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IN SOUTH ASIAN AMERICAN COMMUNITIES IN ILLINOIS

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VOTER REGISTRATION, ACTIVATION, & ENGAGEMENT IN SOUTH ASIAN AMERICAN COMMUNITIES IN ILLINOIS

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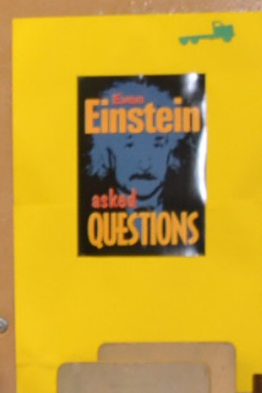
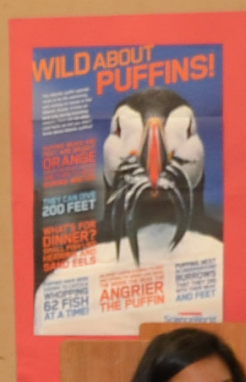
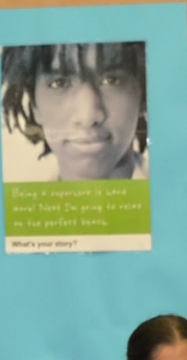
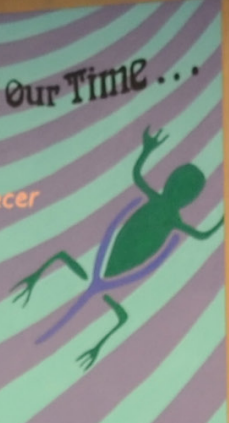
Masters of Urban Planning and Policy

TARGETED VOTER ENGAGEMENT



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LOCAL
IMPACT

Welcome

Note From The Authors

South Asian Americans are one of the fastest growing groups in Illinois and the nation. As the population continues to grow, the collective voice of the community is vital in leveraging potential policies that impact them. One crucial mechanism by which any demographic group partakes in the democratic process is through electoral activities such as voting. This report highlights the issues of voter registration, engagement, and activation among the South Asian American community in Illinois through analysis of data from the United States Census Bureau, the Voter Activation Network, and other recent research. This report is a product of a partnership between South Asian American Policy & Research Institute (SAAPRI) and Harish I Patel, Masters Student in Urban Planning at the College of Urban Planning & Policy at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

About Us

South Asian American Policy & Research Institute (SAAPRI, www.saapri.org) is a non-profit, non-partisan organization established in 2001 to improve the lives of South Asian Americans in the Chicago area, by using research to formulate equitable and socially responsible public policy recommendations. The College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs (CUPPA) at the University of Illinois at Chicago is a nationally recognized innovator in education, research, and engagement that blends basic research, university-community engagement, policy analysis, and profession-based graduate programs. Please contact saapri@saapri.org with any questions regarding this report.

Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

The South Asian American population has grown significantly in Illinois over the past decade, but its influence on elections has not necessarily increased at the same rate. Since 2000, Illinois' South Asian population has grown by over 55% to 242,000, yet their civic engagement has not necessarily seen similar increases.

The large number of South Asian American eligible voters in Illinois indicates the great potential for political empowerment, but it also indicates the need for civic engagement. Approximately 67% of South Asian Americans in Illinois are United States citizens, including those born in the United States as well as those who have become naturalized citizens. Several Chicago Wards, Illinois House, Illinois Senate, and Congressional districts have notable percentages of South Asian Americans.

The views and concerns of South Asian Americans must be considered during the decision-making process for any policy that impacts the local Asian American population, as well as immigrant and minority populations more generally. South Asian Americans represent about 36% of the Illinois' Asian American population and 2% of the state's overall population, with concentrations being higher in particular districts and regions, as shown in the tables and maps in the Analysis section below. This also points to the need for greater civic engagement of South Asian Americans, so that there can be a mechanism for the community to express its views on specific issues and policies.

Voter registration and mobilization should be purposefully targeted by political districts - such as Chicago wards, Illinois House districts, Illinois Senate districts, and Congressional districts - in order to have the highest impact. Political boundaries are not necessarily consistent with neighborhood boundaries. When neighborhoods or communities of interest are divided into multiple political districts, organizations and individuals engaging with South Asian community should be targeted and data-driven in their civic engagement activities in order to increase political power. This approach is especially important for minority and immigrant communities to influence state and local policies.

Resources such as the tables and maps in this report, and the institution map and list published in conjunction, can assist organizations and individuals to leverage the potential for stronger civic engagement of South Asian Americans. It is also the authors' hope that these tools inspire and build capacity for comprehensive and community-based research on civic engagement in the future.

Introduction

South Asian Americans have a large presence in the United States and have been growing rapidly both nationally and locally, but this growth has not been fully represented in the electoral process. As of 2010, over 3.4 million South Asian Americans reside within the United States and the demographic has seen a drastic growth of over 80% within the past decade¹. Since 2000, Illinois' South Asian population has grown by over 55% to 242,000 ([Figure 1](#)). This report uses the term "South Asian American" and "South Asian" interchangeably to refer to all community members who are currently in Illinois and who are of South Asian descent - people born abroad or in the United States and descending from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, or Bhutan.

With this population increase and the growing number of eligible South Asian American voters, there is a large potential for civic engagement, but that potential has not yet been fully realized. It is important that advocates and government leaders learn the concerns of the South Asian community, an often invisible and misunderstood population. But it is also vital that South Asian community members participate actively in the civic engagement process, especially by exercising their right to vote.

Civic engagement is a broad term that encompasses a wide variety of elements. Within the framework of electoral engagement, presidential and federal elections are not the only significant events. This report instead underscores the increasing importance of participation in local elections, especially within the State of Illinois. Representation by various government officials occurs on simultaneous levels ranging from the Alderman or City Council Member on the city level to Representatives and Senators in the federal government ([Figure 2](#) and [3](#)). Community organizations and leaders conducting voter registration can empower eligible South Asian voters in Illinois by registering voters based on state and city districts in a targeted, strategic manner to increase impact with limited resources. Organizations targeting South Asian Americans should also utilize tools made available by new Illinois policies, such as Online Voter Registration, Election Day Registration, language assistance, and the modernization of voting systems.

Targeted voter engagement can have long-term positive benefits that will make elected officials more responsive to immigrant and minority communities' needs and result in policies that better reflect their perspectives and concerns. One recent example of such state-level policy is the Temporary Visitor Driver's Licenses (TVDL) law passed in 2013 that allows undocumented immigrants to drive legally in Illinois². The community organizing and voter engagement by many immigrants and allies, even including activism by undocumented community members who cannot vote, resulted in the bipartisan passage of the bill. This example shows that there is potential for state-level and local policies that are more reflective of the immigrant population in Illinois, even though there is federal gridlock around comprehensive immigration reform. Furthermore, sustained local civic engagement will still be needed for full and fair implementation of programs like TVDL. Civic engagement by immigrant communities can result in responsible and representative policies and programs that affect community members' everyday lives.

1 A Demographic Snapshot of South Asians in the United States (2012), available at <http://saalt.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Demographic-Snapshot-Asian-American-Foundation-2012.pdf>.

2 Illinois Public Act 097-1157 (2013).

Introduction

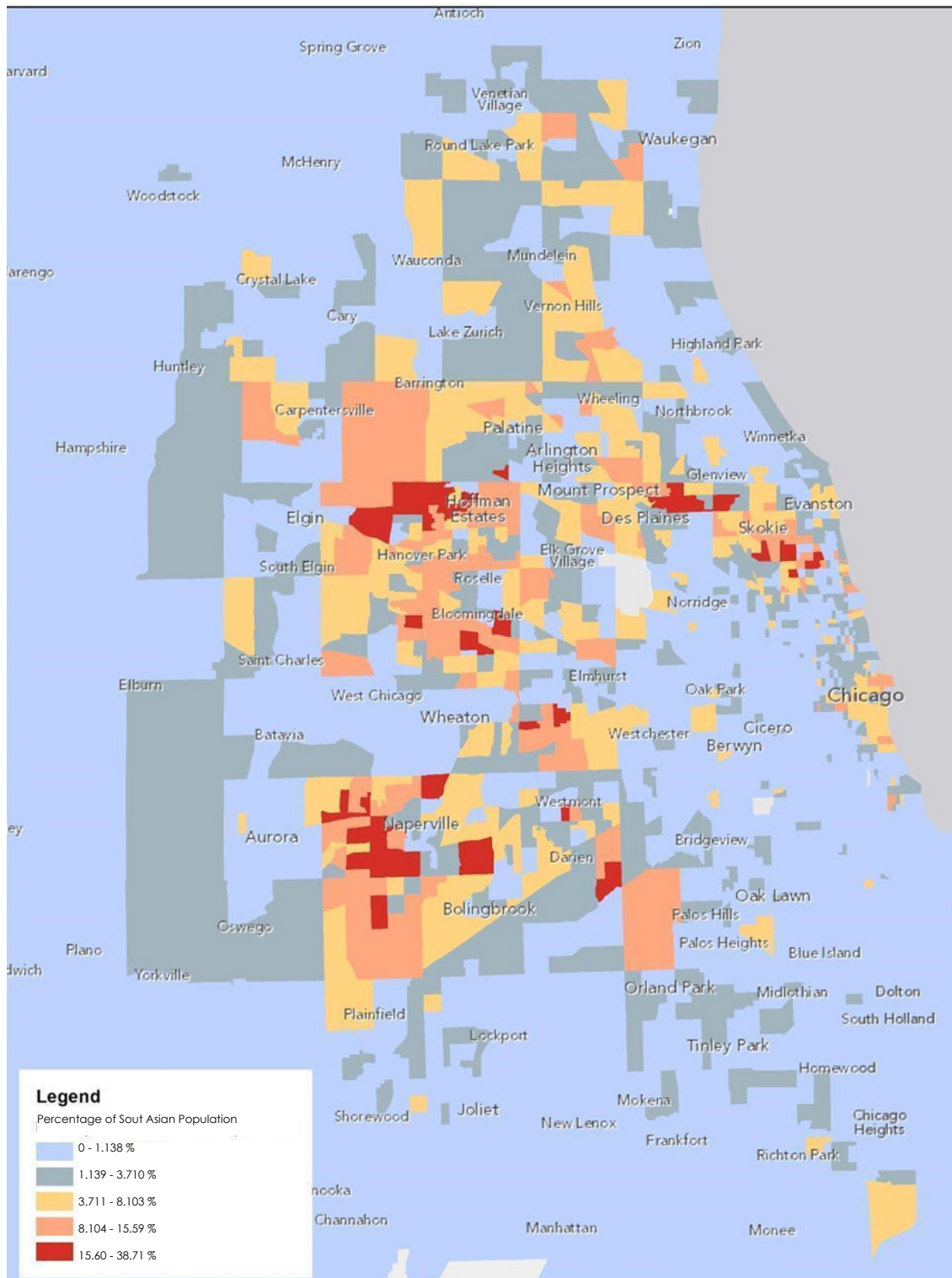


Figure 1: Density of South Asian Population in Illinois
Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey Total Population (2008 - 2012)

Introduction

Civic engagement activities, specifically voter engagement, are most effective when they are targeted to achieve a particular goal. Even nonpartisan organizations and initiatives have permissible targeted goals, such as increasing civic engagement of underrepresented voters³. Community organizing and field activities, such as phone banking and door-to-door canvassing to target potential South Asian voters, are a powerful mechanism to increase the community's involvement in the political process. Data should be harnessed to plan, implement, and measure these field activities.

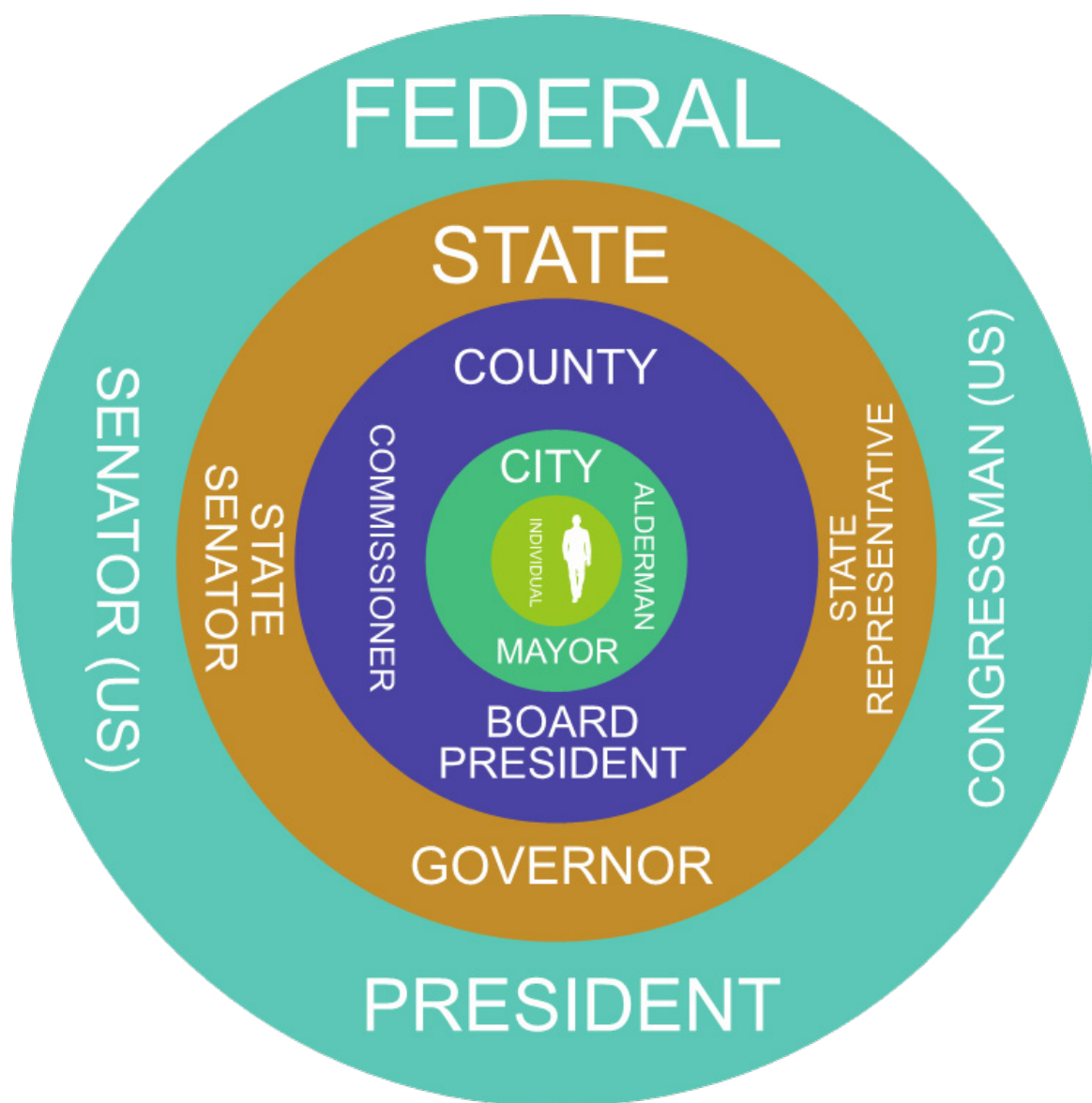


Figure 2: Who Represents You?

Introduction

It is important to note, however, that even when South Asian-serving community organizations and leaders employ data, the data sets have varying degrees of accuracy in reflecting the reality of immigrant and minority communities. **Much of the available data on South Asian civic engagement comes from the U.S. Census Bureau or Voter Activation Network (VAN), a voter database containing information on registered voters.** But it is well known by immigrant-serving organizations that both Census and VAN data have limited accuracy regarding ethnicity. In the case of the South Asian American electorate in Illinois, both registered and non-registered voters, there is an even greater likelihood than other immigrant groups that ethnicity tags in VAN may be miscoded or uncoded, because South Asians are a quickly emerging population and are not a population that has been a target of significant voter registration or activation efforts in the past. The authors recognize the limitations of current data and hope that this report informs improved approaches to voter engagement and activation.

This report provides tools especially for community organizations, community leaders, and engaged community members to focus their energy on targeting their efforts around South Asian voter registration, engagement, and activation to increase the impact. The report hopes to go beyond informing voter registration by providing tables and maps that can also be utilized for Get Out The Vote (GOTV) efforts to activate South Asian communities to not only register, but also employ their right to vote. In addition, the data and analysis in this report can be utilized to target engagement by and with public officials to better involve South Asian communities in the policymaking process. This report will help explain the significance of data on South Asian registered voters and overall South Asian population in Illinois, by analyzing Census and VAN data and utilizing regression analysis and geographic information systems (GIS) mapping.

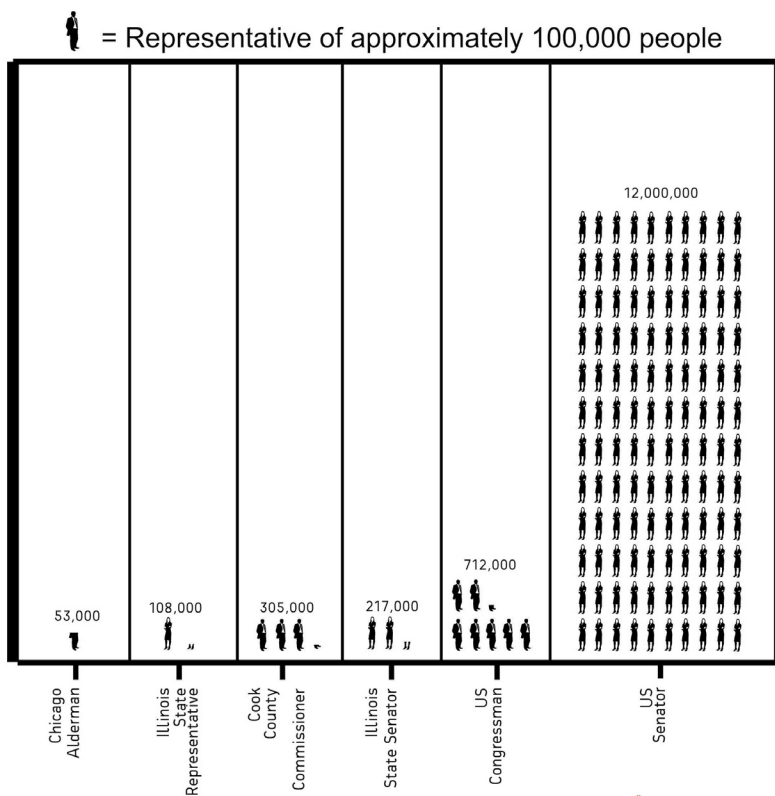


Figure 3: How many of us are represented by whom?

Introduction

For the purposes of this report, it is important to remember that there are distinct but overlapping categories of South Asian American community members:

1 - The total South Asian American (or South Asian) population refers to all people in a designated geographic area who are categorized by the U.S. Census as Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Nepali, or Bhutanese, including community members who were born abroad and in the United States. This includes people of all ages and all citizenship statuses, regardless of whether they are eligible to vote⁴.

2 - The South Asian eligible voter population or voting-age population for this report refers to U.S. citizens who are 18 years of age and older⁵.

3 - The South Asian registered population refers to the number of eligible voters who are properly registered to vote.

4 - The South Asian voting population refers to the number of voting-age citizens who actually reported casting ballots (or, in other words, voters who turned out to the polls).

Of course, the same categories would exist for the general population in Illinois or in a given district - total population, eligible voters, registered voters, and voters who turned out to the polls.

SAAPRI and CUPPA are pleased to present this report building upon past research on demographic changes and population growth of the South Asian community in Illinois. The authors of this report hope that community organizations, political leaders, and activists will make full use of the research findings to elevate civic engagement within the South Asian community, especially focused in a targeted manner through voter engagement and activation efforts.

4 Due to the growing importance of biracial and multiracial populations among Asian Americans and South Asian Americans, this report has included data on South Asian Americans “alone and in combination” when feasible. In other words, the total population of South Asian Americans in this report includes people, for example, who reported the single ethnicity of Asian Indian alone, as well as people who reported that ethnicity in combination with one or more other ethnicities or racial groups.

5 It should be noted that those who are convicted of felonies do not have the right to vote while incarcerated, according to Article III, Section 2 of the Illinois Constitution (“A person convicted of a felony, or otherwise under sentence in a correctional institution or jail, shall lose the right to vote, which right shall be restored not later than upon completion of his sentence.”) Additional information is available at <http://www.866ourvote.org/issues/felony-convictions> and <http://www.sentencingproject.org/template/page.cfm?id=133>.



ACTIVATING COMMUNITIES

History of Research & Demographic Data on South Asian Voters in Illinois

Even though South Asian Americans in Illinois are one of the most quickly growing ethnic groups, to the authors' knowledge, there has been little published analysis to date of this group's voter registration or turnout. As set forth in previous research and explored further in this report, **South Asian Americans have the potential to influence local and state elections, but more should be done to leverage this potential through increased and targeted voter registration and activation efforts.**

As discussed in the 2013 Making Data Count⁶ report by SAAPRI, the recent growth of Asian Americans in the greater Chicago area has been fueled by the increasing numbers of South Asian immigrants. Among South Asian Americans, Indian Americans are by far the largest ethnic subgroup. Other South Asian American groups are smaller but often demonstrate a higher growth rate. According to the 2010 Census, approximately 67% of South Asian Americans in Illinois are United States citizens, including those born in the United States as well as those who have become naturalized citizens.

In SAAPRI's 2013 Making Data Count, the authors used an estimation technique to approximate South Asian voting participation in the 8th Congressional district, the Illinois Congressional district with the highest concentration of South Asian Americans. In this district, about 70% of South Asian American registered voters actually did vote in at least one recent federal election, compared with 71% turnout among all registered voters in the same district. However, South Asian American participation in more than one recent federal and local election lags behind the overall turnout rate. This reveals the opportunity to leverage the growing South Asian American population for greater and sustained participation in future elections, which have influence on particular policies that impact the community.

In addition to the potential increase of South Asian American voter participation within Illinois, the broader context is that South Asian Americans are also at an historically important juncture, possessing both eagerness and ambition to increase their influence in government and politics. One of the potential drivers for civic engagement could be South Asian American candidates running for public office. In 2011, Ameya Pawar became the first South Asian American and the first Asian American member of the Chicago City Council. In Skokie, Schaumburg, Niles Township, and York Township, South Asian Americans have been elected to local office, and South Asian American judges have been elected and appointed to the Cook County Courts. In the March 2012 primary election, South Asian Americans ran for three of the 18 federal Congressional seats in Illinois. The 2014 state elections in Illinois saw an increase in South Asian American candidates running for state legislature, including Mo Khan, Laddi Singh, and Krishna Bansal. Despite the increase of South Asian American candidates, there are no elected South Asian Americans in the Illinois State Legislature. Although it is a positive sign to see an increasing number of South Asian Americans engaging with the political process by running for office, there is much more to be done to increase and sustain the broader

6 See <http://www.saapri.org/gallery/2013-demographic-profile/>.

History of Research & Demographic Data on South Asian Voters in Illinois

community's civic engagement. Furthermore, South Asian Americans are anxious for all government officials – regardless of race or ethnicity – to effectively engage with and show more accountability to the South Asian community.

Another potential driver to expanding South Asian American voter participation is access to the electoral system. This access is not always easy or automatic. Limited English proficiency is a growing concern for South Asian Americans and has historically served as a barrier to voting and civic engagement, as well as access to other government and social services. About 85% of the South Asian American population in Illinois speaks a different language than English at home. About one in four South Asians in Illinois is limited English proficient. Because of the high number of limited English proficient Indian Americans who are eligible to vote, the City of Chicago and suburban Cook County election boards have been legally required since 2011 to provide language assistance in Hindi, Gujarati, and Urdu, under Section 203 of the federal Voting Rights Act. Through this legal requirement and organizations like SAAPRI playing a continued role in advocacy and implementation, access to the polls is increasing, especially in Chicago and Cook County.

Through the 2013 Voting Trends and Access report⁷, SAAPRI and Advancing Justice Chicago learned about the opinions and experiences of local Asian American and South Asian American voters through in-person exit polling. Of the voters surveyed, most voted for Democrats, but most voters named substantive issues rather than parties as their top priorities when choosing a candidate. When asked what factors were most important when selecting a candidate, South Asian American voters primarily listed economy or jobs, healthcare, and personal characteristics – including, ethics, trust, integrity, morals, and other similar characteristics. When listing reasons why their family and friends do not vote, exit poll respondents mentioned that those individuals are not citizens, not interested, or not registered to vote; other factors included limited English ability and lack of transportation. These responses identify some of the key obstacles faced by immigrant and minority voters and shape SAAPRI's work on civic engagement and other issues. Additional details are available in the full report.

Corruption has been another major barrier to civic engagement by South Asian Americans in Illinois, as has been the case for other immigrant and minority communities in the area. In 2012, SAAPRI and political science researcher Maya Pillai conducted a pilot study regarding South Asian Americans' views on ethics and corruption in Illinois politics. The pilot study⁸ concluded that the South Asian community is well poised for deeper civic engagement including anti-corruption efforts. Community members showed an interest in spreading the trend of civic and political participation but were seeking guidance in how to promote positive forms of civic engagement.

7 See <http://www.saapri.org/gallery/voter-trends-and-access/>.

8 Maya Pillai & South Asian American Policy and Research Institute, Social Capital in Illinois: Potential & Pitfalls, Proceedings Paper for "What's in the Water in Illinois?" Ethics & Reform Symposium by Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University, available at http://paulsimoninstitute.siu.edu/_common/documents/whats-in-the-water/water-illinois/pillai.pdf.

History of Research & Demographic Data on South Asian Voters in Illinois

First-hand stories from voters, candidates, and other community members are also crucial to understanding the context behind research and analysis. A few such stories are featured in the 2013 article “South Asian American Civic Engagement: Opportunity for Impact” by Priyang Baxi and Ami Gandhi⁹.

These various reports show us that South Asians have potential for increased civic engagement. The current report provides a framework that South Asian organizations and individuals can utilize to identify and pursue specific strategies and priorities for civic engagement, especially through targeted electoral engagement on a local level.

⁹ DePaul Journal for Social Justice, Vol. 6, No. 2, p. 153 (Spring 2013), available at <http://www.saapri.org/gallery/saapri-article-in-depaul-journal-for-social-justice>.



**POTENTIAL TO
INFLUENCE**

Methodology

To develop targeted strategies for electoral engagement on a local level in Illinois, this report utilizes quantitative data of two types: population data and voter registration data.

Population Data

Population data was gathered from the U.S. Census Bureau, specifically the 2012 American Community Survey Total Population (2008-2012) and the 2012 American Community Survey, Asian and Hispanic Groups. Within the 2012 American Community Survey, this report analyzed the South Asian population by utilizing sub-sections within the Asians by Specific Origin. The South Asian population included Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Nepali, and Bhutanese populations, including those born abroad and in the United States. This includes people of all ages and all citizenship statuses, regardless of whether they are eligible to vote. Due to the growing importance of biracial and multiracial populations among Asian Americans and South Asian Americans, this report has included data on South Asian Americans "alone and in combination" when feasible. As an example, figures for "Indian Americans" in this report include people who reported the single ethnicity of Asian Indian alone, as well as people who reported that ethnicity in combination with one or more other ethnicities or racial groups.

Voter Registration Data

Voter registration data was extracted from the Voter Activation Network (VAN) through an advanced search with two main criteria. The first criterion was based on location -- Illinois. The second criteria was based on specific ethnic group: Asian Indian and Pakistani. At the time this report was written, VAN did not disaggregate data on other South Asian target groups such as people of Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Nepali, and Bhutanese descent.

Tables

The resulting data was then used to produce tables showing the relationship between the South Asian population and the number of South Asian registered voters within Illinois or particular political districts. The tables show these relationships at the Chicago ward, Illinois Senate district, Illinois House district, and Illinois Congressional district levels. These numbers were then imported into ESRI's ArcGIS software program as Excel-based files¹⁰.

10 See http://resources.arcgis.com/en/help/main/10.1/index.html#/Regression_analysis_basics/005p00000023000000/.

Methodology

Maps

With ArcGIS, we were able to connect demographic and voter registration data to geographic boundaries in order to analyze the relationships between different geographic areas based on their demographic attributes. For the geographic boundaries, we downloaded the Chicago Community Districts shapefile, the U.S. Census Tract shapefile, and South Asian Data by Census Tract in order to identify South Asian voters by City ward, Illinois House, Illinois Senate, and Congressional districts by overlaying the demographic data sets on the political boundaries.

Ethnicity data at the level needed to analyze the South Asian population is not provided at a smaller geographic level than Census Tract. Therefore, we had to calculate in ArcGIS the population count of particular Asian ethnicities by ward, House, Senate, and Congressional districts. This calculation process worked well with the federal Congressional districts because these boundaries follow Census Tract boundaries. However, state districts or Chicago wards do not align with Census Tract boundaries. Accordingly, we used an estimation method for the tracts that lie in more than one political district. The tract population was divided among the districts based on the percentage of the area of the tract that was in each district. This was accomplished by intersecting the Census Tract with political district boundaries. In this way, the Census Tract would be cut down into two smaller areas that coincide with the political district boundaries. The population was then multiplied by that percentage in order to yield the estimated population number in each district (Figure 4).

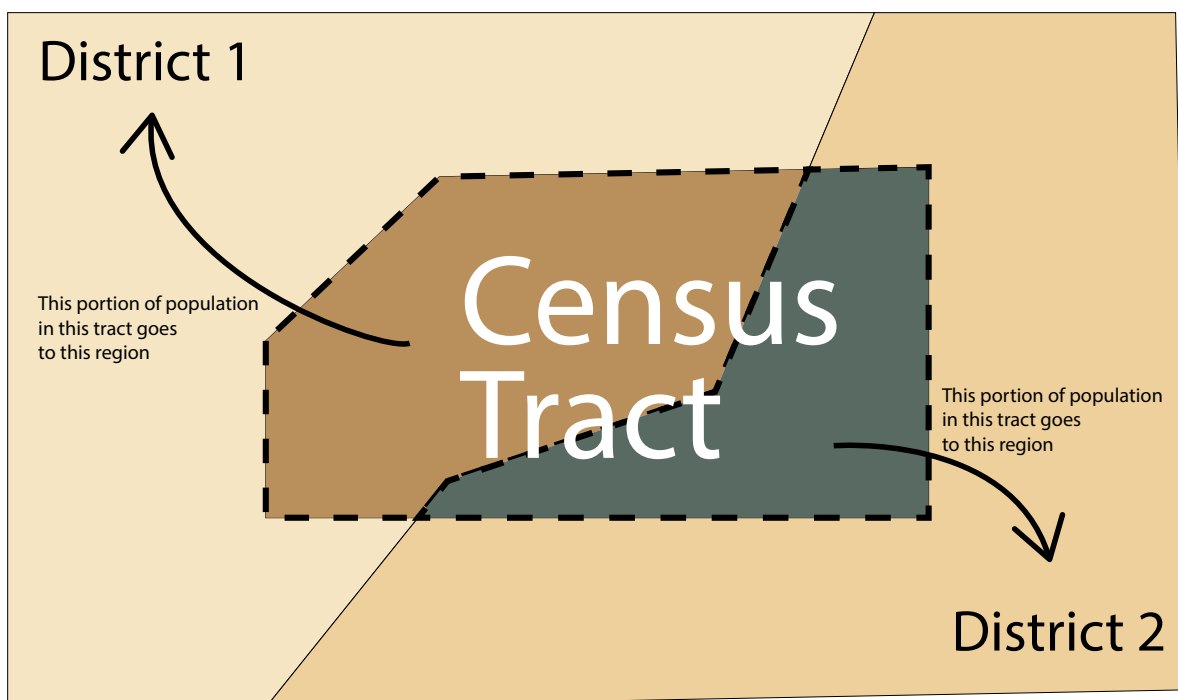


Figure 4: GIS Process of Converting Population Data from Census Tracts to Political Districts

Methodology

Accordingly, for tracts that were completely within a political district, the percentage would be 100%. On the other hand, a tract might fall into multiple regions. For example, take a Census Tract that has a South Asian population of 1,000 people. If 30% of the tract falls into one district (a state district or Chicago ward, for example), 300 of that population (30%) would be assigned to that district. The rest, which would be 700 people (70%), would be assigned to the other district. Although people are not equally distributed within each Census Tract, we had to make the assumption that they were, in order to proceed with this research. Despite this limitation in accuracy due to these various assumptions, this process using shapefiles and ArcGIS was used to produce the most accurate analysis that we could produce with the limited data available.

By using this process of overlaying the Census Tract by South Asian ethnicity data with the various boundary files, we were able to create a Regression Analysis Bell Curve that allows us to analyze and display the extremes. We color-coded these districts in *blue* and *red* to show where the greatest potential for voter registration and voter activation lies. The *blue* areas on the maps are the districts where the number of South Asian registered voters is less than what is estimated, and the *red* areas show where the number of South Asian registered voters is more than estimated based on our calculation.



TOOLS FOR VOTER ENGAGEMENT

Analysis

This section provides an analysis of South Asian voter data by presenting it in tables and maps, which are based on data from the Voter Activation Network (VAN) and the U.S. Census Bureau.

The U.S. Census is intended to include people of all ages and all citizenship statuses. Therefore, this data is used to calculate all South Asians living in a district, regardless of whether they are eligible to vote. This data set included people categorized as Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Nepali, and Bhutanese. Additional detail about this data set is included in the Methodology section above.

As discussed previously in the Introduction section, the registered population refers to the number of eligible voters who are accurately registered to vote. Registered voters should be distinguished from the eligible population or voting-age population, which refers to U.S. citizens, 18 years of age and older. Registered voters should also be distinguished from the voting population, which refers to the number of voting-age citizens who actually reported casting ballots.

Tables

The tables below provide an analysis of South Asian registered voters broken down by political boundaries for Chicago wards, Illinois House districts, Illinois Senate districts, and federal Congressional districts in Illinois¹¹. **It is important to note that political boundaries are not necessarily consistent with neighborhood boundaries.** Although a discussion about redistricting is beyond the scope of this report, the process by which district lines are redrawn in Illinois following the decennial Census has historically led to dilution of minority voting rights. **In some cases, neighborhoods or communities of interest are divided into multiple political districts.** For example, the registered voters that live in the “Devon Avenue area” or “Little India” in Chicago are mostly located in the 50th Ward, but many of them do live in other city wards surrounding the 50th Ward.

Note: The data on registered voters represented in the tables below was retrieved from VAN. At the time this report was written, VAN did not have a category for “South Asian.” The authors used the only available relevant data, which was for the VAN data categories of Asian Indian and Pakistani. For a more refined, inclusive, and accurate analysis in future, this report highly recommends that VAN and other databases provide greater disaggregation and higher accuracy of data on Asians and South Asians.

¹¹ SAAPRI's 2013 Making Data Count contains tables showing total South Asian population broken down by political districts at various levels of government.

Analysis

Table 1

Voter Registration, By Chicago Ward, Ranked by Number of South Asian Registered Voters

Ward #	South Asian Registered Voters	Total Registered Voters	Total South Asian Population	Total Population
50	1,682	25,535	9,040	53,912
42	807	31,369	5,918	53,912
40	595	28,075	6,731	53,912
39	517	29,162	3,918	53,912
48	492	30,213	3,544	53,912

Based on 2010 Census data, each of the 50 City Council members represents around 53,912 people.

Table 2

Voter Registration, By Illinois House District, Ranked by Number of South Asian Registered Voters

House District #	South Asian Registered Voters	Total Registered Voters	Total South Asian Population	Total Population
16	3,457	56,534	18,150	108,734
44	2,503	50,126	16,775	108,734
56	2,189	61,104	17,764	108,734
41	2,172	69,830	12,053	108,734
46	2,048	57,017	11,838	108,734

Based on 2010 Census data, each of the 118 Illinois House Representatives represents around 108,734 people.

Table 3

Voter Registration, By Illinois Senate District, Ranked by Number of South Asian Registered Voters

Senate District #	South Asian Registered Voters	Total Registered Voters	Total South Asian Population	Total Population
8	5,199	115,878	29,576	217,468
23	3,863	124,259	23,689	217,468
21	3,194	143,419	17,321	217,468
24	2,903	144,538	13,544	217,468
28	2,795	121,133	26,975	217,468

Based on 2010 Census data, each of the 59 Illinois Senators represents around 217,468 people.

Analysis

Table 4

Voter Registration, By Illinois Congressional District, Ranked by Number of South Asian Registered Voters

Congress District #	South Asian Registered Voters	Total Registered Voters	Total South Asian Population	Total Population
8	10,215	425,674	60,122	712,813
9	8,123	423,828	44,437	712,813
6	7,575	463,439	40,097	712,813
11	6,844	385,287	30,042	712,813
10	5,328	399,041	30,350	712,813

Based on 2010 Census data, each of the 18 Congressional representatives in Illinois represents around 712,813 people.

Key Findings from Tables

As many might expect, [Table 1](#) shows us that the 50th Ward has the largest number of South Asian population and South Asian registered voters of all the wards in the city of Chicago. South Asians make up more than 16 percent of the population of the 50th Ward. Interestingly, the second highest ranked ward in terms of South Asian registered voters' is the 42nd Ward, which is located much closer to downtown Chicago. Unlike the 50th Ward, the 42nd Ward does not boast a long history of South Asian immigrants residing in or migrating to the area. The 42nd Ward might represent more South Asian Americans born in the U.S. to immigrant parents, as opposed to the first generation South Asian immigrants, who might have greater representation in the 50th ward.

As shown by [Table 2](#), the top three Illinois House districts by number of South Asian registered voters are Districts 16, 44, and 56. Each of these districts have South Asians as more than 15 percent of the total population. Yet out of 17,764 South Asians in District 56, only about 12 percent of them are registered to vote, compared to 56 percent of the total population (of any race) that is registered to vote in this district. This is a huge gap, even with the assumption that not all of the 17,764 of the South Asians in the district are eligible to register to vote. The South Asian population in this district could exert more influence if more community members were registered to vote.

As shown by [Table 3](#), Illinois Senate District 28 is ranked 5th based on the number of registered voters that are South Asians, but based on the total South Asian population, the number of registered voters should be much higher. Only around 10 percent of the total South Asian population in District 28 is registered to vote - again a low percentage, even with the understanding that not all South Asians are eligible to register to vote. This district shows important potential for greater voter registration, activation, and engagement.

With effective voter registration and targeted voter mobilization efforts, the South Asian population can become a more powerful voting bloc in districts such as those identified above.

Analysis

Maps

The regression analysis maps below use geographic information systems (GIS) mapping to represent data from the U.S. Census Bureau and VAN, as discussed further in the Methodology section above. One map displays Chicago wards and two maps each display Illinois House, Illinois Senate, and Illinois Congressional political boundaries, respectively.

Regression analysis allows one to study different elements that might affect a certain phenomenon. For example, analyzing whether a correlation exists between the amount of fast food consumption and physical activity can inform conclusions and interventions related to obesity. If there is a high correlation between fast food consumption and low physical activity, we assume that these two variables highly affect obesity rates. However, if there are regions that have high fast food consumption rates, low physical activity, and do not have high rates of obesity, we can conclude that there is a variable missing in our analysis, which might be a cause of obesity. Thus, regression analysis can be an important tool for predicting and studying social patterns and formulating responses. In this example, obesity rate is the dependent variable, and fast food consumption and physical activity rates are the explanatory variables.

In the case of registered voters and South Asian populations, we analyze the dependent variable - *the rates of South Asian registered voters in Illinois* - by using two explanatory variables - *the total registered voter population* and *the total South Asian population*. The reasoning behind this analysis is that if there is a very low South Asian population, we expect that there should be a very low number of South Asian registered voters. Similarly, if the total number of registered voters is very low, we expect that there should be a very low number of South Asian registered voters. However, when these trends do not demonstrate the correlation that we expect, there is an indication that there may be another variable at play - such as civic engagement or lack thereof.

Finding political districts with irregular or unexpected relationships between South Asian registered voters, total registered voters, and total South Asian population can help us identify areas where a closer look is needed to understand community dynamics and improve civic engagement strategies in response.

Analysis

Interpreting The Maps

Blue: Actual number of South Asian registered voters is *less* than what was estimated by relationship between total South Asian population and total registered voters

Red: Actual number of South Asian registered voters is *more* than what was estimated by relationship between total South Asian population and total registered voters

For example, blue shaded districts are populated by many South Asian Americans and show high number of total registered voters, but they are substantially lower than expected in South Asian registered voters. These districts could be potential targets for voter registration.

On the other hand, based on the total South Asian population and total registered voters, the red districts represent areas where the South Asian registered voter count is substantially higher than expected. Therefore, these districts could be potential targets for voter mobilization/Get Out The Vote (GOTV) or voter education.

Analysis: Chicago Wards

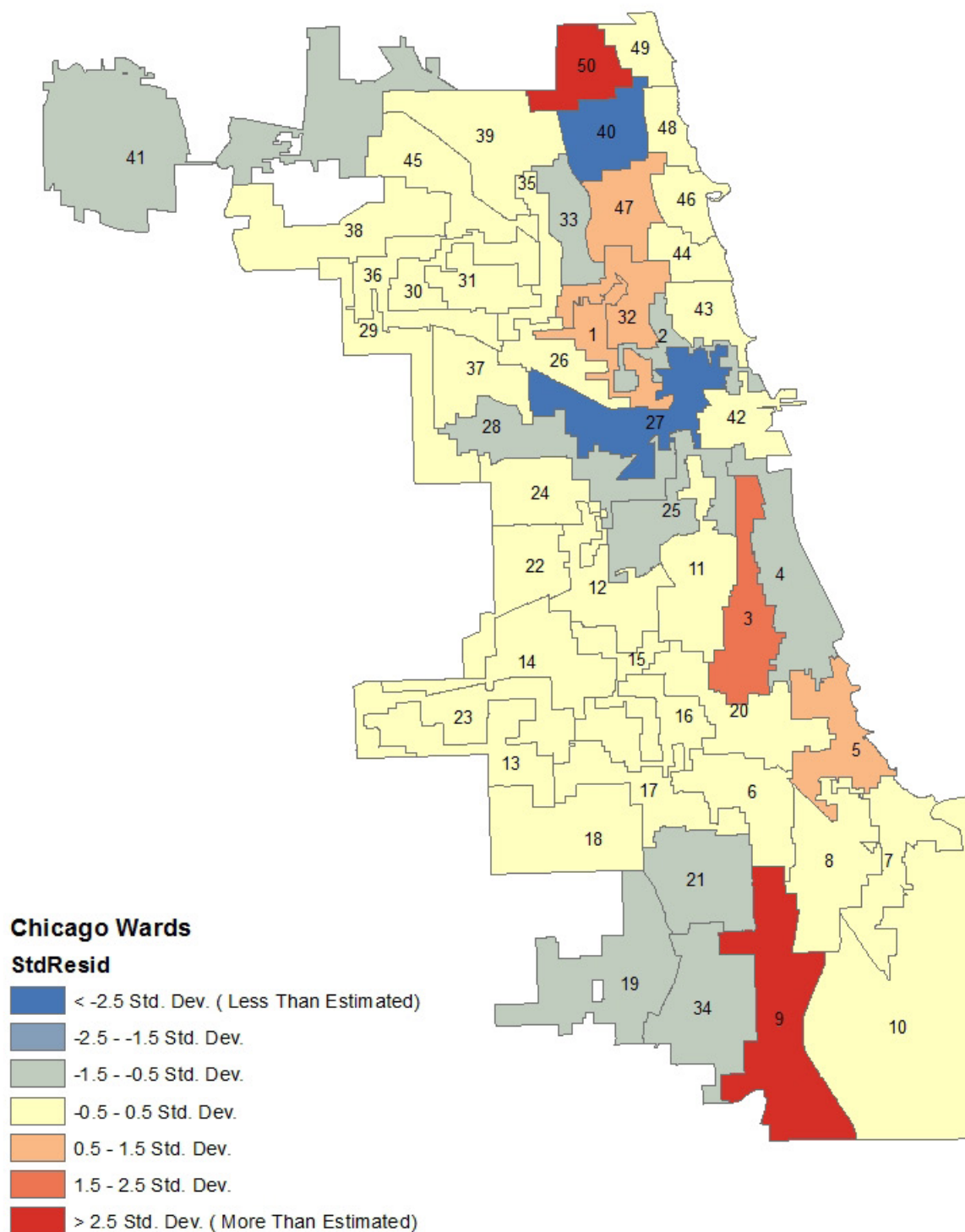


Figure 5: Chicago Ward South Asian American Voter Registration Regression Analysis

Analysis: House Districts

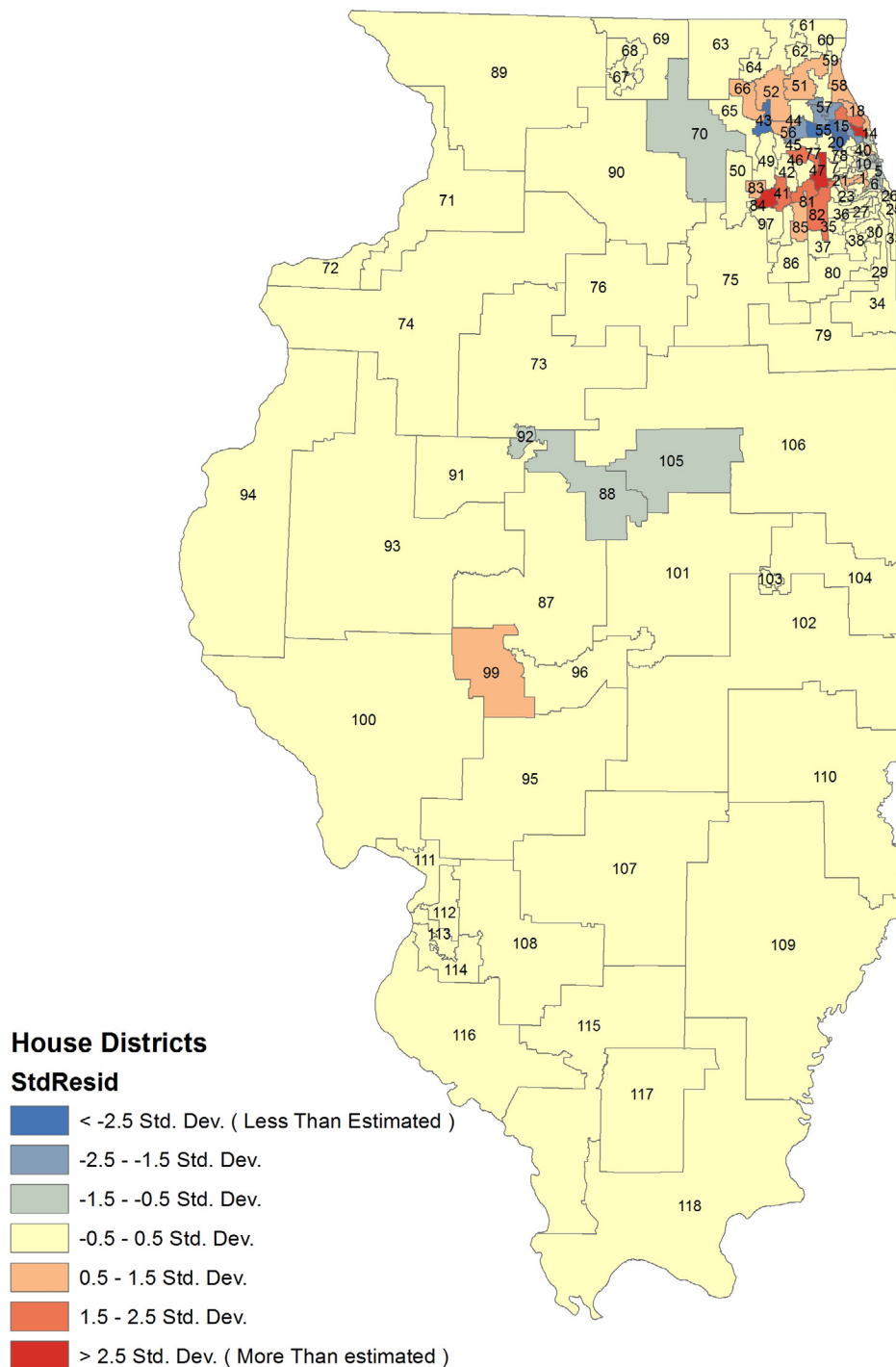


Figure 6: Illinois House District South Asian American Voter Registration Regression Analysis

Analysis: House Districts

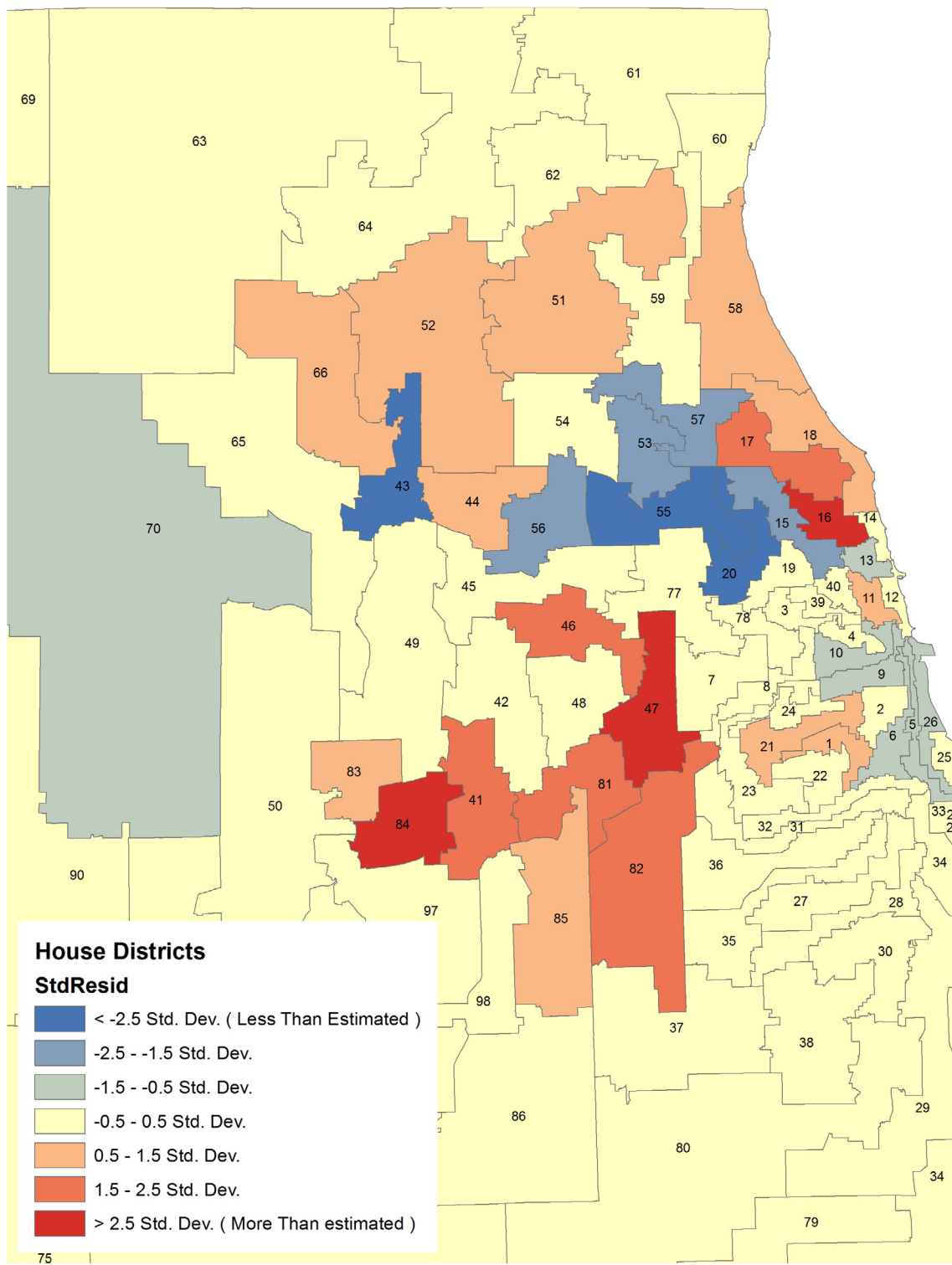


Figure 7: Illinois House District South Asian American Voter Registration Regression Analysis (Zoomed in)

Analysis: Senate Districts

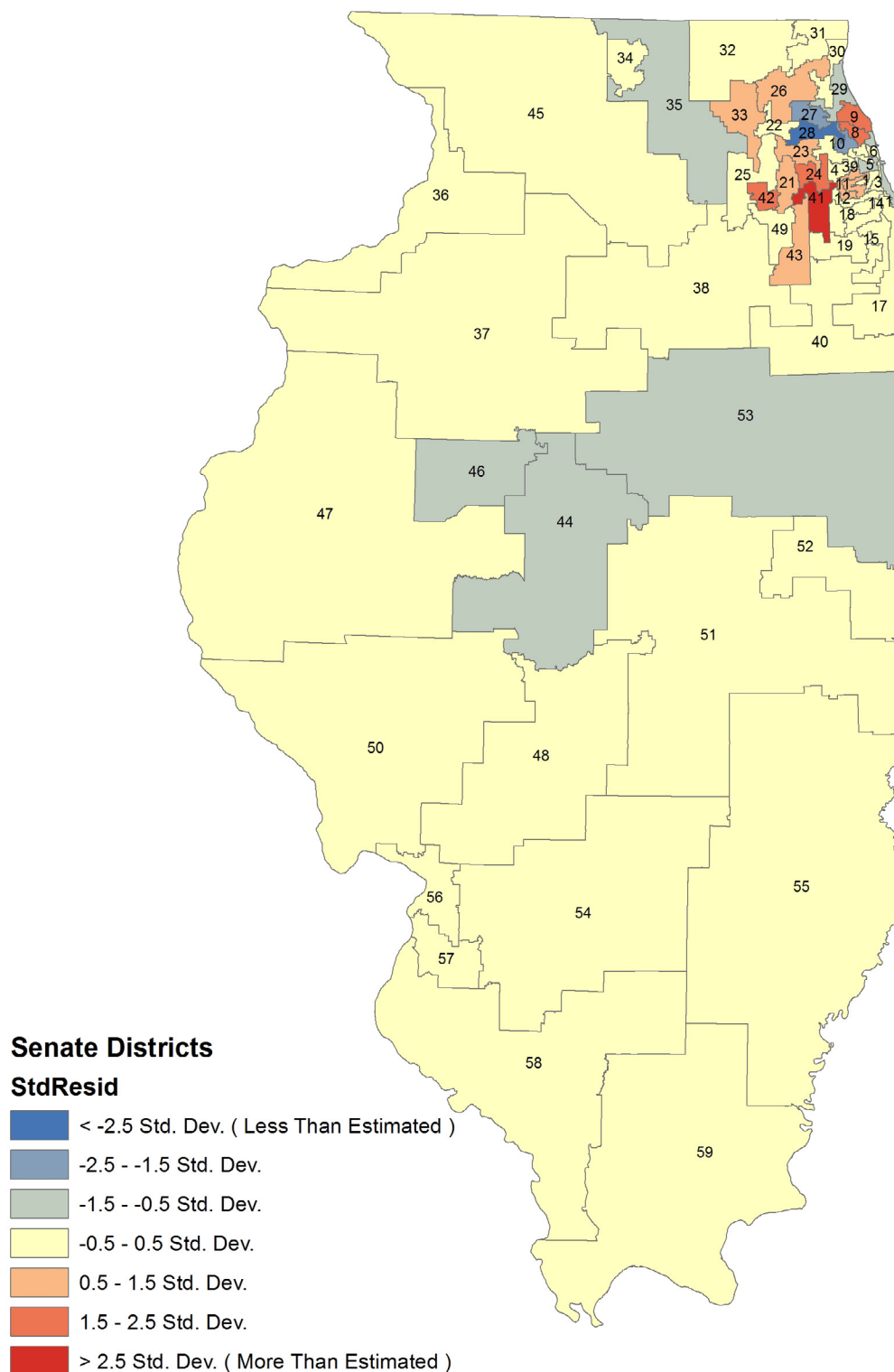


Figure 8: Illinois Senate District South Asian American Voter Registration Regression Analysis

Analysis: Senate Districts

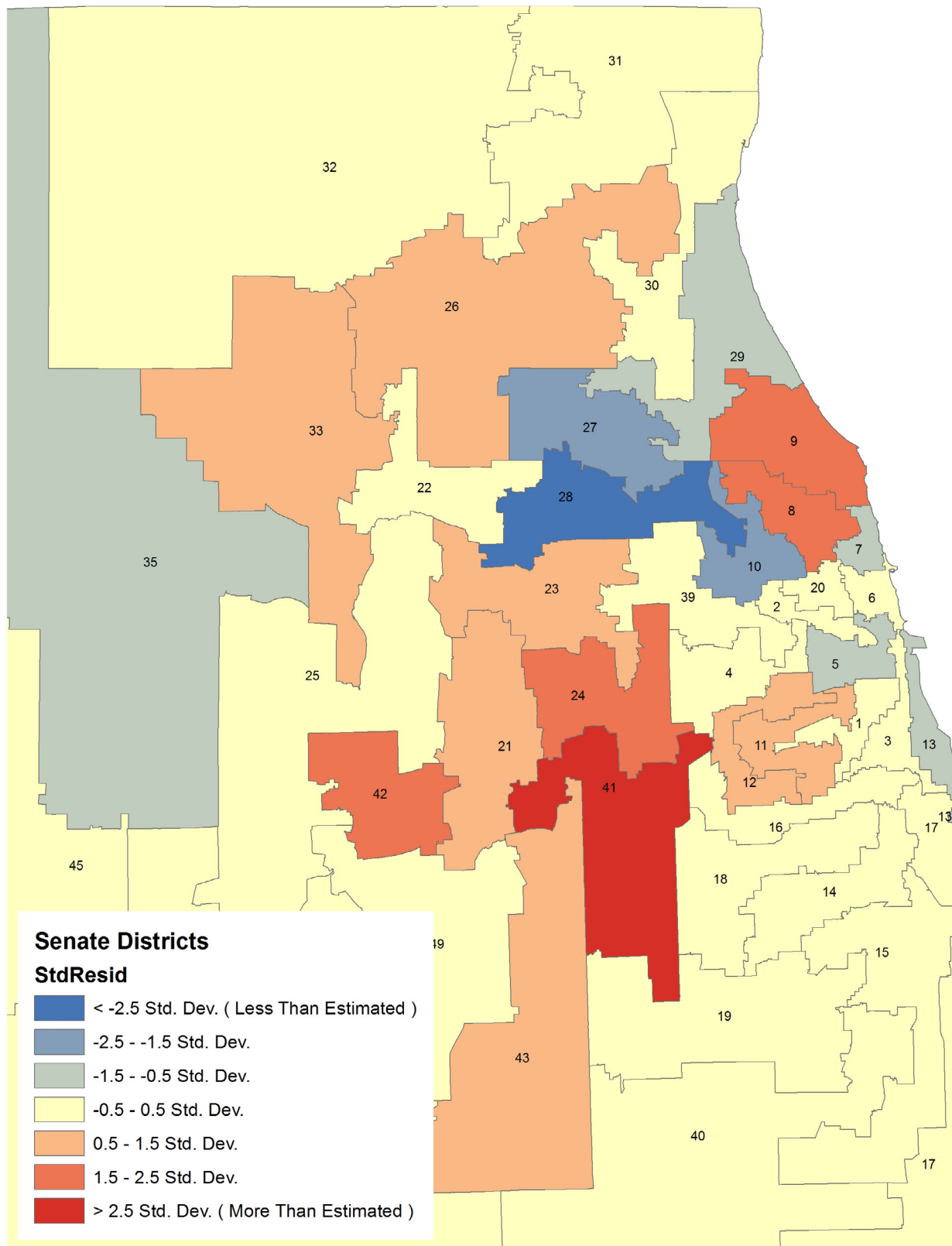


Figure 9: Illinois Senate District South Asian American Voter Registration Regression Analysis (Zoomed in)

Analysis: Congressional Districts

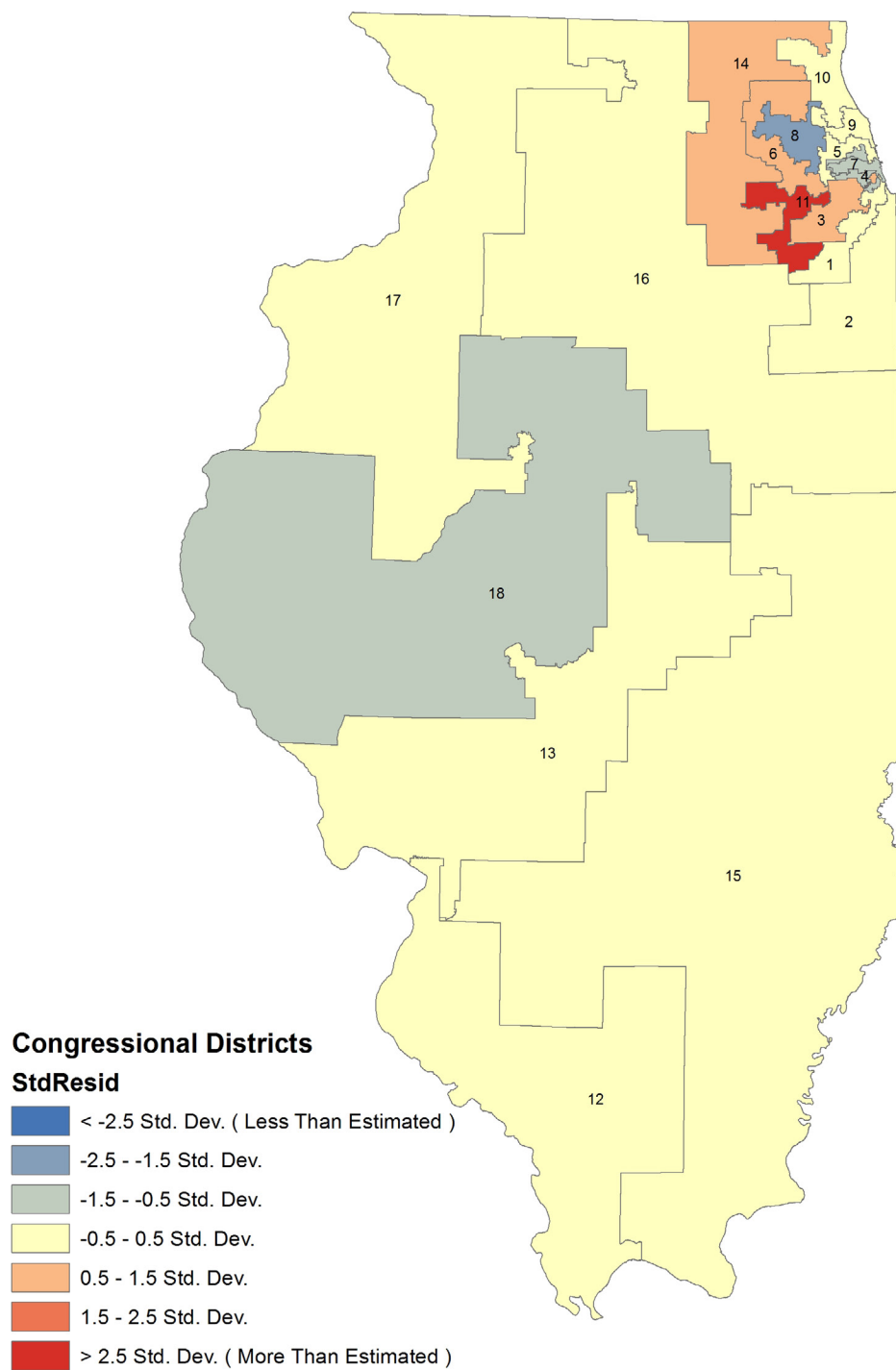


Figure 10: Illinois Congressional District South Asian American Voter Registration Regression Analysis

Analysis: Congressional Districts

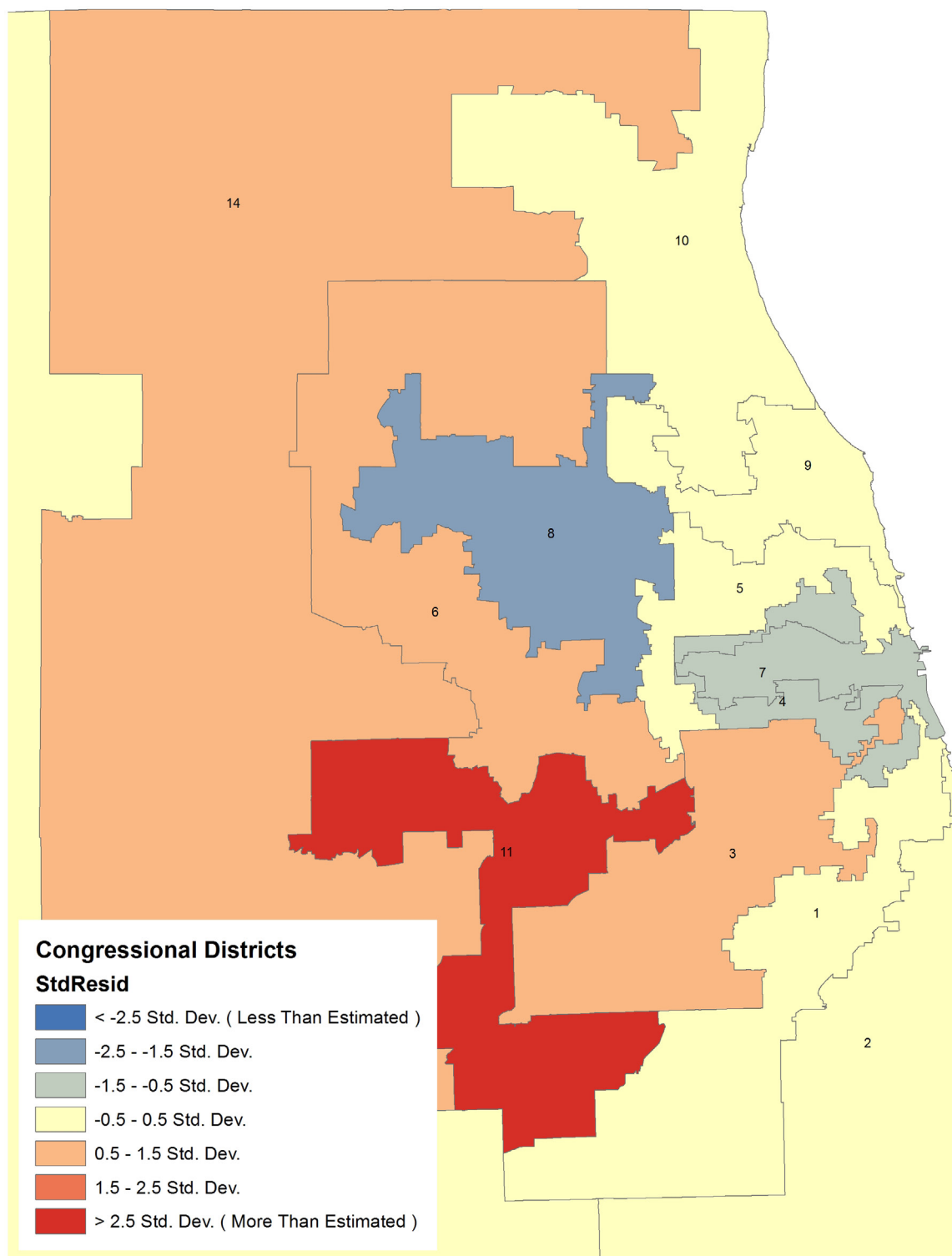


Figure 11: Illinois Congressional District South Asian American Voter Registration Regression Analysis (Zoomed in)

Analysis

Key Findings from Maps

The Chicago Ward Map ([Figure 5](#)) informs us that the 50th and 9th Wards are both shaded red. This means that these wards have a higher than expected voter registration rate for South Asians, based on the overall number of registered voters in that area and the South Asian population. The relatively high voter registration rate can further inform how an organization, community advocate, or candidate for public office engages those voters. For many geographic areas, including those with emerging populations of South Asians, it will be crucial to form or strengthen existing coalitions with allies, especially with other communities of color.

Alternatively, the 40th and 27th Wards in Chicago are shaded blue. These respective wards have a low South Asian registered voters count, based on the number of total registered voters as well as the South Asian population in those wards. This informs us that there is a large potential for voter registration efforts within South Asian communities in these wards. Organizations and individuals involved in these activities can make a targeted impact with limited resources.

[Figures 6](#) and [7](#) show us that Illinois House Districts 16, 47, and 84 that are shaded red should be targeted for voter engagement and mobilization. In comparison with general registered voters and the total South Asian population in these districts, the registration rate for South Asian is relatively high. On the contrary, Illinois House Districts 20, 43, and 55 that are shaded blue are areas that have potential for increased voter registration efforts. Similarly, Illinois Senate District 28 (shaded blue in [Figures 8](#) and [9](#)) is also an area that is ripe for voter registration. Illinois Senate District 41 (shaded red in [Figures 8](#) and [9](#)) is a strong prospect for voter activation/GOTV efforts due to the relatively high number of South Asian registered voters, compared with general registered voters and the total South Asian population.

These findings should be used to formulate and revamp civic engagement strategies, especially during this pivotal time of political and demographic changes in Illinois.

Analysis

Map of Institutions Serving the South Asian Community

In addition to the above tables and regression analysis maps, the authors have created a South Asian-Serving Institutions Google Map that can be utilized by community members and public officials to engage with organizations that are already convening South Asians. In addition, South Asian-serving organizations can form new alliances and strengthen existing coalitions to maximize civic engagement efforts, including but not limited to electoral engagement. This map and institution list includes more than 150 organizations and can be found at www.saapri.org/map.

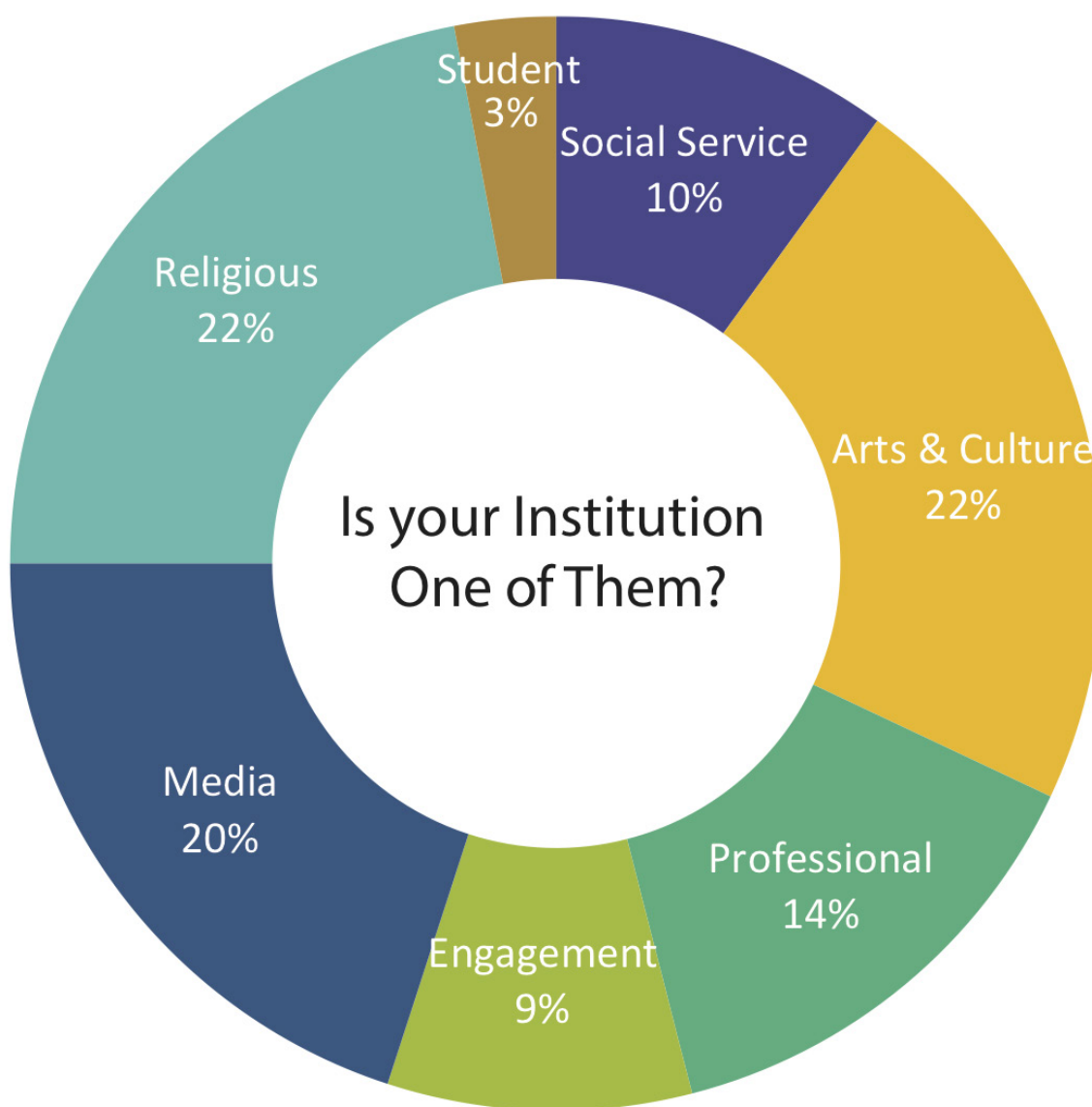


Figure 12: Distribution of South Asian-Serving Organizations in Illinois by Category

A photograph of a group of people in a meeting room. Several people are seated in the foreground, facing away from the camera towards a long table at the front of the room. The table is covered with a red cloth and has papers and a small orange cup on it. A man in a suit and green tie is seated at the table, looking down at a document. Other people are seated around the table, some looking towards the camera and others looking away. The room has large windows with blinds on the left side, letting in bright light. The floor is covered with a beige carpet. The text "BUILDING POWER & SHIFTING PARADIGM" is overlaid in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters across the center and bottom of the image.

BUILDING POWER & SHIFTING PARADIGM

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Voter Engagement

The data and analysis in this report show the great opportunity for civically engaging South Asian communities in Illinois, which will play an important role in increasing participation in local, state, and federal elections and in the electoral process in general. Through more effective electoral engagement, South Asians can more effectively address state and local issues affecting the community, including but not limited to health care access, immigrant integration, language access to government services, and safety and well being of small businesses and their workers.

Some organizations already utilize VAN and similar targeted models for their voter registration and mobilization efforts. However, there is a need for greater capacity and focus by grassroots, neighborhood, and other organizations that are involved in voter engagement. If such organizations focus their efforts by targeting political districts, the South Asian community can better leverage its potential to mobilize voters for an election and hold elected officials and candidates accountable. This report provides tools in the hope for a much more collaborative, efficient, and effective approach to state and local electoral activities for the South Asian community in Illinois.

Current political boundaries should not necessarily exist the way they do now, and South Asian community input should be considered when district lines are redrawn following the decennial Census and during discussions about reform of the redistricting process itself. Nonetheless, given that resources and influence are limited, in the meantime, community organizations should engage South Asian eligible voters in a much more targeted fashion for greater impact. Organizations should increase collaboration and strengthened alliances with existing and new partners, both within and outside the South Asian community. For some geographic areas, it will be crucial to form or strengthen coalitions with allies such as other communities of color, in order for South Asians to voice their concerns effectively.

The tables and maps above show specific areas where organizations and individuals should target South Asian voters for registration and activation. Organizations can increase voter engagement by focusing their efforts for voter registration where it is low (in other words, the areas represented in blue in the maps above) and voter mobilization or Get Out The Vote (GOTV) efforts in areas that have relatively high voter registration rates (red areas in the maps above).

Public officials and candidates, including those in the districts listed in the tables and maps above, should also utilize these maps- as well as other resources from SAAPRI and other community organizations- to learn where and how to engage South Asian Americans.

The authors hope that this report, the tables and maps, and the institution map and list supports such efforts towards building a much more civically and electorally engaged South Asian community.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Future Research

In order to better understand the complexities of civic engagement among South Asians, greater disaggregation of data is needed across various dimensions, including ethnicity, language, country of origin, age, and year of arrival to the United States.

For a more refined, comprehensive, and accurate analysis in the future, the authors strongly recommend that VAN and other similar databases provide additional categories of disaggregated data on South Asians. The voting data that was retrieved from VAN for this report did not have a category of "South Asian". Furthermore, data was only available for the two South Asian categories of Asian Indian and Pakistani, and even these ethnicity tags may be miscoded or uncoded, as discussed in greater detail above in the Introduction. Community groups must be involved in the process of collecting, reviewing, and revising VAN and other such databases going forward.

More resources are needed for future research on additional aspects of civic engagement, including analysis of eligible voter population, citizen voter population, and voting population or population that turned out to the polls.

Additional research is needed about community members' views and experiences on particular issues, as such findings will help to further target and contextualize voter registration and mobilization strategies. This issue-based research can empower voters to continue to have a voice, even after Election Day, on particular policies and programs.

Future research is needed on smaller South Asian populations in Illinois, including Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Nepali, and Bhutanese populations. Moreover, South Asians are not only from South Asia, and the diaspora also descends from past generations of South Asians who originally settled in other parts of the world, including Africa, Canada, the Caribbean, Europe, the Middle East, and other parts of Asia and the Pacific Islands. Currently available data does not sufficiently describe the unique issues facing these particular populations or the civic engagement of these communities. Efforts have been made in this report to include data on these populations where feasible, but SAAPRI also remains open to input from these and other communities on information needs.

The diversity of the South Asian population in terms of language and culture, along with the geographic distribution of South Asian voters across various neighborhoods and suburbs within Illinois, poses great challenges and opportunities for community-based research and engagement. In order to successfully incorporate the voices of a broad spectrum of South Asian voters, future research should have greater involvement of multiple community-based organizations and a significant commitment of time and resources to carry out the work in a coordinated and effective manner. Accordingly, communities need more resources to carry out such community-based research and provide even greater insights into how to effectively engage South Asians in Illinois.

Voter Registration, Activation, & Engagement In South Asian American Communities In Illinois

February 2015