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THE ROLE OF MINORITY VOTERS IN THE 2018 MIDTERM ELECTIONS

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**Introduction:**

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**Panel Discussion:**

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## P R O C E E D I N G S

DR. LEE: Good afternoon. We want to welcome everybody here who is here at the Brookings Institution with us this afternoon, as well as those of you who are watching us in C-SPAN, who is kindly covering this event this afternoon. I have the pleasure of, for those of you who know me, not sitting on this panel, but actually being someone who is interested in the topic. My name is Dr. Nicol Turner Lee. I am a fellow in the Center for Technology Innovation which sits in our Governance Studies department here at Brookings. But I have this great honor to introduce the moderator for today's event, which is going to address the role of minority voters in the midterms, which cannot be much more of a timely topic today than ever before.

Dr. Fred Harris is a nonresident fellow here at Brookings, but he is also most importantly the dean of social science and professor of political science at Columbia University. He also serves as the director of Center on African American Politics in Society. And I would like to say that he's probably one of the most preeminent scholars that we have on African American politics with his publications, including books entitled "Something Within: Religion in African American Activism," which was awarded the V.O. Key Book Award by the Southern Political Science Association, the Best Book Award by the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, and the Best Book Award by the National Conference of Black Political Scientists. He is also the coauthor of "Countervailing Forces in African American Civic Activism 1974-1994," which received the W.E.B. Du Bois Book Award from the National Conference of Black Political Scientists, and the Ralph Bunch Award from the American Political Science Association.

His most prominent book, "The Price of the Ticket: Barack Obama and the Rise and Decline of Black Politics," and "Beyond Discrimination: Racial Inequality in a Post-Racist Era," both written in 2012, respectively 2012 and 2013, have received

numerous awards. "The Price of the Ticket" receiving the Hurston Wright Legacy Award for nonfiction. He's also a regular contributor to publications that include the Dissent, the London Review of Books, the New York Times, Society Souls, and the Washington Post.

I also know Dr. Harris from a previous life. We both were in grad school together, though he is much older than I, I must say (Laughter).

So with that, I cannot be more honored and humbled and pleased to have Dr. Harris with us to kick off this wonderful event. He will come up to the stage and actually introduce his panelists. Please follow us with any comments on #2018Voters, which is our hashtag, so that we can continue this conversation beyond this place. And, again, join me in welcoming Dr. Fred Harris to the stage. (Applause)

DR. HARRIS: Welcome, everyone. This is a very crucial moment in American political life. We are facing a midterm, one that we haven't seen for at least more than a generation. And, as you know, midterm elections are a referendum on the policies of a president. And the Trump Presidency has engendered a great sense of divide in our country. And so today we're going to explore to what extent we will hear minority voices when it comes to the election next Tuesday.

And so we have a preeminent panel of specialists with us. I have to say, Jessica Reeves, who is the chief operating officer of Voto Latino was scheduled to be with us today and, unfortunately, her schedule would not allow her to appear. To my left is Kimberly Atkins, who is the chief Washington reporter and columnist for the Boston Herald, where she focuses on the coverage on the White House, Congress, and the U.S. Supreme Court. She is a reoccurring guest host for C-SPAN's morning call-in show, Washington Journal, where she interviews lawmakers, public policy experts, and journalists about the issues on Capitol Hill. Kimberly is also a regular panelist on one of my favorite shows on Friday evenings, PBS news show Washington Week. And before

launching her journalism career, Kimberly was a litigation attorney in Boston. And I will be remiss if I didn't mention as a Dean at Columbia that Kimberly is also a graduate of Columbia University School of Journalism.

Next to Kimberly is Christine Chen, who is the founding executive director of Asian and Pacific Islander American Vote, known as APIAVote. APIAVote is involved in research and polling of Asian American voters. The organization's efforts have strengthened local grassroots programs by reaching out and mobilizing Asian American and Pacific Islander voters to the polls. Christine has more than two decades of experience in organizing and advocating on issues such as immigration, hate crimes, affirmative action, the census, racial profiling, voting rights, and election reforms. And given those issues, given your decades-long commitment to these issues, they're still in the forefront today. So we're looking forward to hearing what you have to say specifically about -- generally about minority voters, but specifically around the participation of Asian American voters.

Michael Fauntroy is associate professor of political science, associate chair, and director of graduate studies in the Political Science Department at Howard University where he teaches courses on African American politics, interest groups, the presidency, and political parties. Michael served as a civil rights analyst at the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, where he conducted research on such issues as voting rights and fair housing. He is the author of "Republicans and the Black Vote," which analyzes the historical relationship between African American and the GOP.

So I want to start with this general question. So after two years of the Trump presidency many are predicting a blue wave. But we're not in normal times. That is, the country is divided and many see that much is at stake in this upcoming election. So the question I want to start with, there's a question whether minority voters will

contribute to this so-called blue wave, or whether lower than hoped for turnout will prevail and keep the political status quo intact. What are your thoughts about the role of minority voters next Tuesday?

MS. ATKINS: I mean I think that's the \$60,000 question coming up with these midterms that are coming at a time -- we've had, as you said, two years of President Trump who has proven to be the most polarizing figure in modern American politics in a lot of ways, including racially. So when we're talking about minority voters, that has to have an impact. You have seen minority voters galvanized -- you've seen a lot of different groups galvanized in a way that you have not seen previously. It started the day after President Trump was elected with the women's march, which was the biggest political event in my lifetime that I saw here in Washington, but you've seen that same motivation when it comes to young people, when it comes to people of color. But at the same time, you have a recent spate in the last decade or so of laws being passed and policies being implemented that erect barriers to the polls that disproportionately affect people of color, particularly people of color who are poor, people of color in more rural areas, but has a disproportionate effect on them.

So you have these two competing things happening in these midterm elections. Midterms generally draw fewer voters than presidential election years, so you also have that issue, and you have a whole lot of very important house and senate races, and local races, gubernatorial races, that are very particular the regions that they're in. So there are a lot of other factors that are weighing in too.

But as a whole, I think we don't know yet, is the answer to your question as far as I can see. That's one of the things I'm going to be looking at the day after the election, is exactly what role minority voters play. And it's hard to tell from polling, particularly with minority voters. But I think a lot of us -- I think about the day after the

2016 election when I was looking at exit poll data the first thing that morning and I think a lot of people were surprised that Donald Trump won the majority, the clear majority of white women voters, for example. I think looking and parsing and looking at how these voters turned out, how they reacted, what groups on the ground were saying about efforts of voter suppression, which I'll talk a little bit more about later, I think that's what we're all looking for.

MR. HARRIS: Right. Christine?

MS. CHEN: You know, I really believe that campaigns and the political parties no longer can afford to ignore people of color and these base of voters, including Asian American and Pacific Islanders, just for the simple fact of looking at the growth of the population. You know, everyone has been asking like oh, well, suddenly we're hearing about Asian American voters. Well, it's also because in the last decade there's been tremendous growth in specific states where there are like tight race. APIAVote and AAPI Data just recently conducted our 2018 Asian American Voter Survey. We conduct this once every two years. It's one of the few in language polling that's done on Asian American voters. And I have to really emphasize "in language" because there are also differences in terms of those that go ahead and take it in English versus another language. And from our survey in September, you know, we have 76 percent who are planning on voting. And that's even higher for some ethnic communities. Like Indian community is as high as 80 percent and 86 percent for Japanese Americans.

Also I think democrats right now going into this should be catering to the Asian American voters because according to the polling they also have an advantage when it comes to the issues. And also in the senate races they actually have 50 percent of voters that were surveyed are looking at voting for the democrat, and then around the same amount for the congressional races as well. But I really have to emphasize that

probably a quarter of them are still undecided. So there are even still undecided voters going to this. So it goes back to again what are the campaigns and the parties doing to engage these base of unlikely voters, as they usually critique them as.

And I would have to say, as we've been phone banking -- so APIAVote, we work with local nonprofits in 27 states. So they are currently doing -- they've been doing voter registration, phone banking, door knocking. We actually sent out over a half a million mailers in language, we translate into nine different languages in 21 different states. So as we're following up with phone calls, some of them are even saying oh, how did you get my phone number or my address. So that tells me no one has ever touched them, no one has ever actually reached out to them to even persuade them to vote for their particular candidate.

MR. HARRIS: Yeah. So direct mobilization is very important. And we're going to talk in a moment specifically about Asian American voters. I think one important thing to note, which I'm sure you're going to remind us, is that Asian American voters are not a monolith, right. And so those statistics that you gave about sort of 50 percent in support of a particular political party I think is worthy to note.

Michael, what do you have to say?

MR. FAUNTROY: Well, I would say first and foremost that you can't have a blue wave without a black wave and a brown wave and Asian Pacific Islander wave. And so the results from this election, whether it's blue or not, I think is almost entirely a function of what happens in these communities around the country.

Now, it's very interesting because you have some headliners in some of these races that could potentially drive turnout. So if Bill Nelson holds onto his senate seat in Florida it might be because Andrew Gillum at the top of the ticket running for governor was able to draw in more African Americans than might otherwise turnout. We

may see similar down ballot impacts in Georgia and in other places around the country, not far from us in Maryland and New York. I think the Tish James New York Attorney General race has not gotten the kind of attention that perhaps it should, because it could have some significant impacts as well.

So I think that we are perhaps in the first election -- in some ways -- the first midterm election, even including the one in between the Obama elections, in which minority voters will actually determine some really big questions.

And so there are a couple of things that initially stick out to me. One is, at least in terms of African American voters, there's really high energy around the country. Now, the other side of that though is that a lot of that high energy is driven by anger with the President. And so we need to see if that anger with the President will translate to materializing at the ballot box. We don't quite know yet. We won't know until the election. And it's also existing in an environment which there's deep concern about voter suppression, voting machine concerns and issues. If some of the reporting coming out of Texas, for example, is true with regard to the early voting, then we may well have a very serious problem in terms of electoral administration.

And then, lastly, I teach undergraduate and graduate students and my 18 year old freshmen were 8 years old when Barack Obama was elected President. And so they're sort of whole understanding of American politics is not in any way connected to what the history of American politics has been. And for many of them they don't understand why things are the way they are. And for them it's a bit of a reckoning and they're beginning to understand that it's not enough to just vote in presidential elections. And this blue wave that we're discussing here is largely going to be driven in many ways by younger voters who, by the way, are the most unreliable voters in the American electorate.



So there's a lot going on to suggest that there will be a blue wave, but many of those suggestions, you turn the coin over and there are a lot of reasons to be concerned as to whether or not it will actually materialize.

MR. HARRIS: I want to build on that. As you recall, when President Obama faced his first midterm and lost miserably he described it as a shellacking. But there's something different about President Trump. He's engaged his core constituency since basically he stepped in the White House, which suggests that there's a great deal of mobilization or connection there and that perhaps this blue wave that many are predicting may actually be closer than many of us think because of that engagement. We're not living in normal times. You know, presidents normally don't have that level of engagement with their core constituency during the first years of their presidency. They usually wait to the reelection to sort of really deeply engage.

Any thoughts about that? About the potential closeness of this election?

MR. FAUNTROY: Well, I think it will be a lot closer than we are believing. Part of that is because of polling. Polling is more difficult now, particularly among millennial voters, younger voters. My students don't have landlines, you know. They don't do a lot of the things that people of my generation do. So they're harder to reach in polls. And so we don't actually know if the polling we're seeing is undercounting these voters or in other ways sort of being inaccurate. So I think that's a really big concern in terms of trying to figure out what's going to happen.

Now, President Trump is playing to his strength. He's been campaigning since 2015 almost continuously. So your point with regard to the sort of keeping connections to the base is absolutely well taken. Now, the other side of that is if all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail. And I think that's kind of what he's doing. You know, he's not doing the policy thing in a traditional way, but if he can keep control of

the house and the senate then he'll be able to continue doing what he wants to do.

So I get it, I understand it, and we will see, of course, on Tuesday if that's actually the best strategy.

MS. CHEN: At the same time, you know, I view that the last two years -- because the different policies and different proposals being tossed out there, everything from immigration to healthcare, affirmative action to census, no one actually took a break. So like all the different nonprofit and advocacy organizations and their members, they've been constantly busy, whether it's participating in rallies, visiting your members and elected officials. But because of that continuous activity, I see that people continue to learn and be more sophisticated about recruiting volunteers. And instead of just resting for two years or resting for four years, they've actually been continuing to build. So I think there's more also of the infrastructure leading into this election that we haven't seen.

One great example is Georgia. Because they had special elections, they had primaries, primaries that didn't get 50 percent, so they had another election. And then now going to the midterms. I would have to say that there are more diverse political infrastructures in Georgia now than we've ever seen because of that continuous activity. And so whether it's from non partisan groups to also political organizations.

MR. HARRIS: Right, right. Well, Kimberly, you've been doing -- you're a journalist, so you've been watching with a wide lens with what's going on in the election, but I want you to focus in on what's happening with Latino voter, particularly around the sense that the rhetoric around immigration is instilling a sense of fear within that population. And everyone else can jump in too, but can you give us a reporter's perspective and talk about the implications of the rhetoric around immigration and how that may affect turnout?

MS. ATKINS: Certainly, certainly. So we have seen in particular in the

last couple of weeks President Trump make his closing argument in the midterm focused entirely on the issue of immigration, specifically on the issue of illegal immigration and specifically in a way that is trying to invoke fear and demonize a certain group of people, primarily Latinos. And it's based on the group of migrants making their way through Mexico right now from Central America, almost all of whom are fleeing poverty and/or violence and/or just untenable conditions so that they can make a bid for asylum in the United States, knowing that the majority of them won't get it, but it was worth making that trip anyway.

The President has now, as you know, in recent reports not only question everything from birthright citizenship, which is something he brought up on the campaign trail and people thought, oh, he's just kidding. He's brought that up, he's promised as many as 15,000 troops at the border, which he's already sending 5,000, which is more than the American troops that we have fighting ISIS in Syria. If he sends 15,000 that will be more than we have in Afghanistan, to send on U.S. soil when there is federal law that prohibits U.S. troops from acting in law enforcement capacity on U.S. soil. But still, that's his wall. He couldn't get his wall, but that's what he has.

So that is serving, in his view, to galvanize his base, to galvanize primarily white voters who supported him in stoking this fear. During the 2016 election that fear was stoked at Middle Easterners, right, with the Muslim ban. Now it is the Latino population in the United States. Also threatening Latinos. He had a tweet last week that said all levels of government and law enforcement are watching carefully for all VOTER FRAUD, including EARLY VOTING. Cheat at your own peril. Violators will be subject to maximum penalties, both civil and criminal. Clearly designed to put fear in Latino Americans who can vote that somehow if they do vote or engage in government that that could put perhaps other people in their family who are legal residents or who are not legal

residents in some sort of danger.

He is staking his claim on this. The problem is this very well could motivate his base. And Latino voters have had historically low turnout for a lot of reasons, including voter suppression efforts, that I can get into more later. This very kind of fear that doing things, engaging in government in ways like voting, things that they have a right to do, could somehow backfire on them. And, frankly, the lack of political infrastructure built by either party to really engage these voters. Generally speaking, when it comes to canvassing, canvassing rarely reaches Latino voters in this country. When it comes to polling, polling rarely reaches Latino voters. I mean I wrote down when you said, Christine, the idea of unlikely voters. In the press we certainly always see registered voters, likely voters, and that's who everybody focuses on. And it's almost a foregone conclusion that Latino voters are unlikely voters and so nobody pays attention to them. Nobody is reaching out to them with a message.

I think this year there's been a big question as to what the message of the democrats has been to counter Donald Trump, and it seems to have been a bit all over the place. It seems that the democrats kind of started, saying oh, well, we have to reach out to these forgotten voters that the President's talking about, these white guys who lost their steel working jobs in Pennsylvania and who are disillusioned with the democratic party, when that is a very, very tiny contingent of the voting population. And then they went to issues which, frankly speaking, when you talk to Latino voters, black voters, others, their number one issues are not crime, it's not immigration, it is things like healthcare, it is things like the economy, it is things like education. These are the things that motivate the most. They started talking about that and now they're back focused on Donald Trump. Democrats are opposing that message.

So in a lot of ways Latino voters just get left out. And when you see at

the end, wow, President Trump saying all these things, but we did not see the turnout we expected, those are the reasons why.

MR. HARRIS: Okay. Also, I don't know if you want to weigh in, but I do want to -- I don't want to run out of time, because we have still some questions to get through, but I want, Christine, for you to say something about what's been described at least among some political scientists as the Asian American political participation paradox. That is that Asian Americans on average have higher levels of education than average Americans. But among racial and ethnic groups they're among the least likely to come out and vote.

So could you say something about that and could you say that if you think that this midterm election will be different than it has been in the past?

MS. CHEN: Right. So historically there is a reason why the numbers for Asian American participation is lower. Because, first of all, you have to realize that Asian Americans couldn't even immigrate and become citizens really in large numbers, only starting in 1965 when immigration laws changed. And then, even then, it takes a while to get settled and actually build organizations. Even nonprofit organizations actually do this work. APIAVote, we were established in 2007, right, and so only then we started reaching out to local nonprofits to help them, convince them that they're allowed to even do this work and try to even change the culture or understanding of like when you become a citizen, what does that actually mean and what's the process like to actually go vote. So you have a lot of issues in regards to also education and their perception of what voting is like. And it's so complex. We know that in every single state the laws vary.

And then for those -- about two-thirds also speak a different language, so that there may be also language issues. And so that's why we also provide a hotline

during this time period, because a lot of them also are asking questions in language about the elections in itself.

MR. HARRIS: Right, right. But we also shouldn't think of those groups as monolith, right, in terms of their turnout? Can you say more about the differentiation?

MS. CHEN: Right. So even though I provided general numbers from the Asian American poll that we conducted, there are differences in terms of biethnicity. So traditionally Vietnamese and Filipino Americans are a lot more republican leaning. The Chinese in the past have been more democratic leaning, but now we're actually seeing them not identifying with either party. So we're also seeing that growth of those undecided voters. But I will say in terms of issues that motivate them, it's similar to the Latino community. The number one issue was jobs and economy, healthcare, education, and then also gun control. 7 to 1 are supportive of gun control, and it's even higher among immigrant born voters. So these are things that are necessarily seen or talked about or covered when you're thinking about gun control and Asian American voters.

So there are like similarities as well as some differences. But I think it also goes back to one of the growing trends, once again, is that not enough of the political campaigns are reaching out to these voters. We're starting to see changes, like in Virginia, especially in northern Virginia, with the Virginia 10 congressional race, Nevada, every cycle, it's such a close race that they are -- both republicans and democrats are courting the Asian Americans, especially the Filipino vote in Nevada. And then we're also seeing this midterm -- because of Asian American candidates who are running for congress. Like Young Kim in southern California. She's a republican, but she's had a long history developing relationships with the community that that race is going to be very tight. And then in Houston, Texas, Sri Kulkarni, he went ahead and established a field program in 16 different languages. And he has volunteers identifying

Asian American voters and their sub-ethnic groups and how those volunteers reach out to them in different languages. It actually helped him in the primaries. He was not expected to win the primary, but he increased primary participation by increasing Asian American voter participation.

MR. HARRIS: Right, right. That's remarkable. And to it's interesting that you mention the case in California, this candidate who seems to be drawing on sort of his connections to the Asian American community.

So what I want to ask you, Michael, is that we know from the literature on African American politics the role of historic firsts in mobilizing black voters. We saw that of course with the case of Barack Obama. You know, historic turnouts, even in 2012, for the first time in American history -- recorded history at least -- African American voter turnout exceed white voter turnout. And we saw that decline in 2016.

But we have on the ballot three back gubernatorial nominees in Florida, in Georgia, in Maryland, and, as you mentioned earlier, the attorney general's race, where you have two African Americans who are nominees.

What effect do you think that that's going to have on black voter participation?

MR. FAUNTROY: Well, I think first and foremost party operatives in all of those states are hoping that they can have in microcosm what the national democrats had with Obama in 2008 and 2012. And I will tell you, the Abrams race in Georgia and the Gillum race in Florida are particularly interesting in that regard because I think that they have the potential to drive out turnout in a way that perhaps you might not see as much in Maryland with Ben Jealous. So that's part of it.

The other part of it is the ability to drive out turnout is also a function of who you're running against. And in both Georgia and Florida the democratic nominees

are running against extremely dislikable, at least in black communities, nominees. Which people go to vote for candidates, but they also vote against candidates. And you may see some of that as well in both of those races. And so I think that those two races will have a great impact on turnout and, as I mentioned earlier, could have a cascading effect on down ballot races. And we could wake up on Wednesday with a whole bunch of historic firsts, first black New York attorney general, first black Florida governor, first black Georgia governor, and if there's a really big turnout in Maryland, perhaps even first black governor in Maryland. And if that happens, you know, I will be shocked. (Laughter) But it could be a really big day in terms of generating enthusiasm going forward for politics.

Remember, I think this is important, we're hearing stories about early voting and the tremendous turnout in early voting, but even in best case scenarios, we're fortunate if we get 50-51 percent turnout in a midterm. And these candidates have the potential to take those numbers way beyond that.

MR. HARRIS: Okay. Are we looking at the future or are we in the moment of the past in the sense that -- I had mentioned this before, but in talking here I wonder how much demographic change is a part of the stories that we're hearing here. Both sort of the reaction of many conservative white voters -- and we're going to talk about voter suppression in a moment -- and the opportunities for candidates of color to be the nominee, viable nominees of candidates to governor of Georgia and South Carolina, and Maryland -- let's not forget Maryland. It's something that we haven't seen in quite some time. I mean there was an African American president before there were governors of deep south states, with the exception of Virginia.

MR. FAUNTROY: Well, you know, you raise a very interesting point, because as you will recall, in the aftermath of Jesse Jackson's 1984 and 1988 campaigns there was tremendous mobilization of black voters that resulted in a whole bunch of



African Americans being elected in places that we had not seen, Doug Wilder in Virginia, Norm Rice in Seattle, Wellington Webb in Denver.

MR. HARRIS: Mayor of New York.

MR. FAUNTROY: David Dinkins of New York, of course. And so perhaps what we're seeing is a sequel to what we saw in that period in which you now have these other candidates, some of whom are seen as cut from Obama cloth, if you will, and who are taking the baton in new directions that we had not previously seen.

MR. HARRIS: Are we seeing more Asian American or Latino voters? One thing I will be remiss, also, not to mention, is that there is an intersectional connection here because there are lots of issues regarding women in politics, which is also a response to the Presidency of Donald Trump, the women's marches, the MeToo movement. And so we're seeing women of color who are also emerging. In your town of Boston there was a breakthrough. And in my City of New York, a Latina beat -- beating democratic incumbents, white men.

Any thoughts on that? Are we seeing the future or is it sort of temporary, like we saw in 1992, the Year of the Woman?

MS. ATKINS: Yeah, I mean that was going to be one of my points is the corollary to the Year of the Woman after the Anita Hill testimony in the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearing before this all white panel of men. And the senate judiciary committee spurred this election of a lot of women to congress, including Senator Diane Feinstein, who is on the committee now.

These things are cyclical because we saw the election of women, but we really did not see a lot of fundamental from the ground change. I think the election that you pointed out of Ayanna Pressley out of Boston, who defeated an incumbent democrat who was popular in Boston. Nobody disliked Mike Capuano in Boston. But it was the

State's only majority minority district and it was -- on the issues they were exactly the same, but it was a matter of who did this district want to see go to Washington to represent them. And she had the energy, she was a black woman, and that was the face they wanted to send to congress. I think we are seeing some of that. At the same time, even in races that don't involve a candidate of color, we are seeing the power of the minority vote, particularly minority women. I think a great example of that is the special election in Alabama where everybody was shocked the next day when women of color, black women, came out in droves because they were horrified at the idea of -- and it wasn't a racial issue, the top issue was the fact that this -- voting against the candidate who was accused of really horrific crimes against underage women. That motivated black women. I mean I think people are understanding the power of black voters in a way that they've neglected in the past.

On the other hand, when you're talking about low turnout among people of color, that's also a problem because one complaint that I hear from voters of color is well, we're not at the table, you're not coming and reaching out to us, be we come for you when you need us, you thank us. But in a crisis we come and we come through for you, but all the rest of the time, when there is no political crisis, you don't. And that is a big factor of -- it's not just suppression that keeps people away from the polls, it's a lack of engagement or a feeling that, you know what, my vote is not going to matter, so why bother.

MS. CHEN: I think this time there's a huge change because we are seeing a lot more women and also people of color running for office. And they're also running for office in locations where you don't think that there's sizeable populations. Like Gina Ortiz, she's a Filipina in Texas, in San Antonio. So obviously she's not catering to the Asian American voters out there, right. It's really about building a comprehensive

coalition and reaching out to a diverse group of voters.

But also even the Obama effect. We have a number of Obama appointees, like Andy Kim in New Jersey, southern New Jersey. He's also positioned to potentially win that race. He was an appointee during that time period. And so he was inspired to run.

So we're seeing that, but also once again the population growth, like in Orange County. There's a large Vietnamese population. Now, for this election, we actually heard that there are 24 Vietnamese Americans who are running for office and 13 of them have the same last name -- Nguyen. (Laughter) So they actually have to differentiate themselves. But, you know, we've never seen that in one location, even when there has been a growth of a population.

MR. HARRIS: So it does sort of signal the growing diversity of the electorate, as well as those who are running for office.

MS. CHEN: Right.

MR. HARRIS: I want to get to this point that we have been pointing to, that we're going to get to since we started, and that's voter suppression. And so this is really the other side of voter participation. So we talked about with Christine building institutions or organizations in order to facilitate or bring people within the electorate. With African Americans we've talked about the importance of political empowerment, particularly in the instance of historic firsts. And we talked about sort of the galvanizing force of women in the electorate.

But there is another side of this, and that's voter suppression. And I think it's important to note that in the Supreme Court decision Shelby County v. Holder, which was rendered months after Barack Obama was reelected as President, where you had a historic turnout of African Americans that -- the Voting Rights Act was weakened. The

enforcement, Section 5, where any changes in voting laws has to be pre-cleared through the Justice Department or through a federal court.

What evidence is there that Shelby County v. Holder has had an impact on allowing voter suppression and what kind of evidence do we see currently? And what impact these voter suppression tactics might have in the outcome of next week's election?

MS. ATKINS: We're seeing a lot of the evidence of that playing out in real time when it comes to these midterms. I mean that decision was handed down in 2013 where the Supreme Court struck down a portion of the Voting Rights Act that dealt with the coverage formula, as what determined when the Justice Department had to pre-clear certain districts that had a history of voter suppression. New voting laws had to be pre-cleared through the Justice Department before they could be implemented in these districts. Or in the case of the Commonwealth of Virginia, the whole state was covered under pre-clearance. And in other places there were specific districts.

It's interesting, because in the talk of voting rights Donald Trump has installed two new Justices to the Supreme Court and there has been some talk that now since the Court has shifted to the right, Chief Justice John Robert is sort of the new swing voter Justice, so to speak. That he might be the one who can be swayed one way or the other. Well, John Roberts was the author of the Shelby County decision. And in describing this pre-clearance formula that was set up to decide what districts needed to have this clearance, he wrote racial disparity in those numbers was compelling evidence to justify the pre-clearance remedy and the coverage formula -- talking about when it was implemented in 1965. There is no longer such a disparity. Well (laughter), since then there have been -- in that five years since that decision, there have been hundreds of suppressive voting laws passed in nearly half of the states in the United States. This is

not just a problem in southern states, this is happening all over. And these laws vary and they've been challenged, but a lot of them have been upheld. For example, voter ID laws that have been passed, probably the most pervasive form of this, have largely been upheld, but some of them are even more -- about more than showing an ID. For example, in North Dakota, where there is a very close, very important senate race taking place, there was a law implemented that required a person to have a street address on their ID in order to vote. Well, you have thousands of Native Americans that live in rural communities that are off the postal grid, essentially. They go get their mail at post offices. And this essentially disenfranchised all of them. This law was passed coincidentally enough right after Heidi Heitkamp won her election by what was seen as an unexpected victory, and suddenly the state really needed this law.

And then you have other things, voter purging laws, use it or lose it laws, where you lose your constitutional right to vote I guess, if you don't vote for a while. Those are being challenged. There is an exact match law, which is playing a factor in that Georgia race where your name has to be an exact match on your ID as it is on the voter rolls. I can tell from experience, when a clerical error at the DMV misspelled my middle name and it took months and me writing checks to two different states to get a certified copy of my birth certificate to go back and try to get this corrected, how big of a problem that can be.

And that of course disproportionately affects communities of color because it folks of color who are more likely to have a name that may get confused or there may be a typo like it was -- it was leaving off one letter out of my middle name that caused all of that trouble. Fortunately, it did not keep me from voting, but if you are poor, if you live in a more rural area, if you don't have access to the resources to pay two more fees just to get your personal information right, though it was mistaken by no fault of your

own, you can understand how this can be a burden on folks. Proof of citizenship requirements. That was something that was stopped by the Courts, but it was tried by Chris Kobach in Kansas, who as you know was the short-lived chairman of the President's committee on voter fraud. And we talk about the non existence of that, the virtual non existence of voter fraud. But he is a chief architect of a lot of the voter suppression efforts you are seeing across the country. So literally hundreds of laws.

There are right now tens of thousands of voter registrations that are being challenged I think in Georgia alone based on that exact match law. I mean we're talking about thousands and thousands of votes that are at stake in elections where the margins are going to be really small. So it's a big, big impact.

MS. CHEN: And even for states that don't have voter ID, some of the polling locations where if you're seeing an increase of Latino and Asian voters, and you're not used to seeing that, they are also asking them specifically for ID. And so they're self selecting whether or not you really live in that particular district and have the right to vote.

But I will have to re-emphasize in terms of the match and the clerical issues, especially when those who are processing the voter registration forms, they're not used to seeing these names. And there are a lot of times clerical mistakes. Or even for the Asian community, many times in your -- like my Chinese name is (speaking in Chinese), is like the first part of my name. So we always have to emphasize to our volunteers, like make sure that the last name is actually put in the last name and the first name is placed in the first name when they register.

MR. FAUNTROY: And let me just add quickly two quick examples, one of which is the pickup on the Georgia one. 55,000 voter registration applications haven't been processed and roughly 70 percent of those are among African American voters. So that's going to have a big impact. And this is a responsibility of a secretary of state. Just

so happens in this case the secretary of state is running for governor and has no particular incentive to do this, which is going to have a big impact.

And then the other one, which is really egregious in my view, is that there have been nearly 1,000 voter locations, polling places, that have been closed throughout the south since Shelby v. Holden. Now, historically, those would have to be pre-cleared. And in the past the Federal District Court here in DC or the Justice Department would not pre-clear that unless there was another one open nearby. Well, that's not the case now because there's no real way to engage in that. And the vast majority of those closed polling places are in minority communities.

So the suppression is real, the talk about voter fraud is fake news, if I could use that phrase here, and is just an example of how you can tell how important something is by the extent to which some will go to keep you from using it. And in this case we're talking about the vote.

MS. ATKINS: And I didn't even get to gerrymandering. I mean --

MR. HARRIS: Oh, yeah. Well, we don't have -- but before I open the audience up for questions, and since we are on C-SPAN live and since the election is next week, I didn't mention this question to you in my notes, so you can decline to answer it if you want. Will the democrats prevail on next Tuesday in congress?

MS. ATKINS: Look, the house races looks positive for the democrats. I think the latest estimates out in the last day or two were somewhere between 30-40 seats that the democrats could pick up. They need 23 to regain control of the house. The senate is a lot more difficult because of the maps and the fact that republicans had the momentum going in. I mean once Heidi Heitkamp fell behind in the polls in North Dakota, I think that made the reach for the democrats a lot tougher to take that back.

But again, I want to re-emphasize the point that Michael made about

polling. Polling is horrible. Polling is horrible on a national level. When you get down to local races, polling is particularly horrible. So it's really, really difficult to know. And I think there are going to be a lot of surprises, individual surprises once Wednesday morning comes around.

MR. HARRIS: Well, Michael, you're a political scientist so you have to say something. But, Christine -- you can pass if you like.

MS. CHEN: I'll pass.

MR. HARRIS: Yeah, that's what I thought.

MS. CHEN: Because of my institution.

MR. HARRIS: Of course, yeah.

MR. FAUNTROY: One of the great things about tenure if you can just  
(laughter) --

So democrats plus six in the house, minus one in the senate.

MS. ATKINS: Wow.

MR. HARRIS: Oh, wow. So you've thought about this. (Laughter)

MR. FAUNTROY: A lot. Well, my job, I've got to think about it.

MR. HARRIS: Okay. Well, we're going to open the -- yes, the gentleman here.

SPEAKER: Do you have any information on the voting tendencies of people from the Indian subcontinent and what you might expect in this election?

MS. CHEN: So according to our polling, ever since we've been doing it, since 2012, Indian Americans are actually the one population that are heavily democrat consistently. So when we look at the disaggregated data amongst the top six ethnic Asian communities, they ranked as the top in terms of democrats. So where there's a large Indian population the democrats really have an advantage when it comes to that



community.

SPEAKER: Can I just interject? Just another paradox. I didn't know that actually. I thought it was much more divided between South Asians between republicans and democrats. And the reason why I thought that is because the breakthroughs of Indian Americans and politics have been as governors of southern states on the republican side. So --

MR. HARRIS: Bobby Jindal?

SPEAKER: In South Carolina.

MS. CHEN: Well, it goes back to the issues, right. So you look at the issues of the impact of 9/11 on Indian Americans and also the attacks on religion. Because the Indian American and South Asian communities really are very diverse when it comes to religion as well.

MR. HARRIS: Right.

SPEAKER: I haven't voted on a regular election day since the first Obama election. Long lines. I've done early voting ever since. I don't know why anybody doesn't do early voting if they can.

Do you have any feel for how early voting is doing in predominantly minority communities? Is it higher than expected, higher than normal? Any clues?

MS. ATKINS: I mean so far from the data that we've seen, early voting states, the turnout across the board has been higher as compared to past election years, which sort of shows that the base is galvanized. Keep in mind that early voters are voters who tend to be politically active people, active voters, minds made up early, more base voters than those who are in independents or in the middle. But so far there have been high numbers, higher numbers, but you can't tell from them yet whether that is going to equal overall higher turnouts among minority population groups. I just don't think

we have enough of those numbers yet.

SPEAKER: And I do daily work on this and it just came out that there are 12 states have already exceeded their total early voting numbers --

MR. HARRIS: Can you wait for a mic please?

SPEAKER: Oh, I'm sorry. I do work on this at the National Education Association, and this we just put into the excel sheet, but there are 12 states have already exceeded the total early voting numbers from 2014. Over 22 million have already voted. But like you said, it still hasn't disaggregated it in any kind of ethnic minority terms.

MR. HARRIS: Any other questions? Yes, this --

SPEAKER: I remind myself that voter suppression is a historical tendency in white America. It happened to my ancestors, it's happened to many of our ancestors here. The response of the civil rights movement of the '60s was to a large extent to ameliorate that situation. What's it going to take now? I don't see a coherent democratic strategy to address this issue, which, you know -- we haven't mentioned the Texas rates with Beto O'Rourke and Cruz. That could very clearly in my mind depend upon voter suppression in that state.

MS. ATKINS: Yeah. I mean I think that's an important issue. When you talk about motivating voters and fighting back against -- in terms of messaging -- against these suppressive voter efforts. I mean fighting back on the state level. These laws are passed by the states and they're passed by largely republic-led legislatures. So you actually have to win those offices if you are a democrat and you want to try to reverse those.

And just to a side point, it's not all republicans that are doing that. In Massachusetts the governor just signed a law for automatic voter registration. So I mean it's not every republican doing this. But in terms of that messaging, at least when you're

messaging to black people you can invoke the civil rights movement. That's something we saw Oprah do today when she introduced Stacey Abrams in Georgia, and talk about the fight that was waged for this vote, how people died before they were even able to vote, people who vote for this right before the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was passed and the importance of it. But when it comes to Asian voters, Latino voters, they were not part of that, especially those who have come and become citizens of this country since then. So you don't have that same message. And I think that's a message that needs to be created. I think that is something that you need to teach people to understand. This why it impacts you, this is why it impacts your community, and this is why voting isn't just a right, it's something that's important, it's a responsibility that you need to do, not just for yourself, but for past generations and for future generations.

MR. HARRIS: But sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't, even among black voters. I mean you heard that in 2016, you know, Michelle Obama, vote as if your life depended on it, John Lewis, who also were making the appeals. And despite all that you still saw a slide in black voters.

MS. ATKINS: A precipitous slide.

MR. HARRIS: Yes.

MR. FAUNTROY: Well, let me also add, this is a really complicated question on how to message that. On the surface it should easily resonate with people in minority communities, particularly African Americans. But when you play the historical card on Gen X or, you know, millennial African Americans who don't have any sort of historical context for that, it falls flat. And so the messaging has to be created to reach them in a different way.

And then also I would add, in terms of a coherent strategy, you don't really see it from the elected officials. You may see it from outside groups, but even that

is not really as coherent and as targeted as it should be.

MR. HARRIS: The gentleman in the -- yes.

SPEAKER: Thanks. Brendan Campbell, Arizona PBS. It's unfortunate that Ms. Reeves isn't here as well, but I'd like to get your opinion, Latino voters typically skew towards more average on social issues, average voters rather than pro democratic liberal sort of skewing. And I'm wondering if they also have historically low voter turnout like we talked about?

This election is being framed as a referendum on Trump, largely, and I'm wondering if that's going to get us over that barrier, too, because there is a lot of antipathy amongst Latinos towards Trump. If it's going to draw out their voting and which way that's going to skew.

MS. ATKINS: I mean I think it's one -- and I'm not a Latino voter expert, but I think it's important to note here that just like Asian American voters, all Latino voters are not monolithic either. We have seen lots of different voters, and whether it's different parts of the country or different backgrounds who vote in a lot of different ways, historically. Particularly now older Cuban Americans, for example, tend to be far more conservative and might be moved on issues such as the President's policy regarding Cuba, reversing the Obama Administration policy on Cuba. You may seem some that are motivated by the issue of South Americans and the messaging by President Trump. I think the majority are probably like we said, motivated by issues like the economy and education and housing affordability and things like that.

So I think it's tough to say -- I wouldn't put a broad umbrella and define Latino voters as liberal or anything else. It's very complex. The voter of the Puerto Rican descent in New York is going to vote very differently than a voter perhaps of Mexican descent in California in the San Diego reason.

So I think it's tough to say.

MR. HARRIS: Yes, here.

SPEAKER: To what extent in states where suppression efforts are high will people be permitted to vote provisionally, especially in a state like Georgia? And where they will be able to, is that message getting out? So the people say don't say oh, I'm not going to go vote because they're not going to count my vote.

MR. FAUNTROY: Well, my understanding of it is that this will vary widely depending upon what is allowable in the states. And in some states you can cast a provisional ballot, but it won't be counted until after the election if it's necessary to count, if it matters. So there are a variety of different moving parts here in different parts of the country.

Now, the Georgia example is very interesting to me, and I'll be curious to see exactly how that plays out and what the rules allow. But if it turns out that you can cast a provisional ballot in Georgia, then the entire GOTV effort in Georgia has to be around letting those voters know that even though there are some games being played with their applications they can still cast a provisional ballot.

MS. CHEN: So like right now a lot of the campaigns, as well as the nonprofit groups, are really pushing out, whether it is through ethnic press or when they're doing phone banking or door knocking, making sure that people know all the hotline numbers so that way if they're turned away -- and what their rights are, they understand what they could do.

MR. HARRIS: Okay. We're going to have one more quick question. The gentleman in the back.

SPEAKER: Good afternoon, everyone. I'm currently a student at Howard University and one of the major issues that I've had or witnessed or experienced

is absentee voting. Many students who apply for absentee ballots but often do not receive them in time. And in their case they feel like well, at this point, there's no point in me sending it back, it won't even get back into their county or their city clerk's office in time for it to be counted.

And so just wanted to just briefly ask what do you think -- how to change that or the suppression that maybe surrounded by absentee voting for college students?

MS. CHEN: So I know at APIAVote we work with in a broad coalition with young voters collective. And one of the things I know early on we've also been trying to emphasize is that to consider just registering with your address on campus. Because their vote there is just as important. So that's one thing. But now it's also about making sure that they know where their polling locations are or early voting locations. There have been some also issues around that because the early voting locations are a lot further from campus or the lines have been too long and they haven't been able to accommodate everybody. So there have been like voter suppression tactics being conducted that way unfortunately.

MR. HARRIS: Well, unfortunately, we've run out of time. We'll all be waiting with baited breath next Tuesday to see how all of this is going to turn out.

But I want to thank our panelists for participating in this great discussion.

(Applause)

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