

# 2020 Survey of Suburban Chinese American Voters (SSCAV)

## Report

AAPI Force -EF

September 17, 2020

### Background

Chinese Americans are the largest single Asian American national origin group in California, making up about 27% of the state's Asian American population (and nearly 5% of all Californians). Among registered voters, Asian Americans comprise over 10% of the electorate, with Chinese Americans making up a little under a quarter of all Asian American voters (23% of all Asian American registered voters or a little over 3% of the total CA registered voter population).

Chinese Americans in California increasingly reside in the suburbs. In some districts, they make-up a critical mass of the total population. In Alameda County, for example, Chinese Americans comprise nearly 10% of all county residents.

More critical than their numbers, however, is the political power that this group has demonstrated. Long-standing trends show that Asian Americans have moved dramatically toward support for the Democratic Party since 1992. In 2012 and 2016 more than 65% of Asian Americans voted for the Democratic presidential candidate. But, at the local level we have witnessed a countervailing trend. This trend is driven by a group of concerned and activated first-generation immigrants from mainland China, whose views are becoming increasingly important and powerful.

This segment of Chinese American immigrants has been visible on issues ranging from affirmative action to immigration reform. In 2014, Chinese Americans in the state drew national attention by opposing a measure (SCA-5) that would have allowed voters to restore affirmative action through a state constitutional amendment. Observers credited Chinese Americans for their successful political organizing when the measure was defeated.

Contemporary understandings of Chinese American voters tend to be based mostly on anecdotal information because research and polling on this relatively small group focuses on visible activists and small samples. The current project attempts to study Chinese American voters in the suburbs more systematically through a survey of **2,832** registered voters in five California suburbs who self-identified as having some part of their background "Chinese" or "Chinese American." The purpose of this research is to better understand the political attitudes of Chinese American suburban voters.

### Methodology:

From July 8 to August 26th, 2020, a coalition of partner organizations including OCAPICA, APEN, SBYC, AYC, and CPA-SF, coordinated by AAPI Force-EF, fielded a survey in five California suburban regions with high Chinese American immigrant voter density (Alameda, Los Angeles County, Orange County, Santa Clara County). The survey was conducted via two modes – phone (cell and landline) and online. Surveys were conducted in English and Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese).

Data are weighted based on 2013-2018 American Community Survey cumulative file (citizen voting age population) including county PUMS, nativity, age, education, and gender. Percentages in each table may not add up to 100% due to rounding error.

<b>Suburban Region</b>	n	Margin of Error (%)
TOTAL who provided county residence info	2,774	+/-2
ALAMEDA COUNTY (East Alameda)	559	+/-4
LOS ANGELES COUNTY (San Gabriel Valley)	939	+/-3
ORANGE COUNTY	516	+/-4
SAN FRANCISCO COUNTY (Western San Francisco)	486	+/-4
SANTA CLARA	274	+/-6

#### **Unweighted Sampling Characteristics**

Online	11%
Phone	89%
English	52%
Chinese	48%

## Key Results

*weighted, row or column percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding error*

**Table 1. Partisanship**

	<b>Democrat</b>	<b>Decline to State</b>	<b>Republican</b>
<b>Overall</b> (sample size)	40 (1121)	48 (1299)	12 (339)
<b>Suburban area</b> (sample size)	(1096)	(1299)	(339)
Alameda	36	53	11
Los Angeles	40	48	12
Orange County	55	30	14
San Francisco	38	52	10
Santa Clara	36	49	15
<b>Nativity</b> (sample size)	(1096)	(1278)	(332)
Born in US	56	37	7
Born outside US	32	54	14
<b>Age</b> (sample size)	(1121)	(1299)	(339)
18-34	55	37	8
34-49	30	55	15
50+	25	60	14
Source: 2020 Suburban Chinese American Voter Survey (weighted)			

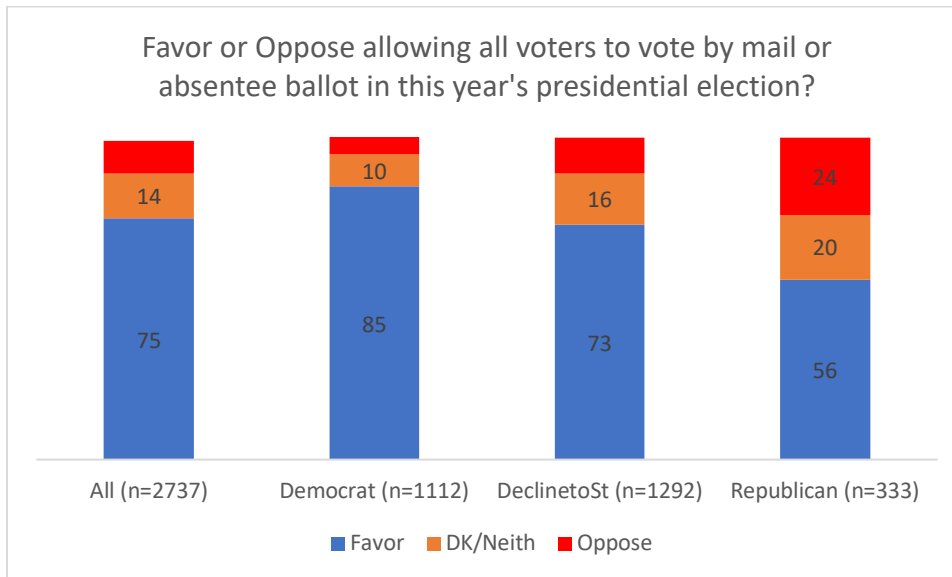
Overall, there are fewer Republican-identifiers than Democrats, with the sample leaning heavily toward “Decline to state.” This is not uncommon for Asian American voter studies. A recent national sample of Chinese American voters showed a distribution of 52% Democrat, 24% Independent/Other, and 22% Republican. We might expect the California sample to be even more Democratic leaning, which is the case with the current sample. In addition, we note that the sample for Orange County leans a little more progressive than one might expect. The sample was selected randomly from the California voter file, but any particular sample may still be biased in unexpected ways. We have weighted the sample according to known population estimates in an attempt to account for these biases. The sample also only included those who provided a place of birth (U.S. or another country).

**Table 2. Self-reported financial situation**

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Prefer not to say
	6%	33%	45%	10%	6%
Sample Size	(111)	(578)	(795)	(177)	(140)

The 2020 Survey of Suburban Chinese American Voters (SSCAV) began with a question about preferred method of voting. Voting by mail is favored by the majority of Chinese registered voters surveyed. This is consistent with surveys of Asian American registered voters in California more generally. Fully 70% of registered Asian American voters in the state, surveyed over a roughly similar period, plan to vote by mail, according to the 2020 Asian American Voter Survey.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps not surprisingly, favorability toward voting by mail is also associated with partisanship. National survey data show that, in general, Republicans view mail-in voting with more suspicion than Democrats.<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 1. Voting method preferences**



Source: 2020 Suburban Chinese American Voter Survey (weighted); Question: “Do you favor or oppose allowing all voters to vote by mail or absentee ballot in this year’s presidential election?”

When asked about which issues they considered to be important to them personally, the largest majorities of Chinese American suburban voters were most likely to name “gun control” and “immigrant rights.” However, when it comes to action (volunteering or contributing to a campaign), the respondents were most likely to say they would take part action to expand job opportunities in their region. Note that the “college admissions” process is one of only a few issues for which a higher proportion of Chinese American suburban voters were likely to say they would take action on than the proportion that said the issue is “Extremely important” to them.

<sup>1</sup> <https://aapidata.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Slides-CA-AAVS-2020-sep16.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/context/washington-post-university-of-maryland-poll-by-ipsos-on-voting-issues-aug-24-31/d0ca1dc3-4b85-40b1-92b1-4c91986d0be3/?itid=lk\\_interstitial\\_manual\\_9](https://www.washingtonpost.com/context/washington-post-university-of-maryland-poll-by-ipsos-on-voting-issues-aug-24-31/d0ca1dc3-4b85-40b1-92b1-4c91986d0be3/?itid=lk_interstitial_manual_9)

**Table 3. Issue importance**

	% Say Important ("Extremely" or "Very")	% Say "Extremely" Important	% Would volunteer 2 hours/contribute to campaign
Gun Control	76 (1738)	33 (730)	22 (489)
Immigrant rights in your region	72 (1711)	28 (612)	29 (761)
Reforms to your local system of policing	69 (1365)	31 (530)	19 (374)
Job opportunities in your local region	69 (1682)	27 (605)	31 (759)
Recycling and environment	66 (1794)	25 (649)	26 (792)
Housing affordability	65 (1545)	25 (559)	18 (413)
College admission processes	58 (1479)	20 (436)	25 (611)
Racism and racial discrimination	57 (1834)	23 (782)	15 (596)
How sex education is taught in public	53 (1224)	17 (360)	13 (260)

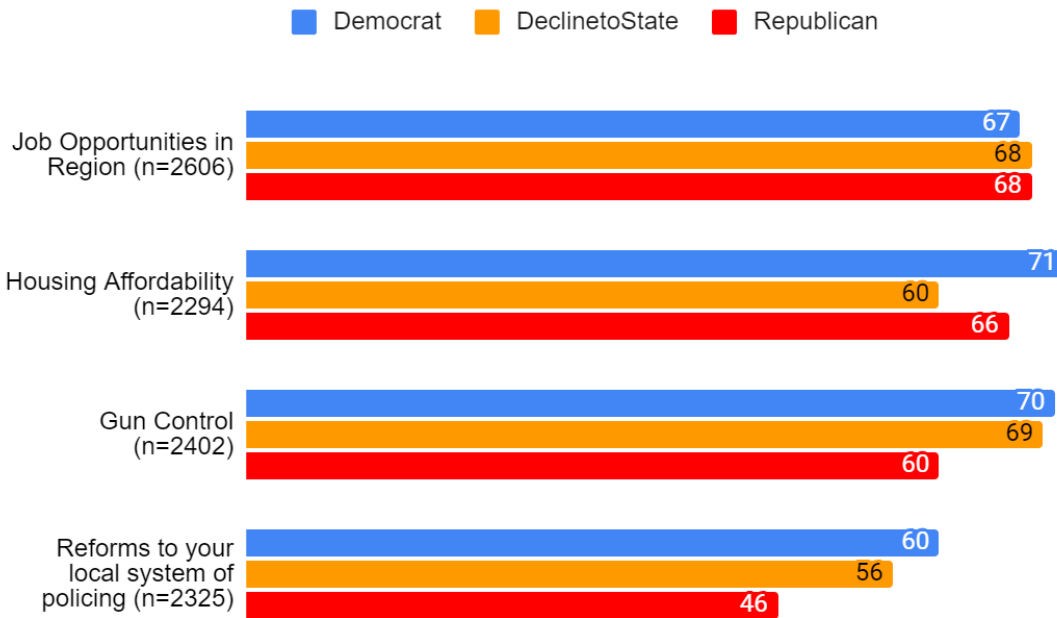
Source: 2020 Suburban Chinese American Voter Survey (weighted); Questions: "Here are some issues that affect many communities today. Please indicate how important each is to you personally," "We are not collecting your private information. This survey is anonymous, and the following question is hypothetical. For any of these issues, would you be willing to contribute to a campaign or take 2 hours of one day to volunteer? Which issues are those? [check all that apply]"; Number of respondents in parentheses ()

**Table 4. Issue importance by suburban region: Percent saying issue is “extremely” or “very” important**

	Alameda	Los Angeles	Orange	San Francisco	Santa Clara
Job Opportunities in Region (n=2652)	61	66	67	70	77
Housing Affordability (n=2339)	60	65	73	66	64
Gun Control (n=2446)	68	68	70	72	68
Reforms to local system of policing (n=2371)	58	57	63	58	52

Source: 2020 Suburban Chinese American Voter Survey (weighted); Questions: “Here are some issues that affect many communities today. Please indicate how important each is to you personally

**Figure 2. Issue importance by party identification: % saying “very” or “extremely” important**



Source: 2020 Suburban Chinese American Voter Survey (weighted); Questions: “Here are some issues that affect many communities today. Please indicate how important each is to you personally

The importance of specific issues varied slightly by region and other voter characteristics, such as party. Reforms to respondents’ local system of policing is associated with fairly large partisan gaps. Democrats (60%) are more likely to have indicated that the issue is important to them than Republicans.

**Table 5. Support for Prop. 15 (“Schools and Communities First”) varies only slightly by region**

	<b>All</b> (n=1961)	<b>Alameda</b> (n=441)	<b>Los Angeles</b> (n=713)	<b>Orange</b> (n=274)	<b>San Francisco</b> (n=312)	<b>Santa Clara</b> (n=221)
No	16%	19%	20%	15%	9%	16%
Yes	64%	64%	65%	67%	63%	63%
Undec/Don't know	20%	17%	15%	18%	28%	21%

Source: 2020 Suburban Chinese American Voter Survey (weighted); Questions: “Here are some issues that affect many communities today. Please indicate how important each is to you personally. Question: “This November, voters will be asked to vote on Proposition 15. It would [ROTATE: increase funding for K-12 public schools, community colleges, and local government services by \$12 billion dollars per year/by lifting tax caps on large commercial and industrial properties and requiring that they be taxed based on current market value] If the election were held today, please indicate how you would vote on this ballot measure.”

**Table 6. Support for Prop. 15 (“Schools and Communities First”) varies by party identification, with high levels of undecided across all partisan affiliations**

	<b>Democrat</b>	<b>Decline to State</b>	<b>Republican</b>
No	10%	14%	37%
Yes	74%	60%	46%
Undec/Don't know	16%	25%	17%
n	770	905	242

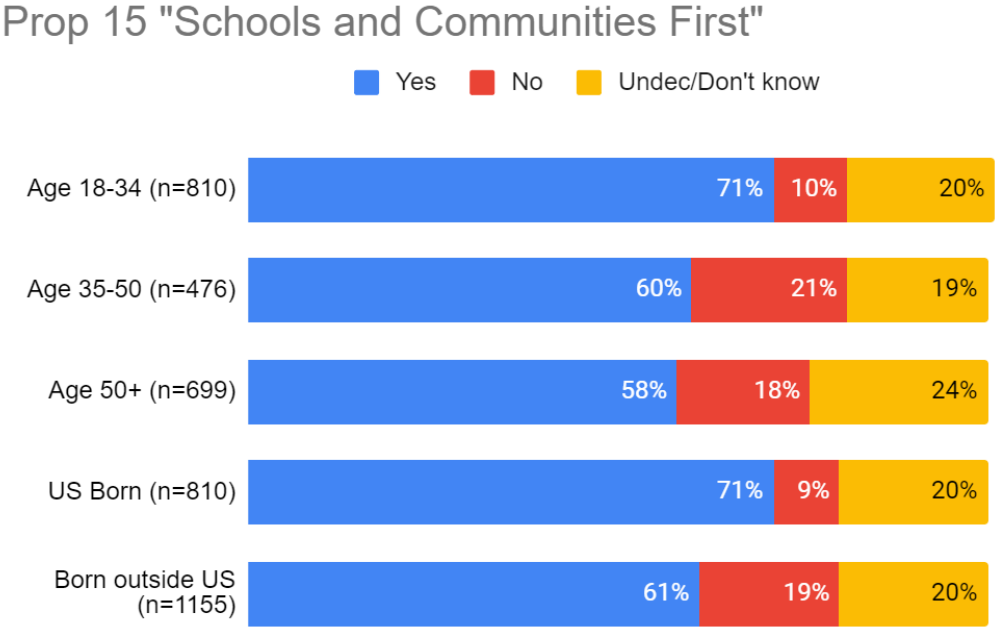
Source: 2020 Suburban Chinese American Voter Survey (weighted); See Table 5 note for question wording

Support for Proposition 15, which would lift tax caps on large commercial and industrial properties was fairly consistent across region. In contrast, there were large partisan divides on this issue, with 74% of Democrats supporting compared to just 46% of Republicans. Note that a majority of those who declined to state their party preference (60%) support the tax reform, but not at the same level as Democrats. The proportion of Chinese American voters in the suburbs that oppose Prop. 15 (16%) was comparable to the proportion of Asian American registered voters in the 2020 AAVS California sample. In that survey, 18% opposed the measure but the proportion of those who claimed to be undecided is smaller (20% vs. 32%).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> <https://aapidata.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Slides-CA-AAVS-2020-sep16.pdf>



**Figure 3. Support for Prop. 15 (“Schools and Communities First”) varies by age and nativity**



Source: 2020 Suburban Chinese American Voter Survey (weighted); See Table 5 note for question wording

**Table 7. Support for Prop. 16 (restore affirmative action) varies by suburban region**

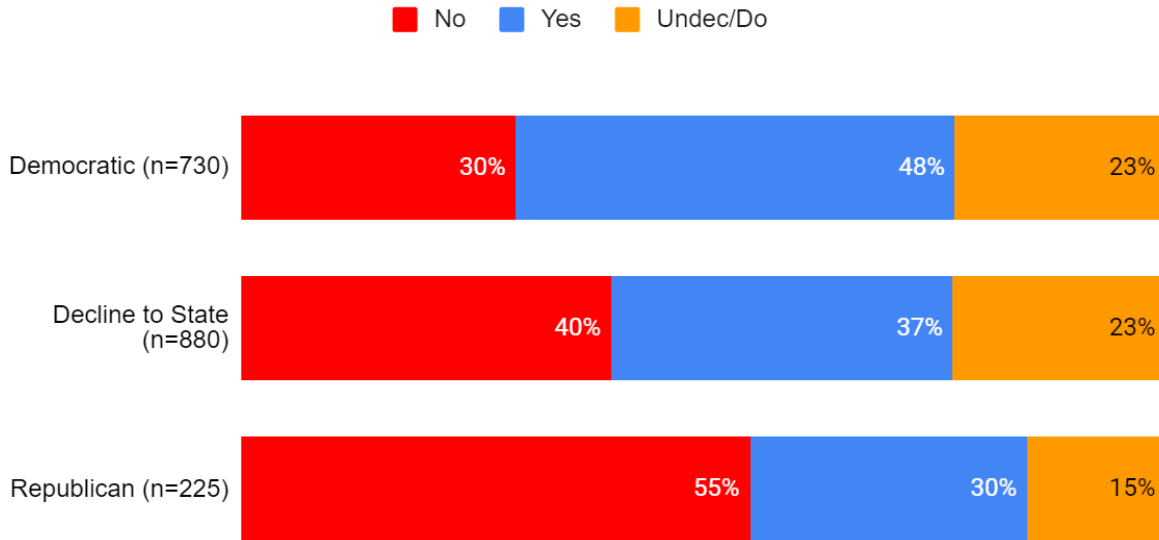
(sample size)	<b>All</b> (1895)	<b>Alameda</b> (419)	<b>Los Angeles</b> (693)	<b>Orange</b> (263)	<b>San Francisco</b> (283)	<b>Santa Clara</b> (213)
<b>No</b>	37%	39%	41%	28%	29%	43%
<b>Yes</b>	40%	43%	42%	51%	37%	35%
Undec/Don't know	22%	18%	16%	22%	34%	22%
Rows below exclude "Undec/Don't knows"	<b>All</b> (1451)	<b>Alameda</b> (330)	<b>Los Angeles</b> (556)	<b>Orange</b> (208)	<b>San Francisco</b> (279)	<b>Santa Clara</b> (160)
<b>No</b>	48%	48%	49%	35%	44%	55%
<b>Yes</b>	52%	52%	51%	65%	56%	45%

Source: 2020 Suburban Chinese American Voter Survey (weighted); Question: "This November, California voters will be asked to vote on Proposition 16, which is a ballot measure that would restore affirmative action by repealing Proposition 209, which prohibited the state from considering race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin in the operation of public employment, public education, and public contracting. Thinking about this ballot measure, if the election were held today, would you vote Yes or No or are you undecided?"

Similar to other statewide surveys of Asian Americans, Chinese American suburban voters were split on repealing Prop. 209 and reinstating affirmative action through the current ballot measure known as Prop. 16. More than one-in-five had not yet decided on a position at the time they responded to the survey. As one would expect (see figure 4 below), Democrats were more likely to support the measure than Republicans and younger and U.S. born voters were more likely to support restoring affirmative action than those who are older or foreign-born. These patterns are consistent with anecdotal evidence that suggests that older, foreign-born Chinese Americans are highly mobilized against affirmative action (see figure 5). At the same time, the data here suggest that opposition to affirmative action is far from uniform across Chinese American suburban communities. Note, though, that 30% of Chinese American Democrats in the suburbs oppose Prop. 16

**Figure 4. Support for Prop. 16 (restore affirmative action) varies by party identification**

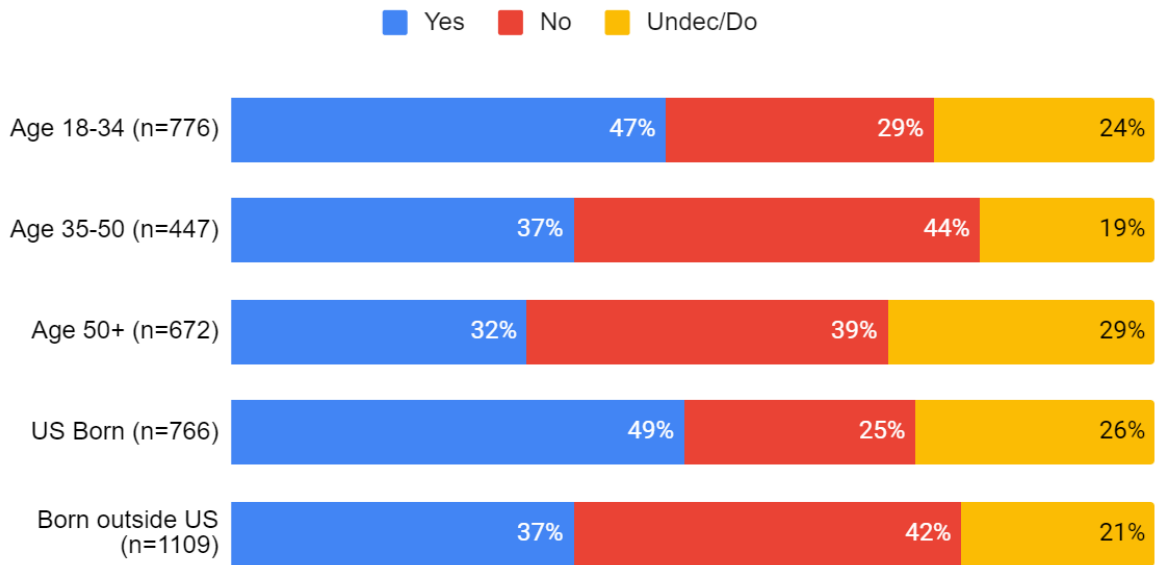
Prop. 16



Source: 2020 Suburban Chinese American Voter Survey (weighted); Question wording, see Table 6.

## 5. Support for Prop. 16 (restore affirmative action) varies by age and nativity

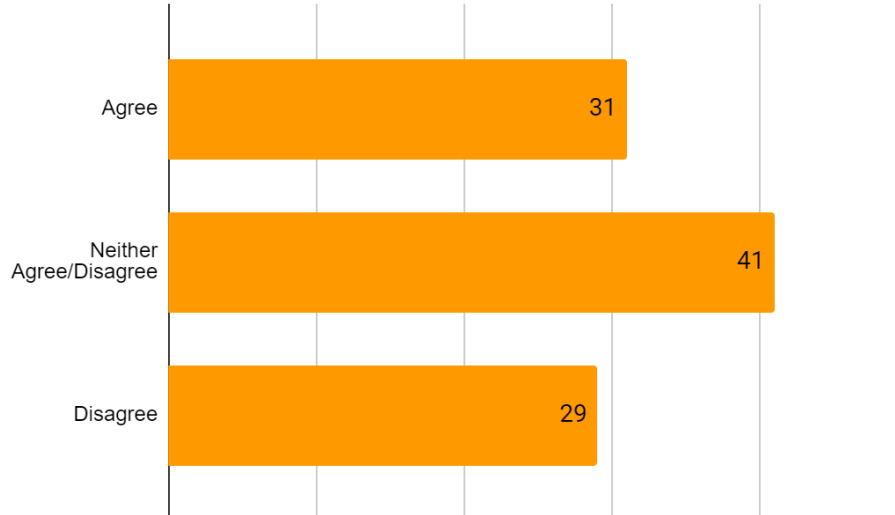
### Prop. 16



Source: 2020 Suburban Chinese American Voter Survey (weighted); Question wording, see Table 6.

**Figure 5. Chinese American suburban voters split on whether race should be considered as one factor among many others in college admissions**

Should race be considered along with other factors in college admissions?

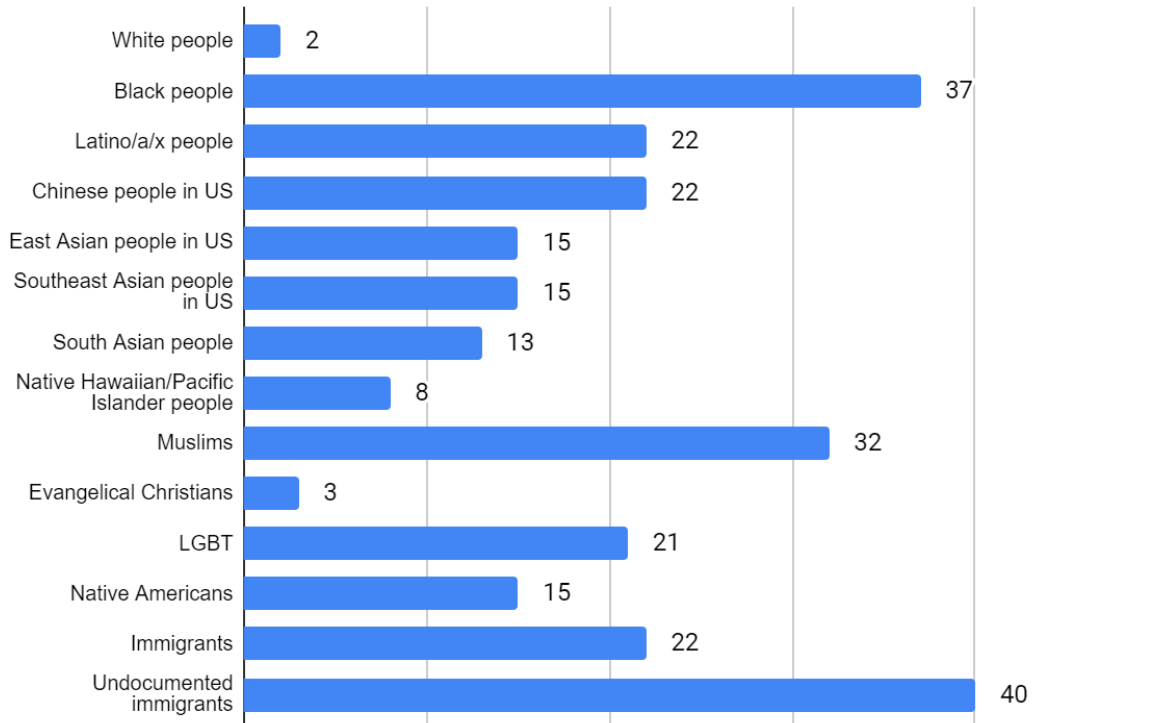


Source: 2020 Suburban Chinese American Voter Survey (weighted); Question wording “Do you agree or disagree? Colleges and universities should consider factors that impact a student’s life experiences, such as race, neighborhood environment, and opportunities to lead, in addition to academic performance, as part of students’ applications for admission.” Unweighted sample size n=1777

In the abstract, Chinese Americans in the suburbs are split on whether race should be considered in college admissions. Note that in figure 5, the proportion that agree with considering race is similar to the proportion that disagree. Again, the issue of race-conscious policies and affirmative action appears far from settled in the Chinese American community, despite a popular narrative that contends that Chinese Americans as a whole vehemently oppose affirmative action.

**Figure 6. Chinese American Suburban Voters believe Black people and undocumented immigrants face most discrimination**

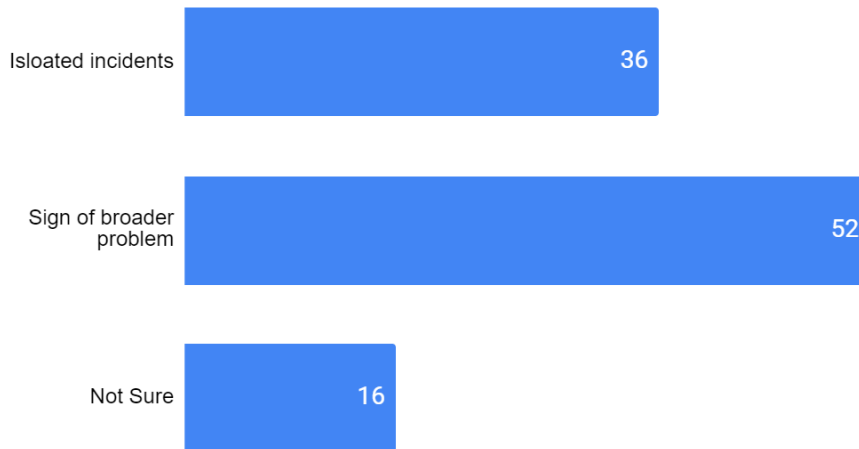
Face "A lot" of Discrimination



Source: 2020 Suburban Chinese American Voter Survey (weighted) Question: "Please tell us how much discrimination there is against each of these groups in our society today. How much discrimination do you think there is against..."; Unweighted sample size ranged from response to "Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander people" (n=1359) to "Black people" (n=1777)

Chinese American registered voters in the California suburbs are attuned to racial and other kinds of discrimination. According to our survey results, they are most likely to contend that Black people, Muslims, and undocumented immigrants face "a lot" of discrimination. Within the AAPI umbrella, more Chinese Americans registered voters in the suburbs believe their own group faces "a lot" of discrimination (22%) than believe other groups, such as South Asian (13%) or Southeast Asians (15%) face "a lot" of discrimination.

**Figure 7. Deaths of African American people during encounters with police isolated incidents or signs of a broader problem between African Americans and the police?**

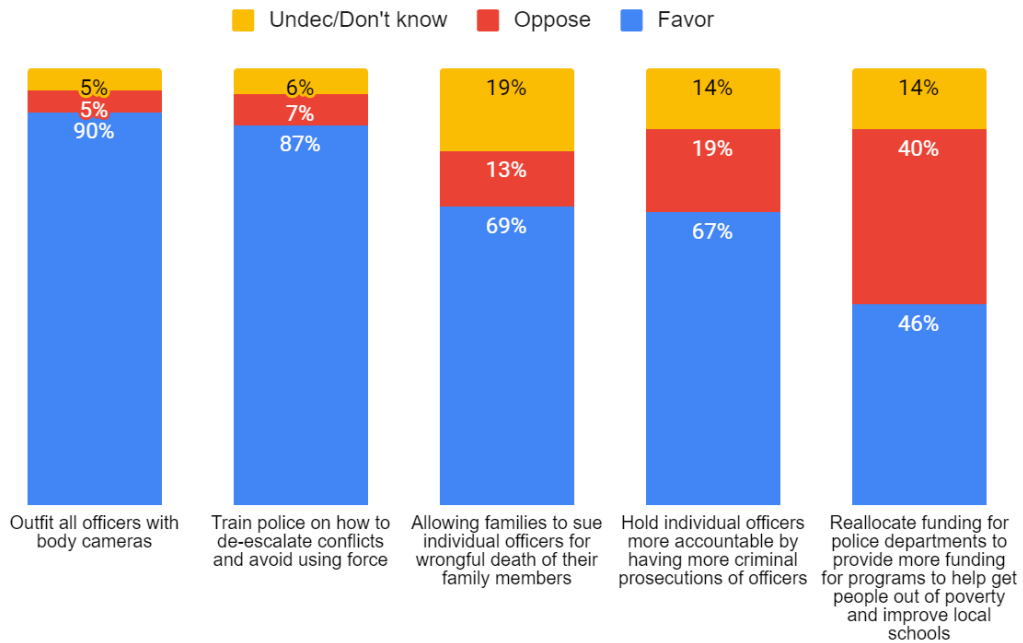


Source: 2020 Suburban Chinese American Voter Survey (weighted); Question wording “Do you think the deaths of African American people during encounters with police in recent years are isolated incidents or signs of a broader problem between African Americans and the police.” Unweighted sample size n=1777

A slight majority of Chinese American registered voters in the suburbs believe that the deaths of African American people during encounters with the police in recent years are a sign of a broader problem (rather than isolated incidents). This suggests that Chinese Americans in the suburbs are open to understanding police killings of Black people as the result of systemic racism. A survey of the U.S. population conducted in September 2020 found that 36% believed that “recent killings of Black people by police” were “isolated incidents,” 60% believed they were a “sign of a broader problem, and 3% were “unsure.” Much of the difference between Chinese Americans in the current survey and the broader U.S. population has to do with larger numbers of respondents who indicate they are “not sure” about the issue versus the general population.

**Figure 8. Policies proposed to reduce deadly force encounters involving the police**

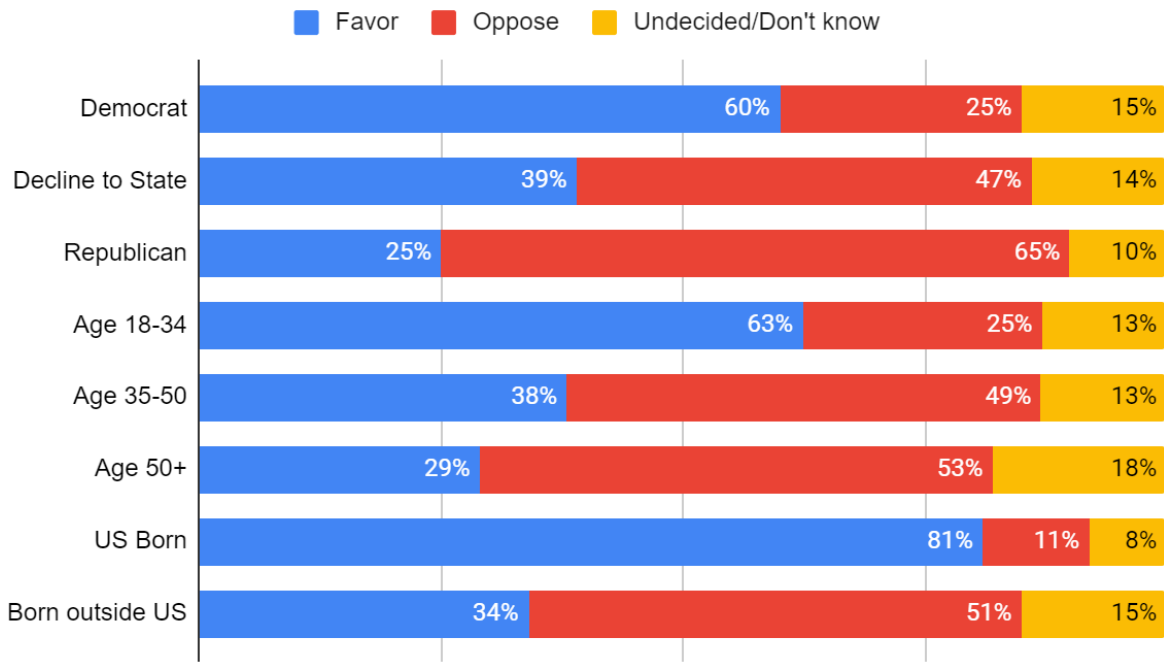
Policing: Favor or Oppose



Source: 2020 Suburban Chinese American Voter Survey (weighted); Question wording “Here are some things that have been proposed to reduce deadly force encounters involving the police. Which of these do you favor or oppose?” Unweighted sample sizes ranged from n=1866 to 1915 for each policy choice (ie “Outfit all officers with body cameras or “Allowing families to sue individual officers for wrongful death...”)



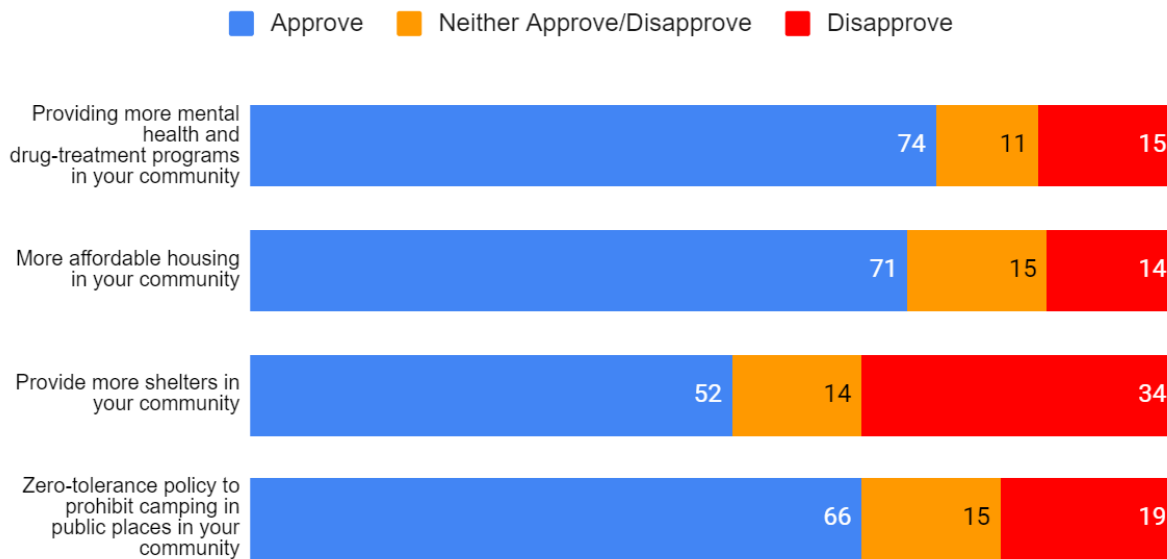
**Figure 9. Democrats, younger voters, and those who are US born more likely to support reallocating funding for police departments to provide more funding for programs to help get people out of poverty and improve local schools**



Source: 2020 Suburban Chinese American Voter Survey (weighted); Question wording “Here are some things that have been proposed to reduce deadly force encounters involving the police. Which of these do you favor or oppose?” “Support for reallocating funding for police departments to provide more funding for programs to help get people out of poverty and improve local schools”; minimum unweighted sample size for any subgroup n= 1806

**Figure 10. Housing policy: Majority support more shelters in their community and majority support zero-tolerance for camping in public places**

### Housing policy



Source: 2020 Suburban Chinese American Voter Survey (weighted); Question wording “Many Californians are concerned about growing numbers of people who face homelessness. Please indicate whether you strongly approve, approve somewhat, neither approve nor disapprove, disapprove somewhat, or disapprove strongly of the following local strategies to address homelessness.” Minimum unweighted sample size for any policy question analyzed above n=1858

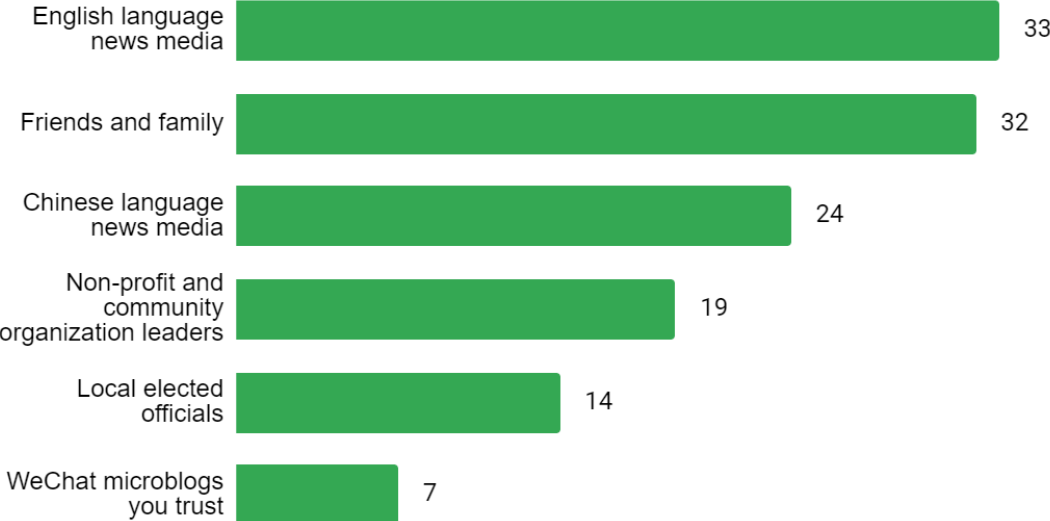
**Table 8. Support for providing more shelters in respondent’s community varies by suburban region**

	Alameda	Los Angeles	Orange	San Francisco	Santa Clara
Approve	45%	51%	69%	43%	63%
Neither	16%	14%	13%	15%	11%
Disapprove	39%	35%	18%	42%	26%

Source: 2020 Suburban Chinese American Voter Survey (weighted); Question wording above; Unweighted sample size n=1833

**Figure 11. Trusted information sources about issues affecting community**

Trusted information sources



Source: 2020 Suburban Chinese American Voter Survey (weighted); Question: “Below is a list of people and organizations you may hear from about issues affecting your community. Please select which you trust most? [Allow multiple responses]”; Unweighted sample size n=1583

## Appendix A. Survey Questions

Q1. Do you favor or oppose allowing all voters to vote by mail or absentee ballot in this year's presidential election?

Strongly favor (1) Favor somewhat (2) Neither favor nor oppose (3) Somewhat oppose (4) Strongly oppose (5) Don't know (6) Refused

Q2. Here are some issues that affect many communities today. Please indicate how important each is to you personally. Extremely important, very important, somewhat important, or Not that important

Not that important (1) Somewhat important (2) Very important (3) Extremely important (4) Don't Know (88) Refused (99)

Job opportunities in your local region

College admission processes

Immigrant rights in your region

Recycling and environment

Gun Control

Racism and racial discrimination

Reforms to your local system of policing

Housing affordability

How sex education is taught in public schools

Q3. We are not collecting your private information. This survey is anonymous and the following question is hypothetical. For any of these issues, would you be willing to contribute to a campaign or take 2 hours of one day to volunteer? Which issues are those? [check all that apply]

A. Job opportunities in your local region

B. College admission processes

C. Immigrant rights in your region

D. Recycling and environment

E. Gun Control

F. Racism and racial discrimination

G. Reforms to your local system of policing

H. Housing affordability

I. How sex education is taught in public schools

Q4. [Randomize split half sample gets A/half sample gets B; if split sample not possible, use QxA ]

Q4A. This November, voters will be asked to vote on Proposition 15. It would increase funding for K-12 public schools, community colleges, and local government services by \$12 billion dollars per year by lifting tax caps on large commercial and industrial properties and requiring that they be taxed based on current market value.

If the election were held today, please indicate how you would vote on this ballot measure."

Q4B. This November, voters will be asked to vote on Proposition 15. It would lift tax caps on large commercial and industrial properties and require that they be taxed based on current market value to increase funding for K-12 public schools, community colleges, and local government services by \$12 billion dollars.

If the election were held today, please indicate how you would vote on this ballot measure.

Yes (1)

No (2)

Undecided (3)

Don't know (88)

Refused (99)

Q5. This November, California voters will be asked to vote on Proposition 16, which is a ballot measure that would restore affirmative action by repealing Proposition 209, which prohibited the state from considering race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin in the operation of public employment, public education, and public contracting. Thinking about this ballot measure, if the election were held today, would you vote Yes or No or are you undecided?

Yes (1) No (2) Undecided (3) Don't know (88) Refused (99)

Q6. Do you agree or disagree? Colleges and universities should consider factors that impact a student's life experiences, such as race, neighborhood environment, and opportunities to lead, in addition to academic performance, as part of students' applications for admission.

Agree strongly (1), Agree somewhat (2), neither agree or disagree (3) Disagree somewhat (4), disagree Strongly (5) Don't know (88) Refused (99)

Q7. Please tell us how much discrimination there is against each of these groups in our society today. How much discrimination do you think there is against... {repeat response options as necessary}

1. None 2. Only a little 3. Some 4. A lot 88. Don't know 99. [Phone only] Ref

[ROTATE]

A. Black people

- B. Hispanic/Latin(o/a)/Latinx people
- C. White people
- D. Chinese in the U.S.
- E. East Asians in the U.S., such people of Chinese, Koreans, and Japanese backgrounds
- F. South Asians in the U.S., such people of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds
- G. South East Asians in the U.S., such people of Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Hmong backgrounds
- H. Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders

And how much discrimination do you think there is against... {repeat response options as necessary}

- I. Muslims
- J. Evangelical Christians
- K. LGBT people
- L. Native American people
- M. Immigrants in the U.S.
- N. Undocumented immigrants in the U.S.

Q8. Do you think the deaths of African American people during encounters with police in recent years are (isolated incidents) or (signs of a broader problem between African Americans and the police)?

Isolated incidents (1)

Signs of a broader problem (2)

Not sure/don't know (88)

Refuse (99)

Q9. Here are some things that have been proposed to reduce deadly force encounters involving the police. Which of these do you favor or oppose?

Favor (1) Oppose (2) Don't know (88) Ref (99)

Implement an early warning system to identify problematic officers

Outfit all officers with body cameras

Train police on how to de-escalate conflicts and avoid using force

Reallocate funding for police departments to provide more funding for programs to help get people out of poverty and improve local schools

Hold individual officers more accountable by having more criminal prosecutions of officers

Allowing families to sue individual officers for wrongful death of their family members

Q10. Many Californians are concerned about growing numbers of people who face homelessness. Please indicate whether you strongly approve, approve somewhat, neither approve nor disapprove, disapprove somewhat, or disapprove strongly of the following local strategies to address homelessness

Providing more shelters in your community

Providing more mental health and drug-treatment programs in your community

Providing more affordable housing in your community

Creating and enforcing a zero-tolerance policy to prohibit camping in parks and public places in your community

Q11. Below is a list of people and organizations you may hear from about issues affecting your community. Please select which you trust most? [Allow multiple responses]

Friends and family

English language news media

Local elected officials

WeChat microblogs you trust

Non-profit and community organization leaders

Chinese language news media

None

Don't know

And finally,

Q12. Thinking about your current financial situation. Would you say you are currently in excellent financial shape, good shape, only fair shape, or in poor shape financially?

Excellent financial shape

Good shape

Fair shape

Poor shape

Prefer not to answer