

To: Interested Parties

From: The Ballot Initiative Strategy Center, GBA Strategies, Lake Research Partners

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Attitudes on Ballot Initiatives among the Asian American and Pacific Islander California Electorate

Asian Americans are a rapidly growing component of the electorate in the United States and in California. Political analysts are starting to recognize their electoral importance. At the same time, there is scant research on the California AAPI community's views on voting and especially on ballot initiatives. This landmark research project represents the first major study of the California AAPI community's views of ballot initiatives, which are an integral part of democracy in California.

AAPI voters in California see voting as a right and responsibility. They believe it is important to make their voices heard – mostly as individuals and families, but also as a community. AAPI voters see ballot initiatives as important, but often find them confusing. They are very susceptible to ballot initiative roll off – voting at the top of the ticket, but skipping some ballot initiatives.

Making informed decisions about ballot measures is important to these voters and as a result, they are very deliberate in choosing their sources of information. There is no one source to reach them through, but instead communicating with AAPI voters in California requires layering multiple sources.

AAPI voters in California trend Democratic, finding the Democratic Party more favorable than the Republican Party, giving Hillary Clinton a presidential win by broad margins and siding with progressives on key ballot initiatives.

Chinese, Korean, Filipino, and Vietnamese voters identify more readily with their own communities than they do as Asian Americans. Likewise, there aren't many statewide Asian leaders that voters look to for voting information. Certain groups know and pay attention to leaders that are seen as directly from their community – such as Mayor Ed Lee among Chinese in San Francisco – but Asian leaders from other parts of the state or of other ethnicities are generally viewed with no special affinity.

The following are key findings based on multilingual focus groups conducted among Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Filipino and Hmong American voters by Lake Research Partners

in various cities in California from April-May 2016,¹ as well as a multilingual, statewide survey of 1,800 Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese and Filipino voters conducted by GBA Strategies, online and by phone, from June-July 2016.²

THE POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

- **AAPI voters in California tilt strong Democratic, but with a moderate streak.** When asked their ideology, far more AAPI voters describe themselves as moderate than they do liberal or conservative – 52 percent of Vietnamese, 47 percent of Chinese, 40 percent of Filipino and 36 percent of Korean voters – even though majorities take positions favorable to Democrats, and though many more identify their party affiliation as Democratic than Republican. Focus groups show that few use the word “progressive” to describe their views and that they resist framing issues in terms of ideology or partisanship, rather as matters that need to be addressed for the sake of a better future.
- **Clinton dominates Trump among AAPI voters in CA; a large chunk of Republicans are looking for an alternative to Trump.** Clinton wins AAPI voters resoundingly, and by a very similar margin between Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese voters. She sweeps the vote among Independents in each group. Among Republicans, large numbers remain undecided in the presidential race – 22 percent of Vietnamese Republicans, 18 percent of Korean Republicans, 17 percent of Chinese Republicans and 16 percent of Filipino Republicans – all clearly unhappy with their candidate. Republicans vote Other and Undecided at a much higher level than Democrats, in some cases by double or nearly triple the amount.

BALLOT INITIATIVES

- **AAPI voters in California like ballot initiatives, but often find them confusing. AAPI voters appear susceptible to ballot roll-off, especially Korean and Vietnamese Californians.** AAPI voters appreciate the opportunity ballot initiatives offer, with huge majorities agreeing that they like them because they give them “a chance to vote directly

¹ Lake Research Partners conducted 9 focus groups of Asian American voters registered in California, held between April 6th and May 3rd, 2016. These were conducted in English and 4 other languages, among Vietnamese Americans in Orange County and San Jose (both in Vietnamese), among Korean Americans in Orange County (English) and Los Angeles (Korean), Filipino Americans in San Francisco, Pasadena and Long Beach (all in English), Chinese Americans in San Francisco (Chinese) and Pasadena (English), and among Hmong Americans in Fresno (Hmong language).

² GBA Strategies conducted a survey of 1,800 Asian American likely voters from June 13th to July 17th, 2016. 1,000 interviews were conducted by cell phone and landline in English and 4 other languages, and 800 interviews were conducted online. Those surveyed were divided by ethnicity into 4 groups of 450 respondents: Chinese Americans (51% interviewed in Chinese), Korean Americans (50% in Korean), Vietnamese Americans (51% in Vietnamese) and Filipino Americans (10% in Tagalog). The margin of error for each group is +/- 4.6 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level.

on issues I care about,” nearly half of them agreeing strongly. Yet large majorities also agree that they are “often written in confusing ways that make it difficult for me to know which way to vote.” Voters over 40 years old feel most favorable toward initiatives and are far more likely to agree that they “find it easy to learn about ballot initiatives and to decide how to vote.” Korean voters are the least enthusiastic; they are most likely to find ballot initiatives difficult to deal with and only 35 percent say they vote on all ballot measures. Vietnamese voters follow closely with just 40 percent voting on all measures.

- **Most AAPI voters have not seen language as a barrier to voting participation, yet they value multi-lingual ballots.** No more than 20 percent in any ethnic group has found language to be a barrier to voting. Yet, 81 percent of Vietnamese voters, 80 percent of Korean, 71 percent of Chinese and 64 percent of Filipinos believe it is important that voting materials be written in multiple languages (with 57 percent of Vietnamese and 56 percent of Korean voters saying it is very important).

2016 BALLOT INITIATIVES

- **The English proficiency, education tax extension, and cigarette tax initiatives enjoy strong support among AAPI voters.**

English Proficiency Language Education in Public Schools. This measure garners a higher Yes vote than any of the other initiatives tested in each ethnic group. The most significant gaps in the vote are by language, with non-English respondents generally more invested; voting Yes over No by a higher margin.

| English Proficiency Initiative | | | | |
|--------------------------------|---------|--------|------------|----------|
| | Chinese | Korean | Vietnamese | Filipino |
| Yes | 84 | 82 | 89 | 89 |
| No | 12 | 14 | 8 | 10 |
| Yes-No | +72 | +68 | +81 | +79 |

Tax Extension to Fund Education and Healthcare. The tax extension touches on two issues that are important to many AAPI voters – healthcare and education – and has wide support. The survey shows that Chinese, Korean and Filipino voters under 30 years old are by far its strongest supporters.

| Tax Extension Initiative | | | | |
|--------------------------|---------|--------|------------|----------|
| | Chinese | Korean | Vietnamese | Filipino |
| Yes | 70 | 67 | 73 | 71 |
| No | 28 | 26 | 23 | 24 |
| Yes-No | +42 | +41 | +50 | +47 |

Cigarette Tax to Fund Healthcare, Tobacco Use Prevention, Research and Law Enforcement. AAPI voters overwhelmingly support the cigarette tax measure, with few strong divides in opinion within each ethnic group.

| Cigarette Tax Initiative | | | | |
|--------------------------|---------|--------|------------|----------|
| | Chinese | Korean | Vietnamese | Filipino |
| Yes | 84 | 81 | 84 | 78 |
| No | 14 | 16 | 14 | 20 |

OTHER ISSUES

- **AAPI voters in California point to a number of issue concerns, including water conservation, health care, crime and affordability concerns.** Affordability concerns include incomes not keeping pace with the cost of living, lack of affordable housing and other rising costs facing individuals and families.
- **Across the board, AAPI voters see education as central to opportunity and democracy.** When asked whether they agree with the statement “I believe public education is central to our democracy because it gives everyone the opportunity to succeed,” at least 90 percent in each ethnic group agrees, with over two-thirds in each group saying they agree *strongly*. Focus groups show that AAPI voters are most interested in the issues they believe directly affect their families and their future, with a particular focus on education and its importance to economic success. Investment in education is a big positive, and this is borne out by the data, which shows that ballot initiatives supporting schools win big among AAPI voters.
- **AAPI voters consider themselves environmentalists at very high levels.** This is consistent across groups, with 82 percent of Chinese, 80 percent of Vietnamese, 77 percent of Korean and 74 percent of Filipino voters saying they agree with the statement “I consider myself an environmentalist.”

SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND MESSENGERS

- **AAPI voters rely on a range of sources of information about initiatives with differences driven by age.** Sources most relied upon are newspapers and television, more predominantly by older voters, and Google searches and social media by younger voters. Voters also look to family and friends as well as voter pamphlets and voter guides, but to a lesser extent.

- **AAPI Voters take cues from the major parties and more objective sources to get “both sides” of the issue.** Regardless of the popularity of a party – and Democrats are far more favorable to AAPI voters than Republicans – voters are interested in understanding both sides of the argument. Making an independent, informed decision at the ballot box is important to AAPI voters, and they are open to sources they don’t agree with. Those that are seen as having expertise, such as newspapers, and for some, labor unions, are worth paying attention to.