

# The Asian-American vote in California

3 October 2012, by Bettye Miller

Asian Americans—who account for 10 percent of registered voters in California—support a tax measure proposed by Gov. Jerry Brown, are closely divided on the death penalty ballot measure, overwhelmingly support affirmative action, and support tax increases on high earners to close the federal budget deficit, according to two new reports from the National Asian American Survey.

The reports—"The 2012 General Election: Public Opinion of Asian Americans in California" and "The Policy Priorities and Issue Preferences of Asian Americans in California"—were released in an event at the Asian Pacific American Legal Center on Oct. 2.

The results are drawn from interviews conducted through Sept. 19, 2012, with more than 1,150 respondents residing in California. Among the fastest-growing groups in America, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders grew by nearly a third in California between 2000 and 2010, and constitute nearly 15 percent of the state's resident population.

"Just as in the national picture, a large proportion of Asian Americans in California are undecided on the presidential election and key state ballot measures," said Karthick Ramakrishnan, associate professor of political science at the University of California, Riverside and director of the National Asian American Survey (NAAS). "When compared to the general electorate, the Asian-American vote is very much up for grabs at this late stage in various campaigns."

"Despite their growing numbers, party identification as a lifelong bond has yet to take root among most Asian Americans in California," added Taeku Lee, professor and chair of political science and professor of law at the University of California, Berkeley. "Asians in California on net favor Democratic candidates and take more liberal positions on the issues, but this is not the result of vigorous outreach efforts from either political

party." Lee is a principal investigator of the survey and co-author of a book (with Zoltan Hajnal), "Why Americans Don't Join the Party."

## The data show that:

— On Proposition 30, a state constitutional amendment that would temporarily raise the state sales tax and income taxes on high earners, 48 percent of Asian American likely voters are in favor, 28 percent are opposed, and 24 percent are undecided. On Proposition 34, which would end the death penalty in California, 37 percent of Asian Americans are in favor, 41 percent are opposed, and 22 percent are undecided.

— Most Asian-American likely voters do not understand the top-two primary system in California (70 percent) and are much more divided than the rest of the California electorate on the desirability of the new system.

— Asian Americans are overwhelmingly supportive of affirmative action, with more than 75 percent of Asian-American adults supporting "affirmative action programs designed to help blacks, women, and other minorities get better jobs and education."

— A majority of Asian Americans also support a path to citizenship (56 percent) and in-state tuition for undocumented immigrants (51 percent). A plurality also supports driver licenses for undocumented immigrants (49 percent support, 39 percent oppose and 12 percent are undecided). On the issue of health care reform, which has divided support among the general population, Asian Americans in California are largely supportive, with about a 3-to-1 ratio in favor. These levels are comparable to those found among Asian Americans living outside of California.

— Support for health care reform is high regardless of whether the law is referred to as the Affordable Care Act or Obamacare.

— On strategies to reduce the [federal budget deficit](#)

, Asian Americans in California are very supportive of tax increases on high earners (69 percent). This proposal receives majority support (52 percent) even among those households earning more than \$250,000 a year.

"It is vitally important to know where Asian Americans in California stand on issues relating to immigrant rights," Reshma Shamasunder, executive director of the California Immigrant Policy Center, noted as she spoke at the presentation of the reports. "Not only are they the most heavily immigrant group, they are also an important part of the California electorate."

Stewart Kwoh, the executive director of the Asian Pacific American Legal Center (APALC), a member of the Asian American Center for Advancing Justice, said the national Asian American survey poll results on affirmative action are especially timely given the U.S. Supreme Court will hear arguments in the Fisher v. Texas case on Oct. 10.

"APALC, along with our Advancing Justice affiliates and over 70 civil rights, advocacy, business and student groups nationwide have filed an amicus brief in this case supporting the University of Texas at Austin's holistic admissions program that considers race as one of several factors for a small percentage of each incoming class," Kwoh said.

"These poll results demonstrate that [Asian Americans](#), Native Hawaiians, and [Pacific Islanders](#) across the country support fairness and equal opportunity – not exclusion."

Manju Kulkarni, the executive director of South Asian Network noted the importance of the Affordable Care Act to South Asian communities.

"This study shows the strong desire in the South Asian community to improve access to health care, not only for themselves but also for the larger community."

**More information:** The full reports, including information about the survey methodology, can be found at [naasurvey.com/presentations.html](http://naasurvey.com/presentations.html)

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