



**VIEWS OF A DIVERSE ELECTORATE:
OPINIONS OF CALIFORNIA REGISTERED VOTERS IN 2014**

*An analysis and presentation by National Asian American Survey
of August 2014 Field Poll data by race and detailed ethnicity*

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National Asian American Survey

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The United States is diversifying rapidly along the lines of race and ethnicity, and perhaps nowhere is that more apparent than in California, a state where no racial/ethnic group is a majority (California has been a “majority-minority” state since 2000), and where Latinos are now the largest racial/ethnic group among residents in the state.¹ At the same time, the presence of Latinos and Asian Americans at the ballot box has been limited by the fact that their rates of citizenship and voter registration have been below those of whites and African Americans.

Still, the growing diversification of California’s electorate is unmistakable. While in 1994, 77% of registered voters were white, 11.4% were Latino, 5.9% were African American, and 4.4% were Asian American, by 2012 these figures had changed dramatically, to 55.6% white, 24% Latino, 10.3% Asian American, and 6.9% African American.² This is a remarkable transformation in the electorate over 20 years, and a sign of even greater change to come as Asian Americans and Latinos are among the fastest growing groups in the state.³

Given this context, it is critical for public opinion surveys in California to reflect the diversity of its electorate. This report presents the results of interviews conducted by Field Research Corporation from August 14 to 28, 2014, of 1,280 registered voters. Interviews were conducted in English, Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean, and Vietnamese, with supplemental interviews of Asian American registered voters to produce more reliable estimates of public opinion.

The data on public opinion by race and detailed ethnicity reveal that:

- Non-Hispanic whites are pessimistic about the direction of the country, but not about the direction of the state. They give President Obama low approval ratings, and Congress even lower ratings. They are supportive of the death penalty, including speeding up the process to avoid long delays. Finally, they are also supportive of affirmative action programs that relate to jobs and education.
- Latinos are pessimistic about the direction of the country, and ambivalent about the direction of the state. They give President Obama a net positive approval rating, and a net negative rating for Congress. They are supportive of the death penalty, but are more divided when it comes to speeding up the process to avoid long delays. Finally, they are strongly supportive of affirmative action programs that relate to jobs and education.

¹ See <http://www.scpr.org/blogs/multiamerican/2014/04/09/16331/california-s-latino-plurality-we-re-confident-that/>

² Authors’ analysis of Current Population Survey Voter Supplements.

³ See <http://www.advancingjustice-alc.org/news-media/publications/community-contrasts-asian-americans-native-hawaiians-and-pacific-islanders>

- Asian Americans are ambivalent about the direction of the country, and positive about the direction of the state. They give President Obama a net positive approval rating, and a net negative rating for Congress. They are supportive of the death penalty, but are more divided when it comes to speeding up the process to avoid long delays. Finally, they are supportive of affirmative action programs that relate to jobs and education, and this support also holds true for detailed origin groups such as Chinese Americans and Vietnamese Americans.
- African Americans are the most optimistic about the direction of the country and the state. They give President Obama high approval ratings, and Congress very low approval ratings. They are very supportive of solutions to move away from the death penalty to life imprisonment, and are also very supportive of Affirmative Action programs.

MOOD OF THE ELECTORATE

Direction of the country

Half of the survey’s respondents were asked “Thinking about the country overall, do you think things in the U.S. are generally going in the right direction, or do you feel things are seriously off on the wrong track?” Table 1 below presents the statewide results by racial group (the sample sizes were too small for detailed Asian origin on this question).

African Americans were more likely than registered voters of any other racial and ethnic group to think that things in the United States were going in the right direction. While the margin of error for this population is sizable (+/-18%), the results still show a net positive view of the country’s direction among African American registered voters. By contrast, whites were, on net, pessimistic about the direction of the country, with only about one third saying it was headed in the right direction and 57% saying it was on the wrong track. Latinos and Asian Americans tended to be more ambivalent in their opinion, with a sizable proportion of Asian Americans indicating no opinion on the matter.

Table 1. Direction of the Country

	Right Direction	Wrong Track	No Opinion	<i>Number of respondents</i>
Overall	35.9%	50.8%	13.3%	642
White, non-Hispanic	32.5	57.0	10.5	265
Latino	39.1	45.8	15.1	157
African American	66.4	24.4	9.2	42
Asian/Pacific Islander	34.1	36.7	29.2	179

Note: See Appendix for sample margins of error associated with number of respondents

Direction of the state

Another half of the survey’s respondents were asked “Thinking about this state, do you think things in California are generally going in the right direction, or do you feel things are seriously off on the wrong track?” Table 2 (next page) presents the statewide results by racial group (the sample sizes were too small for detailed Asian origin on this question).

For the population overall, registered voters are less pessimistic about the future direction of California than of the United States more generally. This is also true for Latinos and whites in particular, who are about even in their assessment of where

California is headed. By contrast, African Americans and Asian Americans had a net positive view of the state’s direction, with the difference stronger among African Americans.

Table 2. Direction of the State

	Right Direction	Wrong Track	No Opinion	<i>Number of respondents</i>
Overall	43.2%	41.1%	15.7%	638
White, non-Hispanic	41.2	42.9	15.9	245
Latino	41.5	44.7	13.7	166
African American	65.3	29.2	5.5	40
Asian/Pacific Islander	47.0	31.9	21.0	211

Note: See Appendix for sample margins of error associated with number of respondents

Presidential approval

All respondents were asked “Overall, do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as President?” Table 3 below presents the statewide results by race and detailed ethnic origin for registered voters.

Table 3. Approval of Barack Obama’s Job as President

	Approve	Disapprove	No Opinion	<i>Number of respondents</i>
Overall	44.5%	43.2%	12.3%	1280
White, non-Hispanic	40.3	49.6	10.1	510
Latino	47.2	38.9	13.9	323
African American	80.0	12.6	7.4	82
Asian/Pacific Islander	44.5	31.6	23.9	390
<i>Chinese</i>	41.8	36.6	21.6	128
<i>Korean</i>	41.1	34.1	24.8	107
<i>Vietnamese</i>	50.9	14.0	35.0	106

Note: See Appendix for sample margins of error associated with number of respondents

African Americans gave the President his highest job approval, with support from four in every five registered voters. By contrast, the President’s approval rating among every other group was in the low- to mid- 40s. However, disapprovals outnumbered approvals among non-Hispanic whites. For Latinos and Asian Americans, more approved of the President’s job than disapproved, with net approval strongest among Vietnamese Americans.

Congressional approval

Half of the survey’s respondents were asked, “Overall, do you approve or disapprove of the way Congress is doing its job?” Table 4 below presents the statewide results by racial group (the sample sizes were too small for detailed Asian origin on this question).

Congress is held in low regard by all racial/ethnic groups in California, with the highest levels of disapproval among non-Hispanic whites and African Americans. Congress had strong net disapproval ratings among Latinos and Asian Americans, too, albeit with margins that were smaller than those among whites and African Americans. Finally, a high proportion of Asian American registered voters gave no opinion on their approval of Congress.

Table 4. Approval of Congress

	Approve	Disapprove	No Opinion	<i>Number of respondents</i>
Overall	13.4%	74.8%	11.8%	642
White, non-Hispanic	9.6	82.5	7.9	265
Latino	23.4	63.8	12.8	157
African American	13.4	81.8	4.8	42
Asian/Pacific Islander	15.2	47.0	37.8	179

Note: See Appendix for sample margins of error associated with number of respondents

DEATH PENALTY

All respondents were asked “As you know, California has capital punishment – that is, execution – as a form of punishment for certain crimes. In general, would you say that you are strongly in favor, somewhat in favor, somewhat opposed or strongly opposed to the death penalty?” Table 5a below presents the statewide results by race and detailed ethnic origin for registered voters.

As the results indicate, most Californians support keeping the death penalty rather than to do away with it, with the exception of African Americans, for whom the difference between keeping the death penalty and doing away with it was within the survey’s sampling margin of error for this group.

Table 5a. Opinion on Death Penalty

	Do Away With It	Keep It	No Opinion	<i>Number of respondents</i>
Overall	34.4%	55.9%	9.7%	1280
White, non-Hispanic	35.2	57.3	7.5	510
Latino	31.6	57.5	11.0	323
African American	42.2	46.4	11.4	82
Asian/Pacific Islander	29.9	47.1	23.0	390
<i>Chinese</i>	25.3	62.4	12.2	128
<i>Korean</i>	24.8	57.2	18.1	107
<i>Vietnamese</i>	22.2	55.9	22.7	106

Note: See Appendix for sample margins of error associated with number of respondents

In addition, respondents were asked “Last month a federal judge ruled that California’s death penalty law is unconstitutional because it takes so long for the state to carry out an execution. What action do you favor California taking in light of this ruling? Should it take steps to speed up the execution process? Or should it do away with the death penalty and replace it with the sentence of life in prison without the possibility of parole?” Table 5b (next page) presents the statewide results by race and detailed ethnic origin for registered voters.

As the results indicate, Californians support speeding up the process to reduce delays in death penalty cases, with strongest support among non-Hispanic whites. By contrast, African Americans have a strong preference for life in prison as an alternative, while the opinions of Latinos and Asian Americans are more ambivalent, with a preference for speeding up the process that is within the survey’s sampling margin of error.

Table 5b. Solutions for Delays in Death Penalty Process

	Speed Up Process	Replace with Life in Prison	No Opinion	<i>Number of respondents</i>
Overall	51.9%	39.6%	8.5%	1280
White, non-Hispanic	56.6	36.9	6.5	510
Latino	48.5	40.9	10.6	323
African American	27.7	61.9	10.4	82
Asian/Pacific Islander	43.8	39.4	16.8	390
<i>Chinese</i>	60.6	23.0	16.3	128
<i>Korean</i>	47.4	27.7	24.9	107
<i>Vietnamese</i>	44.3	37.2	18.4	106

Note: See Appendix for sample margins of error associated with number of respondents

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

All respondents were asked, “Do you favor or oppose affirmative action programs designed to help blacks, women, and other minorities get better jobs and education?” This same question was asked of Asian Americans in the 2012 National Asian American Survey,⁴ and in an earlier survey by Pew Research Center. This question also reflects the state of affirmative action in California before its repeal in 1994 under Proposition 209 in 1996.⁵ Table 6 below presents the statewide results by race and detailed ethnic origin.

Overall, nearly two-thirds of registered voters in California support affirmative action as it relates to employment and higher education. For all of the subgroups we examined, support for affirmative action is significantly higher than opposition. Even among whites, we find majority support. While 63% voted to end affirmative action in 1996,⁶ 57% of non-Hispanic whites are in favor of affirmative action today. African American and Latino support for affirmative action is very high, and in line with how these groups voted on Proposition 209—with 74% of African Americans and 76% of Latinos opposed to ending affirmative action in 1996. Finally, 69% of Asian American registered voters support affirmative action, while 13% are opposed and 18% offered no opinion. Among the Asian subgroups for which we have sufficient sample size, we find majority support among Vietnamese Americans and Chinese Americans. For Korean Americans, 40% registered no opinion on the matter, while 47% were in favor and 13% opposed.

Table 6. Opinion on Affirmative Action in Jobs and Education

	Favor	Oppose	No Opinion	<i>Number of respondents</i>
Overall	65.7%	25.4%	9.0%	1280
White, non-Hispanic	57.3	33.8	8.8	510
Latino	81.4	11.1	7.5	323
African American	83.1	13.1	3.8	82
Asian/Pacific Islander	69.1	12.9	17.9	390
<i>Chinese</i>	59.7	24.1	16.2	128
<i>Korean</i>	47.1	12.8	40.1	107
<i>Vietnamese</i>	73.2	9.2	17.6	106

Note: See Appendix for sample margins of error associated with number of respondents

⁴ In the 2012 NAAS, 80 percent of registered Asian American voters responded in favor to this question wording.

⁵ Proposition 209 made it unconstitutional to accord preferential treatment “on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin in the operation of public employment, public education, or public contracting.”

⁶ Los Angeles Times Poll, Exit Poll: The General Election 1996, available at <http://media.trb.com/media/acrobat/2008-10/43120439.pdf>

In addition to the general results above by race and detailed origin, we have sufficiently large samples in some of these groups to examine differences by gender, age, nativity, region, and party registration.

Table 7. Support for Affirmative Action by Gender

	Men	Women	<i>Number of respondents</i>
Overall	65%	66%	1280
White, non-Hispanic	57%	57%	510
Latino	78%	84%	323
Asian/Pacific Islander	72%	67%	390

Note: See Appendix for sample margins of error associated with number of respondents

Table 8. Support for Affirmative Action by Age Group

	18 to 39	40 to 64	65 or more	<i>Number of respondents</i>
Overall	73%	64%	57%	1280
White, non-Hispanic	67%	54%	50%	510
Latino	83%	82%	72%	323
Asian/Pacific Islander	72%	69%	66%	390

Note: See Appendix for sample margins of error associated with number of respondents

Table 9. Support for Affirmative Action by Nativity

	Born in the United States	Born Outside the United States	<i>Number of respondents</i>
Overall	62%	79%	1280
Latino	77%	89%	323
Asian/Pacific Islander	68%	70%	390

Note: See Appendix for sample margins of error associated with number of respondents

Table 10. Support for Affirmative Action by Region in California

	Northern CA	Southern CA	<i>Number of respondents</i>
Overall	67%	65%	1280
White, non-Hispanic	61%	54%	510
Latino	78%	83%	323
Asian/Pacific Islander	81%	60%	390

Note: See Appendix for sample margins of error associated with number of respondents

	Coastal CA	Inland CA	<i>Number of respondents</i>
Overall	68%	60%	1280
White, non-Hispanic	60%	52%	510
Latino	84%	76%	323

Note: See Appendix for sample margins of error associated with number of respondents

Table 11. Support for Affirmative Action by Partisanship

	Republican	Democrat	Other/ No Response	<i>Number of respondents</i>
Overall	43%	83%	62%	1280
White, non-Hispanic	36%	79%	54%	510
Latino	64%	87%	82%	323
Asian/Pacific Islander	59%	82%	62%	390

Note: See Appendix for sample margins of error associated with number of respondents

As the results indicate, there is majority support for affirmative action among most of these subgroups of registered voters, with the following exceptions: Republicans in the state, and non-Hispanic white Republicans in particular. For other subgroups, majority support is within the survey's sample margin or error, meaning that we cannot rule out with a 95% level of certainty that support is below 50%. These subgroups include whites ages 40 to 64 and ages 65 and over, whites in Northern California and Inland California, whites who are not registered as Republican or Democrat, and Asian American Republicans.

APPENDIX

Methodology

The following is taken verbatim from Field Poll Report Release #2479, which is the survey we use for this analysis (archives at <http://www.field.com/fieldpollonline/subscribers/>)

The findings in this report are based on a Field Poll completed August 14-28, 2014 among 1,280 California registered voters. Interviews were administered by telephone using live interviewers in six languages and dialects – English, Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean, and Vietnamese. In order to cover a broad range of issues and still minimize respondent fatigue, the survey was divided into two random subsamples on some questions.

The overall sample included supplemental interviews conducted among the state's growing ethnic voter population. Funding for the survey's supplemental interviews conducted with Asian American voters was provided by Professor Karthick Ramakrishnan of the University of California, Riverside as part of the National Asian American Survey project.

Individual voters were sampled at random from voters with telephones drawn from the statewide voter registration rolls. The supplemental sample of Asian Americans was developed from voter roll listings targeting Chinese American, Korean American and Vietnamese American voters based primarily on their ethnic surnames. Once a voter's name and telephone number had been selected, interviews are attempted only with the specified voter on either their landline or cell phone, depending on the source of the listing from the voter file. After the completion of interviewing, the overall sample was weighted to align it to the proper distribution of voters by race/ethnicity and other political, demographic and geographic characteristics of the California voter population.

Sampling error estimates applicable to the results of any probability-based survey depend on sample size and the percentage distributions being examined. The maximum sampling error for results from the overall sample in this survey is +/- 3.2 percentage points at the 95% confidence level, while findings based on the random subsample of registered voters have a maximum sampling error of +/- 4.5 percentage points. The maximum sampling error estimates are based on survey findings in the middle of the sampling distribution (i.e., results at or near 50%). Percentages at either tail of the distributions (i.e., results closer to 10% or 90%) have somewhat smaller margins of error. There are other potential sources of error in surveys of public opinion besides sampling error. However, the overall design and execution of this survey sought to minimize these other possible errors.

The Field Poll was established in 1947 as The California Poll by Mervin Field, who is still an active advisor. The Poll has operated continuously since then as an independent, non-partisan survey of California public opinion. The Field Poll receives financial support from leading

California newspapers and television stations, who purchase the rights of first release to Field Poll reports in their primary viewer or readership markets. The Poll also receives funding from the University of California and California State University systems, who receive the data files from each Field Poll survey shortly after its completion for teaching and secondary research purposes, as well as from foundations, non-profit organizations, and others as part of the Poll's policy research sponsor program.

Using the sampling error methodology above, the margins of error are the following at their respective sample sizes:

In questions where all respondents were interviewed: 510 non-Hispanic whites (4.3%), 323 Latinos (5.4%), 82 African Americans (10.8%), 390 Asian/Pacific Islanders (5.0%), 128 Chinese Americans (8.7%), 107 Korean Americans (9.5%), and 106 Vietnamese Americans (9.5%).

In questions where half the respondents were interviewed: 265 non-Hispanic whites (6.0%), 157 Latinos (7.8%), 42 African Americans (15.1%), and 179 Asian/Pacific Islanders (7.3%).

The margins of error in this report follow the convention of polls based on sample sizes of respondents. The errors introduced by design effect are different, and do not change the significance of the results discussed in the text, with the exception of Latino and Asian American findings in Tables 3 (Obama approval) and 5b (Solutions to death penalty delays). For more details, please contact Karthick Ramakrishnan, karthick@ucr.edu

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

The National Asian American Survey is a scientific, independent, and nonpartisan effort to gauge the opinions of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the United States.

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

Karthick Ramakrishnan is professor of public policy and political science at the University of California, Riverside. His research focuses on civic participation, immigration policy, and the politics of race, ethnicity, and immigration in the United States. Ramakrishnan directs the National Asian American Survey and is writing a book on the rise of state and local legislation on immigration over the past decade. Ramakrishnan directs AAPI Data and is the founding editor of the *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics*, an official journal of the American Political Science Association.

Ramakrishnan received his Ph.D. in politics from Princeton University, and has held fellowships at the Russell Sage Foundation, the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, and the Public Policy Institute of California. He has received several grants from sources such as the James Irvine Foundation and the Russell Sage Foundation, and has provided consultation to public officials at the federal and local levels. His articles and books on immigration and politics can be found at www.karthick.com.

TaeKu Lee is professor of political science and law at the University of California, Berkeley. He has authored and edited numerous books on race and ethnic politics, immigration, political parties, and public opinion. Lee serves on the American National Election Studies Board of Overseers and on the Council of the American Political Science Association.

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. Lee's work has earned him three book awards and several fellowships.

Together, Ramakrishnan and Lee have had extensive experience in survey design and analysis and expertise on public opinion and racial politics. They have collectively written 7 books and dozens of articles on racial/ethnic politics, and have conducted 18 surveys, nine of which have included multiple language support for Asian Americans. They have also overseen several successful research projects and their dissemination to policy-relevant audiences