

10-1-2008

Interest and Action: Findings from a Survey of Asian American Attitudes on Immigrants, Immigration, and Activism

Michael Liu

University of Massachusetts Boston, michael.liu@umb.edu

Shauna Lo

University of Massachusetts Boston, shauna.lo@umb.edu

Paul Watanabe

University of Massachusetts Boston, paul.watanabe@umb.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.umb.edu/iaas_pubs



Part of the [Asian American Studies Commons](#), [Demography, Population, and Ecology Commons](#), and the [Immigration Law Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Liu, Michael; Lo, Shauna; and Watanabe, Paul, "Interest and Action: Findings from a Survey of Asian American Attitudes on Immigrants, Immigration, and Activism" (2008). *Institute for Asian American Studies Publications*. Paper 7.
http://scholarworks.umb.edu/iaas_pubs/7

This Research Report is brought to you for free and open access by the Institute for Asian American Studies at ScholarWorks at UMass Boston. It has been accepted for inclusion in Institute for Asian American Studies Publications by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at UMass Boston. For more information, please contact library.uasc@umb.edu.

INSTITUTE
for
ASIAN
AMERICAN
STUDIES

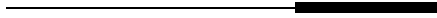
in cooperation with
Asian American Resource Workshop
Chinese Progressive Association
Vietnamese American Initiative for Development



by Michael Liu, Shauna Lo, and Paul Watanabe



October 2008



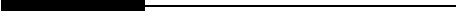
INTEREST AND ACTION

Findings from a Survey of
Asian American Attitudes on
Immigrants, Immigration, and Activism

Michael Liu, Shauna Lo, and Paul Watanabe

Published by the Institute for Asian American Studies

October 2008



INTEREST AND ACTION

Findings from a Survey of Asian American Attitudes on Immigrants, Immigration, and Activism

Michael Liu, Shauna Lo, and Paul Watanabe

Introduction

Questions involving immigration policies, the impact, role, and treatment of immigrants whether legal or undocumented, and, indeed, the very content of the nation's identity have moved to near the top of the United States' policy agenda. In recent years, these perennial issues have generated a particularly contentious debate accompanied by immigrants demanding justice and recognition of their contributions. A *Boston Globe* article on the morning after May Day 2006, for example, described demonstrations and a "mass walkout being staged by immigrants...around the state and country...as thousands of immigrants stayed home to make a point about their vital role in American life." The article went on to note that those activities drew little participation "in Asian strongholds in and around Boston." As the story's headline proclaimed, "In Asian Communities, Just Another Day."¹

While the news media have focused upon immigrants and their supporters, particularly in the Latino community, engaged in activism and organizing around immigrant rights and policies, many observers have asked, "Where are the Asian Americans?" "Are they

¹Jenna Russell, "In Asian Communities, Just Another Day," *Boston Globe*, May 2, 2006.

interested in these matters?” “Can they be mobilized politically in support of immigrant rights or for certain immigration policies?” Answers to these questions are particularly important to organizations who serve immigrants, especially Asian Americans, as they determine how to better educate their communities and how to better engage themselves and their constituents in the intense and highly consequential battles over immigration policies and immigrant rights.

This report answers some of these critical inquiries by focusing on the views of Asian Americans themselves. Although there has been extensive survey research done on general public opinion on immigrants and immigration issues, there has been very little research centering on the populations most affected by immigration policies, and, in particular, on Asian American attitudes. For this study, in contrast, we draw upon the responses of over 400 Chinese and Vietnamese Americans in the Greater Boston area. Furthermore, in the development of the survey instrument and in the discussions about preliminary data, we have benefitted from our collaboration with the Asian American Resource Workshop, the Chinese Progressive Association, and the Vietnamese American Initiative for Development.

Our analysis of the potential for Asian American activism and engagement around immigration and immigrant rights is built around findings that measure the following critical components. First, we consider the extent to which Asian Americans are paying attention to the issue of immigration. Second, Asian American attitudes on whether immigrants strengthen or burden the country are explored along with views on Latino demands for immigrant rights. In addition, opinions on two specific policy issues—immigration preferences and provision of a process for legalization for undocumented immigrants—are presented. Finally, the impact of the immigration issue on the likelihood of Asian Americans participating in several acts of civic and political engagement—seeking to naturalize, registering to vote, turning out to vote, participating in a march or demonstration, signing a petition, contacting a government official, and working in an organization dealing with immigration issues—are assessed.

The responses to the survey clearly indicate that Asian Americans are interested in discussions about immigration. Asian Americans, furthermore, approach immigration issues with a strong belief that immigrants on balance strengthen rather than burden the nation. When asked whether they are sympathetic to Latino activist demands for immigrant rights, a clear majority of Asian Americans say that they are sympathetic. On the issue of which categories of immigrants they would prefer reflected in immigration policies, respondents express varied preferences. For example, Chinese and

Vietnamese offer somewhat different responses which are likely a reflection of the specific categories under which their foreign-born co-ethnics arrived and are arriving in the U.S. On the matter of establishing a process for the legalization of undocumented immigrants residing in the U.S., Asian Americans, for the most part, are supportive of that process. Taken as whole the high levels of attention to immigration, belief in the positive impact of immigrants, sympathy with demands for immigrant rights, and views—some reflecting consensus and some indicating distinctions—on specific policy issues suggest that Asian American engagement with immigration and immigrant related matters is built on some solid foundations.

This report's key finding is that Asian Americans can be mobilized politically around immigrant rights and immigration policies. There is a clear connection between discussions about immigrant rights and immigration and several civic and political behaviors. For foreign-born Asian Americans, these discussions increase the likelihood of their becoming naturalized. Citizens not registered to vote are more likely to register and those registered are more motivated to turn out to vote. In the important realm of engagement beyond elections, Asian Americans, with some interesting demographic distinctions, embrace activities related to immigration and immigrant rights that include signing petitions and contacting officials. Some Asian Americans are prepared as well to join in high commitment modes of participation such as marching in a demonstration and joining with others to work in an organization.

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

Survey Methodology

The survey in English, Chinese, and Vietnamese was mailed to a representative sample of Chinese and Vietnamese American adults (18 and older) residing in areas of Greater Boston with high concentrations of Asian Americans. The survey was administered between November 2007 and February 2008. The areas and population groups sampled correspond to the areas and populations served by our three partnering community organizations. One organization serves Chinese Americans primarily in Boston and

Quincy, one serves primarily Vietnamese Americans in the Dorchester neighborhood of Boston, and the third serves Asian Americans throughout Greater Boston including a significant percentage who reside in Brookline and Cambridge. Chinese and Vietnamese adult residents were identified from resident lists utilizing Chinese and Vietnamese surnames. Systematic random sampling was utilized to draw a sample of 3,495 persons. Four hundred twelve valid surveys (219 in English, 135 in Chinese, and 58 in Vietnamese) were received for a response rate of 11.8%. The margin of error is +/- 4.8%.²

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

Profile of Respondents³

Nearly three-quarters of the respondents are of Chinese ancestry, while just under one-quarter is of Vietnamese descent. Somewhat more than one-half, 53.2%, of the overall sample are female, although for Vietnamese, there are a slightly greater percentage of males in the sample. About 30% of the respondents are in the 30–44 and 45–64 age groups, while just below 20% percent fall in the 18–29 and 65 or older age groups. Only 12% of the Vietnamese, however, are aged 65 years or older.

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

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

²At the 95% confidence level.

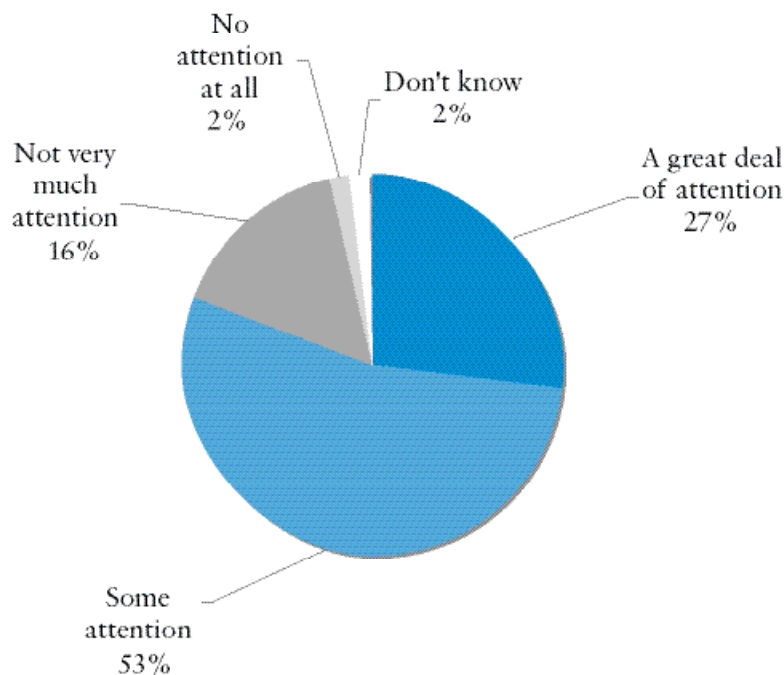
³See Appendix 1.

Findings⁴

I. Attention paid to the issue of immigration

One of the essential foundations for activism or involvement in any issue area is interest. Our Asian American respondents are following the discussion about immigration with over 80%, paying attention to these matters. As the data reported below indicates, the high levels of attention are generally reflected across the board—among immigrants and non-immigrants, those in the U.S. many years and those who are recent arrivals, Chinese and Vietnamese, the young and those older, females and males, and the well-educated and the less-educated.

Amount of attention paid to issue of immigration



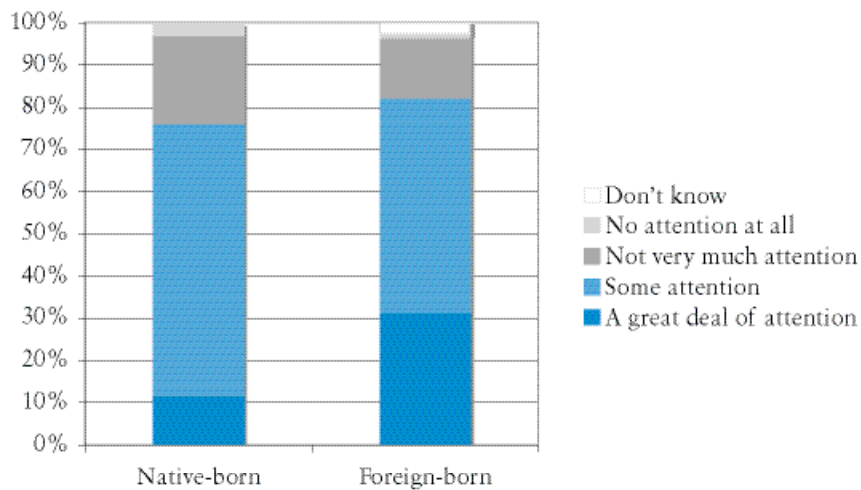
N=412⁵

⁴Statistically significant associations are listed in Appendix 2. Total percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding.

⁵The N value is the number of respondents who answered the question.

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

Amount of attention paid to issue of immigration by nativity

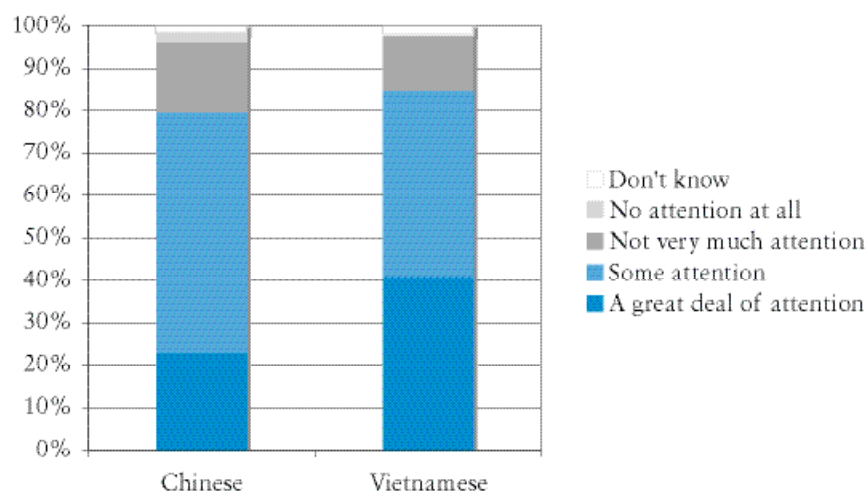


	Native-born	Foreign-born
A great deal of attention	11.5%	31.2%
Some attention	64.6%	51.0%
Not very much attention	20.8%	14.1%
No attention at all	3.1%	1.0%
Don't know	0.0%	2.7%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

N=394

Attention to discussions about immigration is very high among both Chinese and Vietnamese. An especially large proportion of Vietnamese, over two out of five, report paying “a great deal of attention” to immigration discussions.

Amount of attention paid to issue of immigration by ethnicity

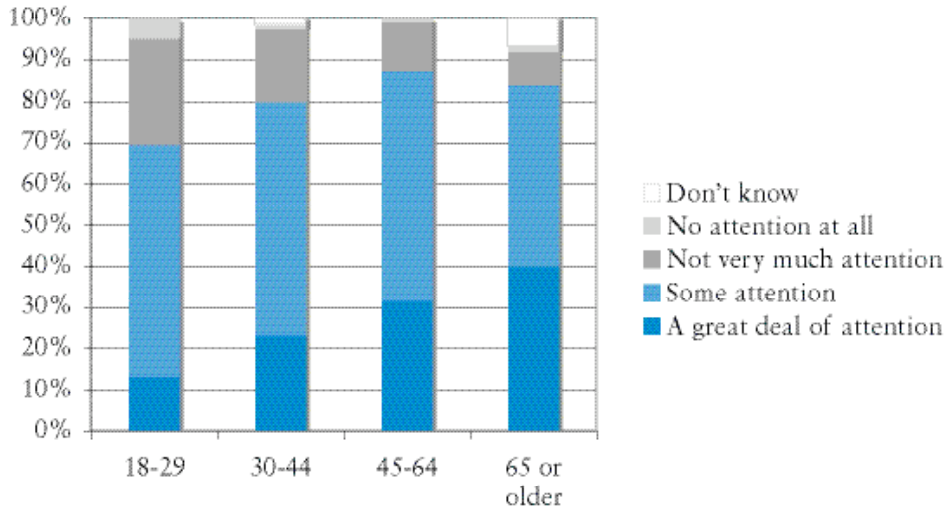


	Chinese	Vietnamese
A great deal of attention	23.1%	40.9%
Some attention	56.5%	44.1%
Not very much attention	16.7%	12.9%
No attention at all	2.0%	0.0%
Don't know	1.7%	2.2%
Total	100.0%	100.1%

N=387

The older the respondent is, the more s/he is paying attention to the discussion about immigration. In particular, forty percent of respondents aged 65 or older say that they are paying “a great deal” of attention, compared to only 13.4% of those aged 18–29. More than a quarter, 25.6%, of those aged 18–29 report paying “not very much” attention, compared to only 8.0% of those aged 65 or older.

Amount of attention paid to issue of immigration by age

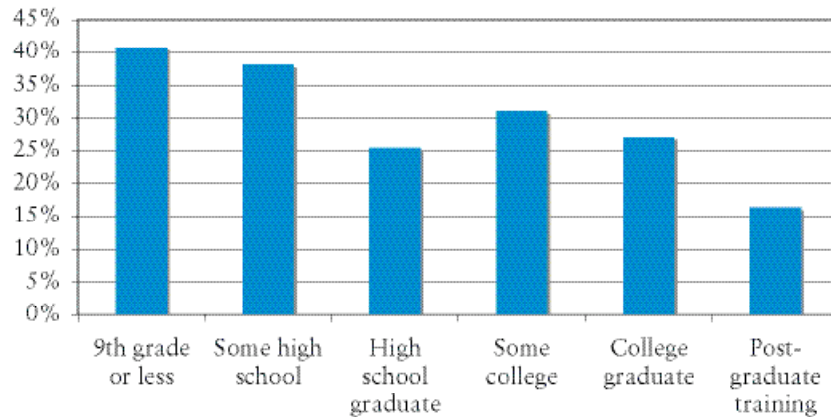


	18-29	30-44	45-64	65 or older
A great deal of attention	13.4%	23.2%	31.7%	40.0%
Some attention	56.1%	56.8%	55.8%	44.0%
Not very much attention	25.6%	17.6%	11.7%	8.0%
No attention at all	4.9%	0.8%	0.8%	1.3%
Don't know	0.0%	1.6%	0.0%	6.7%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

N=402

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

Percentage paying “a great deal” of attention to issue of immigration by education



Amount of attention paid to issue of immigration by education

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

N=399

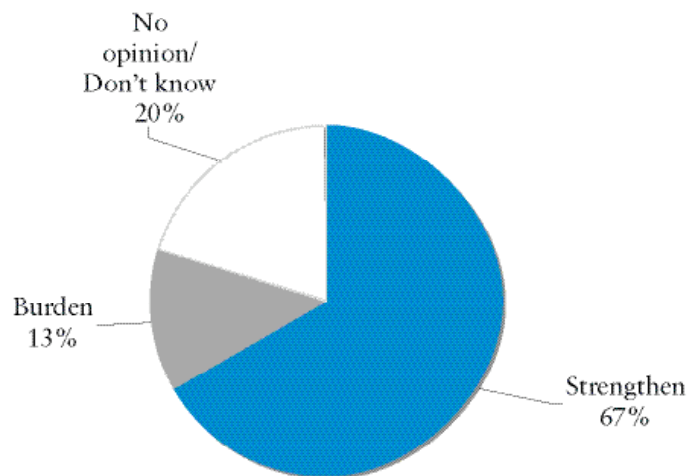
II. Attitudes about immigrants and immigration policies

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

Immigrants: strength or burden?

For effective involvement in immigrant-related issues, it is important that immigrants are recognized as assets. By a greater than five to one margin, Asian Americans believe that immigrants strengthen rather than burden the country. A majority of all respondents in all categories irrespective of age, immigration status, gender, educational attainment, or Asian ethnicity share these sentiments.

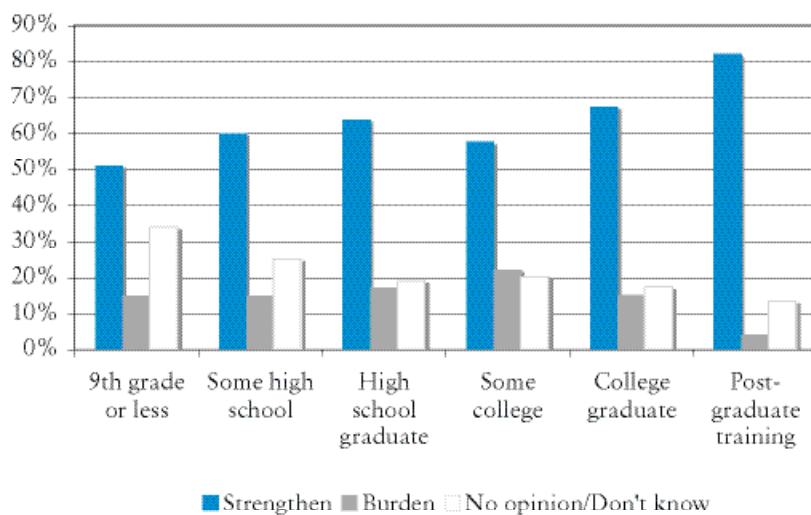
Overall impact of immigrants on the country



N=398

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

Overall impact of immigrants on the country by education



	9th grade or less	Some H.S.	H.S. graduate	Some college	College graduate	Post-grad. training
Strengthen	50.9%	60.0%	63.8%	57.8%	67.3%	82.1%
Burden	15.1%	15.0%	17.2%	22.2%	15.3%	4.5%
No opinion/DK	34.0%	25.0%	19.0%	20.0%	17.3%	13.4%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	99.9%	100.0%

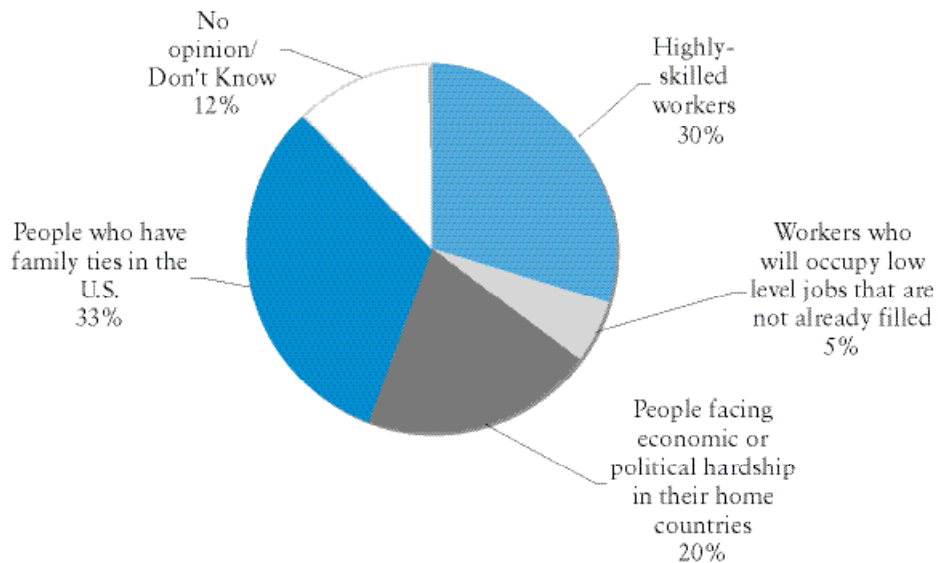
N=386.

Immigration category preferences

Since there are limits placed on the total number of individuals allowed to immigrate to the U.S., the preferences assigned to each category of immigrants are a hotly debated topic. No clear consensus on which immigration categories are preferable emerges among Asian Americans. This situation in turn probably complicates the process of building consensus around specific immigration preference structures. This finding probably reflects the diverse range of immigration categories under which Asian Americans have entered the United States. When asked which of four categories of immigrants should be given highest preference to immigrate, respondents most often select, “people who have family ties in the U.S.,” 32.2%. However, the category of

“highly-skilled workers” is close behind, receiving 29.8%. One-fifth of the respondents choose the category, “people facing economic or political hardship in their home countries.”

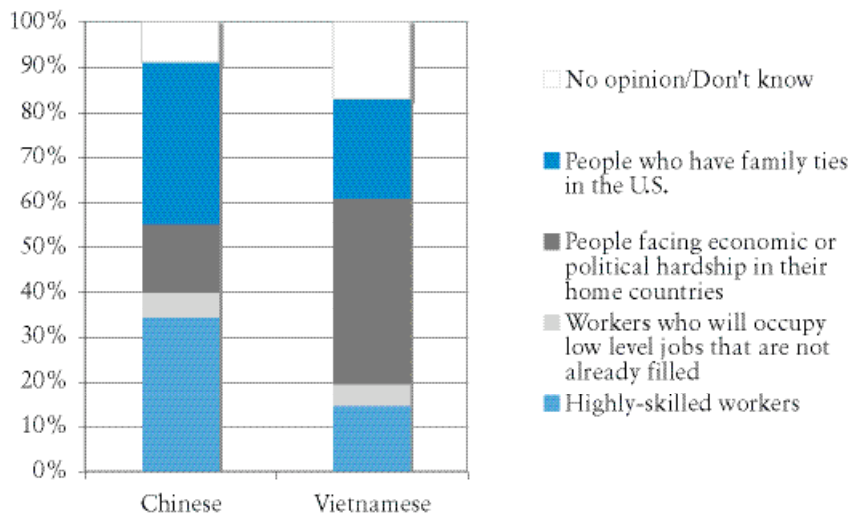
Category that should be given highest preference to immigrate to the U.S.



N=369

Understandably, differences between Chinese and Vietnamese are reflective of some of the varied experiences of the two groups. Over 41% of Vietnamese, for example, believe “people facing economic or political hardship in their home countries” should be given highest preference to immigrate which reflects the heavily refugee roots of early Vietnamese immigration to the United States. On the other hand, about one-third each of Chinese respondents believe highest preference should be given to people who have family ties in the U.S. or to highly-skilled workers, a likely reflection of the much longer duration and more varied circumstances accompanying Chinese immigration.

Category that should be given highest preference to immigrate to the U.S. by ethnicity



	Chinese	Vietnamese
Highly-skilled workers	34.3%	14.6%
Low-level workers	5.7%	4.9%
People facing hardship	15.1%	41.5%
People who have family ties in the U.S.	35.8%	22.0%
No opinion/Don't know	9.1%	17.1%
Total	100.0%	100.1%

N=347.

Respondents with less than a college degree overwhelmingly select family ties as the category which should be given highest preference. Those with post-graduate training overwhelmingly select highly-skilled workers as the most preferred category.

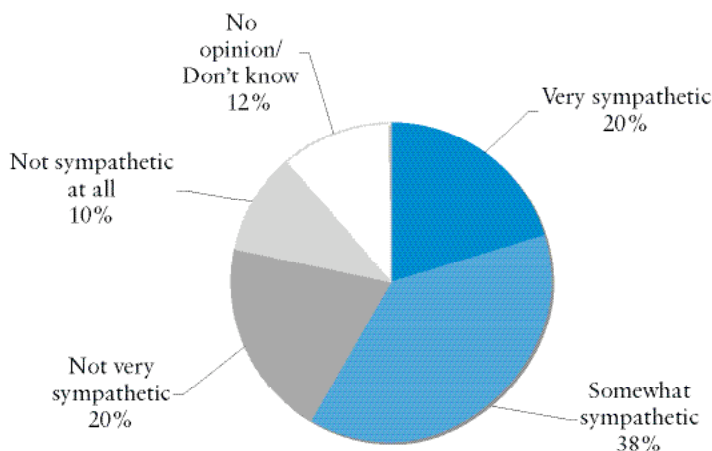
Category that should be given highest preference to immigrate to the U.S. by education

	9th grade or less	Some H.S.	H.S. graduate	Some college	College graduate	Post-grad. training
Highly-skilled workers	20.4%	5.3%	19.6%	21.4%	31.9%	46.5%
Low-level workers	2.0%	5.3%	5.4%	11.9%	5.5%	4.0%
People facing hardship	12.2%	26.3%	23.2%	33.3%	15.4%	23.2%
Family ties	53.1%	47.4%	41.1%	23.8%	33.0%	16.2%
No opinion/DK	12.2%	15.8%	10.7%	9.5%	14.3%	10.1%
Total	99.9%	100.1%	100.0%	99.9%	100.1%	100.0%

N=356

Latino demands and activism

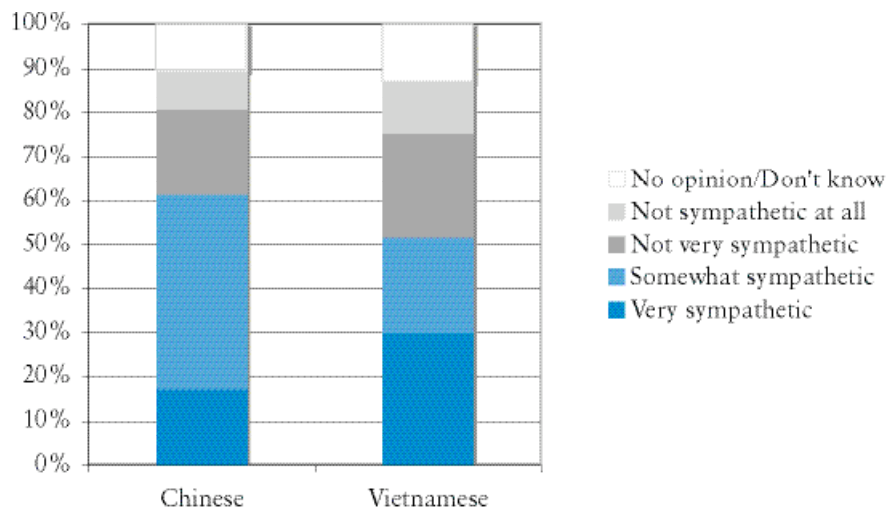
This report opened with a description of the significant attention focused on Latino engagement with issues related to immigrants and immigration policies. Our premise is that activism by Latinos is the dominant focus of public discourse. With this assumption in mind, we believe that Asian American attitudes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

Sympathy for Latino demands

N=408

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

Sympathy for Latino demands by ethnicity

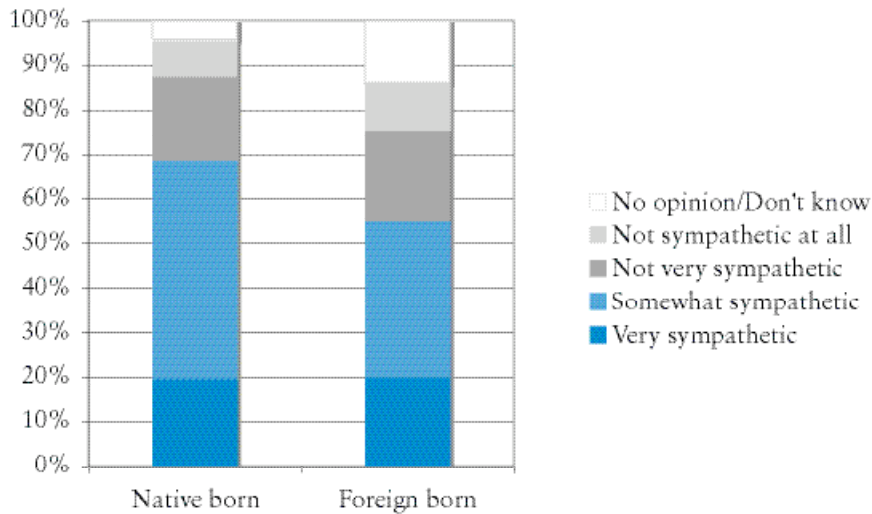


	Chinese	Vietnamese
Very sympathetic	17.2%	30.1%
Somewhat sympathetic	44.1%	21.5%
Not very sympathetic	19.3%	23.7%
Not sympathetic at all	9.0%	11.8%
No opinion/Don't know	10.3%	12.9%
Total	99.9%	100.0%

N=383

A higher percentage of respondents born in the U.S. are “very” or “somewhat” sympathetic to Latino activism, 68.6%, compared to 55.1% for foreign-born respondents.

Sympathy for Latino demands by nativity

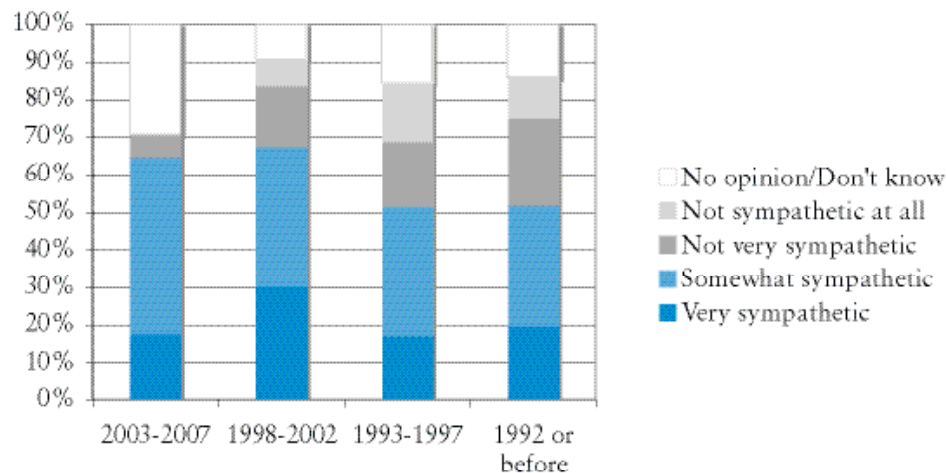


	Native-born	Foreign-born
Very sympathetic	19.8%	20.1%
Somewhat sympathetic	49.0%	35.0%
Not very sympathetic	18.8%	20.4%
Not sympathetic at all	8.3%	10.5%
No opinion/Don't know	4.2%	13.9%
Total	100.1%	99.9%

N=390

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

Sympathy for Latino demands by year of arrival in U.S.



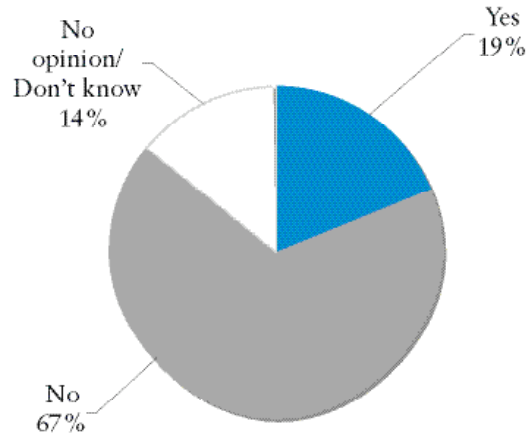
	2003-2007	1998-2002	1993-1997	1992 or before
Very sympathetic	17.6%	30.2%	17.2%	19.8%
Somewhat sympathetic	47.1%	37.2%	34.4%	32.0%
Not very sympathetic	5.9%	16.3%	17.2%	23.3%
Not sympathetic at all	0.0%	7.0%	15.6%	11.0%
No opinion/Don't Know	29.4%	9.3%	15.6%	14.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.1%

N=299

Legalizing undocumented immigrants

Among policy issues the debate on what to do about undocumented immigrants is especially intense. Respondents in our survey were asked whether they support or oppose providing a process whereby the undocumented could be legalized. However, before presenting that information, in order to provide some indication of the magnitude of the undocumented Asian American population, we asked respondents if they knew any person or persons of Asian descent in the country illegally. About one in five respondents indicate that they do know at least one undocumented person.

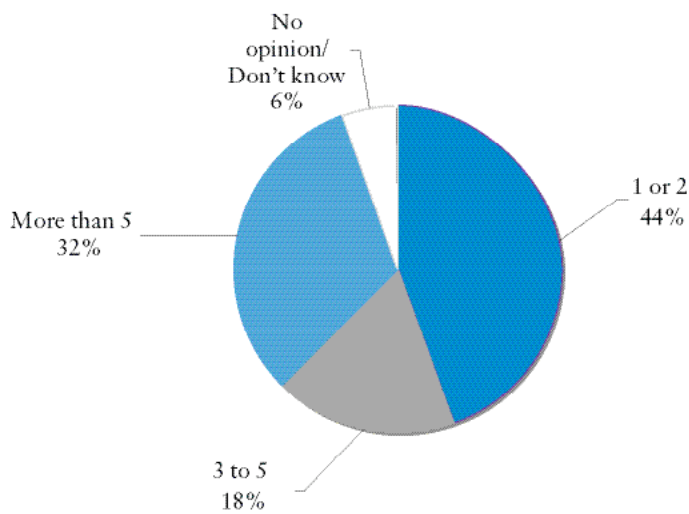
Know an undocumented Asian American



N=394

Of the 72 respondents who know an undocumented person, over 44% report knowing one or two individuals in the country without proper documentation, about 18% say they know three to five, and 31.9% say they know more than five. Even with the likelihood of underreporting of information related to personal knowledge of undocumented persons, the responses still reflect the reality that issues affecting the undocumented are relevant concerns to a large component of the Asian American population.

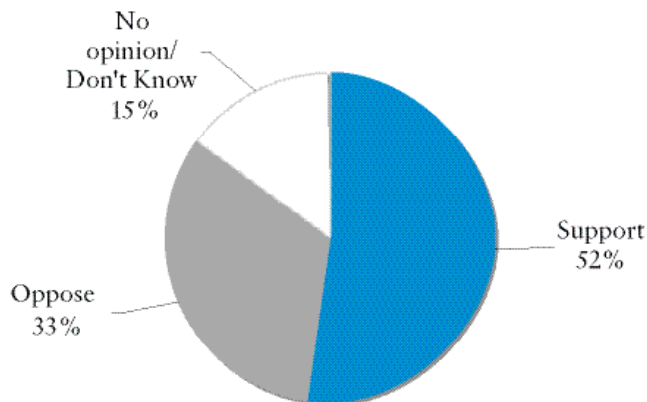
Number of undocumented Asian Americans you know



N=72

On the fundamental question as to whether a process for legalization should be provided for undocumented immigrants, a majority of Asian Americans, 52.2%, are supportive while just under one-third, 32.8%, are opposed.

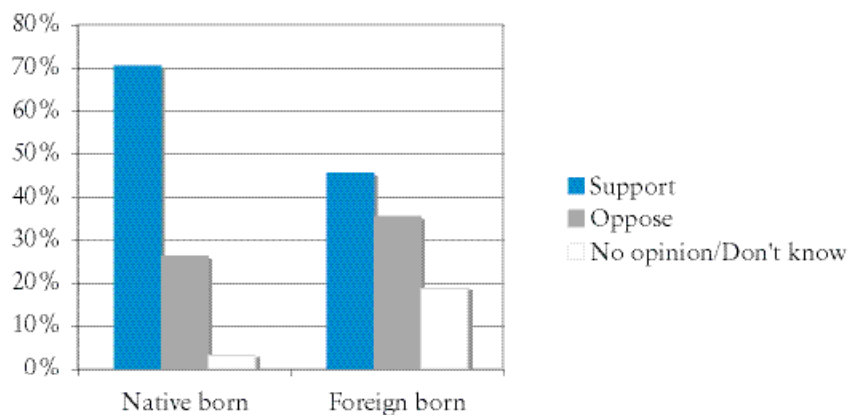
Legalization process for undocumented immigrants



N=402

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

Legalization process for undocumented immigrants by nativity



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

N=388

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

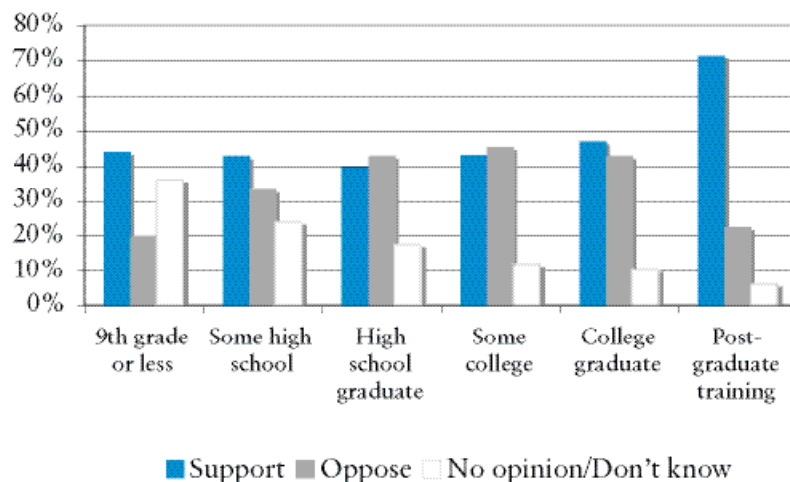
Legalization process for undocumented immigrants by ethnicity

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

N=379

The more education a respondent has, the more likely s/he is to support a process to legalize undocumented immigrants. Respondents with post-graduate training in particular are significantly more likely to support a process to legalize undocumented immigrants than any other educational level—a difference of greater than 25 percentage points more than every other educational level. Those with between a high school degree and a college degree were significantly more likely to oppose a process of legalization than those with less than a 9th grade education or those with post-graduate training.

Legalization process for undocumented immigrants by education



	9th grade or less	Some H.S.	H.S. graduate	Some college	College graduate	Post-grad. training
Support	44.0%	42.9%	39.7%	43.2%	46.9%	71.3%
Oppose	20.0%	33.3%	42.9%	45.5%	42.9%	22.6%
No opinion/DK	36.0%	23.8%	17.5%	11.4%	10.2%	6.1%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.1%	100.1%	100.0%	100.0%

N=391

III. Impact of discussions about immigrants and immigration on behavior

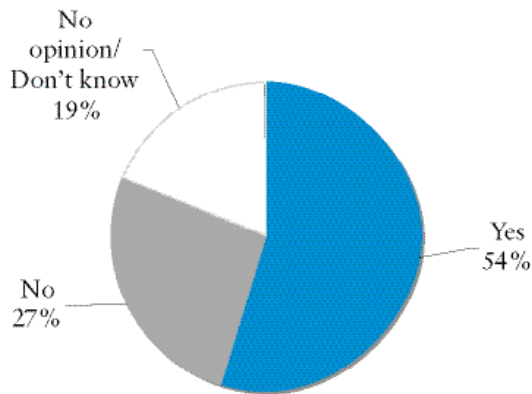
After having established earlier that Asian Americans are paying attention to the immigration issue, we assess the possible impact of that attention on certain behaviors—the likelihood for those who are not naturalized to become citizens and willingness to engage in particular acts of civic and political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

Likelihood of becoming a citizen

The decision by immigrants to seek U.S. citizenship is often a complicated one to unravel. The survey indicates, however, that for a large percentage of immigrants, 55%, the discussion about immigrants and immigration contributes to their likelihood of

becoming citizens. This is an important finding relative to certain modes of political participation since citizenship is a necessary attribute for those desiring to vote.

Discussion has made me more likely to want to become a citizen

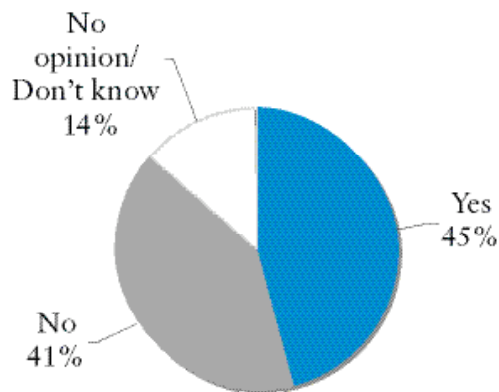


N=64

Likelihood of registering to vote and voting

For those Asian Americans not yet registered to vote, almost 50% indicate that these discussions will increase their likelihood of registering.

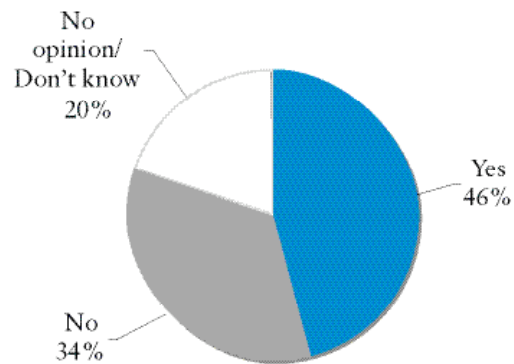
Discussion has made me more likely to register to vote



N=37

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

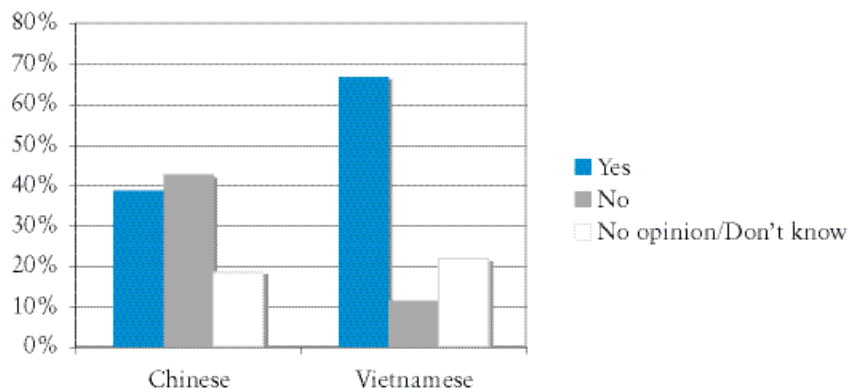
Discussion has made me more likely to vote



N=288

The impact of discussion about immigrants and immigration on likely voter turnout is dramatic among the Vietnamese with two-thirds indicating that they will be more likely to vote because of these discussions.

Discussion has made me more likely to vote by ethnicity

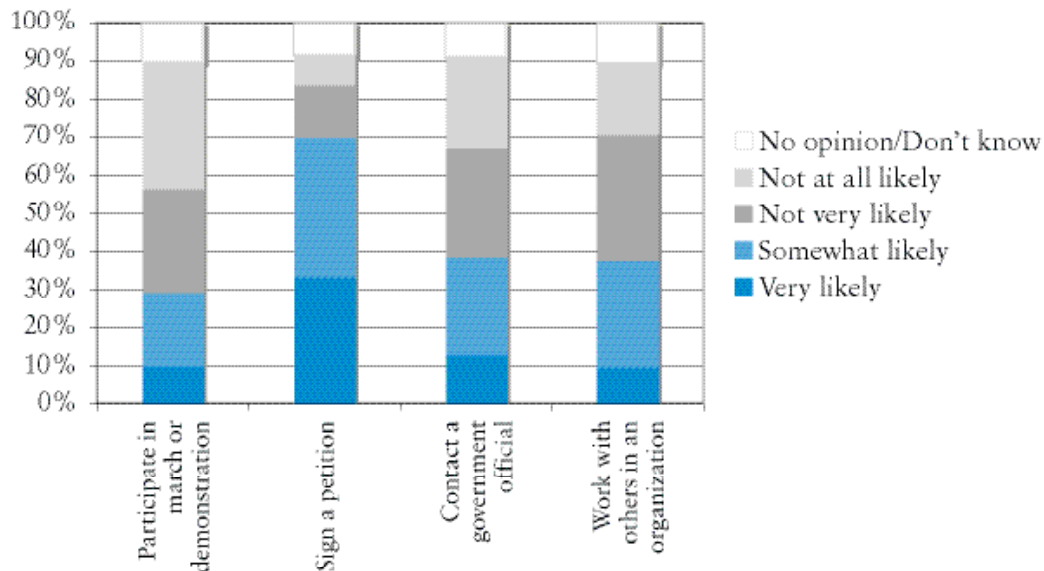


N=275

Likelihood of participating in activities in support of greater rights for immigrants

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

Likelihood of participating in activities to support immigrant rights



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

N=355, 362, 335, 265 by activity

Of those who answer that they are “very” or “somewhat” likely to work in an organization on immigrant rights issues, just over half, 51.5%, prefer to work with an Asian American organization, 19.4% a multiracial or multiethnic organization, and 24.3% any kind of an organization.

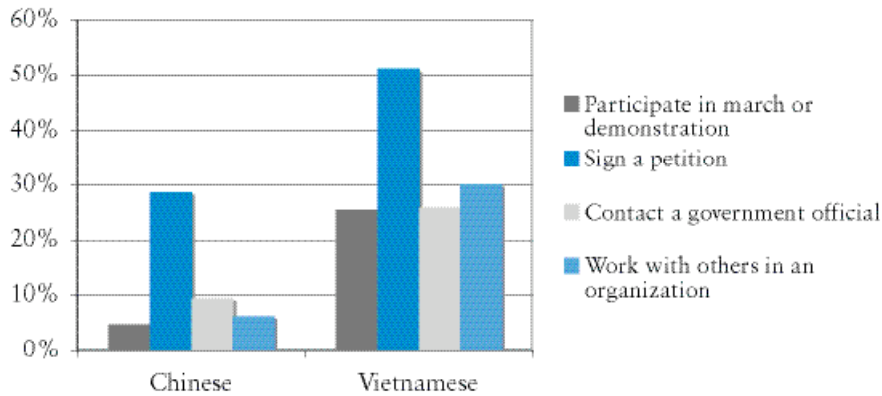
Type of organization you prefer to work with

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

N=103

There are some interesting differences between Vietnamese and Chinese with regard to some activities. Vietnamese report being “very likely” to participate in the selected activities much more often than Chinese. Vietnamese, for example, are more likely than Chinese to participate in a march or demonstration. Also, by a greater than five to one margin, Vietnamese indicate that they are “very likely” to join in these activities. More than half of Vietnamese are “very likely” to sign a petition compared to 28.8% of Chinese. One-quarter of Vietnamese are “very likely” to contact a government official compared to 9.4% of Chinese, and nearly one-third are “very likely” to work in an organization compared to 6.2% of Chinese. Similarly Vietnamese are considerably more likely overall than Chinese to contact a government official or to work with others in an organization.

“Very likely” to participate in activities to support immigrant rights by ethnicity

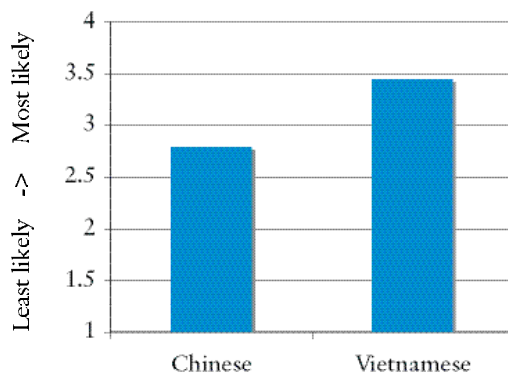


	Chinese	Vietnamese
Participate in march or demonstration	4.7%	25.6%
Sign a petition	28.8%	51.2%
Contact a government official	9.4%	26.0%
Work with others in an organization	6.2%	30.2%

N=32, 118, 42, 26 by row

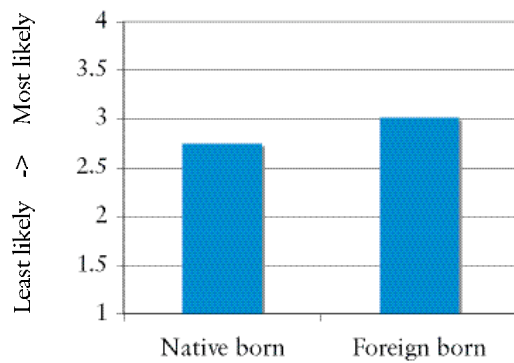
We created a single participation measure that averages the responses to the four different activities. The results show that Vietnamese are more likely than Chinese to be active.

Average likelihood of participating in four activities to support immigrant rights by ethnicity



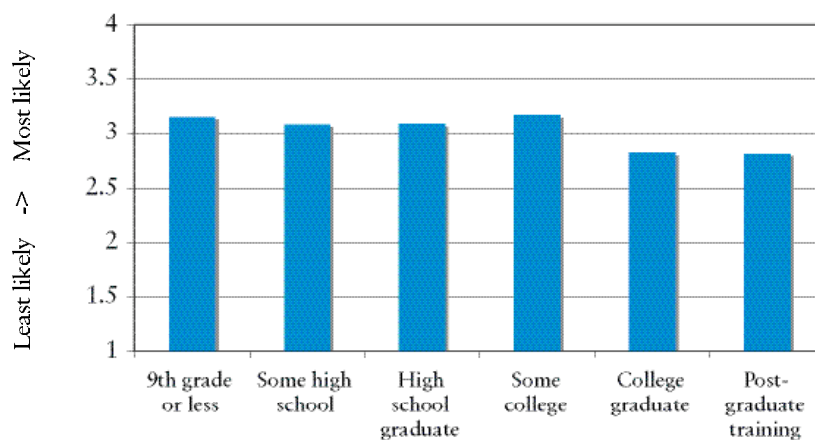
Foreign-born respondents show a greater willingness to be active with respect to supporting immigrant rights.

Average likelihood of participating in four activities to support immigrant rights by nativity



Finally, those with less than a college degree are most likely to be active around immigrant rights.

Average likelihood of participating in four activities to support immigrant rights by education



Conclusion

In the news article mentioned at the beginning of this report, several Asian American leaders were asked why Asian Americans appeared to be conspicuously absent from demonstrations and other activities centered on immigrant rights. Among the answers offered were the heavy preoccupation of Asian Americans with the demands of work and school, limited coverage of the immigration debate in the Asian press, the perceived lack of organized structures for activism, unfamiliarity with the political process, fears of repercussions for being active, etc. Assuredly, all of these factors and others shed some light on the challenges to Asian American engagement. Despite these difficulties, however, a critical finding is that many Asian Americans whose views are captured in this report are geared up for activism. The key ingredients are in place for active responses—high interest and a willingness to indicate policy views. The focus on immigration has increased the likelihood of many Asian Americans to engage in a range of politically relevant behaviors—seeking naturalization, registering to vote, turning out to vote, signing petitions, contacting officials, joining with others in organizations, and, even for some, joining in marches and demonstrations to further immigrant rights. We are mindful, of course, that a willingness to participate politically is not the same as actual participation. Individuals don't always do what they say they will.⁶ There is no doubt, however, that issues related to immigration touch the lives of Asian Americans broadly and deeply. Organizers and organizations from within the Asian American community and beyond who are mindful of the challenge to further educate their constituents about the oftentimes complex dimensions of the immigration debate will be the most successful in expanding activism. Solidarity among Asian Americans and with others engaged in the important struggle for immigrant rights will also be enhanced by strengthening the linkages among informed interest, relevant attitudes, and political action.

⁶On the other hand, we are cognizant of the fact that a willingness to participate can be thwarted if barriers to effective participation are not removed. The battle in Boston over bi-lingual ballots, for example, is a case in which the desire to participate confronts barriers to participation.

Appendix 1

Sample Distributions for Socio-Demographic Variables

Variable	Percent
Ethnicity	
Chinese or Taiwanese	74.4
Vietnamese	23.5
Other	2.0
Gender	
Male	46.8
Female	53.2
Age	
18–29	20.4
30–44	31.1
45–64	29.9
65 or older	18.7
Nativity	
Foreign-born	75.6
U.S.-born	24.4
If foreign-born, year came to U.S.	
2003–2007	5.6
1998–2002	14.5
1993–1997	21.1
1992 or before	57.8
Don't know	1.0
Citizenship	
U.S. citizen	82.5
Not U.S. citizen	17.5
Highest level of school completed	
9th grade or less	13.6
Some high school	5.3
High school graduate	15.8
Some college	11.3
College degree graduate	25.1
Post-graduate training	29.1

Language survey completed in	
English	53.2
Chinese	32.8
Vietnamese	14.1

Sample size: 412.

Note: Percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding.

Appendix 2

Statistically Significant Associations

The data presented in this report is derived from the 412 individuals who returned the survey. Statistics, however, can be used to determine the likelihood that the results would be identical for other similarly collected random samples as well. The following associations between two variables are found to be significant at a 95% confidence level or greater:

Attention to immigration issue

- Foreign-born Asian Americans are paying more attention than native-born (.193***)
- Male Asian Americans are paying more attention than females (-.157**)
- The older an Asian American is, the more s/he is paying attention (.249***)
- The less education an Asian American has, the more s/he is paying attention (-.175***)
- Vietnamese Americans are paying more attention than Chinese Americans (.159**)

Immigrants: strengthen or burden?

- The higher the level of education an Asian American has, the more likely s/he is to believe immigrants strengthen the country (.184***)

Sympathy with Latino demands

- The more recently an Asian American has arrived in the U.S., the more sympathetic s/he is to Latino activism (-.119*)

Support for legalization process for undocumented immigrants

- Native-born Asian Americans are more likely to support a process for legalization than foreign-born (-.162**)
- The higher the level of education an Asian American has, the more likely s/he is to support a process for legalization (.107*)

Likelihood of participation in four activities combined

- Foreign-born Asian Americans indicate they are more likely to participate in the four activities than native-born Asian Americans (.121*)
- Asian Americans with less education show more likeliness to participate in the four activities than those with more education (-.151**)
- Vietnamese Americans are more likely to say they will participate in the four activities than Chinese Americans (.252***)

The numbers in the parentheses indicate the strength of the association between the two variables. They can be interpreted as follows:

Value	Strength of association
0.00 to .009	Trivial
0.10 to 0.29	Low
0.30 to 0.49	Moderate
0.50 or greater	High

A negative number indicates that the relationship is negative; otherwise the relationship is positive.

*** = $p < .001$, or 99.9% confidence level

** = $p < .01$, or 99% confidence level

* = $p < .05$, or 95% confidence level

The p value indicates the probability that that the result occurred purely by chance. A 95% confidence level means, for example, that the same result will occur in 95 out of 100 similar samples.

Acknowledgements

This study was made possible in part by a grant from the Sociological Initiatives Foundation.

The Institute for Asian American Studies would also like to thank: Asian American Studies Outreach at UMass Boston, Alan Clayton-Matthews, Xiaogang Deng, Janet Gee, Richard Chi-Kan Hung, Information Technology Client Services at UMass Boston, Nathan Bae Kupel, Lisette Le, Nam Le, Chung Nguyen, Hoa Mai Nguyen, Terri Oshiro, and Ann Wong.

Cover images: API Movement & *Boston Globe*.

Layout: Shauna Lo

About the Authors

Dr. Michael Liu is Research Associate and Community Programs Coordinator at the Institute for Asian American Studies.

Shauna Lo is the Assistant Director at the Institute for Asian American Studies.

Dr. Paul Watanabe is Director at the Institute for Asian American Studies and Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Massachusetts Boston.

**Institute for Asian American Studies
University of Massachusetts Boston**

The Institute for Asian American Studies at the University of Massachusetts Boston conducts community-based research on Asian Americans issues, provides resources to Asian American communities, and supports opportunities on campus for the study of Asian American studies experiences.

100 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, MA 02125-3393
Tel 617-287-5650
Fax 617-287-5656
www.iaas.umb.edu
asianaminst@umb.edu