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California Indians strongly back Obama: survey

October 29th, 2008 - 10:47 am ICT by IANS -

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Washington, Oct 29 (IANS) Indian Americans in California are the strongest Asian supporters of Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama with about two-thirds backing him as against a little over half nationally, according to a new survey. Voting Indians in California which has more Asian-Americans than any other state, are the strongest supporters of Obama, preferring him by 62 percent to just 12 percent who favour McCain with 25 percent still undecided, it says. Nationally, 53 percent of Indians favour Obama.



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On the other end of the spectrum in California were Vietnamese Americans, who favour McCain by 52 percent to 21 percent.

Asian Americans in California favour Obama by 42 percent to 24 percent.

Part of the National Asian American Survey (NAAS), described as the most comprehensive survey of Asian-American political views ever, with 4,394 people surveyed by phone between Aug 18 and Sep 26, the poll covered 1,891 Californians, including 229 Indian Americans.

Asian Americans are twice as likely to be Democrat as Republican (33 percent to 16 percent), with Indians by far the most Democratic (50 percent, vs. just 7 percent Republicans, 13 percent Independent and 30 percent Non-partisan), it said.

Those who think of Asians as socially conservative would be surprised to find that they oppose a ban on same-sex marriage, the survey said noting 57 percent of likely voters do not support Proposition 8, a ballot initiative which would eliminate the existing right for same-sex couples to marry. Only 32 percent favour the initiative.

The survey also suggested that “Those who participate in the politics of their home countries in some manner are actually more likely to vote in the United States than those who do not (65 percent versus 50 percent).”

One of the authors of the report Karthick Ramakrishnan, an associate professor of political science at the University of California, Riverside, says Indians have a higher rate of voter participation than many other Asian groups, but the same advantage does not extend to other forms of political participation.

In his view Indians higher voter participation is likely due to three main factors: a) South Asians tend to have higher incomes than other groups, b) they have the highest levels of English proficiency, and c) they have stronger party identification than many other Asian groups.

“Still, their participation is lower than the national average, with lower party attachments and lack of voter mobilisation being an important factor,” Ramakrishnan told the South Asian Journalists Association (SAJA) forum.

Indians identification with the Democratic Party is very strong, second only to Japanese Americans, who traditionally have been very strongly pro-Democrat, he says. Still, one half are either Independent or Non-Partisan and don't think of themselves in terms of party labels.

On the findings that people who pay attention to homeland politics are more active in American politics, Ramakrishnan says: “My hunch has always been that people who are active in homeland politics are inherently interested in politics. So there is no necessary tradeoff between homeland and domestic participation.”

“Indeed, given the importance of US foreign policy in South Asia, and the growing business ties and economic interdependence, it is understandable that interest in the homeland will help foster participation in the US,” he says.

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