

ASIAN AMERICANS TURN OUT FOR WHAT?

SPOTLIGHT ON YOUTH VOTERS IN 2014

*An analysis and presentation of the
APIAVote & Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC 2014 Voter Survey*



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Asian Americans have, for decades, been a rapidly growing population segment in the United States. More recently, they have also been growing significantly in their political presence, as measured by the growth of registered voters (an average increase of 600,000 per midterm election cycle), Congressional candidates (from 10 candidates in 2010, 30 in 2012 and 39 in 2014), or the number of organizations involved in voter registration (from 154 participating in National Voter Registration Day in 2012 to 317 organizations in 2014).

Along with the growing presence of Asian American voters is a growing interest in the opinions and priorities of this electorate. This report presents the results of interviews conducted by telephone from August 14 to September 11, 2014, of 1,337 registered voters who identify as Asian American, producing an overall margin of sampling error of +/- 2.7%. Sampling was targeted towards the six largest national origin groups that together account for more than 75% of the Asian American adult citizen population. Interviews were conducted in English, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean, and Vietnamese, and included landlines and mobile phones.

The data on Asian Americans youth reveal that:

- *Age bears a significant relationship to nativity among Asian Americans*
 - Young adults are a much higher proportion of U.S.-born Asian American adult citizens than of foreign-born naturalized citizens
- *In past midterm elections, Asian American youth participation has been low relative to older Asian Americans, and to white and African American youth*
- *Asian American young adults are those least likely to receive election-related voter contact*
- *At the same time, Asian American young adults are more likely than average to say that they are more enthusiastic about the 2014 election than prior elections*
 - This heightened interest among Asian American youth suggests that greater outreach and more targeted efforts at youth can make a difference in turnout
- *We find the greatest gains in voter turnout are among young Asian American adults*
 - While turnout among Asian American registered voters can increase from 60% to 77% among Asian Americans overall, the increase is much more dramatic among young Asian American adults, increasing from 37% to 63%
 - Voter education and outreach will be key to ensuring that voter turnout among Asian American youth is higher than in recent midterm elections.

BACKGROUND: THE RAPIDLY GROWING ASIAN AMERICAN ELECTORATE

The Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community has long been among the fastest growing populations in the United States, with immigration playing a significant role. More recently, these communities have been notable for their quickly developing civic and political infrastructure, including a growing base of voters, donors, elected officials, appointees, and public policy advocates. This transformation is ongoing, but the potential is already being realized in many states and localities, and especially in elections with narrow margins.

According to a report from the Center for American Progress and AAPI Data, the number of Asian American voters in the last decade has nearly doubled from more than 2 million voters in 2000 to 3.9 million voters in 2012.¹ The report estimates that Asian Americans will reach 5 percent of voters nationally by 2025 and 10 percent of voters by 2044. In many states and localities, however, these milestones have already been achieved. For example, AAPIs are already 5 percent or more of the citizen voting age population (CVAP) in 7 states, including two (California and Hawaii) where they are over 10% of the CVAP. Looking next at counties, AAPIs are 5 percent or more of the CVAP in 73 jurisdictions, including 33 jurisdictions where they are greater than 10 percent. When looking at congressional districts, there are 10 where AAPIs account for more than 25 percent of the CVAP, 35 districts where they account for between 10 percent and 25 percent, and 58 districts where they account for between 5 percent and 10 percent.

Just as the population of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders has grown, so too has the number of registered voters. And this has been true, not only during presidential election years but also in midterm elections. In midterm elections over the last two decades, the number of AAPI registered voters has increased by an average of about 600,000 over the prior cycle—from about 1.4 million AAPI registered voters in 1994 to 3.9 million in 2010.² More recently, there has also been a rapid growth in the civic infrastructure of AAPI communities. For example, this year 317 AAPI serving organizations participated in National Voter Registration Day, more than double the number of organizations who participated in 2012 (154). Importantly, a growing number of community-based organizations are integrating voter registration into their regular activities and programs throughout the year. In doing so, these organizations amplify and reinforce the importance of civic engagement, especially as growing civic participation increases the ability of organizations to advocate for their communities' interests.

¹ Center for American Progress and AAPI Data, “State of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders” (2014), available at <http://ampr.gs/AAPIREports2014> (last accessed October 2014).

² Analysis by AAPI Data of Current Population Survey Voter Supplement data from 1994, 1998, 2002, 2006, and 2010.

The growth of AAPI civic participation is due, not only because community organizations are getting more involved, but also because of the growing number of AAPI elected officials and candidates running for office. Each time a leader from the community decides to run for office or secure an appointment, they engage their network of extended family and friends to become involved. According to the 2014 UCLA Asian Pacific American Political Almanac, there are at least 4000 Asian American and Pacific Islander elected officials and appointees from 39 states.³ Recent years have seen a surge of Asian Americans running for Congress, from 8 in 2008 and 10 in 2010, to 30 in 2012,⁴ and 39 in 2014.⁵ In addition to Congress, there are hundreds of AAPI elected officials at the state and local levels, including 182 state representatives from 21 states and territories.⁶

The growth of these elected officials is supported with the growing political infrastructure. The last two decades, more political PACs and Democratic and Republican clubs and caucuses have been established. There is also a growing number of staffers of Asian descent involved with campaigns. The Democratic National Committee has had an AAPI community desk focused on engagement with the AAPI community since the 1990s. More recently, the Republican National Committee has hired staff and provided assistance in outreach to AAPIs in several states.⁷

³ Don T. Nakanishi and James Lai, eds., “National Asian Pacific American Political Almanac” (2014), University of California Los Angeles Asian American Studies Center.

⁴ Jeffrey Stein, “With Surging Numbers, Asian-Americans Look for Congressional Gains” (2012) CNN, available at <http://www.cnn.com/2012/07/15/politics/asian-americans-congress/> (last accessed October 2014).

⁵ Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies, “Advancement in Congress with 39 AAPI Candidates in the 2014 Elections,” (2014) available at <http://apaics.org/advancement-in-congress-with-39-aapi-candidates-in-the-2014-elections/> (last accessed October 2014).

⁶ Nakanishi and Lai, 2014.

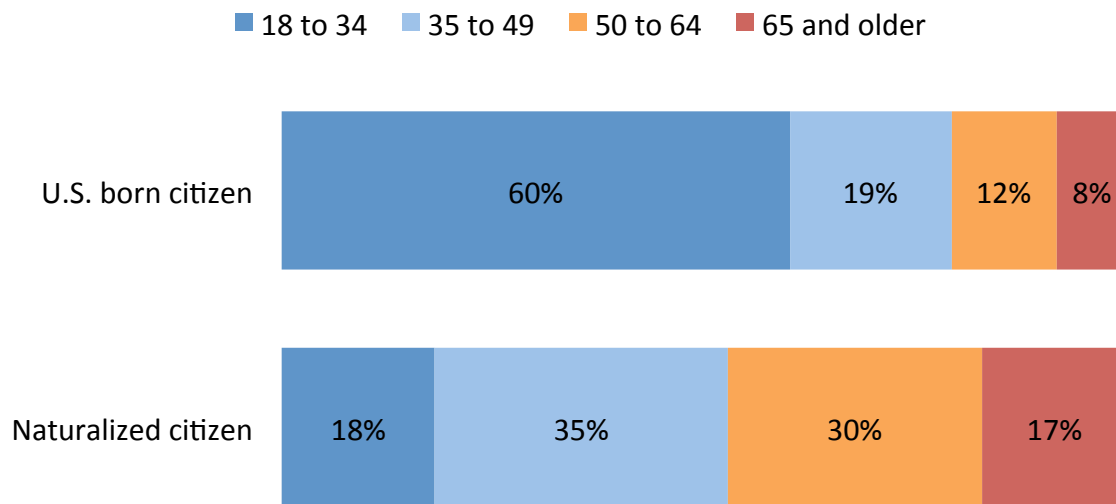
⁷ Moore, Martha T. “GOP Sees Need to Woo Asian-American Voters.” (2013) *USA Today* <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2013/04/11/republicans-asian-americans/2066389/> (last accessed October 2014)

BACKGROUND ON ASIAN AMERICAN YOUTH AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Age and Nativity Among Asian American Adult Citizens

The Asian American population in the United States is the only racial group for whom a majority of adult citizens are foreign-born, or naturalized, citizens. For example, according to a recent analysis by Center for American Progress and AAPI Data, 69% of Asian American adult citizens are foreign born, compared to 25% for Latinos, 6% for African Americans, and 5% for whites.⁸ Among Asian Americans, there are significant differences in the age distribution of adult citizens who are naturalized citizens versus U.S.-born citizens, as indicated in Figure 1. As we can see, U.S.-born Asian Americans who are eligible to vote are much more likely to be concentrated among young adults age 18 to 34. This is because migration from Asia was severely restricted from the early 1900s through 1965 and did not go up significantly until around 1970, and so most children of Asian immigrants have been born within the last 35 years.

Figure 1. Age Distribution by Nativity, Asian American Adult Citizens⁹



Lower Participation among Asian American Youth

In past elections, voter registration and turnout among registered voters among Asian American youth (ages 18 to 34) has tended to be fairly low. For Asian Americans in the last midterm election (2010), voter registration rates among young adults was 41%, compared to 50% for

⁸ Center for American Progress and AAPI Data, “State of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders” (2014), available at <http://ampr.gs/AAPIREports2014> (last accessed October 2014).

⁹ Analysis by AAPI Data of Public Use Microdata Sample from Bureau of the Census, “2008–2012 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates,” available at http://www.census.gov/acs/www/data_documentation/2012_release/ (last accessed March 2014).

those age 35 to 49, 54% for those age 50 to 64, and 57% for those age 65 and older. Similarly, turnout among registered voters was only 47% among young Asian American adults, compared to 66% among those age 35 to 49, and 67% each in the higher age categories of 50 to 64, and 65 and older, respectively.

It is perhaps not surprising to find that voter participation among young adults is lower than those among older adults, although in the case of Asian Americans, the higher concentration of U.S. born citizens among youth means that language barriers are less of a problem for Asian American youth than they are for older Asian Americans. Still, other factors related to life stages and life cycles, including being employed, having children at home, and owning one's home all help explain why participation among older Asian Americans remains higher, offsetting some of the disadvantages associated with being foreign born.¹⁰

Finally, voter engagement among young adults (ages 18 to 34) is significantly lower for Asian Americans than those in other racial and ethnic groups. In 2010, for example, voter registration in this age demographic was 41% for Asian Americans, compared to 42% for Latinos, 54% for African Americans, and 55% for whites. Turnout gaps among registered voters were less stark, but still statistically significant: 47% and 49% among Asian American youth who were registered to vote, 55% for African Americans, and 51% for whites. These racial gaps in registration and turnout also persisted among young adults in the 2012 presidential election.

Given this backdrop, it is important to gauge the extent to which Asian American youth feel engaged in the 2012 election, and the kinds of issues and appeals that could motivate them to increase their participation.

¹⁰ For a more detailed examination of age, nativity, and socioeconomic status, see Karthick Ramakrishnan, *Democracy in Immigrant America* (Stanford University Press, 2005).

THE POTENTIAL YOUTH VOTE IN 2014

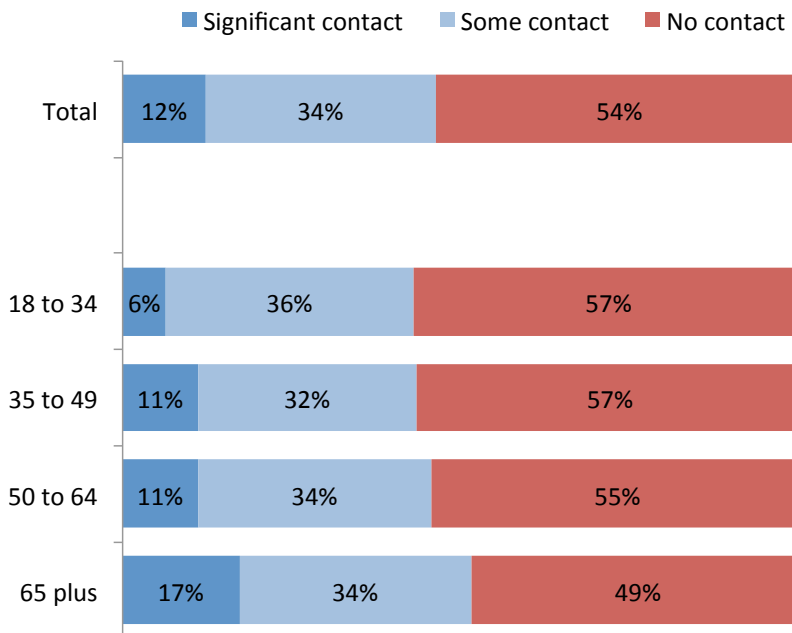
Lack of Voter Contact

One of the problems related to low participation among Asian American youth is lack of voter contact. Respondents were asked whether they were contacted by the Democratic Party, Republican Party, and community organizations, “have you been contacted any of the following groups in the past year: a great deal, some, a little, or not at all.”

We find that, by and large, Asian American registered voters are not being contacted by either Democrats or Republicans. Only one in three Asian American registered voters reported being contacted by Democrats, and only 7 percent reported being contacted “a great deal.” An even smaller proportion of voters (24%) reported being contacted by Republicans, with 5 percent saying they were contacted “a great deal.” Finally, 28% of registered voters said they were contacted by community organizations, a rate of contact that is on par with contact rates by the Republican Party.

When we add all contacts by any of these groups (Figure 2), we find that 46% of Asian American voters have been contacted about the election, with 12% getting “significant contact,” meaning that they had gotten “a great deal of contact” from at least one of the three groups mentioned: Democrats, Republicans, or community organizations. The problem of low voter contact is especially acute among younger Asian American adults. As we can see from Figure 2, only 6% of Asian American registered voters age 18 to 34 reported getting significant contact related to the election, compared to 17% among those age 65 and older.

Figure 2. Total Election-Related Contact for Asian American Voters



Voter Enthusiasm

Respondents were asked, “Compared to previous elections, are you more enthusiastic than usual about voting this year or less enthusiastic?” Table 6a below presents the results for Asian Americans overall, and by national origin, gender, and nativity.

Voter enthusiasm among Asian Americans is on par with prior elections, with 40% reporting they felt the same level of enthusiasm as before. This is in stark contrast to the general public, where only 13% feel the same level of enthusiasm according to the latest Pew Research poll.¹¹ We also see major differences when looking respondents who felt more enthusiastic about the upcoming election. Overall, just 28% of Asian Americans report that they are more enthusiastic about the 2014 election, compared to 40% of the general public according to the Pew poll. \

At the same time, our survey data also indicate that the increase in voter enthusiasm among young Asian American adults is higher than among those in other age groups (Table 1). This suggests that, with significant outreach by parties, campaigns, and nonpartisan organizations, youth turnout among Asian Americans in 2014 has the potential to rise above the levels found in previous midterm elections.

Table 1. Voter Enthusiasm Among Asian American Voters, Compared to Prior Elections

	Overall	18 to 34	35 to 49	50 to 64	65 and older
More enthusiastic	28%	39%	28%	29%	25%
Less enthusiastic	29%	38%	36%	26%	26%
Same	40%	21%	36%	43%	44%
Don't Know	3%	2%	1%	3%	5%
N	1,337	122	191	397	562

Likely Turnout Among Registered Voters

Respondents were asked, “There will be a general election for Congress and other offices this November. Are you planning to vote or not planning to vote in that election?” For those who said they plan to vote, we asked a subsequent question: “How certain are you that you will vote in the upcoming statewide election? Are you absolutely certain, fairly certain, not too certain or not at all certain that you will vote?”

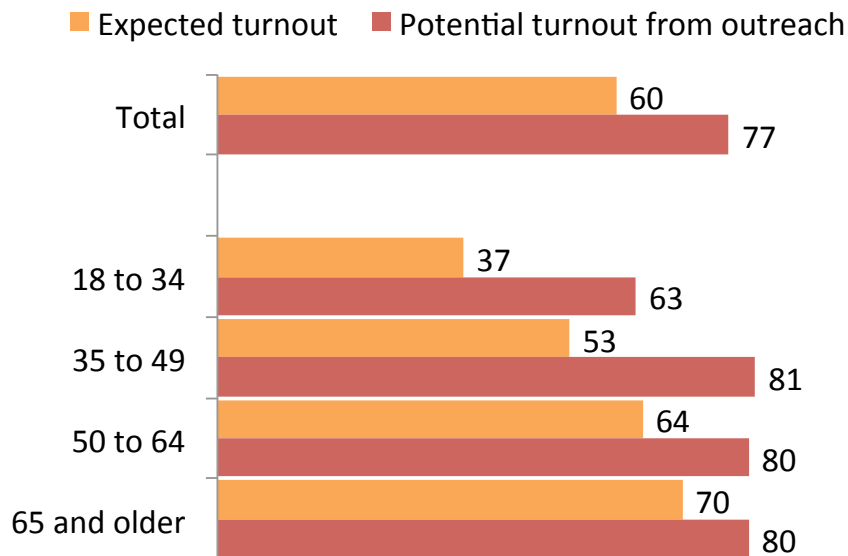
Based on answers to these questions, we estimate likely turnout among Asian American registered voters to range between 60% (those who are absolutely certain that they will vote), and 77% (those who are fairly certain that they will vote). This gap represents the potential

¹¹ See the Pew Center poll at <http://www.people-press.org/files/2014/07/2014-Midterms-Release2.pdf>

gains that can be made from outreach by political parties, campaigns, and nonpartisan organizations. By way of comparison, in the 2010 midterm elections, 62 percent of Asian American registered voters turned out to vote and in 2006, 66 percent of Asian American registered voters turned out to vote.

As we can see in Figure 3, the potential gains from significant voter outreach are by far the strongest among Asian American young adults, jumping from 37% who are absolutely certain that they will vote to 63% who are fairly certain that they will vote. These are the voters who—with voter education and attention to key issues—can gain the most from a significant push on voter outreach and mobilization.

Figure 3. Likely Turnout Among Asian American Registered Voters, 2014



CONTOURS OF THE YOUTH VOTE

What are the kinds of issues that might motivate Asian American youth? Respondents were asked “Now I'd like to ask you about some issues that might be important in the elections in November. Please tell me how important the following issues are to you personally in deciding how to vote.” Respondents were given a choice of “extremely important, very important, somewhat important, or not that important.”

Table 2 presents the results for Asian American registered voters overall, as well as for those ages 18 to 34. The top issues of concern for Asian American registered voters were national security, jobs and the economy, gun control, and health care.¹² However, when we look at Asian American young adults, we find that health care is by far the most important concern (43%), followed by jobs and the overall condition of the economy. The environment also ranks as a very important issue, ranking as a “top 4” issue for Asian American young adults but not among Asian American registered voters more generally.

What these data indicate is that a focus on health care and environmental issues, in addition to jobs and national security, may be important ways to get young Asian Americans more motivated and engaged in the 2014 elections.

**Table 2. “Extremely” Important Election-Related Issues
Among Asian American Registered Voters**

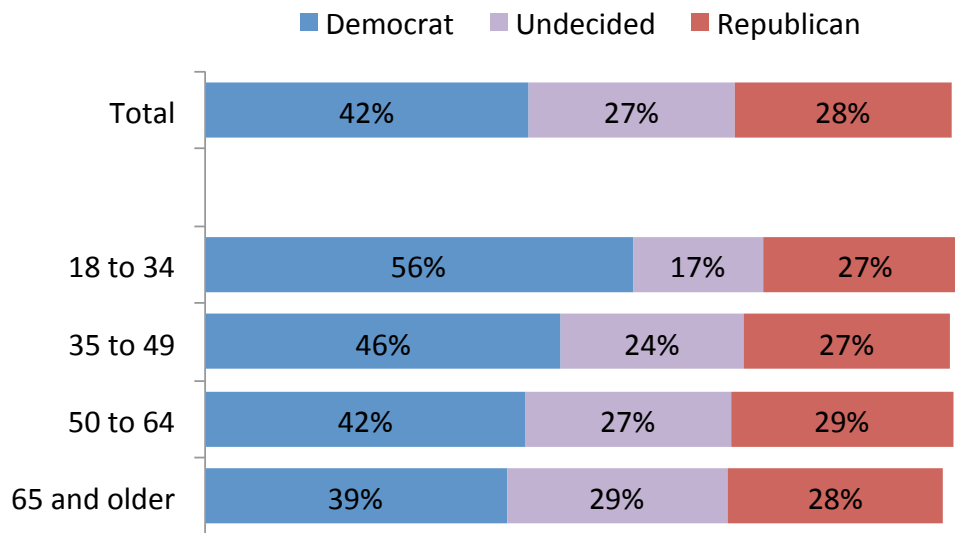
Average		Ages 18 to 34	
National security	42%	Health care	43%
Jobs and economy	41%	Jobs and economy	38%
Gun control	40%	National security	34%
Health care	40%	Environment	29%
N	1,337	N	122

¹² Other issues, like immigration, taxes, environment, and decline in real incomes were also of significant concern, with a quarter or more of respondents identifying these as “extremely important”

Vote for U.S. House of Representatives

Respondents were asked “Thinking about the upcoming November election for House of Representatives in your district... If the election were being held today would you be inclined to vote for the Republican or Democratic candidate?” The choice of Republican and Democrat were rotated in a random order. Figure 4 below presents the results for Asian Americans overall, and by age group.

Figure 4. Preference for U.S. Representative Among Asian American Registered Voters, 2014



Note: Those who refused to answer the question are not included in this chart

Overall, in races for the U.S. House, Asian Americans prefer Democrats to Republicans, 42% to 28%. In the general electorate, by contrast, the divide between Democrats and Republicans is much narrower. According to the latest CBS News/New York Times Poll, registered voters preferred Republicans to Democrats, and at a much closer margin of 47% to 42%.¹³ The proportion of undecided voters is also much higher for Asian Americans in this survey (27%) than those found in the CBS/New York Times poll (7%).¹⁴

Finally, as we can see in Figure 4, there are significant differences in the House ballot by age. A stronger Democratic preference is found among youth (18 to 34) and middle-aged adults (35 to 49) versus those in older age groups.

¹³ See the CBS News/New York Times Poll at <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/09/18/us/politics/18EVENING-POLL-DOC.html>

¹⁴ See the 2008 and 2012 National Asian American Surveys, and the August 2014 Field Poll of California registered voters

APPENDIX

Survey Questionnaire

Complete survey questionnaire can be found in the “Left, Right, or Center?” report released on October 7, 1994. Available at <http://apiavote.org/research>.

Methodology

This report is based on telephone interviews conducted from August 14 to September 11, 2014, of 1,337 registered voters who identify as Asian American. Sampling was targeted towards the six largest national origin groups that together account for more than 75% of the Asian American adult citizen population.

Interviews were conducted in English, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean, and Vietnamese, and included landlines and mobile phones. 45 percent of the interviews were conducted in an Asian language.

The sample sizes by age group are as follows, along with an estimation of the maximum margin of error associated with each sample size (in parentheses):

Total: 1,337 (+/- 2.7%)

Ages 18-34: 122 (+/- 8.9%)

35-49: 191 (+/- 7.1%)

50-64: 397 (+/- 4.9%)

65 and over: 562 (+/- 4.1%)

Sampling error from the size of our sample is only one type of error possible in surveys like the 2014 APIAVote & Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC survey. Findings may also be subject to variation from question wording, question order, and the time and date when the survey was conducted. The findings in this report are weighted statistically to account for any demographic differences of interest between the sample and population parameters for analyses of the national Asian American population, as well as for subgroups of the population, on the following dimensions: size of group within a state, educational attainment, gender and nativity.

Contact information

For additional questions on survey methodology or design, contact Karthick Ramakrishnan at (818)305-4865 or karthick@aapidata.com. For information on voter demographics and outreach, contact Christine Chen at 202-223-9170 or cchen@apiavote.org. For any other media inquires, contact Sandhya Bhatija sbathija@advancingjustice-aajc.org.