

Political Contributions by Asian Americans: An Analysis of the 2002 Massachusetts Gubernatorial Campaign

*Paul Y. Watanabe, University of Massachusetts Boston
Gregory Kim-Ju, California State University Sacramento*

Introduction

The Institute for Asian American Studies has analyzed and chronicled, often for the first time, the involvement of Asian Americans in the daily life of the Commonwealth. Over the last few decades Massachusetts has experienced a remarkably rapid growth in its Asian American population. Between 1990 and 2000, for example, this population grew by 67.5% to 238,124. Asian Americans now constitute just under 4% of the state's population.

One of the dimensions that we have studied is the political participation of Asian Americans. This study takes an initial look into a specific mode of political participation – contributing money to political candidates. In this case, we examine contributions to gubernatorial candidates in Massachusetts during the 2002 campaign. This election was marked by a spirited effort by several candidates to secure the Democratic nomination, the Republicans settling early on Mitt Romney after the incumbent Republican Governor Jane Swift chose not to seek her party's nomination, and the third party candidacies of most notably Jill Stein of the Green Party and Libertarian Carla Howell. In the end, Romney prevailed over Shannon O'Brien the Democratic standard bearer, Stein, and Howell.

The picture that emerges from the data on contributions generally reflects a modest level of giving and few startling surprises or departures from the pattern of giving by non-Asians. This overall characterization, however, does not diminish in our minds the importance of this report in providing for the first time information on Asian American giving in a major Massachusetts campaign and in creating a much-needed baseline. By establishing this foundation, we endeavor to shape and inform what we hope will be regular analyses of Asian American contributions in gubernatorial and other political contests. We can better ascertain, for example, whether there are any notable distinctions between the participation of Asian and non-Asian contributors. Furthermore, comparisons of political contributions in future elections with that evidenced in 2002 will assist us in ascertaining more clearly possible patterns in Asian American participation through political contributions.

Method

A database of campaign finance activity administered by the Office of Campaign and Political Finance (OCPF) of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts was used to analyze political contributions to candidates for the 2002 Massachusetts gubernatorial race. This database consists of reports filed by state candidates and committees (including those associated with statewide and legislative offices and ballot questions). Contributions include those made by residents of Massachusetts from \$.01 to \$500. The OCPF's Electronic Filing System receives reports from candidates and committees on these contributions.

We searched the database for the period from January 2002 to December 2002 for contributions made to candidates for governor. It should be noted, therefore, that contributions made before this period are not included in this report. Contributions for Thomas Birmingham (Democrat), Steve Grossman (Democrat), Shannon O'Brien (Democrat), Robert Reich (Democrat), Mitt Romney (Republican), Jill Stein (Green), and Warren Tolman (Democrat) were included in the database. Contributions for Carla Howell (Libertarian) were not reported.

For each candidate a listing with information on each contribution including contributor's first and last names and address and the amount and date of the contribution was compiled. A single person may make several contributions although the total of these contributions cannot exceed \$500. On certain occasions, multiple entries were mistakenly made either by candidates filing reports or by the OCPF. Thus, we eliminated all double entries of contributions with the same amount and from the same person from these files based on specific contribution dates. We also eliminated all contributions from businesses and organizations.

Since the race of contributors is not included in the listings, we devised a technique to extract the records of contributors with the greatest likelihood of being Asian Americans. The contribution files were coded for "Asian" versus "non-Asian" contributors using an "Asian Names List" (ANL) previously established by the Institute for Asian American Studies at the University of Massachusetts Boston. Files that consisted of likely Asian contributions were then double checked by researchers to maintain consistency. Although certain names such as "Lee," "Park," and "Young" were contained in the ANL, we included entries with these surnames in the final listing of Asian American contributors only if their first name was also deemed to be Asian. For example, if the contributor's name was listed as "Richard Lee," this contribution was eliminated from the Asian contributions file. Names such as "Myoung Lee," however, were included with the Asian contributions files. While this is a conservative procedure for including Asian names, it enabled us to maintain as much as possible the integrity of the ANL.

Findings

Table 1 contains data on the number of overall and Asian American contributions for major candidates for Governor who filed reports with the Office of Campaign and Political Finance of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. There were 62,057 total contributions of which 644 were from Asian Americans (1% of all contributions). Shannon O'Brien had the largest number of Asian American contributions with 215. Mitt Romney was next with 178, followed by Robert Reich 162, Thomas Birmingham 62, Jill Stein 14, Steve Grossman 8, and Warren Tolman 5. O'Brien's Asian American contributions at 1.3% also constituted the largest percentage of total contributions for any candidate. Asian Americans made up 1.2% of Stein's total contributions. For Birmingham 1.1% of his total contributions were from Asian Americans. Asian Americans were 1% of Romney's and Tolman's total contributions and 0.9% of Reich's.

Table 1. Number of Contributions*

Candidate	All Contributions	Asian Americans		
		Contributions	% of all contributions	% of Asian American contributions
Thomas Birmingham	5,718	62	1.1	9.6
Steve Grossman	1,716	8	0.5	1.2
Shannon O'Brien	16,384	215	1.3	33.4
Robert Reich	18,062	162	0.9	25.2
Mitt Romney	18,370	178	1.0	27.6
Jill Stein	1,152	14	1.2	2.2
Warren Tolman	655	5	1.0	0.8
Total	62,057	644	1.0	100.0

*Carla Howell did not file campaign contribution reports and, therefore, is not included in this table.

As a percentage of all Asian American contributions, O'Brien led the group with 33.4% of all Asian American contributions. She was followed by Romney's 27.6% of all Asian

American contributions, Reich’s 25.2%, Birmingham’s 9.6%, Stein’s 2.2%, Grossman’s 1.2%, and Tolman’s 0.8%.

In terms of dollar amounts, Table 2 indicates that total individual contributions totaled \$10,544,301. Of this amount Asian Americans contributed \$121,030 or 1.1% of all contributions. The candidates receiving the largest amount of money from Asian Americans were O’Brien with \$46,139 followed by Romney with \$37,167. Since O’Brien and Romney were the major party standard-bearers in the general election, it is not surprising that they led the other candidates in this and several other categories. Asian Americans contributed \$575 to Stein who was also on the final election ballot. Of the candidates who competed only in the primaries, the leaders were Reich with \$17,699 and Birmingham with \$16,050. Grossman raised \$2,900 and Tolman \$500 from Asian Americans.

Table 2. Dollar Amount of Contributions*

Candidate	All Amount	Asian Americans		
		Amount	% of all contributions	% of Asian American contributions
Thomas Birmingham	\$1,465,112	\$16,050	1.1	13.3
Steve Grossman	624,423	2,900	0.5	2.4
Shannon O’Brien	2,969,467	46,139	1.6	38.1
Robert Reich	1,697,688	17,699	1.0	14.6
Mitt Romney	3,679,644	37,167	1.0	30.7
Jill Stein	44,158	575	1.3	0.5
Warren Tolman	63,809	500	1.1	0.4
Total	\$10,544,301	\$121,030	1.1	100.0

*Carla Howell did not file campaign contribution reports and, therefore, is not included in this table.

Asian American contributions accounted for 1.6% of O’Brien’s total contributions, the largest portion for any candidate. Stein followed O’Brien with 1.3% of her contributions coming from Asian Americans. After Stein came Birmingham 1.1%, Reich and Romney 1%, Tolman 0.8%, and Grossman 0.5%.

O’Brien secured the highest percentage, 38.1%, of all Asian American contributions, followed by Romney’s 30.7%, Reich’s 14.6%, Birmingham’s 13.3%, Grossman’s 2.4%, Stein’s 0.5% and Tolman’s 0.4%.

Table 3 includes the average size of all contributions and of those by Asians and non-Asians. Contributions by non-Asian Americans averaged \$169.72. The average of Asian American contributions was larger \$187.93 or about 10.7% higher than the figure for non-Asian Americans. Overall the average contribution to gubernatorial candidates was \$169.91. Grossman secured by far the largest average size of contributions by Asian Americans, \$362.50, and non-Asian Americans, \$363.89. On the other hand, the smallest average size contributions by an even wider margin went to Stein, \$41.07 by Asians and \$38.30 by others. Contributions by Asian Americans to Birmingham averaged \$258.87, O’Brien \$214.60, Romney \$208.80, Reich \$109.25, and Tolman, \$100.00.

Table 3. Average Dollar Amount of Contributions*

Candidate	All	Non-Asian Americans	Asian Americans
Thomas Birmingham	\$256.23	\$256.20	\$258.87
Steve Grossman	363.88	363.80	362.50
Shannon O’Brien	181.24	180.80	214.60
Robert Reich	93.99	93.85	109.25
Mitt Romney	200.31	200.22	208.80
Jill Stein	38.33	38.30	41.07
Warren Tolman	97.42	97.40	100.00
Total	\$169.91	\$169.72	\$187.93

*Carla Howell did not file campaign contribution reports and, therefore, is not included in this table.

Implications for the Future

As we indicated earlier, the principal goal of this inquiry is to provide an initial overview of Asian American political contributions to candidates for major office in Massachusetts. By examining data from the 2002 Governor's race, we were able to identify in that election many similarities and a limited number of differences between the behavior of Asian and non-Asian American donors. In addition, some distinctions with respect to giving to specific candidates were discerned.

Our long term goal is to encourage the regular compilation of this information on Asian American political donors—information that is typically reported only for the general population. This first compilation, therefore, can be compared with new data from future gubernatorial races. Some of the questions that could be explored in making these comparisons over time might include the following:

- As the Asian American community has become more established have the number of Asian American contributors increased?
- Has the Asian American share of overall contributions and contributors grown as well?
- Are there any indications that Asian American donors disproportionately favor candidates from particular political parties?
- Do contributions from Asian Americans differ substantially in their average size from those of non-Asians?

The effort to assess the rate of Asian American giving, e.g., whether it is low, moderate, or high, is made difficult by the absence of a single standard. By systematically securing information on contributions in studies such as this one, we are convinced that analysts will be much better equipped to establish that standard and to respond to these and other questions about Asian American behavior relating to this important mode of political participation.

Acknowledgements

As is true with all of the research conducted at the Institute for Asian American Studies this project benefited from the contributions of several people. We want to express our appreciation, therefore, to Michael Liu, Shauna Lo, and Yiu Fai Wong for their valuable assistance.

About the Authors

Paul Y. Watanabe is the Director of the Institute for Asian American Studies and an Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Massachusetts Boston.

Gregory Kim-Ju is an Assistant Professor of Psychology at California State University Sacramento. In 2002–2003, he was a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Institute for Asian American Studies at the University of Massachusetts Boston.

Institute for Asian American Studies
University of Massachusetts Boston
100 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, MA 02125-3393
Tel 617-287-5650
Fax 617-287-5656
www.iaas.umb.edu
asianaminst@umb.edu

August 2004