

Asian-American voters are spurning Trump and the GOP

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Asian-American voters are siding strongly with Hillary Clinton in the presidential contest, as younger voters in particular abandon Donald Trump and the Republican Party, a new poll of those voters has found.

Clinton has a firm hold on 55 percent of Asian-American voters. When those leaning toward the candidates are counted, she leads Trump by 49 points, 70 percent-21 percent.

That puts her in striking distance of President Barack Obama's standing in the 2012 election, when he won 73 percent of Asian-American voters, according to exit polls.

The results released Wednesday as part of the National Asian American Survey suggest that Trump's rhetoric — especially on the topic of immigration — has caused an irreparable breach with those voters.

"All of the anti-immigrant rhetoric and harsh tone and language is a turnoff to voters," said Karthick Ramakrishnan, a University of California, Riverside political science professor and associate dean of the School of Public Policy, who directed the survey.

In a twist, the gender and education demarcations seen in the national electorate this year were absent among Asian-Americans. A majority of both men and women sided with the Democratic nominee, as did almost 6 in 10 of both college-educated voters and those without college degrees.

Among white voters, Trump has regularly claimed the allegiance of men and those without a college degree; Clinton has won among women and the college-educated.

The findings among Asian-American voters are similar to results in surveys this year among Latino voters, who have sided with Clinton regardless of gender or educational experience.

"Race seems to trump the impact of other categories like gender and class," Ramakrishnan said. "This is fairly clear evidence that we do not live in a post-racial society. ... Other differences like education don't matter as much for communities of color."

As negative as Asian-American voters overall were toward the Republican nominee and his party, the views worsened among younger voters, suggesting a difficult path ahead regardless of the results of November's election.

Fifty-two percent of voters overall had a "very unfavorable" view of Trump; among millennial voters that figure rose to 69 percent. Adding in voters with a "somewhat unfavorable" position resulted in 67 percent with a negative view of him. Among voters under age 35, that rose to 81 percent.

Clinton, by contrast, was seen in a "very unfavorable" light by only 18 percent of voters; 36 percent were either somewhat or very negative toward her. Almost 6 in 10 voters thought well of Clinton, compared to only 23 percent for Trump.

But it was voters' views of Republicans that spelled the greatest long-term danger to a party whose base of older white voters is rapidly losing strength in the electorate. (Asian-American voters will make up 3 percent to 4 percent of November voters nationally, but their heft will be felt more acutely in contested states like Nevada and Virginia.)

Almost 6 in 10 Asian-American voters had a negative view of the Republican Party; fewer than 3 in 10 had a positive view. Those numbers were reversed when it came to the Democratic Party.

And, as with Trump, younger voters were more negatively disposed. Seven in 10 of voters under age 35 had an unfavorable view of the party, to 31 percent who had a negative view of the Democratic Party.

That alliance with Democrats — and against the Republicans — is telling because Asian-American voters have historically been more independent than other groups.

About 4 in 10 said in the new survey that they were independent, and another 4 in 10 said they were Democrats. Only 16 percent said they were Republicans.

But when those independents who lean to a particular party were considered, almost 6 in 10 were with the Democrats. Among younger voters, that figure rose to 7 in 10.

The liberal alliance appeared to be driven by issues. The survey found strong support among Asian-American voters for Obama's health care plan, for

government help with college costs and for measures that would limit emissions in order to lessen climate change.

Trump's proposal to ban Muslims from entering the country was opposed by almost two-thirds of Asian-American voters. But they were more equivocal about accepting Syrian refugees, with 44 percent approving and 35 percent opposed.

The exception when it came to embracing liberal views was the legalization of marijuana: 56 percent were opposed and only 36 percent were in support.

The survey illuminated a quirk found in almost all polling of Latino or Asian voters: Immigration is a powerful character test for candidates, but it doesn't rank high on the list of issues that those voters think are most pressing.

In the Asian-American survey, the economy was seen as the most important issue, followed distantly by terrorism and racism. Immigration was cited as the most important issue by only 4 percent of voters — less than one-sixth the percentage who cited the economy.

But it clearly is a threshold issue, Ramakrishnan said, one that can either block a candidate from consideration or ease the path to acceptance, depending on their position and tone. In Trump's case, his handling of the issue has blunted his candidacy.

"The way that a candidate talks about immigration is a sign of respect or disrespect," he said. "It's not that immigration is a big policy issue — it's that they can't bring themselves to vote for someone who seems to disrespect their community."

The poll questioned 2,238 Asian-American adults, including 1,694 registered voters, between Aug. 10 and Thursday. It has a margin of error of 3.5

percentage points in either direction among registered voters, and larger for other subgroups.