

**TAPPING MOTIVES AND DYNAMICS  
BEHIND CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS**  
**Insights From the Asian American Case**

WENDY K. TAM CHO  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Campaign donors are sometimes characterized as investors who carefully allocate their financial resources to candidates and/or political action committees to maximize their influence. Although this theory has some veracity, it does not adequately describe all contributors. The patterns of Asian American contributions imply that their interests are strongly tied to ethnicity rather than to alternative influence-maximizing strategies. Indeed, contrary to popular belief, Asian Americans predominantly fund candidates of their own ethnicity. The campaign finance data are virtually devoid of pan-Asian coalitions. A detailed study of the behavior of Asian American donors is useful in its own right. More important, an accurate portrait of the Asian American donor highlights the crudeness of a strictly rational sketch of campaign contributors and adds to our understanding of the logic behind political behavior.

**Microeconomic perspectives** have become commonplace in the study of political participation. Campaign finance, unsurprisingly, is often portrayed in cost-benefit terms. Clearly, the campaign finance environment lends itself well to game-theoretic setups. The individual campaign contributor can be characterized as a strategic actor who distributes a limited pool of financial resources to candidates and/or political action committees (PACs) in a calculated manner to buy influence in the way of promises and eventual favors from victorious candidates. Despite the easily formed rational theories that imply that contributors view the campaign arena as a marketplace for investments, it would be premature to endorse the rational investment logic

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as proven or even well documented. Indeed, because contributor motives are difficult to tap empirically, this logic has not been tested across a wide variety of campaign types. Instead, it is unclear how or even whether this logic applies to different strategic situations and across a range of donor types. Uncovering empirical evidence of contributor motives is justly characterized as difficult.

A major barrier to uncovering the strategies that underlie campaign contributions is a paucity of data. A typically sized survey often contains few donors. Brown, Powell, and Wilcox (1995) have undertaken the study of donations by surveying those identified in public records as having made donations. This approach bypasses the need to rely on self-reports of campaign donations, a clear virtue given the well-documented tendencies for overreporting in surveys of behavior such as turnout. A different tactic is to bypass surveys all together and rely instead on the massive, objective records of donations compiled by the Federal Election Commission (FEC). One drawback with the FEC data is that although one would like to explore campaign-, candidate-, and donor-specific variables in a well-specified model of strategic behavior, the FEC does not collect information on donor traits. 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. Given the lack of personal information about each donor, it is difficult, then, to relate much of the campaign contribution dynamic to individual characteristics.

If we knew the race of the contributor, we would be able to explore whether minorities contribute to those representatives who are in the best positions to influence legislation that most directly affects minorities. Alternatively, we may discover that examining these contributors will push us to expand our understanding of the logic behind campaign contributions to include other motives and objectives. Do minorities view the campaign process as a market for investments, or does their logic and view of the process differ markedly? Moreover, why would the logic of minorities differ from those who are not minorities? Such queries initially seem to be beyond the reach of the FEC records because the FEC reports no information on race. Despite this unfortunate situation, an insight into how to use the FEC records is that one group, exactly one group, can be reasonably identified on the basis of name alone: Asian Americans.

The ability to parse the FEC database for Asian names is especially felicitous because there is, in fact, a fairly large received wisdom about Asian Americans and campaign finance. Indeed, this group of contributors has recently attracted considerable attention from the general media. Strangely, then, because of the voluminous media attention, we believe that we know something about the behavior of this group despite the lack of scholarly research. For instance, it is now widely believed that Asian Americans are unique political animals because they combine general political apathy with generous campaign giving, and it is believed that these contributions are significant and disproportionately large in relation to the size of the Asian American population. Indeed, our impressions of Asian American contributions are shaped largely by fast and loose commentary glibly put forth and then recirculated among politicians, activists, pundits, and journalists. Beyond the many casual statements lacking hard evidence, we know little about the patterns of Asian American campaign contributions.<sup>1</sup>

This article, accordingly, sets out to subject a growing consensus about Asian American political behavior and contributor motives to empirical tests. In doing so, I aim to demonstrate that the common understanding of Asian American campaign contributors is largely a myth, perpetuated by journalists and pundits. Moreover, the results will be more far reaching in that they not only illuminate the behavior of Asian Americans in particular but also act as a useful addition to the larger literature on campaign finance. By documenting the patterns in Asian American contributions, I call attention to an important variety of political behavior that undoubtedly reaches beyond the case at hand. Surely, it is not only Asian Americans who entertain a wide variety of interests in their contribution choices.

#### **THE ASIAN AMERICAN CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTOR**

Asian Americans are widely regarded as anomalous political actors because their continuing detachment from grassroots political activities such as voting and volunteering in campaigns is oddly coupled with an alleged tendency to be very active in campaign finance. Indeed, although Asian Americans have been arriving in droves only since 1965, some now claim they have, in these short 30 some years,

become disproportionately influential with respect to financial campaign contributions (e.g., Espiritu, 1992; Lee, 2000; Lien, 1997; Nakanishi, 1997; Uhlaner, Cain, & Kiewiet, 1989; Wong, 1988; Yip, 1996). The broad understanding is that they favor activism not on the front lines but from the sidelines. As conservative Ron Unz (1994) pithily puts it, Asians are on the verge of becoming "Republican Jews" because Americans of Asian descent have deep pockets "without the liberal guilt." During the 1996 campaigns, Asian American campaign contributions became tied to campaign finance scandals, the central figure of which was John Huang. This attention, albeit negative, cast the connection between Asian Americans and campaign finance into the limelight, highlighting for average Americans what political activists have been claiming for some years, that Asian Americans have become major league contributors.

This insider's conventional wisdom, that Asian Americans cannot be expected to turn out to vote in large numbers but that they can be induced to make large campaign contributions, is certainly not lost on politicians and fundraisers (Kwong & Lum, 1988; Tachibana, 1986). Robert Matsui (D-CA), former Democratic National Committee treasurer, recalls that "in 1976 there was one Asian at the Democratic National Committee who worked the [Asian American] community. In a few weeks, he had a million dollars" (Massey, 1986, p. 6). The clout and dollar amounts have only risen since the 1970s. In 1996, the Democratic National Committee collected a record-breaking \$5 million from Huang's efforts. Although more than \$1 million was eventually returned to donors in an attempt to correct ethical lapses (Miller, 1996), the dollar amounts were noteworthy, nonetheless. The Republicans, as well, have recognized the large potential source of funds. After Matt Fong introduced Bob Dole at a rally of ethnic supporters in California, Roy Wong, the Asian American Get-Out-the-Vote director concluded, "This is the first time the Asian community has been reached out to so aggressively" (Lin, 1996, p. 7). Clearly, both parties have come to view Asian ethnic communities as rich sources of financial support, still largely untapped.

Despite the emerging folklore and obvious potential impact on American politics, there has not yet been a systematic study of financial contributions to political campaigns by Asian Americans.<sup>2</sup> Although much of the conventional wisdom arises from observations

and conjectures based on soft money contributions, the implications clearly carry over into perceptions of direct contributions, the topic at hand.<sup>3</sup> What is the exact pattern of Asian American campaign contributions? To whose campaigns are they contributing money? Why do they contribute? Do they contribute money to influence politicians? Are they successful in pushing their favorite policy issues? Or, are they more interested in contributing to Asian American candidates as, perhaps, a gesture of ethnic pride or solidarity? Although it is cumbersome to rake through years of campaign contribution records documenting millions of contributors and contributions, this task is essential to establishing an understanding of Asian American political participation.<sup>4</sup> Our understanding in this area should not be confined to anecdotal evidence when the hard facts are accessible. Similarly, we should not assume that Asian American contributors fit into the traditional mold of the rational investors if we have no empirical evidence of such behavior. Even surveys, often the best sources of individual-level data, seem to be of limited usefulness because they conflict markedly in their accounts of campaign contribution levels—the documented tendency to lie about voting, which results in inflated voter turnout numbers in surveys, seems to translate to the arena of campaign contributions as well.<sup>5</sup>

This article addresses an obvious void in the literature on campaign finance, both generally with respect to all campaign contributions as well as specifically with regard to Asian American contributions. The article proceeds as follows. First, I describe the FEC data and provide an overview of the data extraction process. Second, a general theory of why people contribute to campaigns is proposed as the microfoundation for modeling the data. Specifically, I argue that the interests of Asian American contributors to federal campaigns are not mainly to gain influence from members of Congress but to support the campaigns of Asian Americans. Third, I note the surprisingly strong and unexpected patterns that are evident from even a light perusal of the data. Fourth, I test several model specifications to uncover the characteristics of the campaigns where Asian American money is particularly influential and the characteristics of the campaigns that mobilize Asian American contributors. I aim to provide evidence for the theory of symbolic contributing through these models, that is, a large portion of Asian American contributions can be seen as a symbolic expression

of support toward one's own ethnic group (whether strategic or not). Finally, I expound on the implications of these results on our overall understanding of the dynamics behind campaign contributing.

### DATA AND METHOD

The FEC began collecting data on federal campaign contributions during the 1978 elections, following the 1974 amendments to the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA).<sup>6</sup> Because these data are unavailable before 1978, we are unable to undertake a long historical study of campaign finance from the FEC data. Fortunately, very few Asian American candidates are excluded from the analysis because, outside of Hawaii, few Asians ever sought office until quite recently.<sup>7</sup>

Two clear advantages of the FEC data are that they are uniform for all federal candidates, and they are readily available. The data for candidates who run for state offices are less uniform because different states have different reporting laws. Some of these laws are more strict and some are less strict about the specific information and the size of the contributions that need to be reported. In addition, it is difficult to obtain older data, and the data do not reside in a single, easily accessible repository such as the FEC database. In this article, I focus only on contributions to federal campaigns. In this way, I institute one control for similar types of candidates. Examining the state and local candidate data would certainly be a natural extension to the analysis presented here.

Although there are multiple sources of funding (the public treasury, individual contributions, party contributions, PAC or committee contributions, and candidate personal funds), only individual contributions are examined. The primary reason for this choice is that if one wants to examine the pattern of ethnic contributions, the only information on race/ethnicity is contained in the name of the contributor. Some organizations have obviously ethnic names. As well, certain PACs have clear ethnic ties. There may not be much error in attributing an ethnic identity to some PACs, such as the Vietnamese American Political Action Committee or the National Asian American Alliance, but most PACs would not lend themselves well to this name-matching technique. Individuals' names, on the other hand, are reasonable indi-

cators for individuals.<sup>8</sup> Intermarriage obviously produces some complications in this scheme. However, people with clearly ethnic first names can be identified through name matching.<sup>9</sup> Each contributor's name, both first and last, was checked against an ethnic name dictionary for a match to one of the Asian ethnic names. This amounted to checking 6,085 names against 6 million contributions. Hence, to create a data set for examining Asian American contributions, a minimum of 36.5 billion comparisons needed to be performed. This task was accomplished through PERL scripts.

Obviously, examining only individual contributions leaves out some percentage of specifically ethnic contributions. However, note that individual contributions have regularly accounted for more than half of the receipts of congressional candidates (Sorauf, 1992). Moreover, neither the Republican nor the Democratic party is an ethnic organization, and although PACs can be ethnically oriented, most are not. Hence, although examining only individual contributions is somewhat limited, approximating the percentage of ethnic contributions by looking at only individual contributions is not likely to be very misleading. In addition, individual contributions comprise an interesting source of funds that is distinct from the other sources of funds (i.e., PAC contributions, party contributions, and personal funds), and they provide the most direct measure of public sentiment.

#### **THE INTERESTS PURSUED THROUGH CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS**

People contribute to campaigns for many reasons. Moreover, these interests may be multifaceted. A donor might contribute to support a candidate he or she admires, often because the candidate is in some way similar. This type of contribution can be seen as nonstrategic in the sense that the potential of the candidate to win the election is not a primary concern and is not heavily weighted in the decision to contribute. Other campaign contributions can be described as more strategic and may fall under the rubric of an investment because the contributions are given with the expectation of some future benefit. This type of giving is strategic in the sense that the contribution is directed toward one's own interest and so relies on an assessment of a reason-

able chance of paying off. The anticipated return may be as direct as a personal kickback or as indirect as expecting the representative to cast roll call votes of which one approves. Certainly, the idea that cash contributions might be used as a vehicle for buying influence is obvious from the various limitations that have been suggested in the provisions to FECA and the concerns raised in *Buckley v. Valeo* (1976).<sup>10</sup> There are more reasons and certainly a wide variety of interests that motivate giving, so this description is admittedly not all encompassing or perfect. For instance, giving to a candidate of the same ethnicity can be strategic in the sense that having a representative of the same ethnicity raises the profile of one's ethnic group and, in turn, is a benefit for the entire group. This type of strategic behavior and the investment type of strategic behavior are both strategic, but different interests are being pursued.

An alternative conceptualization can be seen in Brown et al.'s (1995) work. They survey a large number of contributors and discover that personal networks are a key factor in securing campaign funds. They also posit that ideological proximity is a strong determinant of the decision to give. This description can be seen as an alternative conceptualization, but it is, as well, consistent with the interest-based theory. For instance, networks of personal contributors may be constructed along ethnic lines. And, ideological proximity is often correlated with ethnicity.

Because the origins of a contributor's actions are, of course, known only to himself, we cannot be certain of what interest a donor might be pursuing.<sup>11</sup> However, some insight into the psyche of the contributor can be gained by observing the pattern of the contributions. For instance, if Asian Americans give predominantly to Asian candidates, then this would provide evidence of where their interests lie. Moreover, this evidence would be bolstered if we further found that many of these Asian candidates were never serious contenders. It is hard to argue that Asian Americans are being strategic in the investment sense if they are donating predominantly to Asian American candidates who have little chance of attaining political office. If, however, contributors primarily donated to their own representatives or to candidates who seemed likely to be able to return favors to them, then this would appear to be a form of strategic investment. Strategic contributions, as well, may be connected with national or policy issues. This latter type



of strategy is not as prevalent with Asian American interests, because most agree that there is little consensus with regard to policy among the Asian American groups (Espiritu, 1992; Nakanishi, 1997; Tam, 1995). Although we will always mischaracterize some motives if we need to surmise the motive from the pattern of donations. If the patterns are overwhelming, most would agree that we have successfully obtained at least a glimpse into contributor motives.

There are two questions at hand: who do Asian Americans contribute to? And, why do they contribute? An insight here is that although we cannot determine, with certainty, why Asian Americans contribute, who they contribute to provides insight into their motives. Ascertaining who Asian Americans financially support is a large but feasible task. Accordingly, I now turn to an accounting of contributions by Asian Americans and contributions to U.S. Congressional candidates who represent areas with comparatively high percentages of Asian residents.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, these groups do not exhaust the list of candidates or entities that Asian Americans support. For instance, Asian Americans also contribute to PACs, parties, and presidential candidates. In the interest of space, however, this article is concerned only with contributions to nonpresidential candidates. A full accounting of Asian American contributions is too large a task for one article.

#### **INITIAL ASSESSMENTS OF CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS**

To assess Asian American campaign contributors, initially, I first examine the types of contributions received by two sets of candidates. The first set is composed of candidates who are Asian American, those who, if elected, would provide descriptive representation. Most people, politicians included, probably could not name more than a handful of Asian American candidates. This is not surprising, because the majority of Asian American candidates for the U.S. Congress have been low-profile candidates who lost their campaign bids and thus never served in Congress. Few Asian Americans have won House elections or even garnered significant proportions of the vote. The second set of candidates is composed of representatives whose districts have relatively high proportions of Asian Americans, those who are in

a unique position to provide substantive representation.<sup>13</sup> For present purposes, the threshold for relatively high proportions is more than 10% of the constituency being Asian American. Across the country, there are 23 of these congressional districts.<sup>14</sup> These representatives are the most likely to provide substantive representation for Asian Americans. Because of their unique position, they also likely to receive campaign contributions from Asian Americans. We are comparing, then, contributions to the two groups that are the most likely to provide representation for the Asian American community.

Certainly, Asian Americans have reasons to contribute to both sets of candidates, although the reasoning may differ. In addition, both sets of candidates have justifications for courting Asian American contributors, although their modal appeals differ. Given that all of these candidates have incentives to court Asian American contributors, I proceed now to detail whose appeals are heeded with the most enthusiasm.

#### ASIAN AMERICAN CANDIDATES

Tables 1, 2, and 3 summarize campaign contributions for the first set of candidates described: Asian Americans who ran for federal office in the 20-year period 1978–1998. Both Tables 1 and 2 provide the same information. The difference is that Table 1 is a summary of campaign contributions given to Asian American candidates who ran for office in California, while Table 2 is a summary of campaign contributions given to Asian American candidates who ran for office outside of the state of California, excluding Hawaii.<sup>15</sup> Table 3 is devoted to the careers of Robert Matsui (D-CA-5) and Norman Mineta (D-CA-15) because they have the two longest-standing careers of any (non-Hawaiian) Asian American in the House.

Even a brief glance at Tables 1 and 2 reveals several overwhelming characteristics of the campaigns of Asian American candidates. First, Asian American candidates generally do not run for office in districts with particularly high proportions of Asian constituents. It seems counter to initial expectations that of the districts where Asian Americans ran for office, the average percentage of the constituency that was

*(text continues on p. 362)*

**TABLE 1**  
**Individual Campaign Contributions to Asian American Congressional Candidates in California (1978-1998)**

<i>Candidate (Party)</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Contribution</i>				<i>Primary Election</i>	<i>General Election</i>		
				<i>N</i>	<i>Amount (\$)</i>	<i>Asian (%)</i>	<i>Ethnic (%)</i>	<i>Vote (%)</i>	<i>Major Opponent</i>	<i>Vote (%)</i>	<i>Major Opponent</i>
Rose Ochi (D) <sup>a</sup>	CA-30	1982	Japanese	25	17,500	84	67	14	Matthew Martinez		
Dan Wong (R) <sup>a</sup>	CA-34	1982	Chinese	9	5,100	100	100	46	Paul R. Jackson		
Lily Chen (D) <sup>a</sup>	CA-30	1988	Chinese	137	112,548	96	98	26	Matthew Martinez		
Sang Korman (R) <sup>a</sup>	CA-21	1988	Korean	121	99,000	99	100	14	Elton Gallegly		
Sang Korman (R) <sup>a</sup>	CA-21	1990	Korean	281	172,800	99	99	32	Elton Gallegly		
Sang Korman (R) <sup>a</sup>	CA-24	1992	Korean	112	75,600	96	100	24	Tom McClintock		
Sang Korman (R) <sup>a</sup>	CA-24	1994	Korean	68	46,800	96	100	16	Rich Sybert		
Jay Kim (R) <sup>b</sup>	CA-41	1992	Korean	644	319,590	85	85	30	Charles Bader	60	Bob Baker
Jay Kim (R) <sup>b</sup>	CA-41	1994	Korean	740	374,258	85	85	41	Valerie Romero	62	Ed Tessier
Jay Kim (R) <sup>b</sup>	CA-41	1996	Korean	635	361,340	81	93	58	Bob Kerns	58	Richard Waldron
Jay Kim (R) <sup>a</sup>	CA-41	1998	Korean	351	235,182	89	94	26	Gary Miller		
Albert C. Lum (D) <sup>a</sup>	CA-30	1992	Chinese	263	172,588	86	96	16	Xavier Becerra		
Elsa Cheung (R) <sup>c</sup>	CA-8	1994	Chinese	13	5,000	92	85	100	Uncontested	18	Nancy Pelosi
Doris Liu (R) <sup>a</sup>	CA-15	1994	Chinese	3	1,750	33	33	34	Robert Wick		
Peter Mathews (D) <sup>a</sup>	CA-38	1992	Indian	30	14,771	83	100	27	Evan Brande		
Peter Mathews (D) <sup>c</sup>	CA-38	1994	Indian	542	270,219	85	100	100	Uncontested	37	Steve Horn
Peter Mathews (D) <sup>a</sup>	CA-38	1996	Indian	80	34,931	66	100	49	Rick Zbur		

*(continued)*

TABLE 1 Continued

Candidate (Party)	Race	Year	Ethnicity	N	Contribution			Primary Election		General Election	
					Amount (\$)	Asian (%)	Ethnic (%)	Vote (%)	Major Opponent	Vote (%)	Major Opponent
Peter Mathews (D)	CA-38	1998	Indian	156	67,969	88	100	100	Uncontested	44	Steve Horn
Mark Takano (D) <sup>b</sup>	CA-43	1992	Japanese	137	72,926	65	82	29	Raven L. Workman	46	Ken Calvert
Mark Takano (D) <sup>b</sup>	CA-43	1994	Japanese	262	120,405	53	37	70	Raven L. Workman	38	Ken Calvert
Kyo Paul Jhin (R) <sup>a</sup>	CA-24	1996	Korean	60	31,850	93	89	22	Rich Sybert		
Matt Fong (R) <sup>b</sup>	CA-Senate	1998	Chinese	11,171	7,995,453	27	89	45	Darrell Issa	43	Barbara Boxer

SOURCE: Contribution data compiled from Federal Election Commission (1978-1998) reports. Available from: [www.fec.gov](http://www.fec.gov). Other data compiled from the *Almanac of American Politics* (Barone & Ujifusa, 1980-1998), *America Votes* (Scammon & McGillivray, 1980-1998), the *Congressional Directory* (Stevens, 1978-1998), and *Congressional Districts in the 1980s* (Gottrun, 1973).

NOTE: Reported Asian contribution percentages are percentages of the total *N* contributions; reported ethnic contribution percentages are percentages of the total Asian *N* contributions; reported opponent in primary elections reflects the candidate who received the most votes; primary vote percentages reflect the percentage of the candidate's "own party" vote; D = Democrat; R = Republican.

a. Candidate lost his or her primary election.

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

c. Candidate was unopposed in his/her party's primary.

**TABLE 2**  
**Individual Campaign Contributions to Asian American Congressional**  
**Candidates Outside of California (1978-1998)**

<i>Candidate (Party)</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Contribution</i>			<i>Primary Election</i>		<i>General Election</i>		
				<i>N</i>	<i>Amount (\$)</i>	<i>Asian (%)</i>	<i>Ethnic (%)</i>	<i>Vote (%)</i>	<i>Major Opponent</i>	<i>Vote (%)</i>	<i>Major Opponent</i>
Jesse Chiang (I) <sup>a</sup>	WA-Senate	1982	Chinese	1	500	0	0			1	Henry Jackson
Soleng Tom (D) <sup>b</sup>	AZ-5	1982	Chinese	4	3,000	100	100	17	Jim McNulty		
Tom Shimizu (D) <sup>c</sup>	UT-2	1986	Japanese	99	72,570	11	91	62	Douglas Bischoff	44	Wayne Owens
S. B. Woo (D) <sup>c</sup>	DE-Senate	1988	Chinese	1287	1,063,158	93	93	74	Ernest Ercole	43	Michael Castle
S. B. Woo (D) <sup>c</sup>	DE-AL	1992	Chinese	994	485,366	93	92	50	Samuel Beard	38	William Roth Jr.
Dianand											
Bhagwandin (R-C) <sup>d</sup>	NY-6	1992	Indian	39	16,375	85	100	100	Uncontested	19	Floyd Flake
Jay W. Khim (R) <sup>b</sup>	VA-11	1992	Korean	40	23,150	60	96	16	Henry Butler		
Glenn Sugiyama (D) <sup>b</sup>	IL-9	1992	Japanese	50	28,851	28	79	23	Sidney Yates		
Esther Lee Yao (R) <sup>b</sup>	TX-25	1992	Chinese	206	108,732	91	99	45	Dolly Madison McKenna		
Neil Dhillon (D) <sup>b</sup>	MD-6	1994	Indian	496	263,038	86	99	18	Paul Muldowney		
Binh Ly (R) <sup>b</sup>	FL-19	1994	Vietnamese	31	20,860	62	89	40	Peter Tsakanikas		
Paull Shin (D) <sup>b</sup>	WA-2	1994	Korean	193	125,985	77	97	18	Harriet A. Spanel		
Ram Uppuluri (D) <sup>b,d</sup>	TN-3	1994	Indian	261	94,771	77	74	20	Randy Button		
Yash Aggarwal											
(D-L) <sup>c</sup>	NY-20	1996	Indian	184	79,034	90	100	67	Ira Goodman	38	Benjamin Gilman
Nimi McConigley											
(R) <sup>b</sup>	NY-Senate	1996	Indian	79	42,750	72	100	7	Michael Enzi		

*(continued)*

TABLE 2 Continued

Candidate (Party)	Race	Year	Ethnicity	N	Contribution			Primary Election		General Election	
					Amount (\$)	Asian (%)	Ethnic (%)	Vote (%)	Major Opponent	Vote (%)	Major Opponent
Cheryl Lau (R) <sup>b</sup>	NV-2	1996	Chinese	168	85,805	83	96	24	Jim Gibbons		
Jorawar Misir (R-C-I-FR) <sup>d</sup>	NY-6	1996	Indian	12	5,950	83	100	100	Uncontested	15	Floyd Flake
Paul Park (D) <sup>b</sup>	IL-Senate	1996	Korean	53	20,400	98	100	1	Richard Durbin		
John Lim (R) <sup>c</sup>	OR-Senate	1998	Korean	428	302,406	93	91	63	John M. Fitzpatrick	34	Ron Wyden
R. Nag Nagarajan (D) <sup>b</sup>	IN-6	1998	Indian	1	500	100	100	24	Bob Kern		
David Wu (D) <sup>c</sup>	OR-1	1998	Chinese	1388	672,293	35	92	52	Linda Peters	55	Molly Bordonaro

SOURCE: Contribution data compiled from Federal Election Commission (1978-1998) reports. Available from: [www.fec.gov](http://www.fec.gov). Other data compiled from the *Almanac of American Politics* (Barone & Ujifusa, 1980-1998), *America Votes* (Scammon & McGillivray, 1980-1998), the *Congressional Directory* (Stevens, 1978-1998), and *Congressional Districts in the 1980s* (Gottrun, 1973).

NOTE: Reported Asian contribution percentages are percentages of the total *N* contributions; reported ethnic contribution percentages are percentages of the total Asian *N* contributions; reported opponent in primary elections reflects the candidate who received the most votes; primary vote percentages reflect the percentage of the candidate's "own party" vote; I = Independent; D = Democrat; R = Republican.

a. Candidate ran as an Independent; there was no primary.

b. Candidate lost his or her primary election.

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

d. Candidate was unopposed in his/her party's primary.

e. Ram Uppuluri was a multiethnic candidate (Japanese and Asian Indian). However, he received little support from the Japanese community. See Shankar and Srikanth (1998).

**TABLE 3**  
**Campaign Contributions for Robert Matsui and Norman Mineta**

<i>Candidate (Party)</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Contribution</i>			<i>Primary Election</i>		<i>General Election</i>	
				<i>Amount (\$)</i>	<i>Asian (%)</i>	<i>Japanese (%)</i>	<i>Vote (%)</i>	<i>Major Opponent</i>	<i>Vote (%)</i>	<i>Major Opponent</i>
Norman Mineta (D) <sup>a</sup>	CA-13	1978	178	43,245	30	94	100	Uncontested	59	Dan O'Keefe
	CA-13	1980	109	23,875	35	97	100	Uncontested	59	W. E. (Ted) Gagne
	CA-13	1982	40	27,746	28	73	100	Uncontested	66	Tom Kelly
	CA-13	1984	50	33,220	24	58	100	Uncontested	65	John D. (Jack) Williams
	CA-13	1986	72	43,450	33	92	100	Uncontested	70	Bob Nash
	CA-13	1988	120	74,965	33	72	100	Uncontested	67	Luke Sommer
	CA-13	1990	346	151,193	31	81	100	Uncontested	58	David E. Smith
	CA-15	1992	575	266,401	31	61	100	Uncontested	64	Robert Wick
	CA-15	1994	603	279,023	25	60	100	Uncontested	60	Robert Wick
Robert Matsui (D)	CA-3	1978	563	157,561	36	76	36	Eugene T. Gualco	53	Sandy Smoley
	CA-3	1980	54	26,875	35	84	89	Ivaldo Lenci	71	Joseph Murphy
	CA-3	1982	54	33,546	15	88	100	Uncontested	90	Bruce A. Daniel
	CA-3	1984	23	15,953	13	100	92	Bill Watkins	100	Uncontested
	CA-3	1986	92	61,991	15	86	100	Uncontested	76	Lowell Landowski
	CA-3	1988	212	135,743	16	73	100	Uncontested	71	Lowell Landowski
	CA-3	1990	653	328,700	34	80	100	Uncontested	60	Lowell Landowski
	CA-5	1992	186	88,300	20	76	100	Uncontested	69	Robert S. Dinsmore
	CA-5	1994	283	146,539	20	74	100	Uncontested	68	Robert S. Dinsmore
	CA-5	1996	254	136,000	26	77	100	Uncontested	70	Robert S. Dinsmore
	CA-5	1998	167	76,700	10	71	100	Uncontested	72	Robert S. Dinsmore

SOURCE: Contribution data compiled from Federal Election Commission (1978-1998) reports. Available from: [www.fec.gov](http://www.fec.gov). Other data compiled from the *Almanac of American Politics* (Barone & Ujifusa, 1980-1998) and *America Votes* (Scammon & McGillivray, 1980-1998).

NOTE: Reported Asian contribution percentages are percentages of the total *N* contributions; reported Japanese contribution percentages are percentages of the total Asian contributions; D = Democrat.

a. First elected in 1974.

Asian American was relatively low (7.0% with a standard deviation of 5.0). There are certainly districts with much higher percentages of Asian Americans. California districts, for instance, top out at 28%. In another four districts, Asian Americans comprise more than 20% of the constituency. Although districts with high percentages of Asian Americans do attract some Asian American candidates, they do not attract many. These districts are all represented by non-Asian representatives. This pattern is greatly contrasted with the patterns found among blacks and Latinos. Black and Latino districts are overwhelmingly composed of minority voters and nearly always elect a black or Latino representative (Grofman & Davidson, 1992; Lublin, 1997).

Second, of the total number of contributions that Asian American candidates receive, the percentage of these contributions that come from Asian American contributors is very high. On average, Asian American contributors account for 59.3% ( $\sigma = 32.9$ ) of the total number of contributions. This number is even higher (79.2%) with a smaller standard deviation ( $\sigma = 23.5$ ) when the Japanese candidates' contributions are left out of the computation. For the Japanese candidates, the average drops to 27.2% with a standard deviation of 15.9. Neither of these percentages is even remotely close to the much lower percentage of Asian Americans that comprise the respective districts. On average, the difference in percentage of Asian American contributors and Asian American constituency is 52.4. Evidently, Asian American candidates are able to garner support from many Asian Americans outside their own districts. Consider, for example, S. B. Woo's contributions. He received more than 93% of his contributions from Asian Americans, but Asian Americans comprise only 1.4% of his constituency.

The support that the broad Asian American community provides for Asian American candidates is further evidenced in the numbers of in-district contributions. In-district contributions are contributions that are given to campaigns in a contributor's own district.<sup>16</sup> Of the Asian Americans who contributed to Woo's campaign, for instance, only 3.5% lived in his state. Indeed, on average, only 24.4% of the contributions that Asian candidates receive from Asian Americans are from their own constituents. Asian Americans are clearly willing and even happy to support Asian candidates regardless of whether the candidate will be their own representative or even a representative from



their own state. This pattern is not evident among other candidates. As we can see from Table 4, candidates generally receive more money from their own constituency.

This broad support from the Asian American community is broad only in the geographical sense. That is, although Asian Americans will cross districts, counties, and states to lend support to a fellow Asian American candidate, they generally will not cross ethnicities. Indeed, Tables 1 and 2 provide strong evidence against the notion of Asian American pan-ethnicity. Although journalists and activists virtually always speak of “Asian American politics” and an “Asian American identity,” with regard to campaign finance, these concepts remain abstract and lack concrete and widespread evidence. Contributions to Asian American candidates come predominantly from Asian Americans of the same ethnicity. To use S. B. Woo as an example again, note that more than 92% of his Asian American donations were specifically from Chinese Americans. Evidently, the campaign chests of Asian American candidates are not filled by all Asian American communities. On average, 84.6% of the Asian campaign contributions come from contributors of the same ethnicity.

#### **CANDIDATES WHO REPRESENT AREAS WITH COMPARATIVELY HIGH CONCENTRATIONS OF ASIANS**

Even before embarking on more sophisticated analysis, several contribution patterns emerge. Moreover, the patterns for Asian American candidates stand in stark contrast to the contributions that other candidates receive. Consider the numbers in Table 4 that summarize contributions in the 1990s to candidates who represented areas with comparatively high concentrations of Asian Americans. The patterns that were so clear in Tables 1, 2, and 3 are not evident in Table 4. They are not absent, but rather now appear in an intriguingly opposite manner. These non-Asian candidates received less money from Asian Americans than one well versed in journalistic accounts would have expected.<sup>17</sup> The percentage of their funds received from Asian Americans is far less than the comparable Asian percentage of their constituencies. The sole exception to this rule is Representative Gary Ackerman (D-NY-5). He received more than 18% of his donations from Asian Americans, even though Asian Americans make up only 11%

**TABLE 4**  
**Campaign Contributions to Candidates Who Represent Areas**  
**With Comparatively High Concentrations of Asians, 1990s**

<i>Candidate</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Total Contributions</i>		<i>Asian Contributions</i>			<i>In-District Contribution</i>		
			<i>N</i>	<i>Amount (\$)</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Amount (\$)</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Total (%)</i>	<i>Asian (%)</i>	<i>% Asian in District</i>
Xavier Becerra (D)	CA-30	1992-1996	166	82,285	8	3,958	4.80	10.99	11.43	21
Tom Campbell (R)	CA-15	1996	2378	1,695,340	69	47,400	2.90	10.54	23.53	11
Ron Dellums (D)	CA-9	1992-1996	305	176,569	45	37,467	13.90	27.17	26.71	16
Robert Dornan (R)	CA-46	1992-1994	766	282,179	7	3,700	0.90	3.11	26.67	12
David Dreier (R)	CA-28	1992-1996	427	194,847	15	10,083	3.60	30.27	42.86	13
Anna Eshoo (D)	CA-14	1992-1996	548	278,388	20	7,795	3.80	54.18	42.65	12
Bob Filner (D)	CA-50	1992-1996	621	293,053	11	5,267	1.70	16.96	19.92	15
Jane Harman (D)	CA-36	1992-1996	1104	594,197	15	9,083	1.30	11.27	18.58	13
Tom Lantos (D)	CA-12	1992-1996	155	78,337	7	4,950	4.10	19.00	42.06	26
Zoe Lofgren (D)	CA-16	1994-1996	381	202,492	29	14,495	7.10	36.07	53.29	21
Matthew Martinez (D)	CA-31	1992-1996	55	34,911	6	3,050	11.10	24.73	73.33	23
George Miller (D)	CA-7	1992-1996	167	93,439	2	617	1.10	21.44	22.22	14
Nancy Pelosi (D)	CA-8	1992-1996	346	223,417	22	12,867	6.30	56.61	76.30	28
Richard Pombo (R)	CA-11	1992-1996	554	228,643	14	4,475	2.40	80.22	83.99	12
Dana Rohrabacher (R)	CA-45	1992-1996	280	144,147	29	17,683	9.70	28.53	24.17	11
Ed Royce (R)	CA-39	1992-1996	489	197,203	46	17,174	9.20	26.07	21.56	14
Pete Stark (D)	CA-13	1992-1996	150	96,472	3	1,917	1.80	1.17	6.67	19
Sidney Yates (D)	IL-9	1992-1996	219	135,892	1	167	0.13	3.15	0.00	10
Gary Ackerman (D)	NY-5	1992-1996	731	496,635	141	100,804	18.20	42.65	26.17	11
Thomas Manton (D)	NY-7	1992-1996	267	138,059	15	8,850	5.10	20.41	37.66	11
Nydia Velazquez (D)	NY-12	1992-1996	296	128,563	7	2,433	2.10	10.20	16.67	19
Jim McDermott (D)	WA-7	1992-1996	46	20731	2	950	2.90	41.28	11.11	11

SOURCE: Contribution data compiled from Federal Election Commission (1978-1998) reports. Available from: [www.fec.gov](http://www.fec.gov). Other data compiled from the *Almanac of American Politics* (Barone & Ujifusa, 1980-1998).

NOTE: Reported Asian contribution percentages are percentages of the total *N* contributions; numbers reflect a rounded, nonweighted average of the indicated time span; D = Democrat; R = Republican.

of his constituency. The average however is 5.2% (4.6% without Ackerman), while the average percentage of the constituency that is Asian American is 16.3%. Contrary to initial expectations, then, Asian American campaign donations do not figure prominently in Asian American districts.

We have already seen from Tables 1, 2, and 3 that Asian Americans do, as the pundits report, contribute significant amounts of money to political campaigns. Hence, lack of resources is not the problem. Nor is the problem a lack of efficacy. The pundits' reports are misleading, however, in that although Asian Americans do have money and they do contribute, they do not contribute much to their own representatives. Instead, given the opportunity to choose, they choose disproportionately to fund Asian American candidates of their own ethnicity. They are not, as previous accounts imply, a source of funds for all candidates. The patterns of Asian American contributions seem more consistent with symbolic expression than influence maximization because the determining entity is not the district composition but the race of the candidate.

### ANALYSIS

I now turn to a more sophisticated analysis of Asian American contribution patterns to determine whether the initial assessments hold when subjected to more rigorous testing. This analysis includes, in addition to the candidates named in Tables 1, 2, and 3, any candidate who received a reasonably high number of contributions from the Asian American community.<sup>18</sup> In the following models, I explore the relationship between campaign funds received from Asian Americans and various election characteristics such as the ethnicity of the candidate and the competitiveness of the seat and general district characteristics. The most support for the hypothesis of symbolic contributing occurs when the proportion of funds rises with being an Asian American candidate while also being a candidate with no hope of winning. Moreover, although the evidence will not be definitive, the evidence will be stronger if none of the district characteristics is significant. The caveat, of course, is that we are making conjectures of motivations based on contribution patterns. We do not have a direct measure of

motivations, so our evidence cannot be conclusive. However, as we have noticed from the descriptive statistics thus far and as we will notice in the following analysis, because the patterns are overwhelming, the evidence is strong.

Table 5 displays the results from a series of regression models. The sample for this analysis includes all campaigns where Asian American donations exceeded a threshold, all districts where the presence of Asian Americans was more than the 10% threshold, and all campaigns with Asian American candidates. The dependent variable in the first, second, third, and sixth columns is the percentage of funds that were received from Asian Americans. And the dependent variable in the fifth and seventh columns is the dollar amount (in thousands) that was received from Asian Americans. Campaigns that receive a large number of contributions (or dollars) from Asian Americans are clearly able to mobilize the Asian American contributor. On the other hand, campaigns that receive a large percentage of their funds from Asian Americans can be characterized as the campaigns where Asian Americans exert the greatest degree of influence. These two sets of campaigns need not be identical.<sup>19</sup>

The models in the first five columns include all of the aforementioned candidates, while the models in the sixth and seventh columns include only elections where Asian American candidates ran. The models with percentage as a dependent variable are weighted least squares regression.<sup>20</sup> The other models are ordinary least squares. The independent variables are the percentage of the primary vote that the candidate received, the year of the campaign, the percentage of the district that is Asian, the total number of contributors, and dummy variables for whether the candidate lost the primary, whether the candidate was the eventual victor, whether the seat was a Senate race, whether the race was in California, the party of the candidate, whether the candidate was Asian American, whether the candidate was of a specific nationality, whether the candidate was deemed a "hopeless candidate," and whether the candidate was deemed a "competitive candidate." For this analysis, candidates were separated into three types: hopeless, competitive, and favored. Hopeless candidates are those who lost their primary and did not garner a significant proportion of the vote in the effort (i.e., less than 30%). Competitive candidates raised a reasonable amount of money and garnered a significant

**TABLE 5**  
**Funds Received From Asian Americans**

	<i>Contribution</i>						
	%	%	%	N	\$	%	\$
Intercept	28.48*	19.23*	11.63*	44.46	18.06	67.41**	146.53
	(12.28)	(7.51)	(4.90)	(75.95)	(56.70)	(10.60)	(77.54)
Asian American candidate		51.14**	75.40**	146.12*	86.05		
		(3.13)	(4.65)	(59.41)	(44.36)		
Chinese American candidate			-8.87	187.81*	141.69*		
			(5.64)	(63.82)	(47.65)		
Japanese American candidate			-59.21**	-111.01	-83.35		
			(5.56)	(66.28)	(49.48)		
Korean American candidate			5.94	108.08	91.67*		
			(5.39)	(61.44)	(45.87)		
California district	12.30	-7.81*	-2.96	20.71	4.81	-3.41	-80.06
	(5.71)	(3.69)	(2.46)	(31.82)	(23.76)	(7.29)	(54.89)
Democratic candidate	-3.56	-7.47*	1.15	14.31	21.48	-29.65**	-40.14
	(4.33)	(2.65)	(1.81)	(24.40)	(18.22)	(5.99)	(43.04)
Percentage Asian in district	-0.40	0.42	0.35	0.32	1.07	-0.53	2.36
	(0.48)	(0.30)	(0.20)	(2.71)	(2.02)	(0.69)	(4.85)
Primary vote	0.03	-0.06	0.10*	-0.31	0.37		
	(0.11)	(0.07)	(0.05)	(0.61)	(0.46)		
Primary loser	20.24*	9.06	9.66*	-147.92*	-77.73*		
	(8.22)	(5.06)	(3.27)	(43.87)	(32.76)		
Eventual winner	-20.23*	-7.70*	-1.27	-21.85	-29.56		
	(6.08)	(3.79)	(2.60)	(35.32)	(26.37)		
Year	0.00	0.05	-0.98**	0.07	-2.78		
	(0.51)	(0.31)	(0.21)	(2.85)	(2.13)		
Total number of contributions				0.01	0.00	-0.00	
				(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	
Senate seat				92.36*	92.41**		
				(35.87)	(26.78)		
Hopeless candidate						33.15**	-50.13
						(7.29)	(53.32)
Competitive candidate						20.93*	105.74
						(7.19)	(56.59)
R <sup>2</sup>	.29	.74	.89	.35	.33	.64	.21
N	165	165	162	164	164	59	59

NOTE: Standard errors in parentheses.  
\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

proportion of the vote (i.e., more than 30%). Favored candidates are incumbents.<sup>21</sup>

The results in the first model run contrary to our initial expectation but perhaps not to our expectations after some contemplation. Initially, given the premise that candidates are supported by their constituency, one might expect that as the number of Asian Americans in one's district rises, the percentage of funds and the total number of contributions from Asian Americans should also rise. However, this relationship is not borne out in the data. The percentage of the district that is Asian fails to emerge as a significant variable in any of the models. Asian Americans, then, when given a choice, neither generally attempt to exert influence by donating to their own representative nor are especially mobilized by that representative. In this sense, they are not investors, or good investors, in any case.

Also, seemingly counter to perceived wisdom are the large coefficient on the "primary loser" dummy variable and the small coefficient on the "eventual winner" variable in the first model. The significance and size of the coefficient implies that Asian Americans are most influential in the campaigns of candidates who lose their primary bid and not in the campaigns of candidates who win the general election. So, serious candidates receive a smaller percentage of their funds from Asian Americans. This reality seems largely inconsistent with the strategy of a contributor who views his donation as an investment. In this vein, Asian American contributions appear less investment oriented and more symbolically expressive. This implication is further bolstered by the fact that most of the races in question were not hotly contested. There are certainly symbolic reasons to fund hopeless candidates.<sup>22</sup> There are some strategic reasons to do so as well, but it is more of a stretch to fit these strategic reasons to the patterns that we observe. Although these were not perfect information situations (i.e., Asian Americans may not have known which candidates were the best investments), the presence of safe seats, incumbents, and low-quality challengers made them high-information situations: The eventual victor of these races was not surprising.

The model in the second column is further illuminating on these points. This model includes a dummy variable to indicate whether the candidate is Asian American. As we can see, the inclusion of this one variable changes the estimates drastically. The predictive power

moves in dramatic fashion to the Asian American candidate dummy variable, and the significance of all the other variables is overshadowed. Note that the effect of being a primary loser is lessened and now only weakly significant. The coefficient on "Asian American candidate," however, is large and highly significant. Moreover, the value of  $R^2$  rises dramatically and far in excess of the marginal increase one would expect with the inclusion of just any variable. These results strike at the foundation of journalists' and pundits' claims that Asian Americans are a source of funding for all. Instead, the evidence points to a group whose behavior is much more ethnocentric. Although Asian Americans do fund other candidates, their influence is greatest and most evident in, and they are mobilized primarily by, Asian American campaigns.

These results hold as a general rule for all Asian nationalities except the Japanese. As we can see from the results in the third column, the inclusion of a dummy variable to indicate whether the candidate is Japanese American adds a large amount of explanatory power. The  $R^2$  jumps to .89, and the coefficient for the dummy variable is large and significant. Much of this effect can be attributed to Norman Mineta and Robert Matsui. In this sense, we may be tapping an auxiliary effect from congressmen who are already influential in Congress. However, one should note that this effect is not a general incumbency effect, because there are several other Japanese candidates in the data set.

The models in the fourth and fifth columns retain the basic structure of the model in the third column. The difference is in the dependent variable. The results from using the number of contributions as the dependent variable (fourth column) and using contributions measured in thousands of dollars (fifth column) are basically the same. Moreover, the story is consistent with the one that has been put forth already. Asian American candidates mobilize the Asian American contributor, with Japanese candidates again being the exception. Some other basic patterns are evident as well. That is, Senate races garner more contributions, and candidates who lose in the primary bring in fewer contributions than candidates who go on to run in the general election. These two models demonstrate the difference between campaigns that mobilize Asian Americans and those in which they are influential. Asian Americans are influential mainly in

the low-profile campaigns of Asian American candidates, primarily the unsuccessful ones. These small campaigns, however, do not mobilize a large number of Asian American contributors. Despite this, the size and significance of the Asian American dummy variable in the models demonstrate that, *ceteris paribus*, Asian American contributors still greatly favor Asian American candidacies and not simply large campaigns or the campaigns of their own representatives.

Finally, when we examine just Asian Americans candidates, other patterns emerge that lay further claim to the conjectures that have been offered. In particular, in the sixth column, the proportion of Asian American funds is modeled as a function of the different strategic situations of Asian American candidates. As we can see, the proportion of funds received from Asian Americans increases as the seriousness of the candidate's bid decreases. Hopeless candidates receive the most funding (proportionally) from Asian Americans, while the most competitive candidates receive the lowest proportion of their funds from Asian Americans. Apparently, competitive candidates need additional funding and a broader base of support than the Asian American community can provide. Moreover, part of the reason why they are competitive is because they are able to solicit money from a broader base of voters. Hopeless candidates, on the other hand, are unable to find many sources of money. Strategic contributors looking for an investment are not likely to invest in a hopeless candidate, so the bulk of funds originates from contributors with other interests.<sup>23</sup>

Notice in the model in the seventh column, where the dependent variable is dollars (versus proportion) and the observations include only Asian American campaigns, that none of the variables are significant at the traditional .05 level.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, the  $R^2$  value is low. These results again confirm that Asian donors are not primarily concerned with the more hotly contested campaigns. No campaign type (hopeless, competitive, or incumbent) mobilizes the group more than another, and the group as a whole is most influential in hopeless campaigns. This profile does not fit well with the notion of a strategic contributor looking for an investment.

These models, as a collective, shed considerable insight into the profile of Asian American campaign contributors. It is evident that Asian American contributors do not generally fit the suit of the classic investor contributor or, at minimum, are extremely unsuccessful in



trying to fit into that suit. Instead, Asian Americans are most influential in Asian American campaigns, and Asian American campaigns are the most successful when it comes to mobilizing the Asian American contributor. On average, Asian Americans give less frequently to their own representatives and to candidates who win their campaigns. Their interests seem to ally most closely with a theory of ethnic solidarity.

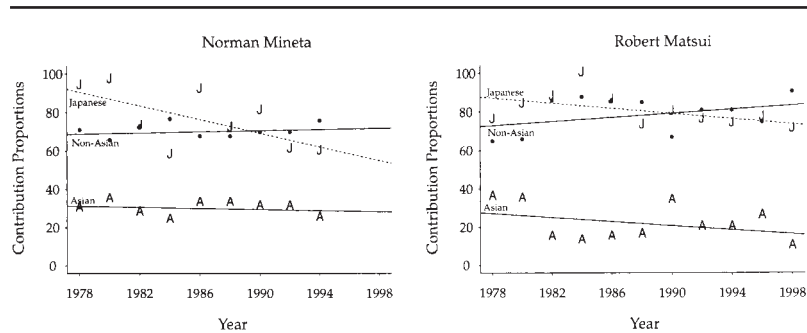
#### THE TIMING OF CONTRIBUTIONS

The observed patterns may be consistent with a strategic motive that has not been examined yet. In particular, strategic motivations may be evident in the timing of the contribution. That is, a good strategy for Asian American contributors is to provide the seed money for a campaign by giving money early in the campaign with the purpose of inducing further contributions from other potential contributors. Contributing in this manner, although posing under the guise of symbolism and perhaps still primarily symbolic in nature, would be strategic as well.

The strategic timing of contributions can be seen in both a short-term as well as a long-term context. The short-term context occurs within an election period. Here, contributors would try to induce other contributors to give before the election occurs. In contrast, the long-term context spans several years. The hypothesis is that Asian American candidates rely less on Asian American contributors when they are established politicians. If this were true, Asian American contributors would constitute a large proportion of contributions in the first few elections, but after the candidate becomes an incumbent, this type of seed money would diminish.

In the long-term context, there are only two candidates to observe: Mineta and Matsui. The plot in Figure 1 shows the pattern of their contributions beginning in 1978. Regression lines are fitted to the observations. From the plots, it appears that the proportion of Asian contributions from Japanese donors decreases with time. Asian American contributions, although largely stable, have been on a slight decline as well.

There are several ways to test whether these slopes are significant. First, we can simply check the significance of the coefficient in the



**Figure 1: Regression Lines for the Proportion of Contributions From Different Groups to Norman Mineta and Robert Matsui**

NOTE: A indicates the proportion of contributions from Asians; J indicates the proportion of Asian contributions from Japanese; the dots indicate the proportion of funds from non-Asian contributors.

regression. Using this test, only the slopes for the Japanese donations for both candidates are barely significant (at the .10 level). This test, however, imposes many assumptions including a distribution for the errors. Another statistic we can employ that has fewer restrictive assumptions because it is a distribution-free nonparametric test is the Theil (1950) statistic  $C$ .<sup>25</sup> For both Matsui and Mineta, the results of the one-sided lower tail test, using the Theil statistic  $C$ , indicate that the slope of the regression line for Asian contributions is insignificant (i.e., Asian American contributions are stable over time). However, there is a declining reliance on Japanese American contributions over time. For Matsui, the  $p$  value is .076, and the  $p$  value for Mineta is .038. Hence, there is some evidence that Asian American candidates tend to rely less on contributors of their own ethnicity over time. However, there is no evidence that reliance on the broad Asian American group declines over time. The claim that there is no pan-ethnicity among Asian Americans, then, may be somewhat premature. Indeed, based on these results, the conjecture that a pan-ethnic identity is emerging cannot be discounted.

To explore whether Asian Americans employ the seed money strategy in the short-term context, we consider the candidates listed in Tables 1 and 2. For some of these candidates, this timing strategy is either not evident or not successful. Thus, a number of candidates

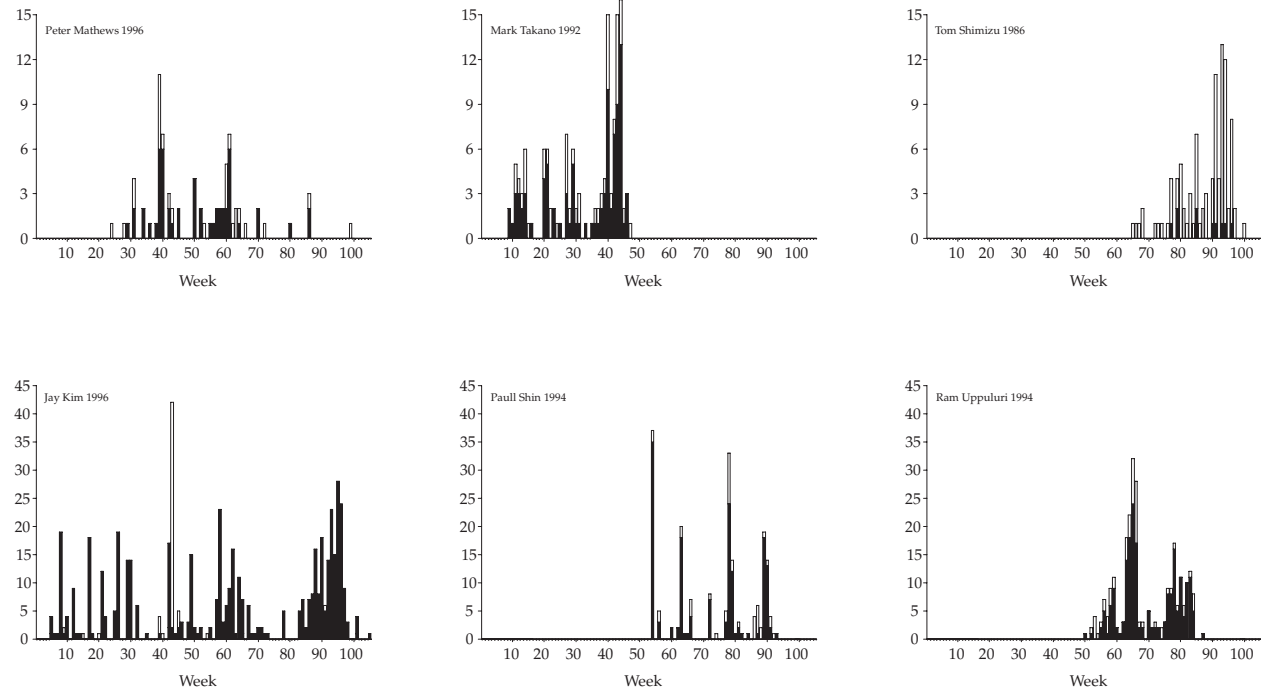
listed in Tables 1 and 2 can be safely excluded from the analysis. First, we can exclude from this analysis candidates who do not receive some threshold number or amount in contributions. Here, this threshold number of contributions is somewhat arbitrarily set at 60. Because we are interested only in whether candidates benefit from receiving money from Asian Americans early in their campaigns, the candidates who receive few contributions clearly belong outside the analysis. This leaves 27 races to consider. Second, of the remaining candidates, the candidates who receive at least 85% of their funds from Asian Americans are also excluded. Certainly, the money that these candidates have received from Asian Americans has not successfully been deployed as seed money. This leaves only 10 races to consider.

Because there are so few races to consider, we can look at the contribution patterns for each race in some detail. Figures 2 and 3 display the contribution patterns. The black blocks display the number of Asian American contributions, and the open blocks display the additional contributions from non-Asian contributors. If Asian Americans were strategic and if they successfully deployed the seed money strategy, we would see a disproportionately high numbers of black blocks in the early weeks of the campaign. This proportion would taper off as the campaign wore on and would be replaced by a disproportionate number of open blocks. However, in neither Figure 2 nor Figure 3 do we see this pattern.

To verify this assessment, we can use a test for general alternatives. In particular, we can use the Kruskal-Wallis nonparametric test where the null hypothesis is no difference among the treatment effects  $\tau_1, \tau_2, \tau_3$ , i.e.,  $H_0 : [\tau_1 = \tau_2 = \tau_3]$  and the alternative is that at least two of the treatment effects are not equal, i.e.,  $H_a : [\tau_1, \tau_2, \tau_3,]$  not all equal. Here, the treatments are simply different periods in the campaign season. So, the Kruskal-Wallis statistic,

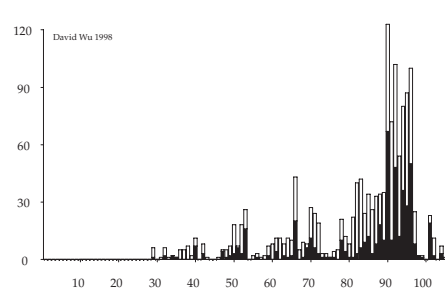
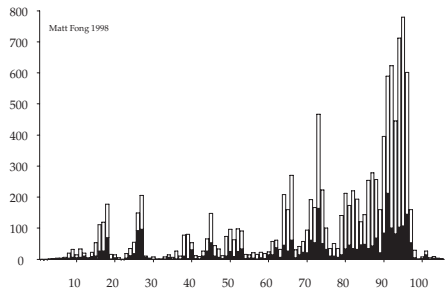
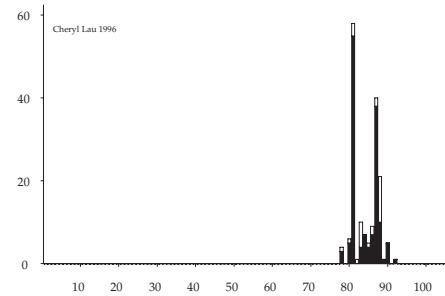
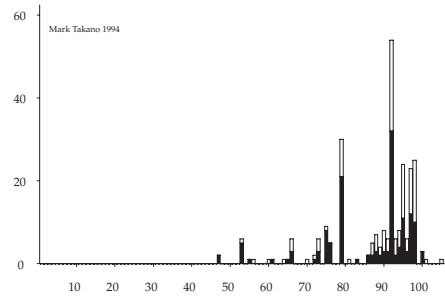
$$H = \left( \frac{12}{N(N+1)} \sum_{j=1}^k \frac{R_j^2}{n_j} \right) - 3(N+1),$$

is used to test whether the proportion of contributions from Asian Americans differs among the different tri-periods of the campaign. Here,  $R_i$  is the sum of the ranks for the  $i$ th sample, and  $H$  is approxi-



**Figure 2: Timing of Campaign Contributions**

NOTE: The solid block indicates the number of Asian American contributions in a given week, and the open block indicates the number of non-Asian American contributions in a given week.



**Figure 3: Timing of Campaign Contributions**

NOTE: The solid block indicates the number of Asian American contributions in a given week, and the open block indicates the number of non-Asian American contributions in a given week.

**TABLE 6**  
**Kruskal-Wallis Test**

	<i>Year</i>	<i>Kruskal-Wallis H</i>	<i>p</i>
Tom Shimizu	1986	3.538	.171
Paull Shin	1994	3.025	.220
Mark Takano	1992	0.843	.656
Mark Takano	1994	1.704	.426
Ram Uppuluri	1994	1.993	.369
Jay Kim	1996	0.775	.679
Cheryl Lau	1996	2.645	.266
Peter Mathews	1996	0.191	.909
Matt Fong	1998	1.378	.502
David Wu	1998	3.267	.195

mately distributed  $\chi^2_{k-1}$  where  $k$  is the number of treatments. The Kruskal-Wallis statistics for the various candidates are reported in Table 6. As we can see, there is not a single case where we can reject the null hypothesis that each of the three periods have observations that are generated from the same distribution.

Hence, in the short-term context, there is little evidence of a successful seed money strategy. Asian American contributions are not heavily weighted toward the beginning of the campaign but are dispersed evenly throughout the campaign season. In most cases, they account for most of the contributions in any given week. That is, the money does not seem to induce very many non-Asian contributors. By and large, Asian American contributors bear the brunt of funding Asian American candidates and are unsuccessful in inducing others to take up their charge.

### CONCLUSION

This examination of the behavior of Asian American campaign contributors reinforces a key finding about voting and Asian Americans: that they do not act politically as a monolithic bloc. Instead, the interests of the different ethnic groups diverge on a number of political issues (Tam, 1995). There is some evidence suggesting that the differ-

ent Asian American groups may coalesce as future generations come of age, but there is no certainty that this unity will emerge (Cho, 1999). Despite the evidence, journalists and activists continue to trumpet Asian Americans as a force to be reckoned with today, claiming that those who court the Asian American campaign donor will reap great rewards. Media accounts almost always slip into unbridled use of the umbrella term *Asian American*. The popular media aside, a little thought and analysis lead one to conclude that many barriers must still be overcome before the notion of pan-Asian ethnicity becomes anything more than a favored and desired moniker among activists. Instead, the patterns of campaign contributions mirror voting trends by displaying few traces of pan-ethnic solidarity.

The journalistic accounts are correct, however, when they speak of Asian Americans as potentially active and influential political participants. Asian Americans do contribute to campaigns and often contribute significant amounts. Hence, Asian Americans have shown that they can and do have political causes to support. The media image, nonetheless, exaggerates the depth of Asian pockets and overplays the expansiveness of their interests. With regard to the funding of congressional candidates, Asian Americans are nationalist and symbolically expressive. There is evidence that some campaign contributors use cash to try to gain disproportionate influence. Because Asian Americans are not generally of this ilk, the desire to buy influence cannot be generalized to them. In fact, when we examine the set of individuals who contribute to Asian American campaigns, the evidence runs strongly to the contrary. Even in districts where Asian American influence is presumably the highest (i.e., districts where they command a significant proportion of the electorate), the desire to buy influence through campaign contributions seems almost nonexistent. Rather, Asian Americans seem to be more concerned with expressing ethnic solidarity.

In this respect, the widely publicized 1996 campaign finance scandal involving John Huang and Charlie Trie further twisted an already distorted image. There is, to be sure, evidence that some Asian American donors do try to influence politicians through campaign contributions. Although there continues to be widespread dissatisfaction with how the 1996 events and commentary unfolded, there is little debate that large sums of money and Asian Americans were involved. These

sums are outside the scope of this article because they primarily involved donations to presidential campaigns and the Democratic National Committee. It may be that Asian Americans do engage in investment type contributing in these more national situations or that various Asian American elites who participate at this level are more sophisticated political actors than the individual contributors we have examined. This claim remains to be tested. My point is that donors at the congressional level are a large and significant group and that their actions align well within the realm of symbolic expression, and not strategic investment. Overlooking this fact would be a serious oversight.

In part because of Olson's (1965) long shadow, favored accounts for why people engage in political activities nearly always involve strategic action set in a rational choice framework. Although this rationality may include noninvestment objectives, most accounts implicitly point toward the marketplace model. Indeed, previous studies that used the FEC data have shown that this framework fits some of the data rather well. Most of this work, however, includes only PAC activity. Individual behavior is a more difficult phenomenon to tackle. The ability to extract a new source of variance in the FEC data (i.e., to identify a distinct racial group), however, compels us to expand our understanding of the logic behind campaign contributions to include a wider variety of interests. This study, although perhaps seemingly narrow in its focus on Asian American contributors, clearly has broader implications for our understanding of political behavior.

## NOTES

1. Perhaps part of the problem is that there is a mistaken notion that the data are not available. Espiritu (1992) states that "although comprehensive data are not available, Asian Americans are believed to be the second most generous political donors after Jewish Americans" (p. 61). The claim that comprehensive data are not available is plainly mistaken. The data exist. It is simply the sheer volume and structure of the data that make it difficult, but not impossible, to parse manageably.

2. Some cursory studies have been conducted. Fugita and O'Brien (1991, pp. 151-152) comment on Japanese American contributions on the basis of a survey. Espiritu (1992) examines the 1985 campaign contributions of Michael Woo and the 1987 campaign contributions of Warren Furutani, candidates in Los Angeles city elections. Tachibana (1986) reports on the funding of a few candidates by Asian American donors.



3. It would be ideal if we could trace Asian American soft money contributions. However, such a quest is most likely to be futile because the nature of soft money contributions makes them difficult to track. Although federal candidates often control how the soft money is spent, the money is given to the national parties under the guise of "party building."

4. The full collection of Federal Election Commission individual contribution reports is very large. There were 341,237 records in 1980, 168,383 in 1982, 260,581 in 1984, 274,635 in 1986, 436,294 in 1988, 530,328 in 1990, 888,224 in 1992, 838,212 in 1994, 1,229,605 in 1996, and 1,005,184 in 1998. Overall, then, there are about 6 million records to parse.

5. From 1952 to 1990, in the National Election Study sample, the percentage of people who contributed to campaigns peaked in 1960 at 11.6%, with an average of 8.84% for the period (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993, p. 61). However, other surveys report much higher numbers. For instance, in a 1993 *Los Angeles Times* poll of six Southern California counties, 12% of Asian Americans, 21% of Whites, 9% of Blacks, and 5% of Latinos reported that they had contributed to a campaign (Lien, 1997). A 1984 statewide California poll detected even higher numbers: 18% of Asians, 20% of Whites, 17% of Blacks, and 12% of Latinos reported that they had contributed to a campaign (Uhlener, Cain, & Kiewiet, 1989). A 1996 Texas statewide poll reported that 19% had contributed to a campaign (15% of Asians, 17% of Latinos, 20% of Blacks, and 24% of Whites). The reports from different surveys are clearly discrepant, and the inconsistency is strikingly irreconcilable. Furthermore, all of the polls report numbers that seem to be too high to be plausible given what we can glean from objective records. Sorauf (1992) writes that "millions of Americans, perhaps as many as 20 million in an election year, contribute willingly, even virtuously, the cash that makes the funding of American campaigns so feared and despised" (p. 1). Having parsed through the official reports of campaign contributions, Sorauf places an upper limit of 20 million on the total number of contributors. In 1995, there were 263 million people in the United States, so this translates into 7.6% being contributors. It is not possible to reconcile this number with the seemingly inflated, self-reported numbers from the various surveys. Along the same lines, many of these contributors may be people who checked off the presidential campaign box on their tax forms. These people are not considered campaign contributors in this article although it is not hard to see why they might self-report themselves to be contributors. A story in the *Wall Street Journal*, April 7, 1999, stated that 14.6 million people in fiscal year 1998 checked off the box to donate to the presidential campaign. This amounted to approximately 12% of all returns and was the lowest percentage since the early 1970s. The peak was 29% in the late 1970s. Self-reporting coupled with the extremely small numbers of Asians in most surveys render surveys unreliable and generally impractical for assessing contributors' motivations.

6. A downside of the Federal Election Commission data is that candidates must report only the names of individual contributors who contribute more than \$200. (Although campaigns are not required to report contributions less than \$200, many campaigns do report these contributions.) Hence, many of these smaller contributions are included in the data set. However, some number of contributors is excluded. This bias against the small contributors should be noted.

7. There are a few exceptions, including two victorious candidates. From 1956 to 1960, Democrat Dalip Singh Saund won three primary elections (one uncontested) and three general elections in California's 29th district. Following redistricting in 1962, he won the primary but lost the general for the 38th district. In 1976, S. I. Hayakawa won a four-way Republican primary and then triumphed in the general election to represent California in the U.S. Senate. In 1906, Benjamin Chow ran as a Socialist candidate in Massachusetts's 1st district. He received only 3.87% of the vote. In 1950, Democrat Charles Komaiko lost the general election for the 12th district of Illinois. Kirpal Singh contested but lost Republican primaries for California's 2nd district in 1962 and 1964. In 1972, Benjamin Chiang and Richard Kau won Republican primaries in California's 2nd and 41st districts, respectively, but both lost their general election contests. Jesse

Chiang lost the 1974 Republican Senate primary in Washington. In 1976, Melvin H. Takaki won the Republican primary but lost the general election in Colorado's 3rd district. That same year, Edward Aho won a few hundred votes in Michigan's 11th district, running as the Human Rights candidate. In 1978, Democrat Rajeshwar Kumar (a write-in candidate in the primary) lost Pennsylvania's 19th district in the general election to Republican William F. Goodling.

8. This procedure is more accurate than one might initially guess. For Koreans, for instance, Kim is by far the most common surname. Of the Korean population, 22% have this surname. In addition, because Kim is a surname not found outside Korea, it is safe to assume that anyone with the surname is of Korean descent. It is followed by Yi (also Lee), which accounts for 15% of the population. Following Yi are Pak (9%) and Choe or Choi (5%). Together, these four surnames account for about half of all Koreans. The next most common names are Chong, Kang, Cho, Yun, Chang, Im (also Lim), Shin, Han, O, So, Ryu, Kwon, Hwang, An, Song, and Hong. Each of these names accounts for about 1% of the Korean population. All together, these names account for about 80% of the population.

9. In this study, four different ethnic name dictionaries were used, one each for the Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese groups. The Chinese dictionary includes 521 names. The Japanese dictionary includes 4,818 names. The Korean dictionary includes 334 names. The Vietnamese dictionary includes 63 names. The dictionaries were compiled through a joint effort of the author and the consulting firm, Pactech Data and Research. This is not an exhaustive list of the Asian nationalities. Other groups were left out for practical, not substantive, reasons. For instance, the Filipino group is a very substantial component of the Asian American group. However, their surnames closely resemble Latino surnames, so it is virtually impossible to obtain an accurate count of Filipino contributors. Hence, candidates such as Gloria Ochoa, who ran in the 22nd House District in California in 1992, and A. R. "Cecy" Groom, a Democrat who ran for the 39th House District in California in 1998, are left out of the analysis.

10. Indeed, Congress has attempted on several occasions to curb the disproportionate influence of the wealthy. In 1907, a federal law was passed to prohibit direct contributions from corporations. In 1925, after the Teapot Dome scandal over cabinet-level bribery, the Corrupt Practices Act was passed. The act required disclosure of campaign funds. In 1943, labor unions were prohibited from direct contributions. In 1971, the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA) was passed. In 1974, after the Watergate scandal, FECA was amended. In 1976, the Supreme Court in *Buckley v. Valeo* (1976) overturned key aspects of FECA because they were violations of First Amendment free speech rights. Congress then rewrote FECA to preserve most of its features. Many individuals, however, still attempt to bypass these limitations as is evident from the savings and loan scandal in the 1990s and the Clinton/Gore campaign finance scandals.

11. There is one unique survey of actual campaign contributors (Brown, Powell, & Wilcox, 1995). A great advantage of this survey is that one does not need to rely on self-reporting of contributor status, and there are questions that directly probe motivations. This survey is very unique, however. Most surveys are ill suited for the same purpose.

12. All individual campaign committees that include at least 25 contributions from Asian Americans are included in the analysis.

13. Of course, any representative can provide substantive representation, not just the ones who have many Asian constituents. However, these representatives seem more likely to or, at least, to have more reasons for taking a special interest in Asian American issues.

14. Most of these districts are in California, although there are three in New York, one in Illinois, and one in Washington. Of these districts, 22 are listed in Table 4. Robert Matsui's district is 13% Asian but is not listed in Table 3. There are 3 additional districts that are approximately 10% Asian (Districts 27, 37, and 41 in California). Thanks to Okiyoshi Takeda for pointing out this distinction. See also Takeda (2001).

15. For a study of Asian American contributions in Hawaii, see Cho (2001).

16. In-district contributions are determined by examining the zip code of the contributor. This method is not entirely accurate because some contributors do not list their zip codes and none of the contributors lists the four-digit extension for their zip code. Because 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.

17. Only the winners of these districts are included. The other candidates who ran but lost in these Asian districts are not included. Although donating to the campaigns of these losers can also be viewed as investments, I am primarily interested in the ability of Asian Americans to invest wisely (i.e., to invest in candidates who seem likely to be able to return favors). Although there is imperfect information and Asian Americans may be unsure which candidates present the best investments, these scenarios are lessened in the races examined here. The races in question were generally won or lost by large margins, and many of the candidates have been incumbents for years. Hence, the outcomes of these races were not particularly surprising.

18. The threshold for reasonably high number is 25 contributions.

19. Indeed, in the case at hand, it is easy to see how and when they may differ. For instance, if a campaign receives very few donations, say, 10, but 9 of them are from Asian Americans, then 90% of the donations are from Asian Americans. On the other hand, a large campaign may receive 5,000 contributions, with 500 contributions from Asian Americans. The percentage would be only 10%. In the former example, Asian Americans are influential but not largely mobilized by the small campaign. In the latter example, Asian Americans are mobilized but not largely influential in the more prominent campaign.

20. The weight is a categorization of the total number of contributions. The choice to use weighted least squares is made to alleviate heteroskedasticity. If all the races had the same number of contributions, we would be more justified in running an ordinary least squares model because 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 identical. Obviously, we are more confident in the percentage value if there are more observations. The effect of using weighted least squares 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.

21. The one exception is Jay Kim's last bid for Congress. He was expected to lose in the primary and did. At the time of the election, he was under house arrest for campaign violations. Accordingly, Kim was coded as a competitive candidate in his last election and not as an incumbent/favored candidate.

22. There are, of course, other reasons to contribute. For instance, the contributor may have been asked to contribute by someone who they knew personally, or they may have been contributing to further a business relationship with a solicitor. In either of these cases, there may be little thought given to how likely the candidate is to win. These reasons are clearly strategic but are miscategorized as symbolic in my scheme. Whether there is gross, negligible, or some type of miscategorization in between these extremes here is a decision that needs to be based on the uniqueness of the patterns that occur. Given the overwhelming patterns, the incidences of such strategies are not likely to be common enough to affect my final results or conclusions.

23. As a final note, outliers seem likely to exist in this data set because the data seem to have wide variance on some dimensions. To determine whether any of the observations exhibit undue leverage and/or influence on the final results, residual plots, Cook's distances, hat values, and DFFITS were analyzed separately and as a collective. In Model 3, Elsa Cheung and Albert Lum were excluded. In Models 4 through 7, Matt Fong was excluded.

24. The dummy variable for competitive candidate and the intercept are significant at the .10 level, but the size of the coefficients is small and accounts for very little additional spending. So, there seems to be a marginal but largely insignificant effect here.

25. In particular, we test the null hypothesis that for each subsequent year in office, we expect no change in the proportion of funds that is given by Asian Americans ( $H_0: \beta = \beta_0$  and  $H_a: \beta < \beta_0$  where  $\beta_0 = 0$ ). The Theil (1950) statistic  $C$  is

$$C = \sum_{i=1}^{n-1} \sum_{j=i+1}^n c(D_j - D_i),$$

where

$$D_i = Y_i - \beta_0 x_i, \quad i = 1, \dots, n$$

and

$$c(a) = \begin{cases} -1 & \text{if } a \leq 0, \\ 0 & \text{if } a = 0, \\ 1 & \text{if } a > 0. \end{cases}$$

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Wendy K. Tam Cho is an associate professor in the Department of Political Science and the Department of Statistics at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.