

Asian Students' Voting Behavior

At University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, various ethnic groups build a large unit of society. For instance, Asian student society is composed with students who come from several part of the world: China, Japan, Singapore, Korea, India, and Taiwan. The Asian student group is majorly divided by two subgroups; the group is divided by Native-born and Foreign-born groups. "Recent arrivals have shifted Asian Americans from a native-born to a predominantly foreign-born population" (Hune 14). As the research by Shirley Hune reveals, nowadays, the number of foreign-born Asian precedes the number of native-born Asian in U.S. Also, at U of I, there are more foreign-born Asian students than Native-born students. Although two groups share the same race, they have very different perspectives, needs, and values. Nationality is the other factor that divides the Asian society into several subunits. Because people have diverse ethnicities, many of people choose to segregate themselves from other Asian people who have different ethnic background. For instance, every flourished city in U.S. including Chicago, New York and Los Angeles has special towns where ethnically homogeneous people live together. At U of I, you also can see the clear segregation of Asian people who share the same language and experiences. Because of ethnical cultural influence, Asian people form unique traits in U.S. society. According to recent Asian American studies, researchers found out that "Asian Americans are distinctive as a nonwhite, multiethnic, immigrant-majority, relatively affluent, but also highly polarized population" (Lien 496). These interesting traits are applied to the Asian students at the university. These unique traits are shown through their voting behavior at UIUC. There are several distinctive voting characteristics. Relatively lower percentage of participation is one of Asian students' characteristics of voting behavior. Also, voting for people who has common ethnicity, whoever the candidate is, is not an astonished phenomenon. Because of Asian people's patriotism is so

strong that many of Asian students tend to vote for someone who has the same ethnicity. The way they define the ethnicity, race and nationality also influences the outcome of election.

Asian students are unique ethnic group at Universities in U.S. society. According to the research “Demographics and Diversity of Asian American College Students” by Shirley Hune, “The Asian American population is one of the fastest-growing racial groups in the United States and in higher education”(Hune 11). Hune’s statement can explain the fast-growing Asian population at UIUC. Asian students represent almost 19% of the total student population. This is the second largest population of student body; White student body occupies the largest student population which is 60%. About 20% of student population means that Asian students have enough power to determine the outcome of election at UIUC. Thus, the values that they pursue are very important issue for candidates who want the supports from Asian students.

Asian group’s value and need are different in various subgroups of it. Native-born groups are usually called ‘Asian American’. At UIUC, general Asian American students are the second generation of immigrants. “English is generally the first and often the only language of the American-born” (Hune14). Usually, they think and behave in between American and Asian. Since they usually associate with their peers who are native-born American, they usually do not seriously accept the cultural behaviors that only Asian people value such as age hierarchy. However, the influence from their parents who are thoroughly Asian makes them involve in Asian culture. Second generation of immigrants have several chances to meet with Asian people who have the same ethnicity. For instance, the parents of them tend to involve ethnic churches with their children in order to socialize with the people who can speak their language. In contrast, most foreign born Asian students use a language other than English. They are usually international students. Most Asian students at UIUC are international students leaving from their family in their nations. They tend to segregate with the same ethnic students who

study abroad. They more value Asian culture than American culture. Although there are some differences between native-born and foreign-born groups, they have some common aspects. Both groups are not completely integrated into the American Society. They live in a society which is somewhat different from mainstream race in U.S., Caucasian. “Asian Population on campus faced some difficult issues, for example, racial stereotyping and violence against Asian Americans” (Prevezer 9). They go through the same discrimination experiences not only in U.S. society but also at University. Thus, they show similar characteristics on social behavior. For example, because of their minor race, Asian people tend to have affinity on racial minorities rather than majorities. And, these characteristics are shown in voting behavior also. Therefore, it is clear that voting behaviors of Asian students at UIUC is vastly influenced by their race, ethnicity and society.

In general, Asian voting participation is relatively lower than other ethnic groups in the U.S. Low percentage of participation is due to Asians’ general social position in the U.S. According to the research “Asian American Immigrants as the New Electorate”, there are four ways to divide the social status of Asian in U.S.: foreign-born, native-born, citizenship, and non-citizen. Each group shows different percentage of participation on election. However, at UIUC, there are two ways to divide the Asian students. One is Asian American students and another is Asian students who study abroad. Most of the Asian students at UIUC are foreign-born, international students. Usually, the majority of international students plan to return to their homelands. Thus, in general, they do not have affection on the schools where they currently enroll. This returning tendency of international student supports the reason that they cannot be thoroughly integrated into UIUC society. In survey, the question about participation of election is given to surveyors. For the question, “Have you ever voted at UIUC?”, less than one-third of people said yes. It means that majority of Asian students is not participating in elections. The survey result represents the relationship between race and voting participation.

From the interview I could find more specific reasons why Asian people usually do not vote. On April 25, I interviewed Asian students at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. I named them interviewee 1, 2, and 3. I interviewed one female, interviewee 1, and two males, interviewees 2 and 3. Interviewees 1 and 2 claim that their nationality is Korea. Interviewee 3 claims U.S. as his nationality. The questions of interviews are very similar to the survey questions but while survey questions required only short answers, the interview questions required explanation of their answers. In interview, for the question about voting participation, all three of interviewees never have voted at U of I. Three of them do not even care about the elections going on at the campus. The female interviewee, interviewee 1, said that she does not know how to participate in election. Interviewee 2 said that although he knows there are some elections going on but he does not care about the elections. Interviewee 3 also said he does not care about the election and its outcome because it never affects his college life. This result supports the fact that Asian students have a low percentage of participation in election at U of I. Asian students' apathy about the UIUC society is the biggest reason for low participation. Not like white students who are thoroughly integrated in the society, Asian students tend to set their own society and try not to care about the UIUC society as a whole.

In general, there are strong bonds between people who have the same ethnicity. Especially in Asian society, race and ethnicity is very important. "Many of the Asian American students on campus choose to segregate themselves from other students" (Prevezer 1). When Asian students vote for some candidate, their ethnic background information is one of the key factors that determines election outcome. There are about 50% of people aware of the candidates' background ethnicities when they vote for them. And, when I ask people that 'if you know candidates' ethnicity, could it be easier to vote, why and why not?' about 30% of people said that it is easier to vote when they know about the ethnicity of candidate. Without background information, about 22% of people have voted for someone just because she or he

has an Asian name. Even though the percentage seems low, considering that Asian students are occupying the second population at UIUC, it still clearly expresses that race affect to the results of elections. In interview, I gave the same question to interviewees. Two interviewees said it would be easier to vote if they know the ethnicity of a candidates. One said no because ethnicity does not affect how a candidate will do their position. The two interviewees who said yes to this question clearly states that they have compassion with people who have the same ethnicity. After the question, I give another question about affinity of ethnicity. I ask, 'If there are 4 candidates for the leader of your group discussion, Caucasian, African, American, and Hispanic, who would you choose? Why and why not?' Interviewee 1 and 2 said they will choose Asian because unreasonable reasons. For instance, interviewee 2 said that he will choose Asian because Asian is smarter than others. This unreasonable reason can be explained with patriotism; ethnicity is one of the biggest values for Asian people.

Definition of ethnicity, race and nationality can be differed by a person's ethnic background. To interviewees, I give a question about definition of three similar terms: ethnicity, nationality, and race. Interviewee 1 said ethnicity is a synonym of race; nationality is the country that one's citizenship belongs to; race is groups of people with similar appearance. Interviewee 2 said ethnicity is one's culture and heritage; nationality is one's birthplace and citizenship in that country; race is one's color of their skin. Interviewee 3 said ethnicity is blood; nationality is country; race is color. They all give the similar definition of nationality and race. However, there are two distinctive answers. The Asian students, interviewee 2 mentions about birth place on his definition. He treats the nationality and birth place the same. This reveals that interviewee 2 has never thought of the situation that birthplace is different from citizenship. In contrast, the Asian American student, interviewee 3 who has different birth place and citizenship only defines nationality as a country which means citizenship. And, Interviewee 1, she answers that ethnicity is synonym for race. Ethnicity is not the synonym for

race. It is the concept that is included in race. Her answer would be driven from her life in homogenous ethnic and racial society such as Korea and Japan. Family is an important element which determines the ethnicity. In general, preference of their parents determines the voting behavior. Most of Asian students at UIUC may have parents who have little or no contact with American culture. The parents may think that they are not related to the election because they are not participants in the U.S. society. The anti-social thought can be transmitted to their children. For Asian Americans, even though American culture may affect them, they value ethnicity and nationality more than the cultural environment. According to the survey, about 90% of Asian students said that they are Asian when I asked them whether they are Asian (ethnicity) or Asian American. Only 10% of people said that they are Asian American. Even native-born Asian students said that they are Asian. This result clearly shows that people are influenced by their ethnicity rather than the physical society, U.S. which they belong to.

As a minority in U of I society, Asian students tend to segregate with other minorities. This racial climate is related to the social context of US society. As an example, the article "Asian Americans could play key role in presidential race, study shows." Janet Gilmore emphasizes that a high portion of undecided Asian American voters, about 34%, were a significant source of potential votes for both candidates, McCain and Obama, in the election. Asian population played a serious role in the result of the presidential election 2008. Many of Asians are supporting presidential candidate Barack Obama. Although there are various reasons that Asian people support Barack Obama, it is an undoubtedly clear fact that Asian people support Barack Obama because he is a minority. The result of the 2008 presidential election conveys the relationship between race and election. In order to see voting behavior of Asian students at U of I, an imaginary situation, four candidates who have the same ability but different ethnicity run for election, is given to people of the subject group. People had to choose one of the candidates for their discussion group. For this question, most of the people chose the Asian candidate among

candidates who have four different ethnicities: Caucasian, African, Asian, and Hispanic. This distinctive preference can explain the segregation of Asian students at UIUC. The result of the survey tells the strong bond between Asian people. However, Caucasian who is the mainstream race gets the least support from Asian people. It was lower than 5%. On the other hand, the subject group supports African candidate the most. The percentage of support goes up to about 10%. The candidates' race is very important feature that can determine the electorates' vote.

Ultimately, at UIUC, Asian students have three distinctive voting behaviors. They have an apathy to the election which is going on in campus. They build their own society and try not to associate with the other race or ethnicity. Because of discriminations and a glass ceiling, they do not integrate into the UIUC society. Asian students tend to choose a candidate with the same ethnicity because they value their ethnicity the most. For instance, interviewees represent the affinity of their ethnicity. They do not hesitate to vote for a candidate who has the same ethnicity. Asian students at UIUC tend to support other minorities rather than major racial group. In survey, rather than a candidate with mainstream race, Asian students tend to vote for other minority groups as a second choice other than their ethnic group. Asian students tend to have strong connection towards other minorities. These behaviors are key factors that may affect on the election on campus. Since the Asian population is so big and powerful at UIUC, candidates have to aware of Asian students' tendencies and behaviors when they consider running for election.

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