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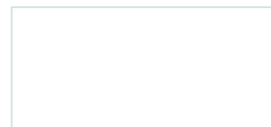
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Atlantic County politicians court Asian-American vote

By MICHELLE J. LEE Staff Writer, 609-272-7256

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Asian populations				
Atlantic County (Total population: 270,644)			New Jersey (Total population: 8,685,920)	
	Population	Percentage	Population	Percentage
Total Asian	17,758	6.7	648,484	7.6
Asian Indian	7,296	41.1	242,402	37.4
Chinese	4,204	23.7	128,073	19.7
Filipino	1,713	9.6	116,903	18.0
Japanese	332	1.9	13,954	2.2
Korean	747	4.2	91,378	14.1
Vietnamese	1,949	11.0	19,947	3.1
Other	1,517	8.5	35,827	5.5

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau's 2007 American Community Survey; Press analysis

Press graphic


GRAPHIC: Click on the image above for a larger view

A burgeoning Asian-American community is slowly changing the political landscape in Atlantic County. Candidates running for U.S. Congress, county sheriff and freeholder, and municipal offices have been paying attention. Many of them made appearances last week at an Indian dinner in Galloway and an Eid-al-Fitr celebration in Atlantic City, organized by the Bangladesh Association of South Jersey.

While Asian-Americans are very diverse, culturally and ethnically, they represent a desirable voting block because many are politically unaffiliated and, among voters, tend to have a high turnout rate, said Jane Junn, a professor at Rutgers University's Eagleton Institute of Politics, who is Korean American.

Junn said Asian Americans are in a position similar to Hispanic Americans in the 1990s - and the Asian community is growing.

"It's maturing politically," Junn said. "Not only are the people who came 15, 10 years ago have acculturated to American politics and culture, their children, in college and about to go to college, are voters."

 Asian Americans are the fastest growing minority group in New Jersey. The Garden State has 687,204 Asian Americans, the nation's third-highest **proportion** of Asian Americans (including people of mixed Asian descent) about 8 percent of the population of the state, according to **the U.S. Census Bureau's 2007 American Community Survey**.

Almost half of Asian Americans are also undecided voters: The National Asian American Survey, released last month, found 45 percent of Asian American voters in New Jersey are undecided, 38 percent support Obama and 17 percent support McCain. The national survey questioned 5,100 people in English and seven Asian languages.

Sensitive to these linguistic issues, McCain supporters have a Web site translated into Vietnamese, while Obama supporters posted online fliers translated into 14 languages, such as Arabic, Chinese and Hindi.

Local movers, shakers

Local Asian Americans have also taken initiative.

Mohammed Z. Islam is an enthusiastic Democrat. The Atlantic City accountant has volunteered with the local party since 1990. He believes Barack Obama will change Washington and improve the economy.

Islam, along with other Bangladeshi and South Asian organizers, registered more than 50 new voters. They have also been reminding people to go to the polls.


In contrast, Pravin Khatiwala, a hotel company owner from Ventnor, is registered as an independent, but has been a political volunteer since 1998 for mostly Republican candidates. Khatiwala supports John McCain and the local Republican party "because they run government like a business," and believes they can create more jobs and wealth.

Khatiwala and another hotel businessman, Basant Gupta, registered about 40 new voters within the Indian American community.

Asian American links

Biographical information about the candidates may appeal to the candidates:

Republican John McCain's experience fighting communists during the Vietnam War could attract some voters. McCain's family also

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While these are very nice people...they talk a good game and act like they are active in the community but they do not vote!! I do not know why but they never make it to the polls. When and if they ever do start to vote they will be a population who would need to be heard and have their say!!

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