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The 2020 Asian American Voter Survey Executive Summary

Asian Americans are the fastest growing racial group in the country, and the group exhibited record levels of turnout in 2018 for midterm elections. Enthusiasm levels are high as we approach the November 2020 Presidential elections as well.

Asian Americans constitute a critical mass in several competitive states, including Arizona, Pennsylvania, and North Carolina. They are likely to be influential in congressional races in Southern California, Texas, and New Jersey, as well as in other states.

As attention turns to the immigrant vote, it is worth noting that “immigrant voters” include about as many Asian Americans as Latinx people and that Asian Americans are the only racial group that is majority immigrant. This means that bilingual voting materials and outreach remain acute needs in Asian American communities.

The 2020 Asian American Voter Survey includes a national sample of 1,569 Asian American registered voters. It was conducted from July 4 to September 10th, 2020. The survey breaks out Chinese, Indian, Korean, Vietnamese, Japanese, and Filipino voters and was offered in English, Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese. The survey was co-sponsored by APIA Vote, AAPI Data, and Asian Americans Advancing Justice-AAJC.

Results from the survey show strong enthusiasm about the upcoming Presidential election among Asian American registered voters. A majority (54%) of registered Asian Americans said that compared to previous elections, they are more enthusiastic than usual about voting.

A majority of Asian Americans (54%) surveyed planned to vote for Biden compared to just 30% who planned to support Republican incumbent Donald Trump.

Biden was strongly favored among all national origin groups surveyed, except Vietnamese Americans. Among Vietnamese registered voters, support is higher for Trump (48%) than Biden (36%). Indian Americans are the most inclined to vote for Biden among all Asian American groups (66%). At the same time, 14% of Asian American registered voters remained undecided about their presidential vote choice, with Chinese Americans (22%) exhibiting the highest proportion of voters who said they were “undecided.”

Majorities of Asian American registered voters also said they will support Democratic over Republican candidates in House and Senate races. Again, the exception to this trend of Democratic support were Vietnamese American voters, who on the whole are more likely to support Republican candidates for House and Senate than Democratic candidates.

Partisanship likely drives these group differences among Asian Americans. Vietnamese Americans were the only Asian American group surveyed that leans more Republican (38%) than Democrat (28%) with a large proportion of those who identify as non-partisan (34%)

Although enthusiastic about voting, Asian American registered voters also expressed some concerns about the upcoming election. Almost half (48%) said they often worry about the possibility of election interference in November. In addition, almost half worry about the health and safety of voting in-person at the polls due to COVID-19. Perhaps as a consequence, most Asian American registered voters (54%) said they prefer to vote by mail or vote by absentee ballot, rather than to vote in-person (26%) on Election Day.

Asian American voters exhibit tremendous diversity in terms of characteristics like national origin, geographic region, religion, and English-language proficiency. At the same time, they demonstrate remarkable cohesion when it comes to their interest in health care and opinions related to immigration, the environment, guns and education. On many of these issues, Asian Americans lean progressive, favoring a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, stronger environmental protections, gun control, and affirmative action. They are likely to believe that the Democratic party handles most issues better than the Republican party, with the exception of taxes and “jobs and the economy.”

Political parties have yet to harness the power of the Asian American vote despite the fact that many remain persuadable. The 2020 Asian American Voter Survey shows that about half of all respondents were not contacted by either major party. With a higher than average response of voters who do not subscribe with either party, party outreach will be critical for Asian American voters.