Fill the Data Gap on Asian Americans: Pew Research Center's Being Asian in America Project

Speaker: Neil G. Ruiz, PhD, Associate Director of Race and Ethnicity Research, Pew Research Center

Tuesday, September 13, 2022
12:00pm - 1:30pm PDT

Co-sponsored by:

Asian American Pacific Islander Coalition (AAPIC)  
UCSF Office of Diversity and Outreach
Being Asian In America

The Diversity of Missing Voices in Public Opinion Research

Neil G. Ruiz

Associate Director of Race and Ethnicity Research
Who we are: A nonprofit ‘fact tank’ that informs the public about the issues, attitudes and trends shaping the world. We are nonpartisan and nonadvocacy, meaning we do not take policy positions or make recommendations.

We are a subsidiary of The Pew Charitable Trusts, our primary funder. We partner strategically with philanthropists and institutional funders who share our commitment to impartial research and data that drive discussion.

What we do: Generate a foundation of facts to enrich public dialogue and support sound decision-making. We conduct public opinion polling, demographic research, content analysis and data-driven social science research.
Challenge #1

TREATMENT AS ONE MONOLITHIC GROUP
Nationally representative surveys challenge of including Asian languages to accurately depict the U.S. Asian population

Even before the pandemic, a majority of Asian Americans had personally experienced discrimination because of their race or ethnicity

% of Asian adults* saying they have personally experienced discrimination or been treated unfairly because of their race or ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Regularly</th>
<th>From time to time</th>
<th>Net</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apr 2021</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jun 2020</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 2019</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Asian adults were interviewed in English only.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted April 5-11, 2021.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER
Six Asian origin groups in the U.S. account for 85% of the nation’s Asian population

% of the U.S. Asian population that is __, 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodian</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hmong</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laotian</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepalese</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burmese</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesian</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lankan</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysian</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mongolian</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhutanese</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All others 15%

Chinese 23%
Indian 20%
Filipino 18%
Vietnamese 9%
Japanese 6%
Challenge #2

A DIVERSE GROUP WITH DIFFERENT ORIGINS AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES
Immigrant shares vary by Asian origin group

% foreign born among Asian origin groups in the U.S., 2019

- Bhutanese: 85%
- Malaysian: 85
- Nepalese: 83
- Sri Lankan: 80
- Mongolian: 79
- Burmese: 78
- Thai: 76
- Indonesian: 74
- Bangladeshi: 72
- Indian: 68
- Pakistani: 65
- Vietnamese: 62
- Chinese: 62
- Korean: 59
- Laotian: 57
- All Asians: 57
- Cambodian: 56
- Filipino: 50
- Hmong: 34
- Japanese: 27

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 2017-2019 American Community Survey (IPUMS)
Median household income varies widely among Asian Americans

Median annual household income, 2019, by origin group

- Burmese $44K
- Nepalese $55K
- Laotian $61K
- Hmong $68K
- Vietnamese $70K
- Korean $72K
- Japanese $83K
- Chinese $82K
- Filipino $90K
- Indian $119K

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 2017-2019 American Community Survey (IPUMS)
As does the share who live in poverty

% among Asian Americans who live in poverty, 2019, by origin group

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 2017-2019 American Community Survey (IPUMS)
54% of U.S. Asians have a bachelor’s degree or more education

% of those ages 25 and older with a bachelor’s degree or more, by origin group, 2019

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 2017-2019 American Community Survey (IPUMS)
Filling the Data Gap on Asian Americans

USING FOCUS GROUPS TO ACCOUNT FOR THE DIVERSITY OF VOICES
What It Means To Be Asian in America

BY NEIL G. RUIZ, SUNNY SHAO AND SONG SHAH

AUGUST 2, 2022
Note: Participants’ information on their family’s origins, household income and country of birth were collected in a pre-focus-group survey. **Country of birth:** Participants born in the U.S. are those born in the 50 states, the District of Columbia or Puerto Rico. Participants born outside the U.S. includes anyone who was not a U.S. citizen at birth, including those who have become U.S. citizens through naturalization. “<10 years” and “10 years+” refers to years lived in the United States among immigrants. **Household income:** Above or below median refers to the national median household income ($62K) according to 2019 American Community Survey 5-year file. Mixed income groups had participants with both above and below $62K household income.


**PEW RESEARCH CENTER**
Research Team Rigorously Coded 132 hours of Focus Group Transcripts into Themes that Emerged

- Transcripts coded in Atlas.ti
- Organized quotes for each code name
- Quotes organized by themes for each topic
THIS IS HOW I IDENTIFY
Asian was only one part of how participants viewed themselves:
Different settings influence how participants choose to identify

• 'Asian’ is used in more formal settings

• Navigating social life in America is an adjustment

• Balancing between individualistic and collective thinking

• Identity is influenced by birthplace
Participants described how their racial or ethnic identity overlaps with their American identity.

Participants emphasized where their racial identity and ethnic identity intertwined with American ones, as opposed to replacing one another.

Note: This graphical representation reflects the breadth of responses shared by focus group participants, not the frequency with which these responses came up. Other identities mentioned in the focus groups, such as religion and gender, are not included in this graph.


PEW RESEARCH CENTER
Participants described differences between race-centered and ethnicity-centered identities

- **Racial identity (Asian)**
  - “Most people don’t know where Burma is, so I just say I’m Asian”
  - “I’m just American like everyone else”
  - “It depends who I am talking to”
  - “I would say I am Indian and we are South Asian”
  - “I’m Asian, and more specifically Chinese”
  - “Asian is so broad, I am Cambodian”

**Note:** This graphical representation reflects the breadth of responses shared by focus group participants, not the frequency with which these responses came up.


“What It Means To Be Asian in America”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER
Smaller ethnic groups default to ‘Asian’ since their groups are less recognizable

“Coming to a big country like [the United States], when people ask where we are from ... there are some people who have no idea about Bhutan, so we end up introducing ourselves as being Asian.”

–Immigrant woman of Bhutanese origin in late 40s

‘Asian’ as a label or identity just doesn’t fit

“I love South Asian or ‘Desi’ only because up until recently ... it’s fairly new to say South Asian. I’ve always said ‘Desi’ because growing up ... I’ve had to say I’m the red dot Indian, not the feather Indian. So annoying, you know? ... Always a distinction that I’ve had to make.”

–U.S.-born woman of Indian origin in late 20s
Balancing between individualistic and collective thinking

“I feel like one of the biggest things I’ve seen, just like [my] Asian American friends overall, is the kind of family-individualistic clash ... like wanting to do your own thing is like, is kind of instilled in you as an American, like go and ... follow your dream. But then you just grow up with such a sense of like also wanting to be there for your family and to live up to those expectations, and I feel like that’s something that’s very pronounced in Asian cultures.”

— U.S.-born man of Indian origin in mid-20s
THIS IS HOW OTHERS SEE AND TREAT ME
A majority of Asian Americans say violence against Asians is increasing in the U.S.

% of Asian* adults who say ...
Violence against Asian Americans in the U.S. is ...

- Increasing: 63%
- Staying the same: 19%
- Decreasing: 8%
- Not sure: 9%

They worry ____ that they might be threatened or attacked because of their race or ethnicity:

- Almost every day: 7%
- Every day: 14%
- Sometimes: 51%
- Rarely: 18%
- Never: 10%

They worry they might be threatened or attacked because of their race or ethnicity, and have made changes in their daily schedule or routine in the past 12 month due to that worry:

- Yes: 36%
- No: 64%

Their local elected officials are doing a ____ job dealing with violence against Asian Americans:

- Very/somewhat good: 19%
- Very/somewhat bad: 43%
- NET Not an issue in my community/not sure: 38%

*Estimates for Asian adults are representative of English speakers only.
Note: No answer responses not shown.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted April 11-17, 2022.
Even before the pandemic, a majority of Asian Americans had personally experienced discrimination because of their race or ethnicity

% of Asian adults* saying they have personally experienced discrimination or been treated unfairly because of their race or ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Regularly</th>
<th>From time to time</th>
<th>Net</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apr 2021</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jun 2020</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 2019</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Asian adults were interviewed in English only.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted April 5-11, 2021.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER
Disconnect between respondents’ identity and how others see and treat them

- All people see is ‘Asian’
- The model minority myth and its impact
- Whether U.S. born or immigrants, Asians are seen by others as foreigners
The model minority myth and its impact

“As an Asian person, I feel like there’s that stereotype that Asian students are high achievers academically. They’re good at math and science. ... I was a pretty mediocre student, and math and science were actually my weakest subjects, so I feel like it’s either way you lose. Teachers expect you to fit a certain stereotype and if you’re not, then you’re a disappointment, but at the same time, even if you are good at math and science, that just means that you’re fitting a stereotype. It’s [actually] your own achievement, but your teachers might think, ‘Oh, it’s because they’re Asian,’ and that diminishes your achievement.”

-U.S.-born woman of Korean origin in late 20s
Whether U.S. born or immigrants, Asians are seen by others as foreigners

“You know, I spoke English fine. But there were certain things that, you know, people constantly questioning you like, oh, where are you from? When did you come here? You know, just asking about your experience to the point where ... you become fed up with it after a while.”

– Immigrant woman of Filipino origin in mid-30s
THIS IS WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HOME IN AMERICA
Participants take pride in their unique cultural and ethnic backgrounds, calling the United States their home

- Taking pride in their unique culture
- Where home is
- ‘American’ means to blend our unique cultural and ethnic heritage in the U.S.
“I mean, Bangladeshi Americans who are here, we are carrying Bangladeshi culture, religion, food. I am also trying to be Americanized like the Americans. Regarding language, eating habits.”

–Immigrant man of Bangladeshi origin in mid-50s

“Just like there is Chinese American, Mexican American, Japanese American, Italian American, so there is Indian American. I don’t want to give up Indianness. I am American by nationality, but I am Indian by birth. So whenever I talk, I try to show both the flags as well, both Indian and American flags. Just because you make new relatives but don’t forget the old relatives.”

–Immigrant man of Indian origin in late 40s
In Their Own Words: The Diverse Perspectives of Being Asian in America

AUGUST 2, 2022

What does it mean to be...

Bangladeshi    Bhutanese      Burmese      Cambodian
Chinese        Filipino      Hmong        Indian      Indonesian
Japanese       Korean        Laotian      Nepalese    Pakistani
Sri Lankan      Taiwanese     Thai         Vietnamese

View all quotes

... living in America?

Selected quotes from all focus group participants

“[I think] that Vietnamese people are very hardworking and successful. I’m also lucky to be in this country, and I have my freedom.”

Immigrant woman of Vietnamese origin, 55 (translated from Vietnamese)
“I would say I’m Hmong-American, then South East Asian, then Asian.”

— Pa Houa Xiong, video participant

“It was kind of exciting to first time go on the bus, you know. But when we got to the bus depot, there were soldiers with guns.”

— Tokiko Nishimura, video participant

“I want to teach my children two traditions, one American and one Vietnamese, so they can compare and choose for themselves the best route in life.”

— Helen Phan, video participant

“How I would describe myself now is first and foremost American.”

— Brent Suen, video participant

“I work hard ... I feel proud as an American Pakistani because maybe what struggle I can do here, I cannot do in Pakistan.”

— Shahid Khokar, video participant

“We get overshadowed a lot, by the other Asian cultures .... Very few people really are familiar with Lao food, Lao culture, what makes us unique, what makes us different.”

— Mali Phoophadit, video participant
Video Documentary

Being Asian in America
There is so much to learn from the diversity of voices of Asian Americans, this is part of a larger multi-year project....
More Upcoming Work

2022-2023 ASIAN AMERICAN SURVEY
Address-Based Sampling in Places with High Likelihood of Asian Americans
Multiplying the Impact of this Comprehensive Study

RESEARCH APPROACH TO GIVING VOICE TO SMALL AND RARE POPULATIONS
There are still more voices from other racial and ethnic groups that need to be heard:

**Including More of America**

- Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders (NHPI)
- Puerto Ricans, U.S. Virgin Islands and other American territories
- Native Americans
Contact Information

Neil G. Ruiz
Associate Director of Race and Ethnicity Research

nruiz@pewresearch.org
@neil_ruiz