

## Issue Brief: Asian-Americans and Voting Behavior

### **Key Words:**

Asian-Americans; voting behavior; ethnic variations; citizenship

### **Description:**

This issue brief outlines important factors that affect the way in which the Asian-American population participates in the political process of voting.

### **Key Points:**

- The language barrier that Asian Americans face
- The lack of representation of Asian-Americans in political offices
- The low rate of naturalization of Asian American immigrants
- Lack of party identification of within Asian-American population

### **Issue Brief:**

What are the factors that affect Asian-Americans in the political process? Why is there relatively low voting turn out in the Asian-American communities, when based on average socioeconomic resources, would be expected to participate at much higher levels? The first factor one must consider is that there are many different ethnic groups within the Asian population a citizenship. One major qualification in order to vote is to be a United States citizen; however, there are many Asian Americans within America who have immigrated but have not earned citizenship. Because of this low rate of naturalization, Asian immigrants naturally are not qualified to vote. The Asian population has the highest number of individuals born abroad compared to any other ethnic group. This explains why there is a substantial number of

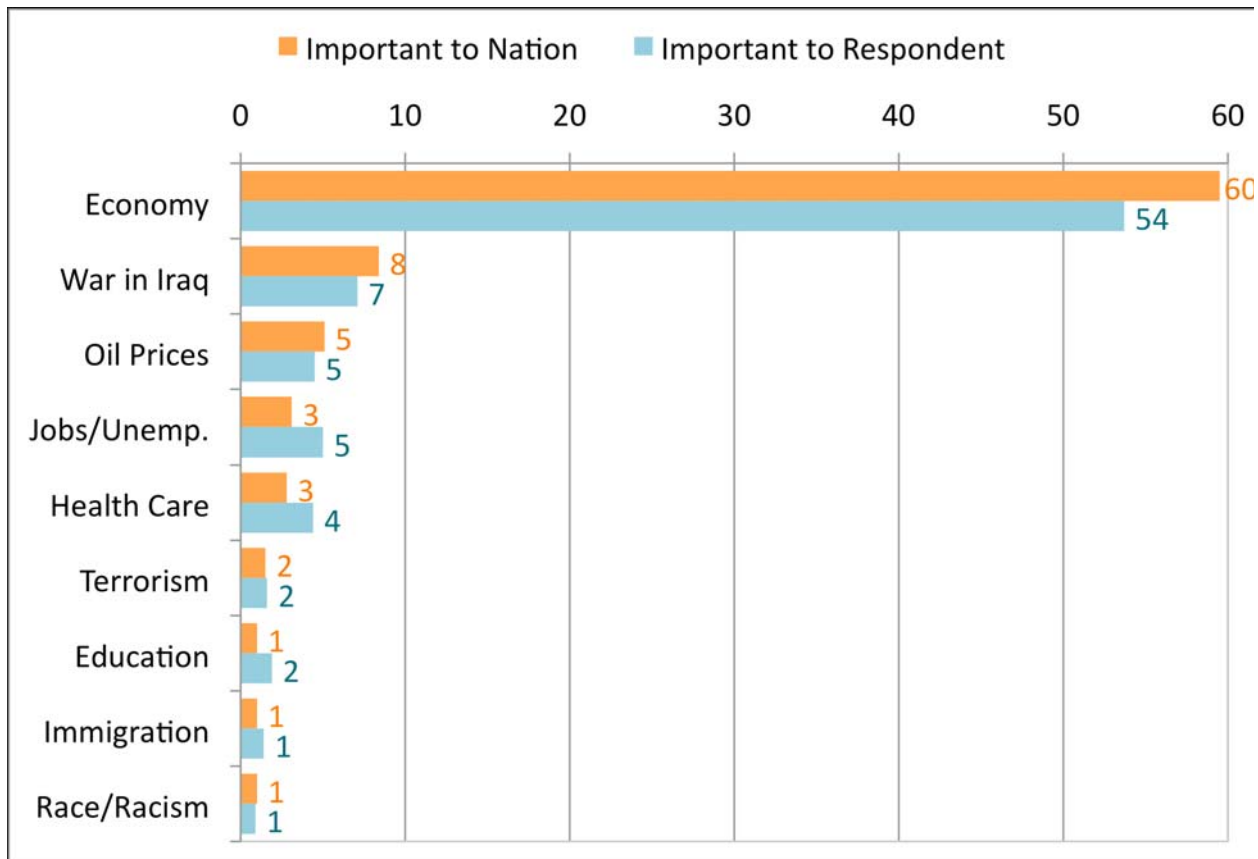
individuals who are not eligible to vote. However, even among those who are naturalized citizens, there still exist low rates of party affiliation and registration. Generally, Japanese-Americans are the most likely to register and to vote; Vietnamese and Korean-Americans rank consistently among the lowest. Japanese-Americans are the only Asian-American group in which a majority was born in the United States. Citizens of Chinese ancestry are still estimated to register at lower rates and Korean-Americans are less likely to turnout than other comparable Asians. Also, each group has its own particularities. Although Chinese, Filipino, Korean and Japanese are among the groups that associate with higher socioeconomic status, groups such as the Vietnamese earn half of what Japanese people make. These differences among the group are not easily noticeable when all Asian groups are lumped under one large label, namely Asian American. Another factor that must be considered is the low rate of naturalization and

**TABLE 1**  
**Percentage Distribution of Voting and Registration in the Elections of 1990–1998 by Race**

	Asian	Latino	Indian	Black	White
<b>November 1990 Election</b>					
Citizenship	51%	59%	96%	93%	96%
Registration	28 (56)	32 (55)	52 (55)	59 (64)	67 (70)
Voting	20 (72)*	21 (65)	35 (66)	39 (67)	49 (74)
Weighted N (×1000)	4,547	13,756	1,019	20,064	142,492
<b>November 1992 Election</b>					
Citizenship	53%	58%	99%	95%	98%
Registration	31 (62)	35 (63)	61 (63)	64 (70)	74 (77)
Voting	27 (88)	29 (83)	51 (84)	55 (85)	67 (91)
Weighted N (×1000)	5,070	14,688	944	20,777	143,962
<b>November 1994 Election</b>					
Citizenship	55%	59%	99%	96%	98%
Registration	29 (52)	31 (53)	56 (56)	59 (61)	68 (69)
Voting	22 (76)*	20 (64)	37 (66)	37 (64)	50 (74)
Weighted N (×1000)	4,772	17,476	954	21,514	145,027
<b>November 1996 Election</b>					
Citizenship	57%	61%	99%	96%	98%
Registration	33 (58)	36 (59)	61 (62)	64 (67)	72 (73)
Voting	26 (79)	27 (75)	45 (73)	51 (80)	60 (83)
Weighted N (×1000)	6,580	18,426	1,385	21,918	145,343
<b>November 1998 Election</b>					
Citizenship	59%	61%	98%	96%	98%
Registration	29 (49)	34 (55)	57 (58)	61 (64)	68 (69)
Voting	19 (66)*	20 (60)	35 (61)	40 (66)	47 (68)
Weighted N (×1000)	7,327	20,321	1,476	22,603	146,501

Source: Pei te Lien, "Asian Pacific-American Public Opinion and Political Participation

A third factor is the lack of representation in the political sphere. The concerns of Asian Americans are not in the agenda of many politicians in government. Because there is little to relate to in regards to public policy, there is no real incentive to vote. What was worse is the negative influence of campaign-finance investigation against Asian after the 1996 presidential elections. The attack on Asian Americans by political figures leads these individuals to lose faith in the system. When asked in a survey by the National Asian American Society what is the most important facing the United States today and to you personally, their majority response was the economy. However, there are not many politicians that have Asian small businesses in mind when writing up new policies. This lack of representation discourages Asian American from participating in American politics.



Source: National Asian American Society

While these statistics show a drab future for Asian Americans in American politics, in actuality, Asian Americans are a growing ethnic group as well as a strong force. The highest turnout was present in the 2008 presidential election. While it seems that these obstacles hinder Asian Americans from fully participating in politics, there is a growing number of Asian Americans in office holding. As more Asian Americans participate in politics, the more opportunities they acquire to run for office. The increasing number of public figures shows that Asian Americans are not longer a passive and quiet folk but they are ready to speak out. This gives hope for Asian Americans as they become a growing force in political participation.

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