

Asian Candidates in America: The Surprising Effects of Positive Racial Stereotyping

Neil Visalvanich^{*†}

Word Count: 8762

Abstract

Racial stereotyping has been found to handicap African-American and Latino candidates in negative ways (Terkildsen 1993, Sigelman 1995). It is less clear how racial stereotypes may change the fortunes of Asian candidates. This paper explores the candidacies of Asian Americans with an experiment run through Amazon Mechanical Turk as well as real world evaluations of Asian-American candidates using the Cooperative Congressional Elections Study. In my experiments, I find that Asian candidates do significantly better than white candidates across different biographical scenarios (conservative, liberal, and foreign). I find that, contrary to expectations, Asian candidates are not significantly disadvantaged from being immigrant and foreign born. My experimental results mirror my observational results, which show that Asian Democrats are significantly advantaged even when compared to whites. These results indicate that Asian candidates in America face a set of racial-political stereotypes that are unique to their racial subgroup.

^{*}Lecturer in Comparative Politics, Durham University, School of Government and International Affairs, neil.visalvanich@durham.ac.uk

[†]A previous version of this paper was presented at the 2015 annual meeting of the Western Political Science Association. I would like to thank Marisa Abrajano, Christopher Fariss, James Fowler, Zoltan Hajnal, Hans Hassell, Gary Jacobson, Nazita Lejavardi, Taeku Lee, Brad LeVeck, Kelly Matush, Maya Oren, David Searle, the journal editors, and the anonymous reviewers for their many helpful comments and suggestions.

1 Introduction

From 1950 to 2000, a total of nine candidates of Asian or Pacific Islander descent sought a seat in the U.S. Congress and won. Since the turn of the century, 16 Asian candidates have been elected to Congress. The 2012 election alone saw the election of five new members of Congress of Asian descent. In addition to Congress, Asians have been elected chief executive of politically and racially diverse states such as Washington (Gary Locke), Louisiana (Bobby Jindal), and South Carolina (Nikki Haley), as well as cities such as Oakland (Jean Quan), San Francisco (Ed Lee), and Garden Grove (Bao Nguyen). Not only are Asian candidates seeking office at the highest rate in American history, but they are also winning in racially diverse districts that range from majority white to majority Latino or African American (Census, 2012).

Despite Asian Americans being the one of the fastest growing minority groups in America (Census, 2013) and the increasing success of Asian candidates, the literature on race and ethnic politics lacks a clear understanding of what effect, if any, race has on the candidacies of Asian Americans. Extensive work on the candidacies of blacks and Latinos has found that white voters often incorporate racial stereotypes into the evaluation of their candidates (Terkildsen, 1993; McDermott, 1998; Kinder and Dale-Riddle, 2012). The thrust of this literature has found that a candidate's race has an overall negative effect on the perception of the candidate among whites (Schaffner, 2011; Kinder and Dale-Riddle, 2012; Stephens-Davidowitz, 2013; Lewis-Beck, Tien and Nadeau, 2010; Highton, 2011). Studies about African-American and Latino congressional candidates find that they are perceived as more ideologically liberal and less competent than their white counterparts (Jacobsmeier, 2014; Sigelman et al., 1995; McDermott, 1998). What has remained unexplored is whether Asian candidates suffer a similar racial handicap.

The racial stereotypes of Asians are distinct from those of blacks and Latinos. Asians are seen as the "model" minority, possessing positive traits like industriousness and intelligence (Chou and Feagin, 2008). On the other hand, at various times in American history, Asian Americans have been seen as a foreign threat (Chang, 2004; Kim, 1999; Chou and Feagin, 2008), a stereotype which persists into the modern day (Lee, 2000; Wu, 2003). The overall socio-economic status of Asian Americans also makes them distinct from blacks and Latinos. Asians are more likely to have a higher median income and have

higher educational attainment than than blacks or Latinos (DeNavas-Walt, Richardson and Stringfellow, 2010). How these impressions and characteristics of Asians might play into the evaluation of Asian candidates remains an open question.

In order to test whether the popular racial stereotypes of Asians have an effect on the outcome of their political candidacies, I utilize an experiment meant to isolate the effect of the Asian racial cue as well as test the interaction of candidate race with ideological cues and foreign-born/immigrant cues.¹ I supplement this experiment with an observational study of real-world Asian candidates competing in congressional elections.

In my experiments, I find that Asian candidates are actually favored by whites in the vote when compared to white candidates with the same biography in an election with minimal political cues and where both candidates are portrayed as politically neutral. In addition, I find that foreign-born Asian candidates are significantly advantaged in terms of vote choice as well, suggesting that Asian candidates are not handicapped by foreignness. The results of the observational study mirror the results of the experimental study. I observe that Asian candidates, specifically Asian Democrats, are seen as less ideologically extreme and more competent, and have a sizable advantage in the vote when compared to black, Latino, and even white candidates with similar qualities.

While traditionally race has been seen as a hinderance on minority candidates, these results point to a racial dynamic of American politics in which race may be a benefit to certain groups under certain contexts. In addition, these findings speak to the unique position in which Asians find themselves in American politics; as members of a minority group that is seen as at least politically proximal to whites and superior to their black and Latino counterparts.

¹This paper primarily looks at the candidacies of East-Asians, while recognizing that different stereotypes might apply to different sub-groups of Asians. The stereotypes that might afflict South-Asian and Middle-Eastern candidacies, as well as inter-ethnic variations, might produce results significantly different from those presented in this paper. This avenue of research should be explored in a separate project.

2 Asian Americans and Minority Candidate Evaluation

2.1 Candidate Race as an Informational Heuristic

Voters often use informational heuristics, such as partisan affiliation or incumbency, in evaluating their candidates (Popkin, 1994). Studies of the effect of race on minority candidates have found that voters do indeed use race to cue in on a candidate's personal and political qualities, whether it be ideology, integrity, or competence.

The thrust of the literature on race and candidate evaluation has found that voters often impute group-based stereotypes onto black and Latino candidates. Generally these group-based stereotypes include both political stereotypes and social stereotypes. Bobo (2001) finds that whites are more likely to see blacks and Latinos as politically liberal and more supportive of social welfare policies. In addition, he also finds that blacks and Latinos are seen as less trustworthy than whites or Asians. These racial stereotypes have in turn been found to apply to black and Latino candidates for political office. Experimental and observational studies have found that both black and Latino candidates are seen as more liberal and less competent than whites (Sigelman et al., 1995; Visalvanich, 2016). These findings are echoed by McDermott (1998), who finds that blacks are perceived as more likely to hold liberal policy positions that are pro-social welfare. This literature indicates that group-based stereotyping is a major component of minority candidate evaluation.

If a white electorate imputes its stereotypes and prejudices onto black and Latino candidates, it stands to reason that Asian candidates are afflicted by their own social and political stereotypes as well. However, a rigorous examination of how group based stereotyping may apply to Asian candidates has yet to be conducted. The primary contribution of this paper is to explore this question, both with experiments and observational data. Using preexisting theories and empirical findings about stereotypes of Asians in America, I present several different hypotheses of how racial stereotyping might affect Asian political candidates.

2.2 The Stereotyping of Asians in America

In order to properly examine how group-based stereotyping may influence Asian candidacies, it is important to first examine empirical studies of public opinion towards Asians in America. The thrust of many of these studies finds that Asians are subject to a very distinct set of socio-political stereotyping when compared to blacks and Latinos. [Bobo \(2001\)](#) finds that while whites are more likely to perceive Latinos and blacks as “less intelligent” and “more demanding of welfare,” these stereotypes do not apply to Asians. Unlike blacks and Latinos, Asians in America are often associated with what can be considered positive racial stereotyping even when compared to whites. [Bowler and Segura \(2011\)](#) examine racial stereotypes across subgroups and find that Asians as a group are seen as both more hardworking and more intelligent when compared to other minority groups, especially blacks and Latinos. Interestingly, white respondents view Asians very positively when compared to whites as a subgroup themselves. [Bowler and Segura \(2011\)](#) also finds that 39.2% of white respondents from the 2008 American National Elections Study rated Asians as *more* hardworking than whites, while 43.1% of white respondents rated Asians as equally as hardworking as whites. In the same survey, 27.5% of white respondents rated Asians as *more* intelligent than whites, while 50.4% of respondents rated Asians as equally as intelligent as whites. In the same survey, white respondents were significantly less likely to rate African-Americans and Latinos as more intelligent or hardworking when compared to whites themselves, setting up Asians as a minority sub-group that whites view positively.

Asians have also been stereotyped as apolitical and non-threatening ([Chang, 2001](#)). Taken on the whole, these stereotypes fit into a “model-minority” narrative of Asians in America ([Kim, 1999](#)). In Kim’s conception, the portrayal of Asians as a model-minority is meant as a tool to shame other races and sustain white supremacy. Other studies have debunked the model minority narrative as overly simplistic ([Chou and Feagin, 2008](#)), but survey research has shown that whites do apply model minority stereotypes to Asians as a whole. [Bobo \(2001\)](#) finds that Asians are seen as trustworthy, industrious, and less threatening than blacks or Latinos. And while many aspects of the model minority stereotype of Asians are overly simplistic, some are grounded in accurate socio-economic qualities of the Asian community as a whole. For instance, while Asian Americans have had an increasing affiliation towards the Democratic Party ([Wong et al., 2011](#)), many Asian Americans still choose to not identify with any polit-

ical party (Hajnal and Lee, 2011), fitting into the stereotype of Asians as apolitical. In addition, Asians are much more likely to come from a middle- or upper-class background (DeNavas-Walt, Richardson and Stringfellow, 2010), a trait that also fits the stereotype of Asians as hard-working and industrious.

The model minority stereotyping also coincides with many of the positive qualities, that voters value in their candidates, also known as “valence” qualities (Stokes, 1963; Burden, 2004; Stone and Simas, 2010). From this positive stereotyping of Asians, I posit the first of three hypotheses.

- ***Asian Advantage Hypothesis*** - *Because Asians are stereotyped as having positive racial qualities, they will be evaluated as equal to or favorably compared to whites.*

On the other hand, it is not necessarily a given that Asian candidates will benefit racial stereotypes in all instances. The negative stereotypes of Asians are not of the same nature as those of blacks or Latinos, who are seen as less competent and connected to crime and violence. Asians are often stereotyped as “perpetually foreign,” inscrutable, and, as a result, less trustworthy than white candidates (Kim, 1999; Lee, 2000; Wu, 2003). Lee (2000) finds that the perpetual foreigner stereotype is pervasive, with a majority of Asians surveyed claiming to have been victims of this kind of discrimination. Kuo, Malhotra and Mo (2014) finds similarly that foreign stigmatization contributes to Asian-American political identity. This, in turn, affects non-Asian attitudes towards social policy considered favorable towards Asians. People who are more likely to believe in Asian stereotypes are also more likely to oppose issues like legal immigration or reparations for Japanese Americans.

How might foreignness stereotyping afflict Asian candidates? Many Asian candidates who do run for office are either first- or second-generation Americans, reflecting the fact that Asians are still a mostly immigrant community (Chang, 2001). Questions about loyalty to America or general trustworthiness might undermine Asian candidacies. The internment of Japanese-American citizens is still a reminder that Asian-American citizens are not immune from prejudicial treatment. A brief look at Asian candidates who run for office shows that often they seek to emphasize their ties to the community and their personal history, perhaps in an attempt to combat these stereotypes. For instance, former Oakland Mayor Jean Quan’s website features an extensive political history that emphasizes a life-long residence in the city of Oakland and a lifetime of service to the city as a public official.

From the “foreign threat” stereotype of Asians in America, I posit my second hypothesis.

- ***Foreign Threat Hypothesis*** - *Because Asians are stereotyped as perpetually foreign, candidates who are seen as foreign will be evaluated less favorably compared to whites.*

Finally, we need to consider how the Asian racial cue might interact with partisan political cues. Partisan identification has proven to be a dominant force in American politics, influencing all aspects of candidate evaluation (Campbell et al., 1960; Popkin, 1994; Bartels, 2000). While race has been shown to function as an informational heuristic for voters, in an era of increased polarization, partisan cues motivate not just vote choice but also how voters process political information (Nicholson, 2011; Rahn, 1993). Given the strength of partisanship, ideological cues will either overwhelm or significantly diminish the effect of the Asian racial cue. I posit the last of my hypotheses:

- ***Ideological Hypothesis*** - *Given the polarizing nature of ideological cues, any effect the racial cue has on Asian candidates will be diminished or extinguished by ideological cues.*

3 Asian Candidates: An Experimental Manipulation

In order to test the effect of race on the candidacies of East Asians, I designed a survey experiment that presented respondents with the biographies of two fictional candidates running a contested election for local office. The survey asked respondents to evaluate each candidate's ideological leaning and prospective performance, and then to choose who they would hypothetically vote for in that election. This survey experiment was administered through Amazon Mechanical Turk. Amazon's Mechanical Turk is a website where requesters publish tasks (called Human Intelligence Tasks or HITs) and provide payment to those who choose to participate. Those who request a task can limit the availability of the task to respondents who have certain characteristics such as age or location. Recruitment through Mechanical Turk is similar to other web-based approaches such as YouGov that maintain panels of participants and invite them to participate in studies in exchange for a payment or other incentive.

[Table 2 About Here]

Respondents were paid 50 cents per valid response and the average time for completion of the survey

was eight minutes.² In total, a sample of 2,443 respondents were recruited into the sample. Of that initial sample, 1,652 self-identified as racially white. Since this study is an exploration of white attitudes toward Asian candidates, I look exclusively at white respondents. Table 2 summarizes the demographic qualities of this sample. The respondents recruited through Mechanical Turk lean Democratic and tend to be poorer, less educated, and younger. Despite the skew in the sample, respondents recruited through Mechanical Turk are still more representative than experimental convenience samples commonly used in social science (Berinsky, Huber and Lenz, 2012; Buhrmester, Kwang and Gosling, 2011). And while self-identified Democrats outnumber Republicans in the sample, there were still enough Republican identifiers to make cross-partisan comparisons in my analysis.

Respondents were randomly assigned into three different experimental scenarios and a control scenario. Subjects were randomly assigned into these scenarios using Qualtrics's complete randomization process. I also ran a Hotelling balance test, which revealed no significant differences in the demographic characteristics or political and ideological orientation of respondents in each of these experiments. Each subject was exposed to only one of the experiments.

The first experiment is a "low-information" scenario that is meant to isolate the effect of race on candidate evaluation without other political cues, such as issue positions and political ideology. This represents a one-factor, between-subjects experiment. The low-information scenario features biographies

²Previous research has found that subjects recruited via Mechanical Turk are equally as attentive as subjects used in laboratory experiments (Paolacci, Chandler and Ipeirotis, 2010). In order to ensure that respondents were reading the questions fully, I included a manipulation check, which asked respondents to answer a specific question in a specific way in order to ensure they were paying attention. Answering this question incorrectly would lead to a prompt that told the respondents, "You are not reading the questions fully. Please read the questions in their entirety before answering the questions." This prompt is meant to deter respondents from just clicking through the questions. Berinsky, Margolis and Sances (2013) find that making individuals aware of their failure to pay attention through these checks leads them to engage at similar levels to those who are fully aware throughout the experiment. For that reason, I decided to keep these respondents in the sample.

of two candidates who are competing with each other for a seat on the San Diego City Council. A local office was chosen for external validity; it is plausible that a city council race would be a non ideological and non partisan contest. Biography A features a candidate who was born locally and who promises to “promote government efficiency while in office and is committed to improving roads and schools.” Biography B also features a local candidate who promises a “commitment to constituent services as well as public safety and disaster planning.” Each biography is paired with a picture and name of either an Asian candidate (David Wong) or a white candidate (Carl Guenther). The pairing is randomly assigned to each respondent.³

The second experiment is an “ideological” scenario. In this treatment, respondents are given two candidates with distinct political ideologies, and are asked to evaluate both of them. Respondents are presented with either a liberal Asian candidate running against a conservative white candidate or a liberal white candidate running against a conservative Asian candidate. This represents a two-factor, between-subjects experiment. The purpose of this experiment is to see whether any racial effect from the low-information treatment carries over when other political cues are added. The liberal biography features a candidate described as a “liberal progressive” with the endorsement of “environmental groups” and “labor unions” who promises to “expand social programs for the urban poor” while in office. The conservative biography features a candidate who is described as a “business-friendly conservative” with the endorsement of “local business groups” and the “Chamber of Commerce” who promises to “lessen the regulatory burden on businesses” while in office. Like the low-information scenario, respondents were randomly assigned whether the liberal or conservative biography featured a picture and name of a locally

³San Diego was also chosen because it is a city with a significant Asian population, and so an Asian candidate could plausibly run for local office there. A Chinese name was chosen because Chinese-Americans are the largest Asian immigrant group in America, but also because the group includes a significant number of second and third generation Chinese, thus making for an easier experimental manipulation between the native and foreign conditions. A German name was chosen because the distinctiveness of a German name is more likely to cue foreignness. The text of the candidate biographies appears in the appendix.

based Asian candidate or a white candidate.

The third experiment is a “foreign-born” scenario, in which one of the candidates is a foreign-born immigrant who competes against a native-born candidate. Respondents are presented with either a foreign Asian candidate running against a native white candidate or a foreign white candidate running against a native Asian candidate. This represents a two-factor, between-subjects experiment. The purpose of this experiment is to see whether East-Asian candidates are significantly disadvantaged if they are foreign-born immigrants. The foreign-born biography features either a foreign-born Asian candidate with a foreign name (“Yuan Wong,” in contrast to the low/ideological information’s more Anglicized “David Wong”) running against an American-born white candidate or a foreign-born white candidate with a foreign name (“Gerhard Guenther”) running against an American born Asian candidate. In order to isolate the effect of “foreignness” on candidate perception, both candidates were presented without any other overt partisan or ideological cues. The immigrant/foreign candidate is presented as a member of immigrant advocacy groups and a proponent of immigrant interests.

Finally, there is a “control” scenario, which features a white candidate versus a white candidate with minimal cues. The control is meant to establish a baseline for a broader comparison.

All respondents are given a pre-treatment survey that asked a normal array of demographic questions, including questions pertaining to partisan identification, partisan lean, education, income, age, race, and gender. After being randomly assigned a treatment scenario, each respondent is asked to evaluate his or her candidates’ ideologies and probable performance in office, and indicate who he or she would vote for if he or she was were to vote in the election. The ideology rating is five point ordered scale (1=Very Conservative, 2=Conservative, 3=Moderate, 4=Liberal, 5=Very Liberal). The performance metric is also ranked on a five point ordered scale (1=Very Poorly, 2=Moderately Poorly, 3=Average, 4=Moderately Well, 5=Very Well). The vote, ideology rating, and probable performance are the three main ways I measure my dependent variable, candidate perception.

4 Experimental Results

4.1 Asian Candidates in a Low-Information Environment

[Figure 1 about here]

I start my analysis by examining the effect of race on East-Asian candidacies in a the low-information treatment scenario.⁴ Although both biographies in the low-information scenario were written to minimize political cues, there is a possibility that certain aspects of each specific biography will advantage one biography over the other. Therefore, I examine the results for Biography A and Biography B separately. Figure 1 shows the rate in which respondents chose to vote for either candidate, split by race and by biography. Respondents were, on a whole, more predisposed to support the candidate with Biography A. However, Asian candidates with this biography did significantly better than white candidates by a substantial margin. Asian candidates with Biography A drew 80% of the vote. On the other hand, white candidates with the same biography drew 60% of the vote. While respondents were less likely to support Biography B, Asians with this biography were still advantaged when compared to white candidates with the same biography. A difference-in-proportions test yields a p-value of $Pr(T < t) \approx 0.0000$. At first glance, it appears that Asian candidates are actually *advantaged* because of their race.

[Figure 2 about here]

A more thorough examination of the data reveals that Asian candidates do significantly better in other metrics of evaluation as well. Figure 2 compares the ideological evaluation and the performance

⁴As a manipulation check, I asked the respondents a series questions about whether they thought each respective candidate would support or oppose specific racial policies. The two issues that specifically referenced race were whether the respondent thought the candidate would support or oppose “efforts to help local businesses expand local trade with Asia” as well as “affirmative action for Asian hires in local government.” Respondents were significantly more likely to say that Asian candidates would support these measures across all treatment conditions, which indicates that respondents received the racial treatment.

evaluation between Asian and white candidates in a low-information scenario, with both biographies combined for this analysis. Asian candidates are seen as more moderate, with an average rating of 2.95 on the scale, close to the “moderate” rating of 3. Respondents, on average, rated the white candidate as more ideologically conservative, with an average rating of 3.21. This difference between white and Asian candidates in ideological rating is not statistically significant. White respondents, however, are significantly more likely to say that Asian candidates will perform better in office than white candidates with the identical biography, and this difference is statistically significant ($Pr(T > t) = 0.0002$).

On the whole, the results in the low-information scenario provides strong evidence that Asian candidates actually benefit from their race. Asian candidates are seen as better able to perform and are better liked than white candidates with the same biography. This result supports the Asian-advantage hypothesis. The next step in my analysis examines whether this racial advantage holds when we add ideological cues into the mix.

4.2 Asian Candidates in a Ideological Information Environment

[Figure 3 about here]

Figure 3 shows the vote total for white and Asian liberals as well as for white and Asian conservatives. A comparison of white liberals versus Asian liberals reveals a slight advantage for Asian candidates. Asian liberals received 70% of the vote from white respondents. White liberals, on the other hand, received 64% of the vote. This difference is statistically significant ($Pr(T > t) = 0.03$). Asian conservatives maintain a similar advantage over their white conservative counterparts. Asian conservative candidates received 36% of the vote while white conservative candidates received 30% of the vote. This difference is not statistically significant ($Pr(T > t) = 0.09$), however it is close to statistical significance. Overall, these results indicate that Asian candidates do maintain an advantage in the vote even when ideological cues are added. However, the results also indicate that the extent of this advantage is diminished significantly when compared to the low-information scenario. Asian candidates in the low-information scenario had a 20% advantage over their white counterparts. Adding ideological cues reduced this advantage to 6%.

[Figure 4 about here]

Figure 4 shows a comparison in ideological and performance ratings of Asian and white liberal candidates as well as Asian and white conservative candidates. There is no significant difference in most of the perceptual ratings of Asian and white candidates of both conservative and liberal biographies. The difference in ideological rating of liberal candidates is statistically significant ($Pr(T > t) = 0.025$), with Asian liberals being seen as slightly more moderate than white liberals. This difference is marginal at best, however. All the other perceptual measures yield insignificant differences between the races.

On the whole, these results suggest that the addition of ideological cues reduces the positive benefit of race for Asian candidates significantly. A comparison of the results of the low-information treatment to the ideological treatment supports the ideological hypothesis that the addition of ideological cues will diminish the effect of race for Asian candidates. A difference-in-differences test in the vote between the low-information and ideological treatments is significant ($Pr(T > t) = 0.000$). While Asian candidates in the ideological scenario maintain a marginal advantage in vote choice, they lose their advantage in all other measures of candidate perception.

4.3 Asian Candidates in a Foreign Born/Immigrant Information Environment

[Figure 5 about here]

The last experiment I explore examines Asian and white candidates in a foreign-born/immigrant scenario. In this experiment, one of the candidates, either white or Asian, is given a foreign-born biography (with the country of origin being either Germany or China) and a foreign-sounding name. If the foreign threat hypothesis is supported, then we should observe foreign Asian candidates doing significantly worse than foreign white candidates and native Asian candidates.

Figure 5 shows the vote for foreign and native candidates of both white and Asian races. Contrary to the expectations of the foreign-threat hypothesis, foreign candidates actually do significantly better than *all* other candidate types in the foreign-born/immigrant scenario. Asian candidates with a foreign biography drew 65% of the vote, while white candidates with a foreign biography drew 42% of the vote and Asian candidates with a native biography drew 58% of the vote. Not only do Asian foreign candidates do

significantly better than white foreign candidates with virtually the same biography ($Pr(T > t) \approx 0.000$), they do significantly better than Asian native candidates as well ($Pr(T > t) = 0.0419$). These counter intuitive results suggest that not only are Asian candidates not handicapped by a foreign-born biography, they actually benefit from the cue. I discuss what might be driving these results in the discussion and conclusion section.

4.4 The Effect of Respondent Partisanship

Thus far, I have found that Asian candidates are advantaged compared to white candidates in each of the three different informational scenarios, although this advantage is diminished significantly in an ideological scenario. While these results offer strong evidence in support of the Asian advantage hypothesis, it is possible that they are driven by the liberal and Democratic skew of the sample. In order to ensure that this is not the case, I turn to a parametric test using a logit model with vote for the Asian candidate as the main dependent variable and with a party identification interaction for each of the experimental scenarios. By examining the interaction, I am able to see whether self-identified Republicans are less likely to support an Asian candidate.

[Table 3 about here]

The results in Table 2 show the results of the logit model with the Republican party identification interacted within each of the experimental scenarios. These findings show that, by and large, a candidate being Asian has either a positive effect among self-identified Republicans, or there are no distinguishable effects. The positive effect is especially strong for Asian conservative candidates, who are significantly more likely to draw support from Republican respondents. The notable exception to this general finding (of either a null or positive effect for Asian candidates) is that Republicans are less likely to support an Asian liberal candidate, indicating that Republican respondents do penalize Asian candidates because of their race, but only if those candidates are liberals.

However, while these experimental results point to a strong and persistent advantage for Asian candidates, any experiment is subject to questions of external validity. Experimental studies on black and Latino candidates (Terkildsen, 1993; Sigelman et al., 1995; McDermott, 1998) have found a persistent

bias against these candidates. However, observational research has found that race has a minimal effect on candidate evaluation (Highton, 2004). For this study, I am able to bridge this gap in research design by examining observational data on Asian candidates as a compliment to my experimental results.

5 Asian Candidates: An Observational Look

[Table 4 about here]

Until very recently, scholars have been unable to thoroughly explore the candidacies of Asian Americans with observational data. This has been due primarily to a general lack of Asian candidates, especially for national office, as well as a related lack of comprehensive observational data that feature Asian candidates. Fortunately, the 2010 and 2012 U.S. Congressional elections featured the most diverse array of candidates to run at the national level in American history. Table 3 shows the racial makeup for candidates for Congress in 2010 and 2012. These two election cycles featured a significant portion of candidates of Asian descent. Most Asian candidates who ran did so as Democrats and during this time no Asian Republican was elected to Congress. This indicates that for many Asian candidates, the Democratic Party remains the primary vehicle to attain elected office at the Congressional level.

By utilizing the racial diversity of the Cooperative Congressional Elections Study (CCES) (Ansolabehere, 2010, 2012),⁵ I am able to put together a dataset that can thoroughly examine the candidacies of Asians at the national level for the first time. The primary strength of the CCES lies in its large size. Between the 2010 and 2012 CCES there were roughly 100,000 respondents. This large sample size gives us the ability to examine respondent-level responses to minority candidates across the country. Taken in conjunction with the historically high number of Asian candidates who ran for Congress between these two elections, I am able to examine white responses to Asian candidates observationally in order to see if the strength of Asian candidates in the experimental design mirror their strength in real world elections.

The CCES is not only unique in its size and scope, it also features survey questions that allow me to

⁵More information on the CCES can be found at <http://projects.iq.harvard.edu/cces>

test some of the same hypotheses I tested with the experimental study. In addition to asking respondents for whom they voted, the CCES also asks respondents to rate their candidates' ideological orientation as well as to assess their competence. Not only am I able to test whether Asian candidates have an advantage in the vote, but I am also able to examine whether Asian candidates are perceived as ideologically distinct from other candidates with comparable candidate qualities. In addition, I am able to compare how respondents view the competence of Asian candidates versus candidates with similar qualities.

Because part of my analysis focuses on ideological perception of candidates, I chose to incorporate candidate ideal-point estimations based on campaign finance donations (called Campaign Finance Scores, or Cfscores), a technique pioneered by [Bonica \(2014\)](#), into my analysis. I chose to use Cfscores in my analysis because they allow me to analyze challengers and incumbents using a uniform measure.

Because this study focuses on white responses to Asian candidates, I look only at white respondents. In addition, because there were so few Asian Republicans who ran, and no Asian Republican incumbents who ran in a biracial election, I also limit my observational analysis to Democratic candidates. I also dropped races in which the incumbent was unchallenged. Unfortunately, the nature of the data sample does not allow me to test the foreign-threat hypothesis since there is no question that gets at how foreign respondents perceive the candidates to be, and almost all the candidates who ran at the Congressional level were native-born Asian Americans.

6 Observational Results

[Figure 6 about here]

I begin my analysis with an examination of my main dependent variables: the vote and ideological and competence assessments of congressional candidates. The CCES asks respondents to rate their candidates' ideology on a seven-point ordered scale, from "Very Liberal" to "Very Conservative." In order to produce a more meaningful measure of how respondents view their candidates, I subtract this measure from each respondent's own self-reported ideological rating. This creates a 12-point measure of ideological distance of respondent from candidate, ranging from -6 to +6, in which negative values indicate that the respondent views the candidate as to the ideological left of him or herself, while positive values

indicates that the respondent views the candidate to the right of him or her. The CCES also asks its respondents to rate their candidate's competence on a seven-point scale, from "Very Strong" to "Very Weak."

Figure 6 shows the average vote total, ideological rating, and competence broken down by race. In examining vote totals by race, we observe that Asian candidates receive significantly more support in the vote than their white, black, and Latino counterparts. The first observation of note is that Asian Democratic candidates do significantly better in the vote than candidates of other racial subgroups, even white. Asian Democrats received 43% of the white vote, while white Democrats received 39%, black Democrats 40%, and Latino Democrats 35%. When comparing average ideological and competence assessments by race, we see results that mirror results in the vote. Asian Democrats are seen as more moderate than blacks or Latinos and are seen as roughly on par ideologically with white Democrats. Asian Democrats are seen as on par with white Democrats with regards to competence assessments as well, while black and Latino Democrats are seen as significantly less competent than their Asian and white counterparts.⁶

[Table 5 about here]

The results in Figure 6 represent the average assessments of each candidate without taking into account the numerous other variables that could factor into candidate assessment. In order to account for these variables, I turn to a logistic regression model for vote choice and an ordered logistic regression model for ideological and competence assessments that takes into account the various candidate-specific and respondent-level controls. Table 4 shows a logit model on vote choice and an ordered logit model on ideological assessments and competence assessments. The main variables of interest are the candidate-race variables. This is a binary variable that takes on the value of "1" for "Asian Democrat" if the candidate is of Asian descent and "0" if the candidate is not of Asian descent.⁷ Latino and black candi-

⁶In order to test whether the advantage for Asian candidates are the result of most Asian candidates being incumbents, I also compared the vote, ideology, and competence assessment among challengers. The results among challengers mirror the results among incumbents and the results overall.

⁷South Asian candidates were coded as "Asian" for the purposes of this study.

dates were coded the same way, creating four racial dummy variables for each racial group (white, Asian, black, and Latino). In all the models, white candidates are the excluded category, so the coefficient for each racial variable represents the effect of candidate race when compared to white candidates. In order to account for district-level variance, I used a random effects model with standard errors clustered at the district level.

I incorporated a standard array of both candidate-level as well as respondent-level controls in the model, including incumbency, whether the seat is an open seat, candidate and opposition spending, a dummy for the cycle year, whether the respondent is of the same party as the candidate, and respondent ideology, education, age, employment status, and gender. I also incorporated Cfscores as an ideological control in the model, however in the vote model I use the absolute value of this score as a measure of candidate extremity.

For the vote, the dependent variable was coded as “1” in the Democrat model if the respondent voted for the Democrat, and “0” if the respondent did not vote for the Democrat. If whites are discriminating against minority Democrats, we should see a significant and *negative* result on the coefficient for minority Democrats, whether they be black, Latino or Asian. The first column of Table 4 represents the results for the vote model and these results show support for the Asian advantage hypothesis. Because white candidates are the excluded category, the coefficient for Asian candidates represents a comparison against white candidates with the same qualities. The most notable result is that Asian Democrats do significantly *better* in the vote than white candidates with the same qualities. Asian Democrats also do significantly better than Latino and black Democrats, who incur a penalty in the vote among whites.⁸

⁸Analysis for minority Republicans showed insignificant results for Republican candidates of all racial groups, which indicates that whites evaluate minority Republicans differently than minority Democrats. It is worth noting that among the Asian Republicans who did run, only two were incumbents (Charles Djou, R-HI and Anh “Joseph” Cao, R-LA), both of whom were representing majority-minority districts that were heavily Democratic. All Asian Republicans who ran in 2010 and 2012 lost, which may point to a greater weakness among Asian Republicans during these two cycles. It is possible that the null result for Asian Republicans is an artifact of weaker candidates and that a stronger candidate pool might reveal a stronger racial effect for Asians.

These observational results are significant even after accounting for a diverse array of candidate and respondent level controls, and provide strong support for the Asian advantage hypothesis. Most importantly, it shows that the experimental findings showing an Asian advantage extend to observational data with real world candidates.

The second column in Table 4 shows the results of an ordered logit model of how far a respondent perceives his or her candidate to be from his or her self-reported ideology.⁹ It is important to note that this model uses a candidate's Cfscore as a control for "true" ideology so that a candidate's actual ideology is taken into account in the model. Because negative values of the dependent variable means the respondent sees his or her candidate as ideologically to the left of his or her own political position and because white candidates are the excluded category, negative coefficients on the race variables indicate that respondents see candidates of these races as more ideologically liberal when compared to white candidates of comparable qualities. Even after accounting for candidate ideology (as measured by Cfscores), the results show that Asian candidates are seen as ideologically similar to white candidates. Among Democratic candidates, both black and Latino candidates are perceived as ideologically to the left of respondents, even after taking into account ideological controls, while the effect size for Asian candidates is notably smaller and statistically insignificant.

The third column in Table 4 shows the results of an ordered logit model on competence rating. The competence assessments are arranged such that higher values indicate higher ratings of competence. Negative coefficients for the race variables indicate that respondents were more likely to see their minority candidates as less competent than white candidates with similar characteristics.¹⁰¹¹ The results of the

⁹For illustrative purposes, the cut-point intercepts were left out of this table.

¹⁰Because the survey question on candidate competence was only asked in the 2010 CCES, I could only conduct the analysis on competence for the 2010 election.

¹¹I included the ideological distance measure used as the dependent variable in the second column as a control in the competence model. It is possible that perceptions of ideological leanings may have an

competence model mirror the results of the ideology model. Black and Latino Democrats are seen as significantly less competent than their white counterparts, but Asian Democrats are seen as more on par with white candidates. While the coefficient for Asian candidates is negative, the strength of this coefficient is not nearly as pronounced as it is for black and Latino candidates. It is also statistically insignificant.

The results in Table 4 support the Asian advantage hypothesis; that Asian candidates, specifically Asian Democrats, are seen as more ideologically moderate and on par with white candidates of similar qualities. These results, in conjunction with the results from Figure 6, point to an observational reality that matches the experimental results: Asian candidates appear to be advantaged in the electoral arena, even when compared to white candidates. I discuss the implications of these findings in the next section.

7 Discussion and Conclusion

The sum of these results points to an advantage for Asian candidates that holds across experimental and observational contexts. These results provide strong evidence in support of the Asian advantage hypothesis, showing that not only were Asian candidates not disadvantaged due to their race, they actually consistently outperformed white candidates given the same biographies. In addition, this paper found evidence against the foreign-threat hypothesis, showing that even when foreignness was cued, Asian candidates outperformed their white counterparts significantly.

In the observational portion of the study, I find that real-world Asian candidates also seem to do better in the vote, whether it be in comparison to their counterparts from other minority groups or to white candidates. Asian candidates have a decided advantage in the vote and are also seen as ideologically moderate after taking into account ideological controls.

influence on competence assessments so I accounted for this in the model. In the model of ideological distance, competence is not included. The ideology model run using only the 2010 data with the competence rating as a control yields similar results, so I have chosen to use the model that features more observations.

Why would Asian candidates be advantaged when compared to white candidates? And why do foreign-born Asian candidates do so well given the extensive literature on public opinion of Asians as a foreign threat? The answer to the first question may lie within the measures of candidate evaluation. Perceptual evaluations of Asian candidates in the low-information scenario show that they are indeed evaluated favorably when it comes to valence qualities. Asians seen as moderate, which reflects the “apolitical” stereotype. Despite the fact that Asian-Americans on the whole have been trending toward the Democratic Party over the last 15 years (Wong et al., 2011; Green, 2013; Kuo, Malhotra and Mo, 2014), it does not appear as though this partisan orientation has colored political perceptions of Asian candidates the same way it has with Latinos and blacks (Dawson, 1994; McDermott, 1998). In addition to being seen as ideologically moderate, Asian candidates in the low-information scenario are also seen as more likely to perform well when in office, which fits into the stereotype of Asians being competent and industrious.

Why whites prefer foreign-born Asian candidates is more difficult question to answer. Within that broader question lie two questions worth discussing. The first is, why might Asian candidates not be penalized for being foreign, and the second is, why might whites actually prefer the candidacies of foreign-born Asians? It is possible that Asian candidates are not penalized for being foreign because the foreign-threat stereotype is conditional on the place Asian Americans hold in modern society. While the stereotypes of Asians as inscrutable and foreign persist, their salience has varied throughout American history, depending largely on context and who America considers to be its enemy overseas (Wu, 2003; Chang, 2004). While in the the past, the perceived enemies of America have included Asian nations like Japan and China, currently, Asians are not considered to be as great of a threat as Muslims or Latinos (Salaita, 2005; Abrajano and Alvarez, 2010), and therefore whites may not perceive Asian candidates as a threat either. The other possibility is that, given the relative standing of Asians in America right now, merely cueing foreignness is not enough to cue a foreign threat. If this is true, another experiment might be needed to cue a foreign threat. Finally, it is possible that cueing foreignness may also cue valence qualities as well. Foreign-born Asians who become accomplished enough to seek public office may fit into the narrative of the hard-working Asian immigrant, which could in turn cue a positive response to these candidacies.

It is also important to note that the implications of the Asian-advantage hypothesis are not necessarily always positive. The model-minority stereotype may also set expectations for Asian candidates that are unattainable, and may set them up for racially charged criticisms when things go wrong. Asian candidates may be forced into running campaigns that appeal to these stereotypes in order to achieve electoral success, and may be unable to run campaigns that emphasize different messages for fear of political reprisal.

These results also beg a puzzling question: if Asian candidates are advantaged, why don't we see more Asian candidates running and winning elected office? Asian candidates are gradually realizing their potential as political candidates, as we have seen the number of Asians seeking political office increase substantially over the last decade. The continuing underrepresentation of Asians in office may be due to factors that are independent of white voter discrimination. Asian-Americans participate at very low rates compared to their white, black, and Latino counterparts, and it makes sense that these low participation rates extends to Asians seeking elected office as well.

While this study has established the relative perceptual advantage of Asian candidates in low-information elections, there are other avenues of research that remain open for further exploration. This paper looked primarily at East-Asian candidates, specifically, Chinese candidates, while recognizing there is a possibility that the racial and political stereotypes that apply to East-Asian candidates may not apply to South-Asian candidates. A separate or companion study examining South Asians would go a long way toward recognizing seeing the of political stereotypes afflict this Asian subgroup. This study also did not examine differences among Asian ethnicities. While there is evidence that whites generally view East-Asians as a uniform racial group (Bobo, 2001; Chou and Feagin, 2008), whether this view of racial uniformity holds in candidate evaluation is a yet unanswered question. It is possible that whites may evaluate different Asian ethnicities in varying ways, given the different histories each Asian ethnic group has in America (Chang, 2004; Wu, 2003; Chin, 2002).

As America moves towards a future with a majority-minority population, Asian Americans have the potential to be a key part of a multiracial political future. It is clear that research about race and ethnicity in American politics that includes Asians must consider the unique nature of racial effects imputed on Asians as a racial subgroup.

Table 1: Demographic Summary of Turk Sample (White Respondents)

White Respondents	Survey Sample	Number
Democrat (with leaners)	59.14%	977
Republican (with leaners)	24.95%	412
Independent	16.09%	393
Income less than \$40K	64.83%	1,071
with less than college degree	44.79%	740
Under 35	62.65%	1,035

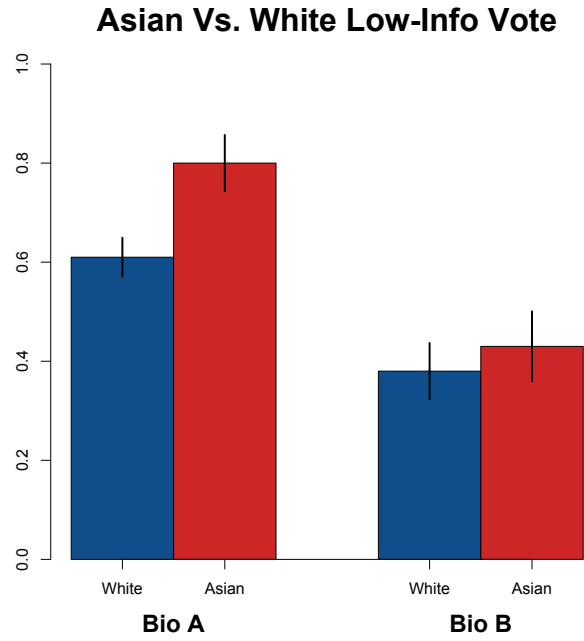


Figure 1: Vote in the Low-Information Scenario

Asian Vs. White Low-Info Ideo & Perform

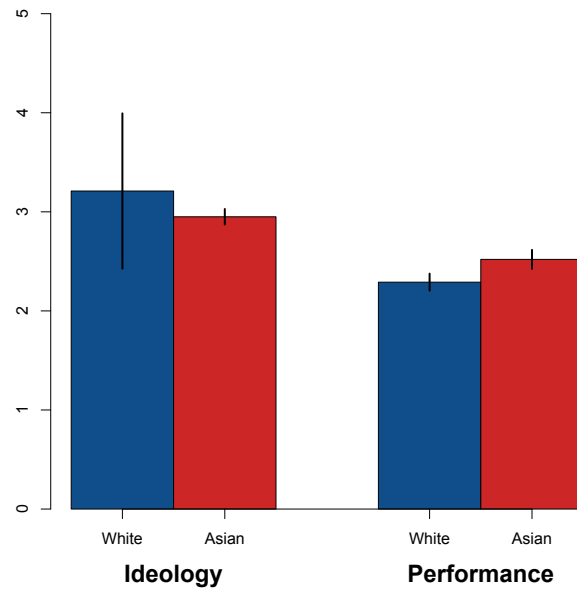


Figure 2: Candidate Perception in the Low-Information Scenario

Asian Vs. White Ideology Vote

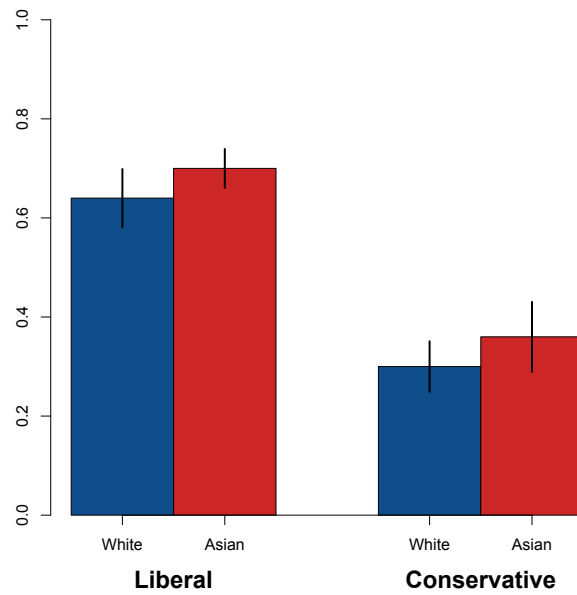


Figure 3: Vote in the Ideological Scenario

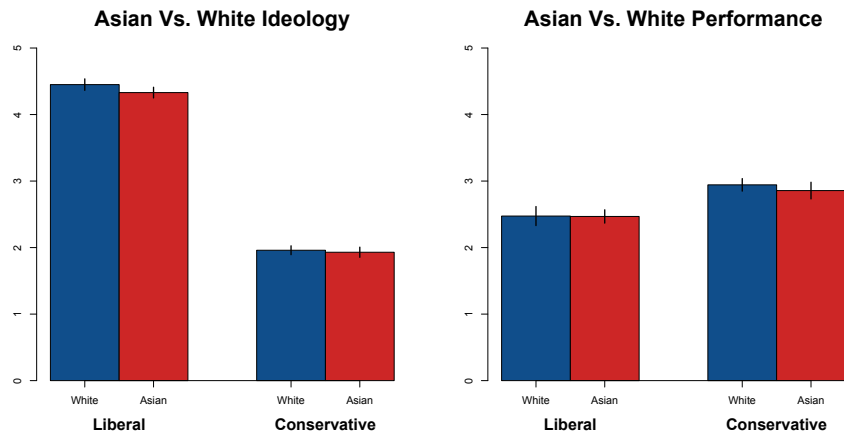


Figure 4: Candidate Perception in the Ideological Scenario

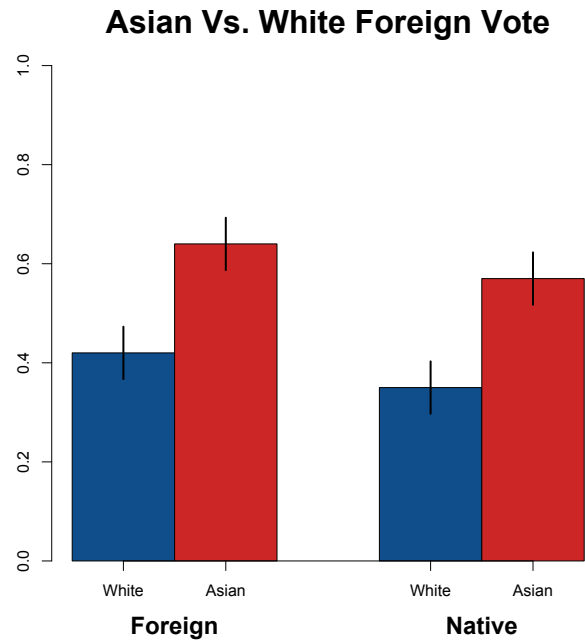


Figure 5: Vote in the Foreign-Born Scenario

Table 2: Logit Model of Vote For Asian Candidate with Republican PID Interaction

Variable	Coefficient	(Std. Err.)
Low-Info A * Rep ID	0.263	(0.425)
Low-Info B * Rep ID	-0.921	(0.524)
Liberal * Rep ID	-1.788**	(0.350)
Conservative * Rep ID	3.357**	(0.481)
Foreign * Rep ID	-0.246	(0.379)
Native * Rep ID	1.188**	(0.374)
Low-Info A	1.980**	(0.207)
Low-Info B	0.492*	(0.215)
Liberal	1.844**	(0.188)
Conservative	-0.804**	(0.218)
Foreign	1.322**	(0.178)
Native	0.747**	(0.172)
Republican PID	-0.541	(0.302)
Intercept	-0.478**	(0.134)
N		1,652
Log-likelihood		-1423.594
$\chi^2_{(13)}$		455.487

*prob < .05, **prob < .01; Standard errors

Table 3: Racial Makeup for 2010 and 2012 Congressional Elections

	Total	% Republican	% Democrat
Black	135	20%	80%
Latino	103	41%	59%
Asian	37	21%	79%
White	1,387	56%	44%

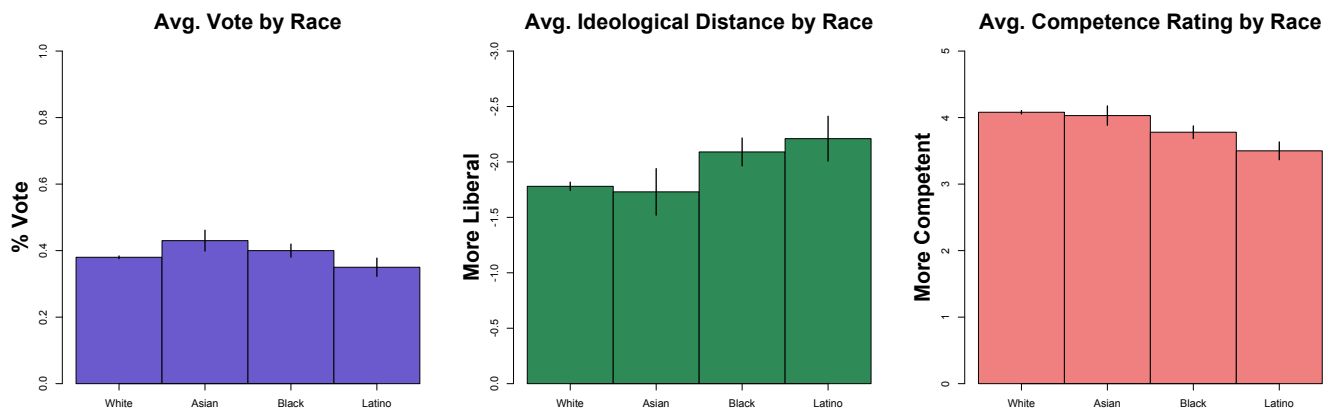


Figure 6: Candidate Comparison of Vote, Ideological Assessment, and Competence Assessment by Race

Table 4: Models of For Candidate Perceptions on Race

Variable	Vote	(Std. Err.)	Ideology	(Std. Err.)	Competence	(Std. Err.)
Candidate Race						
Black Candidate	-0.220*	(.086)	-0.567**	(.064)	-0.596**	(.101)
Latino Candidate	-0.276*	(.121)	-0.516**	(.077)	-0.503**	(.153)
Asian Candidate	0.379**	(.125)	-0.171	(.091)	-0.133	(.111)
Candidate Characteristics						
Incumbent	0.612**	(.066)	-0.750**	(.048)	0.245**	(.069)
Open Seat	0.233**	(.070)	-0.092	(.053)	0.133	(.105)
Candidate Spending	0.247**	(.052)	-0.253**	(.040)	-0.049	(.059)
Opposition Spending	-0.064*	(.049)	0.083*	(.037)	-0.069	(.048)
CfScore	-0.164	(.064)	0.734**	(.048)	0.242**	(.056)
Respondent Characteristics						
Co-Partisan Respondent	3.115**	(.039)	0.813**	(.055)	1.201**	(.075)
Respondent Ideology	-0.646**	(.012)	-1.436**	(.019)	-0.090**	(.023)
Education	-0.007	(.014)	-0.167**	(.013)	0.097**	(.018)
Age	-0.000	(.007)	-0.005**	(.001)	0.002	(.001)
Unemployed	-0.002	(.034)	0.135	(.007)	-0.249**	(.095)
Gender (female)	0.034	(.151)	0.255**	(.031)	0.037	(.042)
Cycle (2012)	0.713**	(.041)	0.165**	(.034)		
Ideological Distance					-0.567**	(.018)
Constant	0.718**	(.151)			-0.028**	(.010)
No of Obs	41,966		32,685		16,014	
Log-Likelihood	-12334		-46173		-20780	

*prob < .05, **prob < .01; Standard errors in parentheses

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