



The Deciding Margin:

Mobilizing AAPIs Through Community Organizations



Executive Director Lily Trieu speaking at Coalition Community Hour, San Antonio, TX

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Co-Authors:
Nicolette Ardiente
Christina Hahn
Asian Texans for Justice

Asian Texans for Justice (ATJ) was founded to be a voice for our state's diverse Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) community - to claim our space and inspire Texas to invest in our stories.

We envision a future where all people feel bold in their belonging. We are committed to serving the more than 1.9 million AAPIs in Texas by connecting our community to civic action.

*All quotes have been edited for clarity and anonymized for safety.

INTRODUCTION

As the fastest growing and most diverse of all racial groups in Texas, the Asian American & Pacific Islander (AAPI) population is a critical focus for Texas’ political future.

Understanding the experiences of AAPI-serving organizations across the state is imperative for building the collective power of AAPIs. Over the summer of 2023, Asian Texans for Justice (ATJ) conducted a statewide research survey* to understand the AAPI landscape in Texas. Insights from this research will inform ATJ’s coalition building work in Texas; reaching AAPI Texans and connecting them with civic action, personal agency, and political power. Texan AAPI’s have the potential and desire to become the deciding margin in Texas politics; ATJ aims to make this dream a reality.

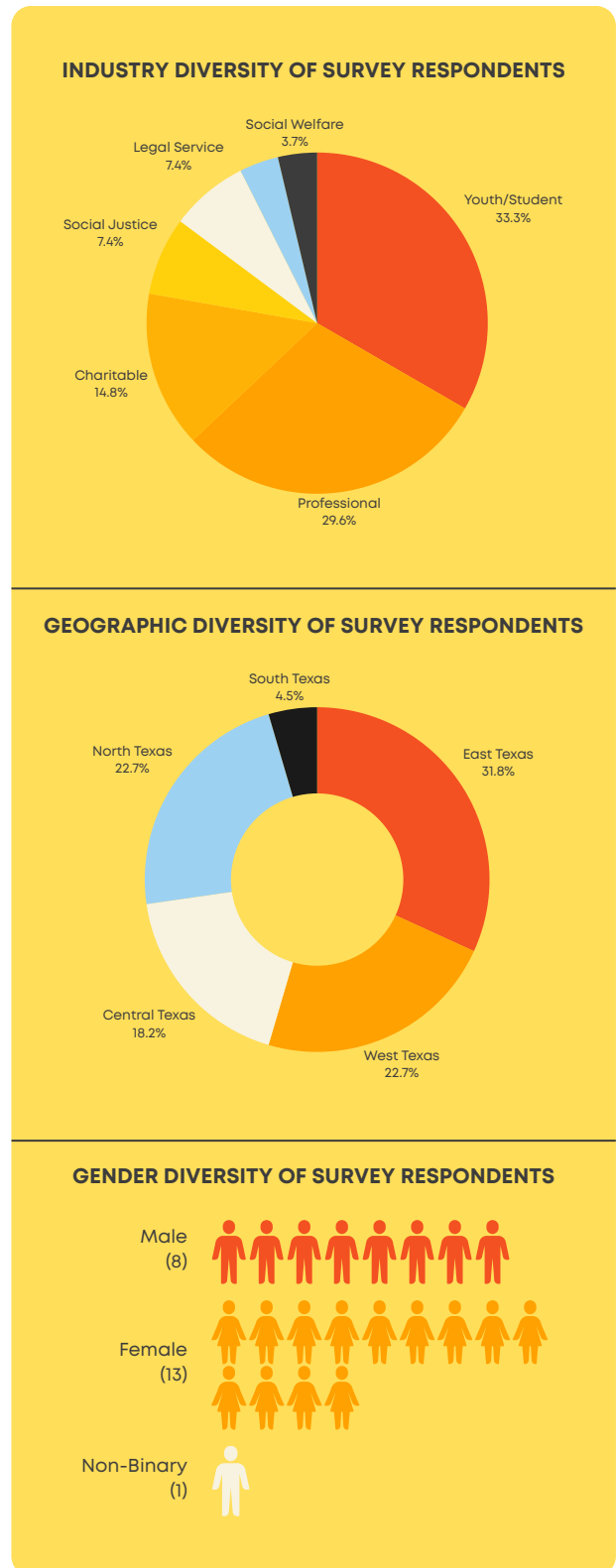
RESEARCH INSIGHTS

Several overlapping obstacles shape the lives and hinder the collective progress of the Texan AAPI community; of which ATJ has identified three main categories:



These interconnected categories require a multidimensional approach to promoting AAPI civic engagement in Texas.

METHODOLOGY



*The main method of surveying respondents was through cold calling various organizations throughout Texas. The survey was conducted in English. We conducted video survey interviews between August and October of 2023. We conducted this survey online and awarded respondents with a \$75 Amazon gift card for their participation.

Table 1. Challenges Outline: Barriers of Asian American Organizations

	INTERNAL BIAS & DISCRIMINATION	EXTERNAL BIAS & DISCRIMINATION	RESOURCE ACCESSIBILITY & PERSONAL AGENCY
CHALLENGES	<p><u>Expectations</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community expectations to be more outward facing Asian Pride & lack of power sharing Cultural expectations to prioritize in-group ethnicities Lack of awareness of different Asian ethnicities <p><u>Alienation & Othering</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of representation in places of power Fear of judgment, perceived lack of political relevance Foreigner treatment / mindset 	<p><u>Macroaggressions</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Islamophobia Anti-immigrant Hate crimes Racial inequities (within marginalized communities) <p><u>Microaggressions</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discrimination & stereotype expectations Limited awareness of diversity of AAPI people Lack of racial & ethnic diversity within locales 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of inter-organizational collaboration Inefficient resource sharing Transportation access Public safety Language barriers & accessibility Historical trauma with government involvement Economic & small business concerns

Internal Bias and Discrimination refers to the preconceived notions and biases that AAPI individuals may hold about themselves and their communities, and the consequential discriminative behaviors that they may be both victims and perpetrators of.

AAPI organizations are faced with **internal pressures** shaped by their own community and cultural expectations in addition to a profound sense of alienation and othering. Community and cultural expectations to prioritize their own ethnic groups (combined with a sense of pride in being the sole authority of their community knowledge and lack of desire to share leadership roles) result in a current state of AAPI communities who lack awareness of other outside-group Asian ethnic communities and organizations who struggle to innovate and collaborate.

On the other hand, a sense of **alienation and othering** feed into a vicious cycle of AAPI civic disengagement. Fear of judgment and self-perceived lack of political relevance due to immigrant status (i.e. “perpetual foreigner syndrome”) are further compounded by a lack of visible AAPI representation in places of power, discouraging future AAPI involvement in civic society.

External Bias and Discrimination refers to the preconceived biases and discrimination that AAPI individuals, groups, and organizations experience from individuals and institutions outside of their communities.

Respondents noted that **macroaggressions** (including Islamophobia, hate crimes, and anti-immigration sentiment) compounded by **microaggressions** (such as limited awareness of AAPI people, stereotype expectations, and lack of racial diversity in residential locales) created a hostile and lonely environment for AAPI organizations in Texas, who struggled to garner support for their work from their greater community beyond AAPI individuals.



I don't think I've ever had a conversation with my parents or friends about voting...just because I feel like there is a cultural taboo to talk about politics. I get shamed for even bringing up the topic...

AAPI Community Member from East Texas

Resource Accessibility and Personal Agency

refers to access to essential public resources and an individual’s ability to conduct their everyday lives successfully. These challenges range from large infrastructural barriers such as transportation access and public safety to small yet pervasive obstacles like language barriers and historical trauma regarding government involvement. According to our surveyed respondents, the combination of the above challenges and the prioritization of short-term economic issues such as inflation, small business ownership, and property taxes led AAPI community members to be less inclined towards civic engagement.

Finally, respondents noted that despite an overlap of objectives within various AAPI-serving organizations, these organizations lack the element of collaboration with one another; creating redundancies in outreach efforts and resources.



Discrimination and alienation is a major obstacle because I think COVID made things worse for us...

AAPI Community Member from West Texas



We know that they [government] have resources they can help out the community, but it's never top of mind because it's like, 'Oh, we only want to take care of ourselves and nobody else is gonna come here to save us or help us.'

AAPI Community Member from East Texas



...I wish there was an opportunity to build better networks so people do have the support they need, but I don't know how to do that as a young person.

AAPI Community Member from East Texas

Table 2. Needs Analysis: Barriers of Asian American Organizations

NEEDS	Internal Bias & Discrimination	External Bias & Discrimination	Resource Access & Personal Agency
Funding & fundraising	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Trainings: infrastructure & capacity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Strategic planning	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Public safety, infrastructure improvements, housing access	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Cultural competency	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Education on importance of civic involvement		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Language access/interpreters		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

NEXT STEPS:

Interconnected Needs & Solutions

Addressing civic engagement in the AAPI Texan community from an organizational standpoint involves tackling multiple obstacles to community participation. A combination of in-group mindsets, dismissal by non-AAPI groups, and structural obstacles create a challenging environment for AAPI community members to be civically engaged. To navigate these multifaceted challenges and needs effectively, a collective effort fueled by inclusivity, collaborative initiatives, and advocacy for equitable representation and resources is necessary.

In response, Texas-based AAPI serving organizations seek to provide interconnected solutions to these interconnected needs. For example, providing funding and training for fundraising, strategy, and capacity-building for AAPI organizations will help target both internal and external biases and discrimination for the AAPI community. Additionally, meeting public safety, housing, and culturally sensitive information needs addresses both internal bias and resource accessibility challenges.

Finally, providing language access and education of the importance of civic involvement will help reduce external bias and resource accessibility challenges.

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We want to make sure people are seeing the good things we're doing in the community. We need to enhance our image as a community.

AAPI Community Member from North Texas

Building a sense of AAPI community solidarity is a crucial step toward combating these issues statewide while reshaping the community's image nationwide.

The AAPI community has the ability to become the deciding margin in Texas' political future. Blocking our civic potential are interconnected challenges with the overarching need for AAPI-inclusive outreach. Organizations such as Asian Texans for Justice and the organizations we've surveyed are a critical investment in solving these complex challenges.

Using our insights, we encourage funders and allies to define the deciding margin by investing in AAPI organizations throughout Texas. Through our research, ATJ will strategically invest in our AAPI Texan communities to build collective power. ATJ's Coalition Building Programming supports AAPI-serving organizations in developing civic action within their own regional and local communities.

We are passionate about the future of AAPI Texans and committed to expanding the collective power of our Asian American Pacific Islander community in Texas. We hope that this comprehensive view into the key issues facing the fastest growing racial group in Texas inspires you to take part in our movement.



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