**AANHPI Voters are the Future: The Findings from my Research Fellowship with APIAVote**
Ranen Miao

Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) voters constitute the fastest growing bloc of America's electorate. From local to federal elections, AANHPIs continue to shape the outcomes of key elections from the school board to the President. As candidates and political parties prepare for the 2024 election and beyond, it's important to consider the role of AANHPI voters in shaping future elections and who is sent to Congress.

This spring, I had the privilege of serving as a data fellow with APIAVote, the nation's leading nonpartisan nonprofit dedicated to engaging, empowering, and empowering AAPI communities to strengthen and sustain a culture of civic engagement. APIAVote seeks to tackle apathy in the AANHPI community by reaching voters where they're at and creating culturally competent, linguistically accessible materials to support GOTV efforts and AANHPI civic engagement efforts. I was placed by AAPI Data, a nonprofit producing accurate data for the AANHPI community to support community narratives and drive enduring change. This partnership provided me both with the skills to conduct impactful research, and the platform to learn about the political power of AANHPI voters.

My project analyzed Congressional Districts across the United States represented by members of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC) or rated as swing districts by the Cook Political Report. These districts would offer us a crucial cross section of voter demographic data, allowing us to identify the relationship between AANHPI populations and the outcomes of crucial elections. These findings are accessible as factsheets on APIAVote's website, following in the design and function of APIAVote's state-level factsheets.

This research showed me three important ideas from the AANHPI space: the importance of disaggregated demographic data, the importance of AANHPI voter engagement and mobilization, and the growing relevance of AANHPI voters.

First, we must disaggregate data collection. Grouping AANHPIs under singular umbrellas erases the incredible cultural and linguistic diversity of our communities, along with obscuring the structural inequalities that exist within our communities. For example, while the aggregate Asian median household is the highest amongst communities of color at $91,828, Burmese, Marshallese, Mongolian, and Bangladeshi median family households are only around half of that average. The AANHPI acronym reflects a broad spectrum of ethnic identities that include unique and specific diasporic and cultural histories which inform best practices for service delivery and programming.

In the context of political engagement, it informs the ways that specific groups vote and view the world. While Vietnamese Americans are more likely to skew conservative because of lasting grievances and memories from America's intervention in the Vietnam War, South Asians are the most liberal Asian group in part because of their post-9/11 experiences with discrimination and hatred. Political priorities also shift, such as the increasing focus by the AANHPI community at

large on hate crimes after a spike in violence targeting predominantly East Asian Americans in 2021 due to racialization of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While the Biden administration is taking steps to disaggregate data, we need more aggressive efforts to ensure that federal data is more representative and provides more nuanced accounts of how our communities experience federal programs and services. We need legislators and state-level leaders to lead the charge in demanding and implementing data disaggregation to ensure that AANHPI communities can be represented in policymaking. Through sustained advocacy and pressure, we can transform our nation's system of data collection, unlocking new opportunities to serve, represent, and reach AANHPI communities across the country.

Second, AANHPI voters play a critical role in electoral outcomes. Seeing the high AANHPI populations in the majority of Congressional districts represented by CAPAC members is a reflection of the critical role that AANHPIs play in shaping the outcomes of Congressional elections. Similarly, witnessing the way that AANHPI voters were able to shift electoral outcomes in races like New York's 3rd Congressional District, a seat formerly held by the disgraced Republican Representative George Santos now represented by Democrat Tom Suozzi. AANHPI voters in Queens and Nassau County were critical in sending Rep. Suozzi to Congress instead of his Republican challenger, Mazi Pilip.

Similarly, AANHPI voters' turnout in favor of President Biden over President Trump made the difference in swing states including Georgia and Pennsylvania, tilting the outcome of the 2020 election. At the local level, AANHPI voter mobilization efforts have helped to elect mayors, school board members, and city councilors who represent AANHPI enclaves across the country, representing the broad geographic reach and political power of AANHPIs. In 2024, AANHPI voters will undoubtedly continue to play a powerful role in the nation's elections for federal, state, and local offices, shaping who gets to represent us and who will best advance our interests as a community.

Lastly, AANHPI political power is growing. AANHPI voters constituted the nation's fastest growing electorate between 2020 and 2024, growing by 15% – 5 times faster than the general population's 3% growth. AANHPIs are also the most-likely foreign born population, making AANHPIs a unique demographic in terms of immigration history and educational backgrounds. Paired with a variety of linguistic, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds, AANHPIs are a rapidly growing and diverse constituency that will become an increasingly relevant political power base in years to come.

This growing power is precisely why candidates and political parties must begin investing more in mobilizing and energizing AANHPI voters. Building a sustained culture of civic engagement, from voting in elections to running for office, can grow the representation and political power for AANHPIs while advancing the interests of BIPOC communities by diversifying our government to look more like our nation.

While AANHPIs made up over 6.1% of the U.S. population in 2020, we constituted less than 0.9% of elected offices. We are the nation's most underrepresented group. Without building a culture of civic engagement in our community and producing research that reflects our community's political and electoral power, these numbers will not be able to shift.

Only through concerted efforts to turn out and recognize the full diversity of our community can we receive the representation and policy that we deserve. I hope research like mine will influence more elected officials to better serve and represent the interests and needs of the AANHPI community, before, during, and after each election. Our community's voice deserves to be heard and represented year-round, a reality that can only come to fruition if we work for it.

1052 words