



Immigration Initiative AT HARVARD

ISSUE BRIEF SERIES

The IIH supports the production and dissemination of rigorous, non-partisan, and non-ideological research on immigration issues across a broad diversity of disciplines and perspectives, and the application of this research to local, regional, and national policy issues.

KEYFACTS

- Immigrants will make-up about 1-in-10 people eligible to register to vote in the upcoming U.S. elections.
- Asia-origin immigrants will comprise about the same proportion of that voting bloc as those from Latin America.
- Most Asian American voters are immigrants and naturalized citizens.
- There is evidence of a lack of outreach to the Asian American electorate. The 2020 Asian American Voter Survey shows that only about half of all respondents were contacted by either major political party.
- A majority of Asian Americans (54%) plan to vote for Biden compared to just 30% who planned to support Trump. Vietnamese Americans are the only Asian American group surveyed that leans more Republican (38%) than Democrat (28%)
- Health care remains a core concern for Asian Americans.

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Asian Americans and the Immigrant Vote in the 2020 U.S Election

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Immigration Initiative at Harvard Policy Brief5.



Photo: Frederic J. Brown/AFP/Getty Images

Introduction

Immigrants will make-up about 1-in-10 people eligible to register to vote in the upcoming U.S. elections on November 3rd, and Asian-origin immigrants will comprise about the same proportion of that voting bloc as those from Latin America. And while the majority of people of Latinx heritage are U.S. born, the majority of Asian Americans were born outside the United States. Thus, most Asian American voters are immigrants or naturalized citizens. This issue brief explores how this group is making its mark in 2020.

Methodology

This brief presents the results of interviews conducted by telephone and online from July 15th to September 10th, 2020 of 1,569 registered voters who identify as Asian American, producing an overall margin of sampling error of +/- 2%. 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, mobile phones, and web surveys.

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The sample sizes by ethnicity are as follows, along with an estimation of the margin of error associated with each sample size (in parentheses):¹

Total Sample: 1,569 (+/-2%)	Ethnicity	Sample size and (margin of error)
	Asian Indian	260 (+/6%)
	Chinese	306 (+/6%)
	Filipino	263 (+/6%)
	Japanese	226 (+/7%)
	Korean	250 (+/6%)
	Vietnamese	264 (+/6%)

The findings in this brief 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, age, and nativity.

Key Findings

Record Breaking Voter Enthusiasm

The data show that enthusiasm toward the upcoming U.S. presidential election is running high. A majority (54%) of registered Asian Americans say that compared to previous elections they are more enthusiastic than usual about voting. The survey² included Chinese, Indian, Korean, Vietnamese, Japanese, and Filipino voters.

These results, when combined with results from the 2018 election showing record high levels of turnout among nearly every Asian American voting demographic,³ suggests that the 2020 election will break records for the Asian American vote for a presidential election.

Party Preferences

Enthusiasm among registered Asian American voters is likely to benefit Democratic candidate Joseph Biden. A majority of Asian Americans (54%) planned to vote for Biden compared to just 30% who planned to support Republican incumbent Donald Trump.

Biden was strongly favored among all national origin groups surveyed, except Vietnamese Americans. Among Vietnamese registered voters, support is higher for Trump (48%) than Biden (36%). Indian Americans are the most inclined to vote for Biden among all Asian American groups (66%). At the same time, 14% of Asian American registered voters remained undecided about their presidential vote choice, with Chinese Americans (22%)

exhibiting the highest proportion of voters who said they were “undecided.”

Consistent with this pattern, Biden’s favorability ratings were nearly twice as high as Trump’s among the Asian Americans surveyed.

Majorities of Asian American registered voters also say they will support Democratic over Republican candidates in House and Senate races. Again, the exception to this trend of Democratic support were Vietnamese American voters, who on the whole are more likely to support Republican candidates for House and Senate than Democratic candidates.

Partisanship

Partisanship, a potent factor in determining vote choice among the electorate as a whole, likely drives these group differences among Asian Americans. Vietnamese Americans are the only Asian American group surveyed that leans more Republican (38%) than Democrat (28%) with a large proportion of those who identify as non-partisan (34%). Although lack of partisanship has long been a feature of the Asian American electorate, Democrats now comprise a larger group of Asian American registered voters (44%) than do non-partisans (32%).

The Impact of COVID-19

Although enthusiastic about voting, Asian American registered voters also expressed some concerns about the upcoming election. Almost half (48%) said they often worry about the possibility of election interference in November. In addition, almost half worry about the health and safety of voting in-person at the polls due to COVID-19. Perhaps as a consequence, most Asian American registered voters (54%) said they prefer to vote by mail

“**Results suggest that the 2020 election will break records for the Asian American vote for a presidential election.**”

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or vote by absentee ballot rather than to vote in-person (26%) on Election Day. This was a preference of all of the groups surveyed, though Vietnamese Americans were more willing to vote in-person on Election Day than other Asian American groups.

Outreach to the Asian American Electorate

Asian Americans are the fastest growing racial group in the electorate and comprise a critical mass in Presidential battleground states like Arizona, Pennsylvania, and North Carolina.⁴ Political parties have yet to harness the power of the Asian American vote, however, for there is evidence of a lack of outreach to the Asian American electorate. The 2020 Asian American Voter Survey shows that only about half of all respondents were contacted by either major political party.



Photo: Protest against Sinophobia in wake of COVID-19.

Asian American Voters are Health Care Voters

The Affordable Care Act passed under President Obama remains a topic of major debate as voters head toward the November election. However, one thing is clear, Asian Americans have taken advantage of the policy. A report from the Commonwealth Fund,⁵ for example, shows that gaps in health care coverage between Asian Americans and Whites have closed since its passage. It should come as no surprise then, that the 2016 National Asian American Survey showed that majorities of all Asian American groups expressed support for the Affordable Care Act, the health care law passed by Congress and President Obama in 2010.⁶

Health care remains a concern for Asian Americans in

the current political environment. More than half (54%) say that they worry “somewhat often” or “very often” about not being able to afford the health care that they need. Worry about health care affordability is highest among those under 50 years old.

The most pressing public health crisis is the global pandemic, which has exacerbated racial inequalities in the U.S. and had a unique impact on Asian Americans. A recent report from The Marshall Project,⁷ for example, suggests that Asian Americans, Latinos, and Black Americans have died at a relatively higher rate than Whites as a result of COVID-19. Asian Americans make-up a disproportionate share of essential workers serving on the frontlines of health care systems and they have been deeply affected by the pandemic effects on restaurants and food service, according to data compiled by The New American Economy Research Fund.⁸ Research also shows that Asian American unemployment and joblessness rates have grown relative to Whites over the COVID-19 crisis.⁹ Finally, reports of hate crimes and anti-Asian bias incidents spiked during this period.¹⁰

The 2020 Asian American Voter Survey provides new insights on how Asian American registered voters are responding to the COVID-19 pandemic:

A majority (54%) worry somewhat or very often that they will not be able to access health care because of COVID-19.

44% worry very often about job loss or difficulties finding employment because of COVID-19.

At 56%, Vietnamese registered voters express the highest levels of worry over job security.

COVID-19 related worries also extend to hate crimes and harassment. More than one-out-of-four Asian American registered voters say that they worry very often about hate crimes, harassment, and discrimination because of COVID-19. And, more than half of all Asian American registered voters worry “very often” or “somewhat often” about this kind of experience.

What do these trends mean for the November election? When asked which party is doing a better job on health care, 50% of Asian Americans surveyed said the Democrats, 20% indicated the Republicans, and 30% said there is no difference or that they didn’t know which party was doing better on this critical issue.

Immigrant Asian American Voters

Finally, our survey allows us to zero-in on salient distinctions between Asian American immigrant and

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non-immigrant voters. Foreign-born and native-born Asian Americans are equally enthusiastic about the upcoming election. 54% of both groups say they are “more enthusiastic” about the November election compared to previous elections. Although both groups are more likely to support Joe Biden over Donald Trump, the gap is much narrower among the foreign born (47% for Biden, 35% for Trump, and the rest undecided), compared to the U.S. born (69% Biden, 29% Trump, and 11% undecided). Finally, Asian immigrant voters are less progressive than U.S.-born Asian Americans when it comes to government-sponsored health insurance and providing a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, but notably more progressive on gun control and protecting the environment.

Conclusion

The survey data presented in this brief give some indication of the importance of the Asian-American vote in the 2020 U.S. election and trends within the community. COVID-19 appears to be an important factor in influencing the vote, and in the volatile climate it has forged, time will tell its true impact on this diverse community in terms of both voting patterns, turn-out and candidate preference.

¹ Sampling error from the size of our sample is only one type of error possible in surveys like the 2020 Asian American Voter Survey (AAVS). Findings may also be subject to variation from question wording, question order, and the time and date when the survey was conducted.

² APIA Vote, AAPI Data and Asian Americans Advancing Justice-AAJC (2020) 2020 Asian American Voter Survey (AAVS). Available at: <https://aapidata.com/surveys/>

³ Ramakrishnan, K., Shah, S. and Shao, S. (2019) ‘Record Gains in AAPI Voting Likely to Continue Through 2020’, Data Bits Blog for AAPI DATA, published September 16, 2019. Available at: <http://aapidata.com/blog/voting-gains/>

⁴ Shao, S. and Nguyen, M. (2020) ‘Where Can AAPI Voters Have the Most Impact in November 2020?’, Data Bits Blog for AAPI DATA, published August 12, 2020. Available at: <http://aapidata.com/blog/where-can-aapi-voters-have-the-most-impact-in-november-2020/>

⁵ Gunja, Z.M., Baumgartner, J.C., Shah, A., Radley, D. C., and Collins, S.R. (2020) ‘Gap Closed: The Affordable Care Act’s Impact on Asian Americans’ Health Coverage’, The Commonwealth Fund. Blog, published July 21, 2020. Available at: <https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/issue-briefs/2020/jul/gap-closed-aca-impact-asian-american-coverage>

⁶ Ramakrishnan, K., Wong, J. Lee, T., Lee, J. (2016) *Asian American Voices in the 2016 Election: Report on Registered Voters in the Fall 2016 National Asian American Survey*. Report, published October 5, 2016. Available at: <https://naasurvey.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/NAAS2016-Oct5-report.pdf>

⁷ AAPI Data (2020) ‘Asian Americans and COVID-19 Deaths’. Infographics. Available at: <https://aapidata.com/covid19/>

⁸ New American Economy Research Fund (2020) ‘Asian Americans and Pacific Islander Americans on the Frontlines’. Blog, published May 21, 2020. Available at: <https://research.newamericaneconomy.org/report/aapi-americans-on-the-frontlines/>

⁹ De La Cruz-Viesca, M. (2020) ‘Report Shows Major Effects of COVID-19 on Asian American Labor Force’, UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs. Blog, published July 22, 2020. Available at: <https://luskin.ucla.edu/report-shows-major-effects-of-covid-19-on-asian-american-labor-force>

¹⁰ Stop AAPI Hate (2020) Stop AAPI Hate, Website. Available at: <https://stopaapihate.org/>

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Karthick Ramakrishnan is Professor of Public Policy and Political Science at the University of California, Riverside, and Founding Director of the Center for Social Innovation. He is also a Board Member of The California Endowment and Chair of the California Commission on APIA Affairs. Ramakrishnan directs the National Asian American Survey (NAAS) and is founder of AAPIData.com, which publishes demographic data and policy research on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. He has published many articles and 6 books, including most recently, *Framing Immigrants* (Russell Sage, 2016) and *The New Immigration Federalism* (Cambridge, 2015), and has written dozens of opeds and appeared in over 1,000 news stories. He was recently named to the Frederick Douglass 200 and is currently writing a book on state citizenship in the United States.

Janelle Wong is Professor of American Studies and a core faculty member in the Asian American Studies Program at the University of Maryland. She is the author of *Immigrants, Evangelicals and Politics in an Era of Demographic Change* (2018, Russell Sage Foundation), *Democracy's Promise: Immigrants and American Civic Institutions* (2006, University of Michigan Press) and co-author of two books on Asian American politics, including *Asian American Political Participation: Emerging Constituents and their Political Identities* (2011, Russell Sage Foundation), based on the first national, multilingual, multiethnic survey of Asian Americans. She was a Co-Principal Investigator on the 2016 National Asian American Survey (NAAS), a nation-wide survey of Asian American political and social attitudes.

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This issue brief is also available in Mandarin.

NATIONAL ASIAN AMERICAN SURVEY (NAAS)

NAAS is a scientific, independent and nonpartisan effort to gauge the opinions of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the United States. NAAS conducted its first survey in 2008, which focused primarily on issues of civic engagement and political participation. In 2012, NAAS partnered with various community organizations, to provide an in-depth look at where Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders stand on a variety of important public policy issues. In 2016, they conducted two waves of surveys, one before the presidential election and another after the presidential election. All NAAS reports and data are available at www.naasurvey.com.

ABOUT IIH

The Immigration Initiative at Harvard (IIH) was created to advance and promote interdisciplinary scholarship, original research, and intellectual exchange among stakeholders interested in immigration policy and immigrant communities. The IIH serves as a place of convening for scholars, students, and policy leaders working on issues of immigration—and a clearinghouse for rapid-response, non-partisan research and usable knowledge relevant to the media, policymakers, and community practitioners.



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Also in this series:

Lowenhaupt, R., Mangual Figueroa, A., Blanca Dabach, D.B, Gonzales, R.G., Yammine, J., Morales, M., Tesfa, E., Andrade, P. and Queenan, J. (2020) “Connectivity and Creativity in the Time of COVID-19: Immigrant Serving Districts Respond to the Pandemic,” Immigration Initiative at Harvard Issue Brief Series no. 4, Cambridge MA: Harvard University.

Available at:

<https://immigrationinitiative.harvard.edu/connectivity-and-creativity-time-covid-19-immigrant-serving-districts-respond-pandemic>

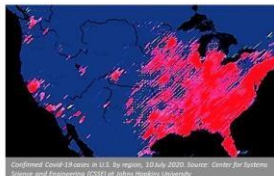
This issue brief is also available in Spanish.



Connectivity and Creativity in the Time of COVID-19: Immigrant Serving Districts Respond to the Pandemic

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Background

In recent years, educational institutions have sought ways to support immigrant students and their communities as they cope with heightened anti-immigrant policies and discourse. Schools serve as key points of contact for immigrant communities for academic and language learning, social integration, and access to a range of social services. These crucial supports have been shaken by the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent school closures. The United States has seen important differences in how these school closures have played out across local contexts. As a district administrator in Texas commented, “it’s like we’re all in the storm, but on different boats. Some people are in a yacht, some on a raft, some have no boat at all. We have a responsibility as humans to help one another, but especially as educators, it’s compounded. In this storm, our role is to really help kids and their families get through this.”

Since 2018, our research team has worked in partnership with six immigrant-serving school districts across the country to identify

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