2025 Perspectives

Listening to Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in New Jersey

September 2026

AAPI NEW JERSEY

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Executive Summary

In 2025, AAPI New Jersey, in partnership with organizations across the state, coordinated a multimodal Get Out the Vote (GOTV) outreach campaign ahead of the 2025 primary election in June and the general election in November. The campaign allowed AAPI New Jersey to collect data throughout the year about what issues Asian American community members are most concerned with in their lives. This campaign included a broad range of outreach tactics from tabling at community events to text banking, phone banking, door-to-door canvassing, and exit polling on Election Day.

By the end of 2025, we coordinated outreach at over 12 community events, sent over 670,000 texts, called over 122,000 voters and knocked on over 4,900 doors. Cumulatively, we had thousands of conversations and interactions throughout the year which helped inform the analysis presented in this report. **Overwhelmingly, the AAPI community in New Jersey is concerned with the cost of living, jobs and the economy, access to affordable housing, and access to affordable health care.** Notably, access to education, public safety, democracy, and immigration were also consistently among the top issues in 2025.

Lastly, language accessibility at the ballot box and at polling sites continues to be a need for Asian American voters in New Jersey with voters continuing to report that translated ballots would have been helpful in this past election.

Right: Exit poll volunteer in Palisades Park, NJ.

*"Capturing and sharing AAPI perspectives...**ensures that the experiences, concerns, and priorities of our communities are accurately represented** rather than overlooked...they add depth and meaning to the data and help paint a more complete picture of community needs."*

— Volunteer (Bergen County)

Above: Canvassing group for the 2025 Primary election.

About Our GOTV Outreach Strategy

AAPI New Jersey is the state's leading advocacy organization advancing the rights, representation, and empowerment of AAPI communities in the Garden State. Asian American and Pacific Islanders make up more than 11% of New Jersey's population—over 1.1 million residents—and represent one of the fastest-growing racial groups in the state with 615,000 eligible voters. Between 2014 and 2024, the AAPI population grew 25.8% in New Jersey.

Despite our communities' increasing power, AAPI voters remain under-engaged and underrepresented in elections and policymaking due to structural barriers such as gaps in language access, lack of culturally responsive outreach, and lack of investment in AAPI communities.

Grounded in values of equity, inclusion, and multiracial democracy, AAPI New Jersey's outreach strategy focused on Get Out the Vote (GOTV) canvassing and integrating GOTV outreach through cultural events and organizing.

*"Drawing power from the margins is contingent on sufficiently **understanding the diverse needs and issues that permeate a community**, and we can only start to really empower our community by **knowing it from the inside out**."*

— Henessa (Essex County)

Methodology and Outcomes for Issue Identification

Above: (left) Tabling at Ligaya Fest in Metuchen, NJ. (right) Volunteers conduct exit polling in Palisades Park, NJ.

Through tabling, canvassing, and exit polling, AAPI New Jersey collected both quantitative and qualitative feedback from residents. Our 2025 strategy moved beyond short-term awareness building toward deeper community listening, increasing voter turnout, and integration of organizing with policy issue advocacy.

Our GOTV campaign included deep canvassing through door knocking, phone and textbanking, as well as voter registration mailers, exit polling on election days, and outreach at cultural and community events. We focused on the three counties with highest AAPI populations in New Jersey: Middlesex (primarily Edison), Bergen (primarily Fort Lee), and Hudson (Jersey City). Phonebanking prioritized the same three counties and subsequently expanded to North, then Central and South Jersey, while textbanking was statewide. Exit polling was coordinated at six polling sites in the same counties with the addition of Passaic (Paterson) for the general election.

*"Given the growth of the AAPI community in New Jersey, I believe **it is imperative that leaders understand our unique struggles and points of view**. The members of the AAPI community in Edison I canvassed were glad to hear that, through our canvassing efforts, their views will have the possibility of being seen by others."*

— Ibrahim A. (Middlesex County)

Community Tabling & Events

Tabling conversations help serve as a point-in-time temperature check about what issues are top of mind for community members. AAPI New Jersey organizers and volunteers engaged AAPI residents at cultural festivals, faith-based gatherings, neighborhood events, and community spaces across the state. Meeting people where they already gather allowed for more direct outreach to AAPI communities.

Community members were shown an array of issues and asked to vote for the ones that mattered most to them or to write in their own.

12 EVENTS

750+

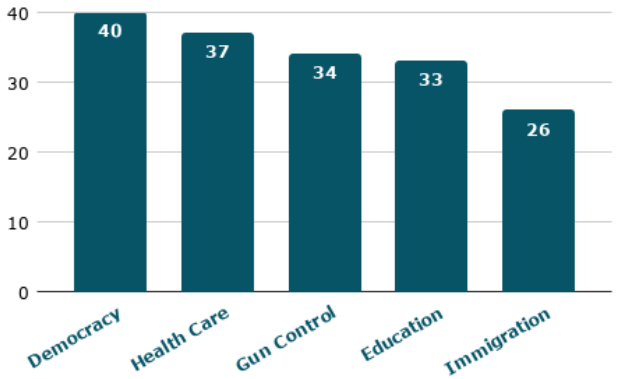
CONVERSATIONS

TOP PRIORITIES

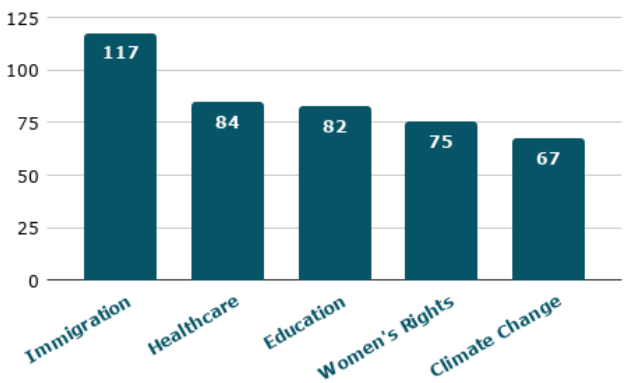
Immigration
Health Care
Education

What issues are most important to you? – 2025 tabling outcomes

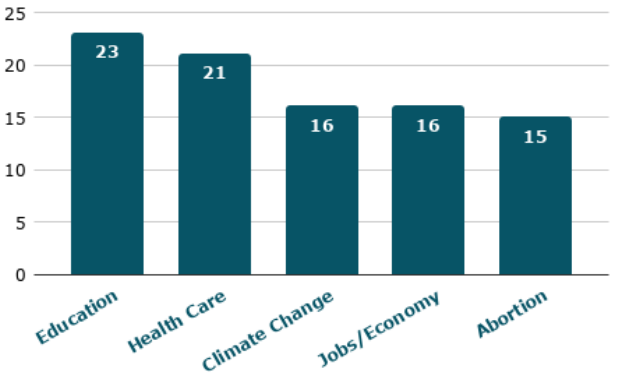
January 2025 - Lunar New Year



May 2025 - Lantern Festival



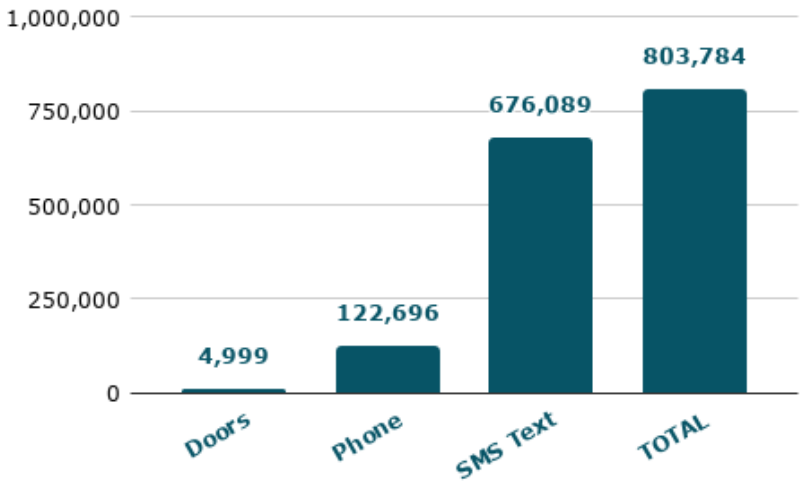
September 2025 - Civic Engagement Event



Voter Engagement, GOTV Outreach Efforts & Exit Polling

National studies show that voter contact falls short for AAPI communities. However, there are promising indicators. Voter contact from the major political parties has improved since 2022 when less than 50% of Asian Americans reported they were contacted by any of the major political parties. Still, in the 2024 Asian American Voter Survey (AAVS), 27% of Asian Americans had no or uncertain contact from either major political party. Overall, during the primary and general elections, AAPI NJ attempted to reach a total of over 800,000 voters in New Jersey. The majority of attempts were made by SMS text, then phone calls, and then door-door canvassing attempts.

Method of voter contact attempts



Outreach was tailored to each space using multilingual materials in English, Chinese, Korean, Gujarati, Hindi, and Tagalog, culturally relevant messaging, and one-on-one conversations. Rather than transactional voter contact, organizers focused on listening—asking community members what issues mattered most to them and how those issues affected their daily lives.

Primary Election: Canvassing Outreach Outcomes

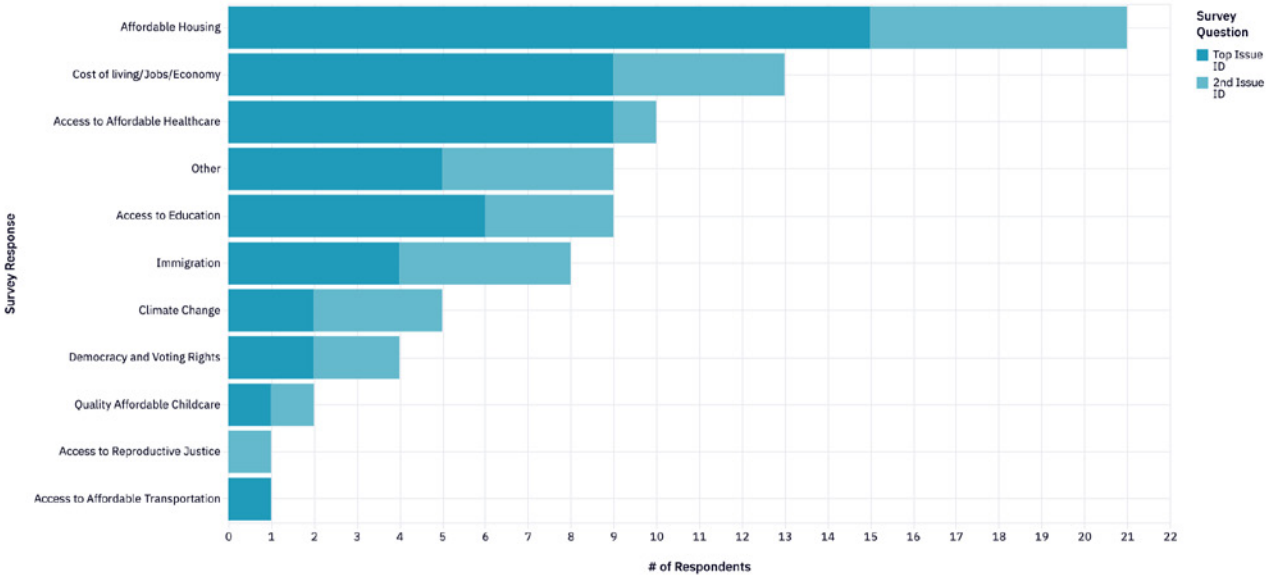
In 2025, New Jersey entered a gubernatorial election year with primary elections held in June and general elections in November. AAPI New Jersey's primary election outreach focused on increasing awareness and participation among AAPI voters who are often disengaged from non-presidential elections.

Above: Cavassers working in Jersey City, NJ.

From March 2025 through the beginning of June ahead of the primary, AAPI New Jersey canvassers and volunteers used phonebanking, textbanking, door-to-door canvassing, and digital outreach to provide culturally and linguistically accessible voter outreach and education. Our campaign focused on the three counties with highest AAPI populations: Middlesex (primarily Edison), Bergen (primarily Fort Lee), and Hudson (Jersey City). Phonebanking also focused on Middlesex County, while textbanking was statewide. Ahead of the Primary election, between March and June, we knocked on over 2,400 doors, called over 13,500 voters, and sent over 458,000 texts. We had over 260 deep canvassing conversations in person and over 630 over phone calls.

The top issue that AAPI voters named in primary election canvassing conversations was affordable housing followed by cost of living and jobs/economy, and affordable health care.

Top issues identified through canvassing of AAPI voters



To ensure we met Asian American voters' cultural and language access needs, our canvassers and phonebankers spoke English, Hindi, Urdu, Korean, and Tagalog. Additionally, for our door-to-door canvassing and tabling, we used printed materials in English, Chinese, Korean, Gujarati, Hindi, and Tagalog. Depending on where we were canvassing, we would provide our canvassers with in-language materials they were most likely to encounter. We partnered with APIAVote on a bilingual mailer (Filipino and Chinese in Jersey City, and Hindi and Gujarati for Middlesex county).

We supplemented our on the ground outreach with digital outreach.

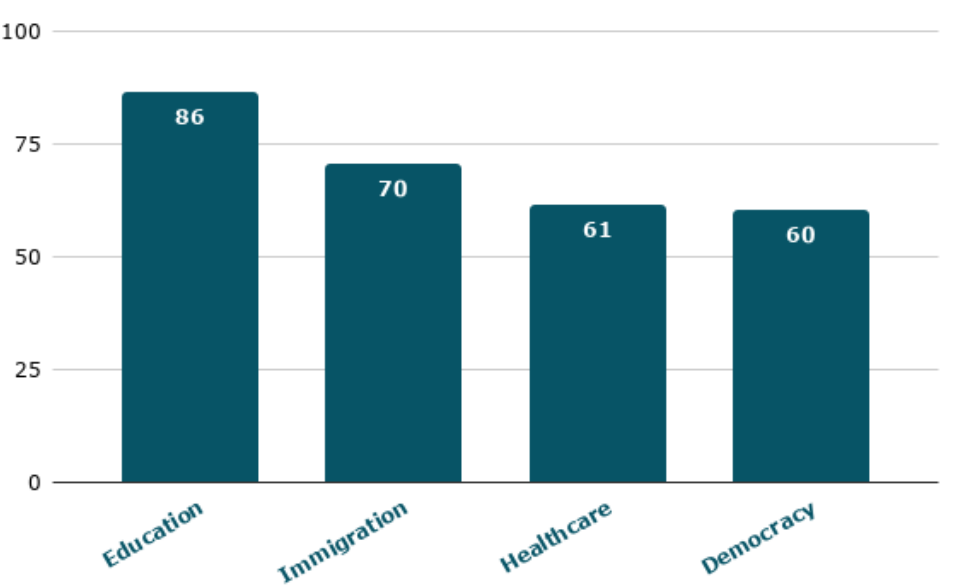
Below: (left) Example of AAPI NJ digital outreach on Election Day. (right) Example of multi-lingual materials used for deep canvassing.

Exit Polling on Primary Election Day

During the primary election day on June 10th, we conducted exit polling with 194 AAPI voters surveyed in Edison, Jersey City, and Palisades Park. We surveyed 98 voters in Edison, 64 in Palisades Park, and 32 in Jersey City. The top three issues identified were education, immigration and health-care followed closely by democracy.

Above: (left) Exit poll volunteers in Palisades Park, NJ. (right) An AAPI voter shares their top issues in an exit poll survey.

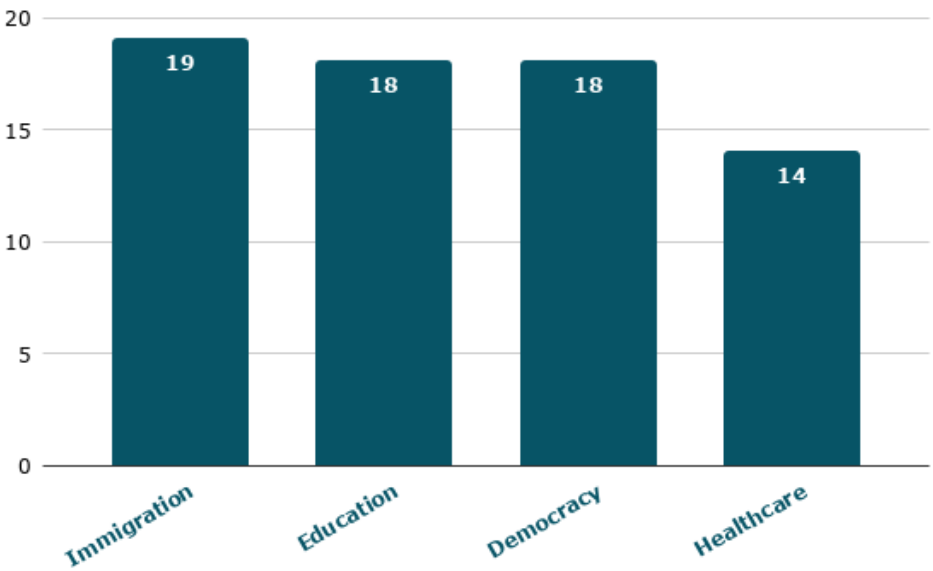
Top issues reported by AAPI voters on primary Election Day



The Youth Perspective

In AAPI NJ's primary exit polling survey, younger voters between 18–29 years old said their top issues were immigration, education, democracy and healthcare.

Top issues reported by voters age 18–29 on primary Election Day



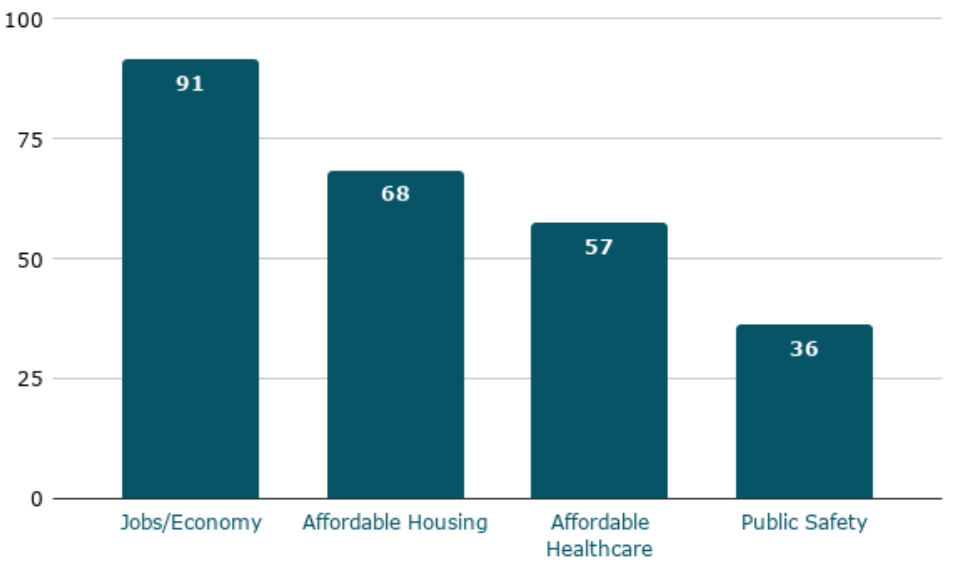
Right: Exit poll volunteers in Paterson, NJ.

Canvassing Outreach Ahead of General Election Day

For the general election, AAPI New Jersey expanded its GOTV outreach with increased volunteer engagement and canvassing. Outreach emphasized turnout, ballot completion, and voter confidence, with language support and real-time problem solving. To boost our on the ground canvassing efforts we published a mail-in ballot completion video in Chinese.

During the general election GOTV outreach phase, AAPI NJ made over 100,000 calls, sent 215,000 texts, and knocked on 2,500 doors. We had over 390 conversations where AAPI voters identified **cost of living, jobs/ economy, affordable housing, and affordable healthcare as the top three issues**, followed by public safety and access to education.

Top issues reported during deep canvassing from Sep.–Nov. 2025



> *"Someone went from not voting/unsure to voting on election day!"*
>
> *— AAPI New Jersey Canvasser*

Exit Polling on General Election Day

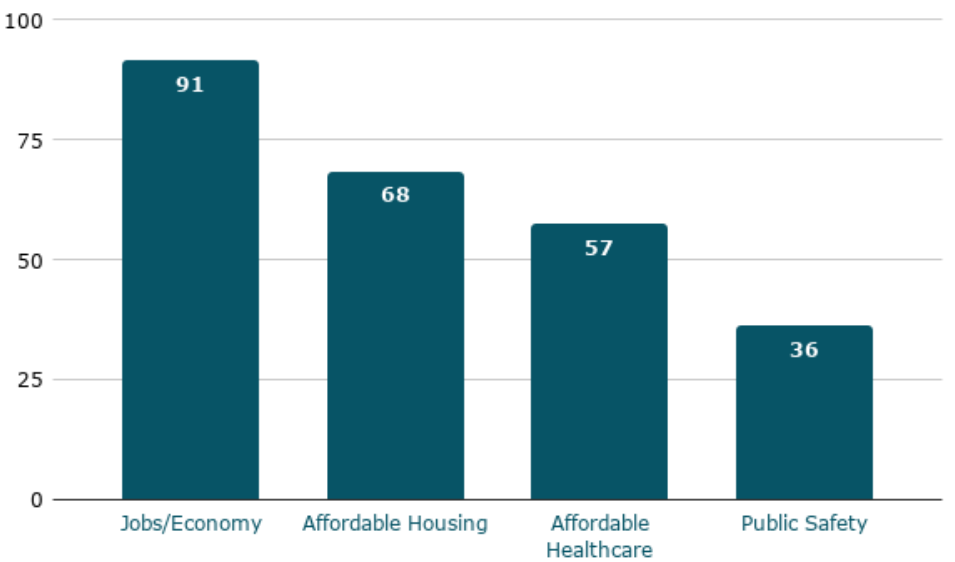
AAPI NJ leads New Jersey with the largest election day exit polling operation in the state. 75 volunteers spoke to 523 Asian American voters after they exited poll sites in Fort Lee, Palisades Park, Jersey City, Paterson, and Edison—five communities with high concentrations of Asian American voters.

Exit polling provided additional insight into voter priorities and experiences, reinforcing patterns seen throughout the year. The top three policy issues identified by AAPI voters during the general election exit polling were cost of living, jobs/economy, and democracy.

The poll was administered in English, Bengali, Korean, Hindi, Gujarati, Arabic, and Tagalog.

Above: Exit polling in Jersey City, NJ.

Top issues for AAPIs in general election exit poll - Nov. 2025



Language Access at the Polls

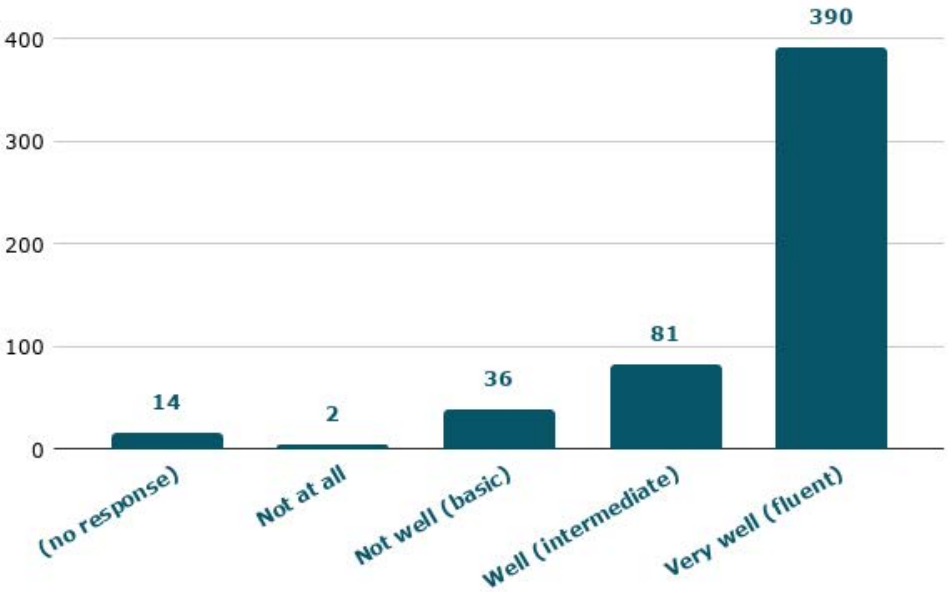
The federal Voting Rights Act's Section 203 requires jurisdictions with a significant number of limited English proficient voters to provide in-language voting materials. In New Jersey, two counties, Bergen and Middlesex, fit this requirement for Asian language speaking voters who speak Korean and Gujarati, respectively.

In general election exit polling, our survey asked voters several questions regarding language access needs including how well they speak English.

To identify language access needs, we asked "Did someone help you vote in the language you are most comfortable speaking?" While an overwhelming majority of 80% of respondents said they did not need an interpreter, 16% of respondents indicated they would have benefited from some type of language access support.

Out of the 523 voters who responded to the survey, 390 voters (75%) self-reported they spoke English Very Well (fluent), 81 (15%) said they spoke English Well (intermediate), 36 said they did not speak English well (7%), and 2 reported they did not speak English at all.

Poll question responses: How well do you speak English?



Despite the fact that most voters spoke English Well or Very Well (90%), a significant number of voters who spoke another language said they would have benefited from a translated ballot.

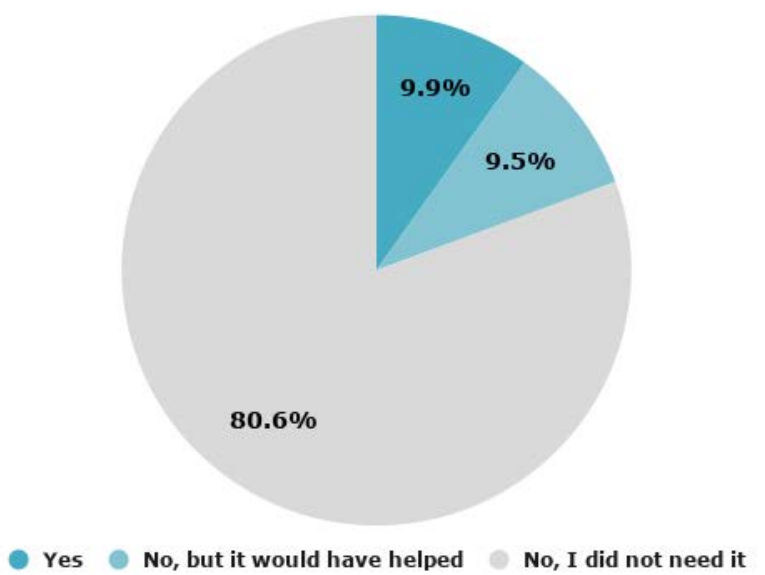
While most voters (80%) did not need a translated ballot, 10% said they used a translated ballot and another 10% said it would have helped them to have a translated ballot (see figure below). In Bergen County, out of 77 Korean language speakers, 24 reported using a translated ballot, and another 24 reported that while they did not use a translated ballot, it would have helped them in the voting process.

In Middlesex County, most voters reported that they did not need a translated ballot. Out of a total of 246 votes, 221 said they did not need a translated ballot, 13 reported they used a translated ballot in this election including 7 Gujarati speakers. Twelve voters said that while they did not use a translated ballot, it would have helped, including those who felt most comfortable speaking Gujarati, Hindi, Tamil, and Urdu.

In Passaic County, out of 54 voters polled, 7 Bengali-speaking voters said that a translated ballot would have been helpful in the voting process.

In addition to conducting the exit poll, AAPI New Jersey also monitored poll sites for compliance with relevant voting rights laws.

Poll question responses: Did you use a translated ballot?



Partnerships & Coalition Work

In the 2025 general election cycle, AAPI New Jersey worked with grassroots organizations that center civic engagement work in Asian American communities.

During exit polling in Palisades Park, we had partners from MinKwon and Give Chances join us. These volunteers were bilingual, which allowed us to engage with more voters. They also taught other exit pollsters some basic phrases to speak with voters.

Above: AAPI New Jersey partnered with Latino Action Network Foundation, League of Women Voters of New Jersey and New Brunswick Area NAACP to conduct a joint canvassing day with Million Voters Project.

To support community outreach, AAPI NJ awarded seven civic engagement microgrants for outreach to local AAPI communities. Examples included:

APIDA Alliance (East Brunswick, Middlesex County) hosted a Sip & Sign event in partnership with Youth Voice in Action to encourage youth voter registration, engaging over 75 participants.

OutFront Metuchen (Metuchen, Middlesex County) hosted postcard pizza parties to write postcards to low propensity voters. They welcomed 30 community members and mailed over 40 postcards.

United Chinese American Association of New Jersey (Wayne, Passaic County) tabled outside a popular Chinese restaurant, speaking with 50 people and sharing additional voting information with 12.

Fort Lee Chinese American Community Association (Fort Lee, Bergen County) tabled at their membership meeting and spoke to attendees about

the importance of voting. They engaged over 150 people and shared voting information with 30 attendees.

Paramus High School (Paramus, Bergen County) hosted a Voter Information Booth at a Trunk or Treat event and shared an interactive "Why Voting Matters" engagement at various school events.

Livingston Chinese Association (Wayne, Essex County) and its youth chapter hosted voter registration drives outside the Livingston Chinese School and another popular restaurant.

The College of New Jersey's TCNJ Votes! (Ewing, Mercer County) hosted a Boba & Ballots event for approximately 80 students across 10 Asian American student organizations/clubs and invited an AAPI New Jersey staff member to speak to students about the importance of civic engagement for Asian American communities.

Additionally, we partnered with the Gem Project, a nonprofit that fosters leadership and community service among youth, to conduct a phonebank targeting young voters of color (18-40) in Newark on Election Day. While this effort was not part of our deep canvassing efforts and thus did not yield results in this report, it was a partnership that stemmed from our shared work of building a multi-racial democracy.

Below: Civic engagement Sip & Sign event hosted by AAPI New Jersey microgrant recipient, APIDA Alliance in East Brunswick, NJ.

*"Many praised us for our efforts. Most importantly **we were visible and those of us who volunteered felt a sense of community**. The act of putting this together leads the volunteers to communicate with each other, share ideas, and build solidarity."*

— United Chinese American Association of New Jersey

Challenges & Lessons Learned

AAPI's are one of the most linguistically diverse racial groups, and a major challenge we continue to face is language access. As we did broader outreach in Edison, we learned about the demographic shifts within the community (ie. North Edison being a Gujarati-speaking neighborhood and South Edison being a Hindi-speaking neighborhood), which helped us identify when we would need certain translated materials. Our Field Organizer was fluent in Hindi and Urdu, which allowed us to translate materials in a timely manner.

Above: (left) Community members connect at Asisan American Advocacy Day in Trenton, NJ. (right) An organizing volunteer engages attendees at a local event.

*"**Nobody has ever paid much thought to enlist the thoughts of Asian Americans** who live, work, and vote in this country and the Garden State. I'm proud AAPI NJ has done just that—by knocking on doors, making phone calls, and asking Asian Americans what issues matter to them."*

—Suhaib J (Middlesex County

Message to Lawmakers

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in New Jersey are a key and growing constituency whose voices must be meaningfully included in policymaking. Community members consistently expressed frustration with feeling overlooked and engaged only during election seasons. AAPI NJ calls on lawmakers to commit to year-round, culturally competent engagement with AAPI communities and to center community-identified priorities—such as affordability, economic opportunity, and democratic access—in legislative and policy decisions. Listening to and partnering with AAPI communities is essential to a truly representative democracy.

2026 John R. Lewis Voter Empowerment Act

In July 2026, New Jersey leaders passed and signed into law The John R. Lewis Voter Empowerment Act (NJVEA) making strides in protecting democracy and voter access in New Jersey as federal protections are eroded. The NJVEA includes provisions to protect and expand access for limited English proficient (LEP) voters in localities which meet the threshold as determined by Census data. The provisions will go into effect in 2027. AAPI New Jersey will continue to monitor and advocate for the successful implementation of these provisions.

"For most of America's 250 years, AAPI immigrants were barred from becoming citizens and voting. ***The rights we enjoy today have been built up over generations by diverse people who have spoken out, marched, and even died*** *because they refused to accept anything less than equal opportunity to shape our democracy. Thanks to the community members and multiracial coalition who have taken up this work, the John R. Lewis Voter Empowerment Act is poised to enact critical protections for nearly 600,000 Asian American and Pacific Islander voters in New Jersey."*

—Amber Reed, Co-Executive Director, AAPI New Jersey

Thank You to Our Funders

This work was made possible by Million Voters Project, APIAVote, and The Asian American Foundation.

*"This work matters to me because **capturing AAPI perspectives helps ensure our communities are truly heard**, not just counted. Sharing these voices, experiences, and opinions is a step toward more inclusive understanding and better decision-making."*

—John L. (Middlesex County)

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