

UC Riverside

UCR Honors Capstones 2025-2026

Title

EDUCATION PATHWAYS INTO POLITICS AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: ASIAN-AMERICAN EXPERIENCES

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6kt6k5m8>

Author

Rai, Kashish

Publication Date

2026-06-15

EDUCATION PATHWAYS INTO POLITICS AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION:
ASIAN-AMERICAN EXPERIENCES

By

Kashish Rai

A Capstone project submitted for Graduation with University Honors

May 07, 2026

University Honors

University of California, Riverside

APPROVED

Dr. Kim Yi Dionne

Department of Political Science

Dr. Begoña Echeverria

University Honors

ABSTRACT

Asian Americans in the United States are underrepresented in both politics and public administration. One of the reasons could be the type of education that Asian Americans obtain leading them to a political career. In fact, nearly all members of Congress have a bachelor's degree, coming in with 94% of representatives; most also have a graduate degree, with 64% of the elected officials holding one. Furthermore, the most common subjects that legislators study are political science, history, and economics in their undergraduate degrees. This shows that there is a “typical” career pathway in order to work in politics or become a policymaker through public administration. I hypothesize that the underrepresentation of Asian Americans in politics is due to lower enrollment rates in typical pathway majors/degree programs that lead to careers in politics and public administration. These lower enrollment rates are an individual-level explanation of lower political participation, which is possibly affected by familial influence. By looking at the connections between the traditional educational pathway to becoming involved in politics, the underrepresentation of the Asian American community could be explained.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply indebted to Professor Kim Yi Dionne for her mentorship and discussions that enriched this research question. If not for her support and insightful research methods course, I would not be the researcher I am today. I also extend my gratitude to the University of California, Riverside Political Science and Statistics Department faculty for granting access to participants crucial for this study.

Research reported in this publication was also partially supported by the UC Riverside Undergraduate Education MiniGrant Program. Lastly, I am thankful for the support of my family and close friends, whose encouragement and belief in my work kept me motivated.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	2
Acknowledgements.....	3
Table of Contents.....	4
Introduction.....	5
Asian Americans and Political Participation.....	6
Methods.....	9
Sample Population.....	9
Survey Design.....	10
Focus Group Design.....	11
Key Variables.....	11
Regression Model.....	13
Recoding Variables.....	14
Results.....	16
STEM-subjects Impact on Willingness to Run for Office (H1a).....	19
Familial Influence on choice on STEM-subjects (H1b).....	21
Conclusion.....	23
Works Cited.....	25
Appendix A.....	28
Appendix B.....	33

INTRODUCTION

The Asian American community is growing rapidly in the United States, forming about 7% of the population. This has doubled since 2000, growing from 12.5 million Asian Americans to a new high of 25 million in the United States (Krogstad and Im, 2025). While growth is swift, political representation for this community has not increased at the same rate. Rather, Asian Americans are the least likely population to hold office, making up about 0.9% of elected officials across all levels of government (Dugyala, 2021). A gap of 6.1% between population make-up and political representation signifies the need to examine motivators for this community that affect their drive to become involved in politics and public administration.

The type of education that Asian Americans obtain can be a motivating factor for pursuing a political career (Dam, 2022). In the United States, the standard pathway to a career in politics or public administration involves earning a college or advanced degree in law, public policy, or political science. In fact, nearly all members of Congress have a bachelor's degree, coming in with 94% of representatives; most also have a graduate degree, with 64% of the elected officials holding one (Schaeffer, 2023). In regards to the subjects and professions, Congress members have dominantly public service/politics, business, and law backgrounds (Manning, 2025). Based on these trends, the educational choices, specifically the subject-matter, is what I explored when looking at Asian American communities and their involvement in politics – especially relevant when running for office.

ASIAN AMERICANS AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Previous research on Asian Americans' political participation has explored the (1) voting process, (2) naturalization and registration process, (3) personal attitudes, (4) social standing and educational background, and (5) model minority myth.

Viewing the voting process as a many-step process was a major factor in political participation. These steps consisted of the role of institutional barriers and contextual elements, along with examining participation beyond voting (Lien et al., 2001). Institutional barriers were defined as Voting ID requirements, lack of language access, and reduced voting hours. Participation beyond voting was seen as donating money, running for office, and reading the news. Here, it was shown that Asian Americans were having a harder time voting because of this complicated process.

Naturalization and registration also played a role in political activity of the Asian American community. It was concluded that it is not the top priority for Asian Americans to register to vote, along with the fact that it is a harder process for those immigrants to naturalize (Masuoka et al., 2019). However, this seemed to change after 2020, where the Asian American minority has become more politicized due to COVID-19. Literature shows that there was a relationship between Asian Americans' racial considerations and turnout and vote choice (Chan et al., 2024). It seems that individuals in this minority are now becoming more politically active to mitigate the effects of new politicization.

In this same vein, Asian American political attitudes are shown to be influenced by the Asian American identity. Specifically, the Asian American identity is formed through social interactions in society (Wong and S. Karthick Ramakrishnan, 2023). Their interactions can include socialization in a school setting, workplace interaction, and community events— all

pulling together immigrants and second-generation individuals. This is especially why the increased politicization of the Asian American identity has mobilized the community. Trump's targeted rhetoric toward Asian Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic pushes the racial group, largely "Independent" or nonpartisan affiliated, to lean more towards the Democratic Party, making them slowly more likely to be involved in politics (Chan et al., 2022). This means that COVID-19 not only affected the voting behavior of the Asian American community but formed their political attitude as a whole.

There are some considerations in whether or not Asian Americans' political behavior is affected by their educational background and social standing. Education, in itself, can be an indicator of interest in the political process; a model created in 1995 discussed the idea of how the resources of time, money, and skills affect political participation (Brady et al., 1995). If one is more educated, they most likely have access to those resources mentioned above, increasing their political activity. Asian Americans historically have higher rates and access to education, with about 56% of their population having a bachelor's degree or higher (Krogstad and Im, 2025). However, this model cannot be applied to the Asian American community. In practice, Asian American turnout has increased in nearly every election cycle but continues to lag behind White and Black turnout. Thus, while education can have an impact on political participation, Asian Americans are not participating at the same rate as their peers.

A possible explanation for this discrepancy could be the model minority myth: which refers to a minority group perceived as particularly successful, especially in a manner that contrasts with other minority groups. This is typically associated with Asian American individuals, who are praised for their success across academic, economic, and cultural domains (Harvard Law School, n.d.). This model could account for the lack of Asian American political

representation through the idea that Asian Americans are unique among racial groups in their focus on education at the expense of creativity and political power. However, this is an incomplete explanation for relatively low levels of political participation among Asian Americans (Wong and S. Karthick Ramakrishnan, 2023).

Political activity can be judged through two main factors: structural effects and individual attainment of members. The model minority myth suggests a possible structural explanation, which neglects to account for individual attitudes of the community members. The model minority myth also lacks to explain the link between Asian Americans' willingness to give up political power for a growth in their education. By looking at the factors affecting individuals in the Asian American community and their personal educational journey, this link could be explained between the increased education but low political activity in the community.

Personal family dynamic or parental expectations can be a possible explanation for the individual attainment of the members. According to previous research surrounding Asian Americans, children in this ethnic group tended to worry more about their familial expectations (Saw et al., 2013). Asian American students tended to show more worry about their academic life in terms of attaining future educational goals and preparation for long-term careers. The focus on parental expectations on the subject-matter (specifically Science, Technology, Engineering, or Math (STEM) focused subject matter) that students choose could explain low political activity in the community.

Thus, it is possible that the underrepresentation of Asian Americans in politics is due to lower enrollment rates in typical pathway majors/degree programs that lead to careers in politics and public administration. By looking at the familial motivation on students' choice to pursue a more STEM-based educational pathway rather than other subjects, the phenomenon of

underrepresentation of the Asian American community could be explained on an individual level. All research regarding a career pathway in politics shows that there is a “typical” way to work in politics or become a policymaker through public administration. This could be one aspect that affects the representation of Asian Americans, especially if they do not follow these traditional paths.

Hypotheses

Building on this existing scholarship, my hypotheses regarding Asian Americans’ political participation and educational choices are:

H1a: Students’ choice of STEM-based subjects negatively influences their willingness to run for office.

H1b: Students’ choice to study STEM-based subjects will be influenced by familial/parental expectations.

METHODS

Sample Population

I used a survey and focus group interviews to study the link between Asian American’s willingness to participate in politics and their educational choices. To disseminate these data collection methods, I submitted an Institutional Review Board application, which was approved to work with human subjects under the ID number 30750. The population of this study were University of California, Riverside (UCR) undergraduate students of all ethno-racial heritage in five schools on the campus. These schools were College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHASS), College of Natural and Agricultural Sciences (CNAS), Bourns College of Engineering (BCOE), School of Education (SOE), and School of Public Policy (SPP).

I chose the population of this study because of comparative ethno-racial statistics between Latinx and Asian students published by UCR. Comparison between these two groups took place due to their similar population sizes out of the general UCR student population with Latinx students making up about 41% of UCR population, while Asian students made up 35% (UCR Enrollment Statistics: Winter 2026). Trends that emerged through both of these subsets showed that 53% of Latinx students were pursuing the humanities and social sciences, while 35% of Asian students were doing so. In comparison, 37% of Latinx students were pursuing STEM-based subjects, while 51% of Asian students were doing so. This comparison displays a wide discrepancy between the choices being made by students of different ethnicities at UCR, along with the overwhelming majority of Asian students choosing STEM based degrees.

Survey Design

I tested the two main hypotheses – on how familial influence affects educational choices, which in turn affects willingness to run for office – through survey responses. Then, I created regression models on the outcome scale variable, possibility of running for office. The survey¹ had 18 questions with topics focused on respondents’ ethno-racial heritage, chosen educational and career subjects, influence on educational choices and political ambition/participation.

I dispensed the survey to the student population for a period of ten weeks. It was advertised through word-of-mouth, presentations in both humanities/social sciences and STEM courses, and through flyers² posted online platforms where student communities congregate such as Discord, Slack, and Instagram. All participants had an opportunity to win a 20-dollar gift card at the end of the survey dispensation time. At the end of the collection time period, I collected 83 survey responses, with 55 completed entries. All respondents were UCR students and survey

¹ See the survey (i.e. to know question order, wording, and response options) in Appendix A.

² See survey dissemination materials in Appendix A.

entries were used to create ordinary-least squares (OLS) and ordinal logistic regression (OLR) models.

Focus Group Design

In addition to a survey, I held three focus groups with UCR students of different ethno-racial heritage. Each focus group³ was one-hour long held over a recorded Zoom meeting in order to ensure ease of meeting. Participants were asked six questions and were asked follow-up questions when applicable.

I advertised the participation opportunities for these focus groups through word-of-mouth, presentations in humanities/social sciences and STEM courses, and through flyers posted online platforms where students meet such as Discord, Slack, and Instagram. All participants received a 20-dollar gift card for their time commitment to meet.

At the end of conducting focus group interviews, there were 11 participants overall. Each focus group but the last had four participants each, while the last one had three. I used the information gleaned during these meetings to provide context and background to the survey-based regression models. In further writing, the first focus group will be referred to as Group A, the second as Group B, and the last as Group C. Additionally, I used pseudonyms for participants in order to match their testimonials and identification in writing.

Key Variables

The outcome of interest is respondents' possibility of running for office. I asked this as an ordinal variable in the survey, where a five-point scale response was provided: "What best characterizes your attitude toward running for a political office in the future?" Response options include: (1) It is something I would definitely like to undertake in the future; (2) It is something I might undertake if the opportunity presented itself; (3) I would not rule it out forever, but I

³ See the focus group questions and promotional materials in Appendix B.

currently have no interest; (4) It is something I would absolutely never do; and (5) I currently hold elected office. In the focus group, this outcome variable was asked to all participants as an open-response: “Would you ever consider running for political office?”

Another variable relevant to the question was the participants’ ethnicity. I asked both a fill in the blank and 3 choice questions, but in the regression model the choice questions were used. The three choice questions about ethno-racial heritage built from a select-all option, to single selection for a primary ethnicity. If Asian-American was chosen in the primary ethnicity question, then more subsection choices of the Asian ethnicity were provided to respondents. This question was not asked in the focus group.

A family influence variable was also added to the survey as a sliding scale. This question was asked as: “On a scale of 0-10, how influenced do you feel by your family to pursue this career path?” Respondents were then asked to scale with (0) being no influence and (10) being a large influence. In the focus group, family influence was asked to all participants as an open-response: “What, if anything, has affected your decision to pursue your chosen career path? If so, how?”

Survey respondents’ also had to disclose the school their major was a part of. This was asked through the question: “What school are you in at UCR?” Responses were a choice between College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHASS), College of Natural and Agricultural Sciences (CNAS), Bourns College of Engineering (BCOE), School of Education (SOE), and School of Public Policy (SPP). In the focus group, participants were asked to introduce themselves and their major, which was then categorized into humanities/social sciences or STEM subjects.

Additionally, I asked a question about career choice in the survey as a choice response: “What subject is the career field you want to pursue?” Respondents could choose between humanities, social sciences, science, technology, math, engineering, and fill in the blank option labeled ‘other’. This question was not asked explicitly in the focus group, as it fell under the introduction question.

Survey participants were also asked the binary yes or no question regarding their vote in the previous election: “Did you vote in the previous presidential election?” Focus group respondents were not asked as explicitly, rather a more general participation question with an open-response: “Do you believe that you are a politically active individual?” This question allowed participants to open up about their political attitudes and previous participation.

Finally, respondents were also asked to self-identify about their political participation through a 4-point scale variable: “Do you consider yourself politically active?” Respondents were able to choose from: (1) I consider myself not active; (2) I consider myself not that active; (3) I consider myself somewhat active; and (4) I consider myself active. Focus group respondents' answers were considered through the previous question of being a politically active individual.

Regression Model

I chose an Ordinal Logistic Regression and Ordinary Least Squares Regression model for this analysis. Ordinal Logistic Regression helps to analyze the data in regards to hypothesis 1a since the outcome variable (possibility of running for office) is a scale variable with multiple levels. By using this method, I calculated the logit odds-ratio and percentage for each movement between levels, showing the likelihood of running for office with each effect of chosen predictors (UCLA: Statistical Consulting Group, n.d.).

I also used Ordinary Least Squares Regression to analyze the data with respect to hypothesis 1b, since the outcome variable is the type of school (shows the STEM-based subjects). This is not an ordinal variable and therefore a regular regression model will show the effects of family influence and other predictors on the outcome.

Recoding Variables

I re-coded almost all variables of interest to an ordinal scale or binary values given survey responses as is shown in Table 1 below. Possibility of running for office was coded through a 0-3, with 0 being no possibility of running, 1 being no plan at the moment, 2 being a more positive attitude towards running, and 3 being currently holding office. While the initial scale had five choices, the recoded variable only had four based on the number of respondents who selected choices 3 and 4. There were not enough respondents who chose those scale options for a positive attitude towards running for office, which is why they were combined into one for the fitting of the regression model.

Ethnicity was coded as a binary— respondents that selected Asian-American as their primary ethnicity were coded as Asian in the re-code, while those who did not were Non-Asian in the model. Family influence was also coded as binary. This was to make the variable more definitive in the terms of interpreting regression. Respondents that had chosen less than 5 on the sliding scale were coded as having little to no family influence, while respondents with more than 5 were coded as having a high family influence.

The type of school was coded into two initial binary variables: with a student being a CHASS student or not, and then with a student being CNAS or not. Career subject was coded to two variables, with a binary social science and not social sciences subject along with the same application to humanities choices. To display previous political participation, voting in a

previous election was recoded to 0 (not voted) and 1 (voted) based on what the respondents chose in the survey. Finally, the politically active scale was recoded as another ordinal scale variable coded between 0-3 with 0 being not politically active and 3 being politically active.

Table 1. Variables of Interest and Recode

Variable	Survey Response	Recoded Variable(s)
<i>Possibility of Running for Office</i>	It is something I would definitely like to undertake in the future. It is something I might undertake if the opportunity presented itself. I would not rule it out forever, but I currently have no interest. It is something I would absolutely never do. I currently hold elected office.	0: It is something I would absolutely never do. 1: I would not rule it out forever, but I currently have no interest. 2: It is something I would definitely like to undertake in the future. && It is something I might undertake if the opportunity presented itself. 3: I currently hold elected office.
<i>Ethnicity</i>	White Black or African American Hispanic or Latino American Indian or Alaskan Native Asian or Pacific Islander Native Hawaiian Arab, Middle Eastern, or North African Not willing to answer	0: Non-Asian 1: Asian
<i>Family Influence</i>	0-10 Scale	0: No influence 1: Influence
<i>School at UCR</i>	College of Humanities and Social Science (CHASS) College of Natural and Agricultural Science (CNAS) Bourns College of Engineering (BCOE) School of Public Policy (SPP) School of Education (SOE)	** CHASS: 0: Not in CHASS 1: In CHASS ** CNAS: 0: Not in CNAS 1: In CNAS
<i>Career Choice Subject</i>	Humanities Social Sciences Science Technology Engineering Math Fill in the blank	** Social Science: 0: Not Social Science 1: Social Science ** Humanities: 0: Not Humanities 1: Humanities

<i>Vote in Previous Election</i>	Yes No	0: No 1: Yes
<i>Politically Active Scale</i>	I consider myself active I consider myself somewhat active I consider myself not that active I consider myself not active	0: I consider myself not active 1: I consider myself not that active 2: I consider myself somewhat active 3: I consider myself active

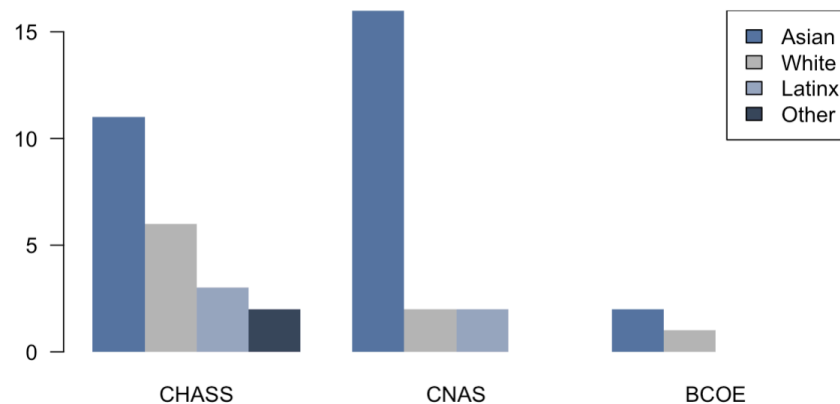
Notes: Not all recoded variables were used in the regression analysis, specifically the split ones of School at UCR and Career Choice Subject. Initial models were fit with both and comparative Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) values were used to pick one of each in the final regression models.

RESULTS

Ethnicity and School

Before fitting the two chosen regression models, I conducted an initial exploratory analysis to observe patterns in the data, specifically surrounding variables of interest. The racial breakdown of each school of interest (CHASS, CNAS, and BCOE) was plotted to observe survey trends.

Figure 1. Ethnicity Breakdown by School



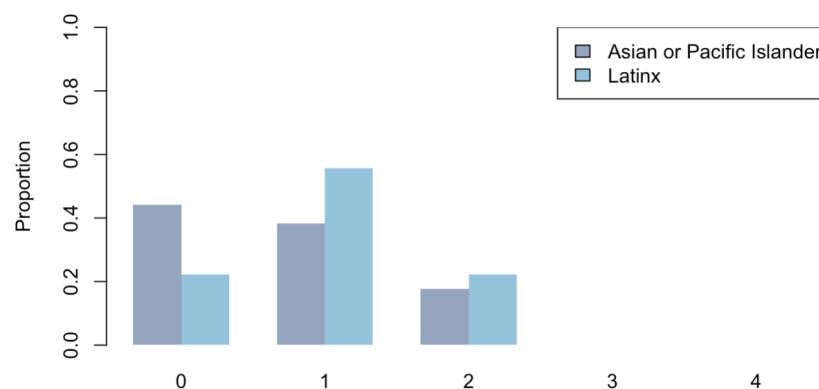
Notes: School of Education (SOE) and School of Public Policy (SPP) were not included in this consideration as there were not enough responses to create an ethnicity breakdown for those schools. Instead, all other respondents have been factored into the CHASS as both other schools fall under subject matter of humanities and social sciences.

In the comparison between Asian and Latinx students, this data was consistent with previous literature for UCR undergraduate students' prevalence in each college. While CHASS did seem to have many Asian students, the Latinx population was the highest of all shown colleges in CHASS as well. Moving towards more STEM-subject based colleges of CNAS and BCOE, Latinx participation dropped heavily, with none of the survey respondents being a part of BCOE. The Asian student population also grew significantly in CNAS, being 8 times larger than the reported Latinx respondents. Initial analysis showed that Asian undergraduate students, while high in CHASS, have a 1.6 times higher presence in CNAS and BCOE. In comparison, Latinx students have a higher presence in CHASS and partly CNAS, while none in BCOE.

Possibility of Running for Office

Differences between Latinx and Asian respondents were also prevalent in the possibility of running for office. Asian students proportionally were more likely to never consider running for office as compared to Latinx students. In the other two categories, where attitudes towards running for politics were more positive and might be a future consideration, Latinx respondents were proportionally more prevalent. The Asian student populations' responses are consistent with literature that members of this community are less likely to become involved in running for office as compared to other ethnic groups.

Figure 2. Proportional Possibility Of Running for Office by Ethnicity

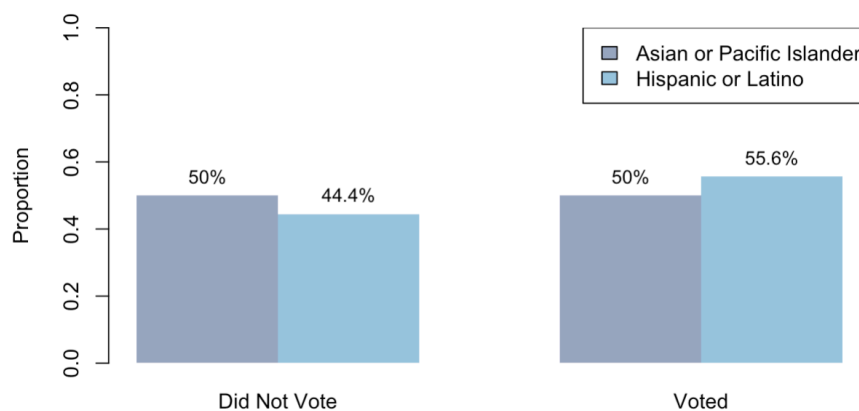


Notes: Exploratory data analysis was conducted before recoding of variables, thus, the data has 4 levels instead of negative recoding with 3 levels. 0– It is something I would absolutely never do. 1 – I would not rule it out forever, but I currently have no interest. 2 – It is something I might undertake if the opportunity presented itself. 3 – It is something I would definitely like to undertake in the future. 4 – I currently hold elected office.

Voting in Previous Elections

I examined a similar difference when examining the binary variable of previous election voting. Asian respondents were an even split between the action of voting and non-voting, which shows that there was no skew in the data regarding voting activity. However, Latinx students were more likely to vote as compared to not, with a 11.2% difference between the two groups. This, once again, shows that there is some significant difference between the two ethno-racial groups regardless of their similar makeup as UCR's undergraduate student population.

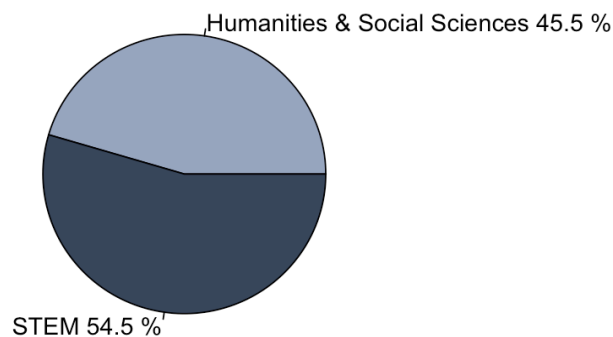
Figure 3. Proportional Voting in Previous Election by Ethnicity



Focus Group Statistics and Breakdown

There was a reasonably even distribution of Humanities and Social Science majors (45.5%) and STEM majors (54.5%) in the overall focus group interviews.

Figure 4. Breakdown of Subject Matter in Focus Group



This even distribution lasted throughout many of the key variables and categories in the focus groups. 54.5% of individuals considered themselves politically active, while 45.5% considered themselves as not. Similarly, 45.5% of individuals felt influenced by their families to pursue a career path, while 54.5% did not feel such a pressure. The only category where there wasn't a relatively even split between the binary categories was the consideration of running for office. 28% of interviewees would possibly run for office in the future, while 72% of them would not consider doing so.

STEM-subjects Impact on Willingness to Run for Office (H1a)

I fitted the initial models for OLR with all aforementioned key variables. Then, I used a global goodness of fit test to examine if any variables were significantly impacting individual willingness to run for office. A Wald test was applied to determine if there was significance to the final fitted model, which demonstrated a low probability value (chi-square value = 14.61, df = 46, $p = 0.04134$). Since significant predictors were present in the overall OLR model, I completed individual tests to identify which predictors were significantly affecting the possibility of running for office.

These individual tests were fitted confidence intervals for all models, and any non-significant predictors were taken out of the model. The three predictors that had significant models were as follows: School at UCR 95% CI[-2.87, -0.97], Career Choice Subject 95%

CI[0.35 2.38], and Politically Active Scale 95% CI[0.24 1.12]. The final model equation is below.

$$\text{Possibility Of Running for Office} \sim \text{School at UCR} + \text{Career Choice Subject} + \text{Politically Active Scale} \quad (1)$$

Table 2. Ordinal Logistic Regression (OLR) Model Predictors

Predictor	Estimate	Std. Error	T-Value	% Odds-Ratio
<i>School- CNAS</i>	– 1.5406	0.6364	– 2.4209	– 78.57%
<i>Politically Active</i>	0.4278	0.2937	1.4563	+ 53.39%
<i>Social Science Career</i>	0.2875	0.7016	0.4097	+ 33.31%

* *CNAS* – Binary (0 = Not in CNAS, 1 = In CNAS)

* *Social Science* – Binary (0 = Not Social Science Career, 1 = Social Science Career)

* *Politically Active* – Scale (0 – 3; 0 = Not Active, 3 = Very Active)

These variables were the type of school respondents were in, showing a negative relationship between a STEM-based school and willingness to run for office. In fact, there was a 78.57% odds decrease in willingness to run for office if the respondents were in CNAS, holding all other variables constant. The final model used the school choice of CNAS as compared to the CHASS variable because of the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) comparisons between two models: one fitted with CNAS and the other with CHASS. The model fitted with CNAS had a lower AIC of 117.96 as compared to the one fitted with CHASS of 118.71. Thus, the regression model was fitted with the School type of CNAS as the main predictor.

There were also positive predictors of the possibility of running for office with the type of career individuals wanted to pursue, along with their politically active scale. If a survey respondent were pursuing a social science career, they had 33.31% odds of being more likely to have a positive attitude towards running for office, holding all other variables constant. Similarly, if an individual was politically active, they had 53.39% odds more likely to have a positive

possibility of running for office, holding all other variables constant. Both of these variables were consistent with previous literature with their impact on the willingness to run for office.

These results were also supported by the focus group interview data. Sara, an Asian-American respondent from Group C disclosed that her attitude towards running for office and being politically active was not discussed often in her family. This affected her interest in politics and oftentimes, her family did not enforce discussion on the topic. She said:

“I also feel like this is tied into my parents as well since, I don't know if it's common for Asian American parents to [discuss politics]. Or at least for mine, they never really talked about it or enforced anything either. So I kind of just grew up with my friends and not even talking about [politics] until I got older. But in the end, I'm trying to learn more.”⁴

However, both of the data from the survey and focus group did not show family influence and ethnicity to be significant predictors as it directly related towards the possibility of running for office. This result could have been achieved due to possible confounding factors. Thus, I added an ordinary least squares regression as a second analysis point to observe these variables' effect on choosing a field of study– thus, the next model was fitted with just family influence and ethnicity with the outcome variable of CNAS.

Familial Influence on choice on STEM-subjects (H1b)

I completed an initial and final fitting of the OLS containing the two variables of interest: Ethnicity and Family Influence. The final model equation is shown below.

$$CNAS \sim Ethnicity + Family Influence \quad (2)$$

This model showed two important results: that ethnicity was in fact, not a significant predictor when it came to Asian students' choosing CNAS over other schools. However, family influence did play a very significant role in that choice.

⁴ Focus Group Participant C (female, statistics major).

Table 3. Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) Model Predictors

Predictor	Estimate	Std. Error	T-Value	P-Value
<i>Intercept</i>	0.7819	0.2182	3.583	< 0.01
<i>Ethnicity– Asian</i>	0.2009	0.1268	1.585	0.12
<i>Family Influence</i>	0.3306	0.1274	2.594	0.012

* *Asian* – Binary (0 = Not Asian, 1 = Asian)

* *Family Influence* – Binary (0 = No Family Influence, 1 = Family Influence)

Based on this result, I included a further interactive effect that was used as a predictor to observe whether family influence and ethnicity together affected the choice of CNAS. However, after adding this interaction to the regression model, none of the variables in the OLR model were deemed significant as ethnicity ($b = -0.1632$, $p = 0.070154$) and family influence ($b = 0.2028$, $p = 0.29298$) both had high probability values. In terms of the interaction between the two, ethnicity and family influence ($b = 0.2314$, $p = 0.37170$) also had a high probability value.

The focus group interview data on the other hand, contradicted these non-significant interactive effects. More than half of the Asian participants ranging from Groups A-C attested that their parents had, in fact, had an influence or expectation on their choice of major and career. None of the participants of other ethnicities had mentioned familial influence on their choice of major or career. Some statements about familial expectation as were mentioned by Asian participants are:

Ashley: “I honestly felt more pressure [from my parents] to pursue computer science or medical school...I definitely felt pressure to pursue a career that obviously gives you a good return for everything you invest in college.”⁵

Kaitlyn: “I think both my parents and I had specific criteria for what I wanted my future career to be. So for my parents, their biggest concern was would I be financially stable

⁵ Focus Group Participant A (female, political science major).

and able to be independent? They never said no to anything, but they kind of shaped my viewpoint on what decisions I made.”⁶

Lauren: “My parents, coming from an immigrant family background, wanted me to pursue a career that would earn me good money, like a stable job. So there were really only three career options like doctor, engineer, or lawyer. And I just pursued the one that I was most interested in.”⁷

Based on this qualitative data, I decided to use the first model for conclusion purposes rather than the model that included interaction effects between the variables of interest. The first model showed that family influence – not based on ethnicity – played a significant role in affecting survey respondent’s choice to pursue a major in CNAS.

CONCLUSION

This project aimed to understand the individual level of Asian-American’s participation in politics and possibility of running for office. Through survey and focus group data, I found that subject matter, specifically STEM-based, did negatively affect willingness of students' running for office – proving Hypothesis 1a correct. However, ethnicity played a less significant role than was expected in Hypothesis 1b. While familial influence and expectation did have an effect on students’ choice to study STEM-based subjects, that effect was not magnified with Asian American students.

Thus, there is a substantial subject-matter link between the choice to pursue political office and be interested in the field in general. Students that pursue STEM-focused subjects have higher odds of being less likely to run for office, and the choice to pursue those subjects has been heavily influenced by their family background. This is backed by the qualitative focus group

⁶ Focus Group Participant B (female, linguistics major)

⁷ Focus Group Participant C (female, political science major)

testimonials, while also shedding some light on ethnicity. While survey data and my regression model didn't quite show a link between ethnicity and familial influence, focus group data did. Specifically, Asian American students were more likely to mention their family when discussing their future career choice and current majors. These same students were also more likely to mention that their families influenced their educational decisions, whether directly or indirectly.

Some limitations to this study were that it took place in a university that is a minority-serving research institution. This might be different from PWIs (primarily white institutions) or HBCUs (historically black universities or colleges). These communities and their views of political representation and efficacy might differ significantly from those at the University of California, Riverside. Additionally, this study took place over the course of ten weeks, making it difficult to gather a large amount of data from both surveys and focus groups. Only 55 entries were usable for the survey, along with 11 focus group respondents – this is a smaller sample size, thus changing some of the proportional graphs and regression models. Further studies could be conducted for representative samples of students throughout the United States, gaining a larger sample size of undergraduate students. Additionally, focus groups could be larger and have at least 10 to compare between participants.

WORKS CITED

- Brady, Henry E., Sidney Verba, and Kay Lehman Schlozman. “Beyond SES: A Resource Model of Political Participation.” *American Political Science Review* 89, no. 2 (1995): 271–94. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2082425>.
- Chan, Nathan, Joyce H. Nguy, and Natalie Masuoka. “The Asian American Vote in 2020: Indicators of Turnout and Vote Choice.” *Political Behavior* 46, no. 1 (2024): 631–55. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-022-09844-9>.
- Chan, Nathan Kar Ming, Jae Yeon Kim, and Vivien Leung. “COVID-19 and Asian Americans: How Elite Messaging and Social Exclusion Shape Partisan Attitudes.” *Perspectives on Politics* 20, no. 2 (2022): 618–34. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592721003091>.
- Dam, Andrew Van. “Analysis | The Differences between What Congressional Republicans and Democrats Studied in College, and More!” *The Washington Post*, October 28, 2022. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2022/10/28/congress-college-majors-economics/>.
- Dugyala, Rishika. “Asian Americans Are the Least Likely to Hold Elected Office - POLITICO.” May 04, 2021. <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/05/04/asian-american-pacific-islander-representation-elected-office-485279>.
- Krogstad, Jens Manuel, and Carolyn Im. “Key Facts about Asians in the U.S.” *Asian Americans*. Pew Research Center, May 1, 2025. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/05/01/key-facts-about-asians-in-the-us/>.

- Lien, Pei-te, Christian Collet, Janelle Wong, and S. Karthick Ramakrishnan. “Asian Pacific-American Public Opinion and Political Participation.” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 34, no. 3 (2001): 625–30.
- Manning, Jennifer E. “Membership of the 119th Congress: A Profile.” *Legislation*. Accessed May 6, 2026. <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R48535>.
- Masuoka, Natalie, Kumar Ramanathan, and Jane Junn. “New Asian American Voters: Political Incorporation and Participation in 2016.” *Political Research Quarterly* 72, no. 4 (2019): 991–1003. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912919843342>.
- “Ordinal Logistic Regression | R Data Analysis Examples.” Accessed May 6, 2026. <https://stats.oarc.ucla.edu/r/dae/ordinal-logistic-regression/>.
- Saw, Anne, Howard Berenbaum, and Sumie Okazaki. “Influences of Personal Standards and Perceived Parental Expectations on Worry for Asian American and White American College Students.” *Anxiety, Stress, & Coping* 26, no. 2 (2013): 187–202. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10615806.2012.668536>.
- Schaeffer, Katherine. “Nearly All Members of the 118th Congress Have a Bachelor’s Degree – and Most Have a Graduate Degree, Too.” Pew Research Center, February 2, 2023. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/02/02/nearly-all-members-of-the-118th-congress-have-a-bachelors-degree-and-most-have-a-graduate-degree-too/>.
- “The Model Minority Myth - Harvard Law School Center on the Legal Profession.” Accessed May 6, 2026. <https://clp.law.harvard.edu/knowledge-hub/magazine/issues/asian-americans-in-the-law/the-model-minority-myth/>.
- UCR Enrollment Statistics: Winter 2026*. UCR Academic Dashboards, 2028.

Wong, Janelle S., and Karthick Ramakrishnan. "Asian Americans and the Politics of the Twenty-First Century." *Annual Review of Political Science* 26, no. Volume 26, 2023 (2023): 305–23. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-070621-032538>.

APPENDIX A

Survey Questions

This survey is part of a research study to better understand students' educational choices. If you would like to learn more, please look below:

This survey is recruiting those who are undergraduate students at UCR and I would like to invite you as a participant. I am currently looking for students aged 18-22 from all the different schools: CHASS, CNAS, BCOE, SOE, and SPP to participate in a survey. The survey will take 10 minutes to complete. You will need to fill out about 13 questions that will be multiple choice and 4 questions that are fill in the blank. Your responses to the questions will be kept confidential. Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time.

There is possible compensation for participating in this survey. You will put into a one-time drawing to receive a \$20 gift card for Amazon for participating. Everyone can be entered in the drawing regardless of participation. If you do not want to participate but want to be included in the drawing, please email me at krai009@ucr.edu.

If you have any questions, please feel free to ask by the contact information below:

Kashish Rai

krai009@ucr.edu

1. Are you a student at UCR
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
2. What is your email? (for gift card drawing)
 - a. Fill in the blank
3. What school are you in at UCR?
 - a. College of Humanities and Social Science (CHASS)
 - b. College of Natural and Agricultural Science (CNAS)
 - c. Bourns College of Engineering (BCOE)
 - d. School of Public Policy (SPP)
 - e. School of Education (SOE)
4. What is your ethno-racial heritage?
 - a. Fill in the blank
5. What racial or ethnic groups describe you? Please choose all options that describe you best.
 - a. White or Caucasian
 - b. Black or African American
 - c. Hispanic or Latino

- d. American Indian or Alaskan Native
 - e. Asian or Pacific Islander
 - f. Native Hawaiian
 - g. Arab, Middle Eastern, or North African
 - h. A race or ethnicity not listed here
 - i. Not willing to answer
6. Even if they are all important, which of these would you consider your primary race or ethnicity, if you had to choose one?
- a. White
 - b. Black or African American
 - c. Hispanic or Latino
 - d. American Indian or Alaskan Native
 - e. Asian or Pacific Islander
 - f. Native Hawaiian
 - g. Arab, Middle Eastern, or North African
 - h. Not willing to answer
7. **(Only if choosing Asian American)** Which ethnicity do you identify with?
- a. Chinese
 - b. Filipino
 - c. Indian
 - d. Japanese
 - e. Korean
 - f. Vietnamese
 - g. Taiwanese
 - h. None
 - i. Other (Please Elaborate)
8. What is your major?
- a. Fill in the blank
9. What subject is the career field you want to pursue?
- a. Humanities
 - b. Social Sciences
 - c. Science
 - d. Technology
 - e. Engineering
 - f. Math
 - g. Other
 - i. Fill in the blank
10. What career do you want to have in the future?
- a. Fill in the blank
11. On a scale of 0-10, how influenced do you feel by your family to pursue this career path?

- a. 0-10 scale
- 12. On a scale of 0-10, how influenced do you feel by your friends to pursue this career path?
 - a. 0-10 scale
- 13. On a scale of 0-10, how influenced do you feel by yourself to pursue this career path?
 - a. 0-10 scale
- 14. How likely are you to pursue these career paths:
 - a. Doctor
 - i. 0-10 scale
 - b. Lawyer
 - i. 0-10 scale
 - c. Professor
 - i. 0-10 scale
 - d. Politician
 - i. 0-10 scale
 - e. Nurse
 - i. 0-10 scale
 - f. Teacher
 - i. 0-10 scale
 - g. Researcher
 - i. 0-10 scale
- 15. What best characterizes your attitude toward running for a political office in the future?
 - a. It is something I would definitely like to undertake in the future.
 - b. It is something I might undertake if the opportunity presented itself.
 - c. I would not rule it out forever, but I currently have no interest.
 - d. It is something I would absolutely never do.
 - e. I currently hold elected office.
- 16. What qualifications do you believe that you need to run for office?
 - a. Fill in the blank
- 17. Did you vote in the previous presidential election?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
- 18. Do you consider yourself politically active?
 - a. I consider myself active
 - b. I consider myself somewhat active
 - c. I consider myself not that active
 - d. I consider myself not active

Survey Promotional Materials

Survey Flyer

Hello,

My name is Kashish Rai, and I am an undergraduate student at the University of California, Riverside. I am conducting a survey as part of a research study to better understand about Asian American students' educational choices and if those affect their careers in politics and public administration.

The survey is recruiting those who are undergraduate students at UCR and I would like to invite you as a participant. I am currently looking for students aged 18-22 from all the different schools: CHASS, CNAS, BCOE, SOE, and SPP to participate in a survey. The survey will take 10 minutes to complete. You will need to fill out about 13 questions that will be multiple choice and 4 questions that are fill in the blank. Your responses to the questions will be kept confidential. Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time.

Unless otherwise specified, our survey is confidential. We accept ultimate responsibility for these data and understand our responsibility in maintaining confidentiality of survey responses and protecting respondents' identities by carefully guarding any information that could be used to identify individual respondents.

There is possible compensation for participating in this survey. You will put into a one-time drawing to receive a \$20 gift card for Amazon for participating. If you are willing to take part in the survey, please reply to this invitation letter and I will contact you shortly with the survey. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask by the contact information below.

If you are interested in participating, the link to the survey is attached here:

https://qualtricsxmmgwtj5ggk.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_doQ3HXvfSK94frg?Q_CHL=qr

Below I am offering a short description of my project so that you can get a sense of the purpose of this research and how your participation can be helpful to this project.

Description of the Project

Much of the research that exists about Asian Americans' underrepresentation of being involved in politics focuses on institutional barriers such as registration and naturalization. There is also some focus on the community as a whole being less cohesive in their actions since there is such a large amount of ethno-racial minorities falling under this umbrella term. However, I believe that there has not been much focus on exactly how the educational pathways that are taken by the Asian American community affect their interest and proliferation into politics and public administration. With given research, there is a "typical" career pathway in order to work in politics or become a policymaker through public administration. By analyzing if students in the Asian American community feel as though they are influenced to pursue pathways that are different from the "typical pathway," there will be some contribution to existing knowledge as it is a new factor for youth that can be measured for the effect on Asian American political behavior.

Thank you for your time and consideration!

Kashish Rai

Undergraduate Student at University of California, Riverside

krai009@ucr.edu

Survey Dissemination Request

Hello Professor [BLANK],

I hope you are doing well. My name is Kashish Rai and I am a senior undergraduate student conducting research this quarter. My honors thesis advisor, Kim Yi Dionne, encouraged me to reach out to see if you'd be willing to share this following announcement with your students. I have CC'd her to this email for your reference!

At the moment, I am collecting survey and focus group data from students about their chosen majors and student educational outcomes as related to politics/public administration. It is especially impactful if students from your class, [INSERT CLASS], fill out this survey and participate, as [STEM/Humanities] students are a critical part of the population in my study.

I would really appreciate your help in dissemination of my recruitment flyers to your students. I have attached them to this email. I have also included further information about my study in those flyers, along with my survey link and contact information.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or my honors thesis advisor!

Thank you for your time and consideration,

--

Kashish Rai

Political Science & Statistics

Class of 2026

University of California, Riverside | University Honors

APPENDIX B

Focus Group Questions

Thank you for participating in this focus group. We are interested in learning about students' educational choices and if those affect their careers in politics and public administration. I will pose a series of questions for you to respond to and discuss among yourselves. Our conversation will be recorded (ONLY if on zoom) so that we have accurate information about what was said, but I will not identify any of you by name in my academic writing and presentation.

If at any point, you feel that you want to withdraw from this group, you can verbally ask during the focus group or contact me to ask to withdraw from the study after the focus group has taken place.

1. To begin with, could you tell us your school and your major? Could you tell me when you are graduating?
2. Most students are pursuing majors in a field in which they hope to get a job. Do you believe that applies to you?
 - a. If it does not, why are you pursuing this major?
 - b. If it does, why do you believe it will help you get your chosen career?
3. What, if anything, has affected your decision to pursue your chosen career path? If so, how?
4. Do you believe that you are a politically active individual?
 - a. If yes, what do you believe makes you politically active?
5. Would you ever consider running for political office?
 - a. If not, why not?
 - b. If so, why?
6. Sometimes, it's possible that certain qualifications are required to run for office. What qualifications do you believe that you need to run for office?

Focus Group Promotional Materials

Focus Group Flyer

Hello,

My name is Kashish Rai, and I am an undergraduate student at the University of California, Riverside. I am conducting a **focus group** as part of a research study to better understand about Asian American students' educational choices and if those affect their careers in politics and public administration.

The focus group is recruiting those who are undergraduate students at UCR and I would like to invite you as a participant for this focus group. I am currently looking for students aged 18-22 from all the different schools: CHASS, CNAS, BCOE, SOE, and SPP to participate. The focus group will take 45-60 minutes to complete. Your responses to the questions will be kept confidential. Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time.

Unless otherwise specified, our focus group data is confidential. We accept ultimate responsibility for these data and understand our responsibility in maintaining confidentiality of survey responses and protecting respondents' identities by carefully guarding any information that could be used to identify individual respondents.

There is a compensation for participating in this focus group. You will receive a \$20 gift card for Amazon for participating. If you are willing to take part in the group, please reply to this invitation letter and I will contact you shortly. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask by the contact information below.

Below I am offering a short description of my project so that you can get a sense of the purpose of this research and how your participation can be helpful to this project.

Description of the Project

Much of the research that exists about Asian Americans' underrepresentation of being involved in politics focuses on institutional barriers such as registration and naturalization. There is also some focus on the community as a whole being less cohesive in their actions since there is such a large amount of ethno-racial minorities falling under this umbrella term. However, I believe that there has not been much focus on exactly how the educational pathways that are taken by the Asian American community affect their interest and proliferation into politics and public administration. With given research, there is a "typical" career pathway in order to work in politics or become a policymaker through public administration. By analyzing if students in the Asian American community feel as though they are influenced to pursue pathways that are different from the "typical pathway," there will be some contribution to existing knowledge as it is a new factor for youth that can be measured for the effect on Asian American political behavior.

Thank you for your time and consideration!

Kashish Rai
Undergraduate Student at University of California, Riverside
krai009@ucr.edu

Focus Group Consent Form

UC Riverside
RESEARCH INFORMED CONSENT

Title of research study: **Educational Factors on Asian American Proliferation into Politics and Public Administration**

Researcher:	[Kashish Rai, Lead Researcher] [Political Science] [818-629-8003, krai009@ucr.edu]
-------------	--

Faculty Advisor:	[Kim Yi Dionne, Principal Investigator] [Political Science] [818-629-8003, kdionne@ucr.edu]
------------------	---

Introduction:

This is a research study about Asian American Political Participation. The study researchers, Kim Yi Dionne from the UCR Department of Political Science, will explain this study to you. Research studies include only those people who choose to participate in the study.

You are being asked to take part in this study because you are an undergraduate student at UCR aged 18-22 from all the different schools: CHASS, CNAS, BCOE, SOE, and SPP.

What happens if I say yes, I want to be in this research

You will be interacting with 5-8 other students in a 45-60 minute focus group. You will be asked about your career choices, educational background, and ethnoracial background.

You can skip questions you do not want to answer or stop participating at any time. We will keep your answers confidential and will not share your personal information with anyone outside the research team.

If you decide to discontinue participation altogether, your data will be deleted if you refuse to answer or leave from the study during the focus groups before conducting the research. However, once you participate in the research or once results have been published, I will not be able to delete your anonymized data, as I will not be able to tell which one is individual.

Whom can I talk to?

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, talk to the research team at krai009@ucr.edu.

If you have questions about your rights or complaints as a research subject, please contact the IRB Chairperson at (951) 827 - 4802 during business hours, or to contact them by email at irb@ucr.edu.

CONSENT

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. The decision to participate, or not participate, is solely up to you.

If you wish to participate in this study, you should sign below.

Date

Participant's Signature for Consent

