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# SURVEY: Latinos account for 44% of Coachella Valley's population

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do something about the 12 million people here illegally," said Sylvia Cardona, a member of the grassroots group Comité Latino, which supports the Obama clubs.

Although immigration did not rank high on the laundry list of concerns among Latinos in the poll, Cardona said the economy and U.S. immigration policy are closely tied.

McCain is expected to unveil his immigration policy package later in the summer, said Rick Gorka, the Arizona senator's communications director for the Western region based in Henderson, Nev.

McCain's camp believes that plan will lure more Latinos to his campaign, Gorka said.

### Wooing Latino voters

Both political parties have sought Latino voters, believing they are an important bloc in big battleground states like Florida, Colorado, New Mexico and Nevada, researchers said.

The Bush administration has tried to woo Latino voters to the GOP, making immigration reform a top priority that ultimately failed after dividing the party.

Latinos comprise about 15 percent of the U.S. population, but only 9 percent of eligible voters, primarily because they often are not citizens or are younger than

voting age — which has some concerned this eventual majority will have no political clout.

Latinos account for 44 percent of the population in the Coachella Valley's nine cities.

National and local citizenship drives have attempted to boost the number of eligible Latino voters.

Pew researchers said the poll findings indicate the shift toward the Democratic Party is largely because of discontent with the war and a shaky economy, reflecting the general sentiment of the public.

"We have reason to believe that Latinos are unhappy, that they do not view the president favorably," said Susan Minushkin, Pew Hispanic Center deputy director.

In the 10 years the center has tracked party sentiment, Thursday's poll marks the greatest spread between identifying with Democrats or Republicans, 39 percent.

The shift away from the Republican Party, some suggest, is a result of failed immigration reform.

"In difficult times that we're facing right now, who takes the brunt of the hardship on the economic ladder? When you look at it, they're Latinos. That's just the reality," said Juan Lujan, a Mexican historian and dean of off-campus programs for College of the Desert in Palm Desert.

"(John) McCain possesses, for a lot of people, maintaining the course."

Not true, McCain's campaign said.

"The campaign is actually reaching out to Latino voters as we're reaching out to all voters," Gorka said.

Gorka pointed to McCain's messages on lower taxes, help for small-business owners and "meaningful immigration reform" as issues that resonate with Latino voters.

In his presidential run, McCain has not supported a pathway to citizenship for the estimated 12 million undocumented immigrants, many of whom are Latino, living in the U.S.

McCain has supported securing the borders, which, for the most part, is the 2,000-mile southern border with Mexico. Some cite federal studies that have shown a greater risk of terrorists entering through Canada.

Pew Hispanic Center conducted the poll of 2,015 Latinos, 44 percent of whom report being registered voters, nationally from June 9 through July 13.

Founded in 2001, the Pew Hispanic Center conducts research on Latinos and their impact in the United States to foster education. The Center does not take policy positions.

To read a copy of the full report, go to <http://pewhispanic.org>.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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# POT: Thousands of plants seized

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cial agent. The Desert Sun is not identifying the agent for the agent's safety.

The plantation was reported by water district employees who noticed a spike in fecal matter during a routine creek water test.

The creek water is not part of the district drinking water system, according to water officials. It was never available for public consumption.

The forest service worked in conjunction with the Riverside County Sheriff's Department, the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration Thursday to remove the marijuana.

As they ripped out the plants, they kept a running toll of the number, and bundled them for helicopter crews.

Helicopter crews then dumped the plants into a truck and they were taken elsewhere to be destroyed.

Officials are not disclosing where the plants were taken or how they are destroyed.

"It's hard, hard, dirty, hot work," said Miller.

He said it is possible the growers, who usually camp in groups of two to five, are responsible for three other plantations that have been found in the canyon.

The San Bernardino National Forest is among the areas in the state with the most reports of marijuana discoveries, the undercover agent said.

In the past two years, the local forest ranked within the top five of 17 national forests.

The main dangers associated with such gardens are possible environmental damage and the safety of people who may stumble upon the plantation, Miller said.

Unsuspecting people have been killed in the past by growers, he said.

The search for plantations is ongoing.

"Once law enforcement is finished with the site they immediately start planning for the next eradication," Miller said. "It's really become a year-round problem."

In California, 45 arrests have been made this year stemming from 4,000 to 5,000 known marijuana plantations, according to Miller.

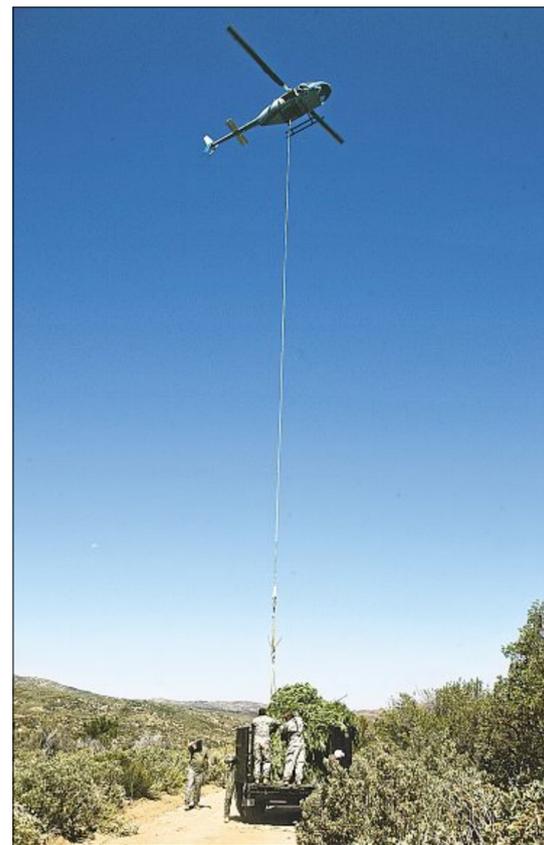
"We did some serious damage to their organizations last year," the special agent said.

Colin Atagi of The Desert Sun contributed to this report.



JAY CALDERON, THE DESERT SUN

Riverside County sheriff's agents guide a large load of marijuana into the back of a truck after U.S. Forest Service workers had cut down the remote crop off of Highway 243.



JAY CALDERON, THE DESERT SUN

A helicopter was used to carry out bundled marijuana plants that were then loaded onto trucks and taken to an undisclosed location for destruction. The marijuana plantation was found in a rugged canyon between Highway 243 and Snow Creek Canyon. No arrests were made.

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