

## Indian-Americans most left-leaning of Asian groups, says survey

by Oct 3, 2012

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That Indian Americans tend to favour Democrats in general, and Barack Obama in particular, is no surprise.

But what's news is the level of support.

“Indian-Americans are the most left leaning of Asian-American groups ... on a host of issues and also in terms of their political orientations,” said Karthick Ramakrishnan at a panel discussing the Asian American vote recently according to [New America Media](#).

Ramakrishnan, an associate professor of political science at University of California-Riverside, is co-author along with Taeku Lee from the University of California-Berkeley, of a [National Asian American Survey](#) about where the Asian American vote is headed.



Representational image. Reuters.

When it comes to the Indian-American vote, here's the good news, if you are the Republican party. Fifty three percent identify as independent.

Here's the bad news. Only 3 percent identify as Republican. Forty-four percent identify as Democrats.

When you add in the leaners, that is those who lean one way or the other, Democrats' share of the Indian American vote goes up to 58 percent.

When it comes to Barack Obama in particular, Indian Americans' approval rating hits 88 percent. That makes them Obama's staunchest supporters among all the Asian groups and stratospherically higher than Obama's national approval rating which hovers around 51 percent.

That's just the general support. It does not necessarily translate into votes. Among likely voters, Indian Americans still beat the other Asian groups when it comes to supporting Obama. They clock in at 68% with 5% support for Mitt Romney.

The results have raised eyebrows.

As Khalil Abdullah reports in [New America Media](#):

(The) finding that took one Indian-American journalist at the event by surprise. He questioned whether Indian doctors and lawyers, for example, were really more inclined to vote Democratic when, in his opinion, the Republican Party has been more representative of business and conservative values typically associated with the Indian-American professional class.

That's been a view that's been shared by other Indian Americans. In a [widely circulated post](#), American Enterprise fellow Sadanand Dhume also scratched his head about Indian Americans' "illogical" support of Democrats and Obama when their natural home, he felt, should be the Republican Party.

Indian-American median household income in 2010 was \$88,000 compared to the national average of \$49,800. Only 9 percent live in poverty. This is a community of strivers whether it's taxi drivers in New York or motel owners in Georgia or software engineers in Silicon Valley. "To put it bluntly," wrote Dhume "this is not the natural constituency for the party of food stamps, affirmative action, and welfare without work."

Add to this, Indians conservativeness around social issues, and the community should be ripe pickings for the Republicans. Yet even with 53% identifying themselves as independent, why do 88 percent lean towards Obama?

In a response to Dhume's piece in [Firstpost](#) we had suggested that the fault lay with what the Republican Party had become. Despite its Bobby Jindal and Nikki Haley, the party had increasingly become hostage to the vitriol of angry white men. Its conservatism has veered towards Christian conservatism with an emphasis on Bible-thumping Christian.

Ramakrishnan agrees with that analysis. According to [Huffington Post](#) he said "it has a lot to do with perception - which party appears more welcoming and inclusive." That the Republican Party does not appear to be that, despite two high-profile Indian American governors, says more about the Republican party's shortcomings than the desi community's short-sightedness. As Huffington Post [notes](#):

The Republican convention, for instance, hammered the message that America is a Christian

nation. Only [four in ten](#) Asians are Christian. The rest are Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, or those unaffiliated with any religion.

Some Republicans are worried about the long term implications of this. “The demographics race we are losing badly,” [said](#) South Carolina Senator Lindsey Graham at the Republican convention. “We're not generating enough angry white guys to stay in business for the long term.”

What that means for Mitt Romney, is that he needs to win at least 61 percent of the white vote to squeak out a victory. A Republican strategist told journalist [Ron Brownstein](#), “This is the last time anyone will try to do this.” (This being putting all your eggs in one basket viz. the white vote.)

But is the Democratic Party just smugly taking the desi vote for granted?

While Indian Americans are gung-ho about Obama 25 percent still say they are undecided. That's lower than other Asian groups but a lot higher than the national figure of 7% undecided. That should give Democrats some pause. Asian Americans, being split into so many different sub-groups, usually get a lot less attention than the Latino vote or the African American vote. And among the various Asian groups, Indian Americans and Cambodians appeared to have been most neglected when asked if they were contacted about the elections. With Indian Americans there is often a perception that because they are well-educated and English-speaking they require no special outreach, no advertising in their own media.

But that blasé attitude could cost Democrats dearly for one simple reason.

In US elections, with its electoral college system, it's battleground states like Ohio, Virginia, North Carolina, Nevada that really matter. And according to the NAAS survey the Indian vote stands out in four key states - Florida, Virginia, Michigan and Pennsylvania.

Indian Americans constitute a larger share of the likely voter population in battleground states than their national average. When one looks at the ethnic composition of Asian American likely voters, Indian Americans, unlike Chinese and Filipinos, constitute a larger share in the battleground states (22 percent) than their national average (13 percent).

Obama might need every one of those voters to show up for him in November.