

Following History: Colonial Mentality and Generational Effects in Filipino American Voting Behavior

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What role does colonial mentality play in causing intergenerational differences in voting amongst Filipino Americans? In their attempts to explain Asian American politics, scholars have come to recognize uniquely fractured patterns of voting behavior that sometimes deviate along ethnic lines. Much of the established research contextualize these trends in relation to domestic conditions and leave little consideration for the potential effect of lasting immigrant experiences, especially for historically oppressed Filipinos. Because ethnic-level nuances for Asian American electorates can become easily lost in aggregate analysis, this paper stresses the distinguishing attributes that make Filipino American voting behaviors unique. I hypothesize that first generation immigrants are more likely to exhibit symptoms of colonial mentality in their voting behavior and that these effects wane in subsequent generations. To address a considerable gap in current research, this paper's analysis draws on literature from multiple pertinent fields to substantiate the viability of my hypotheses as well as encourage further research.

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Introduction

Scholarly discourse surrounding Asian American voting behavior comments heavily on fractured patterns emerging along ethnic dimensions. Many observations place significant importance on barriers separating immigration and incorporation, noting the potential deterrence that processes like naturalization and voter registration pose on political participation. While these domestic factors' contributions to Asian American political nonparticipation have been empirically explored, much less work has attempted to determine whether accompanying elements rooted in transnationality substantially exist. Because Asian American and immigrant identity happen to be so closely related, at least within a modern context, it would be crucial to examine effects related to native experiences. Then, with this detail in mind, Filipino Americans—who constitute the third largest Asian American population—make for an interesting subject since their history is deeply defined by colonial oppression.

This paper employs an interdisciplinary assessment of Asian American politics, social psychology, and ethnic studies literature to further address the sociopolitical implications of transnational identity. To maintain an appropriate scope, the research analyzed will largely be constrained to studies regarding Asian American, immigrant, and Filipino political behavior supplemented by interdisciplinary works on “colonial mentality” in Filipinos to comprehensively conceptualize a plausible causal relationship between these separate fields. There will be some exceptions to these boundaries, as I incorporate literature about minority voting behavior and some ethnic-specific analyses to establish the theoretical basis for this paper's argument. Ultimately this review aims to establish that colonial mentality, or internalized oppression endemic to Filipino colonial experiences, manifests markedly in Filipino American voting participation. These expressions vary, especially for first-generation immigrants, but follow an overarching trend of increased participation especially in younger immigrants and subsequent generations.

While literature with similar objectives remains sparse, a general synthesis of existing research drawn from intersecting fields provides foundational knowledge that can be argued to be in favor of my thesis. However, it would be conducive, at least to contextualize the ambitions of this topic, to reiterate the immediate lack of scholarship regarding the direct political implications of immigrant experience exogenous to American politics and life. It seems that literature across Asian American politics and Filipino politics identify increasing rates of voter participation and Democratic inclination amongst Filipino Americans. Additionally, in the sphere of social psychology and ethnic studies, scholarship has come to the consensus regarding the presence and detrimental repercussions of colonial mentality. Even so, the political implications of colonial mentality lacks substantial discussion. As a result, the overall effects of colonial mentality on either Filipino immigrant voting behavior or generational effects cannot be assessed with complete certainty.

Main Body

Asian American and Immigrant Politics

It is important to investigate the broad trends and potential gaps within Asian American political literature to fully grasp the context of this research. Some compelling themes within this field, which intersect importantly with this research, include the immigrant identity inherent to Asian American experiences and their generally politically fractured behaviors. As Ong and Scott (2009) succinctly state: “The Asian American population is dominated by immigrants” (26). These concepts tend to find considerable weight in the assessment of non-participatory tendencies, especially when juxtaposed with other significant American racial electorates like Black and White Americans (DeSipio et al., 2008; Diaz, 2012; Xu, 2005). Lien (2004) state that higher rates of nonparticipation result from barriers inherent to a largely immigrant Asian American identity, as institutions like naturalization and registration may affect overall turnout. Furthermore, there seems to be variations in political integration along ethnic dimensions for major Asian

immigrant groups (Yang, 2002). Bearing these trends in mind may help illuminate a continuity between immigrant identity, ethnic background, and political behavior. This consideration, however, merely uncovers the grand and complex scope of the Asian American puzzle.

Reiterating Yang (2002), the experience of immigration alters between major ethnic groups. In an assessment of immigrant political incorporation, Ramakrishnan and Epi shade (2001) find that variations along racial and ethnic dimensions inhibit the application of assimilationist theories, especially in a contemporary context. To an extent, this observation could serve as a brief precedent of the political fragmentation that persists in political incorporation and participation, but divergence is far from limited to these criteria. For example, Lien et al. (2001) categorize socioeconomic factors, demographics, social connectedness, political connectedness, and political context as additional influences to voting participation. Although these mechanisms do have an observable deterring effect, they should not be conflated with disengagement.

The aggregate increase in Asian American voting resulting from co-ethnic candidacy identified by Sadhwani (2022) may complicate the possibility of panethnic mobilization. These findings follow a logic derived from a broad history of voting behavior research that asserts living proxima same race or ethnicity cohorts affects voting considerations (Bobo and Gilliam, 1990; Barreto et al., 2010). Although this may seem like a manifestation of an identity-to-politics link originally described by Lee (2008), it is important to acknowledge the imprints of familiar rifts. For example, observations by Sadhwani (2022) seem to vary between ethnic lines amongst the major Asian immigrant groups. As Japanese, Indian, Korean, and Filipino voters all exhibited behaviors possibly indicative of panethnicity, Chinese Americans—who constitute the United States' largest Asian immigrant group—displayed no increase in turnout in response to a co ethnic candidate or an increase in percentage share of their district.

Okamoto (2003) offers an interesting

contextualization of Asian panethnicity through both competition and cultural division of labor theory. Competition theory claims that groups contesting for resources will see boundaries between them as salient, while cultural division of labor theory anticipates an increase in panethnic solidarity if occupationally segregated. In the act of contrasting each framework's ability to galvanize Asian American identity, this study discovered that both theories worked congruently in a singular historical process. What makes this dynamic notably important is its noticeable ramifications on ethnic and panethnic identity: "At both [panethnic and national origin] levels, the same mechanism is at work—segregation processes foster common interests, networks, and identities. In addition, intragroup competition dampens pan-national collection action networks, while ethnic or national-origin organizing contributes to higher rates of panethnic activity" (p. 835). This observation may indicate that cohesive developments in both ethnic and panethnic levels are not mutually exclusive. In other words, panethnic solidarity and behavioral similarities could translate to a more general sense of shared identity and consciousness. Therefore, disaggregating Asian Americans shows to be a valid approach in assessing both ethnic and panethnic contexts.

Filipino American Politics

Considering this, understanding Filipino voting behavior requires an investigation of its place within and separate from the larger scope of Asian American political research. The findings posited by Okamoto (2003) reconceptualizes the behavioral fractures of Asian American politics into more interfaceable facets of a panethnic mosaic. Yet it would be disingenuous to disregard or discredit previous literature arguing the participatory inconsistencies attributed largely to ethnic variations, institutional barriers, and socioeconomic conditions within the Asian American electorate. For that reason, scrutinization at the national origin level offers comprehensive conclusions as to whether the puzzle of Asian American voting more resembles a shattered surface or a cohesive

mosaic. Further conclusions will draw heavily on immigrant and participatory elements as a means of contextualizing behaviors unique to Filipinos within a broad history of Asian American voting scholarship.

As of 2020, Census Bureau data estimates that the Filipino American population has reached approximately 4.1 million people (United States Census Bureau, 2020), making them the third largest Asian American group behind Chinese Americans and Indian Americans, respectively. Because they make up a considerable portion of the Asian American demographic, Filipinos theoretically appear to be a politically mobilizable population, especially in light of their largely immigrant roots and high naturalization rates (Lien, 2004; DeSipio, et al. 2008; Yang, 2002). Characteristics such as increased likelihood of citizenship, relatively high registration numbers in comparison to other Asian groups (Lien, 2004), and English language proficiency (Oh, 2013) all seem to indicate conditions conducive to the development of a politically active electorate. According to Lien (2004), after controlling for equal conditions, Filipinos are estimated to register at higher rates than their Asian counterparts, which oddly enough does not alter turnout rate. Nonetheless, Filipinos in the aggregate exhibit higher rates of registration and voting in comparison to other Asian American groups (Lien et al., 2004). Such trends cannot simply be explained through an ethnic variable alone, because as previously mentioned, socioeconomic factors and context substantially shape voter behavior. It would then be crucial to explore ethnic inconsistencies through generational developments.

Generational Effects

Generational Effects on Voting

Scholars have somewhat reached a consensus regarding generational effects in Asian American voting behaviors. Extensive literature discusses the propensity of native-born and second-generation Asian-Americans to vote and register at higher rates compared to their first-generation counterparts (DeSipio, et al. 2008; Ramakrishnan and Epenshade, 2001; Lien, 2004; Oh, 2013).

Because of the presupposed breadth of variation within Asian Americans, it seems that explaining ethnic divergences would be the next process in the development of this research. Lien (2004) finds that Filipinos exhibit generational effects contrary other Asian Americans who experience an increase in registration after spending more of their life in the United States. Oh (2013) detects a similar pattern in first-generation Filipinos, identifying an increased likelihood to register and vote compared to Chinese and Korean Americans, but conditions this finding with a comparatively minimal generational increase in participation. This taper in participation could be seen as a testament to the Filipino predisposition to American politics, culture, and way of life. Filipino Americans enjoy particularly lower barriers, namely language proficiency and citizenship, to political participation. These advantages allow voting and registering to be more accessible to first-generation Filipino immigrants in comparison to most first-generation Asian American immigrants.

In a qualitative study involving politically active Filipinos, De Leon (2018) recalls that some respondents noted generational differences in political behaviors. One quote explicitly mentioned how second- and third-generation Filipinos are “definitely much more engaged” (p. 443), not just in electoral politics but also political demonstrations and social media discourse. It seems that electoral politics do not solely define the boundaries of Filipino American engagement, necessitating a thorough probing of alternative expressions.

Generational Effects on Party Affiliation

In view of this, discerning the nature of generational effects within this ethnic group cannot simply end with turnout and registration rates. Substantially recognizing differences in intergenerational voting behaviors could require identifying where political allegiances and priorities lie. Through this framework, we can then completely determine if second- and subsequent-generation immigrants shed many of the experiences and behaviors closely associated with their predecessors. The next logical step

in establishing the presence of generational effects would be identifying other relevant manifestations. DeSipio et al. (2008) posit that “immigrants, who represent the majority of the new electorate within the Asian American community, are less likely than their native-born counterparts to feel attached to the Democratic Party” (p. 66). This assessment follows prevalent logic within minority politics literature which assumes prolonged exposure to discrimination leads many disadvantaged groups to align with the Democratic party.

An important contribution to the credibility of this literature would be the minority group hypothesis constructed by Cain, Kiewiet, and Uhlaner (1991) which asserts that the longer Asian and Latino immigrants stay in the United States, the more likely they are to identify with Democrats simply due to the party’s perceived ownership of minority issues. This hypothesis also predicts stronger Democratic associations in second-, third-, and subsequent Asian and Latino generations. The minority group status hypothesis can be compartmentalized into two basic assumptions: First, a formative aspect of immigration is transitioning from majority to minority identity. Discrimination plays a prominent factor in the reinforcement of this transitional process. Secondly, most immigrants maintain a degree of investment in their homeland’s affairs. For example, Asian immigrants coming from communist regimes may feel compelled by Republican stances because of policy interests rooted in their homeland’s politics.

While this study was able to conclusively detect the minority group status hypothesis’ effects on Latinos, it failed to comprehensively assess Asian American party acquisition. They attribute an absence of overall and generational movement towards party preference to “the lack of exposure-related effects to the fact that Asians do not feel particularly disadvantaged or discriminated against” (p. 416). This justification feels particularly neglectful of the exhaustive level of variation within the Asian American group alone, and warrants further evaluation considering they believe this study “underscores

Abramson’s (1983) admonition against conflating the political experiences of different ethnic groups” (p. 416).

Though not directly referencing former colonial states, Ramakrishnan and Epenshade (2001) argue that neither first- nor second-generation citizens emigrating from “repressive regimes” exhibit higher propensities to vote than those coming from democratic regimes (p. 895). Once again referencing Cain et al. (1990), maybe minority political behavior can only truly move in response to experiences of discrimination in America. Lim et al. (2006) attempts to address the Asian American-sized lapse in the minority group status hypothesis by applying a focus on ethnically Chinese Southeast Asian immigrants. They target ethnically Chinese immigrants with Southeast Asian national origins because of the group’s extensive history as economic and political minorities. In short, Lim et al. (2006) were able to identify increased Democratic partisanship within their designated demographic. Ethnic Chinese Southeast Asian immigrants, regardless of socioeconomic status, expressed higher rates of Democratic preference than nonethnic Chinese originating from the same region. A notable contribution of this topic is its contextualization of native struggle and immigrant experience, bringing attention to the nature of transnationality and its implications on assimilation. In a qualitative study involving Filipino American political leaders, De Leon and Daus (2018) noted how interviewees concurred that Filipino Americans’ favored voting as their preferred form of political engagement, and underscored a tendency to operate along partisan lines. Despite that, Filipino Americans in general still exhibit non-participatory habits and often display a reluctance to affiliate with a political party (Oh, 2013; De Leon and Daus, 2018).

Are there additional pieces to this puzzle? Circling back to the hypothesis examined by Cain et al. (1990) and Lim et al. (2006), what intervening factors could be complicit in the development of Filipino political behaviors? Or rather, to gauge transnationality more intentionally, could generational trauma stemming from colonialism tangibly materialize in American politics?

Hopefully, unpacking the sociopolitical baggage of Filipino immigrants could provide necessary insight into the tenability of its political fruits.

Colonial Mentality

The term colonial mentality (CM) often arises within Filipino and ethnic discourse, usually to describe certain constructs that perpetuate and internalize colonial oppression. As the late Filipino historian Renato Constantino (2008) eloquently wrote: “We learned to regard the cultures imposed on us by Spaniards and Americans as superior and, despite sporadic attempts to assert our national identity, we still tacitly accept the alienation of our own culture... we look up to our conquerors and depreciate ourselves” (p. 385). Filipino deference to Western identity emerged from generations of violent, suppressive, and dehumanizing colonial conditioning. Rimonte (1997) refers to beliefs revering this occupation as a “golden myth,” propagated not only by colonial governments but also through civil institutions like the Catholic church and education systems. This “golden myth” deified colonial occupiers and reframed their regimes as generous and benevolent. Eventually this misconception reified itself through institutions and figures endorsed by either the Spanish or American governments, rendering indigenous Filipinos incapable of fully realizing the illegitimacy of their colonization. In short, “Filipinos were victims and did not know it” (Rimonte, 1997, p. 59).

David and Okazaki (2006) specify the dimensions of colonial mentality through four distinct elements: seeing Filipino identity as inferior, perceiving Filipino culture and body as inferior, discriminating against less Americanized Filipinos, and tolerating past and present instances of oppression. These elements culminate in an alienation from Filipino identity, family, culture, and various other connections. In a quantitative survey involving 605 self-identified Filipino Americans, David and Nadal (2013) find that 85.5% of respondents’ family members and 88.6% of respondents’ friends expressed colonial mentality. Results from both qualitative and quantitative surveys in this study point

to a process of acculturation initiating before immigrating to the United States. While colonial mentality is not a psychological experience unique to Filipinos, it could be an important consideration in the contextualization of Filipino psychological health. It seems that colonial mentality, depression, and poor mental health are convergent themes in Filipino American life (David and Nadal, 2013; David and Okazaki, 2006; Tompar-Tiu and Susteno-Seneriches, 1995).

Colonial mentality’s effects of Filipino Americans is not limited to mental health. The concept of *kapwa*, which can be loosely translated into a sense of unity between the Filipino self and others, is an important facet of indigenous Filipino culture (David et al., 2018). This idea constitutes in large the fabric of Filipino society, family, and interpersonal relationships. The early onset of American acculturation endemic to Filipino immigrants may contribute to an overall breakdown in the persistence of *kapwa* precisely because the process encourages replacing heritage with a dominant western culture (David et al., 2018). Widespread sentiments like the conflation between “marrying up” and “marrying white” (Bergano and Bergano-Kinney, 1997) as well as the adoption of colonialist beauty standards (Bulloch, 2013) corroborate the cultural salience of colonial mentality in Filipinos. Overall, it seems that the acculturative effects of colonial mentality threaten, if not outright cause, detriment to indigenous Filipino institutions. While much of this ethnic studies and minority psychology literature has focused on the clinical applications and social repercussions of colonial mentality, little work has explored its political implications.

Connections and Limitations

Upon evaluation of literature, it appears that transmission and reinforcement of colonial mentality continue beyond the borders of the Philippines. In fact, the observation of early acculturation reemphasizes the truly transnational nature of this subject. However, as mentioned before, an absence in discourse surrounding interactions specifically between

colonial mentality and voting behavior leaves ample room for speculation. Therefore, a literary synthesis would be the most valid approach in gauging the validity of my hypothesis.

To reiterate, my hypothesis claims that colonial mentality primarily influences first generation Filipino American voting. I supplement this assertion with the condition that colonial mentality poses less influential effects on younger first-, second-, and subsequent-generation immigrants. This claim offers a novel application of conclusions made by Cain et al. (1991) and Lim et al. (2006), wherein experiences of discrimination encourage the development of group consciousness. This hypothesis operates under the assumption that imperial oppression, evidenced by the perpetuation of colonial mentality in Filipino immigrants, exerts similar politically formative stimuli as that of the socioeconomic injustice faced by ethnically Chinese Southeast Asian immigrants. In the case of Filipinos, social discrimination manifests as experiences of racism even for those who are educated and assimilated (Santos and Chan, 2011). Furthermore, some recall these encounters as frequent (Alvarez and Juang, 2010). Arguably the minority group hypothesis, at least according to Oh (2013) and Lim (2006), gains traction within these contexts since both groups exhibited tendencies towards Democratic policies. However, as Cain et al. (1990) prescribed, much of the discrimination experienced by Asian Americans in the United States is constrained to social bigotry. Even then, Filipinos are far less economically mobile than their Asian American cohorts as generations progress (Oh 2013). Nonetheless, these connections remain substantially inconclusive because there exists no research concertedly targeting the political implications of colonial mentality.

Can the same be said for potential generational effects? Generational economic stagnation coupled with social discrimination could contribute to a growing sense of progressive identity and political urgency in many younger Filipinos (Wray-Lake et al., 2012; De Leon and Daus, 2018). This discussion requires constant cognizance of the possibility that

historical trauma diminishes as generations begin to separate from their native cultural roots. Kirmayer, et al. (2014) offer some nuance in this topic: “While traumatic experiences of ancestors could in theory play some causal role, other more proximate causal factors must predominate to account for this increased incidence of suffering within contemporary populations” (p. 311). Jeyasundaram et al. (2020) found similar “sociohistorical, cultural, and familial contexts” influencing Tamil and Vietnamese refugees’ transmission of and recovery from generational trauma. Applying this to Filipino activists, Hanna (2017) identified “martial law, migration and exile, sexism, capitalism, racism, transphobia, homophobia, feudalism, imperialism, and colonialism” as specific contextualizing qualities that characterize Filipino historical trauma (p. 707). The endurance of colonial mentality may prove that these qualities of trauma remain accessible in Filipino American memory, and could become even more visible with compounding effects like social discrimination. But again, much like the first segment of this paper’s thesis, the exiguous literature regarding the interaction of these phenomena produces, at best, ambiguous conclusions.

Conclusion

Approaching discourse about political behavior with nuance is tantamount especially when discussing a demographic “dominated by immigrants” (Ong and Scott, 2009, p. 26). Generalizations regarding Asian Americans can be purposefully utilized in attempts to explore the possibility of panethnic mobilization, but essentially fall short in acknowledging the ethnic diversity and recency entailed by post-1965 immigration. Ethnic variations, socioeconomic differences, and an unequal distribution of political barriers necessitate an understanding of Asian American politics as inevitably fractured. This condition holds especially true for Filipino immigrants because of their colonial relationship with the United States.

While Filipino Americans reflect some voting behaviors of Asian Americans, most notably nonparticipation, a combination of

high citizenship rates and language proficiency facilitate some divergences. English speaking skills and high naturalization rates make processes associated with electoral politics far more welcoming to first-generation Filipinos than any of their Asian counterparts. This initial ease of participation could explain why generational increases in both registration and voting rates in Filipino Americans tapers off more considerably compared to other major Asian American groups. Yet I argue much of the existing literature offers analyses limited to conditions specific to United States. This paper attempts to address this problem by adding a transnational focus to the evaluation of Filipino American research. The minority group status hypothesis originally proposed by Cain et al. (1991) fits appropriately within this framework because it proposes a plausible metric to measure the perpetuation of colonial mentality. This hypothesis establishes depth in Filipino voting because party affiliation may represent what issues and stances appear to be salient in native born and assimilated Filipinos. Because denigration of indigenous identity and distrust of self-agency permeate throughout expressions of colonial mentality, demonstrating involvement in the general improvement of life for fellow Filipino Americans could indicate a generational withering of this effect.

Future efforts will be imperative in establishing my hypotheses with any political manifestations of colonial mentality. Severe limitations in availability of research have resulted in this paper's inability to come to a cohesive verdict simply because colonial mentality has yet

to be thoroughly explored within the field of political science. Its presently ambivalent role in Filipino American politics merits further investigation because research cannot grow complacent with leaving this nuance unaddressed, especially considering colonial mentality's ubiquity in academically adjacent fields. Despite being unable to find a concrete resolution to this topic, this paper has at least uncovered a significant lapse in existing research which could hopefully inspire further inquiry into the topic.

Practicalities

FDA Approval and Legal Marijuana Products

One of the more interesting intricacies of the issue of marijuana legalization is that cannabidiol and hemp products are legal in many states that still outlaw marijuana for medical or recreational purposes. (Mead, 2017) Additionally, if these things are in fact legal then they are subject to legal regulation and there is a move to have them regulated by the FDA. This is also a concern with states that have legalized medical marijuana. If this is going to be classified as a legal medical treatment then many argue that it should be regulated as such. (Mead, 2017) Part of the issue is that marijuana is classified as a schedule I drug which means that it has no accepted medical use. (Mead, 2017) This classification means that there is very little actual research that has been done on the medical effects of marijuana and the associated cannabidiol or CBD products due to the difficulty getting approval. (Mead, 2017) Without research there cannot be accurate regulation on the growing market for medical marijuana. Some progress has been made in CBD with some products granted FDA approval though they were sourced from hemp plants with very low THC content rather than the kind grown for medical or recreational marijuana use. (Andres, 2019)

Existing Frameworks

In writing these new laws most suggest pulling from other similar areas to create a framework for regulation and limits. (Shrover, Humphreys, 2019) The most commonly suggested frameworks were those used for alcohol laws and tobacco and gambling regulations. (Hickenlooper, 2014) It makes sense in many ways as these areas face similar challenges as the new marijuana laws would likely deal with. For example, creating certain kinds of licenses for dispensaries similar to a liquor license to cut down on unregulated gray markets, and some overlap in regulation on use in public with restricted smoking areas. However, these existing laws are an incomplete guide. Part of the issue is practical. While laws for drunk driving can be clear in that it is testable if a

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