

7 Revitalizing Civic Institutions in Immigrant Communities

Long-Term Strategies

Qualitative and quantitative evidence suggests that community organizations have assumed an important role in mobilizing Asian American and Latino immigrants. Contrary to historical patterns, political parties today are not engaging immigrants through mass-mobilization efforts and have been slow to develop a significant presence in immigrant communities. Parties are operating within a larger context of demographic change as immigrant groups from all over the world, especially Asia and Latin America, enter the United States in large numbers. Party behavior is influenced by the low rates of electoral participation that Asian Americans and Latinos exhibit relative to the rest of the population: parties consequently engage in selective mobilization, focusing their efforts on groups that vote at higher rates and on those Asian Americans and Latinos who are citizens and high-propensity voters. In contrast, community organizations, which through limited mobilization seek to reach beyond the most advantaged and civically engaged Asian Americans and Latinos, appear to be taking on some of the roles parties played in the past.

Demographic Features of Asian American & Latino Populations

Regardless of which set of institutions is most active in immigrant mobilization, both the Asian American and Latino communities present demographic characteristics that have affected their levels of political participation (table 6). Both groups represent a small percentage of the total U.S. population (Asian Americans are 4 percent and Latinos 13 percent, while the non-Latino white majority is 69 percent). Historically, small population size has contributed to the low rates of Latino and Asian American mobilization, but when the 2000 Census showed that Latinos for the first

time outnumbered African Americans, the two major parties took notice. The Census also revealed that although the Asian American population has been growing quickly, that group apparently still lacks a politically significant demographic presence in the United States. This situation has deterred party mobilization, although continuing growth may change that.

TABLE 6. Demographic and Political Profile of Asian Americans and Latinos, 2000

	Asian Americans	Latinos
Percentage of U.S. population ^a	4	13
Percentage of growth 1990 to 2000 ^b	72	58
Percentage of foreign-born	69	40
Percentage of noncitizens among adults	41	39
For those over twenty-five years old, percentage with a bachelor's degree ^c	44	10
Median per capita income	\$22,352	\$12,306
Median age	31 years	26 years
Percentage under eighteen years old	27	35
Registration rate among adults (%)	31	35
Registration rate among adult citizens (%)	52	57
Voting rate among adults (%)	25	28
Voting rate among adult citizens (%)	43	45
Voting rate among registered (%)	83	79
Percentage of voters in 2000 election ^d	2	5–7
Percentage increase in voters, 1996–2000	22	19
Percentage of population residing in battleground states, 2000 ^e	20	20
Percentage of voters supporting Bush 2000	41	35
Percentage of voters supporting Gore 2000	55	62

Source: Myer 2001; U.S. Census Bureau 2001; CNN 2000; Jamieson, Shin, and Day 2002; Bauman and Graf 2003; Passell 2004; DeSipio and de la Garza 2005.

^aUnless noted, statistics are based on those who reported that they were Asian alone or Asian in combination with another race. Those who reported that they were Asian alone in the 2000 Census accounted for 3.6 percent of the U.S. population.

^bThis calculation is based on the figures for race alone or in combination in the 2000 Census. If figures for race alone were used, the growth rate is 48 percent between 1990 and 2000.

^cThis calculation is based on the figure for those who identified as Asian alone.

^dThese figures are based on DeSipio and de la Garza 2005, table 1.9; Passell 2004. Estimates of the Latino vote vary from 4 percent to 7 percent (DeSipio and de la Garza 2005, table 1.9).

^eBattleground states in 2000 included Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Iowa, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.

Neither group has a share of the electorate that equates to its share of the overall U.S. population. Asian Americans comprised just 2 percent and Latinos just 5–7 percent of the voters in the 2000 presidential election (DeSipio and de la Garza 2005, 51; Passell 2004). In 2004, exit polls showed that Asian Americans constituted 2–3 percent of the electorate and Latinos 5–8 percent.¹

Although they share some common demographic features that influence their participation in the political system, Asian Americans and Latinos differ in certain critical respects. One notable difference occurs in the area of socioeconomic status. Asian Americans as a whole exhibit the highest rates of educational achievement among the four major U.S. racial and ethnic groups. According to the 2000 Census, 44 percent of Asian Americans over age twenty-five held bachelor's degrees, compared to just 10 percent of Latinos in the same age group (table 6). The median per capita income in 2000 for Asian Americans (\$22,325) eclipsed that of Latinos (\$12,306).² Socioeconomic resources are one of the most consistent and powerful determinants of political participation, yet socioeconomic power has not translated into political power for Asian Americans. A primary reason is that a large number of foreign-born Asian American adults lack U.S. citizenship. About 40 percent of adult Asian Americans and Latinos were ineligible to vote in 2000 because they were not citizens. Having a large percentage of nonnaturalized individuals in their ranks continues to impede the participation of both Asian Americans and Latinos.

Latinos and Asian Americans also exhibit distinct patterns of naturalization. Immigrants from Asia tend to naturalize at higher rates than do those from other parts of the world, whereas immigrants from Latin America naturalize at lower rates (Portes and Rumbaut 1996). In 2000, according to Jeffrey Passell, only 30 percent of Latino immigrants with legal documents had naturalized, compared to 80 percent of immigrants from other parts of the world, and if Latino immigrants had naturalized at the same rate as other immigrants, an estimated seven hundred thousand additional Latinos would have been eligible to vote in 2000 (2004, 1). Changes in naturalization rates, especially those that result from efforts to streamline and accelerate the process, would likely result in higher rates of citizenship for both Latino and Asian American immigrants, inducing both Republicans and Democrats to pay greater attention to these newcomers.

Voter-registration rates for both Asian Americans and Latinos are also

quite low. Only about one-third of adult Asian Americans and Latinos were registered to vote in 2000, but the registration rate climbs moderately for citizens in that group. For the registered voters, the turnout rates compare quite favorably with other groups—83 percent for Asian Americans and 79 percent for Latinos, compared to 86 percent for registered whites and 84 percent for registered blacks. Thus, racial and ethnic gaps in electoral participation shrink considerably after Asian Americans and Latinos register to vote but not when they merely meet the citizenship eligibility requirement for voting by naturalizing. Registration is clearly a key to increasing voting participation for both groups.

Citizenship status and registration are not the only demographic characteristics that affect electoral participation rates. Age also matters, since voters must be at least eighteen years old. In 2000, 27 percent of Asian Americans and 35 percent of Latinos were under eighteen, compared to 23 percent of white Americans. As Latino and Asian American young people come of political age, voting rates for both groups will no doubt increase. Until that time, however, lack of citizenship, low rates of registration, and a young population will continue to depress Asian American and Latino electoral participation.

Because members of these two groups do not vote at high rates, parties and candidates fail to target many in those groups for mass mobilization. The belief that, as groups, Asians and Latinos do not vote leads political strategists to ignore many immigrants, even though assistance with naturalization and particularly with registration could belie that assumption. The lack of interest in mobilizing Asian Americans and Latinos (at least those outside of the battleground states), whether newcomers or citizens, further depresses their rates of participation, creating a pattern of neglect by the mainstream parties. Parties may be overlooking an important trend, however. Recent years have seen a dramatic increase in the number of Asian American and Latino voters. From 1996 to 2000, the number of Latino voters increased 19 percent and that of Asian American voters increased 22 percent (table 6; see also Passell 2004). In contrast, the number of white voters increased just 4 percent.

In recent elections, mobilization by the two major parties has also depended on a group having a strong demographic presence in a battleground state. The vast majority of Asian Americans are concentrated on the East and West Coasts. In 2000, more than half of the Asian American population lived in just three states—California, New York, and Hawaii—

and Asian Americans accounted for more than 10 percent of the populations of California and Hawaii. However, only 20 percent of Asian Americans lived in battleground states, compared to 40 percent of non-Latino whites. Latinos are also regionally concentrated, with half living in just two states, California and Texas. However, although only 20 percent of all Latinos lived in battleground states in 2000, the Latino population was significant in certain ones. In particular, Latinos constitute a significant part of the population in Florida, Arizona, and New Mexico, critical states in close elections. Along with their larger demographic presence, Latinos' growing clout in battleground states partially accounts for why the two parties paid more attention to Latinos than to Asian Americans in 2000 and 2004.

In the 2000 election, exit polls showed that Latino and Asian American voters supported Al Gore at rates of 62 percent for Latinos and 55 percent for Asian Americans, while 35 percent of Latinos and 41 percent of Asian Americans voted for George W. Bush. In 2004, the Republican incumbent seemed to have made impressive gains among Latinos, gaining support from 44 percent of the members of that group, compared to 53 percent who backed his challenger, John Kerry (3 percent of the Latino electorate favored Ralph Nader or another candidate) (CNN 2004). Forty-four percent of Asian Americans voted for Bush, while 56 percent supported Kerry (CNN 2004). However, after the 2004 election, scholars and pundits argued that the exit poll data (based on polls sponsored by a consortium of media outlets, including NBC and CNN) relied on flawed sampling and weighting techniques that exaggerated Latino support for Bush (Fears 2004; Southwest Voter Registration and Education Project 2004). Regardless of the controversy over the validity of the exit poll results, most observers agreed that vote choice and partisan loyalties among Latinos remain "volatile" and were not solidified by the events of 2004 (Alonso-Zaldivar 2004). Similarly, although Asian Americans leaned toward the Democratic candidate in both races, their party loyalties are far from assured (Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004, 16). Although neither party has consolidated support among Asian Americans and Latinos, this fact manifests itself quite differently in terms of the parties' approach to each group. Both parties seem to believe that they can eventually win the support of Latinos with largely symbolic efforts. In contrast, the parties' appear to see Asian Americans not as potential swing voters but as a group that splits its vote and is therefore not worth mobilizing.

Despite its high level of educational attainment and economic power, parties are not likely to perceive Asian Americans as an important voting bloc because the group is relatively small and contains such a large proportion of nonnaturalized individuals and because those who are citizens exhibit low voter-registration rates. Low rates of voting contribute to a vicious cycle, as parties are reluctant to spend resources on those whom they view as being apathetic. Because the group is seen as having split partisan loyalties, neither party seems to view it as desirable to mobilize. Lack of party mobilization then further depresses participation. The concentration of the Asian American population outside the battleground states, the primary focus of recent presidential elections, has reinforced this pattern.

Latino demographics also exhibit traits that are associated with depressed political participation. Latinos are characterized by a high proportion of nonnaturalized individuals who are ineligible to vote and a high proportion of young people not yet of voting age (table 6). The low socioeconomic position of many Latinos constitutes another deterrent to their political participation. Despite their long history in the United States, Latinos have been slow to garner recognition from the two parties. However, the overall size of the Latino population in relation to other groups in the United States and the belief that their party loyalties can be won has now resulted in increasing attention, but it has been primarily symbolic and focused on registered Latino voters living in battleground states. As a consequence of these many factors, an increase in voter turnout has not developed despite the brisk growth rate for the Latino population.

Republican vs Democratic Strategy: Short-Term or Short-sighted?

The parties' strategic targeting of high-propensity voters in battleground states may appear rational at first glance, but there are reasons to believe that this approach is shortsighted. As the largest minority population in the United States, Latinos have demographic strength. Asian Americans, the fastest-growing of the four major racial and ethnic groups during the 1990s, are not far behind. The U.S. Census Bureau projects that those identifying as "Asian alone" (not in combination with another race) will approach 10 percent of the U.S. population within the next four decades (U.S. Census Bureau 2004). Further, the numbers of Asian American and Latino voters are increasing at a much faster pace than the numbers for their white counterparts. Therefore, a longer-term approach to mobilizing Asian Americans and Latinos could have a dual benefit of speeding up par-

ticipation rates for both groups and solidifying group loyalty to a given party.

At present, however, parties have not taken a long-term approach to mobilizing Asian Americans or Latinos, especially the immigrant members of these communities. In contrast to the past, parties have not been mobilizing immigrants on a mass level in the communities where they live. They primarily engage in selective mobilization of the most likely voters. Community organizations such as labor organizations, workers' centers, advocacy and social service organizations, ethnic voluntary associations, and religious institutions have stepped into the breach, but many of their efforts face significant challenges, such as lack of financial resources and competing priorities dictated by organizational mission. Thus, they engage in limited mobilization. Given that parties fail consistently to mobilize immigrants and that community organizations are limited in their ability or resources for a mass mobilization of immigrants, long-term, gradual political socialization over time may represent the only mechanism currently operating to increase the participation of large numbers of immigrants in the political system.

The Passage of Time as a Mechanism for Increasing Political Participation

A consistent theme during the interviews with Chinese and Mexican immigrants and community leaders was the importance of length of residence as an influence on contemporary immigrants' political participation in the United States. Those who work closely with immigrant communities often remarked on this relationship. One Mexican organizer in New York compared the political organization of Mexican communities in New York to those in Los Angeles and Chicago: "California was Mexico before, and Chicago is another place where Mexicans were there in the beginning of the century, so they have a lot of organizations—a lot. They have one organization for teachers, for students, for people who sell on the streets, for flower vendors—for everything, they have an organization. But they have been there for a hundred years." He emphasized that because the Mexican community in New York is relatively new, it will take time to establish an organizational infrastructure and develop leaders. Most community leaders mentioned that they expect to see more and varied political participation in their communities as individual members' duration of residence in the United States lengthens.

The director of a social-service center serving a mostly Chinese immi-

grant population in Sunset Park, New York, emphasized the political gains his community had gradually made: “We are seeing improvement. We saw that maybe five or six years ago—we were probably able to serve fifty or sixty people a day on Election Day. The last Election Day was about the local community school board, [and] we were able to mobilize a little over fifteen hundred Chinese to come out and vote. It’s really amazing because that has never happened in the Brooklyn area.” Interviews with immigrants themselves also show a consistent relationship between length of residence and political involvement. Chinese and Mexican respondents in the study indicated that they were more interested in U.S. politics at the time of the interview than when they had first arrived. When asked if she had become more interested in U.S. politics, one Chinese immigrant in Los Angeles responded, “When I first came, I didn’t even want to bother listening. But now, after living here for so long, it’s inevitable for me to become more interested than when I first was.”

Length of Residence and Political Participation

Data from the Current Population Survey show a very strong association between length of residence and political participation across a representative sample of immigrant groups (Ramakrishnan and Espenshade 2001; Ramakrishnan 2003). For immigrant citizens from each of the four major U.S. racial and ethnic groups, voting participation increases dramatically with length of residence in the United States (see figure 1). Using the Current Population Survey 2002 Volunteer Supplement, a nationally representative sample that includes a large proportion of immigrants, S. Karthick Ramakrishnan (2003) found that long-term residents are more likely to work as volunteers than are new arrivals.³ All four major U.S. racial groups demonstrated a strong relationship between length of residence and volunteering, although, across time, the relationship was most consistent for Asian American and Latino immigrants.

Alejandro Portes and Rubén Rumbaut (1996, 108), two prominent scholars of contemporary immigration, claim that not until after the passing of the first generation do subsequent generations of Latinos and Asian Americans turn their attention to U.S. politics. However, we should not dismiss the political participation of first-generation immigrants. Past studies of immigrant communities have emphasized that length of residence is an important determinant of civic participation for first-generation immigrants (Cain, Kiewiet, and Uhlaner 1991; Arvizu and Garcia 1996; Ong

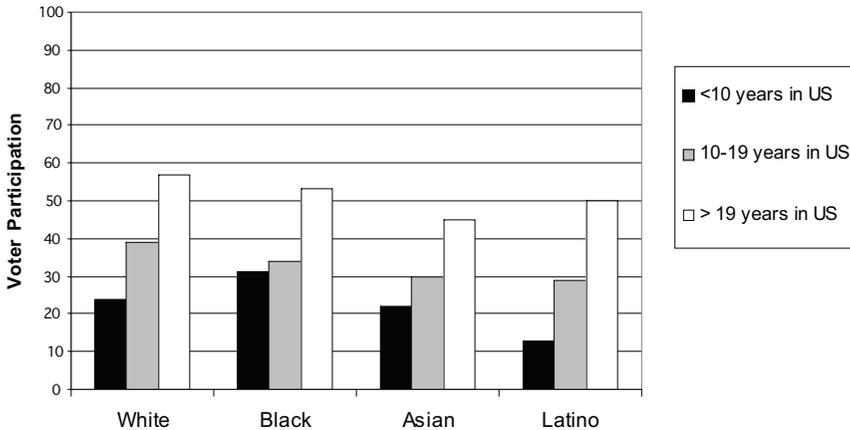


Fig. 1. Length of residence and voting participation among immigrants, midterm elections, 1994–98. (Data from Ramakrishnan and Espenshade 2001.)

and Nakanishi 1996; Jones-Correa 1998; Lien 2000; J. Wong 2001). These studies rely on data collected primarily in the late 1980s and early 1990s and, in some cases, data that are geographically limited to a particular state. More recent data from the 1999 *Washington Post*/Kaiser/Harvard University Survey of Latinos in America (LAT) and the 2000–2001 Pilot National Asian American Political Survey (PNAAPS) also show a positive association between length of residence and the political participation of contemporary Asian American and Latino immigrants. (For details on the LAT and PNAAPS, see appendix, tables A1, A2). In addition, these surveys include a wider range of questions than the Current Population Survey contains, allowing for a more in-depth analysis of that association.

The PNAAPS asked Asian Americans if they were registered to vote and if they had voted in 2000. A third question asked, “During the past four years, have you participated in any of the following types of political activity in your community?” Respondents picked activities from a list that included writing or phoning a government official, donating money to a campaign, signing a petition for a political cause, or taking part in a protest or demonstration. (For the exact wording of questions measuring participation in activities other than voting, see appendix, table A7.) Analysis excluded those who have lived in the United States for fewer than five

years, the residency period required to naturalize and thus to register and to vote.⁴

For naturalized Asian Americans, registration rates increased with length of U.S. residence (see figure 2). Those who have lived in the United States for twenty-one years or longer are actually more likely to be registered voters (93 percent) than are U.S.-born Asian Americans (85 percent). A similar pattern holds for Asian American voter turnout in 2000. Of the Asian Americans who had lived in the United States for less than ten years, fewer than 30 percent indicated that they had voted, compared to more than 50 percent for those who had lived there for twenty-one years or more. Again, Asian immigrants who are long-term residents are even more likely to have voted in 2000 than are native-born Asian Americans. Answers to the third question also revealed that length of U.S. residence is a factor. For example, just 35 percent of those who have lived in the United States for less than a decade indicated that they had participated in a political activity other than voting during the four years prior to the survey, compared to 55 percent for those who have lived there for between twenty-one and twenty-five years. Interestingly, participation among the longest-term residents (twenty-six years or more) drops off slightly. Overall, however, participation in activities other than voting appears to increase with length of residence.

Using the LAT survey, voting participation was measured based on whether respondents voted in 1996 or 1998. (See appendix for details on the survey methodology.) Both election years are included in an attempt to capture consistent voting behavior. Turnout in a presidential election (1996) tends to be higher than turnout for a congressional election (1998), but people are more likely to recall whether they voted in the more recent election. Unlike the questions in the PNAAPS, the questions in the LAT measure participation in political activities other than voting by asking about whether respondents had worked or volunteered for a Latino political candidate; attended a public meeting or demonstration regarding Latino concerns; or contributed money to a Latino candidate or organization. The survey did not have a measure of general participation (that is, one that was not specifically related to supporting a Latino candidate or cause).

Like their Asian American counterparts, the Latino immigrants in the United States for the longest period of time are more likely to report that they had registered and voted than are more recent arrivals. Latinos who

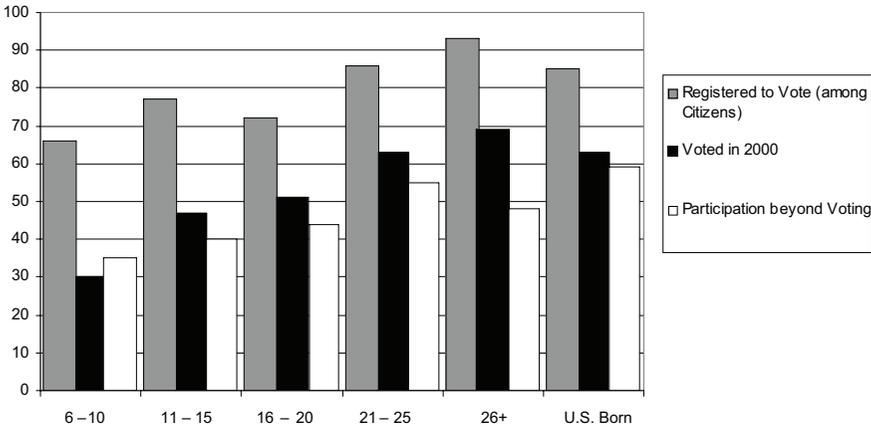


Fig. 2. Political activity and years of U.S. residence: Asian Americans. (*Note:* Statistics on voting do not take into account eligibility. As shown, eligibility [registration] is also time dependent.) (Data from PNAAPS.)

have lived in the United States for twenty-six years or longer are just as likely to have registered and voted as are U.S.-born Latinos (figure 3). Participation in political activities other than voting is more consistent over time, although the newest residents are less likely to have participated (28 percent) than are residents who have lived in the United States for at least 26 years (35 percent).

Is it possible that these changes in political participation over time are simply a matter of increases in socioeconomic resources or age? In other words, might the basic socioeconomic model of political participation explain these trends? Using LAT data on voter registration and controlling for immigrant age and socioeconomic status, separate regression models tested for the effects of length of residence on voting in 1996 or 1998 and participation in political activities other than voting for Latinos (see table 7). Controlling in one equation for socioeconomic status (measured as education and income), age, and length of residence allows us to examine the separate effects of each variable on the type of political participation included in each model. The relationship between age and political participation is curvilinear for the Latino sample, indicating that Latino individ-

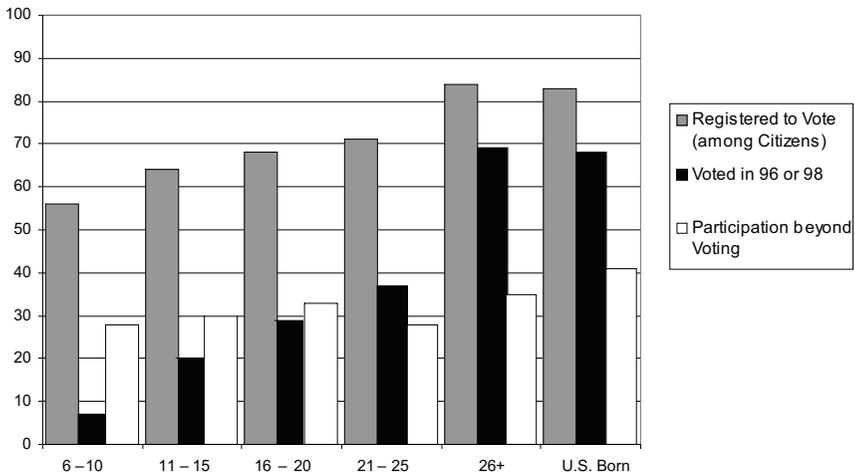


Fig. 3. Political activity and years of U.S. residence: Latinos. (*Note:* Statistics on voting do not take into account eligibility. As shown, eligibility [registration] is also time dependent.) (Data from LAT.)

TABLE 7. Political Participation and Length of Residence among Latinos

	Registered (among citizens)		Voted in 1996 or 1998 (among registered)		Participation in activities other than voting	
	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE
Education	.16***	.06	.36**	.09	.13***	.04
Household income	.04	.06	.00	.09	.05	.04
Age	.01	.00	.09**	.04	.06***	.02
Age squared	.01	.03	.00	.00	.00***	.00
Years in the United States	.03**	.01	.05*	.02	.02***	.01
Constant	-.78	.75	-3.33	1.01	-.27	.41
	-2 (Log-Likelihood) Initial = 663.74		-2 (Log-Likelihood) Initial = 393.36		-2 (Log-Likelihood) Initial = 1,647.18	
	-2 (Log-Likelihood) Convergence = 632.17		-2 (Log-Likelihood) Convergence = 338.87		-2 (Log-Likelihood) Convergence = 1,610.22	
	Chi-Square 31.58 (df 5)		Chi-Square 54.46 (df 5)		Chi-Square 36.96 (df 5)	
	$p < .00$		$p < .00$		$p < .00$	
	N = 571		N = 418		N = 1,329	

Source: LAT.

Note: Foreign-born sample only. Logistic regression used for all models.

* $p \leq .10$ ** $p \leq .05$ *** $p \leq .01$

uals are more likely to participate in politics as they grow older; among the very oldest, however, participation begins to drop off. Thus, a variable (age squared) that captures the curvilinear nature of the relationship is included. A similar set of analyses was conducted using the PNAAPS sample (see table 8). For both analyses, only those eligible to vote were included.

The most important result of these analyses is the consistently positive, statistically significant relationship between length of residence and the likelihood of Latino and Asian immigrants registering to vote, voting, and participating in political activities other than voting. And this holds true even after controlling for age, income, and education. With the exception of Asian-immigrant voter turnout in 2000, which shows a negative association between length of residence and participation, when one takes into account respondents' age, income, and education, length of residence exerts a positive influence on whether Asian American and Latino immigrants participate politically.

TABLE 8. Political Participation and Length of Residence among Asian Americans

	Registered (among citizens)		Voted in 2000 (among registered)		Participation in activities other than voting	
	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE
Education	.20**	.09	.45**	.12	.22***	.06
Household income	.10	.08	-.08	.10	.15***	.05
Age	.03***	.01	.04***	.01	.01	.01
Years in the United States	.04**	.02	-.06***	.02	.02*	.06
Constant	-1.65**	.55	-.49	.77	-2.39***	.36
	-2 (Log-Likelihood)		-2 (Log-Likelihood)		-2 (Log-Likelihood)	
	Initial = 489.27		Initial = 332.72		Initial = 1,041.92	
	-2 (Log-Likelihood)		-2 (Log-Likelihood)		-2 (Log-Likelihood)	
	Convergence = 451.39		Convergence = 300.46		Convergence = 991.92	
	Chi-Square 37.91(df 4)		Chi-Square 32.26 (df 4)		Chi-Square 50.00 (df 4)	
	<i>p</i> < .00		<i>p</i> < .00		<i>p</i> < .00	
	N = 460		N = 357		N = 773	

Source: PNAAPS.

Note: Foreign-born sample only. Logistic regression used for all models.

p* ≤ .10 *p* ≤ .05 ****p* ≤ .01

Although for Asian immigrants, the relationship between length of residence and 2000 voter turnout is negative ($b = -.06$), an examination of consistency in voting (measured by voter behavior in 1998 and 2000) yields a positive and statistically significant relationship ($b = .03$, standard error = .01) (see tables 8 and 9). Length of residence is not a critical predictor of Asian-immigrant voter turnout in 2000, but a positive association exists between length of residence and turnout in the two consecutive elections. Thus, regardless of differences in age, income, and education, with each additional year of U.S. residence, Asian Americans can be expected to vote more consistently.

The effect of length of residence on Asian American and Latino political participation is highlighted by the following example.⁵ The likelihood that a forty-five-year-old Mexican immigrant citizen with average education and income who has lived in the United States for just five years would be registered to vote is 64 percent, while that figure is 75 percent for an immigrant who has been in the United States for twenty years. Similarly, for a forty-seven-year-old Asian American immigrant citizen with average education and income who has lived in the United States for five years, the likelihood of being registered is 75 percent, versus 83 percent for an Asian American with the same characteristics who has lived in the United States for twenty years.

The findings also confirm that at the individual level, socioeconomic

TABLE 9. Consistent Turnout among Asian Americans

	Turned out in 1998 and 2000	
Education	.19**	.09
Household income	-.13*	.08
Age	.02***	.01
Years in the United States	.03**	.01
Constant	-2.39***	.64
-2 (Log-Likelihood) Initial = 455.84		
-2 (Log-Likelihood) Convergence = 432.89		
Chi-Square 23.76 (df 4)		
$p < .00$		
$N = 357$		

Source: PNAAPS.

Note: Foreign-born sample only. Logistic regression used for all models.

* $p \leq .10$ ** $p \leq .05$ *** $p \leq .01$

status, especially education, is often a strong predictor of political participation among Asian American and Latino immigrants.⁶ This conforms to what we know about the positive relationship between education and political involvement for European immigrants (an analysis of a European immigrant sample is shown in appendix, table A8) and for the general population in the United States (Verba and Nie 1972; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995).⁷ However, the results of the analyses of the LAT and PNAAPS data show that even when socioeconomic status is taken into account, length of residence is almost always key to the political participation of immigrants. We can conclude, then, that although socioeconomic resources are important for immigrant participation, the passage of time matters a great deal as well and exhibits an independent relationship with participation.⁸

What types of acculturation processes explain why length of residence matters for political participation? Additional multivariate analysis shows that for Asian Americans, length of residence sometimes has an indirect effect on political participation (J. Wong n.d.). That is, the effects of length of residence can be explained by specific acculturation processes, such as becoming more fluent in English, obtaining citizenship, or experiencing discrimination. For Latino immigrants, the direct effects of length of residence on political participation persist, even when adaptive processes are taken into account.

Contemporary Immigrants Are Similar to Earlier European Immigrants

Researchers who have compared earlier European immigrant groups to contemporary Asian and Latin American immigrant groups generally agree that the former were more active in politics than are the latter (see, for example, DeSipio 2001; Sterne 2001; Waters 2001; Schier 2002). How different are contemporary Asian American and Latino immigrants from European immigrants of the past? Despite the low levels of political participation among Asian American and Latino immigrants today, the *process* of becoming politically involved over time, at least at the individual level, does not appear to differ from that experienced by earlier European immigrants.

It is especially useful to compare the experience of Irish immigrants to that of contemporary nonwhite immigrants because the Irish constituted “the first great ethnic minority in American cities” (Sowell 1986, 17). The

Irish represent a historical example of a “distinct and active ethnic group in American political life” (Cochran 1995, 590). For the Irish Americans who arrived during the 1800s, political success accumulated over several decades (Barone 2001). As one historian describes Irish Americans’ political prospects over time, “The Irish began their political career in New York as the pawns of the Democratic machine. They exchanged their votes for unskilled jobs, petty licenses, and other relatively low-cost benefits. These ‘crumbs’ represented the absolute highest these impoverished newcomers expected. But as they grew in number, they became more American. . . . The crumbs grew into substantial slices, and by the 1860s, the time of [Boss] Tweed’s hegemony, the Irish garnered the most jobs, the best patronage, and increasingly significant positions, even key leadership roles” (Diner quoted in Barone 2001, 52).

Kristi Andersen’s (1979) case study of turnout in immigrant wards in Chicago also illustrates participation patterns among immigrants in the 1920s and 1930s. She finds that in the wards with the highest percentage of foreign-born residents from Europe, voter turnout increased dramatically over time. She estimates that in 1924, less than one-third of the potential electorate in immigrant neighborhoods voted, but by 1940, that figure rose to half. In a ward of mostly Czech and a few Russian immigrants, for example, turnout grew from 43 percent in 1924 to 75 percent in 1940 (109). Andersen attributes this surge primarily to mobilization of nonvoters by the Chicago Democratic machine, but it may also be traced in part to processes of acculturation that occurred over time as immigrants became more knowledgeable about and familiar with the political system, learned English, and acquired citizenship.⁹ Thus, it seems European immigrants’ political participation increased gradually along with length of residence.

Similarly, the passage of time (measured by length of residence) appears today to exert a powerful force on both Asian and Latino immigrant political participation. According to my statistical analysis, a potent association exists between length of residence and political participation for both groups, and the remarks made by immigrants during the interviews are quite consistent with these findings. A twenty-year-old Mexican immigrant living in Los Angeles for ten years said that he had become more interested in politics than when he first arrived in the United States because he could relate to more political issues and that some laws, such as Proposition 187 (a 1994 California ballot initiative that sought to limit

social services for immigrants without documents), had affected him directly. A twenty-six-year-old Mexican immigrant living in New York for six years said that she had definitely become more interested in U.S. politics than when she first arrived; when she watched the news, it interested her because she knew it would affect her in one way or another. She had become “more conscious” of being in the United States.

Consequences of Long-Term Length of Residence on Aggregate Participation

Because California leads the nation in the percentage of foreign-born residents, the Golden State provides a good case for understanding the critical role that length of residence plays in terms of aggregate trends in political participation. According to Dowell Myers and John Pitkin, immigrants account for just over 10 percent of the total U.S. population but more than 25 percent of California’s population. In comparison, 20 percent of New Yorkers and 18 percent of Floridians are immigrants (2001, 6). Not only has immigration driven demographic transformations in California, but the immigrant population is also changing. Significantly, more immigrants are becoming long-term residents (defined as someone who has lived in the United States for twenty-one or more years. Whereas long-term residents in California account for 21.9 percent of the current immigrant population, that figure is predicted to increase to 55 percent in twenty years (16). Based on their research using the Demographic Futures Database, Myers and Pitkin project that “over time, more immigrants remain in California, and as these immigrants age, the number of foreign-born residents who entered the United States more than twenty years ago is expected to soar by 364 percent from 1990 to 2020” (16). Consistent with these projections, recent arrivals (defined as those who have lived in the United States for ten or fewer years) are expected to constitute a much smaller share of the state’s future population. By 2010, those who arrived during the peak periods of migration that characterized the 1980s and 1990s will have become long-term residents.¹⁰

In California and similar states, dramatic increases in the Asian American and Latino shares of the population are likely to lead to gains in political power for those groups. However, because long-term residents have a much higher propensity to vote than do recent arrivals, changes in the electorate’s makeup are not likely to result simply from changes in the numbers of Asian Americans and Latinos in the state but also are likely to be the consequence of an increase in voting by the growing numbers of

long-term immigrant residents. Thus, several processes are contributing to Asian Americans' and Latinos' growing political force in California and other high-immigration states. First is the increase in the two populations. More important, however, may be the increasing number of immigrants who are long-term residents—that is, those who are most likely to vote. Third, as they come of voting age, the children and grandchildren of immigrants will swell the ranks of eligible voters.

To understand Latino and Asian American political participation in the United States then, key comparisons should not be limited to differences between the first and second generations (Portes and Rumbaut 1996) but should also include distinctions between long-term residents and more recent arrivals. Further analysis suggests that voter turnout differences are, in many cases, larger between recent arrivals and long-term residents than between immigrants and the U.S.-born (J. Wong 2002). With steady population growth and the passage of time, Asian Americans and especially Latinos will inevitably become an increasingly important segment of the California electorate. It is also possible that for Asian and Latino immigrants, electoral power in a vote-rich state such as California will translate into increasing political clout at the national level as well.

Long-Term Strategies to Facilitate Immigrant Political Participation

Lack of mass mobilization by American civic institutions—either parties or community organizations—leaves the passage of time as the only consistent and powerful mechanism operating to increase the participation of large numbers of immigrants in the political system. As such, the current circumstances suggest that immigrant political participation rates will grow slowly and steadily rather than in dramatic surges.

Because the most pressing concern for the two major parties is the next immediate election, they often adopt very short-term mobilization strategies. For example, in the few weeks before an election, parties commonly spend most of their resources on direct mail, mass-media advertising, and phone contacts. When two strong candidates face off, campaign funds are likely to be spent both early and late in the season, and when a strong incumbent faces a weak challenger, the majority of campaign funds are especially likely to be spent late in the election season (Justin Fox and Indridason 2001). In the highly publicized 2003 California gubernatorial recall election, the embattled incumbent, Governor Gray Davis, as well as

the major candidates vying to replace him deluged the airwaves with media spots and packed the mailboxes of registered voters with campaign flyers in the last week and a half before the election.

These approaches to mobilization are not only short term but also rely on strategic targeting of the most likely voters: registered citizens who vote regularly. A recent study of party strategy describes a campaign-management publication for Republican candidates that advises, "Ideally, you will only stop at the homes of registered voters. . . . In a large district, you may only want to stop at the homes of registered voters who have a history of voting in important elections" (cited in Leighley 2001, 59).

Given the short-term, targeted approach that the mainstream parties usually adopt, it should not be surprising that when asked about their affiliation, more than 20 percent of Asian American respondents in the PNAAPS reported that they do not think in terms of the traditional categories of Democrat, Republican, and independent. Nearly 10 percent of the immigrants polled indicated that they were not sure of their party affiliation. The 2001 *Washington Post*/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University Survey on Race and Ethnicity asked a multiracial sample of respondents, "In politics today, do you consider yourself a Republican, a Democrat, an independent, or something else?" Asian Americans (19 percent) and Latinos (17 percent) were more likely to respond "something else," "nothing," or "don't know" to the question than were whites (9 percent) or blacks (12 percent). These statistics suggest that many groups with large immigrant populations lack a basic knowledge of the two major parties and the party system as a whole and are thus only weakly, if at all, connected to that system. Not only the two major parties but also third parties, such as the Green Party and the Labor Party, must establish meaningful relationships with immigrant voters to bring them into the parties' coalitions.

Parties that adopt short-term, targeted mobilization strategies are missing an important opportunity to build their voter base. Because many Asian American and Latino immigrants are noncitizens who demonstrate low rates of registration and who do not exhibit a long or consistent voting history, they are unlikely to be targeted by parties in the short period before an election takes place. Party strategies that neglect Asian American and Latino immigrants may not have a dramatic effect on party fortunes in the immediate future; however, as growing numbers of immigrants become long-term residents and citizens, they will certainly participate in

politics at higher rates. Thus, parties will benefit in the long run if they direct some resources toward more long-term mobilization strategies directed at Asian American and Latino immigrants.

Political parties should consider the adoption of two long-term mobilization strategies if they want to build up their base in immigrant communities, especially in those communities that will someday be home to many long-term—and politically active—residents.

Mass Registration Drives. Voter registration is the key to immigrant political participation. After registering, Asian American and Latino immigrants vote at rates comparable to the general population (Lien 2000; see also table 6). Parties currently do not use their resources to register newer immigrants; instead, they target those who are already registered and voting (Leighley 2001; DeSipio and de la Garza 2005). To accelerate immigrant political participation, parties should hold mass registration drives at regular intervals throughout the year, rather than only during the campaign season. These events should be held at citizenship ceremonies; at local immigrant community events, including holiday festivals, sporting events, and cultural celebrations; and at locations that immigrants frequent, such as grocery stores and parks.

Voter-Education Programs, Town Hall Meetings, and Workshops for Both Citizens and Noncitizens. Parties should enhance immigrants' understanding of and familiarity with the political system to facilitate and accelerate political socialization. Pamphlets including short, accessible overviews of aspects of the political process, descriptions of the party's policy priorities, and explanations of the role that citizens can play in party organizations and in government should be widely distributed in immigrant communities. These materials should be prepared specifically with immigrants in mind and be made available in multilingual formats. Parties should introduce themselves to immigrant communities through town hall meetings that both are informational and solicit the opinions of immigrants and through workshops that aim to demystify local, state, and national politics. All these activities should also be maintained year-round and should also be offered at places and times that are easily accessible for immigrants.

These long-term strategies are likely to yield long-term gains for the parties. These strategies will create opportunities to attract new, loyal voters who could swell partisan ranks. Immigrants acquainted with the party

system will be more likely to get involved in the political system, perhaps at a faster pace than is currently the case.

Civic Institutions Outside the Party System

Community organizations, such as labor organizations, workers' centers, advocacy and social service organizations, ethnic voluntary associations, and religious institutions, may be more likely than parties to invest in long-term mobilization of immigrants. Unlike parties, such groups are not tied to the election cycle; instead, they focus on increasing their political clout by building their membership base. An example is the National Association of Latino Elected Officials Education Fund (NALEO), an advocacy organization that was founded to respond to the lack of support for Latino candidates by the two major parties and that now declares itself the "leading national organization of Latino political empowerment."¹¹ It has taken an explicitly long-term approach to immigrant mobilization. In the spring and summer of 2004, NALEO, in cooperation with Univisión, a major Spanish-language television network, and *La Opinión*, a major Spanish-language newspaper, organized a "national listening tour," which held gatherings in town hall settings in Los Angeles, Houston, New York, Miami, and Chicago. The goal was to engage Latinos by soliciting their opinions on a range of political issues. The organizations recruited participants through leaflets sent in the mail and by running public service announcements. During the meetings, participants broke into discussion groups of fifteen to twenty people and were encouraged to talk about their perspectives on political participation and issues that they felt were relevant for the 2004 campaign.

Describing the effects of the forum, Erica Bernal, NALEO's director of communications, said, "It empowers people. Because all of a sudden they feel part of the process. . . . It triggers something in them, in feeling invited and part of the process. That what they're saying matters and is being heard." Bernal further discussed NALEO's goal of building a long-term relationship with Latinos and contrasted it to what she viewed as the goals of the mainstream parties:

Very simply put, the parties and the candidates are about winning elections, so they're about trying to appeal to their base and they're about

trying to appeal to a small margin of voters who haven't made up their minds, and [the parties] try to bring them over to their side and mobilize them. NALEO is about expanding the Latino electorate. So there are very different strategies. . . . [W]e're talking to Latinos who are registered but have not had a history of participation, and we're trying to get them engaged, developing a long-term relationship with them cycle after cycle, so that they can become active, vote once, hopefully, vote again, and then get picked up by the parties and the candidates as high-propensity voters that are receiving information and mailers.

Because NALEO's focus is on "low-propensity, low-frequency voters," says Rosalind Gold, the organization's director of policy, research, and advocacy, "In our work, it is very difficult to see immediate results. Because these are people you have to keep contacting over and over and over again."

NALEO is clearly devoted to doing the difficult work of turning low-propensity voters into high-propensity voters over the course of many years. In this respect, the group is helping to lay the foundations of participation in the Latino community. Its members also constitute a critical bridge between the mainstream political system and Latinos and Latino immigrants. NALEO focuses on long-term engagement and specifically targets those individuals whom the parties tended to ignore. NALEO has raised sufficient resources to launch a large-scale mobilization effort. The group's *Ve y Vota* (Go Vote) voter-information hotline received thousands of calls during the 2004 presidential campaign, and NALEO targeted more than one hundred thousand individuals with its Get Out the Vote project, which included the country's largest phone bank aimed at mobilizing Latinos.

Community organizations with limited financial resources are impeded from adopting long-term voter mobilization strategies. However, labor organizations, workers' centers, advocacy and social service organizations, ethnic voluntary associations, and religious institutions may be resource rich in other ways. They are often staffed by individuals who are intimately familiar with the language, cultural traditions, and policy priorities of the community the organization serves. That knowledge, coupled with years of providing immigrants with services and information, can give an organization strong legitimacy that positions it to mobilize immigrants. Although most community organizations have nonpolitical missions and

do not mobilize immigrants at a mass level, these groups are clearly helping to build the foundations of political participation in their communities through limited mobilization.

Conclusion

A strong, statistically significant positive relationship exists between length of U.S. residence and political participation for Asian American and Latino immigrants. One of the most important implications of this relationship is that increasing political participation for contemporary Asian American and Latino immigrants is likely to be slow and steady over time, just as it was in the past for European immigrant groups. Parties currently fail to mobilize immigrants on a mass level; when parties do attempt to reach out to these new arrivals, they engage in selective mobilization and do so using short-term strategies. Community organizations, which are otherwise well positioned to provide political socialization for immigrants, face restrictions in terms of financial resources and time available for mass mobilization. Instead, they engage in limited mobilization. Given this situation, the simple passage of time appears to be the only consistent mechanism operating to increase the participation of large numbers of immigrants in the political system.

The evidence showing gradual increases in political participation for Asian American and Latino immigrants over time should be a signal to parties and other civic institutions. Short-term, get-out-the-vote mobilization strategies by political parties in the weeks before an election are not likely to be very effective at bringing new immigrants into the political system. Instead, parties should adopt a long-term approach to mobilizing Asian American and Latino immigrants, through regular mass voter-registration drives, voter-education programs, and the establishment of a stronger presence in immigrant communities. By choosing to marginalize immigrants today, they are missing an important long-term opportunity. Despite institutional and political disincentives, parties should actively court Asian Americans and Latinos because the failure to do so will have consequences for party relevance in years to come. Further, long-term mobilization strategies can facilitate and accelerate immigrant political participation, contributing to a larger pool of high-propensity voters who would solidify and expand the parties' bases of supporters.

In contrast to parties, some community organizations engage in long-

term mobilization strategies. Most, however, have nonpolitical missions and limited financial resources that prevent them from adopting long-term strategies for political mobilization of immigrants. Nevertheless, community organizations have other types of resources—in particular, sensitivity and understanding rooted in cultural, linguistic, and substantive knowledge of the local immigrant population, and legitimacy won through long service to that community. These attributes enable these groups to mobilize some Asian American and Latino immigrants, including those whom the parties do not traditionally target. This mobilization encompasses activities other than just voting and often cross-cuts ethnic and racial identity to leverage other immigrant identities. These efforts can provide a strong foundation for future participation and mass mobilization efforts.