How Asian American voters are changing N.C.
The potential to shift a political landscape — October 2018

Asian Americans are becoming a significant, integral part of our state. This community is a key demographic group with untapped political power. The group is one of the fastest growing in the country, with enough numbers to potentially deliver the margin of victory in key races across the state. Yet, low turnout rates throughout several key elections have hindered the translation of such power, with limited voter contact and language barriers as some contributing factors. Despite the growing Asian American mark on the state’s fabric, Asian Americans remain relatively underrepresented in our voting population and political leadership in North Carolina.

Where are our communities now and how can we effect change together in upcoming elections? And just what is our potential to sway the course of history?

A fast-growing community

Between 2000 and 2016, North Carolina’s Asian American population grew by 144% — the fastest rate among Southern states and the second-fastest in the country. The Asian American community is a diverse and largely immigrant population that is contributing to the changing face of North Carolina’s electorate. In 2017, Asian Americans made up 3.5% of the state’s total population.

Since 2010, the number of eligible Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) voters in N.C. grew 43%, more than five times faster than the statewide growth rate.

North Carolina’s Asian Americans—By the numbers

1st
Rank of Asian Americans among racial groups with the fastest growing population in N.C.

56.5%
Asian American voters’ turnout rate in the 2016 presidential election in N.C., compared to 69% statewide

357,296
Population of Asian Americans in the state as of 2017

89,174
Registered Asian American voters in N.C. as of August 2018

157,454
Eligible AAPI voters in N.C. as of 2016

31
Cities across N.C. where one vote decided an election in 2015

Source: “State Voter Profiles (2018)” by AAPI Data and APIA Vote based on 2016 American Community Survey 1YR Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) file and American Community Survey 5YR PUMS file.
Asian Americans live across the state of North Carolina, but are especially concentrated in four major urban counties: Wake (79,162), Mecklenburg (61,859), Guilford (27,306) and Durham (14,634). Across North Carolina, there are more than 157,400 Asian Americans who are eligible to vote, making the AAPI community a potentially significant voting bloc in this battleground state. As of August 2018, there are about 89,000 Asian American registered voters, or about 57% of the total eligible voting population. The table below lists out the top House/Senate districts where Asian American voters have the swaying power, with total voting-eligible Asian American population greater than the margin of victory in each race in 2016.

Top N.C. House and Senate districts where Asian American voters could have swaying power

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>House/Senate district</th>
<th>Margin of victory in 2016 election</th>
<th>Eligible Asian American voters (2016)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>House District 40 (Wake)</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>3,414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House District 88 (Mecklenburg)</td>
<td>467</td>
<td>1,995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House District 44 (Cumberland)</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>1,450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House District 49 (Wake)</td>
<td>820</td>
<td>1,625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House District 36 (Wake)</td>
<td>1,420</td>
<td>2,270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House District 41 (Wake)</td>
<td>6,746</td>
<td>7,901</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate District 17 (Wake)</td>
<td>1,042</td>
<td>9,339</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

INDEPENDENT-MINDED

Asian Americans in North Carolina and across the country tend to avoid party labels. Nationwide, nearly two out of five do not identify as either Democrats or Republicans. As of August 2018, 52.5% of registered Asian American voters in North Carolina are independent or unaffiliated.

**Party affiliation of North Carolina voters, 2018**

![Bar chart showing the party affiliation of North Carolina voters, 2018](image_url)

Source: North Carolina State Board of Elections.

**Young AAPI voters**

Almost one in three voting-eligible AAPIs in North Carolina are young adults between the ages of 18 and 29. They are even more independent, with 55.8% being unaffiliated. An APIAVote analysis from the 2014 election shows that although they are least likely to receive voter contact, AAPI young adult voters display greater voter enthusiasm than other age groups and are more likely to turn out to vote.

**Low voter turnout and limited voter contact**

Though Asian Americans constitute a significant voting bloc, their turnout has been low compared to other racial groups in North Carolina. Voter contact remains a large, unmet need among Asian Americans. In the 2016 presidential election, 71% of Asian American voters nationally reported that they were not contacted by either major political party about the election. Among counties in North Carolina with at least 5,000 Asian American residents, turnout was lowest in Mecklenburg (53.97%), Cumberland (47.97%), Onslow (39.8%), and Catawba (34.6%) counties.

**Highest and lowest Asian American voter turnout in select counties in N.C. 2016 presidential elections**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Wake</th>
<th>Orange</th>
<th>Union</th>
<th>Durham</th>
<th>N.C. Average*</th>
<th>Mecklenburg</th>
<th>Cumberland</th>
<th>Onslow</th>
<th>Catawba</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>64.22%</td>
<td>62.60%</td>
<td>60.52%</td>
<td>57.92%</td>
<td>56.50%</td>
<td>53.97%</td>
<td>47.97%</td>
<td>39.77%</td>
<td>34.56%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: North Carolina State Board of Elections.

*This refers to the average turnout rate of Asian American voter across North Carolina.
**IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE ACCESS FOR A DIVERSE COMMUNITY**

As a largely immigrant community, the majority of Asian American households in North Carolina speak an Asian ethnic language(s) at home.

- Among Asian Americans in the state, 70% speak a language besides English at home, more than 42% of whom speak English less than “very well.”
- 33% of Asian Americans living in North Carolina’s four major urban counties reported themselves as Limited English Proficient (LEP).
- According to a national 2012 post-election survey, voter turnout was lower among LEP voters by 9 percentage points than English-proficient voters.
- 63% of respondents in the same survey said that Asian language support at polling sites would be useful.

**Largest Asian American ethnic populations in N.C., 2016**

Source: AAPI Data and APIA Vote, 2018 State Factsheet North Carolina.

---

**GET INVOLVED**

NC State University students volunteer with NCAAT to canvass a neighborhood in Cary, N.C., in 2018. Photo courtesy of David Chang.

With the 2018 midterm election fast approaching, removing barriers to voting and taking proactive steps to increase civic engagement among Asian Americans is crucial. North Carolina Asian Americans Together (NCAAT) was created to uplift community representation and collective power for Asian Americans and allies.

Join the movement.

[www.ncaatogether.org/get-involved](http://www.ncaatogether.org/get-involved)

Find us on social media — @ncaatogether

---

**WHAT’S ON THE BALLOT IN 2018?**

- All 13 U.S. House of Representatives seats
- All 50 N.C. State Senate seats
- All 120 N.C. State House seats
- 1 N.C. Supreme Court judge seat
- 3 N.C. Court of Appeals judge seats
- School board elections in Cumberland, Forsyth, Gaston, Guilford, Johnston, Union and Wake counties
- Other local elections in Durham, Forsyth, Guilford, Mecklenburg and Wake counties
- 6 proposed amendments to the N.C. state constitution

---

**ENDNOTES:**

5. Based on North Carolina Board of Elections data on election results.

Terms and methodology: Unless stated otherwise, this report focuses on the Asian American population and refers to Asian Americans as U.S. citizens who come from Asia, trace their heritage to Asia and/or consider their race to be Asian. Data from the N.C. State Board of Elections and American Community Survey (ACS) are primarily based on the “Asian alone” category. However, the number of eligible mono-racial Asian American voter is not provided by the U.S. Census Bureau. This report instead used the number of a broader category of AAPI (Asian American and Pacific Islander) voting-eligible population obtained from the 2018 State Factsheet. Similarly, the number of registered Asian American voters in North Carolina captures only the mono-racial group, and is likely to be an underestimate of the population who identify as the Asian Americans.


---

Questions? Contact —
North Carolina Asian Americans Together
711 Hillsborough St, Suite 102, Raleigh NC 27603
contact@ncaatogether.org | www.ncaatogether.org