

Traditional Asians? Race, Ethnicity, and Gender Policy Attitudes in the United States



RUJUN YANG  AND MARIA CHARLES 

American stereotypes depict the pan-Asian culture as monolithically traditional in matters of gender and sexual politics. Most national surveys include too few Asian respondents to assess the validity of these claims, much less to interrogate differences across Asian-ancestry groups. Using data from the 2016 National Asian American Survey, this study examines racial and ethnic variability in support for policies that would extend rights and protections to women and to sexual and gender minorities. Results provide no evidence of pan-Asian gender traditionalism, and they show much more attitudinal heterogeneity across Asian ethnic groups than is popularly recognized. Some of this heterogeneity is linked to ethnic differences in sociocultural traits, including religion, politics, nativity, education, and gender-identity salience. Substantial variability across Asian American groups remains unexplained, however. Future research should explore how this variability maps onto distinctive gender regimes in ancestral countries and different histories of immigrant reception within the United States.

Keywords: ideology, gender, race-ethnicity, Asian American

Since the resurgence of the feminist movement in the 1960s, attitudes relating to gender and sexuality have maintained a powerful capacity to mobilize American voters and shape laws and policies that affect the social, economic, and reproductive rights of more than half the U.S. population. Debates about abortion, affirmative action, and the rights of sexual minorities are particularly contentious.

Given the sociopolitical significance of these policy positions, it is surprising that their racial and ethnic contours have received relatively little analytical attention. Especially under-researched are attitudes of Asian Americans, the fastest growing racial group in the United States today.

Popular American stereotypes depict the pan-Asian culture in monolithic terms—as gen-

Rujun Yang is a PhD candidate in sociology at University of California, Santa Barbara, United States. **Maria Charles** is professor of sociology and director of the Broom Center for Demography at University of California, Santa Barbara, United States.

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der traditional, resistant to egalitarian ideals, and less accepting of homosexuality (Chow 1987; Chou 2012; Nemoto 2006; Semrow et al. 2019). Asian men are portrayed as simultaneously effeminate and patriarchal (Chen 1999), and Asian women as exotic and submissive or as passive sex objects (Pyke and Johnson 2003). Accounts of interracial relationships also reflect the symbolic dichotomy between pan-Asian traditionalism and white egalitarianism. Asian men's masculinity is commonly pitted against both white egalitarianism and white hegemonic masculinity, and it is often presumed that Asian women marry into the white world to flee gender traditionalism (Kim 2006; Nemoto 2006, 2008; Chou 2012). Stereotypes about Asian homophobia also abound in mainstream American culture and in the gay community (Takagi 1994; Han 2015; Semrow et al. 2019). Asian traditionalism is placed in rhetorical contrast to a white egalitarian world, having regard for neither the pervasiveness of gender- and sexuality-based inequalities among white Americans nor the diversity of gender practices within the pan-Asian population.

Most nationally representative surveys of public opinion have included too few Asian respondents to provide much evidence on the relative traditionalism or liberalism of Asian American beliefs about gender and sexuality, much less about how these beliefs vary across Asian-ancestry groups. This study addresses that gap. Using data from the post-election wave of the 2016 National Asian American Survey (NAAS), we explore racial and ethnic variability in attitudes toward four hot-button social issues: abortion rights, affirmative action for women, legal protections for sexual minorities, and transgender bathroom access. The NAAS includes oversamples large enough to allow comparison across ten Asian-origin groups, as well as between Asians and other major U.S.

racial groups. This makes a first comparative view of gender and sexual politics within the Asian American population possible.

Before turning to the empirical analysis, we describe the broader context of American policy debates related to gender and sexuality and review the current state of knowledge on Asian American gender attitudes.

Gender and Sexual Politics in the United States

In American political discourse, attitudes about the social, economic, and reproductive rights of women and sexual minorities are often represented as discrete poles in a culture war that divides the public into two opposing moral camps. Cultural traditionalists, often religious conservatives, aim to restrict access to abortion (and sometimes contraception), enact policies to preserve gendered divisions of family labor, and restrict marriage to heterosexual unions. Those in the other camp are expected to oppose all of these things (Hunter 1991; Hochschild 2002; Hartman 2015).¹ Transgender rights have recently emerged as a new front in this symbolic culture war (Castle 2019).

Social research points to a messier, less binary distribution of American public opinion than this culture war narrative would suggest (Evans 2002; Johnson 2017; Baldassarri and Goldberg 2014). Two forms of ideological complexity are particularly relevant. First, evidence is growing that gender ideology varies along multiple independent dimensions rather than moving along a single traditional-to-liberal axis (Knight and Brinton 2017; Grunow, Begall, and Buchler 2018; Pepin and Cotter 2018; Scarborough, Sin, and Risman 2019). Knowing where someone stands on abortion, for example, does not necessarily tell us what they think about affirmative action, gay marriage, or transgender rights.² Similarly, the factors predicting support for civil liberties of lesbians, gays, and trans-

1. In a fiery speech to the 1992 Republican National Convention, for example, Patrick Buchanan invoked culture war imagery in describing the "radical feminism" of the Clintons as "abortion on demand, a litmus test for the Supreme Court, homosexual rights, discrimination against religious schools, [and] women in combat units."

2. Research suggests that attitudes about abortion tap into a diverse array of orientations related to individual autonomy, sexual morality, and the humanity of the fetus (Jelen and Wilcox 2003; Jelen 2015; Luker 1984), and that support for affirmative action may be undermined by individualistic and meritocratic ideology (Baunach 2002; Bobo 1998; Kane and Whipkey 2009; Konrad and Hartmann 2001).

gender people are distinct from those predicting moral approval of homosexuality, granting informal privileges to gays and lesbians, and expanded use of gendered public spaces (Lofthus 2001; Doan, Loehr and Miller 2014; Jones et al. 2018).³

We allow for this multidimensional structure of attitudes about gender and sexuality by exploring variability separately on four historically contentious gender-policy issues: affirmative action for women, abortion rights, legal protection of sexual and gender minorities, and transgender bathroom access.

A second form of complexity pertains to the distinctive gender beliefs that grow out of group-specific experiences and immigration histories. Ethnoracial variability in gender and sexual politics may be attributable, for example, to group differences in political, religious, educational, and generational composition. College-educated persons generally hold more liberal gender views, and religious fundamentalists and political conservatives more traditional ones, although these relationships vary according to the specific attitudinal tenet at issue.⁴ Group differences in the timing of immigration may also contribute to attitudinal differences across ethnic groups. A tug-of-war is common between acculturation and the preservation of ethnic authenticity, but immigrants' attitudes tend to become more similar to natives' as generations pass (Tuan 1998; Min 2001; Alba and Nee 2003; Röder and Mühlau 2014; Su, Richardson, and Wang 2010; Apgar and McManus 2019). Ethnic differences in gender and sexual politics may also reflect different cultural understandings of what it means to be a man or a woman. Research has shown that people's support for rights claims that are seen to benefit women and sexual minorities increases with the salience of women's gender identities and decreases with the salience of men's gender identities (Cameron and Lalonde 2001; Bosson and Michniewicz 2013; Wood and

Eagly 2015). The ethnic and racial contours of these effects have not yet been explored systematically.

Given the diverse array of ancestral countries and cultures it represents, the pan-Asian American population is likely to be especially variable in gender-policy attitudes. We allow for this ethnic heterogeneity by comparing policy positions across ten Asian heritage groups, with and without controls for the social, cultural, and demographic factors discussed.

What Do We Know About Asian American Gender-Policy Attitudes?

Most survey-based studies of American attitudes about gender and sexuality have allowed for comparisons only across major racial groups, especially whites, blacks, Asians, and Hispanics. These comparisons have yielded some evidence of Asian traditionalism, but it is weak. For example, one analysis of late twentieth-century survey data shows a slightly less pronounced historical trend toward gender liberalism among Asians than among other American groups, perhaps reflecting the stronger representation of recent immigrants in the Asian population (Cotter, Hermsen, and Vanneman 2011). More recent life-history interviews suggest a greater propensity for Asian than black, white, or Latinx college students to endorse traditional forms of masculinity or femininity that conform to parental expectations (Risman 2018), but these differences cannot be generalized because of the small number of Asians interviewed (25).

Asian Americans' positions on specific policy items have been examined only recently. On affirmative action, Karthick Ramakrishnan and Janelle Wong (2018) find substantial Asian support except among Chinese Americans, whose opposition has increased since 2012 in conjunction with growing controversies about race-conscious college admissions policies. Asian American attitudes about affirmative action ap-

3. Debates about access to gendered spaces such as public bathrooms are about not only transgender rights, but also biology- versus identity-based understandings of gender (Westbrook and Schilt 2014; Schilt and Westbrook 2015).

4. On the determinants of attitudes about gender and sexuality in the United States, see Kane 2000; Bolzendahl and Myers 2004; Olson, Cadge, and Harrison 2006; Sherkat et al. 2011; Norton and Herek 2013; Chatillon, Charles, and Bradley 2018.

pear to be influenced by the wording of survey questions, with stronger support when Asians or women are mentioned as potential beneficiaries (Wong, Lee, and Tran 2018; Lee and Tran 2019).

In regard to abortion rights, a 2008 survey showed substantial attitudinal heterogeneity across six Asian groups, with Japanese, Chinese, and Indian Americans expressing greater support than Korean, Filipina/o, and Vietnamese Americans (Wu and Ida 2018). Stronger opposition to abortion among religious Christians accounted for much of this inter-Asian difference, although Asian American evangelicals tend to be less conservative than their white evangelical counterparts on many policy issues (Wong 2018).

Analyses of racial differences in Americans' attitudes toward homosexuality and gay marriage have mostly involved comparisons of blacks, whites, and others. "Others" have shown greater conservatism than whites in some analyses and no difference from whites in others (Loftus 2001; Lewis 2003; Sherkat, de Vries, and Creek 2010; Baunach 2012). Qualitative studies have reported some instances of Asian parents shunning nonnormative children (Chou 2012), but the prevalence of these practices is unknown, as is their association with specific policy positions.

Most studies on attitudes on transgender people have not covered Asian Americans (Flores 2015; Jelen and Wilcox 2003; Jones et al. 2018; Norton and Herek 2013). The best available evidence comes from Janelle Wong's analysis of NAAS data, which shows majority support for transgender bathroom access among Asian Americans but substantial variability depending on ethnic group and religiosity (2017).

The aims of this study are to evaluate evidence of pan-Asian traditionalism, to provide a richer description of the ethnic contours of Asian American gender and sexual politics, and to identify the social, cultural, and demographic factors that influence Asian-American positions on specific policy questions. Specif-

ically, we will apply NAAS survey data from 2016 to address four questions: (1) Do pan-Asian Americans express more traditional attitudes related to gender and sexual politics than do other major racial groups in the United States? (2) How do attitudes related to gender and sexual politics differ across Asian American ethnic groups? (3) What social, cultural, and demographic characteristics influence the gender and sexual politics of Asian American? (4) Do these predictors vary across policy domains?

DATA AND METHODS

Data are drawn from the 2016 post-election wave of the National Asian American Survey, which oversamples Asians of diverse ancestries. NAAS respondents were asked about their views on four contested policy issues. Two items concern the rights of women (to legal abortion and affirmative action), and two concern the rights of sexual and gender minorities (to legal protections, and access to public bathrooms corresponding to their gender identities).

We consider attitudinal variation across four major U.S. racial groups (Asian, white, black, and Latinx) and then across ten Asian ethnic groups (Bangladeshi, Cambodian, Chinese, Filipina/o, Hmong, Indian, Japanese, Korean, Pakistani, and Vietnamese).⁵ Ethnoracial groups were defined using information on racial identities of all respondents and ethnic identities of Asian respondents. Persons identifying as Native Hawaiian, Samoan, Fijian, or multiracial were dropped because of their small numbers. Because the NAAS intentionally oversamples Asians, especially those from groups with smaller U.S.-based populations, we apply person weights so that our statistical results are representative of the U.S. population.⁶

Measuring Attitudes About Gender and Sexuality

Survey researchers commonly measure and compare gender attitudes by constructing unidimensional scales that range from traditional

5. Exploratory analyses showed that a more parsimonious grouping into East Asians, Southeast Asians and South Asians did not capture the complexity of attitudinal differences.

6. Weights approximate the U.S. population on the following dimensions: race-ethnicity, state, nativity, gender, and education.

to egalitarian. We do not. Recent comparative studies, as well as our analysis of the current data, suggest that different tenets of gender ideology often follow independent causal logics that are obscured when survey items are aggregated into a unitary measure (Grunow, Begall, and Buchler 2018; Pepin and Cotter 2018). Disaggregated analyses of seemingly related attitudinal items have indeed revealed distinct belief structures (Baunach 2002; Loftus 2001; Jelen and Wilcox 2003; Jones et al. 2018).

This study considers support for four policy items, two related to the rights of women, and two related to the rights of gender and sexual minorities. All are measured as dichotomies (0/1), as follows:

Support for affirmative action for women: “Are you for or against preferential hiring and promotion of women?” A 1 on this measure indicates the respondent’s reported support for preferential hiring and promotion.

Support for abortion rights: “Which comes closest to your views on abortion?” Two sets of response categories were administered, each to half of the sample. The first set (version A) offers four choices: abortion should always be legal; legal most of the time; legal only in cases of rape or incest; legal to protect the life of the mother and illegal in all other cases. The second (version B) asks respondents to choose the specific circumstances under which abortion should be legal: abortion should not be legal under any circumstances, even if the mother’s life is in danger; only be legal in certain circumstances, such as when a woman’s health is endangered or when pregnancy results from rape or incest; legal during the first three months of pregnancy, no matter the reason; and legal under any circumstance. Respondents who chose response 1 or 2 on version A or 3 or 4 on version B are classified as supportive of abortion rights given that

legal most of the time and legal during the first three months of pregnancy, no matter what the reason, most closely represent the American status quo, even in the most restrictive states. A dummy indicator is included in all regression models to capture mean differences in support between the two question versions. We carry out supplementary analyses, described further on, to assess the sensitivity of observed relationships to question wording.

Support for legal protection of sexual and gender minorities. This item was also administered in two versions, each to half the sample: “Do you favor or oppose legal protections against discrimination against gay, lesbian and transgender people” (version A), and “Do you favor or oppose legal protections against discrimination against gays and lesbians (version B)?” Responses were originally coded on a 1–5 ordinal scale ranging from strongly favor to strongly oppose, 3 corresponding to neither favor nor oppose. Those favoring or strongly favoring protections for either gay, lesbian, and transgender people or gays and lesbians are classified as supporters on this measure. Again, we include a dummy indicator to capture mean differences in support between the two question versions, and we carry out supplementary analyses to assess the sensitivity of regression results to question wording.

Support for transgender bathroom access: “Do you favor or oppose allowing transgender people—that is, people who identify themselves as the sex or gender different from the one they were born as—to use the bathrooms of their identified gender?” Responses were coded on a 5-point ordinal scale ranging from strong opposition (1) to strong support (5), with those who report favoring or strongly favoring this policy classified as supporters on our measure.⁷

7. Very similar results were obtained in ordinal logit models that retained the original 5-point scales of the two items related to rights of gender and sexual minorities (not shown). One difference is that the negative effect of religious fundamentalism on transgender bathroom access becomes statistically significant in the ordinal model. In the interest of simplicity, we opted to apply the same binary modeling approach to all four policy items.

Regression Analyses and Independent Variables

To assess racial and ethnic variability in gender policy support independent of compositional differences in social, cultural, and demographic traits, we carry out separate logistic regression analyses for each of the four gender policy positions. We compute these models first for the full sample with fixed effects for race, and then for the Asian subsample with fixed effects for ethnicity.

Religious affiliation is measured using two survey items: “What is your religion?” and (for Christians only) “Do you consider yourself a fundamentalist or evangelical Christian, a born again Christian, or Charismatic?” Respondents are grouped into seven categories: Catholic, fundamentalist Christian, mainline Protestant (reference), Buddhist, Muslim, other religion, and agnostic/atheist. Mainline Protestants are defined as non-evangelical, non-Catholic Christians. In addition to denominational affiliation, we consider respondent’s religiosity, measured by the annual frequency of service attendance.⁸

We assess effects of political allegiances by comparing Republicans and Democrats with Independents (reference category). Educational attainment is measured with a binary variable that identifies persons with at least a bachelor’s degree. Regression models also include standard measures of age, employment status, household income, and marital status.⁹ Generational status (first, second or third-plus generation) is measured by combining information on respondent’s nativity (foreign born or not) and parents’ nativity (whether at least one parent was foreign born). We also include

a binary indicator of respondent’s citizenship status.

Our models also explore interactive effects of respondents’ gender and the relative salience of their gender identities. Gender is measured as a binary variable (woman=1), and gender-identity salience is measured as the reported importance of being a man or woman (1–4 scale) relative to the importance of other group-based identities (race, nationality, religion).¹⁰ We use a relative measure of identity salience because identities are multiple and effects on attitudes should depend on the centrality of identity as a woman or man, relative to other group-based memberships. Sensitivity tests that substituted an absolute measure showed the same general patterns, though effects were somewhat weaker. Interacting this identity score with gender allows us to assess effects of gender-identity salience separately for men and women. Scores were mean-centered, so main gender effects can be interpreted as the effect of being a woman (relative to a man) for respondents with average gender-identity salience scores.

The appendix shows descriptive statistics on the dependent and independent variables for the full sample broken down by race (table A1), and for the Asian sample broken down by ethnicity (table A2).

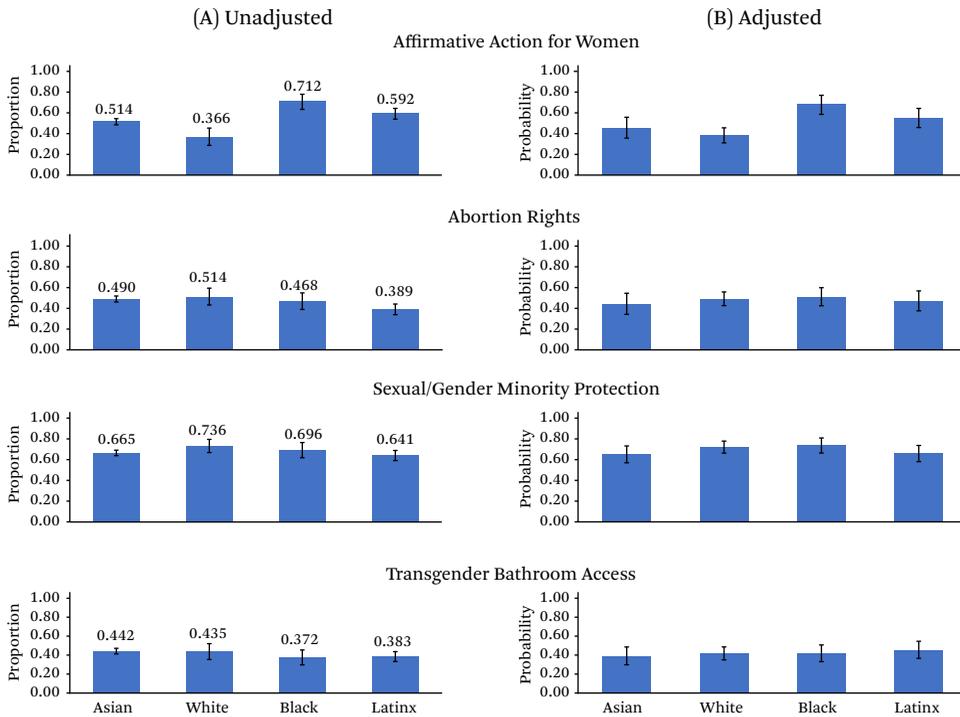
RESULTS

To address our first research question, pertaining to stereotypes of Asian traditionality, we compare levels of support for each gender-policy item across four major racial categories. To address the second and third, we explore

8. We use the NAAS’s original ordinal scale to approximate annual frequency as follows: Attendance more than once a week is coded as 78 visits per year (an average of 1.5 visits per week); once a week is coded as 52; once or twice a month as 12; a few times a year as 3; and seldom as 1. Persons responding never or reporting no religion (including agnostics and atheists) are coded 0.

9. Age is measured in years; employment status distinguishes employed from non-employed persons (0/1); and married persons (reference category) are distinguished from previously married (widowed, divorced, or separated) and never-married persons. Household income is measured as the natural log of the midpoints of class categories on a 10-point ordinal scale.

10. The survey asks, “How important is being [gender][race][nationality] to your identity?” and “How important is your religion to your identity?” Responses are coded on a 1–4 scale, from extremely important to not at all important. To measure the relative salience of gender identity, we calculated the ratio of the gender response to the sum of responses to all four identity items (gender+race+religion+nationality).

Figure 1. Support for Policies Related to Gender and Sexuality, by Race

Source: Authors' tabulation based on Ramakrishnan et al. 2018.

Note: Brackets show 95 percent confidence intervals. Values in panel A are unadjusted proportions reporting support; values in panel B are predicted support levels for persons with average scores on variables included in the regression models.

attitudinal differences within the Asian American population.

Racial Differences in Gender and Sexual Politics

Panel A of figure 1 shows mean scores for the four gender-policy items, broken down by major racial group: Asian, white, black, and Latinx. On each policy position, the proportion of each group reporting agreement is displayed above the respective bar, and the brackets show 95% confidence intervals. Nonoverlapping confidence intervals indicate statistically significant differences on the respective indicator. Results provide no support for stereotypes of Asian gender-traditionality. Asian Americans' responses are statistically different from whites' on one of the four policy measures—gender-based affirmative action—but Asians report more rather than less agreement than whites

(51 percent versus 37 percent) on this item. Racial differences are much less pronounced on the other three items, except that support for abortion rights is weaker among Latinxs than other respondents. Contrary to popular beliefs, blacks are not significantly less likely than whites to express support for the rights of sexual minorities.

Gender and sexual politics differ little between Asians and non-Asians in the aggregate, but it is possible that an underlying culture of Asian traditionalism is obscured by compositional differences between racial groups—for example, higher levels of educational attainment or lower levels of religious fundamentalism among Asian than non-Asian Americans (see table A1). This possibility is assessed in panel B of figure 1, which compares predicted agreement levels by race for hypothetical persons with average scores on the explanatory

variables.¹¹ Results are again wholly inconsistent with stereotypes of pan-Asian traditionalism. With these adjustments, none of the predicted policy positions of Asian Americans differ from those of the white majority. The only statistically significant difference with Asians is found in the strong support for gender-based affirmative action reported by black Americans.¹² Consistent with previous evidence of multidimensionality, none of the major racial groups shows levels of agreement that are consistently high or consistently low across all four policy domains.

In sum, Asian Americans' attitudes toward gender and sexual politics differ little in the aggregate from those of white, black, and Latinx Americans, even controlling for a wide range of social and cultural traits. This similarity across major racial groups likely obscures important differences within the pan-Asian American population, however. We interrogate those differences next.

Asian American Heterogeneity in Gender and Sexual Politics

To address our second and third research questions, we focus on a subsample of Asian Americans from ten ethnic groups. We first explore patterns of ethnic variation in gender and sexual politics and then compare causal dynamics across the four policy domains.

Figure 2 shows policy positions for the pan-Asian subsample broken down by ethnic group. The first panel again shows raw group averages, meaning that values are unadjusted for group differences in sociodemographic composition. The bars, as well as the statistically significant F statistics found for each policy item, indicate substantial variability across Asian ethnic groups. We briefly summarize these differences.

Affirmative action for women generally finds more support among Asian groups that experience greater economic precarity in the United States (Bangladeshi, Cambodian, Hmong, Viet-

namese). Chinese Americans report relatively little support, which is not surprising given their recent activism against race-based affirmative action in higher education (Ramakrishnan and Wong 2018). Disaggregation of men's and women's responses (see figure A1) reveals significant gender gaps within some ethnic groups, with stronger support for affirmative action among Cambodian, Filipina, and Vietnamese women than among their male counterparts.

Consistent with previous research (Wu and Ida 2018), we find least support for *abortion rights* among groups with strong Catholic cultural heritages (Filipino/a) and among Vietnamese Americans, about 30 percent of whom identify as Catholic (see table A2). Cambodian and Hmong Americans also report relatively low levels of support for legal abortion.

Turning to *protection of sexual and gender minorities*, we find strongest agreement among Indian and Japanese and weakest support among Cambodian, Hmong, and Korean American respondents. Support for *transgender bathroom access* is weaker than support for the general protection of sexual and gender minorities, and Asian views are again wide ranging, with Japanese, Bangladeshi, and Indian Americans most favorable, and Cambodian, Chinese, and Hmong Americans most opposed (see also Wong 2017).

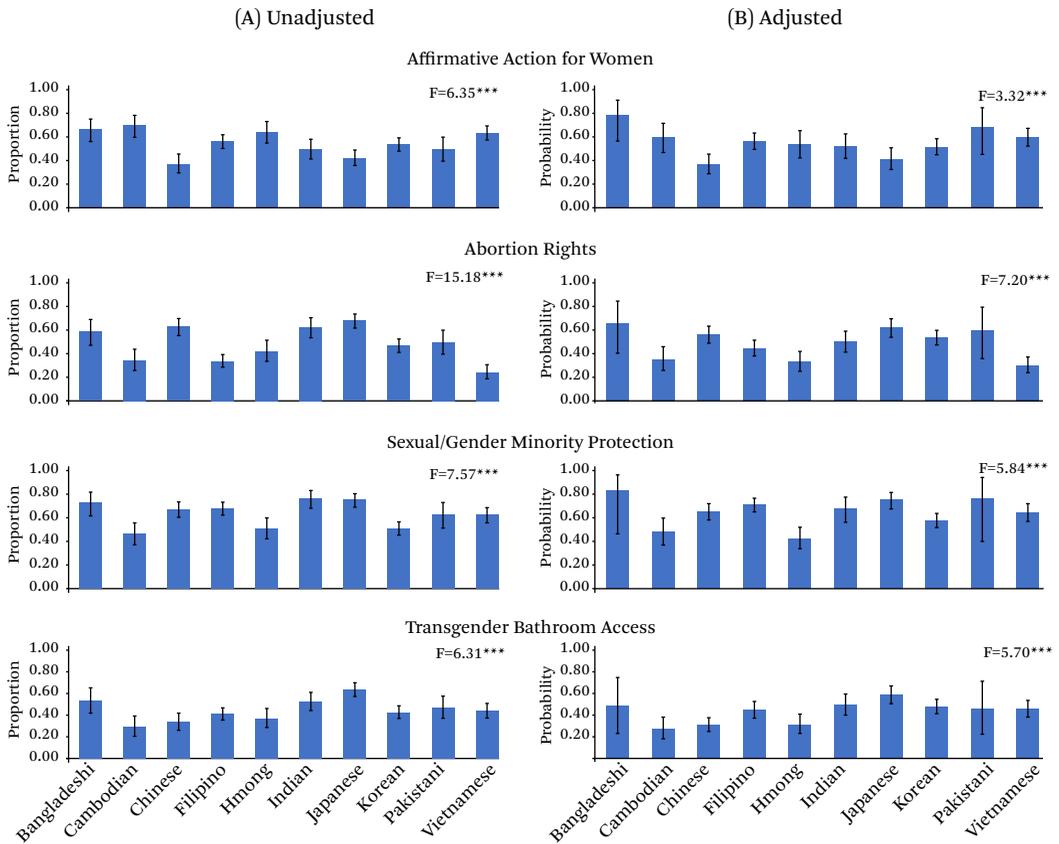
Groups' relative agreement levels vary across the four gender-policy domains. Chinese Americans, for example, are among the least supportive of affirmative action and transgender bathroom access, but in the middle of the pack on the other two items. In other words, attitudinal profiles of Asian ethnic (and racial) groups tend to be indicator-specific rather than generically traditional or progressive.

To what extent can the observed ethnic heterogeneity in policy positions be attributed to group differences in religious, social, or generational composition? To address this question, we again calculated adjusted probabilities of

11. These adjusted values are computed using coefficients from regression models that include all of the social, cultural, and demographic variables listed in table A1, an interaction between gender and gender-identity salience, and dummy indicators distinguishing the four major racial categories.

12. This difference is not surprising given a history of race-based affirmative action policies aimed at addressing anti-black discrimination in the United States.

Figure 2. Support for Policies Related to Gender and Sexuality, by Asian Ethnicity



Source: Authors' tabulation based on Ramakrishnan et al. 2018.

Note: Brackets show 95 percent confidence intervals. Values in panel A are unadjusted proportions reporting support; values in panel B are predicted support levels for persons with average scores on variables included in the regression models. The F-statistics in the upper right corner of each graph provide a measure of unexplained variability across ethnic groups.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

agreement, conditional on similarity in religion, politics, education, nativity, and other traits. Comparing these values in panel B of figure 2 to the unadjusted values in panel A tells us how much ethnic variability in attitudes is explained by group differences in socio-demographic characteristics. Visual comparison indicates modest reductions in intra-Asian heterogeneity, most notably with respect to abortion rights, where some of the shorter bars (Vietnamese and Filipina/o) become taller and some of the taller bars (Chinese, Indian, Japanese) become shorter. These adjustments are partly attributable to group differences in socioeconomic status and religiosity (see table A2).

Reductions in the F statistics between panels A and B confirm an attenuation of ethnic variability when demographically and socially similar persons are compared. Significant differences remain on all four policy items. This residual variation is most pronounced with respect to abortion rights and least pronounced with respect to affirmative action. Unexplained ethnic differences in attitudes toward abortion are likely influenced by distinctive histories of abortion law in countries of ancestry; views on gender-based affirmative action may be less tied to respondents' ethnic identity because this policy is more directly rooted in the American response to systemic racism.

What Predicts Gender Policy Positions of Asian Americans?

Question 3 interrogates the sociocultural determinants of Asian American gender politics and the variability of sociocultural effects across gender-policy domains. This information can be found in table 1, which shows coefficients from four logistic regression models. Results reveal attitudinal effects of politics, religiosity, and immigrant generation that are generally consistent with culture war arguments in the sense that nonreligious, Democratic Party-affiliated, and college-educated persons tend to report more liberal views. Inconsistent with culture war accounts, however, effects differ across these hot-button policy items. Democratic political affinity is unrelated to views on affirmative action, for example, and frequency of religious service attendance is unrelated to views on both protection of sexual minorities and affirmative action. Other than a generally liberalizing effect of agnosticism, we find no differences among major religious traditions in the Asian American sample. Although religious fundamentalism is generally associated with conservative social policy positions, recent research has pointed to more liberal views among Asian American than among white American evangelicals (Wong 2018). This analysis of Asian Americans' gender-policy beliefs in fact shows no significant differences between fundamentalist Christians and their mainline counterparts.¹³

Multigenerational U.S. residency, youth, and college education are positively associated with Asian American support of all policies but affirmative action. This finding is consistent with previous national studies, which suggest that socioeconomic elites are more likely to espouse classically liberal values that define equality in formal procedural terms rather than as efforts to redress historical group-based wrongs (Bobo 1998; Baunach 2002; Kane and Whipkey 2009; Konrad and Hartmann 2001). The positive relationship of age with the affirmative action item

and its negative relationship with the other items likely reflect generational differences—both in the frequency of exposure to openly gay, lesbian, and transgender people, and in understandings of race-based affirmative action, which had more broad-based, bipartisan support during the early years of the civil rights struggle than after the conservative backlash of the 1980s. Net of age, never-married Asians express stronger support for women's rights than their married counterparts do, but do not differ significantly in their support for policies benefiting gender and sexual minorities.

Policy positions of Asian American men and women also depend on the salience of their gender identities (relative to their racial, religious, or national identities). Among men, a strong masculine identity is associated with significantly less support for protection of sexual minorities and transgender bathroom access. Women, by contrast, are more likely to support women's rights claims if they identify more strongly with their gender group.¹⁴ This interaction is depicted in figure 3, where we can see a clear positive relationship of gender-identity salience with women's support for abortion and affirmative action and a clear negative relationship with men's support for rights of sexual and gender minorities. Further disaggregation (not shown) reveals that the negative effects of masculine identity are especially strong among Japanese, Korean, and Indian, and Pakistani men.

Table 1 reveals no significant effect of question wording on pan-Asian responses to the survey items on abortion rights and protection of sexual minorities. We explore possible ethnic differences in wording effects by running separate regression models for versions A and B of the two split-survey items. Regression coefficients suggest more support for abortion rights under question version B than A for some Asian ethnic groups, especially Cambodian, and Vietnamese, although t-tests show that none of the ethnic coefficients differs significantly across

13. Separate regression analyses by ethnicity (available on request) show a traditionalizing effect of Christian fundamentalism on attitudes toward gender and sexual minorities among Chinese and Korean Americans, however.

14. Conditional on an average level of gender-identity salience, we find no significant differences between Asian men and Asian women on any policy measure but affirmative action (see also figure A1).

Table 1. Logit Models Predicting Support for Policies Related to Gender and Sexuality

	Affirmative Action for Women	Abortion Rights	Sexual-Gender Minority Protection	Transgender Bathroom Access
Political affinity (Independent = 0)				
Democrat	0.002 (0.170)	0.647*** (0.182)	0.429* (0.173)	0.753*** (0.184)
Republican	-0.206 (0.186)	0.241 (0.206)	-0.0348 (0.175)	0.101 (0.206)
Religion (other Christian = 0)				
Catholic	-0.443 (0.239)	-0.317 (0.252)	0.493 (0.262)	0.246 (0.254)
Fundamentalist Christian	-0.321 (0.226)	-0.193 (0.240)	-0.0168 (0.240)	-0.266 (0.237)
Buddhist	-0.120 (0.286)	0.400 (0.267)	0.531 (0.283)	0.315 (0.262)
Muslim	-1.008 (0.629)	-0.453 (0.730)	-0.667 (1.103)	0.123 (0.785)
Other religion	0.061 (0.365)	0.636 (0.353)	0.762 (0.414)	0.0681 (0.373)
Agnostic-atheist	-0.347 (0.251)	0.492* (0.244)	0.704** (0.265)	0.482* (0.244)
Religious attendance per year	0.002 (0.003)	-0.014*** (0.003)	-0.005 (0.003)	-0.006* (0.003)
Immigrant generation (second = 0)				
First	-0.263 (0.186)	-0.547** (0.189)	-0.626** (0.204)	-0.709*** (0.194)
Third and higher	-0.383 (0.289)	-0.161 (0.268)	-0.360 (0.331)	-0.0662 (0.265)
U.S. citizen	0.212 (0.249)	0.448 (0.284)	-0.009 (0.236)	-0.386 (0.228)
Woman	0.340** (0.123)	-0.057 (0.135)	0.049 (0.131)	0.032 (0.130)
Gender-identity salience, man	-0.182 (1.031)	1.113 (1.181)	-2.957** (1.033)	-3.305** (1.148)
Gender-identity salience, woman	3.269** (1.127)	3.172** (1.225)	-0.170 (1.341)	1.644 (1.241)
Employed	0.170 (0.154)	0.071 (0.152)	-0.026 (0.158)	-0.090 (0.178)
College degree	-0.259 (0.138)	0.321* (0.156)	0.471** (0.144)	0.398** (0.148)
Family income, ln	-0.393*** (0.080)	0.217** (0.078)	0.131 (0.079)	-0.106 (0.074)
Marital status (married = 0)				
Never married	0.460* (0.198)	0.627** (0.238)	0.487 (0.252)	0.153 (0.210)
Previously married	0.013 (0.185)	0.230 (0.205)	-0.004 (0.196)	0.184 (0.198)

Table 1. (continued)

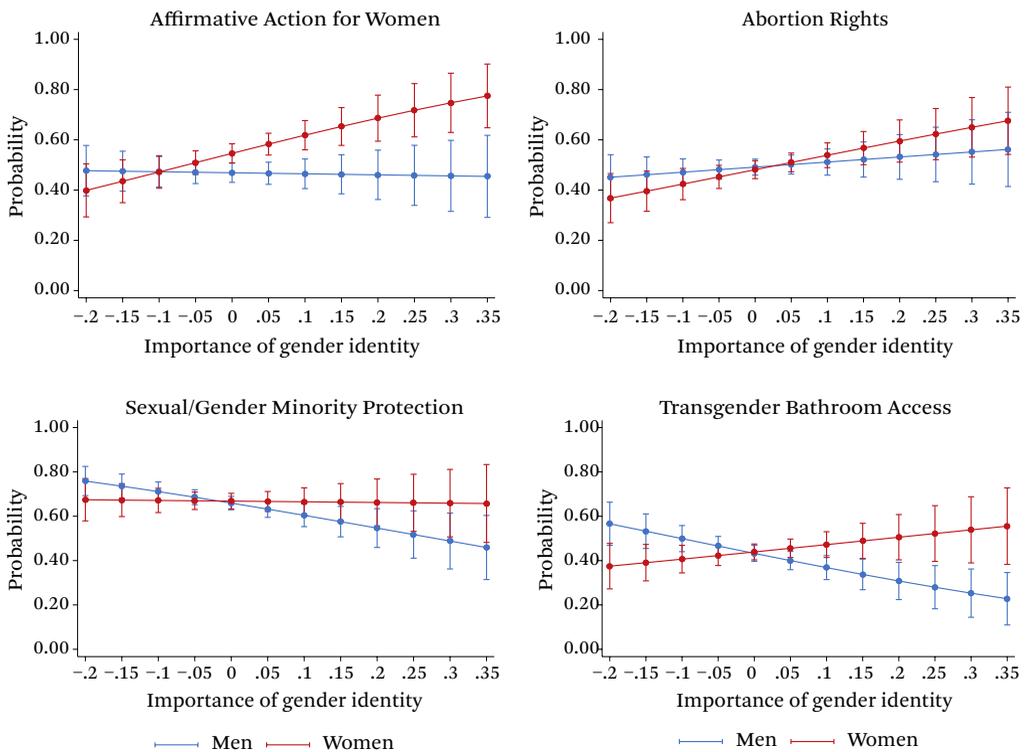
	Affirmative Action for Women	Abortion Rights	Sexual-Gender Minority Protection	Transgender Bathroom Access
Age, years	0.010* (0.005)	-0.011* (0.005)	-0.019** (0.006)	-0.024*** (0.006)
Abortion QA (= 1)		-0.112 (0.130)		
Sexual min QA (= 1)			0.002 (0.127)	
Constant	2.489** (0.846)	-0.050 (0.970)	1.904 (1.275)	1.767 (0.917)
Observations	2,910	3,040	3,026	2,950

Source: Authors' tabulation based on Ramakrishnan et al. 2018.

Note: Data are from the 2016 NAAS post-election survey, weighted to represent the U.S. Asian population. Values are weighted coefficients (standard errors). Models include fixed effects for ten Asian ethnic groups (not shown).

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Figure 3. Predicted Probabilities of Policy Support



Source: Authors' tabulation based on Ramakrishnan et al. 2018.

Note: Lines show the predicted probability of reporting support (or strong support) on the respective policy item. Prediction models include indicators of ethnic group membership and all covariates listed in table A2. Brackets show 95 percent confidence intervals.

models—on either policy item (table A3). Table A3 reveals only one statistically significant difference in coefficients: the negative effect of a highly salient masculine identity on support for protection of sexual minorities holds only under administration of question version A, which includes transgender persons in the class of potentially protected persons. The direction of this difference is consistent with evidence that attitudes are more negative toward transgender than gay and lesbian Americans (Lewis et al. 2017) and suggests that bias against transgender people is particularly strong among people with highly masculine gender identities (see also Bosson and Michniewicz 2013; Hall and LaFrance 2012). Such wording effects are potentially important because they mean that the level and causal dynamics of public support for policy initiatives can be influenced by their cognitive and moral framing.

CONCLUSION

Contrary to widespread stereotypes, results of this study provide no evidence that Asian Americans hold more traditional attitudes about gender and sexuality than members of other major racial groups in the United States. This is true even controlling for a wide range of social, cultural, and demographic variables, including religiosity, political party affiliation, education, and gender-identity salience. Exposure to racial stereotypes, and to racial discrimination in general, likely sensitizes Asian Americans to the structural and cultural disadvantages that subordinate social groups, including women and sexual minorities, face (Chua and Fujino 1999; Kibria 1990; Min 2001; Espiritu 2008; Lu and Wong 2013; Okamoto 2014; Fujiwara and Roshanravan 2018). It is possible that firsthand experience with bigotry and structural disadvantage, combined with Asian women's relatively high occupational status in the United States, moderates effects of any gender-traditional cultural heritages on Asian Americans' gender and sexual politics.

Although these analyses do not support stereotypes of pan-Asian American gender traditionalism, they do reveal substantial variability across Asian ethnic groups that is obscured by popular generalizations about Asians and Asian Americans. Regression analyses link

some of this heterogeneity to group differences in social and cultural traits, including religiosity, politics, nativity, age, and education. Our models, though, leave unexplained substantial differences across Asian American groups, some of which may be attributable to unmeasured particularities of heritage cultures. Ongoing influences of ancestry countries on attitudes, employment patterns, and many aspects of family life are well documented (Leaper and Valin 1996; Read 2003; George 2005; Fernández and Fogli 2009; Röder and Mühlau 2014; Frank and Hou 2015; Finseraas and Kotsadam 2017). Future research should explore in greater depth how positions on specific gender-policy issues map onto different histories of immigrant reception within the United States and distinctive gender regimes in ancestral countries.

In addition to heterogeneity of attitudes, our results reveal heterogeneity in the sociodemographic processes generating these attitudes—in at least two senses. First, the relative positions of racial and ethnic groups covary only weakly. Consistent with previous evidence of multidimensionality in American gender attitudes, we find no clear racial or ethnic gradients of traditionalism (or progressivism) that cut across the four policy domains considered. For example, Cambodian Americans report relatively strong support for affirmative action but relatively weak support on protection of sexual minorities, and Chinese Americans are among the strongest supporters of abortion rights and among the weakest supporters of transgender bathroom access. Second, the sociocultural characteristics most central to the culture war narrative (religion, politics, nativity) show variable effects across gender policy domains. Our regression results indicate, for example, that religiosity (service attendance) is associated with opposition to abortion rights, but not opposition to affirmative action, among Asians.

We also find distinctive effects of feminine and masculine identities on Asian American attitudes that warrant further study. Our findings on gender-identity salience align with those from national studies linking a strong feminine identity to support for gender-related rights claims (Burn, Aboud, and Moyles 2000; Cameron and Lalonde 2001; Becker and Wagner

2009) and linking a strong masculine identity to binary understandings of gender and disapproval of homosexuality and transgender people (Bosson and Michniewicz 2013; Hall and LaFrance 2012; Wood and Eagly 2015; Norton and Herek 2013). They also support an intersectional conceptualization of Asian American attitudes and stereotypes (Tinkler et al. 2020). More research is needed on how effects of gender-identity salience vary across Asian ethnicities, immigrant generations, and religious traditions.

Overall, results provide little evidence of an across-the-board cultural divide between con-

sistent gender liberals and consistent gender conservatives—neither between Asian and non-Asian Americans, nor within the Asian American population. Asian Americans who are secular, Democratic, college educated, and women tend to report more liberal positions, but effects still vary across policy domains. Affirmative action for women is especially distinctive in its causal dynamics, perhaps because of its particular legacy as a remedy for anti-black discrimination. This study provides further evidence that different gender policy positions are shaped by independent, historically specific causal logics.

Table A1. Descriptive Statistics for Dependent and Independent Variables

	Asian (N = 3,167)	White (N = 296)	Black (N = 308)	Latinx (N = 826)	Total (N = 4,597)
Affirmative action for women	0.514	0.366	0.712	0.592	0.542
Abortion rights	0.49	0.514	0.468	0.389	0.448
Sexual/gender minority protection	0.665	0.736	0.696	0.641	0.626
Transgender bathroom access	0.442	0.435	0.372	0.383	0.406
Political affinity					
Democrat	0.496	0.467	0.743	0.595	0.52
Republican	0.308	0.410	0.170	0.242	0.352
Independent	0.196	0.122	0.087	0.163	0.128
Religion					
Mainline Protestant	0.090	0.272	0.261	0.062	0.23
Catholic	0.183	0.174	0.067	0.463	0.206
Fundamentalist Christian	0.148	0.279	0.522	0.298	0.304
Buddhist	0.124	0.002	0.009	0.003	0.008
Muslim	0.047	0.002	0.007	0.000	0.004
Other	0.165	0.036	0.027	0.001	0.036
Agnostic/atheist	0.243	0.235	0.106	0.173	0.211
Religion attendance per year	23.836 (28.300)	21.232 (27.853)	29.778 (29.453)	26.346 (28.269)	23.125 (28.254)
Immigrant generation					
First	0.775	0.019	0.069	0.459	0.128
Second	0.186	0.076	0.115	0.333	0.125
Third and higher	0.039	0.905	0.816	0.208	0.747
U.S. citizen	0.915	0.996	0.985	0.796	0.96
Woman	0.515	0.511	0.560	0.483	0.513
Gender-identity salience	0.252 (0.081)	0.241 (0.092)	0.252 (0.059)	0.251 (0.065)	0.244 (0.085)
Employed	0.587 (0.492)	0.488 (0.502)	0.467 (0.500)	0.617 (0.487)	0.510 (0.501)
College	0.613	0.488	0.298	0.261	0.437
Family income in \$1,000	87.072 (76.460)	84.976 (72.544)	57.971 (62.981)	52.010 (50.747)	76.887 (70.000)
Marital status					
Married	0.604	0.637	0.364	0.486	0.581
Never married	0.296	0.213	0.391	0.344	0.257
Previously married	0.101	0.150	0.245	0.170	0.162
Age	52.242 (20.688)	53.935 (20.184)	54.418 (20.895)	46.581 (20.174)	52.779 (20.440)

Source: Authors' tabulation based on Ramakrishnan et al. 2018.

Table A2. Descriptive Statistics for Dependent and Independent Variables

	Bangladeshi (N = 183)	Cambodian (N = 295)	Chinese (N = 260)	Filipino (N = 407)	Hmong (N = 255)	Indian (N = 355)	Japanese (N = 401)	Korean (N = 426)	Pakistani (N = 199)	Vietnamese (N = 406)	Total (N = 3,167)
Affirmative action for women	0.663	0.698	0.371	0.561	0.645	0.496	0.422	0.536	0.496	0.636	0.514
Abortion rights	0.584	0.342	0.628	0.337	0.422	0.623	0.679	0.467	0.497	0.242	0.49
Sexual-gender minority protection	0.728	0.463	0.672	0.68	0.511	0.764	0.751	0.509	0.627	0.624	0.665
Transgender bathroom access	0.537	0.29	0.335	0.409	0.369	0.527	0.638	0.427	0.472	0.439	0.442
Political affinity											
Democrat	0.581	0.356	0.379	0.549	0.5	0.515	0.586	0.621	0.583	0.382	0.496
Republican	0.311	0.204	0.264	0.319	0.184	0.331	0.306	0.303	0.271	0.355	0.308
Independent	0.108	0.44	0.357	0.133	0.316	0.155	0.108	0.076	0.146	0.263	0.196
Religion											
Mainline Protestant	0.001	0.049	0.096	0.087	0.123	0.028	0.197	0.235	0.018	0.006	0.090
Catholic	0	0.008	0.022	0.612	0.016	0.015	0.046	0.079	0	0.298	0.183
Fundamentalist Christian	0	0.053	0.105	0.191	0.19	0.015	0.153	0.454	0.003	0.096	0.148
Buddhist	0.006	0.766	0.181	0.002	0.029	0.003	0.241	0.017	0	0.433	0.124
Muslim	0.907	0	0	0	0	0.096	0	0	0.865	0	0.047
Other	0.021	0.015	0.001	0.015	0.473	0.696	0.021	0	0.033	0	0.165
Agnostic-atheist	0.065	0.109	0.595	0.092	0.17	0.147	0.342	0.214	0.081	0.167	0.243
Religion attendance-year	28.073 (31.346)	15.923 (20.813)	8.984 (19.626)	34.450 (28.288)	16.792 (25.449)	21.212 (26.124)	14.852 (23.734)	37.828 (32.529)	32.097 (29.506)	24.483 (27.824)	23.836 (28.300)

(continued)

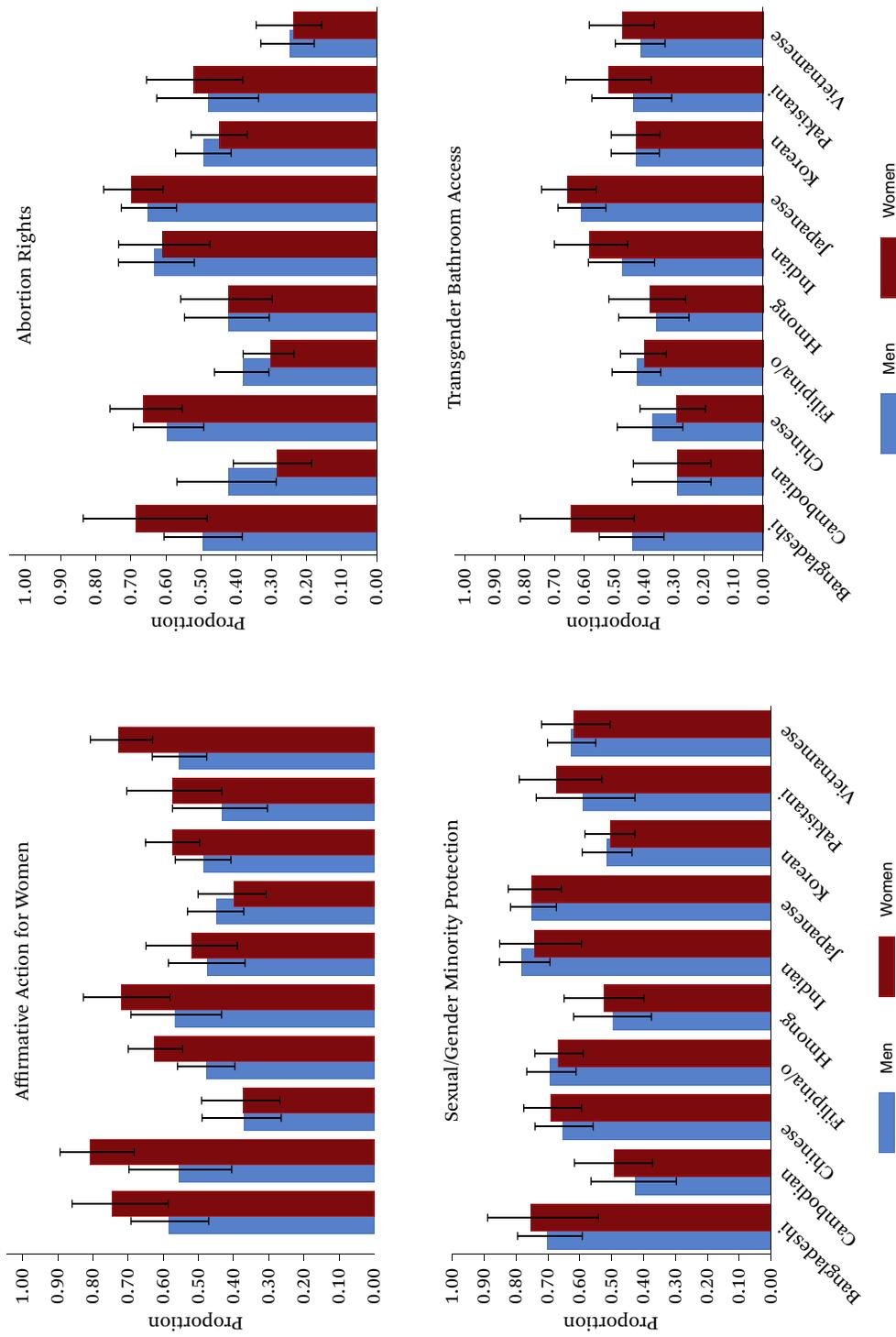
Table A2. (continued)

	Bangladeshi (N = 183)	Cambodian (N = 295)	Chinese (N = 260)	Filipino (N = 407)	Hmong (N = 255)	Indian (N = 355)	Japanese (N = 401)	Korean (N = 426)	Pakistani (N = 199)	Vietnamese (N = 406)	Total (N = 3,167)
Immigrant generation											
First	0.907	0.731	0.731	0.774	0.581	0.852	0.43	0.811	0.82	0.848	0.775
Second	0.091	0.269	0.232	0.182	0.412	0.143	0.22	0.182	0.178	0.152	0.186
Third and higher	0.002	0	0.037	0.044	0.007	0.004	0.35	0.007	0.003	0	0.039
U.S. citizen	0.993	0.938	0.918	0.93	0.965	0.894	0.816	0.941	0.915	0.937	0.915
Woman	0.511	0.56	0.475	0.573	0.49	0.476	0.583	0.569	0.444	0.466	0.515
Gender-identity salience	0.245	0.250	0.260	0.252	0.266	0.256	0.258	0.252	0.252	0.226	0.252
	(0.072)	(0.063)	(0.094)	(0.068)	(0.060)	(0.088)	(0.081)	(0.078)	(0.065)	(0.070)	(0.081)
Employed	0.64	0.5	0.617	0.524	0.689	0.693	0.442	0.573	0.66	0.546	0.587
											(0.492)
College	0.504	0.25	0.572	0.595	0.258	0.769	0.615	0.673	0.694	0.454	0.613
Family income in \$1,000s	72.148	47.571	74.995	83.436	52.073	125.985	90.326	81.890	109.642	55.674	87.072
	(78.390)	(55.754)	(68.248)	(72.851)	(45.326)	(85.305)	(78.709)	(72.681)	(85.121)	(53.068)	(76.460)
Marital status											
Married	0.692	0.601	0.618	0.587	0.452	0.603	0.516	0.598	0.74	0.655	0.604
Never married	0.282	0.269	0.307	0.259	0.503	0.366	0.194	0.287	0.208	0.278	0.296
Previously married	0.027	0.13	0.075	0.154	0.044	0.031	0.29	0.115	0.051	0.067	0.101
Age	40.774	48.395	51.551	57.372	36.316	44.627	63.863	54.512	46.053	53.840	52.242
	(14.703)	(18.172)	(21.031)	(20.778)	(14.739)	(18.304)	(19.406)	(21.326)	(18.155)	(19.182)	(20.688)

Source: Authors' tabulation based on Ramakrishnan et al. 2018.

Note: Values are means and standard deviations. Data are from the 2016 NAAS post-election wave, weighted to represent the respective U.S. population group. Sample sizes are unweighted.

Figure A1. Support for Policies Related to Gender and Sexuality



Source: Authors' tabulation based on Ramakrishnan et al. 2018.

Note: Bars show the unadjusted proportions reporting support (or strong support); brackets show 95 percent confidence intervals.

Table A3. Support for Split Sample Survey Items Among Asians, by Question Wording

	Abortion Rights		Sexual-Gender Minority Protection	
	(A)	(B)	(A)	(B)
Asian ethnicity (Bangladesh = 0)				
Cambodian	-2.354** (0.885)	-1.043 (0.922)	-2.196 (1.139)	-2.190 (1.208)
Chinese	-0.508 (0.787)	-0.445 (0.901)	-1.676 (1.050)	-0.942 (1.161)
Filipino	-1.385 (0.816)	-0.852 (0.877)	-1.141 (1.053)	-0.681 (1.161)
Hmong	-1.992* (0.773)	-1.563 (0.888)	-2.533* (1.008)	-2.380* (1.175)
Indian	-0.993 (0.700)	-0.469 (0.814)	-1.596 (0.947)	-0.617 (1.158)
Japanese	-0.117 (0.814)	-0.234 (0.917)	-1.096 (1.073)	-0.372 (1.175)
Korean	-0.601 (0.769)	-0.588 (0.883)	-1.895 (1.036)	-1.459 (1.159)
Pakistani	-0.502 (0.506)	-0.242 (0.400)	-0.715 (0.641)	-0.219 (0.403)
Vietnamese	-2.513** (0.823)	-1.523 (0.894)	-1.681 (1.061)	-0.942 (1.179)
Political affinity (Independent = 0)				
Democrat	0.588* (0.270)	0.655** (0.246)	0.348 (0.238)	0.531* (0.246)
Republican	0.311 (0.310)	0.153 (0.279)	0.0435 (0.261)	-0.102 (0.239)
Religion (other Christian = 0)				
Catholic	-0.582 (0.395)	-0.149 (0.333)	0.275 (0.408)	0.637 (0.353)
Fundamentalist Christian	-0.333 (0.354)	-0.099 (0.329)	-0.397 (0.377)	0.277 (0.318)
Buddhist	0.308 (0.424)	0.499 (0.348)	0.439 (0.446)	0.750* (0.365)
Muslim	-0.045 (0.701)	-0.830 (0.896)	-1.195 (0.992)	-0.534 (1.209)
Other religion	0.680 (0.491)	0.508 (0.500)	0.652 (0.567)	0.821 (0.562)
Agnostic-atheist	0.056 (0.364)	0.899** (0.338)	0.370 (0.401)	1.124** (0.355)
Religious attendance per year	-0.017*** (0.004)	-0.012** (0.004)	-0.005 (0.004)	-0.005 (0.004)
Immigrant generation (second = 0)				
First	-0.595* (0.255)	-0.472 (0.261)	-0.778* (0.312)	-0.524 (0.280)
Third and higher	-0.377 (0.392)	0.0371 (0.338)	0.109 (0.623)	-0.578 (0.349)

Table A3. (continued)

	Abortion Rights		Sexual-Gender Minority Protection	
	(A)	(B)	(A)	(B)
U.S. citizen	0.662 (0.416)	0.098 (0.361)	0.027 (0.305)	0.089 (0.355)
Woman	0.021 (0.187)	-0.077 (0.188)	-0.001 (0.186)	0.081 (0.183)
Gender-identity salience, man	2.080 (1.668)	-0.374 (1.557)	-5.307*** (1.511)	-0.397 (1.396)
Gender-identity salience, woman	2.571 (1.791)	3.718* (1.640)	-0.680 (2.148)	0.162 (1.695)
Employed	0.037 (0.206)	0.100 (0.220)	-0.030 (0.217)	-0.008 (0.223)
Family income, ln	0.274** (0.106)	0.177 (0.115)	0.154 (0.104)	0.117 (0.115)
College degree	0.576** (0.212)	0.0920 (0.226)	0.563** (0.199)	0.390 (0.211)
Marital status (married = 0)				
Never married	1.139*** (0.344)	0.227 (0.324)	0.494 (0.330)	0.458 (0.364)
Previously married	0.376 (0.302)	0.122 (0.282)	0.150 (0.273)	-0.168 (0.269)
Age, in years	-0.002 (0.008)	-0.019* (0.007)	-0.026*** (0.007)	-0.013 (0.009)
Constant	-0.973 (1.167)	0.643 (1.220)	2.943* (1.365)	1.108 (1.527)
Observations	1,541	1,499	1,516	1,510

Source: Authors' tabulation based on Ramakrishnan et al. 2018.

Note: Version (A) of abortion rights offers the following four choices: abortion should always be legal; legal most of the time; legal only in cases of rape, incest; legal to protect the life of the mother and illegal in all other cases. Version (B) asks respondents to choose the specific circumstances under which abortion should be legal: abortion should not be legal under any circumstances, even if the mother's life is in danger; only be legal in certain circumstances, such as when a woman's health is endangered or when pregnancy results from rape or incest; legal during the first three months of pregnancy, no matter what the reason; and legal under any circumstance. For protection of sexual and gender minorities, the two versions are "Do you favor or oppose legal protections against discrimination against gay, lesbian, and transgender people?" (version A), and "Do you favor or oppose legal protections against discrimination against gays and lesbians (version B)?" Bolded are coefficients that are statistically different across models. Data are from the NAAS 2016 post-election wave, weighted to represent the U.S. Asian population.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

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