

Session 3

Asian and Pacific Islander Power in the 2024 Election

Purpose: Chance and opportunity for APIA folks to come together to discuss efforts and strategies to foster and support voter turnout in a way that translates into increasing our demographic's electoral power

Moderator: Natalie Masuoka (Associate Professor of Political Science and Asian American Studies at UCLA; Faculty Director for the Asian American Policy Initiative at the UCLA Asian American Studies Center)

Panelists:

- Godfrey Santos Plata (Deputy Director at LA Forward Institute; on the board of API Rise)
- Andy Tran (Staff Attorney on the Impact Litigation at Asian American Advancing Justice Southern California [AJSOCAL])
- Nancy Yap (Executive Director of the Center for Asian American United for Self Empowerment [CAUSE])
- Easter Mulipola (Executive Director of Project-Respect)

Data Power Point Presented by Godfrey Santos Plata

→ *Keep in mind that this PowerPoint was based of LA County data available Wednesday (2/28) night so the data may have changed since then*

→ *Cautioned to keep in mind data availability (point above reflects this) and the limitations of data disaggregation (out of scope issue due to this stemming from secretary of state)*

→ *Contextual Differences to keep in mind considering this presentation compared 2024 primary election data to that of the 2020 primary and 2020 presidential election*

- Issues with ethnic categorization
 - Available categories: Armenian, Persian, Chinese, Pacific Islander, Filipino, Korean, Southeast Asian, Asian-Anglo, Japanese, Arabic, Russian, Asian Misc., Chinese-Korean-Viet (secretary of state uses birth records and last names to categorize), Vietnamese, Chinese-Korean, Chinese-Vietnamese
 - “No Ethnic ID” coded to mean white
- LA County Numbers
 - 88 Cities, over 10 million people; out of the 10 million, only 5.67 million registered to vote
 - AANHPI specific: 1.67 million in LA County; only ~65400+ registered to vote
 - 3 biggest voting blocs: No Ethnic ID, Latino, and African American
 - Biggest Asian Voting blocs: Chinese, Filipino, Armenian, Korean, Vietnamese
- Early Headlines

- low turnout overall
- in early votes 65+ dominated age category (65+ > 64 and under),
- more voted last minute
- higher republican turnout
- AANHPI Headlines
 - Top five Asian American groups voted closer in numbers to 2020 than big three population did
- Case Study
 - LA CD-10/AD-54/CA-34 (Overlaps in Koreatown; a Korean candidate for each of those positions)
 - LA CD-14/AD-52/CA-34 (Overlaps in Eagle Rock, 2 Filipino candidates)
 - Both these showed that Asian voters will show up more if they feel represented

Panelist Q&A - Moderated

- Question 1: “What do you see as the main issues of your advocacy?”

Nancy Yap:

- Civic Engagement
 - “Does it matter that we see a candidate that we relate to?” “how connected they are to our communities” [is what is more important]
 - Surveying why folks do not vote [language accessibility concerns, general awareness]
- Lots of us being the first/only in these spaces
 - Alludes to challenges of burn out, tokenization, and having to navigate unfamiliar terrain
- Addressing
 - Being in community
 - Partnering with UCLA (I assume the AAPI Policy Initiative?)

Andy Tran:

- Systemic Gaps
 - “democracy has historically left people out the process by design (to look like a mistake)”
- Addressing
 - Ensuring bilingual materials under state law

Easther Mulipola:

- Pacific Islander Marginalization
 - Lack of representation and in language materials for our communities
 - “lots of local candidates are disconnected from local communities”
 - “We don't need outside people to tell us how to be us... bring us into these spaces.”
- (Working) Class Implications
 - “...busy living (how am I gonna pay for rent, my car)”

- “basic necessities is what our communities is still grappling with”
- Addressing
 - eyeball to eyeball discussion/small group discussions/honoring and respect/it down and introduce yourself your family your village/ bring food → all this *before* you talk business
 - Social media outreach and content remixing
 - Bringing us (Pacific Islanders) in (to these Asian spaces catered to “AAPI” communities)
 - Church as community centers
 - “When you capture the elders and the main faith based groups, the message will be distributed that way”

Godfrey Santos Plata:

- Voting barriers
 - The act of voting as isolating and/or intimidating
 - Can be compounded when thinking about language inaccessibility
 - Voting center locations
 - Relying on population density pushes an equality (over equity) approach
 - Systemic barriers (size and tech availability/functionality concerns)
- Addressing
 - Ballot parties (as a way to encourage voting)
- Question 2: “Why is bilingual access an issue in our communities? Why are our communities advocating for this?”

Nancy Yap:

- Not as simple as a translated ballot → go further
 - “...even if the ballot is in language, what does it mean when the ads are not in language, or even the reach out in there?”
- “There is a spirit of wanting to make it better, but it is hard to find what is missing” → What would it look like for these environments to be welcoming
- Language and translation = wanting to include us enough that we feel welcomed
- beginning step to civic engagement

Andy Tran:

- All these materials (ex. Bilingual materials) should elevate the ability for AAPI voters to cast ballot
- Federal voting act laws → “recognizing that many Asian Americans speak a language other than English”
- Poll Monitoring
 - Work helps with training volunteers to make sure that they hold these centers

accountable

- Issues noticed at the primary elections
 - Changing and/or updating the address
 - Changing (political) party affiliation
 - Many first time voter registration
 - Language assistance (when casting the ballots)

Natalie Masuoka: *//transitioned to give space for people to share their work on the ground//*

Easther Mulipola:

- “Care to Vote” (established in 2020)
 - Civic engagement effort to normalize participating in election
- Black and Brown Talking Circle
 - Usually Pacific Islanders live in the same communities as or in close proximity to Black and/or Latino communities (“neighbor communities”)
 - Sometimes our communities (as a result) feel more connected to these other Black and Brown communities (than the Asian American community)
- What was effective
 - Helping those who are already registered to go out and vote
 - Working with people trusted by the community
 - These folks then become the trusted messenger to share the message and inform their own communities

Godfrey Santos Plata:

- Number one strategy: relationships
 - Trust; “being able to know someone enough to reach out at any hour for help”
- Ballot Curing as an extension of poll monitoring
 - With mail-in ballot, people who are ballot curing double check that the mail in votes
 - Have a signature (some get sent without one)
 - That the signature on the ballot matches their federal signature

Nancy Yap:

- *(Specific to experience with ballot centers in LA County)* Whole team of people who check ballots
 - If mistakes are caught early enough (like missing signatures) the team can help fix those
- Looking Forward
 - Moves towards transparency (that way tactics to help our communities can be better adjusted)
 - Needing data surrounding ballot curing
- Question 3: “These efforts demonstrate the work that is being done here in Southern California to ensure AAPI electoral participation. One of the important features of the work you all

describe is the importance of collaboration with other organizations and the kind of integrated community infrastructure that is being built in the region. We would be interested to hear from each of you about your reflections on this collaborative work, how you would describe what is being created and how collaborative efforts pave the way for AAPI empowerment?”

Nancy Yap:

- Partnership Mentioned: UCI
 - Need for data to help share our stories
 - “When we are erased we do not have the resources we need” (ex. housing, health data)
 - Disaggregated data would help better develop our stories

Andy Tran:

- California Electorate Organization(? Not sure if the wording is right but essentially this is a group of legal organizations who aligned themselves together towards assisting with outreach)
 - Sharing resources, guidance, and past lessons
 - Helpful when reaching out to other AAPI organizations and non AAPI orgs

Easther Mulipola:

- Recruiting more for partners
 - Looking to build coalition with other community partners

Godfrey Santos Plata:

- Bringing in non AAPI folks as coalition partners to help service communities

Q&A with the Panelists

Audience member 1: “This November, the voter in LA City will be redistricted. Does anyone in the panel think this is necessary or do groups need to organize to improve the representation of our communities?”

Godfrey Santos Plata:

- Short Answer: Yes!
 - Every ten years census data indicates population growth, hence why there’s redistricting
- Need for Independent Body to do the redistricting
 - Shared a story (from leaked tapes in 2021) concerning how people appointed by City Council (therefore not an independent body) redistricted based on political agendas/motivation
- Representation
 - 5 supervisors for 10 million peoples
 - Los Angeles City: 15 Council Districts (easier to feel represented in smaller districts)

Nancy Yap:

- Communities of interest needing to be able to speak to their rep in more intimate ways

Audience Member 2: “How many people changed their political affiliation during this voting period?”

Andy Tran:

- We do not have that data (on hand)
- It was on a questionnaire (therefore should be able to look at that eventually)

Godfrey Santos Plata:

- We can get the data (we do not have it but we should be able to get it)
-

Audience Member 3: “What would be the motivation/the barriers to change this (low turnout)? For some communities it is so single issue based.”

Nancy Yap:

- Keep trying
- Catch people where they are passionate about
- Accountability
 - hold candidates accountable especially if they use our trauma to get to their position

Natalie Masuoka:

- To move away from focusing on single factor motivation
 - When looking at turnout, it is easier to blame
- The laws in place impede voter access
 - Need to make sure people are getting contacted and that their ballots are not getting rejected

Audience Member 4: (focus was on community college partnerships) “This question is for Easter. Is there a way to build a messaging toolkit to reach PI communities... to build that training?”

Easter Mulipola:

- Yes!
- Include us in the room
 - That way we can take the messages and resources back to our communities

Closing Remarks

“Any closing comments? Thoughts about moving forward, advocacy, what would you like us to pay attention to?”

Godfrey Santos Plata:

- Don't let what is happening federally keep you from what is happening locally
- join an organization that allows you to focus on civics

Easter Mulipola:

- tie your shoes and keep moving forward

Andy Tran:

- throughline is having an action item
- volunteering as poll observer

Nancy Yap:

- Voting is a team sport (can be fun and can bring others together)

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