



# The Myth of Representative Democracy

In 1776 an electorate of old white men elected officials who were also old white men. Over the course of the last 200+ years, people marched and blood was spilt to allow women, people of color, immigrants and others to have the simple right to vote. And yet, the vast majority of our elected officials are still older white men.



### **THE ISSUE:**

One in five Americans is an immigrant or has an immigrant parent. Only 1% of the 500,000 elected offices are held by Asians or Latinos. We are not actually the representative democracy we think we are. People of color and from diverse ethnic backgrounds don't feel connected to the very democracy that they have come to this country to be part of, and they are not represented by elected officials.

### **WHY IS YOUR STORY IMPORTANT?**

We'd like to shift people's attitudes - those who feel represented, and those who don't - on why a democracy that reflects demographics matters.

### **NOMINATED BY:**

Sayu Bhojwani, New American Leaders



## 1. The issue

Changing demographics in the United States mean that the country's population will include a majority of minorities by the year 2050. Already (since July 2012) the majority of births in America were to minorities. As we become a majority of minorities, we must contend with creating a more reflective democracy, which looks like and represents the people. Today, nearly 11% of the electorate is Asian or Latino, but that number could double if the 11 million Latinos and 4 million Asians who are eligible to vote would register.

In terms of leadership, 16% of our country is Latino yet less than 6% of Congress is Latino. Nearly 6% of the country is Asian yet less than 3% of Congress is Asian. At the state and local level, the contrast between our country's residents and its population is even starker. Of close to 500,000 state and local offices, less than 1% of seats are occupied by Asians and Latinos.

With elected officials who do not reflect our changing demographics, we also have policymakers who do not understand the experience and needs of diverse Americans – language access, fear of law enforcement, cultural barriers, etc..

This lack of representation goes largely ignored. Many are unaware, while others have difficulty accepting that the country's leadership should be anything but white male. The "birther" movement surrounding President Obama demonstrates that many Americans still don't believe he was born in the U.S. and is the rightful leader of the country.

In recent months, many campaigns have emphasized the importance of immigration to the economy and to society at large, but little attention has been paid to the issue of political representation. By drawing attention to this issue, we want to further our goal to make American leadership be truly representative of the country's demographics. As a result of the leadership change, we expect that policies introduced and implemented will more closely reflect the priorities of diverse communities.

## 2. What are your goals?

We want general audiences to understand that there is a problem with existing representation – that American democracy is not as healthy and strong as we like to think it is.

We want first and second-generation immigrants who don't have a history of running for office to see themselves in leadership positions in ways they haven't before and to see the impact they can have on their communities if they succeed.

## 3. Specific ideas/hooks/concepts

- 1) Trying to pick apart the mental image of "American" and "American leadership" – also



could be – who is really American?//

--When first- and second-generation Americans run for office, we all win.

2) Take down the myth of representative democracy – weave together the visual of the American demographic and Congress (how starkly different they are)

--You miss 100% of the shots you don't take. Run now.

3) Congress is broken, in part because it doesn't represent the people. You can change it. You are already a leader in your community, help represent it.

4) Showing the tangible ways in which immigrants have difficulty accessing services, and how the right leaders could change that access

5) An individual narrative – someone who arrived here, and made good, then contributed to our democracy, a la Raul Ruiz. <http://www.drraulruiz.com/>

#### **4. Facts and Figures**

- 16% of the country's residents are Latino, and only 5.6% of Congress is Latino.
- 6% of the country's residents are Asian, and only 2.2% of Congress is Asian.
- Of the 500,000 elected officials at the local and state levels, less than 1% are Asian or Latino.
- For every 1,000 immigrants living in a county, 46 manufacturing jobs are created or preserved that would otherwise not exist or have moved elsewhere.
- Nearly 18 million—or more than 40 percent of immigrants—are naturalized citizens.
- Nearly 75,000 foreign-born Americans are currently active in the armed forces. In fact, 8% of our armed forces – nearly 1 in 10 men and women serving our country – are first generation immigrants.

#### **5. Guidelines**

A lot has been done recently about immigrants and immigration, particularly about putting a face on undocumented immigrants. We can't add much to that, so let's try not to.



We don't want to give the impression that being immigrant is enough. The kind of person who runs, and the policy they create, is what is important to our work. So, focusing on community leaders might be one way to get at this.

## **Additional Data**

The immigrant population in the United States grew considerably over the past 50 years. In 2011 there were 40.4 million foreign-born people residing in the United States, whereas the immigrant population in 1960 was 9.7 million. Broken down by immigration status, the foreign-born population in 2011 was composed of 15.5 million naturalized U.S. citizens, 13.1 million legal permanent residents, and 11.1 million unauthorized migrants.

The immigrant population was 5.4 percent of the total U.S. population in 1960, when 1 in 20 residents were foreign-born. In 2011 immigrants made up 13 percent of the total U.S. population, meaning that they were one in every eight U.S. residents.

Between 2000 and 2011 there was a 30 percent increase in the foreign-born population. The immigrant population grew from 31.1 million to 40.04 million.

The retirement of the Baby Boom generation will create millions of replacement job openings, even as economic growth creates the need for additional workers to fill newly created jobs. At the same time, our nation is becoming more demographically diverse. Immigrants and their children make up a growing share of the population that will be entering their prime working years over the next two decades.

Between 2010 and 2020, 27.3 million workers will leave the workforce, and between 2020 and 2030 another 31.3 million will leave. In total, these 58.6 million of the 83 million new workers projected to enter the labor force during the next two decades, more than two-thirds of all new workers will be replacements for older workers leaving the workforce. Where will the close to 83 million new workers come from? There are three streams of new entrants to the workforce: 51.3 million grown children of native-born parents today (third-generation or higher Americans); 18.6 million immigrants (first-generation Americans); and 12.9 million grown children of immigrants (second-generation Americans). Hence, 31.5 million of the 83 million new workers, or 38 percent, will be immigrants and their children.

Immigrants today are putting down roots across the United States, in contrast to trends we saw 50 years ago. In the 1960s two-thirds of U.S. states had populations with less than 5 per-



cent foreign-born individuals, but the opposite is true today. In 2010 two-thirds of states had immigrant populations above 5 percent. In 2010, 67 percent of the foreign born lived in the West and the South—a dramatic shift since the 1960s, when 70 percent of the immigrant population lived in the Northeast and Midwest.

The 20 million U.S.-born children of immigrants are significantly better off financially than their immigrant parents. The median annual household income of second-generation Americans is \$58,100, just \$100 below the national average. This is significantly higher than their parents' median annual household income of \$45,800.

U.S.-born children of immigrants are more likely to go to college, less likely to be living in poverty, and equally likely to be homeowners as the average American. About 36 percent of U.S.-born children of immigrants are college graduates—5 percent above the national average. Eleven percent of U.S.-born children of immigrants are in poverty—well below the national average of 13 percent. And around 64 percent of them are homeowners—just 1 percent under the national average.