

U.S. NEWS

# Kamala Harris energizes South Asian voters, a growing force in key swing states

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As Vice President Kamala Harris seeks to shore up support for her presidential nomination, the potential election of the daughter of an Indian immigrant to the White House has electrified Asian American communities. (AP video: Joseph B. Frederick)

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BY **MATT BROWN**

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JOHNS CREEK, Ga. (AP) — A drive out to Atlanta’s sprawling suburbs passes the cultural centers, schools and houses of worship that opened as this became [the nation’s sixth-largest metropolitan area](#).

Displaying the diversity within the growth, shops and brightly lit billboards advertise in [Chinese](#), [Korean](#), [Spanish](#) and [Hindi](#). The changes have been stark even for residents who experienced them.

“There were a handful of Indians around when I was growing up,” said Hemant Ramachandran, an Atlanta attorney who grew up in Gwinnett County, a short drive from Atlanta and the heart of Georgia’s fast-growing Asian American community.

## Some Atlanta suburbs turn Asian American

In some parts of Gwinnett, as well as neighboring Forsyth and Fulton counties, most of the census tracts and schools are now majority Asian American, according to county and Census Bureau data.

“It’s grown a lot since I was a kid. It definitely wasn’t like there where I grew up or anywhere else in metro Atlanta,” Ramachandran added.

[Vice President Kamala Harris](#) comes to Georgia Tuesday for what aides bill as the biggest campaign rally since she became the probable Democratic nominee. The daughter of [Jamaican](#) and Indian immigrants will aim to court the votes of a region where Asian American voters — often Indian American communities in particular — stand to play a pivotal role in the election.

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Harris' identity as a woman of Indian descent has sparked kitchen-table conversations in many Asian American and immigrant households in metropolitan Atlanta and energized local advocates. For many in Atlanta's Indian American community, Harris' story strikes a unique chord.

"The South Asian community here is fairly excited because this is really unprecedented," said Ashwin Ramaswami, a 24-year-old technology entrepreneur and state senate candidate for a competitive seat that spans much of Atlanta's affluent northeastern suburbs.

## Indian Americans in politics

Harris' ascent comes at a moment of especially high visibility and influence for Indian Americans in politics.

Five Indian Americans serve in Congress. Usha Vance, the wife of Ohio senator and GOP vice presidential nominee JD Vance, is Indian American, as were two of the most prominent candidates in the 2024 Republican primary, Nikki Haley and Vivek Ramaswamy.

Democratic Rep. Pramila Jayapal of Washington state, who chairs the Congressional Progressive Caucus, was one of the first lawmakers Harris called for support after President Joe Biden bowed out of the race.

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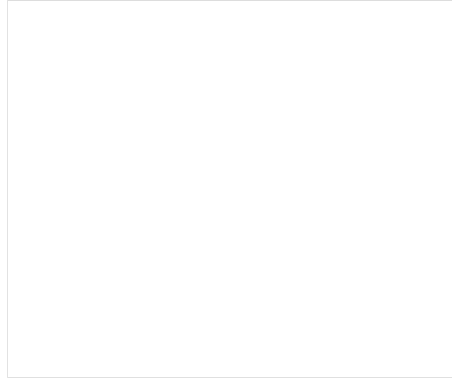
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Indian Americans are now the largest population among Asian Americans, [according to a recent US Census survey](#). Arizona, Georgia, Nevada and Michigan have relatively large Indian American communities that could prove pivotal in a tight race for the Oval Office.

The Georgia legislature has seven lawmakers of Asian American descent from both parties. In north Fulton and Gwinnett counties, high-school auditoriums now regularly serve as venues for classical Indian dance recitals. Events like the Johns Creek International Festival garner thousands from across the region.

Buoyed by enthusiasm for the vice president's potential nomination among the Democratic base, Harris' campaign has ramped up events in Georgia. The campaign gathered 300 Harris supporters on Saturday in Forsyth County, a longtime Republican stronghold that has become more contested as it has grown and become more diverse.

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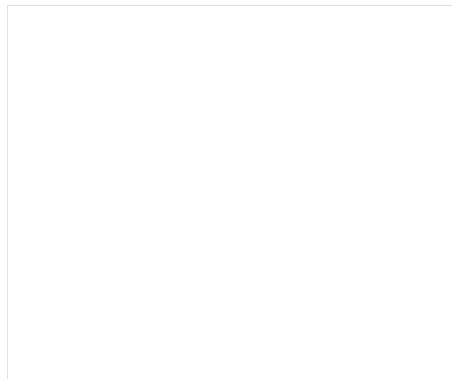


## Does shared identity equal votes?

To be sure, Harris' identity as the first Asian American and Black American vice president does not necessarily translate to votes. Indian Americans, and Asian Americans at large, are a highly diverse bloc across every metric. In conversations with more than a dozen Indian American voters, many said they did not know much about the vice president's record and felt that her background was interesting but irrelevant to the campaign.

"I don't have much perspective so far (on) Kamala Harris," said Ashish Sahu, a software engineer from Alpharetta, an Atlanta-area city of about 65,000 people. Sahu said that he expected to "hear more about her in a few debates or during her campaign." He added that most people in his personal life and broader community in suburban Atlanta "are pretty educated and independent and wait to see who's the best candidate"

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Ramachandran, the Atlanta attorney, said that, "the way I look at it, the more representation we have, the more I kind of feel like representation doesn't matter as much."

He didn't feel that any prominent Indian American politicians especially centered their heritage and occupy at times starkly different political camps. He added, however, that

many in the Indian diaspora, like many immigrant communities, find “a sort of sense of pride, almost reflexively, that comes about where people go ‘Look, that person came from, where I’m from.’”

And he and Harris had at least one experience in common.

“The same beach that she used to walk on when she was a kid, I used to walk on when I was a kid when I used to visit my grandparents,” Ramachandran said.

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A group called South Asian Women for Harris organized a call last week that more than 4,000 women joined and more than \$250,000 was raised over about two hours. The panelists on the call included celebrities like Mindy Kaling, as well as Jayapal. The congresswoman talked about working with Harris on legislation when Harris was in the Senate, and on Harris’ strength in speaking out for reproductive rights.

## **A country where anything is possible**

Those on the call were located across the country, many expressing their enthusiasm for supporting Harris, through fundraising or get out the vote efforts. Panelists urged them to stay involved.

Organizers paid tribute to Win with Black Women, which kicked off the spate of support calls that drew tens of thousands of Black women attendees and raised well over \$1 million.

“A lot of people are very excited. My photo album is strained by WhatsApp content right now, from like all corners (with) Kamala Harris stuff,” said Tanbir Chowdhury, president of They See Blue New York, a Democratic group that engages South Asian voters.

According to [an AAPI Data/AP-NORC survey](#) conducted in May, about half of AAPI Americans identify as Democrats, while about one-quarter identify as Republicans.

Around one-quarter identify as independents or don't identify with a political party. The findings were similar among AAPI adults of South Asian descent.

More than half of South Asian American adults had a positive view of Harris in the poll.

Chowdhury cautioned that Democrats “have a lot of work to do on that messaging on the border security” with South Asian voters and that issues like the cost of living and other economic concerns are top of mind for South Asian voters.

Ramaswami, the tech entrepreneur whose mother grew up in Besant Nagar, Chennai, India, the same neighborhood as Harris' mother, said the vice president's campaign is personally significant. He hopes increased visibility for Indian Americans bodes well for increasing political and cultural influence.

“It's nice to know that regardless of where you come from, or what your background is, or where your parents came from, this is a country where it really anything is possible, if you want to serve the people and do the right thing,” he said.

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AP writer Deepti Hajela and videojournalist Joseph Frederick, both in New York, contributed.

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