

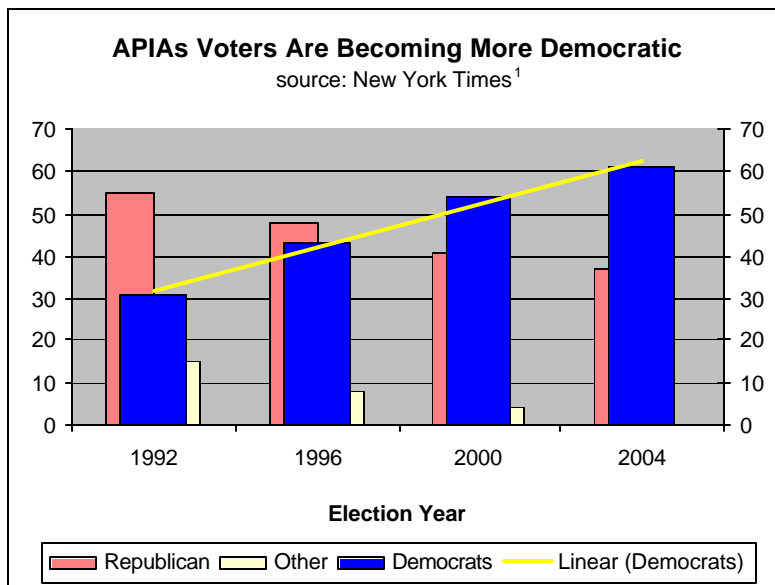
# Asian Pacific Islander American 2005 Political Landscape

## **Overview:**

In the 2004 Presidential election cycle, the Asian Pacific Islander American (APIA) community voted overwhelmingly for Democratic candidates including Senator John Kerry for President. The APIA community responded at the polls to the promise of economic and educational opportunity, a fair and consistent foreign policy, and a steadfast commitment to civil rights offered by the Democratic Party. APIAs are a rapidly growing political force in the country, and have emerged as an integral part of the Democratic Party.

According to polls from the *Los Angeles Times*, 64% of APIAs voted for John Kerry and John Edwards, while the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* polled APIA support for Kerry-Edwards at 61%. Even more encouraging was a national multilingual exit poll (conducted in 9 languages by the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund) of 11,000 APIA voters that found that 74% favored Kerry-Edwards, with 38% percent of respondents being first-time voters.

In 1992, the majority of APIA voters supported the Republican presidential candidate, but over the past 12 years that support has switched resulting in significant increases for Democratic candidates each Presidential cycle since 1992.



## **Why did APIA Voters Choose Democrats?**

Democrats are committed to ensuring opportunity for all Americans and keeping the American Dream alive for families across this country. That means building an economy that works for all Americans, bringing down health care costs, ensuring children get the quality education they need to succeed in the 21st century, building an economy that works for all Americans and giving every voter an equal shot to have their voice heard.

- In their joint endorsement statement, over 75 Filipino American leaders said their primary reasons for supporting Kerry included his plan to create jobs, reduce the cost of health care and his commitment to improve education. They also cited Kerry's and Edwards' pledge to improve U.S. relations with foreign countries.
- The American Muslim Taskforce, a coalition of ten non-partisan organizations, endorsed the Democratic ticket, citing the Bush administration's insensitivity to the civil liberties and human rights of American Muslims, Arab-Americans and South Asians.
- 80-20 PAC, a national non-partisan pan-Asian organization endorsed the Kerry-Edwards ticket, stating that "the Democratic Party's position on immigration policy and anti-hate crime policy is better for all minorities including Asian Americans." While Senators Kerry and Edwards both promised in writing to help Asian Americans achieve equal opportunity in workplaces through the enforcement of Executive Order 11246, President Bush did not. 80-

20 also applauded the Democrats' condemnation of Republican Congressman Howard Coble's offensive remarks, which attempted to justify the internment of Japanese Americans during WWII. In contrast, the Republican Party and Bush-Cheney campaign were silent on the issue.

### **Historic Emphasis on APIA Participation:**

*APIA Voice*, the largest get-out-the-vote (GOTV) program ever was created by the Democratic National Committee and the Kerry-Edwards campaign and resulted in historic APIA political activism. Over 400 APIA volunteers traveled to battleground states from other states to assist with *APIA Voice* outreach activities including phone banks, rallies, precinct walks, canvassing, visibility and GOTV.

In addition, over 2,700 APIAs volunteered through *APIA Voice* for GOTV efforts in non-battleground states, like CA, NY, NJ and DC, contacting over 300,000 APIA voters via multilingual phone banking. APIA Voters were both identified and persuaded in languages including Hmong, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean, Laotian, Cambodian, Vietnamese, Filipino and Hindi. Democrats placed an unprecedented investment into Asian Pacific Islander American newspapers and radio stations in seven different states. The overall market share of Asian and Pacific Islanders reached via radio airwaves were close to 350,000 Asian and Pacific Islander radio listeners.

### **Issues Important to Asian Pacific Islander American Voters:**

In 2004 a coalition of seventeen national APIA organizations produced the *Platform for Asian Pacific Americans: National Policy Priorities*. An issue-by-issue comparison of this non-partisan document with the Democratic Platform reveals that the priorities of equal rights, opportunity, security and education valued in the Democratic Party reflect the concerns of the APIA population.

According to the poll from the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, 27% of APIA voters named the economy and jobs as their top issue in the 2004 election. Sixteen percent of voters were primarily concerned with either the war in Iraq or terrorism, followed by health care, civil rights and education followed as the next most important issues.

### **Economy / Jobs:**

In order to strengthen the economy and help APIA families find jobs, Democrats will continue to encourage entrepreneurship, investment in small businesses, technology re-training programs, and support workers' rights. Democrats recognize small businesses and entrepreneurs as the lifeblood of the American economy. Because APIAs believe in helping businesses cope with the skyrocketing cost of health care, they choose Democrats to reform the health care system and cut taxes to help small businesses pay for health insurance. As a result of the failed policies of Bush's first term, last year 240,000 APIA's fell into poverty and APIA household incomes dropped by over \$3,800. In their 2004 Platform, Democrats supported a new economic plan that will put jobs first, renew American competitiveness, make honest budget choices, and invest in our future.

### **Terrorism:**

APIAs, like all Americans, want to know that their freedom and way of life is safe. However terrorism assumes forms other than dirty bombs and biological weapons. The increase of hate crimes and discrimination have made Asian Pacific Islander Americans unsafe in their own neighborhoods. In the three months following the September 11 attack on America, the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium (NAPALC) documented approximately 250 hate crimes against South Asians, including two murders, a marked increase from previous years. Women and children are often targets of this new violence, particularly Asians who can be singled out by physical appearance on the basis of the publicly perceived image of a "terrorist."

Democrats have led the fight against hate crimes and have promoted the Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act, which would expand the number of hate crimes covered by federal law in addition to providing local law enforcement agencies with more resources to investigate and prosecute hate crimes. Despite the dramatic increase in violence against APIAs, the Republican administration has taken no further action to advance this legislation.

### **Health care:**

The cost of health insurance is a major barrier for APIAs who are more likely to be self-employed or working for small firms that typically do not offer employer-sponsored coverage. The US Census estimates 21% of API children and 18% of API adults are uninsured. Up to 34% of recent immigrants and first/second generation APIAs are uninsured. In addition, 20% of these uninsured APIAs are in working families. These workers are often low-wage earners who cannot afford to purchase private insurance. Families USA reported that approximately 50% of APIs may be medically underserved.<sup>2</sup>

President Bill Clinton established the first ever White House Advisory Commission on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the Department of Health and Human Services.<sup>3</sup> Recognizing that APIAs have higher incidence of cervical cancer, diabetes and heart disease and other serious illnesses, Democrats worked with community groups to increase APIA participation in federal programs to improve their quality of life. The Bush Administration “demonstrated a lack of commitment” by moving this Commission to a less suitable department, reducing its funding and watering down its mandate, despite the protest of thousands of APIAs.<sup>4</sup>

**Education:**

Asian Pacific Islander Americans recognize that education is a cornerstone of equal opportunity. While APIAs as a whole have high rates of education, certain APIA ethnicities face unrecognized disparities in educational attainment. While nearly 25% of the US population over 25 years old have college degrees, only 7% of Cambodian adults and 7.5% of Laotian Americans hold bachelor's degrees or higher. Over half of Hmong-American women have had no formal education at all, compared to a national average for all Americans at just over one percent. Only about 5% of women in that community have college degrees.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, under Republican leadership in Washington, tuition costs have soared, promises to increase Pell Grants have been broken, and American families have had a harder time getting quality affordable education. Democrats will keep our promise to our children by increasing support for pre-school education, fighting for a fully funded No Child Left Behind program and by making sure it is implemented correctly. We will address the shortfall of math, science and special education teachers by creating tuition incentives for college students to major in these fields, and we will work to make sure that every American who wants it can afford four years of college with new tuition tax credits and relief from burdensome loans.

**Immigration:**

The 2004 Democratic Platform pledged: “We will extend the promise of citizenship to those still struggling for freedom. Today's immigration laws do not reflect our values or serve our security, and we will work for real reform. We will hasten family reunification for parents and children, husbands and wives, and offer more English-language and civic education classes so immigrants can assume all the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.” Instead of embracing new Americans, the Bush administration and Republican legislators enacted special registration laws that misguidedly targeted people based on religious and ethnic background and required them to be documented, fingerprinted and interviewed by the government.

**Civil Rights:**

Democrats are solidly committed to civil rights. We will restore vigorous federal enforcement of our civil rights laws for all our people, from fair housing to equal employment opportunity. We support affirmative action to redress discrimination and to achieve the diversity from which all Americans benefit. By appointing judges more interested in rolling back rights than protecting them and passing laws that benefit corporate special interests rather than the American public, Washington Republicans have rejected the American vision of greater equality.

**Conclusion:**

As of 2004, APIAs constituted 5% of the US total population (13.1 million). APIAs are the fastest growing racial group in the United States, with a reported 95% increase from 1980 to 1990 and a 48% increase since 1990. The US Census estimates by 2050 the APIA population will have grown 213%, at a rate four times as large as the overall population. In 45 years, one out of every 10 Americans will be of Asian or Pacific Islander descent. Several states, such as Nevada have already experienced dramatic APIA population increases – a 123.7% growth, compared to the statewide population growth rate of 50%. 48% of foreign-born APIAs become naturalized United State citizens, while the overall naturalization rate is 37%.<sup>6</sup>

Barriers to further APIA political empowerment include language and communication barriers, citizenship status, and the degree to which they believe their issues will be heard at the national level. Before 1992, information on Asian Pacific Islander American voting patterns was not collected at a national level. To this day, reports of APIA political participation frequently lacks critical statistical data on ethnicity, citizenship status, and length of time in the United States, which are contributing factors to political participation.

Although the APIA community has grown tremendously and even flourished during the past four years, the APIA Americans have still faced considerable setbacks due to Republican leadership in Washington. The Democratic Party will continue to support Asian Pacific Islander American community leaders and work with them to ensure that all Americans have the chance to achieve the American Dream of freedom, equality and opportunity.

---

The term Asian Pacific Islander Americans encompasses people of many different ethnicities, including East Asians (Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese), South Asians (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan), Southeast Asians (Hmong, Laotian, Indonesian, Malaysian, Thai, Vietnamese), and Pacific Islanders (Hawaiian, American Samoan, Guamanian/Chamorro).

<sup>1</sup> *Election 2004; How Americans Voted: A Political Portrait*. New York Times. November 12, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> *AAPI Demographics*, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, March 3, 2002. <http://www.fapac.org/demographics.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> *Minority Health Disparities at a Glance*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, July 12, 2004. <http://raceandhealth.hhs.gov/glance.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> National Council of Asian Pacific Americans Press Release: *National AAPI Leaders Denounce Gutting of Historic Executive Order*, May 12, 2004. [http://www.ncapaonline.org/detail\\_pressreleases.asp?PID=12](http://www.ncapaonline.org/detail_pressreleases.asp?PID=12).

<sup>5</sup> *Not the Model Minority*, Southeast Asian Resource and Action Center Press Release, May 4, 2003. <http://www.searac.org/pr-2000-census.html>.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Census, *Facts & Figures*, April 19, 2004 [http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/facts\\_for\\_features\\_special\\_editions/001738.html](http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/001738.html).

PRODUCED BY  
OFFICE OF ASIAN PACIFIC ISLANDER AMERICAN OUTREACH  
VICTORIA LAI, DIRECTOR  
DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL COMMITTEE  
430 SOUTH CAPITOL STREET, SE  
WASHINGTON, DC 20003  
[www.democrats.org](http://www.democrats.org)



In memory of Congressman Bob Matsui: a dedicated American who tirelessly stood up for America's children and seniors. His presence in Congress inspired a generation of young Asian Pacific Islander Americans to enter public service and taught many more to lead with integrity.

Many thanks to the Members and staff of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus and the leaders of the numerous civil rights organizations and APIA advocacy groups who fight every day for the APIA community. Lastly, thank you to all the volunteers and staff who dedicate their lives to registering voters, contacting their neighbors and generating enthusiasm for political participation.