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Political Contributions by Asian Americans

An Analysis of the 2014 Massachusetts Gubernatorial Campaign

Introduction

The Institute for Asian American Studies' report on political contributions by Asian Americans in the 2002 Massachusetts gubernatorial campaign represented the first time that these contributions were systematically reported and analyzed.¹ In that election, Asian Americans constituted 1.0% of all individual contributions. In terms of dollar value, those contributions accounted for 1.1% of the total dollar amount contributed. This report follows that initial study by examining Asian American political contributions to candidates for governor in 2014.

The 2014 governor's race was energized by the fact that two-term incumbent Deval Patrick chose not to seek re-election. Patrick's decision touched off a spirited effort, particularly on the Democratic side, to select a nominee. The race also attracted candidates from parties outside of the Republican–Democratic mainstream—Evan Falchuk, Scott Lively, and Jeffrey McCormick. On the Republican side, Charlie Baker easily prevailed over Mark Fisher to secure the nomination. The Democratic primary was hotly contested among Donald Berwick, Martha Coakley, and Steve Grossman with Coakley prevailing as the Democrat's standard bearer. In the final election, Baker defeated Coakley.

The number of Asian American contributions in 2014 was 1,221. This figure was nearly double the number of contributions, 644, in 2002. Furthermore, the growth in Asian American contributions was significantly greater than the growth of overall contributions. Asian American contributions accounted for 1.1% of all contributions in 2014.

The total dollar value of Asian American contributions rose to \$297,884 in 2014 from \$121,030 in 2002. The average Asian American contribution in 2014 rose as well to \$243.97 from \$187.93.

The aggregate data on Asian American giving is augmented in this report by detailed information on number and dollar value of Asian American contributions to individual candidates who were active in the primary and final elections. Baker received the largest number of Asian American contributions followed by Coakley and then Grossman and Berwick.

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¹ Watanabe, Paul, and Gregory Kim-Ju Kim. *Political Contributions by Asian Americans: An Analysis of the 2002 Massachusetts Gubernatorial Campaign*. Boston: Institute for Asian American Studies, 2004.

Method

To analyze political contributions to candidates for the 2014 Massachusetts gubernatorial race, we drew upon the database of campaign finance activity administered by the Office of Campaign and Political Finance (OCPF) of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The 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 donors from \$.01 to \$500. The OCPF's Electronic Filing System receives reports from candidates and committees on these contributions.

The database was searched for contributions to gubernatorial candidates up until December 2014. It should be noted, therefore, that contributions after this period are not examined in this report. For this study, data was examined on candidates who appeared on the primary and final election ballots—Charles Baker (Republican), Donald Berwick (Democrat), Martha Coakley (Democrat), Evan Falchuk (United Independent), Mark Fisher (Republican), Steven Grossman (Democrat), Scott Lively (Independent) and Jeffrey McCormick (Independent).

For each candidate a listing with information on the contributor's first and last name, address and the amount and date of the contribution was compiled. In Massachusetts, a single person may make several contributions although the total of these contributions may not exceed \$1,000 during each calendar year. On certain occasions, multiple entries were mistakenly reported either in 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. Also eliminated were all contributions from businesses and organizations. Finally, candidate contributions to their own campaigns, which are not limited, were also excluded from the totals in this report.

Since the race of contributors is not included in the OCPF database listings, we devised a technique to extract the records of contributors with the highest likelihood of being Asian Americans. The contribution files were coded for "Asian" versus "non-Asian" contributors and various Asian subgroups, using an "Asian Names List" (ANL) previously established by the Institute for Asian American Studies and incorporating the work on this method from Diane Lauderdale.² Files that consisted of likely Asian contributions were then double checked by researchers to maintain consistency. For example, although certain names such as "Lee," "Park," and "Young" were contained in the ANL, we included entries with such surnames in the final listing of Asian American contributors only if their first name was also deemed likely to be Asian. This meant, for instance, that a contributor's name listed as "Richard Lee," would have been eliminated from the Asian contributions file. A name like "Myoung Lee," however, would have been retained. While this was a conservative procedure for including Asian names, it enabled us to maintain as much as possible the integrity of the ANL.

² Lauderdale, Diane S., and Bert Kestenbaum. "Asian American ethnic identification by surname." *Population Research and Policy Review* 19, no. 3 (2000): 283-300.

Findings

Table 1 contains data on the number of overall and Asian American contributions for candidates for Governor who filed reports with the office of Campaign and Political Finance of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. There were nearly 108,000 contributions of which 1,221 were from Asian Americans (1.1% of all contributions). Charles Baker received the largest number of Asian American contributions with 439. Martha Coakley received the second largest number of contributions with 299. This is not surprising since Baker and Coakley were the nominees of the two major parties and received donations in the final as well as primary elections. Steven Grossman received the third largest number of Asian American contributions, 242, and Donald Berwick the fourth largest, 224, then followed by a wide margin by Evan Falchuk, 11, and Jeffrey McCormick, 6. Two minor candidates, Mark Fisher and Scott Lively, received no Asian American contributions.

Table 1. Number of Contributions

Candidate	All Contributions	Asian Americans (AA)		
		Contributions	% of all Contributions	% of AA Contributions
Charles Baker (R)	52,159	439	0.8%	36.0%
Donald Berwick (D)	7,850	224	2.9%	18.3%
Martha Coakley (D)	30,394	299	1.0%	24.5%
Evan Falchuk (I)	897	11	1.2%	0.9%
Mark Fisher (R)	270	–	0.0%	0.0%
Steven Grossman (D)	15,440	242	1.6%	19.8%
Scott Lively (I)	207	–	0.0%	0.0%
Jeffrey McCormick (I)	714	6	0.8%	0.5%
Total	107,931	1,221	1.1%	100.0%

As a percentage of a candidate's total donations, Berwick received the highest percentage of Asian American contributions, nearly 3%. This was followed by Grossman with 1.6%. From this data the precise reasons for the pattern of support by Asian Americans cannot be determined. However, one might speculate, for example, that Grossman's particularly active cultivation of support from Asian American and immigrant communities may have contributed to the relatively high percentage of Asian American contributions he received. Evan Falchuk was the only other candidate who received greater than 1% of his contributions from Asian Americans, 1.2%. All other candidates received 1% or less from Asian Americans.

Table 1 also indicates each candidate's share of all Asian American contributions. Charlie Baker received 36.0% of all Asian American contributions. He was followed by Martha Coakley, 24.5%, Steve Grossman, 19.8%, and Don Berwick, 18.3%. Evan Falchuk had just under 1%, while Jeffrey McCormick had 0.5%.

A growth in Asian American contributions since the 2002 gubernatorial race is evident. While the total number of contributions grew in 2014 compared to 2002 by nearly 75%, Asian American contributions grew by almost 90%. Asian Americans also increased their support for the Republican gubernatorial candidate. In the 2002 election, Asian Americans gave their largest number of contributions to the Democratic gubernatorial candidate versus the Republican candidate, 33% versus 28%. In 2014, the situation was reversed with the Republican gubernatorial candidate favored 36% to 24%. Overall, however, looking at both the primary and final elections, 63% of Asian American contributions went to Democratic candidates.

The data on Steve Grossman, who was the only candidate for governor in both 2002 and 2014, are interesting. In 2002 Grossman received eight contributions, which represented about a half percent of his total number contributions. Twelve years later, Grossman's Asian American contributions increased by over thirty times from 2002.

In terms of dollar amounts, Table 2 indicates that total individual contributions were \$27,142,737. Of this amount Asian Americans contributed \$297,884 or about 1.1% of all contributions. Baker led with \$116,611 from Asian American contributors. Baker was followed by Grossman, \$72,469, Berwick, \$60,197, and Coakley, \$44,672. Falchuk and McCormick each received about two thousand dollars in Asian American contributions.

Table 2. Dollar Amount of Contributions

Candidate	All Amount	Asian Americans (AA)		
		Amount	% of all Contributions	% of AA Contributions
Charles Baker (R)	\$12,471,987	\$116,611	0.9%	39.1%
Donald Berwick (D)	\$1,958,731	\$60,197	3.1%	20.2%
Martha Coakley (D)	\$5,612,922	\$44,672	0.8%	15.0%
Evan Falchuk (I)	\$230,649	\$2,135	0.9%	0.7%
Mark Fisher (R)	\$22,804	\$0	0.0%	0.0%
Steven Grossman (D)	\$6,626,007	\$72,469	1.1%	24.3%
Scott Lively (I)	\$29,586	\$0	0.0%	0.0%
Jeffrey McCormick (I)	\$190,050	\$1,800	0.9%	0.6%
Total	\$27,142,737	\$297,884	1.1%	100.0%

Looking back to 2002 the growth in the amount of Asian American contributions roughly kept pace with the growth in overall contributions. The dollar amount of Asian American contributions increased by 146% compared to overall growth of 157%. Asian American contribution amounts, as a percentage of overall contribution amounts, held steady from 2002 at 1.1%.

Information in Table 2 also indicates that nearly 40% of the total dollar value of all Asian American contributions went to Baker. Grossman at 24.3%, Berwick at 20.2%, and Coakley at 15.0% followed.

Table 3 includes the average size of all individual contributions and of those by Asian Americans and non-Asian Americans. Contributions by non-Asian Americans averaged \$251.57, an increase from \$169.72 in 2002. Asian American contributions averaged \$243.97—3% lower than figures for non-Asian Americans, and compared to 2002, an increase from \$187.93. In short, whereas the average Asian American contribution exceeded that of non-Asian Americans in 2002, the situation was reversed in 2014.

McCormick secured the largest average size of contributions by Asian Americans, \$300, but he received only a small number of Asian American contributions. Grossman, who had a significantly larger number of such contributions, was close behind at \$299.46. Grossman also had the largest average contribution overall, \$429.15. On the other hand, the smallest average overall contribution went to Fisher, \$84.46. Fisher, however, received no contributions from Asian Americans. Coakley also had relatively small average contributions overall, \$184.67, and the lowest average Asian American contribution, \$149.40, for candidates who received Asian American funding. For the remaining candidates, contributions by Asian Americans averaged, in descending order, \$268.74 to Berwick, \$265.63 to Baker, and \$194.09 to Falchuk. For Berwick and Baker, Asian American average amounts were greater than non-Asian American average amounts.

Table 3. Average Dollar Amount of Contributions

Candidate	All	Non-Asian Americans	Asian Americans
Charles Baker (R)	\$239.11	\$238.89	\$265.63
Donald Berwick (D)	\$249.52	\$248.96	\$268.74
Martha Coakley (D)	\$184.67	\$185.02	\$149.40
Evan Falchuk (I)	\$257.13	\$257.92	\$194.09
Mark Fisher (R)	\$84.46	\$84.46	–
Steven Grossman (D)	\$429.15	\$431.21	\$299.46
Scott Lively (I)	\$142.93	\$142.93	–
Jeffrey McCormick (I)	\$266.18	\$265.89	\$300.00
Total	\$251.48	\$251.57	\$243.97

Finally, patterns of Asian American contributions by selected Asian American subgroups were analyzed. Table 4 indicates that Chinese Americans overall made the most frequent contributions to candidates, 39.7% of all identified Asian subgroup contributions. Indian Americans followed close behind at 37.5%. Chinese Americans and Indian Americans are the largest Asian American subgroups in Massachusetts, but Chinese Americans gave contributions slightly above their proportion of the Asian American population, while Indian Americans gave contributions significantly above their proportion. Japanese Americans were third, with 8.7% of identified Asian subgroup contributions, three times greater than their share of the Massachusetts Asian American population. Vietnamese Americans, the third largest Asian American subgroup in the state, gave the fourth largest share of contributions, which represents about half their proportion of Asian Americans in Massachusetts.

Table 4. Population vs. Percent of Asian American Contributions by Asian Subgroup

Asian Subgroup	Population in MA*	% of Asian American Population	% of Asian American donations**
Chinese	118,164	33.7%	39.7%
Indian	77,177	22.1%	37.5%
Japanese	9,224	2.6%	8.7%
Korean	24,110	6.9%	4.4%
Vietnamese	42,915	12.3%	6.8%
Other	78,178	22.4%	3.0%
Total	349,768	100.0%	100.0%

* Subgroup Alone, 2010 U.S. Decennial Census

** Percentages are of identified Asian subgroup contributions

Vietnamese Americans noticeably gave a relatively higher percentage of their contributions to Republican candidates, while Japanese Americans noticeably gave a relatively higher percentage of their contributions to Democratic candidates.

For candidates Baker and Coakley, the largest share of their Asian American contributions came from Chinese Americans, as shown in Table 5, followed by Indian Americans. For Berwick and Grossman the order was reversed with Indian Americans providing the largest share of Asian American contributions followed by Chinese Americans.

While Chinese Americans gave the largest number of donations, Indian Americans gave the largest total amount of money. Korean Americans gave the largest average donation, followed by Indian Americans; both subgroups' average donation was greater than the average donation from all subgroups. The other Asian subgroups' average donation was less than the average donation from all subgroups.

Table 5. Number of Contributions by Asian Subgroup

Asian Subgroup	Baker	Coakley	Grossman	Berwick	McCormick	Falchuk	Total	% of AA Donations*
Chinese	168	117	81	65	4	5	440	39.7%
Indian	123	97	99	92	2	3	416	37.5%
Japanese	29	29	11	25	0	2	96	8.7%
Korean	27	11	6	5	0		49	4.4%
Vietnamese	56	14	5	0	0		75	6.8%
Other	9	16	1	6	0	1	33	3.0%
Undetermined	27	15	39	31	0		113	–
Total	439	299	242	224	6	11	1,221	100.0%

* Percentages are of identified Asian subgroup contributions

Table 6. Amount of Contributions by Asian Subgroup

Asian Subgroup	Baker	Coakley	Grossman	Berwick	McCormick	Falchuk	Total	Average Donation
Chinese	\$45,255	\$18,175	\$20,476	\$18,695	\$800	\$850	\$104,251	\$236.40
Indian	\$37,924	\$15,811	\$33,034	\$28,491	\$1,000	\$750	\$117,010	\$280.60
Japanese	\$6,820	\$2,055	\$2,750	\$2,890	–	\$500	\$15,015	\$158.05
Korean	\$6,372	\$3,145	\$3,000	\$1,750	–	–	\$14,267	\$291.17
Vietnamese	\$8,355	\$1,895	\$1,550	–	–	–	\$11,800	\$157.33
Other	\$2,760	\$1,096	\$500	\$1,500	–	\$35	\$5,891	\$190.03
Undetermined	\$9,125	\$2,495	\$11,159	\$6,871	–	–	\$29,650	\$262.39
Total	\$116,611	\$44,672	\$72,469	\$60,197	\$1,800	\$2,135	\$297,884	\$243.97

Conclusion

Contributing financially to political candidates is one of the ways in which individuals can be politically engaged and influential. The data summarized in this report shows that compared to the 2002 gubernatorial race, the number of contributions by Asian Americans increased significantly. At the same time, however, the average dollar amount of their contributions decreased. This may indicate that Asian American donors as a group are becoming more diverse, with Asian Americans from a wider range of socioeconomic backgrounds contributing to political campaigns. Since the Asian American population in Massachusetts is projected to maintain its steady growth, we emphasize the importance of continuing to monitor the extent to which Asian American political participation, including contributing to candidates, keeps pace with or lags behind that expansion.

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