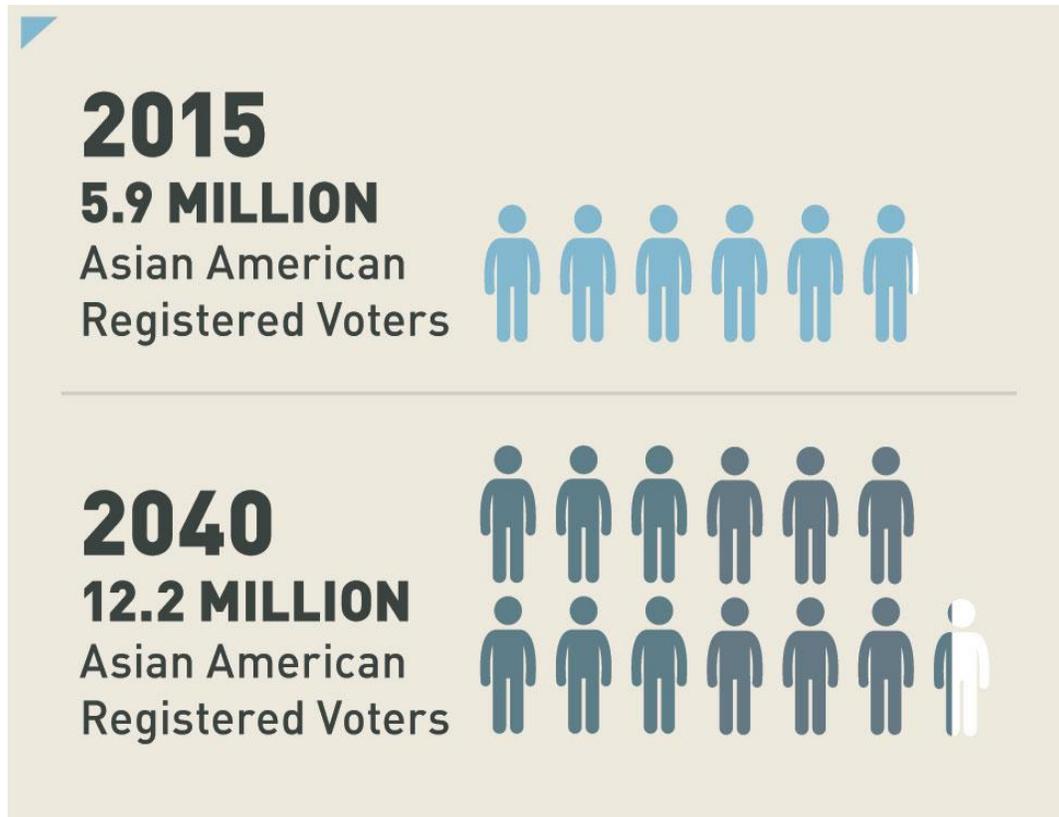


# THE FUTURE OF ASIAN AMERICA IN 2040

## Asian American Electorate to Double



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#### Disclaimer

Authors are solely responsible for the content and interpretations in this report.

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## Introduction

The number of Asian American registered voters will double to about 12 million in 2040, making them one of the fastest growing electorates over the next quarter century. This could be a game changer. Not only will Asian Americans be a politically influential voting bloc in select areas in the United States, they have the potential to be the margin of victory in critical swing vote states during the next six presidential election cycles. This report provides details on the demographic characteristics of the emerging Asian American electorate.

The phenomenal growth of the Asian American electorate is driven by a larger demographic dynamics. The US Census Bureau projects that between 2015 and 2040, the number of Asian Americans (Asians alone and in combination with another race) will increase by 74%, making them the fastest growing demographic group (by race and Non-Hispanic origin) in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Our analysis finds that there will be even higher growth rates among Asian Americans of voting age (18 years and older) and Asian Americans eligible voters (citizens of voting age).

Over the next 25 years, there will be important shifts in the composition of Asian American registered voters, which in turn will influence the political and policy concerns of this electorate. For example, while naturalized immigrants will continue to comprise the majority of Asian American voters, U.S. born voters will be growing at a faster rate. In fact, U.S. born registered voters<sup>2</sup> will account for a majority of the net increase in Asian American registered voters. In addition, there will also be a generational age gap between U.S. born Asian Americans and most foreign-born Asian Americans. By 2040, the median age of the U.S. born will be 37 years old, while the median age of foreign-born Asian Americans will be 56 years old. These age, and birthplace (nativity), factors, along with other socioeconomic ones, suggest a diversity, and potential divergence, of interests among subgroups of Asian American voters.

The projected growth of the Asian American electorate creates both challenges and opportunities. For example, is there a vision or agenda that can unite Asian Americans into an effective voting bloc, rather than one that divides the group into offsetting votes? Is there a strategy to grow the Asian American vote base beyond what is currently projected? Considering that Asian Americans have a low voter participation rate, how can culturally and linguistically appropriate policies and programs be leveraged to increase higher naturalization and voter registration rates to further advance civic engagement and political participation? Where will Asian Americans – particularly multiracial Asian Americans - fit into the nation’s political landscape as America becomes majority minority or minority majority?

This report is a part of a larger project that builds on the pioneering work that was published over two decades ago, “The State of Asian Pacific America, Policy Issues to the Year 2020,” jointly published in 1993 by LEAP (Leadership Education for Asian Pacifics) and UCLA’s Asian American Studies Center. As with that edited volume, we believe that it is critical to understand key characteristics of the future population of Asian Americans, by nativity and age. Doing so enables us to understand their concerns and priorities by age and immigration status, and how they can exercise their “voice” across their political and demographic lifespan.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, Asian American refers to the inclusive category of Asians alone and Asians in combination with another race.

<sup>2</sup> This includes those born in the U.S., and those born abroad to U.S. citizens.

While others have made projections of the Asian American population and the Asian American electorate<sup>3</sup>, this project is unique in providing details not available elsewhere. Instead of using a simple linear extrapolation for all Asian Americans, collapsing Asian Americans with “others,” or reporting only for “Asians Alone,” this project utilizes demographic projection techniques that enhance the U.S. Census Bureau’s most recent 2014 National Population Projections.<sup>4</sup> The project also takes into account differences in racial classifications<sup>5</sup> and utilizes statistical models to project the absolute and relative size of Asian American eligible voters (those 18 years and older, and citizenship by birth or naturalization) and Asian American registered voters.<sup>6</sup>

## **Background**

The growth of Asian America 2040 is the result of the following factors and trends. Between 2015 and 2040, Asian Americans (Asians alone & Asians in combination with other races) will grow 74%, from 20.5 million to 35.7 million. This increase is more than three times that of the U.S. total population, and greater than any other major racial and ethnic group (See Figure 1). By 2040, nearly one-in-ten Americans will be Asian American.

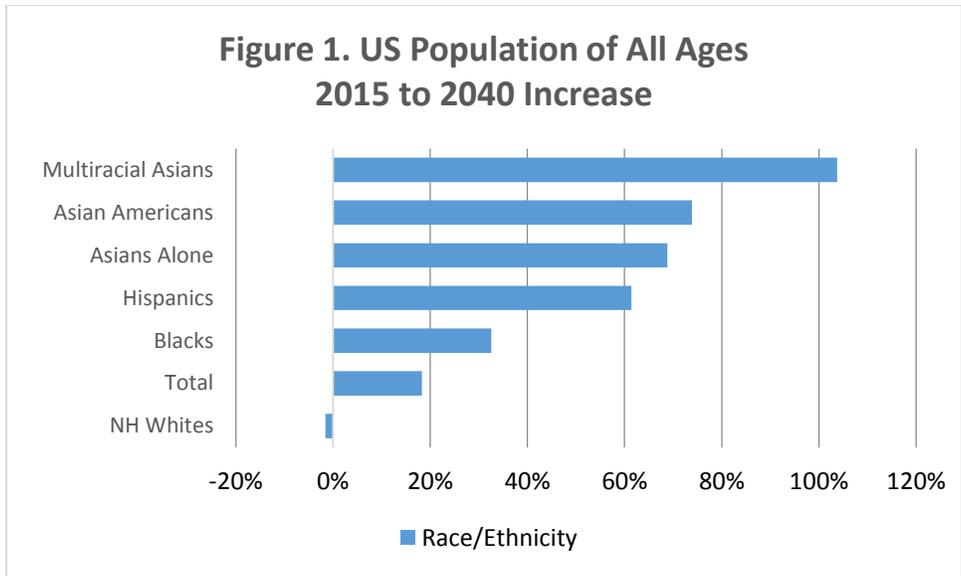
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<sup>3</sup> See for example: Demographic Research Group, Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, University of Virginia. National Population Projection and 2040 Projections for the 50 States and DC. July 2013. <http://www.coopercenter.org/demographics/national-population-projections>; Karthick Ramakrishnan and Farah Z. Ahmad. State of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders Series: A Multi-faceted Portrait of a Growing Population. September 2014. [www.americanprogress.org](http://www.americanprogress.org); Taeku Lee. 2014 Midterms: Patterns and Paradoxes in Voting Among Asian Americans. Brookings 2014 Midterm Election Series. October 29, 2014. [www.brookings.edu/blogs/fixgov/posts/2014/10/29-2014-midterms/](http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/fixgov/posts/2014/10/29-2014-midterms/); William Frey. Diversity Explosion: How New Racial Demographics Are Remaking America, Brookings Press, 2014; and Ruy Teixeira, William H. Frey and Robert Griffin. States of Change. The Demographic Evolution of the American Electorate, 1974-2060. February 2015 [www.americanprogress.org](http://www.americanprogress.org).

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 National Population Projections, <https://www.census.gov/population/projections/data/national/2014.html>. The Bureau reports projections by nativity only for Asian Americans alone. The supplements those projections with ones for multiracial Asian Americans to produce counts for an inclusive count of both Asian Americans alone and Asian Americans in combination with another race.

<sup>5</sup> The project also accounts for the differences in the racial/ethnic categories used for the Bureau’s population projection models and the categories used for other Bureau data sources, such as the decennial census and the American Community Survey. The projections’ categories are consistent with those used by the U.S. National Center for Health Statistics. For a discussion on the differences, see [http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/bridged\\_race.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/bridged_race.htm).

<sup>6</sup> The multivariate logistic models that account for naturalization rates by age, nativity and years in the U.S., and multivariate logistic models account for voter registration rates by age and nativity and for presidential and non-presidential elections. Micro-level data from the 2011-2013 American Community Survey are used to estimate the naturalization model. Description of that data can be found at [http://www.census.gov/acs/www/data\\_documentation/public\\_use\\_microdata\\_sample/](http://www.census.gov/acs/www/data_documentation/public_use_microdata_sample/). Micro-level data from the 2010 and 2012 November voter supplement file of the Current Population Survey, Description of that data can be found at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/socdemo/voting/>.



The voting age Asian American population (those 18 years old and older) will also grow by 80%, compared to Hispanics who will grow by 77%, Non-Hispanic Blacks by 38% and Non-Hispanic Whites at 1% (See Figure 2). The growth rate is particularly high for Asians of mixed race, although this due to their relatively small numbers in 2015.

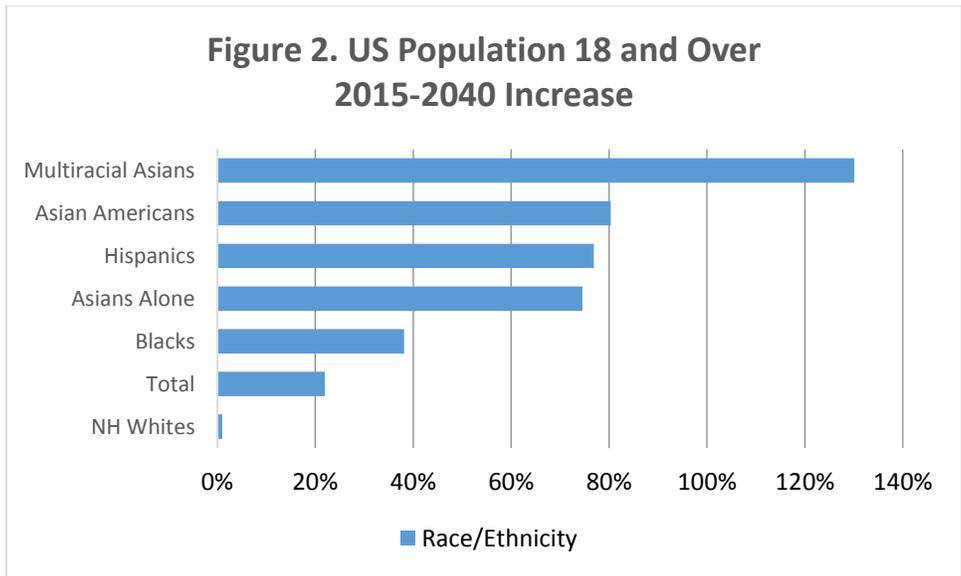
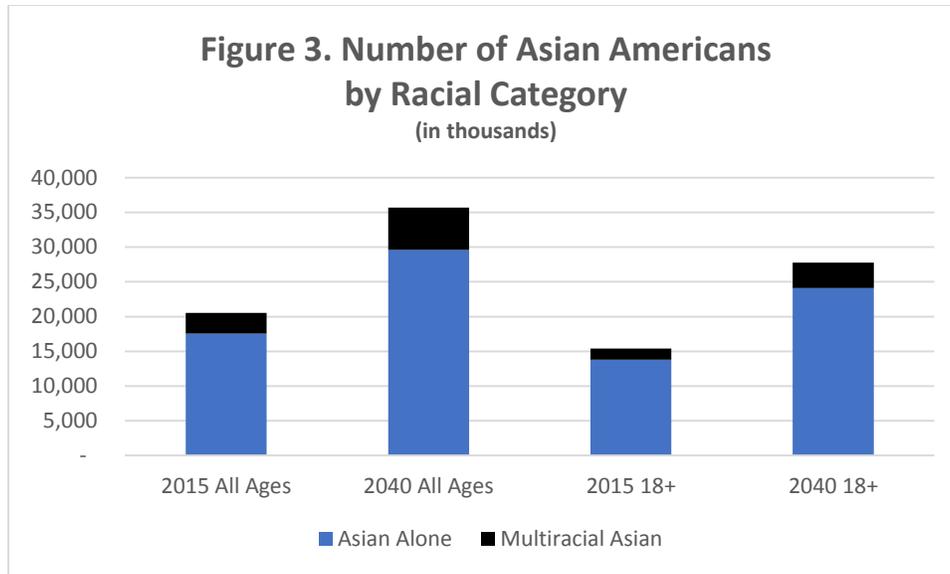


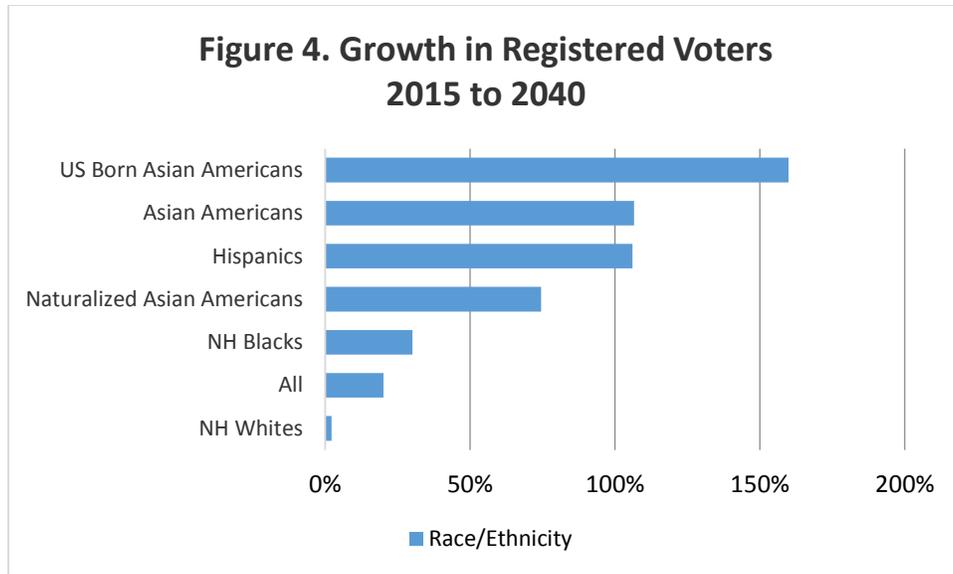
Figure 3 reports the number of Asians Alone and Multiracial Asians (Mixed Asians). The Asian Alone segment will continue to be a large majority of the total Asian American population, as well as the Asian American voting age population. However, the number of Multiracial Asians will have a much higher growth rate. This group will grow by 130%, compared to 75% for Asians Alone. Among adults of voting age, Multiracial Asians will grow at a rate of 104%, significantly higher than the 69% rate for Asians Alone.



The rapid growth of the Asian American population fuels an even faster growth rate among Asian American eligible voters, and an even faster growth rate of 107% among Asian American registered voters.<sup>7</sup> According to our projections, Asian American registered voters will grow from 5.9 Million in 2015, to 12.2 Million by 2040. By 2040, 1 in 15 registered voters will be Asian American. The increase will make Asian Americans one of the fastest growing electorates in America, by major racial and ethnic groups.<sup>8</sup> (See Figure 4).

<sup>7</sup> The differences in growth rates are due to changes in the composition of the Asian American population by age, nativity and years in the United States. For example, older adults tend to register at a higher rate, so an aging population would tend to have more registered voters.

<sup>8</sup> The projections for groups other than Asian Americans are adjusted for by age category, and age category and nativity for Hispanics.

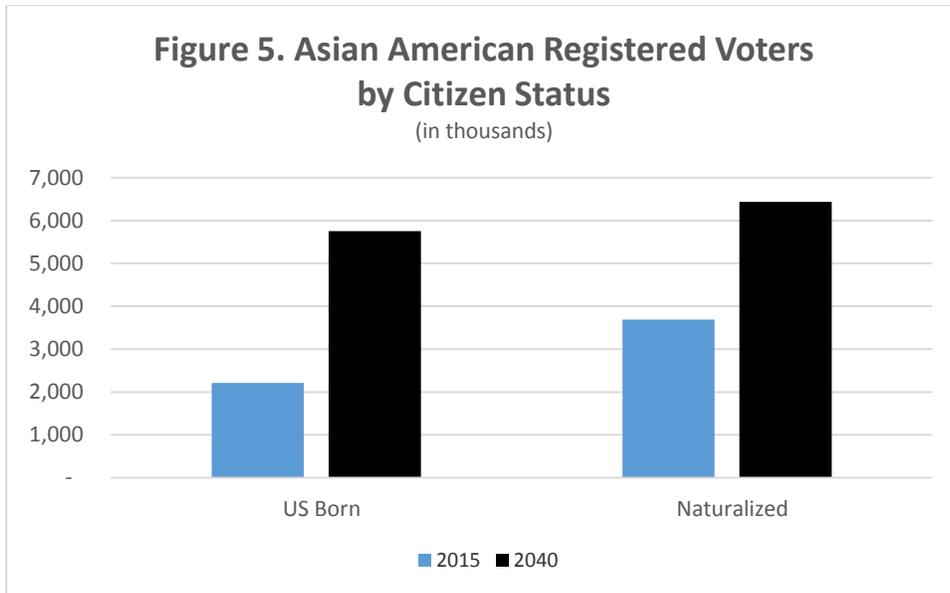


**Characteristics of the Asian American Electorate**

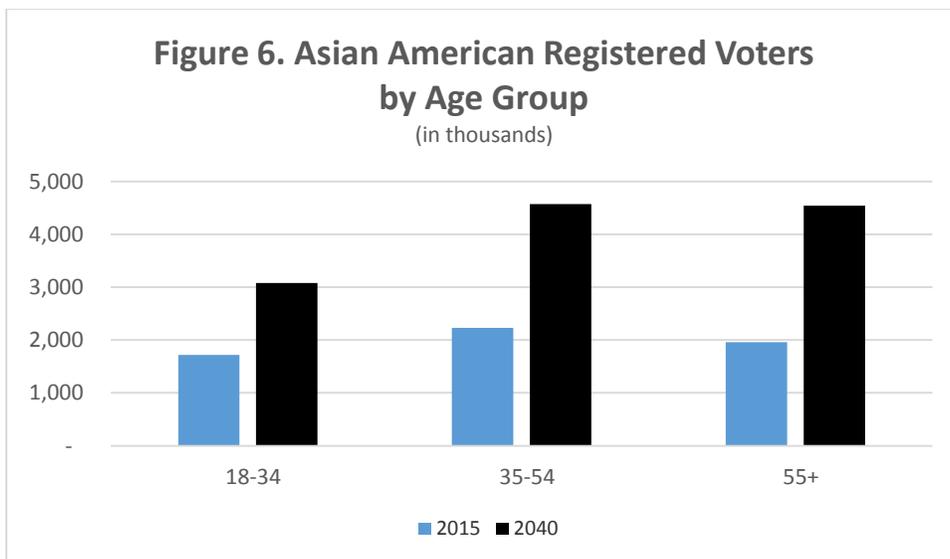
There will be important shifts in the demographic composition of the Asian American electorate by age and nativity. As reported in Figure 5, Asian American registered voters who are naturalized immigrants will continue to be in the majority, though the number of U.S. born registered voters will grow much more rapidly, bringing them much closer to parity with those who are naturalized citizens.<sup>9</sup> Today, nearly two-thirds of Asian American registered voters are foreign-born, but a quarter of a century later, only slightly more than half will be. That’s because there will be an 160% increase among U.S. born Asian American registered voters that is more than twice that of the 75% increase among naturalized Asian American registered voters. In fact, U.S. born Asian Americans will make up a majority of the net increase in registered voters between 2015 and 2040. The different growth rates translate into a sizeable re-composition of the vote by nativity.

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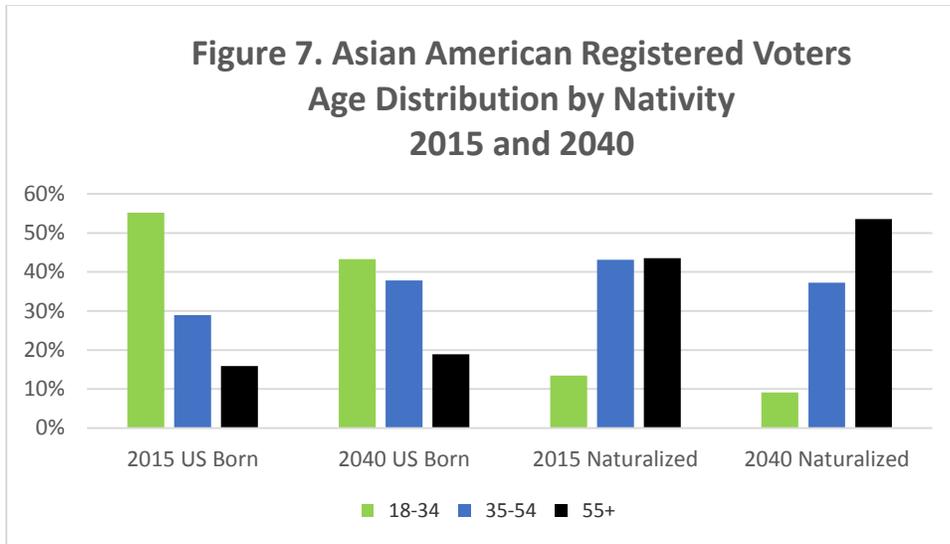
<sup>9</sup> For this report, the category “U.S. born” also includes a small number of individuals born abroad to parents who are U.S. citizens.



The composition by major age groups of Asian American voters will change moderately. In 2015, 29% of Asian American registered voters are 18-34, 38% are 35-54, and 33% are 55 and over. By 2040, 25% of Asian American registered voters will be 18-34, 38% will be 35-54, and 37% will be 55 and over. Those 55 and over will grow by 132%, making them the fastest growing Asian American voter age segment. As a consequence of the shift in age composition, the median age of registered voters will increase slightly, from 45 years old in 2015 to 48 in 2040. Aging applies to the U.S. born, from 33 to 37 years old, and to the foreign-born, from 52 to 56 years old.

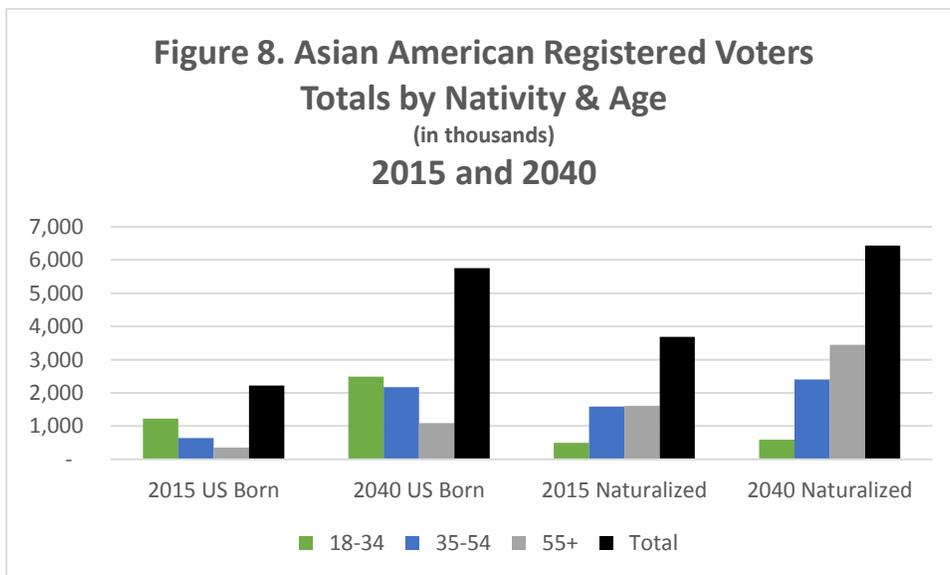


Disaggregating age groups by nativity reveals considerable demographic differences, as seen in Figure 7. In 2015, young U.S. born adults (18-34) constitute a significant majority, 56%, of U.S. born Asian American registered voters, while those who are middle-aged (34-54) will constitute 29%, and those who are older (55+) will constitute 16% of U.S. born Asian American registered voters. By 2040, however, young U.S. born registered voters (18-34), will constitute only 43% of U.S. born Asian American registered voters, while 38% will be middle aged, and 19% will be 55+ years old.



The naturalized foreign-born segment is quite different. It is older, and comprised to a large degree by Asians who came to the U.S. as a result of the Immigration & Naturalization Act of 1965, and the Refugee Resettlement Act of 1975. In 2015, only 44% of all naturalized Asian American registered voters are 55 and over, but by 2040, 53% will be. During this period, the youth share will decline from 13% to 9%, and the middle-aged share will decline from 43% to 37%.

Figure 8 provides additional details by reporting the absolute number of Asian American registered voters. The overall contours of the distribution by age and the change over time are the same as those in Figures 6 and 7. Figure 8, however, identifies which groups will emerge as key segments for political outreach and voter contact.



**Implications of the Ascent in the Asian American Electorate 2040**

The projected rapid growth of the Asian American registered voters will have profound implications for this population and for national politics. Their overall share will increase from about 4% of all registered voters in 2015 to nearly 7% in 2040. At 7% of the electorate, Asian Americans can make the margin of difference in tight presidential races, particularly in swing vote states where there are sizable shares of Asian Americans. Republicans and Democrats are just beginning to understand the significance of the Asian American swing vote, and while there is a propensity among Asian Americans to register as Independents, political candidates and political parties are beginning to understand the value of micro-targeting and turning out Asian American voters in tight partisan races in mid-term Congressional elections.

At 7% of the vote in 2040, political candidates will want to court the Asian American vote. To do so, candidates will need to understand that the Asian American vote is not a monolith. They will need to understand that the political concerns and priorities of Asian Americans are both unique and complex, shaped in part by age, nativity, multiracial, and other evolving demographic composition. For example, foreign-born Asian American voters may carryover the cultural values and concerns of their native countries. As a result, international relations, international trade/finance, education and immigration could be a high priority. Recently naturalized Asian American voters may have greater need for in-language registration forms, town halls, election booklets and ballots. In contrast, second, and subsequent, generations may take their right to vote for granted, and not turn out to vote unless there is an issue that resonates with them. Second generation Asian Americans share values with the U.S. mainstream, and the issues that are likely to turn them out to vote, are issues related to equality, the environment, health care/elder care affordability, college affordability, affordable housing, bullying, medical debt and credit card debt.

In addition, the emergence of a multiracial Asian America has the potential of reshaping politics and the political trajectory. As mentioned before, this group will experience much a higher growth rate than for Asian Americans alone, although the former will still be a small minority. Nonetheless, their increasing presence resonates with a larger transformation of inter-racial relations in the United States, one that is embodied in a growing acceptance of inter-racial marriages and families, and one that could be aligned with a “New Blended Majority.” This could also translate into political power for candidates who embody the image and culture of a multiracial America, now, and decades from now.

### **Reshaping the Trajectory, Influencing the Future**

Demographic trends are not destiny. These projections are built on assumptions about key population parameters and political behavior (e.g., rates of naturalization and propensity for political engagement). These assumptions are based on best guesses anchored in an understanding of patterns and recent trends. Clearly, unexpected developments could produce dramatically different projections, such as a major change in immigration policy. Even if we ignore these macro-level factors, there is still great potential to influence the future. The trajectory for registered voters reported here can also be reshaped by a number of possible factors, including what actions will be taken by Asian Americans to increase naturalization to promote even greater civic engagement and political participation.

Our analysis indicates that there is considerable room for increasing civic and political engagement. For example, Asian Americans currently have a low voter registration rate. They also have one of the highest rates of not declaring a party affiliation. Given the enormous diversity by age and nativity, along with ethnicity and nationality, and socioeconomic class, there is also a daunting challenge of creating a

common political agenda that unites Asian Americans into an effective and cohesive voting bloc. While there has been some progress in increasing the number of elected Asian American office holders, there is still a gap between the group's share of the total population and its share of elected officials.

For example, today we celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act, and the 1965 Voting Rights Act. These two policies define the course of Asian American political participation. The Immigration and Naturalization Act lifted immigration quotas against immigrants from Asia, and enabled Asian immigrants a pathway to citizenship. The Voting Rights Act eliminates barriers to political participation, and protects Asian Americans' rights to effectively participate in electoral politics. Over the past 50 years, both of these Acts transformed America's social and political landscape. For example, at the start of 1965, Asian Americans were less than 1% of the nation's population, and Asian Americans comprised 2% of the US Senate, and nearly 1% of the US House of Representatives (4 of 435). A quarter-of-a-century later, in 1990, Asian Americans were 3% of the nation's population, and comprised 2% of the US Senate, and 1.4% of the US House of Representatives (6 of 435). A half-a-century after the 1965 Acts, in 2015, Asian Americans comprise 6% of the nation's population, but only 1% of the US Senate and 2.3% of the US House of Representatives (10 of 425-435). Three-quarters of a century later, in 2040, where will Asian Americans be? Will they be able to transform the power of the Asian American electorate into political power? Will there be an increase in political representation?

Another question is whether Asian Americans (who are rapidly becoming more multiracial) will become a part of the "old majority" made up of non-Hispanic whites, as implied by some social scientists, or become part of the "new majority," which includes African Americans, American Indians, Latinos and Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders. If Asian Americans can solve or transcend these challenges, it might be possible for Asian Americans to have even greater political influence.

Whether Asian Americans will reach their political potential will be determined by their demographic trajectory, and just as important, by the actions they individually and collectively take to elect responsive officials, enact appropriate legislation, and advocate for relevant policies and programs. The Immigration Act and Voting Rights Act created what Ong, De La Cruz-Viesca and Nakanishi call the "Next Sleeping Giant" in American politics.<sup>10</sup> The question remains, will the "Next Sleeping Giant" awaken, and change the course, and discourse, of America, by the year 2040?

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<sup>10</sup> Paul M. Ong, Melany De La Cruz-Viesca, and Don T. Nakanishi, "Awakening the New "Sleeping Giant"?: Asian American Political Engagement," *AAPI Nexus*, 6(1):1-10, Spring 2008.