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Survey: Asian-American voters support Obama, many remain undecided

By Astrid Munn

(AXcess News) Washington - More than a third of likely Asian American voters remain undecided on a presidential candidate, and 35 percent identify themselves as nonpartisan - factors John McCain and Barack Obama might want to consider, researchers said Monday.

Researchers announced these and other results from the first [National Asian American Survey](#), which they said is the largest and most comprehensive pre-election measure of Asian Americans' political leanings, at the National Press Club.

The survey, which took place Aug. 18 to Sept. 26, interviewed more than 4,000 Asian Americans likely to vote in November and was conducted in English, Cantonese, Mandarin, Hindi, Japanese, Korean, Tagalog and Vietnamese.

"Most national polls cannot report the preferences of these likely voters because they do not interview in multiple languages, and the number of interviews they conduct among Asian Americans is very small," said researcher Janelle Wong, an associate professor of political science at the University of Southern California.

The Asian and Pacific Islander American Vote, a nonpartisan nonprofit group, reports nearly 7 million Asian Americans are eligible to vote, and about half are registered.

In comparison, the Pew Hispanic Center reported last year that 18.2 million Latinos are eligible to vote and projected that 10.6 million would register. Next to Latinos, who made up 14.8 percent of the population in 2006, Asian Americans are the fastest-growing share of the U.S. population - now at 5 percent.

The survey found that among Asian-American citizens, 65 percent can be described as "likely voters." And within this group, 41 percent support Obama, and 24 percent support McCain. These trends hold for toss-up states such as Nevada, Washington and Virginia, where 43 percent of Asian-American likely voters support Obama and 22 percent support McCain.

However, a third of likely Asian-American voters remain undecided. Surveys of all likely voters found 8 percent were undecided.

"With such a high proportion of undecided voters, Asian Americans are a critical source of potential votes for either candidate in the final weeks of the campaign," said researcher Karthick Ramakrishnan, an associate professor of political science at the University of California, Riverside.

Researchers attributed the high number of undecided voters to the changing nature of political parties and naturalized immigrants' unfamiliarity with U.S. politics.

"Parties played a very strong role in bringing immigrants into politics," said researcher Taeku Lee, an associate professor of political science at the University of California, Berkeley, referring to political parties' inclusion of European immigrants in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. "Local parties are much weaker than in the past."

Lee said elections have become more candidate-centered, with campaigns now targeting specific demographics. And for some candidates, the cost of reaching Asian-American communities outweighs the projected benefits.

"Asian Americans are essentially ignored," he said.

Although Asian immigrants have a high naturalization rate, researcher Jane Junn said civic participation does not come easily for many new citizens.

"When immigrants come to this country, they don't have a history with U.S. politics," said Junn, an associate professor of political science at Rutgers University. "It takes a little bit of time for them to determine who the key players and issues are."

Obama may have an overall lead among Asian-American voters, but support for the candidates varies by ethnic group. Voters of Japanese, Chinese and Indian ethnicity support Obama by more than a 3-1 ratio. Korean- and Filipino-American voters follow by a smaller ratio.

Vietnamese Americans say by a nearly a 2-1 ratio that they will vote for McCain.

Researchers said Vietnamese Americans tend to side with Republican candidates for reasons similar to those of Cuban Americans who also tend to vote Republican, in that the Republican Party is typically associated with anti-communist positions.

The economy was a key issue for survey participants. About 80 percent of likely voters said the

economy is one of the most important problems the nation faces, with 55 percent saying the economy was most important to them personally.

Susan Allen, president of the U.S. Pan Asian American Chamber of Commerce, a non-profit organization connecting Asian American suppliers to corporate and government buyers, said there are ties between Asian-American voters' interest in the economy and their nonpartisan stance.

"Asian Americans are generally apolitical. They tend to keep their nose to the grind, and the most important things for them are family, work and business," Allen said. "They live a rather sheltered life, and politics are not at the top of their agenda. So they are not familiar with the political dialogue or debate going on in the country. They are paying attention to their work and their families."

At the same time, Allen said Asian Americans owning small businesses, firms with 500 or fewer employees, have businesses interests that complement McCain's plan for smaller businesses, which includes lowering taxes and providing incentives for reinvestment.

"For that, they may go for McCain," Allen said.

The poll has a margin of error of plus or minus 1.5 percentage points. For subgroups, the margin of error ranges from plus or minus 2.9 to 4.3 percentage points.

Source: *Scripps Howard Foundation Wire*

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