



Written by [Luis Miguel](#) on November 4, 2022

## Asian Americans Take Opposing Sides of Affirmative-action Debate

Asian groups are finding themselves on opposite sides of the ideological debate as two consequential affirmative action cases are heard by the U.S. Supreme Court, the ultimate decisions for which could have wide-reaching and long-lasting repercussions for the controversial race policy.

The fight began with cases brought against Harvard and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill by an organization called Students for Fair Admissions, which has generally been seen as an anti-affirmative action group. The organization has represented over 20,000 students and parents in court, the majority of which have been Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders who claim to have been rejected by universities due to their race.



jorgeantonio/iStock/Getty Images Plus  
Harvard University

In the Harvard and UNC cases, which were originally filed in 2014, the organization claims the two colleges racially discriminate against Asians in the application review process. The cases were finally heard by the high court on Monday.

Because the Supreme Court currently has a conservative majority, it's widely believed that this could at last be the death knell of affirmative action, a set of policies that seeks to include minority groups in schools, workplaces, and other settings for diversity's sake regardless of whether the included individuals are more qualified than non-minorities who were rejected.

Although Asian Americans have largely been at the forefront of the movement to end affirmative action, ethnically Asian leftists have been organizing in favor of the policy in order to counter the conservative case.

Sarah Zhang, a sophomore at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, leads the school's first pro-affirmative action group.

"We've all experienced racism, and we know what it's like to feel isolated in our hometowns and in our classrooms," Zhang [told NBC News](#). "It's tough to stay hopeful, but it's important to note that we're doing this because we love our campus and want to continue cultivating this space for diversity at Carolina."

Left-leaning Asian Americans have similarly been rallying at Harvard, calling for the preservation of affirmative action.

NBC notes:



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“Coming to Harvard, I was meeting people for the first time that had a biracial identity or that were mixed between, say, Indian and another race,” said Sruthi Kumar, who is Indian American and a junior at Harvard. “I had my first teacher of color as a freshman in college.”

Kumar, who is a member of student activist group Coalition for a Diverse Harvard, has been organizing with her peers to keep affirmative action alive. She was part of a group of over 100 students from across the country that went to protest outside the court Monday, and she worries that taking away race-conscious admissions would mean chipping away at campus diversity everywhere.

“That world I walked into freshman year might not be the reality for incoming classes,” she said. “That really scares me.”

U.S. Solicitor General Elizabeth Prelogar defended affirmative action before the Supreme Court this week, [making the case](#) that the country “relies on having a diverse pipeline of individuals who had the experience of learning in a diverse educational environment and who themselves reflect the diversity of the American population.”

It’s not only universities, but big business that has come to affirmative action’s defense. Google, Apple, General Motors, and Adobe are among the dozens of large companies that have spoken out in favor of the defendants in the Harvard and UNC cases.

Earlier in the year, the companies filed an [amicus brief](#) stating that they have “a significant interest” in the cases as they “rely on the nation’s schools to educate and train their future workers.”

“While the benefits of diversity are real and tangible — and corporate DE&I programs seek to maximize those benefits — Amici do not recruit applicants in a vacuum,” the brief reads. “To succeed, these DE&I efforts depend on university admissions programs that lead to graduates educated in racially and ethnically diverse environments.”

Despite these arguments, affirmative action’s days appear to be numbered. Conservatives have a 6-3 majority on the court, and even the most-often conservative defector — Chief Justice John Roberts — appears to be no fan of affirmative action.

As Fox News [notes](#), in Roberts’ first term on the court, “It is a sordid business, this divvying us up by race.” And in the current case, when Harvard lawyer Seth Waxman recalled a time affirmative action was used to fill an orchestra’s need for an oboe player, Roberts noted, “We did not fight a Civil War over oboe players.”



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