



The Fight for Representation: The State of Chinese Americans 2022

Executive Summary



COMMITTEE OF 100

 COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

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Background

Chinese Americans are one of the fastest growing population groups in the United States, estimated to be 5.5 million or 1.7% of the U.S. population according to the 2021 American Community Survey (ACS). Chinese Americans are also one of the fastest-growing groups of voters. While historically, Asian Americans have participated less in politics than many other groups, they experienced the largest increase in voter turnout between the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections among all racial or ethnic groups. Yet, Chinese Americans have been systematically marginalized and excluded from American society since their arrival in the 1850s. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was the first U.S. law ever implemented to prevent entry to the country and pursuit of naturalization based on ethnicity or nationality. Further, Chinese Americans have been historically underrepresented in politics and policy, and underserved in healthcare, education, and social services.

The COVID-19 pandemic saw a sharp increase in anti-Asian hate crimes and incidents in the U.S. This surge in hostility was fueled by the false and harmful rhetoric linking the virus to China and Chinese people. Chinese Americans in particular faced abuse, harassment, and violence. Among all 11,467 hate incidents reported to Stop AAPI Hate between March 2020 and March 2022, nearly half targeted people of Chinese descent. The impact of this hate has been severe. Across the country, Chinese and other Asian Americans reported increased fear, anxiety, and vigilance, suffering from deteriorating mental health, and decreased business revenue and income.

To address these issues, we must continuously collect comprehensive and accurate data on the diverse and multifaceted backgrounds and needs of Chinese Americans, including information related to demographic characteristics, cultural identity, healthcare, education, employment, economic security, and political engagement. Prior to the current study, large-scale survey data on Chinese Americans was limited. Most nationally representative surveys include samples of Chinese Americans too small to report on, and instead only report on Asian Americans at-large. Further, these surveys are typically only administered in English and Spanish, preventing participation from Chinese Americans that prefer or are only able to communicate in Chinese. Some nationwide surveys of Asian Americans include a relatively large sample size of Chinese Americans, but their focus is typically narrowed to one or two topic areas such as cultural identity or political engagement, and lack measures on other aspects of the living conditions of

the Chinese American population. Collecting a wide range of data on a large nationwide sample of Chinese Americans is key to understanding the characteristics, experiences, and opinions of this population, which, in turn, enables us to address the issues, concerns, and challenges faced by Chinese Americans.

Objectives

As a collaborative initiative between Columbia University and the Committee of 100, the goal of the State of Chinese Americans Survey is to showcase the demographic, economic, health, sociopolitical, and other characteristics and dynamics of the Chinese American population. It is intended to inform policymakers and the public regarding the status, contributions, and needs of the Chinese American population, and to inform timely and responsive policies, programs, and services that will address the gaps identified.

This survey project aimed to address three main research questions:

First, what are the **demographic characteristics** of Chinese Americans regarding birthplace, place of upbringing, languages spoken at home, and English language proficiency? In terms of a **sense of belonging and cultural identity**, how accepted do Chinese Americans feel in American society? How do they feel about living across and navigating American and Chinese cultures? And, how prevalent are **racial discrimination experiences** among Chinese Americans and how do they cope with such experiences?

Second, what are the **political opinions and levels of engagement** among Chinese Americans? What proportion of Chinese American citizens are **registered to vote** and **turn out** in elections? What do Chinese Americans see as the **most important problems** facing the U.S.? How do they want the **U.S. to engage with China** on economic issues, and in what areas do they see the **two countries working together**? Moreover, how do **U.S.-China relations** affect the daily lives of Chinese Americans?

Third, what is the **health and economic** status of Chinese Americans? What does their **household income distribution** look like? What do levels of **physical and mental health** and life satisfaction look like among Chinese Americans? How prevalent are **medical disadvantages and economic hardships** in this population? Finally, what kind of support and resources do they need?

Methodology

The State of Chinese Americans Survey questionnaire included 77 questions across six modules: Demographics, Racial and Cultural Background, Health, Economic Activities and Insecurity, Social Engagement, and Political Engagement. Two open-ended questions in the survey asked respondents to describe their experiences with racial discrimination and coping mechanisms, and the impact of U.S.-China relations in their daily lives. The nationwide survey was conducted online in English, simplified Chinese, and traditional Chinese, and invited participation from

anyone over the age of 18 who self-identified as a person of Chinese ethnic origin and living in the United States. No incentives were provided for survey participation.

Study participants were recruited through community outreach in partnership with more than 100 organizations throughout the country. Given the lack of a complete and reliable national sampling frame of Chinese Americans, this study used a non-probability sampling method with targeted subgroup recruitment efforts focusing on a set of key demographic characteristics for diverse representation. Special efforts were made to recruit participants in geographical areas where Chinese Americans are underrepresented. To ensure sufficient sample sizes for the harder-to-reach individuals with lower income, education, and/or English proficiency, roughly one-third of the partner organizations specialized in community engagement, resource provision, and housing. The remaining two-thirds were affiliated with advocacy, commerce, culture, religion, and various professions.

After data collection was completed, statistical weights were created using the post-stratification raking method. The raking method is commonly used in survey research to adjust for nonresponse and sampling biases. The method involved calibrating the sample statistics so that the sample distribution of key demographic characteristics including gender, age, education level, English proficiency, U.S. citizenship, income level, and region aligns with the known distribution of the national Chinese American population based on the 2020 ACS 5-year estimates. All results reported are with the statistical weights applied.

The final sample included 6,481 respondents across regions and various demographic and socioeconomic subgroups. It is important to note that the sample is not nationally representative due to its non-probability sampling method. However, our survey design, recruitment methods, and statistical weighting ensure that study results reflect the diverse backgrounds, experiences, and views of the Chinese American population across the country.

Key Findings

The State of Chinese Americans Survey findings reveal the challenges and opportunities facing Chinese Americans today. Three sets of key findings highlight the diverse experiences, wide-ranging access and needs, and vocal aspirations of the Chinese American population.

First, Chinese Americans are diverse with regard to birthplace, place of upbringing, language spoken at home, and English proficiency. While the overwhelming majority of Chinese Americans see themselves as accepted in American society and culturally blended between American and Chinese cultures, they are also often marginalized and have experienced discrimination in their daily lives.

- About one in three Chinese Americans was born in the U.S., and 40% named the U.S. as their place of upbringing.
- Chinese Americans are a multilingual population. At home, nearly half spoke English and nearly 40% spoke two or more languages. The majority (80%) reported being English proficient.

- Nearly three-quarters reported feeling accepted in American society, and over 80% reported feeling culturally blended and having cultural harmony between American and Chinese cultures.
- Nearly three out of four Chinese Americans experienced racial discrimination in the past 12 months, with two in three staying vigilant due to worries about safety related to hate crimes or harassment, nearly half reporting being treated with less respect than other people, and over a quarter experiencing bias or hate incidents such as being physically intimidated or assaulted, having their property vandalized or damaged, and being called names or made a racial slurs.
- Chinese Americans are speaking up and taking action to advocate for education and funding for greater awareness, community support and solidarity, and are calling for authorities to pursue accountability in addressing racial discrimination and hate incidents.

Second, Chinese Americans are active political participants. The overwhelming majority of Chinese American citizens vote. They care deeply about issues facing U.S. society and want better relations and more collaboration between the U.S. and China.

- Eight in ten Chinese American citizens were registered voters, and 91% of registered voters voted in the 2020 presidential election.
- Racism, crime, gun control, and the economy were identified as the top four most important issues facing the U.S. by the survey respondents.
- There was high-level anxiety about U.S.-China relations, especially among more educated groups. About four in five Chinese Americans viewed the current U.S.-China relations as negative.
- Eight in ten Chinese Americans agreed that the U.S. should build a collaborative economic relationship with China. The economy and trade were identified as the two top areas for mutual benefit from U.S.-China collaboration efforts.
- “Family” and “people” were the most frequently mentioned words when respondents described the impact of U.S.-China relations on their daily lives.

Third, Chinese Americans are not homogenous. While often stereotyped as a “model minority,” which fuels the perception that Chinese Americans are more prosperous and face fewer challenges than other racial groups, many in fact face disadvantages or hardships in health and economics and need better support from policies and services.

- There was a wide household income distribution among Chinese Americans surveyed, with one-tenth in low income.
- Nearly a quarter received some form of assistance, with public assistance being the most common form of assistance.
- One in four Chinese Americans had at least one form of health disadvantage, including reporting either fair or poor physical or mental health, or having one or more type of disabilities. Health disadvantages were more prevalent among households with low incomes and those with limited English proficiency.
- Nearly one in four Chinese Americans were at moderate or severe risk of mental illness based on self-reported psychological distress, including feelings of worthlessness,

depression, hopelessness, restlessness, nervousness, or that everything was an effort. Nearly one in three reported low-to-moderate life satisfaction.

- Nearly a quarter faced some form of medical disadvantage or economic hardship, including delayed medical care, difficulty paying for food or bills, or lack of health insurance coverage in the past 12 months.

Recommendations

The State of Chinese Americans Survey provides important implications for promoting greater equity and inclusion of Chinese Americans. The diversity of Chinese Americans calls for proactive research and education in order to design equitable and inclusive policies, programs, and services. Not all Chinese Americans will have the same set of experiences and needs. Our findings also highlight significant marginalization and hardship in the Chinese American community as a whole, despite individual differences among respondents. As such, policymakers must discern the opportunities and challenges associated with their respective areas in American society and how Chinese Americans might be impacted. Moreover, Chinese Americans are active political participants, and the importance of including their voices and perspectives in political discourse and decision-making should be emphasized.

Recognizing the wide-ranging experiences and perspectives of Chinese Americans is the first step to promoting greater equity and inclusion. Based on the findings from the State of Chinese Americans Survey, we offer the following recommendations.

To promote greater equity and inclusion of Chinese Americans, we recommend:

- Incorporate or expand Asian American history lessons across all levels of education, from K-12 to higher education, to help Americans understand the diverse accomplishments, contributions, and challenges of Chinese and Asian American populations.
- Allocate or increase funding for language access to provide Chinese Americans with low English proficiency with equal access to the same level of services and opportunities as English-speaking individuals. Partner with community members and organizations and solicit their feedback to improve the quality and implementation of new or existing language access services.
- Allocate or increase funding for community programs and organizations that bring support services and initiatives directly to Chinese Americans.
- Establish clear guidelines on addressing and responding proactively to reports of anti-Asian hate and discrimination. Entities must ensure language access and culturally-informed protocols for the safety and wellness of those affected by anti-Asian hate as well as to seek appropriate resolution for the reported incidents.

To increase levels of political engagement and reduce the negative impact of contentious political rhetoric and strained U.S.-China relations on the lives of Chinese Americans, we recommend:

- Increase get-out-the-vote efforts and political mobilization of Chinese Americans, especially at the grassroots level to increase political participation of groups whose voices tend to be less heard and who tend to turn out at lower rates: younger, lower income, less educated, and less English-proficient groups.
- Actively discourage and speak up against usage of inflammatory and derogatory language in discussion of U.S.-China relations, which has a direct and negative impact on the lives of Chinese Americans.
- Establish and increase venues and opportunities to have more in-depth, meaningful conversations about political and civic engagement issues among Chinese Americans and across different racial or ethnic groups to enhance mutual understanding and respect and promote joint efforts and alliance building.

To address the health and economic needs of Chinese Americans, we recommend:

- Provide public assistance and health care services in various languages and dialects to support Chinese Americans with limited English proficiency to receive the economic support and medical services they need.
- Raise visibility and facilitate discussions of disadvantages and hardships among the Chinese American community to improve awareness and dismantle model minority stereotypes.
- Facilitate culturally-informed services and resource outreach to improve access to services and assistance programs among the Chinese American population with low incomes or limited English proficiency.
- Increase the number of bilingual, culturally-competent Chinese and Asian American mental health and social work professionals. Establish funding and scholarships to encourage multilingual services and provide language classes and training to support this goal.

For more information, visit <https://socialwork.columbia.edu/> or <https://www.committee100.org/>

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