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The Asian American Vote in 2020: Indicators of Turnout and Vote Choice

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Abstract

What were the indicators of voter turnout and presidential vote choice among Asian Americans in 2020? We argue that 2020 was a unique year in which race was salient for Asian Americans due to the rise of anti-Asian attitudes attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic and the opportunity to elect a vice presidential candidate of Asian descent. Because of this, racial considerations played a unique role that informed Asian American political participation and attitudes in this election. Using data from the 2020 Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey, we identify the individual-level factors associated with turnout and presidential vote choice among Asian Americans. We find that stronger perceptions of racial discrimination were related to a higher likelihood of turnout and voting in support of the Democratic Party, especially among Asian immigrants relative to the native-born. This study offers new insight for when we can expect racial considerations to inform the politics of Asian Americans, who are the fastest growing racial group in the United States and therefore an increasingly important bloc of the electorate.

Keywords Voter turnout · Vote choice · Political participation · Public opinion · Race and ethnicity · Asian Americans

The percentage of Asian Americans who turned out to vote in the presidential election broke new records in 2020. Analysts estimated that 60–62% of eligible Asian Americans adults turned out to vote in 2020. The rate of turnout increased

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from the previous presidential election cycle for Asian Americans, bypassing the rate of change for whites, Blacks, or Latinos between 2016 and 2020 (Ghitza & Robinson, 2020; Ramakrishnan, 2021). Indeed, 2020 presented a unique electoral context for Asian Americans. For the first time, Asian Americans had the opportunity to vote in support of a presidential ticket that included a person of Asian heritage on the ballot, Kamala Harris, whose mother is an immigrant from India. Yet at the same time, Asian Americans faced the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic. When COVID-19 first began spreading in the United States in March of 2020, public blame took aim at China, where the virus originated. The association of China with COVID-19 manifested in a rise of antipathy toward Asian Americans. Evidence shows that there was a clear spike in reported hate crimes against Asian Americans by April 2020, with further academic research showing a growth in anti-Asian sentiment among the American public (Jeung et al., 2021; Lu et al., 2021; Lu & Sheng, 2020; Tessler, Choi, and Kao 2020; Chan, Leung, and Kim 2021). Asian Americans were simultaneously struggling with not only the threat of public health but also the racial targeting aimed at their community. The growth in voter turnout during 2020 for the Asian American population was therefore particularly notable given what was also occurring in that same year.

This study asks two questions. What were the indicators of turnout and presidential vote choice for Asian Americans in 2020? In addition, given the context in 2020, we ask more specifically, did racial considerations play a role in shaping Asian American turnout and vote choice? By racial considerations, we refer to those attitudes gauging either the importance of race or those consequences due to one's racial classification. In this paper, we measure racial considerations using the variables measuring racial group linked fate and attitudes about racial discrimination.

While racial considerations have been found to play an important role in the political behavior of communities of color (Chong & Rogers, 2005; Sanchez, 2006; Chan and Jasso 2021), prior research has yielded mixed findings about the connection between racial considerations and political behavior for Asian Americans (Collet, 2005; Wong, Lien and Conway 2005; Wong et al., 2011; Masuoka et al., 2018; Sadhwani, 2020; Leung, 2021). To explain these mixed findings, some scholars have argued that researchers should pay more attention to the specific social, economic, or political contexts that are occurring when we find Asian Americans to mobilize based on racial or pan-ethnic identities and compare it to those contexts when race appears to play a more minimal factor (Junn & Masuoka, 2008; Okamoto and Mora 2014). These scholars argue that for Asian Americans, their race or racial identity is not always consistently activated or politically consequential (see also McClain et al., 2009). However, when certain conditions make race a salient issue, we should then find that race-based considerations play a role in their political decision-making. Building on this argument, this 2020 study offers a new case to understand when racial considerations matter for Asian American political behavior.

We argue that there were two important contextual factors in 2020 beyond typical electoral conditions that likely activated racial considerations for Asian American voters. First, the rise of anti-Asian hate that occurred in response to the COVID-19 pandemic meant that many Asian Americans were personally witnessing

racial discrimination against their community. This rise of anti-Asian hate has been attributed to former President Trump's (as well as other Republican political elites) willingness to stoke anti-China sentiment among the American public (Chan, Leung, and Kim 2021). As a result, we expect that many Asian Americans would link their experiences with and perceptions of racial discrimination directly with the actions of the Trump administration. We expect then that there should be a connection between attitudes toward racial discrimination with voter turnout and candidate choice for Asian Americans in 2020. Second, the presence of an Asian American candidate on the ballot could have activated a shared group identity among Asian American voters. As a result, we expect that linked fate was a meaningful factor for mobilizing participation and shaping vote choice in 2020 because those with a strong sense of group identity would feel motivated to turnout in support of descriptive representation. To test our expectations, we analyze the 2020 Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey (CMPS), a survey of a diverse America, which included a sizable oversample of Asian Americans ($n=3975$). We test multivariate models to determine if racial considerations such as linked fate and perceptions of racial discrimination were associated with turnout and presidential vote choice for Asian Americans in 2020.

This study proceeds as follows: We first overview the established literature on political behavior among Asian Americans to generate expectations about the main predictors of turnout and vote choice. We then review the literature on the relationship between racial considerations and political behavior before discussing how the year 2020 presented several unique racial considerations that we argue would explain the nature of Asian American vote in the 2020 presidential election. We then present our analysis of the 2020 CMPS. To preview our findings, our analysis shows that perceptions of discrimination were associated with both turnout and voting for the Democratic ticket, primarily for Asian American immigrant voters. This finding demonstrates that contexts can have heterogeneous effects across subgroups of Asian Americans.

Established Literature on Asian American Voting

Asian American political behavior has often been framed as a paradox because conventional indicators, such as socioeconomic status, do not adequately predict participation among Asian Americans (Junn, 1999; Tam, 1995; Wong et al., 2011). Experts in Asian American politics note that conventional factors such as socioeconomic status are less able to predict Asian American participation patterns largely because today's Asian American adult population is overwhelmingly foreign-born. Many Asian immigrants arrive in the United States with more resources, such as higher degrees and obtain professional jobs. However, limited language proficiency, citizenship, and voter registration hinder the ability of Asian Americans to vote (Ramakrishnan and Epenshade 2001; Ramakrishnan 2005; Lien 2004; Xu 2005; DeSipio, 2011; Masuoka et al., 2019).

At the same time, Wong, Lien, and Conway (2005) find that once naturalized, foreign-born Asian Americans register and vote at rates that are virtually

indistinguishable from their native-born counterparts. After overcoming these barriers to voting, Asian Americans are capable of and do participate, which dispels the myth of Asian American voter apathy. As such, Asian Americans have become one of the fastest growing electorates with increasing political influence (Ong, De la Cruz-Viesca, and Nakanishi 2008). The Pew Research Center estimates that the Asian American electorate has experienced staggering growth since 2000, with eligible voters almost tripling in number from 4.6 million to about 11.1 million in 2020 (Budiman 2020). Therefore, while immigrant-related variables might constrain Asian American political behavior, mobilization-related factors are increasingly becoming key explanatory factors for their turnout in elections (Wong et. al 2011; Wong, 2005).

Once mobilized to turnout, the next question is how Asian Americans assert their political preferences. Relative to whites and Blacks, Asian Americans are less likely to identify with a political party, potentially indicating a sense of uncertainty about U.S. politics, low levels of information, and complications with incorporation or assimilation (Garcia & Phan, 2009; Hajnal & Lee, 2011; Wong et al., 2011). Yet, while partisan identification can be weak, when Asian Americans cast a ballot there is preference for Democratic candidates. This is a partisan trend that has strengthened over past election cycles (Bowler & Segura, 2011; Masuoka et al., 2018). The systematic sorting along racial lines of whites into the Republican Party and voters of color into the Democratic Party that has increased over the second half of the twentieth century is one explanation for Asian American voters' increased support of Democratic candidates over time (Frymer, 1999; Hajnal & Lee, 2011; Junn & Masuoka, 2020). Other research has shown that factors such as feelings of social exclusion, peer socialization, and intergroup solidarity with other minority groups increase support for the Democratic Party among Asian Americans (Kuo, Malhotra and Mo 2017; Chan, Kim and Leung, 2021; Raychaudhuri, 2018; Raychaudhuri, 2020).

While in the aggregate Asian Americans vote for Democrats, once we disaggregate by national origin group, research shows important variation. For example, Vietnamese Americans are seemingly more Republican leaning (Lien, 2001; Wong et al., 2011). Although, new evidence shows a greater share of Vietnamese Americans supporting Democratic candidates in recent elections (Masuoka et al., 2018). A relatively larger share of Filipino Americans also favor Republicans compared to other national origin groups. In contrast, Indian Americans are the most Democratic of all Asian national origin groups (Wong et al., 2011). As Asian American communities move further away from the immigrant experience, the politics of the country of origin is found to weaken. Studies show that second generation Asian Americans and beyond are more likely to vote for the Democratic party regardless of their national origin background (Lien, Conway and Wong, 2004; Wong et al., 2011).

Demographic factors, in particular immigrant-related ones, are important indicators of Asian American voting behavior. Additional research shows there to be some variation in partisan choice by national origin and immigrant generation. As such, we expect these to be important factors that predict turnout and vote choice in 2020. However, this literature offers a baseline of what we can expect of

Asian American voters *when their race or racial identity was not made as salient in elections*. We argue that events in 2020 primed the importance of race for Asian Americans and so we expect there to be additionally important predictors of turnout and candidate choice for the 2020 election to consider. In the following section, we review the research on how racial considerations such as racial group identity or perceptions of discrimination are understood to influence Asian American behavior.

When Race Matters for Asian American Voting Behavior

For historically marginalized racial minority groups, race can be a mobilizing factor for politics. Early theories argued that perceptions of relative deprivation experienced by the racial group can cultivate a sense of politicized group consciousness leading to the greater motivation to improve one's group status through the act of voting (Bobo & Hutchings, 1996; Verba & Nie, 1972). Political science increasingly relies on a measure of linked fate, and research shows that these racial consideration variables are strongly related to both political participation and public opinion for African Americans (Chong & Rogers, 2005; Dawson, 1994). Extensions of this research have shown similar findings for Latinos (Sanchez, 2006; Stokes, 2003). Other research has explored the role of other measures that account for racial considerations—such as perceptions of racial discrimination—on political behavior and have found similar results (Berry et al., 2020).

Although Asian Americans have historically witnessed disadvantages and discrimination due to their racialization throughout American history (Kim, 1999), empirical research has not found a consistent individual-level link between measures of racial considerations—such as racial group linked fate or perceptions of racial discrimination—and voter behavior for Asian Americans. Some studies find there to be a weak relationship between racial considerations and voter registration or turnout. For example, Wong, Lien, and Conway (2005) find that measures of racial “group-based resources” (p. 13) and might even have a demobilizing effect. These scholars found that racial group consciousness, group identity, and experience with discrimination were not related to increases in turnout among Asian Americans. Further, in a study on Asian American voting behavior in the 2008 primary election, researchers found that while those who did not see political commonality between Asian Americans and African Americans were linked to less support for Obama, the role of race-based considerations were weak relative to partisanship (Ramakrishnan et al., 2009). Another study by Wong et al., (2011) found that Asian Americans who experienced racial discrimination did not report higher rates of turnout relative to those who did not experience racial discrimination. They also found no relationship between racial group linked fate and turnout. Similarly in their study of the 2016 presidential election, Masuoka et al., (2018) found null effects of race-based considerations on voting.

It should be noted that these studies mentioned above examine the general propensity to turnout in an election, but when scholars focus on specific types of elections and contexts—most notably those that involve the opportunity to support

a co-ethnic candidate—research shows distinctive patterns of behavior for Asian Americans. Observational studies of voter files find that the presence of an Asian American candidate increases turnout in districts with a higher proportion of Asian Americans (Sadhwani, 2020) and that Asian Americans are more likely to support an Asian American candidate on the ballot (Collet, 2005; Leung, 2021). In an experimental design, Junn and Masuoka (2008) demonstrated that descriptive representatives help activate racial group consciousness for Asian Americans, which offers identification of the main mechanism that explains why the presence of co-ethnic candidates on the ballot is mobilizing for Asian American voters.

Other studies show that racial considerations can be an important factor that drives protest and other forms of political activism as a response to a case involving racial discrimination. Historical studies have documented cases when Asian Americans collectively organize in response to their negative racialization as an undesirable foreign outsider, such as the national movement in response to the Vincent Chin beating in the early 1980s or immigrant labor organizing for fair wages (Espiritu, 1992; Okamoto, 2003; Saito, 1998). Moreover, Wong, Lien and Conway's (2005) study demonstrates evidence showing that group consciousness is related to increases in non-voting forms of political participation. Okamoto's, 2003 study of pan-ethnic movements among Asian Americans in the second half of the twentieth century argues that successful movements were those that were able to develop compelling frames of shared racial and class subjugation, demonstrating that race can be used as a powerful message for mobilization.

While the research on the link between racial considerations and turnout has shown varied findings, another line of research consistently demonstrates a link between racial considerations and partisanship. Since the Civil Rights Movement, the Democratic Party has been identified as the party in favor of promoting racial equity and as a result has increasingly attracted more voters of color to its coalition (Carmines & Stimson, 1989). Newer research suggests that this may be the case for Asian Americans. For example, Kuo, Malhotra and Mo (2017) find that perceived social exclusion increases the likelihood of Democratic favorability among Asian Americans. In their 2021 study on COVID-19 and Asian Americans, Chan, Leung and Kim's findings suggest that exclusionary rhetoric from political elites further solidifies Asian Americans' preference towards the Democratic Party. In sum, for events when race or racial identity is made a salient issue, studies find that racial considerations influence the politics of Asian Americans.

The Activation of Racial Considerations for Asian Americans During the 2020 Election

Research demonstrates the importance of context and helps us situate when we can expect racial considerations to be related to Asian American voter behavior. We argue that given events that occurred in 2020, Asian American voters were operating in a unique context where their race was strongly emphasized and thus was likely informing their political decision-making in the 2020 election cycle. We hypothesize that there were two ways that racial considerations were activated for

Asian American politics in 2020. First, Asian Americans were subject to persistent discriminatory treatment attributed to the rise of anti-Asian hate that spawned during the COVID-19 pandemic. Second, Asian Americans were provided positive or inspirational frames, given their opportunity to elect a candidate of Asian heritage at the top of the ticket. In this section, we outline our expectations for how these two contexts could have produced an important link between two different types of racial consideration variables (perceptions of discrimination and racial group linked fate) and political behavior for Asian Americans in 2020.

Asian Americans were subject to severe negative racialization beginning in early 2020 when the coronavirus pandemic first began spreading through the United States. Additionally, Asians and Asian Americans were identified as the scapegoat for the spread of the virus. This racialization was widespread in nature given the former Trump administration's rhetoric connecting COVID-19 with China (Chan, Kim and Leung, 2021; Graziosi, 2020; Silver, Devlin and Huang 2020). Recent studies have documented a rise in anti-Asian attitudes across the United States (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Reny & Barreto, 2020) along with a spike in hate crime reporting among Asian Americans (Jeung & Nham, 2020). In response, some community leaders and elected officials offered a cohesive message that Asian Americans were being unfairly targeted due to the erroneous assumptions that they were the source of COVID-19 (Arora et al., 2021; Feng & Lien, 2020; Sadwhani and Kulkarni 2021). This offered a mobilizing frame in the public sphere and connected the actions of the Trump administration with the rise of anti-Asian hate.

In this context, Asian Americans were likely to either personally experience this negative racialization by being subject to some form of racial discrimination or knew someone close to them that was subject to discrimination. As a result of this specific context, we expect that the experience of racial discrimination or one's attitudes about racial discrimination were particularly strong factors informing Asian Americans' decision to turn out to vote in 2020. Because of the Trump administration's role in activating anti-Asian attitudes, we also expect there to be a direct relationship between the experience of discrimination and perceived discrimination and support for the Democratic ticket (Biden-Harris). In sum, we hypothesize that both experienced and perceived racial discrimination should be associated with higher turnout and voting for the Democratic candidate in 2020 for Asian Americans.

On the inspirational dimension, the 2020 election included a candidate of Asian American heritage at the top of the ticket with Kamala Harris selected as the Democratic vice-presidential candidate. With Harris on the ballot, Asian Americans could have seen the opportunity to elect the first person of Asian descent as Vice President of the United States. Consistent with studies testing the role of descriptive representation (Junn & Masuoka, 2008), we could therefore surmise that Harris had the potential to activate a racial group linked fate among Asian American voters. The literature suggests that linked fate can be both politically mobilizing and leads to greater support for the Democratic Party (Dawson, 1994). Given this, we expect linked fate to have a positive and significant relationship with higher voter turnout and should also predict greater support for the Democratic ticket.

Yet at the same time, we might not expect Harris to have the same effect in activating a strong sense of linked fate for all Asian Americans. Research shows that

most Asian Americans report the strongest sense of group solidarity with others of the same national origin background compared to a panethnic or racial group linked fate (Wong et al., 2011). Given Harris' Asian Indian background, this might lead us to expect that her election would be most meaningful to those who were also Asian Indian. However, Asian Indians already have one of the highest turnout rates and are already the strongest supporters of the Democratic party relative to other Asian national origin groups (Mishra, 2016; Sadhwani, 2020; Sadhwani & Arora, 2021). As a result, it might not be the case that there was a clear change in behavior among Asian Indian voters. Moreover, Harris' biracial background may also weaken the mobilizing effect. A survey experiment conducted by Lemi, Arora and Sadhwani (2022) finds that Indian Americans respond more positively in their support of Harris when she is framed racially as Indian alone over bi-racial or Black. This suggests that Asian American voters who perceived Harris as non-Asian may not have seen her as a descriptive representative. Overall, this leads us to expect that the inspirational dimension, via linked fate, may have an important, yet albeit weaker impact on Asian American behavior in 2020 compared to perceptions of racial discrimination.

Taken together, we hypothesize that the negative racialization of Asian Americans likely had a stronger impact on Asian American turnout and vote choice than the inspirational opportunity to elect a candidate of partial Asian heritage. We therefore expect that the experience with and attitudes about racial discrimination will be two of the strongest factors informing Asian American political decision-making in the 2020 election.

Data and Methods

This study draws on data collected by the 2020 Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey (hereafter as, 2020 CMPS) which included 3975 completed interviews of Asian American adults (Frasure, Wong, Barreto, and Vargas 2021). This online survey was administered after the 2020 election between April 2 and August 25, 2021, and was available in multiple languages including Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese.¹ The 2020 CMPS is an ideal dataset to study the participation and attitudes

¹ We acknowledge that this survey was conducted some months after the 2020 election. In March 2021, a mass shooting that targeted Asian women occurred in Atlanta, Georgia (see Knowles et al., 2021). One concern is that this event and other hate incidents occurring in early 2021 may have influenced how Asian American survey respondents viewed racial discrimination against their group and which would result in a spurious relationship with voter turnout or candidate choice in the election that occurred months prior. However, it is unlikely that the Atlanta shooting dramatically changed Asian American attitudes about discrimination between the election and the collection of this survey. Anti-Asian attitudes had already been on the rise in 2020 and so the Atlanta shooting did not necessarily present "new" information that anti-Asian hate existed in the United States between November 2020 and collection of the survey. Moreover, a separate study by Leung, Kim and Masuoka (2021) found that Asian American attitudes about discrimination were unchanged in response to new events in 2020 when the initial spike of anti-Asian attitudes occurred. This suggests that attitudes about discrimination are not strongly influenced by new events. A different study by Arora et.al. 2021 found that media coverage and attention to the mass shootings in Atlanta were very short lived. Analysis in this study shows that audiences were only responsive to social media posts about the shooting that only lasted for about a month after the event. Taken together, we do not believe the Atlanta shooting is a confounding event in this study that altered survey respondents' attitudes about racial discrimination.

of Asian Americans given that it ensured large samples of both registered and non-registered voters.²

We analyze two dependent variables: voter turnout and presidential vote choice. For turnout, we utilized the respondent's self-report of voting in the 2020 presidential election.³ Due to the large immigrant share in the Asian American community, we limited this analysis to the citizen voting age population. For vote choice, we used the survey item asking which presidential ticket the respondent voted for. Since we are interested in understanding the final election outcome, our analysis of vote choice only included those who actually reported voting. Both dependent variables were coded as dichotomous variables.⁴

Given the context of 2020, our key independent variables of interest are those attitudinal measures that account for racial considerations, specifically racial group linked fate and perceptions about racial discrimination. To account for racial group linked fate, we use a measure originally proposed by Dawson (1994). To account for attitudes about racial discrimination we include two measures: personal experience with racial discrimination and perceived discrimination against Asian Americans as a racial group. We evaluated the relationship between personal experiences with discrimination and perceived discrimination against one's racial group. We found that while the relationship was indeed positive, it was not highly correlated ($r=0.29$). This is consistent with past scholarship which shows that these two items measure distinctive dimensions of racial discrimination (Oskooii, 2018). Given this, we include both experienced and perceived racial discrimination in our model specification.

Beyond these three primary explanatory variables of interest, we also considered other important predictor variables established by past scholarship on Asian American political behavior. We included demographic indicators such as age, gender, education, immigrant status, and national origin. In analysis of national origin, all coefficients are in comparison to Indian Americans, which are used as a baseline. We do this so that we can determine whether Indian Americans were more likely to turnout and/or support the Democratic ticket relative to other national origin groups. We also will examine how attendance at religious services impacted the group's turnout and vote choice in 2020. In addition, we looked at other standard political variables considering partisanship, strength of partisan identity, or whether

² Data in this analysis are weighted to fall within the margin of error of the adult population in the 2019 Census ACS 1-year data file for age, gender, education, nativity, and ancestry. A post-stratification raking algorithm was used to balance each category within ± 2 percent of the ACS estimates. See <https://cmpsu.rvey.org/2020-survey/>.

³ We acknowledge that social desirability bias may influence response to this survey item. Unfortunately, a validated turnout variable was not included in the 2020 CMPS initial release, at the time when this article was written. We follow a tradition in political science research which uses self-reported measures of voter turnout (Brady et al., 1995; Dawson 1994; Leighley and Nagler 1992).

⁴ For question wording and coding of all variables please see online Appendix A.

respondents had been contacted by a campaign, political party, or community organization to vote or register to vote during the last election cycle.⁵

For this analysis, we specify two sets of multivariate models. Model 1 is our demographic model. Given that the Asian American electorate grows with each new election, we first wanted to understand which demographic predictors were associated with increased turnout/Democratic vote choice in 2020. Model 2 tests for the unique impact of racial considerations by including our three independent variables of focus (linked fate, experience with discrimination and perceptions of discrimination) along with demographic and other relevant political controls. This second “full” model allows us to evaluate the relationship between Asian American linked fate, experienced discrimination, and perceived discrimination on our dependent variable of interest, controlling for other demographic and political factors. Since both dependent variables are dichotomous, we use logit regression for all multivariate models. In the following sections, we first evaluate the predictors of voter turnout followed by an analysis of presidential vote choice. Given that the literature shows there to be important differences by immigrant status and national origin (Masuoka et al., 2019; Wu, 2022), we will also disaggregate the sample into subgroups to determine if racial considerations are distinct predictors across immigrant status and/or national origin group.⁶

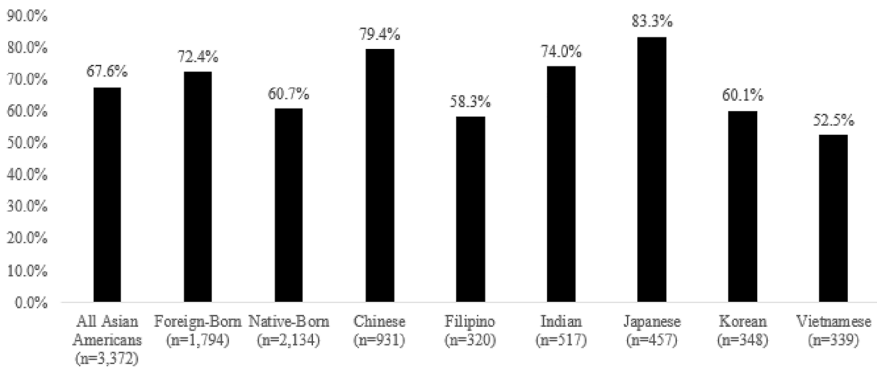
Contours of a Growing Electorate: Predictors of Asian American Voter Turnout in 2020

According to the 2020 CMPS, about 67.6% of eligible Asian Americans respondents turned out to vote in the 2020 general election (see Fig. 1).⁷ Given the diversity of the Asian Americans, we also disaggregated the sample by immigrant status and national origin and found important differences across subgroups. Foreign-born Asian Americans were more likely to vote (72.4%) than native-born Asian Americans (60.7%). Japanese Americans were the national origin group with the highest rate of turnout in 2020 at about 83%. Indian Americans (74%) and Chinese

⁵ We also considered how experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic may have impacted voter turnout and presidential vote choice among Asian Americans. We considered the role of experiencing a COVID-19 infection and experiencing economic hardship during the pandemic on our two dependent variables. This analysis found that these health-related factors were not significantly related to voter turnout nor presidential vote choice. Therefore, we excluded these factors from consideration in this study. We present our analysis of COVID-19-related experiences in the Appendix B, Tables B1-B4.

⁶ The CMPS is currently embargoed to collaborators and contributors only. See: <https://cmpsurvey.org/2020-survey/>. The survey will be posted for public use on ICPSR sometime in 2023. We have posted code for the analysis on the Political Behavior Dataverse here: <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/XI7MWK>.

⁷ This rate is slightly higher compared to estimates documented by other studies, but the difference is not large. For example, in an analysis of vote returns conducted by Catalist, it was estimated that about 62% of eligible Asian American adults voted in the 2020 presidential election (Ghitza and Robinson, 2020). An analysis of 2020 Current Population Survey data finds that approximately 60% of Asian American eligible adults voted in the presidential election (Ramakrishnan 2021). The advantage of using survey data is that we can look at individual-level attitudinal correlates of turnout.



Note: CMPS 2020 data is weighted to fall within the margin of error of the adult population in the 2019 Census ACS 1-year data file for age, gender, education, nativity, and ancestry. Rate is calculated only among citizens.

Fig. 1 Voter turnout rates for Asian Americans, CMPS 2020

Americans (79%) also turned out at very high rates. The national origin group with the lowest turnout rate was Vietnamese American at 53%.⁸

We then explore the predictors of Asian American voter turnout in 2020. Table 1 presents our multivariate analysis. Looking at our demographics in Model 1, we find that two strong predictors of voter turnout in 2020 were age and education. Those who were older and had higher levels of education were those most likely to turnout to vote. Our results also find that once controlling for other demographic factors, immigrants were less likely to turn out to vote compared to the native born. This differs from the pattern found for Asian American voters in the 2016 election (Masuoka et al., 2019). Interestingly, we find that there was no statistically significant difference in turnout across national origin groups. So, while we had expected Indian Americans to be more mobilized to vote compared to other national origin groups given the presence of a co-ethnic candidate (Harris) on the ballot, our results do not provide strong evidence for this assumption. Since turnout rates for Indian Americans were already impressively high in 2020, this might explain why we do not find a distinct national origin difference for Indian Americans relative to other groups.

After identifying which demographic groups in Asian America were more likely to turnout in 2020, we then investigated whether there was a mobilizing effect of racialization in 2020. Turning to the full Model in Table 1, we find that linked fate played no significant role in increasing turnout among Asian Americans. However, we do find that both perceptions of discrimination against Asian Americans and the personal experience of racial discrimination had mobilizing effects on Asian American turnout. The influence of these factors on Asian American turnout is significant

⁸ Vietnamese and Filipino Americans may have been the least likely to turnout in 2020 due to under-recruitment in those communities (see Appendix, Table B11). In the 2020 CMPS, we found that these two Asian American national origin groups were those least likely to be contacted by political organizations about voting.

Table 1 Indicators of voter turnout for Asian Americans in 2020

	Dependent variable: voter turnout			
	Model I demographics		Model II full	
	Logit coeff	Odds ratios	Logit coeff	Odds ratios
Age	3.411*** (0.200)	30.286	3.868*** (0.229)	47.841
Woman	0.095 (0.105)		0.158 (0.115)	
Education	2.996*** (0.213)	20	2.779*** (0.234)	16.1
Income	0.688*** (0.172)	1.99	0.547*** (0.187)	1.728
Foreign born	- 0.263** (0.117)	0.768	- 0.178 (0.127)	
Attend religious services	- 0.468*** (0.149)	0.626	- 0.805*** (0.169)	0.447
Chinese	- 0.054 (0.187)		- 0.012 (0.199)	
Filipino	- 0.037 (0.190)		0.169 (0.206)	
Japanese	- 0.098 (0.286)		- 0.145 (0.308)	
Korean	- 0.290 (0.206)		- 0.040 (0.229)	
Vietnamese	- 0.148 (0.202)		0.062 (0.221)	
Other Asian	- 0.095 (0.196)		- 0.002 (0.211)	
Recruitment			0.296** (0.119)	1.344
Political interest			0.957*** (0.213)	2.603
Party strength			0.367** (0.173)	1.443
Linked fate			- 0.001 (0.206)	
Perceived racial discrimination			0.416* (0.218)	1.516
Experienced racial discrimination			0.275** (0.124)	1.317
Constant	- 2.527*** (0.239)		- 3.732*** (0.333)	
Observations	2,992	2,992	2,808	2,808
Log likelihood	- 1,061.989	- 1,061.989	- 906.098	- 906.098
Akaike Inf. Crit	2,149.978	2,149.978	1,850.197	1,850.197

Among Asian American citizens only. Logit regression. * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

even when we account for the established variables of political interest, partisanship strength and recruitment.

Given our expectations that racialization due to COVID-19 likely impacted subgroups of Asian Americans in distinct ways, we tested to see if the predictors of turnout varied first across immigrant status and second across national origin. First, we disaggregated the sample by immigrant status and ran the same Full model from Table 1 separately on foreign-born and on native-born respondents.⁹ We tested to see if the predictors of turnout were the same for native-born respondents compared to immigrant respondents. In Table 2, we find that only for Asian immigrants is there a significant relationship between both perceived discrimination and experienced discrimination and voter turnout. Since we use logit regression, we also calculated predicted probabilities to facilitate the interpretation of these results. We displayed the results for perceived discrimination in Fig. 2. Asian American immigrants who perceive no discrimination against Asian Americans are about 10 percentage points less likely to turnout compared to those who perceive a lot of racial discrimination. Asian American immigrants who had experienced racial discrimination were moderately more likely to turnout by about 6 points compared to those who have never experienced discrimination (see online Appendix B, Figure B1). This suggests that the results in the full model presented in Table 1 showing the significant effect of both perceived and experienced discrimination on turnout is driven largely by immigrant respondents in the Asian American sample.

Finally, we conducted a similar analysis to compare the predictors of turnout by national origin group. We disaggregated the sample by the six largest national origin groups and then ran the full model separately. This analysis yielded only a few differences in the types of predictors explaining turnout across national origin groups (see analysis in Appendix B, Table B6 and B7). Racial considerations were a significant predictor largely for one group: Filipinos. For Filipinos, the experience of discrimination was associated with higher rates of turnout. This was an unexpected finding, and we speculate that this could be attributed to the fact that Filipinos are often employed as essential workers (specifically in health care) and thus could have been subject to higher rates of discrimination in 2020 relative to other national origin groups. Further research and data with larger subgroup samples by national origin should be conducted.

A Blue Wave in 2020: Asian American Vote Choice for President

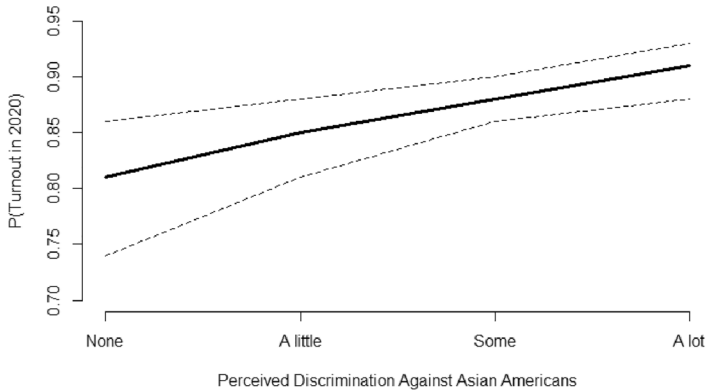
Next, we examine Asian American preferences for president in 2020. As shown in Fig. 3, the overwhelming majority (69.6%) of Asian Americans casted a ballot for the Democratic ticket, Joseph Biden and Kamala Harris. Therefore, as a whole,

⁹ We also ran the Demographics Only Model separately on native-born and then on foreign-born Asian Americans (see Appendix B, Table B5). We find fairly consistent demographic predictors for Asian Americans across immigrant status. Those who were older and with higher socioeconomic status were more likely to turnout to vote in 2020 for both native-born and foreign-born Asian Americans.

Table 2 Comparing indicators of voter turnout across immigrant status

	Dependent variable: voter turnout			
	Foreign born		Native born	
	Logit coefficients	Odds ratios	Logit coefficients	Odds ratios
Age	3.704*** (0.286)	40.594	4.054*** (0.399)	57.614
Woman	0.034 (0.152)		0.300 (0.185)	
Education	2.184*** (0.307)	8.877	3.475*** (0.393)	32.31
Income	0.652** (0.256)	1.920	0.616** (0.290)	1.851
Attend religious services	- 0.849*** (0.224)	0.428	- 0.754*** (0.273)	0.471
Chinese	- 0.111 (0.251)		0.034 (0.335)	
Filipino	- 0.098 (0.249)		0.724* (0.379)	2.063
Japanese	- 0.448 (0.517)		- 0.103 (0.431)	
Korean	0.242 (0.306)		- 0.303 (0.376)	
Vietnamese	0.397 (0.317)		- 0.122 (0.348)	
Other	0.001 (0.267)		- 0.024 (0.355)	
Recruitment	0.333** (0.157)	1.395	0.269 (0.194)	
Political interest	0.769*** (0.283)	2.158	1.232*** (0.334)	3.427
Party strength	0.305 (0.226)	1.357	0.477* (0.281)	1.6111
Linked fate	- 0.297 (0.277)		0.270 (0.322)	
Perceived racial discrimination	0.828*** (0.302)	2.289	0.030 (0.333)	
Experienced racial discrimination	0.583*** (0.170)	1.791	- 0.071 (0.192)	
Constant	- 3.451*** (0.445)		- 4.333*** (0.519)	
Observations	1,015	1,015	1,793	1,793
Log likelihood	- 552.242	- 552.242	- 335.391	- 335.391
Akaike Inf. Crit	1,140.485	1,140.485	706.782	706.782

Among Asian American citizens only. Logit regression. * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$



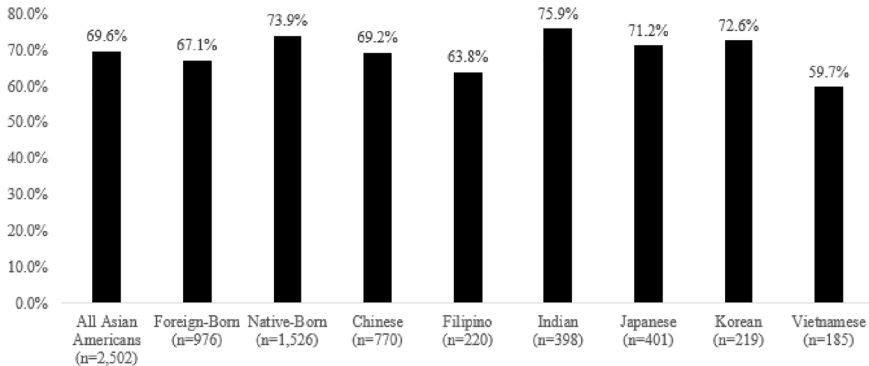
Note: Figure displays the predicted probability of voting in 2020 at each level of perceived discrimination, holding all control variables at their means with 95% confidence intervals. Asian Americans who were born outside of the U.S. only.

Fig. 2 Predicted probabilities of perceived discrimination on voter turnout among Asian American immigrants

Asian Americans have again solidified their position in the Democratic Party’s coalition. However, we also find that Democratic preference does vary by immigrant status and national origin. Native-born Asian Americans were more likely to vote for Biden (73.9%) compared to foreign-born Asian Americans (67.1%). Indian Americans, Korean Americans, and Japanese Americans were convincing Biden voters, voting for him at about 76%, 73%, and 71%, respectively. About 69% of Chinese Americans voted for Biden, while a smaller proportion of Filipino Americans (64%) and Vietnamese Americans (60%), did the same.

Turning to the multivariate regression results in Table 3, we found that many demographic factors were significantly related to vote choice (Model 1). Women, the higher educated and the native-born were those that were more likely to support Biden. Although all of the major national origin groups leaned toward the Democratic ticket in 2020, we also find that relative to Indian Americans, the coefficients for the other national origin groups were negative (and all statistically significant with the exception of Koreans). This tells us that Indian Americans were more likely to have voted for the Biden-Harris ticket compared to most other national origin groups. As we anticipated, this national origin difference could be attributed to the presence of Harris, who is of Indian descent, on the ticket. We acknowledge that previous studies on Asian American vote choice have found Indian Americans as a group with the highest rate of Democratic preference, but at the same time have often found national origin differences to generally be statistically insignificant which makes this 2020 finding distinct (Masuoka et al., 2018).

Turning to the Full model in Table 3, as expected, we find that variables accounting for political orientations, in particular partisanship, shape vote choice for Asian Americans. But more importantly, even when controlling for partisanship, we find that two of our key racial consideration variables—linked fate and perceptions of



Note: CMPS 2020 data is weighted to fall within the margin of error of the adult population in the 2019 Census ACS 1-year data file for age, gender, education, nativity, and ancestry. Rate calculated only among those who reported to have voted.

Fig. 3 Biden vote share among Asian Americans, CMPS 2020

racial discrimination—are significantly related to vote choice. Linked fate and perceptions of discrimination were both positively related to Democratic vote choice. This finding conforms to our expectation that race was a salient consideration for Asian Americans in the 2020 election cycle.

As what was conducted for voter turnout, we ran the full models separately on subgroups, first disaggregating the sample by immigrant status and then by national origin. Table 4 displays the results disaggregated by immigrant status.¹⁰ Like what we found in the voter turnout models, the racial consideration variables were more likely to explain vote choice for foreign-born immigrants compared to native-born Asian Americans. We found that perceived racial discrimination, as well as linked fate, increased the likelihood that immigrants supported the Democratic ticket. After calculating change in predicted probabilities, we found that, holding all other variables at their means, immigrants who perceived a lot of discrimination were 14-points more likely to support Biden compared to those who viewed no discrimination (see Appendix B, Figure B2). In Fig. 4, we also note that immigrants with the strongest perceptions of linked fate with other Asians were about 15-points more likely to support Biden compared to those who held no linked fate. In contrast, the racial consideration variables were insignificant in the model for the native-born. For native-born Asian Americans, partisanship was the core driver for vote choice in 2020.

Turning to our analysis by national origin group, we find that the racial consideration variables were significant predictors of vote choice, but the relationships did

¹⁰ We also ran the Demographics Only Model separately on native-born and then on foreign-born respondents (see Appendix Table B8). For native-born Asian Americans, we find that women and those who attended religious service more frequently were more likely to vote for the Democratic ticket in 2020. Among foreign-born Asian Americans, education and religious service attendance were significant predictors of vote choice. National origin differences also emerge across foreign-born Asian Americans; Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, and Vietnamese Americans were less likely than Indian Americans to vote for Biden and Harris.

Table 3 Indicators of vote choice for Asian Americans in 2020

	Dependent variable: vote for Biden			
	Model I demographics		Model II full	Model II full
	Logit coeff	Odds ratios	Logit coeff	Odds ratios
Age	- 0.249 (0.196)		0.602** (0.294)	1.826
Woman	0.229** (0.106)	1.257	- 0.196 (0.159)	
Education	0.615** (0.248)	1.849	- 0.363 (0.356)	
Income	- 0.025 (0.184)		0.227 (0.271)	
Foreign born	- 0.296** (0.119)	0.744	- 0.136 (0.173)	
Attend religious services	- 1.120*** (0.148)	0.326	- 0.174 (0.221)	
Chinese	- 0.537*** (0.170)	0.585	- 0.385 (0.244)	
Filipino	- 0.492** (0.193)	0.612	- 0.382 (0.284)	
Japanese	- 0.544** (0.239)	0.58	- 0.499 (0.356)	
Korean	- 0.133 (0.229)		0.176 (0.335)	
Vietnamese	- 0.799*** (0.217)	0.45	- 0.439 (0.314)	
Other	- 0.296 (0.207)		0.036 (0.295)	
Political interest			- 0.405 (0.280)	
Republican			- 4.410*** (0.207)	0.012
Independent			- 2.257*** (0.215)	0.105
Linked fate			0.865*** (0.289)	2.375
Perceived racial discrimination			0.792*** (0.301)	2.207
Experienced racial discrimination			0.185 (0.167)	1.203
Constant	1.380*** (0.287)		2.576*** (0.499)	
Observations	2,227	2,227	2,144	2,144
Log likelihood	- 1,004.654	- 1,004.654	- 526.687	- 526.687
Akaike Inf. Crit	2,035.308	2,035.308	1,091.373	1,091.373

Analysis of only voters. Logistic regression. *p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01

vary across the six major national origin groups. Table 5 presents a summary of the predicted change in probabilities for each racial consideration variable on support for Biden for each of the national origin groups.¹¹ We find that racial consideration, in particular, informed vote choice for Chinese Americans with linked fate and experienced discrimination both significant and positive predictors of support for Biden. Chinese Americans who had a strong sense of linked fate were significantly more likely to vote for Biden by 15 percentage points compared to those with no linked fate, and those who had experienced racial discrimination were 7-points more likely to vote for Joe Biden. For Chinese Americans, the rise of anti-China and anti-Asian attitudes attributed to the pandemic could explain why these race-centered considerations were so strongly associated with vote choice for Biden.

We also find that for Filipinos, the experience of discrimination also positively predicts support for Biden, aligning with our above finding that the experience of discrimination encouraged voter turnout. Indian and Korean Americans were driven to vote for the Democratic ticket by their perceptions of how much discrimination exists for their own racial group. This variation by national origin suggests that distinct dimensions of racial considerations had different impacts on the vote choice of Asian American national origin groups in 2020. At the same time, we urge future research to more thoroughly examine heterogeneity by national origin as we are limited in making the strongest conclusions due to relatively small sample sizes. One point of interest might be to more fully interrogate how linked fate shaped the voter behavior of Indian Americans in the 2020 election, when there was an opportunity to elect a co-ethnic candidate.

Discussion and Conclusion

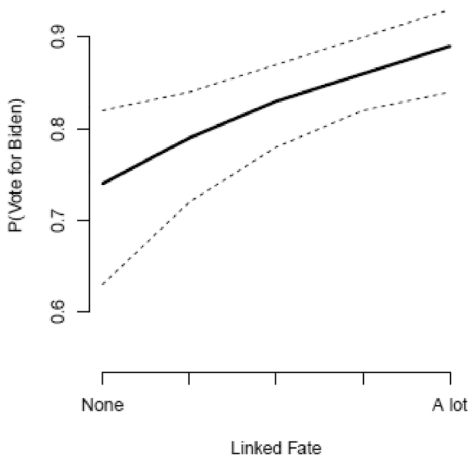
Our analysis of the 2020 CMPS reveals that Asian Americans were largely active in the 2020 election with notable heterogeneity. Asian American turnout was impressively high in this election. Our analysis shows that a majority of all Asian American voters and across the six largest Asian national origin groups supported the Democratic ticket. Filipino and Vietnamese American voters who were the two national origin groups with the lowest rate of Democratic support, were also the least likely to turnout to vote. In other words, those more Republican-leaning Asian American national origin groups were less likely to cast a ballot to begin with. Thus, strong Democratic voter turnout was notable among Asian American voters in 2020. This suggests the growing importance of Asian American voters to a winning Democratic coalition.

¹¹ Regression results for the Full model and Demographics only model for each national origin group is presented in Appendix Tables B9 and B10. We find that for each national origin group, different demographic groups were more likely to vote for Biden. For Filipinos, it was the higher educated and native-born. For Indians, women were strong Biden supporters. For Koreans, younger and higher educated voters supported Biden. For Vietnamese, younger and higher income voters preferred Biden.

Table 4 Comparing indicators of vote choice across immigrant status

	Dependent variable: vote for Biden			
	Foreign born	Foreign born	Native born	Native born
	Logit coeff	Odds ratios	Logit coeff	Odds ratios
Age	0.674* (0.392)	1.963	0.301 (0.462)	
Woman	- 0.310 (0.205)		0.037 (0.265)	
Education	- 0.618 (0.446)		0.020 (0.628)	
Income	0.198 (0.349)		0.298 (0.449)	
Attend religious services	0.177 (0.289)		- 0.622* (0.362)	0.537
Chinese	- 0.378 (0.293)		- 0.180 (0.474)	
Filipino	- 0.712** (0.350)	0.49	0.279 (0.545)	
Japanese	- 1.397** (0.596)	0.247	0.115 (0.540)	
Korean	- 0.023 (0.414)		0.570 (0.615)	
Vietnamese	- 0.348 (0.373)		- 0.538 (0.590)	
Other	0.017 (0.351)		0.229 (0.596)	
Political interest	- 0.378 (0.355)		- 0.483 (0.472)	
Republican	- 4.923*** (0.300)	0.007	- 3.991*** (0.317)	0.018
Independent	- 2.681*** (0.302)	0.068	- 1.796*** (0.335)	0.166
Linked Fate	1.095*** (0.377)	2.99	0.543 (0.471)	
Perceived racial discrimination	0.919** (0.400)	2.506	0.657 (0.483)	
Experienced racial discrimination	0.213 (0.214)		0.208 (0.278)	
Constant	2.780*** (0.654)		2.130*** (0.796)	
Observations	826	826	1,318	1,318
Log Likelihood	- 335.536	- 335.536	- 181.868	- 181.868
Akaike Inf. Crit	707.072	707.072	399.737	399.737

Analysis of only voters. Logistic regression. * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$



Note: Figure displays the predicted probability of voting for Joe Biden and Kamala Harris at each level of linked fate with other Asian Americans, holding all control variables at their means with 95% confidence intervals. Asian Americans who were born outside of the U.S. only.

Fig. 4 Predicted probabilities of linked fate on vote choice for Biden among Asian American immigrants

Our focus of this paper was to understand the unique role of racial considerations for Asian American voters. We hypothesized that given the context of 2020, racial considerations were more likely to matter for Asian American voters, and our analysis finds there to be some notable relationship between their racial considerations and turnout and vote choice. One of the most striking findings from our study was the strong impact of racial considerations among Asian *immigrant* voters. It could be the case that the apparent rise of anti-Asian sentiment attributed to COVID-19 was particularly vivid and consequential for Asian immigrants. One possible explanation for why immigrants were motivated by their experiences and perceptions of racial discrimination in 2020 was the notable media attention that highlighted hate attacks against Asian Americans (Stop AAPI Hate 2021; Borja & Gibson, 2021).¹² Immigrants may have been less aware of American race-relations compared to those born in the United States due to their lack of knowledge and socialization as newcomers (Wong & Tseng, 2008). Thus, media portrayals and personal knowledge of hate acts against other Asian Americans that were occurring during the pandemic helped to magnify the reality of race-relations for newer Asian immigrants.¹³ These events made it clear to Asian Americans broadly that the “forever foreigner” stereotype continues to guide their treatment in the United States. However, particularly for immigrants,

¹² We note that media attention to anti-Asian hate incidents against the elderly is distinct from the fact that several sources have found that younger Asian American adults are more likely to report experiencing anti-Asian hate (for example, see: Lee and Ramakrishnan 2021).

¹³ Similarly, personal experience of threat has been found to politically mobilize immigrants. See Pan-toja, Ramirez and Segura (2001).

Table 5 Summary of predicted probabilities for racial consideration variables on Biden vote choice across national origin groups

	Dependent variable: vote for Biden					
	Chinese American	Filipino American	Indian American	Japanese American	Korean American	Vietnamese American
Linked fate	+ 15% **	+ 21% *	+ 9%	+ 11%	+ 13%	+ 31%
Perceived racial discrimination	- 1%	+ 12%	+ 25% ***	+ 21%	42% **	+ 7%
Experienced racial discrimination	+ 7% **	- 3%	- 1%	+ 1%	- 4%	+ 5%

Bold value indicates $p \leq 0.1$

See full model results in Appendix. Change in predicted probability comparing highest value of independent variable relative to lowest value of independent variable, holding all other control variables at their means. * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

their sense of belonging in the United States may have been seen as threatened, and therefore the heightened perception of threat was potentially more politically influential.

Given the unique circumstances of 2020, it will be important to track whether racial considerations continue to substantively influence Asian American turnout and vote choice in future elections. In addition, future research could also parse out the effects of whether inspiration by co-ethnic candidates or threatening contexts had a greater effect on Asian American political decisions in 2020. It could be that both threat and enthusiasm paired together drove turnout and vote choice, but we acknowledge that these causal mechanisms are difficult to determine with the cross-sectional data we employ in this study. While it should be recognized that racialization is conditional and can interact with the political context in different ways, it could be the case that many of the unique circumstances of 2020 will have a long-term impact on the politics of Asian Americans.

Supplementary Information The online version contains supplementary material available at <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-022-09844-9>.

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