
Asian American vote still question mark in election

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While students at the Neilson Dining Hall on Douglass campus worked to register voters before the 2008 election voter registration deadline, Professor Jane Junn released her findings on whose votes are missing in this election, at the nearby Eagleton Institute of Politics.

“This is the very first Asian American study released on the national level,” Junn said.

Speaking in front of a crowd of more than 40 people at Eagleton on Douglass Campus, Junn announced her findings from the National Asian American Survey, which focuses on the voting trends of Asian Americans in the United States. Junn’s presentation focused on the voting trends in the states of New Jersey and New York, a fragment of the nationwide results that were presented Oct. 6 in Washington, D.C.

Thirty-four percent of Asian Americans remain undecided in the 2008 election, according to the report, which took two years with joint efforts from Rutgers University, University of California at Berkley, University of California at Riverside and the University of Southern California.

“There’s a population that is just getting used to politics,” Junn said. “So if you are a politician, you better jump on it.”

Junn said one of the problems is that Asian Americans are underrepresented in politics.

“Rutgers has about 24 percent Asian Americans, but there’s no political representation, no deans, no department chairs.” Junn said. “And in New Jersey, there are only two elected officials that are Asian American.”

Chamber of Commerce President Seema Singh, who was in Washington, D.C. for the talks with India about a nuclear arms deal, said she was not very surprised by these findings.

“There were more Asians and Indians than usual present in Washington, given the issue,” Singh said. “But there was a feeling that a lot of people were holding back.”

New Jersey falls over the national average of undecided Asian American voters at 44 percent, according to a press release by the Eagleton Poll.

It is the third largest state with minority representation, trailing behind California and Hawaii.

John Weingart, the interim director of the Eagleton Institute of Politics, said this should shed some light on the fact that Asians view democracy intelligently rather than just seeing it as a beauty contest.

The Eagleton Institute of Politics provided about one-eighth of the funding for this project, Weingart said, and hopefully these findings will merit future funding.

The National Asian American Survey performed its research through 4,394 telephone interviews of adult Asian Americans between the days of Aug. 18 through Sept. 26 in eight different languages.

Junn said her future plan with the National Asian American Study is to look beyond the election to the overall environment of political participation for Asian Americans, including their public policy preferences and the influence of race and religion on political thought.