

Asian-Americans and Civic Engagement

This research seeks to understand the level of civic participation of Asian-Americans in voting terms, and why Asian-Americans don't vote as actively in comparison to other minorities. This research looks to understand why it is harder to reach out to Asians as opposed to other minorities, such as the Latino and black populations. This study seeks to compare the outreach to Asian voters between Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama during the middle of their first term in office, and to demonstrate the importance of Asian voters in future elections. Additionally, this study seeks to see if there was any correlation between outreach and civic participation. This study also presents a case study that shows how Asian-American voters helped impact the 2012 presidential election in Washoe County, Nevada, versus Sacramento County, California. The main question for this study was: In relation to Asian-American outreach by an incumbent president, did participation spike, decrease, or peak? Limitations of this work are that not every daily agenda schedule and article was found or available, or even relevant for the matter. This research was contributed by the following literature, Asian American Political Participation by Wong, Ramakrishnan, Lee, and Junn, Getting Out the Asian-Pacific-American Vote by Gimpel and Cho, and finally, Beyond Identity and Racial Politics: Asian Americans and the Campaign Fund-raising Controversy by Wang. Finally, the conclusion will show the results to the research questions, as well lessons future presidential candidates can learn about Asian voters.

This research is introduced with an introduction to a more modern history of Asian voting, which for all intents and purposes for this study, starts in 1992, when Bill Clinton during his presidential campaign and later victory over the incumbent George H. W. Bush. Prior to 1992, Asian-Americans voted predominantly for Republicans. However, Bill Clinton campaigned in what was a “deliberate” action to actively mobilize Asian-American voters away from the GOP vote.¹ Since the 1992 election, where Bill Clinton received 31% of the Asian vote, the support among Asians for Democrats has more than doubled, with Obama receiving 73% of the Asian population.² Obviously, the question that arose to this has been, “Why?” Why has it been the case that Asian-Americans have begun voting so heavily and decidedly liberal? The answer to that stems from a startling history of solidarity between Asian-Americans and other minorities.

Cesar Chavez is widely decorated and celebrated among the Latino community for helping bring on improved working conditions for the Delano grape workers.³ However, Larry Itliong, a Filipino farmer who also worked in the Delano area had long advocated for the same better working conditions that Chavez was largely accredited for in years later. Itliong championed the same ideas and values that Chavez is

¹ Khalid, A. (2015, September 18). How Asian-American Voters Went From Republican To Democratic. Retrieved December 11, 2015, from <http://www.npr.org/sections/itsallpolitics/2015/09/16/439574726/how-asian-american-voters-went-from-republican-to-democratic>

² Edsall, T. (2015, November 3). Why Are Asian-Americans Such Loyal Democrats? Retrieved December 11, 2015, from <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/04/opinion/why-are-asian-americans-such-loyal-democrats.html>

³ UFW: The Official Web Page of the United Farm Workers of America. (n.d.). Retrieved December 11, 2015, from http://www.ufw.org/_page.php?menu=research&inc=history/07.html

celebrated now for. Among them include knowledge of the danger of pesticides and better wages. Itliong organized the first Delano strike, but as the number of Latino workers increased, the Filipino workers aged and dwindled in number, and many, including Itliong left Delano.⁴⁵ Even now in 2015, the Latino-Asian-American solidarity is just as powerful as the past. Current Republican presidential candidate hopeful Donald Trump angered many when he referred to Mexico as a nation that sends only “the worst elements of Mexico” to the United States. Some of these “elements” are referred to by Trump as drug dealers and rapists, among other disparaging terms.⁶ Likewise, another would-be Republican candidate Jeb Bush is in hot water after claiming that Asian women only come to the United States to exploit a law that says any child that is born in the United States is an American citizen. Bush referred to these children as “anchor babies,” and originally while the term has originally been geared to refer to children of undocumented Latino immigrants, Bush attempted to shift the generalization and term onto Asian children.⁷ As a result, there is outcry over Jeb Bush’s remarks. According to a survey done by the Pew Research Center, the Latino and Asian demographics

⁴ Guillermo, E. (2015, September 8). Eclipsed by Cesar Chavez, Larry Itliong's Story Now Emerges. Retrieved December 11, 2015, from <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/asia-america/eclipsed-cesar-chavez-larry-itliongs-story-now-emerges-n423336>

⁵ UFW: The Official Web Page of the United Farm Workers of America. (n.d.). Retrieved December 11, 2015, from http://www.ufw.org/_page.php?menu=research&inc=history/07.html

⁶ Walker, Hunter. "Donald Trump Just Released an Epic Statement Raging against Mexican Immigrants and 'disease'" *Business Insider*. Business Insider, Inc, 6 July 2015. Web. 11 Dec. 2015.

⁷ Khalid, Asma. "How Asian-American Voters Went From Republican To Democratic." *NPR*. NPR, 18 Sept. 2015. Web. 11 Dec. 2015.

combined says that 70% of adult immigrants in the United States today are immigrants, and almost 50% of adults living in the United States today are children of immigrants. Additionally, about 16 million people who are still under the age of 18 identify as children of immigrants live in the United States today. These second generation children identify more liberal and less Republican, because second generation children believe in working hard and having strong career success.⁸ What is even more telling, is according to surveys done by Pew Research and the National Asian American Survey is Asian voters were more enticed to the platforms espoused by Obama during the 2012 presidential campaign. Among these platforms were LGBT rights, women's rights, healthcare, immigration, ensuring a healthy and robust economy, and finally, a strong and clear foreign policy plan. The only subject that Obama lost Asians on was his proposed fiscal policy.⁹

The correlation between Asian outreach by candidates and civic participation is not as widely available as hoped. Using any sitting President's name along with 'w/3 Asian-Americans' varied in results among Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama. For all three presidents, the filter starts with New Year's Day 1994, 2002, and 2010, and ends on the day of their respective reelections. Searching for Clinton yielded fifteen results, with only one relevant. The relevant article in mind is titled *The Rise of Asian Americans in the 21st Century*. The author of this article, Mazlan Nordin writes

⁸ "Second-Generation Americans." *Pew Research Centers Social Demographic Trends Project RSS*. 7 Feb. 2013. Web. 11 Dec. 2015.

⁹ Warren, Michael. "Why Romney Lost the 'Asian Vote'" *Weekly Standard*. Weekly Standard, 3 Dec. 2012. Web. 11 Dec. 2015.

that Asian-Americans could become 10% of the American population in the 21st century, but apart from that, did not offer up any idea on how Asian-Americans could impact an election. With Bush, the filter runs until November 2, 2004. Bush's results yielded nine results, and only two bared any relevance. The first article, written in 2003 by Tom Lochner of the *Contra Costa Times* writes that the Asian population in the United States is growing, and that George W. Bush met with John Quoc Duong, who was in charge of the White House Initiative on Asian-Americans and Pacific Islanders regularly.

Secondly, the other relevant article from the *San Jose Mercury News* said that John Kerry was winning the polls against President Bush during the 2004 election. With Obama, the filter ends on November 6, 2012. Obama has 52 results and many of them write of the Asian voting swing that began under Clinton and has continued through Obama. Many of the relevant articles say the same that Obama has drawn strong support from the various Asian communities in the United States.

During the 2012 presidential election, the neighboring states of California and Nevada had two entirely different stories going into Election Day. California, which has long had a history of being predominantly liberal and reflecting these votes in presidential elections, seemed to be an easy victory for the incumbent Obama. Nevada, on the other hand, was a hotly contested swing state that had no clear consensus. The case studies here are between Sacramento County, California, and Washoe County, Nevada. As the case study will show, Asian votes did not matter as much in Sacramento County as much as they did in Washoe County. These two counties were selected because of their geographical proximity, which is about two to three hours apart on either side of the Sierra Nevada. In Sacramento County, Asians make up about

15.8% of the population.¹⁰ However, Sacramento County voted for Obama in a relatively big landslide with 57.2% of the vote. Overall in the state of California, Obama won the state with 59.3% of the vote to Romney's 38.3%.¹¹ On the other hand in Nevada, Asians make up 5.8% of the population in Washoe County.¹² During the 2012 presidential election, Nevada as a whole was a swing state that did not have a clear winner.

Washoe County reflected the state trend, as Obama narrowly won the county, with a count of 50.7% to Romney's 47.2%. Overall in the state, Obama won Nevada 52.3% over Romney's 45.7%. The lesson here that Asians are a growing voting bloc cannot be overstated enough. Asians are becoming the fastest growing demographic in the United States, and the 2012 election in Nevada is beginning to show that trend. The Asian voters did not matter as much in California, because the state has a long history of voting predominantly liberal. Henceforth, it would not have done well for Democratic candidates to mobilize Asian voters in California, because state trends show that Democrats will win the state handily. In the same logic, the Democrats would not want to mobilize Asian voters in California, because mobilization may not always work in their favor. Democratic candidates might mobilize Asian voters, but the candidates might end up pushing the Asian bloc to Republicans instead, or possibly even towards political apathy. On the other hand in Nevada, Democrats would want to mobilize the votes of

¹⁰ "Sacramento County QuickFacts from the US Census Bureau." *Sacramento County QuickFacts from the US Census Bureau*. Census.gov. Web. 11 Dec. 2015.

¹¹ "2012 California Presidential Results." *POLITICO*. POLITICO, 19 Nov. 2012. Web. 11 Dec. 2015.

¹² "Washoe County QuickFacts from the US Census Bureau." *Washoe County QuickFacts from the US Census Bureau*. Census.gov. Web. 11 Dec. 2015.

Asians, because in swing states such as Nevada, Virginia, and Florida, Asians now stand as the margin who can decide who wins these key states. A final lesson that can be learned here is Asians are starting to become the largest group of immigrants in the United States, surpassing even that of Latinos.¹³ Asian-American voters are becoming more relevant, and this is a trend that candidates cannot continue to ignore. This study matters because like the Civil Rights movement that mobilized black voters, like immigration laws and deportation measures from the Department of Homeland Security that sparked protests and rallied Latino voters, Asian voters are slowly gaining civic relevance, and while Asian voters may not have a defining moment in history now, Asian voters are developing voting trends based on rhetoric that is disenfranchising to them and are interchangeable with other minorities in the United States today, thus creating a strong sense of empathy and solidarity.

Future candidates can learn from the 2012 election that the Asians can be mobilized effectively and will vote along party lines, that is if candidates make an active attempt to do so. The candidates must dissuade the Asian demographic of why the other party in question is not good for them, and what alternatives their party can offer. In addition, if Democrats want to keep and maintain party loyalty from Asians, then they must continue to court Asians. The reason comes to light because of the 1996 campaign finance scandal, which it had turned out that wealthy Chinese investors have had ties to Bill Clinton dating back to when he was still the governor of Arkansas. Wang writes that Republicans were quick to demonize the Asian-American population, saying

¹³ "The Rise of Asian Americans." *Pew Research Centers Social Demographic Trends Project RSS*. Pew Research Center, 18 June 2012. Web. 11 Dec. 2015.

that Asians were a big part of what was wrong with corruption in American politics and foreign money influencing the way people voted. The Democrats in turn decided to turn away from Asian voters, in a face to show that they were committed to running “clean” and “fair” elections.¹⁴ The Asian voters have strong opinions on polarizing issues, and future candidates must be willing to find them, listen to them, and represent them.

Latinos have found causes to mobilize around and become active in voting circles, which in their case have been the Delano strikes. African-Americans mobilized over the Civil Rights movement. Asian-Americans may not have a singular, unifying cause in the same way that Latinos have been polarized by Donald Trump’s racist comments and rhetoric, but Asian-Americans have empathy and solidarity with these other minority groups. Candidates must realize this if they are to effectively mobilize the Asian population at-large.

Candidates must realize that Asian voters are a growing demographic and are becoming politically relevant. Whether or not the Asian community at-large will ever have a Delano or Selma remains to be seen, but Asians can be reached strongly with empathy and solidarity.

¹⁴ Wang, L. (1998). Beyond Politics and Racial Identity: Asian Americans and the Campaign Fund-raising Controversy. *Asian American Law Journal*, 5(12), 334; 339-334; 339.