

ASIAN AMERICAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER POLICY BRIEF



Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) are two of the fastest growing racial groups in the U.S. [The largest Asian American populations](#) are in [California](#) (14.1% of overall population), New York (8.4%), Texas (4.5%), New Jersey (9.4%), Illinois (5.2%), Washington (8.1%), Hawaii (57.4%), Florida, Virginia (6.2%), Pennsylvania, Massachusetts (6.0%), and Georgia (3.8%). States with smaller populations but relatively high proportions of Asian Americans include Nevada (8.1%) and Maryland (6.2%). As a result, AAPIs are an underappreciated but growing and potent economic and political force.

One challenge in assessing what AAPIs care about and how candidates can reach them is the heterogeneity of the population. The most numerous groups among the 22 million Asian Americans as collected by the U.S. Census Bureau are Chinese (5.0 million), Asian Indians (4.4 million), Filipino (4.0 million), Vietnamese (2.1 million), Koreans (1.9 million), and Japanese (1.5 million). There are 1.6 million Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders.

An additional important feature about AAPIs is that they speak many languages. [About one-third of AAPIs speak only English, one-third speak English “very well”](#) along with another language, and one-third speak English less than “very well”. These proportions vary by groups. For example, [51% Vietnamese](#), 46% Chinese, 23% Filipinos and 21% Asian Indians were not fluent in English. While this linguistic heterogeneity may appear daunting, the lack of prior outreach in Asian languages and the low cost of ethnic media advertising actually present the opportunities for major returns from low level investments for targeted outreach.

In [2016](#), 11.1 million Asian Americans were citizens, with 57.3% reported having registered to vote, and 49.9% reported voting. The low rate of voting is partly due to the lack of outreach by political candidates and parties. In particular, the Democratic Party was outspent and out-organized by the Republican Party working with AAPI voters in the 2016 Presidential election.

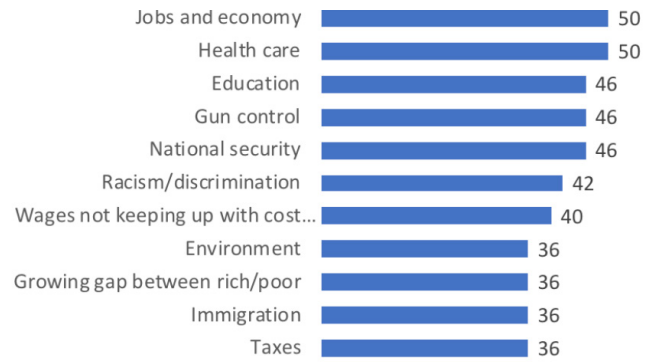
Nevertheless, due mostly to grassroots organizing, AAPIs helped Hillary Clinton to win in swing states with large AAPI populations such as Nevada and Virginia. Her lack of investment among AAPIs may have sealed her doom in states with smaller AAPI populations. For example, in [Wisconsin](#), where Trump won by 22,748 votes, there were approximately 70,000 AAPI voters, a group that was not reached at all by the Clinton campaign.

The 2018 elections showed that AAPIs are more engaged politically. AAPI voters helped to flip four seats in the [Orange County, CA](#) congressional delegation from Republican to Democrat. This trend will continue in 2020, and it is likely that the AAPI vote will determine the outcome of many elections in some states and some elections in many states.

However, AAPI voters cannot be taken for granted by the Democratic Party. [Almost 40%](#) of AAPIs do not identify with either party. The Republican Party has recognized that this population is crucial to its hopes in future elections as the demographics shift in this country leads to fewer white voters and more African American and Latino voters, who tend to vote for Democrats.

With the changing demographics of the U.S., it may very well be that the AAPI vote will be the swing vote that determines the next President of the United States. Thus, it is crucial for any Presidential candidate to understand which issues and policies are important to AAPI voters.

In 2018, AAPI Data and AAPI Vote conducted [surveys](#) in the appropriate languages (English, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean, and Vietnamese) of 1,316 registered voters who identified as Asian American. The sample was targeted towards the six largest national origin groups that together account for more than 75% of the Asian American adult citizen population. Figure 1 shows the findings of the policy issues that are important to AAPIs.



Source: 2018 Asian American Voter Survey (AAVS) by AAPIVote and AAPI Data

Figure 1. "Extremely" Important Election-Related Issues Among Asian American Registered Voters, 2018

General Policy Recommendations

Given the heterogeneity of the AAPI populations, three key general policy priorities for AAPIs are disaggregated data by national origin group, language access to government services, and diversity in the federal workforce at all levels. Thus, AAPI Progressive Action and AAPI Victory Fund recommend the following to all Presidential candidates:

- Promoting policies and support legislations that require the collection, analysis, and dissemination of disaggregated data by national origin for AAPIs in all federal data, as best exemplified by the Census Bureau.
- Improving language access to the services provided by the federal government to AAPIs, including:
 - » Monitoring and ensuring that federal agencies meet current language access mandates.
 - » Expanding mandate for access to interpreters in federal courts.
 - » Improving rules and standards for the use of interpreters and translated materials while also prioritizing appropriate training and compensation.
- Implementing efforts to increase hiring of AAPIs to federal government jobs, and promoting them to senior positions where they are under-represented, and include AAPIs in Cabinet level appointments.

Economy, Jobs, Wages, and Income Inequality

In aggregate, Asian Americans have a higher [median household income](#) compared to non-Hispanic whites. However, 12% of Asian Americans live below poverty level compared to 10.4% of non-Hispanic whites, a problem that is exacerbated by the fact that many Asian Americans live in areas with high cost of living. Disaggregation of the data by national origin also reveals inequalities, with poverty rates of 20% or more among Bangladeshi, Burmese, and Nepalese and 15% among Cambodian, Chinese, Hmong, and Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders compared to less than [8% for Asian Indians, Filipinos, and Japanese](#).

The story is somewhat different for wealth compared to income. [Asian American household wealth is substantially less](#) than that for non-Hispanic whites. Homeownership rate among Asian Americans is [59%](#) and for Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders 46% compared to 74% for non-Hispanic whites. Only 53% of Asian Americans work for an employer with a retirement plan compared to 62% of non-Hispanic whites, a disparity that worsens as Asian American workers get [older](#).

The unemployment rate in 2019 for [Asian Americans is 2.2%](#) compared to 3.1% for non-Hispanic whites. This data is not disaggregated by national origin. AAPI workers were slightly less likely to be unionized compared to the general population (10.3% vs. 11.4%), but in manufacturing, only [6.2% of AAPI male workers are unionized](#) compared to 11.4% of all male workers. AAPI workers, particularly women, are [over-represented in the low-wage workforce](#), including in food service, personal care work, retail service, and domestic care.

In 2012, [businesses owned by Asian Americans](#) generated \$707 billion in gross receipts and sales and employed more than 3.6 million people, both numbers the highest of any minority group. Although Asian Americans constituted 5% of the population in 2015, they paid 7.4% of the taxes. They also had \$455 billion in spending power.

Policies that improve the situation for both AAPI workers and business owners will benefit not only the AAPI populations but also the country as a whole. Thus, AAPI Progressive Action and AAPI Victory Fund recommend the following to all Presidential candidates:

- Promoting policies that stress the importance of a living wage, and increasing the minimum wage to \$15 per hour by supporting the Raise the Wage Act.
- Protecting workers against pay and employment discrimination based on race, gender, and other characteristics.
- Implementing policies and supporting legislation that will strengthen labor unions across various industries, including manufacturing, technology, health, and service industries such as domestic workers. Workers should have a right to join unions free from harassment and intimidation from their employers.
- Ensuring that federal contracts are disseminated and awarded fairly to AAPI businesses, and that these businesses have access to federal and state resources to grow, including resources from the Small Business Administration such as loans and training, and government export incentives.
- Improving access to networks, resources and capital to drive greater entrepreneurship among AAPIs.
- Prohibiting the use of federal resources for the gentrification of Asian American communities in major cities which are seeing the demise of Chinatowns and other places where Asians congregate and conduct business together.

Health and Health Care

AAPIs have significant health problems. Among them are cancer, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, hepatitis B, and mental health problems. There is a substantial lack of data and research on this population's health as a whole and disaggregated by national origin.

[The rate of uninsured among Asian Americans was 7.3%](#) and for Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders was 8.3% in 2017 compared to 8.5% for non-Hispanic whites. The rate of uninsured among all foreign-born Americans were 16.8%, including 8.9% for naturalized citizens and 24.1% for non-citizens, and there are disparities within the AAPI populations by birthplace and citizenship. The overall rate of insurance coverage obscures that some groups, for example, those age 50 to 64 and thus not covered by Medicare, have much higher rates of being uninsured. In addition, while more Americans in general are insured, the rates of being under-insured has gone up, in part due to the policies of the Trump Administration.



Thus, AAPI Progressive Action and AAPI Victory Fund recommend the following to all Presidential candidates:

- Strengthening the Affordable Care Act and Medicaid by:
 - » Removing barriers to immigrants' participation
 - » Expanding Medicaid without restrictions such as work requirement.
 - » Restoring Medicaid eligibility for Pacific Islanders from Compact of Free Association (COFA) communities.
 - » Banning short-term health insurance plans that do not comply with the ACA.
 - » Reinstating outreach and navigator funding for ACA enrollment, since AAPIs need help to access information that are often not in their languages or are too complicated, and extending the marketplace open-enrollment period.
- Aiming for universal health insurance coverage.
- Supporting the re-introduction and passage of the Health Equity and Accountability Act.
- Increasing funding on data collection and research on AAPI health.

Education

Although AAPIs have high levels of educational attainment, [with 87.5% age 25 and older having](#) a high school diploma and 53.0% a bachelor's degree, some groups have lower rates. For example, fewer than 20% of Cambodians, Hmong, Laotians, or Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders have a bachelor's degree.

Thus, AAPI Progressive Action and AAPI Victory Fund recommend the following to all Presidential candidates:

- Increasing resources for English language learner students.
- Funding Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and Higher Education Act (HEA) programs serving AAPI students.
- Supporting Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs).
- Defending affirmative action, which helps AAPIs by increasing diversity in learning environments, without discriminating against AAPIs.

Immigrant and Civil Rights

Nearly [13 million AAPIs were born outside of the U.S.](#), and 51% of those had arrived in the U.S. after 2000. While immigration is generally thought of as a Latino issue, [more Asian immigrants have arrived in the U.S. each year](#) than Latinos since 2010. [Undocumented Asian immigrants](#) constitute about 11% of the undocumented immigrants.

AAPIs, both immigrants and U.S. born, are subject to bullying, discrimination, racism, and other hate-related acts, which have escalated during the Trump Administration. The Trump Administration has also created extreme policies that have hurt the AAPI communities, such as lowering the number of refugees admitted and a new public charge rule that limits the number of new legal immigrants and that will prevent legal immigrants in the U.S. from obtaining permanent resident status if they temporarily use Medicaid, SNAP (food stamps), or federally subsidized housing.

Thus, AAPI Progressive Action and AAPI Victory Fund recommend the following to all Presidential candidates:

- Immediately ending the rule that expanded the scope of public charge, and supporting passage of the [No Federal Funds for Public Charge Act](#) until the rule is ended.
- Immediately ending detention and family separation policies.
- Supporting the [passage of the Reuniting Families Act](#).
- Ending deportations of immigrants who had committed crimes but had been punished appropriately by the judicial system.

- Supporting comprehensive immigration reform that create a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants currently in the U.S., strengthening family-based immigration, protecting immigrant workers, and ensuring due process for immigrants.
- Ending racial and religious profiling within the federal government.
- Monitoring and prosecuting bias and discriminatory actions as well as hate crimes against AAPIs, including intersectional characteristics such as immigrant, LGBTQ+, and religion.
- Restoring section 5 of the Voting Rights Act (VRA) and enforcement of Section 203 and 208 of the VRA related to language assistance for those who have limited English proficiency, and ending voter suppression.

Gun Control

While the AAPI population has not been shown to be disproportionately affected by gun violence (with the most recent exception of the 2012 shooting at the Sikh Gurdwara in [Oak Creek](#), Wisconsin), gun control is an important topic for these communities given the increasing number of mass shootings across the country. In 2016, 77% of Asian American registered voters supported stricter [gun control](#), ranging from 67% among Filipinos to 89% among Vietnamese.

Thus, AAPI Progressive Action and AAPI Victory Fund recommend the following to all Presidential candidates:

- Enforcing universal background check and closing the loophole allowing unlicensed dealers to avoid doing background check.
- Allowing research on gun violence and gun control.
- Repealing immunity for the gun industry.
- Banning assault rifles.

Environment and Climate Change

[According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2018 report](#), to avoid catastrophic climate change, we must have “rapid and far-reaching” changes across multiple sectors. Frontline communities, including AAPIs, bear a disproportionate burden of all climate effects, pollution, and health disparities. Currently, significant Asian-American populations already bear impacts of air pollution from wildfires, transportation, and emissions from electrical power and commercial/residential building inefficiencies. [A recently published survey by the Union of Concerned Scientists \(UCS\)](#), found that Asian-Americans in Mid-Atlantic and Northeast were burdened with 73% more pollution than whites. 70% of AAPI view themselves as [environmentalists](#) and [76% of AAPI support stronger emissions regulations](#) compared to 40% and 64%, respectively, in the general population.

Thus, AAPI Progressive Action and AAPI Victory Fund recommend the following to all Presidential candidates:

- Support agenda for Equitable and [Just Climate Platform](#)
 - » Committing to reduce emissions to achieve the goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degree Celsius.
 - » Reducing greenhouse gas pollution.
 - » Transitioning to a clean energy future with investments in clean energy jobs and job training.
 - » Reducing transportation pollution
 - » Making justice and equity a priority in climate change solutions, and addressing legacy of pollution, including centering AAPI communities in these solutions.
- Creating an office in the Department of Justice to monitor and punish corporate polluters.