



# living in the margins

A NATIONAL SURVEY OF LESBIAN, GAY,  
BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER ASIAN  
AND PACIFIC ISLANDER AMERICANS

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**The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute**

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# executive summary

In 2005, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated that there were 14 million Asians in the United States, a number expected to triple in the next 50 years. In fact, between 2000 and 2003, the Asian American population grew by 12.5 percent, nearly four times the growth rate of the total U.S. population (3.3 percent) and second only to the nation's Hispanic and Latino/a population. Despite this significant growth, there have been few attempts to collect quantitative, socio-demographic data specifically on Asian and Pacific Islander (API) Americans who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT).

Since 2005, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (the Task Force) Policy Institute collaborated with more than a dozen API LGBT community organizations to administer a survey nationwide designed to collect basic demographic data on API LGBT Americans and quantitatively analyze the effect of multiple minority identities on their experiences of discrimination and harassment, as well as their political and civic participation.

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## DEMOGRAPHICS

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### Geographic distribution

Respondents lived in a total of 38 states and the District of Columbia in a pattern that closely reflects the geographic distribution of Asians and Pacific Islanders in the United States. California was home to the most respondents (37 percent), followed by New York (18 percent), Illinois (5 percent), Massachusetts (5 percent) and the District of Columbia (4 percent).

### Ethnicity

More than a dozen ethnicities were represented in the sample, including Chinese (40 percent), Filipino/a (19 percent), Japanese (11 percent) and Asian Indian (10 percent). Smaller numbers of Vietnamese, Korean, Hawaiian, Malaysian, Thai and Pakistani respondents also participated.

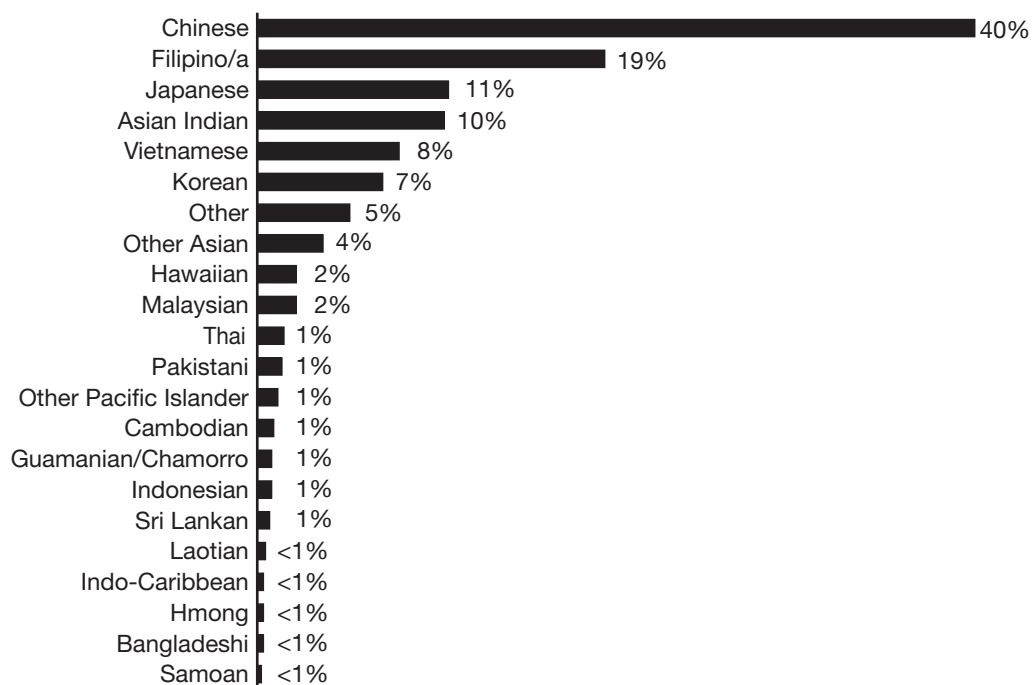


### Who are APIs?

The term Asian and Pacific Islanders (APIs) encompasses a vast collection of ethnic groups with unique histories, cultures and migrations within both their Asian or Pacific Islands ancestral country of origin and their experience living in the United States. API includes people with ancestral ties to ethnic groups located

in South Asian countries like India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka; Southeast Asian countries like Vietnam, Thailand and Cambodia; East Asian countries like China, Japan and Korea; Pacific Island countries like the Philippines and Indonesia; and indigenous people of Samoa, Guam and Hawaii.

### What ethnicity/nationality comes closest to identifying your family heritage?



According to the U.S. Census Bureau, after Chinese (24 percent), the largest API ethnic groups in the US were Filipino/a (18 percent), Asian Indian (16 percent), Vietnamese (11 percent), Korean (11 percent) and Japanese (8 percent). This comparison shows that our survey respondents represented the diversity of API people across the country.

### Citizenship

The majority of survey respondents (55 percent) were U.S.-born citizens, while 27 percent were naturalized citizens. Nearly 19 percent were non-citizens.

By comparison, the 2000 Census found that Asians were equally distributed between U.S.-born citizens (31 percent), naturalized citizens (34 percent) and non-citizens (35 percent). This indicates that our sample of API LGBT individuals is more likely to include U.S. citizens (natural-born or naturalized) than the broader API population in the US.

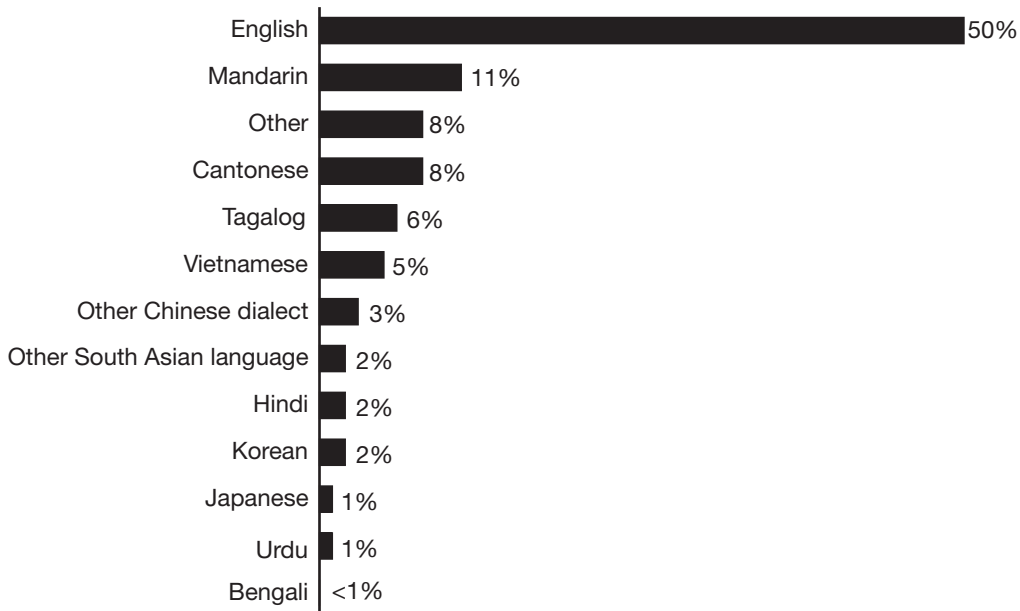
### Native language

Only 50 percent of respondents said that English was their native language. Mandarin (11 percent), Cantonese (8 percent), Tagalog (6 percent) and Vietnamese (5 percent) were the most frequently cited native languages.

By comparison, the U.S. Census Bureau reports that almost four-fifths (79 percent) of Asians speak a language other than English at home, but about three-fifths (60 percent) report speaking

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### Native language



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English “very well.” Chinese, Tagalog and Vietnamese are among the top five most frequently spoken languages in the US next to English and Spanish, with Korean ranking seventh.

### Gender and gender identity

Fifty-three percent identified as men, 41 percent as women and 10 percent as transgender.

Fifty-three percent of the participants identified as men, 41 percent as women and 10 percent as transgender. These figures add up to more than 100 percent because participants who checked off “man” or “woman” and one of the transgender categories were counted in both categories.

In order to provide the most accurate picture of the gender and gender identity of the participants, the survey asked respondents to identify their gender, allowing them to check off all that applied given the following choices: “man,” “woman,” “transgender: female to male,” “transgender: male to female,” “transgender: transsexual,” “transgender: genderqueer/bi-gendered/androgynous” and “other.” Because the number of respondents who chose transgender identities was small, they were merged into a single “transgender” category for meaningful statistical analysis.

### Sexual orientation

Forty-seven percent of respondents self-identified as gay, 19 percent as lesbian, and 9 percent as bisexual. Twenty percent identified as “queer,” with women more than twice as likely as men to choose that label.

### Relationship status

One-third of respondents reported being in a committed relationship, and 10 percent had a domestic partner.

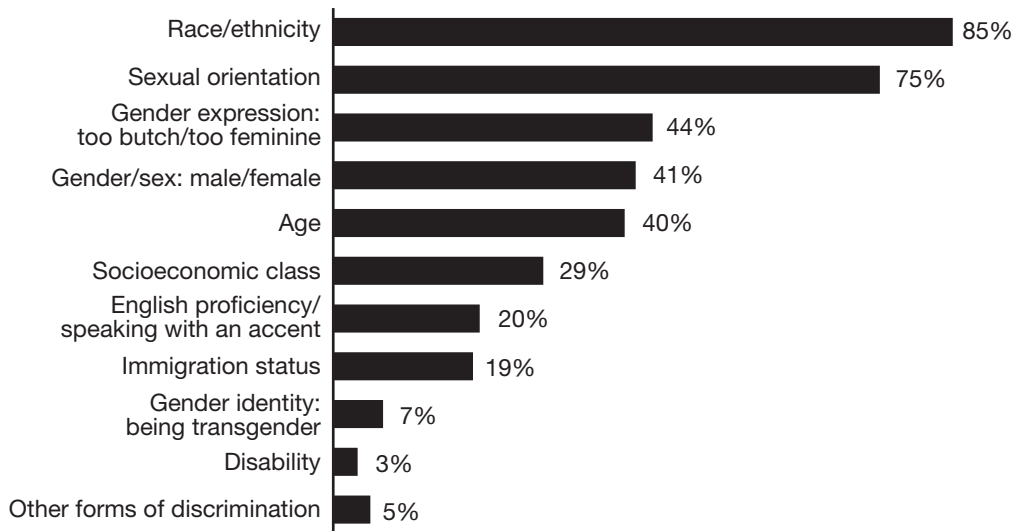
## DISCRIMINATION

Eighty-five percent had experienced discrimination and/or harassment based on their race or ethnicity.

Nearly every respondent (98 percent) had experienced at least one form of discrimination and/or harassment in their lives.

- Eighty-five percent had experienced discrimination and/or harassment based on their race or ethnicity
- Seventy-five percent reported that they had experienced discrimination and/or harassment based on their sexual orientation

**Have you ever faced discrimination and/or harassment based on any of the following?**



Nearly seven in ten (69 percent) transgender respondents said they had experienced discrimination because they were transgender.

Nearly all respondents (89 percent) agreed that homophobia and/or transphobia is a problem within the broader API community.

Seventy-eight percent agreed that API LGBT people experience racism within the predominantly white LGBT community.

**VERBAL AND PHYSICAL HARASSMENT**

Overwhelming majorities experienced verbal harassment at one time in their lives for being of Asian or Pacific Islander descent (77 percent) or lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (74 percent).

Nearly one in five (19 percent) reported having experienced physical harassment for being of Asian or Pacific Islander descent. Sixteen percent reported having experienced physical harassment for being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

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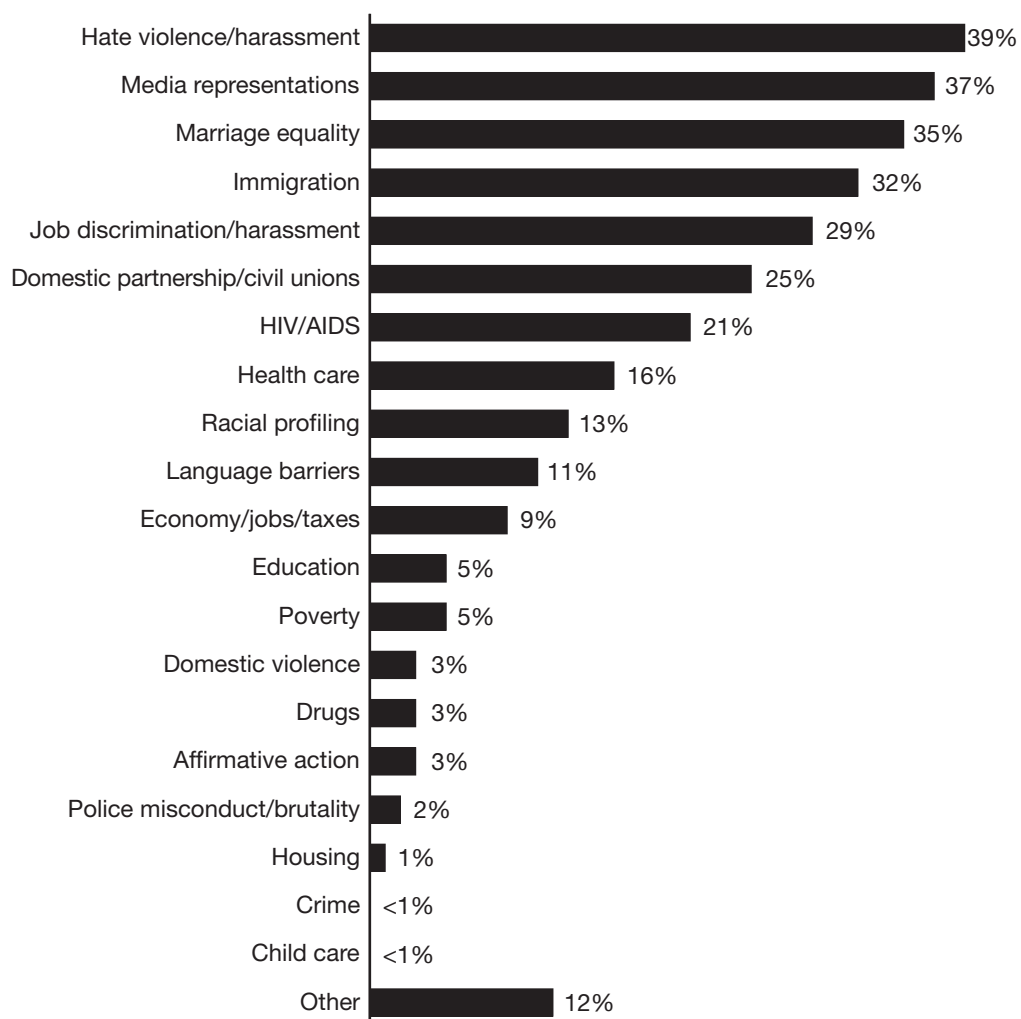


## POLICY PRIORITIES

The most important issues facing API LGBT Americans are hate violence/harassment, media representations, marriage equality and immigration.

According to our survey, the most important issues facing API LGBT Americans are 1) hate violence/harassment (39 percent), 2) media representations (37 percent), 3) marriage equality (35 percent) and 4) immigration (32 percent).

### Most important issues facing LGBT Asian Pacific Islanders in the US





Respondents indicated that the three most important issues facing all Asian and Pacific Islanders in the US were 1) immigration (57 percent), 2) media representations (38 percent) and 3) language barriers (38 percent).

## POLITICAL BEHAVIOR

API LGBT Americans in our sample are very politically active: 67 percent reported that they planned to vote in the 2006 mid-term election (approximately 20 percent reported that they were ineligible to vote).

Of those eligible to vote, a strong majority (67 percent) of respondents were affiliated with the Democratic Party, with 20 percent not affiliated with any political party. Two percent were Republican.

Strong majorities of respondents also reported that they participate in other political activities, including signing petitions (81 percent), participating in marches or rallies (65 percent) and contacting their elected officials (55 percent).

## CONCLUSION

Activists have frequently cited anecdotal evidence that API LGBT people face pervasive harassment and discrimination. This study, based on data from a nationwide sample, confirms that discrimination and harassment based on a number of factors, including race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity, is a problem that needs to be addressed by the broader API *and* LGBT communities. This is among the most important findings of the study.

Important policy issues around which there was much consensus among survey respondents included immigration, combating hate violence and harassment, media representations, issues related to health care (HIV/AIDS in particular), the economy/jobs and language barriers. Activists and researchers can utilize these findings as a basis to advocate for and implement policy changes at the local, state and national levels.

This study reveals insights into the lived experiences of API LGBT people. Through understanding the intersections of racism, homophobia/transphobia, sexism and classism and how these affect API LGBT people, key issues emerge as recurring opportunities for proactive organizing. The issues addressed in this report cut to the heart of community members' experiences as a racial or ethnic minority in predominantly white LGBT

This study confirms that discrimination and harassment is a problem that needs to be addressed by the broader API *and* LGBT communities.



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settings, and likewise, as LGBT participants in predominantly heterosexual API environments. The policy issues identified by respondents, in conjunction with their high rates of political participation, show an engaged, active community that seeks to find meaningful opportunities to transform the discourse around race in the LGBT community and sexuality in the API community.