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# From Kamala Harris to Vivek Ramaswamy: the rising and complex prominence of Indian Americans in US electoral politics

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## ABSTRACT

The rising prominence of Indian Americans in US politics was on display in 2024 in both parties. While Democrats long enjoyed the support of Indian American voters, the election shows a drift toward Donald Trump. Drawing upon survey data collected in 2020, I find that Indian Americans with a stronger connection to India and sense of ethnic identity have a greater desire for descriptive representation. While this worked in the favor of Biden and Harris in 2020, I offer two potential explanations for the small but notable drift away from Democrats in 2024: The salience of ethnic identity may have waned amongst Indian Americans muting the mobilizing effect of Harris. Alternatively, while not at the top of the ticket, the visibility of Indian Americans within the Republican party could signal that Indian Americans continued to desire descriptive representation, but the ideological or partisan preferences of a minority shifted in 2024.

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I literally have tears in my eyes. Kamala Harris just said “chithis” which means aunties. My heart is so full right now. (Padma Laksmi, August 20, 2020)

## Introduction

The experience of Indian Americans was thrust into the political limelight when Vice Presidential nominee Kamala Devi Harris took the stage at the 2020 Democratic national convention and spoke of her family and her “chithis.” TV Host Padma Laksmi’s sentiment was felt and echoed widely throughout the Indian American community and provides much of the motivation for this study to better understand the political attitudes and motivations for participation in US politics for the largest subgroup of Asian Americans. Four years later, Harris was again on the political stage, this time at the top of the ticket, and her rise was not in isolation of other notable political momentum within the Indian American community. The last two election cycles have seen two new Indian American Democrats elected to Congress joining the self-named “samosa caucus”, including

Shri Thanadar of Michigan in 2022 and Suhas Subramanian of Virginia in 2024. Their addition makes a total of six Indian Americans elected to Congress, all of which are Democrats. 2024 also saw Indian American Nikki Haley as the leading alternative to Donald Trump in the Republican primary as well as the emergence of political newcomer Vivek Ramaswamy, whose Trump-like bombastic style caught the attention of younger voters, especially on social media platforms like TikTok. In addition to Ramaswamy, numerous Indian Americans have received key administrative appointments including Kash Patel as FBI Director, Sriram Krishnan as a senior advisor on artificial intelligence, and Harmeet Dhillon as Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights. Even the presence of Usha Vance, the Indian American wife of Vice President J.D. Vance, elicited a conversation about the openness of the Republican party to immigrants of certain backgrounds, despite the harsh rhetoric and policies toward other immigrant communities. The visual of Indian Americans on both Democrat and Republican stages reflects the political complexity and dynamism of the fastest growing racial group in the United States during an era of extreme polarization.

This paper builds upon prior work on Asian American political attitudes and behavior and charts a research agenda to better understand the uniqueness of the Indian American political experience and the extent to which, like other racialized groups, shared identity may be central to Indian American political attitudes and participation, and fuels a desire for descriptive representation. Drawing upon social identity theory, I argue that shared identity is salient among Indian Americans and serves as one of many motivating factors at the ballot box. While measures such as linked fate and group consciousness may not be entirely transferable to the Asian American experience (Gay, Hochschild, and White 2016; Junn and Masuoka 2008), I argue and find that Indian Americans nonetheless do exhibit a shared identity and a sense of common interests among the community. I argue that *home country connectedness* for voters of immigrant backgrounds is linked to a desire to see someone from their community advance and succeed in elected office.

Using original survey data collected just prior to the 2020 election, I find that Indian Americans not only strongly supported Kamala Harris and the Biden-Harris ticket in 2020, but that their desire to see more Indian Americans elected to office was particularly strong, *regardless* of a candidate's partisan affiliation. The analysis shows that this desire was fueled by a view that Indian Americans have shared political interests and connectedness to India, operationalized here through the consumption of Indian television news.

While this finding helps to explain Indian American mobilization for the Biden-Harris ticket in 2020, what explains the modest drop off in support in 2024 identified in multiple surveys? I propose two hypotheses to explain the shift. In November 2020, racial identity was highly salient for many Americans facing the height of the Covid-19 pandemic and a national mood that favored the inclusion of diverse voices and criminal justice reform, motivated by protests against the murder of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police (Chan and Leung 2024; Sadhwani and Kulkarni 2021). The salience of Indian American ethnic identity and group connectedness likely spurred support and turnout for the Democrats whose ticket included for the first time ever a candidate of Indian American descent. By 2024, the salience of racial identity may have waned, in a national mood that scorned diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts and as the pendulum on criminal justice reform and immigration swung conservative even in liberal havens like California.<sup>1</sup>

Others, especially Muslim Indian Americans, grew disenchanted with Democrats unwavering support for Israel's heavy-handed attack on Gaza. On the other hand, the same effect of racial salience, driven by home country connectedness, may have been activated but simply operationalized in a different partisan direction. The high visibility of Indian Americans like Vivek Ramaswamy, Nikki Haley, or Usha Vance within the Republican party or even the warm relationship between Donald Trump and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi may have swung a small but noticeable segment of Indian American voters toward the Republicans. As a part of this collection of articles (Logan 2025), this project offers an early review of the increasingly visible role of Indian Americans in US politics. A majority of Indian Americans have historically voted in support of Democrats and tended to be more progressive than other Asian Americans, yet the slight shift to the right suggests that Trump has made inroads into the community. I offer a first look at what factors might be causing this shift and argue that Indian Americans are a community ripe for additional research.

### **Ethnic identity and home country connectedness**

Was Kamala Harris a descriptive representative for the Indian American community? Throughout the history of the United States the concepts of representation, race, and citizenship have been intimately intertwined. For racial and ethnic minorities like Indian Americans, who have been historically and systematically shut out of the democratic system, scholars have normatively argued for descriptive representation as a way of increasing the visual representation of minority communities (Bobo and Gilliam 1990; Dawson 1994; Dovi 2012; Mansbridge 1999; Phillips 1995; Pitkin 1967; Young 2002). Such group-based claims for descriptive representation rest on the assumption that the ethnic community shares a group-based identity (Chan and Jasso 2023; Omi and Winant 2014). Moreover, the study of descriptive representation is steeped in the politics of racial group-based identity formation, which scholars have argued should be informed by individual-level psychological processes (Turner, Brown, and Tajfel 1979).<sup>2</sup> As an immigrant community, Indian Americans are a relatively new racialized group in which to extend the consideration of descriptive representation. Despite the vast diversity that exists in India, I argue Indian Americans exhibit a shared group-based identity, and that the salience of this identity was consequential in the election of Kamala Harris in 2020.

### ***The distinctiveness of Indian American voter cohesion***

Indian American political behavior is typically studied within the context of the broader Asian American subgroup, but doing so masks key differences unique to Indian Americans. Indian Americans occupy a "triangulated" position in the hierarchical racial structure of the United States (Kim 1999). While Indian Americans generally continue to be viewed as "not white"<sup>3</sup>, their economic class places them in closer proximity to whites. Indian Americans have the highest educational attainment levels and highest median weekly earnings of any racial group in the United States, including whites. Consequently, Indian Americans face relatively lower barriers to political participation than other immigrant groups. One factor that continues to reinforce the racialization of Indian Americans and tie the fate of the community together are ongoing acts of discrimination,

scapegoating, and discriminatory policies. Following the attacks on September 11, 2001, Indian Americans faced indefinite detention of legal permanent residents (Mishra 2013), additional scrutiny in airports, casual racism, and hate crimes such as the murder of Balbir Singh Sodhi in 2001 or the mass shooting of a Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin in 2012.

In studies of voting behavior, Indian American voting patterns are markedly different from other racialized communities. Despite theories of an empowering effect of a co-ethnic candidate, prior research demonstrated that the mobilizing effect of a co-ethnic congressional candidate was dependent upon the size of the community within a given district (Fraga 2016). Scholars have theorized that districts with large concentrations of a community likely have group-based assets such as local community health clinics, in-language media and services, religious and community organizations that all contribute to the mobilizing effects that are found. In addition, the larger size of the community builds an empowering sense that the community's vote could be decisive in the outcome of the election. In a study of Asian American voter behavior, Sadhwani (2022) found the same pattern amongst Korean American and Filipino American voter turnout as was found amongst Blacks and Latinos – mobilization for a co-ethnic candidate occurs in districts with large communities of the population. Unlike other groups, however, the Indian American vote was observably different. When an Indian American candidate was on the ballot, Indian American voter turnout soared *regardless* of the district demographics of where they live and vote. The finding suggests that descriptive representation is likely a strong motivating factor for Indian Americans – perhaps even more so than for other racialized communities. This unique behavior of Indian Americans vis-à-vis other racialized communities was the inspiration for collecting the survey data analyzed in this study. The voter turnout finding gives credence to the hypothesis that Kamala Harris, as a person of Indian American heritage, would generate significant support from the Indian American electorate given the pride in the community and a vast desire to see more Indian Americans succeed and be elected to office. I argue that what drives these differential effects in voter behavior is a deep sense of connectedness within the community.

### ***Transnational ties and political participation***

Transnational ties can create a nuanced political identity for immigrant communities who are navigating between political landscapes. Lien (2010) argues that Asian Americans with strong connections to their countries of origin may develop political perspectives that reflect issues and values from both settings, influencing their political behavior in the US because Asian Americans balance their involvement in local US politics with concerns for their homeland (Collet and Lien 2009). This dual perspective often results in a political engagement that reflects a blend of domestic and international priorities. The media is one platform that scholars have associated with sustaining transnational ties and the persistence of ethnic identity. Media outlets – ranging from ethnic newspapers and radio stations to television channels and digital platforms – allow immigrant communities to celebrate and maintain their cultural practices (Tukachinsky, Mastro, and Yarchi 2015; Yu 2016), but the media also plays a crucial role in shaping political discourse and powerfully molding political consciousness (Iyengar 1994).

In the study of Latino political behavior, an extensive literature has developed examining the role of Spanish language media, such as Telemundo and Univisión. The research

finds that ethnic media consumption insulates the community from threatening narratives about Latinos that are present in English language media (Dorfman et al. 1997); strengthens group identity (Garcia-Rios, Pedraza, and Wilcox-Archuleta 2019); builds political trust in the US (Wilson, Preuhs, and Gervais 2024); and mobilizes voters to the polls (Velez and Newman 2019). Similarly, but less explored, South Asian media outlets like TV Asia and Zee TV broadcast content that resonates across the Indian diaspora, reinforcing cultural identity and providing a sense of connection to the homeland (Fazal 2007). For the first time, this study examines the extent to which consumption of news from India – a common practice in many Indian American households – may be correlated with political attitudes about descriptive representation in the United States.

A home country connection, fostered through media consumption, can fuel a voter's attitudes towards candidates in the US political context. The greater connection a voter has to their birth or ancestral nation of origin, the more likely they are to desire to see someone from their community advance and succeed in elected office. Measured here through the consumption of news and images of the homeland as well as self-reports on the connectedness they feel as a community, this paper offers a first look and consideration of how the complex relationship immigrants in this modern era have with their home country might influence how they operate within the constraints of the hyperpolarized political landscape of the United States observed over the last two presidential election cycles.

## Data and methods

This study argues that Indian Americans who possess a desire for descriptive representation are influenced by a sense of shared community political interests and a connection to their homeland through the consumption of Indian news. To test this argument, I draw upon a survey of 1,003 people living in the United States who trace their national origin to India. The sample includes Hindus, Muslims, Christians and respondents of other religious backgrounds, and includes native born and foreign-born individuals. The survey was conducted online and in English in October 2020, just prior to the presidential election.<sup>4</sup>

The dependent variable measures a desire for descriptive representation through a measure of support for candidates of Indian origin. The question asks respondents if they would support Indian American candidates for elected office regardless of candidate party affiliation. An additional survey question similarly revealed a strong degree of desire for descriptive representation, with 66 per cent of respondents saying they would indeed feel better represented with more Indians in office (See [Tables 1](#) and [2](#)).

The first explanatory variable assesses the strength of group identity as Indian Americans, and in particular a sense that Indian Americans have shared interests, in which

**Table 1.** Support for Indian candidates regardless of party affiliation.

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	590	58.82
No	413	41.18
Total	1003	100

Question wording: "Would you support an Indian American candidate running for political office regardless of their party affiliation?"

**Table 2.** Would more Indian Americans elected make you feel better represented?

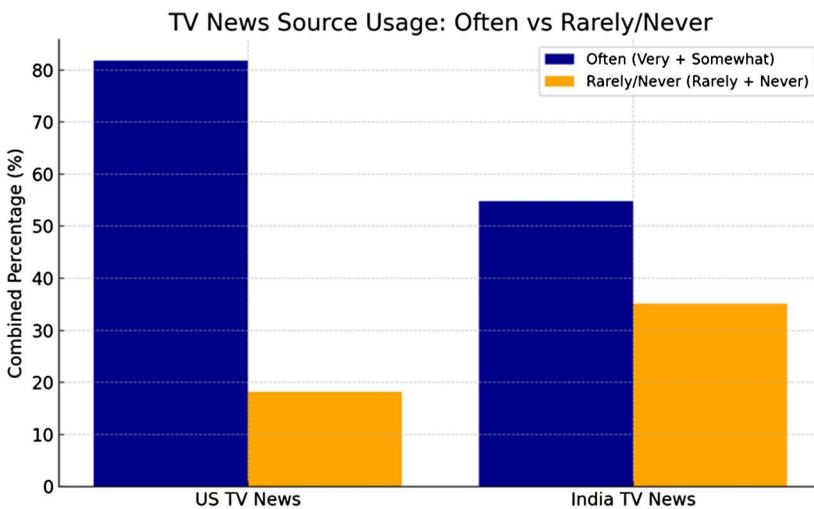
	Frequency	Percent
Definitely yes	289	28.81
Probably yes	379	37.79
Might or might not	287	28.61
Probably no	27	2.69
Definitely no	21	2.09
Total	1,003	100

Question wording: "If more Indian Americans were elected to political office at the local, state, and federal levels, would you feel like you were being better represented?"

more than half of respondents believed Indian Americans indeed had common political interests. Respondents were asked a three-part question about whether they believe Indian Americans have common political, economic, and cultural interests. Respondents were asked, "Do you believe that Indian Americans have common ... [Political interests/ Economic interests/ Cultural interests]?" A five-point response scale was used, which included the following options: Definitely yes; Probably yes; Might or might not; Probably not; Definitely not.

The second independent variable of interest examines how often a respondent watches television news from India, where more than 50 per cent of respondents said they watched very or somewhat often (See Figure 1). In comparison, US television broadcasts are far more popular among Indian Americans, with more than 80 per cent of respondents reporting they watch television news broadcasts from the United States very or somewhat often. Cross tabulations show a clear distinction between foreign born and native-born respondents, with 61 per cent of foreign-born Indians reporting they somewhat or very often watch television news broadcasts from India, while 54 per cent of US born Indian Americans report rarely or never receiving their news from such outlets.

In addition, a host of other controls are included in the model that could impact an individual's desire for descriptive representation such as socioeconomic factors of age,



**Figure 1.** US and Indian media consumption (percentage).

education level, partisanship in the United States, length of time in the United States, and religious and regional differences that are salient in India.

## Findings

The majority of Indian Americans in the survey affirmed a desire to see more Indians elected to office and reported they would feel better represented if more Indians were elected to office. As hypothesized, a belief that Indians share common political interests is positive and strongly significant as a predictor of support for an Indian candidate regardless of partisan identification. In the model, consumption of Indian TV news is highly predictive of support for Indian American candidates (Table 3).

These data were collected in 2020 and suggest that a home country connection fueled support among Indian Americans for the Biden-Harris ticket for the Democrats. The analysis suggests that those with a strong connection to India including those who report believing that Indian Americans have common political interests are more likely to support an Indian American at the top of the ballot.

An important caveat to these findings is the limitations of their observational nature and lack of a reference group by which to compare. For example, Casellas and Wallace (2015) examined the desire for descriptive representation among Blacks and Latinos in comparison to Whites. They found that while Blacks and Latinos did prefer co-ethnic representation at a statistically significant level vis-à-vis whites, the majority of Blacks (71 percent) and Latinos (72 percent) reported that a legislator being of the same racial/ethnic group was “not at all important.” Citing Swain (1995), they contended that Black and Latino voters ultimately wanted to see substantive representation more than descriptive representation (156). The finding presented in this study offers a stark contrast to those of Casellas and Wallace of Black and Latinos.

**Table 3.** Multivariate analysis of attitudes toward descriptive representation among Indian Americans.

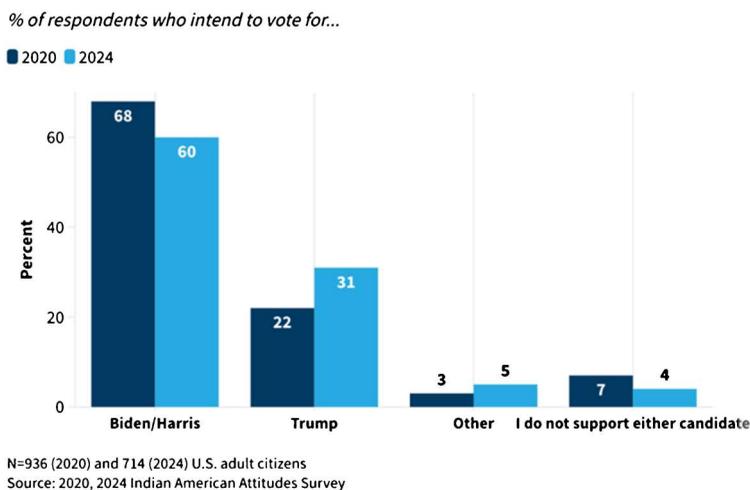
	Support for an Indian Candidate
<b>Common Interests</b>	
<i>Common Politics</i>	1.59 (.37)***
<i>Common Culture</i>	-.58 (.32)
<i>Common Economics</i>	-.35 (.39)
<b>Media Consumption</b>	
<i>India TV News</i>	1.833(.30)***
<i>India Newspaper</i>	-.20(.33)
<i>American TV News</i>	.22 (.42)
<i>American Newspaper</i>	-.19 (.30)
<b>Partisanship</b>	.09 (.18)
<b>Socioeconomics</b>	
<i>College Education</i>	.03 (.17)
<i>Age</i>	.01 (.006)
<i>Female</i>	-.01 (.14)
<b>Immigrant Differences</b>	
<i>Immigration Status</i>	.01 (.15)
<i>Religion (Hindu)</i>	.09 (.14)
<i>North Indian</i>	.03 (.20)
<i>South Indian</i>	.01 (.21)
Constant	-1.04

\*\*\* $p < .01$ .

## Discussion

Scholars have long argued that race is central to understanding American politics and that identity has a strong and guiding force in political behavior, leading communities of color to vote as cohesive blocs. The findings presented here offer a snapshot in time for the 2020 election and largely confirms and extends the study of group based racial dynamics to Indians Americans, an ethnic subgroup whose political preferences and behaviors are often masked within the larger Asian American racial categorization. But the data emerging from the 2024 election reveal modest shifts in voter preferences among Indian Americans as well as other communities of color. In the 2016 presidential election, 77 percent of Indian Americans voted for Hillary Clinton and only 16 percent for Trump (National Asian American Survey). By 2024, Trump nearly doubled his support from the community with 31 percent reporting an intention to vote for Trump over Harris (Indian American Attitudes Survey) – a candidate of Indian American descent. Even comparing 2020, where Harris appeared on the ballot as the Vice President, to 2024 a notable loss in support is observable (see [Figure 2](#)). If Kamala Harris’s racial identity as an Indian American fueled support from Indian Americans in 2020 as the findings here demonstrate, what happened in 2024? The remainder of this section considers hypotheses for what might explain this shift.

First, the salience of racial identity and the sense of common interests among the group may have waned in the face of economic pressures and an atmosphere that spurned efforts toward diversity and inclusion. Social identity theory argues that shared identity and group membership, offers an organizing mechanism by which group members view their preferences as aligned, and vote based on that membership (McClain et al. 2009), particularly when their identity as a member of the group is salient or when the group faces threat. Prevailing research might suggest that a person of color on the top of the ticket might heighten the salience of Indian American group



**Figure 2.** Indian American vote choice 2020, 2024.

membership leading to a surge in support for Harris in 2024. Similarly, attacks on racial identity groups such as hurling stereotypes from the Republican presidential campaign about immigrants eating dogs<sup>5</sup> or that the White House would “stink of curry” if Harris were elected<sup>6</sup> might have had a mobilizing effect among Indian Americans for Harris (Kuo, Malhotra, and Mo 2017). Examinations of linked fate theory have found the salience of race for African Americans to be high, such that deviation away from the Democratic party is rare (White and Laird 2020). If support for a co-ethnic such as Kamala Harris is not motivating Indian Americans to cast their ballot in her favor, what is? The lessened salience of racial identity may have operationalized in numerous ways. In the face of debilitating inflation, the economy ranked as a top issue for Indian Americans and a lack of trust in Democrats to solve the crisis may have superseded the psychological benefits of electing a descriptive representative. Alternatively, the data from both 2024 surveys also revealed a pronounced gender gap with 67 percent of Indian American female respondents intending to vote for Harris, in contrast to just over half of male respondent’s planning to support her. India’s traditional patriarchal gender roles appear to have dampened support for Harris. Another explanation could be Harris’ stance towards the conflict in Israel and Palestine. According to the Pew Research Center, 13 percent of Indian Americans express a connection to Islam. As protests raged on college campuses throughout 2024, many Muslim Americans – including Indian Muslim Americans – chose to stay home in November and not participate in the 2024 election, which could lead to the shift in support for Harris and Trump being observed.

While race may be central to American politics, it is not essential to individual identity. Voters take numerous identities with them to the ballot box – their racial identity to be sure, but also their traditional or modern cultural values, their “kitchen table” economic needs, their desire to get ahead in their new homeland, their religious group-based identities. There is a scholarly tendency to view group-based identities through the prism of race, and particularly through the racial categorizations of “Asian American” or “Indian American” – identities that do not exist in home countries but are applied to large and incredibly diverse populations upon arrival in the United States. A feature of being connected to the homeland for Indian Americans is carrying and maintaining social fractures such as caste distinctions, religious animosity, political divisions, and gender expectations. In fact, Raychaudhuri (2018) argues that social peer groups are essential to understanding partisan vote choice of Asian Americans. She finds first-generation Asian Americans primarily interact with fellow Asian immigrants and develop positive attitudes about conservative ideology but vote for Democrats because they perceive contemporary Republicans as too extreme. Her study outlines how many Asian Americans believe the Democratic party becomes too focused on questions of inclusivity such as policing and treatment of minority communities. Issues that dominated Trump’s talking points in 2024. Moreover, when faced with other pressures, including competing identities beyond racial identity, the economy, heightened concerns about foreign relations, the motivation to elect a descriptive representative to the highest office may have waned.

An alternative interpretation, however, could be that Indian American identity was similarly salient in 2024 as in 2020, but has begun to operationalize in a different partisan direction. Hajnal and Lee (2011) have argued that the distinct socialization processes of immigrant communities foster information uncertainty, ideological ambivalence, and identity formation making communities, like Indian Americans, vulnerable to political

change. For the last two decades the Republican party has been relatively hostile toward immigrant communities, including the targeting of South Asians following the attacks on September 11 (Mishra 2013). The growing visibility of Indian Americans within the Republican party in 2024, such as Nikki Haley and Vivek Ramaswamy, could be shifting the view of the Republican party among some segment of Indians for whom allegiance to the Democrats was never fully solidified. In that scenario, the same forces of group consciousness, home country connectedness, and support for co-ethnics could be shifting the partisan preference of Indian Americans away from the Democrats, having capitalized on a mood of discontent toward President Biden and the Democrats. After all, the 2020 election data presented here found that nearly 60 percent of respondents said they would support an Indian American *regardless* of their party affiliation. Though an Indian American was not at the top of the Republican ticket, the highly visible presence of Indian Americans in the party could have had an impact. While Haley uses an anglicized name and converted to Christianity, Ramaswamy talked openly about his Hindu faith and how it fits within the American religious lexicon. Ramaswamy's social media presence and viral TikTok videos provided appeal not only to young Indian Americans, but to a broad array of young people making Indian Americans a visible presence to a greater audience of Americans. Similarly, the stoic and loyal stance of Usha Vance beside her husband, Vice President J.D. Vance, could be leading some Indian Americans to abandon their allegiance to the Democrats in favor of a party being viewed as less hostile to Indian Americans than in the past. This paper does not explicitly examine these questions, but these are areas ripe for additional research in the future.

## Conclusion

The increasing visibility of Indian Americans in various sectors of American society reflects their growing influence and contributions. The Indian American population grew by 50 per cent nationally between 2010 and 2020 to become the largest subgroup of Asian Americans in the United States. According to the American Community Survey, there are over 2.1 million Indian American adults eligible to vote and many are concentrated in presidential battleground states like Arizona, Georgia, Pennsylvania, and Michigan. Yet despite this influence and potential impact, few to any studies directly examine the political attitudes and behaviors of Indian Americans.

For more than a decade, survey data has found a wide majority of Indian Americans to be closely aligned with the Democratic party. The data emerging from this election, however, reveal modest shifts in voter preferences within many communities of color, particularly along gender lines. The early data presented here finds that Indian Americans are not immune to this shift, though it is too soon to know if such a shift will be replicated or expanded upon in future elections, or if 2024 was an anomaly based on an assortment of contextual peculiarities – President Biden's last hour exit from the race and the Democrat's lack of a primary process, the result of a surge in support for former President Trump who faced assassination attempts, or simply a rebuttal of the current economic times. To be certain, scholars and pundits must continue to examine these emerging trends amongst young voters and men of color.

In a departure from a scholarly tradition that typically examines Asian Americans has a heterogeneous group, this paper begins to explore and offer a snapshot of Indian

American voting behavior and political attitudes. The consideration of home country connectedness and the complex contours of the politics-to-identity link for Indian Americans adds to the race and ethnic politics literature calling for an examination of group-based behavior that goes beyond linked fate. Future studies should continue to examine the complexities of national origin subgroups, particularly those located in swing districts and states where their vote can be decisive in the outcome of an election. This paper has argued that home country connectedness, as measured by consumption of Indian television news, has impacted Indian Americans at the ballot box. But the finding raises many questions for future analysis: To what extent are other kinds of home country connections salient in activating a desire for descriptive representation, such as using a native language at home, making trips to the home country, or supporting family members with financial remittances? How, when, and to what extent are Indian Americans' views of US politics informed by their views of the rightward turn of Indian politics and Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the last decade? To what extent might home country connection influence the political attitudes and behaviors of other immigrant communities? These questions and many more can and should be asked and examined in the future. This paper, prepared on the heels of the 2024 election is not intended to be conclusive or definitive, but instead to chart a trajectory for studying the largest Asian American subgroup in the United States as more members of the community join the national political stage, and the votes from within the community are courted by candidates across the nation.

## Notes

1. California voters in 2024 approved proposition 36 that rolled back many progressive criminal justice reforms and instead increased sentencing.
2. In addition to individual-level psychological processes, group based identity formation can also be attributed to institutional and structural policies adopted by the state such as racial categorization within the US context (Hattam 2007; Nobles 2000), the unique histories of migration (Junn 2007), and discriminatory policies and actions that bind a group together (Wallace, Zepeda-Millán, and Jones-Correa 2014). While these factors certainly apply to the study of Indian American identity formation they will not be discussed here.
3. During the early twentieth century, Indians attempted to make claims for US citizenship, which the United States expressly denied. In the case of the *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* (1923), the Supreme Court officially ruled that Indians are legally "not white" and therefore were deemed ineligible for US Citizenship, thus establishing the legal parameters by which Indians, seeking political incorporation in the United States, were barred access from citizenship and "othered" by the Supreme Court. This racial categorization as "non-white" was further institutionalized through the US census. For three decades in the early 20th century, people originating from the subcontinent were identified by the US Census as "Hindoos", until 1950 when they were erased from the US Census count entirely (Pew Research Center). In 1977 the Office of Management and Budget's policy Directive Number 15 categorized people with origins from the Indian Subcontinent in a broad panethnic "Asian" category for the purposes of federal statistics and administrative reporting (Nobles 2000).
4. The survey was conducted by Maneesh Arora of Wellesley College and me. We used the firm Lucid to collect an online sample of 1,003 Indian Americans living in the United States. The survey was conducted October 13–30, 2020, just before the 2020 presidential election and was Census-matched for age, gender, education level, political party and geographic region. While we did not construct the sample for representativeness of religion, the

sample includes Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and respondents of other religious backgrounds. The median age of this sample is about 35 years and most participants have Bachelor's degrees. About 59 percent of respondents were born overseas, mostly in India. Respondents or their families hail from 25 of India's 28 states and the Delhi region. A majority of respondents are first generation Americans and identify as Democrats. The demographic characteristics of our sample compare favorably to the 2020 Indian American Attitudes Survey (IAAS), a nationally representative sample of 1,200 Indian Americans collected through the firm, YouGov (Badrinathan, Kapur, and Vaishnav 2020). The only major discrepancy between the samples is that 56% of the respondents in our sample are women while 45% of the IAAS sample is women. Across all other characteristics, the samples are relatively similar.

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## Acknowledgements

The survey research presented in this study adhered to the highest ethical standards to protect the rights, dignity, and welfare of all participants. Participation in this study was entirely voluntary, and respondents could decline to answer any question or withdraw at any time without consequence. All responses were anonymous and confidential. No personally identifiable information was collected or reported. Data continues to be stored securely and used solely for research purposes. The survey has been designed to minimize any potential risks or discomfort to participants, and all questions are intended to respect cultural and individual sensitivities. This study complies with institutional and national ethical guidelines and was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Pomona College. Informed consent was obtained prior to participation, and participants were provided with a clear explanation of the purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits associated with the study.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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