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Claremont McKenna College

**Asian American Voting During the 2020 Elections: A Rising,
Divided Voting Group**

submitted to
Professor John J. Pitney
and
Professor Tamara Venit-Shelton

by
Vi T. Nguyen

for
Senior Thesis
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Abstract

Asian Americans continue to be an untapped force within American politics. Despite their status as the fastest-growing racial or ethnic group in the United States they have had surprisingly low political participation rates.¹ But 2020 represented a watershed moment. Campaign outreach and voter participation increased, and Asian Americans assumed new prominence on the national stage. Nonetheless, the 2020 elections also demonstrate historical divides within the community and a lack of cohesion as a voting group.

This thesis investigates Asian American voter behavior during the 2020 election and links trends within this year's elections to assess Asian American panethnicity. It focuses on anti-Asian sentiment and violence, mobilized Asian American voters, and encouraged the growth of panethnicity. This thesis analyzes Georgia and California's local and national election results to confirm the theory that political threats created an increase in panethnicity. Drawing on election results and Asian American voter behavior in these two states, the findings of this work demonstrate moments in which Asian Americans as a voting bloc shift; however, there is no evidence for long term changes and the development of a nationwide Asian panethnic identity. Ultimately, the voting behavior of Asian ethnic groups in the United States will continue to change. Campaigns must take account of their linguistic and cultural diversity to mobilize Asian Americans successfully.

¹ Pagaduan, Megan. "What About the Asian Vote?" Berkeley Political Review <https://bpr.berkeley.edu/2020/08/10/what-about-the-asian-vote/>.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Asian Americans on the National Stage

The 2020 elections mark a watershed moment for Asian American politics. One significant aspect is the increased Asian American representation on a national level. Three AAPI candidates participated in the Democratic presidential primaries (Andrew Yang, Tulsi Gabbard, and Kamala Harris).²

Kamala Harris became the first South Asian on a major-party ticket.³ The general public's interpretation of her multiracial identity and her own personal self-identification highlights how the general term "Asian American" can lead to different interpretations of Asian and the divides among Asian Americans as a whole. Andrew Yang demonstrates the unique attempt to unify Asian Americans by reclaiming Asian stereotypes in his campaign and rejecting identity politics.

The excitement of Kamala Harris' 2020 campaign mainly revolved around her racial identity. The media published articles that wrote variations of "Biden Picks Kamala Harris as Running Mate, First Black Woman."⁴ Why did the press fixate on her Blackness and leave out her South Asian identity? Some argue that the racial label Black is more noteworthy to American readers.⁵ This attention incentivizes media outlets to

² Lee, Jennifer "Opinion: Andrew Yang Isn't the Only Asian American Running for President." Los Angeles Times, October 16, 2019. <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2019-10-15/asian-americans-andrew-yang-kamala-harris-tulsi-gabbard-presidential-race-democrats>.

³ Burns, Alexandra "Kamala Harris, Biden's V.P. Pick, Is First Woman of Color on Major Party Ticket - The New York Times." <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/11/us/politics/kamala-harris-vp-biden.html>.

⁴ Ronayne, Kathleen. "Biden Picks Kamala Harris as Running Mate, First Black Woman." AP NEWS. Associated Press, August 12, 2020. <https://apnews.com/article/virus-outbreak-election-2020-ap-top-news-race-and-ethnicity-ca-state-wire-5ac8fff8bbe1c70479604e3ff62ecb10>.

capitalize on Harris' Black identity. Another theory is that as a mixed South Asian woman, her "Asianess" is not enough. South Asian countries have limited interactions with East Asian countries. South Asians are also physically distinct from East Asians. According to the 2016 National Asian American survey, for most Americans, "the default for Asian is East Asian. While South Asians – such as Indians and Pakistanis – classify themselves as Asian, other Americans are significantly less likely to do so, reflecting patterns of *South Asian exclusion*."⁶ Therefore, South Asian is not regularly considered Asian by other Asian Americans. In her memoir Harris explains that when her family arrived in the Bay area from India, they emersed themselves in the Black community.⁷ She describes her upbringing writing, "My mother understood very well that she was raising two Black daughters. She knew that her adopted homeland would see Maya and me as Black girls, and she was determined to make sure we would grow into confident, proud Black women."⁸ Due to the realities of a Black woman in America, Kamala Harris' Black identity is at the forefront of national headlines and her personal experiences. Although she is a uniting force to inspire Asian Americans with her historic role as the first Asian American on a major presidential ticket, the discussion of her racial labeling is indicative of the complicated nature of the term *Asian American* and for mixed race people.

Andrew Yang defied expectations and became the first Asian American man to run for president and the only person of color at the Democratic primary debate in

⁶ Jennifer Lee & Karthick Ramakrishnan (2019): "Who counts as Asian, Ethnic and Racial Studies", DOI: 10.1080/01419870.2019.1671600

⁷ Bouie, Jamelle. "Black Like Kamala." The New York Times. The New York Times, August 14, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/14/opinion/kamala-harris-black-identity.html>.

⁸ Ibid.

December 2020.⁹ He continued his efforts to unite Asian American votes with his work on the Biden campaign. He also proved to be a polarizing figure for Asian voters during the 2020 Democratic primaries with his rejection of identity politics and his decision to embrace racial stereotypes.¹⁰ His campaign techniques point out how unfamiliar the political territory can be for Asian Americans and the debate of what campaign techniques work best for Asian Americans.

Andrew Yang's presidential campaign fully embraced Asian stereotypes while criticizing identity politics. Yang's campaign slogan was "MATH, make America think harder."¹¹ The slogan was a play on words to Donald Trump's Make America Great Again slogan and alluded to the Asian stereotype that assumes Asians are good at math. Critics pushed back on Yang's decision to monopolize on Asian stereotypes. Asian American political scientist Ellen Wu claims opposes Yang's campaign tactics saying, "That stereotype, which overgeneralizes Asians as diligent and high-achieving, traces back to a broader culture of anti-black racism in America that helped to justify a kind of racial order."¹² This reaction alludes to how a panethnic identity does not exist for Asian Americans. With such a diverse group of people, pandering to all Asian Americans is complex and it is easy to overgeneralize with stereotypes. Andrew Yang also managed to mobilize Asian American voters and lead in Asian American donations among

⁹ "Opinion: Andrew Yang Isn't the Only Asian American Running for President." Los Angeles Times, October 16, 2019. <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2019-10-15/asian-americans-andrew-yang-kamala-harris-tulsi-gabbard-presidential-race-democrats>.

¹⁰ Stevens, Matt. "At a Historic Moment for Asian-American Candidates, Andrew Yang Leans In (Published 2019)." The New York Times, May 22, 2019, sec. U.S. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/22/us/politics/andrew-yang-2020-asian-candidates.html>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² NBC News. "Kamala Harris and a History of Trying to Define 'Asian American.'" October 20, 2020. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/kamala-harris-history-trying-define-asian-american-n1242200>.

Democratic candidates.¹³ His campaign success shows that possibly, stereotyping is the key to success for Asian Americans in politics.

The problems in Kamala Harris' and Andrew Yang's campaigns demonstrate the divides in the Asian American community. Their presence in politics shows the strides Asian Americans are making in U.S. politics despite cultural barriers to political participation.

Historic Election Turnout

Historically, Asian Americans have exhibited the lowest turnout rates for national elections.¹⁴ However, Asian Americans registered to vote at historic rates, and more Asian Americans voted in the 2020 elections than in any past election.¹⁵ Asian American registered voters demonstrated a 59.7% turnout rate.¹⁶ In general, the 2020 elections received the highest voter turnout for all Americans, with 61% voting.¹⁷ In swing states like Georgia with close elections, Asian American's record turnout determined the election results. Some scholars suggest an increase in Asian American representation with politicians like Andrew Yang or Kamala Harris contributed to this growth.¹⁸

Christine Chen, executive director of APIAVote said that, "Traditionally, any time we've seen an Asian American candidate run, we typically see a lot larger numbers because

¹³ AAPI Data Contributors, Data Bits. "Who Is Winning the Asian American Money Race?," December 20, 2019. <https://aapidata.com/blog/who-is-winning-asian-donors2019q3/>.

¹⁴ Aoki, Andrew, and Okiyoshi Takeda. 2009. Asian American politics. Cambridge: Polity.

¹⁵ "Asian Americans Are the Fastest-Growing Racial or Ethnic Group in the U.S. Electorate." Pew Research Center (blog). Accessed May 3, 2021. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/05/07/asian-americans-are-the-fastest-growing-racial-or-ethnic-group-in-the-u-s-electorate/>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Fang, Marina. "Kamala Harris' Historic Candidacy Helped Asian American Turnout Soar." HuffPost. HuffPost, November 11, 2020. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/kamala-harris-asian-american-aapi-voter-turnout-2020_n_5fab0530c5b6ed84597c0c87.

suddenly you're hearing more about their background, and the community is looking to identify with that candidate because of that similar background.”¹⁹ This explains why Asian Americans may have voted for presidential nominee Joe Biden and his running mate Kamala Harris rather than Donald Trump and Mike Pence, both white. Therefore, 2020 represents a moment in which Asian Americans grew their political presence and exhibited their importance for future elections.

The Covid-19 Pandemic, Election Administration, and Perceived Political Threats

On January 20st, 2020, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) confirmed its first case of Coronavirus disease, also known as Covid-19.²⁰ Covid-19 is an infectious disease, and to slow down the spread, people began practicing physical distancing and wearing medical masks.²¹ At times, local governments instated “stay-at-home orders” to prevent excessive human contact.²² Around the world, people’s lives changed as Covid-19 spread. For Americans, campaign operations and election administration changed as well. Due to the significant societal constraints created by the deadly COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, federal and state policymakers met one of the greatest U.S. election crises in recent history. Most states identified two primary goals during the 2020 election to adapt to the pandemic: expanding early voting and expanding mail-in voting.²³ Ultimately, the change in election administration may have affected voter turnout or behavior in many ways. Asian Americans experience additional obstacles to mail-in-voting. Voting by mail

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Taylor, Derrick Bryson. “A Timeline of the Coronavirus Pandemic.” The New York Times. The New York Times, February 13, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/article/coronavirus-timeline.html>.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ball, Molly. “How COVID-19 Changed Everything About the 2020 Election.” Time, August 6, 2020. <https://time.com/5876599/election-2020-coronavirus/>.

²³ Ibid.

required information about the process, and Asian American immigrants face language barriers.²⁴ About 71% of Asian Americans are foreign-born, and only 57% of this foreign-born population can speak English proficiently.²⁵ Additionally, Asian Americans receive low-level contact from campaigns and are less informed about elections.²⁶ Also, historically vote-by-mail ballots disproportionately reject Asian American immigrant signatures because signatures several Asian countries do not commonly use signatures and foreign immigrants are less familiar with the experience.²⁷

The pandemic created a unique challenge for Asian Americans, increased anti-Asian sentiment and violence. Scientists found the first case of Covid-19 in Wuhan, China. Because of the disease's Chinese origin, President Trump referred to the Virus as the "Chinese-Virus."²⁸ After his first tweet using the term Chinese-Virus, an increase in anti-Asian conspiracy theories occurred.²⁹ These conspiracy theories created an increase in anti-Asian sentiment and violence. This context created a perceived political threat for Asian Americans. A perceived political threat is an individual's assessment of how a political event, person, or group will negatively impact their social, political, economic

²⁴ Kambhampaty, Anna Purna. "Why Asian Americans Face Extra Obstacles to Voting by Mail." *Time*. *Time*, October 20, 2020. <https://time.com/5901094/asian-americans-vote-by-mail/>.

²⁵ Budiman, Abby, and Neil G. Ruiz. "Key Facts about Asian Americans, a Diverse and Growing Population." *Pew Research Center*. May 2, 2021. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/04/29/key-facts-about-asian-americans/>.

²⁶ Kambhampaty, Anna Purna. "Why Asian Americans Face Extra Obstacles to Voting by Mail." *Time*. *Time*, October 20, 2020. <https://time.com/5901094/asian-americans-vote-by-mail/>.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Croucher, Stephen M., Thao Nguyen, and Diyako Rahmani. "Prejudice Toward Asian Americans in the Covid-19 Pandemic: The Effects of Social Media Use in the United States." *Frontiers*. *Frontiers*, May 22, 2020. <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fcomm.2020.00039/full>.

²⁹ Yam, Kimmy. "After Trump's Covid-19 Diagnosis, Anti-Asian Tweets and Conspiracies Rose 85%: Report." *NBCNews.com*. *NBCUniversal News Group*, October 15, 2020. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/after-trump-s-covid-19-diagnosis-anti-asian-tweets-conspiracies-n1243441>.

status.³⁰ Therefore, this increase in Asian violence led some Asian Americans to see President Trump and others who spread anti-Asian conspiracy theories as a threat. Studies demonstrate a positive relationship between the threat perception of Donald Trump's presidency and the increased feeling of Asian American panethnic linked faith.³¹ Chapter 3 of this study goes into more depth about the effects of anti-Asian violence and Asian American panethnicity.

The increased political representation, voter turnout, and Covid-19 Pandemic set the stage for Asian American voter behavior during the 2020 elections. This paper seeks to analyze the implications of this context as well as Asian American voter behavior throughout history, by looking at political threat studies, elections, ballot initiatives, and diverse candidate recruitment strategies.

Is there a Pan-Asian Identity?

In the 1960s, Asian American activists coined the term *Pan-Asian* to address racial inequalities and maximize their electoral power.³² A panethnic identity is a collection of ethnic groups united by social norms and ideals.³³ Panethnicity creates a sense of unity among individuals of diverse national origins but similar ethnic identities. For example, in America, panethnicity forms when a group like Asian Americans come

³⁰ Le, Danvy, Maneesh Arora, and Christopher Stout. "Are You Threatening Me? Asian-American Panethnicity in the Trump Era." Wiley Online Library. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, October 14, 2020. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ssqu.12870>.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Wirtz, Rosette Ho, "Creating a panethnic identity: The Asian American movement's vision of racial and political solidarity" (1995). UNLV Retrospective Theses & Dissertations. 490. <http://dx.doi.org/10.25669/85km-yaww>

³³ Tam CHO, Wendy K. "Foreshadowing Strategic Pan-Ethnic Politics: Asian American Campaign Finance Activity in Varying Multicultural Contexts." *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* 1, no. 3 (September 1, 2001): 273–94. <https://doi.org/10.1177/153244000100100303>.

together in solidarity for common social and political goals. This is different from panethnic self-identification which is when an ethnic group increasingly identifies as Asian American. This identification may be forced due to societal grouping of racial identities. Racial labels are imposed, but Asian Americans can determine their panethnicity. Yen Le Espiritu's definition is "the generalization of solidarity among ethnic subgroups."³⁴ This panethnicity is critical to Asian American political organizations as one of the smallest minority groups in America.

Organizing Asian Americans is a difficult task because of the complexity of the term *Asian American*. Broadly, it refers to descendants of Asia who are American citizens.³⁵

Asians also lack a sense of panethnic identity. In the 1870s, the U.S. Census included all East Asians under "Category C" which stood for Chinese.³⁶ This lumping together produced divisions within Asian Americans. American society assigned Asian Americans stereotypes and characteristics that applied to all subgroups. During World War 2, Anti-Japanese sentiment and internment encouraged Chinese immigrants to separate themselves from Japanese Americans to avoid discrimination.³⁷ Scholar Tanujaya calls this aversion technique "ethnic disidentification," which is the "act of distancing one's group from another group so as not to be mistaken and suffer the blame for the presumed misdeeds of that group."³⁸

³⁴ Espiritu, Yen Le. "Race and U.S. Panethnic Formation." *The Oxford Handbook of American Immigration and Ethnicity*, August 25, 2016. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199766031.013.013>.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Tanujaya, Nina, "The Racialization of the Pan-Ethnic Asian American Identity" (2019). Senior Projects Spring 2019. 86. https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2019/86

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

In the 1960s, the political climate set the stage for the initial growth of panasian solidarity. A wave of civil rights movements developed in America. College-aged Asian Americans played a role in the Black Power Movement and the antiwar movement.³⁹ The increased political awareness of Asian Americans led them to recognize their social inequalities. “The struggle for social justice in America was more than an African American and European American issue; it involved other people of color. In a rude awakening, Asian Americans became acutely aware that they had more in common with African Americans than with European Americans, that racial injustice had been visited on them as well.”⁴⁰ Acknowledging similarities and difference with other racial groups in America encouraged Asian Americans to coalize for Black Americans and develop a sense of panethnicity among themselves.

Activists produced the Asian American Movement in response to this watershed moment in America’s civil rights history. Thus, Asian Americans reclaimed their imposed panethnicity label for the use of political solidarity. In 1965, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 abolished the quota system and increased Asian immigration.⁴¹ This trend continues in 2020 and explains why Asian Americans are the fastest-growing voter bloc in the U.S. Nevertheless, immigrants who arrived and continue to come did not experience this movement, which unified the Asian American panethnic identity. First-generation Asian American immigrants tend to be politically inactive and

³⁹ Wei, William “The Asian American Movement.” Temple University Press, 1993. Accessed November 30, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt14bt3pg>.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

identify with their home country.⁴² Second-generation, native-born Americans increasingly identify as panethnic Asian Americans instead of their subgroup.⁴³ Therefore, it is unclear whether there is currently a panethnic voter bloc in America. The complexity of an Asian American panethnic group is one that campaigns question themselves. Is there an Asian American electorate for campaigns to mobilize? If so, how do they organize a group of multicultural, multiethnic, multilingual people?

Why Campaigns Don't Reach Out

The fragmentation of the Asian American political bloc is why many campaigns do not target the population. The many sub-groups of Asian Americans that a campaign must target make the act not worthwhile. The high costs of voter outreach are also due in part to the many language translations necessary to reach out to all Asian sub-groups.⁴⁴ Reaching out to Asian American voters is costly and does not have a stable return on investment. Historically, Asian Americans were geographically concentrated in Democratic states like California and New York. This concentration means that Asian Americans have the most political leverage in confidently blue states where a small population of voters cannot decide an election. However, Asian Americans are growing in importance in swing states and red states. In the 2020 presidential election, Arizona and Georgia flipped blue and the Asian American voter population represented the small

⁴² Kim, Caitlin "Why Asian Americans Don't Vote." *New Americana* September 7, 2017. <http://newamerica.org/weekly/why-asian-americans-dont-vote/>.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Hsu, Hua "Are Asian Americans the Last Undecided Voters?" *The New Yorker*. October 26, 2020. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/11/02/are-asian-americans-the-last-undecided-voters>.

margin of votes necessary to decide the election.⁴⁵ North Carolina and Texas did not flip blue but demonstrated a surprising shift to the left which can also be credited to Asian American voter turnout.⁴⁶ The importance of Asian Americans in flipping Georgia blue is covered in Chapter 3 of this paper.

The political participation of Asian Americans is also unreliable. Empirical studies show that low political participation levels are mainly due to a person's socioeconomic status. Typically, when a person's education, income, and occupation improve, they have additional access to voting. However, Asian Americans are an outlier, and socioeconomic status is less likely to predict an Asian American's voting behavior.⁴⁷ Also, as mentioned before, first-generation Asian Americans tend to be much less interested and familiar with America's political system.⁴⁸ According to the Pew Research Center, Asian Americans were the least likely minority group to participate during the 2018 midterm elections.⁴⁹ Thus, campaigns are less likely to look at Asian Americans as viable voters for their campaigns.

Asian Americans also do not have fixed partisanship. Black Americans almost always vote for Democrats. Asian Americans have become Democrats increasingly but

⁴⁵ Mejia, Elena "How The 2020 Election Changed The Electoral Map," FiveThirtyEight, December 8, 2020, <https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/2020-swing-states/>.

⁴⁶ Wang, Claire "Asian American Swing State Early and Absentee Voting Increased 300%, More than Any Other Group." Nov. 20, 2020 <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/asian-american-swing-state-early-absentee-voting-increased-300-more-n1248454>.

⁴⁷ Lien, Pei-te. "Asian Americans and Voting Participation: Comparing Racial and Ethnic Differences in Recent U.S. Elections." *The International Migration Review* 38, no. 2 (2004): 493-517. Accessed May 3, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27645387>.

⁴⁸ "Asian Americans Are the Fastest-Growing Racial or Ethnic Group in the U.S. Electorate." Pew Research Center (blog). Accessed May 3, 2021. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/05/07/asian-americans-are-the-fastest-growing-racial-or-ethnic-group-in-the-u-s-electorate/>

⁴⁹ "Voter Turnout Rose in 2018 across Racial, Ethnic Groups | Pew Research Center." Accessed May 3, 2021. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/05/01/historic-highs-in-2018-voter-turnout-extended-across-racial-and-ethnic-groups/>.

still show tendencies to vote Republican.⁵⁰ For example, Vietnamese Americans in 2008, 42% of Vietnamese Americans registered as Republicans.⁵¹ In 2020, 48% of Vietnamese Americans supported Republican Donald Trump in the presidential election.⁵² Because of this group's experience with communism in Vietnam, Vietnamese voters are more likely to align with the Republican party's anti-communist platform.⁵³ The unreliable nature of Asian American voters contributes to the low levels contact Asian Americans receive from campaigns. This low-level contact reinforces Asian American's lack of political participation.

Pan ethnicity Among Other Minority Groups in the United States

Asian Americans struggle to maintain a unified voting bloc. It is important to note that cohesion among voting for other ethnic groups is also questionable.

The Associated Press Vote Cast Survey showed that Biden won 90% of Black voters, 70% of Asian voters, and 63% of Hispanic voters.⁵⁴ Despite this, most ethnic groups do not have a panethnic identity that links them as a voting bloc. Studies show that currently, Black Americans are the only unified electorate.⁵⁵ Since 1964, a report by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies identifies that an average of 88% of

⁵⁰ Vo, Linda, University of California, and Irvine. "Asian-Americans Continue To Drift Away From The GOP, But It's A Complicated Story." NPR.org. Accessed December 6, 2020. <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2016/10/12/497063888/asian-americans-continue-to-drift-away-from-republicans-but-it-s-a-complicated-s>.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² "2020 Asian American Voter Survey | APIAVote." September 15, 2020

<https://www.apiaivote.org/research/2020-asian-american-voter-survey>

⁵³ Nguyen, Terry. "48% of Vietnamese Americans Say They're Voting for Trump. Here's Why." Vox, October 30, 2020. <https://www.vox.com/first-person/2020/10/30/21540263/vietnamese-american-support-trump-2020>.

⁵⁴ McGill, Brian. "The How We Voted in 2020 Presidential Election." The Wall Street Journal. Dow Jones & Company, November 3, 2020. <https://www.wsj.com/graphics/votecast-2020/>.

⁵⁵ Johnson, Theodore R. "How the Black Vote Became a Monolith." The New York Times. The New York Times, September 16, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/16/magazine/black-vote.html>.

Black Americans voted for a Democratic presidential candidate.⁵⁶ Black Americans are a political monolith because of their shared experiences and history. Black Americans are all connected by slavery, the Civil Rights Movement and have little relations to foreign countries due to American slavery. Since obtaining the right to vote, Black Americans have been a consistent vote for the Democratic party.

The same is not true for the Hispanic/ Latino/ Spanish vote. This group includes various countries of origin, including Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Central and South American.⁵⁷ According to the Pew Research Center, 51% of Hispanics avoid panethnic terms like “Hispanic” or “Latino” and prefer to identify as their country of origin.⁵⁸ Language, immigration experience, and cultural traditions all act to divide this ethnic group. Therefore, political support varies per region. In Florida, Trump won 55% of the Cuban American vote, securing him the state while Biden lead in Hispanic votes for Arizona and Nevada, which he won.⁵⁹ These geographical differences separate the Latino vote.

The Native American vote became noteworthy in 2020 when it helped secure Joe Biden’s win in Arizona.⁶⁰ Native American communities are disenfranchised and face many barriers to voting. Lack of water, electricity, grocery stores, highest Covid-19

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Taylor, Paul, Mark Hugo Lopez, Jessica Martínez, and Gabriel Velasco. “II. Identity, Pan-Ethnicity and Race.” Pew Research Center's Hispanic Trends Project. Pew Research Center, December 30, 2019. <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2012/04/04/ii-identity-pan-ethnicity-and-race/>.

⁵⁸Ivis García. “Cultural Insights for Planners: Understanding the Terms Hispanic, Latino, and Latinx.” Taylor & Francis. Accessed May 3, 2021. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01944363.2020.1758191>.

⁵⁹Kim, Eun Kyung. “*How Latino Voters Helped, and Hurt, Trump.*” Roll Call. Roll Call, November 5, 2020. <https://www.rollcall.com/2020/11/05/how-latino-voters-helped-and-hurt-trump/>.

⁶⁰ Fonseca, Felicia. “*Native American Votes Helped Secure Biden's Win in Arizona.*” AP NEWS. Associated Press, November 19, 2020. <https://apnews.com/article/election-2020-joe-biden-flagstaff-arizona-voting-rights-fa452fbd546fa00535679d78ac40b890>.

infection rates, distance from ballot boxes are all barriers for the Native American vote.⁶¹ According to the American Bar Association, Natives are the least likely to vote.⁶² Natives make up 10% of voters in Arizona, enough to have made a difference. Despite their common history and increased panethnic beliefs, because they are disenfranchised in many ways, voting patterns are sporadic.

Ethnic groups in America are ultimately not a reliable voting bloc except for Black Americans. There are instances in which ethnic groups are united, like during times of political threats; however, those effects are only short-term. For example, African Americans are able to unite together because of an American history of slavery, civil rights movements, and ultimately a separation from other nations. This common American identity unites the group and creates similar American political beliefs. However, a history like that is difficult to form. Therefore, Although the Asian American voter behavior may allude to increased panethnicity, it is unlikely these effects will be long-term.

⁶¹ “Overcoming Barriers for Native American Voters.” PBS. Public Broadcasting Service. Accessed May 3, 2021. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/vote-overcoming-barriers-for-native-american-voters/>.

⁶² “How the Native American Vote Continues to Be Suppressed.” American Bar Association. Accessed May 3, 2021. https://www.americanbar.org/groups/crsj/publications/human_rights_magazine_home/voting-rights/how-the-native-american-vote-continues-to-be-suppressed/.

Chapter 2: Political Threats

Nationally, early data demonstrated a 310% increase in early votes by Asian Americans in 2020 compared to 2016.⁶³ The 2020 elections were a unique opportunity for Asian Americans to grow as a voter bloc. NBC's early exit polls showed that Asian Americans heavily favored the democratic candidate Joe Biden and voted for him 63% to 31%.

On January 30th, 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) labeled the Covid-19 pandemic a global health concern.⁶⁴ In December 2019, CDC announced that the first known case of Covid-19 case originated in Wuhan, China. Because of the virus' Asian origin, anti-Asian sentiment increased in the United States, and many blamed Asian people for the pandemic. Studies show that President Donald Trump's anti-Asian and anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies during the Covid-19 pandemic served as a perceived political threat that increased Asian American panethnicity as Asian Americans came together against him.⁶⁵ Asian American voters disapproved of Donald Trump's performance as president, with 65% disapproving and 21% approving as opposed to the national approval rating of 46%.⁶⁶ Despite this, there remain a large groups of Asian

⁶³ Mejia, Elena. "How The 2020 Election Changed The Electoral Map." *FiveThirtyEight*, December 8, 2020. <https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/2020-swing-states/>.

⁶⁴ Taylor, Derrick Bryson. "A Timeline of the Coronavirus Pandemic." *The New York Times*. *The New York Times*, February 13, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/article/coronavirus-timeline.html>.

⁶⁵ Nakamura, David. "With 'Kung Flu,' Trump Sparks Backlash over Racist Language — and a Rallying Cry for Supporters." *Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/with-kung-flu-trump-sparks-backlash-over-racist-language--and-a-rallying-cry-for-supporters/2020/06/24/485d151e-b620-11ea-aca5-ebb63d27e1ff_story.html.

⁶⁶ ALDEF. "AALDEF Exit Poll of 7,600 Asian American Voters in 2018 Midterm Elections: Preliminary Results," November 8, 2018. <https://www.aaldef.org/press-release/aaldef-exit-poll-of-7-600-asian-american-voters-in-2018-midterm-elections-preliminary-results/>

Americans who voted for Trump. Also, due to the increased anti-Chinese rhetoric, other Asian Americans practiced ethnic disidentification in order to separate themselves from Chinese people.⁶⁷ Ultimately, in 2020 Asian Americans exhibited an increase in panethnicity however, the political threat of Trump is temporary and will not sustain a future of panethnicity for Asian American voters

In February 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) wrote, “Don’t attach locations or ethnicity to the disease, this is not a 'Wuhan Virus,' 'Chinese Virus' or 'Asian Virus.’”⁶⁸ The WHO wrote this to ease the anti-Asian sentiment that spiked partially due to these terms. Anti-Asian conspiracy theories and prejudice on Twitter increased by 85% after Trump tweeted about the “Chinese Virus”.⁶⁹ The population growth of Asian Americans has a positive relationship with crimes against Asian Americans. The New York Police Department’s data indicates that between 2008-2019, Asian Americans are the only racial group to have experienced an increase in hate crimes.⁷⁰

This prejudice toward Asian Americans did not begin with Donald Trump and is traced back to the 19th-century racial exclusion of Asian Americans. Yellow peril paranoia popularized in American culture.⁷¹ This paranoia refers to the fear of Asian

⁶⁷ Sadhwani, Sara. “Asian American Mobilization: The Effect of Candidates and Districts on Asian American Voting Behavior.” *Political Behavior*, May 6, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-020-09612-7>.

⁶⁸ Gstalter, Morgan. “WHO Official Warns against Calling It 'Chinese Virus,' Says 'There Is No Blame in This'.” *The Hill*. The Hill, March 19, 2020. <https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/488479-who-official-warns-against-calling-it-chinese-virus-says-there-is-no>.

⁶⁹ Zhang, Y., Zhang, L. & Benton, F. Hate Crimes against Asian Americans. *Am J Crim Just* (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-020-09602-9>

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Wu, Ellen D. *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority*. Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014. Accessed May 3, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5hhphr>.

Americans as national security threats. During this time, white supremacist groups like the Arsonists of the Order of Caucasians murdered Chinese immigrants. These groups justified this violence by claiming Chinese people created poor economic conditions for Americans. This racial prejudice encouraged Asian Americans to participate in the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s.⁷² Asian Activists chanted, “Yellow peril supports Black Power” in solidarity among all Asian and Black Americans.⁷³ By reclaiming the derogatory term yellow, Asian Americans demonstrated that during times of perceived political threats, Asian Americans developed an increased panethnic identity. This increase in anti-Asian sentiment and minority groups coming together amidst political threats is a common trend in American history.

Dr. Yulin Hswen, an assistant professor of epidemiology at U.C., San Francisco, said that, “Anti-Asian sentiment depicted in the tweets containing the term 'Chinese Virus' likely perpetuated racist attitudes and parallels the anti-Asian hate crimes that have occurred since.”⁷⁴ Many Asian Americans believe Trump caused the increase in anti-Asian sentiment due to his negative reactions toward the pandemic that targeted Asian Americans. Studies demonstrate that even before the pandemic, counties that hosted Trump rallies reported a 226% increase in hate crimes. During the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, Wuhan, China, carried the first known case of the Covid-19 Virus.^[5] For

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Weik, Taylor. “The History behind 'Yellow Peril Supports Black Power' and Why Some Find It Problematic.” NBCNews.com. NBCUniversal News Group, June 15, 2020. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/history-behind-yellow-peril-supports-black-power-why-some-find-n1228776>.

⁷⁴ Reja, Mishal. “Trump's 'Chinese Virus' Tweet Helped Lead to Rise in Racist Anti-Asian Twitter Content: Study.” ABC News. ABC News Network, 2021. <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/trumps-chinese-virus-tweet-helped-lead-rise-racist/story?id=76530148>.

example, the Group “Stop AAPI Hate” documented a case where an individual posted on Facebook that “There is a special place in hell reserved for the f—king Chinese and their archaic culture...[Trump's] description of COVID-19 as the Chinese Virus is the most accurate thing he has ever said--I wish it had wiped the whole country off the planet.”⁷⁵ These beliefs demonstrate the increase in anti-Asian sentiment and the increasing visibility of this racism for Asian Americans. Since the beginning of the Covid-19 Pandemic, 45% of Asian adults claim to have experienced some form of discrimination. Most Asian Americans (81%) also believe that anti-Asian violence is increasing.⁷⁶ Stop AAPI Hate received 3,292 self-reported cases of anti-Asian hate in 2020.⁷⁷ Therefore, hate crimes were increasing as well as Asian American’s perception and belief that this violence could affect them.

Asian Americans experience racial bias as a population.⁷⁸ A study done by Pediatrics revealed that many Chinese American adults and youth experienced racial prejudice in-person and online that led to self-reported anxiety and mental health issues.⁷⁹ A majority of children and adults surveyed experienced discrimination in-person, one-

⁷⁵ Asian Pacific Policy Planning Council, “Stop AAPI Hate Monthly Report” Stop AAPI Hate March 23 2020 http://www.asianpacificpolicyandplanningcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/STOP_AAPI_HATE_MONTHLY_REPORT_4_23_20.pdf

⁷⁶ Chavez, Nicole. “Study: Asian Americans Face Attacks during Pandemic.” The Mercury News. The Mercury News, March 17, 2021. <https://www.mercurynews.com/2021/03/16/study-asian-americans-face-attacks-during-pandemic/>.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Staff, The Petrie-Flom Center. “The Two Pandemics Facing Asian Americans: COVID-19 and Xenophobia.” Bill of Health, October 1, 2020. <http://blog.petrieflom.law.harvard.edu/2020/10/01/covid19-xenophobia-asian-americans/>.

⁷⁹ Cheah CSL, Wang C, Ren H, Zong X, Cho HS, Xue X. COVID-19 racism and mental health in Chinese American families. *Pediatrics*. 2020; doi: 10.1542/peds.2020-021816

fourth experiencing it every day.⁸⁰ With most Chinese Americans experiencing anxiety due to Covid-19, these emotions may influence candidate evaluations in the elections. A new Center for Public Integrity poll found that in April 2020, 1/3 of Americans witnessed someone blaming Asian people for the pandemic.⁸¹ Additional findings demonstrate that those who used Fox News or social media to receive information about Covid-19 were more likely to see Asian Americans as a health threat than those who watched CNN, MSNBC, or did not use social media. Studies demonstrate that social media reinforce prejudices.⁸² Social media content during the Covid-19 pandemic can create perceived threats where adverse reactions toward the pandemic will increase prejudice toward the group seen as responsible. Sentiments like this led Asian Americans to believe that Donald Trump's racialization of the Covid-19 Virus created a spike in violence against Asian Americans.⁸³

Studies indicate that the threat perception of Donald Trump is a uniting force for the community. Referring to an Asian hate crime, Mr. Park, a local man from Georgia, says, "I do think this horrible crime has brought people together."⁸⁴ Therefore, Mr. Park represents a feeling many Asian Americans experience after hearing of increased anti-Asian hate. Some studies label this "The Trump Effect" which demonstrates that an

⁸⁰ Ellerbeck, Alex. "Survey: More than 30 Percent of Americans Have Witnessed COVID-19 Bias against Asians." Center for Public Integrity, April 28, 2020. <https://publicintegrity.org/health/coronavirus-and-inequality/survey-majority-of-asian-americans-have-witnessed-covid-19-bias/>.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Cheah CSL, Wang C, Ren H, Zong X, Cho HS, Xue X. COVID-19 racism and mental health in Chinese American families. *Pediatrics*. 2020; doi: 10.1542/peds.2020-021816

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Richard Fausset, Nicholas Bogel-Burroughs and Marie Fazio. "8 Dead in Atlanta Spa Shootings, With Fears of Anti-Asian Bias." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, March 26, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/03/17/us/shooting-atlanta-acworth>.

increase in the media coverage of hate crimes occurs after Trump’s rallies or speeches and produces a fear among minority groups.⁸⁵ This fear encourages panethnicity among Asian Americans.

This anti-Asian rhetoric by Donald Trump may also affect the partisanship of Asian Americans. Democracy Fund and UCLA Nationscape surveys demonstrated that most Asian Americans who thought there was “a great deal” or “a lot” of anti-Asian hate in the United States supported Democrat Joe Biden.⁸⁶ Those who believed there was not a lot of anti-Asian sentiment were much less likely to prefer Joe Biden over Republican Donald Trump. Nationscape surveys indicated that from July 2019 to May 2020, after the first time Donald Trump referred to Covid-19 as the “Chinese Virus,” Asian Americans displayed shifts to the Democratic party more than any other racial group.⁸⁷ Political scientists Alexander Kuo, Neil Malhotra, and Cecilia Mo claim that Asian Americans who believe they face discrimination are more likely to be Democrats due to the party’s diversity.⁸⁸ Asian Americans may also relate their negative feelings of social exclusion to the predominately white Republican party. House Democrats attempted to pass H.Res.908 “Condemning all forms of anti-Asian sentiment as related to COVID-19.” It

⁸⁵ Zhang, Y., Zhang, L. & Benton, F. “Hate Crimes against Asian Americans.” *Am J Crim Just* (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-020-09602-9>

⁸⁶ Chin, Caitlin. “Why Democrats and Republicans Would Benefit from Hate Crime Protections for Asian Americans.” *Brookings*. Brookings, April 14, 2021. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/how-we-rise/2021/04/13/why-democrats-and-republicans-would-benefit-from-hate-crime-protections-for-asian-americans/>.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Kuo, Alexander, Neil Malhotra, and Cecilia Hyunjung Mo. “Social Exclusion and Political Identity: The Case of Asian American Partisanship.” *The Journal of Politics* 79, no. 1 (November 4, 2016): 17–32. <https://doi.org/10.1086/687570>.

passed with 243 yays and 164 nays, with all of the nays coming from Republicans.⁸⁹ This vote garnered national attention and angered many Asian Americans. Although surveys do not definitively show that anti-Asian sentiment has a positive relationship with Asian Democrats, the past year of anti-Asian rhetoric caused by Republican leaders demonstrates the link between American minorities and the Democratic party. The National Committee of Asian American Republicans is a conservative group dedicated to educating and mobilizing Asian Americans for the Republican Party. This group is also known as the “Asian GOP.”⁹⁰ The group endorsed Joe Biden during the 2020 election, saying, “We need a president with empathy, integrity, and broadness capable of bringing all sides to the table.”⁹¹ This group had endorsed Trump four years earlier. The committee said that it had received little support from the Republican National Committee. They added that Trump was a leader, “too familiar to many Asian American immigrants who came from places where authoritarians make themselves Godly above people.”⁹² Therefore, the experiences of many Asian American immigrants led many to detect Donald Trump as a familiar political threat.

Mobilizing groups like the Asian GOP played a role in shaping Asian American voting behavior during the 2020 election. The group vied to influence Asian conservatives in swing states where the election results had slim margin of victory. The

⁸⁹ Gajjar, Saloni. “Asian Americans Call out Republicans Who Opposed Anti-Racism Measure.” NBCNews.com. NBCUniversal News Group, September 23, 2020. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/asian-americans-call-out-republicans-who-opposed-anti-racism-measure-n1240870>.

⁹⁰ Vo, Linda, University of California, and Irvine. “Asian-Americans Continue To Drift Away From The GOP, But It’s A Complicated Story.” NPR.org. Accessed December 6, 2020. <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2016/10/12/497063888/asian-americans-continue-to-drift-away-from-republicans-but-it-s-a-complicated-s>.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

mobilizing group “Asian Americans Against Trump” (AAAT) aimed to mobilize Democratic voters in spite of Donald Trump’s presidency.⁹³ This group is a subgroup of the New American Voice PAC which mobilizes the Asian American vote in swing states. New American Voice created this group in 2016 to mobilize Asian American voters against Donald Trump, his agenda, and his supporters. For example, in 2018, they helped flip three conservative districts in California, CA-39, CA-45, and CA-48. These groups remedy the lack of Asian American voter outreach resources.⁹⁴ Both groups provide voter information in many Asian languages and organize diverse ethnicities of Asian Americans to reach out to their subgroups for greater cultural identification. Asian Americans Against Trump targeted swing states and south to influence critical races. Motivated to organize against Trump, both organizations provided tools necessary to overcome Asian American voting barriers and vote against President Trump.

The study, “Are You Threatening Me? Asian-American Pan ethnicity in the Trump Era?” provides evidence for the relationship between Donald Trump’s presidency and Asian American panethnic linked faith.⁹⁵ Linked fate is defined as, “an individual's life chances are tied to the fate of his or her racial or ethnic group.”⁹⁶ Research shows that underrepresented groups such as Latinos respond to political threats by developing stronger panethnic linked faith. Groups with higher linked faith are likely to make similar

⁹³ Wang, Claire. “Asian American Swing State Early and Absentee Voting Increased 300%, More than Any Other Group.” NBCNews.com. NBCUniversal News Group, November 20, 2020. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/asian-american-swing-state-early-absentee-voting-increased-300-more-n1248454>.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Le, Danvy, Maneesh Arora, and Christopher Stout. “Are You Threatening Me? Asian-American Panethnicity in the Trump Era.” *Social Science Quarterly* 101, no. 6 (2020): 2183–92. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.12870>.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

political decisions. As discussed before, Asian Americans historically display little evidence for a panethnic identity.

The study created the panethnic linked fate measure with two questions, “Do you think that what happens generally to Asian Americans in this country will have something to do with what happens in your life?”⁹⁷ Those who responded yes were given the question: “How much does what happens to Asian Americans affect you?” Respondents had three choices: 1 = “A little”; 2 = “Some”; and 3 = “A lot.”⁹⁸ The study sought to see if the timing of the question during Trump’s presidency affected the panethnic linked fate measure. Figure 1 shows that the study results suggest that after President Trump’s election, the number of survey respondents who felt “a lot of linked fate” grew significantly and maintained itself throughout Trump’s presidency.⁹⁹ Linked faith influences political behavior and demonstrates why Asian American’s were motivated to vote together against Trump. As Figure 2 shows, many respondents emphasized Asian Americans were developing linked faith because of President Trump. One respondent said, “Covert racists seem to be emboldened from the Trump presidency. As such, there is comfort in confiding in fellow Asian Americans who similarly feel threatened.”¹⁰⁰ Therefore, political threats create group cohesion.

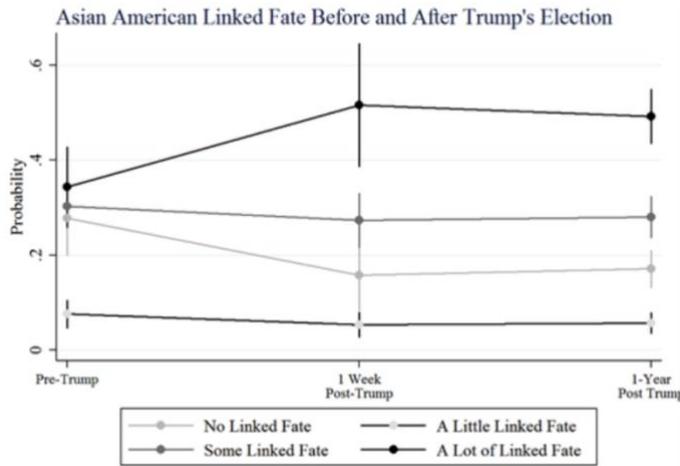
⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

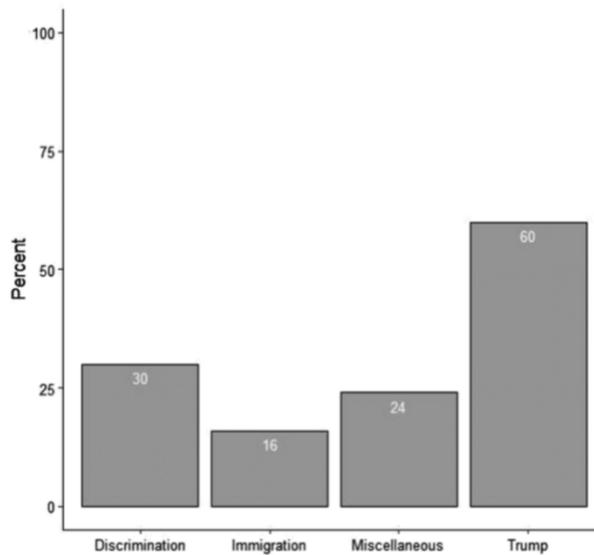
¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

Figure 1



Predicted Asian-American Linked Fate (1 = None and 4 = A Lot) Before and After Trump's Election to the White House Based on Ordered Logit Regression

Figure 2



Content-Coded Responses Answering a Question Why Asian Americans Experienced an Increase in Linked Fate After the 2016 Election

It is important to note that both President Trump and the Covid-19 Pandemic are temporary threats to Asian Americans. With President Trump's defeat in the 2020 elections, he will no longer be a perceived political threat to unite Asian American. Also, Asian Americans are not supporting Donald Trump less, instead, 14% more Asian Americans voted for him during the 2020 elections than 2016.¹⁰¹ Other studies demonstrate that political threats may cause a sense of ethnic disidentification among Asian Americans. For example, when Japanese internment in the U.S. occurred, other Asian Americans would wear name tags to distinguish themselves as separate.¹⁰² Therefore, it cannot be said that Asian Americans have formed a panethnic identity due to political threats like Donald Trump and increased anti-Asian sentiment.

¹⁰¹ Yam, Kimmy. "Asian Americans Voted for Biden 63% to 31%, but the Reality Is More Complex." NBCNews.com. NBCUniversal News Group, November 9, 2020. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/asian-americans-voted-biden-63-31-reality-more-complex-n1247171>.

¹⁰² Tanujaya, Nina, "*The Racialization of the Pan-Ethnic Asian American Identity*" (2019). Senior Projects Spring 2019. 86. https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2019/86

Chapter 3: Georgia

From 2000-2010, the Asian American population in the South grew faster than other minority groups.¹⁰³ In Georgia, it increased by 131% since 2000.¹⁰⁴ In total, the U.S. Census reports that Asians make up 4.4% of Georgia's population.¹⁰⁵ Georgia's population is majority white with African Americans making up 32.6% of the population as the largest minority group.¹⁰⁶ The Pew Research Center estimates that Asian Americans make up about 3% of Georgia's eligible voters.¹⁰⁷ The largest AAPI groups in Georgia are Indians, Chinese, and Koreans.¹⁰⁸ From 2010 to 2016 the number of Asian Americans in Georgia steadily grew due to the state's growth of tech companies.¹⁰⁹ Asian Americans demonstrated a 12% increase in voter registration since 2016, and more than 30,000 Asian Americans in Georgia registered and voted for the first time in 2021.¹¹⁰ But other ethnic groups in Georgia experienced an increase in registration in 2020. African Americans have experienced an increase of 25% registered voters since 2016.¹¹¹

¹⁰³ Budiman, Abby "Key Facts about Asian Americans." Pew Research Center (blog). April 29, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/08/key-facts-about-asian-americans/>.

¹⁰⁴ AAPI Vote "2018 State Factsheet" AAPI Data December, 15 2017, <http://aapidata.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/GA-2018.pdf>

¹⁰⁵ Quick Facts, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/GA>

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Pew Research "Detailed data on Asian American eligible voters by state" <https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Detailed-data-on-Asian-American-eligible-voters-by-state.pdf>

¹⁰⁸ AAPI Data. "State Voter Profiles (2020)." 2020 Accessed December 7, 2020. <https://aapidata.com/states/>.

¹⁰⁹ Charpe, Anita "In Tight Georgia Battle, Asian Americans Could Decide the Vote - Bloomberg." October 28, 2020 <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-10-28/in-tight-georgia-battle-asian-americans-could-decide-the-vote>

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ "Black, Latino, Asian Adults Key to Georgia Registered Voter Increase since 2016." Pew Research Center (blog). Accessed March 5, 2021. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/12/21/black-latino-and-asian-americans-have-been-key-to-georgias-registered-voter-growth-since-2016/>.

Typical Political Participation

Asian Americans experienced heightened political participation in the 2020 election but have a long history of low voter participation rates in Georgia. About a third of Asians living in Georgia are foreign-born, and 44% of this community in Georgia speak “English less than “very well.”¹¹² Those who do not speak English well are 9% less like to participate in elections.¹¹³ This low participation rate can be attributed to the fact that Asian Americans speak dozens of languages and it is difficult for advocacy groups to find the time, funds, and translators necessary.

Brian Kemp & Obstacles to Voting

Georgia has drawn national attention for its rigid voting laws that disproportionately affect minority voters. The Covid-19 pandemic heightens this affect for Asian Americans and other minority groups in Georgia. When he was Georgia’s Secretary of State, Governor Brian Kemp carried out an “exact match” policy mandating that voter registration applications must exactly match paperwork kept by the Department of Drivers Services or the Social Security Administration.¹¹⁴ Because Asian names do not conform to American romanization, the exact match disproportionately affected them.¹¹⁵

From 2013-2015, this policy rejected 35,000 voter applications, 75% of these applications were Asian American, Black, Latino, Hispanic voters.¹¹⁶ Compared with white voters, Georgia rejected Asian American ballots six times more than white

¹¹² AAPI Vote”2018 State Factsheet” AAPI Data.

¹¹³ AAPI Data. “State Voter Profiles (2020).” 2020 Accessed December 7, 2020. <https://aapidata.com/states/>.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

ballots.¹¹⁷ U.S. District Judge Eleanor Ross relaxed the exact match restrictions saying that the policy posed "grave concerns for the Court about the differential treatment inflicted on a group of individuals who are predominantly minorities. The election scheme here places a severe burden on these individuals."¹¹⁸ But Georgia remains one of 18 states that require voters to show photo ID when voting.¹¹⁹ Activists argue that laws like these disenfranchise Asian and minority voters who lack these forms of identification. Naturalization certificates and licenses are costly to obtain and groups like Mongolians, have a high rate of poverty with one-fourth of Mongolian adults living in poverty.¹²⁰

The Covid-19 pandemic created challenges for state election administration. Many states decided to opt for mail-in-voting to reduce the spread of Covid-19 or protect immunocompromised people. Initially, Georgia mailed all voters a ballot application for the primary. However, the state-administered in-person voting for the general election and required voters to submit an absentee ballot request to vote by mail. Nse Ufot, CEO of the New Georgia Project claimed that the Republican Secretary of State may have done this based on partisan politics. "I think it's because there was historic turnout, particularly among Democratic primary voters, and [Republicans] don't want to

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ VanSant, Shannon, "Judge Rules Against Georgia Election Law, Calling It A 'Severe Burden' For Voters : NPR." NPR, November 3, 2018. <https://www.npr.org/2018/11/03/663937578/judge-rules-against-georgia-election-law-calling-it-a-severe-burden-for-voters>.

¹¹⁹ Ferriss, Susan, "Georgia Hotbed for Voter Suppression Tactics." Center for Public Integrity. <https://publicintegrity.org/politics/elections/us-polling-places/georgia-hotbed-for-voter-suppression-tactics/>.

¹²⁰ Ruiz, Neil, "Key facts about Asian Americans, a diverse, growing population" Pew Research Center, April 29, 2021 <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/04/29/key-facts-about-asian-americans/>

encourage that in the general election.”¹²¹ Ufot makes this claim because studies have demonstrated that the Democratic Party receives more votes with higher turnout rates. The in-person voting prompted issues for Georgia’s voting centers on the day of Georgia’s general election. Technical problems and short staffing due to the pandemic led to long lines. Some polls closed for voters who had to wait in long lines for hours. These long lines led to some voters turned away at polling centers and disproportionately affected nonwhite voters.¹²² This logistical issue occurred because nonwhite voters like Asian Americans experienced a surge of voter registration during the 2020 election; however, crowded polling centers could not accommodate this surge. The metro Atlanta area holds half of Georgia state voters but only 38% of the polling centers.¹²³ Although it cannot be said that Georgia’s GOP intentionally produced long lines for nonwhite voters, Asian Americans and other minority voters disproportionately experienced trouble voting due to pandemic-related issues.

Political Affiliations & Voting Trends

In 2015, the Pew Research Center reported that nationally, Asian Americans made up 1% of Republicans and 1% of Democrats.¹²⁴ Therefore, Asian Americans represent a group of non-affiliated swing voters. Georgia’s population increased from 7.9 million to

¹²¹ King, Maya, POLITICO. “How Stacey Abrams and Her Band of Believers Turned Georgia Blue.” November 8, 2020. <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/11/08/stacey-abrams-believers-georgia-blue-434985>.

¹²² Fowler, Stephen, NPR. “Why Do Nonwhite Georgia Voters Have To Wait In Line For Hours? Too Few Polling Places” October 17, 2020 <https://www.npr.org/2020/10/17/924527679/why-do-nonwhite-georgia-voters-have-to-wait-in-line-for-hours-too-few-polling-pl>

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ “1. Trends in Party Affiliation among Demographic Groups.” Pew Research Center - U.S. Politics & Policy. Pew Research Center, August 28, 2020. <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2018/03/20/1-trends-in-party-affiliation-among-demographic-groups/>.

almost 11 million since 2000. This population increase influenced the political landscape. Immigrants are now 10 percent of Georgia’s population, including Asian American immigrants.¹²⁵ Charles S. Bullock III, a political scientist at the University of Georgia, describes the demographic shifts in Georgia, saying the state is, “attracting a racially and ethnically diverse population. So more Hispanics are moving into them, as well as a variety of Asians — Koreans, Indians, Chinese. These groups are all more Democratic than not.”¹²⁶ Asians may be helping change Georgia into Democratic-leaning state.

Religion for Asian Americans in Georgia has no strict political affiliation. Religious Asian Americans in the United States are not a monolith. Janelle Wong, a political scientist at the University of Maryland claims that, “Asian Americans have not consolidated under either political party.”¹²⁷ Therefore, it is difficult to determine how religion may affect voting outcomes for Asian Americans. Wong found that Asian American evangelicals have Republican and Democratic values, maintaining beliefs such as abortion and progressive immigration.¹²⁸ The untapped potential of religious Asian voters influenced campaigns to target the group. For example, the Ossoff campaign’s constituency director Cam Ashling stated that the campaign, “has made engaging AAPI voters of faith in Georgia a key component of the campaign’s work to mobilize AAPI

¹²⁵ Tavernise, Sabrina. “A New Political Force Emerges in Georgia: Asian-American Voters.” *The New York Times*, November 25, 2020, sec. U.S. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/25/us/georgia-asian-american-voters.html>.

¹²⁶ Budiman, Abby, and Neil G. Ruiz. “Key Facts about Asian Americans, a Diverse and Growing Population.” Pew Research Center. Pew Research Center, May 2, 2021. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/04/29/key-facts-about-asian-americans/>.

¹²⁷ Hannah, Miao. “Often Overlooked, Asian American Christian Voters Could Be Key in Georgia Senate Runoffs.” CNBC. CNBC, January 11, 2021. <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/12/31/georgia-senate-runoff-asian-american-christians-could-be-key-to-victory.html>.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

voters across the state.”¹²⁹ Because religious Asian Americans in Georgia do not strongly affiliate with a political party, the Ossoff campaign targeted campaign efforts toward Asian American faith-based events in hoped to influence this politically independent community. Likewise, the Biden campaign hosted news conferences for Atlanta-based Korean American pastors of earning their support for the Democratic Senate candidates.

2020 Presidential & Senate Runoff Elections

For the first time in thirty years, Georgia, long a Republican stronghold, voted for a Democratic presidential nominee.¹³⁰ At the same time, there are two competitive Senate races and a flipped Georgia house seat.¹³¹ These results are partially the work of Stacey Abrams and other voting rights activists who aimed to register disenfranchised communities in Georgia.¹³² Stacey Abrams voting rights organization Fair Fight and New Georgia Project successfully registered 800,000 voters.¹³³ In 2016, during her gubernatorial race she staffed a member to conduct voter outreach in Asian immigrant communities.¹³⁴

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Benk, Ryan “Asian American And Pacific Islander Turnout Helped Hand Biden Georgia : Biden Transition Updates : NPR.” December 4, 2020. <https://www.npr.org/sections/biden-transition-updates/2020/12/04/942271036/asian-american-and-pacific-islander-turnout-helped-hand-biden-georgia>.

¹³¹ Wang, Amy “Asian Americans Helped Biden Win Georgia. Can They Do the Same for Warnock and Ossoff?” The Washington Post. November 28, 2020. https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/asian-americans-georgia-senate/2020/11/28/28521068-2ad2-11eb-9b14-ad872157ebc9_story.html.

¹³² King, Maya “How Stacey Abrams and Her Band of Believers Turned Georgia Blue “ Politico November 8, 2020. <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/11/08/stacey-abrams-believers-georgia-blue-434985>.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Tavernise, Sabrina “A New Political Force Emerges in Georgia: Asian-American Voters” The New York Times. “November 25, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/25/us/georgia-asian-american-voters.html>.

Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Atlanta dialed 92% of the estimated 238,000 eligible AAPI voters across the state.¹³⁵ These organizations registered many Asian American voters who turned out in historic numbers. Over 30,000 of these voters registered for the first time in 2020.¹³⁶ Joe Biden led Georgia by 12,670 and these new Asian American voters were a crucial asset for Joe Biden's win.¹³⁷ Sam Park, the first Asian American Democrat elected to the Georgia General Assembly said, "There's a saying that the Asian American community has gone from being a marginalized community to being the margin of victory."¹³⁸ There will also be six Asian Americans in the statehouse now.

Georgia demonstrates the possibilities of Asian Americans as a voting bloc when mobilization organizations target and register Asian Americans to vote. Asians in Georgia tend to be vote Democratic, making history in the previously Republican state. However, it is premature to say that Asian Americans are a reliable voting bloc for the Democratic Party.

"I've mentioned that 114,017 AAPI voters cast an early vote in GA this year, 56% more than the 72,698 who voted in total in '16. But here's the incredible part - 30,571 were voting for the first time, ever. Joe Biden carried GA by 14,122 votes," tweeted Tom

¹³⁵ James C. Woo "Asian American Voters in Georgia Turnout in Record Numbers." Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Atlanta November 4, 2020. <https://www.advancingjustice-atlanta.org/news/aapi-turnout-in-ga>.

¹³⁶ Tavernise, Sabrina "A New Political Force Emerges in Georgia: Asian-American Voters" The New York Times." November 25, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/25/us/georgia-asian-american-voters.html>.

¹³⁷ Wang, Amy, Asian Americans Helped Biden Win Georgia. Can They Do the Same for Warnock and Ossoff? "The Washington Post December 7, 2020 https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/asian-americans-georgia-senate/2020/11/28/28521068-2ad2-11eb-9b14-ad872157ebc9_story.html.

¹³⁸ Sharpe, Anita "In Tight Georgia Battle, Asian Americans Could Decide the Vote" Bloomberg. October 28, 2020. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-10-28/in-tight-georgia-battle-asian-americans-could-decide-the-vote>.

Bonier just a week after the 2020 general election in Georgia.¹³⁹ Before 2020, most Asian Americans in Georgia were unregistered or voted infrequently. For a battleground state like Georgia, these voters could provide the slim margin of votes that decided the election. Because of the importance of Asian American voters in Georgia, both the Trump and Biden Presidential campaign dedicated resources to Asian American outreach.

Presidential Campaigns Target Asian Americans

Trump's reelection campaign launched an "Asian Pacific Americans for Trump" coalition to mobilize Asian American voters.¹⁴⁰ Lara Trump, senior advisor for the Trump campaign explained the coalition said, "The campaign's newest coalition will try to mobilize AAPI voters by touting what they say are Trump's accomplishments while in office, including what had been a strong economy before the coronavirus pandemic."¹⁴¹. The coalition appealed to Asian American voters by promoting Trump's contribution to the Asian American community and small businesses with his Covid-19 response.¹⁴² Generally, the Trump campaign focused on policy issues that could interest Asian American groups and society as a whole like a stable economy or Covid-19 response.

Joe Biden's presidential campaign introduced a wide range of methods to target Asian Americans, including focus on diverse Asian ethnic identities. The Biden campaign implemented "live translations at events, an advertising buy that has aired in at

¹³⁹ Bonier, Tom. "Here's an Incredible Stat..." Twitter. Twitter, November 13, 2020. <https://twitter.com/tbonier/status/1327386586116464642?lang=en>.

¹⁴⁰ Axelrod, Tal. "Trump Campaign Launches Asian Pacific Americans Coalition." The Hill, May 30, 2020. <https://thehill.com/homenews/campaign/500244-trump-campaign-launches-asian-pacific-americans-coalition>.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

least 16 states, a virtual bus tour, and tailored op-eds published in ethnic media outlets. The campaign's materials have also been translated into 20 Asian languages including Hmong, Hindi, Tagalog, Korean, Chinese, and Japanese."¹⁴³ The Biden campaign targeted Asian Americans and also the diverse identities within the broad term. Joe Biden himself published op-eds in Viet Bao and World Journal who have Vietnamese and Chinese American readership.¹⁴⁴

Presidential Election Results

In 2020, Georgia voted for a Democratic president for the first time in 30 years. Joe Biden narrowly won by less than a 13,000- vote lead. Asian Americans represented over 30,000 first-time voters and voted for Joe Biden at a 2:1 margin.¹⁴⁵ Over 70,000 Asian voters who voted this year did not vote in 2016.¹⁴⁶ Therefore, the new or low propensity Asian American voters who turned out during the 2020 elections were arguably a deciding factor for Biden's victory.

The Long-lasting Work of Stacey Abrams

The historic turnout of Asian Americans in Georgia is not solely attributed to the Biden campaign. In 2018, Democrat Stacey Abrams's Gubernatorial campaign focused on registering Asian voters and experienced a positive return on investment. Many Democratic activists said that the turning point for Asian American voters began in 2018

¹⁴³ Zhou, Li. "Asian Americans Are Seeing Unprecedented Outreach - but Campaigns Could Still Do Better." Vox. Vox, November 3, 2020. <https://www.vox.com/2020/11/3/21540472/asian-american-campaigns-outreach>.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Wang, Amy "Asian Americans Helped Biden Win Georgia. Can They Do the Same for Warnock and Ossoff?" The Washington Post. November 28, 2020. https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/asian-americans-georgia-senate/2020/11/28/28521068-2ad2-11eb-9b14-ad872157ebc9_story.html.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

because Stacy Abrams hired multiple staffers to focus on specific Asian immigrant communities.¹⁴⁷ Before her campaign, Republicans in Georgia concentrated on mobilizing well-established Asian American groups. However, Stacey Abrams brought to light the importance of working-class immigrants and unregistered Asian Americans in Georgia. Asian Americans overwhelmingly supported Stacey Abrams, with 82% voting for her during the gubernatorial election.¹⁴⁸ Since then, Asian Americans have experienced a 91% increase in voter turnout that contributed to the 2020 Biden campaign's success.¹⁴⁹ Her progressive mobilizing strategy and her anti-voter suppression campaigns that began in 2018, created the political environment necessary to secure a Democratic presidential victory in Georgia.

Georgia Senate Runoffs

During the 2020 elections, the Georgia Senate runoffs became a highly anticipated event because the two remaining Senate seats would determine whether Democrats controlled the Senate. In addition, with Democrat Joe Biden's presidential election victory and Democrat's House majority, this election would also determine if Democrats controlled the White House and Congress.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Tavernise, Sabrina. "A New Political Force Emerges in Georgia: Asian-American Voters." The New York Times. The New York Times, November 25, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/25/us/georgia-asian-american-voters.html>.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Wang, Amy B. "Record Asian American Turnout Helped Biden Win Georgia. Can It Help Flip the Senate?" The Washington Post. WP Company, November 29, 2020. https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/asian-americans-georgia-senate/2020/11/28/28521068-2ad2-11eb-9b14-ad872157ebc9_story.html.

In Georgia, there is a runoff election if no candidate wins the majority.¹⁵¹ On January 5th, 2020, Georgia held two runoff Senate races between Democrat Jon Ossoff and Republican Senator David Perdue; the other race with Democrat Raphael Warnock and appointed Republican Senator Kelly Loeffler.

Asian Americans turned out at record-breaking rates during the 2020 general elections in Georgia. Campaigns and organizing groups that mobilized Asian Americans, focusing on their various ethnic subgroups, created this turnout.¹⁵² Bernard Fraga, an associate professor of political science at Emory University, said that “the disproportionate increase in Asian American voter turnout is [part of] a multiyear process of empowering nonwhite voters in Georgia to really have control over the political process and their lives.”¹⁵³ Therefore, the increase in Asian American voters can be attributed to an increase in political contact.

Senate Campaigns Mobilize Asian Voters

Ads in Georgia targeted Trump’s Covid-19 response and emphasized Kamala Harris’ South Asian identity to mobilize Asian Americans. IMPACT spent \$2.5 million on ads targeting South Asians, Georgia’s largest Asian population.¹⁵⁴ Organizers in Georgia focused on targeting specific cultural connections of individual Asian American ethnic identities. Political Science Professor Taeku Lee from the University of California Berkley says, “Language access is a seemingly small and simple way to ensure

¹⁵¹ Miao Hannah “Democrats Target Asian American and Latino Voters in Crucial Georgia Senate Runoffs.” CNBC. CNBC, December 25, 2020. <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/12/25/georgia-senate-runoffs-democrats-target-asian-american-latino-voters.html>.

¹⁵² Zhou, Li. “Asian American Voters Could Decide the Georgia Senate Runoffs.” Vox. Vox, December 30, 2020. <https://www.vox.com/22158832/asian-american-voters-georgia-senate-runoffs>.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

participation, but for too many AAPI registered voters, it remains elusive.”¹⁵⁵ An organizer, Kao, adds that Georgia organizers successfully increased Asian American turnout because they stressed relevant local media in multiple Asian languages. Survey data demonstrates that nationwide, 50% of Asian voters are not contacted by the Democratic party and 55% of Asian voters are not contacted by the Republican party.¹⁵⁶ Therefore, simple contact and language resources can make a difference.

This approach is valuable due to Georgia's diverse population of Asian Americans. Different Asian ethnic groups have different cultures, languages, and experiences that create various voting interests. Georgia Representative Sam Park expressed this idea saying, “Having talked to older Korean American voters as well, they tend to be more fiscally conservative,” Park said. “Their understanding of American politics is somewhat tied to the ’70s and ’80s. I know many older Vietnamese Americans vote Republican because it was a Republican administration that allowed Vietnamese refugees to come in and resettle.”¹⁵⁷ Therefore, to mobilize Asian Americans in Georgia, organizers and campaigns reached out to Asian Americans based on their ethnic identities.

Both the Ossoff and Warnock campaign acknowledged the importance of engaging Asian American voters. Warnock attended multiple AAPI mobilization events before the general election and advertised in Korean, Chinese, and South Asian

¹⁵⁵ Kambhampaty, Anna Purna. “Asian American and Pacific Islanders Could Decide the Senate.” Time. December 24, 2020. <https://time.com/5922707/aapi-voters-georgia-senate-runoffs/>.

¹⁵⁶ Zhou, Li. “Asian Americans Are Seeing Unprecedented Outreach - but Campaigns Could Still Do Better.” Vox. Vox, November 3, 2020. <https://www.vox.com/2020/11/3/21540472/asian-american-campaigns-outreach>.

¹⁵⁷ Wang, Amy “Asian Americans Helped Biden Win Georgia. Can They Do the Same for Warnock and Ossoff?” The Washington Post. November 28, 2020. https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/asian-americans-georgia-senate/2020/11/28/28521068-2ad2-11eb-9b14-ad872157ebc9_story.html

newspapers. The Warnock campaign also hired an “AAPI community coordinator” who focuses on Asian American political outreach.¹⁵⁸ The Ossoff campaign had shown a history of Asian American voter outreach, beginning in his unsuccessful 2017 congressional campaign.¹⁵⁹ With a field office in Johns Creek, Georgia, which is almost a quarter Asian, the campaign learned to focus more on Asian Americans.¹⁶⁰ For the 2020 campaign, Ossoff hired a constituency director to focus on Asian American outreach.¹⁶¹

Results

Both Democratic candidates narrowly won Senate seats with Ossoff earning 50.6% of the voters and Warnock earning 51%.¹⁶² A majority of Asian Americans in Georgia supported the Democratic candidates, with 59% voting for Ossoff and 60% voting for Warnock.¹⁶³ On the other hand, 71% of white voters in Georgia voted for the Republican candidates Loeffler and Perdue.¹⁶⁴ Therefore, the group played an important role for the close margin of victory in the two runoff races. It is likely that the Democratic

¹⁵⁸ Miao, Hannah “Democrats Target Asian American and Latino Voters in Crucial Georgia Senate Runoffs.” CNBC. December 25, 2020. <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/12/25/georgia-senate-runoffs-democrats-target-asian-american-latino-voters.html>.

¹⁵⁹ Tamanaha, Akemi “Warnock & Ossoff Address AAPI Issues before Election.” AsAmNews, January 7, 2021. <https://asamnews.com/2021/01/03/warnock-ossoff-campaigns-address-aapi-voters-and-issues-ahead-of/>.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Tamanaha, Akemi, Posted By, and Akemi Tamanaha. “Warnock & Ossoff Address AAPI Issues before Election.” AsAmNews, January 7, 2021. <https://asamnews.com/2021/01/03/warnock-ossoff-campaigns-address-aapi-voters-and-issues-ahead-of/>.

¹⁶² “AALDEF Exit Poll: 2/3 of Asian American Voters Favored Senators-Elect Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff in 2021 Georgia Runoff Elections.” AALDEF, January 7, 2021. <https://www.aaldef.org/press-release/aaldef-exit-poll-2-3-of-asian-american-voters-favored-senators-elect-raphael-warnock-and-jon-ossoff-in-2021-georgia-runoff-elections/>.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

candidates appeal toward the various ethnic identities of Asian Americans contributed to these election results

Chapter 4: California

California has been a Democratic stronghold for almost three decades.¹⁶⁵ The state also has the largest population of Asian Americans, with over 5,866,435 making up 14.8% of California's population.¹⁶⁶ Because of this large population, including a diverse range of Asian subgroups, analyzing California's political state can demonstrate Asian American political trends. Although California has a progressive reputation, its political history shows a complicated divide between progressive and moderate racial policies that contribute to contemporary Asian American voting trends.

Democrats enjoy supermajorities in the state legislature, and in 2019, it held 46/53 of California's congressional districts.¹⁶⁷ Governors, state senators, and any other statewide elected officials represent the Democratic party. Within its registered voters, 46.1% are Democrats, 24.2% are Republicans, and 24% are No Party Preference voters.¹⁶⁸ Republicans have not won a statewide election in California since 2006.

California has the largest population of Asian Americans in the United States, and since 2000, the population has grown 53%.¹⁶⁹ This population growth is partially due to the outflow of industrial jobs and technological industries' development in areas like the

¹⁶⁵ McGhee, Eric "California's Political Geography 2020." Public Policy Institute of California. January 26, 2021 <https://www.ppic.org/publication/californias-political-geography/>.

¹⁶⁶ López, Gustavo, Neil G. Ruiz, and Eileen Patten. "Key Facts about Asian Americans." Pew Research Center. Pew Research Center, April 8, 2021. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/08/key-facts-about-asian-americans>.

¹⁶⁷ McGhee, Eric "California's Political Geography 2020." Public Policy Institute of California. January 26, 2021 <https://www.ppic.org/publication/californias-political-geography/>.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ López, Gustavo, Neil G. Ruiz, and Eileen Patten. "Key Facts about Asian Americans." Pew Research Center April 29, 2021 <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/04/29/key-facts-about-asian-americans/>

Silicon Valley in Northern California. Many Asian Americans, especially South Asian immigrants, moved to California in search of technical jobs. Asian Americans live in highly urbanized areas, with 75% of the population residing in metropolitan areas.¹⁷⁰ The largest Asian American ethnic groups in California are Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Vietnamese, Korean, and Japanese.

Political participation of Asian Americans in California

Asian Americans are one of the least likely racial groups to vote, making up 18% of infrequent voters and 14% of frequent voters in California.¹⁷¹ Of the likely Asian American voters, 43% of voters are Democrats, 36% are No Party Preference, and 21% are Republicans.¹⁷² Most of the voting aged AAPI population are ages 50 and up, while the youth vote (ages 18-29) only makes up 22% of AAPI voters. Nationally, Asian American youth are overwhelmingly Democrats, so the political orientation of California voters is likely to change.

Despite the larger populations of Asian Americans in California, Asian Americans still face challenges with voting and campaigns. Half of Asian American voters claim they did not receive any contact about the elections from the Democratic party, and 60% reported they received no contact from the Republican party.¹⁷³ Therefore, campaign voter outreach fails to inform most Asian Americans in California. Voters also face language barrier issues, with 46% speaking English less than very

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Baldassare, Mark. "California's likely voters." Public Policy Institute of California September 2020 <https://www.ppic.org/publication/californias-likely-voters/>

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

well.¹⁷⁴ Those who struggle with English face more barriers to voting and have a 9% lower turnout than those who can speak English.

California's Republican Political History

Despite the state's current Democratic leaning, its political history tells a more complex story. No party preference voters are the fastest-growing registration category in California and made up 24% of registered voters in 2018.¹⁷⁵ California's version of Independent voters typically lean right, voting for Republican candidates more often than Democratic.

California represents one of the six majority-minority states in the United States. According to the 2019 American Community Survey, "39% of state residents are Latino, 36% are white, 15% are Asian or Pacific Islander, 6% are African American, fewer than 1% are Native American or Alaska Natives, and 3% are multiracial or other."¹⁷⁶ There are voting disparities within its electorate. Although white Americans represent only 44% of the state's population, 55% of California's most likely voters.¹⁷⁷ Therefore 6 in 10 likely voters in California are white, and on the other hand, 6 in ten nonvoters are Latino. Asian Americans make up 18% of infrequent voters and 14% of frequent voters in California.¹⁷⁸ Despite California's diverse demographics, the state's electorate does not reflect similar population trends.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Baldassare, Mark "Race and Voting in California." *Public Policy Institute of California*. January 26, 2021. <https://www.ppic.org/publication/race-and-voting-in-california/>.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

In the 1990s, California represented the United States' racial transformations, welcoming a high volume of Hispanic and Asian immigrants who arrived and populated high tech industries like the Silicon Valley.¹⁷⁹ Hispanics and Latinos played a significant role nationally, driving up population growth during the 1990s. The emerging diversity in California had substantial implications for public policy for the next few years. Many propositions addressing racial diversity would emerge and define the relationship between California and racial progressives.¹⁸⁰ Prop 187, The Save Our State (SOS) Initiative, was on the 1994 ballot “to create a state-run citizenship screening system and prohibit undocumented immigrants from using non-emergency health care, public education, and other services in the State of California.”¹⁸¹ The opposition argued that this proposition was racist and anti-immigrant. Nevertheless, 59% of Californians voted to pass Prop 187.¹⁸² With the passage of this racially charged proposition, a culture war erupted in California, and conservatives were encouraged to continue with an anti-diversity agenda. At the same time, the Democratic party received a surge in voter registration.¹⁸³

In 1998, the success of Prop 187 encouraged the proposal of Proposition 209, the California Civil Rights Initiative (CCRI).¹⁸⁴ This proposition banned affirmative action. Liberal opposers of Prop 209 claimed that the opposition’s passage would harm equal

¹⁷⁹ Gibbs, J.T., T.B. Jewelle Taylor Gibbs, T. Bankhead, and T. Bankhead. *Preserving Privilege: California Politics, Propositions, and People of Color*. Praeger, 2001. <https://books.google.com/books?id=CQ0CjwEACAAJ>.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ “SoCal Briefly: When Did California Become a Blue State?” *spectrumnews1.Com*. Accessed April 12, 2021. <https://spectrumnews1.com/ca/la-west/politics/2020/01/08/socal-briefly-proposition-187-california-politics-immigration-bill-governor-pete-wilson>.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

opportunity for women and minority groups.¹⁸⁵ With solid support from the Republican party, supporters of Prop 209 raised funds to pass Prop 209. The proposition passed with the support of 63% of Californian voters.¹⁸⁶ Asian Americans mainly opposed Prop 209, with only two-fifths of Asian American voters supporting the proposition.¹⁸⁷ White voters were the only group with a majority supporting Prop 209, with 63% in support.¹⁸⁸ Conservatives around the nation praised California's rejection of affirmative action with the backing from influential Republicans like Rush Limbaugh.¹⁸⁹ At the same time, California voters overwhelmingly supported Democrat Bill Clinton, with only 38% of voters supporting Republican Bob Dole.¹⁹⁰ This complex relationship between Democratic supremacy yet notes of conservatism on certain issues would continue on in California and affect the voting trends of Asian Americans.

In 2000, California became the first minority-majority state besides Hawaii. This development significantly improved California citizens' ability to advocate for progressive racial, politics and the development of many minority political groups, such as the Chicano movement in L.A. However, this development created conflict with California's existing conservative that would develop into strife between conservatives and the emerging diverse groups in California in elections and propositions.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Gibbs, J.T., T.B. Jewelle Taylor Gibbs, T. Bankhead, and T. Bankhead. *Preserving Privilege: California Politics, Propositions, and People of Color*. Praeger, 2001.
<https://books.google.com/books?id=CQOCjwEACAAJ>.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

Orange County's Political History

Republican President Richard Nixon once said during a private fundraiser event, “It’s nice to be in Orange County, where the good Republicans go to die.”¹⁹¹ The culture Richard Nixon was referring to is one of staunch conservatism and the birthplace of many Republican political leaders including President Nixon himself.

During the early 20th century, Orange County’s residents consisted of rancher elites interested in government regulations and labor policies related to agricultural work. The Republican party in Orange County focused on these issues, and ranchers were mainly conservative during this time.¹⁹²

The Vietnam War and Cold War-era redefined Orange County’s local economy and political environment. The importance of agricultural work decreased while the wars abroad encouraged the growth of the military defense industry in Orange County. From 1962 to 1982, California’s percentage of U.S. military production grew from 13% to 57%. “The epicenter of Southern California conservatism—Orange County—took the lead in mobilizing the groundswell for Goldwater in 1964,” McGirr writes.¹⁹³ With 72% of the vote in Orange County, California elected Ronald Reagan as Governor, who developed a robust anti-communist platform.¹⁹⁴ Orange County became the birthplace of many conservative, anti-communist groups such as Californians’ Committee to Combat Communism and the John Birch Society. The development of such groups demonstrates the shift from a moderate Republican ideology to the extra conservative movement that

¹⁹¹ Editor. “How the County That Launched Nixon and Reagan Turned Democratic.” Times of San Diego, August 12, 2019. <https://timesofsandiego.com/politics/2019/08/11/how-the-county-that-launched-nixon-and-reagan-turned-democratic/>.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

developed in Orange County. A few years later, the Orange County politician would become president and express his conservative ideology on a national platform. His presidential campaign calls for the “silent majority” to gather support for the Vietnam War after antiwar movements across the nation underscored his roots in Orange County’s military industry.¹⁹⁵

The military environment during the Vietnam war also encouraged new immigration policies. Interracial relationships and families developed when G.I.s traveled abroad, encouraging the passage of bills that allowed for the naturalization of foreign-born Asians like the War Bride Act of 1945.¹⁹⁶ Many of these families resided in Orange County, and when America withdrew from the Vietnam war, the Vietnamese population in Orange County spiked. Immigrants reshaped the political demographics of the historically white, conservative area and made-up half of the county’s population.

Proposition 16- A Dividing Ballot Initiative

In the 2020 elections, Prop 16 would introduce affirmative action in California again, and Asian Americans would be on the front lines of the supporters and opponents of the proposition. Proposition 16 was a 2020 ballot measure that would repeal Proposition 209. Despite California’s diversity and progressivism, the proposition failed with 56.5% against Prop 16.¹⁹⁷ Asian Americans were split on the issue and were a strong presence for both the Yes and No side.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Jaschik, Scott “Experts Discuss the Failure of California’s Proposition 16: Inside Higher Ed November 29, 2021. <https://www.insidehighered.com/admissions/article/2020/11/09/experts-discuss-failure-californias-proposition-16>.

Prop 16 had significant advantages, with supporters raising \$19 million with seven campaign committees and “No on 16” raised just \$1.3 million with small individual donations.¹⁹⁸ The proposition also received support from, “Gov. Gavin Newsom, Sen. Kamala Harris, not to mention several Bay Area sports teams, business groups, labor unions and large-city newspapers.”¹⁹⁹ The high-profile supporters demonstrate the level of publicity the proposition garnered. Yes on 16, a campaigning group supporting Prop 16, targeted Asian American votes for support. The campaign spent \$600,000 for media outreach to Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Indian, and Filipino voters and distributed in language papers around the state.²⁰⁰ Some Asian Americans organized in support of Prop 16. For example, Sing Tao Daily, the oldest and second-largest Chinese language newspaper from Hong Kong, has endorsed the measure.²⁰¹

Despite Asian Americans' large presence in California universities, Prop 16 could help Asians of southeast descent whose enrollment is significantly lower than East Asians. For example, 66% of Chinese students in a California state university graduate within six years, while only 39% of Laotian students graduate.²⁰² Prop 16 also addresses issues beyond education, like hiring decisions in state government where Asian representation remains low. In society at large, “we still don’t get promoted into

¹⁹⁸ Peele, Thomas “Yes on Prop. 16 Has Big Fundraising Lead in Effort to Restore Affirmative Action in California” EdSource October 30, 2021. <https://edsource.org/2020/yes-on-prop-16-has-big-fundraising-lead-in-effort-to-restore-affirmative-action-in-california/642647>.

¹⁹⁹ Zinshteyn, Mikhail “Why Is the Affirmative Action Ballot Measure Trailing?,” CalMatters October 21, 2020 <https://calmatters.org/education/2020/10/prop-16-affirmative-action-trailing/>.

²⁰⁰ Wong, Ashley “Why Some Asian Americans in California Oppose Prop 16” The Sacramento Bee. October 21, 2021. <https://www.sacbee.com/news/california/article246562743.html>.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Fong, Jason “The Asian American Education Story You Probably Don’t Know,” AAPI Data, April 25, 2017 <http://aapidata.com/blog/education-nonelite/>

management, or leadership positions when you look at the tech industry, we're all represented at the entry level ... But when you look at managers and above, we (aren't) getting promoted" said state Senator Richard Pan, D-Sacramento.²⁰³

Despite these positive factors in support of Prop 16, opposition remained strong. The Department of Justice had alleged that Yale discriminated against its white and Asian American students during its undergraduate admissions process, violating Title VI of the 1964 Civil rights Act.²⁰⁴ The Trump Administration initially filed this lawsuit in 2020, and President Biden later dropped the lawsuit claims in 2021. According to the Pew Research Center, 73% of Americans agree with the claim that "colleges and universities should not consider race or ethnicity when making decisions about student admissions."²⁰⁵

Assembly member Evan Low, one of the youngest Asian American legislators elected in California history, voted in to put Prop 16 on the 2020 ballot. Low claimed that he received 94% of his calls were in opposition to Prop 16, many from his Asian constituents.²⁰⁶ Many Asian Americans opposed the measure because they believe that it would hinder their chances in college admissions. Currently, Asian Americans make-up 15% of the state population but made up 30% of enrollment in the University of California system. "As an individual and as a coalition, we believe in the American ideal

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ "Justice Department Finds Yale Illegally Discriminates Against Asians and Whites in Undergraduate Admissions in Violation of Federal Civil-Rights Laws," August 13, 2020. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-finds-yale-illegally-discriminates-against-asians-and-whites-undergraduate>.

²⁰⁵ Graf, Nikki "73% of Americans Say Race, Ethnicity Should Not Factor into College Admissions | Pew Research Center." Pew Research Center February 25, 2021. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/02/25/most-americans-say-colleges-should-not-consider-race-or-ethnicity-in-admissions/>.

²⁰⁶ Wong, Ashley "Why Some Asian Americans in California Oppose Prop 16" The Sacramento Bee. October 21, 2021. <https://www.sacbee.com/news/california/article246562743.html>.

that a man or woman should not be judged by race,” said Dr. Wenyuan Wu, executive director of Californians for Equal Rights. “This measure groups people together along racial lines that are not true in real life.”²⁰⁷

A November poll demonstrated that most Asian American voters were undecided, and the largest group of undecided voters were Vietnamese Americans.²⁰⁸ Asian Indians were the largest group of supporters, with 58% saying they would support the ballot measure.²⁰⁹

A Poll done by Berkley shows that 50% of Asian Americans oppose the use of affirmative action, with 39% supporting and 11% undecided.²¹⁰ Similarly, 53% of white voters did not support affirmative action, with 35% supporting the proposition.²¹¹ The only ethnic group in California that showed clear support for affirmative action were Black voters with 58% of voters supporting the proposition. A Pew Research Center survey finds that a majority of most racial and ethnic groups do not support the use of race in college admissions decisions with, “White adults particularly likely to hold this view: 78% say this, compared with 65% of Hispanics, 62% of blacks and 58% of Asians.”²¹² This demonstrates that most groups, including Asian Americans, generally oppose the use of race in college admission except for Black voters in some polls.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Watanabe, Tessa. “Affirmative Action Divides Asian Americans, UC's Largest Overrepresented Student Group.” Los Angeles Times. Los Angeles Times, November 1, 2020. <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-11-01/affirmative-action-divides-asian-americans-ucl-largest-overrepresented-student-group>.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Graf, Nikki. “Most Americans Say Colleges Should Not Consider Race or Ethnicity in Admissions.” Pew Research Center. Pew Research Center, September 18, 2020. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/02/25/most-americans-say-colleges-should-not-consider-race-or-ethnicity-in-admissions/>.

Republicans are more likely to believe that colleges admissions should not consider race with 85% of voters versus 65% of Democrats.²¹³ The California Democratic Party explicitly supports affirmative action in its platform. Therefore, supporting Proposition 16 remains a divisive issue among Asian Americans and may create tension in the party's efforts to mobilize Asian American voters.

2020 Elections: Diverse Candidate Recruitment

The Democratic Party's most diverse candidates in history and significant House gains since 1974 in 2018.²¹⁴ Democrats won a net gain of 40 seats total.²¹⁵ Republicans responded by seeking out diverse candidates, specifically women of color. In an interview with Rollcall, Susan Brooks, the National Republican Congressional Committee's recruitment chair said, "It's important that we (the Republican Party), as a conference, do a better job of looking like America, and better representing the very diverse country that we have."²¹⁶ Brooks noted that she focused on recruiting women of color for Republican candidates. This recruitment emphasizes that women of color are an effective political tactic. The Ripon Society, a moderate Republican public policy organization, published an article that celebrated the wins of Michelle Steel and Young Kim for the diversity they bring to the Republican party.²¹⁷ The journal argued that their

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Enten, Harry "Latest House Results Confirm 2018 Wasn't a Blue Wave. It Was a Blue Tsunami" CNN Politics December 6, 2018. <https://www.cnn.com/2018/12/06/politics/latest-house-vote-blue-wave/index.html>.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ "House Recruiter to GOP: 'Do a Better Job of Looking like America' - Roll Call." Accessed December 9, 2020. <https://www.rollcall.com/2019/04/10/house-recruiter-to-gop-do-a-better-job-of-looking-like-america/>.

²¹⁷ Brooks, Susan "Winning with Women" The Ripon Society. February, 2020. <https://riponsociety.org/article/winning-with-women/>.

diversity is good for the party and advantageous to appeal to diverse groups. Because Young Kim and Michelle Steele are Asian women of color, it is possible that Asian communities in Orange County identified with the two candidates and voted for them. Studies demonstrate that Asian Americans in California display a strong preference for candidates of national origin preference. The Republican Party has historically used a diverse candidate recruitment strategy in California that proved to be successful, especially among Asian Americans.

The study “Asian American Candidate Preferences: Evidence From California” looks at candidate preferences of Asian American voters during the 2018 midterm elections in California and determines if Asian candidates appeal to Asian voters.²¹⁸ Current studies demonstrate that African American and Latino voters place race secondary to political partisanship. This study finds that Asian Americans have strong national-origin preferences, but when an Asian candidate had a different national-origin, Asian voters tended to rely on partisan preferences. For example, Indian American voters overwhelmingly voted for Ro Khanna, and the same trend holds for Chinese and Judy Chu, Koreans and Young Kim, and Vietnamese and Janet Nguyen. The study also found that turnout for the Asian population in California typically increases when an Asian candidate appears on the ballot. Therefore, diverse candidate recruitment is a strategy that works among Asian voters in California unless they are outside of their national-origin group.

²¹⁸ Leung, V. Asian American Candidate Preferences: Evidence from California. *Polit Behav* (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-020-09673-8>

Michelle Steel (CA-48) & Young Kim (CA-32): Two Korean Republicans Flip House Seats in Orange County

Orange County is a historically Republican county. 36% of voters are registered Republicans, 27% are No Party Preference, and 37% are registered Democrats.²¹⁹ The increase of Asian Americans created a rise of No Party Preference voters.²²⁰ Orange County also has “Little Saigon,” one of the largest Vietnamese communities in the United States. Vietnamese Americans are the most conservative Asian American group.²²¹ Around 17,000 Vietnamese voters in Orange County 18 to 34 years old are registered Democrats, and 5,000 are Republicans.²²² Ultimately, the political culture of Asian Americans in Orange County is complicated. It is not safe to say the ethnic group as a whole uniformly identifies with any political party. Because of this, it is possible that, as the Republican party predicted, Asian Americans in Orange County identify best with the Republican messages given by someone in their national-origin group.

The Republican Party employed the strategy of Asian American candidates long before the Democratic Party became the diverse body it is today.

In the predominately Democratic state of California, two Republican, Asian women defeated Democratic incumbents in Orange County.²²³ Republicans have not defeated a Democrat in California for two decades.²²⁴ Republican Michelle Steel defeated former Congressman Harley Rouda (CA-48). Republican Young Kim defeated former

²¹⁹ Wang, Claire “Nguyen vs. Nguyen Race in Calif. Highlights Rise of Vietnamese American Electorate.” Yahoo, November, 12, 2020. <https://news.yahoo.com/nguyen-vs-nguyen-race-calif-192017326.html>.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Blood, Michael “A New Face to the GOP: Diverse Candidates Win in California.” Associated Press December 8, 2020. <https://apnews.com/article/election-2020-donald-trump-coronavirus-pandemic-immigration-california-67f0c14b3ccec374035d07710e1d706a>.

²²⁴ Ibid.

Congressman Gil Cisneros (CA-39). It is noteworthy that both candidates are Asian women who won in Orange County, an area with a large Asian American population.²²⁵ Both won close races with 51% of the votes.²²⁶ Along with Marilyn Strickland (WA-10), they are the first Korean American women elected to Congress.²²⁷

In 2018, the Blue wave flipped multiple Republican seats to Democrat, including the seats Gil Cisneros and the 39th congressional district and Harley Rouda and the 45th congressional district. These seats in Orange County were historical Republican before 2018. Therefore, with less financial resources and excitement than the 2018 Blue wave and a diverse candidate recruitment strategy, it was unsurprising that Korean American Michelle Steel and Young Kim flipped the two districts.

Gustave Arellano, Journalist for the Los Angeles Times, speaks of the California GOP's candidate's recruitment strategy saying, "They have been investing in Asian candidates now for at least two generations — 1970s and 80s, it was Japanese Americans. It goes along with whatever the ascendant Asian American group is. During the 90s, right up until the 2000s, it was Vietnamese Americans. Now, it's Korean Americans."²²⁸ Nationwide, the Republican party executed a deliberate recruitment strategy that worked. Every flipped seat was done so by a female or minority candidate.²²⁹ Because both

²²⁵ Dispatch, Capo "By the Numbers: Orange County Voting Demographics" The Capistrano Dispatch. February 14, 2020. <https://www.thecapistranodispatch.com/by-the-numbers-orange-county-voting-demographics/>.

²²⁶ Politico Editors "House Election Results 2020 | Live Map Updates | Voting by State." Politico January 6, 2021. <https://www.politico.com/2020-election/results/house/>.

²²⁷ Blood, Michael "A New Face to the GOP: Diverse Candidates Win in California." Associated Press Accessed December 8, 2020. <https://apnews.com/article/election-2020-donald-trump-coronavirus-pandemic-immigration-california-67f0c14b3ccec374035d07710e1d706a>.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Fram, Alan. "Dems Head toward House Control, but GOP Picks off Seats." AP NEWS. Associated Press, November 4, 2020. <https://apnews.com/article/election-2020-donald-trump-virus-outbreak-collin-peterson-house-elections-e8db3e8e04fc65e689e7f36ed200dc45>.

districts are in Orange County, it is critical that the campaigns appeal to moderate or independent voters. California's political history demonstrates that voters are hesitant to move too far left. Therefore, diverse candidates can appeal to moderate voters who are in between parties. Steel explains it herself when she says, "Diversity is going to be really helpful from all sources. I am going to bring my own background as a small-business owner and being first-generation. I think that will be helpful to bring more benefits to Congress than someone who never had these types of experiences."²³⁰ Therefore, Kim and other Republicans understood the value of diversity during the 2020 elections, and with Asian American candidates, the part was largely successful.

Orange County also experiences a unique phenomenon known as split-ticket voting. Ticket splitting occurs when a voter votes for one party for one election while voting for the other party on other parts of the ballot. With Orange County's large population of independent voters and complex political history, it is not surprising that both of Harkey Rouda and Gil Cisneros' districts were two of 16 nationally where voters split tickets.²³¹ In Orange County, 54% of voters chose Democratic President Joe Biden and voted to elect Republican candidates Michelle Steel and Young Kim. Ben Christopher, an author at CalMatters, clarified this trend saying, "An anti-Trump position

²³⁰ Bastian, Jonathan. "OC Elects Conservative Korean Americans to US House. GOP Has Invested in Asian Candidates for Generations." KCRW. November 30, 2020. <https://www.kcrw.com/news/shows/greater-la/historic-cabins-fire-coronavirus-oc-korean-americans/orange-county-republicans-michelle-steel-young-kim>.

²³¹ Staggs, Brooke, Ian Wheeler, and Alicia Robinson. "How Did Your Neighborhood Vote? Ballot Data for Orange County Reveals Curious Shifts, Splits." Orange County Register. November 17, 2020. <https://www.oregister.com/2020/11/13/how-did-your-neighborhood-vote-ballot-data-for-orange-county-reveals-curious-shifts-splits/>.

didn't necessarily translate to an anti-Republican position at the congressional level."²³²

This voting preference demonstrates that Orange County voters represent a group of moderate voters that are accepting of Joe Biden's liberal agenda, and willing to vote for a minority, Republican House Representative. It is possible that this split ticketing occurred because Kim and Steels ethnic diversity appealed to these moderate voters,

The campaign losses can also be attributed to campaign fundraising. In 2018, the 2018 elections brought historic wins for diversity and became the most expensive midterm, with Democrats spending 3 billion dollars for elections nationwide.²³³ Democrats directed this funding toward congressional House seats, including Gil Cisneros' and Harley Rouda's campaigns. However, with a presidential election on the ballot and the possibility to take Republican President Trump out of office, this year's funding was comparatively less. In 2018, Gil Cisneros outspent Young Kim at a margin of 6:1.²³⁴ Similarly, Harley Rouda spent almost over 5 million more dollars than Republican candidate Dana Rohrabacher. This year, both Republican candidates Young Kim and Michelle Steel outspent their Democratic opponents. Especially in Orange County, where advertisements are expensive, studies demonstrate that a financial edge can sometimes be the key to success for political campaigns.

²³² Denkmann, Libby. "Four Lessons From The Southern California House Seats Republicans Reclaimed In 2020." LAist, December 4, 2020. <https://laist.com/news/congress-republicans-reclaim-four-house-seats-california-2020-four-lessons>.

²³³ Open Secrets Editors "Most Expensive Midterm Ever: Cost of 2018 Election Surpasses \$5.7 Billion." OpenSecrets News, December 17, 2019. <https://www.opensecrets.org/news/2019/02/cost-of-2018-election-5pnt7bil/>.

²³⁴ Denkmann, Libby. "Four Lessons From The Southern California House Seats Republicans Reclaimed In 2020." LAist, December 4, 2020. <https://laist.com/news/congress-republicans-reclaim-four-house-seats-california-2020-four-lessons>.

As political candidates, Michelle Kim and Young Kim appealed to the religious groups within Orange County, including Asian Christian Asian Americans. Most Asian Americans are Christian (42%) or unaffiliated (26%).²³⁵ In general, Asian Americans display a wide array of religious affiliations and introduced many non-Western religions to the United States like Hinduism or Buddhism. Asian Americans also have a wide spectrum of the strength of their religious affiliations. Unaffiliated Asian Americans tend to have lower religious commitment levels than other unaffiliated Americans while Asian Evangelical Protestants display higher rates of church attendance than white Evangelicals.²³⁶ The majority of Chinese Americans are unaffiliated, Filipinos are Catholic, Indians are Hindu, Vietnamese are Buddhist, Koreans are protestant, and Japanese are a split between Unaffiliated, Protestant, and Buddhist. The largest Asian ethnicities in Orange County are as follows: Chinese, Indian, Filipino, Korean, and Japanese.²³⁷

Asian American Divides in Orange County

Kim and Steel's victories in Orange County bring to light the divides among the Asian American community in Orange County. In 2018, the Democrat's Blue Wave and the victories of Gil Cisneros and Harley Rouda could be attributed to Asian American voters. Cisneros won by a small margin of 7,611 votes.²³⁸ Therefore, the Asian

²³⁵ "Chapter 7: Religious Affiliation, Beliefs and Practices." Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project. Pew Research Center, December 31, 2019. <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2012/06/19/chapter-7-religious-affiliation-beliefs-and-practices/>.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Tolan, Casey. "Election Results Keep Getting Better for California Democrats." The Mercury News. The Mercury News, November 15, 2018. <https://www.mercurynews.com/2018/11/13/california-election-results-house-representatives-state-legislature-vote-count/>.

Americans overwhelmingly supported him with 62% of Chinese Americans voting for Cisneros. Asian American related organizations like the Asian American Democratic Club, the Korean American Democratic Club, and the Vietnamese American Democratic Club endorsed Cisneros.²³⁹ Dave Min, a member of the Korean American Democratic Club, stated that, “We trust Gil to be an advocate for the Asian American and Korean community and be champion for affordable healthcare, humane immigration reform, and good-paying jobs.”²⁴⁰ Although many believed that perhaps Young Kim's Korean identity would appeal to other Asian Americans, including Korean Americans, Asian Americans in Orange County continued to support Gil Cisneros. Similarly, the Asian American Action Fund endorsed Harley Rouda rather than Korean Americans Michelle Steel. The Fund supported their endorsement saying, “California’s 48th District is home to a large group of AAPI constituents and Harley understands that representation and outreach matter is doing the work to ensure that AAPIs have a seat at the table!”²⁴¹ Therefore, Harley’s political values won over some Asian Americans as opposed to Steel’s Asian American identity. In 2018, when Harley Rouda defeated Republican Dana Rohrabacher, studies credited the victory to Vietnamese residents who supported Rouda.

²³⁹ Mitchell, Liz. “RELEASE: Gil Cisneros Endorsed by Chinese American Citizens Alliance and Korean Resource Center Action Fund.” Cisneros For Congress. Cisneros For Congress, August 3, 2020. <https://www.cisnerosforcongress.com/news/gocsgmauvnzlx4hdmve0bquhp4lhhs>.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ “Harley Rouda.” Asian American Action Fund, October 8, 2019. https://aaafund.org/team_member/harley-rouda/.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Mobilizing Asian Americans is a demanding, and the 2020 elections show that Asian Americans are diverse. The 2020 elections proved to be an essential moment for Asian Americans to form a genuine panethnic identity. Asian Americans were present in politics at the local and national level, overcoming the racial barriers to political representation. Analyzing Asian Americans in politics can also highlight the divides in the Asian American community. The broad term “Asian Americans” fails to convey the nuances of the ethnic backgrounds represented within this term. The fragmentation of this group can make it difficult to form coalitions. In the wake of Covid-19 and the rise of anti-Asian sentiment, according to the study *Are You Threatening Me? Asian-American Panethnicity in the Trump Era*,²⁴² Asian Americans tend to develop a panethnic linked fate and identify as Asian American when politically threatened. Therefore, when the Covid-19 Pandemic began, and anti-Asian sentiment and violence increased, Asian Americans experienced higher amounts of linked faith among one another. Elections in Georgia and California reaffirmed that Asian Americans are increasingly growing as a voter bloc and have demonstrated increasing importance in elections. However, in many political issues and elections, Asian Americans remain divided. Therefore, 2020 demonstrates moments in which Asian Americans as a voting bloc shift toward cohesion but there is no evidence for long-term changes and the development of a national Asian panethnic identity. Despite political threats and increased racial consciousness and

²⁴² Le, Danvy, Maneesh Arora, and Christopher Stout. “Are You Threatening Me? Asian-American Panethnicity in the Trump Era.” *Social Science Quarterly* 101, no. 6 (2020): 2183–92.

awareness sparked by hate violence anti-Asian sentiment, Asian Americans remain a divided group that lacks fixed partisanship.

Future Demographics

The Asian American landscape in the United States will continue its growth and by 2060, the Asian American population will grow from 18.9 million to 35.8 million by 2060.²⁴³ Pew Research Center predicts that this growth will continue for every U.S. state. California, New York, and Texas continue to have the largest Asian American populations. States like North Dakota, South Dakota, and Indiana have all experienced growths of over 170% to their Asian populations.²⁴⁴ With an increasing population in all states, Asian American political presence in America will also transform.

Asian Americans are not a homogenous but are becoming increasingly Democratic with 65% identifying with the Democratic Party or lean Democrat.²⁴⁵ With only 27% of Asian Americans identifying or leaning Republican, Asian Americans exhibit declines in conservative beliefs. The population of Asian Independent voters has risen slightly. In states like California, Independent or No Party Preference voters tend to lean Republican. These Independent voters are potential targets for the Republican and Democratic party, especially in battleground states. Ultimately, it is likely that Asian Americans develop a Democratic identity in. However, there are many factors to

²⁴³ Budiman, Abby, and Neil G. Ruiz. "Key Facts about Asian Americans, a Diverse and Growing Population." Pew Research Center. Pew Research Center, May 2, 2021.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/04/29/key-facts-about-asian-americans/>.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

consider. The voting behavior of interracial, intermarried and various generations of Asian Americans will determine the future of Asian Americans as a voting group.

An increasing number of interethnic marriages may demonstrate a shift toward panethnicity for Asian Americans. Since 1990, Asian Americans' interethnic marriages have increased by upwards of 500% compared with white Americans who have experienced a decrease in interethnic marriages.²⁴⁶ Larry Shinagawa argues that growth of interethnic marriages signifies the development of a panethnic identity and consolidation of racial lines. When Asian Americans marry each other, it signals the development of social networks, economic institutions, and acculturation into a similar national identity. Therefore, Asian Americans bridge a path away from their foreign, ethnic identities and toward a shared American identity.

The increased number of intermarriages has a positive correlation with the number of multiracial Asian Americans. The population of mixed-race Asian Americans is will increase as well. According to the 2019 U.S. Census, 2.8% of the U.S. population identifies as two or more races.²⁴⁷ Racial identification affects a voter's partisanship and policy beliefs. For example, 57% of multiracial adults tend to be more liberal including, biracial white and Asian adults who are usually more liberal than the general republic.²⁴⁸ The second most likely racial group to intermarry are white and Asian; therefore, mixed-

²⁴⁶ Shinagawa, Larry Hajime, and Gin Yong Pang. "Asian American Panethnicity and Intermarriage." *Amerasia Journal* 22, no. 2 (January 1, 1996): 127–52. <https://doi.org/10.17953/amer.22.2.x270073668v30918>.

²⁴⁷ Parker, Kim, Juliana Menasce Horowitz, Rich Morin, and Mark Hugo Lopez. "Multiracial in America: Proud, Diverse and Growing in Numbers." Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project. Pew Research Center, August 18, 2020. <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2015/06/11/multiracial-in-america/>.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

race white and Asian Americans represent most multiracial Americans. White and Asian adults are 60% registered Democrats and 38% registered Republicans.²⁴⁹ The skewed, liberal partisanship can be attributed to the policy preferences and experiences of multiracial adults. Around 41% of multiracial adults believe that there is a lot of discrimination against people who are Black compared with 26% of other Americans.²⁵⁰ On the other hand, many multiracial adults do not identify as mixed-race and, therefore, do not believe their multiracial identity contributes to their political beliefs. In a Pew Research Center Survey, 61% of multiracial adults said they do not consider themselves multiracial. Half of the respondents claimed that they don't identify as multiracial because they, "look like one race," while 39% of respondents say it's because they, "closely identify with a single-race."²⁵¹ However, 70% of multiracial Asian Americans self-identify as mixed race.²⁵² Therefore, as the number of multiracial Asians increases, the political demographics of Asian Americans will transform most likely toward liberal behaviors.

To understand future Asian American voting behaviors we must consider generational identity. Multiracial identity fades with generations, therefore, as the number of third-generation Americans increase the number of people who identify with their multiracial background will likely decrease. Only 13% of those whose mixed racial background comes from a great-grandparent identify as multiracial. The experience of second-generation Asian Americans is far different and, they have higher incomes; more

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid.

are college graduates and homeowners, and fewer live in poverty. "²⁵³A Pew Research Center survey found that Second-generation Asian Americans are also more likely to speak English, intermingle with other races, and identify as American.²⁵⁴ It is important to note that studies cannot predict Asian American voting behavior with socioeconomic status; however, these different life experiences create different voting outcomes. The group's voter participation is much higher, and most are registered Democrats.

The future demographics of Asian Americans demonstrate the many factors that will affect Asian American voting behavior. The behavior of Asian ethnic groups will not be constant over time and many factors can cause a change in the panethnicity or voting preferences of Asian Americans.

Limitations

This paper faced limitations due to the scope of analysis and the use of Asian American data. Of course, It is not enough to look at only Georgia and California to make conclusions about Asian American voters nationally. As a divided group, It is critical to look at the nuances of Asian Americans in different states and communities to understand the group fully. It was necessary to choose a state that provided enough data about Asian American voters. Therefore, I purposefully chose Georgia and California, who experienced media upsurges about Asian Americans during the 2020 elections.

Also, it is challenging to have a national image of the Asian American community due to its size. Asian Americans only make up about 5% of America's population,

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

therefore, when analyzing Georgia, I am looking at less than a percent of the Asian American population. Capturing local-level variations is nearly impossible, especially in Georgia. For Georgia I mainly used national data or statewide data to make assumptions about local communities. Data and surveys also do not have a uniform definition of Asian American. In this paper, I used the census definition of Asian Americans and excluded Pacific Islanders. However, some studies use the term Asian Pacific American (API) to include Pacific Islanders. Therefore, the data and surveys used throughout this paper are looking at different population sizes.

Recommendations

Although it is difficult to tell if Asian Americans will ever have a solid and sustained panethnic-linked faith, it is possible to mobilize Asian Americans by focusing on the multiethnic and multilingual attributes of the community.

Remedying the language barriers many Asian Americans face when trying to vote would significantly improve the participation rates of Asian American voters. Most foreign-born Asian Americans do not speak English; therefore, it is difficult for this population to participate in the democratic process, especially during a global pandemic. An AALDEF exit survey demonstrated that 60% of voters prefer language assistance while voting.²⁵⁵ According to the Voting Rights Act requires a certain amount of language assistance at every polling center; however, in 2012, 23% lacked at least one Asian-language poll worker.²⁵⁶ Due to the diverse nature of the Asian American

²⁵⁵ Uprety, Aastha. "5 Ways to Increase Asian American Voter Turnout." Center for American Progress, May 7, 2018. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/race/news/2018/05/07/450310/5-ways-increase-asian-american-voter-turnout/>.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

population, polling places must account for languages to properly represent Asian Americans.

Campaigns also fail to reach out to Asian Americans. Phone banking to Asian voters in several languages increased turn-out by more than ten percentage points.²⁵⁷ As seen in the Biden campaign, a diverse array of methods to mobilize Asian Americans is effective. In several elections in 2020 Asian Americans proved to be a deciding vote. The importance of their vote is only growing, and campaigns must address this by increasing outreach that targets a diverse range of Asian identities.

States like Georgia must also ease rigid voter laws. These laws disproportionately affect non-white voters, and many Asian Americans lose the right to vote due to voter purges. Sensitive voting laws like the “exact match” policy are discriminatory because Asian Americans are less likely to speak English, have different naming formats, and are sometimes not accustomed to using signatures.²⁵⁸ Asian names are also more likely to be rejected due to the high rate of similar last names like “Nguyen” or “Kim.” Although it is essential to prevent voter fraud, there is very little evidence that these types of voter laws reduce fraud.²⁵⁹

Ultimately, Campaigns and polling centers must provide more Asian-language resources and strictly follow federal guidelines to mobilize Asian American voters not only because it can benefit an election but also because it is important to include Asian Americans in the democratic process. The upsurge of anti-Asian sentiment and violence

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ VanSant, Shannon, “Judge Rules Against Georgia Election Law, Calling It A ‘Severe Burden’ For Voters : NPR.” NPR, November 3, 2018. <https://www.npr.org/2018/11/03/663937578/judge-rules-against-georgia-election-law-calling-it-a-severe-burden-for-voters>.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

in 2020 demonstrates that Asian Americans are a vulnerable community and require proper political representation. History has shown that campaigns and policy strategies typically treat Asian Americans as a political monolith. This tactic is much less effective in representing Asian Americans, and if these generalizations continue, America will fail to address the violence and systemic oppression Asian Americans face. It is not enough to represent Asian Americans in politics, and it is necessary to analyze the unique experience of diverse groups.

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