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DEMOCRACY, GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

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How Asian Minorities Participate in Politics

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Minority Participations in Asian Politics

Analysis of minority participations in Asian nations is difficult and even ambiguous at best. Nationwide probability samples seldom deliver enough respondents to provide truly representative samples of minority populations. The concept of “minorities” is often associated with indigenous populations that are too small to be detected in probability samples. Furthermore, the concept of “minorities” often assumes segments of national populations that are poorer than the average citizen or, more specifically, ethnically diverse from the majority of the population. This essay deals first with the issue of defining a “minority,” and how minorities are represented in Asian populations, followed by an analysis of how minorities participate in the politics of Asian nations. . In Japan, for example, the Buraku people constitute only about 2 percent of the population; the Hwakyō people constitute a similar minority in Korea. The official language of the Philippines is Tagalog, but the Asianbarometer survey during the most recent election periods indicates that an even larger group speaks Cebuano in the home.¹In general, then, the problem is in identifying measurable minorities.

In order to analyze participation by minorities in Asian politics, the first task is to define what we mean by minorities. Usually the definition encompasses dimensions of culture. Minorities in some countries are defined by ethnic traits or other cultural factors such as religion, language, or social organization. Minority status is sometimes defined officially in ways that bar inhabitants from participation in many of the rights of citizens. National surveys seldom extend to remote populations such as “upland peoples” or those who

¹ Tagalog is the indigenous language of the Manila area, while Cebuano is the language common to Cebu.

identify with exotic cultures and these minorities seldom constitute populations large enough to be relevant for this study. There are, however, relatively significant populations that can be measured in large-scale social research in Southeast Asia where, over generations, ethnicities and cultures have developed independently of each other for historical reasons. This study requires some attention to the large settlements of ethnic Chinese and the Malay peoples who migrated to the Asian mainland from the islands of the South Pacific and who, over many decades have come to be identified with Islam.

Chinese immigrants arrived in Southeast Asia by several routes. First, there were the early routes of trade and exploration. There are still caches of early Chinese pottery (shards) as evidence of these activities. Perhaps the most significant source of Chinese immigration was the recruitment by colonial powers of Chinese to administrate governments in Malaya (including Singapore) and Indonesia. Later, when the Nationalist government of China fled to Taiwan in 1949, entire ROC armies crossed the border into Thailand, were given asylum, and were allowed to become part of the Thai population. As a result of the Malay-Chinese conflict in Malaya, the beleaguered Chinese forces crossed into Thailand from the South and signed a treaty with the government of Thailand to lay down their arms in return for asylum. The Chinese-Malay conflicts also produced Chinese immigration into southern Thailand where, as in the rest of Thailand, they came to dominate the economy.

For a variety of historical reasons, the Chinese minority in Southeast Asia dominates the economies of the Southeast Asian nations. The evolution of the Chinese minority to dominance of the economy has often met with resistance from local populations. The late 20th century, for example, saw pogroms against the Chinese in the Philippines. In Thailand, Chinese (Sino-Thai) were excluded from leadership positions in the Royal Thai Police and the armed forces. Many citizens felt it necessary to Thai-size family names and many families resorted to insuring that children were strategically placed in sensitive institutions, such as the government bureaucracy, the armed forces, or the police. In pursuing these strategies, the Chinese minority was elevated to leadership roles in the Thai state. Families such as the Shinawatra (Thaksin) or that of the family associated with Charoen Pokpand corporation now owning the most valuable house in Hong Kong.

In Indonesia, most of the national wealth is concentrated among the Java Chinese community. Singapore is a prosperous Chinese community that seceded from the former Malaya Federation. In this latter case, however, the ethnic Chinese community is now in the majority, and the “minority” includes persons of Malay and Tamil ancestries. The important point is that although, in most cases, the Chinese are a minority, they more than compensate by their overwhelming control of economic affairs in the region.

The second major minority ethnic identity within the 13 countries surveyed by the Asianbarometer is the Muslim populations in Southeast Asia. In the Philippines and Thailand ethnic Malay-Muslims are associated with ongoing insurgencies. In the Philippines, this group represents migrations from Indonesia and the Asian island chain. In Thailand, this group moved into Malaysia and the five most southern provinces of Thailand. At the beginning of the 20th century, the area in Thailand was conquered by the Siamese (Thai) government. An aggressive program to settle non-Malay Muslims (Buddhists) and assimilate Malay populations in the area have produced cleavages associated with conflicts similar to those associated with a civil war in Malaya that was brought to a close in the 1980s. In both the Philippines and Thailand, the Malay-Muslim ethnicity, although national minorities in these two countries, constitute majorities in their local areas. A 2006 poll (Albritton, 2010) in southern Thailand showed that self-identification as “Malay” (as opposed to “Muslim”) tends to be associated with lack of support for the government and support for government opposition even when that opposition includes insurgency in the region, a finding that suggests cultural origins of the insurgencies related to use of local languages, political equity, and political control.

Perhaps the most important finding is that Muslims and Buddhists, the major ethnic groupings in Southeast Asia, do not differ dramatically in general attitudes toward society, politics, and government. An earlier poll (Albritton and Prabudhanitisan, 1997) shows that differences on these dimensions are associated with internal regions of Thailand, rather than ethnic identification as Muslims or Buddhists.

But, how does one measure minority status of respondents in the Asianbarometer in general? Perhaps the most reasonable way is to identify the language spoken in the home. “You are what you speak” is a mantra of linguists and should be measured in all future polls. The question in the Asianbarometer contains four responses to the question “What language do you speak in the home?” Responses are: 1. “Only local language;” 2. “Mostly local languages;” 3. “A mixture of official and local languages;” 4. “Mostly

official languages;” 5. “Only official languages.” Well over half of all respondents indicated an affinity for local languages (54.5 percent). This indicator will be taken as a measure of “minority identification” for purposes of this study. Unfortunately, this question was asked in only four of the nations that responded to the survey. Results of the analysis, however, indicate an important role for this question analyzing political behavior in surveyed nations.

Indicators of Political Participation

Political behavior has been studied in the Western world for decades but less is known about political participation in the developing world or especially how participation is related to radical religious beliefs. September 11, 2001 brought these views to the forefront of the terrorism literature and many analyses concentrated on the Middle East. Less scrutiny has been paid to Southeast Asia and this section seeks to uncover the types of political participation that exist in a region characterized by militant Islam. Are the modes of political participation the same even in an area of the world with ongoing violence supported by those with radical religious beliefs? What types of political participations are associated with citizens who constitute minority populations?

Verba and Nie (1972) posited that the American public consisted of several different types of political participation. Previously, the political behavior literature concentrated on voter turnout in defining political participation. These scholars attempted to show through individual level data analysis that other types of political participation existed and were important in the American political process. They identified six different types of political participation, including inactive, voters, communal, parochial, campaigners, and activist. Not only were they able to show that these types of participation existed in the United States, they were also able to account for who was more likely to participate in each mode. In addition, they argued that political participation is multidimensional and includes both conventional and unconventional activities such as protesting, voting, or contacting officials, or even violent activities. (Parry et al. 1992).

By utilizing Principle Component Analysis eight types of political participation can be identified from data in the 2010-2012 Asianbarometer Survey. These types are based on

Verba and Nie's (1972) different modes of participation found among members of the American public. More questions were added from the dataset to account for a more all-encompassing examination of political participation (notable "nonparticipation"). As Table 1 indicates, all twenty-three questions regarding individuals' levels of participation load at roughly .5 or higher on one of the eight factors that explain 59 percent of the variance across the questions related to an individual's particular activity. Activities associated with a respondent's "interest" provided the identification classification. The "voting specialists" type, for example, is created through scores from questions that asked if the respondent voted in the previous election and how often the respondent votes in general. The "parochial participant" variable is based on respondents' answers to questions concerning the propensity of respondents to contact local and national officials, as well as other public figures with power. Questions pertaining to the amount of contact with other people, including membership in organizations, as well as frequency of meetings with family, friends, and members of the community were used in forming the "Communalist" identity measure.

Questions pertaining to the amount of contact with other people, including membership in organizations, as well as frequency of meetings with family, friends, and members of the community were used in forming the "Communalist" measure. "Campaigners" are quite the opposite of communalists as they engage in hardly any communal activity but are very active in political campaigns. The "Campaigner" type was formed from questions related to if and how often the respondent attended campaign meetings or encouraged someone else to vote for a particular candidate. Finally, Verba and Nie describe "Unconventional Participants" as those individuals who signed petitions, attended demonstrations, used force for a political cause, and refused to pay their taxes.

Table 1: Factor Analysis of Measures Identifying Concepts of Political Participation (58% of Variance Explained)

	Rotated Component Matrix ^a							
	Component							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Are you a member of any organization or formal groups?	-.943	-.070	-.085	.041	-.006	-.051	-.042	-.015
Number of formal group	.944	.054	.094	-.081	.018	.042	.071	.009
How often are you asked to help influence important decisions in other people's favor?	.086	.069	.095	-.056	.031	-.004	.793	.052
And are there people you could ask to help influence important decisions in your favor?	.015	.014	.065	-.040	.008	.042	.830	-.009
Would you have a hard time conversing with your friends or co-workers about politics if you had differing opinions?	.004	-.048	.016	.284	.001	-.037	.020	.466
Have you voted in the last election?	.061	.019	-.010	-.030	.023	.866	.044	-.032
Thinking of whether you voted or not ever since you became eligible for voting, how would you describe yourself-have you voted	.023	.079	.066	.032	-.011	.872	.003	.009
Attend a campaign meeting or rally	.073	.702	.109	-.098	-.008	.124	-.062	-.018
Try to persuade others to vote for a certain candidate or party	-.018	.742	.034	-.138	.052	.036	.080	-.031
Did you do anything else to help out or work for a party or candidate running in the election	.070	.732	.117	-.009	.129	-.050	.075	-.014
How interested would you say you are in politics	.067	.182	.196	-.631	-.001	.165	-.080	.264
When you get together with your family members or friends, how often do you discuss political matters?	.051	-.186	-.136	.698	-.010	-.077	-.014	-.005
How often do you use the internet?	-.042	.242	.106	.535	-.104	.265	-.157	.172
How closely do you follow major events in foreign countries/the world?	-.141	-.082	.019	.619	-.047	.089	-.090	.234
If possible, I don't want to get involved in political matters	.020	-.016	-.004	-.088	.024	.010	.032	.844
Contacted government (administrative) official	-.011	.041	.727	-.018	.057	.065	.122	.101

Contacted elected officials or legislative representatives at any level	.083	.042	.786	-.093	.058	.034	.011	-.012
Contacted officials of political parties or other political organizations	.117	.211	.692	-.053	.129	-.038	.041	-.074
Refused to pay taxes or fees to the government	-.049	.037	.065	.039	.537	-.005	-.004	.035
Got together with others to raise an issue or sign a petition	.220	.031	.142	-.147	.551	-.021	.075	.008
Attended a demonstration or protest march	.008	.166	-.003	-.079	.702	.027	.032	.007
Used force or violence for a political cause	-.059	-.063	.033	.033	.730	.000	-.036	-.041

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.^a

a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.

1. Communalist
2. Campaigner
3. Parochial Interest
4. Interest in Politics
5. Unconventional Participation
6. Voting Specialist
7. Elite Interactions
8. Uninterested in Politics

The factors identified in Table 1 represent dimensions of political participation identified by Verba and Nie. What is the role of minority language status in explaining the dimensions of political participation identified in Table 1? Table 2 shows the role of minority status related to these eight dimensions. Use of official languages is positively associated with communal forms of participation, but negatively related to conventional political participation, involvement in campaigns, and clientelist networks. Minority status, thus, is not much of a factor in what we generally mean by political participation. In fact, it appears to have a negative effect in encouraging what we understand as conventional participation in politics.

Table 2: Associations of Political Participation Factors with Measure of Minority Status

Coefficients ^a					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	2.345	.020		119.393	.000
Communal	.267	.025	.107	10.758	.000
Campaigners	-.417	.027	-.161	-15.618	.000
Contacters	-.010	.024	-.004	-.417	.677
POLINT	.020	.028	.009	.722	.471
Unconventional	-.023	.026	-.009	-.870	.384
Voting Specialists	-.411	.019	-.253	-21.827	.000
EliteNet	-.205	.024	-.091	-8.631	.000
NonParticipate	.040	.025	.016	1.609	.108

a. Dependent Variable: What language do you speak the most in the Home?

R-square= .124

Minority status is one of the set of variables commonly associated with each of the dimensions of political participation. The following tables provide comparisons of minority status with variables that provide the set of demographics usually associated with political participation. Table 3 shows the association of minority status in comparison with these variables.

Table 3: Impacts of Demographic Factors on Communal Modes of Political Participation

Coefficients ^a						
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	-.267	.039		-6.921	.000
	What language do you speak the most in the Home?	.054	.005	.132	11.871	.000
	Gender	-.101	.013	-.084	-7.888	.000
	Age	.001	.000	.024	2.200	.028
	Education	.000	.000	.004	.333	.739
	Monthly Household Income	.063	.005	.152	13.700	.000
	Rural-urban	-.066	.013	-.054	-5.080	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Communal

R-Square= .059

In this comparison of variables, reliance on “local” languages and monthly household income are the most significant contributors to the participation mode of “Communalism”. The greater the affinity for official languages, the more the respondent is associated with communal modes of participation .Other factors include female gender as a contributing factor to communal practice. Urban residence has negative effects on communal participation. Education has virtually no impact on this factor.

The most familiar mode of political participation is the role of “Campaigners.” Table 4 indicates factors contributing to this identification. Strangely enough, education appears to have a repressive effect on political campaigning during elections. This may be because in many parts of Asia education is primarily a status marker rather than indicating cognitive ability alone.

The second strongest force in a negative direction is (not surprisingly) urban residence. Rural residents clearly grasp the fact that, under democratic procedures, active political participation is the only counter-weight to being dominated by an elite, ruling class. An affinity for local languages also tends to suppress political participation in the “campaigner” mode. Only “Age” seems to have an unambiguous positive effect; the older a person, the more likely they are to participate as a campaigner.

Table 4: Sources of Support for “Campaigners”

Coefficients ^a					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	.421	.033		12.590	.000
age	.002	.000	.057	4.978	.000
male	-.020	.012	-.017	-1.638	.101
edu	-.064	.003	-.246	-19.619	.000
1 Rural-urban	-.116	.013	-.099	-9.088	.000
What language do you speak the most in the Home?	-.025	.004	-.063	-5.626	.000
Monthly Household Income	.009	.004	.022	2.001	.045

a. Dependent Variable: Campaigners

b. **R-squared = .109**

“Contacters” are persons who rely on interpersonal linkages in the public sphere to accomplish private goals. At one level these are represented in clientelist systems in which people of lower status petition officials or other higher-status persons for assistance with their private concerns. At another level, persons of higher status may be making demands on officials for interventions in official issues in their behalf. This creates some ambiguity in measures of this mode of political participation that require a much more sensitive analysis than what is attempted here. The latter interpretation is supported by the fact that urban residents seem to make greater use of this style of

participation than rural people. Clearly, urban residents have greater access to government officials in support of the Contacter role. Affinity for local languages also mitigates against this role as this would prove a handicap in presenting oneself in official contexts.

Table 5: Influence on “Contacters” or Persons Who Are Associated With Parochial Interests

Coefficients ^a					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	-.258	.037		-6.912	.000
age	-.005	.000	-.122	-10.293	.000
male	.033	.014	.026	2.393	.017
edu	.013	.004	.046	3.504	.000
1 Rural-urban	.129	.014	.102	9.073	.000
What language do you speak the most in the Home?	-.010	.005	-.024	-2.045	.041
Monthly Household Income	-.028	.005	-.064	-5.493	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Contacters

R-squared= .035

Factors related to Unconventional Participation pose something of a problem. The outlines are relatively clear: urban, elderly men are less likely to participate in unconventional actions than others in the population. The more affluent, better educated, users of official languages are more likely to participate in these sorts of activities, primarily petition-signing and avoidance of taxes. This finding suggests that unconventional political participation is largely a middle-class affair. Education does not play a strong role in this picture. Urban residence is clearly the most significant of these factors, implying that rural respondents constitute the bulk of unconventional political activities defined in the factor of Unconventional Political Participation.

Table 6: Unconventional Political Participation

Coefficients ^a						
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	.354	.038		9.356	.000
	Rural-urban	-.157	.013	-.132	-12.300	.000
	Gender	-.044	.013	-.038	-3.516	.000
	Age	-.002	.000	-.046	-4.210	.000
	Education	.001	.000	.023	2.157	.031
	Monthly Household Income	.052	.005	.127	11.375	.000
	What language do you speak the most in the Home?	.018	.005	.045	4.044	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Unconventional

R-squared= .042

It is important to note how well the indicators explain conventional forms of political participation, that is, what Verba and Nie call “Voting Specialist” (R-squared = .128) . Campaigners go well beyond this level of political participation and it is significant that voting and participating in campaigns fall on orthogonal dimensions. According to Table 7, persons who rely on official languages are less likely to vote than those associated with local languages. This finding helps to explain why turnout in metropolitan areas is generally lower than in rural contexts. Controlling for minority status in this way, however, shows that when language of the home is controlled, urban residents and more highly educated respondents are even more likely to participate limit political participation to the act of voting..

Table 7: Voting Specialists²

Model	Coefficients ^a				
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	.133	.055		2.404	.016
Gender	-.010	.018	-.005	-.518	.604
Age	1.851E-005	.001	.000	.030	.976
Education	.008	.001	.127	12.271	.000
1 Monthly Household Income	-.014	.007	-.022	-2.048	.041
Rural-urban	.331	.019	.182	17.728	.000
What language do you speak the most in the Home?	-.174	.007	-.281	-26.326	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Conventional

R-squared = .128

Table 8 adds additional information to the picture of orientations to minority culture. Regardless of levels of participation in voting, campaigning, or other forms of politics, respondents oriented to local languages have less interest in politics; ironically; so do more highly educated people and those associated with urban areas. Age and Gender have little to no effect on political interest and the higher the level of education, the less interest is sparked. Political Interest is also negatively associated with urban residence, but the analysis shows that identification with official languages (i.e. elite segments of society) are more attentive to political news and information.

² Voting Specialists are persons who generally limit their political participation to the act of voting.

Table 8: Interest in Politics

Model		Coefficients ^a				
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.399	.038		10.476	.000
	age	-.001	.001	-.030	-2.587	.010
	male	-.001	.014	.000	-.044	.965
	edu	-.055	.004	-.189	-14.661	.000
	Rural-urban	-.164	.015	-.126	-11.326	.000
	Monthly Household Income	.019	.005	.043	3.777	.000
	What language do you speak the most in the Home?	.052	.005	.120	10.318	.000

a. Dependent Variable: POLINT

R-squared = .058

It turns out that “Nonparticipants” are not associated with specific demographic indicators. The final factor, then, is the extent to which respondents are associated with networks of citizens both in asking for help and giving such help with personal problems. The data show that only Age contributes positively to this form of political participation. Those associated with official languages are least involved in these networks.

Table 9: Networking with Influential People

Coefficients ^a					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	.437	.043		10.185	.000
Gender	.027	.014	.020	1.899	.058
Age	.002	.000	.042	3.788	.000
Education	-.002	.000	-.044	-4.046	.000
1 Monthly Household Income	-.034	.005	-.073	-6.522	.000
Rural-urban	-.070	.014	-.052	-4.874	.000
What language do you speak the most in the Home?	-.062	.005	-.137	-12.181	.000

a. Dependent Variable: EliteNet

R-squared = .038

Conclusions and Inferences

The topic of this research has been the role of minorities in Asian political participation. Minority status has been operationalized as a measure of the extent to which respondents utilize local versus official languages. One of the most important findings is that the Asianbarometer includes questions that discriminate types of political participation across the Asian nations represented in the study (Table 1). The factor analysis discriminates between “Campaigners” and those whose participation is only voting; it also discriminates between “conventional” forms of participation, such as voting or campaigning, and “unconventional” forms of participation that include demonstrations and even violence in order to obtain political goals. In general, it identifies dimensions of political participation akin to those suggested by Verba and Nie in their monumental study of political participation.

Table 2 shows that minority status has a significant impact reducing political participation either as “Voting Specialist” or “Campaigners.” When we turn to the varied

dimensions of political participation, we discover that the measure of minority status is one of the two most important indicators explaining “Communal” behavior, operationalized as membership in groups (Table 3). “Education” appears to have a strong impact on the “Campaigner” mode of political participation, but, surprisingly, in a negative direction (Table 4). Other impacts of demographic factors appear to have little impact on propensity to contact officials seeking some sort of intervention on behalf of the respondent (Table 5).

Ability to explain “Unconventional” participation is quite low, but the regression analysis indicates that rural residents are more likely to participate in this form of political behavior. Monthly household income is positively related to this form of political expression, as is official language use (Table 6). By contrast, the set of explanatory variables for “Voting Specialists” tends to be quite strong ($R\text{-squared} = .128$). The more highly educated respondents are stimulated to identify with this dimension, as are respondents from urban areas. It needs to be noted, however, that this dimension refers primarily to people who limit their political participation to the act of voting, rather than participation modes consonant with the “Campaigner” dimension, where these positive associations are negative in their impacts (Table 4). In fact, Verba and Nie present these two dimensions as mutually exclusive.

The theme of this study, however, is the role of “minorities” in explaining political participation. The results show that minority status, operationalized as use of local languages, rather than official ones, is one of the strongest predictors for most of the dimensions of political participation. While the Rural-urban cleavages tend to be strongest in predicting political participation behavior, the measure of minority status applied in the study proves to be either the second or third most important variable providing an explanation for each dimension of participation. Because the measure of minority status used here is somewhat problematic, clearly more and deeper studies need to explore this promising relationship.

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