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Exploring the Commonwealth's Asian Population

PENN STATE HARRISBURG – The most recent release of American Community Survey introduced the addition of tables detailing ethnic subgroups within broader racial categories such as Asian alone, and this data provides an opportunity to analyze the proportion and distribution of our Asian residents in new and interesting ways. In order to inform our investigation of specific ethnic groups among Asian Pennsylvanians, we also will examine general population trends as they relate to Asian residents of the Commonwealth as a whole.

General Trends in Asian Alone Population

Pennsylvania's Asian residents totaled 392,595 in 2015 and accounted for approximately 3.1 percent of the total population of Pennsylvania. Asian alone is the third largest racial group in Pennsylvania after White alone (10,430,142) and Black alone (1,403,143) and before other significant groupings such as Two or more races (272,689) or Some other race alone (253,070). Since 2010, the Asian alone population increased from 332,435 to 392,595, an increase of about 18.1 percent – much higher than the state's general population growth of 1.3 percent during that time.

The Asian alone population consists of 204,462 females (52.1 percent) and 188,133 males (47.9 percent). The largest age cohorts for the Asian alone population, persons aged 35 to 45 years (65,488) and persons aged 45 to 54 years (49,420), account for over a quarter (29.2 percent) of the total Asian alone population in Pennsylvania (Figure 1).

Women are represented in larger proportions in each age cohort with the exception of persons aged 5 to 9 years (48.4 percent) and persons aged 20 to 24 years (49.3 percent). Females make up significantly larger portions of the 75 to 84 years (54.0 percent) and 85 years and over (56.9 percent) cohorts.
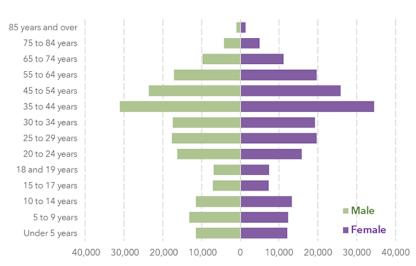

Figure 1. Age distribution of Asian alone population for PA, 2015.

Asian Population Ethnic Groups

There are over 20 distinct ethnic groups listed in the new ACS tables. The Asian Indian (114,874) and Chinese (100,019) groups make up the largest share of the Asian alone population, each at over 100,000 persons. Together, they are over half (54.7 percent) of all Asian residents of Pennsylvania (Figure 2).

The next largest ethnic groups include Vietnamese (42,642), Korean (39,803), and Filipino (24,680). In total, these three groups account for over a quarter (27.3 percent) of the Asian population.

All other groups consist of Cambodian (14,671), Pakistani (10,976), Japanese (7,236), and many more ethnicities including those who did not specify an ethnic group (3,701) or those who identified as two or more (7,417). These groups account for 70,577 persons or 18.0 percent of the total Asian alone population in Pennsylvania.

Trends in Ethnic Group Populations[1]

The highest numeric increases in the Asian alone population from 2011 to 2015 in Pennsylvania were for persons of Asian Indian (29,491) and Chinese (22,246) origin which accounted for 41.2 and 31.1 percent of the total gain, respectively. The Asian Indian population grew by 29.0 percent while the Chinese population grew by 25.6 percent from 2011 to 2015. The largest numeric decrease was for persons of Vietnamese descent at 3,060 (6.7 percent) and represented nearly a third of all Asian alone population loss (31.8 percent).

In terms of percent change, the five largest increases were for the Nepalese (418.9 percent), Sri Lankan (289.8 percent), Bangladeshi
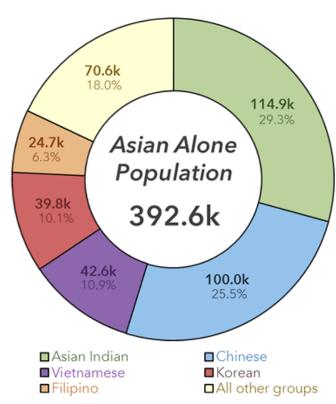

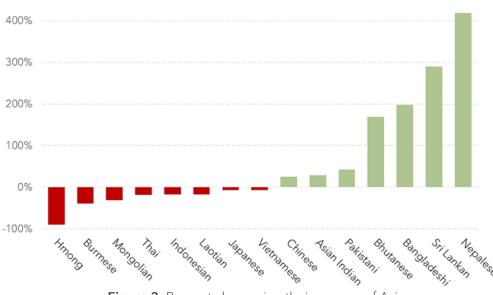**Figure 2.** Proportion of ethnic groups for Asian alone population of PA, 2015.

Figure 3. Percent change in ethnic groups of Asian alone population in PA, 2011-2015.

(198.3 percent), Bhutanese (169.4 percent), and Pakistani (42.8 percent) groups (Figure 4). In total, these groups accounted for nearly 15,000 additional persons in the Asian alone population of Pennsylvania which was responsible for over a fifth (20.8 percent) of the population growth. These groups originate from the South Asian region of Asia which surrounds India, the nation with the largest presence in Pennsylvania.

1. The data in this section are only available in the 2015 ACS 1-Year Estimates and should not be compared to or confused with the 5-Year Estimates.

The five largest decreases were for Hmong (89.9 percent), Burmese (39.1 percent), Mongolian (30.8 percent), Thai (19.2 percent), and Indonesian (17.8 percent) groups. These five groups experienced a total loss of just over 5,000 persons, and accounted for over half (55.1 percent) of the population lost by the Asian alone population in Pennsylvania. Much of the decrease in the Asian alone population was the result of a loss of persons of Southeast Asian ancestry from places like Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam, and Thailand.

Spatial Trends in Asian Alone Population

Asian residents of Pennsylvania are more represented in urban areas of the Commonwealth (Figure 4). The Asian alone population is primarily clustered in the southeast portion of the state around Philadelphia with significant populations outside of Pittsburgh, Harrisburg, Lancaster, Reading, and the Allentown-Bethlehem-Easton area. Asian residents are typically located outside the city areas in suburban and exurban communities (e.g. Chester, Delaware, and Montgomery Counties).

Figure 4. Location Quotient for the Asian Alone Population with select cities of PA, 2015.

The second most visible trend for the Asian alone population is proximity to universities. Tracts in counties such as Centre (Penn State University), Indiana (Indiana University of Pennsylvania), Lycoming (Lycoming College and Pennsylvania College of Technology), Crawford (Allegheny College), Butler (Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania), and others score high on the location quotient analysis due to the presence of Asian students, staff, and faculty. The high density of universities in the urban areas of the state such as Philadelphia and Pittsburgh likely contribute to the high location quotient values of tracts in and around those cities.

Asian population's settling patterns in Pennsylvania have been explored, but from where do these groups originate? While India and China were the two highest senders overall in 2015, when the data are normalized by their sending nation's population, the data reveal different trends (Figure 5). When the ethnic group populations are normalized by their sending nations' populations, the influence of India and China is less
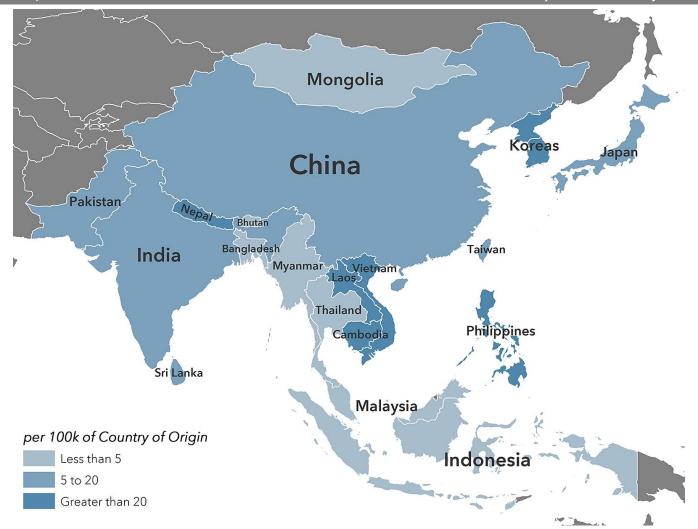
Figure 5. Asian ethnic group population in Pennsylvania normalized by nation-of-origin's population.

impactful. Out of every 100,000 persons in India and China, we receive only 9.2 and 7.3 persons, respectively. The nations with the largest presence in Pennsylvania based on their population are Cambodia (93.4 persons per 100k), the Koreas[2] (52.6 persons per 100k), Vietnam (45.2 person per 100k), Laos (33.9 persons per 100k), and the Philippines (24.4 persons per 100k). The nations with the lowest representation in Pennsylvania based on their populations are Thailand (4.0 persons per 100k), Bangladesh (2.6 persons per 100k), Malaysia (2.1 persons per 100k), Indonesia (0.9 persons per 100k), and Bhutan (0.3 persons per 100k).

2. The ACS 5-Year Estimates do not differentiate between North Korean or South Korean.