

[kqed.org](https://www.kqed.org)

'Representation Matters': South Asians in Silicon Valley Rally Around Kamala Harris

Rachael Myrow

4–5 minutes

Her campaign has energized Democrats, but it has especially galvanized South Asian Democrats in Silicon Valley in ways that 2024 presidential bids by former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley and entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy, both Republicans of South Asian descent, did not.

Krishnan pointed to polls, like the 2022 Asian American Voter Survey, that show a [majority of Indian Americans nationwide \(PDF\)](#) identify as Democrats. Harris, who was born in Oakland, is the daughter of Indian and Jamaican immigrants.

“Representation matters. The first woman. The first South Asian. The first Asian American. The first African American woman. From California. All those things matter to me,” Krishnan said.





Harini Krishnan (left) with Vice President Kamala Harris at an event in Atherton in 2019. *(Courtesy of Harini Krishnan)*

M.R. Rangaswami, a tech executive, angel investor and philanthropist, is originally from Chennai, the same Indian city Harris' mom emigrated from. Rangaswami, 69, said he has closely followed Harris' political rise. "Every step of the way, she was a quick study," he said.

Rangaswami, a San Francisco resident who first came to the United States in 1982, said he plans to vote for Harris. He is

currently working with others to plan a fundraiser.

“There’s no way in my wildest dreams would some scenario like this come true,” he said. “And that’s the beauty of the United States, and that’s why I’m proud to be a U.S. citizen and have my family here. That’s the good side of America. And along with it comes challenges, but net net, it’s a positive thing.”

Tech executive Sunil Mehta has lived in Silicon Valley for 40 years. He co-founded [They See Blue](#), which mobilizes South Asian voters to support Democrats in battleground states. The name is a play on words, pronounced by many Indians and Indian Americans as “Desi” Blue. The word “Desi” means “countryman” in Hindi or Urdu.

“We are agnostic in terms of who the candidate is,” Mehta said. “We don’t blindly support South Asian candidates just because they are South Asian. Now, if they happen to be South Asian, that’s a bonus.”

But what benefits Harris with older South Asian voters — closer to the political center than left on foreign policy, economics and the environment — may complicate her reception among Gen Z South Asian Democrats in tech.

Take Divya Jakatdar, who works in sales at Harmonic, an AI startup. The Los Altos Hills resident is still shaking off her dread at the prospect of Biden losing in November. Her first reaction upon hearing Harris will top the ticket?

“It was such a confusing feeling, because I felt relief and also stress at the same time. There was a little bit of a sigh, like, ‘OK, they’re listening,’” said Jakatdar, 21, referring to Democratic Party leaders who initially supported Biden staying in the race.

Jakatdar is not a single-issue voter, but she says she knows a lot of young progressive voters are. Whether the topic is abortion, Gaza or police brutality, she's worried they'll sit this election out or vote for Trump as a protest against another four years of a Biden-like president.

"I can envision all of the new rights that are going to be taken away in a couple months should we not go with her," she said. "So I hope people remember that you would be voting against a lot of Black and brown people in the United States as well."

Trump may have chosen J.D. Vance for his Silicon Valley connections, but South Asians in the Bay Area took note of the fact his wife, Usha Vance, is Indian American. South Asian Democrats watched Republican National Convention attendees hold up anti-immigration signs as she introduced her husband.

"The raw image was Usha Vance talking about being a child of immigrants to a sea of women holding signs that said 'Mass Deportation Now' — they're telling us who they are," Krishnan said. "Trump is an anti-immigrant xenophobe. And Vance is no different."