

Asian Americans' Reception of Bernie Sanders' Ideas

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Asian Americans represent 17% of the US population, and Bernie Sanders has been one of the most popular candidates among them in both the [2016](#) and [2020](#) presidential campaigns. In [four polls](#) conducted in February 2020, Sanders received by far the most support among those who identified as Asian Americans in all polls but one where his support was slightly surpassed by Mike Bloomberg. In a ten-state [analysis](#) of high density Asian American voting precincts, Sanders was found to attract the most support in state primaries in 2020, consistently performing better than President Biden. This pattern was established in 2016, when Asian American communities largely favored Sanders over his rival in primary, Hillary Clinton. [Some](#) suggest Sanders' popularity among Asian Americans is due to his campaign's extra attention to grassroots mobilization which appealed more to the traditionally low-turnout Asian Americans than other racial groups, but I believe there are more profound historical, demographical, and ideological reasons beneath the surface.

Asian Americans who migrated or have parents migrated from these countries are likely to be affected by the cultures and beliefs in these countries or their origins. Largely populated by first- and second-generation immigrants, Asian Americans accept Sanders' democratic socialist ideas more easily because for many of them, their countries of origin share similar ideologies. Socialist countries in Asia such as China, India, and Vietnam are important sources of immigration to America. In 2019, [census](#) showed Chinese Americans, Indian Americans and Vietnamese Americans collectively take up 55% of the Asian American population. Among these countries, the Chinese political structure and ideology, at its foundation, were radically informed by [Marxism-Leninism-Maoism philosophy](#). Entering the 1980s, China sought to find a middle ground between economic development and adherence to socialist ideals and found the system of "[socialism with Chinese characteristics](#)." Under socialism with Chinese characteristics, China has employed an economic system called "[socialist market economy](#)," where the state controls the broad direction of economic development, but private ownership coexists with public ownership in a market economy. With regard to culture, to ordinary Chinese people, socialism is not only a political system or a way of distributing of resources, but a belief. Ideas associated with socialism, such as collectiveness and equality, are [virtues](#) to be pursued.

One can find some similarity between socialism with Chinese characteristics in ideas that inform and manifest in Bernie Sanders' political ideologies as well. Eugene Debs, the socialist icon who greatly inspired Sanders, was a [self-identified Marxist](#). While Sanders tends not to mention the connection of his ideas to Marxism because of the (irrational) fear of Marx and communism in America, [he did read Marx](#) when he was a teenager. In addition, China's socialist market economy is similar to the economic aspects of Bernie Sanders' ideas of democratic socialism. The major policies he advocates for in his presidential campaigns, such as Medicare for All or College for All, reflect a combination of private ownership and collective ownership of certain means of production. These policies are implemented in the Asian countries following China's socialism as well. In China, medical care is provided for all citizens as long as they pay a small amount of fee. College tuitions are within the range affordable to most people. Coming from countries like China where these policies are the norm, many Asian Americans are far more acceptive of Bernie Sanders' policies that may seem radical to other Americans of non-recent immigrant descent.

Asian Americans also benefit from many of Sanders' policies that tailor more specifically to their current identity. With 59% of the group born in a country other than the United States, many Asian Americans have families or friends overseas, which makes them particularly mindful of foreign

policies. Bernie Sanders' objection to wars in Asian countries such as Vietnam, Iraq, Yemen, and Iran appeal to them specifically. Furthermore, Sanders has been supportive of [policies](#) that make the process of immigration easier, and recognizes the challenges faced by immigrants in regards to language barriers. This issue is particularly faced by the immigrated Asian Americans as well. One in five Asian American households do not speak English as their primary language. Bernie Sanders addresses this issue in his plan for healthcare reform.



The population of Asian Americans eligible to vote has doubled over the past few decades. While the voter turnout has been historically lower than other racial groups, Asian Americans can indeed be mobilized, and they have the potential to become an influential politically relevant group that has real knowledge of Sanders' intellectual roots.