



TAKING OUR SEAT

The South Asian Voice in Redistricting

---

New York City Districting Commission  
Redistricting Hearing for Queens County

Testimony of  
Mohammed Sadiq, Taking Our Seat

August 21, 2012

Good evening, my name is Mohammed Sadiq and I am with Taking Our Seat, a Queens-based non-partisan, civic organization. Taking Our Seat was founded to empower South Asian-Americans (SAA) in the electoral process by eliminating South Asian voter dilution through the redistricting process. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to present my testimony.

I testified 10 years ago before the 2002 Districting Commission and I am back here 10 years later asking for the same thing – to keep our neighborhoods together. The difference between 2002 and 2012 is that the neighborhoods I spoke about have grown in size and in population. The institutions that serve them have grown as well creating an undeniable presence in Queens and in New York.

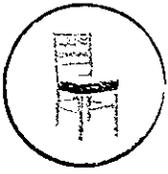
I hope though that there is difference in the outcome in 2012 – that you stop SAA voter dilution.

**Background on Taking Our Seat**

Taking Our Seat defines a South Asian American as anyone who can trace their ancestry back to the countries of South Asia or to a South Asian diaspora, for example, the Caribbean or Africa. Countries include Bhutan, Bangladesh, Fiji, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Trinidad & Tobago, Guyana and Surinam among others.

Taking Our Seat was formed because the SAA community's growth in population and over the past decade has not translated to electoral influence. SAA voters do not have viable choices at the polls and for SAA candidates seeking elected office the door has been closed.

Taking Our Seat seeks to level the playing field for SAA voters by analyzing data from the 2010 Census to help inform the redistricting process. Data collection, research and analysis are the basis of our community organizing, legislative and legal advocacy efforts.



## TAKING OUR SEAT

## The South Asian Voice in Redistricting

---

### **The South Asian American Community**

There is not a single SAA representing New York in Congress, in either house of the State legislature or in the New York City Council. These facts do not reflect the strength of the number of SAAs from the 2010 Census data.

According to the 2010 Census, there are 351,000 SAAs in New York City. This represents an increase of 61% over the past decade. Of these, nearly 60% reside in Queens County. The largest communities of SAAs are found in the following cluster of neighborhoods:

- Richmond Hill and South Ozone Park
- Briarwood and Jamaica Hills
- Jackson Heights and Elmhurst
- Bellerose and Floral Park

These neighborhoods and the SAAs living in them are the victims of cracking, where multiple district lines dilute the residents' voting power. For example, Richmond Hill and South Ozone Park are broken into 4 different Council districts; Briarwood and Jamaica Hills are broken into 3 Council districts.

### **South Asian American Voter Dilution in New York City**

The district lines drawn as a result of the redistricting process following the 2000 Census disenfranchised SAA communities. Due to these lines, SAA voters do not have an equal opportunity to elect a candidate of their choice. For SAA candidates, a fractured base of SAA voters spread over many districts has cost SAA candidates endorsements, fundraising opportunities and has forced SAA candidates to reach far into non-neighboring communities at great expense and with little success. With the community spread over many districts due to voter dilution the only way for meaningful political participation for SAA voters has been through political contributions where much of the contributions have left the community.

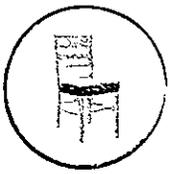
**In those Queens neighborhoods where SAAs are most concentrated, existing electoral district lines serve to dilute SAA voter strength.** Below is the current political representation of the four highest concentration SAA cluster of neighborhoods.

**Richmond Hill Cluster: Council Districts 32, 30, 28 & 29**

**Jackson Heights Cluster: Council Districts 24, 25, 26 & 29**

**Briarwood Cluster: Council Districts 23, 24 & 27**

**Bellerose Cluster: Council District 23**



### **The Solution: Mosaic Districts**

To address the dilution of the South Asian American vote, Taking Our Seat proposes drawing diverse, multi-ethnic districts. This would stop SAA voter dilution while taking into account the close proximity in which SAAs live to other races.

In Queens County's top 100 concentrated SAA census tracts, SAAs tend to live in proximity to other **minorities** in the following prevalence: 56% Latinos, 28% Black and 16% Non-South-Asian Asians. Only 7% of the top 100 SAA concentrated census tracts have a White majority.<sup>1</sup>

We can conclude that SAAs live in multi-cultural census tracts and neighborhoods where a community of interest includes multiple races. Using 2010 Census data, Taking Our Seat identified "Melting Pot" census tracts which have at least 15% South Asians, but where no other racial group exceeds 40% of the total. Melting Pot census tracts anchored clusters of neighborhoods based on existing neighborhood boundaries to base multi-ethnic or Mosaic Districts.

Keeping these clusters of neighborhoods whole in the redistricting process will stop the dilution of SAA votes as well as respect neighboring communities and preserve neighborhood lines.

When drawing legislative district lines, Taking Our Seat requests that the following cluster of neighborhoods be kept whole:

- Richmond Hill, South Ozone Park and Ozone Park
- Briarwood and Jamaica Hills
- Jackson Heights and Elmhurst
- Bellerose, Queens Village, Floral Park and Glen Oaks

By keeping them whole in larger districts or combining them in whole to form complete districts, SAA voter dilution will be eliminated while maintaining the multi-cultural aspect of these vibrant neighborhoods.

A good example of this is when the State's redistricting commission drew the 24<sup>th</sup> Assembly district. Although it did not capture entire neighborhoods the new district's make up is: Asian: 33%; White: 26%; Hispanic 18%; and Black: 13%. The newly drawn 24<sup>th</sup> Assembly district proves that it is possible to draw multi-ethnic districts that don't dilute SAA votes.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak and I welcome any questions you may have.

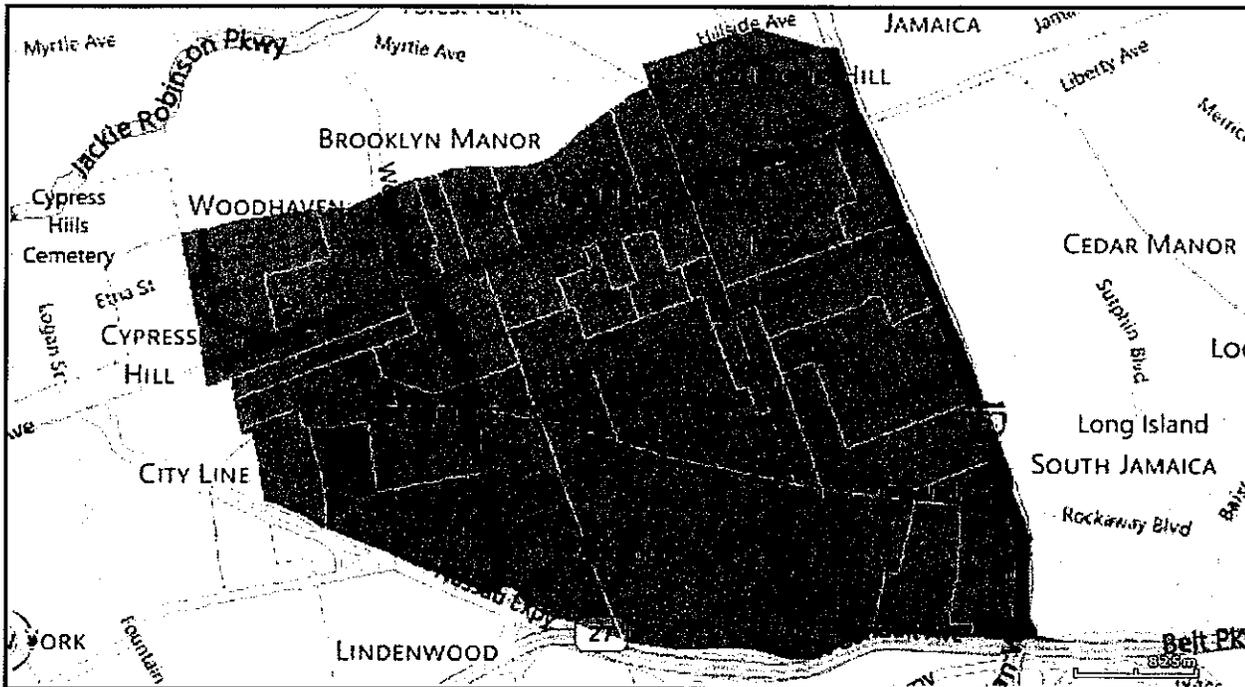
---

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 2: New York City map with co-residence trends of South Asian Americans



Appendix 1: South Asian Neighborhood Clusters

**Richmond Hill, Ozone Park, South Ozone Park Community of Interest**



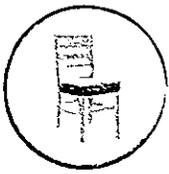
**Boundaries:** North: Jamaica Avenue to Hillside Avenue  
 East: Van Wyck Expressway  
 South: Belt Parkway  
 West: Brooklyn-Queens County Line

**Cluster Profile:** The SAAs in this cluster are primarily Asian-Indian and Indo-Caribbean.

Total Population	192,000
White	11.9%
Black	15.3%
Hispanic	33.8%
Asian	23.6%
Other	14.5%

**Compact:** Yes, approximately 6 square miles; smooth boundary; rectangular in shape.

**Contiguous:** Yes.



# TAKING OUR SEAT

## The South Asian Voice in Redistricting

---

### Community of Interest:

- 1) *Political Subdivisions:* Queens Community Boards 9 and 10.
- 2) *Local High Schools:*

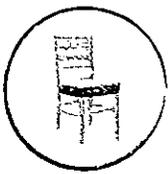
Richmond Hill High School	Data for 2010-2011 School Year
Asian	34.1%
Black	16.0%
Hispanic	47.1%
White	2.4%

John Adams High School	Data for 2010-2011 School Year
Asian	28.2%
Black	29.3%
Hispanic	36.6%
White	4.4%

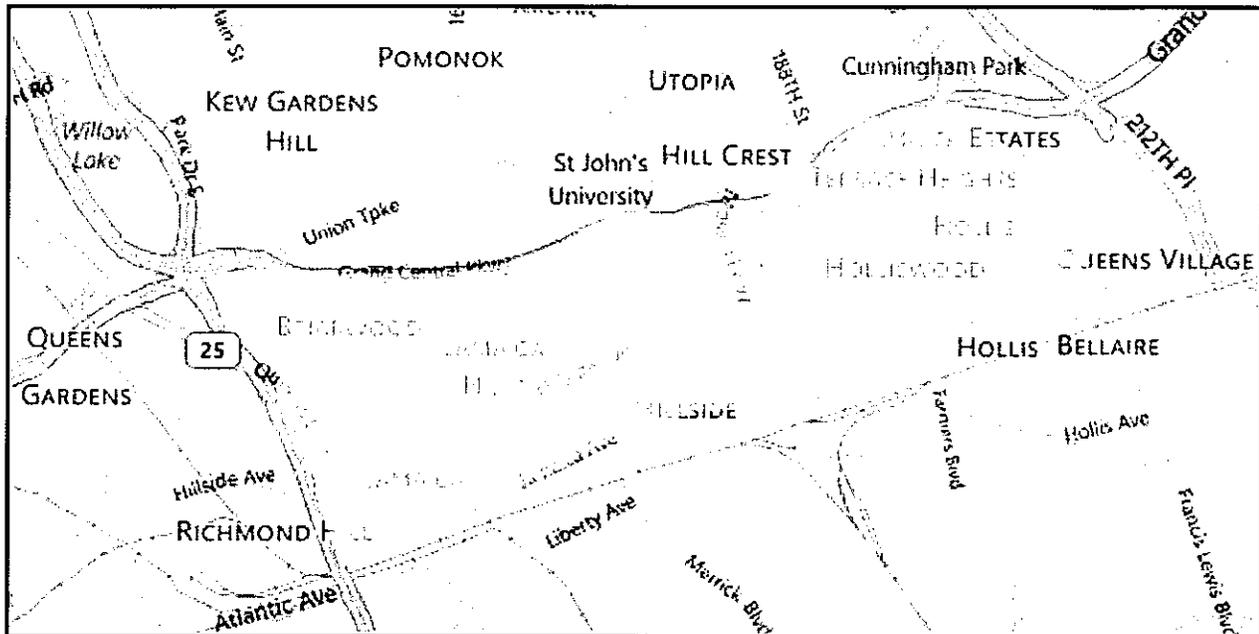
- 3) *Common Transportation Characteristics:*
  - a. Subway: J,Z line and A line;
  - b. Buses: Q7, Q8, Q10, Q11, Q21, Q24, Q37, Q41, Q53, Q56, Q110, QM15, QM 18, BM5.
  - c. Main Thoroughfares: Atlantic Avenue, Jamaica Avenue, Liberty Avenue, Woodhaven Boulevard.
  - d. Average Commute Time: 45 minutes<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> 2000 Census Data for Richmond Hill; information for other neighborhoods in this cluster not available.



**Briarwood, Jamaica Hills, Jamaica Estates Community of Interest**



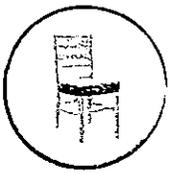
**Boundaries:** North: Grand Central Parkway  
East: Francis Lewis Boulevard  
South: Jamaica Avenue & Long Island Railroad  
West: Van Wyck Expressway

**Cluster Profile:** The SAAs in this cluster are primarily are Asian-Indian, Bangladeshi-American and Indo-Caribbean.

Total Population	107,000
White	13.3%
Black	18.8%
Hispanic	28.1%
Asian	30.9%
Other	8.4%

**Compact:** Yes; approximately 3 square miles; smooth boundary; rectangular in shape.

**Contiguous:** Yes.



Community of Interest:

- 1) *Political Subdivisions:* Queens Community Boards 8 and 12.
- 2) *Local High Schools:*

Hillcrest High School	Data for 2010-2011 School Year
Asian	34.1%
Black	40.1%
Hispanic	22.3%
White	2.6%

Jamaica High School	Data for 2010-2011 School Year
Asian	29.6%
Black	48.6%
Hispanic	20.7%
White	0.8%

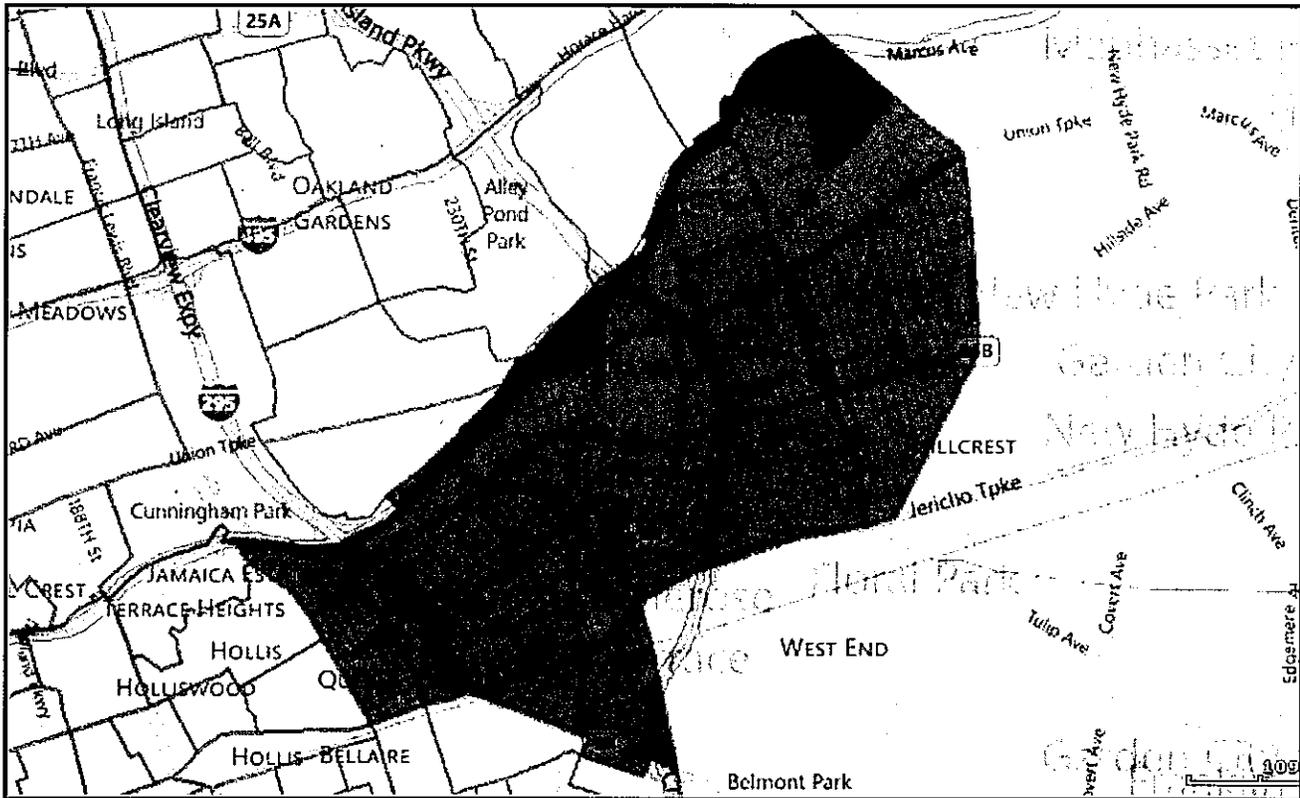
- 3) *Common Transportation Characteristics:*
  - a. Subway: E and F Train
  - b. Buses: Q20a, Q20b, Q25, Q30, Q31, Q34, Q44, Q65. This cluster abuts the Jamaica-Archer Avenue Transportation Hub where a majority of Queens bus routes begin/terminate.
  - c. Main Thoroughfares: Grand Central Parkway, Hillside Avenue, Jamaica Avenue, Parsons Boulevard, Sutphin Boulevard.



**TAKING OUR SEAT**

**The South Asian Voice in Redistricting**

**Bellrose, Queens Village, Floral Park, Glen Oaks**



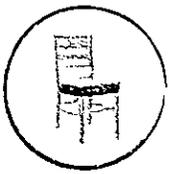
**Boundaries:** North: Grand Central Parkway  
 East: Queens-Nassau County Line  
 South: Jamaica Avenue – Hempstead Avenue  
 West: Francis Lewis Boulevard

**The Cluster Profile:** The SAAs in this cluster are primarily Asian-Indian.

Total Population	79,000
White	27.5%
Black	14.5%
Hispanic	16.9%
Asian	32.8%
Other	7.9%

**Compact:** Yes, approximately 5 square miles; smooth boundary; trapezoidal in shape.

**Contiguous:** Yes.



Community of Interest:

- 1) *Political Subdivisions:* Queens Community Board 13.
- 2) *Local High Schools*

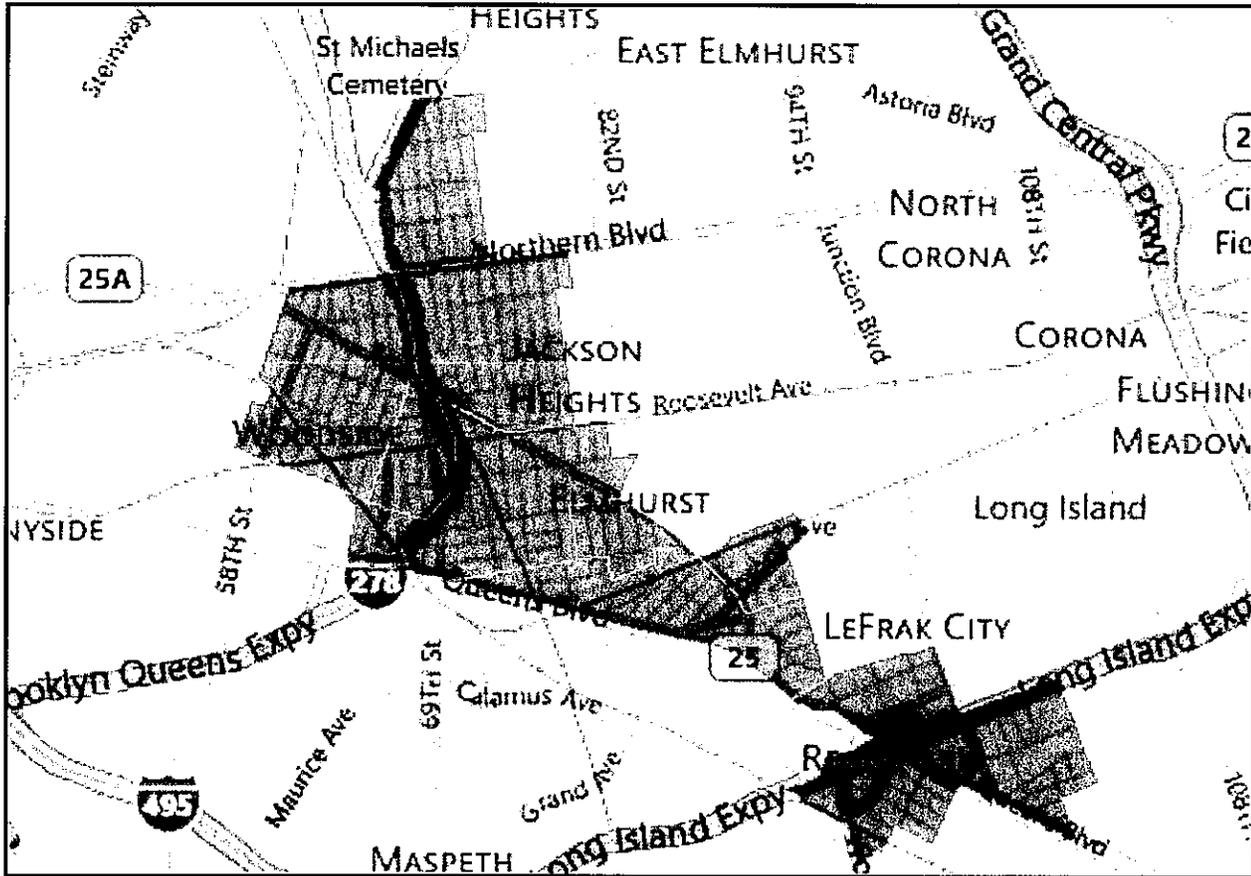
Martin Van Buren High School	Data for 2010-2011 School Year
Asian	22.7%
Black	59.2%
Hispanic	14.9%
White	2.4%

Queens High School of Teaching	Data for 2010-2011 School Year
Asian	23.7%
Black	47.1%
Hispanic	15.7%
White	12.8%

- 3) *Common Transportation Characteristics:*
  - a. Subway: None, bus routes connect commuters to E and F trains or Long Island Rail Road Queens Village Station.
  - b. Buses: Q1, Q27, Q43, Q46, Q76, Q88, X86, QM6, QM5, QM8, N1, N6, N24
  - c. Main Thoroughfares: Grand Central Parkway, Hillside Avenue, Jamaica Avenue, Francis Lewis Boulevard, Braddock Avenue, Springfield Boulevard.



**Jackson Heights, Elmhurst, Woodside and Rego Park**



**Boundaries:** North: Irregular  
 East: Irregular  
 South: Primarily Queens Boulevard  
 West: Irregular

Since the boundaries are irregular, this cluster can be identified by the following census tracts: 247, 257, 259, 261, 263, 265, 267, 289, 287, 291, 293, 309.02, 483, 481, 471, 473, 485, 687, 683, 717.



## TAKING OUR SEAT

## The South Asian Voice in Redistricting

---

The Cluster Profile: The SAAs in this cluster are primarily Asian-Indian and Bangladeshi-American. There is an equally large East Asian population as well.

Total Population	81,500
White	15.7%
Black	1.4%
Hispanic	29.7%
Asian	50.3%
Other	2.8%

Compact: Yes, approximately 2 square miles; jagged boundaries; irregular in shape.

Contiguous: Yes.

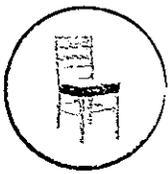
### Community of Interest

- 1) *Political Subdivisions:* Queens Community Boards 2, 3, 4 and 6.
- 2) *Local High Schools*

Newtown High School	Data for 2010-2011 School Year
Asian	23.9%
Black	9.1%
Hispanic	61.4%
White	5.3%

High School for Arts and Business	Data for 2010-2011 School Year
Asian	9.3%
Black	8.3%
Hispanic	79.1%
White	2.9%

- 3) *Transportation:*
  - a. Subway: 7, E, F, M, R.
  - b. Buses: Q29, Q32, Q47, Q49, Q53, QM2, QM2a, QM3.
  - c. Main Thoroughfares: Queens Boulevard, Roosevelt Avenue, Broadway, Northern Boulevard.



Appendix 2

**Patterns of Co-residence in 159 NYC Census Tracts where South Asians are at least 15 percent of the Total Population**

**South Asian Tracts**

-  Whites are 40 percent or more of the population
-  Hispanics are 40 percent or more of the population
-  Blacks are 40 percent or more of the population
-  Asians are 40 percent or more of the population
-  Melting Pot, with South Asians between 30 and 40 percent of the population
-  Melting Pot, with South Asians between 15 and 29.9 percent of the population

Melting Pot tracts are defined as tracts where no group exceeds 40 percent of the population

