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"A Tulsi By Any Other Name: Evaluating South Asian American Support for a Hindu Member of Congress"

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A TULSI BY ANY OTHER NAME

An Analysis of South Asian American Support for a Hindu Congressional Candidate

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The Case of Tulsi Gabbard¹

1989 is almost unanimously considered the year that the concept of intersectionality – imagined as a Womanist hometruth as early as the nineteenth century (Rycenga 2005) – came to its *prominence* in a legal studies article by Kimberlé Crenshaw. Her work on black feminist and critical race theories have set the stage for much of the intersectional analysis in political science, including this edited volume. However, Crenshaw (1989) was not the only scholar at the time calling for a focus on viewing the concurrent effects of race and gender, particularly for women of color; the very same year included the publication of *Making Waves*, an early anthology on the experiences of Asian Pacific American women. One particular piece that stands out from that volume is Esther Chow's essay, "The Feminist Movement: Where Are All the Asian American Women?" Chow (1989) called for a re-imagining of feminist discourse to "address the interconnectedness of sex, gender, race, class, and culture," which would, in turn, provide a foundation for Asian American women (373). While she did not explicitly use the term "intersectionality," her reasoning supported the concept: "Asian American women derive their identification and self-esteem from both ethnicity and gender" (Chow 1989, 367).

In the 25-plus years since Crenshaw (1989) and Chow (1989) both spoke of the need for a revolution in how to understand and appreciate the multi-layered and vibrant attitudes and beliefs of women of color, intersectionality and the use of intersectional analysis have both become focal points of discussion and critique under the aegis of political science. According to Shukla (1997), this new evolution of "the political space that embraces gender, sexuality, and transnationality ... can legitimately be called a 'new ethnic politics'" (271). And yet,

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while Race and Ethnic Politics (REP) continues to grow as a new subfield of focus in our discipline, Asian American women continue to remain a “a marginalized population within a historically marginalized minority community” (Lien 2001, 198) and a group that is trapped in the “false divisions” of “the black/white paradigms of both feminist and civil rights struggle” (Shah 1997, 545).

In particular, I am fascinated by a unique community *within* a community, the South Asian American diaspora or what Shankar (1998) termed “a part, yet apart” (x). By South Asian Americans, I am referring to immigrants and native-born Americans from the Indian Sub-Continent (India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Afghanistan, etc.). Based on the 2010 Census, there are approximately 3.4 million Americans of South Asian descent in the United States with 80 percent of immigrants coming from India, followed by Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and other countries (SAALT 2012). According to Shankar (1998), “South Asian migration to America has had a different sense of pathos or urgency or conflict associated with it – not brought as laborers, put in camps, not affected by male-only policies” (xii). He continues by saying that “under the *genus* Asian American we may have the *species* of East/Southeast Asian American and South Asian American” (xiii).

While Khagram et al. (2001, 279) surmised over a decade ago that “Asian Indian Americans have not been able to make significant inroads into positions of political authority similar to those made by other Asian American groups,” recent elections and scholarship suggest otherwise (Cho and Lad 2004; Sriram et al. 2015). According to the South Asian American Political Activity Database (SAAPAD), 193 men and women of South Asian descent have run for local, state, and federal political office in the United States between 1956 and 2014 (Sriram and grindlife 2014). In that time, the community has elected four members to the U.S. House of Representatives (Dalip Singh Saund – California, 1956; Bobby Jindal – Louisiana, 2004; Hansen Clarke – Michigan, 2010; and Ami Bera – California, 2012) and two governors, Nikki Haley (South Carolina, 2010) and Bobby Jindal (Louisiana, 2008).

What is extraordinary, however, is that *none* of these politicians were Hindu. Recent estimates indicate that there are almost 1.8 million Hindus in the United States, and that 51 percent of Indian-Americans are Hindu (Pew Research Forum 2012; Desilver 2014). While some were born Hindu like Jindal and Bera, who converted to Roman Catholicism and Unitarian Universalism, respectively, one was Sikh (Saund), another a Sikh convert to Methodism (Haley), and one, Clarke, was born in a Christian and Muslim household, but considers himself a practicing Christian (Sriram and grindlife 2014). This all changed in 2012 with the election of Tulsi Gabbard² to the U.S. Congress from Hawaii’s second congressional district. Gabbard, a captain in the Hawaii National Guard, became the first American Samoan elected to Congress, as well as the second female combat veteran after Tammy Duckworth of Illinois.

Gabbard is also Hindu and took her Oath of Office in front of Speaker John Boehner with her left hand resting on a copy of the Bhagavad Gita, the Hindu holy book (Mayani 2014).

Gabbard's election produced an interesting electoral puzzle: How will traditional South Asian American voters respond to a political candidate who is Hindu, but not South Asian? While the research on Asian Pacific Americans is slim, Asian Pacific Americans are more likely than other minorities to support co-ethnics and even cross district, state and party lines to support co-ethnics in an election (Cho 2001, 2002; Sriram et al. 2015). But would Asian Pacific Americans, specifically those of South Asian descent, cross the line, and support a candidate of shared faith, but not of shared ethnicity?

And what of South Asian American women? Will they, as representatives of a diverse set of ethnicities, nationalities, and faiths, support a Hindu candidate who is not from their community of origin? This is a vital question because there is so little we know of the political attitudes of South Asian American women. Outside of broader, group-level examinations of voting, participation, incorporation, and mobilization among Asian Americans as a whole, and Asian American women more specifically, there has been little work specifically on the political attitudes of South Asian American women; to my knowledge, this is the *first* project to contribute to this area. According to Shah (1997, 541), South Asian feminist heritage “consisted of feisty immigrant mothers, ball-breaking grandmothers, Kali worship . . . social activist aunts, freedom-fighting/Gandhian great-aunts.” What is the South Asian American feminist response to Tulsi Gabbard? Does she speak for South Asian women? Can she speak for Hindu women?

In order to partly examine this question and make an initial attempt at understanding the voting behavior of South Asian American women, I created a survey of political attitudes and beliefs to examine how South Asian American voters, and specifically women, would respond to three, fictional, female candidates for Congress – one Indian-American and Hindu; one Indian-American and Muslim; and one White³ and Hindu. Using Facebook and email, the survey was sent out using a network sampling technique and collected 104 respondents including 45 women and 59 men. Using simple descriptive statistics and cross tabs, my initial findings suggest in a low-information election that South Asian American voters, particularly Indian-Americans, are far more likely to vote for an Indian-American candidate, regardless of religion, than a White candidate who is Hindu. I found a similar pattern when looking just at female voters.

An Overview of South Asian American Feminism

The South Asian American feminist movement partly owes its origins to the women's movements of the Indian subcontinent, but also due to the common experiences of South Asian immigrant women to the United States. While

women's rights have been a staple of mass protest and mobilization in India even before independence in 1947 (Chaudhuri 1993), two particular events – the 1985 Shah Bano judgment from the Supreme Court of India, and the 1987 Deorala sati case – are considered to be the more recent catalysts for a renewal of feminist inquiry in India in particular. According to Chaudhuri (1993, ix), “Both events brought to the fore the complexity involved in a post-colonial society's travails in modernization and affirmation of its traditional past. India's multi-religious, multi-linguistic, caste, and tribe-based society compounded matters.” Feminists have also created a rich, scholarly body of theory in other South Asian nations including Pakistan (Gardezi 1990; Jamal 2005), Bangladesh (Hashmi 2000; Chowdhury 2010), Nepal (Enslin 1990), Sri Lanka (Hyndman and De Alwis 2003, 2004), and Afghanistan (Hirschkind and Mahmood 2002; Choudhury 2007).

The struggles of South Asian immigrant women, particularly around the horrors of domestic abuse and intimate partner violence, provided the impetus for a groundswell of support and the unification of women of different backgrounds in the United States (Vaid 1989; Purvi Shah 1997; Sonia Shah 1997; Shukla 1997, 2003; Bhattacharjee 2012). According to Sonia Shah, South Asian American feminists drew from White feminism and Black feminism, but “neither included our South Asian American agendas – battery of immigrant women, the ghettoization of the Indian community, cultural discrimination, and bicultural history and identity” (1997, 541). Building upon this thought, Purkayastha et al. (1997) believe that the ideologies of South Asian women are not so much contradictory to Western liberal beliefs about women, as they are complementary – they empower because of their difference. Vaid (1989) suggests that South Asian women share problems with South Asian men, women in general, and all Asian immigrant women, but also have unique issues that don't affect everyone else. Shukla (1997) has argued that the South Asian American women's movement has succeeded by “giving life to a feminism that is diasporic, with an international set of reference points, and yet highly localized with respect to actual communities” (269). According to Khandelwal (2003), “South Asian American women's leadership may be distinguished by their efforts to look for new paradigms for defining ‘community’ and its agenda” (351).

Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indian, Nepali, and other immigrant women have also created a unique identity by adopting the ethnic identifier “South Asian” and using it to break nationalist, imperialist, and capitalist tendencies to forge a new face for women whose origins were the former British colonies (Shukla 1997, 2003). For Mohanty (1997, 120), “regional differences among those from different South Asian countries are often less relevant than the commonality based on our histories of immigration and our experiences in the U.S.” Purvi Shah (1997) has suggested that the moniker “South Asian” works because it “allows progressive workers for social change to bypass national allegiances and claim belonging elsewhere” (53).

Political Candidates and Vote Choice

As the previous section detailed, South Asian American women experience life, political and otherwise, through the crosscutting cleavages of ethnicity, religion, cultural norms, immigration status, and other areas. But, how does this relate to candidates and vote choice? The field of heuristics and cues, particularly in low-information elections, can provide us with an initial template to understand how South Asian American women might evaluate certain candidates. While the literature on Asian American politics is small, it is also rich with scholarship and findings on questions such as how members of this community vote (Cho 1999; Leighley and Vedlitz 1999; Lien et al. 2001; Ramakrishnan 2005; Wong et al. 2011) as well as identification (Lien et al. 2004; Junn and Masuoka 2008). There is also considerable recent work on how, and under what conditions, Asian American voters support co-ethnic candidates (Espiritu 1993; Cho 2001; Lai et al. 2001; Lai and Geron 2006; Collet 2008). More specifically, the concentrated scholarship of Cho (2001) and Cho and Lad (2004) provides the greatest incentive of support in the belief that co-ethnics, through the vehicle of fundraising and campaign contributions, strongly support the candidacies of their own community members. However, in order to understand how South Asian Americans might vote, we can examine the research in a number of other facets related to voters and candidates.

We know from the literature that voters are more likely to support and vote for candidates who are like themselves (Sigelman and Sigelman 1982) and that gender (McDermott 1997) and race (Sigelman et al. 1995; McDermott 1998) all have an effect on voter evaluation of candidates. While there is a substantial literature on low-information cues and voting behavior in the United States, what is less studied is how cues affect voter perceptions of minority candidates, and in particular, female candidates of color. This matters; for example, scholarship indicates that while Blacks and women continue to remain underrepresented in political institutions, the circumstances are one and the same. According to Darcy et al. (1997), “The problem of black underrepresentation cannot ignore the underrepresentation of black women” (449). Further, there are two assumptions that need to be made. The first is that race and sexuality, particularly for women of color, have been linked together for almost two centuries (Mendelberg 2001). Second, knowledge of a candidate’s sex is important in an election. According to Dolan (2005), “Implicit in any study of voting for women candidates is the idea that their sex matters, that voters are choosing a *woman* candidate, as opposed to choosing a candidate without any consideration of his or her sex” (53). The inherent problem is a theoretical one: American political parties and institutions still operate from the privileged perspective of White masculinity, while “nonwhite women experience ‘gender, class, and racial statuses concurrently’” (Zavella 1988, 202). This means that women of color experience political institutions that are “raced” and “gendered,” while White women do not (Hawkesworth 2003).

Winter (2008) has also pointed out that while gender and race may be fictional constructions, they are “real psychologically and socially” as “children are socialized very early to recognize and understand the importance of sex and race differences and to act accordingly” (3).

Unfortunately, little work has been accomplished in political science on intersectionality or the ways in which these cues work with and against each other as a sort of multivariate equation.

This vacuum in the literature is of particular concern to communities of color who grapple with political goals, resources, and institutions from multiple perspectives and not just one issue. I take umbrage, for example, with McDermott (1997) who suggests that “candidate gender, unlike other demographic cues, can usually be determined by the candidate’s first name” (271). Looking at gender as a “dead giveaway” is an aspect of White privilege; outside of American and European names, distinguishing men’s and women’s names from each other may prove to be much more difficult. With regards to minority American candidates, race and ethnicity may be much better cues.

Since Lippmann’s landmark work (1922), political scientists have focused more and more on the notion of low-information elections and how voters continue to struggle with choosing candidates and depend more and more on “pictures in their heads” as well as “cues” including race, ethnicity, gender, religion, etc. McDermott (2005) has termed these “voter heuristics.” One of the first major studies to examine the intersection of race and gender on voter behavior was the work of Philpot and Walton (2007) on Black female candidates. They argued that neither race nor gender could be examined individually in this situation because each affected the other. According to the authors, “gender and race interact to create a separate consciousness whereby race trumps gender but the intersection of the two trumps both” (2007, 49). They also suggest that

It is important to note that when it comes to examining the electoral prospects of Black female candidates, it is difficult to disentangle the effects of race and gender. For Black women, race and gender do not operate separately from one another.

(2007, 58)

Another recent work looking at the intersection of race and gender on voting behavior was by Matson and Fine (2006). The authors looked at political races for community advising and zoning boards in a Florida county that had little to no media coverage, in an attempt to examine how voters responded in the absence of almost no information about the candidates. Matson and Fine (2006) concluded that voters used gender and names as cues to determine the sex and ethnicity (Hispanic or not) of candidates; as a consequence, “female, non-Hispanic, and high campaign-spending candidates received more votes than did males, Hispanics,

and low campaign-spending candidates, all else being equal” (2006, 50). Further, they determined that negative stereotypes about Hispanics and/or women, also hurt some candidates, as voters went with their preconceived notions about the political acumen of those perceived as being Hispanic vs. non-Hispanic, and male versus female.

There is a rich literature on the effects of race and ethnicity⁴ on voting behavior and public opinion. Under the aegis of African-American politics alone, scholars have examined everything from Tom Bradley’s unsuccessful 1982 bid to become the first Black Governor of California (Citrin et al. 1990) to the perceptions of Black legislators in North Carolina by lobbyists, journalists, and other legislators (Haynie 2002) to effect of skin color and African phenotypes on White voters (Terkildsen 1993; Stokes-Brown 2004; Weaver 2012). Matson and Fine (2006) also argued that ethnicity, in particular Hispanic ethnicity, provided a formidable cue for voters in the Florida elections they studied. The Hispanic or Latino community provides an ideal image to model Asian American voting behavior on because of a wide range of ethnicities represented by the monikers “Latino” and “Asian.” According to Manzano and Sanchez (2010, 569), “Latino ethnic attachments are complicated by the group’s heterogeneity or nationality, citizenship, language, number of ethnic friends, etc.” For Barreto (2012, 25), racial and ethnic identities “provide a psychological foundation for group identification and are central to an intimate sense of peoplehood.” The question of Latino identity formation is at the heart of the recent volume by Stokes-Brown (2012) who suggests that a multitude of intersecting factors affect the creation of Latino identity and these individual characteristics cannot be separated. Since each group “has a unique historical and contemporary experience in the U.S.,” this is “likely to influence the construction of one’s racial identity” (2012, 31).

Although focused on sub-national politics in Africa, Conroy-Krutz’s (2013) work deals with the issue of co-ethnicity, which is analogous to ethnic issues in the United States. According to the author, there are multiple explanations for ethnic voting. It could range from social identity theory or “the psychological benefits the individual gains from membership in a particular identity group” to more rationalist beliefs and the “tangible gains” and “collective action” derived from supporting one’s own ethnic group (346). According to Conroy-Krutz (2013), the added value of ethnicity in elections is its “potential as a cheap source of political information ... at least part of the utility of ethnicity lies in its function as a facilitator of political communication and learning” (346). As such, ethnicity “acts as an informational shortcut, or heuristic, as it provides important cues about competitors’ potential preferences and characteristics, at a low cost to the voter” (346).

While infinitesimal compared to the extant studies on race and ethnic identity as cues, the current scholarship on voter perceptions of religion and religiosity provide a partial answer, and template, to my research question. For example, in

their oft-cited work on trait versus belief stereotypes, Huddy and Terkildsen (1993) suggest that religion matters a great deal, especially in low-information elections. According to them, “voters do not need constant exposure to or detailed knowledge of candidate religious identifications to react to them when making their candidate judgments – they just need to have come across the information elsewhere” (1993, 342). While partisanship and party identification have consistently been valued as the most important predictors of voting behavior since Campbell et al. (1960), we also know that citizens’ images of parties takes place through the public’s view of candidates’ social characteristics (Kalkan et al. 2008; Campbell et al. 2009). In a more recent study, Campbell et al. (2011) examined partisan images, candidate religion, and party identification. They determined that religion can condition partisan voting. By manipulating the candidate’s religion in an experimental design, the authors found that evangelical candidates received more support from Republicans and less from Democrats, and that identifying as a Catholic had no bearing on voter support. Other work on religious cues has specifically examined voter perceptions of Christian candidates (Wilcox and Jelen 1990; Kellstedt and Green 1993; McDermott 2009), Jewish leaders (Berinsky and Mendelberg 2005), and Muslim politicians (Kalkan et al. 2008; Braman and Sinno 2009). Braman and Sinno’s (2009) recent experimental design on voter evaluations of Muslim candidates is among the few studies of non-Christian candidates. The authors examined voter support for a fictional Muslim and a fictional Christian candidate for state attorney general, and U.S. Senator. They determined that individual voter sophistication is correlated to perceptions of Muslims in public office, and that voters have different perceptions of Christian and Muslim candidates, most intriguingly when the potential Muslim attorney general would be prosecuting terrorism cases.

Survey Methodology (see Appendix at www.ADDRESS REQUIRED)

The focus of this part of the project was to test how South Asian Americans would evaluate three female candidates for office, in a *female-only* primary race or general election – what Atkeson (2003) called an “intragender contest.” The only aspects of the candidates that are being changed in this experiment are their race, ethnicity, and/or religion. A few recent studies have followed this format including experiments on voter evaluations of Black, White, and Latina/o candidates (Gershon and Montforti 2015), and of contests involving *only* female candidates (Morehouse Mendez and Herrick 2011), as well as media coverage of Black women’s campaigns for the House of Representatives (Orlanda Ward, this volume), and media coverage and voter evaluation of congresswomen of color (Gershon 2012).

Inspired by other race, ethnicity, and gender surveys (McDermott 1998; Lien et al. 2004), I created a unique, survey-based test to examine how South Asian American voters would evaluate a Hindu candidate for office who was *not* of

South Asian descent. The survey consisted of 13 questions covering demographic information (gender, year of birth, citizenship status); identity (ethnic heritage, religion, and ethnic classification); political knowledge; and, finally, three questions connected to the controlled experiment on voter choice. This resulted in ten explanatory variables and three dependent variables (from the controlled experiment).

This project also focused on gaining the attitudes and behaviors of a wide range of Americans of South Asian descent. Respondents were asked to identify their ethnic heritage and choose from 13 possibilities. The same strategy was also applied to the question on religious affiliation to capture as many of the respondents' religious beliefs as possible. While most South Asian American immigrants are Hindu, Muslim, or Sikh, there are also sizable populations of other faiths in the United States. The question on ethnic classification was of particular interest in order to replicate the results of a similar question from the Pilot National Asian American Political Survey (PNAAPS). In the original survey, respondents were asked to identify as American, Asian American, Asian, ethnic American (e.g., as a Chinese American), or just be ethnic origin (e.g., Chinese).⁵

I created fictional biographies for three congressional candidates. All the candidates – Candidate A, B, and C – were women, and of the same age, marital status, education, and occupation, as well as political experience. Partisanship was never mentioned. The only information that was manipulated in each biographical statement was the race/ethnicity or religion. While this design is unique, its use of fictional candidates in a fictional congressional race does raise questions of external validity, even though this has been the dominant method in the discipline, to date, to examine voter perceptions of candidates. The recent work by Dolan and Lynch (2014) is the best representative of a newer approach to examining this topic. The authors used a two-wave panel survey with respondents in 29 states; the first wave contained questions on gender stereotypes, while the second wave asked respondents questions about their vote choice in *actual* House races in their states.

The literature on Asian American representation and voting allows us to build two hypotheses; namely that respondents are more likely to support co-ethnic candidates, regardless of religion, rather than a candidate from another race or ethnicity. Further, voters are more likely to believe that a South Asian American candidate is not only a better political representative, but also provides a better symbolic representation for the South Asian American community as a whole. As such,

H_1 : Respondents are more likely to say they will vote for either the Muslim or Hindu Indian-American female candidates than the White, Hindu, female candidate.

H₂: Respondents are more likely to believe that the Hindu or Muslim Indian-American female candidates are better representatives of the South Asian American community than the White, Hindu, female candidate.

Survey Delivery

Data were collected relying on an Internet-based survey. Since the target population was small, and this study was unfunded, I borrowed a methodology common in public health known as “network sampling” to reach what scholars have termed “hidden populations” (Spreen and Zwaagstra 1994; Semaan et al. 2002). Through networks of friends via email and Facebook, the survey reached South Asian Americans across the United States and ultimately 107 respondents completed the survey. After three respondents were dropped from the survey due to their data not being recorded, I was left with 104 respondents (45 women and 59 men) ranging in age from 18 to 81. The summary statistics indicate that the average survey respondent was a 44.2-year-old Hindu male of Indian descent who identified as an Indian-American; was registered to vote; was a naturalized citizen of the United States; self-admitted a political knowledge level of 6 on a scale of 0–10; affiliated himself with the Democratic Party; and had lived in the U.S. over 25 years.

Summary of Findings

The results⁶ provide evidence that my first hypothesis was supported. Most of the respondents said they would vote for Candidate A, the Hindu Indian-American candidate (58.7 percent) followed by Candidate C, the Muslim Indian-American candidate (26 percent), and lastly Candidate B, the Hindu White candidate (15.4 percent). Taken together, 74 percent of all respondents said they would vote for an Indian-American female candidate, regardless of religion, over the White female candidate. When I looked just at South Asian American women, the findings were somewhat similar. Table 8.1 displays the results: over 90 percent of Hindu female respondents said they would vote for an Indian-American Hindu female candidate; 100 percent of Muslim female respondents pledged their vote to the Indian-American Muslim candidate; and the White Hindu candidate received the least amount of potential vote support across the board (around 8 percent).

The second hypothesis was also supported over which candidate best represents the South Asian community. The results⁷ indicate an overall feeling of support for the Hindu Indian-American candidate, who was considered the most representative (69.2 percent), followed by the Muslim Indian-American candidate (22.1 percent), and lastly the Hindu White candidate (8.7 percent). Taken together, an even greater number of respondents believe that the

TABLE 8.1 Candidate Vote Choice (Female Respondents)

<i>Respondent's Religious Affiliation</i>	<i>Candidate A (Hindu/Indian)</i>	<i>Candidate B (Muslim/Indian)</i>	<i>Candidate C (Hindu/White)</i>	<i>Totals</i>
Atheism	0	0	0	0
Buddhism	0	0	1	1
Catholicism	2	0	0	2
Hinduism	20	1	2	23
Hinduism + Other	4	3	1	8
Islam	0	0	9	9
Not Religious	0	0	1	1
Protestantism	1	0	0	1
Sikhism	0	0	0	0
Column Totals	26	4	14	44

Indian-American candidates were more representative of the South Asian community as whole than the White candidate (91.3 percent). The results are similar when we just look at female respondents in the survey (Table 8.2). A little over 90 percent of the Hindu female respondents and 80 percent of the Hindu/mixed respondents believed that the Indian-American Hindu candidate (A) was more representative of the South Asian American community, while 80 percent of the Muslim female respondents expressed support for the Indian-American Muslim candidate (C). A mere 4 percent of all women in the sample believed that the White Hindu candidate could adequately represent the South Asian American community. More broadly, these findings provide substantial support for the argument that Tulsi Gabbard, while highly qualified and a self-identified Hindu, is not viewed as an ideal candidate and representative for South Asian American voters, particularly women.

TABLE 8.2 South Asian Representative (Female Respondents)

<i>Respondent's Religious Affiliation</i>	<i>Candidate A (Hindu/Indian)</i>	<i>Candidate B (Hindu/White)</i>	<i>Candidate C (Muslim/Indian)</i>	<i>Totals</i>
Atheism	0	0	0	0
Buddhism	0	0	1	1
Catholicism	2	0	0	2
Hinduism	20	0	2	22
Hinduism + Other	6	1	1	8
Islam	1	1	8	10
Not Religious	0	0	1	1
Protestantism	1	0	0	1
Sikhism	0	0	0	0
Column Totals	30	2	13	45

Conclusion

In her work on South Asian feminisms, Chandra Mohanty (1997) has remarked that being asked “Where is home?” brings with it a contentious internal struggle for South Asian American women because it begs a simple response to a complex question. According to Mohanty, “Since settled notions of territory, community, geography, and history don’t work for us, what does it really mean to be South Asian in the U.S.A.?” (1997, 120). While some work has been accomplished on that front in sociology, history, and literature, political scientists have yet to catch up, and give South Asian American women the respect and attention they deserve.

While the sample size limits the inferences that can be drawn, this study offers a unique look at South Asian American political attitudes, and especially, those of South Asian American women. I believe that this original and exploratory dataset does answer the theoretical questions posed at the beginning of this project – will South Asian American voters support a White woman candidate who is Hindu, and do South Asian American women believe that a woman of similar religious background, but a dissimilar ethnicity, can represent their beliefs? The data suggest not for both questions and the inference I can make is that ethnicity, particularly as a shared solidarity, trumps religion. This is a major finding, particularly in light of historic tensions between Hindus and Muslims in India (Varshney 2003), and in the South Asian diaspora (Kurien 2004). And what of the role of gender? While this chapter provides an overview of South Asian American feminism and some initial quantitative findings on how South Asian American women might respond to a fictional female candidate, there is still so much to be done to understand the role of gender in the political attitude formation of women in this community.

The goals of this project were two-fold – make an argument for the importance of intersectionality and the need for much more scholarship at the nexus of race, ethnicity, religion, and gender in American politics; and frame an original research question regarding voter behavior for a small, but surging political ethnicity in the United States. Can research examine not just how voters perceive female candidates whose race or ethnicity may be different from what is “expected” in current political discourse, but female candidates whose identity as women also intersects with their ethnic and racial identities as Muslims, Hindus, Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Sikhs, and any other faith? Taken another way, how do we, as scholars, perceive women of faith *and* color *in* political science? This question yields an enormous amount of intellectual inquiry because it addresses a vast and gaping hole in political science. According to Lien (2001, 198), “A study of Asian Americans and political participation cannot be complete without addressing the role of women as well as the issue of gender and its intersectionality with race, class, ethnicity, and class.” How do information cues work in the context of intersectionality when taken simultaneously?

And how should voters perceive candidates of color whose religious preferences must also be understood as part of their candidacies? This project provides the first step in a continuing and current research agenda to focus on how the South Asian American community responds to female candidates from within and outside of the immigrant community.

Appendix available online at www.AADDRESS REQUIRED

Notes

- 1 Earlier versions of this chapter were presented at the 2015 Annual Meeting of the Southern Political Science Association, New Orleans, LA and the 2014 Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association in Chicago, IL. I would like to dedicate this chapter to my mother, Dr. Usha Sriram, and to both my grandmothers, Vasantha Jayaraman, and Janaki Krishnan.
- 2 “Tulsi” is a flowering plant with special significance in Hinduism (Sacirbey 2012).
- 3 Rep. Gabbard is biracial (of White and Samoan heritage), but for the purposes of this chapter, the stand-in fictional candidate to mimic voter perceptions of her is a White candidate.
- 4 Like Conroy-Krutz (2013), I used the definition of ethnicity espoused by Chandra (2006, 398), i.e., “eligibility for membership is determined by attributes associated with, or believed to be associated with, descent.”
- 5 According to Lien et al. (2004, 40), among all the respondents, the most (34 percent) “chose to identify as ethnic American and 30 percent by ethnic identity alone.” A similar question was asked by Huang (2009, 15) in an experimental design involving a fictional city council race with Asian American candidates. Fifty-three percent of respondents identified as “Asian-American”; 16 percent as “Ethnic American”; 15 percent by “Ethnic Term Only”; 9 percent as “Asian”; and 7 percent as “American.”
- 6 See Table 8.3 in the appendix.
- 7 See Table 8.4 in the appendix.

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