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ASIAN AMERICAN VOTERS IN CALIFORNIA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Asian American Survey (NAAS) is the most comprehensive survey of the political views of Asian Americans ever. In this report, we focus on findings from California, the state with the largest number of Asian Americans in the country. Our survey indicates that:

- Among Asian American citizens in California, 67 percent can be described as “likely voters.” Japanese American citizens are the most likely to vote (81%), followed by Koreans (73%), Filipinos (70%), Asian Indians (68%), Vietnamese (67%) and Chinese (62%).
- 42 percent of Asian American likely voters in California support Senator Barack Obama while 24 percent support Senator John McCain.
- Roughly one-third (33%) of likely Asian American voters in California remain undecided. By comparison, recent surveys of the general population show that undecided voters are roughly 8 percent of the electorate.
- Asian Americans lean toward the Democratic Party, but include a large proportion of non-partisans: 33 percent identify with the Democratic Party, 16 percent identify with the Republican Party, 17 percent identify as Independent, and 34 percent are non-partisan, saying they do not identify as Democrat, Republican, or Independent. Chinese, Filipino, Asian Indians, Japanese and Koreans tend to affiliate with the Democratic Party more than with the Republican Party. Vietnamese are more likely to identify as Republicans.
- In the California presidential primary, Asian American Democratic voters supported Hillary Clinton over Barack Obama by a small margin. More than half of former Clinton supporters (62 percent) plan to vote for Obama in November. Only 8 percent of former Clinton supporters plan to vote for McCain and 26 percent are undecided.
- Preferences for the presidential candidates vary by national origin. Support for McCain is highest among Vietnamese likely voters, with 53 percent planning to vote for the Republican candidate. In contrast, a majority of Asian Indians (62%) and Japanese Americans (53%) plan to vote for Obama. Chinese and Filipino likely voters favor Obama over McCain, but a large share remain undecided. Korean likely voters favor Obama (34%) only slightly over McCain (31%), with more than one out of every three undecided.
- Important regional differences in California include: higher support for McCain in the regions of Orange County, San Diego, and the Inland Empire; greater identification with the Republican Party in the same regions; and lower participation rates in the Inland Empire region (51% likely voters among adult citizens) when compared to the rest of California (67%).

- A very strong majority (76%) of Asian American likely voters report that “the economy” is one of the most important problems facing the nation, while 35 percent say “the war in Iraq” is among the top problems.
- Perspectives on the economy help to explain vote choice. Among Asian American likely voters who identify the economy as their most important problem to them personally and view the Democratic Party as closer to their views on the economy, 73 percent support Obama. Of those likely voters who identify the economy as the most important problem to them personally and view the Republican Party as closer to their views on the economy, 54 percent support McCain.
- Support for getting out of the war in Iraq is closely tied to vote choice among Asian American likely voters, with those wanting to end the war supporting Obama (59%), while those who most strongly disagree with this sentiment support McCain (69%).
- Asian Americans in California generally oppose Proposition 8, which would “define marriage as between a man and a woman, thus barring marriage between gay and lesbian couples.” 57% of likely voters did not favor the change, 32% favored the change, and 11% said they did not know if they favored or opposed the change
- Language access and ethnic language media are important for the Asian American electorate. Almost half of Asian American citizens in California get informed about politics from Asian-language television and newspapers, and about one in three get political information from Asian-language Internet sources. Access to election materials in non-English languages is a significant issue for the Asian American electorate. More than one in four (27%) say they would use such materials.
- Asian American participation in home country politics is not a deterrent to involvement in the politics of the United States. Indeed, those involved in their countries of origin are slightly more likely to vote in the United States than those who do not (65% versus 50%).
- Overall, there are some notable differences between Asian Americans in California and elsewhere. Due to higher citizenship rates among Asian Americans in California, the proportion of likely voters among all Asian American adults is higher in the state (50%) than in the rest of the country (43%). We also find that a greater proportion of Independents favor Obama over McCain in California, and that support for Obama and the Democratic Party is stronger for Asian Indians in California than elsewhere in the country. Finally, a greater proportion of Asian American likely voters in California access Asian-language media than elsewhere.

BACKGROUND: THE ASIAN AMERICAN ELECTORATE

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Asian Americans have been one of the fastest growing populations in the United States over the last several decades. In 1960, there were fewer than one million Asian Americans in the U.S., or less than 0.5 percent of the total population. In 2000, some 11.9 million Asian Americans were counted in the decennial census, roughly 4 percent of the total population.¹ By 2007, the American Community Survey estimated some 14.9 million Asian Americans, a 25 percent increase from just seven years before. This trend of explosive growth is expected to continue, with census projections of 44.4 million Asian Americans by 2060. In that year, Asian Americans are projected to account for 10 percent of the expected total population of 432 million Americans.²

The Asian American population is also characterized by historic patterns of geographic concentration, emergent patterns of geographic dispersion, and a continuing pattern of striking demographic diversity.

- Nationally, Asian Americans are concentrated in a few regions and states. In 2006, one in two Asian Americans lived in the West region of the United States; the top ten states accounted for 75 percent of the Asian American population in the United States. Asian Americans also make up a significant proportion of the total population in states such as Hawaii (56%), California (13%), New Jersey (8%), Washington (8%), and New York (7%).
- The Asian American population is also growing rapidly beyond the “traditional gateways.” Between the 1990 and 2000 censuses, the Asian American population has more than doubled in 19 states. In fact, the electoral battleground states of Nevada, New Hampshire, Florida, and Georgia are home to some of the fastest growing Asian American populations in the country. In 2000, Asian Americans were more than 5 percent of the resident population in 71 counties, and the number is likely even higher today.³ Between 1990 and 2000, the Asian American population grew in all regions of the U.S.: 57 percent in the West, 79 percent in the Northeast, 84 percent in the Midwest, and 107 percent in the South.

¹ Since the 2000 Census, population figures for racial groups have been reported for the groups “alone” and “alone or in combination with one or more other races” to reflect the new “mark one or more” multiracial identifier question. The population figures here report the number of persons who identify as Asians alone or in combination with one or more other races.

² The Census figures on the Asian American population are based on the more inclusive “alone or in combination” identification with Asian American categories.

³ The American Community Survey does not have coverage of counties smaller than 65,000 residents, so there is no comparable figure for 2006.

- Asian Americans are remarkably diverse in terms of ethnicity, national origin, language, religion, cultural orientation, socioeconomic status, and immigration histories. Focusing on regions and countries of origin alone, Asian Americans have shifted from a population of primarily working-age men from China and Japan in 1900 to a population today that is 24 percent Chinese, 22 percent Asian Indian, 18 percent Filipino, 11 percent Vietnamese, 10 percent Korean, 6 percent Japanese, and about 9 percent from other ethnic/national origin groups like Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, Pakistani, Indonesian, and Thai.

These numbers, however, have yet to translate fully into political power. In 2006, only 0.9 percent of Members of the House of Representatives were Asian Americans; in state legislatures across the US, this figure increases only marginally to 1.1 percent. This stark underrepresentation of Asian Americans in elective political office is closely mirrored by the underrepresentation of Asian Americans among the ranks of voters. In the last presidential election, data from the U.S. Census Bureau reveal that 68 percent of the adult Asian American population were citizens. Of these, 55 percent voted in the 2004 election, accounting for 37 percent of the overall Asian American adult population.⁴ By contrast, 73 percent of white adults and 68 percent of black adults voted in 2004.

Beyond the pattern of underrepresentation in political voice and representation, it is notoriously difficult to establish firm facts about which Asian Americans vote, why they vote, who they vote for, and whether the Asian American vote is a partisan or a swing vote. This is primarily due to a lack of good data on Asian American political behavior. A typical pre-election survey or exit poll will contain only a handful of Asian Americans, is biased toward those who are more educated, well-off, US-born, English proficient, and otherwise assimilated into life in the U.S. Even academic, media polls, and exit polls that explicitly survey Asian Americans are limited because they typically focus on just one or several cities, or they disproportionately sample particular ethnic origin groups, or because interviews are only done in English or a limited number of Asian languages.

The 2008 National Asian American Survey aims to fill this important gap in our understanding of this potentially rising force in the American electorate. In the following pages, we establish some basic facts about the Asian American electorate in the context of the 2008 U.S. Presidential election. We present our findings on who among Asian Americans is likely to vote, which presidential candidate Asian American voters favor, why they favor that candidate, and whether the Asian American vote is different between Asian ethnic subgroups and different regions of the country, such as battleground and toss-up states.

⁴ These figures from the Current Population Survey treat “don’t know” and “no response” as missing data.

Asian Americans in California

Asian Americans have been one of the fastest growing populations in California over the last several decades. According to the California Department of Finance, there were about 670,000 Asian American residents in the state in 1970, or 3 percent of the total population. By 2000, the Asian American population grew to 3.87 million, or about 11 percent of the resident population in California. Today, there are 4.95 million Asian Americans in California, which accounts for 33 percent of the national population for the group. Asian Americans represent nearly 14 percent of California's resident population, and the number of Asian Americans in the state is expected to grow by another million in the next decade.

According to a 2005 report by the Asian Pacific American Legal Center, at least five groups account for more than 10 percent each of the state's Asian American population (Filipino, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and Vietnamese), and South Asians account for an additional 7 percent. Some of these groups, South Asians and Vietnamese in particular, have been growing at a very rapid pace of more than 60 percent in the past decade. Finally, Asian Americans are highly concentrated in particular regions of California: The Bay Area accounts for about one third (34%) of the state's Asian American population and Los Angeles County accounts for another 29 percent. Orange County and the Central Valley account for another 10 percent each. Most of the remaining 17 percent of the state's Asian American population lives in San Diego County (7%) and in the Inland Empire region (4%).

WHO WILL VOTE?

To describe the Asian American voting electorate in the 2008 NAAS, we develop a likely voter model, based on respondents' voter registration status, their past voting record, their level of interest in politics, and their self-reported certainty of voting in the November elections. These, in turn are weighted to reflect known demographic characteristics of the Asian American population in California. On these components of our likely voter model, Asian Americans have the following characteristics:

Total Sample

- 1891 California residents
- 564 are Chinese, 314 are Vietnamese, 288 are Filipino, 275 are Japanese, 229 are Asian Indian, 177 are Korean, and 44 are Other Asian
- 70 percent are citizens

Voter registration:

- 65 percent are registered to vote.
- Of those not registered to vote at the time they were being interviewed, 30 percent reported that they intend to register before the November election.

Past voting record:

- 74 percent of currently registered voters reported voting in the 2004 presidential election.
- 55 percent of registered voters reported voting in their state's primary or caucus earlier in 2008.

Political interest:

- 20 percent of all respondents said that they were “very interested” in politics;
- 42 percent indicated they were “interested.”
- 24 percent reported being “somewhat interested.”
- 14 percent said they were “not at all interested.”

Certainty of voting this November:

- Respondents were asked to rate their chances of voting in the November elections. Table 1 (*next page*) shows the responses for the full sample, for citizens, and for those respondents who reported voting in the 2004 elections.
- Roughly two thirds of Asian American citizens state that they are “absolutely certain” they will vote this November.
- Of those who voted in the 2004 election 81 percent say they are absolutely certain they will vote in 2008.

Table 1. Certainty of Voting by Citizenship and Prior Voting Behavior

	All Respondents	Citizens	Voted in 2004
Absolutely certain	50%	67%	81%
Will probably vote	7	8	6
50-50 chance	8	10	8
Less than 50-50	5	15	5
Not eligible	31	--	--

Question: "I would like you to rate the chances that you will vote in the presidential election in November. Are you absolutely certain to vote, will you probably vote, or is the chance 50-50, or less than that?"

These items were used – together with 2004 Current Population Survey⁵ reports on voter turnout in 2004 – to generate the likely voter model. Based on our likely voter model, we predict that 50 percent of Asian American adults (or 67 percent of adult citizens) will vote in the November 2008 election (Table 2).

Table 2 also presents our estimates of the proportion of Asian Americans who will vote in 2008 by ethnic subgroups. The highest likely rate of voting is among Japanese Americans, with 64 percent of adults and 81 percent of citizens expected to vote in November 2008. While participation is significantly lower among Chinese Americans and Vietnamese Americans, well over a majority of citizens are expected to vote (62% and 67%, respectively).

Table 2. Proportion of Likely Voters By Ethnic Subgroup

	All	Citizen	Registered Voters
TOTAL	50%	67%	77%
Asian Indians	49	69	73
Chinese	46	62	73
Filipinos	53	71	79
Japanese	64	81	89
Korean	48	73	86
Vietnamese	60	67	87
Other Asian	40	60	61

⁵ Among surveys of voters that show breakdowns by race and ethnicity, the Current Population Survey has the lowest level of over-reporting. For instance, in 2004, the CPS shows that 64% of eligible adult citizens said they voted, compared to a rate of 61% among voting eligible adults as reported in the official vote totals by the Federal Election Commission and corrections made for citizenship and ineligible felons (http://elections.gmu.edu/voter_turnout.htm). By contrast, in the National Election Studies from 2004, 79 percent of respondents claimed to have voted.

HOW WILL ASIAN AMERICANS VOTE?

How are Asian American in California likely to vote in the coming 2008 presidential elections? The results from the 2008 NAAS show two salient features of the Asian American electorate:

- Asian American likely voters favor Barack Obama over John McCain by a wide margin of 42 percent to 24 percent.
- A very large proportion of Asian American likely voters (33 percent) remain undecided. Even among those Asian American likely voters interviewed in California during the last half of September, fully 30 percent remained undecided about their candidate choice.

The share between Obama and McCain is roughly the same when we look beyond likely voters to all registration-eligible Asian Americans (Table 3), although the proportion of undecided voters is significantly higher among those not likely to vote.

	Likely Voters	Citizens
McCain	24%	22%
Obama	42	39
Other	1	1
Undecided	33	38

Question: “Do you plan to vote for John McCain the Republican, or Barack Obama, the Democrat, or another candidate for President of the United States, or are you unsure at this point in time?”

Voter Preferences by Partisanship

Partisanship is strongly associated with vote choice among Asian American Californians. We examine the relationship Asian Americans have to political parties in four categories: (1) self-identified Democrats; (2) self-identified Republicans; (3) self-identified Independents; (4) “non-partisans.” Non-partisans are those individuals who indicate that they simply do not think in partisan terms or that they do not know how to answer to the question.

As Table 4 indicates (*next page*), more than one in every three Democrats plans to vote for Obama in the 2008 election and over 70 percent of Republicans plan to throw their support behind McCain. Not surprisingly, those who do not think in terms of the

traditional party system in the US are most likely to say they are undecided about their vote choice (68%).

Table 4. Voter Preferences among Likely Voters by Party Identification

	All Likely Voters	Democrats	Republican	Independent	Non-partisans
McCain	24%	4%	72%	19%	14%
Obama	42	77	3	39	18
Other	1	1	3	2	0
Undecided	33	18	22	40	68

Question: “Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, Democrat, Independent, some other party, or do you not think in these terms?”

Who Are Undecided Voters?

A comparison of undecided likely voters with those who say they know who they will vote for in November reveals that:

- Undecided voters are more likely to be female (57%) compared to those voters who have chosen a candidate to support (51%).
- Undecided voters are more likely to be young (21%) compared to those who have made their candidate decision (11%)
- The proportion of foreign-born people among undecided voters is similar to the proportion among those who have made their vote choice (71% versus 68% respectively).
- The two groups are similar in terms of household income. 33 percent of undecided voters report a household income of \$50,000 or less, compared to 34 percent of those who have made up their minds about who to vote for.
- Not surprisingly, undecided voters include a higher proportion of individuals (63%) who do not identify with one of the two major parties than found among those who have already made their vote choice (24%).

High Proportion of Non-Partisans

Table 4 showed that nearly more than 65 percent of non-partisan Asian Americans were undecided voters and roughly 40 percent Independents are undecided. This segment of the electorate is pivotal because a majority of all Asian Americans are either Independents or non-partisans. Table 5 shows the basic patterns of partisanship among all Asian Americans in the sample. The 2008 NAAS shows that:

- More Asian Americans in California identify as Democrats than as Republicans by a wide margin of 33 percent to 16 percent.
- A significant proportion identify as Independents, 17 percent.
- 34 percent of Asian Americans do not think in partisan terms or even identify as an Independent. This proportion is larger than the proportion of Asian Americans who identify as Democrats, Republicans, or Independents.

Table 5. Party Identification Among Asian Americans

	All Respondents	Asian Indian	Chinese	Filipino	Japanese	Korean	Vietnamese	Other Asian
Democrat	33%	50%	28%	36%	40%	39%	18%	27%
Independent	17	13	25	16	19	8	19	11
Republican	16	7	9	20	17	20	35	9
Non-Partisan	34	30	39	29	25	33	27	53

Question: “Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, Democrat, Independent, some other party, or do you not think in these terms?”

It is important to keep in mind that in many spheres of Asian American life, the panethnic category of “Asian American” often hides significant differences between ethnic sub-groups. This is true of partisanship as well. Table 5 shows that:

- Asian Indian, Filipino, Japanese, and Korean Americans are most strong in their identification with the Democratic Party.
- Vietnamese Americans are most strong in their Republican partisanship (35%), though a large share of this group says they are non-partisan (27%) or Independent (19%).
- Chinese Americans are the group least likely to identify with either of the two major parties. One out of four Chinese Americans consider themselves Independent and almost 40 percent do not identify with any traditional party label.

In addition to partisanship, another key indicator of likely vote choice is one's previous votes. In Table 6, we show Asian American voters' preferences, broken down by how respondents reported voting in the 2004 presidential election between incumbent President George W. Bush and Senator John Kerry, and how they reported voting in the 2008 state primaries and caucuses. With the 2008 primaries and caucuses, we focus in on Asian Americans who reported voting for

Senator Hillary Clinton, Senator Obama, or Senator McCain. About 25 percent of our sample reported voting for a candidate other than these three senators.

Voter Preferences by Past Voting

In addition to partisanship, another key indicator of likely vote choice is one's previous votes. In Table 6, we show Asian American voters' preferences, broken down by how respondents reported voting in the 2004 presidential election between incumbent President George W. Bush and Senator John Kerry, and how they reported voting in the 2008 state primaries and caucuses. With the 2008 primaries and caucuses, we focus in on Asian Americans who reported voting for Senator Hillary Clinton, Senator Obama, or Senator McCain. About 25 percent of our sample reported voting for a candidate other than these three senators.

Table 6. Voter Preferences by the 2004 Vote and 2008 Primary Vote

	All Likely Voters	2004 Bush	2004 Kerry	2008 Clinton	2008 Obama	2008 McCain
McCain	24%	52%	5%	8%	1%	78%
Obama	42	19	65	62	90	3
Other	1	2	1	4	0	0
Undecided	33	27	29	26	9	19

Questions: "Who did you vote for President in the 2004 election? Was it George W. Bush, John Kerry, or someone else?" "Which presidential candidate did you vote for in your state's primary or caucus?"

Table 6 shows that:

- Almost 20 percent of Asian Americans who report voting for Bush in 2004 plan to vote for Obama in the November 2008 election. In contrast, just 5 percent of those who supported Kerry in 2004 plan to vote for McCain.
- More than half of former Clinton supporters (62 percent) plan to vote for Obama in November. Only 8 percent of former Clinton supporters plan to vote for McCain and 26 percent are undecided.
- Those who supported Obama in the 2008 primaries overwhelmingly support him in the general election (90%).
- Nearly 80 percent of those who supported McCain in the 2008 primaries plan to vote for him in November, but a significant portion of this group (19%) is undecided about their vote in the general election.

Voter Preferences by Ethnic Groups

Vote choice varies within the California Asian American community by national origin group. Table 7 shows that

- Asian Indian likely voters are the strongest supporters of Senator Obama. 62 percent of this group plans to vote for him in November. Japanese (53%) are also strong supporters of Obama. However, at least one in every four Asian Indian and Japanese voters remain undecided.
- Chinese and Filipino likely voters favor Obama over McCain. Still, nearly 45 percent of Chinese voters in California are undecided.
- Korean likely voters are almost as likely to vote for McCain as for Obama (30 to 34 percent, respectively).
- A majority of Vietnamese likely voters support McCain over Obama, though nearly one in four say they are undecided.

Table 7. Voter Preferences by Ethnic Group

	All Respondents	Asian Indian	Chinese	Filipino	Japanese	Korean	Vietnamese	Other Asian
McCain	24%	12%	10%	27%	18%	30%	53%	24%
Obama	42	62	42	43	53	34	21	43
Other	1	1	4	1	0	0	2	0
Undecided	33	25	44	30	29	36	24	34

Question: “Do you plan to vote for John McCain the Republican, or Barack Obama, the Democrat, or another candidate for President of the United States, or are you unsure at this point in time?”

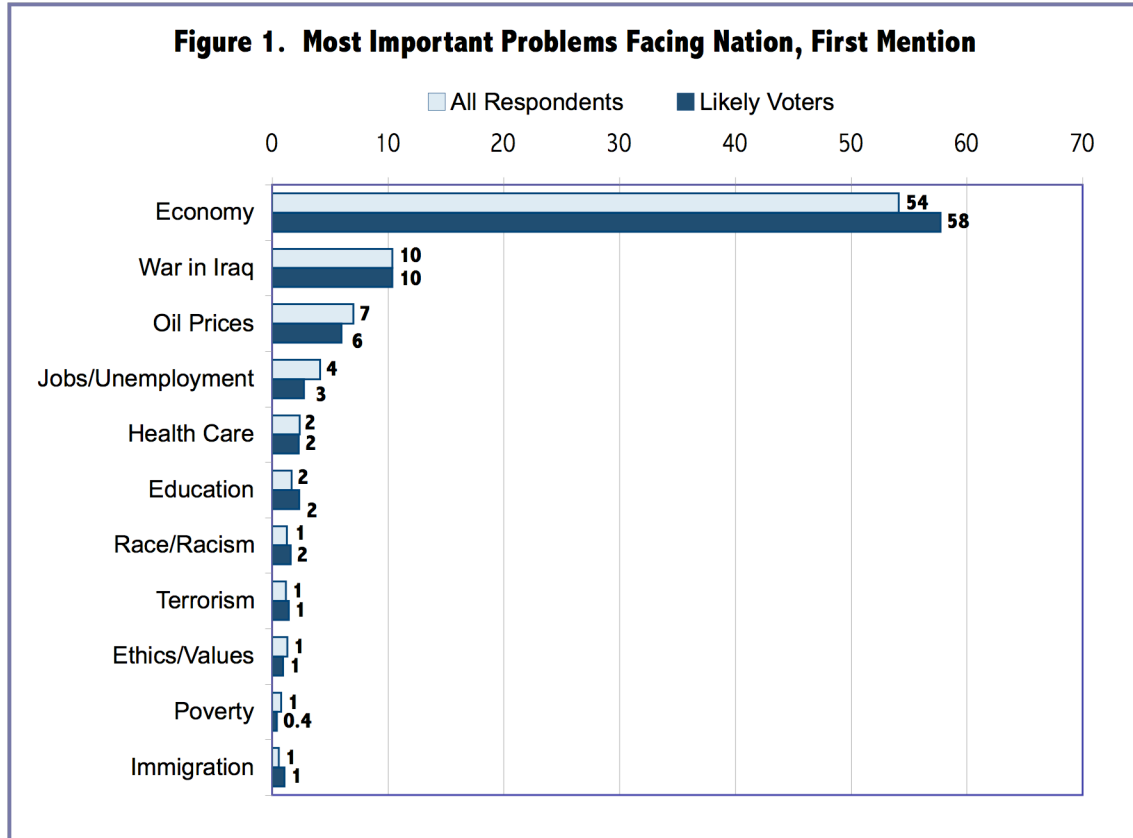
BEHIND THE ASIAN AMERICAN VOTE

What is behind the support for Barack Obama and John McCain among Asian American likely voters? This section provides information about issue preferences and the policy agenda among Asian Americans in California.

The Asian American Policy Agenda

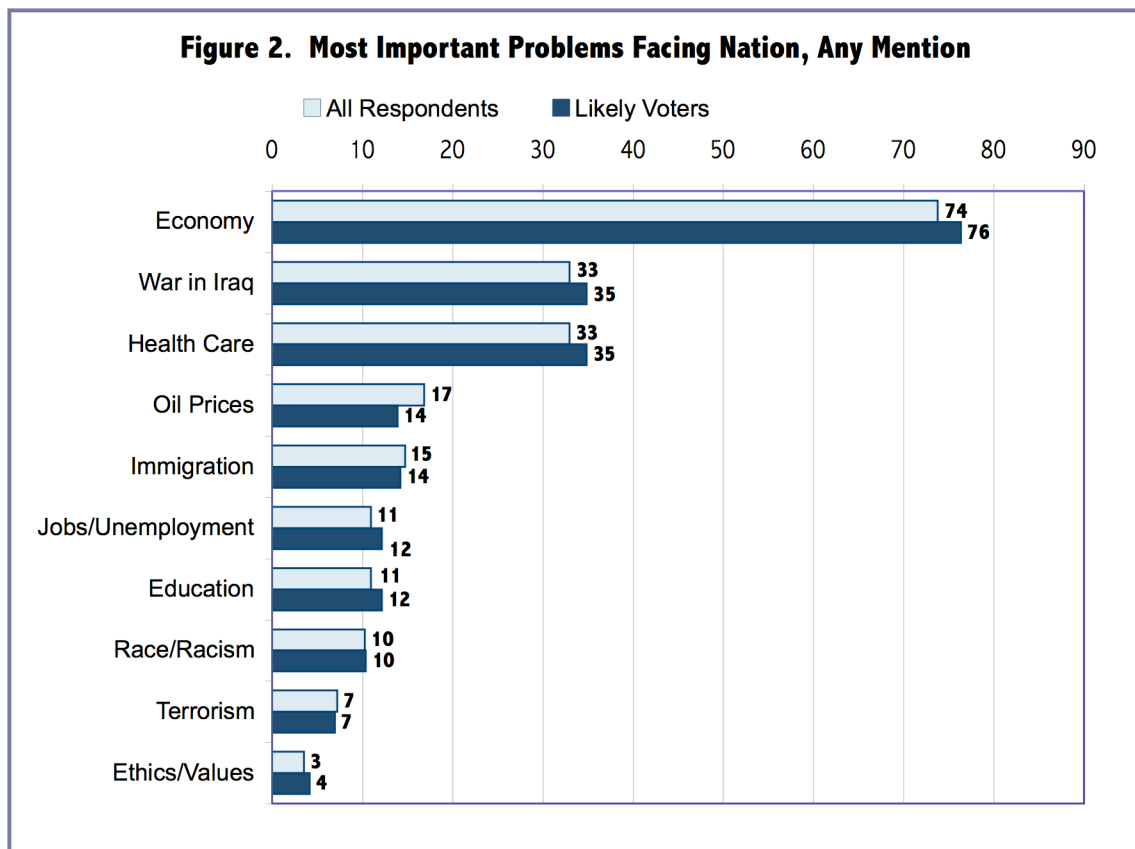
To gauge the Asian American policy agenda, respondents were asked what they felt was “the most important problem facing the United States today.” The survey allowed people to give more than one response to the question, and the issues were captured in the order in which respondents mentioned them. (Most other surveys only record the first mention).

Figure 1 below compares the proportion of Asian American likely voters and all respondents in the 2008 NAAS on the most important problems facing the nation. The economy is by far the most important problem, with 58 percent of likely voters identifying it first. The prominence of the economy is followed by 10 percent identifying the war in Iraq. Oil prices, jobs, health care, and education follow the top two issues of the



economy and the war in Iraq. While likely voters were a bit more concerned about the economy than all Asian Americans, the differences are small.

While most surveys of the “most important problem” only record the first mention made by respondents, such a measure often masks the importance of other issues that also rank high in voters’ minds. In our California survey, 88 percent mentioned two issues, and 79 percent mentioned three issues as being very important to the United States. Some interesting patterns emerge when we examine the most important problem, based on more than one mention (Figure 2).



While the economy still receives the most mentions, over one third of likely voters are concerned about the war in Iraq. Allowing for multiple mentions also elevates the importance of immigration, with one in seven likely voters deeming it an issue of utmost concern.

Finally, respondents were also asked to identify which single issue was most important to them *personally*. Here the economy remained foremost in people's minds: 51 percent of all respondents and 54 percent of likely voters said it was the economy that was most important to them personally. Following the economy in personal salience was the war

in Iraq, oil and gas prices, and health care, identified by 8 percent, 5 percent, and 4 percent of likely voters as most important to them, respectively.

The Economy

Respondents who saw a difference in where the major parties stood on the issue of personal importance were sharply divided in their support for McCain or Obama. Table 9 shows that, among Asian American likely voters who identify the economy as their most important problem to them personally and view the Democratic Party as closer to their views on the economy, 73 percent support Obama. Of those likely voters who identify the economy as the most important problem to them personally and view the Republican Party as closer to their views on the economy, 54 percent support McCain.

Table 9. Likely Voter Preferences and Perceived Party Differences on the Economy

	Democrats Closer	Neither Party / Don't Know	Republicans Closer
McCain	5%	21%	54%
Obama	73	18	4
Other	3	1	0
Undecided	20	60	42

Figures on this table are based on a sequence of three questions: (1) respondents were first asked to identify up to three issues as the “most important problem facing the United States today”; (2) then they were asked, “Which one of these issues is the most important to you personally?”; (3) then they were asked about whether they believed there were important differences between the two major parties economic issues, and, if so, which party they thought was closer to their views on the economy.

The War in Iraq

The second most important problem facing the nation among both all Asian Americans and likely voters alone is the war in Iraq. To dig deeper into the potential electoral impact of the continued US military presence in Iraq, respondents were asked whether the U.S. should get its military out “as soon as possible.” 73 percent of Asian American likely voters agreed with this statement (51% strongly so), 19 percent disagreed (11% strongly so), and 9 percent neither agreed nor disagreed.

Table 10. Likely Voter Preferences and Support for Getting Out of Iraq War

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
McCain	9%	15%	50%	48%	69%
Obama	59	46	11	18	12
Other	2	2	0	0	0
Undecided	30	37	39	33	19

Question: "The U.S. should get our military troops out of Iraq as soon as possible."

Table 10 shows that Asian American likely voters who strongly agree that the U.S. should get out of Iraq are also strong supporters of Barack Obama (59%), while 9 percent say they will vote for McCain. Nearly a third of this largest group of Asian American likely voters remains undecided about their choice for president in 2008. On the other end of the spectrum, and among the 19 percent of Asian American likely voters who disagree with the policy position that the U.S. should get military troops out of Iraq as soon as possible, most say that they will vote for McCain over Obama.

Health Care

Health care was cited as another of the most important problems facing the nation, and about as many Asian Americans felt this issue was as pressing as that of the price of oil and gas. We asked whether government should guarantee health care for everyone. Among likely voters, 80 percent agree with the statement (57% strongly so), 16 percent disagree (8% strongly so), and 5 percent neither agree nor disagree.

Table 11 shows the distribution of this policy item and presidential vote choice among Asian American likely voters. Among those who agree strongly that the federal government should guarantee health care for everyone, Obama is the candidate of choice, favored by 52 percent over 18 percent for McCain. A third of the Asian American likely voters in this category, however, remain undecided about their vote for president. Asian American likely voters who strongly disagreed that the federal government should actively ensure universal health care are expected to vote for McCain over Obama by a wide margin of 54 percent to 13 percent.

Table 11. Likely Voter Preferences and Support for Guaranteeing Health Care for All

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
McCain	18%	19%	35%	39%	54%
Obama	52	39	25	19	13
Other	.4	5	0	1	0
Undecided	30	36	40	39	33

Question: "The federal government should guarantee health care for everyone."

Issues and Ethnic Groups

The survey reveals there may be important national origin group differences among Asian Americans when it comes to the way they will respond to some issues at the top of the public agenda this election season. For example, Vietnamese likely voters expressed distinct views from other groups on whether or not they supported getting the US out of Iraq. Most groups strongly support getting the US out of Iraq. Asian Indians (71%) and Chinese (59%) were most likely to strongly agree that the US should get its military troops out of Iraq as soon as possible. Roughly half of Filipino and Japanese echoed this sentiment and only 13 and 10 percent of each of these two groups disagreed strongly with it. In contrast, just 17 percent of Vietnamese strongly support getting the US out of Iraq. At the same time, Vietnamese are not strongly supportive of the US remaining in Iraq (only 23 percent strongly disagree that the US should get military troops out of Iraq as soon as possible). Vietnamese are much more ambivalent about U.S. military involvement in Iraq compared to other groups. They are more likely to say they neither agree nor disagree with the idea that the U.S. should get military troops out of Iraq than other national origin groups.

However, on key issues like health care reform, the various Asian national origin groups report similar policy attitudes. At least 50 percent of Chinese, Filipino, Asian Indian, and Vietnamese likely voters strongly support the idea that the federal government should guarantee health care for everyone. A smaller proportion of Japanese (35%) and Korean (43%) likely voters strongly agree that federal government should guarantee health care, but a majority of these two groups are willing to say they at least "somewhat agree" with the federal government guaranteeing health care for all.

Gay Marriage and California's Proposition 8

In November 2008, California voters will decide on Proposition 8, a measure that would change the State Constitution to say that only marriage between a man and a woman is

valid or recognized in California. This would mean that same-sex couples do not have a right to marry.

Asian Americans in California were asked “if they favored or opposed changing the California State Constitution to define marriage as between a man and a woman, thus barring marriage between gay and lesbian couples.”

- 57% of likely voters did not favor the change, 32% favored the change, and 11% said they did not know if they favored or opposed the change
- Across all national origin groups in the survey, more opposed than favored the changing the Constitution to define marriage as between a man and a woman. An outright majority opposed the measure among Chinese, Filipinos, Koreans, and Vietnamese, and a near majority of Japanese Americans (46%) and Asian Indians (47%) did so as well.

Asian Language Media and Ballot Language Access

With citizen and likely voter populations that are still mostly composed of first-generation immigrants, the Asian American electorate is notable for the importance of ethnic language media and ballot language access. We asked questions about whether respondents received political information from radio, television, newspapers, and Internet use. After each question, we asked if the source was in English, an Asian language, or both.

As Table 12 indicates, television is the most frequently cited source of political information (84%) among Asian American citizens, followed by newspapers, Internet sources, and radio. While most Asian American citizens receive news and other political information through English language sources, 41 percent pay attention to Asian-language television (13% exclusively so, and 28% in combination with English sources). Similarly, 36 percent get political information from Asian-language newspapers, and 25 percent from Asian-language radio.

Table 12. Sources of Political Information Among Adult Citizens

	Any Source	English Only	Asian Language Only	Both English and Asian Language
Television	85%	43%	13%	28%
Newspaper	67	31	17	19
Internet	55	36	5	13
Radio	53	28	14	11

Question: "People rely on different sources for political information. Do you [read newspapers/listen to the radio/watch television/use the Internet] for information about politics?" "Is that Asian-language, English-language, or both?"

In addition to Asian language media use, the provision of ballot language assistance is also a significant concern for Asian American citizens. Under Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act, counties and states where language communities are greater than 10,000 or account for more than 5 percent of the voting-age citizen population, are required to provide ballot language assistance. Currently, covered jurisdictions in California include the counties of Alameda, Los Angeles, Orange, San Diego, San Francisco, San Mateo, and Santa Clara).

In interviews that were conducted in a language other than English, we asked respondents “If election materials were available to you in your language, would you make use of them?” We find that, regardless of their language of interview, 30 percent of adult citizens, and 27 percent of likely voters, would make use of such materials.

Regional Variations: Within California

As we note in the “background” page on California, Asian Americans are concentrated in particular regions of the state. Los Angeles County and the Bay Area account for about 30 percent each of the state’s entire Asian American population, while Orange County and the Central valley account for another 10 percent each. Much of the remaining Asian American population is found in San Diego County and the Inland Empire region of Riverside and San Bernardino Counties.

Many of the findings in this survey do not vary significantly across regions. For instance, the proportion of residents ranking the economy as the top issue is similar across Asian American likely voters in different regions. There are, however, three areas with significant differences: Proportions of likely voters, support for John McCain, and support for the Republican Party.

The proportion of likely voters is similar across most regions (including Los Angeles County, Orange County, San Diego County, the Bay Area, and the Central Valley), with a 3 percentage point difference from the statewide average that is well within the survey’s margin of error. However, the proportion of likely voters among adult citizens is significantly lower in the Inland Empire region (51%) than the statewide average for Asian Americans (67%).

There are also some significant differences across regions in terms of support for John McCain. The Republican presidential candidate gets his lowest support among Asian Americans in Los Angeles County and the Bay Area (with 23% of likely voters’ support), the highest level of support in parts of Southern California outside of Los Angeles (40%), and an intermediate level of support in the Central Valley (30%).

This variation also corresponds to differences in party identification. Identification with the Republican Party is strongest in Southern California outside of Los Angeles County (34%), followed by the Central Valley (26%), Los Angeles County (23%), and the Bay Area (19%). Conversely, identification with the Democratic Party is strongest among Asian Americans in the Bay Area (41%), followed by the Central Valley (36%), Los Angeles County (33%), and other parts of Southern California (30%).

Regional Variations: Outside California

Overall, there are some notable differences between Asian Americans in California and elsewhere. Due to higher citizenship rates among Asian Americans in California, the proportion of likely voters among all Asian American adults is higher in the state (50%) than in the rest of the country (43%). We also find that a greater proportion of Independents favor Obama over McCain in California (39% to 19%, versus 32% to 22% nationally).

We find that support for Obama is stronger for Asian Indians in California (62%) than the national average for the group (53%). Similarly, a greater proportion of Asian Indians in California identify with the Democratic Party (50% in California versus 39% nationally). Finally, a greater proportion of Asian American likely voters in California access Asian-language media than elsewhere (41% versus 33% in the case of Asian-language television, 36% versus 32% in the case of newspapers, and 25% versus 20% in the case of radio).

MOBILIZATION AND PARTICIPATION BEYOND VOTING

Mobilizing Likely Voters

One of the key factors in voter turnout is mobilization – being recruited to register to vote and being asked to participate on Election Day. Asian Americans are more likely to be contacted by a campaign or party organization than by another type of organization. Overall, 35 percent of Asian American citizens, and 37 percent of registered voters, were targeted by a political party or campaign organization. By contrast, 23 percent of Asian American registered voters were targeted by “any other organization,” including unions, community groups, and other organizations.

The 2008 NAAS also shows that there is a relationship between being recruited into politics and one's expected vote choice in the presidential election. Table 14 shows that a larger proportion of Obama supporters (50%) have been contacted by a party or campaign, compared to 38 percent of McCain supporters.

	Mobilized by Party	Mobilized by Other Organization
McCain supporters	38%	28%
Obama supporters	50	26
Undecided	37	22

Political Participation beyond Voting

Although 2008 is an election year with a focus on an historical presidential race, voting is not the only activity through which people express themselves politically. This is especially the case for people who are not yet citizens of the United States. Table 15 makes clear that a majority of Asian Americans across national origin groups discuss politics with family and friends.

Table 15. Political Participation by Ethnicity*

	All Respondents	Asian Indian	Chinese	Filipino	Japanese	Korean	Vietnamese	Other Asian
Discussed politics with family and friends	70%	67%	69%	67%	79%	78%	64%	72%
Worked for a candidate, party, or other campaign org.	4	3	4	6	4	4	4	4
Contributed to candidate, party, or other campaign org (citizens/permanent residents)**	13	16	11	17	16	14	9	7
Visited Internet to discuss a candidate or issue	13	12	15	13	7	20	7	8

* People take part in many types of civic and political activities. In the last 12 months have you ...

** Analysis based on full sample, including non-citizens, with exception of contributing to a campaign, which is restricted to citizens and permanent residents

With the exception of Vietnamese, at least one in ten Asian Americans contributed to a political party or campaign organization during the past 12 months. More than 15 percent of Asian Indians, Filipinos, and Japanese reported donating to a campaign. 13 percent of Asian Americans report visiting the Internet to discuss a candidate or issue. Finally, with the exception of Koreans, 5 percent or less of any national origin group worked for a candidate, party or other campaign organization over the past 12 months.

Attention to Home Country Politics

There are some media accounts and scholarly articles which suggest that Asian Americans are less likely to participate in American politics because of their focus on the politics of their home countries. The survey included questions on whether respondents send money to their countries of origin, whether they have been in contact with friends and family, and whether they have participated in the politics of that country.

Nearly one third (31%) of respondents have been in contact with friends and family and the same proportion have sent money to people in their home country. However, only 3 percent have participated in the politics of their home country. The figures are similar when looking only at adult citizens in our survey: 30 percent have been in contact with

friends, the same proportion sent money to people, and 4 percent have been involved in the politics of their countries of origin.

Most importantly, those who participate in the politics of their home countries are actually more likely to vote in the United States than those who do not (65% versus 50%). Thus, participation in home country politics is not a deterrent to participation in the United States. Indeed, our results suggest that participation in one context may help increase participation in the other.

APPENDIX

Methodology

This report is based on data collected from 4,394 telephone interviews of adults in the United States who identify themselves as Asian American, which in the broadest sense includes people with any family background from countries in Asia. Interviews were conducted by telephone from August 18, 2008 through September 26, 2008. Additional interviews are ongoing through October 2008, and a total of roughly 5,000 interviews will complete the data collection.

The breakdown of the sample by ethnic background as of September 26, 2008 is as follows: 1,195 Chinese, 920 Asian Indian, 678 Vietnamese, 493 Korean, 493 Japanese, 486 Filipino, and 129 “Other Asian” respondents. Respondents were offered a choice of language to be interviewed in. English was the preferred language of interview in 57 percent of the cases: 83 percent of Vietnamese interviews were conducted in Vietnamese; 76 percent of the Korean interviews were conducted in Korean; 64 percent of the Chinese interviews were conducted in either Mandarin (50 percent) or Cantonese (14 percent); 14 percent of the Filipino interviews were in Tagalog; 9 percent of the Japanese interviews were in Japanese; and 1 percent of the Asian Indian interviews were in Hindi.⁶

The randomly drawn list sample was obtained from Catalist and STS Samples; the random-digit dialing (RDD) sample was obtained from SSI (Survey Sampling International). The listed sample from Catalist includes those not registered as well as those who are registered. Catalist has the most comprehensive and up-to-date sample of registered voters, regardless of their party affiliation. The party registration characteristics of our survey sample are in line with estimates from previous studies of Asian Americans in particular states. The survey was conducted by Interviewing Services of America, Inc. (ISA) of Van Nuys, California, under the guidance of Francine Cafarchia, Martin Magana, and Mike Vanacore. Mobile phones were excluded from the dialing procedure. Interview translations were conducted by ISA and revised by Accent on Languages of Berkeley, California.

⁶ We also translated our survey into Hmong with the goal of obtaining a statistically meaningful sample of Hmong Americans. The incidence and cooperation rates were extremely low, however, and we discontinued our efforts after completing just 3 interviews with Hmong respondents, only 1 in the Hmong language.

The sampling error for the total sample of 4,394 respondents is +/- 1.5 percent at the 95 percent confidence level. Sampling error for subgroups within the sample is larger. By ethnic sub-groups, the margin of error for:

- Chinese respondents is +/- 2.9 percent;
- for Asian Indians, it is +/- 3.4 percent;
- for Vietnamese, it is +/- 3.7 percent;
- for Koreans it is +/- 4.2 percent;
- for Filipinos and
- for Japanese, it is +/- 4.3 percent.

By region, the margin of error for Asian Americans in “toss-up” states is +/-4.5 percent. The margin of error is +/- 2.3 percent for California; +/- 4.5 percent for New Jersey; +/- 5.2 percent for New York; +/- 6.4 percent for Texas; +/- 7.7 for Virginia; +/- 7.9 percent for Washington, and +/- 10 percent or higher for all other states. By voting behavior, the margin of error for registered voters is +/- 1.7 percent; for likely voters, it is +/- 2.1 percent. Sampling error from the size of our sample is only one type of error possible in surveys like the 2008 NAAS. Findings may also be subject to variation from question wording, question order, and the time and date when the survey was conducted.

The sampling frame was drawn primarily from commercial vendor lists of “very likely” and “likely” Asians. Based on the research questions and funder interest, we have oversamples in California (1,891 respondents), New Jersey and New York (835). We used Census data from the 2000 decennial census and the 2006 and 2007 American Community Survey to set sample targets for ethnic sub-groups and regions. Ethnic sub-group targets were set to approximate the national Asian American population characteristics.

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.

The 2008 National Asian American Survey is the collaborative effort of Jane Junn at Rutgers University, Taeku Lee at the University of California at Berkeley, S. Karthick Ramakrishnan at the University of California at Riverside, and Janelle Wong at the University of Southern California. Questions about sample design should be directed to Karthick Ramakrishnan at karthick@ucr.edu.

Glossary of Terms and Concepts

Ethnic subgroups

Respondents in our survey were asked: “What is your ancestry or ethnic origin?” Those that specified an ancestry or ethnic origin to a prior question on racial identification were assigned that ancestry or ethnic origin. For response choices, we used the U.S. Census classification system of Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Hmong, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, and other national origins such as Bangladeshi, Cambodian, etc. We also included an option for South Asian. Based on the distribution of responses in our survey, we report data on Asian Indians, Chinese, Filipino, Hmong, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese. All other respondents are classified as “Other.”

“Battleground states”

We distinguish between “toss-up” states in which the difference in poll numbers in voter preferences are razor thin and, for a given survey, do not exceed the margin of error, and “leaning” states in which there is a discernible preference for either Senator McCain or Obama, but the difference in poll numbers is not decisive. Based on recent polls of the general population as identified in *Real Clear Politics*, we identify the following states as “toss-ups”: Colorado, Florida, Indiana, Michigan, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, and Virginia. The following additional states are marked as “leaners”: Georgia, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

This report, and future reports and data from the 2008 National Asian American Survey are available online at <http://www.naasurvey.com/>.

Community organizations can contact Christine Chen by email for outreach opportunities <cchen@strategicalliancesusa.com>. Reporters are advised to contact the communications offices at each university.

Professor Karthick Ramakrishnan studies immigrant civic engagement, organizational activity, and immigration policy. In addition, he specializes in the Asian American population in California, Illinois, and Virginia. The U.S. South Asian and Indian populations are also areas of expertise for Dr. Ramakrishnan.

Professor Janelle Wong studies in Asian American political engagement and religious involvement. In addition, she specializes in the Asian American population in California and Texas. Dr. Wong is an expert on Chinese Americans.

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Professor Taeku Lee studies political partisanship among Asian Americans as they compare to partisanship for whites, Latinos, and African Americans. He also specializes on the role that identity and civic engagement play in bringing Asian Americans into the political arena.