

## Chapter 1 | Making Visible: Political Participation

IN THE SPRING of 2008, Asian American voters were showered with attention for the first time in a presidential election year, as Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama scrambled for voters after the initial set of caucuses and primaries in Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina, and Nevada. With the consequences of Super Tuesday far from certain, and with every delegate potentially important on the road to secure the Democratic nomination, the Clinton and Obama campaigns pressed their case to various constituencies. For the first time, this included a significant number of Asian Americans. Clinton drew endorsements from several Asian American elected officials and sought to build on her formidable fundraising operation in New York, which included prominent Asian Americans. At the same time, Barack Obama highlighted his childhood roots in Hawaii and enlisted the support of his family members, including his Indonesian American sister Maya Soetoro-Ng and her Chinese American husband, Konrad Ng. With a trove of Asian American voters in Super Tuesday states such as New York and California, and more in subsequent states, such as Washington and Virginia, the campaigns were paying attention to Asian American voters as never before.

As a consequence, the political news media also began to draw attention to the role of Asian American voters. The attention was not entirely flattering, however. One of the main storylines that emerged was the strong level of support Asian Americans gave to Hillary Clinton over Barack Obama. In California, for example, the National Election Pool found that Clinton won more than 70 percent of the Asian American vote, much more than the 67 percent among Latinos, and the 56 percent among white women (National Election Pool 2008). Similar results held true in Super Tuesday states, such as New York, leading many news commenta-

tors to attribute the support to racial prejudice against black candidates (Cullen 2008; Ramakrishnan et al. 2009).

However, these media-sponsored polls were problematic. Perhaps most basically, they did not include questions on factors such as name recognition for Clinton versus Obama and voters' attitudes toward the Bill Clinton presidency (which was reported to have largely been beneficial to the livelihoods of Latinos and Asian Americans). By reporting only the top-line numbers, the polls did not provide a clear signal about whether people were voting for Clinton or against Obama. The problems in the National Election Pool were even more acute for Asian Americans for two significant reasons: the survey was conducted only in English and Spanish and included only about 150 respondents in California, thus failing to take into account the number of respondents necessary to cover the significant national-origin diversity within the Asian American community. Despite these problems, news stories in *Time* magazine, on CNN, and from other sources argued that Obama "had an Asian problem," and that he needed to overcome racial prejudice among Asian Americans to win their vote (Cullen 2008; Tuchman 2008). The political story was too appealing to be dethroned by the lack of good data.

It is in this context that we were planning a national political survey of Asian Americans. We had conceived of the idea in early 2006, and, by the time Super Tuesday rolled around, we were well on our way to raising funds for a nationally representative survey of Asian American politics. As our pre-election survey showed, and as various exit polls later corroborated, race-based considerations played only a minor role in the voting behavior of Asian Americans during the presidential primaries and the general election of 2008 (Ramakrishnan et al. 2009). Indeed, Obama enjoyed a level of Asian American support significantly higher than any earlier Democratic presidential candidate (see chapter 4).

What our data highlighted, and what motivated the writing of this book, is the desire to provide a more definitive account of Asian American politics than what exists today. Before the 2008 National Asian American Survey (NAAS), no nationally representative survey had focused on the political behavior and attitudes of Asian Americans and the factors that intervene between immigration, citizenship, voting, and other political activities. Given this lack of data, one of the primary tasks in this book is to lay out a careful descriptive analysis of Asian American political participation as seen through five broad sets of factors: immigrant socialization, residential contexts, party socialization, racial identification, and civic association. At the same time, we also engage with several important theoretical questions about the determinants of political participation among Asian Americans, and what the answers indicate about the impor-

tance of socioeconomic status, national origin, party mobilization, and racial identification in shaping political behavior. Before delving into the analysis, however, it is important to address a few basic questions, including: Who are Asian Americans? Why it is important to draw scholarly attention and analysis to political participation among Asian Americans?

## IMPORTANT QUESTIONS IN ASIAN AMERICAN POLITICAL BEHAVIOR

The anecdote with which we began this book—of a misreading of Asian American opinion toward Obama during the 2008 presidential election—suggests that the place of Asian Americans in the American political system remains unclear to most Americans, including many news organizations. Perhaps this should not be surprising. Asian Americans constitute about 5 percent of the U.S. resident population, a relatively small group today when compared with other racial-ethnic groups such as whites and African Americans. Internal diversity within the group—along the lines of national origin, language, religion, immigrant generation, and socioeconomic status—also poses a challenge to those trying to assess the political position of Asian Americans as a whole.

And yet, we argue that there are good reasons to pay closer attention to this group when it comes to U.S. politics. First, according to the U.S. Census, Americans of Asian and Pacific Islander heritage have been one of the fastest-growing populations over the last several decades. In 1960, there were fewer than 1 million Asian Americans in the country, less than .5 percent of the total population. By July 2008, the Asian American population had grown to 15.3 million, about 5 percent of the total. This explosive growth is expected to continue, census projections suggesting 44.4 million Asian Americans by 2060, or slightly more than 10 percent of the expected total population of 432 million Americans that year.<sup>1</sup> In a democratic system in which numbers matter, this kind of population growth may very likely translate into increased political influence for Asian Americans.

Because Asian Americans exhibit patterns of concentrated geographic settlement in particular regions, some places in the United States have already seen the growing political influence of the group. According to the 2008 American Community Survey, nearly one in two Asian Americans (48 percent) live in the western region of the United States, the Pacific seaboard states (including Alaska and Hawaii) accounting for about 43 percent of the national Asian American and Pacific Islander population. California has by far the largest Asian American population, accounting for one-third of the national total, and adding New York and Texas covers nearly half (48 percent). In fact, it is estimated that Asian Americans now

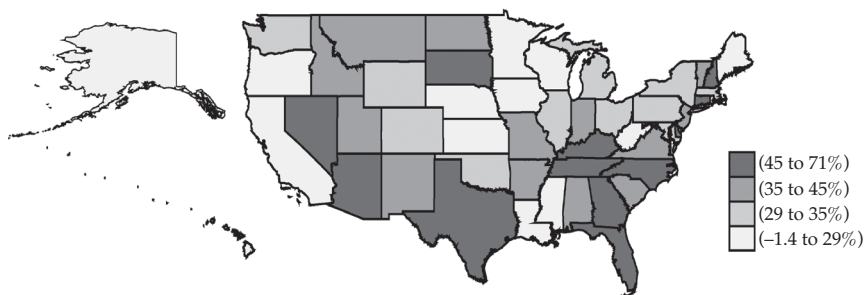
make up a larger proportion of California's registered voter population than African Americans do. Although Latinos are even more concentrated in particular states (California, Texas, and Florida accounting for 56 percent of the national Latino population), the geographic concentration of Asian Americans is considerably higher than the residential concentration of blacks and whites, where the top three states of residence account for 22 percent and 20 percent, respectively, of each group's national population.

In high Asian American concentration states such as Hawaii, California, and New York, Asian American political power is no longer a matter of long-term speculation, but a present-day reality. For example, Asian Americans in 2008 accounted for twenty-four of fifty-one state house representatives in Hawaii, and eight of eighty assembly seats in California. Asian Americans have also enjoyed some success in winning statewide offices in these high-concentration states, from U.S. senators to governors and attorneys general, although the examples of governors Jindal (R-LA), Haley (R-SC), and Locke (D-WA) show that the appeal of Asian American candidates extends to areas of smaller concentrations as well. Finally, at the local level, Asian Americans have served as council members in major cities such as New York, Los Angeles, Houston, Boston, San Francisco, Oakland, and Seattle.

Despite their high levels of geographic concentration relative to whites and blacks, Asian Americans are now becoming increasingly geographically dispersed. This dispersion is evident at region, state, county, and municipality levels. By region, the Asian American population grew by an impressive 57 percent in the West between 1990 and 2000, but somewhat modestly in comparison with the 79 percent in the Northeast, 84 percent in the Midwest, and 107 percent in the South. Between the 1990 and 2000 censuses, the Asian American population more than doubled in nineteen states, which continue to be high growth areas. Indeed, data from the American Community Survey indicates that between 2000 and 2008, the Asian American population grew by more than 30 percent in most states, with higher than 50 percent growth in such politically important states such as Florida and Texas (figure 1.1). In 2000, seventy-one counties had Asian American populations that were more than 5 percent of the resident population. By 2008, the American Community Survey indicated that the number had risen to ninety-two. Even more congressional districts have Asian American and Pacific Islander residents above the 5 percent threshold (103 of 435). When the unit of analysis is the city or municipality, the number of places with significant Asian American populations shoots up to nearly six hundred. Hence, as their numbers grow in places considered competitive battleground states in presidential elections, Asian Americans may become a critical constituency in national politics as well.

Of course, political power is not based only on the number of residents.

Figure 1.1 Growth in Asian American Population, 2000 to 2008



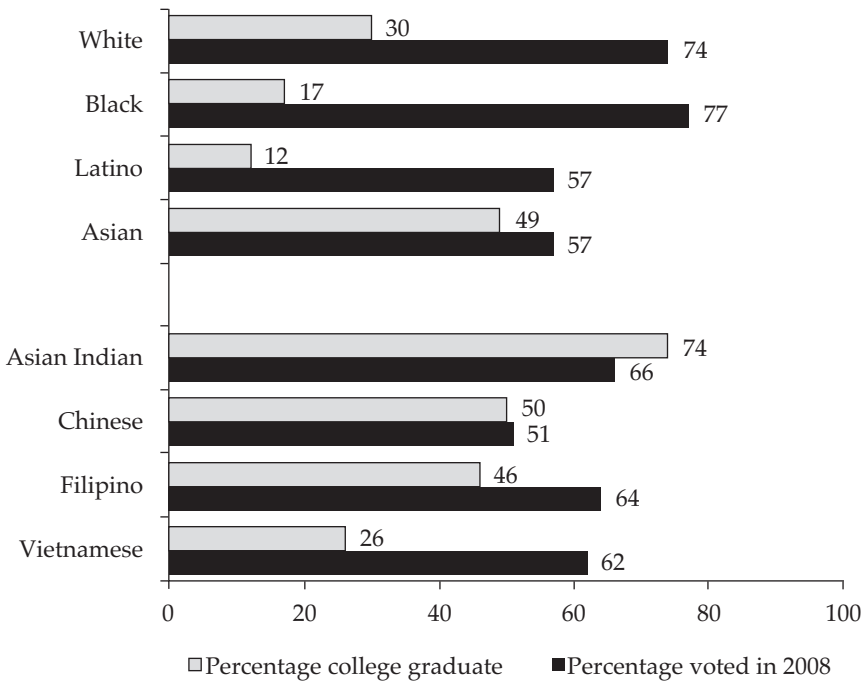
Source: Authors' figure based on data from U.S. Census Bureau (2000, 2008a).

For a group to exert influence in American politics, it must show that the individuals who contribute to those numbers actually participate in the political system. The central question at the foreground of this book, then, is perhaps one that is central to the study of any group-based population in a representative democracy: Who among this group participates in the political process, and why?

For the population of Asians in America, these bedrock questions have a particular force that emerges from the mismatch between the high average economic and education achievement of the Asian American community and its correspondingly modest levels of political activity. As figure 1.2 indicates, higher group levels of educational attainment do not demonstrate a strong correspondence with higher levels of formal aspects of political participation, such as registration and voting. Among adult citizens, Asian Americans and Latinos have similar rates of voting participation, but vastly different levels of educational achievement. The lack of correspondence between group-level educational attainment and voting rates is evident not only in comparisons between Asian Americans and members of other racial and ethnic groups, but also in comparisons across national origin groups for Asian Americans. For instance, among adult citizens, Asian Indians are nearly three times as likely as their Vietnamese counterparts to have a college degree (74 percent versus 26 percent) but only marginally more likely to have voted in 2008 (66 percent versus 62 percent). Similarly, Chinese Americans are slightly more likely than Filipino Americans to have completed a college degree, but less likely to have voted in 2008.

This lack of linear correspondence, at least as a first-order association, between education and voting can also be shown using other measures of

Figure 1.2 Voting and Educational Attainment Among Adult Citizens



Source: Authors' compilation of data from the 2008 Current Population Survey Voter Supplement (U.S. Census Bureau 2008b).

socioeconomic resources and of political participation. The finding rubs against one of the most robust results in political behavior research: namely, that high levels of socioeconomic resources go hand in hand with high rates of voting and other forms of political participation (Verba and Nie 1972; Verba, Nie, and Kim 1978; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). To put this in context, the conventional view today is that political participation is the result of at least three factors: having the means, being properly motivated, and being mobilized to act. As one set of scholars puts it, “individuals may choose not to participate because they can’t, because they don’t want to, or because nobody asked” (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 15). The means of participation here range from individual-level resources, such as time, money, civic skills, and political knowledge, to institutional rules, such as voter eligibility requirements, in-language ballots, redistricting, and vote-recording technologies. Although a resource like education is perhaps most intuitively linked to the resource-based roots of participation, it clearly also redounds

to how incentivized people are to vote and whether they are recruited to do so. In the ensuing sections, then, we seek to better understand why high levels of socioeconomic resources appear not to engender correspondingly high levels of political engagement for Asian Americans by specifying five pathways to participation that take into account the distinct characteristics of the Asian American population.

Figure 1.2 also suggests another important corollary question: the extent to which national origin plays an important role in shaping Asian American political behavior. Given the relatively high proportion of first-generation immigrants, one might expect national origin differences to remain a powerful determinant of Asian American political behavior. Thus, for instance, a recent Indian immigrant who has voted in several elections before coming to the United States may be better informed about the role of political parties in the United States than a recent immigrant from the People's Republic of China. National-origin differences are also evident in party identification and presidential vote choice, Vietnamese Americans leaning heavily toward the Republican Party and Republican candidates, and Japanese Americans and Indian Americans favoring Democrats. At the same time, there may be reasons to think that national-origin differences fade away as immigrants spend more time in the United States, confront common hurdles such as racial discrimination, and receive messages about a pan-ethnic racial identity from community organizations, schools, and various government agencies (Espiritu 1993). Indeed, we find from the National Asian American Survey that, when we move from the first generation to subsequent generations, national origin differences begin to fade for a wide variety of political outcomes (see chapter 8). Furthermore, even in instances when national-origin differences are important, they are often attributable to other factors, such as group variations in rates of English proficiency, educational attainment, and experiences with racial discrimination.

Finally, an important background question that may arise in the examination of Asian American politics is one that arises in any study of political behavior: Why does it matter? Why does it matter if some groups are more likely to vote in elections than others, or if some groups are more likely to make campaign contributions than others? The United States, as a growing chorus of political scientists have shown, is a place where political participation is polarized and unequal (Jacobs and Skocpol 2005; Hacker 2006; Bartels 2008; McCarty 2006; Gelman 2008). The normative grounds for concern here are obvious enough. As Sidney Verba argues, "of the various ways in which U.S. citizens can be unequal, political inequality is one of the most significant and troubling . . . one of the bedrock principles in a democracy is the equal consideration of the preferences of all citizens" (2003, 663). Moreover, political activity and the attendant

claims to social membership that accompany it, are central to a full and flourishing conception of citizenship itself (Kymlicka and Norman 1994; Bosniak 1999).

Empirically, research has revealed several important reasons to pay attention to group disparities in political participation. For instance, higher turnout may alter election outcomes, though studies suggest that this is more likely in local than in statewide elections (Hajnal and Trounstein 2005; Citrin, Schickler, and Sides 2003). More important, however, several studies indicate that elected officials are more likely to be responsive to the interests of those active in politics than those who are not (Griffin and Newman 2005, 2008; Bartels 2008). This is true even for U.S. senators, who are elected only once every six years and are presumably more insulated from electoral influence than state and local representatives. Additionally, the dynamics of political mobilization may reproduce inequalities in representation over time, because political parties and campaigns pay far more attention to those who have participated in past elections than those who have not, and as those who are contacted by political parties and campaigns continue to participate at higher levels than those who are not contacted (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Ramirez and Wong 2006). Recurring cycles of differential participation and mobilization can thus perpetuate a form of American democracy characterized by unequal representation, and research on lower participation and lower mobilization among Asian Americans suggests that they are at an unequal political footing with respect to other racial and ethnic groups in the United States (Uhlener, Cain, and Kiewiet 1989; Junn 1999; Ramakrishnan 2005; Wong 2006). That is, to the extent that political participation is a primary vehicle for the representation of policy preferences, groups that do not participate at high rates will be systematically disadvantaged. This is true across groups, but also within heterogeneous pan-ethnic groups, such as Asian Americans.

To better understand Asian American political participation, we must contextualize their political involvement. For example, we might look to the past and consider the extent to which institutions that have historically played an instrumental role in the integration and incorporation of immigrants from multiple shores and whether they continue to play this role today. In the portrayal of many historians, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in America were a golden age of sorts for newcomers and their offspring (Dahl 1961; Allswang 1977; Archdeacon 1983).<sup>2</sup> In the political realm, this period is especially notable—if only in our collective memory—for representing an American archetype of inclusion into a pluralist political system through the rough and tumble of street-level party competition, with ward bosses and precinct captains deploying favor and coercion to impress upon immigrants what it meant to be a



Democrat or a Republican. Although most scholars continue to see partisan attachments as a defining political identity for Americans, many scholars of immigrant incorporation conclude that today's political parties are far more selective in their inclusion of new Americans into the political process. What role, then, do institutions like parties and other forms of organizational life in civil society like unions, places of worship, community organizations, and ethnic media play in the politicization of Asian Americans?

We might also look to the present and consider the current role of Asian American voters in the terrain of electoral competition in America. From the standpoint of race relations, for instance, we might inquire about the extent to which President Barack Obama's race factored into the Asian American vote in the 2008 primaries and general election. As noted at the outset of this book, many observers were surprised by the overwhelming support among Asian Americans for Hillary Clinton over Barack Obama, and did not have the benefit of survey data to realize that racial attitudes actually played only a marginal role in the voting decisions of Asian Americans. Or, we might look to the future and consider the extent to which the dramatic demographic transformation of American society is likely to engender a similarly dramatic political transformation of electoral competition in America. Social demographers foretell a near future in this century in which whites will no longer be a majority of the population and, soon thereafter, of the electorate. The U.S. population will, simultaneously as well, continue to grow in its proportion of immigrants and their offspring and in its proportion who claim multiple racial and ethnic heritages. How will the current configuration of America's ethno-racial categories survive this metamorphosis and what political implications follow?

## WHO ARE ASIAN AMERICANS?

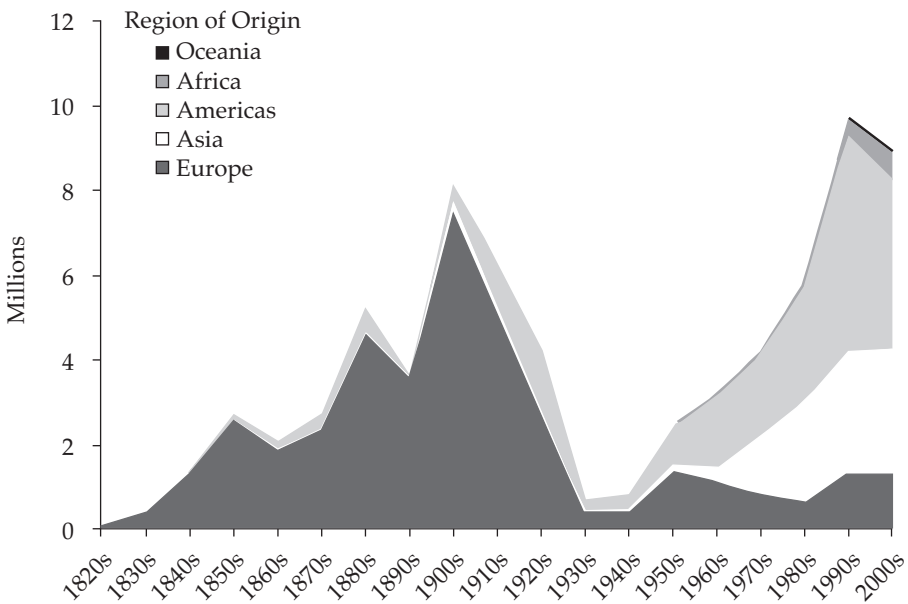
Who are Asian Americans and are they a meaningful category when it comes to U.S. politics? This question underlies much of Asian American politics and is one we engage with throughout this book. In particular, our analysis highlights the ways in which the community shares patterns as a group and how their political participation varies according to internal group variations. This approach allows us to assess points of convergence and divergence in the group's political participation. We discuss how members of the group are similar and different in how they engage with the political system, and we suggest potential building blocks for political community based on patterns of political participation.

It is true that Asian Americans are remarkably diverse in terms of ethnicity, national origin, language, religion, cultural orientation, socioeco-

nomic status, and immigration histories. Focusing on regions and countries of origin alone, Asian Americans have shifted from a population of primarily working-age men from China and Japan in 1900 to a considerably more diverse population today in terms of national origin, gender, class background, and modes of entry into the United States. The U.S. Census Bureau's system of racial classification reflects this growing diversity, from the addition of Chinese in 1870 and Japanese in 1890, to the addition of Filipinos and Hawaiians in 1910, and Hindus and Koreans in 1920 (Minnesota Population Center 2011). Indeed, the Census Bureau did not group these various national origins under the same category until 1990, when it included ten options under the umbrella of Asian or Pacific Islander (API). Many Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander activists then pushed for a separate racial category, which the Census Bureau granted in 2000. Today, according to various federal government agencies, the term Asian refers to individuals with origins in the Far East, Southeast Asia, or Indian subcontinent and to individuals who self-identify racially as Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Japanese, Vietnamese, or Other Asian, including Asians of Burmese, Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, Pakistani, and Thai origin. Starting with the 2000 census, after consultation with relevant community organizations, the federal government began to group Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in a separate category. Of course, census definitions shift over time and reflect changing popular and scientific notions of race and ethnicity (Omi and Winant 1994).

Asian Americans in the United States today are thus very much a moving target in terms of their geographic location and ethnic composition. However, certain common characteristics and dynamics unify this diverse group of residents and, we believe, warrant treating it, at times, as a meaningful pan-ethnic category, Asian Americans. First, Asian Americans share a history of racial exclusion from naturalization in the United States (Ngai 2004). Thus, even though Asian immigrants and native-born Asian Americans were classified variously as Chinese, Filipino, Hindu, and so on, and even though popular notions of race from the early 1900s viewed Asians as belonging to two or more racial stocks, Asian immigrants were nevertheless treated the same when it came to eligibility for naturalization. As the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in two separate decisions (*Takao Ozawa v. U.S.*, 260 U.S. 178 1922; *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind*, 261 U.S. 204 1923), Asians were neither white nor Caucasian, and thus could not gain citizenship through naturalization. Not until the 1950s were most Asian immigrants granted the right to naturalize as citizens of the United States. Because they occupied a racial hinterland outside the traditional formation of Caucasian-white,

Figure 1.3 Legal Permanent Residents



Source: Authors' compilation based on data from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (2009b).

Negro-black, and American Indian, Asian Americans from various national origins found themselves politically disenfranchised until the second half of the twentieth century.

Apart from having a common history of political disadvantage for much of the last century, two other important characteristics unify most Asian Americans: they are the most heavily immigrant group among the five major racial and ethnic groups in the United States at the beginning of the twenty-first century and are also among the most highly educated. Both characteristics stem from the liberalization of immigration laws starting in 1965, as the United States dramatically raised quotas on migration and emphasized professional skills and family reunification as important considerations for permanent resident applications. As figure 1.3 indicates, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 had a profound effect on the national origin mix of immigrants to the United States. Whereas before World War II most migrants to the United States came from Europe, immigrants in the past four decades have predominantly come from Latin America and Asia. As a result, the foreign-born account

for a very high proportion of Asian American residents (67 percent) when compared with whites (4 percent), blacks (8 percent), and even Latinos (40 percent), who had a sizable population of native-born citizens before the rise in immigration after 1965.

For Asian Americans, the expansion of professional visas after 1965 also coincided with policies in Asian countries that produced a surplus of skilled labor relative to the needs of centrally managed national economies (Bhagwati and Hamada 1974; Khadria 1999). As a consequence, most of the Asian immigrants who came to the United States after 1965 tended to be highly skilled, though significant numbers of migrants who came through refugee provisions and family reunification were less likely to be college educated. Despite the bimodal distribution of Asian Americans according to various indicators of resources and socioeconomic status, Asian Americans nevertheless enjoy higher-than-average levels of income and educational attainment when compared with any other group of Americans classified by race. According to the most recent American Community Survey (ACS) data, about 50 percent of the Asian American (Asian alone) population age twenty-five and older had a bachelor's degree or higher, versus roughly 31 percent of whites, 18 percent of blacks, and 13 percent of Latinos. Similarly, the proportion of households living under the poverty line in 2008 was 8 percent for Asian Americans, 6 percent for whites, 21 percent for African Americans, and 19 percent for Latinos (U.S. Census Bureau 2008a). As several studies have shown, however, the relative economic gains of Asian Americans have not automatically led to more social and political resources in American society (Tuan 1998; Junn 2008). Instead, the association of Asian Americans as "perpetual foreigners," combined with the high proportion of Asian Americans who are first- and second-generation immigrants, has produced a situation where they are seen as outsiders to the sociopolitical system, though occupying relatively high-status positions in the labor force when compared with Latinos and African Americans (Kim 1999).

In this book, we use the terms Asian and Asian Americans interchangeably and frequently, with a broader understanding of their meanings than might be implied by our reference to particular census categories. We use both as covering terms for the diverse populations represented in the 2008 National Asian American Survey without intending to imply either wrongful judgments about proper membership in the United States when we use Asian or incorrect assumptions about the nativity of our sample when we use Asian American. (See appendix A for a more detailed discussion of Asian and Asian American as socially and politically constructed racial categories.)

## BUILDING ON RESEARCH OF ASIAN AMERICANS

This book is based on a new, original survey of Asian American political attitudes and behavior. Much of the data we have relied on in the past for statements about Asian American citizens and voters are important, but limited in several ways. The Current Population Survey (CPS), which is a standard reference on voter registration and turnout across racial and ethnic groups, conducts its interviews only in English and Spanish. Various exit polls from organizations such as the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF) have interviews in various Asian languages, but are limited in that they survey only voters in heavily Asian precincts. Thus the perspectives of nonvoters and noncitizens, and the factors that intervene between immigration, citizenship, voting, and other political activities, are rendered invisible. Finally, studies of Asian Americans, such as the Pilot National Asian American Political Survey (PNAAPS), have had an impressive set of questions and a mix of citizens and noncitizens, but drew only on Asian Americans in major metropolitan areas. A nationally representative survey of Asian Americans, citizens as well as noncitizens, with support in the major Asian languages, was still lacking.

The survey we conducted between August and October 2008 addresses many of these problems. The NAAS involved 5,159 interviews of the six major national-origin groups that together account for 85 percent of the Asian American population. The survey was drawn from a nationally representative sample of Asian American residents, with oversamples in new immigrant destinations, such as Houston, Texas, and in particular states like New Jersey. Interviews were conducted in eight languages, including English, and included many questions on political attitudes, political and civic behavior, immigrant socialization, and racial identification. Many of these questions are comparable to those in other concurrent data collections, such as the American National Election Study, which had oversamples of more than five hundred African Americans and Latinos, whereas others are uniquely designed to capture the political dynamics of a highly immigrant community with significant diversity in national origin, region of settlement, and English proficiency.

A number of surveys have been conducted on reasonably large samples of Asian American respondents, but generally fall into one of three groupings, each with different limitations. The first are a set of geographically specific samples that do not offer broad coverage of the national Asian American population: the Los Angeles Study of Urban Inequality,

the Immigrant Second Generation in Metropolitan New York project, and the University of Massachusetts–Boston Institute of Asian American Studies Polls. Next are media polls that include a limited set of explanatory variables and are therefore not well suited for in-depth research: the *Los Angeles Times*'s polls of Chinese, Filipino, Korean, and Vietnamese Americans in the 1990s; and the Kaiser Family Foundation's surveys with the *Washington Post* in 1995 and 2001 and the *San Jose Mercury News* in 2004. Last are exit poll data limited both in terms of the small number of questions included in the survey instrument, and by their sampling frames: the Voter News Service/National Election Pool exit polls and Asian-specific exit polls by Asian Pacific American Legal Center, Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, Chinese American Voters Education Committee, and other advocacy organizations. Furthermore, in many of these cases, the approaches to sampling the Asian American population fall shy of being representative because they rely exclusively on listed surname frames, English-only interviews, and selection on either one or only a few national origin and ethnic groups.

The most significant scholarly effort thus far to study Asian American political behavior is the Pilot National Asian American Political Survey (PNAAPS) of 2001 (Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004). PNAAPS surveyed 1,218 Asian Americans living in the metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) with the largest concentrations of Asian Americans in the United States: New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Honolulu, and Chicago. Because Asian Americans tend to live in urban areas on the east and west coasts, this method yielded a sample representing 40 percent of the Asian American population. However, the validity and utility of inferences were limited by sample size for particular national groups and the heavy reliance on Asian Americans living in large central cities.

Since the 2001 PNAAPS, one other important effort focused on the political opinions of Asian Americans: the National Poll of Asian Pacific Islanders (NPAPI) on the 2004 election. The NPAPI interviewed 1,004 Asian American registered voters who were identified as likely voters in the 2004 presidential election. This approach was useful for understanding the potential influence of Asian Americans in that election, but tells us far less about the barriers Asian Americans face in terms of democratic participation (such as becoming citizens and registered voters), the key political interests and priorities that characterize the community as a whole, or the future political potential of noncitizens and those not registered to vote. The inferences that can be drawn from a survey that screens for likely voters, furthermore, depends on what factors are taken into consideration in constructing the likely voter screen. Neither of these studies in-

cluded a large enough sample to allow for meaningful analysis within specific ethnic subgroup and national origin.

## THE 2008 NATIONAL ASIAN AMERICAN SURVEY

To address these multiple limitations of previous efforts and, more generally, to advance our understanding of this emerging population, we undertook the most comprehensive survey to date of the civic and political life of Asians in the United States. The National Asian American Survey represents the fruits of our labors and serves as our primary source of data for this book's effort to answer long-standing questions about the relationship between individual-level resources, political partisanship, ethnic and racial identity, immigrant assimilation, social capital, and structural context and political engagement. The NAAS is a dataset of 5,159 completed interviews conducted over roughly ten weeks before the 2008 election and includes large numbers of respondents from the six largest Asian national-origin groups: Asian Indians, Chinese, Filipinos, Japanese, Koreans, and Vietnamese. Surveys were conducted by telephone between August 18 and October 29, 2008. The NAAS includes adults in the United States who identify any family background from countries in Asia, exclusive of those classified as the Middle East.<sup>3</sup> Survey interviews were conducted in eight languages based on the interviewee's preference—English, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean, Vietnamese, Tagalog, Japanese, and Hindi—and yielded sample sizes of at least five hundred adult residents for Asian Americans in the six largest national-origin groups. The final breakdown was 1,350 Chinese, 1,150 Asian Indian, 719 Vietnamese, 614 Korean, 603 Filipino, and 541 Japanese, and an additional 182 either from other countries in Asia or who identify as multiracial or multiethnic.<sup>4</sup> Overall, 40 percent of our sample chose English as their preferred language for the interview. We weight our sample, using a raking procedure, to reflect the balance of gender, nativity, citizenship status, and educational attainment of the six largest national-origin groups in the United States, as well as the proportion of these groups within each state. More details about our sample design and weights are provided in appendix F.

Before discussing our survey questionnaire, we address our primary choice in drawing our samples by national origin or ethnoracial classification, and their relationship to the larger body of scholarship on Asian immigrants and Asian Americans more generally. As we shall see in chapter 2, there are many good reasons to do so, from the perspective of Asian American histories that vary by national origin, as well as census catego-

ries and immigration policies that continue to differentiate Asians on the basis of national origin. Additionally, several decades of scholarship on Asian Americans suggest that examining national-origin differences is critical to a thorough understanding of the community (Zhou and Xiong 2005). In fact, with more than twenty-four national-origin groups included under the Asian American umbrella since 1990, every major textbook on Asian Americans testifies that national-origin diversity is a central feature of contemporary Asian America (Kitano and Daniels 1995; Zhou and Gatewood 2000; Vö and Bonus 2002; Min 2005a). Min Zhou and James Gatewood, for example, claim that “national origins evoke drastic differences in homeland cultures, such as languages, religions, foodways, and customs; histories of international relations, contexts of emigration; reception in the host society; and adaptation patterns” (2000, 19). In addition, they write that “panethnicity accounts for neither regional or national differences nor for the historical legacies of intergroup conflicts . . . the Asian American community today is, and continues to be, marked by tremendous diversity in the era of high immigration” (27).

Still, by presenting our findings in a manner that highlights national origins, we remain cautious about unintentionally reifying national origin categories or privileging national origin differences over other internal distinctions, such as class, gender, religion, and nativity. Like race, national origin categories do not represent inherent biological, geographic, or even cultural divisions between groups of people, but instead reflect a complex social, historical, and political process that distinguishes people based on the meanings attributed to their geographic origins, phenotypic characteristics, language background, and a host of other features or experiences (see appendix A). Our measure of national origins does not speak to these complex processes. However, we find important distinctions between national-origin groups (even crudely measured), and thus disaggregate the sample according to group and report on relevant differences between particular groups.

## Questionnaire

The 2008 NAAS was a comprehensive interview that included questions about political behavior and attitudes as well as personal experiences in immigration to the United States. Its length and complexity is less than in-person social and political surveys such as the American National Election Study and the General Social Survey, and is comparable to the Latino National Survey of 2005–2006. The overall length of interview was about twenty-nine minutes, with English-language interviews taking a little longer than twenty-six minutes and Asian-language interviews taking



thirty-two. Our response rates are in line with typical telephone surveys: 47 percent of those we reached agreed to take the survey, making for a 12 percent rate of all valid numbers dialed.

The interview began with screening questions that allowed respondents to interview in the language of their choice and allowed us to meet our sampling targets, for example, by ethnic-national origin groups and county of residence. To obtain an adequate representation of multiracial Americans of Asian ancestry, we added two follow-up screening questions to our racial identifier.

The main body of the instrument is composed of modules that allow us to gain a better sense of respondents' national origins and experiences with migration; media use and political priorities; political participation and candidate evaluations; issue orientations, party identification, and political ideology; racial-ethnic identification and inter- or intragroup relations; and civic engagement. The questionnaire ends with standard demographic measures of individual-level characteristics on education, income, home ownership, length of residence, and other items known to influence voting and other forms of political participation such as mass media consumption. The full text of our survey instrument—including details of question wording, question order, and randomization among response categories—is included in appendix B.

## THE NATIONAL ASIAN AMERICAN SURVEY AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The NAAS study is at its heart a study of Asian American political participation. But what is political participation? Sidney Verba and Norman Nie introduced a classic formulation of political participation in their seminal work *Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality* (1972). Political participation, according to this account, is “activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take” (2–3). This definition, the authors admit, is “broader than some, narrower than others.” The breadth here is in the openness to multiple modes of influence on democratic decision-making. The narrowness is in the emphasis on “acts that aim at *influencing* the government, either by affecting the *choice* of government personnel or by affecting the *choices made by* government personnel” (1972, 3, emphasis in original). What is excluded by this definition, then, are participatory acts aimed at expressing generalized support for an existing political regime. Although this distinction, wrought in a previous era of authoritarian regimes and Cold War politics, is a meaningful way of excluding symbolic gestures of legitimation, the

realm of participatory democracy has changed profoundly in the last four decades.

Specifically, although we continue to use this general definition in the pages that follow, we note important shifts in the way political scientists conceive of what is political and what counts as influence. On the former, there has been a durable shift away from thinking about politics as a closed system in which participation is compartmentalized as inputs into the electoral process and governance is compartmentalized as outputs from political institutions, government agencies, and the public policy-making process (Easton 1965). To wit, there is a broader embrace of multiple modalities of participation and a range of inputs from ritualized participation to shared governance. In parallel with these “changing boundaries of the political” (Maier 1987, 2), there has been a shift away from viewing civil society as a hermetically distinct sphere of social interaction from the state. In its place, there is a growing awareness of the potential for positive-sum interactions between civil society and the state and a heightened scrutiny of civic engagement and civil society organizations as important pathways into the political process (Evans 1997). These are not just theoretical conceits, but shifts in thinking that reflect changes on the ground in the modes of political participation that are deployed and in the linkages between participatory acts in the civic and political realms. In this book, then, we make more inclusive allowances for indirect affects on political choices and policies and for activities at a range of levels of collective decision-making, from national to local to community to transnational.

How, then, do private political actors strive to help shape the actors and acts of government? The 2008 NAAS asks its respondents about a broad range of participatory acts. Table 1.1 shows the basic frequency of responses on thirteen items. Some, like registering to vote, self-reported voting in past elections, vote intentions, and political talk, have a high incidence rate. Others, like campaigning, protesting, and actively taking part in the politics of one’s country of origin, are far less common. Additionally, differences between ethnic-national origin groups in their partiality for particular modes of participation are numerous. For example, Japanese Americans are the likeliest group to be registered to vote and to report voting; Asian Indians are especially likely to report engaging with others in their community on some common problem; Koreans are the likeliest to report following politics online; and Vietnamese tend to engage in protest politics far more frequently than other groups.

Although the thirteen participatory acts presented in table 1.1 capture meaningful variation in the range of ways that citizens and noncitizens can make their druthers known on political matters, we focus on a select

Table 1.1 Frequency of Participatory Acts

	Asian							Total
	Indian	Chinese	Filipino	Japanese	Korean	Vietnamese		
Registered to vote	43	52	61	63	49	60		54
Voted in 2004	33	39	48	55	37	51		42
Voted in 2008 primaries	42	45	53	53	35	39		45
Vote intention in 2008*	76	67	69	82	84	80		74
Talk with family or friends	71	71	63	72	73	58		68
Worked for campaign	3	3	5	4	3	3		3
Contributed money	12	11	17	18	11	7		13
Contacted politician	11	9	13	10	5	5		9
Community work	27	19	23	17	18	21		21
Online participation	13	14	11	5	17	7		12
Protest activity	4	4	4	3	3	8		4
2006 immigration marches	0.3	0.7	0.8	0.4	1.5	1.6		0.8
Home country politics	5	5	4	1	1	2		4

*Source:* Authors' compilation of data from the 2008 National Asian American Survey (Ramakrishnan et al. 2011).

*Note:* All numbers are in percentages.

\* Registered voters who reported being "absolutely" certain they would vote in the November elections.

subset of these in our subsequent analysis. Trying to be comprehensive here would simply yield an indigestible hodgepodge of empirical findings. Which, then, among these multiple modes are most likely to shed light on the nature and dynamics of Asian American political engagement? Sidney Verba and Victor Nie argued, on theoretical grounds, that there are four distinct modes of participation: voting, campaigning, group work to address some community problem, and particularized contacting of elected or public officials (1972). There are, however, a number of reasons to dispute that these are the only four distinctive modes of participation (Rusk 1976; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). In particular, arguments that protest politics, interest group participation, and making monetary contributions are all equally distinct as a mode of doing politics are persuasive.

## FIVE ACTS OF PARTICIPATION

In this book, we concentrate on five key participatory acts as our dependent variables: voting, political donations, contacting government officials, working with others in one's community to solve a problem, and protest. There are a number of ways to think about these distinctive acts of political participation, in terms of their inputs and outputs as well as the context of the engagement as an individual- or group-based activity. Voting, contacting, contributing, protesting, and community participation take place in different settings, the first three in greater isolation—the voting booth, composing a letter or making a call, and writing a check—than either protest or community activity. Both protest and community activity by definition involve other people and usually local settings. Although voting, contacting, and contributing can also be at the local level, they often have a federal or national political focus, particularly within respect to U.S. presidential elections. Interaction with other people and institutions differs in important ways.

In terms of participatory inputs (Verba and Nie 1972), distinctive political acts require greater and different types of resources. Contacting public officials in the United States is done in English, whether one writes a letter, sends an email message, or telephones. Asian Americans with limited English-language ability or those less comfortable communicating in a second language will be at a systematic disadvantage and require stronger mobilization efforts and motivation. Making contributions to candidates or political groups requires discretionary income, and the activities that make up the voting measure are encouraged by partisan affiliation and political party mobilization, both more likely to be held among native-born Asian Americans and naturalized citizens who have lived longer in the United States. Alternatively, protesting and working with

others in the community are encouraged by strong associations with like-minded individuals and mobilization through other community-based organizations. These activities do not require English or U.S. national institutions, therefore reducing the assimilation barriers to entry.

The five acts of participation are distinctive in a second way in terms of the outputs that they deliver. As other scholars of political participation have duly noted, voting, though a blunt instrument, is nevertheless among the most powerful motivators of responsiveness among elected officials. Power of the franchise and the voting booth among Asian Americans are among the more important aspects of influence and representation. Contacting and contributing provide more direct and precise information to elected officials than voting, but the important takeaway is that these acts are directed at traditional structures of democratic governance. They are system-directed and aimed at making policy and party changes within the constraints of democratic institutions as they currently exist. On the other hand, protest and community activity are less constrained, both in terms of the amount and type of information communicated, as well as with respect to audience. Often considered weapons of the weak, group-based collective behavior such as these are well suited as challenges to the existing political agenda and structure of democratic institutions. In this sense, the political output of protest and community activity is more information-rich and potentially more transformative.

To summarize, then, participation can be classified along several dimensions of difference. As Margaret Conway (2000) notes, some are active (going door-to-door to register voters) and others are passive (watching the State of the Union address on television); some are conventional (voting) and others are unconventional or radical (burning military draft cards); some are symbolic (singing the national anthem) and others are instrumental (writing one's representative about a local zoning matter). Across the spectrum of participatory acts we examine in this book are a range of distinct relationships between political subjects and the state. Voting embodies the minimal expectations of citizenship and is necessary to the legitimacy and proper functioning of a representative democracy. Monetary contributions to campaigns and candidates and contacting government officials capture two distinct particularistic expressions of preference intensity and, more controversially, a greater demand for gaining access and particularistic benefits. Protest politics and community work push the boundaries of the political beyond formalized channels of political input and enlist more lateral modes of collective engagement.<sup>5</sup> We describe each of these five acts in greater detail in the following sections, and provide a basis for comparing the participation of Asian Americans with members of other racial and ethnic groups in the 2008 American National Election Studies (ANES).

## Voting

Voting is considered a key indicator of the health and democratic character of a political system. Although a large body of literature questions whether voting constitutes rational political behavior given that it is unlikely that any individual's vote will determine the outcome of an election, democratic theory posits that voting in regular elections provides a critical mechanism for holding elected officials accountable to the will and policy choices of the people. And it remains true that voting constitutes the most common type of political participation in the United States. When it comes to making group comparisons on voting, however, it is important not to focus on just one particular election since regular voters may have missed their chance to participate for various idiosyncratic reasons. Thus, most polling organizations create a "likely voter" index based on an individual's voter registration status and past voting history. We follow a similar convention here when we report out our voting statistics: we rely on a factor scale of voting based on registration status, voting in the 2004 presidential election, voting in the 2008 primaries, and intention to vote in the 2008 presidential election; and we weight the results to reflect the participation rates as reported by the Current Population Survey Voter Supplement in 2008.<sup>6</sup> We have already seen how Asian American participation compares to those of other racial and ethnic groups in the Current Population Survey, with Asian Americans tied with Latinos at 57 percent, and lagging behind whites at 74 percent and African Americans at 77 percent.

## Political Donations

As the costs of running for elective office or ballot proposition campaigns rise, political donations have become a more important political activity (Abramowitz 1988; Coleman and Manna 2000; Gimpel, Lee, and Kaminski 2006). In fact, according to John Coleman and Paul Manna, campaign spending may be beneficial to democratic participation: "Campaign spending increases knowledge of and affect toward the candidates, improves the public's ability to place candidates on ideology and issue scales, and encourages certainty about those placements" (2000, 757). Yet campaign spending may also transform economic inequalities into political inequalities, because those with more resources have greater access to elected officials than those of relatively modest means (Gimpel, Lee, and Kaminski 2006).

Finally, the study of campaign contribution activity is arguably of central importance to Asian American participation for several reasons.

Table 1.2 Rates Of Political Participation

	Asians	Whites	Blacks	Latinos
Campaign work	3	4	6	4
Contribute	13	13	8	5
Contact	9	21	11	9
Community work	21	30	27	21

*Source:* Authors' compilation of data from the 2008 National Asian American Survey (Ramakrishnan et al. 2011).

*Note:* Data on whites, African Americans, and Latinos for campaigning, contributions, contact, and community work for these groups are from the 2008 National Election Study. The 2008 ANES contains only thirty-five Asian American respondents, with no interviews in Asian languages. The ANES also does not include a measure of protest politics comparable to the NAAS item. Figures are in percentages.

First, that Asian Americans are a highly dispersed population with considerable socioeconomic resources suggests that making campaign contributions may be a more effective way of gaining political access than relying primarily on votes. Furthermore, the controversy surrounding the political contributions to the 1996 Clinton-Gore campaign from three individuals with connections to the Chinese government, and the subsequent media frenzy and scrutiny over contributions from all Asian Americans, directed a large spotlight on an emerging trend in political participation among Asian Americans (Lee 2000). Subsequent studies of Asian American participation have also focused on contribution activity, to show that such scandals may have been responsible for a shift in campaign contributions away from presidential candidates and toward Asian American candidates from across the country (Cho 2002). As we can see from table 1.2, however, the contribution rate of Asian Americans remain on par with the contribution activity of whites, despite the fact that Asian American citizens have, on average, higher levels of household income.

### Contacting Government Officials

Contacting a government official constitutes a direct attempt to influence political representatives and policy outcomes. Constituents send letters to express deeply felt policy positions (Lee 2002) or to request assistance on personal matters related to government bureaucracies or agencies. Research on Congress and public policy also suggest that elected officials pay far greater attention to correspondence from constituents, especially when it takes the form of individual letters or personal phone calls, than they do to mass mailing campaigns or even individual votes. This is espe-

cially so when it comes to the day-to-day policymaking that occurs in between election years.

Yet contacting a government official requires familiarity with the political system and the ability to navigate political offices and bureaucracies. It also often requires strong English-language skills, both in terms of speaking and writing formal letters. As such, we believe it is important to examine this activity among Asian Americans, who, as a predominantly immigrant group, may be less familiar with the U.S. political system and demonstrate lower levels of English-language proficiency. What is noteworthy from our comparison of racial groups in table 1.2 is that for whites, a higher propensity to contribute money is coupled with a higher propensity to contact elected and other public officials. For Asian Americans, however, there is no such correspondence. Where 21 percent of whites report contacting officials, only 9 percent of Asians do so, the low incidence for Asians being quite similar to that for African Americans (11 percent) and Latinos (9 percent).<sup>7</sup>

### Community Activism

Research has shown that working with others to solve a community problem is one of the most popular non-voting activities among Asian Americans (Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004). Although Asian Americans may join a group to tackle a local community issue without the direct intention of influencing elected officials or national policy, we believe that this form of participation is both political and important. First, working with others to solve a community problem is likely to build the civic skills identified as crucial to longer-term political engagement (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Second, this form of political participation allows both citizens and noncitizens to influence local political and community structures. Finally, working with others to solve a community problem may provide Asian Americans a measure of political influence at the local level that, because of their relatively small share of the national population, may be difficult to achieve at the state or national level. As table 1.2 indicates, however, this is another type of political activity in which Asian Americans lag significantly behind whites and African Americans, and are on par with Latinos.

### Protest Activity

We include protest activity as a measure of political participation because it allows us to examine behavior that often is outside of the traditional boundaries of the political system. Protests often challenge core aspects of



the political system itself (Meyer 2007). For a group made up largely of immigrants, many of whom may not be citizens, protest may be one of the most visible political activities available. Thus, for example, hundreds of thousands of immigrants gained national attention for marching and demonstrating for immigrant rights and comprehensive immigration reform in the spring of 2006. Thus, because it is less traditional and may draw both citizens and noncitizens alike, we focus on protest activity as a critical measure of political participation in the chapters that follow. Our data indicate that 4 percent of Asian Americans have taken part in a protest in the previous twelve months. Although the American National Election Studies do not include comparable measures of protest activity, data from the 1990 Citizen Participation Study show that 5 percent of whites, 9 percent of African Americans, and 4 percent of Latinos engaged in protest activity in the two years before the survey. More recent studies of the 2006 immigration rallies suggest that Latino protest activity may have been higher, although since 2007 it has diminished considerably (Voss and Bloemraad 2010).

## WHAT EXPLAINS PARTICIPATION?

Several decades ago, political scientists asked who votes and who participates in various types of political activities beyond voting. One of the most consistent answers to have emerged from the literature is that those with higher levels of socioeconomic status (often measured as educational attainment and income) are the ones most likely to get involved in politics. In 1972, Sidney Verba and Norman Nie declared in their pioneering study of civic and political participation that “citizens of higher social and economic status participate more in politics. This generalization has been confirmed many times in many nations” (17). Subsequent research on what is often referred to as the standard socioeconomic model of political participation has since confirmed the validity of this statement, not only in the general population but also among immigrants and members of racial and ethnic minorities (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Ramakrishnan 2005). For Asian Americans, this is true not only in studies that use large-scale national data such as the Current Population Survey Voter Supplement, but also in smaller studies that rely on surveys of Asian Americans from several states and metropolitan areas (Ramakrishnan 2005; Lien 1997; Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004). That is, at the individual level, greater levels of education or income translate into more political participation. The consensus seems to be that higher education leads to greater participation, whether through acquiring political skills or connections to

social networks that foster mobilization (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry 1996). The effects of income are also significant, though their magnitudes have generally been weaker than in the case of education, especially for immigrants and members of racial and ethnic minorities (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Ramakrishnan 2005).<sup>8</sup>

When studying political participation it is important to keep in mind that the standard socioeconomic model has never been as simple as it might at first sound. When Verba and Nie first introduced the model in *Participation in America* (1972), they took care to explain that resources such as income, education, and occupation are only a baseline for understanding participation. They also considered other factors such as race, organizational membership, party affiliation, community context, and political beliefs to be important influences on political participation. Raymond Wolfinger and Steven Rosenstone give greater weight to income, occupation, and education as critical determinants of political participation (namely voting). But they, too, put forth a theory that leaves room for other influences on political participation, such as institutional barriers to voting. Finally, Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry Brady (1995) emphasize income as one of the most important determinants of political involvement, but also underscore the extent to which variables such as organizational membership and mobilization stand out as critical influences on political participation as well. Thus, the most prominent studies of socioeconomic status and political participation highlight the link between resources and political participation, but resources are defined broadly, and encompass much more than educational achievement and family income (Verba and Nie 1972; Verba, Nie, and Kim 1978; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). We adopt a similarly broad view of resources here.

Second, the degree to which socioeconomic resources match up to political participation depends a great deal on the unit of analysis: the individual or the group. This is particularly important to consider when considering differences in participation across racial and ethnic groups. In the decades following the publication of *Participation in America*, a host of studies grappled with the fact that African American voting was higher than expected based on SES models, given the group's relatively low levels of education, income, and homeownership with respect to whites (Shingles 1981; Bobo and Gilliam 1990; Leighley and Vedlitz 1999; Alex-Assensoh and Assensoh 2001). Even when socioeconomic factors mattered for participation within the group, other factors—such as group consciousness, feelings of political empowerment, and links to social movements and community organizations—helped diminish the role of lowering black voter turnout vis-à-vis whites. For Latinos, too, studies have shown that

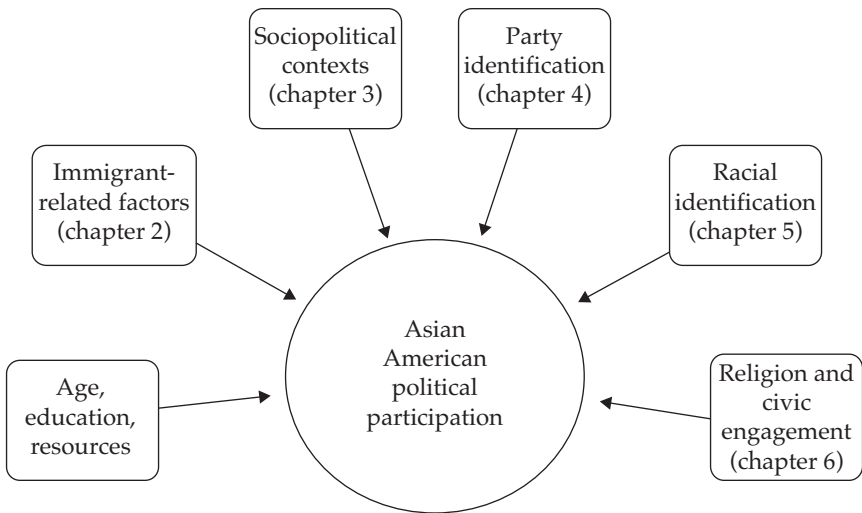
factors such as group consciousness and living in places characterized by high levels of political threat or high levels of political empowerment help push voter turnout higher than one might expect, based on socioeconomic resources alone (Pantoja, Ramirez, and Segura 2001; Ramakrishnan and Espenshade 2001; Barreto, Segura, and Woods 2004; Stokes 2003).

For Asian Americans, the puzzle with respect to socioeconomic models of voting is the opposite one—the group’s lower levels of participation despite relatively high levels of education and income. The surprisingly lower level of participation among Asian Americans has been noted nearly as long as the higher level of participation among blacks (Brackman and Erie 1995; Nakanishi 1986, 1991; Uhlaner, Cain, and Kiewiet 1989; Leighley and Vedlitz 1999; Cho 1999; Lien et al. 2001; Lien 2001, 1997, 2004a; Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004). For example, in one of the earliest studies of Asian American political participation, Carole Uhlaner and her colleagues stated that the “the high level of education among Asians does not translate into activity” (1989, 212). Nearly fifteen years later, Andrew Aoki and Don Nakanishi described the puzzle similarly: “APA voting rates have remained low. . . . This seems particularly curious given their high median socioeconomic measures” (2001, 607–8). Consistent with these observations, Phil Kasinitz and his colleagues report in their study of first- and second-generation immigrants in New York City that some groups participate in politics at much higher rates than one would expect based on the group’s average income and education levels, and others at much lower rates (2008).

It is critical to emphasize that those concerned with the puzzle of political participation for Asian Americans or other immigrant groups focus on the racial or ethnic group as the unit of analysis. At the individual level, we expect to see a link between socioeconomic status and political participation more in line with that predicted by Verba and Nie and more recent studies (compare Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004; Ramakrishnan 2005). However, because Asian Americans as a group exhibit high levels of education and, relative to whites and blacks, low levels of political participation, we also take seriously Aoki and Okiyoshi Takeda’s imperative to “take into account other factors that might mitigate the effects of education and income on Asian Americans’ participation” (63).

Our analysis, then, builds on this literature. In addition to the standard focus on socioeconomic resources and key demographic traits such as age and gender, we identify five factors that potentially influence the political participation of Asian Americans: immigrant socialization; residential contexts; party identification, mobilization, and political orientation; racial identity formation; and membership and involvement in civic associations (see figure 1.4).

Figure 1.4 Explaining Asian American Political Participation



Source: Authors' compilation.

### Immigrant Socialization

Immigrant socialization is critical because Asian Americans are predominantly a population of immigrants and their offspring. Based on the 2004 American Community Survey, nearly two in three Asians in America (65 percent) are foreign-born, and roughly 90 percent are either immigrants or their offspring. Thus, unlike most native-born Americans who acquire partisan habits through their parents and civic skills in their K–12 education and other institutional venues, Asian immigrants and their offspring are less likely to be fully socialized into American political life. It is little surprise, then, that previous studies have shown that factors related to immigrant socialization such as nativity, immigrant generation, length of stay in the United States, English-language skills, and citizenship status are significant predictors of Asian American political participation (Lien 1994; Cho 1999; Wong 2000; Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004; Ramakrishnan 2005). Thus, one potential explanation for the patterns of political participation we observe among Asian Americans is that different ethnoracial groups may vary in the extent to which they are socialized into the political arena.

## Residential Contexts and Political Geography

A growing and robust literature finds that a broad range of political outcomes—from racial attitudes to voting behavior to hate crimes—are shaped by the context in which a person lives (Key 1949; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1992; Cohen and Dawson 1993; Green, Strolovich, and Wong 1998; Oliver and Mendelberg 2000; Hajnal 2001; Oliver and Wong 2003; Gay 2001, 2004). The range of structural contexts that shape one's politics are diverse, including demographic (absolute numbers of each racial-ethnic group, population growth, racial balance), social (organizational density, network ties, hyper-segregation), economic (poverty rates, tax base, skills mismatch), and political contexts (party competition, regime type, electoral rules). Indeed, all previously articulated explanations of Asian American political engagement are tested with self-reported observations at the individual level. And yet these individuals are embedded in structural contexts that mediate the impact of various explanations for immigrant political incorporation and political engagement. Devoid of the actually lived contexts in which political parties get out votes, socializing experiences transpire, identities are formed, civic ties are forged, and so on, such individual-level explanations alone provide too little inferential leverage to fully explain Asian American underparticipation. Our second explanation argues that variation in Asian American participation is largely a function of how social and political processes occur at an aggregate geographic level, and not at the individual level.

## Party Identification

In the political science literature, the psychological attachment individuals have to one of the two major political parties is a ubiquitous and pivotal factor in defining a person's politics (Campbell et al. 1960; Miller and Shanks 1996; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002). Alan Gerber and Donald Green write, "In the field of public opinion and electoral behavior, no explanatory variable is more pervasive than party identification" (1998, 794). Kinder and Sanders describe party identification as "the single most important determinant of individual voting decisions" (1985, 686). Despite this primacy of place of partisanship, research shows a plurality (and, in some surveys, majority) of Asian Americans have no relationship to a political party, choosing either to identify as an independent or otherwise refusing to self-identify with any partisan category (Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004; Hajnal and Lee 2006). In addition to weaker party identification, research has also shown weaker mobilization efforts

by political parties and campaigns, due variously to the lack the organizational capacity, cultural literacy, institutional incentives, and perhaps even political will to shepherd Asian Americans into the political system (Kim 2007; Wong 2006). Thus, factors related to political parties give us an important set of hypotheses: Asian Americans vary in their participation based on how strongly they hold any party identification, and perhaps relatedly, based on whether parties have sought to mobilize them.

### Racial Identity Formation

Our account of immigrant socialization highlights the roles that mainstream political institutions and social processes of acculturation play in engaging Asian Americans. Underlying these accounts is a lively debate over whether and how immigrants assimilate into their newfound societies, ranging from the view that immigrants are assimilated and incorporated in an invariant, linear process across time and generations (Gordon 1964; Dahl 1961; Alba and Nee 2003), to the view that this process of assimilation and incorporation is conspicuously bumpier and more segmented, especially for racialized present-day minorities like Latinos and Asian Americans (Glazer and Moynihan 1963; Tuan 1998; Ortiz and Telles 2008; Portes and Zhou 1993; Jiménez 2010). In the latter case, the formation of a sense of racial-ethnic identity constitutes a fourth potential pathway to political engagement.

Here, Asian Americans are commonly viewed as a single group for purposes of bureaucratic classification (Omi and Winant 1994), but the activation of this identity in politics varies across historical, institutional, and spatial contexts (Espiritu 1993; Okamoto 2003, 2006). Specifically, there are two ways in which racial identity formation might help explain Asian American political engagement. If the process of racialization is driven by discrimination, social isolation, or other exclusionary processes, the processes that shape Asian Americans' sense of groupness may also shape a sense of political alienation, distrust, and inefficacy, all to the detriment of political engagement. Alternatively, group consciousness may in theory work for Asian Americans as it does for African Americans in enabling and empowering participation (Miller et al. 1981; Dawson 1994; Chong and Rogers 2005; Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004), but the conditions to sustain such an authorized sense of groupness may not yet exist for Asian Americans. Therefore, by our fourth hypothesis, Asian Americans vary in their participation based on the extent to which they identify as a racial or ethnic group, the extent to which they feel that they share political interests with each other and with other racial and ethnic groups,

and the extent to which they see discrimination as a problem that requires political action.

### Involvement in Secular and Religious Organizations

In the absence of a demonstrable role of parties in the incorporation of Asian Americans, and given the overwhelming numbers who do not think in U.S. partisan terms, one place scholars have increasingly turned to is civic institutions and civil society (Ecklund and Park 2005; Ramakrishnan and Viramontes 2006; Wong 2006; Ecklund 2006). The logic and attraction behind looking here is quite clear. Civic institutions like labor unions, social service organizations, ethnic associations, and religious institutions should serve as a mediating influence. Secular and religious organizations may bridge between Asian American newcomers and politics writ large in the United States. Political philosophers and empirical political scientists alike view civic engagement, volunteerism, and associated networks of belonging as vehicles to develop key civic skills, like political communication and organizing, and to nurture a sense of social trust and psychological engagement and efficacy in the realm of public affairs (Pateman 1970; Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1995; Skocpol and Fiorina 1999a, 1999b; Putnam 2000; Macedo 2005). By these accounts, then, Asian American participation in politics varies according to their engagement in religious and civic life and the degree to which civic institutions mobilize them to participate in the political sphere.

### CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND PLAN OF THE BOOK

The central research questions we address in this book are why some Asian Americans participate and others do not, and why they get involved more in some types of activities than in others. We argue that immigrant socialization; residential contexts; party identification, mobilization, and political orientation; racial identity formation; and membership and involvement in civic associations all contribute to political participation among Asian Americans. We engage this question by leveraging the diversity within the Asian American population. That is, we observe that some Asian Americans participate more than others and we seek to better understand why differences in political participation exist within the community.

Do the pathways to participation we identify operate differently across

distinct segments of the population? To get a better handle on this question, we first provide a deep exploration of each of these pathways. Chapters 2 through 6 each begin by laying out the relationship between a set of descriptive traits of individual survey respondents, including national origin, citizenship, generation of migration, class, gender, age, educational attainment, region, and the pathway of interest—that is, immigrant socialization, residential contexts, party identification, mobilization, and political orientation, racial identity formation, and membership and involvement in civic associations. We then introduce a more complex modeling of the relationship of these descriptive traits to the pathway of interest.<sup>9</sup> Finally, we link the pathway of interest to variations in political participation, the key dependent variables using descriptive statistics.

The research that forms the basis for these chapters compels us to confront a much broader question. Given the tremendous internal diversity that characterizes those that fall under the Asian American rubric, why study the group as a whole at all? Should we aggregate under a single racial banner those who differ so greatly in terms of national origin, socioeconomic status, language, religion, generation, and a host of other demographic, economic, and social dimensions? This question has implications for how we understand the role of groups in American politics, particularly groups defined in racial terms. The very nature of this research, a study of Asian American political attitudes and behavior, assumes that the category of Asian American has some meaning in the U.S. political system. In the pages that follow, we return to this theme both explicitly and implicitly. In fact, by taking a careful, systematic look at the political participation of those who identify themselves as somehow Asian or with one of many national origin groups, we provide new information about the degree to which the diverse members of this group are similar or different when it comes to their political activity and, to a more limited extent, their political orientations.

In chapter 7, we bring together the different pathways to political participation examined in the previous five chapters, and draw attention to the major findings that emerge from a statistical analysis that controls for various factors simultaneously. In addition to figuring out which variables emerge as consistently important to political participation, we focus on three narratives that arise from the multivariate results: the extent to which civic and political resources may compensate for group advantages or disadvantages in socioeconomic status, the extent to which political behavior among Asian Americans conforms to standard models of immigrant assimilation or newer models of group racialization, and whether religious diversity among Asian Americans has any significant consequence for political behavior. In chapter 8, we conclude by reflecting on



the future of Asian Americans as a political group, drawing attention to the small but growing group of super-participants. We also assess our empirical findings in light of key questions about the extent to which Asian Americans constitute a coherent or meaningful category in terms of their participation in American politics. Finally, we project the future of Asian American participation in the decades to come, and point to opportunities for political parties and other institutions to mobilize and gain the allegiance of Asian American voters.