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## Hey, Obama and Romney: Asian Americans Are Up for Grabs

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Who is the choice of Asian Americans in the 2012 presidential election?

Forty-three percent of likely Asian-American voters support President Obama while just 24 percent back Mitt Romney, according to the new [National Asian American Survey](#), the most comprehensive political look at Asian-American political sentiment to date.

Now you don't have to wonder if the GOP challenger would have more Asian-American support if only he changed his name to Ramen-y.

The NAAS has the real data after thousands of phone calls through this month, resulting in more than 3,000 interviews both in English and in-language, enough to put the findings' margin of error to as low as +/- 2 percent for the general group, and to +/- 7 percent for specific ethnicities.

It means you can say with authority that Asian Americans give the president a 59 percent approval rating (higher than the national average) vs. just 30 percent for Romney.

On voter preference, it also means you can even drill down to that miniscule group called "likely Hmong voters," who give Obama an overwhelming 56 percent edge to just 4 percent for Romney.

Without the NAAS, you'd be guessing. Most definitely, you'd be hard-pressed to find any *New York Times*/CBS/*Wall Street Journal*/NBC or other poll able to say anything with authority about those same "likely Hmong voters," let alone Cambodian, Korean, Chinese voters... you get the picture.

The ethnic breakdown even challenges existing political stereotypes within our own community. Would Chinese Americans be the biggest Obama supporters? Nope, that would be ethnic Indians with 68 percent. (Chinese Americans were just at 43 percent.) Considering the GOP likes to trot out Louisiana's Bobby Jindal and South Carolina's Nikki Haley, it shows how far from the mainstream Indian community those GOP leaders really are.

The biggest Romney supporters? One might have said Vietnamese Americans, with their strong anti-Communist views and loyalties to the Nixon White House. But the survey shows Vietnamese Americans at 24 percent for Obama, and 21 percent for Romney.

The biggest Romney support actually comes from Filipino Americans, with 38 percent for Romney and just 32 percent for Obama. In fact, the migration of Filipino Americans to the right of the political spectrum in just four years is startling. Filipino Americans were 50-46 percent Obama over McCain in 2008; now they are the most conservative Asian Americans in the bunch. Is it the flood of Catholic immigrants? The Kennedys were Catholic too. One can only speculate.

In general, the survey challenges the assumption of Asian Americans as staunch Democrats. If Filipino Americans are moving rightward, the NAAS shows Asian Americans in general moving to the side with 52 percent identifying as non-partisan, perhaps indicative of a larger number of new voters to the political process.

That number should raise the interest of political operatives looking to lure voters in the long-term. In the weeks ahead, however, the most pertinent number may be this one: 32 percent of Asian Americans, even at this late date, say they are among the undecided--perhaps the most coveted segment of voters in the final weeks of this election season.

Asian Americans were polling high undecided numbers in the spring, and apparently that hasn't varied. Even after the conventions, there was little change in these numbers. It's not clear whether Asian Americans are being coy or genuinely are waiting for some bit of information that would bring certainty to how they see the political equation. But for more than a third of likely voters, there is no definitive answer. We're up for grabs.

So are we being targeted effectively by anyone? Nope. The NAAS reveals that only 19 percent of likely Asian American voters say they've been contacted by a party or candidate to register or turnout to vote in November.

In other words, Asian Americans are possibly the most eligible swing voters out there -- if only anyone would bother to court them or talk them off the fence. Or ledge.

Again, you won't find any of these numbers in any mainstream poll that tracks the electorate on a regular basis. The random samples in those polls usually gather too few Asian Americans to say anything authoritative about us as a group.

That's why after its first attempt at reflecting the Asian-American electorate in 2008, the 2012 NAAS survey is a welcome sight. Without it, Asian Americans are truly invisible politically, too often left out of the discussion simply because we never show up in that main driver of our nation's political agenda, public opinion polls.

Karthick Ramakrishnan, a UC Riverside political science professor and the lead author of the survey, told me that's far from overstating the situation. But, he says, while the findings are encouraging, real empowerment may still maybe a generation away.

"Asian Americans are poised to make an impact in some key ways in states like North Carolina, Nevada and Virginia," he said. "But they haven't yet fully arrived in the way that Latinos have; that's probably a decade or more away. But it's a sign of things to come. We're seeing some real traction made as far as people's involvement in politics."

In the future, it should be much harder to ignore Asian Americans, the fastest-growing racial group in the last 12 years, which added 600,000 voters in 2008 and are poised to do so again in 2012.

But for now, it's a big deal for NAAS just to lift up the rocks and reveal to all what's there when one says "Asian America."

*This piece originally appeared on the [Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund blog](#).*

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