

---

## Why Do Asian Americans Vote for Democrats?

Posted: 12/03/2012 10:17 am

---

That the majority of Hispanics voted for President Obama this November surprised no one. But what may have been less expected is that [73 percent](#) of Asian American voters cast their ballots for Obama this fall, according to exit polls. Data also shows that Asian Americans have shifted more to the left since 2008 than any other minority group.

Asian Americans, an oft-neglected voting group, represent only 3 percent of the national voting population. However, they are also the fastest growing demographic in the United States, and are also beginning to move out of traditionally blue states (like California, Hawaii, New York and New Jersey) into swing states like Virginia and North Carolina, making them an increasingly important demographic for politicians to pay attention to.

But why are Asian Americans so solidly Democratic?

One of the biggest reasons is that Asian Americans align more closely with the Democratic party on key issues, including preferring a bigger government that provides more services than a smaller government with fewer services (55 percent to 36 percent), according to [Pew study](#) conducted in June this year.

Asian Americans also support health care reform (about 50 percent in favor, 15-18 percent against), according to the [National Asian American Survey](#) conducted this September.

Around [18.1 percent](#) of the Asian American population doesn't have health insurance, compared to the national average of 16.3 percent, according to the American Community Survey. Among Korean Americans, one in four are without health insurance.

Asian Americans also support raising taxes on high earners, even though they are among the highest-income racial groups in the U.S.

"Sixty-two percent [of high-earning Asian Americans] supported raising taxes on themselves," said Professor Karthick Ramakrishnan, director of the [National Asian American Survey](#). "Just because a group might stand to lose does not mean they won't support it."

An overwhelming majority of Asian Americans surveyed also approve of affirmative action (78 percent in favor, 13 percent against), an issue which Democrats have traditionally supported.

Another reason for the shift towards the left, says Ramakrishnan, is that Asian Americans increasingly do not relate to the Republican Party image.

"The Republican Party between 2000 and 2010 became much more conservative on immigration and that hurt its standing among Asian American voters," said Ramakrishnan. "On top of that, a party projecting a pro-Christian image makes it difficult to reach out to Asian American voters, most who are not Christian."

While Asian American voters did not rank immigration high on the list of issues they considered in this election (like most voters, the economy and jobs came first, followed by health care), nonetheless the impression of the Democratic Party as friendly to immigrants has helped the party attract more Asian Americans.

"There's a growing perception among Americans of color that the Republican Party is not concerned about the concerns of minorities," said Melissa Michelson, professor of political science at Menlo College, who has published a book on Asian American voter mobilization.

There are around 1 million undocumented Asian American immigrants in the U.S. today, notes Christine Chen, executive director of APIAVote, a national nonpartisan organization that seeks to mobilize the Asian American and Pacific Islander voting population, so immigration continues to be an important issue, even if it is not the highest ranking.

Finally Asian Americans may feel a stronger connection to Obama himself, suggested Michelson.

The fact that Obama grew up in Indonesia means that some voters "feel that he is somebody who can understand a bit more where they come from," she said.

While Obama was criticized by many for saying he had eaten dog as a child in Indonesia, this is not unusual to many Asian Americans.

"An Asian American is more likely to understand -- there's a little bit more of a connection in that they understand how he is being attacked for this thing that would be totally normal, that a mainstream American would not understand," said Michelson.

Looking ahead, Republicans have realized that the Asian American community is a set of voters that they cannot allow to slip away. While Romney's campaign was not able to reach out to Asian Americans in as great numbers as Obama's team, Chen

says that she saw evidence that Republicans are beginning to pay attention.

"This was the first time that Republicans made some type of investment in reaching out to Asian Americans," she said. "They had Chinese-translated literature in Ohio -- it's the first time I've ever seen that."

*CORRECTION: A previous version of this post incorrectly stated that Melissa Michelson is an associate professor of political science at California State University. Dr. Michelson is a professor of political science at Menlo College. The post has been updated to reflect this.*