



Greg Vojtko / The Press-Enterprise

Linda Nguyen, 70, of San Bernardino, gets a VOTE T-shirt from Rasmey Sam, President/CEO of Asian-American Resource Center, Inc.

A third of the nation's Asian Americans live in California. People of Asian and Pacific Islander ancestry made up 13 percent of the state's population in 2006, according to U.S. Census estimates. About 6 percent of the population of Riverside and San Bernardino counties was Asian.

Statewide, 67 percent of Asian Americans who are U.S. citizens are likely to vote in the November elections, the report found. In Riverside and San Bernardino counties, only 51 percent are.

That is largely because a disproportionate number of Asian Americans in the Inland area are relatively recent arrivals, either from other parts of California or from their native countries, said Karthick Ramakrishnan, an associate professor of political science at UC Riverside. Ramakrishnan authored the study with researchers from USC, UC Berkeley and Rutgers University in New Jersey.

People are less likely to vote if they have lived in an area for a short period of time, Ramakrishnan said Wednesday during a USC news conference at which the report was unveiled.

In addition, in areas with bigger and more established Asian populations, such as Los Angeles and Orange counties, there are longstanding Asian American organizations that mount sophisticated get-out-the-vote efforts, Ramakrishnan said. There's nothing like that in the Inland area.

"We expect that in the future, as more organizations come up, and the population gets more established," a higher percentage of Inland Asian Americans will vote, he said.

Tanzila Ahmed, policy manager of the Orange County Asian and Pacific Islander Community Alliance, said door-to-door get-out-the-vote mobilizing is more difficult in the Inland area than places like Orange County's Little Saigon or Los Angeles' Koreatown because the Inland Asian population is smaller and more dispersed.

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Hung Nguyen, 65 of Highland, reads a pamphlet during a voting presentation to seniors at Asian-American Resource Center, Inc.

"You have all these ethnic hubs of people living together, so you can go knock on doors," she said. "You don't have that in the Inland Empire."

Also, in those counties, ballots are available in several Asian languages. Federal law requires foreign-language ballots only for counties in which at least 10,000 people or 5 percent of the voting-population speaks a certain language.

There are not yet enough speakers of an Asian language in Riverside and San Bernardino to reach that threshold, said Daniel Kikuo Ichinose, project director for the Los Angeles-based Asian Pacific American Legal Center of Southern California. Ichinose said people are less likely to vote if they have trouble reading the election materials.

The Asian American Resource Center in San Bernardino distributes non-partisan voter booklets in seven Asian languages as part of its voter-mobilization effort, Rasmey Sam, executive director of the group, said by phone.

The survey found that, although more than half of Asian-Americans statewide do not identify with a political party, more than twice as many call themselves Democrats than Republicans.

In the Inland area, the partisan leanings were almost exactly the reverse, with 36 percent identifying with the Republican Party and 22 percent with the Democratic Party. McCain is leading among Asian Americans in the Inland area, while Obama is leading statewide. Researchers warned that the small sample size of Inland Asian voters means there is a high margin of error.

James Na, a Korean-American McCain supporter from Chino Hills, said Inland Asians are more likely to be socially conservative on issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage than Asian-Americans in other parts of the state, which is a key reason why many are Republican and will vote for McCain.

Al Ko, a Riverside supporter of Obama and a Korean-American, said Obama's big lead among Asian voters statewide reflects discontent over the economy and the Iraq war. The economy was by far the most important issue for Asian American voters, the study found.

Ko said many Asian American voters do not identify either as Republicans or Democrats because a high proportion are immigrants who have not lived in the United States long enough to develop strong partisan leanings.

The study was based upon interviews with nearly 4,400 Asian Americans nationwide, including almost 1,900 in California.

Reach David Olson at 951-368-9462 or dolson@PE.com

Asian American voters

Inland Asian Americans have different voting patterns than Asians in other parts of the state, a study released Wednesday found.

Only 51 percent of Inland Asian American citizens are likely to vote on Nov. 4, compared with 67 percent statewide.

Barack Obama is leading John McCain among Asian Americans statewide, by 42 to 24 percent, but McCain leads in the Inland area 44 to 24 percent.

36 percent of Inland Asian Americans identify with the Republican Party, compared to 16 percent statewide.

22 percent of Inland Asian Americans are Democrats, compared to 33 percent statewide.

The survey also found:

Asian Americans statewide oppose Proposition 8 - which would ban state recognition of same-sex marriage - by 57 to 32 percent, with 11 percent undecided.

Voters of Vietnamese ancestry are the only Asian ethnic group to prefer McCain over Obama statewide. Obama's strongest support is among Asian Indian voters.

58 percent of likely voters said the economy was the most important issue facing the nation. The Iraq war was far behind in second place, at 10 percent.

SOURCE: National Asian American Survey. The survey was conducted between Aug. 18 and Sept. 26.

NOTE: There is a high margin of error in the Inland-specific data, because of a small sample size of 49 voters out of nearly 1,900 surveyed statewide.
