

**Asian, American, and Female: An Examination of the Politics of Representation within the
117th Congress**

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A Dissertation Submitted in Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Campuswide Honors
Collegium and Political Science Honors Program at University of California Irvine

Irvine, California

2022

Preface and Acknowledgments

On June 20, 2018, I walked into Avon Cinema on Thayer Street in Providence, Rhode Island to watch the documentary *RBG*. I was surrounded with four other classmates from my “Creating Change Through Public Policy” course at Brown in the midst of summer. 17 year old Chloe had no idea that this initial interest in politics would evolve to become her college major and career. I neither truly felt like myself at this stage, nor felt like a woman. At best, I was an emotional, indecisive girl at best. I was more concerned with finishing highschool and getting into college. Once the documentary ended and we sat through the end credits, I left that theater with the conclusion that I would pursue political science. This initial interaction developed into my feminist passions and a greater confidence in my identity. Here I am, nearly 3 years later, pursuing research for girls just like myself.

To my wonderful team of research assistants who share the same passions regarding AAPI women, I am so grateful for all the ways that you have helped me during this process.

Just like this paper, my life too focuses around women. Raised in a woman-centric household by my mother and grandmother, I’ve always recognized the central role women play both in my life and within society. They’ve always raised me to be confident in my identity as an Asian American female; no one could take that part of me from myself. To my mother — the most independent, stubborn, hardworking, yet kindhearted woman I know — without your constant support, I wouldn’t be where I am today. At times when I’ve doubted myself, your belief in me never waivered. You’ve shown me what it is like to be a female dedicated to their work in a male-dominated environment, whilst being unapologetically yourself. I have only grown into the woman I am today because of you. This thesis is dedicated to you.

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Abstract

2021 has been a record year for women within the 117th Congress; within the House of Representatives, 27% are women members. Similarly, with the election of new members in this Congress, we have also observed a growth in female Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) members within the House with 3 new members. With the introduction of these new members follows hope that issues specific to their communities will be discussed more frequently. As elected officials, congressional members within the House of Representatives primarily serve their constituents and districts through the introduction of legislation. I examine House legislation — bills, simple resolutions, concurrent resolutions, and joint resolutions — to determine whether women-related or AAPI-related issues are more heavily discussed as a result of this growth in membership. Legislation qualifies as women or AAPI-related if the title or content of the legislation contains a set of predetermined keywords. I compare these percentages of relevant legislation from the 117th Congress against the 116th Congress to determine if any change is expressed. This study reveals the efficiency rates of AAPI Congresswomen addressing the political needs and preferences of their constituents. Through the localized case study of Representative Young Kim, I am able to assess CA's 37th Congressional District and Kim's resulting policy outputs or impacts on this community. Political discourse revolving around elected officials of color primarily pertains to Black & Latine communities. As a result of the fairly recent growth of AAPI representation within Congress, the need for more focused studies persists and grows more significant.

Keywords: *substantive representation, intersectionality, AAPI, elected officials of color*

Chapter I: Introduction

STEVEN YEUN: "Sometimes, I wonder if the Asian American experience is what it's like when you're thinking about everyone else, but nobody else is thinking about you."

Amongst political discourse regarding substantive representation and representatives of color, studies tend to focus primarily on Black elected officials (EOs) and Latine EOs. Research regarding the Asian American Pacific Islander community and their correlating representatives still has a long way to go.

During the pandemic, like many others, I felt quite isolated. Covid-19 had a global impact, but it affected the AAPI community in its own manner. With nicknames like "Kung Flu" and the "China Virus", the AAPI community became scapegoats for America to collectively blame. Throughout this period of time, anti-Asian hate crimes increased exponentially, with disproportionate impacts on AAPI women. The organization Stop AAPI Hate recorded 6,000 reports of violence or discrimination between March 2020 and March 2021. This data additionally revealed that "AAPI women and girls report these hate incidents 2.2 times as often as AAPI men" (StopAAPIHate.org). The National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF) published a survey that determined that "74% of Asian American and Pacific Islander women reported experiencing racism and/or discrimination over the last year," with 51% of East Asian femal respondents indicating that "they felt less safe today than at the start of the pandemic" (Shivaram, 2022).

Notably, in March of 2021, 6 Asian women were shot and killed at various massage parlors throughout Atlanta. The names and backgrounds of these women haunted me, and they did such because of their semblance to my mother. In January of 2022, Michelle Go was maliciously pushed onto the train tracks at the Times Square station. In February of 2022,

Christina Yuna Lee was followed into her apartment in New York and brutally murdered (Liu, 2022).

As an Asian American woman, I was fearful; yet, I was equally enraged. I questioned where our representatives' true interests lay and whether their policies were indeed aimed at protecting vulnerable communities — especially ones they might personally identify as. By further examining introduced policies or proposals, indicators regarding issue preferences or focuses can be revealed.

During the swearing-in ceremony of the 117th Congress, I witnessed Representative Marilyn Strickland dressed in Korean traditional clothing named hanbok. This display of confidence in one's cultural heritage and their femininity was a profound and personally transformative moment for myself. Representative Strickland reminded me of myself. I chose at this moment to further research AAPI women in the House of Representatives.

As a resident of California's 39th Congressional District, I felt inclined to examine our representative and political practices on a more detailed level. I first hand experienced an unexpected shift in representatives, and thus questioned what conditions allowed for this political preference shift in congressional candidates during the 2021 election. Through this localized case study, I hoped to apply my personal insight as a resident, whilst also observing the Korean American community and their significance during Representative Young Kim's campaign journey.

Chapter II: Categories of Political Representation

*BELLA AZBUG: "This woman's place is in the House ... the House of Representatives."*¹

Bella Azbug's 1970 campaign slogan

Hanna Pitkin categorizes representation into four distinctive types: descriptive, symbolic, formal, and substantive (1967). When legislators and the individuals they represent "share physical traits such as ethnicity, race, or gender," this is an instance of descriptive representation. Descriptive representation primarily pertains to quantity and does not pertain to institutional outputs (Mansbridge 1999; Jeong 2011). If the number of racial groups serving in an institution is proportional to those numbers within the population, this institution can be defined as descriptively representative (Owens 2005; Jeong 2011).

Symbolic representation is when "legislators have the confidence of those they represent and are trusted" by these constituents. Formal representation is when legislators are "selected according to the formal rules of an institution". Lastly, substantive representation can be seen when "legislators deliver policy outputs that are in the interest of those they represent". Substantive representation, however, does relate to institutional outputs.

As this relates to a representative serving as an advocate of their community with a "congruent policy view," substantive representation regards the quality of such representation and its policy outputs (Owens 2005). If an institution is to represent the interests of minority groups, the resulting policy outputs of this institution should also reflect minority groups' preferences. By increasing substantive representation, political knowledge among members of minority groups tends to increase (Jeong 2011).

¹ Slogan of candidate Bella Azbug in her 1970 campaign.

Various studies have focused on representation, however, there still exists a lack of study regarding the intersection of race and gender and its resulting impact on representation (Orey et al., 2007). Orey et al. question how women of color define their constituency and represent their group's interests. Other scholars, like Jeong (2011), have indicated a lack of available research regarding how minorities respond to substantive representation — as many studies tend to focus on the impacts of descriptive representation alone.

Chapter III: Policy Implications of Higher Female Membership

TUBBS JONES: "Women need to be encouraged to be right here on the floor.... they need to think about how we can be here on the floor of the U.S. Congress talking about issues that impact the entire country and only fifty-seven of us are women."

Congressional Record 1999

Advocates for more women in Congress do so primarily based on the assumption that the election of more women will directly impact the representation of women's interests for the better. A relationship exists whereby increasing descriptive representation will lead to better substantive representation (Hanna Pitkin, 1967). By having representatives who "share a common social identity, such as gender, race, or class", they are more likely to advance the interests of their group (Phillips 1995, 1998; Mansbridge 1999). This connection, primarily based on shared experiences, may improve the "deliberative quality of the legislature" through the inclusion of various perspectives and solutions that can be applied to policy problems. This is further defined as "surrogate representation" ((Mansbridge, 1999).

Women in Congress face a unique set of standards for which they perform "feminist protest" within these representative institutions. They "fight battles for equity on at least two distinct levels — as professionals seeking acceptance within an institution and as advocates on behalf of women constituents" (Dodson, 2006, p. 52). Women in Congress are indeed fighting for acceptance from their peers within a largely male environment and institution; however, their greatest responsibility is to better represent others to help themselves and their female colleagues through "sponsoring and co-sponsoring bills and using legislative power" (Dodson, 2006, p. 52). Carroll (2002) suggests that a typical pattern of behavior for female legislators is shaped as a result of conceptualizations of women and representation — "that women consider interests of

women in their own district more than men do, or that women consider the interests of women in society more than men do” — which distinguishes them from their male colleagues (Gerrity et al., 2007, p. 181).

“Intensity of commitment” by a descriptive representative, especially in an institution that “relies on negotiation and accommodation to produce policy”, can prevent the individual from having to compromise on proposals that may directly impact the interests of the group (Swers, 2002, p. 13). When discussing women’s issues, congresswomen are able to establish expertise and credibility through their personal experience or connection with women as a group; this can impact committee deliberations and aid during policy appeals to the “public, relevant interest groups, and congressional colleagues” (Swers, 2002, p. 10).

However, this does not necessarily translate to the increased probability of acting on women’s issues. As a result of the constraints by “the policy preferences of the district constituency” and “the legislator’s position within the institution”, congresswomen are not able to easily pass legislation related to women’s issues. Female office holders cannot be viewed as the direct copies of their female constituents’ interests and views. To become a reputable and rational legislator, women compete to find particular issues that they can not only successfully pursue, but also associate themselves with other members of the institution or their constituents (Swers, 2002, p. 14). Therefore, many typically find “policy gaps” to fill themselves.

Moreso, buried in the assumption that women indeed make a political difference is the implication that not only “women officeholders will be more aware than their male colleagues of conditions more commonly associated with women’s lives,” but also that “they will more often define these conditions as gender injustices that are problems which should be addressed (rather than just the way things are)”. Dodson further presents that political change may be stunted or

slowed as a result of women members focusing on differing subgroups of women. Thus, “women might make a difference, but the agendas, policy preferences, and compromises they pursue will likely serve some women better than others.” As a result of varying “life experiences, perspectives, needs, and interests” between “white women, women of color (woc), poor women, wealthy women, African Americans, and Latinas,” a policy solution to address their problems will also be complex. Yet, different subgroups of women with similar issues may benefit from differing policies (Dodson, 2006, p. 67).

We must acknowledge the various factors that affect the ability of congresswomen to express their preferences. Within the political and institutional context, factors such as the “identity of the majority party, relative power of the leadership, ideological composition of Congress, and the public mood” hold a significant presence (Swers, 2002, p. 15). Female members may pursue policy that applies only to various subgroups of women. Therefore, although women may make a political difference, the issues, agendas, and routes to pursuing such will end up disproportionately serving some women and hurting others. Women of color and white women hold differing experiences and needs, just as affluent women do in comparison to poor women. Even if different subcategories of women experience similar problems, each might be better served by differing policy approaches (Dodson, 2006, p. 67).

Political literature regarding women does affirm that gender plays a role in legislative behavior to some extent (Carroll 1994; Reingold 20000; Swers 2002; Thomas 1994). When a man is replaced by a woman in the same legislative district, the woman does sponsor more women’s issue legislation. However, when testing sponsorship of other issues, such as environmental issue bills, this gender difference did not exist. Therefore concluding that women

elected to office “make a specific difference as agenda setters for women’s issue legislation” (Gerry et al., 2007, p. 197).

TILLIE FOWLER: “I feel a responsibility, and I always have, as a woman who... paves the way for.... that next group of women coming along, as we show that maybe we can do it, and do it well.”

(Dodson, 2006, p. 52)

When reviewing African American women and their role within legislative policymaking, prior studies determined that “a progressive bill is more likely to be introduced when a black woman serves as the primary sponsor” (Orey et al., 2007, p. 112). As a result of “double disadvantages” resulting from both racism and sexism, African American women hold unique perspectives that thus informs their legislative agendas as a result. Therefore, Orey et al. concludes that these unique perspectives produce a legislative commitment to represent the interests of both African Americans and women, thus curating a “liberal-based agenda”. In their observation of Democrats, Orey et al. determined that “white women were no more likely than white men to introduce women’s interest bills as is also the case for Republican women”. Additionally, “African American women were slightly more likely than black men to introduce their black interest bills”.

Therefore, these findings ultimately note that “intra-group differences matter and must be taken into account in constructing models of legislative behavior” and that we should “re-examine claims that ‘women’ as a group are more likely to represent women’s interests” (Orey et al., 2007, p. 113).

Defining Women's Interests

MARGE ROUKEMA: "... when I got to Washington, I found that some of the 'women's issues — the family issues' — weren't being addressed by the men in power. Things like child-support enforcement and women's health issues and family safety issues. It wasn't that the men were opposed to these issues — they just didn't get it. They were not sufficiently aware of them. So I realized, in many important areas — if we women in government don't take action, no one else will."

Congressional Record 1999

African American women were the most likely to introduce women's interest bills. On the contrary, even amongst Democrats, white women were "no more likely" than their white male counterparts to introduce women's interest bills. Therefore, intra-group differences may play a larger role in legislative behavior and must be considered when constructing models. We should aim to re-examine assumptions that women as a whole are more inclined to represent women's interests and "question which women are more likely to represent women's interests" (Orey et al., 1999, p. 113).

The historical discrimination women have faced both within the home and workplace have contributed to shaping their political stances and participation. Women are significantly more likely to support social welfare issues and "take a more activist role in assisting the poor..., guaranteeing jobs, and a standard of living". Additionally, women — in comparison to their male counterparts — are less likely to support military intervention and more likely to maintain a pessimistic view of the economy (Swers, 2002, p. 5). Previous studies indicate voter attitudes falling within gender stereotypes. With "compassion issues," regarding "healthcare, education, children, and the elderly," are featured in an election, voters tend to favor female candidates. Meanwhile, strengths in foreign policy and tax issues were associated with male candidates

(Sapiro 1981-2; Alexander and Anderson 1993; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a, 1993b; Burrell 1994; McDermott 1997).

In previous studies that observed women's issue bills, policies were divided into three categories: feminist, social welfare, and antifeminist bills. When observing the 103rd and 104th Congress, feminist bills ranged from "protecting reproductive rights, expanding family and medical leave, increasing funding for women's health research, protecting victims of domestic violence or sexual harassment, creating programs for women-owned businesses, establishing gender equity programs in education, enforcing child-support laws, and increasing access to child care for welfare recipients" (Swers, 2002, p. 36). These bills tend to fall into this feminist category as a result of promoting "role equity and/or role change for women".

Antifeminist bills differ in the sense that they aim to "inhibit role change". Antifeminist bills include "efforts to hinder abortion, prohibit funding for international family planning programs, eliminate sex education programs in schools, outlaw gay marriage, prohibit homosexuals from serving in the military, eliminating affirmative action programs for women and minorities, and requirements for welfare recipients to disclose the paternity of their child to receive benefits" (Swers, 2002, p. 37).

Lastly, as women have historically been associated with their role as caregivers, social welfare bills pertain to healthcare, poverty assistance, and education. These bills included "proposals to expand health insurance coverage, reform Medicare, expand coverage of mental health services, increase funding for school lunches, create school choice voucher programs, establish regulations for foster care or adoption, punish crimes against children and the elderly, and reform welfare" (Swers, 2002, p. 37-38).

Previous studies have concluded that regardless of party, women are likely to support gender-related legislation more than their male counterparts. A study conducted on the 103rd Congress revealed that “the more directly an issue affects women, such as votes concerning abortion and other reproductive issues, women’s health concerns, and the protection of women against violent crime, the more likely it is that gender will play a role in determining a representative’s vote” (Swers, 1998, p. 445).

Swers indicated that gender plays a significant role especially regarding the way Republican representatives vote. Democratic women typically support many women’s issues; however, Republican women are now departing from their party’s traditional position in order to indicate support for these issues as well. Swers does note that if more highly conservative women are elected to Congress, the correlating impact of gender may also change. Within the twenty six years after the 103rd Congress, I believe that the trends of intense partisanship do indicate that more conservative Republicans and more liberal Democrats have been elected to the 117th Congress.

For the sake of this study, I will be defining women-related legislation within the house as bills introduced as H.R. or resolutions introduced as H.Res. that directly reference women within their summary or title. If given the opportunity to continue this research with a longer timeline, I believe greater policy implementations can be derived from observation regarding whether the issues that directly impact women, such as abortion, childcare, participation in the military, healthcare, etc., are being better addressed as a result.

Defining Women-Related Legislation

Within the scope of this study, women-related legislation within the House of Representatives was defined as those which include these following keywords in their title, summary, or text: women/girls/female, mother/maternal/mom, birth/birth control, gender/sex, pregnancy/pregnant, child, abortion, maternity leave, and women or woman-owned. In order for legislation to be categorized as women-related, it must ensure the protection of women and their correlating rights and cannot cause further harm. Thus, if a bill restricts one's accessibility to resources or health services, it is not considered women-related. The selection was made amongst a variety of legislation types: House Bills (H.R.), House Resolutions (H.Res.), House Joint Resolutions (H.J.Res.), House Concurrent Resolutions (H.Con.Res.), and House Amendments (H.Amdt.).

Chapter IV: Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) Women in Congress

PATSY MINK: "We have to build things that we want to see accomplished, in life and in our country, based on our own personal experiences... to make sure that others... do not have to suffer the same discrimination."

Honolulu Star-Bulletin, October 8, 1975, editorial

Patsy Mink, the first woman of color US legislator, redefined feminist policies and created spaces for future women of color to follow suit. As the first woman of color in Congress, Representative Patsy Mink primarily focused on breaking gender and racial barriers. Her particular prioritization of children is seen through her vows to "fight for better laws so that our children can be better housed, better clothed, better fed, better educated" and "look forward to a better life in the years to come". Her identity as a third-generation Japanese American from Hawaii heavily contributed to her advocacy regarding childcare and Title IX legislation. Mink's political identity or persona "harnessed her identities as assets rather than as obstacles" (Wu and Mink 2022). Mink went on to serve 24 years in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Despite the number of U.S. Representatives remaining constant, the number of states where Asian Americans have been elected has increased. Therefore, this increase in state representation signifies that "many AAEOs (Asian American elected officials) are emerging from non-Asian majority districts" (Geron and Lai, 2002, p. 50). As conversations regarding diversity have increased, I assume that future Congresses will continue to reflect a more diverse body as well.

Membership of the 116th Congress

In the 116th Congress, twenty Members or 3.8% of the total membership are of Asian, South Asian, or Pacific Islander ancestry. 130 female Members serve, making up 24.0% of the total membership. Since the 115th Congress, female membership has gone up by twenty-one Members. Within the House of Representative, seventeen Members are of AAPI descent with sixteen of these Members identifying as Democrats and the others identifying as a Republican. Of these seventeen, only seven Members are female. The Congressional Research Service Report uses thirty-five years as the unit of comparison. Thus, for comparison, during the 99th Congress from 1985 to 1986, there were only a total of five AAPI Members in the House (Congressional Research Service, 2020).

Table 1: Asian Pacific American Women in the 116th Congress² (All House Members except for Sens. Duckworth, Harris, and Hirono)		
Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) Sen. Kamala Harris (D-CA) Sen. Mazie Hirono (D-HI)	Judy Chu (D-CA) Doris O. Matsui (D-CA) Tulsi Gabbard (D-HI) Pramila Jayapal (D-WA)	Grace Meng (D-NY) Stephanie Murphy (D-FL) Aumua Amata Coleman Radewagen (R-AS) [Delegate]

Membership of the 117th Congress

149 women Members serve in the 117th Congress. This population represents 27.5% of the total membership. In comparison to the 116th Congress, female membership has increased by eighteen members. Within the 117th Congress, twenty-one Members, or 3.9% of the total membership, are of Asian, South Asian, or Pacific Islander ancestry. In the House, there are 19 total AAPI Members; sixteen of them identify as Democrats with the other three identifying as

² U.S. Congress, House, Office of the Historian.

Republicans. Of this nineteen, nine Members in the House are female. For comparison, thirty-five years ago during the 99th Congress from 1985 to 1986, there were only five AAPI Members in the House (CRS, 2022).

Table 2: Asian Pacific American Women in the 117th Congress³ (All House Members except for Sens. Duckworth and Hirono)		
Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) Sen. Mazie Hirono (D-HI)	Judy Chu (D-CA) Doris O. Matsui (D-CA) Young Kim (R-CA) Michelle Steel (R-CA) Marilyn Strickland (D-WA)	Pramila Jayapal (D-WA) Grace Meng (D-NY) Stephanie Murphy (D-FL) Aumua Amata Coleman Radewagen (R-AS) [Delegate]

The three new representatives in the 117th Congress — Young Kim, Michelle Steel, and Marilyn Strickland — identify as Korean Americans, with Representative Marilyn Strickland also identifying as African American. Compared to the previous Congress, the number of AAPI female Republican representatives has also increased.

³ Congressional Research Service. *Women in Congress: Statistics and Brief Overview*. 2022.

Policy Implications of Higher Female AAPI Membership

MARILYN STRICKLAND: “As women, we are just policed. Our bodies are policed. Our tone of voice is policed. What does your hair look like? What is she wearing? Did she gain weight? Did she lose weight? I say this because that is part of the process of being elected. But at the same time it’s another layer of what you have to experience, in addition to showing that you’re competent, showing what you stand for, trying to get votes.”

Good Morning America (GMA) Forum

Women, especially Asian American women, face a “double bind” or “double burden” when assuming positions of leadership. In order to appear competent, one must display authority; however, if too dominant, they are judged or labeled as socially deficient. In the case of Asian American women, they are often “evaluated as the least suitable for leadership roles” in comparison to their white male, white female, or Asian male counterparts. This perception forms as a result of Asian stereotypes regarding “less aggressive” or “more feminine” behavior, which directly conflict with leadership traits (Tinkler et al., 2019).

Universe:	Dependent Variable:	Independent Variables:	Test:
All bills in the 116th & 117th Congress (House of Representatives only)	% of those bills that are women or AAPI-related	% of Members of House who are AAPI women	Did % of bills that are women or AAPI-related increase as % of AAPI women representatives increased?

I predict these two following hypotheses to be simultaneously true.

Hypothesis 1: With the 117th Congress having two more AAPI female representatives within the House of Representatives than the previous year, there will be an increase in the percentage of bills and resolutions introduced that are women or AAPI-related.

Hypothesis 2: Despite my expectations regarding an increase in women and AAPI-related bills and resolutions within the House of Representatives, the sponsors or cosponsors of such bills are not likely to be AAPI female representatives.

Defining AAPI Issues

CONGRESSWOMAN MARILYN STRICKLAND: As a woman of both Korean-American and African-American descent, it was deeply personal to wear my hanbok⁴, which not only symbolizes my heritage and honors my mother, but also serves as a larger testament to the importance of diversity in our nation, state, and the People's House.

Statement after Swearing-in Ceremony

Wong and Shah (2021) conducted a study based on data derived from the 2016 National Asian American Survey pre- and post- election surveys (2016 NAAS-Pre and 2016 NAAS-Post). The 2016 NAAS-Pre consists of 2,238 Asian American and 305 Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander adult interviews that were conducted by telephone between August 10 to September 26, 2016 (Wong & Shah, 2021, p. 75). Interviews were conducted in English and ten other languages. Wong and Shah then surveyed nine total U.S. Asian and Pacific national origin groups — starting with the six largest U.S. Asian ethnic groups. These six groups account for more than 80% of the Asian American adult population. The nine groups are as follows: Asian Indian, Cambodian, Chinese, Filipino, Hmong, Korean, Japanese, Vietnamese, and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. The 2016 NAAS-Post consists of a total of 4,393 telephone interviews of Asian American adults that were completed between November 10, 2016 and March 2, 2017 (Wong and Shah, 2021, p. 76). Unlike the 2016 NAAS-Pre, the 2016 NAAS-Post studied ten national origins with the addition of these groups: Pakistani and Bangladeshi.

Although the 2016 NAAS-Pre and NAAS-Post contain national samples, the study conducted by Wong and Shah only produces a probability sample and therefore will yield a study sample big enough to conduct within-group analysis. However, considering that Asian

⁴ Hanbok is traditional Korean garb, typically worn on special occasions such as Lunar New Year, weddings, and more.

Americans are a population that is extremely hard-to-reach and make up less than seven percent of the total U.S. population, I believe this study is sufficient enough in indicating several points of political convergence among Asian Americans (Barreto et al., 2018).

When observing Asian American political identities, previous political science literature indicates that “Asian Americans are most likely to identify as Democrat, especially those registered to vote,” as shown in Table 1 below.

2016 NAAS-Pre	Democrat	Independent/No Party	Republican
All	46	25	29
Registered	50	19	30
Not registered	28	43	29

Source: Authors’ tabulation based on Ramakrishnan et al. 2016.
Note: Numbers in percentages. Distribution based on 2016 NAAS pre-election survey, Independent = DK, ref, no party, “Do not think in terms of political parties”; leaners included with major party.

Table 1

Wong and Shah argued that by observing the questions presented within the NAAS pre-election study, the identification of future policy agendas among Asian Americans is possible. On issues that regard healthcare, immigration, climate change, racial equality, and taxation, the 2016 NAAS pre- and post-election studies reveal that Asian American communities lean more progressive than conservative as a whole — as seen in Figure 3 below.

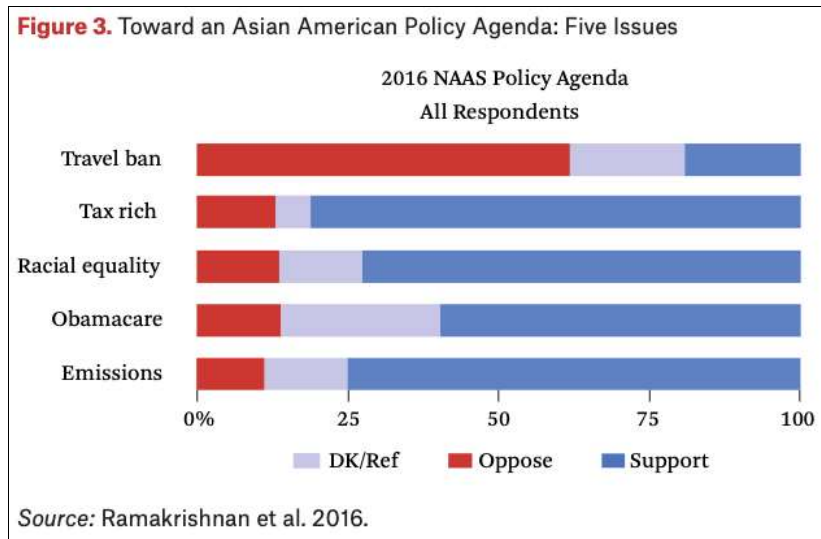


Figure 3

This data indicates that “despite critical differences in national origin, generation, class, and even partisanship, Asian Americans demonstrate a surprising degree of political commonality”. The Asian American population’s many divergences regarding “national origin, historical settlement patterns in the United States, language, religion, and physical appearance,” does not impede on reflections of a unified political preference (Wong and Shah, 2021, p. 78).

For the primary issues presented within Figure 3, the 2016 NAAS pre- and post-election studies revealed that “the Asian American community as a whole leans more progressive than conservative” (Wong and Shah, 2021, p. 77). Figure 3 rather reveals that a majority of Asian Americans “support Obamacare (Affordable Care Act), stricter emission limits on power plants to address climate change, and raising taxes on the rich” whilst also opposing a travel ban for Muslims entering the U.S. (Wong and Shah, 2021, p. 77). Wong and Shah argue that support for these policies and their indicated concentration of support “might be associated with the U.S. government taking a strong role in providing social services and addressing major societal

problems, such as climate change and the government’s role in addressing racial equality” (Wong and Shah, 2021, p. 77).

For the sake of this study, AAPI-related legislation was defined as legislation that addressed specific AAPI groups — such as Korean American, Vietnamese American, Indian American, and Pacific Islander communities like Hawaii — in addition to bills that specifically addressed people of color or racial and ethnic minorities. A majority of AAPI-related legislation pertained to minority-serving institutions, especially for higher education and graduate schools. Within the title, summary, or text, the particular legislation must explicitly mention or study the disparities or impact that this legislation may have on communities of color or AAPI communities if implemented. The selection was made amongst a variety of legislation types: House Bills (H.R.), House Resolutions (H.Res.), House Joint Resolutions (H.J.Res.), House Concurrent Resolutions (H.Con.Res.), and House Amendments (H.Amdt.).

Chapter V: California's 39th Congressional District

California's 39th congressional district consists of the following cities: Fullerton, La Habra, La Habra Heights, Brea, Buena Park, Anaheim Hills, Placentia, Yorba Linda, Diamond Bar, Chino Hills, Hacienda Heights, and Rowland Heights. The total population consists of 717,176 individuals with a generally greater female population. The most common age group are those ages 45 to 54. Within this district, White, Asian, and Hispanic or Latino communities are most populous (The 2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates). In 2019, the median age was 40.5 years old. The 2019 poverty rate was 8.89% with a 4.92% decrease from the previous year (Data USA 2019).

The Cook Partisan Voting Index (CPVI or PVI) is a measurement that compares U.S. congressional districts or states with others through the past two presidential elections (Benen 2017; Cillizza 2018). The PVI determines whether the district or state leans more towards the Democratic or Republican Party in comparison to the nation as a whole with a correlating numerical value. For example, for "the national average for these latest ratings, we have taken the average Democratic share of the two-party presidential vote for 2016 and 2020, which is roughly 51.7%." Thus, "if Hillary Clinton carried 55% of the two-party vote in a given district in 2016 and Joe Biden carried 58% in the district in 2020, the district would have a PVI score of roughly D+5" (Wasserman 2021). The 2018 Cook Partisan Voter Index (PVI) for CA-39 determined it was EVEN; the CA-39th district's results are thus within 1 percentage point of the national average for the 2016 and 2012 presidential elections. Thus, CA-39 was determined to be the 200th most Democratic district nationally.

The United States has strong ties to its historical and ongoing migration. Prior legislation, such as the Chinese Exclusion Acts of the 1850s, highlighted xenophobic tendencies and

anti-Asian sentiment that persisted for decades afterwards. After the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act passed, the number of immigrants who entered the United States from Asian countries significantly increased. In 2019, “14.1 million immigrants from Asia resided in the United States, representing a 29-fold increase from 1960”. 48% of Asian immigrants reside in these three prominent states: California (30%), New York (9%), and Texas (8%). Orange County is one of the top four counties nationally where immigrants from Asia settled (Hanna and Batalova 2021).

Historically, these political positions were held by Republicans in Orange County. Despite voting for Hilary Clinton in 2016, Orange County constituents voted for Republican congressional candidates. This flipped in 2018 when a district flip was recorded where constituents voted for Democratic congressional representatives. Orange County was now a blue county with all seven congressional seats being occupied by Democrats. This “Republican wipeout in Orange County”, which long served as the breeding ground for “a wellbeing of conservatism that nourished generations of state and national party leaders” heightened the significance of rapidly changing demographics and political changes and their direct implications in elections (Barabak 2018).

The following data comes from the 2020 Cooperative Elective Survey, conducted by political scientists at Harvard and Tufts University. The Cooperative Election Study (formerly the Cooperative Congressional Election Study) is a national stratified sample survey consisting of over 50,000+ people. This survey is administered through the Internet polling firm YouGov. The CES consists of common content and team content. Common content consists of half of the questionnaire that is asked of all 50,000+ people, whereas, team content is the other half of the questionnaire asked of a subset of 1,000 people “designed by each individual participating

team.” The survey can be split into an additional two parts: the pre-election wave, and post-election wave. Two-thirds of the questionnaire are answered by respondents during the pre-election wave from late September to late October. This portion of the survey pertains to “general political attitudes, various demographic factors, assessment of roll call voting choices, political information, and vote intentions.” During the post-election wave in November, respondents then go on to answer the remaining third of the questionnaire which primarily consists of topics related to the most-recent election. For non-election years, the survey only has a single wave in the fall.

Within the State of California, 24.72% of individuals identify as Republican, 24.79% identify as Conservative, 56.94% indicated that white privilege exists, and 23.97% indicated that women are too easily offended. Considering that California identifies as a blue state and therefore holds more liberal views, these statistics do not come with much surprise. However, within California’s 39th Congressional District, 36.25% of constituents identify as Republican, 32.50% identify as conservative, 55.00% indicated that white privilege exists, and 31.25% indicated that women are too easily offended. The party and ideology categories were asked during the pre-election wave, whereas the racism and sexism indicator categories were asked during the post-election wave.

Of the 53 total California Congressional Districts, the 39th District ranked 10th highest for the percentage of Republican constituents, 12th highest for conservative constituents, 29th highest for being aware of white-privilege, and 8th highest for indicating sexist sentiment.

Chapter VB: Young Kim's Journey to Office

Young Kim's political career first began as the Director of Community Relations and Asian Affairs for former Congressman Ed Royce — the former representative for CA-39. During this position, she served as the key liaison to the 39th District and served as the advisor on issues pertaining to the Asian-American community and foreign policy.

Before her career as a congresswoman, Kim was the first Korean-American Republican woman to serve in the California State Assembly. Kim's identity heavily revolves around her role as an immigrant, small business owner, community leader, and mother. As an assemblywoman, Kim's political agendas included "fighting to grow jobs, supporting small businesses, ensuring public safety, promoting educational opportunities, supporting veterans, and protecting victims of domestic violence" (Young Kim House About Bio).

Kim was a candidate in 2018 for California's 39th Congressional District election for the U.S. House of Representatives. Despite advancing from the primary on June 5, 2018, Kim was unable to win the general election on November 6, 2018. The Los Angeles Times noted, "the Republican Party's loss of the 39th District in 2018 came as a surprise as Kim had held a lead over Cisneros on election night." However, after the mail-in ballots were counted, Cisneros had won by 3.2 percentage points. Gil Cisneros (D) ultimately defeated Young Kim (R) by 7,611 votes (Ballotpedia). Thus, in 2018, all 7 Orange County congressional seats were blue.

Kim returned in the 2020 election for California's 39th Congressional District election. 37% of the 39th's registered voters were affiliated with the Democratic Party as of October, with Republicans only making up 32.5% (The Los Angeles Times). However, Kim ultimately won in 2020 with 4,109 more votes than Cisneros (Ballotpedia).

Kim is currently running for re-election to the U.S. House as a representative of California's 40th Congressional District. She has declared candidacy for the primary which is scheduled to be on June 7, 2022 (Ballotpedia).

During her career as a congressional representative, Young Kim cosponsored 24 bills that were categorized as either women or AAPI-related. Of these 24 bills, 12 bills were women-related, 11 bills were AAPI-related, and 1 bill was both women and AAPI-related.

For AAPI-related legislation, Kim focuses primarily on the Korean-American community. For example, H.R. 234 — titled the “Korean American VALOR Act” — provides hospital care, domiciliary care, and medical services “through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)... to veterans who served in the armed forces of the Republic of Korea... and became U.S. citizens after such service” (Library of Congress). H.Res. 45, titled “Supporting the goals & ideals of Korean American Day”, both “honors the 118th anniversary of the arrival of the first Korean American immigrants to the U.S.” and “expresses support for the goals and ideals of Korean American Day” (Library of Congress). H.Res. 294, “Encouraging reunions of divided Korean-American families”, discusses the complex histories between North Korea and South Korea and its everlasting impact on the division of families. H.Res. 120, “Recognizing the cultural & historical significance of Lunar New Year in 2021”, focuses more on the unifying elements of the AAPI-community in the sharing of traditions, practices, holidays, and culture.

For women-related legislation, Kim tends to focus on maternal issues such as pregnancy and breast cancer. H.R. 4387, “Maternal Health Quality Improvement Act of 2021”, enforces that “the Department of Health and Human Services (HSS) undertake activities to improve maternal health” especially in rural areas by awarding grants and implementing new training practices (Library of Congress). H.R. 5163, titled the “Care for Her Act”, aims to help support parents and

pregnant women by allowing taxpayers to claim the Child Tax Credit and establishing the Pregnancy Support Collaborative which would consist of representatives from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Other bills that Kim cosponsored aimed to increase accessibility to mammogram technologies. Kim cosponsored 3 bills — H.R. 3087, H.R. 3183, and H.R. 5769 — that focused on breast cancer, raising awareness, and improving equity efforts or greater accessibility to services.

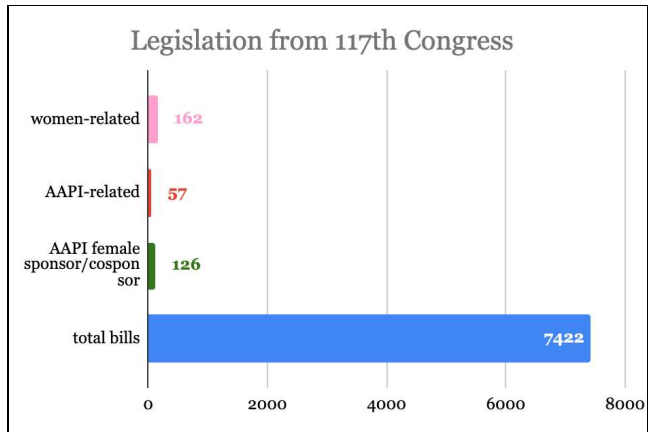
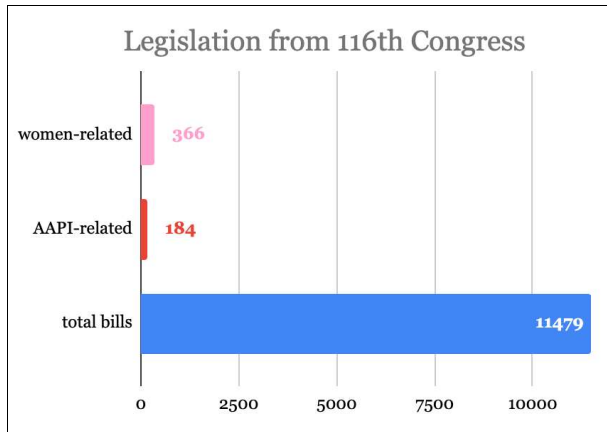
However, Young Kim’s voting history indicates a more restricted political agenda regarding women, health services, and equity. H.R. 3755, titled the “Women’s Health Protection Act of 2021”, “prohibits governmental restrictions on the provision of, and access to, abortion services” (Library of Congress); Kim voted nay against this bill’s passing. Considering that Kim identifies as a Republican representative, it is not surprising that her political beliefs align with the GOP on particular issues such as abortion, birth control access, and more. H.R. 5, the “Equality Act”, “prohibits discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity in areas including public accommodations and facilities, education, federal funding, employing, housing, credit, and the jury system” (Library of Congress); Kim once again voted nay against this bill’s passing. Considering Young Kim’s campaign emphasis on her identity as a Korean American woman in addition to her role as a mother, it is interesting that she once again adopts a more traditional, conservative political stance on issues that explicitly prevent against forms of discrimination that pertain to gender and sexual orientation. Kim seems to generally support women-related legislation with exception to the particular policies that conservatives have historically opposed.

Asian American Conservatism

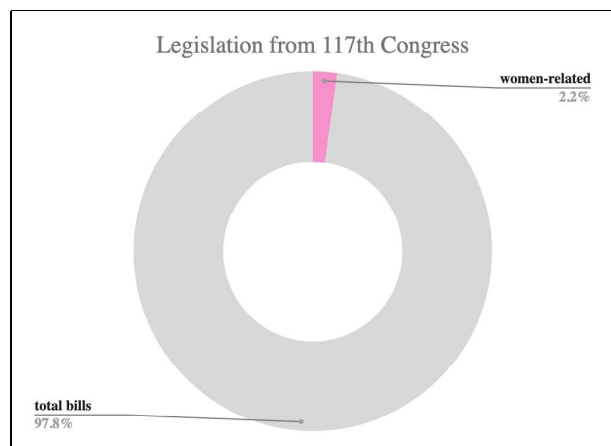
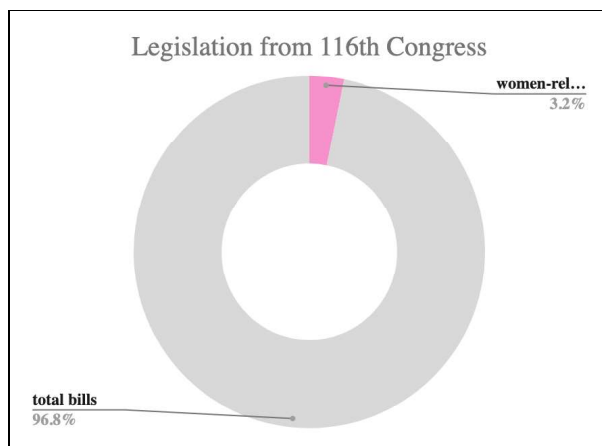
Republican women are often “willing to downplay their commitment to women’s issues” in order to advance other policy priorities or priorities specific to their district that conform to the Republican agenda more (Swers, 2002, p. 17). However, some Republican women might deflect from the Republican party’s more traditionally conservative stance to support feminist initiatives regarding women’s issues, especially when “members of the less powerful minority” as a party within the chamber.

Within discussions regarding conservative parties and substantive representation of women, feminist interest and gendered interests must be distinguished from one another. Feminist interests and claims “challenge existing gender norms and roles as well as patriarchal structures”. Gendered interests and claims, on the other hand, “aim to improve traditional roles for women as wives, mothers, caregivers, or victims of violence” (Celis and Childs; 2012; 2014). Och and Williams (2021) concluded that the “framing of conservative women’s advocacy on women’s issues tended to either coopt feminist claims — breaking down traditional gender roles, norms, and structures or use gendered claims — emphasizing women’s role in society as mothers” (Och and Williams; 2021; p. 2). The identity of motherhood has additionally played a larger political role in the campaign efforts of Republican women of color.

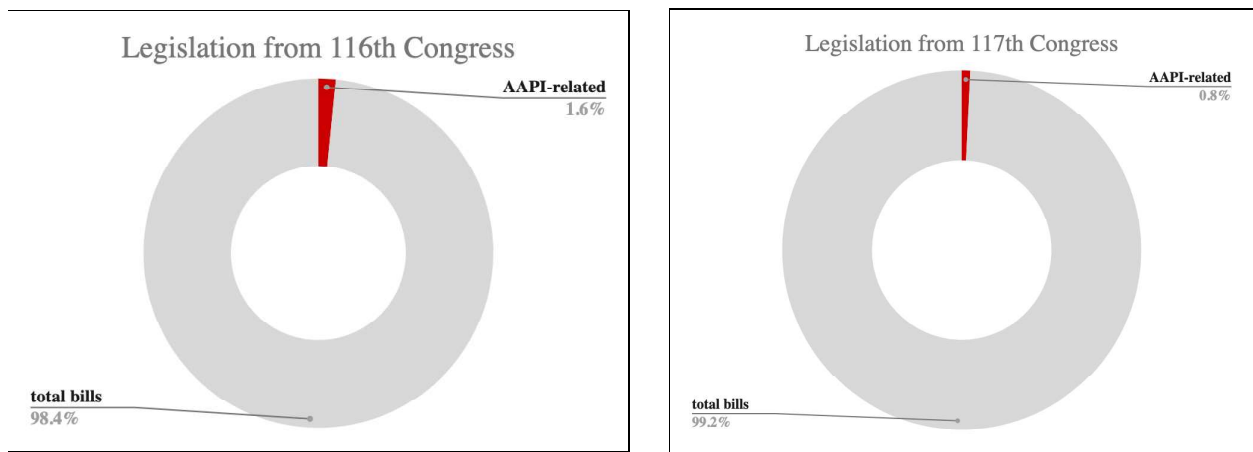
Chapter VI: Findings & Conclusions



Above are the graphs indicating the overall data sets collected both from the 116th and 117th Congress when considering legislation within the House of Representatives only. In the case of the 116th Congress, only 366 bills were determined to be women-related and 184 bills were determined to be AAPI-related. For the 116th Congress, I considered a total of 11,479 bills, resolutions, and amendments. For the 117th Congress, only 162 bills were determined to be women-related and 57 bills were determined to be AAPI-related. Within the legislation I considered women or AAPI-related, a total of 126 bills were sponsored or cosponsored by AAPI female representatives. In the 117th Congress, a total of 7,422 bills were considered.



In the 116th Congress, only 3.2% of the legislation was women-related. In the 117th Congress, only 2.2% of the legislation was women-related. We see a decrease of a whole percentage. This decrease could have resulted due to the limitations of the time period for the 117th Congress. If I were to categorize all the legislation for the 117th Congress after the term is completed, it is possible that the percentage of women-related bills might slightly increase from its current percentage.



In the 116th Congress, only 1.6% of the legislation was AAPI-related. In the 117th Congress, an even smaller 0.8% of the legislation was AAPI-related — despite varying bills being introduced that explicitly referenced AAPI communities, AAPI holidays like Lunar New Year, and health issues that disproportionately affect AAPI individuals. The low percentage from the 117th Congress may be attributed to the constrictions of the time span as well. In my categorization of these bills, certain bills that were AAPI-related had to be coded as non-related because their latest date of action was past the month of January.

These findings reveal that both of my hypotheses were wrong. Despite the increase in AAPI female representation within the House of Representatives, unexpectedly, there was a decrease in both women and AAPI-related bills in comparison to the prior Congress. The percentage of women-related bills decreased from 3.2% to 2.2%, and the percentage of

A-API-related bills decreased from 1.6% to 0.8%. Additionally, despite the fact that the percentages of women and A-API-related bills were so low, a majority of the sponsors or cosponsors of these bills were indeed female and A-API representatives. There were 13 bills that were both women and A-API-related that were sponsored or cosponsored by A-API female representatives. 82 bills of a total 162 women-related bills were sponsored or cosponsored by A-API female representatives. 30 bills of a total of 57 A-API-related bills were sponsored or cosponsored by A-API female representatives. This concludes that A-API female representatives remain the driving force for introducing these specific issues on a legislative level.

Future Improvements

If given the opportunity to pursue this research further within a longer timeframe, there are a few changes I would make. Firstly, I'd like to collect data regarding both legislation in the House of Representatives and the Senate to better assess Congress as a whole. In this study, as the 117th House of Representatives is currently still completing its term, I had to limit the legislative data I collected to only be from January 2021 through the end of January 2022. As a result, it may be possible that the total percentage of women and A-API-related bills actually increase in the second half of the term as further bills or resolutions are introduced. The ways in which I categorized whether legislation was women-related or A-API-related was quite narrow. As mentioned beforehand, a set keywords list was utilized; however, the categorization process also required a subjective element. Not only did I and my research assistants have to review whether the title, text, or summary included such keywords, but also review how these words were used within their respective contexts. Due to the subjective nature of whether or not these bills qualify as being related to women or A-API communities, I determined that human review

would better determine my results. For efficiency, however, future data sets may rely on a coded program instead.

If I were to continue this research, I would like to expand the category of women-related legislation to include a wider range of issues that do not explicitly mention women. In previous studies regarding the 103rd and 104th Congress, scholars defined women's issues as "bills that are particularly salient to women because they seek to achieve equality for women; they address women's special needs, such as women's health concerns or child-care issues; or they confront issues with which women have traditionally been concerned in their role as caregivers, such as education or the protection of children". Yet, scholars such as Dodson recognize that "when identifying which specific bills concern women's issues, one can find reasons to categorize all bills as women's issues or no bills as women's issues" (Dodson, 2006, p. 34). Thus, she reviewed the monthly legislative reports of "five major liberal and conservative women's groups," where "each group claims to represent women's interests and has a legislative department devoted to following women's issues in Congress" (Dodson, 2006, p. 35). She finalized eight major issue categories: children and families (non-education), education, civil rights/affirmative action, economic equity and employment benefits, women's health, general health, crime, and welfare. However, due to the interwoven nature of these policy fields and their impacts on women, people of color, children, etc, a majority of bills may be determined to be women or AAPI related despite not explicitly mentioning these communities.

Additionally, studies regarding Representative Young Kim are sparse as her congressional career just began in 2021. At the end of her term, it would be beneficial to survey constituents of the 39th district to indicate how well constituents believe their representative aligned with their political interests through the policies she implemented or failed to implement.

Although this study aimed to be as conclusive as possible, the limitations of how Representative Kim and the 117th Congress was recently elected to office only allowed for limited reflection. Thus, further research will continue to strengthen such findings as we can review a greater period of time and its correlating political impact.

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