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THE INVISIBLE VOTE

Survey of 1,300 registered Asian American voters shows this community continues to be ignored in the political process

By Carl Hum

In virtually every election, political pundits break down the white, black and Hispanic vote, but a discussion about the Asian American vote is a rare find. For most candidates, and the news media covering these candidates, the Asian American vote is an afterthought, if even a thought at all.

For decades, the Asian American and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NHPI) vote has been all but invisible. It's time for that to change. The Asian American and NHPI electorate nearly doubled from 2 million voters in 2000 to 3.9 million in 2012.ⁱ By 2025, Asian American and NHPI voters will make up five percent of the national electorate and by 2044, AAPI voters will constitute 10 percent of the national electorate.ⁱⁱ

According to new polling released today by the Asian and Pacific Islander American Vote (APIAVote) and Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC, which surveyed more than 1,300 Asian American registered voters, most Asian Americans have not been contacted by political parties in advance of the 2014 Midterm Elections.ⁱⁱⁱ In the face of a growing population and share of the electorate, it would be a mistake for political parties and candidates to overlook the Asian American vote.

THE AAPI VOTE MATTERS

Many ethnic groups are considered Asian American and NHPI, including Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Indian, Taiwanese, Thai, Indonesian, Filipino, Vietnamese, Malaysian, Hmong, Korean, Chinese, Cambodian, Laotian and Japanese, to name but a few.^{iv} The Asian American and NHPI population is growing fast, and is projected to reach 27 million by 2030, nearly eight percent of the total population, and 43 million by 2060, more than 10 percent of the total population.^v

Asian Americans have been quick to develop civic and political infrastructures, including a growing base of voters, donors, elected officials, appointees and public policy advocates. AAPIs have been growing significantly in their political presence. There has been an average increase of 600,000 voters per midterm election cycle from 1994 to 2010.^{vi} Congressional candidates of Asian American descent increased nearly fourfold from 10 candidates in 2010 to 39 in 2014.^{vii}

Asian Americans and NHPIs are also living in places outside traditional gateway cities. AAPIs aren't just growing in Hawaii and California, where the population has traditionally been concentrated. The states where there is the largest population boom of Asian Americans are in the South and Midwest.^{viii} Between 2000 and 2010, the highest percentage of growth of Asian American and NHPI communities was in Nevada (116 percent), Arizona (95 percent), North Carolina (85 percent), North Dakota (85 percent), Georgia (83 percent), New Hampshire (80 percent), Delaware (78 percent), Arkansas (77 percent), Indiana (74 percent), Texas (72 percent), Florida (82 percent), Virginia (71 percent), Idaho (71 percent), South Dakota (70 percent) and Alabama (70 percent).^{ix}

THE AAPI VOTE WILL IMPACT FUTURE ELECTIONS

While the Asian American turnout rate of registered voters is high, the percentage of citizen voting age Asian Americans who register is lower than other communities. Only 56 percent of adult Asian American citizens registered to vote in 2012, compared to registration rates of 72 percent and 73 percent among whites and blacks, respectively, and 59 percent among Latinos.^x To address this challenge, there has been an intensified effort to register the community. Just this past month, 317 organizations helped register Asian American voters on National Voter Registration Day, up from 154 organizations participating in 2012.^{xi}

Once registered, however, the Asian American community turns out to vote in numbers greater than the national average. In 2012, 79 percent of registered Asian American voters cast ballots, compared to only 58.2 percent nationwide.^{xii} According to the AAPIA Vote & Advancing Justice | AAJC poll, between 60 to 77 percent of registered Asian American voters are likely to vote this November.^{xiii}

In the 2014 Midterms, Asian American voters could produce the margin of victory in competitive House races given the community's high turnout rates. In more than 60 House races across the country, including but not limited to congressional districts in Georgia, New York, Illinois, Minnesota, Maryland, California and Hawaii, the Asian American and NHPI community constitutes eight percent or more of the voting-age population – large enough to close the gap in these races.^{xiv}

POLITICAL PARTIES ARE IGNORING AAPI VOTERS

Despite Asian American and NHPI contributions and voter turnout among registered voters, most have not been contacted by either political party. The AAPI Vote & Advancing Justice | AAJC survey showed that 64 percent registered Asian American voters have not heard from Democrats, and 73 percent have not heard from Republicans.^{xv} Because of candidate apathy to the Asian American community, a majority of Asian Americans (70 percent) feel shut out of the political process and that public officials care little about them.^{xvi}

THE AAPI VOTE IS UP FOR GRABS

Most Asian Americans don't identify with a particular political party. The AAPI Vote & Advancing Justice | AAJC Survey found that 45 percent of AAPI voters do not identify with either major political party.^{xvii} The others are split between the parties, with more leaning Democrat than Republican.

This is fertile ground for political parties to gain support and gather new ideas but the parties and candidates seem to be asleep at the wheel. Contact by the political parties to the AAPI community in 2014 were even lower than when last surveyed in May 2012, six months prior a presidential election. Only 12 percent of the survey respondents said that they received "significant contact" from either the political parties or community organizations focusing on the upcoming election.^{xviii}

CONCLUSION

With its growing numbers and looming influence, the AAPI community is an electorate base to be ignored only at the political parties' and candidates' peril. It is a wonder that the AAPI vote has yet to be tapped, particularly given its alignment with the national mood. The issues that are on the AAPI community as it heads to the polls this November are no different from any other American – jobs and the economy, healthcare and national security. However, on other pressing national issues such as immigration, affirmative action and income equality, the AAPI community's attitudes are nuanced from other racial groups. Whichever party, candidate or cause that is able to understand and accommodate these nuances will access the untapped, growing potential of the AAPI vote.

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- ⁱ U.S. Bureau of the Census. 2013. *The Diversifying Electorate—Voting Rates by Race and Hispanic Origin in 2012 (and Other Recent Elections)*. Department of Commerce. Available at <http://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/p20-568.pdf> (last accessed October 2014)
- ⁱⁱ Center for American Progress, “State of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders Series” (2014) available at ampr.gs/AAPireports2014 (last accessed October 2014)
- ⁱⁱⁱ Asian Americans Advancing Justice, “Left, Right or Center? Asian American Voters in 2014” (2014) available at <http://www.advancingjustice-aajc.org/news-media/publications/left-right-or-center-results-apia-vote-and-advancing-justice-aajc-2014-voter> (last accessed October 2014)
- ^{iv} Asian Americans Advancing Justice, “A Community of Contrasts: Asian Americans in the US (2011) available at <http://www.advancingjustice.org/publication/community-contrasts-asian-americans-us-2011> (last accessed October 2014)
- ^v U.S. Bureau of the Census. 2013. *2012 National Population Projections: Summary Tables*. Department of Commerce. Available at <http://www.census.gov/population/projections/data/national/2012/summarytables.html> (last accessed October 2014)
- ^{vi} Asian Americans Advancing Justice, “Left, Right or Center? Asian American Voters in 2014” (2014) available at <http://www.advancingjustice-aajc.org/news-media/publications/left-right-or-center-results-apia-vote-and-advancing-justice-aajc-2014-voter> (last accessed October 2014)
- ^{vii} Ibid.
- ^{viii} Asian Americans Advancing Justice, “A Community of Contrasts, South” (2014) available at <http://www.advancingjustice.org/publication/community-contrasts-south-2014> (last accessed October 2014)
- ^{ix} Asian Americans Advancing Justice, “A Community of Contrasts: Asian Americans in the US” (2011) available at <http://www.advancingjustice.org/publication/community-contrasts-asian-americans-us-2011> (last accessed October 2014)
- ^x U.S. Bureau of the Census. 2013. *The Diversifying Electorate—Voting Rates by Race and Hispanic Origin in 2012 (and Other Recent Elections)*. Department of Commerce. Available at <http://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/p20-568.pdf> (last accessed October 2014)
- ^{xi} Asian Americans Advancing Justice, “Left, Right or Center? Asian American Voters in 2014” (2014) available at <http://www.advancingjustice-aajc.org/news-media/publications/left-right-or-center-results-apia-vote-and-advancing-justice-aajc-2014-voter> (last accessed October 2014)
- ^{xii} George Mason University, “2012 General Election Turnout Rates” (2012) available at http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout_2012G.html (last accessed October 2014)
- ^{xiii} Asian Americans Advancing Justice, “Left, Right or Center? Asian American Voters in 2014” (2014) available at <http://www.advancingjustice-aajc.org/news-media/publications/left-right-or-center-results-apia-vote-and-advancing-justice-aajc-2014-voter> (last accessed October 2014)
- ^{xiv} Asian and Pacific Islander American Vote, “Citizen Voting Age Population by Congressional District” (2014) available at <http://apidata.com/stats/district-data/citizen-voting-age-population-by-congressional-district-aapi/> (last accessed October 2014)
- ^{xv} Asian Americans Advancing Justice, “Left, Right or Center?” (2014) available at <http://www.advancingjustice-aajc.org/news-media/publications/left-right-or-center-results-apia-vote-and-advancing-justice-aajc-2014-voter> (last accessed October 2014)
- ^{xvi} Ibid.
- ^{xvii} Ibid.
- ^{xviii} Ibid.