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Study: Asian Americans May Be Key Voting Bloc

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Category: [News](#) > [University](#) > [Academics and Administration](#)

Asian Americans could play a key role in the outcome of the upcoming presidential election, according to a new national survey led by a UC Berkeley researcher.

The National Asian American Survey, released yesterday, found that a high proportion of Asian American likely voters polled between August and September were still undecided on a candidate, which researchers say will make the group a key voting bloc on Election Day. The data is based on answers from more than 4,000 people.

UC Berkeley associate professor of political science Taeku Lee, one of the four survey researchers, called it the first national study to comprehensively examine Asian American political preferences. It was a collaboration between professors at UC Berkeley, University of Southern California, UC Riverside and Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey.

"Candidates will see that Asian Americans will play a pivotal role, especially in battle ground states," Lee said. "(Partisan campaigners) will decide to shift their energies and resources to woo Asian American voters."

According to the report, 41 percent of Asian Americans most likely to vote support Sen. Barack Obama while 24 percent support Sen. John McCain.

With more than one-third of likely Asian American voters remaining undecided, Asian Americans will be a critical source of votes in the final weeks of the campaign, according to Karthick Ramakrishnan, associate professor of political science at UC Riverside.

National polls held since the major party conventions have found that undecided voters comprise roughly 8 percent of the electorate, according to the study.

"In the past, the size of the Asian American population, especially the voting population, was deemed too small and too insignificant to warrant national attention," said L. Ling-chi Wang, an emeritus professor in UC Berkeley's Asian American studies department. "The Asian American population in the last three decades has been increasing sharply ... the highest among all racial groups in the U.S."

Survey researcher Jane Junn, an associate political science professor at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, said the study's distinctive methodology also allowed them to collect data that was more valid and

reliable than previous studies that investigated Asian American political preferences.

Interviews were conducted in eight different languages while prior surveys used only English, Junn said. According to the study, more than 43 percent of those surveyed preferred to be interviewed in an Asian language.

"Because Asian Americans are so heavily immigrant and speak a foreign language, you systematically (exclude) the people who can't do the interview in English," Junn said. "It is a more accurate portrayal ... and a better representation of the population."

Tags: Voting, Elections 2008

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