

AAPI Values Research in North Carolina: Survey & In-Depth Interview Findings

Phase 1 Survey (Oct–Nov 2025) and Phase 2 In-Depth Interviews (April 2026)

Executive Summary

This memo summarizes two complementary phases of research into Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) voters in North Carolina. Phase 1, a survey of 600 AAPI voters fielded in late 2025, examined how these voters understand their political power, representation, and sense of belonging, and identified the values and issues most likely to shape political decision-making. Phase 2, a set of twenty (20) 60-minute in-depth interviews (IDIs) conducted in April 2026, deepened those insights through firsthand accounts of belonging, identity, political efficacy, values, climate impacts, and information ecosystems.

Taken together, the research points to a consistent pattern. AAPI voters in North Carolina experience community primarily through the people they interact with day to day, such as neighbors, coworkers, or fellow parents. American identity is dominant in everyday life, while ethnic and hyphenated identities shape how specific issues are understood. AAPI identity tends to surface situationally, becoming more salient when external events such as discrimination or immigration enforcement bring it forward. Economic stability and fairness are the strongest drivers of political decision-making, and while many voters feel their leaders are broadly responsive, confidence weakens when responsiveness is framed specifically around AAPI communities.

The central strategic implication is that outreach should **meet communities where they already exist**, lead with **tangible local issues**, and **let identity become the connective tissue** rather than the entry point. The sections below detail the methodology, key findings, recommendations, and actionable next steps.

Methodology

This research was conducted in two phases with distinct but complementary objectives.

Phase 1: AAPI Values Survey

The survey sought to understand how AAPI voters in North Carolina perceive their political power, representation, and sense of belonging; to identify which identities, values, and issues most shape political decision-making; to establish the groundwork for values-based narratives that resonate across and within AAPI communities; and to understand which frames build trust, connection, and motivation to engage.

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| Sample size | N = 600 AAPI voters |
| Geography | North Carolina |
| Field dates | October 29 – November 17, 2025 |
| Methodology | Mixed-mode design combining live calling (cellphones and landlines) and text-to-web online survey. Respondents were sampled from the voter file. |

Phase 2: In-Depth Interviews (IDIs)

The IDIs were designed to deepen insights first identified in Phase 1; to explore participants’ experiences related to belonging, identity, political efficacy, values, climate impacts, and information ecosystems; and to contribute to a broader understanding of the social, cultural, and political landscapes that shape AAPI life in the state.

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Sample size | 20 in-depth interviews (60 minutes each) |
| Geography | North Carolina |
| Field dates | April 6 – 23, 2026 |
| Sample composition | NC AAPI voters segmented across four groups: 5 Vietnamese voters 5 East Asian voters (Chinese, Korean, Japanese) 5 South Asian voters (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and others) 5 Southeast Asian & Pacific Islander voters (Filipino, Cambodian, Lao, Hmong, Samoan, and others). |

Key Findings

Survey Findings

Overall Takeaways

- AAPI voters in North Carolina believe they have some power, both collectively and personally, to make a difference in their community—especially older voters.
- Hyphenated identities emerge as particularly meaningful in a political context, alongside a strong emphasis on identifying as American.
- A majority of AAPI voters believe elected leaders in North Carolina are responsive to the needs of their communities and people like them, though opinions are more divided on whether those leaders are responsive specifically to AAPI voters.
- Inflation and the cost of living is the most important issue facing AAPI voters in North Carolina.

11. Which of the following issues would you say are the most important issues facing Asian American and Pacific Islanders in North Carolina? You may select up to THREE.

| | | East Asian | South Asian | SE Asian | Vietnamese |
|----------------------------------|-----|------------|-------------|----------|------------|
| Inflation and the cost of living | 51% | 50% | 49% | 57% | 55% |
| Health care | 35% | 37% | 31% | 36% | 42% |
| Racism and discrimination | 34% | 37% | 28% | 40% | 34% |
| Immigration | 31% | 33% | 30% | 32% | 27% |
| Jobs and wages | 30% | 27% | 31% | 33% | 35% |
| Crime and violence | 20% | 21% | 18% | 24% | 26% |
| Democracy | 16% | 15% | 21% | 10% | 9% |
| K-12 education | 16% | 24% | 10% | 12% | 13% |
| Reproductive Rights | 9% | 8% | 9% | 7% | 12% |
| Student loan debt | 8% | 5% | 9% | 9% | 8% |
| Climate change | 7% | 5% | 13% | 2% | 0% |
| Abortion rights | 7% | 4% | 12% | 5% | 4% |
| Voting rights | 6% | 6% | 8% | 5% | 6% |
| Criminal justice reform | 6% | 4% | 6% | 7% | 7% |



The Vietnamese respondent sample size was N=65; results should therefore be interpreted carefully.

©HITstrategies

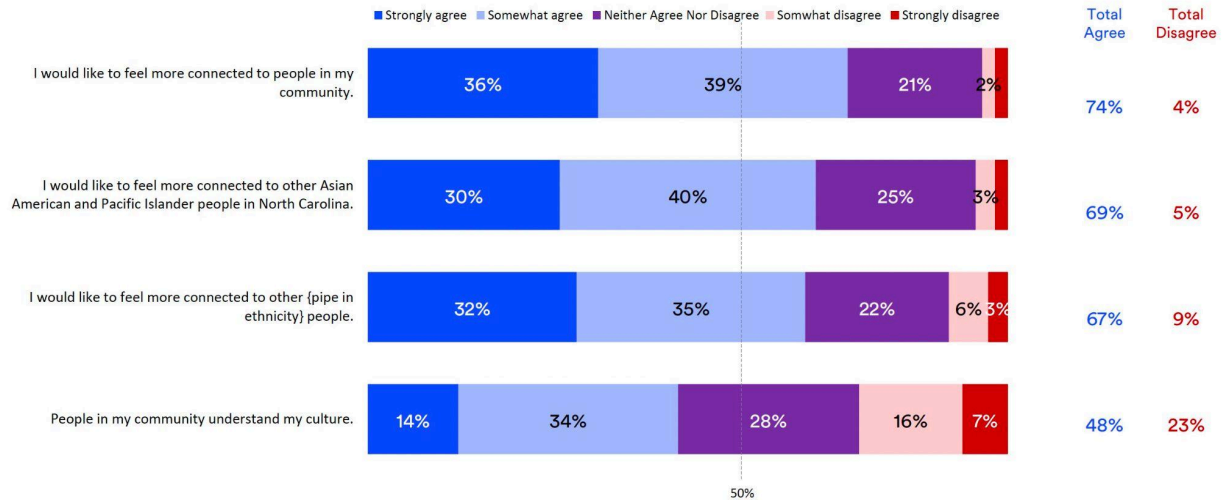
11. Which of the following issues would you say are the most important issues facing Asian American and Pacific Islanders in North Carolina? You may select up to THREE.

| | | First Gen | Second Gen | Third Gen |
|----------------------------------|-----|-----------|------------|-----------|
| Inflation and the cost of living | 51% | 55% | 49% | 39% |
| Health care | 35% | 37% | 32% | 35% |
| Racism and discrimination | 34% | 29% | 37% | 43% |
| Immigration | 31% | 27% | 38% | 32% |
| Jobs and wages | 30% | 29% | 32% | 32% |
| Crime and violence | 20% | 24% | 15% | 17% |
| Democracy | 16% | 15% | 16% | 19% |
| K-12 education | 16% | 14% | 20% | 14% |
| Reproductive Rights | 9% | 8% | 8% | 13% |
| Student loan debt | 8% | 7% | 9% | 9% |
| Climate change | 7% | 7% | 7% | 10% |
| Abortion rights | 7% | 5% | 8% | 10% |
| Voting rights | 6% | 7% | 6% | 5% |
| Criminal justice reform | 6% | 7% | 4% | 1% |

Identity and Belonging

- AAPI voters report wanting to feel more connected to their community, to other AAPI residents in NC, and to fellow co-ethnics.
- Community is best described as the people voters regularly interact with—friends, coworkers, or social networks—rather than as people who share AAPI culture.
- For many voters, being American is the most important political identity, with ethnic and hyphenated identities shaping how issues are understood within the broader AAPI community.
- AAPI voters share the most common concerns with other Asian Americans, immigrants, and multiracial Americans, and report the least commonality with White Americans.

20. Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.



Values and Representation

- Economic stability and equality/fairness consistently emerge as the strongest drivers of political decision-making, with economic concerns slightly outpacing fairness across most subgroups and generations.
- A plurality of AAPI voters believe elected leaders in North Carolina are responsive to their communities overall, but confidence becomes more mixed when responsiveness is framed around people like them personally, and declines further when framed specifically around AAPI communities.

In-Depth Interview Findings

Overall Takeaways

- **Entry points are local, not identity-based.** AAPI voters define community through who they interact with day to day—neighbors, coworkers, and fellow parents—rather than through ethnicity or AAPI heritage. Outreach rooted in local, tangible concerns resonates.
- **AAPI identity is situational, not constant.** American identity is dominant in day-to-day life. AAPI identity becomes salient when something external surfaces it, such as discrimination, immigration enforcement, or a news event.
- **Civic energy is moderately high but largely disconnected from formal politics.** Participants are deeply organized through PTAs, workplace groups, HOAs, and faith communities, but they do not necessarily describe that activity as political. Women drive

direct civic engagement and voting, while men skew more skeptical of formal politics and engage institutionally.

Recommendations

- People are already organized around neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, and faith communities. NCAAT does not need to create community; it needs to meet community where it already exists. Leading with the issue (housing costs, ICE, school quality) and letting identity become the connective tissue will land better than leading with AAPI identity upfront.
- Across all participants, immigration enforcement came closest to activating a shared AAPI identity and a willingness to act. The fear is communal even when the direct risk is not. Protest participation is limited by fear and family obligation, not indifference. The window is open, but it requires infrastructure to capture it.
- Women in this sample are more direct civic organizers and more consistent voters, making them the more accessible entry point for community-based outreach. Men, especially younger men, require a more skepticism-acknowledging approach that connects civic action to concrete and immediate stakes. The gender pattern is an important nuance in efforts to reach these communities.
- Top-down messaging from organizations does not land the same way as a recommendation from someone they already trust in their daily life.

Actionable Next Steps

Actionable Strategies

Embed NCAAT into the community structures that already exist: school PTAs, Facebook parent groups, workplace ERGs, and temple & church networks. Lead with issues (housing costs, ICE know-your-rights, childcare) and let identity become the connective tissue.

In order to reach the AAPI community effectively, there needs to be deep consideration in building specific targeted universes and messaging for those subgroups. The research shows that women in this sample are more direct civic organizers and more consistent voters, suggesting this group as a strong entry point for community-based outreach.

Future Work Needed

The Phase 1 poll and these IDIs establish the landscape. The next step is testing specific messages, outreach channels, and entry points with the distinct segments identified here: women vs. men, 1st generation vs. 2nd/3rd generation, and urban Triangle vs. Charlotte vs. smaller communities.

Where Are the Gaps and How is NCAAT Filling Them?

AAPI Identity

AAPI identity as a political frame is weak across this sample. Most participants do not think of themselves politically as AAPI. NCAAT's challenge and strategy is to build a bridge from the issues people care about to the collective-power framework, without requiring people to adopt an identity they do not naturally carry.

Geographic Fragmentation

NCAAT's organizing model needs to account for the fact that what works in the Triangle may not be replicable in Greensboro, Concord, or rural counties where AAPI residents describe near-total isolation. This work to address the geographic fragmentation begins with NCAAT's refined membership model, which incorporates geographic cohorts to organize folks in other cities outside of the typical metropolitan areas.

Ethnic Experience

Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander experiences are being subsumed by the broader AAPI frame in ways that risk leaving those communities behind. NCAAT continues to be intentional with Pan-Asian events (i.e., cultural festivals/events), ensuring that those from all AAPI communities feel seen and represented.