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Asian American votes up for grabs, advocates say

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(Xinhua)

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WASHINGTON - Contrary to the often-held belief that Asian Americans are solidly in the corner of Democrats this election season, advocates said Tuesday that a large chunk of the group is on the fence.

"This community is up for grabs," said Mee Moua, president of the Asian American Justice Center and former Minnesota state senator.

"People should not write this community off as already... bought by the Democratic Party," she said Tuesday at a panel discussion at the Woodrow Wilson Center to launch the 2012 National Survey of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

"There is a 31 to 34 percent independent block within the Asian American community that nobody has touched," Moua added. "If you add that independent one-third to the ones who are self-identifying as trending Republican, that's a majority."

While both Democrats and Republicans fight to gain Hispanic votes - last month's GOP convention was much geared toward currying Latino favor - Asian Americans are often overlooked by both parties as not having the sheer numbers necessary to make a difference in the election.

However, panelists at the Tuesday forum noted that swing states such as Virginia have particularly large Asian-American populations.

"Anyone who ignores Asian Americans does so at their own peril," said Moua.

Indeed, the Asian American population has over the last decade grown more rapidly than any other racial group in the United States, at a rate of 46 percent, according to the survey released Tuesday.

In 2010, the group comprised 5 percent of the country's total population in 145 congressional districts and more than 600 cities, the study found.

Most importantly for the upcoming presidential elections, 600,000 new Asian American voters entered the electorate in 2008, with a similar number of voters expected in November, it indicated.

While many Asians are small business owners and it would seem logical for them to vote Republican, many within the GOP have cast their party as Christian, making it seem less hospitable to Asians from India, many of whom are Muslims or Hindus, said Karthick Ramakrishnan, director of the National Asian American Survey.

Like most other US voters, topping the agenda of concerns for Asian Americans are jobs, as they are still struggling amid the sluggish recovery from the worst recession in decades.

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