

## CHAPTER 32

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# ASIAN AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION

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## THE ASIAN AMERICAN PUBLIC

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ACCORDING to the US census, Americans of Asian and Pacific Islander heritage have been one of the fastest-growing populations in the United States over the last several decades. In 1960 there were fewer than 1 million Asian Americans in the US, or less than 0.5 percent of the total population. By 2008 the Asian American population had grown to 15.3 million, comprising roughly 5 percent of the total US population. This trend of explosive growth is expected to continue, with census projections of 44.4 million Asian Americans by 2060, slightly more than 10 percent of the expected total population of 432 million Americans that year.<sup>1</sup>

The Asian American population is also characterized by at least three other salient demographic features: historic patterns of geographic concentration, emergent patterns of geographic dispersion, and a continuing pattern of striking demographic diversity. Nationally, Asian Americans are geographically concentrated. According to the 2008 American Community Survey, one in two Asian Americans lives in the West region of the United States; and one in two live in California, New York, or Texas. Ten states account for 75 percent of the Asian American population in the United States.

<sup>1</sup> The census figures on the Asian American population are based on the more inclusive “alone or in combination” identification with Asian or Pacific Islander categories.

At the same time, Asian Americans are becoming increasingly geographically dispersed. Between the 1990 and 2000 censuses, the population more than doubled in nineteen states. In 2000 seventy-one counties had Asian American populations that were more than 5 percent of the resident population, and the number is likely higher today. By region, the Asian American population grew an impressive 57 percent in the West between 1990 and 2000, but this increase is somewhat modest in comparison to the 79 percent growth in the Northeast, 84 percent growth in the Midwest, and 107 percent growth in the South. Once a small and heavily geographically concentrated population, Asian Americans are, like Latinos, growing both in numbers as well as in presence in areas across the United States. Today and going forward, studies of American public opinion need to take account of the perspectives of this segment of the US population.

Asian Americans are remarkably diverse in terms of ethnicity, national origin, language, religion, cultural orientation, socioeconomic status, and immigration histories. Focusing on regions and countries of origin alone, Asian Americans have shifted from a population of primarily working age men from China and Japan in 1900 to a considerably more diverse population today in terms of national origin, gender, class background, and modes of entry into the United States. According to federal government criteria in the US census today, the term "Asian" refers to individuals with origins in the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent and to individuals who self-identify racially as "Asian Indian," "Chinese," "Filipino," "Korean," "Japanese," "Vietnamese," or "Other Asian," including Asians of Burmese, Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, Pakistani, and Thai origin.

Asian Americans in the United States today are very much a "moving target" in terms of both their geographic location and their ethnic composition, within a context of growing diversity. However, what unites this diverse group is a shared racial classification and the accompanying assignment of tropes that have run the gamut in US history from "coolie" to "model minority" (Espiritu 1992; Junn 2007; C. Kim 1999; Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004; Lopez and Espiritu 1990; Okamoto 2003; Wong 2006). Contrary to contemporary stereotypes (Lowe 1996; Tuan 1996; Wu 2002), not all Asian Americans are well-educated professionals, and instead, the population is bimodal in terms of educational and economic resources. Nevertheless, and by most measures, Asian Americans today have higher household incomes and higher levels of educational attainment on average than any other group of Americans classified by race. According to the 2004 American Community Survey (ACS), about 48 percent of the Asian American ("Asian alone") population attained a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to roughly 30 percent of the non-Hispanic white population and 27 percent of the general population. Similarly, the median annual household income for Asian Americans in the 2004 ACS was just above \$56,000, with non-Hispanic whites at about \$49,000 and the general population averaging less than \$45,000 by comparison (Cheng and Yang 1996; Lee and Kumashiro 2005).

What are the implications of these demographic and socioeconomic factors on public opinion among Asian Americans? We begin by reviewing existing social science

research on Asian American political attitudes, noting the small number of studies on this dynamic population. We then move on to discuss the contours of Asian American political partisanship and attitudes on several important political issues by examining data from the 2008 National Asian American Survey (NAAS), the first national survey of political behavior and attitudes among Asian Americans. We conclude with observations about the challenges of gathering opinion data among Asian Americans and a discussion of research strategies to meet those challenges in the future.

## RESEARCH ON ASIAN AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION

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There have been a number of surveys with reasonably large samples of Asian American respondents, but they generally fall into one of three groupings, each with their limitations. The first are a set of geographically specific samples that do not offer broad coverage of the national Asian American population, such as the Los Angeles Study of Urban Inequality, the Immigrant Second Generation in Metropolitan New York project, and the University of Massachusetts–Boston Institute of Asian American Studies polls. Next are media polls that include a limited set of explanatory variables and are therefore not well suited for in-depth research, such as the *Los Angeles Times*'s polls of Chinese, Filipino, Korean, and Vietnamese Americans in the 1990s; the Kaiser Family Foundation's surveys with the *Washington Post* in 1995 and 2001 and with the *San José Mercury News* in 2004. Finally, there are exit poll data that are limited both in terms of the small number of questions included in the survey instrument, and by their sampling frames (e.g., Voter News Service/National Election Pool exit polls and Asian-specific exit polls by the Asian Pacific American Legal Center, Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, Chinese American Voters' Education Committee, and other advocacy organizations). In many of these cases, the approaches to sampling fall short of being representative of the Asian American population as a result of exclusive reliance on listed surname frames, English-only interviews, and selection on either one or only a few national origin–ethnic groups.

Important work examining Asian American political behavior and some political attitudes has been written based on, in particular, the Kaiser Family Foundation survey of 2001, including Chong and Kim (2006) and Masuoka (2006). The 2004 Ethnic Politics Study also included a sample of Asian Americans (Junn and Masuoka 2008). However, as with other national survey data, these data collections are limited in inferential power across the range of Asian Americans in the US because of the inability of standard national samples to capture variation by national origin group and Asian language.

The most significant scholarly effort thus far to study Asian American political behavior is the Pilot National Asian American Political Survey (PNAAPS) of 2001

conducted by Pei-te Lien, M. Margaret Conway and Janelle Wong (Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004). This study surveyed 1,218 Asian Americans residing in the Metropolitan Statistical Areas with the largest concentrations of Asian Americans in the United States (New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Honolulu, and Chicago). Because Asian Americans were concentrated in urban areas on the east and west coasts, this method yielded a sample representing 40 percent of the Asian American population. However, the validity and utility of inferences were limited by sample size for particular national groups, the disproportionate representation of foreign-born Asians and of respondents who selected a non-English language for interview, and the heavy representation of Asian Americans living in large central cities. Much of the existing and recent research on Asian American political behavior in a national context has drawn description and inferences from this important data collection.

The National Poll of Asian Pacific Islanders on the 2004 election (NPAPI 2004) interviewed 1,004 Asian American registered voters who were “likely voters” in the 2004 presidential election. This approach was useful for understanding the potential influence of Asian Americans in that election, but tells us less about the barriers that Asian Americans face in terms of democratic participation (such as becoming citizens and registered voters), the key political interests and priorities that characterize the community as a whole, or the future political potential of non-citizens and those who were not registered to vote. Importantly, neither of these studies included a large enough sample to allow for meaningful analysis within specific ethnic subgroup and national origin.

One major area in public opinion scholarship where there is significant published research on Asian Americans is on political party identification. Even for this important indicator of political attitudes, scholars and political commentators have encountered a dearth of systematic, reliable data on which to base expectations about Asian American partisanship. A powerful example of the variability and suspect quality of data on Asian American partisanship is the striking “house” effects between two exit polls fielded in California following the 1996 general election. The Voter News Service found Asian Americans to be more Republican than Democratic (48 percent to 32 percent), while the *Los Angeles Times* found the opposite—Asian American Democrats appeared, by this exit poll, to outweigh Asian Republicans (44 percent to 33 percent). Notwithstanding these seemingly intractable challenges to reliable, valid data on Asian American public opinion, a clear and emerging pattern is apparent even with less than optimal existing poll data on Asian Americans.

As with Latinos, Asian Americans appear to favor the Democratic Party, and this is a partisan pattern that seems to have developed over the past few decades. In the first study of Asian American partisanship acquisition, Cain, Kiewiet, and Uhlaner (1991) found—using data from a 1984 survey of Asian Americans in California—a roughly even split in partisanship and that Asian Americans were far more Republican in their partisanship than Latinos. The authors argue that this effect resulted from the salience of foreign policy concerns among Chinese, Koreans, and Southeast Asians and that there was no discernible effect of being a racial-ethnic minority that pulled Asians toward the Democratic Party among their second- and third-generation respondents.

Yet according to one review of twelve national, state-level, and metropolitan-level surveys in the 1990s, the roughly even split in Asian American partisanship began to take a discernibly Democratic turn by the 1998 off-year elections (Lien 2001). This leaning has become solid in recent years. In the post-election 2000–1 PNAAPS, Democratic identifiers outnumbered Republican identifiers by more than two to one, and across all ethnic subgroups except for Vietnamese Americans (who lean modestly toward the Republican Party). Partisanship remains an important predictor of political participation among Asian Americans (Wong 2000).

This partisan leaning is also evident in how Asians vote when we examine exit poll data. We note, however, there are strong reasons to use caution when reading exit poll data on Asian Americans. The data can be biased by reliance on sampling selective precincts, sampling based on past voting behavior, and interviewing only in English or with a predominance of particular ethnic–national origin groups. According to the 2000 Voter News Service exit poll, a solid majority of Asian Americans voted for Al Gore over George W. Bush (55 to 41 percent), and the advantage for Democratic presidential candidates among Asian American voters grows steadily over successive elections with 56 to 44 percent in 2004, and 62 to 37 percent in 2006. In the most recent presidential elections, the 2008 National Election Pool found a decisive 63 to 34 percentage points split in favor of Barack Obama over John McCain, his Republican opponent.

This emerging pattern is also mirrored by voter registration studies in 2004 and 2006 by the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF) in New York and the Asian Pacific American Legal Center in southern California, which found marked increases in the number of Asian American registered Democrats. The most recent 2008 AALDEF exit poll (a non-partisan poll that is admittedly non-random in its sample) found 58 percent of its Asian American respondents identified as Democrats, 14 percent as Republicans, and 26 percent unaffiliated.<sup>2</sup>

There is a growing literature on Asian American voting and political participation, with less emphasis on public opinion and attitudes (Cain 1988; Lien 1994, 1997; Nakanishi 1991; Ong and Nakanishi 1996; Ramakrishnan 2005; Ramakrishnan, Wong, Lee, and Junn 2009; Rim 2009; Tam 1995). One persistent question remains the relatively low political participation, particularly voting, among Asian Americans despite high levels of education and income. While higher socioeconomic status Asian Americans still participate at a higher rate than those with fewer resources, the average rates of activity remain lower than expected (Ramakrishnan 2005; Wong, Ramakrishnan, Lee, and Junn 2010). Taeku Lee's contribution to *Transforming Race Relations* (Lee 2000) is among the few systematic studies of Asian American public opinion focusing on racial attitudes.

<sup>2</sup> The Asian American Legal Defense Foundation conducts election exit poll data but do not use methods of random selection for polling places. While useful in multiple ways, AALDEF exit poll data have inferential limitations. For example, the 2008 AALDEF exit poll reported a 76 percent to 22 percent split between support for Obama and McCain, substantially greater than found in National Election Pool results.

## THE 2008 NATIONAL ASIAN AMERICAN SURVEY

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One of the main reasons for the sparse research on Asian American political attitudes is the absence of national survey data. The 2008 NAAS was the first nationally representative sample of Asian Americans to focus on political behavior and attitudes and was conducted under the direction of the authors. The NAAS is the most comprehensive survey to date of the civic and political life of Asians in the United States, with 5,159 interviews conducted over two months in 2008, and including large numbers of respondents from the six largest Asian national origin groups including Asian Indians, Chinese, Filipinos, Japanese, Koreans, and Vietnamese. In order to capture opinion accurately among this heavily immigrant population, the interviews in the NAAS were conducted in multiple languages. More than a third of respondents completed the interview in their native language, a proportion not surprising given the high proportion of foreign-born among Asian Americans. While two thirds of Asian Americans are foreign-born, this figure includes the children of immigrants. Taking adults only, eight in ten Asian Americans were born in a country outside of the United States and the first language of most of these immigrants is one other than English.

Surveys for the NAAS were conducted during the 2008 general election season by telephone, between August 18 and October 29, 2008. The NAAS includes adults in the United States who identify any family background from countries in Asia.<sup>3</sup> Survey interviews were conducted in eight languages, including English, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean, Vietnamese, Tagalog, Japanese, and Hindi. While heavily immigrant, nearly two thirds of Asian Americans are citizens and more than half are eligible to vote. The registered voters in the sample included 784 of Indian origin, 748 Chinese, 521 Vietnamese, 406 Filipinos, 388 Korean, and 340 of Japanese origin.<sup>4</sup>

The sampling design of the NAAS does not follow typical US population surveys because the Asian American population is distinctive. Instead, in order to account for the spatial dispersion of the Asian American population and the geographic concentration of particular national origin groups in various parts of the United States, sampling began at the county level. This selection strategy was consistent with an effort to account for demographic, organizational, and political contexts of incorporation among Asian Americans. In addition, and because the study was conducted during the general election campaign during the 2008 US presidential election, the sampling design allows for analysis of particularly important states and regions in the national

<sup>3</sup> Note that this distinction excludes countries classified as the Middle East but includes any family background from countries in East Asia, Southeast Asia, the Philippines, and South Asia.

<sup>4</sup> In our survey, 120 registered voters are categorized as “Other Asian American,” which includes multi-racial respondents as well as those outside the six largest ethnic origin groups.

election. All data reported here are weighted to represent the national population of Asian Americans.

## ASIAN AMERICAN PARTISANSHIP

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When we turn to the 2008 NAAS, the findings mostly confirm the general patterns highlighted in voting behavior from exit poll data. Party identification here is defined in the conventional manner, in seven categories ranging from strong Democrats on one end of the spectrum to strong Republicans on the other. A disproportionate number of Asian Americans who can place themselves on the conventional seven-point party identification scale identify as Democrats. Combining self-identified Democrats together with Independents who report leaning Democrat, our initial estimate suggests that fully 61 percent of our sample can be classified as Democrats. By contrast, 28 percent are classifiable as Republicans and only 11 percent as pure Independents.

In addition, there are also interesting and important ethnic group differences in party identification. Most groups identify as Democrats, with Asian Indians as the most heavily Democratic among the groups in our sample (the split between self-identified Democrats and Democrat leaners and self-identified Republicans and Republican leaners for Asian Indians is 72 percent to 18 percent). Other groups are also unmistakably, if less strongly, Democratic: 70 percent of Japanese, 68 percent of Koreans, 62 percent of Chinese, and 58 percent of Filipinos are Democrats or Democrat leaners; the proportion of Republicans and Republican leaners for these ethnic subgroups, respectively, is 22 percent, 31 percent, 19 percent, and 33 percent. The one group that stands out here is Vietnamese. Fully 54 percent of Vietnamese identify as Republicans or Republican leaners, with only 34 percent identifying as Democrats or Democrat leaners.

We have thus far highlighted two defining features of Asian American partisanship: its contingency across time and data sources and its partiality for the Democratic Party in the dyadic choice between identifying with the Republican or Democratic parties. But these features, important as they are, mask another important feature: the tendency of large segments of the population to remain outside the traditional US partisanship scale. While party identification is a mainstay among the native-born, for immigrants there is a critical prior question and they must first ponder what it means to be a partisan. The willingness to think in partisan terms—by which we mean the willingness to place oneself on a party identification spectrum at all—is a separate and important prior factor to the specific self-placement on the spectrum from strong Democratic to Independent to strong Republican identification.

This decision is relatively inconsequential when we consider the white or African American populations. In the American National Election Study cumulative file from 1948 to 2004, less than 7 percent of the black and white sample across years chose one of the following non-partisan responses—“no preference,” “none,” “neither,” “other,”

“don’t know”—or otherwise refused to answer question. Thus, it is not surprising to find that most studies of partisanship simply dismiss this group as an anomaly, code them as missing, and drop them from analysis altogether.<sup>5</sup>

While the phenomenon of uncommitted and non-identifiers may be rare enough among whites and African Americans to treat as a residual response category, for immigrant-laden groups like Latinos and Asian Americans, defining oneself in terms of the two-party system is a challenging cognitive task (Lee and Hajnal forthcoming). In the 2006 LNS, fully 38 percent of respondents were uncommitted to a partisan category and non-partisans (non-identifiers and Independents, taken together) made up 55 percent of all responses.

These numbers are closely mirrored in the 2008 NAAS. Thus, perhaps the most pronounced finding on partisanship in the 2008 NAAS is that the modal respondent in our survey simply did not make head or tails of the conventional party identification question. As Table 32.1 shows, fully 34 percent of NAAS respondents indicated that they “do not think in these terms,” where the terms of partisanship are self-identifying as a Republican, Democrat, or Independent. When “non-identifiers” are combined with those Asian Americans who identify as Independents, 55 percent of NAAS respondents did not identify as either a Democrat or a Republican. This tendency not to identify with a major party is quite pervasive across ethnic subgroups, moreover. The range of non-identifiers in the 2008 NAAS was between 28 percent among Japanese Americans and 40 percent among Chinese Americans, and the range of non-partisans (“non-identifiers” and Independents, together) was between 43 percent among Japanese Americans and 68 percent among Chinese Americans.

**Table 32.1 Party identification, four categories, by ethnic origin group, 2008 (%)**

Category	Asian Indian	Chinese	Filipino	Japanese	Korean	Vietnamese	Total
Republican	9	7	16	14	17	31	14
Democrat	39	25	34	43	37	19	32
Independent	22	28	18	15	12	19	21
Non-identifier	31	40	32	28	35	31	34

Source: 2008 National Asian American Survey.

<sup>5</sup> We refer interchangeably to those who opt for these “non-compliant” response categories—“no preference,” “none,” “neither,” “other,” “don’t know,” or some other mode of refusal to self-identify as “Democrat,” “Republican,” or “Independent”—as “uncommitteds” and “nonidentifiers.” We further refer to “non-partisans” as the larger set of individuals who are either nonidentifiers or self-identify as Independents.



## ASIAN AMERICAN OPINION ON POLITICAL ISSUES

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There are few existing studies of Asian American opinion on public issues in part because of the absence of reliable data sources, but also because until recently there was not substantial interest in the attitudes of this relatively small and geographically concentrated group of Americans. The racial and ethnic diversity of the US population is changing rapidly, however, and there is growing interest in the extent to which members of minority groups hold distinctive opinions on political issues. While we cannot answer these questions in comparison to other racial and ethnic groups, we can outline the basic contours of Asian American opinion by examining data from the 2008 NAAS on the issues of health care, abortion, immigration policy, and US involvement in the war in Iraq.

Before proceeding with a discussion of the data, it is important to note two important characteristics about Asian Americans. Not only is the population growing rapidly and moving to geographic locations outside of traditional immigrant gateways, but barring any significant change to federal immigration policy in the US, the size and dispersion of the Asian American population will grow exponentially. Opinion on political issues in the US might therefore vary systematically by generation of immigration or years in the United States for Asian Americans. Second, English is a second language for most Asian Americans, and fully 80 percent of adults are foreign-born. Many survey respondents may struggle with questions posed to them in English and, in addition, may be unfamiliar with political terms commonly used in public opinion surveys, such as “liberal” and “conservative.” Thus, while mirroring the time-in-the-US distinction made above, there could be systematic differences in issue opinions when the questions are asked in the respondent’s native language rather than in English.

The 2008 NAAS asked respondents whether or not they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements representing five policy issues. The first issue was US military involvement in the war in Iraq. Asked to say whether they agreed strongly, agreed somewhat, neither agreed nor disagreed, disagreed somewhat, or disagreed strongly, respondents answered about the statement: “The U.S. should get our military troops out of Iraq as soon as possible.” Taken during the heat of the general election campaign in 2008, when the Iraq war was an important issue, Asian Americans responded with overwhelmingly strong support to end American involvement with 54 percent agreeing strongly and another 19 percent saying they agreed somewhat with this policy statement. In contrast, only 16 percent of Asian Americans said they disagreed somewhat or strongly with the statement that the US should remove military troops from Iraq as soon as possible. Just under 10 percent of the population refused or replied that they did not know in response to this question.

In terms of differences in responses by language of interview and years in the United States, those completing the survey in English were more likely (75 percent) to say they

agreed strongly or somewhat with the policy position to remove American troops from Iraq than those who were asked in their native language (70 percent). The differences for native-born and years in the US, however, do not show variation across opinion on US military policy in Iraq.

In terms of support for universal health care, Asian Americans display strong positive sentiment toward this policy. We asked respondents the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement “The federal government should guarantee health coverage for everyone.” We found even stronger levels of support among Asian Americans for universal health care compared with the troop withdrawal question. More than eight in ten Asian Americans (60 percent agreed strongly and 23 percent agreed somewhat) supported this statement. Only 11 percent said they disagreed with the statement on universal health care, while 6 percent were uncommitted, and 3 percent refused or said they did not know. Just the reverse was true in terms of language of interview for this policy issue, and 88 percent of those completing the interview in an Asian language supported universal health care compared with 81 percent of respondents interviewed in English. There were also differences in terms of years in the US and native-born status, with second-generation respondents the least likely to support universal health care (77 percent)—while still overwhelmingly in support—than the 90 percent of respondents who had been in the US five years or less or 88 percent support among those in the US between five and fourteen years.

While Asian Americans may be “liberal” on issues such as health care, they are divided on whether abortion should be legal in all cases. Twenty percent agreed strongly with the statement, 19 percent agreed somewhat, while 18 percent said they neither agreed or disagreed. A substantial proportion of Asian Americans are opposed to abortion rights and 27 percent said they disagreed strongly with the statement that abortion should be legal in all cases while 17 percent said they disagreed somewhat. Eight percent of the population either refused to answer the question or said they did not know. Japanese Americans and Indian Americans were most strongly in favor, while Filipino Americans and Vietnamese Americans were most strongly opposed. In addition, among those who took the interview in English, 41 percent responded in favor of abortion rights in all cases, while a third (32 percent) of those interviewed in an Asian language replied favorably. Similarly, support for abortion rights was strongest among the native-born (50 percent) and weaker among the foreign-born, with little relationship to how many years they had been in the US.

Asian Americans are also divided on questions of immigration policy. Even though many Asian American advocacy organizations are strongly in favor of a path to citizenship for unauthorized immigrants, more Asian Americans oppose the policy than support it. When they read the statement “The U.S. should provide a path to citizenship for people in this country illegally,” 15 percent of Asian Americans said they agreed strongly and another 20 percent said they agreed somewhat. Ten percent refused to answer the question or said they did not know, while 15 percent replied by saying they neither agreed nor disagreed with the policy statement. There is strong opposition to this policy among Asian Americans, and 21 percent disagreed somewhat

while 17 percent disagreed strongly with the idea of providing a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants. Korean Americans are the only group who slightly support a path to citizenship for unauthorized immigrants. Among Asian language interviewees, the proportion was higher (39 percent) in support of this policy than among those interviewed in English (33 percent).

Asian Americans are also divided over immigration policies such as the one proposed by the US Senate in 2006 that would “favor people with professional qualifications over those who already have family in the United States.” While more than half agreed (29 percent agreed strongly and 25 percent agreed somewhat), 22 percent say they neither agreed nor disagreed while 24 percent disagreed (10 percent disagreed strongly and 14 percent disagreed somewhat). An additional 10 percent of Asian Americans refused to answer or said they did not know, which is higher than for questions on other issues such as health care and abortion. There were no differences in opinion on this issue depending on whether the interview was done in English or in an Asian language. However, those in the US for the shortest length of time (0–4 years and 5–14 years) were most supportive of this aspect of federal immigration policy (59 percent and 60 percent) compared with those who had been in the US 15–24 years (54 percent) and 25 years or more (55 percent).

## MEDIA SOURCES FOR POLITICAL INFORMATION

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while mass media usage was not the main focus of the 2008 NAAS, respondents were asked about the kinds of media they consumed for political information, including newspapers, television, radio, and the Internet. Given the high immigrant population and the prevalence of this population to have a native language other than English, respondents were also asked about whether they used these media sources in English or in an Asian language. Asian Americans are much more likely to get their news from English language sources across the board, and nearly two thirds (65 percent) got political information from newspapers written in English compared to 35 percent from Asian language newspapers. An even larger proportion of Asian Americans (85 percent) got political information from television in English compared with 38 percent who watched news on TV in an Asian language. The same pattern is true for radio news, with 45 percent listening in English for political information and 20 percent in an Asian language. For Internet usage, 52 percent said they got political information on the World Wide Web in English versus 21 percent in an Asian language.

Media usage in English and an Asian language has an interesting relationship to the political issue areas discussed above, and shows similar patterns to those for language of interview and years in the United States. Here we focus on the heavy users of English language media—those who watch TV, read newspapers, listen to the radio, and use the World Wide Web for political information. This makes up 20 percent of the Asian American population. Do their opinions on political issues differ systematically from

those who consume less political information in English? The answer is yes and no. For US policy in Iraq, there is virtually no difference, and while support for universal health care is higher among those who consume news from all four types of media (89 percent), those who use English language media less are still strongly supportive of this policy reform (85 percent). Similarly for immigration policy, heavy media users are both more likely to support the path to citizenship (38 percent) and preferences for skilled worker status (59 percent) than those who use English language media less, where support is slightly lower for both policies (34 percent for path to citizenship and 52 percent for H1B visas). It is in abortion policy where English language media usage shows its most striking difference, with 45 percent who consume news in English only supporting abortion being legal in all cases versus 36 percent among those who use English language media less. These results show a progressive bent among those Asian American respondents who use the most forms of English language media.

Is just the reverse true for those respondents who use exclusively Asian language media sources for political information? There are a smaller number of respondents who use all four forms of media for political information in an Asian language only (6 percent), so we combined this top category with those who use at least three of the four forms of newspapers, television, radio, and the Internet to include the top 18 percent of Asian American respondents who use Asian language media for political information. The results show few differences across the five issue questions of the US military involvement in Iraq, universal health care, abortion, and the two immigration policy items. There were small differences between the fifth of the Asian American population in the survey who used exclusively Asian language media for political information in terms of stronger support (88 percent) for universal health care compared with those who did not use Asian language media much or at all (82 percent). Those who used Asian language media exclusively were slightly more supportive (58 percent) of the policy of granting visas for skilled professionals than those who used less Asian language media (53 percent). Here it appears that exclusive reliance on non-English language sources of news is associated with somewhat more liberal attitudes on these policy items, though the differences are small.

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCHING ASIAN AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION

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As this review of the research on Asian American public opinion has shown, the knowledge base among political scientists studying new immigrant populations such as Asian Americans is still in development. The Asian American population is both dynamic and relatively new, and very difficult to study systematically not only because of the language issues but also because of the geographic dispersion of the population. While some Asian Americans have long family histories in the United States, the vast

majority of Asian Americans today are immigrants. In contrast to immigrants from Latin America, who come primarily from a single country—Mexico—no one sending nation in Asia is a dominant source of émigrés to the US. Instead, Asian Americans are a pan-ethnic mix of native-born Americans of Asian descent combined with new immigrants from China, India, the Philippines, Vietnam, Korea, Japan, and a mix of other Asian nations, with the highest levels of immigration among Indians and Chinese. Not only is there variation in the national origins and ancestry of Asian Americans, but recent immigrants vary internally in important ways. That the population is such a “moving target” makes it all the more difficult to study, but of course all the more important to investigate with precision.

These characteristics of a high degree of language diversity and relative newness in the United States require special consideration when designing surveys and other methods to collect data on public opinion among Asian Americans. In addition, the geographic patterns of settlement among Asian Americans today—spread across high-density immigrant gateways and metropolitan areas, and increasingly in new destinations unfamiliar with Asian migration—make locating research subjects complex and challenging. The 2008 NAAS provides one example of a blend of sampling techniques designed to effectively locate respondents. In addition, researchers must be sensitive to the foreign language needs of Asian American immigrants, and be ready not only to interview subjects in their native language should they choose, but also to tackle issues of translation of questionnaires and other research material.

The opinion data from the 2008 NAAS present interesting differences in policy attitudes between those second-generation Asian Americans who have only ever known the United States as their country of origin and who were socialized politically in America and those who are new to the culture and politics of US society. Similarly, there are some potentially important distinctions between Asian Americans—particularly immigrants—with different national origin backgrounds. While these differences are important for some issue areas, it is not clear whether opinion variation is a function of country of origin or the result of the distinctive migration histories of Asian immigrant groups. For example, Asian Indians are the newest immigrant Asian group, with nearly all having arrived since 1990. In contrast, Japanese Americans are mostly US-born, having long roots in the American West. Despite these distinctive immigrant histories, Asian Indians and Japanese Americans are the strongest supporters of the Democratic Party, and these results cast doubt on the notion that there is something “organic” about national origin and political attitudes. Finally, differences in media usage for both English language and Asian language media showed some differences in political attitudes, with heavy users of English language media for political information the most left-leaning on political issues among Asian Americans.

Finally, one of the most important filters of opinion on issues—partisanship—is clearly a social identity up for grabs among Asian Americans. While Asian Americans as a whole are more likely to be Democrats than Republicans, a large proportion of this newest group of Americans says that they do not think in partisan terms. The issue positions of Asian Americans line up more closely with the policies of the Democratic

Party, but the large numbers of unaffiliated Asian Americans make them prime targets for political parties looking to expand their base and mobilize new American voters. These are among the most interesting and important questions for scholars of US politics to tackle as the nation moves rapidly away from the black–white binary and into racial politics with multiple racial and ethnic groups. While Asian Americans and Latinos may be new groups, the questions of partisan affiliation, media usage, and public opinion remain stalwart inquiries for the systematic study of politics.

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