

A QUALITATIVE FOUNDATION: EXPLORING POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT  
AMONG ASIAN INDIANS IN CALIFORNIA

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B.A., University of California, Santa Cruz, 2003

THESIS

Submitted in partial satisfaction of  
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF PUBLIC POLICY AND ADMINISTRATION

at

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SACRAMENTO

FALL  
2007

A QUALITATIVE FOUNDATION: EXPLORING POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT  
AMONG ASIAN INDIANS IN CALIFORNIA

A Thesis

by

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Abstract

of

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*[Use of the next three headings is optional as long as the content is supplied.]*

Statement of Problem

Sources of Data

Conclusions Reached

\_\_\_\_\_, Committee Chair  
Dr. Mary Kirlin

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Insert your acknowledgements here.

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## Chapter 1

*“Voice and equality are central to democratic participation. In a meaningful democracy, the people’s voice must be clear and loud—clear so that policymakers understand citizen concerns and loud so that they have an incentive to pay attention to what is said. Since democracy implies not only governmental responsiveness to citizen interests but also equal consideration of the interests of each citizen, democratic participation must also be equal.”* (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995)

Over the course of the last 100-years, California’s population has grown at a rate higher than any other developed part of the world. ~~For example,~~ since 1960, California’s population has nearly doubled. Perhaps more remarkable is the highly diverse nature of California’s population growth. Just 30-years ago, 80-percent of Californians were non-Hispanic white. Yet, in the year 2000, no particular race or ethnic group represented a majority of the state’s population (Johnson, 2003).

For the next few years, California’s high rate of population growth will likely continue. By the year 2010, California’s population will reach nearly 40-million, increasing by an additional five-million from the year 2000. Similar to the growth trends of the past 30-years, the highest level of growth will be among Latino and Asian communities. Moreover, the population of non-Hispanic whites will grow slowly or even decline (Johnson, 2003).

In this context, as California policy-makers work to ensure the highest quality of life for all Californians, determining “who” California is and what exactly it needs will be an increasingly challenging task. Policy-makers and government officials will have to pay close attention to the increasingly diverse and rapidly changing needs and desires of their respective constituencies. A failure to do so could not only create severely

misguided policy decisions, but could also hold negative political consequences for officials seeking to maintain incumbency.

Understanding the nature of the public's voice—who speaks up, why, when, and how loudly—is vital for policy-makers seeking to do the “right” thing. This voice of the people gives policy-makers and government officials vital information about the needs and desires of the communities they serve. Thus, ~~in a democratic society such as California~~, policy-makers and government officials should be interested in making sure that as many Californians as possible have their voice heard ~~at the right time~~, in the clearest, loudest way possible.

Yet, do all Californians show equal levels of political engagement? Do they equally articulate their needs and desires to policy-makers and government officials? According to one of the most important works on voluntary civic and political participation published in the last 15-years, *Voice and Equality* by Sidney Verba, Kay Schlozman, and Henry Brady (1995), “the public's voice is often loud, sometimes clear, but rarely equal.” That is, the voices of some individuals and communities are more likely to be heard and understood by policy-makers.

As California's population continues to grow, and continues to increase in its level of diversity, whose voices are heard and whose are not, and why? Such political and civic engagement questions have been the topic of much research and study in the context of non-Hispanic whites, the Latino community, and the black community.

However, ~~despite when looking at what we know about research about~~ Asians and their political engagement, ~~the research~~ is quite sparse.

To the extent it exists, the work tends to focus ~~more~~ broadly on “Asians” ~~while~~ ~~typically~~ failing to account for the highly diverse nature of the Asian community.

In fact, one of the few existing studies on the Asian community’s political engagement ~~source please...~~ warned that generalizing the community’s political behaviors is risky.

The study explicitly acknowledged that ~~because~~ the Asian community is so diverse, in flux, and dispersed that making generalizations based on the existing research is not only problematic, but potentially of no use. However, the study also noted that such a gap in the existing literature presents important opportunities for researchers looking to employ an approach that is more sensitive to the multi-faceted, diverse nature of Asians in California (Lien, Collet, Wong, Ramakrishnan, 2001).

Thus, my study focuses on the economically and socially significant Asian-Indian community of California. Tracing their pre-immigration heritage to the country of India, Asian-Indians represent a significant component of the ~~great, diverse~~ growths in the Asian population seen throughout California. According to US Census data, the number of Asian-Indians in California nearly doubled over the course of the 10-years between 1990 and 2000. Specifically, California’s population of Asian-Indians totaled approximately 160,000 in the year 1990. By 2000, the state’s Asian-Indian population had grown to 314,000—an increase of 97-percent over 10-years (Kim, 2001). Can you put a graph in here? Also make comparisons to the total pop growth and other ethnic groups, that would help understand both scale relative to other groups, both asian and others, and growth rate relative to other groups.

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~~This increase in California's Asian-Indian population has had significant, positive economic impacts on the state.~~ While research quantifying the economic contributions of Asian-Indians in the aggregate is difficult to come by, studies regarding Asian-Indians in specific sectors of the economy—the high-technology industry as merely one example—provide some clues about what Asian-Indians mean to California.

According to a 1999 study by the Public Policy Institute of California, 32-percent of Silicon Valley's science and engineering workforce was comprised of immigrants. Of that, 23-percent were Asian-Indian. According to the same study, in 1998, a total of 774 Silicon Valley High-Technology firms were owned by Asian-Indians. They collectively employed nearly 17,000 individuals and had total sales equaling \$3.6 billion. ~~Also according to this 1999 study, the contributions of Asian-Indians in California's high-technology industry go far beyond that of scientific innovation and entrepreneurship.~~ The study also finds that the “long-distance social and economic linkages” fostered by Asian Indians contribute just as significantly to California's economic success as job and wealth creation do. That is, Asian-Indians have helped California gain a competitive edge in the global marketplace with their language skills, cultural proficiencies, and international financial mobility (Saxenian, 1999).

~~In looking for other clues about the significance of Asian-Indians within a body of research that is relatively non-existent, a look at national data provides valuable insight into the community.—Nationally, (The collective buying power of Asian-Indians in the United States for example is estimated to equal over \$20 billion. Because California is home to more Asian-Indians than any other state in the United States, it is reasonable to~~

assume that Asian-Indians in California generate a significant portion of this buying power. In addition, the Asian-Indian median family income is approximately \$61,000 in stark contrast to the national median family income of about \$42,000. ~~Moreover~~, 85% of Asian-Indians in the United States have completed high school, while at least 62% have some college education. More than 5,000 Asian-Indians serve as faculty at institutions of higher education in the United States. In terms of professional backgrounds, Asian-Indians are most commonly found in the hospitality, medical, high-technology, law, and engineering professions (Indian Embassy, 2001).

**Comment [A1]:** All this data is good, but I'd like you to think "compared to what?" for each data set. That is, give me something to create a context. It will mean digging around for some additional data but it shouldn't be hard to find.

Yet, is this extremely significant segment of California's rapidly growing, and highly diverse population politically and civically engaged? Does the Asian Indian community have a political voice with which it informs policy-makers and government officials about its needs? If so, how do Asian-Indians express their political voice? Perhaps most significantly, what are likely drivers of political engagement among the Asian Indian community? What makes it more or less likely that an Asian-Indian individual will engage in the political process?

Quite simply speaking, we do not know. This thesis will...you need to let the reader know what you're going to do in the thesis. Just a few sentences.

## Chapter 2

~~As discussed in the introductory chapter of this work,~~ existing literature already explores many important, fundamental questions about political participation. Scholars have developed a relatively well-accepted definition of political participation and have done considerable work to identify the types of factors that bear ~~some impact~~ on the extent to which individuals participate politically. Though lacking specific focus on Asian-Indians, the existing body of literature provides valuable tools that can help researchers explore and understand the political behaviors of ~~specific ethnic groups such as~~ the Asian-Indian community.

In this literature review, I focus first on what political participation means—how existing literature defines it and what scholars have argued are acceptable “types” of political participation. I highlight the relative consensus in the literature on the broader notion of political participation and discuss both electoral types of participation as well as non-electoral types of participation. I then discuss the many factors that scholars have found to ~~bear significant influence on~~ participation. That is, what makes it more or less likely that someone will participate politically? ~~Finally Perhaps most importantly,~~ I provide a critique of the existing literature in the context of how it has dealt with questions regarding political participation among Asians, and Asian-Indians most specifically.

### **How scholars have defined political participation**

Political participation is typically voluntary activity intended to influence government action—either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies (Verba, Scholzman, Brady, 1995). More recently, scholars have defined political participation as voluntary activities or actions undertaken by individuals in an effort to influence the political process. These actions are typically carried out in one of two realms—in the realm of electoral politics and in non-electoral realms where government policies are formulated, administered, or enforced (Ramakrishnan and Baldassare, 2004).

What is notable about the earlier and more recent definitions is the relative similarity of the two. Both definitions ~~tend to~~ characterize political participation as a voluntary act—one that individuals do at their own free will. They are activities for which individuals typically do not receive any significant monetary compensation. Additionally, both characterizations posit that the intent of such activities ~~must be~~ to influence government or public policy, whether directly or indirectly through a host of methods highlighted later in this section.

#### Voting and direct electoral political participation:

Voting is among the most fundamental and most widely accepted modes of political participation (Verba, Scholzman, Brady, 1995; Ramakrishnan and Baldassare, 2004; Lien, Collet, Wong, Ramakrishnan, 2001; Tolbert and McNeal, 2003; Jones-Correa and Leal, 2001). However, some scholars have argued that while voting itself is an important type of political participation, registering to vote is also a significant type of

political participation—an act that however indirect, implicitly indicates the intent of an individual to influence politics and government (Jones-Correa and Leal, 2001).

~~Additionally,~~ financial contributions to political campaigns, causes, and organizations are also widely accepted as a type of political participation ~~as well~~ (Jones, Correa, Leal 2001; Verba, Scholzman, Brady 1995; Ramakrishnan and Baldassare, 2004; Lien, Collet, Wong, Ramakrishnan, 2001).

Working with political parties is also a recognized component of political participation (Ramakrishnan and Baldassare, 2004; Verba, Scholzman, Brady, 1995). However, some scholars have focused more specifically on the notion of volunteering time with political parties rather than broadly looking at the notion of “work” with political parties (Jones-Correa and Leal, 2001). The key distinction between these two definitions is whether an individual financially supports the party and its activities with donations. For example, is the individual writing a check to the party or taking time out of his or her day to walk precincts, print flyers, or make phone calls? One school of thought has taken the idea of work with political parties a step further and has asserted that mere identification with a political party—or partisanship—is also a significant type of political participation (Lien, Collet, Wong, Ramakrishnan, 2001). Implicit in the difference between “working for a political party” versus “identifying with a political party” is a distinction that suggests mere identification with a particular party, even if the individual gives no money or time the party, is a form of political participation.

Non-electoral political participation:



Contacting elected officials has been identified to be a significant type of political participation (Tolbert and McNeal, 2003; Verba, Schlozman, Brady 1995). However, scholars have focused on different methods by which individuals make such contact with officials. Some have focused on the phoning of officials (Lien, Collet, Wong, Ramakrishnan, 2001) while others have focused on writing to officials (Ramakrishnan and Baldassare, 2004; Jones-Correa and Leal, 2001). While there is a slight distinction between phoning and writing government officials appearing in the existing literature, a justification for why an individual scholar may have used one or the other is unclear. That is, why do some look at phoning while others look at writing? The existing literature does not provide an explicit answer.

Attendance at political rallies has also been deemed a significant type of political participation (Ramakrishnan and Baldassare, 2004; Tolbert and McNeal, 2003). However, some scholars have chosen to make a distinction between attending rallies and participating in protests. The notion of protest could be viewed as a way of expressing discontent over a given issue or policy, while attending a rally may be viewed to have more positive connotations—showing up to support an issue or cause rather than protesting it for example. As such, some have instead chosen to include attendance or participation in protests or demonstrations, as opposed to attending rallies into their definition of political participation (Lien, Collet, Wong, Ramakrishnan, 2001; Verba, Schlozman, Brady, 1995).

Additionally, some have viewed the expression of individual preferences or opinions in a political context as an important type of political participation. Here, the

signing of petitions has been deemed a significant type of political participation (Lien, Collet, Wong, Ramakrishnan, 2001) (Tolbert and McNeal, 2003) (Jones-Correa and Leal, 2001). Some have suggested that posting a sign or wearing a button to express such personal views on a particular issue also qualifies as a type of political participation (Jones-Correa and Leal, 2001).

Scholars have also asserted that contacting the media—through letters to the editor or opinion statements for example, are significant and have thus included contact with the media into their definitions of political participation. (Lien, Collet, Wong, Ramakrishnan, 2001). However, others have explicitly challenged the significance of contacting the media, and have excluded such activity from their definition (Verba, Schlozman, Brady, 1995). The exclusion of contacting the media has been on the premise that the “target audience” for the contact with media is not the elected official or government. Rather, the target audience tends to be the public and thus, according to Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995), contacting media is not a type of political participation.

Scholars have also identified individual work with the broader community to solve a common problem as an important form of political participation (Lien, Collet, Wong, Ramakrishnan, 2001; Verba, Schlozman, Brady, 1995). Scholars have also suggested that serving without pay on local elected and appointed boards—like a part-time City Council, or a local Library Commission—are important types of political participation (Verba, Schlozman, Brady, 1995). Attending local community meetings, perhaps a school board or planning commission meeting for example, is also considered

by some to be a type of political participation (Ramakrishnan and Baldassare, 2004; Jones-Correa and Leal, 2001).

**Comment [A2]:** You have identified most of the types of participation but the list of authors is a bit scant and CA focused. Please cruise through the [www.civicyouth.org](http://www.civicyouth.org) cite and pull up the Civic Participation study. You'll want their survey as another seminal work to buttress your list against.

### **What scholars say influences political participation**

Among the most consistent findings in the existing literature is that socioeconomic status (SES) has a strong, positive correlation with propensities for political participation.source(s) That is, individuals with high levels of income and education for example, are typically more likely to demonstrate greater political engagement. However, many researchers have argued that while SES is an important predictor of political participation, it only tells one part of a more complex story regarding political participation. Recent studies have demonstrated a need for more focus on causal factors—~~how and~~ why people participate— in new discussions about political participation (Jones-Correa and Leal, 2001). Need some more here....it should be the why, you talked about the how above, unless you want to add to that discussion with new models of the how. Then it should be up front.

It is apparent in the literature that until about 15-years ago, research models exploring political participation relied primarily on the SES model. That is, studies tended to rely heavily upon how income, education, and closely related factors affected the likelihood that an individual would politically participate. Yet, while important for understanding the nature of who is likely to vote, make political contributions, or otherwise engage politically, the SES model was deemed as simply inadequate in explaining “why” particular trends of political participation existed. In that context, a

relatively tangible paradigm shift from solely an SES based research model to a broader, more comprehensive model seeking to draw more causal relationships appears in the existing literature.

Perhaps one of the most significant and ground-breaking works that looks beyond SES as bearing some influence over political participation is the landmark work of Sidney Verba, Kay Schlozman, and Henry Brady in their book, *Voice and Equality* (1995). Specifically, these authors contend that while SES bears some impact on political participation, it is an individual's acquisition of civic skills through associational relationships—churches and other organizations for example—that in large part explains why an individual politically participates (Jones-Correa and Leal, 2001). Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) posit that participation is about resources and the “civic skills” to effectively use those resources. Not just financial and educational resources, but important civic and political resources acquired from community institutions such as family, work, organizational affiliations, churches, and the like.

Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) identify an extensive inventory of factors—beyond just SES—that can ~~have varying degrees of~~ impact ~~on~~ political participation rates. They assert that certain factors have a greater impact on political participation than others while arguing that varying combinations of factors can yield different propensities for political participation among individuals. This sentence is descriptive only, give the specifics. They also contend that different individuals tend to engage in different types of political participation, suggesting that the type of participation may in and of itself affect

~~bear some impact on~~ whether or not an individual engages politically (Verba, Scholzman, Brady, 1995). This sentence isn't clear.

The findings of *Voice and Equality* (Verba et al 1995) suggest that civic skills, political interest, beliefs about individual efficacy in the political process, and connections to social networks have a substantial impact on political participation. They contend that ~~both~~ financial and civic resources acquired through education, a commitment to the workforce, the types of jobs one holds, the kinds of churches one attends, and the types and level of engagement one displays in charitable and social activities, can ~~all bear significant influence on~~ the likelihood that an individual participates in the political process (Verba, Scholzman, Brady, 1995).

With the departure from the SES model taken by Verba, Scholzman, and Brady (1995), they ushered in a new era of research on political participation—Confusing sentence... That is, after the publishing of *Voice and Equality* (1995), a number of other scholars adopted the idea that SES was an incomplete way to look at political participation. The post-Verba, Scholzman, Brady studies do not reject SES, and continue to acknowledge its importance by still incorporating SES into their models. Like Verba, Scholzman, and Brady (1995), the more recent studies also tend to employ other, non-SES factors that provide more causal strength to the study of political participation.

In alignment with the work of Verba, Scholzman, and Brady (1995), Wong (2000) asserts that the presence of partisanship is an important predictor of political participation rates. The notion of partisanship is defined as whether or not an individual has an affiliation with or a leaning towards a particular political party. Wong (2000)

contends that individuals who tend to identify or lean towards a political party are more likely to participate.

Lien, Collet, Wong, Ramakrishnan (2001), suggest a ~~quite~~ broad, and comprehensive set of twenty variables. ~~Their model employs twenty variables,~~ including: income, education, gender, nativity, age, residential mobility (homeownership/renting), marital status, work status, connection with a church, connection with a political party, connection with a union, connection with “other groups that enhance participation or awareness,” media coverage of particular political issue, event, or election, certainty of outcome, issue salience, significance of office, English language skills, citizenship status, immigration generation, and length of stay in the United States. Overall, this work tends to acknowledge and legitimize the work of Verba, Schlozman, Brady (1995) and builds upon it by adding various other factors into their model. Perhaps most notable about this study is a finding that while the variables identified are significant, different combinations of the identified variables among individuals can yield a wide array of outcomes related to political participation rates.

What is the punch line... ie, which variables matter?

Geron, de la Cruz, Saito, Singh (2001) ~~take a case study approach.~~ They suggest that community level service organizations that deal with domestic violence, hate crimes, and immigrant rights issues have been significant drivers of political participation. They also suggest that “mainstream” opposition to efforts to build or develop cultural or religious centers can drive political participation. They also note that political

mobilization is more likely when ethnic enclaves are at risk or when issues pertinent to ethnic homelands are at stake.

Jones-Correa and Leal (2001) look for the relationship between religion and political participation. In particular, they explore whether denominational differences among Latinos influence political participation and mobilization. They argue that while in fact denominational differences had little to do with political participation, the associational relationships with the church more broadly can be significant drivers of political participation. The church becomes a conduit for political information and recruitment—thus influencing political participation. This research is consistent with the significance given to association with churches by Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) and Lien, Collet, Wong, Ramakrishnan (2001).

Bimber (2001) tests if the “information revolution” has had any impact on political engagement. Specifically, Bimber explores whether or not internet use and information available on the internet is significant in determining political engagement. Bimber finds little relationship between the internet and political engagement and further suggests that the only political participation demonstrably linked to internet use is the act of giving financial contributions. However, Tolbert and McNeal (2003) suggest that access to the internet and online elections significantly increased the probability of voting in the 2000 election.

Baldassare and Ramakrishnan (2004) explore the impact of eight demographic factors on political participation among varied ethnic groups. Specifically, they look at the following: age, income, work status, education, homeownership, years at residence,

gender, and if children are present at home. In this study, Baldassare and Ramakrishnan (2004) revert mainly to the standard SES model to analyze impacts on political participation. The justification for this study's reversion to just the SES model is unclear. However, this study does focus specifically upon the differences in political participation rates seen amongst various ethnic groups in California—a comparative feature not ~~commonly~~-found in ~~other~~ previous studies. Thus, perhaps the authors attempted to set a stage for future research on comparative participation rates among ethnic communities by beginning with a study that employs just the SES model for analysis.

Cho (2003) suggests that “the contexts” in which individuals find themselves bears ~~an impact~~ on their political activity. Specifically, Cho argues that the notion of spatial dependence--where one lives, whom they associate with, and what one's community looks like all contribute to the development of context for a particular individual or community. Cho (2003) focuses specifically on financial contributions as a mode of political participation and suggests that among Asian-Americans, a diffusion of information and political interest through social networks, or context, has an impact on financial contributions made for political purposes.

#### Political participation among Asian Indians

A noticeable ~~and concerning~~ gap regarding the Asian community exists ~~amongin~~ the various seminal ~~key-works~~ ~~in the overall body of research~~ that comprises the existing literature. ~~Specifically, w~~While some of the studies have focused on African Americans and Latinos, they have left Asians out altogether. While some have attempted



to focus on Asians, they have failed to be sensitive to the diversity of the Asian community. you just said they left out Asians all together, now you say they haven't paid attention to the diversity, which is it? Perhaps most significant in the context of my work is the fact that beyond one case study, comprehensive focus on the increasingly significant Asian-Indian community and its political participation—or its political voice—remains largely unexplored.

The work of Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) is quite useful as it lays out a precious framework for analyzing political participation that goes well beyond the traditional SES model typically used up until about 15-years ago. The work provides a great deal of insight into how various associational relationships—which often times may have specific ethnic implications (most, though not all Latinos tend to affiliate with the Catholic church, for example)—impact political participation. Additionally, through its established theoretical framework ~~(which is discussed in the above section of this paper),~~ the work of Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) analyzes specific drivers of political participation among the African-American and Latino communities. However, the work does not include Asians in the analysis.

Lien, Collet, Wong, Ramakrishnan (2001) employ much of the work of Verba, Schlozman, Brady (1995) and study various SES and non-SES factors in the context of Asian-Americans. Their work finds that political non-participation in terms of voting may be a factor of three separate, sequential institutional barriers—challenges in getting naturalized, challenges in getting registered to vote, and specific challenges in getting out to the polls. They focus on language issues, lack of familiarity with the US system,

social discrimination, and challenges for working class immigrants as factors that play a role in non-participation.

Lien, Collet, Wong, and Ramakrishnan (2001) posit that traditional factors such as income, age, length of residence, and gender may also be insignificant in explaining political participation amongst Asian Americans. The authors in fact suggest that political context—the ethnicity of candidates and the efforts of community-based organizations—may foster political awareness, interest, and linkages that could influence political participation more significantly. Yet, the authors also caution that generalizing about the Asian Americans and their political participation is precarious. Specifically, the warning is in an explicit acknowledgement by the authors that the Asian American community is highly diverse and in flux and that, the existing research falls critically short in its sensitivity to diversity of the Asian American community.

Geron, de la Cruz, Saito, Singh (2001), ~~as discussed earlier in this section~~, take a case study approach and explore specific political mobilization seen among the South Asian community in the context of a 1998 cab-driver strike in New York. As a case study, the work focuses on one particular event and provides some clues as to the drivers of political participation among South Asians—and Asian Indians. Nevertheless, it leaves much opportunity for additional research on the topic. In fact, the study notes that the South Asian community is notably diverse even within itself and suggests that the study is only one part of a much more complex puzzle regarding political participation among South Asians.

Geron, de la Cruz, Saito, Singh (2001) further suggest that first-generation South Asians have not entered the US political process in substantial numbers and that the community's focus has tended to be on individual professional and financial establishment rather than on political issues. However, the authors do posit that increasing numbers of South Asians are running for office and working within government and political institutions. They also find that political mobilization within the community tends to occur when ethnic, cultural, or religious heritages are threatened. Beyond these suggestions, the study does not offer a great deal more on the topic.

Cho (2003), also as discussed above, focuses specifically on financial contributions as a mode of political participation and suggests that among Asian-Americans, a diffusion of information and political interest through social networks, or context, has an impact on financial contributions made for political purposes. However, the study explicitly operationalizes "Asian" as Chinese, Japanese, Korean, or Vietnamese. The author does make an explicit acknowledgement of controversies surrounding use of the term "Asian" as an umbrella category and specifically mentions the limitations of the study in that regard.

Also as discussed above, Baldassare and Ramakrishnan (2004) explore the impact of eight specific demographic factors on political participation among varied ethnic groups. In this study, based specifically on California's population, Baldassare and Ramakrishnan (2004) employ a basic SES model and do separate Asian Americans into a separate category for comparative analysis with Latinos, African Americans, and non-Hispanic whites. Yet, their category of Asian Americans is also broad, and the extent to

which Asian-Indians are included in the definition is unclear. [What did they find about Asians though?]

Okay, so here are my general thoughts... very good and comprehensive review of the literature. I'd like to see you rework it a bit so that either you tell the whole story from beginning to end or you more clearly delineate general knowledge about political participation from knowledge about Asians in particular. This may be easier to talk about on the phone but it felt like I was reading along and everything seemed to say we knew nothing about Asians and then all of the sudden I get three pages of info about what we do know... I'm not looking for more information, I'm just looking for better flow.

The second observation I have is that you sort of lay out what the different authors find without giving us the punch line. So, you say XX uses these new variables but then you don't tell me what they found was important. This will matter as you try to distinguish what you find with Asians versus more generic research or info about other ethnic and racial groups.

## Chapter 3\*\*\*

Towards a qualitative approach:

During the initial design phases of this study, I began with a proposal that employed a quantitative methodology. That design was about testing whether or not factors deemed by existing literature to impact political participation were significant in the context of Asian-Indians. ~~Through the use of a highly structured, widely distributed questionnaire, the study sought to predict what factors were likely to increase or decrease levels of political participation among Asian-Indians. The intent originally was to implement a methodology that would support generalizations and conclusions pertaining to the broader Asian-Indian community.~~ However, ~~in working closely with several academic mentors,~~ it became quite clear that such a methodology was ~~fairly~~ inappropriate for the level and type of inquiry I sought to engage in.

~~Given the circumstances in which this study was conducted, the development and implementation of a quantitative methodology posed major challenges. I had a relatively short period of time to complete the project and was operating on a tight budget. I had just a few months and no significant source of funding dedicated to the study. Additionally, in order to draw broad generalizations about the factors that influence political participation among Asian-Indians, the sample size needed to be quite significant and sufficiently randomized. This posed yet another set of requirements associated with a quantitative study that appeared ill-suited for this project.~~

~~Resource~~ Time and financial constraints aside, the quantitative methodology ~~also posed major academic problems and~~ appeared to “miss the mark” in terms of the specific

point of this study. Quantitative methods are powerful tools for testing a specific hypothesis about how a set of variables relate to one another. Such methods can clearly illustrate those relationships, gauge the strength and direction of those relationships, and help demonstrate how well those observed relationships within the sample mirror what is likely to be the case in the broader population.

However, this particular project was not about developing broad, statistically sound generalizations about factors that influence political participation. ~~Instead, it iwas~~ about using the ~~very~~-individual experiences of people to tell a thought provoking, plausible story about political participation among Asian-Indians. The study ~~iswas~~-not aimed at proving relationships or characterizing any of the findings as truth. To the contrary, the explicit academic thrust of the project ~~iwas~~ about helping highlight what the various factors identified in the existing literature meant for a small group of Asian Indians. The findings of the study could lay the groundwork for developing a hypothesis~~is~~ about political participation among Asian Indians. ~~And, at some point in the future, such and eventually such~~ hypothesis could be the basis for a broader, more comprehensive, quantitative study.

Thus, I chose to employ a qualitative methodology for this ~~project~~. This methodology allowed me to conduct in-depth interviews with a small group of individuals—features that not only met the demands of my resource constraints, but also catered more directly to the academic goals of this project. The qualitative method ~~would~~ allow me to engage the existing literature regarding political participation and develop the types of insights I was looking for. Specifically, by setting up a less-structured, more

**Comment [A3]:** You need to pick a verb tense, I tried to change it to the present above, I think it works better but pick one and be consistent.

**Comment [A4]:** This is future tense.

open-ended set of questions, I was able to allow individuals to illustrate how the widely accepted factors that influence political participation resonated with them. I was able to glean more complex and unadulterated feedback from the individuals—feedback that was guided by the topic at hand, yet induced by the flexibility for participants to respond with unanticipated, personal views and emotions.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with fifteen Asian-Indian individuals. Sample size and randomization were relatively insignificant in the context of this study. Yet, the number of interviews I chose to conduct was based on what appeared to be significant and feasible. The individuals were identified through references from within California’s Asian-Indian community, ~~through people that I had existing relationships with~~. I approached South Asian community organizations, local elected officials, religious institutions (Gurdwaras, Mosques, Temples), among ~~a host of~~ others to gain access to individuals willing to be interviewed. Once given a reference, I contacted the potential respondents via email and telephone and provided additional information about their role in the study. To formalize their participation, I provided each respondent a consent form they were required to sign. For non-identifying, demographic information on each specific respondent, see Appendix A.

Comment [A5]: Why?

The interviews were conducted over the telephone, at times and on days mutually agreeable to the respondent and me. I chose to telephone interviews over in-person interviews for a few different reasons. Time and resource constraints made it very difficult to actually have face to face meetings with each individual. The telephone interviews also maintained an extra-level of anonymity for the respondent. Additionally,

the telephone interviews provided a great deal of flexibility and convenience for both the respondent and me. ~~For example, rather than having to decide on a place to meet, planning to drive there and then ending up being unable to make it because of a traffic jam, the telephone interviews could be conducted whenever and wherever it worked for both the respondent and me.~~ Although conducting telephone interviews appeared to come with its own set of drawbacks. One obvious drawback of telephone interviews was an inability to read non-verbal cues (facial expressions, body-language, and the like). Additionally, the telephone interviews may have negatively impacted my ability to establish the highest degree of rapport with each respondent.

Respondents were offered anonymity, demographic and other non-identifying information notwithstanding. The interviews were not tape recorded, mainly because it appeared that the presence of a tape recorder could impede candid responses and inhibit the level of comfort I sought the respondents to experience during the interviews. ~~Additionally, the amount of time and resources needed to transcribe fifteen in-depth interviews appeared incredibly problematic.~~ Instead, I took copious notes as respondents spoke. I typed up those notes immediately following each interview and included specifics about the respondent's emotions, audible-expressions, and other cues that were apparent.

Each interview was carefully reviewed, with a particular eye for clues provided by existing literature as to what political participation means and the various factors that drive such engagement. ~~That is, in reviewing the interviews,~~ I paid close attention to what we already know about various types of political participation, in addition to the



types of things that bear some influence on the degree to which an individual engages politically.

Did the group of interviewed Asian Indians participate in the political process?

To the extent they do participate, what form did their participation take? And again, perhaps most significantly, what appeared to ~~bear some~~ influence ~~on~~ whether or not they engage politically?

Design of the survey:

My critique of the existing literature has been in part about a lack of focus and sensitivity to California's Asian population—and most specifically, to the state's Asian-Indian population. However, the intent of the critique was not to draw into question the tools or instruments used in existing literature to obtain information regarding political engagement. That is, while I am critical of the gap in the existing literature as it relates to Asians and Asian-Indians, I do not challenge the surveys or other instruments used in previous studies. Indeed, To the contrary, much of the existing literature provides a host of valuable tools by which researchers may better understand the political engagement of communities like Asian-Indians in California. As such, I rely heavily upon the methods used in the existing literature in an effort to highlight political participation among Asian-Indians.

Perhaps the most important set of tools for conducting such research can be found in the seminal work of Verba, Schlozman, and Brady in their book, *Voice and Equality*. As discussed at length in the Literature Review section of my study, *Voice and Equality*

took a comprehensive departure from earlier ways of looking at political participation, methods that tended to rely heavily on socioeconomic status (SES) for explaining political participation rates. While including SES variables in their model, Verba, Schlozman, and Brady go further and include a variety of other variables that provide much greater explanatory strength to research models seeking to draw more causal conclusions about drivers of political participation. The Verba, Schlozman, and Brady model, though over 10-years old, remains one of the most cutting edge frameworks for analyzing political participation through a lens other than SES. Thus, the survey used for my study was in large part based on the work of Verba, Schlozman, and Brady and the survey they developed and implemented for *Voice and Equality*.

However, there were important nuances regarding Asian-Indians that post-*Voice and Equality* studies suggested were important for researchers to pay close attention to when exploring questions about political participation among the community. That is, while Verba, Schlozman, Brady (1995) provide an excellent, relatively comprehensive framework for beginning to understand “why” individuals participate politically, the model does tend to leave out some factors that may be significant in the context of Asian-Indians. As discussed in more detail in the Literature Review section of this work, such factors appeared in studies conducted after the release of *Voice and Equality*.

For example, arguments made by Cho (2003) and Lien, Collet, Wong and Ramakrishnan (2001) regarding “political context” and its impact on political participation amongst Asians ~~for example~~ were worked into more open-ended questions in my survey that Verba, Schlozman, and Brady did not necessarily capture.

**Comment [A6]:** You can shorten up the set up to these last few sentences. We might consider laying out what you think are the most important elements of the research at the end of the lit review, then you don't need much set up at all and it's clear where they came from.

**Comment [A7]:** Okay so instead of saying it this way you need to do the following: lay out what the lit says (you did in the section above) then indicate EXACTLY what you are drawing from the different surveys, probably by putting it in a table of sorts that shows the bulk of their measures and the ones you are using and/adding to meet your needs. This section then becomes a description of the changes you are making and why. This paragraph right now only says what you did, it doesn't tell me why you did it. The why should come from your lit review and the set up of your specific question.

Additionally, Geron, de la Cruz, Saito, and Singh (2001) suggested that the ethnicity of political candidates, the role of community level service organizations, “mainstream” opposition to efforts to build or develop cultural or religious centers, risks to ethnic enclaves, and pertinence of issues to ethnic homelands all were important in the context of explaining political participation among South Asians—a category of which Asian-Indians are a subset. Thus, respondents were provided the opportunity to provide feedback on these potentially significant factors through another set of less-structured questions included as part of the survey instrument.

~~Yet, overall, other than the few adjustments made for the distinct focus and limitations of my study the survey was in large part based upon the work of Verba, Schlozman, and Brady in their book, *Voice and Equality*.~~ For a comprehensive inventory of the types of political participation and potentially influencing factors incorporated into my model, please see Appendix B and C ~~nope, I think you need to spell it out in the methodology section... the survey can stay in an appendix..~~ For the ~~actual~~ survey instrument, see Appendix D.

Chapter 4

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## RESULTS OF THE DATA

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APPENDICES

	Page
APPENDIX A .....	#



## APPENDIX B

**Core Types of Political Participation**

<b>Electoral</b>	<b>Non-Electoral</b>
Voting	Contacting government officials
Registering to vote	Attending political rallies
Making financial contributions	Attending political protests
Working with political parties	Signing petitions
Posting a sign	Posting a sign
Wearing a button	Wearing a button
	Working with community to solve a problem
	Serving on boards or commissions



## APPENDIX C

**Factors Potentially Influencing Participation among Asian-Indians**

<b>Socioeconomic</b>	<b>Demographic</b>	<b>Other</b>
Income	Age	Individual political interest
Education	Religion	Perception of individual efficacy
Occupation	Ethnicity	Overall civic skills
Employment status	Generation	Association with political parties or partisanship
Residential mobility	Citizenship	Association with religious institutions
	Presence of dependents	Association with Asian-Indian community
		English language proficiency
		Spatial dependence or context
		Issue saliency and relevance
		Characteristics of political candidates

## APPENDIX D

**A Qualitative Foundation:**  
**Exploring Political Engagement among Asian-Indians in California**

**Background and Introduction:**

Thanks so much for taking time out of your day to talk with me. I really do appreciate it.

As you know, I'm currently a graduate student at California State University, Sacramento. For purposes of my Master's thesis project, I am conducting a study about political participation among South Asians.

Our conversation will be used only for purposes of my thesis project. I will not be tape record it and will simply take notes. If you would like to remain anonymous, that's completely fine.

Some of the questions I'll be asking will be quite structured and specific. Others will be very open-ended, through which I'll be looking to learn about your personal perspectives.

Please feel comfortable being candid, and don't worry about coming up with answers you may think I want to hear. There is no "right" or "wrong" answer.

If you need clarification on any of the questions, please feel free to ask. Also, if there's a question you don't feel comfortable answering, don't hesitate to pass.

The interview should take about 30-45 minutes. Have you any questions for me before we begin?

**Basic information about the respondent:**

I'll begin by asking you some basic questions about yourself.

**AGE:**

Tell me about your age. I'll give you some ranges. Are you between 18 and 34 years old? Between 35 and 54 years old? Or above 55 years of age?

**EDUCATION:**

What is the highest grade of regular school (elementary, middle, high) that you have completed? Have you earned a high school diploma? Do you have any college degrees? If so, what is the highest degree you have earned? Did you receive this education in the United States or in another country? Additionally, did you receive your education primarily in English or in another language?

**INCOME:**

Tell me about your annual gross household income. I'll give you some ranges. Less than \$40,000 per year? Between \$40,000 and \$80,000 per year? Or above \$80,000 per year?

**WORK STATUS and JOB LEVEL:**

I'd like to know about your occupation. Are you currently working full-time for pay, working part-time for pay, going to school, a homemaker, or doing something else? What kind of work do you normally do? What is your work called?

**FAMILY:**

Tell me a little bit about your family. Are you single, married, widowed, divorced, or separated? How many children do you have living at home with you? What is the age of the youngest child living at home with you?

**COMMUNITY ROOTS/RESIDENTIAL MOBILITY:**

How long have you lived in your present city or town? Where you live now, do you or your family own your place or rent?

**CITIZENSHIP:**

Were you born in the United States? If not, are you an American citizen?

**ETHNICITY:**

Tell me about your Indian background. Do the extent you have a sense of this history, to exactly where in India would you trace your heritage?

**RELIGIOUS ACTIVITY AND AFFILIATION:**

What is your religious preference? How often do you attend religious services? Do you belong to a temple, mosque, church, or other religious institution? When you attend services, do you normally attend at the same place of worship?

Have you been an active member of your religious community—have you served on a committee, been tasked with special projects, or organized meetings? In the past five-years, have you served on a board or held an official position?

In your best estimate, how much money would you say you annually donate to your religious institution? About how many hours of your time do you give to the institution, not including the time you spend in services?

**BROADER OPPORTUNITIES FOR BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

Tell me about where you grew up and went to school. Was it common for people around you to be concerned about current events and politics? Ask respondent to expand on why they think it was the way it was...

Were you personally concerned about current events and politics when you were growing up and in school? Were you involved in any sort of student government or other activities (to the extent such opportunities were available) when you were in school or college?

Additionally, I'd like to know a little bit about the social environment in which you typically find yourself. Approximately what percent of your non-work related, personal and leisure time is spent with other Asian-Indians?

**Information from respondent about political participation:**

**VOTING:**

Are you registered to vote? If so, when was the last time you voted? If you were to characterize your voting habits over the last few years, would you say you vote often, sometimes, or never?

**CAMPAIGN WORK:**

Looking back on the past five-years, have you worked as a volunteer—for no or little token pay—for a candidate running for national, state, or local office? Could you quantify in hours, days, or weeks, the amount of time you have spent working on such campaigns? Ask respondent to comment on why or why not.

**CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS:**

Again, looking back on the past five-years, have you contributed any money—to an individual candidate, a particular party, a political action committee, or any other organization that supported candidates running for office? Thinking back on the largest contribution you made, about how much would you say you contributed? Ask respondent to comment on why or why not.

**COMMUNITY ACTIVITY:**

Let's talk a little bit about your role in your community. In the past five-years, have you served in a voluntary capacity—that is, for no pay, or little token pay—on any official governmental board or council that deals with community problems and issues, such as a city council, school board, planning commission, etc? If so, what kind of a board or council was it? What was its main focus?

Rather than serving on one, have you attended a meeting of such an official board or council in the past five-years? Do you attend regularly or once in a while? Are there particular issues that draw your attention to and attendance at such meetings?

Aside from such "official" meetings, have you gotten together informally with or worked with others in your neighborhood to solve some community problem? Would you be

willing to share what problem you were working to solve? If yes, ask respondent to comment on why.

CONTACTING:

Now let's discuss contacts you may have made with government officials. In addition to contacts you have made as part of your regular job, have you contacted any government officials or their staffs, either via telephone or letter? Ask respondent to comment on why or why not.

PROTESTING:

In the past five-years, have you taken part in a protest, march, demonstration, or boycott (other than a strike against your employer)? When did you take part in this action? How much impact do you think you made? If you feel comfortable, might you be willing to share what the issue at hand was?

PARTISANSHIP:

Do you identify with a political party? I do not need to know which party—simply whether or not you identify with one. How strongly would you say you identify with this particular party?

PETITIONS:

Have you ever circulated a petition that was political in nature? Separate from whether or not you circulated one, have you ever signed such a petition?

**Broader, more open-ended questions about political participation:**

INDIVIDUAL POLITICAL INTEREST:

Thinking about your local community, how interested are you in local community politics and local community affairs? How interested are you in national politics and national affairs? What about international politics or international affairs? Are there issues that you feel are more important than others? Ask respondent to expand.

PERCEPTION OF INDIVIDUAL POLITICAL EFFICACY:

If you had a complaint about a local government activity and took that complaint to a member of the local council, do you think that person would pay a lot of attention? Some attention? Very little attention? What about at the state and federal levels? How much influence do you feel you can have over government? Ask respondent to expand.

**For respondents that appear to be politically active:**

Thinking about your political activities, take a moment to reflect back on why you decided to get involved (political contribution, campaign work, serving on local body, etc). Tell me about why you decided to get involved.

**For respondents that appear to be politically inactive:**

Thinking about your political activities, take a moment to reflect back on why you decided to get involved or not (political contribution, campaign work, serving on local body, etc). Tell me about why or why you didn't get involved.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

[Insert your source documentation according to your depart