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# Asian Americans and Redistricting: Empowering Through Electoral Boundaries

Paul Ong and Albert J. Lee

## Abstract

This article examines the background, history, and outcomes of Asian American engagement in political redistricting. It provides a historical context through an overview of the efforts by African Americans and Latinos, which established a foundation for Asian Americans. Through an analysis of demographic and spatial patterns, the paper argues that Asian Americans face a unique challenge and consequently have had to rely on utilizing a strategy based on the concept of “Community of Common Interest” to defend the integrity of Asian American neighborhoods from being fragmented by redistricting. Although it is difficult to construct Asian-majority districts, the creation of Asian-influence districts has contributed to an increase in the numbers of elected Asian American officials.

## Introduction

Every ten years, the United States redraws boundaries of electoral districts based on a decennial enumeration of the population. The process for the next round of redistricting will begin in 2011 following the release of data from the 2010 Census. Mandated by constitutional requirements, this process ensures fair and equal representation by adjusting and modifying political lines to account for differential population growth across geographic areas. Since the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, participation by minorities in redistricting has played an increasingly significant role in ensuring that minority voters are not disenfranchised through *gerrymandering*, the practice of drawing boundaries to privilege particular political parties or groups through selectively concentrating or fragmenting neighborhoods. Without careful oversight and active involvement by minorities, redistricting can pose significant obstacles for minority communities seeking to elect officials to represent and protect their interests. African Americans have been involved for the lon-

gest time in this arena, and their efforts have resulted in a marked increase in the number of Black officials elected to office. Latinos have mobilized in more recent decades, producing measurable gains that have enhanced Latino political power. Though Asian Americans have not engaged in redistricting for as long as these other minority groups, active participation in the process has been crucial for empowering Asian Americans and representing their interests.

While Asian Americans benefited greatly from the legal and strategic precedents set by African Americans and Latinos, they have charted a different path. Asian Americans within the contiguous United States are not geographically concentrated and consequently face a number of distinct challenges in constructing districts where their interests can be fairly represented.<sup>1</sup> There are very few areas in which Asian Americans can constitute a numerical majority of an electoral district at the state level. This geographic pattern is an obstacle because courts have ruled that voting-rights protections against racial gerrymandering that has the effect of diluting minority voting power are only applicable where they can constitute a majority. Many Asian American neighborhoods face the risk of being divided into two or more electoral districts, effectively diluting their political power—a very real possibility given the history of splitting Asian American neighborhoods through the redistricting process. Such seemingly daunting hurdles, however, should not discourage Asian Americans from actively and aggressively participating in the upcoming 2011 redistricting process. Keeping these neighborhoods geographically intact can greatly increase the influence of Asian Americans in the political arena.

The rest of the article is organized into three parts. Part 2 provides the historical background and context of redistricting and gerrymandering. This strategy has traditionally been used to enhance the power of one political party over another, and it can also be used against people of color. Part 2 also examines how the voting rights laws and court rulings can protect racial minorities from adverse gerrymandering. The greatest protection is afforded to areas where a minority group can potentially form a majority within a district. Part 3 presents a brief history of African American and Latino efforts in redistricting, which established the groundwork for Asian Americans. Successful redistricting efforts have contributed to an increase in the number of elected African Americans and Latinos, although occasionally at the expense of attenuating their influence on

White elected officials. Part 4 documents the challenges facing Asian Americans because of their unique demographic and spatial patterns, which preclude the construction of Asian-majority districts. While the paper examines redistricting as a national issue, it draws heavily on the events and experiences in the Los Angeles metropolitan area, which is home to the largest absolute number of Asian Americans in the United States and has been and continues to be at the center of Asian American redistricting efforts.

One of the major conclusions drawn from the analysis in this paper is that Asian Americans have much to gain by forming Asian-influence electoral districts, in which they are not a numerical majority, but are nonetheless a significant minority. This is best done by maintaining the political integrity of Asian American neighborhoods by preventing the fragmentation of these neighborhoods through the redistricting process. The concentration of Asian Americans in influence districts increases their political voice and leverage so their issues are more likely to be addressed. Moreover, this approach increases the odds of Asian American candidates winning elections. Asian Americans have achieved this goal more recently by demonstrating that their neighborhoods are “communities of common interest,” a concept used by the courts as a possible criterion to keep a geographic area intact. What is at stake in the next round of redistricting can either enhance or dilute the effectiveness of Asian American voters and this will require refining the methods used to maintain the cohesiveness of Asian American neighborhoods.

## Background

Redistricting is an integral part of ensuring fair and proportionate representation by adjusting electoral districts in response to changes in population. Since a series of Supreme Court cases in the 1960s (*Baker v. Carr*, *Reynolds v. Sims*, and *Wesberry v. Sanders*), fairness has been measured against the doctrine of “one-person, one-vote” (Galderisi, 2005). In practice, this has meant that districts must be drawn to include roughly the same number of constituents. Article 1 of the United States Constitution mandates that the Census be taken every ten years for the purposes of obtaining this data and reapportioning seats in the House of Representatives:

The actual Enumeration [of the population] shall be made within three Years after the first Meeting of the Congress of the United States, and within every subsequent Term of ten

Years, in such Manner as they shall by Law direct (United States Senate).

The process of adjusting the number of congressional seats allotted to each state based on its relative population growth is referred to as *reapportionment*. States with much higher than average growth rates during the intervening decade gain seats, while those with substantially lower growth rates lose seats. Reapportionment and differential geographic growth patterns within each state require states and local jurisdictions to redraw their electoral districts for Congressional seats, state legislative houses, city council districts, school board districts, and other seats to ensure fairness. This latter process is known as *redistricting*.

Drawing boundaries can shift power from one group to another, increasing the influence of some votes while diluting it for others. Such practices have often taken the form of a deliberate alignment of electoral boundaries through the process of gerrymandering. The term originated in 1812 after Elbridge Gerry, an influential politician and the Governor of Massachusetts at the time, proposed an oddly shaped legislative district around Boston in order to benefit his party. After an editorial cartoonist added wings and a head to the district silhouette, its salamander-like shape resulted in the term “gerrymander” (Galderisi, 2005). It is now popularly used to describe the intentional, politically motivated drawing of electoral districts into similarly contorted shapes and configurations.

Gerrymandering generally takes two forms. The first, *packing*, is the practice of drawing boundaries so that votes are concentrated within a limited number of districts, constraining the potential for greater representation by preventing the formation of possible voting blocs across more districts; packing votes results in fewer electoral districts with higher concentrations of voters. The second method, *cracking*, is the separation of a cohesive voting bloc into multiple electoral districts. Cracking distributes voting power across districts so that voters are denied the opportunity to act effectively as a bloc.

Challenging vote dilution has been particularly important for minority groups who have struggled to maintain a cohesive voting presence in the face of damaging redistricting practices that have weakened their ability to elect candidates favorable to their interests for the benefit of White voters (O’Hare, 1989; Parker, 1989).

Minority communities and neighborhoods have been impacted by both cracking and packing schemes. For example, the voting power of racial minorities has been diluted when their votes have been spread thinly across predominantly White districts through cracking; in other instances, boundaries over-concentrated racial minorities in a few districts (approaching 100 percent of the population) at the expense of the influence they could wield if their votes were distributed across a greater number of districts where they were a simple majority (Winburn, 2008).

Legislative acts and case law precedents have been established to address the adverse impacts that such gerrymandering and other redistricting practices could have on both general and minority populations. The Voting Rights Act of 1965, passed at the culmination of the Civil Rights Movement to fulfill the promise of the Fifteenth Amendment, is particularly important because of its impact on racial gerrymandering. The act contains key provisions that either directly or indirectly prohibit racial discrimination and govern the redistricting process.

There are four basic legal principles that protect minorities from the dilution of their votes through adverse racial gerrymandering. The first has been discussed, that is, the constitutional requirement of “one person-one vote.” This principle is important for immigrant groups because non-citizens are included in the population used to draw electoral districts of equal size. Two other principles are specific to the Voting Rights Act: Section 2, which prohibits discrimination, and Section 5 that applies to minority group populations. The final principle, that of *jurisprudence*, stems from a series of landmark court cases defining the use of race as a factor in redistricting. These four principles have been used to prevent or limit the extent to which redistricting can be deployed as a tool to weaken or dilute voting power, and thus fair representation.

Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act broadly prohibits any standards, practices, or procedures related to voting that curtail or otherwise deny the right of a citizen to vote on account of race or color. In practice, Section 2 guarantees can be deployed (usually through the Department of Justice) when challenging the cracking and packing of districts with minority populations. It should be noted, however, that the Constitution and the Voting Rights Act guarantee equality of opportunity, not equal representation in proportion to a minority group’s share of the general population.

A number of cases have established precedents for the process and requirements of challenging vote dilution under Section 2. In *Thornburg v. Gingles* (1986), the Supreme Court listed three criteria that must be satisfied in a claim of realized or potential vote dilution effect under the Voting Rights Act:

1. The voting-age population of the minority group is numerically large enough and geographically limited so that a majority-minority district can be drawn;
2. The minority group is politically cohesive, voting for the same candidates or the same way on major issues; and
3. “Polarized voting” occurs, whereby a White majority forms a bloc to consistently defeat the favored candidate of a minority group.

In 1993, the Supreme Court further stipulated that the “excessive and unjustified use” of racial considerations in redistricting was prohibited by the federal equal protection clause (*Shaw v. Reno*). While acknowledging that race could continue to be one factor when redrawing districts, the Court stated that it could not be the predominant or controlling factor. What qualified as a predominant or controlling factor was further limited two years later in *Miller v. Johnson*, wherein the Supreme Court ruled that racial considerations could not be made at the expense of traditional nonracial districting principles, including: “compactness, contiguity, respect for political subdivisions, or communities defined by actual shared interests” (Ojeda-Kimbrough, Lee, and Shek, 2009).

Unlike Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, Section 5 is a temporary measure set to expire in 2031. It applies to certain “covered jurisdictions,” requiring those states and their localities to “preclear” any changes to voting standards, practices, or procedures. Jurisdictions intending such changes (including redistricting plans) must submit their plans to the Department of Justice or obtain a declaratory judgment from a panel of judges in the District of Columbia. In examining the preclearance of these plans, the Department of Justice requires proof that such plans will not deny or abridge the right to vote on account of race, color, or membership in a language minority group.

## Black and Latino Involvement

The representation of racial minority interests in politics

through the legislative process is important because of both its symbolic and practical implications. Because the most widely used indicator of a group's position in the political system is the presence of that group in elective offices, the advancement of minority interests can be measured by increases in the number of minority officials elected to office (Cameron, Epstein, and O'Halloran, 1996). Such advantages entail a number of tangible benefits that are associated with minority election/representation, including:

- Greater distribution of services
- Reduced polarization and stereotyping
- Commission appointments
- Police review boards
- Minority contracts

These are in addition to several intangible benefits, including greater visibility and political clout. These officials play a critical role in increasing the visibility of their communities, with the potential to expand such visibility by assuming increasingly powerful and visible positions as they move up the political ladder.

Since the advent of the civil rights movement, passage of the Voting Rights Act, and subsequent provision of jurisprudence, racial minority-interest groups have become increasingly active in the redistricting process. The two most visible and active organizations have been the Legal Defense Fund (LDF) of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF). Over time, their efforts have expanded from a predominantly reactive approach, mainly by contesting pro-White plans and proposals, to a proactive building of the technical and legal capacity to develop and advocate for strategically drawn plans to maximize minority political clout.

As one of the oldest non-profit civil rights organizations in the country, LDF spearheaded minority-redistricting activism. As early as 1965, the parent organization of LDF, the NAACP, provided testimony supporting the implementation of the "one person-one vote" principle. They participated in a hearing on Senator Everett Dirksen's proposed constitutional amendment to include race as a factor in ensuring fair implementation of any redistricting plan (Biossat, 1965). In South Carolina, LDF vehemently opposed



the at-large voting system for state senatorial districts (with one official calling the system “malapportionment”); instead, LDF advocated for a fairer single-member voting system (*The Sumter Daily Item*, 1972). LDF subsequently successfully filed a federal lawsuit in 1971 challenging a discriminatory redistricting plan that had been approved by the state’s legislature (*Spartanburg Herald-Journal*, 1971).

Following the 1980 Census, LDF responded to a noticeable lack of African American representation in the South despite a significant increase in population. Though African Americans comprised more than 55 percent of New Orleans and 22 percent of Louisiana in 1980, no African American had been elected to Congress since the 1870s. White legislators intentionally excluded African American leaders and state legislators from involvement in redistricting based on the 1980 enumeration, resulting in a plan with no majority-African American districts and the fragmentation of New Orleans and other heavily African American-populated areas. In 1982, LDF challenged the plan in federal court, alleging a dilution of African American voting strength; the court agreed, ordering the state of Louisiana to redraw electoral lines that would be fair to all voters (Legal Defense Fund, Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, and National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium, 2000).

The 1980s also saw a shift in efforts to influence the way plans were developed. LDF focused on geographic areas in which African American voters did not have equal opportunities to elect candidates of their choice, including five southern states (Alabama, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia) with significant African American populations but no African Americans in Congress since the end of Reconstruction. LDF developed and lobbied for plans that led to the creation of at least one majority-African American congressional district. The 1992 round of elections saw the election of eight African Americans to Congress from these states alone (Legal Defense Fund, et al. 2000).

Though not as active as African Americans in the 1960s and 1970s, Latinos also challenged redistricting plans that would have or did dilute the voting power of Latinos. For example, in 1972, MALDEF attorneys filed a lawsuit against the City of Los Angeles, alleging that the redistricting plan was discriminatory towards Latinos (*Castorena, et al v. City of Los Angeles*, 1972). Though MALDEF

lost the case on appeal, this demonstrated that it was committed to redistricting. Sustained involvement with redistricting issues began in the 1980s. In 1982, it successfully challenged the redistricting plan of Refugio County in Texas, charging that the plan did not meet the “one person-one vote” requirement despite preclearance from the Justice Department. Moreover, MALDEF sought the classification of Mexican Americans as a *protected class*, arguing that other courts had provided class status to Mexican Americans that consequently afforded them protections under applicable voting rights laws.

Like African Americans, Latinos too have become increasingly proactive in the redistricting process—particularly in California. In 1980, MALDEF began using the first computerized redistricting program at the Rose Institute of State and Local Government at Claremont McKenna College to develop pro-Latino plans. MALDEF was the only racial minority-interest group to submit a plan in California in 1981. Though it did not wield a significant impact on the redistricting plan that was ultimately approved during that round, the technical and legal expertise that was cultivated during the process proved to be extremely important for subsequent redistricting proposals (Estrada, 2010). By the 1991 round of redistricting, MALDEF had positioned itself as the best-resourced minority-interest organization in California with respect to redistricting. Though other groups such as the Asian Pacific American Legal Center and LDF also submitted plans, only MALDEF’s proposal survived legislative scrutiny; as a result, there was a significant increase in Latino representation over the next decade with four Assembly, three State Senate, and two Congressional seats won by Latinos (Estrada, 2010). MALDEF continues to play an active role in the redistricting process at all levels of government, and the expertise gleaned from its historical challenges and precedent-setting struggles will be critical in future rounds of redistricting for all minority-interest organizations.

As implied in the above discussion of Black and Latino activism in redistricting, both LDF and MALDEF consider the construction of majority-minority districts to be a critical mechanism for maximizing voting power. There is empirical evidence that shows that the probability of a minority candidate’s election rises dramatically as the proportion of minority voters increases (Lublin, 1997). For example, in districts with 50 percent African American

residents, the chance of an African American candidate winning an election is approximately 60 percent. When the percentage of residents increases 5 percent, the probability of winning increases to 86 percent. Likewise for Latino voters, in districts with 50 percent Latino residents, the chances of a Latino candidate winning an election is 57 percent, with the figure increasing to 84 percent when there is a 5 percent increase in the percentage of Latino residents.

The creation of majority-minority districts contributed to dramatic increases in Latino and African American elected representatives over the past quarter century. For example, between 1970 and 2001, the number of Black elected officials increased from 1,469 to 9,101, a nearly 620 percent increase (Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, 2001). Even more recently, elected Latino officials have increased from 3,743 in 1996 to 5,129 in 2007—a significant 37 percent increase in a population that is projected to continue growing well into the next century (National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials Educational Fund, 2008). Such significant increases point to the growing importance and recognition of racial minority candidates and officials, regardless of party affiliation. Because of these gains, both Black and Latino political activists continue to pursue this strategy as the best way to increase their political clout and address the needs of their communities. This approach will likely remain at the core of their next round of involvement in redistricting after the release of the 2010 Census data.<sup>2</sup>

### Asian American Involvement

Asian Americans are the last major minority group to become actively involved in redistricting. In Los Angeles, the metropolitan area with the largest number of Asian Americans, few community leaders and activists had personal or organizational involvement with the redistricting process in the 1981-1982 round (Azores and Okamoto, 1991). The efforts of the 1980s centered on *ad hoc* reactions to plans that would disadvantage Asian American elected officials. For example, in 1986, several community organizations protested a redistricting plan that would have favored Latinos, but placed Chinese American Los Angeles City Councilman Michael Woo at risk of losing his seat.<sup>3</sup> While the lack of participation during these years can be attributed to the relatively smaller population size of Asian Americans, redistricting nonetheless had adverse consequences for Asian American communities. Koreatown, for

example, was split into four City Council districts and five State Assembly districts, a fragmentation that made it difficult for its residents to obtain assistance after the 1992 riots because no single legislator felt or could be held responsible (Levitt and Foster, 2008).

Asian Americans began their involvement in the drawing of redistricting plans during the 1990s with the legal expertise of the Asian Pacific American Legal Center, technical and analytical expertise of UCLA's Asian American Studies Center, and participation of community and political leaders (Saito, 1993). During those years, the collaborative effort was limited in geographic scope, focusing mainly on three areas where Asian Americans comprised a significant minority: downtown Los Angeles, the South Bay, and San Gabriel Valley. Following the 2000 enumeration, Asian Americans in California were able to develop a statewide redistricting plan, while those in New York City were able to advocate for the construction of selected electoral districts (Hum, 2004; Ichinose, 2010).

While Asian Americans greatly benefited indirectly and directly from legal precedents and redistricting strategies developed by African Americans and Latinos, they faced a distinct set of conditions rooted in a spatial demographic configuration that offered few opportunities to create majority Asian American districts. This forced them to emphasize an approach associated with the notion of "community of common interest," which seeks to prevent the fragmentation of Asian American neighborhoods. Several Asian American politicians subsequently won local and statewide seats.

The statistics for metropolitan areas in Table 1 document the spatial demographic challenging Asian Americans.<sup>4</sup> In 1980, Asian Americans constituted a numerically insignificant proportion of the nation's population, comprising less than two percent of the total population in all metropolitan areas.<sup>5</sup> In the following two decades, however, the Asian American population grew at a much faster rate than that of African Americans and Latinos, but nonetheless remained proportionately small at approximately one-third the size of each of the other minority groups.

The relatively small size of Asian Americans is compounded by a lack of geographic concentration as shown in the level of residential segregation, which is measured by the dissimilarity index (DI). The DI, ranging from 0 to 100, represents the percent of a minority group that has to move into predominantly non-minority

neighborhoods to achieve full integration. Although racial segregation has declined for African Americans, they remain the most segregated, followed by Latinos, whose DI values have remained essentially unchanged. Asian Americans are the least segregated with a DI over 20 points lower than African Americans in 2000. In addition to greater residential integration, existing Asian American neighborhoods tend to be small and non-contiguous. This can be seen in the clustering patterns as measured by the spatial proximity index: the higher the value larger than one, the greater the degree to which minority group members live disproportionately in contiguous areas. While African Americans are most likely to be in close proximity to each other (indicating large contiguous geographic areas that are predominantly African American), Asian Americans tend to be spatially scattered, making it difficult to draw Asian American majority electoral districts.

An analysis of the spatial demographic patterns in the Los Angeles metropolitan area illustrates the challenges facing Asian Americans with redistricting. Although their numbers surpassed those of African Americans during the early 1990s, Latinos continued to be the largest non-White population throughout this period. Similar to the patterns of geographic concentration for all metropolitan areas, Asian Americans in Los Angeles are less segregated, as indicated by the DI values. In 2000, only 17 percent of Asian Americans lived in census tracts where they were a majority, while the comparable figures for African Americans and Latinos were 28 percent and 70 percent.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, there was a smaller absolute number of Asian Americans living in tracts where they were the majority compared to African Americans (191,000 compared to 278,000). Furthermore, Asian American neighborhoods are geographically scattered as shown in Figure 1, which specifies census tracts by the majority population. While most of the majority-African American tracts are clustered together in and around South Los Angeles, the majority-Asian American tracts are spread throughout the region, effectively precluding the construction of Asian-majority Congressional and State Senate districts, and making it difficult to construct Asian-majority State Assembly districts.

The difficulty of constructing Asian-majority districts poses challenges to the ability of Asian Americans to use Section 2 (where applicable, this protects minority areas where they could form a majority, as described earlier). Instead, the approach adopted was

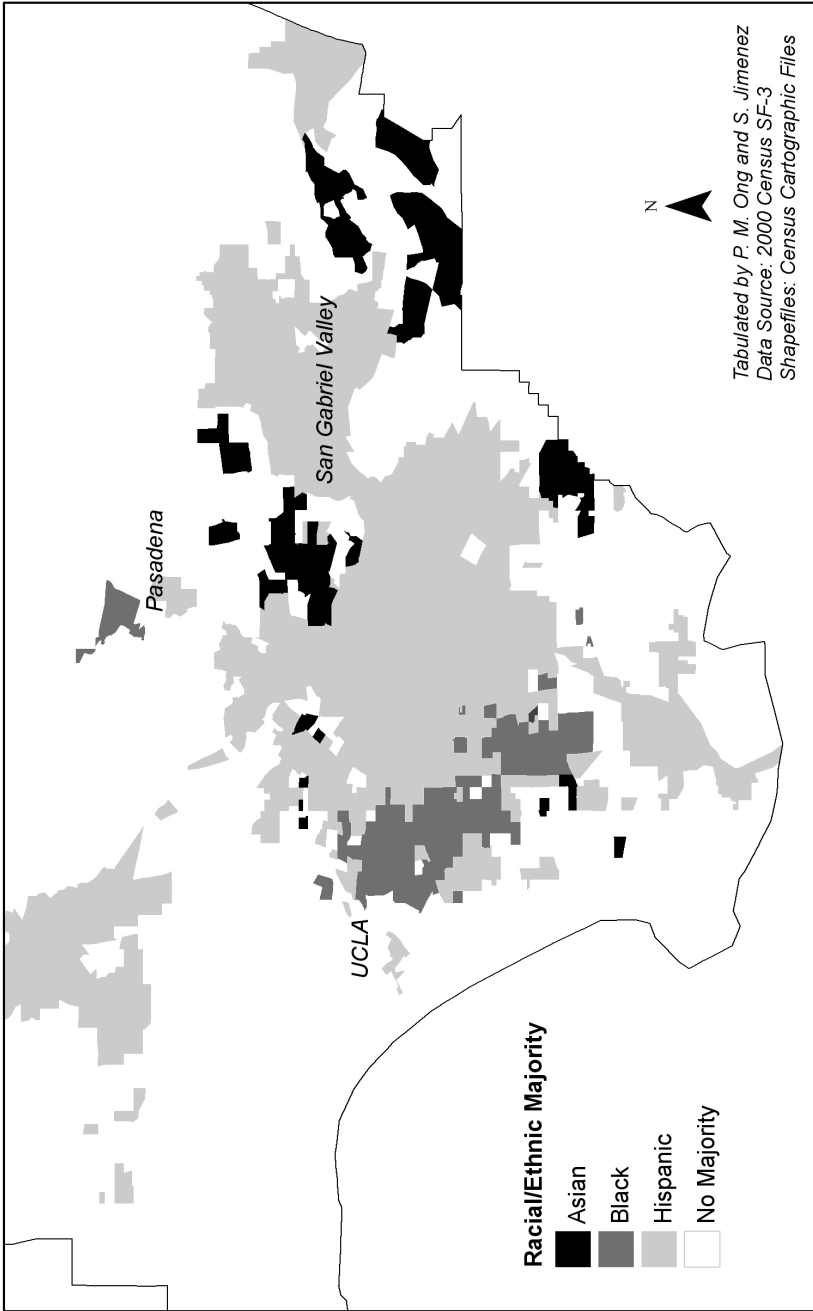
Table 1. Population, Segregation, and Clustering by Race

United States, All Metro Areas	1980	1990	2000
Population (millions)			
African Americans	21.5	25.1	29.9
Asian Americans	3.2	6.8	10.2
Latinos	12.8	19.8	32.2
Segregation (DI)			
African Americans	73	68	64
Asian Americans	41	41	41
Latinos	50	50	51
Clustering Index			
African Americans	1.44	1.4	1.37
Asian Americans	1.04	1.08	1.1
Latinos	1.2	1.23	1.23
Los Angeles MSA			
Population (millions)			
African Americans	0.94	0.99	1
Asian Americans	0.43	0.95	1.28
Latinos	2.07	3.35	4.24
Segregation (DI)			
African Americans	81	73	66
Asian Americans	47	46	48
Latinos	57	61	63
Clustering Index			
African Americans	1.78	1.65	1.56
Asian Americans & Pls	1.12	1.19	1.22
Latinos	1.34	1.38	1.35

Source: Iceland, Weinberg, and Steinmetz, 2002.

to prevent the fragmentation of existing Asian American neighborhoods, which would at least allow them to influence elections and increase their ability to hold elected officials accountable. This approach is based on convincing line-drawers (or the courts if there is

Figure 1.



a subsequent lawsuit) to maintain cohesive “communities of common interest” based on “actual shared interests” (*Miller v. Johnson*, 1995).

Using a “communities of common interest” strategy, Asian Americans have been partially successful in keeping their neighborhoods intact in Los Angeles. In 1990, they worked with Latinos to accomplish this in the western San Gabriel Valley (which included the heavily Asian-populated suburban cities of Monterey Park and Alhambra), and were able to preserve the cohesiveness of most Asian communities in the South Bay; however, they failed to prevent the continuing fragmentation of Asian American neighborhoods in downtown Los Angeles. In 2001-02, redistricting efforts had mixed results, with the greatest setback in the San Jose area (Ichinose, 2010). In New York City, the Asian American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (AALDEF) prevented the fragmentation of Asian communities by placing them into districts with similar social and economic characteristics and problems (Hum, 2004). These successes resulted, in part, from a defense of the plan based on the argument that these areas constituted a “community of common interest” (in *Diaz v. Silver*, 1997). In the absence of feasible Asian-majority districts, Asian-influence districts, areas where they are not a majority but nonetheless are a sizeable minority, offered the best opportunities to increase the odds of electing Asian American candidates. This is best illustrated in the San Gabriel Valley, which saw the election of Judy Chu to the State Assembly District in 2001 (based on the 1991-92 redistricting boundaries), which laid the foundation for her subsequent elections to the State Board of Equalization in 2006 and Congress in 2009. Similarly in New York City, an Asian American City Councilmember was elected through one of the configurations advocated for by AALDEF (2009). These results demonstrate the possibility of electing Asian Americans to office without the existence of majority-minority districts.

An analysis of California’s Congressional and state seats provides further insight into the importance of influence districts. Table 2 categorizes the electoral districts created in 2001-02 by the percent of the population that is Asian American.<sup>7</sup> The statistics and projections show no Asian American majority districts under the existing boundaries.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, there were thirteen districts where they made up over one-quarter of the total population, but where they did not comprise a majority; these could be considered influence districts.



Table 2. Number of Electoral Districts by  
Percent Asian American in District

Percent Asian American in District	2000	2008	2013
50% or higher	0	0	0
25-49%	13	17	17
13-24%	46	55	62
< 13%	114	101	94
Total Number of Districts	173	173	173

Source: Tabulations by authors.

Despite the lack of Asian-majority districts, considerable progress has been made to close the gap in under-representation in California. In 2000, there were only five Asian Americans in the House of Representatives or one of the state legislative houses. By 2008, Asian Americans had won 14 Assembly, State Senate, and Congressional seats out of 173 possible seats (See Table 3). While this was a dramatic improvement, Asian Americans were still under-represented relative to their proportion of the population. They comprised approximately 13 percent of the state's total population, but only 8 percent of the elected officials for the three legislative houses.

What is intriguing is the parity index, which is the percentage of Asian American elected officials divided by the percentage of Asian American population in each category. A value of one indicates parity, where Asian Americans achieved proportionate representation; a value less than one means under-representation and a value more than one means higher than expected representation. For the districts in the category with lowest percent Asian Americans (those where they comprised less than 13 percent of the population), the parity index is 0.14, indicating extreme under-representation. The parity index for the next category (where they comprise 13 percent to 24 percent of the population) is higher at 0.61, but still under parity. Interestingly, for influence districts (the seventeen containing between 25 and 49 percent Asian Americans), the parity index is 1.21, indicating that Asian American candidates have a better than expected chance of winning elections. This is achieved by appealing to Asian American and other voters. Overall, the importance of influence districts is enormous. While

Table 3. California Asian American Elected Officials, 2009

Percent Asian American	Total Seats	Asian American Elected Officials	Asian American Percent Elected
Assembly Districts	80	9	11%
State Senate Districts	40	2	5%
Congressional Districts	53	3	6%
All Seats	173	14	8%
25% to 50%	17	7	41%
13-24%	55	6	11%
< 13%	101	1	1%

Source: Tabulations by authors.

less than one-quarter of Asian Americans live in these areas, half of the elected Asian Americans come from them. Although it is impossible to determine the exact contribution of influence districts, keeping Asian American neighborhoods intact and concentrated through redistricting was undoubtedly an important factor.

### Conclusion

This paper pairs a historical overview of redistricting with contemporary analyses of the Asian American community to explore the current position of and opportunities for Asian American political representation. Based on a review of the literature and the data collected and examined here, several conclusions can be drawn and considered for the next round of redistricting. The first is that Asian Americans have benefited immensely from the voting rights struggles of the past few decades and particularly from the legal and strategic precedents established by African Americans and Latinos. Despite this lineage, the data show that Asian Americans possess unique characteristics that distinguish this population—and their neighborhoods—from those of other racial minority communities. Most notably, Asian Americans are spatially and geographically scattered; this distinctive demographic profile has required that

Asian Americans rely heavily on a strategy to protect the integrity of Asian American neighborhoods by designating them as “communities of common interest.” Moreover, although there are no majority-Asian American districts in the contiguous United States at the state or national level, Asian-influence districts produce manifold benefits, including increasing the odds of the election of Asian Americans to office. Given this reality, future applied research must respond to evolving court standards by developing the techniques and methods for determining which Asian American neighborhoods are “communities of common interest.” Drawing influence districts will also require research that can inform Asian Americans about which other nearby neighborhoods are most compatible with Asian American concerns and priorities.

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### Notes

1. As the only state with a majority-Asian population, Hawaii possesses a distinct history and set of experiences with redistricting issues that are specific to its demographic profile and beyond the research objectives of this article.
2. Though majority-minority districts generate many tangible and symbolic benefits, research suggests that there are potential tradeoffs, such as maximizing the number of elected minority officials versus maximizing the votes in favor of minority-sponsored legislation (Cameron et al., 1996). Concentrating minority voters (even without reaching “packing” levels) can lead to the defeat of some nearby White Democrats, thus benefiting less friendly Republicans (Cameron et al., 1996; Lublin, 1999). In a study of political non-minority incumbents who lost African American constituents due to the formation of majority-minority districts, incumbent officials became less sensitive to minority interests as they lost their minority constituents (Overby and Cosgrove, 1996). The nomination of a minority official can result in the defection of party-line voters (usually Democrats) in those electoral races with minority candidates, regardless of whether the defection is due to ideology or racism (Cameron et al., 1996), but this is not always the case (Liu, 2006). Despite these potential problems, minority-majority districts are likely to provide the best chance of

- electing minority candidates whose first priority centers around their constituents.
3. The plan was redrawn to satisfy a U.S. Department of Justice lawsuit. Though the redistricting was done to favor the election of a Latino based on the Voting Rights Act, Woo's district was consequently remapped to represent a heavily Latino district constituency—a move that would have made Woo's political future an uncertainty (Simon, 1986). The proposed plan met with a wave of Asian American protests and rallies from community members and organizations such as the Asian Pacific American Legal Center, the Korean American Coalition, and the Japanese American Citizens League. The Asian American community alleged that the new plan, though satisfactory according to the Voting Rights Act, discriminated against Asian American voters (Holley, 1986). The mayor subsequently vetoed the plan, and a new one that presented a compromise between Woo and the Latino electorate was passed.
  4. Although many of the figures in this and subsequent tables include Pacific Islanders, the statistics are dominated by Asian Americans.
  5. The counts of the 2000 metropolitan population come from American FactFinder using the race alone category for African Americans and Asian and Pacific Islanders, and the Latino count regardless of race; the 1990 numbers come from the U.S. Census, 1993; and the 1980 numbers come from U.S. Census, 1983. The segregation and clustering statistics comes from Iceland, Weinberg, and Steinmetz, 2002.
  6. Percentages calculated by authors based on SF1 data from U.S. Census FactFinder. The race data are based on the single race counts, and the Latino data include all Latinos regardless of race. If API is used instead of Asian Americans, the percentage is 16 percent. Interestingly, over a third of African Americans live in majority-Latino tracts.
  7. The statistics for the two tables were generated by the authors based on data and maps from several sources. The boundaries for the electoral districts drawn in 2001-02 are based on the Statewide Database (SWDB) created by the Institute of Governmental Studies at UC Berkeley. The SWDB's "Census Geography Assignment and Conversion File" ([http://swdb.berkeley.edu/district\\_con\\_ass.htm](http://swdb.berkeley.edu/district_con_ass.htm)) is used to assign census-tract level data to Assembly, State Senate and Congressional districts. In cases where a tract is in two or more electoral districts, the conversion table includes weights that proportionately allocate tract population counts to the appropriate electoral districts. The 2000 tract-level population counts are based on the 2000 Census. Tract-level data on population estimates for 2008 and population projections for 2013 come from the "Estimates and Projections Databases" produced by Geolytics, Inc (<http://www.geolytics.com>). The linking and allocation of the population data

by race to the electoral districts using the SWDB conversion factors was through SAS. The aggregated data by race were converted into percentages (proportion that is Asian American) and consolidated into the categories used in the tables. Information on Asian American elected officials in 2008 comes from the websites maintained by the California Assembly, State Senate, and Congress.

8. It may be possible draw new boundaries to construct an Asian American majority district based on the 2010 data, but even then there will be far more potential Asian American influence districts.

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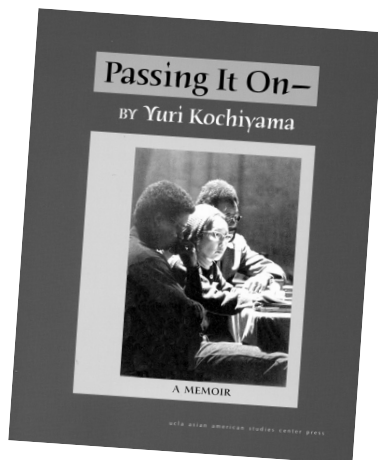
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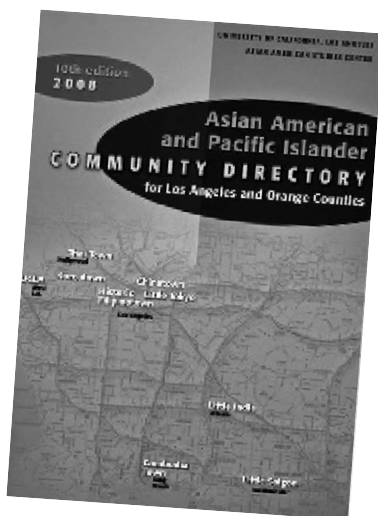


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