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Polling AAPI Voters

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Introduction

Exit polls are surveys of voters as they emerge from a polling place after having cast their vote on Election Day and are commonly conducted to better understand voter attitudes and preferences. Despite their potential value, exit polls carried out or commissioned by large mainstream media outlets or consortiums such as the Voter News Service (a consortium of major television networks) are often unreliable as sources of accurate, useful information on Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) voters. Nearly all survey a small number of AAPIs and survey in either English or Spanish, limiting response to AAPIs comfortable being surveyed in English. Few provide information on AAPI voters by county or in targeted legislative districts. None disaggregate results on AAPI voters by ethnic group.

Over the last decade, community organizations like the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF) in New York, Asian Pacific American Legal Center (APALC) in Los Angeles, National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium (NAPALC), and National Korean American Service and Education Consortium (NAKASEC) have led efforts to conduct exit polling that more accurately measures Asian American and Pacific Islander voter attitudes and preferences. These efforts have helped answer important questions about the AAPI electorate. What makes AAPI voters similar to or different from other voters? Where do AAPI voters stand on important candidates and ballot measures? What assistance do AAPI voters need to fully participate in the electoral process? The answers to these questions not only give voice to AAPI voters by making their preferences known, but also inform efforts to promote AAPI political participation.

While growth in the Asian American and Pacific Islander elec-

torate has led to improvements in the quality of some mainstream exit polls, most will continue to yield little accurate and useful data on AAPI voters. Unfortunately, the task of providing this important information will continue to fall on community organizations, which must expand such efforts as more AAPI voters head to the polls in cities throughout the United States in November 2004. Developing the capacity to conduct an exit poll rests on understanding both the methodological and practical issues involved. This article helps community organizations grasp these issues by discussing exit poll methodology and findings based on APALC's experience conducting AAPI voter research in Southern California.

Methodology

As with most surveys, an exit poll is carried out in roughly five stages: (1) defining the study's goals and objectives; (2) determining what questions to ask and how to ask them; (3) determining whom to survey; (4) collecting the data; and (5) entering, analyzing, and reporting on data collected.

Goals and Objectives

The first step in planning an exit poll is to clearly define the project's goals and objectives. What is the purpose of conducting the study? How will the information be used? The goal of the exit poll may be to draw political attention to community positions on candidates and/or controversial ballot measures like California Propositions 187, 209, or 54. Conversely, the pollster might be interested in collecting information on voter use of bilingual assistance to inform efforts to improve the provision of such assistance.

Clearly defining the exit poll's goals and objectives is important for two reasons. First, because exit polling consumes considerable organizational resources, it is important to consider whether the project's goals can be achieved through alternative methods. For example, if the goal is simply to assess the age, gender, political party affiliation, or ethnic composition of the electorate, the organization might consider doing so using voter registration and turnout records instead. Second, the exit poll's goals and objectives inform each subsequent stage in the process of planning and execution. For example, if a candidate of interest is vying for a

Congressional, State Senate, or State Assembly seat, the pollster must ensure an adequate sample in the targeted district.

Questionnaire Development and Translation

Once the pollster has identified the exit poll's goals and objectives, she then needs to determine what questions to ask and how to ask them.

As part of the exit polling conducted in Southern California every major election, APALC develops a questionnaire instrument that typically includes questions on (1) voter characteristics, (2) voter behavior and attitudes regarding candidates and ballot measures, (3) political participation, and (4) language ability and use of bilingual assistance. Questions that capture voter characteristics, such as a voter's age, gender, racial/ethnic background, education, or income, allow comparisons of voter behavior and attitudes, political participation, and use of bilingual assistance by group. In addition to asking what candidates and ballot measures voters supported, the pollster might also ask why they voted the way they did. Questions on political participation can gauge a voter's party affiliation, how often she votes, or how often she engages in political activity besides voting. Finally, questions on language ability and the use of bilingual voter assistance provide information useful in efforts to monitor compliance with Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act, which requires certain jurisdictions to provide written and oral assistance to voters in designated Asian languages. While the questionnaire should contain core questions consistent from year to year that allow the comparison of voter characteristics over time, there may be issues that are unique to any given election.

In developing questions that capture voter behavior and attitudes in these areas, content, structure and format, phrasing, and sequence are important considerations.

Question content is the first consideration in questionnaire development. Here, the pollster begins by exploring what questions she is interested in asking. If the pollster is interested in measuring use of bilingual voter assistance, what is it about bilingual voter assistance that she is interested in? Whether a voter used or did not use bilingual assistance? What problems a voter might have had encountered while using bilingual assistance? Why a voter did not use bilingual assistance? Once the pollster knows

what she intends to measure, it is useful to first explore whether there are existing measures that capture the information she is interested in. If no acceptable measures exist, the pollster must move forward with constructing her own.

Structure and format are also important. A question's structure can be characterized as closed-ended or open-ended. A closed-ended question provides respondents with specific response options, while open-ended questions do not, instead allowing the respondent freedom in how they articulate their response. Because exit polls require the collection of large amounts of data in a relatively short amount of time, they seldom use open-ended questions. In developing closed-ended questions, response options should be mutually exclusive and exhaustive. That is, any given response should be captured by one and only one response option. Because response options presented first are more likely to be selected than response options presented last, there should be no meaningful systematic bias in the order in which response options are presented to voters (e.g., incumbents should not be consistently listed first when surveying the vote in candidate races).

How a question is phrased is also important. Because voters are diverse in their educational background and ability to read English, questions should be phrased as simply as possible. Here, particular attention should be paid to terms related to voting or political participation that might be unfamiliar to voters. Questions should also be phrased in a way that does not influence the voter's response. Pollsters should avoid using phrasing that places value on one response over another or sets up expectations as to how the voter should respond.

Question sequence is a final consideration. Generally, a questionnaire should start with simple questions (e.g., gender) and end with complex or sensitive questions most likely to cause the voter to discontinue participation in the poll (e.g., income). This allows for the collection of as much information as possible before a voter is most likely to discontinue participation.

Once developed, the questionnaire should be pre-tested. Pre-testing (sometimes referred to as pilot testing) is a formal review of the questionnaire conducted well before Election Day largely to ensure that questions are asked in a clear and accessible manner, measuring what they were designed to measure. The process typically involves a trial administration of the questionnaire, preferably

to a small group of voters similar to those likely to respond when approached on Election Day. After each trial administration, the pollster should review the questionnaire with the voter, asking her (1) to share her understanding of each question and its response options, (2) how her answer to the question was captured by existing response options, and (3) to identify any other sources of confusion the questionnaire presented. Troublesome questions should be revised and re-tested.

Figure 1 is a questionnaire used in exit polling conducted in Southern California by APALC during the November 2002 General Election. The questionnaire begins with a few simple demographic questions, followed by questions on candidates and ballot measures, language ability and use of bilingual assistance, political participation, and less important or sensitive demographic questions like income.

The questionnaire should then be translated into languages spoken in areas where polling is to take place. Based on analyses of census data, APALC typically translates its questionnaire instrument from English into seven languages: Chinese, Hindi, Korean, Japanese, Spanish, Tagalog, and Vietnamese. The pollster should use experienced translators, either from a commercial translation house or community organization that regularly translates materials for public consumption. To ensure the quality of translation, each version of the questionnaire instrument should be reviewed to ensure that the original meaning is maintained. A process of back translation is ideal. Here, an alternate translator translates each version of the questionnaire back into English. If the original meaning of each question and set of response options is maintained, the questionnaire is ready to be administered. If the original meaning is not maintained, changes in the translation are made and the process repeated. Because back translation is often costly for organizations operating on a limited budget, a focus group of voters fluent in a given language may instead be conducted to review each translation. Focus groups should be particularly attentive to concepts or wording related to voting or political participation that might be unfamiliar or difficult to translate, sensitive questions, and the clarity of questionnaire instructions. For more information on translating questionnaires, see Behling and Law (2000).

Figure 1. Asian Pacific American Legal Center's Exit Poll Questionaire

1. **Are you...**
   - ☐ A. Male ☐ B. Female

2. **What year were you born?** 19 ___ ___

3. **What is your racial/ethnic background?**
   (*Check all that apply*)
   - ☐ A. African Am. / Black
   - ☐ B. Cambodian
   - ☐ C. Caucasian / White (Non-Hispanic)
   - ☐ D. Chinese
   - ☐ E. Filipino/a
   - ☐ F. Japanese
   - ☐ G. Korean
   - ☐ H. Latino/a
   - ☐ I. Native American
   - ☐ J. Pacific Islander
   - ☐ K. South Asian (Indian, Pakistani, etc.)
   - ☐ L. Vietnamese
   - ☐ M. Other Asian (*specify*) _____

4a. **Who did you vote for Governor?**
   (*Check only one*)
   - ☐ A. Iris Adam (NL)
   - ☐ B. Peter Camejo (Green)
   - ☐ C. Gary Copeland (Lib)
   - ☐ D. Gray Davis (Dem)
   - ☐ E. Reinhold Gulke (AI)
   - ☐ F. Bill Simon (Rep)
   - ☐ G. Other candidate
   - ☐ H. Did not cast vote in Governor's race
   - ☐ I. Don't know / refuse to answer

4b. **If you live in California State Assembly District 49, who did you vote for Assemblymember?**
   (*Check only one*)
   - ☐ A. Judy Chu (Dem)
   - ☐ B. George Shen (Rep)
   - ☐ C. Other candidate
   - ☐ D. Did not cast vote in Assembly race
   - ☐ E. Don't know / refuse to answer

4c. **If you live in the City of Los Angeles, did you vote to support or oppose Measure F: San Fernando Valley secession?**
   - ☐ A. Supported Valley secession
   - ☐ B. Opposed Valley secession
   - ☐ C. Did not cast vote on Valley secession
   - ☐ D. Don't know / refuse to answer

5. **Generally speaking, which were most important to you in deciding which candidates to support?**
   (*Check up to two*)
   - ☐ A. Candidate's advertising
   - ☐ B. Candidate's endorsements
   - ☐ C. Candidate's experience
   - ☐ D. Candidate's political party
   - ☐ E. Candidate's racial / ethnic background
   - ☐ F. Candidate's stance on the issues
   - ☐ G. Other _____
   - ☐ H. Don't know / refuse to answer

6. **Generally speaking, which issues were most important to you in deciding which candidates to support?**
   (*Check up to three*)
   - ☐ A. Abortion
   - ☐ B. Civil Rights / Immigrant Rights
   - ☐ C. Crime
   - ☐ D. Economy / Jobs
   - ☐ E. Education
   - ☐ F. Energy Situation
   - ☐ G. Health Care
   - ☐ H. Homeland Security
   - ☐ I. Immigration
   - ☐ J. Race Relations
   - ☐ K. State Budget
   - ☐ L. Other _____
   - ☐ M. Don't know / refuse to answer

7. **How well do you read English?**
   (*Circle one*)

3	2	1	0
Very Well	Well	Not Well	Not at All

8. **What is your native language?**
   - ☐ A. Chinese-Cantonese
   - ☐ B. Chinese-Mandarin
   - ☐ C. English
   - ☐ D. Gujarati
   - ☐ E. Hindi
   - ☐ F. Ilocano
   - ☐ G. Japanese
   - ☐ H. Korean
   - ☐ I. Mon-Khmer
   - ☐ J. Spanish
   - ☐ K. Tagalog
   - ☐ L. Thai
   - ☐ M. Urdu
   - ☐ N. Vietnamese
   - ☐ O. Other (*specify*) _____

9. **Did you use bilingual assistance in voting at the polls today?**
   - ☐ A. Yes ☐ B. No

10. **If you did not use bilingual assistance, why not?**
    - ☐ A. Bilingual assistance was not available
    - ☐ B. I did not know bilingual assistance was available
    - ☐ C. I did not need bilingual assistance
    - ☐ D. Don't know / refuse to answer

11. **Is this your first-time voting in an election in the United States?**
    - ☐ A. Yes ☐ B. No

12. **If not a first-time voter, do you vote in every election?**
    - ☐ A. Yes ☐ B. No

13. **Which political party are you registered with?**
    - ☐ A. Democratic Party
    - ☐ B. Republican Party
    - ☐ C. Other _____
    - ☐ D. None
    - ☐ E. Don't know / refuse to answer

14. **In the past 2 years, have you done any of the following?**
    (*Check all that apply*)
    - ☐ A. Donated money to a candidate or ballot measure
    - ☐ B. Volunteered for a candidate or ballot measure
    - ☐ C. Contacted any lawmaker about an issue
    - ☐ D. Participated in a political rally or public forum
    - ☐ E. Other political activity besides voting
    - ☐ F. No political activity besides voting

15. **What is the highest level of education you have completed?**
    - ☐ A. No formal education
    - ☐ B. Some education, no High School Degree / GED
    - ☐ C. High School Degree / GED
    - ☐ D. Some college education, no degree
    - ☐ E. Associate / Trade School Degree
    - ☐ F. Bachelor's Degree
    - ☐ G. Master's, Doctorate, or other Professional Degree

16. **Where did you complete your education?**
    - ☐ A. In the U.S.
    - ☐ B. Outside the U.S.
    - ☐ C. Both in and outside the U.S.

17. **Were you...**
    - ☐ A. Born a U.S. citizen.
    - ☐ B. Naturalized less than 3 years ago.
    - ☐ C. Naturalized 3-10 years ago.
    - ☐ D. Naturalized more than 10 years ago.

18. **What is your annual family income?**
    - ☐ A. Less than $20,000
    - ☐ B. $20,000 to $39,999
    - ☐ C. $40,000 to $59,999
    - ☐ D. $60,000 to $79,999
    - ☐ E. $80,000 to $99,999
    - ☐ F. $100,000 or more
    - ☐ G. Don't know / refuse to answer

Sampling Design

It would be nearly impossible to administer a questionnaire to every voter in a state, county, city, or even city council district. Sampling allows the pollster to learn about the behavior and attitudes of all voters by collecting data on only a subset of them. In developing a sampling design, the pollster must determine (1) whom she is sampling, (2) how many voters she must survey to construct an appropriate sample, and (3) where voters should be surveyed.

The pollster must first identify the population she is interested in surveying. Do the exit poll's goals demand that the study's findings be generalizeable to all voters, AAPI voters, or AAPI voters in areas with high concentrations of AAPIs? The answer to this question dictates what sampling frame is appropriate. A sampling frame is a list from which voters or groups of voters are selected for inclusion in the sample. Because an exit poll surveys only those who vote at the polls on Election Day, it is impossible to construct a list of voters prior to data collection. Instead, the pollster must sample clusters of voters, typically as election precincts. To produce a sampling frame of election precincts that contains information necessary to draw an appropriate sample, the pollster should either (1) match the last names of voters listed in voter registration data available from local election officials to an Asian surname list, such as that produced by Lauderdale and Kestenbaum (2000), and aggregate individual level data to the precinct level or (2) access existing voter registration data including AAPI voter registration estimates at the precinct level, such as those produced by the Institute for Governmental Studies' Statewide Database at UC Berkeley. To estimate the voter turnout for each precinct, multiply the total and ethnic registration for each precinct by the percent of registered voters expected to vote, adjusted from the last comparable election. To estimate the number of voters likely to be surveyed in each precinct, multiply the estimated voter turnout by the percent of voting hours covered by data collection volunteers, then by the anticipated response rate.

Next, the pollster must identify the sample size (n) necessary for the study's findings to be statistically meaningful. This can be produced by using the following formula:

$n = 1.96^2(p)(1-p)/error^2$

Here, 1.96 is a number (z value) corresponding to a desired level of confidence in the stability of response to a question (95%), p is the percent of voters the pollster expects to respond affirmatively to a question (e.g., 54% voting for a candidate), and error is the acceptable margin of error (polls conducted by the *Los Angeles Times* regularly feature a margin of error of ±3%). If a pollster constructed a sample size of 1,060 voters given these parameters (z=1.96, p=.54, and error=.03) and found that 54 percent supported a candidate, she could be confident that if she were to repeat the exit poll 100 times, she would find that between 57 percent and 51 percent of voters support the candidate in 95 out of 100 exit polls. Note that this formula can also be used to determine the margin of error for each question once data have been collected and analyzed.

Finally, the pollster must decide where voters should be surveyed. Keep in mind that the pollster's goal is to collect a sample that is representative of the population she is interested in. Toward this goal, it is important to recognize the advantages of a randomized versus convenience sample. Exit polls that use convenience samples select precincts that are familiar or easily accessible to the pollster. While this simplifies the process of selecting precincts, it means that voters in precincts selected could be qualitatively different from voters in precincts not selected, biasing the exit poll's findings. In contrast, a randomized sample would select precincts at random, allowing each an equal chance of being targeted for exit polling. By reducing the likelihood that voters in precincts selected would be qualitatively different from voters in precincts not selected, random sampling ensures the exit poll's findings are representative.

The pollster should begin by randomly sampling precincts within each area of interest (e.g., a city, county, or legislative district). For example, in exit polling conducted in Southern California during the November 2002 General Election, APALC randomly selected precincts for inclusion within each area of interest, the 49th State Assembly District, City of Los Angeles, remainder of Los Angeles County, and Orange County. Precincts should be randomly selected until the number of estimated responses they will yield reaches the appropriate sample size. Because a completely random sample of precincts is likely to yield a small number of AAPI voters, the pollster should employ a research design

that augments a random sample of precincts with an oversample of precincts with high AAPI registration. To supplement its random sample of precincts in November 2002, APALC also randomly sampled precincts that had AAPI ethnic registration higher than 80 percent of precincts countywide for each AAPI ethnic group targeted. Precincts with high AAPI registration should be randomly sampled until the number of estimated responses they yield reaches 100 for each ethnic group of interest.

Data Collection

Data collection activities include both the recruitment and training of an appropriate number of staff and/or volunteers to carry out data collection, as well as the coordination and execution of questionnaire administration to voters on Election Day.

The pollster must begin the process of hiring staff and recruiting volunteers needed to carry out the exit poll from the onset of the project. Because the failure to collect an adequate sample of voters will lead to questionable results and conclusions, it is recommended that the pollster arrange for and oversee paid staff to assist in the recruitment of volunteers to carry out both data collection and data entry. Volunteer recruitment relies heavily on partnerships with community organizations and academic institutions. Community organizations that work to improve AAPI political participation have a vested interest in the exit poll's findings and are logical partners, particularly if they have paid staff and/or members who can be mobilized to assist in data collection. Partnerships with nearby colleges and universities are equally valuable given the large number of student volunteers they are capable of providing. Here, it is important to contact professors and internship programs at these academic institutions six to eight months before Election Day to establish their willingness to provide course/internship credit to students who volunteer. Regardless of their source, volunteers should include those bilingual in Asian languages and non-Asians if surveying all voters.

The number of volunteers necessary to carry out data collection activities is dependent upon both the number of precincts sampled and the number of volunteer shifts per precinct. Ideally, the pollster and her staff would recruit enough volunteers to administer exit poll questionnaires to voters over the duration of voting hours on Election Day (in California, polls are open over a

thirteen-hour period from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.). Realistically, this is difficult to achieve. APALC assigns two volunteers per polling place during each of two four-hour shifts, one between 7 and 11 a.m. and another between 4 and 8 p.m. Because APALC typically surveys voters in fifty precincts throughout Los Angeles and Orange counties, it requires 200 volunteers dedicated to data collection.

To ensure that data are collected smoothly in a systematic, unbiased manner, all volunteers must be trained in the two weeks leading up to Election Day. Through a one-hour training session, volunteers should develop an understanding of the exit poll's purpose and how to carry out their duties on Election Day. The training should begin with an introduction to the organization, the purpose of the exit poll, and a review of the meaning and intent of each question and response option. The training should continue with direction on how volunteers are to carry out their duties. This should include instruction on (1) the importance of professional behavior, including appropriate dress and demeanor (e.g., volunteers are not to wear campaign buttons or engage in electioneering of any kind) and establishing a positive relationship with county poll workers, (2) how to approach voters, and (3) how to administer the questionnaire (e.g., volunteers are permitted to help voters understand questions and response options but not influence how they respond). Here, it is helpful to role-play, allowing volunteers the opportunity to practice questionnaire administration in a variety of situations and providing volunteers with written instructions to review before Election Day.

On Election Day volunteers should report to a regional coordination site one hour before data collection is to begin. After receiving materials (e.g., copies of questionnaires, pens, clipboards, directions to the appropriate polling place, and other items) and a brief review of data collection procedures, volunteers report to their assigned polling place. Upon arrival, volunteers introduce themselves to precinct workers, ideally with a form letter from a local election official noting the legality of exit poll activities and the conditions under which they are to occur, and set up materials in a location closest to traffic exiting the polling place. Volunteers should approach voters in a systematic way by selecting either the next or nth voter to survey. Once their shift is over, volunteers return materials and completed questionnaires to their regional coordination site.

Data Entry and Analysis

Once responses to the questionnaire have been collected, they must be entered and analyzed.

Before data entry can begin, the pollster must prepare software necessary to accommodate the task. More advanced users familiar with statistical analysis software may prefer packages such as SPSS's Data Entry Builder and Data Entry Station, which increase the speed and accuracy by which data can be entered and facilitate the preparation of data for analysis. Users not familiar with these software products may choose to use spreadsheets such as Microsoft Excel but should take greater precautions to ensure that data are entered accurately.

Because timely reporting of exit poll findings is important, data entry begins on Election Day as soon as completed questionnaires can be delivered from each regional coordination site to the pollster. Like data collection, data entry requires volunteer support. As a general rule, the pollster and her staff should recruit ten volunteers to carry out data entry over a four-hour period for every 1,000 completed questionnaires (typically thirty to fifty volunteers). Data entry volunteers report thirty minutes before their shift is to begin to receive training that includes a review of the questionnaire and instruction as to how to use data entry software. Depending on the availability of computers, data entry volunteers work alone or in pairs. Under these conditions, data entry can be completed in one to two days.

Once entered, exit poll data should be prepared for analysis. The pollster should begin by examining the data for errors. Here, she should double check data entry for a handful of questionnaires, as well as review entered responses to ensure they match existing response options. Because a sampling design that employs an oversampling of precincts or voters by race and/or ethnicity will yield a sample in which targeted groups are over-represented, perhaps leading to inaccurate estimates of voting behavior and other characteristics, the pollster should explore weighting the data according to criteria used to collect the sample.

The pollster should begin an analysis by running a frequency distribution for each question. By providing the number and percent of voters who chose each response option, frequency distributions allow a general understanding of how voters responded

to each question. This is useful not only as a fundamental analysis, but in identifying potential problems in data entry. Once frequencies have been produced, crosstabulations should be considered. Crosstabulations provide the number and percent of voters who chose each response option by a specified characteristic, such as race, ethnicity, or nativity. For example, crosstabulations are necessary if the pollster is interested in determining whether voters of different racial or ethnic backgrounds varied in their support for a candidate or ballot measure. While community organizations seldom pursue analysis beyond frequency distributions and crosstabulations, more sophisticated analyses can be performed. For example, regression analysis of exit poll data can be used to determine the extent of Asian bloc voting in support of a given candidate, a precondition to bringing a successful redistricting claim under the Voting Rights Act (Grofman 2000).

Reporting Exit Poll Findings

Exit poll data become meaningful only after analysis and have impact when disseminated. This section provides examples of findings reported from recent exit polls conducted in Southern California by APALC. Again, the purpose of conducting an exit poll is to better understand the AAPI electorate and its position on candidates and ballot measures. These examples feature the crosstabulation of responses by important demographic characteristics like race and nativity (native versus foreign-born), which allow the pollster to assess within and between group differences.

Profiling Native versus Foreign-Born Voters

Exit poll data can be used to examine the demographic characteristics of voters and how they differ by racial or ethnic group. For example, exit polling conducted by APALC has shown that, like Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders generally, a majority of AAPI voters are foreign-born. Depending on voter turnout, APALC has found that 66 percent to 81 percent of the AAPI electorate is immigrant, consistently higher than any other racial or ethnic group surveyed (see Figure 2).
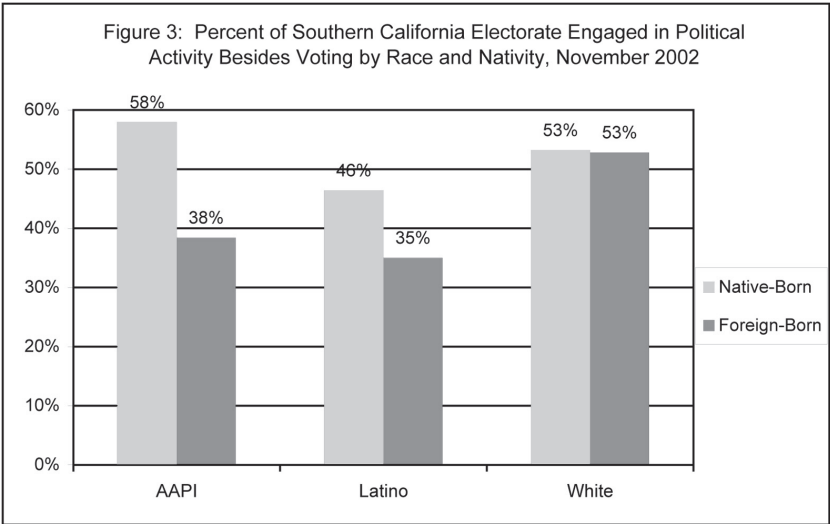
Do native and foreign-born voters differ in their engagement in political activities besides voting? Exit polling during the 2002 General Election found that over 54 percent of AAPIs voters engaged in no political activity besides voting. Only Latinos had an

Figure 2: Percent of Electorate that is Foreign-Born, Southern California General Elections
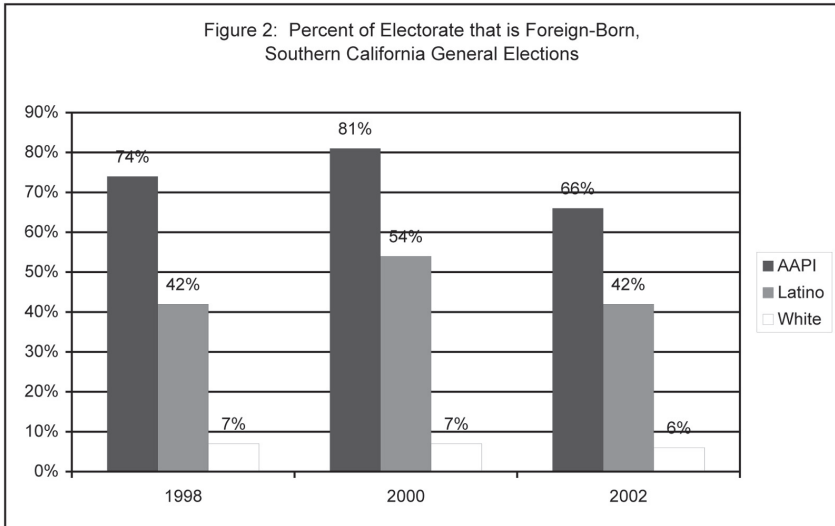
overall lower rate of political participation. However, APALC found significant disparities in the political participation of native versus foreign-born AAPI voters. While only 38 percent of immigrant AAPI voters indicated they engaged in political activity besides voting, over 58 percent of native-born AAPI voters indicated they had either donated money to or volunteered for a candidate or ballot issue, contacted a lawmaker about an issue, participated in a rally or public forum, or engaged in some other political activity in the past two years (see Figure 3). The political participation of native-born AAPIs who voted in the 2002 General Election outpaced that of native-born Latinos and Whites, challenging the stereotype of Asians as politically disengaged.

Given the large number of foreign-born within the AAPI electorate, it is important to examine limited-English proficiency. In exit polling conducted during the November 2002 General Election, respondents were asked to assess their ability to read English, an indicator of their need for bilingual voter assistance. APALC found that AAPI voters were more likely than any other racial or ethnic group to be limited-English proficient (LEP), or speak English less than "very well." Over 32 percent of AAPI voters and 46 percent of AAPI immigrant voters were LEP.

Naturally, AAPIs were also more likely to use bilingual voter assistance at the polls. In November 2002, nearly 12 percent of

Figure 3: Percent of Southern California Electorate Engaged in Political Activity Besides Voting by Race and Nativity, November 2002

AAPI voters, 16 percent of immigrant AAPI voters, and 28 percent of AAPI voters who were limited-English proficient used either written or oral voter assistance in their language to vote. Here, it is important to note that findings may vary considerably from election to election based on the composition of the electorate. Because the November 2002 General Election featured the lowest voter turnout for a General Election in California since the state started keeping records in 1910 (California Secretary of State 2003), the electorate included a greater number of high propensity voters, who are less likely to require bilingual assistance.

Voter Attitudes and Preferences

An important objective for any exit poll is to capture the vote on candidates and ballot measures. While analyses of exit poll findings by race are informative, examining change over time can be particularly insightful. An example comes from one of California's more compelling political stories in recent years, the rise and fall of former Governor Gray Davis. Though declining from 1998 to 2002, support for Governor Davis remained strong among Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders when APALC polled voters in Southern California during the 2002 General Election. Nearly 57 percent of AAPIs voted for Davis, including nearly 63 percent of AAPI immigrant voters. Over 79 percent of AAPI Democrats and 54 percent

of AAPIs who held no party affiliation supported the incumbent (see Figure 4). Yet the decline in support among AAPIs hinted at an increasing disaffection with the Governor that led to his eventual recall from office.
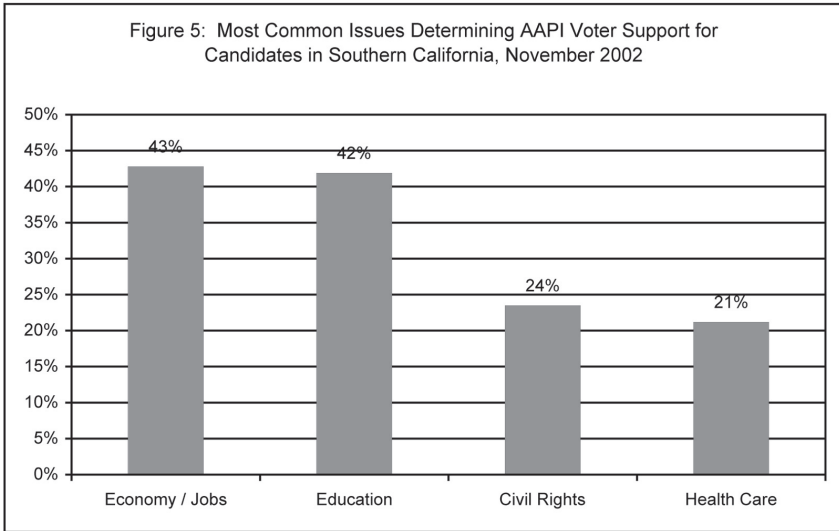
APALC also typically polls contests involving Asian American candidates. Exit polling conducted since 1998 has demonstrated the coalition politics often necessary to elect Asian American candidates. In November 1998, George Nakano won an open seat in the race for California State Assembly, District 53 (including Torrance), with 85 percent of the Asian vote, 81 percent of the Latino vote, 50 percent of the White vote. In November 2000's race for California State Assembly, District 44 (including Pasadena and South Pasadena), Carol Liu earned 84 percent of the AAPI vote, 70 percent of the Latino vote, and 49 percent of the White vote. Finally, in November 2002's race for California State Assembly, District 49 (including Alhambra, Monterey Park, Rosemead, and San Gabriel), incumbent Assemblymember Judy Chu enjoyed support across racial and ethnic boundaries. While garnering over 75 percent of the AAPI vote and nearly 79 percent of the Latino vote, Chu also earned nearly 52 percent of the White vote in her district.

In California politics, ballot measures have become political lightning rods, often drawing more controversy than candidate contests. While statewide ballot measures are typically the most

Figure 4: Southern Californi AAPI Vote for Davis by Party, 1998 and 2002

	Dem	Rep	Dcl
1998	88%	30%	65%
2002	79%	23%	54%
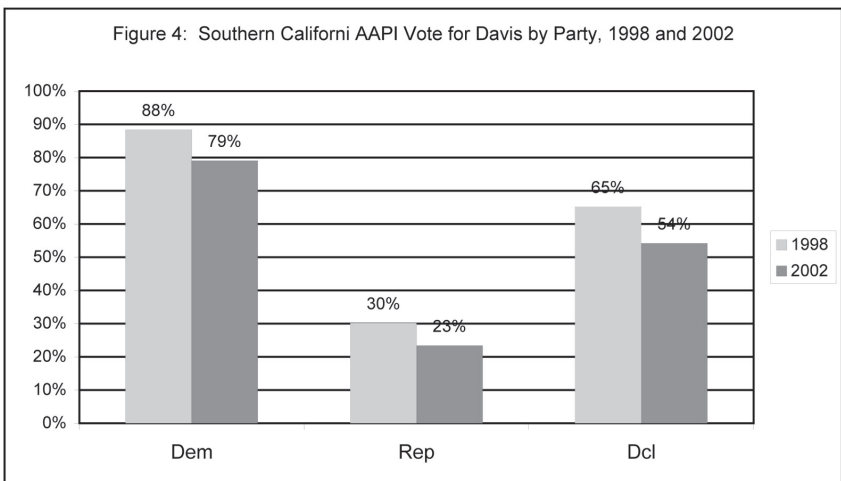
contentious, local measures also galvanize voters. In November 2002, voters in the City of Los Angeles were presented with Measure F, a local ballot measure that would have brought about San Fernando Valley secession from the city. APALC exit polling indicated that nearly 64 percent of AAPIs in the City of Los Angeles voted against the measure, which had drawn opposition from leading AAPI community organizations like APALC and the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (APALA).

Exit polling can also provide insight as to why voters support certain candidates. APALC's November 2002 exit poll found that AAPI voters most often relied on a candidate's stance on issues to choose which candidate to support. When presented with a list of eleven issues and asked which three were most important to them in determining which candidates to support, AAPIs most often cited the economy, education, civil rights, and health care (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Most Common Issues Determining AAPI Voter Support for Candidates in Southern California, November 2002

Dissemination of Exit Poll Findings

Disseminating exit poll findings through diverse mechanisms is often critical to achieving project goals. When press coverage is important, timely reporting of the exit poll's findings is essential. Both mainstream and ethnic presses are less likely to

cover an exit poll whose findings are released more than two days after Election Day. Therefore, the pollster should first release the exit poll's findings by holding a press conference one to two days after the election, targeting both mainstream and ethnic media. While mainstream media coverage is important in raising the visibility of AAPIs and AAPI voters in the public eye, ethnic press coverage promotes the importance of voting among limited-English proficient AAPIs. A full report on the exit poll and its findings provides a more permanent record that can be used to inform efforts to promote AAPI political participation and influence elected officials well after the election is over. Here, the report should convey the exit poll's key findings in a clear, accessible, and professional manner. Finally, the pollster should seek opportunities to present exit poll findings to a variety of audiences in the months following the election. Such opportunities include meetings of community organizations or others working on AAPI voter issues and legislative visits to elected officials representing areas with large numbers of AAPIs.

Conclusion

Exit polling is not without its problems. When properly conducted, it demands significant resources (e.g., staff time, student and community volunteer hours, and funding) and can be a difficult activity to sustain long term. Complications beyond the control of pollsters, such as low voter turnout, can affect the exit poll's sample size and hinder its effectiveness. Finally, because large numbers of AAPI voters now vote by absentee ballot, exit polls fail to provide a complete representation of the AAPI electorate. Pollsters should explore ways to supplement exit poll findings with research on the attitudes and preferences of absentee voters.

Yet documenting AAPI voter attitudes and preferences provides information useful in program planning, advocacy, and voting rights litigation. Because programs promoting political participation among Asians and Pacific Islanders can be difficult to fund, they must carefully allocate scarce staff time and resources. Exit poll results can be used to help target voter education efforts. What issues do AAPIs appear uninformed about? Who within the AAPI community is politically uninvolved? Who is unaware that bilingual voter assistance is available? By increasing the visibility of AAPI voters in the eyes of elected officials, exit polling

can be effective in priming policymakers to advocates' messages around issues of importance to Asians and Pacific Islanders. By providing an independent assessment of the successes and failures of efforts to provide written and oral language assistance to AAPI voters, exit poll results can inform advocacy around and enforcement of Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act, which requires certain jurisdictions to provide such assistance to voters in Asian languages. Finally, exit poll data can be used to support voting rights litigation challenging redistricting proposals that discriminate against AAPIs. Preconditions to bringing a sucessful claim under Section 2 of theVoting Rights Act include the demonstration of both minority bloc voting for a candidate of choice and majority bloc voting against that candidate. Both can be assessed through regression analysis of exit poll data collected over the course of several elections.

The November 2004 General Election will provide a rare opportunity to poll Asian American and Pacific Islander voters. Interest in the Presidential Election should draw even low propensity voters to the polls, driving voter turnout above 65 percent of those registered. Large numbers of AAPI voters, including immigrants and the limited-English proficient, will cast ballots, many for the first time. In anticipation, those working to promote AAPI political participation should consider working with organizations like AALDEF, APALC, NAPALC, and NAKASEC to carry out exit polling of AAPI voters in cities like Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and San Francisco, or develop the capacity to conduct an exit poll independently. By contributing to a growing body of research on AAPI voters, pollsters will not only paint a new portrait of an emerging Asian American and Pacific Islander electorate, but protect its right to vote.

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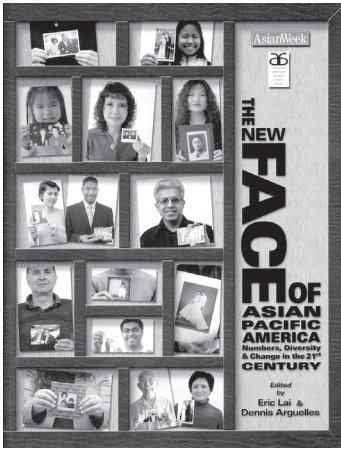
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