

'Asian American': A rallying cry that united Asians in the 1960s but is it still relevant?

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Table 6. Simplified Profiles of Classes

	Immigration Reservationists	Progressives	Immigration Undecided	Conservatives	Undecided
Affordable Care Act	S	S	M	O	DK
Free tuition	S	S	M	O	DK
Syrian refugees	O	S	DK	O	DK
Marijuana	O	S	O	O	DK
Muslim travel ban	M	O	DK	M	DK
Limits power plants	S	S	S	O	DK
Government help blacks	S	S	S	O	DK
Education	Medium	High	Low	Medium	Low
Gender	Men	Men	Women	N/A	Women
Nativity	Foreign born	Native	Foreign born	Foreign born	Foreign born
Party ID	Mixed	Democrat	Independent	Republican	Independent
Major groups	Cambodian Korean	Indian Japanese Hmong	Vietnamese	NHPI Filipino Chinese	Cambodian
Secondary groups	Chinese Filipino	Korean Filipino	Korean		
Class size	36	26	24	10	4

Source: Author's tabulation based on data from the NAAS (Ramakrishnan et al. 2018).

Note: S = support, O = oppose, M = moderate, DK = don't know. NHPI = Native Hawaiian-Pacific Islander.

Simplified profiles of classes compiled by Sunmin Kim based on data from the National Asian American Survey. Credit: Sunmin Kim.

The recent attacks against Asian Americans have put Asians in the U.S. in the spotlight. Many of the victims are first-generation immigrants in ethnic communities, while those rallying for the victims are second-generation Asian Americans. A new Dartmouth study explores who Asian Americans are today and the range of identities this category encompasses.

The study, by Sunmin Kim, an assistant professor of sociology at

Dartmouth, is based on 2016 pre-election survey data and found that Asian Americans tend to have progressive opinions about public policy, including on healthcare, education, climate change, and racial justice, but diverge on views toward Muslim immigration.

As previous research has reported, in 1968, the pan-ethnic category, 'Asian American' was born, as Chinese students and Japanese students at University of California, Berkeley, wanted a collective term to refer to both their student associations that could be used to help mobilize their political action. As a result, they established the Asian American Political Alliance, for which a chapter was also created at San Francisco State College.

"With the rise of radical social movements in the 1960s, the term 'Asian Americans' gained further traction as Asians protested domestic racism and the Vietnam War, often viewing both racism and U.S. intervention in Vietnam as originating from imperialism," says Kim. "If the category Asian American can be created, then a logical extension of that argument is that it can also be broken down, reversed or remade in a different context."

To determine whether Asian Americans still rally behind a common cause, the study drew on data from the 2016 pre-election National Asian American Survey (NAAS). With over 3,100 respondents representing nine national origin and ethnic groups in the U.S. (Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese, Hmong, Cambodian, and Native Hawaiian-Pacific Islander), and interviews conducted in English and 10 other languages, as well as comparison data on whites, Blacks, and Latinos, the survey is one of the most comprehensive of its kind. Kim's research focused on the data from the nine Asian groups.

Participants in the NAAS survey were asked seven questions on public policy. Did they support or oppose: the healthcare law passed by Barack

Obama and Congress in 2010; federal government spending to make public colleges tuition-free; accepting Syrian refugees into the U.S.; legal possession of small amounts of marijuana; banning Muslim immigrants from entering the U.S.; establishing stricter emissions limits for power plants; and government initiatives to give Blacks equal rights with whites?

The study's findings are published in *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* in the issue "Asian Americans and the Immigrant Integration Agenda."

The results showed that Asian Americans support the Affordable Care Act, free college tuition, emissions limits for power plants, and racial equality initiatives for Blacks. However, 18% supported the Muslim travel ban, 31% opposed accepting Syrian refugees into the U.S. and 49% opposed the legalization of marijuana.

"Although Asian Americans are often Democrat-leaning, their [liberal views](#) are somewhat dampened when it comes to questions on Muslim immigration and Syrian refugees as compared to their opinions on other liberal public policies," says Kim.

The results indicated that Asian Americans with reservations about immigration are more likely to be foreign born than native born and less educated, as opposed to progressives, who are more likely to be born in the U.S.

"There's a considerable number of Asian Americans who are leaning towards these ideas of anti-immigrant sentiment even though they are immigrants themselves," says Kim. "This divergence is one that political candidates may be inclined to tap into in the future, as they work to build a larger coalition. This was the case with Sery Kim, a Korean-American Republican, who delivered anti-Chinese remarks in March during her

campaign for Texas' 6th Congressional District."

The research by Sunmin Kim also found that Asian Americans were more liberal than native whites, just as liberal as Latinos, and less liberal than Blacks.

As part of the analysis, the study applied a statistical technique designed to develop a typology, which is similar to the way that we perceive different types of people in various contexts. The analysis revealed two distinct subgroups of Asian Americans:

- There are the second- or third-generation Asian Americans who are young, liberal, college educated, middle class, and racially conscious. These individuals may be of East Asian and Indian descent. Kim speculates that this group includes professionals such as lawyers and doctors, who live in the big cities such San Francisco or New York City and are integrated physically into white residential areas and working spaces.
- There is also an older, first-generation of Asian American immigrants who were born outside the U.S. and are relatively more conservative. They are more likely to be men than women and are of Southeast Asian heritage, such as Cambodian or Vietnamese. Kim speculates that members of this group may not be proficient in English.

"While many second-generation immigrants today may identify with the Asian American label, if you ask a first- generation immigrant what they think of the term, they probably will be more inclined to identify with their national origin, rather than being associated with such a commonality," says Kim.

"There's a generational divide among Asian Americans, which is ironically present in the recent attacks on Asian Americans: the older,

more conservative first-generation immigrants have often been the victims of these attacks rather than the younger, more liberal and highly educated second-generation," adds Kim.

The study reports that, according to *The Making of Asian America* by Erika Lee at the University of Minnesota, the Asian American category comprises 24 ethnic groups, each with a distinct culture. As Kim explains in the conclusion of his paper, understanding division within Asian Americans is essential to sustaining the politics of this category and to addressing differences and inequality among Asian Americans today.

More information: Kim, Fault Lines Among Asian Americans: Convergence and Divergence in Policy Opinion, *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* (2021). [DOI: 10.7758/RSF.2021.7.2.03](https://doi.org/10.7758/RSF.2021.7.2.03)

Provided by Dartmouth College

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