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Class participation in politics in Southeast Asia

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Using the dataset from the Asian Barometer Survey conducted in 2010-2012, we determine the variations in political participation across socioeconomic classes in five Southeast Asian countries and apply Oaxaca decomposition method to explain the variations. In general, we find high rates of voting participation across classes in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand. In Singapore, barely half of the sample voted in previous elections. In Indonesia, Thailand, and Malaysia, the middle classes distinguish themselves from the rest by participating in other political activities, including contacting officials or the news media, joining others to voice out or directly address their common concerns, and attending rallies or demonstrations. Furthermore, interclass differences in political participation is due more to divergence in mean characteristics in Thailand, but they are due more to the heterogeneous effects of these characteristics in Indonesia and Malaysia. Relative to the middle classes in these three countries, those in the Philippines and Singapore each appears politically disengaged.

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1. Introduction

Are the middle classes more politically active or engaged than other socioeconomic classes in democratic Southeast Asian countries? There is theoretical basis to expect them to be so, which some casual observations seem to confirm. Aristotle first advanced the idea that the middle class is crucially linked with democracy, i.e., a large prosperous middle class mediate between the rich and the poor, and thereby creates the structural foundation for democratic processes [Glassman 1995]. Building on this idea, Lipset [1959] hypothesized a country's

democratization—more evidently, perhaps, among the middle classes—as it develops. Also, Moore [1967] famously claimed that there can be no democracy without the middle class. Enunciating the casual link between middle class and democratization, Acemoglu and Robinson [2006] posit that "… a strong and large middle class may aid democratization because it is less in favor of radical policies than the poor. Hence, if the rich are convinced that democracy is controlled by the interest of the middle class agents, they have less to fear from democracy and are less inclined to use repression to avoid it." This idea finds support in a study where democratic institutional reforms are found likelier to be in countries with sizable middle classes [Loayza, Rigolini, and Llorente 2012].[1] Arguably, the middle classes help bring about such reforms by espousing democratic views and values and then acting on them when needed.

The last two decades or so in Southeast Asia witnessed a range of participation of the middle classes in major events. In Thailand, the Bangkok middle classes have participated in political rallies that led to the ouster of the popularly elected Thaksin Shinawatra as prime minister in 2006. Thaksin's sister, Yingluck Shinawatra, while also popularly elected as prime minister in 2011, nonetheless also faced massive anti-government protests in 2013 that culminated in her removal from office in 2014 by the Constitutional Court on corruption charges. Even in post-Soeharto Indonesia, corruption in the highest level of government continues to agitate various groups, including the middle classes that, together with the poor population, elected Joko Widodo for president in 2014. In the Philippines, the urban middle classes organized the so-called Million People March in August 2013 that brought in more than 100,000 Filipinos to Luneta Park to rally against corruption and pork barrel funds. Before that, they joined in the street rallies in EDSA that culminated in the removal from office of President Joseph Estrada in early 2001. In Singapore and Malaysia, the same political parties continue to remain in power, although Malaysia's United Malays National Organization is facing a growing opposition led by its former member Anwar Ibrahim, whose supporters include the youth, the ethnic Chinese, and the urban residents.

Notwithstanding the importance of these political activities, do they really distinguish the middle classes from the rest? Several previous studies on Southeast Asia (e.g., Robison, David, and Goodman [1996]; Embong [2001a]; Kimura [2003]) noted that even in earlier periods, the middle classes—loosely referring to those living in major urban areas, are professionals, are white-collar workers[2], or are college educated—engaged in political rallies, protest demonstrations, and

[1] For recent studies linking the middle classes, economic development and democracy, see, for example, Gerring et al. [2005], Banerjee and Duflo [2008], Chun, Hasan and Ulubasoglu [2011], and Birdsall [2015].
[2] The studies in Embong [2001a] use the Erikson-Goldthorpe scheme in classifying people into social classes on employment status and occupational classifications.

election debates and campaigns to demand reforms or change in government. Rather than leading in these political activities, the middle classes, however, were merely following, and they were more sporadic than regular in their engagements. Their participation was prodded more by a general or popular sentiment (say against a repressive regime) and less by pure class consciousness or interest.

Two reasons are suggested for their apparently restrained role. Firstly, they also benefitted from the economic policies promulgated by the very regimes that they wanted to reform or change. Secondly, they continue to espouse traditional values that emphasize respect for authority and primacy of group welfare, just like the other Asian societies. Indeed, it was Singapore's Lee Kwan Yew who famously argued that Asians can achieve economic growth without giving up traditional values, unlike Western societies (Emerson [1995]; Fukuyama [1995]).

Yet, it is hard to determine from the aforementioned studies whether the middle classes as a group are not unlike the rest. One the one hand, the socioeconomic classes are not well identified; much of the findings is based on the observed actions of known members of the middle class who may be extremist themselves. Second, there are other forms of political activities—like voting in elections or contacting officials that are less public or dramatic than others—wherein the socioeconomic classes may differentiate themselves. We thus re-investigate the issue of class participation in politics in five Southeast Asian countries.

Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand are selected for two reasons. Firstly, all five have the survey data required for the method adopted here. Of the countries in Southeast Asia, only these five, Vietnam, and Cambodia were included in the third wave of the Asian Barometer Survey conducted in 2010-2012. Being in the same region, they all share a common geography, socio-cultural heritage, and history, which facilitate comparison. Secondly, they vary enough in terms of economic development and politics that can be explored to answer our main research question. The World Bank classifies Indonesia and the Philippines as lower-middle countries and Thailand and Malaysia as upper-middle income countries. Like most Asian developing countries, the four developing Southeast Asian countries also experienced in recent years reductions in poverty rates and expansion of the middle-income sub-population [Asian Development Bank 2010]. All four have positive POLITY IV scores in 2010, indicating they are more democratic than autocratic.[3] Of the five, only Singapore is considered a high-income country, but it also has a negative POLITY IV score and, perhaps, a more entrenched Confucian culture. Arguably, Singapore may provide the benchmark for the group.

Following the lead of previous studies on the Asian values thesis that used survey data (e.g., Chang, Zhu, and Pak [2007]; Chang, Chu, and Diamond

[3] POLITY IV is developed by the POLITY IV Project. http://www.systemspeace.org/polity/polity4htm. Accessed 30 July 2015.

[2012]), we use for this paper the dataset from the third round of the Asian Barometer Survey. Instead of using the self-reported income status or occupation, we construct wealth/asset indices and then delineate the nationally representative sample into three socioeconomic classes. We then compare the three classes in terms of proportions that participate in certain political activities. The differences in proportions are further decomposed using the Oaxaca method into two parts: one part that is due to differences in the observed characteristics (like age, education, urbanity, occupation) of the classes; and the other part that is due to heterogeneous effects of the same characteristics across classes.[4] Unlike in previous studies, our approach here allows us to measure and decompose the class differences in their political participation and to compare the results across countries.

In general, we find high rates of voting participation across classes in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand. In Singapore, barely half of the sample voted in previous elections. In Indonesia, Thailand, and Malaysia, the middle classes distinguish themselves from the rest by participating in other political activities, including contacting officials or the news media, joining others to voice out or directly address their common concerns, and attending rallies or demonstrations. Interclass differences in political participation is due more to divergence in mean characteristics in Thailand, but they are due more to the heterogeneous effects of these characteristics in Indonesia and Malaysia. Relative to the middle classes in these three countries, those in the Philippines and Singapore each appears politically disengaged.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 discusses the data used in the analysis.[5] Section 3 details the methods used in the analysis. The results are then presented in Section 4. The concluding section discusses the implications of the findings.

2. Data

2.1. Survey data

The data used here is obtained from the third wave of the Asian Barometer Survey[6] jointly conducted by Taiwan-based Academia Sinica and the National Taiwan University. The third-wave surveys were conducted in 2010-2012 in nine East Asian and Southeast Asian countries, including Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. Local institutions administered the country-level surveys and used the same survey instrument and sampling design to collect comparable data. In each country, a nationally representative, random sample of

[4] Dow [2009] used the same method to account for the differences in political views between genders.
[5] Sections 2 and 3 draw heavily from Capuno [2015].
[6] The website is www.asianbarometer.org.

voting-age population served as interview respondents. The sample consisted of 1,550 for Indonesia, 1,214 for Malaysia, 1,200 for the Philippines, 1,000 for Singapore, and 1,512 for Thailand.[7]

The survey questionnaire used has several modules designed to capture, among others, the respondent's participation in elections and other political activities and his or her demographic and socioeconomic characteristics (e.g., family composition, self-reported household income level, and social status). Additionally, the enumerator also records his or her own observations about the respondent and the community characteristics in the interview sites.

2.2. Indicators of political participation

We constructed ten binary indicators of political participation. The first 4 indicators pertain to electoral participation. These indicators are *voted_last election* (= 1 if the respondent voted in the most recent national election, parliamentary, or presidential; 0 otherwise), *voted_most elections* (= 1 if voted in every or most past elections, 0 otherwise), *member_political organization* (= 1 if member of a political party or of an organization that supports candidates, 0 otherwise), and *support_candidate* (= 1 if tried to persuade others to vote for a certain candidate or party or do anything else to help out or work for a party or candidate running in the election, 0 otherwise). Note that the valid samples for the above indicators exclude those who were not eligible to vote or to participate in the past elections, possibly because they were too young then.

The next three indicators pertain to personal initiatives to draw the attention of authorities presumably to their concerns. The indicators of personal engagement are *contacted_official* (= 1 if contacted elected officials or legislative representatives or officials at higher level at least once in the past three years, 0 otherwise), *contacted_other leaders* (= 1 if contacted traditional leaders/community leaders or other influential people outside the government at least once in the past three years, 0 otherwise), and *contacted_media* (= 1 if contacted news media more than once in the past three years, 0 otherwise). Note that it is possible that those who responded did the implied political activities together with others, but that is not asked in the survey.

The last three indicators pertain to collective actions other than electoral participations to directly address a common concern or to call public attention. The three indicators are *participated_with others* (= 1 if got together with others to try to resolve local problems or to raise an issue or sign a petition at least once in the past three years, 0 otherwise), *attended_rally* (= 1 if attended a campaign

[7] The sample sizes were set to allow for a minimum confidence interval of ±3 percent at the 95 percent probability. The sample sizes are standard in similar surveys (e.g., World Values Survey, EuroBarometer Survey).

meeting or rally in the last national election, 0 otherwise), and *attended_demonstration* (= 1 if attended a demonstration or protest march more than once in the past three years, 0 otherwise). Note that the samples for *attended_rally* exclude those who responded "not applicable" to the relevant survey question, possibly again because they were too young.

No single indicator is a definitive measure of political engagement, but altogether they will indicate the extent. Our participation indicators are similar to those in Wu and Lee [2012] and Verba, Nie, and Kim [1978]. Table 1 presents the variables used in this paper and their definitions.

TABLE 1. Variable definitions

Variable name	Definition
Political participation	
Voted_last election	= 1 if voted in the last election, 0 otherwise
Voted_most elections	= 1 if voted in all or most past elections, 0 otherwise
Member_political organization	= 1 if member of a political party or an organization that supports a candidate, 0 otherwise
Supported_candidate	= 1 if tried to persuade others to vote for a certain candidate or party or do anything else to help out or work for a party or candidate running in the election, 0 otherwise
Contacted_officials	= 1 if contacted elected officials or legislative representatives or officials at higher level at least once in the past three years, 0 otherwise
Contacted_other leaders	= 1 if contacted traditional leaders/community leaders or other influential people outside the government at least once in the past three years, 0 otherwise
Contacted_media	= 1 if contacted news media more than once in the past three years, 0 otherwise
Participated_with others	= 1 if got together with others to try to resolve local problems or to raise an issue or sign a petition at least once in the past three years, 0 otherwise
Attended_rally	= 1 if attended a campaign meeting or rally in the last national election, 0 otherwise
Attended_demonstration	= 1 if attended a demonstration or protest march more than once in the past three years, 0 otherwise
Economic class	
Lower class	= 1 if belongs to wealth quintile 1 or 2, 0 otherwise
Middle class	= 1 if belongs to wealth quintile 3 or 4, 0 otherwise
Upper class	= 1 if belongs to wealth quintile 5, 0 otherwise
Other characteristics	
Male	= 1 if male, 0 otherwise
Age	Age in years
Age2	Square of age
Some college	= 1 if has at least some college education, 0 otherwise
Finished college	= 1 if finished college, 0 otherwise
Employed	= 1 if employed, 0 otherwise
Catholic	= 1 if religion is Roman Catholic, 0 otherwise

Variable name	Definition
Buddhist	= 1 if religion is Buddhism, 0 otherwise
Islam	= 1 if religion is Islam, 0 otherwise
In union	= 1 if married or living in with a partner, 0 otherwise
Household size	Number of household members
Urban	= 1 if residing in urban area, 0 otherwise
Mega_majorcity	= 1 if living in capital city, megacity, regional center, or major city, 0 otherwise
Access index	= 100 x {[paved road + public transport + post office + school + police + sewerage + clinic + cellular signal + recreation facility + church + town hall + market stall]/12}

2.3. Socioeconomic classes

Following the method in Filmer and Pritchett [2001], we classified into economic classes the samples in each country based on wealth indices constructed, which are based on the reported household amenities and assets. The lists of amenities and assets vary slightly across countries. First, we developed binary indicators of the household's connection to electricity and piped water and ownership of motor vehicle (car or jeep), tractor, television set, cable television, motorcycle, telephone, mobile phone, bicycle, radio, pumping set, refrigerator, camera, and livestock (goat and cow). Next, we took the mean and standard deviation of each indicator, and then we derived the first principal component of the vector containing these indicators. These statistics are then used to generate a score for each household asset or amenity. The asset scores are then added up to derive the household's overall wealth index. Ranked from lowest to highest wealth index, the households are then grouped into quintile.

The first two quintiles together are classified as the lower class, the third and fourth quintiles together as the middle class, and the fifth quintile as the upper class. By construction, the lower class may include households with incomes above the poverty threshold but who may become poor due to sudden unemployment, illness, calamity, or other adverse shocks. As well, the middle class possibly includes some wealthy households whose fortunes are still modest to be considered part of the economic elite. By construction, the last group is the wealthiest and the smallest in size (only 10 percent of the sample). This is consistent with the observation that the rich are few and rarely participate in such surveys.

For the Philippines, Thailand, or Indonesia, the first principal component accounts for 21 percent of the within-country variations in the household amenities and assets (and livestock). The corresponding proportions are 18 percent in Singapore and 15 percent in Malaysia. To further validate the wealth quintiles, we correlated them with the self-declared household income levels. In the surveys, the respondents were asked to identify where they are at in a five-rung income ladder, where the first rung is the "lowest level" and the fifth and last

rung is the "highest level". The resulting correlation coefficients are 63 percent for Thailand, 55 percent for Indonesia, 47 percent for the Philippines, 46 percent for Malaysia, and 25 percent for Singapore.[8]

Finally, we also compared the proportions of white-collar workers in the lower class, middle class, and upper class in each country. The expectation is that most, if not all, white-collar workers would belong in the middle and upper classes.[9] The proportions of white-collar workers among the employed are as follows: in the Philippines, 34 percent in the lower class, 57 percent in the middle class, and 66 percent in the upper class; in Thailand, 12 percent in the lower class, 29 percent in the middle class, and 72 percent in the upper class; in Indonesia, 17 percent in the lower class, 41 percent in the middle class, and 66 percent in the upper class; in Singapore: 76 percent in the lower class, 82 percent in the middle class, and 90 percent in the upper class; and in Malaysia, 40 percent in the lower class, 63 percent in the middle class, and 70 percent in the upper class.

Overall, our wealth quintiles and the economic classes derived from them correlate fairly well with other indicators of social classes. The correlation is relatively lower in Singapore, arguably because of the limited list of amenities and assets contained in the Asian Barometer Survey questionnaire. Furthermore, the choices are too commonplace to sharply distinguish Singaporeans by wealth status. Since most Singaporeans are well off, and all live in urban areas, they are likely to own all the assets in the list, save perhaps the livestock and farm equipment.

2.4. Covariates

Table 1 shows the variables used to further characterize the sample respondents. The individual-level characteristics are gender (male = 1, 0 otherwise), age (in years), attainment of at least some tertiary-level of formal schooling (at least some college), employment status (employed), married or living-in with partner (in-union), and religion (Catholic, Islam, Buddhist). The household-level characteristics include household size and residence in an urban area, capital city, megacity, or regional center. Both age and its squared term (age2) and household size are continuous variables; the rest of the aforementioned variables are dichotomous variables.

[8] The correlation estimates are for samples that reported their household income level and excludes those with missing responses or replied not to know their income levels.

[9] The classification of the respondents into "white-collar" worker or otherwise is based on the scheme proposed by Erikson and Goldthorpe [1992]. In this paper, "white-collar" workers include "professionals, large enterprise employers, managers (with 1-10 or more than 10 subordinates), and routine clerical and sales workers." However this classification can be applied only to respondents who, at the time of the survey, were currently employed and declared their main occupation.

We also constructed an access index based on the reported presence of certain public facilities or amenities within the respondent's community or immediate environment. In developing the index, first we developed binary indicators of the presence of paved roads leading to the respondent's abode, and of access to a public transportation, post office, school, police station, public sewerage facility, clinic, cellular phone signal, recreation facility, church, town hall, and marketplace. Each indicator has a value of 1 if the reference public amenity or facility is present and 0 if otherwise. Then we summed up the values of these indicators, divided the total by 12, and finally multiplied the resulting quotient by 100 to derive the household's access index score. The access index score ranges from 0 (lowest) to 100 (highest). A high score implies that the household has fairly easy access to sources of information or facilities for mobility or social interactions.

Annex 1 shows the mean and standard deviations of the covariates for each country. In each country, about half of the sample is male, and the mean age is between 41 to 47 years. Between 9 percent in Indonesia and 48 percent in Singapore attained some college education. In the Philippines, about 84 percent are Catholic. In Indonesia, 87 percent practice Islam, while the figure is 57 percent in Malaysia. The proportion of Buddhists is 94 percent in Thailand and 40 percent in Singapore. In each country, at least 48 percent claims to be employed and at least 68 percent are married or living-in with a partner (in union). The mean household size ranges from around 4 (Singapore) to nearly 5.7 (Malaysia). Less than half of the respondents in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand live in urban areas. A huge majority of the sample in the Philippines resides in megacities or major cities, while less than 25 percent of the samples in Indonesia or Malaysia do so. (Note that this indicator cannot be constructed with the survey data for Thailand and Singapore.) Finally, the mean access index is lowest in the Philippines at 65.10 percent and highest in Singapore at 98.08 percent. As expected, around forty percent of the sample in each country belongs to the lower class and another forty percent to the middle class; the rest belongs to the upper class.

3. Methods

3.1. Test of proportions

For each country sample, we apply tests of proportions to determine if the middle class differs from other economic classes in terms of political participation. Basically, the test ascertains if the middle class and another class have statistically equal proportions of members who, say, voted in the last election. If the proportions are not equal, we then proceed to decompose the difference using the Oaxaca method.

3.2. Oaxaca decomposition method

First introduced in Blinder [1973] and Oaxaca [1973], the original Oaxaca decomposition method (also called the Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition method) was used to decompose the sources of wage differentials between sexes, where wages are a linear function of gender and other control variables. In this paper, we follow the extension of the original method to non-linear functions made by Sinning, Hanh, and Bauer [2008].

To fix ideas, consider an outcome Y being a nonlinear function of the characteristics of members of group g. Y could be a dichotomous indicator of political participation (e.g., 1 = Yes, 0 otherwise) and is related by a logistic function, say, to a vector of observable characteristics $\boldsymbol{X}$ (that contains, for example, gender, employment, and educational attainment). Let the average outcome for group M be denoted by $\overline{Y}_M$. Let the average outcome for group L be denoted by $\overline{Y}_L$. The difference in the average outcomes can be decomposed as follows:

$$\overline{Y}_M - \overline{Y}_L = \{E_{\beta_L}(Y_{iM}|\, \boldsymbol{X}_{iM}) - E_{\beta_L}(Y_{iL}|\, \boldsymbol{X}_{iL})\} + \{E_{\beta_M}(Y_{iL}|\, \boldsymbol{X}_{iL}) - E_{\beta_L}(Y_{iL}|\, \boldsymbol{X}_{iL})\}$$

$$+ \{[E_{\beta_M}(Y_{iM}|\, \boldsymbol{X}_{iM}) - E_{\beta_L}(Y_{iM}|\, \boldsymbol{X}_{iM})] - [E_{\beta_M}(Y_{iL}|\, \boldsymbol{X}_{iL}) - E_{\beta_L}(Y_{iL}|\, \boldsymbol{X}_{iL})]\},$$

where $E_{\beta_g}(Y_{ig}|\boldsymbol{X}_{ig})$ refers to the conditional expectation of Y_{ig}, and $E_{\beta_g}(Y_{ig}|\boldsymbol{X}_{ih})$ refers to the conditional expectation of Y_{ih} evaluated at the parameter vector β_g, with $g,h = (M,L)$ and $g \neq h$.

To elaborate, the difference in the mean outcomes of groups M and L can be decomposed into three parts, as represented by the three terms in parentheses in the right-hand side of the equation above.

The first part, $\{E_{\beta_L}(Y_{iM}|\, \boldsymbol{X}_{iM}) - E_{\beta_L}(Y_{iL}|\, \boldsymbol{X}_{iL})\}$, is due to the differences in the average characteristics of the two groups. Specifically, it denotes the change in the mean outcome of group L if its members attain the same characteristics as those in group M, but multiplied by the coefficients of group L.

The second part, $\{E_{\beta_M}(Y_{iL}|\, \boldsymbol{X}_{iL}) - E_{\beta_L}(Y_{iL}|\, \boldsymbol{X}_{iL})\}$, is due to differences in the coefficients of the two groups. It denotes the change in the mean outcome of group L if its coefficients are set equal to that of group M, but evaluated at the same average characteristics of group L.

The last term, $\{[E_{\beta_M}(Y_{iM}|\, \boldsymbol{X}_{iM}) - E_{\beta_L}(Y_{iM}|\, \boldsymbol{X}_{iM})] - [E_{\beta_M}(Y_{iL}|\, \boldsymbol{X}_{iL}) - E_{\beta_L}(Y_{iL}|\, \boldsymbol{X}_{iL})]\}$, derives from the interaction of the differences in the mean characteristics and in the coefficients of the two groups. In our empirical implementation of this decomposition, the reference group is the middle class (M) and the comparison group (L) could be other households not in the middle class ("other class" means low class and upper class), those that are in the low class alone, or those that are in the upper class alone.

To illustrate the insight that can be gained with this method, consider one characteristic, say, college education, and one outcome, say, voted in the last election. Suppose the middle class has a higher proportion of members than the lower class who voted. The decomposition allows us to determine how much of the difference in proportions would be reduced if the lower class achieved the same average level of education as the middle class. This is important since if by doing so the differences are completely or substantially eliminated then the case for subsidized college education of the underprivileged is strengthened, in this case the higher education will inculcate in them the virtue and value of exercising their rights and duties to vote.

However, if the coefficients are significantly different, the decomposition method will also indicate that the same college education provided to the poor will not make them exercise their voting rights as much as the middle class, which renders such an education policy inadequate for the purpose. The differences in coefficients reflect the heterogeneous effects of the same intervention targeted to the two groups. These may arise out of idiosyncrasies in personal (or class) experiences or expectation, or these may be conditioned by the social context or culture to which members of the same class belong. The decomposition method used here provides an estimate and the statistical significance of the heterogeneous effects, but it does not identify the reasons for the differential impacts. Notwithstanding this limitation, distinguishing the differences in mean characteristics from the differences in their effects to explain the variations in political participation across classes is still relevant to policy. Since at least some observable characteristics (like education and employment) are directly influenced by government intervention, the decomposition method can shed light on the effectiveness in terms of shaping a national political consensus of government policies and programs, on the one hand, and of possible (yet still unidentified) psychosocial and cultural factors, on the other.

Since the dependent variables are all dichotomous variables, we use probit regression models to estimate the differences in the probability of an outcome (measuring political participation) conditional on a list of covariates (characteristics). To carry out non-linear Oaxaca decomposition analysis, we use the Stata module *nldecompose* [Sinning, Hahn, and Bauer 2008]. Note that in both the tests of proportions and Oaxaca decompositions, the reference group is the middle class. Thus, a negative (positive) difference in proportions indicates a lower (higher) proportion of the middle class than either the lower class or upper.

4. Results

4.1. Test of proportions

Table 2 shows the results of the tests of proportions for Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand. In the left panel, we find that, overall, a high proportion (90 percent) of Indonesians exercised their right to vote, but a significantly lower percentage had other forms of political engagements. Only a fourth of them reported to have joined a rally or a campaign meeting, and about one in ten joined forces with others to address a collective issue.

Nonetheless, there are indications that the Indonesian middle class is different from the other classes. When compared to the lower class, they appear to be more active in being members of political organizations, in supporting political candidates or parties, in contacting local officials or the news media, or in joining others to address a common concern. When compared to the rich, however, they appear less inclined to contact officials or the news media or to team up with others to resolve a common concern.

In the middle panel, we find that nearly 80 percent of the Filipinos voted in past elections, and about 23 percent of them reported to have joined political rallies. Less than five percent reported to have participated in other types of political activities. Generally, members of the Filipino middle class do not appear to be more or less politically active or engaged than the lower class or upper class. They appear to be distinct from the lower class only in that a lower percentage of them have joined forces with others to address a common problem.

Like Indonesians, most Thais exercised their right to vote (right panel). Unlike in Indonesia and the Philippines, nearly half of the Thais claimed to have joined political campaigns or rallies during the last national election. Less than 10 percent of Thais reported to have participated in other forms of political activities. When compared to the lower class, members of the middle class are less likely to vote or to attend a rally, but they are more likely to contact the news media or participate with others. When compared to the rich, the middle class is likelier to vote, to support a political party or a candidate, or to attend a rally.

TABLE 2. Test of proportions: Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand

Indicator	Indonesia				Philippines				Thailand			
		Difference in proportions				Difference in proportions				Difference in proportions		
	Overall proportion	Middle class vs. others	Middle class vs. lower class	Middle class vs. upper class	Overall proportion	Middle class vs. others	Middle class vs. lower class	Middle class vs. upper class	Overall proportion	Middle class vs. others	Middle class vs. lower class	Middle class vs. upper class
Voted_last election	0.903	-0.005	-0.020	0.026	0.798	0.024	0.027	0.018	0.913	0.003	-0.033**	0.072***
	[0.0296]	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.023)	[0.401]	(0.025)	(0.028)	(0.035)	[0.283]	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.024)
	N=1550				*N*=1032				*N*=1509			
Voted_most elections	0.923	-0.008	-0.015	0.006	0.786	0.014	0.025	-0.011	0.921	0.003	-0.033**	0.076***
	[0.266]	(0.014)	(0.015)	(0.020)	[0.410]	(0.025)	(0.027)	(0.033)	[0.268]	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.023)
	N=1528				*N*=1127				*N*=1498			
Member_political organization	0.070	0.030**	0.035**	0.019	0.022	0.003	0.008	-0.008	0.006	-0.002	-0.001	-0.008
	[0.256]	(0.014)	(0.015)	(0.019)	[0.146]	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.014)	[0.077]	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.007)
	N=1550				*N*=1200				*N*=1512			
Supported_ candidate	0.084	0.016	0.026*	-0.006	0.119	0.013	0.023	-0.009	0.081	0.014	-0.001	0.037**
	[0.277]	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.021)	[0.324]	(0.021)	(0.022)	(0.030)	[0.273]	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.017)
	N=1550				*N*=1032				*N*=1503			
Contacted_ officials	0.015	0.001	0.013**	-0.023**	0.026	-0.011	-0.008	-0.017	0.034	0.014	0.016	0.007
	[0.124]	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.012)	[0.159]	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.014)	[0.181]	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.013)
	N=1550				*N*=1200				*N*=1509			
Contacted_other leaders	0.046	0.006	0.018	-0.020	0.028	0.006	0.005	0.010	0.040	-0.002	0.003	-0.016
	[0.209]	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.017)	[0.166]	(0.010)	(0.011)	(0.013)	[0.200]	(0.010)	(0.011)	(0.015)
	N=1550				*N*=1200				*N*=1509			

TABLE 2. Test of proportions: Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand

Indicator	Indonesia				Philippines				Thailand			
		Difference in proportions				Difference in proportions				Difference in proportions		
	Overall proportion	Middle class vs. others	Middle class vs. lower class	Middle class vs. upper class	Overall proportion	Middle class vs. others	Middle class vs. lower class	Middle class vs. upper class	Overall proportion	Middle class vs. others	Middle class vs. lower class	Middle class vs. upper class
Contacted_ media	0.019	-0.002	0.013**	-0.035***	0.030	0.010	0.009	0.014	0.043	0.013	0.020*	-0.004
	[0.138]	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.014)	[0.171]	(0.010)	(0.011)	(0.013)	[0.202]	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.016)
	N=1550				*N*=1200				*N*=1503			
Participated_with others	0.126	0.008	0.034*	-0.048*	0.063	-0.023	-0.029*	-0.009	0.082	0.014	0.034**	-0.022
	[0.332]	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.026)	[0.244]	(0.014)	(0.016)	(0.019)	[0.275]	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.021)
	N=1550				*N*=1200				*N*=1510			
Attended_rally	0.248	-0.004	-0.025	0.041	0.226	0.010	0.023	-0.019	0.499	-0.078***	-0.175***	0.112***
	[0.432]	(0.022)	(0.025)	(0.029)	[0.418]	(0.027)	(0.029)	(0.038)	[0.500]	(0.026)	(0.028)	(0.034)
	N=1550				*N*=1032				*N*=1507			
Attended_ demonstration	0.021	0.004	0.007	-0.004	0.029	-0.009	-0.008	-0.013	0.051	0.002	-0.002	0.004
	[0.142]	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.011)	[0.168]	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.014)	[0.220]	(0.013)	(0.014)	(0.017)
	N=1550				*N*=1200				*N*=1509			

Notes: Figures in brackets are standard deviations. Figures in parentheses are standard errors. *N* means number of observations.
*$p<0.10$
**$p<0.05$
***$p<0.01$

Table 3 shows the corresponding results for Singapore and Malaysia. Relative to Indonesians, Filipinos and Thais, Singaporeans in general appear to be less politically engaged. Less than half of them voted in most of the past elections, and only 56 percent of them voted in the last election. Less than eight percent of them joined in rallies, and less than four percent joined any other political activity. Moreover, a lower proportion of the middle class than the lower class voted in most elections or contacted any government official. Also, a lower percentage of them than the upper class supported a political party or candidate.

The overall pattern of political participation of Malaysians is closer to that of the Indonesians, Filipinos, or Thais than to Singaporeans. About three in every four Malaysians exercised their right to vote. About one in ten was a member of political parties or organizations or supported political candidates. Nearly two in ten contacted government officials or joined others to address a common concern. About three in ten attended political rallies. When compared to the lower class, the middle class has a greater percentage of members who belong to political organizations or contacted officials, but less of them attended demonstrations. When compared to the upper class, the middle class appears less likely to contact traditional leaders or community leaders or to contact news media.

TABLE 3. Test of proportions: Singapore and Malaysia

Indicator	Singapore				Malaysia			
		Difference in proportions				Difference in proportions		
	Overall proportion	Middle class vs. others	Middle class vs. lower class	Middle class vs. upper class	Overall proportion	Middle class vs. others	Middle class vs. lower class	Middle class vs. upper class
Voted_last election	0.554	-0.022	-0.017	-0.035	0.770	0.008	0.014	0.004
	[0.497]	(0.034)	(0.038)	(0.047)	[0.421]	(0.027)	(0.029)	(0.037)
	N=855				*N*=1026			
Voted_most elections	0.484	-0.059*	-0.070*	-0.034	0.746	-0.013	-0.001	-0.033
	[0.500]	(0.034)	(0.037)	(0.048)	[0.436]	(0.028)	(0.030)	(0.037)
	N=855				*N*=1026			
Member_political organization	0.012	0.0003	0.002	-0.004	0.100	0.032*	0.042**	0.012
	[0.109]	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.011)	[0.300]	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.025)
	N=1000				*N*=1214			
Supported_ candidate	0.012	-0.013*	-0.011	-0.016*	0.105	-0.015	-0.012	-0.019
	[0.110]	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.011)	[0.306]	(0.018)	(0.019)	(0.024)
	N=979				*N*=1214			
Contacted_officials	0.02	-0.013	-0.018*	-0.004	0.288	0.023	0.062**	-0.054
	[0.140]	(0.008)	(0.01)	(0.011)	[0.453]	(0.027)	(0.028)	(0.037)
	N=1000				*N*=1214			
Contacted_other leaders	0.008	-0.005	-0.008	-0.0004	0.181	-0.024	0.002	-0.075**
	[0.089]	(0.005)	(0.007)	(0.006)	[0.385]	(0.022)	(0.024)	(0.032)
	N=1000				*N*=1214			
Contacted_media	0.022	0	0.002	-0.004	0.060	-0.013	-0.001	-0.038**
	[0.147]	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.014)	[0.238]	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.021)
	N=1000				*N*=1214			

Indicator	Singapore				Malaysia			
		Difference in proportions				Difference in proportions		
	Overall proportion	Middle class vs. others	Middle class vs. lower class	Middle class vs. upper class	Overall proportion	Middle class vs. others	Middle class vs. lower class	Middle class vs. upper class
Participated_with others	0.038	-0.019	-0.016	-0.026	0.167	-0.015	-0.014	-0.014
	[0.191]	(0.012)	(0.013)	(0.018)	[0.373]	(0.022)	(0.024)	(0.029)
	N=1000				*N*=1214			
Attended_rally	0.076	0.014	0.021	-0.002	0.316	-0.003	-0.029	0.052
	[0.265]	(0.017)	(0.019)	(0.025)	[0.465]	(0.027)	(0.030)	(0.035)
	N=973				*N*=1214			
Attended_ demonstration	0.01	-0.004	-0.0002	-0.0008	0.030	-0.030***	-0.036***	-0.016
	[0.010]	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.009)	[0.172]	(0.009)	(0.011)	(0.012)
	N=1000				*N*=1214			

Notes: Figures in brackets are standard deviations. Figures in parentheses are standard errors. *N* means number of observations.
*p<0.10
**p<0.05
***p<0.01

In summary, there is generally a high level of participation in elections among Southeast Asian people. A small but significant minority in most countries attends rallies, contacts officials or the news media, or joins others to voice out or directly address their common concerns. In these political activities, the middle classes distinguish themselves from the rest. The factors that make them distinct are identified below.

4.2. Oaxaca decomposition[10]

Table 4 shows for Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand the results of the Oaxaca decomposition of the sources of the class differences in political participation. Note that the decomposition is done only for those participation indicators where class differences are statistically significant. In the left panel, we see that, in Indonesia, the differences between the middle class and the lower class are not due to the dissimilarities in their average characteristics but rather to the relatively bigger effects of the same characteristics on the middle class. The results show that the differences in coefficients account for at least three percentage points of the total gap in proportions of the middle class and lower class that reported to be members of political organizations or supported political candidates. Furthermore, the differences in coefficients

[10] The results reported are based on a set of 32 unweighted regression runs, one pair for each indicator of political participation where proportions of the middle classes and another class (lower classes, upper classes) differ. Sampling weights are not used to make the results comparable with those obtained in the tests of proportions, which do not allow weights. The detailed regression results are not reported here to save on space, but they are available from the author upon request.

account for at least a percentage point of the total gap in proportions that contacted officials or the news media. The decomposition reveals, however, that the differences between the middle and upper classes are only apparent. Neither the differences in average characteristics, their differential impact on the likelihood of political participation, or the interaction of these two factors appears to be statistically significant.[11]

TABLE 4. Oaxaca Decomposition of political participation: Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand

Indicator	Indonesia			Philippines			Thailand		
	Middle class vs. others	Middle class vs. lower class	Middle class vs. upper class	Middle class vs. others	Middle class vs. lower class	Middle class vs. upper class	Middle class vs. other	Middle class vs. lower class	Middle class vs. upper class
Voted_last election									
Characteristics								-0.038***	0.038*
								(0.009)	(0.020)
Coefficients								0.042*	-0.002
								(0.025)	(0.020)
Interaction								-0.036*	0.039
								(0.020)	(0.026)
Voted_most elections									
Characteristics								-0.039***	0.068***
								(0.009)	(0.023)
Coefficients								-0.005	0.028
								(0.022)	(0.026)
Interaction								0.007	-0.014
								(0.016)	(0.03)
Member_political organization									
Characteristics	-0.009	-0.005							
	(0.008)	(0.012)							
Coefficients	0.027*	0.030*							
	(0.015)	(0.016)							
Interaction	0.012	0.010							
	(0.009)	(0.015)							

[11] Note that the decomposition method applied here works only when the two classes have the same set of characteristics. When a characteristic is unique to or highly prevalent in a class, it is dropped by the statistical method used here. This is the reason why a number of decomposition results in Tables 4 and 5 are statistically insignificant. It is possible the omitted variable may be the one that drives the class differences.

Indicator	Indonesia			Philippines			Thailand		
	Middle class vs. others	Middle class vs. lower class	Middle class vs. upper class	Middle class vs. others	Middle class vs. lower class	Middle class vs. upper class	Middle class vs. other	Middle class vs. lower class	Middle class vs. upper class
Supported_ candidate									
Characteristics		0.008							0.005
		(0.009)							(0.017)
Coefficients		0.036**							0.005
		(0.017)							(0.026)
Interaction		-0.017							0.021
		(0.011)							(0.024)
Contacted_ officials									
Characteristics		-0.001	-0.008						
		(0.004)	(0.010)						
Coefficients		0.013**	-0.014						
		(0.006)	(0.014)						
Interaction		0.001	-0.001						
		(0.004)	(0.011)						
Contacted_ media									
Characteristics		0.002	-0.015					0.016***	
		(0.002)	(0.010)					(0.005)	
Coefficients		0.012***	-0.019					-0.006	
		(0.005)	(0.012)					(0.024)	
Interaction		-0.001	-0.001					0.008	
		(0.003)	(0.012)					(0.019)	
Participated_with others									
Characteristics		-0.010	0.015		-0.001			-0.002	
		(0.011)	(0.011)		(0.007)			(0.009)	
Coefficients		0.032	-0.040		-0.043***			0.030*	
		(0.020)	(0.030)		(0.016)			(0.017)	
Interaction		0.013	-0.022		0.015			0	
		(0.014)	(0.023)		(0.012)			(0.013)	
Attended_rally									
Characteristics							0.004	-0.046***	0.103***
							(0.01)	(0.013)	(0.031)
Coefficients							-0.100***	-0.131***	0.002
							(0.026)	(0.027)	(0.042)
Interaction							0.009	-0.011	0.004
							(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.036)

Figures in parentheses are bootstrap standard errors estimated with 100 replications.
*p<0.10
**p<0.05
***p<0.001

In the case of the Philippines, we also find that it is the heterogeneous effects rather than the dissimilarities in average characteristics that distinguish the middle class from the lower class in terms of likelihood to team up with others to address a common concern. Unlike in the Indonesia, however, the effects are lower for the middle class than the lower class.

In the case of Thailand, it is the dissimilarities in mean characteristics that make the middle class less likely than the lower class to vote in elections and more likely than the upper class to vote or to attend rallies. We also find that the interaction of the differences in the average characteristics and in the coefficients explains why the middle class is less likely than the lower class to vote in the previous election. The heterogeneous effects of average characteristics also explain why the middle class appears more likely than the lower class to team up with others to solve a common problem but less likely than the lower class to attend rallies. Finally, the apparent discrepancies in proportions of middle class and upper class that supported political candidates are neither due to divergence in mean characteristics or in their differential effects.

Table 5 shows the results of the decomposition analysis for Singapore and Malaysia. In the case of Singapore, it is the differential impacts of the characteristics that make the middle class less likely than the rest to support a candidate or than the lower class to contact any government official. In addition, we find that the interaction of the differences in average characteristics and the differences in coefficients also explain why the middle class is likelier than the lower class to contact government officials The decomposition results indicate that it is not the differences in mean characteristics, the differences in the impacts of the characteristics, or the interaction of these two differences that account for why the middle class and the lower class are not equally likely to vote, or why the middle class and the upper class are not equally likely to support a candidate.

TABLE 5. Oaxaca Decomposition of political participation: Singapore and Malaysia

	Singapore			Malaysia		
Indicator	**Middle class vs. others**	**Middle class vs. lower class**	**Middle class vs. upper class**	**Middle class vs. others**	**Middle class vs. lower class**	**Middle class vs. upper class**
Voted_most elections						
Characteristics	-0.012	-0.028				
	(0.017)	(0.020)				
Coefficients	-0.052	-0.037				
	(0.032)	(0.034)				
Interaction	0.005	-0.005				
	(0.017)	(0.020)				

	Singapore			Malaysia		
Indicator	**Middle class vs. others**	**Middle class vs. lower class**	**Middle class vs. upper class**	**Middle class vs. others**	**Middle class vs. lower class**	**Middle class vs. upper class**
Member_political organization						
Characteristics				-0.002	-0.010	
				(0.009)	(0.011)	
Coefficients				0.035**	0.054***	
				(0.018)	(0.017)	
Interaction				-0.001	-0.003	
				(0.009)	(0.014)	
Supported_candidate						
Characteristics	-0.002		-0.004			
	(0.005)		(0.009)			
Coefficients	-0.012**		-0.011			
	(0.005)		(0.008)			
Interaction	0.001		-0.001			
	(0.005)		(0.009)			
Contacted_officials						
Characteristics		-0.001			0.017	
		(0.003)			(0.020)	
Coefficients		-0.032***			0.059*	
		(0.012)			(0.033)	
Interaction		0.015**			-0.013	
		(0.007)			(0.026)	
Contacted_other leaders						
Characteristics						-0.005
						(0.011)
Coefficients						-0.065*
						(0.035)
Interaction						-0.006
						(0.021)
Contacted_media						
Characteristics						0.006
						(0.007)
Coefficients						-0.052**
						(0.023)
Interaction						0.008
						(0.015)
Attended_demonstration						
Characteristics				0.001	0.001	
				(0.004)	(0.003)	
Coefficients				-0.029***	-0.043***	
				(0.008)	(0.013)	
Interaction				-0.001	0.006	
				(0.006)	(0.008)	

Figures in parentheses are bootstrap standard errors estimated with 100 replications.
*p<0.10
**p<0.05
***p<0.001

Finally, in the case of Malaysia, we find that it is more the heterogeneous effects of characteristics that distinguish the middle class from the other classes. In particular, this divergence makes the middle class more likely than the lower class to become members of political organizations or to contact officials. However, the dissimilarities in coefficients make the middle class less probable than the upper class to contact traditional or community leaders or less likely than the lower class to attend demonstrations.

In sum, we find evidence that the differences in class participation in politics are explained by differences in mean characteristics and in the effects of these characteristics. However, it is not always the case that raising the average characteristics of the lower class to match that of the middle class will make them as politically engaged as the latter; in fact, there are instances when doing so will make them less engaged. Part of the reason is that the same characteristics may lead to lower or negative incremental effects on their probability of political participation.

5. Discussion and conclusion

Here we find evidence in five Southeast Asian countries that, generally, the middle classes are like other socioeconomic classes in terms of voting participation, but they are unlike the rest in other forms of political engagement. We also find that the middle classes are not always more politically active than other classes. Moreover, if the characteristics that seem to make them active were adopted by or transplanted in others, they may yield a different, even negative, effect on others. We also find the middle-class activism varies in both extent and form across countries.

In democracies, elections are an important institutional mechanism by which the people hold their leaders accountable. As the pivotal group of voters, the middle class is also expected to participate more in this activity than others. Our results show that voting participation is equally high across socioeconomic classes in Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Malaysia. In Thailand, the voting participation rate of the middle class is slightly lower than that of the lower class, but it is higher than that of the upper class. However, the middle classes are distinct in their involvement in other election-related activities, such as membership in political organizations in Indonesia and Malaysia or supporting a political candidate or party in Indonesia and Thailand.

Democracy also thrives in other forms of political activism. In Indonesia, Thailand, and Malaysia, the middle classes further distinguish themselves, in terms of contacting government officials or news media, participating with others, and attending rallies and demonstration. In Indonesia and Thailand, the differential participation rates across classes is explained more by the heterogeneous effects of average characteristics, whereas in Malaysia it is more due to the inequalities

in mean characteristics. These results suggest political activism may be more directly influenced by policies in Indonesia and Thailand than in Malaysia.

Relative to the three countries, the Philippines and Singapore each appear distinct. In contrast to the Indonesian, Thai, or Malaysian middle classes, the Filipino middle class seem unremarkable. Its rates of participation in all election-related activities or in most of the other political activities are not different from any other class. Where it diverges is only in terms of participating with others, showing an even lower proportion than the lower class. Even its high voting rate does not distinguish it from other classes, although the overall voting rates among the poor and, perhaps, even of the middle class in the Philippines could be driven by clientilist relations. That is, perhaps a large segment of the population votes for politicians in exchange for money or personal favors.[12]

In Singapore, barely half of the sample reported to have voted in the past elections. Moreover, the level of engagement in other political activities of the middle class is generally lower than either the lower class or the upper class. Their lower participation rates could imply that they are resigned to any attempt to change or reform the government. Alternatively, it could mean that they are "co-opted" through the government programs (like public housing, for example). Investigating the issue further will have implications on the claim made that Singapore follows a different Asian style of democracy.[13]

Our results suggest two directions for future research. One direction is to apply the same method on the same or similar data but to explore other interclass differences in their political or social orientations or activities. For example, it may be investigated if the middle class eschews traditional values and adopts modern values more than the lower class or upper class. The results of this investigation will shed light on the role of the middle classes in the democratization of Asian countries. The other direction is extending the decomposition method to identify the critical characteristics that matter more and in developing methods to identify the cognitive, social, or contextual factors that lead to heterogeneous effects.

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[12] Thanks to Prof. Corina Gochoco-Bautista for this interpretation of the results.

[13] In another study [Capuno 2015], the Singaporean middle class, however, appears more pro-democracy in their views and values than other socioeconomic classes.

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ANNEX 1. Means and standard deviations of the explanatory variables

Variables	Indonesia (*N*=1550)		Philippines (*N*=1200)		Thailand (*N*=1512)		Singapore (*N*=1000)		Malaysia (*N*=1214)	
	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation
Male	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.48	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.50
Age	41.8	14.1	40.9	15.4	46.9	14.7	41.5	14.5	41.4	15.2
Age2	1946.6	1293.5	1906.8	1404.5	2418.5	1466.2	1931.8	1370	1945.1	1362.9
Some college	0.09	0.29	0.27	0.45	0.13	0.34	0.36	0.48	0.16	0.36
Employed	0.65	0.48	0.49	0.50	0.78	0.42	0.61	0.49	0.53	0.50
Catholic			0.84	0.36						
Buddhist					0.94	0.24	0.40	0.49		
Islam	0.87	0.34							0.57	0.49
In union	0.84	0.37	0.74	0.44	0.75	0.44	0.68	0.47	0.70	0.46
Household size	4.7	2.03	4.91	2.27	4.64	2.16	4.12	1.43	5.65	3.16
Urban	0.30	0.46	0.68	0.47	0.25	0.43			0.44	0.50
Mega_majorcity	0.22	0.41	0.84	0.37					0.14	0.34
Access index	68.9	20.2	65.1	21.9	76.78	14.9	98.08	7.30	85.69	18.12
Lower class	0.41	0.49	0.43	0.49	0.40	0.49	0.40	0.49	0.40	0.49
Middle class	0.39	0.49	0.39	0.49	0.39	0.49	0.41	0.49	0.40	0.49
Upper class	0.19	0.40	0.19	0.39	0.19	0.39	0.19	0.39	0.20	0.40