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S. F. Chinese Immigrants Voters Persistency in Voter Registration

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Introduction:

This working paper assesses the durability of Chinese-American political participation in the San Francisco Bay Area between 1996 and 2004. We are interested in this durability, which we call “survival,” for two reasons. First, because it gives us a better understanding of the universe of the population we are trying to study. Our survey was culled from those members of the 1996 cohort who are on the most recent registration rolls, which means that it contains information on only those members of the 1996 cohort who remained politically active. It is therefore useful for us to learn more about the characteristics of this group, and to determine what characteristics contribute to their continued political action. In particular, we want to know if the continued Chinese-American participation is a specifically *ethnic* phenomenon; that is, if the durability of the Chinese-American registration is owed to their being Chinese American, rather than to other factors (such as income or age or gender). If the continued Chinese-American registration is ethnic in nature, this would lend credence to our hypothesis that the large surge in political activity in 1996 by Chinese Americans was a defensive reaction, and one that remains influential today.

Our second reason for performing this analysis is more academic: the data themselves tell an interesting story about the durability of political involvement. Political scientists have long concerned themselves with patterns of electoral participation, and in efforts to determine why political participation increases for some individuals and declines for others. Thus while our primary purpose in this duration analysis is to better understand this Bay Area Chinese-American population, a secondary benefit is that it yields us a useful experiment that can contribute to the more general literature in political science.

We use registration to vote as our proxy for political activity, and the sample is, again, drawn from the 1996 cohort of first-time Chinese-American registers. The 1996 cohort is a useful one to study because, as we have noted in previous sections, 1996 marked a significant upsurge in Chinese-American political activity in the Bay Area, largely as a reaction to anti-immigrant legislation. The 1980s and early 1990s witnessed an increase in anti-immigrant sentiment in both American politics at large and California in particular—a number of anti-immigrant measures were either proposed or passed by voters in California. The threat to immigrants posed by these measures prompted a significant increase in naturalization rates and voting on the part of Bay Area Chinese Americans, culminating in a large cohort of Chinese Americans that voted in the national elections of 1996. Naturalization was an understandable and predictable reaction for Chinese Americans. Naturalization not only provided protection against anti-immigrant measures, but also provided a voice with which the newly naturalized could help shape future policies. The durability of Chinese-American political engagement, however, is less easy to predict. Two conflicting dynamics are at work. On the one hand, ethnic mobilization, and particularly defensive mobilization, can be short-lived. Political activity spawned by a

particular issue or threat also tends to be transitory; once the threat subsides, levels of political participation can also decay. Evidence also suggests, however, that political activity tends to predict itself—that once the initial foray into politics is made, subsequent involvement becomes easier and more common. In this framework ethnic mobilization, regardless of its root cause, would set in motion a positive cycle that leads to continued involvement. Lastly, of course, we should also include the possibility that the perceived threat has not subsided; if anti-immigrant sentiment remains strong, so too might the political participation of immigrant groups.

We should note that Chinese Americans who registered for the first time in 1996 did not necessarily naturalize and register that year. Certainly some of them may have. But the sample may also include Chinese Americans who naturalized earlier but did not become impelled to register until 1996. Either way would represent a significant step toward political activity, and makes 1996 a useful starting point for our study.

Anecdotal and descriptive data suggests that Chinese Americans have remained politically active in the Bay Area, and that indeed they have emerged as an important swing voting bloc in municipal elections (Lee, 2003). Chinese Americans have been credited with helping Gavin Newsom win the San Francisco mayoral race in 2004. In this study we use a survey and duration analysis to determine whether Chinese-American voting activity has in fact endured in the ten years since the 1996 cohort. Our results suggest that this is the case; Chinese Americans from the Bay Area cohort remain politically active.

Predictors of Political Participation:

Voting is probably the best-known indicator of political incorporation for immigrants. Casting a vote is the culmination of a three-step process: becoming naturalized, registering to vote, and then turning out on Election Day. The first of these steps—naturalization—can be thought of as reactive. Becoming a legal citizen provides an immigrant with rights and protections. Voting by contrast is proactive: rather than simply affording shelter from anti-immigrant policies, it allows the voter to help block or create policies. Registering lies somewhere in between naturalization and voting. A block of registered voters is a form of latent political power. If the block is large enough, elected officials work to appease it (or at least not cross it) even in the absence of voting itself. Some political scientists (Dahl, 1961; Hirschman, 1970) have argued that high rates of registration but low rates of voter turnout give groups a reservoir of dormant political influence, which can be drawn on in times of threat or crisis.

Voting and registering are not, of course, the sole forms of political engagement available to immigrants (or any other citizens, for that matter). At smaller geographic scales, local activism and agitation may be more effective than voting, even though voting also becomes more effective as jurisdictions get smaller, because the chance that any given vote will be decisive increases. Small jurisdictions can also increase the effectiveness of cash donations to candidates or causes, and can legitimize the threat of “exit.” One can credibly threaten to leave one’s town if a local election goes the wrong way, but a threat to leave the nation if one doesn’t like the president is much harder to deliver on (see Downs, 1957; Hirschman, 1970; Fischel, 2001).

All that being said, voting remains a good proxy for political engagement. It is also, however, difficult to study. Investigations of voting behavior often rely on surveys, and the surveys are often prone to inaccurate self-reporting by respondents; people who do not vote might well claim they have (Belle, et al., 1999; Cho, et al., 2004). Despite these obstacles, studies of voting have yielded a number of findings about people’s propensity to vote. The decision to vote hinges on a number of personal and contextual factors.

Membership in a political party (Aldrich, 1995), homeownership (DiPasquale and Glaeser, 1999; Fischel 2001), educational attainment and socioeconomic status all have a demonstrable positive impact on the tendency to vote. There is also some evidence that voting rates rise as the number of elections falls—that voters exhaust their willingness or ability to keep track of political issues and go to the polls. This has been offered as a partial explanation for why the United States, which tends to have more elections than other developed nations, also has lower voter turnouts.

Perhaps most importantly, however, is the finding that registration is highly correlated with voting. In fact, a number of studies have shown that once an individual registers, many other predictors of voter turnout decline in importance. Cho et al. (2006) point out that differences in the political engagement of poor and affluent citizens greatly diminish once poor citizens have registered; similarly, citizens who have not registered account for the great majority of citizens who do not vote: “The act of registration appears to be a decisive cut-point in the level of political interest.”

Registration, therefore, can also serve as an excellent proxy for political engagement, and studying registration offers the added advantage of having registration lists that are more reliable and easier to compile than data from surveys. Registration rolls also include addresses, allowing investigators to study the effects that different residential locations have on political participation.

The evidence suggests that location does matter—this is the “neighborhood effect.” A well-known finding in political science is that politically-active neighborhoods produce politically-active citizens. However, it remains unclear what makes a neighborhood politically active in the first place. In some instances the geographic concentration of an ethnic group can stimulate political activity. Political parties and candidates tend to target groups, and particularly groups that have no strong allegiance to a specific party, and they want to reach as many members of that group as possible with the minimum expenditure of time and money. If a group is geographically concentrated, it may be more likely to attract outreach efforts from candidates and parties, and therefore more likely to be politically engaged.

Geographic concentration can also depress political activity, however, particularly in the case of recent immigrants. The presence of large numbers of recent immigrants can sometimes make a neighborhood insular and disconnected from the larger polity; ethnic media and a high proportion of people who do not speak English can lead to lower levels of political participation.

Asian-Americans and Ethnic Political Mobilization:

Fifty years ago political theorists believed that urbanization and modernization would gradually erase ethnic and cultural distinctions. The power of assimilation would lead different ethnic groups to adopt national identities and cosmopolitan outlooks, and dispense with parochial or “tribalistic” political loyalties (Nagel and Olzak, 1983). But events in many countries—developed and developing, with the United States no exception—have led to a dramatic revision of this view. Now it seems that the interethnic contact wrought by immigration and urbanization actually heightens ethnic differences and ethnic identity. Various theories have been proposed to explain this fact, but most revolve around the idea that contact with other groups is often accompanied by a competition for resources (economic or political) as well as discrimination, and that these activate a feeling of common identity among individuals of the same ethnic group. One strain of this scholarship, for instance, argues that urbanization confers ethnic identity on individuals; because they are judged by others based on their ethnic characteristics (and often location—i.e., in a Chinatown) they soon adopt that identity (Hechter and Okamoto, 2001).

Immigration can therefore foster ethnic solidarity, which is the first step toward ethnic mobilization. To have solidarity is to identify oneself with a particular ethnic group; to mobilize is to organize politically around issues important to that group (Olzak, 1983). The question of what spurs ethnic mobilization has been debated extensively, but again, discrimination and the competition for resources tend to be common answers. Groups denied access to labor and consumer markets often become politically engaged. The Irish of Boston, for instance, rose to political power at the turn of the twentieth century largely as a result of the consistent discrimination leveled against them by the city's Brahmin elite (Greenberg, 1999). And once in power, they relied on patronage and ethnocentric rhetoric to maintain their hold on local government.

Because Asian-Americans have not suffered consumer or employment discrimination on a scale comparable to some earlier immigrant groups, they have never been as politically mobilized as other ethnic groups in the United States. Today Asian-Americans are one of the fastest growing segments of the US population, but their voting participation is well below that of other Americans. Asian Americans in 2000 were about 5 percent of the United States population, but exit polls indicated that they comprised only 2 to 3 percent of voters in the 2000 and 2004 national elections (Wong, 2005). In some ways this is surprising: Asian-Americans are not just a fast-growing demographic but also one without ideological allegiance to a major political party (in contrast to, say, African-Americans, who are aligned overwhelmingly with Democrats). This combination should make them a prime target for outreach by both parties. But just as high turnout predicts itself, so too does low turnout. Political incorporation is often a circular process. Groups that organize and participate are often targeted for outreach in subsequent elections, and this outreach stimulates further involvement. By the same token, however, the failure to organize and vote can have the opposite effect. Because Asians are not regarded as "high propensity voters," parties are reluctant to invest resources in courting them. And just as outreach from political organizations can stimulate political engagement, so too can neglect depress it. Wong (2005) has shown that moderate outreach expenditures can significantly increase Asian-American voter turnout, but also shows that major parties do not engage in even these minor efforts.

It is worth noting that the importance and scope of ethnic voting varies by both location and the scale of the contested political jurisdiction. The density of Asian Americans in California, for example, makes them a crucial voting block, and candidates for statewide office in California are more likely to appeal to a "pan-Asian" vote than are national candidates or candidates in other states. At the local level, ethnic voting blocks tend to splinter. The Asian-American vote might be considered important at the state level, but the more specific Chinese-American vote might be more significant in a local contest. Similarly, national candidates will actively court a monolithic "Hispanic" vote, while municipal candidates might have to negotiate the conflicting interests of Puerto Rican and Chicano constituencies. And if a particular group is widely dispersed, it may not accumulate political capital at any jurisdiction: Japanese-Americans are so spread out geographically that candidates and parties almost never target them (Cho, et al., 2006).

Chinese Americans and Political Participation:

Like many Asian-Americans, Chinese Americans differ from Americans at large in a number of the factors that predict voting behavior. Chinese Americans are less likely to have strong party affiliations, are divided on race-based policies, are conservative in foreign policy, and are strongly influenced by ethnic affinity (Ichinose, 2004; Ong, 2004; Hum, 2004; Lien, 2003; Cho and Cain, 2001; Ong and Lee, 2001; Ong, 2000).

The anti-immigrant sentiment of the 1980s and 1990s, however, led many Chinese Americans to become more engaged politically. In the 1980s a reactionary backlash against increased immigration led California voters to approve two propositions that made English the state's official language. In 1994, riding the same xenophobic wave, Golden State voters passed Proposition 187, which denied public assistance benefits to undocumented immigrants and their children (the proposition was later overturned in court). At the national level, the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act, popularly known as welfare reform, included restrictions on benefits for legal immigrants.

These initiatives, and the broader wave of anti-immigrant sentiment that engendered them, led to a flurry of political activity among advocates for immigration. This activity included naturalization and “get-out-the-vote” drives, designed to give immigrants the protections of citizenship and also to increase their political clout at the ballot box (Chin, 1996; Estrada and Marcos, 1997; Bui, et al., 2004; Magpantay, 2004; Wong, 2004). The actual effectiveness of these drives remains unclear, but there is little question that some combination of factors—perhaps the drives augmented an increased level of individual motivation—led to a large surge in applications for citizenship. Among all immigrants, applications for citizenship grew from 207,000 in 1991 to a peak of 1.4 million in 1997. The number of naturalized citizens rose from 308,000 in 1991 to a peak of over 1 million in 1996, and then declined.¹ Among Asians, the naturalization numbers climbed from 168,000 in 1991 to 307,000 in 1996.

Many of these newly naturalized citizens voted in 1996, and community activists hoped that the new citizens would remain politically engaged. As we discussed earlier, however, there was no guarantee that the political participation would not decay. Working in favor of continued engagement is the fact that people who have registered to vote are likely to remain involved. Potentially working against the maintenance of political interest was the defensive nature of the initial engagement. For many of the Bay Area Chinese immigrants, the foray into voting was motivated not by a desire to be politically engaged, but instead by a desire to protect themselves. If the anti-immigrant threat subsided, the incentive to vote may have subsided with it. By the same logic, however, if the anti-immigrant threat did *not* subside (or did subside significantly), then political activity might remain at the increased levels of 1996. And an argument can be made that after 1996 anti-immigrant sentiment waned but by no means disappeared. The proposal of formal laws to curb immigrant rights fell after 1996, but various scandals and media events, as well as increased grassroots discontent over immigration, has kept the topic controversial.

The 1996 presidential election, for example, was colored by the revelation that a number of Chinese-American businessmen, the most prominent being John Huang, illegally solicited funds from Asian business executives and funneled the money to the Democratic National Committee and the campaign to re-elect President Clinton. The scandal had all the usual distastefulness of money-for-access, but also added racial and xenophobic dimensions to a familiar story, as the media portrayed Chinese Americans as agents of foreign nationals who were trying to influence the highest levels of government. In 1999, Chinese-American Wen Ho Lee, a nuclear scientist at the Los Alamos National Laboratory, was accused of mishandling information and selling secrets to China. Although the spying charges were ultimately dropped, Lee spent nine months in jail while the FBI—and the national press—investigated him. Both the Lee case and the fundraising scandal fostered the perception that Chinese Americans were untrustworthy and had divided loyalties (Wang, 2003; Turnbull, 2003).

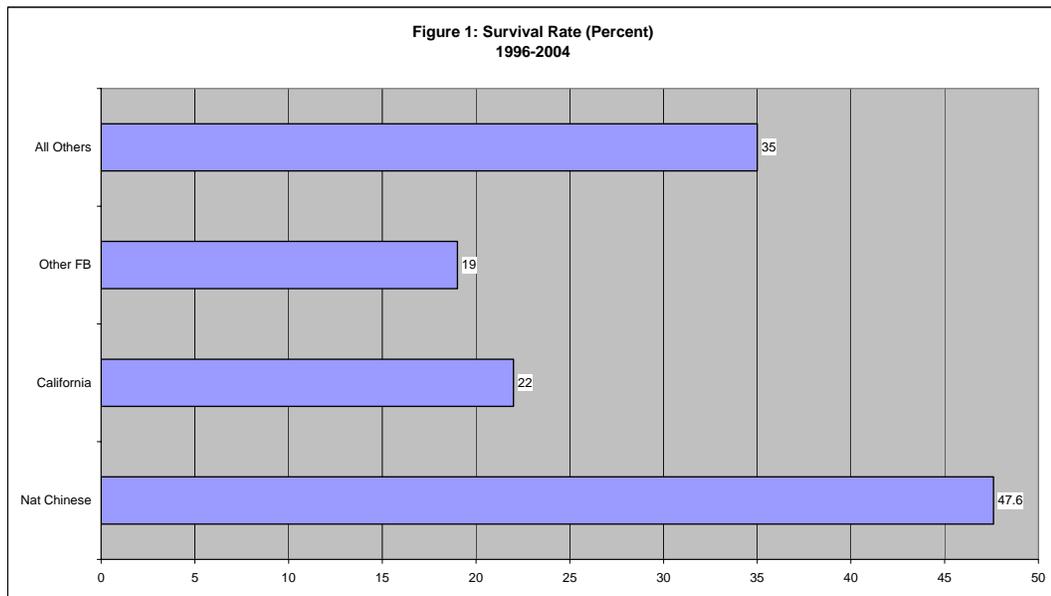
¹ The Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 contributed to this growth, but only accounted for about one-third of the increase. See Rytina (2001).

The September 11 terrorist attacks fomented an entirely new wave of suspicion about immigration and its consequences. The aftermath of the assaults on New York and Washington brought with them a torrent of complaints about America's porous borders, as well as calls to monitor immigrant communities. Federal responsibility for immigrants was folded into the Department of Homeland Security, and for a brief chaotic period immigrants were ordered to register at various consulates. In California and other parts of the Southwest, the suspicion toward immigrants that September 11 aroused only exacerbated existing concerns about immigration from Mexico and Latin America. For much of the 2000s, the costs and benefits of immigration have received prominent coverage in newspapers and have dominated the airwaves of talk radio. In 2005 an armed citizens' militia called the Minutemen began patrolling the Mexican border in Arizona and California, and California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger at one point signaled his approval of their activities. While the post-9/11 immigration debate has not been about Chinese-American immigration, it has created an atmosphere of uncertainty for all immigrants. This uncertainty could help sustain political engagement on the part of Chinese Americans.

Lastly, in the San Francisco Bay Area specifically, a group of Chinese-American parents filed suit in 1994 to end the City of San Francisco's affirmative action program for its public schools. The affirmative action program essentially placed a limit on the number of Chinese-American students that could be enrolled in the coveted Lowell High School. This case wound its way through the courts for five years, and was finally decided in the parents' favor in 1999. Because Chinese Americans identify strongly with ethnic issues, this case would serve to maintain a high level of political engagement in the Bay Area.

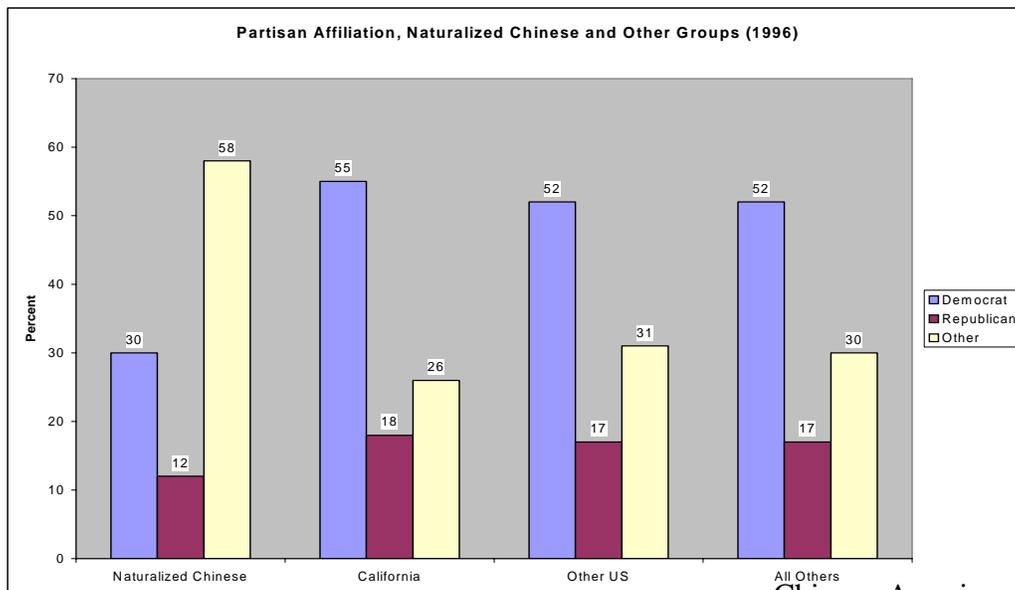
Description of Research:

Our methodology for this analysis was fairly straightforward. We first broke down our sample from the 1996 cohort and analyzed its survival rate, and then compared this rate with our three control groups. After establishing that the survival rate for naturalized Chinese exceeds that for other groups, we draw on a series of variables—which are described in more detail below—to determine the causes of survival. Using a logistic regression model similar to the one described in Section II, we regressed voter survival on these variables, which helps us gauge the strength of individual characteristics that influence the probability of survival. Data from 1996 and 2004 were used to determine trends over the period in question. In this section we will first show some descriptive statistics on our sample groups, and then our regression results.

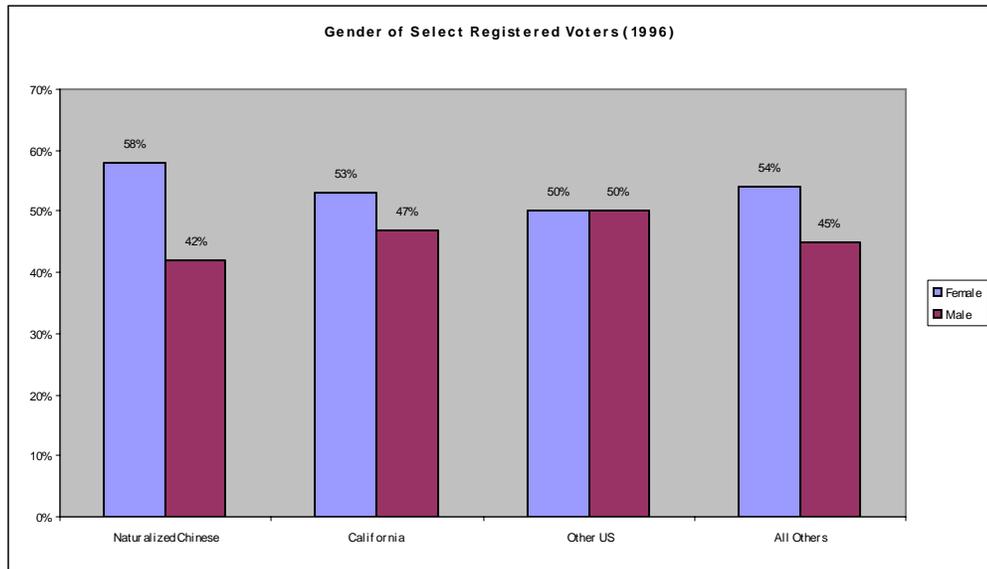


When we look at the descriptive statistics, one immediate observation is that the naturalized Chinese remained active at a greater percentage than the three control groups. Forty-seven percent of the naturalized Chinese who had been registered to vote in 1996 remained registered in 2004, as compared to 22 percent of people born in California, 19 percent of respondents born elsewhere, and 35 percent of all others.

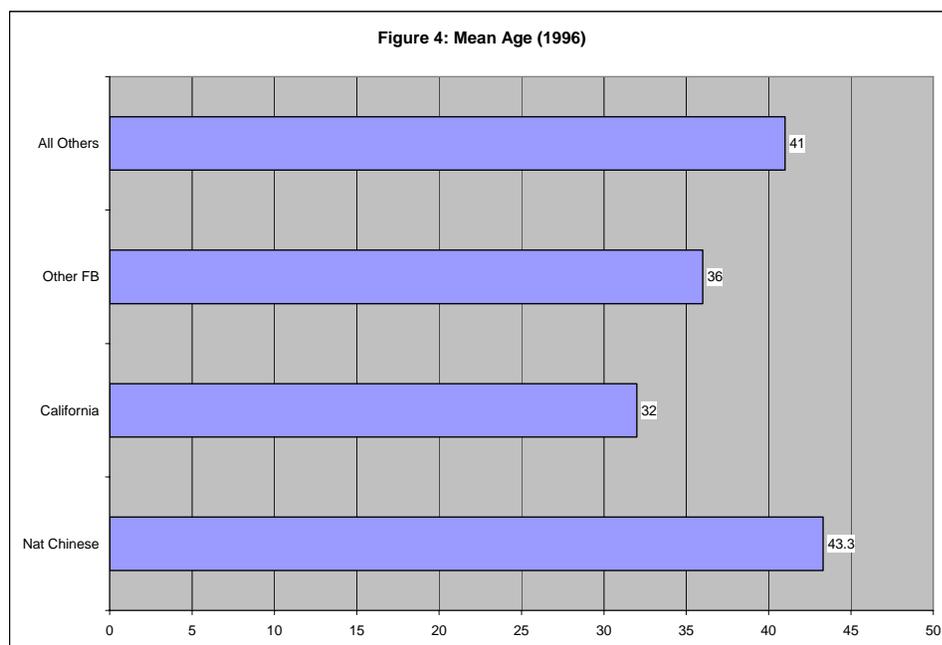
The 1996 cohort is also notable for its partisan composition. Our sample conforms to earlier findings suggesting that Chinese Americans lack a strong allegiance to either of the US's major political parties, and it is striking that the majority of the naturalized Chinese (indeed almost 60 percent) identified with a party other than Republican or Democrat. Our three control groups, by contrast, all leaned solidly Democratic. Interestingly, a minority of all four groups identified themselves as Republicans. We can only speculate as to why this might be the case, but the Republican Party does have a nativist wing that has been consistently hostile to immigration. Immigrants might therefore be less inclined to support it, even if they broadly agree with the Republican Party on other issues, such as a conservative approach to foreign policy. Given that party



allegiance is often correlated with political participation, the high survival rate of the 1996 cohort, even in the apparent absence of any strong partisan affiliation, merits some attention.



In other areas the naturalized citizens were not strikingly different from the control groups. All the groups, for instance, were fairly evenly divided between men and women, although three of the four had slightly more females than males. The naturalized Chinese were noticeably older than members of the three control groups, which could be important since political involvement also rises with age, at least to a point—as individuals become elderly their political participation begins to decline.



In order to determine the influence of these variables on the durability of political involvement, we performed a logistic regression analysis. In so doing, we were able to isolate the specific impact that being a member of the 1996 cohort had on durability. That is, we could ascertain whether the high survival rate of the newly naturalized Chinese was a significant event, even after accounting for factors like gender, age and membership in a major political party. We analyzed nine separate variables:

- *Age* is simply the age of the respondent. As we have noted, political participation generally rises with age until an individual becomes elderly, at which point it begins to fall.
- To control for the nonlinear relationship between age and political participation, we also included *age_sq* as a variable. We should expect to see *age_sq* generate a negative impact on political participation, indicating that involvement does indeed decay once individuals reach a certain age.
- *Nat_Chi* is the variable indicating membership in the 1996 cohort.
- *Oth_FB* denotes a foreign-born individual not from the 1996 cohort, and
- *Calif* represents other citizens of California.
- *Male* is simply the gender variable.
- We represented party affiliation with two variables—*dem* and *rep*—to capture the effects of the two major American parties.
- Lastly, we included *reg-month*, which is the month in which the citizen registered to vote, to see if that had any impact on continued registration.

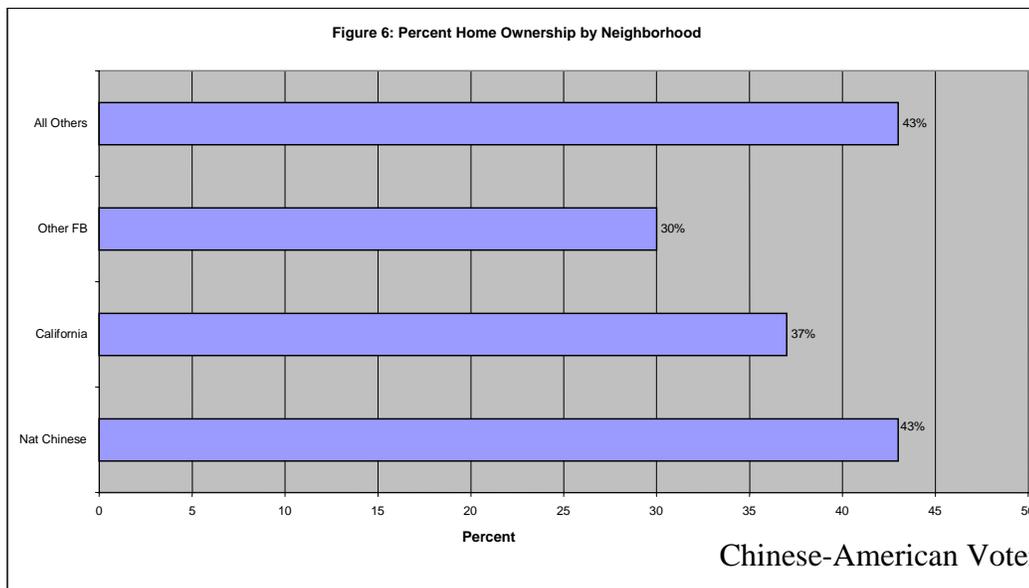
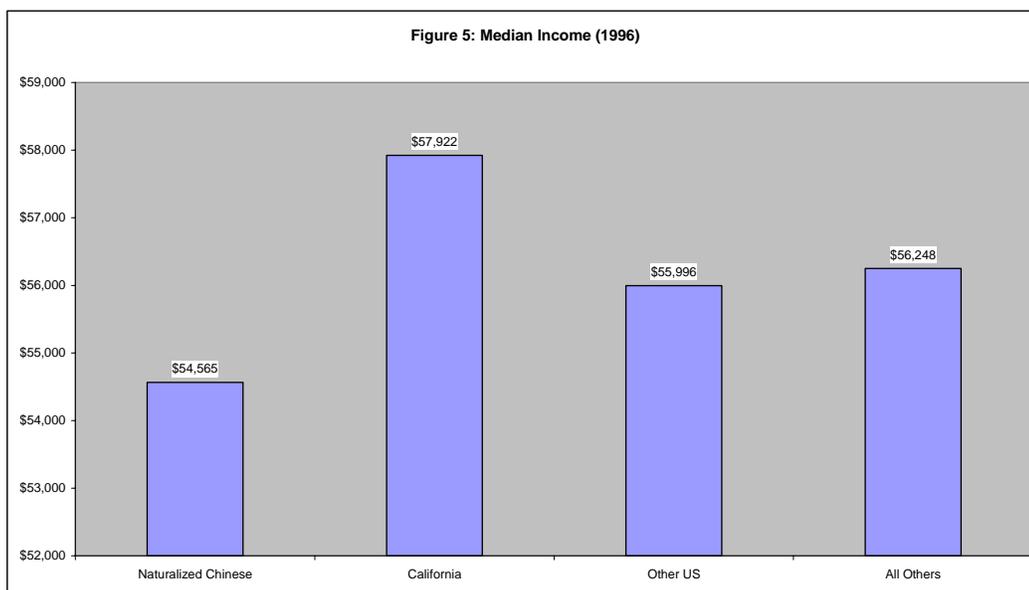
Our results show that being a member of the 1996 Chinese-American cohort is in fact a highly significant predictor of being a registered voter in 2004. Indeed, it was the most powerful predictor of any of our variables. Age weakly predicted durability, and the square of age weakly predicted against it. The registration month had a small positive impact. Interestingly, membership in the two major political parties had no significant impact on continued political involvement.

Table 1: Analysis of Maximum Likelihood Estimates
Regression Results for Voter Survival (N=32,311)

Parameter	DF	Estimate	Standard Error	Wald Chi Square	Pr > ChiSq
INTERCEPT	1	-5.1472	0.1315	1531.4097	<.0001
AGE	1	0.1233	0.00556	491.4027	<.0001
AGE_SQ	1	-0.1014	0.00574	312.4772	<.0001
NAT_CHI	1	0.7911	0.0617	164.5275	<.0001
OTH_FB	1	0.4777	0.0617	129.8988	<.0001
CALIF	1	0.3182	0.0419	66.201	<.0001
MALE	1	0.0123	0.0316	0.1523	0.6964
REG_M	1	0.0606	0.0450	1.8141	0.1780
REG_O	1	-0.0273	0.0508	0.2890	0.5909
DEM	1	0.2276	0.0378	36.3134	<.0001
REP	1	0.1598	0.0486	10.8099	0.0010

The results for this analysis were robust, but they did not include two key variables: the income of respondents, and whether they owned homes. These two variables tend to correlate both with each other and with political activity. Unfortunately, we did not have individual-level data on these variables—only neighborhood data. In one way this was a disadvantage: certainly we would have preferred to have income and ownership information at the individual level. But while using neighborhood-level data is not perfect, it does allow us to gauge the “neighborhood effect.” The median income and homeownership rates of a given neighborhood are a reasonable proxy for its socioeconomic status, so we can use these variables to evaluate the influence that neighborhood status has on political participation.

Descriptive statistics show that neighborhoods of the 1996 cohort of naturalized Chinese had a lower median income than our other groups, but a higher rate of homeownership. Median income for the naturalized Chinese neighborhoods was approximately \$54,500, while median income for the other three groups ranged from just under \$56,000 to \$58,000. Naturalized Chinese neighborhoods, however, had a 43 percent homeownership rate—slightly higher than for other foreign-born and other Californians.



To account for the potential impacts of income and homeownership, we merged the individual-level data from our first regression with the neighborhood data and added three new variables in doing so: *ownership*, *med_inc2* and *med_inc2sq*. We then ran a second regression with these new variables intact.

Table 2: Analysis of Maximum Likelihood Estimates: Regression
Results for Voter Survival With Neighborhood Effects (N=32,310)

Parameter	DF	Estimate	Standard Error	Wald Chi Square	Pr > ChiSq
INTERCEPT	1	-6.2566	0.2142	853.073	<.0001
AGE	1	0.1221	0.00554	485.2576	<.0001
AGE_SQ	1	-0.0995	0.00571	303.9843	<.0001
NAT_CHI	1	0.6451	0.063	104.9844	<.0001
OTH_FB	1	0.3148	0.0437	51.9583	<.0001
CALIF	1	0.2405	0.0396	36.8469	<.0001
MALE	1	0.0420	0.0319	1.7330	0.1881
REG_M	1	0.0616	0.0453	1.8510	0.1737
REG_O	1	-0.0017	0.0512	0.0011	0.9733
DEM	1	0.2146	0.0380	31.8990	<.0001
REP	1	0.1661	0.0492	11.3912	0.0007
MED_INC2	1	0.2243	0.0561	15.9746	<.0001
MED_INC2SQ	1	-0.0149	0.0449	11.0116	0.0090
OWNERSHIP	1	1.11	0.0872	162.1711	<.0001

The results change, which is not surprising, but they do not change enough to alter our initial conclusions. Living in a high-homeownership neighborhood is a very strong predictor of continued political activity, as is residence in a high-income neighborhood. When these neighborhood effects are accounted for, the importance of membership in the 1996 cohort attenuates somewhat. By no means, however, does it lose significance entirely: the naturalized Chinese still had a statistically significant survival rate, suggesting that the group's continued political participation is to a great degree an ethnic phenomenon.

Conclusions:

In the 1990s the rise of anti-immigrant sentiment, and the political mobilization among immigrants that resulted from it, led to a spike in Chinese-American political activity. We use a cohort of citizens from the San Francisco Bay Area who naturalized and voted in 1996, and examine the persistence of their political involvement. We find that in comparison to other groups, these individuals' political participation remained high, even when controlling for factors such as homeownership, income and party affiliation. This suggests that the persistence of Chinese-American political activity is in fact an ethnic phenomenon.

We did not examine *why* political participation might have risen or fallen after 1996, and previous research would offer explanations for both outcomes. We can, however, speculate briefly. It is possible that participation persisted among Bay Area Chinese Americans because they became a more important local voting block after 1996. If

local candidates and parties began to court Chinese Americans in the wake of the 1996 surge in political activity, then this courtship could have stimulated further involvement. It is also possible that the anti-immigrant sentiment that led many of the Chinese Americans to register in 1996 did not subside sufficiently to warrant a drop-off in political activity. In the last eight years the nativism in California has not reached the intensity it had in the early 1990s, but neither has it evaporated. Immigration remains a divisive and much-discussed issue, and individuals who registered and voted out of concern for that issue in 1996 might remain so motivated today.

Our analysis does suggest a few directions for policymakers. Because our findings reinforce the idea that registration is a critical cut-point in political engagement, policymakers can take away the idea that efforts to register voters are worthwhile. Equally important, however, is that our analysis suggests areas where political involvement continues to lag, and where increased effort by community leaders could be fruitful. The young, the poor and those who do not own property (there is doubtless significant overlap in these categories) remain lamentably uninvolved. Living in affluent neighborhoods, or neighborhoods with high levels of homeownership, predicts political involvement, as does being older. Efforts to “get out the vote” among people with these characteristics may in some cases be redundant. Efforts in lower-income, lower property-ownership areas, however, may offer significant gains for parties and candidates, if they can successfully initiate registration among these groups.

Because our study is restricted to the San Francisco Bay Area, our ability to generalize from it is limited. In a number of ways, however, it lends support to previous findings about political engagement. A politically-engaged group or neighborhood often stays politically engaged, and political participation varies positively with income and homeownership. Our finding that partisan affiliation has little impact on survival rates is intriguing, but lends credence to other research suggesting that Chinese Americans do not have strong ties to any single political party.

The location of our study, however, cautions against generalizing too much from any of our results. Both California and the San Francisco Bay Area have a higher density of Chinese Americans (and Asian Americans) than the nation as a whole. While this makes the Bay Area a useful laboratory to study Asian-American political participation, the context of that participation is quite different in the Bay Area than in the United States at large, where Asian-Americans are less likely to be a geographically or even demographically cohesive voting block. Further research using a national sample would be necessary to make any general inferences about Chinese-American voting behavior. We do have this information in its raw form, and if funding were to become available, we could conceivably expand this study and elicit more generalizable results.

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