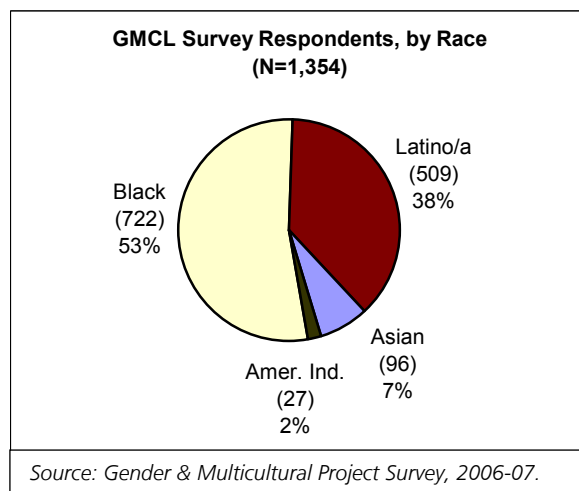




## Elected Officials of Color in the US: A Portrait of Today’s Leaders

As the 21<sup>st</sup> century unfolds, the United States is undergoing substantial demographic change, with nonwhites slated to become the majority population over the next few decades. As the country becomes more diverse, it is important to establish a baseline portrait of today’s elected leadership with a focus on gender as well as race/ethnicity. To this end, the Gender and Multicultural Leadership Project launched an ambitious endeavor to create a database of more than 10,000 elected officials of color and then to conduct a telephone survey of a sample of these officials that examined their demographic backgrounds, paths to elected office, and positions on some of the most important policies under debate today.

The Gender and Multicultural Leadership Survey is the first comprehensive survey of elected officials of color that includes a national sample of women and men who are Black/African American, Latino/a, and Asian/Pacific Islander state legislators, county and municipal officials, and school board members. It also includes American Indian state legislators and a small sample of American Indians from other offices as well. The survey was conducted from summer 2006 to spring 2007. Slightly more than half of the survey respondents are Black/African American; over a third are Latino/a, 7% percent Asian and 2% American Indian (see figure).<sup>1</sup>



### Demographic Background: Significant Gender and Racial/Ethnic Differences

The following table shows selected demographic characteristics for the survey respondents as a whole, by race and by gender. The average age of the elected officials surveyed was 56 and there were no significant gender differences; however, women of color are older when they seek office for the first time: 45 years of age compared to 42 for male elected officials.

Of particular note is the fact that elected officials are highly educated, with 58% having completed college and, in 30% of the cases, gone on to achieve a master’s, law, medical or other graduate degree. Racial differences are large and significant: 87% of Asian elected officials have at least a college degree or higher compared to 63% of Black, and 46% of Latino/a and American Indian officials.

	All	Black	Latino	Asian	Amer. Indian	Men	Women
Age (Mean) (N=1,186)	56	59	53	53	56	56	57
Age First Elected (Mean) (N=1,171)	43	45	42	44	42	42	45
Education (N=1,208)							
College Degree	28	29	25	36	21	26	31
Graduate Degree	30	34	21	51	25	30	30
Household Income (N=1,206)							
Less than \$50k	25	27	24	9	46	22	30
\$150k or more	9	6	9	28	4	10	7
Married (N=1,208)	70	63	77	82	83	80	53
Received gov’t assistance when growing up (N=1,204)	18	17	21	7	29	21	14
Nativity (Non US born)							
Self (N=1,208)	7	1	10	45	0	8	7
Parent(s) (N=1,119)	16	1	35	51	4	19	11
Grandparent(s) (N=1,119)	29	4	60	98	13	31	24

Source: Gender & Multicultural Project Survey, 2006-07.

Women elected officials of color follow a national trend in general: 61% compared to 56% of men have at least a college degree. However, there are large and significant differences when both race and gender are taken into account. Almost all of the Asian males and nine in ten of Asian females have at least a college degree; 77% of Black females compared to 66% of Black males do whereas just 53% of Latina female officials and 50% of Latino male officials have at least a college degree.

The racial differences in terms of household income and nativity of the elected officials (and their parents/grandparents) are shown in the table. One of the most remarkable findings is that, whereas 80% of male elected officials are married, just 53% of women are.

## Political Background and Experience

About a third reported “having been raised in a political family” with a ten-point gender gap (40% of women said yes compared to 30% of men). Racial differences were striking: 42% of American Indians, 35% of Blacks and 34% of Latinos/as answered in the affirmative, compared to just 19% of Asians. Furthermore, there were striking differences by race in interaction with gender: 43% of Latina elected officials compared to 30% of their male counterparts answered yes; the Asian gender gap was almost nine percentage points and 40% of Black female compared to 32% of Black male elected officials said they were raised in a political family.

Of those who reported party affiliation, about 8 in 10 are Democrats and, among the rest, there is a greater proportion of Independents (11%) than Republicans (8%). The incidence of Democratic partisanship is higher among Blacks (82%) than American Indians (77%), Latinos (72%), and Asians (56%). Women are more likely to report being Democrats than men and, although there is no gender difference among Latinos, there is a ten-percentage-point gender gap among Asians and about a five- point gap among Blacks.

Two thirds of all respondents said yes when asked, “Is this your first elective position?” There were no significant differences by race but a five-point gender gap: 70% of women officials, compared to 65% of men, are first-time office holders.

## What Offices Do They Hold? Differences by Race and Gender Emerge

About half (47%) hold positions at the municipal level, 26% at the school board level, 16% at the county level, and 11% hold positions at the state legislative level.

Almost four in ten (38%) respondents are women of color. The share of women of color elected officials is highest among Blacks at 43%, followed by American Indians at 41%, and Asians and Latinos/as at 31%. Men of color make up a higher proportion of state legislators (62%) and municipal officials (64%) than women (38% and 36%, respectively). Men and women make up about equal shares of school board members (52% and 49%, respectively) but county officials of color are much more likely to be male (77%) than female (23%).

As the table below shows, 11% of men and women alike report serving as state legislators; 48% of men and 45% of women hold municipal offices. The biggest disparities are in county government and school boards where just 10% of women are elected county officials (at the level of commissioner/supervisor) compared to 19% of men; in contrast 34% of women and 22% of men are school board members.

Level of Office by Race and Sex  
(%)

Level	All	Black	Latino	Asian	Amer. Ind.	Men	Women
State Legislature	11	10	8	19	67*	11	11
Municipal	47	51	43	45	26	48	45
County	16	20	13	4	4	19	10
School Board	26	19	37	32	4	22	34

Source: Gender & Multicultural Project Survey, 2006-07.

\*Note: The large percentage of American Indians as state legislators is a function of our data source. During the interview process, some survey respondents listed in the NALEO, Jt. Center, and UCLA Asian directories self-identified as only Native American/American Indian and were re-classified into their correct race. Because we did not sample American Indians at all levels of office, the percentage distribution of state legislators and other levels may not be representative of the true population.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The 1,354 respondents in the survey included 722 Black, 509 Latino, 96 Asian, and 27 American Indian elected officials. Under the category “Asian” we include Pacific Islanders as well as those from East, Southeast and South Asia. The category “American Indian” includes Alaskan Natives.

## About the Gender & Multicultural Leadership (GMCL) Project

The GMCL Survey is to date the nation’s most comprehensive multiracial, multi-office national survey of Black, Latino, Asian, and American Indian elected officials holding positions at the state and local levels. A total of 1,354 elected officials of color were included in this report of the telephone survey conducted between June 5, 2006 and March 21, 2007, by the Institute for Public Policy (IPP) at the University of New Mexico. Seventy-two percent of those public officials who were successfully contacted agreed to participate in the survey. The margin of error for the entire sample is  $\pm 3\%$ .

Besides the survey, other components of the GMCL Project include a **national database** of elected officials of color, by race and gender (as of spring 2006); an annotated **bibliography** and **analytical framework** on the intersection of gender, race/ethnicity, and class; and a project **website** for public education.

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