Center for American Progress

Civic Participation and Democracy

Part of the "State of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders" Series

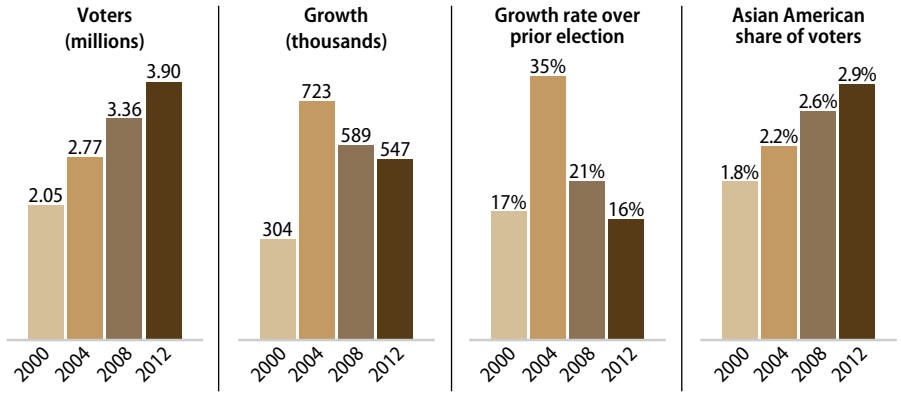
By Karthick Ramakrishnan and Farah Z. Ahmad June 11, 2014

The Asian American electorate is growing rapidly

The number of Asian American voters in the last decade has nearly doubled from more than 2 million voters in 2000 to 3.9 million voters in 2012. (see Figure 6.1) The biggest growth spurt during this period occurred between the 2000 and 2004 elections as 723,000 new Asian American voters entered the electorate—a 35 percent increase from the record of more than 2 million set in 2000. Since 2004, there has been continued strong growth in the Asian American electorate with more than 500,000 new voters added every four years with a growth rate of 21 percent in 2008 and 16 percent in 2012. The Asian American share of the voting population has also steadily increased from 1.8 percent of all voters in 2000 and 2.2 percent in 2004, to 2.6 percent in 2008 and 2.9 percent in 2012. If future rates of change are projected for each racial group, based on trends over the past four presidential elections we estimate Asian Americans will reach 5 percent of the voting population by 2025 and 10 percent of the voting population by 2044.

FIGURE 6.1

Growth of Asian American voters, 2000 to 2012



Source: Thom File, "The Diversifying Electorate—Voting Rates by Race and Hispanic Origin in 2012 (and Other Recent Elections)" (Bureau of the Census, 2013), available at http://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/p20-568.pdf.

AAPI electorate is significant in many states, counties, and congressional districts

There are many parts of the United States where Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, or AAPIs, are a significant share of the electorate. Take, for example, state voting populations: AAPIs in the 2012 presidential election amounted to 50 percent of voters in Hawaii, 10 percent of voters in California, and 5 percent or more of voters in Nevada, Washington, and New Jersey.[1] Looking more broadly at the citizen voting-age population, or CVAP, AAPIs are more than 5 percent of the CVAP in seven states: Hawaii, California, Nevada, Washington, New Jersey, New York, and Alaska.[2] Looking next at counties, AAPIs are 5 percent or more of the CVAP in 73 jurisdictions, including 33 jurisdictions where they are greater than 10 percent. These counties are mostly in Hawaii, California, New York, and New Jersey, but they also include Fairfax County, Virginia; Loudon County, Virginia; Fort Bend County, Texas; King County, Washington; and Montgomery County, Maryland.[3] When looking at congressional districts, there are 10 where AAPIs account for more than 25 percent of the CVAP, 35 districts where they account for between 10 percent and 25 percent, and 58 districts where they account for between 5 percent and 10 percent.[4]

TABLE 6.1

Jurisdictions where Asian American and Pacific Islanders are 5 percent or more of the citizen voting-age population

	States	Counties	Congressional districts
Total	7	73	103
5% to 9.9%	5	40	58
10% to 24.9%	1	25	35
25% and above	1	8	10

Source: Authors' analysis of Public Use Microdata Sample from Bureau of the Census, "American Community Survey 2008 – 2012 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates," available at http://www.census.gov/acs/www/data_documentation/pums_data/ (last accessed May 2014).

Significant gaps in citizenship and voter registration exist for Asian Americans

Despite the size and growth of the Asian American electorate, their rates of voting participation are comparatively lower than other racial groups. (see Table 6.2) Given the fact that Asian Americans have the highest proportion of foreign-born residents, their citizenship rate of 66 percent among adults during the 2012 election is significantly below the citizenship rates of whites, at 98 percent, African Americans, at 95 percent, and is comparable to the citizenship rate among Latinos, at 66 percent. Thus, even as Asian immigrants continue to be among the fastest to naturalize among eligible immigrants, the relatively high number of recent immigrants in this group means that their eligibility to vote is less than most other racial groups.[5] However, lack of citizenship is not as significant a barrier for Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, or NHPIs, as 88 percent of the adult NHPI residents are U.S. citizens.

TABLE 6.2

Rates of citizenship, voter registration, and voting by race, 2012

	Citizens (among adults)	Registered (among adult citizens)	Voted (among registered voters)	Voted (among adult citizens)
White	98%	73%	87%	64%
Hispanic	66%	59%	82%	48%
African American	95%	73%	91%	66%
Asian	66%	56%	84%	47%
American Indian	99%	64%	80%	51%
Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander	88%	58%	85%	49%

Source: Authors' analysis of Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey November 2012: Voting and Registration Supplement File (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2012).

Voter registration is another significant barrier for AAPIs. (see Table 6.2) Even after taking into account differential rates of citizenship, Asian Americans are less likely to register to vote—registration sits at 56 percent among adult citizens—than whites, at 73 percent, and African Americans, at 73 percent. Their low rates of voter registration are comparable to those of Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders at 58 percent and Hispanics at 59 percent. Once Asian Americans and NHPIs are registered to vote, turnout gaps with whites and African Americans are less significant. However, the gaps in registration produce some stark disparities in voting among the eligible electorate, with only 47 percent of Asian American adult citizens and 49 percent of NHPIs reporting that they voted in the 2012 presidential election—comparable to the voting rate among Hispanics, at 48 percent, and American Indians, at 51 percent, but much lower than the voting rates among whites, at 64 percent, and African Americans, at 66 percent.

Significant differences in voting by nativity and national origin, but not by gender

Looking at variation in voting within the Asian American community, we find that naturalized citizens are significantly more likely to have voted in the 2012 presidential election than native-born citizens: 50 percent of naturalized citizens voted while 43 percent of native-born citizens did not.[6] However, this gap disappears after controlling for the effects of age: among Asian Americans who were eligible to vote in 2012, the foreign-born were about 13 years older, on average, than the native-born.[7] There were also some significant differences in voting by national origin in 2012, with Japanese Americans and Indian Americans reporting higher rates of voting than

Chinese Americans, and with Korean Americans reporting among the lowest rates of voting.[8] These differences were evident at the voter-registration stage among adult citizens but not at the turnout stage among registered voters. However, these results should be interpreted with caution because of the relatively small national origin sample sizes in the Current Population Survey's Voter Supplement.

The 2012 AAPI Post-Election Survey found significant turnout differences by national origin. This survey conducted telephone interviews with 6,609 registered voters with comparable sample sizes across national origins.[9] For example, only 40 percent of Laotian American registered voters turned out to vote compared to more than 85 percent of Indian Americans, Japanese Americans, and Hmong Americans.[10] Most of these national origin differences persisted even after controlling for age and education. Finally, analysis of Current Population Survey Voter Supplement data reveal slight gender differences at the registration stage, with AAPI women more likely to register than AAPI men in 2012. Fifty-eight percent of Asian American women reported registering to vote versus 55 percent of Asian American men, and 59 percent of NHPI women reported registering versus 57 percent of NHPI men.[11] However, these differences were not statistically significant. Similarly, both the Current Population Survey Voter Supplement and the AAPI Post-Election Survey indicate slightly greater participation at the turnout stage among Asian American male registered voters, but these gender differences, too, are not statistically significant.

Campaigns had limited contact with AAPI voters in the 2012 election

The 2012 AAPI Post-Election Survey of registered voters found that only 31 percent of Asian Americans and 26 percent of Pacific Islanders had been contacted about the November election.[12] By contrast, 39 percent of African Americans, 36 percent of Latinos, and 43 percent of white registered voters reported getting election-related contact.[13] There were significant differences in contact across nationalities, with Indian Americans and Hawaiians being the least contacted in each of these groups at 25 percent, while Chinese Americans and Hmong Americans reported higher levels of contact at 39 percent and 49 percent respectively.[14] Contact was much higher in battleground states—48 percent—than in nonbattleground states—27 percent—and the Democratic Party was more likely than the Republican Party to make contact in either type of jurisdiction.[15] Community organizations also played a meaningful role, as 20 percent of Asian Americans contacted by community organizations were not contacted by either the Republican or Democratic Party.[16]

Asian Americans' participation rates are on par with other groups on some activities but lag behind in others

In Table 6.3, we present data from the 2008 National Asian American Survey, or NAAS, and the 2008 American National Election Studies, or ANES—the most recent year for which comparable questions were asked in both the NAAS and the ANES. When comparing across groups we see that the proportion of Asian Americans engaged in political campaigns is comparable to those of whites—4 percent and 3 percent, respectively—and rates of campaign contributions are the same at 13 percent. However, there are big differences in contacting government officials, as the participation rate among whites, at 21 percent, is more than twice the rate of Asian Americans at 9 percent. Differences also emerge in terms of rates of engagement in community activism—21 percent Asian Americans had "worked with others in [their] community to solve a problem," lower than the 30 percent rate among whites and the 27 percent rate among African Americans.

TABLE 6.3
Political and civic participation beyond voting by race

	White	Latino	Black	Asian American
Campaign work	4	4	6	3
Campaign contributions	13	5	8	13
Contact public officials	21	9	11	9
Community activism	30	21	27	21

Sources: Data on Asian Americans based on authors' analysis of Karthick Ramakrishnan, Jane Junn, and Taeku Lee, "National Asian American Survey, 2008" (Ann Arbor, MI: Resource Center for Minority Data, 2011), available at http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/ICPSR/studies/31481; Data on other racial groups based on authors' analysis of the 2008 American National Election Study available at http://www.electionstudies.org/studypages/download/datacenter_all_NoData.php.

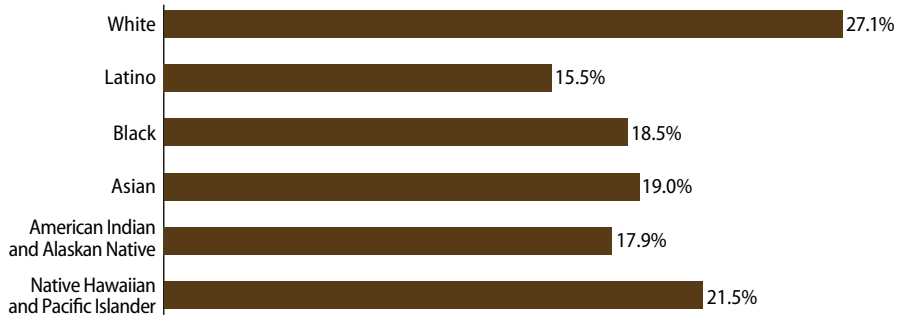
Rates of volunteerism among AAPIs are low compared to non-Hispanic whites

Similar to other communities of color, rates of volunteerism among Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders lag behind the participation rates of whites. Every year, the Current Population Survey conducts a supplemental survey of volunteerism, asking specifically about volunteer activities done "through or for an organization."[17] Using the latest available data from September 2013 (see Figure 6.2), we see that 19 percent of Asian Americans ages 16 and older report having volunteered

in the past year, as do 21.5 percent of Pacific Islanders. These figures are comparable to the proportion of African Americans who volunteered, at 18.5 percent, and higher than the proportion of Latinos who volunteered, at 15.5 percent, but significantly lower than the proportion of whites who volunteer, at 27.1 percent.

FIGURE 6.2

Rates of volunteerism, by race, 2013



Source: Authors' analysis of Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey September 2013: Volunteer Supplement File (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2013).

Looking at differences within the Asian American community we find significant gender differences: 22 percent of women volunteer while only 16 percent of Asian American men choose to do so. Native-born Asian Americans are also much more likely to participate than foreign-born, with 24 percent of native-born volunteering and only 17 percent of foreign-born doing the same. In the case of voting, we find that participation rates in volunteerism are highest among Japanese Americans and Indian Americans at 25.5 percent and 24 percent, respectively. Other groups close to the average for Asian Americans include Filipino Americans, at 20.2 percent, and Korean Americans, at 17.6 percent. However, Chinese Americans, at 16.9 percent, and Vietnamese Americans, at 15.7 percent, have participation rates that are below the average for Asian Americans.

Growing number of AAPIs serve as elected officials nationally and locally

In the 113th Congress, 10 out of 435 representatives in the U.S. House of Representatives, or 2.3 percent, were Asian American or NHPI.[18] An additional two delegates from American Samoa and Northern Mariana Islands are NHPI, and one U.S. Senator—Mazie Hirono (D-HI)—is an Asian American of Japanese

descent. Given that Asian immigrants were not eligible for naturalization until the 1940s, the first Asian American to serve as a member of Congress did not occur until the election of Dalip Singh Saund (D-CA) in 1957.[19] Since then, there have been a total of six AAPI U.S. senators and 26 U.S. representatives.

Looking beyond the Congress to state legislatures, the Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies lists 98 AAPIs as serving in state legislatures (see Table 6.4). Of these, 57 serve in Hawaii, 11 serve in California, 7 serve in Washington, and the rest serve in Alaska, Connecticut, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Texas, Utah, Vermont, and Virginia.[20] In addition, 20 serve in territorial legislatures in American Samoa, Guam, and the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands.[21] Finally, there are more than 160 AAPIs serving as elected representatives in city government and 22 AAPI legislators in county government.[22]

TABLE 6.4

Asian American and Pacific Islander elected officials

U.S. senators	1
U.S. House representatives	10
U.S. House delegates	2
State legislatures	98
Territorial legislatures	20
City government	161
County government	22

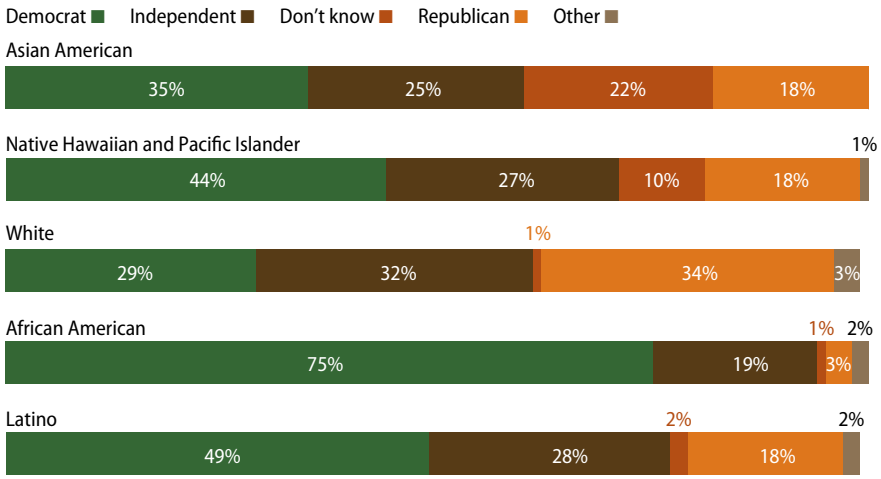
Source: Lorraine Tong, "Asian Pacific Americans in the U.S. Congress" (Washington: Congressional Research Service, 2010), availble at http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/138762.pdf; Authors' analysis of data from Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies, "Political Database" available at http://apaics.org/resources/political-database/ (last accessed May 2014).

AAPI voters largely do not identify with political parties, but Democrats led among those who do

According to the 2012 AAPI Post-Election Survey, 47 percent of Asian American registered voters did not identify with either the Republican Party or Democratic Party. Twenty-five percent of AAPIs declared themselves to be independents and 22 percent indicated that they did not know or that they did not think in terms of political parties. This high level of AAPI political nonidentification overshadows the 33 percent of white registered voters choosing not to identify in 2012, 20 percent of African Americans, and 30 percent of Latinos. (see Figure 6.3) However, among those who do identify with a political party there is a clear advantage to the Democratic Party, with Asian American registered voters identifying as Democrat over Republican by nearly a 2-to-1 margin at 35 percent to 18 percent. The Democratic Party advantage is even greater for NHPIs, with 44 percent of registered voters identifying as Democrats and 18 percent identifying as Republicans. This Democratic Party advantage stands in sharp contrast to the party identification of white registered voters, where there is a slight Republican Party edge over Democrats at 34 percent to 29 percent.

FIGURE 6.3

Party identification among registered voters, 2012



Sources: Data on Asian Americans and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders based on authors' analysis of Asian American Justice Center, Asian and Pacific Islander American Vote, and National Asian American Survey, "Behind the Numbers: Post-Election Survey of Asian American and Pacific Islanders in 2012" (2013), available at http://www.naasurvey.com/resources/Presentations/2012-aapipes-national.pdf; Data on other racial groups based on authors' analysis of the "2012 American National Election Study," available at http://www.electionstudies.org/studypages/download/datacenter_all_NoData.php (last accessed May 2014).

Party identification and presidential voting varied by language of interview

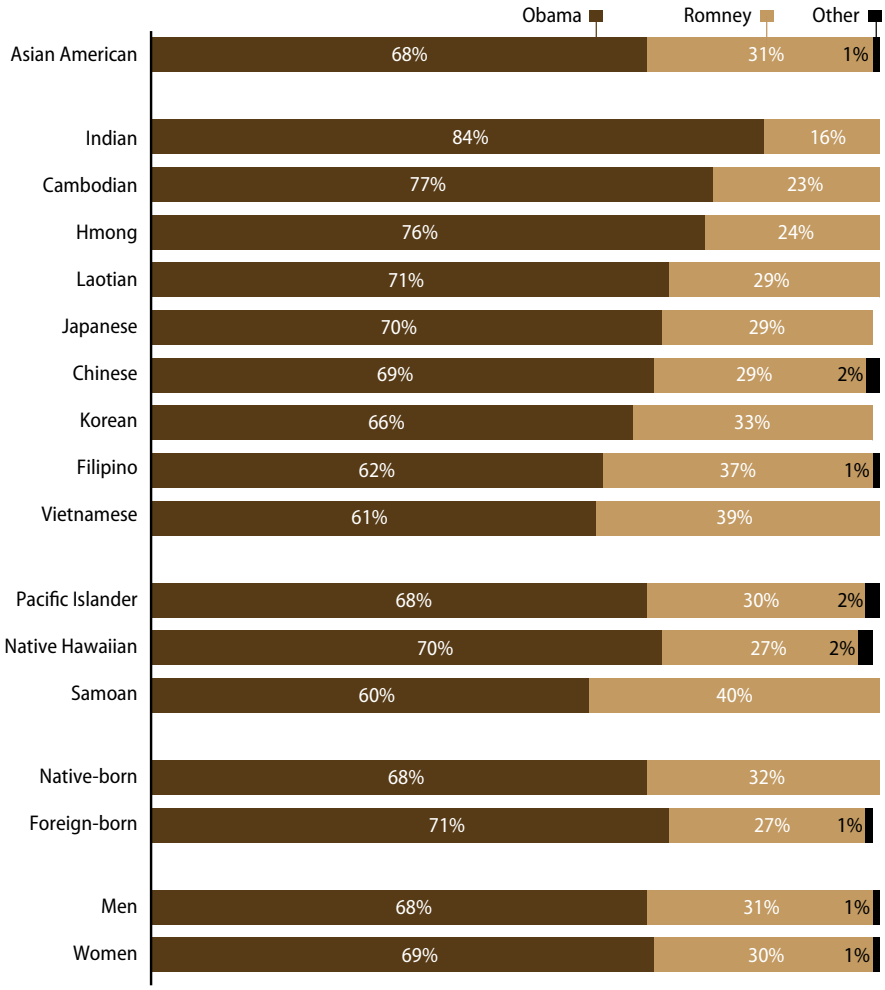
According to the 2012 AAPI Post-Election Survey, Barack Obama won 68 percent of the Asian American vote compared to 31 percent for Mitt Romney, while 1 percent voted for a different candidate. Importantly, there was a significant difference in presidential voting based on language of interview. Among those who took the survey in an Asian language, 65 percent reported voting for Obama, while for those who took the survey in English, this figure was 72 percent. Notably, this latter figure is nearly identical to the Asian American estimate provided by the National Election Pool, and widely reported in news stories, of 73 percent choosing to vote for Obama.[23] The National Election Pool survey was conducted only in English and Spanish, and comparisons of these two surveys suggest that English-only surveys of the Asian population can produce biased estimates of presidential vote choice. English-only surveys are also likely to produce biased estimates of other aspects of public opinion, as the 2012 AAPI Post-Election Survey found much higher levels of party nonidentification among registered voters taking the survey in an Asian language, at 55 percent, than those taking the survey in English, at 38 percent.[24]

Obama won every major subgroup of AAPI voters

In the 2012 presidential election, Barack Obama not only won the AAPI vote, he did so decisively, winning the vast majority of every national origin group. (see Figure 6.4) The highest support for Obama was among Indian Americans at 84 percent and the lowest among Samoans at 60 percent.[25] Importantly, he won the Vietnamese American vote by a 61-to-39 margin, which is notable because this group of voters has traditionally been viewed as strongly Republican.[26] Finally, there was no significant difference in support for Obama between Asian American men and women—a notable difference from the gender gap among white voters, with white men much less likely than white women to vote for Obama in 2012 [27]

FIGURE 6.4

Presidential vote by ethnicity, age, and gender



Source: Data on Asian Americans and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders based on authors' analysis of Asian American Justice Center, Asian and Pacific Islander American Vote, and National Asian American Survey, "Behind the Numbers: Post-Election Survey of Asian American and Pacific Islanders in 2012" (2013), available at http://www.naasurvey.com/resources/Presentations/2012-aapipes-national.pdf.

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Acknowledgements

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Endnotes

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3 Authors analysis of sex, age, and citizenship data by race in Bureau of the Census, "American Community Survey 2008-2012 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates," available via American FactFinder, available at http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml. For a list of these jurisdictions, visit http://aapidata.com/stats/county-data/.

4 Ibid.

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17 Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Survey September 2012: Volunteer Supplement File* (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2012), Attachment 8, p. 8-1, available at http://www.census.gov/prod/techdoc/cps/cpssep12.pdf.

18 Lorraine H. Tong, "Asian Pacific Americans in the United States Congress" (Washington: Congressional Research Service, 2013), available at http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/97-398.pdf.

19 Ibid. Prior to Rep. Saund, NHPIs had served as territorial delegates, and Filipinos had served as resident commissioners from the Philippine Islands.

20 Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies, "Political Database," available at http://apaics.org/resources/political-database/ (last accessed March 2014).

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 *The New York Times*, "President Exit Polls," available at http://elections.nytimes.com/2012/results/president/exit-polls (last accessed May 2014).

24 Asian American Justice Center, Asian and Pacific Islander American Vote, and National Asian American Survey, "Behind the Numbers."

25 Ibid.

26 The largest concentration of Vietnamese Americans has been in Orange County, California, and most Vietnamese American elected officials from this region have been Republican. See Wong and others, *Asian American Political Participation: Emerging Constituents and Their Political Identities*. The 2000–2001 Pilot National Asian American Political Survey indicates a 57–43 ratio of Republican Party to Democratic Party identification, but the sample sizes are too small to definitively conclude a Republican advantage among Vietnamese in the early 2000s. See Pei-te Lien, "Pilot National Asian American Political Survey (PNAAPS), 2000–2001" (Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium of Political and Social, 2004), available at http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/ICPSR/studies/3832.

27 *The New York Times*, "President Exit Polls."