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# NAAAS

## NATIONAL ASIAN AMERICAN SURVEY

### ASIAN AMERICANS AND THE 2008 ELECTION

Jane Junn, *Rutgers University*

Taeku Lee, *University of California, Berkeley*

S. Karthick Ramakrishnan, *Univ. of California, Riverside*

Janelle Wong, *University of Southern California*

THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY  
**RUTGERS**



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
**UCRIVERSIDE**



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Asian Americans are one of the fastest growing segments of the electorate, and are a pivotal voice in the 2008 presidential election. Between 1990 and 2000, the Asian American population has more than doubled in 19 states, growing fastest in key battleground states such as Nevada, New Hampshire, Florida, and Georgia.

The National Asian American Survey (NAAS) is the most comprehensive survey of the political views of Asian Americans ever. The data reveal that:

- Among Asian American citizens, 65 percent can be described as “likely voters.” Japanese American citizens are the most likely to vote (82%), followed by Asian Indian (73%), Koreans (72%), Filipinos (67%), Vietnamese (65 %) and Chinese (60%).
- 41 percent of Asian American likely voters support Senator Barack Obama while 24 percent support Senator John McCain.
- More than one-third (34%) of likely Asian American voters remain undecided. By comparison, recent surveys of the general population show that undecided voters are roughly 8 percent of the electorate. These undecided voters are a critical source of support for both candidates in the final weeks of the campaign. In our survey, even among those who were interviewed in the second half of September, more than 30 percent were undecided between Barack Obama and John McCain.
- In battleground/toss-up states, 43 percent of Asian American likely voters support Senator Obama, 22 percent support Senator McCain, and 35 percent remain undecided.
- Asian Americans lean toward the Democratic Party, but include a large proportion of non-partisans: 32 percent identify with the Democratic Party, 14 percent identify with the Republican Party, 19 percent identify as Independent, and 35 percent are non-partisan, saying they do not identify as Democrat, Republican, or Independent. Chinese, Filipino, Asian Indians, Japanese and Koreans tend to affiliate with the Democratic Party more than with the Republican Party. Vietnamese are more likely to identify as Republicans.
- Asian American Democratic primary voters supported Hillary Clinton over Barack Obama by a 2 to 1 margin. More than half of former Clinton supporters (59 percent) plan to vote for Obama in November. Only 10 percent of former Clinton supporters plan to vote for McCain and 29 percent are undecided.
- Among Asian American likely voters who supported Bush in 2004, 51 percent plan to vote for McCain in November while 18 percent plan to vote for Obama, and 29 percent remain undecided. Among Kerry supporters in 2004, 65 percent plan to vote for Obama, 6 percent plan to vote for McCain and 30 percent remain undecided.

- Preferences for the presidential candidates vary by national origin. Support for McCain is highest among Vietnamese likely voters, with 51 percent planning to vote for the Republican candidate. In contrast, a majority of Japanese Americans (60%) and Asian Indians (52%) plan to vote for Obama. Chinese, Filipino, and Korean likely voters favor Obama over McCain, but a large share remain undecided.
- A very strong majority (79%) of Asian American likely voters report that “the economy” is one of the most important problems facing the nation, while 35 percent say “the war in Iraq” is among the top problems.
- Support for getting out of the war in Iraq is closely tied to vote choice among Asian American likely voters, with those wanting to end the war supporting Obama (57%), while those who most strongly disagree with this sentiment support McCain (71%).
- Similarly, views on the economy sharply divide Obama and McCain supporters. 61 percent of Asian American likely voters who see the Republican Party as closer to their views on the economy plan to vote for McCain, only 4 percent for Obama. 72 percent who see the Democratic Party as closer to their views on the economy plan to vote for Obama, only 4 percent for McCain.
- Language access and ethnic language media are important for the Asian American electorate. One third of Asian American citizens get informed about politics from Asian-language television and newspapers, and about one in five get political information from Asian-language radio and Internet sources. Access to election materials in non-English languages is a significant issue for the Asian American electorate. More than one in four (28%) say they would use such materials.
- When they contact Asian Americans, political parties and other organizations are very successful in differentiating between likely voters and non-likely voters. Still, the rate of contact by political parties appears lower for Asian Americans than for the general population.
- Asian American participation in home country politics is not a deterrent to involvement in the politics of the United States. Indeed, those involved in their countries of origin are slightly more likely to vote in the United States than those who do not (73% versus 67%).

## BACKGROUND: THE ASIAN AMERICAN ELECTORATE

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 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 one million Asian Americans in the U.S., or less than 0.5 percent of the total population. In 2000, some 11.9 million Asian Americans were counted in the decennial census, roughly 4 percent of the total population.<sup>1</sup> By 2007, the American Community Survey estimated some 14.9 million Asian Americans, a 25 percent increase from just seven years before. This trend of explosive growth is expected to continue, with census projections of 44.4 million Asian Americans by 2060. In that year, Asian Americans are projected to account for 10 percent of the expected total population of 432 million Americans.<sup>2</sup>

The Asian American population is also characterized by historic patterns of geographic concentration, emergent patterns of geographic dispersion, and a continuing pattern of striking demographic diversity.

- Nationally, Asian Americans are concentrated in a few regions and states. In 2006, one in two Asian Americans lived in the West region of the United States; the top ten states accounted for 75 percent of the Asian American population in the United States. Asian Americans also make up a significant proportion of the total population in states such as Hawaii (56%), California (13%), New Jersey (8%), Washington (8%), and New York (7%).
- The Asian American population is also growing rapidly beyond the “traditional gateways.” Between the 1990 and 2000 censuses, the Asian American population has more than doubled in 19 states. In fact, the electoral battleground states of Nevada, New Hampshire, Florida, and Georgia are home to some of the fastest growing Asian American populations in the country. In 2000, Asian Americans were more than 5 percent of the resident population in 71 counties, and the number is likely even higher today.<sup>3</sup> Between 1990 and 2000, the Asian American population grew in all regions of the U.S.: 57 percent in the West, 79 percent in the Northeast, 84 percent in the Midwest, and 107 percent in the South.

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<sup>1</sup> Since the 2000 Census, population figures for racial groups have been reported for the groups “alone” and “alone or in combination with one or more other races” to reflect the new “mark one or more” multiracial identifier question. The population figures here report the number of persons who identify as Asians alone or in combination with one or more other races.

<sup>2</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.

<sup>3</sup> The American Community Survey does not have coverage of counties smaller than 65,000 residents, so there is no comparable figure for 2006.

- 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 population today that is 24 percent Chinese, 22 percent Asian Indian, 18 percent Filipino, 11 percent Vietnamese, 10 percent Korean, 6 percent Japanese, and about 9 percent from other ethnic/national origin groups like Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, Pakistani, Indonesian, and Thai.

These numbers, however, have yet to translate fully into political power. In 2006, only 0.9 percent of Members of the House of Representatives were Asian Americans; in state legislatures across the US, this figure increases only marginally to 1.1 percent. This stark underrepresentation of Asian Americans in elective political office is closely mirrored by the underrepresentation of Asian Americans among the ranks of voters. In the last presidential election, data from the U.S. Census Bureau reveal that 68 percent of the adult Asian American population were citizens. Of these, 55 percent voted in the 2004 election, accounting for 37 percent of the overall Asian American adult population.<sup>4</sup> By contrast, 73 percent of white adults and 68 percent of black adults voted in 2004.

Beyond the pattern of underrepresentation in political voice and representation, it is notoriously difficult to establish firm facts about which Asian Americans vote, why they vote, who they vote for, and whether the Asian American vote is a partisan or a swing vote. This is primarily due to a lack of good data on Asian American political behavior. A typical pre-election survey or exit poll will contain only a handful of Asian Americans, is biased toward those who are more educated, well-off, US-born, English proficient, and otherwise assimilated into life in the U.S. Even academic, media polls, and exit polls that explicitly survey Asian Americans are limited because they typically focus on just one or several cities, or they disproportionately sample particular ethnic origin groups, or because interviews are only done in English or a limited number of Asian languages.

The 2008 National Asian American Survey aims to fill this important gap in our understanding of this potentially rising force in the American electorate. In the following pages, we establish some basic facts about the Asian American electorate in the context of the 2008 U.S. Presidential election. We present our findings on who among Asian Americans is likely to vote, which presidential candidate Asian American voters favor, why they favor that candidate, and whether the Asian American vote is different between Asian ethnic subgroups and different regions of the country, such as battleground and toss-up states.

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<sup>4</sup> These figures from the Current Population Survey treat “don’t know” and “no response” as missing data.

## WHO WILL VOTE?

To describe the Asian American voting electorate in the 2008 NAAS, we develop a likely voter model, based on respondents' voter registration status, their past voting record, their level of interest in politics, and their self-reported certainty of voting in the November elections. These, in turn are weighted to reflect known demographic characteristics of the Asian American population. On these components of our likely voter model, Asian Americans have the following characteristics:

### Voter registration:

- 58 percent are registered to vote.
- Of those not registered to vote at the time they were being interviewed, 39 percent reported that they intend to register before the November election.

### Past voting record:

- 73 percent of currently registered voters reported voting in the 2004 presidential election.
- 46 percent of registered voters reported voting in their state's primary or caucus earlier in 2008.

### Certainty of voting this November:

- Respondents were asked to rate their chances of voting in the November elections. Table 1 shows the responses for the full sample, for citizens, and for those respondents who reported voting in the 2004 elections.
- Roughly two out of three Asian American citizens state that they are "absolutely certain" they will vote this November.
- Of those who voted in the 2004 election 81 percent say they are absolutely certain they will vote in 2008.

**Table 1. Certainty of Voting by Citizenship and Prior Voting Behavior**

	All Respondents	Citizens	Voted in 2004
Absolutely certain	47%	68%	81%
Will probably vote	7	9	7
50-50 chance	7	9	6
Less than 50-50	10	14	6
Not eligible	30	--	--

Question: "I would like you to rate the chances that you will vote in the presidential election in November. Are you absolutely certain to vote, will you probably vote, or is the chance 50-50, or less than that?"

Political interest:

- 16 percent of all respondents indicated that they were "very interested" in politics;
- 25 percent said they were "interested."
- 39 percent reported being "somewhat interested."
- 20 percent said they were "not at all interested."

These items were used – together with 2004 Current Population Survey<sup>5</sup> reports on voter turnout in 2004 – to generate the likely voter model. Likely voter models are preferable to self-reports on voter turnout and self-report on one's likelihood of voting in the next election because studies repeatedly show that survey respondents consistently over-report how often they vote.

Based on our likely voter model, we predict that 43 percent of Asian American adults will vote in the 2008 elections (Table 2). However, the proportions are higher if one looks at turnout among the citizen population (65%) and the registered voter population (74%).

	<b>All</b>	<b>Citizen</b>	<b>Registered Voters</b>
TOTAL	43%	65%	74%
Asian Indians	45	73	78
Chinese	39	60	71
Filipinos	30	67	69
Korean	41	72	84
Japanese	60	82	89
Vietnamese	52	65	80
Other Asian	55	60	70

Table 2 also presents our estimates of the proportion of Asian Americans who will vote in 2008 by ethnic subgroups. The highest likely rate of voting is among Japanese Americans, with 60 percent of adults, and 82 percent of citizens expected to vote in November 2008. While participation is significantly lower among Chinese Americans and Vietnamese Americans, well over a majority of citizens are expected to vote (60% and 65%, respectively).

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<sup>5</sup> Among surveys of voters that show breakdowns by race and ethnicity, the Current Population Survey has the lowest level of over-reporting. For instance, in 2004, the CPS shows that 64% of eligible adult citizens said they voted, compared to a rate of 61% among voting eligible adults as reported in the official vote totals by the Federal Election Commission and corrections made for citizenship and ineligible felons ([http://elections.gmu.edu/voter\\_turnout.htm](http://elections.gmu.edu/voter_turnout.htm)). By contrast, in the National Election Studies from 2004, 79 percent of respondents claimed to have voted.



## HOW WILL ASIAN AMERICANS VOTE?

How are Asian Americans likely to vote in the coming 2008 presidential elections? The results from the 2008 NAAS show two salient features of the Asian American electorate:

- Asian American likely voters favor Barack Obama over John McCain by a wide margin of 41 percent to 24 percent.
- A very large proportion of Asian American likely voters (34 percent) remain undecided.

These patterns are roughly the same when we look beyond likely voters to all vote-eligible Asian Americans (Table 3).

	<b>Likely Voters</b>	<b>Citizens</b>
McCain	24%	23%
Obama	41	38
Other	1	1
Undecided	34	38

Question: "Do you plan to vote for John McCain the Republican, or Barack Obama, the Democrat, or another candidate for President of the United States, or are you unsure at this point in time?"

### ***Voter Preferences by Partisanship***

The expected vote choice of Asian Americans, not surprisingly, varies strongly by partisanship. Table 4 shows the relationship Asian Americans have to political parties in four categories: (1) self-identified Democrats; (2) self-identified Republicans; (3) self-identified Independents; (4) "non-partisans." Non-partisans are those individuals who indicate that they simply do not think in partisan terms or that they do not know how to answer to the question.

The results from Table 4 show that:

- Among Democrats, Asian American likely voters overwhelmingly support Barack Obama over John McCain by a 74 percent to 5 percent margin.
- This partisan preference is similarly strong among Republican likely voters, who prefer John McCain over Barack Obama 72 percent to 5 percent.

- The proportion of undecided voters is smaller among self-reported partisans than it is among Independents (44 percent of whom are undecided) and non-partisans (65 percent undecided).

**Table 4. Voter Preferences among Likely Voters by Party Identification**

	<b>All Likely Voters</b>	<b>Democrats</b>	<b>Republican</b>	<b>Independent</b>	<b>Non-partisans</b>
McCain	24%	5%	72%	22%	14%
Obama	41	74	5	32	20
Other	1	1	2	3	1
Undecided	34	21	22	44	65

Question: "Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, Democrat, Independent, some other party, or do you not think in these terms?"

### **Who Are Undecided Voters?**

A comparison of undecided likely voters with those who say they know who they will vote for in November reveals that the differences between the two groups is small.

- Undecided voters are as likely to be female (52%) as those voters who have chosen a candidate to support (51%). They are similar in terms of household income as well. 33 percent of undecided voters report a household income of \$50,000 or less, compared to 31 percent of those who have made up their minds about who to vote for.
- Only slight differences characterize undecided voters and those who have made their candidate decision in terms of the proportions of young people (16% versus 11%, respectively) and foreign-born people in each group (72% versus 65% respectively).
- Not surprisingly, undecided voters include a higher proportion of individuals (61%) who do not identify with one of the two major parties than found among those who have already made their vote choice (26%).

### **High Proportion of Non-Partisans**

Table 4 showed that nearly two out of three non-partisan Asian Americans were undecided voters and roughly one out of two Independents are undecided. This segment of the electorate is pivotal because a majority of all Asian Americans are either Independents or non-partisans. Table 5 (*on next page*) shows the basic patterns of partisanship among all Asian Americans in the sample. The 2008 NAAS shows that:

- More Asian Americans identify as Democrats than as Republicans by a wide margin of 32 percent to 14 percent.
- A significant proportion identify as Independents, 19 percent.
- 35 percent of Asian Americans do not think in partisan terms or even identify as an Independent. This proportion is larger than the proportion of Asian Americans who identify as Democrats, Republicans, or Independents.

**Table 5. Party Identification Among Asian Americans**

	All Respondents	Asian Indian	Chinese	Filipino	Japanese	Korean	Vietnamese	Other Asian
Democrat	32%	39%	25%	35%	42%	38%	22%	36%
Independent	19	21	28	18	17	6	15	15
Republican	14	7	7	19	14	18	29	14
Non-Partisan	35	33	40	28	28	39	34	35

Question: "Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, Democrat, Independent, some other party, or do you not think in these terms?"

It is important to keep in mind that in many spheres of Asian American life, the panethnic category of "Asian American" often hides significant differences between ethnic sub-groups. This is true of partisanship as well. Table 5 shows that:

- Asian Indian, Japanese, and Korean Americans are most strong in their identification with the Democratic Party.
- Vietnamese Americans are most strong in their Republican partisanship, though an equal share of this group says they are non-partisan.
- Chinese Americans are the group least likely to identify with a major party

### ***Voter Preferences by Past Voting***

In addition to partisanship, another key indicator of likely vote choice is one's previous votes. In Table 6 (*on next page*), we show Asian American voters' preferences, broken down by how respondents reported voting in the 2004 presidential election between incumbent President George W. Bush and Senator John Kerry, and how they reported voting in the 2008 state primaries and caucuses. With the 2008 primaries and caucuses, we focus in on Asian Americans who reported voting for Senator Hillary Clinton, Senator Obama, or Senator McCain. Only 7 percent of our sample reported voting for a candidate other than these three senators.

**Table 6. Voter Preferences by the 2004 Vote and 2008 Primary Vote**

	<b>All Likely Voters</b>	<b>2004 Bush</b>	<b>2004 Kerry</b>	<b>2008 Clinton</b>	<b>2008 Obama</b>	<b>2008 McCain</b>
McCain	24%	51%	6%	10%	1%	81%
Obama	41	18	65	59	87	2
Other	1	2	0.5	2	0	0
Undecided	34	29	29	29	12	17

Questions: "Who did you vote for President in the 2004 election? Was it George W. Bush, John Kerry, or someone else?"  
 "Which presidential candidate did you vote for in your state's primary or caucus?"

Table 6 makes clear that Asian Americans' votes in the 2004 presidential race guide their current intentions in 2008:

- Likely voters who reported voting for George W. Bush in 2004 are much more likely to favor John McCain over Barack Obama by a margin of 51 percent to 18 percent.
- Supporters of John Kerry in 2004 are even more overwhelming in their support of Barack Obama over John McCain, by a margin of 65 percent to 6 percent.
- Still, a substantial portion of both 2004 Bush supporters (29 percent) and Kerry supporters (29 percent) remain undecided between the major party candidates in 2008.

How Asian Americans voted in this year's primaries and caucuses has an even stronger impact on how they expect to vote this fall:

- 87 percent of Asian American likely voters who reported voting for Barack Obama in the primaries and caucuses plan to vote for him in the general election; only one percent favor McCain over Obama.
- 81 percent of McCain supporters in the primaries and caucuses plan to vote for him in the general election while two percent favor Obama instead.
- A very large proportion of Senator Hillary Clinton's supporters (59 percent) are now throwing their support for Barack Obama; only 10 percent would say they will vote for John McCain.
- A substantial proportion of Asian American likely voters (29 percent) who voted for Hillary Clinton in the primaries and caucuses remain undecided.

## ***Voter Preferences by Ethnic Groups***

As we noted in our discussion of partisanship, it is very important to consider ethnic group differences within the Asian American population. Our headline results – that Asian Americans favor Barack Obama over John McCain by a wide margin – varies when we look into voter preferences by ethnic groups (shown below in Table 7).

Table 7 shows that:

- Vietnamese Americans are not only more Republican in their partisanship, but also much more likely to support Senator McCain than Senator Obama by a margin of 51 percent to 24 percent.
- Japanese Americans and Asian Indians, consistent with party identification patterns shown in Table 5, are the strongest supporters of Barack Obama.
- Among likely voters who are Chinese American and Korean American, more say they will vote for Obama than McCain.
- Filipino voters also support Obama over McCain, but by a smaller margin.

**Table 7. Voter Preferences by Ethnic Group**

	<b>All Respondents</b>	<b>Asian Indian</b>	<b>Chinese</b>	<b>Filipino</b>	<b>Japanese</b>	<b>Korean</b>	<b>Vietnamese</b>	<b>Other Asian</b>
McCain	24%	13%	12%	29%	17%	27%	51%	26%
Obama	41	53	41	35	60	36	24	38
Other	1	0.6	3	1	0	0	1	1
Undecided	34	33	43	34	23	38	24	35

Question: "Do you plan to vote for John McCain the Republican, or Barack Obama, the Democrat, or another candidate for President of the United States, or are you unsure at this point in time?"

## ***Voter Preferences in Battleground States***

Finally, it is important to consider how the voter preferences of the Asian American electorate differ across different regions of the United States. As we note in the "Background" to this report, the Asian American population is growing rapidly in new destinations across the United States, places that differ socially and politically from traditional destination states such as New Jersey and cities such as New York and Los Angeles. State and regional differences are also important when considering the dynamics of presidential elections, with battleground states commanding much of the attention and resources of political organizations in the final months of a campaign.

The sample of Asian Americans in our survey allows us to analyze separately regions where the Asian American population is highly concentrated (e.g., California, New York/New Jersey) and new destinations where the Asian American population is growing at a dramatic pace. We do not present this analysis in this report, and findings from these analyses are forthcoming. Here we report only on whether and how the Asian American vote varies in battleground states.

We distinguish between "toss-up" states in which the difference in poll numbers in voter preferences are razor thin and, for a given survey, do not exceed the margin of error, and "leaning" states in which there is a discernible preference for either Senator McCain or Obama, but the difference in poll numbers is not decisive. Based on recent polls of the general population as identified in *Real Clear Politics*, we identify the following states as "toss-ups": Colorado, Florida, Indiana, Michigan, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, and Virginia. The following additional states are marked as "leaners": Georgia, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin.

**Table 8. Voter Preferences in Battleground States**

	<b>All Likely Voters</b>	<b>Toss-Up</b>	<b>Toss-Up &amp; Leaning</b>
McCain	24%	22%	29%
Obama	41	43	39
Other	1	0	0
Undecided	34	35	32

Question: "Do you plan to vote for John McCain the Republican, or Barack Obama, the Democrat, or another candidate for President of the United States, or are you unsure at this point in time?"

Table 8 compares voter preferences among all likely Asian American voters, those who live in toss-up states, and those who live in either toss-up states or leaner states.

Overall, the figures reveal:

- The margin of support for Senator Obama over Senator McCain is greater (43 to 22 percent) among likely voters in toss-up states (a slightly smaller advantage holds when "leaning states" are included in our analysis of battlegrounds).

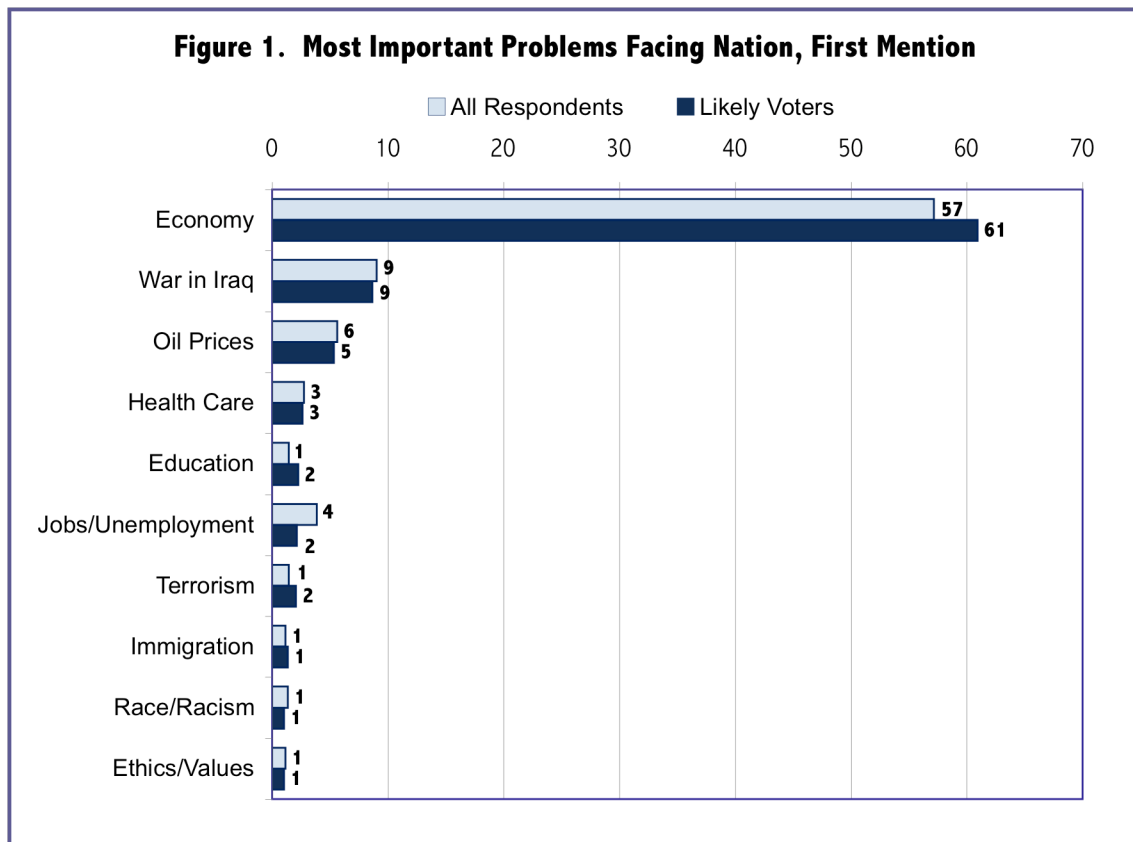
## BEHIND THE ASIAN AMERICAN VOTE

What is behind the support for Barack Obama and John McCain among Asian American likely voters? This section provides information about issue preferences and the policy agenda among Asian Americans.

### *The Asian American Policy Agenda*

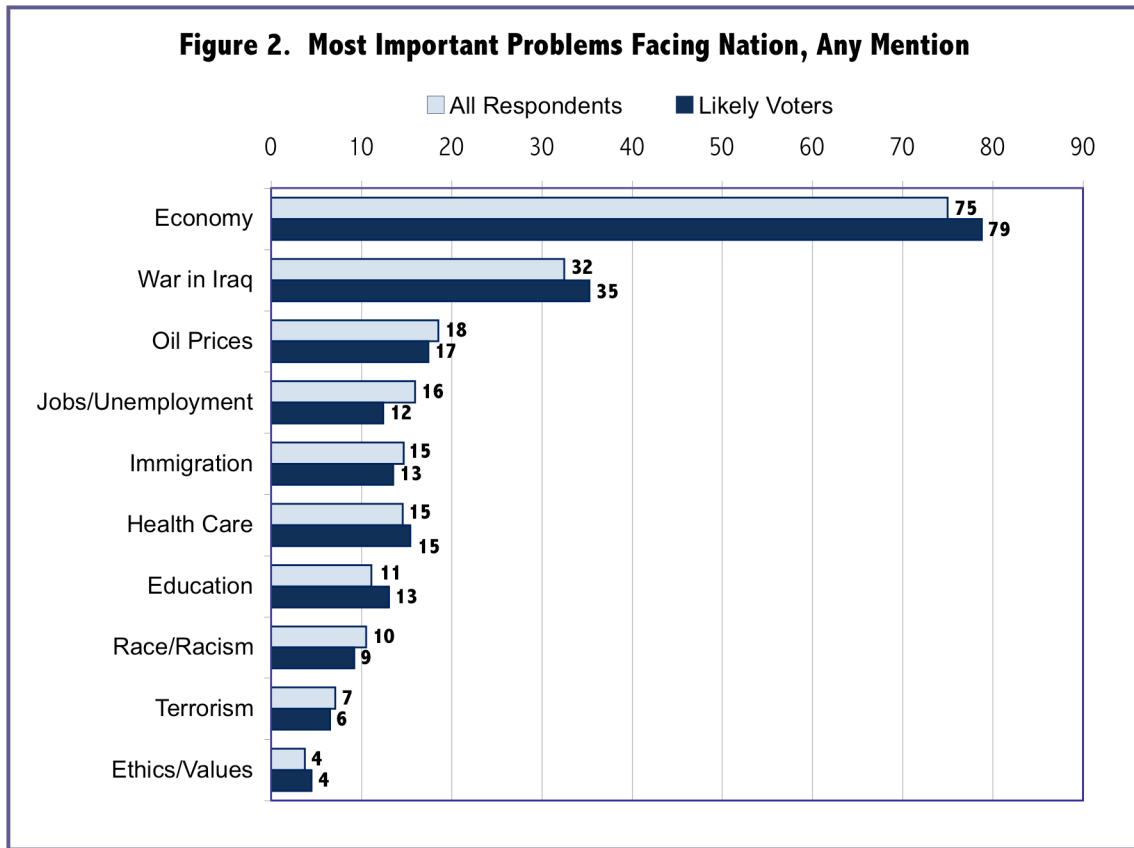
To gauge the Asian American policy agenda, respondents were asked what they felt was "the most important problem facing the United States today." The survey allowed people to give more than one response to the question, and the issues were captured in the order in which respondents mentioned them. (Most other surveys only record the first mention).

Figure 1 below compares the proportion of Asian American likely voters and all respondents in the 2008 NAAS on the most important problems facing the nation. The economy is by far the most important problem, with 61 percent of likely voters identifying it first. The prominence of the economy is followed by 9 percent identifying the war in Iraq. Oil prices, health care, jobs, and education follow the top two issues of the



economy and the war in Iraq. While likely voters were a bit more concerned about the economy and education than all Asian Americans, the differences are small.

While most surveys of the “most important problem” only record the first mention made by respondents, such a measure often masks the importance of other issues that also rank high in voters’ minds. In our survey, 87 percent mentioned two issues, and 77 percent mentioned three issues as being very important to the United States. Some interesting patterns emerge when we examine the most important problem, based on more than one mention (Figure 2).



While the economy still receives the most mentions, over one third of likely voters are concerned about the war in Iraq. Allowing for multiple mentions also elevates the importance of immigration, with one in six adults, and one in seven likely voters deeming it an issue of utmost concern.

Finally, respondents were also asked to identify which single issue was most important to them *personally*. Here the economy remained foremost in people's minds: 53 percent of all respondents and 55 percent of likely voters said it was the economy that was most important to them personally. Following the economy in personal salience was the war in Iraq, oil and gas prices, and health care, identified by 8 percent, 5 percent, and 4



percent of likely voters as most important to them, respectively. Importantly, respondents who saw a difference in where the major parties stood on the issue of personal importance were sharply divided in their support for McCain or Obama. Among likely voters:

- Those who saw the Republican Party as closer to their views on their most important issue overwhelmingly favored John McCain over Barack Obama by a margin of 70 percent to 4 percent.
- Those who saw the Democratic Party as closer to their views on the issue of greatest personal importance were, in turn, much more likely to favor Obama over McCain by a margin of 74 percent to 4 percent.

Perceptions of the major parties on issues most important to likely voters are especially powerful for Independents and non-partisans.

- 50 percent of non-partisans and Independents who see the Republican Party as closer to their most important issue expect to vote for McCain; only 7 percent expect to vote for Obama; 40 percent remain undecided.
- 54 percent of non-partisans and Independents who see the Democratic Party as closer expect to support Obama; only 6 percent favor McCain; 39 percent remain undecided.

### ***The Economy***

The economy is not only at the forefront of Asian Americans' assessments of the country's problems, but also a key to defining support for Senators McCain and Obama. Table 9 shows that, among Asian American likely voters who identify the economy as their most important problem and view the Democratic Party as closer to their views on the economy, 72 percent support Obama. Of those likely voters who identify the economy as the most important problem to them personally and view the Republican Party as closer to their views on the economy, 61 percent support McCain.

**Table 9. Likely Voter Preferences and Perceived Party Differences on the Economy**

	<b>Democrats Closer</b>	<b>Neither Party / Don't Know</b>	<b>Republicans Closer</b>
McCain	4%	16%	61%
Obama	72	20	4
Other	2	2	0
Undecided	22	63	35

Figures on this table are based on a sequence of three questions: (1) respondents were first asked to identify up to three issues as the "most important problem facing the United States today"; (2) then they were asked, "Which one of these issues is the most important to you personally?"; (3) then they were asked about whether they believed there were important differences between the two major parties economic issues, and, if so, which party they thought was closer to their views on the economy.

It is interesting to match up this salience of the economy as an important national problem to respondents' assessments of their financial well-being. When asked to evaluate how they were faring financially now compared to a year ago, 4 percent of all respondents report being much better off, 7 percent somewhat better off, 52 percent about the same, 20 percent somewhat worse off, and 16 percent much worse off. Only a minority of Asian American likely voters reported being in personally dire financial straits. At the same time, only 11 percent of all Asian Americans indicate that they are somewhat or much *better* off financially than they were a year ago.

These personal assessments of financial well-being do appear to shape the voter preferences of Asian American likely voters, but the effects here are not very strong. Among those who reported being somewhat or much worse off than they were a year ago, 20 percent expected to vote for John McCain and 42 percent for Barack Obama. Of those who reported being somewhat or much *better* off than they were a year ago, 32 percent supported McCain and 43 percent supported Obama. Perhaps more notable is the decline in the proportion of undecided voters, with 24 percent of those who say they are better off being undecided, compared to 36 percent of those who report being worse off.

### ***The War in Iraq***

The second most important problem facing the nation among both all Asian Americans and likely voters alone is the war in Iraq. To dig deeper into the potential electoral impact of the continued US military presence in Iraq, respondents were asked whether the U.S. should get its military out "as soon as possible." 70 percent of Asian American likely voters agreed with this statement (49% strongly so), 20 percent disagreed (10% strongly so), and 10 percent neither agreed nor disagreed.

**Table 10. Likely Voter Preferences and Support for Getting Out of Iraq War**

	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>Neither</b>	<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
McCain	10%	16%	37%	47%	71%
Obama	57	45	21	21	9
Other	2	1	0	0.6	1
Undecided	32	38	42	31	19

Question: "The U.S. should get our military troops out of Iraq as soon as possible."

Table 10 shows that Asian American likely voters who strongly agree that the U.S. should get out of Iraq are also strong supporters of Barack Obama (57 percent), while 10 percent say they will vote for McCain while nearly a third of this largest group of Asian

American likely voters remains undecided about their choice for president in 2008. On the other end of the spectrum, and among the 20 percent of Asian American likely voters who disagree with the policy position that the U.S. should get military troops out of Iraq as soon as possible, most say that they will vote for McCain over Obama.

### **Health Care**

Health care was cited as another of the most important problems facing the nation, and about as many Asian Americans felt this issue was as pressing as that of the price of oil and gas. We asked whether government should guarantee health care for everyone. Among likely voters, 75 percent agree with the statement (52% strongly so), 16 percent disagree (7 percent strongly so), and 9 percent neither agree nor disagree.

Table 11 shows the distribution of this policy item and presidential vote choice among Asian American likely voters. Among those who agree strongly that the federal government should guarantee health care for everyone, Obama is the candidate of choice, favored by 52 percent over 18 percent for McCain. A third of the Asian American likely voters in this category, however, remain undecided about their vote for president. Asian American likely voters who strongly disagreed that the federal government should actively ensure universal health care expected to vote for McCain over Obama by a wide margin of 58 percent to 9 percent.

**Table 11. Likely Voter Preferences and Support for Guaranteeing Health Care for All**

	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>Neither</b>	<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
McCain	18%	21%	37%	38%	58%
Obama	52	37	25	20	9
Other	0	3	1	1	4
Undecided	30	39	38	42	30

Question: "The federal government should guarantee health care for everyone."

### **Issues and Ethnic Groups**

The survey reveals the there may be important national origin group differences among Asian Americans when it comes to the way they will respond to some issues at the top of the public agenda this election season. For example, Vietnamese likely voters expressed distinct views from other groups on whether or not they supported getting the US out of Iraq. All other groups strongly support getting the US out of Iraq in a range of 46 percent to 62 percent; only 15 percent of Vietnamese strongly support getting the US out of Iraq. At the same time, Vietnamese are not strongly supportive of the US

remaining in Iraq (only 22 percent strongly disagree that the US should get military troops out of Iraq as soon as possible). Vietnamese are much more ambivalent about U.S. military involvement in Iraq compared to other groups. They are more likely to say they neither agree nor disagree with the idea that the U.S. should get military troops out of Iraq than other national origin groups.

However, on key issues like health care reform, the various Asian national origin groups report similar policy attitudes. At least 50 percent of Chinese, Filipino, Asian Indian, Korean, and Vietnamese likely voters strongly support the idea that the federal government should guarantee health care for everyone. A slightly smaller proportion (40%) of Japanese likely voters strongly support the federal government guaranteeing health care.

### ***Asian Language Media and Ballot Language Access***

With citizen and likely voter populations that are still mostly composed of first-generation immigrants, the Asian American electorate is notable for the importance of ethnic language media and ballot language access. We asked questions about whether respondents received political information from radio, television, newspapers, and Internet use. After each question, we asked if the source was in English, an Asian language, or both.

**Table 12. Sources of Political Information Among Adult Citizens**

	<b>Any Source</b>	<b>English Only</b>	<b>Asian Language Only</b>	<b>Both English and Asian Language</b>
Television	86%	53%	10%	23%
Newspaper	66	34	15	17
Internet	55	37	5	13
Radio	51	31	11	9

Question: "People rely on different sources for political information. Do you [read newspapers/listen to the radio/watch television/use the Internet] for information about politics?" "Is that Asian-language, English-language, or both?"

As Table 12 indicates, television is the most frequently cited source of political information (86%) among Asian American citizens, followed by newspapers, Internet sources, and radio. While most Asian American citizens receive news and other political information through English language sources, 33 percent pay attention to Asian-language television (10% exclusively so, and 23% in combination with English sources). Similarly, 32 percent get political information from Asian-language newspapers, 20 percent from Asian-language radio, and 18 percent from Asian-language Internet sources.

In addition to Asian language media use, the provision of ballot language assistance is also a significant concern for Asian American citizens. Under Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act, counties and states where language communities are greater than 10,000 or account for more than 5 percent of the voting-age citizen population, are required to provide ballot language assistance. Currently, covered jurisdictions include: Alaska (Kodiak Island); California (counties of Alameda, Los Angeles, Orange, San Diego, San Francisco, San Mateo, and Santa Clara); Hawaii (Honolulu and Maui); Illinois (Cook County); New York (Kings, New York, and Queens counties); Texas (Harris County); and Washington (King County).

In interviews that were conducted in a language other than English, we asked respondents “If election materials were available to you in your language, would you make use of them?” Among adult citizens (regardless of their language of interview), we find that 28 percent of adult citizens, and 27 percent of likely voters, would make use of such materials.

# MOBILIZATION AND PARTICIPATION BEYOND VOTING

## ***Mobilizing Likely Voters***

One of the key factors in voter turnout is mobilization – being recruited to register to vote and being asked to participate on Election Day. Asian Americans are more likely to be contacted by a campaign or party organization than by another type of organization. Overall, 35 percent of Asian American citizens, and 37 percent of registered voters, were targeted by a political party or campaign organization. By contrast, 22 percent of Asian American registered voters were targeted by “any other organization,” including unions, community groups, and other organizations.

Still, the level of contact by political parties is much lower than for the general population. The American National Election Study shows that 43 percent of registered voters in 2004 were mobilized by a political party.

How successful are political parties and other organizations in targeting likely voters? Table 13 below shows that they are very successful in doing so. Among those mobilized by a party, 84 percent are likely voters. Similarly, 82 percent of those mobilized by other types of organizations are likely voters. It still remains an open question, however, whether parties and other organizations target those who are *already* likely voters, or if individuals *become more likely* to vote if they are mobilized by one of these groups.

**Table 13. Likelihood of Voting by Mobilizing Citizens**

	Total	Mobilized by Party*	Mobilized by Other Organization**
Likely voter	67%	84%	82%
Not likely to vote	33	16	18

\* "In the past 12 months, has a political party or candidate contacted you about a campaign?"

\*\* "Did any other organization contact you about a campaign in the past 12 months? We are talking about groups like unions, community groups, and other organizations outside of political parties and campaigns."

The 2008 NAAS also shows that there is a relationship between being recruited into politics and one's expected vote choice in the presidential election. Table 14 (*on next page*) shows that a slightly larger proportion of Obama supporters (41%) have been contacted by a party or campaign, compared to 37 percent of McCain supporters. More significantly, however, only 27 percent of undecided voters have been contacted by a party or campaign organization. Thus, if parties are reaching out to undecided Asian

Americans voters, they are not doing so through direct contact such as mail and telephone calls.

**Table 14. Mobilization by Candidate Support**

	<b>Mobilized by Party</b>	<b>Mobilized by Other Organization</b>
McCain supporters	37%	24%
Obama supporters	41	23
Undecided	27	16

***Political Participation beyond Voting***

Although 2008 is an election year with a focus on an historical presidential race, voting is not the only activity through which people express themselves politically. This is especially the case for people who are not yet citizens of the United States. Table 15 makes clear that a majority of Asian Americans across national origin groups discuss politics with family and friends. Japanese and Koreans are the most likely to do so (75%), and Vietnamese are the least likely (56%).

**Table 15. Political Participation by Ethnicity\***

	<b>All Respondents</b>	<b>Asian Indian</b>	<b>Chinese</b>	<b>Filipino</b>	<b>Japanese</b>	<b>Korean</b>	<b>Vietnamese</b>	<b>Other Asian</b>
Discussed politics with family and friends	69%	70%	70%	68%	75%	73%	56%	77%
Worked for a candidate, party, or other campaign org.	4	4	3	6	4	5	7	5
Contributed to candidate, party, or other campaign org (citizens/permanent residents)**	12	13	10	17	17	11	7	14
Visited Internet to discuss a candidate or issue	13	14	13	13	8	17	7	13

\* People take part in many types of civic and political activities. In the last 12 months have you ...

\*\* Analysis based on full sample, including non-citizens, with exception of contributing to a campaign, which is restricted to citizens and permanent residents

With the exception of Vietnamese, at least one in ten Asian Americans contributed to a political party or campaign organization during the past 12 months. Twelve percent of

Asian Americans report visiting the Internet to discuss a candidate or issue. Finally, 7 percent or less of any national origin group worked for a candidate, party or other campaign organization over the past 12 months.

### ***Attention to Home Country Politics***

There are some media accounts and scholarly articles which suggest that Asian Americans are less likely to participate in American politics because of their focus on the politics of their home countries. The survey included questions on whether respondents send money to their countries of origin, whether they have been in contact with friends and family, and whether they have participated in the politics of that country.

Nearly three quarters (74%) of respondents have been in contact with friends and family and one third (33%) have sent money to people in their home country. However, only 4 percent have participated in the politics of their home country. The figures are similar when looking only at adult citizens in our survey: 69 percent have been in contact with friends and family, 31 percent have sent money to people, and only 4 percent have been involved in the politics of their countries of origin.

Most importantly, those who participate in the politics of their home countries are actually more likely to vote in the United States than those who do not (73% versus 67%). Thus, participation in home country politics is not a deterrent to participation in the United States. Indeed, our results suggest that participation in one context may help increase participation in the other.



## APPENDIX

### ***Methodology***

This report is based on data collected from 4,394 telephone interviews of adults in the United States who identify themselves as Asian American, which in the broadest sense includes people with any family background from countries in Asia. Interviews were conducted by telephone from August 18, 2008 through September 26, 2008. Additional interviews are ongoing through October 2008, and a total of roughly 5,000 interviews will complete the data collection.

The breakdown of the sample by ethnic background as of September 26, 2008 is as follows: 1,195 Chinese, 920 Asian Indian, 678 Vietnamese, 493 Korean, 493 Japanese, 486 Filipino, and 129 “Other Asian” respondents. Respondents were offered a choice of language to be interviewed in. English was the preferred language of interview in 57 percent of the cases: 83 percent of Vietnamese interviews were conducted in Vietnamese; 76 percent of the Korean interviews were conducted in Korean; 64 percent of the Chinese interviews were conducted in either Mandarin (50 percent) or Cantonese (14 percent); 14 percent of the Filipino interviews were in Tagalog; 9 percent of the Japanese interviews were in Japanese; and 1 percent of the Asian Indian interviews were in Hindi.<sup>6</sup>

The randomly drawn list sample was obtained from Catalist and STS Samples; the random-digit dialing (RDD) sample was obtained from SSI (Survey Sampling International). The listed sample from Catalist includes those not registered as well as those who are registered. Catalist has the most comprehensive and up-to-date sample of registered voters, regardless of their party affiliation. The party registration characteristics of our survey sample are in line with estimates from previous studies of Asian Americans in particular states. The survey was conducted by Interviewing Services of America, Inc. (ISA) of Van Nuys, California, under the supervision of Francine Cafarchia, Martin Magaña, and Mike Vanacore. Mobile phones were excluded from the dialing procedure. Interview translations were conducted by ISA and revised by Accent on Languages of Berkeley, California.

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<sup>6</sup> We also translated our survey into Hmong with the goal of obtaining a statistically meaningful sample of Hmong Americans. The incidence and cooperation rates were extremely low, however, and we discontinued our efforts after completing just 3 interviews with Hmong respondents, only 1 in the Hmong language.

The sampling error for the total sample of 4,394 respondents is +/- 1.5 percent at the 95 percent confidence level. Sampling error for subgroups within the sample is larger. By ethnic sub-groups, the margin of error for:

- Chinese respondents is +/- 2.9 percent;
- for Asian Indians, it is +/- 3.4 percent;
- for Vietnamese, it is +/- 3.7 percent;
- for Koreans it is +/- 4.2 percent;
- for Filipinos and
- for Japanese, it is +/- 4.3 percent.

By region, the margin of error for Asian Americans in “toss-up” states is +/-4.5 percent. The margin of error is +/- 2.3 percent for California; +/- 4.5 percent for New Jersey; +/- 5.2 percent for New York; +/- 6.4 percent for Texas; +/- 7.7 for Virginia; +/- 7.9 percent for Washington, and +/- 10 percent or higher for all other states. By voting behavior, the margin of error for registered voters is +/- 1.7 percent; for likely voters, it is +/- 2.1 percent. Sampling error from the size of our sample is only one type of error possible in surveys like the 2008 NAAS. Findings may also be subject to variation from question wording, question order, and the time and date when the survey was conducted.

The sampling frame was drawn primarily from commercial vendor lists of “very likely” and “likely” Asians. Based on the research questions and funder interest, we have oversamples in California (1,891 respondents), New Jersey and New York (835). We used Census data from the 2000 decennial census and the 2006 and 2007 American Community Survey to set sample targets for ethnic sub-groups and regions. Ethnic sub-group targets were set to approximate the national Asian American population characteristics.

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 population, as well as for subgroups of the population.

The 2008 National Asian American Survey is the collaborative effort of Jane Junn at Rutgers University, Taeku Lee at the University of California at Berkeley, S. Karthick Ramakrishnan at the University of California at Riverside, and Janelle Wong at the University of Southern California. Questions about sample design should be directed to Karthick Ramakrishnan at [karthick@ucr.edu](mailto:karthick@ucr.edu).

## ***Glossary of Terms and Concepts***

### Ethnic subgroups

Respondents in our survey were asked: “What is your ancestry or ethnic origin?” Those that specified an ancestry or ethnic origin to a prior question on racial identification were assigned that ancestry or ethnic origin. For response choices, we used the U.S. Census classification system of Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Hmong, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, and other national origins such as Bangladeshi, Cambodian, etc. We also included an option for South Asian. Based on the distribution of responses in our survey, we report data on Asian Indians, Chinese, Filipino, Hmong, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese. All other respondents are classified as “Other.”

### “Battleground states”

We distinguish between “toss-up” states in which the difference in poll numbers in voter preferences are razor thin and, for a given survey, do not exceed the margin of error, and “leaning” states in which there is a discernible preference for either Senator McCain or Obama, but the difference in poll numbers is not decisive. Based on recent polls of the general population as identified in *Real Clear Politics*, we identify the following states as “toss-ups”: Colorado, Florida, Indiana, Michigan, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, and Virginia. The following additional states are marked as “leaners”: Georgia, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin.

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## FOR MORE INFORMATION

This report, and future reports and data from the 2008 National Asian American Survey are available online at <http://www.naasurvey.com/>.

Community organizations can contact Christine Chen by email for outreach opportunities <[cchen@strategicalliancesusa.com](mailto:cchen@strategicalliancesusa.com)>. Reporters are advised to contact the communications offices at each university.

*Professor Karthick Ramakrishnan* studies immigrant civic engagement, organizational activity, and immigration policy. In addition, he specializes in the Asian American population in California, Illinois, and Virginia. The U.S. South Asian and Indian populations are also areas of expertise for Dr. Ramakrishnan.

*Professor Janelle Wong* studies in Asian American political engagement and religious involvement. In addition, she specializes in the Asian American population in California and Texas. Dr. Wong is an expert on Chinese Americans.

*Professor Jane Junn* studies Asian American political participation in terms of voting as well as political activities beyond the ballot box. Dr. Junn specializes in the Asian American population in New Jersey and New York, with emphasis on Korean Americans, South Asians, and Chinese in these areas.

*Professor Taeku Lee* studies political partisanship among Asian Americans as they compare to partisanship for whites, Latinos, and African Americans. He also specializes on the role that identity and civic engagement play in bringing Asian Americans into the political arena.