



A GROWING VOICE

Asian American Voters in North Carolina

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The Institute for Southern Studies is a nonprofit research, media and education center that exposes injustice, strengthens democracy and builds a community for change in the South.



North Carolina Asian Americans Together is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization focused on bringing together the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community in North Carolina through civic engagement and political participation.



Southeast Asian Coalition works to increase community empowerment in the growing Southeast Asian American community of the Carolinas.



Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Los Angeles is the nation's largest legal and civil rights organization for Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders.

About the report

This report is a collaboration of the Institute for Southern Studies, North Carolina Asian Americans Together, the Southeast Asian Coalition and Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Los Angeles, with support and contributions from Democracy North Carolina.

For more information about the report,
visit www.ncasian.org.

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Executive Summary

A sian Americans are the fastest-growing racial demographic in the country today. A diverse and largely immigrant community, they are a key demographic fueling the changing face of the electorate in the country, the South and North Carolina.

Asian Americans are a particularly important voting bloc to watch in North Carolina — one of the biggest battleground states in the country in 2016 and a state that has emerged as a major hub of Asian American population growth in recent years. Between 2000 and 2010, the Asian American population in North Carolina grew 85 percent, which was the fastest rate in the South and third-fastest in the nation. Since 2010, Asian Americans have been the fastest growing racial or ethnic demographic in the state.

As the Asian American community has grown, so too has its potential political clout. In North Carolina, the number of Asian American voters grew 130 percent between 2006 and 2014. As of September 2016, registered Asian American voters were 90,000 voters strong, and their numbers will continue to grow.

In a defining election year, in the country's hottest battleground state, Asian Americans are poised to be a deciding vote in key races up and down the ballot.

But translating this growth into political power requires an informed, targeted strategy to reach this community that has been extremely under-engaged. In the South, 80 percent of potential Asian American voters said they were not contacted by a political party or community organization about voting in 2012. In North Carolina, only 58 percent of eligible Asian Americans were registered to vote in 2014, compared to 70 of all North Carolinians. And analyses also show that Asian American voters could be disproportionately affected by provisions of a new state voting law passed in 2013.

Asian Americans have an increasingly important role to play in our democracy and in our state and country's future. While they have unique concerns around issues like immigration and language access, Asian Americans are affected by issues that voters broadly care about like jobs, education and health care, and they are impacted by issues that many communities of color are concerned about including racism, voting rights and police accountability.

Asian Americans are more likely to be independent voters and are less entrenched in our country's and state's partisan divides. That means they're a unique demographic that parties and groups across the spectrum should pay attention to and engage.

Mobilizing the Asian American vote in North Carolina in 2016 is vital. Not only could the Asian American voting bloc hold the key to political victory in this battleground state, the community's history of exclusion, discrimination and stereotyping makes it critical for Asian Americans to raise their voices through the ballot box and beyond. The time is now for the community to flex its political muscle and play a greater role in defining North Carolina and our collective future.

Index of Asian American voters in North Carolina

1	Rank of Asian Americans among racial groups with the fastest growing populations in North Carolina and across the country
29	Percent increase in the Asian American population in North Carolina between 2010 and 2015
5	Percent increase of North Carolina's overall population during that period
103,000	Number of voting-eligible Asian Americans in North Carolina
92,000	Number of votes by which Republican Mitt Romney beat Democrat Barack Obama in the presidential race in the state in 2012
46,000	Number of votes by which Republican Thom Tillis beat Democrat Kay Hagan in the U.S. Senate race in North Carolina in 2014
59	Asian American percent turnout rate in North Carolina's 2012 election, compared to the overall rate of 68 percent
27	Their turnout in the 2014 election, compared to the overall rate of 44 percent
55	Percent of the state's eligible Asian American voters who live in just four urban counties (Wake, Mecklenburg, Guilford and Durham)
51	Percent of registered Asian American voters in the state who are not affiliated with any political party
78	Percent of Asian Americans in North Carolina who say they speak a language other than English at home
40	Percent of Asian American voters nationally who say they would switch their vote if their first-choice candidate expressed anti-immigrant sentiments
73	Percent of Asian American voters age 18 to 34 who said they would switch their vote if their first-choice candidate expressed anti-Muslim views
50,000	Number of young Asian American voters in North Carolina projected to age into the electorate by 2032
2040	Year by which the Asian American electorate nationally will double to 12.2 million

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THE GROWING CLOUT OF ASIAN AMERICAN VOTERS

The Asian American population has grown significantly in recent decades. In a battleground state like North Carolina where a mere one or two percentage points separate candidates in the polls, the Asian American vote is a significant, untapped demographic that could provide the margin of victory in key races in the state. Asian American voters have largely opted out of choosing a side in the state and country's partisan divides and are thus a critical "swing vote" demographic to engage, especially as their numbers continue to grow.

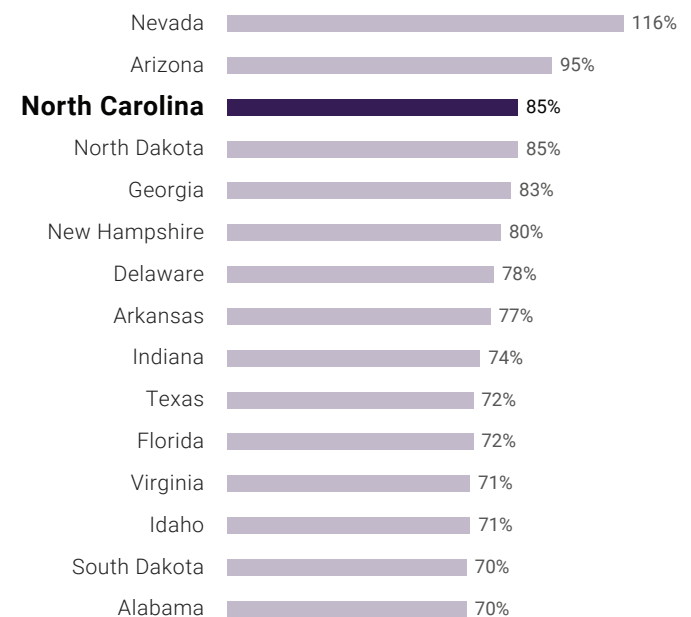
The fastest-growing racial demographic

The Asian American population has grown dramatically in North Carolina and across the country. Nationally, the Asian American population grew 46 percent between 2000 and 2010, outpacing the nation's overall growth rate of 10 percent and even Hispanic growth of 43 percent during that period.¹

North Carolina's Asian American population growth has far outpaced the national rate. Between 2000 and 2010, the state's Asian American population grew 85 percent — the fastest growth rate in the South and the third-fastest in the country.²

Asian American population growth in recent years has also remained strong, with Asian Americans emerging as the fastest-growing racial or ethnic demographic in the state. Between 2010 and 2015, North Carolina's Asian American population grew nearly 30 percent, while the overall population grew just 5 percent. This growth has even outpaced that of the Hispanic population, another one of the state's fastest-growing groups, which expanded by 14 percent during that period.³

Percentage growth in Asian American population by state, 2000-2010



Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

North Carolina population growth by race and ethnicity, 2010-2015

Race alone or in combination	2010 population	2015 population	Population growth
White (non-Hispanic)	6,373,570	6,560,680	2.9%
Black (non-Hispanic)	2,118,487	2,252,831	6.3%
American Indian and Alaskan Native (non-Hispanic)	162,977	172,272	5.7%
Asian (non-Hispanic)	249,659	321,444	28.8%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander (non-Hispanic)	11,636	14,114	21.3%
Hispanic (of any race)	835,654	953,433	14.1%
Statewide, all races and ethnicities	9,558,979	10,042,802	5.1%

Source: 2015 Census Bureau Population Estimates. Because population totals by race include individuals who identify as that race alone or in combination with other races, these totals do not add up to the statewide total.

Unlike the Hispanic population, which has been growing largely due to new births, the growth of the Asian American population is fueled by immigration. Between 2000 and 2014, over half — 56 percent — of the growth of the Asian American community in North Carolina was from newcomers who were born abroad. By comparison, only 33 percent of Hispanic population growth during that period was attributable to those born abroad.⁴

In the years to come, the Asian American population will continue to grow. North Carolina’s Office of Budget and Management estimates the Asian American population — in combination with the Pacific Islander population, which was 14,000 in 2015 — will be nearly half a million (463,000) by 2035 and make up nearly 4 percent of the state’s population.⁵

Who is “Asian American?”

The Asian American community is referred to in a variety of ways — Asian, Asian American, Asian and Pacific Islander. This report focuses on the Asian American population, rather than Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian populations. This report also uses the term “Asian American” to underscore how members of this community, whether citizens or not, are equal and important members of our state and country. To read more about these terms, see Appendix A.

Growing political power

As the number of Asian Americans has grown in North Carolina, so too have their voting and political clout. Despite being a largely immigrant community, a remarkably high number have become naturalized citizens, resulting in an overall citizenship rate among Asian Americans in North Carolina of 71 percent.⁶ About 103,000 Asian Americans in the state are citizens 18 years or older.⁷

Over the last decade, Asian American voters have increasingly been adding their names to the voter rolls in North Carolina. Between 2006 and 2014, the number of registered Asian Americans in the state grew 130 percent, according to Census Bureau estimates.⁸

Recent data from the North Carolina State Board of Elections indicates there were 65,000 registered Asian American voters as of September 2016; however, this number may not capture the entire population if Asian American voters did not indicate their race on their registration form or registered before “Asian” was included as a specific category. An analysis of voters’ last names indicates there may be as many as 90,000 Asian American registered voters in the state.⁹

Though these numbers may not seem large, in a battleground state like North Carolina Asian American voters could be decisive in electing our state and country’s future leaders. In 2012, Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney won North Carolina by just 92,000 votes. Four years prior, Democrat candidate Barack Obama carried the state by only 14,000 votes. In the 2014 midterm elections, Republican Thom Tillis defeated incumbent Democrat Kay Hagan by a razor-



Young volunteers help the Southeast Asian Coalition register new voters in Charlotte for the 2016 election. (Photo by Ricky Leung)

thin 1.5-point margin — just 46,000 votes — in the U.S. Senate race.¹⁰

In 2016, North Carolina has again emerged as one of the biggest battleground states in the country. In tossup races for president, governor and U.S. Senate, Asian American voters could provide the margin of victory, shaping the direction of state and national politics. They could also influence other important statewide races, including contests for state attorney general and state Supreme Court.

Beyond statewide races, Asian Americans are a key voting bloc in several of the North Carolina’s most competitive legislative districts, including state House districts in Wake, Buncombe and Mecklenburg counties. In five state House districts, the voting-eligible Asian American population is greater than the total votes that provided the margin of victory in those races in 2014.

THE GROWING CLOUT OF ASIAN AMERICAN VOTERS

Top 10 N.C. House districts where Asian Americans could sway the outcome

House district (County)	2014 winner	2014 runner-up	Margin of victory (# of votes)	Eligible Asian American voters, 2014*	Asian American share of MOV
41 (Wake)	Gale Adcock (D)	Tom Murry (R)	777	6,403	824%
92 (Mecklenburg)	Charles Jeter (R)	Robin Bradford (D)	1,136	1,778	157%
44 (Cumberland)	Rick Glazier (D)	Richard Button (R)	971	1,354	139%
49 (Wake)	Gary Pendleton (R)	Kim Hanchette (D)	1,298	1,786	138%
40 (Wake)	Marilyn Avila (R)	Margaret E. Broadwell (D)	2,553	2,743	107%
36 (Wake)	Nelson Dollar (R)	Lisa Baker (D)	3,062	2,082	68%
115 (Buncombe)	John Ager (D)	Nathan Ramsey (R)	496	329	66%
116 (Buncombe)	Brian Turner (D)	Tim Moffitt (R)	977	558	57%
88 (Mecklenburg)	Rob Bryan (R)	Margie Storch (D)	2,839	1,618	57%
11 (Wake)	Duane Hall (D)	Ray Martin (R)	5,531	2,940	53%

Source: North Carolina State Board of Elections and 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

*Eligible voters based on citizen voting age population. Note that while most other statistics cited about the Asian American population include those who identify as Asian American alone or in combination with another race, this data reflects those who identify as Asian American alone, and may underestimate the number of eligible Asian American voters.

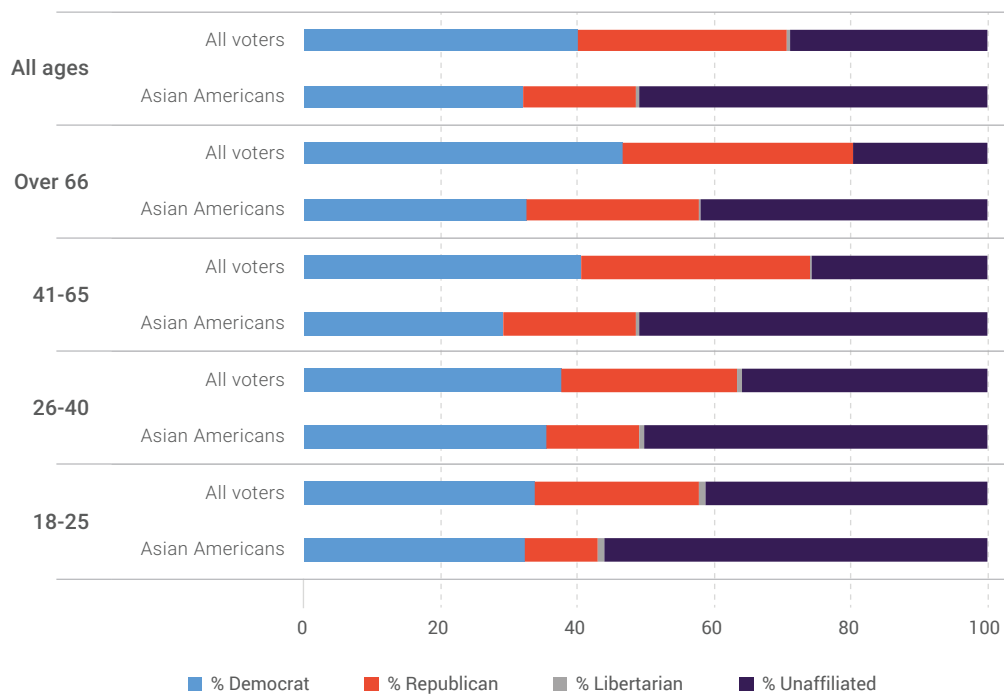
Independent minded

As a newer community to North Carolina and to the U.S., Asian Americans have been much less entrenched in the country's partisan divides than many other groups, making them a key demographic to engage for parties and other political groups across the spectrum.

Nationally, a 2016 poll found that 37 percent of Asian Americans were unaffiliated voters.¹¹ Without strong identification for either party, Asian American voters have shifted their support dramatically at the national level from backing Republican President George H.W. Bush by 24 points in 1992 to voting for Democratic President Barack Obama by 47 percent points in 2012.¹²

Partisan affiliation of North Carolina's registered voters

by age, 2016



Source: N.C. State Board of Elections June 2016 data on registered voters. Analysis based on race indicated on voter registration.

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In North Carolina, Asian American voters are even more solidly independent. As of the state's June 2016 primary, 51 percent of registered Asian American voters were unaffiliated, compared to 29 percent of all North Carolina registered voters. Thirty-two percent were registered as Democrats, while 16 percent were registered as Republicans.¹³

Young Asian American voters in the state are even less likely to affiliate with a political party. Fifty-six percent of Asian American voters age 18 to 25 are unaffiliated,

compared to 41 percent of all registered voters in that age bracket. This gap seems largely due to lower rates of young Asian American voters registering as Republicans. While 32 percent of young Asian Americans are registered as Democrats, roughly in line with the 34 percent of all voters in this age bracket, only 11 percent of young Asian Americans are registered as Republicans compared to 24 percent of all young voters.¹⁴

Recent national polls have found that Asian Americans nationally are increasingly affiliating with the Democratic Party, which many argue is due to Asian Americans' negative reaction to the anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric of Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump. In 2016, 47 percent of Asian American voters nationally reported identifying with the Democratic Party, up from 35 percent in 2012, as the share of voters not identifying with either party fell from 47 percent to 37 percent over that period.¹⁵

But will this national trend affect how Asian Americans in North Carolina vote up and down the ballot? With the loss of straight party voting in North Carolina and the high level of independent voters among this demographic, Asian Americans may be open to splitting their ticket in down-ballot races and voting for candidates of different parties.



Former U.S. Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta talks to young Asian American voters at the Democratic National Convention in Charlotte in 2012. Though national polls show increasing affiliation with the Democratic Party among Asian American voters, 56 percent of these voters age 18-25 remain unaffiliated. (Photo by Ricky Leung)

Expanding the electorate

While the numbers indicate their increasing influence in elections, Asian Americans have only scratched the surface in terms of electoral clout. Nationally, the Asian American electorate is projected to more than double by 2040 to 12.2 million voters.¹⁶ As a result of demographic trends and through more concerted outreach, the Asian American electorate in North Carolina is also likely to continue to grow and have greater impact.

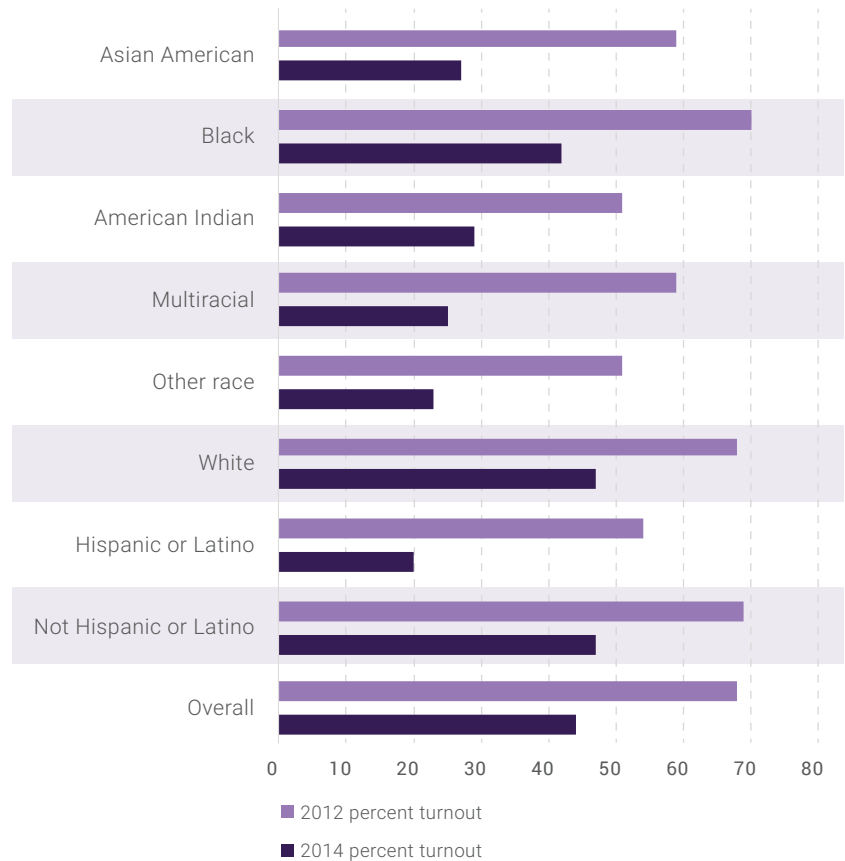
In North Carolina, a key segment that will add to the Asian American electorate is a cohort of young Asian Americans who will age into the electorate. Among Asian American residents in 2014, 84 percent of young people under the age of 18 were citizens, compared to 61 percent of voting-age adults. By 2020, roughly 15,000 young Asian Americans will become eligible to vote. By 2032, nearly 50,000 will.¹⁷ (See Appendix B for a detailed breakdown of citizenship rates by age among Asian Americans.)

Another key avenue to expanding the Asian American vote is to engage a larger share of the existing electorate.

Asian American voters in North Carolina have been extremely under-engaged in terms of voter registration and turnout. According to the Census Bureau, only 58 percent of the state's Asian American citizens were registered in 2014, compared to 70 percent of all citizens in the state.¹⁸

North Carolina voter turnout

by race and ethnicity, 2012 and 2014



Source: North Carolina State Board of Elections. Turnout rate based on the number of registered voters. Analysis based on voter-indicated race and ethnicity.

Among registered voters, Asian American voter turnout in the state lags behind that of white and black registered voters, mirroring national trends. In 2012, only 59 percent of registered Asian American voters in the state cast a ballot, compared to 68 percent of registered white voters and 70 percent of registered black voters. During the 2014 midterm elections, the turnout gap between Asian American voters and white

and black voters was even wider — 27 percent compared to 47 percent and 42 percent, respectively.

One likely factor contributing to the turnout gap is a lack of intentional, targeted outreach to Asian American voters. In a 2012 post-election survey, 80 percent of Asian American voters in the South reported receiving no contact from either political party or community-based organizations.¹⁹

The right to vote

Beyond the political calculus of Asian Americans as a pivotal voting bloc in North Carolina, increasing Asian American engagement at the ballot box and beyond is critical to ensuring this growing community has a voice in deciding the leadership and future direction of the state.

Too often, Asian Americans have been stereotyped as quiet or passive and rendered invisible on important issues that face our state and country. In order to hold leaders accountable and have a say in the decisions that affect their lives and their communities, Asian Americans must have a seat at the table and a voice in the political process.

Voting is a particularly important vehicle for participation, especially considering Asian Americans did not always have the right to vote in the U.S. and were explicitly excluded from the country. Early in the country's history, eligibility for U.S. citizenship was limited to whites only, excluding Asian Americans and other non-white groups. Asian American naturalization continued to be banned through the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and subsequent bans on immigration from Asian countries.²⁰

These naturalization bans barred Asian Americans from exercising full rights as U.S. citizens — including having the ability to vote — in a country they helped build. It was not until the Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed in 1943 that Chinese Americans were first permitted to become U.S. citizens and granted the right to vote. These rights were extended to Indian Americans in 1946 and to Japanese Americans and other Asian Americans in 1952.²¹

Since then, the Asian American electorate has expanded as additional voting rights protections were enacted to ensure Asian American voters could access the ballot. The federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 has been amended over the years to include protections for language minorities (read more about this on page 16). The number of Asian American voters has swelled to 5.9 million nationally.²²

With Asian Americans now a significant and growing part of the fabric of North Carolina, it is critical for this demographic as community members, civic leaders, elected officials and as voters to have a voice in determining North Carolina's future. ■



New citizens register to vote right after a naturalization ceremony at the 2016 International Festival in Raleigh. (Photo by Johnny J. Jones / Zoë Pictures)

ENGAGING ASIAN AMERICAN VOTERS

Given that Asian Americans are a critical voting bloc in North Carolina, how can their engagement and turnout be strengthened?

At a fundamental level, those seeking to reach Asian American voters must understand the great diversity encompassed in the Asian American community. It includes dozens of languages, ethnicities, nationalities, religions and cultures. Some have come to North Carolina as high-educated, high-skilled workers while others have come to escape persecution and pursue a better life. Language access is a fundamental issue but one that affects different groups in different ways.

Understanding the nuances of various communities within the Asian American population should be at the forefront of developing any voter engagement strategy.



Sikh Americans attend the 2012 Democratic National Convention in Charlotte, North Carolina. Asian Americans practice a range of faiths and reflect many different cultural backgrounds. (Photo by Ricky Leung)

A mosaic of communities

No single story captures the Asian American experience in North Carolina. The community includes people from over 20 Asian ethnicities and nationalities who speak over 40 languages. It includes highly educated and wealthy demographics as well as communities struggling to achieve the American dream.

The largest ethnic group among Asian Americans in the state in recent decades has been the Asian Indian community, whose population has more than doubled in the past decade and now makes up 28 percent of the Asian American population. The second-largest is Chinese Americans at 15 percent of the Asian American population, followed by Vietnamese and Filipino communities at 12 percent each.²³

In addition, North Carolina has become home to significant ethnic minority communities from Southeast Asia, many of whom have come to the state as refugees. They include the Montagnards from mountain regions of Vietnam, including members of Jrai, K'ho, Rhade and

other tribes. North Carolina also has one of the largest Hmong communities with 10,800 Hmong residents in 2010 who came to the state from Southeast Asia.²⁴

Each community brings a wealth of languages, traditions, religions, foods and culture to the state. The most commonly spoken Asian languages in the state are Chinese, including Mandarin, Cantonese and other varieties of Chinese language; Vietnamese; and Arabic (see: “How do you say ‘voting’ in Chinese” on page 15 for more on language diversity). Asian Americans also practice a range of religions, including Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism and Christianity.

As Asian Americans have built community in North Carolina, language, culture and religion have been important ways of bringing people together. Although the state has very few organizations dedicated to Asian American civic and political participation, dozens of organizations and community groups have emerged to become important institutions in Asian American communities — and potential networks to tap into to increase civic engagement. These include language schools, religious institutions, cultural and arts groups, campus organizations and Asian American-owned and -serving businesses.

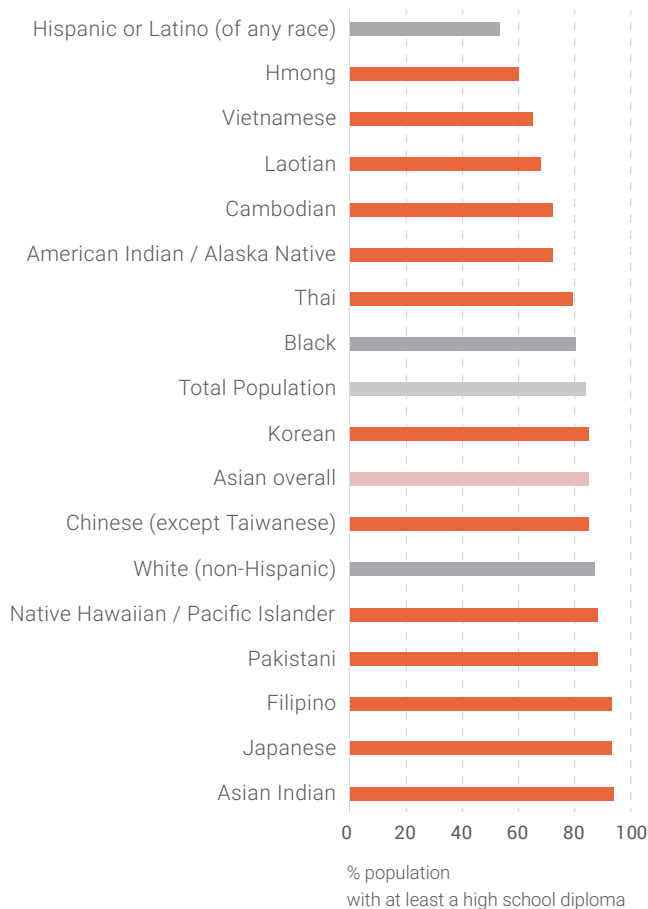
North Carolina’s Asian American community is also economically diverse. While stereotypes of Asian Americans as a highly educated, economically successful group persist, many Asian American communities face significant economic challenges.

According to the 2006-2010 American Community Survey, Hmong, Korean, Pakistani and Cambodian Americans in North Carolina experienced a higher rate of poverty than the statewide average of 16 percent, with rates as high as 24 percent among Cambodian Americans. Several Asian American ethnic groups also had lower rates of members with at least a high school diploma than the statewide rate of 84 percent. Less than 70 percent of Laotian, Vietnamese, and Hmong Americans in North Carolina had a high school diploma.²⁵

These numbers show that the Asian American community faces similar educational and economic barriers as the Hispanic and African American communities and underscore the need for a strong Asian American voice on how to expand opportunity for all.

Educational attainment in North Carolina

by race, ethnicity and nationality



Source: 2006-2010 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

Finding a voice in a new country

Suin Cil and her family waited 15 years to come to Charlotte, North Carolina, from Vietnam. They are part of the K’ho tribe of the Montagnards, an ethnic minority group that lives in the mountains of Vietnam. They, like many other Montagnards, sought refuge in the U.S. after the Vietnam War because they were persecuted for having aided American troops during the conflict. In 2003, 15 years after first filing the paperwork to come to the U.S., Suin who was 18 at the time and her family finally resettled in North Carolina.

“At first I was struggling especially with the language barrier,” Suin said about arriving in Charlotte. “It was hard for me to get adapted to the life here. I was a little bit nervous at first. But then, I have to accept it. I was thinking that life here is much better than back home because we have more opportunity.”

Suin and her family leaned on support from refugee agencies, their relatives and the sizable Montagnard community in North Carolina, which is the largest population of Montagnards outside of Southeast Asia with an estimated 20,000 residents.²⁶ Suin’s biggest goal was to go to college, and she attended UNC Charlotte to pursue an accounting degree, graduating in 2011. She’s the only one in her family to graduate from college and now works for a mortgage company.

Having achieved her biggest goal, Suin is focused on giving back to her community. She has been involved with the Southeast Asian Coalition (SEAC) since 2011 and has worked to share her K’ho tribe and culture with others. She has also helped her family, as well as 50 other Montagnard community members, through the naturalization process to become citizens. And she’s working to demystify the voting process for the Montagnard community and registering them to vote.

“To me, voting is very important because I have a right to choose someone who represents my state and my country,” said Suin, who became a citizen in 2009.

Suin is concerned that many in her community don’t realize how much their vote matters. She’s been working this year to raise awareness and help her community pay attention to



Suin performs a cultural dance with friends during SEAC’s annual street food festival in Charlotte that brought visitors out for voter registration and community building work. (Photos by Ricky Leung)

candidates and what they promise to do. She tells them they should not leave it to others to decide our future leaders.

For Suin, who plans to vote this election, choosing a leader who embraces all communities, including immigrants, is an important issue.

“I want a leader who looks at other people right, who respects people from different countries,” Suin said. “To me, you are the United States. The term, ‘unite,’ it’s like everyone is equal. It’s not — you’re from China, that means you’re different. Korean, different. Vietnamese, different. Everyone is equal.”

Where are Asian American voters?

Asian American communities — and accordingly, Asian American voters — are largely based in and around North Carolina’s major metro areas. Raleigh and Charlotte have by far the largest Asian American populations in the state, with a growing number of Asian Americans in nearby cities and suburbs. The Piedmont Triad, particularly Greensboro and to a lesser extent Winston-Salem, and the military community of Fayetteville also have significant Asian American communities.

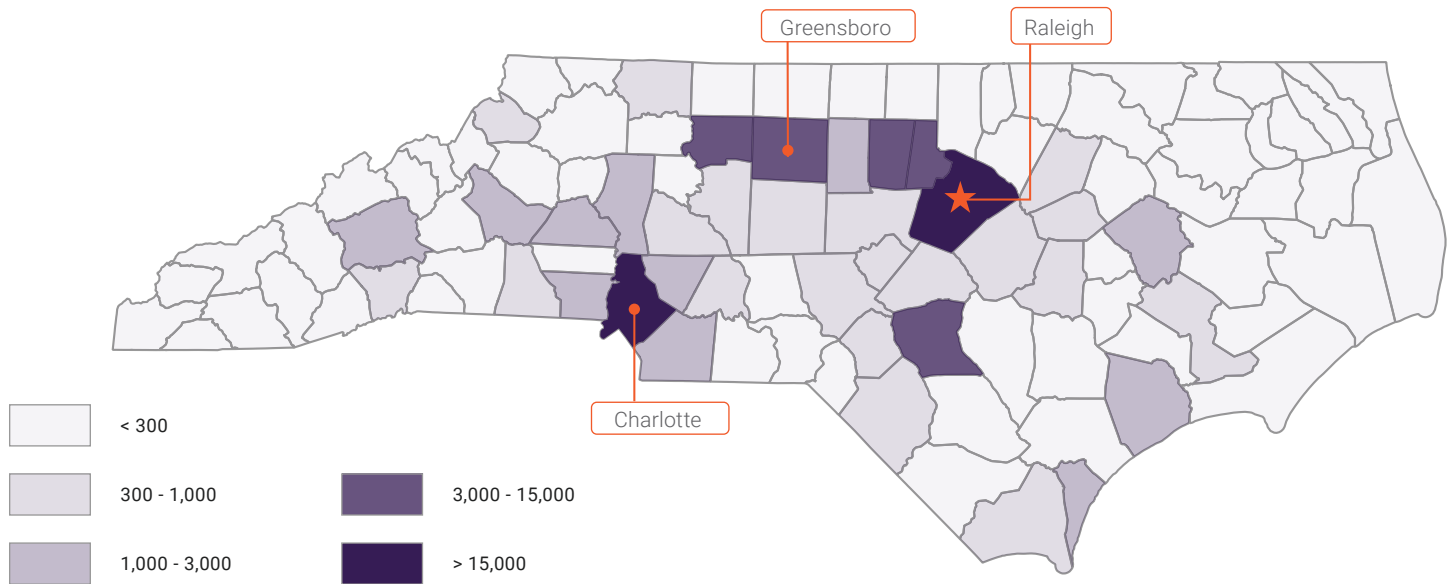
Wake County, whose seat is the capital city of Raleigh, has the largest number of eligible Asian American voters (those who are citizens age 18 or older). Its nearly 23,000 potential Asian American voters make up 22 percent of all eligible Asian American voters in the state. Nearly 80 percent of Wake County’s eligible Asian American voters are naturalized citizens. There are another nearly 18,000 voting-age Asian Americans in the county who are non-citizens, emphasizing the importance of naturalization efforts to growing the Asian American electorate.²⁷

The numbers in Mecklenburg County, whose seat is Charlotte, are similar. The county has nearly 20,000 eligible Asian American voters who account for 19 percent of the state’s eligible Asian American voters. Seventy-two percent of Mecklenburg’s eligible Asian American voters are naturalized citizens. Another 17,000 Asian American adults residing there are non-citizens.²⁸

Outside of Wake and Mecklenburg counties there is a substantial drop in the eligible Asian American voter population. The county with the third-highest numbers is Guilford County, home to Greensboro, with over 8,000 eligible Asian American voters, followed by Durham County with 6,000. These four counties account for 55 percent of the state’s Asian American electorate.²⁹

The distribution of registered Asian American voters, as tracked by the race indicated on voter registration forms, follows a similar pattern. As of June 2016, Wake County had the largest number of registered Asian American voters at nearly 18,000 followed by Mecklenburg with

Citizen voting-age population of Asian Americans in North Carolina, 2014



Source: 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

12,000.³⁰ (These numbers should not be compared with previous eligible voter numbers because they reflect different time frames.)

Orange County, home to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, has the highest share of Asian Americans among all voters in the county at 3.8 percent. Wake and Durham counties followed at 2.7 and 2.6 percent respectively.³¹

For a county-level breakdown of Asian American citizens of voting age populations, see Appendix B. For a county-level breakdown of registered Asian American voters, see Appendix C. Because these two tables are drawn from different data sets reflecting different time frames, calculations of registration rates based on the two data sets are not a reliable measure of voter registration and are likely to be overestimated.

Hmong voters in the Foothills

While Asian American voters are concentrated in North Carolina's urban centers, significant Asian American communities reside in other parts of the state as well. The Foothills of North Carolina between the Appalachian Mountains and the Piedmont region are home to one of the nation's largest communities of Hmong people, an ethnic minority group from Southeast Asia who have been resettled in the U.S. since the Vietnam War. In 2010, over half of the 10,800 Hmong residents in the state lived in two counties in this region, Burke and Catawba, with other Hmong communities based in surrounding counties.³²

Leng Vang, a new Hmong voter, was born in Laos and came to Statesville, North Carolina, in Iredell County with his family in 1998. They were one of the first Hmong families to move to the area, and they eventually started a family flower business. After serving in the U.S. military and later getting a degree, Leng came back to support his family's business.

Although many in the Hmong community are eligible to vote, Leng observed that young people don't seem particularly motivated to do so and are more aware of presidential candidates than state or local races. Meanwhile, Leng said the



Leng makes the trip to Raleigh to help his family's flower stand at the North Carolina State Farmers Market on most weekends. (Photo by Ricky Leung)

older generation struggles to get engaged. Not only is there a language barrier, many seem confused about the voting process and where to turn to get information. The Hmong community is active in its own elections for a local Hmong council, and Leng hopes that engagement will broaden to local, state and federal elections this year.

How do you say ‘voting’ in Chinese?

Language is a vital consideration for Asian American voter engagement, as 78 percent of Asian Americans in North Carolina speak a language other than English at home.³³ Among the dozens of Asian languages spoken in the state are Hindi, Urdu, Korean, Tagalog, Hmong, Laotian, Gujarati and Japanese. Even within a single ethnic group like the Montagnards from Vietnam, various tribes speak different languages including Jrai, Rhade, Bunong and K’ho.

Chinese is the most commonly spoken language among North Carolina’s Asian Americans with over 30,000 speakers of Mandarin, Cantonese and other varieties of Chinese language. Vietnamese and Arabic are the next most commonly spoken languages among the state’s Asian Americans.³⁴ (See Appendix E for a detailed breakdown of Asian language speakers.)

Among Asian Americans in North Carolina, 30 percent report speaking English less than “very well.” English proficiency rates vary widely by nationality and ethnicity. Several Southeast Asian groups report low levels of English proficiency, including 50 percent of Vietnamese Americans who say they speak English less than “very well.” Chinese and Korean Americans also cite lower than average proficiency rates.³⁵

Meanwhile, 88 percent of Filipinos and 81 percent of Asian Indians say they are English proficient. While their lack of English proficiency is low among Asian Americans, it is still significant compared to whites and blacks, only 1 percent of whom are not English proficient.³⁶

These numbers show the need to conduct outreach and provide materials in different languages when targeting Asian American voters. Translations facilitate engagement in practical ways, helping those who struggle with English understand the voting process. It can also send a powerful message, even for those who don’t struggle as much with English, that their communities are recognized, valued and welcomed.

There are also several strategies to help ensure access to the ballot for non-native English speakers. Through

federal Voting Rights Act protections, limited English proficient voters have the right to bring an interpreter of their choosing to assist them at the polls. Through mail-in absentee voting, voters may fill out the ballot at home with help from a language interpreter.

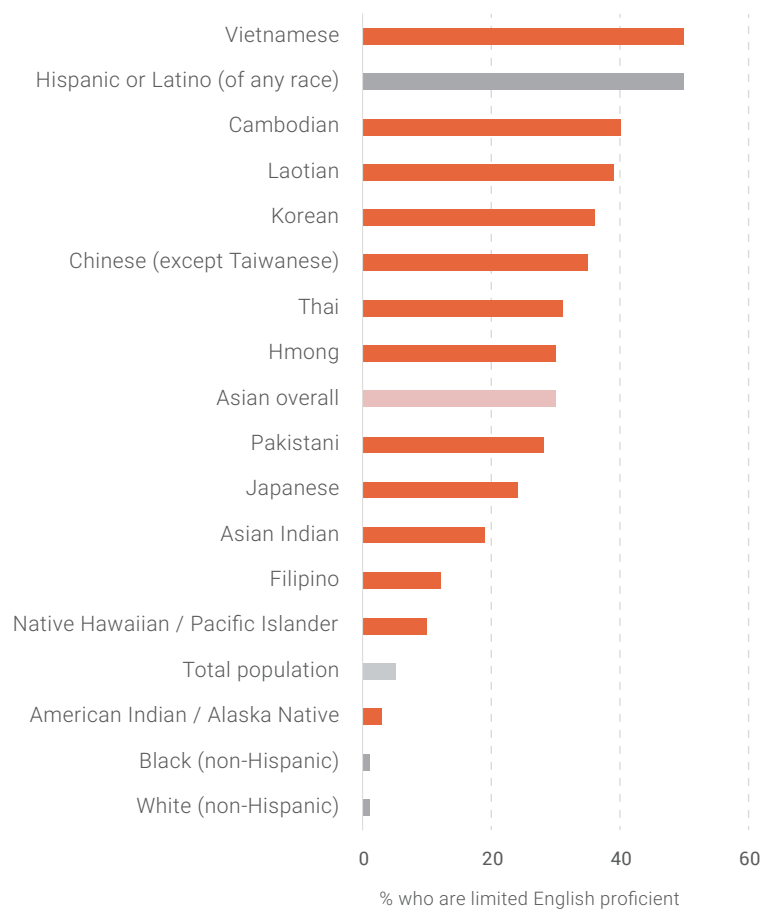
Asian American voters who encounter issues at the polls can call a multilingual national voter hotline operated by APIAVote and Asian Americans Advancing Justice at **1-888-API-VOTE** (1-888-274-8683). Bilingual voter assistance is provided in English, Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean, Vietnamese, Tagalog, Urdu, Hindi and Bengali.

North Carolina voters can also call the Election Protection hotline at **866-OUR-VOTE** (888-687-8683) or the North Carolina hotline **888-OUR-VOTE** (888-687-8683), which provides assistance in English and Spanish.



Limited English proficiency in North Carolina

by nationality, ethnicity and race



Source: 2006-2010 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

Voting rights for language minorities

Over the years, Congress has amended the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA) to include protections for language minorities. Section 203, passed in 1975, directs jurisdictions that meet a certain population threshold of language minorities, including speakers of Spanish, Asian, Native American and Alaska Native languages, to provide translated voting materials in those languages. Most jurisdictions covered by Section 203 are in Western and Southwestern states, as well as Hawaii and Alaska. Given the current size of the Asian American population in North Carolina, no counties qualify for these protections for Asian language minorities.³⁷

Another part of the VRA that protects language minorities' voting rights is Section 208, which was added to the law in 1982. This provision allows voters who need assistance due to a disability or an inability to read or write — including reading or writing in English — to bring someone to assist them at the polls. Although this rule applies to voters across the country including in North Carolina, there is a lack of awareness among voters as well as among poll workers who risk violating voters' rights by barring interpreters from the voting booth.³⁸

What motivates Asian American voters?

No demographic group should be painted with a broad brush, especially one as diverse as Asian Americans. While polling of voters provides some sense of the mood of the electorate, polling of Asian American voters in North Carolina has been limited. However, national surveys suggest that this demographic is concerned about issues that most American voters focus on like education and the economy.

Polling on issues

A Spring 2016 poll of Asian American voters conducted by Asian Americans Advancing Justice, APIAVote and AAPI Data found that top issues for Asian American voters included education, health care, terrorism, jobs and the economy. The poll also found substantial support among Asian American voters for enacting stricter gun control, raising the federal minimum wage, and enacting stricter emissions limits to address climate change. A majority — 63 percent — of Asian American voters also opposed legalizing marijuana, although rates varied by age and whether the voter was native- or foreign-born.³⁹

The poll also found differences among Asian American groups. For example, it found that Asian American voters

in general tend to support President Obama's health care law, the Affordable Care Act, with 57 percent supporting it and 29 percent opposing. However, support varied by nationality from a low of 39 percent among Korean American voters to a high of 74 percent among Asian Indian American voters.⁴⁰

Immigration

Immigration is a salient issue for many Asian American voters. While the issue of immigration reform did not emerge as the top issue in the Spring 2016 poll, immigration and candidates' attitudes towards immigrants were a significant concern for Asian American voters. Forty percent of respondents said that if their candidate of choice expressed strongly anti-immigrant views, they would vote for someone else, even if they agreed with that candidate on most other issues. That rate jumped to 51 percent among Asian American voters ages 18 to 34.⁴¹

Anti-Muslim sentiment

Asian American voters surveyed nationally also expressed aversion to candidates who voice anti-Muslim views. Forty-three percent said they would switch their vote



New citizens line up to receive their certificates after a naturalization ceremony at the 2016 International Festival in Raleigh. What will motivate these newly eligible voter at the polls? (Photo by Johnny Jones / Zoë Pictures)



to another candidate if their initial choice expressed anti-Muslim sentiments. Among young Asian American voters, that figure was 73 percent.⁴²

Anti-Muslim sentiment has affected North Carolina since the 9/11 terror attacks and more recently following attacks in Paris, California and elsewhere. The issue was brought to the forefront in a tragic way in February 2015 when a man shot to death three young Muslim American students at their home in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. While law enforcement said a parking dispute led to the murders, many others including the victims' families called them a hate crime.



The issue affects many Asian American Muslims in the state. North Carolina is home to a many immigrants from Asian countries where Islam is a major religion including Indonesia, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.⁴³ Although American Muslims are racially diverse,⁴⁴ a rise in anti-Muslim sentiment and attacks have targeted Asian American Muslims and other Asian Americans perceived as Muslims.

Police accountability

The issues of deadly police force and police accountability, which have been elevated across the country particularly by black communities, have also intersected with the Asian American community in North Carolina.

In 2014, Chieu Di Thi Vo, a 47-year old Vietnamese woman who lived with her mother, was shot and killed by a Greensboro police officer who responded to a call that Vo was chasing her mother around an apartment complex with a knife. The officer had claimed that Vo had been lunging at him with the knife when he fired the shots, but the family and its attorneys say the police bodycam footage — which was finally released two years later in 2016 following calls from the community for transparency — contradicts the officer's account and that she was not imminently threatening the officer. Vo did not speak English and had a mental illness.⁴⁵

TOP: SEAC youth from Charlotte and Greensboro march to Greensboro City Council in May 2016 with the Vo family to support them as they see the police bodycam footage for the first time and demand that it be released to the public. (Photo courtesy of SEAC)

BOTTOM: SEAC youth honor civil rights history outside the Woolworth's, site of the Greensboro sit-ins, after the Vo action. (Photo by H'lois Mlo, courtesy of SEAC)



In June 2016, young activists with SEAC marched from the governor’s mansion in Raleigh to the government center to stage a “die-in” and deliver 77 flowers — representing the 77 people who had been shot and killed by police since police body cameras were implemented in 2014 — to Gov. McCrory’s office. (Photo by Kass Impressions, courtesy of SEAC)

Another shooting death occurred in West Charlotte in April 2016. Sulasone “Bong” Ackhavong was a 41-year old Lao American refugee living in West Charlotte who was suicidal and had a gun at a local convenience store one night. Police, including a SWAT team, were called in and shot and killed Ackhavong when they said he pointed the gun at them. The Southeast Asian Coalition (SEAC), whose community Ackhavong had been a part of, held a vigil for him following his death and called the State Bureau of Investigation to look into the shooting.⁴⁶

SEAC has been organizing around these two fatal police shootings and more broadly around the issue of police accountability. Policing is an issue that SEAC’s youth, most of whom live in East and West Charlotte in majority black neighborhoods, experience alongside their black peers in schools and neighborhoods. It has been working

in coalition with black advocates and other groups around these and other fatal police shootings in Charlotte including that of Jonathan Ferrell in 2013 and Keith Lamont Scott in 2016.

SEAC recognizes that securing justice for black communities is integrally linked to ensuring freedom for Asians and Asian Americans from war, forced migration, racial profiling, economic disenfranchisement and deportations. SEAC’s director, Cat Bao Le, said in an AJ+ video about its activism on police accountability, “These are real issues that affect real Southeast Asians in North Carolina. ...We can’t just sit still. We have a stake in this too.”

Accessing the ballot

Recent changes in North Carolina’s voting laws could affect Asian American voters disproportionately compared to other groups.

In 2013, the state legislature made sweeping changes to North Carolina’s voting laws by passing House Bill 589. One of the biggest changes was a new requirement that voters show photo ID at the polls. But the law also included a reduction of early voting days and elimination of voter “safety nets” like same-day voter registration during early voting and out-of-precinct voting. It also eliminated a pre-registration program for 16- and 17-year-olds.

The law has been in flux as it has been challenged in the courts. In July 2016, a federal appeals court blocked implementation of the new law in the 2016 general election, finding it was racially discriminatory against African Americans. The case has been appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, which will not hear it until after the election.

Although HB 589 won’t be enforced this election, certain provisions of it could have disproportionately affected

Asian American voters. Analysis of voting trends suggests Asian American voters have benefited from voting safety nets like same-day registration during early voting and may be disproportionately affected by implementation of the photo ID requirement.

While changes to voting laws can be confusing for any voter, language barriers among Asian American voters can make it even more difficult to understand when, where and how to vote in North Carolina. Compounded by a lack of outreach and engagement from parties and community organizations, Asian Americans may face greater barriers in understanding how to cast their ballot.

Same-day registration

Same-day registration (SDR) allows voters to register and vote at the same time during the early voting period. In addition to giving voters who have missed the regular voter registration deadline a chance to register and vote, SDR also functions as a “safety net” to protect voters from administrative mistakes made at the DMV and other agencies where people can register to vote. SDR is particularly important for groups of voters who

Same-day registration users in North Carolina

by race and age, March 2016 primary election

Race or ethnicity	Share of total registered voters	Count of SDR users	Share of total SDR users	Count of SDR users under 30	Share of SDR users under 30
African American / Black	22.4%	3,861	16.9%	2,176	56.4%
American Indian / Alaska Native	0.8%	280	1.2%	114	40.7%
Asian American	1.0%	564	2.5%	379	67.2%
Hispanic / Latino	2.1%	1,096	4.8%	684	62.4%
White	70.4%	13,336	58.4%	7,089	53.2%
Total	—	22,855	—	12,468	54.6%

Source: North Carolina State Board of Elections data analyzed by Isela Gutiérrez and Amanda Matson of Democracy North Carolina.

The March 2016 primary election in North Carolina was the first in which the photo ID requirement and “reasonable impediment” declaration were implemented, and voting trends from that election suggest Asian Americans were disproportionately caught in the confusion around voter ID.

move more frequently, including low-income voters and younger voters.

During North Carolina’s March 2016 primary election, 22,855 voters used same-day registration to vote during early voting who otherwise would have not been able to vote in that election. Asian American voters took advantage of same-day registration at disproportionately high rates. Although they made up only 1.1 percent of registered voters at the time, 2.5 percent of same-day registrants from the March 2016 primary identified as Asian American.⁴⁷

Young Asian American voters disproportionately use same-day registration. Two-thirds (67.2 percent) of Asian American voters who used SDR were under the age of 30, although that age group makes up only 28 percent of registered Asian American voters.⁴⁸ This rate is also higher than their same-age counterparts in other racial groups. By comparison, 53.2 percent of white same-day registrants and 56.4 percent of black same-day registrants were under 30.⁴⁹

One possible explanation for the high use of same-day registration among young Asian American voters could be the high rates of same-day registration among university students. In seven North Carolina counties that are home to major universities, Asian American voters under the age of 30 make up 55 percent or more of Asian American same-day registration users. In Orange County, home to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and Durham County, home to Duke University, Asian American voters under 30 made up over 80 percent of that race’s same-day registration users.⁵⁰

Voter ID

HB 589 introduced a new photo identification requirement to vote, listing a limited number of ID types that would be accepted while excluding college student

IDs. The law initially offered few options for voters who did not have valid ID but was amended in 2015 to allow those without ID to declare a “reasonable impediment” to obtaining a photo ID and then cast a provisional ballot.

The March 2016 primary election in North Carolina was the first in which the photo ID requirement and “reasonable impediment” declaration were implemented, and voting trends from that election suggest Asian Americans were disproportionately caught in the confusion around voter ID.

Voters who have an issue at the polls for various reasons, including not having ID with them, are able to cast a provisional ballot, which may or may not be counted. Of all the provisional ballots cast by Asian American voters in the primary, 20.3 percent were cast for the reason of having “no acceptable ID,” compared to only 5.9 percent of all provisional ballots cast for that reason. If voters had ID at home, they were allowed to later present that ID to election officials to make their ballot count, but it’s unclear how many of those Asian American provisional voters had ID to present and how many had no ID at all.⁵¹

Those voters who had no ID and faced a reasonable impediment to obtaining one were able to file a reasonable impediment declaration and cast a provisional ballot which would be counted, although due to confusion among poll workers around this provision, many who faced reasonable impediments were not offered this safety net. Asian American voters were disproportionately represented among those who did file a reasonable impediment, making up 2.4 percent of reasonable impediment claims while making up just 1.1 percent of registered voters.⁵²

Isela Gutiérrez and Amanda Matson of Democracy North Carolina provided content and analysis for this section. ■

Conclusion

Asian Americans are becoming an integral part of North Carolina. Their many, diverse communities are impacted by the decisions that leaders at the local, state and federal levels make, and many of their concerns intersect with those of other demographics and groups. As the number of Asian American residents and voters in the state grows, this community will play an increasingly important role at the ballot box and beyond to shape our future.

But realizing that potential hinges on what is done today to increase engagement with Asian American communities throughout the state. It requires building the connections, relationships and capacity with and among those communities to ensure Asian American voters of all backgrounds understand the issues and are able to cast their vote. With so many close races hanging in the balance, 2016 is a critical year to lay this groundwork and make Asian American voices heard.

Appendices

Appendix A: Terms and methodology

When people refer to Asian Americans, they are talking about people who trace their roots to dozens of countries and ethnic groups in Asia, the Pacific Islands and Hawaii. The U.S. Census Bureau initially collected data together for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (sometimes referred to with the acronyms API, AAPI or APIA) but has more recently tracked Asian Americans as one category and Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (NHPI) as another. While other reports have included Pacific Islander and Native Hawaiian data, this report is focused on the Asian American population.

In this report, Asian Americans include those who are from Asia, trace their heritage to Asia, and/or consider their race to be Asian. Not everyone in this group are U.S. citizens, and some, especially immigrants, may not identify with the term. At the same time, Asian Americans have often been stereotyped as “foreign” or never fully American — a mindset that has facilitated discrimination against Asian Americans in a variety of ways. To challenge that negative stereotype and emphasize that Asian Americans, whether citizens or not, are equal and important members of our state and country, this report refers to this population as “Asian American.”

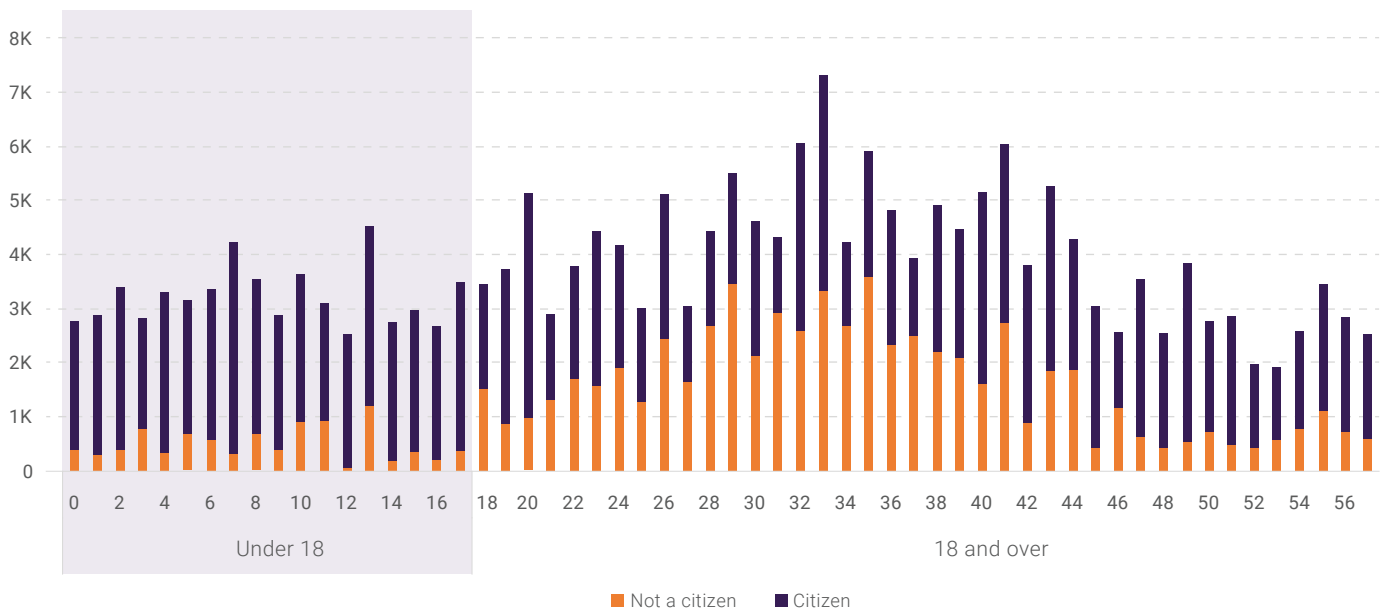
This report draws heavily on data from the U.S. Census Bureau about the Asian American population. That data has been primarily based on the “Asian alone or in combination” category. Where data reflects the “Asian alone” population has been noted in the report.

This report also draws on voter data made public by the North Carolina State Board of Elections. In most analyses, racial data is based on the race and ethnicity a voter reports to the agency on their voter registration form. However, some Asian American voters, such as those who registered before the Asian American racial category was added to the form in the mid-2000s or those who identify as multiracial Asian American, may not be listed as Asian Americans, and may therefore not be included in analyses of Asian American registered voters that rely on self-identified racial information.

This report also uses the terms “Hispanic” and “Latino” interchangeably. “Hispanic” or “Latino” categories are coded as an ethnicity rather than a race in state voter data and Census Bureau data. For this reason, data on the Hispanic and Latino populations may overlap with other racial categories.

Appendix B: N.C. Asian American population by age and citizenship

Age and citizenship breakdowns of the Asian American population in North Carolina show varying rates of citizenship by age group. Young people under the age of 18 make up 24 percent of the Asian American population while those 18 and older make up 76 percent. Among young people under age 18, 84 percent are citizens while 16 percent are not citizens. Among voting-age adults, 61 percent are citizens while 39 percent are not citizens.



Source: 2014 American Community Survey 1-year Estimates.

Appendix C: N.C. Asian American voting-eligible population by county

For counties with an Asian American voting age population of 1,000 or more

County	Asian American voting-age population	Asian American citizen voting-age population (CVAP)	Share of voting-age population who are citizens	Share of county CVAP who are Asian American
Wake	40,682	22,862	56%	3.6%
Mecklenburg	36,618	19,637	54%	3.0%
Guilford	15,253	8,352	55%	2.3%
Durham	10,446	6,096	58%	3.1%
Orange	7,320	4,135	56%	4.2%
Cumberland	6,191	4,268	69%	1.9%
Forsyth	5,484	3,310	60%	1.3%
Catawba	3,592	2,712	76%	2.4%
Onslow	3,006	2,183	73%	1.6%
Cabarrus	2,845	1,712	60%	1.4%
Union	2,765	2,176	79%	1.6%
Iredell	2,536	1,523	60%	1.3%
New Hanover	2,302	1,510	66%	0.9%
Pitt	2,282	1,180	52%	0.9%
Burke	2,172	1,745	80%	2.6%
Buncombe	2,088	1,516	73%	0.8%
Gaston	2,065	1,358	66%	0.9%
Alamance	1,572	1,015	65%	0.9%
Craven	1,520	862	57%	1.1%
Davidson	1,514	851	56%	0.7%
Rowan	1,135	966	85%	0.9%
Wayne	1,097	666	61%	0.8%
Harnett	1,035	792	77%	0.9%
Randolph	1,007	639	63%	0.6%

Source: 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, "Asian alone" race category.

Note: These measures should not be compared to registered voter numbers listed in Appendix D because these tables draw from different data sets reflecting different time frames. Calculations of registration rates based on the two data sets are not a reliable measure of voter registration and are likely to be overestimated.

Appendix D: N.C. Asian American registered voters by county

For counties with 100 Asian American registered voters or more

County	All registered voters	Registered Asian American Voters	Share of voters who are Asian American	Share of state's Asian American voters
Wake	667,451	17,934	2.7%	25.4%
Mecklenburg	664,729	12,015	1.8%	17.0%
Durham	214,212	5,633	2.6%	8.0%
Guilford	344,947	5,493	1.6%	7.8%
Orange	109,094	4,138	3.8%	5.9%
Cumberland	198,221	2,404	1.2%	3.4%
Forsyth	242,248	1,886	0.8%	2.7%
Catawba	101,045	1,629	1.6%	2.3%
Union	144,805	1,602	1.1%	2.3%
Cabarrus	125,271	1,247	1.0%	1.8%
New Hanover	160,390	1,020	0.6%	1.4%
Onslow	99,797	954	1.0%	1.4%
Buncombe	189,451	907	0.5%	1.3%
Gaston	135,123	833	0.6%	1.2%
Burke	56,994	831	1.5%	1.2%
Iredell	113,116	810	0.7%	1.1%
Pitt	116,364	799	0.7%	1.1%
Alamance	96,094	547	0.6%	0.8%
Craven	69,102	513	0.7%	0.7%
Davidson	102,138	448	0.4%	0.6%
Harnett	69,217	409	0.6%	0.6%
Chatham	48,863	396	0.8%	0.6%
Randolph	89,886	393	0.4%	0.6%
Wayne	73,540	391	0.5%	0.6%
Johnston	115,839	381	0.3%	0.5%

Source: N.C. State Board of Elections data as of the June 2016 primary election.

Note: These measures should not be compared to eligible voter numbers listed in Appendix C because these tables draw from different data sets reflecting different time frames. Calculations of registration rates based on the two data sets are not a reliable measure of voter registration and are likely to be overestimated.

Appendix D (cont'd): N.C. Asian American registered voters by county

For counties with 100 Asian American registered voters or more

County	All registered voters	Registered Asian American Voters	Share of voters who are Asian American	Share of state's Asian American voters
Rowan	91,562	374	0.4%	0.5%
Henderson	79,037	337	0.4%	0.5%
Moore	63,458	312	0.5%	0.4%
Watauga	43,480	286	0.7%	0.4%
Stanly	36,611	279	0.7%	0.4%
Jackson	26,752	256	1.0%	0.4%
Robeson	64,823	252	0.3%	0.4%
Nash	64,823	248	0.4%	0.4%
Hoke	30,523	242	0.8%	0.3%
Brunswick	90,416	239	0.3%	0.3%
Carteret	50,950	205	0.4%	0.3%
Halifax	38,079	203	0.5%	0.3%
Cleveland	60,918	184	0.3%	0.3%
Scotland	22,242	169	0.8%	0.2%
Lee	33,586	158	0.5%	0.2%
Wilson	54,586	156	0.3%	0.2%
Montgomery	15,862	153	1.0%	0.2%
Rockingham	59,025	135	0.2%	0.2%
Lincoln	53,215	133	0.2%	0.2%
Caldwell	53,901	131	0.2%	0.2%
Alexander	23,795	127	0.5%	0.2%
Pasquotank	27,551	125	0.5%	0.2%
Richmond	29,939	122	0.4%	0.2%
Granville	36,438	120	0.3%	0.2%
McDowell	28,276	116	0.4%	0.2%
Franklin	41,391	108	0.3%	0.2%

Source: N.C. State Board of Elections data as of the June 2016 primary election.

Note: These measures should not be compared to eligible voter numbers listed in Appendix C because these tables draw from different data sets reflecting different time frames. Calculations of registration rates based on the two data sets are not a reliable measure of voter registration and are likely to be overestimated.

Appendix E: Speakers of Asian Languages in North Carolina

Language spoken at home	Number of speakers
Chinese	31,303
Other Asian languages	23,911
Vietnamese	23,270
Arabic	17,992
Korean	15,501
Hindi	14,433
Tagalog	14,013
Other Indic languages	11,577
Gujarati	9,546
Hmong	9,352
Urdu	6,160
Japanese	5,767
Laotian	5,294
Mon-Khmer, Cambodian	4,969
Other Pacific Island languages	4,650
Persian	3,737
Thai	2,245
All Asian languages	181,991

Source: 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

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