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Honors Thesis

PARTY CONTACTING, GROUP IDENTITY, AND COVID-19:
AN ANALYSIS OF ASIAN AMERICAN VOTER TURNOUT

by
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Submitted to Brigham Young University in partial fulfillment
of graduation requirements for University Honors

Political Science Department

Brigham Young University

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ABSTRACT

PARTY CONTACTING, GROUP IDENTITY, AND COVID-19: AN ANALYSIS OF ASIAN AMERICAN VOTER TURNOUT

Suzy Yi

Political Science Department

Bachelor of Arts

Many scholars have focused on what affects voter turnout rates among Black and Latinx voters, with some emphasis on party contacting. However, questions about what affects voter turnout in Asian Americans remain, especially when considering Asian American voter turnout peaked in 2020 despite being consistently low in previous elections. In this paper, I use ANES data from 2016 and 2020 to study the impact of party contacting and racial group identity on Asian American voter turnout. I conduct a series of logit regressions on self-reported voter turnout with party contacting and measures of racial group identity. I find that Asian Americans who were contacted by a political party and have a stronger sense of racial group identity were more likely to vote in 2016 and that Asian Americans who had the strongest and weakest sense of racial group identity regardless of party contacting were more likely to vote in 2020. This study raises questions on how the changing political and social context could affect voter turnout in different racial minorities.

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Introduction

Many scholars have examined what affects voter turnout rates among racial minorities compared to that of white voters. Racial minorities consistently turn out to vote in elections at lower rates than white voters (Pew Research Center 2020; US Elections Project). One method of combating low voter turnout is through party contacting, in which political parties mobilize people who are most likely to vote through activities such as door-to-door canvassing or individualized contact through mail, phone calls, and texts (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1992; Wielhouwer and Lockerbie 1994). However, because political parties direct their efforts toward those who are most likely to vote, they are more likely to favor white voters over minorities. As a result, minorities are often filtered out of the party contacting process (García-Castañón et al. 2019; Stevens and Bishin 2011).

Although significant research details Black and Latinx voter turnout, there is a dearth of information on Asian American voter turnout (Fraga 2016b; Filer et al. 1991; Rocha et al. 2010). In addition, current research lacks the necessary links to explain Asian voter turnout in 2020. Asian American turnout in 2020 showed unusual voting patterns for the traditionally uninvolved racial group, increasing from 70% in 2016 to 83% in 2020 despite being consistently low in previous elections. What led to this sudden increase in voter turnout? A few studies suggest that Asian Americans who hold a pan-Asian identity are more likely to be involved in political activities (Sadhwani 2020; Chen and Nakazawa 2017). Consequently, I posit that a heightened sense of Asian racial group identity contributed to the high turnout rates for Asian Americans.

To test my hypotheses, I use ANES data from 2016 and 2020 to study the impact of party contacting and racial group identity on Asian American voter turnout. I conduct a series of logit regressions on self-reported voter turnout with an interaction effect between party contacting and measures of racial group identity.

I find that the relationship between party contacting and racial group identity differs between 2016 and 2020. Asian Americans who reported being contacted by a political party and have a stronger sense of racial group identity were more likely to vote in 2016. In contrast, Asian Americans who had the strongest and weakest sense of racial group identity were more likely to vote in 2020, regardless of party contacting. Whereas the interaction between party contacting and group identity was a significant indicator of voter turnout in 2016, it was not significant in 2020. Rather, the model for Asian group identity shifted in 2020 and became a significant indicator of voter turnout in 2020. I find that Asian Americans who had the highest and lowest racial group attachment were more likely to vote in the 2020 election.

The results of the study raise questions on how the changing political and social context could affect voter turnout for different racial minorities. The shifting political context in 2020 could have contributed to an explanation for the differences in racial group identity and voter turnout compared to the data from 2016. The heavy racialization of COVID-19 likely affected the rise in racial group identity for Asian Americans, which then increased voter turnout and political participation generally. My study also suggests that further research could examine the effects of nontraditional mobilization efforts on various minority groups by considering how indicators of voter turnout likely vary between racial and social groups.

Literature Review

Voter Turnout for Racial Minorities and Party Contacting

While voter turnout rates across the United States are frequently low compared to other democracies, racial minorities are less likely to vote than white citizens in presidential elections and are often viewed as less politically active overall (García-Castañón et al. 2019; Hill and Leighly 1999; Berry and Junn 2015). Political parties can pursue various strategies for electoral mobilization of minority populations, some of which can be more effective than others. However, the perception of low minority turnout often causes political parties and organizations to direct less attention to minorities in their mobilization efforts, which in turn cyclically affects low turnout rates. Various studies offer explanations for the racial discrepancy in voter turnout with suggestions on how to increase minority turnout, including greater descriptive representation of candidates for African American and Latinx populations (Rocha et al. 2010; Whitby 2007; Griffin and Keane 2006) as well as nominating minority candidates in areas that have a larger proportion of minority groups compared to the general population (Fraga 2016a; Bhatti and Hansen 2016; Oberholzer-Gee and Waldfogel 2005). Despite these mobilization efforts, racial minorities continue to fall behind white citizens in voter turnout rates (García-Castañón et al. 2019; Berry and Junn 2015).

Beyond descriptive representation and group size, political parties can contact voters to increase turnout rates. Party contacting involves mobilizing people who are most likely to vote through activities such as door-to-door canvassing, mail, phone calls, emails, texts, and social media outreach, with personal face-to-face interactions generally increasing voter turnout more than impersonal methods (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1992;

Wielhouwer and Lockerbie 1994; Niven 2004; Gerber and Green 2000). Several studies on Black and Latinx voter turnout have shown that party contacting is an effective form of mobilization that tends to increase turnout rates among minorities (Philpot et al. 2009; Diaz 2012; Wielhouwer 2000). One study (Philpot et al. 2009), for example, studied the turnout and surrounding circumstances in 2008 to determine that the increase in Black turnout rates was due to increased party contacting for Black voters rather than Barack Obama's nomination alone. Turnout involves methods of mobilization used across social and racial groups. Party contacting is an effective method for mobilizing voters, especially those that have traditionally been ignored by parties. Political parties, therefore, have a direct role in mobilizing minority voters beyond descriptive representation.

However, the two major political parties still seem to direct less effort into contacting racial minorities compared to the heavy mobilization efforts toward white voters (García-Castañón et al. 2019; Stevens and Bishin 2011). Because parties strategically use the most effective and expensive face-to-face methods to contact voters who are most likely to vote, they can often overlook racial minorities and other groups with lower turnout rates. As a result, many ethnic minorities are contacted by nonpartisan organizations more than by major political parties, which leads to varying levels of effectiveness in increasing voter turnout (García-Castañón et al. 2019; Stevens and Bishin 2011; Kim 2015). Partisan contacting, however, is generally a more effective strategy in increasing turnout rates for racial minorities (Wielhouwer 2000; Michelson 2003). I chose to study the effects of party contacting because of its effectiveness in increasing minority turnout.

Interestingly, there is a substantial dearth of information on Asian American voter turnout. Studies on voter turnout and political participation that focus on differences between races typically compare white, Black, and Latinx voters without much regard for Asian voters (Fraga 2016b; Filer et al. 1991; Rocha et al. 2010). Additionally, studies that focus on the political participation of either Black voters (Philpot et al. 2009; Gillespie 2015; Clark 2014) or Latinx voters (Arvizu and Garcia 1996; Highton and Burris 2002; Fraga 2016b) are common, but studies on Asian American voters are minimal compared to other minority groups. The few studies that have examined Asian American political participation generally explain low turnout as a result of low mobilization efforts towards immigrant groups and a lack of adequate descriptive representation (Kim 2015; Diaz 2012; Sadhwani 2020).

Several different factors could contribute to the lack of research on Asian American voters. Asian Americans are often viewed as less politically active than other racial groups, which leads to fewer mobilization efforts by political parties, politicians, and interest groups and thus decreases overall participation levels (Jo 1984; Diaz 2012). The model minority myth is a stereotype that portrays Asian Americans as high achievers in academics and occupations (Chou and Feagin 2015). The stereotype delegitimizes racism towards Asian Americans and could also frame Asian Americans as an unproblematic group that doesn't warrant further studies (Li and Nicholson 2021). Even among racial minorities, Asian Americans tend to be among the least politically active (Lien et al. 2001; Lien 2004; Sadhwani 2020). In their mobilization efforts, parties are more likely to ignore Asian and Latinx populations because immigrant groups are associated with lower turnout rates (Kim 2015; Berry and Junn 2015; Jang 2009).

Because parties focus on mobilizing those who are most likely to vote for them (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1992), they often strategically pass over immigrant populations as being unlikely to vote at all. However, this immigrant effect does not explain the differences in attention between Asian and Latinx voters. Asian American voters are often overlooked by parties and scholars, leaving many questions about their political behavior.

Pan-Asian Identity

Existing theories of social identity claim that a strong group identity can enhance political participation and engagement of certain groups by providing cues and strategies for people to follow (Fowler and Kam 2007; Bernstein 2005; Ben-Bassat and Daham 2012). Group identity can be described as a sense of belonging, group cohesion, and a personal connection to group experiences (Ashforth and Mael 1989). If a social group that an individual identifies with is involved in politics, the individual is more likely to be involved in politics themselves, especially when the shared identity lies in the group's race and/or ethnicity. Racial group identity can create a collective group consciousness, where members of the group believe that what happens to the group as a whole will affect them personally. Racial group identity can also cause group members to believe that their race is a more salient aspect of their identity (Philpot et al. 2009). This identity can be self-created by the various ethnicities to coalesce into a collective unit or can be imposed by self-serving politicians and organizations. Examples of this effect include distinct African tribes that politicians have lumped different groups together to maximize

mobilization efforts (Posner 2004). Pan-ethnic identities often serve strategic purposes related to maximizing the group's political influence and effects.

Similarly, a pan-Asian identity serves to unite diverse groups of people and cultures with shared experiences under a common name, although the identity is usually aimed at a political goal. Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, though ethnically diverse, are often lumped together into a single pan-Asian identity to maximize their political influence (Kim 2015; Espiritu 1992; Omi and Winant 1994; Xu 2002). Because Asian Americans are typically more assimilated than other immigrant groups, a pan-Asian identity has varying effects on civic participation depending on the political context at the time of identity formation (Junn and Masuoka 2008). Political parties and organizations can strategically turn a latent racial identity into a salient one to appeal to voter preferences. Studies have shown that increased use of a pan-Asian identity by political parties can increase civic participation and socialization by strengthening feelings of trust and understanding between group members (Sadhwani 2020; Kim 2015; Chen and Nakazawa 2017; Junn and Masuoka 2008). People who hold a pan-Asian identity can be more politically active by participating in elections and social movements. Accordingly, a pan-Asian identity can serve a useful purpose in bringing diverse communities of Asian Americans together to achieve a common goal.

Racialized Effects of COVID-19

More recently, a pan-Asian identity has been used by organizations and individuals to mobilize Asian American activists in the wake of heightened racism from COVID-19. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly increased racialized comments

towards people of Asian descent because the virus originated in China. Many people viewed Asians as an easily identifiable embodiment of the pandemic and targeted fear and xenophobia towards Asians (Jun 2021; Li and Nicholson 2021; Chan et al. 2021; Gover et al. 2020). The initial reactions of politicians and private individuals who associated the virus with Asia reignited racist and xenophobic attitudes toward Asians, causing hate crimes against Asian Americans nationwide to rise significantly (Tessler et al. 2020; Grover et al. 2020; Jun et al. 2021). Consequently, the pandemic has also created a stronger pan-ethnic identity that has united various Asian ethnicities to combat anti-Asian racism (Li and Nicholson 2021; Jun et al. 2021). Increased attention to Asian Americans with COVID-19 caused an increase in racial group identity. Organizations such as Stop Asian American Pacific Islander Hate were formed to unite the larger Asian community under a common identity and purpose of reporting and reducing anti-Asian hate crimes nationwide.

The interaction between coronavirus-related racism and a stronger pan-Asian identity has led to greater Asian American activism as people are more willing to speak out against racism as a collective unit. Masouka (2006) stated that racial discrimination and political involvement encourage pan-ethnic identity for Asian Americans, which highlights the importance of racial context for the political participation of minorities. The relevance of COVID-19 as a racial threat against Asians has led to a need for a stronger group identity, which in turn could have contributed to the increases in voter turnout in 2020. Some studies have primarily focused on anti-Asian racism and the rise in Asian American activism at the beginning of the pandemic but have not analyzed voter turnout as a clear indicator of increased political participation among Asian Americans

(Li and Nicholson 2021; Jun et al. 2021). A few studies suggest that the relative strength of a group identity will increase the efficiency of group appeals by increasing voter turnout (Valenzuela and Michelson 2016; Kim 2015), which suggests that racial group identity could have impacted voter turnout and political participation overall.

Although voter turnout overall surprisingly increased in 2020 despite concerns over the COVID-19 pandemic (Santana et al. 2020; Baccini et al. 2021; Galdieri et al. 2021), Asian Americans saw the highest rate of increase in voter turnout across all racial groups. To determine what caused this sudden increase in voter turnout rates, I examine both party contacting and a salient group identity caused by reactions to the coronavirus as factors that led to the record-high turnout rates for Asian Americans. Relatively few studies have analyzed party contacting for Asian American voters (Wong 2005; Kim 2015; Ricardo and Wong 2012), and none have yet studied the effect of party contacting on turnout rates for Asian Americans in the 2020 election. Furthermore, while a few recent studies have examined the effects of COVID-19 on strengthening a pan-Asian identity generally (Jun et al. 2021; Gover et al. 2020; Tessler et al. 2020; Li and Nicholson 2021), no study has yet researched the heightened group identity as a cause of increased voter turnout of Asian Americans in 2020. The 2020 election was especially important for Asian American political activity because of the politicization of COVID-19 that largely reignited anti-Asian racism, which reframed the model minority into a physical threat (Li and Nicholson 2021). Because a stronger pan-Asian identity became salient due to racial responses to the pandemic, the racial context and importance of Asian American political participation likely shifted in 2020 compared to previous election years.

Hypotheses

I theorize that the increase in party contacting towards Asian Americans combined with the spread of a pan-Asian identity due to the racialization of COVID-19 mobilized Asian American voters in 2020 in an unprecedented way.

I expect party contacting and racial group identity to both play important roles in increasing minority voter turnout. I hypothesize that racial minorities who were contacted by a major political party leading up to the election and who also have a stronger sense of racial group identity were more likely to vote (H1). I assess my hypothesis for Asian, Black, and Latinx voters from the 2016 and 2020 ANES data.

I also expect Asian American group identity to be stronger in 2020 than in 2016 (H2a). In line with this hypothesis, I expect that racial group identity will be a stronger indicator of Asian American voter turnout in 2020 than in 2016 (H2b). The 2020 election was important for Asian Americans because of racialized responses to COVID-19 and subsequent hate crimes against Asians that brought them to the forefront of the political atmosphere.

Finally, I hypothesize that the combination of party contacting and racial identity together increased Asian American voter turnout in 2016 (H3a) and that the effect was stronger in 2020 because of higher racial identity (H3b). Although I speculate that this increase was due to the racialized effects of COVID-19, I am unable to test this hypothesis with the given ANES survey data because the survey does not directly ask respondents about the pandemic.

Method and Design

I use data from the American National Election Study from 2016 and 2020 to examine variables for voter turnout and party contacting for each racial group, focusing on data for Asian Americans. Because no study before 2016 does not ask about the respondent's perceived level of personal discrimination, the perceived level of discrimination against Asian Americans, nor the importance of the respondent's racial group identity, I chose to focus on the 2016 and 2020 studies.

Voter turnout and party contacting are measured as dichotomous variables, and racial group identity is measured by an index that averages responses from four questions about group identity asked in the ANES survey. Although the model for racial group identity was linear in 2016, the model shifted to a quadratic relationship in 2020. To account for the shift in the model, I added a quadratic term for racial group identity in 2020.

I also chose to use ANES because the survey asks respondents about the level of racial discrimination they perceive as a group and individually. I use these questions to create an index of racial group identity. In my analysis of Asian American voters, I rely on responses from people who self-reported as belonging to the "Asian or Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic alone" racial group as specified in the ANES survey. I also compare my initial analysis of Asian Americans to white, Black, and Latinx voters.

My dependent variable is self-reported voter turnout from ANES in 2016 and 2020. My independent variables are party contacting and measures of group identity strength, also self-reported by survey respondents in ANES. Voter turnout is measured as

a dichotomous variable for whether the respondent voted in the 2020 election. Party contact is also a dichotomous variable for whether the respondent was contacted by either of the two major political parties before the election. I measured racial group identity by creating an index with the average values from four questions in the ANES survey. I examined questions that asked about the importance of being Asian to one's identity (measured from 0 being "not at all" to 4 being "extremely important"), how much what happens to other Asians will affect one's life (measured from 0 being "not at all" to 4 being "a lot"), the perceived level of discrimination against Asians (measured from 0 being "none at all" to 4 being "a great deal"), and how important it is for Asians to work together to change laws that are unfair to Asians (measured from 0 being "not at all" to 4 being "extremely important") as reported by ANES. Because ANES categorizes all Asian ethnicities and Pacific Islanders into one large racial group, I consider these factors to be indicators of a pan-Asian identity rather than identities about a specific ethnic group. The racial group identity index variable ranges from 0 being no sense of group identity to 4 being the highest sense of group identity. I also created similar racial group identity variables for white, Black, and Latinx voters.

ANES surveys a limited number of Asian voters, with only 148 Asian respondents in 2016 and 284 respondents in 2020. When adding in control variables, the sample size fell to 127 in 2016 and 157 in 2020. Consequently, I also used the 2016 and 2020 Cooperative Election Studies to measure voter turnout across different races. Unlike ANES, the CES uses voter-validated files, which provides more substantive evidence of the increase in Asian American voter turnout in 2020 compared to 2016.

Statistical Modeling

I test my hypotheses using a series of logit regressions for the interaction between party contacting and Asian group identity on Asian American voter turnout across 2016 and 2020. I chose a logit model because voter turnout is a dichotomous variable. In these regressions, I control for gender, age, income, education level, marital status, and religiosity. I then run the same regressions for white, Black, and Latinx voters.

After establishing the interaction between party contacting and racial group identity for each racial group, I focus on the relationship for Asian American voters. I conducted another regression with the interaction between party contacting and racial group identity on Asian American voters in 2016 and 2020 to determine if and how the relationship changed between the election years. The model showed that the relationship was linear in 2016 and parabolic in 2020, meaning that people who were contacted by a political party and had the lowest and highest racial group identities were the most likely to vote. To better fit the initial data model visualization, I added a quadratic term for Asian group identity in 2020. A quadratic model in the 2016 data did not follow the initial data visualization and did not yield any statistically significant results. I then show the probability of voter turnout based on different values of Asian group identity in marginal effects plots.

Results

Changes in Voter Turnout, Party Contacting, and Group Identity

Based on the ANES self-reported data, average voter turnout increased substantially in 2020. Moreover, voter turnout for each racial group reported in the

survey increased as well. Average party contacting, however, decreased. These results likely come from the decrease in party contacting towards white voters. Party contacting towards Asian, Black, and Latinx voters increased slightly in 2020 compared to 2016.

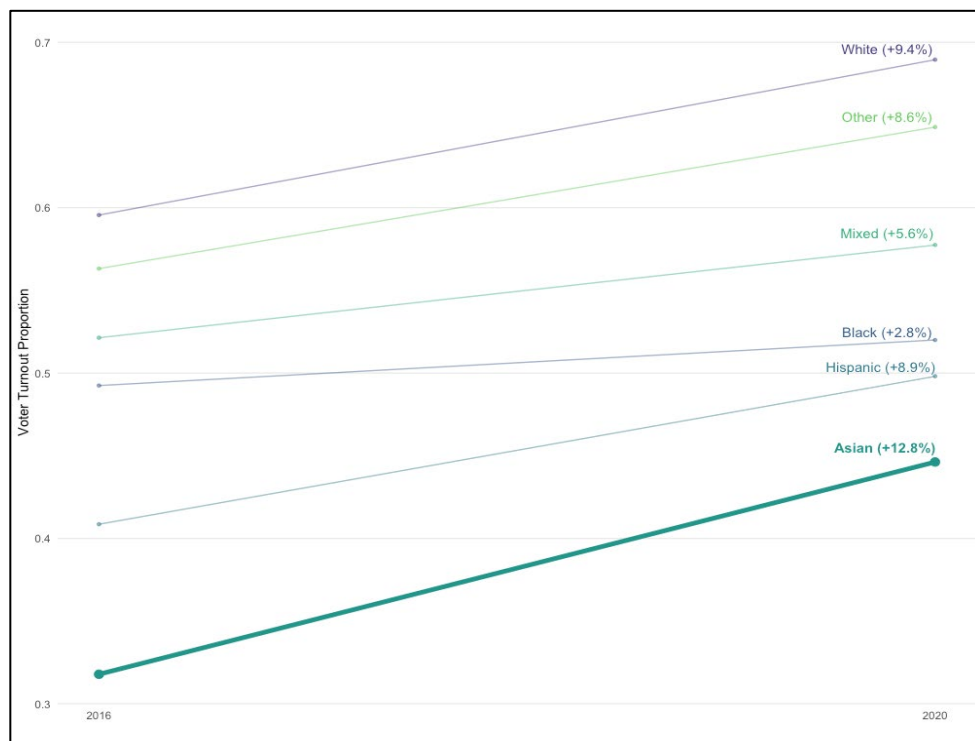
From 2016 to 2020, Asian Americans had the highest increase in voter turnout rates. Asian American voter turnout increased from 69.64% in 2016 to 83.33% in 2020, a 13.69 percentage point increase (see Table 1). The average increase in voter turnout for all races surveyed was an 8.32 percentage point increase, jumping from 77.81% in 2016 to 86.13% in 2020. Compared to the average, Asian American voter turnout was substantial in 2020.

Table 1: Demographics of Voters in 2016 and 2020

	Average	Asian American	White	African American	Latinx
2016 Voter Turnout	77.81%	69.64%	80.68%	78.92%	62.67%
2020 Voter Turnout	86.13%	83.33%	88.62%	81.68%	74.06%
2016 Contacted by Major Political Party	32.32%	26.31%	33.4%	33.43%	26.81%
2020 Contacted by Major Political Party	30.67%	27.56%	30.22%	33.64%	29.15%
2016 Average Racial Group Identity	---	1.97	1.57	3.14	2.64
2020 Average Racial Group Identity	---	2.11	1.47	3.33	2.67

The CES voter-validated data shows that Asian Americans had the highest percentage point increase in voter turnout among all racial groups between 2016 and 2020 (see Figure 1). Asian American voter turnout increased by 12.8 percentage points but remains among the lowest proportions of the electorate. The validated findings from CES corroborate the findings from the self-reported turnout in ANES.

Figure 1: CES Voter Turnout by Race in 2016 and 2020



The figure above shows that Asian Americans had the highest percentage point increase in voter turnout in 2020 but remained among the lowest proportions of the electorate. Data from CES.

Self-reported party contacting towards Asian Americans in 2020 also increased, as expected, though the increase was slight (see Table 1). The 1.25 percentage point increase in party contacting from 26.31% in 2016 to 27.56% in 2020 was a small increase

and likely did not solely contribute to the high turnout rates. Asian Americans still saw the lowest party contacting rates overall. As a result, some other factors likely contributed to the increase in Asian American voter turnout in 2020. As discussed previously, a heightened sense of racial group identity among Asian Americans likely resulted from the racialization of COVID-19.

Racial group identity for Asian Americans also increased in 2020, showing support for H2a. Asian American racial identity rose from an average of 1.97 in 2016 to an average of 2.11 in 2020 (see Table 1). The 0.14-point average increase is among the higher increases for racial group identity between the election years. Average African American racial identity increased by 0.19 points, which is a significant increase in group identity. Racial group identity generally does not increase in a short period without cause because group-level identity should be relatively stable (Junn and Masuoka 2008; Fowler and Kam 2007). For comparison, the average Latinx racial identity rose by only 0.03 points from 2016 to 2020.

Although Asian Americans saw slight increases in party contacting and racial group identity in 2020, the two factors individually likely did not affect the high voter turnout rate. However, the interaction of party contacting and racial group identity could have increased voter turnout, which I examine below.

Interaction of Party Contacting and Racial Group Identity

Overall, Asian American voter turnout increases as people who have a higher sense of group identity are contacted by the major political parties. However, the small sample size could affect the statistical significance of the results for the interaction. Table

2 is a logit model that shows that the interaction between the two factors increases turnout for Asian Americans at the 90% statistical significance level. Among Asian Americans who were contacted by a political party, those who have a one-unit increase in racial group identity show a 68.4% increase in the predicted probability of voting.

To test whether party contacting and Asian group identity affected 2020 turnout rates, I ran another regression examining the effects of party contacting and racial group identity for Asian, white, Black, and Latinx voters. Latinx voters are also more likely to vote if people with higher racial group identities are contacted by a major party, offering support for H1. Latinx voters who are contacted by a political party and have a one-unit increase in racial group identity show a 61.47% increase in the predicted probability of voting (see Table 2). The difference between the Asian and Latinx voters suggests differences beyond group identity or migrant effects from political parties. The interaction of party contacting and racial group identity is a slightly stronger indicator of turnout for Asian Americans.

As mentioned earlier, Asian American and Latinx voters are typically ignored by the major political parties in contacting efforts. Voter turnout rates for white and Black voters, however, are not significantly affected by the interaction of party contacting and racial group identity. The interaction between party contacting and racial group identity, then, appears to be an important factor in voter turnout for minority groups that are traditionally overlooked by the major political parties. The results support H1 as it relates to Asian and Latinx voters but not to Black voters, suggesting that there are different nuances to consider in studying voter turnout based on different racial groups.

**Table 2: Effects of Party Contacting and Racial Group Identity
in 2016 and 2020 on Voter Turnout**

	Combined effects from 2016 and 2020			
	Asian American	White	Black	Latinx
Party contact	-0.735 (0.822)	0.754*** (0.217)	0.510 (0.914)	-0.524 (0.684)
Racial group identity	-0.076 (0.187)	-0.172*** (0.056)	0.453*** (0.155)	-0.135 (0.140)
Party contact x Racial group identity	0.772* (0.426)	-0.046 (0.119)	0.096 (0.286)	0.467* (0.255)
Democrat	0.535 (0.364)	0.123 (0.097)	-0.394 (0.421)	0.198 (0.245)
Independent	-0.038 (0.424)	-1.145*** (0.114)	-1.814*** (0.470)	-1.212*** (0.291)
Age	-0.023 (0.099)	0.351*** (0.025)	0.462*** (0.077)	0.261*** (0.063)
Female	-0.139 (0.302)	0.209** (0.084)	0.459** (0.229)	0.123 (0.193)
Religiosity-ever attend	0.030 (0.304)	0.226*** (0.085)	0.157 (0.225)	0.081 (0.193)
Education Level	0.096 (0.100)	0.347*** (0.030)	0.118 (0.083)	0.336*** (0.069)
Total family income	0.090 (0.077)	0.175*** (0.024)	0.307*** (0.076)	0.121** (0.055)
Marital status	0.361 (0.317)	0.314*** (0.090)	0.222 (0.282)	0.191 (0.205)
Constant	0.116 (0.722)	-1.415*** (0.186)	-2.773*** (0.664)	-1.170** (0.483)
Observations	283	5,321	719	635
Log Likelihood	-145.264	- 1,929.927	-281.011	-336.429
Akaike Inf. Crit.	314.528	3,883.854	586.022	696.857

Note:

* p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01

Party Contacting and Asian American Group Identity

Once I established that the interaction between party contacting and racial group identity was an important factor in increasing voter turnout rates for Asian Americans, I focused on if and how the relationship changed in 2016 and 2020 (see Table 3). Initial data analysis showed a largely linear relationship between voter turnout and Asian group identity in 2016 and a quadratic relationship in 2020, as confirmed by the marginal effects plot in Figure 2. Accordingly, I conducted another logit regression with a simple interaction between party contacting and racial group identity for Asian American voters in 2016.

Figure 2: Asian Group Identity and Voter Turnout

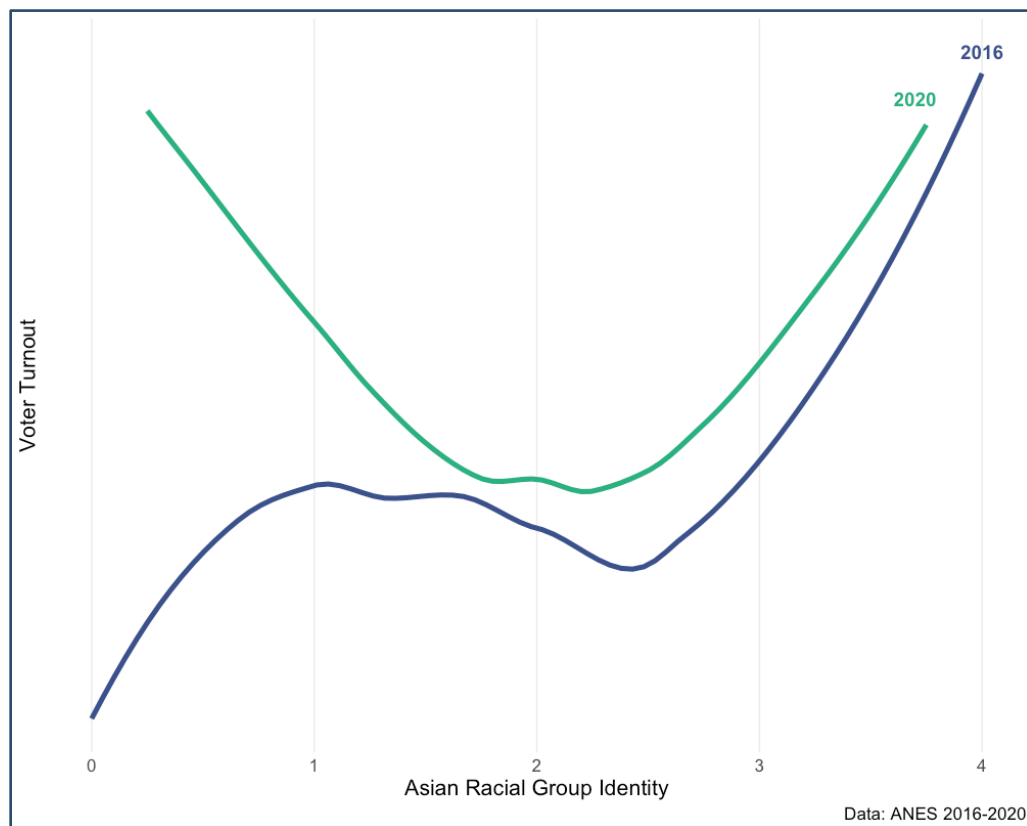


Figure 2 visualizes the relationship between voter turnout and Asian group identity in 2016 and 2020, which suggests a quadratic model in 2020. I tested for the quadratic relationship in the logit regressions because of this model.

The relationship between turnout and the interaction was linear in 2016, meaning that those who were contacted by a political party in 2016 and had a higher sense of racial group identity were more likely to vote than those who did not have a strong sense of group identity. However, initial model visualization showed that the relationship in 2020 appeared to shift from a linear relationship to a quadratic relationship, indicating that those who were contacted by a political party and had the highest and lowest senses of racial group identity were most likely to vote. Asian Americans with a moderate sense of racial group identity in 2020 were among the least likely to vote. Because a quadratic term better fits the model in 2020, I ran another logit regression with the interaction between party contacting and a quadratic term for Asian group identity in 2020. The quadratic relationship for Asian group identity in 2020 is confirmed by the marginal effects plot in Figure 2.

Table 3 shows differences in Asian American voter turnout rates in 2016 and 2020 from the effects of party contacting and racial group identity. Party contacting did not increase the likelihood of voter turnout in either 2016 or 2020. Party contacting alone seems to be an ineffective and detrimental method for increasing turnout among Asian American voters.

Additionally, Asian identity alone was a stronger indicator of voter turnout in 2020 than it was in 2016. The results suggest that the effects of Asian racial group identity on voter turnout were not significant in 2016, whereas the findings were significant in 2020 at the 90% confidence level. This finding provides support for H2b, suggesting that racial identity alone was a stronger determinant of voter turnout in 2020 than it was in 2016.

Table 3: Party Contacting and Asian Group Identity with Quadratic

	Asian American voter turnout	
	2016	2020
Party contact	-0.280 (2.203)	11.340 (11.957)
Asian racial group identity	-0.256 (0.899)	-4.500* (2.415)
Asian racial group identity ²	0.071 (0.226)	1.028* (0.559)
Party contact x Asian racial group identity	-4.230 (4.017)	-12.564 (12.973)
Party contact x Asian racial group identity ²	2.635 (1.874)	3.588 (3.521)
Democrat	0.787 (0.530)	0.890 (0.646)
Independent	0.010 (0.562)	0.385 (0.802)
Age	-0.037 (0.134)	0.091 (0.176)
Female	-0.628 (0.450)	0.272 (0.497)
Religiosity—ever attend	0.056 (0.425)	0.411 (0.543)
Education level	-0.020 (0.138)	0.135 (0.179)
Total family income	0.050 (0.116)	0.246* (0.127)
Married	0.060 (0.454)	0.752 (0.558)
Constant	0.636 (1.124)	2.653 (2.547)
Observations	127	156
Log Likelihood	-71.880	-54.222
Akaike Inf. Crit.	171.760	136.445

Note:

* p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01

However, the same simple interaction between party contacting and group identity was not a significant indicator of Asian American voter turnout in 2020. Rather, the quadratic term for Asian group identity alone was a significant factor in voter turnout at the 90% confidence level (see Table 3). This finding means that Asian Americans who had the highest and lowest levels of racial group identity were more likely to vote than those who held moderate levels of group identity (see Figure 2).

Though the interaction between party contacting and Asian group identity squared in 2020 is positive, it is not statistically significant. Accordingly, I do not find support for H3b in the regression. The quadratic term for Asian identity was a more reliable indicator of 2020 voter turnout than the interaction of party contacting and Asian group identity.

The quadratic term for Asian group identity was a relatively significant indicator of voter turnout in 2020 (see Table 3). In 2020, a one-unit increase in Asian identity was correlated with a 1% increase in the predicted probability of voting until a certain point, at which a one-unit increase in group identity was associated with a 73.65% increase in the predicted probability of voting. Asian Americans who had either the lowest sense of group identity or the highest sense of group identity were the most likely to vote in the 2020 election.

People who had a moderate sense of group identity, however, were the least likely to vote in the election. Higher turnout rates for people with a greater sense of group identity are expected, as explained above. However, the high turnout rates for people with the lowest sense of group identity is an unexpected finding. For reference, Table A.1 in the appendix shows the results of the logit regressions in 2016 and 2020 without the

interaction between party contacting and group identity and the quadratic variable for racial group identity.

Interestingly, none of the control variables were significant indicators of Asian American voter turnout, except for total family income in 2020. Among the variables studied, racial group identity was the only significant factor in higher Asian American turnout rates in 2020. Given that I controlled for measures traditionally viewed as reliable indicators of voter turnout, the findings suggest that factors of voter turnout vary across racial minorities.

Furthermore, I expected to find the interaction between party contacting and group identity to be a significant determinant of voter turnout in both election years. Although this interaction was significant in 2016, it was not significant in determining Asian American voter turnout in 2020. Even with the quadratic term for Asian group identity, the interaction between party contacting and racial group identity was not a significant determinant of voter turnout. Racial group identity for Asian Americans was a more significant indicator of voter turnout in 2020. Asian group identity, then, seems to be a more important factor in voter turnout now than it was previously.

Conclusion and Discussion

The interaction between party contacting and racial group identity appears to affect Asian American voter turnout in some circumstances. Larger social and political context affects Asian American voter turnout. As such, political parties can only do so much in terms of mobilization. In 2016, the interaction effect was significant, meaning that among those contacted by a political party, people with higher racial group attachment were more likely to vote in the election. In 2020, however, the effect of party

contacting diminished, and racial group identity became stronger in influencing voter turnout rates. I found no evidence that the interaction between party contacting and group identity increased Asian American voter turnout rates in 2020.

However, Asian Americans who reported the highest and lowest racial group attachment held the highest probability of voting in 2020. Although I expected those with higher group identities to have higher probabilities of voting, the finding that those with the lowest group attachment also have the highest turnout rates is unexpected. I suspect that exogenous circumstances led to the shift for people with the lowest group identity holding the highest probability of voter turnout in 2020. Differences in immigrant status or specific ethnic group identities could account for the quadratic relationship between racial group identity and voter turnout. Additional research could corroborate these findings and provide an analysis as to why people with the lowest and highest sense of group identity were more likely to vote in the election.

Because the relationship between Asian racial group identity and party contacting shifted significantly between 2016 and 2020, the data suggest that larger contextual factors played an important role in the sudden increase in voter turnout. An obvious change in the political and social environment in 2020 was COVID-19. The pandemic drastically altered the political and social landscape and brought Asians to the forefront. Because Asians were initially portrayed as the cause of the virus by politicians and groups, the pandemic was highly racialized against Asians. Consequently, Asians experienced a shocking increase in hate crimes, and COVID-19 likely caused Asians to unite through linked fate and heightened group identity.

One possible explanation for the quadratic relationship between Asian group identity and voter turnout could be differences in immigration status. Children of immigrants are more likely to be involved in politics and to explain political issues to their parents than having parents explain politics to their children (Wong and Tseng 2008). Furthermore, researchers have observed differences in voter turnout within intergenerational immigrant families, specifically with higher turnout in Asian Americans after the first generation, which then recedes after the second generation (Ramakrishnan and Espenshade 2001). The intergenerational trends from immigrant status could have shifted in 2020 because of the racialization of COVID-19. Because many anti-Asian attacks targeted elderly Asians (Takamura et al. 2022), Asian Americans who strongly identify with their Asian ethnicities could have become more politically involved in an effort to show pride in their immigration status.

Conversely, Asian Americans who more strongly identify with an all-American identity and have a low sense of Asian racial group identity could have also become more likely to vote as a way to suppress differences from their immigrant status. Future research could ask Asian American respondents about their immigration status in addition to racial group identity, voter turnout, and party contacting to determine how immigration affects group identity and turnout in the aftermath of the coronavirus.

Future research could also examine how party contacting, Asian group identity, and voter turnout differ for each Asian American ethnicity. Although voter turnout for Asian Americans generally increased in 2020, ANES does not provide data on specific ethnicities. Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are grouped into one racial category, which causes problems because the groups have diverse backgrounds and face different

issues. The common Western idea of Asians being restricted to East Asians rather than all diverse Asian ethnicities also contributes to the difficulty of studying the various ethnic groups. The quadratic relationship between racial group identity and voter turnout could be a result of variations in ethnic identities among Asian Americans.

More specifically, the ANES questions I used to create the index for Asian racial group identity could have catered to some ethnicities and not others. Each question asks about the respondent's perceptions of Asians generally rather than specifying ethnicities or even noting Asian Americans. Some of the Asian respondents might not have seen themselves as part of the larger group of Asians recorded in the survey.

One group that could have been identified as Asian in ANES is people from the Middle East. A problem with the 2020 ANES racial identification question is that there is no category for people who identify with a race other than the ones listed on the survey. The Middle East, also known as Central Asia, Southwest Asia, or North Africa (Parvini and Simani 2019), has been given several different identities in Western culture. Although the US Census categorizes people from Middle Eastern countries as white, many Middle Eastern people do not consider themselves white (Marvasti 2005; Cole and Kandiyoti 2002; Parvini and Simani 2019).

The 2016, 2012, and prior ANES questions had an option for respondents to select "other" as a racial category. In 2020, however, the ANES question on race eliminated the opportunity for respondents to select a race besides the ones explicitly listed in the survey. The "other" option was combined with the option for "Native American," which is not a comparable pairing and is easy to overlook. As a result, some Middle Eastern respondents could have selected "Asian" as their racial identification

because there was no other option but have no sense of racial group identity associated with Asians. However, the racial group identity of Middle Easterners is distinct from the pan-Asian identity of East and Southeast Asians (Eickelman 1998; Cole and Kandiyoti 2002). The vast differences in cultures, history, religions, physical features, and languages could have caused many Middle Eastern respondents to disassociate with a pan-Asian identity over time.

Consequently, Middle Easterners would not hold a sense of Asian racial group identity but could have still voted at high rates in the 2020 election. The elimination of the “other” race in 2020 could help explain the quadratic relationship between Asian group identity and voter turnout. Because ANES eliminated the “other” racial category and CES did not ask respondents questions related to their sense of racial group identity, there is not a straightforward way to determine if people who hold a Middle Eastern identity but marked themselves as Asian affected the unexpectedly high voter turnout rates for low Asian group identity. Differences in what “Asian” means to respondents and how people are categorized into racial groups could have affected the index for the Asian racial group identity in 2020.

Moreover, studies could examine the specific effects of COVID-19 on Asian American political participation. Because ANES did not ask respondents about the pandemic, another survey that focuses on Asian Americans could determine if and how the racialization of the coronavirus affected Asian American voter turnout in 2020.

The insignificance of the chosen control variables for Asian American voter turnout also reflects the dearth of information on minority turnout. The control variables, which are typically viewed as strong indicators of voter turnout, were all significant

indicators of white voter turnout, as shown in Table 2. In the regression, the number of significant indicators of voter turnout decreased for Black and Latinx voters and fell substantially for Asian voters.

The only significant finding in the analysis for Asian American voters was the interaction between party contacting and racial group identity. These findings indicate that factors regarded as typical determinants of voter turnout are largely tailored to reflect white voters. Currently recognized indicators of voter turnout, then, are likely not as widely applicable to all minority groups. Especially because Asian Americans fit into the existing predictions of higher education and income but have lower turnout rates, previously unconsidered factors may influence voter turnout for different racial groups. Further studies on minority voters may need to consider other nontraditional factors besides the typical indicators of high turnout.

A limitation of the research is that respondents in the ANES data do not report what specific messages parties use to mobilize voters. Methods of party contacting may not involve racial messages at all. As a result, I must assume that party contacting in any form caused Asian Americans to consider their racial identity, regardless of if the messages themselves were racial. Because racial identity was more salient in 2020 without a significant effect from party contacting, I also assume that political messages in general caused Asian Americans to think about their racial identities.

The findings in this study have implications for future Asian American voter turnout. Depending on the larger social and political context, Asian racial group identity could continue to be a salient factor in increasing turnout rates. Additional research could examine the long-lasting effects of COVID-19 on Asian group identity as well as its

effects on other social groups. Because Asian American voter turnout is less influenced by factors such as higher education and income levels than are other racial groups, research on Asian voters may require a different perspective.

In the 2024 presidential election, Asian voter turnout could shift based on the larger social context and the role of the political parties in bringing Asians closer to the center of the political atmosphere. In the aftermath of COVID-19 and the increase in anti-Asian hate crimes in 2021 and 2022 (Stop AAPI Hate 2021; Campa 2023), Asian American racial group identity could have expanded and may affect the next election. Political parties can maximize their roles in Asian American voter mobilization by increasing contacting efforts and paying attention to the general atmosphere around racial group identity. Questions about discrimination, the pandemic, and political participation in the 2024 ANES survey could clarify the relationship between Asian racial group identity and party contacting.

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Appendix

Figure A.1

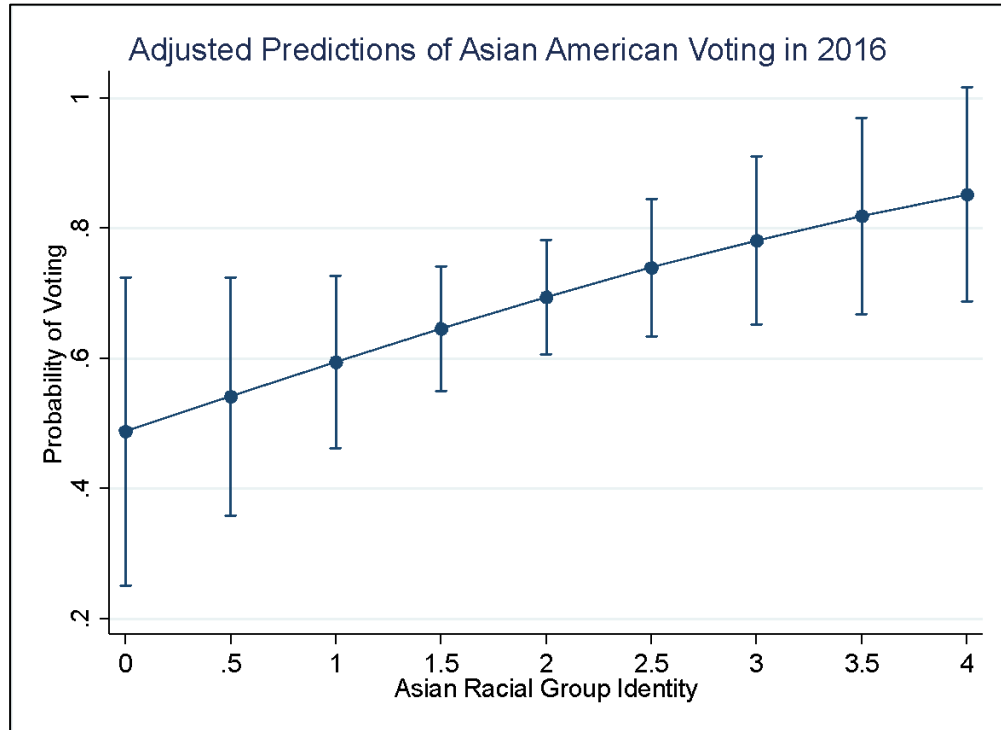


Figure A.1 shows a margins plot for the predicted probability between voting and Asian racial group identity in 2016. The relationship is linear, showing that people who held a higher sense of racial group identity had a higher probability of voting in the election. I used a probit regression to generate this plot.

Figure A.2

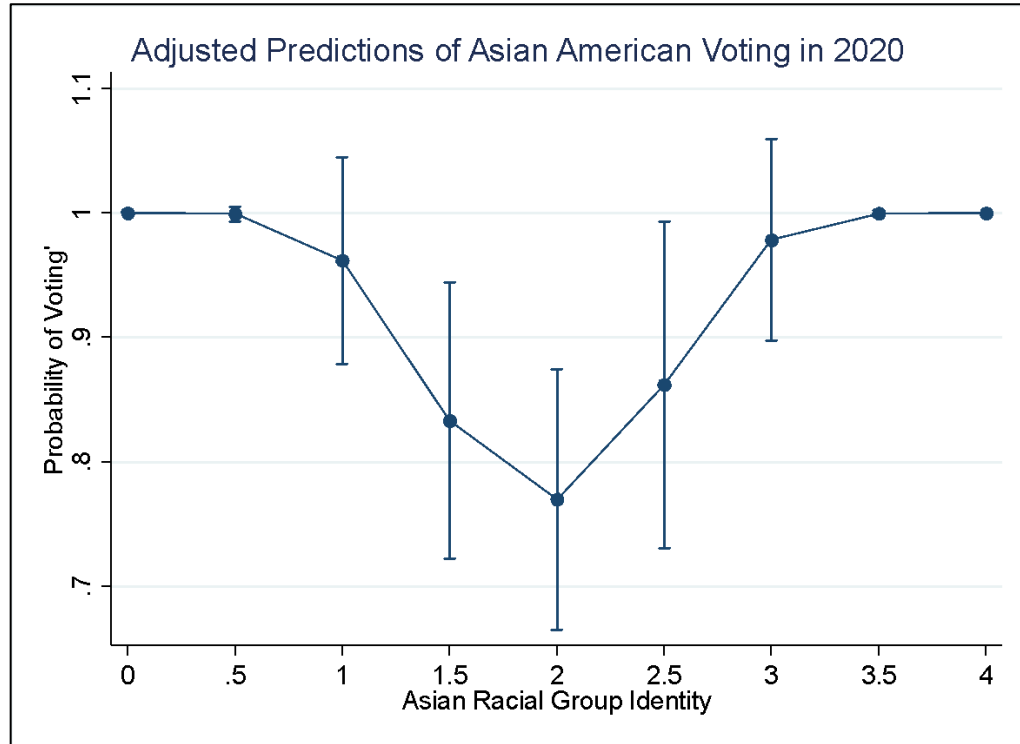


Figure A.2 is also a margins plot that shows the predicted probability of voting and racial group identity in the 2020 election. The graph indicates that people who reported a medium group identity had a lower probability of voting than those who reported having a low or high sense of group identity. Like Figure A.1, this figure was also generated from a probit regression.

Figure A.3

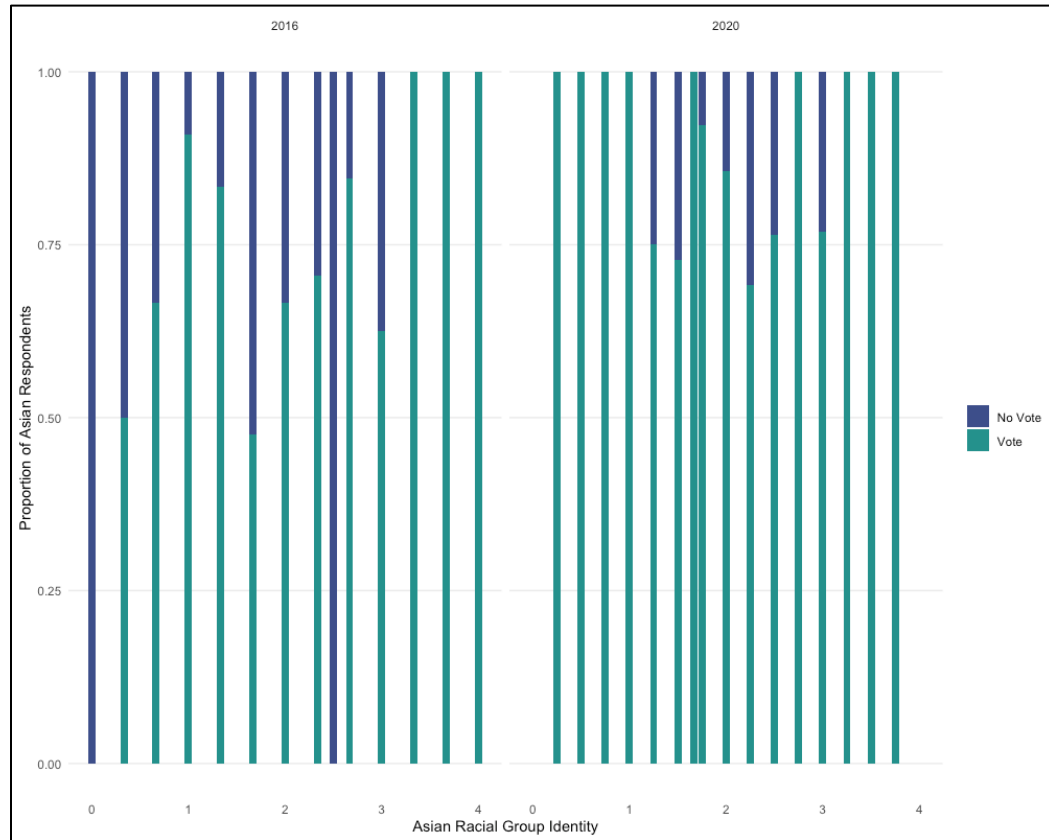


Figure A.3 is a 100% stacked bar chart showing Asian group identity and voter turnout in both 2016 and 2020. This graph confirms the initial model visualizations showing a quadratic relationship between voter turnout and Asian group identity in 2020.

Figure A.4

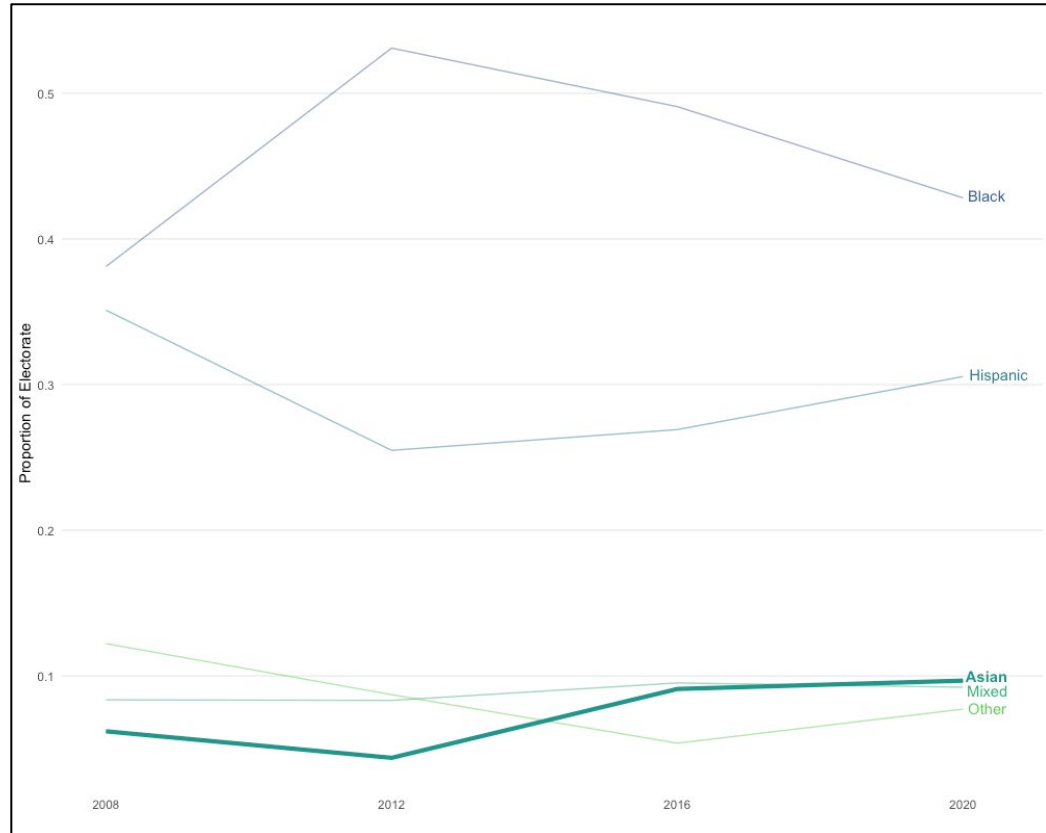


Figure A.4 shows changes in the electorate for racial minorities from 2008-2020.

Figure A.5

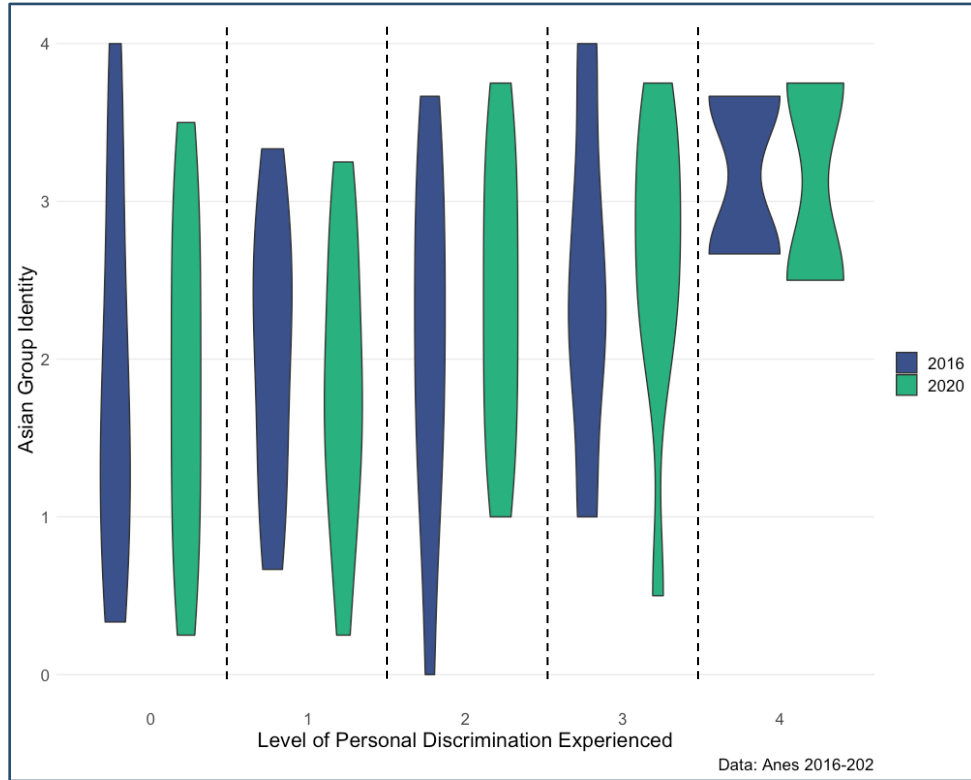


Figure A.5 is a series of violin plots showing the relationship between Asian racial group identity and the level of personal discrimination experienced by respondents in 2016 and 2020. People who reported a high sense of racial group identity also reported experiencing higher levels of personal discrimination.

Figure A.6

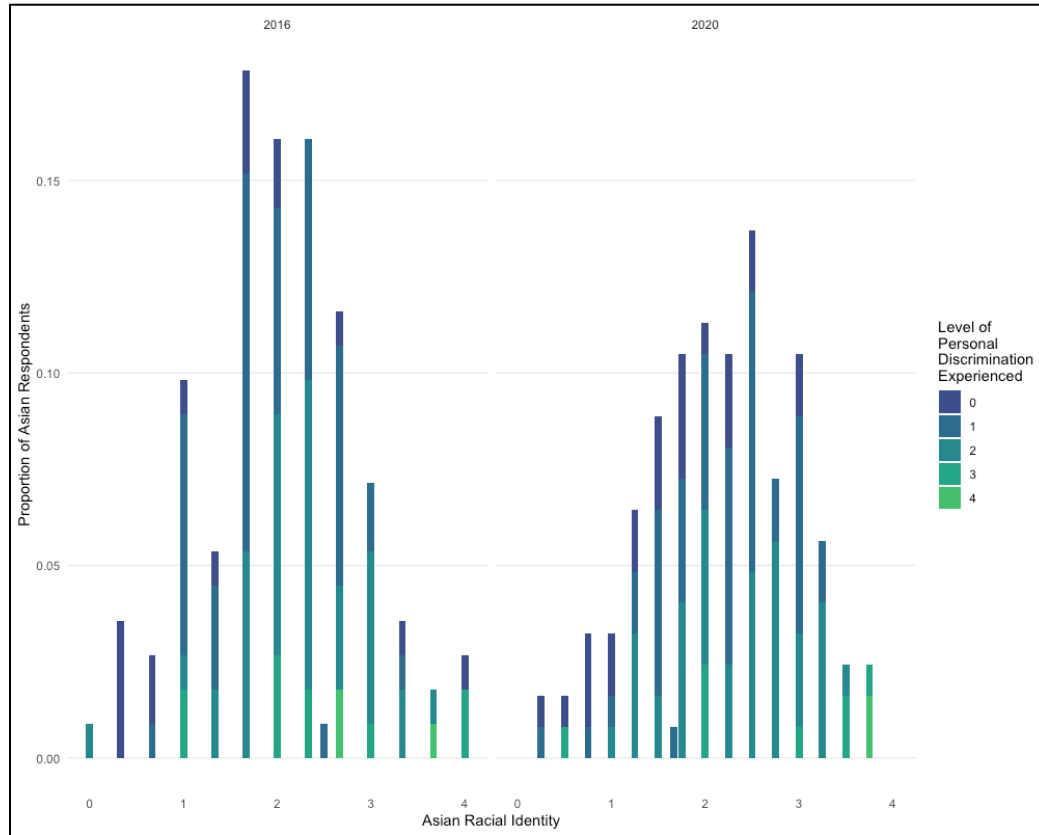


Figure A.6 is a stacked bar chart showing Asian racial group identity and the level of personal discrimination experienced in 2016 and 2020. The figure is another visualization of the same relationship shown in Figure A.5.

**Table A.1:
Additional Results
from 2016 and
2020**

	(1) 2016	(2) 2020	(3) 2016 With Interaction	(4) 2020 With Interaction	(5) 2016 With Quadratic	(6) 2020 With Quadratic
Asian American Voter Turnout						
Party contact	0.280 (0.285)	0.609** (0.309)	-1.311* (0.769)	0.406 (0.814)	0.277 (0.286)	0.701** (0.325)
Asian racial group identity	0.204 (0.139)	-0.0532 (0.159)	0.0458 (0.155)	-0.0749 (0.179)	-0.0464 (0.465)	-2.971** (1.315)
Party contact x Asian racial group identity			0.915** (0.437)	0.101 (0.379)		
Age	-0.0399 (0.0784)	0.00746 (0.0916)	-0.0521 (0.0798)	0.0107 (0.0923)	-0.0411 (0.0785)	0.0263 (0.0961)
Female	-0.313 (0.247)	0.143 (0.258)	-0.309 (0.251)	0.140 (0.258)	-0.314 (0.247)	0.175 (0.270)
Religiosity—ever attend	0.00196 (0.241)	0.149 (0.267)	-0.0769 (0.248)	0.144 (0.268)	0.0136 (0.242)	0.154 (0.282)
Education level	0.0178 (0.0788)	0.0776 (0.0940)	0.0113 (0.0796)	0.0782 (0.0939)	0.0231 (0.0794)	0.0843 (0.0994)
Total family income	-0.00202 (0.0669)	0.0952 (0.0643)	0.00547 (0.0677)	0.0961 (0.0644)	-0.00219 (0.0668)	0.128* (0.0691)
Married	-0.0588 (0.265)	0.389 (0.281)	-0.0415 (0.270)	0.384 (0.281)	-0.0449 (0.266)	0.313 (0.294)
Asian racial group identity ²					0.0662 (0.118)	0.712** (0.306)
Constant	0.234 (0.518)	-0.0995 (0.629)	0.606 (0.551)	-0.0646 (0.643)	0.395 (0.594)	2.302* (1.338)
Observations	127	157	127	157	127	157

Standard errors in
parentheses
*** p<0.01, **
p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table A.1 shows additional results of a probit regression from the 2016 and 2020 ANES surveys. I examined the relationship for voter turnout with an interaction term for party contacting and Asian racial group identity and with a quadratic term for Asian group identity. I used the results to confirm that Asian racial group identity was quadratic in 2020. I then re-ran the regressions in a logit model to report the results in terms of predicted probabilities, which are stated in the paper.