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Survey Reveals Asians Are a Voting Bloc that Cannot Be Ignored

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Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) are the nation's fastest growing racial group, [growing by as much as 46 percent](#) during the first decade of this century. According to Karthick Ramakrishnan, Director of the National Asian American Survey (NAAS), AAPIs are an important and growing political constituency. While only 5.6 percent of the U.S. population is of [Asian descent](#), six hundred thousand new AAPI voters participated in the elections for the first time in 2008 and a similar number is expected to do so this year.

AAPI organizations have been heavily mobilizing the community, urging people to register and vote. The Asian vote could very well determine the outcome in [battleground states](#) where there are large concentrations of AAPIs. In fact, one in six Asian Americans lives in a battleground state.

NAAS has released a [report](#) on the 2012 elections which includes a number of findings which can prove invaluable to both Democrats and Republicans, not just in this election cycle but moving forward, as the AAPI community jockey for its place in American society and politics.

Last week, the Wilson Center's Asia Program hosted a [panel](#) which discussed the [2012 National Survey of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders](#). Although NAAS is an academic and nonpartisan effort to poll the opinions of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders on a wide range of issues, Ramakrishnan anticipated that many in the audience were interested in learning how the AAPI community will vote in November.

Among U.S. citizens in this group, 45 percent can be described as "likely voters." Filipino Americans, the second largest AAPI group, and Japanese Americans are the most likely to vote among AAPIs. Forty-three percent of Asian American likely voters support Barack Obama while 24 percent support Mitt Romney. There are some considerable differences by ethnic group, however: Indian Americans, the third largest group, show the strongest support for the president (68 percent) while Filipinos show the strongest support for Gov. Romney (38 percent).

It is crucial to point out that nearly a third of likely AAPI voters [remain undecided](#). In contrast, recent surveys reveal that roughly 7 percent of the general population is undecided. Moreover, a little more than half of Asian Americans consider themselves independent or non-partisan.

Mee Moua, president of the Asian American Justice Center ([AAJC](#)), warned both parties that they have been ignoring the Asian American community at their peril. She distributed an AAJC handout showing that over the past couple of years neither Democrats nor Republicans have seriously reached out to AAPI registered voters. Only 23 percent of registered Asian Democrats and 17 percent of registered Asian Republicans were contacted. Although the community shows greater support for Mr. Obama and leans Democratic, they "have the potential to be the margin of victory" for either party, Moua stressed. If the Democratic Party fails to convince undecided and independent AAPIs, then the GOP has an opportunity to win more votes for Mr. Romney and other Republican candidates.

Ramakrishnan, when asked what might explain President Obama's and the Democratic Party's better standing among AAPIs, said that it has a lot to do with perception -- which party appears more welcoming and inclusive. The Republican convention, for instance, hammered the message that America is a Christian nation. Only [four in ten](#) Asians are Christian. The rest are Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, or those unaffiliated with any religion.

Voters, regardless of their race or ethnicity, will support candidates they can identify with and who they believe understand their concerns. Asian Americans still feel invisible and ignored, but they are ready to take their seat at the table. Both parties better get to know AAPIs fast and vie for Asian American votes, [just as they do](#) for other communities of color.

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