

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Don Nakanishi, Ph.D.
UCLA Asian American Studies Center
3230 Campbell Hall, 405 Hilgard Avenue
Los Angeles, California 90095-1546
Phone: (310) 825-2974
dtm@ucla.edu

The New “Sleeping Giant” in California Politics: The Growth of Asian Americans

Los Angeles, CA (September 6, 2006) – In the 1980s and 1990s, Hispanics were considered the “sleeping giant” in California politics because of their growing numbers. Asian Americans are now the new “sleeping giant” and are at a point where Hispanics were about two decades ago.¹ They have significantly increased their potential power at the polls in California, according to an analysis conducted by researchers affiliated with the UCLA Asian American Studies Center and with the UC AAPI (Asian American & Pacific Islander) Policy Initiative. The analysis uses data from the 2005 American Community Survey (ACS) released on August 15 and 29, 2006 by the U.S. Census Bureau, along with previously released data from the Census Bureau.²

The number of Asian Americans in California eligible to register to vote (citizens who are 18 and older) climbed by over a half million between 2000 and 2005, from 2 million to 2.5 million. The Asian American share of the a proportion of the state's population eligible to register as voters increased from 10% to 12% during this time period.

Two factors behind the emergence of the new “sleeping giant” are the overall increase in the total Asian American population and the higher rate of citizenship. Between 2000 and 2005, the number of Asian Americans residing in California’s households increased from 3.8 million to 4.7 million, accounting for 38% of the net gain of 2.2 million persons in California’s population.³

¹ In 1990, Hispanics made up 14% of adult citizens in California. In 2005, Asian Americans approach that level, with 12% of California’s adult citizens. See Table 2: Percentages of California adults who are eligible to register to vote by race.

² See technical note.

³ The 2005 American Community Survey covered only individuals living in households, that is, it excluded those living in institutions, college dormitories, and other group quarters. In California, Asian Americans represented over 13.4% of the total population in 2005, an increase from 11.8% in 2000. California’s population grew by 2.2 million (33 million to 35.2 million), with the Asian American population growing by over 850,000 (3.8 million to 4.7 million). Nationally, the Asian American percentage of the nation's population grew from 4% to 4.8%, an increase of over 3 million Asian Americans (10.8 million to 13.8 million). The national population increased by over 14 million persons, with Asian Americans accounting for more than 20% of this national population increase.

Along with population growth, Asian Americans experienced an increase in their citizenship rate -- 71% of Asian American adults are U.S. citizens by birth or naturalization, representing an increase from 67% in 2000.⁴ These figures show that Asian Americans are not an alien population, but a population that has become fully integrated into American society through citizenship.

The growth in the potential Asian American electorate over the last five years is a continuation of a pattern that began in the 1990s. In 1990, there were slightly more than one million Asian American adult citizens, comprising about 6% of all adult citizens in the state.⁵ If recent trends continue, there will be over 3 million Asian American adults eligible to register to vote by the end of the decade, making up about 14% of all Californians eligible to register.

The growth in the absolute number of Asian Americans and those eligible to become voters can have political ramifications. California State Assembly Member Judy Chu states that the overall growth of the Asian American population will open up new opportunities and challenges:

“The incredible growth of Asian Americans in California and in the United States brings as much opportunity as it does challenges. Asian Americans continue to contribute to the cultural diversity and economic success of this nation, but the growing population also means that public services and elected representation will need to grow to accommodate the unique needs of our community.”

Community leaders point to the potential impact on a number of public policy issues. Vivian Huang, Legislative Advocate of Asian Americans for Civil Rights & Equality, states,

“With increasing population growth, Asian Americans are poised to dramatically escalate their political representation and power in politics and highlight key issues important to the community, such as civil rights, immigrant rights, and access to language assistance.”

This opinion is widely shared by other community leaders, including Lisa Hasegawa (Executive Director of the National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development), JD Hokoyama (President & CEO of Leadership Education for Asian Pacifics, Inc.), and Elena Ong (former member, California Commission for Women).

According to Professor Don Nakanishi, a political scientist and director of UCLA’s Asian American Studies Center,

"This growth has contributed to the increasing number of Asian American state and local elected officials in California and nationwide. The Asian American political infrastructure of voters, donors, politicians, and community groups has

⁴ See Graph 1.

⁵ See Graph 2.

also undergone remarkable growth and maturation, and will likely have an increasingly significant impact on state and national politics."

However, there are still barriers to fully translating the population numbers into voting power. According to Paul Ong, an economist and professor in UCLA's School of Public Affairs, "The challenge is to convert the growing numbers of Asian American citizens into voters." Previous research and data for California from the 2002 and 2004 November Current Population Survey show that Asian American citizens are less likely to register and vote than non-Hispanic whites and African Americans.⁶ (See Table 3.)

For the upcoming November elections, community activists have focused on voter registration and voter-turnout drives. David Lee, Executive Director of the Chinese American Voters Education Committee, notes

"Our bilingual voter registration efforts are yielding record numbers of Asian American voters in the immigrant community. Thanks to absentee ballots Asian American voter turnout has been growing rapidly."

Leading Asian American scholars believe that this group can become an effective voting bloc by formulating a common political agenda both among Asian Americans and across racial lines. The Asian American population is culturally, linguistically and economically heterogeneous. Despite these divisions, Professor Yen Le Espiritu, a sociologist in the department of Ethnic Studies at UC San Diego notes that, "history has shown that Asian Americans can overcome differences to build viable pan-Asian political coalitions to promote and protect both their individual and their united interests." Moreover, Professor Michael Omi, professor of Ethnic Studies at UC Berkeley, predicts, "different racial and ethnic groups will increasingly see the necessity of defining areas of common political concern and mobilizing significant voter blocs to wield political power."

The UCLA Asian American Studies Center is the nation's leading research center in the field of Asian American Studies and houses a Census Information Center, which will continue to analyze data from the ACS as they become available.

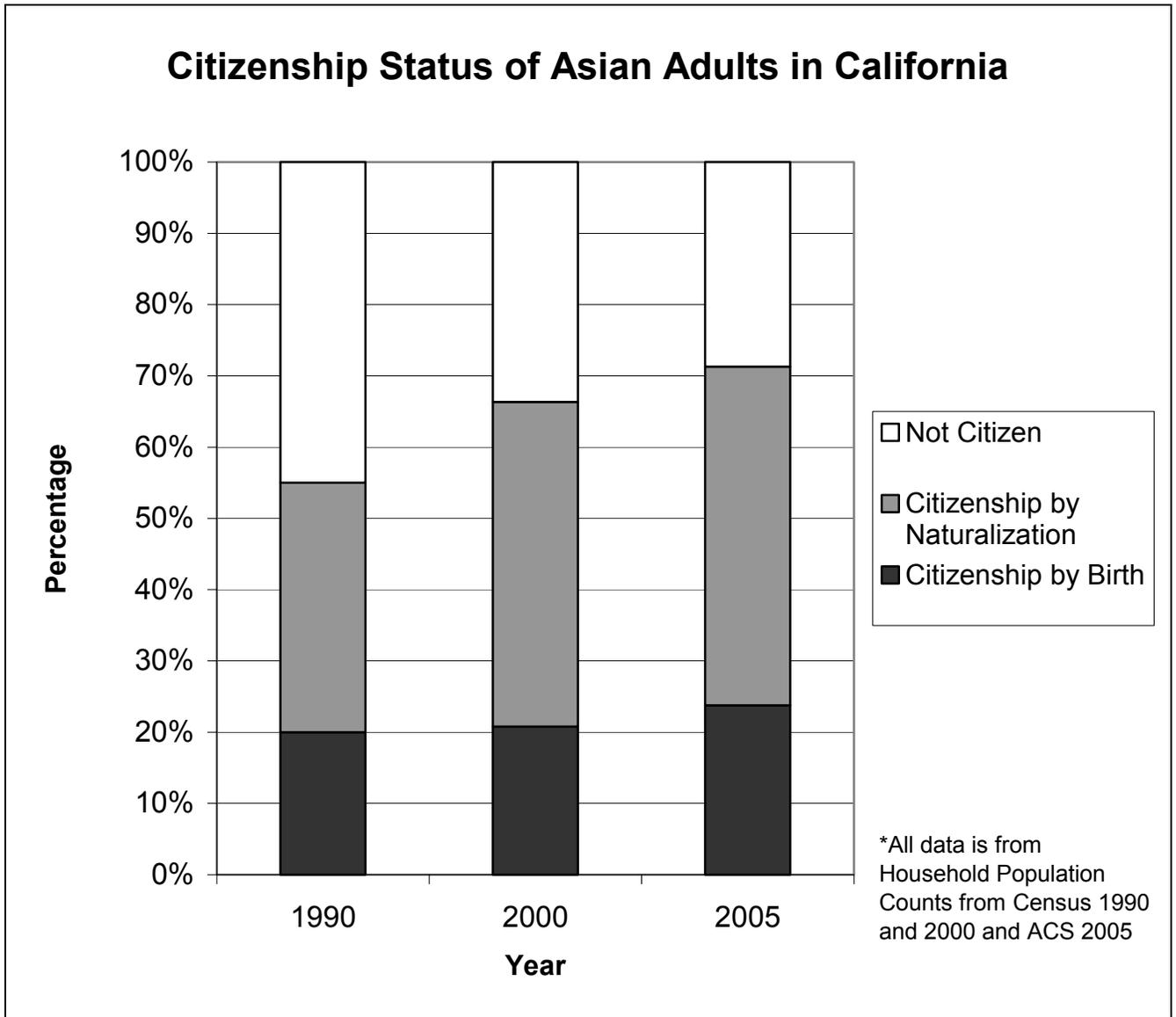
The UC AAPI Policy Initiative brings together University of California researchers and community organizations to conduct research focusing on the policy concerns of the AAPI community.

Attachments: Graphs; Tables; Technical Note; Contact Sheet

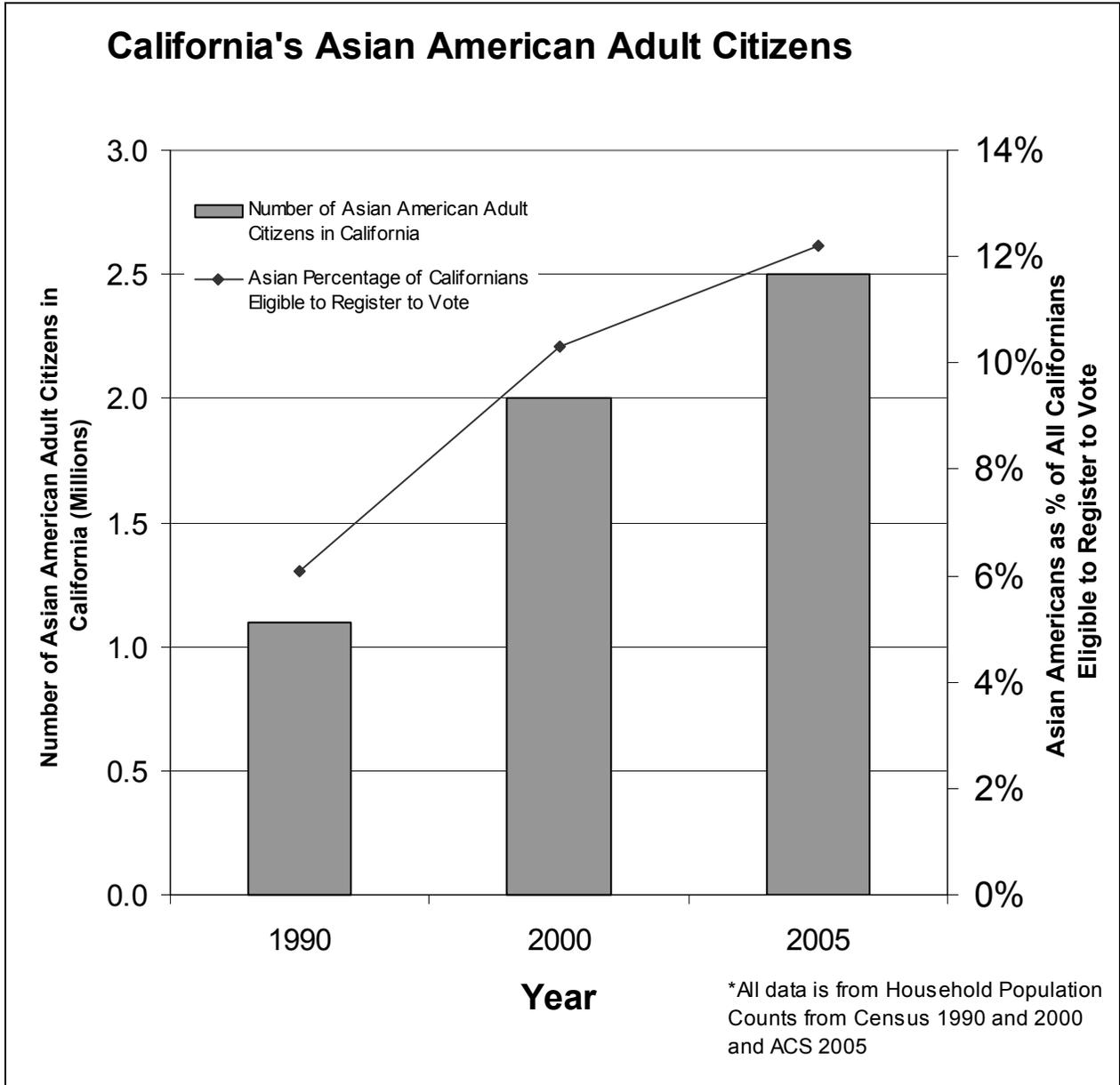
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⁶ The national statistics for Asian American citizens are very similar, and there is very little difference in the statistics for U.S. born Asian American citizens and naturalized Asian Americans.

Graph 1



Graph 2



Tables

Table 1: Citizenship Status of Asian Adults in California

	1990	2000	2005
Citizenship by Birth	20%	21%	24%
Citizenship by Naturalization	35%	46%	48%
Not Citizen	45%	34%	29%

*All data is from Household Population Counts from Census 1990 and 2000 and ACS 2005. Asians includes those who self report as Asian only or in combination with other races. Total percentages can sum to more than 100% due to rounding. For single-race Asian adults, 21% are citizens by birth, 50% are naturalized, and 30% are not citizens.

Table 2: Distribution of Californian Adult Citizens by Race

	1990	2000	2005
Non-Hispanic White	71%	61%	57%
Asian	6%	10%	12%
Black	8%	8%	7%
Hispanic	14%	19%	22%
Other	1%	2%	2%

*All data is from Household Population Counts from Census 1990 and 2000 and ACS 2005. Total percentages can sum to more than 100% due to rounding. Asians includes those who self report as Asian only or in combination with other races.

Table 3: Registration and Voting Rates of California's Adult Citizens

	Registered	Voted	Not Registered
Non-Hispanic White	71%	59%	29%
Asian	52%	40%	48%
Black	64%	52%	36%
Hispanic	54%	40%	46%

*Pooled November 2002 and 2004 Current Population Survey. Total percentages can sum to more than 100% due to rounding.

Technical Note

The statistics in this press release are based on tabulations of the 5% Public Use Micro Samples from the 1990 and 2000 Census, the Public Use Micro Sample from the 2005 American Community Survey, and the voting supplements of the November 2002 and 2004 Current Population Survey. To adjust for differences in coverage (the Census includes persons in group quarters and the ACS does not), the analysis includes tabulations decennial data for only the population residing in households. Those eligible to register to vote are defined as individuals 18 years or older and citizens by birth or by naturalization. Because the Bureau of the Census uses two questions to collect information on ethnicity and race, the following hierarchical procedure is used to create exclusive categories:

- 1.) Anyone who self reported being Black (Black alone or in combination with one or more other races) is classified as Black; then
- 2.) Anyone who self reported being Asian (Asian alone or in combination with one or more other races) is classified as Asian; then
- 3.) Anyone who self reported being Hispanic is classified as Hispanic; then
- 4.) Anyone who self reported being White alone and did not report to be Hispanic is classified as being non-Hispanic White; and then
- 5) Anyone else is classified as Other.

The analysis for this press release was conducted by Professor Paul Ong, and the press release was prepared with the assistance of Elena Ong, Oiyen (Anita) Poon, Don Nakanishi, Elsa Scheven, Veronica Terriquez, and Christina Lee.

Contact Sheet

Assemblymember Judy Chu
Capitol Office
State Capitol
P.O. Box 942849
Sacramento, CA 94249-0049
Phone: 916-319-2049
FAX: 916-319-2149
Assemblymember.chu@asm.ca.gov

Yen Le Espiritu, Ph.D.
Professor, Ethnic Studies
University of California, San Diego
9500 Gilman Dr.
La Jolla, CA 92054
(858) 534-5206
yespirit@weber.ucsd.edu

Lisa Hasegawa
Executive Director, National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development
1001 Connecticut Ave., NW, Suite 730
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: (202) 223-2442
FAX: (202) 223-4144
lisa@nationalcapacd.org
<http://www.nationalcapacd.org>

JD Hokoyama
President & CEO of Leadership Education for Asian Pacifics, Inc. (LEAP)
327 E. 2nd Street, Suite # 226
Los Angeles, CA 90012
Phone: (213) 485-1422
FAX: (213) 485-0050
jdh@leap.org
<http://www.leap.org>

Vivian Huang
Legislative Advocate, Asian Americans for Civil Rights & Equality
1225 8th Street, Suite 590
Sacramento, CA 95814
Phone: (916) 321-9001
FAX: (916) 448-6774
vhuang@caasf.org

David Lee
Executive Director
Chinese American Voter Education Committee
838 Grant Avenue #403
San Francisco, CA 94108
415.397.8133
Fax. 415.397.8153

Don T. Nakanishi, Ph.D.
Director and Professor
UCLA Asian American Studies Center
3230 Campbell Hall
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1546
Phone: (310) 825-2974
FAX: (310) 206-9844
dtm@ucla.edu
<http://www.aasc.ucla.edu>

Michael Omi, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, Ethnic Studies Department
UC Berkeley
592 Barrows Hall
Phone: (510) 643-8744
omi@berkeley.edu

Elena Ong
Former Member, California Commission for Women
Phone: (310) 948-2947
elena.ong.1@gmail.com

Paul Ong, Ph.D.
Professor, School of Public Affairs and Asian American Studies
3320 Public Policy Building
University of California, Los Angeles
Los Angeles, CA 90095
pmong@ucla.edu