



STATE OF CHINESE AMERICANS SURVEY 2025

Where are you really from?

Half of Asian Americans still seen as foreign
regardless of birthplace

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Committee of 100



NORC

at the
University of
Chicago


Six years after the global pandemic triggered a surge in anti-Asian hate crimes, structural xenophobia and discrimination still pervade the lives of Asian Americans.

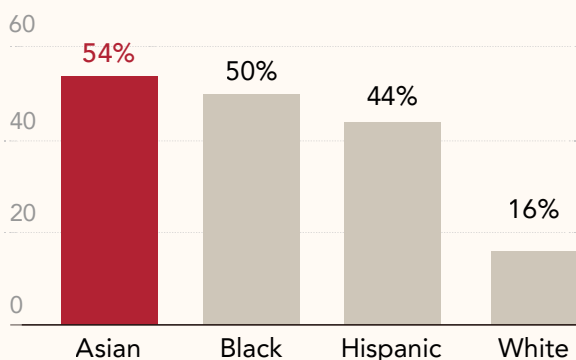
A national survey conducted by Committee of 100 and the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago (NORC) reveals that Asian Americans face unique barriers related to assumptions about their national origin and inability to speak English, which correspond with worse mental health outcomes and feelings of societal exclusion.

While many studies have examined the prevalence and negative consequences of Asian Americans being perceived as perpetual outsiders, this research draws novel and important comparisons about the rates at which Asian Americans and other groups experience this form of discrimination, providing clear evidence of the unique challenges that Asian Americans face from being treated as foreigners in their own land.

Discrimination is commonplace for non-white Americans

Discriminatory experiences such as being insulted, harassed, or receiving poor treatment at stores or restaurants are not unusual for non-white Americans. Around half of non-white Americans report encountering “everyday discrimination” monthly, compared to 16% of white Americans.¹

 Percentage of Americans that experience at least one form of ‘everyday discrimination’ per month because of their race or ethnicity



For Asian Americans, the most common experience is of assumed foreignness, with 55% reporting being asked where they are “really from,” or people assuming that they don’t speak English. Being denied

a sense of belonging in the U.S. is distressing, particularly for Asian Americans born in the U.S., the survey found.

The perpetual foreigner stereotype doesn’t just harm individual Asian Americans; it has broader implications for civic life. In the 2024 presidential election, AAPI turnout was estimated at roughly 58% for Asian Americans and 54% for Pacific Islanders, which was below white (70%) and Black (65%) turnout.²


Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are underrepresented in political office, only making up about 2.4% of local officeholders despite comprising roughly 7% of the U.S. population.³

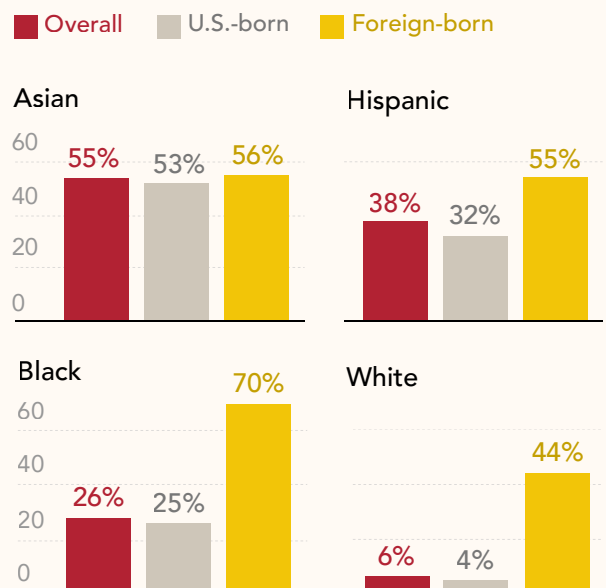
Studies have also found that politicians are the least responsive to Asian Americans as a group. This furthers a cycle of exclusion and contributes to lower voter registration and turnout rates.^{4,5}

“But where are you really from?”

The type of discrimination varies by ethnicity. For Asian Americans, the most ‘typical’ experience is one of assumed foreignness.

U.S.-born white, Black, and Hispanic and Latino Americans are significantly less likely to report being othered than their foreign-born counterparts. But for Asian Americans, birthplace makes almost no difference.

 Percentage of Americans that regularly experience assumptions of being foreign, by race/ethnicity and birthplace



U.S.-born and foreign-born Asian Americans are treated as outsiders at nearly the same elevated rate: 53% and 56%, respectively. These patterns are consistent across Asian Americans of different national ancestries, including Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Indian Americans.


Together, these observations provide clear evidence of the persistence and pervasiveness of the “perpetual foreigner” stereotype faced by Asian Americans. Over half of Asian Americans regularly report being treated as foreigners, and this discrimination is uniquely prevalent among Asian Americans. Unlike other groups, being born and raised in America offers no protection from being treated as an outsider in one’s own country.

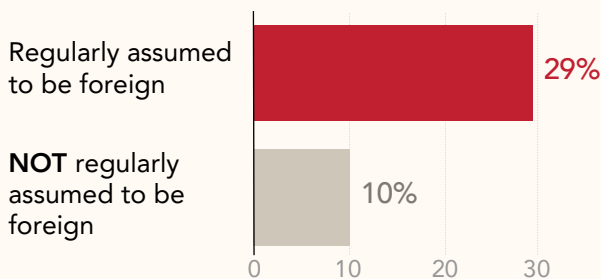
When U.S.-born Asian Americans hear they don’t belong

Those who regularly encounter assumptions of being foreign-born or unable to speak English feel societally excluded at significantly higher rates, especially among Asian Americans born in the U.S.

Among the 47% of U.S.-born Asian Americans that don’t typically face such assumptions, 90% have a strong or moderate sense of belonging, and only 10% say they feel like they belong “only a little” or “not at all”—on par with other racial and ethnic groups.

But for U.S.-born Asian Americans who frequently face assumptions of foreignness, 29% feel like they only belong “a little” or “not at all.” That’s nearly three times the rate of U.S.-born Asian Americans who don’t regularly encounter these forms of the perpetual foreigner stereotype.

 Percentage of U.S.-born Asian Americans who feel like they belong in the U.S. only a little or not at all, among those who are...




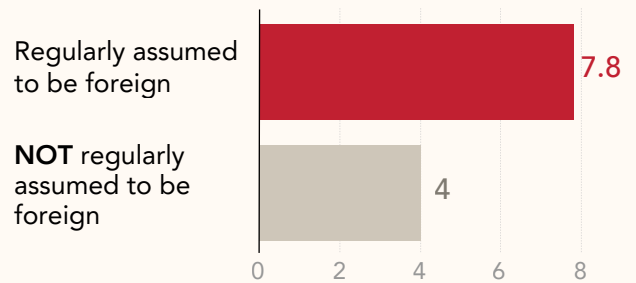
The psychological cost of exclusion

Regularly being asked where you’re from or assumptions of not being able to speak English are also related to significantly greater psychological distress.

Researchers asked respondents a series of validated questions about their recent mental and emotional states using the 6-item Kessler Psychological Distress Scale. Americans that are regularly treated as outsiders report greater psychological distress than those who aren’t.

Among U.S.-born Asian Americans, those who typically encounter assumptions about not being from the U.S. or being unable to speak English have nearly double the psychological distress score compared to U.S.-born Asian Americans that don’t typically face these assumptions.

 Psychological distress score (KPDS-6) of U.S.-born Asian Americans, among those who are...



A possible path forward

There is hope for the decline and eventual eradication of the perpetual foreigner stereotype, however. Sixty-nine percent of Americans surveyed said that public school curriculum should include lessons on Asian American history. Other research shows clear benefits when students learn about histories, cultures, and experiences of non-white populations, which lead to increased understanding and positive perceptions of those populations.⁶

References

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