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Nativity and Latina/o and Asian American Online Voter Registration in California

By Lisa García Bedolla and Verónica N. Vélez

In a previous brief, we explored the gender and ethnoracial differences among the 787,337 Californians who registered online for the November 2012 election (García Bedolla and Vélez 2013). In this brief, we look at nativity differences across those voters: whether U.S. born Latina/o and Asian American[1] online registrants have different characteristics than those who are naturalized.[2] Considering nativity is important because it sheds light on how the political socialization process can vary across generations and across different national origin groups.

Naturalized voters were a smaller proportion of online registrants than they were of the electorate.
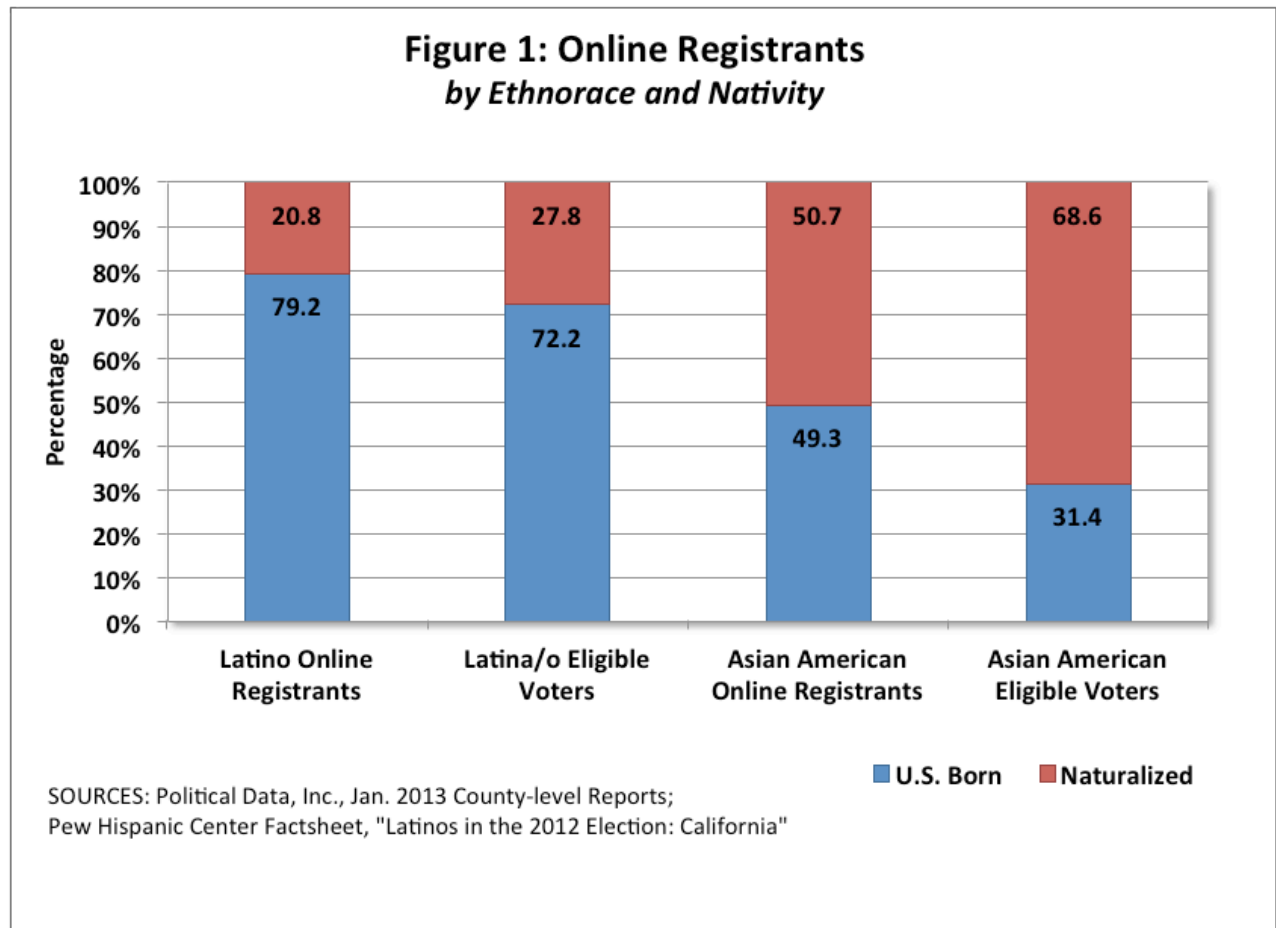
Nativity and Online Registration

We begin by exploring what proportion of online registrants was naturalized. We find

that 16.6% (N=130,643) of online registrants in November 2012 were naturalized voters. Given foreign-born voters made up 19.3% of California's registered voters in November 2012, we see that naturalized eligible voters were not as likely to take advantage of online voter registration as U.S. born voters. Figure 1 compares Asian American and Latina/o naturalized online registrants.[3] We see in figure 1 that the proportion of naturalized Asian American online registrants was more than two times the proportion of Latina/o naturalized online registrants. This largely reflects the demographics of the two communities: 68.6% of eligible Asian American voters in California in 2012 were naturalized, compared to 27.8% of Latina/o eligible voters.[4] Thus, it is not surprising to find more naturalized Asian American voters registering online. But, this does make clear that Latina/o and Asian-origin naturalized eligible voters did not take advantage of the opportunity to register online at the same rate as U.S. born eligible voters. Language access also

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seems to have been important. In November 2012, the online registration interface was only available in English and Spanish. This could help to explain why Latina/o naturalized eligible voters registered online in numbers that were closer to their proportion of the eligible voter population overall. Asian American naturalized voters, in contrast, made up a significantly smaller proportion of online registrants than we would have expected, given their proportion of eligible Asian American voters.

Figure 1: Online Registrants
by Ethnorace and Nativity

Category	U.S. Born	Naturalized
Latino Online Registrants	79.2	20.8
Latina/o Eligible Voters	72.2	27.8
Asian American Online Registrants	49.3	50.7
Asian American Eligible Voters	31.4	68.6

SOURCES: Political Data, Inc., Jan. 2013 County-level Reports;
Pew Hispanic Center Factsheet, "Latinos in the 2012 Election: California"

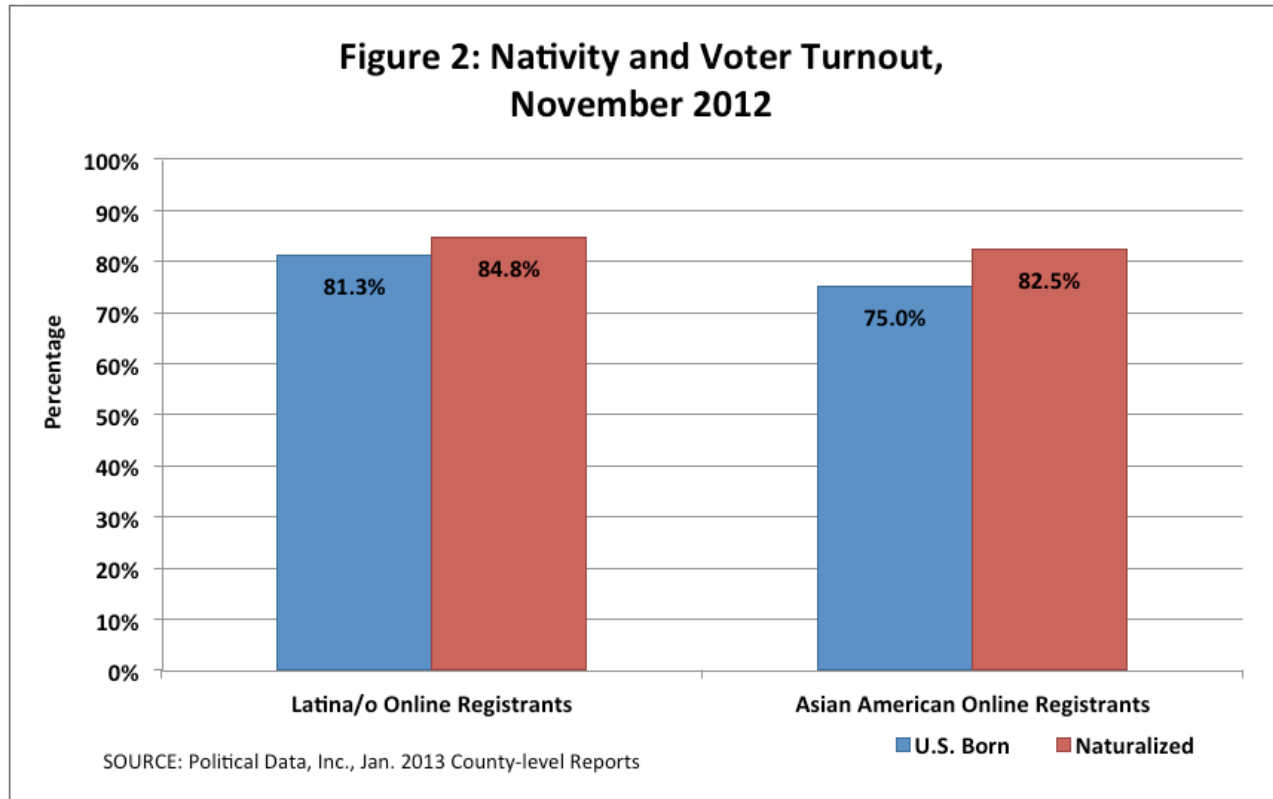> *Latina/o and Asian American naturalized online registrants turned out at higher rates than the U.S. born.*

Nativity, Online Registration, and Turnout

It is currently understood that Latina/o and Asian American naturalized citizens turn

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out to vote at higher rates than the U.S. born (DeSipio 2011). The question is whether turn out rates among online registrants followed the 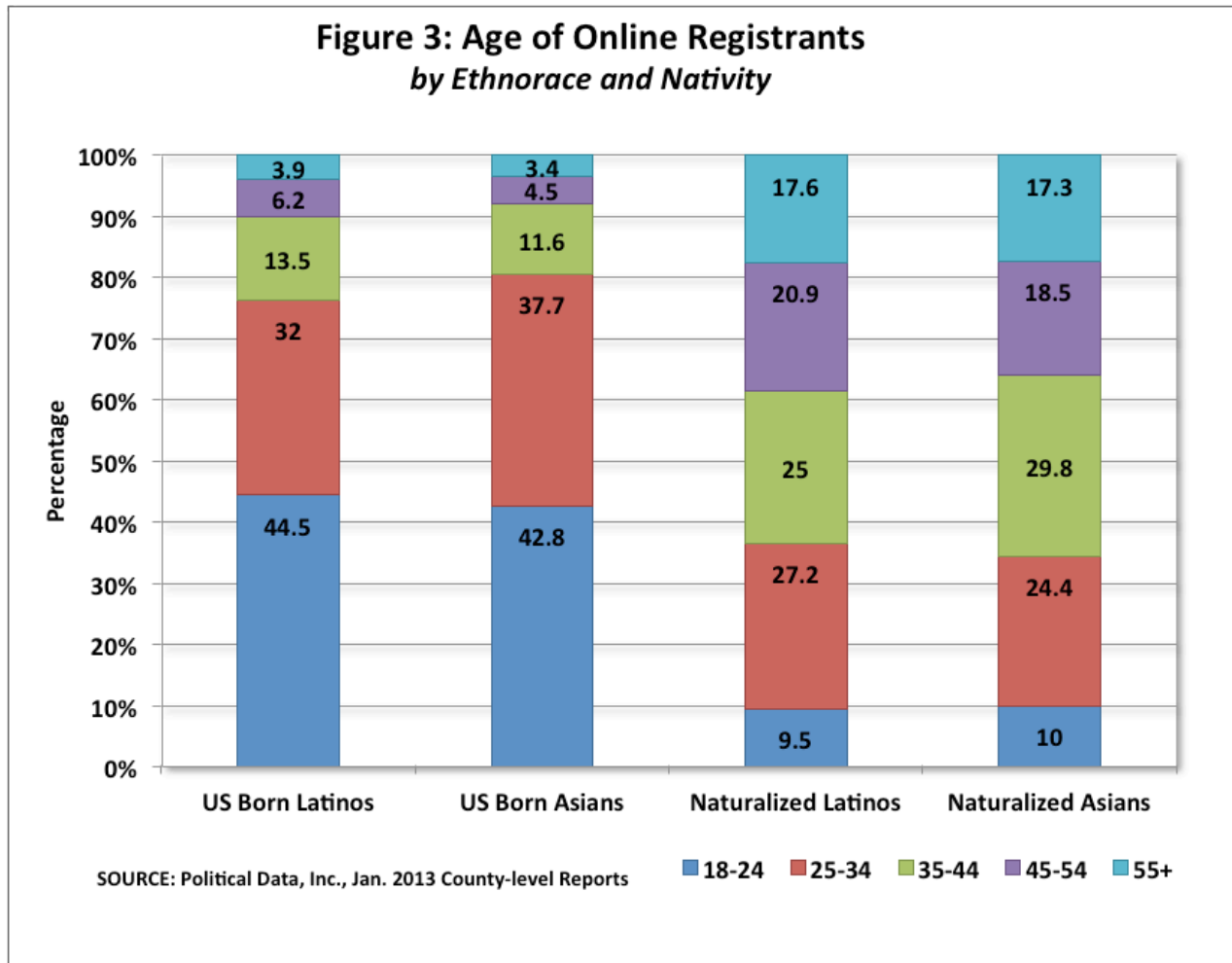same pattern. Figure 2 summarizes turnout rates among naturalized and U.S. born online registrants. We see that, as with the general voting population, the naturalized turned out at higher rates in November 2012.

Figure 2: Nativity and Voter Turnout, November 2012

SOURCE: Political Data, Inc., Jan. 2013 County-level Reports

Age, Nativity, and Online Registration

Many analysts assumed that youth would be the most likely to register online, given their greater comfort with digital media. Looking at the intersection of nativity and youth in Figure 3, we see that among the U.S. born, over 75% of Latina/o and Asian American online registrants was under age 35. Among naturalized online registrants, we find a greater age range, with more than 35% of each group aged 45 or older. This is likely a reflection of the fact that naturalized eligible voters tend to be older than their U.S. born counterparts. What is important to note is that among naturalized voters online registration was not only a "youth" phenomenon.

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Figure 3: Age of Online Registrants
by Ethnorace and Nativity

SOURCE: Political Data, Inc., Jan. 2013 County-level Reports

■18-24 ■25-34 ■35-44 ■45-54 ■55+

Nativity and Party Identification

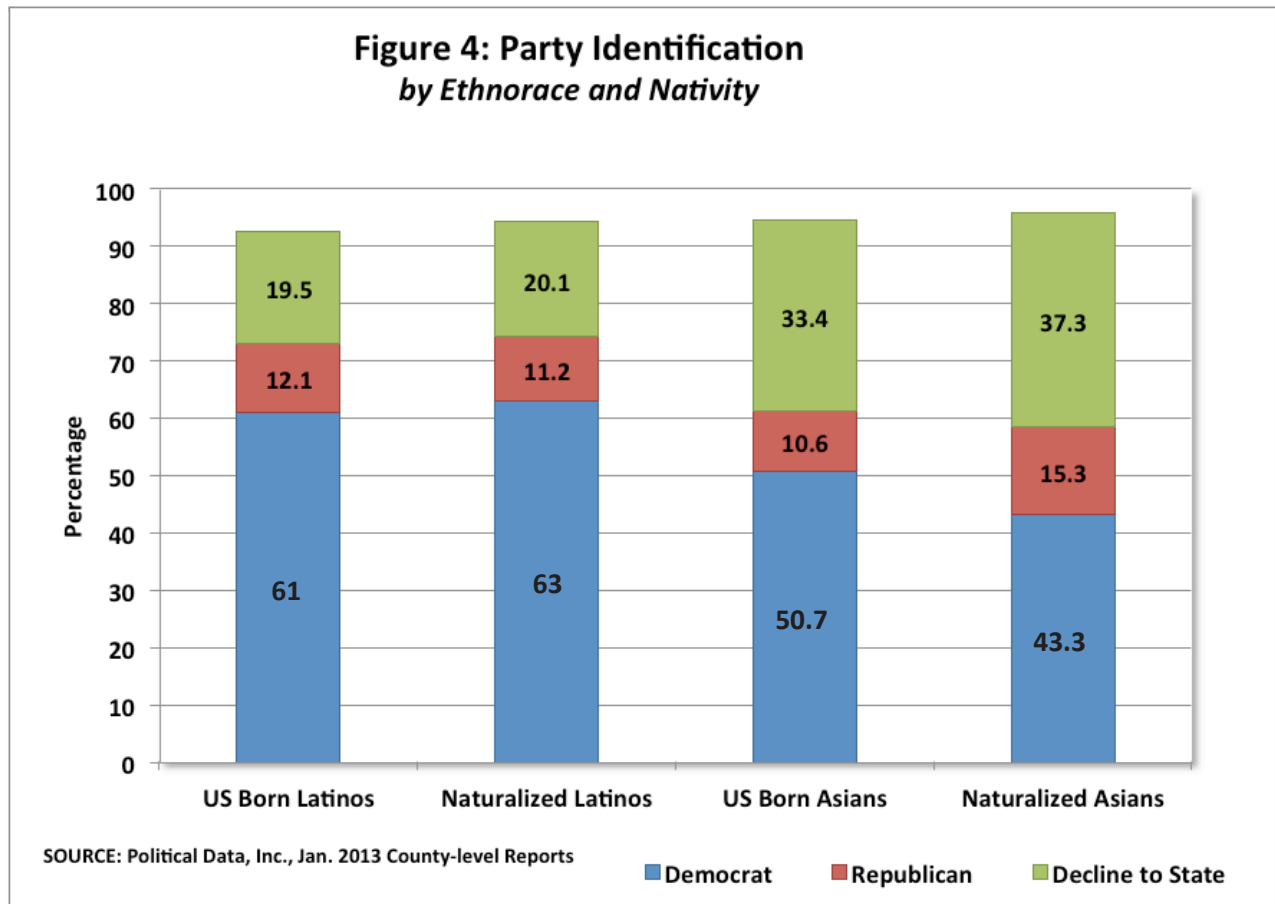> *U.S. born Latina/o and Asian American youth most likely to register online.*

In our previous brief, we found that California's online registrants were significantly more likely to identify with the Democratic Party than the Republican Party. Here we explore how party identification varies by nativity and ethnoracial group. Figure 3 summarizes Latina/o and Asian American party identification by nativity.[5] What is most interesting about this analysis is that, despite the age differences noted above, we see that party identification looks more similar within groups than across nativity.[5] In other words, naturalized Latinas/os' party identification patterns look more similar to those of U.S.

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born Latinas/os than they do to naturalized Asian Americans. Much was made in commentary after the 2012 election about the degree to which the strong support among Latinas/os and Asian Americans for

Democratic candidates would be sustainable over time. This analysis, given the similarities in party identification across generations, suggests these voting patterns will remain in the U.S. born generations.

Figure 4: Party Identification by Ethnorace and Nativity

SOURCE: Political Data, Inc., Jan. 2013 County-level Reports

Socioeconomic Status, Nativity, and Online Registration

Contrary to expectations, in our previous analysis we found a significant majority of online registrants came from low and middle-income communities. Based on
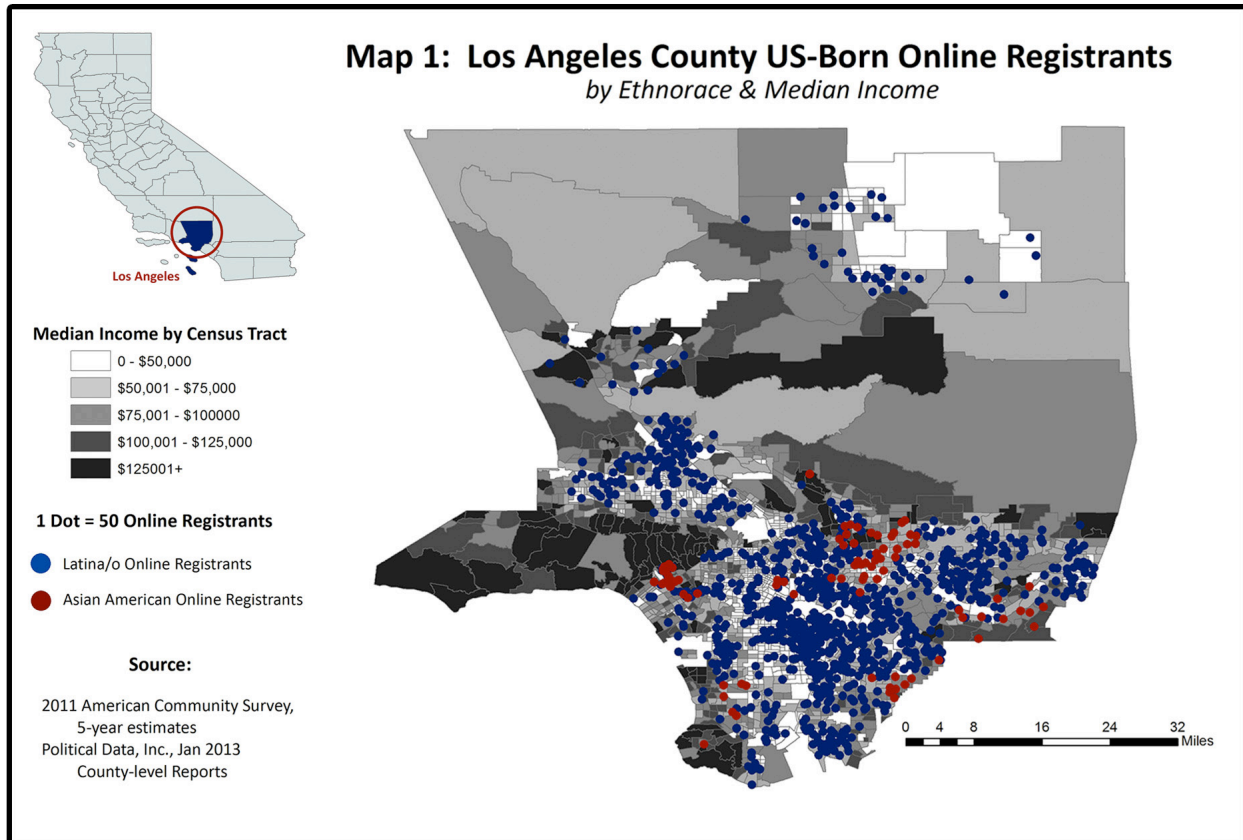
these findings, we decided to conduct a similar analysis comparing naturalized Asian American and Latina/o voters who registered to vote online in Los Angeles County in November 2012. We selected Los Angeles County because of its relatively high numbers of both Latina/o and Asian American naturalized

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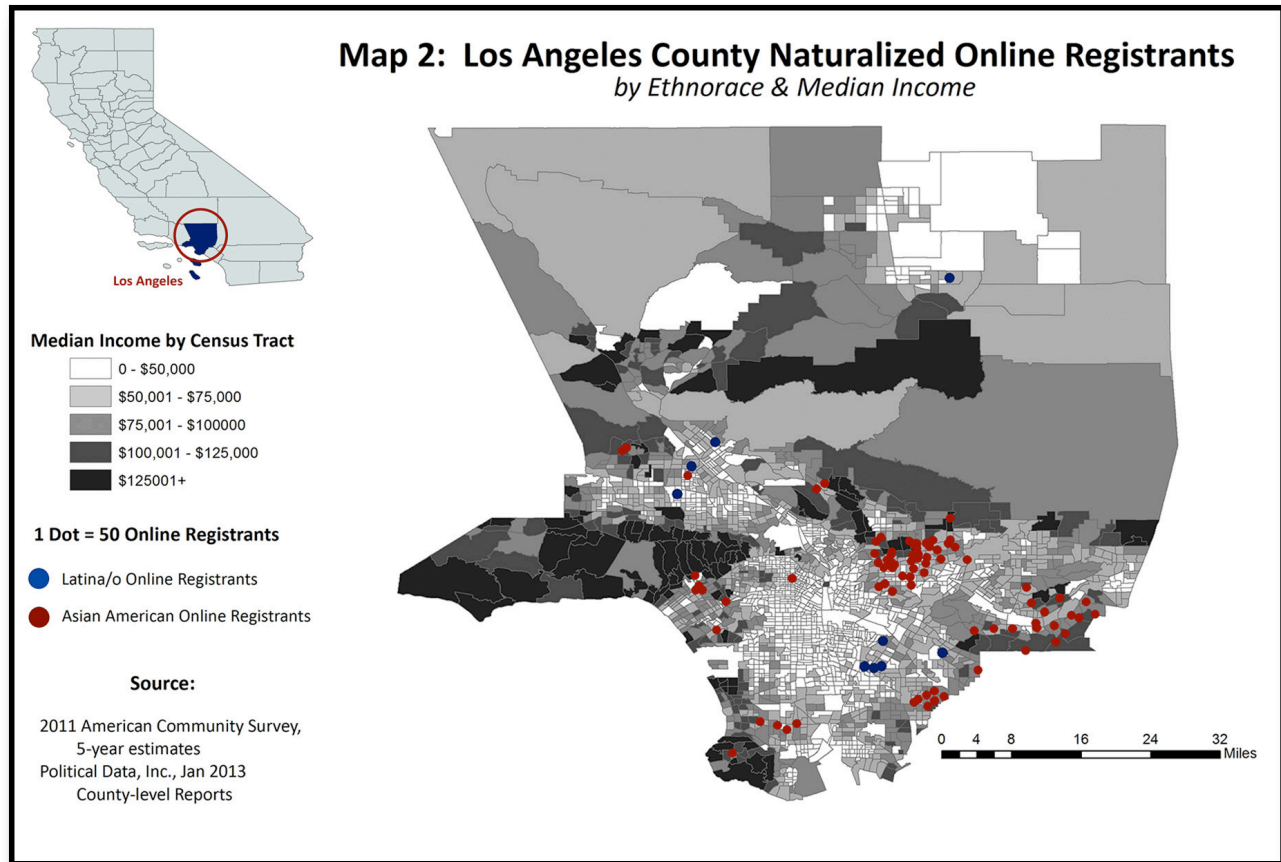Phone: (510) 642-6903
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and U.S. born online registrants: 14,858 Latina/o and 14,391 Asian American naturalized online registrants were from Los Angeles County. These numbers represent 21% of all Latina/o online registrants in California and 51% of all Asian American online registrants.

> *Online registrants' party identification is driven more by ethnorace than nativity*

We used GIS to plot newly registered voters (based on their address in the online voter file) and then aggregated their concentrations within census tracts across Los Angeles County. The census tract colors range from light to dark depending on where the tracts fall in terms of median income, which we calculated using data from the 2011 American Community Survey (5-year estimates). Maps 1 and 2 summarize this analysis, situating US-born and naturalized Latina/o and Asian American online registrants within their particular census tracts.

Map 1: Los Angeles County US-Born Online Registrants
by Ethnorace & Median Income

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Map 2: Los Angeles County Naturalized Online Registrants
by Ethnorace & Median Income

Los Angeles

Median Income by Census Tract
- 0 - $50,000
- $50,001 - $75,000
- $75,001 - $100000
- $100,001 - $125,000
- $125001+

1 Dot = 50 Online Registrants
- Latina/o Online Registrants
- Asian American Online Registrants

Source:

2011 American Community Survey,
5-year estimates
Political Data, Inc., Jan 2013
County-level Reports

Map 1 and 2 support our earlier findings that online registrants for the November 2012 election were not concentrated in affluent areas.[6]   This is true for both U.S. born and naturalized Latina/o and Asian American online registrants. In fact only 1% of US-born Latina/os and 6% of US-born Asian American online registrants lived in census tracts with median incomes greater than $125,000 per year. The numbers stay practically unchanged among the naturalized: 1% of naturalized Latinas/os and 5% of naturalized Asian American online

registrants live in these high-income areas. Conversely, 86% of US-born Latina/o and 62% of US-born Asian American online registrants lived in census tracts with median incomes lower than $75,000 per year. Similarly, we found that 82% of Latinas/os and 65% of Asian Americans naturalized voters – a clear majority for both ethnoracial groups – lived in lower income communities.

The other factor of note in the maps is the limited amount of geographic overlap we find between Latinas/os and Asian Americans, U.S.

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born and naturalized. Clearly, both groups occupy different geographic spaces, even within the confines of Los Angeles County.

Conclusion

One in five of California's registered voters in November 2012 was naturalized. When considering institutional reforms such as online voter registration, it is important to consider how these registration opportunities will be utilized by different categories of eligible voters. Clearly, Latina/o and Asian American naturalized voters did take advantage of this opportunity, even those that were low-income and over age 45. But, the gap in registration rates between online registrants and regular registrants suggests that there is more that the state could do in order to make the online registration process more accessible for these eligible voters.

For November 2012, the interface was only available in English and Spanish, and we saw that Asian American naturalized voters did not register online in the rates we would have expected. For future elections, the state should provide the opportunity to register online in multiple languages and use ethnic media to inform eligible naturalized voters of the registration option. The lack of geographic overlap we found between Latina/o and Asian American naturalized online registrants suggests these outreach efforts need to be designed with the understanding that these naturalized voters likely belong to separate social networks, and therefore outreach needs to be targeted towards each particular national origin population. Given naturalized online registrants turned out at higher rates than the U.S. born, it is especially important that the state ensure the electoral system is accessible to all eligible voters, regardless of nativity.

NOTES

Our thanks to Christina Chong for her help with the brief's layout.

[1] In this brief we use panethnic terms to describe communities that contain significant national origin and generational variation. Although we acknowledge the artificial nature of these categories, we would argue that they reflect groupings that have political meaning within the U.S. political context, and which past research has shown reflect commonly held self-identifications within these national-origin groups (Wong, Ramakrishnan, Lee and Junn 2012; Fraga et al. 2011).

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2 This analysis is based on data provided by Political Data, Inc. (PDI), a data vendor that collects data from each of the 58 counties in California and other proprietary sources. PDI acquires voter data from individual counties at regular intervals, typically no less often than once per 4 months. When voter records are retrieved from counties, they are subjected to record standardization, validation, and enhancement. Standardization includes the application of an internal matching reference key, an internal ID tracking number, and name field standardization. Validations against death registries and National Change of Address listings are also performed. For the identification of voters who filed for registration online, PDI relies largely on the record keeping of the individual counties. In most cases, the registration method is recorded and maintained by the county registrar-recorder and can be added directly to voter file records. In certain counties, the voter data is not stored in a manner that allows for direct recording of the registration method, which forces PDI to use other means to determine how a voter filed their registration. Of these counties that do not store the registration method directly most have a source code on each voter's actual affidavit number. By parsing out these codes, it is possible to determine which voters filed for registration online. There are, unfortunately, several counties that are not able to record the application source identifier into the voter's affidavit number, which make recovering registration method in those counties impossible via currently available means. Those counties are excluded from this analysis.

3 We use the term "ethnoracial" to describe these groups in order to capture the intersection between race and ethnicity. Scholars have long debated which is the more appropriate term to describe group experiences. The word race presupposes a common biological or genealogical ancestry among people. Ethnicity places more of an emphasis on cultural practices than on common genetic traits. Many scholars use the terms race/ethnicity or ethnorace to describe the ways in which factors often attributed to culture, such as language, can be racialized. In other words, ascriptive attributions can be based on linguistic or cultural practices that are not "racial" (or biological), but still can have racialized consequences. Because we believe the lived experiences of the populations discussed in this brief include both racialized and ethnic/cultural traits, we describe them as ethnoracial groups.

4 We identified Latino voters by merging the state voter file with the U.S. census Spanish surname list. Although the use of this list underestimates the total Latino population (because some Latinos do not have Spanish surnames), the U.S. Census Bureau estimates the surname list captures 93.6% of all Hispanics, with fewer than 5% falsely identified. For a full explanation of the list and its methodology, see Word and Perkins (1996). Asian American voters were similarly identified based on surname, and include Chinese-origin,   Korean-origin,   Vietnamese-origin,   Filipino-origin,   and   Japanese-origin   registrants.

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[5] The columns do not equal 100% because it excludes individuals who selected other parties, such as the Green Party, American Independent Party, etc.

[6] Each dot on Maps 1 and 2 represents 50 online registrants located in that tract. If a tract contained fewer than 50 online registrants from that ethnoracial group, no dot appears. But, readers should keep in mind that those tracts may contain smaller numbers of online registrants from that ethnoracial group even though they do not appear on the maps.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dr. Lisa García Bedolla is Chair of the Center for Latino Policy Research (CLPR) and Associate Professor of Education and Political Science at the University of California, Berkeley. She is co-author, with Melissa R. Michelson, of *Mobilizing Inclusion: Transforming the Electorate through Get-Out-the-Vote Campaigns* (Yale University Press, 2012). Dr. Verónica Vélez is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at CLPR and a GIS specialist. Her articles have appeared in the *Harvard Educational Review* and in numerous other academic outlets.

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