

To: Interested Parties

From: HIT Strategies - Roshni Nedungadi, Jamel Love, and Michelle Whitlock

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Re: Nine in ten South Asian Americans have faced discrimination — and they're fighting back at the ballot box this November

Executive Summary

On behalf of [Indian American Impact](#), HIT Strategies conducted a groundbreaking nationwide study of 800 South Asian registered voters¹ to learn how their cultural heritage influences their political beliefs and to understand their outlook heading into the midterms. We found that South Asian American voters enter the 2026 midterms with a clear sense of what they want from government, yet a deep skepticism if politicians are even listening. They are voting on the economy, they favor Democrats by a wide margin, and they are doing so at a moment when hostility toward their community is rising. Three findings define how this electorate is approaching November:

1. **South Asian American registered voters believe in their own vote, but doubt if politicians are listening.** Seventy-eight percent say their vote has the power to make change on issues that matter to them, yet just as many (79%) say elected officials are out of touch with regular people, and two-thirds say elected officials don't care what people like them think (67%).
2. **Economic concerns are shaping their vote and they are breaking three-to-one for Democrats, with a meaningful share still up for grabs.** Cost of living (65%) and healthcare (53%) are top issues to likely voters across party lines. Democrats lead the generic congressional ballot 60% to 22% among likely voters, but 71% of pure Independents remain undecided, and 25% of Trump 2024 voters plan to vote for Democrats in November.
3. **Discrimination is unfortunately a near-universal experience for South Asian Americans, with 9 of 10 saying they've seen or experienced discrimination.** Ninety percent of registered South Asian voters claim to have faced discrimination or know someone who has. Among likely voters who say what happens to South Asians in this country affects them a lot, 71% plan to vote for Democrats. This is consistent with

¹ Our sample of South Asian American voters primarily identify ethnically as Indian (87%) but included other backgrounds, such as Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Nepali, Bhutanese, Maldivian, Afghani, Khmer, and Burmese people. This report uses South Asian American as an organizing term for Americans who have these backgrounds.

national data: Pew's 2023 survey found that about nine in ten Asian Americans have personally experienced discrimination.²

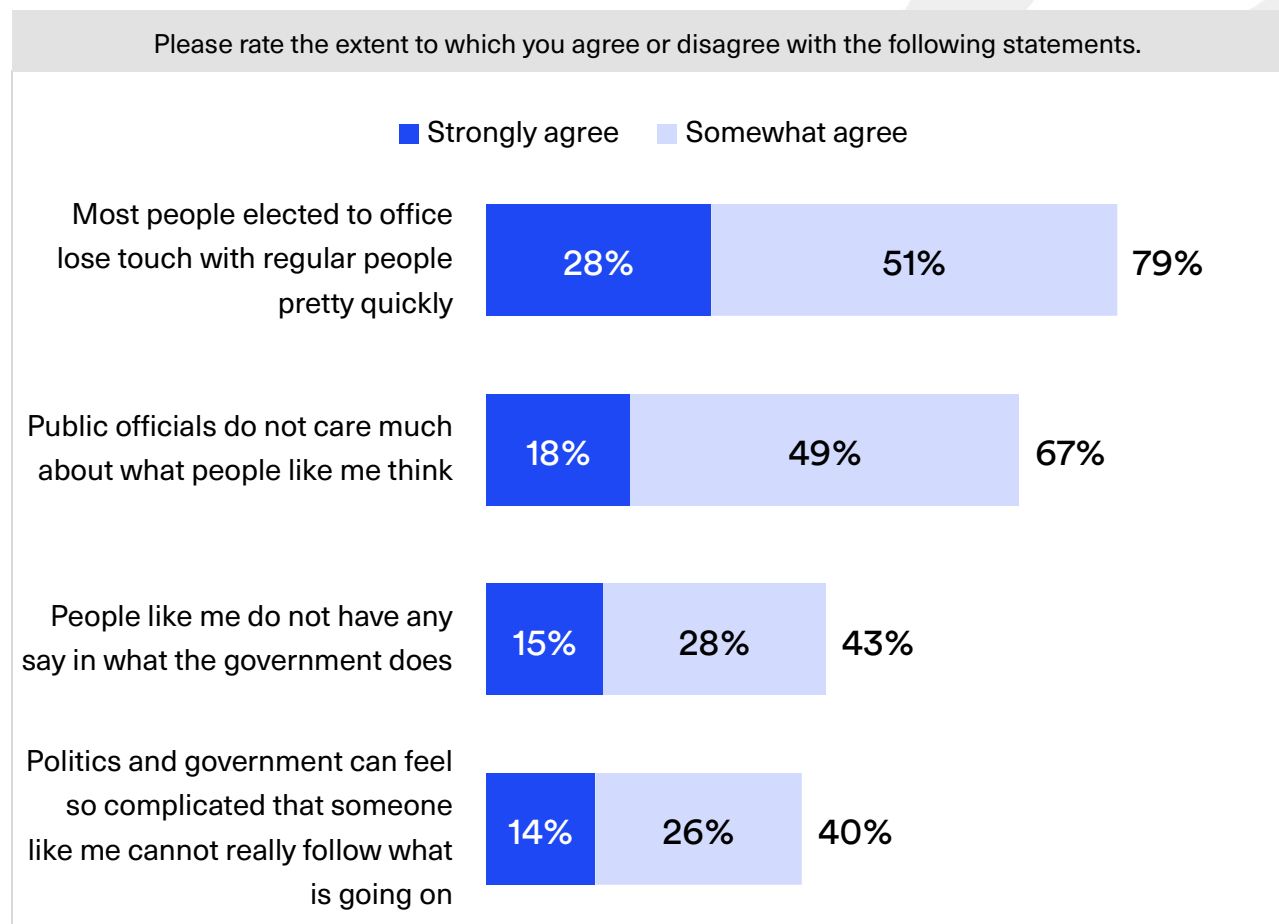


² Pew Research Center, “Discrimination Experiences Shape Most Asian Americans’ Lives,” November 30, 2023. Based on a survey of 7,006 Asian American adults conducted July 5, 2022–January 27, 2023. <https://www.pewresearch.org/race-ethnicity/2023/11/30/discrimination-experiences-shape-most-asian-americans-lives/>

Confident in Their Vote, Skeptical of the Political System

South Asian American voters trust the power of the ballot more than the people on it. There is a tension between South Asian American voters' desire to express their views on the issues that matter to them and their distrust that their voices will be heard. While 78% say their vote has power to make change, 79% say elected officials quickly lose touch with regular people and 67% say officials don't care what people like them think.

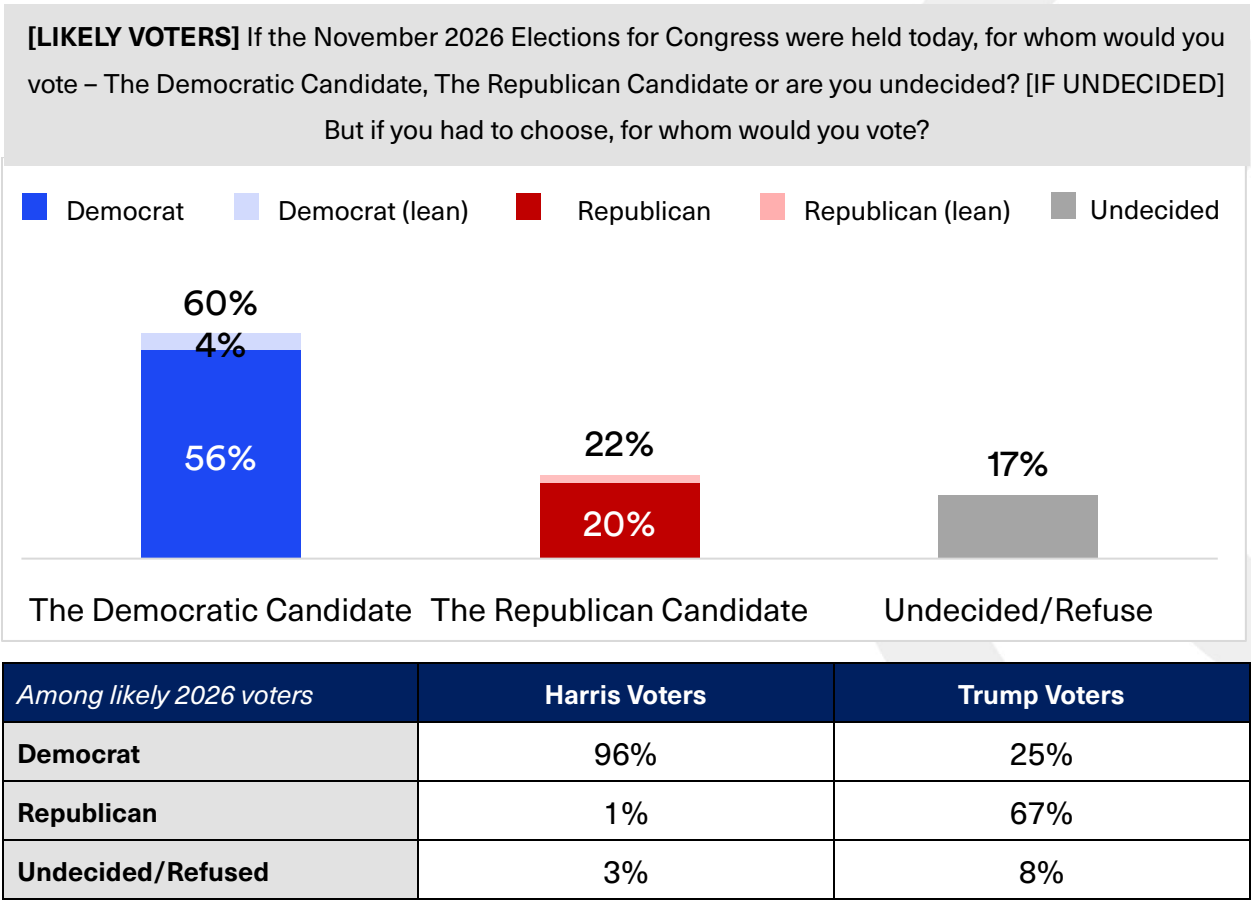
Many also feel shut out altogether: 43% say people like them have no say in government, and 40% say politics is too complicated to follow. Non-college South Asian voters feel this most. About half of non-college voters (51%) feel they have no say, compared to 38% of college graduates.



Kitchen-Table Priorities and a Democratic Advantage

South Asian American likely voters are considering the economy when they're heading to the polls. Their top issues are cost of living (65%), healthcare (53%), jobs and wages (33%), and education (28%), with the importance of education driven by voters under 30. Cost of living ranks first among Democrats, Independents, and Republicans alike.

For South Asian American voters, Democrats lead the generic congressional ballot 60% to 22%, with 17% of South Asian American likely voters still undecided. The Democratic coalition is consolidated: 96% of 2024 Harris voters plan to vote Democratic. The Republican coalition is not: only 67% of 2024 Trump voters plan to vote Republican, and 25% plan to vote Democratic.



Democratic South Asian American politicians are also viewed more favorably than Republicans: Zohran Mamdani is at +36 net favorability among likely voters, Kamala Harris +29, and Ro Khanna +25, compared with -13 for both Vivek Ramaswamy and Nikki Haley.

Persuadable Voters & A Moveable Middle

Pure Independents are 17% of South Asian American registered voters, and they are the community's least engaged group in the voting process. Seven in ten (72%) are undecided in their 2026 congressional vote (71% even among those likely to vote), no Democratic or Republican leader tested tops +13 net favorability among them, and a majority (55%) did not vote in 2024.

Their distance from either party does not reflect indifference. Independents are the community's most economically focused voters, naming cost of living (74%) and healthcare (64%) as top issues at higher rates than Democrats or Republicans. When we offered tradeoffs between government and free-market solutions, 34% to 44% said "it depends," but those who chose a side favored collective solutions by wide margins.

The barrier is belief that voting matters, not political ideology: only 63% of Independents say their vote has the power to make change, compared with 78% of all voters. These voters are open to an economic message, and no party has yet given them a reason to turn out. That makes them the clearest opportunity for engagement.

Rising Hostility Online & in the Public Arena

Seventy-five percent of South Asian American voters feel fully accepted as Americans, but, shockingly, nearly all have encountered discrimination. Ninety percent have faced it or know someone who has, including 48% who experienced it personally, most often from other Americans unfamiliar with South Asian cultures (63%) or at work or school (24%). Sixty-one percent say they have to work twice as hard as others for the same recognition.

The Trump administration's claims that immigrants are stealing people's jobs and racist content and comments online are contributing to [new surges](#) of anti-South Asian discrimination. The rise of racism and the administration's efforts to restrict legal and illegal immigration may be taking their toll on the South Asian American community. [The Center for the Study of Organized Hate](#) found monthly hateful posts targeting South Asians on X (formerly known as Twitter) rose 240% between January 2024 and June 2026, with spikes tied to fights over the H-1B program, including the \$100,000 fee on new petitions announced in September 2025.

This concern extends across faiths: 87% say discrimination against Muslim Americans is at least a moderate problem, as do 70% for Sikh Americans and 64% for Hindu Americans. 89% say what happens to South Asians in this country affects their personal lives.

Additionally, Trump's attacks on the South Asian American community may be hurting Republicans' chances in November. Among those who believe that what happens to other

South Asian Americans has a lot of impact on them personally, seven in ten are planning to vote for Democrats (71%). A majority of these voters oppose the Trump administration's ICE enforcement in cities (58%), and they are far more likely to say that discrimination and civil rights are top issues when deciding how they will vote (32%).

What to Watch for in November

South Asian American voters are confident in their vote, focused on the economy, and increasingly aware of the hostility directed at their community. Four questions will determine what that means on Election Day:

1. **Whether the movable middle breaks.** Seventy-one percent of likely Independents are undecided, and a quarter of 2024 Trump voters (25%) claim they plan to vote Democratic for Congress. How these voters settle will determine the size of the Democratic margin in this community.
2. **Whether candidates speak to their economic priorities.** Cost of living and healthcare top the list for Democrats, Independents, and Republicans alike. These voters already believe officials lose touch with them (79%), so the candidates who engage them on these issues have room to stand out.
3. **Whether rising hostility becomes a reason to vote.** Nine in ten have faced discrimination or know someone who has. Likely voters who feel most connected to their community are the most Democratic (71%) and the most focused on civil rights (32% rank it a top issue).
4. **Whether the community's unengaged voters are reached.** Sixteen percent of South Asian American registered voters have not voted in any general election they were eligible for since 2020 and report low confidence in voting. Most of them (74%) still say their vote has power to make change, which makes outreach and voter education the difference between staying home and turning out.

Appendix: Methodology and Sample

On behalf of [Indian American Impact](#), HIT Strategies conducted a poll of N=800 registered voters nationwide who identify as South Asian American from September 18 – 26, 2026. 800 modeled South Asian Americans were interviewed from the L2 voter file via live caller interviews and text to web. Weights were applied to ensure we match known demographic distributions derived from the L2 voter file, the American Community Survey, and AP VoteCast. Data was weighted on age, gender, education, country of origin, geography, urbanity, nativity, modeled partisanship, and 2024 election participation & vote choice, as well as some bivariate of these. Likely voters are those who have participated in at least one of the past three general elections. The margin of error is +/- 3.88 points for registered voters and +/- 4.42 points for likely voters.

Demographics		
Gender	Male	49%
	Female/Other gender	51%
Age	Under 50	56%
	50+	44%
Education	Non-College	39%
	College+	61%
Party Identification	Democrat	53%
	Independent	30%
	Republican	17%
Family Background	Indian American	87%
	Non-Indian American	13%
Born in USA	Yes	15%
	No	85%