

# Interest and Action: Findings from a Boston-Area Survey of Chinese and Vietnamese American Attitudes on Immigrants, Immigration, and Activism

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## INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

Questions involving immigration policies and the impact, role, and treatment of immigrants are high on the United States' policy agenda. These are perennial issues which continuously generate contentious debate. In recent years, many immigrants have become increasingly fervent in demanding justice and recognition of their contributions. For example, in 2006, the *Boston Globe* chronicled the "May Day" demonstrations that took place across the nation advocating for immigrant rights. The article reported that thousands of immigrant workers participated in a "mass walkout being staged . . . around the state and country" or "stayed home to make a point about their vital role in American life."<sup>1</sup>

Asian Americans are rarely identified as being engaged in the immigration debates. This is especially evident in contrast to the extensive chronicling of the Latino community's involvement. Indeed, Asian Americans are probably noted as much for their alleged absence as for their participation. The *Boston Globe* article, for instance, mentioned that the walkout and demonstrations drew little participation "in Asian strongholds in and around Boston." As the story's headline proclaimed, "In Asian Communities, Just Another Day."

As the nation wrestles with the volatile issue of immigration, it is critical to ask, "Are Asian Americans paying attention to immigration and

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1. Jenna Russell, *In Asian Communities, Just Another Day*, BOSTON GLOBE, May 2, 2006, available at [http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2006/05/02/in\\_asian\\_communities\\_just\\_another\\_day/](http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2006/05/02/in_asian_communities_just_another_day/) (last visited Apr. 3, 2009).

immigrant related matters?” “Can they be mobilized politically in support of immigrant rights or for certain immigration policies?” Assessing the saliency of discussions about immigration and the likelihood of political action is especially relevant with regard to the Asian American community. More than any racial group, the Asian American community is by far comprised of the highest percentage of foreign-born members. Furthermore, answers to these questions are particularly important to organizations who serve immigrants, including Asian Americans, as they determine how to better educate and engage themselves and their constituents in the intense and highly consequential battles over immigration policies and immigrant rights.

This article answers some of these critical inquiries by focusing on the views of two specific groups of Asian Americans. Although extensive survey research exists concerning general public opinion on immigrants and immigration issues, much less research exists centering on the opinions of those populations most affected by immigration policies, and, in particular, on Asian American attitudes.<sup>2</sup> For this study, in contrast, we draw upon the responses of over 400 Chinese and Vietnamese Americans in the Greater Boston area.<sup>3</sup> This study, therefore, helps fill a vacuum created by the lack of comprehensive nationwide Asian American surveys measuring the community’s views on immigration and activism. Studies of Asian American communities such as those in the Boston area can yield insights that are not only relevant on a local scale, but also on a broader geographical level.

In the development of the survey instrument, we benefited from our collaboration with three Boston area community-based organizations: the Asian American Resource Workshop, the Chinese Progressive Association, and the Vietnamese American Initiative for Development. The focus on Chinese and Vietnamese Americans – the two largest Asian ethnic groups in the Boston area – reflects the fact that these groups account for a substantial portion of the constituencies served by these organizations.

Our analysis of the potential for Asian American political activism and engagement around immigration and immigrant rights is built around findings that measure the following critical components. First, we consider

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2. See, e.g. Pei-te Lien, *Pilot National Asian American Political Survey (PNAAPS)*, ICPSR 3832, 4, 13 (2004); Jane Junn, Taeku Lee, S. Karthick Ramakrishnan & Janelle Wong, *Asian Americans and the 2008 Election*, National Asian American Survey, 14 (2008). Such surveys have not, as of this time, reported on items on attention, policy positions, and political behavior comparable to those included in this survey.

3. In the four cities from which our sample was drawn, Chinese and Vietnamese accounted for 65% of the total Asian American population in 2000. U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, American Fact Finder: DP-1 Profile of General Demographic Characteristics (2000), available at [http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/QTTTable?\\_bm=y&-context=qt&-reg=DEC\\_2000\\_SF2\\_U\\_DP1:001|012|016|029;&-qr\\_name=DEC\\_2000\\_SF2\\_U\\_DP1&-ds\\_name=DEC\\_2000\\_SF2\\_U&-CONTEXT=qt&-tree\\_id=402&-redoLog=true&-all\\_geo\\_types=N&-\\_caller=geoselect&-geo\\_id=05000US25025&-search\\_results=01000US&-format=&-\\_lang=en](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/QTTTable?_bm=y&-context=qt&-reg=DEC_2000_SF2_U_DP1:001|012|016|029;&-qr_name=DEC_2000_SF2_U_DP1&-ds_name=DEC_2000_SF2_U&-CONTEXT=qt&-tree_id=402&-redoLog=true&-all_geo_types=N&-_caller=geoselect&-geo_id=05000US25025&-search_results=01000US&-format=&-_lang=en) (last visited Apr. 3, 2009).

the extent to which Asian Americans are following discussions about the issue of immigration. Second, Asian American attitudes on whether immigrants strengthen or burden the country are explored along with views on Latino demands for immigrant rights. In addition, opinions on two specific policy issues – immigration preferences and the provision of a process for legalization of undocumented immigrants – are presented. Finally, the impact of the immigration issue on the likelihood of Asian Americans to participate in several acts of political engagement – seeking to naturalize, registering to vote, turning out to vote, participating in a march or demonstration, signing a petition, contacting a government official, and working in an organization dealing with immigration issues – are assessed.

The responses to the survey, which are more fully delineated and analyzed in the findings section of this article, in brief indicate that Asian Americans are paying attention to discussions about immigration.<sup>4</sup> Asian Americans, furthermore, approach immigration issues with a strong belief that immigrants on balance strengthen rather than burden the nation. A clear majority of Asian Americans are also sympathetic to Latino activist demands for immigrant rights. Respondents, however, expressed varied opinions when asked which immigrant categories, e.g., those favoring family unification or those favoring the admission of those with special skills, should receive preference in immigration policies. For example, Chinese and Vietnamese offer somewhat different responses which likely reflect the specific categories under which their foreign-born co-ethnics arrived and are arriving in the United States. On the matter of establishing a process for the legalization of undocumented immigrants residing in the United States, Asian Americans, for the most part, are supportive of that process. In short, our respondents expressed: 1) high levels of interest in immigration, 2) strong beliefs about the positive impact of immigrants, 3) sympathy with demands for immigrant rights, and 4) clear views on certain specific policy issues. Taken as a whole, these attitudes provide a solid foundation for Asian American political engagement.

The key finding that emerges from the data examined in this article is that Asian Americans can be mobilized politically around immigrant rights and immigration policies. There is a connection between discussions about immigrant rights and immigration and several civic and political behaviors. Our analysis will show that for foreign-born Asian Americans, these discussions increase the likelihood of their becoming naturalized. Citizens not registered to vote are more likely to register and those registered are more motivated to turn out to vote. In the important realm of engagement beyond elections, Asian Americans, with some interesting demographic distinctions, embrace activities related to immigration and immigrant rights

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4. Copies of the survey and results are on file with the authors.

that include signing petitions and contacting officials. Some Asian Americans are prepared as well to join in high commitment modes of participation, such as marching in demonstrations and joining with others to work in organizations that promote immigrant rights.

In summary, Asian Americans in the Boston area are prepared to be active participants and are not content to sit on the sidelines as the momentous debates about immigration swirl around them. Or, perhaps, it is more accurate to say that there are sufficient levels of interest, supportive attitudes, and motivations for Asian American political engagement, and that effective organizing and extensive education will enhance, deepen, and expand the inclination to be players rather than pawns.

### I. SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Between November 2007 and February 2008, the survey was mailed to a sample of Chinese and Vietnamese American adults (18 and older) residing in areas in and adjacent to Boston with high concentrations of Asian Americans. The survey was produced in English, Chinese, and Vietnamese. Chinese and Vietnamese adult residents were identified from resident lists utilizing Chinese and Vietnamese surnames.

The areas and population groups sampled correspond to the areas and populations served by our three partnering community organizations. One organization serves Chinese Americans primarily in Boston and the neighboring city of Quincy. Another serves primarily Vietnamese Americans in the Dorchester neighborhood of Boston. The third serves Asian Americans throughout Greater Boston including a significant percentage who reside in the cities of Brookline and Cambridge. Systematic random sampling was utilized to draw a sample of 3,495 persons. Four hundred twelve surveys (219 in English, 135 in Chinese, and fifty-eight in Vietnamese) were received for a response rate of 11.8%. The margin of error is +/- 4.8%.<sup>5</sup>

The attitudinal questions were focused in three areas: 1) attention paid to immigration, 2) views on the impact of immigrants and sympathy with immigrant rights demands as well as immigration related policies, and 3) likelihood of engaging in certain behaviors. In addition, several socio-demographic and background questions were included.

### II. PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

Nearly three-quarters of the respondents are of Chinese ancestry, while just under one-quarter is of Vietnamese descent.<sup>6</sup> Somewhat more than one-half, 53.2%, of the overall sample are female. About 30% of the

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5. At the 95% confidence level.

6. This approximately 3 to 1 ratio is comparable to that for the Chinese and Vietnamese populations in the cities from which the respondents were drawn.

respondents are in the 30–44 and 45–64 age groups, while just below 20% percent fall in the 18–29 and 65 or older age groups. Only 12% of the Vietnamese, however, are aged 65 years or older.

Overall, about three-quarters of the respondents were not born in the U.S. Ninety-three percent of Vietnamese and 70.5% of the Chinese in the study are foreign born. Nearly 60% of those born outside the country arrived in 1992 or earlier. Twenty percent arrived in the last ten years and three-quarters of these more recent arrivals are Chinese. Over 80% of the respondents are U.S. citizens.

More than half of the respondents overall have a college degree or higher. On the other end of the spectrum, 14.1% have a 9th grade education or less. A much greater percentage of Chinese have post-graduate training, 37%, as compared to Vietnamese, 7%.

III. FINDINGS<sup>7</sup>

A. Attention Paid to the Issue of Immigration

One of the essential foundations for activism or involvement is interest in an issue area.<sup>8</sup> The survey results show that the Asian American respondents do follow the discussion about immigration with over 80% paying attention to these matters. The high levels of attention are generally reflected across the board among immigrants and non-immigrants, those residing in the United States for many years and those who are more recent arrivals, Chinese and Vietnamese, young and old, females and males, and the well-educated and the less-educated.

Table 1: Amount of attention paid to issue of immigration<sup>9</sup>

A great deal of attention	26.9%
Some attention	53.9%
Not very much attention	15.5%
No attention at all	1.7%
Don't know	1.9%
Total	99.9%

N=412<sup>10</sup>

7. Column percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding.

8. The relationship between interest and political participation is well-established in the political science literature. See, e.g., SIDNEY VERBA AND NORMAN H. NIE, PARTICIPATION IN AMERICA: POLITICAL DEMOCRACY AND SOCIAL EQUALITY (Harper & Row 1972); VERBA ET AL., VOICE AND EQUALITY: CIVIC VOLUNTARISM IN AMERICAN POLITICS (Harvard University Press 1995); and M. MARGARET CONWAY, POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN THE UNITED STATES (3rd ed. CQ Press 2000). See also PEI-TE LIEN, MARGARET CONWAY & JANELLE WONG, THE POLITICS OF ASIAN AMERICANS: DIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY (Routledge) (2004) (applying the relationship between interest and political participation specifically to the Asian American community).

9. Question 1: "There has been a lot of discussion about immigration in this country lately. How much attention have you been paying to this issue?"

A particularly large proportion of immigrants, 82.2%, report paying “a great deal of attention” or “some attention” to discussions about immigration. Non-immigrants are not far behind in their level of attention with 76.1% of those born in the U.S. paying “a great deal of attention” or “some attention” to discussions about immigration. Almost three times as many immigrants, however, are paying “a great deal” of attention as compared with the native-born, 31.2% to 11.5%.

**Table 2: Amount of attention paid to issue of immigration by nativity**

	Native-born	Foreign-born
A great deal of attention	11.5%	31.2%
Some attention	64.6%	51.0%
Not very much attention	20.8%	14.1%
No attention at all	3.1%	1.0%
Don't know	0.0%	2.7%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

N=394

Attention to discussions about immigration is very high among both Chinese and Vietnamese. Notably, over 40% of Vietnamese report paying “a great deal of attention” to immigration discussions.

**Table 3: Amount of attention paid to issue of immigration by ethnicity**

	Chinese	Vietnamese
A great deal of attention	23.1%	40.9%
Some attention	56.5%	44.1%
Not very much attention	16.7%	12.9%
No attention at all	2.0%	0.0%
Don't know	1.7%	2.2%
Total	100.0%	100.1%

N=387

The older the respondent is, the more s/he pays attention to the discussion about immigration. In particular, 40% of respondents aged 65 or older say that they are paying “a great deal of attention,” compared to only 13.4% of those aged 18–29. More than a quarter of those aged 18–29 report paying “not very much attention,” compared to only 8% of those aged 65 or older.

10. The N value in all tables represents the number of respondents who answered the question.

**Table 4: Amount of attention paid to issue of immigration by age**

	18-29	30-44	45-64	65 or older
A great deal of attention	13.4%	23.2%	31.7%	40.0%
Some attention	56.1%	56.8%	55.8%	44.0%
Not very much attention	25.6%	17.6%	11.7%	8.0%
No attention at all	4.9%	0.8%	0.8%	1.3%
Don't know	0.0%	1.6%	0.0%	6.7%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

N=402

In all categories of educational attainment, respondents report that they are following discussions about immigration. Notably, however, the less education a person has, the more likely s/he is paying attention. For example, 40.7% of respondents with a 9th grade education or less report that they are paying “a great deal of attention” – the highest proportion of any educational cohort. In comparison, only 16.4% of those with post-graduate training say they are paying “a great deal of attention.”

**Table 5: Amount of attention paid to issue of immigration by education**

	9th grade or less	Some high school	High school graduate	Some college	College graduate	Post-graduate training
A great deal of attention	40.7%	38.1%	25.4%	31.1%	27.0%	16.4%
Some attention	31.5%	47.6%	65.1%	53.3%	52.0%	62.1%
Not very much attention	13.0%	14.3%	9.5%	15.6%	19.0%	17.2%
No attention at all	1.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.0%	4.3%
Don't know	13.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.0%	0.0%
Total	100.1%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

N=399

*B. Attitudes About Immigrants and Immigration Policies*

As we have suggested, the evidence indicating high levels of attention to immigration issues by Asian Americans is a critical component of potential involvement and activism. Also important are the attitudes that Asian Americans have regarding the role and impact of immigrants, (i.e., “do they strengthen or burden society?”), as well as attitudes concerning specific immigration policies, (e.g., preferences, legalization, etc.). Attention and attitudes are foundations on which specific acts of political and civic engagement by individuals, organizations, and communities can be constructed.

*1. Immigrants: Strengthen or Burden?*

By a greater than five to one margin, our respondents believe that immigrants strengthen rather than burden the country. A majority of all respondents across all categories irrespective of age, immigration status, gender, educational attainment, or Asian ethnicity share these sentiments.

**Table 6: Overall impact of immigrants on the country<sup>11</sup>**

Strengthen	66.6%
Burden	13.1%
No opinion/Don't know	20.4%
Total	100.1%

N=398

There are some notable differences, however, with respect to levels of education and views on the impact of immigrants. In general, the more education a person has, the more likely s/he believes that immigrants strengthen the country. About 82% of respondents with post-graduate training believe that immigrants strengthen the country, as opposed to 50.9% of those with a 9th grade education or less. Those with some college education are most likely to indicate that immigrants burden the country. A large percentage has no opinion or do not know.

11. Question 2: “In general, would you say that immigrants today strengthen the country or are a burden on the country?”

**Table 7: Overall impact of immigrants on the country by education**

	9th grade or less	Some high school	High school graduate	Some college	College graduate	Post-graduate training
Strengthen	50.9%	60.0%	63.8%	57.8%	67.3%	82.1%
Burden	15.1%	15.0%	17.2%	22.2%	15.3%	4.5%
No opinion/Don't know	34.0%	25.0%	19.0%	20.0%	17.3%	13.4%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	99.9%	100.0%

N=386

*2. Immigrant Category Preferences*

Since the U.S. government limits the total number of persons allowed to immigrate to this country, the preferences assigned to each category of immigrants are hotly debated. No clear consensus on which immigrant categories are preferable emerges among Asian Americans. This situation in turn complicates the process of building consensus around specific immigration preference structures. This finding probably reflects the diverse range of immigrant categories under which Asian Americans have entered the United States. When asked which of four categories of immigrants should be given the highest preference to immigrate, 32.2% of respondents select, “people who have family ties in the U.S.” However, the category of “highly-skilled workers” is close behind, receiving 29.8%. One-fifth of the respondents choose the category, “people facing economic or political hardship in their home countries.”

**Table 8: Immigrant category that should be given highest preference<sup>12</sup>**

Highly-skilled workers	29.8%
Workers who will occupy low level jobs that are not already filled	5.4%
People facing economic or political hardship in their home countries	20.3%
People who have family ties in the U.S.	32.2%
No opinion/Don't know	12.2%
Total	99.9%

N=369

12. Question 3: “Which category of people do you think should be given the highest preference to immigrate to the U.S.?”

Understandably, differences between Chinese and Vietnamese likely reflect some of the varied experiences of the two groups. Over 41% of Vietnamese give the highest preference to “people facing economic or political hardship in their home countries,” likely demonstrating the primarily refugee roots of Vietnamese immigration to the United States. On the other hand, about 36% of Chinese respondents believe that the highest preference should go to people who have family ties in the United States or to highly-skilled workers. This is a plausible reflection of the fact that Chinese immigration is of much longer duration, dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and has been accompanied by many varied circumstances and policies ever since.

**Table 9: Immigration category that should be given highest preference by ethnicity**

	Chinese	Vietnamese
Highly-skilled workers	34.3%	14.6%
Workers who will occupy low level jobs that are not already filled	5.7%	4.9%
People facing economic or political hardship in their home countries	15.1%	41.5%
People who have family ties in the U.S.	35.8%	22.0%
No opinion/Don't know	9.1%	17.1%
Total	100.0%	100.1%

N=347

In addition to ethnic differences, differences in educational attainment also elicit some distinctive preferences. Respondents with less than a college degree, for example, overwhelmingly select family ties as the preferred category. Those with post-graduate training overwhelmingly select highly-skilled workers.

**Table 10: Immigration category that should be given highest preference by education**

	9th grade or less	Some high school	High school graduate	Some college	College graduate	Post-graduate training
Highly-skilled workers	20.4%	5.3%	19.6%	21.4%	31.9%	46.5%
Workers who will occupy low level jobs that are not already filled	2.0%	5.3%	5.4%	11.9%	5.5%	4.0%
People facing economic or political hardship in their home countries	12.2%	26.3%	23.2%	33.3%	15.4%	23.2%
People who have family ties in the U.S.	53.1%	47.4%	41.1%	23.8%	33.0%	16.2%
No opinion/ Don't know	12.2%	15.8%	10.7%	9.5%	14.3%	10.1%
Total	99.9%	100.1%	100.0%	99.9%	100.1%	100.0%

N=356

*3. Latino Demands and Activism*

This article opened with a description of the significant attention focused on Latino engagement with issues related to immigrants and immigration policies. Our premise is that activism by Latinos is the dominant focus of public discourse. With this in mind, we believe that Asian American attitudes about Latino demands for immigrant rights are a factor in assessing the proclivity of Asian Americans to also be active. These attitudes also influence the prospects for collaboration between Asian Americans and Latinos. Our survey results indicate that nearly 60% of Asian Americans are indeed sympathetic with Latino demands for immigrant rights.

**Table 11: Sympathy for Latino demands<sup>13</sup>**

Very sympathetic	20.3%
Somewhat sympathetic	38.0%
Not very sympathetic	19.9%
Not sympathetic at all	10.3%
No opinion/Don't know	11.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

N=408

Overall, 61.3% of Chinese report being “very” or “somewhat sympathetic” to Latino activism as compared to 51.6% of Vietnamese. However, more Vietnamese (30.1%) than Chinese (17.2%) are “very sympathetic.”

**Table 12: Sympathy for Latino demands by ethnicity**

	Chinese	Vietnamese
Very sympathetic	17.2%	30.1%
Somewhat sympathetic	44.1%	21.5%
Not very sympathetic	19.3%	23.7%
Not sympathetic at all	9.0%	11.8%
No opinion/Don't know	10.3%	12.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>99.9%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

N=383

Nearly 70% of native-born respondents are “very” or “somewhat sympathetic” to Latino activist demands, compared to 55.1% of foreign-born respondents.

**Table 13: Sympathy for Latino demands by nativity**

	Native-born	Foreign-born
Very sympathetic	19.8%	20.1%
Somewhat sympathetic	49.0%	35.0%
Not very sympathetic	18.8%	20.4%
Not sympathetic at all	8.3%	10.5%
No opinion/Don't know	4.2%	13.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.1%</b>	<b>99.9%</b>

N=390

13. Question 4: “In the past year, many Latinos have been active in demanding rights for immigrants. How sympathetic do you feel to their demands?”

Immigrant Asian Americans who arrived in the last ten years are more sympathetic to Latino demands than those who have been in the United States for over a decade. In particular, those who immigrated five to ten years ago are most sympathetic to Latino demands.

**Table 14: Sympathy for Latino demands by year of arrival in U.S.**

	2003-2007	1998-2002	1993-1997	1992 or before
Very sympathetic	17.6%	30.2%	17.2%	19.8%
Somewhat sympathetic	47.1%	37.2%	34.4%	32.0%
Not very sympathetic	5.9%	16.3%	17.2%	23.3%
Not sympathetic at all	0.0%	7.0%	15.6%	11.0%
No opinion/Don't Know	29.4%	9.3%	15.6%	14.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.1%

N=299

*4. Legalizing Undocumented Immigrants*

Among policy issues, the debate on what to do about undocumented immigrants is especially intense. In order to provide some indication of the magnitude of the undocumented Asian American population, we asked respondents if they knew any person or persons of Asian descent living in the country without proper documentation. About one in five respondents indicate that they know at least one such undocumented person.

**Table 15: Know an undocumented Asian American<sup>14</sup>**

Yes	18.8%
No	67.0%
No opinion/Don't know	14.2%
Total	100.0%

N=394

Of the seventy-two respondents who know an undocumented person, over 44% report knowing one or two individuals in the country without proper documentation; about 18% say they know three to five; and 31.9% say they know more than five. Even with the likelihood of underreporting of information related to personal knowledge of undocumented persons, the responses still reflect the reality that issues affecting the undocumented are relevant concerns to a large component of the Asian American population.

14. Question 7: "Do you know anyone of Asian descent who is in the country illegally?"

**Table 16: Number of undocumented Asian Americans known<sup>15</sup>**

1 or 2	44.4%
3 to 5	18.1%
More than 5	31.9%
No opinion/Don't know	5.6%
Total	100.0%

N=72

On the fundamental question of whether they support or oppose a process for legalization of undocumented immigrants, a majority of Asian Americans at 52.2% are supportive while just under one-third, 32.8%, are opposed.

**Table 17: Legalization process for undocumented immigrants<sup>16</sup>**

Support	52.2%
Oppose	32.8%
No opinion/Don't know	14.9%
Total	99.9%

N=402

Native born respondents are particularly supportive of legalization with supporters outnumbering opponents in this group by a nearly three to one margin. Among immigrants, the gap between supporters and opponents is narrower with about 46% in support and 36% in opposition.

**Table 18: Legalization process for illegal immigrants currently living in the U.S. by nativity**

	Native born	Foreign born
Support	70.5%	45.7%
Oppose	26.3%	35.5%
No opinion/Don't know	3.2%	18.8%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

N=388

A greater percentage of Chinese respondents, 54.4%, support a process to legalize undocumented immigrants, compared to 45.7% of Vietnamese respondents.

15. Question 8: "How many?"

16. Question 6: "Do you support or oppose providing a process for illegal immigrants currently living in the U.S. the right to live here legally?"

**Table 19: Legalization process for undocumented immigrants by ethnicity**

	Chinese	Vietnamese
Support	54.4%	45.7%
Oppose	30.0%	42.4%
No opinion/Don't know	15.7%	12.0%
Total	100.1%	100.1%

N=379

The more education a respondent has, the more likely he or she is to support a process to legalize undocumented immigrants. In particular, respondents with post-graduate training are significantly more likely to support a process to legalize undocumented immigrants than any other educational level—a difference greater than 25% more than every other educational level. Those with between a high school degree and a college degree were significantly more likely to oppose a process of legalization than those with less than a 9<sup>th</sup> grade education, as well as those with post-graduate training.

**Table 20: Legalization process for undocumented immigrants by education**

	9th grade or less	Some high school	High school graduate	Some college	College graduate	Post-graduate training
Support	44.0%	42.9%	39.7%	43.2%	46.9%	71.3%
Oppose	20.0%	33.3%	42.9%	45.5%	42.9%	22.6%
No opinion/Don't know	36.0%	23.8%	17.5%	11.4%	10.2%	6.1%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.1%	100.1%	100.0%	100.0%

N=391

IV. IMPACT OF DISCUSSIONS ABOUT IMMIGRANTS AND IMMIGRATION ON BEHAVIOR

After having established earlier that Asian Americans are very interested in immigration issues, we assess the possible impact of that attention on certain behaviors – the likelihood for those who are not naturalized to become citizens and the willingness of respondents to engage in particular acts of political participation.

*A. Likelihood of Becoming a Citizen*

The decision by immigrants to seek United States citizenship is often a complicated one. The survey results indicate that a large percentage of immigrants, 55%, feel that the discussion about immigrants and immigration contributes to their likelihood of becoming naturalized. This is an important finding relative to certain modes of system-directed political participation since citizenship, for example, is a necessary attribute for those desiring to vote.

**Table 21: Discussion has made me more likely to want to become a citizen<sup>17</sup>**

Yes	54.7%
No	26.6%
No opinion/Don't know	18.8%
Total	100.1%

N=64

*B. Likelihood of registering to vote and voting*

Americans who are citizens must also then clear the voter registration hurdle before they can cast their ballots. For those Asian American citizens who are not yet registered to vote, almost half indicate that discussions concerning immigration increase their likelihood of registering.

**Table 22: Discussion has made me more likely to register to vote<sup>18</sup>**

Yes	45.9%
No	40.5%
No opinion/Don't know	13.5%
Total	99.9%

N=37

With regard to Asian Americans who are citizens and registered to vote, the response to a question about whether the discussion about immigrants and immigration will increase the likelihood of their turning out to vote suggests that these issues will indeed motivate electoral activism. Nearly 46% of this group indicate that this discussion increases their likelihood of voting.

17. Question 13: "Has discussion about immigrants and immigration made you more likely to want to become a U.S. citizen?"

18. Question 15: "Has discussion about immigrants and immigration made you more likely to register to vote?"

**Table 23: Discussion has made me more likely to vote<sup>19</sup>**

Yes	45.8%
No	34.4%
No opinion/Don't know	19.8%
Total	100.0%

N=288

Among the Vietnamese, the impact of discussion about immigrants and immigration on likely voter turnout is especially dramatic. Two-thirds indicate that they will be more likely to vote because of these discussions.

**Table 24: Discussion has made me more likely to vote by ethnicity**

	Chinese	Vietnamese
Yes	38.8%	66.7%
No	42.7%	11.6%
No opinion/Don't know	18.4%	21.7%
Total	99.9%	100.0%

N=275

*C. Likelihood of Participating in Activities Supporting Greater Immigrant Rights*

Asian American responses to inquiries about the likelihood of participating in selected activities other than voting in support of immigrant rights challenge the popular notion that Asian Americans are content to sit on the sidelines and let others carry the ball.<sup>20</sup> Asian Americans are prepared to be active. Respondents vary in their likelihood of participation depending on the type of activity identified. For example, respondents are most likely to sign a petition at over 70% and least likely to join a march or demonstration. Even in the latter category, however, nearly 30% indicate that they are “very likely” or “somewhat likely” to march or demonstrate. Over 38% indicate that they are likely to contact a government official and a similar portion indicates a likelihood of working with others in an organization dealing with immigrant rights issues.

19. Question 16: “Has discussion about immigrants and immigration made you more likely to vote in upcoming elections?”

20. The importance of not limiting the examination of Asian American political participation to electoral activities is detailed in several studies. *See, e.g.,* PEI-TE LIEN, *THE MAKING OF ASIAN AMERICA THROUGH POLITICAL PARTICIPATION* (Temple University Press) (2001) (for a discussion asserting a stereotypical assumption that Asian Americans are politically apathetic); Jane Junn, *Participation in Liberal Democracy: The Political Assimilation of Immigrants and Ethnic Minorities in the United States*, 42 AM. BEHAV. SCIENTIST 1417, 1417-38 n.9 (1999) (arguing the importance of not limiting the examination of immigrant and ethnic minority political participation to electoral politics).

**Table 25: Likelihood of participating in activities to support immigrant rights<sup>21</sup>**

	Participate in march or demonstration	Sign a petition	Contact a government official	Work with others in an organization
Very likely	9.9%	33.4%	12.8%	9.8%
Somewhat likely	19.4%	36.5%	25.7%	27.9%
Not very likely	27.3%	13.8%	28.7%	32.8%
Not at all likely	33.0%	7.7%	23.9%	18.9%
No opinion/Don't know	10.4%	8.6%	9.0%	10.6%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.1%	100.0%

N=355, 362, 335, 265 by activity

Of those answering that they are “very likely” or “somewhat likely” to work in an organization on immigrant rights issues, 51.5% are most likely to work with Asian American organizations, 19.4% with multiracial or multiethnic organizations, and 24.3% with any kind of organization.

**Table 26: Type of organization most likely to work with<sup>22</sup>**

Asian American	51.5%
Multiracial or multiethnic	19.4%
Any kind	24.3%
No opinion/Don't know	4.9%
Total	100.1%

N=103

There are some interesting differences between Vietnamese and Chinese with regard to some activities. Vietnamese report being “very likely” to participate in the selected activities much more often than Chinese. Vietnamese, for instance, are more likely than Chinese to participate in marches or demonstrations. In addition, Vietnamese indicate that they are “very likely” to join in these activities by a greater than five to one margin. More than half of Vietnamese are “very likely” to sign a petition compared to 28.8% of Chinese. Just over a quarter of Vietnamese are “very likely” to contact a government official, compared to 9.4% of Chinese, and nearly a third are “very likely” to work in an organization,

21. Question 17: “There are several ways people organize to try to influence what policies are made. Please tell me how likely would you be to participate in the following activities to support greater rights for immigrants?”

22. Question 18: “With what kind of organization would you be most likely to work?”

compared to 6.2% of Chinese. Similarly, Vietnamese are considerably more likely overall than Chinese to contact a government official or to work with others in an organization.

**Table 27: “Very likely” to participate in activities to support immigrant rights by ethnicity**

	Chinese	Vietnamese
Participate in march or demonstration	4.7%	25.6%
Sign a petition	28.8%	51.2%
Contact a government official	9.4%	26.0%
Work with others in an organization	6.2%	30.2%

N=32, 118, 42, 26 by row

CONCLUSION

In the news article mentioned at the beginning of this report, several individuals in the Asian American community were asked by the reporter why Asian Americans appeared to be conspicuously absent from participating in demonstrations and other activities centered on immigrant rights. Answers offered included the heavy preoccupation of Asian Americans with the demands of work and school, limited coverage of the immigration debate in the Asian American press, the lack of organized structures for activism, unfamiliarity with the political process, fears of repercussions for being active, etc. Assuredly, all of these factors and others shed some light on the challenges to Asian American engagement. Despite these difficulties, however, a critical finding of this study is that many Asian Americans are geared-up for activism. The key ingredients are in place for active responses – high interest and a willingness to indicate policy views. The focus on immigration according to our respondents increases the likelihood of many of them to engage in a range of politically relevant behaviors – seeking naturalization, registering to vote, turning out to vote, signing petitions, contacting officials, joining with others in organizations, and even, for some, joining in marches and demonstrations to further immigrant rights.

We are mindful, of course, that a willingness to participate politically is not the same as actual participation. Individuals do not always do what they say they will.<sup>23</sup> There is no doubt, however, that issues related to immigration touch the lives of Asian Americans broadly and deeply. Organizers and organizations from within the Asian American community

23. On the other hand, we are cognizant of the fact that a willingness to participate can be thwarted if barriers to effective participation are not removed. The legal battles over ballot access and bilingual ballots, for example, remind us that the desire to participate often confronts barriers to participation.

and beyond interested in expanding activism should heed the challenge to further educate their constituents about the oftentimes complex dimensions of the immigration debate. Solidarity among Asian Americans and with others engaged in the important struggle for immigrant rights will be enhanced by promoting awareness of and strengthening the linkages among informed interest, relevant attitudes, and political action.