

Public Opinion

Part of the “State of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders” Series

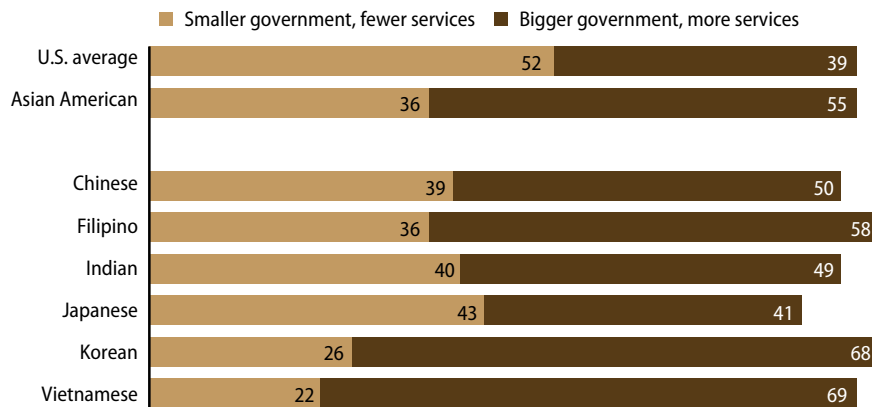
By Karthick Ramakrishnan and Farah Z. Ahmad April 23, 2014

Where do Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, or AAPIs, stand on key matters of public policy? While national public opinion data on AAPIs are not conducted with nearly the same frequency as opinion polls of whites, Latinos, and African Americans, there have been several national surveys of Asian Americans since 2008 that point to a community that is largely progressive on a range of issues.

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders prioritize government spending over tax cuts

With respect to the size of government, Asian Americans are more likely than the U.S. average to prefer an activist government that provides more services than a smaller government that provides fewer services. Data from the 2012 Pew Asian American Survey show that 55 percent of Asian Americans opt for a more active government, compared to 39 percent for the U.S. average. Among particular groups, such as Korean Americans and Vietnamese Americans¹, support for government involvement is even higher, at 68 percent and 69 percent, respectively.

FIGURE 5.1
Views on size and role of government

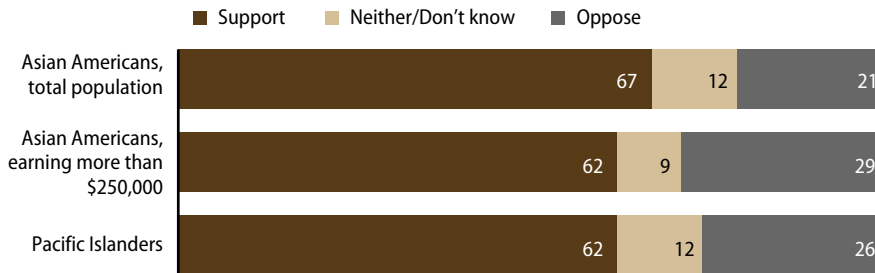


Note: The original question was: "If you had to choose, would you rather have a smaller government providing fewer services or a bigger government providing more services?"

Source: The Pew Research Center, "The Rise of Asian Americans" (2013), available at <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/files/2013/04/Asian-Americans-new-full-report-04-2013.pdf>.

Another way to gauge AAPI opinion on fiscal matters is to examine their opinions on tax increases and cuts in government spending as ways to reduce the federal deficit. The 2012 National Asian American Survey asked both of these questions to a nationally representative sample of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. As the results indicate (see Figure 5.2), Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are much more likely to support than oppose tax increases on high earners as a way to reduce the federal deficit. This was the proposal favored by President Barack Obama and the Democratic Party in 2012, and we see net support for this policy even among those Asian Americans whose income levels would have subjected them to higher income taxes. The alternate proposal—favored by former Gov. Mitt Romney (R-MA) and House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan (R-WI) in 2012 and many Republican leaders since then—is to rely exclusively on cuts in government spending to reduce the federal deficit. Here, only 25 percent of Asian Americans and 26 percent of Pacific Islanders supported a cuts-only approach to reducing the federal deficit.

FIGURE 5.2
Support for tax increases on high earners
as a means to reduce the federal deficit



Note: The original question gauged the extent of agreement or disagreement with the following statement: "In order to reduce the national deficit, the federal government should raise taxes on those earning more than \$250,000 a year."

Source: Authors analysis of Karthick Ramakrishnan and Taeku Lee, "National Asian American Survey, 2012" (Ann Arbor, MI: Resource Center for Minority Data, forthcoming).

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are strong supporters of environmental protection

When it comes to attitudes toward environmental protection, past surveys of the general population have taken two different approaches:

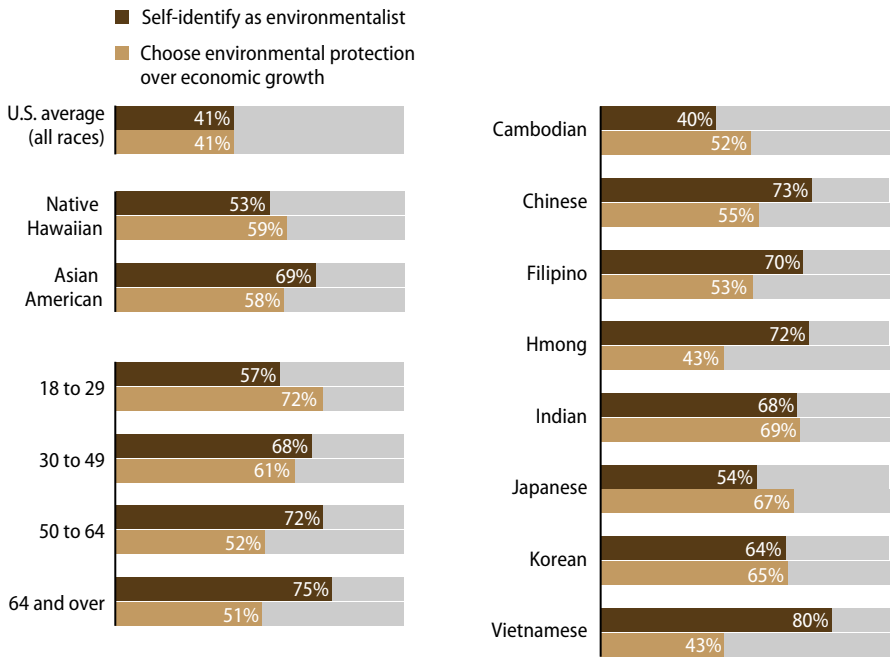
- To ask individuals if they self-identify as an environmentalist
- To present respondents with a tradeoff of choosing between more environmental protection with some risk to economic growth and the converse of more economic growth with some risk to the environment

The 2012 National Asian American Survey asked both of these questions and found that Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders rank much higher on their commitment and identification with environmentalism than the rest of the U.S. population.

As Figure 5.3 indicates, 69 percent of Asian Americans consider themselves environmentalists, about 30 points higher than the national average. Among some groups, including Chinese and Vietnamese, the proportions are even higher. Pacific Islanders are also more likely to self-identify as environmentalists than the national average, although the difference is smaller than it is for Asian Americans. Interestingly, young Asian American adults are not the ones most likely to self-identify as environmentalists. Only 57 percent of young Asian Americans, those between 18 and 24 years old, identified as an environmentalist compared to 75

percent of those age 64 and older, the age group most likely to identify as environmentalists. Finally, as Figure 5.3 indicates, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are significantly more likely than the national average to prioritize environmental protection over economic growth. This sentiment is especially strong among young adults, and among Indian Americans, Japanese Americans, and Korean Americans.

FIGURE 5.3
Environmental attitudes among Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders



Note: The original questions were: "Do you consider yourself an environmentalist?" and "Which one of these statements about the environment and the economy do you most agree: Protection of the environment should be given priority, even at the risk of curbing economic growth, OR Economic growth should be given priority, even if the environment suffers to some extent."

Source: Authors analysis of Karthick Ramakrishnan and Taeku Lee, "National Asian American Survey, 2012" (Ann Arbor, MI: Resource Center for Minority Data, forthcoming).

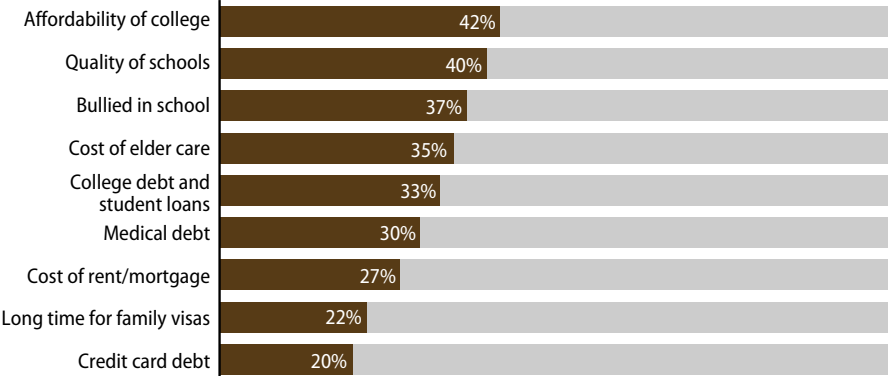
Education ranks high among the list of concerns for Asian Americans

Among the issues that Asian Americans care about, education ranks high, whether in terms of access or affordability. The 2012 National Asian American Survey gave respondents a list of issues "people have mentioned as challenges they face" and then asked to assess "how serious of a problem each is for you and your family." Education-related issues were at the top of the list in terms of problem severity, with 40 percent of respondents indicating that the quality of schools is a very

serious problem. The problem of bullying in schools is also a significant issue for Asian American families, as 37 percent identify it as a very serious problem.² Finally, the affordability of higher education was also a significant concern, with 42 percent identifying the cost of college and 33 percent identifying college debt as very serious problems.

FIGURE 5.4
Proportion of Asian Americans identifying problem as “very serious” for self and family

Respondents evaluated the importance of challenges they face



Note: The original question was: "Here are some issues other people have mentioned as challenges they face. Please tell me how serious of a problem each is for you and your family: Not at all serious, not very serious, fairly serious, or very serious." Don't Know and refuse responses were excluded from the analysis.

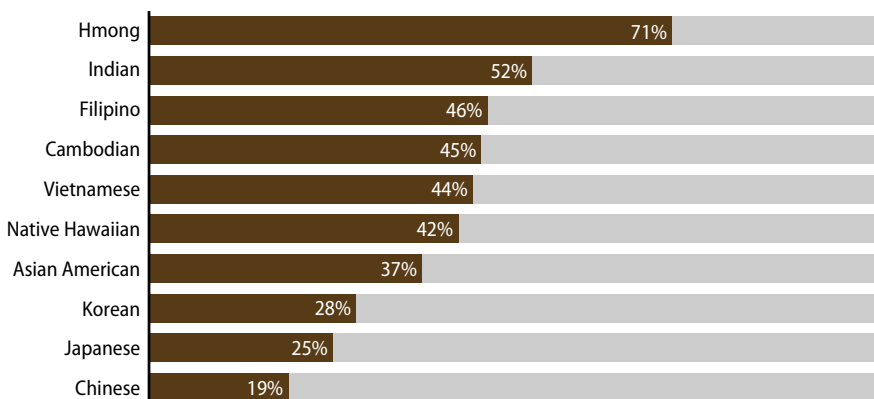
Source: Authors analysis of Karthick Ramakrishnan and Taeku Lee, "National Asian American Survey, 2012" (Ann Arbor, MI: Resource Center for Minority Data, forthcoming).

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The school bullying is a serious concern and varies across subgroups

When it comes to the problem of school bullying, we find significant variation across national origin groups, with Southeast Asian and South Asian groups much more likely to report it as a serious problem. For example, 71 percent of Hmong respondents, 52 percent of Indian respondents, and 46 percent of Filipino respondents indicated that school bullying was a very serious problem for their families, while the comparable proportions of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean Americans were below 30 percent.

FIGURE 5.5
Proportion identifying bullying in schools as a “very serious problem”



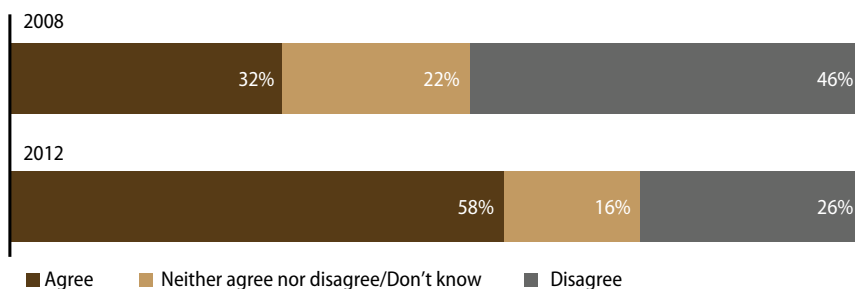
Note: The original question was “Here are some issues other people have mentioned as challenges they face. Please tell me how serious of a problem each is for you and your family: Not at all serious, not very serious, fairly serious, or very serious: Getting Bullied in School.” Don’t Know and refuse responses were excluded from the analysis.

Source: Authors analysis of Karthick Ramakrishnan and Taeku Lee, “National Asian American Survey, 2012” (Ann Arbor, MI: Resource Center for Minority Data, forthcoming).

Asian Americans support a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants

On the issue of undocumented immigration, Asian Americans are decidedly in favor of a pathway to citizenship. Questions on support for a pathway to citizenship were included in both the 2008 and 2012 National Asian American Survey. As Figure 5.6 indicates, a solid majority of Asian Americans in 2012—58 percent—supported a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants. This is a major change in opinion from 2008, when just about a third of respondents supported a path to citizenship and 46 percent were opposed.

FIGURE 5.6
Support for pathway to citizenship among Asian Americans



Note: The original questions gauged the extent of agreement or disagreement with the following statements: In 2008: "The U.S. should provide a path to citizenship for people in this country illegally." In 2012: "Undocumented immigrants should have the opportunity to eventually become U.S. citizens."

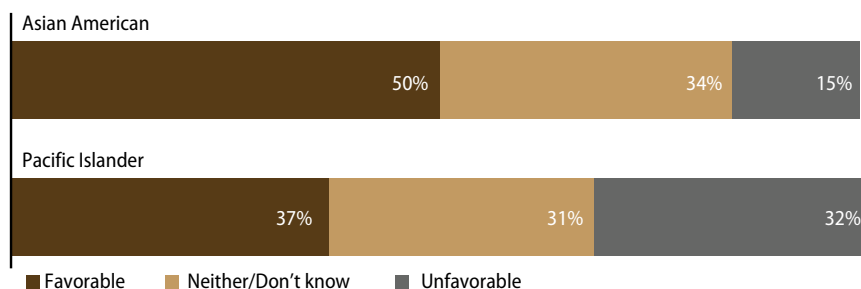
Source: Authors analysis of Karthick Ramakrishnan and Taeku Lee, "National Asian American Survey, 2008" (Ann Arbor, MI: Resource Center for Minority Data, 2011) and Karthick Ramakrishnan and Taeku Lee, "National Asian American Survey, 2012" (Ann Arbor, MI: Resource Center for Minority Data, forthcoming).

Asian Americans are net supporters of the Affordable Care Act

A key aspect to the issue of health care is public opinion on the Affordable Care Act, or ACA, sometimes referred to as Obamacare. Surveys of the general population have shown that about 38 percent of Americans have a favorable impression of the law, and a greater proportion—46 percent—have an unfavorable impression.³ Support has varied significantly across racial and ethnic groups, with significant opposition among non-Hispanic whites—with an average of 36 percent favorable and 50 percent unfavorable during the time of the 2012 National Asian American Survey—to majority support among Latinos—averaging 51 percent favorable and 29 percent unfavorable—to very strong support among African Americans—averaging 62 percent favorable, while 17 percent were unfavorable.⁴

How do Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders compare?

FIGURE 5.7
Asian American and Pacific Islander opinion on the Affordable Care Act



Note: Numbers are rounded and may not add up to 100; The original question was: "As you may know, Congress passed a sweeping health care law, the Affordable Care Act, in 2010. It was then mostly upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court. Given what you know about the law, do you have a generally favorable or generally unfavorable opinion of it?"

Source: Authors analysis of Karthick Ramakrishnan and Taeku Lee, "National Asian American Survey, 2012" (Ann Arbor, MI: Resource Center for Minority Data, forthcoming).

As the results indicate in Figure 5.7, Asian Americans are much more favorably inclined toward the ACA than opposed to it. About 50 percent had a favorable impression of the health care law, more than three times the proportion of those who had an unfavorable opinion of it. These indicate a level of support for the ACA that are comparable to support among Latinos and African Americans and in strong contrast to the net opposition to the ACA among whites. Pacific Islanders, by contrast, had lower support for the law, although more had a favorable opinion of the law rather than unfavorable.

Asian Americans are the most positively inclined toward racial diversity

Finally, as we look ahead to the future demographic makeup of the United States, when no racial group will be in the majority by 2050, it is important to gauge how different groups react to this rising diversity and the extent to which they support a new equity agenda that would lift up both whites and communities of color. The Center for American Progress and PolicyLink conducted a survey in the summer of 2013 in collaboration with Latino Decisions that had a sizable sample of Asian Americans with language support in Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese. The survey results indicate that Asian Americans are among the most open to diversity when compared to other racial groups. As measured by a 160-point scale based on 16 indicators, Asian Americans ranked an average of 96.9, when compared to 93.2

among African Americans, 90.1 among Latinos, and 83.8 among whites. In Table 5.1, we present where Asian Americans stand with respect to other racial groups on their agreement that increased diversity brings various types of new opportunities. In nearly all indicators, Asian Americans rank highest or second highest in their view that increased racial diversity will bring greater opportunities.

TABLE 5.1
Views on opportunities from diversity categorized by racial group

	Total agree	White	African American	Latino	Asian
1. Americans will learn more from one another and be enriched by exposure to many different cultures.	70	66	76	75	87
2. A bigger, more diverse workforce will lead to more economic growth.	69	65	81	79	75
3. Diverse workplaces and schools will help make American businesses more innovative and competitive.	69	65	78	75	82
4. People will become more accepting of their differences and more willing to find common ground.	65	62	71	69	70
5. With more diverse people working and living together, discrimination will decrease.	61	59	59	66	70
6. The entry of new people into the American workforce will increase our tax base and help support our retiree population.	59	55	65	70	65
7. Our country's ideals of opportunity for everyone will be realized.	49	43	58	62	61
8. The country's global image will improve.	47	41	59	61	64

Source: Center for American Progress and Policy Link, "Building an All-In Nation: A View from the American Public."

References

Newly released reports and infographics at <http://aapidata.com/public-opinion/>.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Sono Shah of the University of California, Riverside, for his research assistance on this report series.

Endnotes

- 1 All of the groups mentioned in this report refer to people of Asian and Pacific Islander origin in the United States. When we refer to several groups in a series, we will add the term “Americans” at the end of the series, rather than in each instance.
- 2 The problem of school bullying is also highlighted in a report about Asian American high-school students in New York by the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund and The Sikh Coalition, “One Step Forward, Half a Step Back: A Status Report on Bias-Based Bullying of Asian American Students in New York City Schools” (2013), available at http://sikhcoalition.org/images/documents/onestepforward_bullying_report.pdf.
- 3 Liz Hamel, Jamie Firth and Mollyann Brodie, “Kaiser Family Foundation Health Tracking Poll: March 2014” (Menlo Park, CA: Kaiser Family Foundation, 2014), available at <http://kff.org/health-reform/poll-finding/kaiser-health-tracking-poll-march-2014/>.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 For a collection of responses to the question, “As you may know, Congress passed a sweeping health care law, the Affordable Care Act, in 2010. It was then mostly upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court. Given what you know about the law, do you have a generally favorable or generally unfavorable opinion of it?”, see authors analysis of Karthick Ramakrishnan and Taeku Lee, “National Asian American Survey, 2012” (Ann Arbor, MI: Resource Center for Minority Data, forthcoming).