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Spread liberally: New York

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Jon Sobel and **Eric Bottcher** explain why they have faith in Obama to help shape a more inclusive political landscape

Let's get this party started: Jon Sobel

We New York City voters are so overwhelmingly liberal that our state, New York, is considered a lock for the Democrats. As in most states, our electoral votes are allocated on a winner-takes-all basis, so we know who'll be getting all our state's votes. Hence I vote not because my vote is essential, but because it's a civic duty.

It helps to have an exciting candidate. But there's no suspense here. So some Obama supporters look for ways to help the cause. That means finding ways to spread out – like tentacles – to other states.

One way is by phone. National groups compile lists of out-of-state voters and organise Obama parties, where New Yorkers get together in someone's apartment, cell phones in hand, to call those in other states and urge them to vote.

Here's another way: an attorney friend of mine volunteers on election day at polling sites in a neighbouring, contested state, trying to make sure voters aren't intimidated or illegally turned away by thugs on the opposing side. (I'm not kidding, this stuff does go on, particularly in states where the election is expected to be close.)

Another friend volunteers here in the city as a poll worker. This is "nonpartisan" work, but City rules require one volunteer from each major party to attend each booth. Since Republicans are heavily outnumbered in many parts of New York City, some Democratic volunteers are assigned Republican tags. There's something to be said for seeing how the other half lives, I suppose.

Because we're such a lopsided state, the candidates don't visit us much – just once in a while to fundraise. Both Obama and McCain showed up at the Alfred E Smith dinner, but that's de rigueur for presidential candidates. It's the one occasion for them to make fun of each other and themselves while showing off their comedy chops.

Obama also gave a major speech at Cooper Union, the symbolically important hall where then-candidate Abraham Lincoln first spelled out his anti-slavery views for the nation in 1860. And Sarah Palin paid a visit to the UN to meet a few world leaders and establish some foreign policy credentials.

Now, excitement and nervousness are building. But with the news of al-Qaida "endorsing" McCain and idiot skinheads getting caught planning to assassinate Obama, the nagging fear of another terrorist attack – or some other "October surprise" – nips at the fringes of my mind as I sit at my desk 3km from Ground Zero, looking north out of my window at the Empire State Building.

Obama speaks for me: Eric Bottcher

In choosing between these political candidates, one of my big social motivations is the openness that Barack Obama is reflecting. I believe that an Obama presidency will bring a more aggressive attitude towards social issues, particularly gay rights. On that level, the McCain campaign doesn't represent me, or my values.