

# UNEQUAL VOICES

California's Racial Disparities  
in Political Participation



JUNE 2016



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Our **Political Voice** program nurtures a healthy democracy by amplifying the voices of low-income communities of color in all political processes and ensuring that government responds to those voices.



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# UNEQUAL VOICES

## California's Racial Disparities in Political Participation

JUNE 2016

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Supplemental data available at  
[www.AdvancementProjectCA.org/UnequalVoices](http://www.AdvancementProjectCA.org/UnequalVoices)

*Unequal Voices* was made possible by  
a generous grant from The James Irvine Foundation.







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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# Unequal Voices: California's Racial Disparities in Political Participation

Since 2000, California has been a majority-minority state where no racial group holds a numerical majority. Yet California's democracy does not accurately reflect that demographic reality.

Several studies have documented the significant racial disparities that persist in voting in presidential and statewide elections. These studies, however, provide only a partial window into the problem of class and racial inequalities in California's democracy.

This report, the first in a two-part series, broadens public understanding of political participation in California by providing a concise analysis of voting and other forms of participation.

Using voter and civic engagement data collections from 2004 to 2014, we analyze data on voting in presidential, midterm, and local elections, data on voting by mail, as well as data on participation beyond the ballot box – contacting public officials, supporting political campaigns, attending political meetings, protesting, engaging in consumer activism, and discussing politics.

## KEY FINDINGS

Latinos and Asian Americans in California face the greatest inequalities in voting, with lower rates of citizenship and registration as the key drivers of disadvantage

Racial disparities are worse in midterm elections than in presidential elections and continue when we move from statewide to local elections

Racial gaps persist in most forms of political participation beyond voting, such as contacting public officials, attending political meetings, and engaging in protest and consumer activism

Fewer than 1 in 10 blacks, and only about 1 in 20 Asian Americans and Latinos, respectively, had contact with their public official to express their opinions compared to nearly one in six whites

15% of whites had attended a meeting where political issues are discussed compared to participation rates of 11% among blacks, 7% among Asian Americans, and 6% among Latinos

Education, income, and homeownership play significant roles in explaining many of these disparities, but racial gaps remain even after accounting for these socioeconomic factors

## SOLUTIONS

California has taken significant steps to address problems of low voter registration and turnout over the past five years, but more must be done to address inequities in all forms of political participation. We call on policymakers, community organizers, researchers, and others to:



Create educational opportunities for residents in communities of color, especially low-income communities, to develop civic knowledge and skills.



Proactively include people in under-resourced communities of color in efforts to mobilize constituents.



Design public policies in ways that can boost participation among those groups with low participation rates.



Implement innovative models of participation, such as the Empowerment Congress, a multisector partnership in Los Angeles County's Second Supervisorial District.



Reform existing participation infrastructure to meet the needs of all Californians.



Improve how surveys collect information about civic and political participation.



Reduce socioeconomic inequalities that produce inequalities in civic participation as well as life chances for Californians.

# Racial Disparities: Unhealthy for Democracy

For decades, public attention on political participation in California has focused almost exclusively on voter registration and turnout. This has been especially true in presidential and midterm elections.

Such focus makes sense. Voting is a central mechanism in our democracy for making important decisions about political representation and public policy. Additionally, presidential and midterm elections are major national events, attracting widespread media attention and public interest.

Yet this focus misses the bigger picture of political participation in California. There are many ways beyond voting in which Californians have a say in public policy and decision making.

There are also numerous ways in which those who speak up are unrepresentative of California's population. Racial disparity has been a common thread in voting and nonvoting forms of political participation. This does not bode well for California's democracy. When some groups have significantly more of a say than others in democratic decision making, it is a signal that the political system is in trouble.

Those who speak up are unrepresentative of California's population.

## UNDERSTANDING ASPECTS OF OUR UNEQUAL DEMOCRACY

This report, the first in a two-part series, broadens public understanding of political participation in California by providing a concise analysis of data on voting and other forms of participation.

Racial gaps in participation remain even after looking at class. In California's diverse democracy, this should be of great concern.

Using available voter and civic engagement datasets with information between the years of 2004 and 2014,<sup>1</sup> we present and analyze data on voting in presidential, midterm, and local elections, as well as data on voting

by mail, contacting public officials, supporting political campaigns, attending political meetings, protesting, engaging in consumer activism, and discussing politics.

Our analysis focuses on racial disparities in participation and the ways these gaps relate to participation disparities by age, gender, immigrant origin, and socioeconomic status.<sup>2</sup> Similar to voting, we find significant gaps between whites and people of

color, between those with higher and lower levels of income and education, and between older and younger generations on a range of political activities.

Importantly, we find that racial gaps in participation remain even after factoring in socioeconomic status. This means that race bears a strong direct relationship to participation, as well as an indirect relationship through class disparities.

In California's racially, socioeconomically, and generationally diverse democracy, the disparities that we identify should be of great concern, because they point to the existence and durability of inequities in political influence. In 2004, the first and only comprehensive statewide report on civic engagement (i.e., volunteerism and political participation) concluded that "[those who are white, older, affluent, homeowners, and highly educated have a disproportionate say in California politics and representation in the civic life of the state]" (Ramakrishnan and Baldassare 2004, 81).

Our analysis of the decade since that report shows an imbalance that remains.<sup>3</sup> The challenge facing California's democracy, therefore, is not simply to develop public policies and engagement strategies to increase voter registration and turnout. The challenge is also to develop policies and strategies to increase political participation beyond the ballot box.



Policymaking in Sacramento, in city halls and county governments, and in school districts must begin to listen to, be accountable to, and be shaped by the racially, socioeconomically, and generationally diverse range of people that now make up, not only the electorate, but the whole of California.

# Racial Disparities in Voting

Voting is considered the primary mode of political participation in the United States. For many people, casting a vote is the only type of political activity in which they will regularly participate throughout their lifetime. And voting is consequential to making sure that community needs are being addressed. This happens through mechanisms of representative democracy, such as the election of legislative officials, as well as through mechanisms of direct democracy, such as statutory initiatives that create new legislation.

## VOTING IN PRESIDENTIAL AND MIDTERM ELECTIONS

### KEY FINDINGS

Latinos and Asian Americans in California face the greatest inequalities in voting

Lower rates of citizenship exacerbate the representational disadvantage for Latinos and Asian Americans

Racial disparities are worse in midterm elections than in presidential elections

Age and class disparities play a significant role in producing these inequalities, and particularly so in midterm elections

Even after accounting for class disparities, racial gaps in voting remain

In California, we see significant racial disparities in voting in presidential and midterm elections (Table 1). For example, voting rates in the last three presidential election cycles averaged 68% among white adult citizens, but only 51% and 48%, respectively, among their Latino and Asian American counterparts.

TABLE 1

### VOTING RATES AMONG ADULT CITIZENS

Presidential Voting	2004	2008	2012	2004-2012 Average	Midterm Voting	2006	2010	2014	2006-2014 Average
Nation	64%	64%	62%	63%	Nation	48%	46%	42%	45%
California	62%	63%	58%	61%	California	48%	47%	37%	44%
White	71%	69%	64%	68%	White	56%	56%	47%	53%
Black	67%	66%	62%	65%	Black	38%	44%	33%	38%
Native American	63%	58%	54%	58%	Native American	16%	28%	27%	24%
Pacific Islander	59%	53%	48%	53%	Pacific Islander	36%	44%	42%	41%
Latino	47%	57%	49%	51%	Latino	37%	35%	25%	32%
Asian American	45%	52%	48%	48%	Asian American	34%	35%	27%	32%

Source: Authors' analysis of U.S. Census Bureau's *Current Population Survey Voter Supplements*.

Note: Data for all ethnicities represent California only, and represent Non-Hispanic individuals in each race except for the category of Latino. The category "Latino" in this table comes from the U.S. Census category "Hispanic or Latino", "Native American" comes from the U.S. Census category "American Indian or Alaska Native", and "Pacific Islander" comes from the U.S. Census category, "Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander".



These racial gaps were even worse during the last three midterm elections. Voting rates among whites were more than twice as high as among Native Americans (53% versus 24%), and much higher than the voting rates among Pacific Islanders (41%), blacks (38%), Latinos and Asian Americans (32% each). These disparities in voting rates mean that whites are more likely than communities of color to have a say in the outcomes of presidential and midterm races in California.

What accounts for these racial gaps in voting? One set of factors to consider in answering this question comprises demographic characteristics like age and socioeconomic status. These characteristics, which political scientists have found are often correlated with voting, tend to display significant disparities by race and ethnicity. Such disparities can impact voting because individuals who are younger and/or have lower levels of income and education are less likely to have resources that make

Disparities in voting rates mean that whites are more likely to have a say in the outcomes of presidential and midterm races than communities of color.

the voting experience easier (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2012). These resources include time, money, civic knowledge (i.e., an understanding of political processes and information), and civic skills (i.e., the ability to obtain and use political information, and to draw on experiences in leadership and community service). Additionally, individuals with lower levels of income and education are less likely to be encouraged to vote by politicians and political parties through efforts like get-out-the-vote campaigns (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993).

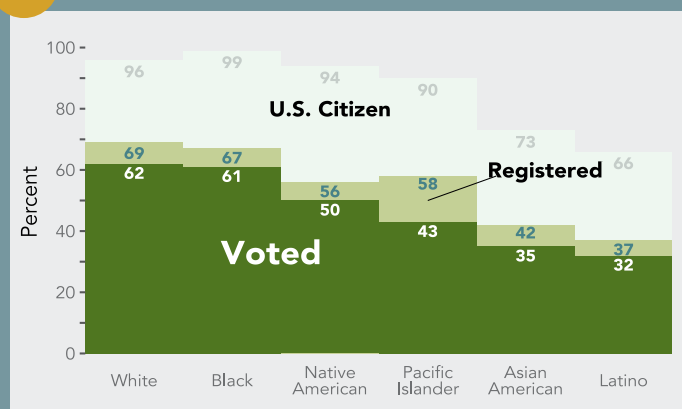
In our analysis, we considered the extent to which age and class might account for racial gaps in participation.<sup>4</sup> We found that education, income, and homeownership all

## RACIAL DISPARITIES AMONG ALL ADULTS

Racial disparities deepen when we examine gaps between all California voters and all California adults, not just adult citizens. Consider the last presidential election in 2012 (Figure 1). 62% of white adults and 61% of black adults living in California had a say in that election, while only 50% of Native Americans, 43% of Pacific Islanders, 35% of Asian Americans, and 32% of Latinos did.

FIG 1

### GAPS IN VOTING ACROSS RACE AND ETHNICITY



Source: Authors' analysis of U.S. Census Bureau's 2012 *Current Population Survey Voter Supplement*.

These gaps are largely explained by gaps in the three component stages of voting: citizenship, registration, and turnout.<sup>5</sup> If a racial or ethnic group has a low rate of citizenship or registration, then more members of that group will be ineligible to vote. As a result, that group will have lower voting rates compared to others.

This is what happened in 2012. Our analysis found that citizenship rates were much lower among Latino and Asian American adults (66% and 73%, respectively) than among whites (96%) and blacks (99%).<sup>6</sup> We also found that registration rates among Latino (57%), Asian American (57%), and Pacific Islander (65%) adult citizens were much lower than those of whites (72%) and blacks (68%). Notably, gaps between voter registration and turnout were similar across groups, with the exception of Pacific Islanders who had disproportionately low turnout among registered voters. Thus, the voting rates for Latino and Asian American adults were so low because of the relatively low rates of citizenship and registration in those groups.

However, as the state begins to implement its program of automatic voter registration, we can expect to see racial gaps in the turnout stage become more significant than racial gaps in registration. This is likely to occur, not only because the process of automatic voter registration should make racial gaps in registration much smaller, but also because the process is likely to bring in a new group of adult citizens with a lower likelihood of voting than prior groups for whom voter registration was a more active choice.

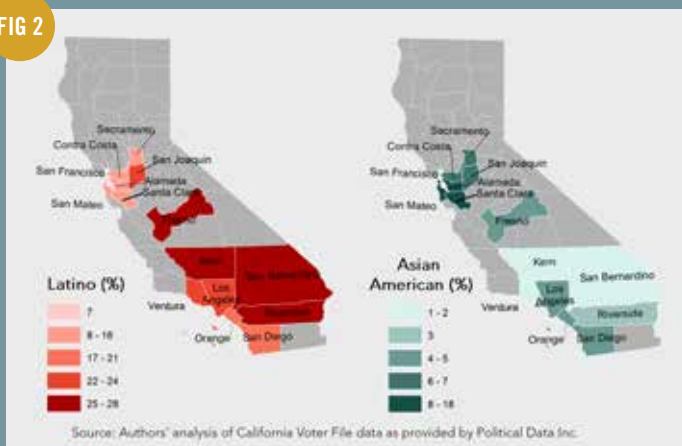
## RACIAL DISPARITIES AMONG ALL RESIDENTS

Racial disparities deepen even further when we look at gaps between all California voters and all California residents, not just adults. We examined racial variation by county in turnout and residency using publicly reported data from Political Data Inc., which imputes values of race and ethnicity based on name classifications of voter history files, combined with information about racial composition at the neighborhood level.

### PARTICIPATION GAP AMONG COMMUNITIES OF COLOR, BY COUNTY

Difference between Percent Residents and Percent Voters in 2014

FIG 2



As Figure 2 indicates, Latinos are a much smaller share of the voting population than their share of the resident population in all of the major counties in California. Latino gaps in voting are most pronounced in areas of inland California, including the counties of Riverside, San Bernardino, Kern, and Fresno. For Asian Americans, gaps in voting are greatest in the Bay Area counties of San Mateo, Alameda, Santa Clara, and San Francisco, and relatively low in Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura counties.

play a very important role in shaping who votes in California; and these class disparities are stronger in midterm elections than in presidential elections (see Appendix Table A.3 - available at [www.AdvancementProjectCA.org/UnequalVoices](http://www.AdvancementProjectCA.org/UnequalVoices)).

At the same time, race matters even beyond class: significant racial disparities in voting remain for Asian Americans and Latinos, even after controlling for age, gender, and socioeconomic status. For Asian Americans, racial gaps in voting are even more pronounced because this population has,

on average, higher levels of educational attainment than blacks and Latinos (see Appendix Table A.3). When controlling for class, we find that Asian Americans have much lower rates of voting than what we might expect from their relatively higher socioeconomic status.

The persistence of these disparities is potentially explained by other factors. As prior research has indicated, language barriers, insufficient information, and lack of civic infrastructure and political mobilization all play important roles in worsening gaps in participation (Ramakrishnan 2005; Wong 2006; Haynes and Ramakrishnan 2016; Fraga and Merseeth 2016). All of these barriers affect Asian Americans and Latinos disproportionately. In the case of Asian Americans, however, these barriers likely have even stronger effects because of this group's generally higher socioeconomic status.

By contrast, blacks have similar voting rates as whites in presidential elections, despite the fact that blacks tend to face significantly greater class disadvantage. Thus, blacks vote much more in presidential elections than we might expect, if we were only to look at their class backgrounds. As indicated in other research, the strength of group consciousness among blacks and the strength of civic institutions, especially churches, help overcome the participation disadvantages this group would otherwise face from their comparative disadvantage in socioeconomic resources (Tate 1994; Calhoun-Brown 1996; Harris 1999). However, it is important to note that blacks in California participate disproportionately less in midterm elections than in presidential elections.

Another set of factors to consider in accounting for racial disparities includes

institutional barriers, such as voter ID laws, early registration deadlines, and limitations on absentee voting (Berinsky 2005; Ramakrishnan 2005), as well as mobilization and engagement by political parties, community organizations, and social movements (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Lee 2002; Wong 2006; Han 2009). California has among the lowest institutional barriers to voting in the country, with permissive laws on early voting and absentee voting,<sup>7</sup> registration deadlines 15 days before Election Day,<sup>8</sup> and a policy of automated voter registration that began implementation in 2016.

Nevertheless, there are some important barriers within the state, such as the absence of Asian-language ballot assistance in most counties and uneven implementation of language assistance in counties covered by Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act. National data from 2012 also indicate lower levels of political outreach to Asian Americans and Latinos when compared to non-Hispanic whites.<sup>9</sup> However, there is no cross-racial dataset in California that includes these measures, as well as measures of

voter registration and turnout. We plan to include these measures in our companion study of civic engagement due in fall 2016.

Civic resources include time, money, knowledge, and skills. Low-income communities of color often lack these resources.

## VOTING BY MAIL

### KEY FINDINGS

California leads the rest of the nation when it comes to voting by mail

Asian Americans vote by mail at higher rates, but it is important to remember that they vote at lower rates overall

Latinos and blacks vote by mail at much lower rates

Efforts to improve voting by mail will need a huge push for Latinos and blacks

Most states have some method for eligible voters to cast a ballot before Election Day. These typically include early voting or allowing registered voters to cast absentee ballots by mail. Voting by mail and early voting are often referred to as “convenience voting,” because they help reduce time and transportation burdens related to voting.

Scholars who study early voting and vote by mail have found mixed results. A 2007 meta-analysis found a slight increase in turnout (2-5%) (Gronke and Toffey 2008). Other scholars have found that all-mail elections (in states like Oregon) produce higher levels of turnout particularly among elections perceived to be less important (Karp and Banducci 2000). While the turnout effects associated with early voting and vote by mail are not large, they nevertheless offer other benefits for populations that need additional time and assistance with voting, including the elderly and those needing language assistance.<sup>10</sup>

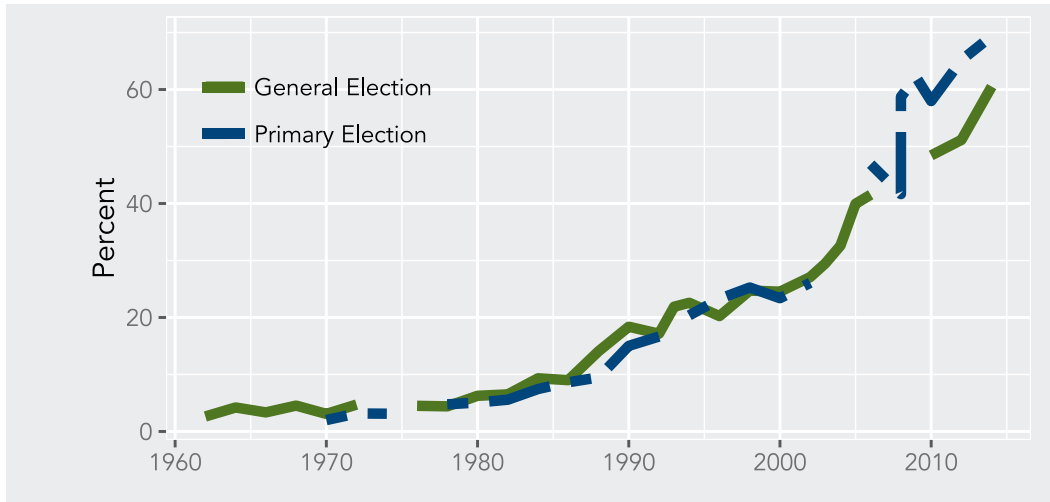
In California, registered voters can vote up to 29 days before Election Day, and they can choose to become permanent vote-by-mail voters after a brief application process. Voting by mail in California has been steadily increasing over time. As reported by the California Secretary of State, the proportion of votes that were cast by mail increased from 18% in 1990 to 25% in 2000, to 48% in 2010 and nearly 61% in 2014 (Figure 3a).<sup>11</sup> While there is no comparable national administrative data on absentee voting, data from the *Current Population Survey Voter Supplement* indicate that California’s rate of voting by mail is more than double the national average.<sup>12</sup>

Although voting by mail has been increasing in California, there are significant racial and ethnic gaps. Whites and Asian Americans are much more likely to take advantage of California’s generous vote-by-mail provisions than are black and Latino voters. As we can see in Figure 3b, a majority of whites and nearly 60% of Asian Americans in the most recent midterm elections cast their ballots by mail. By contrast, fewer than 40% of blacks and only a third of Latinos did the same. Notably, voting by mail was significantly higher across all racial groups in California than in the United States more generally.

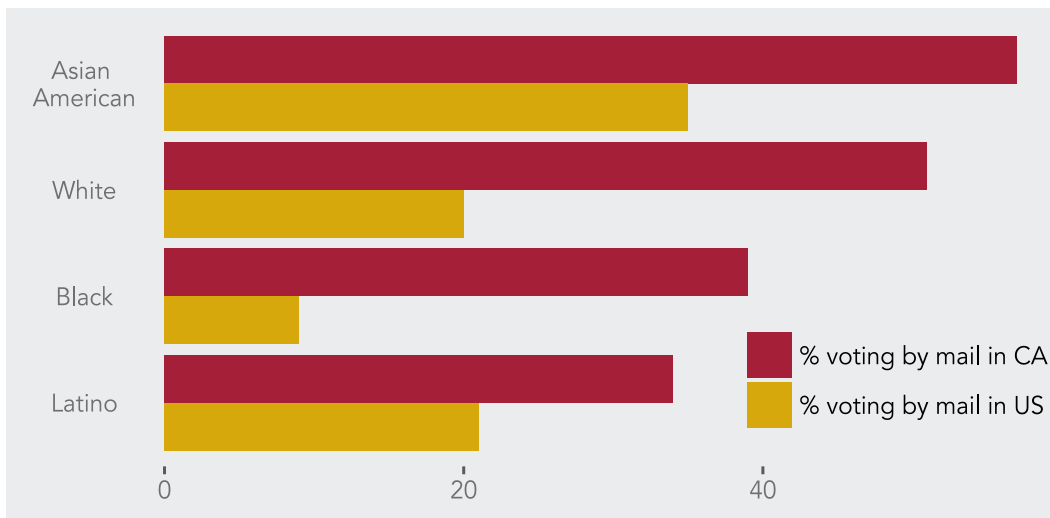
## VOTING BY MAIL IN CALIFORNIA, OVER TIME AND ACROSS RACIAL GROUPS

FIG 3

### a RISING IMPORTANCE OVER TIME



### b VOTING BY MAIL ACROSS ETHNICITY



Sources: (a) California Secretary of State's Office at: [www.sos.ca.gov/elections/historical-absentee/](http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/historical-absentee/), and (b) Authors' analysis of *Current Population Survey Voter Supplement*, 2010 and 2014.

Note: Years where data is not available in Figure 3(a) are not drawn.

Why do these racial gaps exist in the use of absentee ballots? As in the prior section, we analyzed the data controlling for age and socioeconomic status. First, we found significant class disparities in the proportion of those who vote by mail, with high-income individuals, homeowners, and those with college degrees much more likely to vote by mail than those with lower socioeconomic standing (see Appendix Table A.4). Even after controlling for these factors, however, we found that blacks and Latinos have lower rates of vote-by-mail participation. This suggests that other factors like insufficient voter awareness, outreach, or perhaps even differences in community preferences for in-person voting might be at play.

Finally, it is important to remember that Asian Americans are among those least likely to vote in California, so the relatively high level of voting by mail operates from a smaller base of actual voters. Thus, attempts to improve voting participation in California need to focus on increasing vote-by-mail utilization among blacks and Latinos, and on increasing overall voter turnout among Asian Americans and Latinos.



# VOTING IN LOCAL ELECTIONS

## KEY FINDINGS

All groups vote at lower rates in local elections, but racial gaps persist

There are significant class biases for voting in local elections

Even after controlling for age, class, and gender, significant racial gaps in voting remain for Asian Americans and Latinos

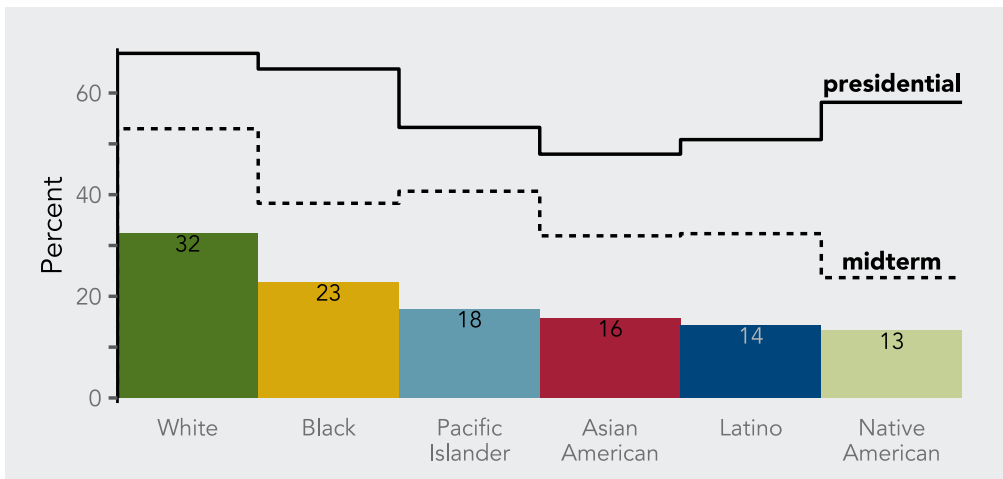
It is important to separate participation in local elections from state and national elections for a few reasons. First, local elections often involve issues of political representation and policy that are much more relevant to the everyday lives of community residents. Second, local government is the most immediately visible level of government. Last, local elections tend to be held outside of presidential and statewide general elections, and voters often lack access to information about local policies and officials, not only because local offices are nonpartisan but also because news coverage of local politics is relatively sparse.

As we can see in Figure 4, there are large racial gaps in those who say they always vote in local elections. For example, Asian American adult citizens in California were half (16% vs. 32%) as likely as whites to say that they “always voted” in local elections. Native Americans (13%), Latinos (14%), Pacific Islanders (18%), and blacks (23%) similarly reported disproportionately low rates of voting in local elections when compared to whites.

## RACIAL DISPARITIES IN VOTING IN LOCAL ELECTIONS IN CALIFORNIA

Participation in presidential and midterm elections shown for comparison

FIG 4



Source: Authors' analysis of US Census Bureau's *Current Population Survey Civic Engagement Supplements*.  
Note: Data are averages of voting rates among adult citizens as follows: over 2011 and 2013 for those who say they “always vote” in local elections; over 2004, 2008, and 2012 for those who reported voting in presidential elections; and over 2006, 2010 and 2014 for midterm elections.

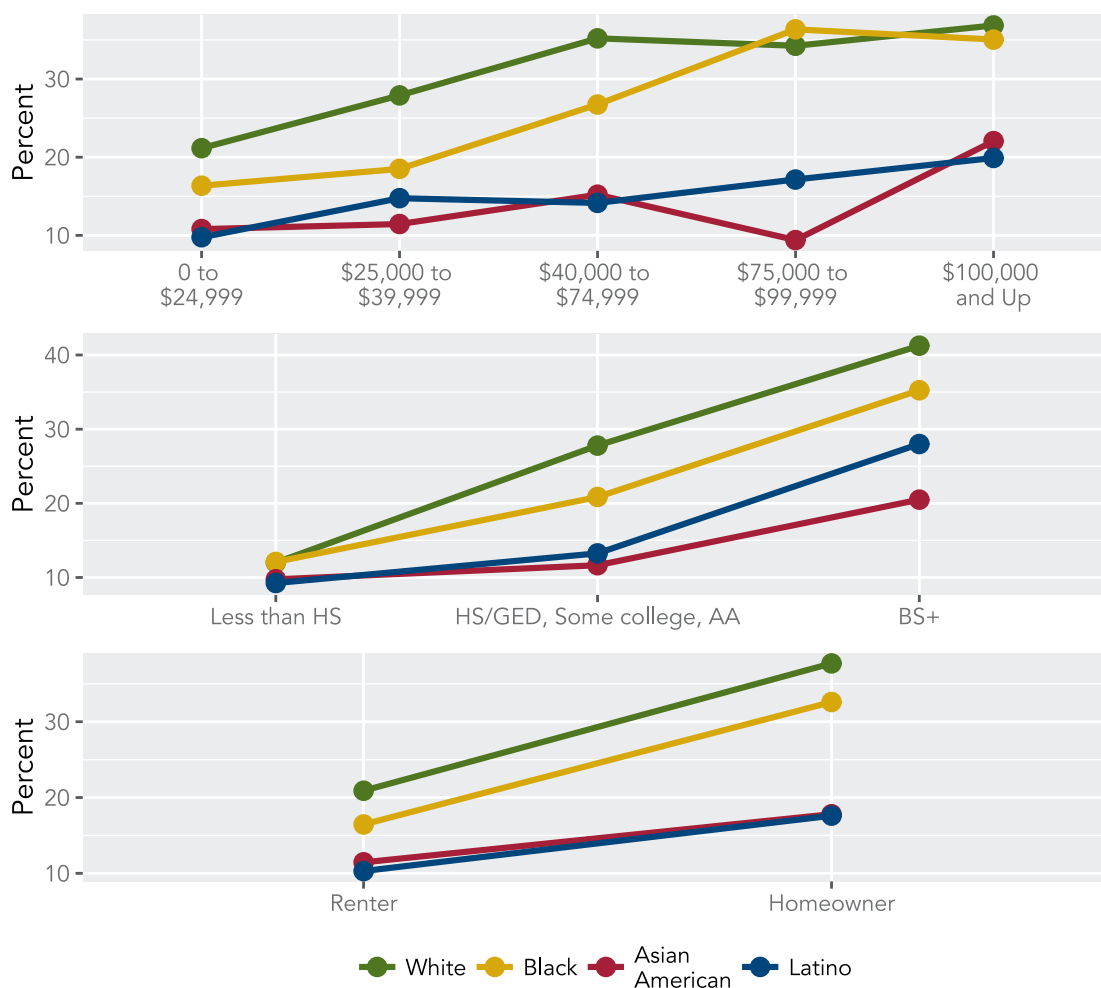
Why do these racial gaps in participation exist when it comes to voting in local elections? Even more than voting in presidential and midterm elections, socioeconomic status plays an important role in shaping who votes in local elections. As we can see from Figure 5, there are significant class biases in participation in local elections, as homeowners and those with higher education and incomes are much more likely to participate. Given racial and ethnic disparities in access to homeownership and higher education, it is easy to understand how racial gaps in political participation are produced.

At the same time, racial differences emerge across the range of socioeconomic status. Level of income is a prime example: whites are more likely to participate more frequently in local elections than Latinos or Asian Americans, not only among middle-income residents (\$40,000 to \$74,999), but also in the highest and lowest income levels. Similar gaps hold true across different education levels and between homeowners and renters (Figure 5).

Lastly, controlling for age and socioeconomic status wipes out the racial gap in local voting for African Americans. For Asian Americans and Latinos, however, these racial gaps remain and the problem is particularly pronounced for Asian Americans (see Appendix Table A.5). Thus, race has an indirect relationship to voting in local elections for blacks, in that it operates largely through class disparities that are significantly related to participation. For Asian Americans, racial disparities operate directly (controlling for education and income worsens the gap in participation with whites). For Latinos, the relationship between race and participation is both direct and indirect (racial disparities operate through class disparities, but significant gaps remain even after controlling for class-related factors). As noted earlier, language barriers, insufficient outreach and lack of civic infrastructure all play important roles in depressing participation among Asian Americans and Latinos. These problems are exacerbated in the context of local elections where contests are usually out of sync with presidential and midterm elections, and where ethnic media infrastructure is lacking.

## VOTING IN LOCAL ELECTIONS ACROSS RACE AND SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS

FIG 5



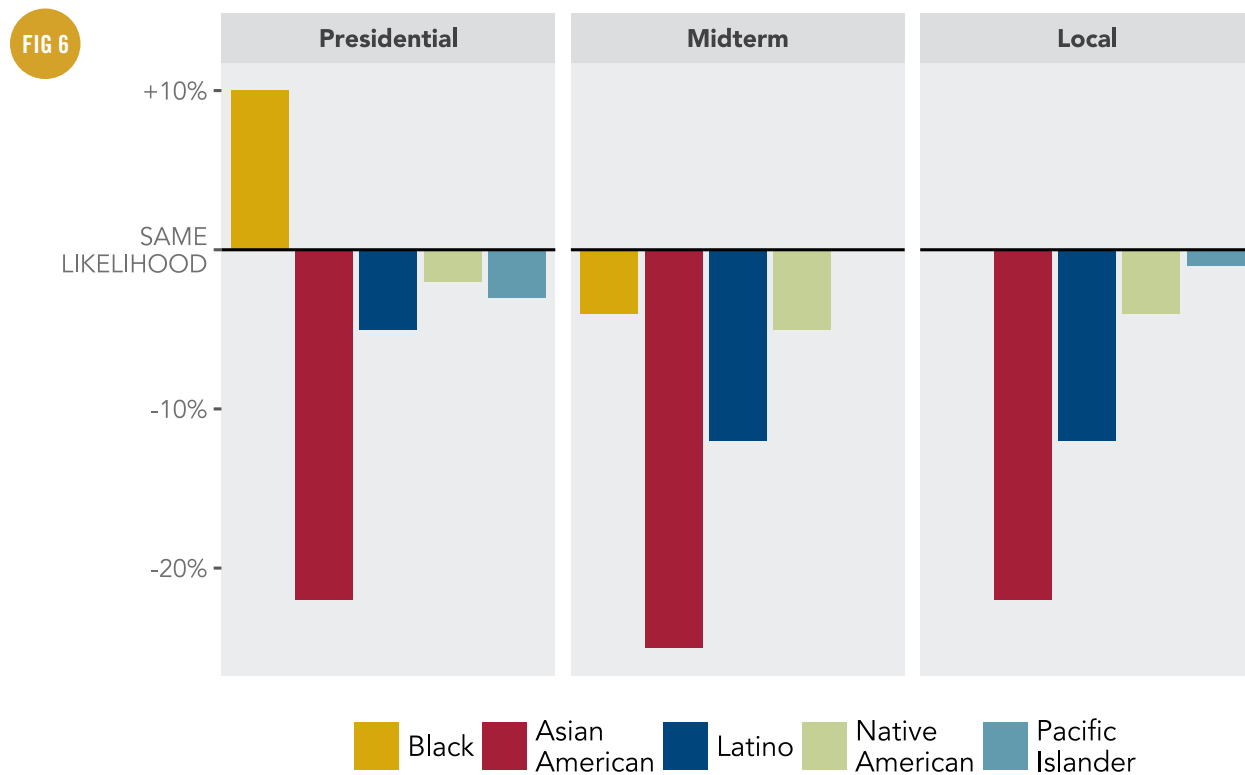
Source: Authors' analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's *Current Population Survey Civic Engagement Supplement*, 2011 & 2013.  
Note: Data on renters includes both cash renters and those renting with public assistance.

## RACIAL DISPARITIES PERSIST, EVEN WHEN CONSIDERING CLASS, EDUCATION, AND AGE

To sum up, our analysis of racial disparities in voting reveals some consistent and troubling patterns. Regardless of the type of election being considered (presidential, midterm, or local), Asian Americans and Latinos are among those least likely to participate while whites are consistently among the most likely to participate. Importantly, these disparities cannot simply be attributed to differences in age and socioeconomic status. As indicated earlier, language barriers, insufficient information, and lack of civic infrastructure and political mobilization all play important roles in worsening gaps in participation for Asian Americans and Latinos.<sup>13</sup>

For blacks, there is a clear difference in participation between presidential versus midterm and local elections. In presidential elections, blacks are actually slightly more likely to vote than whites once we control for age and socioeconomic status. This pattern disappears, however, when we consider midterm and local elections, with black voters unable to compensate for disadvantages in participation that stem from lower incomes, lower rates of homeownership, and lower rates of educational attainment (Figure 6).

### RACIAL DISPARITIES IN THE LIKELIHOOD OF VOTING COMPARED TO WHITES



Source: Authors' analysis of the US Census Bureau's *Current Population Survey Voter Supplement*, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, and 2014, and the *Current Population Survey Civic Engagement Supplement* 2011 and 2013.  
Note: These figures are standardized changes in odds ratios based on regressions that control for age, education, income, homeownership, and gender.

# Gaps in Political Participation Beyond Voting

Although voting is important for a healthy democracy, there are many other ways that political participation matters for individuals and communities. Elections are relatively infrequent but policy decisions happen every day of the year. Because of the pervasive impact of decision making from school boards and city councils all the way up to Congress and the President, it is important to pay attention to nonelectoral forms of political participation, which can include contacting public officials, attending political meetings, and engaging in consumer activism. These types of political activity often demand a high level of civic skills, knowledge, motivation, and sense of empowerment. Consequently, they are much rarer than voting in presidential or midterm elections.

In Table 2, we summarize the latest available data on California's racial disparities in political participation beyond voting, followed by a more detailed discussion of each activity. One clear pattern that emerges from the overview is that, on every measure, whites have the highest rates of engagement, while Asian Americans and Latinos are disadvantaged on most measures of participation.

## KEY FINDINGS

Racial gaps are significant for nearly all activities beyond voting

Class biases are an important part of the story, but racial gaps remain even after we consider class

Gaps between whites and people of color in contacting public officials and attending public meetings are especially concerning – elected officials are hearing primarily from whites

## PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL ACTIVITIES BEYOND VOTING, AMONG ADULT CITIZENS

TABLE 2

	White	Black	Asian American	Latino	CA	NATION
Contact public official*	16%	9%	6%	5%	12%	13%
Support campaign**	23%	18%	11%	11%	18%	16%
Attend political meeting**	15%	11%	7%	6%	12%	11%
Protest**	6%	4%	4%	3%	5%	3%
Consumer activism*	20%	7%	8%	7%	14%	13%

Source: Authors' analysis of *Current Population Survey Civic Engagement Supplement*.

Note: There are insufficient sample sizes to estimate participation rates for these outcomes for Native Americans and Pacific Islanders. Information derived from the most recently available datasets: \* denotes pooled between 2011 and 2013, and \*\* denotes data from 2008.



## CONTACTING PUBLIC OFFICIALS

Contacting officials affords constituents a way of registering their opinions multiple times between election cycles, either on multiple or single issues. Research on contact has also shown it to be effective: legislators appear to pay significant attention to personalized and direct appeals from their constituents, and more so than to generic mailing campaigns that are sponsored by interest groups (Taylor and Kent 2004).

Despite its effectiveness, contacting officials comes with a set of challenges that make participation more difficult for certain groups. One challenge is that it requires familiarity with the various facets of local, state, and federal government. Another challenge is that it requires strong English language skills. Both of these factors tend to disadvantage groups with lower educational attainment, lower rates of English proficiency, and higher proportions of first- and second-generation immigrants.

The U.S. Census Bureau's *Current Population Survey Civic Engagement Supplement* asked respondents in 2011 and 2013 whether, in the last 12 months, they had "contacted or visited a public official – at any level of government" to express their opinion. The data reveal notable racial gaps in contacting

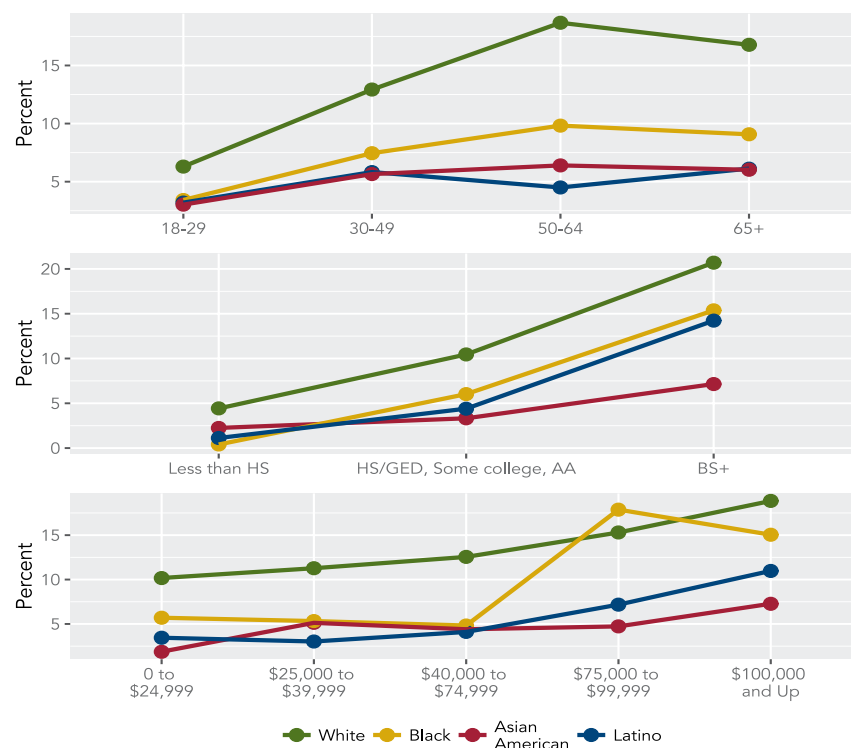
officials. Nearly one in six whites had contacted or visited a public official in the prior year. By contrast, fewer than one in 10 blacks, and only about one in 20 Asian Americans and Latinos, respectively, had contacted their public official to express their opinions.

Age and socioeconomic status play important roles in explaining these gaps, with participation significantly higher among older citizens, and those with higher educational attainment and/or income. Whites retain a participation advantage throughout these various age and socioeconomic categories, including among the oldest age groups and among those with the highest levels of income and educational attainment (Figure 7).

Controlling for education, age, immigrant origin, and income largely wipes out the gap in participation between blacks and whites (see Appendix Table A.6). This indicates that that gap is largely related to class disparities. For Asian Americans and Latinos, however, racial disparities remain significant even after controlling for age and income, which suggests the need to pay attention to other factors like language barriers and inadequate access to civic infrastructure.

### FREQUENCY OF CONTACTING PUBLIC OFFICIALS ACROSS RACE AND SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS

FIG 7



Source: Authors' analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's *Current Population Survey Civic Engagement Supplement*, 2011 & 2013.

## SUPPORTING CAMPAIGNS

	White	Black	Asian American	Latino	CA	NATION
Support campaign (2008)	23%	18%	11%	11%	18%	16%

Supporting a politician's campaign, either by distributing materials, fundraising, or making a contribution, is another mode of political participation with important implications for representation and access.

Campaign contributions represent a heightened level of access to high-level decision makers. Research has shown that donors are much more likely than a nondonating constituent to be granted a face-to-face meeting with a candidate (Kalla and Brockman 2015). Other scholars have found that members of Congress seem to be more aligned with their donors' preferences than with those of their constituents (Barber 2016; Bartels 2009). Thus, discrepancies in the rates of contribution among racial/ethnic groups are extremely important to understand how and why certain groups are marginalized in policy decision making.

Like contacting public officials, supporting a campaign has a set of challenges. Individuals must have a high level of interest as well as sufficient time, money, and civic skills to volunteer or donate (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). These barriers become very consequential when thinking about racial and ethnic minority groups.

In November 2008, the *Current Population Survey Civic Engagement Supplement* asked respondents

whether they "showed support for a particular political candidate or party by distributing campaign materials, fundraising, making a donation, or in some other way" in the last 12 months. While this more expansive measure of campaign activity finds more involvement than traditional measures of campaign contributions (e.g., national data from the American National Election Studies show that only 13% of whites, 8% of blacks, and 5% of Latinos made campaign contributions), we still find significant racial disparities in campaign activity, particularly for Asian Americans and Latinos.

To explain these gaps, our analysis identified education and income as factors that have the strongest relationships to participation, followed by gender and immigrant origin (see Appendix Table A.7). Controlling for these factors largely wipes out the gap in participation between blacks and whites. In the case of Asian Americans and Latinos, racial disparities remain significant even after controlling for age and socioeconomic status. As indicated earlier, this is in line with research more generally on political participation, which indicates that language barriers, lack of outreach, and limited civic infrastructure are important factors that limit participation among first- and second-generation immigrant communities.

## ATTENDING POLITICAL MEETINGS

	White	Black	Asian American	Latino	CA	NATION
Political meeting (2008)	15%	11%	7%	6%	12%	11%

Attending a meeting where political issues are discussed is another form of participation that requires resources, such as time and civic skills. Similar to supporting a campaign, attending and participating in public meetings is difficult if a constituent doesn't have assets like transportation or childcare. At the same time, participation in public meetings

and hearings does not require individuals to have significant disposable income, nor does it require the kind of time commitments that come with working for political parties or campaigns (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2012). Finally, participation in public meetings also opens up opportunities for citizens as well as noncitizens to act (Barreto and Muñoz 2003).

In November 2008 the *Current Population Survey Civic Engagement Supplement* asked respondents whether they had “attended a meeting where political issues are discussed” in the last 12 months. As the data indicate, there were significant racial disparities in this activity.

To explain these gaps, our analysis identified education and immigrant origin as having the most impact, with college-educated individuals much more likely to participate than those without high-school degrees,

followed by income and gender (see Appendix Table A.7). Controlling for these factors largely wipes out the gap in participation between blacks and whites. For Asian Americans and Latinos, racial disparities remain significant even after controlling for age and socioeconomic status, indicating a persistent disadvantage that is not solely attributable to class disparities. As noted earlier, language barriers and lack of adequate civic infrastructure and political mobilization are often noted as playing critical roles in these communities.<sup>14</sup>

## PARTICIPATING IN PROTESTS AND CONSUMER ACTIVISM

	White	Black	Asian American	Latino	CA	NATION
Protest (2008)	6%	4%	4%	3%	5%	3%
Consumer activism	20%	7%	8%	7%	14%	13%

Some marginalized groups in the United States lack access to decision makers in government and therefore engage in protests and/or consumer activism. These forms of participation are unique in that they tend to be highly visible, accessible to citizens and noncitizens alike, and attempt to influence policy through mechanisms outside of the standard political process.

In the case of protests, organizers rely on getting people onto the streets to gain the attention of decision makers, either through direct confrontation or by mobilizing public support through media coverage and strategic messaging. The large-scale rallies for immigration reform held across the country in 2006 perfectly exemplify this type of mobilization, with participants bringing their families and waving American flags to demonstrate their loyalty and contributions to local communities (Voss and Bloemraad 2010).

By contrast, consumer activism uses individual business interactions or the refusal to engage in such interactions to gain leverage during a struggle with a corporation or government. A prime example is the recent boycott of North Carolina. Following the enactment of legislation that prohibits cities and counties from passing wage ordinances and nondiscrimination ordinances that differ from state law, numerous companies and entertainers have decided to not do business in the state.<sup>15</sup>

We rely on two questions to gauge participation in protests and consumer activism. For protests, the *Current Population Survey Civic Engagement Supplement* asked respondents in November 2008 whether they had “taken part in a march, rally, protest, or demonstration” in the last 12 months. For consumer activism, the *Supplement* asked in November 2011 and 2013 whether respondents had “bought or boycotted a certain product or service because of the social or political values of the company that provides it.”

Given the rich history of protest among blacks and the rise in immigration reform protests since 2000, the results on protest activity may be surprising to many. The data reveal no significant differences across racial groups and indicate that protest is a relatively low-frequency activity for all groups. The data on consumer activism reveal a different result: whites are much more likely to engage in this activity (20%) than are Asian Americans (8%), blacks (7%), and Latinos (7%). We also find that participation in consumer activism is higher among men and those with higher education and income (see Appendix Table A.8). Overall, our findings run counter to studies that use less systematic evidence indicating that marginalized groups are more likely to engage in boycott activity (Gardberg and Newbury 2013).<sup>16</sup> This is an important discrepancy in an understudied topic, suggesting fruitful avenues for further research.

## ENGAGING IN POLITICAL DISCUSSION

Finally, political discussions (in various forms) can be studied in their own right, but they also relate to other types of participation. Scholars have found that participation in political discussion is associated with higher levels of political knowledge, which can lead to higher levels of political engagement (Eveland 2004). Research on digital democracy has also shown that online forums have encouraged younger people to participate (Best and Kruger 2005, 2006; Muhlberger 2003). Higher rates of political discussion both offline and online help increase political engagement among groups that are less likely to participate.

### CIVIC ACTIVITIES THAT HELP PREDICT POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

TABLE 3

	White	Black	Asian American	Latino	CA	NATION
Discuss politics (every day)	14%	7%	3%	5%	9%	10%
Discuss politics (at least few times/week)	37%	22%	16%	18%	28%	28%
Use Internet to discuss politics (at least a few times/week)	9%	9%	4%	7%	8%	8%

Source: Authors' analysis of *Current Population Survey Civic Engagement Supplement*.

Note: There are insufficient sample sizes to estimate participation rates for these outcomes for Pacific Islanders. Data are pooled between 2011 and 2013.

The *Current Population Survey* asked two different questions about political discussion from 2008 to 2013. Between 2008 and 2013, it asked how often politics were discussed among family and friends,<sup>17</sup> while between 2011 and 2013, it also asked how often individuals had used the Internet to express their opinions about political or community issues.<sup>18</sup> As the results in Table 3 indicate, there are significant racial disparities in this kind of “daily” political activity. Even when we expand the time period to cover an entire week, we find that whites are the group most likely to discuss politics with family and friends by large

margins. They are also the group most likely to use the Internet to express their political beliefs, although racial gaps in this activity are not statistically significant among those below age 35.

Importantly, these racial disparities in participation largely remain even after controlling for age and socioeconomic status (see Appendix Table A.9), pointing to some of the deep-rooted ways in which political inequalities manifest themselves even in the most mundane and easily accessible acts of participation.<sup>19</sup>

## PARTICIPATION BEYOND VOTING BY REGION

Similar to our analysis of voting rates, we tried to examine the data by geography. Unfortunately, the *Current Population Survey* dataset on nonvoting political activities does not have sufficient sample sizes to produce estimates of participation across racial groups. However, we ran analyses that combine race/ethnicity with region of residence to see if there were any places where participation seemed particularly high or low for a given racial group. For the most part, these analyses did not yield significant results. However there were exceptions, both involving Latinos:

- 1 Latinos in the Central Valley were more likely than Latinos statewide to report contacting local officials; and
- 2 Latinos in Southern California were more likely to say that they used the Internet to discuss politics at least a few times a week.



## UNEQUAL INFLUENCE IS PERVASIVE

To summarize, significant racial gaps remain with one notable exception: protesting is a low-frequency activity for all Californians and so gaps in participation between whites and people of color are not statistically significant. For all other activities, there are significant racial gaps in participation, ranging from “everyday” political activities like discussing politics in person or online to less frequent activities like supporting campaigns.

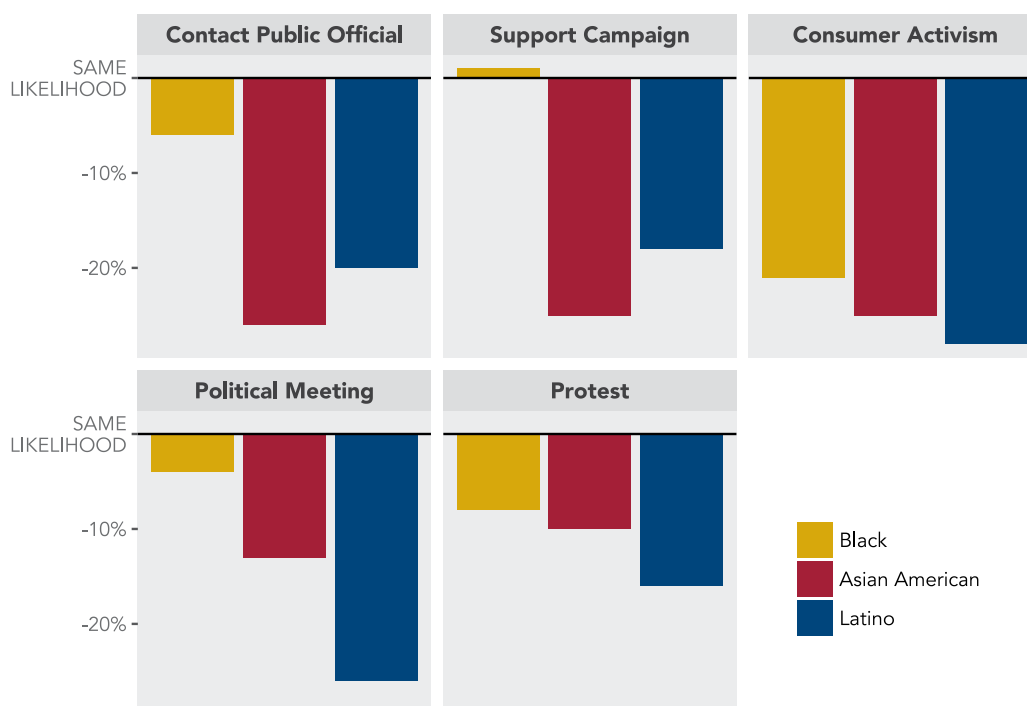
Perhaps most concerning with respect to influence over policy, elected officials in California are much more likely to hear from white residents than residents of color. Indeed, the contact rates among whites is more than twice the contact rate among Asian Americans (16% versus 6%), and three times higher than the contact rate among Latinos (16% versus 5%). It is important to keep in mind that these contact rate data only include adult citizens and citizenship is not a requirement for contacting officials. If we expand our analysis to all adult residents, these racial disparities in participation grow even wider (see Appendix Table A.10).

Elected officials in California are much more likely to hear from white residents than people of color, creating an imbalance in influencing policy.

Finally, controlling for age, gender, and socioeconomic status leaves intact many racial disparities in participation. In each of these instances, we consistently find that higher income and education are associated with greater levels of participation (e.g., see Figures 5 and 7). Even after controlling for these factors, however, significant racial disparities in participation remain, with whites being the most likely to contact public officials, attend political meetings, protest, and engage in consumer activism (Figure 8).

### DISPARITIES IN THE LIKELIHOOD OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION BEYOND VOTING COMPARED TO WHITES

FIG 8



Source: Authors' analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's *Current Population Survey Civic Engagement Supplement*, 2011 and 2013.

# Recommendations to Reverse Racial Disparities in Political Participation

Within the last five years, there has been a surge in efforts to address California's voter registration and turnout problems. Several significant electoral reforms have been made or are pending:

- ✓ **Online voter registration became available in 2012;**
- ✓ **Also in 2012 legislation was enacted to make Election Day voter registration (also known as Same-Day Registration) available;**
- ✓ **In 2014 Assembly Bill 1461, which enables the Secretary of State to automatically register eligible adults to vote when they go through certain processes with the Department of Motor Vehicles, passed and is in the process of being implemented; and**
- ✓ **Currently, Senate Bill 450, which would allow counties to conduct elections using all-mailed ballots, ballot drop-off locations, and vote centers, is being debated.**

Compared to extensive efforts to erase disparities in voting, there is nothing similar to address problems beyond voting.

Beyond these legislative reforms, greater cooperation is happening between the governmental and nongovernmental sectors. Through the Future of California Elections collaborative, elections officials, civil rights organizations, and election reform advocates have enhanced their ability to learn from one another and strategize together.

Finally, in the fields of community organizing and philanthropy, "integrated voter engagement" (IVE) has become a popular model for increasing political participation and shifting power relations through sustained engagement with registered and eligible voters. However, IVE strategies have yet to systematically measure modes of participation other than voting.

Compared to this extensive list, there are far fewer efforts to address problems in forms of political participation beyond voting. Of course this is not surprising: as we have noted, there has been little to no public attention given to these problems.

This report is a call for change. It is a call for all stakeholders to prioritize political participation beyond voting. Such forms of participation are important mechanisms for all community residents – those who can and cannot vote – to engage in democracy and exercise political influence.

This is a call for change. Advocates for a healthy democracy need a concerted effort to address political participation gaps.

The data we examined indicate significant racial, socioeconomic, and generational gaps in those forms of engagement and influence. Advocates for a healthy democracy need a collaborative and concerted effort to address these gaps if California is to have a more equitable and accountable democratic system. In this section we offer policy and data recommendations to aid in that effort.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

People of color are at a significant disadvantage in political influence when compared to whites. As this report has demonstrated, there are significant racial disparities across a range of political activities. Multiple factors help explain these disparities: rates of naturalization, institutional barriers, language barriers, access to civic infrastructure, and access to socioeconomic resources.

Due largely to the datasets, our analysis points to disparities in socioeconomic resources as a key factor, though we also found that other factors are at play for Latinos and Asian Americans. Accordingly, our recommendations focus on strategies to address access to socioeconomic resources; however, they also relate to civic infrastructure access.

Because of this focus, the recommendations should be understood as a partial set of strategies needed to reduce racial disparities in participation. Another general point to keep in mind is that the strategies need to be tailored to regional and jurisdictional conditions. What makes sense to implement in one community to increase engagement at the municipal level may be different from what makes sense in another community to increase engagement at the state level.

### Create educational opportunities for people of color, especially those in low-income communities, to develop civic knowledge and skills.

Those who participate at higher rates are more likely to have civic knowledge and skills, which enables them to (1) make connections among their preferences, their participation, and politics, (2) understand how to participate in political processes, (3) understand how to participate effectively, and (4) feel a sense of political efficacy (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2012). People are not born with such knowledge and skills; they develop both through formal education and social networks, such as family, friends, workplaces, voluntary associations, and religious institutions.

**To reduce disparities in participation, community leaders and policymakers should tailor existing civic education programs for children and adults of color in ways that are culturally competent, and they should create new programs where needed.**

Civic education advocates have suggested one way this could be done in the K-12 context: community leaders could urge school board members to include civic education in their district's Local Control Accountability Plan. They could also work with district officials to ensure that the curriculum is culturally competent and that students of color have access to that education.

People are not born with civic knowledge and skills; they develop both through formal education and social networks.

## Enhance efforts to mobilize people of color.

One primary reason why people participate is that they are mobilized by political and community leaders who directly and indirectly encourage them and create opportunities for engagement (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). This is effective, in part, because those leaders use their own resources to make participating easier. It is also effective because it can transform an individual's self-understanding, leading that person to think of her- or himself as a participant in politics (García Bedolla and Michelson 2012).

Yet, mobilization efforts are often biased. They generally target people who are readily accessible and predisposed to participate. This has the effect of exacerbating and reinforcing participation disparities, since those more likely to participate are white and older, with higher levels of education, income, and civic knowledge and skills (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2012).

Mobilization stimulates participation – it activates people while reducing barriers

**Community leaders and policymakers should, where necessary, increase or initiate outreach to people of color, especially those in low-income**

**communities, when input is needed to inform or lift up an issue.** For example, as cities convert from at-large to by-district elections in an effort to comply with the California Voting Rights Act, city council members should create multiple opportunities for community residents to learn about and inform the conversion and line-drawing processes. Such efforts should involve extensive outreach and consultation with leaders in communities of color to determine the most effective ways to engage those communities.

## Design public policies in ways that can stimulate participation.

Disadvantaged groups are more likely to participate when political institutions address issues that concern them (Schattschneider 1960). In addition to substantive issues, policy design and institutional design also matter (Mettler and Soss 2004; Mettler and Welch 2004; Soss, Hacker, and Mettler 2007; Fung 2006).

Participation can be stimulated by social welfare policies that (1) provide resources to offset socioeconomic disadvantages, and (2) are implemented in ways that encourage beneficiaries to interpret government responsiveness and their sense of membership in the political community in positive ways.

### Among the design factors to consider are:

- Whether the policy's benefits are meager or generous;
- Whether those benefits are means-tested (i.e., dependent upon being below an income threshold) or universal (i.e., independent of any income threshold); and
- Whether the authority relations involved in the policy's implementation are paternalistic (i.e., focused on government control and surveillance) or democratic (i.e., concerned about providing autonomy and voice for beneficiaries).

Policy design that provides generous benefits universally and a democratic, open process to access benefits fosters participation



Studies have found that universal policies with generous benefits and democratic authority relations have fostered participation among low-income recipients. These policies include Social Security Old Age Insurance and the G.I. Bill (Campbell 2003; Mettler 2005). **Given this, when crafting a social welfare policy, community leaders and policymakers should carefully consider the policy's substance and design, and they should push to include design features that research shows can stimulate participation.**

### Implement innovative modes of participation.

Across the country and in some parts of California, local governments have established or experimented with innovative modes of participation. These efforts differ but are similar in that they aspire to include residents in local governance in ways that go beyond standard processes like public comment periods.

One example is the Empowerment Congress, a multisector partnership in Los Angeles County's Second Supervisorial District. Among other services, the Empowerment Congress provides district residents with civic education opportunities, links to public resources, and a channel to impact public policies that affect the community. The partnership comprises an executive council, leadership council, and nine issue-specific committees that work with the county supervisor's office and are operated by district residents and stakeholders.

Innovative engagement processes like these could be promising ways of increasing participation in under-resourced communities, though evaluation is needed to determine the conditions that lead to success. **Policymakers should review and learn from the Empowerment Congress model, as well as models of participatory budgeting and public deliberation.**

### Reform existing participation infrastructure.

A more ambitious strategy focuses on reforming what one study refers to as our "participation infrastructure" – that is, "the laws, processes, institutions, and associations that support regular opportunities for people to connect with each other, solve problems, make decisions, and celebrate community" (Nabatchi and Leighninger 2015, 6).

#### **Our existing infrastructure includes multiple components:**

- Legal (the laws, rules, and regulations at all governmental levels that structure participation);
- Governmental (the resources, particularly personnel, that governments use to inform and interact with residents in participation processes);
- Civic (the formal and informal associations that mobilize citizens to get involved in public affairs);
- Electoral (the method and extent to which electoral campaigns involve citizens in the development of policy platforms); and
- Educational (the curricula used in formal educational institutions to prepare students for participation).

According to the study, this infrastructure is inadequate to meet the current needs of residents and public officials, with a resulting detrimental effect on participation. We agree with this contention and encourage community leaders and policymakers to assess participation infrastructure at the local, state, and federal levels. **Where necessary, reforms to the infrastructure should be made to meet the needs of all community residents.**

## DATA RECOMMENDATIONS

Datasets are central to adequately assessing the health of California's democracy. In the past few years, the *Current Population Survey* supplements on civic engagement have been a valuable source of information on racial disparities in important political activities, such as contacting public officials, attending political meetings, and discussing politics with friends and family.

At the same time, the *Current Population Survey* is limited because it is primarily a survey about the labor force and does not include important questions that relate to social and political attitudes. As a result, we do not have a rich understanding of what might be driving racial disparities beyond socioeconomic status and age.

The *Current Population Survey* is also limited because it does not always ask respondents the same set of questions about political participation. This makes it difficult to understand shifts in certain types of participation over time.

**Given these limitations with the most comprehensive dataset on political participation, we offer the following data recommendations:**

Data is necessary to assess the health of California's democracy, yet current surveys fail to capture critical information.

### **Include other attitudinal questions in the *Current Population Survey* on civic engagement.**

Other attitudinal questions – such as interest in politics, trust in political institutions, and a sense of political efficacy – can help provide a better answer to why some of these racial disparities in participation persist and, importantly, what can be done to address them.

### **Expand the range of data collected on political and civic participation in regular surveys of California residents.**

The Public Policy Institute of California's *Statewide Survey*, the *Field Poll*, and surveys by the *Los Angeles Times*, can help California better track the health of its democracy by asking questions about political participation that capture the wide array of political activities that are consequential for governance.

### **Collect data on political participation with more regularity.**

The *Current Population Survey* asked questions about participating in protests, supporting campaigns, and attending political meetings in 2008 but has not asked those questions since. The Public Policy Institute of California last asked a range of questions about civic engagement in 2002. Given the changing demographics of the state and rapid changes in technology and policies related to political participation, it is important to collect data on political participation with more frequency and regularity.

## Collect data that can measure the health of California's democracy at the regional, county, and municipal level.

The *Current Population Survey* does not allow for easy ways to measure political participation at the regional level in California, since many smaller counties that are part of larger regions are missing from public-use files. This problem can be ameliorated if the *Current Population Survey* provides regional geographic markers for large states with discrete population centers or at the county level in California. Surveys like the Public Policy Institute of California's *Statewide Survey* and the *Field Poll* provide regional breakdowns, and can help address this gap by adding questions on political participation beyond voting. Finally, county- and city-level survey efforts would be well advised to include measures of political participation such as participation in public hearings and contacting local officials.

With more regular, comprehensive, and detailed data on political participation by race and ethnicity in California, we can expect to have a better understanding of the health of California's democracy. And with that understanding, we will be better positioned to fix gaps in participation.

Regular, detailed data collection on political participation by race and ethnicity will allow California to fix participation gaps.



# Strengthen Democracy: Ensure Participation by All Californians

In November 2016, Californians will vote on a new President in a high-stakes race, a new United States Senator after two decades, and a likely list of controversial ballot initiatives. Consequently, there will be higher voter turnout than in the 2014 general election.

As important as the sheer number of Californians voting is, it is critical to look at the makeup of who votes. As we have shown in this report, recent trends in voting rates suggest that there will be significant racial disparities in who shows up to the polls, with whites voting at a higher rate than people of color, especially Asian Americans and Latinos. Considering the persistence of racial gaps in voting, advocates for a healthier democracy in California must continue to facilitate greater participation in the election process by those who vote at relatively low rates.

However, as we have also shown in this report, similar gaps persist in political participation beyond the ballot box. Given our findings, advocates must address these disparities to ensure that California's democracy remains relevant to, and representative of, the people who live here. Policymaking in Sacramento, in city halls and county governments, and in school districts must begin to listen to, be accountable to, and be shaped by the racially, socioeconomically, and generationally diverse range of people that now make up, not only the electorate, but the whole of California.

The recommendations provide part of a conceptual framework for community leaders and government officials to think and act in more innovative and collaborative ways. These are not easy fixes; racial disparities are long-standing, entrenched, and some people in power are highly resistant to changing the status quo.

For community leaders, finding effective solutions will require augmenting existing mobilization strategies and advocating for more participatory governance. For the funders that support those organizations, it will require a sustained commitment and willingness to experiment with innovative ideas. For elected officials and government staff, it will require a sea change in how to approach, respond to, and actively engage all of the community.

But the payoff will be worth it. As more and more Californians feel their voices are heard and that they have an impact in the choices that affect their everyday lives, our democracy will be revitalized. New energy and new ideas will flow in from previously marginalized communities. This surge of innovation and sense of common purpose will ensure a brighter future for all Californians.

California's democracy  
must be relevant to, and  
representative of, the  
people who live here.

The payoff will be worth it.  
As more and more  
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# Notes

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- 1 We use the following datasets: *Current Population Survey Voter Supplement* (U.S. Census Bureau), *Current Population Survey Civic Engagement Supplement* (U.S. Census Bureau), *National Asian American Survey*, and Political Data Inc.
- 2 For the sake of simplicity, this report discusses our main findings. More detailed statistical analyses can be found in an online appendix (available at [www.AdvancementProjectCA.org/UnequalVoices](http://www.AdvancementProjectCA.org/UnequalVoices)).
- 3 This report analyzes the latest available data on participation in California, through November 2014, and shows persistent racial gaps in participation. In our companion report to be released in the fall of 2016, we will collect and analyze survey data through 2016.
- 4 There are three different ways that we can examine racial disparities in participation as they relate to age and class:
  1. We can examine whether intraracial differences in participation appear for some groups but not for others. For example, are there lower rates of participation among low-income Asian Americans but not among those with higher incomes? We call this strategy “descriptive intersectional analysis.”
  2. We can control for age and socioeconomic status and see if any direct relationships between race and participation remain.
  3. We can examine the extent to which different racial groups have different resources at their disposal, which in turn affects the relationships uncovered in #2 above.For simplicity's sake, we describe the results of #2 above here and discuss the ways that race and class matter for voting. More detailed analyses can be found in the Appendix, found at [www.AdvancementProjectCA.org/UnequalVoices](http://www.AdvancementProjectCA.org/UnequalVoices).
- 5 We use terms on voting and turnout as follows: voting rates are calculated as a proportion of adults or adult citizens, while turnout rates follow the convention of the California Secretary of State, which is voting among registered voters.
- 6 This is because foreign-born residents accounted for a much larger proportion of the Latino and Asian American population than they did for whites and blacks. A recent study estimates over 2 million immigrant adults in California who are eligible to naturalize, with nearly 1.5 million from Latin America and about 530,000 from Asia (USC Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration 2016). The problem of unauthorized immigrant status was also a significant factor contributing to lower rates of citizenship among these groups: an estimated 18% of the Latino population and 8% of the Asian American population in California were undocumented, and therefore ineligible for U.S. citizenship. Estimates of Latino and Asian American unauthorized are based on region of origin data as provided by the Migration Policy Institute in its most recent state estimates: <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/unauthorized-immigrant-population/state/CA>. 7 Comparisons across states can be found at <http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/absentee-and-early-voting.aspx>.
- 8 Comparisons across states can be found at <https://www.usa.gov/voter-registration-deadlines>.
- 9 See Asian American Justice Center, Asian and Pacific Islander American Vote, and National Asian American Survey (2013). Also see Phillips (2016).
- 10 See Asian American Justice Center, Asian and Pacific Islander American Vote, and National Asian American Survey (2013).
- 11 <http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/historical-absentee/> (last accessed May 16, 2016).
- 12 Self-reported data on voting by mail in California is about 7 percentage points lower in the *Current Population Survey Voter Supplement* than in administrative data reported by the Secretary of State. Part of this discrepancy might be due to individuals who drop off mail ballots in polling locations on Election Day, but survey respondents might also misremember which method they used while voting. It is unlikely that the latter dynamic varies across states. To the extent that California makes it relatively easy for individuals to cast absentee ballots, the gap between California and the rest of the country on mail ballots is probably a conservative one.
- 13 Political participation of Pacific Islanders and Native Americans requires further study.
- 14 Labor unions and advocates for better schools can help overcome these barriers and promote greater local participation (Terriquez 2011).
- 15 A copy of the bill can be found at <http://www.ncleg.net/Sessions/2015/Bills/House/PDF/H2v0.pdf>.
- 16 However, one study using systematic evidence indicates higher participation in boycott activity among more advantaged groups and higher participation among marginalized communities in “buycott” behavior (Baek 2010).
- 17 The exact question wording was as follows: “During a TYPICAL MONTH in the past year, when communicating with family and friends, how often were politics discussed – basically every day, a few times a week, a few times a month, once a month, or not at all?”
- 18 The exact question wording was as follows: “How often, if at all, (have you/has NAME) used the Internet to express (your/his/her) opinions about POLITICAL or COMMUNITY issues within the last 12 months – basically every day, a few times a week, a few times a month, once a month, less than once a month, or not at all?”
- 19 A recent study of youth indicates that communities of color may be more likely than whites to engage in friendship-driven and interest-driven discussions online (Cohen and Kahne 2012). This is an area that bears monitoring and further study.



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