



# Asian American Political Participation: Emerging Constituents and Their Political Identities

*Janelle Wong, S. Karthick Ramakrishnan, Taeku Lee, Jane Junn*

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Asian Americans are a small percentage of the U.S. population, but their numbers are steadily rising—from less than a million in 1960 to more than 15 million today. They are also a remarkably diverse population—representing several ethnicities, religions, and languages—and they enjoy higher levels of education and income than any other U.S. racial group. Historically, socioeconomic status has been a reliable predictor of political behavior. So why has this fast-growing American population, which is doing so well economically, been so little engaged in the U.S. political system? *Asian American Political Participation* is the most comprehensive study to date of Asian American political behavior, including such key measures as voting, political donations, community organizing, and political protests. The book examines why some groups participate while others do not, why certain civic activities are deemed preferable to others, and why Asian socioeconomic advantage has so far not led to increased political clout.

*Asian American Political Participation* is based on data from the authors' groundbreaking 2008 National Asian American Survey of more than 5,000 Chinese, Indian, Vietnamese, Korean, Filipino, and Japanese Americans. The book shows that the motivations for and impediments to political participation are as diverse as the Asian American population. For example, native-born Asians have higher rates of political participation than their immigrant counterparts, particularly recent adult arrivals who were socialized outside of the United States. Protest activity is the exception, which tends to be higher among immigrants who maintain connections abroad and who engaged in such activity in their country of origin. Surprisingly, factors such as living in a new immigrant destination or in a city with an Asian American elected official do not seem to motivate political behavior—neither does ethnic group solidarity. Instead, hate crimes and racial victimization are the factors that most motivate Asian Americans to participate politically. Involvement in non-political activities such as civic and religious groups also bolsters political participation. Even among Asian groups, socioeconomic advantage does not necessarily translate into high levels of political participation. Chinese Americans, for example, have significantly higher levels of educational attainment than Japanese Americans, but Japanese Americans are far more likely to vote and make political contributions. And Vietnamese Americans, with the lowest levels of education and income, vote and engage in protest politics more than any other group.

Lawmakers tend to favor the interests of groups who actively engage the political system, and groups who do not participate at high levels are likely to suffer political consequences in the future. *Asian American Political Participation* demonstrates that understanding Asian political behavior today can have significant repercussions for Asian American political influence tomorrow.

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