

Asian American Voter Registration in Massachusetts

A preliminary report on ten cities and towns

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**Asian American Voter Registration in Massachusetts:
A Preliminary Report on Ten Cities and Towns**

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Introduction

The 2000 Census reports that Massachusetts' Asian American population is the state's fastest growing racial group, increasing by 68% since 1990.¹ By 2025, the number of Asian Americans in Massachusetts is projected to expand to 534,000 from the current total of 238,124.² This dramatic growth, however, has apparently not been accompanied by high levels of Asian American electoral participation and political clout. A major challenge for Asian Americans, therefore, is to substantially increase their participation and influence.

The Institute for Asian American Studies at the University of Massachusetts Boston through its "Political Participation of Asian Americans Project" is addressing the desire for reliable, detailed, and accessible information and analysis related to the ability of Asian Americans in Massachusetts to participate in the political process. One of the specific needs cited by community based organizations, officials, the news media, and others is the relative lack of data on Asian Americans and voter registration.

This preliminary report³ contains the most detailed information on voter registration and Asian Americans in Massachusetts ever assembled. It includes analysis by the Institute for Asian American Studies of recent data⁴ from ten cities and towns⁵ in Massachusetts with large Asian American populations.

The information on voter registration is organized into three parts. The first section includes two different measures of voter registration rates for Asian Americans: 1. the registration rate for Asian Americans of voting age, and 2. the registration rate for Asian Americans of voting age who are citizens. The second section examines the consequences of voter registration rates on actual and potential Asian American electoral influence by looking at: 1. the Asian American share of the voting age population, 2. the Asian American share of voting age citizens, 3. the Asian American share of registered voters, and 4. the impact of increased voter registration on the Asian American share of the eligible electorate. The final section provides data on the party affiliations of Asian Americans who are registered to vote.

¹ Census 2000 Summary File 1 and Census 1990 Summary File 1. In reporting Census 2000 data on Asian Americans in this study, we utilize the "Asian alone" category. Consequently, the most conservative figures for the number of Asian Americans in 2000 are employed in this analysis.

² U.S. Census Bureau, Projected State Populations, by Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 1995-2025.

³ A report containing information from a larger number of cities and towns and with analysis of additional variables related to voter registration will be released in 2003.

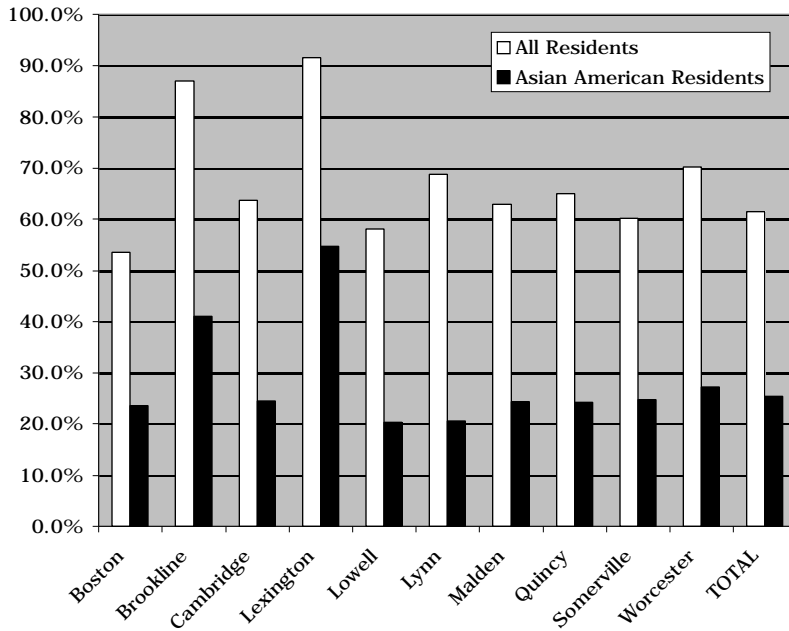
⁴ 2001 and 2002 city and town resident lists and Census 2000 information.

⁵ Boston, Brookline, Cambridge, Lexington, Lowell, Lynn, Malden, Quincy, Somerville, and Worcester are ten of the top eleven cities and towns in Massachusetts with the largest Asian American populations. Newton, which is among the top ten, is not included due to difficulties in gaining access to resident data. The combined Asian American population of the ten cities and towns (124,876) analyzed in this report accounts for 52.4% of all Asian Americans in Massachusetts.

I. Asian American Voter Registration Rates

Rates for the Voting Age Population

Figure 1. Percentage of Voting Age Population Registered to Vote



In order to be eligible to register to vote, individuals must first be at least 18 years of age. Figure 1 and table 1 indicate that **for the combined ten cities and towns, 25.4% (24,416) of Asian Americans of voting age are registered to vote.⁶ In comparison, the registration rate for all adults residing in these cities and towns is well over double the Asian American rate, 61.4% (668,087).**

Figure 1 and table 1 also show that **the registration rates for Asian Americans of voting age vary considerably by city or town.** Lexington stands alone with an Asian American registration rate utilizing this measure that is over fifty percent, 54.7%, and with a registration rate for all residents of 91.6%. Brookline has the next highest Asian American rate with 41% and a total population rate of 87%. The cities with the lowest rates for Asian Americans are Lowell at 20.3% (the rate for all Lowell residents is 58.2%), and Lynn at 20.6% (the all resident rate is 68.8%). The remainder of the cities and towns have Asian American registration rates that fall within the range of 23.5% to 27.2%.

Table 1. Voting Age Population Registered to Vote

	All Residents	Asian American Residents
Boston	53.5% (252,865)	23.5% (8,590)
Brookline	87.0% (41,416)	41.0% (2,435)
Cambridge	63.7% (55,975)	24.6% (2,659)
Lexington	91.6% (20,482)	54.7% (1,203)
Lowell	58.2% (44,695)	20.3% (2,215)
Lynn	68.8% (44,729)	20.6% (686)
Malden	62.9% (28,385)	24.3% (1,463)
Quincy	64.9% (47,172)	24.2% (2,518)
Somerville	60.2% (39,717)	24.8% (1,042)
Worcester	70.2% (92,651)	27.2% (1,605)
TOTAL	61.4% (668,087)	25.4% (24,416)

⁶ Nationally 30.7% of Asian Americans of voting age are registered to vote. (U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2000)

Rates for the Voting Age Citizen Population

A different perspective on Asian American voter registration can be gained by examining registration rates for the adult population who are citizens. This measure accounts for the requirement that those eligible to register to vote must be citizens in addition to being at least 18 years old. Citizenship is a particularly important criterion for eligibility to vote with regard to Asian Americans because a significant number of Asian Americans residing in Massachusetts are foreign born. **In Massachusetts, only 50.3% of Asian American adults are estimated to be citizens compared to 92% of the total Massachusetts adult population estimated to be citizens.**⁷

Figure 2 and table 2 report that **for the ten cities and towns combined, 50.5% (24,416) of the Asian Americans who are estimated to be citizens are registered.**⁸ **Of all residents who are citizens in those cities and towns, 69.5% (668,087) are registered.** **By removing noncitizens from the voting age population, therefore, the voter registration rate increases only slightly for the total population, but, in most cases, markedly increases for Asian Americans.**

The voter registration rates for Asian Americans who are citizens also vary from one city or town to the next. They range

Figure 2. Percentage of Voting Age Citizen Population Registered to Vote

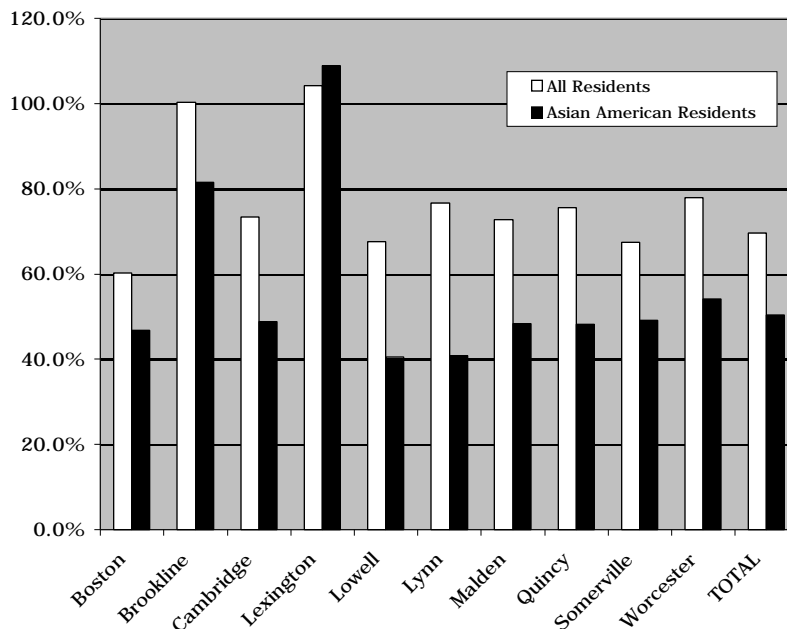


Table 2. Voting Age Citizen Population Registered to Vote

	All Residents	Asian American Residents
Boston	60.3% (252,865)	46.8% (8,590)
Brookline	100.2% (41,416)	81.5% (2,435)
Cambridge	73.3% (55,975)	48.8% (2,659)
Lexington	104.2% (20,482)	108.8% (1,203)
Lowell	67.6% (44,695)	40.4% (2,215)
Lynn	76.6% (44,729)	40.9% (686)
Malden	72.8% (28,385)	48.3% (1,463)
Quincy	75.5% (47,172)	48.2% (2,518)
Somerville	67.4% (39,717)	49.2% (1,042)
Worcester	77.9% (92,651)	54.1% (1,605)
TOTAL	69.5% (668,087)	50.5% (24,416)

⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2000. These figures represent the best available estimates of the percentage of Asian Americans and of the total population who are citizens. Recent and precise information on the citizenship status of residents in each of the ten cities and towns analyzed are not currently available. The estimated numbers of Asian Americans and of all residents who are citizens in the ten cities and towns, therefore, were calculated by multiplying the number of voting age adults by 50.3% for Asian Americans and 92% for the total populations.

⁸ Nationally 52.4% of Asian Americans who are citizens are registered to vote. (U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2000)

from Lexington and Brookline with very high Asian American registration levels, 108.8%⁹ and 81.5% respectively, to the rest of the cities and towns that fall within a range of 40.4% to 54.1%. In comparison, the voter registration rates for the total citizen population are 104.2% in Lexington and 100.2% in Brookline¹⁰ with the remainder of the cities and towns ranging from

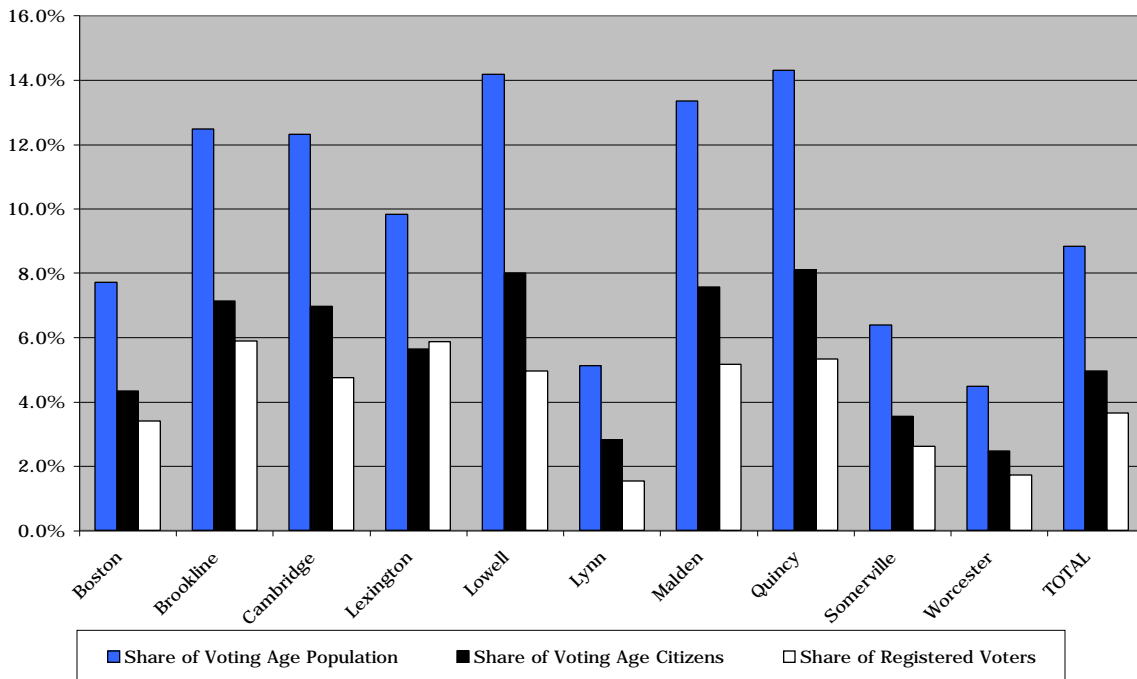
60.3% to 77.9%.

A major explanation for the relatively low number of registered Asian Americans in most jurisdictions, therefore, is that slightly more than one-half of Asian Americans in Massachusetts are estimated to be U.S. citizens. It is also true, however, that, for those Asian Americans who are citizens, in many cases there remains a con-

siderable disparity between their registration rates and those of the general population. In other words, **both structural, e.g., a high proportion of foreign-born Asian American residents, lower citizenship rates, etc., and individual factors, e.g., difficulties registering, motivation, etc., account for generally lower Asian American voter registration rates.**

II. The Asian American Share of Adult Residents, Citizens, and Registered Voters

Figure 3. Asian American Share of Voting Age Population, Voting Age Citizens, and Registered Voters



⁹ The figure for Lexington is over 100% due to our method of estimating the adult Asian American citizen population of the town. In Lexington's case, it is likely that the percentage of Asian American adults who are citizens is greater than the 50.3% state average that we utilize in our estimates.

¹⁰ The figures for Lexington and Brookline are over 100% due to our method of estimating the adult citizen population of the towns. In the cases of Lexington and Brookline, it is likely that the percentage of all adults who are citizens is greater than the 92% state average that we utilize in our estimates.

Share of the Voting Age Population

Figure 3 and table 3 indicate that **Asian Americans account for 8.8% (96,178) of the total adult residents of the ten cities and towns.**¹¹ In terms of the adult population in the cities and towns analyzed, **Asian Americans constitute the largest share in Quincy (14.3%), Lowell (14.2%), Malden (13.3%), Brookline (12.5%) and Cambridge (12.3%).** These numbers reflect the rapidly growing presence and significant political potential of Asian American in many cities and towns in Massachusetts.

Share of the Voting Age Citizen Population

Figure 3 and table 3 also report the Asian American share of the voting

age citizen population. **Asian Americans constitute 5% (48,378) of the adult citizenry of the ten cities and towns.**¹² **Asian Americans account for the highest portions of total adult citizens in Quincy (8.1%), Lowell (8%), Malden (7.6%), Brookline (7.1%), and Cambridge (7%). Asian Americans in Worcester (2.5%) and Lynn (2.8%) comprise the smallest shares of eligible residents.**

The gap between the 8.8% of the voting age population that Asian Americans constitute and the 5% of the voting age citizen population that Asian Americans represent is what we identify as “the voter eligibility gap.” It reflects the barrier posed by citizenship requirements that limit the ability of Asian Americans to register to vote. While this gap is 3.8% for the combined cities and towns,

it is much larger for cities and towns such as Lowell, 6.2%, Quincy, 6.2%, Malden, 5.7%, Brookline, 5.4%, and Cambridge, 5.3%, and somewhat smaller in Worcester, 2%, Lynn, 2.3%, and Somerville, 2.8%.

Share of Registered Voters

Data on the Asian American share of registered voters are also reported in figure 3 and table 3. **Of the total registered voters in the ten cities and towns (668,087), Asian Americans account for 3.7% (24,416).**¹³ **As a percentage of registered voters in each of the ten cities and towns, Asian Americans represent 5.9% in Brookline and Lexington at the high end and 1.5% in Lynn, 1.7% in Worcester, and 2.6% in Somerville at the low end.**

Table 3. Asian American Share of Voting Age Population, Voting Age Citizens, and Registered Voters

	Voting Age Population	Voting Age Citizens	Registered Voters
Boston	7.7% (36,480)	4.3% (18,349)	3.4% (8,590)
Brookline	12.5% (5,938)	7.1% (2,987)	5.9% (2,435)
Cambridge	12.3% (10,827)	7.0% (5,446)	4.8% (2,659)
Lexington	9.8% (2,198)	5.6% (1,106)	5.9% (1,203)
Lowell	14.2% (10,888)	8.0% (5,477)	5.0% (2,215)
Lynn	5.1% (3,331)	2.8% (1,675)	1.5% (686)
Malden	13.3% (6,021)	7.6% (3,029)	5.2% (1,463)
Quincy	14.3% (10,388)	8.1% (5,225)	5.3% (2,518)
Somerville	6.4% (4,210)	3.6% (2,118)	2.6% (1,042)
Worcester	4.5% (5,897)	2.5% (2,966)	1.7% (1,605)
TOTAL	8.8% (96,178)	5.0% (48,378)	3.7% (24,416)

¹¹ The share of the total adult population that is Asian American is 3.7% both nationally and in Massachusetts. (Census 2000 Summary File 1.)

¹² The share of the total adult citizen population that is Asian American is 2.5% nationally and 1.3% in Massachusetts. (U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2000)

¹³ Nationally 1.9% of registered voters are Asian American. (U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2000)

Figure 4. Percentage Change in Asian American Voter Registration Needed to Eliminate Voter Registration Gap

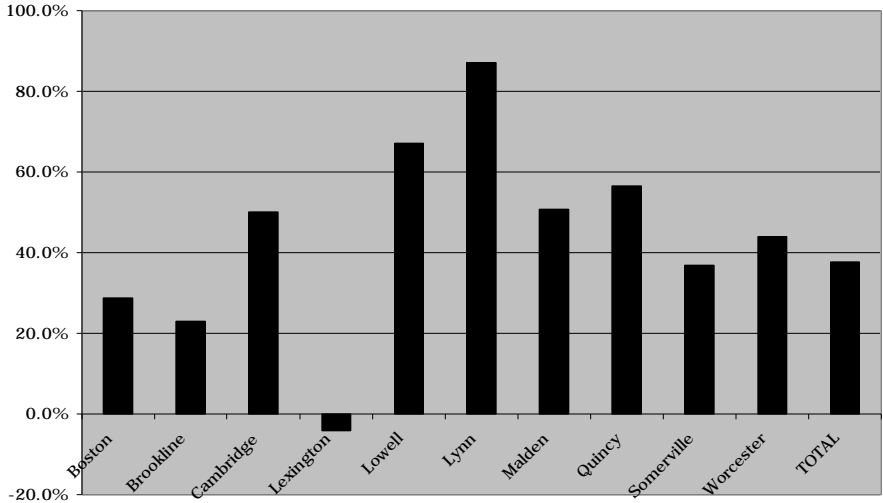


Table 4. Change in Asian American Voter Registration Needed to Eliminate Voter Registration Gap

Boston	28.7%	(2,469)
Brookline	22.9%	(559)
Cambridge	50.1%	(1,333)
Lexington	-4.2%	-(50)
Lowell	67.1%	(1,486)
Lynn	87.0%	(597)
Malden	50.7%	(742)
Quincy	56.6%	(1,426)
Somerville	36.9%	(385)
Worcester	44.0%	(706)
TOTAL	37.8%	(9,224)

The gap between the 3.7% of registered voters that Asian Americans account for and their 5% share of the voting age citizen population is what we call “the voter registration gap.”

This gap represents the distance between those who are fully eligible to register to vote and those who are actually registered. For Asian Americans in the combined cities and towns, the gap, therefore, is 1.3%. The registration gap is largest in Lowell, 3%, Quincy, 2.8%, Malden, 2.4%, and Cambridge, 2.2%. The gap is smallest in Worcester, .8%, Somerville, 1.0%, and Boston, .9%. In Lexington, the gap is -.3%, which indicates that the share of Asian Americans in Lexington who are registered to vote exceeds their share of the voting age population.

As we have indicated, the rapidly expanding Asian American population in Massachusetts is the foundation for their enhanced political participation and influence. However to take full advantage of the growing Asian American presence the voter eligibility and voter registration gaps must be narrowed. **Clearly two major ways to tighten the gaps are: 1. to increase the naturalization rates of Asian American immigrants and, thereby, closing the eligibility gap and 2. to increase the registration rates of those Asian Americans who are citizens and, thus, address the registration gap.**

Making considerable progress in increasing naturalization rates is a long and tedious process and a substantial challenge. **The number of Asian Americans who are citizens in the ten cities and towns would need to nearly double in order to completely close the voter eligibility gap.**

This is not to say that efforts to ease the citizenship process are not worthwhile. It simply emphasizes the point that it is not likely that the percentage of Asian American adults who are citizens will increase dramatically (and it may in fact decrease) in the near future largely due to the continuing stream of immigrants from Asia. Increasing the registration rates of those who are citizens, however, is a very attainable objective.

What changes in the rate of Asian American voter registration would be necessary to eliminate the voter registration gap? How much, for example, must Asian American registration increase in order for the Asian American share of registered voters to equal their share of the voting age citizen population? For the Asian American voter registration gap to be eliminated, the Asian American registration rate must equal that of the total population. Table 4 and figure 4 report the changes in Asian American registration that would be needed for this to happen and, thereby, to erase the registration gap. **For the combined cities and towns, this means that the number of Asian Americans registered to vote must increase by 37.8% or 9,224 additional Asian American registrants. In Lynn the registration challenge is formidable requiring an 87% increase in Asian Americans registered. The task in Lowell is also formidable with a 67.1% growth in Asian American registration needed. On the other hand, an increase in Asian American voter registration of 22.9% in Brookline and 28.7% in Boston would result in eliminating the registration gap.** Obviously, if Asian Americans registered at even higher rates including at rates greater than that of the total population, they would represent a correspondingly greater portion of the electorate.

III. Party Affiliation of Asian Americans

Figure 5. Party Affiliation for the Combined Asian American Population in the Ten Cities and Towns

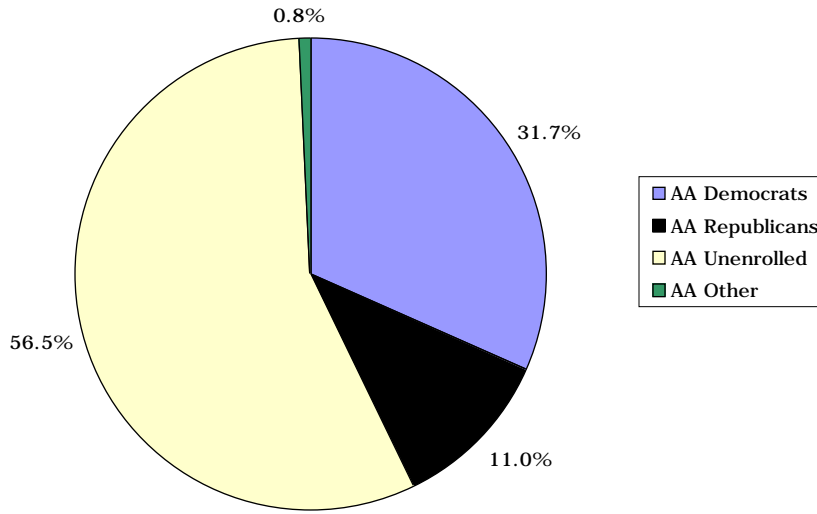


Figure 5 and table 5 show that **over one-half, 56.5% (13,784), of Asian Americans registered to vote (24,416) in the ten cities and towns do not designate a specific party affiliation, i.e., they are formally listed as “unenrolled.”** About one-third, **31.7% (7,743), is enrolled as Democrats, 11% (2,683) as Republicans, and .8% (206) in other parties.** In comparison, as shown in figure 6 and table 6, for the total population in these cities and towns, **39.1% (261,144) are unenrolled, 50.5% (337,412) are Democrats, 9.6% (64,323) are Republicans, and .8% (5,208) identify with other parties.**

Table 5. Party Affiliation of Asian Americans

	Democrats	Republicans	Unenrolled	Other	Total Reg
Boston	33.1% (2,846)	10.0% (861)	56.2% (4,829)	0.6% (54)	8,590
Brookline	34.3% (834)	9.6% (234)	55.6% (1,355)	0.5% (12)	2,435
Cambridge	38.4% (1,020)	10.3% (274)	50.7% (1,349)	0.6% (16)	2,659
Lexington	26.4% (318)	12.4% (149)	61.0% (734)	0.2% (2)	1,203
Lowell	29.5% (653)	13.3% (295)	56.3% (1,246)	0.9% (21)	2,215
Lynn	31.2% (214)	15.5% (106)	45.9% (315)	7.4% (51)	686
Malden	25.9% (379)	11.1% (162)	62.3% (912)	0.7% (10)	1,463
Quincy	25.5% (643)	10.3% (259)	63.4% (1,597)	0.8% (19)	2,518
Somerville	37.3% (389)	7.8% (81)	54.3% (566)	0.6% (6)	1,042
Worcester	27.9% (447)	16.3% (262)	54.9% (881)	0.9% (15)	1,605
TOTAL	31.7% (7,743)	11.0% (2,683)	56.5% (13,784)	0.8% (206)	24,416

According to table 5 **Asian Americans do not vary widely in terms of their party affiliations from one city or town to the next.** Asian Americans are slightly more apt to register as Democrats than the Asian American norm for the combined ten cities and towns in Cambridge, 38.4%, Somerville, 37.3%, Brookline, 34.3%, and Boston, 33.1%. Asian Americans registered as Republicans exceed the Asian American average for the ten cities and towns in Worcester, 16.3%, Lynn, 15.5%, Lowell, 13.3%, and Lexington, 12.4%. The percentage of Asian Americans not designating a party affiliation is higher than the ten cities and town average in Quincy, 63.4%, Malden, 62.3%, and Lexington, 61%.

Figure 6. Party Affiliation for the Combined Total Population in the Ten Cities and Towns

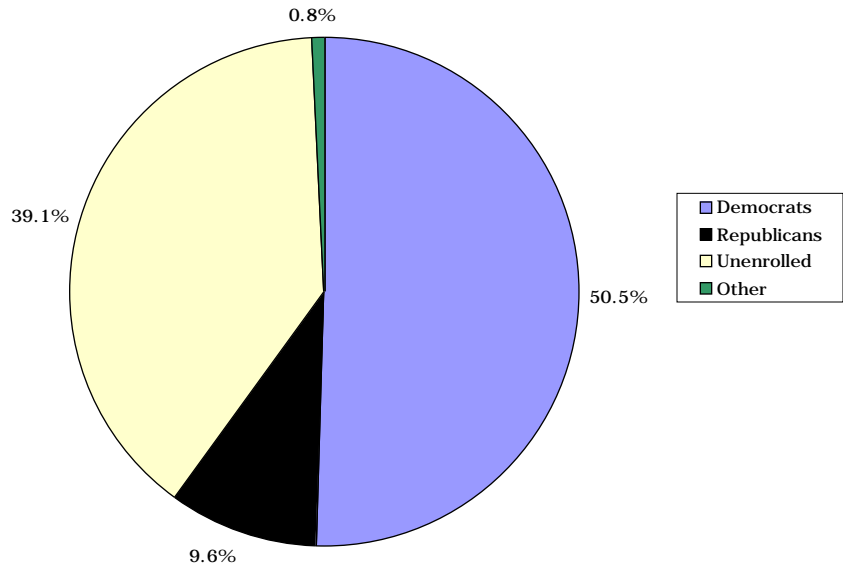


Table 6. Party Affiliation of Total Population

	Democrats	Republicans	Unenrolled	Other	Total Reg
Boston	54.7%(138,321)	8.7%(21,899)	35.8% (90,650)	0.8%(1,995)	252,865
Brookline	45.2%(18,731)	10.6% (4,401)	43.7% (18,111)	0.4% (173)	41,416
Cambridge	57.1%(31,954)	8.1% (4,514)	33.9% (18,966)	1.0% (541)	55,975
Lexington	40.6% (8,317)	15.8% (3,234)	43.3% (8,876)	0.3% (55)	20,482
Lowell	43.7%(19,554)	10.2% (4,557)	45.3% (20,227)	0.8% (357)	44,695
Lynn	46.2%(20,673)	7.9% (3,521)	45.2% (20,222)	0.7% (313)	44,729
Malden	45.5%(12,908)	8.2% (2,327)	45.7% (12,976)	0.6% (174)	28,385
Quincy	49.4%(23,287)	13.6% (6,405)	36.3% (17,109)	0.8% (371)	47,172
Somerville	55.2%(21,921)	6.6% (2,622)	37.2% (14,765)	1.0% (409)	39,717
Worcester	45.1%(41,746)	11.7%(10,843)	42.4% (39,242)	0.9% (820)	92,651
TOTAL	50.5%(337,412)	9.6%(64,323)	39.1%(261,144)	0.8%(5,208)	668,087

Notes on methodology

In reporting on the number of adults and in calculating the adult citizen populations in the ten cities and towns, we rely on U.S. census data rather than resident lists. Due to often high non-response rates to the city and town censuses upon which the resident lists are based, 2000 U.S. census data are used instead for figures on the adult populations in the cities and towns. The Asian American citizen population is derived by multiplying the voting age population of Asian Americans by 50.3% (this figure is the percentage of Asian Americans in Massachusetts who are citizens as reported in the U.S. Census Current Population Survey, November 2000). The total citizen population is derived by multiplying the total voting age population by 92% (this figure is the percentage of adults in Massachusetts who are citizens).

In this report, the 2000 and 2001 resident lists are used only to identify registered voters in the cities and towns and their party affiliations. For the purpose of identifying Asian American registered voters, Asian American resident records were extracted from the city and town resident listings through the identification of Asian surnames. These surnames were checked against an extensive database of Asian surnames compiled by the Institute for Asian Americans Studies from existing Asian names lists and from consultations with expert informants. A proprietary computer program written by the Institute was utilized to automatically extract the records of residents with Asian surnames. Efforts were made to limit racial misidentifications. For example, in the case of surnames that are common for more than one racial group, such as Lee, Young, and Ray, records were manually inspected for evidence of the likely race of the resident, e.g., first and middle names, other household members, etc. Any names that remained in doubt were not included in the listing of Asian Americans.

Acknowledgements

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