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From Netizen to Citizen: Netizen Empowerment and Political Activism among
Chinese Americans

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Political Science

by

Yiming Shao

June 2021

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## Acknowledgments

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

From Netizen to Citizen: Netizen Empowerment and Political Activism among Chinese
Americans

by

Yiming Shao

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Political Science
University of California, Riverside, June 2021
Dr. Noel Pereyra-Johnston, Co-Chairperson
Dr. Karthick Ramakrishnan, Co-Chairperson

Since 2010, Chinese Americans have been actively engaged in policy issues such as affirmative action organized through an ethnic social media called WeChat. Many scholarly works would predict that an immigrant with less than ten years of residence in the US, who speaks limited English and lives in a neighborhood with a small co-ethnic population, is less likely to be politically active. However, it is the very group described above that passionately joined many offline protests and demonstrations in the past decade. Many social movements start with online activities, but some failed to make a substantive impact in the offline world. How does this netizen movement transform into impactful political engagement as citizens? This study will ask the following research questions to find out. Who are those Chinese activists? What motivates them to act? And to what extent is their level of political engagement? This study will use survey data, campaign contribution data, and ethnic social media chat group messages to answer these three questions. First, I will use the National Asian American Survey to explore the demographic characteristics

of Chinese activists and answer the question "who are the Chinese activists?". Second, this study will examine how WeChat and mainstream media news influence WeChat chat group members. Third, I will test whether Chinese voters living in the "majority Chinese" zip code are more likely to make a political contribution. For the first research question, this study found that Chinese Americans who use social media for political information may become more confident in their ability to influence policy outcomes, which motivates them to join offline protests. Moreover, when mainstream media and WeChat show opposing sentiments towards the same issue, Chinese "Netizens" are more likely to debate with strong emotions. Using campaign contribution data, this project also found that Chinese Americans living in a neighborhood with less Chinese population are more likely to make a political contribution, which is constant with political movements on popular press led by suburban Chinese parents. This project aims to shed light for future research on this area that collectively breaks the monolithic view of Asian Americans.

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# Chapter 1

# Introduction

During the California Gold Rush in the 1850s, Chinese workers came to the United States. They were often referred to as the first wave of Asian American immigration. Since then, many groups have taken a similar "leap of faith". Today, Asian American has grown into an integral part of American electorates. However, fewer studies went beyond the monolithic view of the group. As many rising scholarly works have pointed out, the monolithic approach masks the diverging difficulties and challenges among different Asian American ethnic groups. Thus, this thesis will follow the growing literature in this area and disaggregate the group by ethnicity when analyzing Asian American's political engagement. Moreover, I will take a closer look at Chinese Americans, which allows me to take a deeper dive into the nuances varied by demographic characteristics, social experience, and neighborhoods. This thesis will also compare Chinese Americans with other racial and ethnic groups, shedding light into future research that could expand in this area of literature. While focusing on Chinese American's mode of political activism, there are a few questions

that need to be answered. First, how to accurately measure the group's true political opinions. Since vote choice is confidential, scholars have been relying on other sources such as political opinion surveys and political activity data. These datasets serve as a proxy that can indirectly measure the respondent's preferences. It is understandable to note that different measurements come with unique challenges. Different from the previous work, I will leverage existing data on Asian American research and complement the analysis with noble datasets from WeChat chat group messages and surname-matched campaign contribution records. The idea behind this empirical strategy is to test some of the existing theories and mechanisms against forms of political activities that may suffer less from social confirmation bias.

**The Puzzle of Chinese American Activism**

First-generation Chinese immigrants share less than 1 percent of the total population in the United States. With some of them being non-citizens, the size of eligible voters is even smaller. Many of them came to the U.S. after 2010 with limited political knowledge about the United States. Furthermore, they often settle in suburban areas with a small share of the Chinese American population. According to the existing literature on immigrant political engagement, one might predict that this group would be less engaged in American politics. Yet, not only did this group engage in many political events actively, but they have also gained attention from political parties and mainstream media in unprecedented ways. As shown in table 1, many of these protests and demonstrations have led to the revision or withdrawn of this piece of legislation. Since 2012, Chinese immigrants have been using WeChat, a Chinese social media platform, to mobilize and organize protests and

| Year | Legislation | State | Issue | Result |
|------|-------------|-------|-------|--------|
| 2012 | SCA5 | California | Affirmative Action | Withdrawn |
| 2015 | SB359 | Connecticut | Data Disaggregation | Revised & Passed |
| 2016 | AB1726 | California | Data Disaggregation | Revised & Passed |
| 2017 | H3361 | Massachusetts | Data Disaggregation | Redraft & Pending |
| 2017 | S0439 | Rhode Island | Data Disaggregation | Passed |
| 2018 | 120B.35 | Minnesota | Data Disaggregation | Passed |
| 2019 | R88 | Washington | Affirmative Action | withdrawn |

Table 1.1: Major Chinese Immigrant-led Activism

demonstrations for this piece of legislation. Thus, there is an incongruence between the existing literature on immigrant political participation and the level of observed political activism among Chinese immigrants.

**Theory on Chinese American Political Engagement**

Scholars have examined the relationship between individual-level characteristics and the level of political engagement among immigrants. First, scholars have argued that immigrants with limited English proficiency cannot fully understand and communicate political issues (Ramakrishnan, 2005a; Wong, Ramakrishnan, Lee, Junn, & Wong, 2011). This challenge translates to a lower level of political engagement. Second, immigrants who have lived in the United States for a short period often have less political knowledge. Nevertheless, it is important to note that immigrants' level of political knowledge also varies

upon their arrivals. Researchers have found that the level of political similarity between destination and home country can shape an immigrant's political knowledge as well as socioeconomic status (Wong et al., 2011). They further argue that immigrants with a high level of political knowledge and socio-economic status are more likely to engage in politics (Wong et al., 2011). Scholars on resource-based theory also argue that demographic characteristics such as socioeconomic status can determine the level of resourcefulness, which shapes the level of political engagement (DeSipio, 1998; Cho, 1999; Brady, Verba, & Schlozman, 1995).

Furthermore, Scholars have also examined how the length of stay in the United States affect an immigrant's level of political engagement. Wong et al. (2011) and Hochschild, Chattopadhyay, Gay, and Jones-Correa (2013) argue that as the length of stay in the US increases, an immigrant is more likely to engage in politics. However, Hochschild et al. (2013) have also argued that the length of residency is a necessary but not sufficient condition. More importantly, community organizations and civic engagement institutions are more likely to reach an immigrant as their length of stay increases. Another factor that contributes to a low level of civic engagement is political interests. This is especially true for Asian American immigrants seen as the "model minority". This rhetoric suggests that Asian American immigrants should "lay low and work hard" (Chou & Feagin, 2015). Comparative political scientist Lem (2010), have found supporting evidence of such effect among second-generation Chinese French who show little interest in a salient political movement among their peers. Back in the US, researchers have been observing similar patterns among

Asian American immigrants. Kinder, Sanders, and Sanders (1996) argue that when members of society don't share this value, they are viewed as lazy and burdens to the government. Thus, political activism is seen as seeking trouble and therefore discourages participation.

"No man is an island entire of itself" is a poetic phrase often used to describe the interdependence among people in society. Scholars on racial minorities' political engagement have shown that neighborhood characteristics matter. Browning, Marshall, and Tabb (1986) found that a relatively large population of local black electorates mobilizes black voters in elections. This pattern can also be applied to Latinx, but the level of political participation is higher when coupled with strong demand-protests before the election (Browning et al., 1986). The authors further argued that when minorities share a large portion of the labor force in a city's critical industries, they have more power in political negotiation (Browning et al., 1986). This power position motivates them to participate in politics. A similar argument can be made for Asian American immigrants, and their share of the local electorate shapes their level of political engagement.

**Existing Literature on social media and Political Participation**

One potential explanation of the puzzle is the usage of WeChat, the Chinese social media platform. Although not for WeChat in particular, scholars have examined the effect of online activities on political participation. Early studies have shown that internet access for political purposes and reading online political news have positively associated with civic engagement (V. Shah, 2001) and voting participation (Tolbert & McNeal, 2003). Vitak et al. (2011) also found that political activities on Facebook as well as reading political

discussions are strong determinate of general political participation. Dimitrova, Shehata, Strömbäck, and Nord (2014) found similar patterns in the 2010 Swedish election. Many scholarly works also suggest that various online activities can translate into offline political participation under certain conditions. In the American context, scholars have found that social media mobilization can shape perceptions of candidate's trait in the Iowa caucus, but it only works effectively among less-educated citizens or ones that pay less attention in politics (Dimitrova & Bystrom, 2013).

Outside of the context of the United States, studies in Egypt show that influential users and broadcaster users trigger more cascades of protests (González-Bailón, Borge-Holthoefer, & Moreno, 2013). In Chile, Valenzuela (2013) argues that using social media for opinion expression and activism mediates the effect of social media usage on protest behaviors. Furthermore, increased coordination on social media such as using a specific hashtag on Twitter is associated with an increase in protests the following day according to Chile data in a study conducted by Steinert-Threlkeld, Mocanu, Vespignani, and Fowler (2015). Scholars have also found that netizens are using social media more strategically than before. Different from other online platforms, social media users are more integrated into the movement (Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia, 2014; Harwit, 2017; DeLuca, Brunner, & Sun, 2016). They use social media to interact with a broader audience, recruit more volunteers as well as update the process of the movement (Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia, 2014). However, scholars have also alerted us of the potential pitfalls of social media activism that might prevent it from being the backbone of future social movements. An Indonesian study

by Lim (2012) suggests that social media mobilization is more effective when narratives and symbolic match with dominating contemporary popular culture. A social movement from the grassroots often challenges the norm of the status quo. She further argues that social media mobilization might trigger more low-risk activities such as signing an online petition, but it is less effective for high-risk actions Lim (2012). Limited research has closely examined the effect of social media activism on offline protests. Recent case studies on WeChat suggest that WeChat might help form small-scale activism but cannot form a large digital society in China due to the network's exclusivity (Harwit, 2017; DeLuca et al., 2016). More empirical studies are needed to further examine the effect of WeChat activism among Chinese immigrants to explain the puzzle.

**Chapter Two**

Building on existing research and empirical framework, in the next chapter of this study, I will first explore patterns of political engagement among Chinese Americans using the 2016 National Asian American Survey. The key research question here is that under what condition do Chinese Americans engage in politics. There are three existing mechanisms for political participation. The first one focuses on demographic characteristics such as gender, age, education, income, and nativity. The second mechanism aims at political resources, where Chinese Americans may have different means to participate in different forms of political activism. The third one talks about the internal factors such as intrinsic motivation and political efficacy. Overall, these three mechanisms draw a vivid picture of political activism, where the level of engagement depends on "who they are", "what they have" and "how they think". There are many forms of political engagement

and the rich data in the 2016 NAAS contains variables such as offline protest participation, online discussion, elected official contacts, community engagement, campaign contribution, and attending public meetings. You may ask why it is important to model all these different forms of political participation? Different forms of political participation require a different level of resources, can motivate different subset of Chinese Americans who have their unique motivations and backgrounds. Accordingly, by creating separate models for each political activity, the weighted logit model will reveal patterns of political engagement that varied by demographic characteristics, socioeconomic status, and internal political efficacy.

**Chapter Three**

In the second chapter, the weighted logit model revealed the association between demographic characteristics and political discussion on social media. However, the survey question-wording included ethnic social media within the broader category of online activity. To overcome the limitation of the survey data, the third chapter of this study will use WeChat chat group data collected in 2020. Additionally, the second chapter discovered that internal political efficacy is the real reason for social media usage to increase political engagement. To further explore this mechanism, the third chapter will test how internal influencers in the same chat group, internally shared WeChat articles, and externally salient media coverage, shape the political discussion. The comparison between WeChat news and Mass Media news will reveal how different information sources interactively or independently shape the chat group member's sentiment towards affirmative action. While most chat group members are content receivers, some active members also comment and lead the sentiment of the group. They are also content creators. Thus, the comparison between

WeChat "elite" users and internally shared WeChat articles will examine the role of people and words.

Although the chat group message data is not representative of all Chinese Americans on ethnic social media, it will shed light on patterns of political discussion among active groups such as the one analyzed in this study. The study of this chapter is organized into the following steps. First, the chat group messages are classified using the latent Dirichlet allocation model. I will then filter the message and focus on affirmative action-related chat, as it is one of the most motivating issues among Chinese Americans (a news reference here). Each message is assigned a sentiment score ranging between zero to one, where one indicates the most positive sentiment towards affirmative action. Using a similar approach, news articles from the Lexus Uni database are re-coded into a zero to one sentiment score. More importantly, I aggregate news articles from the mass media by date and weight by total words in each article. This procedure results in a unified score for each day that describes mass media's overall sentiment towards affirmative action. Influencers or elite members of the chat group is defined as active member whose total message count in a year ranks in the 95th percentile. Finally, to address variations among different members, the unit of analysis is individual, and the dependent variable will measure the change of sentiment for a given chat group member from their average sentiment score. Accordingly, the model can test the effect of the three factors that makes a member's sentiment more positive or negative than usual. This chapter takes an exploratory journey and unmasks the potential role WeChat

plays among Chinese Americans. This role refers to both its informational assets (articles) and social network (influencers).

**Chapter Four**

The fourth chapter of this study directs its attention to campaign contribution during the 2020 presidential election. As prior chapters stated, both internal and external factors can shape the level of political engagement among Chinese Americans. However, to what extent do these forms of political participation translate to ballot choice? The behavior from campaign contribution could hint at an electorate's final choice at the ballot box. First, it is a real financial commitment, which creates a stronger incentive for election turnout. Second, collectively interest groups who donate to the same candidate can potentially influence the candidate's policy platform. Third, campaign funds collected from individuals will apply to other campaign expenses. This could create a ripple effect and reach more voters who may not show up and vote otherwise. Meanwhile, minority groups such as Chinese Americans face a unique challenge: will their vote matter?

Existing scholarly work argues that as the minority population share increases in a district, their votes can determine the outcome of an election. Accordingly, racial minorities are more like to engage in politics if they live in this type of majority-minority district. This work has applied to both Latinos and African Americans but had mixed findings. Intuitively, this theory may also apply to Chinese Americans as they share some similar challenges with other minority groups. However, recent news about Chinese activists reveals that many political activities are organized online, making neighborhood characteristics

less relevant in this modern era. If the role of the netizen is more salient, then how many Chinese Americans live in one's neighborhood should not influence their level of political contribution. On the contrary, characteristics of one's neighborhood are still the primary factors shaping their level of political engagement. The fourth chapter will put this debate to test by combining the individual campaign contribution recording with Census zip code level demographic data. Using the OLS model, this chapter will explore the relationship between Chinese American's population share and the level of campaign contribution to a candidate in the 2020 presidential election.

# Chapter 2

# Who Are the Chinese American Activists?

Asian Americans are one of the fastest-growing groups in the United States. According to the 2018 Census data, 25% of total Asian American immigrants are Chinese. Yet, existing literature offers a limited understanding of their mode of civic and political engagement. Growing new articles and popular media exposure has revealed that Chinese Americans have become politically more active in the recent decade, mobilizing others, and organizing events through WeChat. These groups have led the movement against various state and local policies such as affirmative action in higher education and Asian American data disaggregation. Accordingly, it is undeniable that the all-in-one social media platform WeChat Guo (2017); Plantin and de Seta (2019) has played an integral role in the rise of Chinese immigrants' political engagement. This has challenged the existing model of immigrant political participation, as this group would be seen as low-propensity politi-

cal activists according to our current consensus. Motivated by the differences between the scholarly work and trends in recent political events, this chapter will investigate under what conditions do Chinese immigrants engage in politics. This includes an investigation of forms of political participation as well as the characteristics of different Chinese immigrants. More importantly, through empirical analysis, this chapter aims to learn where does ethnic social media fit in the mode of political participation among Chinese immigrants.

**The Three Existing Mechanisms for Political Participation**

Existing literature on political participation includes both native-born citizens and immigrants. The broader theme contains three key models: demographic characteristics, resources, and motivations. The first model emphasizes the role of demographic characteristics in political participation, which includes variables such as education, income, and residency. The resource-based model argues that individual becomes politically engaged when they have time and money to do so. Additionally, individuals with stronger civic skills are more likely to engage. Different from the prior two models, motivation theory points out the importance of intrinsic motivation (Lilleker & Koc-Michalska, 2017). Political knowledge may not translate to political engagement without high internal political efficacy.

*Mechanism I: Demographic Characteristics*

Political engagement models based on demographic characteristics vary between native-born citizens and immigrants. This chapter will focus on relevant variables for Chinese immigrants. First, scholars have argued that immigrants with limited English proficiency cannot fully understand and communicate political issues (Ramakrishnan, 2005b;

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Wong et al., 2011). This challenge translates to a lower level of political engagement. Second, scholars have also examined how the length of stay in the United States affect an immigrant's level of political engagement. Wong et al. (2011) and Hochschild et al. (2013). argue that as the length of stay in the US increases, an immigrant is more likely to engage in politics. However, Hochschild et al. (2013) have also argued that the length of residency is a necessary but not sufficient condition. Researchers have also found that the level of political similarity between destination and home country can shape an immigrant's political knowledge as well as socioeconomic status (Wong et al., 2011). They further argue that immigrants with a high level of political knowledge and socio-economic status are more likely to engage in politics (Wong et al., 2011).

*Mechanism II: Political Resources*

The resources-based model for political participation points out three key components: time, money, and civic skills (Brady et al., 1995). Intuitively, individuals whose time is occupied by work and other responsibilities will have less time to pay attention to political information or act upon certain issues. Similarly, some forms of political participation require financial investment such as political contribution and offline demonstration. DeSipio (1998) and Cho (1999) supported this notion and argue that socioeconomic status can determine the level of resourcefulness, which shapes the level of political engagement. Additionally, Brady et al. (1995) pointed out that communication and organization skills are integral to one's ability to participate in politics. For instance, immigrants with limited English proficiency cannot effectively communicate with the elected official and express their views on an issue. Meanwhile, organizing an offline protest among members who live

in various parts of the state requires strong organizational skills. Further study by Djupe and Grant (2001) revealed that civil skills gained in a religious institution may bring an individual closer to the political sphere and indirectly increase the likelihood of political engagement.

*Mechanism III: Intrinsic Motivation & Political Efficacy*

A longitudinal election study conducted in Germany found that internal political efficacy translates political knowledge to a higher propensity of political participation (Reichert, 2016). The author illustrated empirically that political knowledge is positively associated with political participation mediated through internal political efficacy (Reichert, 2016). In this article, political efficacy is referred to as the internal belief about one's capacity to engage in politics. Consistent with Reichert (2016) finding. A study conducted using 2006 ANES data found that political efficacy translates internet access and online exposure to information to political engagement (Kenski & Stroud, 2006). A more recent study in Taiwan revealed that political efficacy mediates between "information-oriented social media" usage and political participation (Chen, Bai, & Wang, 2019). This growing literature sheds light on the role of intrinsic motivation or belief plays in political participation.

**Hypothesis**

According to the demographic characteristics model, an immigrant who migrated to the US more recently are less likely to engage in politics. Similarly, this pattern applies to immigrants with limited English proficiency, lower socioeconomic status, and lower educational attainment. However, not all of these predictions are accurate for Chinese immigrants. Some Chinese activists speak English less than "very well" or have migrated to

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the U.S. in the recent decade. Thus, the demographic model cannot explain the current phenomenon among Chinese immigrants comprehensively. This is not to say that demographic characteristics do not matter, but they have a weaker association with political participation compared to other variables. Among the recently mobilized Chinese activists, it seems that they have relatively high educational attainment and income. This led me to theorize that Chinese immigrants' education and income are positively associated with political participation. On the other hand, most Chinese activists have migrated to the U.S. in the recent decade and some may have limited English proficiency. Accordingly, the length of stay in the U.S. and English proficiency may be negatively associated with political participation.

*H1: Education and income are positively associated with political participation.*
*H2: English proficiency and length of residency in the U.S. are negatively associated with political participation.*

As for the resource-based model, it may seem apparent at first that it explains the recent phenomenon really well, as many Chinese activists spent a lot of time and money to engage in politics and have taken diverse and effective political actions. However, Chinese immigrants were relatively silent in American politics, even among the group with enough time, income for civic skills to engage. In other words, the group with enough resources to engage in politics existed before, yet the level of political activism has only risen in the recent decade. Thus, I argue that time and money are necessary but not sufficient condition for political participation, and as long as a Chinese immigrant has more than a minimal amount of resources, there is a propensity to engage in politics depending on the

circumstances. WeChat as well as other online exposure to political information may serve as a shortcut to civil skills on specific issues. Accordingly, the overall civil skills among Chinese activists may not be high, but they have enough to act effectively on issues they care strongly about.

*H3a: A higher than minimal income is positively associated with political participation*

*H3b: A higher than minimal time is positively associated with political participation*

*H3c: Overall civil skills are not associated significantly with political participation*

If demographic characteristics are weakly associated with political engagement, and political resources only matter when moving from the minimum level to a higher level, then what explains the mode of political participation among Chinese immigrants? I argue that intrinsic motivation matters such as the level of internal political efficacy. As Wong et al. (2011) pointed out, the political similarity between the home and destination countries plays an important role in political engagement among immigrants. For many Chinese immigrants who migrated from Mainland, China, it takes time to build political efficacy. In particular, Chinese immigrants are more likely to participate in various political activities if they believe in their own capacity to understand and engage in politics. Part of the silent past among Chinese immigrants is due to their low internal political efficacy regardless of socio-economic status and resources. One thing that might have changed this situation is the creation of WeChat. Using this application, Chinese immigrants were able to receive social, cultural, and political information of their local community translated in Chinese. Moreover, content creators (public accounts) often translate and frame the story in cultur-

ally competent ways. Therefore, internal political efficacy can translate social media usage for political information to political participation.

*H4a: Political efficacy is positively associated with political participation*
*H4b: Social media usage for political information is positively associated with political participation mediated through internal political efficacy.*

However, it is worth noting that social media usage may not increase internal political efficacy for all Chinese immigrants. Language capacity and financial capacity might interact with social media usage when affecting internal political efficacy. Among Chinese immigrants who speak don't have a strong English accent, social media usage is positively associated with internal political efficacy. As their accent increases, the association between social media usage and internal political efficacy decreases. In addition, I hypotheses that income level acts in a similar fashion. As increased level decreases, the association between social media usage and political participation decreases. Alternatively, there might not be a curved linear interaction, which means that the association between social media usage and internal political efficacy is weaker when the accent is very strong or when the income level is at a minimal level.

*H5a1: As English accent increases, the positive association between social media usage and internal political efficacy decreases*
*H5a2: Compared to the rest of Chinese immigrants when one's accent is very strong, the positive association between social media usage and internal political efficacy significantly decrease*

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*H5b1: As income level decreases, the positive association between social media usage and internal political efficacy decreases*

*H5b2: Compared to the rest of Chinese immigrants when one's income is less than $50,000, the positive association between social media usage and internal political efficacy significantly decrease*

**Data Sources and Variables**

*Survey Data*

In this chapter, I use the 2016 Pre-election National Asian American Survey, which is nationally representative in geography and demographic characteristics. The survey data contains 4,787 samples from phone interviews conducted in 11 languages based on the interviewee's preference. 72% of total interviews were conducted in landlines and 28% were done in cellphones. Interviews were conducted between August 10th to September 29th in 2016. One of the language options in NAAS (National Asian American Survey) data is Mandarin, which helps when interviewing Chinese residents who speak limited English. The survey also oversampled Asian Americans, which allows comparison among detailed ethnic groups. Out of 2,760 Asian American respondents, there are 364 Chinese Americans. Among them, 296 are Chinese immigrants (foreign-born population). Table 2.1 shows the breakdown of respondents by race/ethnicity and nativity.

*Forms of Political Participation*

In NAAS (National Asian American Survey) 2016 pre-election survey, there are 9 survey items related to political participation, which include online political discussion,

|                  | Foreign-born | Native-born | N     |
| ---------------- | ------------ | ----------- | ----- |
| Black            | 35           | 485         | 520   |
| Latino           | 230          | 284         | 514   |
| White            | 28           | 472         | 500   |
| Pacific Islander | 115          | 295         | 410   |
| Filipino         | 281          | 94          | 375   |
| Vietnamese       | 343          | 27          | 370   |
| Asian Indian     | 309          | 55          | 364   |
| Chinese          | 296          | 68          | 364   |
| Korean           | 322          | 40          | 362   |
| Hmong            | 285          | 40          | 325   |
| Japanese         | 51           | 259         | 310   |
| Cambodian        | 274          | 16          | 290   |
| Total            | 2,569        | 2,135       | 4,704 |

Table 2.1: Respondents by Race/Ethnicity and Nativity

|                                | (Yes) | (No) | N (missing data) |
|--------------------------------|-------|------|------------------|
| Online political discussion    | 57%   | 43%  | 3                |
| Political contribution         | 15%   | 85%  | 4                |
| Contacting elected officials   | 7%    | 93%  | 3                |
| Work on community issues       | 17%   | 83%  | 4                |
| Attend protest/demonstration   | 7%    | 93%  | 3                |
| Sign a petition                | 18%   | 82%  | 8                |
| Attend public meetings         | 12%   | 88%  | 4                |
| Charitable donation            | 42%   | 58%  | 4                |

Table 2.2: Have you been. . . in the past 12 months? (among Chinese immigrants)

political contribution, contacting elected officials, working on a community issue, attending a protest/demonstration, signing a petition, attending a public meeting, and charitable donations. Each item is a binary variable that measures whether the respondent has engaged in that activity in the past 12 months. The seventh Item is about boycotting products or services for political reasons. I dropped this item due to an extremely skewed distribution between this item and other independent variables. For all 8 items, "don't know" and "refused" are treated as missing data, because they consist less than 0.5% (N = 1) of total Chinese immigrant samples.

*Independent Variables: Demographic Characteristics & Resources*

To test the hypothesis on demographic characteristics, I will include five key variables: age, LEP (limited English proficiency), years since migrated to the US, income, and educational attainment. LEP was defined as someone who speaks another language other

than English at home and speaks English less than "very well". Instead of measuring English proficiency as an ordinal scale, I constructed a binary measurement (1=LEP) that distinguish the LEP population from the rest. The main reason to recode this variable is that I hypothesis that English proficiency would have a significant impact on political participation when moving from the LEP population to the rest. In other words, among Chinese immigrants who speak English "well" or "not at all", there is no statically significant difference in their propensity to engage in politics. In NAAS 2016 dataset, there are two items related to income level. The first one breaks down income into seven levels (1=less than $20k, 2=$20-30k...7=more than $250k). Among total Chinese immigrant respondents, 7% answered "don't know" and 21% refused to answer. This makes a total of 28% (N = 83) of the nonresponse rate. The second item asked respondents who refused to answer or said, "don't know". In this question, the income level is broken down into 3 categories (1=less than $50k, 2=$50-100k, and 3=more than $100k). By combining responses from both items and rescale income into three levels, the final variable has a nonresponse rate of 24% (N=71).

With respect to education, the original survey item is a six-point scale (1=no schooling completed...6 graduate degree). I recode the measurement into a four-point scale "less than high school" (23%), "high school or GED" (32%), "some college or associated degree" (12%), and "BA degree or higher" (31%). Interviewers terminated the survey if the respondents refused to answer this question, thus this variable has no missing data. There is no direct measure for the length of residency in the United States, and the final variable is calculated based on the year of migration, which assumes that the respondent

has been living in the US since they initially arrived. In this dataset, 74% of Chinese immigrants migrated from China before 2000, 17% came between 2000 and 2010, and 9% arrived after 2010. There is no missing data for this variable. The length of residency in the US might be confounded with cohort effect or generations, thus I included age in my model to address that. It is re-coded from the birth year variable in the dataset. Finally, I constructed two variables related to the English accent. The first variable is ordinal, which measures the respondent's English accent on a four-point scale from none (35%) to very strong (28%). The second variable is binary with 1 being a very strong English accent. Four items are index when generating the final civil skill score (0-4), which includes written a letter, planned/chaired a meeting, given a speech, and contacted an elected official. Respondents can answer either "yes" or "no" to each item. The final score aggregates all items and forms a scale ranging from zero (answered no to all four items) to four (answered yes to all four items).

*Key Variables: Source of Political Information*

Seven items related to source for political information including magazines, TV, radio, newspaper, social media/Internet, community organizations, and family/friends, which are measured in a five-point scale (0=not at all...4=a great deal). There is no direct measure for WeChat usage among Chinese immigrants from NAAS 2016, but the social media/internet usage can serve as a proxy because the portion of Chinese immigrants who don't use WeChat is statistically small enough to be ignored. That is to say, for a Chinese respondent, a higher score in this value means they use the Internet, Facebook, Twitter, or WeChat in a great deal for political information. This is not a perfect measure, as it does not separate traditional social media such as Facebook and Twitter from ethnic social media such as WeChat. However, it distinguishes other sources of political information such as TV and newspaper. Furthermore, all seven variables are measuring these sources regardless of the language of the content. For example, high usage of the TV for political news includes both English and ethnic TV channels. Generally, the model would include all these independent variables as well as confounding factors. However, after carefully evaluating my independent variables, I noticed that many of them are highly correlated. Thus, I will test each of these variables in separate models.

*Political Efficacy*

In the NAAS 2016 pre-election dataset, there are two items related to political efficacy internal and external. Both items were measured based on their level of agreement towards a statement. The first item serves as an indicator for internal political efficacy:

"Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on" (1=strongly disagree…4=strongly agree). The second statement is "Public officials don't care much what people like me think", which serves as an indicator for external political efficacy. In order to standardize the scale, both sources of political information and internal political efficacy are recoded to a 0 to 1 scale when testing mediation effect. Answer "don't know" is recoded as missing data (16.7% N=24).

**Findings**

*Demographic Characteristics and Resources*

Using weighted logit to model each form of political participation, I found that demographic characteristics are significantly associated with political participation in specific circumstances. Holding other variables constant, the length of residency in the US is negatively associated with the likelihood of contacting an elected official. Every decade of increase in the total length of residency in the US, a Chinese immigrant's likelihood of contacting an elected official decrease by 24% (*significant at 90% level). Every ten years of growth in a Chinese immigrant's residency in the US. The likelihood of participation increases for community work (+39%*), signing a petition (+36%*), attending a public meeting (+42%*) and making a charitable donation (+42%***). Age is only significantly associated with the likelihood of signing a petition. The relationship is negative and every one-year increase in age, there is a 2% significant decrease in the likelihood to sign a petition. Compared to English proficient Chinese immigrants, the ones with limited English proficiency are 75% less likelihood to join political discussion online or make a political contribution. LEP (Limited English Proficiency) is not significantly associated with other

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forms of political participation. Educational attainment has significant association with three forms of political participation: online discussion, political contribution and attending public meetings. All three relationships are positive. Income level has positive and significant association with five forms of political participation, which are online discussion, political contribution, contacting an elected official, working on a community issue and signing a petition. Finally, civic skill is not significantly associated with any forms of political participation among Chinese immigrants.

*Sources of Political Information*

Table 2.3 indicates the odds ratio from the weighted logit models using each form of political participation as the dependent variable. Accordingly, source of political information and usage intensity are not significantly associated with Chinese immigrants' likelihood to make a charitable donation. For online discussion, the intensity of using TV, social network (family and friends) and social media for political news are positively associated with the likelihood to post a political comment online. The degree of using community organization for political news is positively associated with the likelihood to make a political donation among Chinese immigrants. It increases the probability by 38% (with 99% confidence interval). Social media/internet is the only source of political information that is significantly associated with the probability of contacting an elected official among Chinese immigrants. Every unit of increase in the degree of social media usage, we can expect to see an 42% increase in the probability to contact an elected official. The result is statistically significant. The same pattern is absent among Asian Indian and Filipino immigrants when

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|  | Discussion | Donation | Contact | Community | Protest | Petition | Public meeting | Charity |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Magazines | 1.042 | 0.916 | 1.631 | 1.353 | 1.421 | 1.603 | 0.942 | 1.038 |
|  | (-0.191) | (0.279) | (0.481) | (0.324) | (0.590) | (0.392) | (0.189) | (0.175) |
| Newspaper | 1.238 | 1.259 | 1.132 | 1.801** | 1.038 | 1.682** | 1.269 | 1.114 |
|  | (-0.194) | (0.344) | (0.368) | (0.354) | (0.304) | (0.332) | (0.282) | (0.169) |
| TV | 1.518** | 1.608 | 1.198 | 1.647* | 1.899* | 1.734* | 1.660* | 1.237 |
|  | (-0.245) | (0.449) | (0.398) | (0.384) | (0.594) | (0.375) | (0.392) | (0.176) |
| Radio | 0.997 | 0.902 | 0.745 | 1.313 | 0.959 | 1.192 | 1.010 | 1.179 |
|  | (-0.154) | (0.200) | (0.175) | (0.263) | (0.235) | (0.224) | (0.244) | (0.164) |
| Social media | 1.444* | 1.533 | 2.478*** | 1.196 | 1.654** | 1.211 | 1.390 | 1.231 |
|  | (-0.231) | (0.412) | (0.598) | (0.228) | (0.319) | (0.199) | (0.288) | (0.186) |
| Family/Friends | 2.229*** | 1.363 | 0.978 | 1.613 | 1.288 | 1.810** | 1.695* | 1.405 |
|  | (-0.432) | (0.342) | (0.226) | (0.394) | (0.260) | (0.377) | (0.444) | (0.263) |
| Community org | 0.998 | 2.225** | 0.838 | 1.704* | 1.461 | 1.497 | 1.915** | 1.192 |
|  | (-0.171) | (0.668) | (0.253) | (0.432) | (0.329) | (0.311) | (0.424) | (0.205) |

controlling other demographic characteristics; (* p¡0.05 ** p¡0.01, *** p¡0.001) (N=Chinese immigrants)

Table 2.3: Odds Ratio of Weighted Logit Models

running the same model. Similarly, social media usage for political information is positively associated with the likelihood to attend a protest (25%**).

Television is another important source for political information when it comes to attending an offline protest. Social media and internet usage are also important for Filipino immigrants (26%*), but not so for Asian Indians. The substantive interpretation of the results are as follows. Among Chinese immigrants, receiving more political information from social media matters in their likelihood of contacting an elected official compared to other

sources of political information. This pattern is also unique among Chinese immigrants, as similar results are absent from the other two top Asian immigrant groups: Asian Indian and Filipino. This can be explained by step-by-step training articles on WeChat that translate and guide Chinese immigrants to express their political views to the right elected officials. Social media usage also matters in offline protests and online political discussion. The result is significant and increase the likelihood of participation by 20% in average.

*Internal Political Efficacy & Social Media Usage for Political Information*

To further investigation how social media usage increase the probability of political participation, the second model will include internal political efficacy score. Controlling for demographic characteristics and internal political efficacy, social media usage for political information is positively associated with the probability of doing community-based work, attending a protest/demonstration and charitable donation. However, the association between social media usage and the chance of attended a protest in the past 12 months is not statistically significant. Meanwhile, internal political efficacy is positively associated with the likelihood a Chinese immigrant attended a protest in the past year, and the result is robust at the 95% confidence interval. Meanwhile, internal political efficacy is a function of social media usage. Thus, exposure of political information on social media (including WeChat) would increase the chance of protest participation when it boosts one's internal political efficacy. This explains that long period of political silence among Chinese immigrants, even among those who have enough social capital and are more politically resourceful. Migrated from a less democratic political system, it is natural that Chinese immigrants may have low self-belief in their ability to understand and engage in American
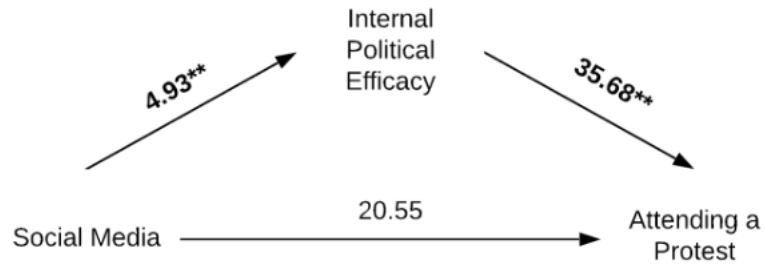
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Figure 2.1: Mediating Effect of Internal Political Efficacy

politics. As they get more exposure to political information, especially when ones from WeChat translated and interpreted in culturally competence ways, their internal political efficacy increases. This is then positively associated with the likelihood to take a costly political action such as attending a protest or demonstration.

However, Chinese immigrants can differ in various characteristics when they arrive in the United States. Accordingly, social media usage may increase internal political efficacy disproportionally among some groups. Two key factors can shape a Chinese immigrant's initial political efficacy: English accent and income. Theoretically speaking, having a very strong accent may discourage the Chinese immigrant to express their political view and even further suppress their enthusiasm to participate in other forms of political activities. Additionally, as resource-based model pointed out, income level is a proxy of a Chinese immigrant's financial capacity to engage in politics. Graph 2.2 shows the marginal effect of social media usage on internal political efficacy when interacted with accent and income. Social media usage can boost internal political efficacy among Chinese immigrants who make more than $50,000 a year. Meanwhile, having a very strong English accent can diminish the

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effect social media usage on internal political efficacy. In other words, Chinese immigrants who speak English with some or no accent may have a stronger faith in their capacity to engage in politics as their exposure of political information from social media increases.
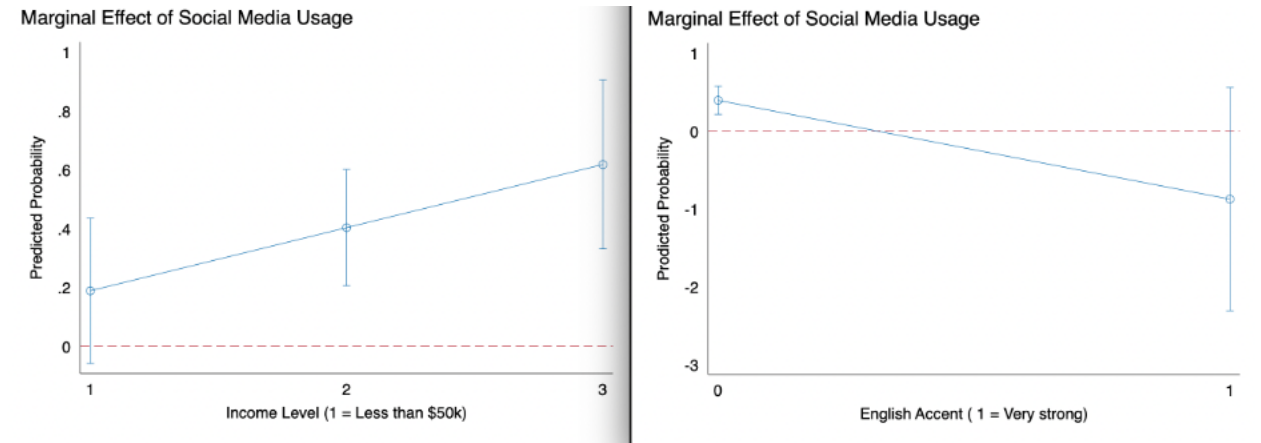
Figure 2.2: Effect of Social Media Usage on Internal Political Efficacy

**Robustness Check**

*Missing Data*

To ensure that the result is robust, the results must hold when addressing the missing variables. As table 2.2 shows, there are 3-4 missing observations from each item of political participation and majority of them overlaps with each other. Moreover, key independent variables such as social media usage and internal political efficacy also contain missing data. Controlling for other variables, the T test of missing data between political participation (attending a protest) and social media usage is statistically significant. Accordingly, it is important to impute the missing value and test the robustness of the model. Assuming that the missing data happens completely at random (MCAR), I use the multiple-imputation method (Rubin, 2004) to address the nonresponse data in the survey. More specifically, I will use the multiple-imputation chained estimate, which impute the

|                            | Odds Ratio | SE    |
| -------------------------- | ---------- | ----- |
| Age                        | 0.947***   | 0.009 |
| Residency                  | 1.061***   | 0.015 |
| LEP                        | 0.297***   | 0.096 |
| Education                  | 1.364*     | 0.199 |
| Income                     | 0.149***   | 0.051 |
| internal Political Efficacy | 3.729**   | 1.866 |
| Social Media               | 2.82*      | 1.336 |
| Constant                   | 1.786      | 1.236 |

*Controlling other demographic characteristics; (\* p<0.05 \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001)*

Table 2.4: Logit Model with Missing Data Imputed

variable with the fewest missing data first. Since the key findings are derived from the model for attending a protest, this robustness check focuses on this model. As shown in table 2.4, the results are slightly different from the original results, but same findings can still derive from it. More importantly, the association between the likelihood to attend a protest and international political efficacy remains the strongest among other variables. Graph 2.3 also shows the k density of social media usage score between observed data and imputed data.

*Reverse Causality*

Another question that can raise from the analysis is the possibility of reverse causality. For instance, politically active Chinese immigrants may use social media more intensively for political information. Existing methods that address reverse causality includes two main approaches. First, using panel data, the model can include independent variable lagged for a few periods. Ideally, that would address the potential reverse causality issue between social media usage and political participation, since the likelihood of political participation in time t cannot affect the level of social media usage in t-2. However, the NAAS data in 2008 have interviewed a different group of respondents. Another statistic strategy is instrumental variable that has no reverse casual issue with the dependent variable. I argue that internal political efficacy acted as the instrumental variable between social media usage and political participation. Individuals with minimal internal political efficacy may not participate in politics at the first place. Moreover, experiences with political engagement are more likely to increase external political efficacy than the internal one as activists interacts more with elected officials and government agencies. Finally, the

strongly relationship between social media usage and political engagement is strong enough to encourage further examination on the role of WeChat in the second chapter, and more robust mechanism could reveal through a mixed method approach.

*Alternative Explanation*

What else can explain the phenomenon among Chinese immigrants if social media usage and internal political efficacy are not the reasons? One potential explanation is that offline organizations serving Chinese community has moved online, which adopted more effective outreach and mobilization strategies than before. Therefore, these actions increased the internal political efficacy, which then boosts the likelihood of political engagement. Another possible explanation is the level of information homogeneity. Individuals who spent more time on political information on social media are more likely to surround themselves with other like-minded people. This kind of network homogeneity increases their internal political efficacy as they surround themselves in this political information bubble. This then increases their possibility of political engagement. Finally, as the main ethnic social media for Chinese immigrants, WeChat helps to organize a large number of Chinese immigrants living a wide range of neighborhoods, who are otherwise costly to reach. Accordingly, information itself might not be the reason for such heightened political enthusiasm. Chinese immigrants who use social media for political information intensively are more likelihood to engage in politics because their cost to act is much less. Social media and the internet in general have provided more political resources to otherwise less resources immigrants and therefore increase the propensity to engage (Anduiza, Gallego, & Cantijoch, 2010; Hargittai & Shaw, 2013).

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**Conclusion**

This chapter investigated three key areas that explains Chinese immigrants' growing political activism: demographic characteristics, source of political information and internal political efficacy. Using weighted logit model and testing on various forms of political participation, the results show that demographic characteristics matter in some forms of political participation, but mainly for variables related to socio-economic status. Source for political news have positively associated with the probability of political engagement. Among which, social media usage remains the key variable for political activity such as attending a protest. Further examination shows that this strong association is mediated through internal political efficacy. More importantly, this mediating effect is only significant among Chinese immigrants who don't have very strong English accent and have at least $50k annual income.

# Chapter 3

# What Role Does WeChat Play in the Political Mobilization of Chinese American?

**Background: A Virtual China Town**

Today, one in twenty immigrants in the United States are Chinese Americans, and more than half of them have limited English proficiency (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). How do they navigate their new American life? In the recent decade, WeChat becomes the go-to social media app for most of them. It is the app to communicate with people in the U.S. and China, a centralized place to exchange goods and information, and an informal place for political news. There are four key features of WeChat. First, a WeChat user can exchange messages with anyone who is their WeChat friend. Second, they can create chat groups and invite their friends to join. These friends can then invite people from their

network to join the group. Members within the same chat group can exchange messages. Third, WeChat user can share their life moments and it is only visible to users who they directly add as their friends. In other words, chat group members are not always friends, and their communications may be limited to the chat group. Additionally, individuals, organizations, and firms can open public accounts and share articles with WeChat users through subscriptions. Users can leave comments under each article, although the visibility of these comments varies by public account editors. The messaging function allows users to transfer money, and exchange texts, audios, images, and documents. This allows Chinese immigrants to access and exchange information about jobs, resales, and services without the need to understand English (Guo, 2017). It is safe to say that WeChat has formed a virtual Chinatown among Chinese immigrants in the United States, serving its members in all aspects of their lives. In a chat group, members come from different social networks who join the group via existing members' invitations. With that said, members of the same group are not always WeChat friends unless they actively visit a member's profile and request to connect. Within the group, each member can comment or share articles from WeChat public accounts. If a member wants to speak to another member directly in the chat, they can also use the "@" function to mention them. This study will focus on chat group messages but explaining the full ecosystem of the WeChat platform will help to set the context of the role chat group plays among WeChat users. This paper will examine how external and internal information influence WeChat user's sentiment towards one of the most salient issues in the community: affirmative action.
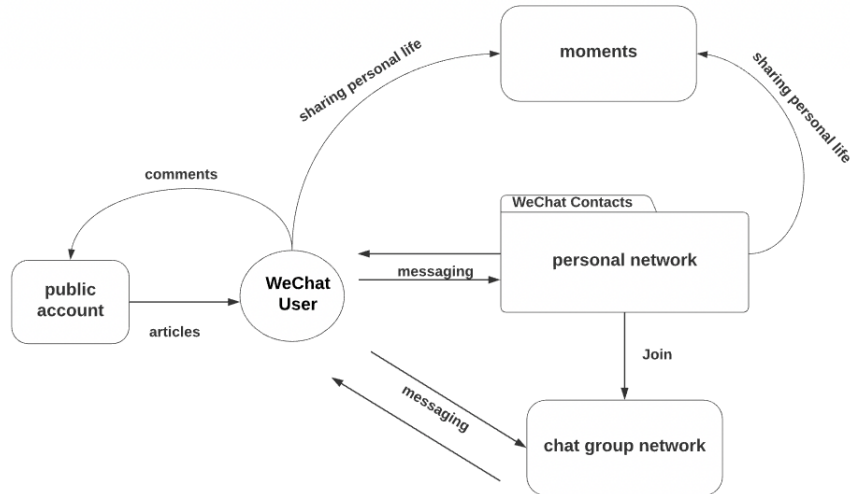
Figure 3.1: WeChat Key Features

## Media Influence on Public Opinion

*Agenda Setting*

Building on theory of public opinion, from Lippmann (1923), scholars have examined the agenda-setting power of media and organizations. Traditionally, the general public relies on news organizations to access political information, which anchors them into thinking about specific issues. Early research on agenda setting pointed out that the public's belief of issue importance comes from media (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1948). McCombs and Shaw (1972) supported this notion by comparing issue priorities between voters and news outlets. More recent research illustrated a more nuanced approach. There are a few communication channels for an individual, where news from media transfer to its audience, and the audience then share this news to people in their social network (Katz & Lazarsfeld,

1966; Weimann & Brosius, 1994; Yang & Stone, 2003). Moreover, scholars have pointed out that media's agenda-setting power has diminished with the growth of alternative social media platforms and news outlets (Williams & Delli Carpini, 2004). Scholars have also predicted that the audience can influence news content as the level of competition among media platforms intensifies (Chaffee & Metzger, 2001). With the overwhelming amount of news sources, individuals can surround themselves with selective information of their preferences (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008). All these points to a potential competing mechanism between traditional mass media and ethnic social media among Chinese immigrants.

*Framing Effect*

The agenda-setting power of mass media only drives the public to think about particular issues. They can still have opposing opinions if not convinced by the news story or angered by the coverage. News stories use different frames to influence public opinion and sentiment. The framing strategy of Mainstream news means the news story talks about an issue in a certain way, which can activate a type of judgment based on a specific value system. Accordingly, it is integral to understand how the framing effect works, and it is the key to understand the influence mainstream news has on Chinese immigrants. Political scientists, sociologists, and social scientists from other disciplines have examined the framing effect in different social and political lives. Entman (1993) defined framing as a way to present selective information that forms a particular perception of reality. More importantly, framing triggers a type of value and belief system independent of personal material self-interests (Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2015). Lippmann (1923) set the theoretical foundation explaining this type of value-based system as a cognitive shortcut that helps

individuals form opinions based on limited information. Converse (2006) also argued that the same subject shifts their opinion on the same issue when asked repeatedly. For instance, one frame for affirmative action could argue that this issue is about educational inequality. Another post could talk about affirmative action as a debate between preferential admission policy and merit-based admission, which lead to the emphasis on fairness to high-performing students.

Although there is no research on Chinese immigrants' political sentiment toward affirmative action, existing empirical studies on similar issues have offered promising results. The following studies all pointed out that the framing effect can significantly shift public opinion on the same issue. Although the framing effects might vary by partisanship and other pre-treatment conditions, the result is still significant in various policy areas. Chong and Druckman (2007) argued that the framing effect depends on the "quality" of the frame and its effectiveness to culturally resonate with individuals. The following two studies on immigration policies offer further nuances. First, the study by Knoll, Redlawsk, and Sanborn (2011) finds that the framing effect interacts with precious policy preferences and issue salience. They find that the "earned citizenship" and "deportation" frame are significant among Republican Iowa Caucus-goers when issue importance is high (Knoll et al., 2011). Second, the survey experiments on 2007 and 2010 CCES (Cooperative Congressional Election Study) show that the frame for immigrants without legal status affects public attitudes toward restrictive immigration policy. Amnesty refers to the forgiveness of violations, which sends a stronger signal about the legality of immigration. When framing

| | WeChat Circulated Articles | | N/A |
|---|---|---|---|
| Mainstream News | both positive | conflicting sentiment+ | Mainstream Media Dominance |
| | conflicting sentiment* | both negative | |
| N/A | WeChat Dominance | | Control Group |

*positive WeChat news with negative media news

+negative WeChat news with positive media news

Table 3.1: Four Scenarios of External Influence on Public Opinion

the solution to undocumented immigration as offering amnesty, respondents are more likely to support restrictive immigration policy (Haynes, Merolla, & Ramakrishnan, 2016).

**Research Questions and Hypotheses**

Existing research on news and public opinion pointed out the agenda-setting and framing effects of news organizations. Mainstream news media can shape public opinion on issues, especially among those who use them as their main source of information. This may not always be true for Chinese immigrants for a few obvious reasons. Half of the Chinese immigrants have limited English proficiency, making it difficult for them to understand political issues on the news. Moreover, they often require additional historical information or contextual explainer to fully understand a controversial issue. If we assume that everyone seeks information shortcuts to form a world view (Lippmann, 1923), then Chinese immigrants would prefer news articles written in Mandarin from WeChat over CNN or New York Times. Accordingly, WeChat news at least plays a competing role in shaping Chinese

immigrants' political sentiment. If this is a competition of influence, how do mainstream media and WeChat influence public opinion among Chinese immigrants?

There are four possible scenarios as listed in table 3.1. When both sources of information cover the same issue, they compete over their influence on Chinese immigrants. When there is only one source discussing the issue, it has a dominant influence on public opinion. Finally, when both sources of information are quiet on an issue, issue opinion is solely based on an individual's interests and value-system. When the mainstream media and WeChat have competing dominance on public opinion, their sentiment towards the issue can vary. When both sources share positive sentiment towards an issue, the message gets amplified which leads to more positive sentiment among Chinese immigrants. For Chinese immigrants who depend more heavily on WeChat information, Mainstream media coverage can further validate their beliefs. For Chinese immigrants who have access to both news sources, WeChat circulated articles further explain the issue and strengthening their beliefs. Thus, I hypothesis that consistent sentiment towards an issue between the mainstream media and WeChat will have a strong persuasive effect on Chinese immigrants' sentiment on the same issue.

*H1: When the mainstream media and WeChat articles share similar sentiments towards an issue, Chinese immigrants in the same chat group are more likely to hold consistent sentiment like their sources.*

Similarly, when both sources are negative about an issue, it is more likely to witness negative sentiment on the same issue among Chinese immigrants, due to the same

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mechanism of persuasion. When the mainstream media and WeChat articles share conflicting sentiments towards the same issue, regardless of the composition, Chinese immigrants are more likely to be negative about the issue. Partially, this negative sentiment is rooted in deep confusion about the inconsistency. More importantly, for Chinese immigrants who rely heavily on WeChat sources, they are more likely to have a negative sentiment on the issue when seeing the mainstream media disagreeing with articles they saw on WeChat. This leads to the second hypothesis where Chinese immigrants' sentiment is more likely to be negative.

*H2: When there is conflicting sentiment between the mainstream media and WeChat, Chinese immigrants in the same chat group are more likely to have a negative sentiment on the same issue.*

If the issue is not salient on WeChat or mainstream media, Chinese immigrants may have their own opinion on the issue derived from their value-system or personal interests. This can vary among individuals based on their demographic characteristics and political ideology. Thus, in the model specification section, I will control this variation before testing the hypothesis. Moving from the scenario of competing dominance to a single dominance model, the single source of information could dominant Chinese immigrant's opinions about an issue.

*H3: When the mainstream media or WeChat becomes the only source of information on affirmative action, that source dominants the public sphere. Consequently, Chinese immigrant's sentiment toward affirmative action will align with that source.*

Besides news coverage, active members in the chat group also play an important role in shaping other member's sentiments. On one hand, an active member's message may have a stronger sentiment (this can be either positive or negative) than other members. On the other, an active member's message can impact the way how other members respond to the discussion. Accordingly, hypotheses 4 and 5 are about influencer's role on Chinese immigrants' sentiment toward an issue, which is independent from news coverage.

*H4: Controlling for other factors, the influencer's message has stronger sentiment than other members. H5: Within a 60-minute time window, more influencer's involvement in the debate will trigger a stronger sentiment among other members.*

**Affirmative Action: A Salient Issue among Chinese Americans**

Compared to other immigrants in the United States, Chinese immigrants pay closer attention to elite university admission as this is a proven path to success in China (PKU, 2018). In China, the prestige of the university determines the competitiveness of the student in the job market, while the university's enrollment decision is solely based on the score. Thus, it is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for students to change the socio-economic status of their families especially for those from rural and mountainous areas. The merit-based system has been accepted by students and their parents as a fair way to access educational resources. In 2018, more than 9.7 million students are taking the college entrance exam, but only 3,047 students were enrolled in Peking University, one of the top schools in China (PKU, 2018; *Gaokao exams to determine fate of 9.75m examinees - Global Times*, n.d.). Therefore, the competition is intense, and students can lose the opportunity by being one point short. Accordingly, parents are very sensitive to educational policies

that could potentially violate their perceived fairness of the system. Parents have protested against the preferential policy for ethnic minority students believing that it offers favorable treatment towards ethnic students (Xie, 2016). A similar argument has been made among Chinese immigrants for affirmative action in America. According to a survey conducted by the Chinese Academy of Social Science, more than 91.47% of parents of high school students agreed that the "merit point" system needs to be reduced to store the fairness for the college entrance exam (Ke, 2014). Between November 2019 to November 2020, numerous pieces of legislation are proposed on affirmative actions, which leads to fierce debate among many WeChat chat groups. Meanwhile, both WeChat sources and the mainstream media had a relevant high engagement in this issue, which produces enough sample on all four possible compositions of influence competition. Thus, this study uses affirmative action as the issue and measure sentiment on affirmative action in a WeChat chat group created for political discussion.

**Data & Methodology**

*Messages on affirmative action using topic modeling*

The sample data is collected from one WeChat chat group called dedicated for political discussion between Dec 13, 2019, to November 11, 2020. There are 67,650 total messages posted by 184 active WeChat users. The majority of the messages are written in Mandarin Chinese with less than 5% English content. This study wants to understand how influencers, internally shared news and external media news affect this group's sentiment towards affirmative action. Similar to other social media chat groups or rooms, the topic of the discussion shifts over time, thus this study will classify messages into topics using the

Latent Dirichlet Allocation model. This model has the following assumptions. The term document refers to different terms, where

$$\omega = \omega_1, \ldots, \omega_N \quad and \quad \omega_i \in \{1, \ldots, V\} \quad for \quad all \quad = 1, \ldots, N$$

(Hornik & Grün, 2011). There are three key steps that the LDA model uses to determine the topic classification of each document. First, the term distribution $\beta$ is a Dirichlet distribution, which is a discrete probability distribution with a fixed number of possible outcomes. Second, the proportion $\theta$ of the topic distribution for each document also fits a Dirichlet distribution of $\alpha$. Finally, for each of the N number of words in $\omega_i$ we choose a topic $z_i$ with a multinomial distribution of proportion $\theta$, and a word $\omega_i$ from a multinomial probability distribution is conditioned on the topic $z_i$. Thus, the likelihood of $\omega_i$ belonging to a specific topic can be modeled as $z_i : p(\omega_i \mid z_i, \beta)$, where $\beta$ is the term distribution of the topics and contains the likelihood of a word occurring in each topic (Hornik & Grün, 2011). Using the maximum likelihood estimation of the LDA model, the optimal topic $z_i$ should maximize the log-likelihood of all documents for parameter $\alpha$ and $\beta$. In other words, the probability of a document belongs to a specific should be as large as possible, while its probability belonging to other topics should be as little as possible.

This means, if the topic $z_i$ is too small, then documents might be related to multiple topics with similar likelihood. On the other hand, $z_i$ cannot be too large, as the proportion of the topic distribution without increasing the topic sorting probability. Since there are z number of topics, this study uses harmonic mean to measure the overall performance
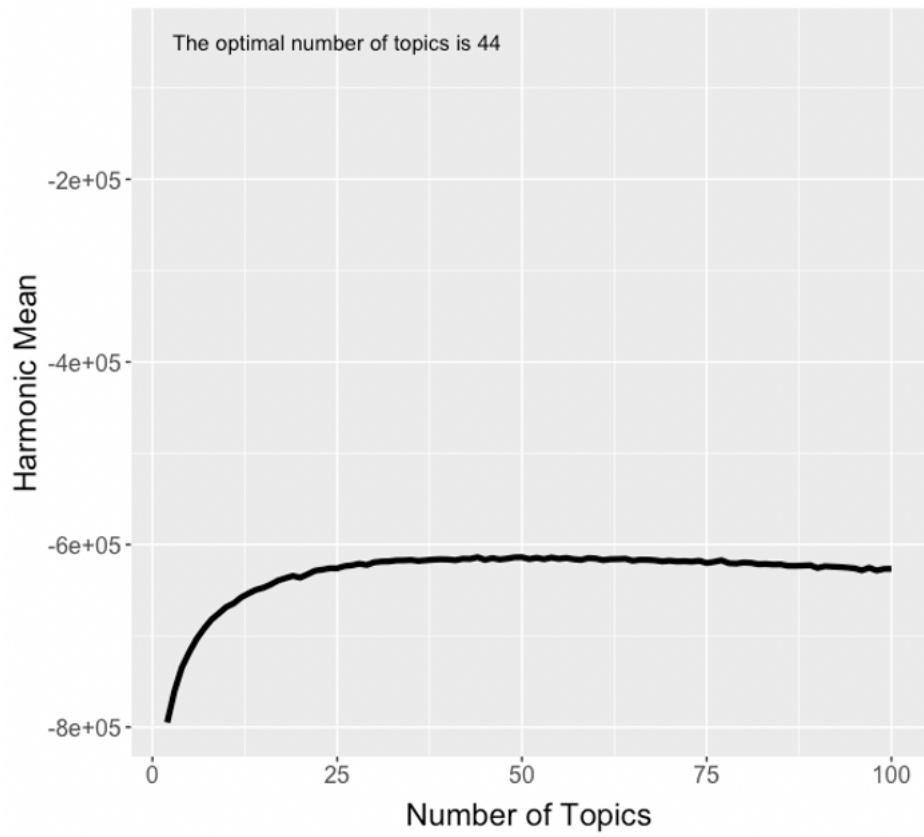
Figure 3.2: Optimization of Total Topics

*"Harvard", "Ivy League", "affirmative action", "education", "school", "enrollment", "admission", "student", "university", "GPA", "SAT", "ACT", "哈佛", "教育", "爬藤", "常春藤", "名校", "学校", "平权", "录取", "种族配额", "学生", "上学", "prop 16", "Proposition 16", "ACA5", "16 号提案", "SCA5", "反 aa", "反 AA", "affirmative action", "ACA", "议案"*

Figure 3.3: Search Terms for Affirmative Action

of the topic classification. After 99 iteration using $z_i$ value between 2 to 100, the graph below shows that the best total topic for my sample data is 44. After inspecting the term frequency, topic 18 and 1 includes key terms such as "college admission", "Anti-AA" and "ivy league schools". In this study, I will filter the chat group messages to these two topics.

*Direct Messages and Related Discussions*

A Further inspection of topic 1 and 18 reveals that some messages are indirectly related to the discussion on affirmative action. To capture even more direct comments and add as a robustness check, I also constructed an alternative definition of Affirmative Action debates where messages contain keywords that are directly related to affirmative action. Since these messages are bilingual, search terms have both English and Chinese versions. The topic modeling methods selected 4,869 messages from the total 67k messages in the chat group, and the search term methods extracted 843 non-duplicated records. I will use this alternative definition to test the validity and accuracy of the topic modeling approach. If the results are consistent between the two samples, it will further strengthen
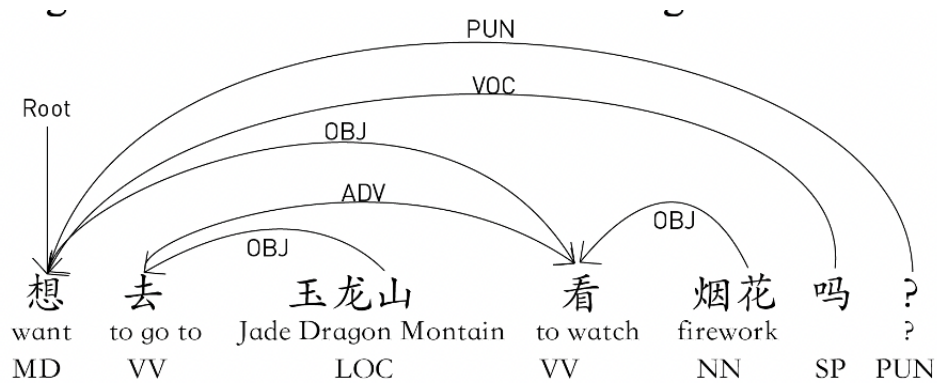
Figure 3.4: Chinese Sentence Processing

the argument from the findings. If the results are inconsistent, then the study will reveal the difference between direct sentiment towards affirmative action among these groups and related sentiment on affirmative action debates.

**Dependent Variable**

*Message Sentiment*

To measure WeChat user's sentiment towards affirmative action, this study constructed a sentiment score for each message. There are a few approaches to Chinese sentiment analysis. One common initial step is to parse each sentence into word segments. Figure 3.4 shows how the sentence is parsed into word segments. This is a unique step for the Chinese language, as a sentence consist of characters and each word could be a segment of one character or multiple characters. For instance, the sentence below shows how a nine-character sentence is parsed into six segments. The second common step is to remove stop words based on the Baidu stop words dictionary. There are two approaches in the third step: Machine Learning-based approach and the knowledge-based approach

(Peng, Cambria, & Hussain, 2017). The first approach uses supervised machine learning based on labeled data that are manually coded. The second approach can be divided into two branches. The first branch uses a lexicon method that extracts emotion words from text based on an emotion dictionary such as the emotion dictionary from Baidu, the most powerful search engine in Mandarin Chinese (B. Liu, 2012). Alternatively, a knowledge-based method explores "syntactic rules and other logics" (Peng et al., 2017). The accuracy of the machine learning method depends on the quality of the training dataset and the test data.

In this research, many messages are one-sentence comments or short phrases. The machine learning method uses probability-based classification and kernel-based approaches such as the naïve Bayesian model to predict the sentiment of new text based on a labeled database. To calculate the similarity between the labeled data and the testing text, the testing text needs to have enough information to build a document term matrix. Accordingly, the machine learning approach will not produce quality sentiment analysis for the dataset of this study. Alternatively, lexicon and logic-based methods can handle shorter text. this study will use a mix-method that utilizes both lexicon and word relationships. First, this study parses each sentence into word segments and extracts negative and positive sentiment words from each message and aggregates them by days. The word parsing technique is a unique linguistic requirement for the Chinese language, as each sentence consists of words, and each word can be the combination of one or more characters. Thus, the study uses the Jieba segmentation (Qin & Wu, 2019) method to identify "character groups" called

word segments. This approach will remove all stop words, external links, pronounces, and punctuation.

Second, I will use the "cnsenti" Python package and HowNet word relationship database for the sentiment analysis. HowNet is an online relationship file between lexicon of Chinese and equivalent English terms, for the sentiment analysis (Dong, Dong, & Hao, 2010a). This database is popular among scholars in Chinese natural language processing than the word-based dictionary, as this file combines the two branches of knowledge-based sentiment analysis (Dong et al., 2010a; L. Liu, Lei, & Wang, 2013; Xianghua, Guo, Yanyan, & Zhiqiang, 2013). The lexicon contains positive and negative emotion vocabulary, which counted the total number of negative emotion words and positive emotion words. For instance, for the sentence containing words: "right", "agree" and "support", then the absolute positive score is 3 and the negative score is 0. Afterward, I readjust the sentiment scores by weighted the score by word position. This means the same emotional term "support" will yield depending on its position in a sentence. For example, "I support this idea" will get a higher positive sentiment score than the sentence "I heard about her support on this issue".

Finally, the sentiment score is weighted by adjective terms in the same sentence. For example, as shown in Table 3.2, the phrase "I am soooo happy" will get a higher sentiment score than "I am happy". Sometimes, a reverse term is used in front of an emotional word. For instance, by adding "rarely" in front of the word "nice", the meaning of the phrase changed. Thus, "rarely nice" becomes part of negative terms. Thus, the final

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| Example | positive words | negative words | Positive score | Negative score |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| I am very glad about this. | | | | |
| This is wonderful! This is soooo great! Nobody should feel awful after this news. | glad, happy, wonderful, great | awful | 27 | -10 |
| That is fake! They're rarely nice. | nice | fake | -3 | 5 |

Table 3.2: Example-Weighted Emotion Score

$$\text{Positive emotion score} = f(x) = -1^{\gamma_1} * \sum_{i=1}^{k} P \tag{1}$$

$$\text{Negative emotion score } f(y) = -1^{\gamma_2} * \sum_{i=1}^{g} N \tag{2}$$

$$\gamma = \begin{cases} 1, \textit{if there is a counterterm near the emotion word} \\ 0, \textit{if there is no counterterm near the emotion word} \end{cases}$$

**k = total number of positive emotion words; g = total number of negative emotion words**

$$\textit{Sentiment Score} = \frac{f(x)}{f(x) + f(y)} * \omega * S \tag{3}$$

$\omega = \textit{weight for word position in a sentence}$

Figure 3.5: Construction of final sentiment score

Figure 3.6: Concept Relation Net of word "doctor"

negative sentiment score for the third sentence is 5+3=8. However, it is worth noting that HowNet determines the weights of different adjective terms and the value of different word positions and relationships between words. As shown in figure 3.6, HowNet accounts for 16 types of word relationships such as synonymy, antonymy, attribute-host relationship, and part-total relationship (Dong, Dong, & Hao, 2010b).

**Independent Variables**

*Mainstream Media Coverage*

Externally, political scientists, as well as scholars in other disciplines, have emphasized the framing effect of media, which can shape public perception of issues (Entman, 1991; Druckman, 2001; Kahneman, 2011; Ferree, Gamson, Rucht, & Gerhards, 2002). One way to measure the framing effect of news articles is the capture the overall sentiment. Using the Nexis Uni database, I extracted all English political news from newspapers and

news transcripts that contain "Affirmative Action" anywhere in the news between November 12, 2019, to Nov 2, 2020. Furthermore, I excluded international news and limit it to news stories in the United States. This search term yield 257 articles. Duplicated news articles referenced by other mainstream media outlets are preserved as this variable accounts for issue salience. In other words, when two mainstream media cover the same article, it magnifies the sentiment. I then extracted the main body text from each news article and calculated the total number of emotion words using the AFINN wordlist (F. \. Nielsen, 2011). Similar to the sentiment score formula used for the dependent variable, this final score measuring the sentiment of each news article ranges between 0 to 1, where 1 indicates the extreme positive sentiment and 0 as the most negative sentiment. For days when there is no news coverage, the sentiment score is 0.5 as the sentiment is neither positive nor negative. In general, it takes time for media coverage to influence public opinion, thus the model will include variables with a lagged effect. For members of WeChat chat groups, may not actively seek information from the mainstream media or have no access to them. Accordingly, the influence of news stories on affirmative action today might impact the WeChat world 2 weeks later.

*Internally Shared Articles*

Internally, chat group users also circulate online content and the emotion of those articles also affects the sentiment of messages that are part of that discussion. WeChat users are exposed to news coverage from the mainstream media, on the other hand, they also receive shared links among in-group members. These links contain various sources, among which four top categories are WeChat public account articles, news, blogs, and social media

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content. Using URL links shared in the chat group, I collected these articles' titles and main body content by scrapping the HTML nodes from each webpage. I then filtered all content by title and kept articles that contain affirmative action related keywords in titles. Out of 839 news articles shared in that chatgroup, there are 47 news articles related to affirmative actions. Similarly, I started with 5,651 WeChat public account articles and kept 122 articles that are about affirmative actions. The sentiment of each article is then calculated using similar processes as message sentiment scores. Theoretically, the final sentiment score can range between 0 to 1, but for the actual data in my dataset, the highest sentiment for internally shared articles is 0.87. A value of 0.5 indicates that there is no article, or the article is neither positive nor negative. Different from external news coverage, internally shared articles can reach chatgroup members right away and may impact the sentiment of messages that occurred within the same hour. I started with a matrix with all positive combinations of messages and influencer content and subset the data to combinations where the influencer's content was posted no more than an hour ago. For each message, I counted the total number of influencer content posted within an hour before any given message. More importantly, I excluded the influencer's message when counting the total messages from other influencers.

*Internal Chatgroup Influencers*

Independently from shared links to articles, active chat group members can also influence other users' sentiment towards an issue. How to identify influencers from the chatgroup? Influencers are a small set of chatgroup members who are frequently mentioned by others in their messages using the "@" function. In a chatgroup with almost two hundred

members, discussion among multiple subgroups can happen simultaneously, using the "@" function makes any direct communication between two users possible. Accordingly, chat group members who get the most mention from other users are more influential, and their sentiment towards affirmative action may have an impact on other members. Using this logic, I identified influencers that whose total mention ranked at the top 95th percentile. They also contributed over a quarter of total messages on affirmative actions. For each message, I defined a 50-minute window as a timeframe where prior influencer's messages may have an impact on the message's sentiment. Similar to the coding for internally shared content, I excluded influencer's messages when counting their recipient of influencer content.

**Model Specifications**

I applied the OLS model to examine factors that can affect the sentiment of a message about affirmative action. In this study, the unit of analysis is the message. At the group-level, each member's willingness to express their emotion can vary, which means that a sentiment score of 0.8 can be a major sentiment boost for one member but a very common emotion for another. Accordingly, I subtracted each message's sentiment with the message sender's average sentiment score. The final dependent variable measures the change of sentiment in messages compared to that particular sender's average sentiment score. There are three levels of influence on the change of sentiment. First, at the message level, I control for the total number of sentences and words to make sure the shift in sentiment is not affected by message length. Additionally, I control the identity of the message sender (being an influencer) and the day of the message (weekend). Second, at the group level, an internally shared article about affirmative action can frame the issue in a

$$\Delta \boldsymbol{message\ sentiment} = \ \boldsymbol{\beta_0} + \boldsymbol{\beta_1 news\ sentiment} + \boldsymbol{\beta_2 shared\ article\ sentiment} +$$
$$\boldsymbol{\beta_{12} news\ sentiment} * \boldsymbol{shared\ article\ sentiment} + \boldsymbol{\beta_3 total\ influencer\ messages} +$$
$$\boldsymbol{\beta_4 influencer} + \boldsymbol{\beta_5 weekend} + \boldsymbol{\beta_6 total\ words} + \boldsymbol{\beta_7 total\ sentences} \qquad (4)$$

Figure 3.7: model for change of message sentiment

certain way affecting group discussion in the next hour. Similarly, an influencer's comments on affirmative action can impact the sentiment of the message. Finally, at the national level, mainstream media covers news stories about affirmative action whenever the issue became salient. The sentiment of these news articles would also impact members of the chatgroup. Different from articles directly shared in the chatgroup, mainstream news has a lagged effect on chat group messages. As illustrated in figure 3.2, when setting the lagged period to 17 days, the adjusted R squared value is the highest. This means more of the variation on the dataset is explained by the OLS model.Among these variables, two elements can frame the issue of affirmative action for the chat group members. They are the sentiment from mainstream media news and sentiment of articles shared in the group. Thus, in the OLS model, I created an interactive term between news article sentiment and internally shared article sentiment, as I hypothesized that the framing effect of mainstream media depends on chat group members' accessibility to alternative sentiments.

**Empirical Results**

Table 3.3 shows the OLS models for sentiment change of messages. Model 1 defines affirmative action related messages based on related keywords and model 2 defines affirmative action related messages using topic modeling. In both models the direction of
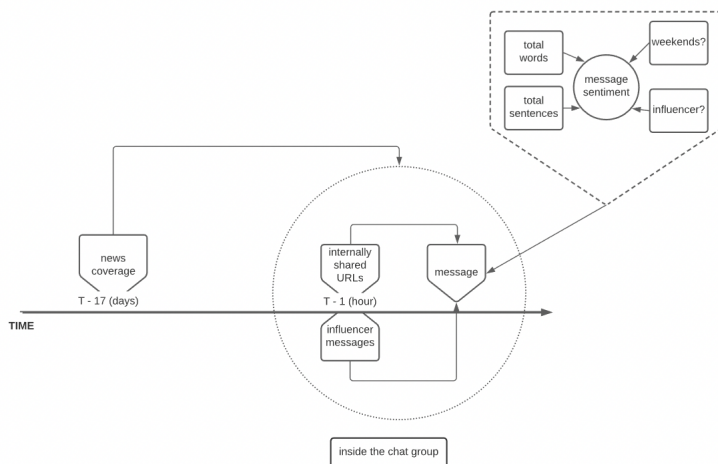
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Figure 3.8: Changes of Member's Sentiment Toward Affirmative Action

the effect is consistent. at the message level, holding other variables constant, the total number of words has a small positive and significant effect on the sentiment change of messages. On the other hand, and the total number of sentences is negatively associated with the sentiment change of messages. Influencer content has a negative impact on sentiment change, which is small yet significant. For the binary variable "identity", there is the incongruence of its effect on sentiment change. For direct messages about affirmative action, while holding other variables constant, there is no statistically significant difference in sentiment change between an influencer's message and another member's message.

The results from both models indicate that there is an interactive effect between the sentiment of news and the sentiment of shared articles. When the two information sources share opposing sentiments, there is a significant decrease in the message's sentiment. It

| | sentiment change direct discussion | | sentiment change related discussion | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Predictors | Estimates | p | Estimates | p |
| (Intercept) | 1.21** | 0.023 | 0.20** | 0.030 |
| Sentiment of news | -2.51** | 0.016 | -0.54*** | 0.007 |
| Sentiment of shared articles | -2.35** | 0.024 | -0.38** | 0.033 |
| Sentiment of news*Sentiment of shared articles | 5.02** | 0.014 | 0.89** | 0.022 |
| Influencer Contents | -0.01** | 0.019 | -0.00*** | 0.001 |
| Days of the week | -0.02 | 0.335 | 0.00 | 0.669 |
| words | 0.0003*** | 0.001 | 0.01*** | 0.001 |
| sentences | -0.01*** | 0.001 | -0.09*** | 0.001 |
| identity | -0.03 | 0.240 | 0.03*** | 0.001 |
| Observations | 939 | | 6823 | |
| R2/R2 adjusted | 0.032/0.024 | | 0.271/0.270 | |

*Notes: the sentiment score of news story is lagged by 17 days to optimize the R-squared value

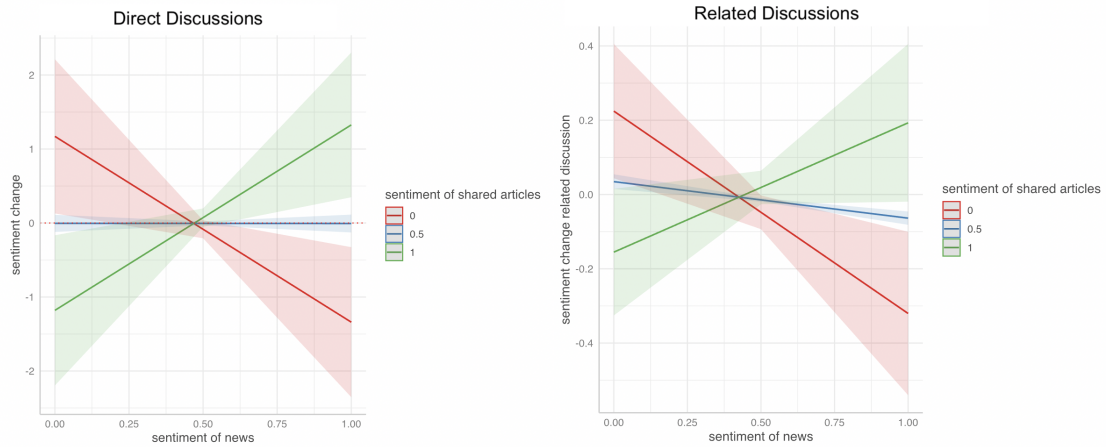Table 3.3: OLS Models for Sentiment Change on Affirmative Action

Figure 3.9: Change of Message Sentiment on Affirmative Action by News Sentiment and Shared Article Sentiment

is also worth noting that the effect size for model 1 is much larger than model 2. This is consistent with our hypothesis. Comparing to related discussions about affirmative action, direct comments on affirmative action have a stronger association with affirmative action related articles and news. As shown in figure 3.9, when the sentiment of shared articles is extremely positive and the mainstream media news' sentiment is negative, there is a significant decrease in message sentiment on affirmative action. When the sentiment of shared articles is extremely negative, but the mainstream media news' sentiment is positive, there is also a significant decrease in message sentiment from the mean. On the other hand, when the news' sentiment and the shared articles' sentiment are consistent, both negative and both positive, there is a significant increase in the message's sentiment. Finally, when media news's sentiment towards affirmative action is neutral (score = 0.5), internally shared articles have no impact on the message's sentiment.

**Discussion**

The empirical evidence has pointed out that both external and internal news affect Chinese immigrants' sentiment toward affirmative action. While some findings supported the hypothesis, others lead to more questions for future research. For H1, this study found mixed results. Controlling for other factors, when both mainstream news and internal "news" have a positive sentiment towards affirmative action, we can expect a member's sentiment to affirmative action to be more positive. However, when both external news and internal "news" are negative, the sentiment of a message is more likely to decrease. This pattern may be unique among Chinese immigrants, especially on the affirmative action issue. Both the supporting side and opposing side use the same framing message for affirmative action: fighting for equality and fairness in public education. However, the supporting side views affirmative action as a way to address racial inequality and uplift the disadvantaged communities, while the opposing side views fighting affirmative action as a way to address admission bias against Asian students and supporting their hardworking and deserving children.

The empirical findings on competing sentiment also supported H2. When media speaks positively about affirmative action while internal "news" is negative, members are more likely to share more negative emotions of affirmative action. The reverse is also true as member's sentiment towards affirmative action turns more negative. This finding reveals the sentiment of Chinese immigrants when their sources of information conflict with each other. As the emotion of distrust and anger surface in their discussions. More
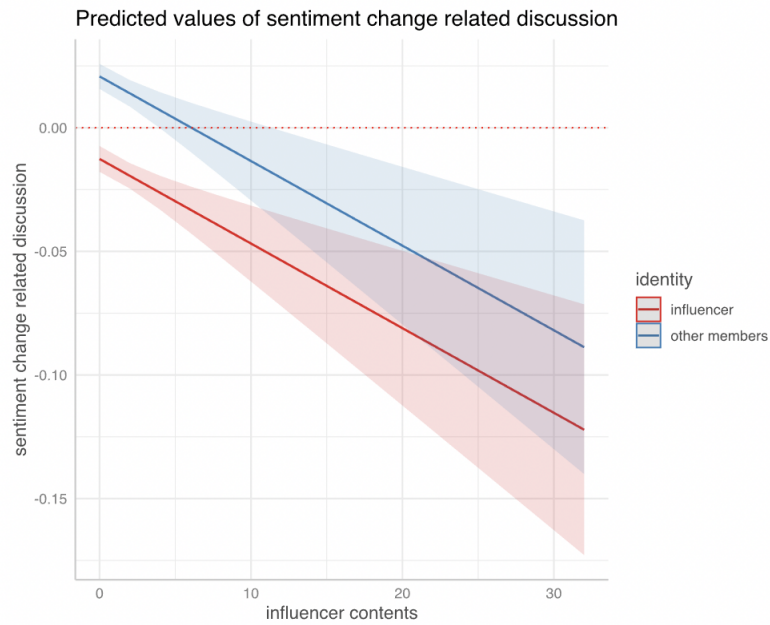
Figure 3.10: Sentiment Change by Message Sender Identity

importantly, for direct discussion on affirmative action, the conflicting message among news includes positive mainstream news and negative internal "news", and negative mainstream news and positive internal "news". For a related discussion on affirmative action, if the conflicting news means negative media news and positive internal "news", then there is no significant change in member's sentiments. When positive media news conflicts with negative "internal" news, member's sentiment is significantly more negative. This indicates that in a broader discussion about affirmative action, chat group member's sentiment is more aligned with internal "news".

The third hypothesis is not supported by the findings in this study. When one news source has dominant coverage, there is no significant change in member's sentiment. This is true for both direct discussion and related discussion on affirmative action. When looking at the situation among related discussion, where there is no strong sentiment on internal "news", as media sentiment towards affirmative action turns more positive, member's sentiment becomes more negative. The result is also statistically significant. It is unclear if this is because of the agenda-setting power of the mainstream media. However, it seems to suggest that mainstream media has a stronger influence on Chinese immigrants when internal "news" is absent or lacks strong sentiment. It is worth noting, however, the mainstream media failed to persuade Chinese immigrants in this chat group. Instead, it triggered the reverse effect. This means the more mainstream media talks about positive things regarding affirmative action, the more negative Chinese immigrants feel about this issue.

Finally, to test H4 and H5, I included the message sender's identity and influencer message intensity in the model of sentiment change. The results suggest that the roles of chat group members differ. Some active members of the chat group are influencers whose message is negatively associated with sentiment change in messages. Furthermore, an influencer's message about affirmative action is more negative compared to other members of the chat group. This is only true for the broader discussion related to the issue. As shown in figure 3.10, for a broader discussion on affirmative action, influencers' engagement in the discussion is negatively associated with messages' sentiment change. However, this

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mechanism is absent among influencers. That is to say, one influencer's sentimental change towards affirmative action is not associated with other's influencers' participation in the discussion. Prior research on social media activity also supported this finding. Ba, Li, Wang, and Li (2017) theorized that some WeChat users are influencers, while others are information seekers, and they expect others to tell them what to think and how to think. Influencers act as the doorkeeper who selectively shares opinions and information to the group (Ba et al., 2017). The null effect among direct discussion also indicates the limit to this door-keeping effect. When narrowing the discussion from a broader related debate to direct comments, influencers have less control over member's sentiments.

# Chapter 4

# Political Engagement Beyond the Cheap Talk: A Closer Look at Patterns of Campaign Contribution Among Chinese Americans

Existing scholarly debate on the impact of minority population share in a district is not resolved. On one hand, scholars argued that living in a "majority-minority" district would empower the minority group in engagement in politics. This argument defines a "majority-minority" district as a district where the population share of a minority group exceeds 50%. The theoretical argument is that as the co-racial or co-ethnic popu-

lation share increases, a minority group can collectively determine the fate of an election, which encourages them to learn about policies and participate in campaign contribution and voting. However, through empirical research, another school of scholars has also shown evidence that the so-called "majority-minority" district can cause election participation to drop among minority groups and may even dilute the political influence of the same group in the surrounding neighborhoods. Now, with the heightened interest and engagement of ethnic social media like WeChat, the online virtual community adds another challenge to this puzzle. If people were politically mobilized online, will the neighborhood characteristics such as the population share still matter? This is especially unclear for a campaign donation of the presidential election, as the fund can be redistricted nationally and help the candidate regardless of the location of the voter. More importantly, the previous chapter measures how WeChat can influence political debate and sentiment, which might be seen as "cheap talk" and have no substantive impact on the election outcome. Thus, this chapter will dive into the nuances of contribution pattern, and measure how Chinese Americans and other Asian American ethnic groups react to news coverage of affirmative action and whether neighborhood characteristics still matter for the groups.

**Existing Literature**

*The Concept of Majority-Minority District*

The idea of a majority-minority district defines an area where the population size of a minority group reaches a certain point to make their political interests come true; many existing studies use 55% to 65% as that turning point (Cameron, Epstein, & O'halloran, 1996). The term minority can represent a wide variety of categories such as race, ethnicity,

gender, age, and income. In this study, I will focus on reviewing prior work on the majority-minority theory that measures the political outcome of racial/ethnic minorities. For Asian Americans, the identity of being a racial minority is often coupled with their immigration background. According to Higham (1984), most immigrants do not arrive in the destination country with a fitting identity that matches the existing racial/ethnic classification. In other words, there is no escape from the apparent feeling of being an outsider both internally and externally. A later study by Portes and Rumbaut (2001) further validated this point by emphasizing the identity conflict between immigrants and native-born citizens. Furthermore, external social, cultural, and political forces create the norm of racial order that is vividly felt by immigrants (Kim, 2000). From the perspective of the dominating social group, such as the White American in the U.S., an influx of immigrants could be a threat to the mainstream culture (Citrin, Reingold, & Green, 1990). The debate on their ability to learn English and assimilate to American culture also leads to more resentment to immigrant-populated areas (Huntington & Dunn, 2004). A study by Craig and Richeson (2014) discovered that as the minority population share increases, otherwise unaffiliated White Americans lean more heavily toward the Republican party and conservatism. Four years later, the two scholars co-authored with Rucker and published another piece, where they also highlight the increase of perceived racial threat among White Americans due to the rising minority population (Craig, Rucker, & Richeson, 2018). There are a few reasons why the immigrant population matters in the political context. First, the population share of immigrants plays a passive role in the local political decision-making process regardless of their citizenship status (Hero, 2010). Second, minority group plays into a complex

coalition with other minority groups in different capacities depending on the policy agenda (Browning, Marshall, & Tabb, 1997).

Besides policy outcomes, scholars have found mixed results between minority population share and minority voter turnout. Brace, Handley, Niemi, and Stanley (1995) found that voter turnout has both increased and decreased in majority-minority districts. However, this study uses election results from the same year, which may suffer from a year-specific effect. Another study done by Barreto, Segura, and Woods (2004) used 3 general election data between 1996 and 2000. They found that living in a majority-Latino district is positively associated with the likelihood of Latino election turnout (Barreto et al., 2004). Some scholars like Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, and Waters (2002) also investigated the generational shift, where they found how living in a multicultural city like New York gave a complex and integrated identity to 2nd generation immigrants. Accordingly, the research reminded us of the importance of the population share of other minorities when there is no clear majority in a neighborhood. In agreement with that, Crul (2016) argued that immigrant assimilation is a complicated process affected by various elements such as other ethnic groups, generations, and socioeconomic factors.

All these studies discussed measured the efficacy of a majority-minority district from the perspective of that district. However, another school of scholars paid attention to the political representation of the surrounding districts and worked beyond the limitation of election data using advanced methodologies. Using a nonlinear estimation, the

scholars simulated districting strategies and test what approach can maximize minority representation (Cameron et al., 1996). They found that a majority-minority district would dilute the political power of the group in surrounding districts and dividing the minority groups into different districts in an area can maximize their "substantive" representation (Cameron et al., 1996). In a later study by Epstein and o'Halloran (1999), they also argued that majority-minority districts lead to more polarized politics harming coalitions and other political efforts in representing the group's political interests.

*Economic Factors and Political Engagement*

While the population share of the neighborhood is important, other economic factors can shape Asian American's level of political engagement. Socioeconomic status can shape the level of political engagement as it determines an individual's resourcefulness (DeSipio, 1998; Cho, 1999). Along the same line, Brady et al. (1995) suggest that time, money, and civic skills are three key factors of the model for political engagement. Combining with the literature on majority-minority districts, this means that both minority population share and social capitals are the necessary but not sufficient condition of political participation. However, highly motivated individuals with low income may express their engagement through activities that are more time costly. At the same time, busy and financially comfortable voters may choose to make a political contribution.

*News Sentiment and Political Contribution*

In the era of social media and a 24/7 news circle, people may never run out of content to follow. However, the role mainstream media news plays can vary among

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different Asian American groups. Knoll et al. (2011) found that media's framing effect on the audience depends on an individual's previous issue preferences and issue salience. Although the study used a sample from Iowa, it highlighted the importance of not treating media effects in a vacuum. Accordingly, this study will incorporate news sentiment towards affirmative action, an issue deeply cared about by Chinese Americans, and test its influence among other Asian American groups. A successful frame needs to tell a convincing story that activates pre-existing values and beliefs, as illustrated by Haynes et al. (2016) in their study of framing undocumented immigrants as amnesty.

**Political Engagement in the Form of Campaign Contribution**

In the previous chapters, I focused on political discussion and offline protests as forms of political engagement. However, nothing is a more direct reflection of a voter's political interest than their vote choice. Since that information is highly confidential, the next thing to it is campaign contributions. A voter's campaign contribution reflects their level of support or enthusiasm for the candidate. For instance, an active Biden supporter on social media may not eventually vote for him, or not even vote at all. The comments can be motivated by many reasons, and do not always reflect an individual's sincere preference. Similarly, an individual who joined a protest may shift to another candidate last minute because of the candidate's policy platform on other issues that conflicts with their value. The most unique thing about campaign contribution is that it is the costliest form of political engagement. Collectively, highly active donors from certain racial or ethnic groups will have a stronger influence on their candidates, a strong and direct mechanism that other forms of political engagement may not have. Although existing literature does not address

individual campaign contributions, their research laid the framework to examine the patterns of campaign contribution.

First, as the majority-minority district debate illustrated, the saturation of the minority population is worth investigating. On one hand, results are suggesting a higher population share motivates minority engagement (Barreto et al., 2004). On the other, scholars have argued that it dilutes the political influence of surrounding areas and creates more racial resentment among white Americans (Cameron et al., 1996). Although many of these analysis uses political jurisdiction such as district, the idea may apply to even smaller geographic boundaries such as zip code. This is especially evident, as the racial threat comes from the perception of the minority population. In this context, neighbors living in the same zip code may serve a similar function as a district. The term majority-minority district describes the characteristic of jurisdiction when a minority population reaches a certain amount to make a difference in the election. When using zip code as the geographic boundary, the collective meaning in election outcome no longer exists. Thus, this study will test the relationship between campaign contributions and the population share of the minority group.

Second, financial factors are important to control, as that could determine the level of monetary ability when it comes to campaign contributions. The average housing value in a neighborhood comprehensively reflects various aspects of the resident's economic capacity from household income to socio-economic status. Thus, this study will include

neighborhood housing value as a proxy for an individual's socioeconomic status. Additionally, I also include the population share of highly educated residents as another important characteristic of the neighborhood, as wealth alone does not explain sufficiently the level of political enthusiasm. Finally, campaign contribution can also be a function of news coverage on important issues. To make it consistent with the previous chapter, I will continue using affirmative action and news sentiment scores to measure mainstream media influence on Asian Americans.

Using the OLS model, this study will dive into the nuances of campaign contribution among Asian Americans incorporating factors such as in-group population share, news issue sentiment, neighborhood characteristics, and individual employment status. The analysis will start with a comparison between Asian Americans and other racial groups, followed by an in-depth study of detailed Asian American groups. After that, I will focus on Chinese Americans and divide the sample by candidate to draw a more accurate picture of their patterns of contribution in 2020.

**Hypothesis**

As the literature on majority-minority suggested, the demographic characteristics matter when it comes to political engagement. Some scholars suggest that as a minority group's share of the population in a district increases, members of the minority groups are more likely to engage in politics. Intuitively, this theory may apply to political contribution. As a key form of political engagement, campaign contribution is a more accurate reflection of electoral preferences as it is free of other common measurement errors from survey-based

measurements. At the individual level, the amount of political contribution reflects the level of support the contributor has for the candidate. From an aggregated level, electorates in majority-minority areas have a stronger shared political voice signaled through their contributions. Accordingly, I hypothesis that electorates who live in an area with a larger population share are more likely to donate a higher amount to their preferred candidate during a presidential election. For immigrants, these neighborhood characteristics can be particularly important as their environment can shape their political assimilation process.

*H1: Controlling other variables, the electorate's population share is positively associated with the amount of political contribution.*

In addition to the population composition of a neighborhood, other neighborhood (zip code) characteristics such as educational attainment and housing value may also shape the level of political contribution. At the individual level, voters with higher educational attainment are more likely to engage in political activities such as putting a yard sign, join an offline rally, and making a campaign donation. When a larger portion of highly educated electorates lives in the same neighborhood, aggregately these heightened political activities also encourage all residents to pay closer attention to politics. For instance, by seeing campaign messages from neighbors on their yard signs and bumper stickers, residents in that area are more likely to make a political contribution to their preferred candidates. Thus, as the share of residents with bachelor's degrees (or more) increases in a zip code, residents are more likely to make a higher amount of political contribution through direct or indirect influences. The level of saturation among highly educated residents could be a general factor or an in-group factor. This means, for Chinese Americans, perhaps only the

overall educational attainment level of all Asian Americans in the neighborhood matters. Thus, this paper will test both hypotheses for general neighborhood educational attainment and racial group-specific educational attainment. However, it is important to note that financial capability and spending habits are important factors when talking about any form of donation. Accordingly, electorates living in high home value neighborhoods are more likely to be financially comfortable, making it easier for them to make a campaign contribution when other conducive factors are present.

*H2a: controlling other variables, the electorate's neighborhood educational attainment level is positively associated with their amount of political donation.*
*H2b: controlling other variables, the electorate's neighborhood in-group educational attainment level is positively associated with their amount of political donation.*

*H3: controlling other factors, the electorate's neighborhood home value is positively associated with their campaign contribution.*

In addition to the neighborhood effect, news sentiment towards salient issues can also shape political contributions. As analyzed in the previous chapter, news sentiments towards affirmative action influence Chinese American's sentiments towards affirmative action in a chat group especially when they are congruent with shared articles within the WeChat ecosystem. Similarly, news sentiments towards affirmative action may potentially affect the level of enthusiasm on campaign contribution among Chinese electorates. When news coverage talks negatively about affirmative action, it may trigger similar emotions among electorates who care about this issue causing more fear or anxiety. This means that more

negative news sentiments towards affirmative action could translate into a higher amount of campaign contribution.

*H4: More negative news sentiments towards affirmative action led to more political contribution among electorates, especially among groups who care more deeply about this issue.*

**Dependent Variable**

The key dependent variable in this chapter is the amount of campaign contribution in the 2020 presidential election. This data is gathered from the federal election commission individual contribution records. In this study, I included contribution data registered under each presidential candidate's presidential campaign committees. Most 2020 datasets are organized monthly, including refunds and earmarks. For 2019, some records are archived quarterly. During the entire campaign period for the 2020 presidential election, any eligible individual who donated more than $200 in the full cycle will be registered in the database provided by FEC (Federal Election Commission). This dataset also includes each donor's name, address, employer, occupation, contribution amount, and date. To aggregate these records by unique donors I summarized the total political contribution in this two-year cycle. More importantly, any refund to the donor will be marked as an active value therefore aggregating them up reflects the most accurate cumulative total contribution for each electorate. Based on the 2020 zip code crosswalk file, each address in the record is converted to a census zip code tabulation area. This allows other variables on demographic characteristics to merge by zip code tabulation area code.

**Independent Variables**

*Neighborhood Characteristics*

Since the individual contribution records from FEC do not contain demographic characteristics, this study uses neighborhood characteristics to control some of the demographic variations among electorates due to their zip codes. As hypothesized earlier, neighborhood characteristics can influence the electorate's campaign contribution. Among these, the in-group racial or ethnic composition of the neighborhood is of great importance. This study uses the latest 2019 American Community Survey data from the Census and calculates the percentage share of the group in the neighborhood (zip code tabulation area). For instance, the population composition for Chinese Americans is the share of the Chinese American population among the total population in the same zip code tabulation area. Chinese American is defined as Chinese (except Taiwanese) alone regardless of Hispanic origins. The same formula is applied to other Asian American ethnic groups in this chapter. A similar formula applies to the population share of different racial groups using the racial group definition as race alone regardless of Hispanic origins. Different from other racial groups, the White population share accounts only for Non-Hispanic whites.

The second variable is about the overall educational attainment among residents of the neighborhood, which is measured by population share with bachelor's degree or more. In this definition, 2-year college and associate degrees are excluded from the count. Moreover, in this formula, the total population uses the Census standard definition for measuring educational attainment which defines as the group aged 25 or older. for in-group educational

attainment, the variable measures the population share of people with bachelor's degrees or higher in the targeted racial group. For instance, for each of the Asian American ethnic groups, the in-group educational attainment variable will measure the percentage share of Asian Americans (alone) who have bachelor's degrees or higher.

The third variable is the neighborhood home value index from the Zillow housing database. The index calculates the housing value in the zip code weighted by housing market appreciation. Moreover, the seasonally adjusted housing value is also chained based on seasonal price fluctuation in the past 2-year period (Zillow.com, 2020). This home value index provided by Zillow reflects the 35th to 65th percentile housing price of that zip code in each month. Among total individual contribution records in this study, 98.8% of them have a matching home value index merged by zip code. This weighted and seasonally adjusted home value of a zip code can also serve as a proxy for the overall neighborhood quality of the zip code with factors such as average household income, schooling availability, and average housing construction and amenity quality. Residents in a more "expensive" neighborhood have more financial capability to afford the mortgage or rent (if they are not homeowners). Schooling availability and high-quality building structure and amenity quality also attract households with higher income to reside. Suspecting a non-linear association between the home value and campaign contribution, I use the natural log of the home value index as the final variable included in all my models.

*Media Influence*

In addition to the demographic characteristics of the neighborhood, external mainstream media could also influence campaign contributions. When taking a deeper dive into the sample of Chinese American donors, I incorporate mainstream media sentiment towards affirmative action and test how media shapes Chinese Americans' campaign donations. The same model specification is applied to other major Asian American groups for comparison. Consistent with the measure of the previous chapter, I extracted mainstream news articles related to "Affirmative Action" and "Asian Americans" between the same period as the 2020 presidential campaign and measured the sentiments of each article based on the afinn emotion lexicons (F. Å. Nielsen, 2011). I then calculate the ratio of positive emotion words among total emotion words regardless of sentiments. The final score ranges between zero to one, where zero indicates no positive sentiment and one shows only positive emotions. If there is more than one article per day, the final score is a weighted aggregation by word counts of each article.

*Partisanship*

In addition to the demographic characteristics and media sentiment, partisanship is also a key factor shaping any forms of political activities. This study will address the partisan influence by identifying the targeted candidate for each contribution. The FEC (Federal Election Commission) contribution records in the 2020 general election show that voters are consistent with their candidate of choice in contribution decisions. Although that campaign selection may vary between the primary and the general election, voters didn't switch the camp. In the 2020 general presidential election, I included a binary variable

to measure Biden's campaign and Trump's campaign. In the following models, I will use Trump supporters as the baseline and measure the effect of being a Biden supporter.

**Model Specification**

This study will use the OLS model and measure patterns of campaign contribution as a function of both individual-level and zip code level characteristics. The unit of analysis for models without news sentiment score is aggregated total contribution at the individual level. When adding daily news sentiment score towards affirmative action, the unit of analysis becomes daily contribution at the individual level. All models will include self-reported employment status as a controlling variable and use the status unemployed as the baseline. The models will also include a binary variable for candidate choice using Trump as the baseline. For independent variables on neighborhood characteristics such as co-ethnic population share, the distribution of the value rescaled and normalized to easy interpretation. Each value is subtracted by its mean and then divided by its standard deviation. One standard score increase of the final rescaled variable moves the original variable from one standard deviation below the mean to one standard deviation above the mean. All three neighborhood characteristics variables include co-ethnic/co-racial population share, population proportion of the group with B.A. or higher degrees, and Zillow home value index. The dependent variable is not normalized. One unit change represents one dollar. This is because I am more interested in understanding the absolute dollar amount impact of these predictors than how they change the distribution of the contribution within the 2020 general election records. Since the news sentiment score has unique meanings in news articles' emotions toward affirmative action, this variable is not normalized like the others.
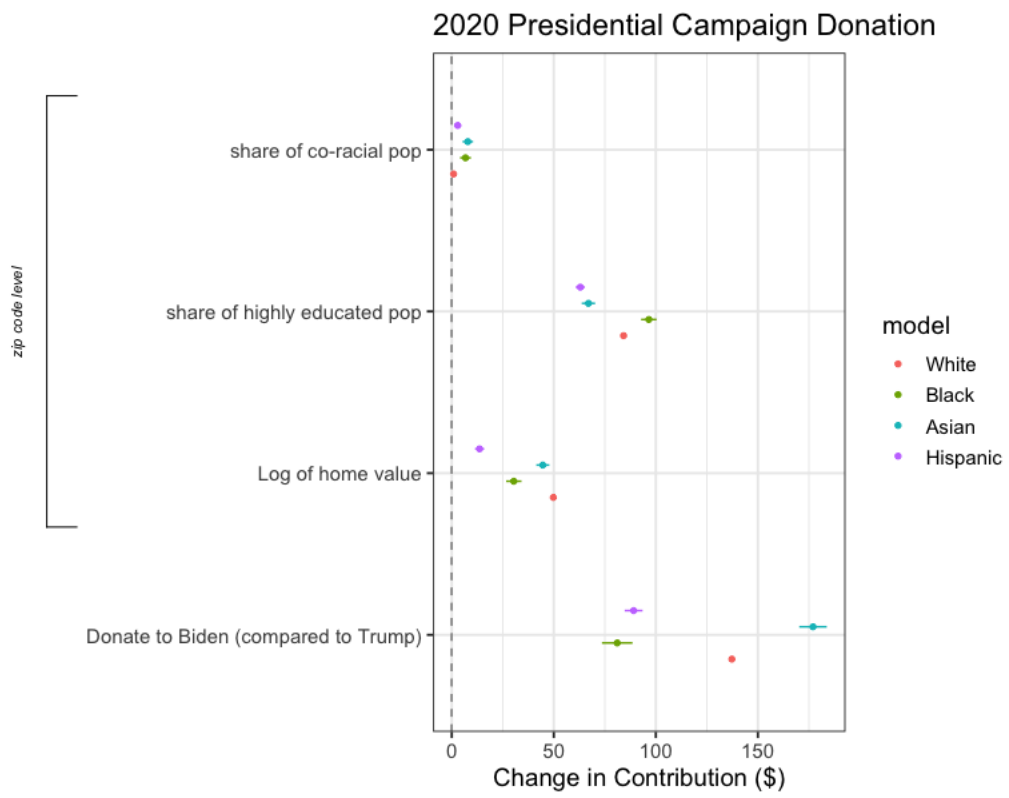
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Figure 4.1: Predicted Change in Campaign Contribution by Racial Groups

**Patterns of Campaign Contribution by Racial Groups**

Among all four racial groups, the effect of partisanship is consistently significant. Controlling other variables, Biden supporters' term to donate more than Trump supporters in the 2020 general election. Among which, Asian American has the largest partisanship effect. Moving from Trump supporters to Biden supporters, Asian American donors are expected to donate more than $177. The same is true for the co-racial group population share in the donor's zip code. However, the result for non-Hispanic white is neither significant nor substantial. Controlling for other variables, moving from one standard deviation below the mean to one standard deviation above the mean, we can expect less than $1 increase in campaign contribution among White donors. For the same unit change in co-racial population share, the expected campaign contribution increases by $6.7 for Black, $7.9 for Asian, and $2.9 for Hispanics. In addition to the co-racial population share, educational attainment and home value show interesting results in this model. First, the saturation of highly educated people in a zip code affects the campaign contribution amount of all groups regardless of racial background. One standard score increase, we can expect campaign contribution for Asian to increase by $67. Second, home value in the donor's home zip code has a curved linear association with a campaign contribution, since the log value had a significant and positive influence on the dependent variable. As shown in Table 4.1, with every standard score increase in log home value, we can expect the campaign contribution to grow by $45 for Asian Americans and or $13 for Hispanics. Finally, model 1 also controls for employment status using "unemployed" as the baseline.

These findings support hypotheses H1, H2a, and H3. The results for Asian American population share in a zip code further validates the electorate empowerment theory tested by Barreto et al. (2004). Like Latinos in Barreto's study, Asian Americans feel more empowered to engage in political contribution when there are more Asians in their neighborhood. This paper will further investigate if this effect would hold when disaggregating Asian Americans into detailed ethnic groups. For educational attainment, model1 finds that the overall educational attainment is more relevant than group-specific educational attainment. This is consistent with hypothesis H2a. Finally, the finding of model 1 among Asian Americans also supports hypothesis H3. The large effect size among Asian Americans suggests that the "price" of the neighborhood is a stronger predictor of campaign contribution among Asian donors than other minority groups.

**Patterns of Campaign Contribution by Asian American Ethnic Groups**

In model 2, I included Chinese, Asian Indian, Japanese, Korean, Filipino and Vietnamese. These six groups make up more than 85% of the total Asian American population in the United States according to the latest Census ACS (American Community Survey) data. A closer look at the Asian American model with disaggregated data reveals a diverging story of campaign contribution patterns that were previously masked in model 1 with monolithic Asian American grouping. Partisanship remains a significant factor for all five detailed groups. Comparing to individuals who supported the Republican candidate, we can expect an increase in political contribution. Among which, the partisan effect is the strongest for Chinese Americans and weakest among Vietnamese and Filipinos. According to the latest Asian American voter survey in 2020, 38% of Chinese Americans are inde-

pendent while the number for Vietnamese is 29%. When tracking the changes in partisan identification between 2016 and 2020, there is fewer independent Chinese Americans, and the growth of Democrats exceeds Republicans. For Vietnamese, the number of independents is relatively stable, while the number of Republicans has grown over time. Thus, the rapid growth of party alignment among Chinese Americans could explain the heightened enthusiasm in campaign contributions. According to the latest Asian American voter survey, the number of Filipinos who self-identify as Democrats have grown from 34% to 46% between 2018 to 2020. This makes their low marginal campaign contribution growth distinct from Vietnamese.

The effect of neighborhood characteristics on contribution also varies by detailed Asian ethnicity. Japanese and Vietnamese Americans do not have an increase in campaign contribution, as the zip code level of the co-ethnic population increases. This result suggests that the co-ethnic population share does not influence campaign contribution patterns for both Japanese and Vietnamese. Different from these two groups, there is a negative association between in-group population share and campaign contribution amount Chinese, Filipinos, Asian Indians, and Koreans. Controlling for other variables, one standard score growth in co-ethnic population share, we can expect $7 decrease in campaign contribution among Chinese Americans. This result rejects hypothesis H1 on the positive effect of the majority-minority district on political engagement. This growth is not as substantial as the partisan variable. Furthermore, if low co-ethnic population share is associated with higher donation, then collectively Chinese donors in low population share zip code would
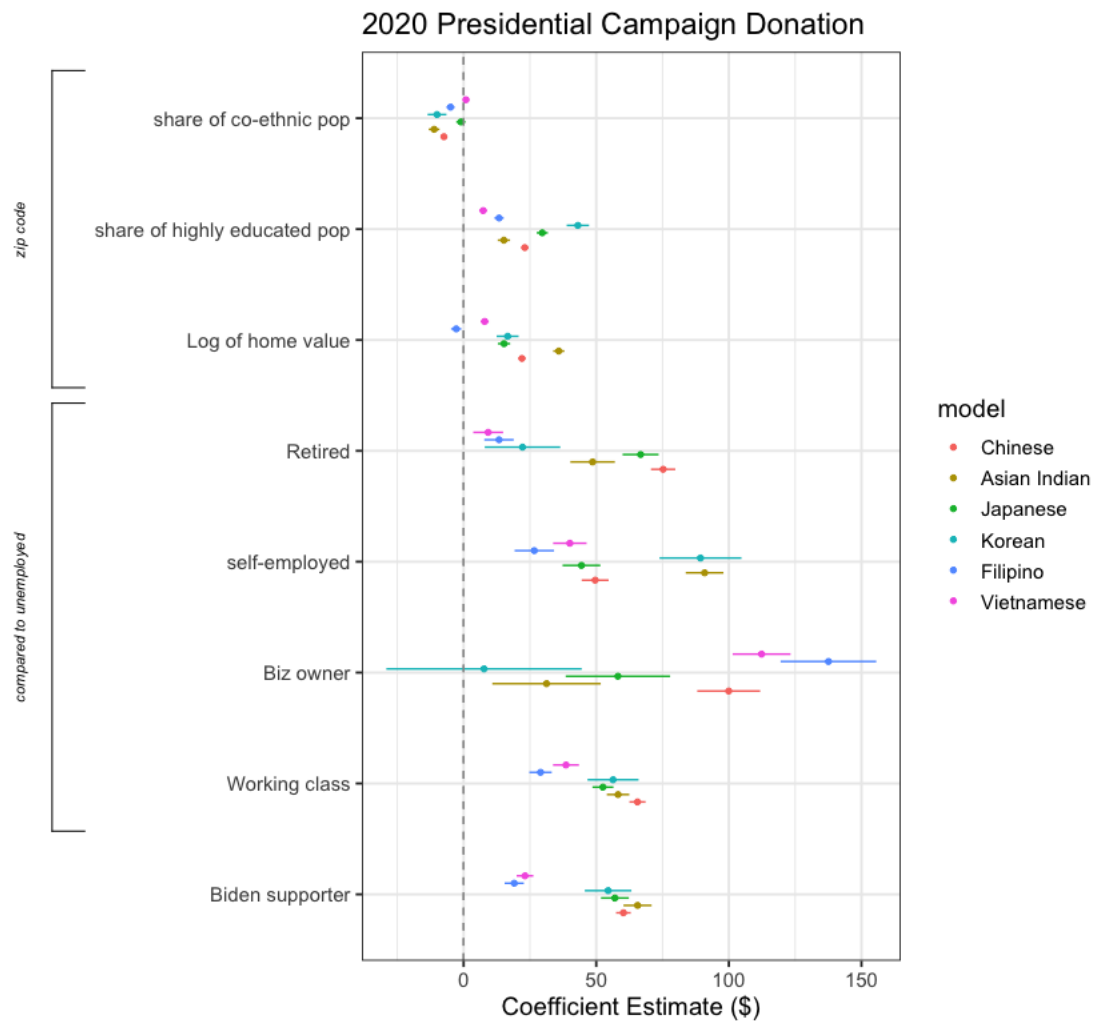
Figure 4.2: Predicted Change in Campaign Contribution among Detailed Asian Ethnic Groups

not yield a high contribution sum either. Why a "majority-minority" neighborhood discourages campaign donation? Existing work has shed light on potential explanations. First, as the population share of Chinese increases, they may perceive more racial resentment from unaffiliated White Americans. Second, with a larger amount of in-group members residing in the same zip code, voters may also suffer from the "free rider" problem (Olson, 1989). An individual may rely on other people to make a political contribution and enjoy the outcome of having their preferred candidate elected. Third, as Epstein and o'Halloran (1999) pointed out, a higher concentration of minority groups may dilute political influence in the surrounding areas. Finally, this finding is aligned with results found in the previous chapter about how diverging messages on affirmative action results in a stronger sentiment of chat group discussion on WeChat. Similar to the explanation discussed in the previous chapter, Chinese American's fear and perceived failure in actualizing their political interests play an important role in shaping their level of political engagement. The result in this model is further proven at this point.

Unlike co-ethnic population share at the zip code level, the effect of educational attainment is positive and consistent among all six Asian American groups. Comparing to other Asian ethnic groups, Filipino makes a significantly higher amount of contribution with every standard score increase in the population share of adults with BA or higher degree. Japanese ranks second place followed by Chinese. This is aligned with the findings in model 1 and supports hypothesis 3. Thus, for educational attainment, disaggregating Asian Americans into detailed ethnic groups revealed the variation in effect size, but all groups

still show the association with the dependent variable in the same direction. Substantively, this suggests that more "educated" neighborhoods encourage political engagement in the forms of campaign contribution.

The last key variable in model 2 is the log home value in the zip code, which tests the relationship between neighborhood value and political contribution. As shown in figure 4.2, there is a statistically significant non-linear relationship between the home value and campaign contribution. Higher log home value is positively associated with contribution among five Asian American groups except for Filipinos. However, it has the largest impact on Asian Indians followed by the other four groups. According to the latest Census 5-year Public Use Micro Sample Data (PUMS), Chinese Americans have the highest homeowner rate (68%) comparing to 62% for Asian Indians. Thus, the finding suggests that Asian Indians living in more home value zip codes are more politically active in terms of campaign contribution. There are a few reasons behind this finding. First, among overall homeowners, Asian Indians might be more likely to live in a wealthier neighborhood. This possibility is backed by Census data on median household income. Comparing to other Asian Americans, Asian Indian has the highest median household income nationwide reaching $121k.

**Adding Media Sentiment Towards Affirmative Action into the Equation**

As shown in figure 4.3. when news sentiment towards affirmative action becomes more negative, it is associated with more contribution for most of the groups, except Vietnamese and Filipinos. Among which, Chinese American has the strongest negative reaction to news coverage of affirmative action stories. This is consistent with the mainstream me-
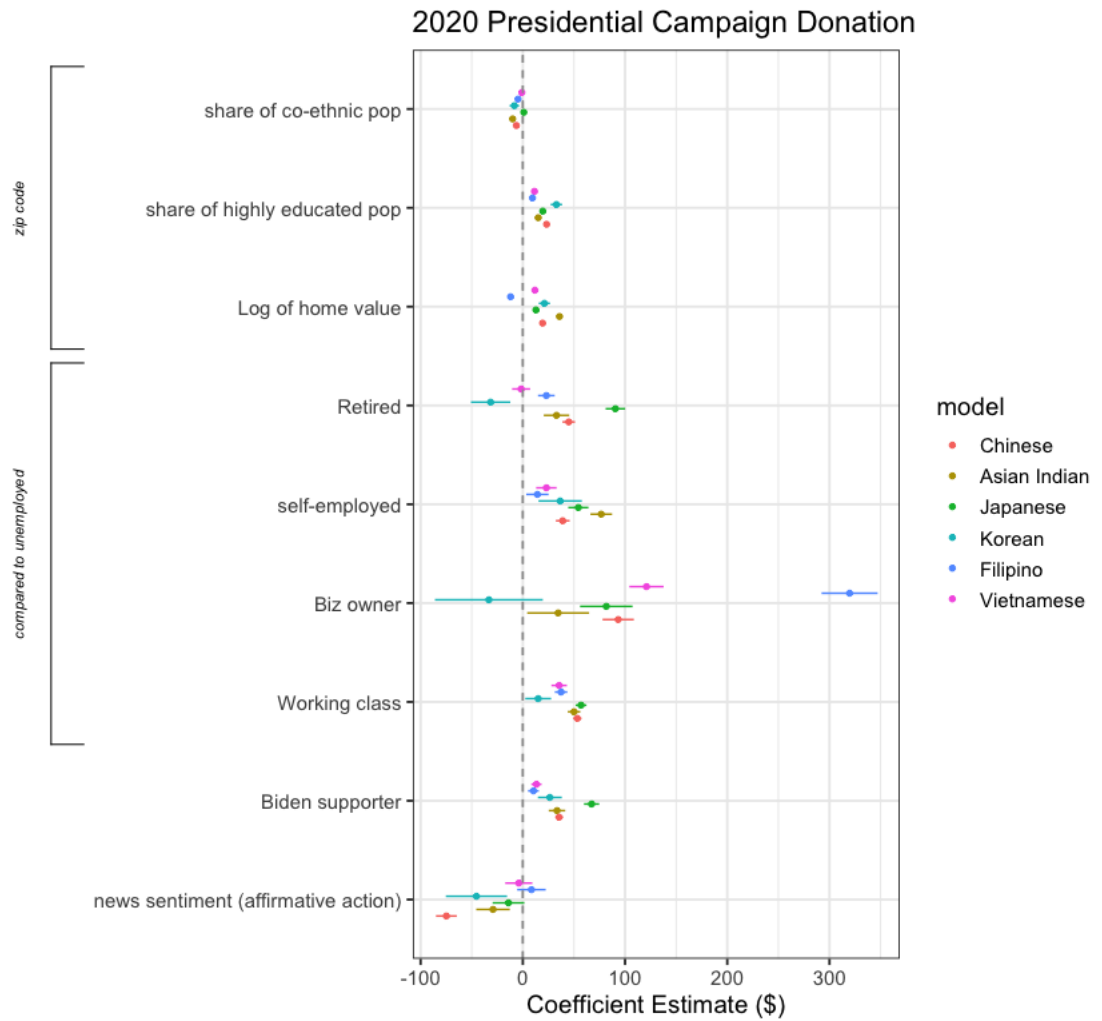
Figure 4.3: Predicted change in Campaign Contribution by Detailed Asian Ethnic Groups - Media Influence

dia coverage on their engagement of both online and offline activities. The effect is not lagged by time as found in WeChat chat group activities. This means that political contribution reacts more quickly on salient issue coverage comparing to ethnic social media such as WeChat. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the sample in these campaign contribution records represents the most politically active Asian Americans. Thus, it is not surprising to find that they react to political news more quickly than general electorates on ethnic social media. Among all six groups of Asian Americans, the Chinese also have the highest effect size between news sentiment and campaign contribution.

**Robustness Check**

*Co-ethnic Population Share by Candidate Choice*

Among Chinese donors, the effect size of co-ethnic population share is much smaller than the candidate effect. One possible explanation is that the coefficient is only measuring the effect for Trump supporters as they are the baseline for the candidate choice variable. When dividing Chinese donor records into two groups based on their candidate choices, Chinese population share is not a strong predictor of contribution amount for Trump supporters, and it is significant for Biden supporters. However, a standard score increase in Chinese population share only moves the "needle" of predicted contribution up by $9. For both education and log home value, the effects are in the same direction, while Biden supporters are making a statically higher contribution with every standard score increase in the independent variable. Surprisingly, positive sentiment towards affirmative action harms contribution for both groups, even though the conservative Chinese electorate is more likely
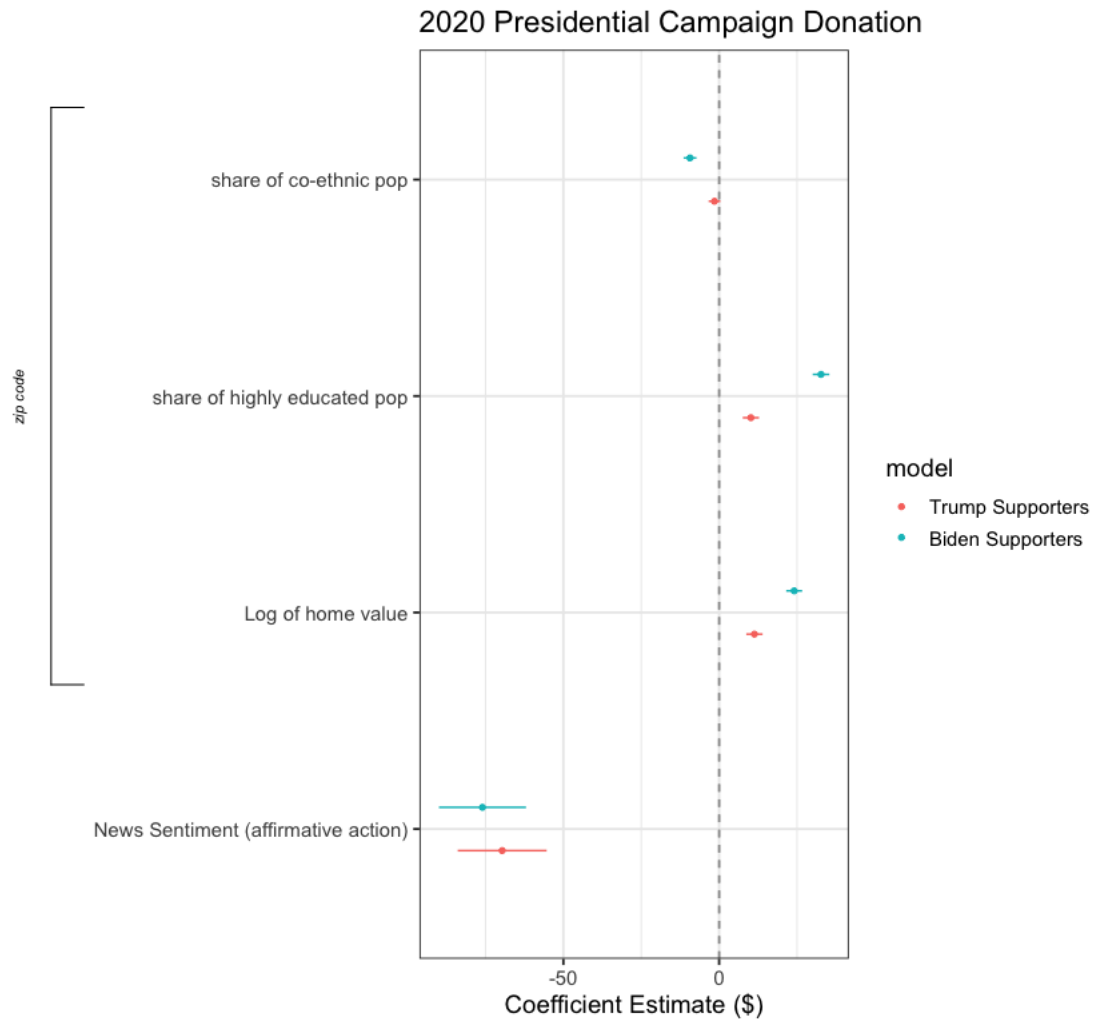
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Figure 4.4: Predicted change in Campaign Contribution Between Trump and Biden Supporters (Chinese American)

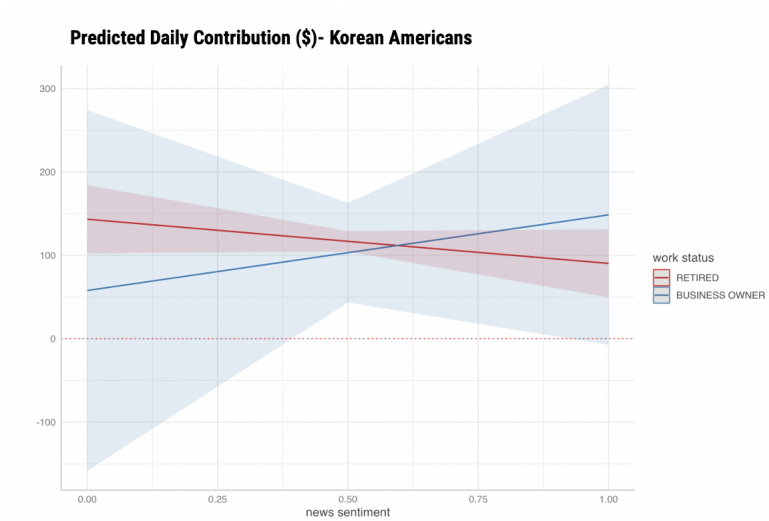**Predicted Daily Contribution ($)- Korean Americans**

Figure 4.5: Predicted Daily Campaign Contribution - Korean

to fight against affirmative action. There are two explanations. First, both liberal and conservative Chinese are aligned on this issue, making them less motivated to make campaign contributions on moments where stories about affirmative action are positive. The second explanation is that these two groups made less contribution for different reasons. For liberal Chinese Americans, more positive news coverage on affirmative action means their support on this issue is working and they feel relax in their efforts to support their candidate. On the other hand, conservative Chinese Americans feel that the mainstream media are not trustworthy among their inner circles, so their positive coverage will lead to more people doubting the efficacy of this type of legislation. Thus, they are not motivated to make a higher contribution at that moment.

*News Sentiment on Affirmative Action and Employment Status*

Another concern that emerges from the analysis is the potential interaction between the controlling variable and the sentiment score. It is possible to assume that employment status might shape the way how an Asian American voter interprets the meaning of affirmative action news on mainstream media. For successful business owners, talking about affirmative action positively may make them worried about their children's career future compared to retired individuals. As shown in figure 4.5 and figure 4.6, news sentiment has a consistent and positive effect among retired Korean donors and Vietnamese donors. However, among Korean business owners, news sentiment towards affirmative action is not positive and significant when the sentiment is not extremely negative. The same effect only occurs for Vietnamese business owners if the news sentiment is less than extremely positive. Controlling for other variables, when the sentiment score is below 0.25, the predicted contribution of Vietnamese business owners is larger than $300. When looking further into the pattern of contribution between retired voters and business owner voters among Chinese Americans, both employment shows a negative association between news sentiment and contribution. However, when the news sentiment scores below 0.6, business owners are more likely to make a higher contribution than retired individuals when hearing the same sentiment towards affirmative action (figure 4.7). These results shed light on potential future research where the disaggregation of Asian American electorate also considers employment status.

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|  | White | Black | Asian | Hispanic |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Dependent variable:* | | | | |
| total | | | | |
| Biden Supporter | 137.255*** | 81.072*** | 177.005*** | 89.117*** |
|  | (0.608) | (3.821) | (3.434) | (2.233) |
| status: Unemployed (baseline) | − | − | − |  |
| status: Retired | 81.388*** | 94.290*** | 74.634*** | 35.175*** |
|  | (0.831) | (5.367) | (5.605) | (3.522) |
| status: Self employed | 88.821*** | 85.894*** | 107.624*** | 112.845*** |
|  | (0.903) | (5.706) | (5.820) | (3.915) |
| status: Biz owner | 119.539*** | 158.630*** | 117.095*** | 170.771*** |
|  | (2.388) | (16.703) | (14.003) | (9.074) |
| status: Working class | 60.943*** | 34.063*** | 71.316*** | 42.972*** |
|  | (0.583) | (3.461) | (3.664) | (2.488) |
| Co-racial Population Share (zip code) | 0.897*** | 6.733*** | 7.879*** | 2.897*** |
|  | (0.219) | (1.360) | (1.312) | (0.881) |
| Highly educated pop Share (zip code) | 84.188*** | 96.567*** | 66.967*** | 62.983*** |
|  | (0.326) | (1.930) | (1.678) | (1.149) |
| Log Home value (zip code) | 49.764*** | 30.408*** | 44.626*** | 13.641*** |
|  | (0.320) | (1.916) | (1.633) | (1.135) |
| Constant | 321.491*** | 315.892*** | 329.639*** | 250.740*** |
|  | (0.741) | (4.652) | (4.560) | (2.961) |
| Observations | 12,922,836 | 256,116 | 437,460 | 523,896 |
| $R^2$ | 0.038 | 0.035 | 0.028 | 0.023 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.038 | 0.035 | 0.028 | 0.023 |
| Residual Std. Error | 786.039 (df = 12922827) | 685.134 (df = 256107) | 863.130 (df = 437451) | 636.138 (df = 523887) |
| F Statistic | 63,214.620*** (df = 8; 12922827) | 1,159.868*** (df = 8; 256107) | 1,560.420*** (df = 8; 437451) | 1,510.030*** (df = 8; 523887) |

*Note:* *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 4.1: Model 1: OLS Models on Campaign Contribution by Race

|  | *Dependent variable:* | | |
|---|---|---|---|
|  | Campaign Contribution ($) | | |
|  | Chinese | Asian Indian | Japanese |
| Biden Supporter | 60.251*** | 65.580*** | 57.052*** |
|  | (1.414) | (2.708) | (2.681) |
| status: Unemployed (baseline) | − | − | − |
| status: Retired | 75.227*** | 48.632*** | 66.728*** |
|  | (2.341) | (4.283) | (3.464) |
| status: Self employed | 49.596*** | 90.858*** | 44.435*** |
|  | (2.590) | (3.624) | (3.634) |
| status: Biz owner | 99.950*** | 31.257*** | 58.171*** |
|  | (6.054) | (10.427) | (10.041) |
| status: Working class | 65.558*** | 58.229*** | 52.528*** |
|  | (1.554) | (2.158) | (2.017) |
| Co-ethnic Population Share (zip code) | −7.425*** | −11.118*** | −1.027 |
|  | (0.549) | (1.032) | (0.889) |
| Highly educated pop Share (zip code) | 23.076*** | 15.182*** | 29.659*** |
|  | (0.732) | (1.179) | (1.079) |
| Log Home Value (zip code) | 21.985*** | 35.880*** | 15.228*** |
|  | (0.710) | (1.074) | (1.185) |
| Constant | 54.954*** | 68.809*** | 41.510*** |
|  | (1.852) | (3.245) | (3.063) |
| Observations | 439,272 | 255,024 | 133,104 |
| $R^2$ | 0.020 | 0.020 | 0.023 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.020 | 0.020 | 0.023 |
| Residual Std. Error | 376.607 (df = 439263) | 426.839 (df = 255015) | 313.026 (df = 133095) |
| F Statistic | 1,108.848*** (df = 8; 439263) | 642.681*** (df = 8; 255015) | 393.962*** (df = 8; 133095) |

*Note:* *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 4.2: Model 2a: OLS Models on Campaign Contribution by Asian Ethnicities

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|  | Dependent variable: | | |
|  | total | | |
|  | Korean | Filipino | Vietnamese |
|---|---|---|---|
| Biden Supporter | 54.474*** | 19.083*** | 23.139*** |
|  | (4.483) | (1.845) | (1.605) |
| status: Unemployed (baseline) | – | – | – |
| status: Retired | 22.204*** | 13.345*** | 9.259*** |
|  | (7.264) | (2.827) | (2.870) |
| status: Self Employed | 89.303*** | 26.660*** | 40.053*** |
|  | (7.880) | (3.788) | (3.218) |
| status: Biz owner | 7.695 | 137.554*** | 112.343*** |
|  | (18.788) | (9.198) | (5.567) |
| status: Working class | 56.339*** | 28.996*** | 38.595*** |
|  | (4.909) | (2.153) | (2.490) |
| Co-ethnic Population Share (zip code) | −10.029*** | −4.931*** | 0.887 |
|  | (1.808) | (0.777) | (0.599) |
| Highly educated pop Share (zip code) | 43.077*** | 13.363*** | 7.371*** |
|  | (2.145) | (0.891) | (0.764) |
| Log Home Value (zip code) | 16.589*** | −2.802*** | 7.935*** |
|  | (2.110) | (0.982) | (0.778) |
| Constant | 98.299*** | 46.671*** | 52.382*** |
|  | (5.937) | (2.578) | (2.663) |
| Observations | 64,284 | 89,676 | 144,396 |
| $R^2$ | 0.027 | 0.011 | 0.013 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.027 | 0.011 | 0.013 |
| Residual Std. Error | 430.317 (df = 64275) | 212.524 (df = 89667) | 236.800 (df = 144387) |
| F Statistic | 226.625*** (df = 8; 64275) | 119.999*** (df = 8; 89667) | 241.819*** (df = 8; 144387) |

*Note:* $^{*}$p<0.1; $^{**}$p<0.05; $^{***}$p<0.01

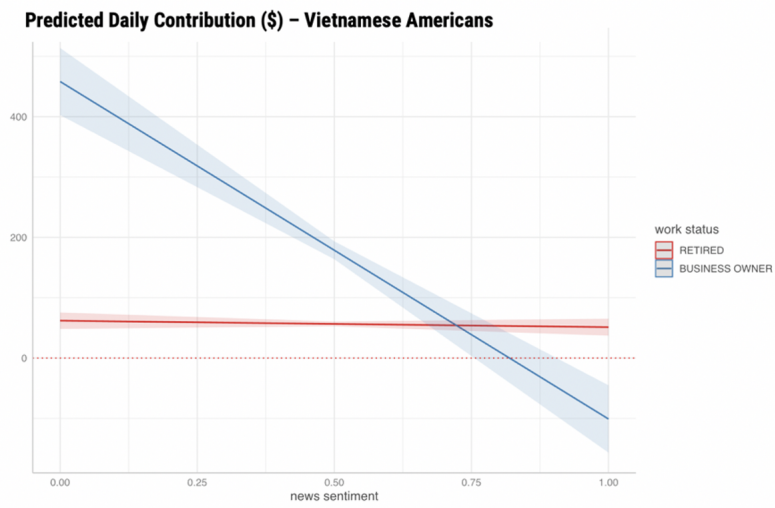Table 4.3: Model 2b: OLS Models on Campaign Contribution by Asian Ethnicities

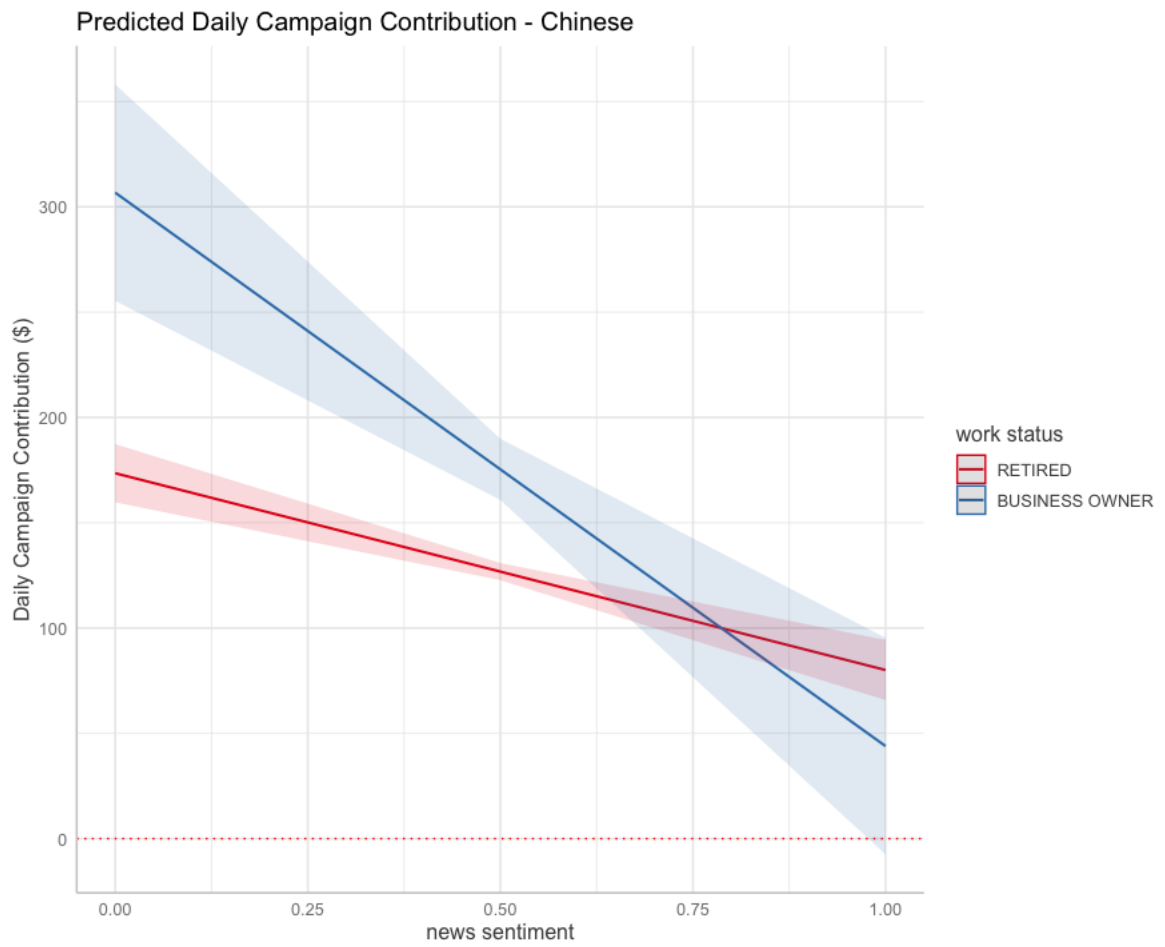Figure 4.6: Predicted Daily Campaign Contribution - Vietnamese

Figure 4.7: Predicted Daily Campaign Contribution - Chinese

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tested how employment status, minority population share, neighborhood characteristics, and news sentiment on affirmative action influence campaign contributions among Chinese Americans and other racial and ethnic minorities. There were a few notable findings that worth further investigation in future elections. First, as the co-ethnic population share increases, the amount of campaign contribution decreases among Chinese Americans even when I control daily news sentiments towards affirmative action. Second, news sentiment towards affirmative action not only has a negative association with contribution among Chinese, but it is also a negative factor for Korean, Asian Indians, and Japanese. All four groups have a highly competitive and strict educational policy in their home countries. It is worth exploring in the future how other Asian American groups feel about affirmative action and if they share similar sentiments towards racial equity in university enrollment even if it does not directly benefit their ethnic group. Third, further analysis on some of the Asian American groups shows the intersectionality between neighborhood characteristics, media influence, and individual-level factors. For the debate on the majority-minority district, these results point to the middle ground of the debate where other interactive factors shape the direction of the effect. In 2020, the reported hate crimes against Asian Americans have increased significantly, which puts research on Asian American's political participation in the center stage. This chapter showed one way of utilizing FEC public records to analyze some of the contribution patterns. Further research can be conducted to focus on groups other than the six groups mentioned in this study.

# Chapter 5

# Conclusions

This study is motivated by the puzzle of heightened Chinese American activism towards affirmative action policy issues. Anecdotally, Chinese American has been more active in offline protects, online discussion and political contribution when it comes to affirmative action. Existing theory on Asian American mode of political participation would not have predicted such high enthusiasm. To investigate the disconnect between the social phenomenon and the theoretical framework, this study leveraged three unique forms of datasets that contained political activity data on protest attendance, online policy discussion, and campaign contribution. Using the 2016 National Asian American Survey, the second chapter explored how internal political efficacy mediates social media usage and influences protest participation among Chinese immigrants. The third chapter took a deeper dive into the online chat group activities among Chinese WeChat users and tested the influence of WeChat and mainstream media on group member's sentiment towards affirmative action. While the previous two chapters revealed some interesting patterns of political par-

ticipation among Chinese Americans, the fourth chapter focused on the "money talk". By cross-walking census neighborhood characteristic data with FEC's campaign contribution records, this chapter examined whether "where" Chinese American lives can affect "how much" they give. In this concluding chapter, I will summarize some of the key takeaways from this study and discuss the potential path for future research in this area.

**Who are the Chinese activists seen in offline protests?**

Between 2010 to 2020, a small group of Chinese Americans has occasionally taken the spotlight from daily news coverage with their strong protest affirmative action policies. One may ask who are these Chinese activists? Are they representative of Chinese Americans or first-generation Chinese immigrants? Existing literature on Asian American political participation would argue that people who are US-born with a higher level of political knowledge living in majority Chinese districts are more likely to be activists. However, most of these participants revealed that they are first-generation Chinese immigrants living in suburban areas with limited English proficiency. One of the key findings from the second chapter address this puzzle. Chinese Americans who are politically active on social media are more likely to be those activists on the street. However, that is not always, the social media user needs to increase their internal political efficacy, a belief that their actions will make a difference in policy outcomes. English accent does not discourage political activism among Chinese Americans who are politically active on social media when the accent is not very strong. Income is also not a deterministic factor if the household makes at least $50,000 a year. In other words, some of the socio-economic and linguistic challenges we know that discourage political engagement do not apply to Chinese immigrants if they at least pass

the "lowest bar". Although this chapter indicated the importance of social media usage, it is unclear what role does WeChat plays in Chinese American political mobilization.

**What role does WeChat play in Chinese American's political mobilization?**

Different from Twitter or Facebook, WeChat is a semi-public space with public accounts and private chat groups. The third chapter tested the competing relationship between WeChat media and mainstream media on their influence towards Chinese "Netizens". Using one private chat group message data between 2019 and 2020, this chapter revealed that when there are opposing sentiments toward affirmative action between WeChat media and mainstream media, chat group users are more likely to talk negatively when discussing the issue. On the other hand, when the mainstream news coverage "agrees" with WeChat media, members expressed more positive emotions. More importantly, if WeChat news remains neutral, mainstream media news sentiment is negatively associated with member's sentiment towards affirmative action. However, this is only true for affirmative action-related discussions but direct comments on affirmative action. In other words, when members start with discuss affirmative action and they see strongly positive coverage on mainstream media and neutral coverage on WeChat, they are more likely to talk negatively in those conversations. Finally, this chapter found that those who are more active in the chat group can also influence members' sentiment towards affirmative action. In general, the influencer's active involvement leads the related conversation in an emotionally more negative direction. A closer look at the discourse also indicates that influencers also use the vocabulary of fear and anger to spark conversation.

**From Netizen Activism to Citizen Engagement**

Among different forms of political participation, one might argue that online discussion and occasional protests won't change policy outcomes. One might even say that these types of Netizen activism are very common with interest groups, and they don't always lead to substantive change in politics. If online political discussion is "cheap talk" and offline protests were weak narrative-building events, but campaign contribution is the ultimate financial committee to the candidate and his or her policy platform. Accordingly, the fourth chapter examined how Chinese Americans make a political contribution. Collectively, a large group with a shared interest can more successfully influence the candidate through a financial contribution. If Chinese Americans make this type of political calculation, then they should only contribution, if they are the majority in their neighborhood. However, if they get politically motivated on WeChat, then where they live does not seem to matter. The fourth chapter resolved some tension from this debate by analyzing the FEC's campaign contribution data in the 2020 presidential election. The key finding suggests that as Chinese Americans' population share in a neighborhood decreases, they are more likely to donate to their candidate. Combining with finding with the results from chapter 3, it is evident that more isolated Chinese Americans are more likely to be politically active, and negative emotions mobilize their political activism. The second key finding from the fourth chapter supported this idea: more negative coverage of affirmative action on the news is triggering more campaign contribution among Chinese Americans.

**Future Research on the Power of Words, Actions, and Money**

Through three chapters of empirical research, this study shed light on the political activism among Chinese Americans as both Netizens and citizens. As netizens, Chinese American engages in online political discussion and WeChat organized offline protests. As citizens, Chinese Americans made campaign contributions to their preferred candidates. Understanding how Chinese Americans engage in these three forms of political participation uncover the way they utilize their power of words, actions, and money in the political world. There are two logical paths for future research in this area. If researchers want to extend the study to Chinese Americans, a well-design experiment could test some of the mechanisms proposed in this study more concretely. The main mechanism is the connection between WeChat content and member's political motivation. In an experimental setting, researchers can control the content that mimics WeChat articles and test how different levels of sentiment towards the same issue influence participants' responses to opinion questions. For instance, by showing a positive or a negative WeChat-looking article about affirmative action, the experiment can test how respondent's policy opinions might have changed from their answers in the pre-experiment survey taken a week ago. Scholars can also use a non-political article as a control condition and rule out any placebo effect. At the end of the experiment, researchers can also test how the motivation may translate to substantive actions. They can ask participants to choose whether they want to sign an online petition, join the WeChat group that organizes a protest, or making a political contribution to the political action committee.

Another path of future research is to apply this model to other minority groups. A future study can incorporate unique ethnic social media and community functions as part of the model. For some Asian American ethnic groups, this means analyzing the data on ethnic social media like Line or WhatsApp. For other racial groups, it could be an individual's involvement in a faith-based institution. Similar to this study's approach, it is important to measure the mediating effect of internal political efficacy. Furthermore, minority population share in a neighborhood could have a different effect on campaign contribution for other racial and ethnic minorities. It would be interesting to test how minorities living in one district donate after they got split into two different districts due to gerrymandering. This type of redistricting presents a research opportunity. Residents live in the same neighborhood, but the redistricting result means their districts' in-group population share changed. For the resident living in the majority-minority district, the collective voice can shape the political outcome. However, the same is not true for their neighbor who lives right across the street from their house. Any significant difference in campaign contribution between these two neighbors unveils how population share translates to perceived political power share.

**Experience on Ethnic Social Media Collection**

In this study, all WeChat article data are collected manually through an article search engine "weixin.sogou.com". This search engine is convenient because it allows users to search by keywords and public account names. Moreover, the database is constantly updated. However, when I collect data via Sogou, I encountered three main challenges. First, the search research is limited to the top 20 articles and requires WeChat account

login to access the remaining articles. Second, links of articles from the search results are not permanent, and can get disabled when trying to use an automated script to load them in a programing software like R. In other words, the link of each article is a Sogou temporary link, and when I paste it to my browser manually, it will automatically redirect me to the permalink. However, if I use the R script to automate this process, the system will recognize the bot and reject the request. Finally, the link of the research result is only active for 24 hours, this also limits the quantity of manual scrapping per day. Since WeChat does not offer an open-source API for public account data, other scholars may need to utilize this type of search engine as well. An R or python package that overcomes these challenges will pave the way for future scholars on WeChat study to increase the scale of their analysis and their sample size.

**Qualitative Research Methods**

Given the technical challenges of getting better data for empirical analysis, scholars can either design a lab experiment or conduct more qualitative research such as a focus group. Researchers can set a virtual focus group with participants only sending WeChat audio files to share their thoughts. This process is different from the traditional focus group but will be more accurately mimicking the interaction among WeChat users in a chat group. Researchers can also introduce additional interventions and allow participants to talk freely about their perceptions, beliefs, opinions, and attitudes toward affirmative action. This approach will also allow natural disagreement among participants, leading them to further evaluate their views on the issues. More importantly, compared to a full lab experiment, a virtual WeChat focus group will be cost-effective and can allow researchers to run multiple

groups with pre-designed group characteristics. Extending from chapter four's findings, the focus groups can vary by employment status, neighborhood co-ethnic population share, home value, and educational attainment. Additionally, this design will also allow scholars to include more individual-level characteristics such as nativity, citizenship, and the year of arrival for immigrants.

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