



ASIAN AND  
PACIFIC ISLANDER  
AMERICAN VOTE

apiavote.org  
info@apiavote.org  
(202) 223-9170

## Policy Recommendations to the Platform Committee of the Democratic National Committee

**Asian and Pacific Islander American Vote (APIAVote)** is a national nonpartisan organization that works with community partners in 25 states to mobilize Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) in electoral and civic participation. APIAVote works to expand the AAPI electorate through voter registration, education, and get-out-the-vote-field activities. We also conduct research and polling, a voter protection program, leadership trainings, and youth engagement in an effort to amplify AAPI voices. We envision a world that is inclusive, fair, and collaborative—where AAPI communities are self-determined, empowered, and engaged.

### AAPI LANDSCAPE

Asian American and Pacific Islanders are the fastest growing population in the United States and are projected to be 10% of the American population by 2040. The potential of the Asian American voter can be unlocked at this present moment with 37% of AAPI registered voters identifying with no party and only one in 3 Asian American registered voters reported being contacted by Democrats. According to a national survey conducted by APIAVote, Asian American Advancing Justice | AAJC, and AAPIData, there was a 12 point increase in the proportion of Asian Americans who identify as Democrats from 2012 to 2016. This is especially true among young Asian Americans who likely are changing their political identification due to the anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric. Our report, “Inclusion, Not Exclusion: Spring 2016 Asian American Voter Survey,” highlights the rapidly growing Asian American electorate.

Furthermore, increasing access to voting for AAPI is not a regionally specific issue but has impact and consequences down the ballot. This is especially important for potential first time voters in areas where we are seeing the fastest growth of the AAPI communities in the past decade, in states such as Nevada, Arizona, North Carolina, and Georgia.

The political engagement of AAPIs has been stifled by laws that seek to block access to language access and translated voting materials. This political environment has led 62% of AAPIs to feel that “politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can’t really understand what’s going on.” The party that embraces voters of all backgrounds and listens to their voices can benefit by best engaging with Asian American voters who tend to vote less on party lines, and more on specific relevant issues. Our greatest concern is that due to restrictive voting laws and the lack of language accessibility to voting materials, as well as an anemic engagement with the electorate, Asian Americans will continue to feel disenfranchised from the political parties.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to strengthen the political engagement of AAPI voters we must deconstruct the barriers that alienate new voters by increase access to the polls through early voting, same day and online registration, enforcing and expanding language-access to voting materials, and engaging the AAPI electorate with political issues.

In terms of voting rights issues, APIAVote recommends the strengthening and restoration of the Voting Rights Act, which has been crucial in preventing discrimination and disenfranchisement for all Americans. Discrimination is not an issue of the past: Voter ID laws and redistricting are presently limiting the voices of minority populations by restricting their ability to vote and limiting the impact of that vote. Historically, there is very little evidence of voter fraud and quite a lot of evidence of redistricting with the purpose of limiting the impact of minority voters.



ASIAN AND  
PACIFIC ISLANDER  
AMERICAN VOTE

apiavote.org  
info@apiavote.org  
(202) 223-9170

APIAVote strongly encourages the movement to increase voter turnout nationwide by expanding “no-excuse” absentee and early voting. As demonstrated in AAPI Nexus’s Spring 2016 essay, “From Citizens to Elected Representatives: The Political Trajectory of Asian American Pacific Islanders by 2040,” we see that California’s longstanding “no-excuse” absentee voting greatly increases voting participation, while Tennessee’s strict excuse absentee ballot requirements discourage voter participation. As recently as 2014, close to 50 percent of California voters vote by mail, and only 5 percent of Tennessee voters (of which 1.2 percent of eligible voters identify as AAPI) vote by mail (Chen, Lai, Ramakrishnan, and Wang 2016). Absentee and mail-ballot voting is particularly important to populations with limited-English proficiency and increases the voter turnout of these populations.

For example, according to the 2012 post-election poll that APIAVote and our partners conducted, limited English proficient voter turnout was 9% lower than those who were English proficient. In a case study in San Diego County, California, the turnout of absentee language minority voters is on average 10 points higher than overall voter turnout for those groups. Early access to ballots allows communities of limited-English proficiency to seek translation help, and reduces the stress of voting. The positive impact on turnout is demonstrated throughout all AAPI ethnicities as well as other minorities. These numbers show how drastically the ability to vote absentee can impact voter turnout, and the significance of continuing to reduce barriers to absentee voting for not only APIAs, but all voters.

APIAVote advocates for the expansion of online and same day voter registration, the implementation of which will not only increase voter turnout of all citizens, but democratizes the institution of voting to groups unfamiliar with it. APIAVote supports the continued surge of online registration, seeing as over 86% of Asian Americans can access the Internet based on the US Census (File and Ryan, 2014). Same-day voter registration gives communities increased flexibility and accessibility to the ballot, particularly for those that receive little voter education outreach, have difficulty understanding the process, and do not have easy access to registration prior to Election Day.

Beyond increasing the opportunity for early voting, we must make strides in improving the accessibility of language appropriate voting materials. Language access is a fundamentally democratic ideal; allowing limited English proficiency citizens the opportunity to vote in their most familiar language is a gesture of acceptance and patriotism. Voting can be intimidating, even to those with full command over the English language. While only a third- or fourth- grade English level is needed to become a US citizen, voting materials such as absentee ballot applications and voting booth instructions often require a high-school level. Barriers to understanding voting materials such as registration forms, on even what’s on the ballot, disenfranchises voters and harms the social inclusion of AAPI voters.

As of the 2011 census, Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act—which mandates that in jurisdictions with at least 5% or 10,000 voters who have limited English proficiency, and speak the same language, translated materials must be made available—covers 43 Asian language groups located in 22 jurisdictions across 11 states. In our 2012 post-election survey, we saw that in jurisdictions covered by Section 203, translated and bilingual voting materials are more accessible to by-mail voters than Election Day voters. We must ensure that in these jurisdictions, language materials are present and visible on Election Day, and outreach is properly implemented notifying voters that these resources exist.

Election Day language assistance is also incredibly important as 30 percent of Chinese Americans, 33 percent of Filipino Americans, 50 percent of Vietnamese Americans and 60 percent of Korean Americans in Los Angeles County used some form of language assistance in the November 2008 election, per the report by Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC, “50 Years of the Voting Rights Act: The Asian American Perspective.” More than 60 percent of Vietnamese voters



ASIAN AND  
PACIFIC ISLANDER  
AMERICAN VOTE

apiavote.org  
info@apiavote.org  
(202) 223-9170

surveyed in Orange County for the November 2004 election used language assistance to vote.

Access to culturally appropriate and translated voting materials is particularly important for the immigrant AAPI community that is more than half of the greater AAPI population. AAPIs have consistently been among the fastest of any racial group to naturalize, however voting among foreign-born, naturalized AAPIs can be drastically improved by fixing the language barrier problem. AAPIs have some of the highest levels of limited-English proficiency: 75% of AAPIs speak a second language and roughly 40% of Asian Americans experience difficulty with English. In the 2012 “Behind the Numbers” post-election survey of Asian American voters, it was found that turnout for Limited-English proficient AAPIs was 9 points lower than for those who can speak English proficiently.

We must ensure that language access is enforced in the jurisdictions that fall under the Voting Rights Act. In our 2012 post-election survey for AAPI voters, only 55% of those in these covered jurisdictions reported seeing translated or bilingual election documents available at the polls. Moreover, only 69% responded that bilingual by-mail materials were available. Not only should we enforce the provision, but we should also extend the protections of Sections 203 to cover smaller pockets of low English proficiency groups. There are many languages and groups that are not covered by Section 203, and more work needs to be done to bring limited English proficiency Asian Americans into the voting process. AAPI groups in cities such as Detroit, Minneapolis, Atlanta and Phoenix are growing at more than 30% annually, and they should not have to wait for the next census to gain access to bilingual voter registration materials, ballots, or early voting applications. The party who proactively contacts these emerging groups, including them in their messaging and political infrastructure will also be proactively engaging with independent voters.

In the short-term, we must also ensure that Section 208 of the VRA, which allows all voters to receive assistance at the polls, is protected and utilized in jurisdictions not yet covered by Section 203. The party should ensure that voters are knowledgeable of these rights, and polling places are knowledgeable of their responsibilities.

As Section 203 depends on data from the U.S. Census and its American Community Survey, we strongly recommend full funding and resource allocation for the Census Bureau, to adequately direct its efforts at canvassing and covering communities with low English proficiency, as well as areas with heavy immigrant populations. If our communities are not counted, we cannot fully understand the need or provide access to not only the vote, but also issues of policy.

APIAVote is available as a resource to the leadership of all political affiliations who are interested in engaging with the AAPI communities. For 2016, our programs include a voter contact program that will reach 1 million voters, culturally appropriate and translated voter education & protection programs, a young voters initiative, and ongoing training and support to our local partners.

For detailed demographic information about the AAPI electorate in specific states and results from our national poll, we encourage you to review them at [apiavote.org/research](http://apiavote.org/research).



ASIAN AND  
PACIFIC ISLANDER  
AMERICAN VOTE

apiavote.org  
info@apiavote.org  
(202) 223-9170

## APIAVote Overview

### Mission & Vision

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

### Voter Contact Program

- APIAVote’s voter contact program is a multi-touch strategy to reach AAPIs in 25 states through voter registration and get-out-the-vote (GOTV) efforts.
  - Our multi-touch program includes rounds of mailers, phone banking, and canvassing.
- We work to redefine the narrative surrounding the AAPI electorate and the impact that AAPI voters can have on election outcomes through public service announcements and other media strategies online with AAPI influencers and celebrities.

### Voter Education and Protection

- We focus on election protection, translating materials, ballot education, and disseminating information on voting rights and alternative methods of voting.
- APIAVote hosts a Presidential Town Hall where candidates are invited to speak directly to AAPI communities and address our issues—in 2016, it will be held in Las Vegas on August 12<sup>th</sup>.
- The 888-API-VOTE election protection and information hotline is available year round for AAPIs in various Asian languages, run by APIAVote and Asian Americans Advancing Justice – AAJC, and publicized in direct mailers and media buys leading up to elections.
  - Our expanded language capacity provides bilingual assistance in English, Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean, Vietnamese, Tagalog, Urdu, Hindi, and Bengali.

### YouthVote

- Our YouthVote campaign works to increase the turnout of young AAPI voters, who have the lowest rate of voter registration and turnout compared to peer groups.
- We work with young leaders to build our networks and focus on direct engagement through our APIAVote Ambassadors, youth conferences, and through online platforms, supporting youth with mini-grants to register and turnout their peers.

### Training and Support

- Through our Norman Y. Mineta Leadership Institute Trainings, we equip our local partners with strong organizational capacity through trainings across the country from April to July to train volunteers and community leaders on current election rules, how to engage voters, and best practices.
- APIAVote provides ongoing technical assistance for our partners throughout the year and across various voter contact programs.

### Research

- In partnership with Asian Americans Advancing Justice – AAJC, AAPI Data, AARP, and others, we collect data through surveys, polls, and electoral analysis to better understand our communities.
  - Asian Americans largely do not identify with a party, and there are low rates of voter contact.
  - Youth are the least likely to be contacted, yet greatest gains in turnout come from youth.
  - 50+ AAPI lag in voting and volunteerism, with low contact rates or party ID. Ethnic media plays a pronounced role for AAPI seniors.