Democracy’s Promise
Politics of Race and Ethnicity

Series Editors
Rodney E. Hero, University of Notre Dame
Katherine Tate, University of California, Irvine

Politics of Race and Ethnicity is premised on the view that understanding race and ethnicity is integral to a fuller, more complete understanding of the American political system. The series’ thematic emphasis welcomes work employing various theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches. The goal is to provide the scholarly community at all levels with accessible texts that will introduce them to, and stimulate their thinking on, fundamental questions in this field. The editors also invite projects that offer original and informative perspectives for the general public on social issues related to the politics of race and ethnicity. We are interested in books that creatively examine the meaning of American democracy for racial and ethnic groups and, conversely, what racial and ethnic groups mean and have meant for American democracy.

The Urban Voter: Group Conflict and Mayoral Voting Behavior in American Cities
Karen M. Kaufmann

Democracy’s Promise: Immigrants and American Civic Institutions
Janelle S. Wong
Democracy’s Promise

Immigrants & American Civic Institutions

Janelle S. Wong

The University of Michigan Press
Ann Arbor
To my parents, Daniel and Brenda Wong, and to my son, Evan Song
Acknowledgments

This book began as a dissertation I wrote while a graduate student in the Department of Political Science at Yale University. I want to thank my advisers, Donald Green, Rogers Smith, and Cathy Cohen, for their guidance and continuous encouragement. Each provided advice, constructive criticism, and insights on many occasions.

While in graduate school, I was fortunate to meet people who have become lifelong friends and cherished colleagues. Dara Strolovich, Vivian Tseng, Elizabeth Cohen, Maria Eugenia Verdaguer, Andrew Rich, Reuel Rogers, Karthick Ramakrishnan, Lisa Garcia-Bedolla, Dorian Warren, and Sandra Lara-Cinisomo shaped this project with their insightful comments and honest observations.

Paul Frymer, Michael Jones-Correa, Jane Junn, Taeku Lee, Pei-te Lien, John Mollenkopf, and Eric Oliver generously provided feedback during my efforts to turn my dissertation into a book manuscript. Kristi Andersen, Cathy Cohen, Michael Dawson, Mark Sawyer, and Katherine Tate extended great support as well as invitations to present parts of the manuscript at workshops and conferences, where I received valuable comments. Dennis Arguelles took time to share with me his expertise about community mobilization.

I finished the book while teaching at the University of Southern California, where Jeb Barnes, Ann Crigler, Nora Hamilton, Gaspar Rivera-Salgado, and Leland Saito offered many useful suggestions on how to improve the manuscript. Beth Garrett, Howard Gillman, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, Sheldon Kamieniecki, Mark Kann, Michael Preston, Alison Renteln, and George Sanchez helped me to refine my ideas and negotiate the publication process. I am also grateful to my USC colleagues Jane Iwamura, Judith Jackson Fossett, Roberto Lint-Sagarena, Viet

I thank Jim Reische, my editor; Katherine Tate; and Rodney Hero for encouraging me to pursue and publish this project. I am grateful beyond words to Patricia Rosas, who read the entire manuscript several times and offered substantive and editorial suggestions that greatly improved the project.

I am deeply indebted to the many community organization members, staff, and leaders who allowed me to conduct research and interviews, especially Rosalind Gold and Erica Bernal of the NALEO Education Fund. Their tireless efforts to improve the social and political lives of others are an inspiration to me. Special thanks also go to the Mexican and Chinese immigrants who opened up their lives to me during the course of this research.

Susan Lai and my aunt and uncle, Laurel and Henry Eu, provided me with food, shelter, and support while I conducted research in Los Angeles. This book would not have been possible without them. Ellen Greenberger, Mike Burton, Martin and Liz Greenberger, Kari Edwards, and Jack Farrell also provided great encouragement and support.

While I was writing, as at all times, I have received wonderful support from my parents, Dan and Brenda Wong, and my brother, Jeff Wong. Their constant love and encouragement were as important to the completion of this book as my academic training. While finishing my dissertation, I met David Silver, who read through the entire manuscript and shared his thoughtful ideas, statistical expertise, and critiques with me. He also made the writing—and more importantly all other aspects of my life—more enjoyable, rewarding, and fun than I could have ever imagined.

My research was supported in part by funding from the Social Science Research Council International Migration Program and the Yale Center for the Study of Race, Inequality, and Politics.
List of Tables & Figures  xi

1. Immigrants & American Civic Institutions  1
2. Mexican & Chinese Immigrants in Two Cities  17
3. Institutional Mobilization in an Era of Local Party Decline  51
4. The Role of Community Organizations in Immigrant Political Mobilization  89
5. Multiple Immigrant Identities & Community Organizations  119
6. Mobilization of Latinos & Asian Americans Evidence from Survey Data  141
7. Revitalizing Civic Institutions in Immigrant Communities Long-Term Strategies  153
8. Institutional Mobilization in a Transnational Context  177
9. Conclusion: American Civic Institutions & Immigrant Mobilization at the Dawn of the Twenty-first Century  197

Appendix: Methodology and Data Sources  213
Notes  227
References  239
Index  269
Tables and Figures

Tables

1. Latino immigrants’ perceptions of individual representation by various organizations 143
2. Latino immigrants’ perceptions of group representation by various organizations 144
3. Mobilization through voter registration among Latino immigrants 145
4. Effect of mobilization on political participation among Latino immigrants by source of mobilization 147
5. Effect of mobilization on political participation among Asian American immigrants by source of mobilization 148
6. Demographic and political profile of Asian Americans and Latinos, 2000 154
7. Political participation and length of residence among Latinos 164
8. Political participation and length of residence among Asian Americans 165
9. Consistent turnout among Asian Americans 166
10. Transnational activities among Asian American and Latino immigrants 182
11. Transnational political orientations and political participation in the United States 184
12. Regression of political participation other than voting on interest in homeland politics among Latino immigrants 188
A1. Descriptive statistics of the Pilot National Asian American Political Survey sample 218
A2. Descriptive statistics of the National Survey on Latinos in America sample 219
A3. Descriptive statistics of the Latino National Political Survey sample 220
A4. Voting participation among eligible Latino immigrants 221
A5. Participation in activities other than voting among Latino immigrants 222
A6. Voting participation among eligible Asian American immigrants 223
A7. Participation in activities other than voting among Asian American immigrants 224
A8. Logistic regression of education on political activity among pre-1965 European immigrant sample 225

Figures

1. Length of residence and voting participation among immigrants, midterm elections, 1994–98 161
2. Political activity and years of U.S. residence: Asian Americans 163
3. Political activity and years of U.S. residence: Latinos 164