ENGAGING THE IMMIGRANT VOICE: POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND ACCULTURATION IN THE INDIAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

Despite constituting well over ten percent of the American population, many immigrant groups struggle to become integrated into the American mainstream. While assimilation is not necessarily desirable or required for any immigrant, certain barriers make acculturation inaccessible for those who seek it. With immigrants consistently registering lower levels of political participation than their mainstream counterparts, even the most socioeconomically advantaged of immigrant groups like Indian Americans locate themselves on the peripheries of the mainstream. On the basis of their lower levels of political engagement, Indian Americans and a number of other immigrant groups have remained differentiated ethnically, culturally, and racially, and therefore not fully assimilated into the American mainstream. Because political participation is a critical part of the American experience, it must be incorporated into existing models of assimilation.

Using existing literature and 25 interviews with first and second generation Indian Americans, I examined the assimilation and political participation patterns of Indian Americans to analyze how civic engagement relates to the larger immigrant assimilation experience. Measured by the social and economic criteria of traditional assimilation models, Indian Americans would be considered fully assimilated into the
American mainstream. However, because the assimilation process is also highly intertwined with political participation, assimilation models must be adjusted to reflect this.

The Indian Americans I interviewed express a high level of interest and knowledge of political processes and an overall identification with American social structures. Simultaneously, many do not feel comfortable or welcome in the country’s political institutions. Extrapolating these findings to other immigrant groups, I would argue that political assimilation signifies a later stage of assimilation. Though individual immigrants acculturate at varying rates and may even enter political life prior to assimilating on any other level, as a group, they are only likely to attain participatory equality many years after migration and often well into the second and third generations. This would suggest that political representatives must make a more concerted effort to hear and act on the concerns of first and second generation immigrants seeking political recourse.
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INTRODUCTION

Recent research has shown that political participation on the whole has been declining in the United States since the mid-1960s. The convergence of various factors is responsible for this trend, but for some groups, the explanations are more complex. While socioeconomic status and a general predisposition towards engaging with politics are significant for explaining noninvolvement for most mainstream Americans, racial and ethnic background can compound the effects of these factors. This is especially observable in immigrant communities composed of racial and ethnic minorities. In addition to minimal descriptive representation (or representation in political office by co-ethnics), immigrants are more likely to encounter discrimination on the basis of race or ethnicity. White mainstream Americans still account for a disproportionate majority in many political organizations and institutions. This can lead to the impression that the government does not respond to the needs of minority groups in the same way that it responds to the needs of the ethnic majority. It can also foster the belief among immigrants that their participation will not make a difference on a large scale. Those who have been confronted with discrimination are even more likely to have such feelings of low political efficacy. Even as past barriers to immigrant involvement are slowly being eroded, many immigrant groups cope with feelings of detachment from the political process.

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1 The “mainstream” is defined here as the culture and society developed, adopted, and perpetuated largely by white Americans of European descent. Though it has been influenced by other immigrant and minority cultures, it represents what is conventionally considered to be the “American core.”
These same obstacles may also affect immigrants’ overall feelings of integration into the American community. Those who experience marginalization on the basis of ethnicity, even if just in the political arena, may understandably feel social distance from the mainstream American community. On the other hand, those who perceive few or no differences between themselves and the mainstream may consider themselves more fully incorporated into American life. The question being considered here is whether political involvement or detachment on the part of first and second generation immigrants ultimately affects feelings of overall assimilation into, or an overall sense of identification with, the mainstream. In one respect, it can be understood as determining whether political efficacy translates into social efficacy. If immigrants feel more enabled through political participation, they may feel more capable of being able to make an impact in other areas of social life, despite having to adjust to a new country.

This paper focuses on this relationship between immigrants’ political participation and their assimilation into the American mainstream. Using the case of first and second generation Indian Americans who arrived in the United States after 1965 as an example, I argue that political involvement does indeed affect assimilation. After understanding the factors that affect political participation and assimilation

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2 The term “Indian American” as used here refers specifically to immigrants who migrated directly from India to the United States or those who have Indian heritage and currently reside in the United States. It encompasses immigrants (first generation) as well as their offspring (second generation and beyond). Because individuals of Indian descent may choose to self-identify differently, the term as applied here only denotes a common country of origin and certain biological facts pertaining to race.
individually, it is possible to see that they can ultimately be viewed as part of a single process.

**Why Post-1965 Indian Americans?**

Indian Americans who arrived in the United States after 1965 are both like and unlike other immigrant groups in many ways. Their comparatively small number and recent arrival as well as the unique history and circumstances surrounding both major waves of Indian immigration to the United States make them unlike most other immigrant groups. Despite their differences, however, Indian American experiences often mirror those of other groups as well. Taken together, these facts often mean that Indian Americans receive little treatment in major discussions on immigration. Because they frequently differ from other immigrant groups, general histories of immigration often fail to account for their experiences. Alternately, those that do consider Indian Americans often generalize the experiences of other Asian Americans or South Asian Americans, with whom they do have areas of commonality, to explain aspects of Indian American adaptation. Only with a more in-depth examination of this rapidly expanding community can these similarities and differences be properly contextualized. A careful analysis of Indian American assimilation and political participation will then not only reveal unique characteristics of the Indian American community, it will have significant implications for other immigrants as well.

Unlike many immigrant groups, including early Indian immigrants, post-1965 Indian Americans were not escaping harsh or adverse conditions and could pursue
careers beyond day labor. Most migrated seeking better career or educational opportunities. With the passage of the Hart-Celler Act of 1965, the United States faced an influx of immigrants from countries that had previously been largely underrepresented in the American mainstream. Many of these immigrants were and are human capital immigrants with high levels of education and occupational training. Indian Americans represent one such immigrant group. Indeed, the median household income of Indian Americans is now higher than the median household income of all Americans and of most other immigrant groups as well. The same is true of their educational attainment. Additionally, having lived in a country with a participatory democracy, they are often familiar with the basic political structures of the United States. In this way, Indian Americans have the tools to become substantially integrated into American society. However, unlike previous immigrant groups that have been similarly disposed to integration, Indian Americans represent a racial, ethnic, and in most cases, religious minority\(^3\). On the other hand, while race has by and large proven to present fewer barriers to Indian Americans than other racial and ethnic minorities, it cannot be ignored entirely.

On the basis of racial and ethnic marginalization, then, Indian Americans face the same types of challenges as other minorities. In the two major waves of Indian immigration, Indian Americans have typically been categorized alongside other major Asian American immigrant groups both officially and unofficially under one pan-

\(^3\) Though religious differences will not be considered in depth here, they have appeared to have subtle and nuanced effects on assimilation.
ethnic “Asian” label. While there are differences, Indian Americans do share much in common with East, Southeast, and other South Asian American groups and can use pan-ethnic identification to act collectively in order to procure benefits for members of all groups (Junn 2006, 37). Additionally, members of several Asian American groups have achieved the same type of socioeconomic success as Indian Americans and have subsequently been cast as “model minorities,” or those “whose cultural values of diligence, family solidarity, respect for education, and self-sufficiency have propelled [them] to notable success” (Kim 2001, 54).

Like other “model minorities,” Indian Americans have been in the unique position of being simultaneously “valorized” and “triangulated” against other ethnic groups by much of the white society. In other words, they are lauded as examples for other minorities to emulate, but are still positioned outside the white mainstream. Their successes make them assets to American society when considered against minorities like inner-city blacks and Latinos who have historically struggled to achieve the same kinds of success. At the same time their successes are attributed to “their ongoing cultural distinctiveness,” which will in some way always separate them from white ethnic Americans (Kim 2001, 54). This triangulation situates Asian Americans as valorized against blacks and Latinos, but still unable to enter the white power structure that dominates political and social life. In this way, Indian Americans, like other Asian Americans and minorities, are subject to exclusion on the basis of race and ethnicity.
This racial differentiation will make the Indian American case especially informative when juxtaposed next to their overall ability to assimilate into American culture.

Outline

In order to approach the topics of assimilation and political participation as they relate to the Indian American community, it is necessary to understand existing research and the specifics of each framework. In Chapter 1, the history of the Indian American community is detailed to provide an overview of the characteristics that make Indian Americans both like mainstream Americans and other immigrant groups as well as those that distinguish them from others. Because there is little continuity between early Indian immigrants and those entering the United States after 1965, the Indian American community today is primarily defined by the circumstances surrounding the latter group. However, in comparing the two groups, the importance of the receiving country’s acceptance of immigrants and mainstream attitudes to immigration in shaping the immigrant experience become evident. Remnants of the struggles faced by the early immigrants symbolize both how much Indian Americans have accomplished in the intervening years and how much more they will have to overcome to feel fully assimilated.

Chapter 2 examines the assimilation literature and models that most directly relate to Indian Americans. While a number of assimilation models have been posited and evaluated in the context of various immigrant groups, few have been analyzed in the context of Indian Americans. Using Indian Americans as a specific case study, it is
possible to see where assimilation models can overlap or reinforce each other in explaining the patterns observed in a community that is as diverse as the Indian American community. Additionally, the frameworks provided by current assimilation models allow for a more thorough examination later of where political participation intersects with the models to provide a more comprehensive picture of the assimilation process for all immigrants, and specifically, Indian Americans.

Chapter 3 considers existing models of political participation to examine the factors that ultimately affect Indian American participation. Though current models are generally designed to explain mainstream political involvement, there are several aspects of the models that can be extrapolated to explain immigrant and Indian American engagement. However, close scrutiny of the models also reveals that they are remiss in considering race and ethnicity as significant predictors of participation. This oversight to some extent explains their inability to fully account for the patterns observed among Indian Americans. It also reveals that because ethnic background can significantly affect political participation, civic engagement is one area in which immigrants have yet to fully assimilate or resemble their mainstream counterparts. This has implications for the relationship between assimilation and political participation that is more closely considered in the next chapter.

Finally, Chapter 4 synthesizes the information presented in Chapters 2 and 3 to evaluate where political participation can fit into current assimilation models, if at all. Here I argue that political involvement is an ultimate step in the assimilation process if
and when assimilation occurs because political participation is an essential part of the American experience. However, it is a stage that many immigrants often do not reach. The personal observations of the Indian Americans surveyed indicate that while they may feel assimilated in a number of ways, the political process is an area in which they do not always feel welcome or represented. This demonstrates that although a full revamping of current assimilation models is unnecessary, it would seem that they would need to be adjusted to include political participation as a final stage in the assimilation process.

**Methodology and Data**

The data used in the analyses will primarily be taken from existing literature on the subjects of immigration, assimilation, and political participation. These data will be supplemented as appropriate with information and insights provided by a sample of 25 Indian Americans who agreed to share their experiences with me on the topics covered by this thesis. The respondents were presented with a set of questions pertaining to their general background information, their experiences adapting to American life, and their perspectives on the American political system. Responses to the questions were either submitted over email or given in phone or in-person interviews. The participants included 14 males and 11 females between the ages of 21 and 71. They represent the first, second, and 1.5 generations (those who were born abroad but

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4 To see the full questionnaire presented to all participants, see Appendix A.

5 To see a summary of salient findings, see Appendix B.
moved to the United States before the age of 10 are classified as second generation, while those who arrived between the ages of 10 and 18 are considered the 1.5 generation).

While all attempts were made to contact participants with as diverse a range as possible of ages, socioeconomic backgrounds, political persuasions, regional and religious backgrounds, and levels of involvement, it should be noted that the sample was largely homogeneous along the lines of education, income, occupation, residential integration, English proficiency, and levels of political awareness. All respondents had completed or were in the process of completing a Bachelor’s level degree, and 19 held graduate level degrees. Additionally, 21 of the 25 respondents reported household incomes of over $50,000, with 14 reporting household incomes of $150,000 or more. All respondents were either students or employees in white collar professions. None reported living in areas with high Indian American concentrations; most live in mixed or largely white neighborhoods. English proficiency was necessary for participants to be eligible for this study at all, so all respondents demonstrated English fluency. Finally, all stated having at least conversational knowledge of American politics, and everyone with American citizenship reported voting in at least one (but often more) election.

Despite the similarities, however, many respondents offered a variety of perspectives on the subjects of political participation and assimilation. With a range of unique personal and social experiences, each participant’s observations and views
cannot always be contextualized in the same way. For example, although all stated being at least somewhat familiar with the American political system, some indicated deeper involvement in the political process. Several contributed in some capacity to political campaigns, while one held an office at the local level and served at the national level as well. In this way, though the comments and opinions of the participants cannot be taken to be representative of the entire Indian American population, there is some diversity in viewpoints that enhances the discussion on assimilation and political participation.

As will be shown by the Indian American experience, political activity is not necessarily less significant to immigrants than it is to mainstream Americans. Still, many immigrants are participating in the political process less than their mainstream counterparts. Because the integration of immigrants into the political process is increasingly overlooked as equality is achieved in other areas, there is a danger that it may continue to be ignored as a significant factor in their adaptation into American life. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, it may signify a continuation of political policies and networks that freeze out or appear to freeze out immigrants. It is the perceived inaccessibility of politics, then, that may best be corrected with the active incorporation of immigrant groups and the encouragement of political assimilation.
CHAPTER 1: INDIAN IMMIGRANTS IN THE UNITED STATES

Introduction

Marked by two distinct phases, Indian immigration to the United States has been shaped by a wide range of circumstances, each uniquely affecting Indian adaptation to American life. Ostensibly, the Indian immigrants of the early twentieth century and those entering the United States after 1965 have little in common beyond their ethnic identity and a shared colonial legacy. Differing in education levels and socioeconomic backgrounds and facing vastly different receiving conditions in the United States, the immigrants of the two phases have endured few of the same experiences after migration. However, despite the disparities, certain patterns of behavior become apparent in both periods as do enduring sets of values that both complicate and help explain the ways in which Indians have engaged with their greater American communities. Both groups came to the United States searching for better opportunities and have struggled to balance two vastly different cultures in their everyday lives. To understand the political behavior and acculturation patterns of Indians who migrated after 1965, it is imperative to understand how immigrant legislation, American tolerance of immigrants, and socialization in the home countries can produce radically different barriers and opportunities over time.

Early Indian Immigrants

At the turn of the twentieth century, the United States faced a dramatic influx of immigrants from across the world and from cultures with which it had little
experience up until that time. As immigrants from southern and eastern Europe were establishing themselves in New York City and various metropolitan areas throughout the United States, Indian immigrants were joining other Asian immigrants in rural areas along the West Coast. Though a handful of Indians settled in the United States in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they did not begin arriving in noticeable numbers until the early twentieth century. Compared to other Asian groups, like the Chinese, whose population in the United States already exceeded 100,000 by 1880, the Indians were comparatively small in number (Cao and Novas 1996, 31-32). By 1920, fewer than 10,000 Indians entered the United States, with approximately seventy percent or more concentrated in California (Jensen 1988, x; Leonard 1997, 70). In spite of their size, however, they were able to assert themselves in American society in a number of ways and often elicited strong reactions from the receiving public.

The majority of these Indian immigrants were men from the Punjab region of India with agricultural and farming backgrounds. Most were followers of the Sikh faith, while many others were Muslim. They generally left Punjab to escape famine, poverty, and a rapidly growing population. With jobs overseas, these Indians felt that they would be able to provide for their families in Punjab and alleviate the problems surrounding the land fragmentation that was distressing the area (Jensen 1988, 24-25; Leonard 1997, 43-44). The cultural, religious, and lifestyle habits accompanying the Indians often produced tension between the immigrants and the general American population. Deemed unsanitary, illiterate, and insolent, among many other things, the
Indians were often isolated from the greater public. They were erroneously labeled “Hindu,” though few actually identified as such, and were largely unable to overcome this and other misconceptions during their residence in the United States (Leonard 1997, 42).

Compounding the misunderstandings was the fact that occupationally, Indians in the United States were perceived as competition for the native population. Like the Chinese and Japanese immigrants before them, Indians supplied cheap labor for industries that needed larger supplies of workers. When Indians began migrating in larger numbers to North America, most went first to the Pacific Coast and settled in British Columbia and parts of Washington. There, they were hired to work in lumber mills and provided employers alternatives to the unionized workers of European descent. As Asians were generally excluded from unions, they were able to work longer hours for lower wages and committed to their positions for longer periods of time (Jensen 1988, 28). While this made them more appealing to employers, other laborers resented the threat they posed and sought to undermine their value as employees. Following the Bellingham riot of 1907 in Bellingham, Washington, wherein several Indian immigrants were attacked by rioters and driven out of the town, the Indian presence in North America was impossible to ignore (Jensen 1988, 46-47).

Because of discrimination in the Pacific Northwest and increasing exclusionary sentiment in Canada, many Indians migrated south to California and established their greatest numbers there during this early immigration period. Between 1907 and 1909,
Indians mainly worked on construction projects, which largely consisted of railroad work. They labored alongside immigrants from other parts of the world with whom they frequently forged genial relations. However, railroad work became scarce by 1910, and Indians began turning to opportunities in agriculture. With improved railroad networks, the market for agricultural products expanded and agricultural activity could flourish in California. For the Indians who had farming experience in Punjab, this had the potential to become lucrative. As agricultural work expanded, wages became more competitive, and Indians, along with Japanese immigrants actively sought to fill positions in the fields (Jensen 1988, 30, 32). Rather than allowing these groups to work together, Indians were further isolated from the white mainstream as well as other immigrants. To prevent labor organizing, growers would set one group against the others by offering Indians lower wages than the Japanese (Cao and Novas 1996, 289). Such practices ultimately encouraged Indians to save or borrow enough money to leave day labor and turn to tenant farming, or for some, buying land (Jensen 1988, 37).

As more Indians became tenant farmers and landowners, they began to settle in communities throughout California with other Indians. This de facto separation sometimes proved beneficial as they were temporarily insulated from discriminatory behavior by those who feared that miscegenation could result from excessive interaction with other races (Jensen 1988, 40). Additionally, as growers were anti-union, Indians did not have to fear accusations of unfair competition (Jensen 1988,
The development of these communities allowed Indian immigrants to practice their traditions with little interference for some time. For example, they established Sikh temples and groups designed to focus on issues relevant to their lives. These centers attracted Indians of all backgrounds and any caste or religious differences that were prevalent in India were often ignored in the United States. Indian students studying at universities on the West Coast would also sometimes spend their summers in these areas, helping with field work or translations (Jensen 1988, 41). However, even such unity could scarcely surmount the increasing hostility towards immigrants, and Indians struggled to obtain equal rights and acceptance.

While these early Indians were subject to the same general discrimination that other immigrant groups faced, the political preferences and activities of Indian laborers and students seemed to encourage a more targeted antagonism towards them. Though these activities often brought together Indians of various backgrounds and experiences, they also served to distance Indians from the American society around them. One strain of activity involved supporting Indians in the United States who had experienced prejudice or had been wronged in some way. The two most prominent groups dedicated to this on the West Coast were the Pacific Coast Khalsa Diwan and the Hindustan Association. In addition to organizing on behalf of Indian immigrants in the United States, the Khalsa Diwan participated in a second strain of political activity which involved supporting various causes in India itself. Most of the immigrants had left colonial India with the hope of seeing it gain independence from the British. Even
upon arrival in the United States, several became active in promoting the cause from their new home. American socialist and anarchist sympathizers would also aid the cause when possible (Jensen 1988, 179-181).

Taraknath Das and Har Dayal, two Indians who had each come to the United States as students, separately became prominent figures in the community and advocated India’s independence (Jensen 1988, 164). Dayal was able to mobilize enough Indians to form the Ghadar Party whose main goal was to foster political awareness about the situation in India. While the Ghadar Party was generally ineffective in organizing or achieving any major victories for its cause, it was able to unify Indians through a feeling of nationalism. Fearing the promotion of anarchy and nursing an underlying desire to maintain healthy relations with the British, American immigration officials began monitoring Dayal to find any proof of revolutionary agitation that could justify deporting him. Though they were ultimately unsuccessful in proving his guilt, American exclusionists were able to continue targeting Indian political activists as undesirable residents and using them as examples for the rest of the community (Jensen 1988, 186-187, 189).

Groups like the Asiatic Exclusion League (AEL) were also instrumental in campaigning against Indian immigrants. Composed of members with ties to organized labor and its supporters, the AEL often had the ears of political figures hesitant to alienate workers whose votes were significant for their campaigns. The AEL wanted to stop immigration from Asia and deny Asians already in the United States citizenship
and other rights (Jensen 1988, 44). By the early twentieth century, naturalization gave immigrants the right to vote (Bedolla 2006, 53). Symbolically, voting and naturalization would legitimize their presence in the United States and allow them to engage in new ways with the greater society. At this time, however, laws governing citizenship were unclear about nonwhite immigrants. This left many states unsure about the handling of Asian immigrants. Though Chinese immigrants were explicitly denied the right of naturalization in 1882, several states granted citizenship rights to Japanese and Indian immigrants. As the Asian presence became more prominent in the United States, the naturalization bureau began imposing stricter regulations and started withholding citizenship from non-white immigrants (Jensen 1988, 247).

While England and America had an understanding that citizens of one country could naturalize in the other, the case of Indians, who were British colonial subjects, was uncertain. When court clerks began excluding Indians because they did not appear to be white, Indians began to appeal the decisions on the basis that racially, they were actually Aryan and therefore Caucasian and could qualify as whites. This led to an uneven distribution of citizenship rights among Indians. Two Sikhs were denied citizenship in 1906 in a California court, while between 1908 and 1922, at least sixty-nine Indians around the country, including California, were naturalized on the reasoning that “white” was equivalent to “Caucasian” (Jensen 1988, 248). It was not until 1923 in the *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* decision that the United States Supreme Court formally rejected the equation of the two terms and limited citizenship
to those who were white in the conventional understanding of “white.” Following this resolution, exclusionists rallied to retract any contracts permitting Indians to own or lease land and even began retroactively denaturalizing Indians who had legitimately acquired citizenship. Some even attempted to denaturalize American-born spouses of Indians on the grounds that their husbands were ineligible for citizenship. The decision to stop denaturalization only occurred in 1927 after sixty-five Indians had already lost citizenship rights. Coupled with the Immigration Act of 1917, which effectively created a “barred zone” and ended Indian and most immigration from Asia, the Thind decision left Indians in America even more powerless against the injustices they encountered (Jensen 1988, 258-263, 142).

With few Indian women in the United States and the barring of further Indian immigration in 1917, Indians who had decided against returning to India often faced difficulties establishing families and continuing their traditions. Though some were able to circumvent anti-miscegenation laws and marry white American-born women, most of the Indians in California who decided to marry chose Mexican brides. The Punjabi-Mexican or “Mexican-Hindu” communities that formed as a result generally centered on agricultural businesses that more successful Indians were able to secure. Many of the traditional Indian customs began to fade out with younger generations, but without these families, the history and memories of this group may have been lost altogether (Leonard 1997, 53-59).
Unlike the Japanese or other immigrants with governments willing to protect their interests, early Indians had only a nonresponsive British colonial government that had the potential to intervene on their behalf. As immigration became a matter of both foreign and domestic policy, neither the United States nor England wanted to jeopardize precarious balances of power by responding to Indian complaints (Jensen 1988, 83). Banned from organizing with other immigrants in labor unions, Indians were essentially left to defend their own interests using limited resources. Despite their best efforts, after the 1924 immigration law effectively reaffirmed Asian exclusion, they were unable to experience any gains for several years. It was not until 1946 that Congress allowed naturalization for Indians and Filipinos as well as a small immigration quota for both in the Luce-Celler Bill (Jensen 1988, 279; Leonard 1997, 67). The McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 further eased restrictions by allowing all races to naturalize, establishing national origins quotas, and permitting family reunification. It was finally in 1965, with the passage of the Hart-Celler Act, which abandoned the national origins quota system and gave preference on the basis of professional qualifications, that Indians began a new type of life in the United States (Alba and Nee 2003, 172-174)

**Post-1965 Indian Immigrants**

In the time between 1924 and 1965, Indians experienced some significant victories. In 1947, India had achieved independence from the British, which meant that immigrants coming to the United States after that would have a government that would
ensure that Indian immigrants received the same rights and liberties that other immigrants could procure. Additionally, the first Asian American was elected to the United States House of Representatives in 1956. Dalip Singh Saund was an Indian who had come to the United States, settled in California as a farmer, and was later elected twice to Congress (Jensen 1988, 280). Though another Indian American would not be elected to Congress again until 2004, his election signified the enormous potential for Indian American political involvement.

The civil rights movement of the 1960s further paved the way for a new era of immigration. Amidst increasing racial equality and acceptance, discriminatory immigration laws required serious reevaluation. As diversity and equality came to be identified as iconic of the United States, Americans began abandoning their old preferences for homogeneity (Alba and Nee 2003, 174). Rather than regarding immigrants as threatening to traditional American values, American society slowly began absorbing new customs into its own culture. For Asian immigrants, who represented both racial and ethnic minorities, the civil rights movement signaled the hope for greater tolerance in their new homes. No longer barred from citizenship on racial grounds, the new immigrants were confronted with the possibility of engaging in different ways with the American mainstream. In conjunction with their stores of human and cultural capital, the civil rights movement helped empower Asians to assert themselves into American society.

Indians, like other Asian groups coming to the United States in this new era,
began taking advantage of the occupational preferences of the Hart-Celler Act in a trend that largely continues to this day. This provision allowed Indians to migrate to the United States en masse because of their “preferred” occupational skills and educational levels. Though both groups of Indian immigrants migrated searching for new opportunities, the composition of Indian immigration to the United States has dramatically shifted away from the single Punjabi Sikh day laborers of the early twentieth century. Unlike the first wave of Indians, the new phase has seen a high percentage of Indians already fluent in English and specially trained in fields like medicine and engineering. The demand for professionals in a changing American economy made Indians an attractive asset and ensured a more positive reception in the United States than their forebearers had received. The “brain drain” that has ensued has spawned the stereotype of Indians as a “model minority,” though it has also negated some of the stereotypes of Indian immigrants from the early twentieth century (Leonard 1997, 68). In contrast to the early immigrants who came to the United States with few alternatives, the new Indian immigrants have had an unprecedented number of prospects.

The new generation of Indians has also differed from the older generation in that it represents several regions throughout India, not just Punjab, with immigrants who are primarily Hindu and Muslim, rather than Sikh. They frequently migrate with spouses or families rather than as single laborers and pursue a variety of career options, the most popular of which include positions in the fields of medicine,
technology, engineering, and other sciences. Though a sizeable number have settled in California like their predecessors, they are now concentrated in urban areas like Los Angeles, San Jose, and San Francisco. Additionally, the dispersion throughout the United States has been much greater since 1965, with New York, Texas, Illinois, and New Jersey, among others, developing substantial Indian constituencies (Leonard 1997, 70). As of 2007, it has been estimated that there are over 2.4 million Indian Americans (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2005-2007 American Community Survey). Various factors have served to unify the Indian American community in each area of settlement. Religious centers like Hindu and Sikh temples or Islamic mosques have often served as community centers as well and have become havens for Indians from all across India. Additionally, a growing number of political organizations are adopting causes pertinent to Indian Americans and increasing the visibility of the community as a whole on a national scale. They join the ranks of the Association of Indians in America (AIA) and the National Association of Americans of Asian Indian Descent (NAAAD) who successfully lobbied to add an “Asian Indian” category to the 1980 census (Leonard 1997, 89).

For the most part, this new generation can be characterized as one for which avenues of success have reached a new level of accessibility. Given their comparatively high levels of education and professional training, the new Indian immigrants are generally successful socioeconomically and have one of the highest median household incomes of any immigrant group. As Figure 1.1 demonstrates, the
median income of Indian Americans is significantly higher than that of Americans as a whole as well as that of Asian Americans as a group. Greater financial stability has allowed a number of Indian Americans to settle in upper-middle class white or mixed neighborhoods, which has facilitated their transition to American life (Alba and Nee 2003, 48). Additionally, with such levels of financial capital, they are poised to access resources, like college educations, that help ensure success for future generations.

**Figure 1.1: Median Household Income by Group**

![Median Household Income Chart]

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000

Education is another factor that distinguishes newer immigrants from those at the turn of the early twentieth century. Figure 1.2 shows that as of 2000, over sixty percent of Indian Americans over the age of twenty-five had obtained a Bachelor’s degree or higher. This is over twice as high as the percentage of the total American population and nearly one-and-a-half times that of the Asian American population with
Like financial capital, education does not guarantee success, but it increases the potential for access to information and resources that would be unavailable otherwise. It also increases the value of the immigrants’ human capital, which in turn can mitigate the effects of racial and cultural differences.

Figure 1.2: Percent of Group 25 Years and Older with Bachelor’s Degree or Higher

![Bar chart showing percent of group 25 years and older with bachelor's degree or higher.](chart.png)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000

While these new Indian immigrants have often come to be identified with their educational and professional achievements, there is a growing subset of Indians who have not been so privileged. Many of these individuals have entered the United States through the family reunification provisions of immigration legislation and do not necessarily share the same educational qualifications as their relations. This in part accounts for the growing number of Indians pursuing small business ventures or self-employment. Many of these business opportunities are part of ethnic economies like
Edison, New Jersey, Jackson Heights, Queens, or Artesia, California, where “ethnic resources” can be maximized and ethnic networks can provide support for immigrants less predisposed to socioeconomic success (Leonard 1997, 83). Other Indians have become involved in fields like the motel business or cab driving, both of which employ substantial numbers of Indian Americans (Leonard 1997, 83). In spite of these avenues, however, many Indian immigrants and their families remain unemployed or live in poverty. As of 2000, about 9.4 percent of the Indians in the country lived below the poverty level, almost comparable to the 12.4 percent who lived below the poverty level nationally (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000). The plight of these individuals and families is a growing reality that tends to be underrepresented in mainstream discussions of the Indian American community.

Other barriers to incorporation have also surfaced and exist regardless of wealth or education. Like the Indians of the early twentieth century, the new immigrants must also respond to fears of economic competition from other Americans worried about losing jobs to outsourcing or foreign business. General anti-immigrant sentiment and targeted hate crimes like the assaults on Sikhs following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks are sobering reminders that Indians have yet to achieve complete parity with whites. Although transition to American life has generally been smooth for Indian Americans, there are a number of concerns affecting the community that require political recourse and consideration as an independent minority with unique concerns produced by its unique trajectory. For many, it is only after
addressing issues specific to the ethnic community that they can feel fully engaged with the larger American society.

**Conclusion**

Understanding the social and political circumstances affecting each group of Indian immigrants places their similarities and differences in historical context and can help explain changes over time. The Indians in both phases came to the United States seeking better opportunities; the realization of their aspirations has varied depending on the receiving attitudes and policies of the Americans. Each group had to respond to an America that was rapidly evolving, though in different ways at each time. In each era, Indians witnessed and contributed to its progress while simultaneously experiencing its greatest shortcomings.

Increased dispersion and a population with one of the highest annual growth rates means that no single narrative can fully communicate the diversity or history of the Indian American community. Still, there is little doubt that Indian Americans are developing greater pull as their successes continue from the first to the second generations and beyond. As clearly demonstrated by both sets of Indian immigrants, Indians have the capacity to mobilize and act when a cause is significant enough to them. While the injustices suffered by new immigrants seem to be few and far between when compared to those that the early immigrants faced, there are numerous issues that can and often do stir the passions of the newer generation. The continuing significance of race seems especially crucial in informing the reactions of Indian
Americans to the policies and politics that affect them the most profoundly. With increased opportunities to voice their concerns and become involved in the political process, the new generation of Indian Americans can utilize their resources to bridge cultural divisions and prevent repetitions of the past.
CHAPTER 2: IMMIGRANT ASSIMILATION

Introduction

The act of resituating from one country to another is both a personal and social process. It often involves the fracturing of certain old bonds and traditions and the acquisition of new ones. Confronting the lifestyles that accompany two (or more) often very different cultures almost always results in compromising facets of the inherited culture in favor of those of the receiving culture. Migration also inevitably requires some level of integration into the social institutions and structures of the new country. However, even adopting the practices of one’s new home does not ensure that one will personally identify with that culture nor does it secure one’s acceptance by native members of that society. Immigrants are frequently subject to nostalgia for their home country as well as prejudice and exclusion from segments of the receiving country. They are often categorized, labeled, and assigned an “otherness” that places them on the peripheries of the mainstream. Though the mainstream is by no means a monolithic or cohesive entity, there are common languages, practices, and institutions that can separate the foreign from the native-born. It is this core culture that immigrants must somehow accommodate in their own lives to be considered incorporated into the general society.

The barriers to integration into mainstream culture naturally vary across immigrant groups and individuals, with some facing few, if any, problems in adapting to a new life and others unable or unwilling to connect with their new environment.
Thus, immigrants to the United States contend with a range of factors that can either facilitate full-scale assimilation into the mainstream, complete marginalization, or some partial adaptation to American life. While none of the three courses of action is necessary, inevitable, or preferable to another, each has been observed with varying frequency in different immigrant groups. Complete isolation from the American mainstream is rare, while complete absorption commonly occurs among immigrant groups who most closely resemble the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant majority of the United States physically and culturally. For groups with marked physical and racial differences, some level of cultural adaptation is evident, though the degree to which this is true most substantially depends on the unique circumstances surrounding each group’s migration.

As Indian Americans fall into this latter category, the assimilation models that provide the most pertinent explanations of their adaptation to American life will account for how they assimilate (if and when they do), what barriers they may encounter, and how ethnic ties can support or hinder assimilation. Testimony from survey respondents interviewed specifically for this study will supplement existing accounts of Indian American assimilation into American life to analyze the reach of these models and their relative strengths and weaknesses. As will be seen, no one model or set of factors pertains to all members of the Indian American community, which makes their assimilation a complex, multifaceted process.
What is Assimilation?

Before considering the factors that affect an immigrant’s incorporation into American society, it is useful to understand what assimilation does and does not entail. Essentially, assimilation is the process by which “Individuals’ ethnic origins become less and less relevant in relation to the members of another ethnic group (typically, but not necessarily the ethnic majority group), and individuals on both sides of the boundary see themselves more and more as alike” (Alba and Nee 2003, 11). This does not mean that ethnic ties or traditions must be lost altogether; rather, similarities and common interests between ethnic groups come to replace ethnic differences in terms of salience during interethnic interaction, even if immigrants maintain ethnic ties. This can take place within one generation or across several, and on the individual and group level. Although a great deal of disagreement and controversy has surrounded the idea of “assimilation,” there is enough evidence to suggest that among most immigrant groups, some level of intentional and unintentional integration into the American mainstream has taken place. Assimilation is no longer synonymous with “Americanization,” or the idea that immigrants must conform to an American ideal and pledge full loyalty to the United States with “willing submissiveness” (Higham 1994, 237). Instead, it is understood as a complex and usually non-linear process that occurs in stages, with some individuals and groups reaching more advanced stages in the process than others.
Assimilation is also not necessarily fundamentally incompatible with cultural pluralism, which “offers legitimization of the preservation of sub-national communal life and some cultural differences for the nation's various ethnic groups, and justifies the result as providing a more democratic, more interesting, and more dynamically fruitful culture for all Americans than one in which uniformity was the norm” (Gordon 1964, 13). In other words, assimilation is not simply a blanket rejection of previously held cultural beliefs and loyalties; ethnic identifiers and customs can flourish alongside newly acquired American traditions. As will be seen in greater detail in the discussion on assimilation models below, most immigrants have adopted some distinctly American habits and values, but retain many of the customs, beliefs, and practices of their ethnic background. Although they may still be distinctive and perceived as foreign, their incorporation would be impossible without some level of acceptance of their presence by the American mainstream.

Assimilation, as noted above, is a multidimensional process. Full assimilation essentially entails an immigrant group having “[at] most, a formalistic or limited group memory,” but otherwise being “largely blended or melded into the larger society culturally, socially, institutionally, and identificationally” (Barkan 1995, 58). These individuals are “no longer regarded or perceived as distinctive by members of the dominant or general society” (Barkan 1995, 58). However, this level of integration is generally seen as the final stage that is only rarely reached by the first generation and is most often associated with native-born generations of immigrant offspring. Between
initial contact with the receiving country and full-scale assimilation, immigrants have a number of experiences that affect their sense of belonging and acceptance in a new country. Their occupations, neighborhoods, education, mobility, and language proficiency, among other factors, all determine immigrant interaction with the mainstream and the way immigrants subsequently adjust to the core culture.

While ultimately assimilation must occur on an individual level with immigrants responding to the distinct social and psychological conditions of their arrival, certain trends are visible among immigrant groups as a whole as well. More established immigrant groups with several generations of history in the United States are more likely to be viewed as fully or almost fully assimilated by themselves and the mainstream. Newer immigrant groups are often more likely to reach full assimilation more slowly and much later than older immigrant groups, if they are to reach it at all. Additionally, for an entire immigrant group to even reach this stage, a “durable ethnic [community]” would have to be virtually nonexistent, which is unlikely given the constant influx of new immigrants of diverse ethnic backgrounds (Barkan 1995, 64). Regardless of the persistent cultural pluralism of the United States, however, with time many immigrant groups come to be slowly dissociated from the alien and are categorically immersed in mainstream life.

Assimilation Models

Although assimilation is contingent on a number of factors, not all of them measurable, there are some indicators that can be used to gauge an immigrant’s
integration into the mainstream. In addition to an immigrant’s own desires or incentives to assimilate, certain societal factors can facilitate identification with the mainstream. The three assimilation models considered here each highlight the complexity of the assimilation process. The updated assimilation model understands assimilation to a core culture as common in most immigrant communities and explains the means by which immigrants assimilate. The multicultural perspective is rooted in the cultural pluralist tradition and states that the mainstream is not composed of a single “core” and rather, is defined by its diversity, often shaped by the immigrants themselves. Proponents of segmented assimilation feel that the mainstream culture is fragmented along socioeconomic lines so that several subcultures shaped by socioeconomic standing co-exist and it is possible for immigrants to be incorporated into any one of these as they adjust to life in the United States. Though there are significant differences between them, taken together, they offer a fairly inclusive explanation of the assimilation process.

**Updated Assimilation Model**

Classical assimilation theory has asserted that assimilation to a core culture has historically occurred in most immigrant communities and is likely to continue with future immigrant groups (Zhou 1997, 980). Cultural assimilation, or acculturation, and structural assimilation have traditionally been used to categorize the behaviors and actions most commonly associated with immigrant integration. While several other dimensions of assimilation have been proposed, cultural and structural assimilation are
the primary stages of assimilation observed among newer immigrant groups and typically occur first chronologically. Acculturation can refer to the adoption of the behaviors and culture of the mainstream on the part of immigrants as well as the integration of immigrant cultures and behaviors into the mainstream culture. It can occur in the absence of extensive interaction with the mainstream culture and without abandoning or replacing the ethnic traditions (Gordon 1964, 61-62; Alba and Nee 2003, 23-25). For some immigrants, assimilation may not progress beyond acculturation, but for others, structural assimilation may describe their relationship with the mainstream culture more accurately. This entails entering into “primary group relationships” with members of the mainstream culture by way of joining mainstream groups and institutions (Gordon 1964, 70). Though there are no definite boundaries between categories of assimilation, deeper structural integration often correlates with stronger feelings of assimilation than acculturation alone.

The updated assimilation model essentially extrapolates from the classical structural assimilation theory by explaining specifically how it is manifested in immigrant communities. The actual mechanisms of assimilation, if and when it occurs, are affected by purposive action on the part of the individual immigrant as well as the “institutional structures, cultural beliefs, and social networks that shape [purposive action]” (Alba and Nee 2003, 14). Purposive actions are calculated actions taken by immigrants that factor in their interests and incentives. Immigrants are most likely to follow those courses of action that appear rational and optimize their chances for
success. While assimilation may not be an end goal in and of itself, decisions to pursue opportunities for success often lead to some form of assimilation, even if as an unintended consequence. For example, immigrants may choose to live in areas with better schools, which increases their children’s chances for educational and later, socioeconomic success. Both educational and socioeconomic success can reflect assimilation, though the immediate goal may have simply been higher education (Alba and Nee 2003, 39-42).

While assimilation is ultimately affected by the decisions immigrants make and their perceptions of the mainstream, certain societal factors can make their choices more predictable (Alba and Nee 2003, 278). Purposive action itself is partially shaped by network mechanisms within social networks designed to reinforce or discourage actions by immigrants, depending on their effects on the immigrant group as a whole. These social networks are usually composed of co-ethnics who seek benefits for the entire immigrant group and therefore monitor the actions of others within the group to encourage behavior conducive to success and deter any disadvantageous behavior. These network connections allow for collective action, which is especially useful when “discriminatory barriers block an individualistic pattern of social mobility” (Alba and Nee 2003, 45). Additionally, the social ties established in these networks are a form of social capital, which can allow new immigrants access to job opportunities and can give more established immigrants “competitive advantages in markets” (Alba and Nee 2003, 43). In conjunction with the human and financial capital that immigrants have
accumulated before migration, social capital resulting from network mechanisms structure the incentives and disincentives for integration.

The levels of human and financial capital that immigrants have are instrumental in shaping the assimilation process. Human capital immigrants are those who generally have higher educational levels and are professionals, managers, and technicians, as well as skilled workers. The higher level occupational positions generally allow immigrants to enter a new country at the middle class level or higher and increase their chances of mobility. Additionally, financial capital is also an asset for mobility and residential assimilation, especially since it is transferrable to later generations (Alba and Nee 2003, 46-50). The advantage of formulating assimilation in terms of forms of capital is that it frames assimilation as a function of resources; as will be shown in Chapter 3, this parallels the way that the Civic Voluntarism Model of political participation realizes that participation is often contingent on factors external to race or ethnicity. In this way, this forms of capital model can explain why some immigrants are upwardly mobile while others experience little change in their socioeconomic situations or have downward mobility throughout multiple generations.

Finally, a macro-level perspective of assimilation reveals that the micro-level, “proximate mechanisms” of assimilation—that is, purposive action, network mechanisms, and forms of capital—are shaped in large part by institutional mechanisms (Alba and Nee 2003, 50). These include social and legal sanctions incentivizing the integration and reception of immigrants in mainstream culture. If the
mainstream culture recognizes the benefits of immigration or if the costs of discrimination are high, for example, there is incentive to accommodate new cultures and ethnicities in the mainstream. Likewise, immigrants may be less inclined to rely on ethnic networks for support and may more readily assimilate into the core culture. On the other hand, if immigrants are viewed as threatening in any way or are excluded from mainstream activity, then their assimilation is more likely to be stunted, and network mechanisms would act to keep immigrants isolated from interethnic contact (Alba and Nee 2003, 51-53).

Because the updated assimilation model was developed under the premise that assimilation is by and large an eventuality for most immigrant groups that improves their standing in the eyes of the mainstream, even if it occurs at varying rates for each group, its primary focus is on the explanation of upward mobility. Though this model is clearly applicable to numerous immigrant communities, two other models move to fill in the gaps it leaves in accounting for groups that have not demonstrated a movement towards full incorporation. While the updated assimilation model does not fully explain why certain immigrant groups are more marginalized than others, it is a useful elaboration of structural assimilation modes and the contextual factors that directly influence assimilation.

**Multicultural Model**

The multicultural model offers an alternative to assimilation to the mainstream culture. Rather, it predicts that with increasing transnationalism and opportunities in
ethnic economies, the core culture will consist of many new ethnic traditions in
addition to the conventional practices already associated with the mainstream. By
living in an ethnic community or interacting frequently with individuals or institutions
in the home country, immigrants’ ethnicities remain significant in the course of their
everyday experiences. Furthermore, the retention of ethnic ties does not signal “the
loss of the advantages once afforded almost exclusively by the mainstream” (Alba and
Nee 2003, 6). Instead, immigrants can have the same opportunities outside of the
mainstream culture since avenues for success no longer preclude strong ethnic ties.
While traditions from the home country may evolve as immigrants adapt to new
environments, the ethnic connection is largely preserved because of the dynamism of
the mainstream-immigrant relationship. Each responds to the other so that assimilation
entails more than the immigrant being integrated into an existing, static culture (Zhou

This model is useful for its observation that a multiplicity of ethnicities
constitutes the mainstream and that assimilation can entail the evolution of the
mainstream culture to encompass ethnic values and traditions as much as it entails the
adaptive behavior of immigrants themselves. However, it does not explain the adaptive
patterns observed across generations in a number of immigrant communities; many
members of the second generation and beyond face pressure to acculturate to the
traditional conception of the mainstream while others simply have weaker ethnic ties
than the previous generation (Zhou 1997, 98). Though this model highlights the
rising importance of transnational and ethnic ties, it does not explain many of the current patterns actually observed in immigrant communities. Its application may prove more relevant in the future when white ethnics no longer constitute a majority of the mainstream and transnational contact is even more accessible than it is now.

**Segmented Assimilation Model**

The final model of assimilation attempts to explain why certain groups may face downward mobility or little mobility in either direction even after several generations. The segmented assimilation model counters the idea that assimilation generally entails upward mobility and the adoption of middle-class norms. Citing communities in which immigrants have increasingly strengthened ethnic bonds in response to downward mobility and isolation from the mainstream, proponents of the segmented assimilation model explain that not all integration occurs into an all-encompassing mainstream. The model specifies the individual-level and contextual factors that can affect assimilation at any level and is best illustrated by way of example. According to this perspective, neither individual-level factors nor contextual factors alone account for fragmentary assimilation. It is how they affect each other that ultimately determines how integration will transpire.

The individual level factors that are most significant are education, aspiration, English proficiency, place of birth, age at migration, and length of time spent living in the United States. Contextual factors include racial status, socioeconomic status of the family, and place of residence (Zhou 1997, 984). Together, these factors can explain or
predict mobility and assimilation at any level. Some immigrant communities with 
limited socioeconomic resources may still experience upward mobility if factors like 
education and achievement are valued in the family and ethnic community. This 
trajectory has the potential to lead to conventional assimilation into the mainstream, 
even if it occurs across generations.

One example of race, socioeconomic status, and place of residence negatively 
affecting education and aspiration can be witnessed in inner-cities. Often, these areas 
include marginalized racial minorities like Latinos who have experienced 
discrimination and some level of socioeconomic entrenchment. Individuals in these 
groups may often choose to reject mainstream values in response to the oppression 
they have experienced and instead integrate into the subculture of the inner-city. They 
view educational attainment and the adoption of mainstream culture as ineffective in 
influencing mobility and even more marginalizing as these factors are incompatible 
with the values of the ethnic or inner-city subculture. In this way, certain immigrant 
groups are being integrated into another culture, though it is not what would generally 
be characterized as the core or mainstream culture (Zhou 1997, 989-990).

The segmented assimilation model expands the updated assimilation model to 
better explain the differing assimilation trajectories of all immigrant groups. It 
provides a comprehensive account of the psychological and structural factors that 
affect immigrant groups and details the combinations of factors that in turn affect their 
amination. It complements the assimilation model’s focus on forms of capital and
institutional mechanisms with additional considerations at the individual and societal levels, which makes it a more inclusive model of incorporation. Its only weakness may be its oversight of pluralism and the communities in which immigrants have not fully acculturated to the mainstream but have found equal opportunities for success elsewhere.

**Self-Identification**

Before understanding how the above models explain assimilation in the Indian American community, it is important to note that one final measure of feelings of assimilation is the way in which first and second generation immigrants self-identify. Though the labels that immigrants may associate with are often symbolic or reductive and cannot account for the totality of one’s identity, it is often instructive to understand how ethnic and non-ethnic identifiers symbolize a greater feeling of incorporation or separation from the core culture. The juxtaposition of various cultures almost invariably leads to a heightened awareness of contrast and difference, but can also emphasize similarities. It can lead to an outsider-insider dichotomy or a more universalized identity. Generally, the greater the feelings of difference between the immigrant and the mainstream, the greater the likelihood that the individual will identify in ethnic-specific terms, while those who perceive fewer differences will place less emphasis on ethnicity (Rumbaut 1994, 754).

The numerous factors affecting self-identification will not be considered in depth here. However, it should be noted that many of these directly or indirectly affect
assimilation as well. For this reason, the ethnic and national labels with which individuals describe themselves will be treated as a rough gauge of psychological attachment to the mainstream culture. Three caveats should be mentioned, however, to fully understand the significance of ethnic signifiers in and of themselves. The first is that the racial and ethnic categories with which immigrants are identified are ascriptive categories, frequently used as convenient designations for the mainstream public, but often neglecting distinctions that may have been salient in the home country. These labels often conflate race and ethnicity arbitrarily, mainly for bureaucratic purposes and often do not reflect real attachments (Lee, Ramakrishnan, and Ramírez 2006, 13). The second is that race and ethnicity are neither essential nor immutable, despite what such identifiers may suggest (Kim 2001, 55-56). In other words, these labels should not be taken to represent an essential nature common to all members of a specific group. The meanings of each term vary with each individual’s perception of his or her situation. Lastly, these labels may very well be “symbolic” identifiers that reflect nominal ties to the ethnic or mainstream community but do not correspond to a deeper investment or relationship with co-ethnics (Waters 1990, 90).

Despite these qualifications, self-identification is often one of the few gauges available to understand psychological dispositions towards assimilation. Because assimilation must ultimately occur by way of individual action and choice, individual reports on their feelings of ethnic and national identification are significant in observing the effects of assimilation on the personal level. Since there are no existing
large-scale studies of Indian Americans’ assimilation, much of the data indicating their feelings of assimilation will be anecdotal and should not necessarily be taken to be reflective of a universal trend. Still, such ethnic and national identifiers are often reflective of their self-reported feelings of acculturation, as will be discussed further below.

**Indian American Assimilation**

Because the Indian American community is composed almost exclusively of immigrants who migrated after 1965 and their children, large-scale assimilation has yet to be witnessed in the group. With a fairly uninterrupted immigrant stream since the 1960s, the Indian American community has continued to support ethnic bonds and institutions, even as many Indian Americans experience socioeconomic mobility, extensive interethnic contact, and engagement with American organizations and associations (Barkan 1995, 55-56, 63). Beyond these commonalities, however, the experiences of Indian Americans can be quite divergent. With widespread dispersion and increasing socioeconomic differentiation, the Indian American community’s assimilation patterns can be explained in part by each of the models discussed above.

For the majority of upwardly mobile, socioeconomically successful Indian Americans, patterns of assimilation seem to coincide with what the updated assimilation model and segmented assimilation model would predict. With high levels of social, human, and financial capital often attained through educational achievements and strengthened by network mechanisms, Indian Americans demonstrate high degrees
of residential, occupational, and cultural assimilation. That is, they often live in mixed communities, are competitive with white and other mainstream ethnics in the job market, and identify traditionally American values as their own (Alba and Nee 2003, 48). This is also evident in the survey data collected for my own study. Of the 25 survey respondents, 22 reported household incomes of over $50,000. All 25 had either completed a college degree or were in the process of completion, and all reported living in largely mixed or white neighborhoods. Phrased in terms of the segmented assimilation model, these immigrants and their children are often part of families and ethnic networks that place a high premium on educational and occupational achievement. By virtue of living in mixed neighborhoods where mainstream values and aspirations are generally espoused, these Indian Americans are enabled in pursuing these goals and will most likely continue on a course of upward mobility.

Despite the prevalence of these trends, however, a growing underclass of Indian Americans is slowly emerging in pockets of the United States. Most notably, a number of Indian immigrants who migrated under the family reunification provisions of immigration law have been developing ethnic enclaves in places like Queens, New York (Khandelwal 2002, 91). Unlike the human capital immigrants, these immigrants are often members of the middle or lower socioeconomic class and are employed in blue-collar-level jobs, like driving cabs or running newsstands. Moreover, rather than settling in mixed areas, these immigrants spend much of their time in the ethnic community or enclave, where there is significantly less opportunity to become
integrated in the mainstream context. They rely strongly on ethnic networks, which provide some cultural, economic, and psychological benefits but often further separate the immigrants from the core community (Khandelwal 2002, 110). The lower class is especially prone to socioeconomic stagnation, which can be explained by the segmented assimilation model. With lower educational attainment and a stronger attachment to ethnic networks whose values and goals do not necessarily match those of the core culture, these Indian Americans have been integrated into a subsection of the mainstream without being offered the same opportunities for advancement as many of their co-ethnics.

A third group of Indian Americans has to some extent actualized predictions based on the multicultural model. A study of Punjabi Sikh immigrants and their school-age children in rural California finds that these Indian Americans acculturate but do not always fully assimilate. While they do not necessarily enter the United States directly into the lower socioeconomic class, many have agricultural backgrounds and lower levels of education than human capital Indian immigrants (Gibson 1988, 4). Their visible physical and cultural differences make them vulnerable to prejudice, and those who try to assimilate to the white mainstream are often ostracized by the ethnic community. For other immigrant groups, the combined effect of lower education and ethnic difference may encourage downward mobility. However, the Sikh children are often successful in school and are able to increase their chances for success both within and outside of the mainstream by rejecting mainstream
habits and values and relying on the support of ethnic networks (Gibson 1988, 168-169). Stricter adherence to the ethnic culture and its nurturing of success demonstrates that mainstream assimilation is not always an imperative. The plurality of traditions in such a rural community is evidence that to some extent, multiculturalism is a viable alternative to assimilation.

Strictly speaking, the Punjabi case may more accurately be seen as a case of selective acculturation. In this sense, the Sikhs are in fact partially assimilating in the mainstream because they often define success in mainstream terms, and some of their opportunities for success lie in the mainstream as well (Portes and Rumbaut, 241, 244-245). In either case, however, there is evidence of little substantive assimilation and support for the idea that parallel opportunity structures are possible beyond the dominant mainstream culture.

Because of its internal diversity, the Indian American community is impossible to comprehend with any one characterization. Though there is a trend among many in the middle and upper socioeconomic classes towards assimilation, segmented assimilation into ethnic subcultures and pluralist tendencies are visible in segments of the group as well. Additionally, examining patterns of self-identification among members of the Indian American community indicates that few in the first and second generation have abandoned ethnic loyalties to any appreciable extent, even if they are otherwise assimilated into the mainstream. Testimony by Indian Americans
demonstrates that ethnic ties and assimilation are not at all mutually exclusive, which further discourages broad categorization of the community.

A study on South Asian American transnational ties reaffirms the multicultural model’s predictions that increased contact with the ethnic community both in the United States and abroad will engender strong ethnic ties. The study found that South Asian Americans frequently identify in ethnic-specific terms, even if those terms are coupled with American national descriptors. While the attachments are often symbolic in that they may only reflect a rudimentary awareness of or engagement with the ethnic community, they are indicators that full-scale assimilation is unlikely for the first and second generations. Transnational networks with Indian communities in India and elsewhere serve a similar purpose as ethnic enclaves or networks in the United States itself (Purkayastha 2005, 3). They reinforce ethnic bonds across continents as Indian Americans and their contacts find common interest in ethnically identified products and ideas. This “consumption of cultures” also suggests the possibility of a pluralist future as ethnic traditions that may be established overseas are sustained among immigrant generations in the United States, even as structural and cultural assimilation occur in other aspects of immigrant life (Purkayastha 2005, 120).

While such ethnic connections may seem more likely given transnational involvement, a similar pattern can be seen among the Indian American survey respondents in my study who did not necessarily specify extensive international contact or involvement. Most interviewees described themselves with a label
encompassing ethnic and American identifiers. When presented with a series of ethnic and national identifiers and asked to choose the labels with which they identify, 20 out of 25 total respondents, first and second generation alike, included “Indian” or “Indian American” as one of the descriptors. When asked which of the labels best described how they self-identify, only 2 respondents listed “American.” Like one respondent noted, “As [an] American born citizen, I consider myself American, but hold greater association as a citizen of the world with my Indian background.”

Still, almost all participants in the study ultimately described themselves as fully or mostly assimilated into American culture. Though many Indian Americans are hesitant to break with ethnic ties, they are also largely structurally integrated into the mainstream, as seen above. Even those who observed areas in need of improvement in terms of Indian-mainstream or immigrant-mainstream relations identified fairly strongly with American culture. One interviewee stated feeling very well incorporated into American culture on average, though he still felt that there were “blind spots” in terms of minorities misunderstanding each other and being misunderstood by the mainstream. Another respondent who had several experiences with racial and ethnic prejudice identified in more universal terms as an “American” and “person of color” rather than in Indian-specific terms, though she noted that, “I never feel truly welcome to be in any group even though I grew up [in the United States] and this is the only culture I know.”
Though an examination of self-reported identities alone and the prevalence of ethnic-specific identifiers may lead to the conclusion that assimilation is a distant possibility, taken in context, Indian Americans seem to suggest that there is a growing conception of assimilation as compatible with cultural plurality. Moreover, many view inherently Indian or ethnic values as naturally coinciding with American ideals, which makes the cultures almost intrinsically compatible and the assimilation process more organic. While the disparities between self-identification and feelings of assimilation may be partially attributed to varying definitions of assimilation, it is clear that labels alone cannot validate claims of a flourishing cultural pluralism replacing mainstream acculturation. Instead, it appears that multiculturalism is prevalent at all levels of the Indian American socioeconomic spectrum and has remained somewhat insulated from more core assimilation processes while only slightly affecting assimilation in turn.

Conclusion

Very little can be conclusively stated about the assimilation process for Indian Americans. With an increasing number of divergent characteristics, existing assimilation models can each variously account for aspects of Indian incorporation into American life. For most, some level of structural and cultural assimilation is evidenced in terms of education, occupation, and general levels of capital. For these individuals, ethnic identification is significant but does not generally play as integral a role as for those who have been relegated to working class situations and ethnic enclaves. For those who interact mainly with co-ethnics in ethnic enclaves, assimilation is less
apparent. There is a greater likelihood of segmented assimilation or assimilation into a subset of the mainstream—one that is defined by its own values and lifestyles, in some ways influenced by the ethnic culture, but otherwise largely reactionary to marginalization by the core culture. Lastly, there are those who subsume certain values of the mainstream culture and use the strength of ethnic networks to realize these goals without compromising the traditional Indian culture. They selectively acculturate and add to a localized ethnic plurality.

Given the recency of Indian migration, it is not surprising that even those immigrants who are integrated on many levels still identify in ethnic specific terms. However, it is significant that between generations, ethnic identification seems to be only marginally attenuated. Though this may be subject to change as more generations of Indian Americans are spatially and emotionally separated from the home culture or feel racial differences diminish in salience, it reflects the vitality of ethnic communities and ties. It also signals the possibility of increased multiculturalism across socioeconomic classes, not necessarily as a replacement for assimilation, but a parallel process that promises to make the mainstream culture more robust and assimilation more tenable.
CHAPTER 3: IMMIGRANTS AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Introduction

According to classical democratic theory, “citizens in a democratic state are interested in and participate in politics, are knowledgeable about the process of government and the proposed alternative solutions to public problems, and vote in accordance with a set of values or principles” (Conway 2000, 2). While realizing this ideal is arguably still the ultimate objective of American government, citizens and non-citizens alike often abstain from political life for a variety of reasons. This in turn leads to participatory inequality: the overrepresentation of certain interests in politics at the expense of others (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 11). The concerns that are overlooked are frequently those of marginalized groups who face barriers to participation. As minority communities in a foreign country, immigrant groups are often among those whose interests are underrepresented. In addition to the constraints common among the native population as well as the foreign-born, like limited time and income, most immigrants also face the burdens of adaptation to life in a foreign country as well as the unique circumstances of their particular ethnic community. For this reason it is constructive to consider immigrants’ political involvement as a three-tiered function of the following: their status as residents of the United States, their status as members of an immigrant group, and finally, their status as individuals of a specific ethnic group. This is the framework within which Indian American political participation will later be analyzed.
Despite living in a democratic country, simply being a resident of the United States does not ensure opportunity or desire to participate in the political system. As seen by surveying existing models of political participation, a number of factors can facilitate or hinder an individual or group’s political involvement, beyond an inherent interest or disinterest in politics. The factors that most frequently determine an individual’s socioeconomic standing, like education, for example, are significant predictors of participation in the political process and provide useful explanations as to why disparities exist among groups. Also, though opportunities to participate are available for all individuals, including those with fewer resources, participation levels in all groups have generally declined since the 1970s (Putnam 2000, 43-45). Understanding why even those who have the opportunity to do so and who are not part of traditionally marginalized groups may decide against participation helps to place the immigrant case in context.

While immigrants and their offspring are subject to the same constraints and advantages that all other American-born residents face, they are also likely to face additional circumstances that must be considered when examining their political participation. Unlike native-born citizens, immigrants often do not acquire political education about the United States until adulthood. Some may have been active in politics or learned about American political structures in their native countries, but many only gain political knowledge in the American context well after their migration to the United States, if at all. Some degree of political awareness is necessary for the
successful incorporation of immigrants into the American system by way of organizational or institutional support. However, citizenship requirements, voting registration barriers, language barriers, and the other obstacles that often accompany adjusting to life in a new country all frequently frustrate successful incorporation efforts. When such barriers prevent certain types of formal political involvement, it is necessary to evaluate informal voluntary political activity among immigrants as well as formal activity. Additionally, some immigrants may feel stronger ties with their homeland than the United States and may either divide their time between involvement with politics in both places or may choose to devote their all their resources to involvement with the home country. The conflicting priorities that confront all immigrant groups to some extent shape the trajectory of immigrant political incorporation and the ability of immigrants to identify with American political life.

As individuals vary drastically across immigrant groups, as well as within immigrant groups, it is important to understand the unique histories and characteristics of each group that have variously accounted for their decisions to participate in or abstain from the political system. While immigrants from one part of the world have much in common with immigrants from other parts of the world, they are all distinctive for a number of reasons. The high levels of education, income, and economic success associated with Indian Americans distinguish them from most other minority groups. Those coming directly from India have also already lived in a democratic country with the same general ideals as the United States. However, as an
immigrant community that is also a racial and ethnic minority, Indian Americans cannot simply be evaluated in the same way as their white American counterparts either. The three main models of political participation—the socioeconomic status model, the Civic Voluntarism Model, and the rational choice model—cannot alone explain Indian American political participation. The efforts of American organizations and institutions to incorporate immigrants in general as well as their success in reaching out to the Indian American community specifically all dictate the future of Indian American political participation. Despite being well-positioned to attain participatory equality with non-immigrant Americans because of their socioeconomic success, Indian Americans have yet to realize their full potential in the American political arena.

After considering the broad range of activities that constitute political participation, this chapter will evaluate existing political participation models and the political incorporation patterns of immigrants. While both are useful in providing a foundation from which to analyze the political participation of Indian Americans, neither are completely effective in accounting for the particulars of this rapidly expanding community. Using existing data from a large-scale study of the Asian American population (which contains some of the only existing large-scale data on Indian American participation), the relative strengths and weaknesses of the existing models and the relevance of political incorporation will be shown in their application to the Indian American case. From this, a more complete picture of the current state of
Indian American political involvement will emerge. Even without one comprehensive model of participation, knowing how Indian American political participation parallels or differs from mainstream American participation will not only allow for the more effective analysis later of Indian Americans’ political incorporation but their overall incorporation into American society as well.

**What is Political Participation?**

In order to analyze political involvement among any group, it is essential to have first a comprehensive definition of political participation and what it entails. Political participation has traditionally been defined as “those activities of citizens\(^1\) that attempt to influence the structure of government, the selection of government officials, or the policies of government. These activities may be supportive of the existing structure, officials, or policies, or they may seek to change any or all of these” (Conway 2000, 3). While this definition describes some of the ways in which individuals participate in the political system, it is limited to active forms of involvement. A wider definition of political participation includes both active and passive involvement in the political process. Active support can be manifested in a number of ways such as voting, working on a political campaign, or running for office, while passive involvement can include maintaining a general awareness of local, state, or national events, contacting a representative, or signing a petition (Conway 2000, 3). By employing a broader definition of political participation, it is possible to consider

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\(^1\) Because the phrase “political participation” can include activities that do not necessarily require citizenship status, for the purposes of this paper, “political participation” will refer also to the political activities of non-citizen residents of the United States.
the engagement of those who may not have the resources to be actively involved in the political process, but contribute in other ways that reflect their incorporation into a political system.

As some of these methods of involvement are “acts that can be multiplied in their volume and have the capacity to communicate more information,” these activities can be viewed as “forms of multiple voting” (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 512, 46). For example, volunteering with a political campaign may allow an individual to express his or her opinions to an authority figure more completely, effectively, or repeatedly than casting one vote in periodic elections might. Likewise, one can contact representatives multiple times to voice their views and opinions on matters of interest. While these “multiple-voting” avenues of involvement are generally open to Americans of all backgrounds, they frequently draw those whose interests are already represented in the public sphere, thereby reinforcing existing participatory inequalities. Still, political participation must be viewed as more than voting; any opportunity people have to engage with the structures and individuals that have the power to impact their daily lives must be regarded as crucial to the integration of all American residents into political life.

The main prerequisite for all forms of political participation is a certain level of political knowledge and awareness. Without some familiarity with the major structures and individuals that determine the policies and conditions that affect one’s life, one can hardly be expected to even know how to act on behalf of his or her interests. The
following observation best summarizes the importance of political knowledge: “If you don’t know the rules of the game and the players and don’t care about the outcome, you’re unlikely to try playing yourself” (Putnam 2000, 35). Individuals must understand their roles in the political process and the consequences of their involvement before engaging with the greater community. Political knowledge can be gained from a number of sources, including, but not limited to, academic settings, media (television, newspapers, radio, Internet), peers, and family. Regardless of how it is acquired, political knowledge is vital to the political process as an informed electorate is the cornerstone of a successful democracy.

Models of Political Participation

Knowing what constitutes political participation does not explain what predicts and influences involvement. Political participation is influenced by a several factors, some psychological, but others more quantifiable. In addition to a willingness to participate, constituents must have the ability to invest time, money, and effort in political activity. While there is general agreement that socioeconomic status affects political involvement, it would be remiss to suggest that socioeconomic status alone provides a comprehensive explanation of individuals’ decisions to participate in the political process. The three primary models accounting for political participation are the socioeconomic status model, the Civic Voluntarism Model, and the rational choice model. The socioeconomic status model of participation shows that education, income, and occupation are each significant indicators of who chooses to participate. The Civic
Voluntarism Model of participation expands on this and considers resources as well as predispositions toward engagement with politics as significant in explaining why individuals choose to participate. Finally, the rational choice model predicts that individuals who become involved in politics do so because the benefits of participation outweigh the costs and that there is some rational incentive to participate. While this is not the most accurate predictive model, it does raise the question of self-interest and the factors that incentivize active involvement. Together, the three models provide a comprehensive basis from which to understand all categories of political involvement. However, while they successfully interpret a variety of political behaviors, they do not completely account for the political actions of immigrants in general or Indian Americans in particular, as will be seen after the components of each model have been outlined.

**Socioeconomic Status Model**

Socioeconomic status is typically measured in terms of education, income, and occupation. Effectively, the socioeconomic status model observes that those with higher educational attainments, higher income, and higher-status jobs are more inclined to participate in the political process. It does not state how or why these factors influence an individual’s decision to participate. However, the socioeconomic status model makes observations that are crucial to understand before further analysis can take place and contains significant implications about political inequality, as summarized below.
Of the three components of socioeconomic status, education has the most considerable impact on political participation: the higher the educational attainment, the greater the likelihood that an individual will vote and become involved in political organization or activities. Education predicts higher levels of involvement in other types of political activity as well. With higher education levels, individuals are more likely to follow political activity in the media, develop opinions on politically relevant subjects, discuss politics with others, and feel confident that they can impact their communities when they want change. Education is also correlated with greater political involvement in a representational capacity. Higher levels of education correspond with greater political knowledge and awareness as well as a greater likelihood to become personally involved in politics. (Conway 2000, 27-29). Because of its ability to predict various types of formal and informal political involvement, education is perhaps the most robust socioeconomic indicator of political participation.

Like education, income is also correlated with political participation. Higher levels of income usually correspond with greater involvement in politics. Those with greater financial resources are more likely to donate to political causes or candidates and belong to environments that offer opportunities for and information on involvement. Income levels most directly correspond with those types of political activity that require financial capital, such as donation and fundraising (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 189-191; Conway 2000, 30). While income has a much
narrower range of influence than education, it affects those forms of participation more dependent on financial resources more strongly than education.

Lastly, occupation has some effect on political participation as well. Though much of the effect of occupation is accounted for by education levels, certain occupations are associated with higher participation levels. Generally, higher-status jobs are correlated with greater political participation but this is not always the case. (Conway 2000, 30; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 281). Because farm owners are more directly affected by governmental policies, they are involved in the political process more than may be expected given their average educational attainments. Government workers are also more involved in the political process, due in part to their higher levels of political interest and knowledge (Conway 2000, 31). Occupation, like education, can predict a broad range of activity, which makes it a reliable indicator of political participation.

The socioeconomic status model makes clear that the more well-educated and affluent with higher-status jobs are more inclined to take part in civic life. It also helps explain political inequality by “predicting participatory inequalities across politically relevant groups—that is, groups that have differing preferences and needs for governmental action and, therefore, that are in political conflict with one another” (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 281). In other words, the groups that are less likely to participate in politics are also the ones who are socioeconomically disadvantaged. It is for this reason that political inequality exists along the lines of
education, income, and occupation. Still, the socioeconomic status model does not expound on reasons behind the relationship between socioeconomic status and political participation. This is where the Civic Voluntarism Model is useful.

**Civic Voluntarism Model**

The Civic Voluntarism Model analyzes political participation on the basis of resources, engagement, and recruitment. Together, these factors explain why individuals cannot participate, do not want to participate, or are not recruited to participate in political life (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 269). According to this model, resources and engagement are central to participation. While recruitment is significant, political participation can occur without active incorporation efforts; it is more unlikely for participation to occur in the absence of resources and engagement.

The resources that the model considers integral to involvement are time, money, and civic skills. These factors are relevant to participation because they can vary with socioeconomic status (in the case of money and civic skills) and explain why socioeconomic status is so strongly correlated with participation. Additionally, without at least some free time, disposable income, or ability to communicate interests and ideas, most conventional forms of participation would be impossible. Though the amount of free time available to devote to political endeavors does not vary significantly with socioeconomic status, it is important to note that those at any socioeconomic level who lack the time to participate will be less inclined to do so.
Both money and civic skills, however, add new dimensions to the socioeconomic model and will be considered in greater depth here.

The socioeconomic components that most directly affect money are occupation and income. Money is also closely related to educational levels: those with higher educational levels are more likely to have money. In this way, the correlation of socioeconomic indicators with political participation can be partially explained more explicitly: those who have higher educational levels, higher incomes, and higher-status jobs tend to participate in politics more because they have the financial resources to contribute to a candidate, organization, or cause.

Likewise, civic skills, or those “communications and organizational abilities that allow citizens to use time and money effectively in political life,” are also related to socioeconomic status (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 304). Civic skills most directly explain why education is correlated so strongly with political participation. With education, individuals attain language skills, communication skills, and knowledge of government, as well as “a sense of civic responsibility or political efficacy that [predisposes] an individual to political involvement” (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 305). Education also leads to opportunities later in life that nurture civic skills as well. In addition to higher-paying jobs, people with higher education are more likely to have leadership opportunities inside and outside of the political arena. Those with higher education are more likely to grasp the complexities of certain policies or events and possess the organizational and leadership skills that would make
them competitive as political representatives. In short, education helps nurture “democratic enlightenment,” or those qualities that allow one to understand the responsibilities and norms that living in a democracy entails, as well as actual political engagement that encourages active pursuit of “self-interest in politics” (Conway 2000, 28-29).

Civic skills also explain why occupation as a socioeconomic component is correlated with political involvement. Workplaces provide opportunities for individuals to improve their organization and presentation skills and learn about the policies relevant to their respective sectors (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 315; Conway 2000, 30). The acquisition of these skills is what ultimately accounts for increased participation and is why education and occupation correlate so strongly with involvement in the socioeconomic status model; education and occupation are simply vehicles through which these skills can be acquired (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 305-306).

The Civic Voluntarism Model extends beyond the socioeconomic status model as well by explaining why other non-political voluntary involvement correlates strongly with political participation. For example, voluntary associations and churches often provide environments for informal political discussion or networks from which political mobilization can start (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 309). Essentially, these organizations offer opportunities to accumulate social capital, or social networks, which cultivates a greater awareness of community and sense of civic engagement
(Putnam 2000, 19). This, in turn, improves civic skills as interaction with a wide range of people requires the ability to communicate and organize effectively. By understanding participation as originating at the resource level, the Civic Voluntarism Model can explain the correlation between participation and a variety of factors at more than just the socioeconomic level.

The Civic Voluntarism Model also introduces the idea that second to resources, “engagement” can influence political participation. Here, “engagement” is defined as the “psychological predispositions” that affect interest in politics, feelings of political efficacy (or the belief that an individual has the power to influence government and the government is responsive to the individual), political information (or knowledge), and partisanship (Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1995, 272, 345-348; Conway 2000, 37). While the absence of resources can affect people’s ability to become involved in politics, their lack of “engagement” with politics can affect their desire to participate. The “engagement” variable works in conjunction with resources to explain the primary motivations for participation or non-participation. Effectively, “interest, information, efficacy, and partisan intensity provide the desire, knowledge, and self-assurance that impel people to be engaged by politics” but without the resources to participate, this

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2 The term “engagement” as used in the Civic Voluntarism Model is not to be confused with the same term as it is used elsewhere in this paper. Here, it is taken strictly to refer to the psychological factors that influence involvement, while throughout the rest of the chapters, it is used interchangeably with “involvement” and “participation” to describe all forms of political activity. For the sake of clarity, I will place quotation marks around the term when I refer to “engagement” in the context of the Civic Voluntarism Model.
A corollary to general “engagement” is “issue engagement”, which also affects political participation. The more deeply an individual is committed to a particular political issue, the greater his or her personal stake is in the particular policy, and the more resources he or she has to devote to action on behalf of that issue, the more likely he or she is to participate. With certain issues like abortion clearly rousing more deep-seated passions than other issues, it is not surprising that “issue-based engagement” motivates political activity. Similarly, countless other politically relevant issues have the potential to elicit involvement in the political process, and often do (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 392, 414-415). While it is unclear how much activity is precipitated by “issue engagement,” it is evident that “issue engagement” incentivizes certain types of political participation and makes politics relevant at the individual level.

The final aspect of the Civic Voluntarism Model tackles the influence of political recruitment on political participation. According to the model, individuals often do not become involved in politics simply because they were not asked. When institutions, mostly non-political but often political as well, reach out to individuals to request political involvement, the individuals are more likely to participate than if they were not asked. Religious institutions are particularly effective at both fostering civic skills as well as recruiting individuals to become involved in politics. The proactive
recruitment by institutions supplements the roles of resources and engagement in facilitating political participation by mobilizing politically relevant groups (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 384-388).

According to the Civic Voluntarism Model, resources are perhaps the most potent factor explaining non-participation. Resources are especially useful in the elaboration of the socioeconomic status model, as it is necessary to understand not just how socioeconomic status affects involvement but why. Additionally, without the resources to participate in politics, involvement is not possible. However, without “engagement” or recruitment, involvement is not probable. Taken together, the three factors explain that participation is directly linked to individuals’ ability and willingness to take part as well as their affiliation with the institutions that most actively request involvement. Though each factor is differentially related to participation based on the type of involvement, each is significant in both formal and informal avenues of political participation. With these strengths, the Civic Voluntarism Model of participation will be the most useful in evaluating the history and future of Indian American political participation. In spite of this, one more model of participation is worth considering before analyzing the other factors affecting immigrant political participation.

Rational Choice Model

According to the rational choice model of participation, individuals are rational actors who are “efficient in the allocation and use of scarce resources to obtain [their]
goals” (Conway 2000, 137). Individuals are expected to act consistently by evaluating their alternatives and choosing the most preferred one even if there is some uncertainty about the actions of others. They also act without considering the effects of their own actions on others, though they can be motivated by altruistic concern rather than self-interest alone. The rational choice model predicts political participation would not be rational as the costs usually exceed the benefits in all forms of political involvement, which means if individuals were truly rational actors, there would be little or no political engagement. However, because individuals do choose to participate, the model cannot be taken to be truly representative of the American population. It construes benefits too narrowly and assumes individuals act rationally more than they do, which limits its predictive capacity. Still, the costs of participation cannot be ignored as significant deterrents for involvement (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 283).

There is a great deal of cost/benefit analysis associated with the decision to participate in the political process. This may include evaluating whether a policy outcome will have a great enough effect to outweigh the costs of participation or if the personal satisfaction derived from participation is enough to motivate involvement (Conway 2000, 138). If a district is known for voting in a particular way in all elections, for example, a rational actor may decide that the time and effort involved in casting a vote would not be enough to affect the outcome of the election in any significant way. For this reason, he or she may choose to abstain rather than
participate. On the other hand, if the individual were casting a vote in favor of a policy that could impact his or her life in a substantial way and had mixed support among the electorate, the individual’s potential influence in the political process is worth the investment of time and effort that participation requires. If resource limitations are reinterpreted as factors that make participation disproportionately costly for some, the rational choice model can accurately account for certain types of involvement. If an individual lacks the resource of money, he or she may rationally opt to participate in activities that only require time investments or civic skills or may not participate at all if doing so yields few beneficial outcomes (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 283-287). In combination with the Civic Voluntarism Model, the rational choice model offers another perspective on the psychology behind political participation.

**The Origin of Participatory Factors**

While each of the models has underscored the importance of factors that directly influence political participation, it is also helpful to know the characteristics that ultimately shape participatory factors. Each individual has a unique combination of certain personal characteristics that is responsible for the course of their life experiences. These characteristics and experiences help determine the individual’s eventual resources, “engagement,” and access to mobilizing networks, all of which are significant for political participation. Parental educational attainment, gender, race, and ethnicity are all characteristics that affect an individual’s socialization and politicization. Beyond the transmission of inherited traits from generation to
generation, the family is critical because parental education is often related to political stimuli in the home. With exposure to political discussion from an early age, one may be more predisposed to follow politics and become involved as an adult. The most significant way in which family affects eventual politicization is in determining the type of education an individual receives, which, as seen already, plays a substantial role in the accumulation of resources and civic skills. Socialization as a child may also include familiarity with voluntary civic or religious institutions, which affect the accumulation of civic skills as well as political mobilization (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 416-421). While these attributes are considered secondary in influencing political participation, the complexities of political participation and the variations in involvement among individuals and groups suggest that politicization is cumulative and that all background and participatory factors act collectively in shaping the trajectory of political involvement.

Summary

The three models of political participation demonstrate that political involvement is stimulated by both social and psychological factors. Different forms of political activity—from voting to contacting a political representative to making a financial contribution to a political candidate or cause—are affected variously by resources, “engagement,” and recruitment. Having an idea about a person’s socioeconomic status can help predict how he or she will choose to become involved in the political process and what costs and benefits might be associated with that.
decision. These participatory factors are all related to background elements that cannot change with time but can operate in conjunction with more variable traits to affect future political involvement. Because of its versatility and broad relevance to the other two models, the Civic Voluntarism Model proves to be the most informative of the three in examining political behavior, though as will be seen shortly, it is still incomplete in its application to immigrant groups.

**Political Participation Models and Indian Americans**

As has already been noted, Indians migrating to the United States since 1965 have typically been characterized by high education levels and high levels of financial success in high-status jobs after settling on American soil. They are also generally proficient in English and frequently settle in mixed neighborhoods rather than in enclaves with their co-ethnics. Given socioeconomic status alone, it would seem reasonable to suspect that Indian Americans have the resources to participate in the American political process as much as their American-born counterparts: high levels of income would enable them to participate through political contributions while high levels of education and English proficiency would give them the civic skills to become involved in a variety of other capacities. With few resource constraints, participation in the political process would be a rational choice. Additionally, residing in mixed communities would theoretically give them equal access as the native-born population to the same voluntary and civic organizations that could mobilize further participation and civic skills. Some may even have access to more voluntary organizations that are
relevant to their ethnic networks specifically. Even factors related to feelings of “engagement” seem to indicate that Indian Americans are no less psychologically predisposed to become involved in the political process. However, despite these elements, Indian Americans have shown lower levels of participation in all forms of participation than would be predicted. The socioeconomic status model and Civic Voluntarism Model will each be evaluated specifically for Indian Americans to show the extent to which models ignoring immigration history and racial and ethnic backgrounds can sufficiently represent their political development.

Data from the Pilot National Asian American Political Survey (PNAAPS) conducted from 2000-2001 will be the primary source for showing how Indian American participation coincides with and differs from predictions based on the above models. It is one of the few large-scale surveys with information on Indian American political involvement, though it does have its limitations (Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004, 1). First, it unites Indian Americans and Pakistani Americans in a single South Asian American category. Though there are certainly similarities between the groups, any significant differences will be disregarded by such a grouping. Additionally, because it is a pan-Asian-American study with information on Asian Americans of all backgrounds, it treats a broad range of issues related to participation, not all of them germane to Indian American participation. Regardless, the data available on South Asian Americans will be treated as roughly indicative of the trends true of Indian Americans specifically and their participatory influences. Where necessary, the data on
Asian Americans as a group will also be used to represent the attitudes and behaviors of Indian Americans in relation to the political participation models.

The socioeconomic status model is perhaps the most limited in its ability to predict Indian American participation. As a group, Asian Americans have lower political participation levels than either white or black Americans. While socioeconomic differences can account for the differences between whites and blacks and between whites and Latinos, it is less of a determinant for Asian American participation. Though both education and income are correlated with participation in some way, neither is related in the way predicted by the model. This is demonstrated in the Indian American case, as their high income levels would predict higher voter turnout than what has been witnessed, with only 39 percent of South Asian American PNAAPS respondents registered to vote and 36 percent actually voting in 2000 (Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004, 160-161). The relationship is altered a bit when examining the relationship between income and non-voting participation, with income being a more significant factor in predicting participation. Also, education is significant in predicting voting behavior but not in non-voting participation (Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004, 158-159). While some of these differences can be attributed to the comparatively recent arrival of many Asian immigrants and the fact that many have not naturalized, it would seem that other factors, like ethnicity, deserve more careful consideration for Indian Americans (Conway 2000, 34-35).
The data on income and education also highlight the Civic Voluntarism Model’s failure to fully account for Indian American participation in terms of resources. While money and education are correlated with certain types of political participation, neither are related in the ways predicted by the model. In terms of civic skills, it seems that while Indian Americans participate in non-voting political activity less than mainstream Americans, they have one the highest rates of participation in these activities as compared to other Asian groups, with 57 percent of South Asian American PNAAPS respondents reporting such activity (Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004, 160-161). Because civic skills are correspond with higher levels of political involvement in non-voting capacities, it would appear that Indian Americans generally have the civic skills to participate in the political process, which is consistent with the levels of education and English proficiency common in the community.

With regard to “engagement” variables, it appears that Indian Americans are among the most engaged of all the Asian groups considered in the PNAAPS. Several factors associated with “engagement” and political efficacy are considered in the survey, and the results for South Asian Americans are summarized below in Figure 3.1.
Compared to other Asian groups, South Asian Americans expressed the highest levels of interest in politics, with 72 percent saying they had some level of interest in government. They also felt that the government pays a great deal or some attention to them more than all other Asian groups considered, with 55 percent believing the government to be responsive to their needs. South Asian Americans registered one of the highest levels of trust in local government officials as well with 41 percent indicating that they could trust their local government officials most or all the time. Those immigrants with political experiences in the home countries reported that they could trust and influence American officials more than officials in their home countries, demonstrating high overall feelings of political efficacy in the United States.
Each of these factors have been shown to positively correlate with political participation, both voting and non-voting, but not in the way predicted by the Civic Voluntarism Model (Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004, 169). It appears that “issue-based engagement” has a stronger correlation with Asian American voter turnout than general feelings of “engagement,” as activity in Asian American causes predicts more frequent voting (Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004, 158). In this way, “engagement” is still fairly significant in predicting Indian American political involvement, and is partially consistent with the Civic Voluntarism Model.

In terms of recruitment and mobilization, the effects on Asian American political participation are mixed. Mobilization by political parties has little effect on participation beyond voter registration, but recruitment by another individual is likely to increase the rates of involvement in non-voting political activities. Though belonging to an Asian American organization strongly predicts participation in non-voting political activity, party and individual-level mobilization is only moderately successful at predicting Asian American political behavior (Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004, 171). Again, the limited applicability of political participation models is evident, and the relevance of immigrant-specific factors must be considered.

The PNAAPS findings introduce several new concepts that may eventually need to be integrated into existing political participation literature. One significant predictor of political participation in the United States for Asian Americans is involvement in the politics of the home country. Though political participation on two
fronsts would suggest an extra strain on limited resources, transnational involvement increases the likelihood of involvement in the host country (Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004, 174). One corollary to political interest is familiarity and interest in ethnic news specifically. Though some political interest must be present already in order to decide to follow news at all, attention to news related to the ethnic community can stimulate even further interest which can affect participation (Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004, 83). Race relations are also often related to political involvement. Those with close personal ties to individuals of other races or frequent interaction with those of other races tend to have higher feelings of “engagement” with government and political structures. Those who have experienced discrimination may distrust government more and have less confidence in their own ability to influence government decisions, but indicate higher levels of political interest on the whole. Length of time spent living in the United States can influence feelings of political efficacy in terms of how confident one feels in their ability to influence government decisions (Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004, 83-85). Lastly, there may be a correlation between having members of one’s own ethnic background serve in a representational capacity and political participation by members of that ethnic group. Though little research has been done on this subject for Asian Americans given the small number of Asian American representatives, other studies on descriptive representation show that minority representation may have an effect on policies affecting that minority group and may possibly affect that group’s participation levels (Conway 2000, 196-198).
While some of these factors may more indirectly affect political participation than others, they reveal some serious omissions in the current political participation models. What is true for mainstream Americans is often not representative of the needs and interests of those with vastly different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. While the socioeconomic model and Civic Voluntarism Model are perhaps still the most instructive participation models, their relegation of race and ethnicity to background factors rather than participatory predictors would appear to be premature. Though Indian Americans and other immigrant communities in the United States can identify areas of commonality with the mainstream, their unique circumstances suggest that their ultimate adaptation to American life requires new perspectives on their political participation.

Political Incorporation

In addition to the political activity that is open to mainstream Americans, immigrants are subject to political incorporation. Political incorporation is the process by which immigrants come to be identified with the organizations and institutions integral to American political life. This can refer to formal incorporation by way of naturalization and voter registration. It can also refer to informal non-electoral immigrant involvement in voluntary organizations and other aspects of civic life (Jones-Correa 2005, 75-76). Political incorporation is primarily dependent on “public policy, characteristics of immigrant groups, and attributes of political and civic institutions,” among other factors; the complexities of incorporation mean that it is not
simply a “binary concept” and can occur to varying degrees (Andersen and Cohen 2005, 186). The extent of incorporation can vary between immigrant groups as well as within groups. This represents an additional variable in the politicization of immigrants that can partially account for the participatory disparities between immigrants and mainstream Americans.

While the process of incorporation does not necessarily entail recruitment or mobilization by a third party, historically, political incorporation has been a more active process by American institutions than it is today. Older immigration waves were typically more socioeconomically disadvantaged upon arrival in the United States than newer waves of immigrants, and many remained so throughout their lives. This was especially true of the eastern and southern European immigrants of the early twentieth century, who also had limited English fluency and often did not naturalize. The institutions that were instrumental in their political incorporation included political party organizations, labor unions, and civic associations (Sterne 2001, 34).

For immigrants who had naturalized and registered to vote, urban machines were valuable, despite their corruption, for their ability to connect immigrants with job opportunities and services that allowed them to better their conditions. On the state and national levels, parties also had initiatives targeted to appeal to immigrant interests (Andersen and Cohen 2005, 193-194). Labor unions, like political parties, drew immigrants to civic engagement in pursuit of working-class interests. Additionally, unions and employers alike would often require immigrants to naturalize, which paved
the way for their participation in electoral politics (Sterne 2001, 46-47; Andersen and Cohen 2005, 195). Lastly, civic associations offered immigrants the most accessible avenue to political incorporation. These organizations included settlement houses, ethnic associations, neighborhood networks, and religious institutions and were open to a greater range of people than political parties or unions (Sterne 2001, 50). Over time, all three institutions have retained varying levels of importance in the incorporation process, as new immigrant groups with new interests and needs become increasingly visible on the American landscape.

As political parties are no longer as competitive on the local and state levels and union membership is generally declining, civic associations have come to play an increasingly significant role in the incorporation of immigrant groups (Jones-Correa 2005, 78-79; Anderson and Cohen 2005, 198-199). Specifically, local nonprofit organizations, ethnic voluntary organizations, and voter education groups designed to encourage immigrant political activity have emerged as the primary “points of entry” for immigrants into American political life (Andersen and Cohen 2005, 198-200). The variety of such organizations means that immigrants have the option to join groups catering to their individual interests rather than co-opting the interests of a specific political party or union, which in turn paves the way for issue-based mobilization. Despite these options, however, incorporation efforts on the part of American institutions have declined on the whole since the early twentieth century. This leaves a fair number of immigrants with little recourse or representation in the political realm.
While incorporation would largely seem to be an element of recruitment and mobilization efforts on the part of formal and informal civic institutions, it can also refer to the incorporation of immigrants into representational positions or the appointment of individuals of immigrant backgrounds to administrative or government positions. The reflection of immigrant interests in legislation and policy affects incorporation as well, which makes it a function of a separate series of processes than recruitment alone (Jones-Correa 2005, 76). This suggests that a more careful reworking of recruitment and mobilization efforts may be in order for existing political participation models so that more complete predictions of immigrant political incorporation can be possible.

**Political Incorporation and Indian Americans**

The political incorporation of Indian immigrants, and indeed, all immigrants, is a complex, non-linear process. As has been seen already, political recruitment and mobilization efforts have an impact on Asian American political participation. The potential for various organizations to incorporate Indian Americans into the political arena is huge; in addition to the traditional mobilizing agents, the number of non-profit, grassroots, professional, and student associations directed at meeting the needs of the Indian American community is constantly growing and encouraging civic participation (Khagram, Desai, and Varughese 2001, 277-279). With the growing number of Indian American representatives in political office and the 2007 election of
Bobby Jindal to the office of Louisiana governor, Indian Americans are certainly gaining prominence in the political arena.

However, such observations must be tempered by the fact that despite high reported levels of involvement in non-voting political activity, a surprisingly low number of Indian Americans are registered to vote in the United States. Again, while this can be partially explained by the high concentration of foreign-born Indian Americans who may have yet to naturalize, more active incorporation efforts would likely have prompted more extensive involvement. Since it has traditionally fallen upon American civic institutions to facilitate the naturalization and registration processes, their growing absence in this process appears to have negatively affected the Indian American community and participation at the voting level, if not beyond. Though citizenship is not a prerequisite for all political participation, its effect on further politicization is difficult to ignore. Organizations that more proactively try to engage Indian Americans and understand their unique needs while demonstrating the significance of engagement with the greater community will most likely encourage further Indian American success at the political level.

Conclusion

In an American political landscape characterized by increasingly lower levels of civic engagement across all groups, already-marginalized groups like the racial and ethnic minorities that make up a number of immigrant groups must recognize the dangers of non-involvement. For immigrants to assert themselves into the American
mainstream, a certain level of political awareness and involvement is required; to overcome existing participatory inequalities, it is necessary. Only by understanding the components of politicization can the consequences of involvement be properly appreciated for each individual group. Neither mainstream Americans nor immigrants are homogeneous groups and their political learning and socialization must be understood with regard to the unique histories that they have either created or inherited.

As seen in Chapter 1, Indian Americans have periodically espoused certain political causes relevant to their community. Support for Indian independence by early Indian immigrants and the initiative by later Indian immigrants to include an Asian Indian category on the Census demonstrate issue-based engagement in both major waves of Indian immigration. What is less visible in the history of Indian Americans is political involvement motivated by a general commitment to engagement with the greater American society. Although issue-driven participation is certainly instrumental in making politics more relevant on personal level, it cannot account for all forms of involvement. Additionally, despite their socioeconomic resources, Indian Americans are still participating less than white, black, and other minority Americans, excepting most other Asian groups. Existing participation models can only partially account for their involvement and do not explain their non-involvement in a substantial way.

In order to correct participatory inequalities, especially for issues relevant to all Americans, native- and foreign-born alike, it is important to understand where there
are common interests and where interests affected by racial or ethnic factors may require greater attention. Even with high levels of income, education, civic skills, “engagement” with the political process, and access to civic institutions and organizations, Indian Americans are participating in politics less than what would be predicted. Adding factors related to racial and ethnic background and political incorporation to the current explanations may more sufficiently account for Indian American involvement and non-involvement, but the consequences of their involvement and non-involvement on other aspects of Indian American life will have to be evaluated separately.

Throughout this chapter, the various factors directly and indirectly affecting political participation have been evaluated for mainstream Americans and for Indian Americans. The disparities between the two groups affirm that participatory inequalities exist and that the non-involvement of immigrant groups must be accounted for both in existing models and in practice. Just as no single assimilation model can explain the acculturation patterns of all immigrant groups, there is no all-encompassing model of political participation relevant to all subsets of the American population. Rather, comparing the predictors of mainstream American political participation and the predictors of Indian American participation reveals new possible explanations or factors that can be included in future studies. Understanding where Indians are still on the margins of political life and where they have been incorporated allows for the development of a framework in the next chapter within which existing
data on Indian American participation as well as the personal narratives of those respondents interviewed specifically for this study can be evaluated.
CHAPTER 4: POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND ASSIMILATION AMONG INDIAN AMERICANS

Introduction

The foregoing chapters examined two conflicting trends among Indian Americans: their increasing vitality as an ethnic subset of American culture and their continued stagnation on the American political landscape. Though no single assimilation or political participation model could capture the entirety of the Indian American experience, the general factors contributing to immigrant assimilation into mainstream American culture as well as immigrant political participation habits were found with varying frequency when applied to the unique set of circumstances surrounding Indian American migration. Absent in these discussions, however, is a concrete connection between assimilation and civic involvement and any suggestion that the two are not, in fact, isolated processes occurring independently of the other.

Traditional assimilation models make little mention of civic engagement as a primary factor in facilitating overall integration into the mainstream or even structural assimilation. Though both processes are affected in large part by the same socioeconomic factors, no one model explicitly includes political participation as a stage of the assimilation process. This may partially be explained by the fact that overall assimilation levels do not always correlate with political assimilation; while Indian Americans demonstrate relatively high rates of overall acculturation and assimilation, they do not have corresponding rates of political engagement. This
disconnect may be perceived as an indicator that the two are unrelated. Alternately, the exclusion of political participation from assimilation models may derive from the notion that political incorporation is not essential to the overall inclusion of immigrants. After all, many mainstream Americans abstain from political engagement. However, in a country where participatory democracy is a central creed, I would argue that political involvement actually represents an important stage of the overall assimilation process and that low rates of political participation should be read as a sign that assimilation is not yet complete.

Data collected from the respondents to this study will be used to illustrate how political participation affects Indian American assimilation and why it should be included as a factor in traditional assimilation models. Even a cursory examination of political participation and assimilation would suggest that the two should be related. Political organizations and institutions are among those structures offering opportunities for immigrant involvement and interaction with the mainstream. It would also seem that assimilation occurring as a result of other factors could potentially affect political participation. Those who are engaged in other aspects of American life would perhaps more readily gravitate towards political involvement as a way of further asserting themselves into the core culture. In the end, however, it still remains to be seen how the political participation and assimilation processes in fact affect each other. Only after understanding how the two processes are connected can the Indian American case be used to illustrate how such an overlap manifests in actuality.
Political Participation in the Context of Assimilation

Recent scholarly analyses have evaluated the process of political integration in terms associated with assimilation models and treated political participation as a reflection of overall assimilation, but have also failed to specify any relational mechanisms between the two. Rather, they are considered two isolated but parallel processes that both independently reflect two similar but separate forms of assimilation. Though these formulations are useful in terms of understanding the definition of political assimilation and the forms it may take, they are less instructive in specifying where political involvement fits into standard assimilation models.

These works examine political participation across generations where both straight-line and segmented assimilation were found in different immigrant groups. Straight-line political assimilation occurs when “the attitudes of today’s immigrants come to resemble those of the modal American” (Pearson and Citrin 2006, 234). This does not mean that immigrants must agree with the views or beliefs of the general populace; more accurately, it means that the immigrant is able to “[combine] patriotism with cynicism toward politicians and government officials” and increase their general levels of political involvement the longer they reside in the United States (Pearson and Citrin 2006, 234; Ramakrishnan 2006, 257). While there is no one ideological standard, there is a general approach to governmental structures common amongst the mainstream that immigrants eventually adopt as they acculturate politically. Segmented political assimilation occurs when certain immigrant groups are
either more likely to engage in the political process or receive information on opportunities for civic engagement than others. Specifically, it has been found that white immigrants are more likely to be recruited to join in civic organizations and receive information on opportunities for involvement than black, Latino, and Asian immigrants (Ramakrishnan 2006, 257). In this way, white immigrants are more likely to adopt the mainstream attitudes to political structures, while other immigrants assimilate at slower rates if they do at all. This in turn leads to the existence and “persistence of ethnic subcultures” wherein political norms are set by an ethnic subset of the mainstream (Pearson and Citrin 2006, 239).

A classical model of assimilation is perhaps more useful in understanding where political assimilation occurs in the overall assimilation process, though it employs a dated definition of what political assimilation actually entails. This model characterized civic assimilation as the final stage of an extensive, multi-stage assimilation process. In this interpretation, civic assimilation was defined as the stage at which “newcomers will have adopted ‘American’ values and goals” so that “they will have no ‘alien’ demands on the body politic” (Gordon 1964, 104). While this construction has since been rejected as too narrow a meaning of political integration, it represents one of the few attempts to understand the two processes as part of a single interwoven progression. Including political assimilation as a stage contained within the general assimilation process reflects the significance of democratic inclusion to overall incorporation. Because the democratic process is such an integral part of the American
fabric, the attainment of participatory equality should be reflected in assimilation models. As demonstrated below with data on Indian American civic engagement, political participation may best be included as a later stage of assimilation, both in the updated and segmented assimilation models.

The treatment of political assimilation has essentially been a variation on discussions of political incorporation. In addition to incorporation into actual political organizations and institutions, civic assimilation includes the incorporation of mainstream political attitudes in immigrant cultures. The above studies have found that on the whole, most immigrant groups have demonstrated some degree of political assimilation. As is the case with overall assimilation, however, political assimilation occurs at varying rates for each immigrant group, depending on the conditions each must face. If immigrants feel a disconnect between their beliefs and the structures intended to represent their interests, social distance is increased between them and the mainstream. Since assimilation has been defined as the process by ethnic differences produce fewer barriers between the mainstream and immigrant cultures, any process producing barriers on the basis of ethnicity must be more closely examined when considering assimilation. As seen in the discussion on political involvement, ethnic differences are partially responsible for participatory differences between the mainstream and some immigrant communities, including Asian American cultures. For this reason, overcoming participatory inequalities must also be considered a major dimension of assimilation. In sum, political involvement is important to the
assimilation process not just because of the centrality of democratic participation to the American experience, but also because political isolation has the potential to perpetuate or reinforce existing ethnic differences in a way that could considerably marginalize immigrants.

**Political Assimilation Among Indian Americans**

Having established why political participation is pertinent to the process of assimilation on a theoretical level, it is important to understand how it is applicable to assimilation in practice. Observations from the Indian American community will demonstrate how the relationship between political involvement and assimilation is manifested in immigrant communities. While more comprehensive research must ultimately be done to test the legitimacy of the findings here, the ideas and opinions expressed still attest to the shortcomings of existing assimilation models. They not only show why political assimilation may represent an additional stage in the assimilation process, they reveal that it may occur at a later stage than acculturation or structural assimilation. They also reflect the distance some Indian Americans feel between themselves and the mainstream at the political level.

Before examining the extent to which political assimilation actually occurs and where in the assimilation process it would fall, it is important to clarify why it is relevant to the assimilation process at all using data collected from the Indian American community. As noted in the discussion on Indian American self-

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1 For a summary of survey findings, see Appendix B.
identification, almost all of the 25 respondents self-identified in ethnic-specific terms. That is, most included some reference to their “Indianness” when reporting their preferred labels. Again, while this is common in immigrant communities dominated by members of early (first and second) generations and certainly does not necessarily negate general feelings of assimilation, it can indicate that some levels of assimilation have yet to occur. However, because Indian Americans (including almost all participants in this study) have by and large exhibited extensive assimilation patterns across the standard indicators of assimilation (educational attainment, occupation, financial capital, residential integration, English proficiency, etc.), it is somewhat surprising that ethnicity would remain a salient feature in their self-perceptions. In and of itself, this may simply indicate identification with a multicultural frame of reference. However, coupled with low levels of political participation and low levels of political representation by Indian American candidates, it would seem that new layers must be added to the assimilation models to explain why ethnic differences persist despite general mainstream incorporation.

Though most respondents reported feeling largely or fully incorporated into American society, at least in terms of structural factors like education, occupation, and residential integration, many also described perceiving ethnic disparities at the political level. Most participants agreed that Indian Americans face few barriers in getting involved in various political and grassroots organizations, but there was little consensus on the opportunities available for Indian American political representation.
One participant noted, “I think there are still quite a few barriers blocking Indians” from working in the American political system. She added, “Many political jobs are still occupied by white American men, and it is more difficult for any minority—including Indians—to network within these groups.” Another respondent stated that in terms of elected office, he did not feel that there was any “conspiracy keeping people out,” but that because people often got involved in elected office because of connections, “there are impediments that way” since “it is not all merit-based…and is a little bit of a popularity contest.”

Additionally, when asked whether they thought an Indian American political representative would better respond to the needs of Indian Americans, ethnic background again seemed to be a significant factor. On one level, many respondents felt that at the very least, it would be more likely that an Indian American representative would be familiar with the issues surrounding the Indian American community than a representative of a different ethnicity, even though overall positions on important issues and leadership ability were ultimately the most important considerations affecting their decisions to vote for a candidate. While most were also quick to note that any elected official’s primary responsibilities were to his or her constituents rather than the ethnic community, there was still some understanding that for ethnic candidates, a large amount of support is found within the ethnic community and that for issues related to racial experience, “ethnicity matters.” On another level, one respondent who felt that an Indian American political leader would
not necessarily represent her interests better than other candidates reasoned that, “If you’re running for office, you have to tone down your ethnicity to be elected.” In this way, even though ethnic background does not lead to an inevitable identification with or representation of the ethnic community, it does affect certain candidates more than others. Whether ethnic background means that a candidate will be more sympathetic or active in issues related to the ethnic community or will try to distance himself or herself from the ethnic community to garner more widespread support, ethnic differentiation occurs in one form or another at the political level.

If minorities are indeed excluded from higher levels of authority, even if not by design, it appears that on some level, “individuals on both sides of the [immigrant-mainstream] boundary” do not see themselves “more and more as alike,” which undermines the assimilation process (Alba and Nee 2003, 11). The fact that these observed representational differences cannot be explained or corrected by objective or socioeconomic factors reflects the continuing significance of ethnicity. Since there is some feeling that ethnicity factors into the ability to become involved in such fundamentally American structures, it is clear that assimilation on some level has not occurred. Adding political assimilation as a new dimension of assimilation would explain where the assimilation process is incomplete and how it can be facilitated if desired.

The second aspect of political assimilation that will be considered is its position in the updated and segmented assimilation models. Though assimilation is not
always a linear process, based on available data, it would seem that political assimilation generally occurs after other forms of integration have taken place. Given the importance of naturalization to a number of forms of political participation, this would make sense because many immigrants naturalize well after establishing residency in the United States. In the time between initial contact with the mainstream and the acquiring of citizenship status, immigrants are likely to acculturate and interact with native-born Americans through a number of other institutions and networks.

Even for those who do not naturalize, political assimilation is likely to occur after immigrants have been integrated to some extent into educational and occupational structures. As was seen earlier, higher income is correlated with higher levels of non-voting political involvement, while educational attainment is correlated with higher rates of voter turnout (Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004, 158-159). This means that some degree of financial and occupational security usually exists before an immigrant becomes politically involved, especially at the non-voting level (which does not always require naturalization for involvement). Likewise, because recruitment to a civic organization corresponds with increased political involvement for Asian Americans, institutional and network mechanisms would generally seem to be temporally prior to political assimilation. The same would seem to hold true from a segmented assimilation perspective. Whether an immigrant enters into the mainstream or a subset of the mainstream, the main factors corresponding with political
participation would need to be in place in the community to which the immigrant belongs before political assimilation is possible.

For these reasons, it would follow that if political assimilation occurs, it would occur after the first generation or at a later stage within the first generation. Again, this will not always be the case, as assimilation is a complex process and certain personal or external factors may spur political activity before any other integration takes place. However, given the traditional incorporating mechanisms, it is not unlikely that it will occur after educational, occupation, linguistic, and residential assimilation.

The third aspect of political assimilation to be considered is the extent to which it has actually occurred in the Indian American community. The assimilation levels can partially be seen in the levels of political participation among Indian Americans. As discussed earlier, Indian Americans are less involved in the political process than would be predicted by their socioeconomic status and integration in various other capacities. Still, some evidence of political assimilation is visible in the Indian American community. Indian Americans generally have higher levels of political involvement than most other Asian American groups. In addition, every participant in my study reported above average levels of political awareness and knowledge. Every American citizen in the study indicated having voted in at least one local or national election, and several also mentioned involvement in non-voting activity. All respondents agreed that voting and political participation was essential for anyone living in a democracy, because, as one respondent said, “You forfeit your right to
complain if you don’t vote.” Another respondent recognized voting as giving the
“‘voiceless’ a voice” while still another felt that it was important for anyone living in a
country or community to “take ownership” by expressing their interests. She also
remarked that while active involvement outside of voting is crucial for those who are
willing and able to devote the time, those who lack the time to actively participate can
and often do “end up donating [money] or being involved in a passive way.” Based on
these types of observations, it would seem that Indian Americans have clearly
espoused the basic ideals of a democratic society, even if they do not participate in an
active capacity. However, further examination reveals that despite their interest and
involvement, government responsiveness to certain issues is often differentiated based
on ethnic background and concerns. This, in turn, reflects incomplete assimilation into
the political sphere.

It is important to reiterate that in order for immigrants to be politically
assimilated, they do not need to adopt the party affiliations, issue interests, or
ideological positions of the “modal American.” Rather, it is more relevant that they
have equal access to institutional structures and are equipped to voice their opinions to
further their interests. Nevertheless, the fact remains that many immigrants are more
conscious of issues specific to their own ethnic communities or relevant to their status
as racial or ethnic minorities, including civil rights, hate crimes, immigration, and
racial profiling. Again, varying issue concerns in different communities are not in and
of themselves a reflection of political marginalization; in fact, issue engagement is one
path to overall political involvement, and an immigrant’s ability to articulate and press for certain courses of action is a testament to one aspect of their political assimilation. However, there is a perceived difference in government responsiveness to the specific issues concerning ethnic minorities and those issues more directly concerning the issues relevant to all Americans. Because assimilation is to some extent a two-way process in that mainstream structures are constantly being readjusted to reflect evolving American society while immigrants are simultaneously adopting mainstream habits and practices, the perceived inattention to issues important to immigrants marks a barrier to full-scale immigrant political assimilation.

In commenting on her own personal feelings of overall assimilation, one participant said, “I feel a connection [with American society] because I was born here,” but added that the more she learned about the political process, the more she realized “how much I’ve been written out of policy.” Another stated that voting and participation in the political process is especially important for minorities who “already deal with society not hearing [them] as much.” He added that active engagement beyond voting is especially important because “no politician would take any group seriously” if “they just vote every four years and then ‘sit back’ and think things will change.” While both of these respondents felt that there are generally opportunities for Indian Americans to become involved on some level with the political process, they also reflected the sentiment that after a certain point, it is easier for issues important to minorities to be overlooked by those in power unless active
effort is taken to counter such inattention. This is the point at which even those who are otherwise politically engaged are often excluded from policy considerations and face obstructions in their political assimilation process. It is in this way that their overall assimilation is still incomplete.

To summarize, data and personal testimony from Indian Americans have been applied to show that political participation is relevant to the assimilation process, that political assimilation would generally occur after other forms of structural integration have taken place, and that assimilation has occurred to some extent for some Indian Americans, but is not yet complete for most and may not be complete without more deliberate incorporation into higher levels of political involvement. Because of the small survey sample, the overall socioeconomic homogeneity of the respondents, and their above average levels of political awareness and involvement, it should be noted that the observations above may overrepresent the views of only a portion of the entire Indian American community. However, given that even those who are more politically involved are subject to representational and participatory exclusion, it is not difficult to imagine that the political assimilation of less advantaged or involved Indian Americans would be even more incomplete. This would mean that ethnic differences between Indian Americans and the mainstream continue to persist, which signals a barrier to their overall assimilation.
Facilitating Political Assimilation

The examples discussed above highlight the general indicators of political assimilation, like individual voting and non-voting involvement in the political process, espousal of democratic values, and government responsiveness to immigrant concerns. Although these are all gauges of political assimilation, in this section, I argue that based on the observations above, participatory equality, representational equality, and to some extent descriptive representation are the three factors that would actually facilitate full-scale political assimilation for Indian Americans.

Participatory equality would be achieved when immigrants participate in the political process in the same general ways as mainstream Americans, all else being equal. In other words, Indian Americans and mainstream Americans with the same socioeconomic status and general life experiences should reflect similar levels of engagement with political structures with no differences traceable to ethnic factors. Representational equality is realized when Indian American political interests are fully represented in political bodies to the same extent as mainstream Americans’ interests. Representational equality differs from descriptive equality in that it does not necessarily require congruity along ethnic (or any other sociodemographic) lines; in other words, representatives do not need to be Indian American since ethnic similarity does not ensure that the interests of the community will match the interests of the individual candidate. However, some studies suggest that descriptive representation may increase the likelihood of representation of the ethnic community’s interests and
may itself facilitate participation (Conway 2000, 192-196). Additionally, it would signify increased accessibility to the power structures generally perceived to be controlled by white American males, even if the candidate’s views do not fully align with those of the ethnic community.

Participatory equality would be a function of both bottom-up and top-down approaches. Fundamentally, political participation is a matter of personal choice. It would require Indian Americans to become involved in the political process even if “they are reasonably satisfied” and “they don’t think or feel like they have any serious burning problem that would motivate them to actively get involved,” as one survey respondent reflected. Since participation is also partly a function of institutional recruitment and group level mobilization, however, there needs to be a top-down change in institutional approaches to immigrant communities to further encourage participation. For those survey respondents who described feeling excluded from policy considerations and higher level political networks, representational equality and descriptive representation would be the main factors fostering macro level political assimilation. In order for political assimilation to occur at this level, the formal and informal groups that govern power structures would need to put forth an active effort to incorporate Indian American and general immigrant concerns so that they receive equal treatment by those accountable to immigrant communities. Though partial political assimilation may occur in the absence of these conditions, it would signal that
previous projections of full-scale assimilation are premature, even for successful, human capital immigrants like Indian Americans.

**Conclusion**

In and of itself, assimilation is not always necessary or desirable. However, if and when it occurs, all aspects of integration should be considered. The goal in including political assimilation as a stage in the overall assimilation process is threefold. First, political involvement has traditionally been perceived as a hallmark of American life. Though participation has continued to decline across the board, the institution and idea of democracy has defined the American spirit. Much of the immigrant experience, like the mainstream experience, is determined by democratic processes; for immigrants’ overall assimilation to be complete, it follows that they must feel like a part of the system, even if they disagree with it. Second, political assimilation exposes disparities in political participation and representation and reveals areas of American life in which immigrants continue to face barriers based on ethnic differences. If assimilation is defined as the process of minimizing the salience of ethnic differences in mainstream organization, then the process of overcoming participatory and representational disparities on the basis of ethnicity in the political sphere would naturally fit in as a part of the process. Third, if immigrants were to feel politically assimilated as far as seeing themselves being welcomed and treated fairly by governing structures, they may be more inclined to become even more deeply involved in the political process.
The last factor is perhaps one of the more significant implications of reconsidering political participation in the assimilation context. Increased political participation is not significant because it facilitates assimilation, but because it facilitates democracy. Even those who may disagree with the idea of democracy can benefit from the ability to fully express their ideas and interests to those responsible for the policies affecting them.

Examining how Indian Americans have experienced assimilation and political participation underscores the ways in which general assimilation may be affected by political participation. Existing studies on the Indian American community have concluded that for the most part, Indian Americans have assimilated or are on the path to full assimilation, but as can be seen through the subjective accounts of some of the more socioeconomically advantaged, educated, and residentially assimilated members of the community, personal realities do not always echo these findings. Even having ethnic origins in a country with the world’s largest democracy has not shielded Indian Americans from some marginalization by the mainstream political structures. Because Indian Americans have many areas of commonality with the mainstream, it would appear that ethnic differences must account for their lower levels of identification with political institutions. The barriers Indian Americans perceive to their full political assimilation also have implications for other immigrant groups as well; the experiences specific to the Indian American community are perhaps also reflective of the obstacles other immigrant groups may face as they attempt to assert themselves into the
mainstream. Understanding that participatory equality, representational equality, and descriptive representation are areas that the mainstream has overlooked in outreach to immigrant communities can direct future research in the area and encourage political candidates to rethink their understanding of immigrant communities.
CONCLUSION

A brief history of the Indian American community demonstrates its evolution from small pockets along the West Coast to a widespread and constantly expanding subset of the American population. Indian Americans’ transition from impoverished and often disenfranchised laborers to socioeconomic success stories has been accompanied by their growing identification with the American mainstream. However, despite their overall socioeconomic assimilation, Indian Americans have yet to fully feel fully integrated into the American political system. Though Indian Americans generally express high levels of interest in the political process and political knowledge compared to other Asian Americans, the levels of voting or active participation in non-voting forms of political activity predicted on the basis of their socioeconomic status do not coincide with the levels of involvement actually observed. All else being equal or nearly equal, it would seem that the lower levels of involvement are attributable to ethnic or racial factors.

The preceding chapters have attempted to understand the relationship between political participation and assimilation through the lens of Indian American political involvement and assimilation. Though assimilation itself is never a foregone conclusion for any immigrant group, it has been observed (as it is conventionally understood) with some frequency in a number of immigrant communities, including the Indian American community. If and when assimilation does occur, it can take place in one generation or over several. It progresses through various stages, some occurring
simultaneously and others in succession, and requires the mainstream community’s acceptance of immigrant cultures as much as it requires the acceptance of the mainstream on the part of immigrants themselves. The question posed here is whether immigrant political involvement facilitates assimilation at all, and if so, at what stage it would occur.

Based on the logic that democratic participation is a fundamental right and obligation in the United States, I have argued that full assimilation, if it occurs at all, should entail identification with the political structures and institutions that affect all Americans’ lives, including those of immigrants. Though political assimilation occurs as a later or even final phase of the total assimilation process, it represents one of the most critical stages. As suggested by the traditional assimilation models, socioeconomic, residential, and linguistic assimilation are often essential for an immigrant’s success in and acceptance by mainstream culture. Therefore, they usually occur prior to an immigrant’s political assimilation. However, without political assimilation, immigrants deprive the electorate of voices and ideas that have the potential to impact communities far greater than their own and do a disservice to the entire democratic process.

Perceived barriers to political involvement perpetuate the idea that immigrants have an “ongoing cultural distinctiveness” that prevents them from achieving political assimilation (Kim 2001, 54). It further encourages the belief that government is an exclusively white power structure designed to prevent a plurality of ethnic
backgrounds. Determining the extent to which the American political system is actually resistant to immigrant incorporation is beyond the scope of this paper; the idea is simply that because there are perceived barriers to political involvement and representation, immigrants see themselves as external to a system that is as much responsible to them as it is to mainstream Americans. Conversations with Indian Americans support the idea that political participation does factor into assimilation. Even those who report feeling mostly or fully assimilated into American society cite examples of race-related obstacles in the political process. When even the most advantaged minorities feel exclusion on any basis, the traditional models classifying them as mostly or completely assimilated need to be reevaluated.

Alternately, it would seem that if such obstacles were removed, racial differentiation would be less prevalent and further assimilation could thus continue. In this way, then, it would appear that further Indian American assimilation is contingent on a more open political process and the encouragement of political involvement on the part of the mainstream rather than correcting a fundamental disinterest or detachment from the political process on the part of Indian Americans. The abandonment of ethnic traditions and assimilation are not being posited here as cures for racial or ethnic discrimination or exclusion. Exclusion may continue even as immigrants assimilate while acceptance does not require the rejection of cultural habits. However, because assimilation by definition is the reduction of ethnic
differentiation, when minorities are being marked primarily by racial differences, even as “model minorities,” the assimilation process cannot be viewed as complete.

Despite the feelings of exclusion that persist among Indian Americans, however, it is important to note that not all Indian Americans feel this way or allow such feelings to affect their own participation. Many survey respondents reported that their political involvement and interest increased over time and that as current events and political climates change, they realize new areas of interest and the importance of participation. With the 2007 election of Bobby Jindal to the office of Louisiana governor and the 2008 election of Barack Obama to the office of President of the United States, a number of the respondents also acknowledged that barriers to minority involvement were being dismantled, albeit slowly. Both represent second generation immigrants who are racial and ethnic minorities that have sufficiently assimilated to achieve widespread popularity across social and ethnic groups. Even those who expressed opposition to the platforms of either individual recognized the significance of their respective elections and the potential for all future generations of Indian Americans and minorities to make substantial gains in the political arena with such precedent. With a growing number of Indian American and minority candidates at the local and state levels, their success in the national scene seems more and more attainable. While such candidates may not always support the same causes as their co-ethnics, their ability to overcome barriers and make visible gains breeds new possibility for subsequent generations.
A number of respondents felt that while first generation Indian Americans may have fewer opportunities to become major players on the national level, they were hopeful that the second generation and beyond would achieve greater success. As one first generation respondent remarked, members of the first generation are so busy striving for socioeconomic stability, they “shy away from joining organizations, which is interesting because we speak passionately about issues among family and friends…and may occasionally write a check,” but the second generation will really make greater strides because “they are already more involved in organizations.” Even in the absence of external factors or sweeping changes in government relationships with minorities, there is optimism that Indian Americans are inherently capable of changing their circumstances and transforming the American political landscape. With the proper encouragement from external entities, opportunities for advancement would be even more readily available to Indian Americans, other minorities, and the mainstream alike.

Recognizing that political assimilation remains incomplete is a small first step in a potentially lengthy process of encouraging immigrant participation in the political process. Once acknowledged as a problem in need of correction, further action can be taken to improve the relationship between immigrant communities and the structures that govern them. As seen in Chapter 3, political recruitment is a significant factor in facilitating political involvement. Investing in resources to combat inactivity would not only encourage immigrant involvement, it would inspire political participation among
all Americans. While Indian Americans are continuing to make headway on a political level, more disadvantaged minorities continue to be neglected or obscured. Increased involvement ensures that politics remains relevant to all those it affects. On a larger scale, it helps sustain and strengthen democracy so that the interests of even the most marginalized will be heard.
APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE

Background Information:

1) Gender
2) Age
3) Marital Status
4) Children?
5) Highest Degree Earned
6) Household Income [$50k or below; $50k-150k; $150k or more]
7) First or Second Generation?
8) City and Country of Birth
9) Country/Countries of Residence Outside of U.S. (if applicable)
10) Length of Residence in Countries Outside of U.S. (if applicable)
11) Length of Residence in U.S.
12) Country/Countries of Citizenship
13) Length of U.S. Citizenship (if applicable)
14) Current Profession (if applicable)
15) How do you self-identify? (American, Indian, Indian American, Asian American, South Asian, South Asian American, North Indian, South Indian, Regional, Religious, other, none)
16) Which of the above descriptors most accurately reflects how you self-identify
Questions:

1) What was your main reason for coming to the United States?

2) If you are not a citizen of the United States, do you plan on becoming a citizen in the future?

3) Are you registered to vote in the United States?
   a) If not, why not?
   b) If so, have you voted in any election before (local, congressional, presidential)?

4) Have you ever voted in another country?
   a) If so, which country?

5) How familiar are you with American politics currently?

6) What resources are or were the most important for you in learning about American politics?

7) How familiar are you with Indian politics currently?
   a) What accounts for this familiarity or lack of familiarity?

8) If you were born in another country, how familiar were you with American politics when you first arrived in the United States?
   a) Are you more familiar now than you were then?
   b) What, if anything, would you say accounts for any changes in your understanding between then and now?

9) Do you think there are enough opportunities for Indian Americans to participate in the American political system? Do you have any examples?

10) Regardless of whether or not you have voted in the United States or elsewhere, do you think voting is important? Why or why not?

11) Regardless of whether or not you have voted in the United States or elsewhere, what factors do you think are important in voting for a candidate?

12) Regardless of whether or not you have voted in the United States or elsewhere, do you think there are more effective ways to participate in the political process than voting? If so, what are they?
13) How often do you discuss politics with family, friends, peers, and/or coworkers?  
   a) To what extent do these discussions influence your own views?

14) Have you ever discussed an issue that was important to you with a political representative or written a letter/email related to an issue that was important to you to such a representative?  
   a) What issue, if any, prompted this?

15) Have you ever written a letter to an editor about an issue that was important to you?  
   a) What issue, if any, prompted this?

16) Have you ever attended a political rally or meeting?  
   a) If so, for whom/what issue?

17) Have you ever been or are you currently involved in any groups or organizations whose primary focus has been on social or political issues?  
   a) If so, which groups/organizations?

18) Have you ever been or are you currently involved in any groups or organizations whose membership is comprised mainly of Indians and/or Indian Americans?  
   a) If so, which groups/organizations?  
   b) What factors influenced your decision to participate in these organizations?

19) What social and/or political issues are important to you?

20) What social and/or political issues related to the Indian or Indian-American community, are important to you, if any?  
   a) What factors would you say account for your interest in this/these subject(s)?

21) Do you think an Indian American leader at any political level would respond to your interests or the needs of your community better than another representative? Why or why not?

22) If you have children, what factors do you think will encourage them to become politically active?
23) If you have children, how have they influenced your political beliefs or behaviors?

24) To what extent do you feel you have been incorporated into American society? Why?

25) What is the racial composition of your current neighborhood or community in which you live?
   a) How has living in such a neighborhood or community affected your feelings of acculturation, if at all?
## APPENDIX B: SUMMARY OF SURVEY FINDINGS

### Background Information on Respondents

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Responses to Questions

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