

To: ProgressNow Arizona
From: Joshua Ulibarri, Lake Research Partners
Re: Brief Summary/Narrative Project FGS Among AAPI
Date: August 19, 2018

Lake Research Partners completed a focus group in Phoenix among Asian American / Pacific Islanders (AAPI). The single focus group included men and women who were in their mid-twenties to their early-fifties. The group was recruited among AAPI who were scored on the voter file as higher partisans and lower on turnout; in addition, some participants were brought in via the facility's database. There was a good mix of partisanship and ideology in the group, and this group in particular included more moderate and conservative voters than may have been expected. The team has received a link to the video for the group. This memo is brief to convey the biggest findings, and what they mean for organizing later this year. As always, do not hesitate to call Joshua with any questions.

There is one big caution that must be communicated. These findings come from one focus group over a 2 hour period and from a discussion among ten people. While the findings may seem accurate and consistent with personal experience, we may be reinforcing our own beliefs in what we write here, given the limited research conducted among the AAPI community in Phoenix/Arizona. Additionally, this discussion included Phoenicians who identified as Korean, Chinese, Japanese, and Vietnamese – a wide range of cultural experiences brought into one discussion. This is a community that has not been given a lot of time and commitment when it comes to research, and ProgressNow and its allies deserve credit for running this group. But, as with African Americans, we left this focus group with as many questions as answers.

Here are the major findings:

1. **AAPI participants in this focus group expressed a mostly disappointed outlook on the way things were going in Arizona and the country.** There was disappointment that others in the state and country are not paying enough attention to what is happening (divisions, Trump, racism), as well as cynicism and unease around not being able to trust what you read online, or the leaders who says those things (keeping promises). That said, there was a sense that things can change, that this may be temporary, and that if we can count on people to organize and get together, things can get better. This sense of empowerment, early on, was a shared sense of togetherness even as the conversation later turned a bit inward.

2. **This was a diverse group with many different viewpoints and at times, some inconsistencies.** Some wanted easier access to guns and self-protection while others were adamant in the other direction – wanting stricter gun laws. While others wanted the AAPI community to remain more in the background and assimilate, others pushed back that there was not a strong enough strain of protest in their culture, and wanted to see more “standing up.” While most were aware of the then-recent police aggression against two men in an apartment complex hallway, they had real differences on supporting police officers or getting to the bottom of the aggression. ***The point is, this is a difficult community to target by demographics or ideology or issues.***

3. **The conversation around community and race was vivid and reflective of findings from other research projects regarding the AAPI community – culturally there is a tendency to be seen but not heard.** When it comes to challenges for “Asians” in Phoenix, the top issue is size. They know they are part of a community that does not receive a lot of attention, like the AAPI community in New York or California, for example. So often the community is “overlooked” or an “afterthought” and that is wrong; but at the same time participants said this is their way to “blend in.” Their parents and grandparents who immigrated to the country wanted to work hard, keep their head down, and not “rock the boat.” There is more pressure, they felt, in the Asian community to “achieve” and just get to work and get things done the way their parents did, and that they must continue in that direction. They are achieving the American Dream and “everything else is noise,” and say they are “comfortable here, we have great jobs.” In the end, this group for the most part agreed that the AAPI community was “low-key”.

Still, many in this group were critical of people in their community who did not stand up. One woman wanted more protests and more coming together for what is right. She didn’t just critique the AAPI community, she said all of Phoenix had an issue with standing up for what is right. While African Americans are advocating for basic human rights, the AAPI community doesn’t have a parade anymore and no marches. They came here the right way, they work hard, and they don’t want to be noticed. Unfortunately, when asked what they would rally or march for, there was not much discussion around potential issues or priorities that would uniquely unite these participants.

4. **While African Americans communicated their sense of being treated unfairly, of being targeted and discriminated against, participants in this group were less likely to share those stories.** At the end of the group there was an attempt to draw parallels between the African American, Hispanic, and AAPI experience, but these participants didn’t feel or communicate that

connection. Their people immigrated differently, and were not subject to the negative attention Latinx immigrants face. African Americans protest for basic human rights, but these participants did not see themselves at risk in the same light. They can be discriminated against, for sure, but it was hard for them to imagine, or to articulate, their community being largely targeted as they once were decades ago. ***This does NOT mean that striving for equality and fairness or fighting racism and discrimination is unimportant, it is to say that the race and discrimination discussion is somewhat seen through the prism of what other people experience.***

- 5. Immigration was an important discussion point. First, because participants said we are a border state dealing with the issue differently than other states.** However, as we learned in the African American group, the current immigration plight faced by Mexicans in particular, is different than what immigrants from their community went through. Here the language centered around the “right way” and the “correct process” and the “legal way” to immigrate; and in particular the way Asian immigrants came through the border. In summary, while both the Asian community and the Latino community may share an immigrant background, the experiences are different. Most participants did not like what is happening and wanted to see some order to the process. Unfortunately, these participants think it is easy to legally immigrate to the country and pushing for an “easier legal path to immigrate” was not well received.

That said, however, Dreamers have the full support of participants from this group. One participant said his Chinese ancestors had what they called “paper children” – children born here as citizens even as their parents were not legally here or were not citizens. Today, regressives call those children anchor babies, but they are the same. Others said we should not send children home to “what is not their home.” There was clear and consistent sympathy for Dreamers who have only know the United States as their home.

- 6. The conversation around who has power in Arizona had an entirely different feel in this group than among African Americans.** If you remember, in the African American group there was a discussion around corporations, the powerful, and corruption (it was shallow, but existed). In this group, the power conversation fell flat. While “who does and does not have power” was a relevant and personal conversation for African Americans, it lacked that passion among those in this AAPI group. ***This is to say activating these voters on taking something back, or holding the powerful accountable, is unlikely to register as easily.*** When the conversation turned to who was the “loudest,” conservatives and Hispanics came up, but still not much conversation around the wealthy, the elite, or corporations. In this group,

power was and is not a dynamic that registers are politically relevant or motivating.

7. **This was an educated group which may or may not reflect the Phoenix AAPI community as a whole – or at least progressive turnout targets in this demographic.** They were aware of specific details, facts, and current events that is unusual in any group. Specific marijuana laws and bills were mentioned. Net neutrality was mentioned in a focus group, which is rare. Zoning laws and the trade war also came up. At the same time, there were some misstatements like in any other group: the notion that marijuana is on the ballot this year, and that Stanton was Governor or running for the Senate. Most newsworthy, perhaps, was that a few younger participants mentioned Kimberly Yee but did not know she was running statewide this year.
8. **Most of these participants see voting as important, but because they were more independent and even non-partisan than other groups in this research, it wasn't seen as a tool for real change.** One person said it didn't matter and another said "if my candidate loses it is almost as if I didn't vote at all." They know voting matters and one said that it can take "years to undo something bad" that happens [like what Trump is doing]. Most vote in the Presidential elections and most say it is national issues that matter most to them, rather than local issues. There is both voting out of obligation ("to do my part") and fear ("worried that someone was going to get elected made me fearful.")

Interestingly, as we also see in many Latinx groups, a few participants here said that they would skip voting because they did not know enough. This is qualitative so we do not want to overstate the finding, but it had a different texture than when Latinx say they don't know enough. Here it appeared that the AAPI participant felt like they failed at something and didn't want to fail again by voting the wrong way; as if there was an anxiety to not knowing about the issue or the candidate. Then again, another participant said they were just "too lazy" to do the research.

9. **There is a hunger to be informed, but at the same time they increasingly doubt the sources of information.** We touched on this briefly in the first major finding, but it bears additional comment. Participants look for pamphlets and websites, but they don't know what to trust. They will turn to what they think are ideological sites that have more trustworthy information (The NY Times, blogs, Washington Post, Fox News, and CNN). But nothing is really trustworthy, not even local outlets. Because they feel additional pressure to know about things, this may also feed the idea that they do not know enough to vote, to rally, or to participate.

10. **There was a generational divide in this group, but it was almost purely based on experience and not ideological.** Younger participants held different views or said different things because of their stage in life rather than a different political view. The millennials in the group were the least likely to vote, the most conservative on choice and guns. While the male spoke often, the younger female participant was less involved in the conversation, likely because she did not feel expert enough or strongly about some issues (she was one of two who knew of Yee).

11. **Unfortunately, there was not as much time to discuss the parties in this group as in others.** But this was not a particularly partisan group, even though it was recruited to be progressive in nature. The Democratic party is not a vehicle to persuade these potential targets. Instead, it needs to be more personal, probably less partisan, and more factual so they can feel as though they are getting information and are making their own decisions.