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Pax Americana with an Asian touch



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IMMIGRANT POWER: Asians who have made the United States their home could help Barack Obama win a second term



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WITH four weeks to go for the United States presidential election, Barack Obama seems set to win a second term. Contributing to a possible landslide could be the Asians who have made America their home.

Leading the pack will be the Chinese and the Indians. Since their advent more than a century ago, they constitute 22 and 20 per cent respectively of the Asian-American population.

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It is not for nothing that Obama paid high-profile visits during his present tenure. He made New Delhi feel like the Asian leader and Beijing was accorded regional superpower status. He upset both, but got away with it.

How a presidential candidate is viewed "back home" does count among America's immigrants. A new national survey of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAP) reveals that Indian Americans are the strongest Obama supporters among the larger AAP group with an overwhelming 68 per cent to five per cent over Republican rival Mitt Romney, with around 25 per cent undecided.

Obama's overall support level among the Asians is a huge 43-24.

The Asians who have migrated to the land of prosperity and opportunity are 18 per cent Filipino, 11 per cent Vietnamese, 10 per cent Korean, and five per cent Japanese.

The survey, reported in Times of India reveals that while Indians, Koreans and Hmongs are most strongly identified with the Democratic Party, Filipino and Vietnamese Americans favour the Republicans.

The survey comes amid growing Asian-American political influence in many states, including key presidential battlegrounds such as Nevada, Ohio and Virginia.

As of 2010, the Asian population exceeded the five per cent threshold in roughly one in four congressional districts and in nearly 600 cities.

After decades of surging economically and settling psychologically, Asians, many of whom have witnessed multi-party contests in their respective countries, have joined America's two-party polity with some enthusiasm. They occupy key positions in Washington and in various state capitals.

A record number of Asian Americans are running for Congress this year. A hopeful hailing from Nepal and another from Bangladesh lost out in the primaries.

Five Indian-Americans, giving a tough fight to their opponents in their respective congressional districts are Upendra Chivukula from New Jersey; Ami Bera and Ranjit "Rikky" Gill both from California; Manan Trivedi from Pennsylvania; and Syed Taj from Michigan.

Of them, only Gill is a Republican while the rest are Democrats.

The survey reveals that Indian-Americans voted for Obama by a massive 93-4 margin in the 2008 presidential elections involving John McCain, much more than the pre-polls estimate of 84 per cent.

Obama appears to have substantially retained that support, scoring the highest job approval rating (84 per cent), much higher than the national average of 59 per cent.

The survey belies speculation that Indian-Americans are veering towards the Republican Party in a significant way. The assumption is that as they become wealthier or stay longer in the US, their conservative ethic pulls them towards the Republican Party. The party boasts of some high-profile Indians American leaders. However, "while governors Bobby Jindal (Louisiana) and Nikki Haley (South Carolina) are among the strongest

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critics of Obama, they seem to be in a relatively small minority of Indian Americans who support Mitt Romney," the survey notes.

Party-wise, how are American presidents viewed from India?

Republican Dwight D. Eisenhower was the first to visit India. Indians loved the charismatic Kennedys, all Democrats, just as they hate Richard Nixon, a Republican, to this day.

Democrat Bill Clinton helped end Delhi's isolation following the 1998 nuclear tests and got Pakistan to withdraw troops from Kargil in 1999.

Republican George W. Bush wooed India as never before, pushing a civil nuclear pact, but Indian-Americans preferred Democrat Obama.

How "close" India and the US are gets debated in both countries. If the Indian political right and the left have united against Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's renewed push at economic reforms, calling it a "sell-out" to the Americans, many an Indian and American analyst wants India to open up more.

Obama's popularity with Indians is not difficult to explain. He hosts Deepavali at the White House and draws hope from Mumbai youth "spreading knowledge for the benefit of mankind".

Indians anywhere may pay only lip service to the Mahatma, but they appreciate Obama invoking him at the United nations General Assembly: "Intolerance is itself a form of violence and an obstacle to the growth of a true democratic spirit."

Obama ended the Iraq war, a Bush-era legacy, and has laid a timetable for quitting Afghanistan. The twin actions are perceived as evidence of America's declining global power. But it would go well with his voters. This is despite the common urge of both Obama and Romney to restore that power and influence.

Get ready for Pax Americana with an Asian touch.



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