/>

⁴ <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/americas-tipping-point-most-u-s-now-multicultural-says-group-n186206>

⁵ To calculate this figure we combined the total number of Latino elected officials as identified by NALEO in their National Directory of Latino Elected Officials and Asian American elected officials as identified by the UCLA in their National Asian Pacific American Political Almanac and divided it by the U.S. Census's census of governments figure for total elected positions in the United States. While neither source is comprehensive, given the difficulty of acquiring this information, it gives us a rough idea of the severity of underrepresentation in the United States.

Elected Officials Who Look Like “Me”

When candidates on the ballot and elected officials in government reflect the diversity of the population, racial minorities feel less political alienation and more trust in government.⁶ They are more likely to participate in various civic activities, notably the quintessential civic act of voting.⁷ Through shared experiences and a deep understanding of community, minority representatives (“descriptive representatives”) are more likely to advocate for issues of importance to their communities than non-minority or non-immigrant candidates.⁸

⁶ See Melissa Michelson’s (2000) “Political Efficacy and Electoral Participation of Chicago Latinos.” *Social Science Quarterly* 81.1: 136-150; Pantoja and Segura’s (2003) “Fear and Loathing in California: Contextual Threat and Political Sophistication Among Latino Voters.” *Political Behavior* 25.3: 265-286; and Bobo and Gilliam (1990) “Race, Sociopolitical Participation, and Black Empowerment.” *The American Political Science Review*: 377-393.

⁷ See Barreto, Matt (2007), “Si Se Puede! Latin Candidates and the Mobilization of Latino Voters.” *American Political Science Review* 101.03: 425-441; Barreto, Segura, and Woods (2004) “The Mobilizing Effects of Majority-Minority Districts on Latino Turnout.” *American Political Science Review* 98.01: 65-75; Griffin and Newman’s (2008) *Minority Report: Evaluating Political Equality in America*. University of Chicago Press; Pantoja and Segura (2003) “Fear and Loathing in California: Contextual Threat and Political Sophistication Among Latino Voters.” *Political Behavior* 25.3: 265-286; and Bobo and Gilliam (1990) “Race, Sociopolitical Participation, and Black Empowerment.” *The American Political Science Review*: 377-393.

⁸ See Pitkin (1972) *The Concept of Representation*. University of California Press; Baker and Cook (2005) “Representing Black Interests and Promoting Black Culture: The Importance of African American Descriptive Representation in the U.S. House.” *Du Bois Review* 2.02: 227-246; Hero and Tolbert (1995) “Latinos and Substantive Representation in the U.S. House of Representatives: Direct, Indirect, or Non-Existent?” *American Journal of Political Science*: 640-652; Fraga and Lopez (2008) “Gender and Ethnicity: Patterns of Electoral Success and Legislative Advocacy Among Latina and Latino State Officials in Four States.” *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy* 28.3-4: 121-145; Mansbridge (1999) “Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent Yes.” *The Journal of politics* 61.03: 628-657. The literature cited in this section applies primarily to African Americans and Latinos, and some of the findings are mixed. See Swain (1993), for example, for a contrasting opinion. There is far less literature on the effects of Asian American descriptive representation.

Welcoming Immigrant and Immigration

Given the alarming rise in anti-immigrant legislation in state legislatures over the last decade, particularly legislation that aims to create such dreadful living conditions for immigrants that they “self-deport,” the stakes couldn’t be higher. Even more recent events, like the riots in Ferguson, Missouri, and the influx of undocumented children from Central American countries, both of which held the nation’s attention in summer 2014, highlight the urgency of our need for more diverse representation and humane policy.

Elected officials of all backgrounds are critical to the passage of immigrant-friendly legislation, but minority elected officials, particularly immigrants, are *far* more likely to introduce and champion legislation that is welcoming to immigrants. Just as women in office are more likely to advocate for issues of relevance to women;⁹ working-class politicians are more likely to push legislation that helps the working class;¹⁰ black politicians are more likely to advocate for issues of importance for the black community;¹¹ so too are Asian American and Latino legislators more likely to push for legislation that is beneficial to immigrant communities.¹²

On average, states with more minority elected officials in their state legislatures have more welcoming immigrant legislation than states with poor representational diversity. Diversity of representation has a positive impact on the lives of immigrants. Simply put: *diversity drives democracy*.

⁹ See Beth Reingold’s Chapter 9, “Women as Officeholders: Linking Descriptive and Substantive Representation,” in *Political Women and American Democracy*, Cambridge University Press, for an overview of the literature on this issue.

¹⁰ See Nick Carnes’s 2013 book, *White Collar Government: The Hidden Role of Class in Economic Policy Making*, University of Chicago Press, for more information.

¹¹ Inata, Michael (2011) *Oversight: Representing Black and Latino Interests in Congress*, Princeton University Press. Also see Katherine Tate’s (2004) *Black Faces in the Mirror: African Americans and Their Representatives in the U.S. Congress*, Princeton University Press, for a more nuanced take.

¹² We often equate Latinos and Asian Americans with immigrants in this study. While we recognize the vast diversity in length of residency and generational status, country of origin, language, and culture, we also recognize that most Latinos and Asian Americans in this country have ties to the immigrant experience and immigrant community. As Gary Segura, a leading Stanford political scientist studying Latino politics points out, 90 percent of Latinos are within two generations of an immigrant. Currently, Asian Americans are the racial group with the largest proportion of foreign-born residents. For more, see <http://news.stanford.edu/news/2012/october/segura-latino-vote-102612.html> and <http://voxxi.com/2013/06/15/asian-immigrants-surpass-hispanics/> and <http://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/A-API-Immigration1.pdf>.

America's Fervent Ambassadors

New immigrants are drawn to America as a place that welcomes new immigrants and fosters their educational and economic achievement. They believe strongly in the values on which this country was founded – tolerance for diversity and equal opportunity for all. When in office, Asian American and Latino elected officials are strongly committed to those ideals and loyal to their own experience of America, which has provided the opportunities for them to succeed, despite the obstacles they may have encountered.

These experiences, values, and ideals translate into the authorship, sponsorship, and co-sponsorship of immigrant-friendly bills like DREAM Acts, driver's license laws, language-access initiatives, fair housing laws, community development acts, health-care access laws, and other anti-poverty measures. Further, once in office, Asian American and Latino officials are more likely to attend to their communities' constituent needs, intervene to ensure that governmental agencies are enforcing civil rights policies, and generally advocate for the concerns and needs of all Americans, but particularly those who are so often left out of the governing process and whose voices are so rarely heard in halls of power.¹³

Below, in the first-ever scorecard on state representation, we take a crucial look at state legislatures to determine how representative they are of America's rapidly changing demographics and how much work we all need to do to ensure they more closely mirror the population and to pass legislation that embodies the values and ideals that define America.

Representation Scorecard

At the national level, the immigration reform debate has gone from hot to cold and back again. Since 2010 in particular, state legislatures have filled the void left by Congress, taking it upon themselves to pass immigrant and immigration legislation. In cases like Arizona, South Carolina, and Louisiana, the results have been devastating to immigrants.

Our research found that states with more Asian American and Latino lawmakers generally had a more welcoming immigration policy, though there are exceptions to the rule as you will see below, particularly in border states like Arizona.

In this scorecard, we assess how representative state legislatures compare to their populations and therefore how well positioned they are to respond to their diverse constituencies. States that scored an A are on the right track in electing representatives that mirror the population. States that scored an F have not a single Asian American or Latino lawmaker serving in their state legislatures.

¹³ Minta, Michael. (2011) Oversight: Representing Black and Latino Interests in Congress. Princeton University Press.

A

Arizona, California, Hawaii, New Mexico

These states have state legislatures that most closely resemble their diverse populations. They each have, on average, 23 Latino state legislators and 17 Asian American state legislators. However, they will still need to increase the combined number of Latino and Asian American elected officials by about 56 percent between now and 2020 for their state legislatures to mirror their population. More specifically, each needs to elect about 15 additional Latino lawmakers and three additional Asian American lawmakers in the next six years.

B

Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Michigan, New Jersey, Nevada, New York, Ohio, Texas, Utah, Vermont

These states have state legislatures that are fairly representative of their populations but still have plenty of room for improvement. They have an average of 12 Latino legislators and one Asian American legislator in each state. By 2020, they will need to more than *double* the combined current number of Asian American and Latino elected officials in each state. When you break that down by group, each state needs to elect about 17 additional Latino lawmakers and six Asian American lawmakers in the next six years.

C

Alaska, Delaware, Indiana, Kansas, Massachusetts

These states have state legislatures that are not very representative of their populations and have a lot of room for improvement. Each state has, on average, just three Latino lawmakers and one Asian American lawmaker. By 2020, they will need to approximately *quadruple* the current number of Asian American and Latino elected officials currently holding office in each state legislature. That is an average of 12 Latino and five Asian American lawmakers in each state.

D

Georgia, Idaho, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, Missouri, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin, Wyoming

These states have a lot of catching up to do. In fact, each has, on average, just two Latinos and one Asian American in their state legislatures. To be at parity by 2020, they need an approximately *sixfold* increase in the combined number of Latino and Asian American elected officials. That means each state will need to elect about 13 additional Latino lawmakers and five additional Asian American lawmakers.

F

Alabama, Arkansas, Iowa, Kentucky, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Carolina, South Dakota, West Virginia

These states are stuck in the dark ages. Not one has a single Latino or Asian American state legislator. Each would need to elect, on average, eight Latino and two Asian American lawmakers to bring them up to parity by 2020.

Breaking It Down

Grades help us group and classify states, but what do they mean? What is the difference between an A and an F? Very significant, in fact.

California, New Mexico, and Hawaii have quite a progressive immigrant and immigration policy, including DREAM Acts for undocumented students, drivers licenses for undocumented adults, ESL education funding, migrant childcare services, and language-access initiatives, among others. These bills are overwhelmingly authored, sponsored, co-sponsored, and fought for by Latino and Asian American state lawmakers who devote their careers working toward a more inclusive, responsive, and democratic America.

What about Arizona? The state passed SB1070, the so-called “Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act,” which in 2010 became the most famous punitive immigration policy ever passed through a state legislature. This regulation shifted enforcement of immigration law from the federal government to the state, and raised many concerns about racial profiling and legal overstep.¹⁴ Latino state legislators in Arizona were unable to block passage of the law but were able to temper many of its original provisions and have since attempted to repeal it in full.¹⁵

Arizona’s experience highlights an important point. While Asian American and Latino lawmakers are champions of immigrants, they do not operate in a vacuum. Policy-making requires a majority of support to vote bills into laws. Immigrant elected officials need allies. These “immigrant allies” include white and black elected officials who care about improving the lives of immigrants. Demographics in the United States are rapidly changing, but only a few states in the country are “majority-minority.” Even if the composition of the state legislature perfectly mirrored the diversity of the state’s population, pro-immigrant bills would never make it through the legislative process unless minority representatives had allies. Coalitions with allies are crucial to the successful passage of welcoming immigrant legislation. With large enough coalitions, immigrant-friendly bills can overcome the hurdles set by “hostile” legislators who see immigrants as threats to America.

Not surprisingly, states that scored an F are also the most likely to pass punitive anti-immigrant policy, resulting in a patchwork of laws aimed at making life so unbearable for immigrants that they “self-deport.” Specifically, lawmakers in South Carolina and Alabama seem to have been competing to become the most anti-immigrant state in the nation, with both states passing legislation closely mirroring Arizona’s SB1070 in 2011.

¹⁴ For more on Arizona SB1070’s original provisions, see <http://www.ncsl.org/research/immigration/analysis-of-arizonas-immigration-law.aspx>

¹⁵ Rouse, Stella (2013) *Latinos in the Legislative Process: Interests and Influence*. Cambridge University Press.

There are some other exceptions to the rule. States like Maryland and North Dakota, for example, have very poor representational diversity yet pass surprisingly progressive immigration policy. And as mentioned above, better representation doesn't guarantee better policy, as we see with Arizona. The general trend, however, is quite strong. States with more Asian American and Latino lawmakers pass more welcoming and inclusive policy than states with poor representational diversity.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The health of American democracy is closely tied to the participation and involvement of its increasingly diverse residents. Immigrants and their children symbolize not just the present but also future voters and leaders. Their participation in the political process is dependent both on how much they are motivated by political parties and candidates and by how well served they are by legislators.

Recruiting Asian American and Latino Candidates

Given that Asian American and Latino elected officials play a key role in legislating a more welcoming and inclusive policy for America, supporting the recruitment, mentoring, and election of leaders from those communities is critical.

Over the past four years, we have been gathering data on the perceived barriers to office among immigrant leaders. Our analysis is sobering but nonetheless optimistic. We found that first- and second-generation immigrants face the same perceived and real barriers and challenges as any other candidate for political office. These include professional and financial barriers, lack of political networks and political experience, and fear of failure. Yet first- and second-generation immigrants are also well aware that white men have long dominated politics in this country and that racial hierarchies still structure many aspects of their social, economic, and political lives. Their race, immigration status, language abilities, and gender have become self-evident and crippling barriers to elected office. Quite simply, most don't run because they think an Asian American or a Latino can't win an election in America.

Yet we know that this isn't the case. With the proper coaching and mentoring, immigrants can run and most importantly, win.

We also know that descriptive representation isn't necessarily a panacea for immigrant communities, as many minority elected officials such as U.S. Senator Ted Cruz (Texas), Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal, and South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley can in fact be extremely detrimental to immigrant communities by supporting anti-immigrant policies. But these examples are the exception to the norm. The vast majority of Latino and Asian American legislators are elected in majority-minority districts, have strong ties to immigrant communities, and work tirelessly to promote the well-being and interests of all their constituents.

Together We Build

The election of Asian Americans and Latinos as representatives of their communities is a critical step toward a reflective democracy. However, it is only one part of the equation.

More diverse representation requires action on the part of all Americans. Senior elected officials can reach out and mentor new American leaders. Party leaders should be tasked with recruiting and supporting minority campaigns. Non-profit organizations should be prepared to train and equip the emerging majority with the skills needed to run and win. Finally, advocacy groups can both support and hold accountable our future leaders. These combined, focused efforts will go a long way in increasing the number of immigrant elected officials such that the populace comes to redefine “immigrant candidates” as simply “American candidates”.

Incorporating immigrant leaders into our political fabric is not an intractable goal, but rather a practical one. Research shows that the United States has already reached a tipping point – this means America is already a multicultural majority. Of the 62.8 percent of the population that identifies as Non-Hispanic white, many are part of this multicultural majority, either because of their own diverse ancestry or because they share homes, neighborhoods and marriages with diverse Americans. The sooner immigrants are included in the full spectrum of American life, including in leadership positions in government, the sooner American communities benefit from the full participation of immigrant neighbors. **Thus, the wellbeing of immigrants and the need for immigrant leaders is now a critical concern for all Americans.** Building a pipeline of new American leaders from the school board to the Senate requires a combined effort, one that can create a stronger democracy for 2020 and beyond.

A note on representation and policy

We borrowed data from Dr. Jamie Monogan on the aggregate immigration policy “scores” in each state, a score he calculated coding immigrant policy passed from 2005 to 2011 in every state by both its scope and its content. We split our sample of states at its median representation score to roughly divide it into states with “good” representational parity and “poor” representational parity. When we calculate the mean policy score for these two groups we see a large statistically significant difference with representationally diverse states having an average pro-immigrant policy score of .52 (on a -2 to +2 scale with -2 being most anti-immigrant and +2 being most welcoming) and representationally non-diverse states having an average pro-immigrant policy score of -.42. This confirms that states with better representational parity have more welcoming immigrant legislation while states with poor representational parity have generally punitive immigrant legislation. We know, however, that other factors could explain this divergence. To test other explanations, we regressed immigration policy scores against alternate explanations, like party of the governor, growth of the Latino population between 2000 and 2010, which party controls the state legislature, and the representational parity score. What we found was that faster growth of the Latino population was statistically associated with a lower pro-immigration policy score. The party that controlled the legislature had the strongest statistically significant impact on the pro-immigration policy score for the state. States with both the upper and lower chamber of the state legislature controlled by Republicans have pro-immigrant policy scores that are about .60 lower than their Democratically controlled counterparts, all else equal, highlighting the importance of immigrant allies in the state legislature. While the representational parity index score had no statistically significant impact in our model, we know from our case studies that Latino and Asian American legislators play the key role in both introducing and advocating for the pro-immigrant policy in the first place, and therefore play an outsized role in the process.