



The Top 3 Things You Should Know About Asian Americans and Affirmative Action

- 1) **The so-called “Asian penalty” in the admissions process is not caused by affirmative action policies.** A commonly cited study by Espenshade and Radford determined that Asian American applicants need to score higher on standardized tests in order to gain admission into our country’s most selective colleges. In reality, any test score gap between Asian and other students is not related to affirmative action because [the same test score gaps exist whether a university considers race in its admissions policy or not](#). The author of the most widely-cited study has even explicitly stated that his research [does not establish anti-Asian bias](#). In fact, a [new study](#) finds that the supposed “Asian penalty” is due to “white admissions advantage,” and not affirmative action because the underrepresented minorities that stand to benefit from affirmative action comprise such a small proportion of the applicant pool. In fact, a [2016 study](#) found that completely eliminating African American and Latino applicants from the Harvard admissions pool only increases the admissions chances of Asian American students by 1 percent, making it quite unlikely that rejected Asian American applicants would be admitted even under a system that does not consider race.

Sources debunking the relevance of the “Asian penalty” to the affirmative action debate:

- Kimberly West-Faulcon, *Obscuring Asian Penalty with Illusions of Black Bonus*, 64 UCLA L. Rev. Disc. 590 (2017) (finding that any Asian penalty is caused by white student advantage and not affirmative action).
 - Sherick Hughes et al., *Causation Fallacy 2.0: Revising the Myth and Math of Affirmative Action*, 30 Educ. Pol’y 63 (2016).
 - William C. Kidder, *Misshaping the River: Proposition 209 and Lessons for the Fisher Case*, 39 J.C. & U.L. 53 (2013) (discussing the persistent test score gap regardless of affirmative action policies and the problem with looking at enrollment numbers to determine whether discrimination exists).
 - William T. Dickens & Thomas J. Kane, *Racial Test Score Differences as Evidence of Reverse Discrimination: Less Than Meets the Eye*, 38 Indus. Rel. 331 (1999) (discussing the persistent test score gap regardless of whether a school has an affirmative action program or not).
 - Meg P Bernhard & Noah J. Delwiche, *Groups File Federal Complaint Alleging Discrimination in Harvard Admissions Process*, The Harvard Crimson, May 16, 2015 (Espenshade quoted as follows: “I stop short of saying that Asian-American students are being discriminated against in the college application process because we don’t have sufficient empirical evidence to support that claim.”).
- 2) **Asian Americans benefit from affirmative action.** Although created largely to remedy past discrimination against African Americans, affirmative action has [opened doors](#) since the 1970s for many Asian Americans in education, employment, and contracting. After California eliminated affirmative action in its public universities, [Asian American students were less likely to get into the UC system](#) than under an affirmative action regime and certain underrepresented groups, such as [Filipino Americans are being shut out of the most selective universities](#). Today, race-conscious policies in higher education continue to benefit low-income Asian American students (Espenshade & Radford) and

Asian and Pacific Islander subgroups that suffer from much lower college completions rates, such as Southeast Asians, Pacific Islanders, and Native Hawaiians. Affirmative action benefits all Asian American students regardless of whether they individually benefit because it promotes diversity, which in turn, [improves the educational experience of students and better prepares them for better for a diverse and global workforce.](#)

Sources identifying benefits of affirmative action to Asian Americans

- Oiyen Poon, “Do Asian Americans Benefit from Race-Blind College Admissions Policies,” CARE (2017) (finding that Asian American admit rates dropped after affirmative action was eliminated).
- Julie J. Park, “Asian Americans and the Benefits of Campus Diversity: What the Research Says,” CARE (2015) (finding significant educational benefits for Asian Americans when they attend diverse campuses).
- Espenshade, Thomas J. & Radford, Alexandria Walton, *No Longer Separate, Not Yet Equal: Race and Class in Elite College Admission and Campus Life* (2009) (finding that affirmative action benefits low-income Asian Americans).
- Muratsuchi, Albert Y., *Race, Class, and UCLA School of Law Admissions, 1967-1994*, 16 Chicano-Latino L. Rev. 90 (1995) (discussing how African American and Latino student groups supported Asian American activists at UCLA to be included in the law school’s affirmative action program, even though it meant their communities would have less seats).
- [Why I support Affirmative Action at Harvard](#) by Jason Fong (via Angry Asian Man) (written when he was a senior in high school, applying to Harvard and other elite institutions).
- [Top Five Reasons Why Asian Americans & Pacific Islanders Should Support Affirmative Action](#) by Nicole Ochi (via Angry Asian Man).

- 3) **The affirmative action “divide” in the Asian American community is overstated.** Contrary to mainstream coverage of Asian American (mostly Chinese American) opposition to affirmative action, public opinion polling consistently shows that a majority of Asian Americans [support](#) affirmative action. More than [160 diverse Asian American and Pacific Islander groups](#) signed on to amicus briefs that supported affirmative action in the *Fisher* case. In contrast, groups like AACE, 80-20, and SFFA are overwhelmingly Chinese and only represent a fraction of the community. The media should do less to amplify these voices and more to amplify the voices of the vast majority of Asian Americans who support affirmative action, including the voice of Chinese immigrants who support affirmative action, like [Steven Chen](#); the prospective and current Asian American Harvard students that we represent who support affirmative action; and Asian American students and parents from the [most underrepresented AAPI subgroups](#), such as Vietnamese, Cambodian, Hmong, Guamanian, and Samoan communities, which all have lower educational attainment than average.

Other Resources

Recently, leading Asian American academics and activists had a [Twitter Town Hall](#) on affirmative action. You can find many links to empirical studies and other evidence related to the issue as well as a [list of AAPI individuals and organizations](#) working to support affirmative action.

Affirmative action contact: Nicole Ochi, (213) 241-0211, nochi@advancingjustice-la.org