

# Civic Engagement as a Pathway to Partisanship Acquisition for Asian Americans

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Taeku Lee

University of California, Berkeley

It is the best of times and the worst of times for Asian Americans in electoral politics in the United States today. Two vignettes illustrate this tale. The first is the story of Harvinder Anand, a businessman who runs a chemical manufacturing company that operates in the United States, India, China, and Thailand. Anand lives in the tony Long Island exurb of Laurel Hollow, New York, where he was elected mayor in 2007. Anand, who with a Sikh turban and beard in a 95 percent white upper crust community, represents what the New York Times reports as a new political phenomenon (Vitello 2007, B1). He is an Indian-American who – like Louisiana State Governor Bobby Jindal, New Jersey Assemblyman Upendra Chivukula, Ohio State Representative Jay Goyal, and Maryland State Delegate and Majority Leader Kumar Barve – find political success among electorates in which they are “the tiniest of minorities.”

Anand’s initiation into politics in the United States, notably, came through civic engagement. Upon moving to a gated community in Laurel Hollow, Anand organized his neighbors to form a heating oil buyers’ co-op and coordinate demands for a more unified garbage collection system. Perhaps as a consequence, Anand’s neighbors in Laurel Hollow neither saw him as a partisan, polarizing figure nor marked him racially or as an immigrant. Here the *New York Times* article quotes John Fitteron, a village trustee: “Harry is just a highly capable individual who, like all of us, wants to give something back to the community” (Vitello 2007, B1). Thus while Anand describes himself as a Reagan Republican, he ran unopposed and remarked, “At the end of the day, I am a businessman. I believe in efficiency and cost-effectiveness” (Vitello 2007, B1).

Further westward along the Jericho Turnpike in multiethnic Queens, we find Morshed Alam. Like Anand, Alam is an immigrant and a chemist by trade. Unlike Anand, Alam is also a laundromat owner, a one-time student leader in Bangladesh's struggle for independence, and a hardened veteran of politics. Alam's rocky inauguration into party politics, American-style, came in 1996 when he decided to challenge Republican State Senator Frank Padavan, a 13-term incumbent who was quite public and vocal about his nativist views on immigration and demographic change in Queens. The Queens County Democratic Party, however, did not greet Alam's political ambition with open arms, or even begrudging recognition. Rather, Alam faced a relentless onslaught of pressure to quit the race. The pressure ranged from a legal challenge to the Board of Elections to physical threat and bodily harm. As Alam puts it, "even when I won the Democratic primary ... I went through every kind of hell in that race ... I was sent to the hospital with two broken bones around my eyes (Lehrer and Sloan 2003, 373-374)."

Alam survived the physical attacks, but was outspent by the Republican incumbent \$500,000 to \$25,000, never received the backing of the county party organization, and ultimately failed to prevail electorally. Nonetheless, he won 42 percent of the vote in the general election, recruited a multi-ethnic rainbow of immigrants into his own organization, the New American Democratic Club, and, ultimately, put the predominantly white Democratic establishment in Queens County on notice that naturalized immigrants like himself could no longer be ignored. Of note, Alam's campaign was expressly partisan and polarizing and his strategy in the face of the Queens County Democratic Party's opposition to his candidacy was to work in earnest to build a successful multi-racial, multi-ethnic coalition. Alam proudly remarks, "[m]y campaign committee was made up of a Colombian-American, a Jewish-American, a Black-American, a union worker, and a conservative Republican. It's not like years ago when you were Irish in an Irish neighborhood, or Italian in an Italian neighborhood (Lehrer and Sloan 2003, 373-374)."

Alam's political fortunes present a bold relief to Anand's. Yet there is also common bedrock to both stories. Namely, Alam shares with Anand a common point of departure through his civic engage-

ment. Prior to his bid for elected office, Alam was active as a former local AFL-CIO chapter president, a leader in the New York-based American Bangladesh Friendship Association, an organizer of neighborhood community groups to combat hate crimes, and a member of the Queens community school board. Moreover, in both cases, the role of political parties in seeking out and shepherding new immigrants into the main-line of American politics ranges from invisible to outright hostile. Neither Anand nor Alam entered into politics as a result of being recruited into party activism or groomed for elected office by the Democratic or Republican parties.

The role of political parties in particular differs starkly from our ballyhooed remembrances of the central role played by parties in incorporating previous waves of immigrants from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As many accounts have it, the late 19th century and early 20th century in America represented a golden age of immigration. These immigrants came from distant lands (predominantly European) and were absorbed into America's economic markets, assimilated into its social customs, and incorporated by its political institutions. This period is, at least in our collective memory, one that represents a model for the inclusion of newcomers into a pluralist political system, with local political parties playing the critical intermediary role in this process of incorporation. As one scholar of immigration describes it,

On a typical day in the 1890s, thousands of immigrants arrived at Ellis Island in New York. For many, learning English and acculturating to America would be the work of years, even decades. But often it would be a matter of only a few weeks or even days before they received a visit from a Tammany Hall ward heeler or before friends or family brought them along to some event at the local precinct hall. Long before many of those newcomers fully understood what it was to be American, they knew quite well what it meant to be a Democrat or a Republican (Schier 2002, 16).

To be sure, scholars who have taken a less nostalgic look at white

immigrant incorporation at the turn of the last century conclude that the willingness of parties to incorporate new citizens was not equal across all immigrant groups (Ignatiev 1995; Jacobson 1998), or all historical contexts (Mayhew 1986), or all electoral circumstances (Erie 1990). Other organizations like neighborhood associations, unions, churches, and ethnic voluntary associations were vital to the incorporation of new immigrant groups (Sterne 2001). Yet the incongruity to today's parties is conspicuous. There has been much careful study of how today's political parties compare with those of yesteryear. For the most part, this body of work has concluded that today's parties lack the organizational capacity, the political incentives, the cultural literacy, and perhaps even the democratic resolve to shepherd new immigrants into the political process and secure their loyalties to a particular political party (e.g., Jones-Correa 1998a; Anderson and Cohen 2005; Kim 2006; Rogers 2006; Wong 2006b).

If the two major parties are reluctant to bring Asian Americans – the largest growth rate segment of the U.S. population since the 1970s – into the political fold, then we are pressed to ask: how does a predominantly immigrant electorate like the Asian American community become politicized? Which factors keep Asian Americans from becoming politically active and which factors act as a stimulus to political activism? In the absence of responsive and responsible parties, one site that many scholars have recently looked to is the institutional influence of organizations in civil society and the individual effects of civic engagement (see, e.g., Ramakrishnan 2006; Rogers 2006; Wong 2006b; Ecklund 2007; Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad 2008). We do the same in this chapter.

Civic engagement as an alternative site for the politicization of Asian Americans is salient in our vignettes of Anand and Alam. Both individuals share a common pathway into politics through their involvement in non-electoral participation and organizing. Yet as our stylized description of the experiences of Anand and Alam suggest, "civic engagement" is neither uniform nor rooted in a shared immigrant experience. In Anand's case, civic participation is motivated by the collective and consensual interests of a socioeconomically and (for the most part) racially homogeneous gated community. Alam's participation, by contrast, is defined by the politics of a far more so-

cioeconomically and racially diverse community and deeply rooted in organizations – like labor unions, civil rights organizations, ethnic associations – that engage in contentious and identitarian politics. One vignette echoes the assimilationist view of Asian immigrants who model the American Dream; the other does not.

In this essay, I examine civic engagement as a potential pathway to the political engagement of Asian Americans. Specifically, I argue that the relationship that we form to a political party is a key marker of our political orientation and activism. A plurality (and in some surveys, majority) of Asian Americans, however, do not identify with a political party. I then present the argument for looking to civic engagement as a pathway to partisanship acquisition. Specifically, I examine the direct effects of civic engagement on party identification as well as an indirect effect, through the formation of panethnic identity. Then, drawing on statistical analysis of the 2000-2001 Pilot National Asian American Politics Study, I examine three different kinds of civic engagement – working to solve a community problem, organizational membership in an ethnic association, and religious participation. The analysis shows that Asian Americans with higher levels of civic engagement are in fact more likely to identify with a political party and, for at least one measure of engagement, also more likely to develop a strong sense of panethnic identity (which then leads to a greater likelihood of identifying as a Democrat). Party identification, in turn, is a key factor in how politically active Asian Americans are. The essay concludes with several important qualifications and rejoinders on these results.

## **Party Identification and Political Incorporation**

For better or worse, the American people have hung their most deeply held political convictions and sentiments, anxieties and aspirations with a political party for about as long as they have existed. Martin Van Buren, founder of the first political machine in New York and principal architect of the first national political party (the Jacksonian Democrats), writes of “an unbroken succession ... Neither the influences of marriage connections, nor of sectarian prejudices, nor any of the strong motives which often determine the ordinary actions

of men, have ... been sufficient to override the bias of party organization and sympathy, devotion to which has, on both sides, as a rule, been a master-passion of their members (1867, 7)." Today, our understanding and analysis of this "master-passion" rests chiefly on the concept of party identification. Virtually every published work in political science on public opinion, voting behavior, and political participation using survey data includes some version of the party identification scale. And given this seeming ubiquity, it is little surprise to find, in study after study, that "the psychological attachment of individuals to one or the other of the major parties ... reveals more about their political attitudes and behaviors than any other single opinion (Keefe and Hetherington 2003, 169)" and that "party identification remains the single most important determinant of individual voting decisions (Kinder and Sears 1985, 686)."

The reasons why party identification is so central to the way that Americans think and act on politics are clear. Partisan habits are something that Americans are born into, starting with the partisanship of their parents and sustained through pre-adult and early adult socialization (Campbell et al. 1960). For adults, it is a psychological attachment that serves as a critical means to navigate a political information environment that is often saturated with complex details and hortatory messages (Fiorina 1981; Popkin 1991). Voters can do without encyclopedic knowledge about each candidate's issue positions and can navigate strategic communications by simply knowing which party and politicians they trust (and which they do not) and then using partisan cues to figure out "who is for what" (Lupia and McCubbins 1998). In effect, in the U.S., "Democrat," "Republican," and "Independent" are the defining identities in the political realm (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002).

What, then, do we know about the party attachments of Asian Americans? The answer, it turns out, is not so easy to decipher. For one thing, there is a dearth of systematic, reliable data on which to base our expectations. A large random sample of U.S. adults – as in a pre-election survey or an exit poll – will contain only a handful of persons of Asian descent, and typically with a bias for those Asians who are more educated, well-off, assimilated into life in the U.S., and proficient in English. The costs of obtaining a larger, unbiased sam-

ple, moreover, can be prohibitive; it is simply difficult to find a sample design for a population that is linguistically heterogeneous and geographically dispersed across ethnic subgroups, yet locally concentrated within ethnic subgroups, as Asian Americans are (e.g., see Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004). As a result, the quality of data on Asian American mass opinion is less than ideal. An example is the striking “house” effects between two exit polls fielded in California following the 1996 general elections. The Voter New Services exit poll found Asian Americans to be more Republican than Democratic (48 percent to 32 percent), while the *Los Angeles Times* found the opposite – Asian American Democrats here appeared to outweigh Asian Republicans (44 percent to 33 percent).<sup>1</sup>

Notwithstanding the elusive nature of Asian American public opinion, a pattern of Democratic partisanship has begun to emerge. According to one review of twelve national, state-level, and metropolitan-level surveys in the 1990s, the roughly even split in Asian American partisanship begins to take a discernibly Democratic turn by the 1998 off-year elections (Lien 2001). This leaning has become even more sharp in recent years. In the post-election 2000-2001 Pilot National Asian American Politics Study (PNAAPS) – the first multi-city, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual academic survey of Asian Americans – Democratic identifiers outnumbered Republican identifiers by more than two-to-one. Moreover, Democrats outnumbered Republicans for every ethnic subgroup in the PNAAPS except for Vietnamese American respondents (who leaned, but only modestly, toward the Republican Party).

This partiality is also mirrored in how Asians vote. According to the Voter News Service exit polls, a solid majority of Asian Americans voted for Al Gore over George W. Bush in 2000 (55 percent to 41). In the 2004 presidential election, the National Election Pool (NEP) exit polls found a 56-44 split in favor of John Kerry over George W. Bush and, in the most recent 2006 elections, Asian American voters split 62-37 in favor of Democratic congressional candidates. In the 2006 mid-term elections, NEP exit polls found a 70-26 split in favor of Dianne Feinstein in the California race for U.S. Senate in California, the only state in which sufficient numbers of Asian Americans were polled to gauge their vote choices. In local, multi-lingual,

multi-ethnic exit polls in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York City the margins are even more decisive for Democratic candidates. Moreover, voter registration studies in 2004 and 2006 by the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund in New York and Asian Pacific American Legal Center in Southern California found marked increases in the number of Asian American registered Democrats.

So, two features define what we know about Asian American partisanship: our measures often vary across polls and, between the Republican and Democratic parties, Asian Americans lean Democratic. These features, important as they are, mask another (perhaps more central) defining feature: the plurality, and in many surveys, *majority* of Asian Americans choose not to identify with any political party at all. In the 1993-94 Los Angeles Study of Urban Inequality (Bobo et al. 2000), only 39 percent of respondents chose to identify as a Republican or a Democrat (11 percent identified as Independents, fully 55 percent chose the response option, “something else,” and 6 percent reported being unsure or refused to answer the question). In the 2000-2001 PNAAPS, shown below in Table 1, only half of the respondents chose to identify as a Republican or Democrat (with 13 percent Independents, 20 percent volunteered that they did not think in partisan terms, and 18 percent reported being unsure or refused to answer the question). Thus while many political observers chomp at the bit to divide the electorate into Red and Blue segments, many Asian Americans themselves first wonder what it means to be a partisan.

Table 1. Patterns of Party Identification among Asian Americans							
“Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, Democrat, an Independent, or of another political affiliation?”							
	Chinese	Filipino	Indian	Japanese	Korean	Vietnamese	ALL
Republican	8%	20%	13%	9%	21%	15%	14%
Democrat	32%	40%	44%	40%	43%	12%	36%
Independent	3%	14%	23%	20%	12%	15%	13%
Not sure / Refused	24%	13%	14%	15%	16%	28%	18%
Don't think in these terms	33%	13%	6%	18%	8%	31%	20%
TOTAL N	308	266	141	198	168	137	1218
Data: PNAAPS (2001)							



Elsewhere, I discuss at length possible explanations for this relative absence of partisanship among many Asian Americans (Hajnal and Lee 2006, Lee and Hajnal 2008). There are two kernels of the argument. First, partisanship acquisition for Asian Americans should be thought of as a sequence: in the first step, Asian Americans need to see the traditional categories of partisanship – “Democrat,” “Republican,” and even “Independent” – as meaningful choices; once they view these categories as meaningful, they then choose between them. The second key to the argument is that – for a population that is predominantly first and second generation – prior political socialization cannot be presumed. In its absence, partisanship is explained as a function of three factors: information, ideology, and identity. Uncertain information about why party competition is important and where parties stand on key issues drives the first step of being partisan or apartisan. Ideological commitments to particular issues and beliefs or a strong racial identity drive the second step of identifying as a Democrat, Republican, or Independent.

This phenomenon of “apartisanship” is related to the general finding that, across multiple measures of immigrant political incorporation, Asian Americans appear far from fully included and well represented in democratic life in the U.S. In a sense, the attachments that immigrant-based ethnic communities like Asian Americans form, *or fail to form*, to a political party are an important and underexamined dimension of immigrant political incorporation. Table 2 summarizes the basic patterns of under-participation in terms of the three widely studied stages of formal political incorporation.

	Whites	African Americans	Latinos	Asian Americans	TOTAL
% citizen	97.9	93.7	59.3	67.5	91.3
% registered	73.5 (75.1)	64.4 (68.7)	34.3 (57.8)	35.0 (51.9)	65.9 (72.2)
% voted	65.8 (89.5)	56.3 (87.4)	28.0 (81.6)	29.8 (85.1)	58.3 (88.5)

Source: 2004 American Community Survey. For “% registered” and “% voted” rows, the top figure in each cell is the proportion of all adults in that group; the figure in parentheses is the proportion of those adults from the previous row (e.g., the proportion of all whites who are registered is 73.5 percent; the proportion of all whites who are registered and citizens is 75.1 percent).

The three key steps here are whether a newcomer to the United States has established citizenship, whether that citizen (if eligible) registers to vote, and whether that registered voter actually casts a vote come Election Day. The table compares levels of incorporation of whites, African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans. The main point of this table is quite clear. Asian Americans (and Latinos) lag behind both whites and African Americans at each step in this process of political incorporation. The proportion of Asian Americans who are citizens is roughly only two in three; the proportion who are registered is roughly only one in three; the proportion who vote is about three in ten.

	TOTAL	African Americans	Latinos	Asian Americans	Native Americans
House	438 (100%)	41 (9.4%)	25 (5.7%)	4 (0.9%)	1 (0.2%)
State Legislature	7382 (100%)	530 (7.2%)	229 (3.1%)	85 (1.1%)	47 (0.6%)

Source: Licn, Pinderhughes, Hardy-Fanta, and Sierra, 2007.

This underparticipation in politics is also mirrored by data on the levels of political representation across racial and ethnic groups. If representation is measured by matching the proportion of legislators in a group to the population proportion of that group, African Americans come the closest to parity in representation, with Latinos and Asian Americans lagging substantially behind. This underrepresentation is shown quite clearly in Table 3: according to the 2006 American Community Survey, Asian Americans (even allowing for the more inclusive “alone or in combination” categorization) were just under 5 percent of the U.S. population, but only roughly one percent of members of the House and of state legislatures.<sup>ii</sup>

A wide range of explanations have been offered for this incomplete incorporation of Asian Americans into the main lines of American politics. At the individual level, some scholars suggest that Asian Americans are simply less interested in politics (Cain, Kiewiet, and Uhlaner 1991; Tam 1995) or more interested in the politics of their home country (Portes and Rumbaut 1996; Barone 2001); others suggest the proper focus should be on the process of political socializa-

tion (W.T. Cho 1999; Wong 2001) and the development of ethnic/panethnic identity (Lien 1997; Wong 2006b). At the institutional level, scholars have either pointed to a logic of party competition that systematically excludes racialized minorities like Asian Americans (Kim 2006; see also Frymer 1999 and Fraga and Leal 2004) or to historical changes in party politics like weakened local party organizations, candidate centered elections, selective and strategic mobilization efforts, and assumptions about the political interests and aptitude of groups like Asian Americans (Wong 2006b).

### **Civic Engagement and Political Incorporation**

In the absence of a demonstrable role of political parties in the political incorporation of Asian Americans and given the overwhelming numbers of Asian Americans who do not think in partisan terms, the question is: how do Asian Americans come to terms with partisan politics? One place that scholars have increasingly turned to is civic institutions and civil society (Ecklund and Park 2005; Ramakrishnan and Viramontes 2006; Wong 2006b; Ecklund 2007; Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad 2008). The reasons for doing so are quite clear. Civic institutions like labor unions, social service organizations, ethnic associations, and religious institutions can act as a mediating influence and organizational bridge between newcomers and the political system writ large. From political philosophers like Carole Pateman (1970) to empirical political scientists like Sidney Verba, Kay Schlozman, and Henry Brady (1995), civic engagement is viewed as developing key civic skills like political communication and organizing and in nurturing a sense of psychological engagement and efficacy in the realm of public affairs. Moreover, beyond reasons why civic institutions may nurture a greater sense of political engagement and incorporation, there is a tide of sentiment viewing volunteerism and civic engagement as a tonic for democratic ills in America (Skocpol and Fiorina 1999; Putnam 2000; Galston 2000; Macedo 2005).

As with any idea on which hopes are heavily pinned, there is much debate over what civic engagement is and whether it helps or harms the flourishing of democratic politics (see, e.g., Skocpol and Fiorina 1999; Putnam 2000). When the term is used in this essay, it

refers to individual and collective actions that aim to address an issue of public concern and that are located in civil society. Broken down into its component words, the term “engagement” *prima facie* denotes actions and behaviors, not attitudes and beliefs. Its modifier, “civic,” is more tendentious and up for grabs. For some, civic refers to the obligations of citizenship and the impulse to act in pursuit of the public interest. For others, civic refers to action that is rooted in civil society, where civil society is an arena of voluntary, uncoerced discourse and action that is independent of the state and the market (and in some variants, the family).

The first definition is more commonplace. In *Democracy at Risk*, a publication of the American Political Science Association’s Committee on Civic Education and Engagement, civic engagement is defined as including “any activity, individual or collective, devoted to influencing the collective life of the polity” (Macedo 2005, 6 [emphasis in original]).” Here “civic engagement most obviously includes voting” and also electoral precursors to voting like working for a political candidate or campaign, attending a political rally, contributing money to a candidate or campaign, wearing a button or displaying a bumper sticker for a candidate or campaign, and trying to persuade a friend, neighbor, or stranger to vote for a candidate or issue.

In this essay, I use civic engagement in the narrower second sense that distinguishes between the formal realms of electoral, legislative, bureaucratic, and judicial politics and the informal realm of civic institutions and civil society. The boundaries between formal politics and civic engagement are, no doubt, porous. This choice is made on several grounds. First, the central argument in this essay is explicitly about the potential for engagement in civil society to serve as a pathway into partisanship and, as a result, into formal political engagement writ large. To avoid a tautology where political activity begets political activity, we need to define civic engagement in a way that distinguishes it from the main lines of politics per se. Second, civil society is interesting to examine separately from other spheres of life. It is in its role as a “third sector” (beyond government and the private sector) that we are interested in civil society as a pathway to the political incorporation of Asian Americans into the formal realm of elections and government. It is also in this role that civil society

acts as a potentially important site for the empowerment of marginalized populations and the mobilization of politics outside the main lines. Finally, activity in civil society is important to examine on its own terms as a counter to pervasive and totalizing indictments about the absence or presence of political action and agency among Asian Americans. That is, just because Asian Americans vote at rates that fall significantly below that of other groups does not necessarily imply that Asian Americans are inactive or uninterested in being engaged. Thus civic engagement, as we use the term in this essay, encompasses a range of specific activities such as working in a soup kitchen, serving on a neighborhood association, and so on, but excludes formal modes of political participation in the electoral arena (for a similar distinction, see Zukin et al. 2006).

**Figure 1. Civic Engagement as a Pathway to Politics**

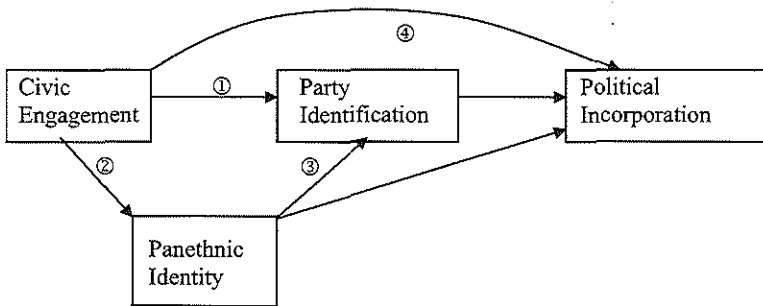


Figure 1 presents this central argument about civic engagement more schematically. There are two ways in which civic engagement can potentially act as a pathway to politics writ large. The first is by propelling Asian Americans to view partisan categories as meaningful (1). In the process of being engaged and feeling efficacious, Asian Americans may be further empowered to stake their ground as a Democrat, Republican, or Independent. This identification with a political party (or as an Independent) then defines one's degree of political inclusion and incorporation. The second route to politics is indirect, through the formation of a sense of ethnic or panethnic identity (2). As Figure 1 shows, in this second route, civic engagement promotes a greater sense of ethnic or panethnic identity that, in turn defines both the partisanship (3) and the political attitudes and action of Asian Americans. Finally, Figure 1 also considers the extent to

which civic engagement may directly increase one's chances of becoming politically active and incorporated, without the mediating effects of partisanship or panethnic identification (4).

A complete empirical test of all pathways in this figure together requires the kind of statistical testing and plain length in text that go beyond the aims of this volume.<sup>iii</sup> An alternate strategy, which we adopt here, is to examine the first key relationship in some detail – whether civic engagement influences one's degree of partisanship (1). Then, as a second order of business, we also look for evidence for the following additional relationships: (2) whether civic engagement influences one's perceptions of panethnic linked fate; (3) whether one's panethnic linked fate influences one's partisanship; (4) whether one's civic engagement influences one's formal political incorporation. In the following sections, we briefly detail the data and measures we use and the approach we take to testing for the independent effects of civic engagement on each of these four relationships. To preview, the results are strongest between civic engagement and whether or not one has views about the partisan system of political competition in the United States (1), with more mixed and selective (depending on which measure of civic engagement we examine) results for the remaining outcomes. The results also vary in several crucial respects between foreign-born and U.S.-born Asian Americans.

## Data and Measurement

This account of the relationship between civic engagement and party identification is examined using data from the 2000-2001 Pilot National Asian American Politics Study (PNAAPS). The PNAAPS is the primary multi-city, multi-ethnic, and multi-lingual survey of Asian Americans, fielded over ten weeks after the November election (see Lien et al. 2001 and Lien et al. 2004). Six primary Asian ethnic groups — Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, South Asian, and Vietnamese — and five major metropolitan centers of large Asian American populations — Los Angeles, Honolulu, the San Francisco Bay Area, Chicago, and New York — are represented. Interviews were conducted by telephone. Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese respondents were given the choice of a non-English language interview.

The resulting sample yielded 1,218 adult Asians: 308 Chinese, 168 Korean, 137 Vietnamese, 198 Japanese, 266 Filipino, and 141 South Asian Americans.

Before we can describe what the PNAAPS shows about the relationship between civic engagement and party identification, we must first detail what we mean, in survey terms, when we speak of these concepts. With civic engagement, the PNAAPS includes three different measures. The question wording for these three measures is as follows:

1. "During the past four years, have you participated in any of the following types of political activity in your community? ... Worked with others in your community to solve a problem?"
2. "Do you belong to any organization or take part in any activities that represent the interests and viewpoints of [R's ETHNIC GROUP] or other Asians in America? [IF YES] How active are you as a member? Are you very active, somewhat active, not too active, or not active at all?"
3. "How often do you attend religious services? Would you say ... every week, almost every week, once or twice a month, a few times a year, or never?"

None of these alone are an ideal measure. These questions, for one thing, were not designed to directly test for civic engagement, but rather intended to measure other things – political participation, ethnic solidarity, and religiosity, in the case of the three items above. Activities and organization membership on behalf of ethnic/panethnic interests may strike some as too particularistic to represent the general concept of civic engagement. Religiosity may strike others as denoting a particular, morally-laden and perhaps biographically prefigured form of voluntary association within the rubric of "civil society." Yet, taken together, the three measures here capture important and distinct dimensions of civic engagement.<sup>iv</sup> The value in examining all three simultaneously, rather than making strong claims on behalf of any one measure, is in acknowledging the heterogeneity and multidimensionality of associational forms and, by corollary, their possible influences on partisanship and political incorporation. In the PNAAPS, 21 percent of respondents reported having worked to solve a community problem, 15 percent belonged to an ethnic as-

sociation, and fully 51 percent reported attending religious services at least once or twice a month.

With party identification, we begin with the standard question format. All respondents are first asked, "Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?" Those who self-identify with a party are then asked, "Would you call yourself a strong [Republican/Democrat] or not a very strong [Republican/Democrat]?" And those who self-identify as an Independent are asked, "Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican or Democratic Party?" This sequence of questions is typically used to measure party identification along a continuum from strongly identifying as a Republican to strongly identifying as a Democrat.<sup>v</sup>

For our purposes, we view party identification as a sequence of two choices: (1) whether or not individuals think in partisan terms ("partisans" or "apartisans"); (2) how they think of themselves in partisan terms ("Democrat," "Republican," or "Independent"). Here identifying as an "Independent" is considered a form of partisan thinking because: (1) Asian Americans who self-identify as Independents can be shown to be distinct in their political orientation and immigrant experiences from those who are apartisan; (2) the category of "Independent" exists, in the American political landscape, *only in relation to* the categories of "Democrat" and "Republican" and can therefore be thought of as partisan in this relational sense. The term "apartisan" is reserved for respondents who refuse to answer the question, who indicate that they are unsure of how to answer the question, or who explicitly volunteer that they do not think in partisan terms. In the PNAAPS, roughly 36 percent of respondents identified themselves as Democrats, only 14 percent as Republicans and 13 percent as Independents, and fully 38 percent were apartisans.

## **From Civic Engagement to Partisanship**

As we noted before, our first order of business is to see if civic engagement is positively associated with a greater degree of attachment to partisanship and a specific major political party. Recall that the importance of looking to partisanship is that it has such a well-es-



tablished influence on one’s political attitudes and actions. Before we dive into a full, elaborate statistical test of the effects of civic engagement on the partisanship of Asian Americans (and, in ensuing sections, panethnic identification and political participation), it is first worth a look at whether the basic patterns on these outcome measures vary by civic engagement. Table 4 thus shows the degree to which party identification varies by each measure of civic engagement. There is a clear tendency toward holding a view on party politics – that is, identifying as a Democrat, Republican, or Independent – among Asian Americans who are civically engaged, across all three measures of civic engagement.

Worked with others in community to solve a problem				
	Democrat	Republican	Independent	Apartisan
Yes	42.6%	15.9%	15.9%	25.5%
No	33.8%	13.5%	12.2%	40.6%
Membership in an ethnic / panethnic organization				
Yes	46.4%	18.8%	13.8%	21.0%
No	33.8%	13.0%	12.8%	40.4%
Attend religious services at least 1-2 times each month				
Yes	37.3%	19.7%	12.1%	30.8%
No	33.9%	7.5%	14.2%	44.4%
Cell entries are row percentages.				

- Across the board, between 40 and 44 percent of Asian Americans who were not civically engaged had no view towards political parties or Independents; only a range from 21 percent to 31 percent of those who were civically engaged were similarly apartisan.
- Beyond this effect on thinking in partisan terms, there are varying effects between our three measures of civic engagement of party choice itself. Asian Americans who attended religious services regularly were significantly more likely to identify as Republican (20 percent) than those who do not attend religious services (less than 8 percent). By contrast, respondents who belonged to an ethnic or panethnic organization (and to a lesser extent, respondents who worked to solve a community problem) were likelier to identify as a Democrat than as a Republican.

- The likelihood of identifying as an Independent does not appear to vary with one's civic engagement.

One might raise the important consideration that these measures of civic engagement may vary in critical ways by key markers of difference within the broad and often totalizing category of "Asian American." Specifically, many key features of Asian American social, economic, and political life vary by ethnic group and by generation and the number of years an immigrant has spent in the United States. Perhaps, to follow the argument, civic engagement is reduced to belonging to a particularly engaged or religious Asian ethnicity; or civic engagement belies one's degree of acculturation in the U.S., varying by length of time spent in the U.S. If so, perhaps the seeming effect of civic engagement on Asian American partisanship is spurious, with patterns of party identification being instead a function of these other factors.

<b>Table 5. Measures of Civic Engagement, by Ethnicity/National Origin</b>						
Worked with others in community to solve a problem						
	Chinese	Korean	Vietnam	Japanese	Filipino	So. Asian
Yes	16.3%	11.3%	12.6%	27.2%	23.5%	35.5%
No	83.7%	88.7%	87.4%	72.8%	76.5%	64.5%
Membership in an ethnic / panethnic organization						
Yes	5.2%	8.9%	8.0%	22.7%	22.2%	24.8%
No	94.8%	91.1%	92.0%	77.3%	77.8%	75.2%
Attend religious services at least 1-2 times each month						
Yes	25.4%	77.6%	44.1%	34.7%	74.0%	62.5%
No	74.6%	22.4%	55.9%	65.3%	26.0%	37.5%

Table 5 shows the extent to which patterns of civic engagement vary by ethnic/national origin, at least for the three measures of civic engagement to which we have access in the PNAAPS data. Here, there are no consistent effects across measures of civic engagement. Koreans appear to be the most religious ethnic sub-group, but they are far less likely to collaborate with other community members to solve a problem or to belong to an ethnic or panethnic organization. Similarly, Japanese are the second most likely group to report working on a community problem, but the second least likely group to re-

port frequent attendance in religious services. That said, there is some within-group consistency: Chinese appear across all measures to be relatively less civically engaged (somewhat also true of Vietnamese); Filipinos and South Asians by comparison appear across all measures to be relatively highly engaged in civic life.

Table 6 looks at the variation in civic engagement by generation and number of years in the United States among the Asian American first generation. Tenure in the U.S. is grouped into four ranges: between 1 and 5 years, 6 to 10 years, 11 to 19 years, and 20 years or more. The basic results of Table 6 are summarized below.

Worked with others in community to solve a problem						
	1-5 years	6-10 years	11-19 yrs	20+ years	2nd gen	3rd gen+
Yes	16.1%	15.6%	13.6%	23.4%	29.2%	34.2%
No	83.9%	84.4%	86.4%	76.6%	70.8%	65.8%
Membership in an ethnic / panethnic organization						
Yes	11.8%	11.3%	13.6%	14.8%	25.6%	13.1%
No	88.2%	88.7%	86.4%	85.2%	74.4%	86.9%
Attend religious services at least 1-2 times each month						
Yes	47.2%	52.3%	58.0%	59.1%	41.7%	40.5%
No	52.8%	47.7%	42.0%	40.9%	58.3%	59.5%

- Levels of work on community problems for PNAAPS respondents increase with time in the U.S. and generation.
- Levels of membership in an ethnic/panethnic organization are highest among the second generation.
- Levels of religiosity increase with time in the U.S., but decline across generations.
- There are no consistent effects across measures of civic engagement.

This possible variation across generation/tenure in the U.S. is especially important to examine given Ong’s (see Chapter One) Census projections for the Asian American population. Beyond the projection that the population is likely to continue to grow, foreign-born Asians will continue to be a majority even in 2030. Given this likely continued significance of the foreign-born population within the

Asian American community into the future, we explicitly compare the influence of civic engagement between the foreign-born and U.S.-born Asian American population in our subsequent statistical analysis. For now, it is valuable to keep in mind that these two factors – ethnic/national origin groups and generational/tenure in U.S. effects – have some bearing on civic engagement, but do not explain the total variance of why some Asian Americans are “joiners” and others are not. Other factors come to mind as possibly varying with one’s level of civic engagement and one’s patterns of party identification, such as income, education, age, and sex of respondent. Here we use statistical regression methods that allow us to “control for” the possibility that these other factors influence party identification and isolate the independent effect of civic engagement on one’s party identification. Table 7 presents the streamlined “marginal effects” of a sequence of three such regressions:

1. In the first, Asian Americans who are “apartisan” are compared to those who are able to identify with one of the three conventional “partisan” categories of “Democrat,” “Republican,” or “Independent.”
2. Of those who identify with a conventional partisan category, the second regression compares Asian Americans who identify as Independents from those who identify with one of the two major parties.
3. Finally, the third regression compares – among major party identifiers – those who identify as Democrats to those who identify as Republicans.

That is, in the first regression, we test for the effect of civic engagement – and other “control” factors (ethnic/national origin, generation, years lived in the U.S., age, sex, education, family income) – on whether Asian Americans are apartisans or not; in the second, on whether Asian Americans are Independents or not; in the third, on whether Asian Americans are Democrats or Republicans. To compare the effect of civic engagement among the foreign-born and U.S.-born respondents – in the context of Ong’s 2030 projections – we also re-ran our regressions to include an “interaction term” that measures the joint occurrence of being foreign-born and civically engaged.

In Table 7 below, we simplify the results of our regression analy-

sis into “marginal effects.” Marginal effects, or predicted probabilities, are a way of focusing our attention on the primary variable of interest. In this case, the cell entries represent the independent effect of each kind of civic engagement on each kind of partisanship, holding all other factors in the regression model to their mean value. For each measure of civic engagement, Table 7 shows in the first row the primary effect of civic engagement that does not differentiate between U.S.-born and foreign-born. In the two following rows, Table 7 shows the revised analyses that allow for an explicit comparison by nativity. The summary effects of Table 7 follow:

**Table 7. Marginal Effects of Civic Engagement on Party Identification<sup>^</sup>**

	APARTISAN	INDEPENDENT	DEMOCRAT
Worked with others to solve common problem	-8.5%** (-0.9 to -16.1)	<i>not sig.</i>	<i>not sig.</i>
<i>U.S.-born</i>	<i>not sig.</i>	<i>not sig.</i>	13.4%** (-4.2 to 27.4)
<i>Foreign-born</i>	-11.7%* (+3.8 to -24.0)	<i>not sig.</i>	-25.5%** (-.01 to -49)
Membership in ethnic/panethnic organization	-14.3%** (-6.2 to -22.5)	<i>not sig.</i>	<i>not sig.</i>
<i>U.S.-born</i>	-15.6%* (.02 to -29.2)	<i>not sig.</i>	<i>not sig.</i>
<i>Foreign-born</i>	<i>not sig.</i>	<i>not sig.</i>	<i>not sig.</i>
Attend religious services 1-2 times each month	-8.7%** (-1.3 to -15.9)	-8.2%** (-1.3 to -15.1)	-19.1%** (-10.6 to -27.6)
<i>U.S.-born</i>	<i>not sig.</i>	-17.0%** (-.03 to -31)	-22.7%** (-.08 to -35.8)
<i>Foreign-born</i>	-14.5%** (.00 to -28.0)	<i>not sig.</i>	<i>not sig.</i>

<sup>^</sup> Cell entries are predicted effects of changing from the minimum value to the maximum value of each measure of civic engagement on party identification and its 95 percent confidence interval.

\* Statistically significant at the p<.10 level.

\*\* Statistically significant at the p<.05 level.

## Community problem-solving

- Asian Americans who work with others in their community to solve a common problem are on average, 8.5 percent less likely to be apartisan than those who do not engage in such community problem-solving work.
- Community problem-solving work does not appear to have any other statistically significant effects on one's partisanship as a first-order effect — it neither distinguishes Independents from major party identifiers nor does it distinguish Democrats from Republicans.
- These effects are altered when we differentiate between the effects of civic engagement for foreign-born and U.S.-born respondents. In the first distinction between apartisans and those who identify as a "Democrat," "Republican," or "Independent," the effect of community problem-solving turns out to hold primarily among foreign-born Asian Americans. For respondents not born in the U.S., community problem-solving work decreases one's likelihood of being apartisan by about 11.7 percent; this mode of community engagement has no effect on partisanship for U.S.-born Asian Americans.
- Differentiating between U.S.-born and foreign-born also reveals a strong effect on the choice between identifying as a Democrat and Republican. Foreign-born who work with others in their community are 25.5 percent more likely to identify as a Republican; U.S.-born who work with others in their community are 13.4 percent more likely to identify as a Democrat. These opposite effects between U.S.-born and foreign-born appear to have canceled each other out when nativity is not explicitly taken into account.
- This last finding suggests that not all forms of "community problem-solving" are alike, and that the kind of work with others on one's community (and perhaps even how the word "community" is interpreted and defined) differs markedly between Asian Americans born in the United States and those born abroad. Here it is tempting to speculate further on the difference in community engagement, but the data used for this study do not allow us to get to the root of this divergence between the foreign-born and U.S.-

born Asian American population.

## Working for an ethnic/panethnic organization or issue

- Asian Americans who belong to an ethnic or panethnic organization (or work on ethnic or panethnic issues) are on average 14.3 percent less likely to be apartisan than non-belongers.
- Belonging to organizations or taking part in activities representing ethnic/panethnic interests does not appear to influence the choice to identify as an Independent or the choice between identifying with one of the major parties.
- Unlike working with others in one's community, the effect of engagement on ethnic/panethnic activities appears to be primarily among the U.S.-born. U.S.-born respondents engaged by this measure are 15.6 percent less likely to be apartisan, with no significant effects on foreign-born respondents.
- The absence of any statistically significant effects on the remaining two stages of party identification does not change with the addition of an interactive term.

## Religious engagement

- Religiosity affects each stage of party identification: Asian Americans who attend religious services frequently are 8.7 percent less likely to be apartisans, 8.2 percent less likely to be an Independent, and 19.1 percent *more* likely to identify as a Republican.
- When we compare U.S.-born to foreign-born Asian Americans, the effects are more selective again. In the first stage, foreign-born who attend religious services often are 14.5 percent less likely to be apartisans than their foreign-born counterparts who do not attend religious services.
- In the second stage, U.S.-born who are religious are 17 percent more likely to identify with a major party than as Independents; there is no effect of religiosity for foreign-born Asian Americans.
- In the final stage of identifying as a Republican or Democrat, the effect is again among the U.S.-born. U.S.-born respondents who are active attendees of religious services are 22.7 percent more

likely to identify as a Republican. Again, there is no effect of religiosity on identifying between the Democrats and Republicans for foreign-born respondents.

These effects are pretty strong. To give a sense of where they stand relative to other factors that we control for, in the first regression, one's family income and number of years in the U.S. also significantly influence whether or not Asian Americans are apartisan or identify with a partisan choice. In the case where our measure of civic engagement is working to solve a problem in one's community, the marginal effect of family income — between respondents to the PNAAPS in the lowest income category and those in the highest — on apartisanship is 15 percent (the higher the family income, the likelier one is to identify with a partisan choice). With respect to the variable of years in the U.S., Asian immigrants who have lived in the U.S. just one year are 6 percent likelier to be apartisan than Asian immigrants who have lived in the U.S. for 20 years.

The upshot here is pretty clear. Active engagement in non-political spheres of civic life induces greater understanding of and identification with partisan politics. With some modes, engagement further shapes the particular content of one's partisan politics: highly religious Asian Americans are also less likely to identify as either Independents or Democrats, favoring instead allegiance to the Republican Party.

## **Partisanship Through Panethnic Linked Fate**

A second relationship to examine is whether civic engagement politicizes Asian Americans by engendering a greater sense of panethnic identity. As many other scholars have noted, Asian American "panethnicity" is an especially distinct kind of social group identity that is characterized by the simultaneous coexistence of externally perceived homogeneity and internally lived heterogeneity (Espiritu 1992; Lowe 1996; Lien 2001; Kibria 2002; Okamoto 2003; Vo 2004; Masuoka 2006; Okamoto 2006). For Asian Americans, the extent of the ambiguity and internal diversity group boundaries begins with the ethnic/national origins covered under the broad rubric of "Asian,"



which includes Chinese (mainland, Taiwanese, Hong Kong), Filipinos, Hmong, Indians, Japanese, Koreans, Malays, Pakistanis, Thais, Vietnamese, and, by some accounts, even Pacific Islanders and Arabs. Further weakening the case for panethnic identity is the sheer diversity of languages, religions, cultural orientations, political economies, and immigration histories characterizing persons defined as Asian American. Yet, under the right historical and organizational circumstances, Americans of divergent Asian national origins, languages, cultures, religions affiliations, immigration histories, collective memories, and structural positions in global and local economies are able to mobilize into a panethnic collectivity (Espiritu 1992; Okamoto 2003; Vo 2004; Okamoto 2006).

Here I build on a previous work using the PNAAPS that demonstrates that panethnicity can also influence the everyday attitudes and actions of Asian Americans (Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004; Lee 2005) and that social contextual factors are an important determinant of panethnic identity formation among Asian Americans (Masuoka 2006). The PNAAPS includes three different measures of panethnicity: (1) perceptions that Asians in America share a common culture; (2) self-identification as an "Asian American"; (3) perceptions that Asians in America share a "linked fate." In previous work, I demonstrate that the conception of panethnicity that has the greatest effect in defining the political orientation of Asian Americans is the third, linked fate conception (Lee 2005). Thus we focus on this measure here. In the PNAAPS, this common fate question asks respondents if they "think what happens generally to other groups of Asians in this country will affect what happens in your life." Following Dawson (1994), perceptions of linked fate can be thought of as a heuristic that simplifies political choice along a panethnic group utility calculus — what is best for me, individually, is determined by what I perceive to be in the best interests for my in-group, collectively.

**Table 8. Strength of Panethnic Linked Fate, by Measures of Civic Engagement**

	No linked fate	A little	Somewhat	Strong linked fate
Worked with others to solve a community problem	17.2%	15.9%	23.7%	25.5%
Membership in an ethnic / panethnic organization	13.4%	15.9%	14.6%	24.2%
Attend relig. services 1-2 times per month or more	46.5%	52.8%	54.5%	57.2%
Cell entries are row percentages.				

Table 8 shows the extent to which civic engagement varies with one’s strength of panethnic linked fate. Across all three measures, Asian Americans who strongly agree that what happens to other Asian Americans affects what happens in their lives are likelier to be civically engaged than their counterparts who reject such a linked fate. The greater likelihood of being engaged is most pronounced in the case of membership in an ethnic/panethnic organization, where 24 percent of strong panethnic identifiers hold such organizational ties in comparison to only 13 percent of non-identifiers.

As with the relationship between civic engagement and party identification, we further tested for the robustness of this effect by controlling again for a range of other factors that could plausibly covary with one’s panethnic identification – ethnic/national origin group, generation, tenure in the U.S., age, gender, family income, and educational attainment. The results, shown in Table 9, are mixed across measures of civic engagement. When we do not differentiate between U.S.-born and foreign-born, Asian Americans who work with others in their community to solve a common problem are 10.5 percent more likely than Asian Americans who do not engage in such work to perceive their fates to other Asian Americans as somewhat or strongly linked. Engagement in ethnic/panethnic organizations or in religious activity, however, do not appear to have any direct effect on one’s perceptions of panethnic linked fate.

**Table 9. Marginal Effects of Civic Engagement on Panethnic Linked Fate**

	A little linked	Somewhat linked	Strongly linked fates
Worked with others to solve community problem	-0.4%	4.9%	5.6%
Born in U.S.	-0.4%	4.9%	6.0%
Born outside U.S.	<i>not sig.</i>	<i>not sig.</i>	<i>not sig.</i>
Membership in (pan)ethnic organization	<i>not sig.</i>	<i>not sig.</i>	<i>not sig.</i>
Born in U.S.	-0.9%	6.3%	9.7%
Born outside U.S.	-0.8%	-11.3%	-7.3%
Attend relig. services 1-2 times each month or more	<i>not sig.</i>	<i>not sig.</i>	<i>not sig.</i>
Born in U.S.	0.2%	-5.4%	5.5%
Born outside U.S.	-0.4%	8.4%	9.1%
Cell entries are row percentages.			

When we explicitly contrast these effects for U.S.-born and foreign-born, we again reveal some hidden and pronounced effects. With engagement with others in one's community, we now see that this effect is isolated to the U.S.-born, who are about 11 percent more likely to believe in a moderate and strong sense of linked fate. There is no effect of community problem-solving work on panethnic identification for foreign-born respondents. More strikingly, the other two measures of engagement now shows some statistically significant relationships to a panethnic linked fate identity.

- U.S.-born Asian Americans who belong to ethnic or panethnic activities or organizations are 16 percent more likely to believe in a panethnic linked fate strongly or somewhat.
- The effect cuts in the opposite direction foreign-born, who are about 19 percent less likely to hold somewhat or strongly to a panethnic linked fate identity.
- With religiosity, it is foreign-born Asian Americans who attend religious services regularly who are more likely (by about 11 percent) to believe their fates are somewhat or strongly linked to that of other Asians in America.
- U.S.-born who are highly religious, by contrast, are almost 17 percent less likely to adhere to a sense of linked fate.

As with party identification, the influence of civic engagement on

panethnic linked fate with religiosity and ethnic/panethnic activity appear to be concealed by the opposite effects between the U.S.-born and foreign-born. Again, it is inviting to theorize about the basis for these divergent effects of civic engagement for U.S.-born and non-U.S.-born Asian Americans, but such considerations exceed the grasp of the PNAAPS data used in this chapter. The key point to underscore is that the critical differences are missed by simply examining Asian Americans as a single, monolithic group.

These findings, taken together, demonstrate the importance of civic engagement on Asian American panethnic identity. It further turns out that when Asian Americans believe their fates are linked to that of all other Asians in America, it has a significant and sizeable effect on their partisanship. As before, party identification is examined in three steps: (1) being apartisan or identifying with a partisan category; (2) being Independent or identifying with a major party; (3) identifying as a Democrat or a Republican. The effects of panethnic linked fate are as follows:<sup>vi</sup>

- Asian Americans who strongly believe their fates are linked are 10 percent less likely to be apartisan than those who reject the idea of a common destiny outright;
- A linked fate orientation has no bearing on one's likelihood of identifying as an Independent or with a major party;
- A strong linked fate orientation increases one's likelihood of identifying as a Democrat by 14 percent.

## **From Civic Engagement to Formal Political Incorporation**

We have thus far examined the various ways in which civic engagement spurs the politicization of Asian Americans. Recall from Figure 1 that there are a number of possible relationships between civic engagement, partisanship, panethnic identity, and the political incorporation of Asian Americans. The most consistent effect we find is the association between all three measures of civic engagement and partisanship: Asian Americans who are not active in civic life are less likely to view the partisan categories of "Democrat," "Republican," and "Independent" as a meaningful choice. We also see more selective evidence for an indirect pathway to partisanship through paneth-

nic identity: Asian Americans who actively work with others in their community on common problems are more likely to hold a strong sense of panethnic linked fate, and this common fate orientation then decreases the likelihood of being apartisan and increases the likelihood of identifying as a Democrat rather than a Republican.

The remaining question is whether civic engagement also directly potentiates the formal political incorporation of Asian Americans. By formal political incorporation we mean the three keys to democratic inclusion in American political life: citizenship, voter registration, and voter turnout. There are other measures we might also examine, including other modes of political participation, such as contributing money to a campaign or candidate, contacting a public official or political representative, and attending a public meeting or protest march. Also, the term “political incorporation” itself is much more encompassing than the sometimes ritualistic acts of obtaining legal status and fulfilling one’s civic duties. Broadly speaking, we care about political incorporation because the term denotes the process of successive stages of inclusion into all arenas of democratic decision-making. Importantly, full incorporation and inclusion perforce also involves one’s subjective membership and ownership in our politics, such as a sense of belonging, agency, and voice.

Focusing for the moment on the three most commonly examined formal measures of political incorporation, Table 10 shows the marginal effects of each measure of civic engagement on citizenship, voter registration, and voter turnout. As with Table 7, these marginal effects are calculated holding the other “control” variables in our regression model – age, education, family income, gender, number of years in the U.S. as an immigrant, immigrant generation, and ethnic/national origin group – at their mean values.

**Table 10. Marginal Effects of Civic Engagement on Formal Political Incorporation<sup>^</sup>**

	Citizenship	Voter Registration	Voting <sup>†</sup>
Worked with others to solve common problem	5.2%* (-0.4 to 10.8)	8.4%* (-0.4 to 17.1)	8.1%* (-1.1 to 17.4)
Membership in (pan)ethnic organization	4.5%* (-1.8 to 10.8)	13.3%** (3.9 to 22.7)	18.1%** (7.7 to 28.5)
Attend religious services 1-2 times each month	5.0%* (-0.8 to 10.9)	11.2%** (2.7 to 19.7)	17.3%** (8.8 to 25.8)

<sup>^</sup> Cell entries are predicted effects of changing from the minimum value to the maximum value of each measure of civic engagement on party identification and its 95 percent confidence interval.

<sup>†</sup> Voting is measured as respondent self-reports of voting in the 2000 presidential election.

\* Statistically significant at the  $p < .10$  level.

\*\* Statistically significant at the  $p < .05$  level.

The results support the promise held by many for civic engagement as a pathway to political incorporation.

- All three measures of civic engagement increase the likelihood of citizenship by about 5 percent.
- Asian Americans who are active in their civic life are also likelier to have registered to vote by a range of 8 to 13 percent, compared to Asian Americans who are not civically engaged.
- The largest effects are found for the act of voting itself. Asian Americans who work with others in their community to solve common problems are 8 percent likelier to have voted; participation in ethnic and panethnic organizations and activities increases one's chances of voting by 18 percent; attending religious services frequently increases voting by 17 percent.
- Differentiating between foreign-born and U.S.-born alters these results somewhat. The most prominent among these is that the effect of civic engagement among U.S.-born increases one's likelihood of voting by 22.9 percent; among foreign-born, it decreases one's likelihood of voting by 19.5 percent. Similarly, but to a much lesser degree, civic engagement among U.S.-born increases one's likelihood of being registered to vote; among foreign-born it may decrease one's likelihood of being registered, but the effect is not statistically significant. There is also some moderate evidence that the effect of religiosity and of participation in ethnic/panethnic

activities or organizations on voting is primarily an effect among U.S.-born Asian Americans.

## Summary and Discussion

Asian Americans are widely noted for their relative absence in spheres of political life. This is so, both at the mass level of political participation and at the elite level of political representation. Often, this relative absence is explained by turning a critical, incriminating eye either to the interests and incentives of individuals: either indicting Asian Americans for being politically apathetic or non-Asian American party elites and non-Asian American rank-and-file partisans for being unwilling to support the candidacy of Asian Americans running for elected office. In these pages, we focus instead on the institutional role of political parties and the relationship that rank-and-file Asian Americans have to the party system in America and to either major party. We have discussed the extent to which the attachments, that Asian Americans form (and fail to form) to the system of party competition in America, serves as a critical bridge to their politicization; we also followed the lead of many current scholars in looking to civic engagement as a key prior step to developing partisanship.

The analysis here has focused on three rather distinct measures of civic engagement found in the 2001 Pilot National Asian American Politics Survey: the general experience of working with fellow community members on a problem of common interest; participation in an ethnic or panethnic organization or activity; and attendance in religious services. We find a strong and significant role for civic engagement in determining whether Asian Americans are partisan or apartisan and a selective relationship between religiosity and Republican Party affiliation. We also find that community problem-solving begets a greater sense of panethnic identity, which in turn begets greater partisan ties and, more specifically, greater Democratic Party affiliation. Finally, we find that all three measures of civic engagement triggers the political incorporation of Asian Americans from citizenship acquisition to voter registration to voting itself.

Taken together, these results strongly affirm the promise that

many imbue to the workaday, seemingly non-political, forms of engagement in civil society. These results, however, should be taken with a dose of precaution. Three reasons, in particular, prompt our circumspection. First, each of the relationships that Figure 1 represents as one-way influences might well be two-way relationships. Panethnic identification may foster greater activity in civic life, not just the other way around; partisanship may foster a heightened sense of panethnic identification, not just the other way around; formal political incorporation (especially the acts of registering to vote and voting itself) may foster a greater sense of partisanship, not just the other way around. Perhaps the least likely of these is that partisanship may foster greater civic engagement, as it is difficult to imagine how identifying with a major party itself would foster working with others in one's community or greater attendance at religious services.

To further complicate matters, a second reason to be circumspect is that it is also possible that both civic engagement and party affiliation are the result of some other underlying processes of immigrant acculturation and political incorporation. In the analysis presented here, I have deliberately specified only a minimal set of factors to include in the statistical analysis as "control variables." In reality, civic engagement and partisanship almost certainly interact in more complex ways with panethnic identification, immigrant socialization, and key structural contexts of immigrant political incorporation (e.g., demographic composition, organizational density, social networks, local and global political economy, party competition, and electoral rules). These results, strictly speaking, thus represent more of a "plausibility" test for the role of civic engagement in the politicization of Asian Americans than a definitive, discriminating causal analysis. Having made this requisite caveat, it is still important to note that even if civic engagement and partisanship are not *causally* related, the forces or interventions that motivate one may very well motivate the other.

A final reason to be cautious in how we use these findings is reflected in the varied, sometime starkly opposite, findings we obtain when we explicitly compare the effects of civic engagement between U.S.-born and foreign-born Asian Americans. There are numerous possible realities on the ground that could support this divergence.



Perhaps most obvious among these is that the kind of civic ties that newcomers from Asia hold may differ in fundamental respects from those that the Asian American second generation and beyond hold. As our results suggest, the forms of civic engagement in which Asian-born respondents participate often push further away from partisanship and political incorporation, while the civic engagement of U.S.-born respondents consistently pull respondents to draw brighter lines between parties, between identities, and towards formal political inclusion.

There is, on this point, simply more research to be done. We have no reason to expect that one's country of birth is the only area in which the effects of civic ties on Asian American politics may diverge. Regional differences and the diversity of ethnic/national origin groups are two other potential dimensions of divergence that bear further examination. In addition, while we have examined three distinct kinds of civic ties in this essay, there are many others that might differ in their politicizing effects, such as labor unions, community-based organizations, hometown associations, and so on. Finally, with regard to projections into the future, there is no magic oracle here. Perhaps the clearest implication based on the present research, however, is that if the two major political parties continue to shun Asian American voters and candidates or otherwise hedge their bets in wooing them, the influence of a panoply of civic organizations and forms of associational life will surely continue.

## Notes

- i Two other key considerations, beyond the availability of data are the representativeness of the sample and the quality of the data. On the first, exit polls only survey voters after they have voted, some surveys poll likely voters, some only poll adults living in metropolitan areas with a high proportion of Asian Americans, some only poll Asian Americans with certain surnames, some only poll certain ethnic subgroups within these "panethnic" groups, and so on. On the second, some surveys only conduct interviews only in English while others allow for non-English interviews; some surveys tolerate response rates as low as 25 percent for a telephone interview while others endeavor to reach much higher response rates and conduct face-to-face interviews; some surveys aim to ask questions in as neutral

a manner as possible while others lead respondents with their question wording (see, e.g., Lee 2001).

- ii African Americans were roughly 13 percent of the U.S. population by the “alone or in combination” grouping (and 12.4 percent if counted as “Black or African American alone”). Native Americans were 1.4 percent of the population when counted “alone or in combination” and 0.8 percent “alone.”
- iii There are two remaining pathways shown in Figure 1 that we do not examine here: the relationship between party identification and political incorporation and between panethnic identification and political incorporation. Elsewhere I test for these effects and find strong effects for both (Lee 2003; Lee and Hajnal 2008).
- iv Vietnamese and Asian Indians were oversampled to generate a sufficiently large number of respondents for analysis. Other details of the survey methodology can be found in Lien et al 2001).
- v The inter-item correlations between these three items are not strong enough to consider scaling the items together into an index of civic engagement.
- vi By convention, “weak” Democrats and Republicans are those individuals who identify with these corresponding parties but whose identification is not strong. “Leaner” Democrats and Republicans are those individuals who choose to identify as an Independent to the initial question but are willing to acknowledge a partisan bent, with the term “pure Independents” reserved to those individuals who identify as an Independent to the initial question but reject any partisan inclinations to the follow-up question.
- vii These results are not shown in a table, but are available on request.