



THE ASIAN AMERICAN VOTE

IN THE 2006 MIDTERM ELECTIONS

NY, NJ, MA, MI, PA, MD, VA, IL, WA, DC

A REPORT OF THE ASIAN AMERICAN LEGAL DEFENSE AND EDUCATION FUND

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On Election Day, November 7, 2006, the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF), with the help of several co-sponsoring organizations and more than 600 attorneys, law students, and volunteers, conducted a nonpartisan, multilingual exit poll of over 4,700 Asian American voters. The questionnaire was available in English and nine Asian languages. Voters were surveyed in 23 cities across nine states—New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, Illinois, Washington—as well as Washington, D.C. AALDEF has coordinated exit polls in every major election since 1988.¹

Multilingual exit polls give a fuller and more accurate portrait of Asian American voters than polls conducted only in English. AALDEF's exit poll often finds different results than mainstream exit polls and reveals more detailed characteristics about the Asian American community.

The five largest groups surveyed in 2006 were Chinese (38%), South Asian (27%), Korean (14%), Southeast Asian (8%), and Filipino (7%).² Approximately four out of five (83%) respondents were foreign born. Twenty-nine percent (29%) had no formal education in the U.S. Thirteen percent (13%) were voting for the first time.

Asian Americans shared common political interests, even across ethnic lines.

Though Asian Americans are diverse, coming from different countries and speaking different languages and dialects, in the political arena they exhibit political unity. During the midterm elections, each Asian ethnic group voted as a bloc for the same top-ballot candidates. Every ethnic group selected Economy/Jobs as the most important issue for the 2008 Presidential candidates to address. On questions of immigration, nearly every major ethnic group shared similar opinions on specific immigration reform issues.

For Asian Americans, Economy/Jobs was the most important issue to be addressed by 2008 Presidential candidates.

Overall, the most important issues that Asian Americans wanted the 2008 Presidential candidates to address were Economy/Jobs (28%), followed by Health Care (19%), the War in Iraq (15%), and Education (15%). Other issues identified by Asian American voters included Immigration (9%), Terrorism/Security (9%), and Moral Issues (4%).

Asian Americans were largely Democratic voters.

Four out of every five (80%) Asian American voters supported the Democratic candidates in the top-ballot races for their respective states.³ In all but one of those races, the Democratic candidates emerged victorious with the overwhelming support of the Asian American vote. Most notably, in the Virginia Senate race, three out of four Asian Americans (76%) voted for Democrat Jim Webb, who unseated Republican incumbent George Allen by 0.3% of the total vote. Webb's victory gave the Democrats a majority in the Senate.

Party crossover voting heavily favored Democrats.

Significantly more Asian American Republicans crossed party lines to vote for Democratic candidates than did Asian American Democrats voting for Republican candidates. Moreover, the majority of Asian Americans not enrolled in a party threw their support to the Democrats.

Asian Americans supported legalization of undocumented immigrants and reducing immigration backlogs, while they opposed making being undocumented a crime.

Of those who expressed an opinion, 75% of Asian Americans said they supported creating a way for undocumented immigrants to gain legal status. Nearly nine out of ten (89%) respondents said they favored reducing the amount of time the government takes to process paperwork for immigrants waiting to enter the country. Seventy-two percent (72%) of Asian Americans opposed making being undocumented a crime.

Language assistance and bilingual ballots are needed to preserve access to the vote.

Forty-three percent (43%) of Asian Americans expressed that they were limited English proficient, and 13% identified English as their native language. A number of poll sites were mandated to provide bilingual ballots and interpreters under the federal Voting Rights Act; other jurisdictions voluntarily provided language assistance. In the 2006 elections, nearly half of all voters surveyed (46%) needed interpreters to vote, and 38% used translated written materials. The greatest beneficiaries of language assistance were first-time voters, 47% of whom were limited English proficient.

Asian Americans faced many voting barriers.

AALDEF poll monitors and pollsters received more than 200 complaints of voting problems. Asian American voters were unlawfully required to provide identification to vote, mistreated by hostile, rude or poorly trained poll workers, directed to the wrong poll sites, and did not receive adequate notification of their poll site assignments.

Copies of this report can be obtained online at www.aaldef.org or by contacting the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund at 212.966.5932 or info@aaldef.org.

Methodology

In November 2006, 593 volunteers, along with AALDEF staff and interns, surveyed 4,726 Asian American voters at 68 poll sites in 23 cities across nine states—New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, Illinois, Washington—and Washington, D.C.

The states selected for the exit poll were among those with the largest Asian American populations in the nation. Cities and poll sites with large concentrations of Asian American voters were selected based on interviews with local elections officials and community leaders. Sites with a history of voting problems were also selected.

It is important to note that jurisdictions covered by the exit poll had large Asian American communities according to the U.S. Census. While Asian Americans constitute 4.3% of the total U.S. population, they comprise:

- 12% of New York City,
- 7% of New Jersey,
- 9% of Boston, MA,
- 17% of Quincy, MA,
- 21% of Lowell, MA,
- 5% of Philadelphia, PA,
- 7% of Upper Darby, PA,
- 15% of Ann Arbor, MI,
- 10% of Hamtramck, MI,
- 15% of Rockville, MD,
- 9% of Silver Spring, MD,
- 14% of Seattle, WA,
- 5% of Chicago, IL,
- 19% of Annandale, VA, and
- 3% of the District of Columbia.⁴

Volunteer exit pollsters were stationed at poll sites throughout the day, usually 7:00AM to 8:00PM. Volunteers were recruited by the co-sponsoring organizations, Asian Pacific American Law Student Association chapters, community-based organizations, law firms, and undergraduate associations and classes. All volunteers were trained in conducting the exit poll. All were nonpartisan. Volunteers were instructed to approach all Asian voters as they were leaving poll sites to ask them to complete an anonymous questionnaire.⁵

4,726 surveys were collected. Survey questionnaires were written in nine Asian languages: Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Gujarati, Khmer, Korean, Punjabi, Urdu, and Vietnamese, in addition to English. Volunteers were conversant in 27 Asian languages and dialects: South Asian

languages (Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Konkani, Malayalam, Nepali, Punjabi, Tamil, Telegu, Urdu), Southeast Asian languages (Indonesian, Khmer, Lao, Thai, Vietnamese), Chinese dialects (Cantonese, Mandarin, Shanghainese, Taiwanese, Toisan), Arabic, Farsi, Korean, Japanese, Tagalog, and Tongan. One in three respondents (35%) completed Asian language questionnaires, while 65% completed the English version. Some voters needed assistance and had the questionnaires read aloud to them.

I. Profile of Survey Respondents

Ethnicity

Survey respondents were predominantly Chinese (38%), South Asian (27%), Korean (14%), Southeast Asian (8%), Filipino (7%), and West Asian (3%). South Asian includes Asian Indians, Bangladeshis, Indo-Caribbeans⁶, Pakistanis, and Sri Lankans. Southeast Asian includes Cambodians, Laotians, Thais, and Vietnamese. West Asian includes Arabs, Lebanese, and Yemeni.⁷ The remaining respondents were of other Asian ethnicities and multiracial Asians.

Language

While 13% of respondents identified English as their native language, 32% identified one or more Chinese dialects as their native language (including Cantonese, Mandarin, etc.), 23% spoke one or more South Asian languages (including Hindi, Urdu, Gujarati, Bengali, Punjabi, etc.), 12% spoke Korean, 7% spoke one or more Southeast Asian languages (including Vietnamese, Khmer, Lao, etc.), 5% spoke Tagalog, 3% spoke Arabic, and 2% identified some other Asian language as their native language.

Among Chinese voters, 45% selected Cantonese as their native dialect, and 32% chose Mandarin. Eleven percent (11%) said they spoke multiple Chinese dialects and/or other Chinese dialects, including Fujianese, Hakka, Shanghainese, Taiwanese, and Toisan. Twelve percent (12%) identified English as their native language.

Among Korean voters, 87% selected Korean as their native language, while 12% identified English as their native language.

Percentage of Voters	Asian American respondents
100%	4,726 Total Surveyed
48	Women
52	Men
38	Chinese
27	South Asian
14	Korean
8	Southeast Asian
7	Filipino
6	Other Asian
19	18 to 29 years old
17	30 to 39 years old
16.5	40 to 49 years old
20	50 to 59 years old
14	60 to 69 years old
13.5	70 and over
17	Born in the U.S.
83	Foreign born, naturalized citizen:
... 8	..... 0-2 years ago
... 12	..... 3-5 years ago
... 20	..... 6-10 years ago
... 43	..... More than 10 years ago
29	No formal education in the U.S.
	Educated in the U.S., highest level:
2	..... Elementary school
2	..... Less than high school
8	..... High school degree or equivalent
3	..... Trade school degree
36	..... College or university degree
20	..... Advanced degree

Among South Asian voters, 22% selected Bengali as their native language, 16% selected Gujarati, 15% selected Urdu, 9% selected Hindi, and 6% selected Punjabi. Meanwhile, 19% of South Asian voters spoke multiple South Asian languages and/or other South Asian languages, including Tamil, Telegu, Malayalam, and Marathi. Twelve percent (12%) identified English as their native language.

Among Southeast Asian voters, 64% selected Vietnamese as their native language, 17% selected Khmer, and 4% selected English. Another 13% spoke multiple languages and/or other Southeast Asian languages, including Thai, Lao, Indonesian, and Burmese.

Among Filipino voters, 82% selected Tagalog as their native dialect. Sixteen percent (16%) selected English as their native language, and 2% spoke other Filipino dialects.



Photo by Jenjamin Yuh

Limited English Proficiency

Forty-three percent (43%) of Asian voters surveyed said they read English less than “very well.” According to the U.S. Census, reading less than “very well” constitutes “limited English proficiency.”⁸ Therefore, over two-fifths of respondents were limited English proficient. Furthermore, almost half (47%) of all first-time voters were limited English proficient.

Of all ethnic groups, Korean voters exhibited the highest rate of limited English proficiency, with 69% indicating that they have at least some difficulty reading English. Similarly, 55% of Southeast Asian voters and 54% of Chinese voters expressed at least some difficulty reading English. Among South Asians, although Asian Indian voters were largely proficient in English, 40% of Bangladeshi voters and 34% of Pakistani voters read English less than “very well.”

In certain neighborhoods, even higher rates of limited English proficiency were revealed. In the Boston area, 63% of Chinatown respondents were limited English proficient, and 80% of Vietnamese voters in Dorchester were limited English proficient. In Chicago, 88% of Korean respondents expressed difficulty reading English.

Nearly a quarter (24%) of respondents reported that they preferred voting with the help of an interpreter or translated voting materials. Yet, 46% actually used an interpreter, either provided by the city or brought by the voter, to help them vote. Thirty-eight percent (38%) used translated voting materials.

The three groups with the highest rates of limited English proficiency also exhibited high propensity towards the use of an interpreter or translated voting materials. Over a third (35%) of Korean voters, 34% of Chinese voters, and 31% of Southeast Asian voters said that they preferred some form of language assistance while voting.

Foreign Born

Eighty-three percent (83%) of all respondents were foreign born naturalized citizens. Eight percent (8%) of voters surveyed became U.S. citizens within the last two years, 12% three to five years ago, 20% six to ten years ago, and 43% more than ten years ago. The groups with the highest rates of foreign born naturalized citizens were Southeast Asians (91%) and Koreans (89%). The groups with the most native born citizens were Chinese (20%) and Asian Indians (17%). Almost all respondents over the age of 40 were foreign born naturalized citizens, while a majority (53%) of those under 30 were native born citizens.

Age

The age distribution of voters polled was fairly even across all groups. Asians 50 to 59 years old and Asian youth 18 to 29 years old were the two largest age groups surveyed at 20% and 19% respectively. Voters 30 to 39 years old and age 40 to 49 years old comprised the third and fourth largest groups at 17% and 16.5% respectively. Fourteen percent (14%) of voters were between the ages 60 and 69, and 13.5% were over the age of 70.

Gender

Out of those surveyed, 52% were male and 48% were female. There was some variation of this gender ratio among specific ethnic groups. Among South Asians, 61% were male and 39% were female. However, among Filipinos, Koreans, and Chinese, the majority of respondents were female. Sixty-five percent (65%) of Filipino respondents, 54% of Koreans, and 52% of Chinese were female.

Educational Attainment

Over a quarter (29%) of all respondents had no formal education in the United States. Four percent (4%) had less than a high school education, 11% attained high school or trade school degrees from a U.S. school, 36% attended college or university in the U.S., and 20% held advanced graduate degrees. Some ethnic groups had even lower rates of formal U.S. education. Over half (56%) of Korean respondents and 30% of Chinese respondents had no formal education in the U.S.

First Time Voting

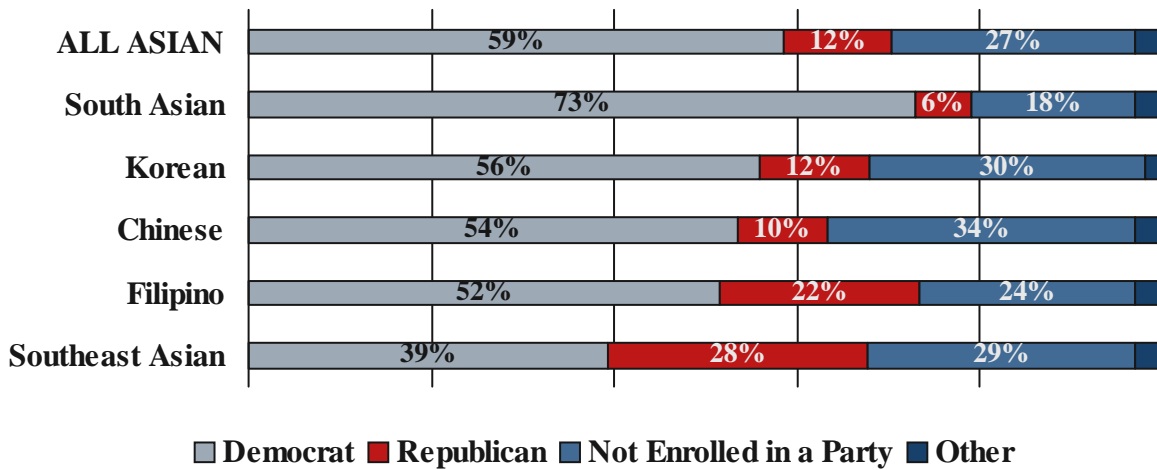
Thirteen percent (13%) of those surveyed stated that they voted for the first time in the November 2006 elections. The groups with the highest rates of first-time voters were Cambodians (25%), Pakistanis (24%), and Bangladeshis (18%). In comparison,

South Asian	17%
Southeast Asian	15%
ALL ASIANS	13%
Chinese	11%
Filipino	10%
Korean	10%

AALDEF's exit poll of the November 2004 elections showed that 38% of all Asian Americans surveyed were voting for the first time, and that more than half of all Cambodian, Arab, and Bangladeshi respondents were first-time voters.

Party Affiliation

A majority of Asian Americans surveyed (59%) were registered Democrats, 12% were registered Republicans, and 3% were enrolled in other parties. Twenty-seven percent (27%) of all Asian American respondents were not enrolled in any political party.



Even though Asian Americans tended to be registered Democrats, the exit poll revealed some variations across ethnic lines. South Asian voters were enrolled in the Democratic Party at higher rates than all other Asian ethnic groups. Overall, 73% of South Asians were registered Democrats, including 70% of Asian Indians, 72% of Pakistanis, 80% of Bangladeshis, and 80% of Indo-Caribbeans.

Conversely, Southeast Asians had much lower rates of enrollment in the Democratic Party with 39% registered Democrats, 28% registered Republican, and 29% not enrolled in any party. Moreover, 31% of Vietnamese voters were registered Democrats, 33% were registered Republicans, and 32% were not enrolled.

Filipino voters also exhibited higher rates of Republican Party enrollment with 22% registered Republicans. More than half (52%) of all Filipino respondents were registered Democrats and 24% were not enrolled in any party.

II. The Asian American Vote

In the November 2006 midterm elections, Democrats seized control of both houses of Congress for the first time in 12 years. They won a majority in the Senate with 51 of 100 seats,⁹ and a majority in the House of Representatives with 233 of 435 seats.¹⁰

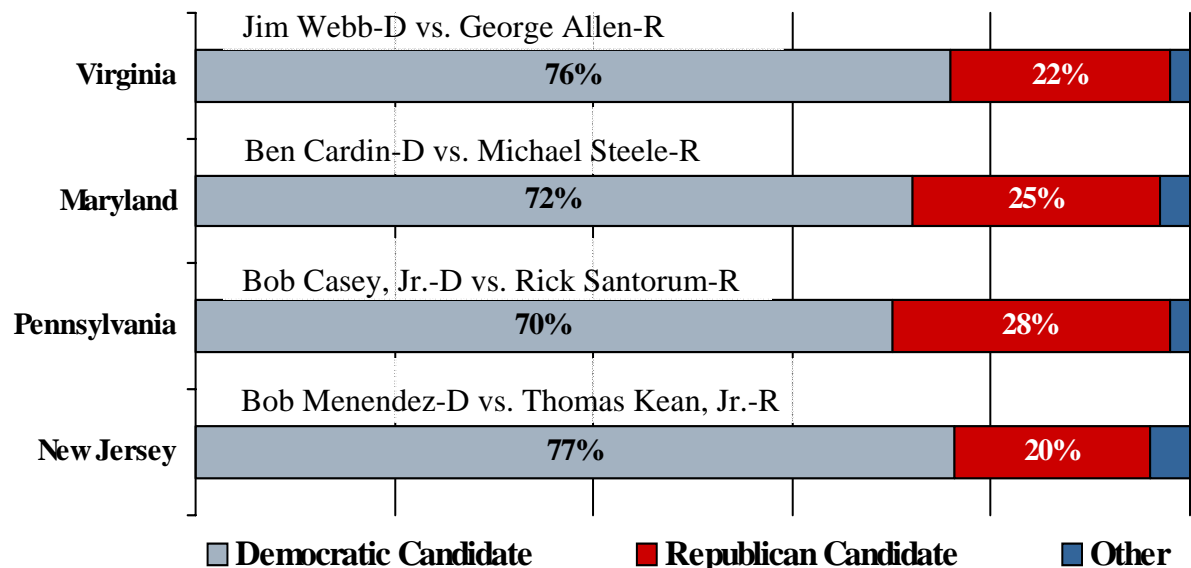
In the midst of this historical shift in power, Asian American voters heavily favored Democratic candidates in key races. Four out of every five (80%) Asian Americans voted for the Democratic candidates in the top-ballot races, and 17% voted for the Republican candidates. Asian Americans also demonstrated robust support for Democratic candidates in other state races for Governor and Attorney General.

Additionally, Asian Americans took a firm stance in supporting affirmative action in Michigan by voting against Proposal 2. Despite the myth that affirmative action policies put Asian Americans at a disadvantage relative to other racial minority groups, Asian Americans voted in a bloc to continue those policies.

U.S. Senate Races

In the *New Jersey Senate race*, 77% of Asian Americans voted for Democratic incumbent Sen. Bob Menendez, while 20% voted for Republican challenger Thomas Kean, Jr. Among all New Jersey voters, Menendez retained his seat by an 8-point margin (53% to 45%).¹¹

In the *Pennsylvania Senate race*, 70% of Asian Americans supported Democratic candidate Bob Casey, Jr., while 28% voted for incumbent Republican Sen. Rick Santorum. Among the general electorate, Casey carried 59% of the total vote and Santorum held 41%.¹²



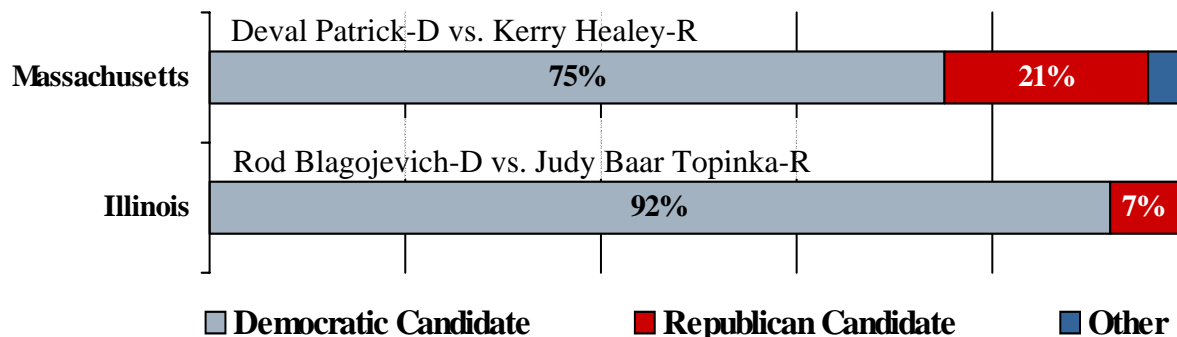
In the *Virginia Senate race*, 76% of Asian Americans voted for Democratic challenger Jim Webb, while 22% voted for Republican incumbent Sen. George Allen. Among all Virginia voters, Webb defeated Allen by less than 8,000 votes, a 0.3% margin of victory.¹³

In the *Maryland Senate race*, 72% of Asian Americans voted for Democrat Ben Cardin to fill the open Senate seat, while 25% voted for Republican Michael Steele. Among the general electorate, 54% voted Cardin and 44% voted for Steele.¹⁴

Governor Races

In the *Massachusetts Gubernatorial race*, 75% of Asian Americans voted for Democratic candidate Deval Patrick, while 21% voted for Republican candidate Kerry Healey. Additionally, although most Vietnamese American respondents were not registered Democrats, a majority (53%) of Vietnamese Americans voted for Patrick. Among all voters, Patrick defeated Healey 56% to 35% and became the first African American governor of Massachusetts and the second elected in U.S. history.¹⁶

In the *Illinois Gubernatorial race*, 92% of Asian Americans supported Democratic incumbent Gov. Rod Blagojevich, while 7% supported Republican challenger Judy Baar Topinka. Among the general electorate, Gov. Blagojevich retained the governorship by a 10-point margin (50% to 40%).¹⁵



Illinois U.S. House of Representatives Races

In the race for the *Illinois 6th Congressional District*, 80% of Asian Americans voted for Democratic candidate Tammy Duckworth, an Asian American, while 20% voted for Republican candidate Peter Roskam. In the general electorate, Roskam won the open seat by less than 5,000 votes, a 2-point margin.¹⁷

New York Attorney General's Race

In the *New York State Attorney General's race*, 82% of Asian Americans voted for Democratic candidate Andrew Cuomo, while 14% voted for Republican contender Jeanine Pirro and 4% voted for other candidates. Among all voters, 57% voted for Cuomo and 40%

voted for Pirro.¹⁸

Affirmative Action

In Michigan, 77% of Asian American voters voted “No” to Proposal 2, which sought to end race- and gender-based affirmative action programs in education, hiring, contracting, and health initiatives. Similarly, according to the National Election Pool (NEP), 86% of African American voters also voted “No” on Proposal 2. However, the NEP exit polls did not have significant numbers of Asian or Latino respondents in Michigan and did not report how those communities voted.¹⁹ Among all Michigan voters, 58% approved of the ban on affirmative action and 42% voted “No.”²⁰ According to the NEP, 64% of all white voters voted “Yes” to Proposal 2.²¹

Crossover Voting

Party crossover voting largely benefited Democratic candidates. In some races, significantly more Asian Republicans broke party lines to vote for Democratic candidates. Additionally, most Asian Americans not enrolled in any party gave their support to the Democratic candidates as well.

In the New Jersey Senate race, 4% of Asian Democrats crossed party lines to vote for Republican candidate Thomas Kean, Jr. Meanwhile, 18% of Asian Republicans and 70% of those not enrolled in a party voted for Democratic candidate Bob Menendez.

In the Pennsylvania Senate race, 7% of Asian Democrats crossed party lines to vote for Republican candidate Rick Santorum. Meanwhile, 12% of Asian Republicans and 78% of those not enrolled in a party voted for Democratic candidate Bob Casey.

In the Virginia Senate race, 3% of Asian Democrats crossed party lines to vote for Republican candidate George Allen. Meanwhile, 18% of Asian Republicans and 74% of those not enrolled in a party voted for Democratic candidate Jim Webb.

In the Maryland Senate race, 5% of Asian Democrats crossed party lines to vote for Republican candidate Michael Steele. Meanwhile, 9% of Asian Republicans and 68% of those not enrolled in a party voted for Democratic candidate Ben Cardin.

In the Massachusetts Gubernatorial race, 8% of Asian Democrats crossed party lines to vote for Republican candidate Kerry Healey. Meanwhile, 26% of Asian Republicans and 73% of those not enrolled in a party voted for Democratic candidate Deval Patrick.

In the Illinois Gubernatorial race, 2% of Asian Democrats crossed party lines to vote for

Republican candidate Judy Baar Topinka. Meanwhile, 39% of Asian Republicans and a solid 100% of those not enrolled in a party voted for Democratic candidate Rod Blagojevich.

In the race for the Illinois 6th District, 5% of Asian Democrats crossed party lines to vote for Republican candidate Peter Roskam. Meanwhile, 22% of Asian Republicans and 85% of those not enrolled in a party voted for Democratic candidate Tammy Duckworth.

In New York's Attorney General race, 6% of Asian Democrats crossed party lines to vote for Republican candidate Jeanine Pirro. Meanwhile, 42% of Asian Republicans and 77% of those not enrolled in a party voted for Democratic candidate Andrew Cuomo.

In Michigan, 27% of Asian Democrats voted "Yes" to Proposal 2 in ending affirmative action programs. However, more than two of every three (67%) Asian Republicans voted "No" on

Proposal 2 in firm support of affirmative action. Ninety percent (90%) of those not enrolled in a party voted against Proposal 2.

III. Immigrant Rights

In the spring of 2006, millions of immigrants and supporters marched in cities throughout the country demanding fair, humane immigration reform. These massive demonstrations thrust immigrant rights into the national consciousness and ignited contentious political debates. At issue was the Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act (H.R. 4437) passed by the House in December 2005. This immigration bill would criminalize undocumented immigrants based on their status for the first time in U.S. history and subject them to deportation and imprisonment.

In late May of 2006, the Senate passed the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act (S. 2611) that would create a temporary guest worker program for immigrants and provide a path to legal status and possibly citizenship for some undocumented immigrants. The bill would also provide resources to clear immigration backlogs (some of which have a waiting list of 20 years) and promote family reunification.

Ensuing debates among politicians and mainstream news media focused around undocumented immigrants from Mexico, overlooking the Asian American stake in the issue. Indeed,

	ALL ASIAN	
	Favor	Oppose
Creating a way for undocumented immigrants to legalize their status	75%	25%
Making being undocumented a crime	28%	72%
Reducing the backlog in processing paperwork for immigrants waiting to enter the country	89%	11%

AALDEF exit polls revealed that Asian American voters have strong opinions on key elements of immigration reform: legalization for undocumented immigrants, opposing the criminalization of undocumented immigrants, and the reduction of immigration backlogs.

Creating a Way for Undocumented Immigrants to Legalize Their Status

Of those who expressed an opinion, three out of four (75%) Asian American voters said they supported a way for undocumented immigrants to gain legal status, while a quarter (25%) opposed such a measure.²² In addition, 78% of Asian Democrats favored legalization while

22% opposed it. Meanwhile, 62% of Asian Republicans favored legalization and 38% opposed it.

Making Being Undocumented a Crime

Of those who expressed an opinion, 72% of Asian American voters opposed making being an undocumented immigrant a crime, while 28% favored making it a crime.²³ Furthermore, 74% of Asian Democrats opposed the criminalization of undocumented immigrants and 26% favored it. Meanwhile, 56% of Asian Republicans opposed it and 44% favored making undocumented immigration status a crime.

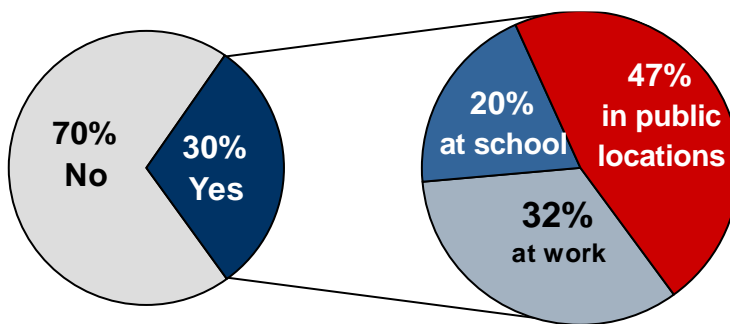
Reducing Immigration Backlogs

Of those who expressed an opinion, nearly nine out of ten (89%) Asian American voters said they favored reducing the amount of time the government takes to process paperwork for immigrants waiting to enter the country. Eleven percent (11%) opposed a reduction in the amount of time to process immigrants.²⁴ Both Asian Democrats and Republicans overwhelmingly supported reducing the amount of time for immigrants waiting to enter the country. Eighty-eight percent (88%) of Asian Democrats and 88% of Asian Republicans were in favor of reducing immigration backlogs.

Anti-immigrant Sentiment

National debates on immigration reform provoked a wave of anti-immigrant sentiment as many groups vocalized staunch opposition to all immigrants and demanded harsher border enforcement. Although “border enforcement” often meant the border between Mexico and the U.S., this backlash of xenophobia reached Asian American communities.

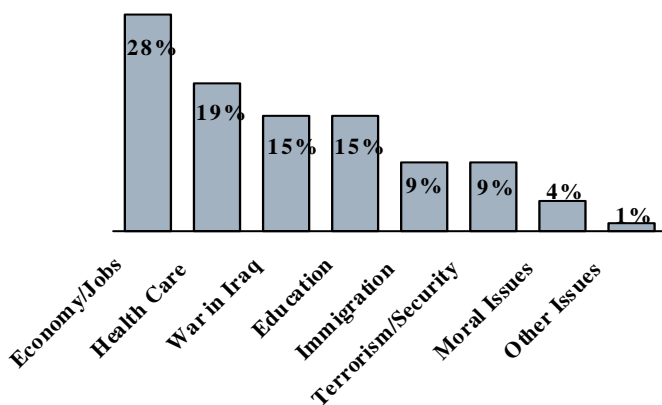
AALDEF asked voters to what extent they or their family had been affected by anti-immigrant attitudes. Of those who had an opinion, 30% of Asian American voters said they had been directly affected by anti-immigrant sentiment. Of those, nearly half (48%) said they had been



affected in public locations, 32% said they had been affected at work, and 20% said they had been affected at school.

Asian American respondents in certain states were affected by anti-immigrant sentiment at an even higher rate. In Michigan, over half of all voters surveyed (51%) said they had been

affected by anti-immigrant sentiment. In Virginia, 39% of those surveyed had been affected. Over a third of Cambodian voters in all states (37%) were affected by anti-immigrant sentiment as well.

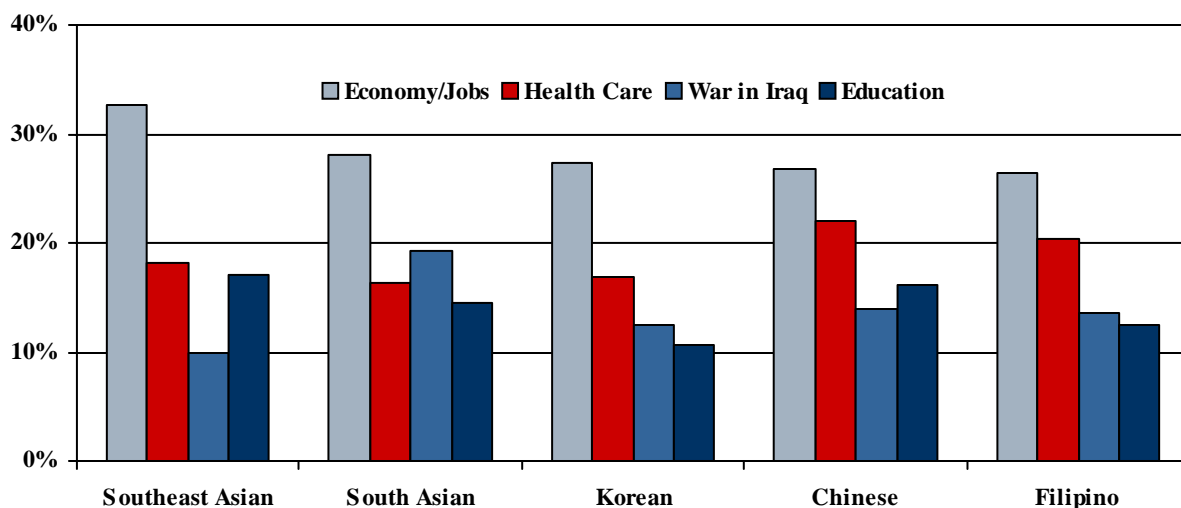


IV. Most Important Issues to be Addressed by 2008 Presidential Candidates

For the two major political parties, there will be open races for the 2008 presidential candidates. AALDEF asked voters to identify three issues they wanted addressed by future presidential hopefuls. The most important issues Asian Americans wanted addressed by 2008 presidential candidates were: Economy/

Jobs (28%); Health Care (19%); War in Iraq (15%); Education (15%); Immigration (9%); Terrorism/Security (9%); Moral Issues (4%); and Other Issues (1%).

In every state, Asian Americans of all ethnic backgrounds cited Economy/Jobs as the most



important issue to be addressed by future presidential candidates. Southeast Asians cited the issue at a rate of 33%, while South Asians cited it at 28%. Koreans, Chinese, and Filipinos each cited it at 27%.

Regardless of political party, Economy/Jobs was the number one issue for Asian Democrats (28%), for Asian Republicans (27%), and for those not enrolled in any party at (28%). Furthermore, for all three groups, Health Care was ranked as a second priority (19%, 16%, and 20%, respectively). Democrats and Republicans differed in their third top priority issue. Asian Republicans ranked Terrorism/Security as their third priority (14%). Asian Democrats, on the other hand, felt that the War in Iraq needed to be addressed much more than the issue of

V. Access to the Vote

The federal Voting Rights Act (VRA) protects racial, ethnic and language minority voters. Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act guards against racial discrimination. Section 203 requires jurisdictions with large numbers of limited English proficient voting age citizens to provide translated ballots and interpreters at poll sites. Congress also enacted the federal Help America Vote Act (HAVA) to remedy many voting problems highlighted in Florida in the 2000 elections. Additionally, several state laws and local election procedures protect Asian American and other minority voters.

Language Assistance

The 2006 exit poll covered jurisdictions that were either legally required to provide or voluntarily provided language assistance to limited English proficient voters.

Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act covers jurisdictions in Alaska, California, Hawaii, Illinois, New York, Texas, and Washington for Asian language assistance. These jurisdictions must provide translated ballots, instructions, and other voting materials and interpreters at poll sites with large numbers of limited English proficient voters.

Only some jurisdictions covered by AALDEF's exit poll survey are required by the VRA to provide Asian language assistance. In New York City, Chinese language assistance is required in Kings County (Brooklyn) and New York County (Manhattan), and both Chinese and Korean are required in Queens County. In Seattle and Chicago, Chinese language assistance is required under the VRA.

In Boston, Massachusetts, Chinese and Vietnamese language assistance is required by the settlement reached in *U.S. v. City of Boston*, a lawsuit under Section 2 of the VRA.²⁵ Other jurisdictions in New Jersey, Illinois, Pennsylvania, and Michigan (formerly under court order) voluntarily provide language assistance, most often in the form of interpreters at selected poll sites for particular Asian language minority voters.

Furthermore, under Section 208 of the Voting Rights Act, all voters have a right to be assisted by persons of their choice, and these individuals (most often a friend or family member) may enter voting booths to translate the ballot for voters. In jurisdictions where Asian American voters are growing in numbers but language assistance is not already provided, the Voting Rights Act allows them to bring their own interpreters.

Nearly a quarter (24%) of respondents reported that they preferred voting with the help of an interpreter or translated voting materials. Yet, 46% actually used an interpreter, either provided by the city or brought by the voter, to help them vote. Thirty-eight percent (38%) used translated voting materials.

Ethnic Group	Limited English Proficient	Prefers Voting with Assistance	Used Interpreter	Used Translated Materials
<u>New York</u>				
• Chinese	61%	38%	56%	48%
• Korean	76%	37%	79%	60%
• Bangladeshi	38%	13%	18%	10%
• Pakistani	40%	17%	43%	13%
<u>New Jersey</u>				
• Korean	75%	28%	38%	35%
• Asian Indian	15%	8%	12%	9%
<u>Massachusetts</u>				
• Chinese	60%	42%	42%	59%
• Vietnamese	75%	53%	79%	69%
<u>Michigan</u>				
• Arab	34%	16%	47%	35%
<u>Pennsylvania</u>				
• Chinese	30%	17%	30%	9%
<u>Maryland</u>				
• Chinese	33%	18%	29%	10%
<u>Illinois</u>				
• Korean	88%	63%	61%	49%

In New York City, 79% of Korean American respondents and 56% of Chinese American respondents used an interpreter to help them vote. A majority of Korean American voters (60%) and nearly half of all Chinese American voters (48%) also used translated materials on Election Day. In Massachusetts, over half of all respondents (55%) used an interpreter to help them vote, including 42% of Chinese American voters and 79% of Vietnamese American voters. Overall, 63% of all Korean American voters, 51% of all Southeast Asian American voters, and 50% of all Chinese American voters needed the help of an interpreter on Election Day.

Voting Barriers

Like other racial minorities, Asian Americans had to overcome a number of obstacles to exercise their right to vote. Among the numerous voting barriers they faced, many Asian Americans were required to present identification in order to vote, even though the Help America Vote Act only requires that certain first-time voters provide identification. However, nearly four out of five (78%) Asian American voters who were asked to present identification were not legally required to do so under HAVA. These voters were exempt from such requirements because they had either registered before 2003 (the year in which HAVA identification requirements came into effect) or had voted in a previous election. In New Jersey, 88% of voters asked for identification were not legally required to do so. In Illinois and New York, of those required to present identification, 84% and 83%, respectively, had registered before 2003 or were not first-time voters. In Massachusetts, 55% of those required to show identification were not legally required to do so.

Particular Asian ethnic groups were also unlawfully required to present identification before voting at higher rates than other Asian ethnic groups. Eighty-seven percent (87%) of Korean American voters and 89% of Filipino American voters who were required to show identification had either registered before 2003 or had voted in a previous election.

Asian Americans voters also reported a host of other voting problems:

- 148 voters did not cast a regular ballot and instead voted by provisional ballot.
- The names of 133 voters were not on the lists of registered voters.
- 100 voters complained that there were no interpreters or translations available to them.
- 59 voters complained of hostile or discourteous poll workers.
- 51 voters were directed to the wrong poll site or election district.
- 148 voters encountered other voting problems.

Overall, more than 200 individual voters filed official complaints with exit pollsters or via AALDEF's election hotline to report voting problems.

Conclusion

The AALDEF multilingual exit poll showed Asian Americans to be a crucial political force in the 2006 midterm elections. Though diverse, the Asian American community agreed on important political issues including immigration reform, affirmative action, and the economy. The growing Asian American electorate has great potential to exert its political power in future elections. Elected officials and presidential candidates can no longer overlook the Asian American vote and must now recognize this growing voice in the American electorate.

Acknowledgments

The following groups helped mobilize over 600 volunteers to conduct the exit poll and monitor poll sites:

National Co-Sponsors

Asian Pacific Islander American Vote
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
National Asian Pacific American Bar Association
National Korean American Service & Education Consortium
Organization of Chinese Americans
People For the American Way Foundation
South Asian American Leaders of Tomorrow
Shearman & Sterling LLP
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Local Co-Sponsors

Asian American Bar Association of New York
Asian American Bar Association of the Delaware Valley
Asian American Lawyers Association of Massachusetts
Asian Bar Association of Washington
Asian Pacific American Bar Association of the Greater Washington, DC Area
Asian Pacific American Lawyers Association of New Jersey
Asian Pacific American Legal Resource Center – DC
Cambodian Association of Greater Philadelphia
Chinatown Voter Education Alliance – NY
Coalition of Asian Pacific Americans of Virginia
Conference on Asian Pacific American Leadership – DC
Filipino American Human Services, Inc. – NY
Greater Boston Legal Services, Asian Outreach Unit
Korean American League for Civic Action – NY
Korean American Resource & Cultural Center – IL
Korean American Voters' Council of NY & NJ
ONE Lowell – MA
Pennsylvania Immigration and Citizenship Coalition
Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation
Providence Youth and Student Movement – RI
YKASEC–Empowering the Korean American Community – NY
The Sikh Coalition – NY
South Asian Youth Action! – NY
Vietnamese American Initiative for Development – MA
and Asian Pacific American Law Students Association chapters across the country.

Endnotes

- ¹ AALDEF surveyed nearly 11,000 Asian American voters in 8 states (NY, NJ, MA, MI, IL, PA, RI, VA) in 2004, 3,000 Asian voters in 4 states (NY, NJ, MA, MI) in 2002, and over 5,000 Asian New Yorkers in 2000.
- ² All percentages are based on total correct responses to survey questions. Questions left blank or incorrectly answered were not included in calculating percentages.
- ³ Survey results based on “top-ballot races” only include Senate races in MD, NJ, PA, VA, and WA, Gubernatorial races in IL and MA, the NY state Attorney General race, and the DC Mayoral race. They do not include Congressional races in IL or Proposal 2 in MI.
- ⁴ Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005 American Community Survey; U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census.
- ⁵ Purposive sampling methodology was employed in this exit poll rather than random sampling. Purposive sampling is a non-random sampling method that involves choosing respondents with certain characteristics.
- ⁶ Indo-Caribbeans are ethnic Asian Indians who were brought to Caribbean nations, such as Guyana, Surinam, Trinidad, and Jamaica, as indentured servants over a century ago. Beginning in 1980 and throughout the 1990s, they have been migrating to the United States, specifically to New York.
- ⁷ Although the U.S. Census Bureau designates Arabs as White, Arabs and other West Asians were included for this survey since South Asians and Arabs faced similar problems of discrimination and racial profiling, especially after September 11.
- ⁸ Source: <http://www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/c2kbr-29.pdf>
- ⁹ Source: <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2006/pages/results/senate/>
- ¹⁰ Source: <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2006/pages/results/house/>
- ¹¹ Source: <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2006/pages/results/states/NJ/S/01/index.html>
- ¹² Source: <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2006/pages/results/states/PA/S/01/index.html>
- ¹³ Source: <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2006/pages/results/states/VA/S/01/index.html>
- ¹⁴ Source: <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2006/pages/results/states/MD/S/01/index.html>
- ¹⁵ Source: <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2006/pages/results/states/IL/G/00/index.html>
- ¹⁶ Source: <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2006/pages/results/states/MA/G/00/index.html>
- ¹⁷ Source: <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2006/pages/results/states/IL/H/06/>
- ¹⁸ Source: http://www.ny1.com/ny/Election/2006election/index.html?page_name=statewide
- ¹⁹ Source: <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2006/pages/results/states/MI/I/01/epolls.0.html>
- ²⁰ Source: <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2006/pages/results/ballot.measures/>
- ²¹ Source: <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2006/pages/results/states/MI/I/01/epolls.0.html>
- ²² Percentages for immigration questions exclude those responding “Not sure.” Twenty-seven percent (27%) of respondents were unsure about their opinion on creating a way for undocumented immigrants to legalize their status.
- ²³ Thirty-four percent (34%) of respondents were unsure about their opinion on making being undocumented a crime.
- ²⁴ Twenty percent (20%) of respondents were unsure about their opinion on reducing immigration backlogs.
- ²⁵ Source: http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/voting/sec_203/documents/boston_cd2.htm

Founded in 1974, the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF) is a national organization that protects and promotes the civil rights of Asian Americans. By combining litigation, advocacy, education, and organizing, AALDEF works with Asian American communities across the country to secure human rights for all.

AALDEF focuses on critical issues affecting Asian Americans, including immigrant rights, civic participation and voting rights, economic justice for workers, language access to services, Census policy, affirmative action, youth rights and educational equity, and the elimination of anti-Asian violence, police misconduct, and human trafficking.

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