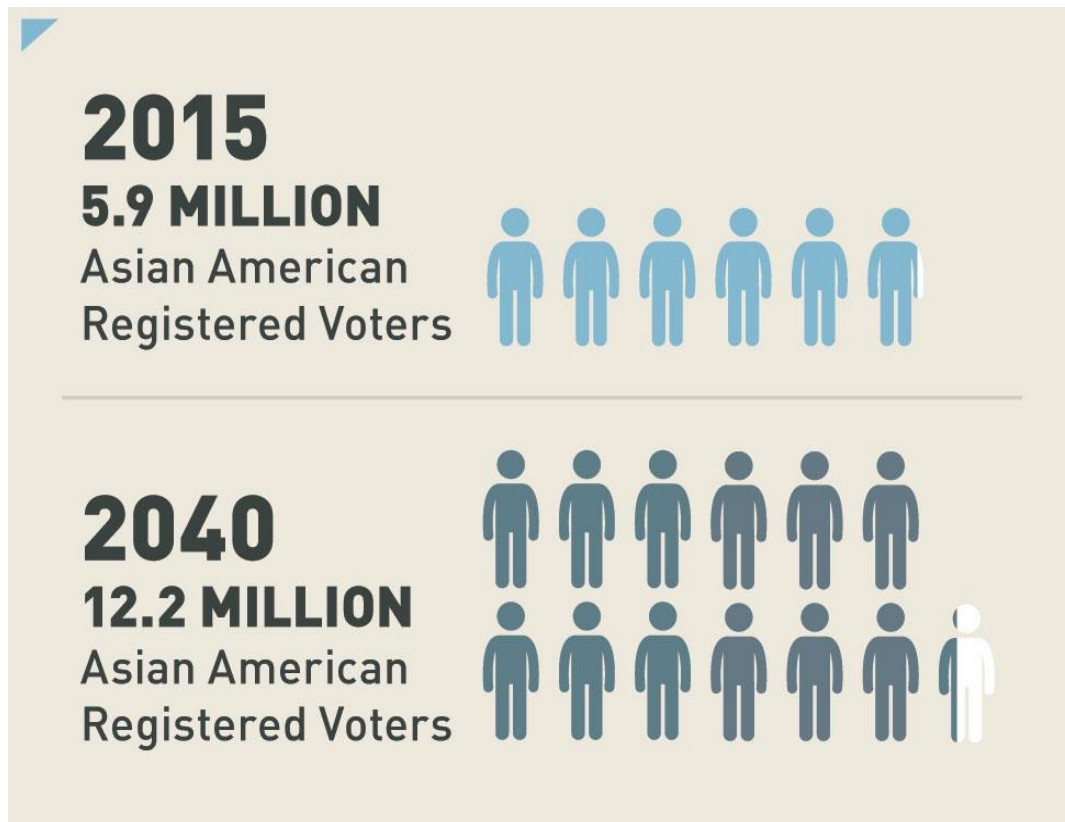


# Commentaries on The Future of Asian America in 2040 Asian American Electorate to Double



Paul Ong and Elena Ong  
UCLA Center for the Study of Inequality  
and  
Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies

May 7, 2015

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Graphics by Lina Cheng

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**Hon. Mazie Hirono, U.S. Senator (HI)**

“The study released today shows that Asian Americans will have a growing presence and stronger voice in our national debates for years to come. As the first Asian-American woman elected to the U.S. Senate, I look forward to continuing to work with organizations like APAICS to grow the pipeline of Asian American leaders who will amplify the voice of our community and continue the fight to overcome the challenges we face.”

**Hon. Judy Chu, U.S. Representative (CA-27)  
Chairwoman, Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus**

“Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are not only the fastest growing racial group in the United States, but are also one of the fastest growing voting populations in our nation. *The Future of Asian America in 2040* report confirms this and provides key findings on the increasingly influential AAPI electorate, which is expected to double by 2040. As AAPIs become more engaged in the political process, it is important now more than ever that our government both represents and responds to the needs of our diverse communities.”

**S. Floyd Mori  
CEO & President, Asian Pacific American Institute on Congressional Studies | APAICS**

“Not only are Asian Americans the fastest growing racial group in America, they are now one of the fastest growing electorates in America. Between 2015 and 2040, the number of Asian American registered voters will double, and shift, from an older, more foreign-born naturalized voter base, to a younger, U.S. born voter base. Understanding this dynamic and viable political force will prove to be advantageous for candidates and campaigns in the 2016 elections and beyond.”

“Asian Americans are a very fluid voting base and every election is a new opportunity to court the Asian American vote. Cultivating Asian American voters and gaining their loyalty is pivotal to a political party's future. Securing the Asian American vote in areas with large concentration, and in swing vote states, will be a political game changer. Political parties should also cultivate candidates who can appeal to, be responsive to, and turn out, the Asian American vote.”

**Mee Moua  
President & Executive Director, Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC**

“These population projections are informative and should be used as a guide when we talk about allocating resources to support and maximize our community's civic participation. If we value an informed citizenry, these numbers imply that we would want to make sure that our outreach and public education efforts include language and community access as a core strategy both in reaching our older, foreign-born citizens, as well as the younger, U.S. born populations.”

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## **THE CHOICE AHEAD**

**Jerry Kang**

**Inaugural Vice Chancellor (designate) for Equity, Diversity & Inclusion, UCLA  
Professor of Law & Professor of Asian American Studies, UCLA**

Ong & Ong provide a tantalizing preview of what is to come for Asian American population and politics. Asian Americans are growing in absolute numbers, growing rapidly in terms of relative percentage of the US population, and also morphing internally in terms of relative concentrations in nativity and age. Should we care? Will these changes have consequences, political or otherwise?

What makes predictions so devilishly hard is that “race is a social construction.” By this, I mean that the racial category itself, the rules of racial mapping, and the racial meanings associated with the category are all socially constructed.

First, the racial category “Asian American” is itself socially constructed. It is not a “natural kind” given to us by deity or genetics. Even if most people use race as a rough proxy for shared ancestry, which seems fundamentally biological, the current category “Asian American” includes people from disparate geographies that share no especially salient, recent, or strong ancestral lineages. How much shared ancestry is there, really, amongst Japanese, Filipinos, and Pakistanis? In addition, racial categories as defined and implemented in law often change. Recall the 1997 decision by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to remove Pacific islanders from the “Asian or Pacific Islander” category and to create a new “Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander” category.

Second, the rules by which we map individual human bodies into the racial category of “Asian American” are also socially constructed. The clearest example comes from individuals whose biological parents self-identify and would be perceived by others as members of different races—one parent unambiguously Asian and the other unambiguously non-Asian. The average identity of a person whose parents are White and Asian may differ substantially from the average identity of a person whose parents are Black and Asian on multiple metrics. To count them both as “Asian American inclusive,” and not as White inclusive or Black inclusive, is a choice.

Third, even if we lock down the racial category and also the mapping rules by which we classify individuals, we have to recognize that the meanings associated with that category are in radical flux. For example, the report emphasizes how the relative concentration of native-born Asian Americans will increase. Being native-born has strong implications for language, culture, and frame-of-mind. The politics that are possible and likely amongst Asians born mostly outside of the U.S. differ substantially from those born mostly inside the U.S.

None of these points about the social construction of race is meant to be novel or controversial. They do, however, surface the inherent difficulty of any counting exercise, when what we’re counting and why we’re counting are constantly shifting. What I am most interested in is whether Asian Americans will play the role of wedge or glue, amongst various racial groups. In our liminal position as the so-called model minority, will we function as honorary Whites or people of color? The raw prediction that there will be many more of us by 2040 doesn’t really help answer this question, although it does suggest that the answer will have greater consequences.

To say something is a social construction is ultimately to remind us that we have a choice. “Asian American” is a concept, experience, identity that is constructed. That means we have a choice. One of the goals of thought leaders, politicians, academics, and activists is to help inform, construct, motivate, constitute, inspire, and critique this identity. Our jobs are to curate this experience. The relative rise of native-born Asian Americans suggests that this identity can be curated in a way that encourages greater

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engagement with domestic politics, greater grappling with the causes and consequences of American racial hierarchy. Even in 2040, the personal family migration story will be important; but more important could be a collective national story that Asian Americans tell themselves about the history of racial injustice and their struggles against. That's the choice ahead.

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Professor [Jerry Kang](#) is Professor of Law, Professor of Asian American Studies, the Korea Times-Hankook Ilbo Chair in Korean American Studies and Law, and the inaugural Vice Chancellor (designate) for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion at UCLA. His wide-ranging scholarship has crossed multiple disciplinary boundaries, including technology, race theory, and social psychology. His work has been cited by numerous courts, especially on the subject of implicit bias.

## THE GROWTH OF THE ASIAN AMERICAN ELECTORATE AND THE POSSIBILITY OF COALITION POLITICS

Franklin D. Gilliam, Jr.  
Dean, UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs

The Ong and Ong report reveals some thought-provoking trends regarding significant increases in the number of Asian American eligible voters. The data projects that over the next 25 years Asian American registered voters will double in size. This increase will make them the fastest growing segment of the American electorate. Moreover, the number of native born voters will increase significantly as the children of foreign born Asians become voting age.

These trends have notable implications for Asian American political empowerment. Further, this has significant meaning for the very nature of American politics. In this commentary I take up the issue of coalition politics. For some time now pundits and scholars have theorized about the potential for inter-ethnic political coalitions. Much of this work, however, was based on Black and Latino efforts to work together towards a common political agenda. It has been only recently that researchers have included Asian Americans in the coalition paradigm. And much of that work focused on particular case studies or data that did not capture the surge in Asian American populations.

The release of the Ong and Ong study paints a more complete and detailed set of estimations about the growth in the Asian American electorate. As such it allows us to consider several new possibilities regarding coalition politics. In what follows I suggest several conditions that enhance, or diminish, the possibility of Asian American inclusion in the coalition framework.

Evidence suggests that Asian Americans are more likely to vote for Asian American candidates regardless of their subgroup identity; and, thus, will be able to increase the resources and networks that provide the political muscle for a pan-ethnic coalition (Jacob, 2006). This would certainly increase the likelihood that Asian American candidates will be elected to a broader range of political offices particularly in areas with larger Asian American populations (Lien, Collet, Wong, and Ramakrishnan, 2001). In other words, the existence of a critical mass is important to the mobilization of Asian American voters.

Recent research suggests that Asian American politicization is much more context specific for Asian Americans than other racial minority groups (Junn and Masuoka, 2008). This view posits that the activation of a sense of group consciousness depends on the specifics of a given political environment. In other words, in contexts where issues are of central importance (e.g., immigration, affirmative action), Asian Americans are more likely to be motivated to participate in politics. This can lead to higher rates of coalition politics (pan-ethnic or otherwise), on one hand, but on the other it may decrease the likelihood of joining a broader coalition because the interests of Asian Americans are not simpatico with that of other minority groups.

One of the interesting features of the Asian American population is the high rate of out-marriage. Overall, the intermarriage rates for Asians between 2008 to 2010 was 29% as compared with 26% of Hispanics, 17% of Blacks and 9% of Whites (Pew Research Center). And, Asian women are twice as likely as Asian men to marry out, with 55% of Japanese American women marrying non-Asians.

The question, then, becomes to what extent will multiracial Asian Americans identify as “Asian?” Put differently, will this group align themselves with Asians on issues of importance to the broader group? If a non-trivial number of multiracial Asians do not identify with the group, it is less likely that they will support an Asian American political agenda (assuming that such an agenda is put forward). The upshot is that a pan-ethnic coalition is likely to be less robust than the numbers might otherwise indicate. This also bears on the potential for participation in a broader minority coalition.

Another condition that bears on coalition politics is what is known as realistic group conflict theory (Bobo, 1992). To the extent that Asian Americans share geography with other ethnic groups, tensions associated with competition for resources such as employment, housing, and social and business services are likely to increase. In the Koreatown section of Los Angeles, for example, there have been reports of conflicts between Korean Americans and Latinos. As the Latino immigrant community in this part of the city matures, it is likely that they will be able to more effectively press their claims. In this instance, it is possible that racial conflicts will diminish the probability of coalition politics.

In all, the possibility of coalition politics is highly dependent on the issues at play, the composition of the Asian American population in question, and, ultimately, the articulation of an Asian American political agenda.

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## **TOWARDS A NEW MAJORITY**

**Manuel Pastor**

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Director, Program for Environmental and Regional Equity at USC  
Co-Director, Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration**

While many pundits focused on the 2012 presidential elections were struck by the 71 percent of Latinos who voted to re-elect President Obama, I and many others were fascinated by another statistic: the 73 percent of Asian voters who also voted to keep in place the country's first African American president.

This was a startling climb from an earlier era – basically a doubling of support from the Asian American vote for the reelection of President Clinton. While the result was partly due to the anti-immigrant tone of the 2012 Republican campaign, those of us more generally interested in a rainbow coalition of ethnic minorities were intrigued, particularly since previous polls of the Asian American electorate had also suggested support for a more active government that could better provide opportunity for all.

Unfortunately, the signs of inter-minority solidarity were soon strained by fights in California around whether or not to eliminate the state's ban on Affirmative Action. Fueled in part by ethnic media (as well as by real concerns over the consequences), the tensions about who might gain or lose places in the state's university system led to flared tempers and frayed relationships.

So what are we to make of the very careful projections undertaken here? What do they mean not just for the numbers but for the politics moving forward?

One of the fascinating sub-stories in the data is the rise of multi-racial Asians – that is, those who claim not just Asian heritage but find themselves squarely in what the authors call the “Blended New Majority.” There is a suggestion that this is a group that might have a particular advantage in forging and sustaining bridges between communities by dint of their own mixed backgrounds.

But even this is not automatic: demography is not destiny, either in terms of populations growing or even populations mixing. Actually, determining a common agenda – one that can respect difference and promote shared prosperity – will require taking the numbers here and providing real programs and real leadership.

This report contributes an important building block for that broader task. It lays down the projections and the possibilities – but to realize those possibilities either in terms of Asian American political voice or a broader agenda of opportunity will require honest conversations about community needs, policy preferences, and political compromises.

I remain as hopeful as ever that such a common ground vision for the “New Majority” – and really for all of America – can be realized. Such hope is rooted not just in the typical optimism of the son of an immigrant (which I am) but also in the recognition that we really have no choice.

At the crossroads of a demographic transition – the Asian American electorate will double just as we are turning the corner to a nation that is majority minority – we can choose a path of justice or a strategy of “just us.” If the nation continues to polarize between old and young, city and suburb, white and non-white, our future is limited; if we can instead link across these divides, we can expand all our horizons.

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Reports like this are a call not just to reflection but to action – and they are part of the way that we will move forward together.

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## **PREDICTING POLITICAL PROSPECTS FOR ASIAN AMERICANS**

**Linda Trinh Vo**

**Associate Professor and former Chair, Department of Asian American Studies at UC Irvine  
President, Association for Asian American Studies**

Paul Ong and Elena Ong predict that Asian Americans are the fastest growing demographic group in the nation, and by 2040, the number of Asian American registered voters will double from 6 million to 12 million. Based on these predictions, they expect the Asian American electorate will expand with emerging opportunities to increase its political influence; however, this trajectory depends on their ethnic concentration, strategic voting patterns, and ability to leverage resources.

They project that Asian American registered voters will increase from 4% in 2015 to 7% in 2040, indicating that the Asian American electorate will continue to be critical swing voters at the city, county, and state levels. In areas where they are concentrated or growing, Asians can shape the outcome in close elections where a small margin of victory is needed, especially in non-presidential election periods, where voter turnout is typically lower amongst the general electorate. In order to win elections in these districts, Asian and non-Asian candidates are advised to pay attention to Asian American constituents if they expect to win elections or be re-elected. In turn, if Asian Americans vote en bloc in elections, they can be strategic in ensuring that these politicians are accountable to their needs.

In concentrated areas, the growth in the Asian American voter electorate could parallel the number of Asian Americans running for office and winning elections. Those winning office can encourage, directly and indirectly, other Asians to run for election by showing that it's possible for an ethnic candidate to get elected or by endorsing and mentoring junior candidates. There are already cases in which the majority of the viable candidates running for office are Asian Americans at the school board, city council, and county supervisory races, which have resulted in majority Asian American members. These local elections are crucial for Asian American politicians to acquire political experience, gain name recognition, and increase their networks, a foundation that helps propel them into state and national office. District elections, rather than at-large elections, are proven to be beneficial to ethnic politicians, since these newcomers to the political process can rely on ethnic voters, donors, and volunteers and candidates can focus their energy and funds within a concentrated area. While it is expected that U.S.-born Asians are willing to run for office, what is significant is the number of first generation and 1.5 generation, those born abroad but raised in the U.S., who are running for and winning elections. For example, in Orange County, the majority of those in elected positions are first generation refugees and immigrants as well as their 1.5-generation children. This means that they are becoming naturalized and within one generation have overcome cultural and linguistic barriers to become incorporated into the political process, an advantage they can pass on to future generations.

It is crucial to pay attention to how and when Asian subgroups actually vote and the effectiveness of bilingual voting materials for those with limited English fluency. Vietnamese Americans have high rates of absentee ballots usage, so they prefer to complete their ballots at home where they can review bilingual ballot materials at their own pace. First generation immigrants and refugees who are novice voters may employ the assistance of family members to ensure their ballots are filled out correctly before mailing them in, preferring this to the new technologies at the voting booth on Election Day. Ethnic language media are a vital source of distributing political information and many first generation voters are receiving

their news through ethnic radio, magazines, newspapers, and television, so ethnic media can be highly influential in encouraging naturalization, registering voters, and swaying voters. Governmental entities or community and advocacy organizations working on mobilization campaigns to register voters and increase voter participation should utilize this media. Ethnic organizations, even religious centers, are extensive in ethnic communities and are also influential in shaping voter registration and participation as well as opinion. However, both ethnic media and organizations are less significant for second and later generation Asian Americans who are fluent in English and tend to be residentially dispersed.

Ethnic populations with overlapping residential and commercial concentrations have the potential to be more effective in electing candidates that cater to their needs, including ethnic candidates, which is the case in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Santa Clara, and Orange counties. At the local level, partisan politics is less relevant, so voters are willing to support a politician from their same ethnic group who they think will benefit the residents and businesses, regardless of their political affiliation. While homeland politics may not determine voting patterns for many Asian subgroups, it does shape political behavior for refugee populations who are attentive to U.S. foreign relations with their homeland, such as Southeast Asians who escaped communist regimes, and will support local and national level candidates who espouse anti-communist policies. Refugee flows have ceased, so by 2040, U.S. born generations will increase proportionately, and it can be projected that this will shift the community's focus to domestic economic and social issues. In the contemporary period, many geographic spaces are shared by two or more Asian subgroups that are lumped together into one district; however, this does not mean they will be uniform or united in their voting patterns or supportive of other ethnic candidates. The struggle to share electoral power and resources in increasingly multiethnic and multiracial districts will continue to be the challenge in 2040.

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## WHEN MORE MAY NOT BE BETTER: THE UNCERTAIN FUTURE OF ASIAN AMERICAN POLITICS

Don Nakanishi

Professor Emeritus and Director Emeritus of the UCLA Asian American Studies Center

Politics is not rational. It is not predictable. It is not linear. And it probably should not be painted in bright and sunny colors.

It is typically American to optimistically assume that the bigger something gets, the better things will be. More is always better.

I have oftentimes publicly characterized the growth and maturation of Asian American political representation, participation, and impact during the past five decades in this positive and promising fashion. For example, I remember in 1976 when I first compiled a list of Asian American elected officials for the publication we now call the *National Asian Pacific American Political Almanac* that there were so few elected officials – and practically all were from the four West Coast states of Hawaii, California, Washington, and Oregon – that I could literally type, xerox, and staple the list. When we released our 15<sup>th</sup> edition in 2014, we reported that there were now 4,000 Asian American elected and major appointed officials in 38 different states. A remarkable achievement.

Indeed, as a result of a number of factors and trends, the overall Asian Pacific American political infrastructure of voters, donors, candidates, elected and appointed officials, political advocacy groups and civil rights organizations has been significantly enhanced and become increasingly influential during the past five decades. In 1965, however, I think it would have been extremely difficult to foresee and to dream of this political future in terms of the realities facing the relatively small, regionally situated Asian American population at that time, which numbered 1.5 million in contrast to the 18 million that it has become in 2015.

In 2040, as Ong and Ong anticipate in their essay, perhaps more will be more: the larger projected Asian American population of 36 million will lead to more Asian American voters, more Asian Americans running for and winning political office, more political donors, and more groups advocating for and protecting the interests of Asian Americans. Asian Americans would then wield greater political power and have a more decisive impact on American electoral and non-electoral politics. This would be wonderful. I hope it happens.

However, is it realistic to have such a positive and largely monolithic and linear vision of the Asian American political future? Can we assume that most of the extremely diverse sectors and groups of Asian America will march together under the same banner of Pan-Asian American unity, share common political interests, and generally cooperate and support one another rather than compete against each other?

Let me offer three potential scenarios that may challenge or disrupt a glowing and optimistic view of the political future for Asian America during the twenty-five years leading up to 2040.

1. *Is class still in session?*

For nearly fifty years, Asian Americans have criticized and critiqued the model minority thesis and have argued that it provides an inaccurate and damaging portrait of Asian Americans, especially in shining the brightest light on those who have done well and neglecting the hardships

experienced by many, who are poor and struggling. Asian Americans occupy all levels of the economic ladder from low to high, from those who are non-union laborers to those who are CEOs of some of the world's largest corporations. Social class affects political participation and interests in many big and small ways. It will be critical to monitor how the projected 36 million Asian Americans in 2040 become distributed economically, and whether different social class-based policy preferences, leaders, organizations, and levels of individual electoral participation emerge and divide Asian Americans

2. *Is the party over?*

Asian Americans have increasingly voted for the Democratic candidate for president with each election, with 73% supporting Barack Obama in 2012. Are Asian American voters now a reliable partner in the Democratic party coalition, or are they still a swing vote that exhibits tenuous political party ties (and still have a large percentage who register as independent voters) and must be wooed and mobilized? Current and future Asian American millennials, as well as immigrants who become naturalized during the next twenty-five years leading up to 2040, will have a major impact on the partisan contours of the future Asian American electorate. In terms of elected officials and candidates, Asian Americans will likely continue to represent the two major parties. It will be interesting to see if partisan skirmishes and controversies erupt between Asian American Republicans and Democrats in the future as the two parties vie for the votes and loyalties of new Asian American voters.

3. *Who's side are you on?*

Asian American civil rights groups and Democratic politicians have unequivocally embraced and pursued a civil rights agenda in partnership with Blacks and Latinos for many decades. Many Republican Asian Americans also supported some long-standing issues of this agenda like those involving hate crimes and employment discrimination. However, there have been instances like the 2014 public protests in California (and earlier U.S. Supreme Court cases) dealing with the use of race in college admissions that have pitted Asian American civil rights groups against Asian American conservative organizations like 80-20, which have aligned themselves with anti-affirmative action groups. During the next twenty-five years leading up to 2040, will a progressive civil rights agenda, as well as active participation in a multiracial coalition, be salient for most Asian Americans? Will America's color line and its racial politics divide or unite Asian America?

I hope more is better, but I am not sure.

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Don Nakanishi is Professor Emeritus and Director Emeritus of the UCLA Asian American Studies Center. He has written extensively about Asian American elected officials, voters, community politics, and social movements. He is currently completing two books on Asian American leadership and a comparative study of Asian American and Asian Australian politics.

## THE POLITICAL CONTEXT AND GROWING NUMBERS OF ASIAN AMERICAN VOTERS

Janelle Wong

Director of the Asian American Studies Program, University of Maryland College Park

The Asian American population is growing and, as Ong and Ong's analysis suggests, likely to fuel dramatic growth in the number of Asian American registered voters. The report points to the potential and likely important political impact of a group regularly ignored in U.S. elections, but also raises key issues related to how the community can maximize its impact. These issues include the characterization of Asian Americans as "swing voters," the importance of political mobilization, and the development of an Asian American political agenda.

### Asian Americans as Swing Voters

First, the authors suggest that Asian Americans may constitute a potentially critical "swing vote" in states across the nation. This may be the case, especially since length of residence is a critical driver of Asian American voter registration and voting. Those Asian American immigrants who have lived in the U.S. for 25 or more years do tend to register and vote at similar rates as US born Asian Americans (Wong 2006). At the same time, the extent to which Asian Americans will constitute a swing vote across the nation will depend on their continued growth in competitive districts and states. And, we must acknowledge that party competition has been decreasing dramatically for the past 25 years across the nation. Thus, as the Asian American population continues to grow, we must consider the places and conditions under which they truly provide the margin of victory in any particular local or state election. Although the Latino vote has been growing, including in swing states, in only 14 of 435 congressional (House) races in 2014 did Latinos provide the margin of victory (less than 5%).<sup>1</sup>

### Political Mobilization

The report's focus on voter registration is a welcome addition to current political analyses. It is clear from past research (Wong 2006, National Asian American Survey 2012) that once Asian Americans register to vote, their turnout is almost the same as the general U.S. population. To make growth in population and registration count decisively, however, community-based and advocacy organizations should devote resources to the places where the Asian American vote is not only growing, but also most likely to be influential (fast growing population and small margins of victory for the candidates; Nevada, North Carolina, Virginia are good targets). As I have argued elsewhere (Wong 2008), while the passage of time and demographic change currently drive Asian American political influence, active registration efforts and voter mobilization could speed-up the process of Asian American political incorporation. The trends revealed in this report should encourage parties and other organizations to make broad and consistent mobilization of Asian Americans a priority.

### Developing an Asian American Political Agenda

Because nearly half of all Asian American registered voters do not identify as either Republicans or Democrat (NAAS 2012), many assume that Asian Americans vote according to "the issues" rather than

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<sup>1</sup> Latinos were "influential" (not decisive) in 44 House races in 2014 – 10% of all congressional (House) races. <http://www.latinodecisions.com/blog/2013/07/09/how-latino-voters-may-decide-control-of-the-u-s-house-of-representatives/>

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“the party.” However, which issues are “Asian American” issues? Ong and Ong contend that for the foreign born, issues related to the homeland may drive political participation. On this point, it is interesting to note that participation in homeland politics does not lead to more or less voting in the U.S. among Asian Americans (there is no association) and only 4% of all Asian Americans take part in politics related to politics in the country of origin (Wong et al. 2011). Further, immigration, as currently framed, is not a top policy priority for Asian Americans (NAAS 2012). Rather, Asian Americans say that their top issue priorities are the economy, jobs, health care, education, the budget deficit, and race and racism. Fully 65% of Asian Americans support taxing high-earners to give the middle class a tax break. This is the same level of support for redistributive taxation that the US population expresses more generally (NAAS 2012). Asian American public opinion is distinct from the U.S. population on three issues, however. Asian Americans tend to be more supportive of universal health care, more favorable of a “bigger government with more services over a smaller government with fewer services,” and more supportive of environmental protection over economic growth. These issues are not generally categorized as “Asian American issues,” but survey data suggest they should be, and that they might constitute the foundation for an Asian American political agenda.

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**THE DISAGGREGATION FACTOR: POLITICS, RACE, ETHNICITY & REPRESENTATION IN ASIAN AMERICA**

**Melany De La Cruz-Viesca**

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When I first started directing the Asian American Pacific Islander Community Development Census Information Center in 2002, disaggregating the Asian American population meant that you reported on the six largest Asian ethnic populations: Chinese, Filipino, Asian Indians, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese. Fast forward to 2015 and this is no longer enough. Recent studies have indicated that Southeast Asian ethnic groups such as Hmong, Cambodians, and Laotians have higher rates of poverty, lower income, and lower educational attainment rates--a very different experience than the six largest Asian subgroups. The lumping of all Asian American ethnic groups under the aggregate "Asian" category masks a high degree of variation in social and economic status across these subgroups. From 2000 to 2010, the growth of the Asian American population was driven primarily by immigration. This was evidenced by the 2010 Census including three new Asian subgroup categories: Bhutanese, Burmese, and Nepalese. The U.S. Census Bureau now reports data on 23 different Asian ethnic groups. Ethnicity, along with nativity and many other demographic characteristics (e.g. age, gender, mixed-race, class) will have major implications on whom will represent the Asian American Electorate in 2040.

As Ong and Ong suggests, "Between 2015 and 2040, Asian Americans will continue to be the fastest growing racial/ethnic population in the United States." Moreover, they estimate the population will double to 12 million by 2040. These projections are telling of how Asian Americans will play a decisive role in setting the stage of future politics.

With growth comes opportunities and challenges, strength in numbers also translates into the invisibility of smaller populations. Interestingly, Ong and Ong point out that naturalized immigrants will continue to comprise the majority of Asian American voters, but U.S. born voters will be growing at a faster rate over the next 25 years. They note, "By 2040, the median age of the U.S. born will be 37 years old, while the median age of foreign-born Asian Americans will be 56 years old." It is critical for federal data sets to disaggregate Asian Americans by ethnicity and by immigrant versus nonimmigrant status, in order to provide a more accurate and nuanced analysis of the Asian American experience.

Census data is used by key federal government agencies who use population numbers in determining how funding and how it should be distributed across the nation. The data is used to determine how many Congressional Representatives each state gets, and finally to collect key demographic information. As the Census Bureau moves to use existing administrative records, often lacking important race/ethnicity data, to reduce costs for the 2020 Decennial Survey, researchers, advocates, and practitioners must ensure reliable data continues to be collected by the Census Bureau.

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