

A large graphic on the left side of the page features a stylized American flag. It consists of a dark blue vertical bar on the left, a white semi-circle at the top containing a white five-pointed star, and three horizontal stripes (red, white, red) below. To the right of this graphic is a large red rectangle. The title text is positioned to the right of the white semi-circle.

Getting Out the Vote among Asian American Young People and Adults In Los Angeles County: A Field Experiment

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CIRCLE WORKING PAPER 19

AUGUST 2004



CIRCLE

The Center for Information & Research
on Civic Learning & Engagement

ABSTRACT

This study examines the effects of mobilization on political participation among Asian Americans. It focuses on whether telephone and mail canvassing increases voter turnout among Asian Americans who live in high-density Asian American areas in Los Angeles County. Prior to the November 5, 2002 elections, a randomized voter mobilization field experiment was conducted. Lists of registered Asian Americans (Chinese, Korean, Indian, Filipino, and Japanese) were randomly assigned to treatment and control groups. A few days before Election Day, the treatment group received a phone call or postcard encouraging them to vote. After the election, voter turnout records were reviewed to compare turnout rates for the treatment and control groups. The results of the study show that telephone calls and mail canvassing increased voter turnout for Chinese Americans and that the effects of contact vary greatly by ethnicity and geographic context.

This research would not have been possible without the generous support of CIRCLE (Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Education), The USC-Cal-Tech Center for the Study of Law and Politics, and CAUSE-Vision21, a non-profit organization dedicated to political empowerment among Asian Americans. I am also grateful to Political Data, Inc. and the County of Los Angeles for their help with providing voting and registration data. I am indebted to Donald Green, Ricardo Ramirez, Alan Gerber, Sandra Chen, and David Silver for their helpful comments and feedback throughout the course of the study. An earlier version of this article is forthcoming in *Asian American and Pacific Islander Policy, Practice, and Community*.

Asian Americans, one of the fastest growing segments of the American population, demonstrate the lowest turnout rates of any major ethnic or racial group (Jamieson, Shin and Day 2002). According to the Current Population Survey, 43% of Asian American citizens of voting age turned out in the 2000 Presidential election, compared to 62% of non-Latino whites, 57% of non-Latino blacks, and 45% of Latinos (Jamieson, Shin and Day 2002).¹ In light of these stark racial gaps in voter turnout, research on Asian American political participation is critical for understanding the prospects for and limits to full participation in the United States among the country's increasingly diverse population. This study examines the effects of mobilization on political participation among Asian Americans, focusing in particular on whether non-partisan telephone or mail canvassing increases voter turnout among Asian Americans who live in high-density Asian American areas of Los Angeles County.

POLITICAL MOBILIZATION AMONG ASIAN AMERICANS

Traditional studies of political participation find a strong relationship between socioeconomic status and voting (c.f. Conway 1991; Verba, Scholozman and Brady 1995). Because the average household income of Asian Americans as a group is greater than that of most Americans (Seelye 2001), one might expect that their political participation would be high. However, because it appears to play a more limited role in the political participation of Asian Americans compared to other groups (Uhlener, Cain, and Kiewiet 1989; Nakanishi 1991; Lien 1994, 1997, 2001; Cho 1999; Junn 1999), it is important for researchers and advocacy groups to look beyond socioeconomic status in

1. Note that the turnout gap between Asian Americans and other groups shrinks considerably once eligibility to vote is taken into account. The November 2000 Current Population Survey shows that 83% of Asian American registered citizens of voting age turned out in the November 2000 election (compared to 86% of non-Latino whites, 84% of blacks, and 79% of Latinos who were registered citizens of voting age) (Jamieson, Shin, and Day 2002).

studies of Asian American participation.

One critical factor to consider beyond socioeconomic status is political mobilization (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba, Scholozman and Brady 1995). There is little systematic research on mobilization by community organizations and turnout among Asian Americans. Although Asian American politics is a growing field of research (c.f. Nakanishi 1998; Chang 2001; Nakanishi and Lai 2002; Lien 2001; Lien, Conway and Wong 2004), the few existing studies that focus on Asian Americans' political mobilization tend to focus on the role of elected officials in generating interest and increasing turnout during elections (c.f. Lai 2000). There remains a dearth of information on the most effective and appropriate strategies that community organizations might use to increase political participation among this rapidly growing segment of the American population.² This study represents a first step in addressing this research gap.

The vast majority of research on voter mobilization relies heavily on survey data, and this is true for studies of Asian Americans as well. Surveys of both the general population and Asian Americans rely on self-reporting by respondents about whether they have been contacted and encouraged to vote by a party or other organization and whether they have voted (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba, Scholozman and Brady 1995; Leighley 2001; Lien, Conway and Wong 2004). In general, studies that use survey data conclude that mobilization predicts voter turnout (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba, Scholozman and Brady 1995; Leighley 2001). Lien, Conway and Wong (2004) use data collected from a multiethnic, multilingual, multi-city survey of Asian Americans and find that, controlling for other factors, contact from a "political party or candidate organization or other political group about a political campaign" (party mobilization) is associated with consistent voter turnout among Asian Americans. In addition, they

2. Asian Americans are one of the fastest growing racial groups in the United States. From 1990 to 2000 the Asian American population grew from 6.9 million to 11.9 million, an increase of 72% (Barnes and Bennett 2002).

find that mobilization by an individual, such as a boss or program director, church leader, or friend, is not associated with voting, but is associated with other types of non-voting political activities.

The data from Lien, Conway and Wong's study suggest that there may be a positive relationship between mobilization of Asian Americans through contact by a political party or individual. However, the data they use are limited for the following reasons (for a good discussion of the limitations of studying mobilization using surveys, see Green and Gerber 2002). First, researchers must rely on respondents' self-reporting to gauge whether contact actually occurred. Second, researchers cannot be certain that higher rates of turnout among those who indicate that they have been mobilized are really attributable to contact, or whether they are due to other factors. Organizations like parties are most likely to target high propensity voters (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Leighley 2001). Therefore, organizational bias toward the most likely voters may explain higher turnout among those who have been contacted. Finally, surveys do not allow researchers to control for the type or quality of contact.

To contend with these issues researchers have partnered with community organizations in order to study the effectiveness of Get Out the Vote (GOTV) efforts through field experiments (Gerber and Green 2000, Gerber and Green 2001, Green and Gerber 2002; Ramirez 2002).³ Recent studies have emphasized the importance of randomization in studies of voter mobilization. The implementation of a randomized experiment includes several advantages over survey-based studies. For example, researchers are able to control the quality and content of mobilization (contact). Also, through a randomized experimental design, researchers are better

3. Gerber and Green (2000) conclude that phone call canvassing is associated negatively with voter turnout. However, Imai (2003), using statistical methods that correct for problems with the implementation of Green and Gerber's experimental protocol (using the same data), finds that phone call canvassing is associated with an increase in voter turnout.

able to understand the effects of contacting on voter turnout while controlling for other possible intervening variables, such as whether the targeted individual is active politically.

EXPERIMENTAL RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Prior to the November 5, 2002 elections, a randomized voter mobilization experiment was conducted in high-density Asian American neighborhoods in Los Angeles County. Lists of registered Asian Americans (Chinese, Korean, Indian, Filipino, and Japanese) were randomly assigned to treatment and control groups. A few days before Election Day, the treatment groups received a phone call or mailing encouraging them to vote. After the election, voter turnout records were reviewed to compare turnout rates for the treatment and control groups. Voter turnout was verified through cross-checking voter identification numbers with turnout data from the Los Angeles County Registrar.

In this case, randomization does not imply haphazardness, but refers to the way that registered voters were placed into treatment and control groups such that each individual has the exact same chance of being assigned to control or treatment groups (Green and Gerber 2004). When done carefully, randomization ensures that differences in outcomes (voter turnout) can be attributed to the treatment (phone or mail canvassing) alone, because other possible factors that might affect voting, such as socioeconomic status, voting history, geographic location, ethnicity, and age, are equally distributed among the treatment and control groups. Green and Gerber (2004) describe how randomization works in voter mobilization experiments: "Flip a coin to decide whether each person will be exposed to some form of 'treatment' or instead to a control group. Since every person has the same chance of getting into the treatment group, there will be no systematic tendency for the treatment group to contain a disproportionate number of frequent voters. . . . When thousands of people are randomly assigned to treatment and control groups, experiments enable researchers to form

a precise assessment of the treatment's impact" (14).

For this study, then, the only difference between the treatment and control groups should be that those in the treatment group received a phone call or mailer urging them to vote. In terms of other factors that might influence voting, like age or vote history, the two groups are indistinguishable from one another. Indeed, statistical tests confirm that the treatment group is no more likely than the control group to include a disproportionate number of people (those who are older, have a long history of voting, are native born, etc.) who would be expected to vote at a high rate.⁴ As such, we can be fairly confident that any statistically significant differences in turnout between the treatment and control groups can be attributed to the treatment.

An up-to-date list of registered Asian American voters was obtained from a vendor. The list includes name, address, telephone number, voter identification number, date of registration, voter history, language of original voter registration card, and age. Voters were registered in Los Angeles County and were residents of high-density Asian American zip codes in Monterey Park, Alhambra, Walnut, Diamond Bar, Torrance, and Gardena, and Artesia. Although this study represents the largest voter mobilization field experiment of Asian Americans to date, the fact that all of the registered voters in this study are residents of high-density Asian American neighborhoods limits the generalizability of the results to Asian Americans living in parts of Los Angeles County with a relatively large proportion of other Asian Americans.

Of the total, 27% of the sample were assigned to Treatment Group I (attempt to contact by phone), 20% were assigned to Treatment Group II (attempt to contact by mail), and the remaining (53%) were assigned to the Control Group (no

treatment).

Volunteers were recruited from an undergraduate class on "Asian American Politics" at the University of Southern California, Asian American student organizations, and students working at CAUSE-Vision21.⁵ CAUSE-Vision21 is the organizational partner for this project and an Asian American organization located in Los Angeles that describes itself as "a non-profit, 501C3 organization, dedicated to advance the political empowerment of our community through voter registration and education, community outreach and leadership development."⁶

There were 56 volunteers working on the project, 49 were Asian American, 34 were bilingual in English and an Asian language. Each volunteer received two hours of training and the Get Out the Vote phone campaign was monitored at all times by the director of the project. Calls were made in-language (Korean, Mandarin, Cantonese, Tagalog, Japanese, Hindi) or in English. Because they tend to have a higher proportion of English speakers compared to other Asian American groups in the study, some small proportion of the Filipino, Indian, and Japanese registered voters were contacted by volunteers who spoke English only. Chinese and Korean registered voters were contacted by bilingual speakers only. Those who were contacted received the following message in English or in-language "Hi, my name is (first name) and I'm a student at (school) calling on behalf of CAUSE-Vision21, an Asian American non-profit organization. I just wanted to remind you to vote on Election Day, next/this Tuesday, November 5." A maximum of three attempts were made to contact individuals by phone over 10 days prior to the election (October 26 through November 4). Calls were made from 10am to 8pm on weekend days and from 4:30pm to 8pm on weekdays. Careful records were kept regarding the status of each attempt (Contacted, Phone Busy, Wrong

4. Assignment to the treatment or control group was regressed on a wide range of independent variables, including age, nativity, gender, ethnicity, and voter history. None of the coefficients associated with the independent variables were statistically significant. Thus, random assignment produced balanced groups along each of these dimensions.

5. CAUSE-Vision21 (Chinese Americans United for Self Empowerment/Vision21) recently changed its name. The organization is now known as CAUSE (Center for Asian Americans United for Self Empowerment).

6. Description of organization from CAUSE website (<http://www.causeusa.org/>)

Number, Call Back, etc.). On the third attempt to contact by phone, volunteers were instructed to leave a message with a person or on an answering machine if possible. Messages left on machines were left in both English and an Asian language unless it was clear from the message on the machine that the resident was an English speaker. In addition, approximately one-third of the sample receiving a phone call were also asked if they had

Park’s Asian American population grew 85% during that time (Harney 1992). Further, Asian Americans made up 34% of the population in 1980 compared to 58% in 1990 (Asian Pacific American Legal Center 1998).

Li (1999) traces the emergence of the suburban Chinese community in Los Angeles. From 1960 to 1975, Chinese moved out of the Chinatown in downtown and, concurrent with

Table 1. Experimental Design

Total Number	Treatment Group I (Attempt to Contact by Phone)	Treatment Group II (Attempt to Contact by Mail)	Control Group
16,383	4425	3232	8726
100%	27%	20%	53%

been contacted about the election by another organization (party, community group).

Due to cost limitations, only the Chinese sample received a bilingual mailing.⁷ Other groups received the mailing in English only.

Not only is the sample divided among several Asian American ethnic groups, the Chinese sample is further distinguished by residence in the East San Gabriel Valley and the West San Gabriel Valley. Today, the San Gabriel Valley, a suburban swath in Los Angeles County that includes the cities of Monterey Park, San Gabriel, Rosemead, Alhambra, Hacienda Heights and Rowland Heights, is a booming center of Chinese American life in Los Angeles. In terms of demographics, some cities in the San Gabriel Valley have experienced dramatic changes. During the 1980s, for example, Monterey Park’s population grew from 54,000 to 61,000. More notable, however, is the fact that Monterey

national suburbanization trends, began to settle in the San Gabriel Valley. This settlement continued when immigrants from Asia began arriving in large numbers in Monterey Park in the 1970s after a real estate agent began to advertise homes in the area in Taiwanese and Hong Kong newspapers (Harney 1992; Saito 1998). Thus, not only was secondary migration occurring as residents moved from Chinatown to suburban Chinese communities, new immigrants also began to move directly to these suburbs, bypassing Chinatown (Li 1999).

There are important geographic distinctions within the San Gabriel Valley. The West San Gabriel Valley includes the cities of Monterey Park, Alhambra, Rosemead, Arcadia, and Temple City and is generally characterized by a larger Asian American population than the East San Gabriel Valley, which includes the cities of Diamond Bar, Baldwin Park, West Covina, Walnut, as well as unincorporated areas like Hacienda Heights and Rowland Heights. The Asian American population in the West San Gabriel Valley is dominated by Chinese Americans, while in the East San Gabriel Valley Chinese are more likely to share space with Filipinos and Koreans. The political context of the West San Gabriel Valley differs from that of the East as well. For example, there are more

7. The mailer text read as follows: “Vote On Tuesday, November 5, 2002. Your vote represents a voice for the Asian American community: For Election Information or Questions Please call toll free voter information hotline at 1-888-809-3888.

Asian American elected officials representing the West San Gabriel Valley. When the current study was conducted, there were two Asian American Members of the California State Assembly representing the West San Gabriel Valley, Carol Liu and Judy Chu. These candidates' races received a great deal of attention in the Chinese language newspapers and other ethnic media. Residents of the West San Gabriel Valley tend to be more Democratic and liberal in their political orientations than those in the East. Finally, the organizational partner for this project, CAUSE-Vision21, focuses much of its political empowerment efforts on residents in the West San Gabriel Valley. Thus, throughout the analysis those in the Chinese sample are grouped according to whether they live in the East or West San Gabriel Valley.

CONTACT AMONG ASIAN AMERICANS

One of the most critical aspects of any mobilization effort is contact. In order to deliver a mobilization message, such as encouraging individuals to get out the vote, one must first make contact with members of the targeted group. Yet reception to contact varies across individuals—some people are easier to contact than others. For example, some people are more likely to be away from their home phones during the times phone contact is attempted. Some may be more reluctant than others to pick up their phones even when they are at home. Moreover, those who are easier to contact also demonstrate voting habits that are distinct from those who are more difficult to contact (Gerber and Green 2000). In fact, previous studies confirm that those who are easier to contact are also more likely to vote (Gerber and Green 2000, Gerber and Green 2001).

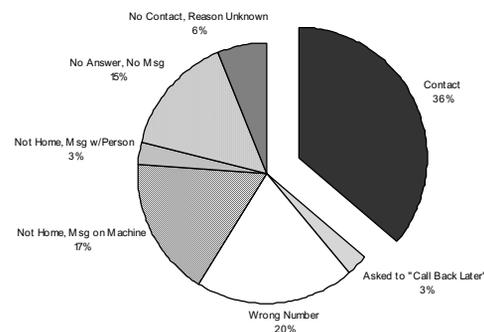
Figure 1 depicts the results of the effort to mobilize Asian American registered voters through phone calls. Successful person-to-person contact was made with 36 percent of the treatment group. Person to person contact among the remainder of the group was not successful in large part due to wrong numbers (20%) and targeted individuals not being home (35%). The latter group was split between those who did not answer and did not

have an answering machine (15% of total); who were not home, but a message was left for them with the person who did answer the phone (3%

Figure 1.

Results of Phone Call Attempts,
Treatment Group 1 (n=4425)

Result of Phone Call Attempts, Treatment Group 1 (n=4425)



of total); who were not home, but a message was left for them on their answering machine (17% of total). Approximately 6% of the sample was not contacted for reasons not specified by the caller. Callers left a message only on the third attempt at contact. In some cases (3% of total), callers were instructed by whoever answered to "call back later" on the third and final attempt at contact.

Does contact receptivity vary by ethnic group among Asian Americans? Japanese Americans and Indian Americans (South Asian) are the most receptive to contact, approximately 42 percent of each group we attempted to contact were actually contacted. Japanese and Indian Americans demonstrate slightly higher average income and education levels relative to most other Asian American groups (Lai and Arguelles 2003). Furthermore, as a group, Japanese Americans include a smaller proportion of immigrants and Indian Americans report relatively high levels of political interest compared to other Asian ethnic groups (Lien et al., forthcoming). These factors may be related to their propensity to pick up the phone. Chinese Americans in the East San Gabriel Valley (36.7%), Korean Americans (33.2%), and Chinese Americans in the West San Gabriel Valley

(33.2%) prove slightly more difficult to contact. Filipino Americans (30.3%) demonstrate the lowest contact rates. In general, the contact rates among different Asian American ethnic groups appear fairly consistent, though some groups are slightly easier to contact than others.

In an effort to better understand the overall mobilization context of the election for Asian Americans in Los Angeles County, an attempt was made to assess the degree to which other groups were also contacting Asian Americans with messages related to the 2002 election. A proportion of the treatment group receiving phone calls were asked if they were contacted about the election by another group, such as a political party, campaign, or organization. The data indicate that few individuals reported contact by other groups about the election. In fact, of all who were asked about contact by another group, only 24 people (less than 2% of all those contacted for the current study) gave an affirmative response. These findings are consistent across ethnic groups. These data suggest that overall mobilization efforts directed at Asian Americans in Los Angeles County were quite limited.

RESULTS OF THE EXPERIMENT

What are the effects of mobilization through phone contact on turnout among Asian Americans? Analysis of vote turnout among the treatment groups is shown in table 2. One observes that 47.1 percent of those who were

assigned to treatment group I and successfully contacted by phone turned out to vote in the November 2002 election. This result appears to be fairly large compared to turnout among those who were assigned to the control group (35.4%). Note, however, that “those who are easy to contact, and therefore easy to ‘treat’ are expected to have higher rates of turnout than those who could not be contacted” and that furthermore the difference is attributable to factors independent of the mobilization message (Gerber and Green, 2001, p. 79). Thus, simply comparing those who are most likely to pick-up and stay on the phone (successful contact) to the control group is likely to overestimate the actual effects of contact (Gerber and Green 2000, Gerber and Green 2001). To deal with this issue, one can make a statistical adjustment to estimate the actual effects of contact by calculating the turnout differential between the treatment group as a whole and the control group and dividing the resulting number by the rate of contact (Gerber and Green 2000; Gerber and Green 2001). This procedure isolates the treatment effect, yielding an accurate estimate of the effect of contact on turnout (Gerber and Green 2000).

It is difficult to measure “successful contact” by mail (Treatment Group II). Eighty-six mailers were returned to CAUSE-Vision21 because the addressees were unknown (mailers were stamped “Return to Sender”). Although the remaining mailers were delivered, one cannot be certain that the addressee received the mailer. For instance,

Table 2.
Summary of Vote Turnout for Treatment Groups

	Phone Call Attempted, No Contact	Phone Call Attempted, Successful Contact	Mailer Returned to Sender	Mailer Delivered	Control
Confirmed Voted	30.0% (848)	47.1% (753)	11.6% (10)	37.3% (1175)	35.4% (3085)
Abstained	66.5 (1880)	51.7 (826)	54.7% (47)	60.3% (1896)	61.7 (5385)
Unknown Vote Outcome	3.5 (99)	1.2 (19)	33.7% (29)	2.4% (75)	2.9 (256)
Total	2827	1598	86	3146	8726

someone else in the addressee's household might have read the mailer and thrown it away or the addressee may not have read the mailer. However, for the purposes of this study mail contact is considered "successful" among those in Treatment Group II, unless their mailer was returned. This method is likely to lead to an overestimate of the contact rate among those in Treatment Group II. That said, one observes that among those in Treatment group II for whom the mailers were delivered, the turnout rate in 2002 was 37.3%. This rate is only slightly higher than among those assigned to the control group (35.4%). Not surprisingly, because they probably no longer had a valid voter registration address, the turnout rate for

difference in turnout between the treatment and control groups is due to chance, rather than the phone call.

The effect of the Get Out the Vote phone banking effort on turnout among Asian Americans as a whole appears fairly modest. However, further analysis (table 4) reveals important differences in the effects of contact by ethnic group and, among Chinese Americans, by region. Although contacting Chinese Americans in the East San Gabriel Valley had virtually no effect on turnout, Chinese Americans in the West San Gabriel Valley who received a phone call were more likely to vote than those in the control group. In fact, the estimated effect of contact among Chinese Americans in

Table 3.

Turnout among Treatment Group I (Phone Contact) and Control (No Contact)

	Successfully Contacted by Phone	Assigned to Treatment (Attempted Phone Contact)	Assigned to Control Group
Percent Confirmed Voted	47.1 (753)	36.2 (1601)	35.4 (3085)
Number	1598	4425	8726
Contact Rate	36.1		
Estimated Effects of Contact			
Turnout Differential (36.2-35.4)/ Contact Rate (36.1)= 2.2%			
95% Confidence Interval = -2.4 to 7.1			

those whose mailer was returned (never delivered) was very low (11.6%). See Appendix A for procedures used to calculate confidence intervals. Effects of Phone Contact on Voter Turnout

Turning to table 3, one observes that the estimated effect of phone contact on turnout among Asian Americans is 2.2%, and the results are not statistically significant.

The phone calls had a slight positive effect on turnout on registered Asian Americans. However, because the effect is not statistically significant, one cannot rule out the possibility that the

the West San Gabriel Valley is 16.3% and the difference in turnout between the treatment and control groups is statistically significant. As stated earlier, the political context in the West San Gabriel Valley is distinct from that of the East. The West is home to more Chinese American candidates and the ethnic press is very active around political issues there. The Executive Director of CAUSE-Vision21, a community group focusing on Asian American political empowerment, considers the area a special target for their mobilization efforts, "CAUSE-Vision 21's stronghold is in the West San Gabriel Valley Area. CV 21 targeted much of our

efforts in the West San Gabriel Valley and due to limited resources we didn't do as much in the East San Gabriel Valley. In the past ten years, I would say 65% of our efforts concentrated in West San Gabriel Valley."⁸

Perhaps several factors, including a relatively high number of co-ethnic candidates and elected officials, including two California State Assembly Members, an ethnic press active around local and state politics, and a high level

of mobilization efforts by community groups— contributes to both the higher level of turnout in general among Chinese Americans and the greater effectiveness of the Get Out the Vote phone contacting efforts in the West compared to the East San Gabriel Valley. Moreover, the effects of phone contact among Chinese Americans in the West San Gabriel Valley were greater than among any other ethnic group in the study. It may be that the Chinese American population in the West

Table 4.

Turnout among Treatment Group I (Phone Contact) and Control (No Contact) By Ethnic Group

<p>Chinese East San Gabriel Valley</p> <p>Estimated Effects of Contact Turnout Differential (26.2-27.3)/ Contact Rate (36.7)= -3.0 95% Confidence Interval = -10.6 to 9.8</p>
<p>Chinese West San Gabriel Valley</p> <p>Estimated Effects of Contact Turnout Differential (37.4-32.0)/ Contact Rate (33.2)= 16.3% 95% Confidence Interval = 2.8 to 29.9</p>
<p>Filipino</p> <p>Estimated Effects of Contact Turnout Differential (39.1-39.0)/ Contact Rate (30.3)= .3% 95% Confidence Interval = -12.1 to 11.0</p>
<p>Indian</p> <p>Estimated Effects of Contact Turnout Differential (36.0-32.9)/ Contact Rate (42.0) = 7.4% 95% Confidence Interval = -3.7 to 17.5</p>
<p>Japanese</p> <p>Estimated Effects of Contact Turnout Differential (50.8-52.0)/ Contact Rate (42.1) = -2.9% 95% Confidence Interval = -18.9 to 8.6</p>
<p>Korean</p> <p>Estimated Effects of Contact Turnout Differential (29.2-30.1)/ Contact Rate (36.1)= -2.5% 95% Confidence Interval = -14.1 to 9.1</p>

8. Author's interview with Sandra Chen, Executive Director of CAUSE, April 17, 2003.

San Gabriel Valley is more politicized in general than other Asian American ethnic groups and therefore more easily "activated" to vote through mobilization.

The effect of contact on turnout varies somewhat among the other ethnic groups in the study. One observes that Indian Americans in the treatment group demonstrate a slightly higher rate of turnout than their counterparts in the control group. In fact, further analysis to isolate the effects of the treatment shows that the phone calls had a slight positive effect on turnout for both Indian and Filipino Americans. In contrast, contact appears to have no effect on whether or not Japanese or Korean Americans turned out to vote. The sign associated with the estimated effect of contact for both of these groups is actually negative. Note

that with the exception of Chinese Americans in the West San Gabriel Valley, however, the effects of phone contact fail to meet conventional thresholds for statistical significance.

Given the diversity of the Asian American community in the Greater Los Angeles area, one might speculate that there are further differences in the effects of phone contact among distinct segments of the community. For example, one might hypothesize that the effect of phone contact would be higher for U.S.-born registered voters compared to their foreign-born counterparts. A simple reminder to vote on Election Day may

Table 5. Turnout by Nativity, Voter History, and Age

	Number Assigned to Treatment (Attempted Phone Contact)	Number Assigned to Control Group	Percent Confirmed Voters in Treatment Group	Percent Confirmed Voters in Control Group
Nativity				
Foreign born	2659	5127	35.0	34.7
U.S.-born	1660	3375	40.4	39.8
Voting history				
Voted in 0 to 2 elections	2453	4770	20.8	19.5
Voted in 3 to 4 elections	593	1229	42.3	41.0
Voted in 5 or more elections	1273	2503	66.1	66
Age				
18-25 years old	471	971	17.6	14.5
26 to 98 years old	3791	7422	37.3	36.8

* Difference between treatment and control group statistically significant (95% confidence)

motivate some of the U.S.-born to go to the polls, but many foreign-born registered voters may require encouragement above and beyond a single phone call, such as a long-term voter education campaign. The results of this study show that phone contact had a positive effect on turnout for both the foreign born and U.S.-born. However, the effects for both groups are not statistically significant (table 5).

One might also predict that the effects of phone contact would be greatest among new voters compared to those who have a long history of turnout. Those who turnout consistently over time are likely to be high propensity voters in general, regardless of the mobilization context. Newer voters may be more receptive to a mobilization message. Regardless of voting history, those in the treatment group turned out at slightly higher rates than those in the control group. Further analysis shows that among registered Asian Americans who voted in two or fewer elections prior to 2002, the effect of phone contact is 3.8%. The effect of phone contact among those who voted in three to four elections prior to 2002 is 3.6%. Finally, among those who voted in five or more elections, **Table 6.**

there appears to be no contact effect (0%). Again, the results are statistically insignificant for all of the groups, regardless of vote history.

THE EFFECTS OF PHONE CONTACT AMONG ASIAN AMERICAN YOUTH

Similar to patterns among the general population (Highton and Wolfinger 2001), the very youngest Asian American registered voters in this study (18 to 25 years old), turned out to vote in 2002 at much lower rates than older registered voters (those 26 years and older). Might mobilization increase turnout among young Asian Americans, a group characterized by especially low voting rates? For both younger and older voters, those in the treatment group are more likely to turnout than those in the control group. Additional analysis was done to isolate the effects of the treatment and shows that phone contact increased turnout among 18 to 25 year olds in the study by almost 10 percentage-points (9.5%). This represents a substantial positive trend, but given the low overall turnout rate among Asian American youth and relatively small sample size, the treatment effect does not reach statistical significance. Among those 26 years old and older, phone contact increased turnout by 1.3%. Again,

Turnout among Treatment Group II (Mail Contact) and Control (No Contact)

	Mailer Delivered	Assigned to Treatment (Attempted Mail Contact)	Assigned to Control Group
Percent Confirmed Voted	37.3 (1175)	36.7 (1185)	35.4 (3085)
Number	3146	3232	8726
Contact Rate	97.3		
Estimated Effects of Contact			
Turnout Differential (36.7-35.4)/ Contact Rate (97.3)= 1.3%			
95% Confidence Interval = -.6 to 3.4			

the results are not statistically significant.

EFFECTS OF MAIL CONTACT ON VOTER TURNOUT

Do efforts to mobilize Asian American voters by mail increase turnout? The data in table 6 suggest that contact by mail may have a modest effect on voter turnout on the group as a whole (1.3%). Although the results are not statistically significant, they approach conventional thresholds for significance (95% confidence interval).

The results in table 7, showing the effects of mail

contact by ethnic group, reveal patterns very similar to those in the phone contact analysis. The effects of mail contact are positive among Chinese Americans in the West San Gabriel Valley and Indian Americans, but statistically significant for the former group only. The estimated effects are negligible or negative and statistically insignificant for all other groups.

Table 7.

Turnout among Treatment Group II (Mail Contact) and Control (No Contact) By Ethnic Group

Chinese East San Gabriel Valley
Estimated Effects of Contact Turnout Differential (26.5-26.3)/ Contact Rate (98.6)= 0 95% Confidence Interval = -3.9 to 4.4
Chinese West San Gabriel Valley
Estimated Effects of Contact Turnout Differential (38.1-32.0)/ Contact Rate (97.0) = 6.3 95% Confidence Interval = 1.3 to 11.3
Filipino
Estimated Effects of Contact Turnout Differential (41.9 – 39.0)/ Contact Rate (96.9)= 3.0 95% Confidence Interval = - 1.0 to 7.3
Indian
Estimated Effects of Contact Turnout Differential (35.5-32.9)/ Contact Rate (95.6)=2.7 95% Confidence Interval = -2.8 to 8.3
Japanese
Estimated Effects of Contact Turnout Differential (49.2 – 52.0)/ Contact Rate (99.4)=-2.8 95% Confidence Interval = -8.1 to 2.6
Korean
Estimated Effects of Contact Turnout Differential (30.2 – 30.1)/ Contact Rate (96.3)= 0.0 95% Confidence Interval = -4.6 to 5.0

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study is twofold. First, it aims to better understand the political behavior of Asian Americans, a group that demonstrates relatively low rates of voting compared to other major racial groups. More specifically, it focuses on the effects of efforts by a non-partisan community group to mobilize Asian Americans. The second aim of this paper is more practical. Given limited resources, what strategies might community-based groups use to mobilize Asian Americans, especially in terms of voting?

ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECTS OF CONTACT ON VOTER TURNOUT AMONG ASIAN

Pacific Americans reveals the importance of paying attention to demographic distinctions (especially ethnicity, geographic region, and age) within the Asian American community. While the effect of phone and mail contact on turnout among the entire group of Asian Americans included in the study is modest, the results suggest that the effects are much higher among some ethnic groups than others. Furthermore, even within a particular ethnic group like Chinese Americans, contact success depends upon geographic and political context. The effect of contact is much greater among Chinese Americans who live in the West San Gabriel Valley than among those who live in the East San Gabriel Valley. As discussed above, these differential effects of contact may be attributable to the distinct political context that characterizes each area.

In the majority of cases, including the overall effects of phone or mail contact on Asian Americans as a whole, the results are statistically insignificant. The 95% confidence interval used to establish statistical significance in this study may be a relatively conservative standard for evaluating the effects of mobilization. It is important to note that effect sizes for experiments of this kind are expected to be extremely small, but nonetheless politically meaningful. As witnessed in the Presidential Election of 2000, for example, a modest 1 to 3 percent change in turnout across a state or national electorate can swing an election.

The results of this study have important

implications for the strategies that community organizations might employ in their efforts to increase political participation through voting among Asian Americans. This study points to the significance of addressing language diversity in any mobilization effort aimed at Asian Americans. About one out of every four Asian Americans who were contacted by phone during this study preferred to speak a language other than English. Furthermore, preference for speaking a language other than English ranged from 5% among Indian Americans who were contacted successfully to over 60% of Korean Americans who were contacted successfully. Finally, organizations that are engaged in Get Out the Vote efforts in the Asian American community may want to focus on making phone and mail calls to members of those ethnic groups for which phone contact is shown to be related to an increase in vote turnout. In their efforts to reach out to other groups, for which contact by phone is less effective, organizations may choose to use a mobilization strategy that is more personal, such as face-to-face canvassing, or to develop more effective phone mobilization messages than the one used in this study. Potential directions for future studies might include a more comprehensive analysis of the effects of contact on turnout among Asian American communities outside of Los Angeles County as well as an examination of the effects of other types of contact on Asian American turnout.

APPENDIX A.

The following procedure was used to assess uncertainty in the estimated treatment effects. This procedure was established by Ricardo Ramirez in his study of non-partisan Get Out the Vote efforts in low-turnout Latino precincts. The following method is taken verbatim from the description provided in Ramirez (2002):

(1) sample m times from the binomial distribution implied for the number of assignees actually contacted, and convert the sampled values to a proportion, x . (For instance, if A subjects are assigned to treatment, and B subjects accept treatment, then sample from the binomial distribution for the number of successes in A independent trials, each with B/A probability of success, and convert the sampled value to a proportion, by dividing by A .)

(2) sample m times from the binomial distribution implied for the number of subjects turnout out, among subjects assigned to treatment; again, convert the sampled values to a proportion, y (see step 1).

(3) sample m times from the binomial distribution implied for the number of subjects turning out, among subjects assigned to the control group; again convert the sampled values to a proportion, z (see step 1).

I let m be an arbitrarily large number (e.g., 100,000). Steps 1-3 induce a sampling distribution over the treatment effect by calculating the m values of the following quantity: $t = (y-z)/x$. The 95% confidence intervals reported in the text are simply the observed 2.5 and 97.5 centiles of the m values of t .

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