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CHAPTER 6

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Assets	94
Visibility of Elected Officials and Increasing Political Clout	94
Legal Efforts to Ensure Better Political Representation	96
Mobilization of Voters, Including Limited English Proficient Voters.....	96
The Critical Role of Community Organizations and Civic Engagement Programs...	97
Needs.....	99
Outreach Challenges of First-Generation Voters	99
Lack of Cohesive AA&NHPI Political Identity.....	101
Barriers Confronting Political Candidates	102
Creating Strategic Representation and Sustainable Political Leadership	105
Fostering the Next Generation of Civic Leaders	106
Channeling Philanthropy toward Civic Engagement	107
Policy Recommendations	108
Interviewed Community Leaders	109
Notes	110



Historically, Asian Americans & Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (AA&NHPI) have faced many barriers that have discouraged, and even prevented, them from political participation and civic engagement. Asian immigrants were barred from citizenship for many decades until World War II and afterwards, so they could not vote or run for office. Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders faced a history of colonialism that denied them the right to democratic participation. This historical legacy shapes AA&NHPI political participation; however, in the past few decades, given their population growth and increasing resources, AA&NHPI are emerging as an influential force in the civic and

political life of the county. Despite being a predominantly immigrant population, first-generation Asian Americans along with their children are making significant political gains by voting and contributing to campaigns. Many AA&NHPI are also running for office and winning elections. They are breaking barriers by being the first in their family or from their ethnic group to participate in local civic and political institutions as volunteers, appointees, and politicians. These efforts to gain a political voice and engage in the democratic process defy the model minority myth that mistakenly presents them as passive or apathetic to political activities.



*Photo courtesy of Asian Americans
Advancing Justice – Orange County*

While major barriers have been removed, AA&NHPI continue to face challenges in reaching their full potential with political participation and civic engagement. The internal diversity within the AA&NHPI populations can make it difficult for them to engage in the process as well as work together as a political force. External obstacles also persist, including racial exclusion, access to funds, and political networks. While community organizations have provided resources for voter outreach and political education programs, there is a need for outreach and programs that foster future leaders who can shape their communities by serving on influential civic engagement boards and running for public office.

ASSETS

Visibility of Elected Officials and Increasing Political Clout

Michael Matsuda, a third-generation Japanese American who grew up in Garden Grove in the 1960s and the superintendent of the Anaheim Union High School District, remarks, “Asian Americans in California are a force to be reckoned with politically and electorally.” For example, in the 2012 elections, over 29 Asian Americans ran for political office in Orange County and 10 were Vietnamese Americans.¹ In 2017, three of the five Orange County supervisors are Asian American, and they are from diverse ethnicities: Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese. Other candidates and elected officials represent the major Asian American groups

such as Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, South Asian, and Taiwanese. Charles Kim, a longtime community activist who cofounded and was the first executive director of the Korean American Coalition, describes how Asian Americans in Orange County are using their political resources and clout to support elected officials who represent their interests:

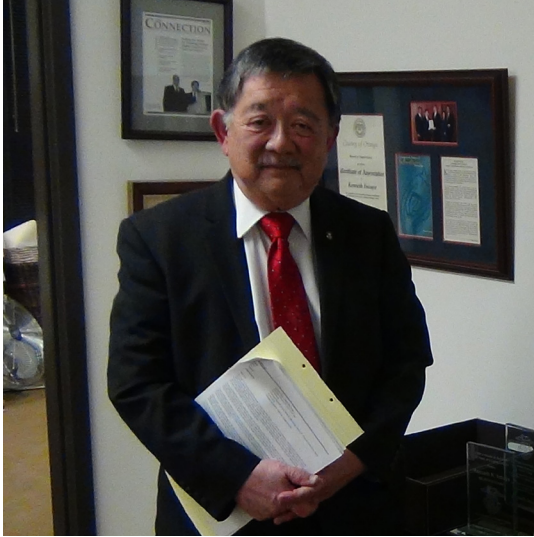
One by one we've been helping, and then we've been successful in getting them elected. . . . If we don't have votes, we'll raise money and help them campaign. If we have votes, we'll make sure they come out and vote. . . . We're here as Americans. We want to be a part of it. We want to work together. If you don't want us to be a part of it, then hey, we'll find someone who can work with us. . . . That's the political decision-making [process]. We want someone that can represent us.

Although the Vietnamese American community was established a little over 40 years ago, it has gained significant political clout at local and state levels, with representatives serving on the California senate or assembly and county board of supervisors, mayoral, city council, or school board positions. Some elections have led to Vietnamese Americans being the majority of candidates and the predominant members elected to the school board or city council. Tam Nguyen, a former president of the Vietnamese American Chamber of Commerce and former president of the Alumni Association at California State University, Fullerton, notes the political strength of the Vietnamese American community:

You have so much representation from the city level to the county level to the state level and now congressional level with Stephanie Murphy [from Florida] and Joseph Cao [from Louisiana]. But the Vietnamese Americans have been a very important community for the mainstream. And every time the election season comes out, I get so many non-Vietnamese friends who I serve on these boards with that always ask like, 'Wow, the Vietnamese go out to vote! They're so strong politically.'

This election of these officials has encouraged more Vietnamese Americans to run for office since they now have role models.

These successes have created political momentum at both the regional and national level, and the community recognizes that their votes count. Furthermore, given their residential and commercial concentration, they have been able to shape local elections and have shown their ability to “get out the vote” for co-ethnic politicians, especially in tight races with low voter turnout. Regardless of the ethnicity of the candidate in cities like Fountain Valley, Garden Grove, and Westminster, candidates have to reach out to the Vietnamese American community if they want to win an election.



*Photo courtesy of Asian Americans
Advancing Justice – Orange County*

Legal Efforts to Ensure Better Political Representation

AA&NHPI have also engaged in legal efforts to ensure better political representation of Asian Americans in Orange County and to provide opportunities for Asian American communities to have important political dialogues. In partnership with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Southern California, Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Los Angeles (Advancing Justice-LA) sued the city of Fullerton in 2015 for having an at-large election system. The lawsuit argued that at-large elections violated the California Voting Rights Act of 2001 by diluting the voting power of Asian Americans, who comprised nearly 25% of the city and were yet precluded from getting elected to office.² Jonathan Paik, Orange County director of the Korean Resource Center, was a plaintiff in the lawsuit and recalls his experience mobilizing the Korean American community, many of whom were engaging in the political process for the first time, and educating the community about political representation:

Being able to see Korean American residents who are like my grandfather's age and folks get excited when they hear about, 'What does it mean about Korean American representation? What are our values as a community?' Those are the things about district elections that no one ever talks about. But for me, it opened up a conversation that I always had a deep fear and apprehension and assumptions about my Korean American community because of the way my family grew up. . . . [Discussions about how to map] districts really unpacked a lot of those values, conversations, for me in a way that I think is really necessary.

Paik observed how Korean Americans of different generations, immigration statuses, and backgrounds were encouraged to have conversations about their political values and learning how to speak with a collective voice. District elections will go into effect in 2018 in Fullerton, and there are efforts to bring district elections to other Orange County cities such as the city of Santa Ana. In one of the newly created Fullerton districts, eligible Asian American voters make up nearly a majority of the district, and if they vote as a bloc, they may influence the outcome of the election.

Mobilization of Voters, Including Limited English Proficient Voters

Since 2006, Asian Americans Advancing Justice has been effectively conducting voter engagement efforts in Orange County, working closely with community partners, to target AA&NHPI voters in their primary language. These collaborative nonpartisan voter mobilization campaigns involve 10 to 20 community groups

and hundreds of volunteers each election cycle, and in the past decade have made hundreds of thousands of calls, in up to 14 AA&NHPI languages in one election cycle. Through collaborative outreach and mobilization projects with thousands of AA&NHPI voters Advancing Justice-LA and the Orange County Asian Pacific Islander Community Alliance found that nonpartisan targeting of limited English proficient (LEP) voters, especially Vietnamese Americans, was particularly impactful because they tend to be low-propensity voters that respond well to targeted, in-language outreach.³ Furthermore, a higher percentage of Asian Americans cast their votes by absentee ballots. The 2006 General Election survey indicated that over half of Orange County voters cast their vote by mail, compared with 61% of Asian American and 72% of Vietnamese American voters.⁴ Having in-language ballots has been helpful to new LEP voters as well as educating them about the process of casting their votes by absentee ballots, which gives them time to go over the complex voting materials at their convenience.

Federal and state laws provide strong requirements to protect the rights of LEP voters, even covering languages beyond the largest groups, which allows immigrants to participate in the political process. AA&NHPI overall have higher-than-average levels of limited English proficiency, and some ethnic communities have particularly high LEP rates. Not surprisingly, many Asian voters rely heavily on language assistance in order to vote. The federal Voting Rights Act requires translated ballots for larger language groups in a particular jurisdiction (10,000 voters or 5% in a county) and the ability to bring interpreters into the voting booth. California-specific laws add further requirements on counties to assist smaller language groups. Both the state of California and Orange County have taken proactive steps to ensure that LEP voters are able to register to vote and to understand and cast their ballot. Orange County's registrar of voters has worked closely with Advancing Justice-LA and the Orange County Asian and Pacific Islander Community Alliance to provide translated ballots and bilingual poll workers. Orange County is covered federally for Chinese, Korean, Spanish, and Vietnamese, and is covered by the state for Hindi, Japanese, Khmer, and Tagalog, but this can change depending on the political climate. These laws and policies have helped to ensure that AA&NHPI voters are able to make their vote count.

The Critical Role of Community Organizations and Civic Engagement Programs

Many of the organizations profiled in this report, including The Cambodian Family, Korean Community Services, Korean Resource Center, Orange County Asian and Pacific Islander Community Alliance, and South Asian Network, have expanded their services to provide civic engagement and political education programs so that community members can acquire the knowledge and skills to engage in the political process. Some immigrants and refugees come from countries in which holding a public office or voting is seen as extremely dangerous; it is thus critical to

teach immigrants and refugees about U.S. civic engagement and political processes. Vattana Peong describes how The Cambodian Family started a civic engagement program because it wanted to promote an understanding of democracy to the community:

[Cambodians] think the city council, the local government, the county government, the state, the federal, they don't want to speak against that because they said, 'You know I don't want to have any problem with the government.' . . . Because of that, what happened to them 30 or 40 years ago, which taught them not to talk against the government, has carried over here, so they remain silent. So The Cambodian Family wants to break that silence, . . . make sure that they come out and be civically engaged.

These organizations have been proactive in increasing the political visibility of their communities, going beyond traditional social service provider roles to becoming advocates and a needed voice for a broader range of issues. In 2003, after the success of community organizing among Native Hawaiians in Los Angeles, Jane and Victor Pang felt that Pacific Islander communities in Orange County that were “disadvantaged” and “invisible” needed something similar, so they cofounded the Pacific Islander Health Partnership. Jane Pang explains:

[We thought] that maybe it's time to really organize something we wanted to do for Orange County, and that started Pacific Islander Health Partnership. [We] called a few of our friends who were living in Orange County and said let's meet and let's talk about maybe helping the communities. And so from the experience of the Hawaiian Civic Club movement, we now have a group of folks who are really engaged with their community in trying to make a difference socially and becoming civically engaged.

While the organization's mission is to collaboratively address the health needs of the Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NHPI) communities in Orange County, the organization has developed its health education services as cultural events that bring together the different NHPI communities. The Pangs and other NHPI community leaders have also been advocates for the Orange County NHPI community at a national level through the Hawaiian Civic Club's annual lobby day in Washington, DC. Jane Pang relates that the lobby day has a cultural ceremony followed by visits with representatives in which “the ask has always been in terms of the cancer funding, continuing education—we have Native Hawaiian Health Act coming up, the Education Act. And so those are specific things [for which] we are able to ask for support.” They also hope to bring more NHPI representatives, especially Samoan and Tongan leaders, to future lobby days.

There are still too few AA&NHPI represented in mainstream social, cultural, and economic boards and committees in the county; however, many are quite civically engaged within the ethnic community organizations and more leaders could be encouraged to transfer these skill sets to mainstream civic and political engagements. Most of these ethnic groups have a multitude of active cultural, educational, economic, religious, social, political, and professional organizations that involve dynamic individuals with a variety of resources. Through these volunteer opportunities and invaluable organizational experiences, individuals can learn the requisite leadership skills and gain the confidence and connections needed to pursue political appointments or elected positions in the mainstream. Moreover, some leaders continue to be engaged in homeland politics and can use these skills to navigate politics in the U.S. context. With support, there is incredible potential with the growing AA&NHPI communities and existing community organizations to organize, mobilize, and direct existing resources, which will enable AA&NHPI to develop a stronger political voice, become more civically engaged, and invest in future electoral processes.

NEEDS

Outreach Challenges of First-Generation Voters

Given the tremendous size and growth of AA&NHPI in Orange County and the shifting political identity of the county, AA&NHPI are poised to play a significant impact in the county with the right resources and attention. AA&NHPI could potentially represent up to 20% of Orange County voters, but they currently comprise only 14% of voters in Orange County.⁵ At least 5% of AA&NHPI who are eligible are not voting. Voter outreach efforts targeting Asian Americans are limited, and to the extent it is done, the focus is on the larger ethnic groups, including Vietnamese, Korean, and Chinese. Very little voter education or mobilization, whether by political parties or nonpartisan community groups, targets smaller AA&NHPI communities. As the AA&NHPI electorate grows, nonprofit social service and grassroots advocacy groups are bridging some of the political education and mobilization gap of AA&NHPI voters and will need the resources to more deeply engage potential voters with relevant programs, including more local candidate forums.

As mentioned earlier, language is a major hurdle for Asian American and Pacific Islander (AA&PI) voter engagement given high levels of limited English proficiency in many AA&PI ethnic groups and the complexity of U.S. elections, particularly California's elections, which often include complicated ballot measures. Not surprisingly, many Asian voters rely heavily on language assistance in order to vote, and targeted, in-language outreach campaigns have proven to be effective in encouraging AA&PI voters who are LEP to vote. More multilingual voter outreach, education, and mobilization resources are needed. The lack of ethnic- and language-

“If we don’t have votes, we’ll raise money and help them campaign. If we have votes, we’ll make sure they come out and vote.”



*Photo courtesy of Asian Americans
Advancing Justice – Orange County*

specific voter outreach and education affects AA&PI voters across the nation, but places such as Orange County, where there is a large immigrant AA&PI population, are particularly impacted when translated voter materials or bilingual poll workers are unavailable.⁶

In addition to language, AA&NHPI voters tend not to strongly identify with either major political party, which has led to low outreach strategies toward these communities. The latest numbers for the county indicate that 35% of Asian

Americans are registered as Republican, 27% Democrat, and 34% Independent.⁷ However, the younger generation of AA&NHPI tend to vote Democratic, so there are partisan splits between generations.⁸ Given that voter outreach and mobilization is heavily funded by political parties and partisan candidates, AA&NHPI voters are often overlooked by major campaigns. In Orange County, which has a long history as a Republican stronghold, the Republican Party has made more headway in AA&NHPI outreach. Not surprisingly, there have been more Republican Asian American elected officials in Orange County than Democratic. However, in the 2016 general election, Orange County began to turn “blue,” or lean Democratic, based on voter registration and votes cast for the presidential election.⁹ This shift raises the stakes in future elections for both major parties in how they outreach to increase the turnout of AA&NHPI voters, including the large number that do not identify with either party.

Since many immigrants or their children are first-generation voters, their partisan allegiances are not as strong, especially in local races, which are seemingly nonpartisan. Mary Anne Foo, founder and executive director of the Orange County Asian and Pacific Islander Community Alliance, provides insight into why Asian Americans may not neatly fit into political affiliations and are often seen as crucial “swing voters” because they vote based on issues and values rather than party lines:

Asians here are socially progressive, fiscally conservative. And the reason why it’s fiscally conservative is because there’s a lot of small business owners and they worry about their taxes and they worry about surviving. . . . They say, ‘I work really hard. I pay taxes. . . . I’m aligned more around business practices.’ But on social stuff—LGBTQ [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning] issues, women’s rights—they’re really progressive! . . . The Asian community is going to be [voting] based on the values of keeping families together, immigration support for keeping families together, . . . not targeting of immigrants. They’re going to vote for business practices and business

support. And they're going to be socially progressive on their values around education for everyone, public school education for everybody, access to higher education, and support for families.

Lack of Cohesive AA&NHPI Political Identity

Community leaders note that political divides within and among AA&NHPI ethnic communities have made it difficult to build political power, coalitions, and a cohesive political identity. In some cases, Asian Americans cross ethnic lines to support an Asian American of any ethnicity in office; however, this sense of ethnic or racial solidarity cannot be assumed. Cyril Yu, senior deputy district attorney and board member of the South Coast Chinese Cultural Association, observes that in cities like Irvine, which has a substantial Asian American population, there are large subgroups of Asian ethnicities, but they do not always vote for one another:

It becomes a little more complicated when you [are] talking about communities because even though I see the communities as being Asian American, they don't necessarily see themselves as being Asian American. They see themselves as being Korean American or Vietnamese American or Chinese American. So there isn't that connection between Chinese voting for Vietnamese and Vietnamese voting for Korean and Korean voting for Chinese. . . . They may view you as 'Okay, you're Asian American, you're close enough. I'll vote for you.' But there isn't that necessarily, 'I'm going to automatically vote for you' in the way that with the Chinese community voting for a Chinese person is going to have that connection.

There are also political divides within each ethnic group, and this internal complexity impacts strategies for outreach and voter mobilization efforts. For example, while outsiders often lump all ethnic Chinese together, there are internal distinctions based on their country of origin, generation, and socioeconomic background. As Yu, explains, these differences create both opportunities and challenges in building political power:

The Chinese community that's come over now, that's come over from mainland China, . . . we have seen this change, and it's been a little bit gradual, but in recent years it's really accelerated. This is very different. This is not the Taiwanese community that came over for education and eventually got jobs. . . . This is the group of individuals in terms of the wealth component of it that have established businesses in China that are moving their wealth offshore to protect their wealth—whether it's buying real estate or making sure their kids have an education—because they don't know what's going to happen in China. We've seen all these things, rapid acceleration over the past 20 years of economic growth.

For some communities like the Chinese American population, which tends to be residentially dispersed with commercial spaces that are not as concentrated geographically, there is difficulty in organizing and collaborating as a political force.

Yu further comments about the political divides among Chinese Americans that reflect the different personal histories within the community:

There has been a very clean divide within, certainly among the Chinese community, but a lot of the more established Asian American communities, that they're split politically between the Republican side and the Democratic side. And so it's not that easy to say that we're all on the same page as the community because politically we're not. There are people who see the world very differently than the other side. They may be the same ethnicity, but they argue very passionately for the Republican position or for the Democratic position. And a lot of it is based on the experiences they had, the communities they've grown up in, and what's happening within their own community. And it's not necessarily based on living in Irvine either. You do have this split between Democrats and Republicans even among middle-class Chinese and so [there are splits] intergenerationally as well.

Charles Kim of the Korean American Coalition has noted similar divides within the Korean American community as it continues to grow and gain a political presence. He explains how the early formation of the Korean American Coalition as a nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy group required that they be mindful of partisan divides as they worked on domestic advocacy issues:

As we became bigger and more powerful, then we divided [into] the more progressive, more conservative, more Democratic, more Republican. So you have a clash of differences and cultures and political ideologies. So we didn't get involved in Korean politics at all, period. But we wanted to get involved, so KAC because it is a nonprofit, we stayed neutral. So we cannot do any political activities, so we cannot help the Korean American Republican Association and also the Korean American Democratic Committee to form. . . . It's not easy as an advocacy organization because you have to take action because of the nature of our work. But two-thirds of our work we work pretty much closely with more progressive organizations, civil rights organizations.

Barriers Confronting Political Candidates

As AA&NHPI comprise the fastest-growing population in the county, AA&NHPI representation in elected offices is critical to ensure the community helps shape the future of the county. However, while there are currently some high-profile Asian Americans in local, county, and state offices, overall AA&NHPI are

underrepresented in key political leadership roles. While there are more Asian Americans running for political office, creating a pipeline to develop, support, and mentor AA&NHPI candidates is still needed. Cyril Yu, who ran for the Irvine School Board, recalls how Chinese Americans encouraged him to pursue politics but hesitated to encourage their own children to pursue this career path because it is not seen as a traditional profession:

You would get a lot of encouragement from parents or from adults. They wouldn't necessarily say I want my kid to go into politics, but they say, 'Hey, you should really go into politics. You should really do this!' And I'm like, 'Okay, cool!' But you would not see them, you know, pushing their kids to do the same thing. So it was an interesting contrast between them recognizing that we want Asian American and Chinese American leaders, but they were very reluctant that that should be the career choice of their own son or daughter.

AA&NHPI candidates may not receive community encouragement and access to opportunities to help build a political career. Audrey Yamagata-Noji, the first Asian American woman to serve on the Santa Ana School Board, describes how running for a political position was difficult for her and went against cultural expectations:

Going into politics actually goes against everything with how I was raised. Number one, you don't brag about yourself. Number two, you don't get involved with things because you're not supposed to rock the boat. Keep everything calm and zen and balanced. You don't ask people for money. You got to fundraise. You don't put signs up with your name or flyers with your picture on it. You don't walk into people's personal space, their houses, knock on their door, and ask them to vote for you and they don't even know you. So this was extremely disruptive to me personally to have to do all of that.

Obstacles still persist for Asian Americans to run and hold elected positions such as campaign fundraising and having networks in the mainstream community to gain crucial endorsements. Eduardo Lee, cofounder of Wahoo's Fish Taco, has made concerted efforts to fundraise and engage politicians so that they are aware of issues impacting small businesses and the restaurant industry. He notes that this is uncommon for many older Asian Americans, even business owners: "We don't [traditionally] donate money politically. That's where your big problem is, we don't want to get involved politically. . . . [The older] generation, we're not really that involved in the community nor are we involved politically. Under the radar is what we're like kind of a thing. We've always been quiet."

For emerging leaders who are the first generation in their family to become politically involved, having limited political connections poses challenges to campaigning. Cyril Yu explains that "with Asian Americans, unless you're active in

“Asian Americans in California are a force to be reckoned with politically and electorally.”



Photo courtesy of Cyril Yu

the community, unless you're active doing things, you don't necessarily have the profile to have the name recognition that gets you to the point where you can run." Furthermore, viable candidates willing to run often need to find and educate potential financial supporters who can support their candidacy: "On the money side, it really kind of depends. Somebody like me that works for the government, I don't have a lot of money. I'm not a successful businessperson, but you have successful businesspeople who say, 'No, I would never touch politics in a million years, but I would happily fund candidates or get behind them to do those types of things.' So you need to have the ability to tap on both of those things."

First-generation immigrants who have limited knowledge of the U.S. political system may have an especially difficult time running for office even if they have interest and support. Naz Hamid, an immigrant parent from Pakistan who is of Indian and Afghani heritage, ran for the Irvine Unified School District board in 2016. She shares her experience trying to run for elected office as a political newcomer and receiving initial support because she represented an important demographic in Irvine, the Asian immigrant parent:

I was actually approached by the teacher's association. I had tried to become a little bit more politically engaged. I had attended a couple of state conventions as an observer, and I knew a lot about how much we were getting for education and how much we were not getting. And they felt that as an immigrant, people would be able to identify with me and vote for me. And they know I'm smart, that I can do this job, so they approached me and asked me if I was interested in running.

However, Hamid also learned that despite her other qualifications, she lacked the experience or training to run a competitive campaign:

I had absolutely no political training when I decided to run for office, and that was a huge disadvantage. I wish I had made the decision a lot earlier because I would have learned so much through a training program. . . . I didn't even know what GOTV [get out the vote] stood for. But all of the sudden all these people around me were going, 'What's your GOTV initiative looking like?' I'm like, 'I have no idea. What is that? What do you mean? What is GOTV? . . . But how do I get out the vote?' I had no clue!

Postelection I took some training and understood what all this meant, but during the election, [I had] no clue. I did nothing to get out the vote. I did absolutely nothing to raise more funds beyond [family]. . . . I didn't do any kind of neighborhood meeting to say 'I'm running.'

Nothing like that happened. And I realized after the election how complex it is. It's almost like running a business when you start running an election. So I feel a lot more prepared now than I was back then.

Creating Strategic Representation and Sustainable Political Leadership

As the AA&NHPI electorate matures, voters are also asking harder questions about what it means to exert political power at the polls and to vote for AA&NHPI candidates. Several community leaders said that although there are high-profile Asian American elected officials in Orange County, not all prioritize Asian American community needs. Audrey Yamagata-Noji, who served on the Santa Ana School Board, notes that in general AA&NHPI are perceived as representing their ethnic base; however, this is not always the case:

What's fascinating to me now is the number of Asian Americans that are elected in Orange County. . . . Just look at the board of supervisors for the County of Orange. That's amazing to me [that three of five are Asian American]. That's absolutely amazing. I know that there are just a lot more that have run for office. I think it's a lot more representative. Whether your goal and purpose was to represent your community or not, whether you identify with your community or not, you're seen as being Asian American. . . . So there's a sense of representation and inclusiveness. Whether it's actually true or not, I think depends on the community.

In some instances, AA&NHPI candidates use their ethnicity, such as their immigrant or refugee background to garner co-ethnic votes, but once elected they do not advocate for the best interest of the AA&NHPI communities. In other cases, Asian American politicians have to distance themselves from their ethnic group to convince other racial constituents that they will advocate for the whole population, not just their own ethnic group. Jonathan Paik, Orange County director of the Korean Resource Center, remarks on how the community is starting to closely evaluate co-ethnic candidates:

There is an ethnic identity and pride that people want to be able to see in their elected leadership. And most folks won't actually ask the questions around values of leadership, which is why our work on district elections is so important, because it teaches that. But for a lot of folks, they say, 'A Korean American is running. It's like, at the end of the day, we know that we're not going to agree with everything, but it's important for us to support our own community.' And so folks will vote that way. . . . But I think the challenge has often been that folks are voting based on an opportunity to support their community, when in reality I think the question remains, 'Is that leader supporting the community?'

As more Asian American politicians vie for the same position, the community has begun to scrutinize their record and become more sophisticated in making their votes count rather than simply voting or fundraising for a candidate because they are a co-ethnic. Some AA&NHPI have also voted and held fundraisers for a non-co-ethnic or non-Asian American candidate over a co-ethnic who they believe has a proven track record or will better address the needs of the community. The community recognizes that as important as it is to have politicians that reflect the racial diversity of their city, having politicians, regardless of ethnicity, who are responsive to the needs of the AA&NHPI constituents and who advocate on their behalf is just as—if not more—vital.

Additionally, winning one election or electing one AA&NHPI candidate is often insufficient for building broader political power as a community. For example, Irvine receives extensive publicity about being a multicultural city and elected two Korean immigrant mayors; however, in the 2016 election, the multiethnic city council transitioned to an all-White council for the first time in 12 years.¹⁰ This outcome has led to questions as to why a majority Asian American city with an Asian American population that continues to increase and has financial resources would lose mainstream political representation. There are a variety of reasons for this, but multiple Asian American and Middle Eastern American candidates ran in the recent election and, in some cases, this can divide the ethnic votes, making it difficult for many first-time candidates without name recognition to garner enough votes. Additionally, the larger population counts due to an increase in newcomers does not automatically translate into more ethnic politicians winning elections as many new immigrants may be unfamiliar with the political process.

Fostering the Next Generation of Civic Leaders

Community leaders stress that youth leadership development and civic engagement are important to fill the political leadership gaps in the county. Since many are the children of immigrants or refugees, they are not necessarily raised in families that have a tradition of civic participation. Jei Garlitos, principal and coordinator of Alternative Education with the Anaheim Union School District, explains that providing opportunities to foster civic learning and leadership training needs to begin early and can occur within the educational system:

This access to more civic engagement for our students is a big piece because . . . they don't get educated in civic engagement within their own families. But also I think within the Asian American community, . . . we don't have enough politicians or we don't have enough of those Asian Americans in that regard.

Looking at it on a bigger scale, if we are really, are to truly affect some of these policies and our program changes or community changes, I think we need some of our Asian American students to start getting

involved with leadership roles. And not just within their own particular profession of how they can be successful. . . . What can we give them so that they can start looking at how to make others successful around them within our own communities? So I think we're starting to see that within our school district at the very least, but I don't know, within the rest of Orange County, if that's something other Asian American students have access to.

One of the main issues many AA&NHPI community organizations face is a lack of individuals willing to volunteer on their boards and committees, even in a community with a relatively large, diverse, and talented AA&NHPI population. Consequently, there is a need to cultivate a young cadre of willing and capable leaders.

Channeling Philanthropy toward Civic Engagement

In terms of supporting AA&NHPI civic engagement, there is a continuing need to build philanthropy or a culture of giving among the first generation as well as the emergent second generation who have accumulated wealth and influence. A small segment of Asian Americans has started making large donations to educational institutions, for example, the University of California, Irvine, School of Medicine, and mainstream cultural institutions such as the symphony or museums, but much more work is needed to nurture a culture of philanthropy within the AA&NHPI community that supports worthy charitable causes encouraging civic engagement. Asian Americans with substantial wealth are an untapped resource that can support programs to improve the quality of life for AA&NHPI in the county.

While some AA&NHPI philanthropists have established family foundations that are responsible for overseeing the investment and directing how the funds will be spent, few target civic engagement projects. Tam Nguyen, former president of the Vietnamese American Chamber of Commerce, notes that there are some wealthy individuals that direct their funds toward charitable causes; yet, being public with their charitable giving can be a barrier for many who do not want to bring attention to themselves: "Many businesses don't want to be on the radar. To being very deliberate about saying I gave over a \$1 million . . . to various organizations, that takes a certain way of thinking and a certain boldness." However, being public with their substantial donations can encourage other AA&NHPI to also give to charitable causes, especially to ethnic projects, and become civically engaged. Furthermore, this charitable largesse works toward ensuring that these influential social, cultural, and political mainstream institutions are more inclusive of AA&NHPI issues in the future.

Charles Kim asserts that overseas companies with headquarters in Orange County are just starting to contribute to the local ethnic community. More can be done to

educate them on the benefits of being more charitable to the local community and to encourage civic engagement where their employees, clients, and customers work and live:

Korean corporations like Hyundai or Samsung or Kia, they make money here. The money goes back to Korea. . . . They're willing to spend money here, [but] just token support. But pretty much the operations of the Korean American community here [are] pretty much self-generated. It's not supported by Koreans, not supported by Korean money. But Korean American businesses support Korean American activities. But it's good to see Hyundai doing well, Kia doing well, but we want them to do more in this community, . . . but they're not listening yet. As much as we pressure the leaders, the civic leaders, we like to pressure the Korean corporations to do more for the Korean American community because . . . [they] make money from this country. [They can] do more.

In addition to ethnic companies and donors, mainstream foundations, institutions, and donors should also target more of their employee efforts and funding to encourage civic involvement and contributions to ethnic communities.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Collect and report disaggregated data for AA&NHPI on political participation (e.g., voter registration, party affiliation, turnout, voter opinion polling, candidates, elected officials).
- Provide culturally and linguistically accessible education, outreach, and assistance for AA&NHPI seeking to become U.S. citizens and voters, including naturalization applications, voter registration, voter education, get-out-the-vote efforts, and assistance at the polls. This applies to political parties and candidates but also to ballot measure (issue) campaigns and nonpartisan voter programs.
- Increase funding and other support for nonpartisan voter programs since a significant number of AA&NHPI voters are not party affiliated.
- Increase AA&NHPI voter participation by working with local election officials to secure resources and ensure compliance with state and federal laws requiring oral language assistance and translated election materials (Section 203 of the federal Voting Rights Act; Sections 12303 and 14201 of the California Elections Code).
- Promote the California Secretary of State's online voter registration website, available in eight Asian languages (registertovote.ca.gov).
- Build the political maturity of the AA&NHPI electorate by educating

AA&NHPI voters on the importance and value of cross-ethnic and cross-racial coalition building for greater political power.

- Utilize redistricting and district elections as tools for better political representation by assessing and evaluating how political districts can be drawn to allow for the elections of individuals who represent diverse constituents in the districts, outreaching to and engaging AA&NHPI communities in the redistricting process, and educating local policy makers about the benefits of district elections.
- Deepen and broaden the pipeline of diverse AA&NHPI running for political office, including the recruitment and training of more AA&NHPI potential candidates; encouraging AA&NHPI to run for more offices at all levels; appointing more AA&NHPI to boards and commissions as a stepping stone to elected office.
- Strengthen a sense of civic participation in AA&NHPI communities, including targeting K–12 students to participate civically (e.g., volunteer as poll workers) and encouraging overseas Asian companies and local philanthropists to make charitable and political donations locally.

INTERVIEWED COMMUNITY LEADERS

Mary Anne Foo	Founder and executive director of the Orange County Asian and Pacific Islander Community Alliance (OCAPICA)
Jei Garlitos	Principal and coordinator of Alternative Education with the Anaheim Union High School District
Naz Hamid	Parent in Irvine; ran for the local school board
Charles Kim	Cofounder and first executive director of the Korean American Coalition
Eduardo Lee	Cofounder of Wahoo's Fish Taco
Michael Matsuda	Superintendent of the Anaheim Union High School District; founding member of the Orange County Asian Pacific Islander Community Alliance (OCAPICA)
Tam Nguyen	Former president of the Vietnamese American Chamber of Commerce; owner of Advance Beauty College; former president of the California State University, Fullerton (CSUF) Alumni Association
Jonathan Paik	Orange County director of the Korean Resource Center
Jane Pang	Cofounder and board member of Pacific Islander Health Partnership (PIHP)
Victor Pang	Cofounder of Pacific Islander Health Partnership (PIHP)
Vattana Peong	Executive director of The Cambodian Family
Audrey Yamagata-Noji	Vice president of Student Services at Mount San Antonio College; served on the Santa Ana School Board for 25 years; volunteer with Leadership Education for Asian Pacifics (LEAP)
Cyril Yu	Former president and current board member of the South Coast Chinese Cultural Association; senior deputy district attorney at the Orange County District Attorney's office; ran for the Irvine School Board

The quotes from these interviews are represented verbatim in this report, with some shortened for space considerations, shown by an ellipsis. The only other modifications are to help provide context, shown in brackets.

NOTES

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