

Study compares the racial consciousness of black and Asian-Americans

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Asian Americans are less attached to their racial identity than black Americans. This finding confirms that minority politics in the United States today is more complex than generally realized and that understanding the increasingly multicultural nature of the U.S. requires perspectives that incorporate, but go beyond, the black historical experience.

The study which led this finding was conducted by political scientists Jane Junn (Rutgers University) and Natalie Masuoka (Tufts University). It is entitled "Asian American Identity: Shared Racial Status and Political Context," and appears in the December issue of *Perspectives on Politics*, a journal of the American Political Science Association (APSA).

Asian Americans exhibit relatively high levels of economic and residential integration with mainstream white America, leading to predictions that they are assimilating more rapidly than black Americans and other minority or immigrant groups. They are also among the fastest growing minorities in the United States, having grown from less than 1 million people in 1960 to 14 million today. In political terms this growth has made Asian Americans a decisive swing vote in states such as California, New York, and Washington. Yet, despite their differences with black Americans, Asian Americans do exhibit racial consciousness in politics.

The study explores this phenomenon. It employs data drawn from the

2004 Ethnic Politics Survey, which included comparison groups of 354 Asian and 416 black Americans. The survey further divided the respondents into two groups, one of which was exposed to questions crafted to accentuate racial identification and measure the resulting sense of group identity. The outcome was that while the overall proportion of Asian Americans who say race is important in their racial consciousness is smaller than for blacks, in the experiment "Asian Americans showed strong results from the experimental manipulation, demonstrating substantial malleability."

In their analysis, the authors identify three factors that drive Asian American group identity: state-sponsored racial classification, immigration policy, and racial stereotypes. They then assess how these factors structure the ways in which Asian Americans identify with their group: "We argue that racial identity for Asian Americans exists as a more latent identity compared to blacks, and we find Asian American group racial consciousness much more susceptible to the surrounding context," state the authors. "In the multi-racial U.S. polity today," they conclude, "we now have the opportunity to consider racial dynamics beyond the binary of black and white."

The article is available online at www.apsanet.org/media/pdfs/POPDec08Junn.pdf .

Source: American Political Science Association

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