

Fil-Ams Top Amerasian Voters in US

By ROY C. MABASA
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MANILA, Philippines --- Among Asian American citizens, there will be more Filipino Americans who will troop to the polls in the Nov. 6 United States presidential elections, a report by the National Asian American Survey (NAAS) said.

According to the NAAS, which conducted a tracking survey from July 31 to September 19, 52 percent of Filipino Americans are likely to vote in 2012-- considered one of the highest among Asian Americans.

The results of the survey -- which was included in the NAAS report titled "Public Opinion of a Growing Electorate: Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in 2012" -- also showed that a high proportion of Filipino Americans are political independents, reaching as high as 47 percent in 2012.

The report explained that a substantial percent of the Filipino American non-partisans are driven not only by those who positively affirm their identification as independents, but also "non-identifiers" -- those who "don't know" how they identify, or do not yet think in terms of US political parties.

But among Asian Americans who do identify with the political parties, Filipino Americans are now emerging as the constituency that offers more support to Republicans than Democrats.

This is a significant shift from prior surveys, the NAAS report noted.

In the 2008 presidential race, Filipino American voters favored Democratic bet Barack Obama over Republican John McCain (50 percent vs. 46 percent).

Four years later, the pattern is reversed: Filipino Americans now give Republican Mitt Romney the highest level of support among Asian Americans with 38 percent, a six-point advantage over the incumbent President (32 percent).

"In a significant shift from prior surveys, Filipino Americans who identify as Republicans now outnumber those who identify as Democrats," the report pointed out. "Indeed a larger portion of Filipinos now identify with the Republican Party than any Asian American group."

Previously, the staunchest Republicans were Vietnamese Americans.

Despite this, the survey still found that the performance rating of Obama was high among Filipino Americans with 45 percent approving the way he is handling his job.

Filipino Americans also have a more favorable impression of Obama than Romney (46 percent vs. 37 percent). However, it was noted in the study that Romney's favorability ratings among Filipino Americans were the highest ratings among Asian Americans.

Likewise, 33 percent of Filipino Americans have a more favorable impression of the Democrats who are running for Congress than the Republicans (30 percent).

Furthermore, a substantial proportion of Filipino American respondents still have yet to decide who to vote for the presidency. Perhaps, the study suggested, this percentage of the Filipino American population is more amenable to campaign appeals and mobilization efforts.

The survey also considered voter preferences of Asian Americans in the so-called battleground states: Ohio, Virginia, Florida, New Hampshire, Iowa, Colorado, Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Missouri, Nevada, and North Carolina.

Based on the polls, 15 percent of Filipino Americans in the US live in these battleground states.

However, they constitute a smaller share of the likely voter population than their national averages -- 19 percent vs. 25 percent.

The study noted that voting is just one of many different ways that citizens express themselves politically and become politically engaged.

For Asian Americans who are non-citizens, these non-voting modes of participation are especially important, the study stressed.

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The survey made clear that a majority of Filipino Americans (59 percent) discuss politics with family and friends.

In other non-electoral activities--working for an election campaign, contributing money to a certain candidate, contacting elected representatives of government officials, attending a protest or demonstration rally, and engaging in politics online--the levels are somewhat low.

The study further showed that Filipino Americans generally follow political affairs in the Philippines. But this attention is not a deterrent to their political involvement in the US.

Indeed, it was noted that those involved in their home country were slightly more likely to be involved in the US elections than those who were not.

The report is based on data collected from telephone interviews of adults in the US, registered and unregistered voters.

The NAAS survey conducted its first nationally representative survey of the political views of Asian Americans in 2008.

This year, they conducted a tracking survey with the addition of even more Asian ethnic groups than the first.

The survey also noted that one of the key factors in voter turnout is mobilization--being recruited to register to vote and being asked to participate on Election Day.

Overall, only 26 percent of the Filipino respondents reported being contacted by anyone about registering or turning out to vote.

In this respect, Filipino American community leaders have already made a strong commitment to be actively engaged in the US political process by registering hundreds of eligible voters and getting them out to vote in the November 6 elections.

For them, it is now all about building political power as an ethnic community.

"And that means translating our numbers in a way that truly count," said Bert Dayao, Capital Region chairman of the National Federation of Filipino American Associations (NaFFAA). "And that means translating our numbers in a way that they truly count."

Political mobilization and empowerment were among the themes that formed the FilAm Vote Coalition of Hampton Roads (FAVCOHR)--a non-partisan voter mobilization project, tapping into the estimated 40,000-strong Fil-Am community in Chesapeake, Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, Suffolk, Portsmouth and Virginia Beach.

Filipinos in the Hampton Roads metropolitan area grew by 33 percent in 10 years, according to the 2010 Census -- a rate of growth that has caught the attention of state and local elected officials and policy makers.

Latest data issued by the US Census Bureau showed that US residents of Filipino descent were the second largest subgroup in the single-race Asian category of the US population with 3.4 million in 2010, a 44.5 percent increase in the first decade of the 21st century,

According to the bureau, among the Asian race, the Filipino population in the US (which numbered around 2.4 million in 2000) was second only to the Chinese numbering around 4 million in 2010 and slightly higher than Indians with 3.2 million.

These three groups accounted for 60 percent of Asians which is considered as the fastest-growing segment by race of the US population within the period 2000-2010.

According to the bureau, almost half of the total Filipino population in the US (49 percent) resides in the West Coast, 16.3 percent lives in the South, 9.7 percent in the Northeast and 8.4 in the Midwest, while the rest are scattered throughout the other states of the US.

Filipinos have the highest proportion of Asians who lived in California (43 percent).

The state with the second-largest proportions of Filipinos is Hawaii (10 percent), followed by Illinois (4.1 percent), Texas and Washington (both with 4 percent).

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