

Beyond the Ballot: Barriers to Asian American Voter Participation

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INTRODUCTION

Asian Americans are the fastest growing bloc of eligible U.S. voters since 2000, yet consistently show among the lowest turnout of any racial group (58% vs 70% of White voters in 2024) (AAPI Data, 2024). This contradiction reflects a long history of legal exclusion: the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882), Japanese American Incarceration through Executive Order 9066 (1942), and ongoing anti-Asian hate (National Archives). Existing research documents structural, legal, and language barriers through advocacy and national survey research, but often treats Asian Americans as a single national population. Therefore, existing research confirms the existence of barriers but fails to explain how they operate locally and how they vary across different communities. Treating Asian Americans as one national bloc erases how factors such as geography, immigration, and local nonprofit infrastructure shape what political life looks like.

RESEARCH QUESTION

What structural, cultural, and language-based barriers most shape Asian American voter turnout, and how do they vary across Queens, NY; Houston, TX; and Atlanta/Gwinnett County, GA?

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

- Move beyond national statistics to examine how Asian American voter behavior is locally produced & experienced
- Compare Queens, Houston, and Atlanta/Gwinnett County to capture Asian American electorate variation
- Center on lived experiences through qualitative interviews with eligible voters, organizers, and nonprofit leaders
- Inform policy & outreach solutions through geographic and comparative research

METHODS

3 LOCATIONS / 14 INTERVIEWS

- Queens, New York (5)**
Multilingual immigrant population, emerging Asian American nonprofits, and urban political landscape
- Houston, Texas (7)**
Restrictive voting environment, diverse and large Asian American population, documented voting access challenges
- Atlanta/Gwinnett County, Georgia (2)**
Rapidly growing Asian American electorate, “Seoul of the South,” 84% Asian American turnout increase compared to previous presidential election (Yam, 2024)

2 PARTICIPANT GROUPS

- Eligible Voters (6)**
- Nonprofit Organization Leaders (8)**

Recruitment methods:

Snowball sampling, direct emails, and social media outreach

DATA COLLECTION

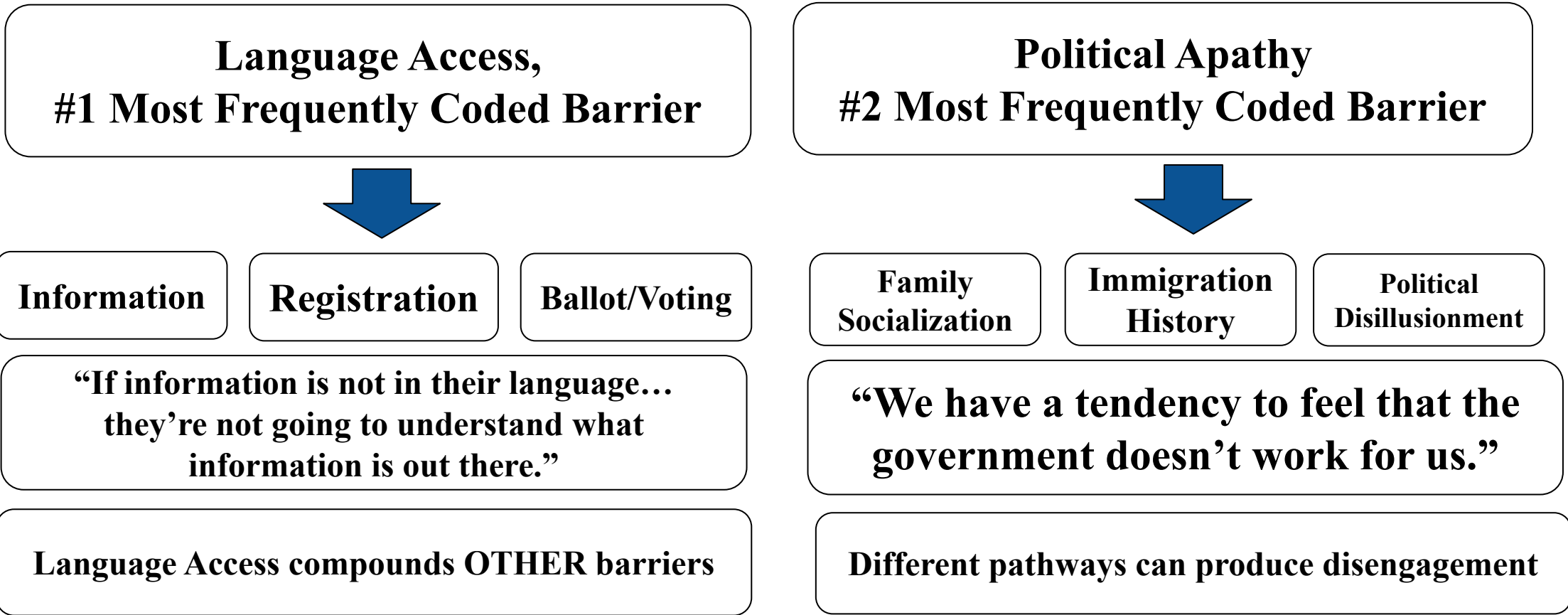
- Interviews:** Zoom teleconference/Phone call
- Eligible Voters:** Personal background, voting history, personal motivations, family & cultural influences, etc
- Organizers:** Mission, GOTV strategies, location-specific barriers

ANALYSIS

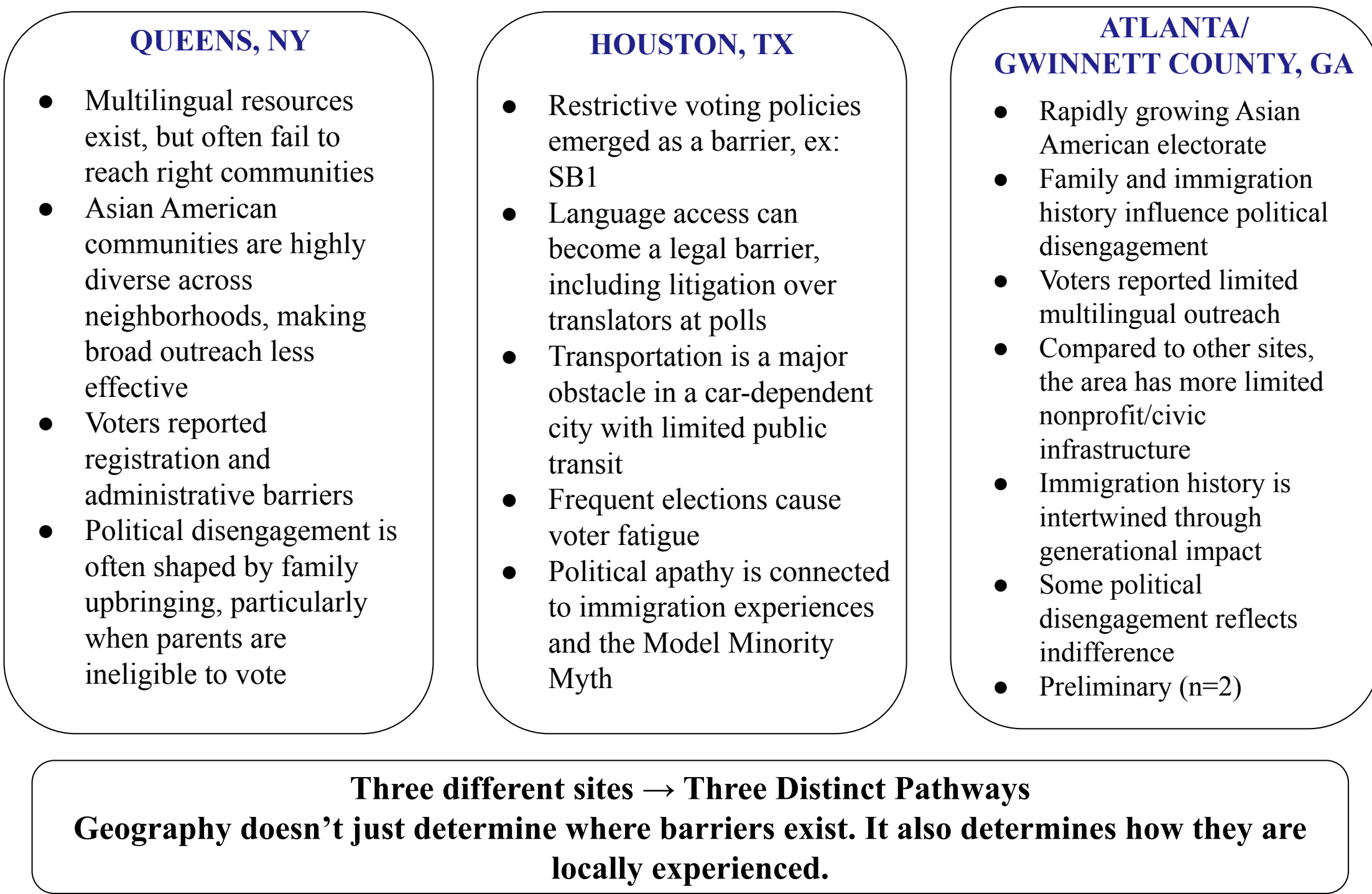
- NVivo:** Computer software platform used to organize, analyze, and find insights in unstructured data
- 25 codes:** Thematic clusters
- 190 total references across codes**

DISCUSSION & RESULTS

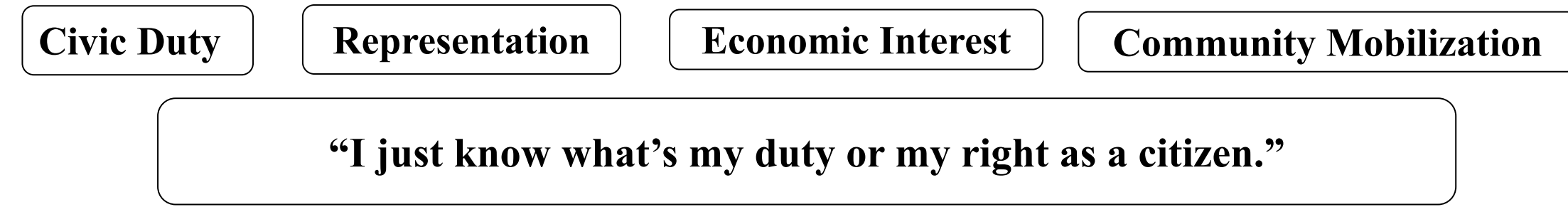
WHAT SHAPES ASIAN AMERICAN VOTER PARTICIPATION?



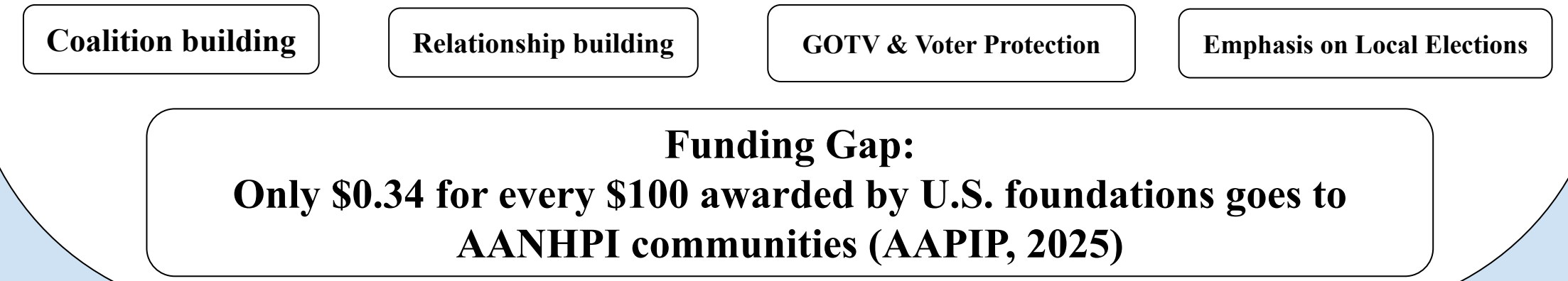
HOW DOES LOCATION MATTER?



WHAT MOTIVATES VOTERS?



HOW DO COMMUNITY ORGANIZERS BRIDGE THE GAP?



CONCLUSIONS & NEXT STEPS

- Language access was the most prominent barrier, shaping voters’ ability to access information and navigate the electoral process
- Barriers vary by geography: Queens, Houston, and Atlanta/Gwinnett County reflect distinct political, demographic, and civic environments
- Political apathy is contextual, shaped by family socialization, immigration experiences, cultural narratives, and political disillusionment
- Asian Americans are NOT a monolith: factors such as ethnicity, language, immigration, geography, and local infrastructure shape political participation
- Community organizations play a critical role in bridging gaps in voter education, outreach, and access

NEXT STEPS:

- Expand sample, conduct additional research in Atlanta/Gwinnett County
- Further examine how nonprofit infrastructure and funding influence voter mobilization
- Work on locally tailored outreach strategies

BIG TAKEAWAY:

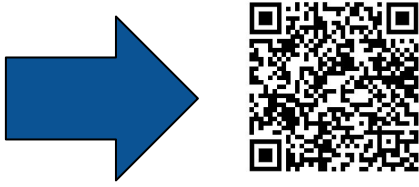
- Political disengagement is shaped by locally specific barriers and requires locally specific solutions
- Geography shapes both which barriers exist and how severely they are experienced

IMPLICATIONS:

- Queens → Prioritize delivery and outreach by language and neighborhood
- Houston → Sustain voting-rights advocacy & funding civic infrastructure
- Atlanta/Gwinnett County → Strengthen nonprofit networks and community outreach

REFERENCES

Please use this QR Code to access references



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