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only 23% of the Latino vote, compared to 71% for the Democratic challenger Gray Davis.

Asian Americans Have Little Party Loyalty

Since the 1994 election, Asian Americans have doubled their share of the electorate. According to Don Nakanishi, director of the Asian American Studies Center at UCLA, “Asian American participation is up partially because of the campaign finance scandal in 1996. It did not turn off voting. In fact, it had the opposite effect. Asians became more interested and committed to vote and were encouraged to run for office.”

Nakanishi also notes there has been more of a concerted effort this election cycle to get out the vote by Asian American organizations. An organization named CAUSE (Chinese Americans United for Self Empowerment) has begun leadership and candidate training classes to prepare young Asian Americans to run for office. Although the black community and women’s groups have been doing this kind of training for years, this marks the first time it has ever been done in Asian American communities.

Currently, Asian Americans are a less monolithic group when registering to vote than Latinos. In the *Times* exit poll, two-thirds of Latinos were registered as Democrats, 21% as Republicans, and 8% as decline-to-state. (Latino party registration has not changed in the 20 years the *Times* has been doing exit polls in California.) Among Asian Americans, 45% are Democrats, 37% are Republicans, and 17% are registered as decline-to-state.

This group voted overwhelmingly for Democratic gubernatorial candidate Gray Davis (65%), with only 35% of their vote going to Republican nominee Dan Lungren. In the US Senate race, however, the Republican candidate was Matthew Fong, the first Chinese American to run for US Senate in California. Chinese American voters overwhelmingly went for Fong, who beat Democrat Barbara Boxer by three points among all Asian American voters (51 to 48%).

“Asian Americans don’t vote straight party line,” says Stewart Kwoh, executive director of the Asian Pacific-American Legal Center. “Their vote depends on candidates and issues, not party affiliation.” Kwoh believes that “the parties cannot take Asian Americans for granted. They have weak party loyalty. Most of the voters are new immigrants who have no emotional ties or political stakes in either major party.”

According to Kwoh, “Asian Americans supported Gray Davis because he has proven that he is a friend of Asian Americans going back to the days when Jerry Brown was governor. Lungren, on the other hand, while in Congress vehemently opposed redress for Japanese Americans, and it would have been extremely unlikely for Japanese Americans to vote for the Republican candidate.”

Don Nakanishi believes that California’s Republican party must do some deep soul-searching if it hopes to attract the Asian American vote in future state elections, a view similarly held by Latino leaders regarding their own growing voting community. In the wake of modest but important GOP gains among these voters in 1998, California Democrats might also do well to heed a word to the wise in the new millennium as California continues to reveal its new electoral face.

D’Amato Comes Up Short (and Other Interesting Tales From New York)

By Lee M. Miringoff

This year’s New York Senate race pitting GOP three-termer Alfonse D’Amato against Democratic challenger Charles Schumer was one of the most closely watched contests in the nation. Public pollsters tracking the candidates’ fortunes and misfortunes were also under close scrutiny.

New York was not immune from the 1998 national political discourse, which tested the legitimacy of public polls. How could President Clinton be surviving with a high approval rating as consistently measured in the public polls? What is it about those polls and pollsters? Typical questions about

sampling (how can so few respondents be representative?), respondent selection (why has no one I know ever been interviewed?), and new queries about refusal rates crept into the popular media.

Schumer Reads From His Own Script

The cloud hanging over the interpretation of the Empire State battleground was that Senator D’Amato had a reputation for pulling close races out of the fire in the closing days. The expectation was that he might do it again. The reality was that

this “come from behind” reputation was built upon one instance. D’Amato had run for re-election twice previously. In 1986, he had won easily. In 1992, he had narrowly escaped defeat in a race where his opponent seemed to be reading from the D’Amato campaign script. Then, Democrat Robert Abrams had managed to cede the high road to D’Amato; in 1998, Charles Schumer was not so cooperative.

Schumer successfully blunted each of D’Amato’s multi-pronged attacks. First, D’Amato tried to minimize a significant gender gap through a series of ads highlighting his efforts on behalf of breast cancer research. Schumer countered with repeated visits by Hillary Clinton into the state. Also, the tragic shooting of Doctor Barnett Slepian outside Buffalo shifted the agenda onto women’s issues and focused public attention on D’Amato’s anti-abortion position.

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Second, D’Amato tried to isolate Schumer as a New York City liberal politician in an effort to take advantage of regional differences. Schumer met this tactic by relying on his shared ballot line with upstate Reform Party gubernatorial candidate Tom Golisano. The Schumer campaign fully appreciated that if upstate voters could break from Governor George Pataki and vote for Golisano, they could break from Senator D’Amato and vote for Schumer. Schumer’s strategy included a rally with Golisano in upstate Rochester, Golisano’s hometown, the day before the election. Unlike 1992, when D’Amato attracted the lion’s share of the one million votes independent Ross Perot garnered in New York, Schumer was successful in linking his upstate fortunes to Golisano. Golisano received approximately 10% of the vote statewide, the bulk coming from upstate. According to VNS exit poll analysis, two-thirds of Golisano backers also voted for Schumer.

Third, D’Amato made a concerted effort to attract Jewish voters, who had given him over 40% of their vote in 1992. He emphasized his efforts to retrieve from Swiss bank accounts assets that had been stolen from Jews during the Holocaust. D’Amato stopped himself cold in his tracks, however, when he used a Yiddish slur to refer to Schumer. Worse yet, by first denying he used the word “Putzhead” and then getting caught, he made Schumer’s “Liar, Liar” case for him.

Finally, D’Amato’s one-note song throughout the campaign about Schumer’s attendance record in Congress was too

lame. The view expressed by many voters, according to the polls, that it was simply time for a change, was a far greater motivator.

The Press and the Polls

This Senate race was indeed close throughout the fall campaign, as reflected in all the pre-election polls. Schumer was numerically ahead in polls conducted by Blum and Weprin for NY 1, Quinnipiac College, Manhattanville College, and in those surveys we conducted at Marist College.

However, an early poll for the *Daily News* and WABC-TV showed D’Amato in front. The *New York Times* poll had the race dead even, as did the final Zogby Poll; and even though all the polls were showing a close race, which it was, it was this second group of polls that contributed to setting election night expectations. Especially glaring in this regard were the tabloid headlines in the closing days of the campaign, based upon the Zogby Poll, which reported that D’Amato was narrowing the gap, that undecided voters were breaking his way, and that the race was a numerical tossup.

Election Night Chagrin

While our final tracking had Schumer up 6.5%, with the attention Zogby and the single-digit margins in the other polls garnered, many politicians, pollsters, pundits, and viewers settled into their election night armchairs awaiting what they thought would be a long night. The early wave of exit polls on Tuesday, however, pointed to Schumer’s likely victory, and the election night projections were quick in coming: D’Amato had been defeated. The shock effect of projecting Schumer the winner at 9:00 p.m., as soon as the polls closed, was considerable. It also, unfortunately, contributed to the predictable post-election critiques, which featured such headlines as, “The Experts Examine Their Miscalculations,” “Surveys Were Polls Apart from Reality,” and “Election’s Over, and Poll-Searching Begins.”

Despite the obvious conclusion that late pre-election polls are better predictors of election outcomes than measurements that stop earlier, sponsorship of these later surveys is hard to attract. Headlines about the horserace for Sunday’s edition (based upon interviews which stop on Friday) often serve as the “final” word.

News cycles also limit what one can realistically release. What do you do with an election eve tracking? Just as politicians often proclaim that the only poll that counts is the one taken on Election Day, pollsters know that the best pre-election poll is taken on election eve.

The Past is Not Always a Guide

Beyond the margins separating D’Amato and Schumer,

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pre-election polls provided useful insight to this election. One consistent finding from the Marist Poll was that, contrary to conventional wisdom, the lower the turnout—usually a help for Republican candidates—the better Democrat Schumer fared. Turnout models of likely voters filtered in expected directions: more upscale, more Republican, and less New York City. (Although election returns showed that falloff in largely Democratic NYC continued to be greater than in other parts of the state, the NYC share of the statewide vote was not as low as in previous off-year elections.) But Schumer had unusual support in the suburbs, among more highly educated voters, and among

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higher income groups. A close examination of the turnout models revealed that D’Amato’s soft support was dropping as the electorate shrank.

Turnout on Election Day in New York State was down nearly 20% among

registered voters from what it had been in 1994, the last off-year election. Schumer’s wider than expected victory, 9%, was the result of this turnout pattern.

Estimates of likely voters, intensity of candidate support, and apportioning of undecided voters must reflect the ebb and flow of a particular campaign and its candidates. Polls which rely on previous turnout patterns and weight accordingly—often by political party—ask for trouble when a particular election does not follow suit. As the ’ol Professor Casey Stengel might comment: “The future is not always as we remember it.”

