

# Residential Concentration, Political Socialization, and Voter Turnout

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*Although many have hypothesized that neighborhoods and social context are important influences on the decision to vote, the data to study these phenomenon have often been inadequate. We examine a unique source of data, registered voter lists, from a rich variety of locations that allow us to tap into this social participation dynamic using a multilevel research design. We find that neighborhood context does have a socializing influence on voters, sometimes mobilizing them while at other times demobilizing them. Notably, this effect is separate from the effect of individual-level sociodemographic influences on participation and is manifest over and above these long-standing explanations.*

That politically active neighborhoods produce, and reproduce, politically active citizens is a well-established finding (Burbank 1997; Huckfeldt 1979, 1986; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995; Krassa 1988; Straits 1990). The instrument for encouraging participation among new residents and offspring in these locales is political socialization. Children and newcomers learn the community's participatory values as they observe ample instances of engagement among their family members and peers. To be sure, this neighborhood political activity may also be endogenous to other local characteristics such as education levels, age of residents, and the stability of the local population, for example. But whatever the roots of a place's participatory behavior, living in some locations facilitates learning the political ropes, while living in other areas does not (Agnew 1987; Gimpel, Lay, and Schuknecht 2003; Johnston 1992).

While the literature that connects individual traits (e.g., age, income, education, race, citizenship status) to voting is extensive, we understand comparatively less about how contextual determinants figure into the participation equation. Nonetheless, social processes have been shown to have an important influence on behavior, and many scholars have embraced the study

of social context, social capital, and their relation to political participation (e.g., Gimpel, Dyck, and Shaw 2004; Huckfeldt 1979, 1986; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995; Leighley and Vedlitz 1999; Mutz 2002a, 2002b; Putnam 2000; Weatherford 1982). We contribute to this intriguing body of research by examining how neighborhood racial or ethnic characteristics condition turnout.

This is an especially timely and fascinating topic because "ethnic context" is not a static entity. The United States is growing increasingly diverse and multicultural, so many of the studies conducted within the realm of black/white relations need to be reexamined and updated with an eye toward the new and emerging multiethnic reality that now defines the nation (Branton and Jones 2005; Costa and Kahn 2003; Oliver 2001). Interestingly, this diversity is coupled with residential patterns that are more heavily weighted toward ethnic isolation rather than integration. The United States is simultaneously becoming more diverse and more "divided by color," with ethnic groups continuing to live more apart than together (Massey and Denton 1992, 1993; Massey and Fong 1990). The impact of this pervasive social phenomenon is unclear. How do residential settlement patterns

affect the impetus toward participation and, consequently, our democratic institutions?

## Contextual Studies of Political Participation

Unfortunately, the ability to study these developments is hindered by several data limitations related to surveys. First, surveys often have inaccurate self-reports of turnout (Anderson and Silver 1986; Belli et al. 1999; Katosh and Traugott 1981; Silver, Abramson, and Anderson 1986). Second, privacy issues surround surveys, and so there is often no identifying information to situate the respondent geographically. However, the ability to geocode the data, i.e., to attach a physical location to each observation, is essential for analyzing how different contexts affect behavior. Third, even if a survey could be geocoded, it may not provide enough observations for each “context.” We need a sufficient number of cases within neighborhoods to obtain context-specific estimates of neighborhood effects.

We overcome many of these difficulties by employing registered voter lists.<sup>1</sup> First, voter lists are advantageous because they give us actual participation records. Second, by geocoding the residential addresses of registrants, we are able to locate voters in their neighborhoods. The geographic identifiers also help us link neighborhood census data to individual characteristics. The merged data allow us to determine whether the participation-burdening aspects of living in an ethnic neighborhood are present even among those who are naturalized or native born *and* have overcome the barriers to voter registration. Lastly, the voter lists are enormous, so we have large samples within many different neighborhoods.

### Exploiting Underexploited Information Sources.

Our aim is to examine variation in participatory behavior as a function of the ethnic heterogeneity of neighborhoods. This is an ambitious agenda, and we focus on just one aspect. In particular, we examine

<sup>1</sup>The size of our data set is enormous and encompasses over 9.2 million registered voters/observations, the voter lists of all registered voters in 16 U.S. counties and their census tracts: Broward (FL), Orange (FL), Pinellas (FL), Dallas (IA), Polk (IA), Story (IA), Delaware (PA), Bernalillo (NM), Clark (NV), Jefferson (KY), Howard (MD), Montgomery (MD), Mecklenburg (NC), San Diego (CA), Santa Clara (CA), and Los Angeles (CA). The census tracts within these counties supply an optimal mix of neighborhood contexts (e.g., battleground states, and wide variance on measures of ethnic heterogeneity). The data, moreover, encompass varied contexts (large cities, suburbs, rural area, etc).

the effects of residential isolation and integration on democracy by noting the differing effects of ethnic context on participation as one traverses the gamut from substantial coethnic populations (segregated areas) to ethnically heterogeneous locations (integrated areas).

Ethnic ancestry information is not usually required when one registers to vote. Because we need to surmise this information from the registrant’s name, we focus on the Asian-American population for the practical reason that this group can be most reliably identified simply by name (Abrahamse, Morrison, and Bolton 1994; Lauderdale and Kestenbaum 2000). Name identification procedures also allow us to classify by ethnicity, and so we have separate data sets on the Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Asian-Indian populations.<sup>2</sup> Distinguishing among the various Asian ethnicities is important because they do exhibit distinctive qualities (Tam 1995).

Studying the Asian-American population is especially promising because it exhibits wide variation along a number of descriptive dimensions. They span an impressive range on the assimilation continuum (very recent immigrants to fourth generation or beyond), can be separated into several distinctive ethnic groups who have had varied social experiences in the United States (see e.g., Lien, Conway, and Wong 2003; Nakanishi 1998; Tam 1995), exhibit significant class divisions, live in both highly integrated and highly segregated communities, and are migratory. When explaining a social phenomenon, the degree of success is directly related to the amount of variance in the data. Moreover, the variation is evident even within the Asian-American population (Alba, Logan, and Stults 2000; Hing 1993; Massey and Denton 1992).

We proceed by reviewing the literature on turnout among registered voters as well as neighborhood context. We then formulate some hypotheses about how ethnic residential concentration and context might structure political behavior. Because we have

<sup>2</sup>Tests of this method have indicated that surname lists do identify, with high accuracy, a majority of persons who self-identify with each group (Lauderdale and Kestenbaum 2000, 294). This technique is admittedly limited in some respects. For instance, intermarriage and adoptions can “mask” ethnic identity. In addition, some names are not unique to a single ethnicity. For example, “Chang” is both a Chinese and a Korean surname. To deal with the name overlap issue, we developed a two-stage process. First, we assigned ethnicity based on which ethnic group had a higher proportion of residents in the census tract. This process was typically able to classify approximately 90% of the overlap cases. The remaining 10% of overlap cases were assigned randomly to the ancestry groups.

data at two levels (individual and neighborhood), we test these hypotheses using multilevel models. Finally, we discuss our results and their broader political implications.

## Registered Voters in Various Neighborhood Contexts

It would be especially notable if ethnic neighborhood context is significant among registered voters since a series of findings shows that once the act of registration is accomplished, many traditional predictors of turnout diminish in importance (Erikson 1981; Highton 1997; Squire, Wolfinger, and Glass 1987; Wolfinger, Glass, and Squire 1990). For instance, low resource voters act more like high resource voters once the registration threshold has been crossed (Squire, Wolfinger, and Glass 1987), and nonvoting is most heavily concentrated among those who are not registered (Highton 1997; Piven and Cloward 1988). The act of registration, whether aided by a rise in education or age (Timpone 1998, 150) or by a change in citizenship status (Cain, Kiewiet, and Uhlaner 1991), appears to mark a decisive cut-point in the level of political interest.

**Theory.** We theorize that neighborhood context influences political participation because it structures *information flow* and affects the *exogenous forces* that come to bear on potential voters. While people are not completely determined by their local environments, they are affected by the knowledge and resources most readily available to them (Gimpel, Dyck, and Shaw 2004; Butler and Stokes 1969). This information varies in content and quantity over time, and certainly from location to location. The local conditions governing information reception, in turn, influence what individuals learn and know about politics, and what can be recalled from memory for purposes of political judgment (Zaller 1992).<sup>3</sup>

Where a person lives also affects the exogenous forces that may come into play. Some settings are more

easily organized for purposes of collective action than others (Agnew 1987, 60). For instance, parties and candidates campaign and spend funds where those activities are most likely to have an impact (Shaw 1999; Wielhouwer 2003). And party organizations target groups that might sway an election. An ethnic group is one obvious type of bloc that might be targeted, and this type of strategy is easier to implement if the group is geographically concentrated. The ethnic composition of a neighborhood, then, is a key determinant of how party strategies develop to target a group.

**Exogenous Forces.** Asian Americans are not considered beholden to one party, and so their votes are coveted, but it makes sense to target this group only if their collective numbers are sufficiently large and geographically compact that they might have an impact on the election. Accordingly, differences in mobilization efforts between locations within and outside of California would not be surprising, since Asians are especially numerous in California and the state houses many Asian-American organizations that regularly engage in voter mobilization efforts (Ramakrishnan 2005, 134–35). In addition, some have found that the large number of Asian ethnic organizations in California facilitates pan-Asian collective action (Okamoto 2003, 833). Similar research on Latinos inside and outside California has found important differences in the level of mobilization and the formation of ethnic identity (Pantoja, Ramirez, and Segura 2001; Skerry 1993). Since Asian Americans are numerous in the Golden State, higher levels of mobilization there may be attributable to exogenous group and party efforts that are absent in non-California settings.<sup>4</sup> We surmise that ethnic insularity coupled with recency of settlement may also be a factor inhibiting participation, since party mobilization efforts are likely to be muted if parties and candidates need to confront the barriers posed by foreign languages or low income (Pelissero, Krebs, and Jenkins 2000).

**Information Flow.** We hypothesize that information flow is significantly affected by neighborhood composition. Neighborhoods with larger foreign-born pop-

<sup>3</sup>The definition of “neighborhood context” is difficult to pin down. Indeed, the term is multifaceted. Although the precise content of “context” is difficult to capture empirically, for our purposes, it includes local environmental characteristics such as the use of ethnic and transnational media, English literacy rates, and exposure to U.S.-born populations (Ramakrishnan 2005; Ramakrishnan and Espenshade 2001). Similarly, the mechanism regulating the flow of politically relevant information is related to such things as the character of communication and interaction with politically involved populations.

<sup>4</sup>Certainly others have noted important political differences between Latinos living in California and those living elsewhere (Skerry 1993). Presumably, it is geographic concentration in California that promotes mobilization and identity politics to an extent not found in other places (DeSipio 1996). Much of this difference in recent years is traceable to California’s controversial immigration-related ballot initiatives, but differences in ethnic mobilization between Californians and non-Californians likely predate the 1990s.

ulations are likely to produce lower levels of political capital and subsequent engagement. Perhaps ethnic media, languages other than English, and lower levels of interest in American elections in these areas, conspire to reduce the socialization pressures that stimulate participation. Alternatively, a group's isolation may be indicative of an unsympathetic response to a social context. This type of retreat from the larger social environment inhibits the development of participatory attitudes (Huckfeldt 1986). Relatedly, Asians living among predominantly non-Asian populations should exhibit higher participation rates because their residential context leads to greater interaction with individuals who have participatory political inclinations (Huckfeldt 1979). Asians living in well-educated, affluent, white neighborhoods, for instance, would be expected to adopt the same political orientations as middle-class whites (Cho 1999).<sup>5</sup>

Lastly, information flow among Asians is structured by the historical forces that have shaped migration streams, settlement patterns, and family structure (Okamoto 2003, 817). Neighborhood composition is wrought by historical forces, and often, fueled by inertia, sits in a state of stasis. Accordingly, we expect unique effects for the various ethnic groups since their histories in the United States differ. For instance, the later arrival of Asian-Indian immigrants and their effective use of the investor category under immigration law resulted in a more dispersed settlement pattern. The Japanese, on the other hand, have a much longer history in the United States that has benefited from family reunification policies.<sup>6</sup> As a result, they have deeper family roots in the United States and are the most dispersed Asian group. The Chinese, in contrast, were completely excluded and not allowed to reunite under family reunification until the 1940s, so

their community could be characterized as a geographically concentrated bachelor society for a significant period of their time in the United States. Our contention is that these historically rooted settlement patterns have a pointed impact on participation, and that insularity, in particular, is detrimental to political participation.

## Data and Methods

Unlike most studies of Asian Americans that focus only on areas of known Asian concentration, such as California (e.g., Cain, Kiewiet, and Uhlaner 1991; Nakanishi 1998; Tam 1995), our data include observations from states not considered immigrant ports-of-entry. In addition, while there are some studies with data from several states (Lien, Conway, and Wong 2003), these data still include only cities where there are large proportions of Asians. Our data, on the other hand, are not only drawn from a broad range of locations, but exhibit ample variation on the main explanatory variables: the proportion of Asian Indians, Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans in the local population.

**Hierarchical Linear Modeling.** To assess the effect of context and other individual characteristics on turnout, we use models uniquely suited for multilevel effects (Lee and Bryk 1989; Raudenbush and Bryk 1986, 2002). We employ a multilevel model because our data occur at two levels, the individual level and the neighborhood level where the individuals are clustered. Level 1 variables are observed at the individual level and are characteristics of the individual voter available from the voter list file (turnout, party of registration, age, Asian ancestry derived from surname coding, and gender). Since we hypothesize that turnout is a function not merely of individual characteristics, but also of neighborhood characteristics or context, we also include variables that describe the neighborhood. These variables come from either census tract information or aggregated individual data and are referred to as level 2 variables.

The main difficulty with the traditional linear model for our data is that it rests upon a basic independence assumption. This assumption is problematic because our observations are grouped into neighborhoods. Individuals within a neighborhood share certain characteristics (i.e., geographic context) and tend to be more similar to others within their neighborhood than to those in more distant neighborhoods. Hence, individuals in different neighbor-

<sup>5</sup>Certainly, some immigrant minorities living in areas of ethnic homogeneity are poor and unskilled (Massey and Fong 1990), and so less likely to participate. Accordingly, we might find that spatially isolated Asian Americans are less participatory for the related reasons of low income and education that led them to settle there in the first place in addition to the lack of exposure to positive socializing forces associated with their insularity from participatory populations. So, context helps us untangle how SES variables work to inspire participation. Our analysis will later demonstrate that while SES accounts for some of the variance in participation levels, neighborhood context also has a significant contribution.

<sup>6</sup>The Japanese were the only group to benefit from family reunification policies prior to 1965. At the turn of the century when immigration restrictions ran strong against all of the Asian nationality groups, the Gentlemen's Agreement with Japan allowed the Japanese population to continue to grow in the United States through family reunification. In addition, many Japanese enclaves were depopulated following displacement and forced internment of Japanese Americans during World War II.

hoods may be independent, but individuals within a neighborhood share a host of similar traits.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, a hierarchical linear model (HLM) that incorporates the multilevel structural characteristic of our data is appropriate here.

The standard HLM uses a normal sampling model with an identity link function, which is most appropriate for continuous dependent variables. Since our dependent variable is binary, we incorporate a binomial sampling model with a logit link, i.e., a hierarchical generalized linear model (HGGLM) rather than an HLM. In this model, the level 1 models differ from the linear case. The resulting level 1 coefficients are then the log odds of “success” as in any logit analysis. So, we have logistic regressions that estimate the effect of selected individual-level explanatory variables on participation. Because this is still a HLM, the regression parameters may vary across neighborhoods, depending upon theoretical expectations. The level 2 variables can be used to predict this variation in both the intercept and the regression coefficients.

For our application, the level 1 model can be written as:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Turnout}_{ij} = & \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}(\text{Republican})_{ij} \\ & + \beta_{2j}(\text{Democrat})_{ij} + \beta_{3j}(\text{Female})_{ij} \\ & + \beta_{4j}(\text{Japanese})_{ij} + \beta_{5j}(\text{Korean})_{ij} \\ & + \beta_{6j}(\text{Chinese})_{ij} + \beta_{7j}(\text{Asian Indian})_{ij} \\ & + \beta_{8j}(\text{Ages 18–19})_{ij} + \beta_{9j}(\text{Ages 30–39})_{ij} \\ & + \beta_{10j}(\text{Ages 40–49})_{ij} + \beta_{11j}(\text{Ages 50–59})_{ij} \\ & + \beta_{12j}(\text{Ages 65 up})_{ij} + \beta_{13j}(\text{Primary Voter})_{ij} \\ & + r_{ij} \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

where  $i$  indexes individuals,  $j$  indexes neighborhood, and  $r_{ij}$  represents the residual for individual  $i$  in neighborhood  $j$ . At the neighborhood level, we model  $\beta_{0j}$  as a function of five level 2 predictors: percent in the neighborhood with a four-year college degree, the population density of the neighborhood, the percent in poverty, the percent who have moved in from a different state in the previous five years (an indicator of population mobility), and the percent of blacks and

Hispanics in the neighborhood. The level 1 coefficients are modeled as shown below.

$$\begin{aligned} \beta_{0ij} = & \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(\% \text{ College Educated})_j \\ & + \gamma_{02}(\text{Population Density})_j \\ & + \gamma_{03}(\% \text{ Migrants})_j + \gamma_{04}(\% \text{ Poverty})_j \\ & + \gamma_{05}(\% \text{ Black or Hispanic})_j + u_{0j} \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

$$\begin{aligned} \beta_{4j} = & \gamma_{40} + \gamma_{41}(\% \text{ Foreign Born})_j \\ & + \gamma_{42}(\% \text{ Japanese Immigrants})_j + u_{4j} \end{aligned} \quad (3)$$

$$\begin{aligned} \beta_{5j} = & \gamma_{50} + \gamma_{51}(\% \text{ Foreign Born})_j \\ & + \gamma_{52}(\% \text{ Korean Immigrants})_j + u_{5j} \end{aligned} \quad (4)$$

$$\begin{aligned} \beta_{6j} = & \gamma_{60} + \gamma_{61}(\% \text{ Foreign Born})_j \\ & + \gamma_{62}(\% \text{ Chinese Immigrants})_j + u_{6j} \end{aligned} \quad (5)$$

$$\begin{aligned} \beta_{7j} = & \gamma_{70} + \gamma_{71}(\% \text{ Foreign Born})_j \\ & + \gamma_{72}(\% \text{ Asian-Indian Immigrants})_j + u_{7j} \end{aligned} \quad (6)$$

$$\beta_{pj} = \gamma_{p0} \quad \text{for } p = 1-3, 8-13 \quad (7)$$

Equations 3–6 assess the extent to which various indicators (i.e., percent of foreign born, ethnic immigrant heterogeneity, and presence in California) at the neighborhood level moderate the relationship between each Asian ancestry group and turnout. We obtain the full model by substituting Equations 2–7 into Equation 1. By including the error at both the individual and neighborhood levels, we avoid the problem with single-level estimation—underestimation of the standard errors and likely biasing of the coefficients.

## Results

Our results are presented in Table 1.<sup>8</sup> Column 1 shows the results from the California counties.<sup>9</sup> Column 2 displays the results from the counties located outside of California.<sup>10</sup> Our data analysis underscores three central findings. First, consistent with previous work, neighborhood participation levels across all of our

<sup>8</sup>Estimates were generated using quasi-likelihood estimation or penalized quasi-likelihood (PQL). PQL constructs a linear approximation of the level 1 model, assumes the linearized dependent variable is approximately normal, and the estimation proceeds as in traditional HLM. We present unit-specific results that emphasize how the effects of neighborhood characteristics influence the level 1 relationships.

<sup>9</sup>These include San Diego, San Jose, and Los Angeles County.

<sup>10</sup>These include counties from New Mexico, Nevada, Kentucky, North Carolina, Florida, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Iowa.

<sup>7</sup>Because some of these are unobserved variables, they will become part of the error term in a linear model. This will create a correlation between the error terms. The error term will have an individual and a group component. The individual components will be independent. The group components will be independent between groups, but perfectly correlated within groups. In addition, since the level of homogeneity between groups will differ, the variance of the group components will also differ.

TABLE 1 Hierarchical Linear Model of Turnout in the 2000 Presidential Election

		California	Non-California
Intercept ( $\beta_{0j}$ )	Intercept ( $\gamma_{00}$ )	-.3737*	-.2061*
		(.0334)	(.0304)
	Percent College Educated ( $\gamma_{01}$ )	.0065*	.0105*
		(.0005)	(.0005)
	Population Density in 1000s ( $\gamma_{02}$ )	-.0049*	-.0122*
		(.0007)	(.0019)
Republican Registrants ( $\beta_{1j}$ )	Percent Migrants ( $\gamma_{03}$ )	-.0186*	-.0083*
		(.0013)	(.0008)
	Percent in Poverty ( $\gamma_{04}$ )	-.0208*	-.0352*
		(.0015)	(.0026)
	Percent Black or Hispanic ( $\gamma_{05}$ )	-.0018*	-.0029*
		(.0004)	(.0003)
Republican Registrants ( $\beta_{1j}$ )	Intercept ( $\gamma_{10}$ )	.2591*	.4042*
		(.0033)	(.0032)
Democratic Registrants ( $\beta_{2j}$ )	Intercept ( $\gamma_{20}$ )	.2843*	.3611*
		(.0030)	(.0031)
Female ( $\beta_{3j}$ )	Intercept ( $\gamma_{30}$ )	.1121*	.1535*
		(.0024)	(.0023)
Japanese ( $\beta_{4j}$ )	Intercept ( $\gamma_{40}$ )	.0478	-.0474
		(.0268)	(.0515)
	Percent Foreign Born ( $\gamma_{41}$ )	.0007	-.0041
		(.0008)	(.0027)
	Percent Japanese Immigrant ( $\gamma_{42}$ )	.0165*	-.1957*
		(.0072)	(.0929)
Korean ( $\beta_{5j}$ )	Intercept ( $\gamma_{50}$ )	-.0455*	-.2838*
		(.0159)	(.0359)
	Percent Foreign Born ( $\gamma_{51}$ )	-.0017*	.0016
		(.0005)	(.0019)
	Percent Korean Immigrant ( $\gamma_{52}$ )	-.0135*	-.1416*
		(.0017)	(.0189)
Chinese ( $\beta_{6j}$ )	Intercept ( $\gamma_{60}$ )	-.0075	-.2354*
		(.0161)	(.0253)
	Percent Foreign Born ( $\gamma_{61}$ )	-.0008	-.0006
		(.0005)	(.0013)
	Percent Chinese Immigrant ( $\gamma_{62}$ )	-.0027*	-.0428*
		(.0010)	(.0087)
Asian Indian ( $\beta_{7j}$ )	Intercept ( $\gamma_{70}$ )	.0483*	-.1735*
		(.0178)	(.0366)
	Percent Foreign Born ( $\gamma_{71}$ )	-.0005	.0034
		(.0006)	(.0020)
	Percent Asian Indian Immigrant ( $\gamma_{72}$ )	.0032	-.0345*
		(.0045)	(.0144)
Age 18–29 ( $\beta_{8j}$ )	Intercept ( $\gamma_{80}$ )	-.7987*	-.4922*
		(.0062)	(.0051)
Age 30–39 ( $\beta_{9j}$ )	Intercept ( $\gamma_{90}$ )	-.3877*	.0782*
		(.0061)	(.0049)
Age 40–49 ( $\beta_{10j}$ )	Intercept ( $\gamma_{100}$ )	-.0839*	.4753*
		(.0061)	(.0050)
Age 50–59 ( $\beta_{11j}$ )	Intercept ( $\gamma_{110}$ )	.0421*	.6867*
		(.0064)	(.0052)
Age 65 and up ( $\beta_{12j}$ )	Intercept ( $\gamma_{120}$ )	-.3199*	.6889*
		(.0063)	(.0053)
2000 Primary Voter ( $\beta_{13j}$ )	Intercept ( $\gamma_{130}$ )	2.3758*	3.1719*
		(.0027)	(.0079)
N (Level 2)		2,993	1,927

Standard errors in parentheses.

Each model also controls for county of residence, but these coefficients are not presented in the interests of space. For California, both dummy variables exhibited positive, statistically significant relationships with turnout. Santa Clara was excluded. For Non-California all the dummy variables were statistically significant (Bernalillo, Polk, and Jefferson in the positive direction and the rest in the negative direction, with Delaware County, PA excluded).

\* $p < .05$ .

study locations are powerfully influenced by levels of education and income (as measured by college education and poverty levels), as well as traditional predictors of participation such as migration, population density, and minority concentration. Second, in addition to the conditioning influence of traditional resource-related variables on turnout, the ethnic immigrant composition of neighborhoods can also be a significant predictor, implying that patterns of racial segregation and integration in America also influence who votes. Third, it does not take large concentrations of Asian Americans for neighborhood effects to appear.

Figures 1–3 highlight some of these effects. Each line on the graphs illustrates the effect on participation levels of the indicated group as the percentage of coethnic immigrants rises in their neighborhoods. Figure 1 shows the effect in counties not located in California. Figure 2 displays the same effects for counties in California. In each figure, we plot only the statistically significant effects, so not all of the groups are depicted. Lastly, Figure 3 highlights the contrast in participation levels between the California results and the non-California results.

We can see in Figure 1 that Chinese coethnic concentrations significantly diminish the participation of non-California Chinese registered voters by about 30% across the spectrum of neighborhoods. For Koreans, the demobilizing impact of coethnic concentration is even more severe and dramatic—lower-

ing participation by 32%, but across a very narrow range of Korean immigrant concentration. The Japanese and Asian-Indian trends similarly decline. The Japanese and Asian-Indian trends similarly decline. Asian Indians mirror the Chinese, and the Japanese mirror the Koreans. In all instances, the decline is unambiguous. The uniformity in response in these locations outside California is unmistakable.

Notably, the results outside California demonstrate that it does not take “California-sized” concentrations of Asian Americans for ethnic context to dampen participation. To the contrary, in fact, Figure 2 shows that the dampening effects of ethnic context in California are less pronounced than they are in most other locations. Chinese and Korean participation drops with coethnic immigrant presence, but only slightly in California. Indeed, the results are rather evenly unexciting despite the fairly wide range spanned by the degree of coethnic immigrant habitation. Moreover, Asian Indians show no significant sensitivity to coethnic context in California, and turnout among Japanese citizens is substantially higher in the California neighborhoods where they are most concentrated.

The uniformity in results that we saw across Asian ancestry groups elsewhere disappears once we visit California. Since most studies of Asian Americans have been conducted in California, our primary fount of knowledge about Asian Americans is California-centric, even if not justifiably so. The common underlying assumption has been that California results

**FIGURE 1** Influence of Coethnic Context on Political Participation of Four Asian American Ethnicities: Registered Voters Outside California, November 2000

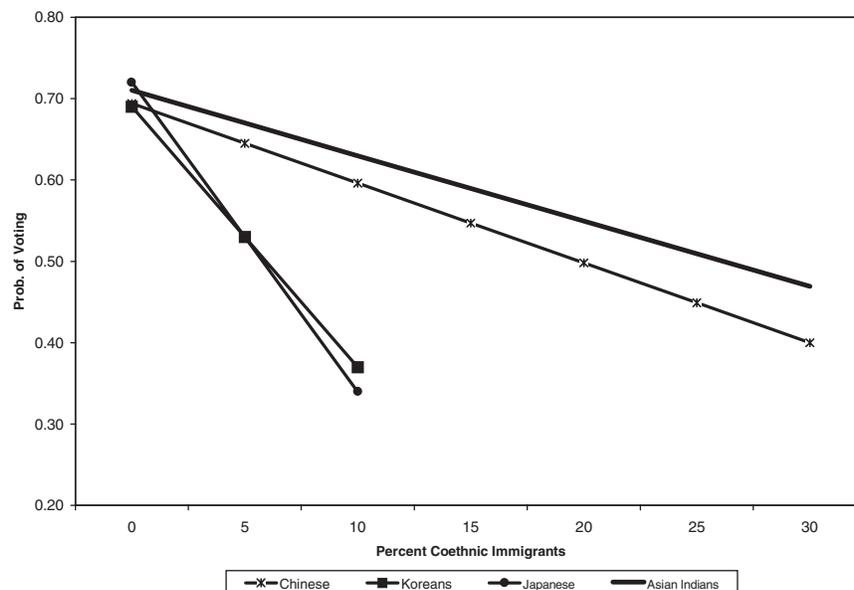


FIGURE 2 Influence of Coethnic Context on Political Participation of Chinese, Korean and Japanese Registered Voters in California, November 2000

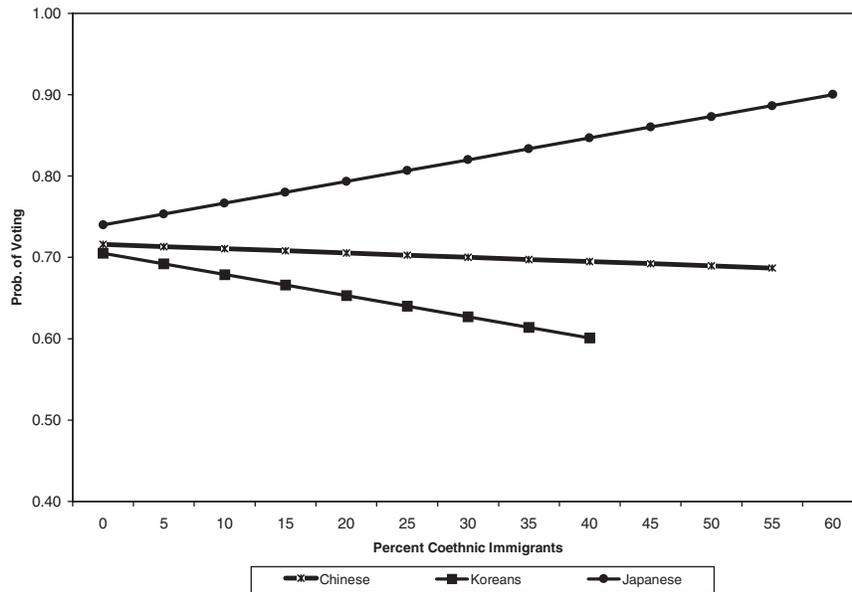
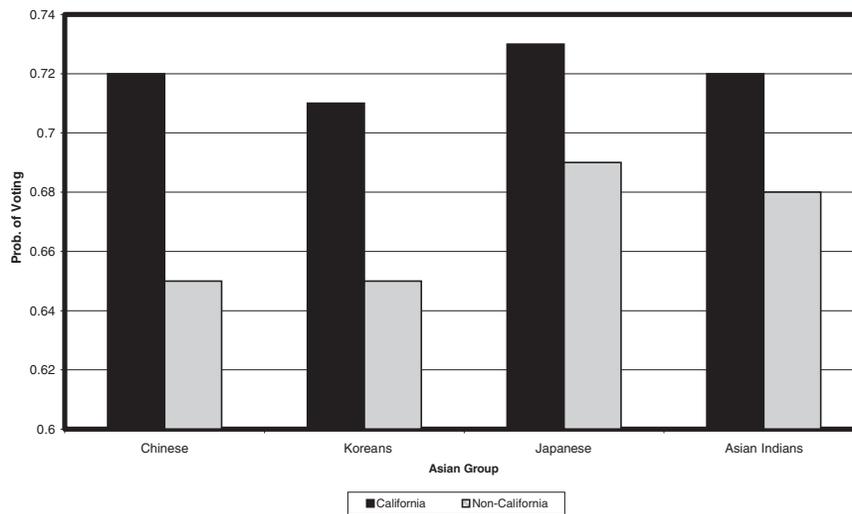


FIGURE 3 Probability of Voting for Each Asian Group is Significantly Higher in California than Outside California, November 2000



generalize to the rest of the nation, but some modification is obviously in order. The contrast between Figure 1 and Figure 2 is especially noteworthy and should cause us to rethink some of the received wisdom that has accumulated on the topic. Figure 3 further illuminates the differences between the results in California and the result for counties we examined outside California. That the non-California results are significant *and* differ in magnitude and kind underscores the importance of both state and neighborhood context in the participatory calculus.

The estimates clearly show that ethnic settlement patterns for these nationality groups have a much greater effect outside of California. For the Koreans and the Chinese, ethnic immigrant concentrations continue to hamper participation in California, but the degree of the dampening effect is diminished. For Asian Indians, the effect disappears entirely, and for the Japanese, it even switches direction. For the Chinese and the Koreans, then, the likelihood of voting always declines as the composition of the neighborhood becomes increasingly inhabited by

immigrants. For the Japanese and Asian Indians, a slightly more complex dynamic is at play. Importantly, all of the groups unfailingly exhibit some sensitivity to neighborhood context.<sup>11</sup>

We also note that we have controlled for some familiar variables from the well-established literature that undoubtedly influence participation. For instance, we see that Republicans and Democrats are consistently more likely to vote than nonmajor party registrants, and that Republican registrants tend to vote at slightly higher rates than Democrats. Those who vote in primary elections are 42% more likely to turn out in the general election than nonprimary voters. Our age cohort indicators show that young voters turn out at a level 13% below the rate of those in the 60–64 age bracket. Turnout increases steadily as voters age until they become senior citizens.<sup>12</sup>

## Discussion

Our results point to several factors that determine when ethnic context is beneficial and when it is detrimental to participation. First, dispersion patterns matter because geographic settlement affects information flow. Some groups are fairly clustered while others have dispersed over time. The Japanese are distinctly dispersed across the United States, a residential pattern akin to none of the other Asian groups.<sup>13</sup> The Asian-Indian group, as well, is some-

what uniquely situated,<sup>14</sup> because they are the only Asian ancestry group not concentrated in the western United States. These patterns of dispersion set the Japanese and Asian-Indian groups apart, affect how information flows within their communities, and help to explain their differing behavior.

Second, socioeconomic status has an undeniable effect. Since each of these groups has been markedly shaped by immigration laws that targeted professional and highly skilled immigrants, all of these groups are unusually skilled and exhibit some degree of professionalism. The Chinese and Korean groups are no exception even though their mean SES levels are not as high as those of the Japanese and Asian Indians.<sup>15</sup> SES operates as we would expect, increasing the level of participation within neighborhoods whether the voter is ethnic or not. The implication is that the effect is not “ethnic” in nature, but is related to a more general contextual phenomenon that encompasses ethnic effects. Our theory regarding information flow is consistent with these patterns.

Lastly, that the results are related to the size of the group is unmistakable, implying a threshold effect. The critical mass of Asians in California is unparalleled in other parts of the United States, and the behavior we observe there is clearly distinct in magnitude and sometimes even direction. Turnout in California among Asian Americans is significantly more impervious to variations in immigrant presence than in the non-California locations. This same change is

<sup>11</sup>We also fit a pooled model. The overall model (pooling both California and non-California locations) is available from the authors. It shows significant declines in turnout associated with coethnic concentration only for Koreans and Chinese. The Asian Indian and Japanese effects are insignificant. These effects are most similar to the California effects, as we might expect given the large number of Asians in California. After taking the large differences between the California and non-California effects into account, these results are not as interesting as the effects from the separate models.

<sup>12</sup>This pattern holds strongly except in Florida where the retired community appears to be highly mobilized.

<sup>13</sup>Japanese immigrants have always been among the most distinctive. Among the Asian groups, the Japanese sport the lowest levels of migration to the United States, but those who do venture across the seas often have high levels of education and income. Along with the Asian-Indian group, the Japanese are the only other Asian group to have a higher median income than the general population. Moreover, the Japanese family has the longest history in the United States and flourished at a time when the Chinese community was largely a bachelor society relegated by U.S. laws to reside within ethnic ghettos. The survival of Chinatowns and the ethnic clustering we still witness today is certainly related to the past. The destruction of ethnic ghettos among the Japanese communities can be traced to distinct periods in their history in America, most notably the internment camps of World War II. That the Japanese did not wish to resettle in ethnic ghettos following the War is not particularly surprising. So their relative dispersion across the United States is easily understood.

<sup>14</sup>More than any of the other Asian groups, Asian Indians have capitalized on the occupational and investor categories of the 1965 reforms to develop their community in the United States (Hing 1990, 102). In 1969, 72% entered under either the occupational or investor category. By 1988, this number was under 11% with the 89% being family reunification cases. However, housing patterns shifted when immigration patterns weighted more heavily toward family reunification, and ethnic enclaves can now be found in various parts of the country. In addition, the Asian-Indian community retains strong cultural ties that bind the community in ways unseen by a purely geographic assessment. As a community, they are unusually professionalized and English-literate.

<sup>15</sup>The Chinese have the longest history in the United States, and their settlement patterns have been strongly influenced by immigration policies. As a result, we continue to see heavy concentrations of Chinese in the West and continued ghettoization in many areas. Chinatowns have been very resilient to the times. Koreans have a relatively short history in the United States compared to the Chinese. Prior to 1965, the number of Koreans in America was very small. Since their migration has been a recent phenomenon and their residential patterns have been much less influenced by U.S. immigration policies, their population is fairly dispersed (less than half of the group lives in the West). Notably, there are Korean populations in all of the major regions, Northeast, South, and Midwest. The community itself, however, remains tightly knit through churches and other social gatherings. Maps of Korean concentration, then, may lead one to underestimate the degree of closeness that binds this community together.

mimicked in the propensity toward higher voter turnout.

Certainly, the levels of concentration vary widely between California and the other locations in the rest of the country. Table 2 shows the maximum percent of each ethnic group in the counties that we examined, with the mean concentration of the group across census tracts listed in parentheses. The minimum value is always zero. Given that the Asian population is segmented into multiple ancestry groups and languages, with varying levels of English proficiency, any given Asian subgroup must be of considerable size in order for exogenous forces to manifest themselves. In most places outside California, this size threshold has not yet been met. Socioeconomic status aside, much seems to depend on there being a sufficient concentration, wherever they settle, that political organizations will take them seriously.

Although there is some similarity across ethnic groups, our results plainly demonstrate that each of

the groups we examine is also distinctive. For the Chinese and the Koreans, coethnic immigrant presence consistently works to the detriment of political participation. For the Japanese and Asian Indians, while the story is not as simple, these two groups also show an evident reactivity to neighborhood context. The varying results across ethnicities are undoubtedly connected to the type of immigrants who come to settle in these neighborhoods, an entity that has changed considerably over time and continues to change.

To conclude, these results strongly suggest that the impact of geographic concentration or residential segregation is not always bad for democracy. Residential segregation is perhaps not “good” in some larger sense, but that is not because geographic density always discourages mobilization or participation. Instead, the impact of social concentration on democratic action is mediated by the incentives of the American political system. Our results suggest that

**TABLE 2** Range of Neighborhood Homogeneity for Each Location

	Chinese	Korean	Japanese	Asian Indian
Bernalillo, NM	2.40 (.23)	1.13 (.11)	1.07 (.10)	2.40 (.11)
Broward, FL	1.80 (.25)	1.99 (.11)	.90 (.05)	2.70 (.27)
Clark, NV	12.24 (.49)	4.21 (.38)	1.92 (.22)	2.30 (.10)
Delaware, PA	10.33 (.42)	5.58 (.48)	4.27 (.10)	29.27 (.76)
Polk, Story, Dallas, IA	25.39 (.50)	5.52 (.27)	.98 (.06)	2.58 (.19)
Louisville, KY	4.87 (.17)	2.59 (.15)	.61 (.04)	4.86 (.24)
Howard, MD	4.64 (1.19)	7.93 (1.98)	.51 (.07)	3.28 (1.18)
Mecklenburg, NC	3.17 (.23)	1.79 (.22)	1.15 (.08)	3.08 (.38)
Montgomery, MD	29.38 (2.11)	9.86 (1.25)	7.86 (.78)	13.12 (1.70)
Orange, FL	3.18 (.26)	1.93 (.19)	4.13 (.12)	3.32 (.32)
Pinellas, FL	1.90 (.14)	1.35 (.08)	.65 (.06)	3.30 (.22)
Los Angeles, CA	57.24 (2.07)	41.87 (1.52)	58.33 (.48)	8.30 (.36)
San Diego, CA	12.85 (.60)	4.67 (.30)	5.32 (.40)	4.76 (.21)
Santa Clara, CA	24.26 (4.24)	9.56 (1.01)	7.97 (.68)	23.58 (2.78)

Cell entries show maximum group presence across each county's census tracts. The mean percentage (as a percent of total population) is shown in parentheses.

small concentrations of immigrant populations may be considerably more insular, politically, than large ones. Larger concentrations of a particular group are the beneficiaries of mobilization efforts by parties and candidates, whereas small concentrations are far more likely to be ignored.

In addition, while Asian Americans have not amassed numbers large enough for them to obtain a congressional district under the Voting Rights Act, residential concentration is, in fact, the reason that we have so many majority minority congressional districts. Although few would herald the merits of geographic segregation, it does, in some ways, make minority representation easier. At the same time, it discourages participation in many other contexts where the critical threshold is not reached and minority interests are usually ignored by party elites. So residential context does appear to socialize voters, but at the same time, it influences which exogenous forces (e.g., party and candidate mobilization) will come into play. The actual effect of coethnic context varies, contingent upon the absolute size of the group, its pattern of dispersion, as well as the prevailing SES traits of the group.

While our analysis kept one specific group under the lens, general themes nonetheless emerge. In particular, while coethnic immigrant context was the initial focus, the analyses revealed that the “coethnic context” effect is not primarily a function of the “coethnic” aspect. The driving force is not simply “coethnics,” but the characteristics of the local native-born and immigrant members of the group. In other words, the results point *not* specifically toward Asian Americans or Asian-American coethnics, but toward the variable contexts that individual voters inhabit more generally. This variation can only be captured by going outside of the usual locations within which the political behavior of ethnic populations is typically investigated. This study uniquely examines the behavior of Asian Americans in places where few Asian Americans are even thought to reside.

Our results are consistent with the broad lesson of contextual effects research that local information exchange matters, but that the quality and quantity of information exchange is highly variable across locations. The fundamental lesson we learn is that voters, Asian or otherwise, do not experience elections in the abstract context of national mass opinion. Their political knowledge is acquired, and they live their lives in the contexts of social worlds dominated by interaction and communication with limited numbers of people (Agnew 1987; Giddens 1984; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995). The socialization and learning processes at spe-

cific locations produce particular political attitudes, including decisions about whether to vote. From this viewpoint the political geography of participation, is not simply epiphenomenal, merely the aggregation of individual propensities to vote or abstain, but expressive of the varying microsociological contexts of places.

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