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**THE 2012 GENERAL ELECTION:  
PUBLIC OPINION OF ASIAN AMERICANS IN CALIFORNIA**



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (APIs) are one of the fastest growing populations in the United States. Between 2000 and 2010, the Asian American population grew faster than any other racial group, at a rate of 46% in the United States, and by nearly a third in California. In California, Asian Americans comprise 13% of state's population when considering those that mention only one race (Asian alone) and 15% of the total population when considering those who identify with Asian and some other race.

Notably, Asian Americans are an important and growing constituency, as 600,000 new Asian American voters entered the national electorate in 2008 and a similar number is expected to do so in 2012. More generally, as of 2010, API residents exceeded the 5% threshold in roughly one in four Congressional Districts and in nearly 600 cities. In 2012, there are also a record number of Asian Americans running for Congress in 2012, and APIs occupy key positions in Washington, D.C. and in various state capitols. Their growing influence in California is already apparent in the key electoral offices held by large-city mayors Ed Lee and Jean Quan, and U.S. Representatives Judy Chu and Mike Honda, among others.

The National Asian American Survey (NAAS) conducted the first nationally representative survey of the policy priorities and issue preferences of Asian Americans in 2008. In 2012, we are conducting a tracking survey with the addition of even more Asian ethnic groups than in 2008 (Hmong and Cambodian, in addition to Chinese, Indian, Filipino, Vietnamese, Korean, and Japanese) and with the addition of Pacific Islander groups such as Native Hawaiians and Samoans.

This report presents the results of interviews conducted through September 19, 2012 with a focus on those Asian Americans residing in California (1,154 respondents).<sup>1</sup> We disaggregate our data to the 8 ethnic groups in our sample when discussing adults and adult citizens in California (Chinese, Filipino, Vietnamese, Indian, Korean, Japanese, Cambodian, and Hmong). Given reductions in sample size for registered voters and likely voters, we break out data only for those groups whose numbers are greater than 70 respondents (Chinese, Filipino, Vietnamese, and Japanese), although the overall Asian American figures include all 8 groups. Our national reports (available at <http://www.naasurvey.com>) are not subject to these sample size limitations.

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<sup>1</sup> The national sample contained 3,376 respondents, with 1,233 interviews of Californians (1,154 Asian Americans and 79 Pacific Islanders). There were an insufficient number of Native Hawaiian and Samoans from California at this point of the data collection to provide reliable estimates of political behavior and public opinion. Additional interviews are ongoing through October 2012, and a total of roughly 5,000 interviews nationwide will complete the data collection.

The data from California reveal that:

- Among Asian American citizens, 45 percent nationally can be described as “likely voters” and 43 percent among California respondents.
- Among likely voters in California, 43% of Asian Americans support Barack Obama while 21% support Mitt Romney. There are some considerable differences by ethnic group, with Japanese Americans showing the strongest support for Obama (56%), and Filipinos showing the strongest support for Romney (33%).
- About one out of every three likely Asian American voters in California remains undecided. By comparison, recent surveys of the general population show that undecided voters are roughly 7 percent of the electorate.
- In the race for U.S. Senate in California, Asian American likely voters support the incumbent Dianne Feinstein over Elizabeth Emken by a 53% to 24% margin, a ratio that is similar to the rest of the California electorate. The proportion of undecided voters among Asian Americans in the Senate race is twice the California average. (*see p26*)
- On Proposition 30, a state constitutional amendment that would temporarily raise the state sales tax and income taxes on high earners, 48% of Asian American likely voters are in favor, 28% opposed, and 24% undecided. The ratio of support to opposition is higher than the California average, as is the proportion of undecided voters (*see p28*).
- On Proposition 34, which would end the death penalty in California, Asian Americans are much more divided, with 37% in favor, 41% opposed, and 22% undecided (*see p30*).
- Most Asian American likely voters do not understand the top-two primary system in California (55%) and are much more divided than the rest of the California electorate on the desirability of the new system (*see pp31-32*).
- More generally, a high proportion of Asian Americans are non-partisan (52% are Independent or do not think in terms of party identification). This figure is higher than the average for the national population (as high as 40%), and is comparable to the proportion of non-partisans among Latinos.
- Democrats have a 33% to 15% advantage over Republicans among Asian Americans in California and, when we add Independents who “lean” towards a party, the difference is 47% to 21%.
- Party affiliation varies across ethnic groups, with Hmong, Indian, and Koreans most strongly identified with the Democratic Party. Self-identified Democrats outnumber Republicans in every ethnic group in the California 2012 NAAS sample.
- Outside of California, Republican Filipinos outnumber Democratic Filipinos and Republican Vietnamese outnumber Democratic Vietnamese. In California, this is reversed, with more Democrats than Republicans for both groups. Vietnamese in California, in particular, are significantly less likely to identify as Republicans than in 2008 and now more likely to identify as Independents.

- Asian Americans in California approve of President Obama's job performance on par with other Californians (60%, which is significantly higher than the national average of 50%), and they have a considerably less favorable impression of Mitt Romney than the overall average for California (30% vs. 39%, respectively). Asian Americans also have a more favorable impression of Democrats in Congress than the national average (43% vs. 34%, respectively). These figures are similar for Asian Americans in California as for those living outside California.
- The issue priorities of Asian Americans in the NAAS are similar to those of the rest of the country. The economy and jobs are by far the most important issues, followed by health care and education.
- Women's rights, health care, and the budget deficit are important issues that differentiate support for Obama and Romney: the first two issues favor President Obama among Asian Americans, while the deficit favors Mitt Romney.
- Asian Americans actively follow political affairs in their countries of origin, but this attention is not a deterrent to their political involvement in the United States. Indeed, those actively involved in their countries of origin are more likely to have voted in the 2008 presidential election, more likely to be registered to vote, and are more likely to vote in 2012.

## BACKGROUND: THE ASIAN AMERICAN ELECTORATE IN CALIFORNIA

### Demographics

Asian Americans are a sizable and rapidly growing population in California. Out of a total population in California of 37.3 million in 2010, Asian Americans accounted for 4.9 million residents, or 13 percent of the state's population. In comparison, African Americans accounted for 6% of the state's population, Latinos accounted for 38% of the population, and non-Hispanic whites accounted for 40% of the state's population.

Other key demographic facts about the Asian American population in California include:

- While the "Asian alone" figure totaled 4.8 million residents in 2010, taking a more expansive measure of "Asian alone or in combination with 1 or more other races" shows a population that exceeded 5.5 million in 2010, or 15% of California residents.
- Between 2000 and 2010, the Asian American population in California grew faster than any other racial group, at a rate of 31.5%. By comparison, the Latino population grew by 27.8%, and the non-Hispanic white population in California reduced in number.
- In 2008, according to the Current Population Survey, Asian Americans were 10% of the registered voter population in California. This compares to 7% for African Americans, 22% for Latinos, and 59% for whites.
- In 2008, according to the Current Population Survey, Asian Americans were 9.2% of those who cast ballots in the November election in California. By comparison, African Americans were 7.6% of those who cast ballots, Latinos were 21.4%, and whites were 59.7%.
- Chinese Americans are the largest ethnic group of Asian Americans in the state, accounting for about a quarter of the Asian American population (1.25 million out of 4.9 million), followed by Filipinos (1.2 million), Vietnamese (0.58 million), Indian (0.53 million), Korean (0.45 million), Japanese Americans (0.27 million), Cambodian (96,000) and Hmong (93,000).
- There were 11 counties in California where the Asian American population exceeded 100,000 residents in 2010: Los Angeles, Santa Clara, Orange, Alameda, San Diego, San Francisco, Sacramento, San Mateo, Contra Costa County, Riverside, and San Bernardino.
  - Of these 11 counties, Riverside and San Bernardino had the fastest growth rates in the Asian American population between 2000 and 2010, (119% and 54%, respectively).

- Of these 11 counties, Orange and Santa Clara had more than 500,000 Asian American residents and Los Angeles County had 1.3 million Asian American residents.
- As a share of the county population, Asian Americans accounted for more than 20% of the resident population in four Bay Area counties in 2010: San Mateo (24%), Alameda (26%), Santa Clara (32%), and San Francisco (33%).
- Asian Americans have household sizes and rates of overcrowding that are higher than the statewide average<sup>2</sup>
- Asians are more likely than whites to have graduated from college, but also less likely than whites to have completed a high school education<sup>3</sup>
- Rates of educational attainment are highest among Indians, Japanese, Koreans, and Filipinos in the state, and are lowest among Hmong, Laotian, Cambodian, and Vietnamese Americans<sup>4</sup>

### High Proportion of Non-Partisans

We can better understand the political orientations of Asian Americans by first examining their patterns of party identification. Over the past three decades, the American electorate has been characterized by a growing proportion of Independent voters, reaching as high as 40 percent of voters in 2012.<sup>5</sup> Among Asian Americans, the proportion of adult citizens who choose not to identify as Republican or Democrat in California is even greater, at 52 percent. The national proportion is also above 50 percent and both figures are similar to the proportion of non-partisans among Latinos.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Asian Pacific American Legal Center, *The Diverse Face of Asian and Pacific Islanders in California*, 2005.

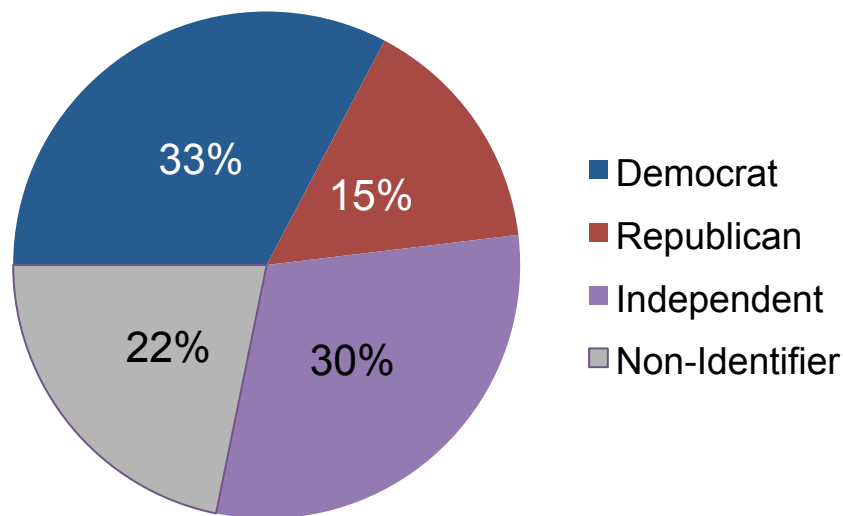
<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Jeffrey M. Jones, *Record-High 40% of Americans Identify as Independents in '11* (Princeton, NJ: Gallup, January 29, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> Jeffrey M. Jones, *Half of U.S. Hispanics Identify as Political Independents* (Princeton, NJ: Gallup, May 2, 2012).

**Figure 1: Party Identification Among Asian Americans<sup>7</sup>**



Unlike for whites and African Americans, for Asian Americans (and Latinos) a high proportion of non-partisanship is found among "non-identifiers" -- those who "don't know" how they identify, who decline to state, or do not yet think in terms of partisan labels.<sup>8</sup> Among the 52 percent who do identify with either political party, considerably more identify as Democrats (30%) than as Republicans (12%) when asked if they think of themselves as "closer" to either party.

### **Party Advantage Varies By Group**

This overall picture of partisanship, however, masks significant variation within the Asian American community by national origin group, gender, and nativity. (See Table 1)

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<sup>7</sup> Question: "Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or in terms of some other party?" ["don't know" and refusals are labeled as "Non-Partisan"].

<sup>8</sup> Building on the work of Zoltan Hajnal and Taeku Lee (*Why Americans Don't Join the Party?* Princeton University Press, 2011), we asked about partisanship in three different ways. The proportion of non-partisans is highest when an explicit option to state that respondents "don't think in terms of political parties" is given.



**Table 1. Party Identification by Ethnicity, Gender, Age, and Nativity<sup>9</sup>**

	<b>Democrat</b>	<b>Republican</b>	<b>Independent / Non-Partisan</b>
<b>Chinese</b>	31%	7%	61%
<b>Filipino</b>	34	25	42
<b>Vietnamese</b>	20	18	63
<b>Indian</b>	44	5	51
<b>Korean</b>	37	21	41
<b>Japanese</b>	35	18	47
<b>Cambodian</b>	30	0	70
<b>Hmong</b>	48	10	42
<b>Male</b>	36	14	50
<b>Female</b>	30	16	54
<b>18 to 34</b>	35	8	56
<b>35 to 49</b>	36	22	41
<b>50 to 59</b>	32	13	56
<b>60 to 69</b>	33	24	43
<b>70+ years</b>	28	20	53
<b>Foreign Born</b>	31	15	54
<b>Native Born</b>	40	15	45

- Japanese Americans have traditionally had the strongest identification with the Democratic Party, but we find that Hmong, Indians, and Korean Americans also hold very strong ties with the Democratic Party.
- In a shift from our 2008 NAAS study, there are now more Vietnamese Californians who identify as Democrats than as Republicans.<sup>10</sup>
- At the national level, Filipinos are closely split between the two parties (34 percent Democratic to 25 percent Republican). Filipino Californians, however, are much more closely aligned with the Democratic Party than their non-Californian counterparts (who split for Republicans over Democrats, 31 to 17 percent).

<sup>9</sup> Numbers total 100% per group when "Some Other Party" is included (figures not shown). As the samples for ethnic sub-groups are substantially smaller, the margin of error for the percentages in Table 1 range from  $\pm 8\%$  for larger groups to as high as  $\pm 13\%$  for Hmong.

<sup>10</sup> In the 2008 NAAS, 35% of the Vietnamese sample identified as Republicans, 18% Democrats, 46 percent as non-partisans (19% Independents, 27% non-identifiers).

- Cambodian Americans are least likely to identify with a major party, with 70 percent non-partisanship. Non-partisanship is also especially prevalent among Chinese and Vietnamese Americans.
- Both women and men are more likely to identify as Democrats than Republican, although women in our California sample are somewhat less likely to identify as Republicans and somewhat more likely to be non-partisans. (Outside California, Asian American women in the NAAS are more likely to be Democratic than Republican.) In the 2012 NAAS overall, the gender gap is not as strong among Asian Americans as among whites, where surveys have found gaps in the magnitude of 10 percentage points.<sup>11</sup>
- With age groups, the most noticeable finding is that young adults (18 to 34 year olds) are the ones least likely to identify with the Republican Party.
- Finally, there is a gap in party identification by nativity: the foreign born are more likely to identify as Independent or Non-Partisan (54%) compared to the native born (45%). Foreign-born Asian Americans in the California sample are also less likely to identify as Democrats (31%) than their US-born counterparts (40%).

Finally, it is well-known that a large share of self-identified non-partisans lean in favor of one of the two major parties if asked, and that leaners often vote with some regularity for the party they lean towards. Among Asian Americans in the NAAS, we first find that a majority of self-declared Independents will remain firmly non-partisan (58% in our California sample), even if asked about their leanings. In the typical American National Election Study, by contrast, roughly three-quarters will side one of the two major parties when asked if they lean in favor of a party. Table 2 shows that the patterns of party identification by ethnicity, gender, age, and nativity largely concur with the results in Table 1.

- We continue to find a significant advantage for Democrats over Republicans by greater than a 2-to-1 margin.
- Vietnamese in California now appear more solidly Democratic (36% to 24%) and Filipinos now stand out as the group with the highest level of Republican support in California (31%).
- The gender gap in our California sample runs opposite to what we find nationally: there is a slightly higher incidence of male Asian American Democrats than female Asian American Democrats.
- Younger Asian Americans are more Democratically-minded than older Asian Americans.

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<sup>11</sup> Frank Newport, *Women More Likely to Be Democrats, Regardless of Age* (Princeton, NJ: Gallup, June 12, 2009).

- The foreign born are more likely to remain firmly non-partisan while the native-born, including leaners, are more likely to identify as Democrats.

**Table 2. Party ID (with Leaners) by Ethnicity, Age, Gender, and Nativity<sup>12</sup>**

	<b>Democrat / Lean Democratic</b>	<b>Republican / Lean Republican</b>	<b>Firmly Non- Partisan</b>
<b>Asian American Average</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>31%</b>
Chinese	48	14	38
Indian	59	13	28
Filipino	43	31	26
Vietnamese	36	24	40
Korean	50	25	25
Japanese	59	21	21
Cambodian	45	4	51
Hmong	58	13	29
Male	50	22	28
Female	45	21	34
18 to 34	55	16	29
35 to 49	50	30	20
50 to 59	47	20	33
60 to 69	40	27	33
70+ years	45	23	32
Foreign Born	46	21	33
Native Born	53	23	24

### Voters in 2008

According to the Current Population Survey Voter Supplement, 51% of Asian American adult citizens in California voted in the 2008 election.<sup>13</sup> This compared to a self-reported voter participation rate of 69% among whites, 66% among blacks, and 57% among Latinos.

In our 2012 survey, respondents were asked if they voted in the 2008 elections and, if so, who they voted for (See Table 3). Among those who reported voting, 70% of our

<sup>12</sup> Question (asked of self-identified Independents): "Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or to the Democratic Party?"

<sup>13</sup> Authors' analysis of individual-level data from the Current Population Survey Voter Supplement, 2008.

California sample indicated they voted for Barack Obama, 27% said they voted for John McCain, and the rest said they voted for someone else. This is slightly higher than our national reports from the 2012 NAAS. National Election Pool exit polls from 2008 in California reported an Asian American vote of 64% for Obama and 35% for McCain, with 1% indicating someone else.<sup>14</sup> It is important to note that the NEP surveys are conducted only in English and Spanish, and sampling frames are designed to represent the overall electorate and provide reliable results for a variety of state and local races. NEP results are thus less likely to be nationally representative of small minority groups such as Asian Americans.

**Table 3. Presidential Vote Choice in 2008<sup>15</sup>**

	<b>Obama</b>	<b>McCain</b>	<b>Other</b>
<b>California Average</b>	61%	37%	2%
<b>AA Average</b>	70	27	3
<b>Chinese</b>	77	21	2
<b>Filipino</b>	60	38	3
<b>Vietnamese</b>	61	37	2
<b>Indian</b>	90	5	5
<b>Korean</b>	66	31	3
<b>Japanese</b>	72	26	2

### Approval of President Obama

Asian Americans in California approve of the job performance of President Barack Obama at a rate similar to the California average. As Table 4 indicates, 60% of Asian Americans in California approve of the way the President is handling his job as President. Approval of the President's job is particularly high among Indian Americans (84%), and is lowest among Filipinos, though still above the halfway mark (52%).

The gender differences we found for party identification continue to hold: Asian American men in California are more likely to approve of Barack Obama's performance than Asian American women in California. Approval ratings are pretty comparable across age groups and native-born Californians have somewhat lower presidential approval ratings than foreign-born.

<sup>14</sup> As reported in CNN: <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/results/polls/#CAP00p1>

<sup>15</sup> Numbers may not total 100% due to rounding.

## Favorability Ratings for Obama, Romney, Democrats and Republicans

Another commonly used measure to evaluate a president's standing is whether his constituents have a generally favorable or unfavorable impression. Table 4 shows these favorability ratings alongside similar favorability ratings for Mitt Romney, Democrats in Congress, and Republicans in Congress.

**Table 4. Job Approval and Favorability Ratings<sup>16</sup>**

	Presidential Approval	Favorability			
		Obama	Romney	Democrats in Congress	Republicans in Congress
<b>CA Average</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>39%</b>		
<b>AA Average (CA)</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>24</b>
Chinese	58	61	23	40	25
Indian	84	89	23	58	20
Filipino	52	52	31	34	28
Vietnamese	61	17	25	21	19
Korean	59	77	41	44	28
Japanese	59	49	41	28	25
Cambodian	61	65	8	33	10
Hmong	58	47	21	31	20
Male	63	60	30	38	28
Female	57	54	26	36	21
18 to 34	59	67	26	39	22
35 to 49	57	56	34	33	27
50 to 59	62	58	28	31	23
60 to 69	59	58	30	26	26
70+ years	60	44	31	39	29
Foreign-born	61	55	28	35	21
Native-born	56	62	28	44	38

<sup>16</sup> Question on presidential approval: "Do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as President?" Question on candidate and party favorability: "We'd like now to get your feelings toward some of our political leaders and organizations in the news these days. For each, please tell me whether you have heard of the person, and if your impression is very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable. If you have no opinion, or have never heard of the person or organization, just let me know."

California findings on Presidential approval and favorability derived from the September 2012 Field Poll: <http://www.field.com/fieldpollonline/subscribers/RIs2424.pdf>

Barack Obama's high approval rating among Asian Americans is also matched by high favorability ratings (See Table 4). The favorability rating is particularly high among Indian Americans (89%) and Korean Americans (77%), and is particularly low among Vietnamese Americans (17%). These low favorability ratings for Vietnamese Americans (which are intended to be a more affective measure of evaluation) is notable especially in light of their much higher marks for Obama on the presidential approval question and their higher rates of Democratic party identification.

Asian Americans' favorability rating of Mitt Romney is considerably lower, about half of the level for Barack Obama (28% vs. 57%). A third of this difference is due to a higher level of Asian Americans who don't know how to rate Romney vs. Obama (20% vs. 9%, respectively). Vietnamese Americans are the only group in our California sample to rate Romney more favorably than Obama, but their favorability ratings for both candidates are quite low (25% and 17%, respectively). Across other demographic criteria, young adults and native-born Californians appear especially likely to take a favorable view of President Obama.

Finally, to see if Asian Americans in California view the political parties that these two candidates represent any differently than their flag-bearers, we asked what NAAS respondents thought about "Democrats in Congress" and "Republicans in Congress." On these institutional measures of favorability Asian Americans appear much closer to national averages, viewing Democrats more favorably than Republicans (37% to 24%), but by a more modest margin than the gap between Obama and Romney. Most of the breakdowns in this institutional favorability by demographic sub-groups coincide with the differences in candidate favorability between Obama and Romney.

## Likely Voters in 2012

The problem of misreporting one's voter registration status, or of overestimating the likelihood of voting, is by now well known. As with other pre-election surveys, we use a model to predict likely voters. Here, we create an index using political interest, plans to vote in 2012, self-reported voting in 2008, and voter registration status, and create cutoff points based on voter turnout rates in 2008.

When we do so, we arrive at a likely voter figure of 45% for our national Asian American sample in the NAAS and 43% among Californians in the NAAS. When these vote propensities are disaggregated by ethnic group, Japanese Americans have the highest likelihood of voting (61%), followed by Vietnamese (49%), Filipinos (46%), Koreans (40%), Chinese (39%), Indians (38%). Cambodians (27%) and Hmong (22%) in California appear to be low-propensity voters.

## VOTE FOR PRESIDENT IN 2012

How are Asian Americans likely to vote in the 2012 presidential elections? The results from our study show two important patterns of the Asian American electorate (Table 5):

- Likely voters favor Barack Obama over Mitt Romney by a wide margin. This margin is 22% among Asian Americans in California (43% to 21%), very close to the national margin of 43% to 24%.
- At the same time, a very large proportion of likely voters are still in play. Roughly one in three Asian American likely voters remain undecided, in California and in the nation.
- The party conventions did not decrease the proportion of undecided voters. For those Asian Americans in California who were interviewed after September 6, 2012, 32% were undecided; 45% supported Obama; 22% supported Romney).

**Table 5. Voter Preference for President Among Likely Voters<sup>17</sup>**

	National	California
<b>Obama</b>	43%	43%
<b>Romney</b>	24	21
<b>Other</b>	1	2
<b>Undecided</b>	32	33

### Voter Preferences by Ethnic Groups, Gender, and Age

As we noted in our discussion of partisanship, it is very important to consider whether different sub-groups within the Asian American population vary in their expected choice for president. Our headline results – that Asian Americans favor Barack Obama over Mitt Romney by a wide margin – varies to some extent when we look into voter preferences by ethnicity, gender, and age groups (see Figure 2 below).<sup>18</sup>

Figure 2 shows that:

- Vietnamese Americans are not the strongest supporters of Mitt Romney, despite their historically strong ties to the Republican Party. Most Vietnamese Americans (58%) now say that they are undecided. Among those who have decided, Vietnamese now favor Obama over Romney by a wide margin (30% to 12%).

<sup>17</sup> Question: "For President of the United States, do you plan to vote for Barack Obama, the Democrat, Mitt Romney, the Republican, some other candidate, or are you still unsure how you will vote?" with randomization over whether Obama or Romney is mentioned first and randomization over whether each candidate is identified with a partisan cue.

<sup>18</sup> Figure 2 excludes the very low (less than two percent) who report that they will vote for someone other than Romney or Obama for president.

- In fact, Filipinos now are the strongest pro-Romney constituency in California, with. Even among Filipinos, however, Obama supporters outnumber Romney supporters (39% to 33%). As with partisanship, Filipinos outside California are significantly more likely to favor the Republican candidate, with 43% for Romney and only 29% for Obama.
- The gender differences in presidential vote choice mirror those for partisanship, with men in California being somewhat likelier to favor Obama than women and women being somewhat likelier to be undecided.
- Between age groups, the single most striking finding in Figure 2 is the overwhelming support Obama receives among the youngest Asian Americans in the NAAS, 18 to 34 year olds. This is reflected not only in the high numbers who intend to vote for Obama (72%), but also in the relatively low numbers of undecided voters (10%).

### Who Are Undecided Voters?

Are particular groups within the Asian American community more likely than others to be undecided, and perhaps more amenable to campaign appeals and mobilization efforts? As Figure 2 indicates:

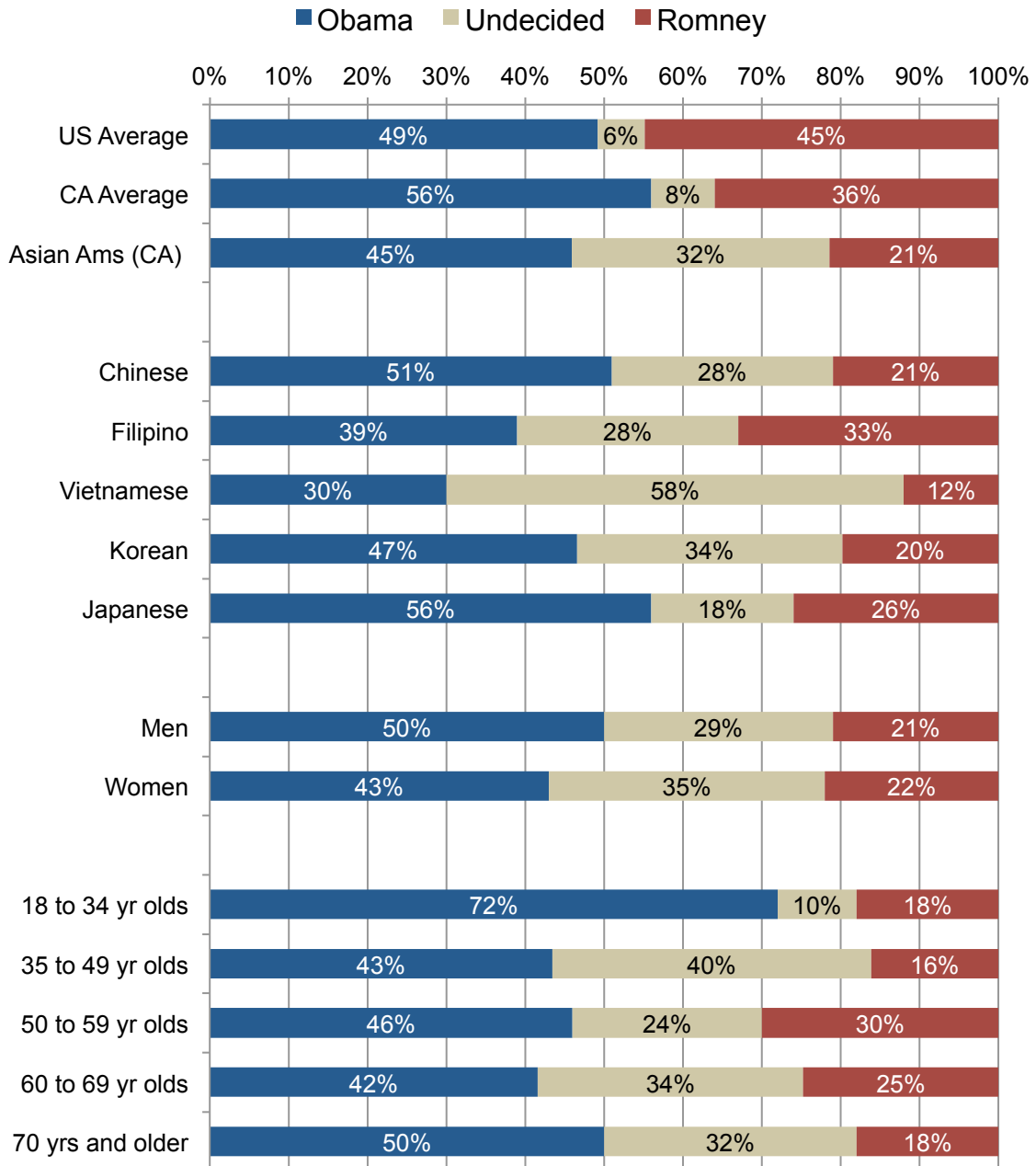
- Young adult Asian Americans (aged 18 to 34) are much less likely to be undecided voters than any other group.
- Japanese Americans in California are among those least likely to be undecided (18%), whereas Vietnamese Americans (58%) are the likely to be undecided.
- Beyond what is shown in Figure 2, perhaps the strongest relationship we find is between undecided voters and party identification. Fully 42% of all undecided voters are Independents; conversely, 44% of all Independent likely voters are undecided and an even higher 53% of all "non-identifiers" among likely voters are undecided (see Table 6 below).
- Undecided likely voters are also noticeably less likely to report high levels of political interest. 48% of undecided voters report being only "somewhat" interested in politics.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Anyone who indicates that they are "not interested" in politics is automatically not a likely voter.



**Figure 2. Voter Preference Among Likely Voters, Key Subgroups<sup>20</sup>**



<sup>20</sup> Averages for the U.S. and California obtained from an average of polls in *RealClearPolitics*, September 30, 2012

## Voter Preferences by Partisanship

Not surprisingly, the expected vote choice of Asian Americans varies strongly by partisanship. Table 6 shows the relationship Asian Americans have with political parties in four categories: (self-identified Democrats, self-identified Republicans, and two different kinds of non-partisans, self-identified Independents and "non-identifiers" (individuals who indicate that they simply do not think in partisan terms, do not know how to answer the question, or refuse to answer the question)).

**Table 6. Voter Preferences by Party Identification (Asian Americans)<sup>21</sup>**

	Likely Voters	Democrats	Republican	Independent	Non-Identifiers
Obama	44%	80%	3%	31%	19%
Romney	22	2	72	24	27
Undecided	34	18	25	44	53

The results from Table 6 show that each party's candidate is doing a successful job in attracting votes from their own party's identifiers, although Obama is doing a better job of this than Romney.

- Among California Democrats, Asian American likely voters overwhelmingly support Barack Obama over Mitt Romney by an 80% to 2% margin, with 18% undecided and 2% choosing some other candidate.
- This partisan preference is slightly less strong among Republican likely voters, who prefer Mitt Romney over Barack Obama 72% to 3%, but a higher proportion are undecided (25%).
- Among Independent likely voters, Obama has a slight edge (31% to 24%), but the largest group remains undecided (44%).
- Finally, a majority of likely voters who are non-identifiers are also undecided voters.

## Voter Preferences by Past Voting

Another common pattern of interest is the extent to which past voting behavior relates to present choices. Table 7 shows the voter preferences of NAAS respondents in 2012, according to their self-reported vote choice in 2008.

<sup>21</sup> Numbers may not add to 100% because of rounding

**Table 7. Voter Preferences in 2012 among Likely Voters, by Vote in 2008 (Asian Americans)<sup>22</sup>**

	<b>Obama</b>	<b>Romney</b>	<b>Undecided</b>
<b>Voted in 2008</b>	44%	22%	34%
<b>- Voted Obama</b>	70%	5%	25%
<b>- Voted McCain</b>	4%	71%	25%

Table 7 shows a clear pattern between Asian Americans' votes in the 2008 presidential race and their current intentions in 2012:

- Likely voters who reported voting for McCain in 2008 are much more likely to favor Mitt Romney over Barack Obama by a margin of 71% to 5%.
- Obama is retaining a nearly identical share of his 2008 Asian American supporters (70% to 4% for Romney).
- Still, more than one-in-four of both 2008 Obama supporters and McCain supporters remain undecided between the major party candidates in 2012.

<sup>22</sup> Question: respondents were first asked, "Thinking about past elections, did you vote in the 2008 U.S. presidential election?" and then asked, if yes, "Do you recall who you voted for? Was it Barack Obama, the Democrat, John McCain, the Republican, or someone else?"

## BEHIND THE ASIAN AMERICAN VOTE FOR PRESIDENT

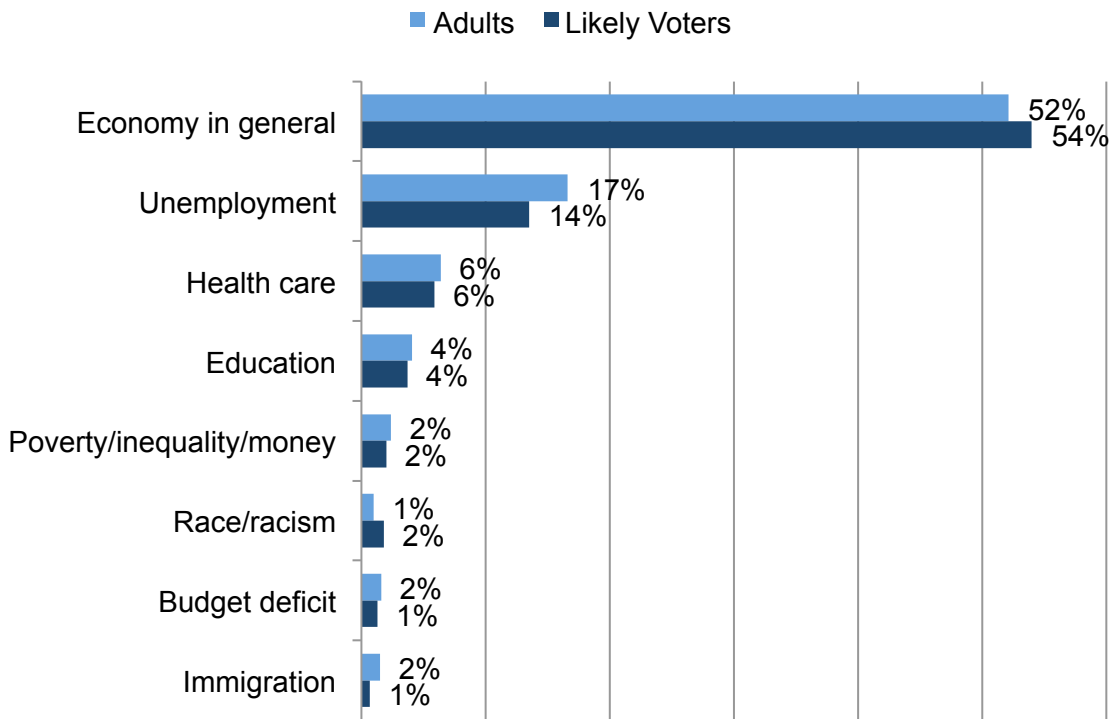
What are the issue priorities for Asian Americans and how do these issues influence their support for Barack Obama and Mitt Romney? This section provides information about issue salience and the policy agenda of Asian Americans.

### Policy Priorities

Respondents were asked what they felt was "the most important problem facing the United States today." The survey allowed people to name up to two issues.

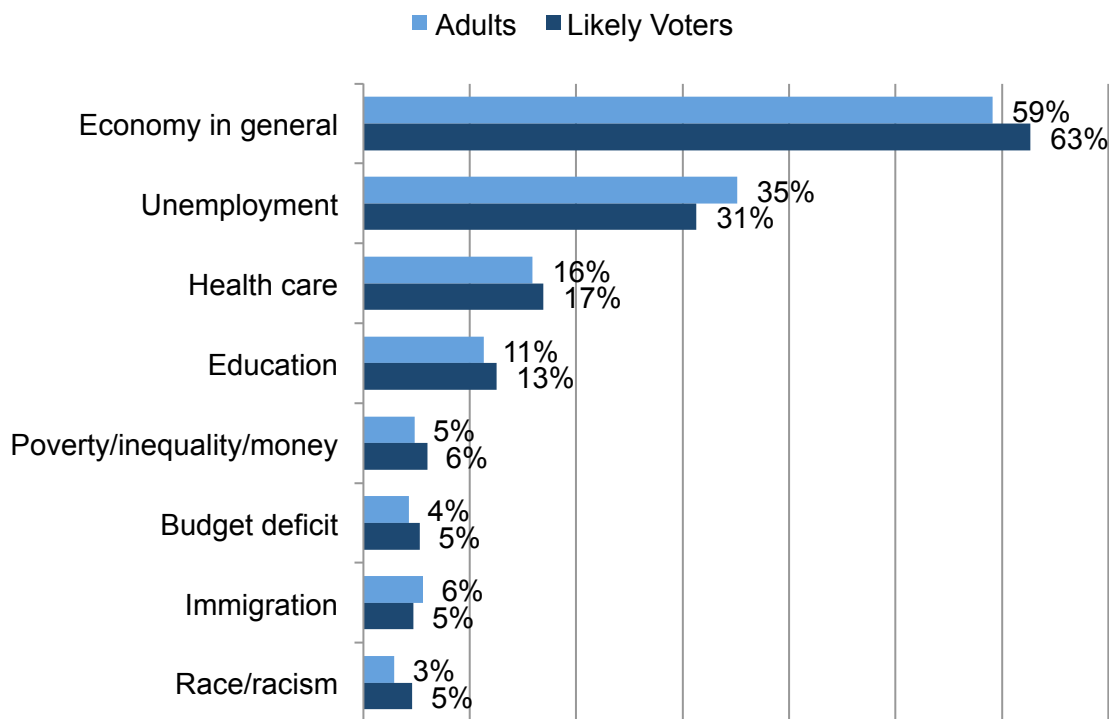
Figure 3 below compares the proportion of Asian American likely voters and all respondents in the 2012 NAAS on this question. The economy is, unsurprisingly, the most commonly cited national problem, named by a majority of both likely voters and all respondents. At a distant second is the related issue of unemployment and jobs, with health care and education running third and fourth. Very few respondents mentioned issues like the budget deficit, poverty and inequality, race and racism, or immigration as a most important national problem. While there are few differences between the full 2012 NAAS sample and identified likely voters, likely voters are slightly less likely to mention unemployment as a critical problem.

**Figure 3: Most Important Problem in the U.S. (1<sup>st</sup> Mention, Californians)**



While most surveys of the “most important problem” only record the first mention made by respondents, the 2012 NAAS allowed respondents to name another issue that ranked very high in their minds. In our survey, 82 percent mentioned two issues as “most important.” The basic rank order of issue priorities remains mostly unchanged in this expanded measure of issue priorities, but the number of mentions of issues other than general economic concerns increased noticeably (Figure 4). Roughly one in three mention unemployment and jobs as a critical issue, although likely voters remain less concerned than non-voters. We also find that nearly one in six likely voters cite health care as a key issue, with education running closely behind.

**Figure 4: Most Important Problem (Any Mention, Californians)**



### The Asian American Policy Agenda

The 2012 NAAS also asked its respondents to name the *one* issue that was most important to them *personally* (that is, compared to “the most important problem facing the United States”). As in 2008, we use this measure to gain some sense of what an Asian American agenda might be, through the process of aggregating the most important problems mentioned by Asian American adults.

By this personalized measure of issue priorities, general concerns about the economy were still prominent, but noticeably less so than when defined as a national problem (41 percent among likely voters). Unemployment and jobs remains unchanged in its position as the second most commonly identified personal priority. The discernible shifts in the

policy agenda for Asian Americans is seen with a greater attention to health care (12 percent among likely voters) and, to a very modest extent, education (6 percent among likely voters).

### Issue Priorities and the Presidential Election

To better gauge the electoral importance of different issues, the 2012 NAAS next asked respondents how pivotal the candidates' positions on a range of issues was to the respondent's vote. The range of issues included unemployment and jobs, health care, education, the budget deficit, foreign policy, women's rights, immigration, and a couple of lower salience issues.

**Figure 5: Key Electoral Issue Among Likely Voters, by Candidate of Choice<sup>23</sup>**

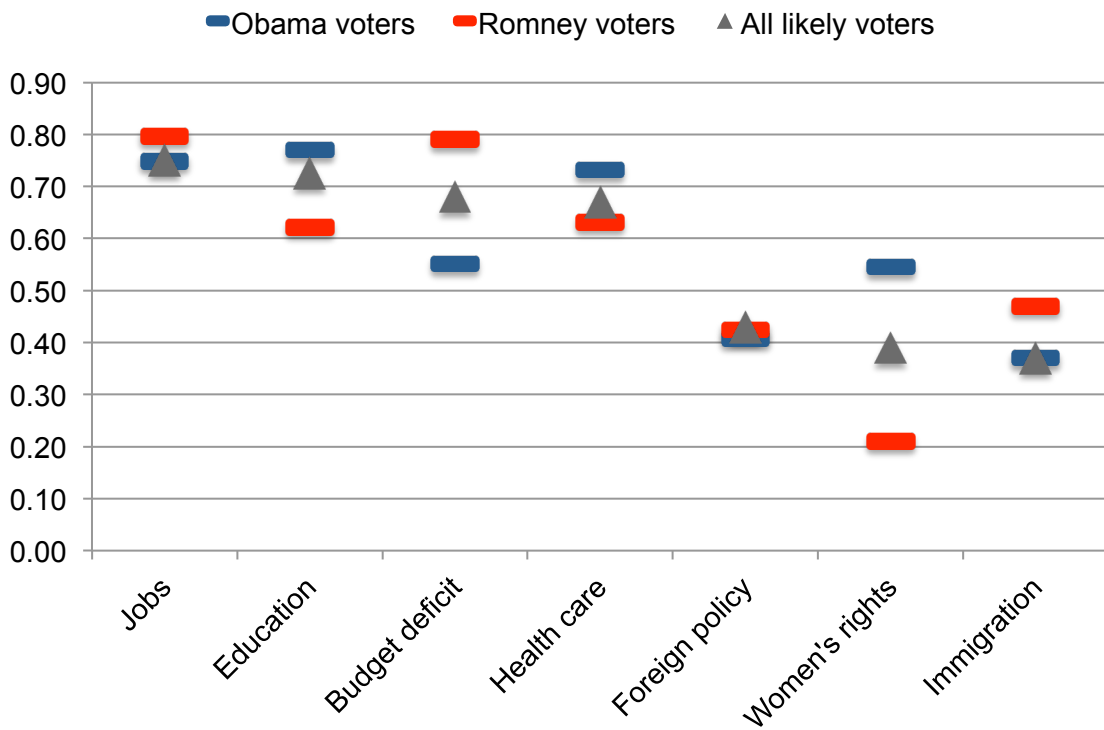


Figure 5 shows the percentage of likely voters who identify each of these issues as among the "most important" to deciding how they will vote (grey diamonds) alongside the percentage of Obama and Romney supporters who do so. While unemployment and jobs is most commonly identified as a key electoral issue (75%), there is little difference between likely voters favoring Obama and Romney on this issue. On immigration and

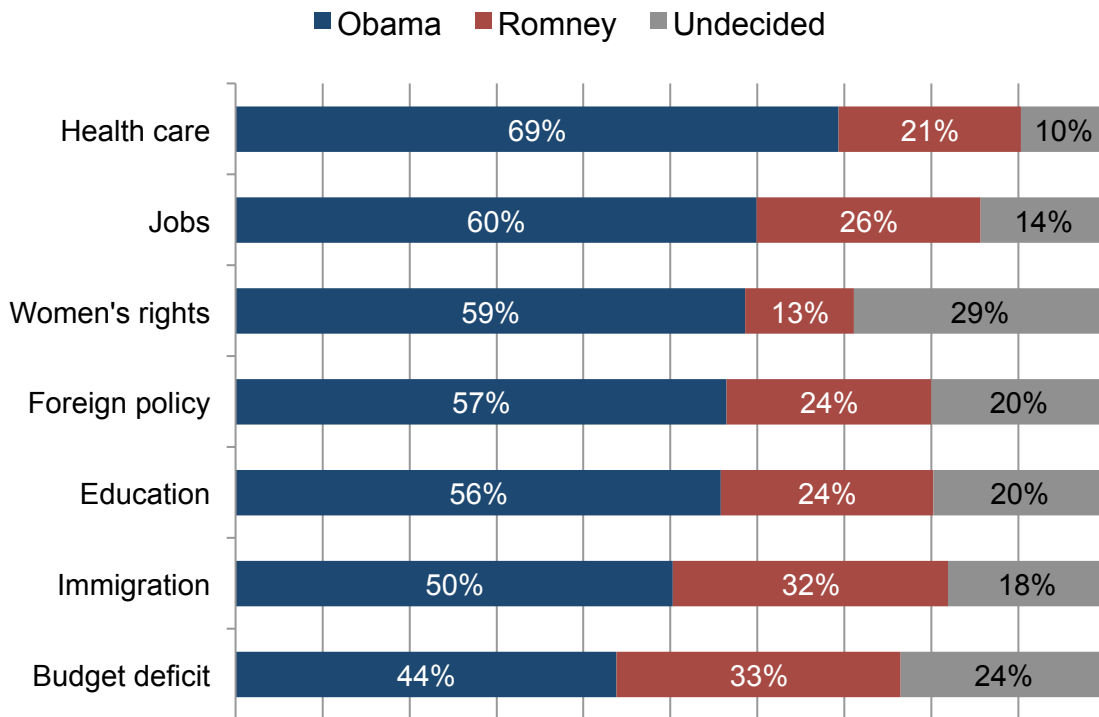
<sup>23</sup> Question: "When it comes to this year's presidential elections, please tell me how important the candidates' views on each of the following questions is in your deciding how to vote: The most important issue, fairly important, not that important, not at all important."

foreign policy, there is also little difference between Obama and Romney supporters. By contrast, there is nearly a 34% gap between Obama supporters (55% of whom see the issue as a key to their vote) and Romney supporters (only 21% of whom do so). There is also a visible gap on the budget deficit (24% gap between Obama and Romney supporters) and to a lesser degree, education (15% gap) and health care (10% gap).

### Presidential Candidate Proximity On Key Issues

In our survey, whenever respondents mentioned an issue as "the most important" to how they will decide to vote, they were then asked which presidential candidate was closer to their views on that issue. Here the biggest contrast is between health care and the budget deficit. An overwhelming 70% of California likely voters in the NAAS who identified health care as a key electoral issue saw Obama as closer to their views on health care reform; only 10% saw Romney as closer on health care. By contrast, only 44% of California respondents who identified the budget deficit as a key electoral issue like what they saw from Obama; yet Romney appears unable to capitalize thus far with Californians, as only 24% in this group like Romney's views on the budget deficit. In fact, there is no pivotal issue on which Romney compares well to Obama for Asian American likely voters in California.

**Figure 6: Which Candidate is Closer on Key Issues?**



These results are slightly different from 2012 NAAS respondents not from California. With non-Californians, Obama's strongest issue with likely voters is women's rights (followed closely by health care reform and education). Also, with non-Californians who see the budget deficit as key to their vote, more likely voters see Romney as closer to their views than see Obama as closer to their views.

The implications from these findings for the presidential candidates and their campaigns are unmistakable. On a purely issue basis, Romney's best hope to win over Asian American likely voters seems center on the economy in general and the budget deficit in particular. In California, however, even that gambit may not succeed without persuading likely voters who presently see no clear difference between the candidates on the budget deficit. By contrast, Obama's comparative advantages with Asian American likely voters in California center on issues like health care, jobs, education, and women's rights.



## CALIFORNIA CONTESTS AND BALLOT PROPOSITIONS

### U.S. Senate Race

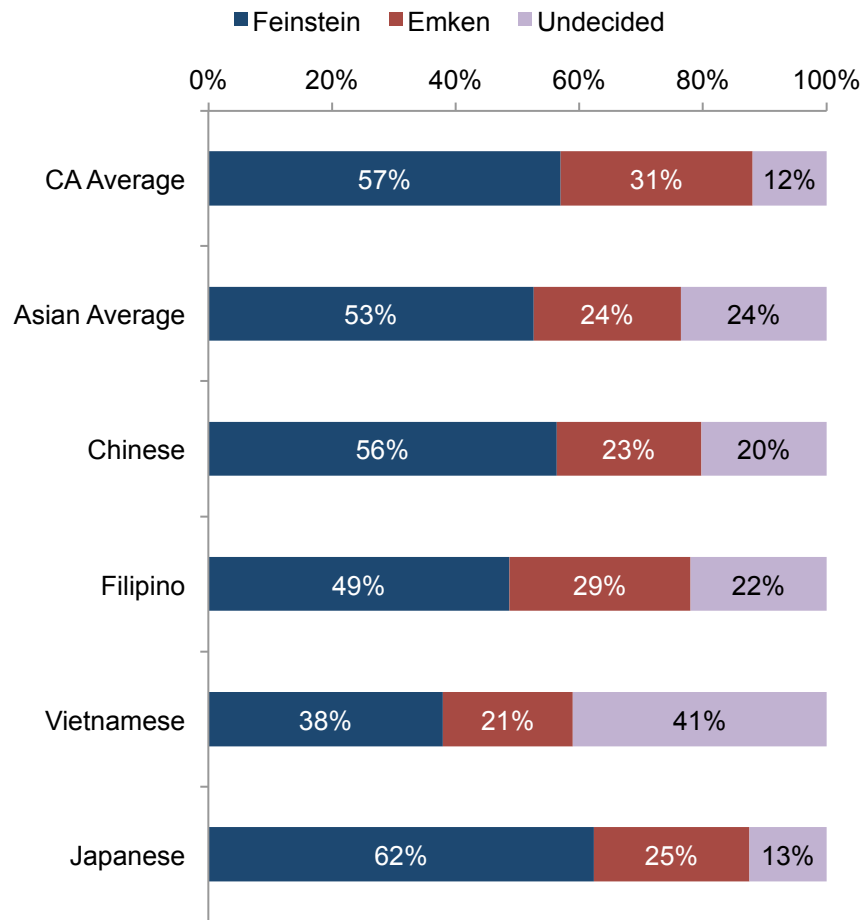
In addition to their vote for President, Californians in 2012 are also casting ballots on a U.S. Senate race and on various statewide ballot measures. Below we present results on the U.S. Senate race featuring Democratic incumbent Dianne Feinstein and Republican challenger Elizabeth Emken (Figure 7); the preferences of Asian American likely voters on Proposition 30, a sales and income tax increase measure backed heavily by Governor Jerry Brown (Figure 8); and likely voter preferences on Proposition 34, a measure that would end the death penalty in California (Figure 9).

Like in the U.S. presidential race, the results from the various California contests indicate that Asian American voters are more likely than the rest of the electorate to report that they are undecided. In the Senate race, for example, Asian Americans are twice as likely as the California average (as reported in a recent Field Poll report)<sup>24</sup> to say that they are undecided. Among those who have made up their mind, Dianne Feinstein enjoys more than a 2-to-1 advantage among Asian American likely voters. The gap between Feinstein and Emken are particularly pronounced among Japanese Americans, but the Democrat Feinstein also enjoys an advantage among Vietnamese Americans, who traditionally have been Republican-leaning in their party orientations (See Figure 7).

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<sup>24</sup> Field Poll Release #2427, "Feinstein Holds Huge 26-Point Lead Over Republican Emken In U.S. Senate Race," September 21, 2012. <http://www.field.com/fieldpollonline/subscribers/Rls2427.pdf>

**Figure 7: Asian American Preferences on Race for U.S. Senate (Likely Voters)<sup>25</sup>**



<sup>25</sup> Question wording: “If the election for U.S. Senate were held today, would you vote for Dianne Feinstein, the Democrat or Elizabeth Emken, the Republican?” Results for California average obtained from Field Poll: <http://www.field.com/fieldpollonline/subscribers/RIs2427.pdf>

Results for Indians, Koreans, Cambodians, and Hmong not reported out separately due to small sample sizes among likely voters.

## Proposition 30

One of the highest-profile statewide measures on the California ballot in 2012 is Proposition 30, a state constitutional amendment that would fund K-12 schools and community colleges by increasing taxes on annual earnings over \$250,000 for seven years and increasing the state sales tax by a quarter of a cent for four years. Governor Jerry Brown has heavily promoted the measure, warning that failure to pass the proposition would lead to deep cuts in public schools, including a shortening of the school year.<sup>26</sup> Supporters of the measure include the California Democratic Party, the League of Women Voters, and the California Teachers Association; opponents include the California Republican Party and the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association.

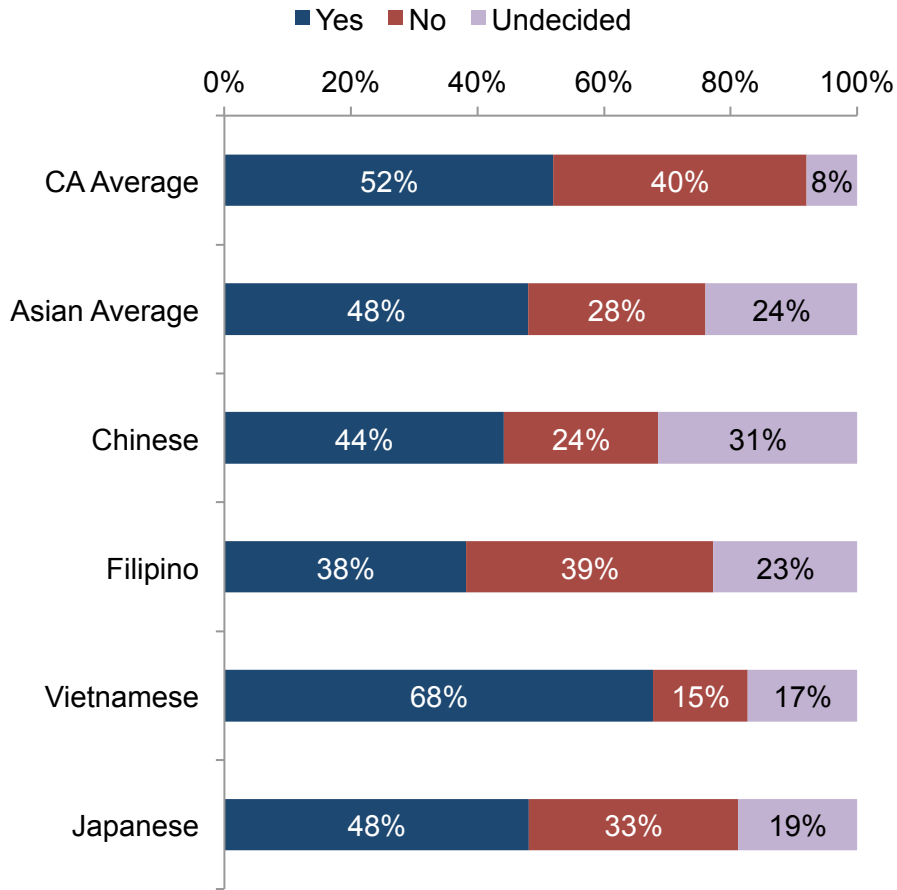
As Figure 8 indicates, opinion on Proposition 30 is similar for Asian American likely voters as for the rest of the California electorate.<sup>27</sup> However, the proportion of undecided voters is triple the rate of the statewide average on this measure. Among those who have made up their mind, Asian American likely voters favor Proposition 30 by a slightly higher ratio (48:28, or 63% in favor) than the rest of the California electorate (52:40, or 56% in favor). Our results also indicate significant differences across ethnic groups, with strongest support among Vietnamese Americans and the weakest support among Filipino Americans (who are evenly split on the measure).

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<sup>26</sup> Diana Lambert, "California Schools Facing Shorter Year," *The Sacramento Bee*, June 9, 2012, <http://www.sacbee.com/2012/06/19/4572022/schools-facing-shorter-year.html>.

<sup>27</sup> Results for California average obtained from the September 2012 PPIC Statewide Survey: Californians and Their Government [http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/survey/S\\_912MBS.pdf](http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/survey/S_912MBS.pdf)

**Figure 8: Asian American Preferences on California’s Proposition 30 (Likely Voters)<sup>28</sup>**



<sup>28</sup> Question wording: “Governor Jerry Brown and others have proposed a tax initiative for the November ballot titled the ‘Temporary Taxes to Fund Education. Guaranteed Local Public Safety Funding. Initiative Constitutional Amendment.’ If the election were held today, would you vote yes or no on the proposed tax initiative?” Results for California average obtained from the September 2012 *PPIC Statewide Survey: Californians and Their Government* [http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/survey/S\\_912MBS.pdf](http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/survey/S_912MBS.pdf)

Results for Indians, Koreans, Cambodians, and Hmong not reported out separately due to small sample sizes among likely voters.

## Proposition 34

Another closely watched statewide ballot measure in 2012 is Proposition 34, which would repeal the death penalty in California and make life without the possibility of parole the highest penalty in the state. In polling Asian American opinion on the measure, we referred to the title of the Proposition as well as to language from news reporting on the ballot measure in April 2012.<sup>29</sup>

*In November, Californians will vote on a ballot measure called the "Savings, Accountability, and Full Enforcement for California Act," also known as the SAFE California Act. If it passes, the 725 California inmates now on Death Row will have their sentences converted to life in prison without the possibility of parole. It would also make life without parole the harshest penalty prosecutors can seek. If the election were held today, would you vote yes or no on this proposed initiative?*

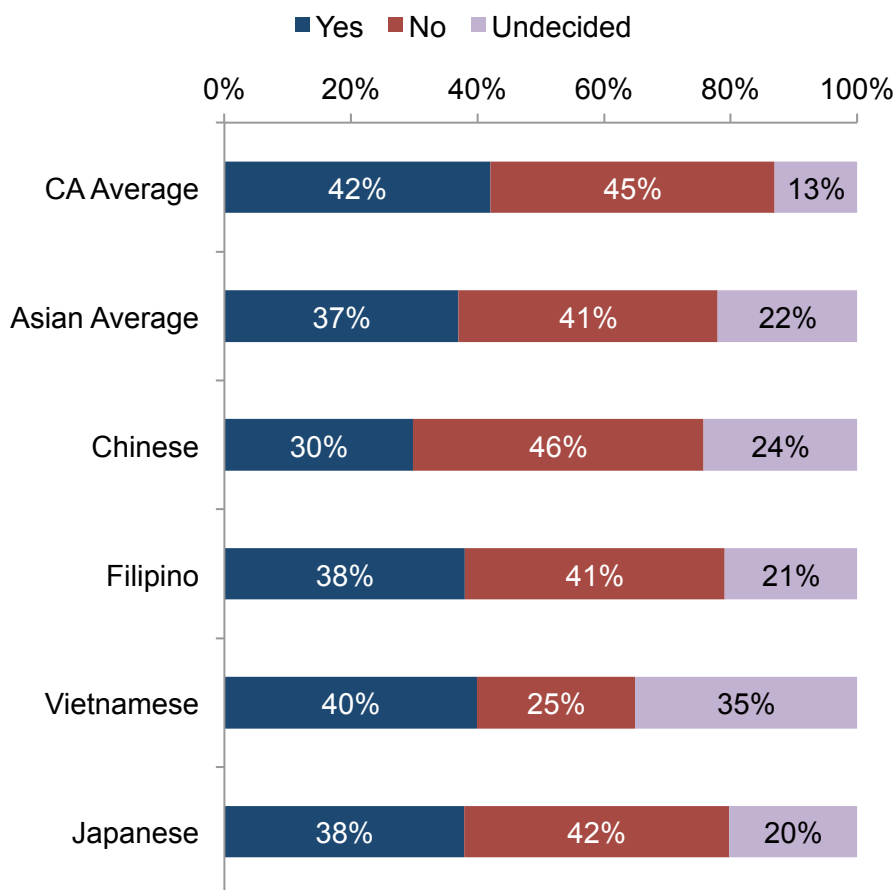
As Figure 9 indicates, Asian American likely voters are split on the measure, similar to the rest of the California electorate. There is significant variation in opinion across ethnic groups on the death penalty measure, with greatest support for repeal among Vietnamese Americans (40%), and lowest support among Chinese Americans (30%). Importantly, more than a fifth of Asian American voters in California were undecided on the measure, and this figure remained high even among those interviewed after September 1, 2012 than among those interviewed in August 2012.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Associated Press, "Death Penalty Ban Qualifies for Calif. Ballot," *CBS News*, April 24, 2012, [http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-505103\\_162-57419637/california-death-penalty-ban-qualifies-to-be-voter-initiative-placed-on-november-ballot/](http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-505103_162-57419637/california-death-penalty-ban-qualifies-to-be-voter-initiative-placed-on-november-ballot/).

<sup>30</sup> Indeed, the proportion of undecided was higher among those interviewed in September (26%) than those interviewed in August (20%).

**Figure 9: Asian American Preferences on California's Proposition 34 (Likely Voters)<sup>31</sup>**



<sup>31</sup> Question wording: "In November, Californians will vote on a ballot measure called the "Savings, Accountability, and Full Enforcement for California Act," also known as the SAFE California Act. If it passes, the 725 California inmates now on Death Row will have their sentences converted to life in prison without the possibility of parole. It would also make life without parole the harshest penalty prosecutors can seek. If the election were held today, would you vote yes or no on this proposed initiative?"

Results for Indians, Koreans, Cambodians, and Hmong not reported out separately due to small sample sizes among likely voters.

Comparison results for California from Field Poll Release # 2429, "Voters Closely Divided On Proposition 34 To Repeal Death Penalty," September 25, 2012.

<http://www.field.com/fieldpollonline/subscribers/RIs2429.pdf>

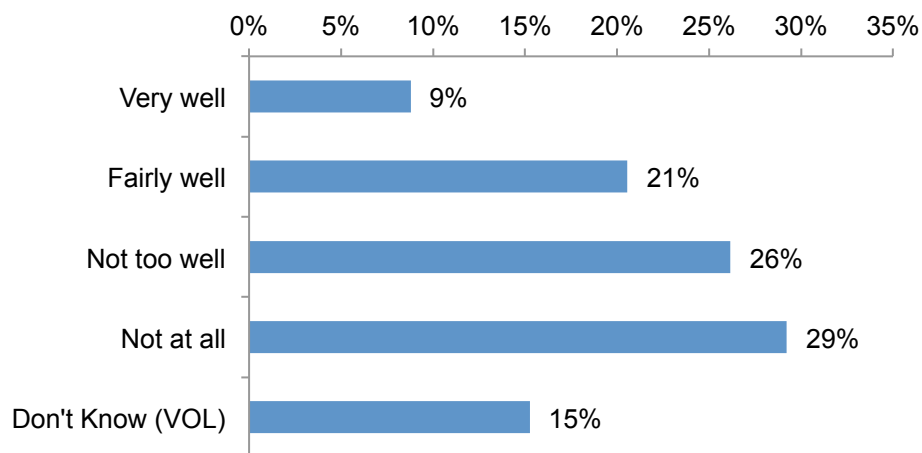
## California's Top Two Primary System

In addition to the various ballot propositions facing California voters in 2012, another significant development is the institution of a top-two primary system in the state, where the top two vote-getters from the primary (regardless of party) will face off in the November general election.

In May 2012, the Public Policy Institute of California Statewide Survey asked: "Do you think that the top-two primary system is a good thing or a bad thing for California elections, or does it make no difference for California elections?"<sup>32</sup> 43% said it was a good thing, 22% saw it as a bad thing, 27% saw no difference, and 8% were unsure.

We used the same wording in our survey to solicit Asian American opinion on the desirability of the top-two primary system, after first asking respondents how well they understood the "new top-two primary system in California." Only 9% of Asian American likely voters said they understood the system very well, 21% said fairly well, and the vast majority (70%) were not well informed about the top-two system (See Figure 10).

**Figure 10: Understanding of Top-Two Primary System  
Among Asian American Likely Voters**

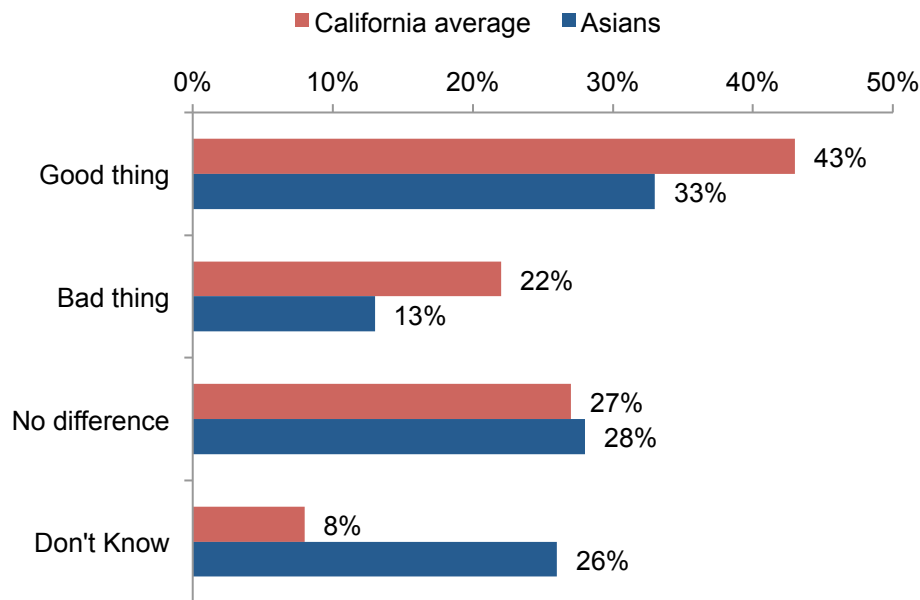


<sup>32</sup> May 2012 PPIC Statewide Survey: Californians and Their Government  
[http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/survey/S\\_512MBS.pdf](http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/survey/S_512MBS.pdf)

For those who understood the top-two system very well or fairly well, we asked the question about whether the system was a “good thing or bad thing” while for those who did not understand the system well, we informed them about the essential features of the system before canvassing their opinion.<sup>33</sup>

Opinion on the top-two system was fairly split among Asian Americans, more so than for the general population in the May 2012 PPIC Statewide Survey (See Figure 11). Overall, a third of Asian American likely voters (33%) thought that the top-two system was a good thing for California, 13% thought it was a bad thing, 28% thought it made no difference, and 26% were unsure of its effects—a proportion more than three times as large as the general population in California.

**Figure 11: Opinion on Top-Two Primary System Among Likely Voters<sup>34</sup>**



<sup>33</sup> We used language identical to that in the May 2012 PPIC survey (*op. cit.*) informing voters about the new system: “This June, California state primaries changed from a partially closed system to a top-two primary system in which voters can cast ballots for any candidate regardless of party, and the two candidates receiving the most votes—regardless of party—will advance to the November general election.”

<sup>34</sup> Results for California average obtained from May 2012 PPIC Statewide Survey: *Californians and Their Government* [http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/survey/S\\_512MBS.pdf](http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/survey/S_512MBS.pdf)



## 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. 2012 NAAS respondents were asked if they were contacted by anyone about registering or turning out to vote. Overall, only 30 percent of 2012 NAAS respondents from California and 34 percent of its California likely voters reported being contacted by someone about registering or turning out to vote for the November elections. These figures are very similar to figures for NAAS respondents not from California. Of likely voters who were mobilized, that contact is less likely to have come from a party or candidate than by an independent group, community organization, or some other entity.

**Table 8. Mobilization of Likely Voters, Levels and Sources<sup>35</sup>**

<b>Any Contact</b>	<b>Parties or Candidates</b>	<b>All Other Sources</b>
<b>34%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>22%</b>

These rates of mobilization fall noticeably shy of that for the general electorate. The 2008 American National Election Study showed that political parties mobilized just about 50 percent of self-reported voters with nearly 20 percent of self-reported voters who were mobilized by someone other than a political party. Another interesting comparison we find is that rates of mobilization for Asian Americans in the NAAS living in presidential battleground states is not discernibly higher than rates of mobilization in California. The common worry about voters in non-competitive states being disregarded vis-à-vis voters in battlegrounds appears not to apply to Asian American likely voters, but this is at least partly the result of the fact that Asian American likely voters appear to go unnoticed in both toss-up states and solidly partisan states like California.

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<sup>35</sup> Question: "Over the past 12 months, were you contacted by anyone to register or to vote in this year's election?" Respondents who were contacted were then asked, "And who was it that contacted you?" Then, if respondents mentioned being contacted by a candidate, campaign, or party representative, respondents were asked, "Were you contacted by the Democrats, Republicans, both parties, or by representatives of other parties?" These questions were asked of only half the respondents in our survey and, thus, the numbers are too small to report for any particular ethnic group.

Columns 2 and 3 may total more than Column 1 because multiple responses on mobilization sources are possible.

**Table 9. Likelihood of Voting by Voter Mobilization**

	<b>Any Mobilization</b>	<b>Mobilized by Candidate or Party</b>	<b>Mobilized by Other Organization</b>
<b>Contacted</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>51%</b>
Not Contacted	37%	38%	38%

One common kind of counter would be a general skepticism about the efficacy of voter mobilization efforts with "low propensity" groups.<sup>36</sup> How successful are political parties and other organizations at targeting Asian American likely voters? Table 9 shows the likelihood that someone is a likely voter by whether they have been mobilized and their sources of mobilization. In general, being contacted about registering to vote or voting has a noticeable, if not very large, effect on voting: 45% of NAAS respondents who reported being contacted were likely voters; only 37% who were not contacted were likely voters.

These effects are magnified when the source of mobilization is considered. When that contact comes from a candidate, campaign, or party, 57% of California citizens in the NAAS were likely voters, compared to 38% among those not contacted from such a group. When mobilized by independent group, community organization, or some other source, 51% were likely voters. It still remains an open question, however, whether parties and other organizations target those who are *already* likely voters, or if individuals *become more likely* to vote if they are mobilized by one of these groups.

The 2012 NAAS also shows an interesting, perhaps unexpected relationship between recruitment into politics and one's expected vote choice in the November presidential election. While Asians in California who are contacted about voting or registering to vote are in fact more apt to be a likely voter (Table 9), that mobilization does not appear to translate into substantially greater support for any one candidate. In fact, Asians in California who are mobilized by any kind of group are less likely to report favoring either Mitt Romney or Barack Obama (the split is 40% for Obama and 15% for Romney). There is instead a much higher proportion (45%) who report being undecided between Romney and Obama. This same pattern (finding a higher proportion of undecided likely voters) holds when we narrow in on those mobilized by a candidate, campaign, or political party.

Mobilization by a candidate or party brings support levels for Romney much closer to Obama, but without any appreciable decline in the high proportion of undecided voters.

<sup>36</sup> In *Mobilizing Inclusion* (Yale University Press, 2012), Lisa Garcia Bedolla and Melissa Michelson find that the right kind of GOTV efforts with Latinos and Asian Americans, groups often thought to be "low propensity voters," can be very effective.

The one partisan effect we do find is that, at least in California, the Democratic Party is much likelier to have mobilized Asian Americans than the Republican Party. Among Asians in California who reported being contacted by a candidate, campaign, or political party, 42% reported that the group was Democratic and 28% that it was Republican.

### Political Participation beyond Voting

Voting is just one of many different ways that Americans express themselves politically and become politically engaged. For a population like Asian Americans with a substantial proportion of non-citizens, attention to these non-voting modes of participation is especially important. Table 10 makes clear that a majority of Asian Americans discuss politics with family and friends, with Japanese (68%) and Chinese (65%) especially likely to talk politics. These levels are comparable to that found for Asian Americans outside of California in the NAAS and somewhat higher than for the general U.S. population; the 2008 ANES finds that 45% of the public discussed the election with someone else.

**Table 10. Non-Voting Participation by Ethnicity<sup>37</sup>**

	Discussed Politics	Worked Campaign	Gave Money	Contacted Govt.	Protested & Rallied	Online Activity
<b>Asian Americans (National)</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>8%</b>
<b>Asian Americans (California)</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>
Chinese	65	4	10	9	3	7
Indian	40	2	6	4	4	6
Filipino	56	9	11	14	9	11
Vietnamese	62	1	2	1	9	7
Korean	62	3	5	6	2	5
Japanese	68	6	18	15	7	10
Cambodian	31	4	5	7	4	9
Hmong	38	5	12	1	6	9

<sup>37</sup> Question: "People take part in many types of civic and political activities. In the last 12 months, have you ... Discussed politics with family and friends ... Discussed this year's election with family and friends ... Worked for a candidate, political party, or some other campaign organization ... Contributed money to a candidate, political party, or some other campaign organization ... Contacted your representative or a government official in the U.S. ... Posted a comment about politics on a blog, Facebook page, or website? ... Attended a protest march, demonstration, or rally." Respondents were also asked whether they "Worked with others in your community to solve a problem" and whether they donated money to a religious organization or some other charitable cause.

Table 10 also shows levels of campaign volunteerism and monetary contributions in the NAAS that are quite similar to the general U.S. public. The 2008 ANES found that 11 percent reported contributing money to a campaign and 4 percent reported engaging in some work for a campaign (other than attending a rally or wearing campaign paraphernalia). Filipinos seem more inclined to work for a political campaign and Japanese-Americans appear especially likely to contribute to a campaign.

Table 10 also shows Asian Americans' levels of engagement in three non-electoral activities -- contacting elected representatives of government officials, attending a protest or demonstration rally, and engaging in politics online. Levels of contact with government are somewhat low, especially among the Hmong and Vietnamese-Americans. Other notable findings here are the discernibly higher rates of protest politics among Vietnamese and Filipino Americans, and the comparably low levels of online activity (defined here quite narrowly as posting a "comment about politics on a blog, Facebook page, or website") across ethnic groups.

### **Attention to Home Country Politics**

In addition to the political engagement of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in domestic politics, the 2012 NAAS also asked questions on involvement in immigrant countries of origin. Some media accounts and scholarly articles suggest that Asian Americans participate less in American politics because of their focus on the politics of their home countries. The survey included questions on whether respondents they have been in contact with friends and family, whether they follow news on politics, whether they are attentive to U.S. foreign policy, and whether they send money vis-à-vis their countries of origin.

Overall there are pretty significant levels of contact and communication with Asian Americans' country of origin. Nearly three quarters of respondents have been in contact with friends and family; roughly half follow news of politics and U.S. foreign policy involving their home country; more than a third report sending money to someone in their country of origin. Taken together, 85 percent of all respondents engage in at least one of these modes of transnational activity. These rates of involvement in one's home country are similar for NAAS respondents in California (Table 11).

**Table 11. Involvement in Home Country by Ethnicity<sup>38</sup>**

	<b>Contacted Friends &amp; Family</b>	<b>Followed Political News</b>	<b>Followed US Foreign Policy</b>	<b>Sent Money</b>
<b>Asian Americans (National)</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>38%</b>
<b>Asian Americans (California)</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>33</b>
Chinese	69	66	61	17
Indian	77	26	20	40
Filipino	74	56	53	49
Vietnamese	67	61	54	44
Korean	85	56	46	25
Japanese	51	42	43	25
Cambodian	57	24	27	39
Hmong	33	8	6	28

There are some cross-ethnic differences worth noting. Hmong-Americans are, by far, least likely to be engaged with their home country (only about 40% of Hmong in our California sample engage in some kind of transnational activity). Japanese-Americans and Cambodians are also less active transnationally than other ethnic groups in California. When we hone in on specific activities, Korean Californians are most likely to keep in touch with family and friends in Korea; Chinese Californians are most likely to follow political news and U.S. foreign policy in China; Filipinos and Vietnamese are especially likely to send money back to the Philippines and Vietnam.

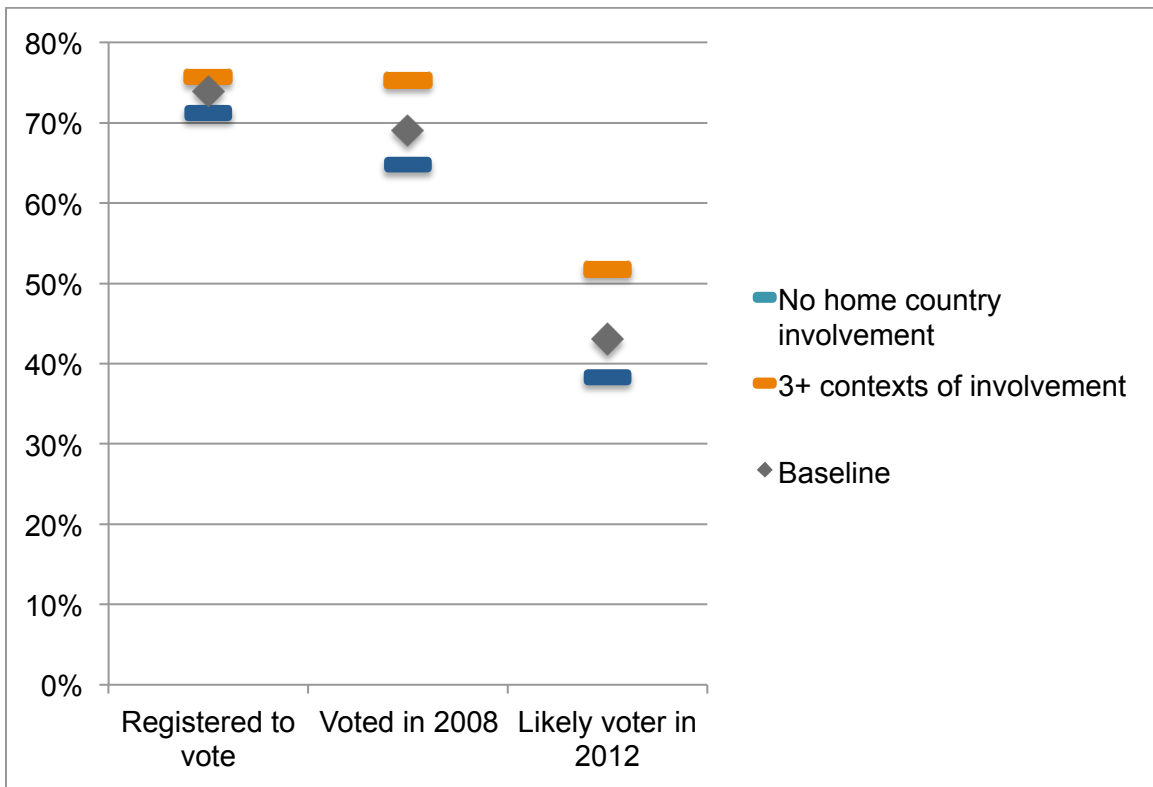
More importantly, among citizens the 2012 NAAS shows that there is no trade-off between attentiveness to one's country of origin and participation in electoral politics in the United States. Figure 7 compares baseline rates on three measures of voter participation with rates among California citizens who were involved in none of the four contexts of home country involvement and those who were involved in three or four of these contexts.<sup>39</sup> The measures of voter participation here are being registered to vote, self-reported voter turnout in 2008, and being a likely voter in 2012. What Figure 7 shows is that contrary to common misconceptions about a compromise between political engagement in one's country of origin and engagement in U.S. politics, transnational political activity appears to boost electoral participation America. Asians in California

<sup>38</sup> Question: "Now I have a few questions about the country where you or your ancestors are from. In the past 12 months, have you ... Sent money to people in that country ... Closely followed news about politics in that country ... Been in contact with family or friends in that country ... Paid close attention to U.S. foreign policy towards that country?"

<sup>39</sup> In the 2012 NAAS, 83% reported engaging in at least one mode of home country involvement, 64% in at least two modes, and 43% in three or all four of the kinds of home country involvement we measured.

who keep eye on home country affairs are 10% more likely to have reported voting in 2008 than those with no home country involvement and 13% likelier to be a voter in 2012. Figure 7 shows the relationships for the California sample, but the same applies for the full national NAAS sample.

**Figure 7. Home Country Activity and Voter Participation in the US**



## APPENDIX

### Methodology

This report is based on data collected from 3,034 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. We also conducted 342 interviews with Pacific Islanders. Interviews were conducted by telephone from July 31, 2012 through September 19, 2012. Additional interviews are ongoing through October 2012, and a total of roughly 5,000 interviews will complete the data collection.

For our California report, we rely on 1,154 Asian American respondents, whose breakdown by ethnic background is as follows.

Chinese	228
Vietnamese	199
Filipino	186
Japanese	154
Korean	118
Indian	117
Hmong	84
Cambodian	68

There were an insufficient number of Native Hawaiian and Samoans from California at this point of the data collection to provide reliable estimates of political behavior and public opinion. When we report on “likely voters,” we do not report on Indians, Koreans, Cambodians, and Hmong because the sample sizes drop below 50 respondents.

Respondents were offered a choice of language to be interviewed in English, Mandarin, Cantonese, Hindi, Hmong, Japanese, Khmer, Korean, Thai, Tagalog, and Vietnamese.

The randomly drawn list sample was obtained from TargetSmart with ethnicity coded by Ethnic Technologies (and Catalist for the Hmong sample, for which TargetSmart does not have an ethnic classification). The listed samples include those not registered as well as those who are registered. Registered voter lists are obtained from state registrars, matched to consumer information data, and updated for address changes. 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 supervision of Francine Cafarchia, John Roses, and Frank Weimer. Mobile phones were included in the dialing procedure. Interview translations were conducted by Accent on Languages of Berkeley, California, and audited by a team of bilingual staff in partner organizations.

Sampling error of the groups reported in this survey are as follows:

Overall sample of Asian Americans in California: +/- 3%

Chinese	+/- 6.5%
Vietnamese	+/- 7%
Filipino	+/- 7%
Japanese	+/- 8%
Korean	+/- 9%
Indian	+/- 9%
Hmong	+/- 11%
Cambodian	+/- 12%

Sampling error from the size of our sample is only one type of error possible in surveys like the 2012 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. We used Census data from the 2010 decennial census and the 2010 American Community Survey to set sample targets for ethnic sub-groups. Ethnic sub-group targets were set to provide adequate representation for the largest Asian American groups, but also to provide as much statistical power to as many groups as possible.

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, on the following dimensions: size of group within a state, educational attainment, gender and nativity.

The National Asian American Survey is the collaborative effort of Karthick Ramakrishnan at University of California-Riverside and Taeku Lee at University of California-Berkeley. Questions about sample design should be directed to Karthick Ramakrishnan at [karthick@ucr.edu](mailto: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 Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Hmong, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, and other national origins such as Bangladeshi, Cambodian, etc. Based on the distribution of responses in our survey, we report data on Chinese, Indian, Filipino, Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese, Cambodian, and Hmong.

### **Revision Notes**

Oct 8, 2012: Table 10 numbers for party and other mobilization corrected to include multiple mentions. Results for national origin groups deleted because of small sample sizes.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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 associate professor of 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 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](http://www.karthick.com).

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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 17 surveys, eight 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.