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Profs weigh in on potential for Bradley effect

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Even with Sen. Barack Obama ahead in all the polls, political experts continue to speculate how race will play into the election results.

The discussion frequently centers on the Bradley effect, named for Tom Bradley, the African-American man who lost his bid for California governor in 1982 despite leading in the polls prior to Election Day.

The theory states that voters who say they are undecided or that they will vote for the African-American candidate will choose the non-black candidate at the last minute.

"They want to say what they think the survey researcher wants to hear, the socially responsible answer," said associate government professor Tasha Philpot. "So in the election polls, he looks like he is leading by a larger margin than he is on Election Day."

As Obama and Sen. John McCain continue to fight for votes in battleground states, some UT professors said the Bradley effect should not be discounted.

"The more it's drummed up, the more it's going to be a problem," said assistant government professor Eric Mcdaniel. "I do expect that the undecided will lean more toward McCain than Obama."

Bradley may have taken the African-American vote for granted. Black voters may not have shown up on Election Day because they felt ignored by the Bradley campaign, said associate journalism professor Paula Poindexter.

"They thought, 'You didn't ask for my vote. You didn't campaign to me, so I'm not going out to vote,'" Poindexter said, adding that she thought a similar situation could occur in this election.

Philpot, however, said she doubts African-Americans feel that way in this election.

"If [Obama] had specifically targeted African-American voters, he probably would not have been as effective with other voters," Philpot said. "The Bradley effect will be canceled out by new voters, especially new African-American voters."

One of those new voters is communication studies junior D'andrea Young.

"I don't think we've ever been so interested in politics," she said. "It makes me feel good that someone of African-American descent is so close to doing something that no one has ever done before."

But Young said that is not the reason she is voting for Obama.

"Regardless of whether he's black, white, purple, blue — the thing we should be worried about the most is, do we feel like he's able to lead us in the direction where we need to be," she said.

Poindexter said a loss might partly result from some making the decision not to vote because they were led to believe there

is a clear winner, based on the media not reporting the number of undecided voters, who could dramatically alter the election.

But the pressure for African-Americans to vote is too strong, Mcdaniel said.

"The level of excitement is so high," Mcdaniel said. "Do you really want to tell your children that you didn't vote for Barack Obama?"

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