Abstract: How do Asian Americans, a predominantly immigrant constituency, develop political orientations? To the extent that Asian Americans represent a gap in traditional familial theories of partisan socialization, alternative accounts must be considered. This paper develops and tests one such account, based on the social transmission of political views from college peers. College is an ideal environment for testing theories grounded in social experience because it is a diverse and immersive setting in which students live, work, and socialize. Using a large longitudinal dataset of Asian American college students (N = 14,539), I analyze the effects of campus racial context and personal interactions with racially diverse peers on the political ideology, policy preferences, and participation of Asian American students. While I find that campus racial context has minimal political effects, Asian American students are open to peer influence. Personal interactions with Asian and non-Asian peers lead to liberal views. However, only social interactions with other Asian students have consistent mobilizing effects. I test whether these effects are moderated by participation in campus activities and pre-college political characteristics, finding suggestive evidence that political orientations are most malleable for Asian Americans enter college within ideologically liberal cohorts and participate in Greek Life.
Introduction

Asian Americans are the fastest growing immigrant group in the United States (López, Ruiz, and Patten 2017). This makes their political preferences and behavior important to understand in the context of contemporary American politics. Scholars have posited several theories about Asian American political participation, partisan preferences, and group consciousness (Lien et al. 2004; Kuo et al. 2017; Masuoka 2006; Wong et al. 2011). However, few provide explanations of political socialization that account for how Asian Americans, many of whom are first- and second-generation immigrants, become acquainted with the political system. How do Asian Americans, a growing immigrant constituency in the United States, develop political preferences and habits of political participation? In this research, I offer and test one explanation – peer political influence in college. Using a large longitudinal dataset of Asian American college students, I explore the role of higher education in shaping the political behavior of Asian American youth.

The development of political orientations is a social process, which is typically thought to occur during childhood and young adulthood. The literature on political socialization has long argued that the family plays a central role in this process (Davies 1964; Easton and Dennis 1969; Greenstein 1965; Hyman 1959). Another strand of research supports a theory of the “inter-generational transmission” of partisan preferences, finding high correlations between parents and children on partisan identification and vote choice across many cohorts (Jennings and Niemi 1968; 1974; 1981; Jennings et al. 2009). The family-centric theory of political socialization offered in these studies is centered on the life experiences of native-born Americans who have familial roots in the United States. This model does not translate well to immigrant groups, like Asian
Americans, who are often in the first few generations of their families living in the United States. Other common models of political socialization include theories of individual experience with the political system (Converse 1969; Kroh and Seb 2009; Shively 1979), generational cohorts (Tilley 2002), and the life cycle (Jennings and Markus 1984). These age and time-centric models also do not translate neatly to Asian Americans and other immigrant constituencies, who may not share the experiences that bond together others in their age cohorts.

There are several reasons to expect that the process of political socialization may be different for immigrants and non-immigrants. First, most immigrants arrive in the U.S. as adults and have their first experiences with the American political system later in life. Second, among first-generation immigrants, partisan views cannot be transmitted through the family. As Hajnal and Lee (2011) put it, “how can parental partisanship explain the party identification of immigrants whose parents have no partisan connections in the American domain?” (6). It is important to note that non-partisan political views may be transmitted from the parents of immigrants to their children. However, this still leaves the work of translating existing political views into the American context, through a process of social learning. Third, differences in political socialization may extend beyond the first-generation. Many second-generation Asian Americans report a lack of political discussion at home with their parents, which makes the standard pathway of familial socialization an unlikely explanation for their political preferences (Raychaudhuri 2018). Given that standard explanations are unlike to apply to immigrant constituencies, alternative accounts that incorporate experiences in schools, professional settings, neighborhoods, and friendship networks must be considered.
In this study, I test whether Asian American college students develop political views through peer influence, using a two-wave longitudinal dataset of 14,539 Asian American students attending 438 colleges, between 1989 and 2014. This large contemporary sample is useful for studying the political views of Asian Americans students. Following Mendelberg et al. (2017), I utilize the panel design to account for pre-college levels of political outcomes. This allows for causal leverage on observational estimates of the political effects of college. I analyze how the racial and ideological composition of college cohorts and interactions with non-Asian and Asian students influence political ideology, policy preferences, voting in general elections, and participation in political campaigns. I find that the composition of a student’s college cohort has minimal political effects. In accordance with theories of peer influence, interactions with both Asian and non-Asian students lead to liberal political preferences and increase voting. In line with theories of group consciousness, I also find that interactions with Asian students increase campaigning. I explore two mechanisms that may explain these results: pre-college political engagement and participation in campus activities.

**Existing explanations of Asian American political behavior**

Much of the literature on Asian American political behavior focuses on participation and partisanship. Several studies find that high levels of socio-economic status notwithstanding, Asian Americans are unlikely to participate in political activity (Lien 1997; Nakanishi 2001; Rim 2009; Uhlaner et al. 1989). Despite low levels of political participation, national surveys of Asian Americans show an increasingly Democratic leaning in vote choice and partisanship, since the late 1990s (Hajnal and Lee 2011; Lien 2001; Lien et al. 2004; Junn et al. 2011; Wong et al. 2011).
There are several existing explanations for Asian American political behavior. Some scholars provide demographic explanations for Democratic partisan preferences (Lien et al. 2004; Wong et al. 2011). Emerging experimental research further explores this trend, testing explanations grounded in racial discrimination and social exclusion (Kuo et al. 2017). Others explore group consciousness as an explanation for voting and Democratic partisanship (Wong et al. 2005; Masuoka 2006). However, the internal diversity of the Asian American community leaves opens the question of whether pan-ethnic group consciousness is socially meaningful (Lien et al. 2003; Hayes and Skulley n.d.).

Taken together, this work conveys that Asian Americans, a racial group relatively new to the political scene, are an increasingly active and liberal constituency. Demographics, experiences of discrimination, and group consciousness may contribute to their political preferences, but existing scholarship does not provide a clear explanation for how Asian Americans become exposed to the American political system. Given the incomplete explanations provided by standard theories of political socialization, it is important to explore new accounts of how Asian Americans become acquainted with the political system.

**Higher education – A ‘missing link’ in Asian American political behavior?**

There are several reasons that higher education may be an important pathway to political socialization for Asian Americans. First, given that Asian American youth are unlikely to develop political preferences through the family, they may be more open to the influence of peers in educational settings than their non-Asian counterparts. Colleges and universities are particularly likely candidates for peer influence because they are immersive and diverse social settings where people live, work, and socialize. Second, Asian American youth attend college at very high rates
(Digest of Educational Statistics 2016). As Figure 1 shows, 65% of Asian Americans between the ages of 18 and 24 attended college in 2015, compared with 42% of Whites, 37% of Latinos, and 35% of Blacks in the same age group. Furthermore, research on higher education and politics suggests that college, an institution that individuals enter during a malleable period of young adulthood when they first become eligible to vote, influences the development of political, regardless of immigrant status (Astin 1993; Henderson and Chatfield 2011; Hillygus 2005; Mendelberg et al. 2017).

Figure 1: College Attendance by racial group (1990-2015, Digest of Educational Statistics)

While some studies of higher education and politics focus on the effects of academic experiences (e.g. Hillygus 2005), others argue that the strongest effects of college are inculcated through cultural norms and social interactions with peers and faculty members (e.g. Armstrong and Hamilton 2015; Dey 1996; 1997; Mendelberg et al. 2017; Stevens et al. 2008). For example,
using a large two-wave dataset of college students, Mendelberg et al. (2017) find that when affluent students attend universities where high-income students are in the majority, they develop more conservative positions on taxation. This supports the results of several sociological studies, which emphasize the centrality of cultural norms on campus and the social status hierarchy to the college experience (Armstrong and Hamilton 2015; Stevens et al. 2008).

Political science studies of Asian American youth also indicate that educational experiences provide important preliminary exposure to American politics. For example, in a study of first- and second-generation immigrant students at the USC, Wong and Tseng (2008) find that the process of political socialization is “bi-directional” within immigrant families. Children inform their parents’ political opinions and vice versa. This research does not directly consider the effects of college on political views. However, it conveys that first- and second-generation college students are politically informed but receive limited political information at home. A qualitative study of Asian American youth finds that many learn about politics through experiences with student government in high school (Kiang 2001). Qualitative research with Asian American adults in Houston suggests that college is also an important pathway to political exposure, leading to Democratic partisan preferences. Many second-generation Asian Americans described a lack of political discussion at home, making them particularly susceptible to the political norms expressed by peers on campus (Raychaudhuri 2018).

In groundbreaking research on the social effects of college, Sidanius et al. (2008) focus on the explanatory role of racial diversity. This research surveys UCLA undergraduates six times over the course of college about many social topics including political ideology, views on racial issues, ethnic identification, and academic achievement. Although the sample size is small (2,061
students in wave 1), it is approximately 35% Asian (752 Asian students in wave 1). This research provides important information about the political effects of college attendance for Asian Americans. With regard to political ideology, they find that Asian American students enter college with moderate but inconsistent political views that become more liberal over time (Sidanius et al. 2008: 85; 115). They also find that exposure to racial diversity, measured as having a roommate of another race, increases minority students’ likelihood of out-group friendships (211). In addition, interactions with students of the same race increase minority students’ identification with their racial group, activism for their racial group, and perceptions of discrimination (241).

While this research provides insight into the changing political views of Asian American college students over the course of college at UCLA, it has several limitations. First, it does not explore what specific social experiences cause these changes (Sidanius et al. 2008: 50). In particular, the authors do not extend the analysis of the effects of exposure to diversity in college to political outcomes. Second, given that the sample is small and drawn from a single university, it is difficult to generalize to other Asian American college students in the United States.

Building on the work of Sidanius et al. (2008), I study the effects of interactions with diverse college peers on a broad set of political outcomes. Interacting with students of different racial backgrounds is an important component of the college experience. College may be the first time that many students are exposed to peers from different racial groups. For Asian American students, college may also be the first time that they are exposed to large numbers of other Asian students and have the opportunity to engage with predominantly Asian friend networks (Museus

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1 Of the 2,156 students interviewed in the first wave, 753 were Asian American (Sidanius et al 2008: 50).
Accordingly, racial diversity – a central dimension of social experiences in college – may have important consequences for the political development of Asian American students.

**A theory of peer political influence**

This paper tests a theory of peer influence, which predicts that Asian American college students develop political orientations through the social transmission of political views from their peers. The key mechanism is the diffusion of political views between college peers. College students may transmit their pre-existing political orientations to each other through social interactions. They also may develop new political preferences, by experiencing new cultural norms and social practices on campus. Accordingly, peer influence may occur contextually, through the transmission of the social norms held by most students on campus. It may also occur on the individual level, through personalized contact with other students.

While this theory may apply to college students of any racial background, Asian Americans are particularly open to peer influence because they are especially likely to enter college without strong pre-existing political views. This also suggests that peer political effects may vary based on the racial background of other students. In what follows, I present separate hypotheses about the political effects of experiences with Asian and non-Asian peers.

**The political effects of experiences with other Asian students**

I develop the following divergent expectations about experiences with other Asian students.

**Hypothesis 1a:** The first expectation draws on a theory of Asian American non-participation. Hypothesis 1a predicts that experiences with other Asian students have minimal effects on political outcomes. This is because many Asian Americans are not very politically active and do not discuss politics at home during childhood (Lien 1997; Raychaudhuri 2018).

**Hypothesis 1b:** The alternative expectation draws on a theory of group consciousness. Hypothesis 1b predicts that experiences with other Asian students lead to liberal political preferences and increased political participation. Though they may be initially apolitical, Asian American students become politically active and increasingly liberal through social contact with each other on campus. This expectation is supported by the empirical associations
between linked fate with other Asian Americans and the following variables: (1) voter turnout and (2) Democratic partisanship (Masuoka 2006; Wong et al. 2005).

**The political effects of experiences with non-Asian students**

Hypothesis 2: This hypothesis predicts that experiences with non-Asian students lead to liberal political preferences and increased participation among Asian American students. Because Asian American students have limited prior exposure to the political system, they develop political views through the diffusion of the views of their non-Asian peers, who enter college with stronger pre-existing views. (Raychaudhuri 2018).

I develop the following divergent expectations about how non-Asian peers influence partisan preferences.

Hypothesis 2a: Given the overwhelmingly liberal preferences on most campuses, Hypothesis 2a predicts that experiences with non-Asian peers always lead to liberal political preferences, (Astin 1993; Sidanius et al. 2008; Pascarella and Terenzini 1991).

Hypothesis 2b: However, experiences with non-Asians might have differential effects across racial groups. H2b predicts that experiences with Latinos and African Americans, Democratic constituencies, are liberalizing. On the other hand, experiences with Whites, a mixed-partisan constituency, are moderated by the political ideology on campus.

**Data and methods:**

In this research, I use a longitudinal dataset of Asian American college students. The data are composed of responses to the Cooperative Institutional Research Program’s (CIRP) “The Freshman Survey (TFS),” and “College Senior Survey (CSS),” which interview students in their freshman and senior years. In addition to the large Asian American sample and the panel data structure, a strength of this data is that it has a response rate above 75% and a low attrition rate. The full analytical sample includes 14,539 Asian American respondents who entered college between 1987 and 2010 and graduated between 1994 and 2010. The sample is evenly split between universities (45%) and liberal arts colleges (45%). About 83% of respondents attended private colleges and 17% attended public institutions. Asian American students are over-represented in western and northeastern colleges. Almost 33% of the sample attended college
in California, 11% in New York, and 8% in Pennsylvania and Massachusetts respectively. In terms of racial demographics, the average entering freshman cohort was 11% Asian American, 4% Black, 7% Latino, and 70% White. Finally, the average entering freshman cohort was ideologically moderate, with 52% of students identifying as liberal.

The dependent variables reflect a diverse range of political outcomes. These include policy attitudes on three issues – (1) “the wealthy should pay more in taxes,” (2) “abortion should be legal,” and (3) “racial discrimination is a problem in America” – (4) political ideology, (5) voting in general elections, and (6) participating in political campaigns. I refer to policy attitudes and ideology as “political preferences,” which are proxies for partisan preferences. The policy attitude questions each reflect an important political issue domain that is divided across partisan lines. The political parties are also ideologically divided, making political ideology a good proxy for partisan preferences. The “voting” and “campaigning” outcomes are used to measure political participation. Collectively, these variables provide a sense of respondents’ political views, and their inclinations to express those views by participating in politics.

The independent variables measure social contact with college peers. These include contextual variables, measured at the cohort level, and personal social interaction variables, measured at the individual level. The contextual variables measure the ideological and racial composition of each respondents’ academic cohort. They include, a high proportion of Asian students, a high proportion of Black students, a high proportion of Latino students, and a high proportion of White students. Cohort ideology is a tercile measure, because the sample is heavily skewed towards moderate cohorts. The ideological categories include (1) “conservative to

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These are binary measures, cut off at the 50th percentile of continuous versions of each variable.
moderate cohorts,” with less than 50% liberal students (2) “moderate to liberal cohorts,” with between 50 and 75% liberal students, and (3) “very liberal cohorts,” with more than 75% liberal students. The first social interaction variable is *interactions with non-Asian students*, a scale that includes (a) having a roommate of another race, (b) dining with, (c) sharing personal feelings with, and (d) socializing or partying with someone of another race (alpha = 0.65). The second social interaction variable is *interactions with Asian students*, a scale that includes (a) attending a racial or cultural awareness workshop, (b) participating in an ethnic or racial student organization, and (c) taking an ethnic studies course (alpha = 0.77).³

To isolate the causal impact of these variables on political outcomes, I control for the pre-college levels of each dependent variable, and various individual-, cohort-, and school-level factors (Mendelberg et al. 2017). The individual-level controls include: female, Catholic, Protestant, other or no religion, citizen, English as a first language, and high parental income. Following Mendelberg et al. (2017), the cohort-level controls are aggregated versions of the individual-level variables, created using responses from students who entered college in the same or the preceding year as each respondent. These variables are created from a larger set of nearly 8 million TFS respondents, in the same or preceding academic cohort as the respondents in the analytical sample.⁴ I also include the following school-level controls: public, college, south. See Appendix Table 1 (pp. 2-8) for coding information and descriptive statistics.

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³ Although these items are not direct measures of social interactions, participation in these activities implies interactions with other Asian students. The survey does not include measures of same-race personal interactions in recent years.

⁴ Cohort-level political ideology is the sole exception to this coding practice because the larger TFS dataset does not include this variable.
Following the empirical strategy of Mendelberg et al. (2017), I use multi-level hierarchical modeling, nesting students within freshmen cohorts, within colleges. The models include senior year fixed effects and random intercepts for freshman cohorts and schools. By controlling for freshman-year levels of dependent variables and the individual- cohort- and school-level variables described above, the results provide a dependable estimate of the influence of college social experiences on political outcomes.

**Results:**

**Changing political attitudes during college**

In the aggregate, the political orientations of Asian American students change from freshman to senior year. Table 1 presents the mean value of each political outcome for Asian American students at college entry and exit, showing statistically significant changes over time for all six outcomes. Starting with political ideology, Asian American students enter college with moderate ideological views, which undergo a small but statistically significant change in a liberal direction. This reflects the pattern exhibited by Asian students in the UCLA study (Sidanius et al. 2008). With regard to policy, Asian American students enter college with moderate or liberal preferences that become more liberal with time.

The aggregate-level changes are mixed for political participation. Table 1 shows that mean levels of turnout drop precipitously between freshman and senior years. However, given that most students enter college when they become eligible to vote, the freshman-year outcome is voting in *student elections* rather than *national elections*. While this measure is a reasonable control for the propensity to vote in analytical models, the change over time is not meaningful. Finally, Asian American students enter college without a strong propensity to participate in
campaigns, which increases very slightly over the course of college. Although this change is very small in magnitude, it is statistically significant.

These descriptive statistics show that Asian American students consistently become more liberal over time. However, they do not tell a clear story with regard to political participation. Asian Americans do not see a major increase in campaigning over the course of college. There is no reliable pre-college measure of turnout in national elections to test whether college increases voting. Next, I investigate what causes these changes in political preferences and whether particular social interactions with college peers increase political participation.

**Table 1: Changes in political orientations over the course of college**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Outcome</th>
<th>Pre-College Value</th>
<th>Post-College Value</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political Ideology (0 = “Far right”; 1 = “Far left”)</td>
<td>0.537</td>
<td>0.562</td>
<td>0.025***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Wealthy people should pay higher taxes” (0 = “Disagree strongly”; 1 = “Agree strongly”)</td>
<td>0.584</td>
<td>0.604</td>
<td>0.020***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Abortion should be legal” (0 = “Disagree strongly”; 1 = “Agree strongly”)</td>
<td>0.557</td>
<td>0.636</td>
<td>0.079***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Racial discrimination is no longer a problem in America” (0 = “Agree strongly”; 1 = “Disagree strongly”)</td>
<td>0.762</td>
<td>0.807</td>
<td>0.045***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voting in elections (1 = “Voted”; 0 = Otherwise) (Pre-college value is student elections)</td>
<td>0.784</td>
<td>0.513</td>
<td>-0.271***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated in a political campaign (1 = “Yes”; 0 = Otherwise)</td>
<td>0.097</td>
<td>0.098</td>
<td>0.001*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p <= 0.05; ** p <= 0.01; *** p <= 0.001
The effects of cohort racial and ideological composition

Figure Two presents the results of the contextual analysis, which explores the political effects of cohort ideology and racial composition. For cohort racial composition, the results are presented as the marginal effects of membership in a freshman cohort with a high proportion of students from each racial group, in percentage points. For cohort ideology, these are the marginal effects of membership in a “very liberal” cohort, relative to a “conservative to moderate” cohort. The full model results are presented in Appendix Table 2 (p. 10).

The results convey that contextual variables have minimal effects on political outcomes. Cohorts with high proportions of liberal students have moderately-sized liberalizing effects on attitudes about abortion (8 percentage points) and racial discrimination (7 percentage points). Other notable effects include a small conservatizing effect of cohorts with a high proportion of Asian students on ideology (3 percentage points), and a moderate demobilizing effect of cohorts with a high proportion of Latino students on voting (6 percentage points).

Hypothesis 2b predicts that the effects of cohort racial composition is moderated by cohort ideology. Do the effects of cohort racial composition vary based on the ideological composition of freshman cohorts? To test this, I estimate the cohort racial composition models separately for cohorts with less than and greater than 50% liberal students. The results do not support this hypothesis. For liberal cohorts, a high proportion of Asian students has a small conservatizing effect (2 percentage points) on political ideology, but there are no other significant effects (Appendix Figure 1, p. 13). Cohort racial composition has no significant effects on political outcomes for conservative to moderate cohorts (Appendix Figure 2, p. 15).
Figure 2: Marginal effects of racial and ideological context on political outcomes

Taken together, these results provide limited support for Hypotheses 1 and 2, suggesting that political norms are not transmitted through the composition of college cohorts. In the next section, I explore whether they are transmitted through individualized social interactions.

The effects of social interactions with peers

Figure Three presents the results of the social interactions analysis. The results are displayed as marginal effects of interacting with Asian and non-Asian peers, in percentage points. The cohort-level racial composition variables are retained as controls. The full model results are
presented in Appendix Table 3 (p. 11). The outcome “attitudes on taxing the wealthy” is omitted from this analysis due to insufficient cases.

Figure 3: Marginal effects of racial social interactions on political outcomes

![Diagram showing marginal effects of racial social interactions on political outcomes.]

* p<0.05; ** p < 0.001; *** p < 0.0001

The results support the theory of peer influence. As Figure Three shows, interactions with non-Asian students have large liberalizing effects on attitudes about abortion (11 percentage points), racial discrimination (11 percentage points), and political ideology (7 percentage points). Interactions with Asian students also have liberalizing effects on attitudes about racial discrimination (7 percentage points) and ideology (4 percentage points), although the effects are smaller in magnitude. Turning to political participation, interactions with Asian students have
large positive effects on voting in elections (14 percentage points) and participating in campaigns (13 percentage points). Interactions with non-Asian students also have a large mobilizing effect on voting (18 percentage points), although this effect is only significant at the p < 0.05 threshold. These results are mostly replicated in a model without individual- or cohort-level controls (Appendix Table 6 and Figure 3, p. 16).

**Summary of main results**

These findings provide preliminary evidence about the influence of experiences with diversity in college on Asian American students’ political preferences. First, the contextual analysis conveys that cohort racial and ideological composition have limited effects on political outcomes. This suggests that political preferences may be transmitted through personalized social experiences rather than campus-wide norms.

The results of the individual-level analysis support this claim and provide insight into how Asian American students may develop political preferences. I do not find support for the hypothesis (1a) that social interactions with other Asian students have minimal effects. In fact, in accordance with Hypothesis 1b, social interactions with Asian students have small liberalizing effects on policy preferences and ideology. They also have large mobilizing effects on voting and campaigning, in accordance with theories of group consciousness. As Hypothesis 2 predicts, interactions with non-Asian students have liberalizing effects on policy preferences and ideology but less consistent effects on political participation.

The effects of interactions with non-Asian students on political preferences and voting are larger than those of interactions with Asian students. This suggests that peer influence on political preferences may be particularly strong when it comes from non-Asians, who enter
college with stronger political views. However, only interactions with other Asians influence both voting and campaigning, which suggests that the development of Asian American group consciousness encourages civic engagement.

In sum, the results support the expectation that peer influence from both Asian and non-Asian students affects political ideology and policy preferences. They also support the expectation that peer influence from other Asian students mobilizes Asian Americans to participate in politics.

**Testing for selection effects**

The main analysis has limitations with regard to self-selection, which I address with supplementary analyses. It is possible that the results are driven by selection into schools based on a desire to socialize with other Asian or non-Asian students. Controlling for freshman year levels of the dependent variables and other pre-college factors helps to mitigate these concerns in the main analysis. Nevertheless, self-selection is an important limitation that merits additional consideration. As a test for self-selection, I re-estimate the social interaction models on a subset of Asian American students who are low income, and thus more constrained in college selection. This is the subset of Asian American students whose parental income is estimated at or below the 20th percentile of national household income in their freshman year.

Low-income students are more constrained than middle- and high-income students in the college selection process for several reasons. First, low-income students are likely to apply to fewer elite schools than their middle- and high-income counterparts, due to financial constraints and a lack of knowledge about financial aid opportunities (Hoxby and Avery 2013). Second, low-income students are more likely to attend public universities and institutions that are close to
their permanent residence (Turley 2009). Amongst Asian American college students, socioeconomic status plays a major role in the college selection process (Teranishi et al. 2004). For example, low-income Asian Americans are more likely attend schools that are “close to home” and select universities based on tuition costs than their more affluent counterparts (p. 537). This suggests that low-income Asian American students are likely to select universities primarily based on financial and familial constraints.

*Figure 4: Marginal effects of racial interactions on political outcomes (Low-income subset)*

* p<0.05; ** p < 0.001; *** p < 0.0001
Figure Four presents the results of the social interactions analysis, re-estimated for low-income students. The results, based on the models in Appendix Table 7 (p. 17), largely replicate the main results. The results replicate in magnitude and statistical significance for attitudes about abortion and campaigning. There are minor differences across other outcomes. For political ideology and attitudes about racial discrimination, the effects of social interactions with Asian and non-Asian students become smaller and insignificant. For voting, the effect of interactions with non-Asian students becomes negative and insignificant. This analysis conveys that the main results hold for a subset of Asian American students who are unlikely to select colleges based on racial composition, providing some evidence against concerns of self-selection.

The moderating effects of political engagement and involvement in campus activities

What explains the large effects of social interactions with other Asian and non-Asian students on political outcomes? A theory of social transmission predicts that Asian American students develop political views through the diffusion of their peer’s views. Based on this theory, we might expect to see the strongest effects amongst students who enter college with strong political interest, highly political cohorts, and many opportunities to socialize. To test this expectation, I explore the potential moderating effects of two mechanisms: pre-college political engagement and involvement in campus activities.

Pre-college political engagement might influence the extent to which interactions with other students influence political outcomes. I measure pre-college political engagement as (1) individual-level frequency of political discussion and (2) cohort-level political ideology. Students who enter college with a proclivity for political discussion may be particularly likely to absorb

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5 The “campaigning” model does not include controls, due to insufficient cases.
political vies from peers when they arrive on campus. Similarly, those who enter college with very ideological cohorts may be more likely to absorb ideological norms through social interactions.

Involvement in campus activities might also influence the effects of interactions with other students on political outcomes. I measure involvement in campus activities as participation in Greek Life, student government, hours per week spent socializing, and hours per week spent participating in club activities. Campus clubs and social events provide opportunities for interacting with other students. Participating in these activities may increase the likelihood of the diffusion of political views because they increase social contact between college peers.

The moderating variables are measured in the first wave when possible and are uncorrelated with social interactions (correlation < 0.20). The full results are presented in Appendix Tables 8 to 13 (pp. 19-24). These models include interaction terms between each moderator and social interaction variable. Only two variables have significant moderating effects on at least two political outcomes: cohort political ideology and participation in Greek Life.

First, liberal pre-college cohort ideology moderates the positive effects of interactions with Asian students on voting and campaigning (Appendix Table 9, p. 20). Figure Five presents the marginal effects of each social interaction variable on voting and campaigning, across cohort ideology. The models displayed in Figure Five do not include individual- and cohort-level controls due to insufficient cases within the ideological subsets. Accordingly, the effects of interactions with Asian students are very large and only marginally significant (p < 0.10). Nonetheless, they are useful for displaying the direction of the moderating effects. The results convey that

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6 While involvement in campus activity is measured in the second wave, these variables reflect opportunities for social over the course of college, and not solely in senior year.
interactions with other Asian students are especially mobilizing on liberal campuses. Interactions with Asian students have a 11 percentage point mobilizing effect on voting and a 55 percentage point effect on campaigning for students in liberal cohorts, compared to negligible effects in conservative cohorts. This suggests that politically liberal cohorts, which are perhaps also more politically active, foster environments in which Asian Americans develop habits of participation.

Figure 5: Moderating effects of cohort political ideology on voting and campaigning

Second, participation in Greek Life moderates the effect of interactions with non-Asian students on ideology (Appendix Table 10, p. 21). As Figure Six shows, interactions with non-Asian students have a 26 percentage point liberalizing effect for Greek Life participants. In contrast, it
only has a 4 percentage point effect for students who do not participate in Greek Life. The fact that Greek Life conditions the effects of interactions with non-Asian students in a liberal direction is surprising, given that Greek Life has conservatizing effects on the political views of White students (Sidanius et al. 2008). This suggests that participation in this activity may have differential effects based on student race. Perhaps Greek Life increases opportunities for social contact with non-Asian peers, thereby heightening its political effects. Greek Life also moderates the effect of interactions with non-Asian students on campaigning. Given that the effect of interactions with non-Asian students on campaigning are insignificant in the main analysis (see Figure Two), this result is not particularly consequential.

*Figure 6: Moderating effects of participation in Greek Life on political ideology*

![Graph showing the effects of Greek Life participation on political ideology.](image)

*p<0.05; ** p < 0.001; *** p < 0.0001*
Conclusion:

This research conveys that college has important effects on the political preferences and participation of Asian American students. In line with Sidanius et al. (2008), college has liberalizing effects on ideology and policy views. It also may increase political participation. What explains these effects? I find that contextual features of college cohorts have minimal political consequences, but direct interactions with other students have large effects. Social interactions with Asian and non-Asian students influence political orientations.

In general, Asian American college students are open to peer influence. Their interactions with non-Asian peers have moderately-sized liberalizing effects on their political preferences. Their interactions with Asian peers have similar effects, although they are smaller in magnitude. Both in-group and out-group interactions lead to the liberal preferences and increase voting participation amongst Asian American college students, who may enter college without strong political preferences. However, only in-group interactions, with other Asian peers, have mobilizing effects on both voting and campaigning. These results support theories of peer influence and group consciousness. Although they are open to the influence of both Asian and non-Asian peers in terms of political views, Asian American students become more likely to take political action when they interact with other Asian students.

This research suggests that experiences in college are an important route to political socialization for Asian Americans. While there is no single pathway through which Asian American college students develop political preferences, interactions with a diverse set of Asian and non-Asian peers leads to increasingly liberal views. These effects are particularly strong for students who participate in intensive social activities, like Greek Life. On the other hand, when it comes to
political participation, one pathway emerges as consistently mobilizing: interacting with other Asian students. The mobilizing effects of interactions with other Asians are particularly large for students who enter college with liberal freshman cohorts.

These results have implications beyond political socialization in the ivory tower. Social interactions and peer influence may play an important role in how Asian Americans develop political views and habits of political participation. College is one social environment that produces such effects. However, many Asian Americans, particularly immigrants who arrive in the U.S. later in life, do not enroll in US colleges or universities. Future work should consider the effects of other types of social environments, such as workplaces, secondary schools, neighborhoods, and friendship networks on the process of political socialization of first-generation Asian Americans.
References:


