

An interview featuring An Le from Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Asian Law Caucus about the 2020 Census and our API community!

E: Hello! Would you like to introduce yourself to our readers?

A: Sure. My name is An Le and I am the 2020 Census Statewide Network Manager for Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Asian Law Caucus. I've actually done this work in 2010, and that was under the organization formerly called the Asian Pacific American Legal Center -- now is Advancing Justice LA-- but the role that I played in 2010 was that I coordinated a statewide network of close to 80 organizations to work on a census outreach to Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in California. And this time around, the work, it's not the same number of organizations, but the work that we're doing is to, to coordinate the production of materials in language materials, coordination of trainings...or developing and implementing, holding trainings, to prepare our organizations to do the outreach, and then also to support media efforts to also promote consensus through ethnic media outlets that will reach our population.

E: Okay, wow, that's very awesome. As our team was doing research and looking at data, I wanted to ask why there might be lower numbers of active civic engagement in the API community, compared to other racial groups? I remember when you came to our class to do a presentation, there were several charts with statistics that asked people of different racial groups about their awareness about the census, likelihood to fill out the census, and their concern about their answers being shared with other government agencies. The API community had the lowest percentages when it came to awareness about the census and the highest percentage when it came to privacy concerns about their information. What do you think is the biggest obstacle for the AAPI community when it comes to that kind of active civic engagement, and how do you think we can overcome that obstacle?

A: Yeah, so just to clarify that those charts were specifically around participation in the census and that the numbers came from the Census Bureau study that they had conducted, where they surveyed different racial groups around the census participation. There are some theories about why the participation, the likely participation numbers were so low based off of that survey. One of the theories is that among the immigrants that came into the US since the last census, those that came from Asian countries made up the largest percentage of the immigrant population. I think the number is 37% of new immigrants since 2010 came from Asian countries. The number of immigrants that came from Latin American countries are at 31%. New immigrants means that they lack experience with a previous census.

So that is one factor that we think might be contributing to those numbers. Another though, is about language access, which I think is a big part of the work for census and for civic engagement and community engagement in general, is that do our materials produced in the

languages for these for these immigrant populations, that tend to be limited English proficient. I think that some of the slides that I had shown to you in the class also had some data on the limited English proficiency for a good number of the Asian ethnicities. So that's one and then another is the high immigrant population. And people think that because they're immigrants, they don't count in the civic engagement programs. There are a lot of messages that we need to put out to assure people or to convince people that they count and that they should do it because it matters.

E: And I think it is really awesome for a lot of people to recognize that the API community does have a very large immigrant population. Language access is extremely important to reaching out to this community. And I mean, going off of that, why is filling out the census important for our API community? How do you think the census will help our community? Do you think there may be any programs in particular that are crucial for our communities right now that we could provide, once we have those demographics from the census if they do fill it out?

A: Yeah. I mean, the census determines federal funds that go into a state and the state of [California has the highest numbers of Asian Americans](#) and the highest number of NHPs on the mainland. Because our populations are new immigrants, have limited English proficiency and some populations have higher rates of poverty, they're reliant on government assistance. A lot of the services that Asian American and Pacific Islander communities benefit from come from the federal funds that are determined by an accurate census count. This will help our communities tremendously and make sure that there are social services that are available for new immigrants who have economic challenges.

I think that there was another very tangible benefit. I mentioned in 1990, that we had an undercount in 2000. There was an API network of organizations working on the census in 2000, and it looks like we had a relatively low undercount. And as a result of that, we were able to draw a congressional district that enabled us in the San Gabriel Valley to elect somebody that represented us and our interest. This actually led to the creation or the formation of the seat that Judy Chu now has. After we were able to get a decent census count, then redistricting came into play. And because we got involved with a redistricting process, we were able to propose maps that enabled better political participation or representation for our community. So now we have the flip side of that, in that we have more people leaving California than moving here. We're losing our population size as a result of that migration. And so there's concern that California is slated to lose a seat just from the loss in population size. On top of that, if we have an undercount then on top of that we actually could be losing an additional Congressional seat. So, there's political representation at stake, really.

E: Wow that is awesome. I was actually talking to NAFCONN the other day, and I think something that really stuck with me from that conversation was about how extremely important it is that we are able to get more representation of our communities into Congress. And I think that would encourage a lot more active civic engagement, knowing that there are people out there who look like us who are speaking on behalf of our communities. It's really encouraging to know

that filling out the census can help that redistribution and redistricting and create that kind of campaign.

A: Mm hmm. I think history needs to be brought up, because I think a lot of times people think, feel that it's always been around, they don't understand that there was a fight for that. Yeah, like, the weekend. People didn't realize that unions brought us a weekend. There were these efforts that needed to be made, to enable us and it and it took people power to do that. And once you get that and you also need to remember the fight that went into that process, so that you don't take it for granted. We know that we got political representation as a result of an accurate census count, then, that's something that's worth fighting for.

E: Wow, that's super awesome. Empowering.

A: You wouldn't think that the census is important, right?

E: Wow. I mean, it's awesome to learn about how just 10 minutes of your day filling out that kind of that form can change so many things for a lot of different people. Yeah. Wow. That's super awesome. But that being said, I know that one of the biggest concerns that might have come up for the API community was the transition to an online platform and privacy concerns where the data is going. Would you be able to maybe debunk these concerns or maybe myths that or had about where the state of goes for the API community?

Unknown Speaker 19:11

A: There's all of these privacy, confidentiality provisions that impose penalties that are sufficient enough to deter the sharing of your information, but I don't know how much that resonates for folks. I mean, I think for privacy or just concerns about your data getting lost or whatever, there is a process that the Census Bureau has put in place to provide the safeguards to prevent information from getting hacked into and all of that stuff. My understanding is that once you submit your response, it goes through an encryption process, so it's private. I think there are different layers of concerns or anxieties around this, like cyber security. But then the other is, will the government use my information to deport my family? The Census Bureau can get data from other government agencies to help fill in the gaps in the census count, but it's a one way relationship. The Census Bureau will not share information the other way around. So, to the extent that people are concerned, I think that there are sufficient safeguards to, to alleviate or some of those concerns and anxieties.

E: Yeah, I liked how you said it's a one way relationship. I feel like that's a really good visual representation of where that data goes. I think it'd be very reassuring for a lot of the members in the API community in terms of where that data is going.

A: Yeah, I think having those concerns debunked or addressed somehow is really important and a big part of that is knowing what is fueling that anxiety and how do we directly address it.

E: Yeah. And I mean, I feel like a lot of that comes from wanting to protect communities and family as well. And that's also part of the concerns, or the reason why those concerns come up. I guess this can be for the general AAPI community, but especially for second generation children, or 2.5 generation children of immigrant families, do you maybe have any encouraging words for this campaign, and for the AAPI community?

A: Yeah, I think that a lot of the second gen children of immigrants are the ones that are oftentimes the trusted messengers within their own communities, and within their families. These are generally going to be the children that will help to fill out official documents for their parents, because of language access. These are the navigators for their families. And that brings with it a lot of responsibilities. I was one of those kids for my family.

And, I think with that responsibility, and it comes almost like a requirement for them to understand why certain community engagement or civic engagement programs are important to them. This is about empowering themselves, and it's about empowering their families, to be seen, to be counted and to be acknowledged, as a community that contributes, that is carrying its weight by participating in this process that everybody is supposed to participate in.

E: Thank you. Thank you so much for doing this interview! I really appreciate it.