Asian American Populations Potentially Covered in Future Section 203 Determination

Asian American Populations Currently Covered by Section 203

What is Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act?
Section 203 requires certain jurisdictions to provide language assistance to voters such as translated materials, multilingual workers at polling sites and publicity of the availability of these resources. Jurisdictions are determined every 5 years based on population size, English abilities and literacy rates in that area.

Asian American Populations Potentially Covered in Future Section 203 Determination

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1 Both Thai and Cambodian communities in Los Angeles County, CA currently receive Section 203 language assistance under the County’s decision to provide language assistance in Thai and Khmer to satisfy their requirement for “Other Asian-Not Specified”.

2 Asian American populations that approached, but did not meet, threshold for coverage in Census Bureau’s 2011 determination; populations included here are those containing 7,000 or more of the Asian American persons necessary to meet the threshold for coverage under Section 203.
Asian Americans and the Need for Language Assistance

LEP = Limited-English Proficient (i.e., speaks English less than very well)

Asian Americans at a Glance

3 in 4 Asian Americans speak a language other than English at home

Almost 1/3 of all Asian Americans are LEP and have some difficulty communicating in English

LEP rates vary among Asian ethnic groups. For example,

- Vietnamese 51%
- Hmong 43%
- Chinese 42%
- Laotian 40%
- Korean 41%
- Thai 36%
- Bangladeshi 46%

Coming Up Against the Language Barrier

The language barrier contributes to lower voter registration and turnout among Asian American citizens – Asian Americans fall behind their white and other racial counterparts:

Percent of Citizen Voting-age Population that has Registered to Vote:

- Latino: 59%
- White (non-Latino): 74%
- African American: 73%
- Asian American: 56%
- Total Population: 71%

Common Problems Asian Americans Experienced at the Polls

- 45% of precincts were missing translated materials or poorly displayed them
- 23% of precincts were missing at least one Asian language-speaking bilingual poll worker
- 35% of poll workers waited for voters to request help
- Poll workers lacked knowledge about voting laws. For example, 14% of precincts had poll workers who DID NOT provide provisional ballots when a voter’s name was not on the roster

Source: United States Census Bureau

Percentages are of precincts monitored, not of all precincts targeted for assistance.

Source: United States Census Bureau
Continued Problems: How Precincts Measure Regarding Language Assistance (By Jurisdictions Monitored)

Percentages are of precincts monitored, not of all precincts targeted for assistance.

King County, WA was not included in this chart because no problems were reported regarding missing translated materials or bilingual poll workers. King County holds vote-by-mail elections and its accessible voting centers were open to all voters in that county.

[Graph showing percentages of precincts with missing or poorly displayed translated materials and percentage of precincts missing at least one bilingual poll worker for various jurisdictions.]
Complying with Section 203

Poll Workers Should
- Actively approach voters who may need assistance
- Understand the needs of LEP voters and how to interact with them in a culturally sensitive manner
- Display translated signage and voting materials
- Wear identification to let voters know that they speak various languages
- Know the rights of all voters

Election Officials Should
- Ensure that bilingual poll workers are present
- Conduct publicity through outreach and education
- Train all poll workers on how to serve LEP voters in an effective and respectful manner
- Have accurate translations of voting materials

Upholding Section 203

San Diego County, CA – In 2004, DOJ sued the county to mandate compliance
Result: Voter registration rose by more than 20% for Filipino Americans and by almost 40% for Vietnamese Americans

Harris County, TX – In 2004, the county signed an MOU with DOJ for Section 203 compliance
Result: Vietnamese voter turnout doubled

Examples of Best Practices
- Translate website and online forms into covered languages (e.g., King County, WA in Chinese and Vietnamese)
- Provide language assistance forms online and post “We Speak” signs in various languages to assist LEP voters (e.g., Los Angeles County, CA)
- Use large bulletin boards to display translated materials (e.g., Alameda, San Francisco and Santa Clara counties, CA)
- Recruit bilingual poll workers from high schools for adequate staffing at poll sites (e.g., San Francisco County, CA)

Call to Action!

Asian Americans’ voices deserve to be heard at the polls!

What you can do in your community:
- Meet with your elections officials about their Section 203 implementation plans
- Participate in advisory committees that oversee language access
- Educate voters in your community about their rights
- Identify and work with local, mainstream and ethnic media
- Help recruit bilingual poll workers and volunteer at your poll to provide bilingual assistance
- Conduct trainings for poll monitors on language assistance
- Work with community organizations in your area to monitor polls and report issues

For more information, please visit: www.advancingjustice.org.