



HOME

PROGRAMS

ABOUT US

NEWS

DONATE

EVENTS

CONTACT US

The First Presidential Debate, Asian Americans, and Affirmative Action

September 30, 2012 9:43 PM

If you're one of those undecided Asian Americans out there (32 percent nationwide, according to the recent National Asian American Survey), you really only have one question that should tip the scales for you: Where do the candidates stand on affirmative action?

That's right, for Asian Americans the single issue that seems to unify us all is affirmative action. (And just when we thought it was the issue that divided us.)

That's one of my takeaways from the aforementioned [National Asian American Survey](#) released last week that oversamples and polls in-language Asian Americans throughout the country (enough so that it can boast a margin of error of +/-2 percent in the broad Asian American category).

Overall, when it comes to the issues, NAAS says Asian Americans aren't really all that different from the rest of the country's demographics. The top issues are the top issues. Among likely Asian American voters, 54.5 percent said the Economy, according to the NAAS.

Jobs was at 13.1 percent.

Then there was a big drop to health care at 4.1 percent. Education at 3.9 percent. Budget deficit was at 2.8 percent. Poverty was at 2.5 percent. My personal favorite, racism, was mentioned by just 1.8 percent of likely voters as the top issue, with immigration bringing up the rear at 1 percent.

Of course, the question was worded "what was the *most* important problem in the United States," so of course, Asian Americans who *must* always have the right answer wouldn't say something important personally. They stuck with the truism, because as we all know, "It's the economy, stupid."

When NAAS respondents were asked to name *two* top issues, it didn't change anything. The Economy was named by 66 percent of likely voters, with the same rankings for the others. Race/Racism and Immigration were mentioned slightly more often, but still took up the last spots with 4.4 percent and 4.6 percent respectively.

What the NAAS tells us is that our views are more generally assimilated than we think, and not defined by race at all. Asian Americans aren't playing grievance politics in Election 2012. We're not race-conscious Americans. Just Americans.

But when asked specifically about Affirmative Action, Asian Americans do perk up and take notice. And vive la difference.

In overwhelming fashion, the NAAS revealed that more than 74 percent, or roughly three-quarters, of all Asian Americans support affirmative action.

The poll reveals it's really our issue.

As he presented the findings last week in Washington, D.C., NAAS lead author Karthick Ramakrishnan talked about "the food fight" that has occurred between some Asian American groups over the *Fisher v. Texas* case scheduled to be heard by the Supreme Court on Oct. 10.

Fisher is the case that conservatives are hoping could end affirmative action forever. Among those in the anti-affirmative action camp is 80-20, a group of Asian Americans that believes affirmative action actually hurts our community.

Read my takes on the *Fisher* case here:

[Asian vs. Asian: Why are some Asian Americans carrying Abby Fisher's water in the affirmative action debate?](#)
[Affirmative action foes' new tool: Asian Americans as the New Jews](#)
[Are Asian Americans really for the end of affirmative action?](#)

Ramakrishnan mentioned how 80-20 buttressed its position with its own online survey of its membership, as well as anecdotal comments stating how Asian Americans were harmed by affirmative action, and therefore needed to back Fisher in order to end the practice.

What Ramakrishnan didn't mention was 80-20's "food fight" also included spam that contained over-the-top attacks against other Asian American community groups that are pro-affirmative action. Specifically, 80-20 took the ad hominem route naming the executive directors of APALC and AALDEF. Was 80-20 just trying to get some attention? It didn't work, mostly because the group really couldn't back up its claims. The NAAS poll puts the food fight to rest.

Three-quarters of all Asian Americans supporting affirmative action confirm that Asian Americans are still bonded and united when it comes to the basic issues that have always forged a sense of Asian America for decades—the fight for our civil rights in America and the end of discrimination.

It also puts us squarely in the 47 percent that Romney talked about. Government help? To end discrimination? We

SEARCH

GO

NEWS

9.28.12

Oct. 2: AALDEF and Civil Rights Groups To Join UT-Austin Students for Affirmative Action Town Hall

9.28.12

AALDEF and Muslim Advocates File Lawsuit to Uncover Details of NYPD Spying Program

9.24.12

AALDEF to Conduct NYC Voter Registration Drive for Sept. 25 Nat'l Voter Registration Day

BLOG

PUBLICATIONS

LITIGATION DOCKET

DONATE

VOLUNTEER



Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF)

99 Hudson St, 12th Fl
New York, NY 10013

tel: 212 966 5932

fax: 212 966 4303

email: info@aaldef.org

support it.

So now we'll see if affirmative action even gets mentioned in this week's presidential debate.

The upcoming Supreme Court hearing next week would seem to make it the most important diversity issue out there. It's also potentially the most treacherous.

Because of that, Obama likely would just as soon concentrate on all the other domestic issues. He already owns the black and Latino vote. We know he's for affirmative action, even if he hasn't adopted Clinton's catchy "mend it, don't end it" concept.

As for Romney, the navigation is trickier.

He may be compelled to appease his "small government conservative" base, which sees *Fisher* as a major opportunity to package Justices Roberts, Alito, Scalia, and Thomas (the affirmative action beneficiary who now wants to shut it down for others), along with Justice Kennedy to kill affirmative action once and for all.

If Romney is sticking to his whites-only approach, we may see him rally his supporters with pro-Fisher comments on Wednesday night.

Romney probably wouldn't care that he would be instantly demonized by blacks and Latinos. (He's already lost their vote.) But as the NAAS tells us, he probably should care that he would alienate the largest number of undecided and very independent minority voters still out there—Asian Americans.

In a debate that had any sense of diversity, there would definitely be an affirmative action question. It's the one I'd ask.

If it does come out in some form, it should once again show all America the real Mitt Romney.

No hidden camera necessary.

Updates at www.amok.com. Follow Emil on Twitter, [@emilamok](https://twitter.com/emilamok).



Posted by: [Emil Guillermo](#)

The views expressed in this blog do not necessarily represent the views or policies of AALDEF.

0 comments

Leave a comment

Name: *required*

Email Address: *required, but will not be published*

Comments:

Submit