

## ELECTIONS, POLITICS

## 2024 Elections: How Will Desis Vote?

*Ethnic groups across the country are shifting towards the right. What about the South Asians?*



by Tanay Gokhale

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Traditionally, the Democratic Party has been the party that best represents the interests of immigrant communities and racial minorities. However, political commentators have noted a shift to the right among **Asian** and **Latino** voters, and a disconnect between **Black voters** and the Democratic party. While this shift is not overwhelming and **these groups still heavily favor the Democratic party** over the Republican party, it could be a pivotal change in the American political landscape.

## The significance of ethnic groups' shift to the Right

In an Ethnic Media Services briefing about the state of American democracy on November 10, constitutional law scholars Gloria J. Browne-Marshall and Aziz Huq, and political science professor Seth Masket discussed the significance of this trend in relation to the upcoming 2024 elections.

They pointed out that by favoring Republicans, some minority voters might be voting against their own interests. For example, Black and Latino voters' support for Trump, a candidate who has engaged with white supremacist groups, and spoken of building a wall along the southern border to restrict immigration.

“When you vote for a candidate, you buy a package and the package includes elements of the coalition that that candidate is close to,” said Dr. Huq about Trump. “And there are coalitions now that incorporate and even celebrate overt white supremacy with all of the policy consequences that entails.”

Browne-Marshall added that the changing demographics of the country might also play a role in further emboldening these groups: “By the year 2045, based on the U.S. Census, this country is going to be majority people of color,” she said.

Going as far back as the 19th century, she noted that every time people of color have gained ground politically, there has been a rise in nativist sentiments, resulting in increased racism and xenophobia. “Depending on the outcome, it could be that the 2024 election is the foundation for apartheid in this country,” she said, reiterating that voting for the Democratic party in the upcoming elections will be the better outcome for American democracy.

## South Asians still expected to vote blue

Rajiv Bhateja, a Silicon Valley engineer and founding member of [They See Blue](#) agrees with Browne-Marshall.

“If we care about our next generation, if we care about our planet, if we care about education and if we care about people's lives, we vote Democrat,” he said.

After volunteering for President Obama's 2008 campaign, and working as a community organizer for the Democratic party in Los Altos, Bhateja joined Sunil Mehta, Rajat Srivastava, and Shashi Agarwal in founding They See Blue. They are an advocacy group that educates South Asian voters about elections, and mobilizes them to vote for Democrats in local, state and federal elections. The organization has 25 chapters across the country, staffed by approximately 6000 volunteers.

“Unlike many other South Asian groups, we don’t particularly support South Asian candidates,” he said. “We are racially and ethnically blind and our goal is to help Democrats win.”

In 2020, estimates suggest that around **72% of Indian-Americans voted for Joe Biden**, and 22% for Donald Trump. Bhateja believes that though the numbers might shift a little in either direction, South Asians will once again get behind President Biden and the Democratic Party in 2024.

However, he is quick to point out that South Asian voters are not a monolith and that some sections of South Asians are more likely to swing to the right than others. For instance, Trump’s strongman image finds more resonance in the largely Sikh farming communities of the Central Valley in California, while South Asian businesspeople and wealthy corporate or tech professionals in the Bay Area gravitate towards the Republican party because they favor lower tax rates.

## **The argument to vote Republican**

Avatans Kumar, a Chicago-based writer and Hindu activist believes that there are also other reasons why some Indian-Americans will vote against Biden in 2024.

“I came here to be respected for who I am, for my work, my work ethic,” said Kumar who moved to the U.S. in the 1990s for his graduate degree in linguistics. “In the last 30 years, I see those things being eroded here and left politics has a lot to do with that.”

Like Bhateja, Kumar also predicts that South Asians will predominantly vote for the Democratic party in 2024. But he believes that as the Indian diaspora itself becomes more diverse, it will allow for a wider spectrum of political beliefs among South Asians, as evidenced by the rise of Vivek Ramaswamy.

“He has galvanized some of the people who were not very open to supporting a Republican candidate, because it’s not the cool thing to do within the diaspora,” said Kumar.

In the past, Kumar has voted for both Democratic and Republican candidates, and considers himself an Independent. Over the current Presidential term however, he feels the Democratic establishment has ushered in an age of identity politics that does not bode well for Hindu Americans.

He has been vocal about his stance on **Affirmative Action at Harvard**, college campuses’ **response to the Israel-Hamas conflict**, and **anti-caste legislation in California**. He believes these are instances of the Democratic agenda alienating Asian, Jewish and Hindu Americans respectively. Additionally, he also raised

questions about the current administration’s pullout from Afghanistan, its handling of the Russia-Ukraine war, and the economic fallout from the latter.

“Right now, it’s not a question of Democrat versus Republican,” he said. “It’s about whether Joe Biden is my candidate, and I can pretty confidently say no.”

Bhateja conceded that even some Democratic loyalists are discontent with the current administration over geopolitical issues and price inflation. But when it comes to deciding who to vote for, Bhateja – ironically an Independent voter himself – urges South Asians to look beyond the ongoing turmoil and to consider larger issues like climate change, women’s rights, and the future of American democracy.

“We’re not scoring Biden on a chart. We are choosing between two guys and we have to figure out which one is the better choice,” he said. “And I don’t think that’s Trump.”

*This story was first published on December 6, 2023 and has been updated since.*

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