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Contact:

Rekha Radhakrishnan, Communications Coordinator, AAI
773.271.0899 x215, rradhakrishnan@aaichicago.org
Ami Gandhi, Executive Director, SAAPRI
773.373.9750, saapri@saapri.org

Asian American Community Organizations Conduct Research on Voter Behavior

Chicago, IL – The recent election was an important one for the local Asian American community because of the prominent role of Asian American candidates, new language resources for Asian American voters with limited English proficiency, and increased grassroots efforts to increase Asian American turnout at the polls.

Asian American Institute (AAI) and South Asian American Policy & Research Institute (SAAPRI), which are non-profit, non-partisan organizations, conducted an informal survey of 768 Asian American voters during early voting and Election Day. AAI and SAAPRI fielded over 50 volunteers to conduct this research across numerous precincts in the City of Chicago and suburbs. AAI policy director Kathleen Fericola noted, “Our civic engagement coalition held 9 early voting events, mobilizing close to 1,200 early voters. Exit polling is a critical instrument in understanding why our community came out to vote, and it will help shape our future Get out the Vote work.”

The research revealed a diverse portrait of Asian Americans in Chicago including people of Chinese, Korean, Indian, Laotian, Filipino, Pakistani, Japanese, Vietnamese, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Thai, Cambodian, and other Asian backgrounds. About 20% of respondents were voting for the first time in the United States. Over 80% of Asian American voters surveyed were foreign-born and non-native English speakers. Almost half of respondents reported that they understand spoken and written English less than “very well.” Over a quarter of respondents used help from a bilingual poll worker, underscoring the importance of such resources in ensuring that Asian Americans have the full and fair right to vote. AAI and SAAPRI have also been advising local election boards in implementing legally mandated language assistance at the polls, in Chinese, Hindi, Urdu, and Gujarati.

“Such research provides crucial insights into the perspectives and potential of this rapidly growing group of voters,” said Ami Gandhi, executive director of SAAPRI. Of the voters surveyed, 72% said that they voted for Democrats, 12% voted for Republicans, and 16% voted for both parties; however, most voters named substantive issues rather than parties when naming the top things that are important to them when choosing a candidate. AAI and SAAPRI will be releasing more results soon, including analysis of barriers to voting and factors affecting candidate choice.

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