

***Asian American Resource-Empowerment:
The effect of Asian American Candidates on Asian American Voting Behavior***

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“...The most powerful and visible sign of ethnic political relevance is a fellow-ethnic’s name at the head of the ticket.”

--Raymond Wolfinger, 1965

“...Human beings can be thought of as symbols and can, under the right circumstances, stand for, represent and mobilize a people.”

--Evelyn Simien, 2015

The 2010 United States Census indicated that Asian Americans were the nation’s fastest growing immigrant group and the Pew Research Center projects Asian Americans to surpass Latinos as the largest immigrant group in the nation by 2055¹. With this growth have come questions about the levels of political participation of the Asian American community and the potential influence they might wield. Following the 2008 election of Barack Obama, in which Asian Americans were seen organizing and mobilizing in support of a candidate with a half-Asian sister and ties to Asia, pundits and scholars questioned if should we expect Asian Americans to vote as a group. While scholars have examined this issue among African American and Latino voters, the political participation of Asian Americans is relatively underdeveloped, largely due to the heterogeneous nature of the community. This study begins to fill this omission within the voter behavior literature. I investigate the following questions: Given the vast diversity of the Asian American community, do Asian Americans have a shared group identity that will influence political participation outcomes? Does the presence of an Asian-American candidate on the ballot empower Asian-American citizens to turn out to vote in greater numbers? Can we expect subgroups of Asian Americans such as the Chinese, Japanese, Korean,

¹ See Lopez, Ruiz & Patten. “Key Facts about Asian Americans, a diverse and growing population.” Pew Research Center. September 18, 2017. Available [here](#).

Vietnamese, Indian, and Filipino voters, to support co-ethnic candidates or is there less cohesion within the Asian American community compared to Latinos and African Americans?

I engage these questions by examining the consequences of an Asian American candidate on the ballot for the California State Assembly. While Asian American populations may be small in other states, California boasts a large and diverse Asian American community. Over the course of three elections, from 2012 to 2016, Asian American candidates appeared on the ballot forty-five times in a state in which 12% of likely voters are Asian American². Foundational studies of American political behavior would theorize that an Asian American on the ballot would inspire increases in co-ethnic turnout (Dahl 1961; Wolfinger 1965). In the examination of this relationship for African Americans and Latinos, numerous studies suggest that a shared identity, group consciousness and sense of linked fate would be the mechanism by which minority voters would be propelled to support co-ethnic candidates (Bobo and Gilliam 1990; Dawson 1994; Barreto 2007; McConaughy et al. 2010). But who is a co-ethnic candidate for an ‘Asian American’ voter? Is an Indian American candidate a co-ethnic for a Chinese American voter? While the existence and salience of a shared identity amongst Asian Americans was previously considered low (Uhlener, Cain, and Kiewiet 1989), various accounts have revealed an Asian American group consciousness and linked fate to be a dynamic and changing construct, at times latent or, alternatively, activated particularly among second generation Asian Americans or naturalized immigrants. (Ramakrishnan and Espenshade 2001; Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004; Junn and Masuoka 2008; J. Wong et al. 2011). Consistent with these latter studies, I argue that Asian American voters, who are by definition either native born or naturalized citizens, have a greater sense of group consciousness and, as a result, will mobilize for an intragroup co-ethnic.

² See Baldassare et al. “Race and Voting in California.” Public Policy Institute of California. August 2017. Available [here](#).

Drawing on the literatures of social identity theory, racial politics and political behavior, I theorize, that Asian American political participation draws upon a unique configuration of elements that I refer to as *resource-empowerment*. ‘Asian American’ as a racial construct becomes more salient as factor of political participation amongst second generational cohorts (Rumbaut 1997; Kibria 2003). In addition, beyond national-origin cultural and linguistic ties, Asian Americans born and raised in the United States or who have sustained many years of residency and the naturalization process, often have shared experiences as an immigrant community: they have faced social exclusion and discrimination (Espiritu 1993; Eng 2001; Kuo, Malhotra, and Mo 2017), and they occupy a similar triangulated racial placement within the American societal structure (Omi and Winant 2014; Kim 1999; Masuoka and Junn 2013). Consistent with the political behavior literature, a majority of Asian Americans also have higher levels of educational attainment and increasing incomes, two factors often considered important (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry 1996; Verba et al. 1995). Given this range of factors, I argue that the presence of an Asian American candidate will increase Asian American turnout.

While this shared and intragroup ‘Asian American’ identity continues to be in formation, national surveys of Asian Americans suggest a persistent racial self-identification with their country of origin (J. Wong, Ramakrishnan, and Lee 2011). Co-ethnic relationships, thus, must also be examined at the level of national-origin subgroup. Given the myriad of national-origin subgroups that fall within Asian American label, I also contend that Asian American voters will mobilize at greater levels for national-origin co-ethnics. In other words, I theorize that Filipino American voters will turnout at higher rates for a Filipino American candidate on the ballot and

Chinese Americans will turnout at higher rates for a Chinese American candidate. I probe this distinction within my analysis.

I test these theoretical expectations through the use of a new dataset that identifies the race or ethnicity of every candidate for the eighty-member California Assembly from 2012 through 2016 (480 candidates in total). This data was combined with surname matched precinct-level voter registration and statement of vote data available from the UC Berkeley Statewide Database. The result is a dataset that identifies six subgroups of Asian American voters in California, in which I examine the voting behavior of Asian American voters when exposed to a co-ethnic candidate on the ballot. The findings challenge recent scholarship that finds a negative mobilization effect among Asian American voters in congressional elections (Fraga 2016) and advance our understanding of political behavior in the United States in an era of growing racial and ethnic diversity.

The Co-ethnic Paradigm

To assert that a candidate on the ballot would have a mobilizing effect on co-ethnic voters is not new. In his 1965 study of Italian and Irish immigrant communities in New Haven, Wolfinger articulates a mobilization theory of ethnic voting. He observes that despite upward economic mobility within the communities – that might otherwise suggest a level of integration or assimilation – partisan attachments and support for a co-ethnic candidate remain strong within second and third generations of the communities. The lineage of this scholarship can be traced to studies of empowerment among African American voters that theorized the presence of black elected officials creates a more trusting orientation toward the political process and could stimulate the political engagement of African Americans (Bobo and Gilliam 1990; Whitby and

Gilliam Jr 1991). The scope of this research was widened and refined with the examination of a similar mobilizing effect among Latinos (Barreto, Segura, and Woods 2004; Barreto 2007; Pantoja, Ramirez, and Segura 2001), yet only study has attempted to extend this analysis to the study of Asian Americans (Fraga 2016). Underlying these applications is the theoretical presumption that group consciousness and a sense of linked fate among minority communities spurs increased participation and turnout.

The impact of group consciousness and linked fate on political behavior outcomes is well documented and debated within the political behavior literature. I rely on McClain et al.'s definition of group consciousness as an "in-group identification *politicized* by a set of ideological beliefs about one's group's social standing, as well as a view that collective action is the best means by which the group can improve its status and realize its interests," (2009, p.476; See also Jackman and Jackman 1973; Gurin et al. 1980; Miller et al. 1981). Moreover, group consciousness is a multidimensional construct that takes into consideration, first, the structural hierarchy of society, second, an individual's view of where their in-group stands within that structure and, third, the individual's perception that acting together as a group may improve the group's standing within the hierarchy. To be clear, this definition of group consciousness is conceptually and methodologically distinct from other psychological constructs. In particular, group consciousness and group identity are two different constructs (Chong and Rogers 2005). Group identity, or the awareness of belonging to a certain group, likely informs an individual's sense of group consciousness, but an individual can identify with a racial group without developing a group consciousness. Group consciousness has been operationalized by scholars typically as survey items that measure the multiple dimensions of the construct (Verba and Nie 1972; Shingles 1981; Miller et al. 1981; Chong and Rogers 2005), such as the closeness one feels

to other in-group members, a perception that the group faces discrimination, and a belief that one's fate is linked to that of the group. Simien (2005) describes linked fate as "the recognition that individual life chances are inextricably tied to the race as a whole," (p.). This sense of rising linked fate and more broadly group consciousness within minority communities is the theoretical assumption that undergirds empirical demonstrations of increased voter turnout levels of a racial group, which Lee (2008) has referred to as an "identity-to-politics" link.

Studies examining differences in political participation outcomes by racial group have found higher participation levels of African Americans compared to whites of similar socioeconomic background, leading many to assert that linked fate among African Americans helps explain their relatively high political participation (Miller et al. 1981; Shingles 1981; Verba and Nie 1972). For African Americans, linked fate stems from a history of group-based social and economic segregation, discrimination and exclusionary policies and institutions (Dawson 1994; Gurin, Hatchett, and Jackson 1990; Tate 2003a; Cohen 1999). It is also advanced and crystallized by interaction with informal and formal African-American sociopolitical networks such as black media, the black family and black religious and community organizations (Dawson 2003; Calhoun-Brown 1996). However, there is a distinction to be made: While African Americans have been found to have participation rates at levels near or higher to that of whites, scholars have not found a significant mobilizing effect, as measured by increased turnout, given the presence of an African American on the ballot (Gay 2001; Tate 2003b, 1993). Despite this distinction, scholars have theorized that elevated to activated racialized group consciousness may also help explain participation and mobilization for Latinos and Asian Americans (Leighley 2001; Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004; Garcia Bedolla and Michelson 2012).

Like Asian Americans, scholars have often been cautious to over-assert the pan-ethnic strength of the Latino community given the variety of national-origin backgrounds (De La Garza et al. 1992; DeSipio 1996; Jones-Correa and Leal 1996; Beltran 2010; Hero 1992). Nevertheless, research has shown a significant and growing level of both group consciousness and linked fate among Latinos. The process for acquiring linked fate among Latinos has been found to be different from that of African Americans (Sanchez 2006; Sanchez & Vargas 2016). Lacking a common history or a singular type of immigrant experience, Sanchez and Masuoka (2010) found linked fate to be higher among Spanish-dominant respondents, a possible indication that linked fate amongst Latinos could be a temporary phenomenon that dissipates over time. In these same studies, the experience of discrimination was not a strong predictor of linked fate among Latinos. Linked fate, thus, is a distinctive construct for Latinos in comparison to African Americans (Sanchez & Vargas 2016). Linked fate and group consciousness amongst Latinos has been found to have a more attenuated impact on mobilization and turnout. Studies attempting to identify a correlation between a Latino candidate on the ballot and increases in Latino voter turnout only find this relationship in distinct contextual environments – such as the composition and percentage of Latinos within a district (Fraga 2016), the overlapping nature of majority-minority districts (Barreto, Segura & Woods 2004), the electoral context such as whether the election is a statewide competition for senate or governor, city wide for mayor or congressional and assembly legislative districts (Barreto 2007), and the proportion of Latino registrants to the percentage of Latinos in the general population (Fraga and Ramírez 2004; Ramirez 2013). Using the present dataset, I confirm these results. With no account for the district environment, I find the presence of a Latino candidate to be negatively correlated with Latino turnout in California Assembly contests.

Given the consistently null results of voter mobilization amongst Latinos and African Americans with a co-ethnic candidate in the absence of district contextual factors, why should we expect Asian Americans – a group that has even less commonality than Latinos, who have no shared language, culture or national-origin – to vote as a group in the presence of an Asian American candidate? Numerous scholars have warned about the application of the terminology and measurement tools of group consciousness and linked fate on Asian Americans (Chong and Rogers 2005; T. Lee 2007). While this study does not directly measure levels of group consciousness among Asian Americans, what have recent studies of group consciousness and linked fate of Asian Americans found that would lead to the expectation of an identity-to-politics linkage?

Understanding the Asian American Electorate

Asian Americans are an evolving electorate. The growing influence of Asian American voters and candidates in California, in particular, has been widely recognized (Nakanishi 1991; Decker 2015.) Asian Americans have commonalities that resemble elements of both Latinos and whites. Like Latinos, Asian Americans have a growing sense of pan-ethnic identity that, like Wolfinger espoused, would mobilize voters to support co-ethnic candidates. While this relationship has been difficult to find amongst Latino voters, and instead research point to various contextual requirements, the same may not be true for Asian Americans. More like whites, whose participation is often viewed as a result of various resources such as income, education and time (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Brady et al. 1995; Verba et al. 1995), Asian Americans are, on average, a community that is highly educated, in large part due to the large number of Asian Americans who enter the United States through (H1b) visa programs

designed for high skilled workers. While Asian Americans are diverse in their socioeconomic status, many Asian Americans do occupy middle to upper income socioeconomic status. This combination of factors comprises what I call the *resource-empowerment thesis* of Asian American electoral participation and helps explain why we should expect a mobilization of Asian American voters around an Asian American candidate, regardless of the district composition or context.

The first element of resource-empowerment for Asian American political behavior is – like other minority groups - empowerment through a growing sense of pan-ethnic identity (Espiritu 1992), group consciousness and linked fate (Masuoka 2006; Junn and Masuoka 2008). Asian American voters are a select subpopulation of the broader Asian American population. To be a voter, Asian Americans must either be foreign-born, naturalized citizens or native-born citizens. In the landmark *National Asian American Survey* (NAAS) of 2008, naturalized citizens and native-born Asian Americans were found to be far more likely to identify with the ‘Asian American’ racial label (Wong et al. 2011). In an investigation of immigrant generation and voting, Ramakrishnan and Espenshade (2001) find that unlike European immigrants, voting among Asian Americans increases with each subsequent generation. They theorize that the continued social exclusion faced by second generation Asian Americans may contribute to increased participation vis-à-vis second-generation whites. This finding is bolstered by a number of socio-political examinations of second generation Asian Americans that find both a growing sense of pan-ethnic identity and rising interest in politics (Park 2008; Min 2002, 2006; Kibria 2003; Sears et al. 2003). Junn & Masuoka (2008) furthered this body of research in their assessment of group consciousness among Asian Americans. In a survey experiment that primes Asian Americans and African Americans with images of co-ethnic cabinet members as a

descriptive representation stimulus, they find Asian Americans primed with these images to exhibit a sense of closeness to one's own racial group to be near the same level as African Americans who have not been primed. They conclude that Asian American identity is dynamic and malleable and is the product of a "complex interaction between policies of the state, institutions, political economy and the stereotypes that result to create incentives for people categorized by race to either adopt or turn away from a group-based political identity," (p. 734). The totality of this research suggests that while national-origin considerations are important within the Asian American community, they are not exclusive from the development of shared group consciousness that is explicitly political in nature and would lead us to expect to find an empowering mobilization effect between Asian American voters and candidates.

While Asian American group consciousness has been shown to be dynamic, malleable and increasing, Asian Americans across generations also continue to strongly identify with their national-origin identities such as Korean American, Indian American or Japanese American (Ramakrishnan et al. 2017; Wong et al. 2011). Field experiments measuring the efficacy of get out the vote campaigns such as phonebanking, mailers and door knocking all stress the need for language appropriate communications (Wong 2005; Garcia Bedolla and Michelson 2012; Green and Gerber 2015). Given this proclivity toward national-origin identities, I theorize that voter turnout will increase with the presence of a co-ethnic Asian American candidate of the same national origin.

A second element of the resource-empowerment model of Asian American political behavior draws upon foundational works in American political science, which have found a battery of socioeconomic indicators and resources to be predictive of increased political participation (Campbell et al. 1960; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-

Barry 1996; Verba et al. 1995). Many of these earlier works did not distinguish how the models and theories might apply to racial minorities, and have since been considered to be benchmarks particularly for white political participation, but not necessarily explanatory of minority participation (Barreto and Pedraza 2009; Smith 1993). To the extent that many of these resources are available to a majority of Asian American voters suggests that Asian Americans may be a test case of the resource model of political participation beyond whites (Sears & Brown 2013). The twenty million Asian Americans in the United States trace their roots from more than twenty different countries in East Asia, the Indian Subcontinent and Southeast Asia. With that, comes an array of immigration pathways. Many communities, particularly those of Southeast Asia arrived in the United States as refugees and may lack the resources of income, high levels of educational attainment called for by the resource models of participation (Zhou et al. 2008; J. Lee and Zhou 2015). Another, larger component/portion of the community has entered the United States as students pursuing advanced degrees, highly skilled workers and their family members (add citations).

I theorize that this combination of empowerment as a dynamic and growing racialized group identity with the traditional resources associated with political participation underscore Asian American political participation in the twenty-first century. This hypothesis stand in contrast to earlier studies of Asian American political participation in the 1980s. Uhlaner, Kiewiet & Cain (1982) found that despite high educational attainment and rising-income levels, Asian Americans' participation to be strikingly low. However, much has changed for Asian Americans in California since 1984. With the increased length of residency, Asian Americans have become further entrenched in the American political sphere and their rising numbers may have shifted their assessment of the ability to influence the outcome of an election. These

changes, thus, substantiate the claim that the presence of an Asian American on the ballot should result in observable Asian American voter mobilization.

↑ Socioeconomic Status → Resources → Increased Turnout

↑ Group Consciousness: Linked Fate → Empowerment → Increased Turnout for Co-ethnic

Hypotheses

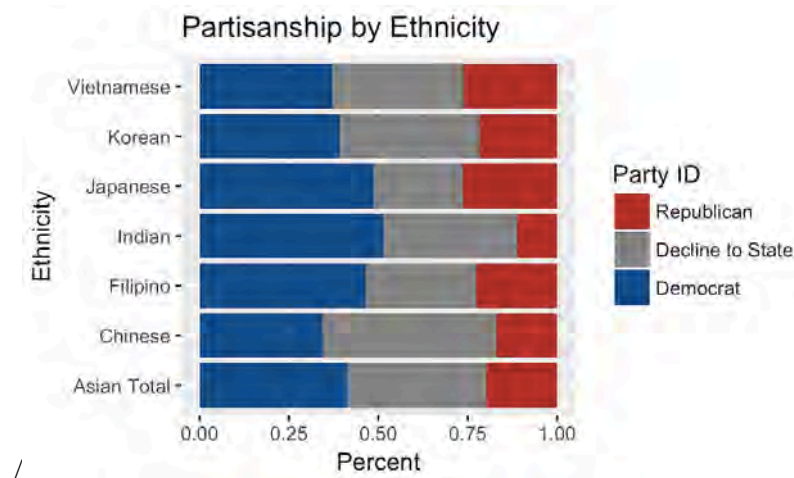
If the concepts of shared ethnicity, group consciousness or linked fate are inconsequential to Asian American voters, then co-ethnic candidates should have no impact on their voting calculus. I argue the combination of resources and empowerment as a racialized group, particularly for the purposes of political power, underscores California Asian American voters in the current context and we should, therefore, expect to see higher levels of Asian American turnout when an Asian American is running.

I conduct this analysis using data from the California State Assembly. The California Assembly is comprised of eighty seats, and like the House of Representatives, legislators stand for re-election every two years. While similar studies of Latinos find a co-ethnic mobilization relationship only to occur in districts with a large proportion of Latinos (Fraga 2016), overlapping majority-minority districts (Barreto, Segura & Woods 2007), and candidate viability (Barreto 2007), I maintain that the combination of resources and empowerment underlying Asian American political participation in the current era makes such a distinction unnecessary in their case. *An assessment of the role of district composition will be available in an appendix.*

In my account, partisanship does not weigh heavily. The hypothesis suggests that co-ethnic mobilization will occur despite partisan attachments. This suggests that those registered with a party may be willing to cross party lines in order to support a co-ethnic candidate. Prior research supports this assertion. First, nearly a third of Asian American voters in California

register with no party affiliation. While these voters may have hidden political preferences, their lack of allegiance to one of the major parties should be viewed as a diminished expectation of which type of candidate they will support. Secondly, while the majority of Asian American voters in California lean democratic according to statewide surname matched registration (see **Figure A**), those who are registered with a party show a strong and significant willingness to cross party lines to support a co-ethnic candidate (for example, see ecological inference analysis from California’s 39th congressional district in 2012, in which more than 90% of Chinese Americans are estimated to have supported Democrat Jay Chen, despite the majority of Chinese voters in the district being registered republican). *A full analysis of Asian American voter turnout that more fully accounts for partisanship will be available in the Appendix.*

Figure A: 2016 California Voter Registration by National-Origin



Another consideration of consequence is California’s use of a top-two primary. This institutional design allows for two candidates of the same party to advance to the general election, significantly altering the range of partisan options available to California voters. In some instances this has led to electoral contests between two Asian Americans from the same

party, a situation not possible anywhere else in the nation. California's 27th assembly district witnessed such a race in 2016 where democrats Ash Kalra, an Indian American, and Madison Nguyen, a Vietnamese American, vied to represent the northern California city of San Jose. These circumstances provide additional opportunity to examine the boundaries and multiplicity of Asian American identity. I include these factors in my research design.

Given all of these considerations, I make the following two hypotheses:

H₁: Asian American voters will have measurably higher rates of voting in an election with a co-ethnic Asian American candidate.

H₂: Asian American voters, identified by their national-origin, will have measurably higher rates of voting for a co-ethnic candidate of the same national-origin.

I examine these hypotheses by analyzing voter turnout rates of Asian American voters in California with the presence of Asian American candidates on the ballot. I employ surname-matched data at the precinct level. This data makes estimations of Asian American turnout possible, yet the aggregation at the precinct-level make interpretation of individual-level characteristics of voters difficult. Despite this limitation, this study represents the first of its kind to quantitatively estimate voter turnout of Asian Americans in a context in which there exist a large number of Asian American voters, candidates and districts with high proportions of Asian American residents.

Data and Methods

To conduct this analysis, I first collected race and ethnicity data for all California Assembly general election candidates from 2012 through 2016. 2012 is the inaugural year of three electoral design reforms in California: (1) the switch to the top-two primary; (2) the

creation of new district lines following the 2011 redistricting, conducted for the first time by a citizen review board; (3) the adoption of additional term limits for state legislators (Sadhvani & Junn 2018). Given these changes, the inclusion of data from prior to 2012 would not allow for easily comparable districts and cases. To assess candidate racial identity I use a number of methods consistent with prior studies such as membership in racial or ethnic caucuses, place of birth, self-made statements about racial and ethnic background either in biographies or media publications and endorsements by ethnic organizations. In 2016, the California Research Bureau, in conjunction with the California State Library, issued the *Demographics in the California Legislature* report which identifies the race and gender of current state legislators. This report was used to crosscheck racial designations.

The units of analysis in this study are aggregated precincts within each of the eighty assembly districts in the state, across three election years. Data was procured from the Statewide Database (SWDB), held at the UC Berkeley School of Law. This data pulls voter data from all California counties and standardizes the variables across counties. To create the dataset, three unique data files for each year were merged. These include (1) the *Statement of Vote*, which reports final vote tallies for each candidate from all counties and certified by the Secretary of State; (2) the *Registration* file, which reports the number of Asian American and Latino voters registered in each precinct using the surname matching technique; and (3) the *Voters* file which reports the final vote at the precinct level with surname matching. Candidate racial and ethnic data were then matched on to this voter data. In total, the dataset includes 64,148 precinct observations.

The Statewide Database (SWDB), California's official redistricting database, conducts a surname matching analysis of voter data. While surname matching is not a perfect science, it

allows researchers to identify voters based on ethnic and typical surname. The SWDB uses two surname dictionaries compiled by the U.S. Census Bureau to identify Latino and Asian American voters (Lauderdale and Kestenbaum 2000; McKue 2011). SWDB identifies Asian Americans by six national-origins: Chinese, Korean, Indian, Japanese, Vietnamese and Filipino. To identify an aggregate measure of Asian American turnout, totals for these six subgroups were summed and analyzed as the proportion of actual voters to total registrants in a precinct. Moreover, the account of Asian American voters and candidates is limited to these six groups and omits important communities that have a significant presence in California such as Cambodian Americans, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, the Hmong, the Thai, Pacific Islanders or the broader definition of Asians which might include Persians or other Eurasian communities. Given the availability of surname matched voter data, the national-origin of Asian American candidates was also coded based on these six subgroups³.

Variables & Design

In this analysis I use ordinary least squares regression, in which the dependent variable, voter turnout, is measured as the proportion of surname matched Asian American voters in a given precinct to the total number registered in the same precinct. I analyze seven models, examining turnout of voters from all six surname-matched national-origin groups (Chinese, Indian, Filipino, Korean, Vietnamese & Japanese) as well as an aggregated measure of voter turnout for all Asian American voters.

The independent variable of interest is the presence of an Asian American on the ballot.

In total, an Asian American candidate appeared on the ballot forty-five times over the course of

³ In one instance a candidate of Indonesian background was coded as Asian-other. He was included in the all Asian turnout model, but is not captured in any of the national-origin specific models. Two mixed race Asian Americans appeared on the ballot. Their race was coded as Asian if their surname appeared in the Asian surname dictionaries.

the three elections. Figure B presents the number of times an Asian American candidate ran for state office by national origin. Note that these figures do not necessarily represent unique individuals. The data is collected over three election years and the same incumbent candidate may be counted in all three years. This broad inclusion of candidates allows for an examination of a candidate over the course of his/her career. Because the initial year of analysis, 2012, was the first year to follow redistricting, the dataset captures several first time legislators in that year and traces them through six years of incumbency advantage, which is controlled for in the model. Because the unit of analysis is the precinct level, each candidate within the dataset has between 200-400 unique observations, depending upon the number of precincts in a given district. If the presence of an Asian American or national-origin co-ethnic influences Asian American voters, then coefficients for this variable will be positive and significant.

Table 1: Asian American Candidates by National Origin, California Assembly 2012-2016

Chinese	15
Filipino	9
Taiwanese	7
Japanese	5
Korean	4
Indian	3
Vietnamese	1
Other Asian	1

Also included in the model are variables that capture the California-specific results of the top-two primary. Dummy variables were created to represent elections in which either two Republicans or two Democrats appear on the general election ballot. A third dummy variable captures an election in which either a candidate runs unopposed or a candidate from a party other than the two main parties, such as Libertarian, Green or Independent, advances from the primary to the general election ballot. Under these circumstances, voters have a different range of options

than a typical election with candidates from the two major parties and must likely need to use a different voting calculus to select a candidate to support.

The model also includes a variety of typical electoral control measures. A dummy variable for candidate incumbency was created, coded 0 if not an incumbent, 1 if the candidate already serves in the legislature. If the election was an open seat with no incumbent on the ballot, it was also coded as a dummy variable. Dummies were also created to account for election year effects and gender of the candidate.

Results

Tables 2, 3 and 4 contain the results of the analysis and confirm the Asian American turnout hypotheses for the presence of a single Asian American on the ballot. The first column of Table 2 reports the results of multivariate analysis, which indicates that Asian American turnout is 2.68% higher with the presence of one Asian American candidate on the ballot. This finding is in direct contrast to a recent study by Fraga (2016), which found the presence of an Asian American congressional candidate to depress turnout of Asian American voters. In that study, Fraga uses nationwide election data from Catalist to assess turnout rates of whites, African Americans, Latinos and Asian Americans. While Fraga's makes a significant contribution to the study of Blacks and Latinos, finding that they are more likely to vote as their share of the population increases regardless of candidate race, his analysis of Asian Americans is less certain, by his own admission. First, in his analysis on the role of majority-minority districts and the influence that the proportion of an ethnic group might have on turnout for a co-ethnic candidate, he cautions that Asian Americans have only one majority-minority congressional district in the United States (CA-17). Additionally, he warns that the Catalist database itself has high error-

rates particularly for the identification of Asian Americans, which may impact his findings (p.106). Moreover, a nationwide assessment of Asian American voter turnout in congressional districts, in which even in the presence of an Asian American candidate voters might assume that their co-ethnic is not viable and that their community does not have the votes to support the candidate, nationwide assessments may be an inappropriate environment in which to aggregate Asian Americans. Interestingly, the presence of two Asian American candidates does not appear to have the same effect. While the coefficient is positive, it is small and not significant, indicating a possible stagnation of turnout when two Asian Americans complete, however this scenario occurs only four times within the three election years examined⁴.

Models based on national-origin subgroups also confirm the hypotheses: Chinese, Indian, Filipino and Vietnamese American voters all turn out at higher rates with the presence of a co-ethnic candidate. The results in Tables 3 and 4 show that Chinese American voters turnout is 4.4% higher with the presence of a Chinese American candidate, Indian American turnout is 5.1% higher with an Indian candidate and Filipino turnout is 3.7% higher within a Filipino candidate, all at the 0.00 level of significance. Model 5, which examines Vietnamese turnout, also suggests a five-percentage point increase, however this estimate is drawn from single election within the dataset that represents the only occurrence of a Vietnamese candidate during the period of analysis. That election was unique because it was an open seat in which two Democrats advanced to the general election and both were Asian American. Thus, voter turnout of Vietnamese Americans is higher in this particularly competitive election, but to fully comprehend the effect of a co-ethnic candidate, additional cases would need to be observed.

⁴ These include districts 27 (Madison Nguyen & Ash Kalra) and 19 (Phil Ting & Carlos Taylor) in 2016, district 19 in 2014 (Phil Ting & Rene Pineda) and district 49 in 2012 (Edwin Chau – Matthew Lin).

Coefficients for Korean and Japanese American models (in Table 4) also show a small and positive effect on turnout, but are not significant. Like studies of Latino and African American turnout, the small percentage of Korean American and Japanese American voters within a particular district might influence their voter calculus, viewing co-ethnic candidates as not having a viable shot to win. For example, this type of scenario could have occurred in the Republican-leaning sixtieth assembly district in 2014 when Democrat and Korean American Ken Park challenged Republican incumbent Eric Linder. Accordingly, the Korean American turnout model indicates a negative and significant correlation with the presence of an incumbent on the ballot. Moreover, not seeing a viable chance for Park's candidacy to advance, Korean Americans may not have altered their voting behavior to support him, particularly in a nonpresidential election year. The share of Korean American voters still remains relatively small in comparison to Chinese, Indian and Filipino Americans, yet there is good reason to keep Korean Americans on the radar of future studies. In 2015, David Ryu became the first Korean American elected to the Los Angeles City Council and in a 2017 congressional special election primary that saw more than twenty-five candidates, Korean American Robert Ahn advanced to the general election, though was unable to succeed in that competition.

The model also accounts for instances in which both candidates on the ballot are Asian American. The results show a clearly elevated level of turnout with the presence of at least one Asian American. With the presence of two Asian American candidates, the coefficient is small, positive, but not significant. This relationship could be interpreted as simply a lack of data. Two Asian Americans on the ballot occurs only four times within the dataset. Half of those observations are within the same district (19), with a strong incumbent. While this is a unique electoral incidence and fodder for future research, there is simply not enough variation to draw

definitive conclusion about the multidimensional ways in which Asian Americans might behave when give the option of two Asian American candidates. Given the few instances of this type, ecological analysis of vote choice might be the best alternative to understand the pulls of co-ethnicity.⁵

Nontraditional general elections such as a ballot with two Republicans, two Democrats, or the presence of a third party candidate are also captured in the model. Interestingly, across all seven models, the presence of two Republicans on the ballot has a positive and significant coefficient, while the presence of two Democrats has a negative and significant coefficient. *A forthcoming appendix will disaggregate turnout by partisanship as well as voters with no party preference to further investigate this finding.*

Discussion

The goal of this study was to analyze the impact of co-ethnic candidacy for Asian American voters for the first time. In contrast to extant studies of Latino and African American turnout that have found co-ethnic candidates do not have an independent effect on turnout, I find the reverse to be true of Asian American voters in California. With the presence of a co-ethnic candidate I find a measurable (2.8 point) increase in turnout for Asian Americans aggregated across six national-origin subgroups. In four of those subgroups I find an additional increase in turnout rates for a co-ethnic candidate. In comparison, I find consistent with the literature a negative relationship with turnout for Latinos when not controlling for district composition.

These findings raise important consequences for theories of turnout such as empowerment, elite mobilization and resource models, in which, given the evidence presented

⁵ For example, see Sadhwani, S. 2017. "When Democrats Compete, Asian Americans Diverge." *Mischiefs of Faction, Vox*.

here, Asian Americans do not fall neatly within one of the predominant theoretical models. While the “empowerment” thesis as proposed by Bobo and Gilliam (1990) has not borne out in data from the African American community for whom the thesis was proposed, the linkage between co-ethnicity and political behavior do bear fruit among Asian American voters. If there was no link between co-ethnic candidates and voters, then the models would result in null effects. This is not the case and, thus, the evolving nature of Asian Americans as fully participating voting members of the United States must be reconsidered, as the data presented here supports an adapted application of the theory to this case of minority voters.

While the evidence suggests empowerment is at play, the findings do not preclude the possibility that elite-level mobilizations could explain increases in Asian American voting. While Asian Americans generally report a low level of communication being received from political campaigns (NAAS 2016, 2008), Asian American candidates likely make significant language appropriate appeals (Lai and Geron 2006; Lai, Kim, and Takeda 2001a; Wong 2008) not captured within the model.

These results beg the question: Why do Asian Americans exhibit significantly different political behavior than African Americans or Latinos? One possible explanation for this variation, that I have argued, may come from the classic resource theory of voter turnout and political participation. Given the immigration history of the majority of Asian Americans as highly skilled workers and their families, Asian Americans, on average, occupy a middle to upper income status, are highly educated, pay close attention to the news media, all of which are associated with increased participation, particularly amongst whites. Moreover, while our existing theories separately may not fully explain the picture of Asian American voter behavior

presented here, a combination of these theories might shed light on the mechanisms that undergird Asian American political participation.

Conclusion

Asian American communities are growing far beyond the Golden State. Nevada, Texas, Pennsylvania, Georgia, New Jersey and many others all have growing communities of Asian Americans. With that growth, legislators and candidates are adjusting their campaign and representative tactics to reach communities that are growing as a proportion of their electorate. In Henderson, Nevada a suburb of Las Vegas, Asian Americans now account for eleven percent of Clark county residents. A recent opening of an Asian American organization drew attendance from two members of congress and representatives from both of the state's senators looking to court Asian American voters.⁶ Nationwide, the majority of Asian Americans is foreign-born and may not be eligible or interested to vote. However, if prior studies are any indication, as years of residence increase and more second generation Asian Americans come of voting age, Asian American interest and participation in political life will likely increase. Political scientists are prodigiously poor at predicting the future. This study is narrow in its focus of Asian American voters in California and cannot be generalized to understand how Asian Americans in other states will vote or behave. Asian Americans in California occupy a unique position as a large community seen for their growing influence in politics, which may impact the calculus of Asian American voters. However, to the extent that resource-empowerment as a theory is effective at explaining the underlying mechanisms of Asian American participation, future examinations of Asian American voting behavior may find similar patterns elsewhere.

⁶ See Kudialis, Chris. "Political group catering to Asian, Pacific Islander populations opens in Las Vegas." *The Las Vegas Sun*. November 4, 2017. Available [online](#).

In addition to being geographically dispersed, Asian Americans represent a diverse set of immigrants and native-born citizens from numerous national origin backgrounds. This study departs from prior studies of voter turnout that have attempted to explain Asian American political behavior as an aggregated group. The findings show discrete differences across Asian subgroups in comparison to the generalized Asian American grouping. Scholars looking to make generalizable conclusions about Asian Americans must be cautious not only about sample size but also the ways in which different subgroups of the Asian American community may behave in divergent ways.

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Table 1: Vietnamese, Korean and Japanese Turnout in California Assembly Elections 2012-2016

	Vietnamese Turnout	Korean Turnout	Japanese Turnout
Vietnamese Candidate	0.0516* (0.0211)		
Incumbent	0.311 (0.295)	-0.0102** (0.00355)	0.481 (0.293)
Open Seat	0.320 (0.295)		0.494 (0.293)
2 Republicans on Ballot	0.00841 (0.00642)	0.0244*** (0.00725)	0.0168** (0.00581)
2 Democrats on Ballot	-0.00907* (0.00454)	-0.00337 (0.00480)	-0.0180*** (0.00430)
Unopposed	0.000237 (0.00637)	0.00363 (0.00688)	-0.00225 (0.00573)
2012	-0.0657*** (0.00367)	-0.0823*** (0.00398)	-0.0504*** (0.00346)
2014	-0.342*** (0.00358)	-0.339*** (0.00388)	-0.293*** (0.00341)
Female	-0.00333 (0.00296)	-0.0166*** (0.00322)	-0.00935*** (0.00282)
Korean Candidate		0.0181 (0.0113)	
o.Open Seat		0 (.)	
Japanese Candidate			0.00741 (0.00889)
Constant	0.341 (0.295)	0.663*** (0.00433)	0.295 (0.293)
Observations	41091	39293	44996

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 1: Chinese, Indian and Filipino Turnout with Co-Ethnic Candidates in California Assembly Elections 2012-2016

	Chinese Turnout	Indian Turnout	Filipino Turnout
Chinese Candidate	0.0367*** (0.00390)		
Incumbent	0.462*** (0.105)	0.327 (0.288)	0.0958 (0.118)
Open Seat	0.475*** (0.105)	0.342 (0.288)	0.109 (0.118)
2 Republicans on Ballot	0.0365*** (0.00486)	0.0105 (0.00570)	0.0302*** (0.00429)
2 Democrats on Ballot	-0.0109** (0.00351)	-0.0168*** (0.00404)	-0.0146*** (0.00314)
Unopposed	-0.0155*** (0.00457)	-0.0124* (0.00534)	-0.00690 (0.00401)
2012	-0.0613*** (0.00286)	-0.0597*** (0.00327)	-0.0610*** (0.00253)
2014	-0.311*** (0.00281)	-0.362*** (0.00322)	-0.356*** (0.00250)
Female	0.00116 (0.00241)	-0.00685* (0.00270)	-0.00376 (0.00208)
Indian candidate		0.0507*** (0.0123)	
Filipino Candidate			0.0375*** (0.00529)
Constant	0.223* (0.105)	0.374 (0.288)	0.613*** (0.118)
Observations	50828	48257	54117

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 1: Asian American and Latino Turnout with Co-Ethnic Candidates in California Assembly Elections 2012-2016

	Total Asian Turnout	Latino Turnout
1 Asian Candidate	0.0268*** (0.00215)	
2 Asian Candidates	0.00664 (0.00620)	
Incumbent	0.335*** (0.0565)	0.372*** (0.0283)
Open Seat	0.346*** (0.0565)	0.379*** (0.0283)
2 Republicans on Ballot	0.0393*** (0.00325)	0.0119*** (0.00252)
2 Democrats on Ballot	-0.0163*** (0.00242)	0.00395* (0.00196)
Unopposed	-0.00365 (0.00303)	-0.0138*** (0.00236)
2012	-0.0588*** (0.00194)	-0.0620*** (0.00153)
2014	-0.323*** (0.00191)	-0.376*** (0.00151)
Female	-0.00317* (0.00161)	0.00569*** (0.00127)
1 Latino Candidate		-0.0381*** (0.00143)
2 Latino Candidates		-0.0511*** (0.00276)
Constant	0.359*** (0.0565)	0.354*** (0.0283)
Observations	58164	61462

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$