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2. [Skip to content](#)
3. [Skip to secondary-content](#)

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Want Inclusive Politics? End Discrimination in Mainstream Polls

By: **Emil Guillermo**, Oct 09, 2008

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New APA poll reveals community's real engagement in politics



Today is my birthday. How old am I? Old enough to recall hearing the cliché “sleeping giant” used to describe Asian Americans and our underwhelming political prowess.

I was a mere Lilliputian when I first heard the phrase a generation or two ago. Now I’m an aging Lilliputian and the term still has currency, which is disheartening.

That’s why I’m elated—hell, I’m giddy with delight—by new groundbreaking research that shall serve as my ideal birthday gift: real data.

This week, APAs are no longer invisible in the 2008 campaign. Where do Asian Americans stand on the presidential race? We’re predominantly for Obama, but a bloc of us remains undecided. The potential for a powerful swing vote this November is high.

The new [2008 National Asian American Survey](#), a poll conducted by a pioneering generation of young APA political scientists, shows what can happen when you bother to ask Asian Americans about politics.

Suddenly, the whole APA community is amok. Silent? Docile? Politically apathetic? That’s the old stereotype perpetuated by the de facto racist public-opinion polls that always seem to render APAs “statistically insignificant.”

There are 15 million Asian Americans in this country, more than four percent of the U.S., and after Latinos, the second-largest minority in California. Take any public-opinion poll like the recent [USA Today poll](#) on race in America, and it’s fairly standard fare—which is to say racist and totally discriminatory against APAs. How can you do a poll about race or anything that matters in America and not bother to ask us any questions?

If you read the NAAS study, you’ll know the APA community is far from a sleeping giant. Conducted by Jane Junn of Rutgers University, S. Karthick Ramakrishnan of UC Riverside, Taeku Lee of UC Berkeley and Janelle Wong of USC, the NAAS is the most comprehensive APA political poll I’ve seen, a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual survey on more than 4,000 likely APA voters from around the nation.

Bottom line: We do count

We weren’t left out of the horse-race poll in this survey. Neither does the poll require some inaccurate extrapolation to figure out where APAs might fit in vis-à-vis blacks, whites or Latinos. The survey said 41 percent of Asian Americans are likely to favor Barack Obama versus 24 percent for John McCain—and you can count on it. Compared to other polls’ 3 to 5 percent wiggle room, the NAAS margin of error is set at plus or minus 1.4 percent. That’s more accurate than Sarah Palin’s moose rifle.

More startling is how this late in the game, 34 percent said they are still undecided. Compare that to other political polls that put the undecided nationwide at eight percent. Of course, those pollsters didn’t bother to ask any Asian Americans.

The other polls also didn’t hire people who could conduct in-language phone interviews for Asian Indians, Chinese, Filipinos, Japanese, Koreans and Vietnamese. Without that, you can’t possibly access our community, which is 80 percent foreign born.

That gives you a rich vein of information. For example, two-thirds of probable Vietnamese American voters support McCain. Japanese Americans, Chinese Americans and Indian Americans support Obama by more than three to one. Korean and Filipino Americans are marginally supportive of Obama, but by as slim a margin as 1.4 percent to 1.

Our Pan-Asian group is far from monolithic.

When public-opinion polls did sample Asian Americans during this campaign, the most noteworthy nugget is how nearly 2 to 1 preferred Hillary Clinton over Obama in the primaries. Since the convention, there was some concern over whether APAs would back Obama, but the NAAS survey shows that 59 percent of Clinton supporters now back Obama. Only 10 percent switched to McCain.

How would we, or anyone, know otherwise? Without some data, we'd all be guessing.

What's the big deal?

When it comes to Asian American political sentiment, most normal pollsters would simply say, "Why bother?"

Yes, the price for accuracy and inclusion of APAs would probably be 20 times the amount needed to conduct a standard poll. But that's cheap compared to the more serious cost of fostering lies through discriminatory polling. Most pollsters may not care if they perpetuate the age-old ideas that APAs are politically inactive, ignorant and disengaged.

But the problem is far from benign. Our invisibility is dependent on NAAS's smarter, wiser poll type of polling. Lazy, exclusionary polls feed a self-fulfilling prophecy in the political world that can stymie APA political involvement.

Polls are taken seriously by the campaigns and the political-industry establishment. If APAs don't show up in the data, then we don't count. Period.

The problem feeds on itself. According to another new report released last week by Leadership Education for Asian Pacifics, the major political parties have failed to engage APAs. The LEAP report cites a lack of organizational capacity and cultural literacy. Just don't underestimate the impact on a lack of representation in polls.

The NAAS poll showed that 32 percent of all Asian Americans identify as Democrats, 14 percent as Republican, 19 percent independents and 35 percent call themselves non-partisan. But it would appear that every last one is up for grabs.

So next time you see some national poll under the imprimatur of an ABC, NBC, CBS, CNN, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, et. al., shame them for participating in what can be seen as among the most discriminatory tool in American politics since the poll tax.

Now that NAAS researchers have done it right, there's no reason outmoded polling methods should be allowed to perpetuate the myth of the sleeping giant.

Did John McCain appear at a rally with Sarah Palin wearing an "I'm with stupid" T-Shirt? Or was he

standing next to an investment banker? Check the daily blog at amok.asianweek.com.



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E-mail: Emil@amok.com

Comments

1. Another empowerment of API voter forum is APAPA.org

Oh yeah, I would vote. I have to decide who is the best at the end. They both have some issues but one of them come forward to our community more, he may be elected. So, keep trying!

–abc on Oct 09, 2008

2. Dear “abc”:

“Coming forward” to ANY “community” by ANY candidate is, alas!, a form of pandering.

And, as with most if not all pandering, the object is to “sell” something, usually snake-oil of one variety or another.

If you really are as sharp as you think you are, you would consider the “issues” and the “stands.” Forget the schmoosing.

P.S.: The fact of this maztter is that your personal “interests” usually lie more with everyone else’s interests.

–Frank Eng on Oct 09, 2008

3. abc seems living in a village and he likes to shake hands in person with whoever the candidate is. He thought this is just another election to elect someone like Sarah Palin in a small village. Never mind what they represent or whatever agenda they might have. Seeing is believing ?

Many older generation of Asian-Americans are still uncomfortable with US politics. Whether it is due to language barrier, cultural barrier or lack of understanding of US politics, government affairs, etc. or simply do not realize the importance of voting , we do not know for sure.

In some part of Asia, many political candidates used to “pay” real money to “buy” votes. These are so called “democracy”.

Many campaign issues in the US today regarding abortion rights, same sex marriage etc. are really of not much interests to Asian-Americans. They are more concerned with the economy, Iraq and oil prices.

Joe the Plumber or Joe Sixpacks are interested in other

issues than typical Asian-Americans worry.

–J. Aso on Oct 21, 2008

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