

AAPI Women in Politics Report

National Focus - 2021



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Asian American Commission



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts Asian American Commission (AAC) is committed to advocating for the Asian American and Pacific Islander community throughout Massachusetts. To learn more, visit the AAC website at www.aacommission.org.

Why AAPI Women Representation Matters¹

Although the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community is the fastest growing demographic in the United States, AAPI individuals—and AAPI women in particular—remain vastly underrepresented in elected offices across the country. This disparity matters. When AAPI women’s voices are more proportionately represented at policymaking tables, they give visibility to the needs of underserved communities and help ensure that federal, state, and local policies are more responsive to diverse constituencies. In short, increasing AAPI women’s political representation leads to a more inclusive, robust, and effective democracy.



Left to right:

- Marilyn Strickland | WA-10 (House)
- Mazie Hirono | Hawaii (Senate)
- Tammy Duckworth | Illinois (Senate)
- Amata Radewagen | American Samoa (non-voting delegate) (House)
- Pramila Jayapal | WA-07 (House)
- Young Kim | CA-39 (House)

While AAPI women representation has hit a record high in several legislative bodies this year, numerous barriers and gaps persist. This report explores many of these realities and calls for greater gender and racial equality among the elected leaders who represent diverse communities across the United States.²

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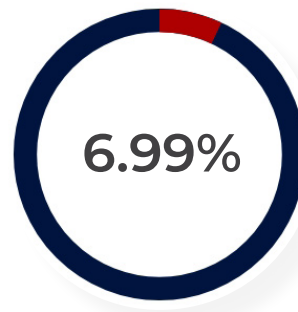
AAPI Women in Elected Office (Federal Level)

Current and Historical Realities³

Within the 117th U.S. Congress (2021-2023):

10 of 143 women

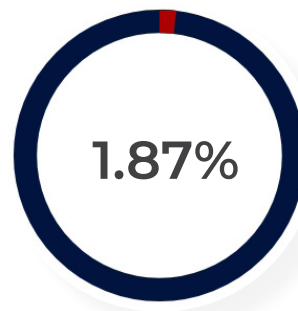
identify as AAPI or multiracial AAPI (see *Appendix*). In total, there are 535 voting members in Congress.



of all women in Congress are AAPI.

1 AAPI woman

serves as the non-voting delegate representing American Samoa. In total, there are six non-voting delegates in Congress.



of all members of Congress are AAPI women.

Prior to the 117th U.S. Congress (2021-2023):

4 AAPI women

in addition to the ones above, served in Congress—all in the U.S. House of Representatives.



Kamala Harris is the **first** AAPI woman elected to the Office of the Vice President of the United States.

AAPI Women in Elected Office (Continued)

Barriers and Progress

BARRIERS

From an intersectional lens, AAPI women at the federal level face considerable biases and obstacles on account of both gender and race. Common barriers include: cultural stereotypes that cast AAPIs as “perpetual foreigners,” gender stereotypes around being weaker and therefore ill-fit to be a politician, fundraising challenges due to limited political donor networks, imposter syndrome, and lack of access to a wide mentor network due to underrepresentation.⁴

PROGRESS

AAPI women representation in the House reached a record high (eight women representatives) as a result of the 2020 election.⁵

67 of the 2,288 women

state legislators serving across the U.S. identify as AAPI or multiracial AAPI. AAPI women serve as state legislators in 22 states.⁶

AAPI Representation: By the Numbers⁷

AAPIs make up **6.1%** of the U.S. population but only **0.9%** of elected leaders in the U.S.

When measuring the percentage of AAPIs in a population against the percentage of elected AAPIs representing that population, studies find that elected AAPIs are proportionately underrepresented at **all levels**, though they have somewhat higher political representation in federal and municipal offices, compared to state legislatures and statewide offices.

While AAPI women lead 81% of state and local AAPI civic engagement organizations, they lag further behind AAPI men when it comes to running for elected office.

6.1%

of the U.S. population is AAPI.

0.9%

of elected leaders in the U.S. are AAPI.

19 states

do not have any AAPI state lawmakers.



“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.”⁸

- Brenda Choresi Carter, Director of the Reflective Democracy Campaign

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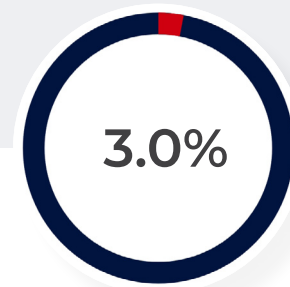
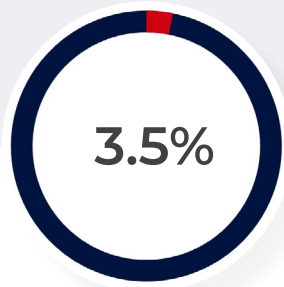
Above:
Philadelphia City Hall

AAPI Women in Political Leadership⁹

Elected Executive Offices

Statewide Elected Executives: Of the 95 women serving in state-wide elected executive offices, **three are Asian American.**

Major U.S. City Mayors: Of the 100 largest U.S. cities, **three have Asian American women mayors** (Bakersfield, Fremont, Irvine; CA).



Conclusion and Recommendations

Given the underrepresentation of AAPI women's representation in elected office, it is critical for organizations—both within and outside of the government—to address current barriers and build upon recent progress. Key recommendations include: offering and increasing access to more political training programs that develop pipelines for electing AAPI women, establishing and expanding political giving circles that resource AAPI women with limited fundraising networks, building out multiracial coalitions that organize across state lines to elect more women of color, encouraging more immigrant AAPI women to run for office, and supporting legislation at the state and local levels that create pathways for more AAPI women in public leadership.

Appendix

Learn More About AAPI Women in Politics (Data as of August 2021)¹⁰

CURRENT AAPI WOMEN SERVING IN ELECTED OFFICE AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL:

U.S. House

- Judy Chu | CA-32
- Pramila Jayapal | WA-07
- Young Kim | CA-39
- Doris Matsui | CA-05
- Grace Meng | NY-06
- Stephanie Murphy | FL-07
- Amata Radewagen | American Samoa (non-voting delegate)
- Michelle Steel | CA-48
- Marilyn Strickland | WA-10

U.S. Senate

- Mazie Hirono | Hawaii
- Tammy Duckworth | Illinois

CURRENT AAPI WOMEN MAYORS OF MAJOR U.S. CITIES:

- Karen K. Goh | Bakersfield, CA
- Farrah Khan | Irvine, CA
- Lily Mei | Fremont, CA

CURRENT AAPI WOMEN IN STATEWIDE ELECTED EXECUTIVE OFFICE:

- Fiona Ma | CA Treasurer
- Betty Yee | CA State Controller
- Kimberly Yee | AZ Treasurer

Endnotes

- ¹ In this report: (1) The categorization of “AAPI women” is used in congruence with the dominant labels and current limitations of publicly available data, while recognizing the need for greater inclusion of nonbinary and gender non-conforming individuals in future data collection and reporting; (2) “AAPI” refers to those who identify as Asian American and/or Pacific Islander, and “Asian American” is generally used when referring to groups with origins or ancestry from specific regions of Asia, but not Pacific Island nations; (3) “Politics” or “political representation” generally refers to electoral politics and/or elected positions.
- ² All statistics listed in this report represent publicly available data as of August 2021.
- ³ Data from this section is credited to: Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University, 2021. See [this page](#) and [this page](#) for updated data each year.
- ⁴ National AAPI Power Fund, New American Leaders Action Fund, Groundswell Action Fund; *Advancing AAPI Women Candidates*; August 2020.
- ⁵ Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University, 2020.
- ⁶ Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University, 2021.
- ⁷ Data from this section is credited to: (1) Reflective Democracy Campaign, *Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) Political Leadership*, May 2021; (2) National AAPI Power Fund, New American Leaders Action Fund, Groundswell Action Fund; *Advancing AAPI Women Candidates*; August 2020.
- ⁸ Quote is printed with the permission of the Reflective Democracy Campaign.
- ⁹ Data from this section is credited to: Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University, 2021. See [this page](#) for updated data.
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