

Asian American Politicians Strategic Communication in COVID: Tweets of “Stop Asian Hate” Amid US-China Tensions

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ABSTRACT

The challenges faced by Asian Americans escalated during the COVID-19 pandemic, exacerbating pre-existing issues that linked them to national security concerns. This situation makes Asian American politicians' public message dissemination even more difficult; they need to consider the challenging situation and try to appeal to their supporters.

This research delves into the strategic communication tactics engaged by Asian American politicians in publicizing messages amid the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, this study analyzes the public response to different messages, especially their response to the messages regarding the Stop Asian Hate movement and national security. The methodology involves the collection of 31,694 tweets from Twitter, using content analysis and topic model network analysis to delineate the framing of messages disseminated by Asian politicians. Additionally, the study employs Difference-in-Difference and t-test analyses to examine the public's reaction to tweets referencing Asian identity.

The findings indicate that Asian American politicians tend to emphasize policies instead of ethnic identity when delivering messages, despite a more favorable reaction from the public toward tweets focusing on stopping Asian hate. Meanwhile, including national security issues in the discourse does not evoke a distinctive response. This research sheds light on the dynamics of communication strategies used by Asian American politicians and the public's reactions to these messages, particularly in the context of the challenging socio-political climate during the COVID-19 pandemic.

KEYWORDS: ASIAN AMERICAN, HATE CRIMES, NATIONAL SECURITY ISSUES, PUBLIC COMMUNICATION, PUBLIC SUPPORT

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1. INTRODUCTION

This special series of *EWC Occasional Papers* is the result of the 2023 *Taiwan & Asia Program Conference* entitled “Washington-Taipei-Beijing Relations at a Crossroads: the 2024 Elections and Geostrategic Implications from the Individual, Domestic, and International Levels of Analysis,” which was hosted by Ramapo College of New Jersey and sponsored by the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office (TECRO) in Washington, DC. The conference organizers gratefully acknowledge the intellectual contributions of the speakers and discussants in providing their views, research observations, and comments to improve the manuscripts as well as the East-West Center in Washington and its editors for reviewing and publishing this series.

How minority politicians navigate the communication of their messages in public is a critical strategy they use to appeal to their supporters, tailored to resonate with them. The strategies for disseminating messages are contingent upon the prevailing social climate toward minorities. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, marked by a surge in hate crimes and physical assaults targeting Asian Americans, coupled with the strained relationships between the U.S. and China, Asian American politicians’ strategies for delivering messages in public have been affected. However, their changing tactics on message dissemination highlight a disparity between their understanding of the social climates and their supporters’ expectations of them. This underscores the challenging position Asian American politicians face amid the increasingly domestic hostile environment toward Asian Americans and the tense relationship between the U.S. and China.

Minority politicians have the option to connect to people with similar racial backgrounds by emphasizing their cultures and identities through specific language and cultural references; however, this approach may inadvertently convey a lack of concern for supporters with diverse backgrounds. Therefore, politicians will also emphasize the issues or policies they anticipate will resonate with most of their supporters to win over their supporters from their competitors. For example, politicians could express their concerns about anti-immigration sentiment and advocate pro-immigration policies when speaking in public to potentially acquire support from people who are aligned with a pro-immigration stance across various racial backgrounds ¹.

Minority politicians typically make a strategic decision on the messages that are delivered to the public with the consideration of the proportion of different message types that attract their supporters’ attention. The overall attitude of their supporters toward minorities in society becomes one critical factor; when their supporters have a more welcoming attitude toward immigrants and minorities, these politicians have more space to mention words that refer to their cultural and ethnic backgrounds ². In addition, when minority politicians are conscious of the hostility to their ethnic background, they endeavor to convey messages that focus on detaching negative stereotypes associated with them. For

¹ Loren Collingwood, *Campaigning in a Racially Diversifying America : When and How Cross-Racial Electoral Mobilization Works*, *Campaigning in a Racially Diversifying America : When and How Cross-Racial Electoral Mobilization Works*, Oxford Scholarship Online (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020).

² Collingwood.

example, they might seek to demonstrate their hard-working image in a campaign advertisement to disconnect the stereotypes of laziness associated with them³.

In the recent context that Asian Americans have faced, the task of dissemination of public messages for Asian American politicians has become more challenging. After the COVID-19 outbreak, the surging hate crimes toward Asian Americans have led to an unfriendly environment toward Asian Americans. Moreover, even before the outbreak of COVID-19, there was a tendency to associate Asian Americans with national security threats, with 31% of Americans considering imposing stricter scrutiny in situations where Asian Americans were in a position that may affect the U.S.'s global interests⁴. The hostile environment specifically targeting Asian Americans has led to the situation where Asian American politicians refrain from mentioning their culture and identity; however, this avoidance strategy may also constrain the flexibility of delivering various type of messages to engage more supporters from the public.

This study collects and analyses the strategies Asian American representatives and senators use when delivering messages to the public and appealing to their supporters across different ethnic groups, especially when the social-political climate deteriorates. Specifically, this study evaluates whether Asian American politicians avoid mentioning their identities and instead concentrate on national security issues as a strategy for engaging with their supporters and dispelling suspicions from others. This paper also analyzes whether messages regarding the national security issue attract greater responses from supporters compared to messages addressing the rising hate crimes and demands for a more supportive environment for Asian Americans.

³ LaFleur Stephens-Dougan, *Race to the Bottom : How Racial Appeals Work in American Politics*, Chicago Studies in American Politics (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2020).

⁴ Inoke Hafoka, Natasha Saelua, and Kēhaulani Vaughn, "Attitudes towards Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders" (The Asian American Foundation, 2023), <https://www.staatindex.org/>.

CROSS-RACIAL MOBILIZATION IN AN UNFRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT

As Asian American politicians build their image to the public, they also need to consider factors beyond the fundamental concerns relevant to Asian Americans across generations and communities since they also need support from the majority of citizens to win elections instead of only relying on support from Asian American voters.

Plenty of minority politicians strategically emphasize different issues and carefully use racial cues depending on the demographic composition of minority groups and the racial animosity in their constituents. It is also common for politicians to balance the use of racial cues and focus on the policies that appeal to the majority of voters to maximize their vote gains. For example, they may selectively mention immigration policies that can benefit diverse minority groups, which also align with the political attitudes of majority voters if the overall political climate in their electorates is relatively open to such discourse. Conversely, if the environment is more hostile to racial issues, most politicians opt to choose to focus on policies that both minorities and majorities prefer⁵.

In addition, to gain additional votes without distancing voters of the same ethnic background, politicians may convey messages through images that show unity across different racial groups. They might also portray them with the valued qualities that most voters prefer, such as diligence, especially when these qualities can help them dispel negative impressions that are associated with their racial identities⁶. Some strategies that are specifically used to mobilize minority voters, such as sending campaign messages in a non-English language, are rarely used to mobilize voters in the public when the overall social climate is unfavorable to specific ethnic groups⁷.

The need to consider social circumstances and strategically navigate the influence of hostility on the environment became particularly urgent in an era where people could easily access the internet and freely share their opinions. The internet, particularly social media, provides politicians with a direct channel to voice themselves without cooperation with conventional media, such as TV channels and radio; these websites and social media are almost always free from editorial influence and convey messages at a relatively low cost. This relatively new media enables politicians to more easily attract attention and facilitate messaging between majorities and minorities, which helps them better control

⁵ Collingwood, *Campaigning in a Racially Diversifying America : When and How Cross-Racial Electoral Mobilization Works*.

⁶ Adam J. Berinsky et al., "The Effect of Associative Racial Cues in Elections," *Political Communication* 37, no. 4 (July 3, 2020): 512–29, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2020.1723750>; Collingwood, *Campaigning in a Racially Diversifying America : When and How Cross-Racial Electoral Mobilization Works*; Jonathan Knuckey and Myunghee Kim, "Racial Resentment, Old-Fashioned Racism, and the Vote Choice of Southern and Nonsouthern Whites in the 2012 U.S. Presidential Election*": Racial Resentment, Old-Fashioned Racism, and the Vote Choice of Whites," *Social Science Quarterly* 96, no. 4 (December 2015): 905–22, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.12184>; Stephens-Dougan, *Race to the Bottom : How Racial Appeals Work in American Politics*.

⁷ D. E. Bergan, "Grassroots Mobilization and Voter Turnout in 2004," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 69, no. 5 (January 1, 2005): 760–77, <https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfi063>; Ryan D. Enos and Eitan D. Hersh, "Party Activists as Campaign Advertisers: The Ground Campaign as a Principal-Agent Problem," *American Political Science Review* 109, no. 2 (May 2015): 252–78, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055415000064>; Knuckey and Kim, "Racial Resentment, Old-Fashioned Racism, and the Vote Choice of Southern and Nonsouthern Whites in the 2012 U.S. Presidential Election*."

their campaign messages. For instance, micro-messaging platforms, like Twitter, provide politicians with a free space that allows for interactive two-way communication with voters⁸. Indeed, Twitter has proven to be an effective tool for mobilizing and engaging citizens, which has also been used for electoral campaigns by several politicians, including Barack Obama's presidential campaign use⁹. However, within the new information environment, which vastly improves minorities' abilities to communicate with diverse audiences (for a discussion of the challenges in traditional media, see, for example, Meyrowitz (1985)), communicating and mobilizing across racial lines becomes more challenging. They need to be more deliberate in selecting messages delivered to voters, as individuals across states can access information about politicians' political attitudes, policy positions, contributions to Congress, and whether they fulfill their commitment.

The potential focus of Asian American Politicians

The factors that can drive Asian Americans to vote vary according to previous studies, which are supposed to be the main focus for Asian American politicians to pay attention to.

Despite the increase in their electoral share, Asian immigrants are less likely to participate in voting compared to other ethnicities¹⁰. Earlier studies to understand this phenomenon pointed to the challenges of living in a new country and the assimilation process among Asian Americans. First-generation immigrants often dedicate their resources to balancing life and adapting to their new environment. They spend most of their time working and saving money and often pay minimal attention to politics¹¹. In some cases, the social connections upon arriving in the U.S. influenced the political engagement of these new arrivals¹²; the influence of their social connection may outweigh their initial indifference to politics.

⁸ Grant Blank and Christoph Lutz, "Representativeness of Social Media in Great Britain: Investigating Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Pinterest, Google+, and Instagram," *American Behavioral Scientist* 61, no. 7 (June 2017): 741–56, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764217717559>.

⁹ Shelly Ghai Bajaj, "The Use of Twitter during the 2014 Indian General Elections," *Asian Survey* 57, no. 2 (April 1, 2017): 249–70, <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2017.57.2.249>; James Everett. Katz, *The Social Media President : Barack Obama and the Politics of Digital Engagement*, First edition. (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Yan Su and Porismita Borah, "Who Is the Agenda Setter? Examining the Intermedia Agenda-Setting Effect between Twitter and Newspapers," *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 16, no. 3 (July 3, 2019): 236–49, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2019.1641451>; Maurice Vergeer, "Adopting, Networking, and Communicating on Twitter: A Cross-National Comparative Analysis," *Social Science Computer Review* 35, no. 6 (December 2017): 698–712, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894439316672826>.

¹⁰ Dan Qi and Sylvia Gonzalez, "Immigrant Status, Race, and Voter Turnout in the American Mass Public," *Social Science Quarterly*, December 30, 2021, ssqu.13110, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.13110>.

¹¹ Pei-te Lien, "Ethnicity and Political Participation: A Comparison between Asian and Mexican Americans," *Political Behavior* 16, no. 2 (June 1994): 237–64, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01498879>; S. Karthick Ramakrishnan et al., "RACE-BASED CONSIDERATIONS AND THE OBAMA VOTE: Evidence from the 2008 National Asian American Survey," *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 6, no. 1 (2009): 219–38, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742058X09090079>.

¹² WendyK.Tam Cho, "Naturalization, Socialization, Participation: Immigrants and (Non-)Voting," *The Journal of Politics* 61, no. 4 (November 1999): 1140–55, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2647557>; Lien, "Ethnicity and Political Participation"; Pei-te Lien, *The Making of Asian America through Political Participation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001).

Nevertheless, second and subsequent-generation immigrants may behave differently from first-generation Asian Americans; their living experiences in the U.S. influence their diverse voting behaviors. In contrast to the first-generation Asian Americans, the subsequent generations of Asian Americans are more accustomed to American cultures and languages. Meanwhile, they have greater awareness of their political rights and the obligations of being good citizens. To pursue better education and job opportunities, the subsequent generation of Asian Americans commonly reside in the major cities in the U.S., where people are usually more liberal and accommodate people from all over the world, which may affect their political attitudes¹³. Presumably, they are more familiar with democratic values and the values of their votes, and fewer of them have experienced authoritarian rulings or wars than their first-generation Asian parents, so they might be less concerned about participating in politics and expressing their political opinions.

In addition to the factors that may independently affect various generations of Asian Americans, there are also some factors that may individually affect Asian Americans' voting behaviors. For example, first generation immigrants may be less concerned about immigration policies as they grow older and stay in the U.S. longer due to their personal experiences¹⁴. Also, the effectiveness of different campaign strategies toward minority groups may differ due to minority voters' personal issues. For instance, individuals who have served in the military may prioritize veteran issues regardless of their racial identities, parents with children may care more about education reforms, and individuals with higher healthcare demands may show a higher interest in healthcare policies.

At the same time, individuals with stronger social connections to the local community and higher social status are more likely to vote; sometimes, the influence of each individual's social connection on Asian Americans' voting behaviors is more impactful than their financial consideration¹⁵. Asian Americans also tend to vote for candidates of the same ethnic origin by identifying the candidates' surnames¹⁶. In some scenarios, Asian American voters, especially those with long-established financial connections with candidates of non-Asian ethnicities, may still vote for the non-Asian candidates rather than the new Asian candidates¹⁷.

The diverse underlying motivations of these voters indicate Asian politicians cannot only focus on one aspect to maximize their appeal to voters. Other than the immigration issues that plenty of immigrating Asian Americans care about, Asian American politicians may also pay attention to economic issues that consider small business' benefits, veterans' rights, and issues the younger generation cares about, such as inflation, jobs, living conditions in major cities, and the like.

¹³ Kayee Zhou and Dennis Patterson, "Changing Patterns of Asian-American Partisanship: Accounting for the Politicization of the U.S.'s Fastest Growing Minority," *Social Science Quarterly* 102, no. 4 (July 2021): 1428–38, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.13050>.

¹⁴ Collingwood, *Campaigning in a Racially Diversifying America : When and How Cross-Racial Electoral Mobilization Works*.

¹⁵ Cho, "Naturalization, Socialization, Participation."

¹⁶ Vivien Leung, "Asian American Candidate Preferences: Evidence from California," *Political Behavior* 44, no. 4 (December 2022): 1759–88, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-020-09673-8>.

¹⁷ James Lai et al., "Asian Pacific-American Campaigns, Elections, and Elected Officials," *Political Science & Politics* 34, no. 3 (September 2001): 611–17.

INCREASING HOSTILITY TOWARD ASIAN AMERICANS AND PUBLIC MESSAGES OF ASIAN POLITICIANS

Beyond the factors that can potentially mobilize Asian Americans, there has been an increase in hostility toward them after the COVID-19 outbreak. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a significant surge in hate crimes targeting Asian Americans. According to the FBI, hate crimes targeting Asian Americans increased by 77% since 2020 across the U.S.¹⁸ Several studies also show a spike in hate crimes targeting Asian Americans in several U.S. metropolitan cities; the hate crimes toward Asian Americans had a 129% increase in Seattle and a 3200% increase in New York¹⁹.

In addition to the increase in hate crimes toward Asian Americans in the midst of the pandemic, there was also a rhetoric associated with Asian Americans as a threat to the U.S.'s national security. The degeneration of the U.S.-China relationship, coupled with concerns from several organizations that the "China Initiative" might cause Asian Americans to live under insecurity and scrutiny by the U.S. government, exacerbated the situation²⁰. Several reports also draw connections between COVID-19, national security, and Chinese hackers in their news coverage²¹. While some investigations are initiated by the government for specific reasons, other connections with Asian Americans and the pandemic are merely personal opinions. Nevertheless, these news and personal opinions regarding Asian Americans have the potential to affect people's attitudes toward Asian Americans, which is one determinant that affects Asian American politicians' dissemination of public messages.

This paper employs the COVID-19 pandemic as a time cut to analyze the strategies applied by Asian American politicians when the overall social-political climate becomes more hostile towards Asian Americans. This paper argues that Asian American politicians often avoid using racial cues or any wording that invokes their identities since they prefer to distance themselves from sensitive issues that might result in a loss of support. Meanwhile, Asian American politicians may adopt a strategy of conveying messages that could detach them from negative stereotypes. For example, they may emphasize their contribution to national security to compensate the association of Asian Americans with perceived threats to U.S. national security.

Based on the presented arguments, three hypotheses are developed to illustrate the strategic changes applied by Asian American politicians in conveying messages to the public.

¹⁸ Department of Justice Community Relations Service, "2020 FBI Hate Crimes Statistics," *Department of Justice, Community Relations Service*, April 4, 2023, <https://www.justice.gov/crs/highlights/2020-hate-crimes-statistics>.

¹⁹ Sungil Han, Jordan R. Riddell, and Alex R. Piquero, "Anti-Asian American Hate Crimes Spike During the Early Stages of the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 38, no. 3–4 (February 2023): 3513–33, <https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605221107056>.

²⁰ AAJC, "Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC Delivers Petition of Nearly 30,000 Signatures Urging President Biden to End the 'China Initiative,'" *Asian American Advancing Justice*, April 12, 2021, <https://www.advancingjustice-aaajc.org/petition-delivered-end-china-initiative>.

²¹ Adrian De Leon, "The Long History of Racism against Asian Americans in the U.S.," *PBS NEWS HOUR*, April 9, 2020, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/the-long-history-of-racism-against-asian-americans-in-the-u-s>; Olivia Gazis, "FBI and DHS Warn That Chinese Hackers Are Targeting U.S. COVID Research," *CBS News*, May 12, 2020, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/chinese-hackers-united-states-coronavirus-research-fbi-dhs/>; Louis Klarevas and Colin Clarke, "Is COVID-19 a National Security Emergency?," *The RAND Blog*, August 6, 2020, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2020/08/is-covid-19-a-national-security-emergency.html>.

Hypothesis One: *When there is a surge in hostility toward Asian Americans in society, Asian American politicians are less likely to mention their heritages or identities.*

Corresponding to the increasing hostility towards Asian Americans, Asian American politicians' supporters may be less likely to embrace their public messages regarding their cultures and identities after COVID-19. Therefore, this paper expects a decline in responses to the messages referring to cultures and identities after the outbreak of the pandemic, as their supporters may also feel the increasing hostility and would like to avoid standing out. In other words, their supporters' reactions to these types of tweets may also be affected by the outbreak of COVID-19.

Hypothesis Two: *Asian American politicians' public messages that refer to their cultures or identities received declining responses after the outbreak of COVID-19.*

As part of a strategic shift, this paper also anticipates that Asian American politicians would deliver more tweets that indicate their contribution to national security issues than those addressing hate crimes toward Asian Americans. Consequently, this paper also expects their supporters to be more likely to be engaged with the tweets that compensate for the negative stereotype associated with the national security threats to the U.S.

Research Question One: Did Asian American politicians mention their contributions to national security more than directly addressing hate crimes toward Asian Americans?

Hypothesis Three: *Messages mentioning national security issues receive more reactions than mentioning hate crimes toward Asian Americans.*

METHOD AND DATA

Content Analysis and Topic Model Network

This paper first applies content analysis and Analysis of the Topic Model Network (ANTMN) to illustrate the overall tweets posted by Asian American politicians to the public. These analysis approaches also served as the foundation for understanding the framing of the posts both before and after the outbreak of COVID-19.

The data for conducting the mentioned two analysis methods are collected via Twitter API. A total of 31,694 tweets with their total likes counts, posted between 2012 and 2022, were collected from the official accounts of 24 Asian American representatives and senators to conduct the content analysis and ANTMN. The representatives and senators included in this analysis are: Ami Bera, Andy Kim, Colleen Hanabusa, Doris Matsui, Grace Meng, Jill Tokuda, Judy Chu, Kamala Harris, Marilyn Strickland, Mark Takai, Mark Takano, Mazie Hirono, Mike Honda, Pramila Jayapal, Raja Krishnamoorthi, Ro Khanna, Shri Thanedar, Stephanie Murphy, TJ Cox, Tammy Duckworth, Ted Lieu, Tulsi Gabbard, Michelle Steel and Young Kim.

To facilitate the comparison of the tweets posted before and after the outbreak of COVID-19, this research begins by examining the framing of these tweets through the Analysis of the Topic Model Network (ANTMN) to analyze all the collected tweets regardless of the reference of these tweets²². In addition, this research specifically selects tweets mentioning the nations of origin of Asian Americans for a more in-depth analysis of the content of the messages. This research relies on the selected tweets to analyze the influence of the pandemic and Asian American politicians' strategic shift when the environment turns more hostile to Asian Americans.

The Analysis of Topic Model Network

The ANTMN methodology comprises three steps: topic modeling, topic networking and community detection²³. Prior to conducting the analysis, I first merged the collected tweets from the 24 Asian American representatives and senators into a corpus that allows us to further analyze the framing of these tweets regardless of these politicians' identities, party identifications, or others. After merging all the collected tweets, I cleaned the corpus by removing the English stop words, such as the, an, a, and the like, so the corpus will only contain the words with substantive meaning that can contribute to the identification of framing. Technical terms associated with Twitter's technical operations, such as t.co, rt, amp, etc., were also removed for a better framing analysis. Also, punctuation and numbers were removed from the merged corpus, and the collected tweets were stemmed to facilitate the analysis. In the next step, for the topic modeling, I applied the Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) algorithm to generate topics from the cleaned corpus, a commonly used algorithm for analyzing text analysis with a topic number equal to 15²⁴. After categorizing the corpus into 15 topics, I examined the most frequently mentioned words and tweets in each topic and qualitatively labeled the topics with the domain knowledge.

After naming the topic, I generated links to connect each topic as a framework by calculating the co-occurrence of words displayed in each topic. This process demonstrates the connection of topics and reveals the framing of the collected tweets. The links that are not statistically significant to connect topics were removed with the backbone method²⁵. Finally, I applied a community detection technique, Louvain, to group topics into more cohesive groups that can more effectively present the framing of the tweets²⁶.

²² Dror Walter and Yotam Ophir, "News Frame Analysis: An Inductive Mixed-Method Computational Approach," *Communication Methods and Measures* 13, no. 4 (October 2, 2019): 248–66, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19312458.2019.1639145>.

²³ Walter and Ophir.

²⁴ David M Blei, Ng, Andrew Y., and Jordan, Michael I., "Latent Dirichlet Allocation," *Journal of Machine Learning Research*, 2003, 30.

²⁵ M. Angeles Serrano, Marian Boguna, and Alessandro Vespignani, "Extracting the Multiscale Backbone of Complex Weighted Networks," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 106, no. 16 (April 21, 2009): 6483–88, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.0808904106>.

²⁶ Vincent D. Blondel et al., "Fast Unfolding of Communities in Large Networks," *Journal of Statistical Mechanics: Theory and Experiment* 2008, no. 10 (October 9, 2008): P10008, <https://doi.org/10.1088/1742-5468/2008/10/P10008>.

Selected 1,000 Tweets with Origins Mentioned

To further study the racial and identity cues utilized by Asian American politicians and their supporters' reactions, this study conducts a content analysis by randomly selecting 1,000 tweets from a pool of 31,694 tweets wherein nations of origin are mentioned by these 24 politicians. The countries of origin that were used to select tweets were: Chinese, Indian, Filipino, Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese, Pakistani, Thai, Hmong and Laotian, which are the most prevalent origins for Asian Americans and account for more than 85% of the Asian American population (Pew Research Center, 2021).

A total of 1,000 selected tweets were manually identified and categorized into various topics. These categories were generated by considering frequently mentioned policies and issues, hashtags used, and the cultural cues and identity cues included in the tweets.

The manual analysis focused on 15 issues, including *Hate Crimes, Campaigns, Connections, Culture, National Developments, Diplomatic Connections, Economic Issues, Environmental Issues, Gun Violence, Health, Human Rights, Identity, Immigration, Security, and Veterans*. Tweets were categorized based on the words each tweet contained. For example, tweets discussing hate crimes or advocating "stop hate crimes toward Asians" were categorized as "*Asian Hate*"; tweets that address economic difficulties and the related policies and issues were categorized as "*Economic Issues*"; tweets that refer to veteran issues were categorized as "*Veteran*," etc.

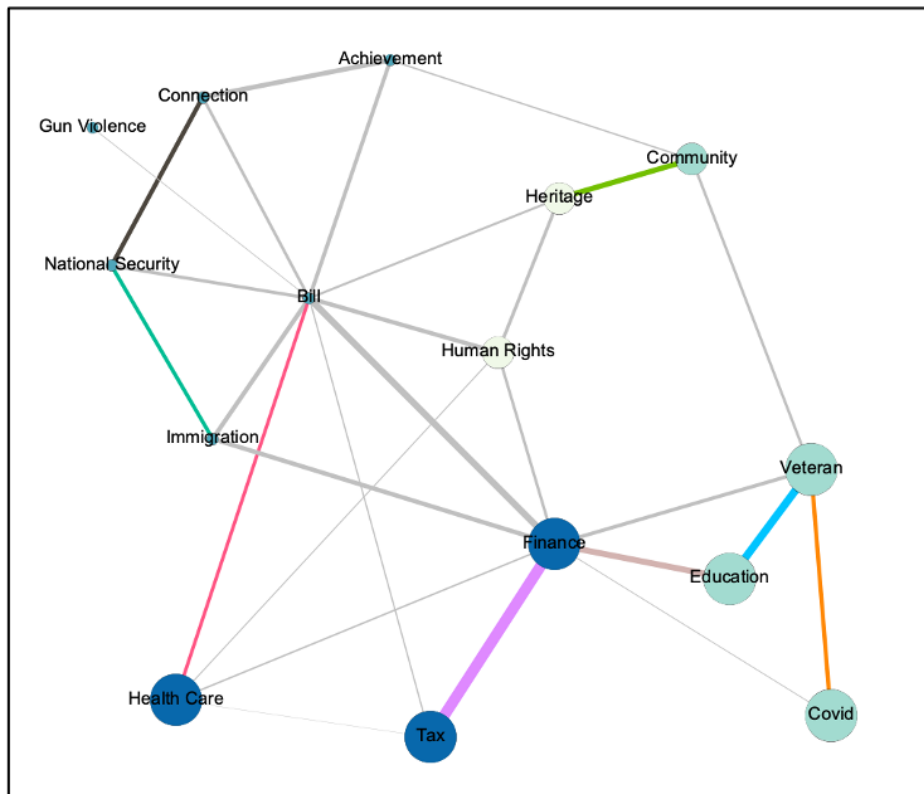
The "*Connection*" category includes tweets about politicians' participation in local and community events. Tweets that mention specific traditional holidays, foods, and cultural terms, such as Diwali, Lunar New Year, dumplings, etc., are categorized as "*Culture*." The category "*Diplomacy Connection*" includes tweets that discuss diplomatic visits undertaken by either politicians themselves or by other politicians that were mentioned by them. The category "*Security*" includes tweets that mention how the U.S. government could collaborate with their international alliances worldwide and establish strategies for national security and defense. The category "*Identity*" includes tweets in which politicians mention their origins or heritage.

These categories contribute to understanding Asian American politicians' focus when they mention the origins nations of Asian Americans in public messages. I utilized a frequency plot to demonstrate the distribution of the mentioned topics.

Supporters' Reactions on the Tweets Referring to Identities and National Security Issues

In addition to the analysis of the content of the tweets, this paper applies baseline comparison and difference-in-difference to explore the strategic shift in posting these tweets by Asian American politicians and their supporters' reactions before and after the COVID-19 outbreak based on the selected 1,000 tweets with specific origins of nations mentioned.

RESULTS

FIGURE 1. *The Analysis of Topic Model Network of Asian Politicians' Tweets*

The Topic Model Network is composed of dots and links that are connected together. The dots in the network demonstrated the topics generated by the LDA algorithm; the larger the dots, the higher the topic percentages relative to the entire corpus. The links that connected topics are generated by the co-occurrence of words in each topic; the thicker the links, the more co-occurrence of words is included in the topics. The dots and links demonstrate how a topic is mentioned by Asian American politicians and how a topic is mentioned with another topic, which demonstrates the overall pictures of the published tweets.

According to the analysis outcome of the Analysis of Topic Model Network (Figure One), Asian American politicians' tweets can be categorized into several different topics that interact with each other. A total of 15 topics are generated and connected as a network. The topics include tax, immigration, national security, veterans, health care, human rights, etc. The topics more frequently mentioned by Asian American politicians than other topics are finance, health care and tax. These topics are important to U.S. citizens and are not exclusively critical to the Asian American community²⁷. These topics are also

²⁷ Pew Research Center, "In a Politically Polarized Era, Sharp Divides in Both Partisan Coalitions" (Pew Research Center, December 2019), <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2019/12/17/in-a-politically-polarized-era-sharp->

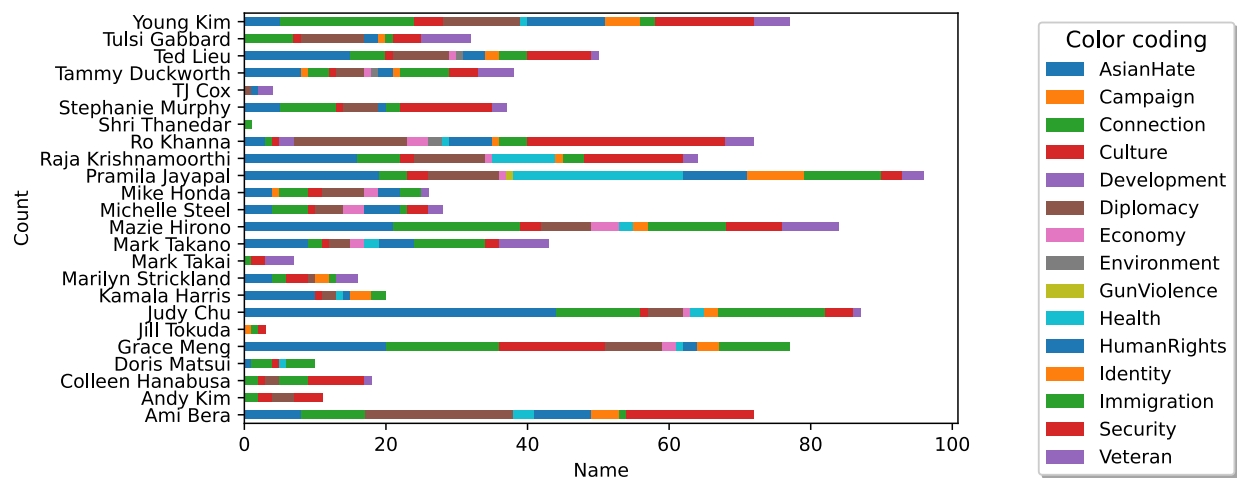
connected to the topic of the bill, which means these three topics — finance, health care and tax — are commonly mentioned when Asian American politicians are discussing the bills they are concerned with. Other topics that are often mentioned compared to other topics but are more peripheral are veterans, education and COVID. These topics are also linked to the topics of finance and tax, which also delineated the framing of these tweets as centered on issues that most U.S. citizens will pay attention to. The issues mentioned by Asian American politicians appeal to most citizens regardless of their ethnic background. On the other hand, even though Asian Americans also mentioned immigration issues and their heritage, these topics do not occupy a high frequency among the overall collected tweets. Surprisingly, the topic of immigration is even less mentioned than heritages. These two topics are two critical topics that can appeal to ethnic minority voters; these two topics can strengthen politicians' personal relationships and emotional connections to the voters who share the mentioned ethnic backgrounds.

From the analysis above, we can see that Asian American representatives and senators do not prioritize mentioning their cultures and identities when disseminating messages to the public. However, these elected Asian American representatives and senators do not lose their office due to the lack of mentioning their identities and cultures. They prioritize several issues that people generally pay attention to, such as tax, health care and finance. Ethnic minority groups and immigrants are not the most common issues mentioned by Asian American politicians.

Tweets with Specific Nations Mentioned

After analyzing the framing of the overall tweets, this research further examines the specific 1,000 selected tweets that refer to Asian Americans' nations of origin. These selected tweets are categorized into different topics based on the content of the tweets.

FIGURE 2. Issues Mentioned by Asian Representatives and Senators



divides-in-both-partisan-coalitions/; Pew Research Center, "Inflation, Health Costs, Partisan Cooperation Among the Nation's Top Problems" (Pew Research Center, June 21, 2023), <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2023/06/21/inflation-health-costs-partisan-cooperation-among-the-nations-top-problems/#:~:text=Majorities%20of%20Americans%20say%20,gun%20violence%20and%20violent%20crime.>

Figure Two provides a summary of the issues mentioned by Asian American politicians. The mentioned issues are listed in order as indicated by the chart legend on the right-hand side of the figure. According to Figure Two, most of the politicians mention several topics in their tweets, although a few of them focus on one topic more than others. For example, Mazie Hirono, Judy Chu and Grace Meng frequently mentioned hate crimes toward Asians in their tweets, although at the same time, they also mentioned several other topics, such as social connection, immigration issues, and the like.

Among these tweets selected with the nations of origin, the representatives and senators commonly mention the topic of hate crimes, even if not all of them prioritize this issue. However, the proportion of terms related to Asian American politicians' cultures and identities is not prioritized among all the tweets selected with the origin nations.

FIGURE 3. *Frequency Plot of Mentioned Issues*

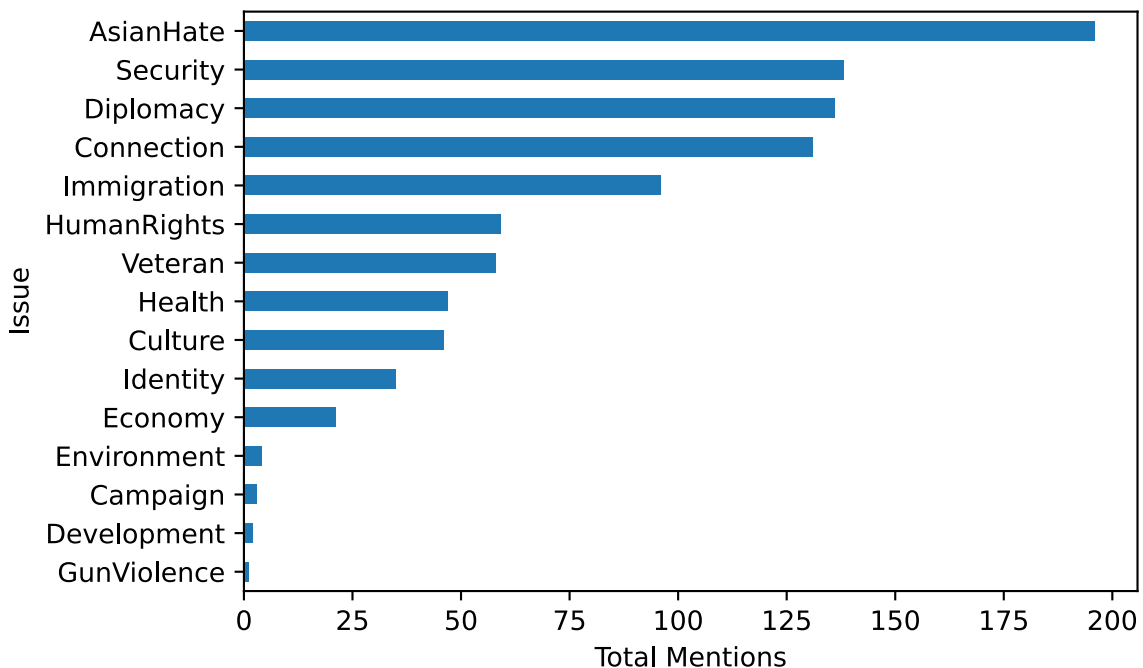


Figure Three shows the frequency distribution of each topic of the 1,000 selected tweets. Among these selected tweets, the most frequently mentioned issues by Asian American politicians are related to hate crimes toward Asian Americans. Several politicians also mentioned U.S. national security concerns and the diplomatic relationship with their origin countries. Immigration issues were also mentioned within these selected tweets. However, tweets that relate to cultures and identities are still not frequently mentioned by Asian American politicians, even when the tweets point out specific nations of origin.

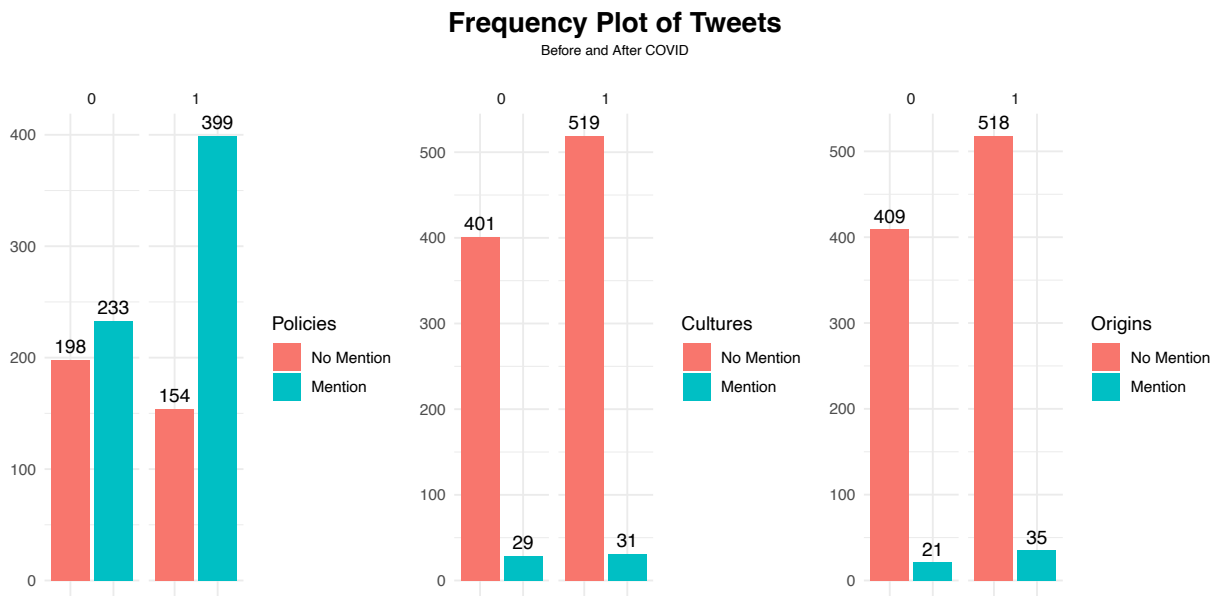
In general, from the outcome of the analysis, cultural and identity cues are not frequently utilized by these Asian American politicians when delivering messages to the public, even in tweets that refer to specific Asian countries. These politicians prioritize hate crimes toward Asian Americans and national security issues.

The Changing Messages and Reactions from the Public

To examine whether the hostile social-political climate affects the messages conveyed by Asian American politicians and their supporters' reactions to these messages, this study also analyzes the messages posted before and after the outbreak of COVID-19 and the like counts of each tweet.

This paper identifies all the tweets that talk about policies from the 1,000 tweets to compare the tweets that mentioned cultures and identity cues in the frequency plots since policies may be a big category that Asian American politicians can use to appeal to voters. This paper also conducted a difference-in-difference analysis before and after the COVID-19 outbreak to analyze the reactions from these politicians' supporters based on the three categories.

FIGURE 4. *Frequency Plots of Tweets Mentioning Policies, Origins, and Cultures*



According to the plot, more than 100 tweets were posted without mentioning cultural cues and their origins; however, the number of tweets that mentioned cultures and origins only slightly increased after the outbreak of COVID-19 despite the situation that the tweets with these two cues were not frequently used before the COVID pandemic. From this figure, Asian American representatives and senators do not commonly engage with their supporters through cultural background and their origins; instead, they choose to emphasize policies when the environment turns more hostile toward Asian Americans.

However, when speaking to the reactions of their supporters, Asian American politicians' supporters preferred to interact with tweets mentioning their cultures and origins. The difference-in-difference analysis, which analyzed the like counts of the tweets, indicated the opposite trend.

TABLE 1. Supporters' Like Counts After COVID Outbreak

<i>Group</i>	<i>Coef</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t value</i>	<i>Pr(> t)</i>	<i>CI_lower</i>	<i>CI_upper</i>
Policy	530.3597	260.0500	2.039	0.0417**	20.67106	1040.0483
Culture	197.7462	158.0361	1.2512	0.2111	-111.99882	507.4913
Origins	330.3832	159.5400	2.071	0.0386**	17.69057	643.0759

Notes: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

The difference-in-differences (DiD) analysis reveals that after the outbreak of COVID-19, tweets discussing policies from these politicians experienced an increase of 500 likes from their supporters. This suggests that during the post-COVID-19 period, these candidates received greater support and attention when addressing policy-related topics on Twitter. However, at the same time, this analysis also observed that tweets mentioning the politicians' identities received a total increase of 300 likes on average. This could imply that post-pandemic, supporters of these politicians engaged more actively with tweets about their ethnicity.

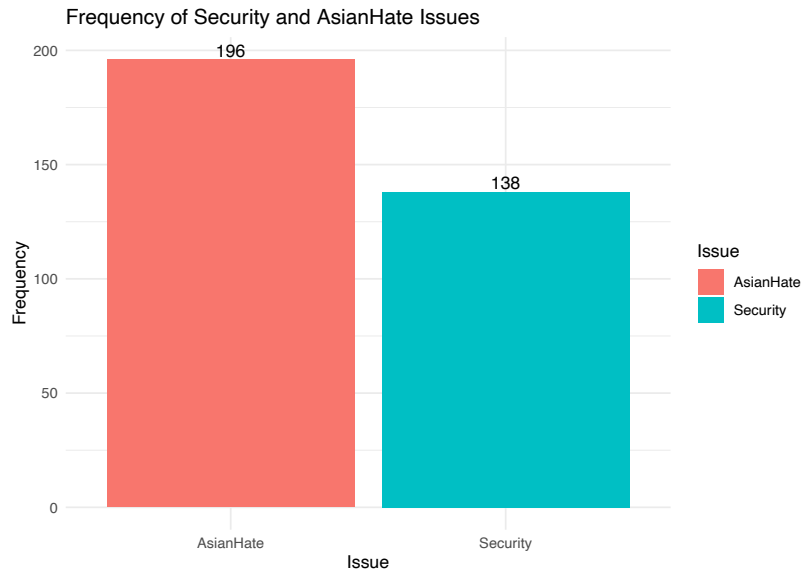
Although the tweets that mentioned cultures did not lead to more likes from these politicians' supporters, in general, people seemed to be more interactive with politicians after the outbreak of COVID. The increasing interaction appears in tweets that mention policies and their identities. The hostile environment did not deter their supporters from demonstrating their support to Asian American politicians who mentioned their origins; instead, support appeared to strengthen after the outbreak of the pandemic.

Detaching the Negative Impression on Asian Americans

Other than the overall reactions from the politicians and supporters after the outbreak of the pandemic, I also researched the messages that could dispel the negative association of Asian Americans with national security issues. Following the pandemic, the Chinese government was suspected of conducting spy operations in the U.S., which may reinforce the negative connection between Asian Americans and the threats to the U.S.'s national security.

To understand whether Asian American politicians also intend to detach themselves from the negative impression of Asian Americans, this study selects tweets that mention security issues and hate crimes toward Asians. The analysis explores how these tweets are posted by Asian American politicians and how their supporters reacted to the selected tweets.

FIGURE 5. *The Frequency Plot of Tweets Focusing on Security Issues and Hate Crimes toward Asians*



Asian American politicians frequently mention tweets relevant to hate crimes and national security issues; among the 1,000 tweets that were selected by the identification of countries, there were 196 tweets addressing hate crimes toward Asian Americans and 138 tweets discussing security issues, which were the top two topics mentioned by Asian politicians.

The frequency plots of these tweets indicate that Asian American politicians tend to focus on hate crimes against Asian Americans directly instead of mentioning national security issues. Meanwhile, the supporters' reactions to these two types of tweets seemed to deviate from the influence of the increasingly hostile environment against Asian Americans.

TABLE 2. *Supporters' Reaction to Security and Hate Crime Issues*

<i>Mean: Security</i>	<i>Mean: Asian Hate</i>	<i>Difference</i>	<i>95% CI Lower</i>	<i>95% CI Upper</i>	<i>t- statistic</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p-value</i>
135.74	599.46	253.75	-769.90	-157.54	-2.98	253.75	0.0031

Note:

H0: Difference in means is equal to 0

H1: Difference is not equal to 0

This research employed a simple t-test to test whether the supporters reacted differently to these two types of tweets. One type tends to detach the negative impression by emphasizing their contribution to national security, and the other addresses hate crimes toward Asian Americans and demands for a safer environment.

According to the t-test, supporters reacted more actively to Asian American politicians when they mentioned hate crimes toward Asian Americans. The like counts for tweets addressing security issues are significantly lower than those of tweets addressing hate crimes toward Asian Americans. The mean of like counts addressing security issues is around 136, and the mean of like counts for the tweets that mention hate crimes toward Asian Americans is around 600; the difference in the mean of like counts is around 253. The t-test indicates a statistically significant difference in like counts between messages that mention hate crimes toward Asian Americans and those mentioning security issues.

CONCLUSION

This study examined Asian American politicians' public messages and the strategies they use in selecting messages to appeal to both ethnic majority and minority voters when the social-political climate turned harsh to Asian Americans. The outcomes of the analysis indicate that, in general, Asian American politicians focus on the policies that most voters care about when delivering messages to the public. These politicians mentioned their contributions to Congress and several issues relevant to people's financial situation, such as tax, health care, education, and the like. They emphasize hate crimes toward Asian Americans and national security issues when they specify the individual country in the public message. However, according to the analysis, these politicians indicate a lower priority on immigration-related issues. They seldom mention terms that refer to their cultures and identities, even when specific countries of origin are mentioned in the tweets.

At the same time, their supporters are reactive to messages with specific identity cues. This research examined the relationships between these tweets, and the number of likes these politicians receive across different types of tweets. The findings indicate these politicians' supporters are more engaged with the tweets that mention policies and their identities. Although Asian American candidates intentionally prioritized tweets related to policy positions over their identities, their supporters did not seem to dislike these tweets as much as these politicians expected. Additionally, tweets that mentioned their own identities earned more likes from their supporters compared to tweets that highlighted their contribution to national security issues.

The research demonstrated that even though these Asian American politicians have avoided overly mentioned terms that may remind other people of their identities and emphasize the issues and policies that most people focus on, their supporters are more engaged with them when they mention their identities. Also, the hostile environment toward Asian Americans does not diminish the interaction of their supporters with these politicians, and tweets mentioning both policies and identities are liked more by their supporters after the outbreak of COVID-19.

APPENDIX

FIGURE 6. Most Frequently Mentioned Words in Each Topic

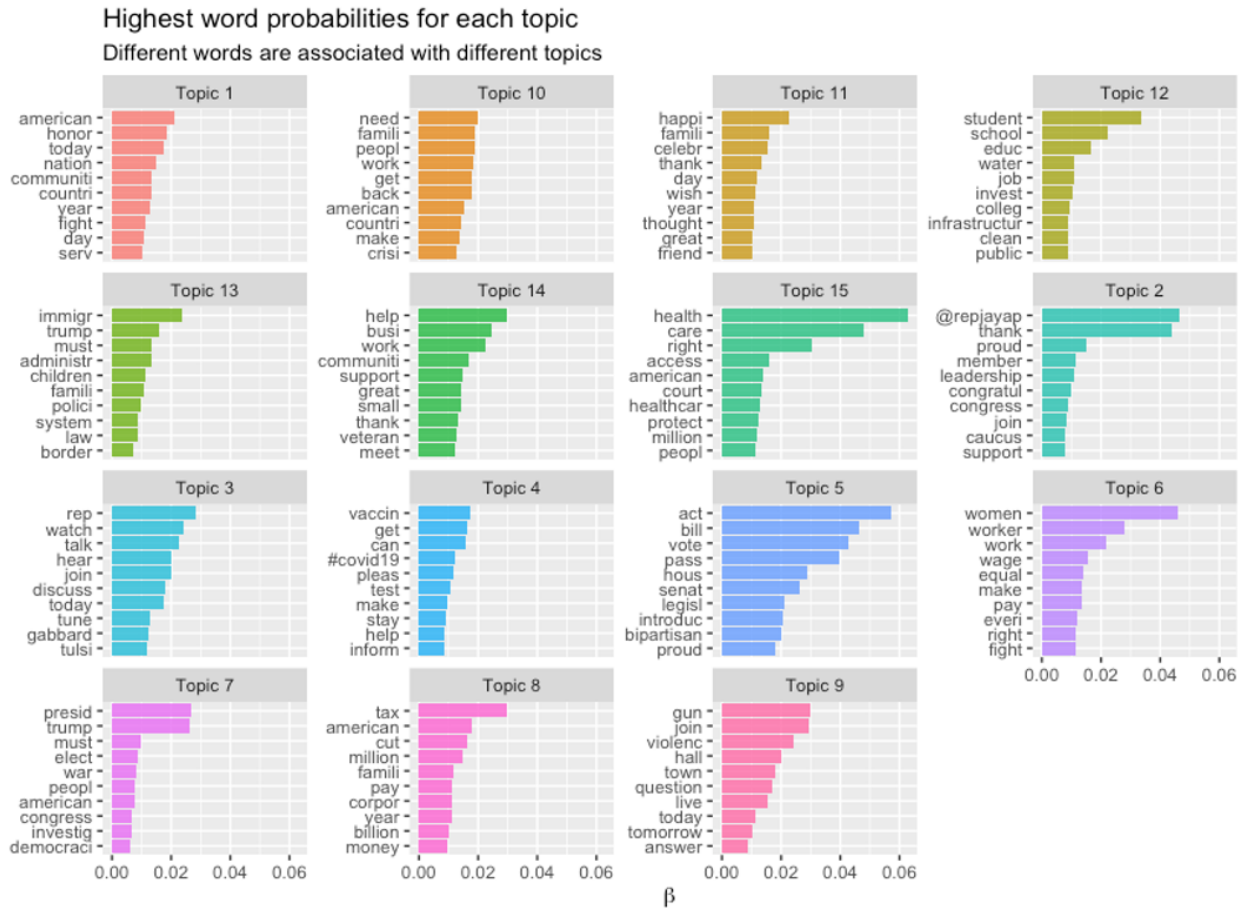


TABLE 3. Most Frequent Words Mentioned

	<i>Heritage</i>	<i>Achievement</i>	<i>Connection</i>	<i>Covid</i>	<i>Bill</i>	<i>Human Rights</i>	<i>National Security</i>	<i>Tax</i>
	Topic 1	Topic 2	Topic 3	Topic 4	Topic 5	Topic 6	Topic 7	Topic 8
1	american	@repjayap	rep	vaccin	act	women	presid	tax
2	honor	thank	watch	get	bill	worker	trump	american
3	today	proud	talk	can	vote	work	must	cut
4	nation	member	hear	#covid19	pass	wage	elect	million
5	countri	leadership	join	pleas	hous	equal	war	famili
6	communiti	congratul	discuss	test	senat	pay	peopl	pay
7	year	congress	today	make	legisl	make	american	corpor
8	fight	join	tune	stay	introduc	everi	congress	year
9	day	caucus	gabbard	help	bipartisan	right	investig	billion
10	serv	support	tulsi	inform	proud	black	democraci	money
11	live	@capac	live	call	protect	fight	donald	budget
12	hate	new	sexual	vote	support	rais	power	plan
13	must	@repjudychu	read	sure	today	voic	attack	big
14	continu	repres	icymi	now	congress	fair	need	cost
15	histori	honor	now	covid-19	right	deserv	nation	peopl
16	right	first	@reptedlieu	today	colleagu	color	@realdonaldtrump	price
17	ago	statement	morn	safe	law	like	u.	spend
18	stand	congression	committe	visit	sign	men	white	work
19	one	work	letter	day	must	time	polit	benefit
20	celebr	congresswoman	@congressmanraja	need	join	union	general	compani
21	peopl	stand	stori	counti	help	minimum	state	bill
22	servic	progress	@housejudiciari	free	amend	know	republican	gop
23	rememb	leader	speak	find	end	day	administr	job
24	never	fight	@oversightdem	open	cosponsor	peopl	hous	taxpay
25	asian	today	press	spread	ensur	earn	secur	profit
26	equal	colleagu	lieu	new	fund	just	constitut	increas
27	veteran	forward	confer	pandem	now	heard	clear	need
28	everi	chair	interview	mask	floor	need	foreign	dollar
29	proud	look	call	updat	just	must	unit	time
30	justic	call	assault	one	american	stand	one	middl

TABLE 4. Most Frequent Words Mentioned (Cont.)

	<i>Gun Violence</i>	<i>Finance</i>	<i>Community</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Immigration</i>	<i>Veteran</i>	<i>Health Care</i>
	Topic 9	Topic10	Topic 11	Topic 12	Topic 13	Topic 14	Topic 15
1	gun	need	happi	student	immigr	help	care
2	join	famili	famili	school	trump	busi	right
3	violenc	peopl	celebr	educ	administr	work	access
4	hall	work	thank	water	must	communiti	court
5	town	back	day	job	children	support	american
6	question	get	wish	invest	famili	great	healthcar
7	live	american	thought	colleg	polic	small	protect
8	today	countri	year	infrastructur	system	thank	million
9	tomorrow	make	great	clean	law	veteran	peopl
10	answer	crisi	friend	public	border	meet	women
11	host	can	love	creat	justic	local	abort
12	congress	better	time	energi	protect	offic	afford
13	look	time	today	futur	human	discuss	suprem
14	campaign	climat	one	high	feder	feder	insur
15	tonight	act	everyon	access	govern	can	decis
16	next	chang	new	nation	use	fund	fight
17	shoot	help	communiti	help	polic	servic	need
18	forward	must	hope	teacher	right	program	coverag
19	take	build	capitol	debt	end	need	must
20	event	across	heart	communiti	account	today	medicar
21	now	now	offic	fund	enforc	provid	republican
22	safeti	live	good	air	need	assist	mental
23	can	care	#queen	innov	public	week	plan
24	common	job	share	program	order	visit	now
25	hope	fight	first	make	separ	counti	make
26	time	put	mahalo	loan	reform	#fl07	state
27	rsvp	leav	birthday	need	crimin	issu	reproduct
28	facebook	take	prayer	economi	ban	proud	time
29	discuss	action	wonder	improv	communiti	state	act
30	need	deliv	see	opportun	harm	staff	

TABLE 5. Full Table for the Difference-in-Difference Analysis

<i>Types of Tweets</i>	<i>Coef</i>	<i>std.error</i>	<i>t value</i>	<i>Pr(> t)</i>
(Intercept)	170.77	(171.86)	0.994	0.3207
Asian Policies `1	-46.31	(233.20)	-0.199	0.8426
Asian Policies `NA	844.61	(867.87)	0.973	0.3307
after_2020	530.36	(260.05)	2.039	0.0417 *
Asian Policies `1:after_2020	-262.58	(327.13)	-0.803	0.4224
Asian Policies `NA: after_2020	-1397.73	(1272.13)	-1.099	0.2722
<hr/>				
(Intercept)	128.13	119.17	1.075	0.2826
Asian Origins `1	357.25	538.63	0.663	0.5073
Asian Origins `NA	887.25	859.37	1.032	0.3021
after_2020	330.38	(159.54)	2.071	0.0386*
Asian Origins `1:after_2020	-57.16	(683.33)	-0.084	0.9333
Asian Origins `NA: after_2020	-1197.76	(1256.01)	-0.954	0.3405
<hr/>				
(Intercept)	149.6025	118.7633	1.2596	0.2080
Asian culture `1	-58.9818	456.7850	-0.1291	0.8972
Asian culture `NA	865.7725	848.1395	1.0207	0.3076
after_2020	197.7462	158.0361	1.2512	0.2111
Asian culture `1:after_2020	2370.0201	633.6557	3.7402	0.0002***
Asian culture `NA: after_2020	-1065.12125	1239.4334	-0.8593	0.3903

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