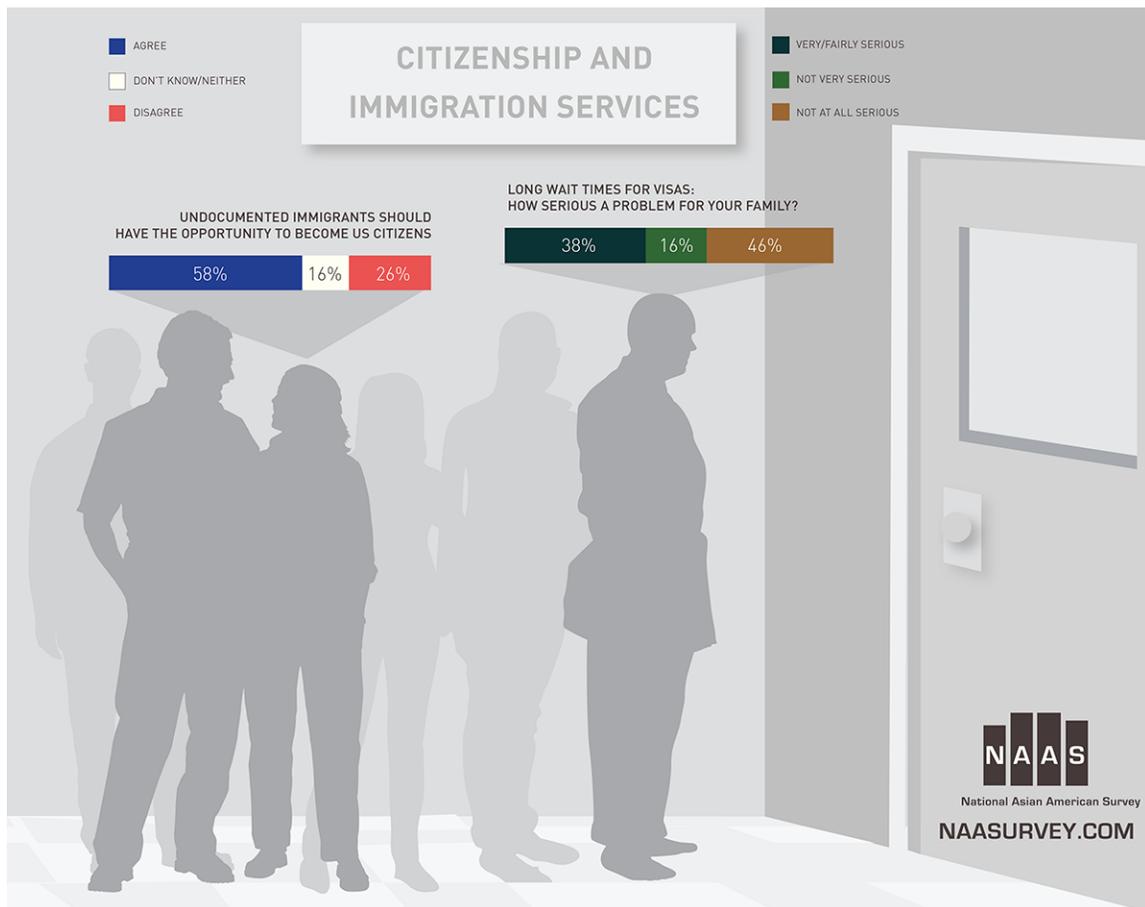


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## OPINIONS OF ASIAN AMERICANS AND PACIFIC ISLANDERS: FEDERAL IMMIGRATION POLICY

SUPPLEMENT TO *THE POLICY PRIORITIES AND ISSUE PREFERENCES  
OF ASIAN AMERICANS AND PACIFIC ISLANDERS (SEP 25, 2012)*



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Project partners on the survey who provided significant assistance in funding and outreach included the National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF) and the Asian American Justice Center (AAJC).

Outreach partners on the survey include 18 Million Rising, Advocates for Youth, API Equality - LA, Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, Asian American/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy, Asian Law Caucus, Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, Asian Pacific American Legal Center, Asian Pacific Environmental Network, Asian Pacific Islander American Vote, Asian Pacific Islander Health Forum, California Immigrant Policy Center, Chinese for Affirmative Action, Japanese American Citizens League, Movement Advancement Project, National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development, National Korean American Service & Education Consortium, National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health, National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance, Orange County Asian and Pacific Islander Community Alliance, Reproductive Health Technologies Project, South Asian Americans Leading Together, South Asian Network, and Southeast Asia Resource Action Center.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Asian American Survey (NAAS) conducted the first nationally representative survey of the policy priorities and issue preferences of Asian Americans in 2008. In 2012, we conducted a tracking survey of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, with even more ethnic groups than in 2008 (Hmong and Cambodian, in addition to Chinese, Indian, Filipino, Vietnamese, Korean, and Japanese) and with the addition of Pacific Islander groups such as Native Hawaiians and Samoans. This report presents the results of 4,755 interviews conducted between July 30, 2012 and October 21, 2012.

Federal immigration policy is particularly important to Asian Americans:

- About three in four Asian American adults are foreign born.
- Since 2008, Asia has been the largest regional source of immigration to the United States.
- About 1.3 million of the undocumented immigrant population is Asian American.

The NAAS data on public opinion among Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders about immigration and immigration policy reveal that:

- 58% of Asian Americans support a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants in the United States.
- This represents a dramatic change from 2008, when just 32% of Asian Americans supported a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants in the country.
- 54% of Asian Americans indicate that visa backlogs is a significant problem for their families, with 38% indicating that it is a “very serious” or “fairly serious” problem.
- Among national origin groups, concern about visa backlogs is highest among Indians (67%), Hmong (66%), Vietnamese (51%), and Filipinos (48%).

## POLICY OPINION ON IMMIGRATION

In January 2013, President Obama and a bipartisan group of U.S. Senators (dubbed the “gang of eight”)<sup>1</sup> separately outlined principles for an immigration bill that would address issues related to border enforcement, visa backlogs, and a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants.

What are Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders' views on immigration reform? The 2012 NAAS asked two questions that are relevant to federal immigration policy: on support for a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, and on backlogs in visas.

The issue of undocumented immigration has been widely covered in news stories and research reports, with an estimated 11 million in the United States.<sup>2</sup> Less well covered, however, is the estimate that about 1.3 million of these unauthorized immigrants are from Asia.<sup>3</sup>

Another pressing issue for the Asian American community is visa backlogs, particularly on family-sponsored visas.<sup>4</sup> There are an estimated 4.3 million individuals waiting abroad due to backlogs in the issuing of family visas. Of these, about 1.8 million are from Asian countries.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, Asia now accounts for the largest share of immigration to the United States, accounting for more than 40% of the foreign born arriving after 2008.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Republican U.S. Senators Flake (AZ), Graham (SC), McCain (AZ), Rubio (FL), and Democrats Bennet (CO), Durbin (IL), Menendez (NJ), Schumer (NY). (See <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/wp/2013/01/28/immigrations-gang-of-8-who-are-they/>)

<sup>2</sup> Migration Information Source (see <http://www.migrationinformation.org/usfocus/display.cfm?ID=886#9>).

<sup>3</sup> Pew Hispanic Center, *Unauthorized Immigrant Population: National and State Trends, 2010*. <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2011/02/01/unauthorized-immigrant-population-brnational-and-state-trends-2010/>

<sup>4</sup> Testimony from Asian American Justice Center, [http://www.advancingequality.org/files/AACAJ\\_Family\\_Unity\\_Waiver\\_Comments.pdf](http://www.advancingequality.org/files/AACAJ_Family_Unity_Waiver_Comments.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Annual Report of Immigrant Visa Applicants in the Family-sponsored and Employment-based preferences Registered at the National Visa Center as of November 1, 2012*. <http://www.travel.state.gov/pdf/WaitingListItem.pdf>. Four of the five highest countries of origin facing backlogs are Asian countries: Philippines (423,449), India (306,789), Vietnam (267,067), and China (226,921).

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *The Newly Arrived Foreign-Born Population of the United States: 2010*. <http://www.census.gov/prod/2011pubs/acsbr10-16.pdf>.

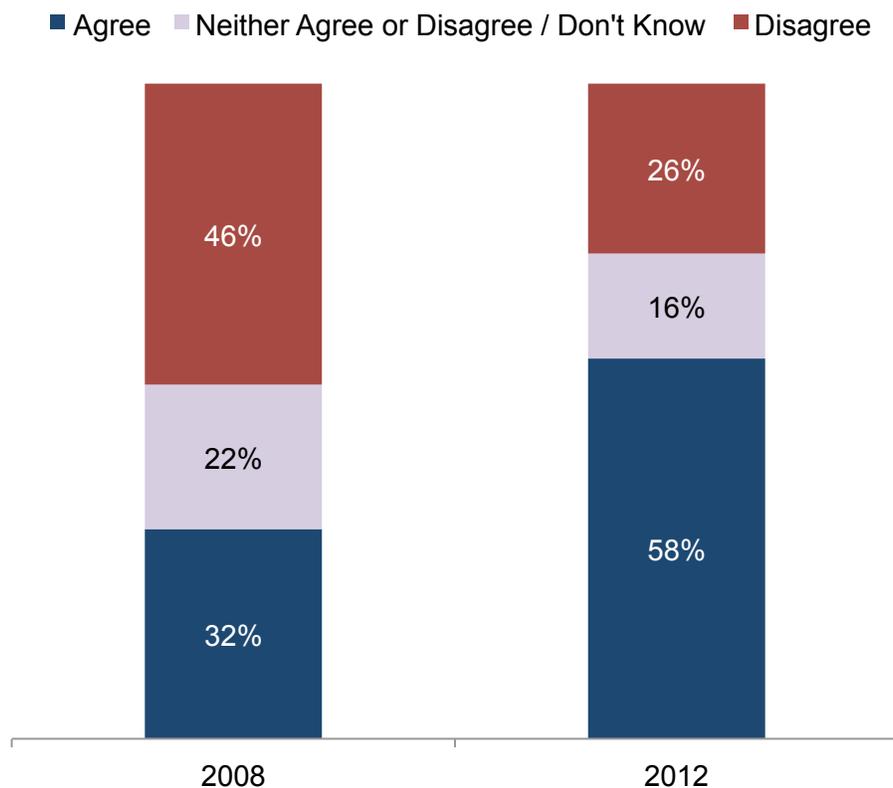
## Policies on Undocumented Immigrants

In the 2012 National Asian American Survey, respondents were asked the extent to which they agree or disagree with the following statement: “Undocumented immigrants should have the opportunity to eventually become U.S. citizens.” This is similar to a question in the 2008 National Asian American Survey, where respondents were asked about their level of agreement or disagreement with the statement “The U.S. should provide a path to citizenship for people in this country illegally.”

As **Figure 1** indicates, a solid majority of Asian Americans (58%) support a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants. By contrast, 26% oppose a path to citizenship, and the remainder (16%) are undecided on the issue.

This is a major change in opinion from 2008, when just about a third of respondents supported a path to citizenship and 46% were opposed.

**Figure 1: Path to Citizenship for Undocumented Immigrants**



*Source: 2008 National Asian American Survey and 2012 National Asian American Survey*

## Visa Backlogs a Serious Problem

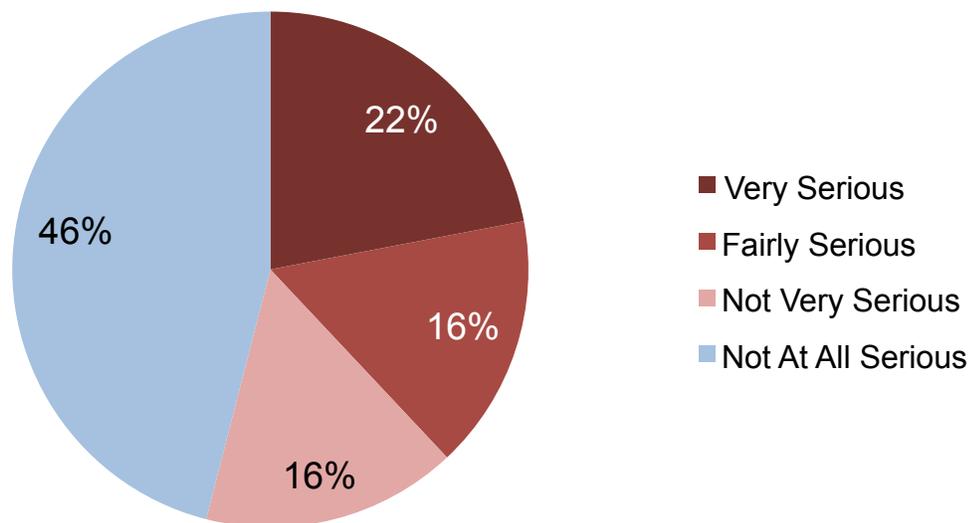
In addition to asking respondents their opinions about undocumented immigrants, we also asked about the relevance of visa backlogs to their personal circumstances.

Respondents were given a list of issues “people have mentioned as challenges they face” and then asked to assess “how serious of a problem each is for you and your family.” The list included various measures of economic stress, and one on “the long time it takes for people to get visas.”

As **Figure 2** indicates, 54% of Asian Americans indicate that visa backlogs are a problem, with 22% indicating that it is a very serious problem and an additional 16% indicating that it is a fairly serious problem.

Concern about visa backlogs was most pressing for Indians (67% indicating it as “very” or “fairly” serious), followed by Hmong (66%), Vietnamese (51%), and Filipinos (48%).

**Figure 2. Severity of Problem For Self and Family: Visa Backlogs**



*Source: 2012 National Asian American Survey*

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

This report, and all other reports and data from the National Asian American Survey are available online at <http://www.naasurvey.com/>.

*Karthick Ramakrishnan* is associate professor of political science at the University of California, Riverside. His research focuses on civic participation, immigration policy, and the politics of race, ethnicity, and immigration in the United States. Ramakrishnan directs the National Asian American Survey and is writing a book on the rise of state and local legislation on immigration over the past decade.

Ramakrishnan received his Ph.D. in politics from Princeton University, and has held fellowships at the Russell Sage Foundation, the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, and the Public Policy Institute of California. He has received several grants from sources such as the James Irvine Foundation and the Russell Sage Foundation, and has provided consultation to public officials at the federal and local levels. His articles and books on immigration and politics can be found at [www.karthick.com](http://www.karthick.com).

*Taeku Lee* is Professor and Chair of Political Science and Professor of Law at UC-Berkeley. He has authored and edited numerous books on race and ethnic politics, immigration, political parties, and public opinion. Lee serves on the American National Election Studies Board of Overseers and on the Council of the American Political Science Association.

Lee studies political partisanship among Asian Americans as they compare to partisanship for whites, Latinos, and African Americans. He also specializes on the role that identity and civic engagement play in bringing Asian Americans into the political arena. Lee's work has earned him three book awards and several fellowships.

Together, Ramakrishnan and Lee have had extensive experience in survey design and analysis and expertise on public opinion and racial politics. They have collectively written 7 books and dozens of articles on racial/ethnic politics, and have conducted 17 surveys, eight of which have included multiple language support for Asian Americans. They have also overseen several successful research projects and their dissemination to policy-relevant audiences.