

UNEQUAL VOICES

Who Speaks for California?
Part II



FEBRUARY 2017

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

California's democracy is neither adequately participatory nor representative. Although California has been a majority-minority state since 2000, its democracy does not reflect that demographic reality.

Part I of *Unequal Voices*, released in June 2016, highlights trends in political participation based on government data between 2004 and 2014. That analysis found significant disparities between whites and people of color in voting rates in presidential, midterm, and local elections. It also found that these gaps persist in most forms of political participation beyond voting, such as contacting public officials, contributing time and/or money to a campaign, attending political meetings, and engaging in consumer activism.

This report shows that racial disparity trends in participation beyond voting continue. Using original telephone survey data from 2016, we analyzed the rates at which Californians contact public officials, contribute money to campaigns, attend public meetings, protest, engage in consumer activism, and sign petitions in person or online. The survey design allowed for closely examining rates of participation within the general adult population (aged 18+), as well as within the millennial (aged 18-34) and Asian American populations.

KEY FINDINGS

Asian Americans and Latinos are under-represented in most political activities, while whites are overrepresented.

There are significant national-origin differences among Asian Americans, with Chinese, Korean, and Hmong Americans tending to participate the least.

Attendance at public meetings is one of the few activities in which whites do not participate at the highest rate.

Racial disparities in political participation are being reproduced in the millennial generation.

Racial disparities are best explained by people of color being less empowered to participate, due to either structural obstacles or poor mobilization by political parties and campaigns, rather than a lack of interest in politics.

Participation in civic associations and mobilization by political parties and campaigns can overcome barriers to political participation.

SOLUTIONS

Reform existing public participation infrastructure to create new opportunities for political participation and socialization.

Enact local public participation ordinances to institutionalize new forms of democratic engagement in municipal decision-making.

Create a statewide public participation program to support government efforts to improve democratic engagement.

Encourage more widespread adoption of practices that regularly gauge constituent sentiment and the quality of representation.

Incorporate high-quality civic education curriculum into K-12 school districts across the state to provide all students the opportunity to develop civic knowledge and skills.

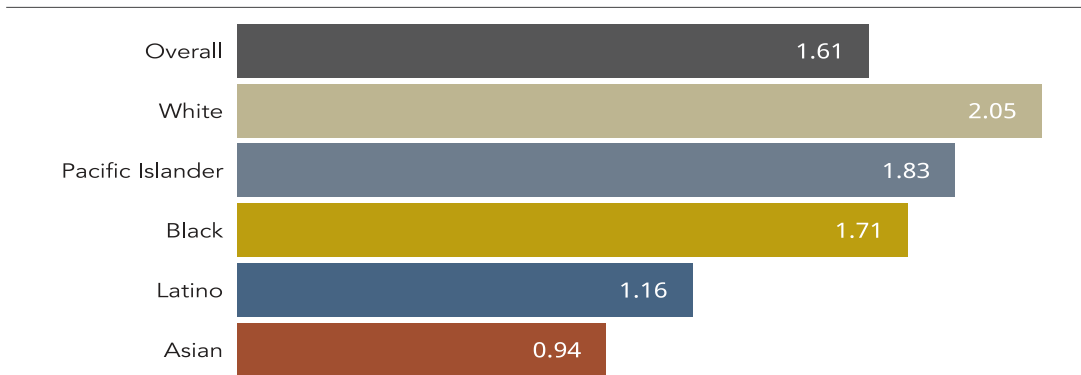
Gaps in Political Participation Among Adults (18+)

KEY FINDINGS

Rates of contacting public officials were especially low among Asian Americans and Latinos.	Attendance at public meetings is one of the few political activities in which whites do not participate at the highest rate.	Blacks and Pacific Islanders reported relatively high rates of campaign contributions.	Among Asian Americans, groups with lower socioeconomic status protest more frequently than those with higher socioeconomic status.	Petition signing is one of the more frequent acts of political participation in California.
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Our analysis finds that when forms of political participation beyond voting are considered collectively, whites participate the most in California’s democracy, followed by Pacific Islanders and blacks. Asian Americans and Latinos rank the lowest on political empowerment, a fact that is extremely concerning given that these populations currently represent a majority of California’s population and are expected to grow significantly in the future.

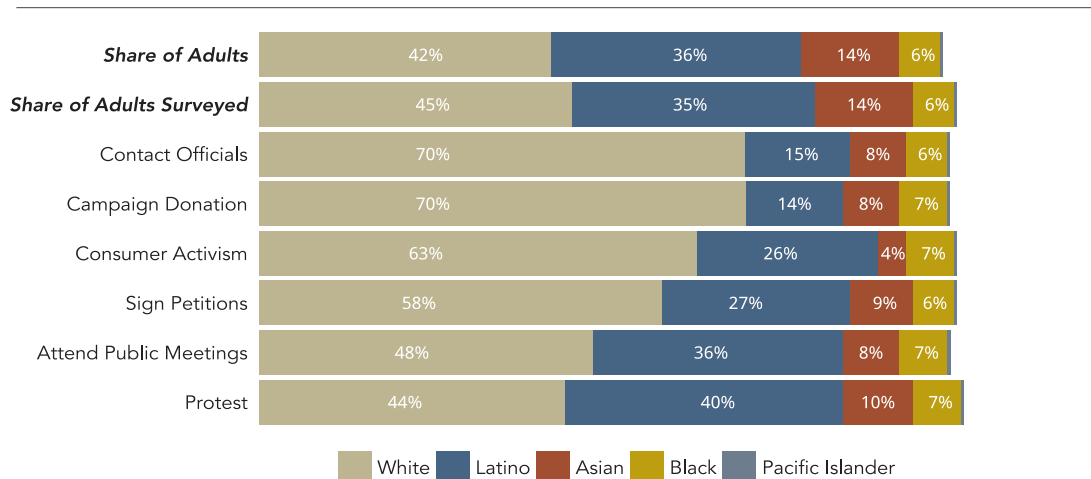
INDEX OF POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT, BY RACIAL GROUP IN CALIFORNIA



Note: Index ranges from a minimum of 0 activities to a maximum of 7

When participation is disaggregated, we find that Latinos and Asian Americans are underrepresented and whites are overrepresented in most forms of political participation in California, while black participation is on par with that group’s share of the adult population.

OVERREPRESENTATION AND UNDERREPRESENTATION IN POLITICAL ACTIVITIES IN CALIFORNIA



Note: Bars aggregate to slightly less than 100% because of groups not included in the survey (Native Americans and “other” racial groups). Population data is derived from CA Department of Finance Population Projections (Table P-3); survey data are weighted to the California population and reflect only the groups included in the survey.

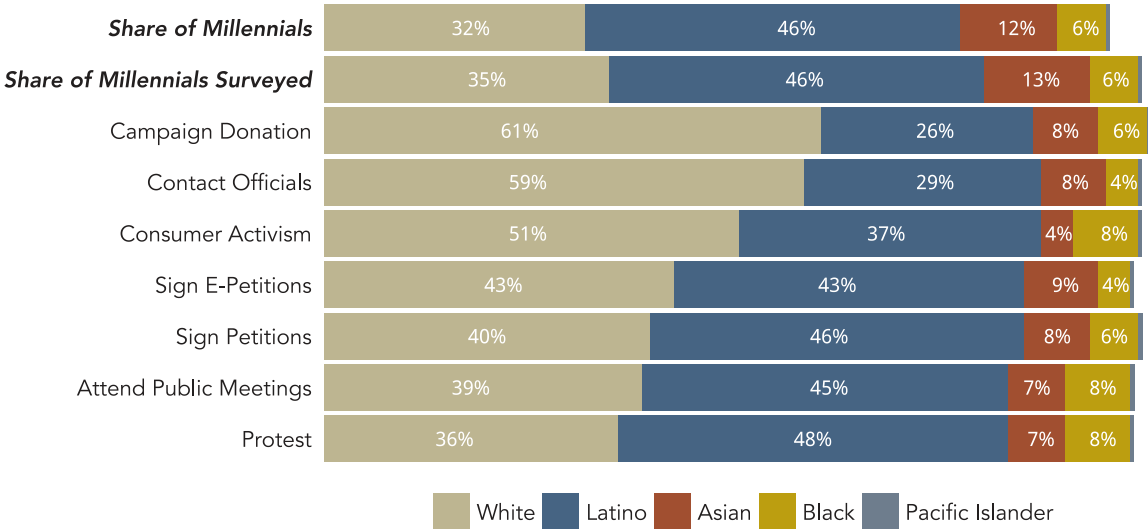
Gaps in Political Participation Among Millennials (18-34)

KEY FINDINGS

Disparities within the general adult population are largely replicated within the young adult population.	There is very little difference between millennials and older Californian adults in attending public meetings.	Black youth were the most likely to report participating in protest activity.	Millennials were 15% more likely than older adults to report having signed an e-petition.
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Data on participation among millennials indicate that racial disparities are being reproduced in the next generation. Even though whites accounted for only 35% of the millennial population in our survey, they accounted for a majority of millennials who made campaign contributions, contacted public officials, and participated in consumer activism, and they were also overrepresented in petition activity. As with the overall population, attending public meetings and protesting were the only activities in which white millennials were not overrepresented in their political participation.

RACIAL OVERREPRESENTATION AND UNDERREPRESENTATION IN CALIFORNIA MILLENNIALS



Note: Population data derived from CA Department of Finance Population Projections (Table P-3); survey data are weighted to the California population and reflect groups included in the survey (Native Americans and other racial groups not included).