

Forces That Shape Ethnic Opinion

What Ethnic Americans Really Think

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Different patterns of self-definition and political thinking do appear to exist among the several ethnic groups in our survey. In the last chapter, we saw how each of the six communities was impacted by several demographic variables.

To obtain an even closer look at the impact of each of these factors, we reorganized the data from Chapter Four in order to compare how the ethnic identification and political ideology of each community is shaped by place of birth, education, religious observance, income, gender and age.

A. Ethnic Pride

1. Compared by Place of Birth

Table 1 Pride in Ethnic Heritage

	Italian	African	Hispanic	Jewish	Asian	Arab
U.S.-Born	78.5	91.5	81.5	86.5	83.0	88.5
Immigrants	85.5	90.0	86.5	79.5	78.5	92.5

Table 2 Importance of Ethnic Heritage

	Italian	African	Hispanic	Jewish	Asian	Arab
U.S.-Born	29.5	62.0	53.5	46.0	41.5	41.0
Immigrants	47.0	69.0	76.5	66.5	58.5	73.0

Table 3 Friendships Outside Ethnic Groups

	Italian	African	Hispanic	Jewish	Asian	Arab
U.S.-Born	97.5	79.0	91.5	90.5	98.0	96.0
Immigrants	91.5	84.5	70.0	87.5	81.0	83.0

While Arab American immigrants are more conservative than native-born Arab Americans, they are also more inclined than native-born Arab Americans to identify with the Democratic party. As in the case of other groups,

high school graduate Arab Americans lean more toward the Democratic party than college-educated, and Arab American women, more than Arab American males, are identified as Democrat, while younger Arab Americans are much less inclined toward the Republican party than older Arab Americans.

The degree of pride in ethnicity and the importance of ethnic heritage are clearly impacted by place of birth, but the impact varies from group to group. Quite logically, ethnic heritage appears to be more important for immigrants in all of our ethnic groups than it is for their native-born counterparts. But the similarity ends there.

In addition to ethnicity being more important to their self-definition, immigrant Italian and Arab Americans also feel more pride in their ethnic heritage than native-born Italian and Arab Americans. Jewish and Asian American immigrants, on the other hand, feel substantially less pride in their heritage than their native-born counterparts.

Generally speaking, most groups report that their immigrants form friendships outside of their ethnicity to a lesser degree than their native-born counterparts. The only exception to this pattern is African American immigrants. The legacy of racial separation and its impact on native-born African Americans appears to be the reason here.

2. Compared by Education Level

Table 4 Pride in Ethnic Heritage

	Italian	African	Hispanic	Jewish	Asian	Arab
High School	89.0	90.0	85.5	92.0	78.5	92.5
College	75.5	95.5	86.5	83.0	80.5	88.5

Table 5 Importance of Ethnic Heritage

	Italian	African	Hispanic	Jewish	Asian	Arab
High School	38.0	69.5	74.0	54.5	67.0	73.0
College	27.5	57.5	57.0	44.5	53.0	38.5

Table 6 Friendships Outside Ethnic Groups

	Italian	African	Hispanic	Jewish	Asian	Arab
High School	96.0	74.5	71.0	72.5	71.0	90.0
College	99.0	86.5	93.0	94.0	88.5	96.5

There is a clear pattern here. The higher the level of education, the lower the emphasis on ethnic heritage—both pride in heritage and its importance to self-definition. The only exception is in the case of African Americans, for whom pride in heritage increases as they become more educated.

All groups, to varying degrees, reveal that the college-educated among them have a higher percentage of friendships outside their ethnicity than those with high school degrees.

3. Compared by Frequency of Religious Observance

Table 7 Pride in Ethnic Heritage

	Italian	African	Hispanic	Jewish	Asian	Arab
Weekly	82.0	92.0	87.0	83.0	80.5	90.0
Never	61.5	85.5	75.0	64.0	72.0	87.0

Table 8 Importance of Ethnic Heritage

	Italian	African	Hispanic	Jewish	Asian	Arab
Weekly	36.0	67.0	70.0	76.5	57.5	54.5
Never	23.0	52.0	39.5	25.5	52.0	34.0

Table 9 Friendships Outside Ethnic Groups

	Italian	African	Hispanic	Jewish	Asian	Arab
Weekly	97.5	75.5	74.5	81.0	87.5	91.0
Never	97.0	82.0	91.0	97.0	90.5	96.5

Without exception, there is a direct correlation between pride in heritage and the importance of ethnic heritage and attendance at religious services. Those who say they attend services weekly are more likely to indicate, to a greater degree, pride in their heritage and the importance

of heritage in self-definition. The degree is most significant among Jewish Americans.

4. Compared by Income Level

Table 10 Pride in Ethnic Heritage

	Italian	African	Hispanic	Jewish	Asian	Arab
\$25–50,000	81.5	93.5	82.0	89.0	82.0	89.5
\$75,000	74.0	93.0	86.0	88.5	80.0	90.0

Table 11 Importance of Ethnic Heritage

	Italian	African	Hispanic	Jewish	Asian	Arab
\$25–50,000	28.5	60.4	66.5	48.0	54.0	54.0
\$75,000	24.0	55.5	51.0	42.0	43.0	48.5

Table 12 Friendships Outside Ethnic Groups

	Italian	African	Hispanic	Jewish	Asian	Arab
\$25–50,000	98.0	80.5	84.5	87.0	80.0	96.5
\$75,000	98.0	88.0	93.0	95.5	88.0	99.0

Income is less of a determinant in ethnic pride than the other factors explored in this survey—but it does have an impact on some groups.

The general pattern that emerges is that ethnicity becomes slightly less important in self-definition as ethnics earn more income. And most ethnic groups in the higher income bracket report a slight increase in friendships outside their groups.

5. Compared by Gender

Table 13 Pride in Ethnic Heritage

	Italian	African	Hispanic	Jewish	Asian	Arab
Male	77.5	91.5	87.0	83.0	80.0	89.0
Female	80.5	91.5	86.0	89.0	79.5	90.5

Table 14 Importance of Ethnic Heritage

	Italian	African	Hispanic	Jewish	Asian	Arab
Male	22.0	62.0	60.0	35.5	49.0	42.5
Female	38.5	63.0	69.0	60.0	60.0	61.0

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Table 15 Friendships Outside Ethnic Groups

	Italian	African	Hispanic	Jewish	Asian	Arab
Male	97.5	82.5	83.5	93.0	80.0	94.5
Female	97.5	76.5	75.5	88.0	90.0	89.0

Ethnic heritage is vastly more important to Italian, Jewish and Arab American women than it is to men in those three ethnic communities. To a somewhat lesser degree, gender plays a similar role for Asian and Hispanics. There are no gender differences among African Americans with regard to the importance of ethnicity in self-definition.

Slightly more African, Hispanic, Jewish, Asian and Arab American males report having friendships outside their ethnic groups than their female counterparts. The notable exception here is Asian American females, who report ten percent more external friendships than Asian American males.

6. Compared by Age

Table 16 Pride in Ethnic Heritage

	Italian	African	Hispanic	Jewish	Asian	Arab
18–34	70.5	89.5	86.5	86.0	76.0	91.0
55–69	85.0	94.5	84.5	87.5	83.5	91.0

Table 17 Importance of Ethnic Heritage

	Italian	African	Hispanic	Jewish	Asian	Arab
18–34	26.0	55.5	65.0	43.5	50.0	52.0
55–69	36.0	70.5	70.5	48.5	49.0	59.0

Table 18 Friendships Outside Ethnic Groups

	Italian	African	Hispanic	Jewish	Asian	Arab
18–34	98.5	85.0	79.5	83.0	87.5	92.0
55–69	97.0	75.0	71.0	93.5	82.5	91.0

The age of some of our respondents does impact their attitudes toward their ethnic community. Older Italian Americans, and to a lesser extent older Asian and African

Americans, feel greater degree of ethnic pride than their younger ethnic counterparts.

But the importance of ethnic heritage in forming the self-definition of our respondents increases among older ethnic Americans in almost all our groups. The most significant increases are among African Americans and Italian Americans.

A lower percentage of older African Americans, and Hispanic and Asian Americans, than their younger counterparts, report friendships outside their ethnic communities. Only among older Jewish Americans do these external friendships increase.

B. Political Identification

1. Compared by Place of Birth

Table 19 Ideology—Liberal/Conservative

	Italian	African	Hispanic	Jewish	Asian	Arab
U.S.-Born	28.5/33.0	41.5/25.0	40.5/26.0	50.0/19.5	29.5/32.5	26.5/36.5
Immigrant	22.0/38.0	43.0/23.5	32.5/33.5	37.0/28.0	35.5/26.0	16.5/40.5

Table 20 Party—Democrat/Republican

	Italian	African	Hispanic	Jewish	Asian	Arab
U.S.-Born	38.0/32.0	78.0/6.0	56.5/17.0	67.5/15.0	33.5/31.0	35.7/38.5
Immigrant	26.5/59.0	76.5/15.0	57.5/27.0	53.0/20.5	36.0/23.5	39.0/30.0

Italian, Hispanic, Jewish and Arab American immigrants tend to be less liberal and more conservative than their native-born counterparts. Asian Americans, on the other hand, move in the opposite direction, with Asian American immigrants appearing to be somewhat more liberal and less conservative than native-born Asian Americans.

Native-born Italian and Jewish Americans tend to identify more with the Democratic party and less with the Republican party than their immigrant counterparts. The opposite is true for Asian and Arab American immigrants whose identification with the Republican party is lower than it is for native-born Asian and Arab Americans. African and Hispanic American immigrants also tend to identify slightly more with the Republican party, but overall identification with the Democratic party remains quite high among both groups.

2. Compared by Education Level

Table 21 Ideology—Liberal/Conservative

	Italian	African	Hispanic	Jewish	Asian	Arab
High School	28.5/30.5	31.5/32.5	38.5/33.0	36.5/32.0	26.5/29.0	24.5/41.5
College	29.0/33.5	49.5/12.5	38.0/25.0	51.5/75.5	24.5/28.5	22.5/37.0

Table 22 Party—Democrat/Republican

	Italian	African	Hispanic	Jewish	Asian	Arab
High School	49.5/26.0	79.5/7.0	57.0/20.5	60.0/22.0	30.0/32.5	49.0/30.5
College	33.5/37.0	74.9/9.5	53.5/23.5	69.0/14.0	32.0/26.5	35.5/38.5

Their level of education appears to have a significant impact on the political outlook of African and Jewish Americans, with college-educated members of both groups appearing to be notably more liberal and substantially less conservative than their high school-educated counterparts.

Education had a similar but less substantial impact on the political philosophy of Hispanic and Asian Americans. It appears to have no impact on Italian and Arab Americans. Education levels appear to have only a slight impact on the party identification of African, Hispanic and Asian Americans. As Italian and Arab Americans become college educated, they tend to identify more than their high school counterparts with the Republican Party. The opposite holds true for Jewish Americans.

3. Compared by Frequency of Religious Observance

Table 23 Ideology—Liberal/Conservative

	Italian	African	Hispanic	Jewish	Asian	Arab
Weekly	24.5/34.0	39.5/26.0	33.5/36.5	34.0/32.0	25.5/38.5	17.5/47.5
Never	37.5/26.0	44.5/14.5	41.0/26.5	58.0/15.0	38.5/24.5	32.0/22.5

Table 24 Party—Democrat/Republican

	Italian	African	Hispanic	Jewish	Asian	Arab
Weekly	36.5/42.0	78.0/6.0	57.0/23.5	59.0/21.0	24.5/28.0	36.0/40.5
Never	44.5/25.5	50.0/9.5	60.5/16.0	73.5/11.0	40.5/27.0	29.5/29.0

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The impact of religious observance on the political philosophy of our surveyed ethnic Americans is substantial and consistent across the board. In all groups, those who are religiously observant tend to be more conservative and less liberal than those who are non-observant.

The same holds true, but to a slightly less degree, with party identification. The only exception here is with non-observant Arab Americans, who tend to be both Democratic and less Republican than Arab Americans who attend weekly religious services.

4. Compared by Income Level

Table 25 Ideology—Liberal/Conservative

	Italian	African	Hispanic	Jewish	Asian	Arab
\$25–50,000	26.0/39.0	48.0/20.5	40.0/31.0	49.5/24.0	26.5/32.0	20.0/42.5
\$75,000	27.0/26.5	50.0/23.0	28.5/34.5	50.0/17.0	39.0/30.0	32.0/22.5

Table 26 Party—Democrat/Republican

	Italian	African	Hispanic	Jewish	Asian	Arab
\$25–50,000	36.0/26.0	80.0/65.0	62.0/24.0	64.0/19.0	43.5/19.5	35.5/44.5
\$75,000	35.0/37.0	69.0/9.5	41.0/37.5	66.0/15.5	22.5/34.0	33.5/39.0

Income plays a role in determining the political philosophy of our ethnic groups, but not in the way one might expect. As Italian, Jewish, Asian and Arab Americans earn more income, they identify less with a conservative political outlook. Among African and Hispanic Americans, the impact of income appears to be slight.

The impact of income on party identification, on the other hand, presents a more complex picture. Italian, African, Hispanic and Asian Americans become more Republican and less Democratic as they report larger incomes. Both Jewish and Arab Americans who earn more than \$75,000 a year show a slight drop in identification with the Republican Party.

5. Compared by Gender

Table 27 Ideology—Liberal/Conservative

	Italian	African	Hispanic	Jewish	Asian	Arab
Male	24.0/36.5	44.0/24.5	36.0/33.0	49.0/19.0	38.5/26.5	23.0/40.0
Female	32.0/30.0	39.0/25.0	35.5/29.0	48.5/20.0	29.5/28.5	24.0/34.5

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Table 28 Party—Democrat/Republican

	Italian	African	Hispanic	Jewish	Asian	Arab
Male	35.0/39.5	73.5/7.0	55.0/24.0	62.5/15.0	36.0/24.5	36.5/38.0
Female	39.5/27.5	82.0/6.0	59.0/18.5	69.5/16.5	34.5/27.0	39.5/33.0

Only among Italian Americans does gender appear to play a significant role in influencing political philosophy and party identification. Italian American women are more liberal, less conservative, more Democrat and less Republican than Italian American men.

In the other ethnic communities in our study, the results are less clear. Asian American men, for example, are more liberal and only slightly more Democratic than Asian American women. The reverse is true for Arab Americans. Jewish women are more Democratic than Jewish men, but they are both equally Liberal.

6. Compared by Age

Table 29 Party—Democrat/Republican

	Italian	African	Hispanic	Jewish	Asian	Arab
18–34	26.5/29.5	73.0/5.5	49.0/17.0	61.5/18.0	47.0/20.5	40.0/24.5
55–69	44.0/34.0	83.0/7.5	55.5/26.5	67.5/16.5	23.5/30.5	39.0/35.5

Older Italian, African, Hispanic and Jewish Americans have a greater affinity toward the Democratic party. Older Asian and Arab Americans are more Republican. Of the other groups, only younger Asian Americans are more Democratic than their older counterparts.

Final Observations

Even after five chapters and ninety-four tables of data, it is safe to say that we have only just scratched the surface of this study. When printed in full, a complete set of cross-tabulations from Zogby International’s “culture polls” contains over 2,000 pages of tables. What we have presented here is a synopsis of that data—its essence—in an effort to determine how ethnic Americans define themselves and how they think about issues.

What we have found is that ethnicity is a factor in shaping many people’s self-definition and outlook. Clearly, most ethnic Americans, even those who are first, second and third generation native-born Americans, remain proud of their heritage. And this heritage, and the shared sense of history, culture and concerns that it represents, does, in fact, have a measurable impact on attitudes.

When four in five or more say that they are proud of their heritage, and when one-third to two-thirds of all of our respondents say that this heritage is *very* important to their self-definition—then we must pay attention to this factor.

How the impact of this factor makes itself felt may vary from group to group, and may increase in intensity from issue to issue. It is, for example, well-known that each ethnic community has some specific issue of concern, oftentimes foreign policy matters, that defines a key part of their political agenda.

While we measured the importance of many of these issues in polling our six individual ethnic communities, in this book we focused on the attitudes of ethnic Americans toward a more general set of issues that all have in common.

We found some areas where responses were quite similar. We also found some areas where striking differences exist between our groups and even their component subgroups. We found, for example, that of all of our groups, ethnic pride and the importance of ethnicity are strongest among African Americans, and to a different extent, immigrant Jewish and Arab Americans—groups that have experienced a degree of discrimination.

Though ethnic pride and identification are strongest among immigrants and only somewhat less strong among college-educated and wealthier native-born Americans, the pull of this force remains quite strong. More than 50% of all of our respondents retain a “strong emotional tie to the land of their “heritage,” and almost 20% of those surveyed send money to family in the countries of their background.

We also found evidence in our study of the effects of discrimination. Although we seek to become “one America,” almost half of our respondents reported experiencing discrimination because of their ethnic heritage, and more than 15% of our respondents noted that they do not have close personal friendships with individuals of other ethnic communities.

We also noted a connection between ethnic pride, religiosity and political philosophy. We found, for example, that the pull of ethnicity is most deeply felt among those who are the most religiously-observant in their respective communities. More than 50% of all of our respondents attend religious services at least weekly. And this group, by and large, appears to be more conservative in political outlook.

On the whole, however, we found that it is difficult to apply traditional labels to the positions that these ethnic Americans take on important current issues. In fact, if the combined set of positions supplied by all six ethnic

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communities were bundled together as a package, they contradict a central tenet of contemporary conventional political wisdom. While many self-styled “moderates” in both political parties have come to define the “new” political center as fiscally conservative and socially liberal, what we have found in our study, is that on many key issues, our groups are both fiscally liberal and socially conservative.

All of this should give pause to policymakers and provide material for further research for analysts. Our “culture polls” represent only a beginning of this study—a benchmark against which we intend to measure the results of future surveys. Much more can and should be done. We invite those who are interested to investigate our complete cross tabulations to make their own comparative studies.

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