

APIS AND THE VOTE



by sophia ng & katherine wang

Amidst all this talk of the upcoming election, the spotlight hasn't exactly been on Asian American voters. Yet, even though the Asian American community is still in the process of being shaped as a civically engaged and active demographic, it yields great potential to be heard. One in six Asian Americans today live in a swing state, with Asian Americans making up 9% of the population in Nevada and almost 7% of that in Virginia. While those numbers may not seem impressive at first glance, keep in mind that Obama is currently leading by only 1% in Nevada while Romney leads by the same percentage in Virginia as of the latest polls – differences so small that they are quite literally still within the margin of error. Add in the fact that over 30% of Asian Americans remain undecided in this race, three-four times higher than the national average of undecided voters, and it is clear the undecided Asian American voter has the potential to be a powerful game changer. Asian Americans are also the fastest growing minority in the United States (at an astonishing rate of 46% per year) and have a higher tendency than other groups to vote based on individual issues, rather than hard party lines.

Asian Americans remain a group largely ignored in this presidential race – and in general. A survey done this May shows that only 23% of Asian Americans have been contacted by the Democratic Party in the past two years and only 17% by the Republican Party—low numbers especially for a group with such high

numbers of undecided voters. Furthermore, Asian American representation in both parties is also appalling. Asian Americans consist of about 6% of the United States population. One would expect that the House of Representatives would reasonably mirror America's demographics with about 26 representatives out of a total of 435. The reality? Only seven API Representatives. It doesn't take much math to see the problem.

So, why are we so underrepresented and ignored? Sure, it may partially be because the Asian American voting bloc is not a very unified one due to its diversity, as evidenced by varying levels of support for each candidate (Indian Americans overwhelmingly support Obama, while Filipino Americans are slightly more in favor of Romney). But, the real problem is something you probably have already noticed and is largely our own fault. It's simple, really. Most Asian Americans just don't really vote. In fact, only 47% of Asian Americans turned out to vote in the 2008 presidential election, the lowest among all ethnic groups – and Asian American voter turnout has consistently been the lowest for decades. If we aren't going to vote anyway, our votes don't matter.

According to the Asian American Survey conducted by the Lake Research Partners, APIA Vote, the Asian American Justice Center, and the Asian American Institute in April 2012, the main reasons for not voting in 2008 were: ineligibility

(36%), out of country/state (13%), no time (10%), didn't know enough about candidates (7%), and didn't like candidates (6%). However, it's important to note that the 36% ineligible voters weren't even counted when calculating the Asian American voter turnout. So, yes, only 47% of eligible Asian American voters voted in 2008. For a community in which a third isn't even currently eligible to vote and make up less than 10% of the overall population, those numbers are extremely low. If we even hope to make our voices heard, this is not the way to do it.

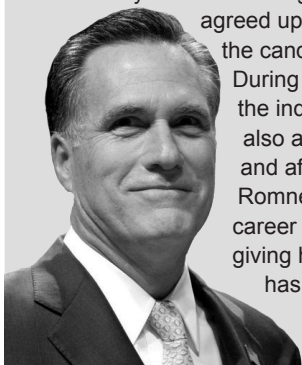
It really comes down to this. **Do** you care about how your tax dollars are spent? Do you want issues such as health resources and immigration to be reflective of the demands of the Asian American community? If so, you have to vote. In the end, civic participation is essential to getting the representation we need—and deserve. And if that is not enough to get you out to the polls on November 6th, perhaps Jon Stewart's Convocation Address will tie up loose ends—"Many people throughout history have fought for your right to do so. They've "rocked" the vote, even accepted the difficult choice of "Vote Or Die." Here's a hint: pick the first one." Even more so, with California's implementation of online voter registration and absentee ballots, inconvenience is no longer an excuse. We cannot complain about the lack of representation or social change if we don't take it upon ourselves to start making what we want as a community a reality.

ROMNEY VS OBAMA

a guide for apa voters

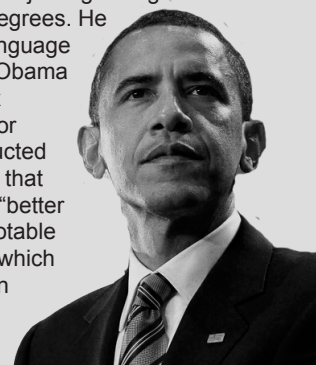
Mitt Romney has taken an active stance to court the Asian American vote, lauding members of the community for their "wonderful culture," contributions to businesses and new products, and service to protect global freedom in remarks to the Virginia chapter of APIA Vote. According to his campaign website, Romney has selected former Secretary of Labor under George W. Bush, Elaine Chao, as the national chair of his Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders for Romney community. Chao's co-chair, Akshay Desai is the CEO of Universal Health Care. In terms of relevant policy issues, Romney holds no current stance on affirmative action. However in 2008, Romney stood against affirmative action and quotas, citing his belief that, "our nation is at its best when people are evaluated as individuals." Other issues of salience particular to the Asian American community include immigration and small businesses. While Obama and Romney

agreed upon their desire to support and cut taxes for small businesses, the candidates did differ among their perception of a small business. During the first presidential debate, Romney had proposed lowering the individual tax rates to lower taxes for small businesses. He also advocated for the "self-deportation" of illegal immigrants, and affirmed his stance against the DREAM Act. According to Romney's official biography on his campaign website, "Mitt is not a career politician. He has spent most of his life in the private sector, giving him intimate knowledge of how our economy works. But he has also been an outstanding public servant."



romney

Barack Obama has appointed several Asian Americans to key positions in his administration during his first term, including a record number of 3 to his cabinet of 15, and doubled the number of Asian Americans on the federal bench. During his term, he also reestablished the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders to better evaluate the issues within the API community. He has promised to address issues of individual Asian American groups and remarks that the government needs to "stop grouping everybody just in one big category [because] dozens of different communities fall under the umbrella of the Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders." Obama supports affirmative action "as a means of overcoming both historic and potentially current discrimination." He is also a strong supporter of immigration and the Dream Act and is in favor of adjusting immigration and citizenship policy to favor those with advanced degrees. He does not believe English should be the official language of the federal government, while Romney does. Obama plans to support small businesses by offering tax credit to businesses, as well as fewer penalties for tax errors. Regarding healthcare, a survey conducted by the National Asian American Survey indicates that 44% of Asian American respondents claim to be "better off" because of Obama's healthcare plan. Also notable is Obama's upbringing in Indonesia and Hawaii, which some argue ties him closer to the Asian American community.



obama