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Why Do Indian-Americans Love Barack Obama And The Democrats?

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Numbering some 3 million, Indian-Americans are becoming an increasingly important voting bloc in the United States – and if a recent survey is accurate, they will overwhelmingly support Democrat Barack Obama in Tuesday's presidential election.

A poll last month by professors Karthick Ramakrishnan, Taeku Lee and the National Asian American Survey (NAAS) revealed that a whopping 68 percent -- higher than any other Asian ethnic group – of Indian-Americans will vote for Obama, while Romney will attract only 5 percent support (25 percent were undecided).

Overall, 81 percent of Indian-Americans gave Obama high job approval ratings, despite the fragile U.S. economy and the president's attacks on outsourcing.

The dramatically strong support for Obama among Indian-Americans flies in the face of some contradictory realities -- Indian-Americans are among the best-educated and highest-earning ethnic groups in the country (a demography that typically favors the Republicans); and the two most prominent Indian-American politicians, Gov. Nikki Haley (South Carolina) and Gov. Bobby Jindal (Louisiana), are members of the GOP and stridently opposed to Obama. Jindal and Haley are regarded as potential GOP presidential or vice presidential candidates themselves.

So, why do Indian-Americans love Obama so much?

Part of the reason may have to do with Obama's steadfast support of India's candidacy for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council. On a more personal note, Obama is familiar with Indian culture, has close relations with India's Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, quotes Mahatma Gandhi in speeches, and has even branded himself an 'honorary Desi.'

But I am an Indian-American, and I generally favor Republicans over the Democrats – which makes me a distinct minority within a minority.

Nonetheless, I think that Indian-American support for Obama (and Democrats in general) is built upon some false premises.

The No. 1 reason (I suspect) why Indian-Americans favor Democrats is their perception that the Republican Party

is opposed to immigration.

And that's it.

Forgetting for a moment that Obama has deported more illegal aliens than any administration in history, the Democratic Party's platform simply clashes with most of traditional Indian values.

I am generalizing, of course, but Indian culture promotes family, faith, education, sobriety, hard work, career, self-reliance and sexual morality. Such things as homosexuality, same-sex marriage and abortion (which the Democrats have made part of their core ideology for at least the past 20 years) are anathema to the majority of Indian-Americans, even those of my generation.

Thus, I am baffled as to why Indian-Americans reject the Republicans -- the party that almost perfectly matches their (our) world-view.

Regarding Obama specifically, Indian-Americans' love for him is based on some very cynical assumptions and attitudes.

I can safely say that many Indian-Americans, particularly those of the older generation, are very racist toward African-Americans. They generally believe that black people are lazy, immoral, violent and beyond hope (mirroring exactly the attitudes of the most virulent white bigots).

Obama, they claim, is an "exception."

Indeed, they refer to how "articulate," "intelligent" and "refined" he is (suggesting that most black people do not have these qualities).

An Indian taxi driver I once spoke to seemed to sum up this dichotomous perspective. This cabbie feared and detested blacks and dreaded having to pick them up as fares.

"I like Obama," he joyfully declared. "He's not like them others (blacks). He speaks good, dresses good and acts good. And he seems to like India a lot."

One can only wonder what kind of support Revs. Al Sharpton or Jesse Jackson would garner among the Indian-American community if they ran as the Democratic presidential candidate.

I have a feeling that Indian-American support for Obama will not reach the 68 percent mark noted in the aforementioned survey. Moreover, if Jindal or Haley (or some other Desi politician) becomes a GOP presidential candidate in the near future, we may witness a huge switch by Indian-Americans to the Republican Party.

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