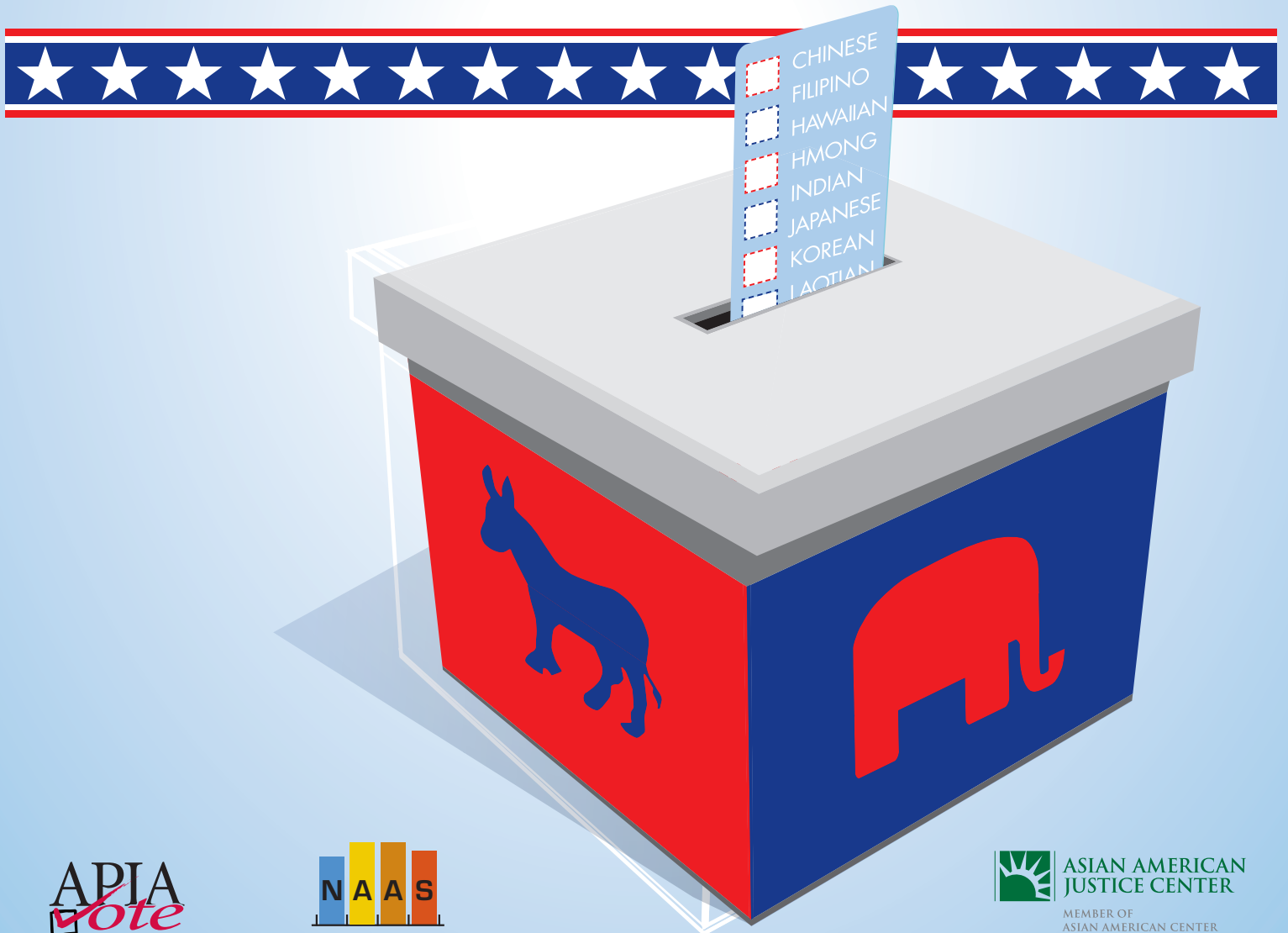


# BEHIND THE NUMBERS

POST-ELECTION SURVEY OF ASIAN AMERICAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER VOTERS IN 2012



Behind the Numbers: Post-Election Survey of Asian American and Pacific Islander Voters in 2012 is a collaborative effort of Asian American Justice Center, Asian and Pacific Islander American Vote, and National Asian American Survey.



**ASIAN AMERICAN  
JUSTICE CENTER**

MEMBER OF  
ASIAN AMERICAN CENTER  
FOR ADVANCING JUSTICE

Founded in 1991, Asian American Justice Center (AAJC), a member of the Asian American Center for Advancing Justice (Advancing Justice), works to advance the human and civil rights of Asian Americans, and build and promote a fair and equitable society for all. AAJC is one of the nation's leading experts on issues of importance to the Asian American community, including census and voting rights. Advancing Justice's mission is promoting a fair and equitable society for all by working for civil and human rights and empowering Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other underserved communities. The other member organizations are the Asian American Institute in Chicago, the Asian Law Caucus in San Francisco, and the Asian Pacific American Legal Center in Los Angeles. Visit AAJC's website at: [www.advancingequality.org](http://www.advancingequality.org) and Advancing Justice's website at: [www.advancingjustice.org](http://www.advancingjustice.org).



ASIAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER AMERICAN VOTE

Asian and Pacific Islander American Vote (APIAVote) is a national nonpartisan organization that works with partners to mobilize Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in electoral and civic participation. APIAVote envisions a world that is inclusive, fair, and collaborative, and where Asian American and Pacific Islander communities are self-determined, empowered, and engaged.

APIAVote works with Asian American and Pacific Islander communities to emphasize the importance of voting and civic engagement and to illustrate how elected officials and ballot measures directly affect the goals of the Asian American and Pacific Islander communities and its members and with local nonprofits organizations, coalitions and civic groups to help them incorporate civic and voter engagement into their existing frameworks. Visit APIAVote's website at: [www.apiavote.org](http://www.apiavote.org).



National Asian American Survey

National Asian American Survey (NAAS) is a scientific, independent, and nonpartisan effort to gauge the opinions of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the United States. NAAS conducted its first survey in 2008, which focused primarily on issues of civic engagement and political participation. In 2012, NAAS partnered with various community organizations to provide an in-depth look at where Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders stand on a variety of important public policy issues. All NAAS reports and data are available at: [www.naasurvey.com](http://www.naasurvey.com).

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the fastest-growing racial groups in the United States, the Asian American and Pacific Islander communities demonstrated their strength and commitment to civic participation by turning out in record numbers this past election. Our findings emphasize that the Asian American and Pacific Islander voting blocs are truly up for grabs. Although overall political engagement increased, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders do not strongly identify with any party. They vote for candidates who support and promote progress on issues that matter to their families and communities.

This report showcases results from **The 2012 Asian American and Pacific Islander Post-Election Survey (2012 AAPI PES)**, the largest nationally representative survey of Asian American and Pacific Islander voters in 2012. It was the only voter survey conducted in nine Asian languages, English, and Spanish. A total of 6,609 interviews were completed in November and December 2012 based on a nationally representative sample, with oversamples in California.

The following are significant findings in this report:

- More than two-thirds of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders voted for President Obama. Obama won every segment of the Asian American and Pacific Islander populations, including Vietnamese and Filipinos, who have historically voted more Republican. (p.6).
- We estimate that about 3.85 million Asian American and Pacific Islander votes were cast—approximately 2.67 million for Obama and 1.18 million for Mitt Romney. (p.7). Without Asian American and Pacific Islander support, Obama’s popular-vote margin of victory would have been 3.5 million. Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders contributed a *net* of 1.5 million votes to Obama’s popular-vote margin of victory. (p.8).
- Nearly half of Asian American and Pacific Islander registered voters identify as independent or undecided with respect to their party identification, pointing to the possibility that many remain open to persuasion and outreach in future elections. (p.11).
- Language ability plays a role in the preferences of Asian American and Pacific Islander voters; English-only surveys are likely to produce inaccurate results. (p.10).
- Uneven access to language assistance remains a significant concern, even in places where Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act mandates assistance. (p.10).
- Of issues relevant to Asian American and Pacific Islander voters, the strongest gaps in support for Obama over Romney were in the areas of education, racial discrimination, health care, and the environment. The smallest gap was on national security issues. (p.9).
- Community organizations significantly increased mobilization efforts for the 2012 election. Still, most Asian American voters (69 percent) and Pacific Islander voters (74 percent) said that no one contacted them about the election. Outreach to Filipinos and Indians—two of the largest Asian American groups—was especially low. (p.3).
- Among those who were contacted by political parties, Democrats more frequently contacted them. (p.3).
- Turnout among registered voters was on par with past elections, and the growing voting-eligible population meant that a record number of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders went to the polls in 2012. (p.5).



# INTRODUCTION TO ASIAN AMERICAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER COMMUNITIES

Since the Immigration and Nationality Act repealed race-based immigration quotas in 1965, the number of Asian Americans has grown dramatically. The Asian American community is the nation's fastest-growing racial group, increasing 46 percent between 2000 and 2010.<sup>1</sup> We are also a growing share of the immigrant population.<sup>2</sup> The second-fastest growing racial group is Pacific Islanders, whose population is growing at a rate of 40 percent.<sup>3</sup> As of 2011, the Asian American population was more than 17.6 million; the Pacific Islander population topped 1.2 million.<sup>4</sup> Asian Americans compose 6 percent of the population; Pacific Islanders account for 0.4 percent.<sup>5</sup>

Much of the Asian American community's population boom is fueled by growth in South Asian communities.<sup>6</sup> Among Pacific Islanders, Native Hawaiians and Samoans are the two largest subgroups, composing 42 percent and 14 percent, respectively, of the group's population.<sup>7</sup> Although states with historically high concentrations of Asian Americans, such as California and New York, continue to see their communities grow, Asian Americans are fanning out and becoming increasing shares of the populations of other states, such as Nevada, Arizona, North Carolina, and Georgia. In these four states, Asian American communities grew the fastest in the nation over the last decade. Florida and Virginia—which were presidential battlegrounds—also saw their Asian American populations grow faster than the national average.<sup>8</sup>

The communities' population growth is mirrored in their increasing political importance and has led Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders to become more politically active. Historically, Asian Americans voted at rates below the national average for two main reasons: lower rates of citizenship (only 61 percent of Asian Americans are citizens compared to the national average of 91 percent) and lower rates of voter registration (only 55 percent of Asian Americans are registered voters compared to the national average of 71 percent).<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, Asian Americans' share of the electorate is growing as more become naturalized citizens and as their U.S.-born children enter adulthood. In 1996, the Asian American share of the electorate was just 1.6 percent; in 2000, 1.8 percent; 2004, 2.3 percent; and 2008, nearly 2.5 percent. In 2008, approximately 600,000 Asian Americans voted for the first time.<sup>10</sup> We anticipate the final breakdown of the 2012 election will show a similar gain. We estimate that Asian Americans will have cast at least 2.8 percent of 2012 votes.<sup>11</sup>

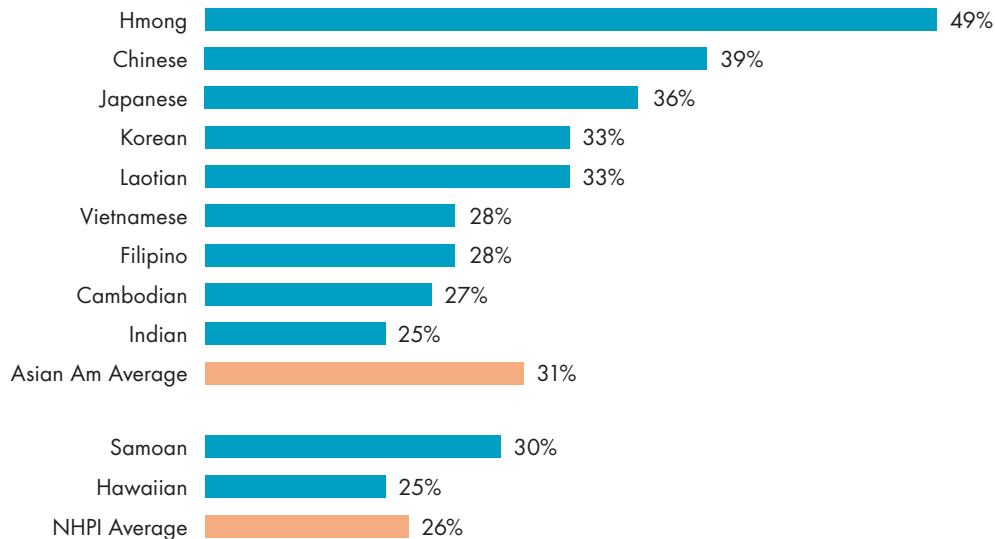
As Asian Americans' and Pacific Islanders' shares of the electorate grow, it becomes even more important to engage them through voter-mobilization efforts. Because a significant portion are independent voters or do not identify with a political party, it is critical for parties, candidates, and mobilizing organizations to reach out to our communities. In order to properly engage us, there must be a better understanding of the community, how it votes, why it votes, and ways to effectively reach us. This report provides detailed information about how Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders voted in November, what barriers to voting they encountered, and the level of mobilization conducted by the parties and community-based organizations to Asian American and Pacific Islander voters—all of which will help campaigns and get-out-the-vote efforts reach our communities in future elections.

## MOBILIZATION BY PARTIES AND GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS

One of our key findings was how little outreach there was to Asian American and Pacific Islander voters. Roughly two of every three Asian Americans said they were not contacted at all by campaigns, political parties or other election-focused groups, according to pre-election surveys.<sup>12</sup> The same was true for Pacific Islanders. Considering that nearly one-third were still undecided a month before Election Day, political groups missed an important opportunity to educate our voters—and potentially build a new base of support.

That changed little as Election Day arrived. The 2012 AAPI PES found that only one in three Asian Americans (31 percent) and about one in four Pacific Islanders (26 percent) were contacted. Also, as Figure 1 indicates, there was considerable variation across ethnic groups. Indians, Native Hawaiians, Cambodians, and Filipinos were contacted the least. Japanese, Chinese, and Hmong received the most outreach. Gender did not play a significant factor (29 percent of men were contacted; 33 percent of women were).

**FIGURE 1: PROPORTION REPORTING ELECTION-RELATED CONTACT**



Source: 2012 Asian American and Pacific Islander Post-Election Survey (2012 AAPI PES)

One other striking difference in election-related contact was based on whether or not people lived in a presidential battleground state: 48 percent in battleground versus 27 percent in other states.<sup>13</sup> However, since only 17 percent of Asian Americans lived in a battleground state, that significantly skewed the overall rate of contact (Table 1). Finally, contacted Asian Americans heard more from Democrats than Republicans: 50 percent said they were contacted “some” or “a great deal” by Democrats; 42 percent said that of Republicans; 25 percent were contacted by other organizations. The gap was similar regardless of whether or not the person lived in a battleground state.



**TABLE 1: PATTERNS OF CONTACT, BY BATTLEGROUND-STATE STATUS**

Battleground-state Status (% who live in)	Any Contact	AMONG THOSE CONTACTED, CONTACT BY			Unique Contact by Community Organizations*
		Democrats	Republicans	Community Organizations	
Battleground (17%)	48%	63%	54%	24%	6%
Non-Battleground (83%)	27%	42%	36%	25%	27%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>20%</b>

\*Of those contacted by community organizations, proportion who were not contacted by party organizations

Source: 2012 Asian American and Pacific Islander Post-Election Survey (2012 AAPI PES)

Importantly, however, a significant proportion of those contacted by community organizations (20 percent) were not contacted by either party. This was even higher in non-battleground states, where more than one in four voters (27 percent) was only contacted by a community organization. Given that 83 percent of community members did not live in a battleground state, our survey indicates that community organizations filled an important gap in outreach to Asian American voters.

Going beyond the national numbers, what do we know about voter mobilization “on the ground?” Here, we rely on qualitative assessments of campaign and grassroots outreach.<sup>14</sup> Unlike previous elections where the Asian American vote was viewed by presidential campaigns as marginal, 2012 brought some strategic efforts by the parties to focus on our communities in Nevada, Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Ohio.

For example, the Democratic Party and the Obama campaign hired field organizers who used their language and cultural skills to recruit hundreds of volunteers in Virginia and Nevada targeting Koreans, Vietnamese, Chinese, Indians, and Filipinos. Asian American political action committees (PACs) and Asian American and Pacific Islander Democratic networks also hired field staff, reached out to our communities, placed ads and editorials in ethnic media, and sought press coverage.

The Republican Party and the Romney campaign used a recorded message from former Labor Secretary Elaine Chao to target Chinese voters in Virginia. A Republican PAC sent literature and called Chinese, Filipino, Korean, and Vietnamese voters in Nevada. In Ohio, similar efforts focused on Chinese and Indian voters. A Republican Asian American and Pacific Islander network issued Asian language press releases, held events, and advertised in ethnic newspapers.

Outreach by the parties, however, is only part of the story. The 2012 election was a turning point for our communities. Early on, Asian American and Pacific Islander grassroots organizations began conducting voter registration efforts. They also sought to educate the community about the election process and voting rights, all of which resulted in significant non-partisan mobilization efforts across-the-board. Those efforts were not limited to battleground states, and included California, Texas, New York, and Washington.

APIAVote, AAJC, and other partners, supported more than 75 organizations in 15 states to increase civic participation in the Asian American and Pacific Islander communities.<sup>15</sup> For example, APIAVote conducted regional trainings, which introduced organizations to tools, tactics, and strategies for voter engagement. They were also briefed on changing election regulations. Organizations created regional field plans focusing on translated materials, encouraging early voting, and recruiting volunteers to provide assistance on Election Day. Volunteers knocked on doors, conducted exit surveys, coordinated with poll workers, and drove seniors to the polls.

Plans to increase voter participation, especially among immigrants, meant utilizing trusted messengers and contacting voters multiple times. Previous outreach undertakings—whether partisan or nonpartisan—typically were one-time efforts during either the registration or turnout stage. Based on experience, community organizers knew that registering Asian American and Pacific Islander immigrants would be harder than registering U.S.-born, native English-speaking citizens. Given many immigrants’ unfamiliarity with the political process, volunteers sometimes spent more than 20 minutes with each potential voter, walking them through various aspects of the electoral process.<sup>16</sup>

AAJC also worked with organizations in nine states to ensure that our voters understood their voting rights by distributing translated “know-your-rights” cards.<sup>17</sup> On Election Day, APIAVote and AAJC hosted an “election protection” hotline with operators conversant in Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Thai. Such extensive outreach by grassroots organizations was unprecedented.



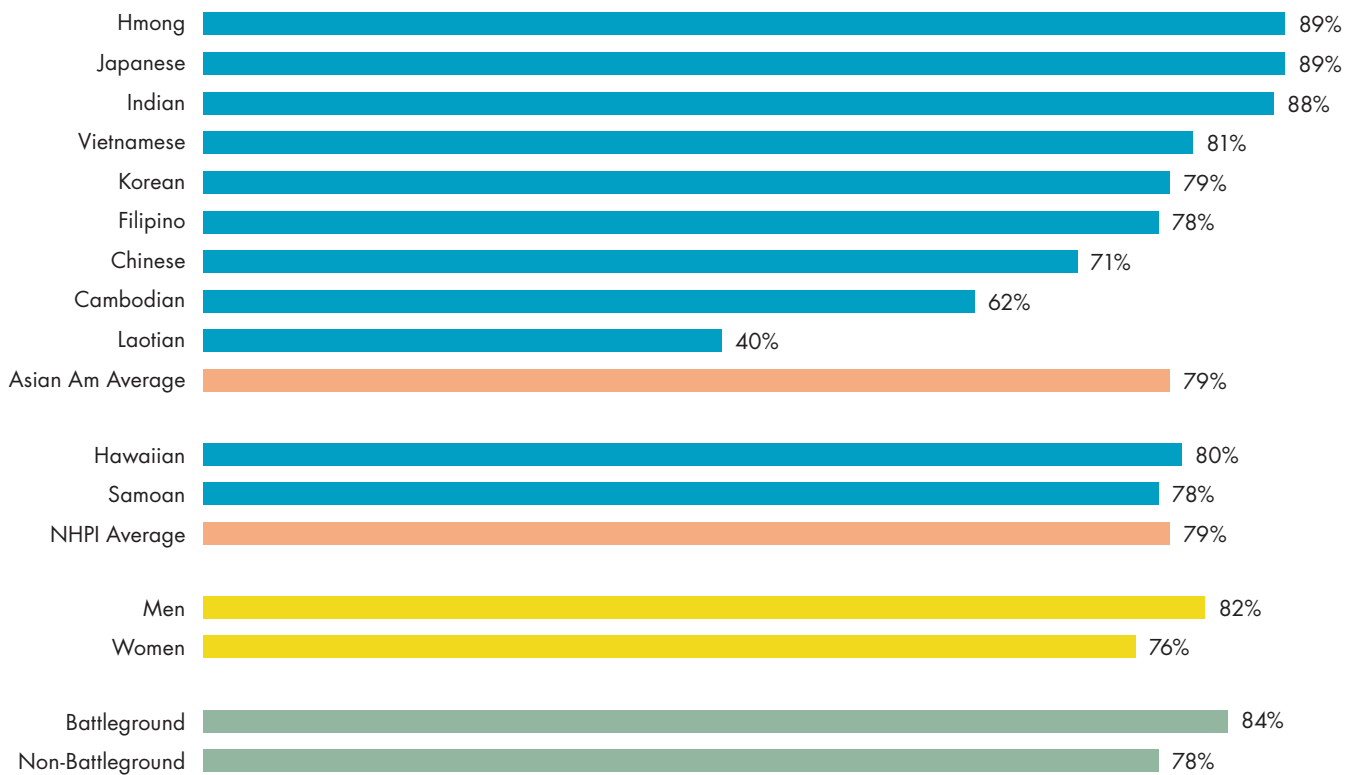
# ★ VOTER TURNOUT IN 2012

One primary goal of electoral contact is to get people to vote. Census Bureau data show that historically, fewer Asian Americans register compared to other major racial groups.<sup>18</sup> Because our survey was based on registered voters, it cannot speak to voter registration rates, but it does allow us to examine patterns of self-reported voter turnout.

As Figure 2 indicates, 79 percent of both Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders voted, which is on par with previous elections. Because of the growth of the population base of adult citizens since 2008 (through naturalization, the entrance of more second-generation Asian immigrants into adulthood, and continued population growth among Pacific Islanders) more Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are eligible to vote than in 2008, and thus we can safely predict that a record number of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders voted in 2012.

Turnout varied greatly by ethnicity, however. Significantly fewer Laotians and Cambodians voted, whereas many Hmong, Japanese, and Indians did. More Asian American men (82 percent) than women (76 percent) voted. Moreover, Asian American community turnout was higher in battleground states (84 percent compared with 78 percent elsewhere).

**FIGURE 2: VOTER TURNOUT BY ETHNICITY, GENDER, AND LOCATION**

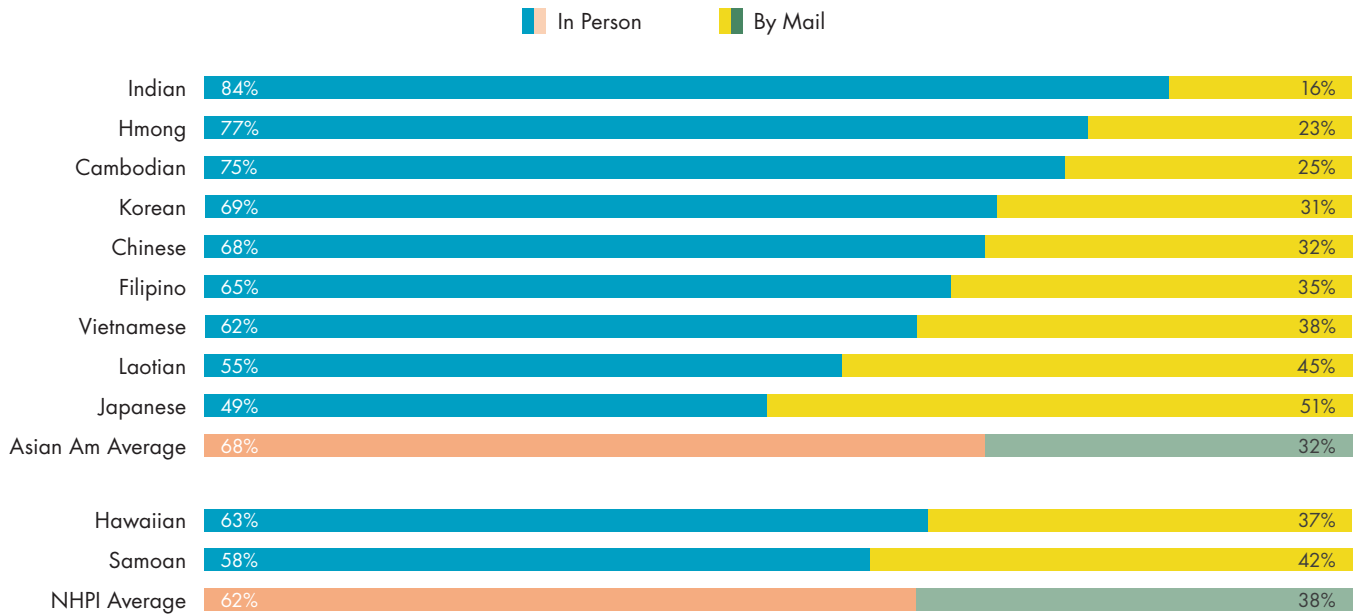


Source: 2012 Asian American and Pacific Islander Post-Election Survey (2012 AAPI PES)



Most voted in person (68 percent of Asian Americans; 62 percent of Pacific Islanders) while the remainder voted by mail. The proportion of people voting by mail was highest among Japanese (51 percent) followed by Laotian (44 percent) and Vietnamese (39 percent). Indians were least likely to vote by mail (16 percent) followed by Hmong (23 percent).

**FIGURE 3: VOTING METHOD**



Source: 2012 Asian American and Pacific Islander Post-Election Survey (2012 AAPI PES)



## ★ THE PRESIDENTIAL VOTE IN 2012

At 68 percent, most Asian Americans voted for Obama; 31 percent cast ballots for Romney; and 1 percent pulled the lever for someone else.<sup>19</sup> Pacific Islanders mirrored the Asian American community: 68 percent for Obama, 30 percent for Romney, and 2 percent for someone else.<sup>20</sup>

Our findings are similar to other national surveys of Asian American voters, including an election eve poll showing that 72 percent supported Obama and 26 percent supported Romney (margin of error of +/- 3.5%) and the National Election Pool (NEP) survey that had 73 percent of Asian Americans voting for Obama and 26 percent for Romney (with a margin of error of +/- 4%).<sup>21</sup> Any differences between our findings and the other surveys may have been the result of variation in survey designs. The election eve poll was conducted prior to Election Day and interviews were conducted in a limited number of Asian languages (Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese) and NEP survey did not conduct interviews in any Asian language. Additionally, NEP survey's sampling was not designed to be nationally representative of the Asian American population. By contrast, our survey was conducted in nine Asian languages and our results were drawn from a geographically dispersed sampling representative nationally of the Asian American population.

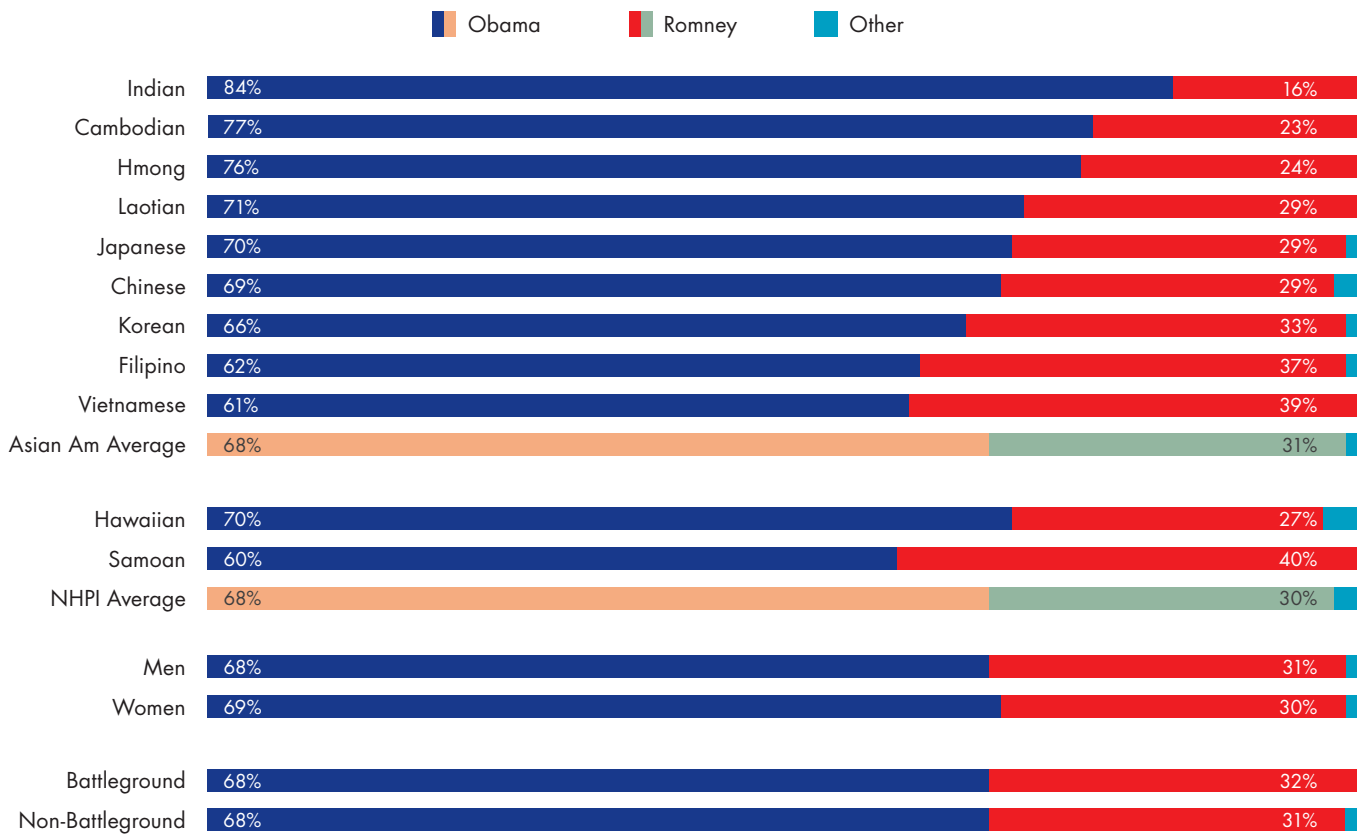


The socially and economically diverse Asian American and Pacific Islander populations are also not uniform in their political preferences.<sup>22</sup> Pre-election surveys revealed that about one-third of Asian Americans were undecided on the presidential race. Obama had the weakest support among Vietnamese, Koreans, and Filipinos, and strongest support among Indians, Cambodians, and Hmong.

Post-election interviews showed that Obama won every Asian American and Pacific Islander group (Figure 4). Even Vietnamese, who traditionally voted Republican, supported Obama and drifted away from the GOP in terms of their party identification. More than three in four Indians, Cambodians, and Hmong voted for Obama; and even among Filipinos and Vietnamese, more than 60 percent chose Obama over Romney. Pacific Islanders followed suit, with 70 percent of Native Hawaiians and 60 percent of Samoans voting for Obama.

Finally, unlike white voters, there was no significant gender gap. Asian American women went 69 percent for Obama, Asian American men, 68 percent—a difference within our margin of error.

**FIGURE 4: PRESIDENTIAL VOTE BY ETHNICITY, GENDER AND LOCATION**



Source: 2012 Asian American and Pacific Islander Post-Election Survey (2012 AAPI PES)



### *Asian Americans' and Pacific Islanders' Impact on the Presidential Election*

Using the final certified popular-vote tallies and our estimate of the Asian American share of the electorate (2.8%) we estimate that Asian Americans cast at least 3.6 million votes out of a total of approximately 129 million.<sup>23</sup> We further estimate that about 2.5 million Asian Americans voted for Obama while 1.1 million voted for Romney. We also estimate that 250,000 Pacific Islanders voted in 2012, with 170,000 voting for Obama, 75,000 for Romney, and the rest for another candidate.

Without Asian American and Pacific Islander support, Obama’s popular-vote margin of victory would have been 3.5 million. Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders contributed a *net* of 1.5 million votes to Obama’s popular-vote margin of victory. The effect can be interpreted either as *augmenting Obama’s popular-vote margin of victory by 43 percent* (1.5 million contributed on top of 3.5 million votes separating Obama and Romney), or as accounting for about *30 percent of Obama’s vote margin of victory* (1.5 million votes out of his 5 million-vote margin of victory).

Given the relatively small sample sizes for individual states such as Florida, Virginia, and Nevada, estimating Asian Americans’ impact on the Electoral College using our survey data was considerably more difficult. Still, using Asian Americans’ vote share from the 2008 election as a conservative floor, we can say that the Asian American share of the 2012 presidential vote was likely greater than the margin of victory in Florida and Virginia, and about half the margin of victory in Nevada and Ohio (Table 2).

**TABLE 2: OBAMA MARGIN OF VICTORY COMPARED TO ASIAN AMERICAN VOTE SHARE IN SELECT STATES**

State	Electoral Votes	Obama Margin of Victory (2012)	Asian American Share of Vote (2008)
Florida	29	0.9%	1.1%
Nevada	6	6.6%	3.2%
North Carolina	15	-2.2%	1%
Ohio	18	1.9%	0.9%
Virginia	13	3%	3.7%

*Source: Authors’ calculations based on Current Population Survey*

More broadly, our estimates of the potential Asian American and Pacific Islander electorates suggest that investment in voter registration, party outreach, and mobilization of these communities can make the difference in elections. For example, the presidential race in North Carolina could have been more competitive and the Asian American electorate could have been more pivotal to the presidential and U.S. Senate races in Nevada and Virginia with more investment in voter registration and turnout.<sup>24</sup>



## ★ ISSUES IMPORTANT TO VOTE CHOICE

Addressing the issues most important to Asian American and Pacific Islander voters is one way to mobilize them. Asian American and Pacific Islander voters took into account candidates’ views on a number of issues in deciding whom to select. Like all voters, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders were highly concerned about the economy, including policies regarding jobs, the budget deficit, and Social Security. Going into the election, two out of three likely voters viewed jobs as a key issue.<sup>25</sup> Education and health care also factored heavily into the decision for a majority of these voters.

The same issues were still paramount post-election for Asian American voters (Table 3). Immigration, the environment, and racial discrimination were also on their minds. Finally, they were also very concerned about national security and foreign policy issues. The same issues were a priority for Pacific Islanders, the only notable differences being slightly lower importance accorded to the environment, immigration, and national security.<sup>26</sup>

Among Asian Americans ranking the economy and jobs as “very important” to their vote, 67 percent voted for Obama (Table 3). A similar pattern held true for those who saw national security as very important, with only 34 percent of those voters selecting Romney. Obama’s advantage was even greater among voters who ranked racial discrimination and the environment, respectively, as “very important.”

**TABLE 3: PRESIDENTIAL VOTE BY “VERY IMPORTANT” ISSUES<sup>27</sup>**

Issue (% as very important)	Obama	Romney
Economy and Jobs (86%)	67%	33%
Education (81%)	71%	29%
Health Care (80%)	71%	29%
National Security (72%)	66%	34%
Social Security (71%)	70%	30%
Environment (59%)	72%	28%
Racial Discrimination (54%)	74%	26%
Immigration (43%)	70%	30%

Source: 2012 Asian American and Pacific Islander Post-Election Survey (2012 AAPI PES)

## ENGLISH PROFICIENCY AND ASIAN LANGUAGE ACCESS

With approximately 60 percent of the population born outside the United States, nearly three out of four Asian Americans speak a language other than English at home.<sup>28</sup> Roughly one in two Asian American adults (44 percent) has difficulty speaking English.<sup>29</sup> Excluding Indians, Filipinos, and Japanese, a majority of adult Asian American citizens has trouble with English. Even within ethnic groups with higher rates of English proficiency, a significant proportion of adult citizens have difficulty (e.g. 30 percent for Filipinos and 36 percent for Japanese).<sup>30</sup> Among respondents in our post-election survey, 84 percent said they spoke a language other than English at home. Similarly, the Limited-English proficient (LEP) rates were higher with a majority (55 percent) stating they spoke English less than very well, which is the Census Bureau standard for LEP.<sup>31</sup>

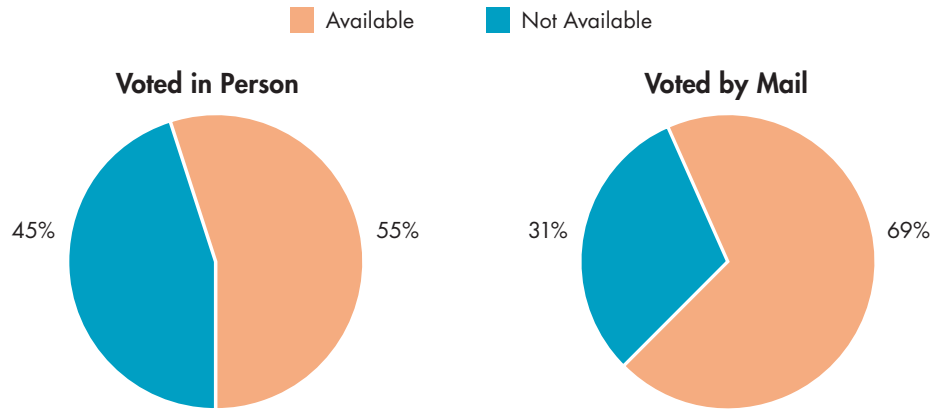
Language difficulties can be a barrier to voting. For example, turnout among those who had difficulty speaking English was 9 percent lower (75 percent) than those who did not (84 percent). Overall, 6 percent of all respondents and 8 percent of those who have difficulty speaking English cited language barriers as a reason for not voting. Finally, language barriers may be one of the reasons why almost one-third of Asian Americans voted by mail. LEP voters may want to vote by mail because they have access to friends and relatives to provide translation at home and can take their time completing the ballot without worrying about holding up the line. At the same time, voting by mail may also appeal to voters without language difficulties because of its convenience.

Reaching and connecting with the community requires providing resources in Asian languages. In some areas, Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act requires jurisdictions to provide language assistance during the voting process. Whether a jurisdiction must do so is determined by a formula that looks at voters’ English abilities and literacy rates.<sup>32</sup>



For Section 203 jurisdictions, our survey data indicated large gaps in the actual provision of such assistance. Only 55 percent of respondents living in covered jurisdictions said that “translated election documents or bilingual election workers” were available at the polls (Figure 5). This proportion was higher among those who voted by mail (69 percent), but still well short of the language assistance required by law.<sup>33</sup>

**FIGURE 5: ACCESS TO LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE AMONG LIMITED ENGLISH-SPEAKING VOTERS IN SECTION 203 JURISDICTIONS**



Source: 2012 Asian American and Pacific Islander Post-Election Survey (2012 AAPI PES)

Past research indicates several potential reasons for these gaps. Translated materials may not have reached polling locations or may have been hidden from view—for example, still in the original packaging, placed on a back table, or tucked underneath a table. Jurisdictions may not have deployed bilingual poll workers to all necessary polling locations and/or those workers may not have shown up at the polling place. Another issue is that bilingual poll workers may not have been easily identifiable by the voters who needed them. Finally, voters who needed help may not have known that they were entitled to it and may not have requested the appropriate ballot, materials, or assistance.<sup>34</sup>



Ensuring effective language assistance is a part of the political process and is important for engaging Asian Americans.<sup>35</sup> Without it, not all of our community members can fully exercise their voting rights.

## ★ THE CONTINUING NEED FOR ASIAN-LANGUAGE POLLING

A correlation between candidate choice and survey interview language seemed to emerge. Fifty-four percent of our respondents were surveyed in English, 46 percent in an Asian language. Those surveyed in English were significantly more likely to have voted for Obama (Table 4). Indeed, the vote split between Obama and Romney in our English interviews (72 percent v. 27 percent) is nearly identical to the vote split in the NEP survey, which had no Asian language support.

**TABLE 4: PRESIDENTIAL VOTE BY INTERVIEW LANGUAGE**

	Asian Language	English	TOTAL
Obama	65%	72%	<b>68%</b>
Romney	35%	27%	<b>31%</b>
Other	0%	1%	<b>1%</b>

Source: 2012 Asian American and Pacific Islander Post-Election Survey (2012 AAPI PES)

Survey interview language also provided a partial view of party identification among Asian Americans (Table 5). For example, 44 percent of English respondents identified with the Democratic Party; only 27 percent of Asian-language respondents did so. This does not mean, however, that identification with the Republican Party is higher among Asian-language respondents. Instead, the key difference is that about one in three Asian-language respondents (32 percent) did not think in terms of political parties, while only 10 percent of English respondents felt the same.

**TABLE 5: PARTY IDENTIFICATION, BY LANGUAGE OF INTERVIEW**

	Asian Language	English	TOTAL
Democrat	27%	44%	<b>35%</b>
Republican	18%	17%	<b>18%</b>
Independent	23%	28%	<b>25%</b>
Other Party	0%	1%	<b>0%</b>
Don't Know / Don't think in these terms	32%	10%	<b>22%</b>

Source: 2012 Asian American and Pacific Islander Post-Election Survey (2012 AAPI PES)

## CONCLUSION: FUTURE TRENDS

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders overwhelmingly supported Obama over Romney, by more than a two-to-one margin. Still, one of the persistent dynamics of the Asian American and Pacific Islander electorates is the potential for persuasion by candidates of either party. As noted in pre-election surveys, the proportion of undecided voters among Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders was about three-to-four times greater than the national average, even a month out from Election Day.<sup>36</sup>

Further examination of party identification among Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders reveals that a sizable proportion does not identify with either party. As we can see from Table 5, only 53 percent of Asian Americans identified with either major party (with similar findings for Pacific Islanders). These results indicate that party outreach (which, so far, has been relatively lacking among these communities), could shape future vote choices of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, particularly in-language outreach.

For future campaigns, it is clear that this vast untapped potential base of support requires commitment and investment in outreach efforts by candidates, political parties, and other organizations. These outreach efforts must recognize our communities' diversity by including materials in numerous languages and staffing that reflects our ethnic and language diversity. These outreach efforts will complement existing grassroots efforts by community organizations working to increase the civic participation of Asian American and Pacific Islander voters.

The power of the Asian American and Pacific Islander electorates is on the rise. Our survey helps lay out the blueprint for engaging their communities and unleashing the untapped potential of Asian American and Pacific Islander voters.



- <sup>1</sup> Asian American Center for Advancing Justice, *A Community of Contrasts: Asian Americans in the United States, 2011*, (Los Angeles, 2011), 7, [www.advancingjustice.org/pdf/Community\\_of\\_Contrast.pdf](http://www.advancingjustice.org/pdf/Community_of_Contrast.pdf).
- <sup>2</sup> US Census Bureau, *The Newly Arrived Foreign-Born Population of the United States: 2010*, (Washington, DC, 2011), 2, [www.census.gov/prod/2011pubs/acsbr10-16.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/2011pubs/acsbr10-16.pdf).
- <sup>3</sup> Asian American Center for Advancing Justice, *A Community of Contrasts*, 7.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>6</sup> Between 2000 and 2010, the Bangladeshi and Pakistani population doubled in size, the Sri Lankan community grew by 85 percent and the Indian community by 68 percent. See, Asian American Center for Advancing Justice, *A Community of Contrasts*, 9.
- <sup>7</sup> American Community Survey, 2011 one-year estimate using American FactFinder, using “race alone or in combination with one or more races.”
- <sup>8</sup> Asian American Center for Advancing Justice, *A Community of Contrasts*, 8.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.
- <sup>10</sup> Authors’ calculations based on Current Population Survey Voter Supplements.
- <sup>11</sup> Authors’ calculations based on Current Population Survey Voter Supplements.
- <sup>12</sup> Pre-election surveys referenced in this report are Karthick Ramakrishnan and Taeku Lee, *Public Opinion of a Growing Electorate: Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in 2012*, (Riverside, CA, 2012), [www.naasurvey.com/presentations.html](http://www.naasurvey.com/presentations.html) and Asian American Justice Center, Asian Pacific Islander American Vote, and Lake Research Partners, *Asian American Survey: Findings from a Survey of 700 Asian American Voters nationwide plus 100 each in FL, IL, NV, and VA*, (Washington, DC, 2012), [www.advancingequality.org/files/AsianAmericanSurvey.f.050412.final.pdf](http://www.advancingequality.org/files/AsianAmericanSurvey.f.050412.final.pdf).
- <sup>13</sup> Based on fall 2008 polls of the general population as identified in *Real Clear Politics*; we categorized the following as battleground states: Ohio, Virginia, Florida, New Hampshire, Iowa, Colorado, Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Missouri, Nevada, and North Carolina.
- <sup>14</sup> Outreach assessments of grassroots organizations that partnered with APIAVote in the 2012 election.
- <sup>15</sup> States were: California, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, North Carolina, New York, Nevada, Ohio, Oregon, Texas, Virginia, and Washington.
- <sup>16</sup> In some regions, our local community partners learned quickly that street fairs and festivals may provide great visibility but were not an efficient use of time in engaging voters on a more substantial level. In other states, such as Oregon and Washington, the prevalence of vote-by-mail meant that organizations needed to host ballot parties, with creative, multimedia strategies to get people to understand various parts of the ballot.
- <sup>17</sup> Cards distributed in nine states: Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, Ohio, Texas, and Virginia.
- <sup>18</sup> Voter registration rates in 2008 were about 55 percent for Asian Americans, 59 percent for Latinos, 70 percent for blacks, and 74 percent for non-Hispanic whites. Data on voter registration are not provided for Pacific Islanders. See [www.census.gov/hhes/www/socdemo/voting/publications/historical/tabA-6.csv](http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/socdemo/voting/publications/historical/tabA-6.csv).
- <sup>19</sup> These figures are within the margins of error of our preliminary estimate of the presidential vote (71 percent Obama, 28 percent Romney, and 1 percent other), based on 1,918 valid responses of those who voted: +/- 2 percent in the case of the preliminary estimate, and +/- 1.5 percent in the case of the final estimate. This excludes those who did not vote, and those who refused or did not know how they voted in the November election, for a total 1,918 valid responses.
- <sup>20</sup> The sampling margin of error is +/- 1.5 percent in the case of Asian Americans and 5 percent in the case of Pacific Islanders.
- <sup>21</sup> The election eve poll was conducted by Latino Decisions/Asian Decisions for National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development and the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund and the National Election Pool survey was conducted by Edison Research on behalf of a consortium of news organizations—ABC News, Associated Press, CBS News, CNN, Fox News, and NBC News (hereafter “NEP survey”).
- <sup>22</sup> See Janelle Wong, S. Karthick Ramakrishnan, Taeku Lee, and Jane Junn. 2011. *Asian American Political Participation: Emerging Constituents and Their Political Identities*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation; Pei-te Lien, Mary Margaret Conway, and Janelle Wong. 2004. *The Politics of Asian Americans: Diversity and Community*. New York: Routledge.
- <sup>23</sup> See Federal Election Commission, “Official 2012 Presidential General Election Results,” [www.fec.gov/pubrec/fe2012/2012presgeresults.pdf](http://www.fec.gov/pubrec/fe2012/2012presgeresults.pdf) (retrieved February 21, 2012).
- <sup>24</sup> For example, the number of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders eligible to vote was more than ten times the margin of victory in the Nevada Senate race and 22 percent greater than the margin of victory in Virginia’s.
- <sup>25</sup> Karthick Ramakrishnan and Taeku Lee, *Public Opinion of a Growing Electorate: Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in 2012*. See also Asian American Justice Center, Asian Pacific Islander American Vote, and Lake Research Partners, *Asian American Survey: Findings from a Survey of 700 Asian American Voters nationwide plus 100 each in FL, IL, NV, and VA*.
- <sup>26</sup> The issue priority differences were eight percentage points lower for Pacific Islanders on the environment and six percentage points lower on immigration and national security.
- <sup>27</sup> Two-way vote split between Obama and Romney, with “other” excluded.
- <sup>28</sup> Asian American Center for Advancing Justice, *A Community of Contrasts*, 17, 24.
- <sup>29</sup> Authors’ analysis of American Community Survey 2010 data.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>31</sup> The LEP rates of respondents for the different ethnic groups were also higher than national rates with more than three in five Cambodian, Chinese, Hmong, and Laotian respondents and more than three in four Vietnamese and Korean respondents stating they were LEP. Even for those with higher levels of proficiency, one in five Japanese respondents, almost one in three Indian respondents, and almost two in five Filipino respondents state that they were LEP.
- <sup>32</sup> Recognizing the link between language barriers and low voter turnout, Congress enacted Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act in 1975. In 2011, the Section 203 determinations were updated and jurisdictions in Massachusetts, Michigan, Nevada, and New Jersey were added to the seven states that contained jurisdictions previously covered under Section 203 for one or more Asian American populations (Alaska, California, Hawaii, Illinois, New York, Texas, and Washington). A total of 43 Asian American populations are now covered under Section 203 across eight Asian American ethnic groups: Asian Indian, Bangladeshi, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Other Asian-not specified (Cambodian and Thai). See Asian American Center for Advancing Justice, *Help Asian Americans Protect their Voting Rights: A Guide to Ensure Language Assistance During Elections*, (Washington, DC, 2012), 4-5, [www.advancingequality.org/files/Section%20203%20handbook%20Final%2002%202010.pdf](http://www.advancingequality.org/files/Section%20203%20handbook%20Final%2002%202010.pdf).
- <sup>33</sup> Our survey included 18 out of 22 Section 203 covered jurisdictions, including coverage in all large cities (e.g., New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, and Houston).
- <sup>34</sup> For more details on the types of problems that may arise, see Asian American Center for Advancing Justice, *Help Asian Americans Protect their Voting Rights: A Guide to Ensure Language Assistance During Elections*, 8–12.
- <sup>35</sup> For more information on Section 203 implementation best practices, see *Ibid.*, 19.
- <sup>36</sup> See National Asian American Survey, *Public Opinion of a Growing Electorate*, [www.naasurvey.com/presentations.html](http://www.naasurvey.com/presentations.html).

# APPENDIX

## Methodology

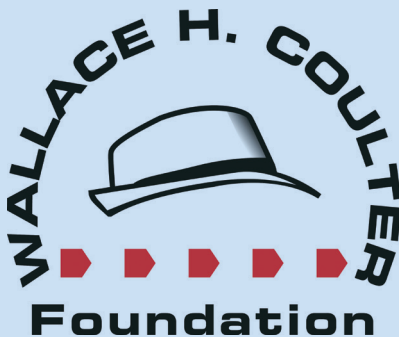
This report is based on data collected from 6,609 telephone interviews of adults in the United States who identify themselves as Asian American, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, or of any ethnicity or national origin recognized in the Asian and Pacific Islander race categories by the US Census Bureau. Interviews were conducted by telephone from November 7, 2012 through December 26, 2012. Respondents were offered a choice of language to be interviewed in English, Spanish, Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese), Hindi, Hmong, Japanese, Khmer, Korean, Laotian, Tagalog, and Vietnamese. The randomly drawn list sample was obtained from TargetSmart with ethnicity coded by Ethnic Technologies (and Catalist for the Hmong sample, for which TargetSmart does not have an ethnic classification). Lists of registered voters were obtained from state registrars, matched to consumer information data, and updated for address changes.

The margin of error based on sample size is 1.5 percent for Asian Americans and 5 percent for Pacific Islanders. By ethnicity, sample sizes and margins of error are as follows: Cambodian (395, 5 percent), Chinese (1151, 2.9 percent), Filipino (957, 3.2 percent), Hmong (290, 5.8 percent), Indian (898, 3.3 percent), Japanese (534, 4.2 percent), Korean (670, 3.8 percent), Laotian (288, 5.8 percent), Vietnamese (956, 3.2 percent), Native Hawaiian (314, 6 percent), and Samoan (156, 8 percent).

Sampling error from the size of our sample is only one type of error possible in surveys like the 2012 AAPI PES. Findings may also be subject to variation from question wording, question order, and the time and date when the survey was conducted.

The findings in this report are weighted statistically to account for any demographic differences of interest between the sample and population parameters for analyses of the national Asian American and Pacific Islander populations, as well as for subgroups of the population, on the following dimensions: size of group within a state, educational attainment, and gender. Interviewing Services of America, Inc. (ISA) of Van Nuys, California conducted the survey, under the supervision of Francine Cafarchia, John Roses, and Frank Weimer. Mobile phones were included in the dialing procedure. Interview translations were conducted by ISA, and audited by a team of bilingual staff in organizations partnering with Asian Pacific American Legal Center (APALC), a member of the Asian American Center for Advancing Justice. Daniel Ichinose from APALC provided critical input and involvement in the design of the survey sample and survey instrument.

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