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Protest and Political Incorporation: Vietnamese American Protests, 1975-2001

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For a period of nearly four months, beginning in late December 1998 through mid-March 1999, Mr. Truong Tran, owner of Hitek video store displayed a portrait of Ho Chi Minh and a communist flag of Vietnam in his store on Bolsa Avenue in the City of Westminster, part of Little Saigon, the largest Vietnamese ethnic enclave in America. Releasing news of his display to local ethnic media, he invited an ongoing protest. For 53 days, Vietnamese-Americans paraded in front of his store to demand his removal of the flag and the portrait. He refused. At one point, police counted at least 15,000 protesters in front of the store.

The so-called “Hitek” incident raises fundamental questions about the nature of protest politics in the Vietnamese American community, and indeed, among immigrant populations more generally. As protest has become ubiquitous in advanced industrialized societies (Meyer and Tarrow 1998), it provides a useful window for understanding broader political phenomena. In this paper, we examine the protests staged by the Vietnamese American community as a means for understanding the development of the politics and political incorporation of this group. We begin by looking at the routinization and institutionalization of protest as a means of making claims. We then look at theories of the political incorporation of immigrants. After reviewing our data and methods, we review findings from newspaper reports of protests in this community, in terms of location, periodicity, issues, tactics, and constituencies.*

Protest in America and the Social Movement Society

Increasingly, scholars see social movements in general, and protest in particular, as an extension of more conventional politics, that is, an additional means for any constituency to make political claims (e.g., Tilly 1984). Whereas protest was once seen as the province of those poorly positioned to make claims through conventional political tactics, this is no longer the case. Protest as a political tactic has diffused across a range of constituencies and claims in the United States and Europe, and, in general, people who protest are likely to engage in conventional political activity on the same issues, including writing to elected officials, contributing money and time to campaigns, voting, and running for office (Meyer and Tarrow 1998). Contributing to, and resulting from, this diffusion is an increased tolerance to protest, such that engaging in political protest is less frequently stigmatized.

If protest has become more common, it is worthwhile to ask why. First, the social movements of the 1960s not only legitimated the tactic but also demonstrated its efficacy. The civil rights movement, particularly, successfully employed extra-institutional protest to help

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African Americans make political gains (e.g, McAdam 1982; Morris 1984). Moreover, protest can offer clear benefits as part of a larger political strategy. At once, colorful protests are more attractive to mass media than less dramatic political action (see Gitlin 1980), allowing a relatively small group of people to project their concerns to a larger audience. Beyond that, staging a protest event is one way to build an organization and feelings of political efficacy among participants. Staging a protest provides a test of commitment among members of a group, and a means of socializing and encouraging participants.

For immigrant groups, particularly those from repressive polities, such as Vietnam or Cuba, the relative tolerance offered to protesters by authorities in the United States, must also be inviting. Demonstrating demonstrates not only the openness of American politics, but also, by contrast, the repressive nature of regimes they had fled.

Protest has also become more common because it is harder for any group, much less a minority group with limited political resources, to get what it wants through conventional political activity. Increased political polarization in American politics, coupled with a long-established system of separation of powers, means that such difficulties are widespread; frequently groups on both sides of an issue resort to protest as part of their political strategy (Meyer and Staggenborg 1996), even as they cultivate allies within mainstream politics. For a relatively small immigrant community, unlikely to win by lobbying or running candidates for office, protest represents a strategy that demonstrates political concerns and commitment, and offers the promise of keeping the issue alive while waiting for better political opportunities. Thus, protest can serve as a mechanism of solidarity, providing a focal point for organizations without good prospects for making progress in other ways, and maintaining connections within the networks used for mobilization (McAdam and Paulsen 1993).

By looking at the issues, tactics, and development of protest within the Vietnamese American community, we get a sense of the development and incorporation of that community.

Immigration and Political Incorporation

Social science models of the political immigration have evolved over the past four decades. An earlier model of incorporation posited the wholesale transformation, over a period of generations, of immigrants into Americans with little in the way of identifiable ethnic interests or behaviors. In a previous generation, Dahl (1962) described political incorporation as a function of mobilization in conventional party politics. Based on his classic study of politics in New Haven, Dahl offered a simple three-stage framework of ethnic incorporation. In the first stage, immigrants are not engaged in politics, lacking both the know-how and the resources—including the vote—to be useful politically. In the second stage, which can last decades, ethnics mobilize en bloc in party politics, with a recognizable and mobilizable ethnic identity providing sufficient resources to broker both collective and individual patronage. Residential segregation facilitates both mobilization and brokerage. In the third, and in Dahl's view, final, stage, interests within the ethnic community become sufficiently diverse that such brokerage is no longer viable. Lessened discrimination and increased education and economic wealth allow individuals to gain access into mainstream social institutions, politics, and occupations, such that the ethnic identity becomes less salient. Dahl's model of incorporation "worked" for white ethnics in New Haven long ago, but not, as he recognized, for African-Americans, who were either unable or unwilling to shed the collective identity and concerns of their community. There is reason to believe his model is also inapplicable to more recent immigrants to the United States. For Dahl, political

incorporation rested on individual assimilation and participation based on individual, rather than ethnic collective, interests.

Scholars in the field of ethnic politics have also defined political incorporation as narrowly as naturalization and voting (e.g., Junn 1999; Lien 1997), even as they acknowledge that ethnic identities remain long after formal political inclusion has been achieved. Particularly in a multi-ethnic country like the U.S., the tendency to employ the narrowest interpretation of incorporation makes sense; we can track when immigrants begin voting and become naturalized citizens, taking an oath of allegiance to a new nation, dodging more difficult issues of identity and interests (Andersen and Cohen 2002). Political engagement in domestic politics, however, is only one element of incorporation. Indeed, in looking at Asian-American politics, scholars have observed a shift toward more conventional forms of participation, such as voting (e.g., Browning, Marshall and Tabb 1984), even while the content of politics has emphasized transnational policy-making rather than domestic politics (Nakanishi 2003). A shift in tactics of participation doesn't necessarily bring about a shift in concerns.

In contemporary politics, many ethnic groups have maintained a distinct transnational collective politics, particularly on issues of foreign policy, while pursuing individual interests in domestic politics (Morawska 2001; Guarnizo 2001). An example is the case of Jewish immigrants in America. Many Jewish Americans, despite their relatively long collective residence in America, seem to create for themselves a perceived role of dual citizenship to pursue dual interests in foreign activism as well as domestic politics (Jacobson 1995). In this case, participation on foreign policy issues accompanies domestic political engagement, albeit sometimes with different sets of allies.

Whereas Dahl saw initial mobilization as a function of partisan mobilization by brokers, Sterne (2001) found that mobilization may initially come from within the immigrant community. The location of brokerage and mobilization, in the more contemporary model, is within the community, which develops indigenous leadership (Sterne 2001). Even if they have naturalized, immigrants of recent years may never be fully assimilated or politically incorporated by older definitions (DeSipio 2001). This is especially true for first-generation immigrants, who firmly retain their ethnic identity and pass it on to their children to continue the tradition (Gerstle and Mollenkopf 2001). Political issues of concern accompany, and partly define, ethnic identities.

Recent literature, hence, reflects the trend in re-conceptualizing the notion of political incorporation (e.g., Ong 1999). Some studies theorized about maintaining transnational relationships between immigrant populations and their sending countries (e.g., Glick-Schiller, Basch, Blanc-Szanton 1992). The immigrants' political issues may have little to do with mainstream U.S. politics and tend to be homeward-looking (Portes and Rumbaut 1996). Especially with recent immigrants from established nation-states, there is some tendency to use their immigrant communities as outposts for political activities affecting their homeland's domestic politics as in the case of Cuba and Korea. Cuban immigrants continued their effort to denigrate the Castro regime and Communism in their homeland by lobbying U.S. officials, broadcasting anti-regime programs, and even financing anti-Communist struggles abroad in the 1980s (Boswell and Curtis 1984; Portes and Rumbaut 1996). Korean-American activities to promote unity within immigrant community and to enhance U.S.-Korea relationship, on the other hand, have received moral and financial sponsorship from the sending country (Kim 1981).

Besides homeward political concerns, resilient ethnicity is another factor in preventing total assimilation: "[W]hen immigrant communities finally turn to domestic issues and the vote, they tend to mobilize along national rather than class lines." (Portes and Rumbaut 1996, p. 125).

Although pan-Asian movements have existed (Espiritu 1992), a gap persists between the experience of immigrants in general and political refugees (Portes and Rumbaut 1996). The Korean immigrants, for instance, are markedly different from the Vietnamese refugees, in their causes for leaving the country, their socioeconomic status, and their cultures. The diversity among immigrant populations tends to keep them from coalescing, and their votes get redistributed across a wide range of concerns.

Hence, we need to separate and refine our conceptions of political incorporation and cultural assimilation. Cultural assimilation implies total acceptance and adoption of a culture other than one's own. The individual becomes entirely absorbed by the culture and abides by almost all of its rules. Whereas, by political incorporation, we mean *the development of the capacity to mobilize effective political action in response to perceived political opportunities in a host country*. This more inclusive definition recognizes a broad range of tactics to open up political channels for immigrants and does not deal explicitly with the political claims activists might make.

On the one hand, some scholars have argued that an overemphasis on foreign policy distorts a community's politics and inhibits its effectiveness on more tractable and immediate domestic issues (Brown, Marshall and Tabb 1984). The international focus can lead the immigrant community into political alliances with elected officials who do not share the community's perspectives on domestic issues. Further, in a simple ecological calculation, time spent on foreign policy is not spent on domestic issues. On the other hand, homeland concerns can serve as a vehicle for politicizing and mobilizing new citizens on a variety of issues, building indigenous organizations and external alliances. Political incorporation, therefore, does not necessarily have the same meaning as cultural assimilation.

General models of assimilation and incorporation play out differently for different immigrant groups, as a function of timing, context and culture. We now turn to the Vietnamese experience in the United States.

The Vietnamese-American Community

Most Vietnamese began their resettlement in America after 1975, when South Vietnam fell. There are three main waves of refugees, each with its distinctive characteristics (Allen and Turner 1997; Gold 1992; Do 1999). Excluding the relatively small number who came to America before 1975 in student exchange programs and decided to apply for refugee status after the fall of Saigon in 1975, the first wave, which arrived in the United States in 1975, involved refugees of relatively high socioeconomic status, the political elite, and US employees in US-supported South Vietnam. This first group of refugees, comprising about 150,000 people, left Vietnam mostly to avoid political persecution by the communist-controlled government (Allen and Turner 1997). Vietnamese continued to emigrate after 1975 in search of a better political and economic life (Allen and Turner 1997; Do 1999). Until the 1990s, Vietnamese and Chinese-Vietnamese escaped their country mostly by boat or by land through one of the neighboring countries, gaining admission to the United States with political or religious refugee status, or by sponsorship from relatives already living in the United States. These "boat people" endured many dangers and hardships in their immigration, including attacks by pirates, loss of loved ones, starvation, and torture in the refugee camps (Do 1999). This "second wave" period, from 1978 to 1981, marked the peak of immigrant flow from Vietnam to the United States (Allen and Turner 1997). Included in this wave were 300,000 Chinese-Vietnamese, forced out by the

Vietnamese government, which confiscated their properties (Tran 2001). By 2000, there were nearly 390,000 refugees admitted (Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, US Department of State).

In response to the refugees' dangerous flights, the US and other countries established programs to admit refugees directly from Vietnam. People began leaving Vietnam for the US through the Orderly Departure Program (ODP) (sponsorship by relatives). Most of the refugees from this group came without much property. With governmental assistance, however, they resettled in the United States and eventually became self-sufficient.

More recent waves of Vietnamese immigrants arrived in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s. These refugees exited Vietnam through the Humanitarian Program and the Amerasian Program, part of the US government's effort to compensate their South Vietnamese allies after the Vietnam War. By 1998, the Humanitarian Program gave 180,000 South Vietnamese army soldiers, officers, and their families a chance to resettle in the US after being imprisoned by the Vietnamese communists for a period of time after 1975 (Tran 2001). The Amerasian Program sought to take care of neglected children of American soldiers during the war by sending about 84,000 Amerasians and their accompanying relatives to the US (Tran 2001). The ODP qualified approximately 362,000 immigrants to be reunited with their refugee relatives (Tran 2001).

The 2000 U. S. Census reports approximately 1.2 million Vietnamese living in the United States. Highly mobile, an estimated 150,000 Vietnamese have resettled in Orange County. Since 1982, the Vietnamese of Orange County have built and maintained an ethnic enclave, "Little Saigon," named for the former capital of Southern Vietnam and considered "the capital of the Vietnamese in exile" (Brody 1987). Little Saigon now is home to several thousand businesses and various cultural activities (Do 1999).

The Vietnamese in the United States are economically among the fastest developing Asian immigrant groups in the United States. Between 1990 and 2000, as reported by the US Census, the median family income for Vietnamese nearly doubled, reaching \$47,000, nearly \$5,000 higher than the median income of all families. Over the same period, the percentage of Vietnamese below the poverty level fell by about 10 percent, to 14.3 percent, a little higher than the rate for all people (11.3 percent) (U.S. Census Bureau).

The economic status of the Vietnamese community in the United States translates to political affiliation in a complicated way. Strong anticommunism has translated into a more conservative political identity during the earlier history of resettlement (Vietnamese Chamber of Commerce in Orange County 1991b). At the same time, more Vietnamese are becoming Democrats and independent voters now than being affiliated with the Republican Party. But this does not mean that individual Vietnamese have been switching parties, so much as that younger people and newer immigrants are registering to vote and participating with different loyalties than the first, well-established wave of immigrants. Without pre-existing loyalties to the Republican party, younger Vietnamese are more likely to join the Democratic party because of domestic concerns. At this point, about half of the Vietnamese place themselves at the center of the liberal-conservative spectrum (Lien et. al. 2001c).

Political Participation among Vietnamese Americans

U.S. foreign policy toward the Pacific Rim, especially concerning Vietnam, plays a central role in Vietnamese-American political participation (Watanabe 2001). In a poll conducted for the

Orange County Register in 2000, an overwhelming majority of 600 Vietnamese Americans surveyed in Orange County ranked fighting communism as “top priority” or “very important” (Collet 2000). Homeland concerns were particularly salient for the older generation, as shown in another poll by the San Jose Mercury News (Collet and Selden 2003). Identifying as refugees, many express the intent to return to Vietnam when democracy is established. Indeed, for the Vietnamese in Orange County, fully 62 percent of those responding to another survey, expressed the hope of returning to Vietnam once the country is free and democratic (Brody, Rimmer, and Trotter 2000). The Vietnamese also maintain regular contacts with their homeland (Lien et. al. 2001c).

Scholars of political participation argue that voter registration and turnout are poor indicators of what Asian Americans are actually doing politically, and have found that Asian Americans are more likely to engage in a broader variety of modes of participation than other immigrant groups, and that many of the predictors for voting behavior do not hold for Asians (Cain, Kiewiet, and Uhlaner 1991). This does not mean that Asians are not active politically, just that they choose to get involved in different ways, including social protests, coalition building, campaign donations, and lobbying (Cho 1999, Lien 2001, Brackman and Erie 2003). Therefore, to understand Asian American participation, in this case, the Vietnamese, it is instructive to look at other political behaviors to get a fuller picture of political incorporation.

Arriving in the United States mostly in the past 28 years, Vietnamese political incorporation is still at a relatively early stage. While some number of Vietnamese are concerned with establishing a solid foundation for personal and family life, essentially Dahl’s first stage of incorporation, others become activists, often focusing on difficult foreign policy issues, rather than more immediate needs in the United States. Whether being pragmatic or idealistic, most Vietnamese-American are subject to the dynamic process of acculturation, as suggested by Barkan (1995), whereby they absorb certain aspects of the mainstream culture, reject some completely, and bargain on some others to fit into the new society. This process of acculturation includes political socialization. The Vietnamese, from a culture without much experience in democracy (Pye 1985; Ong 2001), have gradually assimilated into American democracy, voting and engaging in mainstream electoral politics and have begun to win elective office.

In 1992, the Vietnamese of Westminster helped elect Tony Lam as the first Vietnamese American to the city council. Yet Vietnamese candidates running for offices can not count solely on Vietnamese for votes. After all, the number of Vietnamese eligible and willing to go to the polls may not be enough to put these candidates in office. Similar to other Asian candidates, the Vietnamese often have to appeal to “mainstream” voters and run as “crossover” candidates (Lai, Cho, Kim, Takeda 2001). For instance, Chau Minh Nguyen became the first Vietnamese councilwoman in Garrett Park, Maryland, a town with few Vietnamese, in 1995. On the other hand, candidates like Van Thai Tran (councilman, first elected in 2000) and Lan Quoc Nguyen (trustee on Board of Education, first elected in 2002) were able to rally support from the Vietnamese residents who make up the majority of the city of Garden Grove.

Vietnamese political participation has run the gamut from conventional to unconventional activities, including dramatic protest events, ranging from boycotts and demonstrations to assassinations of individual reporters, bomb attacks, and self-immolation. Participating in demonstrations is by far the most popular mode of political participation, followed closely by voting, according to the Orange County Register poll (Collet 2000), inverting the pattern for other groups. Vietnamese are also more likely to join a protest than members of other Asian

groups (Lien et. al. 2001c). Participating in demonstrations does not require a higher degree of civic skills, and it is an easier task to accomplish because participants only have to decide to get themselves to the event and follow instructions on how to participate (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Asians are quite familiar with this form of political action since the beginning of their resettlement history in America (Lien 2001). Vietnamese immigrants, particularly the older cohorts, have experienced or participated in protests during the most recent war, which ended in 1975. Hence, it is quite conspicuous that protest plays a central role in many of the Vietnamese political demands and expressions of grievances. Furthermore, the demonstration, an accessible form of participation to Vietnamese immigrants, is a handy tool for teaching civic skills and opening other forms of participation.

Data and Methods

This study examines the relationship between protest activities and political incorporation using a macro-level approach. Rather than examining the individuals' motives and characteristics of individual protesters, we look at the nature, issues, and concerns of the protests.

To examine the political protests of Vietnamese Americans, we employed events data analysis of newspaper reports and interviews. To generate a sample of political activities across America, we used the Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe and the Orange County Register search engines to locate articles containing keywords "Vietnamese" and "protest" from 1975-2001 in all newspapers available. Relevant information for each event was extracted and coded from these articles. Descriptions of events that were duplicated in different newspapers were compared, and disparities, if existed, were reconciled by choosing the highest values or most specific details reported in the articles. Each event was coded with the following categories: date (actual or reported), source (name of newspaper—for multiple accounts, only the newspaper which contributed the most information to the event coding was recorded), actors, targets, leaders, locations, issues, positions/demands, tactics, number of participants, duration, and outcomes. This process yielded a total of 209 events for analysis.

Using American newspapers to generate events for analysis is a well-established, if controversial, method in the study of social movements (e.g. Jenkins and Perrow 1977; Kriesi et al. 1995; Koopmans 1998; McAdam 1982; Mueller 1997a; Oliver and Maney 2000; Oliver and Myers 1999; Olzak 1989; Rucht 1998; Rucht, Koopmans, and Neidhardt 1999; Snyder and Kelly 1977; Tarrow 1989). The approach offers the advantage of being able to have a replicable, quantifiable, measurement of observed mobilization over time. At the same time, the approach carries with it certain pitfalls: only a small portion of occurring events that occur are covered in newspapers (McCarthy, McPhail, and Smith 1996; Swank 2000), and coverage of any individual event cannot be judged as reliable or unbiased but is influenced by journalistic norms (Gitlin 1980; Tuchman 1976). Most substantially, coverage is biased in favor of more disruptive and larger events (McCarthy, McPhail, and Smith 1996). At the same time, these data represent an unmatched source for tracking large changes in mobilization over time, and for comparison of movement strategies—if used with understanding of limitations and additional sources of data (Danzinger 1975, 1976; Maney and Oliver 2001; Mueller 1997b; Olzak 1989; Rucht and Neidhardt 1999; Rucht and Olemacher 1992).

Using mainstream English-language papers to assess the activities of Vietnamese American actors, particularly in an ethnic enclave, may not be sufficient to capture the multi-faceted community. Coverage of ethnic groups in mainstream media is generally biased toward

food, crime, and festivals. As a result, political activities within the community may be underreported because they do not fit the stereotypical editorial framework. We choose to use newspaper accounts cognizant of these risks. Adding Vietnamese language papers to our sources would provide a fuller accounting of protest activities, but the lack of well-indexed small ethnic papers, much less a search engine for local Vietnamese papers published in different states, makes the task of sifting through each archival hard copy to find protest stories or announcements untenable.

For our research, events data also provides a single data source that allows comparison of observable activities of protestors over time. We are particularly interested in who did what at which time, and why. Events data help answer the first two questions.

In order to supplement the newspaper accounts of certain events and to draw more in-depth analyses, semi-structured interviews with seven key protest leaders were conducted throughout the months of July and August 2002. The leaders were selected by their identification in the newspaper articles about the events (see Appendix for interview questionnaire).

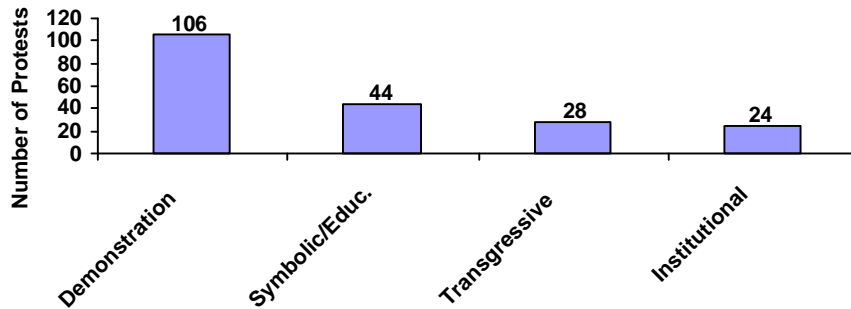
Findings

Types of Protests

Protests come in many forms and the Vietnamese in America have employed diverse means to express their political concerns. We categorized four types of protest activities: demonstrations; symbolic or educational activities; transgressive actions; and institutionally-oriented actions. Demonstrations were most frequently reported, comprising more than half the total number of events. The second largest category was comprised of educational and symbolic activities that ranged from making a public statement to organizing a concert (e.g., September 2000 Rock-A-Vote concert to help Vietnamese register to vote in the November elections). Transgressive actions included non-violent transgression of law, self-immolation, violent action, call to defect, hunger strike, and verbal threat. Excluding transgressive actions, institutional actions were the third common with tactics such as letter-writing campaigns and passage of resolution (Figure 1).

Organizational building activities and monetary donations were reported relatively infrequently, likely a function of our sampling strategy, as newspapers were unlikely to cover such events. This does not mean, however, that such activities did not take place. Indeed, the number of Vietnamese-led mutual assistance associations is higher than that for any other ethnic groups or pan-ethnic associations in California. The 2003 Directory of Mutual Assistance Associations listed 148 organizations, 46 of which being Vietnamese-led compared to 23 servicing the Laos, 14 Cambodians, and 29 pan-ethnic (Office of Refugee Settlement, California Department of Social Services). In addition, to our knowledge, there are at least a dozen more Vietnamese MAA's and numerous religious, political organizations unregistered with the state of California and not formally listed in the Directory.

Figure 1. Types of Protest Activity



Symbolic/Educational: press conference, testimony at public hearing, leafleting or tabling, conference, teach-in, speak-out, criticism of public official, participation in meeting or debate, appeals at organizational meeting, memorial or religious service, concert, exhibit or fair

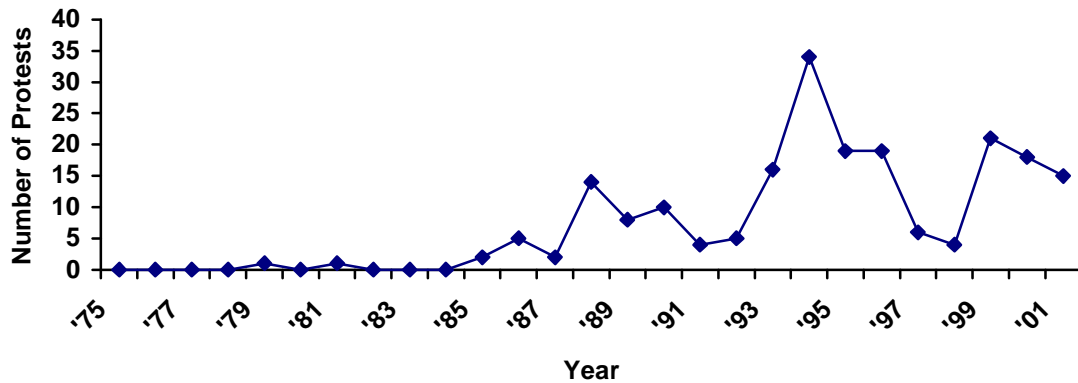
Transgressive activities: non-violent transgression of law, self-immolation, violent action, call to defect, verbal threat, hunger strike

Institutional action: passage of legislation or resolution, filing lawsuit, motion, or brief lobbying, letter-writing or phone campaign, petition

Frequency and Location of Protests

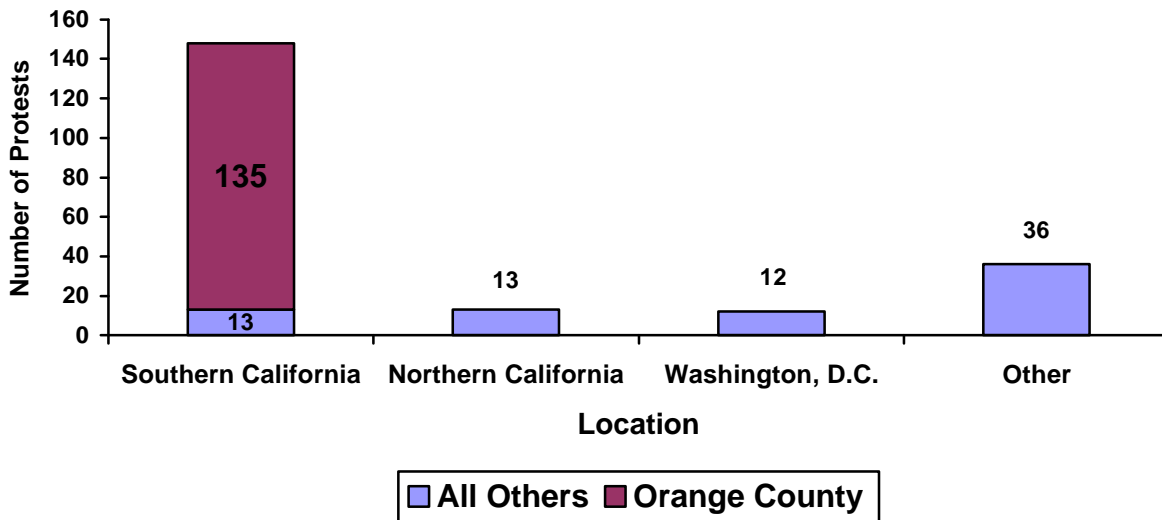
According to newspaper accounts, Vietnamese protest episodically, relatively infrequently until the late 1980s, then increasing to a peak in 1994 (Figure 2) during the debate about normalizing relations with Vietnam, then falling after normalization occurred. Taking the biases of mainstream media as constant over time, the pattern of protest suggests that the early years of residence for immigrants were taken up with establishing themselves, rather than making political claims. Protest then emerged along with other forms of incorporation. There is also the issue of geographic concentration. When Vietnamese immigrants first arrived in America, they were dispersed across the country, reflecting diverse locations of sponsors and U.S. government to policy to help speed assimilation. It was also part of the U.S. policy to help this new group of immigrants quickly assimilated into the mainstream culture, rather than clustering in closed ethnic enclaves. Over a relatively brief period, however, Vietnamese moved together and formed larger ethnic communities. The major inter-state migration took place during the 1980s, so by the mid-1980s immigrants had established several relatively large and coherent ethnic communities, most notably in Southern California. Strong cultural bonds, weather similar to tropical Vietnam, and former network ties probably have attracted more Vietnamese and coming waves of refugees to concentrate in California than any other places in the U.S. (Vietnamese Chamber of Commerce in Orange County 1991a). The rise in number of protests also coincides with the establishment of these communities.

Figure 2. Vietnamese-American Protests, 1975-2001



The concentration of protests in Southern California supports the notion that increased protest came from the establishment of a community that could support political action (Figure 3). Little Saigon in the heart of Orange County has become the “capital of Vietnamese in exile,” and is thus, understandably, the place from which most identifiable Vietnamese American protest activity comes. More than half (N=135) of the protests reported took place in Orange County, mostly in Westminster or Garden Grove, the home of Little Saigon. Northern California, another destination of Vietnamese immigrants, and Washington, DC, the locale for a large share of national protest in the United States, are second and third on our list, and pale in comparison.

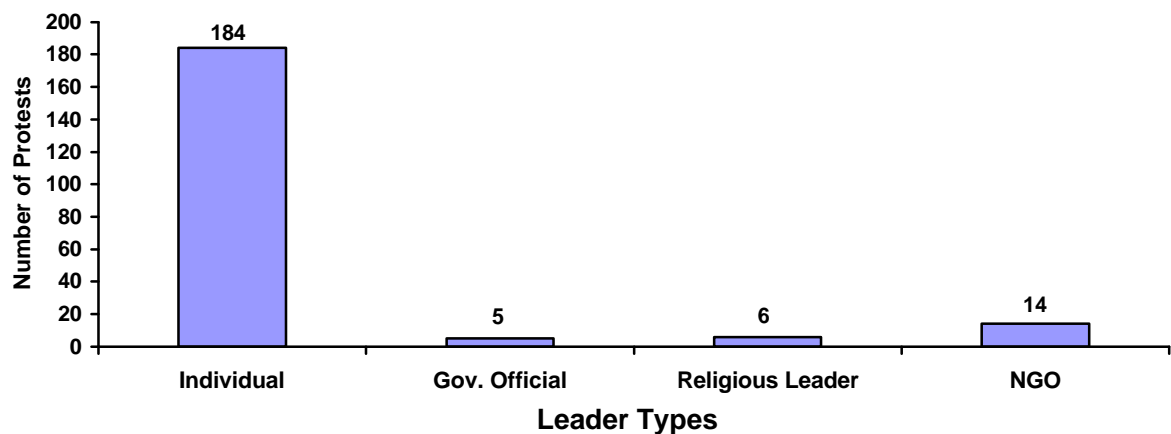
Figure 3. Locations of Vietnamese-American Protests, 1975-2001



Protest Leaders

The newspaper accounts of protests identify protest leaders and frequently interview them, providing direct access to how organizers think about what they were doing. In our sample, most protests are reported to have been led by individuals (Figure 4). Indeed, only a small fraction of the events were led by governmental officials, religious leaders, or identified interest groups. Given the large number of formal and informal associations, it is possible that the reporting understates the role that established organizations play in staging protest, with a relatively small number of individuals identified repeatedly as responsible for the protest action.

Figure 4. Identified Leaders of Vietnamese-American Protests, 1975-2001



Our interviews with protest leaders also illustrate how they viewed their political actions. Unless they belong to a religious group or representing an organization with substantial membership, the leaders were eager to claim credit for organizing protests, including one proudly hoping to use the interview to document his efforts at staging the largest rally and hoping to discredit competing groups with similar interests. Whereas younger leaders often gave credit to organizations they worked within, older activists often emphasized themselves at the expense of any organizations.

Protest Issues

Over a period of nearly thirty years, across more than 200 protests, there are only a few recurrent issues, almost all directed at the current government of Vietnam. Many times, American politics is relevant only to the extent that the United States makes policies toward Vietnam. In interviews, organizers emphasized the need to raise awareness about the repressive nature of that government. Indeed, when asked “What are the important issues for Vietnamese American people?” all offered an answer that related to improving the life conditions of people in Vietnam, be it the abolishment of the current authoritarian government or just a general wish for life betterment.

As seen in Table 1, the majority of the issues that were Vietnam-related fit in this broader frame. Protests targeted themes such as human rights abuse, one-way art exchange agenda, and

the lack of democracy in Vietnam. There were two salient problems facing the Vietnamese in the last two decades. In the 1980s, boat people came to the refugees' center of attention and a clear call to action. Demonstrations were staged in front of consulates to push for policies to accept more Vietnamese into these countries and to raise awareness about abuses happening in refugee camps. The rationale underlying these protests was that the Vietnamese could not stand the political persecution within their countries, so they had to leave and seek safety as well as a better life elsewhere. Then the mid-1990s witnessed the normalization of U.S.-Vietnam relationship after 20 years of U.S. embargo. Supporters of the embargo gathered to protest the lack of democracy and human rights abuse records of Vietnamese government, arguing that the time has not come yet for the "reward" of bilateral trade. Protests on the same theme would occur whenever there were visits from Vietnamese officials, formation of sister-city ties with Vietnam, local art exhibitions or performances by Vietnamese artists, and similar events. Annual political events were also occasions for making such claims, notably the commemoration of the fall of Saigon on the 30th of April, Human Rights Day on December 10th, and the anniversary of the Army of Republic of South Vietnam on June 19th.

Table 1. Newspaper Coverage of Protest Issues

	Protest Issues						
<u>Newspaper Coverage</u>	<i>VN politics</i>	<i>US-VN relation</i>	<i>VN arts exchange</i>	<i>Viet boat people</i>	<i>Viet-Am politics</i>	<i>US politics</i>	<i>Misc.</i>
Frequency	37	54	9	19	51	29	9
Percentage	18%	26%	4%	9%	25%	14%	4%

Other protests, which stemmed from conflicts in the Vietnamese-American community over certain issues, were rooted in differences over Vietnam-related issues. For instance, Vietnamese American LeLy Hayslip, the main character in Oliver Stone's film *Heaven and Earth*, a memoir about the Vietnam War, generated protests when she visited Little Saigon. Co Pham, a physician, faced one month of demonstrations outside his office for publicly supporting U.S.-Vietnam bilateral trade. He then sued one of the protesters for videotaping his patients. Tony Lam, then Westminster councilman, also endured a one-month long protest outside of his family's restaurant for not publicly opposing the Vietnamese flag display at a video store in Westminster. In other words, even when activists picked more proximate targets, the latter were virtually always as a proxy for the government of Vietnam.

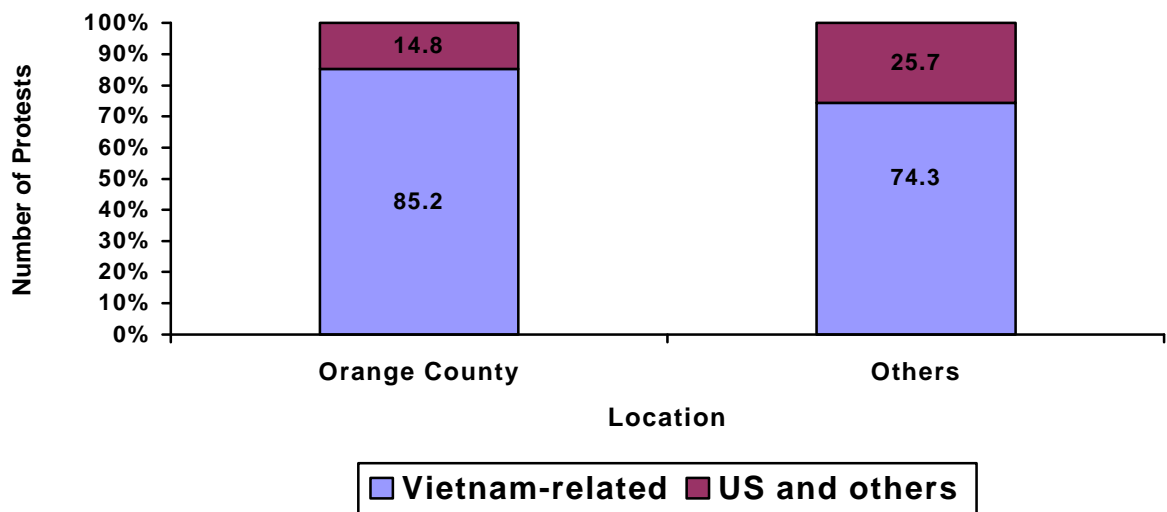
Protests of issues that have to do with the U.S. government (unrelated to Vietnam) were less frequent. These protests touched on the numerous issues common to immigrant life among Vietnamese in America, including welfare, racism, bilingual education, and laws governing certain local business practices. A smaller number of protests were in support of religious appointments and allocation of church funding for Vietnamese services.

Although immigrant-related and mainstream political issues appear on occasion, the lion's share of protests deal with a world thousands of miles away, particularly when protests occur within the ethnic enclave. There are fewer opportunities to organize a protest against Vietnam-related issues when the object or target of protest may not be present in less densely Vietnamese-populated areas. Hence, in states where Vietnamese communities are small,

relatively more claims are made regarding issues central to immigrant life (Figure 5). Whereas, in an ethnic enclave, the number of homeward-looking protests tends to overshadow the relatively fewer protests dealing with immigrant issues.

This dual concern of Vietnam-related and immigrant-related issues was reflected clearly in the interviews of protest leaders. Six out of seven of them identified both improving immigrant life in the United States and of the Vietnamese living in Vietnam as key issues on the political agenda for Vietnamese Americans. These leaders saw the need to use multiple methods of political engagement. Besides protests, they commented, there ought to be Vietnamese running for office, more Vietnamese turnout in voting, and other conventional modes of civic participation. As an experienced leader of many anti-Communist protests asserted, by actively adopting more “mainstream” methods, Vietnamese Americans can have their voices heard throughout a number of issues, ranging from human rights concerns in Vietnam to local funding for education. But it does not mean abandoning demonstrations or hunger strikes. Depending on the type and the degree of urgency for each issue, the Vietnamese Americans will need to be mobilized to employ different tactics in obtaining their political goals.

Figure 5. Protest Issues and Locations, 1975-2001



Conclusion

In this article, we looked at protest activities in the Vietnamese American diasporas. We wanted to see what the pattern and content of protests told us about the process of Vietnamese American political incorporation. The results are mixed. As described, we saw that the ethnic enclave of Little Saigon, in Orange County was home to most of the protests, and the most frequent target of protests was the government of Vietnam. Sometimes, proxies for that government, for example, advocates of normalizing relations or individuals promoting exchange, were targets, but Vietnam always loomed large on the horizon. Identified protest leaders have mostly been passionate and committed individuals, rather than established organizations.

It is possible that our method has led us to fallacious conclusions about politics in the Vietnamese American community. While the ethnic enclave of Little Saigon produces most of the protest, it is overwhelmingly homeward-looking, focusing on issues on which influence is quite unlikely. Furthermore, incidents of protest against Vietnamese Americans who served as proxies for the Vietnamese government keep the community divisive. On the one hand, to the extent that Vietnamese American politics is monopolized by issues not salient to the larger community, the immigrant community will be underserved. Aside from such calculus, on the other hand, homeland-oriented politics helps maintain in part the Vietnamese ethnic identity by reproducing wartime memories and by reviving their history as a refugee community. This approach may serve some social psychological need but does little to exercise influence on policy.

The second generation of Vietnamese in America may move beyond the ghosts of war to become even more proactive in politics. Coupled with increased financial and political resources, the next generation may leave some parts of the politics of the homeland behind and become a significant political bloc in advocating policies benefiting immigrants, engaging a broader range of political issues, and contesting and winning larger numbers of political offices. At the same time, one may see changes in the batch of homeland issues with which Vietnamese Americans will lay their concerns. Perhaps, the Vietnamese Americans will never be fully incorporated politically along party lines but will act more cohesively as an ethnic group or join the effort of other ethnic groups. If this is the case, participation in foreign-policy oriented protests may provide a foundation for subsequent, more varied, political action, rather than a distraction from it. Concurrently, the various tactics added to the new repertoire of political actions may also enhance the quality of advocating homeward-looking issues, should those still be of concerns in the future.

If the same is true for other ethnic groups with strong ties to their homelands, the tapestry of American politics is changing from party competition to a multicultural affair. Recent studies have shown a decline in voting behavior and a growth in independent voters (Wattenberg 2002). The decline in party politics has become a current phenomenon. The trend may coincide with an increase in mobilization along ethnic or pan-ethnic lines on issues most relevant to the collective's welfare. Political incorporation for a new immigrant no longer means identification with certain party and becomes melted in party politics; rather, it is the use of available opportunities in a democracy to the immigrants' collective advantages.

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APPENDIX

Interview Questions

Introduction: Thanks very much for making the time to talk with me. I am working with a professor at UC-Irvine, and we are interested in political actions among the Vietnamese-American people in this area. I want to talk with you because you have organized community events in past years.

Xin cảm ơn anh cho phép tôi được thực hiện cuộc phỏng vấn ngay hôm nay. Tôi đang làm việc với một giáo sư tại Đại học Irvine, và chúng tôi muốn tìm hiểu về các sinh hoạt chính trị của người Việt ở vùng này. Chúng tôi xin phỏng vấn anh vì anh đã từng tổ chức những sinh hoạt cộng đồng trong những năm qua.

Time: about 60 minutes

Biography:

- When did you arrive in America? Anh đến Mỹ khi nào?
- What did you do before 1975? Anh làm gì trước năm 1975?
- What do you do now? Hiện nay anh đang làm gì?

Community Activism:

- What organizations have you been a part of? Anh đã từng tham gia sinh hoạt những hội đoàn nào?
- What are the important issues? Những vấn đề nào là quan trọng nhất?
- Why do you organize events? (Is that the best way to promote your views?) Tại sao anh tổ chức những sinh hoạt? (Nếu có phải là cách hay nhất để đưa ra những ý kiến của anh?)
- What makes an event successful? Những yếu tố nào làm cho một sinh hoạt thành công?
 - +Media coverage? (How do you get it?)
 - +Truyền thông? (Làm cách nào để giới truyền thông quan tâm đến sự việc?)
 - +Turnout? +Số người tham dự?
 - +Is publicity important? Why? +Vấn đề quảng bá có quan trọng hay không? Tại sao?
 - +Timing? +Thời gian?
 - +Location? +Thời điểm?
 - +Sponsorship? +Sự bảo trợ?
 - +Issues? +Vấn đề?

- What issues do most VA people think are important? (How do you know?)
- Vấn đề nào người Việt tại Mỹ cho là quan trọng? (Làm sao anh biết được?)

Specific Events:

- Goals/mission? -Mục đích?
- What groups were involved? -Những tổ chức/hoạt động nào đã tham gia?
- Why do you think XYZ was important? -Tại sao anh nghĩ là XYZ có tầm quan trọng?
- What impact do you think XYZ had on the V-A community? The US government? The Vietnamese government? The world?
- Anh nghĩ gì về ảnh hưởng của XYZ trên cộng đồng người Việt tại Mỹ? Chính phủ Mỹ? Chính phủ Việt Nam? Thế giới?

Future:

- If you were to do XYZ in the future, what would you do differently? Why?
- Nếu anh thực hiện XYZ trong tương lai, anh sẽ làm khác nhiều gì? Tại sao?
- What are some of the hot (salient) issues? (What makes them hot?)
- Những vấn đề nào đang nóng bỏng hiện nay? Tại sao?

- What strategies do you think will mobilize people best?
- Những phương án nào đang nóng hổi với người ta nhiều nhất?
- What issues? -Những vấn đề nào đang nóng hổi với người ta nhiều nhất?