



Registered OHA Voters Can Make a Difference in 1994

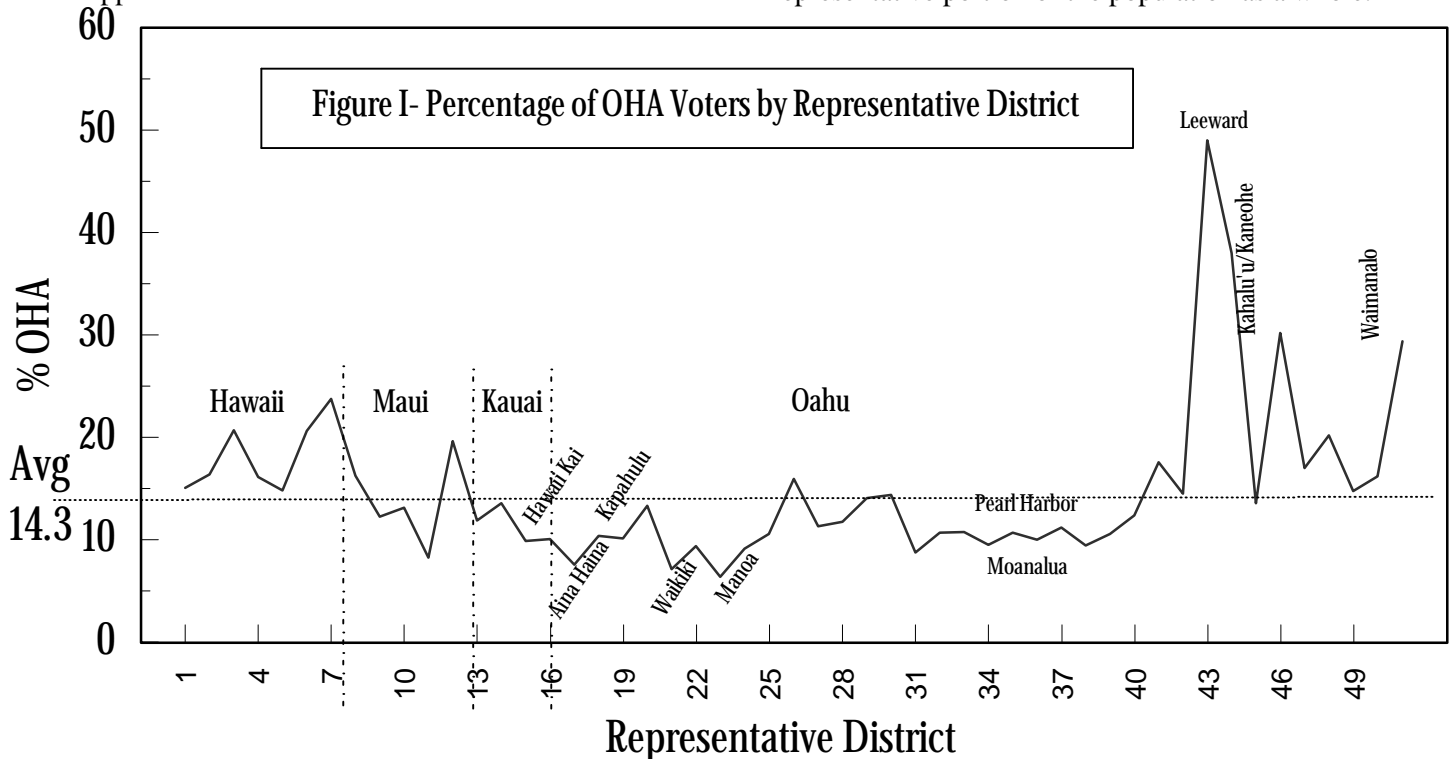
By Malia Kahale and Wendy Kaleiwahea

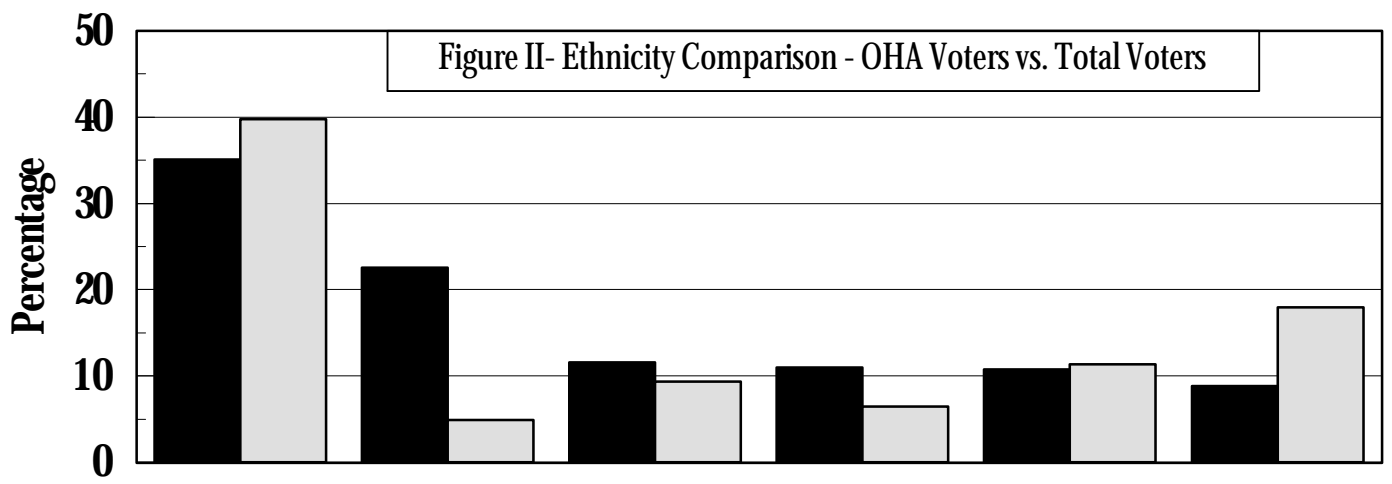
Riding a world-wide wave of ethnic awareness, native Hawaiians are surging towards an identity as a people and a nation in the '90's. Many groups are speaking out and advocating a variety of roads for Hawaiians to follow towards this identity. Questions of "who are the native Hawaiians" and "who can speak for them" begin to take on increased importance. For most, the question of whether they are or are not Hawaiian is obvious, but for many others the answer may be much more subtle.

There are currently two important legal definitions of "Hawaiian"; one used to determine who can lease property in Hawaiian Homestead areas, and the other used to determine who can register and vote in elections for the Trustees of the Office of Hawaiian Affairs. The requirement for Hawaiian Homestead Lands is that you have at least one-half Hawaiian blood quantum. The Office of Hawaiian Affairs definition is included on every Hawaii Voter Registration form. It is not as precise and registration is dependent on the statement of the applicant. It is worded:

"I further swear (affirm) that I am of Hawaiian ancestry as defined in Sec. 11-1, HRS, which states that a Hawaiian is 'any descendant of aboriginal peoples inhabiting the Hawaiian Islands which exercised sovereignty and subsisted in the Hawaiian Islands in 1778, and which peoples thereafter have continued to reside in Hawaii'"

Those who can be considered Hawaiian because they have qualified for OHA registration are indicated on the official file of registered voters of the State of Hawaii. There were 59,406 voters so flagged in November, 1993, representing 14.3% of all registered voters in the state at that time. In this article we will present some facts about this group of Hawaiians. They turn out to be a surprising cross-section of the entire population of the state. They live in every precinct, on nearly every street in the state. In many ways "they are us", a very integrated and representative portion of the population as a whole.





	Caucasian	Polynesian	Chinese	Portuguese	Filipino	Japanese
■ % of OHA	35.1	22.6	11.6	11.0	10.8	8.9
□ % of Total	39.8	4.9	9.4	6.5	11.4	18.0

WHERE ARE THEY?

Where do Hawaiians live? Do they live on Homestead Lands or in tents on the beach? Some might, but most live elsewhere, in nearly every area, on every street. They live in Pearl City, Kona, Manoa, Waikale, Makawao, Kahalu'u and Hanalei. There are expected concentrations of Hawaiians in Hawaiian Homestead Land areas, but basically OHA registrants live all across the state. Figure I shows the percentage of OHA voters who live in each State Representative District. In the middle section of the graph, representing urban Honolulu, all areas are below the average of 14.3%, the lowest being Manoa with 6.4%. The areas with Homestead Lands are easy to spot by the three large peaks on the right side of the graph - 1) the Maile-Waianae-Makaha area, 2) the Kahalu'u-Kaneohe stretch and 3) Waimanalo. Although these areas are higher in concentration of OHA voters, these last ten State Representative Districts only account for 29% of OHA registrants. The other 71% are spread across the rest of the state. So, wherever you live, there is probably an OHA voter on your street or in your building!

WHAT IS IN A NAME?

What is your last name? Is it from the ethnic group you most closely associate with? In studying voter registration data it is interesting to look at ethnic coding of names, especially in a melting pot such as Hawaii. Voter Contact Services has been coding the probable ethnic origin of voters based on surname for some 20 years now. The Hawaii ethnic dictionary was introduced in 1974, and Hawaii campaigns have used it to target voters by ethnic breakdown ever since. Many people in Hawaii are descended from several ethnic groups, and there are a lot of individual mistakes made by coding ethnic origins of voters based on surnames, many caused by marriage.

Although some individuals can be coded incorrectly using ethnic analysis, it is remarkably accurate in the aggregate and some interesting facts can be discovered. Figure II is a comparison of the percentage of total voter vs. the percentage of OHA voters by VCS ethnic group. The spread of OHA registrants across these 6 ethnic groups shows that there are a lot of Hawaiians in the state that don't have Hawaiian surnames. With OHA being a special subset of people of Hawaiian ancestry, one might expect the highest percentage of OHA voters to be in the Polynesian group. The largest group of people, however, are those with Caucasian surnames, with 35%, while Polynesian is next at 22.5%. It should be pointed out the Polynesian coding includes other Pacific Island names, as well as Hawaiian.

An interesting comparison is the percentage of voters in an ethnic group that are registered for OHA. Of the 20,236 total voters coded as Polynesian, 66.2% of them are registered to vote for OHA. The other 30% would include other Pacific Islanders, Hawaiians choosing not to register for OHA and people with Hawaiian surnames that are not of Hawaiian ancestry, i.e. married to a Hawaiian (including one of the two authors). In contrast, people of Japanese ancestry are not highly represented in the OHA tally. There are a total of 116,245 total voters coded as Japanese and only 4.6% of these voters are also registered for OHA. Japanese are known to have strong cultural values, which might decrease the rate of intermarriage by Japanese.

ARE THEY YOUNG OR OLD?

There are some people who can't wait to turn 18 so that they can register to vote, but unfortunately this is a pretty small group. Most people don't get really involved in the political process early in life. They don't think about voting until they begin to see that they can make a difference and

they realize that they can't grumble about what law makers are doing unless they get out and vote themselves. Issues such as increasing taxes and rising cost of living are some issues that might get people out to vote for the President or City Council. These issues tend to affect people more as they grow older.

Hawaiian issues such as sovereignty and returning of Hawaiian Homes Lands are issues that might bring out Hawaiian voters much earlier in life! The young people are the ones who could receive a lot on Hawaiian Homestead Lands and move their family of 5 out of their parents house. They could benefit from an independent sovereign Hawaiian nation. They want to see change.

Issues like this have brought out the younger Hawaiian generation to register to vote in unusually high numbers. And not only can they vote for the OHA Trustees, but they can also vote in all other races. They are beginning to see they have a say in who determines how these issues are resolved and that they can make a difference.


This political activism of the younger generation in OHA can be seen in Figure III. We are not going to focus on the middle area of the graph, the ends are where the story is told. Let's start with the left side. There is an obvious disparity in the 'Percent of Total Voters' line and the 'Percent of OHA Voters' lines here! The 'Percent of Total Voters' line in the under 25 age group is at 3.6% and the OHA line is at 21.1% in the same age group! More than half, 56.2%, of OHA registrants are in the 18-44 age group. For total voters it takes 10 more years, 18-54, and you are only at 54.7%. We know of no other issues, activities or groups in the United States where young people have been attracted to political activism in this way. Young people will respond to things they care about, and OHA is one of them.

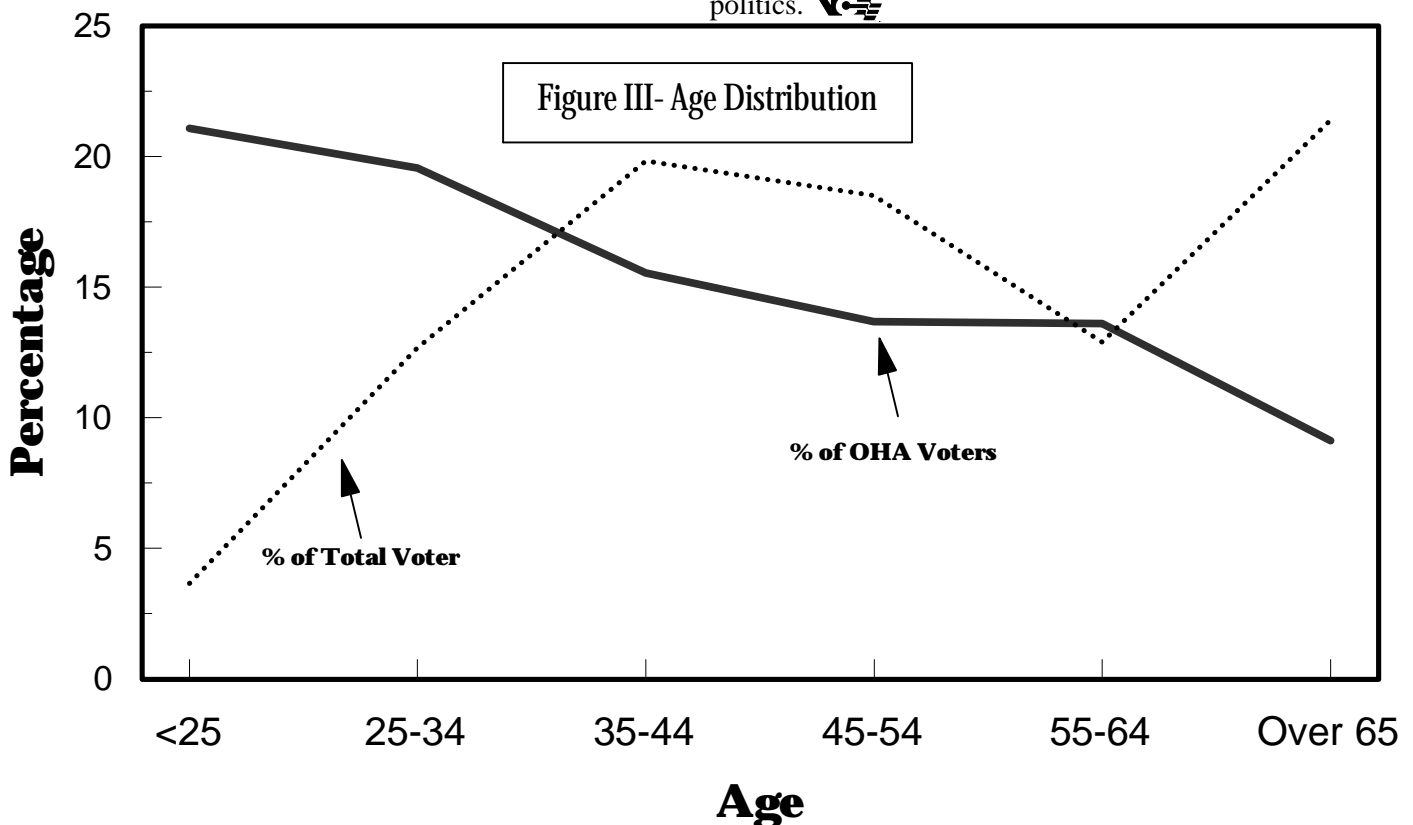
Now to the other end of the graph, the older voters. Although, the deviation of the two lines isn't quite as prominent on this end of the graph, it is still worth looking at. This is the area of the graph where Senior Citizen registration is represented. There has been much in the press lately about the declining health condition of the native Hawaiian population. Poor diet in native Hawaiians has been linked to high incidence of heart disease, cancer, diabetes and hypertension. These types of health problems lead to a lower life expectancy. This may be why OHA registration in Senior Citizens is low. Those older Hawaiians in poor health would be less apt to get out to vote, resulting in the low counts.

ANOTHER YEAR OF THE HAWAIIANS

Regardless of who is Hawaiian and who speaks for them, there is a well known, fairly large, easy to find and politically active group of Hawaiians. They are the OHA registered voters. They represent a broad cross-section of the community, and they will be casting votes in every race this year.

If you are running for office in Hawaii, regardless of the office, there will be a sizable number of OHA voters who will be voting in your race. It seems worth considering their opinions and their interests, and letting them know how you stand on these issues. If you are running for an OHA office, you need to consider the degree to which OHA voters represent a broad cross-section of Hawaii, and have opinions and interest in many subjects beyond OHA.

The issues that they are interested in seem to be ones that attract and motivate young people. This is unique, and might give us all something to consider about how to attract more young people into an interest and involvement in politics. 



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I n t h i s i s s u e - - -

Registered OHA Voters Can Make a Difference in 1994

- ◆ There were 59,406 OHA voters registered in November, 1993, representing 14.3% of all voters registered in Hawaii.
- ◆ Registered OHA Voters live in every area of the State of Hawaii, on nearly every street. Every State Representative District contains more than 5% OHA voters.
- ◆ Less than 25% of Registered OHA Voters have names that are generally associated with probable Polynesian ancestry.
- ◆ Young voters of Hawaiian ancestry are much more likely to be registered, and registered for OHA participation, than any other group of young voters, anywhere.

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