

Participation in Liberal Democracy

The Political Assimilation of Immigrants and Ethnic Minorities in the United States

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This article compares patterns of participatory behavior in politics among immigrants and ethnic minorities in the United States. Differences in rates of participation in a range of political activities from system-directed acts, such as voting and contacting officials, to more direct forms of participation, such as protesting, are analyzed for Whites, African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans, as well as by generation of immigration within groups. The extent to which standard socioeconomic status models of participatory behavior explain variation in political activity across ethnic and racial groups is assessed. In so doing, the article challenges the normative interpretation of the results from these standard models that more participation among minorities and new entrants to the United States is desirable.

How do changes in the ethnic composition of the U.S. population influence citizen participation in liberal democracy? Recent ballot proposals in California—where in the next decade, no one ethnic or racial group will constitute a majority of the population—showcase a spectacular example of political action aimed at restricting the political rights of immigrants and other minorities. Although few other states can match the diversity of California, immigrants and their second-generation offspring constitute roughly one fifth of the U.S. population. In a society increasingly colored by a diversity of immigrants, to what extent can the structure and culture of liberal democracy in America permit the expression of difference that such compositional change engenders? For instance, one might question the persistence of the current practice of single-member winner-take-all legislative elections at both the national and state levels, which make winning elections and securing power and representation more difficult for minorities.

The study of the political consequences of international migration to the United States usually does not begin with an assessment of the ways current democratic institutions and practices either accommodate or constrain new entrants to the polity. Instead, emphasis has more often been placed on determining which factors enhance the political incorporation and assimilation of immigrants and ethnic minorities into American politics as it is presently constituted.

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In political science, perhaps the most common form of this type of analysis is the identification of individual-level characteristics, such as level of formal education, economic resources, generation of immigration, and ethnicity or national origin, on the propensity to be politically active. The implicit acceptance of the democratic system in its current state, combined with the normative position, at least among those on the Left, that participation by immigrants and ethnic minorities ought to be increased, is a familiar theme. It is reasoned that the entrance into the democratic polity of immigrants and ethnic minorities as citizen voters creates opportunities for the development of group-based political power and better representation for previously marginalized groups. At the same time, it is precisely this compositional change and the possibility of enhanced political power for immigrants and ethnic minorities that contribute to restrictionist movements.

In this article, I scrutinize the claim that more participation—especially among immigrants and ethnic and racial minorities—is better, by examining patterns of participatory behavior among residents of the United States and considering the following questions: How well do standard socioeconomic status models explain variation in political behavior across race and ethnicity? To what extent is the familiar interpretation of the results from these standard models consistent with the position that more participation is better?

MORE IS BETTER?

More political participation is usually considered to be a good thing, and during a time in which liberal democracy has few ideological rivals, there is little disagreement that more citizen participation is desirable—provided that this activity constitutes the free expression of voice through democratic deliberation.¹ Many Western feminist theorists have adopted the normative goal of more political participation (e.g., Eisenstein, 1994; Fraser, 1992; Phillips, 1994). Likewise, the political ideal of the practice of political discourse in a public sphere, described by Habermas (1989), in a more deliberative democracy places primary importance on the political and civic engagement of individual citizens (see also Gutmann & Thompson, 1996). There are several common justifications for advocating more political activity in democracy. The most widely held belief among scholars is consistent with Western liberal and enlightenment political theory, which argues that more citizens participating means that more individual opinions and preferences are being taken into account. More individual voice in democracy translates into better representation, which produces a collective outcome that more closely approximates the common good and that promotes equality and justice. In this view, the democratic process is conceived as a neutral mechanism that aggregates revealed individual preferences. A second reason for wanting more citizen participation in democracy has its origin in another set of democratic theories, where political activity benefits citizens not

by virtue of the outcomes of more equitable or efficient preference aggregation but, rather, by aiding individuals themselves in their development as citizens and in their connections to the political community. As individuals follow politics, collect information, express preferences, and deliberate about politics, they develop into capable democratic citizens more fit for inclusion in the polity. Finally, more participation is thought to be good for system-level stability; better attended elections provide popular support for policies and leaders, thereby signifying the legitimacy and stability of both government and nation. These three justifications are not mutually exclusive but, instead, are linked with one another as compelling reasons to advocate the position that more participation is better.

Indeed, more political activity—that is, more liberal democracy in the form of expanded expression of voice and deliberation among citizens—has been advocated as a procedural and substantive solution for distributional inequities in social and political goods. Increasing political activity among those traditionally disadvantaged and politically underrepresented can help create public policies that take their interests into account, as well as empower those previously disenfranchised to take political stands in order to develop and forward their interests. Following this logic, differences in rates of participation among citizens are considered problematic because differences in participatory input imply both inequality in political output as well as variation in the development of qualities desirable to democratic citizenship. Because immigrants and ethnic and racial minorities in the United States participate in politics at comparatively lower rates, people in these groups have become the target of calls for political activity through naturalization and voter registration drives. Such well-intentioned campaigns seek greater equality in political outcomes by making the electorate—the mass of citizens with some means of power in representative democracy—more descriptively representative of the population at large. The inference is that policies beneficial to those previously disenfranchised are most likely to be adopted when the face of the electorate approximates the face of the polity. Conversely, undesirable political outcomes are reasoned to be the result of a lack of activity among those with interests at stake. Under circumstances of modest rates of political activity among immigrants and minorities, what falls under scrutiny for change is the people who influence the institutions and processes of democratic government rather than the institutions themselves.

Under what circumstances might we be doubtful of the claim that more participation is good? More can be desirable only under circumstances in which two critical assumptions are met. First, for democracy to be better with more participation, the process itself—whether representative, parliamentary, or direct—must not privilege some group or ideology. Quite simply, it cannot be assumed that the structure, institutions, and culture of representative government in America present the same costs and incentives to participate for one who is recently naturalized and a native-born English-speaking citizen, for example. Rather, the extent to which democratic practice is either neutral or constructed

from already existing standards that systematically advantage some and disadvantage others must be considered when evaluating whether more participation is desirable. Second, more participation can be justified only if a common understanding of agency and citizenship is fluid; the conception of democracy cannot uphold some a priori static definition of the model citizen. Competing visions of citizenship must be recognized, and the construction of the meaning of being political must reflect the composition of the political community, including those who differ from the already existing cultural norm. As such, democracy cannot require assimilation to the current model; rather, the conception of a democratic citizen must itself be colored by the diversity of the population.

MORE PARTICIPATION AND SOCIAL SCIENCE MODELS

The notion that more participation is better has found a safe home in empirical investigations of mass political behavior in the United States. Political scientists have, for the most part, adopted some portion of this logic for why more participation is good and have directed their attention to studying what makes people active in politics. Models identifying which individual factors contribute to participation are thus deemed useful in developing strategies for increasing participation in the mass public. Most popular among the set of explanations for why people are active in politics is the socioeconomic status, or SES, model. People with more social and economic resources are also more likely to both bear the costs of taking part in politics and value and recognize the incentives of participating. As models of political behavior go, the SES model has thus far been a consistent and safe bet. It has succeeded in identifying among the most important individual-level characteristics that differentiate those who are more likely to be engaged in politics from those who do not take part. The two factors that have consistently proven to be the most important predictors of participation are formal educational attainment and family income, with the former accounting for the larger share of the variation in citizen activity. Political scientists Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980) describe the importance of formal education to voting as “transcendent,” and almost 50 years of American National Election Study and other polling data demonstrate repeatedly that the more highly educated and those with more substantial economic resources participate in politics at higher rates than those with less formal education and more modest incomes. In this way, the SES model has been a resounding success. With respect to explaining political participation among non-White minority Americans, the SES model has also proven useful; once higher levels of education and family wealth among Whites have been controlled for, African American and Hispanic citizens have been found to participate at or near the same rates as their more economically and educationally advantaged White counterparts.²

Despite its perceived success, the SES model suffers from several significant problems. First, although the SES model identifies the individual-level factors

related to political activity, it says little about what it is exactly about education and income that make them such powerful predictors of participation. With some exceptions, the SES model is grossly undertheorized.³ Second, and more damaging to its logic, is the fact that the model yields predictions about political behavior in the wrong direction over time. What has been famously described by Richard Brody (1978) as the “puzzle of participation” is the expectation generated from the simple additive assumption of the SES model that participation should grow over time at a level commensurate with its determinants, at the same time that we observe decline or stasis in electoral activity. Inconsistent with the prediction of the SES model, political engagement has not followed the upward trajectory of the main causal variable in the model; voting, campaign work, and other forms of engagement in electoral politics have declined or remained constant, whereas average levels of formal education have increased dramatically over time.⁴

Finally, some have questioned the extent to which the model applies to a diversity of groups of people. For instance, higher resources do not necessarily drive similar rates of participation among Asian Americans, who, compared to Whites, are more highly educated but less active politically (see Lee, 1998; Lien, 1997; Tam, 1995). Even for those groups, such as African Americans, for which the SES model has a better fit to the data, the interpretation as “positive” of the finding that differences in political activity with Whites either disappear or recede significantly once disparities in resources are accounted for is problematic.⁵ One could argue that making Whites and minorities look like one another in statistical analysis by controlling for what in reality amount to substantial differences in income and education is an odd way to find optimism. Furthermore, a scenario of no variation in the independent variables (where everyone is well educated and wealthy) would be impossible in the American democratic system as it currently exists. Even if we are near “the end of history” in terms of ideological diversity, the hierarchical configuration of democratic-capitalist values, structures, and the institutions that support them (including formal education) are in no imminent danger of extinction.

Notwithstanding these difficulties, the implications of the SES model have been interpreted by fans of liberal democracy as encouraging. Potential participants in the polity can be brought into the political system by increasing their reserve of social and economic resources. In other words, resource-poor individuals can and should be enriched and compelled to participate through their incorporation into the social, political, and economic hierarchy. In the analysis that follows, I reinterpret the findings of the SES model for minority and White Americans. Formal educational attainment and income are conceived of as surrogates for economic and political assimilation to liberal democratic practices and norms in America, and they predominate as explanations of more traditional system-directed political activities such as voting and campaign work. Yet the measures of assimilation (education and income) are less important for other more direct forms of political activity that require less interaction with formal

political institutions. In the next section, I present analyses from two recent surveys of Whites, African Americans, Hispanics, and Asian Americans, detailing how much and what kinds of political activities they engage in and what differences exist between groups.

WHAT THE DATA SAY ABOUT POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Two unique features of both the 1990 Citizen Participation Study (CITPART) and the 1993-1994 Texas A&M Minority Survey (TAM) set them apart from other data collections of mass political behavior. Instead of restricting the measurement of participation to the electoral realm, both surveys asked respondents about their engagement in a wide variety of activities. In addition to the range of political and social activities, a second unique feature of the 1990 CITPART and 1993-1994 TAM studies is the large number of African Americans, Hispanics, and Asians included in the samples. Typical national surveys draw a sample of people to interview of between 1,000 and 2,000 adults who are representative of the U.S. population. Because minority Americans are outnumbered by Whites by a more than four-to-one margin, only small numbers of minority Americans are interviewed in most national surveys. For example, in a typical survey of 1,500 adult Americans, between 90 and 120 Hispanics will be interviewed; an even smaller proportion of Asian Americans, who make up less than 2% of the U.S. population, will be interviewed. The CITPART gathered data from interviews with more than 15,000 Americans—10 times the usual size of the typical national sample, yielding a much larger sample of minority Americans' behavior for analysis. The 1993-1994 TAM survey also used a strategy of stratified sampling to obtain roughly 500 Anglo-Whites, African Americans, Mexican Americans, and Asian Americans.⁶

Taken together, these two data collections present a unique opportunity to view what differences exist in the types, levels, and sources of political activity among Americans, grouped by race and ethnicity. At the same time, however, the two studies differ significantly in terms of their timing (one prior to the 1992 presidential election and the other a year after), samples (one national and the other statewide in Texas), and the questions asked. In particular, the 1990 CITPART study surveyed a random sample of the U.S. population about a wide range of political activities, incorporating both system-directed and more direct forms of political activity, although generation of immigration was not measured. Alternatively, the 1993 TAM study surveyed residents of the state of Texas about their political activity in a somewhat more narrow range of activities, but it included several important questions on generation of immigration and language spoken at home. The 1990 data will therefore be used to examine differences between Anglo-Whites, African Americans, Hispanics, and Asian Americans in terms of their participation in system-directed and more direct forms of participation. Alternatively, the analysis of the 1993 Texas data will examine more

TABLE 1: Percentage Active in System-Directed Versus Direct Political Activity by Race/Ethnicity (difference from Whites in parentheses)

	<i>Anglo-White</i>	<i>African American</i>	<i>Hispanic</i>	<i>Asian American</i>
System-directed political activity				
Registered to vote	82	82 (0)	57 (-25)	46 (-36)
Voted in 1988 presidential election	74	67 (-7)	45 (-29)	35 (-39)
Voted in most or all local elections	57	52 (-5)	33 (-24)	22 (-35)
Worked on a political campaign in last 5 years	11	12 (+1)	9 (-2)	9 (-2)
Gave money to a political campaign in last year	19	17 (-2)	12 (-7)	13 (-6)
Contacted government official in last 5 years	37	22 (-15)	18 (-19)	20 (-17)
Direct political activity				
Served on a local board or council in last 5 years	8	11 (+3)	8 (0)	4 (-4)
Worked with others in local community last year	30	34 (+4)	21 (-9)	26 (-4)
Participated in protest (not strike-related) in last 5 years	5	9 (+4)	5 (0)	9 (+4)
Percentage of population (sample %)	83	10	6	1
Total number of people interviewed	12,149	1,400	894	157

SOURCE: 1990 Citizen Participation Study.

closely the impact of generation of immigration and language assimilation on overall political activity among the four groups in the study (Anglo-Whites, African Americans, Mexican Americans, and Asian Americans).

Table 1 shows the proportion of people in each group in the U.S. national survey who are active in each of nine different types of political activities, including electoral activity, contacting a public official, local community activity, organizational activity, and protesting. The participatory activities are divided into two categories: system-directed political activity and direct political activity. System-directed activities are aimed at influencing elected representatives and other agents of government, whereas the activities classified as direct political activity include those types of participation that involve working directly with others, where the action is not necessarily aimed at elected or appointed officials. The biggest differences between Whites and minority Americans are in the activities of voting (both at the presidential level and for local candidates) and contacting a government official. Not surprisingly, these activities require interaction with bureaucratic institutions of government. Although Blacks are only somewhat less active than Whites in all of the system-directed activities (but significantly less likely to contact a government official), there are large disparities between Anglo-Whites and Hispanics, as well as Asian Americans, in all of the system-directed activities. For instance, only half as many Hispanics

TABLE 2: Percentage Active in Texas by Race/Ethnicity (difference from Whites in parentheses)

	<i>Anglo- White</i>	<i>African American</i>	<i>Mexican American</i>	<i>Asian American</i>
Voted in 1992 presidential election	80	65 (-15)	52 (-28)	37 (-43)
Contributed money or worked for candidate or party	24	20 (-4)	17 (-7)	15 (-9)
Signed a petition	37	21 (-16)	21 (-16)	20 (-17)
Contacted a public official by writing or phone	34	19 (-15)	17 (-17)	13 (-21)
Attended a public meeting	25	24 (-1)	17 (-8)	19 (-6)
Worked with others to solve local problem	38	35 (-3)	30 (-8)	18 (-20)
Attended a demonstration or rally	5	12 (+7)	12 (+7)	6 (+1)
Total number of people interviewed	566	513	550	500

SOURCE: 1993-1994 Texas A&M Minority Survey.

contacted a public official as did Whites, whereas less than half as many Asians voted in presidential and local elections as did Whites.

The differences between groups recede dramatically when we consider forms of direct political activity, where fewer structural and institutional barriers exist. In the 1990 national data, African American citizens are more active in all three types of direct participation (serving on local boards, working with others in the community, and participating in a protest) than Whites. Likewise, Hispanics are less active only in working with others in the local community and equally as active as Whites on the other two forms of direct activity. Asians are almost twice as likely as Whites to engage in protest but half as likely to serve on a board or local council and work with others in the local community.

Table 2 shows the proportion of Anglo-Whites, African Americans, Mexican Americans, and Asian Americans who report taking part in each of the seven political activities asked about in the Texas survey. The patterns of lower activity among ethnic and racial minorities seen in the U.S. data are mirrored here, with larger differences between Whites and Blacks in Texas. Mexican Americans and Asian Americans are also less active than Anglo-Whites in all of the activities except for protesting. Although the other measure of direct political activity in the 1993 TAM study (working with others to solve a local problem) is similar to questions in the U.S. data, the same pattern does not apply. Unlike the 1990 national data, where African Americans were more active than Whites, Hispanics equally as active, and Asian Americans less active, minority respondents in the Texas data were, across all three groups, less likely to work with others to solve local problems. Of all of the types of political activity in both surveys, protesting is the only form in which minority Americans consistently outpace Whites. Protest is a form of political activity that does not necessarily require working with and within current institutions of existing democracy. Instead, marching in the streets—the most readily available weapon of the weak—is

TABLE 3: Percentage Active of Mexican Americans and Asian Americans in Texas by Generation of Immigration

	<i>Immigrant</i>	<i>Second Generation</i>	<i>Third Generation and Above</i>
Mexican Americans			
Voted in 1992 presidential election	19	43	63
Contributed money or worked for candidate/party	9	14	19
Signed a petition	6	19	24
Contacted a public official by writing or phone	8	20	18
Worked with others to solve local problem	14	25	34
Attended a public meeting	6	17	20
Attended a demonstration or rally	5	13	13
Proportion in each generation	16	18	66
Asian Americans			
Voted in 1992 Presidential election	31	65	79
Contributed money or worked for candidate/party	13	23	29
Signed a petition	17	33	46
Contacted a public official by writing or phone	12	10	33
Worked with others to solve local problem	16	10	40
Attended a public meeting	17	28	38
Attended a demonstration or rally	5	14	14
Proportion in each generation	86	6	8

SOURCE: 1993-1994 Texas A&M Minority Survey.

often the only avenue by which the marginalized and disenfranchised can make their voices heard. Resorting to protest is often explicitly a statement of disenfranchisement from and opposition to current institutions and practices. The extent to which this characterization applies to the various groups in question, however, is not uniform. For African Americans, the tradition of mass demonstrations in the civil rights movement may best exemplify the motivation behind protest activity. For more recent and voluntary immigrants, however, protest activity may not reflect such opposition. Instead, concerned with political matters in their home countries, immigrants may find it easier to march in a demonstration to express their sentiments rather than write a letter in English to a U.S. government official.⁷

In addition to the ethnic/racial differences, the Texas data also provide the opportunity to consider how generation of immigration is related to political participation. Table 3 presents the proportion of Mexican Americans and Asian Americans—separated into three categories of generation of immigration (immigrant, second generation, and third generation and above)—who take part in each of the seven activities.⁸ For both Mexican Americans and Asian Americans,

the more recent the immigration, the less active respondents are. For Mexican Americans, the largest jump in activity occurs between immigrants and the second generation across all types of activities. But for Asian Americans, the largest jumps in activity occur in voting, contributing money, signing a petition, and protesting between immigrants and second generation, and in the remaining activities (contacting, working with others to solve a local problem, and attending a public meeting) between the second and third generation.

It is important to note that the two groups differ dramatically from one another in terms of proportion in each generation of immigration. Two thirds of the sample of Mexican Americans in Texas are third generation or above, with the remaining third split between immigrant and second generation. The pattern of political participation among the largest group of Mexican Americans is strikingly similar to that of African Americans in that the proportion taking part in each activity diverges by no more than several points. Alternatively, 86% of the Asian Americans in Texas are foreign-born immigrants. Although immigrants of both of these groups are the least active, relative to those who are second generation and above, Asian American immigrants are more active than Mexican American immigrants in all of the activities and equally likely to take part in a demonstration or rally. The pattern of participation among third-generation Asian Americans is quite similar to that for Anglo-Whites in Texas.

INTERPRETING THE DIFFERENCES: MORE PARTICIPATION AND THE TROUBLE WITH THE SES MODEL

What are we to make of the differences in levels of political participation among groups of citizens in the United States? The most common interpretation of the differences among Whites and African Americans, Hispanics, and Asian Americans is to explain away the variation by accounting for the fact that White Americans on average have more social and economic resources. Invoking the SES model is perhaps the easiest solution for explaining the disparity. Table 4 and Table 5 present profiles of social and economic characteristics relevant to both political activity for the 1990 CITPART and the 1993 TAM data.

The first set of characteristics are measures of place of birth and English-language ability. In both of the U.S. national and Texas data, the vast majority of Whites and African Americans are native born. A significantly higher proportion of Mexican Americans in the Texas data (84%) were born in the United States, whereas only 60% of Hispanics nationally are native born. The proportion of Asians who are born in the United States is a third of Hispanics in the 1990 CITPART data (22%), and only 14% of Asian Americans in Texas are native born. In terms of language, only 27% of Hispanics in the 1990 CITPART data reported speaking English as their first language at home. In the Texas data, a much higher proportion of Mexican Americans reported that English is the

TABLE 4: Profile of Assimilation, Resources, and Other Characteristics by Race/Ethnicity (in percentages)

	<i>Anglo- White</i>	<i>African American</i>	<i>Hispanic</i>	<i>Asian American</i>
Assimilation				
Respondent was born in the United States	97	95	60	22
First language spoken at home is English	—	—	27	—
Social and economic resources				
Less than high school education	13	22	35	9
College degree and beyond	28	17	12	43
Family income less than \$15,000	16	25	27	16
Family income more than \$50,000	26	18	15	30
Respondent works outside the home full-time	56	56	54	54
Respondent owns home	71	46	51	45
Political mobilization				
Respondent is strong partisan	30	42	23	20
Family and community				
Respondent is married	61	42	59	57
Average years of residence in community	20	22	16	9
Average age	44	40	37	35

SOURCE: 1990 Citizen Participation Study.

language spoken most frequently at home (58%), whereas only a third of Asian Americans speak mostly English at home (35%).

The next set of characteristics on social and economic resources shows a different pattern. In terms of education, Asians are the most advantaged, with 43% in the 1990 CITPART data and 60% in the Texas data reporting earning a college or higher degree. Asians are the most highly educated group in both data collections, followed by Whites, where between one third and one half as many report having the same level of educational attainment (28% in the national data and 30% in the Texas sample). The most educationally disadvantaged group are Hispanics and Mexican Americans, where one third in both samples report having less than a high school education. African Americans are similarly disadvantaged, with one fifth on average not completing high school. The data on income show similar patterns to education, where Asian Americans and Whites have the most financial resources, whereas African Americans and Hispanics have the least. In addition, many more Whites own their own homes (more than 70% in both samples) than do minority Americans. In terms of political mobilization through strong political party affiliation, African Americans in both the 1990 CITPART data and the Texas sample were the most strongly affiliated, whereas Asian Americans are the least likely to claim a strong affiliation with the Democratic or Republican party.

TABLE 5: Profile of Assimilation, Resources, and Other Characteristics in Texas by Race/Ethnicity (in percentages)

	<i>Anglo- White</i>	<i>African American</i>	<i>Mexican American</i>	<i>Asian American</i>
Assimilation				
Respondent is immigrant	2	5	16	86
Respondent is second generation	2	1	18	6
Respondent is third generation or above	96	94	66	8
English spoken most frequently at home	100	99	58	35
Social and economic resources				
Less than high school education	12	18	32	6
College degree and beyond	30	17	11	60
Family income less than \$10,000	9	17	19	7
Family income more than \$60,000	21	8	10	26
Respondent owns home	74	52	64	60
Political mobilization				
Respondent is strong partisan	26	38	23	15
Family and community				
Respondent is married	62	41	59	67
Average years of residence in community	20	16	17	8
Average age	46	39	36	37

SOURCE: 1993-1994 Texas A&M Minority Survey.

To identify the importance of assimilation characteristics, social and economic resources, and mobilization to political participation, several models were estimated with ordinary least squares. For the 1993-1994 Texas data, system-directed and direct political activity were not separated, and an overall measure of political activity was created. Table 6 presents the results of the estimation of the model for the four separate groups. Being an immigrant has a significant negative effect on political participation for Mexican Americans, whereas immigrant and second-generation status reduces the likelihood that Asian Americans will be active. Likewise, speaking English at home affects only Asian American participation in a positive direction. Although the effect of education is positive and significant, it has the weakest effect for Asian Americans as compared with the other three groups. Income is a significant and positive predictor of activity for all but Asian Americans; instead, strong party affiliation and home ownership contribute to political activity. (Coefficients and standard errors for the age variables are detailed in Appendix A).

Two sets of models were estimated with the CITPART data. The first set of models predicting the two different types of political activity—system directed and direct—were estimated with all cases in the two samples. What differences remained between individuals of different racial/ethnic backgrounds were captured by dummy variables included in the model. A second set of models with an identical specification (with the exception of the exclusion of the race/ethnicity dummy variables) was estimated separately for each racial/ethnic group.

TABLE 6: Model Predicting Overall Political Activity in Texas by Race/Ethnic Background—Unstandardized Regression Coefficients (standard errors in parentheses)

	<i>Anglo- White</i>	<i>African American</i>	<i>Mexican American</i>	<i>Asian American</i>
Assimilation				
Respondent is immigrant	-.16 (.41)	-.17 (.34)	-.46** (.17)	-1.16** (.23)
Respondent is second generation	.15 (.46)	.24 (.64)	-.08 (.15)	-1.12** (.31)
English spoken most frequently at home	1.48 (.91)	.28 (.71)	.12 (.13)	.35** (.13)
Social and economic resources				
Education	.37** (.06)	.33** (.06)	.36** (.05)	.22** (.05)
Family income	.19** (.04)	.19** (.04)	.17** (.04)	.06 (.03)
Respondent owns home	.26 (.16)	.13 (.14)	.13 (.12)	.29* (.13)
Respondent is male	-.00 (.12)	-.19 (.12)	.10 (.11)	-.05 (.12)
Political mobilization				
Respondent is strong partisan	.32* (.14)	.27* (.13)	.25* (.13)	.84** (.16)
Family and community				
Respondent is married	-.08 (.15)	.28* (.14)	-.09 (.12)	-.30 (.16)
Length of residence in community	.01 (.00)	.01* (.01)	.01 (.00)	.02* (.01)
Adjusted R^2	.27	.25	.35	.30
<i>n</i>	467	440	484	437

SOURCE: 1993-1994 Texas A&M Minority Survey.

*significant at .05. **significant at .01.

Included in the specification of both of these regression models were the measures of being born in the United States and speaking English at home (for Hispanics only), the indicators of social and economic resources, a measure of strength of party affiliation as political mobilization, two measures of family and community, and control variables for gender and position in the life cycle.

Table 7 presents the estimates from the first set of models predicting system-directed political activity and direct political activity. For system-directed activity, such as voting, contacting, and working on a campaign, being African American or Hispanic had no independent effect, accounting for all other factors. Being Asian American, however, has a strong and negative impact on system-directed activity, despite controlling for assimilation and social and economic resources. Alternatively, for direct political activity such as protesting and working with others in the local community, being Black or Hispanic actually increases the likelihood of this type of political activity, whereas being

TABLE 7: Model Predicting System-Directed and Direct Political Activity—Unstandardized Regression Coefficients (standard errors in parentheses)

	<i>System Directed</i>	<i>Direct</i>
Race/ethnicity		
Respondent is African American	-.00 (.04)	.16** (.02)
Respondent is Hispanic	-.04 (.05)	.06* (.03)
Respondent is Asian American	-.49** (.12)	-.05 (.06)
Assimilation		
Respondent was born in the United States	.76** (.05)	.04 (.03)
Social and economic resources		
Education	.16** (.00)	.05** (.00)
Family income	.13** (.01)	.04** (.00)
Respondent works outside the home full-time	.04 (.03)	-.04** (.01)
Respondent owns home	.20** (.03)	.00 (.01)
Respondent is male	.03 (.02)	.01 (.01)
Political mobilization		
Respondent is strong partisan	.67** (.03)	.10** (.01)
Family and community		
Respondent is married	.12** (.03)	.02 (.01)
Length of residence in community	.01** (.00)	-.00 (-.00)
Adjusted R^2	.32	.09
<i>N</i>	13,152	13,152

SOURCE: 1990 Citizen Participation Study.

*significant at .05. **significant at .01.

Asian American has a negative though small and statistically nonsignificant effect. Being born in the United States has no effect on direct political participation but a strong and positive influence on system-directed activity. Of the remaining explanatory variables in the model, the measures of social and economic resources, mobilization, and family and community have positive effects on both types of participation, although the size of the effects is larger for system-directed activity. (Coefficients and standard errors for the age variables in the analyses detailed below are shown in Appendixes B through D.)

Several patterns across the analysis of the system-directed versus direct forms of political activity are worth noting. First, as noted by the higher degree of model fit (adjusted R^2), the SES model does a much better job of explaining the variation in the data for system-directed participation than for activity less mediated by current representative institutions, such as protest and communal work. Second, the coefficients for the indicators of race/ethnicity change both in sign and magnitude across the two types of activities for African American and Hispanics. Whereas being a minority renders one less active in traditional forms of political activity, all else equal, being Black or Hispanic actually predicts more participation in direct activities. The model is able to mostly explain away the effect of race/ethnicity for system-directed activity but not for direct participation.

TABLE 8: Model Predicting System-Directed Political Activity by Race/Ethnic Background—Unstandardized Regression Coefficients (standard errors in parentheses)

	<i>Anglo- White</i>	<i>African American</i>	<i>Hispanic</i>	<i>Asian American</i>
Assimilation				
Respondent was born in the United States	.75** (.07)	.96** (.17)	.68** (.11)	.93** (.30)
First language spoken at home is English	—	—	-.02 (.12)	—
Social and economic resources				
Education	.17** (.00)	.16** (.01)	.10** (.01)	.05 (.03)
Family income	.12** (.01)	.11** (.03)	.13** (.03)	.19* (.07)
Respondent works outside the home full-time	.04 (.03)	-.06 (.08)	.23* (.11)	-.06 (.27)
Respondent owns home	.21** (.03)	.16* (.08)	.13 (.11)	.32 (.28)
Respondent is male	.04 (.02)	.02 (.08)	-.05 (.10)	-.06 (.24)
Political mobilization				
Respondent is strong partisan	.68** (.03)	.57** (.08)	.78** (.12)	.50 (.29)
Family and community				
Respondent is married	.15** (.03)	-.00 (.08)	.05 (.11)	-.05 (.28)
Length of residence in community	.01** (.00)	.01** (.01)	.02** (.00)	.03* (.02)
Adjusted R^2	.30	.30	.36	.27
<i>n</i>	11,003	1,232	767	145

SOURCE: 1990 Citizen Participation Study.

*significant at .05. **significant at .01.

Although revealing, this first set of models tells us only whether race/ethnicity matters but provides little information on what factors influence political participation within groups of Americans. Table 8 presents the coefficients from the regression model predicting system-directed political activity, estimated separately for Anglo-Whites, African Americans, Hispanics, and Asian Americans. In the 1990 CITPART data, being born in the United States is significantly related to participation in system-directed activities, with the strongest effect for African Americans and Asian Americans. Both social and economic resources of education and family income are important for all racial/ethnic groups, with the exception of Asian Americans. Education is of the most modest importance for Asian Americans, compared to the other groups, and income is the most important compared to the other groups.

TABLE 9: Model Predicting Direct Political Activity by Race/Ethnic Background—Unstandardized Regression Coefficients (standard errors in parentheses)

	<i>Anglo- White</i>	<i>African American</i>	<i>Hispanic</i>	<i>Asian American</i>
Assimilation				
Respondent was born in the United States	.06 (.03)	-.02 (.10)	-.02 (.05)	.25 (.14)
First language spoken at home is English	—	—	.05 (.05)	—
Social and economic resources				
Education	.05** (.00)	.05** (.01)	.03** (.01)	.03 (.02)
Family income	.04** (.00)	.06** (.02)	.04** (.02)	.02 (.03)
Respondent works outside the home full-time	-.05** (.01)	-.02 (.05)	.02 (.05)	-.11 (.12)
Respondent owns home	.02 (.01)	-.09* (.05)	.05 (.05)	-.21 (.13)
Respondent is male	.01 (.01)	.04 (.04)	.02 (.05)	.05 (.11)
Political mobilization				
Respondent is strong partisan	.09** (.01)	.15** (.04)	.20** (.05)	.08 (.13)
Family and community				
Respondent is married	.03* (.01)	-.01 (.05)	-.02 (.05)	.15 (.13)
Length of residence in community	-.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.01 (.01)
Adjusted R^2	.08	.08	.09	.04
<i>n</i>	11,003	1,232	767	145

SOURCE: 1990 Citizen Participation Study.

*significant at .01.

Table 9 details the model estimates for each of the four groups, predicting direct political activity. The effect of assimilation characteristics has a statistically significant bearing on participation in direct political activities for none of the groups. Although the effects of both education and family income—the building blocks of the SES model—are positive for Anglo-Whites, African Americans, and Hispanics, they have no significant bearing for Asian Americans. Where social and economic resources matter to direct political participation, the magnitude of their effects is far less important than for system-directed activity.

The analysis of the second set of regression models estimated for each of the four groups separately shows that there are actually many similarities in the combination of factors that encourage participation. The one group that differed systematically was Asian Americans, for whom characteristics of assimilation

were more important than social and economic resources. Perhaps most telling, however, is the comparison between the prediction of the importance of social and economic resources for system-directed activity versus direct political activity. In the case of the former, education and family income have a much stronger impact than they do on participation in more direct forms of political activity. Thus, although resources facilitate political activity—it is far easier to make a campaign contribution when one has extra money—economic resources are but a partial explanation of political activity and do a better job differentiating who within groups is active rather than explaining the disparity between racial/ethnic groups. Indeed, the importance of social and economic resources, such as education and income, to conventional forms of system-directed participation by African Americans and Hispanics is evidence of the extent to which assimilation is a necessary condition for these types of activities. More conventional forms of political activity are facilitated by those social and economic characteristics that are valued as resources in American society. In particular, political participation directed at elected representatives is facilitated by exerting economic wealth, articulating reasoned opinion in American Standard English, and looking like others at political gatherings. In short, conventional democratic participation is facilitated by assimilation. However, other forms of activity may not be influenced as strongly by characteristics that signal assimilation. Instead, less conventional forms of activity—in particular, those that encourage group-based activity not necessarily directed at official structures of government or those at a local or communal level—may be less constrained by current structure and institutions in democracy.

Thus, all is not lost inferentially with the SES model as an explanation of political participation, for in one fundamental way, it accurately portrays the requirements for political access and influence in a social and economic system built on inequality. In this regard, the two central components of the SES model—formal educational attainment and income—are good surrogate measures of economic and political assimilation to norms of liberal democratic practice and resources necessary for participation in U.S. politics. Conceived in this way, the SES model should be a better predictor of engagement in political activities that are system directed and a poorer predictor of more direct forms of participation. For traditional system-directed forms of participation, social and economic resources predominate as predictors, and the SES model can explain away the effect of ethnicity. However, indicators of social and economic resources are less useful in predicting direct political activity, and the effect of being a minority remains significant.

CONCLUSION

So what would it take to make more participation better for democracy? This response is but a partial and preliminary formulation. The data illustrate some

patterns in participatory behavior and the factors that help explain why some are more active in politics than others. Yet these data are constrained by the universe of cases (the sample) and the measurements of political participation, as well as of race and ethnicity. Instead, the data and analysis highlight the need to reconsider the assumptions—either hidden or explicit—that underlie what matters about political participation and why more participation is or is not good.

As an ideal, more participation is desirable; it expands the voice of groups and interests traditionally excluded from American politics. However, advocating more participation—especially by immigrants and traditionally disadvantaged minorities who have been systematically excluded from democracy—is justifiable only under circumstances in which the process of decision making incorporates difference and when the conceptualization of the citizen is contested and fluid. When the institutions and practices are biased, and when concepts of political beings are fixed, advocating more participation does not necessarily empower or emancipate those who have been previously dominated. Under such circumstances, more participation can work in exactly the opposite direction from which it is intended. Instead of eradicating domination and encouraging justice, equality, individual political development, and regime legitimacy, more participation amid institutions of democracy that replicate the domination present in society and economy will only reinforce and legitimize the inequality. Moreover, more participation in a polity where behavioral norms are constructed from a static conception of the political being (as democratic citizen) forces those who differ to choose between assimilating to the standards of the actually existing democracy or exiting.⁹ In reducing barriers and gaining access to politics, we cannot neglect to reconstruct the politics we seek to influence.

What it would take to make more participation good is to grapple seriously with the meaning and problems of incorporating difference into the structures, institutions, and practices of democratic government in the United States. The solution cannot be a simple strengthening of already existing liberal democracy by asking for more participation among citizens. Instead, the challenge for politics in America is to create a democratic practice that views racial and ethnic differences in nonhierarchical terms and that provides electoral space for the representation of group interests beyond the two political parties. In short, the task is to institutionalize a democratic practice that redresses rather than reproduces structural inequalities.

APPENDIX A
Life Cycle Controls for Model Predicting
Overall Political Activity in Texas by Race/Ethnic Background—
Unstandardized Regression Coefficients (standard errors in parentheses)

<i>Life Cycle Controls</i>	<i>Anglo-White</i>	<i>African American</i>	<i>Mexican American</i>	<i>Asian American</i>
Age 25 to 34	-.02 (.23)	.12 (.19)	.20 (.16)	-.18 (.20)
Age 35 to 44	.49* (.23)	.44* (.18)	.44** (.17)	.32 (.23)
Age 45 to 54	.24 (.25)	.10 (.23)	.48* (.22)	.56* (.26)
Age 55 to 64	.61* (.26)	.60* (.25)	.52* (.28)	.38 (.29)
Age 65 and older	.13 (.25)	.37 (.28)	.80** (.27)	.44 (.42)

*significant at .05. **significant at .01.

APPENDIX B
Life Cycle Controls for Models Predicting System-Directed and
Direct Political Activity in 1990—Unstandardized Ordinary Least
Squares Regression Coefficients (standard errors in parentheses)

<i>Life Cycle Controls</i>	<i>System Directed</i>	<i>Direct</i>
Age 25 to 34	.36** (.04)	-.03 (.02)
Age 35 to 44	.79** (.04)	.07** (.02)
Age 45 to 54	.98** (.05)	.04 (.02)
Age 55 to 64	1.15** (.05)	.01 (.03)
Age 65 and older	1.27** (.05)	-.04 (.03)

*significant at .05. **significant at .01.

APPENDIX C
Life Cycle Controls for Model Predicting System-Directed
Political Activity in 1990 by Race/Ethnic Background—Unstandardized
Ordinary Least Squares Coefficients (standard errors in parentheses)

<i>Life Cycle Controls</i>	<i>Anglo-White</i>	<i>African American</i>	<i>Hispanic</i>	<i>Asian American</i>
Age 25 to 34	.34** (.05)	.54** (.11)	.28* (.15)	.21 (.35)
Age 35 to 44	.77** (.05)	.91** (.12)	.76** (.16)	.26 (.39)
Age 45 to 54	.96** (.05)	1.09** (.15)	1.07** (.19)	.52 (.53)
Age 55 to 64	1.15** (.06)	1.32** (.16)	.93** (.22)	-.47 (.65)
Age 65 and older	1.27** (.06)	1.27** (.17)	1.40** (.27)	.74 (.76)

*significant at .05. **significant at .01.

APPENDIX D

**Life Cycle Controls for Model Predicting Direct Political Activity in 1990
by Race/Ethnic Background—Unstandardized Ordinary Least Squares
Coefficients (standard errors in parentheses)**

<i>Life Cycle Controls</i>	<i>Anglo- White</i>	<i>African American</i>	<i>Hispanic</i>	<i>Asian American</i>
Age 25 to 34	-.03 (.02)	.00 (.07)	-.09 (.07)	.06 (.16)
Age 35 to 44	.08** (.02)	.04 (.07)	.03 (.07)	-.03 (.18)
Age 45 to 54	.03 (.03)	.14 (.09)	.00 (.09)	.34 (.26)
Age 55 to 64	.01 (.03)	.03 (.09)	-.14 (.10)	-.12 (.30)
Age 65 and older	-.05 (.03)	-.00 (.10)	-.00 (.12)	-.04 (.35)

*significant at .05. **significant at .01.

NOTES

1. This has not always been the case. Important traditions of thought, frequently characterized as elitist theories of democracy, take quite the opposite position regarding the desirability of greater popular sovereignty. Arguments against more citizen participation reflect concerns about the political, moral, and cognitive capability of the mass public; regime stability; and decision-making gridlock (see, e.g., Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954; Crozier, Huntington, & Watanuki, 1975; Huntington, 1968; Lipset, 1960; Michels, 1962; Schumpeter, 1942). Although silent about the desirability of more citizen participation, perspectives from rational choice suggest that we should simply not expect more activity from individuals (see, e.g., Fiorina 1990).

2. Recent example of research reporting this finding are Verba, Schlozman, Brady, and Nie (1993); Bobo and Gilliam (1990); Calvo and Rosenstone (1989); Danigelis, (1978, 1982); de la Garza, DeSipio, Garcia, Garcia, and Falcon (1992); Ellison and Gay (1989); Guterbock and London (1983); Lien (1994, 1997); Shingles (1981); Tate (1993); Uhlaner, Cain, and Kiewiet (1989); and Welch, Comer, and Steinman (1972). The socioeconomic status (SES) model has been revised to include the importance of ethnic political culture and group consciousness to the political behavior of African Americans and Hispanics (see Nelson, 1979; Miller, Gurin, Gurin, & Malanchuk 1981).

3. In their civic voluntarism model, Verba, Schlozman, and Brady go beyond SES by unpacking the elements of resources as time, money, and civic skills. See Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) and Brady, Verba, and Schlozman (1995). See also Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry (1996) for an analysis of the divergent pathways formal educational attainment takes to political participation. In addition, Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980, chap. 2) provide a good explanation of how and why formal education is so important to voting.

4. See Nie et al. (1996, chap. 6) for a critique of the simple additive logic of the SES model and an explanation of rising aggregate levels of education amid stagnant and declining political engagement.

5. Although the SES model explains a good deal of political behavior among African Americans, the results are not always consistent (see Dawson, Brown, & Allen, 1990; Harris, 1994). Moreover, Leighley and Vedlitz (in press) make a strong case for the applicability of models of participation that go beyond SES for explaining political activity among Hispanics and Asian Americans.

6. The 1990 Citizen Participation Study (CITPART) study was a representative sample of residents of the United States, whereas the 1993-1994 Texas A&M Minority (TAM) study surveyed residents of the state of Texas. In the latter, approximately 500 people from each of four groups were

sampled: Anglo-Whites, African Americans, Mexican Americans, and Asian Americans. Although country of origin was not asked of Asian Americans in the sample, U.S. Census data from Texas indicate that more than 50% of Asians in Texas are of Chinese or Vietnamese origin. In the CITPART sample, the Hispanic population was composed of people from a variety of places including Mexico (57%), Puerto Rico (12%), and Cuba (6%). Country of origin was not asked of Asians in this sample. For a more detailed description of the 1990 CITPART, see Verba et al. (1995); see Leighley and Vedlitz (in press) for a more detailed description of the 1993-1994 TAM.

7. See, for instance, the essays in Ahrari (1987) on ethnic group involvement in U.S. foreign policy.

8. Data for Anglo-Whites and African Americans are not included here because 97% of Whites and 95% of Blacks were born in the United States. In addition, no measures of participation by immigrants in their home countries were included in either the Texas or the national survey. Immigration scholars such as Portes and Rumbaut (1996, chap. 4) have documented the importance of such bidirectional participation to political adaptation.

9. In his study of Latin American immigrants in New York City, *Between Two Nations*, Jones-Correa (1998) argues that among the most significant reasons for the reluctance to become an American citizen is the requirement to renounce formal membership in one's country of origin and declare exclusive allegiance to the United States.

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