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COMMUNITY VOICE

He 'Aha Kēia? Is This a Convention?

Delegate candidates for a Native Hawaiian Constitutional Convention do not reflect the true makeup of the Native Hawaiian population.

ABOUT 10 HOURS AGO • By Randall Akee

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On Sept. 30, 2015, the candidates for delegates for the aha (Native Hawaiian Constitutional Convention) organized by the group, Nai Aupuni, were announced. The biographies and backgrounds for the candidates were made public on the [Nai Aupuni website](#).

From this list of candidates, 40 delegates will be selected to “come together to decide whether or not to create a document or constitution for a nation and its governance.” The purpose of these efforts are to create a Native Hawaiian constitution and government that could eventually seek federal recognition by the U.S. federal government via the executive branch.

There are many reasons to be concerned with this entire aha process, which really is just an outgrowth of failed attempts at federal recognition via the congressional path, also known as the [Akaka Bill](#).



Cory Lum/Civil Beat

Thousands of Aloha Aina Unity marchers head toward

Kapiolani Park on Aug. 9 in a show of strength for the Native Hawaiian community.

First, there was the fraught process of creating a Native Hawaiian Roll which began as an Office of Hawaiian Affairs initiative called “Kanaiolowalu.” The state-appointed Hawaiian Roll Commission’s objective was to sign up 200,000 Hawaiians to participate in the path to self-governance.

A Native Hawaiian Roll Commission appointed by the governor of Hawaii is an anachronism. The Bureau of Indian Affairs initiated similar rolls for American Indians in the 1800s.

The Native Hawaiian Roll only garnered the interest of some 40,000 people. The commission then approached the state to move names from previously collected lists of Native Hawaiians. To that end, some 71,000 names were moved from the initiatives “Kau Inoa” and “Operation Ohana” to the Native Hawaiian Rolls.

Instead of focusing on these other well-known problems, I shed some light on the representativeness of the candidate pool for the aha.

A constitution is intended to embody the values, priorities and concerns of the population that it governs. Therefore, it is quite useful to take a look at the individuals who are interested in undertaking

this endeavor for Native Hawaiians.

Fair questions would be: Do they represent the average Native Hawaiian? Who should be building the foundations of a Native Hawaiian government? Do they have the same struggles, concerns and values that are prevalent in the various Native Hawaiian communities?

Examining the data provided from the candidates themselves, the answer appears to be a resounding no.

On average, the candidates represent a distinct and relatively small portion of the Native Hawaiian population. There are many attorneys, current and former OHA employees (or trustees themselves), and many graduates of private high schools – Kamehameha in particular accounts for over 25 percent of all individuals in the candidate pool.

Additionally, 58 percent of the candidates are male, which is surprising since there tends to be slightly more women on average in the Native Hawaiian community, especially at older ages. The average age of the candidate pool is about 53, and less than 10 percent of the candidate pool is younger than 30.

Even more unbalanced is the proportion of candidates with a college degree or higher. Approximately 60 percent have a college degree or

more while the average for Native Hawaiians in Hawaii is less than 15 percent.

Large portions of the Native Hawaiian community have decided not to participate. The process either attracts a certain type of individual or it creates significant obstacles that make it impossible for others to participate.

One example of such an obstacle might be the requirement that the delegates must participate in the aha for at least 40 days (during work weeks). This requirement may not be feasible for a large group of Native Hawaiians who work multiple jobs, are in school, or do not have the leave time necessary to participate.

There is something fundamentally wrong with a process that attracts a small minority of the population. Having a skewed candidate pool is a problem if the intention was to represent the will of all Native Hawaiians in this aha process. It may not be a problem, however, if the intention is to create a constitution and a government for the benefit of a select few.

Looking at the Data

I collected data from the individual candidate profiles that are all [publicly available online](#).

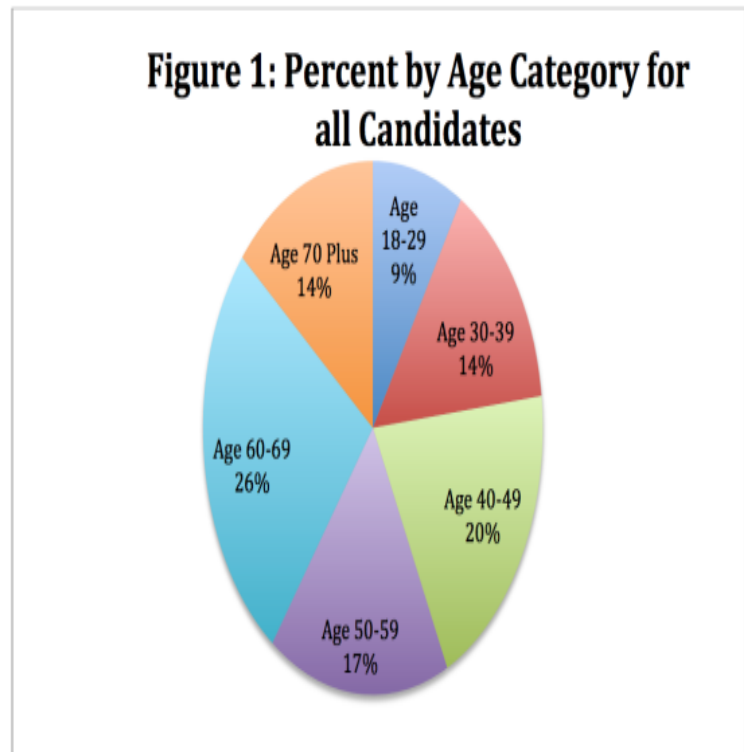
In the table below, I provide information on the

Location	Frequency	Percent	Percent of Native Hawaiians in 2010 US Census
Oahu	116	55%	34%
Hawaii	29	14%	10%
Maui	15	7%	6%
Kauai	5	2%	3%
Molokai	3	1%	1%
California	12	6%	
Washington	7	3%	
Arizona	3	1%	
Nevada	3	1%	
New York	2	1%	
Florida	2	1%	
Washington DC	2	1%	
Alabama	1	0%	
Alaska	1	0%	
Kentucky	1	0%	
Montana	1	0%	
Ohio	1	0%	
Oregon	1	0%	
Sweden	1	0%	
Texas	1	0%	
Utah	1	0%	
Virginia	1	0%	
Wisconsin	1	0%	
Total for Continental US (including Sweden)	42	20%	45%
Total for all locations	2010	100%	99%

As noted earlier, the average age of candidates is approximately 53. In Figure 1 below I provide a distribution of ages for the candidates. Less than 10 percent of the candidates are younger than 30. Almost one-third of the candidates are older than 60 (30 percent) and more than half of the candidates are older than 50.

The fact that such a large proportion of the younger Native Hawaiians are not participating in this process is a problem. While there is value to having the kupuna and makua generations included in this process, a more balanced distribution of

participants by ages is absolutely crucial.



Note: Two individuals did not report an age and are approximately 1% of the total and are not shown in the figure above.

I also compared the educational attainment as reported by candidates in their profiles and these percentages (by highest level of education) to that of the Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander population estimates provided by the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey for 2013 five-year estimates.

None of the Nai Aupuni candidates have less than a high school diploma while about 14 percent of NHOPI adults 25 years old or older have no high school diploma in the 2013 data.

About 9 percent of the Nai Aupuni candidates have

a high school diploma or GED or home schooling is their highest level of education. For the NHOPI group, this proportion is about 36 percent.

About a quarter of the Nai Aupuni candidates have some college background or experience, whereas about 35 percent of NHOPI have some college education. Overall, the data indicates that the candidates for Nai Aupuni are not well represented in these lower education categories.

On the other hand, the Nai Aupuni candidates tend to be over-represented in the college and graduate degree categories. On average, just 15 percent of all NHOPI have a college degree or more in the 2013 data. However, approximately 60 percent of the Na'i Aupuni candidates have a college degree or more. In fact, 13 percent have a law degree of some type and almost 20 percent have a master's degree.

Finally, approximately 6 percent of the candidates hold a doctorate degree of some type.

The candidates for Nai Aupuni are drawn heavily from the upper end of the educational distribution and are not representative of the Native Hawaiian population in general.

It is also possible to identify where individuals graduated from high school in this data, as many mention it in their personal statements.

In Table 3 below, we see that over one-fourth of the candidates are graduates of the Kamehameha Schools. This is larger than the proportion of Kamehameha graduates in the Native Hawaiian population at large.

Overall, if other private school graduates are included, over 30 percent of the candidates for Nai Aupuni are from private high schools in Hawaii. However, only about 16 percent of Native Hawaiians attend private schools in Hawaii, according to U.S. Census data.

Table 3: High School Graduation by Type

Kamehameha Graduate?	Freq.	Percent
Yes	52	24.76
Yes - Maui Campus	2	0.95
Punahou	2	0.95
Sacred Hearts Academy	3	1.43
St. Louis	2	0.95
Damien	1	0.48
St Andrews Priory	1	0.48
Public School or No Information	147	70
Total	210	100

Finally, I compared candidates' employment and occupation information as contained in their online profiles. There are 32 individuals who are currently employed or previously employed by OHA, Kanaiolowalu, the state Legislature, Department of Hawaiian Homelands, or U.S. senators or

representatives or non-profits working on behalf of U.S. federal recognition. These individuals comprise 15 percent of the candidate pool.

A Top-Down Approach

The data provided above paints an interesting picture of the candidate pool for the aha. The candidates are drawn from very specific parts of the Native Hawaiian community that are quite well-educated, male, and middle-aged or older.

A large portion of the candidate pool is private-school educated and is well-connected to the existing agencies that are spearheading the federal recognition process. Fewer individuals are drawn from the younger cohorts of Native Hawaiians or those with lower educational attainment.

There are entire segments of the Native Hawaiian population that do not appear in the candidate pool. For instance, there are very few (if any) homeless participants from my reading of the candidate descriptions.

I also do not find any fishermen or fisherwomen in the list. While there are a few farmers, they number less than a handful. I don't find a single musician or entertainer in the list. Finally, there is a lack of cultural practitioners in the candidate list.

I note that there is one individual who has

graduated to the level of olapa, another candidate has graduated as a laau lapaau practitioner (level wasn't specified in application), another is a well-known expert in loko ia and another has extensive experience on the Hawaiian Burial council. Beyond these four individuals it does not appear that there are other cultural practitioners or experts in the list of candidates.

It must be made clear that I have no problem with the individual candidates themselves. Many of them have provided heartfelt statements of their desire to work for the benefit of Native Hawaiians. I believe many of them.

I question, however, the Nai Aupuni and Kanaiolowalu processes. These state-led and funded processes either discouraged (purposely or not) participation by the majority of Native Hawaiians or only encouraged participation by a select few.

In either case, the process is fatally flawed. One cannot build a house on a foundation of sand. This biased process does not represent Native Hawaiians as they exist in Hawaii (and the continental United States).

What should be done? How about a process that is explicitly inclusive of all Native Hawaiians to start? How about a process that provides educational materials that are accessible and available to

Native Hawaiians from all walks of life?

The process of organizing a government needs to come from the bottom up, not from the top down. Elites should not run this show. This should be inclusive for all. First, we need to know what the priorities are for Native Hawaiians. We have to reach a consensus on priorities, values and desires for the future and the nation.

It is not clear why anyone would attempt to create a constitution for a Native Hawaiian government without knowledge of these priorities, values and desires. A constitution enshrines the soul of a nation in a single document. How can the proposed aha ensure that there will be an inclusive outcome when candidates are drawn from just a sliver of the Native Hawaiian population?

How can this process pretend to represent the desires of all Hawaiians? If there is no concern or outrage by those in charge of the aha, then it is clear that this was not really for the rest of us in the first place but, instead, for just a few.

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they can be shorter or longer) and we need a photo of the author and a bio. We welcome video commentary and other multimedia formats. Send to news@civilbeat.com.

About the Author



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Dr. Randall Quinones Akee is an assistant professor in the Departments of Public Policy and American Indian Studies at UCLA. Before earning his doctorate at Harvard University he worked for several years for the State of Hawaii Office of Hawaiian Affairs Economic Development Division. He is also a graduate of the Kamehameha Schools. He is a research fellow at the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development.

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Moki Hana ·

Welder at Navy Shipyard

While those are some good data points to consider, lets reflect on what that other respresentive groups, that are elected, look like relative to their population? Thus, does congress reflect and mirror society in general--- obviously no. In fact, while we all chagrin some of their thinking and decisions, congress, as a body, is one of the most educated institutions around, with about 95%