



What Does It Mean to Be Asian American in California?

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INTRODUCTION

In the run-up to the November 2022 midterm elections, [politicians](#), [political campaigns](#), and the [political media](#) devoted unprecedented attention to the partisan inclinations of Asian Americans, the country's fastest growing ethnic/racial group.

Pre-election [surveys](#) suggested that this population leans decisively toward the Democratic Party. But it could be months before analysts get a granular post-election picture of the voting behavior of this increasingly influential demographic.

While the recent attention showered on this fast-growing slice of the electorate is welcome—as it has long existed as a [footnote](#) in accounts of contemporary American politics—discussions of the political mobilization, partisan leanings, and policy priorities of “Asian Americans” often [ignore](#) the fact that this demographic is large and internally heterogeneous.

Indeed, the question “What does it mean to be Asian in America?” is not a question with a simple, universal

answer. As a new [Pew Research Center study](#) on Asian Americans eloquently puts it, “No single experience defines what it means to be Asian in the United States today . . . Asian Americans’ lived experiences are in part shaped by where they were born, how connected they are to their family’s ethnic origins, and how others—both Asians and non-Asians—see and engage with them in their daily lives.”

Once one discards the assumption that “Asian American” is a static identity viewed in the same way by all members of the community, a set of questions emerges: How do Asian Americans conceive of their identity? Do Indian-origin and Chinese-origin Americans embrace the “Asian American” label to the same degree? How do Asians in the United States balance their own national origin identities with their connection to America? To what extent are the social networks of Asian-origin Americans comprised of other Asian Americans who come from similar backgrounds? And what forms of identity-based discrimination do they experience in America today and on what grounds?



This article attempts to answer these and other pertinent questions about Asian American identity. It is the third in a [series](#) of articles that explore the political and social preferences of Asian Americans in California, a state where today Asian American and Pacific Islanders make up nearly [16 percent](#) of the state's population.

Like the others in the [series](#), this article draws on a new online survey of 1,000 California-based Asian Americans conducted by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in partnership with the data and analytics firm YouGov. The sample includes respondents from twenty-one Asian-origin groups but excludes Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders.

Specifically, this article examines how California's Asian Americans view matters of identity and belonging by analyzing four themes: Asian Americans' perceptions of their own identity; their relative embrace of umbrella ethnic/racial categories like "Asian American" and "Asian American and Pacific Islander"; the composition of their social networks; and their experiences with discrimination, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The [first](#) article in this series explored the political preferences of the community in the run-up to the 2022 midterm elections, while the [second](#) looked at their policy preferences. Future articles will explore other topics of relevance to California's Asian American community, including foreign policy attitudes and civic and political engagement.

SURVEY DESIGN

The data analyzed here are based on an original online survey of 1,000 California-based Asian American residents. The survey was designed by scholars at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and conducted by polling firm YouGov between September 9 and September 26, 2022.

YouGov recruited respondents from its [proprietary panel](#) of nearly 2 million U.S. residents. Only adult respondents (ages eighteen and above) who are full-time residents of California and who belong to one of twenty-one Asian-origin groups were eligible to participate in the survey.¹ These twenty-one ethnic subgroups account for 97.4 percent of the Asian American and Pacific Islander population in California, according to [2020 U.S. Census data](#).² The YouGov survey did not include respondents who principally identify as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. The survey was fielded in English (see the next section for additional discussion).

YouGov employs a sophisticated sample-matching procedure to ensure to the greatest extent possible that the respondent pool is representative of the Asian American community in California; the procedure uses data from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2019 [American Community Survey](#) as a target sample frame. All the analyses in this study employ sampling weights to ensure representativeness. The overall margin of error for the U.S. citizen subsample is +/- 3 percent. This margin of error is calculated at the 95 percent confidence interval.

The survey instrument contains an extensive range of questions organized across six modules: basic demographics, identity and discrimination, politics, policy preferences, foreign policy, and civic and political life. Respondents were allowed to skip questions except for important demographic questions that determined the nature of other survey items.

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

As [related research](#) has shown, surveys of Asian Americans have to contend with several thorny methodological challenges. While their numbers have increased, Asian Americans are still a distinct minority—even in California—making it difficult to recruit sufficiently large samples for surveys.

One [major benefit](#) of working with an extensive survey panel, such as the one maintained by YouGov, is that it provides access to large sample sizes that allow researchers to make reliable estimates about even relatively small populations of interest. However, online panels have a significant drawback: most online survey panels are conducted in English, and just [around seven in ten eligible Asian-origin voters](#) report that they only speak English at home or speak the language “very well.”

Therefore, the survey results presented in this article cannot mechanically be extrapolated to the Asian American community in California at large. For instance, this survey’s sample includes a larger share of U.S. citizens than California’s Asian American population [as a whole](#). It is best to treat the survey

findings as representative of the views of English-proficient Californians of Asian origin.

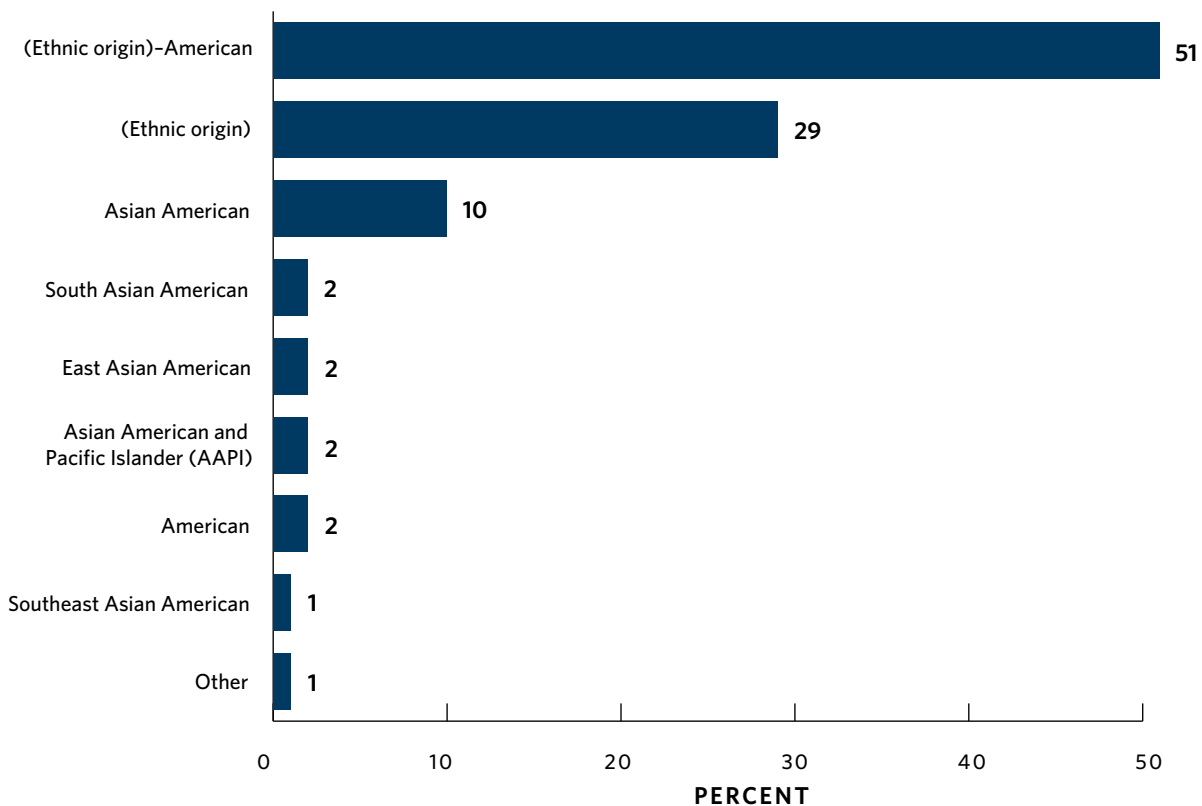
Despite this caveat, this survey serves as an important barometer given that, in the years to come, the characteristics of the Asian American population will increasingly resemble those of the sample studied here.

BELONGING AND IDENTIFICATION

How Asian Americans define their ethnic or racial identity is a subjective, multifaceted endeavor. This section looks at how Asian American respondents describe their own identity, how important their ethnic or immigrant identity is to them, and how they weigh their ethnic and American identities.

FIGURE 1
Varieties of Self Identification

Which of the following would you say best describes your background?



N= 1,000 California adult residents

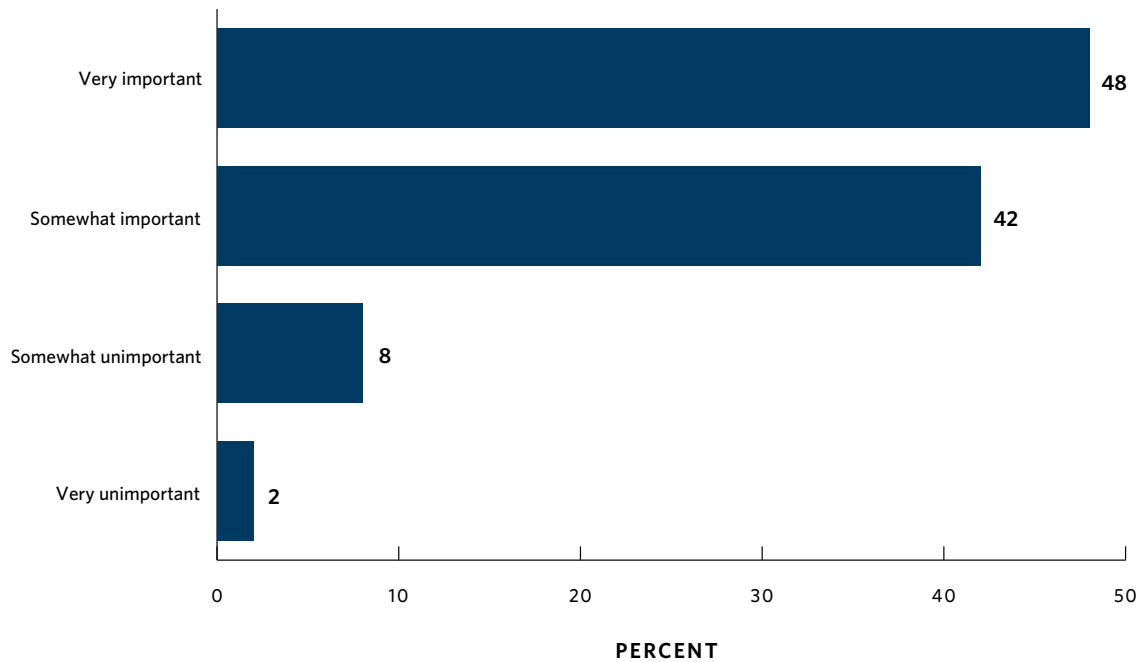
NOTE: “Ethnic origin” refers to each of the twenty-one ethnic/national origin groups that comprise the Asian American community.

SOURCE: 2022 Survey of Asian Americans in California



FIGURE 2
Importance of Ethnic Origin

How important is being (ethnic origin) to your identity?



N= 1,000 California adult residents

NOTE: "Ethnic origin" refers to each of the twenty-one ethnic/national origin groups that comprise the Asian American community.

SOURCE: 2022 Survey of Asian Americans in California

Self-Identification

To determine how Asian Americans in California perceive their race or ethnicity, the survey first asked respondents how they would choose to self-identify (see figure 1). When shown a list of plausible options, a narrow majority of respondents chose to identify with a hyphenated identity, fusing their ethnic origin (for example, Chinese, Indian, or Japanese) and "American." Fifty-one percent of respondents believed that "[selected ethnic origin]-American" (for example, Chinese-American, Indian-American, or Japanese-American) is the term that best describes their background.

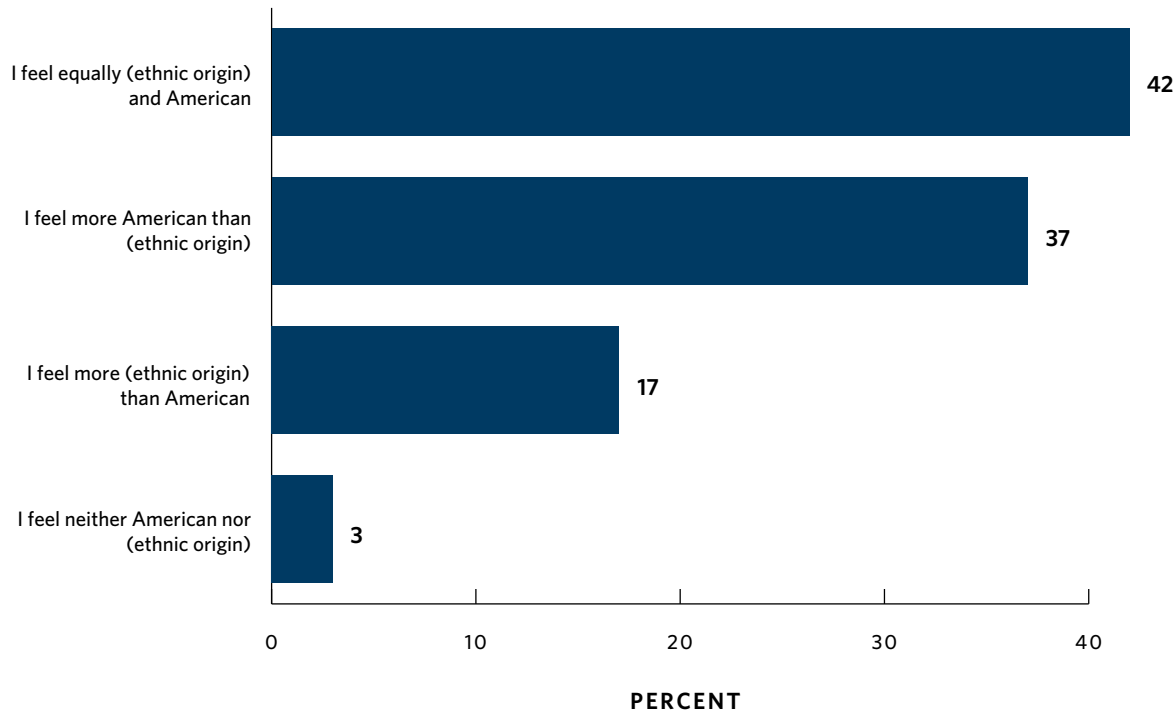
Twenty-nine percent dropped the hyphenation and chose to identify only with their national origin group

(for example, Filipino, Korean, or Vietnamese). Ten percent of the sample eschewed their specific ethnic identity and preferred the umbrella term "Asian American." A very small minority of respondents—around 2 percent each—identified as "South Asian American," "East Asian American," "Asian American and Pacific Islander," or simply "American." Finally, 1 percent preferred to be identified as "Southeast Asian American," while another 1 percent preferred some other formulation.

These results are striking. They point to the way in which Asian American respondents emphasize ethnic or national origin groups when asked to define their own identity. In short, broad, umbrella labels appear less popular when narrow, targeted identities are available.

FIGURE 3
Weighing Ethnic and American Identities

Which of the following best describes your identity?



N= 1,000 California adult residents

NOTE: “Ethnic origin” refers to each of the twenty-one ethnic/national origin groups that comprise the Asian American community.

SOURCE: 2022 Survey of Asian Americans in California

As a follow-up, the survey asked respondents how important it is to them to be a part of their ethnic community (for example, a Chinese, Hmong, Indian, or Pakistani community) (see figure 2). Ninety percent of respondents reported that it is either very or somewhat important, with 48 percent reporting the former. Only 10 percent deemed it somewhat or very unimportant.

Navigating Multiple Identities

The survey probed further to understand how respondents perceived the push and pull between different aspects of their identity. On the one hand, respondents appeared to embrace a hyphenated identity that reflects their ethnic identity and their American one (for example, the formulation

Japanese-American). On the other hand, it is clear from the subsequent question that their connection to their ethnic roots was also important.

To this end, the survey asked respondents how they weighed their ethnic versus American identities. For instance, if one were to consider the Indian Americans in the sample, did Indian American respondents feel more Indian, more American, equally Indian and American, or neither Indian nor American?

The modal response among respondents was that they weighed both sides of their identity *equally*; 42 percent reported that they felt similarly attached to their ethnic origin as they did to being American (see figure 3). However, more than one-third of survey respondents

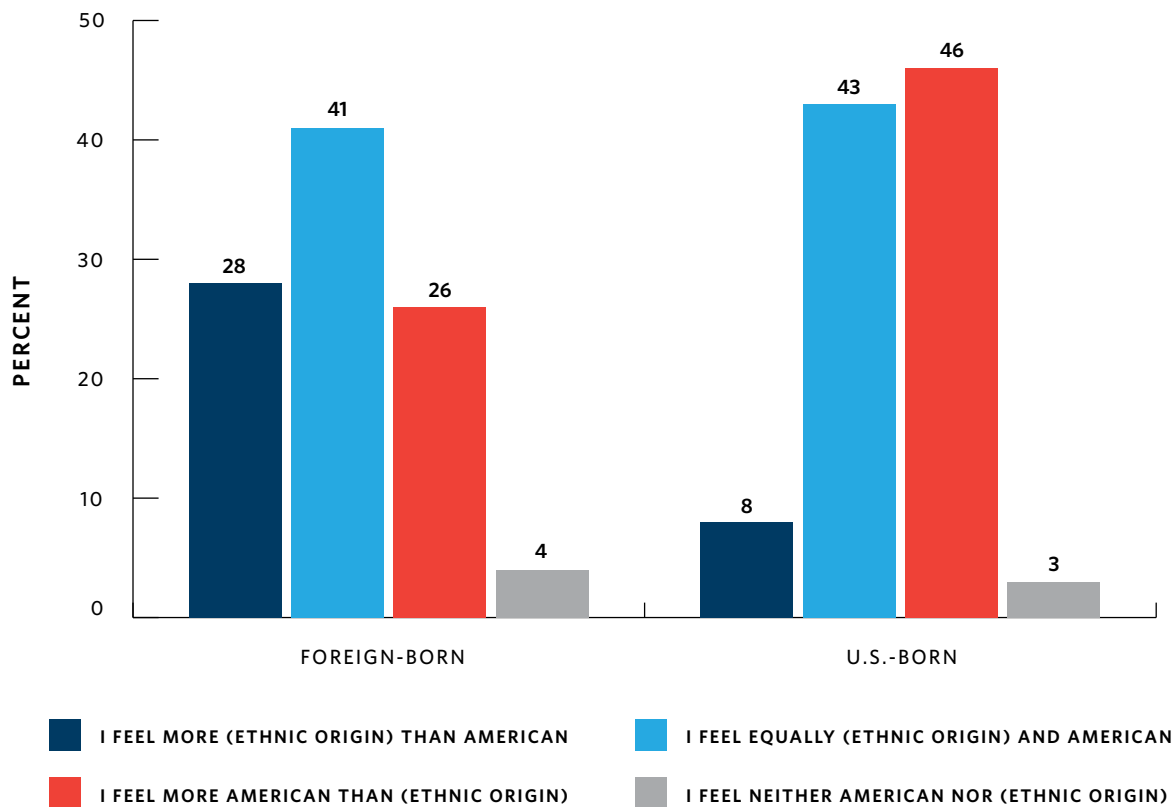
reported feeling more American, and 17 percent of respondents claimed that they felt more attached to their ethnic origin. Finally, very few respondents—just 3 percent—reported that they felt neither American nor part of their ethnic community.

Not surprisingly, the weight that respondents placed on different aspects of their identity varied considerably based on their place of birth (see figure 4). Nearly three in ten foreign-born respondents reported that they felt more connected to their ethnic origin than to

their American identity, while just 8 percent of U.S.-born respondents reported the same. Conversely, 46 percent of U.S.-born respondents reported feeling more connected to their American identity than to their ethnic origin, while just 26 percent of foreign-born respondents reported the same. Notably, the proportions of foreign-born and U.S.-born respondents who felt equally connected to their ethnic and American identities were almost identical, irrespective of country of birth.

FIGURE 4
Weighing Ethnic and American Identities, by Place of Birth

Which of the following best describes your identity?



N= 1,000 California adult residents

NOTE: Numbers do not always equal 100 due to rounding. “Ethnic origin” refers to each of the twenty-one ethnic/national origin groups that comprise the Asian American community.

SOURCE: 2022 Survey of Asian Americans in California

ASIAN AMERICAN BELONGING

This section takes a step back and looks at how Asian-origin residents of California view the umbrella terms “Asian American” and “Asian American and Pacific Islander.” These are contested designations, embraced by some but shunned by others.

Asian American Identity

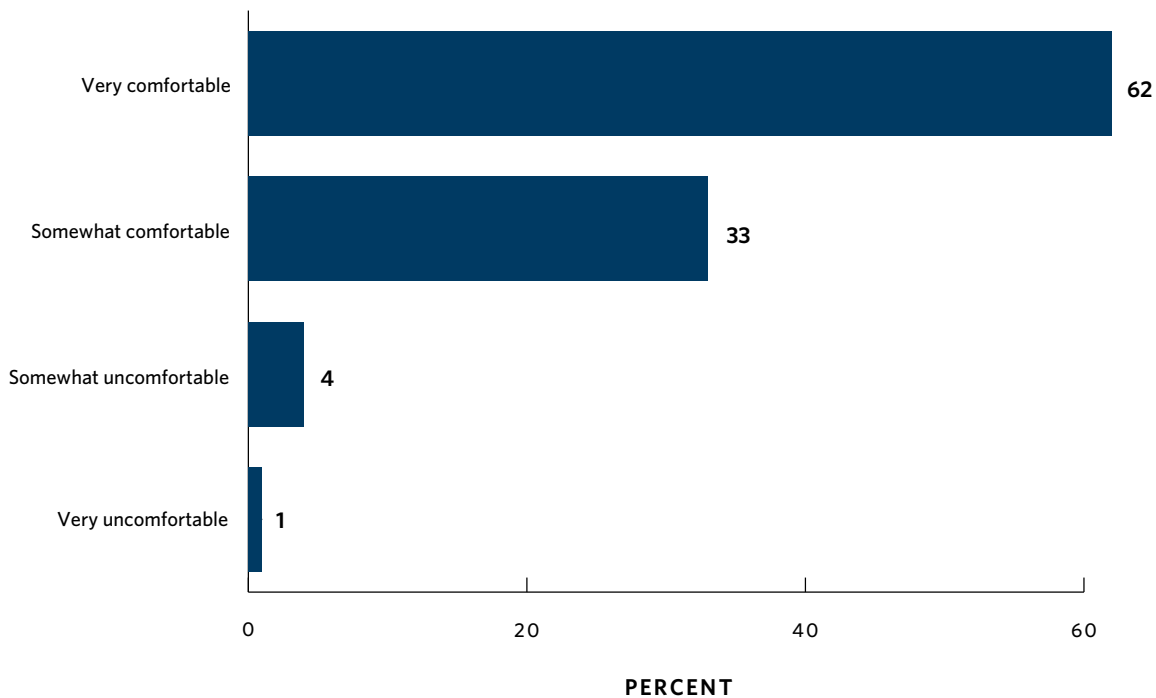
The use of the term “Asian American” dates to the [late 1960s](#) and was advanced as an alternative to the commonplace yet pejorative term “Oriental.” Over the past [six decades](#), civic and political activists have devoted untold hours to developing a feeling of “Asian American” solidarity among the various Asian

immigrant communities in the United States. While the phrase “Asian American” is firmly a part of the country’s vocabulary today, it is [not universally embraced](#) by individuals across all Asian ethnic groups. For instance, many South Asians in the United States do not use the term, believing it encapsulates immigrants from East Asia but not South Asia. This conclusion was reinforced in a [2020 Carnegie survey](#) of Indian Americans, which found that only 6 percent of respondents felt that the term “Asian American” best described their background.

To test respondents’ current attitudes toward the “Asian American” label, this survey asked them how comfortable they felt identifying as a member of this community (see figure 5). Overall, there was widespread support for the label: more than six in ten respondents

FIGURE 5
Asian American Identification

How comfortable do you feel identifying as “Asian American”?



N= 999 California adult residents
SOURCE: 2022 Survey of Asian Americans in California

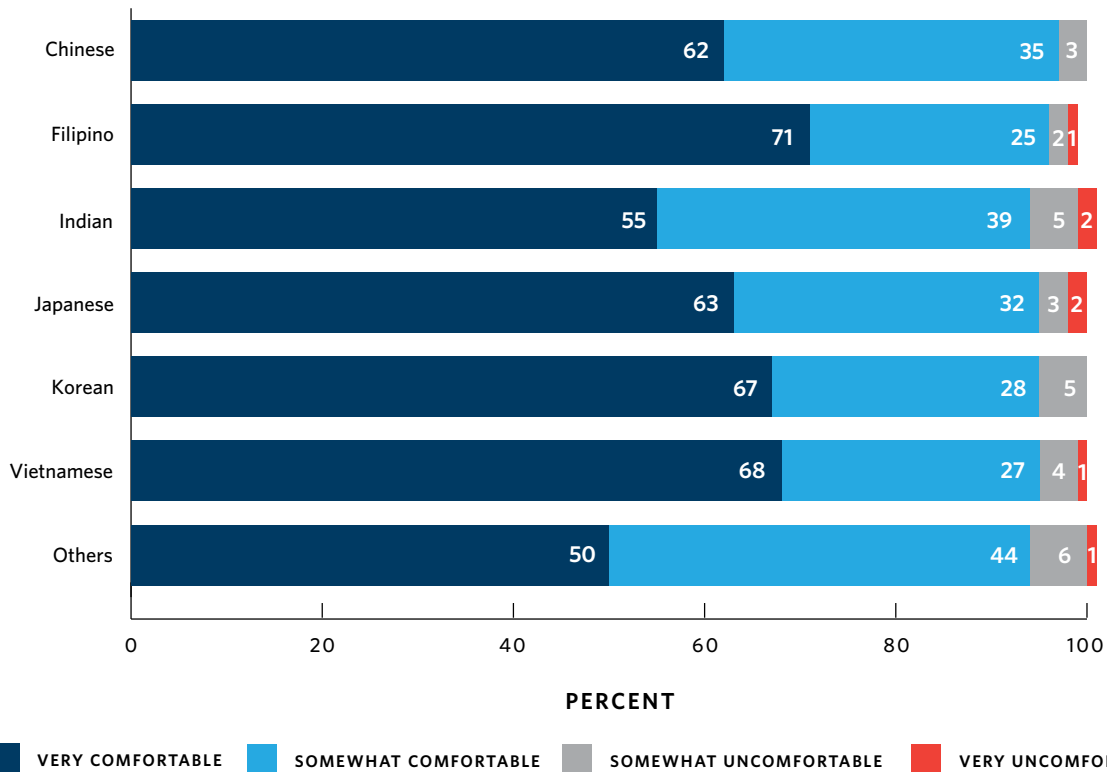
reported that they were very comfortable identifying as Asian American, and one-third reported feeling somewhat comfortable. Only 5 percent of respondents reported feeling either somewhat or very uncomfortable with the term.

However, this acceptance of the term masks some underlying nuance, especially when the data are disaggregated based on respondents' ethnic origin (see figure 6). Across large ethnic origin groups in the sample (for example, Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese origin groups), a clear majority of the total respondents appeared comfortable with the designation of Asian American. The variation between

these groups, however, can be seen in the proportion that was very comfortable. Whereas 71 percent of Filipino-origin respondents reported they were very comfortable with identifying as Asian American, only 62 percent of Chinese-origin and 55 percent of Indian-origin respondents felt the same. Respondents in the Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese ethnic groups found themselves somewhere between these two poles. "Others"—a diverse group consisting of respondents from smaller ethnic groups—appeared somewhat less enthusiastic. Nevertheless, 50 percent of these respondents reported that they were very comfortable with the Asian American designation.

FIGURE 6
Asian American Identification, by Ethnic Group

How comfortable do you feel identifying as "Asian American"?



N= 999 California adult residents

NOTE: Numbers do not always equal 100 due to rounding. "Others" refers to small ethnic/national origin groups in the sample.

SOURCE: 2022 Survey of Asian Americans in California

Asian American and Pacific Islander Identity

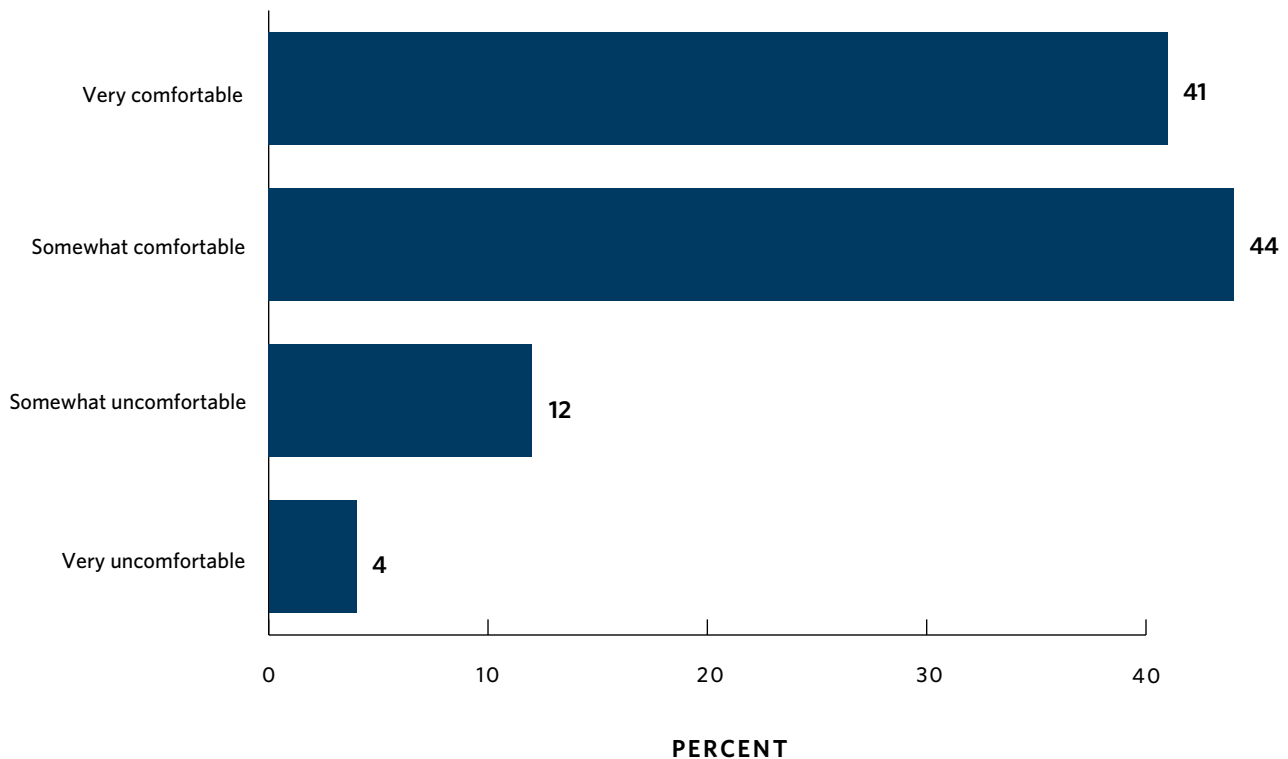
Shortly after the term “Asian American” began to gain ground, some within the community [criticized](#) it for being insufficiently inclusive because it left out individuals hailing from the Pacific Islands (such as Guam, Hawaii, and Samoa, in addition to other Pacific islands). Thus, the term “Asian American and Pacific Islander,” or AAPI for short, was born. In contemporary

American society, AAPI is widely used to recognize people whose origins span both the Asian continent and the countries and territories across the vast Pacific Ocean.

Most survey respondents indicated that they were also comfortable with the term “AAPI” (see figure 7). This is notable because the survey respondent pool excluded respondents who principally identify as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander.

FIGURE 7
Asian American and Pacific Islander Identification

How comfortable do you feel identifying as “Asian American and Pacific Islander” (AAPI)?



N= 1,000 California adult residents
SOURCE: 2022 Survey of Asian Americans in California

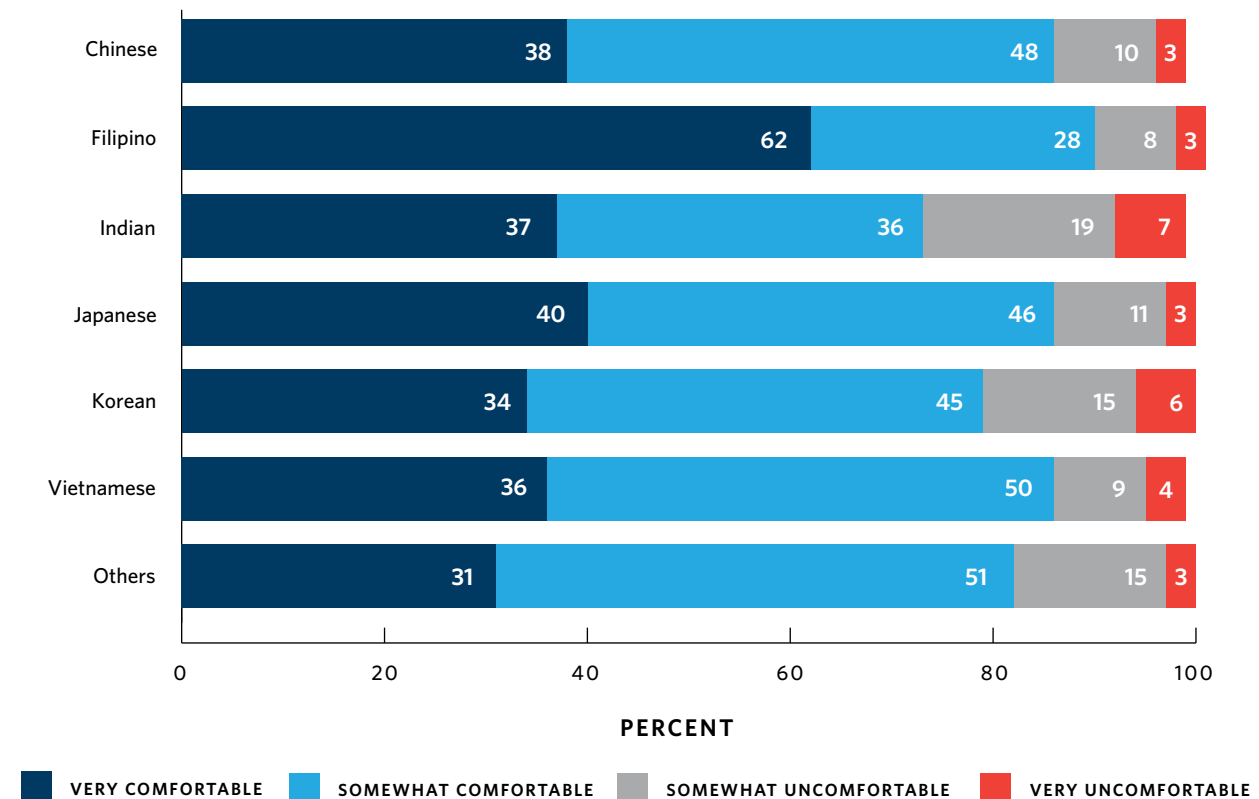
However, the acceptance of the “AAPI” designation is not as widely shared as “Asian American.” Whereas 62 percent of survey respondents reported feeling very comfortable with the phrase “Asian American,” only 41 percent reported that they were very comfortable with the term “AAPI.” A slightly higher proportion reported feeling somewhat comfortable with the AAPI designation (44 percent) compared to those somewhat comfortable with Asian American (33 percent). Finally, 12 percent of respondents reported feeling somewhat uncomfortable with the AAPI label, compared to only

4 percent who were uncomfortable with the Asian American designation.

Disaggregating the data by ethnic origin shows that much lower numbers of respondents in the Chinese, Indian, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese ethnic groups were very comfortable with the AAPI terminology (see figure 8). Indian-origin respondents recorded the highest level of discomfort, with 26 percent reporting that they were somewhat or very uncomfortable identifying as AAPI.

FIGURE 8
Asian American and Pacific Islander Identification, by Ethnic Group

How comfortable do you feel identifying as “Asian American and Pacific Islander” (AAPI)?



N= 999 California adult residents

NOTE: Numbers do not always equal 100 due to rounding. “Others” refers to small ethnic/national origin groups in the sample.

SOURCE: 2022 Survey of Asian Americans in California

Filipino-origin respondents were the outlier among the large ethnic groups in the data: 62 percent of these respondents felt very comfortable with the AAPI label. This makes sense intuitively based on the geographic location of the Philippines, which straddles both Asia and the Pacific Islands. Nevertheless, the vast majority of respondents from large ethnic groups in the sample did affirmatively identify with the AAPI label.

SOCIAL NETWORKS

The survey proceeded to ask respondents a series of questions about their social networks. These questions intended to gauge how deeply respondents were embedded within the broader Asian American

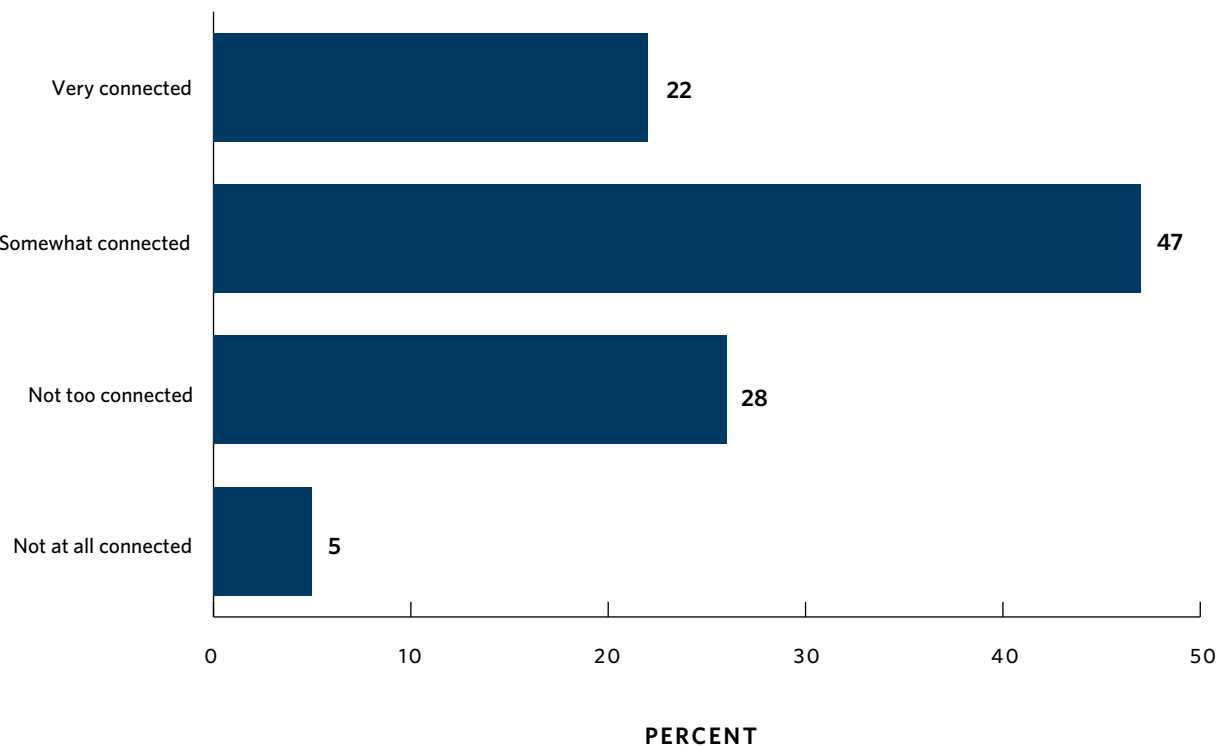
community in California and the extent to which that community is organized along identifiable cleavages like ethnic origin or language.

Connection with Asian Americans in California

To begin, the survey asked respondents how connected they felt with the Asian American community in California (see figure 9). Twenty-two percent of respondents reported that they felt very connected, while nearly half (47 percent) reported feeling somewhat connected. Twenty-six percent of respondents reported feeling not too connected, while a small minority (5 percent) reported feeling no connection to the Asian American community in the state.

FIGURE 9
Sense of Connection

How connected do you personally feel with the Asian American community in California?



N= 1,000 California adult residents
SOURCE: 2022 Survey of Asian Americans in California



When one disaggregates by community, it appears that Japanese-origin and Indian-origin respondents were the most likely to feel limited or zero connection with the Asian American community (50 percent and 39 percent, respectively). Vietnamese-origin respondents, on the other hand, were the most likely to feel very or somewhat connected to the Asian American community (83 percent).

Social Circles

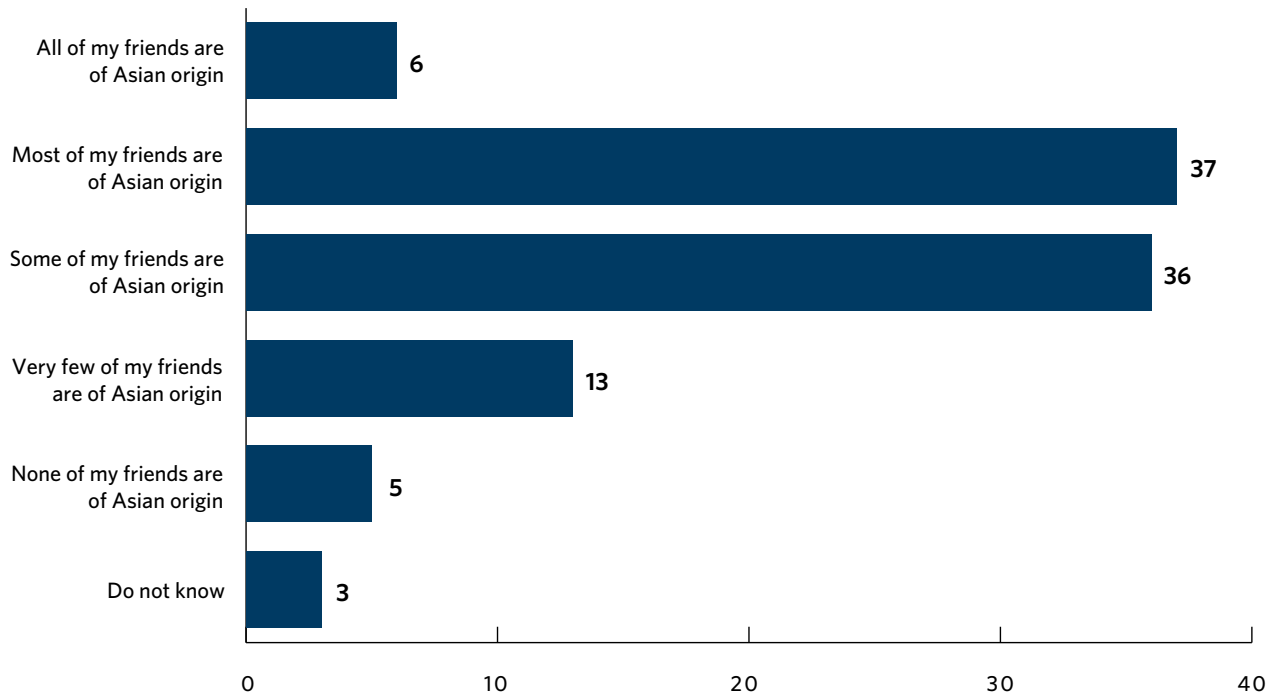
The survey then asked about respondents' social circles and the groups of people with whom they most regularly associate. Specifically, the survey asked respondents, "Which of the following best describes your personal group of friends?" Respondents chose

from the following list of five possible responses (not counting "don't know"): all, most, some, very few, or none (are of Asian origin) (see figure 10).

The distribution of respondents is instructive. Relatively few respondents reported that all of their friends or none of their friends were of Asian origin (6 percent and 5 percent, respectively). Thirteen percent reported that very few of their friends were of Asian origin. Most respondents were located in the middle of the distribution, with 37 percent reporting that most of their friends were of Asian origin and another 36 percent reporting that some of their friends were of Asian origin. Three percent of respondents reported that they did not know the composition of their social circle.

FIGURE 10
Social Circles

Which of the following best describes your personal group of friends?



N= 1,000 California adult residents
SOURCE: 2022 Survey of Asian Americans in California

PERCENT

The data suggest that most Asian American respondents' social circles are oriented, to some degree, around other Asian Americans. But this raises obvious questions: Do these social networks consist primarily of people from the same ethnic community, or do they consist of different groups? Are religion or language important determinants that shape one's personal friendships?

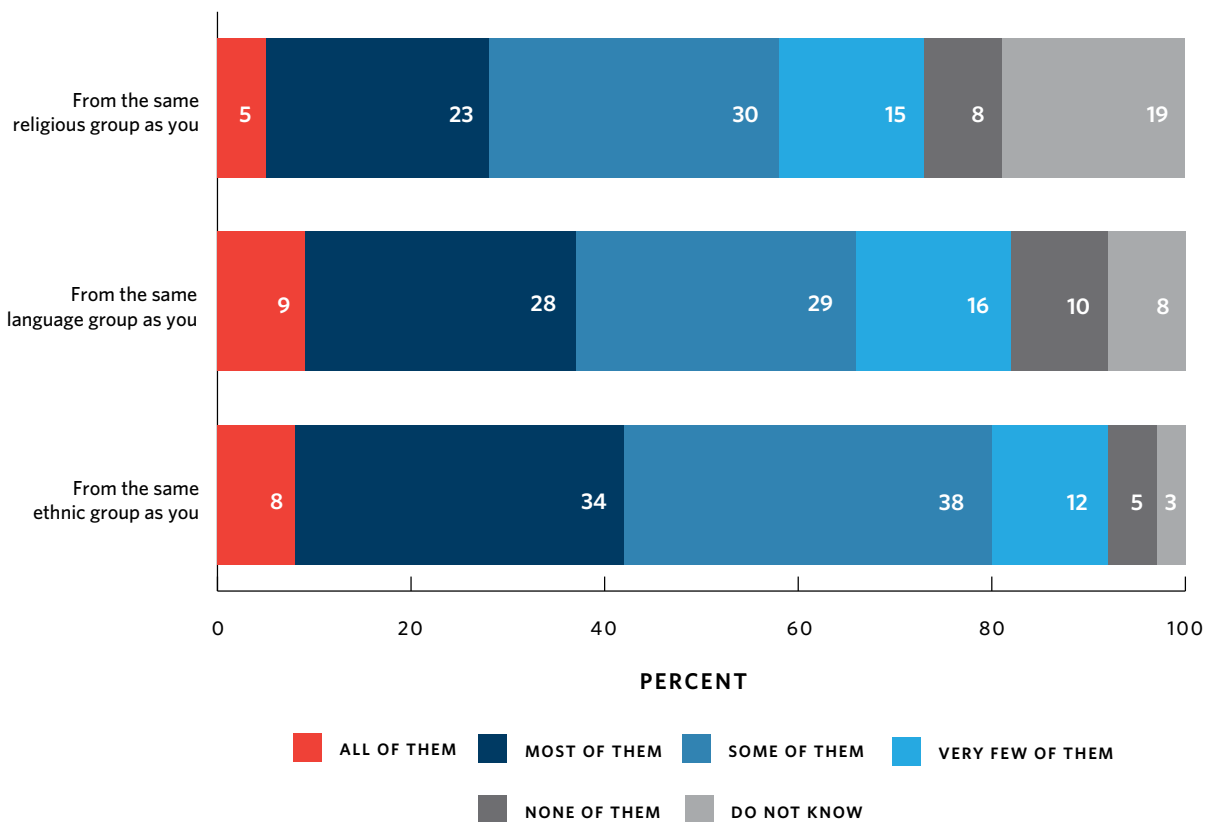
To investigate this, the survey asked a follow-up question to respondents who reported having any friends of Asian origin: "Among your Asian-origin friends, how many (a) belong to the same ethnic group as you; (b)

speak the same language as you; and (c) are of the same religion as you?"

The results suggest that respondents' social networks are oriented primarily around their own ethnic networks (see figure 11). Eighty percent of respondents reported that all, most, or some of their Asian-origin friends share the same ethnic identity as them. More than half of respondents reported that all, most, or some of their Asian-origin friends speak the same language (66 percent) or share the same religion (58 percent) as themselves.

FIGURE 11
Composition of Social Networks by Ethnic Origin, Religion, and Language

Among your Asian-origin friends, how many are...?



N= 943 California adult residents

NOTE: This question is restricted to respondents who report having Asian-origin friends.

SOURCE: 2022 Survey of Asian Americans in California

DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination against Asian Americans has a long, unfortunate history in the United States, and its relative incidence has increased since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. One [study](#) estimated that hate crimes targeting Asian Americans grew threefold between 2020 and 2021, a telling statistic given anti-Asian discrimination had also surged between 2019 and 2020. The advocacy organization, [Stop AAPI Hate](#), reported that from mid-March 2020 to December 31, 2021, it had received nearly 11,000 reports of hate incidents against AAPI residents across the country. This section below examines perceptions of discrimination,

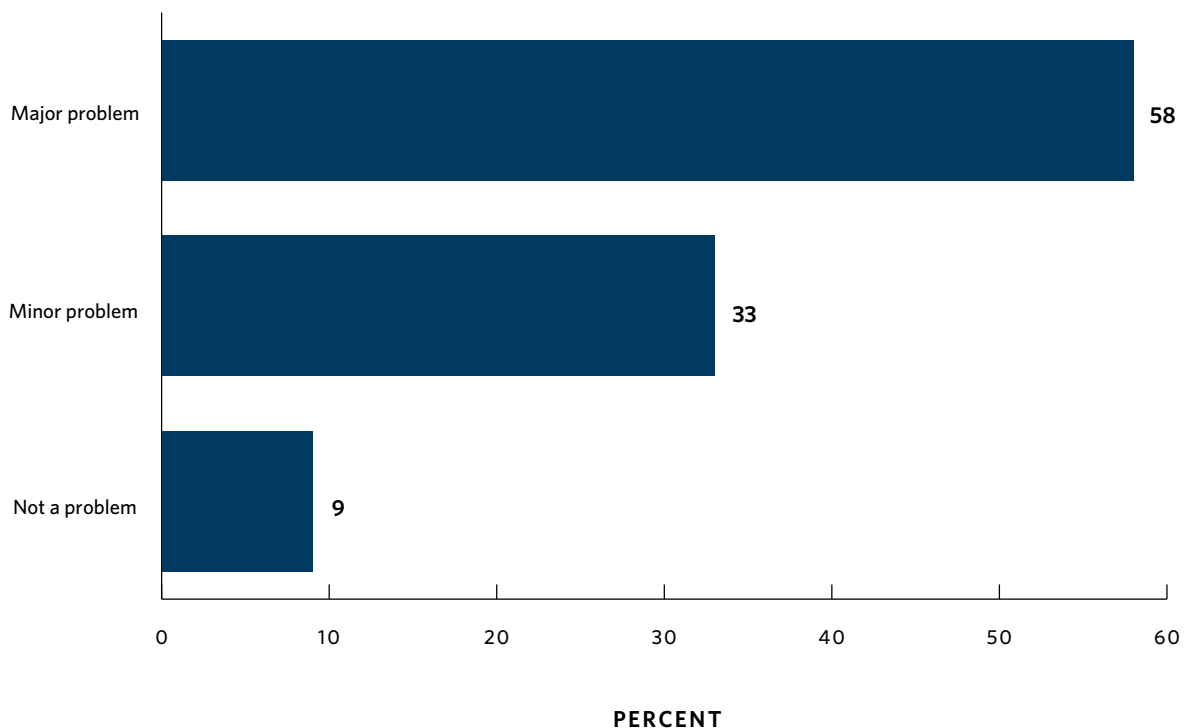
fears about discrimination in the wake of the pandemic, and firsthand experiences with discrimination, including their diverse sources and forms.

Perceptions of Discrimination

The survey asked respondents to assess the severity of discrimination faced by the Asian American community (see figure 12). A clear majority of respondents (58 percent) reported that it is a major problem. One-third of respondents reported that it is a minor problem, and less than 10 percent perceived that discrimination against the Asian American community is not a problem at all.

FIGURE 12
Perceptions of Discrimination

In general, do you think discrimination against people in the Asian American community is a...?



N= 1,000 California adult residents
SOURCE: 2022 Survey of Asian Americans in California

Most respondents also believed that intolerance against Asian Americans has increased in the last twelve months (see figure 13). Sixty-six percent of respondents believed discrimination has increased, and only 8 percent believed it has decreased. The remaining 26 percent believed that the level of discrimination Asian Americans experience has stayed the same.

Drivers of Discrimination

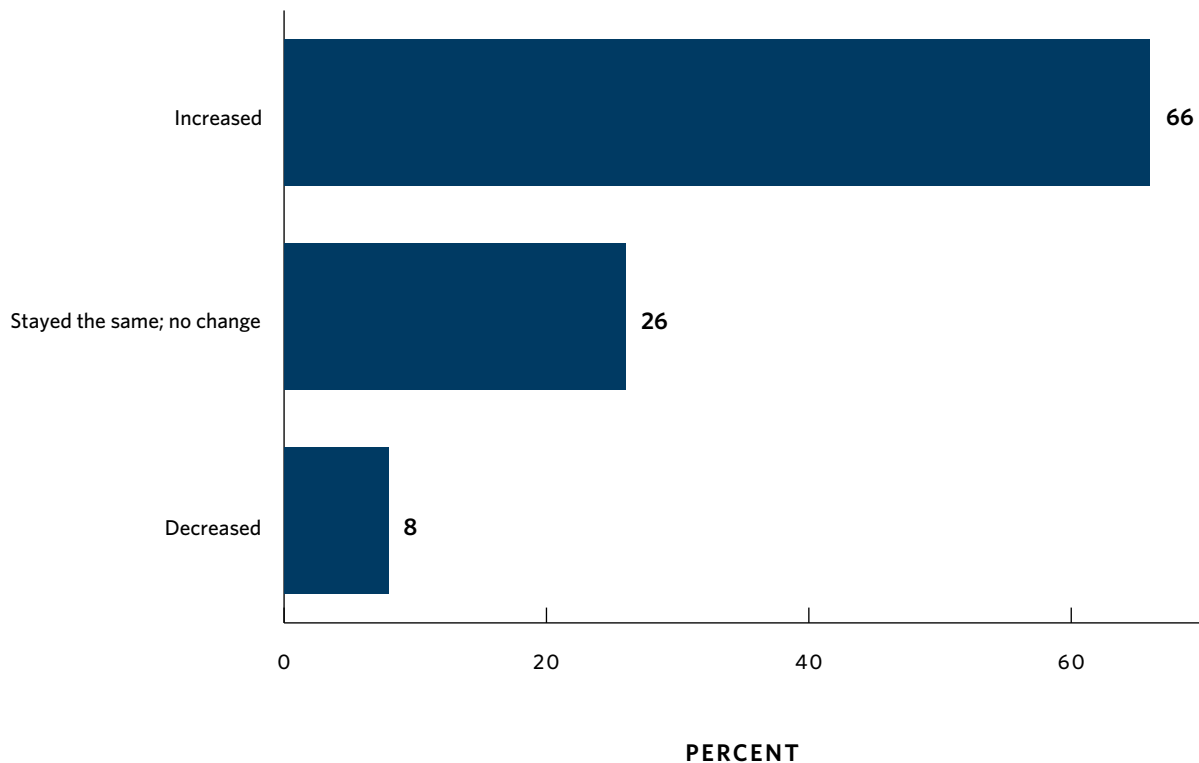
There are many potential drivers of this increasing discrimination. The most prevalent example in recent

discourse relates to the COVID-19 pandemic and its origin in China. [Some analysts](#) have highlighted the pandemic as the main driver that has led some Americans to exact retribution on people who hail from Asia, particularly East Asia. Others have highlighted political rhetoric, such as former president Donald Trump’s use of the term “kung flu” to describe the coronavirus pandemic.

To explore this terrain further, the survey asked respondents who reported that discrimination is on the rise (676 respondents in total) what factor they think is

FIGURE 13
Trends in Discrimination

As you look back at the last twelve months, do you think discrimination against people in the Asian American community in the United States has...?



N= 1,000 California adult residents
SOURCE: 2022 Survey of Asian Americans in California

most responsible for the increased displays of hate (see figure 14). Nearly half of all respondents (47 percent) pointed the finger at the COVID-19 pandemic. A further 29 percent singled out political leaders and political rhetoric. Of course, to a certain degree, both factors likely worked together in the last three years. Relatively few respondents selected other options presented to them: 8 percent reported that inadequate police/law enforcement resources are to blame, and 4 percent highlighted the role of U.S. foreign policy. Five

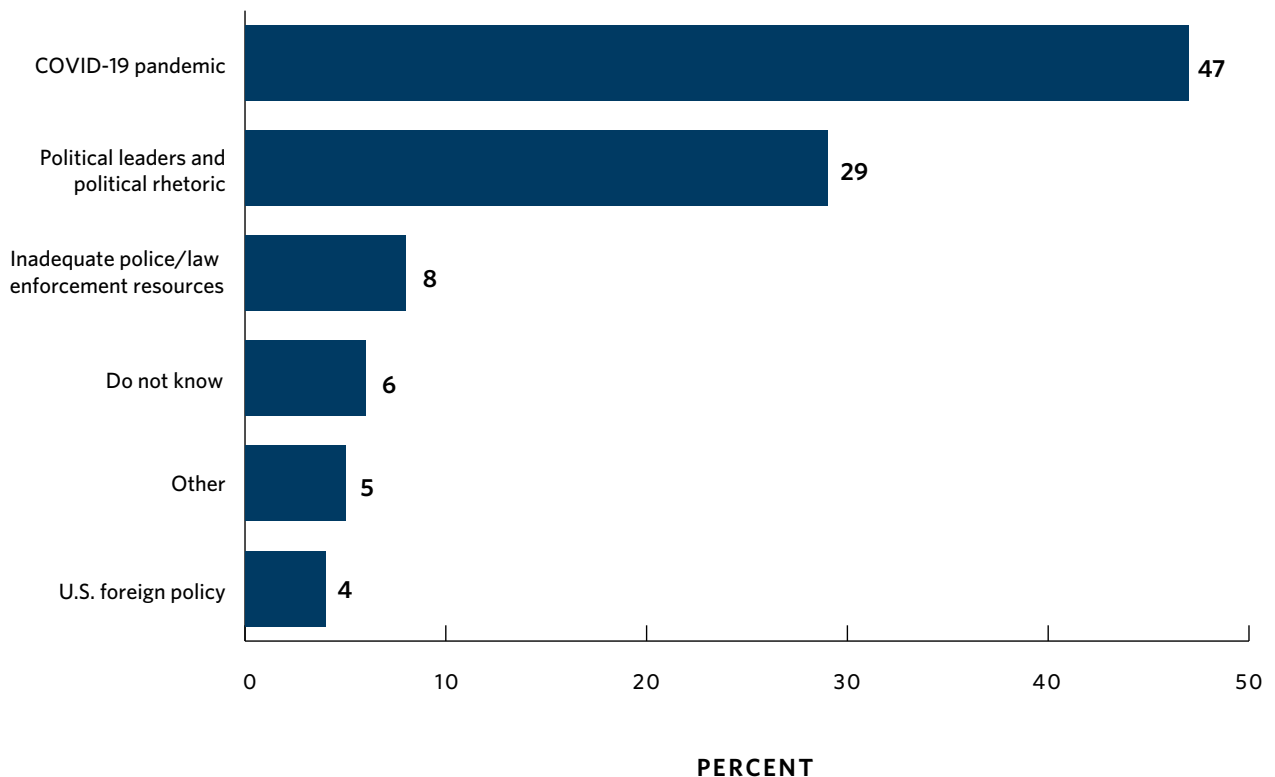
percent of respondents chose the “Other” option, and 6 percent chose “Do not know.”

Fears of Discrimination

The data suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic is a major impetus behind the increased levels of discrimination. But how intensely do respondents feel this threat brought on by the pandemic? The survey asked respondents how often they worry about experiencing

FIGURE 14
Drivers of Increasing Discrimination

While there may be many factors at work, what factor do you think is most responsible for increasing discrimination against Asian Americans?



N= 676 California adult residents

NOTE: This question is restricted to respondents who report that discrimination has increased in the last twelve months.

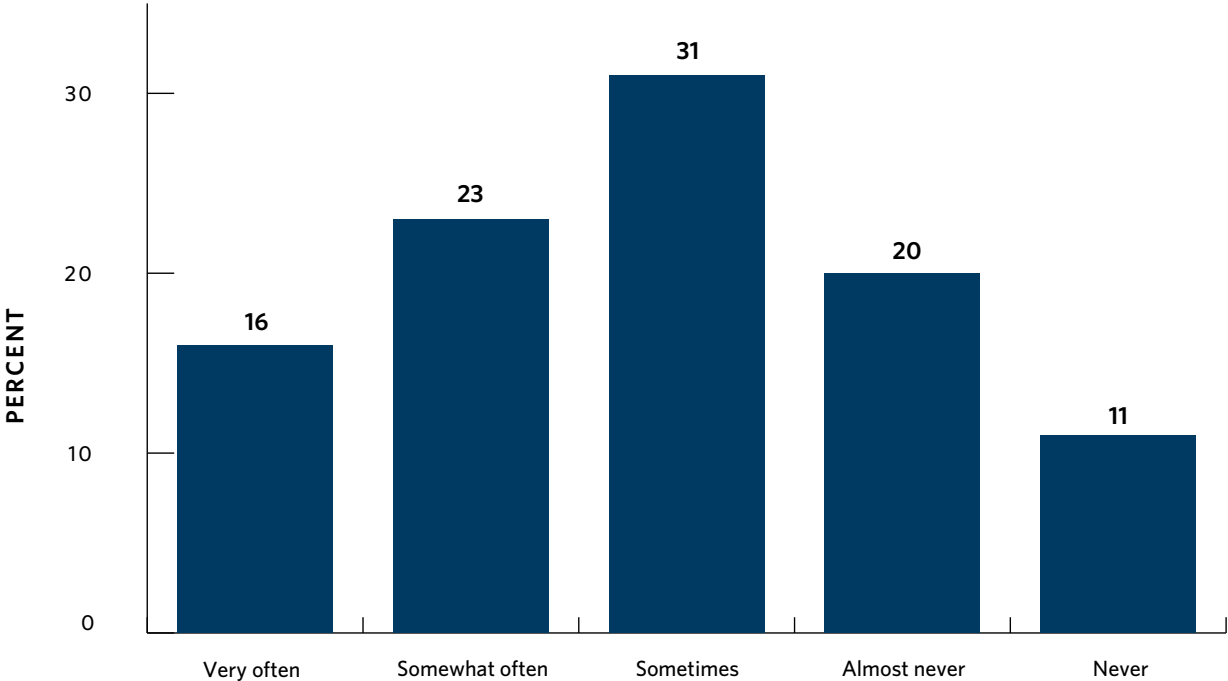
SOURCE: 2022 Survey of Asian Americans in California

discrimination, harassment, or hate crimes firsthand because of the pandemic (see figure 15). Sixteen percent of respondents reported that they felt concerned very often, while 23 percent reported that they worried somewhat often. A plurality of respondents, 31 percent, stated that they sometimes worried about rising hate. Thirty-one percent of respondents noted that they almost never or never worried about experiencing discrimination, harassment, or hate crimes in the pandemic's wake.

There was some variation in respondents' threat perceptions based on ethnic identity (see figure 16). Respondents in the Filipino (42 percent), Chinese (41 percent), Others (41 percent), and Vietnamese (40 percent) ethnic groups reported that they worried about discrimination, harassment, or hate crimes somewhat or very often. Indian Americans were on the opposite end of the spectrum, with just 28 percent expressing similar fears.

FIGURE 15
Discrimination and the Pandemic

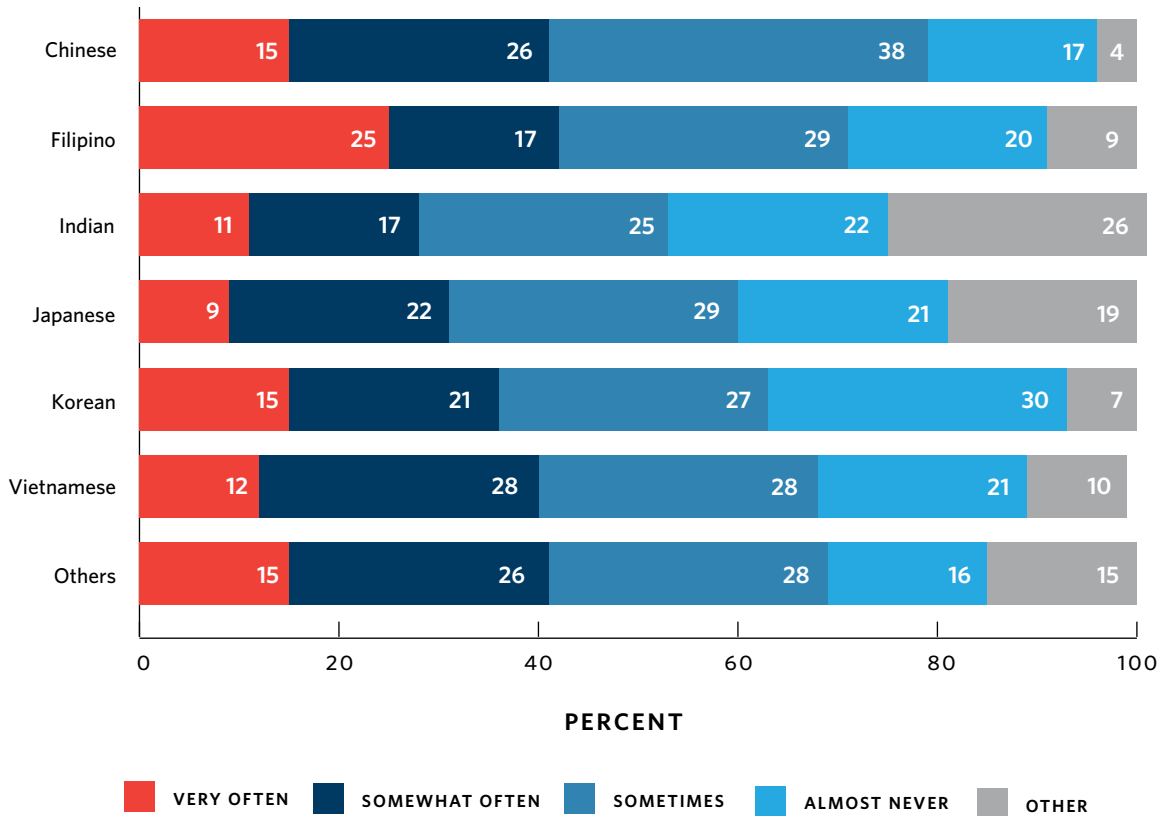
How often do you worry about experiencing discrimination, harassment, and hate crimes as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?



N= 999 California adult residents
SOURCE: 2022 Survey of Asian Americans in California

FIGURE 16
Discrimination and the Pandemic, by Ethnic Group

How often do you worry about experiencing discrimination, harassment, and hate crimes as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?



N= 1,000 California adult residents

NOTE: Numbers do not always equal 100 due to rounding. "Others" refers to small ethnic/national origin groups in the sample.

SOURCE: 2022 Survey of Asian Americans in California

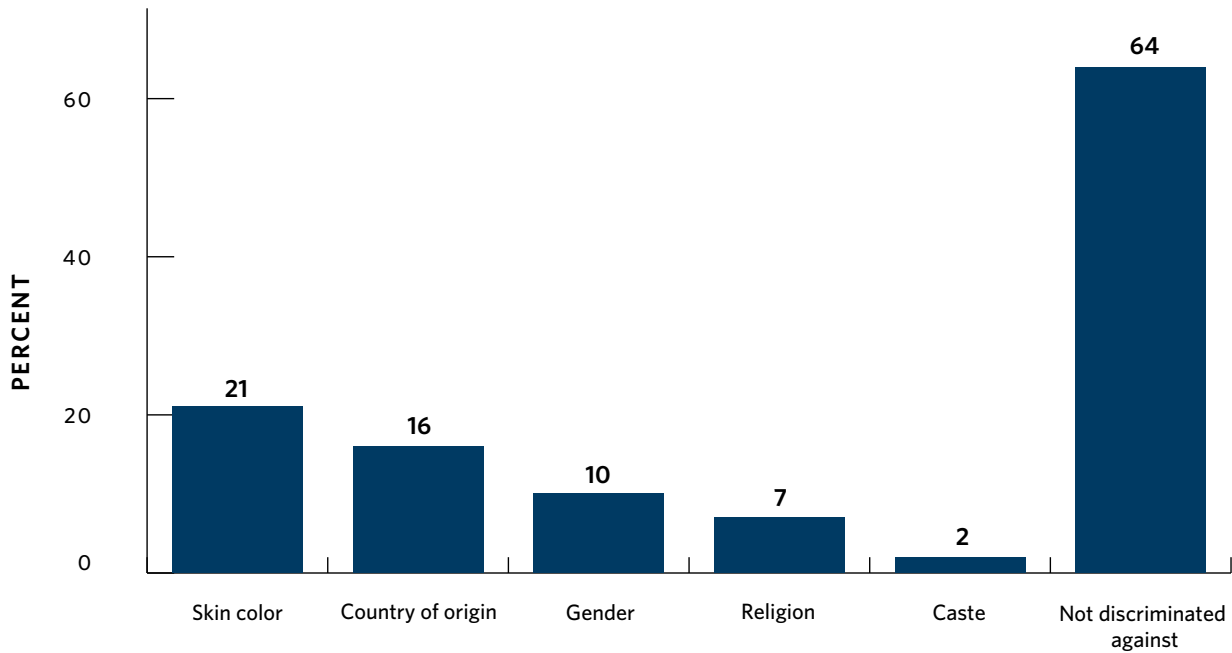
Experience With Discrimination

Having asked about perceptions of discrimination, the survey then asked respondents about their direct, personal experience(s) with discrimination. Specifically, the survey asked whether, in the last twelve months, respondents personally felt discriminated against based on a range of factors: country of origin, skin color, gender, religion, and caste (see figure 17).

Thirty-six percent of respondents reported that they had been discriminated against based on at least one of the identity dimensions they were asked about. The greatest share, 21 percent, reported being discriminated against due to their skin color. Sixteen percent reported being discriminated against due to their country of origin, and 10 percent reported gender discrimination. Finally, 7 percent of respondents reported being discriminated

FIGURE 17
Experience With Discrimination

In the last twelve months, have you personally felt discriminated against for any of the following reasons? Select all that apply.



N= 1,000 California adult residents
SOURCE: 2022 Survey of Asian Americans in California

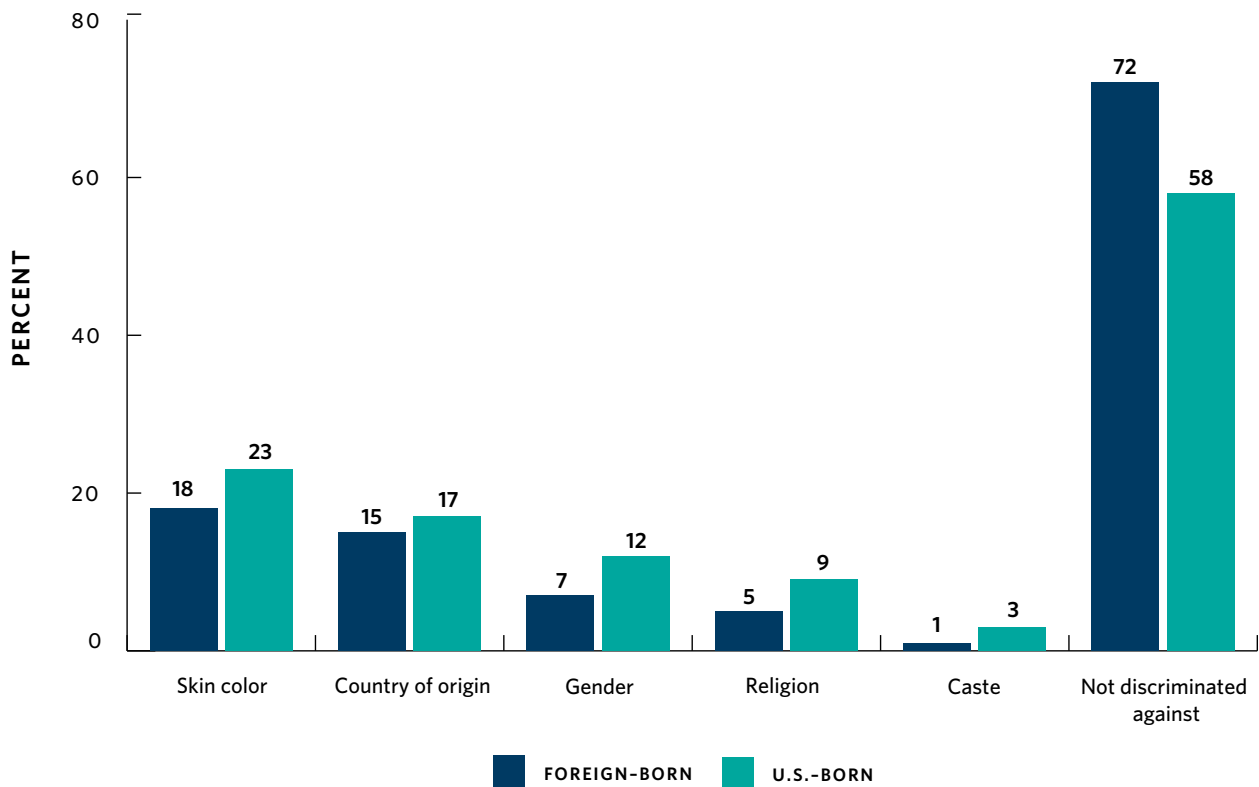
against due to their religious beliefs, while 2 percent reported discrimination on the basis of their caste.

Interestingly, U.S.-born respondents were more likely to report experiencing discrimination than their foreign-born counterparts (see figure 18). Forty-two percent of those born in the United States reported that they had experienced discrimination in the past year, compared to 28 percent of foreign-born respondents. In fact, across all identity-based dimensions, slightly higher shares of U.S.-born respondents reported being victims of discrimination compared to respondents born elsewhere.

At first glance, this is puzzling given that foreign-born respondents are likely to possess more easily identifiable characteristics of a foreigner or outsider (such as language, accent, or dress). However, they do not *report* discrimination to the same extent as those born in the United States. A [2020 Carnegie survey](#) found a similar pattern in the Indian American community. One possible reason for this discrepancy could be higher levels of awareness or sensitivity on the part of respondents born and raised in America. It is also possible that foreign-born residents are concerned about retribution or impacts on their immigration status.

FIGURE 18
Experience With Discrimination, by Place of Birth

In the last twelve months, have you personally felt discriminated against for any of the following reasons? Select all that apply.



N= 1,000 California adult residents
SOURCE: 2022 Survey of Asian Americans in California

Sources of Discrimination

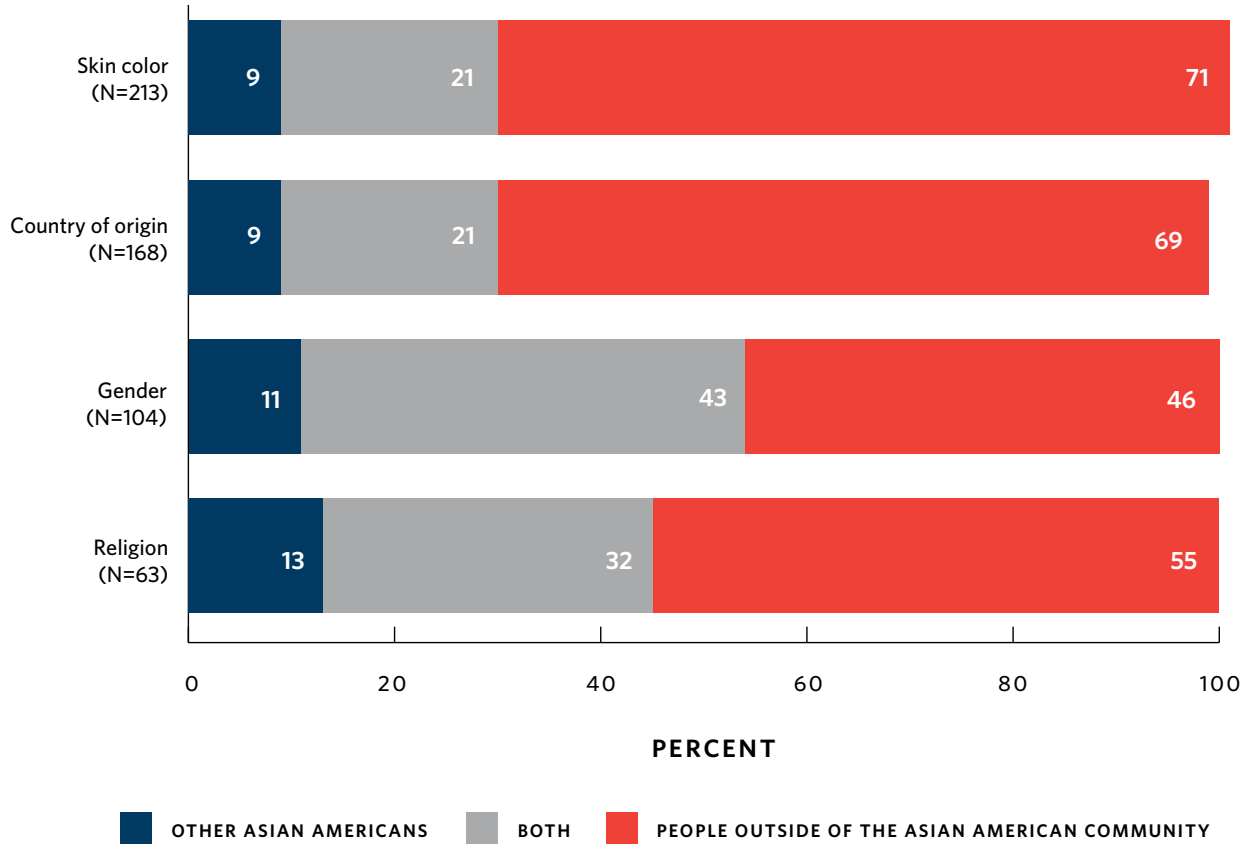
For the 570 respondents who have had direct, firsthand experience with discrimination in the past year, the survey asked about the source of the discrimination—that is, whether the perpetrators of the discriminatory behavior came from outside of the Asian American community, from within the community, or from both categories (see figure 19).

In all cases, the most referenced category was “people outside of the Asian American community.” Seventy-

one percent of respondents who had been discriminated against due to their skin color pointed the blame at individuals outside of the Asian American community. Sixty-nine percent of those discriminated against due to their country of origin and 55 percent of those claiming religious discrimination responded similarly. The share of respondents claiming discrimination by other Asian Americans was relatively small: 13 percent for religion, 11 percent for gender, and 9 percent each for skin color and country of origin. Having said that, a significant proportion of respondents believed they

FIGURE 19
Sources of Discrimination

Who discriminated against you on the basis of your...?



N= 346 California adult residents.

NOTE: This question is restricted to respondents who report being discriminated against in the last twelve months. Respondents can report multiple forms of discrimination. Respondents who only report caste discrimination are dropped due to small sample size. Numbers do not always equal 100 due to rounding. Figure lists unweighted sample size.

SOURCE: 2022 Survey of Asian Americans in California

were discriminated against by *both* Asian- and non-Asian-origin individuals. These numbers were especially pronounced for discrimination along religious and gender lines.

Forms of Discrimination

In addition to exploring the incidence of discrimination and the identity of the perpetrators, the survey also examined the forms discrimination may take. The survey asked respondents who reported being discriminated against in the last twelve months about the form of the

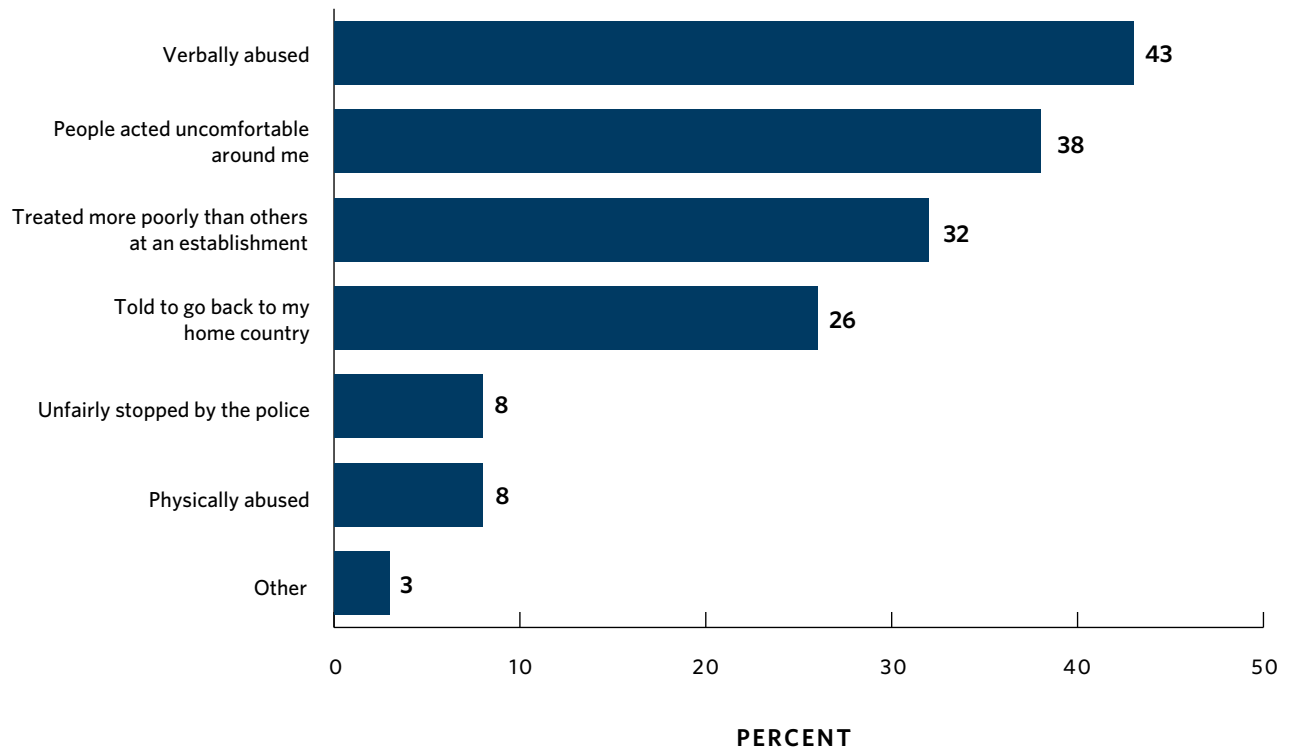
discrimination they have experienced. The numbers do not add up to 100 because respondents could select multiple forms of discrimination (see figure 20).

The most common form of discrimination experienced by respondents is verbal abuse, with 43 percent of respondents reporting that they have been subjected to insensitive comments, jokes, or slurs. Thirty-eight percent reported other people acting uncomfortably around them in a way that suggested they were being singled out, and 32 percent felt that they were treated

unfairly at a shop, restaurant, or other establishment. More than one in four respondents who experienced discrimination were told to go back to their home country. Relatively few respondents reported that they were unfairly stopped, searched, or questioned by the police or were subjected to violence or physical threats in some way (8 percent of respondents for each). Three percent of discrimination victims reported experiencing another, unspecified form of discrimination.

FIGURE 20
Forms of Discrimination

Which of the following forms of discrimination have you experienced in the past twelve months? Select all that apply.



N= 368 California adult residents

NOTE: This question is restricted to respondents who report being discriminated against in the last twelve months.

SOURCE: 2022 Survey of Asian Americans in California

CONCLUSION

Discussions of the social attitudes and political preferences of Asian Americans can often obscure the picture as much as they illuminate it. On the one hand, increased attention to the views of Asian Americans—especially in the political domain—should be welcomed, given the relatively peripheral space the views have occupied to date. On the other hand, it bears repeating that Asian Americans constitute a highly diverse, not monolithic, population. The community’s views are shaped by not only their place of birth but also by various other demographic factors such as ethnic/national heritage and generational divides.

Furthermore, while a majority of California-based respondents embraced both the Asian American and AAPI labels, these umbrella designations often took a backseat to a more specific, hyphenated ethnic/national identity. This emphasis on ethnic/national identities is reinforced by the makeup of respondents’ social networks, driven to a substantial degree by other individuals who are “co-ethnics.”

Irrespective of labels, it is evident that respondents of Asian origin are experiencing elevated levels of discrimination, with majorities stating it is a major problem that is becoming increasingly severe. Respondents believe that the pandemic and political rhetoric—and the interaction between the two—are principally responsible for this shift. How these ugly truths about American society are shaping Asian Americans’ civic and political engagement remains an open question, one that the next article in our series will explore in greater detail.

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NOTES

- 1 The included ethnic subgroups are as follows: Bangladeshi, Bhutanese, Burmese, Cambodian, Chinese, Filipino, Hmong, Indian, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Laotian, Malaysian, Mongolian, Nepali, Pakistani, Singaporean, Sri Lankan, Taiwanese, Thai, and Vietnamese.
- 2 This percentage was calculated from population numbers from the 2020 American Community Survey by the U.S. Census Bureau.

