



Oh, S.N.A.P.! Same Dream, Different Politics? Generational Differences in Economic-Mobility Policy Attitudes Among Chinese Americans in New York City

Xuyin Zhong, Economics and Social History | Mentor: Kurt Semm PhD., Economics

Research Question

How does generational status affect support for government policies aimed at reducing economic inequality among Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans in New York City?

Research-specific definitions for key terms:

- generational status: An individual's relationship to immigration across generations:
- 1st Generation: Foreign-born.
 - 2nd Generation: U.S.-born with ≥1 foreign-born parent.
 - 3rd+ Generation: U.S.-born with U.S.-born parents.
- government policies aimed at reducing:
- income redistribution and social welfare
 - labor and wages,
 - housing
 - healthcare and essential social provision
- economic inequality: the disparities in the distribution of economic resources, security, and access to essential goods and opportunities, including income, employment, housing, education, and protection from poverty.

Methods

A mixed-methods descriptive analysis combined demographic, public-opinion, and qualitative data.

- IPUMS USA (1970–2024)**: Census/ACS microdata were filtered in R to NYC residents identified as Chinese (RACED = 400). BPL was recoded as U.S.-born/foreign-born. Using PERWT, I examined education (EDUCD), personal income (INCTOT), poverty (POVERTY), labor-force/employment status (LABFORCE, EMPSTAT), and owner-occupied housing (OWNERSHP).
- NAAS (2008; 2016 Pre/Post)**: Samples were restricted to respondents labeled Chinese. Respondent and parental birthplace (QA2–QA4; S9, Q1_1, Q1_2) were recoded into 1st, 2nd, and 3rd+ generations. Policy responses were collapsed into support/non-support and analyzed using survey weights.
- CMPS (2020)**: ASIAN_ETH = Chinese identified 974 respondents. S7 and Q809 were recoded into 1st (n=352), 2nd (n=496), and 3rd+ (n=101) generations. Q62R5 was collapsed into agree/disagree on whether social programs interfere with personal freedom and analyzed using WEIGHT.
- CPC & SiNCG (2026)**: Existing findings from 6 intragenerational focus groups + 3 intergenerational discussions conducted across Chinatown, Sunset Park, and Flushing provided qualitative NYC context. CPC/SiNCG recorded and transcribed sessions and thematically coded transcripts, summaries, and notes.

All quantitative data were cleaned, recoded, weighted, and descriptively analyzed in R. Results are reported primarily as weighted percentages and weighted medians. Income was converted to 2024 dollars.

Lastly, the quantitative data was contextualized by CPC qualitative discussions.

Introduction and Background Information

Economic mobility is central to the preconceived “**American Dream**”, yet immigrant generations may understand opportunity and government responsibility differently. **Segmented assimilation theory** suggests that migration experiences and incorporation into U.S. institutions can produce distinct socioeconomic experiences across generations (Zhou, 1997). **Political socialization theory** further emphasizes how family, education, peers, media, and civic life shape political beliefs, potentially exposing generations to different understandings of inequality and government responsibility (Kuziemko et al., 2015). Recent NYC research in 3 Chinese American communities found that older adults more often emphasized economic opportunity and stability, while youth emphasized civic voice and structural explanations of inequality (CPC & SiNCG, 2026).

Goals and Objectives

This research started with my family.

Economic policies has always been a source of political disagreement between my parents and me where we would not see eye to eye on topics surrounding opportunity, inequality, and the role of government. So, admittedly, this project began somewhat selfishly: I wanted data that could help me understand my own family. But that personal question became a much larger one and attempts to answer the following:

- How do different generations understand economic opportunity and the government's responsibility in creating it due to migration experiences, socioeconomic mobility, and political socialization?
- Ultimately, can looking across generations complicate the idea of Chinese Americans as a politically homogeneous group?



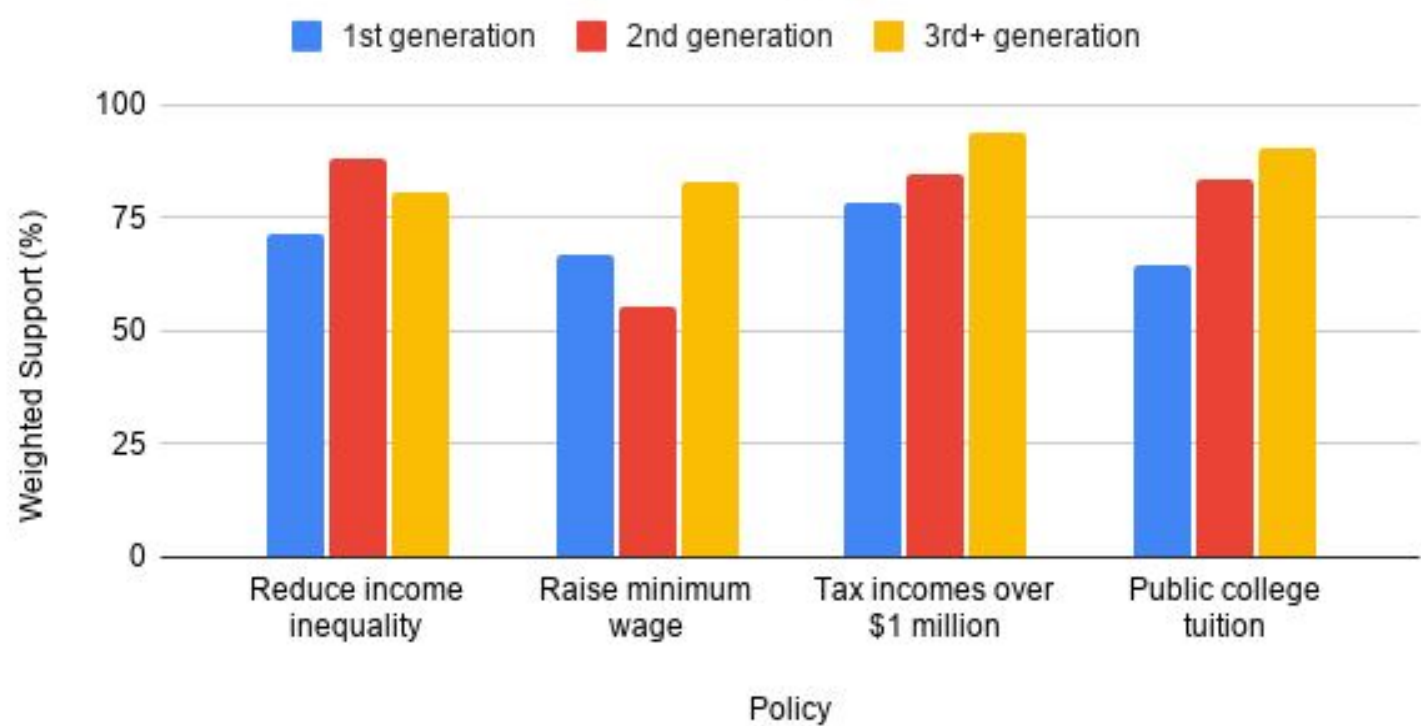
Discussion and Results

Finding #1: Generation matters, but not uniformly.

Later-generation respondents showed greater support for millionaire taxation and public-college investment, while minimum-wage and inequality attitudes were nonlinear.

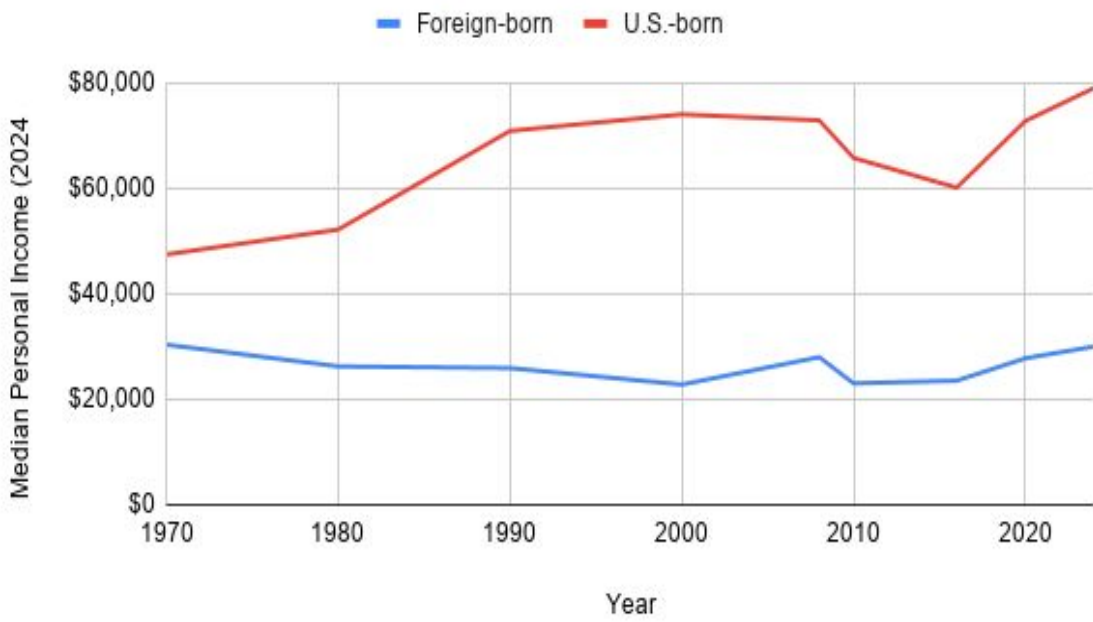
Weighted percentage who *strongly/somewhat agreed*. Chinese respondents only. 1st generation = foreign-born; 2nd = U.S.-born with ≥1 foreign-born parent; 3rd+ = U.S.-born with U.S.-born parents. Estimates are descriptive; later-generation subsamples are smaller. (NAAS Post 2016 Data)

Support for Economic-Mobility Policies Among Chinese American Respondents, by Generation

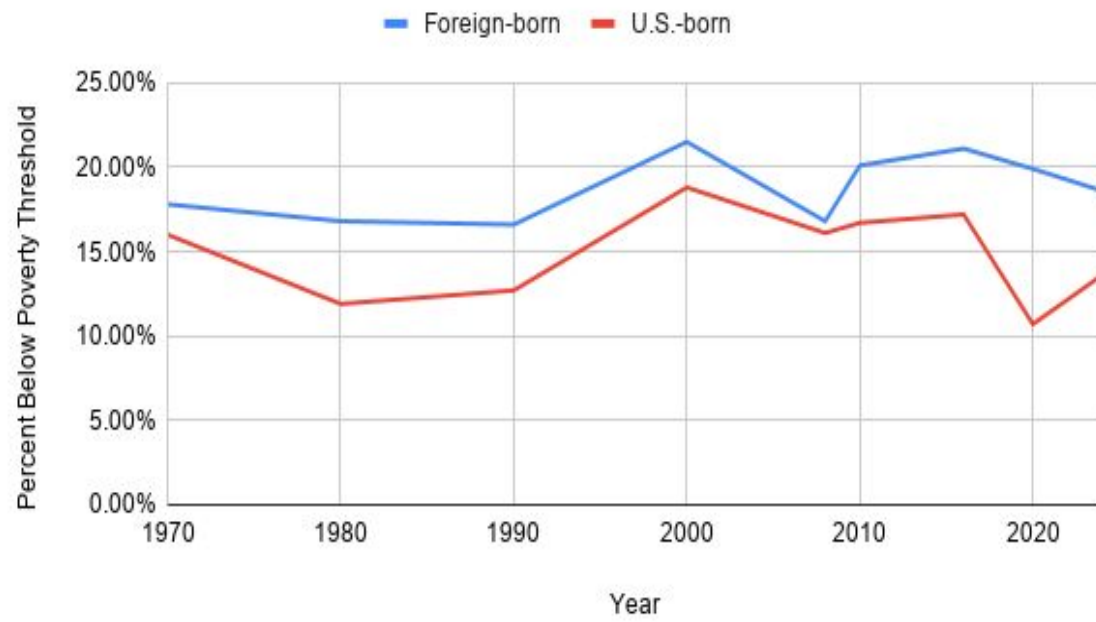


Finding #2: Economic incorporation differs substantially by nativity. By 2024, median personal income was \$79,000 among U.S.-born vs. \$30,000 among foreign-born Chinese New Yorkers, while poverty was 13.6% vs. 18.6%, respectively.

Median Personal Income Among Chinese New Yorkers Ages 25-64, by Nativity, 1970-2024

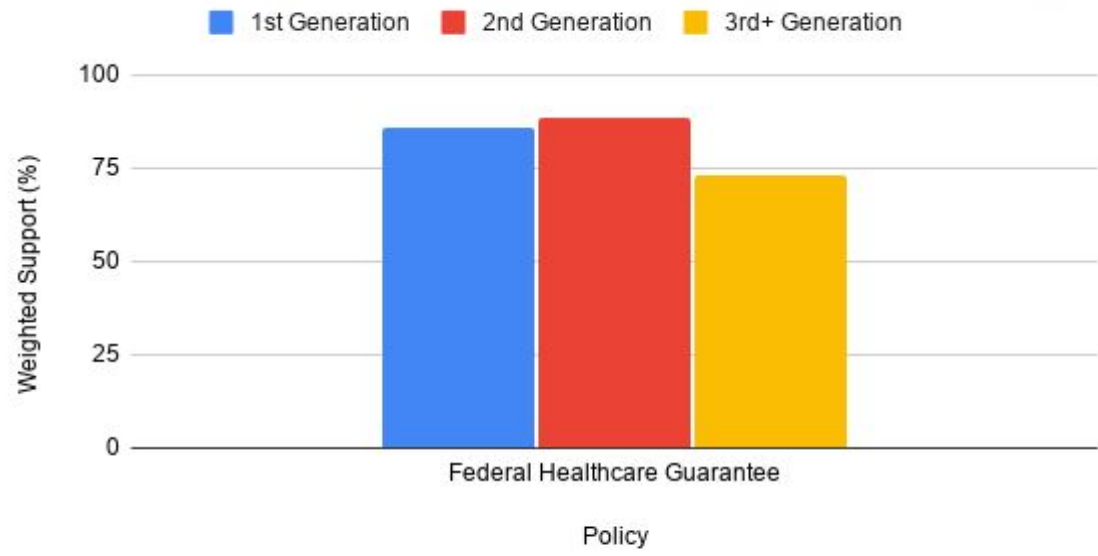


Poverty Rate Among Chinese New Yorkers, by Nativity, 1970-2024

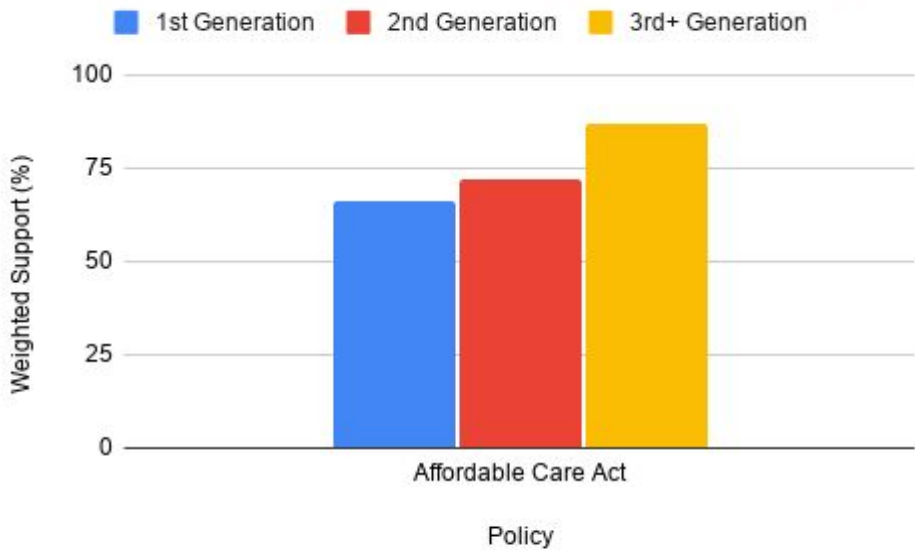


Economic Conditions Among Chinese New Yorkers, by Nativity, 1970–2024 (IPUMS USA Data)

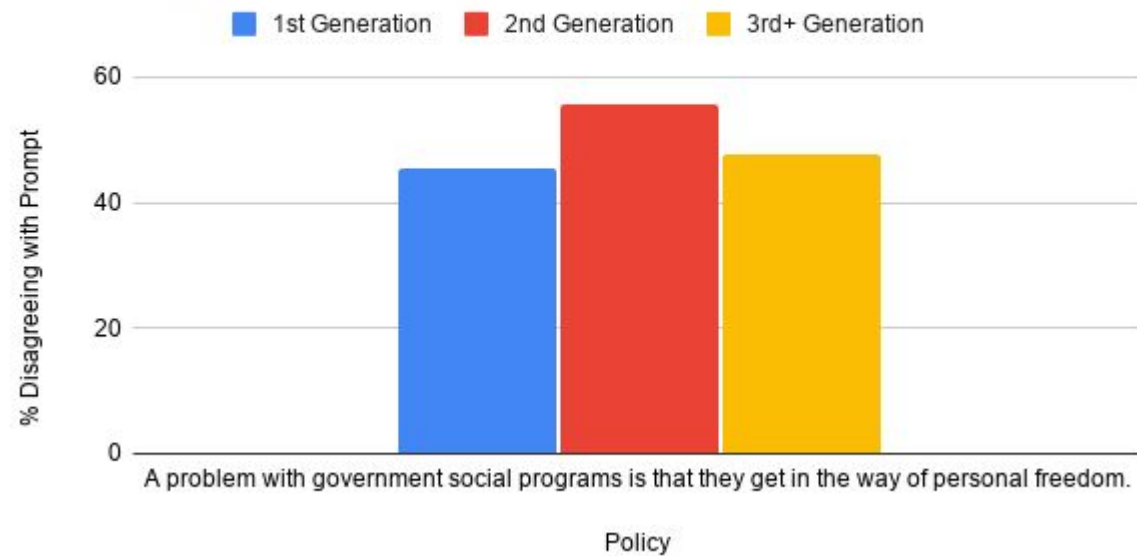
Support for a Federal Healthcare Guarantee Among Chinese American Respondents, by Generation (NAAS Post 2008)



Support for ACA Among Chinese American Respondents, by Generation (NAAS Pre 2016)



Perceptions of Government Social Programs and Personal Freedom, by Generation (CMPS 2020)



Conclusions and Next Steps

- Generation matters, but not linearly.** Support for government intervention varied by both generation and policy.
- 2nd generation may be distinctive.** The nonlinear 2nd → 3rd+ patterns raise new questions about how immigrant political identities evolve across generations and if 2nd generation is political unique.
- Main Takeaway:** Generation shapes political attitudes — but it does not determine them. This study also challenges the idea that Chinese Americans are a politically homogeneous group. Next, I hope to explore the lived and historical experiences behind these patterns, including through my LiA in Hong Kong (fingers crossed!).

Scan QR for References



Acknowledgements

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