



PRESS RELEASE
February 2, 2017

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New Report: California's Asian Americans and Latinos Shut Out of Political Process; Whites Have Disproportionate Political Influence in State
Survey of nearly 2,600 Californians on various forms of political participation yields key insights for people of color and millennials

LOS ANGELES - A new report released today by Advancement Project California (advancementprojectca.org) finds that, when it comes to who has a say in California's politics, whites have the most power and influence while Latinos and Asian Americans, despite making up the majority of the state's population, have the least. The report, an analysis of a survey of 2,600 Californians and more than 900 young people (ages 18-34), also finds significant racial disparities persist in the millennial generation.

"California has a landmark opportunity to use the strength of our diversity to reshape our politics," said John Kim, executive director of Advancement Project California. "People around the country and in California are more eager than ever to get involved in the political process through marches, calling their elected officials, and raising their voices on issues like immigration, health care and education. Our democracy can only be beacon for the nation if all Californians—regardless of race or income—can use their political power and voice."

The report, "**Unequal Voices: Who Speaks for California? Part II**," is co-authored by Dr. Karthick Ramakrishnan, professor and associate dean of UC Riverside's School of Public Policy, and Dr. Lisa García Bedolla, principal and co-founder of the American Majority Project Research Institute and Chancellor's Professor of education and political science at UC Berkeley. The report is based on a survey, conducted in 2016, which measured various forms of political participation, such as contacting public officials, signing petitions and more. The report includes disaggregated data for Asian Americans and a separate category for Pacific Islanders, as well as an analysis of millennials' political participation.

"Fully participating in our democracy requires more than just voting once or twice a year," García Bedolla said. **"It is also attending public meetings, supporting campaigns and participating in consumer activism. These racial gaps in political participation mean that not all Californians are being heard, and this report is an urgent call to change that."**



The report affirms government data that significant racial disparities exist across a range of political activities. Among the report's key findings:

- Whites had the highest rate of participation in most categories, including contacting public officials, contributing to campaigns and petition signing.
- Whites are more than twice as likely as Latinos and Asian Americans to contact public officials. Whites are more than five times as likely as Cambodian and Hmong Americans to do so.
- Even though Latinos and Asian Americans combined are a majority of California's adult population, they account for only a quarter or a third of the participating population in many political activities.
- Among Asian American communities, Indian Americans tend to participate at higher rates, while Hmong and Korean Americans tend to participate at lower rates.
- Language barriers and a lack of confidence in the ability to understand the political process play a significant role in the low participation rates of Latinos and Asian Americans.

In addition, more than eight million young people will enter the California electorate between 2015 and 2030, and 70 percent of these new eligible voters will be people of color. But the report finds that the political power imbalance will persist into the next generation. For example, Asian American and Latino millennials are least likely to engage in a wide variety of political activities, including contacting public officials, supporting campaigns, and engaging in consumer activism. White millennials also are twice as likely as blacks and three times as likely as Latinos and Asian Americans to make political contributions.

“Californians have already seen the impacts of racial gaps in political participation in shaping how issues get prioritized and how resources get distributed in our communities,” said Ramakrishnan. “If millennials continue to participate at current rates, these inequities will persist and deepen in the years to come.”

Despite these gaps in participation, the report also points to bright spots in political participation. For example:

- Protest activities by blacks and Latinos were on par with whites (14 percent for both blacks and Latinos, vs. 12 percent for whites).
- Pacific Islanders and blacks attended public meetings at higher rates than whites (35 percent and 30 percent respectively vs. 26 percent), and Latinos attended public meetings at comparable rates to whites (24 percent vs. 26 percent).



- While white millennials are overrepresented in most forms of political participation in California, black millennial participation is on par with that group's share of the adult population.

"It will take all of us to ensure racial equity by dismantling the structural barriers that stand in the way of more Californians participating in the political process," said Dr. John Dobard, co-author of *Unequal Voices Part II* and manager of the Political Voice program at Advancement Project California. "Policymaking in Sacramento, in city halls and county governments, and in school districts across the state must begin to listen to the diverse range of people that make up the whole of California."

The report points to structural solutions:

- Local elected officials can pass local public participation ordinances that outline guiding principles for achieving effective participation; call for officials to have public participation advisory boards; and mandate that officials report regularly on existing disparities and outreach efforts across race, class, and geographic area.
- State elected officials can create a statewide participation program for government officials and staff. The program can include providing training and technical assistance, such as support on developing and implementing outreach models and metrics for tracking progress.
- School district officials and administrators at the K-12 level, especially those serving communities of color, can incorporate high-quality civic education curriculum in their districts.
- Racial and economic justice advocates must join forces with good governance and democratic engagement advocates to reform the participation infrastructure in California's communities.

The report, the second in a two-part series by Advancement Project California, is available: www.advancementprojectca.org/unequalvoices

ABOUT ADVANCEMENT PROJECT CALIFORNIA:

Founded in 1999, Advancement Project is a next generation, multiracial civil rights organization. In California, it champions the struggle for greater equity and opportunity for all, fostering upward mobility in communities most impacted by economic and racial injustice. It builds alliances and trust, uses data-driven policy solutions, creates innovative tools, and works alongside communities to ignite social transformation.

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