

## Second generation advantage among Asians: Does volunteerism facilitate voting?

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In the United States, past work has shown that Asians are less likely to vote (Lien 2004; Wong et al. 2011) and to be a member of a voluntary association (Stoll 2001) when compared with whites. These findings also hold for the growing second generation Asian population. For example, while second generation Chinese are successful in other aspects of integration, such as education and occupational mobility, they are less likely to vote than native-born whites (Kasinitz et al. 2008),

In contrast, however, Asians, especially second generation Asian *youth*, engage in non-electoral civic activity, volunteerism, at a higher rate compared to third and higher generation whites (Ishizawa 2015; Marcelo et al 2007). More importantly, while past studies have shown a positive association between volunteerism and formal political participation (Hart et al. 2007), we do not yet know how this association may vary by race/ethnic immigrant generational status. Using the confidential version of the Educational Longitudinal Study: 2002 (ELS: 2002) dataset, this study asks: (1) Does voluntary participation increase the likelihood of voting among second generation Asians? If so, are the effects as large, or larger than they are for third and higher generation whites?, and (2) Does the effects of voluntary participation on voting vary by intensity of volunteerism? As post-1965 immigrants' children have been making their transition to adulthood and become a significant part of the voting-age population, the extent to which they are translating their civic engagement experiences into political participation is becoming increasingly important.

### Data

The data for this study are drawn from the confidential version of the Educational Longitudinal Study: 2002. This longitudinal data set is well suited for research examining the effects of volunteerism on voting. Children included in these data were born during the late 1980s, so many children of post-1965 immigrants are included. The ELS base year survey provides information on children, family, and school characteristics in 2002 when students were

in the 10th grade or high school sophomores. The ELS base year parental survey includes information regarding the birthplace of the respondent's mother and father. The first, second, and third follow-up surveys were conducted in 2004, 2006, and 2012 respectively. In 2004, most respondents were in the 12th grade, so high school seniors, while some were in other grades, had dropped out, or had graduated early from high school. In 2006, many respondents were attending college but some were in or out of the labor force and had never (or not yet) attended college. In 2012, many respondents were in the labor force. To understand the long-term effect of volunteerism during adolescent and young adulthood on political participation among adults, the sample is restricted to those who participated in all four surveys.

### **Sample**

The sample of this study is second generation Asians and third and higher generation whites. The second generation are those who are born in the United States with at least one immigrant parent and the third and higher generation are those born in the United States with U.S.-born parents.

### **Dependent variable**

There are two dependent variables. The political participation is measured through (1) voting registration and (2) voting. The former is based on the survey question: Are you currently registered to vote? The latter is based on the survey question: Did you vote in any local, state, or national election during 2009, 2010, or 2011?

### **Key independent variable**

Volunteerism is the key independent variable, which is based on the survey question: "During the past two years, have you performed any unpaid volunteer or community service work through such organizations as youth groups, service clubs, church clubs, school groups, or social action groups?" The outcome categories are (1) none; (2) less than once a month; (3) at least once a month, but not weekly; and (4) at least once a week. While the variable could be dichotomized (e.g., between those who have engaged in volunteerism at least once in the past two years and those without any volunteer experience), this study takes the intensity of volunteerism into consideration. Some positive impacts of volunteering differ by intensity. For

example, one study found a positive association between community service and political knowledge and an understanding of politics, but only for those who participated regularly and extensively (Niemi, Hepburn, and Chapman 2000). Similarly, another measure of civic participation, civic association membership using “yes” or “no,” has been noted by Robert D. Putnam (2000:59) as “ambiguous” for examining active forms of participation.

### **Expected findings/Hypothesis**

The theoretical framework often used to understand voting is resource perspective. Resources, such as socioeconomic resources (e.g., education), cognitive resources (e.g., political knowledge), and civic involvement, facilitate voting (Verba et al. 1995). On the other hand, geographic mobility and raising young children are found to reduce the likelihood of voting (Plutzer 2002). The theoretical framework posits a positive association between volunteering and political participation through exposure to the political process and increasing the political awareness. Following the resource perspective, the first hypothesis is as follows.

***Hypothesis 1:*** Volunteer experiences increase the likelihood of voter registration and voting for both second generation Asians and third and higher generation whites.

The instrumentalist perspective (Handy et al. 2015) also provides an explanation for volunteerism. According to this view, youth are volunteering for the purpose of resume building. Those who are motivated by resume building are less likely to engage in intensive volunteer activities. Following the instrumentalist perspective, the second hypothesis is as follows.

***Hypothesis 2:*** The effect of volunteerism on voting varies by the intensity of volunteerism.

Kasinitz et al. (2008) explained how the low rate of voting among second generation Asians was because this group may not feel the need to be civically engaged or allocate time for political activities. While this may be true, the effect of volunteerism on voting may also be stronger for second generation Asians than for third and higher generation whites since second generation Asians were found to be participating in volunteer activities at a higher rate for all levels of frequency (Ishizawa 2015).

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