

*Foreshadowing Strategic Pan-Ethnic Politics:  
Asian American Campaign Finance Activity in  
Varying Multicultural Contexts*

**ABSTRACT**

Research on Asian American politics is hampered by data limitations. Asian Americans comprise a small proportion of the population, and few political candidates are of Asian descent. However, because the Asian American population is growing quickly, interest in the group's political behavior has grown. One source of data that can be exploited to understand Asian American political behavior is the state of Hawaii. Hawaii provides a natural experiment since the majority of its citizens are Asian American and Asian political candidates are commonplace. This study of Hawaiian politics focuses on Asian American campaign finance behavior. I find that as Asian Americans locate themselves in more multicultural settings, they become more politically strategic, less focused on national-origin groupings, and more inclined to embrace a pan-ethnic identity.

IT HAS BECOME COMMON for journalists and scholars to point to the increasing Asian American population in the United States and speculate on its eventual political impact (Cain, Kiewiet, and Uhlaner 1991; Cho 1999; Lien 1997; Lin 1996; Massey 1986; Nakanishi 1991; Siao 1990; Tachibana 1986; Wong 1999). Much of this discussion is fueled by the realization that the population growth rate of Asian Americans in recent decades has exceeded that of any other group in the U.S. Since every person is a potential voter, political observers find it irresistible to forecast the inevitable and impending rise of Asian Americans in American politics. However, the current low proportion of the U.S. electorate that is Asian American makes it difficult to study how they will behave if and when they become political giants.

Asian Americans are unlikely to constitute a majority of the U.S. population, even in the distant future. However, they are becoming significant subpopulations of some regions. Indeed, since the lifting of immigration restrictions in 1965, the growth trajectory of the Asian American population has been dramatically and monotonically rising (Hing 1993). Hence, in some areas, as their numbers increase, Asian Americans may indeed become an

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unambiguously important political group.

Currently in the continental U.S., Asian Americans remain largely non-strategic in their political behavior, perhaps even apathetic about political affairs. It is unresolved whether this is a function of their being such a small part of the polity, or of cultural or other factors. There is some evidence that the more integrated the various Asian American ethnic groups are (i.e., the more they reside in a multicultural/multi-Asian environment), the more likely they are to embrace strategic pan-Asian political activity (Cho and Cain 2001; Tam 1995). Perhaps in a more multicultural environment where Asian Americans comprise a larger proportion of the electorate, they will participate more zealously and behave more strategically as a group. The incentives for greater political participation would certainly be more favorable in this context.

One potential glimpse of how Asian American political behavior might respond to changing demographics may be found on the islands of Hawaii, which are more multicultural than any other U.S. state and where Asian Americans already comprise a majority of the population. Do Asian Americans behave strategically and cohesively in Hawaiian politics? Or does one find the same nonstrategic and apathetic political tendencies among Asians even when they constitute a majority? Does context matter, or is Asian American political behavior roughly constant across different contexts? Does multiculturalism and a larger voting base affect the Asian American polity? More generally, what can this political behavior among Hawaiian Asians tell us about current theories of acculturation and assimilation of immigrants and ethnic minorities?

This article offers some tentative answers to these questions by investigating political donations. Campaign finance is an interesting arena in which to explore these questions, since Asian Americans are said to have begun to make a significant mark on this aspect of U.S. politics already, despite their still small numbers (Lin 1996; Miller 1996; Tachibana 1986). Who they give to, and why, are significant questions for political observers, scholars, and, of course, candidates. Some inkling of the future—who Asian Americans will be supporting—is even more valuable since a large amount of money is at stake. A common conjecture is that since Asian Americans give proportionally more money to candidates today (Cho 2000; Lew 1987; Lien 1997), they will continue to do so as their population grows. In this study, I explore whether patterns of Asian American donations remain constant despite changing political and demographic environments.

I begin by reviewing the state of the literature on Asian American political behavior in general and specifically on campaign finance behavior. Next,

I develop hypotheses about ethnic political behavior and how this might change with changing contexts. I discuss Hawaii's uniqueness and the generalizability of results drawn from its experience. I then test my hypotheses with data on Hawaiian campaign donations and Asian donation records on the mainland. In the data analysis, every effort is made to control for Hawaii's unique characteristics, and comparable analyses are presented for campaign contributions on the mainland. I conclude by reviewing the key results of the Hawaiian case and then carefully extrapolating to the more general context.

### THEORIES AND EVIDENCE

Discussion of the awakening of the Asian American political giant usually appears in one of two forms. The first is speculative and journalistic accounts with limited empirical support (Kwong and Lum 1988; Lin 1996; Massey 1986; Siao 1990; Tachibana 1986). The second is based on quantitative and empirical research, but these studies are few and far between, primarily due to data limitations (Brown, Powell, and Wilcox 1995; Cain, Kiewiet, and Uhlaner 1991; Lee 1998; Lien 1997). Although the data on Asian American political behavior are sparse and the quality of even these data is often suspect, some of it is useful. Unfortunately, some of these data are of limited generalizability. For instance, most surveys that oversample Asians are conducted in limited geographical settings (Cain, Kiewiet, and Uhlaner 1991; Leighley and Vedlitz 1999). Larger surveys typically include few Asian American respondents and/or only a limited number of Asian American ethnicities (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Thus, we have surmised who Asian Americans will support and how they will conduct their political affairs on the basis of small-scale, sometimes isolated examples of the group's behavior. While much of this research is conducted carefully and exploits the available resources as well as possible, extrapolation to an environment with a much greater number of Asian Americans may be questionable. It would be felicitous to find a sample with a large number of Asian Americans and a good variety and mix of ethnicities and strategic situations. Such a sample would allow one to probe a host of existing theories about Asian American political behavior and to extrapolate to future U.S. politics (Cho 2000; Espiritu 1992; Lien 1997; Nakanishi 1991, 1997; Tam 1995; Wong 1999, 2000).

The study of Asian American campaign finance behavior is plagued by many of these data and generalizability problems. Currently, there are simply not very many Asian American elected representatives or candidates for elective office. Moreover, Asian donors are not particularly geographically

compact. Thus, it is difficult to determine which factors influence Asians' decisions to contribute. The idiosyncratic nature by which the group is dispersed and the geographic compactness of its candidates are two factors that limit our ability to test hypotheses of Asian American political behavior. There may be a large number of contributions and a great deal of variance in certain parts of California, but since this variation is not matched anywhere else in the mainland U.S., it is difficult to isolate and identify effects. It is difficult to generalize about Asian American political behavior from such data because it may change with different contexts. These difficulties may explain why much of the conventional wisdom about Asian American politics is based on qualitative and journalistic descriptions, and why the academic literature on Asian campaign contributions is sparse.

Some of the research on Asian American campaign contributions has been based on surveys (Cain, Uhlaner, Kiewiet 1991; Lien 1997), which are suspect because people tend to misrepresent their campaign finance behavior.<sup>1</sup> Others have looked carefully at a small number of contribution rolls (Espiritu 1992). In either case, the research is not extensive. Although there are few works that focus specifically on Asian American campaign finance, a consistent theme runs throughout both the academic literature and the journalistic accounts — that of the generous Asian American donor (Espiritu 1992; Lien 1997; Nakanishi 1997; Uhlaner, Cain, and Kiewiet 1989; Wong 1988; Yip 1996). However, very little is understood about motives behind Asian American campaign giving, the levels of these contributions, their consistency over time, or other general patterns of campaign finance.

There are some related, well-developed lines of inquiry outside the ethnic politics literature, especially with regard to political action committees (PACs). For instance, a variety of economic models suggest that contributors can be understood as trying to seek policy influence by donating strategically to campaigns according to expected electability (Cameron and Morton 1992; Mebane 1999; Snyder 1990; Welch 1980). However, Asian Americans do not seem to fit well into this mold. Instead of being optimally strategic in this manner, they appear to be mostly expressive (Cho 2000). There is evidence of a strong symbolic component to Asian American contributions, in that they donate most often to Asian American candidates, whether these candidates are running in their own district or not, and whether these candidates seem to have any serious hope of winning the election or not. While Asian Americans contribute to a wide range of candidates, the best predictors of their contribution habits are variables that tap ethnic origin, rather than variables that suggest they are trying to establish influential channels to policymakers. Asian Americans give disproportionately and overwhelmingly to

Asian American candidates, even when these candidates are barely mounting a credible candidacy (Cho 2000). This latter type of contribution provides the strongest evidence of the Asian American tendency toward symbolic contributing.

Two other interesting patterns also have been identified. First, Asian Americans are inclined to contribute to their own specific ethnic group, but not necessarily to Asian Americans as a whole (Cho 2000). That is, Chinese contributors donate heavily to Chinese American candidates, but not necessarily to candidates of Japanese or Korean heritage. Likewise, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese contributors also favor their own groups, while largely ignoring the campaigns of other Asian American ethnicities. This finding substantiates other studies showing little support for a pan-Asian basis of political behavior (Nakanishi 1997; Tam 1995). The second pattern is that Asian Americans often give campaign contributions to candidates outside of their own home districts (Cho 2000). Asian Americans are willing to cross district, and even state, lines to support an Asian American candidate running for office anywhere in the mainland United States. This pattern again points to the symbolic nature of Asian American campaign contributions, since it does not comport with traditional notions of influence buying through campaign contributions (Mebane 1999; Snyder 1990).

Thus, mainland Asian American donors are less than optimally strategic on several fronts. If they are employing a donation strategy, the strategy is far more general than typically discussed, in that they prefer to see Asian Americans in office regardless of geographic considerations. Asian Americans may simply believe that higher visibility in politics would benefit the group as a whole even if they reside in California and the candidate is running for a congressional seat in Delaware. While this behavior is strategic in some sense, it falls more closely in line with notions of symbolic contributing (Snyder 1990).

Are these patterns of campaign contribution behavior the result of the uniqueness of Asian American culture and ethnicity, or are they the result of Asian Americans being such a small minority of the population? While Asian Americans remain such a small part of the population, there are few options to act strategically in a local sense, since Asian American candidates are few and not likely to hail from a prospective donor's own district. Hence, supporting such a candidate gives the appearance of a symbolic motive rather than a traditionally strategic influence-buying motive. Could it be the case that we are categorizing Asian Americans as more symbolic in their behavior simply because they lack opportunities to be strategic? That is, given the option of behaving strategically, would Asian Americans opt for influence

buying rather than ethnic solidarity? Might we see wholly different patterns of behavior in a more multicultural environment? Certainly, in a more multicultural setting like Hawaii, where Asian American candidates are plentiful, the broader strategy employed on the mainland perhaps would be unnecessary. With so many Asian American candidates running, there would be no need to support one who had no chance of winning the election simply because that candidate was Asian American. Instead, Hawaiian Asian donors usually can support a viable Asian American candidate, very often one who hails from the donor's own district, since Asian American candidates are plentiful. Thus, if Hawaiian Asian Americans are still being broadly strategic, as they appear to be on the mainland, their outward behavior would manifest itself differently in Hawaii. In this way, the Hawaiian case offers the opportunity to test whether the campaign finance behavior Asian Americans exhibit on the mainland is due to some innate cultural propensity or their tiny minority status there.

We can test hypotheses concerning the competing impacts of ethnic appeal, apparent electability, and local bias in Hawaii, the one place in the U.S. where Asian Americans are not a small minority. In the 1990s, Hawaii was 62 percent Asian American (Barone and Ujifusa 1992). Even as early as the 1970s, the majority of the Hawaiian electorate was Asian. In contrast, California, with the next largest percentage, was only 9.6 percent Asian American as late as 1990.<sup>2</sup> A large number of Asian American political factors are, at the moment, uniquely Hawaiian. For instance, many Asian Americans have run for and won office in Hawaii. Asian American constituencies are common, are never disregarded by politicians, and are courted in every election. Moreover, there are many different ethnicities represented in Hawaii. Situations arise in which one ethnically Asian candidate runs against a candidate of a different Asian ethnicity. Contrast this situation with that on the mainland where each and every Asian American candidate running in any election is noteworthy.

The data analyzed here include all contributions given to any candidate in the state of Hawaii over the period 1980–98. These data are entirely new, since past studies typically excluded Hawaii, concentrated on only mainland campaigns, or bypassed the Federal Election Commission (FEC) data altogether for survey data (Cho 2000; Lee 1998; Lien 1997; Uhlaner, Cain, and Kiewiet 1989). These Hawaiian data will allow us to determine whether the campaign finance patterns we observe among the Asian American minority on the mainland persist when the group's size increases. Will the Asian ethnic groups coalesce or remain separate? Is the future likely to bring greater ethnic political solidarity for Asian Americans and greater group impact in

American politics? Although the literature on Hawaiian politics has not taken the approach that is proposed here, it has discussed some of these same issues from a different angle. Thus, a brief review of this literature is in order as a prolegomenon to my analyses.

## ISLAND POLITICS

The general consensus among observers of Hawaiian politics is that ethnic Asian solidarity exists in Hawaii, as it does on the mainland, notwithstanding the longer history of Asians on the islands and Hawaii's much more multicultural society (Haas 1998b). Theories of such ethnic persistence sometimes posit that majority groups isolate minority ethnic groups and consequently cause them to embrace their ethnic identity more strongly (Wolfinger 1965). Indeed, it is not uncommon to find instances of ethnic solidarity in politics (Dawson 1994; Erie 1988; Glazer and Moynihan 1972; Polsby 1963). Some suggest that mass integration invariably eliminates, or at least greatly diminishes, such ethnic solidarity (Dahl 1961) because the intensity with which individuals identify with their ethnic group is greatest in the years immediately preceding immigration and steadily wanes thereafter (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Campbell et al. 1960). We have not yet seen this form of assimilation among Asians on the mainland, but perhaps the studies are all concentrated too early in the immigration process, given the small size of the Asian American population there. These conditions are different on the islands. There is a much longer history of Asian Americans, and Hawaii offers the opportunity to observe the interactions among a larger group of Asian immigrants of different ethnicities. But even in Hawaii, we find that the Asian ethnicities have not yet lost their distinctiveness. Of course, theories of mass integration and ethnic solidarity were developed with the case of European immigration in mind (Dahl 1961; Wolfinger 1965), and whether these theories apply to groups that integrate but remain visible minorities is yet to be seen.

In multicultural Hawaii, one need not look further than the high-profile gubernatorial races to gain a sense of the distinctiveness that characterizes the island's Asian identities. When George Ariyoshi ran against Honolulu Mayor Frank Fasi in the 1974 and 1978 Democratic primaries, the ethnic groups divided neatly. The Japanese supported the Japanese American Democrat Ariyoshi while the Chinese, Filipinos, and whites stood behind the other Democrat, Fasi (Barone and Ujifusa 1980). The gubernatorial primaries were bitter, much more so than the general election, since Hawaii is heavily Democratic, with the battle largely along ethnic lines. As we will see in the analysis,

these political divisions by ethnic group are not unique to gubernatorial races, manifesting themselves in various contexts and over time.

The second important characteristic of Hawaiian politics is that the state leans heavily toward the Democratic party (Barone and Ujifusa, various years; Dubin 1998; Duncan, various years). Indeed, Hawaiian politics have long been influenced strongly by central figures of its Democratic party—Daniel Inouye, Spark Matsunaga, George Ariyoshi, and John Burns. This group cemented Japanese support for the Democratic party early on and has been able to maintain this loyalty through the years. Even today, the legacy of these men is felt strongly in Hawaiian politics, with candidates finding that their support or that of their protégés is still a valuable political asset (Barone and Ujifusa, various years). For instance, Daniel Akaka, a native Hawaiian and Chinese American, was an Ariyoshi aide. Since his time in the Ariyoshi camp, he has moved through the ranks to the U.S. House of Representatives and then to the U.S. Senate, where he has served since 1990. John Waihee, a native Hawaiian, was also part of the Ariyoshi legacy and won the governorship after Ariyoshi left that office in 1986 (Barone and Ujifusa 1988).

Although ethnic divisions on the islands are strong, other aspects of machine politics need to be considered to produce a full picture of Hawaiian politics. Akaka and Waihee are two of the more prominent examples because of their success. However, even when the candidates of the Democratic machine are not successful, simple backing by this group has had a non-trivial impact. For instance, while Mufi Hannemann, a native Samoan, has not been very successful in securing elected office, his efforts have been impressive nonetheless. In 1986, he ran against Patricia Saiki in the general election for the first congressional seat. He lost 37 percent to 60 percent but waged a very credible campaign, raising and spending \$500,716 compared to Saiki's \$536,551 (FEC reports 1986). In 1990, when Akaka left his U.S. House seat to serve in the Senate, Patsy Mink, despite outspending Hanneman (\$641,037 to \$383,467), barely edged him out, 37 percent to 36 percent in the special election for Akaka's remaining term. She then beat him by a 40–37 margin to win the full term. As another example of the machine's enduring influence, Daniel Inouye is able to round up the political troops for candidates, whether Asian or not. In 1988, for instance, he campaigned strongly for Mary Bitterman, a non-Asian candidate for the first congressional seat (Barone and Ujifusa 1990). Although Bitterman is not of Japanese descent, she received solid support from the Japanese constituency. Her support is even more surprising when one considers that she defeated an Asian American, Leigh-Wai Doo, in the primary election, and her opponent in the general election, Pat Saiki, was a Japanese American. The two general election candidates spent

close to the same amount on the campaign (over \$600,000 each). Surprisingly, and apparently as a result of Inouye's backing, Bitterman's campaign coffers had more donations from Japanese Americans than did Saiki's (FEC reports 1988). Thirty-eight percent of Bitterman's donors were Japanese, and 81 percent of the donations from Asians were from those of Japanese descent. Compare these numbers to Saiki's, 19 percent and 61 percent, respectively. In short, there are certainly some aspects of Hawaiian politics that are unique. However, the uniqueness is fairly well documented so it can be controlled for, if modeled properly.

Is the Hawaiian experience in Asian American political behavior a harbinger of things to come on the mainland, or is it unique to the islands? To assess generalizability, we need to determine how and why Hawaii is different than the other states. If we can account and control for these factors, then a careful extrapolation may be meaningful. With regard to Asian Americans, the most marked differences between Hawaii and the remainder of the U.S. are the multicultural context, the difference in size of the minority groups, both absolute and relative to the rest of the population, the strength of the Democratic party, and the history of ethnic involvement in politics (Barone and Ujifusa, various years; Stevens, various years). Hawaii is more multicultural, and its Asian Americans are more politically involved than they are on the mainland. Some of these differences may be reduced with the growing Asian American population on the mainland. Other factors may remain unique to the Hawaiian experience. One need not be paralyzed by these latter factors; however, one needs to control for these factors and then interpret all analyses with these differences in mind.

#### DATA ANALYSIS

To test my hypotheses, I use merged FEC and election data. The FEC data span the years 1980–98. Almost all candidates who ran for any federal office in Hawaii during this period, and all of those who filed a campaign finance report with the FEC, are included.<sup>3</sup> Most of the candidates in the analysis received some contributions. So, all contributions given in this period to any federal candidate in Hawaii are included even though not all candidates are included.<sup>4</sup> There is plentiful information about all of the competitive candidates (Barone and Ujifusa, various years; Duncan, various years; Stevens, various years) and often good information even on less competitive candidates. The data challenge is finding correspondingly rich sources of information on contributor attributes. The FEC database provides very little demographic information about contributors.<sup>5</sup> Hence, we must attempt to surmise the

motives of contributors from their contribution patterns. Barring better objective data or more reliable survey data, there is no other recourse.

The analyses presented in Table 1 are models of the level of campaign contributions federal office candidates received from Asian Americans. The specifications in columns 1 and 2 are identical when possible, and at least parallel. The unit of analysis is a candidate's race for federal office in the period 1980–98. All candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives or the

Table 1. Funds Received from Asian Americans (WLS Regression)

	Asian American Contributions to Candidates		
	Hawaii (all races)	Mainland	Hawaii (select races)†
Intercept	-9.44 (9.12)	19.23** (7.51)	-19.29 (21.61)
Asian American candidate	11.65** (3.51)	51.14*** (3.13)	16.10* (7.84)
California district		-7.81** (3.69)	
Democratic candidate	19.56*** (3.35)	-7.47** (2.65)	19.39** (7.85)
Percent Asian in district		0.42 (0.30)	
Primary vote	-0.03 (0.10)	-0.06 (0.07)	-0.03 (0.20)
Primary loser	0.82 (1.20)	9.06* (5.06)	0.80 (3.59)
Eventual winner	-0.20 (0.56)	-7.70** (3.79)	-0.01 (1.20)
Year	0.37 (0.30)	0.05 (0.31)	1.09 (0.72)
In-state	0.31*** (0.06)		0.28 (0.17)
District 1	-3.60 (3.93)		
Senate seat	-2.66 (4.30)		
$R^2$	0.64	0.74	0.48
$N$	88	165	27

Standard errors in parentheses.

\*  $p < .10$  \*\*  $p < .05$  \*\*\*  $p < .01$

† Only those contests featuring both a competitive non-Asian candidate and an Asian candidate.

Note: The unit of analysis is a candidate's race for federal office during the period 1980–98.

U.S. Senate for Hawaiian general or primary elections are included in column 1. In column 2, the model includes data from candidates from the mainland over the same period, for congressional races with an Asian American candidate and for all districts in which Asian Americans comprise at least 10 percent of the constituency. The data for the model in column 3 are Hawaiian candidates from races having at least one competitive non-Asian American and one Asian American candidate over these same years. The dependent variable is the percentage of a candidate's funds received from Asian donors. The independent variables are whether the candidate is Asian American, whether the district is in California (Model 2 only), whether the candidate is a Democrat, the percentage of the district that is comprised of Asian constituents (Model 2 only), the vote percentage that the candidate received in the primary election, whether the candidate lost the primary, whether the candidate eventually won the general election, the year of the election, the percentage of contributions that came from within the state (Model 2 only), whether the seat in contention was in Hawaii's 1st congressional district, and whether the seat was a U.S. Senate seat. The coefficients were estimated with weighted least squares regression.<sup>6</sup>

The Hawaii and mainland model specifications differ for a variety of reasons. First, there are obviously no California districts in Hawaii. This variable was included in the mainland model to distinguish the region on the mainland that has the highest percentage of Asian Americans. The "Percent Asian in district" variable is omitted from the Hawaiian models, since there is little variation in the percentage of Asians across the islands' two congressional districts. This variable is instead replaced by the dummy variables, "District 1" and "Senate seat." These dummy variables serve the same general purpose that the "Percent Asian in district" variable serves for the mainland specification, since they allow for district idiosyncrasies with respect to donation behavior. Another purpose of the "Percent Asian in district" variable is to capture whether Asians prefer to donate to their own representative. If so, donation percentages should increase as the percentage of Asians in the district increases. In Hawaii, again because the variation is not great, the specification includes an "In-state" variable to note whether Hawaiians have a preference toward donating to races in Hawaii.

### *Strategic versus Symbolic Contributions*

A comparison of the Hawaiian and mainland models reveals that Asian American donors differ in degree between these places, but not necessarily in kind. The positive, significant coefficient for "Asian American candidate" in both specifications demonstrates that Asian American candidates, whether

in Hawaii or on the mainland, draw donations from Asian Americans more than do their non-Asian counterparts. Moreover, since the data set practically includes all Hawaiian Asian American contributions, this result can also be interpreted to mean Asian Americans have a tendency to contribute to Asian American candidates. But the size of the coefficients suggests that this propensity is much stronger in the mainland states than in Hawaii. The estimated effect in Hawaii, while substantially large and statistically significant, is more than four-and-a-half times smaller than the estimated effect in the mainland model. The preference toward candidates of one's own ethnicity is muted, but not eliminated, in the more multicultural context.

Another striking contrast between the two venues is that, while in both models Asian American candidates get more money from Asian donors than non-Asian American candidates, the tendency for less successful candidates (i.e., those who lose their primary) to get money from Asian donors and for more successful candidates (i.e., those who are the eventual winners) to get a smaller percentage of their money from them is strong in the mainland states, but disappears completely in Hawaii. The implication of this pattern is that Asian American donors in Hawaii are more strategic, in both the traditional and non-traditional senses, than Asian American donors on the mainland. Hawaiian donors do not flock to Asian American candidates if they are not viable contenders for office. Unlike on the mainland, Asian American candidates in Hawaii cannot expect to receive Asian money simply because of their ethnicity. They must mount a credible campaign. This observation about motivations behind contributions is further bolstered by the contrast between the coefficients for the "Percent Asian in district" variable in the second specification, which is not statistically significant, and the "In-state" variable in the first specification, which is significant. That is, while Asians on the mainland have very weak preferences toward their own representatives, the donors in Hawaii prefer to donate to candidates within their own state. Again, Hawaiian donors appear to behave more strategically.

To some extent, these comparisons may be unfair because Hawaii has so many more Asian American candidates than does the mainland. While this data richness is a feature to embrace and exploit, one must be careful to provide fair comparisons. Do these Hawaiian results hold up in situations that are similar to those found on the mainland? In particular, when given a choice between a competitive non-Asian candidate and an Asian candidate who may be competitive or not (the modal case in the mainland data), do Hawaiian Asian Americans still prefer the Asian candidate?

The model in column 3 of Table 1 addresses these questions, reporting the results from a subset of the Hawaiian data, with only races in which a

competitive non-Asian candidate mounted a campaign against an Asian candidate. These races parallel the modal situation in my mainland data. All of the races that match this description were run in Hawaii's first district, so the "District 1" and the "Senate" variables were not needed. The results displayed in column 3 of Table 1 do not differ markedly from those in column 1. There is still a preference for Asian American candidates and Democratic candidates. The p-value for the coefficient on "Asian American candidate" is 0.054. Hence, while this falls just outside the traditional 0.05 level of significance, the effect is likely still present and substantively large. Furthermore, the greater level of strategic contributing demonstrated by the lack of influence of the "Primary loser" and "Eventual winner" variables is the same in both Hawaiian models. These results demonstrate the robustness of the findings presented previously. Asian Americans in Hawaii tend to be more strategic in their campaign contributions than those on the mainland.

### *Pan-ethnic Versus Ethnic-based Contributions*

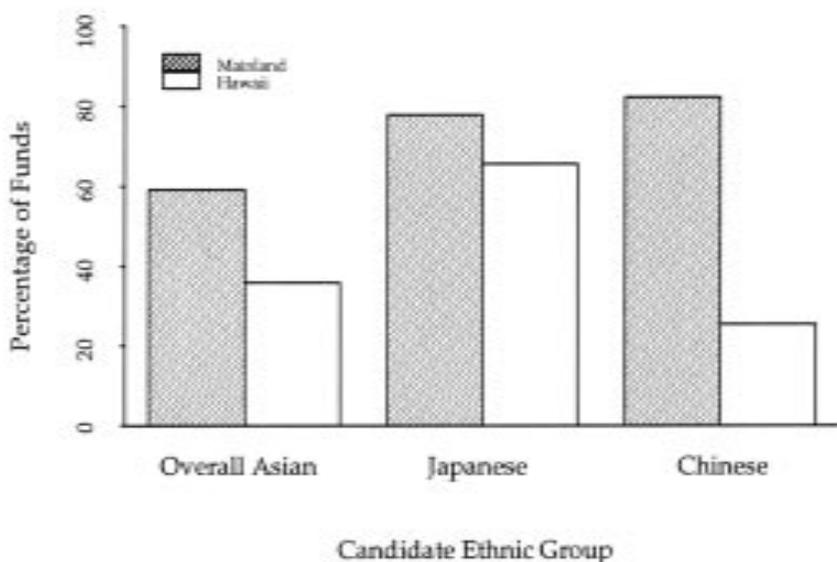
Thus far, I have examined the patterns of political contributions for Asian Americans as a whole. However, there is good reason to consider the distinctive patterns of political behavior of Asian American national-origin subgroups. A clear and important characteristic of Asian American campaign contributors on the mainland is their tendency to contribute not only to Asian American candidates in general, but more specifically to contribute primarily to candidates who are of their own ethnicity (Cho 2000; Nakanishi 1991; Tam 1995). That is, for instance, Chinese donors favor Chinese American candidates, and Korean donors contribute primarily to Korean American candidates. A more accurate representation of the bias, then, is toward one's ethnicity rather than toward the Asian American group as a whole. However, as I hypothesized above, the tendency toward one's own group may be different in a more multicultural context, since this behavior may be due to a lack of mixing among the Asian American ethnic groups on the mainland (Espiritu 1992; Tam 1995).

Ethnic-based contributing among Asian Americans on the mainland is well documented. Fully 59 percent of contributions to Asian American candidates running for federal office from 1978–98 were from Asian contributors. Among these contributions from Asians, the ethnic-based contributing is apparent. Of Asian contributions to Japanese American candidates for federal office from 1978–98, 77.9 percent were from Japanese contributors. Of Asian contributions to Chinese American candidates, 82.4 percent were from Chinese contributors (Cho 2000). Clearly, Japanese American candidates do not receive equal support from the entire Asian American group, but rather from

Japanese Americans primarily. The situation is likewise for Chinese American and Korean American candidates. Does this pattern of ethnic group-based giving appear in the multicultural Hawaiian setting, where the various Asian nationality groups have greater opportunity to mix with one another?

Figure 1 shows that in Hawaii, Asian Americans' ethnic-based tendencies in campaign contributions are muted, and are instead replaced with a more pan-Asian pattern. In this chart, there are three sets of bars, one for each of the groups: overall Asian, Japanese, and Chinese candidates.<sup>7</sup> In the first set of bars, the shaded bar represents the percentage of contributions that mainland Asian American candidates received from Asian donors. The unshaded bar represents the percentage of contributions given to Asian American candidates running in Hawaii from Asian donors. The second set of bars shows the corresponding results for Japanese American candidates and Japanese donors, and the third set of bars are for Chinese American candidates and Chinese donors. On average, 35.9 percent of all contributions to Asian American candidates in Hawaii were from Asian donors, while on the mainland, the average is much higher, at 59.3 percent. In each of these sets, the shaded bar is higher than its paired unshaded bar, showing that a higher proportion of

Figure 1: Contributions to Asian American Candidates



Source: FEC Contributions Database.

Note: Bars represent the percentage of contributions a candidate received from members of his or her own ethnic group. All Asian American candidates who ran for federal office in the period 1980–98 are included.

contributions to Asian American, Japanese American, and Chinese American candidates on the mainland are from Asian, Japanese, or Chinese donors, respectively. Hence, while the Japanese candidates in Hawaii are disproportionately the beneficiaries of Japanese donations, this pattern is stronger in the mainland. In summary, the main lesson to draw from these bar charts is that Asian Americans' ethnic-based campaign contribution tendencies are muted in the more multicultural context.

Although intra-ethnic group contributions are generally high, there is variation among ethnic groups. Figure 1 presents simple summary plots only, and does not provide insight as to why we might observe these differing levels. To begin to understand this variation, consider the analysis presented in Table 2. The dependent variables are donations to Japanese American candidates from Japanese donors and donations to Chinese Americans candidates from Chinese donors, as indicated by the column headings. The independent variables are the ones used in the models in Table 1, except that "Japanese candidate running" is a dummy variable for whether there is a Japanese candidate

Table 2. Ethnic Asian Campaign Contributions in Hawaiian Congressional Races, 1980–98 (WLS Regression)

	Asian American Contributions to Candidates		
	Japanese American Candidate	Japanese American Candidate	Chinese American Candidate
Intercept	42.35* (23.22)	40.45* (22.12)	1.95 (11.42)
Japanese American candidate running	-1.20 (14.82)		24.54** (5.32)
Asian American candidate running		7.74 (11.38)	
Democratic candidate	28.30** (11.16)	31.02** (11.69)	-14.90* (6.52)
Eventual winner	0.42 (1.67)	0.54 (1.12)	0.74 (0.68)
In-state	0.11 (0.24)	0.04 (0.25)	0.46** (0.12)
Senate seat	-4.37 (12.03)	-3.86 (11.85)	-14.54* (5.95)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.33	0.35	0.92
N	20	20	11

Standard errors in parentheses.

\*  $p < .10$  \*\*  $p < .05$  \*\*\*  $p < .01$

Note: The unit of analysis is a candidate's race for federal office in Hawaii during the years 1980–98.

running other than the one in the unit of analysis. Likewise, "Asian candidate running" indicates whether there is a candidate running who is of a different ethnicity than the Asian American candidate in the unit of analysis. These two variables allow us to examine ethnic-based giving while controlling for the ethnicity of the opponents. The other variables in the model allow us to control for district and race characteristics.<sup>8</sup>

The results in column 1 of Table 2 show that the percentage of funds from Japanese donors that a Japanese American candidate receives is not affected by whether there is another Japanese American candidate running. The only significant variable in the model is party. From column 2, we can see that this result holds whether the other candidate is of Japanese or any other Asian ethnicity. The Japanese donors are obviously very loyal to the Democratic party. On the other hand, column 3 shows that Chinese donors employ a different strategy. If there is a Japanese American candidate running in the same race as a Chinese American candidate, Chinese American candidates rely more heavily on Chinese donors than when the Chinese American candidate is the only Asian running. This effect is not huge, given the simultaneous party effect, but both are reasonably large and statistically significant. The ethnic divisions seem to be more potent for Chinese American candidates and donors while Japanese Americans were driven more by party and less by ethnicity. Confounding this distinction, Chinese Americans also lean toward Republican candidates in my analysis. So even in Hawaii, there seem to be real differences in political behavior among Asian American subgroups.

Pan-ethnicity, then, while stronger than on the mainland for Asian Americans, is not predominant in Hawaii. The more multicultural Hawaiian environment is more pan-ethnic politically than the mainland, at least in the campaign finance arena and especially for Japanese Americans, but ethnic Asian subdivisions are not completely suppressed. Thus, there is evidence that as Asian Americans find themselves in more multicultural settings, as they become less a distinct minority, the ethnic divisions among them blur.<sup>9</sup> There is also evidence of a similar movement away from ethnicity-based behavior and toward pan-Asian behavior on the mainland, where the impetus toward a pan-Asian culture is also related to a more multicultural, or at least more multi-Asian, context (Espiritu 1992; Tam 1995). Hence, this result in Hawaii partially supports patterns seen in other areas of the U.S.

## CONCLUSION

My results suggest that Asian American political behavior will become increasingly monolithic and more mainstream in the years to come as Asian Americans continue to immigrate to the U.S., and as the U.S. becomes in-

creasingly multicultural. In a more multicultural context, the behavior of Asian Americans appears less tied to ethnicity and more party based. Although there is still a preference toward Asian American candidates, competitive candidates receive more support than less competitive ones, and many donations are for candidates within the donor's district or at least within the state. This increasingly strategic political behavior bodes well for Asian Americans' political influence. In essence, it seems that a multicultural context encourages the group to move beyond the politics of ethnic subdivisions, toward a more pan-Asian group identity. At the same time, traditional party politics appear in their expected form. These patterns in Hawaii parallel and magnify patterns seen on the mainland among Asian Americans. For example, younger Asian Americans who live in more multicultural counties tend to conform more to party cues than ethnic cues (Tam 1995).

These findings also suggest that Asian Americans will continue to be an anomalous minority group. Their form of politics is distinct from the type of minority politics that has come to characterize Latinos and blacks.<sup>10</sup> Their challenges differ and their behavior within the American political system is unique. They have not been co-opted by one party. And, despite the strength of the Democratic party in Hawaii, Asian Americans do not seem to be leaning heavily toward that party in general (Nakanishi 1991; Tam 1995). Asian Americans also have not, as yet, produced as unified a front as the other minority groups, although this study suggests that the future may bring such a unification.

There are caveats, to be sure, when one examines the Hawaii data and tries to extrapolate. But evidence suggests that Asian Americans are simply not at the same point as other minority groups when it comes to presenting a well-developed political group identity. On the mainland, at least, their identity is still in the formative stages. The separate ethnic groups may coalesce in the future if the proper factors come together, but they are not at that point now. The outcome, moreover, is not pre-ordained. Much will depend on immigration rates, geographic settlement, the forgiveness and lessening of historical animosities, and certainly, the interplay between these factors.

#### ENDNOTES

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1. Survey-based studies conflict markedly in their accounts of campaign contribution

activity. For instance, Rosenstone and Hansen (1993, 61) examined data from the National Election Studies (1952–90) and found that the percentage of people who contributed to campaigns peaked in 1960 at 11.6 percent, with an average for the time period of 8.84 percent. However, other surveys report much higher numbers. For instance, in a 1993 *Los Angeles Times* poll of six southern California counties, 12 percent of Asian Americans, 21 percent of whites, 9 percent of blacks, and 5 percent of Latinos reported that they had contributed to a campaign (Lien 1997). These numbers are significantly higher than those reported in the NES dataset. Moreover, a 1984 statewide California poll detected even higher numbers, with 18 percent of Asians, 20 percent of whites, 17 percent of blacks, and 12 percent of Latinos reporting that they had contributed to a campaign (Uhlener, Cain, and Kiewiet 1989). Within the Asian American subcategory, 15 percent of the Chinese, 26 percent of the Japanese, 16 percent of the Koreans, 14 percent of the Filipinos, and 18 percent of other Asians reported that they had donated money. Finally, a 1996 statewide Texas poll reported that 15 percent of Asians, 17 percent of Latinos, 20 percent of blacks, and 24 percent of whites contribute money to campaigns. The findings of these different surveys are clearly discrepant. Furthermore, all of these polls report numbers that seem to be implausibly high, given what we can glean from objective records.

2. Asian Americans are projected to be about 10.9 million strong across the U.S. in 2000 (approximately 4 percent of the U.S. population), with about 53 percent of these people concentrated in the West (U.S. Census Bureau Report 2000).

3. The few candidates excluded from this data set are those who did not file with the FEC because they did not receive reported campaign contributions. This is a minor limitation since not filing an FEC report is a strong signal that a candidate was not a serious contender. These candidates receive very few votes, so their candidacies are generally not very important or interesting.

4. It is important to note that very few contributions by Hawaiian Asian Americans to any federal candidate are excluded, despite the focus on Hawaiian candidates. In this period, there were 4,079 contributions from Hawaiian Asian Americans to federal candidates. Of these, only 205 went to candidates outside of Hawaii (58 of these went to Asian American candidates on the mainland, and the rest went to non-Asian candidates in 35 different states). So the data set includes all contributions to Hawaiian candidates in the period 1980–98, and this set includes the vast majority of all Hawaiian Asian American contributions. There was no concentration of contributions to specific types of candidates outside of Hawaii. Because of this unusual situation, we can, from the regression models, make credible statements about the behavior of the donors as well as the characteristics of the candidate's campaigns.

5. For all donations above a threshold value, in addition to the amount, date, and recipient of the donation, we know, at most, the name, address, and occupation of the donor. The only information on race/ethnicity is contained in the name of the contributor. In this study, three different ethnic name dictionaries were used, one each for the Chinese, Japanese, and Korean groups. The Chinese dictionary included 521 names, the Japanese dictionary included 4,818 names, and the Korean dictionary included 334 names. In-district contributions were determined by examining the zip code of the contributor. This method is not entirely foolproof, since some contributors do not list their zip codes and none of the contributors lists the four-digit extension for their zip code. Since some congressional districts include only parts of some zip codes, not having the four-digit extension leaves one unable to determine if some contributors should be included in a congressional district that does not include that entire zip code. In these calculations,

if a zip code was partially included in a certain district, the contribution was counted as an in-district contribution. This results in an overcounting. Hence, the percentage of contributions that have come from outside the district is a conservative estimate. Finally, although some contributors did not list a zip code, the number of these was small and does not account for much error in the estimates.

6. Weighted least squares (WLS) is used instead of ordinary least squares (OLS) to alleviate heteroskedasticity. If all of the races had the same number of contributions, we might be justified in running an OLS model since the percentage of contributions from Asians in each race would be computed from the same base, and so the error from each could be seen as identically distributed. The problem of unequal bases is greater on the mainland, where some candidates receive fewer than 10 contributions while others receive tens of thousands of contributions. Obviously, we are more confident in the percentage value if there are more observations. In Hawaii, the range of contributions is much smaller (0–2,226), with most of the observations in the hundreds ( $\mu = 158.2$ ,  $\sigma = 334.1$ ). In only three races did the candidate receive over a thousand contributions. While the problem is not as pronounced in Hawaii, it persists nonetheless and makes WLS a more reasonable model. The effect of using WLS is that greater weight is given to races in which the number of contributions is large, and races with fewer contributions are discounted. We do not disregard these low contribution races altogether, but they clearly provide less information and are not as reliable, so giving them less weight is appropriate.

7. Although only two Asian ethnic groups are included, the implication is not that the other ethnicities are less important. Rather, there are simply not enough people of Korean, Filipino, or other Asian ethnicities in the sample to provide a meaningful analysis.

8. Note that this analysis is already pushing the data as far as it will go. The sample is quite small due to the few congressional races in Hawaii in this period, and so the degrees of freedom are diminished quickly by including more independent variables. In addition, while there are many Japanese American candidates running for office, there are not as many candidates of other Asian ethnicities. Hence, there are enough cases to examine the effect of having a Japanese American candidate and another Asian American candidate running in a race, but there are not enough cases to examine what happens when there are, say, two Chinese American candidates running for office.

9. Much of the distinctiveness that defines the different Asian ethnicities is rooted in their varied histories. To be sure, these histories have and will continue to have an enduring impact. The political struggle of the Japanese in Hawaii has been well-documented (Haas 1998b; Okihiro 1991; Tamura 1994). Akin to many immigrant struggles in the U.S., the Japanese experience has had a positive impact on their political activism. Today, they are active and dominant in Hawaiian politics, and on the mainland, they are arguably the most politically active Asian American ethnic group (Tam 1995). Moreover, especially in Hawaii, the political agenda of Japanese Americans has been shaped by their experiences. Although the political impact of this history has become less pronounced with time, aspects of this history remain influential.

10. Note that the implication here is not that Latino and black politics are the same or that they have nothing in common with Asian American politics. In some respects, particularly those that concern pan-ethnicity, Latinos share commonalities with Asian Americans (DeSipio 1996). Blacks do not contend with this issue on the same scale. My point is that minority politics is multi-faceted, and Asian Americans bring their own unique components to the mix.

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