

## **Issue Brief: Native Americans/ Asian Americans**

### **Key Words (4-6)**

Native American, Asian American, Marginalization, Ethnoracial Pentagon, Socioeconomic Status

### **Description (2 sentences)**

This issue brief compares Asian Americans and Native Americans. The brief explores the similarities and differences in the two ethnoracial groups, and discusses how these similarities and differences effect their political participation.

### **Key Points (4-6)**

- Asian Americans have found an extremely high-end position in American society, while Native Americans have been marginalized as members of the same society.
- Asian Americans make up 5% of the population, while Native Americans make up only .9%.
- Asian Americans are highly educated, more so than any other group, while Native Americans are poorly educated
- Asian Americans also have a dramatically higher median income than Native Americans.
- Despite these differences, both groups are largely made up of Democrats.



**Issue Brief: (500-700 words)**

Native Americans and Asian Americans represent two of the smaller recognized population groups in the United States. The Native American population of the United States stands at 2.9 million, which accounts for .9% of the population. This makes them the smallest racial/ethnic group. The Asian American population has increased dramatically over the past decade to 17.3 million, or roughly 5% of the population. This is a change of 43% in the past decade, making them the fastest growing group in the country. While they do share some similarities as two of the smaller groups in society, Native Americans and Indian Americans are vastly different in terms of their political, economic, and social standing in the United States.

Native Americans have a long history of oppression and marginalization in the United States. Native Americans first arrived in the United States some 18,000 years ago via a land bridge that used to connect Asia and Alaska. They went on to populate the continents of North and South America, but have been on the margins of society since being invaded and subjugated by European settlers. Asian Americans have found a much more central position in modern society. They primarily migrated in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, many of them after civil rights had been granted to the general population. While they were initially forced into manual labor upon arrival, recent years have seen a steady increase in the intellectual accomplishment of the Asian American population.

In general, Asian Americans have found themselves in a far superior societal position than Native Americans have. The Asian American population graduates high school at a rate of 85%, while Native Americans graduate at a rate of 72.7%. Fully 50% of Asian Americans have a college degree, compared to 10.8% for Native Americans. In addition, 20% of Asian Americans have an advanced degree, and only .9% of Native Americans have attained that level. Clearly,

education levels vary drastically between these two groups. Likewise, income disparities have become severe as well. The median Asian American family makes \$68,780, while the median Native American family earns only \$32,240. 12.5% of Asian Americans live in poverty, while 25.1% of Native Americans live in poverty.

These disparities are systemic, and demonstrate a greater trend in the lives of many people living in the United States today. Both groups have faced persecution at different times, but the marginalization of the Native American people began long before modern civil rights were even being considered. The oppression that Native Americans endured in the early history of this country has led to their relocation to reservations, areas that occasionally demonstrate extreme poverty and may fail to live up to modern standards of living. Conversely, Asian Americans predominately arrived in America after the advent of the modern civil rights movement, and have benefitted from the spread of the inherent rights of man to people of all color. Asian Americans as a group are highly successful members of American society, and surpass every other group in terms of education and income. It would be difficult to pick two groups that have come from such similar start points and ended up in such a different place in modern America.

Despite this fact, they are both strongly Democratic voting blocs. Nearly 2/3 of Asian Americans identify as Democrats, while Native Americans are even more staunchly democratic. One explanation for this similarity in voting trend is their shared historical marginalization. The two groups, while currently in different socioeconomic brackets, have endured similar histories in terms of their rights and participation in politics. As the two groups fight to have their voices heard, they find common ground with the Democrat's platform. For Asian Americans, it often has more to do with immigration policies and emphasis on education. For the Native Americans,

the choice to support the Democrats by a 90% margin stems from more traditional reasons related to their need for entitlement programs that aid the Native Americans significantly given their relatively low economic status. Some races have even hinged on Republican efforts to weaken tribal sovereignty rights. Regardless of their reason for associating with a particular party, in recent years both groups have begun to wield their political weight in a more significant fashion. These minority groups will have a large impact in future elections, and it should benefit each of them greatly.

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