

**npr**politics

POLITICS

# The Shifting Allegiances Of Asian-American Voters

Listen · 4:58

Queue

Download

Transcript

October 9, 2016 · 5:04 PM ET

Heard on All Things Considered



ASMA KHALID



MICHEL MARTIN

Asian-Americans are a tiny but growing share of the electorate. In the 1990s, Asian-Americans mostly voted Republican. But in the years since, they seem to have tilted toward the Democratic Party.

**MICHEL MARTIN, HOST:**

So let's talk more about an increasingly important voting bloc. You might be surprised to know that Asian-Americans are the fastest growing racial group in the country. Sure, they are a tiny fraction of the electorate, just about 3 percent. But many live in states like Nevada and Virginia, which are battleground states, so analysts are starting to pay more attention to the way they vote. This is what they found this week - nearly twice as many Asian-Americans now identify as Democrats than Republicans. And that's remarkable because in the 1990s, a majority of Asian-Americans voted

Republican. NPR's Asma Khalid covers the intersection of demographics and politics, and she's with us now to tell us more about it. Asma, thanks so much for joining us.

ASMA KHALID, BYLINE: Happy to be here.

MARTIN: So tell us about the new polling. It's from the National Asian American Survey. What does it tell us?

KHALID: So, Michel, it is a really interesting poll because it's been hard to collectively look at this group. It's a really diverse group of Americans. So they looked at nine different Asian ethnic groups, and that includes, you know, Filipino, Korean, Japanese, Vietnamese, Indian, Chinese. And the big headline that they have is that Asian-Americans don't seem to like the Republican Party.

You have a group that is the wealthiest, most highly-educated group in the country and a group that you would think would naturally align with the Republican Party, maybe because of fiscal issues or maybe more socially conservative on certain issues. But that was the big headline takeaway is that this group does not seem to be aligning with the Republican Party. And what I thought was most interesting is even among Vietnamese-Americans - this is a group that's historically voted more Republican than some of the other Asian ethnic groups - has a net unfavorable rating.

MARTIN: And you're telling us that - that's startling in and of itself. But the other reason that this is so remarkable and is so attention getting is that you go back to exit polls in 1992 and a majority of Asians supported George H.W. Bush over Bill Clinton then. So what changed?

KHALID: That's right, Michel. And actually in the 1996 election as well the Republican presidential candidate also gathered a majority of Asian-American support. We started to see a shift in the year 2000. And ever since then it's been growing. President Obama did phenomenally well in 2012 with Asian-American voters, winning them by nearly

50 percentage points. As for what changed, I spoke with the director of the National Asian American Survey about this. His name is Karthick Ramakrishnan. And he told me that, you know, some of this shift has been happening over the long run because Democrats have been trying to court Asian-American voters. And in this election cycle, we're seeing it even heightened more because the Republican candidate is turning them off.

**KARTHICK RAMAKRISHNAN:** He's talked about instituting a ban on Muslim immigrants, which our survey shows that Asian-American voters reject. He also has talked a lot about China. And just more generally, he's been engaging in the kind of rhetoric that in many ways is a throwback. It actually seems like it's going back to the '50s in terms of explicitly talking about race, and that seems to be turning off a lot of Asian-American voters.

**MARTIN:** Is any particular group driving this change? For example, are younger Asian-American voters at the leading edge of this, or is this a change across the board?

**KHALID:** It's multifaceted. So you definitely see younger Asian-Americans tilting more Democratic than their parents. But on the same token, you're also seeing Asian-Americans as a group identify more with the Democratic Party than you saw them identify, say, even four years ago.

**MARTIN:** So the final question would be, Asma, is, is this a temporary shift, or does it appear to be a long-term shift?

**KHALID:** So Karthick told me that in general political science, the thinking is after two, three election cycles, you would tend to think that a group is kind of hardening or becoming more reliable voters of the Republican or the Democratic Party. We haven't seen that to the same degree among Asian-Americans. The thinking is maybe some of them are newer voters and that they could be somewhat malleable. And Karthick says some of this, you know, just could be due to the fact that the Asian-American

community is thought to not identify with the Republican or the Democratic Party to the same degree. You still have about 40 percent of Asian-Americans who do not identify with either party, so that's a very large number. But Karthick also told me that he seems to think that this is beginning to change.

**RAMAKRISHNAN:** There is some evidence that this is hardening now. And Donald Trump seems like the person who is facilitating that.

**KHALID:** And, Michel, what he meant by hardening is that he is beginning to see Asian-Americans identify more as Democrats. And the thinking is if they do support Hillary Clinton by, say, 50-plus percentage points in this election cycle, we'll now have seen three elections in a row where Asian-Americans really came out and supported the Democratic candidate by huge margins. And if that's the case, it's perhaps a sign that they are becoming more reliably Democratic voters. And that makes it even harder for Republicans to convince them.

**MARTIN:** That's NPR's Asma Khalid. She covers the intersection of demographics and politics. Asma, thank you so much for speaking with us.

**KHALID:** You're welcome.

*Copyright © 2016 NPR. All rights reserved. Visit our website terms of use and permissions pages at [www.npr.org](http://www.npr.org) for further information.*

*NPR transcripts are created on a rush deadline by Verb8tm, Inc., an NPR contractor, and produced using a proprietary transcription process developed with NPR. This text may not be in its final form and may be updated or revised in the future. Accuracy and availability may vary. The authoritative record of NPR's programming is the audio record.*

# There's More To It

We follow politics; you follow us. Catch up with the presidential campaign trail, listen to our latest podcast and find the latest stories from NPR politics reporters around the country.

What's your email?

**SUBSCRIBE**

By subscribing, you agree to NPR's terms of use and privacy policy.

---

**nprpolitics**

© 2016 npr