Asian American Political Participation
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Abstract: The stereotype of the politically ignorant and apathetic Asian American continues to be widespread. However, Asian Americans are in fact politically involved and active. This study examines Asian American political involvement through partisanship, policy/candidate preferences, and political participation in different forms (voting, protesting, and organizing). Additionally, the study examines the differences in political involvement of Asian Americans as a general racial group versus the different ethnic subgroups within the Asian race. We found that there are differences in amounts of political involvement based on different ethnic subgroups, showing that future analysis of Asian American political involvement should look at the different ethnic subgroups within the race rather than generalizing the data for all Asian Americans. It also shows that certain ethnic groups are more politically involved and/or have different preferences than other ethnic groups due to the diversity of experiences and backgrounds within the subgroups of the Asian race.

Introduction: There is little academic research on the political participation of Asian Americans, especially that of each Asian American ethnic group. A popular stereotype is that of the apathetic, foreign Asian who does not participate in politics or even socialize entirely within American society. This study seeks to dismantle that stereotype and give data suggesting that Asian Americans are very diverse and each ethnic group differs from each other significantly, but also that Asian Americans are in fact politically active (and if they are not, what barriers they face in participating).

Methods: Systematic Literature Review
Research Question: How do Asian Americans as a panethnic racial group and in subnational ethnic groups participate in US politics through 1) Partisanship, 2) Policy preferences and 3) Various forms of political participation?

Literature Review: I conducted systematic searches in academic journals for answers to these questions by narrowing my searches to include Asian Americans and each of the three aspects of participation above, making sure to find literature on both Asian Americans as a unified racial group and literature discussing ethnic differences within the group. I then extracted and synthesized data from 37 sources.

Conclusion: There are significant ethnic differences amongst Asian Americans in their political behavior. This has implications for their racial politics, suggesting this group is not homogenous. Additionally, Asian Americans do in fact participate in US politics.

Racial Policy/Candidate Preferences:
Asian Americans do not have panethnic policy interests compared to other minority groups, but four general major policy concerns were found: state of the economy, unemployment/jobs, healthcare, and education (Kim, 2015). Because Asians have the highest proportion of foreign-born populations compared to other racial groups in the US, immigration is a salient policy issue, but report the lowest level of support for pro-immigration policies (Tran and Warikoo, 2021). The top 3 most important issues to Asian Americans in 2016 NAAS Survey were the economy/jobs, terrorism/ISIS/national security, and racism or racial discrimination (Ramakrishnan, Wong, Lee, and Lee, 2016).

Ethnic Policy/Candidate Preferences:
Asian Americans vote for candidates who share the same ethnicity as them (Leung, 2021). Ethnic differences in immigration policy support is as follows: As labor migrants, Filipinos support a congressional increase in annual work visas. As economic migrants, Chinese and Indians support an increase in annual family visas. As refugees, Vietnamese are least supportive of pro-immigration policy. (Tran and Warikoo, 2021). The groups who show the strongest support for Affirmative Action are Hmong (73%), Cambodians (71%), and Asian Indians (70%) (Ramakrishnan, Wong, Lee, and Lee, 2016). Only Chinese Americans have consistent and visible opposition to affirmative action (Wong and Shah, 2021). Although Black and Asian Americans tend to be pitted against each other, 72% of Asians support the “government doing more to give blacks equal rights with whites,” and the groups who give the strongest support are Cambodians (92%), Koreans (81%), and Asian Indians (80%).

Partisanship:
Data showed that most Asian Americans in general prefer Democrats, however many immigrants chose to be nonpartisan due to either lack of knowledge or the lack of the ability to vote and therefore choose (Phan and Garcia, 2009).

As for different Asian ethnic groups, Vietnamese Americans were found to have strong support for Republicans due to coming in as refugees under Reagan, while Filipino Americans began to vote Democratic for Obama in 2008 and Clinton in 2016, and Korean Americans lean towards Democrats (Leung, 2021). Chinese and Vietnamese Americans were more likely to identify as Independents, while Indians and Filipinos were more likely to identify as Democrats (Phan and Warikoo, 2021). Immigrants from China, Korea, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos were found to become more Republican with increased exposure to living in the US (Phan and Garcia, 2009).

Political Participation:
On a panethnic level, the social media movement #StopAsianHate was founded by the Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council, Chinese for Affirmative Action and Asian Americans from San Francisco University Robert, 2021. Organizations such as Asian Law Caucus and Asian Pacific American Legal Center in California, Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AAJDEF) in New York, and Asian Americans Advocating Justice (AAJC) in Washington, DC have long advocated for cross-racial issues (Ramakrishnan, 2014). Immigrants participate through protest and organizing due to 60% not being eligible to vote (Okamoto and Ebert, 2010).

For different Asian ethnic groups, voter registration/naturalization rates differ: Japanese, Korean, South Asians, and Southeast Asians are all less likely to naturalize than Chinese, but Vietnamese and Filipinos more likely to than Chinese (DeSipio, Masuoka and Stout, 2008). The affirmative action restoration measure garnered intense mobilization through protests and town hall meetings among Chinese American communities in California (Ramakrishnan, 2014). Chinese and Japanese made up the majority of AAEOs (Asian American Elected Officials), but other ethnic groups were becoming incorporated as well (Filipino, Korean, Vietnamese) (Geron and Lai, 2002). Lastly, there are ethnic differences in citizenship, registration, and voting. Once participation eligibility is not an issue, not all Asian groups have lower voting participation rates than the mainstream electorate (Lien, 2004).

References: