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# Vote Choice of Minority Groups: Emphasizing Their Issue Preferences

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**VOTE CHOICE OF MINORITY GROUPS: EMPHASIZING THEIR ISSUE  
PREFERENCES**

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MASTER'S THESIS  
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**Abstract:**

In explaining vote choice of minority groups, scholars of American politics often characterize them as natural democrats. They argue that they have become natural Democrats because of their minority identity and the constraints they faced throughout the history of the United States. However, this thesis questions the characterization and highlights the issue preferences of minority groups; it analyzes whether their issue preferences have an impact on shaping their vote choice. By analyzing the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) 2016 survey, this thesis has explored that minority groups vote for candidates who pay greater emphasis on the issues they care about. Moreover, their political ideology and party identification are being greatly influenced by their issue preferences.

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## **Introduction:**

Scholars of American Politics often characterize minority voters as natural Democrats without taking other related factors in consideration. Probably, they have made this argument due to the relationship of minority groups with the Democratic Party over last four decades; the majority of minority groups vote for Democrat candidates in the Presidential elections (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Petrocik 1987; Piven and Cloward 1988; Avey 1989; Radcliff 1994). Many other scholars argued that making such a claim might be oversimplified. Evaluating voting choice is very unpredictable and complex. Therefore, relating racial identity directly with a voting choice may not be the right approach for a study. Rather, a study of vote choice needs to consider a number of other factors including social status, class, wealth occupation, education, length of residence in country, or locality, contemporary political issues, and responses of political leaders of a certain party towards the minorities should be analyzed with their racial factor (Formisano 1971; Walters 2005; Diaz 2012; Wong, Lien, and Conway 2008).

Further, in evaluating voting choice, scholars have identified three important factors: party identification, candidates, and issue preferences (Campbell, Gurin, and Miller 1954; Fairdosi and Rogowski 2015; Dixon 1970; Cassel 1982; Greene 2004, 1999; Keele and Wolak 2006). They argue that the policy preferences of a party are important in understanding why individuals support a party and how their party identification influences them in casting their ballot. In a polarized political system, one party accumulates relatively diverse groups of voters and the other is relatively homogenous and extreme (Greene 1999; Campbell et al. 1980; Weisberg 1980; Zallar 1992; Stanga and Sheffield 1987; Kelly 1989). Therefore, in U.S. politics, the people who care about white homogeneity are likely to support the Republican party as well as vote for Republican candidates. On the other hand, minorities and the other people who care do not care homogeneity

but emphasize diversity support a party in elections who have strong policies and take government actions for enhancing diversity (Campbell, Gurin, and Miller 1954; Kelly 1989).

However, other scholars note that issue preferences are important to voters. They argue that people do not vote for a party or a candidate, but they vote according to their issue preferences. If a party or a candidate place enough importance to issues the individuals care about, they will vote for that. In making a voting choice, individuals evaluate parties' positions on major issues, the level of engagement of a party and party leaders, and the direction of their involvement. If a party offers a great deal of positive importance to the issues individuals care about, they support the party and vote the candidates of party. If the policies of a party or a candidate threaten the issues they care about, individuals tend to vote for the other party in the polarized political system (Campbell, Gurin, and Miller 1954; Campbell et al. 1980; Franklin and Mackie 1987; Catellani and Alberici 2012; Pierce 1993).

Thus, scholars have explained how issue preferences impact voting choice and how they influence individuals to vote for a party as well as a candidate. But, they did not explain specifically how minorities make their voting choice. On the other hand, other scholars explain minority groups as natural Democrat voters since the majority voters of the minority groups vote for Democrat candidates in the Presidential election and they have a relationship with this party over the decades. Do they vote for the Democrat candidates because they are natural Democrat voters? Or, do they make their vote choice based on their issue preferences? What issue do they believe are highly important? Are their issue preferences different than the issue preferences of White Americans? Are the issue preferences of one minority group different than other minority groups? Do their issue preferences influence them in their voting choice over their ideology and party identification? The existing literature does not provide the answers to the questions.

Therefore, the thesis will focus on whether there is any relationship between issue preferences of minority groups and their vote choice. By using data from the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) 2016, I will analyze which issues racial minorities believe are important and which issues they do not care about so much. For this study, I will examine important political issues—abortion, gun control, healthcare, social security, jobs, immigration, environment, taxes, budget deficit, defense spending, crime, gay marriage, national security, and race relations—from the CCES 2016 survey data. After an analysis of the political issues, this thesis will examine how issue preferences of minority groups influence them in their voting choice.

### **Minorities: Party Relations**

In the study of American politics, minorities are often considered as “natural Democrat voters” due to their relations with the Democrat Party over last four decades (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Petrocik 1987; Piven and Cloward 1988; Avey 1989; Radcliff 1994). More than 80 percent of African Americans and approximately 70 percent of Latinos and Asian Americans vote for Democrat candidates in U.S. presidential elections (Walters 2005). Minorities contribute 20-25 percent of the total vote for presidential candidates of the Democratic Party and the political leaders from minority groups can bargain with the Democrat Party in giving greater importance on the issues minority groups care about (Philpot, Shaw, and McGowen 2009; Walters 2005).

Moreover, Democrat candidates in presidential elections receive even a higher percentage of minority votes if they get a candidate from a minority group (Tate 1994; Bullock and Gaddie 2009; McKee, Hood, and Hill 2012; Whitby 2007). Scholars studied the 2008 Presidential election and found that African Americans’ votes for the Democrat presidential nominee increased from

88 percent in 2004 to 95 percent in 2008 because an African American, Barack Obama, was running (Bullock and Gaddie 2009; McKee, Hood, and Hill 2012). Moreover, if Democrat candidates address minority issues in their campaign, a higher proportion of minorities will get interested to cast their ballots and vote for the candidates (Radcliff 1994; McKee, Hood, and Hill 2012). Nichols and Beck (1995) studied this argument in the 1992 Presidential election and found a positive relationship. They argued that higher participation of minority voters in the Presidential election increased the chance of Bill Clinton's win. Further, McKee, Hood, and Hill (2012) argued that Barack Obama got the benefit of higher participation of minority groups in the 2008 Presidential election.

On the other hand, scholars of American politics argued that minorities have a weaker relationship with the Republican Party, especially African Americans, very few of which support or have a relationship with the GOP. At the same time, the Republican party usually neglects minority issues because of their small number compared to the total population of the United States and their relationship with the Democrat party as a group (Wong, Lien, and Conway 2008; Lien 2004; Diaz 2012). But, on some occasions, Republicans have undertaken strategies to attract minority voters in presidential elections. For example, in the 1996 election cycle, Republican operatives planned to attract at least 15 percent of the Black vote, 5 percent more than their usual share (Walters 2005).

However, Formisano (1971) questioned this approach, characterizing minorities as natural democrats without considering other factors. He argued,

“Along with religious heritage, the ethnic factor was perhaps one of the two most important shapers of party loyalty. But any generalization such as this must be qualified by the recognition that human beings, no matter what social qualification one choose to give them for purposes of behavioral analysis, are extraordinarily complex” (Formisano 1971, 194-195).

Further, along with Formisano, other scholars argued that any argument on voting choice and party identification of minorities should not be made only based on their racial identity, many other important variables including status, class, wealth occupation, education, length of residence in country, or locality, contemporary political issues, responses of political leaders of a certain party towards the minorities, and the degree of assimilation should be analyzed with their racial factor (Formisano 1971, 195; Walters 2005; Diaz 2012; Wong, Lien, and Conway 2008).

### **Vote Choice:**

Similarly, scholars of American politics agreed that characterizing the voting choice of a group is very complex and unpredictable. A number of social, cultural, political, and economic factors are interrelated in leading individuals or groups to make a relationship with a party and to vote for a candidate in Presidential elections (Campbell, Gurin, and Miller 1954; Fairdosi and Rogowski 2015; Dixon 1970; Cassel 1982; Greene 2004, 1999; Keele and Wolak 2006). Scholars studied vote choice in three categories: party identification, candidates, and issue preferences (Campbell, Gurin, and Miller 1954; Stokes, Campbell, and Miller 1958). Campbell, Gurin, and Miller (1954) explained party identification as,

“An individual is free to call himself a Democrat and to consider himself such without getting anyone’s approval, paying any fee, or taking any pledge. He is equally free to desert the Democratic party whenever he sees fit and proclaim himself a Republican. While some people have a much more formal connection with their party, for the most part association with a political party in the United States is largely a matter of what one regards himself as being, a Republican or a Democrat” (89).

In explaining vote choice, the existing literature emphasizes political parties and argues that party identification largely influences people in their voting choice. Their opinions can be categorized into five groups. First, some scholars explain party identification with norms and values. They highlight “social identity” theory in explaining party identification and voting choice. They argue that individuals have different self-concepts that drive them to be members of a group and their values and emotions are significantly attached to membership (Tajfel 1978, 1986; Greene 2004, 138). Therefore, in a bipartisan political system, individuals can be classified based on “social identity” theory into two categories: partisanship and independence (Weisberg 1980; Alvarez 1990; Dennis 1988; Greene 2004). Individuals who have a self-concept of being members of a group are attached with a party, either Republican or Democrat Party in the American context. On the other hand, individuals who are incongruous with any party are independent. They may have certain values that are similar to a party, but may not match with most of the values of the party (Keith et al. 1992; Petrocik 1974). Therefore, party identification and voting choice of these people may depend on the values and emotions they care about and carry throughout their life. If any changes occur in their values and emotions, their party identification may change (Greene 1999).

But, scholars, who described party identification based on individuals’ values and norms, explained how these concepts are shaped by political socialization as well as political elites. Though values and norms initially are being shaped by political socialization, political elites play a key role in influencing them to emphasize certain values and disregard other values (Keele and Wolak 2006; Chong 2000). Further, Keele and Wolak (2006) explained the influence of political elites by focusing on four values: egalitarianism, limited government, moral traditionalism, and humanitarianism. While liberals place a greater emphasis on egalitarianism and humanitarianism,

conservatives tend to be concerned with moral traditionalism and limited government. Thus, political elites influence people to place greater importance to certain values and forge a relationship with a party.

Second, some scholars consider the role of racial homogeneity and diversity in explaining party identification and vote choice of a bipartisan political system. They also highlight “social identity” theory but categorize the political parties into two groups: one accumulates relatively diverse groups and other is relatively homogenous and extreme. In the context of U.S. politics, While the Democratic Party gathers diverse groups, the Republican Party usually gets support from White Americans (Greene 1999; Kelly 1989). Additionally, in a bipartisan political system, most of the supporters of one party display negative attitudes toward the opposition party, they support the policies of their party and criticize the policies of other parties (Greene 1999; Campbell et al. 1980, 395; Weisberg 1980; Zallar 1992; Stanga and Sheffield 1987).

Third, some scholars argue that a person’s party identification and vote choice depends on his or her policy attitudes. Others may place a greater importance on welfare and humanitarian policies over other policies. Some other people may place a higher importance on economic issues such as fewer government restrictions on businesses. Therefore, their vote choice depends on the policy advocated for by a political party or a candidate; when their policy preferences match with a party, they support the party and vote that candidate of the party in an election (Cassel 1982; Campbell et al. 1980; Beck 1977).

Fourth, personal history and family attachments may influence people to support a party or to vote a candidate in elections. Campbell, Gurin, and Miller (1954) identified three interpretations of personal history that:

“(a) party attachment, like church preference, may tend to be passed from parent to child and to persist into adult life. (b) it may be that most people remain in the same class, ethnic, and religious groups as their parents and are subject to the same group influences as their parents. (c) People may tend consciously or otherwise to make their memory of their parents’ partnership conform to their own current attachments” (98).

Finally, party identification and vote choice depend on how “the individual sees the political world around him and how he reacts it” (Campbell, Gurin, and Miller 1954, 107). When individuals feel positive toward a party, they support the party and vote for the candidates of the party. In contrast, if people have any negative impression of a party, they criticize the policies of the party and vote the candidates who are opposing the policies (Campbell et al. 1980).

Another important factor of vote choice is how voters evaluate candidates; they evaluate them by their ideology and perception (Campbell, Gurin, and Miller 1954; Buttice and Stone 2012). In addition, scholars explained the ideological factor as a stable predictor of voting choice (Catellani and Alberici 2012; Campbell, Gurin, and Miller 1954; Kroh 2009; Dalton 2008; Barisione 2009). Therefore, the unpopularity of a candidate due to certain actions may play a key role in shaping their vote choice. For example, the war in Iraq influenced voters in the 2006 mid-term election. Voters who opposed the policy of President Bush on Iraq war issues voted for Democratic House candidates (Grose and Oppenheimer 2007; Buttice and Stone 2012).

The other key factor in vote choice is issue preferences. Individuals are being largely mobilized and motivated when they are confident that a candidate is emphasizing the issues they care for (Maheswaran and Chaiken 1991; Kroh 2009; Catellani and Alberici 2012). Even in a polarized political system like the United States, citizens give priority to the issues over their ideology and values (Campbell, Gurin, and Miller 1954; Franklin and Mackie 1987; Pierce 1993; Alvarez 2004; Ensley 2007; Kroh 2009; Dalton 2008; Weisberg 2003).



However, scholars argued that issue preferences may significantly influence individuals in shaping their vote choice. Campbell, Gurin, and Miller (1954) noted that “he will not vote for the man not will he vote his party, except as the man or the party represents governmental policies which he himself wishes to see enacted or protected” (112). Then, they explained the term issue preferences by considering three elements: *sensitivity to partisan differences* on issues that refers to parties’ stand on major issues; *extent of involvement* in issues that refers to the degree of parties’ involvement in certain issues; and *direction of issue involvement* that refers to how individuals favor a party based on their issue preferences (Campbell, Gurin, and Miller 1954, 114).

Further, individuals care about some issues for the three reasons: personal, social, and values. First, it might be personal issues like taxes and prices of goods and services, which impacts their personal finances. They might care more about social service issues as they get benefits from these government services. Second, some social aspects might be associated with their personal issues. They might feel group consciousness that their group will be benefited from some governmental actions. Third, individuals might give importance to the issues that have no relation to their personal or social benefits but have relations with their values and ideologies. Whether they support or oppose a party depends on the policies of a candidate or a party that enhances or threatens their ideology and values (Campbell, Gurin, and Miller 1954, 115; Franklin and Mackie 1987; Catellani and Alberici 2012).

### **Vote Choice: African Americans, Hispanics, and Asian Americans**

Political theorists have taken up anew the question of how “identity politics” would influence minorities into their issue preferences. The big three minority groups—Black, Latino,

and Asian American—in the USA have already produced political consequences. The nation's current demographic makeup stands in sharp contrast to its racial composition of twenty-five years ago (Gutmann 2003; Benhabib 2002; Young 2002). Although the African American population did not grow much after 1980, only from 11.7 percent in 1980 to 12.3 percent in 2000, the population of Latino and Asian American have increased significantly, Latino population increased from 6.4 percent in 1980 to 12.5 in 2000 and Asian American population from 1.5 in 1980 to 3.6 percent in 2000 (Junn and Matto 2008).

Scholars who study the social and political response of minority groups try to understand how they make their voting choice and which issues have a great deal of influence in making their voting decisions (Keech 1969; McKee, Hood, and Hill 2012; Walters 2005; Chong and Kim 2008; Philpot, Shaw, and McGowen 2009; Tajfel 1981; Hogg and Abrams 1988; Matthews and Prothro 1966; Frederick and Jeffries 2009; Rueter 2016; Griffin and Keane 2006). One of the important factors of party identification as well as vote choice is the relationship between individuals and political system; how a political system accept individuals and how individuals response to a political system (Campbell, Gurin, and Miller 1954). In addition, personal history and family attachments may have an influence on people supporting a party and voting in elections (Beck 1977; Campbell et al. 1980).

Therefore, scholars study the personal history and family attachment of minority groups and analyze how they are being treated by the majority of residents. Whether a minority group will be integrated into this society is determined by not only the activities they engage in but also on the treatment they received from the majority of residents. But, minorities have experienced difficulty in obtaining equal opportunities for education, business, public clubs, and political participation (Higham 1992; Gordon 1964; Alba and Nee 2003; Chong and Kim 2008).

Throughout the history of the US, African Americans faced several constraints—for example, poll taxes, literacy tests, secret ballots, multiple ballot boxes, white primary—that reduced their turnout and seem to have strengthened the white community’s majority. Many white politicians were motivated by a desire to disenfranchise African Americans. Then, a separate education system was created and funding for the African American schools were reduced. The reduction in education funding lowered African American voter turnout even further when these children became adults (Filer, Kenny, and Morton 1991). Further, poll taxes were imposed on them making them feel more disillusioned about politics and voting (Lloyd 1952; Filer, Kenny, and Morton 1991). Also, many states established literacy tests during the 1940-1950s for all voters, not only for African Americans. But, the tests had a greater effect on African Americans since their literacy rate was significantly lower compared to whites (Smith 1984; Filer, Kenny, and Morton 1991).

Further, Keech (1969) investigated the voting behavior of African Americans in two cities: Durham, North Carolina and Tuskegee, Alabama. He found several outcomes. First, African Americans were able to reduce the discriminations in the 1960s, but discriminations still had an impact on their lives. Second, though they are being treated fairly in public sectors, they still receive unfair treatment in private sectors. In addition, because of the small number of African American legislators, they are unable to influence the government to propose and pass laws to ensure equality and fair treatment. Third, an equitable sharing of public goods might be easier to obtain than full-assimilation in society. Finally, they think casting ballot may not have any impact on policy where elected officials do not have a direct relation with policymaking.

Thus, these constraints and the challenges that African Americans faced throughout the history of the United States created certain values and ideology among them. This history and

attitudes of other people have impacts on their vote choice and party identification (Chong 2000; Chong and Kim 2008; Wong, Lien, and Conway 2008; Diaz 2012). Therefore, they support a party that has policies of government action on humanitarian and diversity issues (Cassel 1982; Beck 1977).

For Latinos, scholars argue that a significant number of Latinos are immigrants. Compared to African Americans, they are more interested in what is good for immigrants (Barreto 2005; Barreto and Nuño 2011). In addition, candidates and campaigns usually ignore the Latino community because of their lower numbers as well as lower participation in politics (Garza, Abrajano, and Cortina 2008; Barreto and Nuño 2011; Jackson 2011). Barreto and Nuño explained it as “nobody is asking Latinos to participate” (Barreto and Nuño 2011, 449). Moreover, political campaigns and advertisements running on the television are mostly in English while a large number of Latinos do not have English proficiency (Shaw, de la Garza, and Lee 2000; Barreto 2005). Therefore, many of them rely on the impression of their community and make their voting decision based on who is perceived to be good for their community.

Asian Americans are becoming an extremely diverse and fast-growing minority group compared to the other minority groups. According to the Census 2000 brief, a total of 25 distinct ethnic origins are found to be under the term ‘Asian American’ where Chinese is the largest ethnic group (2.73 million), followed by Filipino (2.63 million), and Japanese (1.15 million). In addition, Asian Americans have the highest growth rate, with 72 percent more Asian Americans in 2000 than in 1990. This growth rate is 58 percent higher than Latinos, 22 percent higher than Blacks, and 5 percent higher than non-Hispanic Whites (Lien 2004; Wong, Lien, and Conway 2008).

Scholars who study the voting behavior of Asian Americans find that a significant number of Asian Americans are immigrants and foreign-born. Therefore, they have the same lack of

communication skills that Latinos have (Lien 2004; Wong, Lien, and Conway 2008; Diaz 2012) that leads them to rely on the impression of their group in taking their voting decision. Moreover, Asian Americans might face similar challenges that African Americans are facing because of their identity and their color. Most of their skin colors are very different than non-Hispanic Whites, though people of some Asian origin are very close to non-Hispanic Whites. In addition, because of their immigrant identity, they are being kept from mainstream society (Wong, Lien, and Conway 2008; Diaz 2012). Thus, the behavior of the majority people toward them is important, playing a key role in influencing their voting behavior. They do not make their voting decisions just based on what are benefits for them, but they care what policies are important for their community. Therefore, they support candidates who have a positive perception of their community and care about diversity (Wong, Lien, and Conway 2008; Campbell, Gurin, and Miller 1954).

Thus, the present studies of American politics point out the factors that are very important to citizens in making their vote choice. The three factors of their findings—party identification, candidate, and issue preference—are useful to evaluate and analyze how the voters take their decision to support a party as well as a candidate in Presidential elections (Campbell, Gurin, and Miller 1954; Campbell et al. 1980; Jacobson 1989; Jacobson and Kernell 1983). Voting choice of citizens largely depends on the positions of the political parties and the candidates in the bipartisan political system: whether they accept diversity or they prefer homogeneity (Greene 1999; Kelly 1989), whether they place greater emphasize on certain issues or not, and whether they have certain values but neglect or give very less importance to the other values (Greene 1999; Campbell et al. 1980, 395; Weisberg 1980; Zallar 1992; Stanga and Sheffield 1987). Scholars also offered useful arguments about how candidates' appearance, identity, ideology, and verbal and non-verbal behavior influence people in making their voting decisions (Catellani and Alberici 2012; Barisione

2009; Mondak 1995). Then, by applying the factors or voting choice, scholars analyzed how the personal history and family attachment of minorities are important in influencing them to support a candidate in the Presidential elections. They also studied what challenges and constraints they faced throughout the history of the United States and how the attitudes in response influence them in making their voting decision (Smith 1984; Filer, Kenny, and Morton 1991). Further, they examined how their immigrant identity plays a key role to rely on their community and vote a candidate as a group (Wong 2006; Chong and Kim 2008; Wong, Lien, and Conway 2008; Diaz 2012; Barreto and Nuño 2011; Garza, Abrajano, and Cortina 2008; Jacobson 1989).

However, previous scholarship ignored how issue preference of minority groups play an important role in making their voting decision. Individuals do not vote for a party or a candidate, they vote based on their issue preferences; they support a candidate or a party that takes government actions in favor of the issues and they oppose a candidate or a party that does not place greater emphasis to the issues the minority groups care for or take government actions against their interests (Campbell, Gurin, and Miller 1954). In addition, individuals place greater emphasis on certain political issues based on what is good for themselves as well as for their community, and enhance or threaten their norms and values (Campbell, Gurin, and Miller 1954; Franklin and Mackie 1987; Kroh 2009). Therefore, to understand the voting behavior of minority groups, their issue preference should be studied and analyzed—how their issue preference influence them in their voting choice and their party identification.

### **Vote Choice of Minority Groups: Highlighting their Issue Preferences**

This thesis takes an important step in the study of minorities' voting behavior by analyzing the relationship between issue preferences and vote choice. I argue that a large portion of minority groups vote for Democratic candidates in the presidential elections not because they are natural Democrat voters, but they vote for them because the Democratic candidates and the Democratic Party emphasizes the issues they care for. Similarly, this study assumes that in the polarized political system, the Republican party gives importance on homogeneity; they place a greater emphasis on what is important to the majority group but ignore other issues minority groups care about.

Therefore, I emphasize contemporary political issues in this country. Then, I examine issue preferences of minority groups; what issues they put greater importance and what issues they do not much care about. Then, I analyze the issue preferences of four racial groups: Whites Americans, African Americans, Hispanics, and Asian Americans. I focus on the differences among the races: what issues are very important to a racial group but less important to other groups.

I argue that political ideology of minority groups is not similar to White Americans due to the differences in their issue preferences. Similarly, the differences in issue preference influence minority groups having relationship with the Democrat party. Thus, vote choice of minority groups depends on whether a party or a candidate place greater emphasis on the issues they care about; they vote for a candidate when a candidate gives importance to the issues and takes government actions in favor of the issues. Therefore, the thesis will test the following hypothesis:

H1: When a political candidate gives importance to the issues that are of specific concern to minorities, a large portion of them will vote for the candidate.

The existing literature argued that the citizens do not vote a party or a candidate, but they vote a candidate who gives higher attendance on the issues they care about. Therefore, people make their voting choice based on what issues they care about. In making their voting decision, they consider what issues benefit themselves as well as their community. Citizens are being influenced by the factors whether the policies of a candidate enhance or threaten the values they care for (Campbell, Gurin, and Miller 1954).

H2: Minorities place greater importance on their issue preferences than their ideology and party identification.

Scholars argued that the ideology of the individuals is a stable predictor of their voting choice. Conservatives vote a candidate of the party who support the conservative idea and liberals support the other party who support the liberal ideas (Ensley 2007; Catellani and Alberici 2012). But, issue importance may play a key role in making a voting choice among minorities, they might be influenced by the issues they put greater emphasis. Although they have an ideology and party identification, they might give priority to the issues they care about and make their voting choice based on these issues.

H3: Important political issues to minorities are different than important issues to Whites.

Since much of the existing literature indirectly indicates that the US politics is White dominated (Diaz 2012; Lien 2004; Wong, Lien, and Conway 2008), this study will test whether the important issues to the minority races are different than the important issue to the Whites. If the issues that are important to them would be similar, their voting choice may be similar to Whites Americans. Therefore, I assume that the issue preferences of minority groups are different than the issue preferences of White Americans.



H4: Important political issues to one minority race are different than the important issues to the other minority races.

All minority races may not place the same level of importance to certain issues; one group might put greater emphasis on one issue but other groups do not. For instance, since a significant portion of Latinos and Asian Americans are immigrants, they might be concerned on immigration. But, African Americans might not place similar level of importance on the issue, they might place greater emphasis on other issues like healthcare, race relations, and social security. Therefore, the difference of issue preferences among the minority groups may result in a level of difference among them.

**Data:**

Instead of considering minorities as natural Democrat voters as many of the existing studies do, this thesis will study their issue preferences statistically and examine whether their issue preferences influence them in making their vote choice by using data from the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) 2016. A number of social scientists started working together to generate a large-scale, comprehensive survey on social science issues. They collected a national stratified sample of over 35,000-65,000 Americans fielded online in two waves each election year (Burge and Lewis 2018, 5; Vavreck and Rivers 2008). This data will allow me to study minority racial groups, their political ideology, political party identification, and the issues they care for.

First, using the CCES 2016, this study will analyze the importance of political issues—abortion, gun control, healthcare, social security, jobs, immigration, environment, taxes, budget deficit, defense spending, crime, gay marriage, national security, and race relations. In conducting

the survey, the respondents were given five options to answer about the political issues: very high importance, somewhat high importance, somewhat low importance, very low importance, and no importance at all. I will examine which issues that respondents find the most important and which issues they do not. Then, I will compare the findings of one minority race with other races—with White Americans along with the other minority groups. I will determine whether they care for the same issues or different issues and how they lay a very high level or very low level of importance on the issues compared to other races.

Second, this thesis will analyze the ideology of minority groups by using the CCES 2016. In the survey, the respondents were asked about their political viewpoint by giving them the following options: very liberal, liberal, moderate, conservative, very conservative, and not sure. By examining their responses, I will explain whether their political viewpoints have a relationship with their issue preferences.

Third, I will compare the findings of issues and political ideology of minority races with their party identification. In identifying their party identification, the respondents of the CCES 2016 were given the following options: strong Democrat, not very strong Democrat, strong Republican, not very strong Republican, lean Democrat, lean Republican, independent, and not sure. By analyzing the responses of minority groups, I will determine whether the issues they care for are responsible to shape their political identification, even though they have a different direction in deciding their political ideology.

Finally, this study will compare the findings of issue importance, ideology, and political identification to their votes in the Presidential Election 2016. I will examine whether their ideology and political identification match with their voting behavior in the Presidential election or their voting direction is incongruent with their ideology and political identification. In addition, I will

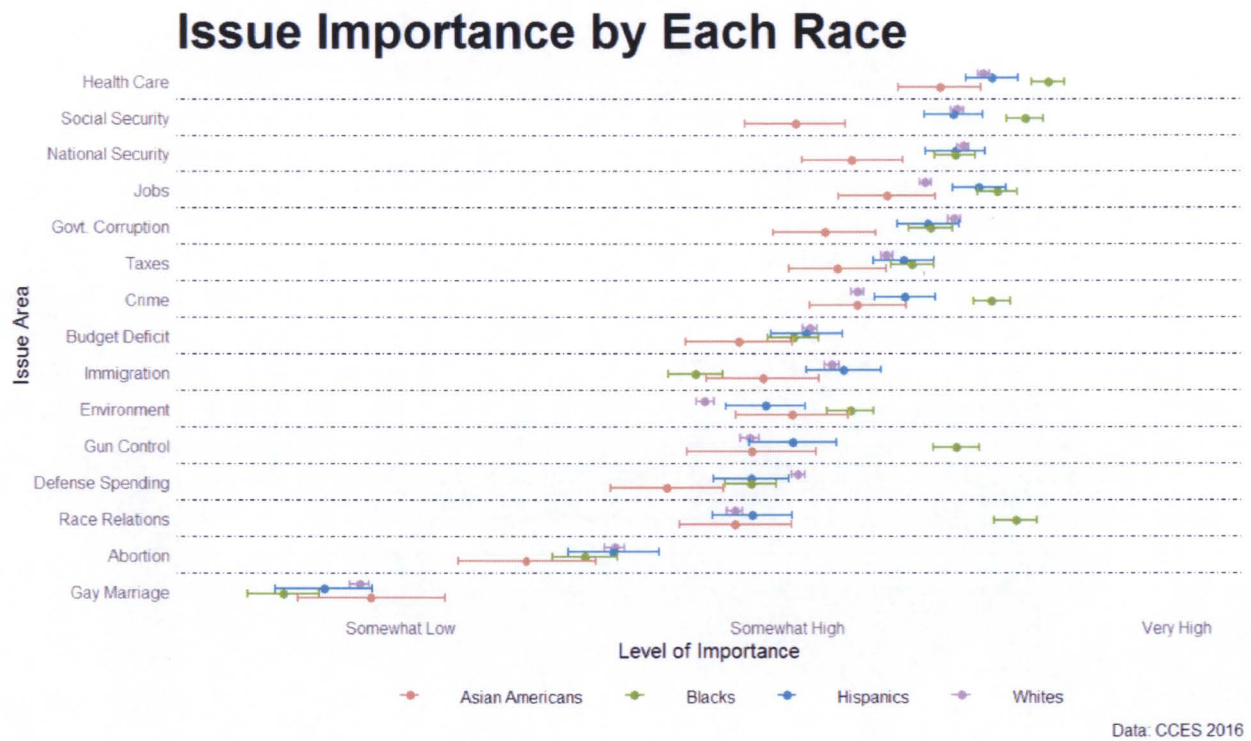
study the issues that are very important to minority races and examine whether the issues have any impact on their voting behaviors if they have any difference among their ideology, party identification, and voting in the Presidential election 2016.

### **Findings:**

An effective way to understand the differences in issue importance among the races is to compare their level of importance on the issues. By using the data from the CCES 2016, I analyzed the differences of the four racial groups—White Americans, African Americans, Hispanics and Asian Americans—in placing their importance on the fifteen issues: abortion, gun control, healthcare, social security, jobs, immigration, environment, taxes, budget deficit, defense spending, crime, gay marriage, national security, and race relations. The respondents were given the following options: very high importance, somewhat high importance, somewhat low importance, very low importance, and no importance at all. Figure 1 shows the mean of their importance on the issues by race along with a 95% confidence level.

On healthcare, all the racial groups place greater importance (greater than 4.25 mean); Blacks place the highest importance (4.67), followed by Hispanics (4.52) and Whites (4.50). Asian Americans pay less importance (4.39) than other groups. Similarly, on social security, Blacks pay the highest importance (4.61) among the groups, followed by Whites (4.44) and Hispanics (4.42). Asian Americans pay much less importance to social security (4.02) than other groups. In national security, government corruption, and taxes, there are very slight differences among Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics. But, Asian Americans are less concerned compared to other racial groups. While their mean on national security is between 4.45 and 4.43, the mean of Asian Americans is

4.16. Similarly, in government corruption, the mean of Asian Americans is 4.09 while the mean of the other three races is between 4.43 to 4.36. Further, in jobs, the mean of Whites, African Americans, and Hispanics is between 4.54 and 4.36, the mean of Asian Americans is 4.25.



**Figure 1: Issue Importance by Race**

In crime, gun control, and race relations, there is no significant difference among Whites, Hispanics, and American Asians. But, African Americans are more concerned with these issues. While the mean for African Americans is 4.52, others' mean is placed between 4.18 and 4.30. Similarly, in gun control, the mean of Whites, Hispanics, and Asian Americans is between 3.90 to 4.01, the mean of African Americans is 4.43. Further, while the mean of African Americans on race relation is 4.58, the mean of the other three races are between 3.86 and 3.91.

However, there are slight differences among the racial groups on immigration, the environment, and defense spending. Whites give less importance to the environment (3.78) than minority groups (3.94-4.16). Though there is no significant difference among the racial groups on abortion and gay marriage, they give less importance; the mean of all groups in abortion is between 3.33 and 3.55 and the mean in gay marriage is between 2.69 and 2.92.

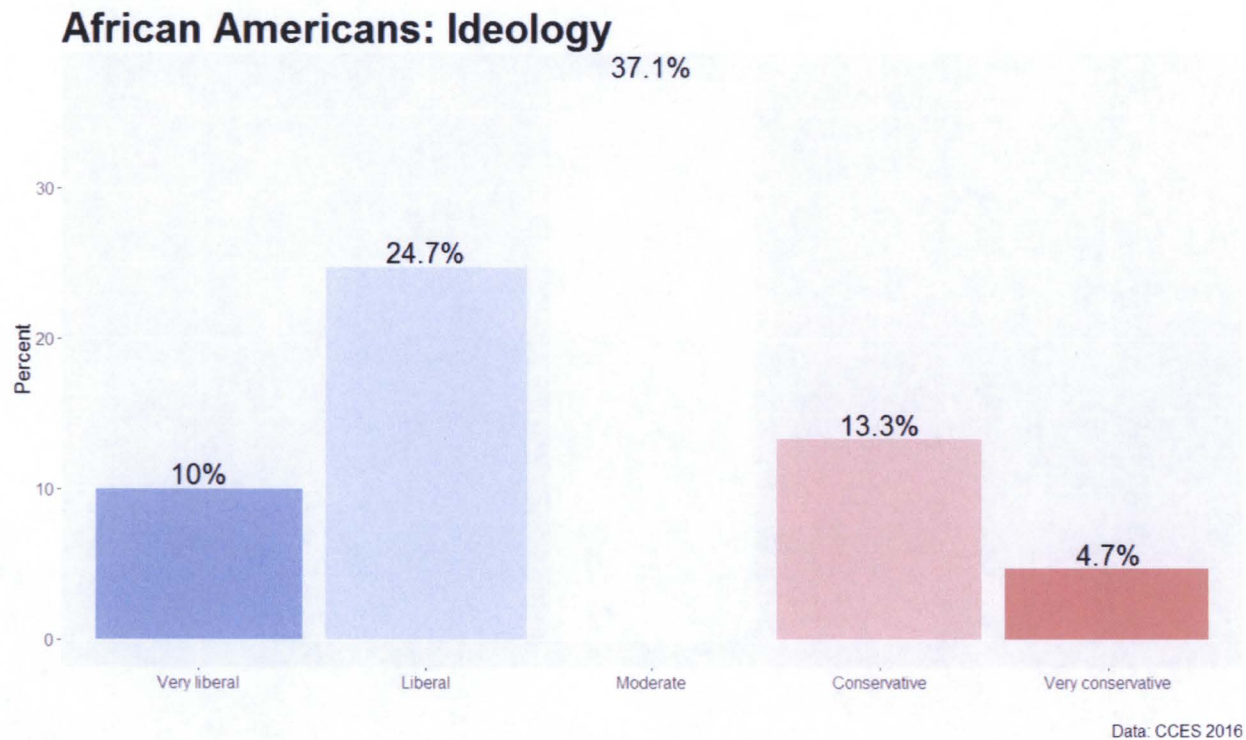
From Figure 1, results indicate that all the races place a similar level of importance in taxes, budget deficit, abortion, and gay marriage. But, on abortion and gay marriage, none of the races put somewhat high or high importance. On race relations and gun control, African Americans display much higher importance than other races. But, they place greater importance on crime. On immigration, Whites and Hispanics give a similar level of importance, but African Americans and Asian Americans place less importance than Whites and Hispanics.

African Americans place a greater emphasis (mean greater than 4.25) on health care, social security, national security, jobs, government corruption, taxes, crime, gun control, and race relation. They pay high importance (mean greater than 3.75 but less than 4.25) to the budget deficit, immigration, environment, and defense spending. But, they put less importance to abortion (3.48) and gay marriage (2.69).

Hispanics place greater emphasis (mean greater than 4.25) on health care, social security, national security, jobs, government corruption, taxes, and crime. They give high importance (mean greater than 3.75 but less than 4.25) to the budget deficit, immigration, environment, gun control, defense spending, and race relation. But, they give less importance to abortion (3.55) and gay marriage (2.80).



Like Hispanics, Asian American place greater emphasis ((mean is equal to or greater than 4.25) on health care and jobs. They pay high importance (mean greater than 3.75 but less than 4.25) to the budget deficit, immigration, environment, gun control, social security, national security, government corruption, taxes, crime, and race relations. But, they put less importance to defense spending (3.69), abortion (3.33) and gay marriage (2.92).

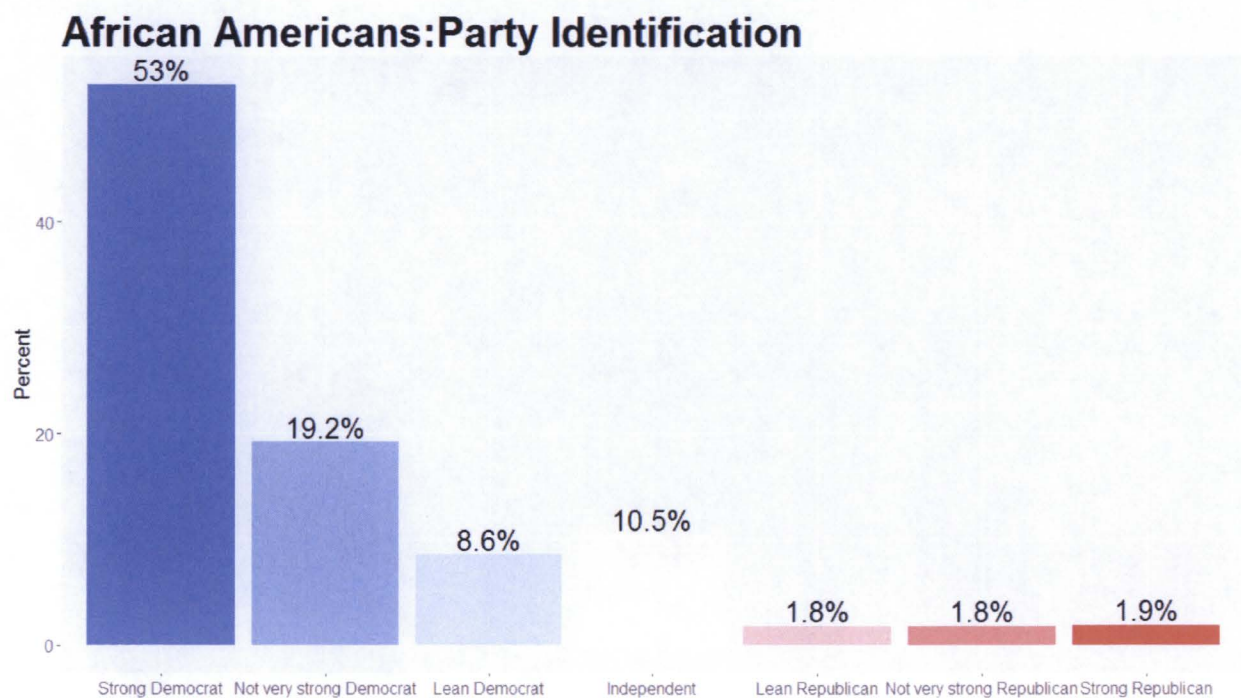


**Figure 2: Ideological Distribution of African Americans**

After describing the findings of which issues the minority groups place greater emphasis, the thesis will examine their ideology, political identification, and their voting behavior in the 2016 Presidential election. Figure 2 displays that a majority of African Americans (37.1%) identified themselves as moderates, followed by liberal (24.7%) and conservative (13.3%). Ten percent of African Americans identified themselves as very liberal and other 4.7 percent as very conservative. But, in their party identification graph (Figure 3) shows that 21.9 percent of African Americans

identified themselves as Republicans or lean Republicans, while 53 percent of them identified as strong Democrat, with a total of 80.9 % of them identifying as Democrats. Though the majority of them were placed in the moderate group in ideological distribution (Figure 2), more than 80 percent of the African Americans respondents said that they are Democrat (Figure 3).

That means the majority of the African American people who identified as moderate generally support or vote for Democrat candidates. On the other hand, only 5.5 percent of them identified as Republicans. Further, by analyzing their voting behavior in the 2016 presidential elections, this research found that 90.5 percent of African American voted for Hillary Clinton and only 6.6 percent of them voted for Donald Trump (Figure 4). But, the percentage of African American who vote for Donald Trump is slightly higher (6.6%) than the percentage of them who identified them as Republicans. That means the majority of African Americans who indicate that they have a moderate ideology and independent party identification support and voted for Democratic candidates in the 2016 Presidential election.



Data: CCES 2016

### Figure 3: Party Identification of African Americans

In addition, this thesis examined the issue preferences of African Americans and their voting choices in the 2016 Presidential election. Figure 5 displays that the African Americans who voted for Donald Trump place greater importance on national security, government corruption, and immigration than the African Americans who voted for Hillary Clinton in the 2016 Presidential election. However, there is a statistical uncertainty since there are only a few African Americans who voted for Donald Trump. On the other hand, African Americans who voted for Hillary Clinton in the 2016 election place greater emphasis to social security, health care, race relations, gun control, and environment. But, both groups place similar importance on crime, jobs, taxes, budget deficit, defense spending, abortion, and gay marriage.

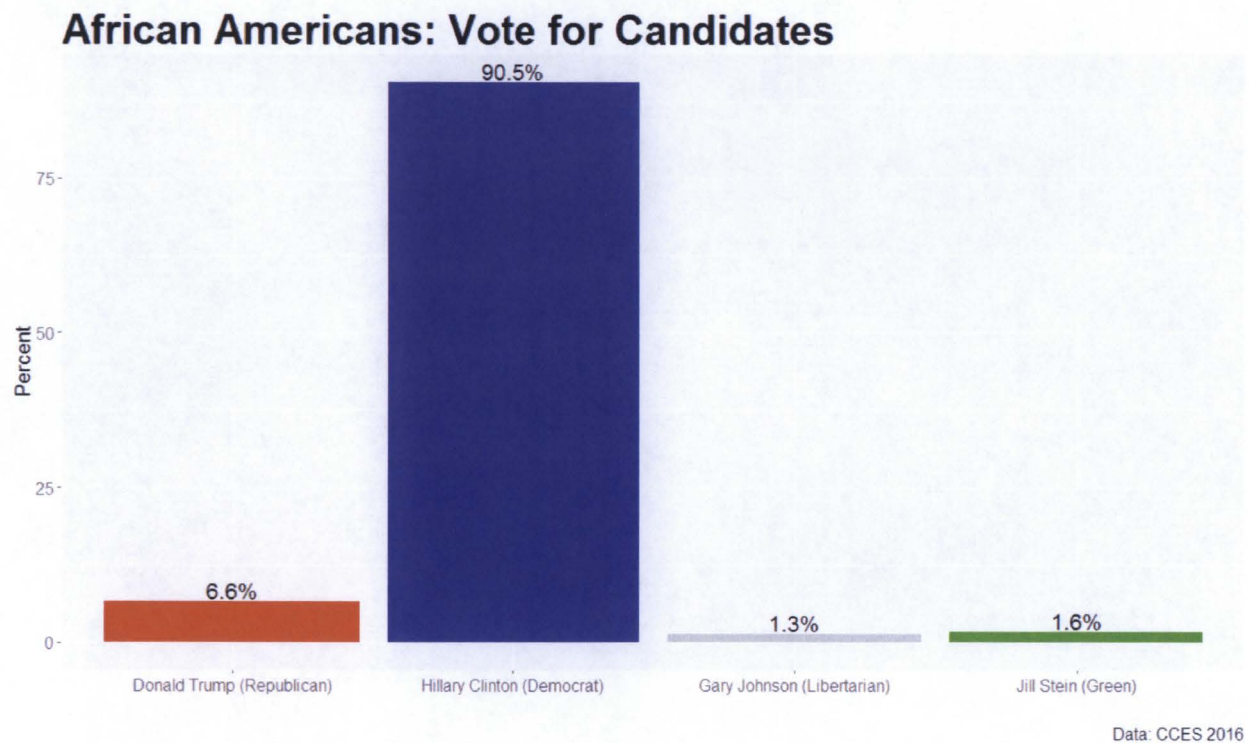
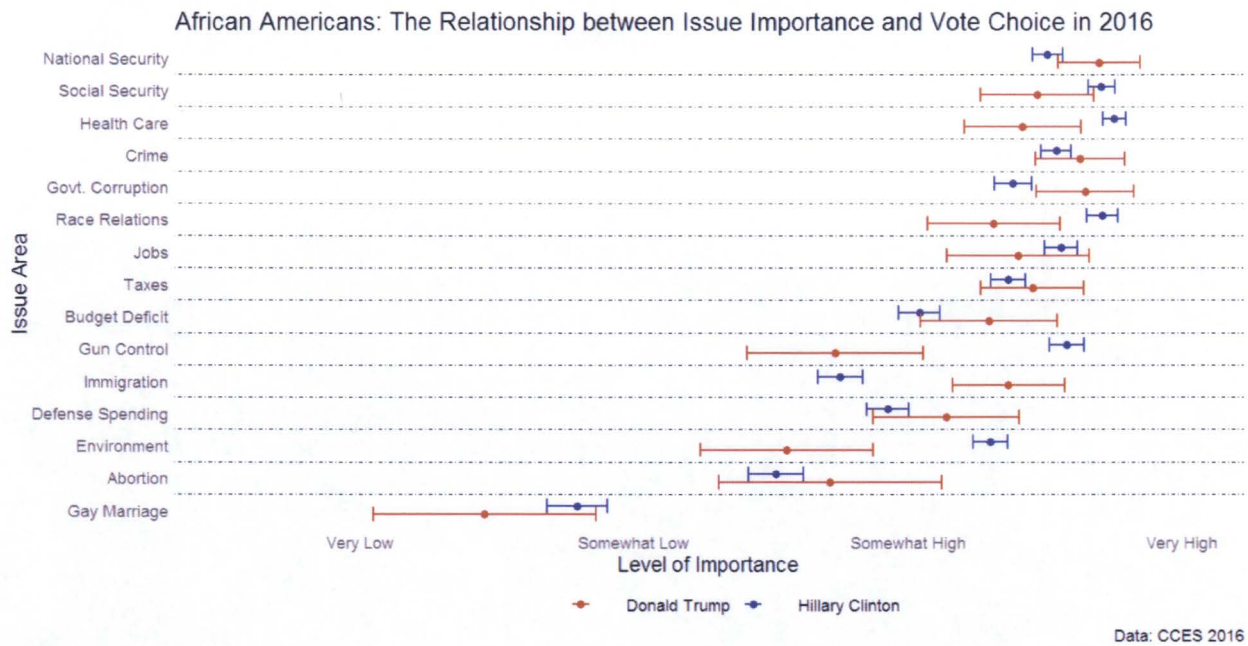


Figure 4: Voting Behavior of African Americans in the 2016 Presidential Election





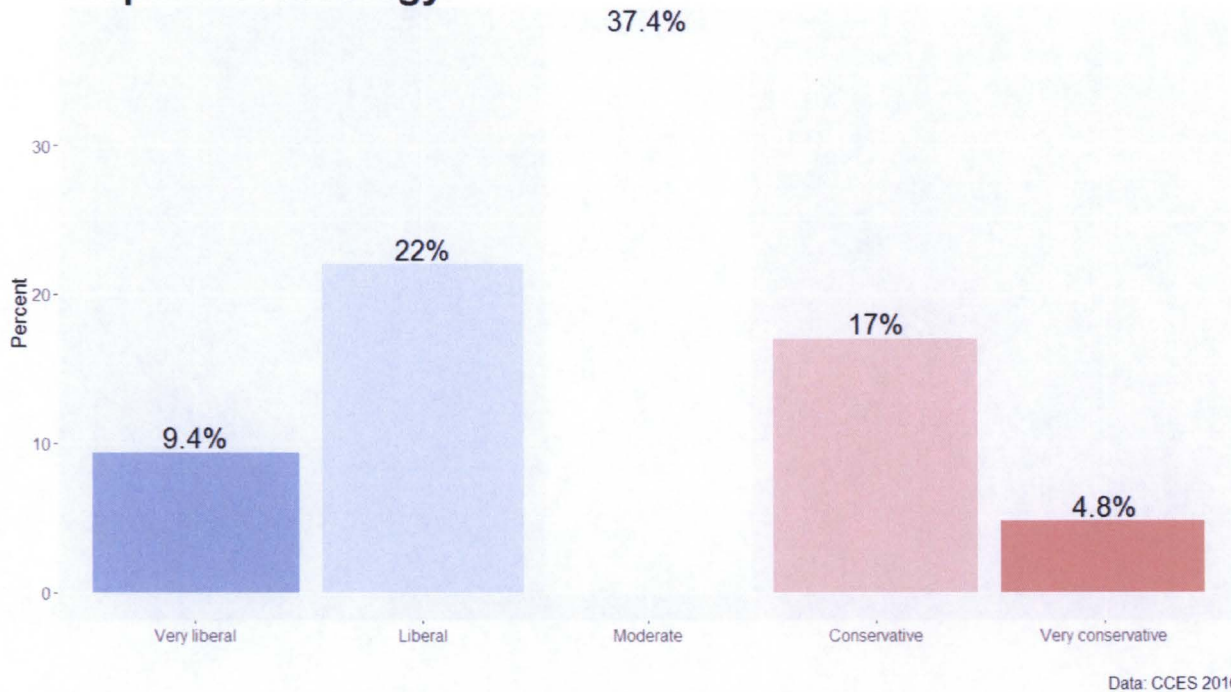
**Figure 5: Relations of Issue Importance of African Americans with Their Voting a Candidate 2016 Presidential Election**

Further, I analyzed the ideology of Hispanics. Figure 6 indicates that the greatest percentage of Hispanics identified themselves as moderate (37.4%), followed by liberal (22%) and conservative (17%). On the other hand, only 9.4 percent of Hispanic respondents identified themselves as very liberal and other 4.8 percent as very conservative. Based on their responses in the CCES 2016 survey, Figure 6 shows two major outcomes: first, the highest percentage of Hispanics are moderate; second, they have more liberal members in their community than conservative members. However, very few of them identified them as very liberal or very conservative.

Though the highest percentage of Hispanics identified themselves as moderate, Figure 7 shows the highest percentage of them identified themselves as strong Democrats (27.6%), followed by not very strong Democrat (20.9%) and lean Democrat (9.6%). A total of 58.1 percent

of Hispanic identified themselves as Democrats, while only 21.3 percent said they are Republicans. The remaining 16.1 percent said that they are independent.

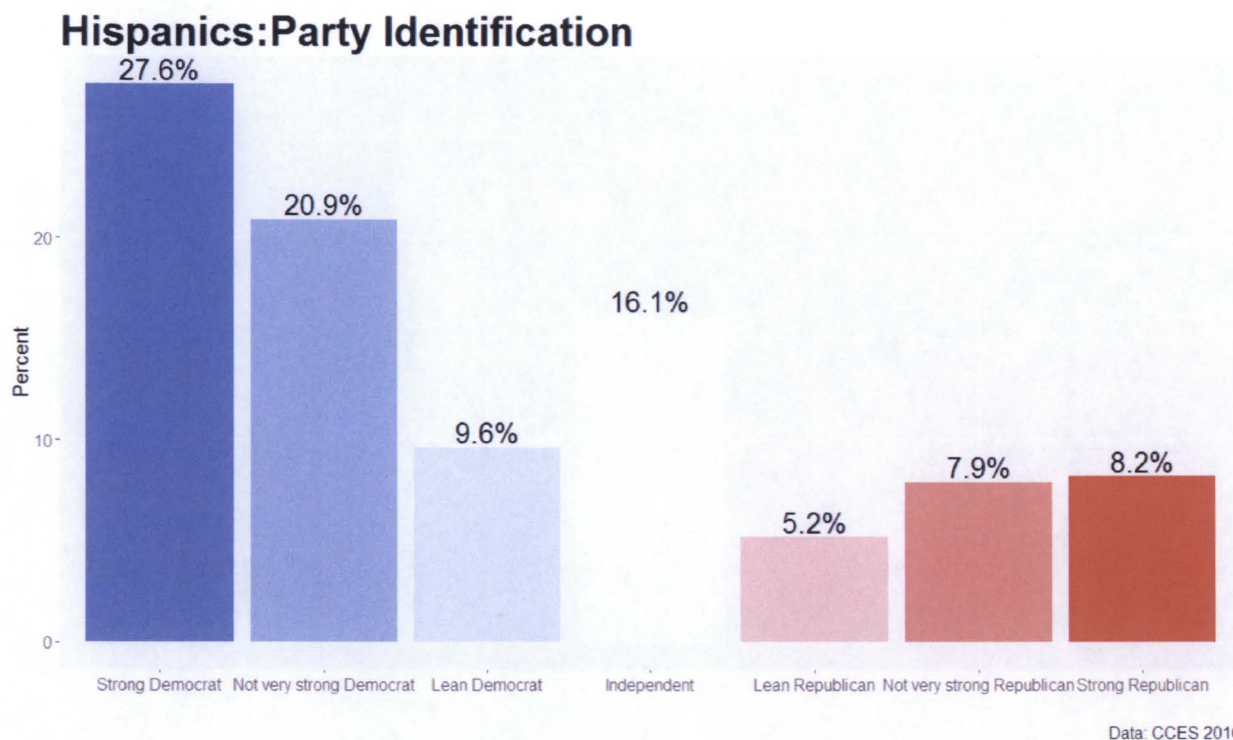
### Hispanics: Ideology



**Figure 6: Ideological Distribution of Hispanics**

Similarly, in party identification, Figure 8 shows that 64.7 percent Hispanics respondent claimed that they voted for Hillary Clinton and 28.9 percent voted for Donald Trump. On the other hand, though 16.1 percent of Hispanics identified themselves as independent voters, independent candidates, Gary Johnson, and Jill Stein, together got 6.4 percent of the Hispanic votes. The majority of Hispanics who identified themselves as political independents voted for Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump. By comparing the findings of party identification with their voting choice, I found that Donald Trump received for the majority of the independent voters. He received 7.6 percent more votes than the percentage of Hispanics who identified themselves as Republicans.

On the other hand, Hillary Clinton received 6.6 percent more Hispanic votes than the percentage of Democrat Hispanics.

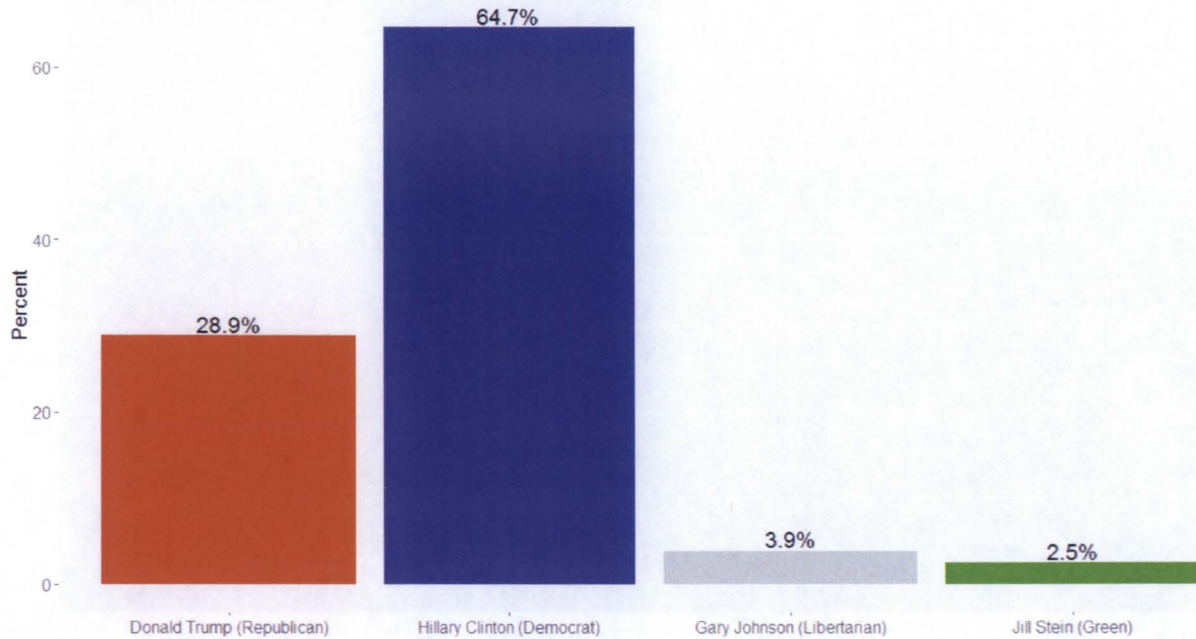


**Figure 7: Party Identification of Hispanics**

Further, I analyzed whether there are any differences in Hispanics who voted for Hillary Clinton in their issue preferences with the Hispanic voters who voted for Donald Trump. Figure 9 displays the mean issue importance of Hispanic Donald Trump voters and Hispanic Hillary Clinton voters along with a 95% confidence level. Both groups are very different in a number of issues, only slightly different in jobs, health care, and abortion. But, the Hispanic Donald Trump voters place greater emphasis on national security, government corruption, taxes, crime, immigration, budget deficit, and defense spending than the Hispanic Hillary Clinton voters. On the other hand, the Hispanic Hillary Clinton voters give much higher importance to gun control, environment, and gay marriage.

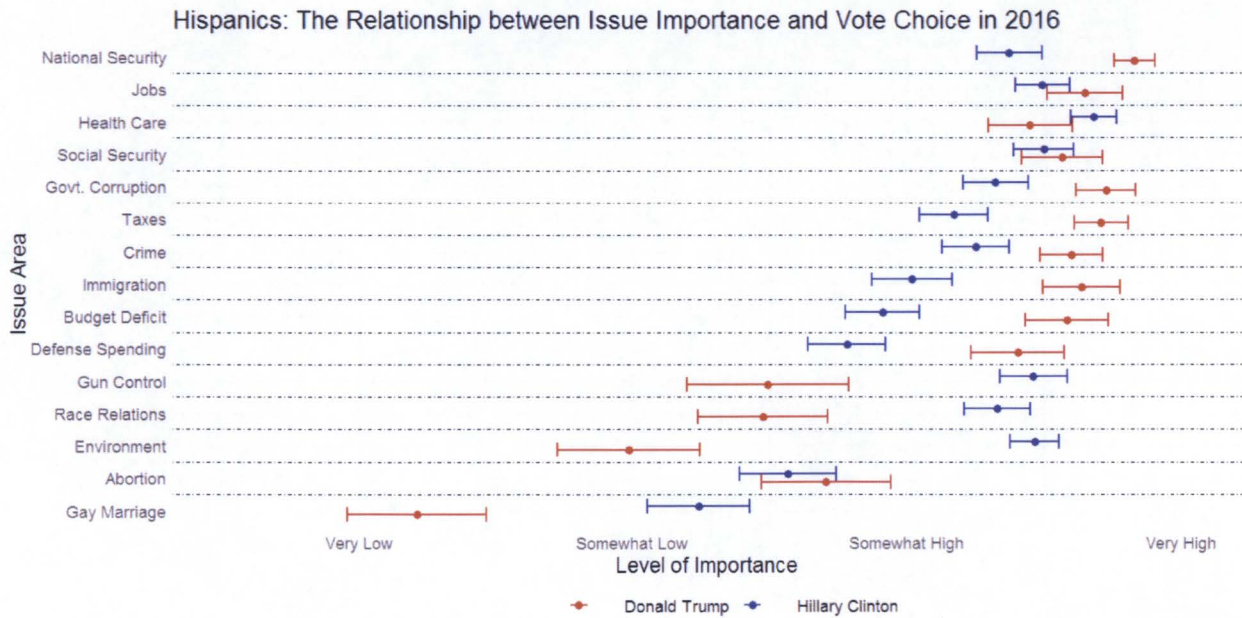


## Hispanics: Vote for Candidates



Data: CCES 2016

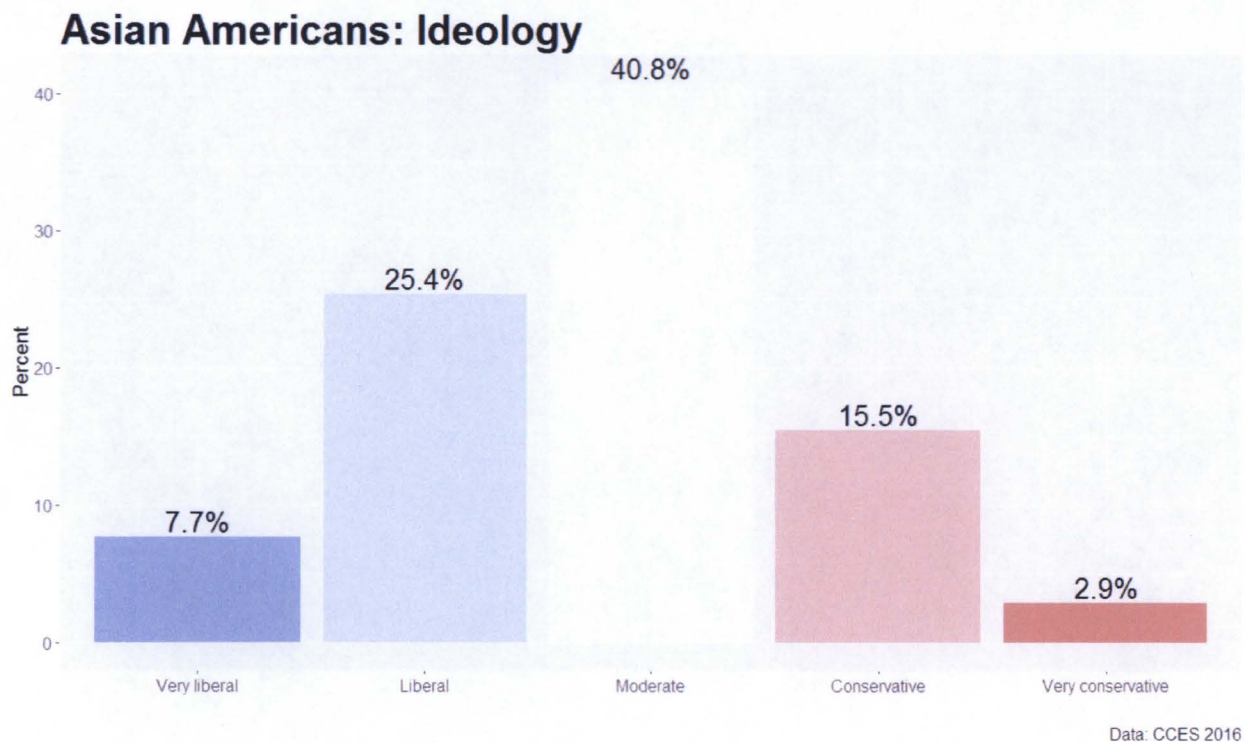
**Figure 8: Voting Behavior of Hispanics in 2016 Presidential Election**



Data: CCES 2016

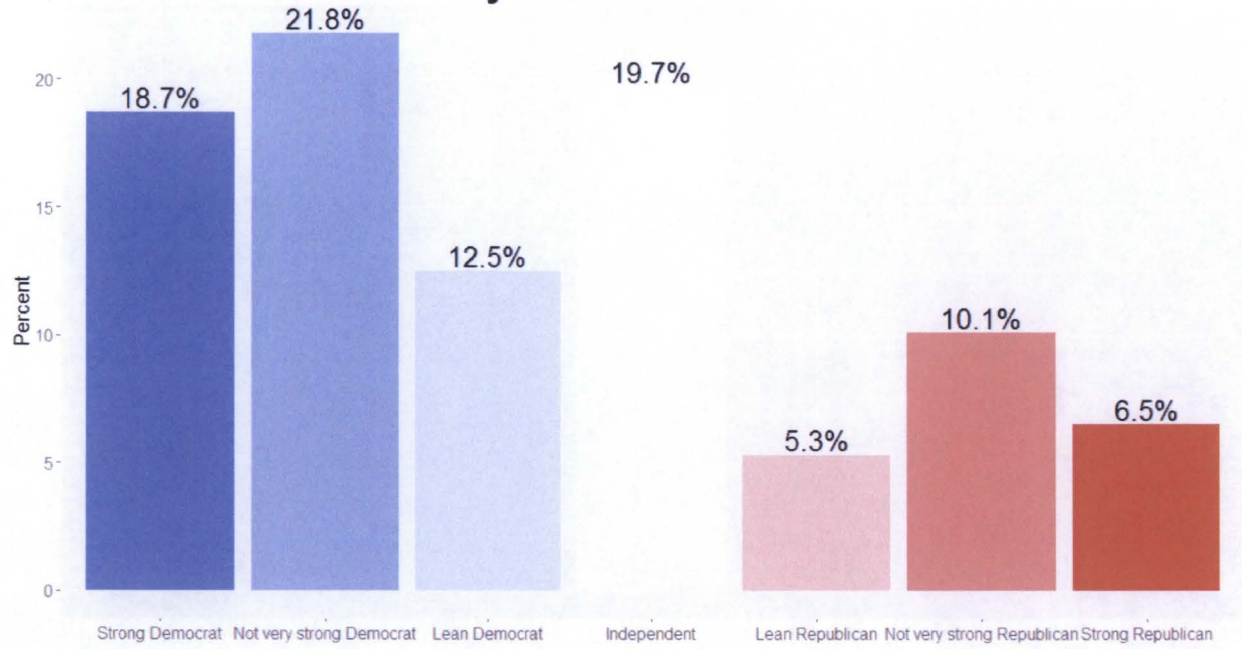
**Figure 9: Relations of Issue Importance of Hispanics with Their Voting a Candidate 2016 Presidential Election**

In the case of Asian Americans, Figure 10 shows that the highest percentage of them responded that they have a moderate ideology (40.8%), followed by liberal (25.4%) and conservative (15.5%). A very small percentage of Asian Americans indicated that they have a strong liberal or strong conservative ideology. But, in their party identification, Figure 11 shows that the highest percentage of them identified them as not very strong Democrat (21.8%), followed by independent (19.7%), and strong Democrat (18.7%). This graph shows a clear difference between Asian Americans and Africans Americans or Hispanics. While the greatest percentage of African Americans (53%) and Hispanics (27.6%) responded that they are strong Democrats, the greatest percentage of Asian Americans responded that they are not very strong Democrats. In addition, a greater percentage of Asian Americans identified them as independent voters (19.7%) than African Americans (10.5%) and Hispanics (16.1%).



**Figure 10: Ideological Distribution of Asian Americans**

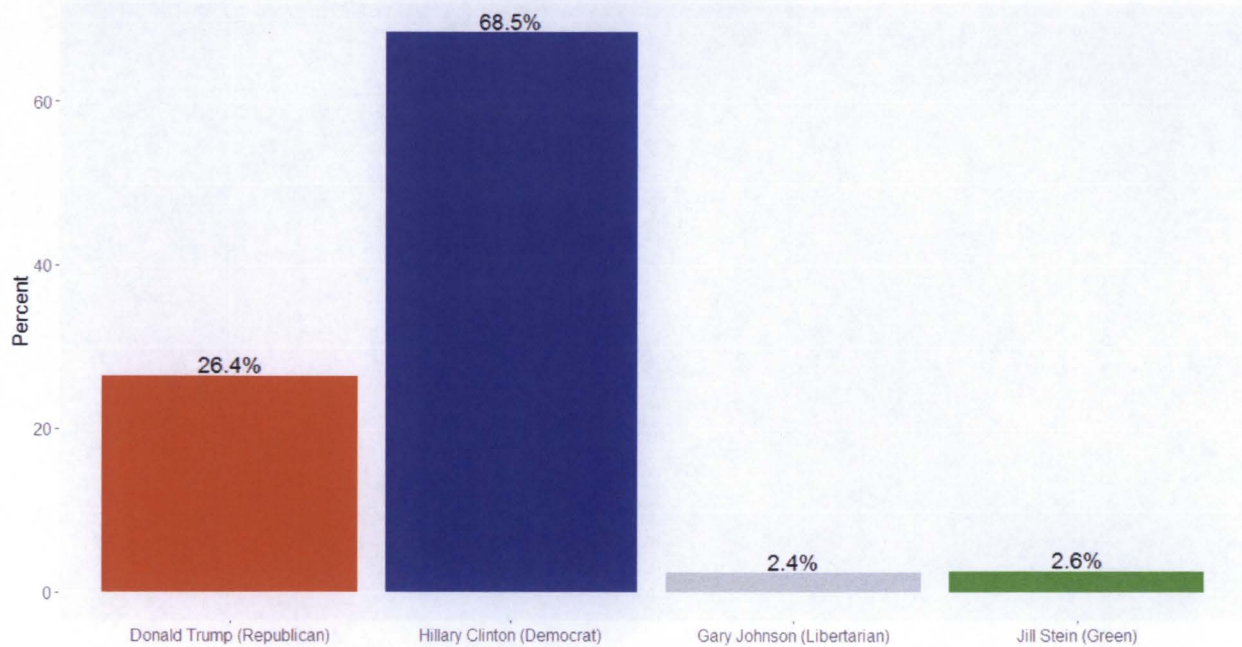
## Asian Americans: Party Identification



Data: CCES 2016

Figure 11: Party Identification of Asian Americans

## Asian Americans: Vote for Candidates

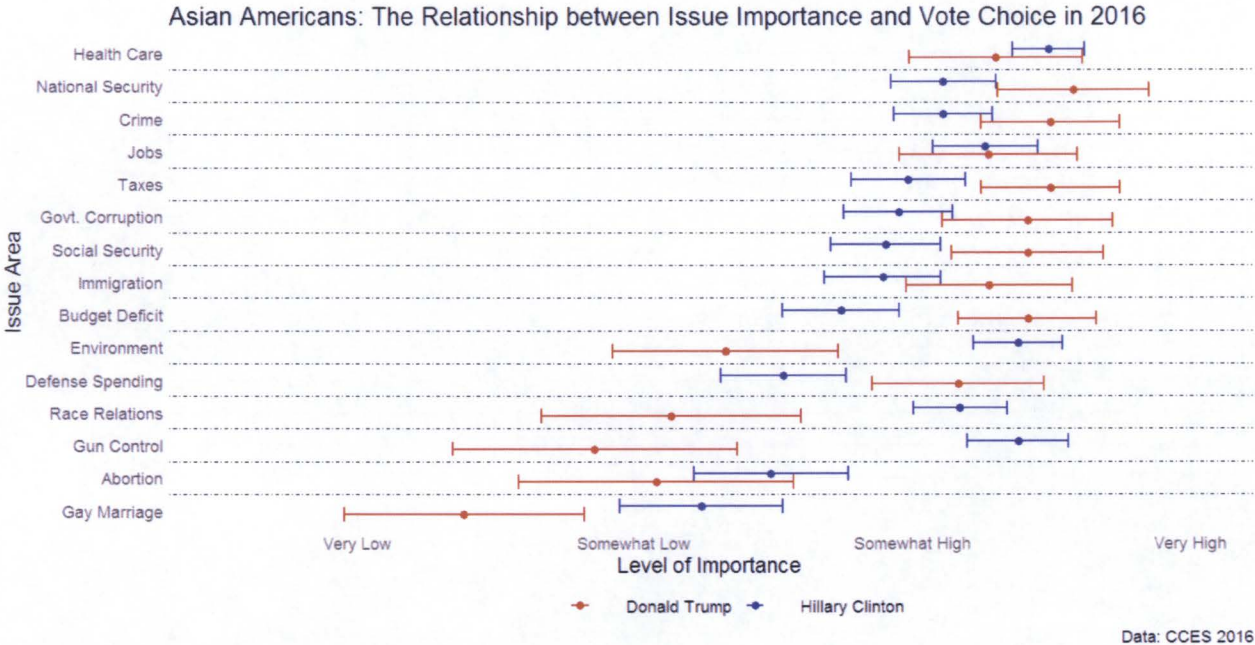


Data: CCES 2016

Figure 12: Voting Behavior of Asian Americans in 2016 Presidential Election



While 21.9 percent of Asian Americans identified themselves as Republicans, Figure 12 displays that 26.4 percent of Asian Americans voted for Donald Trump. On the other hand, 19.7 percent of Asian Americans identified them as independent voters, but Gary Johnson and Jill Stein together got 5 percent of Asian American votes. Hillary Clinton received 68.5 percent of Asian Americans votes that included the majority of the independent voters.



**Figure 13: Relations of Issue Importance of Asian Americans with Their Voting a Candidate 2016 Presidential Election**

Further, I analyzed whether there are any differences among Asian Americans voters who voted for Hillary Clinton in their issue preferences with the Asian American voters who voted for Donald Trump. Figure 13 displays the mean issue importance of Asian American Donald Trump voters and Asian American Hillary Clinton voters along with a 95% confidence level. Both groups are very different in a number of issues, they have a slight difference in health care, national security jobs, government corruption, immigration, and abortion. But, Asian American Donald

Trump voters place greater emphasis than Asian American Hillary Clinton voters on national security, taxes, social security, budget deficit, and defense spending. On the other hand, Asian American Hillary Clinton voters place greater emphasis than Asian American Donald Trump voters on the environment, race relations, gun control, and gay marriage.

### **Discussion and Conclusion:**

The existing literature analyzes the factors that are important to citizens in making their vote choice. Though predicting and evaluating vote choice is very complex and unpredictable, some scholars agreed that issue preferences can be important to individuals than their ideology and party identification; they do not vote for a party or a candidate, but they vote for the candidates who put a greater emphasis on the issues they care about (Campbell, Gurin, and Miller 1954; Kroh 2009; Catellani and Alberici 2012). In addition, their ideology and party identification may also be influenced by the issue preferences (Catellani and Alberici 2012; Franklin and Mackie 1987).

However, though the present studies highlight the importance of issue preferences in evaluating voting choice, they did not evaluate how important issue preferences are to minorities in their voting choice. Therefore, I have given importance to this point and studied how the issue preferences of minorities influence them in making their voting choice.

By analyzing the CCES 2016 survey data, I evaluated the issue importance of three minority groups—African Americans, Hispanics, and Asian Americans. I found that the African Americans who voted for Donald Trump are very different than African Americans who voted for Hillary Clinton in the 2016 Presidential election. African Americans who voted for Donald Trump place greater emphasis on national security, government corruption, and immigration than the



African Americans who voted for Hillary Clinton in the 2016 Presidential election. In addition, African Americans who voted for Hillary Clinton in the 2016 election put greater importance to social security, health care, race relations, gun control, and the environment than African Americans who voted for Donald Trump. But, both groups place a similar level of importance to crime, jobs, taxes, budget deficit, defense spending, abortion, and gay marriage. These findings clearly reveal that more African Americans lay emphasis on social security, health care, race relations, gun control, and environment since 90.5 percent of them voted Hillary Clinton in the 2016 Presidential election.

In addition, Hispanic Donald Trump voters give importance on national security, government corruption, taxes, crime, immigration, budget deficit, and defense spending than the Hispanic Hillary Clinton voters. On the other hand, the Hispanic Hillary Clinton voters place much higher emphasis on gun control, environment, and gay marriage than Hispanics who voted for Donald Trump. These findings explain that more Hispanic voters place greater emphasis to gun control, environment, and gay marriage since 64.7 percent of Hispanic voters cast their ballot for Hillary Clinton in the 2016 Presidential election.

Further, in the case of Asian Americans, Asian American Donald Trump voters give greater importance than the Asian American Hillary Clinton voters on national security, taxes, social security, budget deficit, and defense spending. On the other hand, the Asian American Hillary Clinton voters place greater emphasis than the Asian American Donald Trump voters on the environment, race relations, gun control, and gay marriage. Though both groups are very different on a number of issues, they have a slight difference in health care, national security jobs, government corruption, immigration, and abortion. These findings indicate that more Asian

Americans are more concerned with the environment, race relations, gun control, and gay marriage since 68.5 percent of Asian Americans voted for Hillary Clinton in the 2016 Presidential election.

The three minority groups observed here to place greater importance to the environment and gun control. But, along with the two issues, African Americans give importance to social security, health care, race relations, Hispanics put greater weight on gay marriage, and Asian Americans on race relations and gay marriage. Overall, minorities put emphasis on the environment, race relations and gun control. These findings support my first hypothesis that when a candidate is concerned about the issues minorities care about, the majority of them vote that candidate in the Presidential elections.

Further, on the point of whether they put greater emphasis on their issue preference over their ideology and party identification, I found a mixed result. While the highest percentage of minority groups identified themselves as moderate, the highest percentage of African Americans and Hispanics responded that they are strong Democrats and the highest percentage of Asian Americans said that they are not strong Democrats. In addition, the majority of the minority groups voted for Hillary Clinton in the 2016 Presidential election.

However, making a similar claim on party identification is not possible. Donald Trump received more votes than the percentage of the minority groups who identified themselves as Republicans. These findings indicate that while the majority of African American and Asian American independent voters cast their ballot for Hillary Clinton, the majority of Hispanic independent voters cast their ballot for Donald Trump in the 2016 Presidential elections.

But, the findings of the study reveal that the issue preferences of minority groups—African Americans, Hispanics, and Asian Americans—are different than the majority population of the

United States. Even among minority groups, they give importance to the separate issues but the environment and gun control are common among them. The findings of the differences among the races support the third and fourth hypotheses.

Therefore, this thesis concludes that the issue importance of minority races is crucial to their vote choice. The vote choice of the majority of minority voters has a relationship with their issue importance. They are not just natural Democrat voters, their vote choice depends on what issues they pay higher importance and the candidates who put enough importance to the issues. Further, this thesis argues that lumping all minority groups together and evaluating their voting choice together will not be the right way of a research since the issue importance of a specific group is different than other groups as their issue preferences are different than White Americans.

This thesis has some limitations. In examining whether the issue preferences of minority groups have an influence on shaping their vote choice, I analyzed the 15 important issues that CCES 2016 surveyed. But, there might be other issues that are important in understanding vote choice of minority groups. In addition, I depended only on the survey of 2016 Presidential election to explain the relationship between issue preferences and vote choice of minority groups, including the survey of the previous Presidential elections might increase the strength of this research. Further, there is no strong evidence that if Republican Party pays greater emphasis on the issues minority groups care about, Republican candidates will get majority votes of minorities. However, from the findings of the research, it can be clearly understood that issue preferences of minority groups influence them in shaping their vote choice and motivate them to vote for a Democratic candidate who places a greater emphasis on the issues they care about.

Finally, this thesis suggests that minorities are not just natural Democrat voters, but they vote for Democrat candidates because the Democrat Party places greater emphasis on the issue

minority groups care about; there is a relationship between their issue preferences and their vote choice. Thus, researchers of American politics should investigate the issues that are important to minority groups and how the issues shape their vote choice. In addition, minority groups together may constitute significant support for a political party in elections, might create the difference in election results. Therefore, future studies should emphasize how issue preferences of minority groups are important for increasing their voter turnout and making a difference in election result in the polarized political system. Further, more attention should be paid whether a party of the political system is getting benefits from higher political participation and voter turnout of minority groups by placing a greater emphasis on the issues minority groups care about.

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