SUBCONTINENTAL DIVIDE
Asian Indians and Asian American Politics

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As a group, Asian Indians exhibit high sociodemographic and English proficiency levels, traits commonly associated with high levels of political participation. Recently, they have even begun to field a number of viable political candidates and to donate large sums of money to federal campaigns. Despite bearing all the traits of a coveted political group, we know little about their political behavior or their role within the Asian American group. Our examination of campaign finance records sheds some light on this political entity and adds to the intrigue that they may soon become a significant political force. Whether this force will emerge as part of a larger Asian American movement or on the margins of the broader group is less clear.

Keywords: *racial and ethnic politics; Asian American politics; campaign finance*

Asian Americans now make up a significant proportion of the U.S. population. The 2000 census reported 11.9 million Asians nationally, with 4.2 million of those Asians living in California. Although these numbers add up to a sizeable and potentially influential electorate, whether this group will emerge as a viable political force remains uncertain (see, e.g., Lien, 2001; Nakanishi, 1991; Tam, 1995; Uhlaner, Cain, & Kiewiet, 1989). In many ways, analyzing the political potential of this group is a challenging endeavor, because the composition of the Asian American group is exceptionally fluid. Even at present, it is difficult to predict when or if the makeup of the Asian American group will settle into a stable entity. Instead, immigration from Asia forges ahead at a rapid pace, the proportions of the various ethnicities continue to shift, and the balance between foreign born and native born steadfastly fluctuates. Currently, the three largest groups,

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in order of population size, are the Chinese, Filipinos, and Asian Indians.[1] This hierarchy, as well, has often changed. Perhaps the only constant theme throughout the past few decades is one of phenomenal growth—growth that has brought excitement in political circles and challenges to research enterprises.

In this article, we examine one aspect of the potential of this group formation and consider the larger implications for the emergence of some form of Asian American politics. In particular, we consider the specific challenges posed by the Asian Indian community. Although Asian Indians have all the makings of a coveted electoral group (i.e., high income levels and a growing base of voters), research on the extent and character of this group's political leanings can aptly be described as scant, with just a few exceptions (see, e.g., Khagram, Desai, & Varughese, 2001; Srikanth, 1998). In many ways, the undeveloped literature is understandable, because there are strong data limitations perpetuated by the secret ballot. Surveys and exit polls provide some insight into electoral behavior and issue preferences, though surveys are not useful for our purposes unless there is a sufficient number of Asian Indians in the sample. Not surprisingly, this is not a common occurrence, and so we are forced to explore more creative outlets. Here, we take on this challenge and turn to an underexamined data source, campaign contributions.

Campaign finance records are an objective and promising source of data, especially in this realm in which empirical clues are rare. These data have been collected by the Federal Election Commission (FEC) since 1978. A culling of these donation records allows us to uncover a portrait of Asian Indians that has not been previously revealed. Although the data stretch back to 1978 only, this constraint actually coincides well with a census limitation whereby Asian Indians have been counted as part of the Asian American group only since the 1980 census. The main downside of these data is that the set of campaign contributors is not necessarily representative of the entire Asian Indian populace. Instead, the contributors are more likely an elite group, perhaps more politically assimilated and mobilized than the group as a whole. Nonetheless, these data do provide concrete indications of this group's political behavior. Indeed, these data are a rich, unmined data source that speaks to an important political act, obviously holds clues to understanding the Asian Indian group as a politi-

cal entity, and allows us to compare this group's behavior with other Asian American groups and other contributors. Moreover, as we later show, our results for the Asian Indian contributors are consistent with trends that have been observed among Asian Indians who are less active on the contribution dimension.

Our quest is to understand Asian Americans as a political group. Do they share a common vision, the essence of political unity? Or is their potential obstructed by differing political interests? To gain some insight into these queries, we use campaign donation patterns as a measure of interests. We begin by discussing some issues related to social identity. We then review some of the history of Asian Indians in the United States to give us an initial sense of their position within the umbrella Asian American group. Next, we examine their recent political activity and the popular notions of Asian Indian political participation by the mass media as well as the conceptions of Asian Indian identity through the eyes of Asian Indian political candidates. We use this information as the basis for our exploration into the campaign finance data. By and large, the main contribution of this study is the culling of the entire FEC database for clues about the Asian Indian group. Based on these observations and empirical data, we then discuss the political implications.

FORGING AN IDENTITY

The forging of an identity is something of a mystery. Even after an identity has formed, the process of identity formation often remains somewhat of a mystery. The Asian American identity is no exception. Indeed, the entire notion of "Asian American" is a recent conceptualization, with its roots dating back only as far as the 1960s when the Asian American movement followed on the heels of the civil rights movement (Wei, 1993). Although the Asian American identity began to take shape in the 1960s, this Asian American movement did not include those of Asian Indian descent. Indeed, Asian Indians were not regarded as Asian Americans in the 1960s. Their foray into the Asian American group is a more recent occurrence and finds its roots in the 1980 census.[2] The identity of Asian Indians as Asian Americans, then, is a very recent phenomenon. Moreover, because even the general

Asian American label is a novel conception, one might expect the solidification of this broad Asian American identity and the embracement of this vacillating identity by its varied members to take some time.

Furthermore, research on social identity theory would also imply that some difficulty would arise in the forging of this identity. Specifically, social identity theory identifies psychological processes as the root of conformity. In other words, being a member of a group is defined as the subjective perception of oneself as a member of a specific category (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), and it is this group perception that guides subsequent conformity (Mackie & Cooper, 1984). Once in place, social identification has been found to be a strong and pervasive force. Social identification does not arise, however, simply following a governmental recommendation or a census classification. On a more empirical front, Lopez and Espiritu (1990) cite structural factors such as common material concerns, class, generation, and geographic proximity as the key to the emergence and success of pan-ethnicity. Their analysis indicates that cultural similarities are not as germane to the process. In this sense, they are arguing that the psychological processes will be put into play by events such as the Vincent Chin campaign.[3] When, whether, and how often these events will occur is uncertain.[4]

The barriers to embracing the Asian American identity (both from the Asian Indian perspective as well as from the perspective of the other groups in the Asian American conglomerate) appear to be significant. The uncertainty surrounding future immigration laws and population patterns adds further intrigue.[5] Asian Indians are particularly interesting because of their high socioeconomic levels and their status as the fastest growing Asian American group. Nonetheless, little is known about them as a political constituency.

NOTIONS OF ASIAN INDIAN POLITICAL ACTIVITY

Although Asian Indian campaign finance behavior is uncharted territory, there is a literature on Asian American campaign finance behavior (Cho, 2001, 2002, 2003; Espiritu, 1992; Lai, 2000; Lee, 2000), and certainly on campaign finance generally (see, e.g., Brown,

Powell, & Wilcox, 1995; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; Sorauf, 1992). In the Asian American campaign finance literature, the nationalism theme runs strong. In race after race, whether local, state, or federal, West Coast, East Coast, or Midwest, Asian ethnic candidates tend to bring in the bulk of their money from their coethnics, with very little of it flowing from other Asian ethnic groups (Cho, 2001, 2002, 2003; Espiritu, 1992; Lai, 2000). This pattern is not as strong among the Japanese candidates (Cho, 2002), and there is some evidence that more strategic concerns sometimes come into play (Cho, 2001; Lai, 2000), but the strength of the central relationship cannot be denied. These patterns stand in stark contrast to the more strategic behavior that one can find among other contributors. Indeed, the individual campaign contributor has been characterized as a strategic actor who distributes a limited pool of financial resources to candidates and/or political action committees (PACs) in a calculated manner to buy influence by way of promises and eventual favors from victorious candidates (Cameron & Morton, 1992; Mebane, 1999; Snyder, 1990; Sorauf, 1992; Welch, 1980). So far, this trend among the general populace has little evidence of a counterpart among Asian Americans. The impetus to giving has also been linked to political solicitation (Brown et al., 1995; Sorauf, 1992)—those who give are the ones who are asked to give. In addition, there appears to be a general trend toward out-of-district money for the general population (Grenzke, 1988; Morin & Babcock, 1990; Sorauf, 1992) as well as Asian Americans (Cho, 2002).

How Asian Indians fit into this rubric is unknown. Although Asian Indians have given substantial sums of money, we have few notions of their political tendencies or the preferences manifested by their donation patterns. Neither the Asian American campaign finance literature nor the general campaign finance literature highlights the Asian Indian group in any way. Indeed, even the general Asian American politics literature commonly omits this group or, at minimum, gives the other groups considerably more attention (see, e.g., Cain, Kiewiet, & Uhlaner, 1991; Cho, 2001, 2002, 2003; Lai, 2000; Lien, 2001; Nakanishi, 1991; Tam, 1995; Wong, 2000). However, Asian Indian behavior carries an alluring intrigue on several dimensions because of the new levels of variance they provide. They are a relatively recent immigrant group (primarily post-1965) with unique characteristics

that typify the most politically active (high sociodemographic levels and high levels of English proficiency). Indeed, they are already beginning to field a growing number of political candidates. Most immigrants groups are not as successful in these realms or perhaps are just not able to progress as quickly through the process. The paradox and intrigue will begin to spark some interest in this underexamined group.

We begin to tease out patterns among Asian Indians by starting with the frame of the campaign finance literature. We also examine other outlets such as the popular press, comments from Asian Indian political candidates, and observable trends such as the number of political candidates and the levels of government in which they have made noticeable contributions before moving on to our main empirical contribution, a canvassing of the campaign finance records.

NOTIONS FROM THE POPULAR PRESS

Because the popular press affects public perceptions and is often considered in devising political strategies, its notion of the Asian Indian group is salient for our purposes. Journalists have provided a broad overview of the group, including a political perspective. From simply a general perspective, the Asian Indian group is seen as highly successful and well educated. They

> have the highest per capita income of any ethnic group in the United States, according to the US Census figures. And they are among the most highly educated. In some ways, they are a dream demographic group, with the money to help bankroll campaigns and fund interest groups. (Rodriguez, 2002, p. B1)

From a more political perspective, the group is viewed as an attractive electorate. Indeed, they have

> become increasingly involved in the political system of the United States. Indian-Americans have traditionally exercised the most political influence through their campaign contributions, and are actively involved in fundraising efforts for political candidates on the federal, state and local levels. In recent years, they have begun taking a more

> direct role in politics, as well as continuing to help through their financial contributions. (Embassy of India, 2002)

In addition, Somini Sengupta (1996) writes in *The New York Times*, "In recent years, the city's growing number of South Asians have begun to contribute money to political campaigns, but have rarely run for office themselves. Now for the first time, two South Asians are running for school board seats" (p. 10). Political interest appears to be on the rise.

Although the precise political leanings of the group are unknown, the general perception among journalists places them closer to the Democratic side of the spectrum. This is an image that has perhaps been fueled by some noticeably large donations to Democratic hopefuls. During election year 2000, Al Gore, for instance, received about $600,000 from "a small but influential group of Silicon Valley Indian American entrepreneurs and their wives" (Springer, 2000). Others have also noticed that "[a] number of events sponsored by Indian-Americans have garnered sizeable sums for the Democratic presidential candidate" (Trunzo, 2000). Although Asian Indians have also clearly given money toward Republican causes and candidates, a review of the popular media reveals some, but fewer, acknowledgments of these funds.

Finally, the previously mentioned identity issues have also been of some interest to the press. Dhume (1998) comments on the difficulty of forging a pan-ethnic identity:

> Cut loose from the Subcontinent, we have divided ourselves by region, language and religion. To look without before first dealing with divisions within is tantamount to jumping ship. Why force feed a feeling of kinship toward Japanese Americans when there remains such a wide gap between Tamils and Gujaratis?

The lack of kinship obviously has an impact on the formation of Asian American political groups or perhaps even an Asian Indian political group. Indeed, the more recent Asian Indian immigrants groups are characterized by greater diversity than the immigrants who arrived earlier. The community once could be described as overwhelmingly

Sikh. Now, significant proportions of the group are Hindus and Muslims (Leonard, 1997, pp. 69-70).

In summary, the popular press leaves us with the impression that the Asian Indian group should be a highly coveted political bloc because they have money to finance elections and are increasingly interested in political affairs. Their tendencies ally perhaps more closely with Democratic interests rather than Republican ones, but whether their interests are closer to one group or another, the Asian Indian group remains, nonetheless, divided not only from the broader Asian American group as a whole but even among their own group. The journalistic accounts leave us with the notion that forging a cohesive political bloc is fraught with challenges.

NOTIONS FROM OBSERVATIONS

The common wisdom is that immigrants usually are not concerned with political participation when they first arrive in the United States. Instead, issues related simply to settling in take the forefront. Accordingly, we might expect the appearance of Asian Indians as a formidable political force to take some time to mature.[6] Perhaps uncharacteristically, then, trends within the Asian Indian group already indicate a rising political consciousness. For instance, in recent years there has been a surge in Asian Indians seeking elected office.[7] The rise in political activity is clear, but the visibility of these campaigns is somewhat obscured because they are run primarily at the local and state levels rather than at the federal level. Nonetheless, the importance of these campaigns cannot be denied. Many of the candidacies have been successful (some over several terms), and success and visibility at the local level can be associated with future success at higher levels of government.[8] So far, this success has been illusive, but the ambition is evident.

One commonly recited reason for the lack of success at the federal level centers around an identity issue and the concern that Asian Indian candidates are candidates for Asian Indians and not for all Americans, or even all Asian Americans. In essence, many Asian Indian candidates appear to face a political identity crisis. Like many minority candidates, Asian Indian candidates feel that they must sat-

isfy two constituencies, the general American public as well as their own ethnic group. Consider the candidacy of Ram Uppuluri, a Democrat from Tennessee who ran for Congress in 1994. Although his mother was Japanese and his father was Asian Indian, throughout his campaign Uppuluri had identified himself as a Tennesseean. By labeling himself in this ethnically neutral manner, Uppuluri had hoped to vanquish concerns about which constituent group he was seeking to serve. Although he did attempt to tap the ethnic communities, he was only moderately successful. His efforts to reach out to the Japanese American community were met with failure despite making a concerted effort to increase his visibility within the Japanese American community through prominent Japanese Americans as well as the press. Some considered this effort to be "unfocused and not targeted to a specific type of Japanese American contributor or voter" (Srikanth, 1998, p. 189). In the end, his efforts to include the Japanese American community proved fruitless because many felt that Uppuluri was a candidate for Asian Indians alone. In contrast, his efforts to seek out the Asian Indian community were eagerly embraced. Newspaper articles referred to Uppuluri as an *Indian American* politician. Moreover, among Uppuluri's 260 campaign contributions, the majority (approximately 80%) was from Asian Indians while a scant 1.25% was from Japanese Americans (Srikanth, 1998, p. 194). The identity issue ultimately was a key component of Uppuluri's inability to wage a winning campaign.

A different type of identity issue also seems to plague Asian Indian candidates. Although some candidates have been successful, others have found their ethnicity to be a barrier. An interesting case is the 1998 Indiana 6th Congressional District race. The state Democrats chose R. "Nag" Nagarajan to run against Republican Dan Burton. However, Nag was upset in the primary by a convicted felon and occasional female impersonator, Bobby Kerns. Allan Rachles, the Democratic leader for the 6th District, reasoned that "Nag is a fine candidate but his name conjures up some Middle East monster for voters, I guess" (Clines, 1998, p. 16). Mike Harmless, executive director of the state Democratic Party, further stated that "Nagarajan is not a Hoosier-sounding name" (Clines, 1998, p. 16). Indeed, these comments are revealing and not tinted with innuendo.

NOTIONS FROM ASIAN INDIAN CANDIDATES

These campaigns touch on vexing questions for Asian Indians and American politics. Will these identity issues be pervasive and enduring characteristics of the plight of Asian Indians in American politics? How will the Asian Indian identity settle as a part of the overall Asian American identity? Interviews with a number of Asian Indian candidates reveal several consistent themes. According to Minnesota State Senator Satveer Chaudhary, the highest ranking Asian Indian in elected office,

> The beauty of Indian issues and Asian issues is that our concerns are mainstream. We want solid education—both secondary and post secondary. We have an interest in workplace equity and job growth, especially high tech growth. We also have an interest in a society free from racism. (Kim, 2000)

In short, the claim is that their campaign platforms are targeted to their constituency as a whole, and not just Asian Indians or Asian Americans. We see a similar attitude from Neil Dhillon, a candidate for the U.S. House in 1994. His campaign focus was job creation. Although Dhillon (personal communication, April 2, 2002) believes that Asian American candidates have two constituencies, his bottom line is that "you are working for the people of this country." Former Wyoming State Legislator Nimi McConigley (Das 2002) states that "Indian Americans must consider mainstream issues such as a balanced budget, health care, and social security as well, if they seek to win more support. If they think only of immigration issues, they will seem self-serving." Ayesha Nariman, a Democrat who ran unsuccessfully for Congress in New York's 26th District, had a campaign focused on frugality in government and balancing federal budgets. Last, recently elected Iowa State Representative Swati Dandekar (personal communication, December 20, 2002) believes that her friends and constituents see her as "mainstream American, part of America," with little thought about her Indian American heritage. She ran on a platform focused on education and economic development. In summary, it appears that the identity conflict is not a strong issue for the latest round of candidates. Their general focus is neither on Asian Indian

issues or identity nor on Asian American issues but on their broader constituents' issues.

Asian Indian political activity appears to be on a distinct rise. Moreover, if Asian Indians fit into the general models of political participation and socioeconomic status, their socioeconomic status places them in prime position for continued political activity at the elite level as well as the mass level (see, e.g., Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980). Their role within Asian American politics, however, is not as clear. Hence, although they seem to be increasingly a force to be reckoned with, the characterization of this coming force has yet to be clearly defined. So far, our notions are shaped largely by the popular press. Our goal now is to examine some of the hard evidence and to meld this evidence with the insights from the candidates and the journalists.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE

DATA AND METHOD

As previously mentioned, it is difficult to tap political preferences, because in U.S. elections we employ the secret ballot. We bypass this difficulty by turning to another source of data—the campaign donations database maintained by the FEC. Every contribution recorded by the FEC is accompanied by the contributor's name and various identifying information such as city, state, zip code, and occupation. Because no demographic information (e.g., income, education, or age) is recorded, the data are somewhat limited. For many Asian ethnicities, however, the name record allows one to separate out contributions by a certain group. For some ethnicities, such as the Filipinos whose names overlap greatly with the Latino group, ethnic name matching is not particularly reliable. However, for other groups, such as Asian Indians, the FEC data can be reliably parsed for Asian Indian contributors. For this project, an Asian Indian name dictionary (which includes 2,460 names) was matched with the FEC data from 1980-2000 to compile the list of Asian Indian contributors.[9] The resulting

list, then, should be a *comprehensive* list of Asian Indian contributions to federal campaigns, PACs, and party organizations for the 20-year time period from the 1980s to today.

We also compiled a similar data set that contains the contributions to a comprehensive list of Asian Indian candidates for federal office. We created this list by merging a list we created from using our name dictionary to parse the list of individual campaign committees, lists of candidates that had been compiled from Indian American organizations such as Indian American Center for Political Awareness, and our own scouring of the almanacs of American politics. For each of these candidates, we have the full set of recorded contributions for their specific campaign and so we are able to characterize their donation patterns. These two data sets give us a broad and extensive view of campaign finance behavior *by* Asian Indians as well as the behavior *toward* Asian Indian candidates from the Asian Indian community, the general Asian American group, and the broader electorate.

FINDINGS

How much? How much do Asian Indians contribute to political causes? Are the sums large enough that we might consider them to be significant players in this political arena? Over time, is there a rising trend, a declining trend, or no trend at all in the contribution amounts? Answers to any of these questions give us some insight into the behavior of this group. A rising trend would obviously imply the rise of political relevance. The magnitude of the rise would provide an indication of the degree and stage of this political emergence. Indeed, there are many implications that can be drawn from the campaign finance data.

Figure 1 displays some basic figures from our data. For each 2-year election cycle from 1980 to 2000, the total amount of money that Asian Indians contributed to any federal campaign, party organization, or PAC is shown. It is clear from Figure 1 that political contributions from Asian Indians have risen dramatically in the past couple of decades. In just 20 short years, contributions have burgeoned from almost nothing to approximately $8 million in a single election cycle. Even accounting for inflation cannot negate the dramatic magnitude of the increase. The number of contributors has also risen from just a

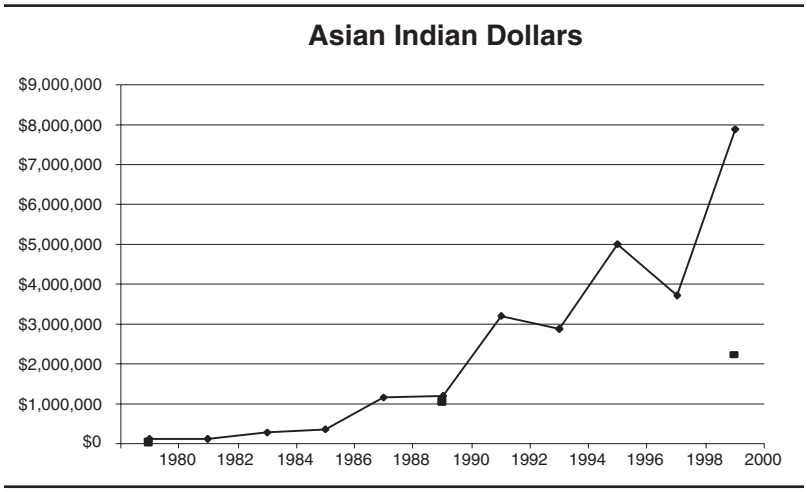

Figure 1: Campaign Contributions From Asian Indians (1980-2000)
NOTE: The square dots indicate the growth rate of the Asian Indian population.

few hundred to approximately 8,000 separate contributions. Although we cannot make definite assessments of potential influence, the coupling of this rapid rate of increase in donations with the fact that the Asian Indian group has one of the highest median incomes of any group in the United States should not be lost on political observers. The potential clearly is enormous, and the foreshadowing of a looming political giant is impressive. Note as well that the rate of growth in contributions exceeds the growth rate of the population. Whereas the population has doubled in the past couple of decades, the rise in contributions has far overshadowed even this phenomenal population growth.

Who do they give to? Now that dollar amounts and trends are clear, a second obvious question in this financial realm is, Who does all this money favor, and are there obvious partisan or ethnic patterns within these lump sums? If we break down the contributions that can be attributed to a partisan cause, we find that the contributions appear to favor the Democrats. As we can see from Figure 2, this preference has been almost constant since their foray onto the contributions scene. Furthermore, this partisan divide in contributions has grown more dramatic over time. The 1990s were especially divisive on this front.

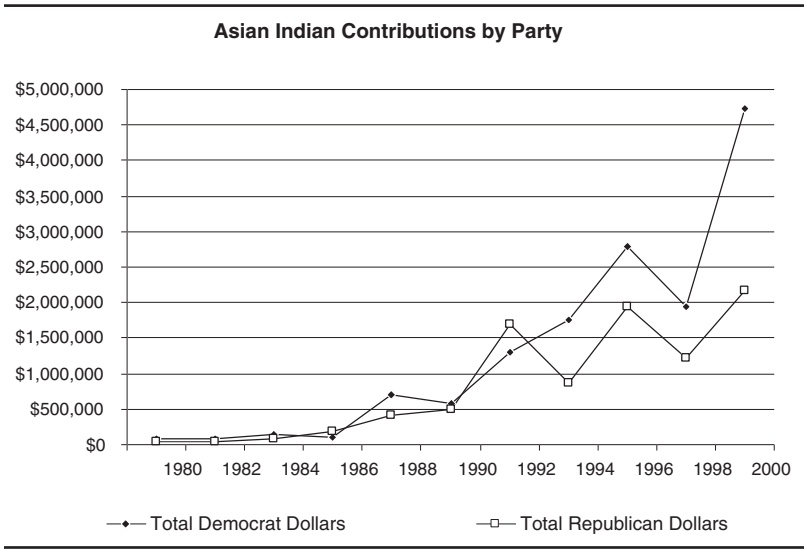

Figure 2: Asian Indian Campaign Contributions by Party (1980-2000)

In the 2000 elections, the disparity was marked by a greater than 2 to 1 margin.

Tables 1 and 2 break down these contributions a step further by displaying the amounts given to specific races. In Table 1 we can see the general Democratic leanings in donations to party organizations as well as both U.S. House and U.S. Senate races. Notably, the partisan disparity seems to be growing over time. Table 2 shows that this divide is somewhat tempered by preferences for presidential candidates, with Asian Indians apparently rejecting the inaugural runs of both Clinton and Gore. The presidential races are certainly informative but perhaps not as indicative of general partisan leanings as the more numerous cases of House and Senate races, if only because there are more cases, and thus more data points, in these latter races. The bulk of the money appears to be directed toward party organizations and House and Senate candidates rather than to the presidential candidates. Overall, the Asian Indian group shows weaker attachment to the Democratic Party than Blacks and Latinos (see, e.g., DeSipio, 1996; Hero, 1992; Swain, 1993), but their preferences certainty lean in that direction.

TABLE 1

Indian American Campaign Contributions

	1980	*1982*	*1984*	*1986*	*1988*	*1990*	*1992*	*1994*	*1996*	*1998*	*2000*
Total	$129,687	$131,234	$278,822	$358,626	$1,173,040	$1,187,055	$3,195,799	$2,898,442	$5,005,462	$3,692,637	$7,862,106
n	238	160	314	416	1,292	2,107	4,871	4,847	6,845	5,361	8,624
Political action committee contributions											
Total	$9,014	$10,108	$56,260	$66,175	$49,187	$144,812	$132,614	$186,487	$244,153	$523,687	$762,238
n	29	11	41	58	58	260	316	299	433	625	856
Party organizations											
Democrat	$26,241	$12,250	$37,100	$5,500	$283,300	$79,200	$281,247)	$396,121	$1,192,123	$668,376	$2,196,678
n	29	13	25	3	112	60	215	227	424	322	591
Republican	$12,650	$10,050	$41,223	$75,696	$170,146	$246,669	$670,258	$242,723	$592,452	$335,822	$735,354
n	20	12	33	65	140	246	430	341	717	470	752
House candidates											
Democrat	$2,148	$17,001	$29,175	$43,100	$90,453	$262,715	$465,097	$1,039,646	$763,504	$899,500	$1,356,156
n	43	23	50	60	137	621	1,045	1,957	1,533	1,726	2,376
Republican	$2,075	$21,600	$12,024	$40,775	$50,537	$131,148	$257,489	$365,542	$587,113	$493,228	$511,924
n	5	26	16	66	84	295	569	783	1,125	925	927
Other	$200	$3,000	$500	$2,000	$16,630	$6,000	$54,046	$25,128	$11,875	$9,350	$19,550
n	1	4	1	3	22	13	116	53	27	16	43
Senate candidates											
Democrat	$13,575	$45,725	$18,000	$52,230	$90,532	$199,644	$382,498	$318,853	$480,178	$358,765	$979,575
n	23	56	26	68	120	383	746	546	890	615	1,391
Republican	$9,750	$9,500	$20,200	$68,900	$77,213	$112,867	$164,152	$249,842	$460,716	$380,259	$632,067
n	19	13	30	87	135	220	297	557	812	637	1,010
Other	$250	$2,000	$1,000	$0	$500	$0	$10,600	$32,900	$2,000	$8,000	$6,700
n	1	2	1	0	1	0	18	38	2	4	16

TABLE 2
Indian American Presidential Contributions

	1980	*1984*	*1988*	*1992*	*1996*	*2000*
Democrat	$17,800	$55,990	$233,322	$170,144	$348,349	$183,417
n	31	81	354	435	423	282
Republican	$13,651	$7,350	$110,220	$594,454	$295,349	$275,435
n	34	10	128	673	443	336
Other	$500	$0	$0	$1,200	$1,350	$1,750
n	2	0	0	4	5	7

Who gives to them? There are many perspectives to take on the contributions data. Thus far, we have been examining the patterns behind their donations. Another angle to take is to explore who donates to Asian Indian candidates. Table 3 is a listing of Asian Indian candidates who ran for federal office from 1980 to 2000. Although the number of candidates is not large, the patterns among this set are quite dramatic. Perhaps most striking is the result displayed in the Ethnic column. This column lists the percentage of contributions from any Asian contribution that was specifically from an Asian Indian donor. As we can see from Table 3, only two races were not marked by *solely* Asian Indian contributions (Neil Dhillon and Ram Uppuluri). In these two races, the percentages from ethnic contributors are so high (99.5% and 97.5%, respectively) that they can be essentially regarded as 100%. Clearly, then, evidence for the notion of pan-ethnicity is, for all practical purposes, nonexistent in these data.

Note that the numbers reported in Table 3 do not differ based on the type of election, the type of candidate, or the percentage of the electorate that is Asian. Candidates who raise a lot of money are not able to tap the broader Asian American network. Likewise, candidates who raise very little money draw their funds from the same group of contributors. If we measure the seriousness of the bid as a function of whether the candidate won the primary election and the percentage of the vote received (Cho, 2002), we can see that "seriousness of the bid" is not a factor in these data. Candidates who run in both a primary and general election are not able to collect any more money from the pan-ethnic contributor network than those who lose their primary bid. It

TABLE 3

Contributions to Asian Indian Candidates

			Contributions					*Primary Election*		*General Election*	
Candidate	*Race*	*Year*	n	*Amount*	*% Asian*	*Ethnic*	*District % Asian*	*Vote*	*Major Opponent*	*Vote*	*Major Opponent*
Yash Aggarwal (D)[a]	NY-20	1996	194	$87,221	95.8	100%	3	64.8%	Ira Goodman	39.7%	Benjamin Gillman
Jorawar Misir (R)[b]	NY-6	1996	12	$5,950	50	100%	6	None		15%	Floyd H. Flake
Dianand Bhagwandin (R)[b]	NY-6	1992	39	$16,375	69	100%	6	None		19%	Floyd H. Flake
Dianand Bhagwandin (R)[b]	NY-6	1994	0	$0	0	0%	6	None		19.6%	Floyd H. Flake
Neil Dhillon (D)[c]	MD-6	1994	496	$263,038	85.8	99.5%	1	17.9%	Paul Muldowney		
Peter Mathews (D)[c]	CA-38	1992	30	$14,771	83.3	100%	9	26.7%	Evan Braude		
Peter Mathews (D)[b]	CA-38	1994	544	$267,569	88	100%	9	None		37%	Steve Horn
Peter Mathews (D)[c]	CA-38	1996	80	$34,731	67.5	100%	9	49%	Rick Zbur		
Peter Mathews (D)[b]	CA-38	1998	160	$68,639	90	100%	9	None		44%	Steve Horn
Ram Uppuluri (D)[c]	TN-3	1994	261	$95,771	78	97.5%	1	19.5%	Randy Button		
Nag Nagarajan (D)[c]	IN-6	1996	18	$6,676	100	100%	1	18.6%	Carrie Jean Dilard-Trammell		
Nag Nagarajan (D)[c]	IN-6	1998	1	$500	100	100%	1	18.6%	Bob Kern		
Nag Nagarajan (D)[c]	IN-6	2000	7	$2,551	85.7	100%	1	26.5%	Darin Patrick Griesey		
Nimi McConigley (R)[c]	WY	1996	79	$42,750	72.2	100%	1	7%	Michael B. Enzi		

a. Candidate ran in both a contested primary election and a contested general election.

b. Candidate was unopposed in primary election.

c. Candidate lost primary election.

seems that a candidate who wishes to mount a very serious campaign for federal office would need to raise money not only from the broader Asian American base (perhaps a natural constituency) but also from a larger base in general. It may be that our set of candidates is mutually exclusive from the set of serious contenders for federal office, and that is the reason why we do not see broader support in their base of financial contributions. On the other hand, it may be that their inability to court a larger base is the reason why none of the Asian Indians have mounted a serious campaign. It is difficult to speculate on the origin versus the cause, even though the pattern itself could not be clearer. In this context, there is a definite disjuncture between Asian Indians and other Asian American groups.

Although the donations data indicate that Asian Indians prefer Democrats to Republicans, there is no bias for one party or the other among Asian Indian candidates. Neither Republican nor Democratic candidates are able to spread their wings further than the Asian Indian group for political donations. The candidates, moreover, are about evenly spread between the two major parties.

The type of district is also not germane to the patterns that we observe. There are districts in the West, the East, and the Midwest. The presence of Asian Indians and other minorities in these districts differs and does not seem to be related to the contribution levels that we observe. There are only a handful of congressional districts that have a sizeable number of Asian Americans. A district with a population that is 9% Asian is a relatively high concentration. A district with a 1% Asian population is not unusual. Perhaps somewhat unexpectedly, the behavior of Asian Americans and Asian Indians in either of these districts seems to be comparable.

Indeed, many of the effects that we might expect to observe are not borne out in the data. Instead, there is essentially only one clear and definite pattern that does not appear to be influenced by any other variables—Asian Indian candidates are successful only at courting the Asian Indian constituency. They are wholly unsuccessful (or perhaps uninterested) in tapping the support of the larger Asian American population base. Unfortunately, we have no empirical measure of "interest" here, so whether they are interested in securing this base is a separate matter and one which is outside the scope of these data. We are not left completely at bay on this matter, however, as our interviews with

several Asian Indian candidates clearly demonstrate that although they are certainly interested in the electorate as a whole, they do feel a special tie to people of their own ethnicity. How this connection translates into an effort to reach these people is the nexus we are unable to tap.

COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Interestingly, and perhaps surprisingly, in comparison to the Chinese, Japanese, and Korean groups, the Asian Indian group is somewhat of an anomaly. Consider the charts shown in Figure 3. The figures on the left in Figure 3 show the two-party breakdown of all partisan contributions by Chinese, Japanese, and Korean contributors.[10] The figures on the right in Figure 3 show the two-party breakdown of all contributions to party organizations by Chinese, Japanese, and Korean contributors. As we can see, these three groups are generally more favorable toward the Republican group. In contrast, the data for the Asian Indian group show that the Asian Indians appear to sit pretty squarely in the Democratic camp.

These data are from the FEC and so represent only the financial contributors to political causes. The larger mass group may or may not have similar leanings. However, although there is limited information, some of the data that do exist verify the Democratic leanings. For instance, in a national survey of Asian Americans, the partisanship indicator for Asian Indians was stronger for the Democratic Party than for the Republican Party. Among the survey respondents, 23% reported Republican leanings, whereas 35% reported Democratic leanings (Lien, Wong, & Conway, 2002). A separate survey, conducted in 1996, indicated that Democrat Bill Clinton received more support from the Asian Indian community than did Republican Bob Dole, and that 42% identified with the Democratic Party, whereas only 13% identified as Republicans, with 24% as independents (Chopra & Kuntamukkula, 1996).

Even if Asian Indians were to embrace the Asian American identity, then, there are partisan barriers and interests that need to be broken down before the group can act as a politically meaningful unit. It may be that they will be able to find some common interests and issues, but the partisan split will undoubtedly mark or mar some of

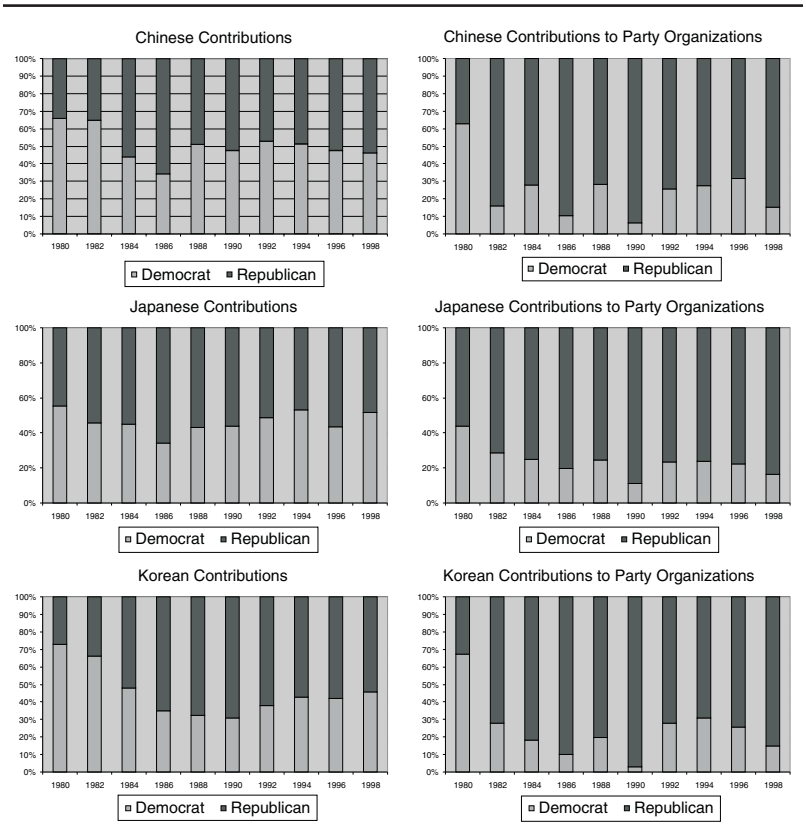

Figure 3: Campaign Contributions by Other Asian American Groups (1980-1998)

these interactions. A group need not be as homogeneous as Blacks are on the partisan front to be a politically meaningful unit, but when the differences are characterized by a definable entity within the larger group (i.e., a specific nationality group), splits are more easily rendered.

CONCLUSION

The formation of Asian American politics visits many critical stages. Many of these stages involve, in one form or another, the

notion of pan-ethnicity or the ability of the group to forward a definable set of interests. As a conglomerate of a large number of different ethnicities, the growth in these various subgroups has brought visibility to the broader group as the fastest growing ethnic group in the United States. At the same time, this growth in numbers is met with a rise in diversity. Some of these differences subside with time, and so the notion of a powerful Asian American political group continues to loom (Cho, 1999). As future generations come of age, the cultural and historical divides begin to lessen for many of the groups. However, the evidence provided here indicates that the lessening of these distinctions is less clear for Asian Indians and the broader Asian American group than for, say, the Chinese, Japanese, and Korean groups and this broader Asian American group. The challenges, whether imposed by the government or from within, are greater for Asian Indians. Ironically, the Asian Indian group may be, of the Asian ethnicities, one of the most ideally poised to enter the political arena given their high sociodemographic levels and English proficiency. They have, moreover, signaled a strong presence with the large number of viable candidates, and their campaign donations have no plateau in sight. Nonetheless, their identity appears to sit on the margins of the larger group.

One should not be surprised to see a more noticeable presence of Asian Indians on the political scene in the next few decades. Whether this presence will signal a rise in Asian American politics or simply in the involvement of one particular group in the U.S. electorate remains to be seen. So far, indications appear to support the latter characterization. Whether a form of Asian American politics will strongly embrace the Asian Indian group is clearly up for debate. Completely aside from Asian American politics, the patterns being exhibited by the Asian Indian group are notable in and of themselves. As a group, they display all the makings of a coveted bloc, untethered to either major party. Moreover, they are a fairly new group and so have encountered few policies that might have an enduring impact on their party loyalties. Instead, the perfect strategy may engender the group into a partisan fold early and sustain their loyalty for generations to come. Indeed, the political development of the Asian Indian group is malleable. This is good news for campaign professionals and politi-

cians. It is not every day that we find a group that is both unbridled and poised for a serious foray onto the political scene.

NOTES

1. We use the term "Asian Indian" to denote any person in the United States who traces their heritage to India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal, or Maldives. The term "South Asian" is perhaps more apt, but we use the term Asian Indian to achieve some consistency with the U.S. census category.

In Census 2000, 1,899,599 people reported being Asian Indian either alone or in combination with another race (1,678,765 reported being Asian Indian alone). The count of Filipinos was 2,364,815 (with 1,850,314 reporting being Filipino alone). Finally, 2,734,841 reported being Chinese (with 2,314,537 reporting Chinese alone).

2. In 1973, the Federal Interagency Committee on Education offered Directive 15—their recommendation for classifying race and ethnicity, which suggested that Asian Indians be placed outside the Asian umbrella group. Although the 1980 census adopted most of the advisements in Directive 15 into its official racial and ethnic designations, the Office of Management and Budget did deviate from the recommendation for Asian Indians. Instead, it officially designated the group, for the first time in U.S. history, as one of the Asian American ethnicities.

3. Vincent Chin, a Chinese American, was beaten to death with a baseball bat in Detroit on June 19, 1982, when two White autoworkers, Ronald Ebens and Michael Nitz, mistook him for a Japanese American. The men blamed Japanese carmakers for Detroit's problems in the auto industry. The two men negotiated a plea bargain, and each received 2 years' probation and $3,700 in fines. The Asian community mobilized several protests over the lenient sentences. Although the Justice Department reviewed the case and charged the men with violating Chin's civil rights, Ebens and Nitz never served any jail time.

4. Interestingly, they primarily examine the Asian Indian group in isolation from the broader Asian American group. They cite that the Asian Indian group is strongly divided by factors such as religion and lingering caste and clan divisions. They also acknowledge the recent arrival and change in these groups and note that the drive toward pan-ethnicity is led by the more established groups with smaller recent immigrant groups (such as Asian Indians) following.

5. The most recent changes are characterized by a rise in general socioeconomic indicators and the shifting of the population group from one that can be characterized as predominantly native born to one that is now predominantly foreign born. Asian Indians have not deviated from these general Asian American patterns. According to the census, in this past decade the Asian Indian group grew by 113%, the fastest rate among all the Asian ethnicities. This was a continuing trend—in the previous decade it grew by 103%.

6. As with many of the Asian groups, the bulk of the Asian Indian population arrived in the United States following the 1965 immigration reforms. According to the Immigration and Naturalization Service, in 1980 over 80% of the group was foreign born, and since about that time, more than 25,000 immigrants have arrived each year. Furthermore, according to the U.S. census, although unemployment and poverty are not insignificant among this group, it is notable that the Asian Indian group has a higher than median income per worker than the general population. Somewhat uniquely, the Asian Indian group made up a large proportion of the immigrants who arrived here using the investor provision of immigration laws (Hing, 1993). The Asian Indian group, thus, is a relatively new but also a relative affluent population group.

7. The list includes Swati Dandekar (Democrat, Iowa State Assembly, District 36; won), Kumar Barve (Democrat, Maryland House of Delegates, District 17; won), Satveer Chaudhary (Democrat, Minnesota State Senate, District 52; won), Stuart Johnson (Republican, U.S. House, California 36; lost), Sukmander Singh (Democrat, U.S. House, California 18; lost), Vij Pawar (Democrat, U.S. House, New Jersey 11; lost), Ayesha Nariman (Democrat, U.S. House, New York 26; lost), Syed Mahmood (Republican, U.S. House, California 13; lost), D.C. Amarsinghe (Green Party, U.S. House, Virginia 2; lost), Rahul Mahajan (Green Party, Texas governor; lost), Kamal Jain (Libertarian, Massachusetts state auditor; lost), A. V. "Sheenu" Srinivasan (Democrat, Connecticut State Assembly, District 31; lost), G. "Nanjun" Nanjundappa (Democrat, California State Assembly, District 72; lost), Shawn Aranha (Democrat, Illinois House of Representatives, District 41; lost), S. Gopal Raju (Democrat, Indiana State House, District 31; lost), Prameela Kaza (Democrat, Delaware State Assembly, District 31; lost), Rina Patel (Florida State Senate, District 33; lost), Satro Narayan (Iowa State Senate, District 30; lost), Deepka Lalwani (Milpitas, California, city council; lost), Shyam Chetal (Fremont, California, city council; lost), Lalit Mathur (Fremont, California, city council; lost), Neil Malhotra (Saratoga, California, city council; lost), Harry Sidhu (Anaheim, California, city council; lost), Alkesh Desai (Berryessa Union School District School Board, California; lost), Deepak Chopra (Monte Sereno, California, city council; lost), Gagan Singh (West Valley/Mission Board of Trustees, California, District 2; lost), and Surjit Dulai (Michigan State University Board of Trustees; lost).

8. Asian Indians who have served in state legislatures include Nimi McConigley of Wyoming, along with current legislators Satveer Chaudhary of Minnesota, Kumar Barve of Maryland, Upendra Chivukula of New Jersey, and the recently elected Swati Dandekar of Iowa. At an even more local level, at least three Asian Indians have held the position of mayor (Bala K. Srinivas of Hollywood Park, Texas; John Abraham of Teaneck, New Jersey; and Arun Jhaveri of Burien, Washington).

9. We constructed this name dictionary by searching various sources for Asian Indian names. The final list is a merging of several name dictionaries that we found online, name lists that we found in printed material, and entries in the Mumbai telephone listing. In addition to last names, our dictionary also includes first names (such as Mohinder and Jagdish) to lessen the issues that might arise from intermarriage, adoption, and persons of mixed heritage. Any name list will, of course, still miss certain people. For instance, some Asian Indians have Christian names. (The former defense minister of India was George Fernandes.) Clearly, all difficulties with name matching cannot be overcome and are not overcome with our list.

10. These data for this figure were again generated through the use of name dictionaries. Additional details on these dictionaries can be found in Cho (2002).

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