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Practitioners Essay

From Citizens to Elected Representatives: The Political Trajectory of Asian American Pacific Islanders by 2040

Christine Chen, James S. Lai,
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Abstract

The political power of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) has increased steadily in the United States. By 2040, one in ten Americans will be AAPI, and the number of Asian Americans registered to vote will have doubled (Ong, Ong, and Ong, 2016). This section examines the growing AAPI electorate and projects a trajectory for AAPI civic engagement and political participation from now until 2040. By looking at trends and projections for citizenship, voter registration, voter turnout, elected officials, and political infrastructure, the authors illustrate that AAPI political empowerment will have even a greater influence on the future of American politics.

Introduction

The political power of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) has increased steadily in the United States as the size of the AAPI population has grown. By 2040, one in ten Americans will be AAPI, and the number of Asian Americans registered to vote will have doubled (Ong, Ong, and Ong, 2016). The number of Pacific Islanders is also expected to significantly increase based on projected population growth. However, there are currently no detailed projections of the number of registered Pacific Islanders. This section examines the growth of the AAPI electorate and presents a trajectory for AAPI civic engagement and political participation from now until 2040.

AAPIs have been suggested to be the potential new “sleeping giant” in American politics (Ong, De La Cruz-Viesca, and Nakanishi, 2008). The projections of the AAPI electorate presented here assert this possibility—

that AAPI voters have the very real potential of becoming an increasingly powerful political force, even beyond high-intensity elections. Growth in the AAPI electorate can translate to growth in the number of AAPI elected officials or other governmental positions, giving AAPI communities increased political influence and the ability to shape public policy.

By looking at the trends and projections in AAPI voting population, including citizenship, voter registration, voter turnout, elected officials, and political infrastructure, the authors delve into an analysis of AAPI political power—presenting a future where this power could yield even greater influence over the future of American politics.

Current Trends in AAPI Political Participation

Voting Population and Trends

Political power through the ballot is more complex than the vote—individuals must be citizens, whether through birth or naturalization, then be registered to vote, and finally turn out to vote. The AAPI population is heavily immigrant, and each stage presents its own challenges and barriers that may stymie possibly even more substantial growth in electoral power (Ong and Nakanishi, 1996, Ramakrishnan 2005).

Among immigrants, Asian immigrants have consistently been among the fastest of any group to naturalize. As Table 1 shows, those from North American countries have averaged about ten years, while those from Asian countries have averaged about seven years. Various factors help explain these quicker rates of naturalization among Asian immigrants, including longer distance to homelands, coming from repressive regimes, and individual characteristics such as income and education (Waters and Pineu, 2015). Among Asian immigrant groups, rates of citizenship are highest among Southeast Asian refugee groups (75 percent or higher among adult Hmong, Laotians, and Vietnamese Americans) and are also high among Filipino and Japanese Americans (more than 70 percent). By contrast, citizenship rates are lowest among South Asian populations (50 percent for Sri Lankans, 55 percent for Indians, 56 percent for Bangladeshis, and 67 percent for Pakistanis). These differences are largely attributable to the fact that South Asian immigrants are more recently arrived, on average, than other Asian immigrants, and also have a lower proportion of U.S.-born residents given their more recent arrival and ongoing increases in migration (which stands in sharp contrast to relatively fewer immigrants coming from such countries as Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam).

Table 1. Median Years to Naturalize by Region of Birth

	2012	2010	2000	1990	1980
Total	7	6	9	8	8
Africa	5	5	7	7	7
Asia	6	5	8	7	7
Europe	7	6	7	10	10
North America	10	10	11	11	11
Oceania	8	7	11	10	8
South America	6	5	10	9	9

Source: Ramakrishnan and Ahmad, 2014

Despite higher rates of naturalization, AAPIs over the past two decades have lagged behind other groups in terms of their voting participation (for a review of this literature, see Lien, 2001; Ramakrishnan, 2005; Wong, 2006), and this pattern continued to hold true in the 2012 presidential election. As indicated in Table 2, voting rates among adult citizens in 2012 were highest among African Americans (66 percent) and non-Hispanic whites (64 percent). Voting among Asian Americans (47 percent) and Pacific Islanders (49 percent) was significantly lower due to multiple factors such as limited English proficiency (LEP), antiimmigrant sentiment, and other systemic barriers.

Table 2. Rates of Citizenship, Voter Registration, and Turnout

	Citizens (among adults)	Registered (among adult citizens)	Voted (among registered)	Voted (among adult citizens)
White	98%	73%	87%	64%
Hispanic	66%	59%	82%	48%
African American	95%	73%	91%	66%
Asian	66%	56%	84%	47%
American Indian	99%	64%	80%	51%
NHPI	88%	58%	85%	49%

Source: Ramakrishnan and Ahmad, 2014

Lower citizenship rates are not the only important factor that is holding back the electoral potential of Asian Americans. When breaking down voting into its component categories, we see that the racial gaps are far more significant when it comes to *voter registration*. Compared to non-Hispanic whites and African Americans at 73 percent, the Asian Ameri-

can voter registration rate is 56 percent and the Pacific Islander voter registration rate is 58 percent, respectively, roughly fifteen to seventeen percentage points lower (or on a proportional basis, 23 percent lower).

In contrast, when it comes to *turnout among registered voters*, Asian American turnout is 84 percent and Pacific Islander turnout is 85 percent, only three to seven percentage points lower (or 4 percent to 10 percent lower on a proportional basis) when compared to whites and African Americans.

A reason for these registration and turnout rates could be that many in the AAPI community are LEP, making language access and Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act a critical part of civic and political participation for AAPIs across the country.¹ The “Behind the Numbers” 2012 Post Election Survey by Asian Americans Advancing Justice—AAJC, Asian and Pacific Islander American Vote (APIAVote), and National Asian American Survey found that turnout for LEP AAPIs was nine percentage points lower (75 percent) than those who could speak English proficiently (84 percent). Another reason for these trends could be because of the anti-immigrant and xenophobic rhetoric exhibited by political candidates.²

Other barriers to increased engagement are systematic in nature. Currently, Asian Americans at 56 percent and Pacific Islanders at 58 percent have the lowest voter registration rates. Eliminating systemic barriers to democratic participation can potentially increase AAPI political engagement. For example, in Oregon and California (which have sizeable AAPI populations of 243,000 and 6,364,000, respectively) legislation has been passed to institute automatic voter registration. It is predicted that there may be more than twenty thousand new AAPI voters in Oregon, as well as hundreds of thousands of new AAPI voters in California, added to the voter rolls. So while AAPI voters will be registered automatically through these systems, much work will still need to be done to educate and motivate these voters to cast their ballot. These new AAPI voters will likely have lower levels of political interest and political efficacy than AAPIs who actively choose to register to vote.

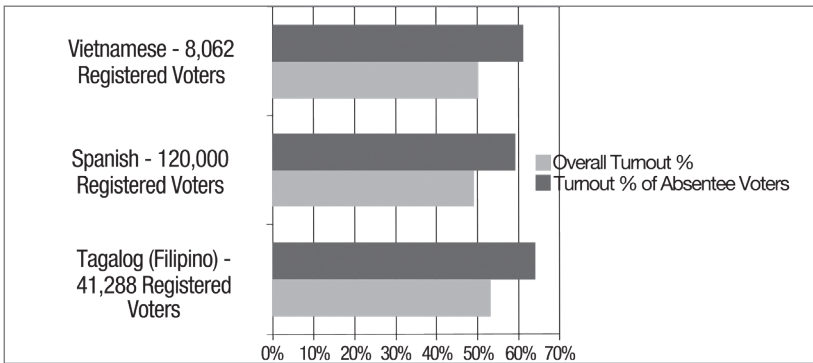
Although automatic registration is currently limited, online voter registration is increasingly available. According to the National Council of State Legislators, as of January 4, 2016, a total of twenty-nine states plus the District of Columbia offer online registration. Based on U.S. Census surveys, we know that more than 86 percent of Asian American households have access to the Internet (File and Ryan, 2014). Online voter registration systems will supplement the traditional paper-based system. The online systems will allow an individual to complete his or

her voter registration form using an Internet site, and have that paperless form submitted electronically to election officials. We anticipate that this could have a positive effect on AAPI political participation.

Same-day registration is currently available in eleven states plus the District of Columbia. This allows any qualified resident of the state to go to the polls or an election official’s office on Election Day, register that day, and then vote. Minnesota (where AAPIs account for 3.1 percent of eligible voters) has implemented this practice since 1974, and currently has the highest voter turnout rate in the country. California, Hawaii, and Vermont (where AAPIs are 15 percent, 66 percent, and 1 percent of the total share of eligible voters, respectively) have enacted same-day registration but have not yet implemented it. If implemented, it could affect turnout by increasing the likelihood that AAPI voters will be courted in a culturally and linguistically sensitive manner.

At the national level there is a movement to eliminate barriers to voting by increasing “no excuse” absentee voting. As of 2014, twenty-eight states and the District of Columbia allow “no excuse” absentee voting and twenty-one states require an excuse to vote absentee. Oregon and Washington (where AAPIs are 4.1 percent and 7.8 percent of the total share of eligible voters, respectively) are the only states that employ a vote-by-mail-only system. In California, which has long had permanent and “no excuse” absentee voting, almost 50 percent of voters vote by mail. Those with strict excuse requirements, such as Tennessee (where AAPIs are 1.2 percent of eligible voters), have only 5 percent of voters who vote by mail. For some of these states, an excuse of serving in an election role, student status, working, or jury duty does not qualify as an excuse.

Figure 1. Absentee Voting Can Increase Turnout among Language Minorities



Source: San Diego County Registrar of Voters

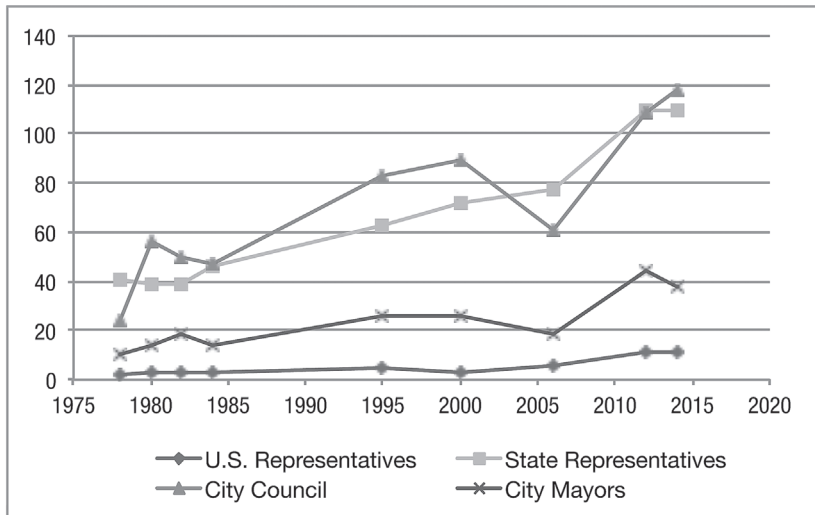
As seen with Figure 1, a case study in San Diego County, absentee voting can increase the turnout among language minorities.

Currently, at 47 percent, Asian Americans are the “least likely” to vote, and Pacific Islanders are the third least likely at 49 percent. Efforts to increase naturalization and language access through Section 203 and culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate outreach and campaigning will likely increase AAPI political engagement and participation. Efforts to address systemic barriers—such as online, as well as in-person, voter registration—must be done in a linguistically and culturally nuanced way, otherwise it could have a net negative effect on AAPI political participation.

AAPI Elected Representation

Another aspect of political participation that extends beyond voting and public opinion is elected representation. AAPI elected representation is an important litmus test for AAPI political power. This issue is and will continue to be a crucial and pivotal centerpiece for AAPI political participation and incorporation in U.S. politics.

Figure 2. Total Number of APAEOs in Key Elected Positions, 1978–2014



Source: Nakanishi and Lai, 1978–2014

Figure 2 illustrates the steady increase in the total number of Asian Pacific American elected officials (APAEOs) at all levels of government taking shape from 1978 to 2014 corresponding to each edition of the

National Asian Pacific American Political Almanac.³ Most noticeably these gains have been at the local and state levels with the elected positions of city council and state representatives. Local officials (city mayors and city council members) and state officials (state representatives) have increased the most rapidly during this period compared to the total number of federal representatives. These changes symbolize the gradual political incorporation of AAPIs, which contain the largest foreign-born population in 2014 among all racial groups, into U.S. politics. Despite this growth, AAPIs still lag behind other racial minority groups with large foreign-born populations such as Latina/os. In 2015, the total number of Latina/o state representatives and state senators were 231 and 74, respectively, and the total number of municipal elected officials was 1,800 (National Association of Latino Elected Officials Education Fund, 2015). In comparison, in 2014, the total number of AAPI state representatives and state senators were seventy-three and twenty-five, respectively.

As Figure 2 demonstrates, local politics remains a primary entry way into U.S. politics, and this is no different for AAPIs, both young and old, U.S.-born and immigrant. Geographic diversity is also another hallmark of AAPI elected representation. Prior to the 1990s, a majority of APAEOs came from the two states of Hawaii and California. For example, in 1978, among the total 161 APAEOs in the United States, California and Hawaii accounted for seventy-eight (48 percent) and sixty-two (39 percent), respectively. Only eight other states had APAEOs.⁴ While California and Hawaii still account for the largest percentage of APAEOs in 2014, a total of thirty-one states were represented among those with APAEOs.

The number of AAPIs serving as presidential political appointees has also continued to increase with every administration since the 1993–2001 Clinton administration. During the 2009–17 Obama administration, at one point the AAPI community had three secretaries of Asian descent serving in the cabinet: Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke, Secretary of Energy Steven Chu, and Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki. In addition, the Obama administration has tripled the number of Asian Pacific American judges on the federal bench, going from eight judges to twenty-four active Article III APA judges since 2008.

AAPI Political Infrastructure

“Political infrastructure” encompasses the community’s ability to build a political pipeline, the number of institutional structures, as well as an organization’s ability to scale up and build capacity to meet the needs of this ever-growing diverse community. Twenty-five years

ago, the AAPI community political infrastructure was far more of a skeleton than it is today. There were only four national Asian American civil rights organizations based in the nation's capital with a combined staff of eight addressing policy issues of importance to the community. AAPIs on Capitol Hill, in the White House, and in federal agencies were just as scarce. Within the last two decades not only has the AAPI community grown, but, along with it, an infrastructure to represent and advocate for themselves. At the same time, continued development and investment in these structures are needed for it to be more effective.

More than twenty years ago, on Capitol Hill, the Congressional Asian Pacific American Staff Association was founded to provide support to those working on Capitol Hill. In 1994, the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC) was founded. Today, CAPAC has grown to forty-eight members. Today there are thirteen U.S. members of Congress of Asian and Pacific Islander descent, the largest number in U.S. history. Recently, CAPAC also created the Asian Pacific American Caucus (PAC) to help support AAPI candidates running for federal seats.

In 1996, the National Council of Asian Pacific Americans (NCAPA) was founded. Today there are thirty-five national AAPI organizations that belong to this national coalition of national Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander organizations. The organization strives for equity and justice by leveraging the diverse strengths of Asian Americans and Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders to shape the public discourse and influence public policy. To align with congressional policy making, NCAPA develops a policy blueprint to guide advocacy efforts.

In 1999, President Bill Clinton signed an executive order creating the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (WHIAAPI). Since then it has been renewed and its focus modified based on the priorities of the administration. In 2009, President Obama reauthorized WHIAAPI and the President's Advisory Commission on AAPIs. Over the past six years, the initiative and commission have connected with almost one hundred thousand individuals in numerous states and cities across the country, including the Pacific Islands. More than twenty agencies have developed robust strategic plans that lay out strategies, objectives, and possible outcomes on a range of issues, including promoting data disaggregation and language access; increasing resources to AAPI organizations and communities; and improving diversity in the federal workforce.

More recently, there has also been a rapid growth in the civic infrastructure focused on voter engagement of AAPI communities. In 2014, for example, 317 AAPI-serving organizations participated in National

Voter Registration Day, more than double the number of organizations that participated in 2012. A growing number of community-based organizations are integrating voter registration into their regular activities and programs throughout the year. In doing so, these organizations are amplifying and reinforcing the importance of civic engagement, especially when growing civic participation increases the ability of organizations to advocate for their communities' interests. Today, AAPIs are actively turning out the vote for the 2016 presidential election, as a broad network of AAPI organizations continue their legacy of participating in the AAPI Presidential Town Hall.

The growth of AAPI civic participation is due not only to the fact that community organizations are getting more involved, but also because of the growing number of AAPI elected officials and candidates running for office. Every time a leader from the community decides to run for elected office, or seek political appointment, she or he engages her or his network of extended family and friends to get involved.

The growth of AAPI elected officials is supported with the growth of AAPI political infrastructure and AAPI political resources. Over the last quarter of a century, more political PACs and Democratic and Republican clubs and caucuses have been established. The latest edition is the AAPI Victory Fund, the first Super PAC focused on engaging the AAPI electorate. We also see a growing number of staffers of AAPI descent involved with campaigns at all political levels. Since the 1990s, the Democratic National Committee has had an AAPI community desk focused on engagement with the AAPI community. In 2013, the Republican National Committee hired staff and provided assistance in outreach to AAPIs in several states. With this development of a political pipeline, infrastructure, and resources, we now have the ingredients for the AAPI community to increase civic engagement and to ensure that participation in the democratic process truly reflects America's diversity.

Likely Trajectory in AAPI Political Participation In 2040

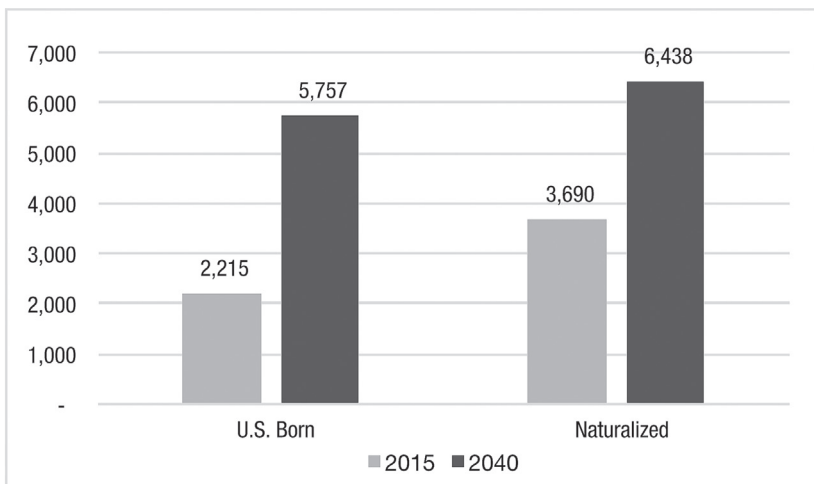
Likely AAPI Voting Trajectory

For immigrants, U.S. citizenship is a prerequisite for registering to vote and voting. Yet, per the Urban Institute, immigration reform proposals could cut the number of family visas to admit more people based on their job skills. As a result, more high-skilled immigrants will come from India, China, and the Philippines. In the future, we could expect the number of citizens from South Asian countries to increase significantly,

as immigrants stay longer in the United States and get settled in various communities. At the same time, their rates of citizenship will not increase as quickly, given expectations of continued new migration from South Asian countries. Finally, we can expect Southeast Asian refugee groups to have even greater rates of citizenship, as the population gets more settled and there are reductions in future waves of immigrants and refugees from these countries. Should there be a war or immigration reform, we might also see an increase in the number of Asians from other nations.

While a large proportion of Asian American voters are immigrants in 2015, the U.S.-born voting population is close to eclipsing the Asian American immigrant vote by 2040. For example, the U.S.-born Asian American population is going to get older, on average, in 2040 when compared to the U.S.-born population today. Based on existing research on voting patterns by age and nativity (Ong, Ong, and Ong, 2016; Ramakrishnan, 2005; Wong et al., 2011), we can surmise that, in the future, this will mean higher rates of voting participation among second-generation Asian Americans (see Figure 3). In addition, the proportion of native-born Asian Americans is projected to increase from about 40 percent in 2010 to 50 percent in 2040 (Ong, Ong, and Ong, 2016).

Figure 3. Asian American Registered Voters by Citizen Status (in thousands)

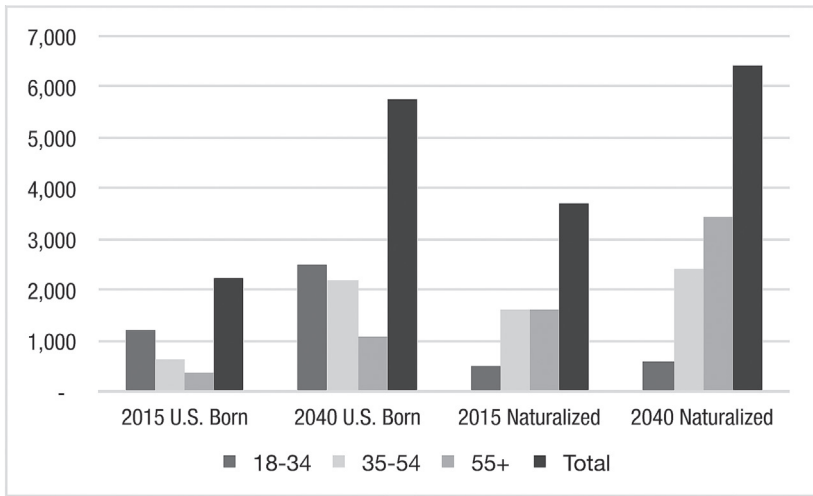


Source: Ong and Ong, 2015

Finally, even though immigration will continue to fuel the growth of Asian Americans in the future, the immigrant population is getting

more and more settled over time, spending more years in the United States, and getting older. As the proportion of long-term residents and seniors among Asian Americans continues to grow, we should expect to see an increase in the overall rate of voter registration and voting (see Figure 4). Importantly, however, the sizable and growing share of undocumented Asian immigrants will serve as a future drag on citizenship and voting participation (Rosenblum and Soto 2015)

Figure 4. Asian American Registered Voters Totals by Nativity and Age, 2015 and 2040



Source: Ong and Ong, 2015

Likely Trajectory in AAPI Elected Officials

Looking forward to 2040, AAPIs will likely become a growing political force as swing voters, active participants in community-based organizations and political clubs, coalition partners, commissioners, and elected officials at the local, state, and national level. Active participation in these organizations can result in the recruitment and mentoring of potential AAPI political candidates (Lai, 2009, 2011; Wong, 2006).

The geographic location of where future APAEOs are likely to be elected will continue to reflect two current trends. First, APAEOs will likely continue to be elected in local, state, and federal districts where Asian Pacific Americans are a minority. In these minority districts, some evidence suggests that Asian Pacific American candidates have a greater chance of winning from these areas than those with large percentages of Asian Pacific Americans (Ong and Lee, 2010). In districts where Asian

Pacific Americans are a minority, they will continue to be important swing voters.

Second, the suburbs, particularly those emerging with a majority or plurality AAPI districts will likely continue to fuel the largest number of future APAEOs and candidates in various city councils and school boards, which allow AAPI voters to vote for AAPI candidates. These cities can be found both in major Asian populated states such as California, Hawaii, and Washington, but also in emerging Asian populated states such as Maryland, Illinois, Virginia, and Texas to city commissions that will allow for political networks to develop.⁵ Thus, redistricting of district boundaries will play a central role in maximizing or diluting voting blocs among AAPIs from taking shape (Kwoh and Hui, 1993; Ong and Lee, 2010). Regardless of group population size, successful AAPI candidates at all levels of government will need to build multiethnic, multiracial, and multi-issue political coalitions among diverse voters, contributors, and interest groups, non-AAPI and AAPI alike (Lai, 2011).

Finally, the long-term trajectory of AAPI elected representation must continue to involve both political pipelining and vertical political incorporation. Political pipelining at the local level is the critical stage of local APAEOs appointing well-qualified, potential AAPI candidates to high-profile city commissions to develop political networks and experiences should they choose to run later for open seats on city councils.⁶ AAPIs, like all groups, must run for open seats at the local, state, and federal levels. With regard to political incorporation, AAPIs have successfully demonstrated political incorporation in various cities, which resulted in multiple and, in some cases, majority Asian American city councils on the continental United States where AAPIs are making key decisions on policies that effect entire cities with significant AAPI populations (*ibid.*).

Likely Trajectory in AAPI Political Infrastructure

As we look toward the future, we foresee that existing organizations will increase their resources and capacity to develop effective programs to address growing AAPI political pipeline and advocacy efforts. The sophistication of the AAPI political community will be well developed by 2040.

We have already observed that more organizations are willing to incorporate and explicitly focus on implementing voter registration, education, and get-out-the-vote programs. With each election cycle, AAPIs are becoming more comfortable with campaign work and, in some cases, start implementing more effective tactics such as securing media coverage, door-to-door canvassing, and phone banking. Between the ongoing

growth of the AAPI community and by their success stories, the AAPI electorate will likely receive attention from political candidates, fundraisers, and parties. With more of the community being exposed to voter participation, it is also growing the AAPI political pipeline.

Closing the Gap between the Likely and Desired Trajectory

Despite a likely upward trajectory in voting that will proceed faster than the growth rate of the population, we still anticipate gaps in voting among AAPIs, on the one hand, and whites and African Americans, on the other. That is because, even among the groups who are most likely to participate (seniors, college educated, U.S.-born), AAPI voting has lagged significantly behind the national average. Thus, even with the growing share of seniors among AAPIs and the aging of the second-generation population into middle age, we expect that AAPI voting will be lower than the overall voting rate in 2040, although these gaps will likely be smaller than in 2012.

That is why today, organizations like APIAVote are developing strategies to engage voters, including youth and seniors. Voter engagement campaigns utilizing various platforms—from digital and social to direct voter contact—engage AAPIs on several fronts. Youth outreach for APIAVote is centered around working with existing youth networks and tapping into AAPI influencers in an effort to increase the discourse around civic engagement as a whole. Senior outreach will be as nuanced, with today's forty-year-olds being 2040's senior vote base.

Additionally, many in the AAPI community are LEP and may continue to be. Language assistance is critical in ensuring all AAPIs have access to the ballot and be informed voters in the democratic process. Even in areas with high AAPI populations not covered under Section 203, language access initiatives are important undertakings. For example, in Fairfax County, Virginia, community organizers worked with the board of elections to translate materials to Korean, serving the large Korean community in the area. Going into the future the potential growth in language access provisions and initiatives will determine the engagement of AAPIs with the ballot. By 2040, we will see an increase of U.S.-born Asian voters; however, there will still be a need for translated ballots and educational materials because another generation of new immigrants will continue to arrive.

Other factors that could impede AAPI political engagement and participation include antiimmigrant hostility, China bashing, and other anti-Asian sentiments from blogs, presidential candidates, and more. Of-

ten statements that promote AAPIs as a perpetual foreigner are made by campaigns as a scare tactic to dampen or suppress AAPI enthusiasm for, and involvement in, the democratic process. But these tactics may no longer work among a newly engaged, and emboldened, AAPI electorate.

Recent polling has shown that the AAPI electorate is not submissive, and it will not tolerate ignorance: 41 percent of AAPIs would change their support of a candidate if that candidate was anti-immigrant (Asian and Pacific Islander American Vote and Asian Americans Advancing Justice—AAJC, 2014). This statistic is a wake-up call, warning candidates that divisive language will not be tolerated or forgiven by the AAPI community. The AAPI electorate is not politically expendable. In fact, AAPIs play a key role as a swing vote in many areas.

Indeed, AAPIs comprise 5 percent or more of the eligible adult voting-age population in seven states, seventy-three counties, and 103 congressional districts (Ramakrishnan and Ahmad, 2014), and AAPI voters are up for grabs in terms of party affiliation/identification. This growing strength can determine the outcome of elections. Hence it is important for candidates to understand the issues and solutions the AAPI electorate cares about.

Conclusion: A Vision for Political Inclusion and Equality

As AAPI communities continue to grow, the AAPI infrastructure continues to mature, and more AAPIs enter all levels of the political process, there is optimism for great progress going into the future, and the surge in AAPI political power is certain and undeniable. Current trends and future projections make this clear—the influence of AAPIs on American civic life is only beginning to thrive.

Yet it is also critical that the work of building political infrastructure, engaging AAPI voters, and developing a pipeline of future leaders is at the core of this thriving AAPI future. Without consistent and sustainable engagement, we lose control of determining the future for AAPI communities. In order to shut down demeaning rhetoric, deconstruct stereotypes, and speak for AAPIs instead of others speaking over AAPIs, AAPIs must continue to develop and grow the infrastructure that made the tremendous growth of the last few decades possible. AAPIs must continue to invest the resources—financial and in-kind—that enable this type of growth to continue.

Today, it is rightfully possible to imagine a future when issues facing AAPIs take political priority, when AAPI voters are the most sought-after vote, and when the number of AAPIs at all levels of elected or ap-

pointed office reaches and/or exceeds parity. That future is our vision for political equality for 2040 and beyond.

Notes

1. Language access provisions, particularly through Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act, are key in ensuring LEP AAPIs have access to the ballot. Language access provisions and initiatives, even outside of jurisdictions covered by Section 203, continue to help enfranchise communities. Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act mandates language assistance in political subdivisions and jurisdictions with significant language minority populations. The law covers areas where there are more than ten thousand or more than 5 percent of total voting age citizens in a political subdivision who are members of a single minority language group and are LEP. Drawn from U.S. Census data, Section 203 jurisdictions may change every decade based on population changes, with the most recent additions to Section 203 coverage in 2011. Political subdivisions are typically based on county, but can also be applied to municipalities and townships. Jurisdictions in ten states are currently covered under Section 203 for Asian languages, and they include ethnic groups such as Asian Indian, Bangladeshi, Cambodian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Thai, and Vietnamese.
2. Comments such as those from former governor Jeb Bush, calling Asians “anchor babies,” is one example of divisive tactics that denigrate AAPIs in the United States.
3. The time gap from 1984 to 1995 was due to the *National Asian Pacific American Political Almanac* not being bi-annually produced during this interval.
4. The other states with AAEOs (number in parenthesis) were Colorado (2), Idaho (1), Maryland (1), Utah (3), Pennsylvania (1), Nebraska (1), Oregon (3), and Washington (9).
5. According to the 2010 Census, Asian Americans (alone or in combination) represented the following percentages in these states: California (14.9), Hawaii (57.4), Washington (9), Maryland (6.4), Illinois (5.2), Virginia (6.5), and Texas (4.4).
6. Political incorporation refers to “the extent to which group interests are effectively represented in policy-making” in U.S. cities (see Browning, Marshall, and Tabb, 2003, 11).

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