

The Economic State of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in the United States

In recognition of Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) Heritage Month, this report provides a snapshot of the current economic state of the AANHPI community and their contributions to the American economy. This group, which makes up about 7% of the American population, is extremely diverse and [includes](#) approximately 50 ethnic groups speaking over 100 languages. This fact sheet disaggregates headline measures of economic well-being, showing the full diversity of the AANHPI community's economic state and the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. Findings including:

- Many AANHPI groups have fully recovered the jobs lost during the pandemic, thanks in part to the American Rescue Plan.
- High AANHPI median family income masks some groups' economic insecurity.
- Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders have higher rates of poverty, while Asian American poverty rates vary widely.
- Asian Americans' high level of educational achievement obscures wide-ranging disparities and low rates of college graduation for Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders.
- Despite high aggregate rates of health insurance coverage, the AANHPI community was disproportionately affected by the pandemic when controlling for socioeconomic factors.

A nuanced understanding of the economic status of AANHPI communities and the challenges they face will help policymakers shape structural solutions and support the ongoing economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic.

The Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander population is growing rapidly in the U.S.

In 2020, more than [24 million](#) people in the United States identified as Asian (including those who are mixed-race). This figure is nearly 40% higher than it was in 2010. Similarly, the number of Americans who identify as Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, including those who are mixed-race, increased by almost 30% over the last decade, from 1.2 million in 2010 to about 1.6 million in 2020. The Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander population in the United States is not just among the [fastest-growing](#), but also among the [most diverse](#), encompassing a large number of origin groups.

The socioeconomic diversity within the AANHPI community reflects the many different histories of AANHPI people. For example, many Japanese and Chinese Americans [immigrated](#)

in the 1800s to build railroads and to work on Hawaiian plantations alongside indigenous Hawaiians. In contrast, the vast majority of Indian Americans are workers with [advanced degrees](#) who immigrated after [1965](#), while many Bhutanese Americans are recent refugees.

The AANHPI community has made a strong economic recovery from the peak of the pandemic, thanks to pandemic relief like the American Rescue Plan and other equity initiatives introduced by President Biden

Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders were hit hard by the pandemic and the economic recession that followed, but in 2022, unemployment for some of these groups fell to lows not seen since before the coronavirus pandemic. The unemployment rate for Asian Americans peaked at 14.3% during the pandemic recession, but is now only 2.8% in early 2022. Similarly, unemployment among Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders spiked to 9.3%, but has now fallen to 3.8% for the early part of this year. In addition, small businesses owned by Asian Americans were [disproportionally affected](#) during this time, as [discrimination](#) and [fear of violence](#) took a toll on the quality of life of the AANPHI community and its business owners.

Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders Have Largely Recovered From Pandemic, but Disparities Remain				
	2019 Average Unemployment Rate	Pandemic Peak Unemployment Rate	Recent Unemployment Rate	Returned to 2019 Levels?
Asian American	2.7%	14.3%	2.8%	✘
Chinese	2.5%	14.5%	2.0%	✔
Indian	2.5%	9.4%	3.2%	✘
Filipino	3.0%	15.7%	2.8%	✔
Vietnamese	2.2%	24.4%	3.2%	✘
Korean	1.9%	12.2%	4.4%	✘
Japanese	2.3%	9.4%	1.7%	✔
Other Asian	3.6%	17.6%	3.0%	✔
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	3.2%	9.3%	3.8%	✘

Source: JEC analysis of Monthly Basic Current Population Survey Microdata, U.S. Census Bureau
 Note: Pandemic peak unemployment refers to April, May and June 2020. Recent unemployment refers to February, March and April 2022. Three month averages are used due to small sample sizes. Data are not seasonally adjusted. People of more than one race are not included in this analysis.

The [American Rescue Plan](#) helped Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders access immediate economic relief, reducing AANHPI poverty by nearly 22%. These relief programs included an extension of unemployment insurance, a fully refundable Child Tax Credit that significantly reduced child poverty and emergency rental assistance that kept families in their homes.

This assistance, plus a wide range of other health, security and economic [initiatives](#) focused on expanding equity for AANPHI workers, students, and entrepreneurs, has contributed to the broad economic recovery of the AANHPI community. Although gaps remain and the return to the labor force is still uneven, all AANHPI workers have seen job gains since the peak of the pandemic. Some groups even have lower unemployment rates today than before the pandemic.

This progress is encouraging and speaks to the effectiveness of President Biden’s investments in workers, families and small businesses to promote broad-based growth. However, the persistence of these labor market disparities reflects the work that lies ahead in order to expand economic growth and shared prosperity.

Disaggregated data is necessary to understand the economic state of AANHPI communities

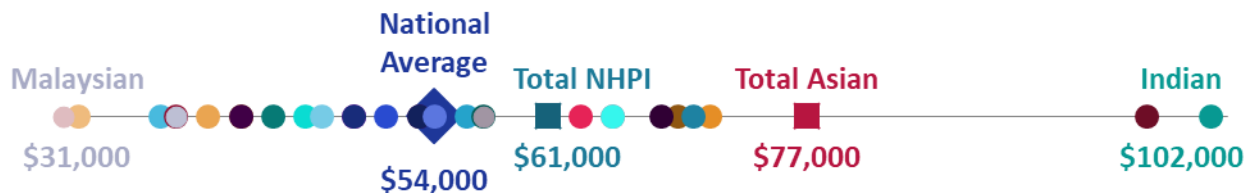
Aggregate statistics often hide important differences between groups and this is particularly true for AANHPI communities. In the aggregate, the AANHPI community seems prosperous, leading to the “[model minority](#)” stereotype that obscures the long history of systematic racism against AANHPI people and can pit the AANHPI community against other communities of color. This aggregated data does not show the full diversity of the AANHPI community, including the many AANHPI groups that are economically vulnerable. While federal and state governments have made significant progress towards disaggregating AANHPI data, [nuanced and disaggregated data](#) remains relatively rare.

High AANHPI family income masks some groups’ economic insecurity

National income statistics for AANHPI families require disaggregation to understand the existing disparities. In aggregate, Asian Americans’ median family income is 43% higher than the national median, and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders’ median income is 13% higher. However, Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders have the [highest level of income inequality](#) of any racial group, reflecting their diversity of experience. For example, Indian Americans have a median family income of \$102,000, nearly twice as high as the national median. However, [refugee](#) populations such as Malaysian Americans and [colonized](#) populations such as Native Hawaiians and the indigenous people of the Pacific Islands have median family incomes significantly below the national median.

High AANHPI Income Obscures Major Inequalities

Median family income by AANHPI origin group, 2015-2019



Source: JEC analysis of American Community Survey data

Note: NHPI signifies Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. Unlabeled data points are other origin groups.

Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders have higher rates of poverty, while Asian American poverty rates vary widely

Poverty rates vary widely across AANHPI groups. Fifteen percent of Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders live in poverty, compared to 13% of Americans overall. Micronesian Americans (outside of those from Guam) have the highest poverty rate of any AANHPI origin group at 31%. While the Asian American poverty rate is 11%, disaggregated data range from 6% for Filipino Americans to 27% for Burmese Americans.

AANHPI Poverty Rates Vary Widely

Poverty rate by AANHPI origin group, 2015-2019



Source: JEC analysis of American Community Survey data

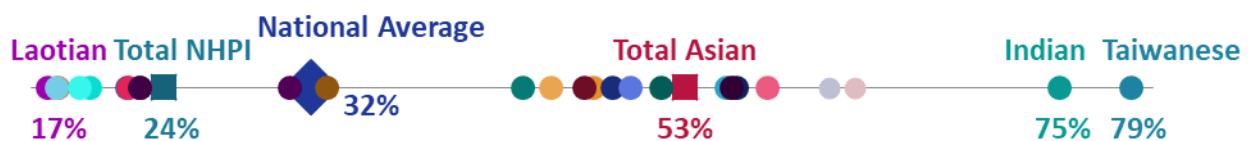
Note: NHPI signifies Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. Unlabeled data points are other origin groups.

Asian Americans' high level of educational achievement obscures wide-ranging disparities and low rates of college graduation for Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders

Aggregate metrics of educational achievement hide important disparities between AANHPI groups. Asian Americans have the [highest levels](#) of educational achievement of [any](#) major racial group, in large part because recent U.S. immigration policy has prioritized [immigrants](#) with advanced degrees and certain skills from Asia. In particular, 79% of Taiwanese Americans and 75% of Indian American adults have a bachelor's degree. In contrast, only 17% of Laotian Americans and 24% of Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders have a four-year college degree, compared to 32% of Americans overall.

There Are Wide Disparities in AANHPI Education Rates

Percentage with a bachelor's degree or higher by AANHPI origin group, 2015-2019



Source: JEC analysis of American Community Survey data

Note: NHPI signifies Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. Unlabeled data points are other origin groups.

Despite high aggregate rates of health insurance coverage, the AANHPI community was disproportionately affected by the pandemic when controlling for socioeconomic factors

On average, Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders and the overall population have similar levels of health insurance coverage at 93%, 92% and 91%, respectively. However, there is a significant gap between these averages and the groups with the lowest levels of health insurance coverage; only 79% of Mongolian Americans and 80% of Micronesians from Guam are insured.

In addition, the AANHPI community was hit hard by the pandemic, with Asian Americans overall being 49% [more likely](#) to die of COVID-19 than white Americans with similar backgrounds. In states with more granular data like California, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders had the [highest](#) death rates of any racial or ethnic group in the first year of the

pandemic. While disaggregated data is not available, this topline likely masks stark disparities. These disparities are driven in part by systematic discrimination in public health and medicine, including limited access to [testing](#).

Vulnerable Groups Are Left Behind in Health Insurance Coverage

Percentage with health insurance coverage by AANHPI origin group, 2015-2019



Source: JEC analysis of American Community Survey data

Note: NHPI signifies Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. Unlabeled data points are other origin groups.

Conclusion

Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) Heritage Month provides all Americans with an opportunity to celebrate the achievements and contributions of the AANHPI community, which is growing rapidly and is among the most diverse racial groups in the United States. While the AANHPI community was hit hard by the pandemic and the economic challenges that followed, many groups have fully recovered from the economic crisis, thanks in part to the American Rescue Plan and other equity-based initiatives focused on providing relief to students, workers, entrepreneurs and families.

The diversity of the AANHPI community requires disaggregated data to understand the important differences that shape their economic reality. For example, the high median AANHPI family income masks wide-ranging disparities between groups. Similarly, poverty rates vary widely across AANHPI households. Aggregate statistics of educational achievement also obscure the low rates of college graduation for Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders. These disparities contributed to the negative impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the AANHPI community, despite high rates of health insurance coverage. Addressing these inequities will be important to sustain the ongoing economic recovery and to ensure that it remains broad-based.

Topline Numbers Obscure Economic Inequalities Within the Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Communities

	Population	Median Family	Poverty Rate	Share With Bachelor's	Share With Health
Asian American	21,400,000	77,000	11%	53%	93%
Chinese	4,442,000	56,000	14%	56%	94%
Indian	4,185,000	102,000	7%	75%	95%
Filipino	3,556,000	71,000	6%	48%	94%
Vietnamese	1,923,000	53,000	12%	31%	92%
Korean	1,732,000	53,000	11%	56%	91%
Japanese	1,152,000	57,000	8%	52%	96%
Pakistani	488,000	68,000	15%	56%	89%
Hmong	290,000	51,000	20%	21%	92%
Cambodian	256,000	46,000	14%	19%	91%
Thai	208,000	40,000	13%	46%	89%
Laotian	197,000	49,000	13%	17%	91%
Bangladeshi	185,000	49,000	20%	49%	90%
Burmese	171,000	38,000	27%	22%	88%
Taiwanese	169,000	70,000	11%	79%	95%
Nepalese	164,000	44,000	17%	44%	86%
Indonesian	76,000	54,000	11%	50%	90%
Sri Lankan	48,000	65,000	9%	58%	92%
Bhutanese	26,000	57,000	17%	N/A	88%
Mongolian	20,000	38,000	24%	62%	79%
Malaysian	19,000	31,000	23%	63%	91%
Other Asian	1,434,000	98,000	14%	48%	93%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1,389,000	61,000	15%	24%	92%
Native Hawaiian	284,000	37,000	14%	22%	92%
Samoan	137,000	42,000	16%	18%	91%
Guamanian/Chamorro	113,000	42,000	13%	22%	92%
Tongan	41,000	47,000	13%	17%	89%
Fijian	35,000	65,000	9%	19%	90%
Other Micronesian	30,000	32,000	31%	N/A	80%
Other Pacific Islander	285,000	63,000	19%	22%	89%
Other AAPI	665,000	69,000	12%	33%	94%
National	324,698,000	54,000	13%	32%	91%

Source: JEC analysis of American Community Survey Data 2015-2019, IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org.

Note: Income data is in 2019 dollars. Data does not include pandemic effects or people living in territories. Some data are excluded due to small sample sizes and may not sum to totals due to rounding.