

Understanding Asian American Chicago

A Research Report Series



from
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for
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❖ **Civic Participation** ❖

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❖ Summary ❖

- ❖ Asian Americans who were citizens tended to have higher incomes than non-citizens and tended to be older.
- ❖ Slightly over half (52 percent) of Asian American survey respondents reported being registered to vote.
- ❖ Levels of voter registration were higher (57 percent to 44 percent) among those over 30 and among those with higher incomes (55 percent to 40 percent).
- ❖ Asian Americans have been less likely to participate in school organizations such as PTAs or local schools councils, or in neighborhood organizations than have non-Asian Americans.
- ❖ Asian Americans are roughly equally divided among those who identify themselves as Democrat, Republican, Independent, or have no mainstream political identity.
- ❖ Asian Americans born in the United States were more likely to identify themselves as Democrats or Independents. Those born outside the United States were much more likely to say that they had no political affiliation (28 percent to 9 percent).
- ❖ Asian Americans who were registered to vote were more likely to identify themselves as Democrats than as Republicans (34 percent to 23 percent).
- ❖ Suburbanites were more likely to be Republican (30 percent to 18 percent), but income appears to play little role in determining political affiliation.
- ❖ Of the major religious denominations, survey respondents were most likely to report that they were Catholic (36 percent). However 28 percent said they had another religion and 18 percent reported none. Catholic identification was strongest among those over 30 (40 percent), citizens (41 percent) and persons with higher income (37 percent).
- ❖ Sixty-five percent of non-citizens reported having no religion or a religion other than Christianity.
- ❖ Older, wealthier, and citizen Asian Americans tended to attend some kind of religious services more often than younger, poorer and non-citizen Asian Americans. Asian Americans born outside the United States were particularly likely to attend a service of some kind weekly or more often (50 percent).

❖ Introduction ❖

The following research brief provides an overview of levels of participation by Asian Americans in important sectors of society or culture during the 1990s. These areas include:

- ❖ Citizenship
- ❖ Activity in community-based organizations
- ❖ Political affiliation
- ❖ Religious activities

The data used in this report are drawn from an annual survey of residents of the six-county Chicago area by the Metro Chicago Information Center conducted during the 1990s. The survey consists of a random sample of approximately 3,000 households per year. Over the decade, 689 Asian American households were surveyed as part of that sample. The race or ethnicity of the household was that identified by the individual responding to the survey.

The Asian American data used here contain some biases attributable to the survey being conducted in English or Spanish. Households with no English or Spanish speakers would be unrepresented or underrepresented in the survey. However, many of the survey questions are directed at the entire household and if one adult member of the household spoke English or Spanish, then that household could have participated in the survey. Nevertheless, for

this report we have attempted to present only data that would be relatively unbiased by the lack of non-English speakers in the sample. United States Census data contains a similar bias in that non-English speaking Asians are far more susceptible to not being counted.

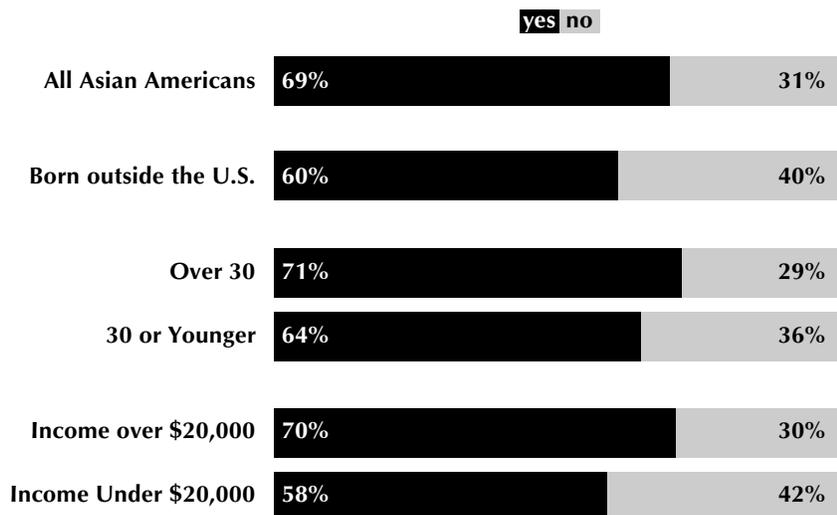
There is wide variation in the number of Asian Americans who responded to any particular survey question. This is because some questions were asked every year of the survey during the 1990s, but others were not. Additionally, not every survey respondent answered every question. In no case is a survey question reported if it had fewer than 50 responses. Most questions used in this analysis had more than 100 Asian American responses. In instances where subgroups are created within the general category of Asian Americans — such as those above or below 30 years of age — then the number of responses generally falls below 100. Each table contains a listing of the years in which a survey question was asked and the number of Asian survey respondents in that year. As a general rule, the margin of error of findings for non-Asians is about plus or minus 3 percent. Findings for Asian Americans as a group have a margin of error of about plus or minus 6 percent, and subgroups a margin of error of about plus or minus 8 percent for a 95 percent level of certainty.

❖ Citizenship ❖

Participation in electoral politics depends on two major criteria – whether an immigrant has become a citizen, and whether they have registered to vote.

Figure 1 indicates that approximately 69 percent of Asian Americans in the Chicago area are citizens. Levels of citizenship are lower among Asian Americans born outside the United States, among Asian Americans age 30 or younger, and among those with lower incomes.

Figure 1 ❖ Is the Respondent a U.S. Citizen?



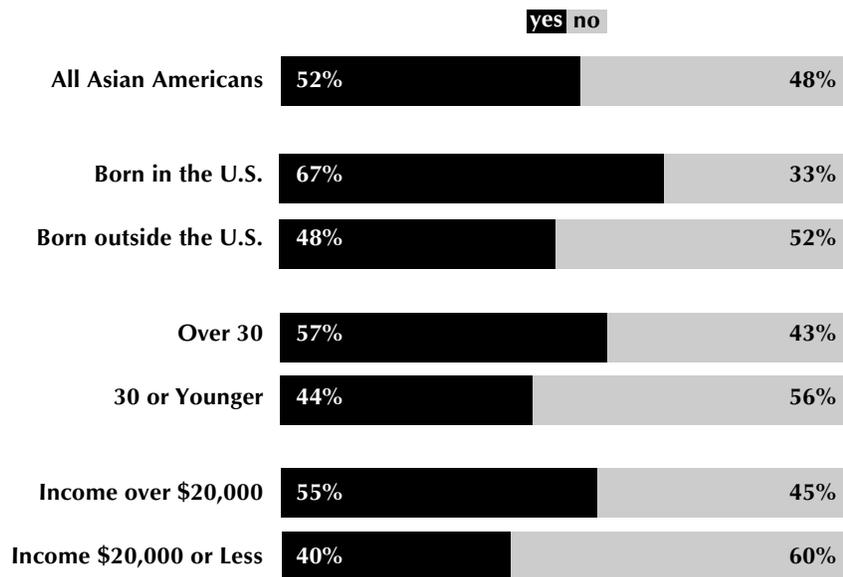
Survey question asked in 1993, '94, '95, '96, '97, '98, '99.
Asian American N = 621.

❖ Voter Registration ❖

About half of Asian Americans living in the Chicago area report being registered to vote. This low figure is, of course, at least in part attributable to the large proportion of Asian Americans who are not citizens. Clearly, however, many Asian American citizens are not registered.

The lowest levels of registration are among those born outside the United States, those who are age 30 or younger, and those with low incomes.

Figure 2 ❖ Is the Respondent Registered to Vote?



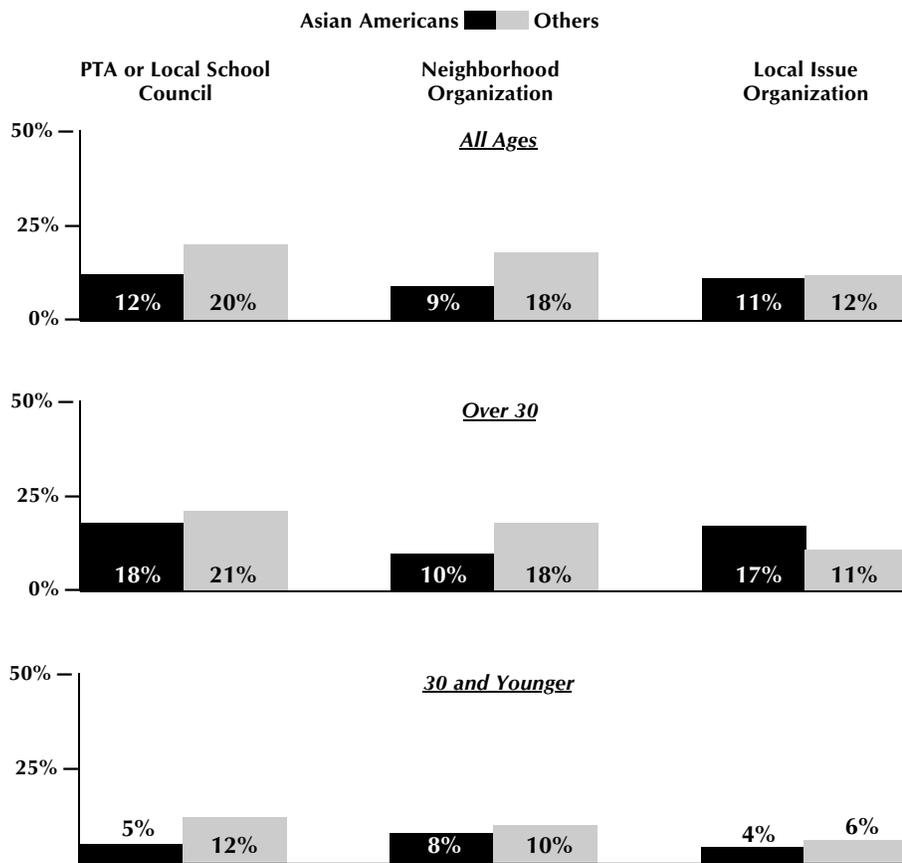
Survey question asked in 1991, '92, '93, '94, '95, '96, '97, '98, and '99. Asian American N = 689.

❖ Participation in Community Organizations ❖

One of the most important means of influencing public policies and life in one's community or neighborhood in general, is through participation in local organizations. The survey asked about three different types: organizations associated with education such as the PTA or, in Chicago, a local school council (LSC); a multipurpose neighborhood organization; and organizations created to address a particular local problem (Figure 3).

Asian Americans were substantially less likely to participate in PTAs or LSCs, or in neighborhood organizations than were other people in the Chicago area. They were about equally likely to participate in some kind of local activism.

Figure 3 ❖ During the Past Year a Household Member Participated In:

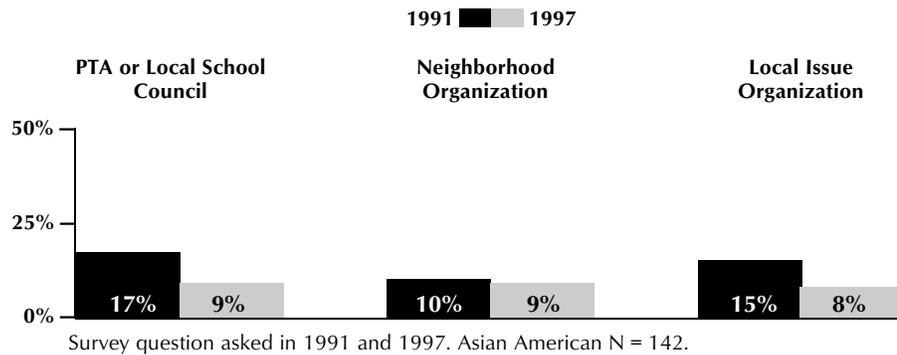


Survey questions asked in 1991 and 1997. Asian American N = 142.

Young Asian Americans were particularly unlikely to participate in PTA or LSC activities (5 percent) compared to Chicago area non-Asians. Asian Americans over 30 were much more likely to participate in local issue organizations than were non-Asians over 30.

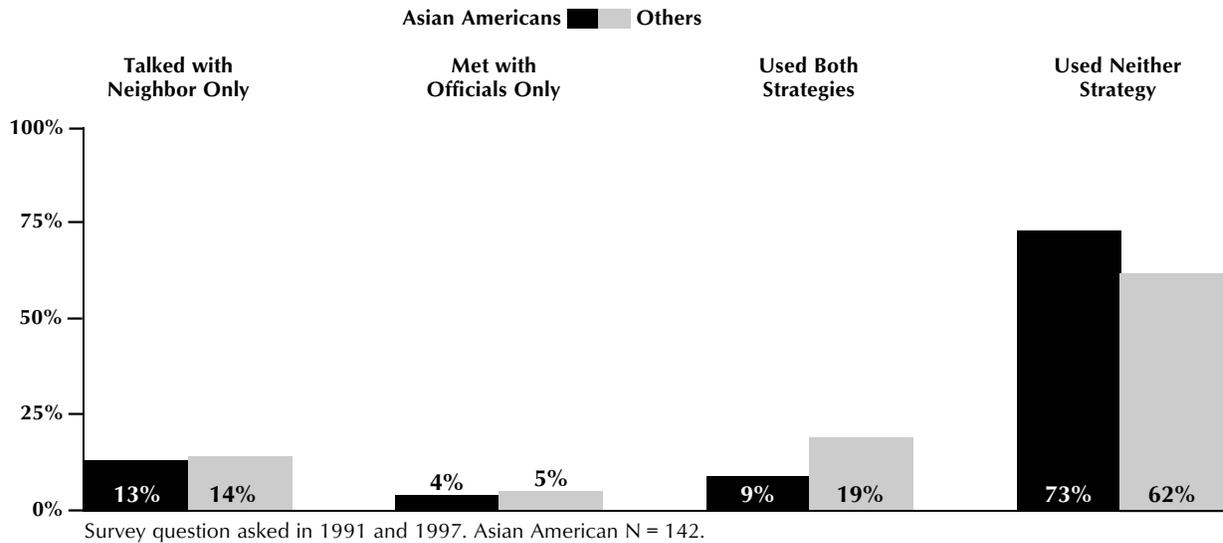
Asian Americans in the Chicago area have experienced decreasing levels of participation in organizations over the 1990s. During the first half of the decade, Asian Americans were about twice as likely to participate in a PTA or an LSC, and in local issue organizations. It is important to note that participation in LSCs has declined across Chicago for all groups over the decade (see Figure 4).

Figure 4 ♦ Participation of Asian Americans in 1991 and 1997



Asian Americans were about as likely to work on a neighborhood problem with either neighbors or public officials as were other Chicago-area residents (Figure 5). However, while 19 percent of non-Asians utilized both strategies, only 9 percent of Asian Americans reported engaging in both. Consequently, a lower percentage of all Asian Americans engaged in some kind of neighborhood problem with neighbors or public officials. It should be noted that 73 percent of Asian Americans used neither strategy, compared to 62 percent of those in other groups. It is possible that Asian Americans channelled their concerns over local issues through organizations representative of their individual ethnic groups.

Figure 5 ❖ Dealt with a Neighborhood Problem



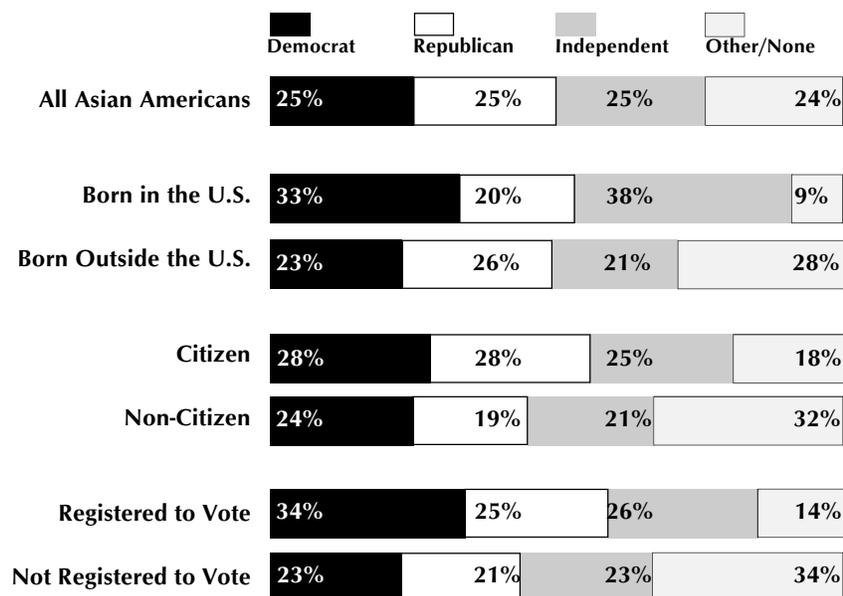
❖ Political Identification ❖

Asian Americans are almost equally divided among four different types of political identification, Democrat, Republican, Independent or Other/None (Figure 6).

Asian Americans who were born in the United States were much more likely to identify themselves as Democrats or as Independents and were, therefore, much less likely to report no political affiliation. Citizens were equally likely to report being Republicans and were less likely to say they had no political affiliation.

Perhaps most significantly, Asian Americans who were registered to vote were much more likely to identify themselves as Democrats than as Republicans. Those not registered to vote were most likely to say that they had no or other political affiliation.

Figure 6 ❖ Political Party Affiliation



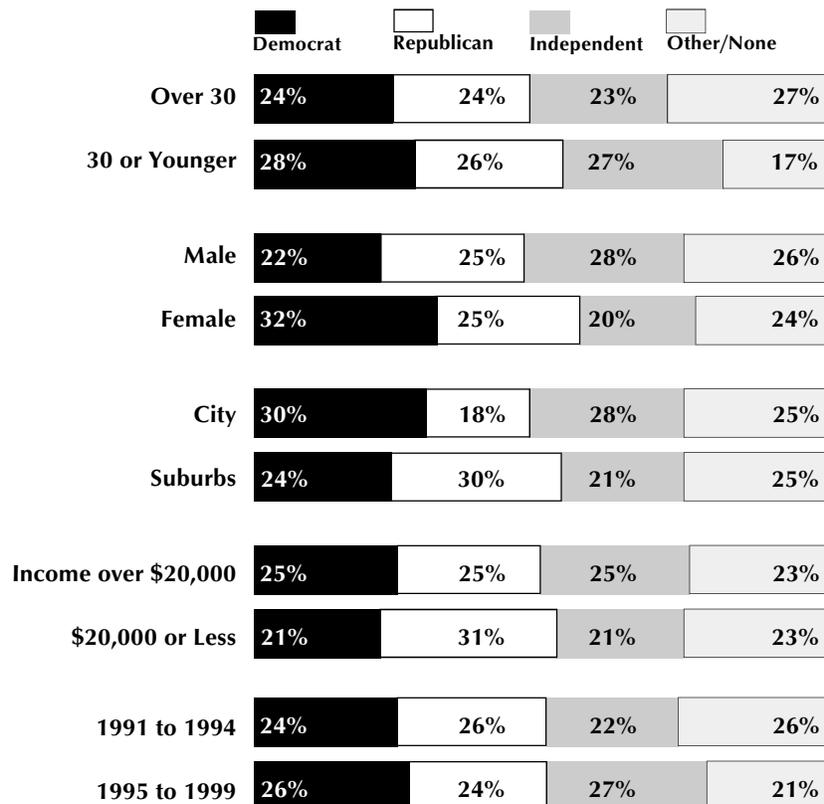
Survey question asked in 1991, '92, '93, '94, '95, '96, '97, '98, and '99. Asian American N = 689.

Age appears to play little role in determining political affiliation of Asian Americans. Those under and over 30 were about equally likely to report identity with either of the major parties.

Females were much more likely to be Democrats, and Asian Americans who live in the suburbs were much more likely to be Republicans.

Income level appears to play relatively little role in determining the political affiliation of Asian Americans, perhaps because of the significant interest in foreign policy that crosses income lines, and also perhaps because of the historically low utilization of public benefits by Asian Americans (Figure 7).

Figure 7 ❖ Political Party Affiliation



Survey question asked in 1991, '92, '93, '94, '95, '96, '97, '98, and '99. Asian American N = 689.

❖ Religious Participation ❖

Of the major religious groups, survey respondents were most likely to report that they were Catholic (Figure 8). However, nearly half reported either no religion or a religion other than Catholicism or one of the Protestant denominations. Many or most of these people are likely to be Buddhists.

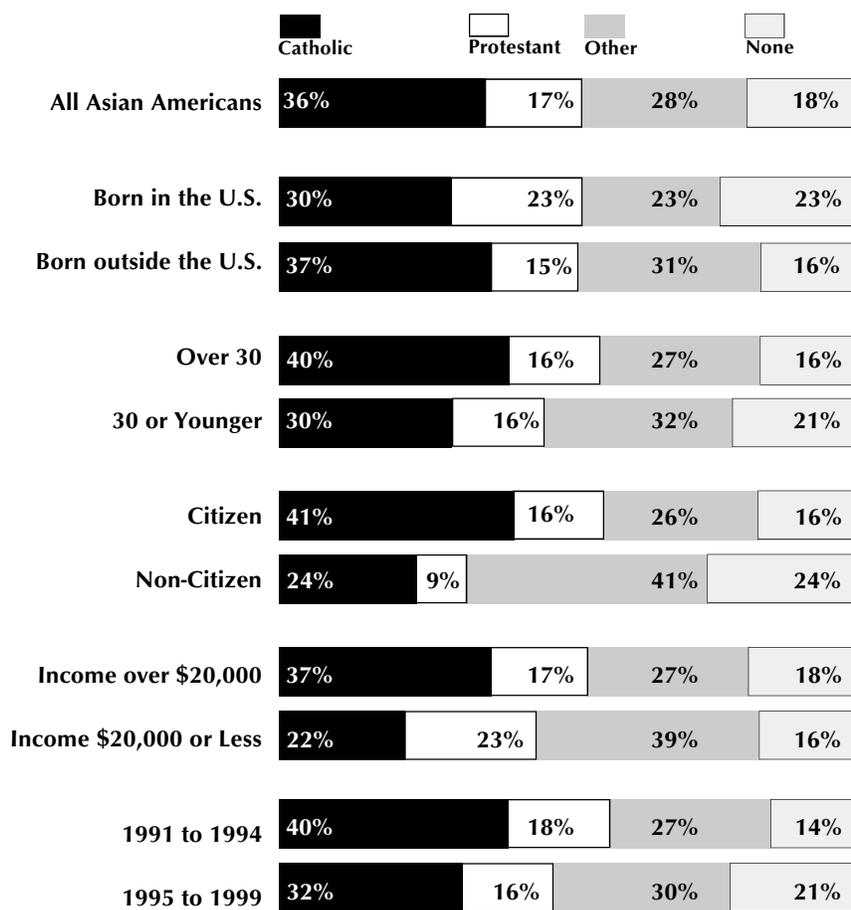
Asian Americans born in the United States were less likely to be Catholic, but more likely to be Protestant. They were also more likely to report no religious identity.

Younger Asian Americans were more likely to have either no religious affiliation or an affiliation other than Christianity.

There appears to be a particularly strong relationship between citizenship and Christian identity. Fifty-seven percent of respondents who were citizens identified themselves as either Protestant or Catholic while only 33 percent of non-citizens had Catholic or Protestant identification.

Asian Americans with higher incomes were more likely to report Catholic identity and less likely to report a non-Catholic or Protestant religion.

Figure 8 ❖ Religious Participation



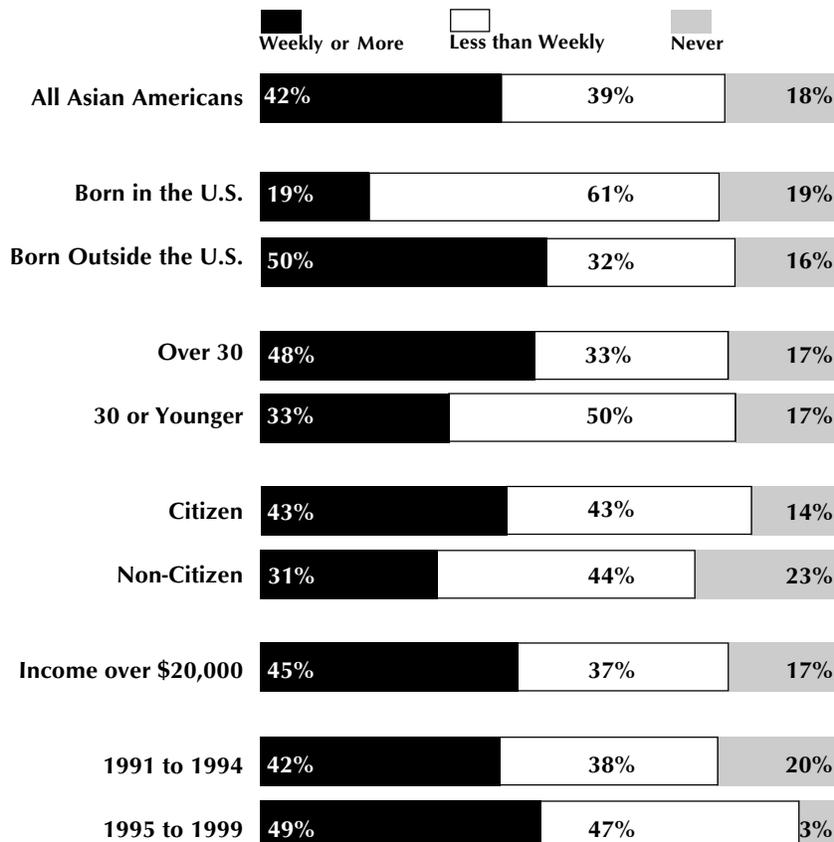
Survey question asked in 1991, '92, '93, '94, '95, '96, '97, '98, and '99. Asian American N = 689.

❖ Religious Attendance ❖

Over 80 percent of Asian American respondents reported attending religious services at least occasionally (Figure 9). Over 40 percent reported attending a service of some kind at least weekly. Respondents born outside the United States were far more likely to attend services than were Asian Americans born within the United States. Asian Americans over 30 were much more likely to attend services more often, as were citizens.

Religious observance appears to have increased substantially over the past decade. In the first half of the decade, 20 percent of Asian Americans reported that they never attended religious services. During the second half of the decade, that figure had fallen to 3 percent.

Figure 9 ❖ Religious Attendance



Survey question asked in 1991, '92, '93, '94, '95, '96, '97, '98, and '99. Asian American N = 576.