

Resource Paper

# From Discrimination to Mobilization: The Responsiveness of Community- Based Organizations to Asian American and Pacific Islander Communities during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Southern California

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## Abstract

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) face varying rates of infection and mortality as well as a surge in acts of verbal harassment, discrimination, and violence. Ethnic-based organizations play an important role both in the provision of services and as a political resource to AAPI communities. This article takes on two tasks: First, using primary resources and interviews with organizations serving the AAPI community in Los Angeles, this article documents the responsiveness of organizations to hate incidents and domestic violence, the services provided by organizations such as unemployment assistance, and organizational outreach efforts to ensure census participation and voter engagement. Then, we explore the potential consequences of discrimination and a sense of threat on the political participation of Asian Americans. We find that the changing needs and circumstances AAPI communities face push organizations to expand their organizational capacity through the provision of new services and new collaborations. Drawing on prior research that has found that the feeling of discrimination and social exclusion has consequences for AAPI political participation, we argue that with the expanded capacity of organizations combined with the impact of

COVID-19–related discrimination, there is an opportunity to galvanize Asian American political participation in 2020 and beyond.

## Introduction

The coronavirus outbreak in the United States launched a new era of racial discrimination, scapegoating, and hate incidents targeting Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs). The former president of the United States often referred to the disease as the “Wuhan virus” or the “Kung-Flu,” and a new wave of hate violence has been hurled upon AAPIs. Stop AAPI Hate, a collaboration of Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council, Chinese for Affirmative Action (CAA), and San Francisco State University’s Asian American Studies Department received more than 2,700 incident reports being filed over a twenty-nine-week period from March to October 2020. In response to the growing incidence of hate across the United States, Representative Grace Meng of New York introduced a House Resolution denouncing anti-Asian discrimination caused by COVID-19. In California, in a letter to the governor, Assemblymember David Chiu, the chair of the API Legislative Caucus, wrote that the former president’s use of such terminology was stoking anti-Asian sentiment and was akin to the “yellow peril” rhetoric used a century ago to lay the foundation of the Chinese Exclusion Act, which severely limited immigration to the United States from China. The caucus called for state agencies to enact policies to combat stereotyping and bullying related to the coronavirus.

In addition, the economic shutdown associated with the safer-at-home order had severe consequences for many AAPIs. For low-income AAPIs, a loss of a paycheck meant uncertainty about where the next meal would come from and also closure of many services they once relied upon such as culturally competent child daycares, afterschool services, and senior centers. AAPIs with limited English proficiency faced difficulties navigating the filing process for unemployment benefits and getting information about where to be tested. AAPI business owners were forced to close their doors and lay off or furlough staff, while also incurring costs to develop new social distancing and deep-cleaning measures.

This article examines the responsiveness of AAPI community-based organizations to the needs and concerns that communities faced and considers what effect this new wave of discrimination amidst a new era of racial consciousness might have on AAPI political participation. The first section of the article will consider the growth and diversity of

the community and will consider the role that organizations can play in both service provision and in building and sustaining AAPI political participation. We will then offer an assessment of the responsiveness of organizations in the Southern California region to the needs faced by Asian Americans during the coronavirus pandemic and conclude with a discussion of how the pandemic may galvanize AAPI political participation.

### Diverse and Growing Community

AAPIs have been identified by the U.S. Census Bureau as the fastest-growing immigrant group since the 2000 Census, and the Pew Research Center projects that, by 2055, Asian Americans will be the largest immigrant group in the United States. While Chinese and Indians are the two largest Asian immigrant communities, significant populations of immigrants come from a diverse set of national origin backgrounds including, for example, Filipinos; East Asians such as Japanese, Koreans, and Taiwanese; Southeast Asians from Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, and Laos; other South Asians from Pakistan, Nepal, or Sri Lanka; and Pacific Islanders (PI) from Samoa, Tonga, and the Marshall Islands. While AAPIs are often grouped together for demographic counting purposes, they come from diverse cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds that result in unique service needs.

### Community-Based Organizations in AAPI Communities

Social and political organizations have shaped the formation and survival of identity-based communities such as African Americans, Latinos, and AAPIs (Minkoff 1995; Tichenor 2009). The federal government devolves the responsibility to provide immigrant resettlement assistance and services to local governments, and by extension nonprofit organizations that develop to serve the unique needs of ethnic-based communities. Ethnic-based nonprofits develop to provide in-language services and assist immigrant and refugee families with essential support such as completing legal documents or navigating education and health care systems. While this is an imperfect system, which creates a sociospatial disparity in service provision nationwide (Joassart-Marcelli 2013), it results in an array of community-based organizations, who must remain flexible in their ability to provide services under changing circumstances and be able to react to fluctuations in funding priorities. Given these kinds of expectations and

strains, the existence and sustainability of organizations—particularly those serving AAPI communities—may be precarious (Hung and Ong 2012). The COVID-19 pandemic created a new set of unique needs for the AAPI community, forcing the patchwork of ethnic, community-based organizations to respond. These organizations have had to face the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the communities they serve by expanding their service and advocacy outreach and adjusting their approach to community engagement under stay-at-home orders.

### *Community-Based Organizations as a Participatory Resource*

Beyond service provision, community-based organizations can play an essential role in the representation of otherwise underserved and underrepresented communities, particularly racial and ethnic minority communities (De Graauw 2008; Strolovitch 2008). Immigrants have often been ignored by political parties and institutions (Jones-Correa 1998; Wong 2005), leaving them without the kinds of information, skills, and network considered necessary for meaningful political engagement (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). In an earlier era, local political parties played an essential political incorporation role to newcomers (Tichenor 2009). In the modern era, community-based, immigrant serving organizations help articulate the needs of immigrants with government officials and engage in advocacy on behalf of immigrants (De Graauw 2008).

We adopt the view of Marwell (2004), who argues that nonprofit community-based organizations, whose mandate often includes the provision of vital social services, are also political actors who can play an important role in the political participation and electoral mobilization of communities they serve. In the case of AAPIs, community-based organizations are often one of the few places where people can access linguistically appropriate and culturally competent legal services, health care, or educational support. In doing so, such organizations also become trusted community allies and take on an important leadership role in disseminating information about political participation by conducting naturalization assistance, voter registration drives, reminding community members of upcoming elections, hosting candidate forums, and endorsing ballot propositions.

### Documenting, Advocating, Empowering: The Role of Asian American and Pacific Islander Interest Groups

To document the responsiveness of organizations serving AAPI

communities, we conducted interviews and examined primary documents from five organizations serving communities throughout the Southern California region: The Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council (A3PCON), Empowering Pacific Islander Communities (EPIC), Center for the Pacific Asian Family (CPAF), Khmer Girls in Action (KGA), and Thai Community Development Center (Thai CDC). Each of these organizations is different in terms of the communities they serve, the issues they seek to address, and the strategies they employ. In addition, all five of these organizations emphasize the role of advocacy and representation of AAPI communities. They provide varying types of services, and also engage in advocacy locally, regionally, and in some instances nationwide.

A3PCON is a coalition of more than forty community-based organizations that serves and represents the 1.5 million AAPIs in Los Angeles County, with a particular focus on low-income, immigrant, refugee, and other vulnerable populations. In other words, A3PCON is a network of many organizations serving specific communities—such as the South Asian Network (SAN) or the United Cambodian Communities (UCC)—or providing specific types of services to various segments of the community such as the Asian Youth Center (AYC) with afterschool care or Pacific Asian Counseling Services (PACS) with mental health services. (For a complete list of the member organizations of A3PCON see Appendix). In March 2020, at the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, A3PCON entered into a partnership with two other organizations—CAA and San Francisco State University’s Asian American Studies Department to launch Stop AAPI Hate. In this article, we will profile the work of A3PCON and four of A3PCON’s member organizations and the strategies they have used and adapted during the coronavirus pandemic.

### *Documenting Injustice*

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States came an alarming escalation in bigotry and discrimination, while many who were forced to stay home became increasingly susceptible to incidents of violence and abuse in the home. In this section we report the efforts of organizations to document incidents of hate and violence that have occurred as a direct result of the pandemic.

### *Hate Incidents*

The COVID-19 pandemic brought a resurgence of anti-Asian,

and in particular anti-Chinese, rhetoric and hate incidents, including the stabbing of an Asian American family in the Dallas, Texas area, which was labeled a hate crime by the FBI (Ramirez, 2020). A3PCON in partnership with CAA and the Asian American Studies Department of San Francisco State University launched Stop AAPI Hate on March 19, 2020. Data collected at twenty-nine weeks reveals more than 2,700 incidents reports submitted from forty-seven states and the District of Columbia. Thirty-nine percent of the incidents take place in businesses and 42 percent occur in public sidewalks, parks, and transit. And, while former president Trump's use of terms like "Wuhan virus," "China virus," and "Kung-flu" are aimed at the Chinese, only 40 percent of individuals reporting incidents are Chinese American, while the rest are those whose families originate from other parts of Asia. As of February 2021, the total number of reported incidents is 3, 795. All this indicates that the problem of anti-Asian hate is widespread, taking place across the nation and impacting individuals in most segments of the Asian American community.

A report released by Stop AAPI Hate in October 2020 characterizes the type of language and terms employed by perpetrators as "virulent animosity" in more than 60 percent of the reported incidents. In Louisiana, for example, two university employees report being followed by a person asking: "Are you Chinese or Japanese? If you are Chinese or Japanese, I am going to kill you," and then proceeding to lift his shirt to reveal a handgun. Other incident reports have been characterized by the group as racial slurs, racist characterizations and scapegoating of the Chinese, and anti-immigrant nativism. A person from Pennsylvania, for example, reported walking into a supermarket when a man yelled, "This pandemic wouldn't have happened if you stayed in your country where you belong, you chink. You brought the virus on purpose" (Jeung et al., 2020).

For many AAPIs who have experienced COVID-19-related hate in recent months, this is an awakening of racial identity as well as a realization of bias and discrimination. Individuals who have benefited from educational and socioeconomic privilege, including physicians, attorneys, and leaders in the business world, have reported their surprise at being targeted. For some, this could be translated into a newfound interest in electoral politics and policy and efforts to advocate with policy makers. In response to a growing interest in advocacy, Stop AAPI Hate seeks to offer additional resources beyond the reporting center and conduct policy advocacy with local, state, and

national leaders.

### *Domestic Violence*

While the coronavirus brought with it acts of hate and bigotry against AAPI communities, the virus also exposed and amplified the issue of domestic violence within the community. Prior research has suggested that traditional Asian values combined with the pressures of the assimilation process into American culture contribute to the domestic abuse and violence against Asian women living in the United States, while the cultural values of fatalism, perseverance, and self-restraint further reduce the incentive of AAPI women to seek help (Ho 1990). The Center for the Pacific Asian Family (CPAF) is an A3PCON member organization founded to help address domestic violence and sexual assault in AAPI communities. The organization runs both temporary and long-term shelters for women and children looking to escape abusive situations, in addition to school-based and community outreach programs designed to prevent and end the cycle of abuse. Unlike other organizations or government agencies, CPAF specializes in providing culturally competent services in multiple Asian languages. For example, recognizing the stigmas around mental health that are common in AAPI communities, CPAF provides peer-level support groups and acupuncture therapy rather than individual mental health services.

For many families experiencing domestic abuse and violence, safer-at-home mandates requiring victims to be home with their abusers have been extremely challenging. Numerous accounts and studies find that the shelter-in-place orders led to an increase in domestic violence, particularly in Los Angeles (Mohler et al. 2020). Moreover, while the volume of cases is definitely increasing during the pandemic, the window of opportunity for survivors to reach out for help is small, according to Natchawi Wadman, community program director, of the CPAF:

Typically, a woman looking to escape her abuser waits until he is out of the home or at work. With everyone home at all times, there may be no end to the terror. So now when a woman calls, we have to move very quickly to intake her information, assess the case and potentially get her and maybe her children out of the home.

The ability to provide rapid response to incoming inquiries as

well as to observe state-mandated social-distancing guidelines in the shelters that they run has stretched the organization's resources. CPAF has long been a participant in the LA County Domestic Violence Council, a coalition of public and community-based organizations that meet regularly to coordinate services and address issues impacting survivors of domestic violence. In April, as calls from domestic violence survivors began to surge, Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti announced a \$4.2 million donation from singer Rihanna and Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey to launch Project Safe Haven, to work in partnership with local hotels to provide rooms for those escaping violence and needing shelter while maintaining social distance.<sup>1</sup> The members of the LA County Domestic Violence Council worked in partnership with the city and county to use this resource for the communities they serve.

### *Advocating Inclusion during COVID-19*

While data disaggregation and documentation of the needs of AAPI communities is a vital step in unveiling the disproportionate ways communities are being impacted by the virus, community-based organizations also play an important role in uplifting the voice and advocating for the inclusion of AAPI communities in the responsiveness of government officials. In this section, we profile the work of two organizations who throughout the pandemic have been advocating for the inclusion of often highly marginalized AAPI communities to ensure their access to health care resources and unemployment assistance.

### *Disproportionate Health Impact*

Particularly hard hit by the coronavirus has been the Pacific Islander<sup>2</sup> community. With origins in nations such as Hawaii, Guam, Tonga, Samoa, Fiji, or the Marshall Islands, there are roughly 1.5 million Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in the United States. While the largest proportion of Pacific Islanders reside in Hawaii, the Census Bureau identifies California, Washington, Texas, and Utah as states that also have significant numbers of residents of Pacific Islander origins.

Empowering Pacific Islander Communities (EPIC) is an A3PCON member and social justice organization dedicated to engaging Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (PI) communities through culturally relevant advocacy, research, and leadership development. The PI community comprises just under 1 percent of California's total population, with a significant number of PI communities found in



Southern California. Given a geographic spread throughout the region and nation, PIs do not live in “ethnic enclaves,” which the organization views as a disadvantage. According to Tavae Samuelu, executive director of EPIC, because the community is not geographically concentrated, legislators and policy makers know very little about the community and their needs:

We have to start lobby visits with legislators not with our issues, but using a map and teaching them about where the Pacific Islands are located.

Long before the pandemic, EPIC and its partners across the country were advocating for the disaggregation of data to specifically identify the social and health inequities facing the PI community. Data on the PI community is often lumped together with Asian American groups, masking unique experiences and needs. For example, the California Health Interview Survey reports that nearly a quarter of PIs have experienced asthma and are 2.5 times as likely to have diabetes than non-Hispanic whites. PIs are more likely to face poverty, live in crowded homes, and work low-wage essential jobs;<sup>3</sup> for example, many Marshallese work in poultry meat-packing facilities and have experienced significant exposure to COVID-19. These jobs allow some PIs legal status in the United States and their livelihood, but also serve as hotbeds where the virus has spread. COVID-19 exposed this blind spot when it became clear that, similar to African American and Latinos, the PI community was experiencing a disproportionate infection and mortality rate. According to the California Department of Health, PIs have contracted the coronavirus at nearly twice the state’s overall rate and seen the highest death rate of any racial or ethnic group.<sup>4</sup>

Given the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on PI communities, EPIC has participated in the formation of a National PI COVID Response Team to advocate for the disaggregation of data on the contraction and mortality rate of the coronavirus to include PIs, as well as educating community members about the virus and how to slow its spread and advocating for additional resources for the community. Resources to support community-based organizations specifically serving the PI community are scarce and, as a result, many cities where PIs live lack the presence and infrastructure of community-based organizations providing culturally competent services and outreach. In such locales,

such as San Bernardino County in Southern California and parts of Utah, Nevada, and Arkansas, the national team has had to rely on community elders and religious faith leaders to engage in community outreach and advocacy for the disaggregation of data. Long before the coronavirus outbreak, these networks of leaders began coordinating to encourage a full count of PIs in the census. While the coronavirus drastically altered the outreach efforts to PIs, the health threats facing the community have been a seed for community-based organizations to help strengthen networks and ties both regionally and nationally and to build capacity in PI communities around the nation.

### *Financial Assistance*

With the shutdown of the economy, Congress acted swiftly to pass the US\$2 trillion Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, providing cash assistance to individuals and businesses financially impacted by the closures. While these funds provided much needed aid to some, many in the AAPI community struggled to receive assistance. The Thai Community Development Center (Thai CDC) has worked during these months to ensure access to assistance programs for segments of the Thai community that have been most hard hit, including seniors, small business owners, the limited English proficient, and the undocumented.

Thai CDC has a broad mission as an organization focused on economic development and poverty alleviation for Thais and other ethnic communities in the greater Los Angeles area. Los Angeles is home to an estimated twenty-seven thousand Thais, according to the Census Bureau, the largest concentration of Thais in the United States. According to Chancee Martorell, the Thai CDC's executive director, many Thais in Los Angeles work in the restaurant or massage industries, and lost income due to the shutdown. To assist small business owners seeking to apply for small business aid under the CARE Act, Thai CDC worked in partnership with organizations across the nation to host a four-hour online Thai language workshop that attracted more than ten thousand participants and translated all materials from English into Thai. For seniors, particularly low-income seniors, the organization worked to distribute bags of food and personal protective equipment in the senior housing building that they own and operate, which is home to 120 people, as well as coordinated efforts to distribute at Thai temples throughout the city. In addition, the organization had a team of interns working to develop activity booklets for seniors experiencing

loneliness from isolation.

Severely impacted by the shutdown are immigrants living and working in the United States without documentation. Under the direction of Governor Gavin Newsom, the state of California developed the Disaster Relief Assistance for Immigrants (DRAI) program to provide relief assistance to undocumented adults who are ineligible for other forms of assistance. Approximately \$400,000 was earmarked for assisting AAPIs and the organization Asian Americans Advancing Justice—Los Angeles served as the central intake agency. Thai CDC worked collaboratively with Advancing Justice—LA to identify and hire Thai-speaking intake personnel to staff a hotline where Thais seeking assistance could call. Offered on a first-come, first-serve basis, this funding was depleted within a month and Thai CDC actively sought additional aid from private foundations to continue providing cash assistance to people in need. In addition to securing cash aid to individuals and households, Thai CDC was also able to secure new grants to serve their general operating budget to allow the organization to continue its work such as providing legal services and to expand its capacity in supporting community asset-building efforts such as affordable housing developments, job creation, and social enterprises.

#### *Empowering for Participation*

Community-based organizations providing essential services to communities can be powerful conduits for change and particularly for engaging communities in deeper political participation. A3PCON served as the lead for Los Angeles' AAPI communities on the 2020 Census. In its efforts to ensure the most robust count of AAPIs in Los Angeles County, A3PCON has worked with more than twenty collaborative partners who conduct direct outreach to specific ethnic and geographic communities across the county. A3PCON sought to ensure linguistic access as well as culturally appropriate messaging to encourage AAPI community members, historically among the hardest to count, to participate. Given the safer-at-home orders and public safety guidelines in Los Angeles, A3PCON faced significant challenges in conducting outreach that had been successful in the past. For that reason, more work was directed toward virtual activities. Those efforts included social media outreach, text banking, phone banking, and direct assistance. In limited contexts, such as food banks and outreach at ethnic markets, A3PCON's ten subcontractors were able to share

handouts and offer outreach materials (i.e., swag) to raise awareness.

As in prior election years, A3PCON conducted voter engagement activities to increase the number of AAPI voters in the November 2020 election. In addition to registering AAPI voters and encouraging them to either go to a voting center or vote by mail through voter drives, A3PCON was one of the few organizations to provide a voter guide on the state and local ballot initiatives. The voter guide was provided electronically and shared with member organizations as well as community groups. Additionally, A3PCON held in-person sessions to explain the measures and its analysis. In early October 2020, A3PCON provided similar analysis on the 2020 ballot measures in an effort to educate voters and motivate them to vote and offered the voter guide in multiple Asian languages to ensure the limited English proficient community members could also understand the measures and their options for voting.

Khmer Girls in Action (KGA) is an A3PCON member organization and partner in census outreach and voter engagement. KGA is dedicated to building a progressive and sustainable community in the Long Beach area that works for gender, racial, and economic justice and is led by Southeast Asian young women. Long Beach has the largest concentration of Cambodians of any city outside of Cambodia (Needham and Quintiliani 2007) and comprise about 4 percent of the city's total population, according to the Long Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau. Over the last twenty years, KGA has engaged more than five thousand young people in leadership development and empowerment training. The organization's goal is to build a progressive base of voters of color between the ages of 18–35 by using an integrated voter engagement strategy that engages voters and community members at multiple touch points. To build political power in the community, KGA doesn't wait for an election year to mobilize voters, but instead engages members on a regular basis with quarterly phone banking and door-knocking efforts for campaigns on environmental, reproductive, and youth justice. Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, KGA was preparing to conduct outreach to ensure a full count of the Cambodian community in the 2020 Census. Joy Yanga, communications director of the organization, explains the unique needs of the Cambodian community:

The community has survived war and had a bad

relationship with their home country government. What seems simple like answering Census questions can be triggering for some people.

The political history of Cambodians and their skepticism and fear of government complicate their incorporation into the political system. When younger people from a second or third generation are trained on political participation and what's at stake for the community, they serve as important ambassadors able to reach elders and the broader community to build their trust. KGA, therefore, plays an important role in the building the capacity of the community to engage Cambodians in the political process. When the coronavirus hit during the heart of census collection, their twenty years of work made them trusted allies within the community to continue to engage, even when in-person outreach efforts were no longer possible. As November approaches, KGA is preparing to continue its voter engagement work, using new text-based networks, educating the community on propositions that will affect them, and encouraging members to submit mail-in ballots.

## Discussion

Scholars have long argued that the context of the immigrant experience will shape the political preferences and participation of immigrant communities (Ramakrishnan 2005; Sadhwani 2020). From the denial of naturalization and citizenship rights in Supreme Court cases such as *Ozawa v. U.S.* (1922) and *Thind v. U.S.* (1923), to the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II or the 1982 murder of Vincent Chin, the AAPI experience in the United States has been marked by instances of race-based discrimination and exclusion. Unlike earlier generations of immigrants, upward mobility has not led to deep acculturation for AAPIs. Instead, Asian Americans have been viewed as “forever foreigners,” who may be tolerated, but never accepted as full participants in the American landscape (Tuan 1998). The anti-Asian rhetoric that has been used during the coronavirus pandemic has brought a new wave of anti-Asian American attitudes, and a renewed sense of social exclusion for AAPIs (Reny and Barreto 2020).

Research finds that the experience of social exclusion and discrimination are important predictors of Asian American panethnic identity, group consciousness, and political participation. For example, Phoenix and Arora (2018) find a strong, positive association between expressed

fear and participation among Asian Americans, distinguishing them from other minority groups. Kuo, Malhotra, and Mo (2017) found that social exclusion on the basis of race influences partisanship and help explain why Asian Americans have become more likely to identify as Democrats. In addition, Lu and Jones (2019) found that even when one has not personally experienced discrimination, the belief that discrimination is happening toward one's racial group is an important predictor of race-based linked fate and political participation.

A3PCON believes the experiences of AAPIs during the pandemic will lead more community members to become a stronger voice in American politics. Anecdotally, this is already being seen. As coronavirus numbers waned in late May 2020 and cities began to reopen, a video of a police officer applying a lethal choke hold to an unarmed George Floyd in Minneapolis sparked massive protests around the nation. Many Asian Americans were visibly active calling for racial justice including solidarity statements from national organizations such as Asian Americans Advancing Justice and Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF) as well as local organizations such as EPIC, KGA and A3PCON. Stories of Asian Americans support for the Movement for Black Lives made headlines, including an Indian American in Washington, D.C. opening his home to nearly a hundred protesters for a night to provide shelter and escape from police who were tear-gassing them,<sup>5</sup> Korean pop band BTS and their "army" of fans contributing more than \$2 million to the Black Lives Matter movement, and the broad organizing efforts of APIS4BlackLives.<sup>6</sup>

Prior research suggests that involvement in social movements will produce a longer-term awareness and participation in politics (Tarrow 2011) and AAPI participation in the protests holds the potential for further engagement in politics. In addition to the targeted, localized work of A3PCON and its members such as KGA, national organizations such as APIAVote registered and mobilized Asian Americans to the polls in 2020 in cities across the country. Future research should attempt to capture the breadth and strength of the Asian American electorate.

## Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic did not simply generate a health crisis but also brought with it severe economic hardships and exposed significant inequities within American life. While AAPIs are often stereotyped as the "model minority," many AAPIs live in poverty and face significant disparities. In this article, we have profiled the work of A3PCON and

four of its member organizations who have been actively working to document and advocate for the needs of vulnerable AAPIs who have faced severe rates of infection and morbidity, witnessed surges in domestic violence, and suffered debilitating losses of income. While these problems affect many communities nationwide, AAPIs are uniquely impacted due to language barriers and differences in cultural norms that make accessing resources challenging. While organizations serving AAPI communities saw their resources stretched, the coronavirus crisis has also provided an opportunity for organizations to form new partnerships and coalitions with other organizations, such as Stop AAPI Hate, and identify new resources to support and even expand their work.

In addition, AAPIs are facing a surge in acts of verbal harassment, discrimination, and hate crimes. Prior research has found that the feeling of discrimination and social exclusion has consequences for AAPI political participation. With the expanded capacity of organizations combined with the impact of COVID-19–related discrimination, there is an opportunity to galvanize Asian American political participation in 2020 and far beyond.

## Appendix

### *Member Organizations of the Asian Pacific Planning and Policy Council (A3PCON)*

- API Equality—LA
- Asian Americans Advancing Justice—Los Angeles (AAAJ-LA)
- Asian American Drug Abuse Program, Inc. (AADAP)
- Asian Business Association
- Asian Pacific American Dispute Resolution Center (APADRC)
- Asian Pacific American Leadership Foundation
- Asian Pacific American Legislative Staff Network
- Asian Pacific Islander Small Business Program
- Asian Resources Inc.
- Asian Youth Center (AYC)
- Cambodia Town, Inc. (CT)
- Cambodian Association of America (CAA)
- Center for Asian Americans United for Self-Empowerment (CAUSE)
- Center for the Pacific Asian Family (CPAF)
- Chinatown Service Center (CSC)

Chinese American Citizens Alliance Los Angeles (C.A.C.A)  
Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking (CAST)  
Empowering Pacific Islander Communities (EPIC)  
Faith and Community Empowerment  
Filipino American Service Group Inc. (FASGI)  
Filipino Migrant Center  
Families in Good Health (FiGH)  
Khmer Girls in Action  
Korean American Coalition (KACLA)  
Korean American Family Services (KFAM)  
Korean Resource Center (KRC)  
Koreatown Youth & Community Center (KYCC)  
Koreatown Immigrant Workers Center (KIWA)  
Leadership Education for Asian Pacific (LEAP)  
Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles  
Little Tokyo Service Center (LTSC)  
National Asian Pacific American Families Against Substance Abuse (NAPAFASA)  
Organization of Chinese Americans of Greater Los Angeles (OCA-GLA)  
Pacific Asian Consortium in Employment (PACE)  
Pacific Asian Counseling Services (PACS)  
Pacific Clinics - Asian Pacific Family Center (APFC)  
SAAHAS for Cause  
Search to Involve Pilipino Americans (SIPA)  
South Asian Network (SAN)  
Special Service for Groups (SSG)  
Thai Community Development Center (ThaiCDC)  
United Cambodian Community, Inc. (UCC)  
UCLA Asian American Studies Center (UCLA AASC)  
USC Asian Pacific American Student Services

## Endnotes

1. See coverage of Project Safe Haven: <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-06-22/domestic-violence-resources> and <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-06-22/domestic-violence-resources>  
<https://losangeles.cbslocal.com/2020/04/29/coronavirus-testing-los-angeles-project-safe-haven-domestic-violence/>
2. Though the official census category is Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander, advocates use Pacific Islander to encompass the group.



3. See reporting by Jackie Botts. 2020. "Track Us Better: Overlooked Pacific Islanders Hit Hard by Coronavirus." *CalMatters*, 5 May. <https://calmatters.org/california-divide/ca-divide-health/2020/05/california-pacific-islanders-hit-hard-coronavirus-overlooked/>
4. These figures are compiled by the California Department of Health: <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/Race-Ethnicity.aspx> and reported by Mario Koran in *The Guardian*: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/may/22/pacific-islanders-california-coronavirus-death-rate>
5. See David Williams. 2020. "This Man Sheltered Dozens of Protesters in His Washington, DC Home to Protect Them from Arrest." *CNN*, 3 June, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/02/us/dc-protesters-sheltered-trnd/index.html>
6. See Natasha Roy and Agnes Constante. 2020. "75 Ways Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders Are Speaking Out for Black Lives." *NBC News*, 12 June, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/75-ways-asian-americans-pacific-islanders-are-speaking-out-black-n1230551>

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