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Unleashing the Power of Participation

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Watch Asian American Millennials: They are a New Wave Says Pat Brown Institute Survey

Younger Asian American voters in Los Angeles County are reshaping Asian American participation. They reflect the coming transformation of racial and ethnic communities through their “millennial” generations. According to the PBI Poll, those 18-29 were more likely than older Asian American voters to identify as Democrats, and to take liberal positions on a number of public issues. They are participating in political activities to a higher degree. Younger Asian American registered voters were more likely than their elders to be native born, to be less religious (regardless of which religion they adhere to), and to receive their news from English language media.

This according to a survey of more than 1600 Asian American registered voters in Los Angeles County by the Pat Brown Institute for Public Affairs at Cal State LA. The survey was conducted in collaboration with Advancing Justice - LA.

Asian Americans are the fastest growing population in the United States. California is the center of the Asian American community. More than a quarter of all California Asian Americans live in Los Angeles County, which KCET has called “the capital of Asian America.”

According to Dr. Raphael Sonenshein, executive director of the Pat Brown Institute and director of the PBI-Cal State LA Poll, “combined with its unusually large sample of Asian American voters, this poll allows a more detailed analysis of political dynamics than many polls that have small samples of geographically scattered Asian Americans.” The survey includes significant numbers of Chinese-Americans, Japanese-Americans, Filipino-Americans, and Korean-Americans.

On at least one issue, whether it is important that Asian Americans should be represented by people from their community, there is broad agreement across nationality groups and ages, with nearly three quarters of all respondents taking an affirmative position. In addition, there is wide support for an increase in the minimum wage across all ages and nationality groups.

Younger Latinos, whites, and African Americans are also demonstrating more liberal voting and opinion patterns than their elders. **The potential exists for wider millennial generation cross-ethnic political alliances than previously believed. Other surveys have shown that native born Asian Americans are more likely to vote than the foreign born, adding to the significance of younger Asian American voters, most of whom are native born.**

These survey results represent a challenge to the leadership of both political parties. There is a tendency to discuss Asian Americans as a single block of voters. To say that Asian Americans are “liberal” or “conservative” is to miss the subtleties that will underlie the development of long-term partisan loyalties.

We find among all Asian Americans much stronger attachment to the Democratic than the Republican party. Clearly, appeals to nativism will pull Asian Americans away from the Republican party even if not always into the Democratic camp. But Democrats have struggled to reach and motivate younger voters of all groups. We also find strong blocks with conservative opinions and Republican loyalty.

Charlie Woo, founder and chair of the Center for Asian Americans United for Self Empowerment (CAUSE) noted, “This survey reinforces what many of us have been saying, that **neither Democrats nor Republicans can take Asian American voters for granted.**”