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Explaining high rates of political participation among Chinese migrants to Australia

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Abstract

Studies of political participation regularly observe the underrepresentation of immigrant citizens and ethnic minorities. In contrast, evidence from Australia suggests that immigrant Australians are overrepresented in certain forms of participation, including donating money and working for a party or candidate. Drawing on major theories of ethnic political participation (including socialisation, recruitment and clientelism), this study uses 2013 Australian Election Study data to show that China-born migrants to Australia participate at higher rates than native-born and other migrant citizens. The study finds support for two explanatory theories: (a) that contributions of money by recently-arrived migrants are an aspect of clientelist relationships between migrants and legislators; and (b) that political interest in and knowledge of the host country's political system are not necessary, and indeed perhaps even depress participation among newly-arrived migrants. These findings suggest an under-explored vein of transactional politics within established democratic systems.

Keywords

Chinese migrants, clientelism, political participation, transactional politics, political socialisation

Introduction

Contemporary theories of democracy regularly rely on inclusive and widespread citizen participation as an indicator of democratic health (Lijphart, 1997). Those who do not participate risk not

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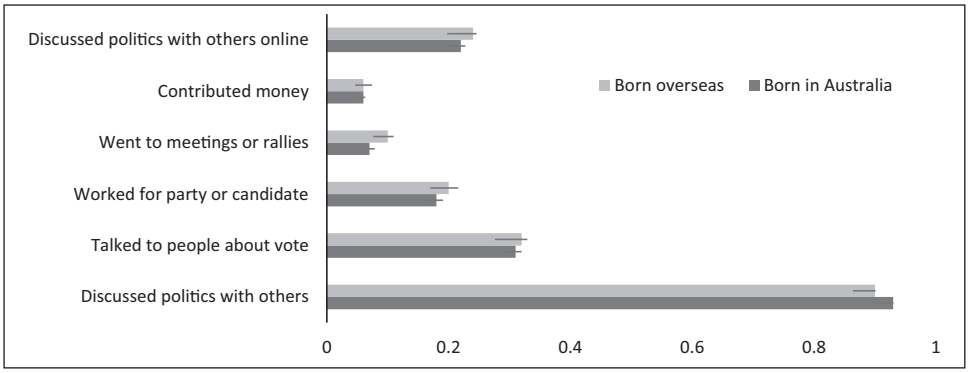
Figure 1. Participation rates by migrant status, 2013.



Notes: bars represent proportion of respondents who reported participating in each activity, as a binary yes/no. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals from the point estimate.
Source: 2013 Australian Election Study (McAllister et al., 2013).

having their voice heard by legislators with responsibility for much of their welfare. This has implications for the representation of ethnic minorities (among others), whom many studies have found are underrepresented in a range of participatory behaviours: voting; membership of organisations, legislative contacting and lobbying, and protesting. The sum of the literature shows that ethnic minorities tend to participate at lower rates than native-born citizens in absolute terms, and usually net of other demographic and socioeconomic factors as well.

Evidence from Australia is more optimistic about the participation of ethnic minorities. Immigrants to Australia demonstrate higher levels of political trust and satisfaction with democracy than the rest of the population, which increases the longer they have lived in Australia (Bilodeau, 2008). Ethnically-diverse and immigrant Australians have participated in formal politics; both major parties in Australia have sought to integrate immigrants into their structures with varying levels of success (Jupp, 1984). However, they have also participated differently from the average Australian (Zappalà, 1999). McAllister and Makkai (1992) observe low rates of campaign participation in 1988, while Bean (2012) and Sheppard (2013) find overrepresentation in campaign acts at the 2007 and 2010 federal elections, respectively. Australian Election Study data in Figure 1 show the percentage of Australian citizens born overseas (compared with those born in Australia) who participated in a range of political activities during the 2013 federal election campaign.

These accounts accord with reputable, mainstream media reporting on political engagement and influence among Chinese ethnic communities in Australia (McKenzie et al., 2017). The data, separated by activities performed during the campaign period and those in the five years prior to 2013, suggest that immigrant Australians are more likely to participate in campaigns than Australian-born citizens, but less likely to engage in other forms of participation. The combination of existing research and recent data present two puzzles: why do immigrants to Australia participate at higher rates than in similar democracies, and why do they disproportionately participate in campaign – but not other – activities? This article addresses this question directly by disaggregating rates and determinants of participation among migrant subgroups, with particular emphasis on China-born migrants in order to test the hypothesis – suggested by media reporting – that this group is inordinately active in Australian political life. We conclude by offering possible explanations for this anomaly, with the caveat that these cross-sectional, observational data do not allow for a definitive causal explanation.

Theories of political participation: Who and why

The literature on political participation consistently finds that citizens need both the resources to participate in politics and to be recruited. Brady et al. observe three reasons why US citizens do not participate in civic life: 'because they can't, because they don't want to, or because nobody asked' (Brady et al., 1995: 271). The first reason refers to resources, and specifically to the relatively high cost of entry to many forms of participation. To participate in a political campaign, a citizen may require money (to donate to a party or candidate), free time to volunteer on the campaign trail, or the skills and confidence to be able to persuade voters to support their preferred candidate. Money is concentrated among White, well-educated males with high levels of education, an employed spouse and school-aged children (Brady et al., 1995). Conversely, free time is most common among male retirees with either no or adult children. Civic skills, including language proficiency, educational attainment and experience running meetings, writing letters and making presentations, can be learned at work or in voluntary organisations such as churches, but even church-related skills are concentrated among citizens with high educational qualifications.

The second factor required for participation is engagement, measured by political interest, efficacy, party identification, and knowledge. Interest in politics explains why an individual with sufficient resources chooses to spend them on political activity, and not some other form of leisure (Brady et al., 1995). Political efficacy describes the extent to which an individual believes that participating is worth the effort: that they can affect a political outcome. Party identification describes an individual's personal attachment to any of the major political parties in a system. Political knowledge describes how much factual information someone possesses, based on varying measures of knowledge about institutions, history and current affairs.

Third, participants in political life are often recruited to contribute funds to a campaign, to protest, sign a petition or join a party (Brady et al., 1995; Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993). Recruitment can be direct – for example, campaigns by political parties, candidates, activists and other political actors to recruit volunteers – or indirect, such as via family, friends or colleagues (La Due Lake and Huckfeldt, 1998). By recruiting directly, 'political leaders provide opportunities for political action that citizens would not have otherwise' (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993: 26). Indirect recruitment is usually more effective, however: 'When friends, neighbors, and co-workers present the opportunities to participate, they also convey social expectations about desirable courses of action' (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993: 29). Additionally, friends or colleagues 'are more likely to have information about the activity potential of the target and more likely to have the leverage that makes acquiescence to a request probable' (Brady et al., 1999: 157).

Interpersonal political recruitment often relies on the individuals' levels of social capital. If someone asks a friend, relative or colleague to donate to or volunteer for a political party, the existing social capital between them should imply that the individual's participation will be repaid in the future, at a similar value. The expectation of reciprocity can be specific and transactional – for example, if I donate to your campaign, you should donate to my sports club – or non-specific, with a general expectation that favours will be reciprocated over time and space, but not by a specific individual or in a specific way (Putnam, 2001). Research suggests that social capital produced by general social interactions can facilitate political participation through indirect mobilisation (La Due Lake and Huckfeldt, 1998). [1]

The co-existence of resources, political engagement and recruitment networks, both direct and indirect, increases the likelihood that an individual will participate in politics. The distribution of these factors largely explains why, in advanced democracies, White, middle-aged participants predominate: 'democracy's unresolved dilemma' (Lijphart, 1997). This study examines one instance in which a minority group is over-represented in participation: the case of campaign participation among immigrant Australians.

Theories of ethnic political participation

Following Nelson's (1979) finding that ethnic diasporas possess their own political cultures and participatory habits, recent studies have increasingly treated ethnicity as having a direct effect on participation, distinct from socioeconomic status (Banducci et al., 2004). Four explanations for migrant political participation dominate the literature: group consciousness, empowerment through descriptive representation, political socialisation and social capital (McAllister and Makkai, 1992). These theories overlap with the mainstream models described by Brady et al. (1995) and others: group consciousness, empowerment and socialisation can be conceived as forms of political engagement, while social capital facilitates the indirect recruitment of activists.

Group consciousness, in the US context, describes 'the awareness among blacks of their shared status as an unjustly deprived and oppressed group'. The positive effect of group consciousness on political participation among racial and ethnic minorities in the United States of America (USA) is well established. The Australian case remains unexplored, perhaps due to the lack of a concentrated, visible ethnic minority (Jupp, 2007).[2] The second theory of ethnic participation, descriptive representation, holds that the presence of elected representatives from visible ethnic minority groups empowers members of those groups to participate (Banducci et al., 2004). Seeing fellow ethnic group members in positions of political power is shown to increase individuals' political engagement (including levels of political trust and efficacy), making them more likely to decide to participate (Banducci et al., 2004).

The third hypothesised determinant of ethnic participation is socialisation, driven by immigrants' pre-immigration as well as post-immigration experiences of democracy (Bilodeau et al., 2010; Greeley, 1974; McAllister and Makkai, 1992). Greeley's (1974) comprehensive study of ethnic US citizens' participation in campaigns and elections advances three tentative hypotheses to explain why different ethnic groups behave in different ways: (a) that immigrants bring cultural heritage with them, informing their behaviour in their new country; (b) that the process of their immigration informs their behaviour, for example the mass immigration and co-settlement of Irish into large cities; or (c) their experience since immigration, citing Irish immigrants' 'unrivalled' entry to local politics in the towns where they settled, and subsequent political patronage and 'machine politics' (Erie, 1988). Across Europe, both pre- and post-migration socialisation appear to be more important than socio-economic resources in predicting immigrants' participation in their host country (Zapata-Barrero et al., 2014).

These types of networked and distributive politics are often characterised as clientelist and most commonly associated with the traditional and developing societies or poor populations (Stokes et al., 2013). However, personalised, networked and exchange-based relationships remain features of developed democracies in the form of machine politics (for Australian discussions see Sawer and Zappalà, 2002), patronage networks or diffuse exchanges of goods, favours or minor administrative advantages (Kristinsson, 2001). Given the systemic differences between exchange-based politics evidenced in established democracies and clientelist politics as broadly understood in the literature (Hilgers, 2011), we refer to these relationships in the Australian context as transactional politics. We further emphasise that evidence of such political behaviour among migrant Australians does not infer that the relationship between legislators, candidates or parties on one side and migrants on the other is reciprocal: the existence of donations on one side does not necessarily imply corresponding legislative favours on the other.

Pappas (2009) argues that transactional political organisation should not be exclusively seen as the product of exogenous cultural or institutional factors, but also endogenously, as a result of political actors. Indeed, in developed democracies where the secrecy of the ballot is assured, transactional relationships are perpetuated by norms which reinforce feelings of obligation and reciprocation between political actors and clients (Lawson and Greene, 2014). In the case of immigrants

establishing themselves in a developed democratic polity, this points to several possible avenues for socialisation to have a significant impact on their political participation.

There is some evidence for similar socialisation and sophisticated networked or clientalistic relationships featuring brokers in Australia. Zappalà (1998, 1999) observes that many immigrants to Australia form strong communities, living in concentrated areas and creating and maintaining strong social bonds. Among these bonds are those with local parliamentary representatives, who assist the local community and either expect or receive some form of reciprocation in the form of campaign donations (of time or money); in some cases, immigrant communities are institutionalised within the major parties as 'ethnic branches' (Zappalà, 1998). Agency among such immigrants is debated: some view them as having 'gone from being factory fodder to party fodder', with the alternative view that ethnic branches are 'a necessary tactic for them to increase their representation within the political system' (Zappalà, 1999: 70). In either case, the phenomenon of immigrant involvement in the two major Australian parties is well established (Kwok, 2008).

Immigrants to Australia from non-democratic countries bring with them attitudes and experiences that shape their new political lives: they are less convinced than other migrants that democracy is 'the only game in town' (Bilodeau et al., 2010), but they also demonstrate greater trust in Australian representatives (McAllister and Makkai, 1992), and are less likely to engage in protest activity (Bilodeau, 2008). Moreover, migrants to Australia often lack the understanding of Australia's Westminster-based political system required to navigate political processes and achieve formal political representation (Jupp,1984). Each of these studies supports Greeley's (1974) hypothesis that immigrants import their cultural heritage into their new country, with greater emphasis on the effects of pre-migration socialisation than post-migration effects.

In a related literature, researchers have focused on 'bridging' social capital in Australian society. In contrast to bonding capital, which creates dense networks of individuals with close ties, bridging capital describes ties between those dense networks (Jupp, 2007; Putnam, 2001). This bridging capital manifests as social cohesion: the extent to which a society, with its heterogenous racial, religious, and linguistic groups, can identify as a cohesive group working towards unified ends (Putnam, 2001). Studies of social cohesion in Australia commonly observe parallel trends towards greater diversity and policies encouraging integration, with the effect of supporting a comparatively cohesive settler society (Markus, 2014). On the other hand, migrant communities report discrimination and low social trust (Markus, 2014). Further, recent incidents of racial and cultural conflict threaten progress towards cohesion and call into question the extent of bridging social capital within and between groups in Australian society (Jupp, 2007).

This study examines the roles of socialisation, recruitment, and transactional politics in explaining the observed high rates of campaign participation among Asian-born migrants in Australia. The alternative theories discussed above do not have valid proxies in the available data (in the case of group consciousness) or sufficient subsample sizes (in the case of descriptive representation) to adequately study here. There is great scope for examining the effects of descriptive representation on ethnic participation in Australia, given recent increases to the diversity of legislative representation, but such a study could comprise its own project. Measures of group consciousness in Australia exist, but separately to the comprehensive dataset employed here. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, analysis will focus on three theories of ethnic participation: socialisation, recruitment and transactional politics.

Methodology and data

The empirical study of Australian politics is a comparatively small field, but the Australian case has much to offer political science. Institutionally, it is comparable with other Westminster systems (the United Kingdom, Canada and New Zealand) because the executive is drawn from, and sits

within, the legislature. Australia compares well with Canada, the United Kingdom and the USA in having a bicameral legislature, and with Canada and the USA in having a federal system of government and a similar history as settler societies. Australia stands on its own among the major advanced democracies in having compulsory voting laws (Mackerras and McAllister, 1999). Compulsory voting laws have effects beyond sustaining high levels of voter turnout: they ensure that, at least every two years or so, citizens have to become at least mildly engaged with the political process, including the parties, candidates and issues of the day (Mackerras and McAllister, 1999).

Since 1967, the Australian National Political Attitudes Survey, and from 1987 the Australian Election Study (AES), have documented the political attitudes, behaviours and demographic characteristics of Australian citizens following federal elections. Drawing on a sampling frame of Australian citizens who are currently enrolled to vote, the AES distributes a postal questionnaire to a stratified sample in the weeks following each federal election campaign. The 2013 AES oversampled first-generation migrants to Australia; of the total 3,955 respondents, 976 were born outside Australia. The resulting subsample of first-generation migrants allows for quantitative analyses not possible with earlier AES or similar general population surveys in Australia. The effective response rate for the 2013 AES was 33.9%.

Of the 976 respondents born in countries other than Australia, a plurality (307) were born in the United Kingdom. Seventy were born in New Zealand, 51 in Italy, 39 in mainland China (excluding Hong Kong), 37 in the Philippines, and 34 in India. The next most common countries of birth are Vietnam (28 respondents), Germany (27), Macedonia, Yugoslavia, and the Netherlands (26 each), Malaysia and South Africa (20 each), and Greece and Sri Lanka (17 each). The distribution of countries of birth allows for categorisation of respondents by Australian Bureau of Statistics classifications of cultural and ethnic groups, but not for country-level categorisation (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). The region of birth categories therefore consist of: Oceania (excluding Australia), North-West Europe, Southern and Eastern Europe, Middle East and Northern Africa, North-East Asia (excluding China), Southern and Central Asia, the Americas, Sub-Saharan Africa, and China. China comprises its own category, allowing us to test the hypothesis (based on media reporting) that China-born migrants have disproportionate rates of involvement in Australian politics (McKenzie et al., 2017).

This study focuses on acts of political participation performed during the campaign period, which officially spans the time from the date election writs are issued by the Governor General of Australia to the date of the election. In the 2013 federal election, this campaign period comprised 33 days (from 5 August to 7 September 2013): a typical length for Australian election campaigns. The AES asks respondents, 'Here is a list of things some people do during elections. How often did you do any of these things during the recent election?', followed by a list of participatory behaviours: 'Discuss politics with others in person (i.e. face to face or over the phone)'; 'Discuss politics with others online (i.e. through email or on a social network site like Facebook or Twitter)'; 'Talk to other people to persuade them to vote for a particular party or candidate'; 'Show your support for a particular party or candidate by, for example, attending a meeting, putting up a poster, or in some other way'; 'Go to any political meetings or rallies'; and 'Contribute money to a political party or election candidate'. The response frame contains four options: 'Frequently'; 'Occasionally'; 'Rarely'; and 'Not at all'.

Political participation outside of the campaign period is outside of the scope of this study, for two reasons. First, this research question arose from earlier evidence that migrants to Australia are disproportionately active in campaign participation, but not in participation outside of the campaign period (Bean, 2012; Sheppard, 2013). With this study, we seek to examine this phenomenon in detail and offer explanations as to why the Australian case seems to run counter to international trends in migrant political participation. Migrants to Australia exhibit little

engagement in non-campaign participation, as measured by the AES. Future studies will build on this work to compare the different predictors of campaign and non-campaign participation in Australia, and the causal mechanisms that explain migrants' participation in the former but not the latter. Second, campaign participation constitutes one important form of political participation that is central to migrants' social and political integration, and their diffuse support for the political regime of their adopted country (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003). The measures of non-campaign participation in the AES – and in most national election studies – concern acts of protest, petition signing, and other forms of demonstration (Dalton, 2008).

Demographic and socioeconomic covariate measures are used to isolate the effects of respondents' region of birth on their participation in the aforementioned acts. Party identification is an ordinal measure of respondents' degree of support for any Australian political party (either 'very strong supporter', 'fairly strong supporter', 'not very strong supporter', or not a supporter at all). Gender is self-identified, and coded as binary with 'female' = '1'. Age is derived from the respondent's stated year of birth. Household income is an ordinal measure of 22 gross annual household income brackets, ranging from 'less than AUD$10,000 a year' to 'more than AUD$180,000 a year'.

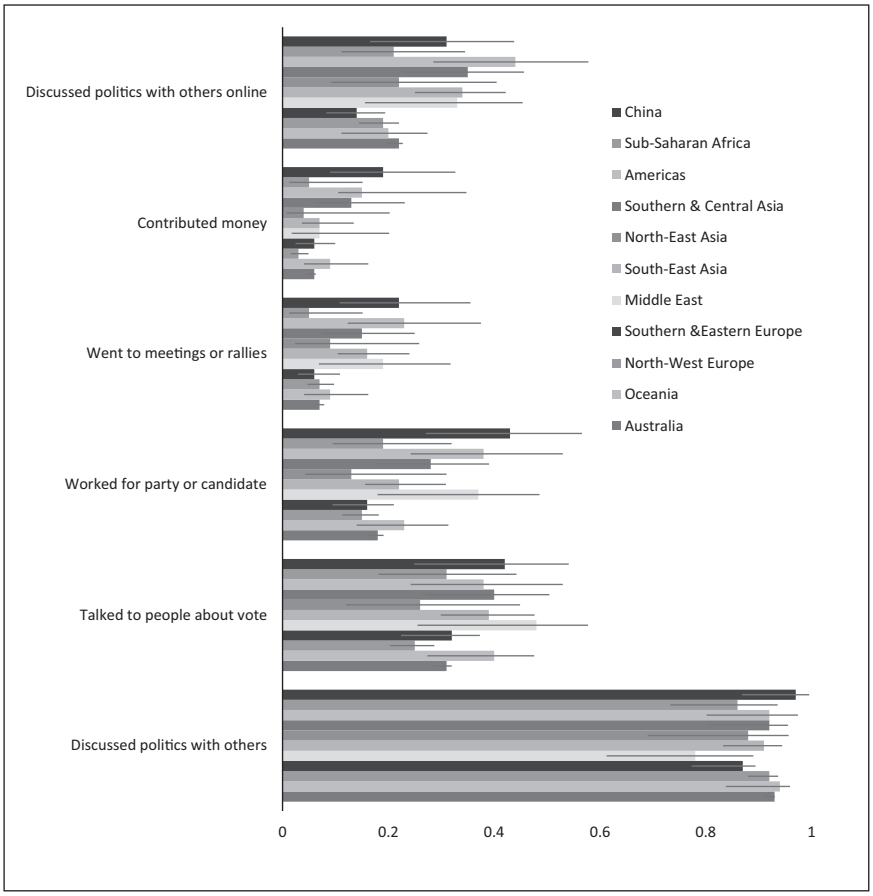
Educational attainment is an ordinal measure of 'highest qualification' categories, ranging from 'no qualification since leaving school' to 'postgraduate degree or postgraduate diploma'. The number of years since a migrant came to Australia is measured as a continuous scale in whole years. Migrants' pre-migration experience with democracy (or autocracy) is measured using the Polity IV score from their country of birth in their year of migration (Marshall et al., 2016). The relationships between respondents' region of birth and their political participation are modeled as multivariate regression analyses. As the dependent variables are all ordinal measures, the study employs ordered logit regression analyses. All multivariate analyses are performed in RStudio and use the 'polR' function within the 'MASS' package for R (Ripley et al., 2016).

Analysis

First, we examine univariate distributions of rates of participation among native-born Australians and first-generation migrants (Figure 1). In other words, we compare those who participated in the 2013 election campaign with those who did not. Figure 1 shows that earlier evidence of differential participation among migrant groups is continued in 2013 (e.g. Bean, 2012; Sheppard, 2013). The least intensive forms of participation are commonplace among both migrant and native-born Australians: 93% of Australian-born respondents discussed politics during the campaign, while 90% of first-generation migrants did likewise. First-generation migrants (20%) are slightly more likely than native-born Australians (18%) to have worked for a party or candidate (at a 90% confidence interval), and more likely to have attended a political meeting or rally (10% compared with 7%, and significant at a 95% confidence interval). Across other modes of campaign participation, the two groups report no significant differences in activity. However, the absence of difference is comparatively notable, ethnic minority and migrant citizens being less likely to participate in most advanced democracies.

Breaking the first-generation group into subgroups by region of birth begins to reveal patterns in participation (Figure 2). First, this analysis marks China-born Australians as a particularly active migrant group. They report the highest rates of political discussion during the campaign (97%), working for a party or candidate (43%), and contributing money to a party or candidate (19%). Further, this group is only one percentage point behind (that is, not significantly different from) American-born migrants in attending meetings or rallies (22%). Notwithstanding the low numbers of China-born respondents and high standard deviations on the point estimates, the differences between Chinese migrant and native-born Australians are significant at the 95% confidence interval.

Figure 2. Participation rates by region of birth, 2013.



Notes: bars represent proportion of respondents who reported participating in each activity, as a binary yes/no. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals from the point estimate.
Source: 2013 Australian Election Study (McAllister et al., 2013).

Other migrant groups display similarly – although less consistently – high rates of campaign participation. First-generation migrants from South and North America report among the highest rates of political discussion (92%), working for a party or candidate (38%), and donating money to a party or candidate (15%). Further, they report the highest rates of online political discussion (44%) and attending meetings or rallies (23%). As with China-born migrants, these estimates are marked by large confidence intervals (due to small subsample sizes), but the pattern of responses suggests that American-born migrants do participate at higher rates than native-born Australians. Likewise, respondents born in the Middle East and Northern African region report high rates of working for a party or candidate (37%) and were the most likely to discuss their vote with others during the campaign (48%). They were also, however, the least likely to discuss politics generally, with only 78% responding that they did so during the campaign.

Ordered logit regression analyses predicting these acts of campaign participation indicate that the differential patterns shown in Figure 2 hold up to multivariate controls (Table 1). Compared with Australian-born citizens, China-born migrants appear less likely to discuss politics generally

Table 1. Predicting participation in the 2013 Australian federal election campaign.

	Discussed politics	Discuss vote	Worked for party/candidate	Meetings/ rallies	Contribute money	Discuss politics online
Region of birth (ref: Australia)						
China	−0.151 (0.297)	0.712** (0.357)	1.734*** (0.348)	1.731*** (0.435)	2.303*** (0.474)	0.131 (0.368)
Sub-Saharan Africa	−0.363 (0.324)	−0.106 (0.354)	−0.232 (0.428)	−0.572 (0.737)	−0.469 (0.745)	−0.236 (0.406)
Americas	0.329 (0.315)	0.483 (0.335)	0.920*** (0.340)	1.499*** (0.403)	0.912* (0.481)	1.278*** (0.322)
Southern and Central Asia	−0.186 (0.252)	0.461 (0.286)	0.695** (0.315)	0.794* (0.429)	1.381*** (0.444)	0.307 (0.289)
North-East Asia (except China)	−0.993** (0.388)	0.116 (0.534)	0.246 (0.643)	0.903 (0.768)	0.867 (1.061)	−0.233 (0.573)
South-East Asia	−0.376** (0.190)	0.448** (0.213)	0.340 (0.249)	0.983*** (0.291)	0.181 (0.444)	0.451** (0.214)
Middle East and North Africa	−0.507 (0.373)	0.709* (0.390)	0.901** (0.448)	0.979* (0.570)	0.808 (0.781)	0.666 (0.416)
Southern and Eastern Europe	−0.398** (0.172)	0.239 (0.205)	−0.274 (0.268)	−0.015 (0.383)	0.002 (0.413)	−0.091 (0.266)
North-West Europe	−0.058 (0.108)	−0.146 (0.133)	−0.377** (0.167)	−0.107 (0.232)	−1.196*** (0.374)	0.064 (0.149)
Oceania (except Australia)	0.279 (0.227)	0.578** (0.249)	0.216 (0.292)	−0.165 (0.479)	−0.074 (0.484)	0.148 (0.304)
Covariates						
Female	−0.042 (0.065)	−0.334*** (0.075)	−0.347*** (0.092)	−0.337** (0.134)	−0.250 (0.156)	−0.194** (0.085)
Age	−0.003 (0.002)	−0.019*** (0.002)	0.0002 (0.003)	0.001 (0.004)	0.028*** (0.006)	−0.033*** (0.003)
Education	0.142*** (0.016)	0.060*** (0.018)	0.099*** (0.022)	0.134*** (0.032)	0.093** (0.037)	0.123*** (0.020)
Household income	0.027*** (0.006)	−0.009 (0.007)	−0.015* (0.008)	−0.013 (0.012)	0.034** (0.014)	−0.003 (0.007)
Party identification (strength)	0.637*** (0.037)	0.662*** (0.045)	0.757*** (0.058)	0.739*** (0.084)	1.012*** (0.108)	0.314*** (0.048)
Intercepts						
Not at all/rarely	−1.162*** (0.202)	0.558** (0.222)	2.567*** (0.284)	3.898*** (0.426)	6.812*** (0.561)	0.265 (0.242)
Rarely/occasionally	0.351* (0.197)	1.650*** (0.225)	3.437*** (0.288)	4.908*** (0.433)	7.433*** (0.567)	1.314*** (0.244)
Occasionally/frequently	2.599*** (0.203)	3.564*** (0.245)	4.676*** (0.300)	6.209*** (0.461)	8.831*** (0.592)	2.696*** (0.258)
Observations	3425	3359	3369	3362	3,343	3,346
Akaike information criterion	7806.935	5898.086	4296.052	2220.363	1713.172	4832.865

Notes: ordered logit regression analysis. Standard errors in parentheses. *$p < .10$; **$p < .05$; and ***$p < .01$.
Source: 2013 Australian Election Study (McAllister et al., 2013).

Table 2. Characteristics and attributes by region of birth, 2013.

	Australia	China	Americas	Southern and Central Asia	South-East Asia	Middle East and North Africa
Age (mean)	52.93 (17.24)	44.74 (14.67)	59.95 (13.09)	45.87 (14.77)	50.05 (13.45)	54.45 (14.38)
Female (% of respondents)	53	56	58	37	60	34
University degree (%)	28	67	45	56	46	31
'Fairly' or 'very' strong supporter of a party (%)	53	31	60	38	56	53
Years in Australia (mean)	Not applicable	19.69 (13.62)	29.88 (15.07)	18.58 (12.81)	24.98 (12.31)	32.22 (15.68)
Speak English at home (%)	96	18	80	43	52	34
'Very interested' or 'interested' in politics	80	64	90	83	72	81
'Very interested' or 'interested' in 2013 campaign	76	72	88	83	77	75
'Very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with Australian democracy	75	92	73	77	73	75
Observations	2819	39	40	63	112	32

Source: 2013 Australian Election Study (McAllister et al., 2013).

(B = -0.151, standard error (SE) = 0.297), but far more likely to contribute money (B = 2.303, SE = 0.474), work for a party or candidate (B = 1.734, SE = 0.348), and attend meetings or rallies (B = 0.1.731, SE = 0.435) in support of parties or candidates in the 2013 federal election. Of the migrant groups identified in the regression model, China-born migrants are the most likely to have discussed their vote, worked for a party or candidate, attended meetings or rallies, and contributed money, net of other factors. With regards to general political discussion, China-born respondents are no more likely to have participated than respondents from other migrant groups nor from native-born Australians. To the extent that there is a phenomenon of China-born Australians participating in campaign activity at anomalously high rates, it appears to be restricted to four specific pro-party or candidate acts.

Although China-born Australians are notably active in these forms of campaign participation, Australians born in the Middle East and North Africa and the Americas also tend to participate at higher rates than native-born Australians. The differences are not uniformly significant, but they do indicate that these three migrant groups are notably different both from native-born respondents as well as from each other. Moreover, these differences are also evident in the bivariate distributions in Figure 2, suggesting they both exist at the aggregate level and are robust to multivariate explanations. Further, Australians born in South-East Asia and Southern and Central Asia participate at higher rates than native-born Australians across two or more activities, and by relatively small amounts. To explore these differences further, Table 2 reports the social and political characteristics of the five subgroups compared with the native-born majority.

Table 2 reveals that China-born migrants differ markedly from other respondents in the sample. Only 18% report that they speak English at home; a much smaller number than the other migrant subgroups. They – perhaps relatedly – are among the most recently arrived migrant subgroup, with a mean length of 19.7 years in Australia post-migration. Southern and Central Asian-born have a marginally (not significantly) lower mean number of years in Australia (18.6 years), but 43% of that subgroup report speaking English at home. On the other hand, China-born migrants in the sample have the highest mean rate of educational attainment, with 67% of the subgroup reporting possessing a bachelor's degree or higher. Among native-born Australians, only 28% of respondents have achieved a bachelor's degree or higher. Disproportionate rates of educational attainment amongst China-born migrants are not a new or unreported phenomenon; Chinese migrants bring unique and highly distinguished educational cultures to their host countries (Watkins et al., 2017). In line with commonly identified relationships between democratic support and education levels internationally, the China-born migrants in this sample are disproportionately satisfied with Australia's democratic system.

China-born and Southern and Central Asian-born Australians are younger than other subgroups, with mean ages of 44.7 and 45.9 years respectively. This is reflective of the demographic profile of first-generation Chinese (and Asian more generally) migrants to Australia: while the median ages of all Chinese migrants (34.7 years) and native-born Australians (33.8 years) in the population are similar, the China-born migrant population is trending younger while the native-born population ages (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017). Despite the difference in the extent of the age-related non-response bias between the two subgroups, weighting the China-born – or any other subgroup – responses to account for differential representation of age groups is not advisable given the small subsample sizes.

Despite the significant relationship between being China-born and participating in the 2013 Australian federal election campaign, the subgroup reports the lowest rate of party identification among respondents. Only 31% describe themselves as either a 'fairly' or 'very strong' supporter of any political party. More than half – 51% – report feeling no closer to any particular party than all others, and no respondents in this subgroup describe themselves as 'very strong' supporters of a party. Moreover, considering the expected pro-politics bias among respondents to a survey of political attitudes and behaviours, which generally leads to inflated estimates of political engagement (e.g., Burden, 2000). Notwithstanding this well-established source of bias, China-born respondents to the 2013 AES are remarkably apartisan, as well as uninterested in the 2013 election campaign. Indeed, ten China-born respondents report having worked for a party or candidate in the 2013 election campaign despite not feeling closer to any party relative to others. While this kind of anomaly might commonly be explained as an artifact of response error (either intended or unintended), here it comprises 25% of the migrant subgroup.

Descriptive statistics therefore attest to the idiosyncratic nature of the China-born subgroup of Australians within this sample. To extend this analysis, Table 3 presents the results of ordered logit regression analyses predicting campaign participation among first-generation migrants. Here, China-born migrants status is measured as a binary variable, with all other migrants excluded as the reference category. Vis-a-vis all other migrants, China-born Australians are significantly more likely to have worked for a party or candidate, attended meetings or rallies, and contributed money during the campaign. Net of other factors, migrants' years in Australia have a negative effect on working for a party or candidate and attending meetings or rallies; that is to say, migrants are decreasingly likely to participate with each additional year they live in Australia. Unsurprisingly, strength of party identification has a strong positive effect on all forms of participation (although with a reasonably weak relationship with online political discussion).

Although established theories of mainstream political participation emphasise the important role of civic resources such as language proficiency (Verba et al., 1995), among the migrant subsample, *not* speaking English at home (as a proxy measure for ethnic and cultural diversity) has a significant positive effect on working for a party or candidate, donating money, and attending

Table 3. Predicting campaign participation among first generation migrants to Australia.

	Discussed politics	Discuss vote	Worked for party/candidate	Meetings/ rallies	Contribute money	Discuss politics online
Born in China	0.333 (0.347)	0.108 (0.409)	1.132*** (0.424)	0.938* (0.541)	1.011* (0.600)	−0.048 (0.436)
Years in Australia	0.001 (0.005)	−0.003 (0.006)	−0.021*** (0.008)	−0.025** (0.010)	−0.009 (0.013)	−0.009 (0.007)
Party identification (strength)	0.605*** (0.073)	0.659*** (0.089)	0.559*** (0.105)	0.492*** (0.138)	0.637*** (0.182)	0.178* (0.091)
Polity IV	0.005 (0.012)	−0.011 (0.014)	0.005 (0.017)	0.019 (0.023)	−0.005 (0.027)	0.023 (0.016)
Age	−0.009 (0.006)	−0.016** (0.007)	0.006 (0.008)	0.010 (0.011)	0.007 (0.014)	−0.026*** (0.008)
Female	−0.004 (0.131)	−0.118 (0.152)	−0.432** (0.183)	−0.175 (0.239)	−0.032 (0.304)	−0.172 (0.168)
Educational attainment	0.123*** (0.033)	0.065* (0.037)	0.091** (0.044)	0.085 (0.058)	0.176** (0.077)	0.147*** (0.041)
Household income	0.029** (0.012)	−0.015 (0.014)	−0.043** (0.017)	−0.024 (0.022)	−0.013 (0.028)	−0.002 (0.015)
Do not speak English at home	−0.518*** (0.177)	0.370* (0.199)	0.416* (0.232)	0.544* (0.296)	0.908** (0.375)	0.139 (0.218)
Intercepts						
Not at all/rarely	−0.941** (0.465)	0.388 (0.511)	1.001* (0.593)	2.373*** (0.797)	3.830*** (1.045)	0.051 (0.547)
Rarely/occasionally	0.569 (0.456)	1.318** (0.513)	1.950*** (0.597)	3.281*** (0.806)	4.714*** (1.059)	1.282** (0.550)
Occasionally/frequently	2.811*** (0.467)	3.272*** (0.544)	3.523*** (0.632)	5.157*** (0.890)	6.226*** (1.131)	2.571*** (0.574)
Observations	849	817	821	818	814	814
AIC	1981.671	1493.899	1092.356	680.625	461.829	1226.183

Notes: ordered logit regression analysis. Standard errors in parentheses. $^{*}p < .10$; $^{**}p < .05$; and $^{***}p < .01$.
Source: 2013 Australian Election Study (McAllister et al., 2013).

meetings and rallies. This is net of the effect of being China-born; while ideally we would test the conditional effects of being born in China on speaking a language other than English at home and look more closely at other characteristics associated with language diversity, the size of the subsample does not allow it. Accordingly, these results suggest – but do not test – the hypothesis that Chinese migrants who speak a language other than English at home are particularly likely to contribute time or money to a campaign, or to attend meetings or rallies during a campaign. These are remarkable findings that contradict much of what is previously assumed about political participation, whether mainstream or ethnic-based.

Discussion and conclusions

Across the regression analyses presented here, three key findings stand out. First, China-born migrants to Australia participate in acts of political participation at higher rates than native-born Australians, but also at higher rates than other migrant groups. Second, this is a socially and politically distinct group of migrants. They are young, recently arrived in Australia, with little partisan allegiance or commitment, very low rates of English-language use at home, and very high rates of educational attainment. On the basis of only one of those measures (educational attainment) would we expect China-born migrants to participate in formal politics; the other measures more commonly lend themselves to political disengagement. Instead, we witness disproportionately high rates of participation in the Australian case. Finally, these data raise the hypothesis – but cannot test with sufficient robustness – that China-born Australians participate in campaign activities most frequently in the years following their arrival in Australia, and at higher rates if they do not speak English at home. These hypotheses represent substantial critiques of the existing political participation literature and warrant further in-depth study using qualitative methods or a specific survey instrument.

Across all forms of participation and within both the full population and migrant subpopulation, unexpected patterns of activity warrant further examination. For instance, migrants who donate money have spent relatively few years in their new country. This may support Zappalà's (1998) observations on the transactional political culture among ethnic Australians: migrants to Australia often approach their local representatives not long after arriving in their new country, seeking official help with their own or family members' immigration application processes. The support of a representative is viewed as vital to a successful application:

> They [immigrants] may try and elicit this support with subtle references to past voting behaviour or future voting intentions, and sometimes with offers of money or gifts. This is a normal and accepted form of political exchange; indeed to many there would be something wrong if they could not return the politician's favour (Zappalà, 1998: 391).

The findings in Table 3 appear to partly support Zappalà's observations that immigrants are inclined to donate to political candidates and parties. However, the cross-sectional data analysed here do not allow us to further investigate what mobilises them to do so, nor what outcomes they achieve through donating. The findings therefore invite further investigation using richer qualitative data.

The separate positive effect of not speaking English at home also provides initial evidence to suggest that these acts of campaign participation have transactional intentions, if not necessarily benefits to the migrant. Native language proficiency has long been considered an integral resource enabling citizens to participate in politics; this finding is in stark contrast to both the mainstream and ethnic participation literatures (Verba et al., 1995). Theories of migrants' political integration usually include native language proficiency as a vital resource, allowing migrants to communicate and transact freely in their host society. Taking the language spoken at home as a proxy for English language proficiency,

these findings suggest that language proficiency is indeed important for general political discussion, but that it depresses other, more intensive forms of campaign activity. Again, we draw on Zappalà (1998) to contend that this particular result indicates the existence of transactional relationships between newly-arrived, non-English-speaking migrants (particularly from China), and local politicians wherein money and time are donated in anticipation of political assistance.

Previous studies have found that, in the transaction between representative and ethnic constituent, the constituent may be expected to join and support the local branch of the representative's political party (Kwok, 2008; Zappalà, 1998). Accordingly, both being born in China and not speaking English at home have strong positive effects on migrants' attendance at meetings and rallies during the campaign, while the number of years since migration has the strongest negative effect on this activity of any other factor studied here. While migrants born in the Americas also report high rates of meeting and rally attendance, members of that subgroup also report very high rates of English-language speaking at home, and have been in Australia for an average length of 30 years. Again, the idiosyncratic social and political characteristics of the China-born subgroup appear to explain their campaign participation.

The socialisation hypothesis has previously helped to explain migrants' political trust, support for democracy, and protest activity in the Australian context (Bilodeau, 2008, Bilodeau et al., 2010; McAllister and Makkai, 1992). Yet, respondents' pre-migration socialisation, measured by the democratic context of their home country, has no significant relationship with their post-migration campaign participation in this study. On the other hand, the concentration of campaign participation within migrants' first years in Australia does suggest that an understanding – or a lack of understanding – of the local political system plays a role in the decision to participate. Given the specific political socialisation of China-born migrants we might expect that understanding to be conditional on a lack of previous experience with democracy and specific modes of political interaction adopted from their country of birth (Jupp, 2007). Alternatively, it could be the product of other, not yet properly understood, motivations particular to this community, which will require further qualitative research. While pathways to citizenship necessarily involve some knowledge of the local political and bureaucratic systems, such knowledge is more easily acquired with local language proficiency and previous experience of similar systems (Morales and Giugni, 2016). To rigorously examine the socialisation hypothesis in the Australian context will require study of non-citizens as well as citizens, from a range of cultural, linguistic, and political backgrounds.

Educational attainment may explain high levels of political participation among Chinese migrants to Australia, given that in the sample they have the highest mean rate of educational attainment. The size of the subsample does not allow us to test the effects of educational levels on participation of the China-born migrant subgroup specifically, and thus it invites further investigation with larger samples in the future. It will also require more stringent study of Chinese political culture, both within China and among members of the diaspora. Inglehart and Welzel (2005) define Chinese political culture as Confucian with a communist influence that differentiates it from Japanese, Taiwanese, and South Korean cultures. Chinese politics are characterised by a strong emphasis on state authority, in the communist tradition, but offset by an intense secularism not evident in any other post-communist society (Almond, 2000). Moreover, the less well-understood concept of *guanxi* emphasises the centrality of relationships to Chinese business and political life. As Western political cultures understand social capital to 'grease the wheels' of everyday transactions, *guanxi* describes the loyalty and reliability required to prosper in business and politics (Pye and Pye, 1985). However, the existence – let alone the form – of any monolithic Chinese culture is debated elsewhere in the literature, with little resolution (Laitin and Wildavsky, 1988).

This study has examined three hypothesised mechanisms of ethnic political participation – socialisation, recruitment, and transactional – within the Australian context, finding evidence for each. First, the factors that predict whether Chinese-born migrants contributed money to a party or candidate during the

2013 federal election campaign support existing theories of transactional relationships between legislators and migrant Australians. Second, the combination of China-born migrants' relative disinterest in politics generally (and the 2013 campaign specifically) with their satisfaction with Australian democracy suggests that these acts of political participation are not necessarily partisan in nature. This sits in stark contrast with how political scientists tend to understand campaign participation.

These findings comprise a vital first step in understanding the complex processes underpinning immigrant political participation in their new democratic politics. Having established systematic and statistically significant differences in rates and types of political participation by native-born, China-born, and other migrant Australians, we argue that they complicate existing conceptions of how these processes play out in the real world. This calls for future research into understanding the role of legislators and political parties as potential facilitators of transactional activities of migrants in general, and China-born migrants in particular. Indeed, if transactional politics is motivating monetary donations by China-born migrants, legislators receiving those donations are implicitly performing a recruiting role. Closer examination of these transactions, and of the motivations driving China-born migrants' participation in meetings and rallies, and voluntary campaign work, requires specific qualitative focus on those participants.

Finally, we need to examine the role of intermediary organisations. What role do migrant civil society organisations, including so-called 'ethnic brokers', play in facilitating the social networks that bring China-born migrants and legislators into contact? What role, if any, do political parties' play in socialising migrants into liberal democracy? Given the implications for normative democratic practices and the integration of migrants from autocratic regimes into democratic ones, the formal and informal processes of migrants' political socialisation in Australia – as an illustrative case study – warrant further investigation.

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Notes

1. The relationship is nonrecursive, however; participation in political activity can create social capital, creating appreciable divisions between individuals who possess social capital and participate, and those who have little or no social capital and do not participate (Putnam, 2001).
2. Indigenous Australians comprise arguably the most disadvantaged minority group in Australian society, but constitute less than 3% of the national population.

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