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

Karthick Ramakrishnan, University of California, Riverside and Janelle Wong, University of Maryland

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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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Sample size and (margin of error)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian Indian</td>
<td>260 (+/ 6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>306 (+/6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>263 (+/6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>226 (+/7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>250 (+/6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>264 (+/6%)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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 survey^2 included Chinese, Indian, Korean, Vietnamese, Japanese, and Filipino voters.

These results, when combined with results from the 2018 election showing record highs 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.”
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 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.

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.


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