

Effect of Living in an AAPI Ethnic Enclave on AAPI Voter Registration

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ABSTRACT

Due to the rapidly increasing immigrant population in the United States, particularly among AAPI individuals, more AAPI immigrants are beginning to choose to live in ethnic enclaves. Past research concludes that the ethnic makeup of a certain location can affect how often the residents of that location register to vote. This study was conducted to explore the effect of AAPI ethnic enclaves on AAPI voter registration. This study is quantitative in nature and the data was collected from available data on the voter registration of counties across the United States that contain ethnic enclaves. This paper identifies the percentage of AAPI people that turned out to vote in each enclave as compared to the surrounding counties with no ethnic enclave, in order to analyze the differences in AAPI voter registration in the enclave compared to outside of the enclave. To minimize the scope of the research, case studies were designated to compare them to other neighboring counties that did not have AAPI ethnic enclaves and observe the voting patterns between AAPI residents that were living in close proximity and those that were not. The overall trend observed by the data collected was that the presence of ethnic enclaves produces an increase in voter registration compared to neighboring counties without such ethnic enclaves. This study concludes that an increase in proximity to other AAPI individuals is associated with a corresponding increase in voter registration.

Introduction

An ethnic enclave is defined as a geographic area with a high concentration of people from a particular ethnic or cultural background characterized by shared customs, languages, and traditions, and can serve as a center for community building and cultural preservation (Lim et al., 2017, p. 1). While it is important to note that not all immigrants choose to settle in ethnic enclaves, they prove a favorable settlement choice for immigrants in the United States. For many immigrants, settling in an ethnic enclave can provide a sense of familiarity in an otherwise unfamiliar country (Hirschman, 2017, p. 1). By living among others who share their culture, language, and traditions, immigrants may feel less isolated (Hirschman, 2017, p. 1). Ethnic enclaves can also provide a support network for immigrants. Members of the community can offer advice and assistance regarding housing, jobs, and accessing social services (Chakraborty & Schuller, 2022, p. 8). Given their unique population makeup, counties containing ethnic enclaves also have unique levels of voter registration as compared to other counties (Chakraborty & Schuller, 2022, p. 8). On one hand, living in an ethnic enclave may make it more likely for individuals to vote (Chakraborty & Schuller, 2022, p. 8). This is because ethnic enclaves often have strong community networks and civic organizations that can encourage and facilitate voting (Chakraborty & Schuller, 2022, p. 8). Community leaders may organize voter registration drives and provide information on how to vote (Mangin, 2018, p. 464) Additionally, living in an ethnic enclave can provide a sense of community and shared identity, which may motivate individuals to participate in the democratic process (Mangin, 2018, p. 464) On the other hand, living in an ethnic enclave may make it less likely for individuals to vote (Root & Kennedy, 2018, p. 1). This is because ethnic enclaves may be marginalized and underrepresented in the political process, which can create a sense of disillusionment and apathy toward voting (Root & Kennedy, 2018, p.

1). There are hundreds of ethnic enclaves in the United States, and they span a variety of ethnic groups. Among these groups are Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, abbreviated AAPIs.

AAPI immigrants in the United States emerged as far back as the 19th century, beginning in the 1850s when young single men were recruited as contract laborers. AAPI immigrants worked as miners, railroad builders, farmers, factory workers, and fishermen, the Chinese represented 20% of California's labor force by 1870, even though they constituted only .002% of the entire United States population. In response to growing labor demand in the late 1890s, AAPIs began moving into urban areas, eventually settling in their own ethnic communities, and forming enclaves (Asia Society, 2023). Today, many AAPIs come to the United States to pursue higher education, work in specialized fields, start their own businesses, or receive access to better healthcare among a multitude of other factors. They may also immigrate to reunite with family members who already reside in the United States (Asia Society, 2023).

The AAPI population is the fastest-growing demographic group in the United States (Nakanishi 2001, AAPI Data and APIA Vote 2018, (Yam 2020). The Asian American electorate has grown by 130% in the past 20 years, and this can have many implications for future elections (Yam 2020). However, the voter registration of the AAPI population in the United States has been historically lower than that of other racial groups (Krogstad, 2014). This is attributed to a variety of factors, including language barriers to understanding registration procedures (Root & Kennedy, 2018, p. 1). However, there has been an increase in AAPI voter registration in recent years. In the 2020 presidential election, AAPI voter registration reached record levels (Ramakrishnan, 2021). According to the AAPI Data organization, an estimated 66% of eligible AAPI voters cast their ballots, marking a significant increase from previous elections (Ramakrishnan, 2021). This increase in AAPI voter registration has been attributed to various factors, including increased mobilization efforts by political campaigns and community organizations, as well as a growing sense of political engagement and awareness among AAPI voters (He, 2022, p. 18). With consistent population growth, increased voter registration, and registration, the Asian American demographic is becoming a formidable force in elections. Having reliable data and knowledge of these groups is crucial to electoral predictions and campaigning strategies. Despite the increasing significance of political participation among Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities, as well as the growing recognition of the potential positive impact of ethnic enclaves on voter registration, there has been a noticeable dearth of prominent research that examines the factors contributing to increased voter registration within the AAPI population. This study aims to understand how living in a co-ethnic AAPI enclave affects AAPI voter registration.

Methodology

To understand how living in a co-ethnic AAPI enclave affects AAPI voter registration, my research was conducted using a combination of case studies and quantitative research approaches. Case studies are defined as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context. A case study method selects a small geographical area or a very limited number of individuals. Case studies as a research approach are widely recognized in many social science studies especially when in-depth explanations of social behavior are sought after. This study implemented case studies of three counties in the United States containing prominent AAPI ethnic enclaves- Queens County, New York, Middlesex County New Jersey, and Santa Clara County, California.

To effectively answer my research question, I also generated quantitative data to understand the correlation between living in an AAPI ethnic enclave and political participation. The value of data in the form of counts or numbers is used frequently by researchers to analyze data statistically, which allows researchers to identify patterns, trends, and relationships in the data. For each of the counties listed above (Queens, Middlesex, and Santa Clara Counties) I recorded the total population of AAPI residents of voting age, and the number of AAPI residents who were registered to vote. I then calculated the percentage of AAPI residents living in a certain county. This data was sourced from APIA vote, a research center that develops data-driven research and supporting policies that help AAPIs build collective power and gain recognition as a growing national force. Every year, the center publishes a detailed breakdown of AAPI demographics in each state, broken down by county, including the number of eligible AAPI voters, and total

A-API population numbers. Data was taken from 2022 (the most recent year available) I recorded the total population of A-API residents living in the respective county and the number of A-API residents who were registered to vote. I then calculated the percentage of A-API residents living in a certain county. For each of the counties listed above, I then ran the same calculations on two neighboring counties without A-API ethnic enclaves to get the percentage of A-API registration in those counties. To evaluate my results, I used the social constructivist research paradigm, which includes observation. Social Constructivism here is defined as the view that knowledge and truth as created by the interactions of individuals within a society (Andrews, 2012) and also referred to as interpretivism, social constructivism has been associated with the post-modern era in qualitative research (Andrews, 2012). The social constructivist philosophy emphasizes the importance of culture and context in the process of knowledge construction and accumulation. Constructivist research aims to understand particular situations or phenomena, and data is gathered from which ideas can be formed. The interaction of a number of people is researched, mostly to solve the social problems of the target group. This experiment accomplishes the goal of Social Constructivist research by collecting data on the ethnic makeup of ethnic enclaves, which observes the interaction of a group of people and takes into account the environment's effect of a certain phenomenon- in this case, voter registration. In my research, the quantitative aspect of the research paradigm was accomplished by collecting data from APIAvote and making patterns and connections within the data. I made patterns by identifying the number of A-API residents living in an ethnic enclave that voted, and the number total number of A-API residents living in that enclave. I then derived a percentage of A-API voter registration for that specific enclave. This percentage derivation process was repeated for two neighboring counties that did not have A-API ethnic enclaves. This was repeated for each ethnic enclave.

Results

Location	A-API Population	A-API Voter registration	Percent of A-API registration
Queens County (A-API Enclave County)	632,047	323,997	23%
Kings County	352,176	183,328	11%
New York County	226,035	128,921	11%

Figure 1.

Location	A-API Population	A-API Voter registration	Percent of A-API registration
Middlesex County (A-API Enclave County)	212,492	102,962	19%
Hudson County	115,834	47,789	12%
Bergen County	166,794	90,422	14%

Figure 2.

Location	AAPI Population	AAPI Voter registration	Percent of AAPI registration
Santa Clara County (AAPI Enclave County)	790,092	419,288	36%
Los Angeles County	1,700,411	1,047,362	17%
Orange County	758,484	471,774	23%

Figure 3.

This study aimed to analyze the effect of living in an AAPI ethnic enclave on AAPI voter registration. The overall trend observed by the data collected was that the presence of ethnic enclaves produces an increase in voter registration compared to neighboring counties without such ethnic enclaves. This proves the relationship between living in proximity to AAPI co-ethnics and political participation in the United States. According to Figure 1, Queens County, which encompasses New York's Chinatown, demonstrated a voter registration rate of 23 percent. Note that in the surrounding enclaves of Kings County and New York County, both match 11 percent voter registration. This indicates that out of all the AAPI co-ethnic people living in those counties, 11 percent registered to vote. In the case of Middlesex County NJ which contains Little India, voter registration reached 19% as opposed to the surrounding Hudson and Bergen Counties which reached 12% and 14% respectively. Santa Clara County in California's voter registration reached 36%, but Los Angeles County and Orange County reached 17% and 23% respectively. This observation proves that proximity, not population, reached the millions, whereas the other counties had barely scratched the 700,000 number. However, Santa Clara County was the only one that had an ethnic enclave. Another factor that must be observed and accounted for is the percentage difference between each ethnic enclave- 11%, for Middlesex County 23% for Queens County, and 36% for Santa Clara County. By observing this, we can prove the theory that living in proximity to more Asian ethnic people makes AAPIs more likely to vote. When isolating the numbers of AAPI people living in the specific enclave- from 212,492 in Middlesex, 632,047 in Queens county, and 790,092 in Santa Clara County, the correlation shows that the number of AAPI people in the enclave affects registration. Ultimately the study concludes that proximity and residing in an ethnic enclave do affect voter registration.

Discussion

This study aimed to analyze the effect of living in an AAPI ethnic enclave on AAPI voter registration and found that the presence of ethnic enclaves produces an increase in voter registration. This study also concludes that ethnic enclaves are areas of higher voter registration compared to surrounding areas, it allows us to understand how to increase voter registration amongst AAPI, as well as regions for politicians to campaign if they wish to increase their portion of AAPI support. These findings add to the existing literature that proximity to co-ethnic groups increases voter registration increase. However, it adds a new perspective on AAPI groups specifically. These results also prove that the impacts are scalar, and as the level of proximity to other AAPI increases, then voter registration also increases instead of needing a certain level of proximity to get to a level of voter registration. This is unexpected since no study in prominent literature has attempted to analyze the relationship between proximity to co-ethnic populations and voter registration, they have only tried to see if a correlation is true or not.

Limitations

The study can conclude how much percentage of people had turned out, but it does not control for factors like voting age. That means that the number of people that had turned out to vote can simply be because there are more voting-age registered people in a certain ethnic enclave than another. Assuming that both neighborhoods have a similar percentage of voting-age residents who are registered to vote, Chinatown would have a much larger pool of potential voters than Little Italy. This also means that other factors such as age in an ethnic enclave may affect voter registration, and voter registration cannot be determined by proximity. A way to rectify this limitation in a future study could be by measuring voter registration in a certain election to avoid the discrepancy.

Future Research

In terms of further research, future studies could be conducted to determine an equation for proximity to co-ethnic populations and voter registration. For example, finding by what amount proximity needs to increase for voter registration to increase as well.

Conclusion

My research aimed to explore the role of AAPI co-ethnic enclaves on AAPI voter participation to understand the relationship between the two if any. This study also aimed to explore if proximity to other AAPI residents is a factor that makes them more likely to participate politically, and determined that proximity to other co-ethnic groups was also a factor. This study narrowed the scope of research by focusing on three prominent ethnic enclaves- Queens, Middlesex, and Santa Clara County, which included ethnic enclaves like Chinatown (Queens County), Little India (Middlesex County) Japantown, and Little Saigon (both Santa Clara County) These case studies were designated was made to compare them to other neighboring counties that did not have AAPI ethnic enclaves and observe the voting patterns between AAPI residents that were living in close proximity and those that were not. After observing the voting patterns the results show that there was indeed a positive correlation between them. The literature on ethnic enclaves increasing voter registration is supported. My findings establish a new understanding of voter registration in AAPI communities that have ever focused on the AAPI community specifically- all tried to observe different immigrant communities without understanding each one/their priorities separately This study also provides a way to increase representation amongst AAPI populations in the country, providing a way in terms of strategy for political figures to campaign in those communities.

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