



## In Florida, a Community Push to Grow the Asian-American Electorate



The Asian American Federation of Florida's outreach efforts focus on community events to grow the Asian-American vote. Courtesy of the Asian American Federation of Florida

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By Emil Guillermo

Asian Americans are approximately 2.5 percent of the electorate in Florida, [according to APIA Vote](#) — roughly half the proportional size of the national Asian-American electorate — but this election year, there's an all-out effort to grow the vote.

“The Asian-American community in Florida is smaller than California's, but we make a difference,” Evelyn Bruce, the [executive director of NANAY Community Development](#), told NBC News.

During early voting last week, Bruce, a Filipino-American transplant from California, was out organizing volunteer drivers to shuttle seniors from North Miami's NANAY Community Center to polling places.

“Our elders can't wait 'til March 15 and wait in line for eight hours,” Bruce, who is also a leader in the Asian American Federation of Florida, said. Shuttling seniors and getting others to the polls on election day is just the final part of a voter drive that began with registration efforts last year at major Asian-American cultural events around the state.

“We know this works,” Bruce said. She's been engaging with people at cultural events for a decade. This year, she's coordinating her efforts with national non-profit organization APIA Vote.

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In Florida, Bruce has reached out to nearly 70 different associations that span a wide range of Asian ethnicities and languages. By far, language, she said, has been the largest barrier to registering new voters. But by working with the largest and most trusted groups, like OCA — formerly the Organization of Chinese Americans — and the National Federation of Filipino American Associations, Bruce and others are making sure Asian Americans in the Sunshine State aren't shut out on Tuesday. They're expecting a noticeably higher voter turnout this year.



A voter registration and education booth hosted by NANAY at a cultural event.  
Courtesy of the Asian American Federation of Florida

Bruce said the effort to expand the Asian-American vote only gets harder and more complicated with time. Part of the problem is identifying potential voters. On paper, Bruce said, most don't see her as Asian, and if they do, they categorize her as Chinese, while she's Filipino American.

“Most of us [Filipinos] have Spanish names and get classified as Latinos and not Asians,” Bruce said. She is asking people to re-register, designating their birth place to make sure people are properly identified.

She's also concerned about U.S. born and mixed-raced individuals and making sure they're accounted for under the Asian-American category.

“We need to have more Asian Americans recognized in Florida because the only way to make a difference in any political endeavor is to have that high number,” Bruce said.

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Bruce said politicians in Miami-Dade County are beginning to pay attention to Asian Americans. Despite just being a small percentage of the electorate, political leaders are asking to meet with her and others.

“They want us at the table,” Bruce said. “We’re vocal.”

And, she added, Asian Americans will be even more sought out if they make their presence felt at the polls.

Emil Guillermo

Emil Guillermo is an award-winning TV journalist, and former host of NPR’s “All Things Considered.” His book, “Amok: Essays from an Asian American Perspective” won an American Book Award. His columns on Asian America have been syndicated nationally, and can be seen on the the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund blog (<http://www.aaldef.org/blog>). His current project is writing and performing the “Amok Monologues,” a series of journalistic theater pieces. He lives in California.