

**CHINESE-AMERICANS' POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT:  
FOCUSING ON THE IMPACT OF MOBILIZATION**

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**Abstract.** This study examines the factors that explain Chinese-Americans' political engagement. Many studies of Chinese-Americans have focused on areas other than their political attitudes/behavior and have been mainly conducted on populations outside the U.S. The present study pays special attention to the effect of political mobilization. Drawing on segmented assimilation theory, the present study regards the mobilization of immigrants by political parties or organizations into mainstream political process as one of the contexts of reception. As a result of China's nondemocratic political systems, Chinese immigrants might have different political values and different ideas about taking part in the political process. Thus, special efforts are needed to encourage Chinese-Americans to become more politically active. The regression results show that the mobilization variables consistently displayed a significant impact, regardless of the different modes of political engagement. Party contact encouraged nonvoting activities, voter registration, and voting among Chinese-Americans, and organization contact led to stronger interest in politics and more active participation in nonvoting activities.

**Keywords:** Chinese-American, political participation, mobilization, party, organization

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## **1. Introduction**

This study examines the factors that explain Chinese-Americans' political engagement. In the U.S., Chinese-Americans are categorized as "Asian-Americans". Greater numbers of Asian-Americans are increasingly playing a role in various aspects of the country. Although previous studies have examined the political attitudes and behaviors of Asian-Americans, most have tended to assume that Asian-Americans are a homogenous, monolith group (DeSipio, Masuoka, and Stout 2008). Therefore, they have framed Asian-Americans as a unified block vote. As noted in an earlier study (Ong and Scott 2009), given the increased

diversity within Asian-American communities, additional analyses are needed to yield a deeper understanding of the individual subgroups of Asian-Americans, as well as that of other minority groups, such as blacks and Latinos. The present study starts from the idea that the political attitudes/behaviors of Asian-American subgroups differ greatly from each other and that these subgroups must be disaggregated based on ethnicity and examined separately in depth.

Chinese-Americans are the largest segment of the Asian-American population in the U.S. Their numbers increased from 2,432,585 in 2000 to 3,347,229 in 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau 2000, 2010). The Chinese were one of the first of the immigrant populations in Asia to emigrate to the U.S. in the 1880s (Kim, Linton, and Lum 2015). Given the long history of Chinese-Americans in the U.S., the extremely scant research on the political attitudes and behaviors of Chinese immigrants is surprising.

This is not to say that there has been no scholarly attention given to Chinese-Americans. However, many studies of Chinese-Americans (Lu, Samaratunge, and Härtel 2013, Guo 2013, Kim, Linton, and Lum 2015, Ng et al. 2015, Chung 2013) have focused on areas other than their political attitudes/behavior (e.g., education, employment, work experience, family life, and social mobility). For example, Lu, Samaratunge, and Härtel (2013) investigated professional Chinese immigrants' acculturation attitudes in the workplace. They found that among the four types of acculturation attitudes (assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization), the majority of Chinese immigrants exhibited attitudes of separation and marginalization, which are related to low affective workgroup commitment. From an economic perspective, Guo (2013) argued that recent Chinese immigrants have encountered multifaceted barriers in employment and language and that these barriers have resulted in unemployment, poor economic performance, and downward social mobility. Chung (2013) studied the impact of family roles on ethnicity among the children of Chinese immigrant families. Chung's study indicated that the ways in which children are integrated into an immigrant household influence their views as adults on ethnicity. In essence, family roles affect the child's choice of ethnicity by strengthening or weakening their orientation toward their parent's ethnic heritage, as well as that of the broader ethnic community. In a study of Chinese immigrant children in the U.S., Zhou (2014) found that the children of Chinese immigrants achieved educational success not only because of their parents' strong emphasis on education but also because of resources generated in the ethnic community.

This brief literature review indicates that previous studies have enhanced our understanding of Chinese immigrants. However, it also shows how relatively difficult it is to find studies on Chinese immigrants as political actors.<sup>1</sup> The incorporation and integration of immigrants in the host society occur via a range of mechanisms (e.g. familial, social, economic, and political). Thus, the present study attempts to examine Chinese-Americans' political attitudes/behaviors.

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<sup>1</sup> Wong (2003) examined Chinese-Americans' political involvement, focusing on Chinese in Southern California. Also, Lien (2006, 2007, 2008) did in-depth research on this population.

Furthermore, studies that have examined Chinese immigrants have been mainly conducted on populations outside the U.S. For instance, Lu, Samaratunge, and Härtel (2013) examined Chinese immigrants in Australia, and Guo (2013), Guo and DeVoretz (2006a, 2006b), and Dyson (2015) focused on Chinese immigrants in Canada. Wong (2008), Lee (2004), Chou (2012), and Ng et al. (2015) conducted research on mainland Chinese immigrants in Hong Kong. Although some studies have been conducted on Chinese-Americans in the U.S. (e.g., Zhou 2014, Kim, Linton, and Lum 2015, Lu 2013, Chung 2013), given their demographic significance in the U.S., the academic endeavors in this area appear to be rather limited. Thus, the present study focuses on the political incorporation of Chinese immigrants by exploring their political engagement. By choosing Chinese immigrants in the U.S. and considering them as political actors, the findings of this study will add general information to the literature on Chinese immigrants around the world.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

Although Asian-Americans are one of the fastest growing minority groups in the U.S., their level of political participation does not match their population growth (Lai et al. 2001, Seo 2011). For instance, the voter turnout rate of Asian-Americans in the 2010 midterm election was 31%, which was lower than that of other ethnic minority groups in the country, such as blacks (44%) and Latinos (31.2%). Moreover, the participation rate of Asian-Americans has been declining, with voter turnout of 40.2% in the 1990 election, 39% in the 1994 election, and 32.1% in the 2006 election. The political inactiveness of Asian-Americans is considered an anomaly, given their impressive academic and economic successes (Tam 1995, Seo 2011), as it contradicts the well-documented positive impact of high socio-economic status on political participation.

Research aimed at resolving this puzzle has applied traditional models of political engagement, with ethnicity-specific factors added to the model. There have been a number of studies of the impact of socio-economic status, such as education, income, and employment status, on a person's political engagement (e.g., Campbell et al. 1960, Key 1964, Rosenstone and Hansen 1993, Bass and Casper 2001, Verb, Schlozman and Brady 1995). Other researchers have attempted to replicate the findings of these studies among Asian-Americans (Cain et al. 1991, Tam 1995). They argued that those with a high socio-economic status have more political resources, time, and energy for political participation and lower costs of participation.

Another line of research examined the role of ethnicity-related factors and argued that experiences and characteristics specific to Asian-Americans can explain their political engagement. Factors identified as significant included the area where the person was born in the U.S., how long the person had resided in the country, the level of English proficiency, the level of consciousness about the ethnic group to which the individual belonged, and the experience and level of

racial/ethnic discrimination. For instance, the “linked fate variable” has been included in many analyses. This variable is linked to the perception that a person’s fate is linked to the fate of the ethnic group to which the person belongs (Rim 2009). A number of studies found that this variable influenced the political behavior of minority groups (Dawson 1994, Tate 1994, Sanchez 2006, Wong, Lien and Conway 2005). Studies also reported that another ethnicity-based factor, experience of discrimination, affected political engagement (Uhlener, Cain and Kiewiet 1989, Wong, Lien and Conway 2005, Leighley 2001, Lien 2001, Welch et al. 2001).

These studies have contributed to our understanding of the political attitudes/behavior of Asian-Americans. However, potential differences in the political attitudes and behaviors of Asian-American subgroups remain an unexplored area of study. A factor found to be influential among one ethnic group might not be important in another ethnic group because each Asian-American subgroup comes from a diverse cultural background and speaks a different language (Magpantay 2009, DeSipio, Masuoka, and Stout 2008). As a result, Americans might differ in their political attitudes, values, and orientation (Lien, Conway, and Wong 2003), to the extent it becomes problematic to lump all into one label of “Asian-Americans”.

For instance, Asian subgroups differ from one another in terms of voting choice. It is well known that every Asian subgroup favored Barack Obama over John McCain in the 2008 presidential election race. However, taking a closer look, there were significant differences between the subgroups’ voting choices, with 93% of South Asians, 73% of Chinese, 64% of Koreans, 59% of Filipinos, and 32% of Vietnamese voting for Barack Obama (Magpantay 2009), yielding variance in the voting choices of 61%. The maximum variance was found among South Asians and the minimum among Vietnamese.

Another example of differences among Asian subgroups is in party identification. According to research, Chinese, Korean, and Southeast Asians tended to become more likely to vote Republican with an increased length of residency in the U.S., whereas Japanese were predominantly more likely to vote Democrat (Cain, Kiewiet, and Uhlener 1991, Wong 2000, Junn 1999, Nakanishi and Lai 2003). Thus, Phan and Garcia (2009) stated that it is difficult to predict the partisanship of Asian-Americans due to their diversity.

Studies have also demonstrated that the naturalization rate of Asian ethnic subgroups varied (DeSipio, Masuoka, and Stout 2008). The naturalization rate of Japanese was found to be particularly low, 33% lower than that of Chinese (DeSipio, Masuoka, and Stout 2008). In addition, Vietnamese were found to be about 20% more likely than Chinese to become naturalized (DeSipio, Masuoka, and Stout 2008).

According to the previous literature, more than 15 national-origin groups fell under the Asian-American pan-ethnic umbrella, thus, treating Asian-Americans as a homogeneous cluster (Espiritu 1992, Lai 2003, Phan and Garcia 2009). To control for country-specific factors, studies have often included Asian subgroup

dummy variables in their analyses (e.g., Rim 2009, DeSipio, Masuoka, and Stout 2008). However, the inclusion of these variables cannot fully explain what determines each subgroup's political attitudes/behaviors.

The present study focuses on Chinese, who are the largest national-origin group of Asian-Americans. As noted earlier, few studies have investigated the political attitudes/behavior of Chinese-Americans, with most focusing instead on their education, family life, and employment. I attempt to examine the political engagement of Chinese-Americans. Among the factors that are known to influence political engagement, the present study pays special attention to the effect of political mobilization. As noted by Seo (2011), political parties and organizations attempt to mobilize voters by targeting specific groups of people. Such efforts are justified because research has shown that voters who were contacted by parties or organizations were more likely to take part in politics (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993, Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, Seo 2011).

The present study on the political engagement of Chinese-Americans draws on segmented assimilation theory. According to segmented assimilation theory, two unique contexts, exit and reception, determine how well immigrants adapt to the host society (Zhou 2014). 'Exit' includes the money, knowledge, skills, and social status of the immigrants in their homelands, which are pre-migration resources that immigrants bring with them (Zhou 2014). 'Reception' refers to the position of the group in the host society, government policies, and public attitudes (Portes and Rumbaut 2006). The present study regards the mobilization of immigrants by political parties or organizations into mainstream political process as one of the contexts of reception. Parties and organizations are important agents in mobilizing individuals (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1992). Political mobilization has been defined as the activity of rousing people to express themselves politically and to undertake political action (Bealy 1999). If political parties or organizations actively mobilize immigrants, this indicates that the immigrants are well received by the host society and that the environment for the reception of the immigrants in the host society is favorable. Under these circumstances, immigrants might be more encouraged to take part in politics. In contrast, if political parties or organizations ignore immigrants and there are scant acts of mobilization toward immigrants, it is more likely that the immigrants reside in an environment not conducive to reception by the host society. The latter might constrain opportunities for active political participation, which will lead to the stagnation or decline of assimilation among immigrants.

I pay particular attention to the impact of mobilization because China's political procedures are in stark difference to those in the U.S. The U.S. has a well-established tradition of voting and tends to place a high value on participation in political activities. In contrast, as a result of China's nondemocratic political systems, Chinese immigrants might have different political values and different ideas about taking part in the political process. They might find demonstrating or rallying for political purposes, contacting representatives, or registering to vote by a certain date unfamiliar compared to other ethnic groups from countries with

democratic political procedures similar to those in the U.S.<sup>2</sup> As Magpantay (2009) argued in a study of Asian-Americans, special efforts are needed to encourage Chinese-Americans to become more politically active. In other words, Chinese-Americans who are unfamiliar with the political system of their new homeland might need more encouragement or guidance to ensure their political engagement.

Based on the aforementioned, the present study investigated whether Chinese-Americans who were contacted by mainstream political parties or organizations were more likely to display participatory behaviors than those who were not contacted.

### 3. Data and methods

The present study used data from the National Asian-American Survey 2008, conducted between August 12, 2008, and October 29, 2008. The survey data included telephone interviews with 5,159 Asian-Americans. For the study, a sample of 1,350 Chinese respondents was selected.

The key independent variable was political engagement. The present study relied on various dimensions of political engagement based on the assumption that different types of political engagement might have different predictors. The factors that influence one type of political engagement might be different from another type of political engagement (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, Rim 2009). Thus, the present study used four types of political engagement: political interest, nonvoting activities, voter registration, and voting. Political interest was operationalized utilizing the question: "How interested are you in politics?" (1 = not at all interested, 2 = somewhat interested, 3 = interested, and 4 = very interested). Seven types of nonvoting activities were used for nonvoting activities: discussing politics with family and friends; working for a candidate, political party, or a campaign organization; contributing money to a candidate, political party, or campaign organization; contacting a representative or a government official in the U.S.; working with others in the community to solve a problem; visiting an internet site or on-line community to discuss a candidate or issue; and attending a protest march, demonstration, or rally. If the respondents said that they took part in an activity, they were coded as 1, and if not, they were coded as zero. The responses to the seven activities were combined and used to construct a nonvoting participation index for Chinese-Americans. For voter registration, respondents who reported that they registered were coded as 1, and those who reported that they did not were coded as zero. The same coding scheme was adopted for the

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<sup>2</sup> In a related vein, Finifter and Finifter (1989) suggested that the 'translation' argument might play a role. The translation argument states that whether immigrants have experience with democratic political procedures in their home country significantly influences their future participation in the destination country. Similarly, Bueker (2005) found that immigrants from nondemocratic societies were less likely to vote. However, the same study found that immigrants from democracies were also not necessarily more likely to vote.

voting variable, using the question: "Did you vote in the 2004 U.S. presidential election?"

With respect to the independent variable of main interest, political mobilization, the party contact and the organization contact variables were included. Contact with a party was measured by the question: "In the past 12 months, has a political party or candidate contacted you about a campaign? (1 = yes, and 0 = no)." Contact with an organization was measured by the question: "Has any organization contacted you about a campaign in the past 12 months? (1 = yes, and 0 = no)."

Socio-demographic variables, such as age, gender, education, income, marital status, and homeownership, were included. Age was coded as a continuous variable, and gender (female = 1), marital status (married = 1), and homeownership (house owned = 1) were coded as dummy variables. Education was coded as the highest level of formal education completed, with its value ranging from 1 (primary or grammar school) to 10 (doctorate). Income was measured by household income (1 = up to \$20,000 and ... 8 = \$150,000 and over).

Based on the previous literature, the analysis included several acculturation-related variables: birthplace, length of residency, citizenship, experience of discrimination, and linked fate. Birthplace was coded as 1 if the person had been born in the U.S. and as zero if not. The length of residency was measured by subtracting the first entry year in the U.S. from 2008 (the year the survey was conducted) for those who were not born in the U.S. and by relying on age for those who were born in the U.S. Citizenship was coded as 1 if the person was a U.S. citizen and as zero if not. For the experience of discrimination variable, an index was created by combining the replies of the respondents to the following five questions: (1) have you ever been unfairly denied a job or fired; (2) have you ever been unfairly denied a promotion at work; (3) have you ever been unfairly treated by the police; (4) have you ever been unfairly prevented from renting or buying a house; and (5) have you ever been treated unfairly or badly at restaurants or stores. Linked fate was operationalized based on the question: "Do you think what happens to other Chinese-Americans affects what happens in your life? (1 = yes, and 0 = no)."

Several political orientation variables were controlled. Political trust was measured by the statement: "We can trust our government in Washington to do what is right," with 1 = disagree strongly to 5 = agree strongly. External efficacy was measured with the statement: "Public officials and politicians care about what people like me think," with 1 = disagree strongly and 5 = agree strongly. Internal efficacy was assessed using the statement: "Sometimes, politics and the government seem so complicated that someone like me cannot really understand what is going on," with 1 = agree strongly and 5 = disagree strongly.

#### **4. Results**

The results illustrated the level of engagement of Chinese-Americans in politics in comparison with that of other subgroups of Asian-Americans (Indian, Filipino,

Vietnamese, Korean, and Japanese). Table 1 shows the results of the frequency test for the six major ethnicities of Asian-Americans in response to the question: "How interested are you in politics?" According to the results, disinterest in politics (not at all interested) was highest among the Chinese respondents (23.87%), followed by Vietnamese (21.89%), Indians (17.20%), Koreans (11.58%), and Japanese (8.36%). The Chinese ranked highest again in the next response category of "somewhat interested." In total, 68.4 % (addition of "not at all interested" and "somewhat interested") of Chinese-Americans expressed a low level of political interest, followed by 60.12% of Vietnamese, 58.03% of Filipinos, 49.68% of Indians, 49.43% of Koreans, and 46.46% of Japanese.

Table 2 and Table 3 display the frequency of voter registration and voting in the 2004 presidential election. Regarding the voter registration rate, 44.63% of Chinese-Americans said that they were not registered, which was the highest

**Table 1. Chinese-Americans' level of political interest**

Subgroup \ % (number)	Not at all interested	Somewhat interested	Interested	Very interested	Total
Chinese	23.87 (290)	44.53 (541)	20.91 (254)	10.70 (130)	100.00 (1,215)
Indian	17.20 (188)	32.48 (355)	20.31 (222)	30.01 (328)	100.00 (1,093)
Filipino	23.75 (142)	34.28 (205)	26.25 (157)	15.72 (94)	100.00 (598)
Vietnamese	21.89 (146)	38.23 (255)	28.04 (187)	11.84 (79)	100.00 (667)
Korean	11.58 (71)	37.85 (232)	36.22 (222)	14.36 (88)	100.00 (613)
Japanese	8.36 (45)	38.10 (205)	31.60 (170)	21.93 (118)	100.00 (538)

**Table 2. Voter registration rate of Chinese-Americans**

Subgroup \ % (number)	Not registered	Registered	Total
Chinese	44.63 (557)	55.37 (691)	100.00 (1,248)
Indian	24.73 (271)	75.27 (825)	100.00 (1,096)
Filipino	27.03 (163)	72.97 (440)	100.00 (603)
Vietnamese	26.29 (189)	73.71 (530)	100.00 (719)
Korean	36.97 (227)	63.03 (387)	100.00 (614)
Japanese	35.56 (192)	64.44 (348)	100.00 (540)

**Table 3. Voting participation by Chinese-Americans**

Subgroup \ % (number)	Not voted	Voted	Total
Chinese	59.62 (744)	40.38 (504)	100.00 (1,248)
Indian	45.62 (500)	54.38 (596)	100.00 (1,096)
Filipino	40.13 (242)	59.87 (361)	100.00 (603)
Vietnamese	37.97 (273)	62.03 (446)	100.00 (719)
Korean	52.12 (320)	47.88 (294)	100.00 (614)
Japanese	43.52 (235)	56.48 (305)	100.00 (540)

among all the subgroups of Asian-Americans. With regard to the other subgroups, 36.97% of Koreans, 35.56% of Japanese, 27.03% of Filipinos, 26.29% of Vietnamese, and 24.73% of Indians reported that they were not registered. Table 3 presents data on the voter participation. The voter turnout of the Asian-American subgroups was lowest among the Chinese, with 59.62% of Chinese respondents stating that they had “not voted”. The voter turnout rates of the other subgroups were as follows: Koreans (52.12%), Indians (45.62%), Japanese (43.52%), Filipinos (40.13%), and Vietnamese (37.97%).

With regard to aspects of political engagement studied, the above results suggest that Chinese-Americans are the least participatory of all the subgroups of Asian-Americans, with less interest in politics, a lower rate of voter registration, and a lower rate of voting in the election. The two survey questionnaire items regarding party identification were used to further examine the inactiveness of Chinese-Americans. Table 4 displays the frequency results based on the question: “Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, Democrat, Independent, belonging to some other party, or do you not think in these terms?” A total of 27.56% of Chinese chose the response item “do not think in these terms” compared to 26.38% of Koreans, 21.90% of Indians, 20.90% of Filipinos, 19.44% of Japanese, and 16.97% of Vietnamese. Additionally, about 10% of Chinese respondents said that “they don’t know”. Those who responded that “they do not think in these terms” or “they do not know” might be less accustomed to or more unfamiliar with the American political process. Those who are less accustomed to the political system or unfamiliar with the system are less likely to be active participants in politics. The results imply that Chinese-Americans are more likely than other Asian-American subgroups not to be engaged in U.S. politics.

Table 5 shows the responses to the question: “Do you think there are important differences between the Democratic Party and the Republican Party?” Again, it

was Chinese-Americans who mostly responded ‘No’ (21.47%), followed by Filipinos (17.91%), Indians (16.33%), Japanese (15.74%), Koreans (15.47%), and Vietnamese (15.02%). These results indicate that Chinese-Americans are most likely to perceive no difference between the two political parties in U.S. politics. Given the significance of the established two-party system in the political process in the U.S., this might point to a low level of political incorporation of Chinese-Americans in mainstream society.

**Table 4. Party identification by Chinese-Americans**

Subgroup \ % (number)	Do not think in these terms	Do not know	Republican	Democrat	Independent	Other party	Refused	Total
Chinese	27.56 (344)	10.18 (127)	6.57 (82)	25.80 (322)	29.33 (366)	0.24 (3)	0.32 (4)	100.00 (1,248)
Indian	21.90 (240)	3.10 (34)	6.75 (74)	39.96 (438)	23.54 (258)	0.73 (8)	4.01 (44)	100.00 (1,096)
Filipino	20.90 (126)	5.47 (33)	19.73 (119)	30.18 (182)	18.74 (113)	0.66 (4)	4.31 (26)	100.00 (603)
Vietnamese	16.97 (122)	10.57 (76)	35.74 (257)	16.41 (118)	19.75 (142)	0.00 (0)	0.56 (4)	100.00 (719)
Korean	26.38 (162)	7.49 (46)	21.01 (129)	34.04 (209)	7.98 (49)	0.49 (3)	2.61 (16)	100.00 (614)
Japanese	19.44 (105)	6.67 (36)	14.63 (79)	38.70 (209)	16.85 (91)	0.19 (1)	3.52 (19)	100.00 (540)

**Table 5. Chinese attitudes toward party**

Subgroup \ % (number)	Yes	No	Skip/NA	Don't know	Refused	Total
Chinese	44.47 (555)	21.47 (268)	4.73 (59)	29.17 (364)	0.16 (2)	100.00 (1,248)
Indian	65.88 (722)	16.33 (179)	5.66 (62)	10.95 (120)	1.19 (13)	100.00 (1,096)
Filipino	59.54 (359)	17.91 (108)	7.30 (44)	14.59 (88)	0.66 (4)	100.00 (603)
Vietnamese	48.40 (348)	15.02 (108)	12.80 (92)	23.64 (170)	0.14 (1)	100.00 (719)
Korean	51.47 (316)	15.47 (95)	8.47 (52)	23.78 (146)	0.81 (5)	100.00 (614)
Japanese	52.04 (281)	15.74 (85)	15.00 (81)	15.74 (85)	1.48 (8)	100.00 (540)

The basic frequency results consistently revealed variance among the different ethnic groups and inactivity of Chinese-Americans in the U.S. political process. The results reinforce the necessity of examining each Asian subgroup separately. As reported by Ong and Scott (2009), nativistic groups view a low level of participation by immigrants in political life as a sign of unwillingness to become truly American. However, it has not further examined whether low participation is due to a lack of desire or constraints beyond their control (Ong and Scott 2009).

A regression analysis was performed to identify the determinants of Chinese-American's political involvement. According to the results in Table 6, the following variables were significant: contact with a political organization, education, and citizenship. Those who were contacted by political organizations, well educated, and U.S. citizens tended to exhibit a high level of political interest.

**Table 6. Ordered regression: political interest**

	B	SE	Odds ratio
Party contact	0.275	0.214	1.317
Organization contact	0.871***	0.244	2.390
Age	0.003	0.007	1.003
Gender	-0.261	0.172	0.770
Education	0.157***	0.044	1.170
Household income	-0.047	0.047	0.954
Homeownership	0.161	0.211	1.175
Marital status	-0.257	0.290	0.773
Birth place	0.162	0.594	1.176
Length of residency	-0.009	0.011	0.991
Citizenship	0.536**	0.226	1.708
Discrimination	0.091	0.071	1.095
Linked fate	-0.139	0.165	0.870
Political trust	0.037	0.066	1.038
External efficacy	0.003	0.065	1.003
Internal efficacy	0.062	0.069	1.064
Log likelihood	-647.7974		
McKelvey and Zavonia's R <sup>2</sup>	0.110		
McFadden's R <sup>2</sup>	0.017		
N	529		

Note: P values: \*\*\*<0.01, \*\*<0.05, \*<0.10

Table 7 shows the results of the analysis of the factors affecting nonvoting activities. Several variables had a significant impact on nonvoting activities. Age was significant, with a negative sign, with young people apparently more likely to take part in nonvoting activities. In line with previous studies (Converse, Clausen, and Miller 1965; Jennings and Niemi 1974), age also influenced Chinese-Americans' political behavior. Education and income also had a positive impact on nonvoting participation, suggesting that those with a high socio-economic status are more likely to take part in nonvoting activities. Two ethnicity-related

variables were significant: birthplace and discrimination. Those who had been born in the U.S. and those who had experienced discrimination tended to be more participatory. In addition, political interest had a positive effect on nonvoting participation. Most importantly, two mobilization variables, party contact and organization contact, significantly influenced the level of engagement of Chinese-Americans in nonvoting activities.

**Table 7. Ordered regression: Nonvoting participation**

	B	SE	Odds ratio
Party contact	0.774***	0.217	2.169
Organization contact	0.476*	0.251	1.609
Age	-0.015*	0.008	0.985
Gender	-0.110	0.173	0.896
Education	0.128***	0.045	1.137
Household income	0.108**	0.048	1.114
Homeownership	-0.285	0.217	0.752
Marital status	-0.065	0.301	0.937
Birth place	1.346**	0.553	3.844
Length of residency	0.004	0.011	1.004
Citizenship	0.230	0.231	1.258
Discrimination	0.273***	0.072	1.315
Linked fate	0.174	0.169	1.190
Political trust	-0.097	0.067	0.907
Political interest	0.450***	0.096	1.569
External efficacy	-0.020	0.065	0.980
Internal efficacy	-0.015	0.069	0.985
Log likelihood	-680.653		
McKelvey and Zavonia's R <sup>2</sup>	0.280		
McFadden's R <sup>2</sup>	0.076		
N	528		

Note: P values: \*\*\*<0.01, \*\*<0.05, \*<0.10

Table 8 displays the results of the logistic regression of voter registration. The following factors were associated with the likelihood of registering as a voter: political party contact, older age, residing in the U.S. for a long period, and interest in politics. According to the logistic regression results for voting in the election (Table 9), party contact, older age, income, length of residency, and internal efficacy influenced voting among Chinese-Americans.

The results of the regression analyses of the four different modes of political engagement showed that Chinese-Americans' political engagement may differ, depending on the mode of political participation. The factors that influenced political interest differed from those that affected voter registration, and variables that influenced nonvoting activities were not influential when considered in terms of voter registration and voting. As previous studies rightly pointed out (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, Rim 2009), this indicates that each type of political engagement requires different resources and orientation.

**Table 8. Logistic regression: voter registration**

	B	SE
Party contact	0.596*	0.361
Organization contact	0.188	0.424
Age	0.020**	0.011
Gender	-0.089	0.268
Education	0.113	0.081
Household income	0.054	0.076
Homeownership	-0.147	0.329
Marital status	-0.471	0.478
Birth place	0.343	1.196
Length of residency	0.051***	0.019
Discrimination	0.028	0.116
Linked fate	0.405	0.264
Political trust	-0.019	0.104
Political interest	0.468***	0.153
External efficacy	-0.154	0.105
Internal efficacy	0.187	0.124
Constant	-2.287	.963
Log likelihood	-190.686	
McKelvey and Zavonia's R <sup>2</sup>	0.309	
McFadden's R <sup>2</sup>	0.058	
N	414	

Note: P values: \*\*\*<0.01, \*\*<0.05, \*<0.10

**Table 9. Logistic regression: voting participation**

	B	SE
Party contact	0.874***	0.288
Organization contact	0.355	0.350
Age	0.040***	0.011
Gender	0.305	0.238
Education	0.046	0.066
Household income	0.118*	0.066
Homeownership	-0.084	0.305
Marital status	-0.502	0.428
Birth place	0.268	0.878
Length of residency	0.062***	0.017
Discrimination	-0.017	0.099
Linked fate	0.175	0.231
Political trust	-0.083	0.091
Political interest	0.206	0.129
External efficacy	0.002	0.090
Internal efficacy	0.192*	0.102
Constant	-4.417	.911
Log likelihood	-233.308	
McKelvey and Zavonia's R <sup>2</sup>	0.341	
McFadden's R <sup>2</sup>	0.111	
N	414	

Note: P values: \*\*\*<0.01, \*\*<0.05, \*<0.10

One of the most interesting findings was that the mobilization variables consistently displayed a significant impact, regardless of the different modes of political engagement. Party contact encouraged nonvoting activities, voter registration, and voting among Chinese-Americans, and organization contact led to stronger interest in politics and more active participation in nonvoting activities. It is noteworthy that the impact of mobilization translates from one to another mode of political engagement.

## **5. Discussion**

Ethnic minorities have been reported to be less likely to participate in politics, relative to dominant ethnic groups (Seo 2011). In line with this finding, the results of the present study indicated that Chinese-Americans were not actively involved in the political process in the U.S.; in fact, they were the least active ethnic group among all the Asian-American subgroups.

The participation of ordinary citizens in the political process is considered a prerequisite for a healthy democracy because individuals can influence the distribution of resources and gain political representation by taking part in political activities. Ethnic minorities constitute important members of a multicultural society (Leighley 2001, Junn 1999). If minority groups do not take part in politics, and the political process is controlled only by the dominant ethnic group, the country can be considered not to be functioning well with regards to democracy (Leighley 2001, Junn 1999). The political alienation of minority groups means that they have a weak voice in the political arena, which translates into a greater gulf between the state and its people (Ong and Scott 2009). Including minority groups in the mainstream public sphere is a priority in many democracies (Seo 2011). The best way to encourage members of minority groups to engage more in political life is the subject of heated public debate (Cumper and Wheatley 1999, d'Entrèves 2002).

As noted earlier, many previous studies have tended to assume that a minority group is homogeneous and monolith and ignored potential differences that may exist in the political attitudes/behaviors of various minority subgroups. The term Asian-Americans is used to refer to all individuals with ethnic origins from various Asian countries. As Phan and Garcia (2009) rightly pointed out, “the umbrella of Asian-Americans may mask important variations among the various Asian-American subgroups” (p. 891). The present study argues that more research is needed to disaggregate Asian-Americans into each subgroup. Examining each Asian-American subgroup separately and then comparing the results will offer a greater understanding of the attitudes and behaviors of the diverse subgroups.

As a preliminary attempt, this study focused on Chinese-Americans. According to the results of the present study, the significant factors influencing Chinese-Americans' political engagement were age, education, income, length of residency, political interest, internal efficacy, and mobilization. The significant

impact of education and income conforms to the findings of previous studies, which showed that racial minorities with a high socio-economic status tended to participate in politics more than less-advantaged white Americans (Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004, Ramakrishnan 2005, Bueker 2005). On the other hand, the results of the present study are not in line with those of Bueker (2005), who found that poverty among immigrants from communist regimes, such as Chinese, did not have a significant impact on voter turnout. Bueker (2005) reasoned that societies that have engineered a more even distribution of wealth may have removed the link between socio-economic status and political participation.

In particular, the current study sheds light on the impact of mobilization by political parties and organizations. The party contact and organization contact variables were consistently influential in Chinese-Americans' political engagement, with the level of contact by political parties linked with the level of interest in politics, activity in nonvoting activities, voter registration, and voter turnout. Therefore, mobilization ensured higher political engagement among Chinese-Americans. These results help to further develop our understanding of the political incorporation of minority groups. In line with the implications of segmented assimilation theory, the results of the present study indicated that 'reception' (i.e. the acceptance by the host society of the immigrants) played a significant role in Chinese-Americans' political engagement. A political environment that is favorable for Chinese-Americans and that considers them important participants in the political process seems to encourage more active political participation.

The results also provide implications for policy makers. The significant effect of mobilization indicates that unfamiliarity with or a lack of awareness of the American political system among minority groups can be enlightened by greater outreach by the political institutions of the host society. Political parties, labor unions, and social organizations should make stronger efforts to reach out to members of minority groups and help ease the burden of participation felt by minorities (Wong 2006). Policies that aid mobilization activities targeted at minority groups by various political institutions will be particularly effective in over-riding political disengagement of members of minority groups and attracting them into the political arena.

This study is just a first step toward understanding the political participation of Asian-Americans. The experience of Chinese-Americans offers a complex lens through which we can understand political behaviors of other subgroups of Asian-Americans. Similar studies of Indians, Filipinos, Japanese, Vietnamese, and Koreans are needed. It would be interesting to see whether the mobilization effect is also found in these other subgroups of Asian-Americans. Furthermore, future research should be conducted on the nature of the political party or organizational contact and on the most likely targets of political mobilization. These follow-up studies will add useful information to the current literature on Asian-Americans, minority politics, and mobilization.

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