

18MR

# ONLINE FORMATIONS: ASIAN AMERICAN DIGITAL POLITICS



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# AN INVITATION

We launched this survey over a year ago in the early spring of 2019. If we were to send the exact same survey out today, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and continued uprisings against ongoing police violence and the movement for Black Lives, we would venture to guess our results about the Asian American online political landscape would be different. We might see policing and mass incarceration as an even higher priority policy issue, as well as upticks in interest for policies around healthcare, labor, and housing. At a time where our personal, political, and professional lives primarily inhabit virtual spaces, the questions around platforms and applications used on a daily basis may change as people have incorporated new methods of communication into their day-to-day routines. Where half of our respondents spent around 2-6 hours online in one day, this duration has likely gone up.

However, the way a particular participant responds to a survey tool can also change within a given day or a week. A survey archives collective moments of interaction and interpretation. So what can we learn from older data? We created this survey with the underlying assumption that Asian American political lives in digital environments continue to be robust and varied, encompassing a myriad of tools, issues, and practices. This survey both confirms that assumption and also reveals the inheritances of Asian American online politics in the last decade—the orientations and positioning of Asian America as a political formation.

Over half the respondents had used or followed #Asians4BlackLives and #NotYourModelMinority. 2019 comes in the wake of the 2014 Black Lives Matter protests, including the murder of Akai Gurley by Chinese American NYPD officer Peter Liang and marked one moment when Asian Americans publicly engaged in online conversations about anti-Blackness within our communities and interrogated the role of the model minority myth.

Yet, we also have shorter memories of our digital activist histories. While 56% of participants had used or followed #MeToo, widely circulated through 2017, only 8.7% of participants had used or followed the hashtag #YesAllWomen, a 2014 hashtag that also indexed personal stories of gender-based harassment and violence. This data marks a point of political engagement situated in a longer lineage. The current report offered makes a case for ways digital culture plays a role in how people locate, change, and evolve their orientations to politics given their personal experiences, backgrounds, and histories. Beyond that, I think what we offer is a rumination on how community-based data can be collected and analyzed.

We hope you might find something here. For example, in the data on gender, there's a qualitative richness in the languages used by Asian Americans to describe their gender identities. We share these methodologies and materials with you as an open invitation to use and repurpose these tools and data.

DOWNLOAD THE DATA AT  
[ASIANAMERICANDIGITALPOLITICS.COM](http://ASIANAMERICANDIGITALPOLITICS.COM)

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## Online Formations:

### Asian American Digital Politics

By Dr. Rachel Kuo, Bianca Nozaki-Nasser, and Turner Willman

This report is part of a collaborative project on Asian American politics and digital technologies between 18 Million Rising and Rachel Kuo (Center for Information, Technology, and Public Life at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill) and supported by the Asian/Pacific/American Institute at NYU.



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# OVERVIEW & PROJECT GOALS

## HOW DO ASIAN AMERICANS & PACIFIC ISLANDERS (AA/PI)\* CREATE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CHANGE IN DIGITAL SPACES?

This collaborative research project between 18 Million Rising (18MR) and Dr. Rachel Kuo (Postdoctoral Fellow, Center for Information, Technology, and Public Life at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill) investigates Asian American and Pacific Islander political formations in digital spaces.

18MR's ongoing work in racial justice activism and movement technologies spans across multiple areas of work: digital content and cultural production, organizing actions and campaigns, hosting events, digital collaborations and partnerships with other groups and organizations, creating technology for social justice, and much more. This collaboration brings together 18MR's digital organizing expertise with Kuo's ongoing research on collective Asian/American politics and the role of technologies in shaping racial politics with the aim of creating new ways for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders to organize online.

Together, we created a survey to assess the landscape of Asian American and Pacific Islander politics in relation to contemporary social movements and digital technologies. We asked participants how they use technology as a place for political community and organizing.

The survey was divided into four sections: 1) demographic information; 2) political engagement; 3) specific engagement with 18MR; 4) and digital technology use. We asked participants what campaigns they've participated in and how; how much time they spent online and what devices and platforms they used most often.

This digital report brings together initial results from survey findings with interviews with 30 Asian American leaders and organizers on racial politics, movement building, and technology use. Names presented in this report have been changed.

## PROJECT GOALS INCLUDED:

- 1 Evaluate different digital tools for organizing and online campaigns, as well as better understand how online spaces shape political engagement
- 2 Identify opportunities and challenges for political education and coalition building
- 3 Assess current and potential political engagement with digital-first organizing campaigns
- 4 Understand how digital technologies create places for community, coalition, and organizing

### \*NOTES ON TERMINOLOGY - AA/PI:

*"The names that we humans call ourselves and that others call us are politically, culturally, and spiritually meaningful to the development of both individual and group identities, and to activism performed from and through those identities."*

- Lisa Kahaleole Hall

In the original data collection for this report, we used AA/PI as shorthand to denote "Asian American and Pacific Islanders". At times, we shift to "Asian American" to describe this study given the majority of respondents reflected in the results.

There are fundamental differences between different Pacific Islander and Asian American groups. In 2019, 18MR actively stopped using the acronym AAPI, and have shifted our language to focus solely on Asian Americans. This is an attempt to productively engage with rather than try to incorporate the Pacific. This distinction also recognizes the specific differences between Asian America and Indigenous Pacific Islander sovereignty, land claims, and histories of U.S. colonialism (Kehaulani Kauanui 2008) as well as maintains the potential for political coalition. Pacific Islander is a significant racial category for our comrades fighting for social and political recognition and resources. We look to follow PI leadership to engage with and lead on issues impact on Pacific Islanders.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## 1. ASIAN AMERICA IS A POLITICAL FORMATION.

**"Adopting Asian American was a statement about my politics."**

Kristin, Technologist and Digital Storyteller

**"Asian America is an evolving construct and idea. It provides us with an anchor to unify together and offers a mobilizing home politically. Asian America can't hold all of our different identities and experiences in and of itself. It's important for different Asian communities to organize themselves."**

Jackie, Anti-Gentrification Cultural Organizer

## 2. RESPONDENTS MOBILIZE THEIR IDENTITY AS A POLITICAL HOME ONLINE.

**85%** of respondents who strongly agreed and agreed that they identified as Asian American, Pacific Islander, and/or with their diasporic and ethnic identities use the Internet to learn more about their identity.

**88%** of these same respondents use the Internet to learn more about social movements.

**97%** participate in movements in their local communities.

## 3. CAMPAIGNS SHOULD REFLECT THE INTERSECTIONS OF DIFFERENT ISSUES.

Respondents had many overlapping political interests, with immigration, policing, and the environment as the top three areas of interest. 63% participants identified both immigration and policing as important policy areas.

## 4. ONLINE SPACES MAY NOT ALWAYS BE CONDUCIVE TO SUSTAINING ENGAGEMENT.

Out of the 77.1% of respondents who have left a platform, over half left in order to take a break.

Respondents included mental health as a reason for leaving, sharing experiences of being overwhelmed and depressed in using a platform. One respondent described their experience as "social media re-traumatization" in regularly seeing racist posts.

**WHO IS REPRESENTED IN THIS DATA?** This survey reflects 475 unique responses primarily representing self-identified Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders already engaged in some form of politics through digital platforms. The survey was distributed through the communications platforms of 18 Million Rising, the Asian American Feminist Collective, and the Asian/Pacific/American Institute at NYU, as well as other community partners who reflect leftist and progressive politics. Over half of the respondents accessed the survey through an email list and 42% accessed the survey through a social media platform.

**76.9%** identify as Asian American.

**9.5%** identify as Pacific Islander.

**68.4%** identify with their diasporic identities.

**54.6%** are between the ages of 23-35.

**63.5%** have attended events, workshops and/or trainings about Asian American political identity.

# METHODOLOGIES & PROCESS

## COMMUNITY-BASED SURVEY DESIGN & THE POLITICS OF DATA:

In developing the survey tool, we had a focused discussion on how we collected demographic data, particularly information on ethnic/racial identity, gender, socioeconomic class, age, and location.

Our considerations reflect observations from our communities, where people have felt excluded<sup>1</sup> and limited by existing data categorization options. For example, Arab Americans have shared that the U.S. census refuses to recognize them<sup>2</sup>.

Asian American communities have also called for data disaggregation<sup>3</sup>, the collection and reporting of data by detailed subgroups, as a means to better advocate for underserved communities. For example, Asian American and Pacific Islander communities have highly variable socioeconomic indicators<sup>4</sup> around income, education, and employment, and aggregated data obscures vast disparities in wealth and access and can render the needs of specific communities invisible<sup>5</sup>.

We aimed to develop categories based on communities' languages for self-description, afford community specificity, and expand understandings of who 'counts' as Asian American and Pacific Islander.

For racial/ethnic identities, we offered 36 categories across nations, geographies, and diasporas connected to the continent of Asia, as well as categories of Black, Hispanic, Latina/o/x, and White. Survey participants could use multiple check-boxes to indicate as many categories of identification. Yet, identity categories transcend defined boundaries.

They're formed in the contexts of longer histories of imperialism and migration. They transform over time. In filling out their own identities, people included their ethnicities within regions and

localities, such as Mon, Bicolano, and Peranakan; multiracial and mixed race as identities; diasporic identities outside of Asia, including the Caribbean and the Middle East; and additional categories of identification, such as Korean adoptees. We also asked participants the degree to which they identified with categories, including Asian American, Pacific Islander, and their diasporic and/or ethnic identities to better understand the depth of identity-based affiliations.

There are many reasons someone may click an identity on a form, such as it's what has been externally socially and/or culturally reinforced. However, someone may check off their identity as Asian while also simultaneously strongly disagreeing with the statement "I identify as Asian American." The question on degree of identity affiliation allows participants to indicate the saliency of an identity category.

For gender, categories in survey design have often limited available options<sup>6</sup> within the binary of 'female and male' (and 'other'). Or, even when gender categories become expanded during data collection, they can become re-sorted into the binary system<sup>7</sup>.

On our form, we used an open 'type your answer here' response format for gender. While many participants utilized dominant languages (ex: 'female and male') for identifying sex and gender, other participants drew on social, political, and cultural terms for gender identity. Participants used an array of language to describe gender fluidity, including genderqueer, nonbinary, they/them, and two-spirit. Some participants identified themselves as cis- or trans-; others used Asian languages to describe their gender. Some participants also wrote in refusals to share the information.

When discussing whether to collect information about socioeconomic status, we realized we didn't specifically want to ask about income range. What we really wanted to know was someone's educational background and access,

particularly access to political education. Rather than ask about someone's formal education (ex: high school, college, graduate school), we ended up framing questions about participation in community-based workshops and youth programs and access to Ethnic Studies and Asian American Studies courses at the undergraduate and graduate level. We also asked about people's participation in cultural and political organizations and volunteer work.

Our survey design reflected our experiences and observations within our communities and the complicated ways that people choose to identify (or not) with specific data categories.

## FOOTNOTES:

<sup>1</sup> Godfrey Santos Plata (2019) "Not All Asian Americans Are the Same. So Why Do School Data Treat Us That Way?" Ed Week, <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2019/07/24/not-all-asian-americans-are-the-same.html>

<sup>2</sup> Moustafa Bayoumi (2019) "I'm a brown Arab-American, and the US census refuses to recognize me." The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/feb/14/arab-american-census-america-racism>

<sup>3</sup> "Data Disaggregation and Asian Americans in the U.S. Census." (2017) Asian Americans Advancing Justice, <https://www.advancingjustice-aaajc.org/publication/data-disaggregation-and-asian-americans-us-census>

<sup>4</sup> Christian Edlagan and Kavya Vaghul (2017) "How data disaggregation matters for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders." Washington Center for Equitable Growth, <https://equitablegrowth.org/how-data-disaggregation-matters-for-asian-americans-and-pacific-islanders/>

<sup>5</sup> Charmaine Runes (2017) "'Invisibility is an unnatural disaster': Why funding the 2020 Census matters for Pacific Islanders." UrbanWire, <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/invisibility-unnatural-disaster-why-funding-2020-census-matters-pacific-islanders>

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Bergner (2019) "The Struggles of Rejecting the Gender Binary." New York Times, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/04/magazine/gender-nonbinary.html>

<sup>7</sup> Rena Bivens (2015) "The gender binary will not be deprogrammed: Ten years of coding gender on Facebook." New Media and Society 19(6): 880-898. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444815621527>

## ON COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS:

### Relationships before research:

I remember 18 Million Rising when they first launched in 2012. I was living in the Midwest and hadn't yet started graduate school. I primarily looked to the Internet as a place for political education and found 18MR, an online organization that used technology and social media for organizing Asian Americans.

I was also spending a lot of time on Twitter (I've been on the platform for over 10 years now) and found different friends in Asian American politics. When I moved to New York City, some of the people I 'met' via Twitter years ago eventually became close friends and collaborators. Some of these people were also staff alum or contributors to 18MR over the years.

Networks can be many interconnected threads of relationships built over time.

In 2015, I was working on my first research project on the Internet and racial justice and invited Cayden, their then-New Media Director for a campus panel on net neutrality and racial justice. However, it wasn't until 2018 that I was starting my dissertation project on digital technologies and solidarities that I reached back out more formally to Cayden, who is now the Executive Director.

Along the way, I'd continued following their different campaigns and often looked to them as a source of political analysis. I was in a post-proposal and pre-dissertation writing stage wondering 'what comes next?' and hoping to ground my research in ongoing community projects. We had our first conversation about a potential research collaboration in San Francisco at a conference in the spring, and touched base again in Detroit later that summer at different conference.

It wasn't until the fall that a potential opportunity for a specific project emerged.

## METHODOLOGIES & PROCESS

Cayden introduced me to Bianca, who at the time was re-designing the 18MR website. Beyond aesthetic changes, a website re-design also changes the organizing structure and logics of a site especially as an organization has grown or transformed.

We discussed mutual goals for how a survey could support this process and ended up with two key questions: *Who currently makes up 'Asian American politics' and how can we expand that? What political issue areas, themes, and topics were people interested in? How were people engaging with digital media technologies as places to build community and enact politics?*

The survey tool would be a way to assess the landscape of Asian American online politics, evaluate the impact of different digital tools, and identify opportunities and challenges in digital organizing.

### **Process over output:**

I want to offer some meticulous details of putting together the survey; my research on social movements emphasizes processes—the work of networking—as a feminist intervention on results-oriented studies of politics. In that vein, I also want to uplift administrative and collective labor as part of research methodologies.

The survey tool itself took several months to design and launch. After working with Bianca, I was also introduced to Turner and Laura. For several months, prior to distributing the survey tool, we had a series of meetings and drafted and edited questions in multiple iterations and revisions of Google docs. We had documents outlining timelines and tasks. I applied for a small grant administered by an institute run by a small staff of women that also took time and labor in processing receipts and organizing my paperwork.

We sent a sample survey to other academic friends and collaborators to give feedback. Bianca carefully inputted all the survey questions from a Google doc into our survey tool. In developing

a survey distribution plan, she also created graphics and we held conversations on what kinds of images and language we would use because textual and visual representation has an impact on outreach when it comes to a political community as diverse as Asian America.

We leveraged expertise on organizing digital campaigns to launch the research tool: Turner, social media organizer, worked on a media toolkit and Laura, campaign manager, created email campaigns.

I think we need to un-romanticize the image of a scrappy solo researcher. Most community research is underfunded and under-resourced, and most community partners are often understaffed. Making something happen requires time, labor, and resources that aren't always there.

I can be impatient and want to jump into action right away. In a field that primarily values outputs, there's rarely a place for projects left dormant for long periods. Yet, sometimes these periods of inertness can spark other things.

Since the start of the survey project, Bianca, Laura, and I, as well as another friend, have partnered to do workshops at different conferences. Over a period of ten months, Turner, Bianca, and Laura and I also worked on a network gathering with the Asian American Feminist Collective for the 2020 Allied Media Conference. These relationships can also continue seeding new ideas. In one of the planning meetings this past spring, after the gatherings had to go virtual, we were discussing how to create intimacy over platforms like Zoom. As both of us taking notes in a Google doc, Bianca wrote me a quick message, *'This seems in line with your research.'*

Community-based research is often like a slow burn. The relationships have to come first before the research and the research alone shouldn't be the sole basis of the relationships. It's an ongoing process of building that requires alternate models of what we consider valuable and how we understand how knowledge gets produced.





# KEY FINDINGS: AA/PI AS POLITICAL FORMATION

***“Adopting Asian American was a statement about my politics.” - Kristin, Technologist and Digital Storyteller***

In better understanding how Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AA/PI) navigate politics online, we first examined how people identified with AA/PI as categories of racial and ethnic identity. In the survey, participants were able to choose from 36 racial and ethnic identity categories and apply multiple categories. Beyond identifying with specific identities, we asked the degree of identification with ‘Asian American’, ‘Pacific Islander’, and specific diasporic and ethnic communities.

**76.9% IDENTIFIED AS ‘ASIAN AMERICAN’**

**9.3% IDENTIFIED AS ‘PACIFIC ISLANDER’**

**68.3% IDENTIFIED WITH THEIR DIASPORIC/ETHNIC IDENTITIES**

We also found that 85% of participants who strongly agreed and agreed that they identified as Asian American, Pacific Islander, and/or with their diasporic and ethnic identities use the Internet to learn more about their identity. 88% of these same participants use the Internet to learn more about social movements and 97% of locally participate in movements in their communities (62% participate always or frequently participate and 35% occasionally participate).

Categories of racial and ethnic identity function as political formations. AA/PI offers a political home and way for people to come together around issues. Digital media-based organizing can offer political education opportunities for people to connect personal experiences around identity to broader issues and also mobilize within their local communities. However, how people find political meaning within AA/PI constantly changes and evolves.

We are interested in how digital culture plays a role in these shifts, particularly as communications and information practices continue to shift and modulate Asian America as a construct.

We found that 46.7% of participants identified ‘Asian’ as at least one of their ethnic/racial identities (only 7 people identified Asian as their only race/ethnic identity). 33.3% of participants identified as Chinese, making up the largest percentage of participants.

Our survey was circulated under the title, ‘ARE YOU AN AAPI ACTIVIST?’ In this vein, results seem to reflect observations and criticisms that ‘Asian America’ as a category has a tendency to be overrepresented by East Asians, particularly people with Chinese ethnic backgrounds. The erasure of South and Southeast Asians as well as the specific needs of Pacific Islanders in dominant discourses around Asian American and Pacific Islander politics may contribute to the degree of how different people identify with ‘AA/PI’ and shape how people find meaning (or lack thereof) within this category.

Future studies of interest may be further examining the significance of identity categories without simplifying or obscuring complex intergenerational and transnational geopolitics of different Asian diasporic communities.



# KEY FINDINGS: AA/PI AS POLITICAL FORMATION

## MEDIA CULTURE AND POLITICAL HISTORIES:

Asian America has been created through a process in which people understand, circulate, and express ideas to articulate politics. Asian America as a political and ideological formation comes from its relative position, or rather, negotiating and using points of connection across difference to stage new social and political positions.

Stuart Hall (1986) describes this political articulation as “a movement of people”. For example, Karen Ishizuka (2016) describes how Chinese, Japanese, and Filipinx Americans came together as ‘Asian Americans’ during the Civil Rights movement and against the Vietnam War by linking together the histories of Chinese railroad workers, Filipino cannery and farm workers, and interned Japanese Americans.

Asian America is *socially produced*—including from government policies, mainstream media outlets, and Asian American grassroots media. Laura Hyun Yi Kang (2002) troubles the politics and problematics of naming, identifying, representing, and categorizing the subject of ‘Asian/American’ to demonstrate the instability and inadequacy of generic delineations of individuality and collectivity.

Forms of ‘naming’ legitimized institutional, economic, and state investments in Asian America that have both demanded and imposed a coherent identity and legibility.

Discursively forged, Asian America is what Kandice Chuh (2003) describes as a “deliberate and self-reflexive term [that] calls attention to the workings of language, to its structures and functions.” Lisa Lowe (1996) draws upon Hall to discuss how identity is both a matter of ‘becoming’—Asian American cultural, political, and social practices produce identity, and the processes that produce identity are always incomplete and constituted relationally.

Lowe characterizes Asian America as “heterogeneous, hybrid, and multiple”—her understanding of “differential relationships within a bounded category” and “social relations multiply determined by the contradictions of capitalism” provide a useful way to map out Asian America as a political formation grounded in a material history about migration and labor.

The history of Asian America as a political formation insists upon both racial and class consciousness in progressive politics. Asian American political identity faces the tension between homogenizing pan-ethnicity and navigating the diversity of nationally defined ethnic self-perceptions.

In thinking through Asian America as a political formation, three things should be taken into account. First, we must consider differences within Asian America in terms of national origin, generational status, class background, gender, sexuality, and more. Second, we have to think through how these differences are shaped by asymmetrical and uneven histories and encounters with the violences of racial capitalism and imperialism. And finally, we have to consider how these differences, as social relations, are determined and experienced along multiple axes of power (also known as ‘intersectionality’).

Asian America has also often been imagined for its coalitional possibilities, useful as bridge or as wedge. Activists and organizers formed Asian America as a concept during the political ferment of the 1960s, imagining Asian America through political alignments, alongside Black liberation and anti-war movements. During the 1960s, racial groups began to also create terms to define themselves, producing language that reflected social changes.

In developing language to challenge labels such as ‘Oriental’ and ‘model minority’, progressive Asian activists negotiated the positioning of Asian-ness between ‘black and white’. A 1969

student newspaper announced the formation of an Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA) at the University of California-Berkeley. The first uses of Asian America as a 'we' articulated a political ideology in opposition to white supremacy and U.S. imperialism, in the wake of the Korean War and the midst of the war in Vietnam. AAPA's newspapers later circulated to different college campuses.

As an analog form, movement newspapers articulated language and ideas about Asian America as a means of political alignment with other racialized groups. The first issue of *Gidra*, a monthly newspaper published by students the University of California-Los Angeles, included the manifesto "Yellow Power!" as a call for "all Asian Americans to...unite with our black, brown, and red brothers of the Third World for survival."

At this time, Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino American activists primarily made up the core of Asian American movement building. However, attempts to organize under the call 'yellow' in earlier stages alienated Filipino activists, where histories of colonization and military occupation under Spain, the U.S., and later Japan created different encounters with systems of immigration. Filipino activists built coalitions with activists from Samoa, Tonga, and Guam, who also experienced U.S. occupation. In the late 1970s, Asian American movement language shifted into including 'Asian Pacific Islanders'.

What it means to be Asian American has changed over time—looking to Asian American digital movement media and the process of creating these media continues to showcase the production of Asian America as a political formation.

Digital organizers and activists negotiate the meaning and racial positioning of Asian America and 'make' politics through digital media projects, from hashtags, Tweetchats, comics, videos, and other forms. Asian Americans continue reflexively reconstruct understandings of collective identity in relation to social movements and political pursuits of solidarities across difference.

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# INTERVIEW EXCERPTS: HOW DO YOU DEFINE 'ASIAN AMERICAN'?

**"We need to understand our differences."**

"I don't identify as Asian American. I identify as Asian. A lot of hyphenated stuff is caught up in immigration status. I think the thing that's complicated is that it's primarily East Asian and Southeast Asian, and then South Asian is assumed to be Indian. There's also the idea that South Asian American is different than Asian American.

I'm from Sri Lanka and a lot of the political issues are trumped by a larger Indian community. However, I say this as a Sri Lankan and my ethnicity is Singhalese and Buddhist and that's to have power in a Sri Lankan context. There's a 35-plus year war and ethnic conflict between Tamil and Singhalese."

- Anika, *Immigrant Justice Organizer*

**"It's a multiplicity of experiences."**

"Right after 9/11, Asian America couldn't hold South Asian, Muslim, and Sikh experiences. Asian American advocacy was East Asian focused and East Asian led. There was a lot outreach and wanting to connect with South Asian communities, but for many of us working in those spaces, we needed our own organizations to connect to our communities directly and speak in those languages, such as words and connections and stories, that would relate to people in our communities more."

- Myra, *Writer and Project Director*

**"...an evolving construct & idea."**

"It provides us with an anchor to unify together and offers a mobilizing home politically. Asian America can't hold all of our different identities and experiences in and of itself. It's important for different Asian communities to organize themselves."

- Jackie, *Anti-Gentrification Cultural Organizer*

**"As a term, it was a political act."**

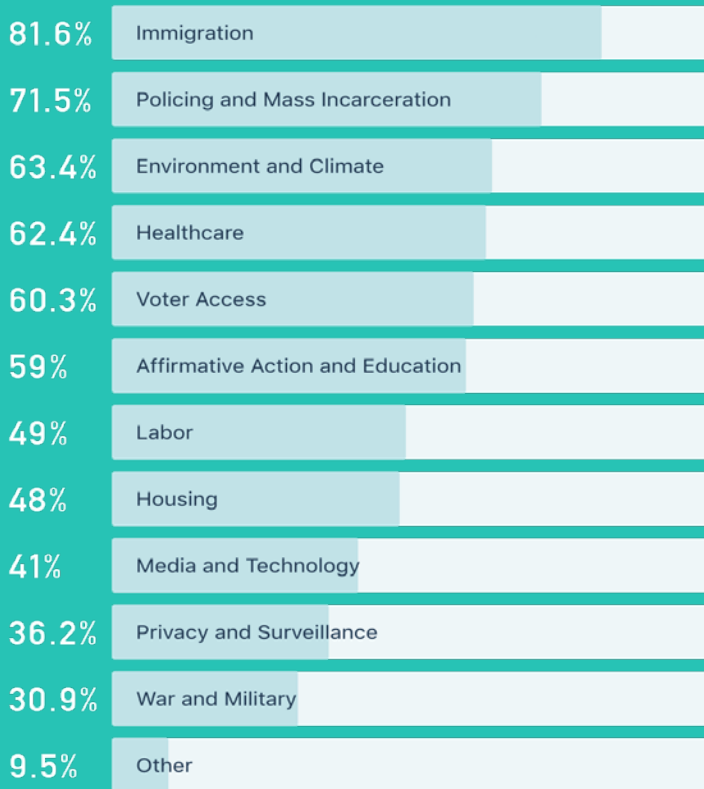
"It was a coalitional identity and forged in the crucible of Black Freedom struggles and post-colonial revolutionary politics as a set of political commitments.

You don't come out front and say we're organizing you as Asian Americans, but as tenants and workers. It's less important around who is included and excluded and more important around interests around political identities.

It's as important for criminalized Southeast Asians to see themselves in relation to criminal justice and U.S. militarism and low wage Chinese workers to see themselves in opposition to Chinese bosses."

- Jin, *Journalist and Political Director*

# KEY FINDINGS: AA/PI AS POLITICAL FORMATION



*Each category reflects percentage of all participants who answered the question (ex: 81.6% of all participants identified immigration as an area of interest).*

80% of those who identified 'Asian' as one of their racial/ethnic identities also listed immigration as a policy issue of interest.

Participants also had many overlapping political interests. For example, with immigration, policing, and environment being the top three area of interest, 63% participants identified both immigration and policing together and 52% of participants identified immigration and environment.

This demonstrates the intersection of varying issues and the importance of campaigns to reflect these connections, such as 18MR's recent campaign work against mass detention and deportation of Cambodian refugees.

## ASIAN AMERICAN POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT:

94.3% of all participants said that they have discussed social and political issues with friends and family. 67.8% of participants have donated money and 66.3% have participated in a rally or protest.

58% have attended a political education event, including either a teach-in or panel and 63.5% have attended an event, workshop, and/or training about Asian American political identity. 44.2% are either currently taking or have taken an undergraduate-level course in Ethnic Studies, with 28.7% having taken an a course specifically about Asian America. Over 30% of all participants have been political involved as young people either participating in youth leadership programs or student-led organizing.

74.4% of all participants currently and/or previously have volunteered with an organization focused on social change, whether that is a nonprofit organization, campaign, or movement formation. 35% have organized an event in their local community. 30% of participants have volunteered for door-knocking and canvassing. Around half of all participants have written a letter and/or called a legislator.

# KEY FINDINGS: ASIAN AMERICAN DIGITAL POLITICS

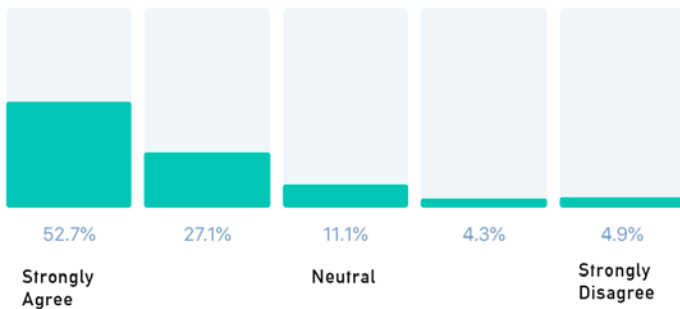
93.7% of participants signed an online petition between 2018 and 2019. 76.6% have re-tweeted or shared a post and 59.6% have used a hashtag in relation to social and political issues.

Over half of the participants have used the hashtags #MeToo, #Asians4BlackLives, #NoDAPL, and #NotYourModelMinority. In connection to immigration detention and deportation, 42% also have used #NoMuslimBanEver in response to travel bans barring entry from Iraq, Syria, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen beginning in January 2017. Only 7.3% have used #ReleaseMN8, a 2016 campaign about the deportation and detention of Southeast Asian eight Cambodian Americans in Minnesota detained by ICE.

31.2% of participants have used #OscarsSoWhite, which critiqued the lack of diversity in Hollywood and mainstream media.

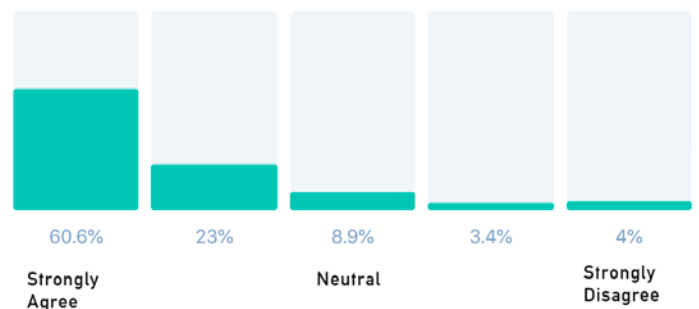
## HOW ARE ASIAN AMERICANS AND PACIFIC ISLANDERS USING THE INTERNET?

**About 80% of respondents use the Internet to learn about their identities.**



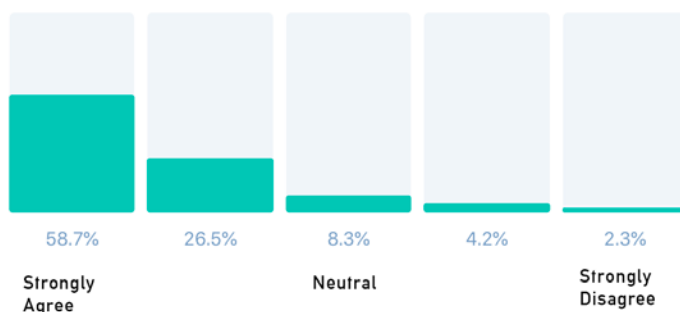
*"I use the Internet to learn more about my identities and communities."*

**83.6% of respondents use the Internet for popular culture.**



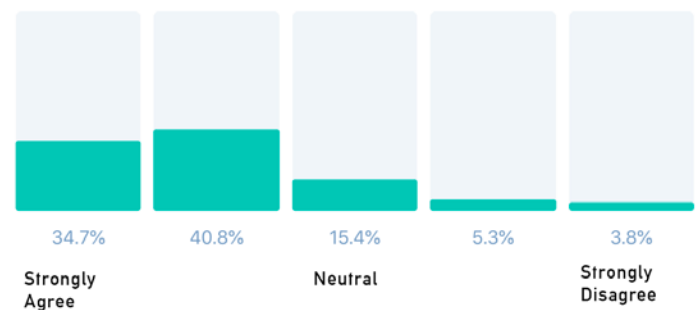
*"I use the internet to learn or read about popular culture."*

**85% of respondents use the internet to get more involved in social movements.**



*"I use the internet to find ways to get more involved in social movements and campaigns."*

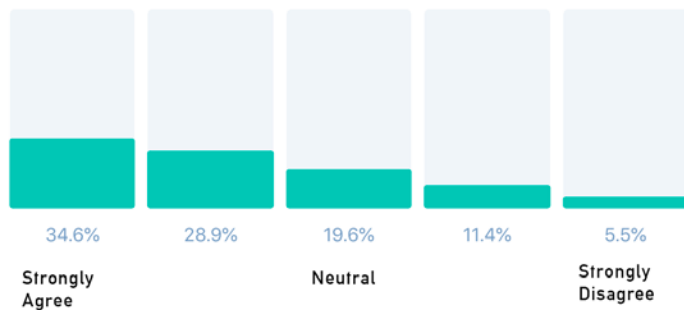
**75.5% of respondents have social networks with similar political beliefs.**



*"Most of the people in my social networks have similar political beliefs as my own."*

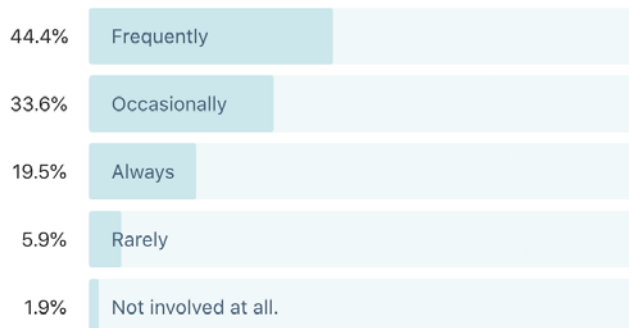
# KEY FINDINGS: ASIAN AMERICAN DIGITAL POLITICS

**63.5% of respondents participate in online communities tied to local groups.**



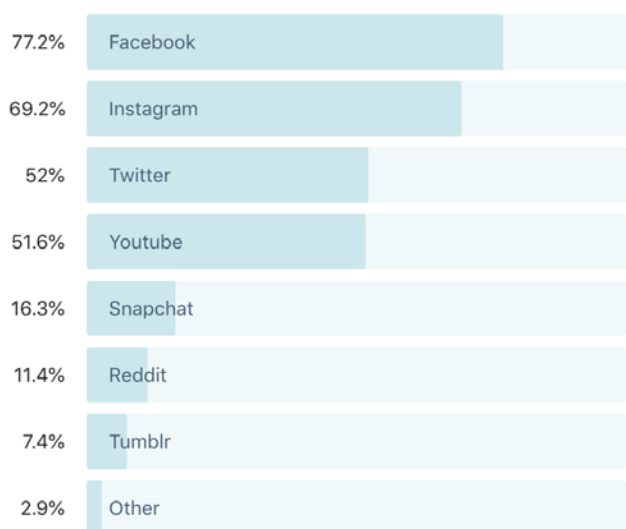
*"I participate in online groups that are directly connected to groups I am also part of in my local community."*

**Almost all respondents are currently or have been involved in online and/or local community campaigns and movements.**



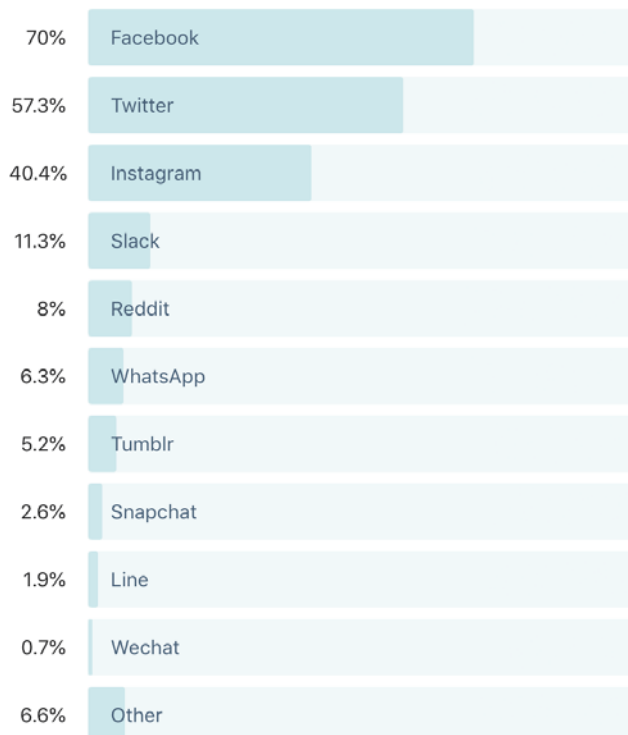
*"Which best describes the frequency of your online and/or local community involvement in campaigns and social movements?"*

**77.2% of respondents use Facebook on a regular basis. 69.2% use Instagram regularly and 52% use Twitter regularly.**



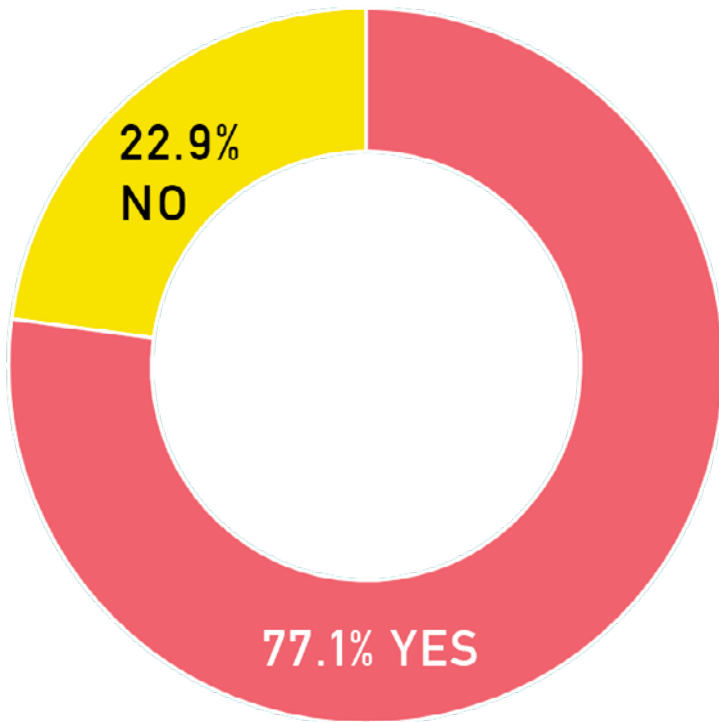
*Which platforms/apps do you currently use on a regular (daily or multiple times weekly) basis?*

**70% of respondents use Facebook for engaging in political issues. 57.3% use Twitter and 40.4% use Instagram.**



*Which apps do you currently use for discussions, updates, and critique on social, cultural, and political issues?*

# HAVE YOU QUIT, LEFT, OR DELETED ANY APPLICATIONS?



55% of Asian American and Pacific Islander survey participants left a platform to take a break from it. Participants included mental health as reasons for leaving. One participant shared feeling overwhelmed and depressed in using a platform, while another described their experience as “social media re-traumatization”, that it was overwhelming to see racist and problematic posts by friends and colleagues.

40.8% left because they were worried about privacy, and 34.6% left to protest a company’s actions or policies. Additionally, 51% shared that they stopped using a platform because they lost interest and 33.7% have stopped because they started using a different platform instead.

Some included technological reasons, such as storage space limitations and changes to the platform’s UX. Others shared being too busy or not having bandwidth to fully engage in the platform.

### ON DECIDING TO LEAVE TWITTER:

“I found myself getting overwhelmed by Twitter. It’s really easy to accidentally scroll through Twitter for 2 hours, especially when the algorithm changed, and you can’t even finish your feed. It’s sucking my life force.

[However] I owe so much to Twitter though. I got on 2008 when it just started to take off. There were so few people on it so that you could form meaningful relationships with people. [Then] the scale of Twitter—how public it was all of a sudden and conversations weren’t just a corner of the internet, but could get pulled and put on CNN. There was the tactic of people coming after you in sustained way. I saw my friends get attacked during Gamergate; it took a different tone and those tactics evolved in Trump era.”

That feeling of immersing yourself in an issue is so tied to soaking in Twitter for hours. If I wasn’t doing that morning and night, I wouldn’t have my finger on the pulse of what others were feeling. For all of those reasons, I understand I’m missing a lot by choosing to step away from Twitter.”

- Kari, Chinese American Digital Organizer



# INTERVIEW EXCERPTS: WHAT ARE THE POSSIBILITIES & LIMITATIONS OF ONLINE PLATFORMS FOR ORGANIZING?

## MESSAGING THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

"Information moves so quickly now. I find two things that are really limiting for us in our work. One is, when we have to shorten messages for social media to be framed in a particular way to be appealing and compelling, the depth of analysis can't be there. Second, the idea that we always have to be on social media to get message out overpowers what the message is rooted in. Both can be challenging to long-term movement work."

- Padma, *South Asian Policy Director*

## WHAT WE NEED TO CREATE SOCIAL CHANGE

"Organizing on social media—clicktivism makes it easy for folks to sit behind a computer, just donate and not show up. Change is not meant for comfort. Winning change, we can't do it when we're sitting at home. We have to be uncomfortable."

With social media, there's also a sense of instant gratification and having to achieve things right away. Change doesn't happen right away. We don't win right away and we don't build right away. It takes hard work, commitment, and long hours."

- Sara, *Chinese-Vietnamese Housing and Labor Organizer*

## BUILDING COMMUNITY ONLINE:

"Twitter is the most robust platform for really rich cultural commentary and dialogue, and also an amazing place for humor. I write for a feminist publication, and the funniest corner of the Internet is always sassy feminist Twitter. It's a form of solidarity that's fun and also politically powerful. There's room in our conversation about solidarity in how you're seen and how you find your community. When I tweet about annoying shit that happened to me, I can tweet about that and other South Asian women get it and they have that shared experience. That's one of the most important ways around building community online."

- Aya, *Indian American Communications Strategist*

## DISCURSIVE FORMS AND FORMAT

"I see the most variety of opinions on Facebook. It's where a lot of people get their news and where I personally find people of older generations and family members. It's also so immediate with Facebook, how you can post a news story and people respond to it right away. Once you share an article, it becomes a mini forum for you to comment, like, love, sad or angry face. Facebook is the place and the place to go and get visibility, especially in text formatting."

What's interesting is the retweet and the quote tweet. You can quote a tweet and completely disagree with it. You can get retweeted and then trolls come into your comments. My connotation is that sharing something on Facebook is an endorsement, but that's not the same on Twitter."

- Lou, *Filipinx Digital Storyteller and Writer*

## INSTAGRAM AND POLITICAL EDUCATION

"On Instagram, my focus has been fashion and self care. It's inherently political, but it's more about the aesthetic as an image based platform. It's a surface-level connection to community. People will find me through hashtags like #filipino and I'll direct them back to Twitter and Facebook to get them more engaged. Instagram is a place I connect well to people who are in early stages of their activism. In direct messages, some people come out to me, asking what my experience was, like how to come out to parents."

- Lou, *Filipinx Digital Storyteller and Writer*

## ON THE LIMITS OF DIGITAL ACTIVISM

"Digital activism is a really first world concept. For example, 60% of South Asia is rural. There's no electricity. 1 million Aadhivasis are being evicted from their land so companies can move in and build factories. This is happening at a rate where the Internet is not strategic platform to respond as quickly as we need. Petitions won't stop land evictions. It's not always digital."

- Munira, *Bangladeshi Political Campaigner*

# APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONS

## YOUR IDENTITIES

### ETHNIC/RACIAL IDENTITY CATEGORIES

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Arab                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Korean           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asian                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Laotian          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bangladeshi                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Latina/o/x       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bhutanese                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Malaysian        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Maldivian        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Burmese                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Marshallese      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cambodian                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Mongolian        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chamorro                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Nepalese         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chinese                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Pakistani        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Filipino                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Samoan           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fijian                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Singaporean      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hawaiian                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Sri Lankan       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Taiwanese        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hmong                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Tongan           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Indian                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Thai             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Indigenous / Native America | <input type="checkbox"/> Vietnamese       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Indonesian                  | <input type="checkbox"/> White            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Japanese                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Other [WRITE IN] |

### MULTIPLE CHECK BOXES

### STRONGLY AGREE <-----> STRONGLY DISAGREE

### DEGREE & DEPTH

I identify as Asian American.

I identify as Pacific Islander.

I identify with my diasporic and/or ethnic identity (ex: Bangladeshi, Filipinx).

I currently use the Internet to learn more about my identities and communities.

I currently use the internet to learn or read about popular culture.

I currently use the internet to find ways to get more involved in social movements and campaigns.

I participate in online groups that are directly connected to groups I am also part of in my local community.

Most of the people in my social networks have similar political beliefs as my own.

## YOU X SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

### WHAT ARE POLICY ISSUES THAT INTEREST YOU THE MOST?

- Immigration
- Environment and Climate
- Policing and Mass Incarceration
- Privacy and Surveillance
- Labor
- Housing
- War and Military
- Healthcare
- Affirmative Action and Education
- Media and Technology
- Voter Access
- Other [WRITE IN]

### WHICH BEST DESCRIBES THE FREQUENCY OF YOUR ONLINE AND/OR LOCAL COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN CAMPAIGNS AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS?

- Not involved at all.
- Rarely
- Occasionally
- Frequently
- Always

### IN THE PAST YEAR, HAVE YOU DONE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES IN RESPONSE TO SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ISSUES?

- Signed an online petition
- Used a hashtag
- Retweeted or shared a post
- Written original content
- Discussed the issue with a friend or family member
- Organized an event in your local community
- Volunteered to doorknock, canvas, etc.
- Participated in a rally or protest
- Called a legislator
- Written a letter to a legislator
- Attended a related teach-in, panel, or event
- Donated money
- Volunteer time and/or labor on an ongoing basis towards a campaign or initiative
- Other [WRITE IN]

### HAVE YOU EVER USED OR FOLLOWED ANY OF THESE HASHTAGS:

- #Asians4BlackLives / #APIs4BlackLives
- #SouthAsians4BlackLives
- #FreePeterLiang / #SavePeterLiang
- #ModelMinorityMutiny
- #NotYourModelMinority
- #NotYourWedge
- #HyperMasculAZNs
- #NotYourAsianSideKick
- #SolidarityisforWhiteWomen
- #YesAllWomen
- #NotAllMen
- #MeToo
- #OscarsSoWhite
- #OnlyOnePercent
- #CureYellowFever
- #Fight4AAAS
- #GraceLeeTaughtMe
- #StayWoke
- #OurAAPIVote
- #SavetheCensus
- #NoMuslimBanEver
- #NeverAgainisNow
- #DefendUndocumented
- #ReleaseMN8
- #UnitedDoesntCare
- #NoDAPL

SURVEY ARCHIVED ONLINE AT TYPEFORM VIA  
[BIT.LY/AAPIACTIVISM](https://bit.ly/aapiactivism)

## APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

### YOU X 18MR

#### HOW DO YOU CURRENTLY STAYING CONNECTED TO 18MR.ORG?

- Email
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- Website
- Tumblr

#### WHAT IS THE PRIMARY REASON THAT YOU FOLLOW 18MR:

- Storytelling
- Media and cultural analysis
- Policy change and advocacy
- Civic engagement
- Rapid response
- Political education
- Asian American history

#### IN THE PAST YEAR, HOW HAVE YOU INTERACTED SPECIFICALLY 18 MILLION RISING?

- Retweeted or shared a post from Twitter, Instagram, or Facebook
- Commented on a post
- Liked a post
- Read a shared article
- Visited 18MR's website
- Used the #OurAAPIVote Toolkit
- Signed a petition for one of 18MR's campaigns
- Written a letter for one of 18MR's campaigns
- Participated in an online training
- Participated in a Twitter Townhall
- Attended a panel or event
- Purchased merchandise
- Donated
- Other [WRITE IN]

#### WHICH OF 18MR'S INITIATIVES HAVE YOU PARTICIPATED IN THE PAST YEAR?

- AAPI Caucus (Netroots Nation)
- Live Panel (Netroots Nation): FCC's War on the Poor
- 18MR DC Meet and Greet
- Crazy Rich Asians Townhall
- Uncovering the Truth – National Webinar Details
- #AAPI Twitter Town hall
- #NoMuslimBanEver Twitter Townhall
- #OurAAPIVote
- 18MR Voter Engagement Survey
- Twitter town hall #HyperMasculAZNs
- Used Votervox platform
- Other [WRITE IN]

### YOU, ONLINE

#### WHICH PLATFORMS/APPS DO YOU CURRENTLY USE ON A REGULAR (DAILY OR MULTIPLE TIMES WEEKLY) BASIS?

- Twitter
- Facebook
- Instagram
- Tumblr
- Snapchat
- Reddit
- Youtube
- Other [WRITE IN]

#### WHICH MESSENGER APPLICATIONS DO YOU CURRENTLY USE ON A REGULAR (DAILY OR MULTIPLE TIMES WEEKLY) BASIS?

- General text messaging
- iMessage
- Facebook Messenger
- Signal
- WhatsApp
- Line
- Wechat
- Slack
- QQ
- Other [WRITE IN]

#### WHICH APPS DO YOU CURRENTLY USE FOR DISCUSSIONS, UPDATES, AND CRITIQUE ON SOCIAL, CULTURAL, AND POLITICAL ISSUES?

- Twitter
- Facebook
- Instagram
- Tumblr
- Snapchat
- Reddit
- WhatsApp
- Line
- Wechat
- Slack
- Other [WRITE IN]

#### HAVE YOU QUIT, LEFT, OR DELETED ANY APPLICATIONS BEFORE? IF SO, WHY?

- I lost interest.
- I started using a different platform.
- I was worried about my privacy.
- I was protesting the company's action and/or policies.
- I needed to take a break from the platform.
- Other [WRITE IN]

#### ON AVERAGE, HOW MUCH TIME IN ONE DAY DO YOU SPEND... ONLINE? USING TWITTER? FACEBOOK? INSTAGRAM? EMAIL? CHATTING ON A MESSENGER PLATFORM?

- Less than 1 hr
- 1 - 2 hours
- 2 - 4 hours
- 4 - 6 hours
- 6 - 8 hours
- 8+ hours

#### ON AVERAGE, HOW MUCH TIME IN ONE DAY DO YOU SPEND USING YOUR PHONE/MOBILE DEVICE FOR ONLINE ACTIVITIES? YOUR LAPTOP OR DESKTOP COMPUTER?

- Less than 1 hr
- 1 - 2 hours
- 2 - 4 hours
- 4 - 6 hours
- 6 - 8 hours
- 8+ hours

## APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

### WHO ARE YOU?

**CURRENT CITY [FILL IN]**

**ZIPCODE [FILL IN]**

**GENDER [FILL IN]**

#### AGE RANGE

- 15 yrs and under
- 16 - 17yrs
- 18 - 22 yrs
- 23 - 28 yrs
- 29 - 35 yrs
- 36 - 45 yrs
- 46 - 54 yrs
- 56 - 65 yrs
- 66 yrs and older

#### EDUCATION:

- I have attended events, workshops and/or trainings about Asian American political identity.
- I am taking or have taken an undergraduate-level course in Ethnic Studies (or similar department).
- I am taking or have taken an undergraduate-level course specifically about Asian America.
- I am taking or have taken a graduate-level course in Ethnic Studies (or similar department).
- I am taking or have taken a graduate-level course specifically about Asian America.
- None of the above

#### LEADERSHIP AND SERVICE:

- I participate or have participated in a youth leadership program for Asian Americans.
- I participate or have participated in a student-led cultural organization.
- I participate or have participated in a student-led political organization.
- I volunteer or have volunteered with an organization focused on social change (ex: nonprofit, campaign, movement, etc).
- I volunteer or have volunteered with an organization that primarily serves Asian American communities.
- I currently do unpaid work
- None of the above

#### WORK:

- I currently work or have worked professionally in an educational institution.
- I currently work or have worked professionally in an organization focused on social change (ex: nonprofit, campaign, movement, etc).
- I currently work or have worked professionally in an organization that primarily serves Asian American communities.
- None of the above

#### IN A PROFESSIONAL (PAID OR UNPAID) CAPACITY, DO YOU DO ANY OF THE FOLLOWING:

- Manage communications strategy
- Produce social media content
- Write articles
- Design software
- Build websites
- Design graphics
- Organize online
- Conduct online research
- Maintain digital content

#### IF YOU DO PAID, UNPAID, OR VOLUNTEER WORK WITH AN ASIAN AMERICAN ORGANIZATION, WHAT IS THE AFFILIATED ORGANIZATION AND YOUR ROLE?

### ABOUT THE SURVEY TOOL:

In the past, 18MR has used Action Network tools for their surveys on voter engagement, as a platform designed for political mobilization and campaign building. For this particular survey, we chose Typeform as our tool, a design forward survey platform, because it offers a user-friendly interface on both mobile and laptop devices to navigate a long survey. However, this also means Typeform is designed for the survey participant rather than for data analysis. The visualizations of initial data make it super easy and accessible to get a quick summary of information, cross tabulating information becomes a big trickier. For example, it takes several extra steps to locate something simple like how many people identify as Asian and Chinese or how many people use Twitter and Instagram to more complex questions about policy issues of interest in relation to different forms of digital engagement.

Those of you who download the raw data in the .csv file will see that the data requires a lot more cleaning.