

Wisckol: Asian Americans back Obama 3-1

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Asian American voters

Asian American voters have voted increasingly for the Democratic presidential nominee since 1992, and outpaced even Latinos in their support for Obama this year.

Source: Edison Research

The Register

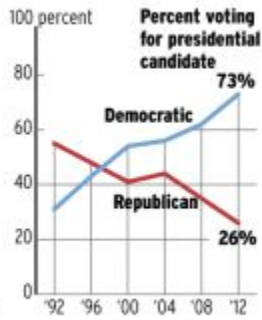


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• GRAPHIC:

Asian American voters and the presidential elections

Latino voters are credited with helping swing the vote for Barack Obama, but the rapidly growing Asian-American electorate supported the incumbent by an even broader margin. According to the Edison Research's exit polls, 73 percent of Asian Americans nationwide voted for Obama while 71 percent of Latinos did so. In California, 79 percent of Asian Americans favored Obama.

In 1992, 31 percent of Asian Americans preferred the Democratic nominee, but that number has grown in each subsequent election since. The Asian American population, meanwhile, has increased

32 percent over the last decade alone.

While they represented just 3.4 percent of the national vote, Asian Americans accounted for 11 percent of the California vote, according to Edison Research. Voter registration tallies show Orange County Asian American voters running nearly 5 points greater than the statewide share, according to Political Data.

By 2050, Asian Americans will account for 10 percent of the nation's voters and at least 20 percent of the state's voters, according to Taeku Lee, a UC Berkeley political scientist and co-author of the National Asian American Survey.

Despite their strong preference for Obama, Asian Americans are far less likely to identify with political parties than the electorate overall. In California, unaffiliated voters account for 39 percent of Asian Americans – more than identify with any given party. Among all voters, the unaffiliated share is 27.

Lee largely attributed that to the population being new to the U.S. Two out of three are foreign born.

"They're still learning what it means to be a Republican or a Democrat," Lee said. "But you really see their views when they vote. Party identification will catch up."

Why Obama?

Asian Americans overwhelmingly list the economy as the country's most important problem, followed by unemployment, health care and education, according to a pre-election National Asian American Survey. But while many gave Mitt Romney the edge on the economy, they were wary of him and his party.

"There have been comments from Romney and others that have sounded exclusionary to immigrants, to minorities, to women and to non-Christians," Lee said. At the same time, they identified with Obama's platform on health care, education and women's rights, according to polling.

The demographic's 20-year trend toward the Democratic Party is a result of Democrats increasingly distinguishing themselves from Republicans on these key issues, Lee said. They were further attracted by Obama's appointment of three Asian Americans to top cabinet posts (Secretary of Energy Steven Chu, Secretary of Veteran Affairs Eric Shinseki, and former Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke, now ambassador to China), he said.

Asian Americans were three times more likely to say Obama rather than Romney "truly cares about them," according to a survey by the National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development.

Asian Americans are also more likely to support tax hikes than the average voter. Proposition 30 was supported by 73 percent and Democrats' plan to increase taxes on the wealthy is supported by 71 percent, according to

NCAPACD.

"The argument that 'less government is better' does not have a clear advantage among Asian American voters," Lee said.

In next week's column, I'll look more closely at Orange County's GOP-leaning population of Asian American voters.

Also, analysts have criticized some aspects of Edison Research's exit polls, but its Asian American national vote tally is virtually identical to one done by NCAPACD.

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