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Asian-American Voters Are Diverse But Unified Against Donald Trump

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The new [National Asian American Survey](#) shows that Asian-American registered voters are increasingly identifying as Democrats. The Democratic edge over Republicans has increased by 11 percentage points since 2012, according to the NAAS, which was released last week. The 2016 survey also found that 59 percent of respondents favor Hillary Clinton in this year’s presidential election while only 16 percent prefer Donald Trump — 26 percent are either undecided or favor a third-party candidate.¹

The NAAS is significant because good data on the political preferences of Asian-Americans is hard to come by. Since Asian-Americans make up only about [4 percent](#) of the electorate, most conventional political polls simply don’t reach enough of them to make statistically sound conclusions about their political leanings. The NAAS, however, sampled 2,238 Asian-Americans and 305 Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders.²

Even beyond sample-size issues, polling Asian-Americans can be difficult. Asian-Americans have one of the highest rates of [limited English proficiency](#), and about [3 in 4](#) are foreign-born. For these reasons, 45 percent of the interviews in the NAAS were conducted in one of nine languages other than English (Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean, Vietnamese, Tagalog, Japanese, Hindi, Hmong, Cambodian).

Indeed, “Asian-American” is a broad group that includes many different ethnicities with distinct political traditions. Vietnamese-Americans have historically [leaned more Republican](#) than other Asian-American subgroups, for example; Indian-Americans and Japanese-Americans have leaned more Democratic. Still, Democrats have made substantial gains across most ethnic subgroups of Asian-Americans.

Share of Asian-American registered voters who identify as Democratic or Republican

	2012		2016		CHANGE IN DEM. EDGE
	DEM.	REP.	DEM.	REP.	
Filipino	36%	46%	52%	33%	+28
Vietnamese	32	36	45	29	+20

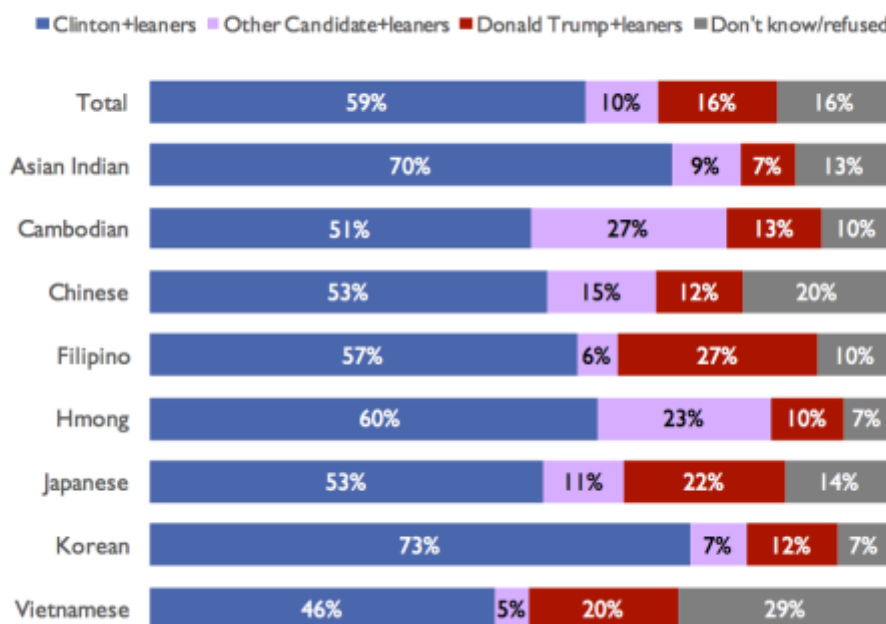
Hmong	63	12	76	6	+19
Korean	56	33	70	27	+19
Asian Indian	68	10	71	13	+1
	DEM.	REP.	DEM.	REP.	CHANGE IN DEM. EDGE
Chinese	56	19	51	18	-4
Japanese	59	28	59	34	-6
Cambodian	62	11	68	26	-9
All Asian-Americans	51	28	57	24	+11

Numbers have been rounded.

SOURCE: NATIONAL ASIAN AMERICAN SURVEY

In the aftermath of the 2012 election, the Republican National Committee released a [report](#) calling on the party to do a better job connecting with minority populations. The RNC hired a national field director, Stephen Fong, and a national communications director, Jason Chung, to conduct [outreach](#) to Asian-American voters. Karthick Ramakrishnan, director of the NAAS, said in an interview that the GOP was “trying to project this image of the Republican Party that was more open, that is more tolerant, that is trying to do significant outreach to the community.”

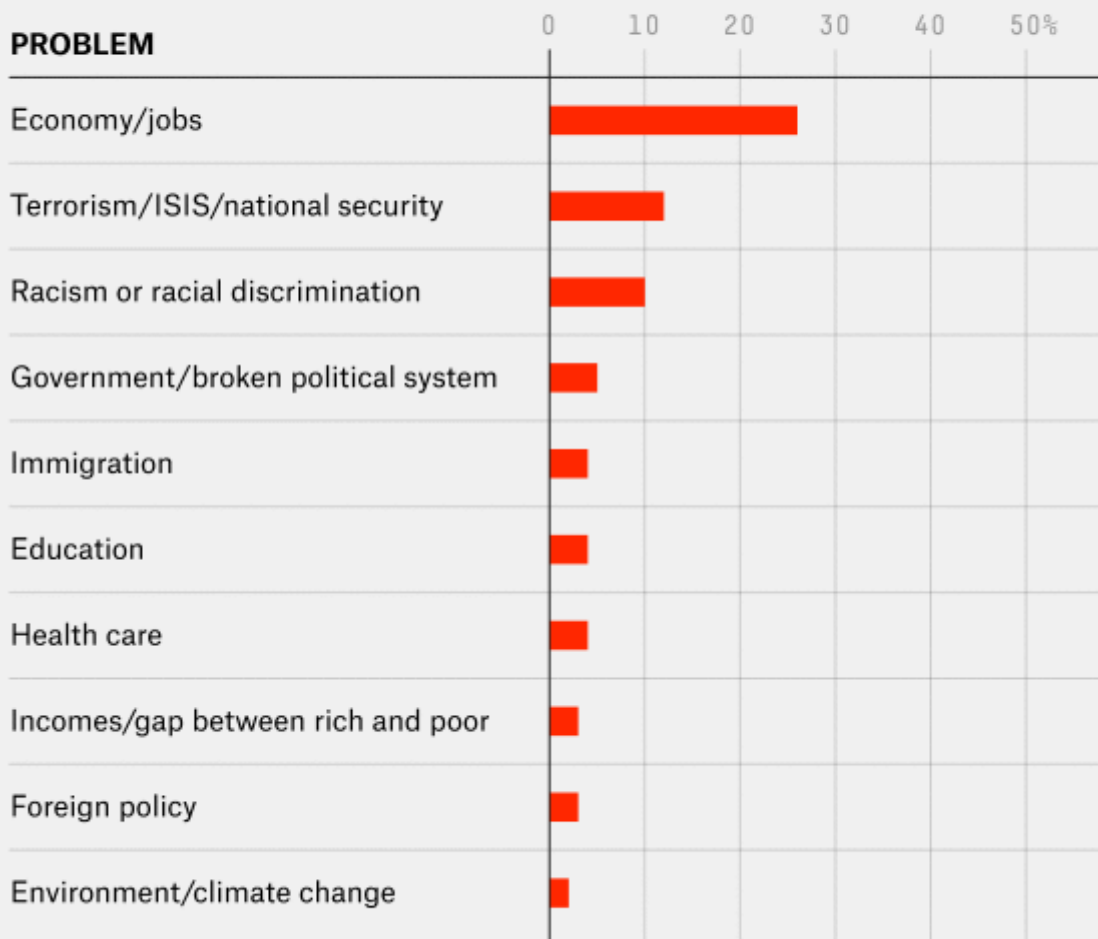
Ramakrishnan said the GOP appeared to be making strides in some areas, pointing to the 2014 [election](#) of several Asian-American Republicans to seats in California’s state legislature. But he said that the polarizing nature of this year’s GOP presidential nominee seems to be nullifying any gains Republicans might have made and that support among Asian-Americans for the GOP may be lower now than in 2012. In previous years, Ramakrishnan said, surveys of Asian-Americans showed larger differences in political preferences between subgroups and between regions of the country. “One way you could put it is that Trump is nationalizing the election for Asian-Americans,” he said.

Figure 1a. Presidential Vote Choice among Asian American Registered Voters, with "leaners"

Trump's effect on the concerns of Asian-Americans may be evident in an open-ended NAAS question that asks respondents to name the "most important problem facing the United States." Ten percent of registered voters in the NAAS said "racism or racial discrimination," the third-most-common answer, behind the economy and national security. Trump has been criticized for anti-immigrant and racist rhetoric, including [saying](#) that Mexican immigrants are rapists, and for [proposing](#) to temporarily ban Muslims from entering the country.

Racism is a top concern for Asian-Americans

Share of Asian-American registered voters in 2016 by their responses to the open-ended question, "What do you think is the most important problem facing the United States today?"



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NATIONAL ASIAN AMERICAN SURVEY

In 2012, only 2 percent of likely voters cited race or racism.

Video: How different demographic groups could swing the election

Footnotes

1. Both the party identification and horse-race numbers include respondents who said they lean toward one party or the other.
2. The survey was conducted from Aug. 10 to Sept. 29.