New Directions in the Study of Asian American Politics, Part II: Political Behavior

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In a continuation of the previous symposium contribution, this article discusses three emergent projects in the study of Asian American political behavior. These are works in progress that were presented during the twentieth-anniversary celebration of the Asian Pacific American Caucus at the 2019 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association.

Although our work covers a range of topics, several common themes emerge. Using original survey experiments, Chinbo Chong examines the effectiveness of identity appeals on Asian Americans' candidate preferences. Contrary to existing studies, Chong finds that panethnic-identity appeals do not unilaterally influence Asian American candidate choice. National-origin appeals influence foreign-born individuals and panethnic appeals influence US-born individuals. Tanika Raychaudhuri explores whether Asian Americans develop Democratic partisan views through social transmission from peers in local contexts rather than through the family. Using data from a longitudinal survey of college students, Raychaudhuri finds that interacting with peers of different races has liberalizing effects on Asian Americans' political views. Nathan Chan uses national survey data to explore Asian American political participation online, finding that their activism on the internet is an important mode of involvement, worthy of further investigation.

THE LIMITS OF PANETHNIC-IDENTITY APPEALS ON ASIAN AMERICAN VOTE CHOICE

Chinbo Chong

Asian Americans are the fastest-growing racial group and segment of the electorate in the United States (Lopez, Ruiz, and Patten 2017). Although this population growth has important implications for Asian American political participation, we know little about how political elites may appeal successfully to these voters, who have historically received limited attention from political parties and campaigns (Hajnal and Lee 2011).

Understanding whether appeals to panethnicity persuade Asian Americans to vote for a given candidate is important because many politicians actively court the group's vote. Elections at each level of government provide examples of strategic outreach to the Asian American electorate through panethnic-identity appeals.[1] For instance, former Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton campaigned using slogans such as "Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders for Hillary." Candidates in congressional, state, and local elections use similar panethnic-identity appeals to mobilize members of this community. These appeals may increase as candidates recognize the growing importance of the Asian American vote.

Despite politicians' frequent use of panethnic-identity appeals, there is little evidence about whether they are persuasive. Existing research suggests that sharing a panethnic identity with a candidate may increase the likelihood of voting for that candidate (Barreto 2010; Barreto and Nuño 2011; Junn and Masuoka 2008). Other scholars find that having a panethnic candidate on the ballot boosts turnout among co-ethnics (Barreto 2007; 2010; Barreto, Villarreal, and Woods 2005; Pantoja and Segura 2003; Sanchez and Morin 2011). The current literature suggests that Asian American candidates may increase political participation among members of their panethnic group, but the mechanism driving these outcomes is unclear. Moreover, there is little evidence of how effective panethnic-identity appeals are relative to national-origin appeals, which for many are a primary locus of social identity (Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004; Wong et al. 2011).

To what extent do panethnic-identity appeals affect voters who belong to the panethnic group? Do these appeals influence vote choice? I advance a new theory grounded in social-identity formation. My theory of "socialization to racialization" argues that lived experiences shape social identity and responses to identity-based appeals. I posit that place of birth shapes identification with and responsiveness to identity-based appeals. Specifically, I hypothesize that foreign-born individuals are more responsive to national-origin appeals than American-identity appeals because they identify more strongly with their country of origin (Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004; Wong et al. 2011). In contrast, US-born individuals are more responsive to panethnic-identity appeals than American-identity appeals

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because panethnic identities are unique to the American racial order (Alba and Nee 2003).

To test these hypotheses, I conducted a candidate experiment on a national sample of Asian Americans through the survey firm Dynata. Panelists are recruited by "open-enrollment" and "invitation-only" methods. To adjust the sample to reflect the national population, I requested quotas by nativity status, gender, and education based on US Census measures. Respondents read biographies of two fictitious Asian American male candidates running for city council. The experimental design included two treatment conditions and one control. The first treatment stated that a national-origin–based organization, which corresponded with the respondent's self-identified ancestral background, endorsed one of the candidates. The second treatment stated that an Asian American organization endorsed one of the candidates. The control condition stated that an American organization endorsed the candidate. Across all conditions, the competing candidate was endorsed by a generic organization.

On average, I found that Asian American respondents are indifferent to panethnic-identity appeals. Moreover, foreign-born Asian Americans are more likely to vote for candidates who use national-origin appeals relative to the control. These results are consistent with the hypothesis that national-origin identities resonate among those who were predominantly socialized outside of the United States. Unexpectedly, US-born Asian American respondents are *less likely* to vote for candidates who appeal to their Asian American panethnic identity, relative to the control. These results suggest that Asian American respondents are not merely indifferent but also may reject candidates who use panethnic-identity appeals. This finding has implications for political representation in the Asian American community, especially among the US born.

My research suggests that panethnic-identity campaign appeals may not effectively influence Asian American candidate preference. Candidates may not influence foreign-born Asian Americans and may actively turn away their US-born counterparts when they appeal to the Asian American community as a whole. The findings highlight the challenges facing campaigns and interest groups that hope to build panethnic coalitions. More broadly, these findings have implications for how political institutions can effectively incorporate these voters.

SOCIAL ROOTS OF ASIAN AMERICAN PARTISAN PREFERENCES

Tanika Raychaudhuri

Asian Americans are increasingly voting for Democrats in national elections. According to exit polls, a majority of Asian Americans voted for the Democratic candidate in every presidential election since 2000 and in the 2018 midterms (Roper Center 2016; Yam 2018). Recent news articles describe Asian Americans as "the Democrats' fastest-growing constituency," who may become pivotal voters in future elections (Desai 2018). Although Asian Americans are a diverse panethnic group, they display remarkable unity in their vote choice. For example, across all national-origin subgroups, a majority of Asian Americans voted for Clinton in the 2016 presidential election (Ramakrishnan et al. 2017).

Understanding whether appeals to panethnicity persuade Asian Americans to vote for a given candidate is important because many politicians actively court the group's vote.

The strong contemporary preference for Democrats is noteworthy because many Asian Americans have characteristics typically associated with Republican support. For example, Asian Americans have the highest median household income of all racial groups in the United States (Parker, Horowitz, and Mahl 2016). In addition, immigrants from countries such as Vietnam and China may harbor anti-communist sentiments (Cain, Kiewiet, and Uhlaner 1991; Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004). Moreover, nearly one quarter of Asian Americans identify as evangelicals, who typically have strong ties to the Republican Party (Wong 2018). Why do many Asian Americans support Democrats despite these group-level characteristics and high levels of internal diversity? More generally, how do Asian Americans develop partisan preferences? Existing work points to several potential explanations, including linked fate, immigrant incorporation, and discrimination (Kuo, Malhotra, and Mo 2017; Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004; Wong et al. 2011).

Building on this literature, I seek to answer these questions about partisan acquisition in relation to the broader process of political socialization. I advance a new theory of "social transmission," grounded in partisan influence from peers. This account is motivated by the fact that standard theories of familial partisan acquisition from parents to children do not fully explain political socialization in immigrant households (Hajnal and Lee 2011). In fact, the process of political learning may be "bi-directional" in immigrant families because children may inform the political views of their parents (Wong and Tseng 2008).

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The theory of social transmission predicts that Asian Americans experience limited partisan socialization through the family and instead develop political orientations through the diffusion of political views from peers in local contexts. Although the composition of peer groups may differ across immigrant generations,[2] the mechanism of partisan acquisition through peer influence is similar. I tested this account with other explanations for Asian American partisan preferences in several studies that use a range of data and methodologies, including national surveys and in-depth interviews (Raychaudhuri 2018; 2020).

In one study in progress, I use a longitudinal survey of college students to test whether Asian Americans develop political orientations through social contact with peers on campus. Interactions with college peers may be politically formative for Asian Americans who come of age in the United States because many report limited political discussion at home and about 60% attended college in recent years (National Center for Education Statistics 2019; Raychaudhuri 2018). I hypothesize that contact with non-Asian peers on ideologically liberal campuses leads to liberal political views among Asian Americans. This is because non-Asians are more likely than Asian Americans to enter college with crystallized political views developed through the family (Sidanius et al. 2008).

The data come from a national two-wave survey of college students spanning decades and institutions, conducted annually by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program, and maintained by the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles. The analytical sample for this study contains 1,057 Asian Americans and 17,397 whites within 296 freshman cohorts and 134 colleges. Respondents were interviewed at the beginning of the freshman year and at the end of the senior year. I used hierarchical statistical models that control for precollege political outcomes; year fixed-effects; a range of individual-, cohort-, and school-level variables; and school intercepts and region to account for local contextual effects. I analyzed the effects of social contact with peers of a different race as the respondent on the senior-year political views of Asian Americans and whites, a nonimmigrant comparison group.

The results support my theory of social transmission. As predicted, social contact with students of a different race than the respondent had moderately sized and statistically significant liberalizing effects on senior-year political ideology and views on abortion. These peer effects are more substantial among Asian Americans than whites, who may have experienced more political socialization through the family during childhood.

Although college students represent a single subgroup within the Asian American community, this research suggests that interactions with peers shape their political views. More generally, these results convey that the social contexts into which Asian Americans are embedded have political consequences. Future research might explore whether a similar process occurs in other contexts, such as workplaces and neighborhoods.

BEYOND THE BALLOT BOX: ASIAN AMERICAN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Nathan Chan

A long-standing puzzle in Asian American politics is that Asian Americans vote at lower rates than other racial groups in the United States despite their high socioeconomic standing (Junn 1999; Xu 2005). Whereas voting is one important form of political involvement, scholars have challenged the field to construct political participation more broadly and explore action beyond the ballot box (Lien et al. 2001). During a 20-year period, scholarship in Asian American politics has examined a wide range of activities, including voting, donating to political organizations, contacting government officials, protesting, and signing petitions (Chan and Phoenix 2020; Lien 2010; Masuoka, Ramanathan, and Junn 2019; Phoenix and Arora 2018; Sadhwani 2020; Sui and Paul 2017; Wong et al. 2011). Although existing work has made important contributions toward understanding Asian American political participation, much of this research overlooks the digital space.

Recent work argues that online political action belongs in the repertoire of political participation (Theocharis and Van Deth 2018). The internet offers a lower-cost substitute for political activities that normally take place in person and introduces new forms of political activity (Kenski and Stroud 2006; Theocharis and Van Deth 2018). As Dalton (2017, 128) stated, "[t]he Internet creates new ways for people to engage politically: to connect with others, to gather and share information, and to attempt to influence the political process."

Because the internet is an increasingly fruitful venue for political participation, it is important to examine online political behavior among Asian Americans. Recent reports note that Asian Americans are more likely than other racial groups to own and/or use a computer or smartphone and have a broadband internet subscription (Cohen et al. 2012; Perrin 2016; Ryan and Lewis 2017). Additionally, many Asian Americans are recent immigrants who cannot vote or participate in other traditional political activities due to language barriers (Masuoka et al. 2018; Masuoka, Ramanathan, and Junn 2019). As such, the internet represents a rare outlet where noncitizen Asian Americans also can express their political views in a preferred language.

The prevalence of the internet continues to create both a necessary demand and an opportunity to study newer digital forms of Asian American political participation in the contemporary moment.

Using the 2016 National Asian American Survey, my study investigated the extent to which Asian Americans participate in digital politics. The survey asks whether respondents participated in the following online political activities during the

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past 12 months: "posted or commented about politics on social media"; "signed an online or email petition"; and "circulated a post about members of their racial group." I found that 17% of Asian American respondents posted or commented on social media sites. About 11% circulated a post about members of their racial group. Additionally, 14% signed a petition online and 22% signed a petition in person within a 12-month period. This suggests that Asian Americans do not necessarily participate in politics more when these actions can be taken online. Therefore, we cannot assume that Asian Americans participate in digital political activities at high rates simply because they have high levels of internet access.[3]

Future research should move forward in two directions. First, it should further interrogate this puzzle of participation online, characterized by Asian Americans' high levels of internet resources yet disproportionately low levels of online political activism. Second, scholars should theorize about which distinctive factors motivate digital political behavior across national-origin groups. Chan (2020) notes that there is heterogeneity in online participation within the Asian American community (see also Lai 2018). For example, Hmong and Cambodian Americans are least participatory in digital activism, perhaps due to structural-level determinants (e.g., recruitment). These disparities in mobilization may further shape differences in online participation across Asian American national-origin groups.

Although scholars find that Asian Americans vote less than other racial groups (Fraga 2018; Wong et al. 2011), considering online political activism may reshape our perspective on the overall racial participation gap. The prevalence of the internet continues to create both a necessary demand and an opportunity to study newer digital forms of Asian American political participation in the contemporary moment.

CONCLUSION

Collectively, these projects and those on affirmative action discussed in the previous article reflect the complexity of Asian American politics, pushing theoretical and methodological boundaries. In turn, they contribute to a contemporary understanding of the diversifying electorate. For example, Chong finds that national-origin appeals influence foreign-born Asian Americans but have a limited impact on the US born. Raychaudhuri contends that studies of Asian American political socialization must look beyond the family and consider the role of outside social influences, such as peers. Chan argues that digital spaces are important political venues that may shape the racial participation gap. These studies suggest that a "one-size-fits-all" approach does not provide a full picture of Asian American politics. They also illustrate that studying groups such as Asian Americans pushes scholars to look beyond traditional explanations, expanding the scope of political science research. ■

NOTES

1. I define "panethnicity" as a superordinate identity that combines many national-origin groups. My definition of the Asian American panethnic group includes individuals from East, South, and Southeast Asia.
2. Asian American immigrants primarily interact with other immigrants from their national-origin group whereas their children's generation has more diverse peer groups (Morin, Funk, and Livingston 2013).
3. This complements Cohen et al.'s (2012) finding that Asian American youth have high levels of internet access but low levels of online political engagement.

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