

Dietrich College Honors Thesis

*Minority Voting Factors*

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## Chapter One

*The purpose of this study is to analyze and understand the factors that influence minority populations to vote in their particular manner. It will seek to offer a critical reevaluation of three fundamental and interlocking themes of each group's socioeconomic status, cultural factors, and political participation factors. This research specifically seeks to understand the factors that influence Blacks, Hispanics, and Asian voters in supporting the Democratic Party over the Republican Party. It will compare and contrast the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections to understand why the voters voted the way they did. By doing so, this study will show how and why these factors play an important role in the voting behavior of Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians. Although there are different explanations of racial politics offered by other literature, this research is unique in the way it offers a more comprehensive method in examining the factors that influence voting patterns of the aforementioned minority groups.*

### **Introduction**

The year 2008 marked a striking change in electoral politics for the United States. It was the year when the nation took its first steps in electing its first non-white president and galvanized enormous support from all types of people, including the multiracial community into its narrative. Ever since, one of the striking features of the political spectrum and campaigns in the United States has been the growing importance of racial and ethnic minority voters. Today, as a result, much of the written literature refers to this time period as a “revelation,” because it was a revelation about the place of race in national politics for the present and the future.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kinder, Donald R., and Allison Dale-Riddle. *The End of Race?: Obama, 2008, and Racial Politics in America*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2012.

This research in particular is not concerning the effect of a black man as the nation's first president. Rather, it focuses on the undergoing development in racial politics- the factors that influence minority voter turnouts. As the nation develops and continues to move forward into an era that is becoming ever more global, we must ask the role and social construct race will take on institutionally, socially, and culturally. It can be seen that this question and hypothesis has acquired even more interest followed with urgency and uncertainty seen from the recent two elections of Barack Obama. And because the last several years have seen a drastic change in the role of minority voters, scholars, researchers, and pundits alike have been trying to identify reasons and variable factors for this change. A big question remains, what impact this will have for the future elections.

In a unique method to answer this question, I conceive of this project as a case study in U.S. political elections that takes three particular ethnic groups as its object. The strength of this method is that it allows for a close examination of a number of pressing issues in the field of attaining minority voters in elections. African Americans, Hispanics, and Asians are the three minority groups that will be observed. In particular, this research will focus on the roughly 40 million Blacks or 13% of the United States population, whom have mostly been living in the United States for the past couple centuries.<sup>2</sup> The Hispanics I refer to mainly focus on the Mexican immigrants, most of whom reside in the western U.S. Currently, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, approximately 53 million Hispanics reside in the United States (roughly 17 percent of the population).<sup>3</sup> This makes those people of Hispanic descent the nation's largest

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<sup>2</sup> "Black (African-American History) Month: February 2012." *United States Census Bureau*, January 4, 2012, accessed May 1, 2014,

[http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/facts\\_for\\_features\\_special\\_editions/cb12-ff01.html](http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/cb12-ff01.html).

<sup>3</sup> "Hispanic Heritage Month 2013: Sept. 15- Oct. 15." *United States Census Bureau*, July 30, 2013, accessed May 1, 2014,

[http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/facts\\_for\\_features\\_special\\_editions/cb13-ff19.html](http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/cb13-ff19.html).

racial minority. Concerning the Asian minority, I focus mainly on the Chinese population due to the fact that they are largest immigrants of the Asian minority. They are also the most politically organized Asian minority group. Asians are roughly 15 million of the U.S. population, or 5.6 percent of the population.<sup>4</sup> Out of the three racial groups studied, the Asian population is the smallest; however, this population is noted for becoming one of the fastest growing group among the other racial groups.

As the numbers reveal, the defined minority groups currently make up approximately 30 to 35 percent of the overall population in the United States. Yet, when it comes to political organizations and political elections, the participatory numbers are extremely small. Much of the scholarly articles and readings reveal that before the 2008 presidential election, minority voters were even more predominantly inactive in the political life.<sup>5</sup> However, with Obama's presidential campaign, there has been a notable substantial increase in the number of minority voters that came out to the voting polls.<sup>6</sup> The 2012 election further saw a record-breaking amount of minority voters involved in the political spectrum.

The findings of my research put into place the national discussions about the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections revealing an overwhelmingly large focus on blacks and whites. Many resources refer almost exclusively to the history of relations between these two groups. Obama's own ethnic roots are one of the obvious causes for this focus. Additionally, most of the predominant themes of the elections, including racial politics, were constructed and centered on

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<sup>4</sup> "Asians are the fastest-growing race group in US, Census Bureau says." *NBC News*, March 21, 2012, accessed May 1, 2014, [http://usnews.nbcnews.com/\\_news/2012/03/21/10797481-asians-are-fastest-growing-race-group-in-us-census-bureau-says](http://usnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2012/03/21/10797481-asians-are-fastest-growing-race-group-in-us-census-bureau-says).

<sup>5</sup> Donald R. Kinder and Allison Dale-Riddle, *The End of Race?: Obama, 2008, and Racial Politics in America*, (New Haven: Yale UP, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

black and white racial archetypes.<sup>7</sup> Thus, discussions of “race” mainly referred to “blackness.”<sup>8</sup> Another interesting point to mention is the discussion of Latino and Asian voters in the elections. These minority voters are predominantly absent in political organizations and participation, yet there was a significant demographical shift that was seen in the 2008 election.

Additionally, there was a high support rating for the Democratic Party among these minority groups in comparison to the Republican Party. Thus, it can be seen that Obama’s presidency marked a change in the dynamism of US politics. With his elections, there was a noticeable shift in the fervor for the willingness to participate in politics within minority voters.<sup>9</sup> This unanticipated minority involvement can be accredited for much of the support to Obama’s particular campaign and the Democratic Party. There was an influential factor behind the voting behaviors of these minority groups that allowed them to vote and to vote in the specific manner they chose to.

### **Questions**

From this, it is evident that there is an ongoing development in race politics; there are underlying factors to the change in the minority voter turnouts. The number of these minorities and newly naturalized citizens are growing day by day. Consequently, what will be the outcome of an estimated influx of new potential minority voters? What will be the overall impact for presidential campaigns, election turnout and outcomes, political identities, and representation? What are the driving factors that are influencing the minority voters to vote in the way they do? What are the political factors for each group, and how are they different or similar? Why is it that

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Tesler, *Obama’s Race: the 2008 Election and the Dream of a Post-Racial America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010).

a majority of these minority voters are generally more involved in the Democratic Party than the other?

In addition to these questions, it is essential to address the workings behind the presidential elections. This study will base the findings off the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections. How were these elections different from the past in terms of bringing out minority voters? How did the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections differ from each other in terms of minority voting? What were the different strategic methods, if any, for attracting these voters? Will there be a greater focus in gaining minority voters in future presidential elections? What will be the affect of minority voters in the long run?

### **Variables**

To set the stage for this research, it is important to consider the factors and racial conditions that establish the context for the 2008 and 2012 presidential election for each of the three minority groups. These ideas will be presented in the following introduction of the dependent and independent variable.

#### *Dependent Variable*

The dependent variable for this study is the reason why minority voter groups vote in their particular manner, why they choose to do so and what motivates them to. It will seek to evaluate how these groups tend to decide their freedom to exercise their vote or not to. It will also answer the question of why they seem to vote as a whole for one party, the Democratic Party, rather than the other.

### *Independent Variable*

The independent variables tested in this research focuses on the background of each minority group's motivations to participate in elections. For this research, I will focus on three main factors, where each minority groups' voting choices depend on socioeconomic reasons, cultural factors, and the factors of political organization participation. Of the other factors, these three in particular were chosen because they seem to best represent the groups as a whole. All the minority groups are influenced heavily by socioeconomic status. There are rarely examined factors of culture and political organizations that inevitably influence the minorities to vote during the presidential elections. Furthermore, it will be observed that all the minority-voting groups are influenced by all these variables; yet, there is a difference in the weight these variables carry for each group. For example, it can be seen that the socioeconomic reasons are the predominant factors in influencing minority votes primarily for the Hispanics, while the main factors for Asian Americans are cultural factors. Additionally, for African Americans, political organization factors seem to be the most influential variable. Specifically, it will be examined what specific aspects influence and affect the reason for each group's voting behavior.

### **Independent Variable Explanation**

#### *Socioeconomic Factors*

One of the most significant variables in influencing the three minority groups to vote in their particular behavior is due to the socioeconomic factors. These factors influence voters and ultimately affect the voting behavior of minorities. For this research, socioeconomic factors will be defined by the following: measurements of the influence that the social environment has on individuals, families, and communities using mainly the factor of social stability as a foundation

for classification. This social stability will be measured by analyzing group income, education level, and occupation. In many ways, it is related to the concept of social class where the groups' development and involvement influence individual behaviors and decisions.

There are different measures and levels of how these factors affect each of the three groups; each group in larger view represent different social classes, which result in a different impact by these factors for each group. Looking at specific statistics, it can be seen that there is a disproportionate ratio of voting blocs that vote for the Democratic Party.<sup>10</sup>

Much of the literature concerning this concept agrees that low numbers affiliated with the socioeconomic status ultimately affect their individual standards of education, poverty, and health. Not only that, it affects society as a whole, especially the specific ethnic minority groups. This is due to the fact that many individuals for each of the groups share similar socioeconomic status. It can also be seen that especially in this day where inequities in wealth and social standards are increasing in the United States, there is a growing disparity gap between individuals and between ethnic groups. Variance in socioeconomic status, including disparities in the distribution of wealth, income, and access to resources, affects a majority of others in the group.

In the United States, individuals vary greatly in levels of wealth, power, and status. Pertaining to social groups, in particular ethnic groups, they are subject to systematically different socioeconomic statuses.<sup>11</sup> It is commonly conceptualized as the social standing or class of an individual or group.<sup>12</sup> When viewed through a social class lens, privilege, power, and

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<sup>10</sup> Enid Lynette Logan, *At This Defining Moment": Barack Obama's Presidential Candidacy and the New Politics of Race* (New York: New York UP, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> Ray Brogan, "Socioeconomic Status," *Education*, December 23, 2009, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.education.com/reference/article/socioeconomic-status/>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.



control are emphasized. Furthermore, an examination of socioeconomic factors as a gradient or continuous variable reveals inequities in access to and distribution of resources.<sup>13</sup>

Socioeconomic factors, race, and ethnicity are intimately intertwined. Research and literature reveal that race and ethnicity, in terms of stratification, often determine a person's socioeconomic status.<sup>14</sup> Communities are also often segregated by socioeconomic factors, race, and ethnicity.<sup>15</sup> These communities commonly share characteristics of developing nations: low economic development, low levels of educational attainment, and low rankings of occupation, as it will be mentioned. Thus, low socioeconomic factors have consistently been implicated as a risk factor for many of the problems that plague communities, especially those associated with the Black and Latino ethnic groups.

Table 1 below offers a broad overlook at the population size and average income rate for each ethnic group. The Hispanic group is by far the dominant ethnic group amongst the three, yet it has a rather high rate for poverty. The Black population is also characterized by having the lowest income rate out of the three and also with the highest poverty rate. The Asian population is the most affluent of the three racial groups, and thus has the lowest rate of poverty among them. Generally, it can be seen that the Black and Hispanic population share more common characteristics while the Asian group is the outlier. Table 2 and Table 3 further highlight the aspects of the socioeconomic factors of the education levels and employment status, respectively, for each ethnic group. It can be seen here that Black and Hispanic communities face a greater disparity in lower educational and employment levels. Usually, these two ethnic groups lean more to the left and vote for the Democratic Party because of its liberal approaches.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Kinder and Dale-Riddle, *The End of Race?: Obama, 2008, and Racial Politics in America*.

On the other hand, the Asian community thrives in these areas. Formally, due to the higher standards of living for the Asian community, they are characterized to hold more conservative values.<sup>16</sup> However, the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections showed a surprising support of Asians for the Democratic Party. The following chapters seek to explain why that is the case; in other words, how do these socioeconomic factors influence voters to vote (or not vote) in their particular manner? What was different about the 2008 and 2012 campaigns?

Table 1: Population and Income

	Black	Hispanic	Asian
Total Population	39,623,138	52,961,017	15,555,530
Average Household Size	2.68	3.51	3.11
Income (Median Household Income)	\$33,764	\$40,417	\$70,644
Poverty Rates	24.2%	23.1%	9.8%

(Source: United States Census Bureau 2013)<sup>17</sup>

Table 2: Educational Level

Education	Black	Latino	Asian
Less than high school diploma	16.8%	36.0%	14.3%
High school graduate	31.3%	26.7%	15.4%
Some college or associate's degree	33.1%	23.5%	19.7%
Bachelor's degree	12.0%	9.4%	29.4%
Graduate or professional degree	6.8%	4.4%	21.2%

(Source: United States Census Bureau 2013)<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Richard A. Posner, "Why did Asian Americans mostly vote for President Obama?" *Slate*, November 26, 2012, accessed May 1, 2014, [http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/view\\_from\\_chicago/2012/11/why\\_did\\_asian\\_americans\\_vote\\_for\\_president\\_obama.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/view_from_chicago/2012/11/why_did_asian_americans_vote_for_president_obama.html).

<sup>17</sup> "Black (African-American History) Month: February 2012," *United States Census Bureau*, January 4, 2012, accessed May 1, 2014, [http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/facts\\_for\\_features\\_special\\_editions/cb12-ff01.html](http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/cb12-ff01.html).

Table 3: Employment Status

Employment Status	Black	Latino	Asian
In Labor Force	62.0%	67.5%	65.3%
Civilian Labor Force	61.5%	67.1%	65.0%
Employed	51.2%	59.5%	60.4%
Unemployed	10.3%	7.6%	4.6%
Private Wage and Salary Workers	76.8%	83.2%	82.8%
Government Workers	19.7%	10.3%	11.5%
Self-employed	3.4%	6.4%	5.4%

(Source: United States Census Bureau 2013) <sup>19</sup>

To further highlight this point, discrimination and marginalization are sometimes barriers for ethnic and racial minorities seeking to escape poverty according to research provided by McGraw-Hill.

- African American children are three times more likely to live in poverty than Caucasian children. American Indian/Alaska Native, Hispanic, Pacific Islander, and Native Hawaiian families are more likely than Caucasian and Asian families to live in poverty.<sup>20</sup>
- Minorities are more likely to receive high-cost mortgages: African Americans (53 percent) and Latinos (43 percent), in comparison to Caucasians (18 percent).<sup>21</sup>
- Unemployment rates for African Americans are typically double those of Caucasian Americans. African American men working full time earn 72 percent of the average earnings of comparable Caucasian men and 85 percent of the earnings of Caucasian women.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> “Ethnic and Racial Minorities & Socioeconomic Status,” *American Psychological Association*, May 1, 2014, <https://www.apa.org/pi/ses/resources/publications/factsheet-erm.aspx>.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

Again, as the data presents, low socioeconomic factors and social divisions are affiliated mostly with Blacks and Hispanics. Those two groups are significantly living in lower socioeconomic statuses compared to Asian Americans.

### *Cultural Factors*

In this study, cultural factors will be largely defined as the role that identifies the aforementioned minority groups. The undermining determinants for individual roles can result from the groups' behaviors that can originate from their ethnic views, attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, practices, and religion. This shows that these cultural factors also influence and affect the voting behavior of racial minorities. It can also be seen that voters belonging to a particular ethnic group are more likely to vote for candidates belonging to the same ethnic group, as can be seen from Obama's presidential campaigns. Furthermore, where there is a greater proportion of the ethnic population under recent immigration status, there is a greater number showing ethnic voting homogeneity together as a group.

From the socioeconomic factors, the extent of the effectiveness of these cultural variables varies for each racial ethnic group. For example, in many Asian countries, citizens are not as involved in the political spectrum because of the belief that politics is corrupt as well as handled by the upper class.

A common political culture by no means suggests that all Americans think alike. Some are conservative and tend to vote Republican. Some are liberal and tend to vote Democratic. Some have more negative attitudes toward public officials than do others. These attitudes determine how Americans participate, whom they vote for, and what political parties they

support. Many factors — including family, gender, religion, race and ethnicity, and region — all contribute to American political attitudes and behavior.

As a general rule, for the past half-century African Americans have been the most loyal Democrats than any other identifiable group. Some experts believe that this loyalty is weakening, but recent elections have confirmed the strong tendency for Black Americans to vote Democratic.<sup>23</sup> Latinos as a whole have a tendency to vote Democratic, but the relationship is not as strong as it is for Blacks. To further complicate matters, the various Latino groups have very different voting patterns. For example, Cuban Americans overall have a strong tendency to vote Republican, and Mexican Americans have an equally strong tendency to vote Democratic. Studies indicate that Asian Americans tend to vote conservative, but 21<sup>st</sup> century presidential elections are questioning this loyalty.<sup>24</sup>

If ethnic identification were not a significant cultural phenomenon, with little attachment to stratification and political processes, we would expect the long-term outcome to show the gradual weakening and eventual disappearance of race and ethnicity as distinct groups with clear boundaries.<sup>25</sup> However, this is not the case. Many ethnic minority groups hold onto their heritage and their background. When they look to become more politically active, they do so without the cost of losing their identity.<sup>26</sup> For example, recent immigrants from Asia and Latin America are more likely to claim national-origin identities.

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<sup>23</sup> “What Factors Shape Attitude?” *Independence Hall Association*, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.ushistory.org/gov/4b.asp>.

<sup>24</sup> Taeku Lee and Karthick Ramakrishnan. “Asian Americans Turn Democratic,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 23, 2012, <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/nov/23/opinion/la-oe-lee-asian-american-voters-20121123>.

<sup>25</sup> Anthony Daniel Perez and Charles Hirschman, “The Changing Racial and Ethnic Composition of the US Population: Emerging American Identities,” *NCBI*, March 2009, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2882688/>.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

Currently, the largest influx of immigrants coming to the United States is from Latin America and Asia. These two groups, as a result, are in comparison unfamiliar and unaccustomed to the American culture and political life. As immigrants, they are also more likely to be focused on integral factors such as finding employment or securing a place for themselves in society.<sup>27</sup> This is affecting the voter turnout during election times, as data reveals the low turnout ratio for these groups. Eligible immigrants have been shown to vote less than others in some studies.<sup>28</sup> Various reasons have been put forward to explain this, including the lack of democratic traditions in some regions of the world, the lack of trust in institutions or differences in political culture. Differences in voting patterns across sub-groups of immigrants are not often reported due to small sample sizes. Thus, the cultural variable is an influential factor when it comes to minority voting.

In order to measure this variable, I used the impact of the role of political party factors and issues that are most pressing for each ethnic group as the prime methods. I also kept in mind U.S. socialization factors such as citizenship status and the adaptability to American culture as prime methods. These observations allow us to analyze each ethnic group's voter preferences for a particular party.

For Asian Americans, the results were quite surprising. According to a NAAS survey in 2009, a randomly selected group of 5,000 individuals were asked if the status of a citizenship was a significant barrier when it came to voting.<sup>29</sup> Since Asians are the largest incoming group of

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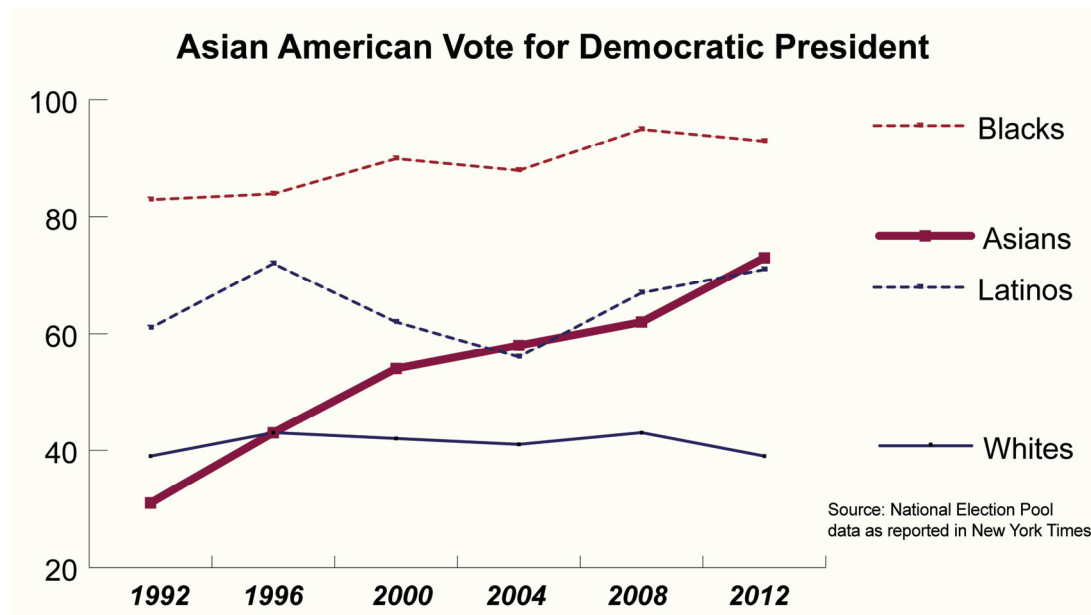
<sup>27</sup> Sharanjit Uppal and Sebastian LaRochelle-Cote, "Factors associated with voting," *Statistics Canada*, February 24, 2012, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75-001-x/2012001/article/11629-eng.htm>.

<sup>28</sup> Erik Voeten, "Asian Americans Voted Democrat: We Should Not Be Surprised," *The Monkey Cage*, November 29, 2012, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://themonkeycage.org/2012/11/29/asian-americans-voted-democrat-we-should-not-be-surprised/>.

<sup>29</sup> Kelli M Rucker, "Why do Asian Americans get involved in politics: 2008 NAAS Survey highlights," *Asian Week*, April 22, 2009, accessed May 1, 2014,

immigrants, citizenship and registration was seen to have been a big issue. Yet, responses revealed that 63% of the adult Asian Americans are citizens and 81% of that group was registered voters.<sup>30</sup> This shows that Asians are interested in American politics, but there has not been much coverage or focus on trying to target these voters specifically.

Furthermore, in terms of partisanship, Asian Americans most identify as Democrats than as Republican, 32% to 14%, respectively. One in five identify themselves as Independents and the largest number of respondents, thirty-five percent, do not identify themselves as Democrat, Republican, or Independent.<sup>31</sup> This is a significant change from the past when Asians were more highly in favor for the Republican Party, as depicted below in Figure 1.<sup>32</sup>



<http://www.asianweek.com/2009/04/22/why-do-asian-americans-get-involved-in-politics-2008-naas-survey-highlights/>.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Erik Voeten. "Asian Americans Voted Democrat: We Should Not Be Surprised."

There are several cultural explanations that attempt to answer this question. For one, Asian Americans, at least those who come to America searching for opportunities, generally come from countries having a significantly less support for individualism and less aversion to the government.<sup>33</sup> As a result, they shun the Republican Party- the conservative and strict exclusions portrayed by the Republican's immigration policies are also a great factor.

President Obama's administration is notable to mention, as there was a significant rise in the number of Asian Americans appointed from Cabinet positions to the World Bank.<sup>34</sup> President Obama had utilized and brought up topics that matter to Asian Americans, such as healthcare, education, immigration, and foreign policy.<sup>35</sup>

For Hispanics, the Pew Hispanic Research Center recently reported the ranks for the most pressing issues for this population: education, jobs, health, and immigration, respectively.<sup>36</sup> In terms of partisanship, 67% of Latinos claimed to be Democratic while 38% favored the Republican Party.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, unskilled and low-skilled immigrants are, and always have been, natural constituents of the Democrats. Their more highly skilled, and even affluent, descendants tend to remain Democrats.<sup>38</sup>

And as Table 1 above depicts, Latinos have generally favored the Democratic Party, although there was a slight drop during the 2004 election.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Taeku Lee and Karthick Ramakrishnan. "Asian Americans Turn Democratic."

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Mark H. Lopez, Ana Gonzalez-Barrera, and Seth Motel, "As Deportations Rise to Record Levels, Most Latinos Oppose Obama's Policy," *Pew Research Center*, December 28, 2011, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2011/12/28/as-deportations-rise-to-record-levels-most-latinos-oppose-obamas-policy/>.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Paul Mirengoff, "The Hispanic Vote in Presidential Elections," *Power Line*, May 16, 2013, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.powerlineblog.com/archives/2013/05/the-hispanic-vote-in-presidential-elections.php>.



Past studies and research present that the main divider between Latinos to choose the Democratic Party over the Republican Party is based on the differing views on illegal immigration.<sup>39</sup> Eighty-one percent of Latinos further believe that unauthorized immigrants should not be deported, which is a contradictory view and rhetoric said by the Republican Party.<sup>40</sup> Because immigration is a very big issue for many Latinos, especially those residing close to the U.S.- Mexico border, it is no surprise that they will refer to this as one of their biggest concerns.

Concerning the Blacks, they are notable for having the longest role in history as a minority group in both major political parties. After the Civil War, almost all Blacks had considered themselves Republicans, as it had been the Republican Party that had supported their freedom from slavery.<sup>41</sup> This affiliation started to change during the Great Depression era with Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal Program. For the Black community, this program had helped them find jobs. As a result, this factor persuaded 71% of the African Americans to vote for a Democrat for president. Furthermore, in 1948, Democrat President Harry Truman gained their favor when he ordered the desegregation of the military in addition to an executive order affecting racial discrimination of federal employment.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore in the election of 1964, the presidential campaign between the Senator Barry Goldwater and President Lyndon B. Johnson visibly alienated and made more blacks abandon the Republican Party for the Democratic Party. For this election, black voters had cast 94% of their votes for the reelection of President

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> "Black Affiliation," *New York Times*, September 19, 1996, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/09/19/us/gop-tries-hard-to-win-black-votes-but-recent-history-works-against-it.html>.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

Johnson.<sup>43</sup> Primarily, the black voters had dismissed accepting Senator Goldwater as their president because of his outspoken support for states' rights and his opposition to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, an issue that was of utmost importance for blacks during the time.<sup>44</sup> With this departure from the Republican Party, it was seen that by 2012 only 16% of African Americans considered themselves Republicans. Although 88% of African Americans voted for Democrat John Kerry in 2004, 44% consider themselves to have a moderate political viewpoint. Over the last 40 years Black Americans have consistently voted overwhelmingly for the Democratic presidential candidate.<sup>45</sup>

#### *Political Organization Participation Factors*

As for political organization participation factors, this variable focuses on the political participation of racial minorities in civic organizations and how it translates into voting behavior. It can encompass different forms of civic engagement such as organizational activities, charities, protest, lobbying, political campaigns and how these activities influence voting turnout and voting behavior. These factors such as levels of civic engagement, formal obstacles are in large, efforts by political institutions to mobilize people. The most significant political factor affecting participation is the question on whether people are mobilized by parties, candidates, interest groups, or social movements. It is assumed that people are much more likely to participate when someone—preferably someone they know—asks them to get involved.

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<sup>43</sup> Leah M. Wright, "Conscience of a Black Conservative: The 1964 Election and the Rise of the National Negro Republican Assembly," *Federal History*, 2009, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://shfg.org/shfg/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/4-Wright-final-design-pp32-45.pdf>.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

Concerning Latinos, the earliest Mexican American political organization worked to fight against discrimination. For example, there had been active participation among Mexican Americans residing in Southwest United States to become politically independent from their dominating white landowners.<sup>46</sup> Organizations such as the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and the American GI Forum worked to stem discrimination against Mexican Americans following World War II.<sup>47</sup> Recently, Latino political strategy has called for organizations that promote voting along ethnic lines and to focus on civil rights laws to ensure fair access to the political system. An acknowledgeable organization for this strategy has been the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) in playing a key role for the community.

For Black voters, the greatest form of political participation has been through civil-society organizations. Because of their long history in the country and the many movements for desegregation and equality, there are numerous organizations active, even to this day. I will use three organizations as an example to support this particular factor. Among the most famous is probably the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, or the NAACP. The mission of their organization is “to ensure the political, educational, social and economic equality rights of all persons and to eliminate racial hatred and racial discrimination.”<sup>48</sup> Another important organization is called the National Urban League, where their mission is to provide policies in an attempt to improve the lives of millions of people nationwide.<sup>49</sup> Finally, another significant organization to mention is the United Negro College

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<sup>46</sup> Theodore J. Lowi, Benjamin Ginsberg, Kenneth A. Shepsle, and Stephen Ansolabehere, *American Government: Power and Purpose*, 12<sup>th</sup> ed., (New York: Norton, 2002), 163.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> “National Association for the Advancement of Colored People,” accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.naacp.org/>.

<sup>49</sup> “National Urban League,” accessed May 1, 2014, <http://nul.iamempowered.com/>.

Fund (UNCF) where their primary goal is to enhance the education and service levels for the African Americans.<sup>50</sup>

For Asian Americans, political organizations seem to be more minimal compared to the other two ethnic groups. Asian organizations that do exist usually center around cultural and ethnic issues. Politically, the most notable is the Asian American Legal Defense & Education Fund. It is notable for being the first legal rights organization to serve Asian Americans emphasizing that the law should be used as a tool to achieve social and economic justice for the community.<sup>51</sup>

Other significant political organization to mention are the various Asian American Alliance (AAA) groups existent throughout the country. There are many such groups with various missions that focus on education, economy, and health. During election season, they also promote voting and relevant issues. With a mission to empower the Asian American vote, they have attempted numerous efforts to address this issue. For example, in 2008, a number of AAA groups had registered voters in Asian communities, monitored poll sites, and conducted exit polling on Election Day to protect the Asian Americans vote across the nation. They recognized that empowering the Asian American vote is a method for ordinary citizens to engage in politics and create their own change on a community level.<sup>52</sup> All of these organizations focus on facilitating their ethnic groups to participate in civic and legislative discussions in the United States.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> “United Negro College Fund,” accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.uncf.org/>.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> David Zhou, “The Asian American Grassroots,” *Columbia Spectator*, October 26, 2013, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.columbiaspectator.com/2008/10/26/asian-american-grassroots>.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

Once again, it can be seen that participation in political organizations influence voters and affect they way they choose to or not to vote in the specific manner that they do. All of the factors influence voting behavior, although some factors hold a different weight for each group.

### **Alternative Explanations**

Much of the existing research and knowledge to this research focuses on the individual person. There have been two major characterizations of voting behavior, the general attitudinal factors of party identification and the general ideological dispositions.

#### *Party Identification*

Party identification is an important attitude factor that influences the voters' decisions in election periods. As most voters identify themselves between one of the two major political parties, it is the basic partisan loyalties that influence their overall behavior and way of thinking.<sup>54</sup> Party identification is usually measured by asking individuals which party they consider themselves to be the most affiliated with among choices of Democrats, Republicans, or independents.<sup>55</sup> Those voters who indicate a specific party are then asked to rate their level of loyalty to those parties; they are asked whether or not they consider themselves to be a strong or weak Democrat or Republican.<sup>56</sup> (Those claiming to be independents are asked whether they feel closer to one of the two major parties.) The results are annotated into a sevenfold classification system: strong Democrats, weak Democrats, independents closer to Democrats, independents not

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<sup>54</sup> "Elections and Voting Behavior," *Pearson*, 2010, accessed May 1, 2014, [http://wps.ablongman.com/long\\_edwards\\_ga\\_12/33/8516/2180188.cw/index.html](http://wps.ablongman.com/long_edwards_ga_12/33/8516/2180188.cw/index.html).

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

closer to either party, independents closer to the Republicans, weak Republicans, and strong Republicans.<sup>57</sup>

Because of the importance of party identification in deciding how to vote, the parties tend to rely on groups that lean heavily in their favor in order to form a basic coalition.<sup>58</sup> Studies suggest that it is possible to manipulate a candidate's appearance and public delivery in a way that affects voters' choices. For example, people may be swayed by an individual candidate's image- the most influential components are said to be that of integrity, reliability, and competence.<sup>59</sup>

### *Party Ideology*

Voters also tend to have a general ideological orientation and disposition concerning certain issues. Some voters may be strongly liberal, others are strongly conservative, or others even moderate. These facts influence voting behavior as well. The effect of ideology on the presidential vote occurs for several reasons. First, it affects positions on specific issues. Thus, voters who hold strongly conservative views are likely to take conservative positions on certain issues that may arise. These positions they take influence how voters cast their ballots during the presidential elections.<sup>60</sup>

Secondly, voters may also have a general ideological perception of a candidate. This perception can be made even if the voters themselves are unsure exactly what the candidate's position is on that specific policy issues.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Charles Prysby and Carmine Scavo, "Voting Behavior in the 2008 Election," *ICPSR*, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/instructors/setups2008/voting.jsp>.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> "Elections and Voting Behavior," *Pearson*, 2010, accessed May 1, 2014, [http://wps.ablongman.com/long\\_edwards\\_ga\\_12/33/8516/2180188.cw/index.html](http://wps.ablongman.com/long_edwards_ga_12/33/8516/2180188.cw/index.html).

## **Contribution**

These two aforementioned factors are more general and long-term, influencing the voting behavior primarily by affecting the attitudes that are more immediate to the vote decision in a particular time period. These factors vary in their stability over time, as each election is short-term. Although these theories present a strong assessment for voting behavior in the short-run, they do not provide an explanation for the long run.

This research will thus present a different method to classify and examine the voting behavior. Specifically, it will seek to identify the voting patterns and reasons for the votes or non-votes for a particular group of people based on race. I will seek to use the three factors of socioeconomic reasons, cultural contributions, and political organizations as the main reasons that affect the voting decisions for Black Americans, Latino Americans, and Asian Americans. My analysis of voting behavior will offer a different perspective of minority-voting groups as a whole. While some of these explanations may help clarify some of the issues I seek to investigate, my explanations will provide a more comprehensive view than other pre-existing explanations.

## **Methodology**

The numerous explanations and debates about the election found in the print and online media constitute particularly fertile ground for a study of the changing role of the minority populations in presidential elections in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Existing literature, online articles, postings, commentary gathered from the mainstream media and books constitute the main source of the primary data used in this research.

The arguments and explanations I offer are based on my analysis of literature reviews and articles that have been published or posted. The most frequently referenced sources include newspaper and online articles. Much of the literature focused on Barack Obama's presidency and the landscape of race in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Enid Logan's *At this Defining Moment* and Donald R. Kinder and Allison Dale-Riddle's *The End of Race?* focused more on President Obama's presidential elections and the election as a significant period or defining moment for race, in particular for the Black population. Some analysis provided a thorough analysis of the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections, providing statistical data for each group's support and affiliation during the election. Other literature focused on the role of the campaigns and the president.<sup>61</sup> Further still, research has addressed the perspective of the American voters- their voting ideology and voting behavior.<sup>62</sup> (*Who Counts?, The Changing American Voter*).

Numerous sources were referenced including those from newspapers (*Wall Street Journal, New York Times, Washington Post, Chicago Tribune*), newsmagazines (*Time, Newsweek, National Review, The Atlantic, Weekly Standard, The Nation*), political blogs (*Huffington Post, Real Clear Politics, Politico.com*), and other major media outlets (Associated Press, Reuters, Fox News, National Public Radio, CNN, CBS News, ABC News, MSNBC). After identifying key themes found in each of the discussions, I linked those observations to wider discourses about factors contributing to the voting behavior of minority voters in the United States.

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<sup>61</sup> Erik Jones, *The 2008 Presidential Elections: A Story in Four Acts* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), Nelson W. Polsby and Aaron B. Wildavsky, *Presidential Elections: Strategies of American Electoral Politics* (New York: Scribner, 1984),

James E. Campbell, *The American Campaign: US Presidential Campaign and the National Vote* (College Station Texas: Texas A&M University, 2008),

John H. Kessel, *Presidential Campaign Politics*, (Pacific Grove: Brooks/Cole Pub. Co., 1992).

<sup>62</sup> Robert Chambers, *Who Counts? The Quiet Revolution of Participation and Numbers* (Brighton: Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex, 2007),

Norman H. Nie, Sidney Verba, and John R. Petrocik, *The Changing American Voter* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976).



## **Chapter Outlines**

Chapter Two will highlight the 2008 presidential campaign. It will explain the role of the three independent variables for each of the three ethnic groups. By examining and analyzing Obama's unique policies and his campaign, it will seek to identify the influence of his campaign on the aforementioned three variables.

Chapter Three will highlight the 2012 presidential campaign in a similar method. It will further compare and contrast the 2008 and 2012 presidential campaigns in terms of the independent variables.

Finally, Chapter Four will tie the two chapters together and make a final conclusion. In the process, it will give a hypothetical approach and outlook for future elections to come and the influence of the minority voters in terms of the three variables.

## Chapter Two: 2008 Presidential Election

The electorate in the 2008 US presidential election was the most racially and ethnically diverse in U.S. history, with nearly one-in-four votes cast by non-whites, according to a new analysis of Census Bureau data by the Pew Research Center.<sup>63</sup> The nation's three biggest minority groups—Blacks, Latinos, and Asians—each accounted for unprecedented shares of the presidential vote in 2008.

More than 131 million people, or 63% of eligible voters, cast their ballot in the 2008 Presidential election, an increase of nine million votes over 2004. According to the election results, Obama won the presidency by approximately nine million votes compared to his opponent. It can be seen that this unusually high margin was due primarily to the enfranchisement of African-Americans, Latinos, Asians, and other non-white Americans into the political system and the overwhelming support of these groups for the Democratic candidate.<sup>64</sup>

Overall, whites made up 76.3% of the record 131 million people who voted in November 2008's presidential election, while Blacks made up 12.1%, Latinos 7.4% and Asians 2.5%.<sup>65</sup> The white share is the lowest ever, yet it is still higher than the 65.8% white share of the total U.S. population.<sup>66</sup> The unprecedented diversity of this election was driven by increases both in the number and in the turnout rates of minority eligible voters.

The levels of participation by Black, Latino, and Asian eligible voters all increased from 2004 to 2008, reducing the voter participation gap between themselves and white eligible voters. This was particularly true for black eligible voters. Their voter turnout rate increased 4.9

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<sup>63</sup> Mark H. Lopez and Paul Taylor, "Dissecting the 2008 Electorate: Most Diverse in History," *Pew Research Center*, April 30, 2009, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2009/04/30/dissecting-the-2008-electorate-most-diverse-in-us-history/>

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

percentage points, from 60.3% in 2004 to 65.2% in 2008, nearly matching the voter turnout rate of white eligible voters (66.1%). For Latinos, participation levels also increased, with the voter turnout rate rising 2.7 percentage points, from 47.2% in 2004 to 49.9% in 2008. Among Asians, voter participation rates increased from 44.6% in 2004 to 47.0% in 2008. Meanwhile, among white eligible voters, the voter turnout rate fell slightly, from 67.2% in 2004 to 66.1% in 2008.<sup>67</sup>

## **Blacks**

### *Socioeconomic status factors*

The election of the first black U.S. president in 2008 brought unparalleled attention to Black voters during the time. Along with the intense scrutiny Blacks found themselves under after Barack Obama's historic win came stereotypes about the African-American electorate. There's a wide perception that President Obama has Blacks to thank for winning the 2008 election. While an overwhelming majority of Blacks did back Obama then, *New York Times* columnist Charles M. Blow reported that "even if every black person in America had stayed home on Election Day, Obama would still have won the presidency."<sup>68</sup>

Furthermore, it is interesting to point out that in 2008, much of the surge in youth voting was driven by an increase in voting among African-American youth. Since 2000, the African-American youth turnout rate has increased by sixteen percentage points – the largest increase of any youth minority group since 1972. In the 2008 election, young African-Americans had the highest rate of voter registration among all races of their age group (63.9%).<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Charles M. Blow, "Election Data Dive," *The New York Times*, November 9, 2012, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/10/opinion/blow-election-data-dive.html>.

<sup>69</sup> "Trends by Race, Ethnicity, Gender," *The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning And Engagement*, January 9, 2012, accessed May 1, 2014,

In terms of socioeconomic factors, Blacks ranked Jobs/Economy followed by Education and Healthcare as their greatest concerns. As the data shows from the previous chapter, Blacks are the most vulnerable to economic crisis. They are at the bottom end of the social ladder, and typically, their education level is the lowest as well. Senator Obama's campaign called for a change in this socioeconomic status, and the Blacks took this to heart. To them, voting would give them a chance to uplift their socioeconomic status. The enormous amount of support and voting results show how important this factor was to them.

### *Cultural Factors*

Among the factors that made the 2008 presidential race historic are that it marked the first time that a racial/ethnic minority became the presidential nominee of a major political party, and that this person won the presidential race. These factors fueled high voter turnout among African-American voters. President Obama himself had stated that attracting the minority votes, particularly the Blacks, had been a part of his campaign strategy. He had declared, "African Americans will rally behind me once they see that I can win the white vote."<sup>70</sup> Though one can argue the same may not have occurred if he had been on the Republican ticket. An example of this can be seen by the lack of support from the African-American community for African-American Republican National Committee Chairman, Michael Steele. Though he is of African-American descent, his party's interests are far removed from the interests, as a whole, of the African-American community. While current data reflects the opinions of African-Americans as

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<http://www.civicyouth.org/quick-facts/235-2/#10>.

<sup>70</sup> "Racial Context and the 2008 and 2012 US Presidential Elections," *Athens Journal of Social Sciences*, January 2014, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.atiner.gr/journals/social/2014-1-1-2-Liu.pdf>

one ethnic/racial group, it does not necessarily take into account, double, or multiple minorities.<sup>71</sup>

### *Political Participation Factors*

Especially for the Black voters, political organizations and political participation are significant factors. As the organizations provide much assistance and insight, they influence greatly on how and why they should vote the way do. The most famous Black organized political group is the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, also known as the NAACP. The NAACP is a civil rights group that promotes a racial and progressive agenda. It is also significant in the way that it is America's oldest and largest political organization.<sup>72</sup> With approximately 500,000 members worldwide, its mission is "to ensure the political, educational, social, and economic equality of rights of all persons and to eliminate racial hatred and racial discrimination."<sup>73</sup> In order to combat what it views as racial inequity, the NAACP actively lobbies for the "enactment and enforcement of federal, state, and local laws securing civil rights." The civil-rights organization is composed of several departments. One of which is the NAACP Legal Department focuses on court cases of broad application to minorities, such as perceived discrimination in employment, government and education. The NAACP also works to improve public education at the local, state and federal levels. Each state has its own NAACP chapter. It also educates and reaches out to fellow Black voters, with the main strategy and desire to bring voters out to election polls to vote on the favored legislation and leaders.

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<sup>71</sup> "Black (African-American History) Month: February 2012," *United States Census Bureau*

<sup>72</sup> "NAACP," *Group Snoop*, accessed May 1, 2014,

<http://www.groupsnoop.org/National+Association+for+the+Advancement+of+Colored+People>.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

Senator Obama took the NAACP organization to his advantage, as he went before them in 2008 during his political campaign. His campaign speech was very relatable to everyone's experience and it gathered much praise and appreciation from the crowd. Obama's rhetoric on change and a new future also drew in attention from the crowd as he stated,

“That's where change begins. And that, after all, is the true genius of America – not that America is, but that America will be; not that we are perfect, but that we can make ourselves more perfect; that brick by brick, calloused hand by calloused hand, people who love this country can change it. And that's our most enduring responsibility – the responsibility to future generations. We have to change this country for them. We have to leave them a planet that's cleaner, a nation that's safer, and a world that's more equal and more just...

So I'm grateful to you for all you've done for this campaign, but we've got work to do and we cannot rest. And I know that if you put your shoulders to the wheel of history and take up the cause of perfecting our union just as earlier generations of Americans did before you; if you take up the fight for opportunity and equality and prosperity for all; if you march with me and fight with me, and get your friends registered to vote, and if you stand with me this fall – then not only will we help close the responsibility deficit in this country, and not only will we help achieve social justice and economic justice for all, but I will come back here next year on the 100th anniversary of the NAACP, and I will stand before you as the President of the United States of America. And at that moment, you and I will truly know that a new day has come in this country we love. Thank you.”<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Lynn Sweet, “Obama's NAACP Speech,” *Chicago Sun Times*, July 14, 2008, accessed May 1, 2014 [http://blogs.suntimes.com/sweet/2008/07/obamas\\_naacp\\_speech\\_cincinnati.html](http://blogs.suntimes.com/sweet/2008/07/obamas_naacp_speech_cincinnati.html).

Another significant political organization is the National Urban League. The League is significant in enabling African Americans to secure economic self-reliance, parity, power and civil rights. Many people rely on this organization for information and assistance, it is an influential organization for this demographic. The Urban League has signature programs in areas concerning education, jobs, housing, and health. Thus, it is no surprise that then Senator Obama reached out to the Urban League during his presidential campaign in 2008. He especially touched upon the significance of the League and the specific areas it targeted in helping to highlight his speech as he had stated,

“I stand here before you today feeling no small amount of gratitude. Because I know that my story, and so many other improbable stories, would not be possible without all that the Urban League has done to put opportunity within reach of every American. It's because of the doors you've opened, because of the battles you've fought and won, because of the sacrifices of people in this room and all those who came before you, that I come here today as a candidate for President of United States of America. And I'll never forget how my journey began. I'll never forget that I got my start as a foot soldier in the movement the Urban League built - the movement to bring opportunity to every corner of our cities.”<sup>75</sup>

## **Latinos**

With the 2008 campaign, Latino voters have moved sharply into the Democratic camp in the past two years, reversing a pro-GOP tide that had been evident among Latinos earlier in the decade. 65% of Latino registered voters say they identify with or lean toward the Democratic

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<sup>75</sup> “Remarks at the 2008 National Urban League Annual Conference in Orlando, Florida,” *The American Presidency Project*, August 2, 2008, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=77758>

Party, compared with just 26% who identify with or lean toward the GOP.<sup>76</sup> This drastic party change shows how a group can change their ideal vote to a different candidate according to their campaign. This 39-percentage point Democratic Party identification edge is larger than it has been at any time this decade; as recently as 2006, the partisan gap was just 21 percentage points.<sup>77</sup>

The movement to the Democrats appears driven in part by an overall dissatisfaction with the state of the country—70% of Latino registered voters say the country is going in the wrong direction—and also with a growing view among Latino voters that the Democratic Party is better attuned to the concerns of their community. More than half of Latino registered voters (55%) say this, while just 6% say the Republican Party is more concerned about Latinos.<sup>78</sup>

Latino voters increasingly identify with the Democratic Party. Among those registered voters who self-identify with either political party or who say they lean toward that party, Democrats now hold a 39 percentage point advantage, larger than at any time over the past decade, with 65% of registered voters identifying themselves as Democrats or leaning toward the Democratic Party, and 26% identifying as Republicans or leaning toward the Republican Party. This trend of growing identification with the Democratic Party is also observed among the general population. According to the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, among all registered voters, Democrats hold a 16-point advantage with 53% of registered voters identifying as Democrats or leaning toward the Democratic Party (up six-percentage points over 2004), and 37% identifying as Republicans or leaning toward the Republican Party (down four-percentage points since 2004).<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.



Despite the allegations of brown-black antagonism in the mainstream media, 67% of Latinos voted for Obama, an unexpected 14-point increase from Latino support since Kerry. A similar pattern can be observed in the group of people classified in “other races,” with a 12 percent increase on support for the Democratic candidate (66%), after a steady decline since 1996. Even if the South-border wall and the immigration raids could have prompted Latinos to withdraw their support for Republicans, this does not necessarily clarify other groups’ overwhelming support for Obama. Considering those who identify with a specific political party, and excluding party leaders, over half of all Latino registered voters identify themselves as Democrats (51%). Just 16% of registered voters identify themselves as Republicans, and 23% identify as independents.<sup>80</sup>

This gradual change in parties and support for Obama’s 2008 campaign shows that the combined effect of race and rhetoric of the campaign, which created a strong signal of political inclusion, were significant and influential factors.<sup>81</sup>

### *Socioeconomic status factors*

According to the Pew Research Center for Hispanic Trends Projects, Latinos registered voters ranked education, the cost of living, jobs and health care as the most important issues in the 2008 presidential campaign, with crime lagging a bit behind those four and the war in Iraq and immigration still farther behind.<sup>82</sup> On each of these issues, Obama was strongly favored over his opponent McCain—by lopsided ratios ranging from about three-to-one on education, jobs,

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Camila Vergara, “The Role of Race in the 2008 Presidential Election,” *Mechanics of Power*, February 13, 2009, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://mechanicsofpower.wordpress.com/2009/02/13/the-role-of-race-in-the-2008-presidential-election/>.

<sup>82</sup> Mark H. Lopez and Susan Minushkin, “2008 National Survey of Latinos: Hispanic Voter Attitudes,” *Pew Research Center*, July 24, 2008, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2008/07/24/2008-national-survey-of-latinos-hispanic-voter-attitudes/>.

health care, the cost of living and immigration, to about two-to-one on Iraq and crime.<sup>83</sup> Overall, Latinos believe that Obama will be able to better address issues dealing with the economy and jobs. Since these issues are most important for Hispanics, they supported the candidate they thought would be able to best regard and consider their situation. Another interesting point is that the highly ranked issues deal with matters of socioeconomic status factors. This shows the importance and dominant role of this factor for voters.

### *Cultural Factors*

According to Jerome R. Corsi, Obama's "Yes We Can" logo could be traced to César Chávez's "sí, se puede," a Spanish slogan that was frequently used in former immigration rallies.<sup>84</sup> It seems that the emotional attachment to a historic Latino symbol of possibility and inclusion was likely a crucial factor for the Latino voters. Obama's strategy and idea seems to have played a crucial impact. Literally, "sí, se puede" means "it can be done." By using the similar "yes we can" saying, Obama made himself part of that common social identity, of those excluded from political power. In another view, it seems that race played a fundamental role in this identity-formation process by which the excluded minorities –African-American, Latino, Asian, and other– became the "we" and Obama their leader. In other words, the fact that Obama looked like them, "non-white," was a necessary element for this identification to occur. They were able to connect and understand more of who Obama was as a person. Moreover, this new common identity was constantly and carefully reinforced in Obama's speeches, in which he not

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Jerome R. Corsi, "The Obama Nation," *The New York Times*, August 12, 2008, accessed May 1, 2014, [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/13/books/chapters/chapter-obama-nation.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/13/books/chapters/chapter-obama-nation.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0).

only explicitly recognized the different racial/ethnic groups, but also united them under the concept of “we.”<sup>85</sup>

### *Political Participation Factors*

As mentioned in the first chapter, there are three main political organizations that have helped mobilize the Hispanic voters in the 2008 election. The League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) is the largest Latino civil rights and advocacy group in the United States. LULAC works to improve opportunities for Hispanic Americans, as stated in their mission statement. Because LULAC gains a lot of publicity and recognition from fellow Hispanics, they were able to play a big role in voter registration and access to voting polls. Furthermore, Obama was able to address LULAC and make a speech to them for his 2008 campaign. During this 15 minute speech, the senator recognized the people of LULAC and the problem facing the minority group. He understood that the problems would need to be addressed efficiently and immediately. He certainly rendered much pathos in his speech, and it was greatly to his favor. For example, he concluded with the following message,

“Ultimately, then, the danger to the American way of life is not that we will be overrun by those who do not look like us or do not yet speak our language. It will come if we fail to recognize the humanity of Cristina and her family - if we withhold from them the same opportunities we take for granted; or more broadly, if we stand idly by as our problems grow, as more and more Americans go without quality jobs, affordable health care, or the skills they need to get ahead in the 21st century. Because America can only prosper if all Americans prosper.

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<sup>85</sup> Camila Vergara, “The Role of Race in the 2008 Presidential Election.”

It goes back to the idea that's at the heart of LULAC - that it's all for one and one for all. That's the idea we need to reclaim in this country. And that's the idea that we can reclaim in this election.

But I can't do this on my own. I need your help. This election could well be decided by Latino voters. Every four years some of the closest contests take place in Florida, Colorado, Nevada, and New Mexico - states with large Latino communities. In 2004, 40,000 Latinos who were registered to vote in New Mexico didn't turn out on Election Day, and Senator Kerry lost that state by less than 6,000 votes. 6,000 votes. That's a small fraction of the number of Latinos who aren't even registered to vote in New Mexico today. So while I know how powerful a community you are, I also know how powerful you could be on November 4th if you translate your numbers into votes.

During the immigration marches back in 2006, we had a saying: "Today, we march. Tomorrow, we vote." Well, that was the time to march. And now comes the time to vote. And I truly believe that if we can register more Latinos, young and old, rich and poor, and turn them out to vote in the fall - then not only will we change the political map, and not only will I win the presidency, but you will finally have a government that represents all Americans. And then you and I - together - will bring about the kind of change we've been marching for and fighting for, and lift up all your communities and every corner of the United States of America."<sup>86</sup>

The Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) also made many efforts to garner political participation in the 2008 presidential election. In particular, MALDEF is an organization that strives to advocate voter's rights. For the 2008 election, MALDEF is

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<sup>86</sup> Obama, Barack, "Obama's Speech to LULAC," *Real Clear Politics*, July 8, 2008, accessed May 1, 2014, [http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2008/07/obamas\\_speech\\_to\\_lulac.html](http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2008/07/obamas_speech_to_lulac.html).

recognized for having secured unfettered access to voter registration materials and to the polling booths for Latino minority voters. MALDEF also stated that it is critical that its Latino population know about their rights and responsibilities as voters. For this, MALDEF had staffed election protection hotlines and information tables, while ensuring that important election information be translated into Spanish. On April 16, 2008, MALDEF's Washington D.C. office co-convened a roundtable discussion regarding legislative strategy to follow the Supreme Court's decision in Crawford upholding Indiana's voter identification law. From here, it is obvious that MALDEF plays a great role both for representing its minority views and getting them heard by politicians. Also significant, for the 2008 election cycle, each of the MALDEF regional and national offices devoted significant time and attention on voter protection before and during the November election. MALDEF had sent letters to election officials reminding them of their obligation to provide language assistance. The organization has also identified key states with high Latino citizen voting age populations (Nevada, New Mexico, Colorado, Texas, and Arizona). Additionally, MALDEF worked with other lawyers, law students, and advocates to monitor election day activities and to ensure fair access to polls. In this way, MALDEF was able to gather many voters and educate them in necessary needs about how voting and polls worked.<sup>87</sup>

### **Asian-Americans**

The Asian-American population is known to be one of the fastest growing segments both in the electorate and the overall nation. It was recorded that between 1999 and 2000, the Asian

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<sup>87</sup> "Voting Protection Efforts," MALDEF, accessed May 1, 2014, [http://maldef.org/voting\\_rights/public\\_policy/voter\\_protection/](http://maldef.org/voting_rights/public_policy/voter_protection/).

population more than doubled in 19 states.<sup>88</sup> Specifically, this population grew the fastest in key battleground states such as Nevada, New Hampshire, Florida, and Georgia.<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, in 2008, political commentators concluded that both presidential tickets should focus on Asian Americans in battleground states such as Virginia, Nevada, and Pennsylvania where their votes could be the deciding factor for either party. On November 4, final exit polls tallied that Obama won the Asian Americans vote 62% to 35%, compared to a 67% to 31% margin among Latinos, and 90% to 10% among African Americans.<sup>90</sup> Examining this, it is no surprise that the elections in current day must take account for the minority voters as those votes will definitely be able to change the entire game.

#### *Socioeconomic status factors*

Accounting for Asian-Americans by socioeconomic status this group, on average, is well off. According to a 2011 U.S. Labor Department report, Asian-Americans are more likely than either whites or blacks to be employed in the private sector, with more than 8 out of 10 employed Asian-Americans working for private companies. It was also reported that the number of Asian-owned businesses expanded at the rate of 40.4 percent, a rate that more than doubled the national average between 2002 and 2007. In short Asian-Americans are fairly well off in comparison to other minority groups in terms of socioeconomic, terms.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Molly Ball. "Asian Americans: 2012's Stealth Swing Vote?" *The Atlantic*, May 1, 2012, accessed May 1, 2014,

<http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2012/05/asian-americans-2012s-stealth-swing-vote/256567/>.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Thomas Chen, "Why Asian Americans Voted for Obama," *Perspective Magazine*, February 26, 2009, accessed May 1, 2014,

<http://www.perspy.com/?p=74>

<sup>91</sup> Leon Hadar, "The GOP's Asian-American Fiasco," *The American Conservative*, November 9, 2012, accessed May 1, 2014,

<http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/the-gops-asian-american-fiasco/>.

Moreover, 7.8 percent of jobs in high-tech industries are going to Asian-American workers, making them overrepresented there compared with their overall presence in the labor force (5 percent). Asian-Americans are similarly well represented in science, technology, engineering, and math occupations, accounting for more than 9 percent of jobs there.<sup>92</sup>

Comparing the Asian population's party stance and socioeconomic status, there is an interesting correlation. For one, the move toward the Democratic Party started during Bill Clinton's presidency. This had been a period when the Democratic Party developed a new pro-business image, economic growth was strong, Asian Americans naturalized in unprecedented numbers and Clinton made public efforts to woo them, including nominating the first Asian American to the Cabinet. As many Asians are firmly business-oriented, this factor certainly influenced their voting pattern. Another main reason for the growing support for Democrats among members of this electoral bloc is that that younger and more educated Asian-Americans are drifting by large numbers to Obama's party, very much like younger and more educated white Americans.

Asian Americans are a diverse community of people, who come from different countries and speak different languages and dialects. In the political arena, however, they share common views. During the presidential election, Asian Americans voted as a bloc for the same candidates and identified common reasons for their votes. Economy/Jobs was the dominant issue influencing the Asian American vote for President (66%) followed by Health Care (40%), Foreign Policy/War in Iraq (31%), Education (27%), and Civil Rights/Immigration Rights (23%).<sup>93</sup> Again, it can be seen here that Asian Americans take into great consideration the economy and jobs, and this is something that Obama tackled in his campaign when targeting the

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

Asian Americans- thus, it is no surprise that the Asian voters would vote for Obama and the Democratic Party.

### *Cultural factors*

At a gathering of 2000 Asian American leaders and activists in May 2008, Obama personally phoned in to declare, “I am a Pacific Islander...I consider myself one of you,” placating many who still harbored resentments that Obama neglected to mention “Asians” in some of his stump speeches stressing racial unity. After Obama’s historic victory, blogs and forums of the Asian American community were abuzz with excitement. The San Francisco Chronicle published an article trumpeting Obama as the first “Asian American” president. AsianWeek, a San Francisco-based newspaper serving the Asian/Pacific Islander American community, speculated about the prospect of the first real Asian American president in the near future.<sup>94</sup> Inspired by Obama’s multi-racial background, childhood story, and his message of change, this year’s election has witnessed both increased political activism and support for the Democratic ticket among Asian Americans.<sup>95</sup> This story highlights the cultural factor behind the 2008 campaign. Even to this day, Asians consider themselves as a minority, thus if there is a person to rise in great support and respect of the group, they are more or less respected. This was the case with Senator Obama. At first, he was not well known or considered for by the minority population. However, after this publication, he garnered extreme interest and publicity because of the support and interest he had shown in their issues and cultural sense of unity. Cultural factors are extremely important in the case of Asian Americans as it accounts for their way of thinking and acting in a certain way.

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<sup>94</sup> Thomas Chen. “Why Asian Americans Voted for Obama.”

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.



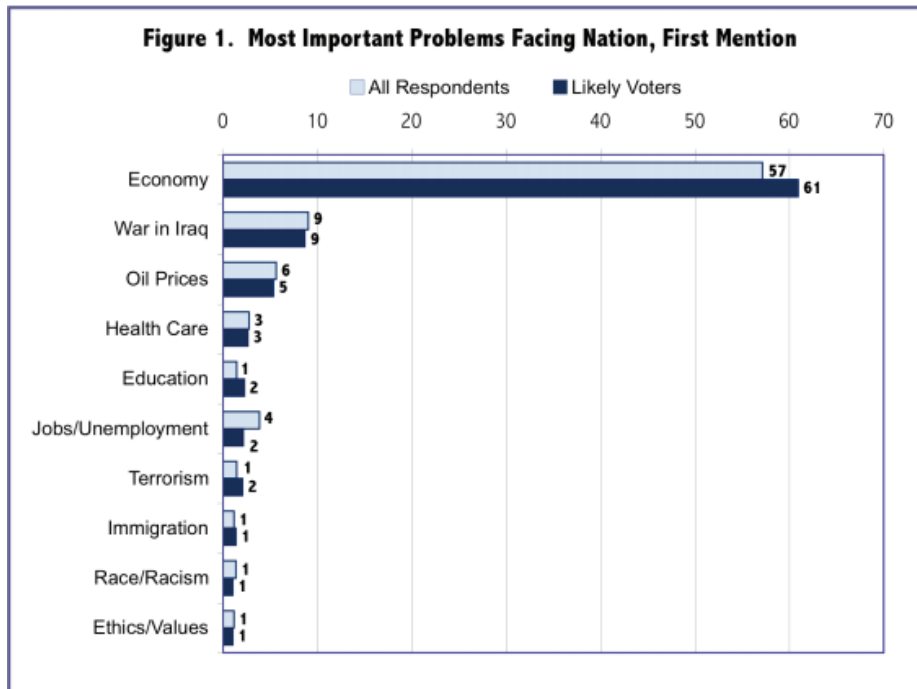
There is the lack of representation for Asian Americans in the political sphere. The concerns of Asian Americans are not in the agenda of many politicians in government. Because there is little to relate to in regards to public policy, there is no real incentive to vote. What was worse is the negative influence of campaign-finance investigation against Asian after the 1996 presidential elections. The attack on Asian Americans by political figures leads these individuals to lose faith in the system. When asked in a survey by the National Asian American Society what is the most important facing the United States today and to you personally, their majority response was the economy. However, there are not many politicians that have Asian small businesses in mind when writing up new policies. This lack of representation discourages Asian American from participating in American politics.<sup>96</sup>

While these statistics (below) show a drab future for Asian Americans in American politics, in actuality, Asian Americans are a growing ethnic group as well as a strong force. The highest turnout was present in the 2008 presidential election. While it seems that these obstacles hinder Asian Americans from fully participating in politics, there is a growing number of Asian Americans in office holding. As more Asian Americans participate in politics, the more opportunities they acquire to run for office. The increasing number of public figures shows that Asian Americans are not longer a passive and quiet folk but they are ready to speak out. This gives hope for Asian Americans as they become a growing force in political participation.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Jane Junn, Taeku Lee, S. Karthick Ramakrishnan, and Janelle Wong, "Asian Americans and the 2008 Election," *National Asian American Survey*, October 6, 2008, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.naasurvey.com/resources/Presentations/NAAS-National-report.pdf>.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.



(Source: NAA Survey)

The first factor one must consider is that there are many different ethnic groups within the Asian population a citizenship. One major qualification in order to vote is to be a United States citizen; however, there are many Asian Americans within America who have immigrated but have not earned citizenship. Because of this low rate of naturalization, Asian immigrants naturally are not qualified to vote. The Asian population has the highest number of individuals born abroad compared to any other ethnic group.<sup>98</sup> This explains why there are a substantial number of individuals who are not eligible to vote. However, even among those who are naturalized citizens, there still exist low rates of party affiliation and registration. Generally, Japanese-Americans are the most likely to register and to vote; Vietnamese and Korean-Americans rank consistently among the lowest.<sup>99</sup> Japanese-Americans are the only Asian-American group in which a majority was born in the United States. Citizens of Chinese ancestry

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

are still estimated to register at lower rates and Korean-Americans are less likely to turnout than other comparable Asians. These differences among the group are not easily noticeable when all Asian groups are lumped under one large label, namely Asian American.

There are some media accounts and scholarly articles which suggest that Asian Americans are less likely to participate in American politics because of their focus on the politics of their home countries. The survey included questions on whether respondents send money to their countries of origin, whether they have been in contact with friends and family, and whether they have participated in the politics of that country.

Nearly three quarters (74%) of respondents have been in contact with friends and family and one third (33%) have sent money to people in their home country. However, only 4 percent have participated in the politics of their home country. The figures are similar when looking only at adult citizens in our survey: 69 percent have been in contact with friends and family, 31 percent have sent money to people, and only 4 percent have been involved in the politics of their countries of origin.<sup>100</sup>

Most importantly, those who participate in the politics of their home countries are actually more likely to vote in the United States than those who do not (73% versus 67%).<sup>101</sup> Thus, participation in home country politics is not a deterrent to participation in the United States. Indeed, our results suggest that participation in one context may help increase participation in the other.

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

### *Political Participation Factors*

For the Asian minority voters, the Asian American Legal Defense & Education Fund is one of the most recognized organization that represents this group as a whole. The AALDEF is a New York based national organization founded in 1974. Its main goal and mission is to protect and promote the civil rights of Asian American by combining litigation, advocacy, education, and organization. In particular, AALDEF represents individuals and groups that are most directly affected by racial and economic injustice (especially those who are immigrants, the working poor, and those unable to speak English). For those people, AALDEF address the legal needs.

In recent years, AALDEF has been able to put in significant effort for this. For example, AALDEF has litigated precedent-setting cases and won millions of dollars in back wages and overtime pay for Asian immigrant workers in the restaurant, garment, hotel, construction and domestic service industries. By working in multiracial coalitions, AALDEF has brought Asian American perspectives to policy debates and organized campaigns to stop hate violence, police misconduct and human trafficking. After the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center, AALDEF defended the civil liberties of South Asians, Arabs and Muslims who were the targets of racial and ethnic profiling. AALDEF has worked with grassroots groups to promote educational equity and youth rights and to ensure that Asian Americans have a greater voice in the political process. AALDEF has trained hundreds of young lawyers and students through its internship programs, encouraging Asian Americans to use their legal skills to serve the community.

One of the most significant works of AALDEF is on its research about Asian American voters and their voting behavior. For one, there is relatively little data about the voting patterns of Asian Americans. Asian American voters often are overlooked by the mainstream media and

by candidates for political office. Mainstream exit polls typically report racial breakdowns for Whites, African Americans, Latinos and "others." In these times when the media neglect the Asian American vote, candidates are often follow suit.<sup>102</sup> In response, the AALDF has conducted similar polls targeted for the Asian population. Thus, these multilingual exit polls give a fuller and more accurate portrait of Asian American voters than polls conducted in English. AALDEF conducted its first exit poll in 1988 in New York City. In the 2008 elections, AALDEF's Asian American Exit Poll reported on the preferences of almost 17,000 Asian American voters in 11 states and Washington, D.C. With these polls, it becomes easier to understand voting patterns and behavior for Asian Americans.<sup>103</sup>

Another significant political organization to mention are the various Asian American Alliance groups existent throughout the country. Although there are many such groups with various missions, they focus mainly on education, economy, and health. During election season, they also promote voting and relevant issues. Thus, with a mission to empower the Asian American vote, they have attempted numerous efforts to address this issue. For example, in 2008, a number of AAA groups had registered voters in Asian communities, monitored poll sites, and conducted exit polling on Election Day to protect the Asian Americans vote across the nation. They recognized that empowering the Asian American vote is a method for ordinary citizens to engage in politics and create their own change on a community level.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> "The Asian American Vote in the 2008 Presidential Election," *AALDEF*, 2008, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.aaldef.org/docs/AALDEF-ExitPoll-2008.pdf>.

<sup>103</sup> "About AALDEF," Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://aaldef.org/about-us/>.

<sup>104</sup> David Zhou, "The Asian American Grassroots," *Columbia Spectator*, October 26, 2013, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.columbiaspectator.com/2008/10/26/asian-american-grassroots>

### *Conclusion*

The 2008 presidential campaign marked a significant change in the voting behavior for the minority voting groups (Black, Latinos, and Asians). In particular, Obama's rhetoric and campaign sparked a new interest in politics and highlighted the issues relevant. Of the issues, factors dealing with socioeconomic status, culture, and political organizations seem to have been the most influential for the voters. As a result, there was also an evident change in support for the Democratic Party. What is most important to understand is that the voting behavior of these minority groups is that their vote is shaped on the factors most relevant and important to them.

## Chapter Three

### Introduction

On April 4, 2011, the president of the United States, Barack Obama, formally announced his decision of running for reelection for the 2012 presidential election. The president was in the midst of finishing his first term with a poor economy due to the former recession. During his first term, he hit a low approval rating of 40% (according to the Daily Presidential Tracking Poll), and multiple unresolved foreign policy issues.<sup>105</sup> Because of this, it was predicted that Obama should not have won this presidential election of 2012; however, his use of social media and campaign strategy helped him a great deal to get ahead in the race.<sup>106</sup> By applying these methods as his campaign strategy, the Obama campaign was able to reach voters, specifically minority voters of Black, Latino, and Asian ethnicity and young voters, to get the message out to vote for Obama for President.

Blacks may be the third largest racial group in the United States after the white and Hispanic population, but it is said that their share of the electorate is larger than any other community of color. On Election Day 2012, African Americans made up 13 percent of U.S. voters. 93 percent of these voters supported Obama's reelection bid, down just two percent from 2008. While the African-American community has been accused of favoring Obama precisely because he's black, the group has a long history of fierce loyalty to Democratic political candidates. John Kerry, who lost the 2004 presidential race to George W. Bush, won 88 percent

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<sup>105</sup> Nadra K. Nittle, "How Minority Groups Helped Obama Win Second Term," *About*, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://racerelements.about.com/od/diversitymatters/a/How-Minority-Groups-Helped-Obama-Win-Second-Term.htm>.

<sup>106</sup> "How Obama Reached Blacks, Hispanics, and Youth Voters Through Social Media." *MPR*, March 4, 2013, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://umasspoliticalreview.com/2013/03/04/how-obama-reached-blacks-hispanics-and-youth-voters-through-social-media/>.

of the black vote. Given that the black electorate was two percent larger in 2012 than it was in 2004, the group's devotion seems to have undoubtedly given Obama an edge.

More Latinos than ever before turned out at the polls on Election Day 2012 in November. Latinos made up 10 percent of the electorate. Seventy-one percent of these Latinos backed President Obama for reelection. Latinos likely backed Obama overwhelmingly over Romney because they support the president's Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) as well as his decision to stop deporting undocumented immigrants who arrived in the U.S. as children so long as they lack a criminal record and are willing to pursue college or military service. Republicans widely vetoed legislation known as the DREAM Act, which would have not only protected such immigrants from deportation but put them on the path to citizenship. Republican opposition to immigration reform has alienated Latino voters, 60 percent of who say they know an unauthorized immigrant, according to a Latino Decisions poll taken on the eve of the 2012 election. Affordable health care is also a major concern of the Latino community. Sixty-six percent of Latinos say the government should ensure that the public has access to health care, and 61 percent support Obamacare, according to Latino Decisions.

Asian Americans, on the other hand, make up a small (approximately three percent) but growing percentage of the U.S. electorate. An estimated seventy-three percent of Asian Americans voted for President Obama, according to the Voice of America using preliminary exit poll data determined on November 7. While Asian American voters do not yet wield the influence that black and Latino voters do, it can be expected that this group will be a bigger factor in the next presidential elections to come. The Pew Research Center reported in 2012 that the Asian-American community has actually outpaced Latinos as the fastest-growing immigrant



group in the country. In four years, the influence of Asian Americans could very well increase up to five percent of the electorate, if not more.

According to Pew Research Center, it estimates that these minority groups currently make up 37 percent of the country's population. It was recorded that these groups cast a record of 28 percent of the votes in the 2012 presidential election, where a lot of the forces behind this were those of immigrant backgrounds.<sup>107</sup> Previously in 2008, the minority voters had only contributed to 26 percent of the votes. Interestingly, in 2008, it was also recorded that of the 26 percent of minority voters, 80 percent of their votes had been cast for Obama.<sup>108</sup>

### **African-Americans**

Significantly, it was reported that the Black voters' turnout rate for the 2012 presidential election was one of the highest seen among other minority groups. It was stated that by most measures, their votes had actually surpassed the white turnout for the first time ever.<sup>109</sup> Unlike other minority groups, the rise in voting for the slow-growing Black population is due to higher turnout. While Blacks make up 12 percent of the share of eligible voters, they represented 13 percent of total 2012 votes cast, according to exit polling.<sup>110</sup> That was a repeat of 2008, when Blacks "outperformed" their eligible voter share for the first time on record.

This shows a polarized election, yet it shows how the minority voters came out significantly to have their votes counted. In regards to this matter, Andra Gillespie, a political

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<sup>107</sup> "Study: Minority Groups Who Voted 80 Percent Obama To Become Majority," *CBS DC*, November 8, 2012, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://washington.cbslocal.com/2012/11/08/study-minority-groups-who-voted-80-percent-obama-to-become-majority/>.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Hope Yen, "Black Voter Turnout Rate Passes Whites in 2012 Election," *Huffington Post*, April 28, 2013, accessed May 1, 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/28/black-voter-turnout-2012-election\\_n\\_3173673.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/28/black-voter-turnout-2012-election_n_3173673.html).

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

science professor at Emory University who has written extensively on Black politicians said, “The 2012 turnout is a milestone for blacks and a huge potential turning point. What it suggests is that there is an ‘Obama effect’ where people were motivated to support Barack Obama. But it also means that black turnout may not always be higher, if future races aren’t as salient.”<sup>111</sup>

### *Socioeconomic status factors*

BET News polled African-Americans in Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Missouri, Nevada, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Wisconsin on their views on the candidates, social issues and voting. The polling revealed that their backgrounds were varied. They included “hopeful elites” who are mostly college graduates living in integrated neighborhoods (13 percent); “solid seniors” (27 percent), whose biggest concern is cuts to programs; and “anxious families” (31 percent) that are most concerned about college education cost and value issues.<sup>112</sup>

African-Americans, who have been disproportionately affected by the nation’s economic downturn and subsequently slow recovery, were “surprisingly optimistic,” according to a poll conducted by Brilliant Corners Research & Strategies. Seventy-seven percent say the economy is stabilizing and getting better; 61 percent said their personal finances have gotten better compared to 7 percent who say theirs have gotten worse.<sup>113</sup>

While lawmakers debate which side is offering the best plan for much-needed job creation, 38 percent of African-Americans are more concerned about whether their salary and

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Joyce Jones, “New BET Poll Surveys Black Voters in Battleground States,” *BET*, August 28, 2012, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.bet.com/news/features/vote-2012/news/politics/2012/08/28/new-bet-poll-surveys-black-voters-in-battleground-states.html>.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

wages are keeping up with the cost of living and 24 percent said that affordable health care is their chief concern. Finding work and being laid off was the third most significant concern for the black population.<sup>114</sup>

Each month, the African-American unemployment rate inflates as it goes up and down, but remains stubbornly high. The poll found that opinions vary about what's keeping Black communities behind. Economic opportunities, such as good paying jobs and educational training, was the cause cited by 38 percent of respondents, while 46 percent placed the blame on a moral decline and breakdown in the family structure. Younger voters, aged 18-29, at 60 percent, are more likely to say the reason is economic, while 58 percent of middle-aged voters point to a moral decline.<sup>115</sup>

Whether Obama has adequately addressed African-American unemployment and other economic issues compared to other "special interest groups" has been a lightning-rod topic of debate among Black leaders. Seventy-six percent said that the president should focus on the national economy.<sup>116</sup>

Listed below are several socioeconomic issues that the black population faced during the 2012 presidential election period:<sup>117</sup>

- The unemployment rate among African-American is 14.1%; almost double that of the national average.
- According to Pew Research the median wealth of white households is 20 times (\$113,149) that of black households (\$5,677).

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> "African Americans and the 2012 Election," *Word Press*, August 29, 2012, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://brandonjsutton.wordpress.com/2012/08/29/african-americans-and-the-2012-election/>.

- In 2010, 28 percent of African-Americans in comparison to 11 percent of non-Hispanic Whites relied on Medicaid, public health insurance.
- According to the 2010 Census Bureau report, the average African-American family median income was \$32,068
- In 2010, the U.S. Census bureau reported that 27.4 percent of African-Americans in comparison to 9.9 percent of non-Hispanic Whites were living at the poverty level
- In 2010, as compared to Whites 25 years and over, a lower percentage of Blacks had earned at least a high school diploma (82 percent and 90 percent, respectively). More Black women than Black men had earned at least a bachelor's degree (19.3 percent compared with 15.6 percent)

### *Cultural factors*

The 2012 presidential election was an important election for the Black community. The 2008 had seen a record number of blacks casting their votes, but 2012 was able to see a greater number yet again. According to the 2012 U.S. Census Bureau, an estimated number of 66.2 percent of eligible black voters casted their votes compared to 64.7 percent in the previous 2008 election.<sup>118</sup> It is interesting to point out that this racial group was the only group to show any significant increase in the number of votes; whereas, the overall percentage of eligible citizens who can vote declined from 63.6 percent to 61.8 percent in the span of four years.<sup>119</sup> There continue to be talks that race was a heavy factor for the continuing support of the Black

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<sup>118</sup> "Blacks Voted at a Higher Rate than Whites in 2012 Election — A First, Census Bureau Reports," *United States Census Bureau*, May 8, 2013, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/voting/cb13-84.html>.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

community for Obama, but according to exit polls, Black voters were said to have recognized Obama's attempts to revitalize the economy, one of the major concerns for Black voters.<sup>120</sup>

President Obama's GOP candidate, Governor Mitt Romney, was said to have been a weak opponent. Many voters claimed that Romney had been unable to motivate both white voters and the black voters. Whereas Obama sought to gain and maintain the black votes, Romney had not even attempted to try. It is said that if Romney had been able to attract and maintain the number of white voters as that of the 2004 and 2008 elections, he may have won the election with their support.<sup>121</sup> Yet, the failure to attract those voters is much evident with the outcome.<sup>122</sup>

### *Political Participation Factors*

As the 2008 presidential election had been an important year for the NAACP, 2012 also proved to be a key moment for this ethnic group. For this particular election, the NAACP had devised a new plan to increase the minority turnout, particularly for blacks, to turn out and vote. With the selected theme of "Your Power, Your Decision- Vote," the NAACP chapters were really seeking to garner the votes for December. During the 2012 election period, the NAACP was recognized for its effort in empowering the voters through education means and active campaigning.<sup>123</sup> Although the official NAACP organization is non-partisan and does not endorse

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<sup>120</sup> "2012 Presidential Election: 5 Reasons Race Has Become a Big Issue," *The Week*, August 28, 2012, accessed May 1, 2014,

<http://theweek.com/article/index/232483/2012-presidential-election-5-reasons-race-has-become-a-big-issue>.

<sup>121</sup> Luke Johnson, "Mitt Romney: My Campaign Fell Short in Attracting Minority Voters," *Huffington Post*, November 15, 2013, accessed May 1, 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/11/15/mitt-romney-minority-voters\\_n\\_4280714.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/11/15/mitt-romney-minority-voters_n_4280714.html)

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Jennifer Bradshaw, "'This Is My Vote' - The NAACP and the 2012 Election," *East Windsor Patch*, September 12, 2012, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://eastwindsor.patch.com/groups/politics-and-elections/p/this-is-my-vote-the-naacp-and-the-2012-election-b4a81dd9>.

a specific campaign or political party, it is important in recognizing the voters' choices and influencing their decisions to vote. With a focus on addressing the issues of voting restrictions and obstacles, the organization has attempted to circumvent and even solve these issues. The ultimate goal of this organization is to provide fellow African-Americans the equal opportunity to go out and vote and to be a part of the voting bloc.<sup>124</sup> According to these activists, they had planned to "reach out to black churches, fraternities and sororities as well as use sophisticated databases, social media and boost training of volunteers to include things like getting a contact for each voter they register."<sup>125</sup>

In an effort to appease to the NAACP members, both President Obama and Governor Mitt Romney targeted NAACP to be a part of their campaign. Mitt Romney participated in a convention earlier in July before the November election. There he recognized his stance and confronted his reality politically. Part of his speech had stated,

"Now with 90% of African Americans, who typically vote for Democrats, you may wonder, or some may wonder, why a Republican would bother to campaign in the African American community and to address the NAACP," the candidate said. "One reason of course is that I hope to represent all Americans, of every race, creed and sexual orientation. From the poorest to the richest and everyone in between. I believe that if you understood who I truly am in my heart, and if it were possible to fully communicate what I believe is in the real, enduring best interest of African American families, you would vote for me for president."<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Nick Ut, "NAACP Urges Minorities to Get to Polls in 2012," *USA Today*, July 27, 2011, accessed May 1, 2014, [http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/politics/2011-07-27-naacap-minority-vote-2012\\_n.htm](http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/politics/2011-07-27-naacap-minority-vote-2012_n.htm).

<sup>126</sup> Shannon Travis, "Romney Draws Boos from NAACP, Support from Conservatives," *CNN*, July 11, 2012, accessed May 1, 2014,

In this matter, Romney tried to appease and gather the support of the Black community. He was able to recognize that the majority of blacks support the Democratic Party, yet he was trying to accommodate to their best interests. There were mixed results to his campaign strategies, as noted by the NAACP members. Many expressed their disapproval of Romney's economic strategies. For example, a NAACP spokesperson had made the following remark concerning the different economic approaches by the two candidates:

"At the NAACP today, leaders in the African American community recognized the devastating impact Mitt Romney's policies would have on working families. He'd gut investments in education, energy, and infrastructure, and raise taxes on the middle class even as he gives \$5 trillion in tax cuts weighted towards millionaires and billionaires. He'd put insurance companies back in charge, threatening the health of more than 30 million Americans who will gain coverage because of the Affordable Care Act. And he refused to use the opportunity today to finally lay out a plan for improving health care or education in this country."<sup>127</sup>

For the 2012 election period, President Obama did not appear himself to make a statement in front of the NAACP community. Vice President Joe Biden had made a statement instead. What is most notable is that both candidates of the two parties were able to recognize the importance of political participation and organizations for the Black community. They realized that it was an important bridge in gathering votes and support.

A similar strategy can be seen used by the National Urban League. The organization's theme for 2012 can be seen as similar to NAACP. Entitled "The State of Black America 2012: Occupy the Vote to Educate, Employ and Empower," The Urban League also focused greatly on

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<http://www.cnn.com/2012/07/11/politics/romney-naacp/>.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

empowering the black voters. Their fundamental ideology centers on the thought that the black community must be politically and actively engaged in order to have a firm voice to represent the group. For this organization, gathering as much votes as possible will empower the people to address their needs, such as education and unemployment.

President Obama seems to have understood the strategy and importance in addressing this group. In July of 2012, he spoke before the National Urban League and addressed a number of issues. With an eloquent speech, the president promised that his administration would work to help strengthen and address the nation's communities. The following is an excerpt from his speech:

“For nearly a century, the National Urban League has been inspiring people of every race and every religion and every walk of life to reach for the dream that lies at the heart of our founding -- the promise that no matter who you are, no matter what you look like, no matter where you came from, no matter how modest your beginnings, no matter what the circumstances of your birth, here in America, you can make it if you try. That idea that everybody should have a fair shot, not just some -- that this country is special because it has grown this magnificent middle class and has provided ladders of access for those striving to get into the middle class -- that's the idea that drove me. That's the idea that has driven the Urban League. That idea that everyone should have equal opportunity -- that's what brought me to Chicago. That belief that this country works best when we are growing a strong middle class and prosperity is broad-based -- that's what led me into politics.”<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Megan Slack, "President Obama Speaks to the National Urban League," *The White House*, July 26, 2012, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2012/07/26/president-obama-speaks-national-urban-league>.



## **Latinos**

Obama's national vote share among Latino voters is the highest seen by a Democratic candidate since 1996, when President Bill Clinton won 72% of the Latino vote. Latinos voted for President Barack Obama over Republican Mitt Romney by 71% to 27%, according to an analysis of exit polls by the Pew Hispanic Center, a Project of the Pew Research Center.<sup>129</sup>

### *Socioeconomic status factors*

In consideration of Latino voters in the United States, a national exit poll surveyed the respondents and received the following information; according to the poll, approximately 60% of the respondents had identified economy as the most important issue facing the United States in current day. Following the economy were issues of healthcare, the federal budget deficit, and foreign policy, in order ranked respectively.<sup>130</sup> Amongst the registered voters, the general assessment of their financial situation had noticeably improved since the 2008 presidential election; compared to the 34% who had stated their personal finances and economy as in good condition before 2010, an increased of 42% had declared so in 2012.<sup>131</sup> It is notable to mention, however, that the majority of registered Latino voters are educated and have means of self-provision economically. Unfortunately, it must be seen that the majority of those who do not vote are not as economically sufficient or educated.

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<sup>129</sup> Mark H. Lopez and Paul Taylor, "Latino Voters in the 2012 Election," *Pew Research Center*, November 7, 2012, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2012/11/07/latino-voters-in-the-2012-election/>.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Mark H. Lopez and Ana Gonzalez-Barrera, "Growing Satisfaction with the Nation's Direction." *Pew Research Center*, October 11, 2012, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2012/10/11/growing-satisfaction-with-the-nations-direction/>.

In an attempt to sway the Latino voters, Governor Romney campaigned regarding economic policies in order to capture their attention. Prior to the election, the governor addressed the issues affecting the Latino population in the economy. He stated the following:

“Hispanics, as you know, have been hit terribly hard, disproportionately hard with an unemployment rate that is substantially higher than the national figures. This is not the legacy we want to leave our children. And the peril of this mismanagement may even be more imminent. We stand near a threshold of profound economic misery. ... Many of you are living proof of the unique strength of America that is constantly renewed by new Americans.”<sup>132</sup>

The Latino community took a more critical, harsher stance on President Obama’s policies. In comparison to the promise Obama had made to create more jobs in the United States, the Latino community was the population to feel the greatest impact of unemployment. The following statistics also highlight the impact made by their unemployment and socioeconomic status:

- About a third of Latino (31%) and Black (35%) households had zero or negative net worth in 2009, compared with 15% of white households. In 2005, the comparable shares had been 23% for Latinos, 29% for Blacks and 11% for whites;
- About a quarter of all Latinos (24%) and Black (24%) households in 2009 had no assets other than a vehicle, compared with just 6% of White households. These percentages are little changed from 2005;

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<sup>132</sup> Josh Furlong, "2012 Presidential Election: Attracting the Latino Voter," *KSL*, September 16, 2011, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.ksl.com/?sid=17276608>.

- During the period under study, wealth disparities also increased within the Latino community. The top 10% of Hispanic households saw their share of all Latino household wealth rises from 56% in 2005 to 72% in 2009.<sup>133</sup>

Thus, although Obama did get reelected in 2012, it can be seen that the Latino population was much more skeptical about his promises regarding the economic status for the Latino.

### *Cultural factors*

An important issue that is pressing for Hispanic and Latino voters is immigration. As mentioned in the previous chapter, President Obama had supported the DREAM (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors) Act, which would help undocumented young people (children of illegal immigrants) opportunity for higher education and living in the United States.<sup>134</sup> Throughout this election cycle, the issue of immigration has been an important issue for Latinos. In the national exit poll, voters were asked about what should happen to unauthorized immigrants working in the U.S. According to the national exit poll, 77% of Latino voters said these immigrants should be offered a chance to apply for legal status while 18% said these immigrants should be deported.<sup>135</sup>

There has been consistent statistical evidence showing that many Latinos compared to non-Hispanics and African-Americans are generally less politically engaged or interested in politics. Recent research has attempted to identify reasons associated with this. One cultural

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<sup>133</sup> Rakesh Kochhar, Richard Fry, and Paul Taylor, "Hispanic Household Wealth Fell by 66% from 2005 to 2009," *Pew Research Center*, July 26, 2011, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2011/07/26/the-toll-of-the-great-recession/>.

<sup>134</sup> Lydia Warren, "Record Number of Hispanic and Asian Voters Head to the Polls to Help Obama Secure Second Term," *UK Daily Mail*, November 7, 2012, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2229225/Presidential-election-2012-Record-number-Hispanic-voters-head-polls.html>.

<sup>135</sup> Mark H. Lopez and Paul Taylor, "Latino Voters in the 2012 Election."

factor deals with the language barrier. As many other immigrants show, there is a language barrier that becomes a problem for those immigrants that live in the United States. This factor has been identified as one of the causes for the low voter turnout among the Hispanic voters despite the rapidly increasing number of Latinos in the United States.<sup>136</sup> The 2012 campaign strategies are noted for creating more advertisements adaptable for the Spanish language. Accordingly, the campaign and advertisements when translated into the Spanish language have been rather effective, especially for those Latinos who speak minimal or no English.<sup>137</sup> This strategy has also been recognized for having a positive appeal on the certain population by being more receptive to the political messages.

Another aspect that has become a factor culturally was the involvement of more Hispanic and Latino representatives in the United States government. Before the 2012 election, there were been 30 Latino representatives elected to the House of Representatives, the Senate, and as state governors. The most notable members are Senator Marco Rubio (Republican) of Florida, Senator Ted Cruz of Texas, Governor Brian Sandoval of Nevada, and Governor Susana Martinez in New Mexico. Although the Hispanic group is a representation of a very diverse number of people and interests, there seems to be a common interest in favoring a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants that unite them in their leaning support for the Democratic Party.<sup>138</sup>

### *Political Participation Factors*

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<sup>136</sup> Costas Panagopoulos, "Targeting Latino Voters in Campaign Communications: New Evidence and Insights," *Latino Decisions*, October 25, 2012, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.latinodecisions.com/blog/2012/10/25/targeting-latino-voters-in-campaign-communications-new-evidence-and-insights/>.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> "The Influence of the Hispanic Vote in the 2012 U.S.A. Elections," *Imagine Mexico*, July 24, 2012, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://imagine-mexico.com/the-influence-of-the-hispanic-vote-in-the-2012-u-s-a-elections>.

As the Latino vote is becoming a critical factor for the presidential elections, the ethnic group themselves is realizing the impact that their votes could make. Thus, many political organizations that highly push for political participation have been appearing in order to galvanize the Latino votes. In an attempt to generalize the voting patterns and become an influential factor for the political field, the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) has been on the frontier for carrying out this mission.<sup>139</sup>

The LULAC community complained that the candidates had failed to address the Latino community. The following statement given prior to the November election by LULAC president, Margaret Moran shows their discontent with the administration's policies:

“It is now less than three weeks before Super Tuesday, and the candidates for President have failed to address issues of concern to the Hispanic community. Sadly, some have attempted to engage the Hispanic electorate through superficial rhetoric; others have dismissed the Hispanic vote altogether and certain states are attempting to pass legislation designed to suppress the vote. Today, LULAC addressed the issues the Latino community is concerned about, as well as, the impact the Latino vote will have on the election, given that the Hispanic turnout is expected to be 26% greater than it was in 2008.”<sup>140</sup>

In the case of LULAC, their main mission is to strategize their efforts in increasing the number of Latino votes as well as defending the right to vote for Latinos in the United States.<sup>141</sup> They have used several methods such as hosting a Spanish-language call center for providing the

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<sup>139</sup> "The Power of the Latino Community in the United States and Puerto Rico," LULAC, accessed May 1, 2014,

<https://lulac.org/programs/civic/>.

<sup>140</sup> "The 2012 Latino Vote: Reshaping the Electoral Map." LULAC, accessed May 1, 2014

[http://lulac.org/news/pr/The\\_2012\\_Latino\\_Vote\\_Reshaping\\_the\\_Electoral\\_Map/](http://lulac.org/news/pr/The_2012_Latino_Vote_Reshaping_the_Electoral_Map/).

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

eligible Latino voters with important information concerning polls. The use of social media as a means to spread the message was also highly utilized as well as working together with other organizations to create a visible campaign.<sup>142</sup>

Similarly, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) has been a forefront runner in handling cases mainly dealing with education and legal aid cases. The issues of education and legality are especially important for the Latino community, as they hold a vital role for the protection of Latino voters.<sup>143</sup> MALDEF plays a significant role in assisting Latino candidates to run for office by funding and helping those individuals build relationships. For example, in March 2009, John Trasviña, MALDEF president, was nominated to be assistant secretary of the Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity.<sup>144</sup> In consideration to legal court cases, in October 2010, MALDEF had assisted in striking down the former Arizona law restricting voter registration in the case called *Gonzalez v. State of Arizona*. They helped in declaring the rule unconstitutional and in violation of the federal law in regards to the numerous identification and document requirements that was enforced.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> "Latino Voters Project Electoral Strength Across the Nation," *LULAC*, accessed May 1, 2014, [http://lulac.org/news/pr/latino\\_voters\\_project\\_electoral\\_strength\\_across\\_the\\_nation/](http://lulac.org/news/pr/latino_voters_project_electoral_strength_across_the_nation/).

<sup>143</sup> Sandra Lilley, "Latino Civil Rights Groups: "Dark Day" and "disappointment" following Supreme Court Decision," *NBC Latino*, June 25, 2013, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://nbclatino.com/2013/06/25/a-dark-day-and-a-blow-to-civil-rights-say-some-latino-groups-following-supreme-court-voting-decision/>.

<sup>144</sup> "President Obama Announces More Key Administration Posts," *The White House*, March 26, 2009, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/05/01/president-obama-announces-more-key-administration-posts>.

<sup>145</sup> Bob Egelko, "State Can't Ask Voters for Citizenship Proof," *San Francisco Gate*, October 27, 2010, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.sfgate.com/nation/article/State-can-t-ask-voters-for-citizenship-proof-3248340.php>.

## Asian Americans

Obama improved his performance among Asian Americans more than among any other ethnic group between 2008 and 2012, according to exit polling. His support in the community jumped 11 percentage points, from 62 percent in 2008.<sup>146</sup> The 73 percent support that Obama garnered was the highest since national exit polls began tallying the Asian vote, and it marked the fifth straight presidential election in which the Democratic nominee attracted a greater share of the Asian-American vote.<sup>147</sup>

### *Socioeconomic status factors*

Like much of the data and exit polls from 2008 compared, the 2012 NAAS also asked its respondents to name the one issue that was most important to them personally. By the use of measuring issue priorities, the data revealed that general concerns about the economy were still prominent as the most important issue. The second greatest issue for this population was followed by unemployment and jobs. Along with the Hispanic community, the 2010 time period was said to hit the Asian community hardest in terms of unemployment and job security.<sup>148</sup> Compared to the previous years, there was also a notable shift in the policy concern for health care and education, 12% and 6%, respectively, amongst the Asian Americans.<sup>149</sup> An interesting

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<sup>146</sup> Shane Goldmacher, "National Journal." *National Journal*, November 8, 2012, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.nationaljournal.com/politics/obama-overwhelmingly-won-asian-american-vote-20121108>.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Anh Phan, "5 Fast Facts About 2012 Asian American Voters," *Center for American Progress*, November 26, 2012, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/race/news/2012/11/26/46016/5-fast-facts-about-2012-asian-american-voters-2/>.

<sup>149</sup> Ramakrishnan Karthick and Taeku Lee, "The 2012 General Election: Public Opinion of Asian Americans in California," *National Asian American Survey*, October 8, 2012, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.naasurvey.com/resources/Home/NAAS12-oct2-CA-election.pdf>.

fact to note is that very few Asian voter respondents mentioned other issues like poverty, inequality, race/racism, nor immigration as important national problems.<sup>150</sup>

In a National Asian American Survey (NAAS) survey, the voters were asked to rank which presidential candidate was closer in supporting their views. There was an overwhelming difference in numbers as 70% of the respondents saw Obama closer to their views, mostly regarding healthcare, while on 10% of the respondents believed Romney was closer to their views on healthcare. These numbers inevitably show the general support Obama had from the Asian American population.<sup>151</sup>

Thus, it can also be seen that on a purely issue basis, Romney's best hope and chance of winning Asian American voters would have to be concerning their biggest concern with the economy and budget deficit. By contrast, Obama's comparative advantages that were said to have gained him further support with Asian American likely voters centered on other issues like health care, jobs, education, and women's rights.<sup>152</sup>

### *Cultural factors*

The Asian American group seems to encompass the most diverse number of groups in regards to ethnicity, language, beliefs, and culture from Asia. In actuality, the 73% of Asian American eligible voters only comprises approximately 3 percent of the national vote.<sup>153</sup> Yet, they were to have overwhelmingly assisted in supporting President Obama's reelection. However, only 49% of Asian Americans affiliate themselves as Democrats while 34% regard

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Anh Phan, "5 Fast Facts About 2012 Asian American Voters." [american-voters-2/>](#).



themselves as Republicans and 17% as Independents.<sup>154</sup> Despite their group's main party affiliation, it is evident that the majority supported the Democratic Party. The reason for their support is associated with various factors, cultural factors being a crucial element.

For one, Asian Americans may feel a stronger connection to Obama himself. According to Melissa Michelson, professor of political science at Menlo College, "The fact that Obama grew up in Indonesia means that some voters 'feel that he is somebody who can understand a bit more where they come from.'"<sup>155</sup> Asian Americans are generally more likely to understand and connect with Obama on issues dealing with racial and cultural differences.

On the other hand, it is said that Republicans have realized that the Asian American community is a set of voters that they cannot allow to slip away. They are increasing vastly in number of eligible voters as well as gaining more of a foothold in the government. As more children of immigrants are being integrated into society, it is increasing the number of eligible voters. The 2012 election period also saw a growing number of Asian Americans in the electorate. Of them, notable members are Senator Mazie Hirono of Hawaii, Representative Tulsi Gabbard of Hawaii, Representative Mark Takano of California, and Representative Tammy Duckworth of Illinois.<sup>156</sup> Excluding Indian-American Governors Bobby Jindal and Nikki Haley who are both Republican, the majority of Asian American candidates elected to office have mostly been affiliated with the Democratic Party.

Romney's campaign was not able to reach out to Asian Americans in as great numbers as Obama's team, but it is evident that the Republicans will begin to pay attention in the upcoming future campaigns and elections.

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Caroline Chen, "Why Do Asian Americans Vote for Democrats?" *Huffington Post*, December 3, 2012, accessed May 1, 2014,

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/caroline-chen/asian-american-voters\\_b\\_2231418.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/caroline-chen/asian-american-voters_b_2231418.html).

<sup>156</sup> Anh Phan, "5 Fast Facts About 2012 Asian American Voters."

### *Political Participation Factors*

#### Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF)

For the 2012 presidential election, the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund conducted exit polls of 9,096 Asian Americans in 14 states across the United States. Their main website cites their purpose for such polls:

“AALDEF monitored the poll sites for compliance with the Voting Rights Act, including the provision of Asian-language ballots, interpreters, signs, and voting materials, which are required in certain districts. AALDEF also monitored the application of strict voter identification and proof of citizenship laws that create discriminatory obstacles for Asian American voters and other voters of color.”<sup>157</sup>

By doing so, AALDEF had strived to examine the key issues facing Asian Americans and their right to vote. Because the polls are translated into multiple Asian languages, they are quick and convenient to access. It is a method used to educate and bring awareness to the community information concerning voting. Although AALDEF is not focused centrally on politics, it is significant to mention that it is an active group trying to bring about change for the Asian community in terms of galvanizing their votes and representation.

### Conclusion

Overall, Obama benefited from relatively strong turnout – both nationally and in key battleground states – among young people and minorities. Obama won voters younger than 30 by a somewhat smaller margin than he did four years ago, but these voters made up about as large a share of the electorate as they did in 2008, according to national exit polls conducted by the

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<sup>157</sup> "Voting Rights: Voting Rights - AALDEF." *AALDEF*, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://aaldef.org/programs/voting-rights/>.

National Election Pool. Moreover, African Americans, Latinos and Asian Americans backed Obama by huge margins.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> "Changing Face of America Helps Assure Obama Victory," *Pew Research Center*, November 7, 2012, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.people-press.org/2012/11/07/changing-face-of-america-helps-assure-obama-victory/>.

## Chapter Four

Even though Barack Obama was not the first black presidential candidate, he was the first post-Civil Right Movement, non-white politician to campaign on an inclusive platform for the highest office. Despite the efforts of Hillary Clinton during the primaries and of John McCain in the earlier candidacy run in 2008, the message that Obama relayed had become a powerful mechanism in gathering the people's votes. In particular, it seems as if Obama's "change" theme and strategy as well as the possibility for the nation of having its first ever African-American president helped him maintain his dominance with his winning message.

In addition to being the most visible cue of change, which was heavily emphasized throughout Obama's campaign, it is evident that race played a pivotal role in the enfranchisement of non-white Americans into the electoral process, especially in 2008. For one, the construction of a common identity around the idea of opportunity and possibility is evident in Obama's campaign rhetoric. His political slogan –"Yes We Can"– is centered on the idea that the candidate and his constituency share a common identity. Even though "Yes We Can" is ambiguous enough to become an empty signifier capable of incorporating society as a whole, it embodies the people's dreams for opportunity. Additionally, Obama's first phrase in his first victory speech –"You know, they said this day would never come"– is an example of the focus on the historical exclusion of a group that still has not achieved representation in the system, a group of which Obama is a symbol. Fundamentally, not just because of the color of his skin, his style, and personal background story, it can be seen that Obama was able to represent, as no other candidate before him had ever done, the aspirations of those who have traditionally been excluded from power: non-white Americans, the poor, and the young.

The 2008 elections indeed were one of the most significant time periods that brought about a change in terms of voting eligibility. Aforementioned in the previous chapters, the minority groups were influenced by the several other factors of socioeconomics, culture, and political organization participation to enlarging their active engagement in the electoral and voting process.

By contrast, in 2011, the Obama administration had announced its new campaign slogan, “Forward.” Similar to the previous campaign in 2008, the 2012 campaign successfully strategized a method to gather and receive the votes. Within the next year, the Obama administration and campaign supporters appropriated approximately \$400 million for the reelection. In the end, President Obama gained the overall support as he won his reelection bid by nearly a four percent margin. Obama received over 51% of the popular vote.<sup>159</sup> The 2012 data suggests that Romney was a particularly weak GOP candidate, unable to motivate white voters let alone attract significant Black or Latino support. Moreover, Obama's personal appeal and the slowly improving economy helped overcome doubts and spur record levels of minority voters in a way that may not be easily replicated for Democrats soon.<sup>160</sup>

This 2012 presidential election was thus also remarkable in the way that the campaign was successful in getting out the vote, especially among minority voters. The 2012 Obama administration is recorded to be the first one to use technology to its advantage. Social media websites like Facebook and Twitter were used in mobilizing people and gathering the people. Additionally, the campaign team was noted to have been highly successful in using such technology to identify eligible and targeted voters. Renee Montagne and Cokie Roberts describe

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<sup>159</sup> “Official 2012 Presidential General Election Results,” *State Election Offices*, January 17, 2013, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.fec.gov/pubrec/fe2012/2012presgeresults.pdf>.

<sup>160</sup> Hope Yen, “Black Voter Turnout Rate Passes Whites in 2012 Election.”

Obama's particular campaign strategy in the following way, "President Obama won reelection, not by going after independent voters, but by going after emerging groups in the U.S. population. By race, age and gender, voters made clear that America is made up of many parts, and the Obama team captured more of them, and delivered more of them to the polls."<sup>161</sup> Indeed, the campaign was highly effective in capitalizing on the emerging groups and segments of the U.S. population, in particular, the ethnic minority groups of America.

In fact, a coalition of Americans from ethnic minority groups is said to have helped President Barack Obama win a second term in office on November 6, 2012. While just 39 percent of White Americans voted for Obama on Election Day 2012, staggering amounts of Blacks, Latinos, and Asians backed the president at the ballot box. The reasons for this are multifaceted, but minority voters largely supported the president because they felt that Republican candidate Mitt Romney could not relate to them. A national exit poll revealed that 81 percent of Obama supporters said the quality that mattered most to them in a presidential candidate is whether he "cares about people like me." Romney, born into wealth and privilege, apparently did not fit their standard requirements.

Comparing the 2008 and 2012 elections, there does not seem to be too much of a difference when comparing these two elections. Yet, it is evident that there is a specific set of concerns that each minority group held as most important. The year 2008 marked a turning point for these voters. Obama was able to successfully attract the minority's votes by calling for a change and focusing on issues most important to these factions.

Another notable observation is the fact that the three factors hold different weight for each of the minority voting groups. Socioeconomic factors hold the greatest weight among

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<sup>161</sup> Renee Montage and Cokie Roberts, "Obama Capitalizes on Emerging Voter Groups," *NPR*, November 7, 2012, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.npr.org/2012/11/07/164582496/obama-capitalizes-on-emerging-voter-groups>.

Blacks and Latino populations. Because Asian Americans are economically better off than the other group, this factor does not have the strongest influence on their voting behavior. Cultural factors seem to be well regarded by all the minority groups. Political organization participation factors are most effective amongst Blacks and Latino groups. The Black population has had a long history of active political involvement through societal organizations, and thus, these organizations are important sources of receiving information about elections. Again, in this area, the Asian American political organization groups are not as dominant in activity compared to the other two groups.

The socioeconomic status of the three minority groups are all different, as it has been described in the past two chapters. According to the United States Census Bureau (chart seen in Chapter 1), Latinos and Blacks are economically unstable compared to the Asians. As a result, this factor is most likely the most important out of the three for Latinos and Blacks. Asian Americans, in fact, are in general known to be financially stable if not well off. As the previous chapters have revealed, both of the ethnic groups ranked economy as most important in 2008 and 2012. Although Obama did not have a specific economic plan, he did acknowledge that this was an issue he would address if he were elected for president.

In terms of cultural factors, Obama was relatable and effective in understanding the importance of reaching out to these groups was prevalent. Obama even reached out to the minority groups had played a significant role in attracting the voters for the Democratic Party. For example, the story of the Asian Americans shows how important this factor is in mobilizing the votes. Asians, for the most part, have regarded themselves more aligned with the Republicans due to their conservative shared values. In 1992, the Asian vote was a margin of 24%, where 54% considered themselves Republicans and only 24% aligned themselves with the Democratic

Party. In 2008, the number changed to a margin of 62-35 and the gap further widened in 2012 with a significant margin of 73-26.<sup>162</sup> Throughout the years, Asians have overwhelmingly increased their support for the Democratic Party. There are reasons to consider for this drastic change. According to a poll from CAP and PolicyLink, diversity is a very important issue for the group.<sup>163</sup> Contrary to the Republican Party, Asians are generally more supportive of immigration and the call for a new agenda in addressing racial and ethnic equality. Another factor to consider is that the majority of the Asian voting block are the young and well educated. As they have started to identify predominantly more with the Democratic Party, it can be seen that unless the Republican Party develops a new strategy and changes, they may lose this group's vote as a whole in the long run.

Political organizational and participation factors are used to mobilize and attract voters. President Obama was able to utilize this knowledge by campaigning frequently within the relevant organizations. In both 2008 and 2012, he addressed the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the National Urban League. These activities are connected to the cultural variable; Obama's efforts to come before the people himself, depicting that he was on their side, greatly influenced and moved people's perceptions of him. This fact undoubtedly influenced people to go out and vote.

All in all, it can be seen that the three factors of socioeconomic status, culture, and political organizational participation were all important in influencing the minority voters to go to the polls. Although there are other explanations for voter turnout, I argue that these factors are especially relevant for the minority groups I have studied. Party identification and party ideology

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<sup>162</sup> Ruy Teixeira, "Why Asians are Deserting the GOP," *Think Progress*, November 3, 2013, accessed May 1, 2014,

<http://thinkprogress.org/politics/2013/11/03/2879681/asians-republicans-diversity/>.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.



are credible variables in explaining voting behavior, but so are the variables I have studied. Usually, some racial minorities do not have a defined political ideology as many of the people have immigrant backgrounds. Thus, what would influence them more are specific factors and issues that is most important for them.

Seeing this pattern, there is a concern for future political elections. As of now, it is obvious that the Democratic Party is receiving the support of a majority of minority groups. The Republican Party is thus suffering in the aspect of losing this voting block. It is true that minority votes are still minimal; yet, it is no doubt that they will be powerful and effective swing voters if strategically coerced. The Democratic Party has been quite successful using this tactic of gaining and attracting the voters of the minority. In order for the pendulum to be swung, the Republican Party must realign their strategies and focus if they want to see such change. As for now, it will be interesting to see if this will become a permanent realignment within presidential elections.

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