

Kamala Harris has spoken of her racial backgrounds, but a shared identity may not be enough to attract supporters

October 8 2024, by Pawan Dhingra



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In one of the most [memorable moments](#) of the current presidential campaign, Donald Trump in July 2024 contended that Democratic

nominee Kamala Harris recently stopped identifying as Indian and "happened [to turn](#) Black."

With these [false remarks](#), Trump implied that Harris emphasized one part of her background to appeal to voters and then changed that to appeal to a different group of voters.

Lost within this controversy has been the underlying assumption in Trump's comments, that people tend to [vote](#) for someone with a shared identity. But is that true? Are Asian Americans, for example, especially likely to vote for Harris because of their shared identity?

Asian Americans are a quickly growing political constituency that made a difference in 2020 in [swing states](#) such as Georgia, Nevada and Arizona, helping elect President Joe Biden. They are positioned [to be influential](#) again this November.

Taken as a whole, [Asian Americans lean](#) Democratic in 2024, with 62% [favoring Harris](#), compared with 38% who support Trump. But for Harris, Asian Americans are not as strong a voting bloc as Black Americans, who [poll at 77% supporting Harris](#), according to the Pew Research Center. Harris cannot take Asian Americans' votes for granted.

What guides identity politics and voting

Despite the assumption in Trump's comments that voters gravitate toward a [political candidate](#) who shares parts [of their identity](#), such as race or gender, that is [not always the case](#).

Voters are more likely to vote for someone with a shared identity when they see a "linked fate." with the candidate. So, people who have the same ethnicity or race may vote in a similar fashion because they expect to experience the effects of policy changes in the same way. Latinos

could be more likely to vote for a Latino candidate because the candidate would prioritize issues that matter to them, such as immigration reform.

Politicians, for their part, can try to encourage people with whom they share an identity to believe in a linked fate to win their vote. In order to do this, candidates can play up issues that affect their identity group and then make the case that they are best equipped and more motivated to address those problems.

For instance, [women rank abortion rights as a key issue](#) and trust Harris to understand it.

In order to earn voters' support, candidates must also come across as likely to act in their supporters' shared interests. This helps explain why people who care about so-called [women's issues](#), such as education or [health care](#), are more likely to vote for a Democratic woman than a Republican woman. People generally think that [Democrats represent](#) women better than Republicans do—and they would not assume that a Republican female politician would champion women's issues just because of her gender.

With this in mind, a candidate wanting to secure the vote of a group must first know what issues matter to them and then demonstrate that they understand the group well enough to earn their vote.

Asian Americans, like most Americans, [list the economy](#), inflation, health care, crime, Social Security, the price of housing and immigration as their top issues in this election.

In order to effectively appeal to Asian American voters, Harris could demonstrate first that she identifies as Asian in order to invoke their shared identity. She could also show that she both understands the issues

that Asian Americans care about and that she can be trusted to act in ways they favor on those issues.

To an extent, Harris has already worked to publicly identify with her South Asian heritage. [She has referred](#) to her mother's immigrant background and has talked about her grandfather who lived in Chennai, in southern India. She has made references to her ethnic culture, such as when she mentioned [coconut trees](#) and cooked the traditional South Indian dish dosa [in a video](#) with fellow Indian American Mindy Kaling.

Connecting to Asian Americans

Once solidifying that they share an identity with a group of voters, political candidates must demonstrate that they understand how the group experiences the issues that matter to them. The concerns of Asian Americans arise out of specific experiences they have—such as immigration.

Asian Americans, for example, often complain about the long wait to sponsor family members abroad for visas to the U.S. At the same time, Asian Americans represent 15% of [immigrants living in the U.S. without a visa](#).

Asian Americans are also concerned about the growing [government backlog of visas](#) and smugglers whom immigrants pay to help them illegally cross the border.

Harris often speaks about immigration and the U.S.-Mexico border, but not in personal terms—or about how this issue specifically relates to Asians.

While all U.S. [residents are affected by inflation](#), [small-business owners](#), in particular, feel the pinch. They must pay higher prices for goods but

have limited capital with which to do so. They also must navigate higher interest rates.

While Asian Americans make up about [7% of the total U.S. population](#), they [represent 10% of business owners](#) and are the [largest nonwhite group](#) of small-business owners.

Harris talks about the economy [and inflation](#), as well as the need to [support small-business owners](#), but not about how these issues specifically affect Asian Americans. Her only ad targeting Asian Americans has focused on [hate crimes](#) against them.

And Asian Americans, like most voters, [strongly support](#) Social Security and other federal programs that aim to ensure stability for the elderly. Harris could speak of how Social Security is the sole [income source](#) for over a quarter of Asian Americans—and for a third of African Americans—compared with 18% of white Americans.

Harris seems poised to capture the majority of the Asian American vote, which leans Democratic. But to what extent they vote for her—and with how much enthusiasm—will depend on Harris' ability to connect with them as Asian Americans and the issues they care about.

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Provided by The Conversation

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