



VOTER PARTICIPATION

AMONG CHINESE IMMIGRANTS IN NORWAY

RESULTS / RECOMMENDATIONS

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WHY?

Voter participation is a crucial part of democracy, but among certain groups, participation is lower than the average. Among Chinese immigrants in Norway, the amount that votes is significantly lower than that of the population as a whole. In the 2023 municipal elections, only 35 percent of Asian immigrants voted, compared to 69 percent of Norwegian citizens.

With support from the Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (Bufdir), the Center for Equality has conducted a survey among Chinese immigrants in Norway to understand the barriers that affect voter turnout. The survey was conducted in collaboration with the Norwegian-Chinese Women and Children Association (NCWA) to ensure relevance and recruitment. The study sheds light on both structural and individual barriers to participation, and proposes measures to strengthen democratic inclusion.

The study has 591 respondents, of whom almost all are migrants from China residing in Norway. 78 percent of the respondents are women and 22 percent are men.

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a red circular sticker. The sticker has the text "I Voted" written in white, bold, sans-serif font. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

I
Voted

ABOUT US

The Center for Equality is a multidisciplinary competence center that has equality as its main area of expertise. The centers' objective is to contribute to an inclusive and fair society with equal opportunities for all. This objective is tied to a broader, intersectional understanding of equality that includes all grounds for discrimination (gender, ethnicity, religion, age, sexual orientation, and disability). The Center for Equality plays an active information and advocacy role and is a driving force for increased equality at a local, regional, national, and international levels. We are based in Hamar in Innlandet.

The Norwegian-Chinese Women and Children Association (NCWA) is an organization established in 2009 to support Chinese women and children in Norway. They offer language courses, cultural and social events and activities to promote integration and community. NCWA is known for its work in strengthening the ties between Chinese and Norwegian communities through various initiatives and projects.

LANGUAGE AS BARRIER


The survey shows that access to information about the electoral process influences whether Chinese immigrants use their right to vote. Many experience that election materials and information are not available in their language, which causes uncertainty and distance to political processes. A large proportion of the respondents reported limited Norwegian language skills, making it difficult to understand the electoral process and political issues. Although information exists in several languages on valg.no, most respondents indicated that they received information through their municipality or from family and friends. A significant number of respondents were unaware of the available information channels, such as valg.no or voting campaigns aimed at immigrants. Over 30 percent responded that the information about elections and voting rights is too poor or not good enough.

The survey shows that 66.4 percent of the respondents reported that they voted in the 2023 election, while 33.6 percent did not exercise their right to vote. Various factors may influence voter participation among Chinese immigrants in Norway. The responses from the participants suggest that language skills, length of residence in Norway, and access to information can affect whether or not one uses their voting rights.

Many called for more available and targeted information, especially in their native language. Language barriers and a lack of familiarity with political processes can make it challenging to navigate the electoral system, potentially resulting in lower participation.

Among the respondents who indicated they were fluent in speaking Norwegian, voter participation was higher than among those who rated their Norwegian skills as limited. This aligns well with the Statistics Norway (SSB) findings, which have pointed out that immigrants who have lived longer in Norway and have higher Norwegian language skills participate in elections to a greater extent than those who have recently arrived or have lower language skills. This suggests that improving language skills and access to information could have a positive effect on voter participation.

Several respondents mentioned that the lack of information creates a vicious cycle, where low participation leads to minority groups remaining underrepresented in political processes. Thus, language is not just a practical challenge but also a key to understanding and participating in democratic processes.



«I have tried to find information on the internet, but there is little information for people who don't speak norwegian well. I feel excluded from something that should be a right.»

REPRESENTATION


Many Chinese immigrants experience that politics does not address their everyday challenges, and that they do not have clear voices in politics that represent their interests. Several respondents expressed uncertainty about whether their voice actually has an impact, and some believed that the Norwegian political system does not take their experiences and needs seriously enough. For some, voting is about a sense of belonging. If one does not experience that politics concerns oneself or one's immediate environment, it can lead to a distance from democratic processes. When voters experience that their experiences and needs are not reflected in politics, engagement and trust weaken.

Only 3.3 percent of municipal council representatives in 2023 had an immigrant background, despite this group constituting 18 percent of voters (Statistics Norway). Chinese immigrants constitute an even smaller proportion of these and are thus severely underrepresented in Norwegian municipal councils. Several respondents in the survey described how a lack of representation and visibility in political bodies reinforced the feeling of being outside of democracy.

Discrimination and everyday racism constitute additional factors that weaken the experience of democratic belonging. Research has shown how people of East Asian origin often encounter exclusion in social and professional contexts. Some respondents in our survey said that they have experienced prejudice and exclusion, which has led to lower political engagement. When the larger society is perceived as inaccessible or unfriendly, the motivation for electoral participation and political engagement is weakened.

***«There is serious discrimination in this country,
especially against Asian people.»***



A young girl with long dark hair, wearing a bright green hooded coat with a pink bow in her hair, is shown in profile from the side. She is reaching out with both hands towards a large, iridescent bubble that is floating in front of her. The bubble shows a reflection of the surrounding green trees and sky. The background is a soft-focus outdoor setting with green grass and trees. In the top right corner, there is a quote in white text.

«I feel like we're not part of society in a political way. No one cares what we think.»

OPPORTUNITIES FOR INCREASED VOTER TURNOUT

Despite the challenges, the survey shows that many Chinese immigrants want to participate more actively in democracy. They are calling for more accessible information in their own language and greater facilitation of political engagement. Digital platforms, social media, and organizations like NCWA play an important role in disseminating information about elections and politics. By consciously targeting information efforts towards these channels, more people can be reached with relevant and understandable content.

For democracy to be inclusive of all, we must dare to discuss why some groups participate less in elections. Low voter turnout among Chinese immigrants is not due to a lack of interest, but to barriers such as language, access to information, political representation, and a sense of belonging.

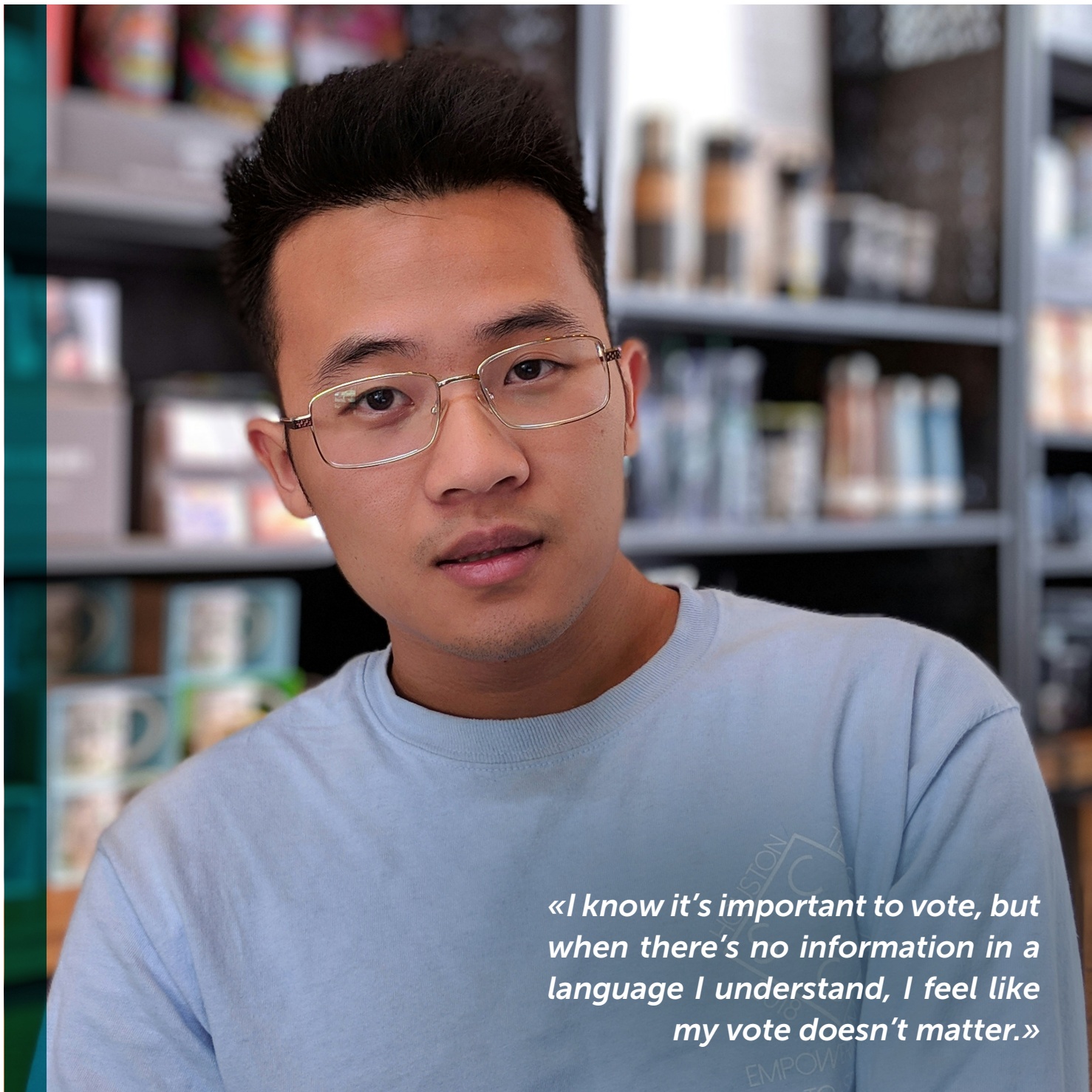
When large groups systematically participate less in elections, it can lead to biases in political

priorities. Politics is shaped by those who participate, and low voter turnout among immigrants can result in their needs and experiences being considered to a lesser extent.


There is a need for a broader conversation about how the electoral system can become more inclusive. The goal must be that information is understandable and accessible to everyone, that more people with an immigrant background find their place in politics, and that political issues are made relevant to different groups in society.

The lack of representation in political bodies can give a feeling of distance from the political system. When more people see themselves in politics, both trust in the system and motivation to participate can increase.

The discussion about voter turnout is not just about increasing voter turnout – it is about strengthening democracy by including all voices.



«I know it's important to vote, but when there's no information in a language I understand, I feel like my vote doesn't matter.»



«If the government want's foreigners to vote, they have to do more to show us why it's important. I don't feel like any political party is trying to reach us.»

RECOMMENDATIONS

BETTER ACCESS TO ELECTION INFORMATION

In order for more Chinese immigrants to participate in elections, information about the election process must be more easily accessible. There is a need for more targeted communication in multiple languages, both through digital platforms and physical information campaigns. Many immigrants obtain information from social media, religious communities and local organizations, and these channels should be better utilized to reach out with information about elections and voting rights.

INCREASED POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

Political representation is a key to increased participation. When voters see that people with their background are participating in politics, trust in the system increases. It is therefore important that political parties work actively to recruit people with an immigrant background to the electoral lists. Increased visibility of minority politicians in the public can also help lower the threshold for political engagement.

LOW-THRESHOLD MEASURES FOR NEW VOTERS

To strengthen democratic participation among immigrants, more low-threshold measures should be established. Cooperation between immigrant organizations and political actors can provide training in Norwegian politics and the electoral system. Experience from other countries shows that mock elections or simulations can give first-time voters a safer way to vote. In addition, election ambassadors

with an immigrant background can act as bridge builders between politics and their local communities.

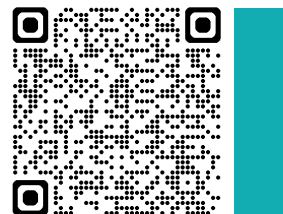
MEASURES AGAINST DISCRIMINATION AND EXCLUSION

Some respondents in the survey highlight discrimination and exclusion as barriers to electoral participation. When parts of the population experience that their vote does not count or that political institutions do not represent their interests, democracy is weakened. It is therefore important that authorities work actively against discrimination, both through inclusive political measures and by strengthening efforts to create a diverse and just society.

A MORE INCLUSIVE DEMOCRACY

By removing the barriers to voter participation and making democracy more accessible, we can ensure broader representation and strengthen trust in the political system. An inclusive democracy requires that everyone who has the right to vote also has the opportunity, knowledge and motivation to use it.

Scan QR-code for
chinese and nor-
wegian version:





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