Asian Americans and Minority Religion

Key Words:
- Asian American
- Minority Religion
- Religion
- Buddhism
- Hinduism
- Religious Diversity

Description:
This issue brief discusses the heterogeneous nature of the Asian American population and how this can be represented through religious affiliation. Further, it demonstrates how minority religious affiliation, compared to other factors that divide the Asian American population, affects political participation.

Key Points:
- Asian Americans are generally less religiously affiliated than other minority groups
- Religion amongst Asian Americans varies greatly — a trend that reflects their heterogeneous categorization
- Religion does not seem to affect Asian American political participation as much as other factors
- Asian Americans are the most religiously diverse of minority groups in the US

Issue Brief:

According to the US Census of 2010, there are approximately 18.2 million Asian Americans living in America (Mosaic of Faiths). Their population is steadily growing, as well: between the years of 1999 and 2000, Asian Americans experienced a population growth rate of between 48% and 72% (Ecklund 2). Today, they are the fourth largest racial or ethnic group behind Whites, Hispanics, and Blacks (Jones). Asian Americans form the most diverse of ethnic minority groups in the United States; although often consolidated under the pan ethnic term “Asian
American,” the different groups of Asian Americans are each different ethnically, culturally, politically, and religiously. Religion, specifically, is an area in which Asian Americans provide a great deal of diversity to the overall American population. They are responsible for the growth of the population of religious followers under non-Abrahamic faiths in America, due to the large Buddhist, Hindu, and Muslim populations they contribute to the aggregate American population (Mosaic of Faiths). However, although they do bring a religious diversity that would be in some ways absent in a non-Asian America, the national representation of the minority religions they are affiliated with is still slim. For example, together, Hindus and Buddhists make up 24% of the religious population of Asian Americans, but only 2% of the total religious population of the United States (Mosaic of Faiths).

Taking a more detailed look at the breakdown between different religions within the Asian American community, we can look to the chart presented by the Mosaic of Faiths article. Here, we see that 42% of Asian Americans are of Christian faith, 14% are Buddhists, 10% are Hindus, 4% are Muslims, 1% are Sikhs, and 2% identify as “other.” Notably, a large 26% of the Asian American population does not fall under a religious affiliation — this means they may identify as Atheist, Agnostic, or as nothing whatsoever (Mosaic of Faiths). This religious heterogeneity points back to the aforementioned ethnic heterogeneity within the Asian American community. Filipinos tend to rest with the Catholic faith, most Korean-Americans are Protestant, half of Indian-Americans are Hindu, and half of Chinese Americans are non-affiliated (Mosaic of Faiths).

Thus, we can observe the diversity amongst Asian Americans as a whole, and part of the reason why, when studying Asian Americans through a political science lens and while looking for political trends, it may be useful to consider each ethnic group of Asian Americans separately, rather than amassing them into a whole unit.
In terms of political and civic participation amongst Asian Americans, we have not gained an adequate understanding of the comparative extent to which different religious traditions will foster civic participation among Asian Americans (Ecklund 3). However, Ecklund, in his study of the intersectionality between gender, ethnicity, class, and religion with concern to Asian American civic participation, found trends within the groups in his results. He found that, within the Eastern-religion Asian Americans, women were more likely than men to participate in community volunteerism (Ecklund 16). He also found that rather than the differences between each minority religion making an impact on civic participation within Asian Americans, that the difference lied in whether the Asian American was affiliated or had no affiliation at all (Ecklund 16).

Socially, Pew Research Forum, in their “Mosaic of Faiths” article, found that Asian Americans, in recent years, have begun adapting what he calls the United States “religious landscape” (Mosaic of Faiths). He crafts this statement from evidence of a trend of religious adaptation and assimilation of American religious traditions. He found that 3/4 of Buddhists and 3/4 of Hindus in the United States celebrate Christmas (Mosaic of Faith). He also found that of the population of adults who were raised Buddhist in the United States, most have strayed away from their Eastern religious roots at some point in their lives: 17% of these people have converted to Christianity, and 27% of them have disaffiliated from Buddhism (and any other religious affiliation) (Mosaic of Faith). PRF attributes this adaptation to what he claims is the notion that Buddhists and Hindus are more “inclusive in their understanding of faith” (Mosaic of Faiths). Through this lens, we can observe that minority religion within the United States Asian American population may not have a large impact on the civic and social structure of the nation. In fact, Pew Research Forum found that of the Asian American populations that do practice reli-
gion, most do not consider it an important factor in their daily lives, aside from the Asian American Evangelical population, who surpass the religious participation of White Evangelicals by 12% (Mosaic of Faiths). Thus, we can conclude moreover that Asian Americans raised practicing a minority religion either do not have the necessary community infrastructure or motivation to practice their religion to a highly devoted extent in the United States today.

On the political spectrum, Asian Americans tend to “lean left” (Jones). A 2009 Gallup poll reveals that Asian Americans tend to be, in general, more Democratic and less conservative. The breakdown of political affiliation amongst the Asian American population is as follows: 41% Democratic; 41% Independent; and 16% Republican (Jones). Compared to other racial and ethnic groups in the US, the Asian American population is, in general, more Democratic than Hispanics and much more Democratic than whites (as shown by the presented Gallup poll results). However, according to this same poll, Asian Americans are not as Democratic as Blacks. The results of this poll affirm no association between religious affiliation and political participation, though, as there is no substantive evidence that emphasizes the respective political preferences amongst Asian American minority religious groups (Jones). The poll insists, as well, that in general, Asian Americans are less religious than other racial or ethnic groups (Jones).

Images:
http://www.pewforum.org/2012/07/19/asian-americans-a-mosaic-of-faiths-overview/

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious Composition of Asian Americans</th>
<th>U.S. Asians</th>
<th>General public</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
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<td>23</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Christian</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhist†</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu†</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.5-0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim†</td>
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<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Jain (vol.)</td>
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<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know/Refused</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2012 Asian-Americans Survey. Q36: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. General public numbers are based on an aggregated data set from surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press in 2011, except where noted.


Pew Research Center

http://keenetrial.com/blog/2012/10/08/religion-ethnicity-and-asian-americans-voting-patterns/

Works Cited:
http://www.pewforum.org/2012/07/19/asian-americans-a-mosaic-of-faiths-overview/
https://muse.jhu.edu/article/185179

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http://aapivoices.com/keeping-losing-faith/