Introduction

As the nation dives even deeper into the upcoming election season, the Asian American electorate is becoming an increasingly important force in deciding outcomes. According to the Pew Research Center, Asian Americans are the fastest growing group of eligible voters in the United States. In many close races, Asian Americans have become larger than the margin of victory. This November—with Americans potentially electing the first president of Asian descent—our vote matters more than ever.

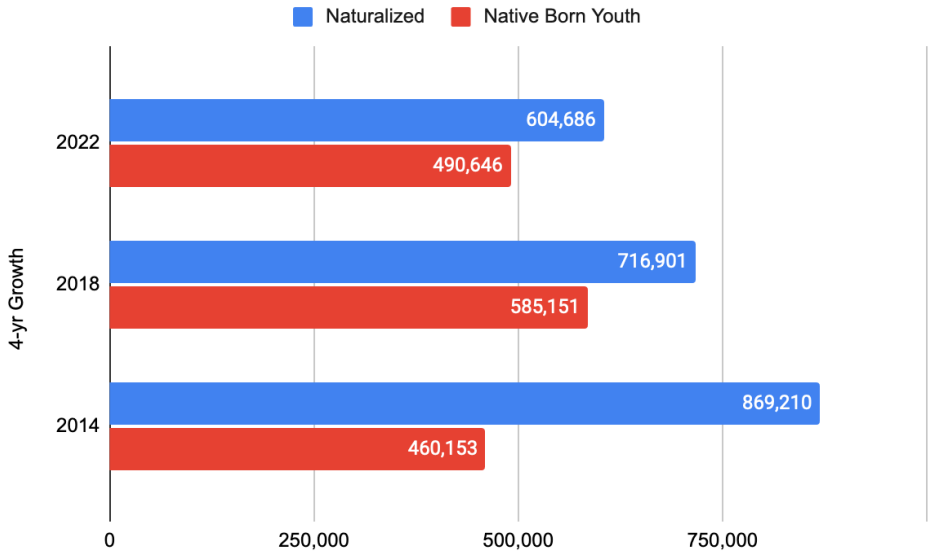
Among the Asian American community, certain populations are growing faster than others. Historically, the growth of the Asian American electorate stemmed primarily from naturalization, or immigrants gaining citizenship. And this makes intuitive sense—Asian Americans are less likely to have multigenerational American roots, and our community still feels new. However, data from American Community Survey (ACS) shows that our community's growth is increasingly coming from Asian Americans aging into the electorate; young citizens turning 18 and preparing to vote for the first time.

This report takes a closer look at the growth of the Asian American electorate, breaks down its composition and its significance for the changing landscape of electoral politics. We also take a closer look at relevant results from the 2024 Asian American Voter Survey (AAVS), the longest-running survey of Asian American voters. When it comes to hot-button policy issues, it becomes clear that the voices of Asian American youth are becoming louder and—as the data reveal—more decisive.

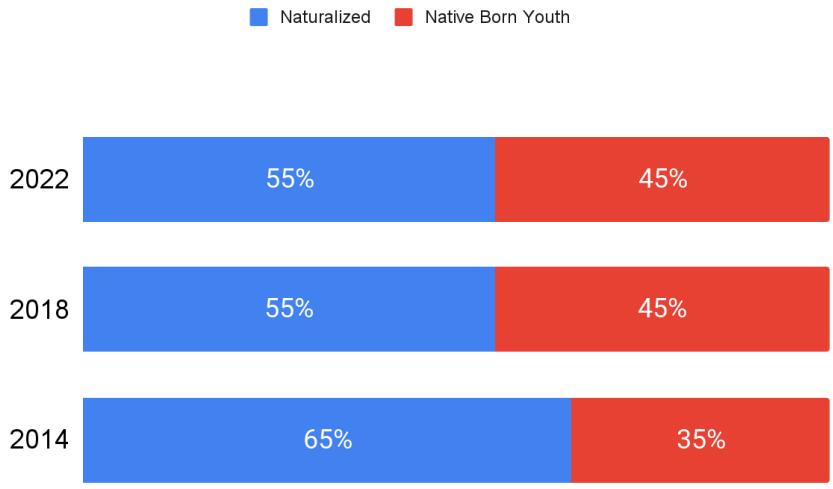
Decomposing the Asian American Electorate

To many—including those within our own circles—the Asian American community still feels new. Many of us are the children of those who immigrated just a few decades ago; some of us are immigrants ourselves. Our roots in this country still feel new, unlike the multigenerational image typically associated with the average American voter

About a decade ago, this sentiment was backed by the data. From 2010 to 2014, Asian Americans naturalized into the electorate at twice the rate of those aging in. That is, people were first becoming eligible voters by being of age and acquiring their citizenship, rather than being citizens and turning eighteen. However, over the next few years, this composition has begun to shift.



As seen in the above chart, the number of naturalizations has gone down in recent years. Meanwhile, native born Asian Americans are growing at a steady rate. The new electorate, then, is trending towards younger, native-born citizens:



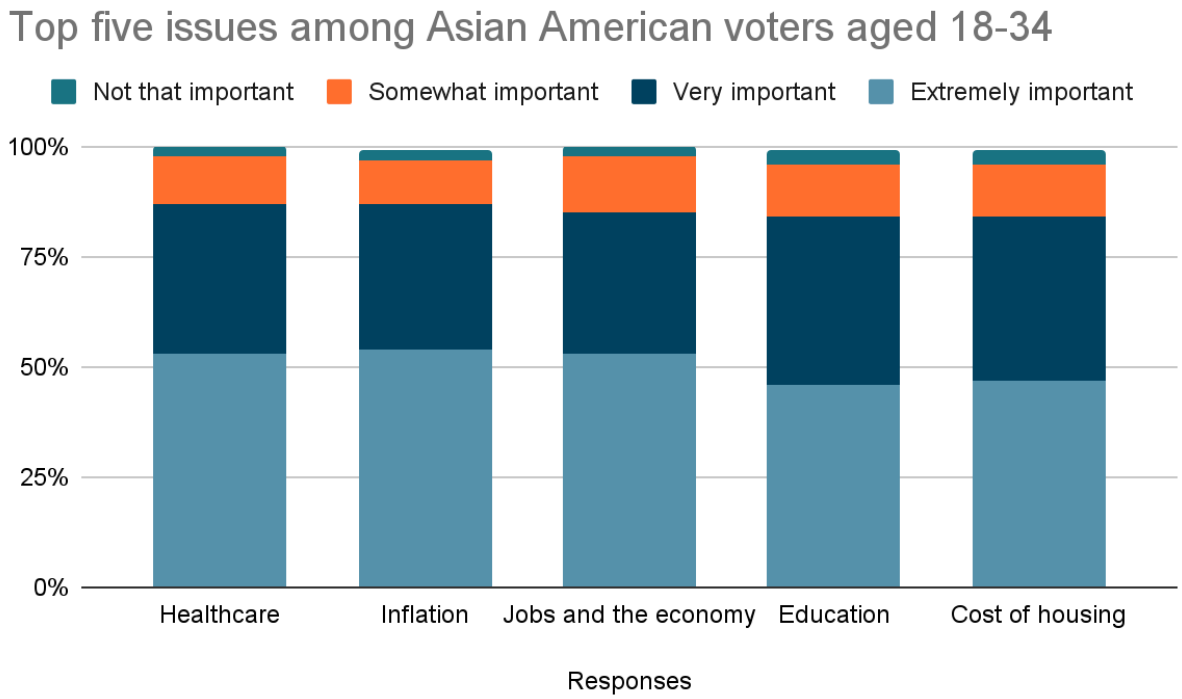
This data breaks down preconceived ideas of what newly eligible voters "look like." The new Asian American electorate is increasingly composed of young voters raised in this country, with vastly different lived experiences than the naturalized population. They may be young, but they have roots in this country—and they have pretty strong thoughts on the direction of this nation. According to AAPI Data's Survey Monkey Poll, over 35% of Gen Z voters (aged 27 and

under) believe that "older generations are standing in the way of economic and leadership opportunities for younger generations." The new electorate is keen on envisioning a new direction during the next presidency. A closer look at the 2024 AAVS reveals which policy platforms are favored among young, native-born Asian American voters.

Youth policy preferences

Young voters (18-34) show nuances in their political preferences in comparison to the general Asian American community. For example, they are more likely to be decisive in choosing a party. While 31% of Asian Americans identify as independent voters, this dropped to 22% among young voters. Young voters are also more likely to identify with the Democratic party.

Even with these strong partisan sentiments, young voters are less sure about their plans to vote in the upcoming election—signaling ambivalence at the upcoming election. In order to galvanize their younger base, candidates should focus on their top five issues: healthcare, inflation, jobs/economy, education, and affordable housing.



Young voters also said that certain issues are enough to get them to the polls. For example, Asian American voters aged 18-34 were almost 10% more likely to have issues like racism and climate change impact the way they vote. Their attitude towards the Israel/Gaza conflict—while still ranking relatively low in importance—is also much stronger than the wider Asian American community.

Both parties are rapidly developing strategies to appear relatable to the youth; Democrats are even getting a little brat-y with their messaging. Yet, neither campaign should underestimate these voters. Asian American youth have demonstrated their willingness to show up to the polls to make their voices heard.

Native-born policy preferences

Native-born voters exhibit similar traits as young voters on key axes like party identification and general civic engagement. For example, native-born voters are much more likely to identify as Democrat (50%) than naturalized voters (38%). They also tend to be more politically engaged and take part in civic and political activities at higher rates: contributing money, contacting representatives, attending a protest, or even just discussing politics with family and friends.

While naturalized voters are more likely to care about economic and immigration policy, native-born voters attach greater-than-average importance to issues like the Israel/Gaza conflict, racism/racial discrimination, and abortion/reproductive rights. Even more notably, naturalized and native-born citizens attached similar importance to health care, gun control, and housing policies—a sign that the two groups still, perhaps, share common goals.

Though the 2024 AAVS was released prior to the both parties finalizing their slate of candidates, early results show strong support for Kamala Harris among native-born voters. Fifty-one percent of native-born voters held a favorable view of Harris, while thirty-nine percent had a negative view. Comparatively, only 41% of naturalized voters had a favorable impression of Harris, with nearly 15% citing unfamiliarity with the Vice President. Comparatively, less than 5% of Asian Americans—regardless of nativity—were unfamiliar with former President Donald Trump. In the weeks leading up to the election, the Harris campaign faces the crucial task of orienting themselves towards a new audience.

These findings show that the Asian American community is truly not a monolith. As the campaigns continue to develop their messaging for the upcoming election, both parties must recognize that Asian Americans are not necessarily speaking with one voice.