

# Asian American Political Participation During Times of Racial Exclusion and Amidst Signs of Inclusion

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Excerpts from Chapter 2, 4, and 5

## *Introduction to Chapter 2*

The central claim in this book is that we need to consider how recent political contexts structure how we ought to approach explaining Asian American political participation. Contexts such as the hate experienced by Asian Americans during the pandemic, which I characterize as racial exclusion, as well as, political climates that exhibit signs of racial inclusion such as the rise of and increased visibility of Asian Americans in government, ultimately determine the very factors that have become meaningful for influencing Asian Americans' decisions to participate in politics. In this chapter, I will lay out how recent, key events can be classified both as racially exclusionary and inclusionary for Asian Americans. These contexts defined by racial exclusion especially during the pandemic, alongside signs of racial inclusion of Asian Americans present in government, have brought to light two core factors that should be addressed in order to have a fuller understanding of why this community has come to participate in politics over time through the contemporary day.

A once in a generation period of anti-Asian hate has made direct experiences with racial discrimination the first factor we will address, derived from such contexts of racial exclusion. Direct experiences with racial discrimination, especially since the pandemic has come to be more important for shaping Asian American political participation. At the same time, the increasing visibility of Asian Americans running, winning, and serving at various levels of political office - signs of racial inclusion - necessitates that we better understand how various dimensions of descriptive representation shape Asian American political participation today. We will discuss this framework for understanding Asian American political participation by centering factors related to contexts of both racial exclusion amidst signs of racial inclusion.

Yet, before we dive more deeply into my framework for examining Asian American political participation through the lenses of racial exclusion and racial inclusion, it is important to note the evolution of research that has sought out to explain what inspires political participation among the mass public broadly, how Asian Americans fit (or do not fit) in with these core explanations, and then note literature that has developed specific explanations for what motivates the likelihood of political participation among Asian Americans.

## *What has motivated political participation in the general mass public?*

Explaining political participation started with a foundational premise that people come to be active in the political life because they can, because they are asked, and because they want to (Almond and Verba 1963; Verba and Nie 1972; and Schlozman and Verba 2012). Early empirical accounts of this approach to understanding political participation has shown that in general, those with

higher resources, those who are more psychologically engaged and attuned to politics, and those who are outreached to are more likely to participate in politics (Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1995).

*Because they can.*

Those in the mass public with higher socioeconomic status are more likely to participate in politics. These socioeconomic resources are often ones such as higher income status or becoming more highly educated, all of which helps people navigate the complexities of politics so that they can then participate in the political process (Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1995; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). Education provides an opportunity to learn more about politics and gain politically-relevant knowledge (Nie, Junn, and Barry 1996; Gutmann 1999). This is even though levels of political knowledge in the United States are still rather low (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Smith 2026) especially about racialized issues (Abrajano and Lajevardi 2021; Chan and Tokeshi 2024). Nonetheless, schools are certainly socialization sites for political activity (Campbell 1996); Holbein and Hillygus (2020) find a positive relationship between the number of civic courses taken and self-reported voter turnout, for example. However, it is important to note that assessing the causal effects of socioeconomic status indicators such as higher income and education has led many to conclude that resourced-based capacities to mobilize political participation is at best mixed (Willeck and Mendelberg 2022; Berinsky and Lenz 2010; Kam and Palmer 2008; Elder, Enos, and Mendelberg 2023).

In regard to socioeconomic status, scholars have pointed out that these approaches are insufficient for explaining the political participation of Asian Americans specifically. For example, it has been found that higher education and income are not strong indicators of political participation among Asian Americans (Nakanishi 1991; Cho 1999; Junn 1999; Lien 2001; Lien 1994; Xu 2005; Uhlaner, Cain, and Kiwiet 1989). Empirically, Wong et al. (2011) find little association between socioeconomic status and voter turnout. After all, Asian Americans tend to have the highest average levels of education and among the highest median household incomes compared to White, Latino, and Black Americans (Kochhar and Moslimani 2023), yet research on gaps in political activity by race would suggest that Asian Americans are not the most active racial/ethnic group in the United States (Fraga 2018). This would suggest that socioeconomic status concerns are not the most primarily impactful for explaining the political participation of Asian Americans.

It is for all these reasons that research on Asian American political involvement often goes beyond just taking resources and socioeconomic status into account. However, recent interventions in the literature point to specific dimensions of education that might matter for the political participation of minoritized groups such as Asian Americans. Civic education has long omitted the history of racial minorities in the United States (Brandle 2020; Monforti and McGlynn 2010); this is especially in the case of Asian Americans, who are underrepresented in introductory political science textbooks and have even been regarded as the “forgotten minority” in the study of American politics (Takeda 2015; Takeda 2016). Yet, when critical pedagogies and materials that actually represent historically disadvantaged racial minority groups, this can improve their propensity to engage in political activities (Nelsen 2023; Garcia-Bedolla and Silva 2020). This has been found to especially be the case for politically mobilizing Asian Americans (Archer and

Raychaudhuri 2026); these race-centered forms of education can indeed be politically meaningful for Asian Americans (Chan and Raychaudhuri 2026), helping Asian Americans overcome political deficits in what they gain inside of the academic classroom (Chan and Hoyt 2021).

*Because they are asked.*

With exceptions, Asian Americans do not fit the standard trajectory where higher socioeconomic status leads to greater political participation. Yet, another classic argument that has been posed to explain why the mass public participates in politics is because they were simply asked to do so. Recruitment into politics and political outreach increases the likelihood of mass political participation (Verba and Nie 1978; Rosenstone and Hansen 1990; Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1995). In general, although with careful attention to variation in the effects of mode of contact and regularity of contact as only some examples, outreach such as Get Out the Vote (GOTV) efforts matter for increasing the likelihood of voter turnout and other forms of political activity (Green and Gerber 2019).

Yet the issue with this recruitment argument when it comes to the political participation of racial minorities is that because campaigns and organizations have limited resources, they generally prioritize who they consider to be higher likelihood voters to begin with. This leaves racial minorities often at the margins of political outreach, exposing a structural barrier to political participation for Asian Americans and other minoritized groups (Wong 2008; Kim 2007). In an era of weak institutional support and despite being the fastest single-racial group in the United States (DeSipio 2011; Rim 2009), time and time again, election after election, Asian Americans report little contact by major political parties and organizations.

In 2024, 57% of Asian Americans had not been contacted by the Republican Party, and about 50% said the same about the Democratic Party, meaning that recruitment is largely untapped by both of the two major political parties in America (AAPI Data 2024). This issue has spanned many presidential elections prior (Ramakrishnan et al. 2016) and these racial gaps in political recruitment not only occur in general elections but primary elections as well (AAPI Data 2022). While Asian Americans are generally not as often contacted to participate (Ramirez, Solano, and Wilcox-Archuleta 2018), the cycles of under mobilization compound because campaigns do not regularly engage in culturally appropriate and informed ways to encourage minorities' political participation (Barreto 2018).

Ultimately, while it is clear that political outreach of Asian Americans is low, Asian Americans do respond to this outreach when this occurs. For example, a field experiment by Wong (2005) confirms that telephone calls and mailers increase the propensity of voter turnout among Asian Americans. This is while Garcia-Bedolla and Michelson (2009) note the power of phone calls that increase the political engagement of Asian Americans. These forms of recruitment can provide political information, helping Asian Americans overcome the cognitive costs needed to take political action.

It is worth mentioning that there are other structural and institutionalized barriers apart from under recruitment by political organizations, especially because so many in the Asian American community come from immigrant backgrounds - either because they are immigrants to

the United States themselves or alternatively because they were born to immigrant parents. Beyond the structural issues such as the lack of political outreach, immigration status and citizenship barriers such as naturalization are important factors that can also structure the likelihood of Asian Americans participating in politics (Lien 2004; Ramakrishnan and Espenshade 2001; DeSipio, Masuoka, and Stout 2008; Masuoka, Junn, and Ramanathan 2019). In a comprehensive study on immigration-related factors, Ramakrishnan (2005) identifies how immigrant generation, length of stay, English proficiency, and country of origin characteristics such as regime type, can all matter for shaping the trajectory of Asian Americans' politics. A follow-up study by Wong and Stoll (2007) makes it clear that being a more recent immigrant, who might have more difficulty speaking English, accounted for participation deficits among Asian Americans. Although, how immigration and nativity concerns shape Asian American political participation differs across national origin (Lien 2004).

In absence of political recruitment networks and because of additional structural barriers associated with being an immigrant such as access to voter identification (Hajnal, Kuk, and Lajevardi 2018; Kuk, Hajnal, and Lajevardi 2022; Hershey 2009) and struggles with in-language materials that can disincentivize political participation specifically among Asian Americans (Masuoka, Chan, and Yap 2024; Jones-Correa 2005; Mapgantay 2004), community-based organizations have been found to fill in for these political participation gaps. Rooted in the core Civic Voluntarism Model of political participation (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995), community-oriented organizations have been found to be particularly fruitful in overcoming institutionalized barriers to political participation (Garcia-Castanon 2018). For example, these community-based organizations such as religious gathering spaces are sites of political socialization and eventually can spur on political activity, especially among racial minorities (Wong et al. 2011; Djupe and Grant 2001; Jones-Correa and Leal 2001; Harris 1995; Wong, Rim, and Perez 2008; Chan and Phoenix 2021; McDaniel 2008; and Huckle and Silva 2021). The racial composition of these spaces and the social meaning of the places where Asian Americans reside, can all come together to shape their degree of political engagement or disengagement (Fraga 2018; Jang 2009; Rim 2009; Carlson, Abrajano, and Garcia-Bedolla, see also: White and Laird 2020).

*Because they want to.*

Foundational models also point to a third, important prong that is linked to political participation: psychological engagement in politics. For example, higher political interest and trust in government have been found to be precursors to participation in politics (Aldrich 1993; Campbell et al. 1960). Other indicators such as political efficacy, the degree to which "people like me" have confidence that they can understand politics and receive responsiveness from government matters also shapes the degree of political participation (Campbell, Gurin, and Miller 1954; Campbell et al. 1960; Campbell and Converse 1972; Craig, Niemi, and Silver 1990). In regards to racial minorities including Asian Americans, additional interventions argue that it is racialized forms of political efficacy conceptualized as an individual's perception of how much their racial in-group has influence over government outcomes (for example, how much Asian Americans feel like Asian Americans as a racial group has influence over government outcomes), is actually a stronger indicator of minority political participation than traditional notions of internal or external political efficacy (Phoenix and Chan 2024).

Nonetheless, psychological engagement in politics also includes one's attachment to a political party. Strength of partisanship shapes the degree to which individuals feel motivated to participate in politics, especially in politically polarized times where partisanship as a social identity is so salient (Verba, Schlozman, and Verba 1995; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2004; Huddy, Mason, and Aaroe 2015; Mason 2018). Yet, these arguments about attachment to American political parties often are structured differently across racial minorities as many immigrant groups experience a different pathway to political socialization and development of partisan identification. As Hajnal and Lee (2011) put it, first of all, "parental influence cannot explain the partisan attitudes of children of immigrants whose parents arrive with fewer connections to the American context to begin with." Immigrant communities, particularly the children of immigrants, may have more malleable partisan attitudes that are not necessarily fully formed at the onset of adulthood and reach partisanship "maturity" later on in life (Carlos 2018). Scholarship has noted that pathways to developing partisanship are often found externally outside of the home, such as in schools (Raychaudhuri 2025), and if or when socialization does happen within the home and across family, political socialization of immigrant communities often occur from children influencing their parents, rather than parents influencing their children, or even bidirectionally between immigrant parents and their children (Wong and Tseng 2008; Carlos 2026; Pedraza and Perry 2020).

This is all to say that socialization into politics operates differently for immigrant communities, and for many Asian Americans they may not linearly follow into identification with a political party but may often select into an independent or truly non-partisan status (Hajnal and Lee 2011; Phan and Garcia 2009). For example, an analysis of panel data finds that no preference of partisanship is relatively permanent for a large proportion of Asian America, buffered by low outreach, a structural issue we already alluded to some pages ago (Le and Ong 2018).

As a unique proportion of Asian Americans do not identify with a major political party, another offshoot emerged in the literature in race, political psychology, and political behavior to understanding minority politics. That is, apart from investigating the political effects of partisan identities, rooted in social psychological theories in social identity (Tajfel 1981; Tajfel and Turner 1986; Huddy 2001), racial and ethnic politics scholars have largely centered the role of racial/ethnic identity and racial in-group solidarity in shaping the political behavior of minoritized communities.

Michael Dawson's (1994) foundational work on Black linked fate, the extent to which African Americans believe that their own individual interests are linked to those in their racial/ethnic group, and its role in shaping Black political behavior, provided a launching point for additional inquiry in the extent to which racial identity centrality might influence the politics of non-Black racial minorities in the U.S. This led to body of work that has examined the development of panethnicity and racial group consciousness, the awareness of one's racial identity combined with the perception that the racial group should collectively act to advance common racial group interest (Miller et al. 1981; Shingles 1981; Verba and Nie 1982; Lien, Conway, and Wong 2003; Masuoka 2006; Sanchez, Masuoka, and Abrams 2019; Sanchez and Masuoka 2010; Chong and Rogers 2005; Lopez and Espiritu 1990; Espiritu 1992; Masuoka and Junn 2008; Lai 2021; Lee 2019; Lien et al. 2021).

While it has been importantly noted that Black identity in the realm of politics is unique due to their disproportional experiences with marginalization and institutionalized racism in the U.S. (Junn and Masuoka 2013; Leighley and Vedlitz 1999; Sears and Savalei 2006), there have been investigations into Latino identity, group consciousness, and linked fate, finding that these racial/ethnic attachments can mobilize Latino political participation (Sanchez 2006; Valdez 2011; Masuoka 2008; Marsh and Ramirez 2019; Bowler and Segura 2011; Gutierrez 2025; Barreto and Pedraza 2009; Garcia-Rios, Pedraza, and Wilcox-Archuleta 2019). Despite there being heterogeneity by national origin and often differences in languages spoken (McClain et al. 2009), racial group-based resources such as group consciousness and linked fate can be politically meaningful for Asian Americans as well (Wong, Lien, and Conway 2005; Wong et al. 2011; Chan, Nguy, and Masuoka 2024).

More recent work in social psychological approaches to explaining political participation among Asian Americans has centralized the role of not just in-group identity and linked fate but superordinate forms of identity and linked fate. For example, identification as a person of color or perceptions of linked fate across racial minorities more broadly, apart from just Asian Americans own racial in-group, can influence the political behavior of Asian Americans (Perez 2020; Chan and Jasso 2024). Emotional reactions such as fear and sense of belonging can influence Asian American political behavior (Phoenix and Arora 2021; Masuoka et al. 2018) - all of which suggests that what the psychological engagement branch means for Asian American political participation often goes far and beyond standard explanations of strength of partisan identity, political interest, or political efficacy, for example.

Building on foundational works that have noted that the American mass public participates in politics because they can, because they are asked, and because they want to, these traditional explanations have been largely insufficient for explaining the political activity of Asian Americans. Scholars have sought out to push boundaries in our understanding of socioeconomic status indicators such as educational attainment and rather have looked at how forms of inclusive civics education, for example, can inform the political participation of Asian Americans. Given the institutional hurdles such as the lack of recruitment and other structural barriers that arise from immigration status, research has centered the power of community-based organizations to facilitate the political involvement of Asian Americans. Lastly, while psychological engagement matters for political participation, this mindset often manifests through non-partisan identification means, spurring the plethora of emphases on racial/ethnic identity, panethnicity, racial group consciousness, and linked fate in shaping the political participation of Asian Americans.

### *Contribution and Preview of Theory Ahead*

With all of the aforementioned work that has emerged in the study of racial and ethnic politics and mass political behavior and within the Asian American politics field's major theme of Asian American political participation (Wong and Ramakrishnan 2023), this book makes several crucial contributions to these lines of work. Pioneering, comprehensive volumes have brought together and evaluated many different factors that might explain Asian American political participation. In fact, even before doing just that, Lien (2001) and Lien, Wong, and Conway (2004) had to undo notions that Asian Americans are politically apathetic and confirm that the community does engage in politics through multifaceted ways. Only then were they able to assess and identify how place

of birth, gender, and income shaped Asian American political participation (Lien 2001). Further, Wong et al. (2011) use the one-of-a-kind, National Asian American Survey in 2008, to examine the influence of immigrant adaptation, geography, racial/ethnic identity, and community involvement to put together the last comprehensive book to solely evaluate the political participation of Asian Americans. These volumes have allowed research to build on these foundational understandings of what mobilizes Asian Americans to get active in politics in creative yet politically meaningful ways.

With that being said, it has been 15 years since the publication of Wong et al.'s (2011) book on Asian American political participation and nearly two decades since the data brought to bear on the book's evidence was collected, back in 2008. Further, quite simply, so much has happened to Asian Americans since these volumes were written. We went through the coronavirus pandemic that killed over 7 million around the globe (World Health Organization 2024), with over 1 million deaths in the United States alone (Center for Disease Control 2026). While the public health crisis emerged, Asian Americans became associated with the spread of this virus and a new wave of anti-Asian hate that emerged to facilitate a once in a generation environment characterized by racial exclusion. This negative sentiment toward Asian Americans would rise for many years later. At the same time, Asian Americans have also been subject to signs of some political inclusion through the increasing presence of Asian Americans in the most visible positions of politics, notably the rise of Kamala Harris in national politics and the increasing success of Asian Americans running and winning across all levels of government to historic numbers also never before seen before.

At the core of this book's contribution and argument is that political participation is dynamic and is responsive to context. That is, contexts of racial exclusion during the pandemic alongside small signs and glimmers of racial inclusion of Asian Americans' visibility in politics are crucial events that have the possibility of shaping the trajectory of Asian American political participation thereafter. These landmark events for Asian Americans ultimately guide the factors undergirding political participation that we should now pay even greater attention to. In the chapter ahead, I argue that it is these contexts of racial exclusion that preclude that we examine how experiences with racial discrimination have become more consistently linked to mobilize Asian Americans into politics, and additionally discuss how simultaneous signs of racial inclusion of Asian Americans in government necessitate that we put greater emphasis on understanding how attitudes toward and prioritization of descriptive representation shapes Asian American political participation.

Also, in recognition of the constantly evolving and deepening modes of political involvement that Asian Americans engage in, this book moves the plethora of scholarship in race and political behavior and Asian American political participation forward by responding to these very crucial events that occurred in recent American politics. By recognizing the dynamism of political behavior that depends on what has occurred in our immediate environments, I put forward a theoretical approach for studying minority political participation rooted in a framework that hinges on recognizing contexts of racial exclusion amidst signs of racial inclusion.

## *The Importance of Key Landmark Events and Context in Studies of Political Behavior*

We must consider the importance of political contexts because at the end of the day, political behavior is indeed dynamic. Decisions to turnout to vote - and what influences individuals to go to the ballot box; or whether one chooses to go to the protests - as well as the factors that mobilize individuals to attend a political rally, all depend on what is going on in the immediate political climate at hand. Factors ebb and flow in response to changes to one's political environment. Quite early on, political scientists urged us to stop and look around at our political surroundings to guide our understanding about how the masses developed their attitudes about politically related issues and how they decided to act on them. This is because important events have been known to socialize individuals into politics and then influence their processes of shaping their political behavior thereafter (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2004; MacKuen 1981; Tessler, Konold, and Reif 2004). These key events or external shocks especially have political consequences for understanding the mass public's formation of partisanship and policy preferences (Converse 1976; Abramson 1979; Page and Shapiro 1992; Miller and Shanks 1982; Citrin 1974; Acharya, Blackwell, and Sen 2018).

Landmark events that have changed political trajectories are many. For example, scholars have pointed to changing tides due to conflict during the Vietnam War that has had a large and enduring impact on individuals' political orientations thereafter. Those that were more likely to be drafted to war ended up being more engaged in anti-war protests and political causes, developed a more liberal ideology, and more likely to vote for Democratic positions (Erikson and Stoker 2011; see also: Green and Hyman-Metzger 2024 and Angrist 1990). Major economic crises that often accompany times of war can also have these consequences as well on shaping political attitudes (Giuliano and Spilimbergo 2025). This is while other contexts and events such as natural disasters (Atekson and Maestas 2012; Fowler and Hall 2018; Gasper and Reeves 2011; Healy and Malhotra 2009) and mass shooting (Barnes et al. 2008; Hassell, Holbein, and Baldwin 2020) have downstream political impacts (see: Marsh 2022 and Marsh 2025 for an in-depth discussion).

Racialized events, especially, have often been at center stage that have then changed the trajectory of American politics and political behavior thereafter, echoing claims about the centrality of race in American politics (McClain 2024; Cramer 2020; Hutchings and Valentino 2004). These racialized turns in the contemporary day could be uniquely politically consequential for immigrant groups such as Asian Americans because they do not follow the traditional parental to offspring model of political socialization (Hajnal and Lee 2011; Carlos 2025; Raychaudhuri 2025). That is, because many immigrants are not born to parents that were socialized in the United States and absent of this socialization about politics inside of the home, the political behavior trajectory of Asian Americans specifically may indeed be influenced disproportionately by major racialized events in America.

Racialized events that happen in real time and in real life can leave a lasting impact on political behavior. Viewing changes to public opinion trajectories from the ground-up, Lee (2002) noted the power of grassroots organizations and protests during the Civil Rights Movement that had long-term effects on attitude change. Further, racialized hate incidents such as Black church arsons were intended to traumatize minoritized groups that can mobilize incentives to voter participation (Marsh 2022). Abrajano and Lundgren (2014) argue that "watershed" immigration

events such as the passage of major immigration bills such as the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, can leave a lasting impression on views toward immigrants and mold preferences toward immigration policies. This aligns well with research that has examined the socialization effects of other major immigration-related events such as the 2006 immigration rallies against Proposition 187 that mobilized the Latino community (Michelson 2001; Garcia-Bedolla 2005; Branton et al. 2011; Zapeda-Millan 2017; Rim 2009; Barreto et al. 2008). Additional contextual threats, for example, such as the proximity to deportation have been meaningful in understanding the political participation of immigrant communities, especially throughout the Trump era (Gutierrez et al. 2022; Gutierrez 2025; White 2016; Perez 2015; Israel-Trummel, Shortel, and Bracic 2025; Walker, Roman, and Barreto 2020; Roman 2023). We might suspect that the recent ICE raids during the beginning of Trump's second administration might have an imprinting effect as a major event that has affected the lives of many immigrant communities, largely Latinos and Asian Americans.

We might also think of the terrorist attacks on 9/11 as a key political event that spurred a broader body of research about the causes of anxiety about terrorism and the political effects of these perceptions (Davis and Silver 2004; Huddy et al. 2005; Hersh 2013). For example, Albertson and Gadarian (2015) show that this emotional aspect of anxiety can increase political information seeking and attention to politics. This is while perceptions of terror threat became associated with stronger support for protective national security policies and greater support for policies that restrict civil liberties at the expense of more pro-democratic norms and values (Merolla and Zechmeister 2009). This memorable event on 9/11 also had consequences on the real lives of Muslim Americans, and created an environment ripe for not only the spread of Islamophobia but led to a strengthening of the relationship between resentment toward Muslim Americans and public opinion formation in the mass public that had lasting consequences even in recent presidential elections (Lajevardi 2020; Lajevardi and Abrajano 2019; Lajevardi and Oskooii 2018; Jardina and Stephens-Dougan 2021; Lajevardi and Zilinsky 2026).

A couple of years later, after the election of our first Black president Obama, scholars have argued that instead of a post-racial era, America was ushered into a most-racial era (Tesler 2016; Logan 2011). Obama racialized American politics to unprecedented levels, which set the stage for racist attitudes and racial resentment toward Black people to become strong influencers of American political attitudes from vote choice to policy preferences (Tesler and Sears 2010; Tesler 2016; see also Enders and Scott 2019). These identity-centered attitudes and how they shape political behavior depend on these key contextual events such as the historic election of Obama but also have the power to persist into the future. Identity-related concerns have not just been activated post-Obama but have come to explain a lot of the mass public's politics throughout the Trump era as well (Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2019).

External shocks and major events matter for mass political trajectories thereafter and considering the contextual nature of the political world should shape how much importance and emphasis we place on factors that influence political behavior and political participation. As we previously reviewed in the introductory chapter, the history of Asian Americans can be understood through the lens of exclusion and inclusion. Yet further, these historical cycles of racial exclusion accompanied by some signs of racial inclusion continue to define the very key events impacting Asian Americans in contemporary day. There are two key contextual events that must be

considered to guide our understanding of the factors that shape Asian American political participation. They are: the racialization of the COVID-19 pandemic (racial exclusion) and the increasing presence of Asian Americans at the highest levels of political office (signs of racial inclusion).

### *Contemporary Racial Exclusion and the Racialization of Asian American During the COVID-19 Pandemic*

As the coronavirus began to spread in 2020, the public health crisis became politicized quickly after. Accounts of the pandemic in political science argue that this was in large part due to Donald Trump and his administration's partisan response to the pandemic. In "Pandemic Politics," Gadarian, Goodman, and Pepinsky (2022) argue that it was the politicization of the virus from the top, from our very own political elites in charge, that spilled over into partisan differences in health behaviors and attitudes about the pandemic, and this indeed had consequences on our health and democracy across the mass public (see also: Clinton et al. 2021; Grossman et al. 2020; Gadarian, Goodman, and Pepinsky 2021; Allcott et al. 2020; Milosh et al. 2021; Druckman et al. 2021; Goldstein and Wiedemann 2022).

However, events and rhetoric surrounding the origins and spread of the pandemic stemming from political elites - such as President Trump, among others - led to differential experiences across racial and ethnic lines. Even though people of color were far more compliant to public health recommendations regarding masking, social distancing, and other protective behaviors (Sanchez, Vargas, and Sayuri Dominguez 2023; Hearne and Nino 2022; Andersen et al. 2022; Fisher et al. 2020), the pandemic, nonetheless, illuminated inequalities across racial/ethnic groups. For example, studies have demonstrated that people of color had higher rates of testing positive for COVID-19 and disease severity relative to White Americans, although with some variation across Hispanic, Asian, and Black Americans (Magesh et al. 2021; Mackey et al. 2020; Sabo and Johnson 2023; see also: Artiga, Corallo, and Pham 2020; Khanijanhani et al. 2021; Magesh et al. 2021). These inequities were not just felt strictly in the realm of public health, especially in regard to the pandemic othering that was about to occur (Yi Dionne and Turkemen 2020).

Despite the ongoing public health pandemic and amidst a moment of racial reckoning in the aftermath of the killing of George Floyd and reemergence of the Black Lives Matter protest - all key events that also had political implications (Reny and Newman 2021; Mikkelsen 2025; Roman et al. 2023), in March 2020, Trump's rhetoric from the podium, using terms to describe the virus such as the "China Virus" or "Kung Flu," sparked anti-Asian sentiment across the mass public (Chan, Kim, and Leung 2022; Jeung et al. 2021). Government officials connected Asian Americans to the pandemic, even though the World Health Organization warned against naming public health crises with racial characteristics. Trump's targeted racialized rhetoric put a target on Asian Americans as a scapegoat for the spread of COVID-19 (Reny and Barreto 2021; Chan, Kim, and Leung 2022; Chan and Leung 2024; Nam, Sawyer, and Style 2024), even though other political representatives in Congress, particularly Asian American women, were on the front lines of trying to disassociate and temper this elite rhetoric and rise in anti-Asian hate (Arora and Kim 2021; Feng and Lien 2020; Arora et al. 2024).

Nonetheless, the politician with arguably the largest platform as President of the United States at the time of the pandemic, continued to double down on his rhetoric. This ultimately led to the exponential rise in anti-Asian hate incidents and hate crimes, which culminated with the killing of six Asian American women in Atlanta, Georgia in March 2021 (Jeung et al. 2021; Cineas 2023; Yam 2022; Venkatraman 2021; Yellow Horse, Jeung, and Matriano 2022; Hswen et al. 2021; Tessler, Choi, and Kao 2020). The racialization of the COVID-19 crisis represented a once in a generation wave of negative sentiment toward Asian Americans, in-part, resembling the explicitly exclusionary environments that were a commonplace in the history of Asian Americans that we reviewed in Chapter 1.

This negatively valenced rhetoric continued through 2024, echoing work that had previously identified a “Trump effect” during his first term in office (Newman et al. 2019; Le, Arora, and Stout 2020). This line of research suggests that Trump can be seen as a symbol and instrument of racial exclusion. Aligning with elite-driven models of political behavior (Lenz 2013; Zaller 1992), key moments since the start of the pandemic fostered an environment characterized by racial exclusion - conditions that I argue make directly experienced forms of racism ripe to spur political action among this very community of Asian Americans. It is paramount that we now see direct experiences with racial discrimination as a core factor mobilizing Asian Americans political participation - especially in light of COVID-19 and during the underlying currents of racial exclusion that ensued and ones that surged following Trump’s re-election both online and offline (Stop AAPI Hate 2025). Experiences with discrimination have become a more consistent mobilizer to political participation among Asian Americans during times of explicit racial exclusion.

## Asian American Political Participation During Times of Racial Exclusion and Amidst Signs of Inclusion

Excerpts from Chapter 4

The Activation of Racial Discrimination on Asian American Political Mobilization  
During the COVID-19 Crisis

### *Introduction to Chapter 4*

Up to this point, I have laid out a framework for the contemporary study of Asian American political participation. The central claim here being that we need to consider how recent political contexts, such as the rise in hate experienced by Asian Americans during the pandemic, which I characterize as racial exclusion, and simultaneous glimmers of hope, such as the rise of Asian Americans candidates and historic firsts of Asian American elected officials, characterized as signs of racial inclusion, have brought to light two core factors that must be addressed in order to have a fuller understanding of how and why the Asian American community comes to participate in the contemporary political life.

That is, from this framework, I then theorized about how contexts of racial exclusion further activate or strengthen the impact of 1) direct experiences with racial discrimination on Asian American political participation. While often occurring at the same time, contexts that signal racial inclusion necessitate new understanding of how various dimensions and desires for more 2)

descriptive representation influence Asian Americans to get involved in politics. I argued that these two factors that derive from this racial exclusion and inclusion framework have become particularly influential on the decision that Asian Americans make to participate in political activities, since the turning point of the racialization pandemic and simultaneous visibility of Asian American politicians in government around the same time. This chapter begins discussion of the first factor, direct experiences with racial discrimination, that has become a strong determinant of Asian American political participation during this once in a generation form of racialized exclusion during times of pandemic.

### *The Role of Racial Discrimination in Shaping the Political Behavior of Minoritized Communities*

Oskooii (2020) defines discrimination as negative actions taken by individuals (interpersonally) in the form of non-verbal antagonism, intimidation, avoidance, or physical assault. While experiences with and perceptions about racial discrimination have found a commonplace in the study of political behavior among minoritized communities, the findings are relatively mixed.

Scholars, such as Oskooii (2016), argue that forms of societal discrimination can lead to more political withdrawal. In regard to immigrants and Asian Americans, at times, institutionalized threats can actually decrease civic activity (Ebert and Okamoto 2013). Further, institutionalized forms of racism such as experiences with incarceration and internment among Japanese Americans has been found to demobilize political engagement (Komisarchik, Sen, and Velez 2022). This is while Lien (1994) found that neither alienation nor sense of deprivation influenced Asian American political participation.

While Wong et al. (2011), Masuoka et al. (2018), and Berry, Cepuran, and Sergio-Rios (2022) found that there was no relationship between experiences with or perceptions about discrimination and Asian American voter behavior, others have found that discrimination mobilizes turnout among other minoritized communities in the United States, examining the case of Latino Americans (Besco 2024; Besco et al. 2022). Although, among Asian Americans, direct experiences with racism can increase the likelihood of engagement, especially when considering other non-voting forms of Asian American political participation, even prior to the pandemic (Wong et al. 2011; Rim 2009; Ouch and Moradi 2022; Chan and Chen 2025) in different surroundings - especially in college campuses (Todd and Yi 2022). Nonetheless, Mussig and Okrug's (2024) meta-analysis of racial discrimination and civic engagement notes these mixed findings are due to differences in group under consideration, time, place, measurement, and mode of political activity.

### *The Rising Salience of Direct Experiences with Racial Discrimination on Asian American Political Participation Since the Pandemic*

Building on this line of work, I argue that in an era of explicit racial exclusion, it is all the more important to understand the political implications of direct experiences with discrimination due to one's race and ethnicity - as a core factor - considering how these direct experiences with racism impact political participation among Asian Americans. Especially since the onset of the pandemic, characterized by racial exclusion during a renewed environment of anti-Asian hate - contexts that we already alluded to previously, these direct experiences with discrimination have come to more

strongly and more consistently mobilize Asian Americans to participate across different modes of political activity - from voting to protests to intention to running for political office themselves. That is, there has been a rising political salience of direct encounters with racism influencing Asian Americans' likelihood of participating in politics; this political salience of experiences with racialized othering depends on context.

Since this once in a generation turning point and persistent moment of exclusion, experiences with racism have become a stronger and more consistent mobilizer of Asian American activism. The recent wave of anti-Asian hate has the potential to remind Asian Americans of their precarious social positioning in the fabric of American social life. Theories of the American racial hierarchy have positioned Asian Americans triangulated between White and Black Americans on the dimensions of relative valorization and civic ostracism (Kim 1999). That is, while Asian Americans are perceived as somewhat more inferior, they are seen as most perpetually foreign. This stereotype of being "competent" while non-American, foreign, and unassimilable is made clear in Zou and Cheryan's (2017) racial positioning model. While Asian Americans do hold multiple privileges in American society that situates them at times close to White Americans on the racial prism (Masuoka and Junn 2013) and in deep recognition it is "anti-Blackness that anchors the racial social order" (Hua and Junn 2022; see also: Kim 2023; Davies 2022), the pandemic has emphasized how racial groups such as Asian Americans can be situated somewhat closer to the top of the American racial hierarchy, yet still maintain a precarious positioning in American socio-political life (Chan and Leung 2024; Chan and Jasso 2022). As Wong and Ramakrishnan (2023) put it, "the "othering" of many Asian Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic has removed their status as honor Whites."

These very macro-level dynamics of surrounding perceptions about the racial hierarchy that Hua and Junn (2022) write about in the context of the pandemic, are crucial for understanding the magnifying relationship between direct experiences with racial discrimination and their activated strength and mobilizing impact on Asian Americans' political participation. I argue that Asian Americans have been reminded about their subordinated, foreign, and still precarious positioning in the wake of the pandemic turning point and throughout undercurrents of anti-Asian hate. It is these conditions and contexts of racial exclusion that make experiences with discrimination on the basis of their racial/ethnic background more poignant and politically salient on their political participation propensity from the pandemic onward for Asian Americans.

The racialization of the pandemic stemming from political elites, which fostered this environment of most recent collective exclusion of Asian Americans, further activated the relationship between direct experiences with racism and political participation of this very community. Social identity theory tells us that people have a natural tendency to think of themselves in terms of collective groups that they may be affiliated with - to help them better understand themselves individually and the world around them (Tajfel 1982; Tajfel et al. 1971; Tajfel 1981). This framework has been important to studying the politics of group attachment among minoritized communities because of persistent marginalization faced because of their racial/ethnic identities (Bilodeau et al. 2023). That is, external threats make identity-related concerns more politically opportune and salient (Huddy 2013; Klandermans 1997; Coser 1998; Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2019).

I argue that in the wake of a once in a generation form of collective racial exclusion against Asian Americans that those in the community who have individually experienced direct forms of racial discrimination are even more likely to participate in a plethora of political activities, thereafter the racialization of the pandemic. This relationship between racial discrimination and Asian American political participation has become magnified in years since the pandemic during times of explicit racial exclusion, relative to times prior. Discrimination has come to be a core factor in mobilizing Asian Americans to become active in politics, especially since the onset of COVID-19, as it is possible that Asian Americans have been reminded of a precarious standing in America's racial hierarchy and additionally have sought out to elevate the status of their group. Collective action in the forms of political participation has become even more so paramount and necessary to change their group's subordinated status (Huddy 2001; Huddy, Mason, and Aaroe 2015; McClain et al. 2011) in order to maintain individuals' sense of self and achieve a decently positive social identity (Mason 2018; Tajfel and Turner 1979). Asian Americans individually experiencing forms of discrimination become even more likely to take action on behalf of others in their racial group who they might be identified with (Klandermans 2014; Simon and Klandermans 2001; Van Zomeren, Postmes, and Spears 2008).

As a response to racial threat, Asian Americans "push-back" against the consequences of negative racialization through becoming more active in politics - rather than making a decision to withdraw from political life (Perez 2015a; Perez 2015b; White 2016; Bowler, Nicholas, and Segura 2006; Barreto and Woods 2006; Klandermans 2003). As mentioned previously, responses to troubleshooting the early goings of the pandemic were quickly politicized. Asian Americans became caught in a crossfire where political elites began to scapegoat the community for the origins and spread of the virus. It makes sense then that the politicized origins of anti-Asian sentiment amidst pandemic more strongly motivate many Asian Americans to seek political solutions in response to this politically rooted environment of racial exclusion.

Politicized origins of racial exclusion created an environment ripe for Asian American mobilization into politics because of direct experiences with racism. In fact, when Asian Americans are asked what their preferred, primary method of solving the rising degree of hate against their communities is, they are most likely to respond saying that they want more, rather than less, government intervention (Chan, Leung, and Collitt 2024). This notion revolving around the activation of racial discrimination on Asian American political participation since the pandemic turning point aligns well with evidence from interdisciplinary fields that note the extent to which discrimination motivated civic activity during COVID-19 (Lee, Tao, and Li 2022; Tran and Hassan 2024; Park et al. 2024; see also: Sadhwani and Kulkarni 2021). The emotions evoked among Asian Americans (Phoenix and Arora 2021), who were dealing with a public health crisis, as well as racial group-specific grievances (Klandermans, Van der Toorn, and Van Stekelenburg 2008) that served as reminders of their alienated, marginalized, and minoritized status (Lin 2020), moved Asian Americans from discontent to seeking government for political solutions during this once in generation time of societal exclusion.

*Evidence of Activation of Racial Discrimination on Contemporary Asian American Political Participation: Analysis from the Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey Waves (2008-2020)*

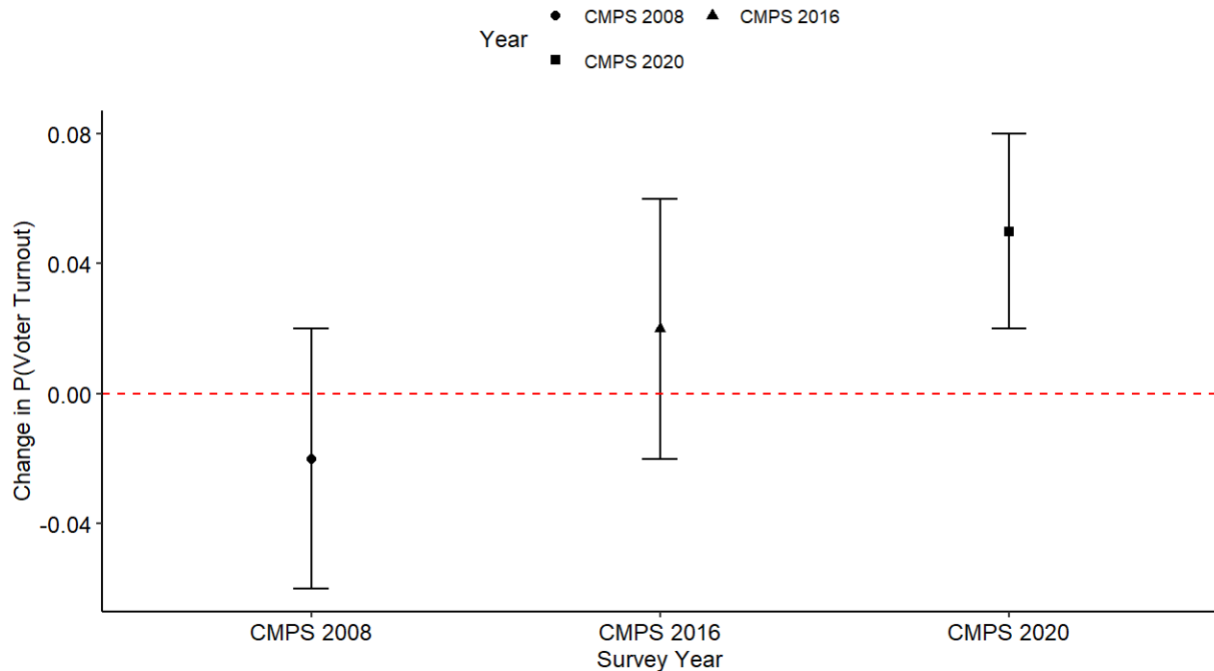
In order to test for the strengthening relationship between direct experiences with racism and participation in various modes of political activities among Asian Americans, our investigation begins with an analysis of three waves of the Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Surveys taken in 2008 (n = 918 Asian Americans), 2016 (n = 3,006 Asian Americans), and 2020 (n = 3,939 Asian Americans). Not only does this over time survey series provide similar over time measures of participation gauged generally within a one-year re-call, retrospective period - descriptives that we analyzed in Chapter 3, but also the CMPS series has consistently asked about individual experiences with racial discrimination as well. This allows us to examine potential for some activation effects of racial discrimination on Asian American political participation before and then after the onset of the pandemic, the latter time period characterized by the explicit racial exclusion of Asian Americans.

The independent variable is measured with the following question: Have you ever been treated unfairly or personally experienced discrimination? Yes or No. Further, in order to isolate that this discrimination was on the basis of race, I utilized an additional follow-up question which asks: In your opinion, were you unfairly treated because of your racial background, ethnicity, or skin color? Respondents that reported experiencing this discrimination were coded 1, while if they did not (including experiencing only discrimination on the basis of gender or sexual orientation, for example - not originated due to individuals' race/ethnicity) were coded 0. I leverage the same political participation measures that I introduced in the previous chapter - activities that range from voting to other electoral forms of action to non-electoral modes of political participation and also analyze the propensity of Asian Americans to run for political office themselves.

Since the political involvement dependent variables are binary, either the respondent participated in said activity in the last year (1) or not (0), I run logistic regression models across these three survey waves between 2008-2020, while controlling for similar set of variables including standard demographics such as age, gender, nativity, education, income, ethnicity (when not disaggregated), and attendance in religious services. I also account for political orientations such as degree of interest in politics, whether or not the respondent was recruited or asked to participate, and strength of affiliation with a political party. Lastly, in regard to other racialization indicators apart from direct experiences with racial discrimination, these logistic regression models control for racial solidarity via feelings of linked fate with other Asian Americans and perceptions of racial discrimination against Asian Americans.

For ease of interpretation, the primary results that are displayed in this chapter are change in predicted probabilities of reporting having participated in a particular political activity, comparing Asian Americans that had ever directly experienced discrimination compared to Asian Americans that have not ever directly experienced racial discrimination. Results from these cross-sectional, over time samples of Asian Americans in the 2008, 2016, and 2020 CMPS will be the first step in allowing us to examine a potentially strengthening of this relationship and determine how this association has possibly changed over different climates, contexts, and politically relevant events.

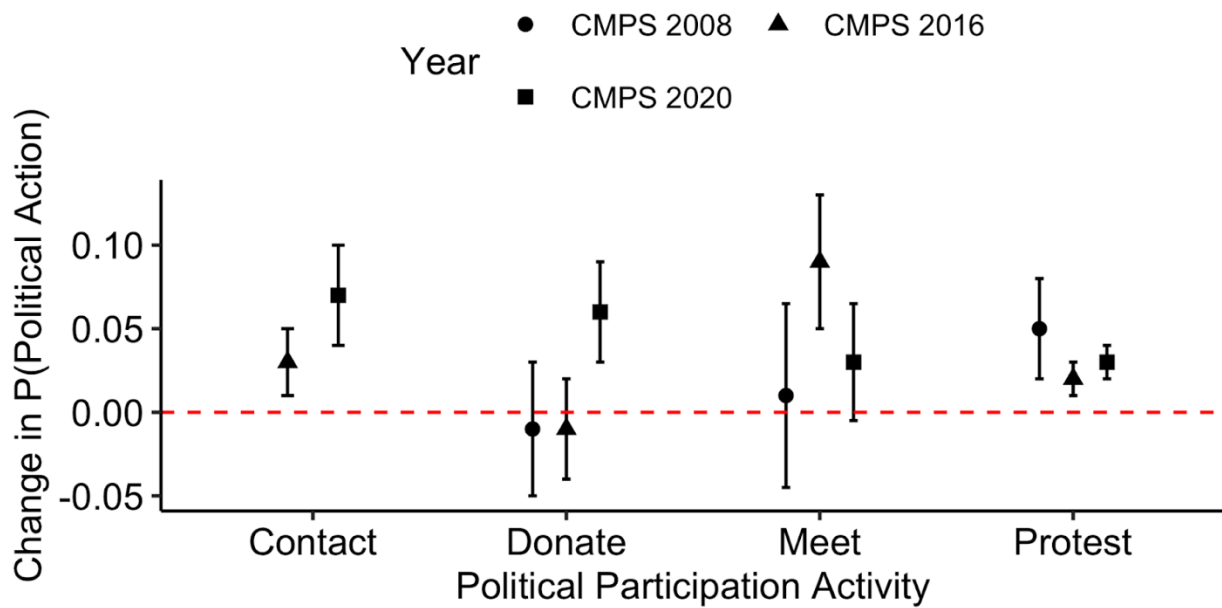
**Figure 1: Impact of Racial Discrimination on Asian American Voter Turnout Across Contexts**



*Note:* Point estimates represent the change in predicted probability of turning out to vote in the 2008, 2016, and 2020 presidential elections comparing Asian Americans that experienced versus did not experience racial discrimination, holding all control variables at their means. 95% confidence intervals.

First, I examine the relationship between direct experiences with racism and having turned out to vote in various past presidential elections. The results demonstrate that experiences with racial discrimination were unrelated to turning out to vote in 2008 and 2016, a result that aligns with previous work on the relationship between discrimination and ballot box-related political activity among Asian Americans (Wong et al. 2011; Rim 2009). However, during the 2020 election cycle, after politicians racialized the pandemic during an era of anti-Asian hate that ensued, I find that these direct experiences with racism began to be positively and statistically significantly associated with voting in 2020. That is, Asian Americans who experienced racial discrimination were about five percentage-points more likely to turnout to vote than Asian Americans who have not directly experienced racial discrimination themselves, after accounting for control variables. This finding on how racial discrimination can motivate voter turnout during times of racial exclusion, underscores the importance of how specific contexts condition this relationship between discrimination and political participation. That is, especially during underlying currents characterized by racial exclusion, voting can become seen as a meaningful, symbolically important and politically urgent act of participation (Valenzuela and Michelson 2016), especially for Asian Americans.

**Figure 2: Impact of Racial Discrimination on Contacting Politicians, Donating to Political Organizations, and Attending Protests Across Contexts Among Asian Americans**



*Note:* Point estimates represent the change in predicted probability of contacting elected officials, donating to political organizations, and attending protests in 2008, 2016, and 2020 comparing Asian Americans that experienced versus did not experience racial discrimination, holding all control variables at their means. 95% confidence intervals.

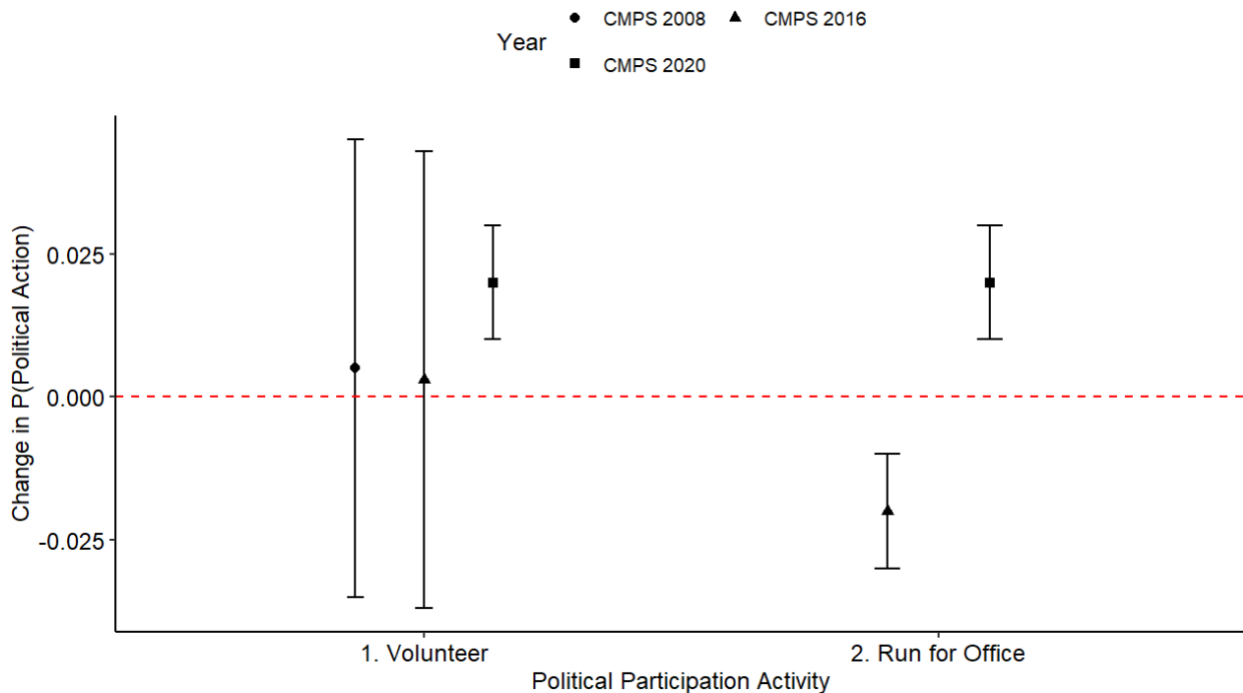
We find further additional evidence of the activation of racial discrimination on Asian American political participation seen in other forms of political participation, apart from voter turnout. The point estimates in Figure 2 again note the change in predicted probability of participating in various modes of political action, comparing Asian Americans that individually experienced racism to Asian Americans that have not experienced racism, accounting for controls across time. As it relates to contacting elected officials about their issues or concerns, I find that there was a positive relationship in 2016, even before the pandemic. However, this relationship strengthened in 2020. That is, Asian Americans who experienced racial discrimination were now even more likely to contact politicians (+7 points), relative to Asian Americans who had never been racially discriminated against.

When considering whether Asian Americans had donated to some kind of political organization or cause, I find that this was not a function of personally experiencing racial discrimination in 2008 and 2016. However, Figure 2 clearly shows that the nature of this relationship changed during times of exclusion. In 2020, Asian Americans who directly experienced racism began to become more likely to contribute donations to political organizations by about six-percentage points, relative to Asian Americans who had not experienced racial discrimination. The association between racial discrimination and contributing to political causes was not present until the racialization of COVID-19 in the era of anti-Asian hate.

We turn to analysis regarding whether Asian Americans had participated in protests or rallies, also displayed in Figure 2. The results demonstrate that, regardless of time or context, that Asian Americans' direct experiences with racial discrimination are positively associated with taking part in unconventional political activities such as protesting. Experiences with discrimination seem to mobilize protest behavior consistently by around four to five percentage points; this was the case before and after the onset of the coronavirus.

Figure 3 presents the results for our last set of political participation dependent variables, for now, and again demonstrates evidence for the activation of racial discrimination on political participation among Asian Americans during explicitly exclusionary times. While there was no relationship between volunteering for political campaigns during the 2008 and 2016 election cycle, there became a positive and statistically significant association in 2020. That is, Asian Americans who had experienced any form of racial discrimination personally were about three-points more likely to volunteer for a political campaign, compared to Asian Americans that had not experienced any form of racism directly, holding all control variables at their means.

**Figure 3: Impact of Racial Discrimination on Participating in Political Campaigns and Running for Political Office Across Various Contexts**

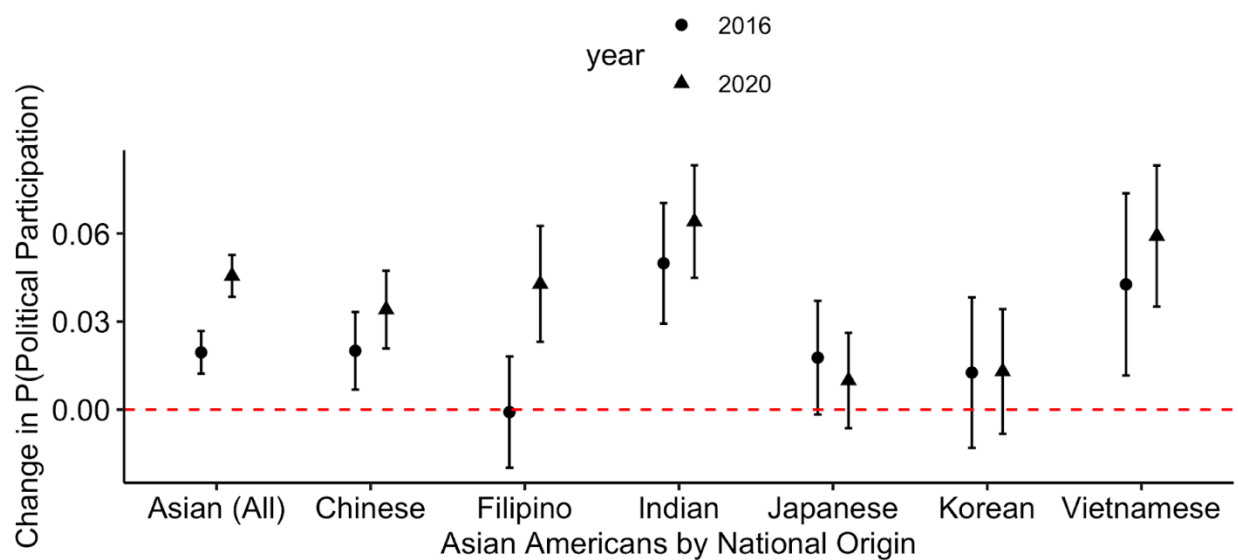


*Note:* Point estimates represent the change in predicted probability of volunteering for others' political campaigns and running their own political campaign across context, comparing Asian Americans that experienced versus did not experience racial discrimination, holding all control variables at their means. 95% confidence intervals.

We also find evidence of activation in the realm of the decision to run for political office themselves. In 2016, Asian Americans who experienced racial discrimination were about 2.5-percentage points less likely to indicate willingness to run for political office. However, the nature of this relationship shifted in 2020. Asian Americans who experienced racial discrimination,

during an exclusionary time characterized by underlying anti-Asian sentiment, were instead about 2.5-percentage points more likely to now say that they had thought about running for political office. Prior to the racialization of the pandemic, discrimination might have signaled to Asian Americans that pursuing politics on the elite-level was not for them. However, in light of this exclusionary environment, Asian Americans began to further seek political solutions to racial discrimination (Chan, Leung, and Collitt 2024). Asian Americans invested in politics and deepened their political involvement, rather than withdrawing from political life - even considering their own runs for political office.

**Figure 4: Impact of Racial Discrimination on Political Participation Index Participating Across Different Contexts by Asian Americans' National Origin**



*Note:* Point estimates represent estimated coefficients of participating in an index of five political activities, comparing Asian Americans that experienced versus did not experience racial discrimination, accounting for control variables - analysis conducted across national origin. Standard errors are displayed.

It is important that we examine how experiences with racial discrimination have impacted political participation among Asian Americans across national origin. This is especially because recent work has noted the political effects of discrimination can depend on national origin (Kim 2024), and with recognition that different Asian Americans groups - such as South Asians might experience different processes of racialization and may make distinct choices of who falls within or outside the umbrella of who counts as Asian (Lee and Ramakrishnan 2019; Goh and McCue 2021). Differences in who is externally seen as Asian American, especially when discussing about anti-Asian hate, could manifest in potential differences in the relationship between experiences with racial discrimination during the COVID-19 and political participation among Asian Americans across national origin.

To get a clearer picture of this, Figure 4 displays the predicted change in probability of participating in non-voting political activities, an additive index of the same political activities we

examined just previously, comparing Asian Americans who experienced racial discrimination, relative to those who have not - holding all control variables at their means, across national origin, and before and after the onset of the pandemic.

As previously noted, overall, as a pan-ethnic community, Asian Americans' direct experiences with racism have mobilized political activism more consistently after COVID-19 than prior. Further, we find evidence that experiences with racial discrimination have become more strongly associated with political participation after the onset of the pandemic in 2020 for many Asian American groups inclusive of those with East, Southeast, and South Asian heritage. For example, while this relationship was statistically insignificant in 2016 among Chinese Americans, racial discrimination has come to motivate higher levels of political participation post-2020.

We observe the activation of this relationship between experiences with racial discrimination and political activism strongest actually among those outside of East Asian groups. We find an interaction based on year/context in the association between experiences with racism and political participation among Filipino and Indian Americans. This mobilization originating from discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, or skin color substantively magnified at the onset of COVID-19. We see some suggestive evidence of the strengthening of this relationship among Vietnamese Americans and to an extent Korean Americans. This is while the positive association did not change much from 2016 to 2020 among Japanese Americans.

Despite some heterogeneity, our results demonstrate that the political effects of racial discrimination carry across Asian Americans' national origin. The political impact of this anti-Asian hate crossed national origin boundaries and was a moment that had implications for the pan-ethnic Asian American community.

### *Conclusion*

I have argued that we need to situate our understanding of contemporary Asian American political participation within a framework guided by important political contexts that are defined by often simultaneous axes of racial exclusion and signs of racial inclusion. In this chapter, we took on the first axis of racial exclusion. Especially in light of the environment of anti-Asian hate since the racialization of the pandemic brought on by our very own politicians, here I elaborated on the first major factor that I argue must be taken into account in order to have a fuller understanding of contemporary Asian American political participation. Drawing from work in social identity theory and theories revolving the racial triangulation and positioning of Asian Americans, especially considering the environment characterized by anti-Asian sentiment pandemic, Asian Americans' direct experiences with racial discrimination have come to mobilize the community, even more so, to become active in the political life.

Analyzing surveys of Asian Americans across time and decades, I find that while experiences with direct forms of racial discrimination had limited impacts on motivating Asian Americans to get involved with most modes of political participation activities, that at the turning point during the pandemic, experiences with racism began to more strongly and consistently mobilize Asian Americans to become more participatory in politics. This involvement ranged from increasing Asian Americans' propensity to participate by voting in elections to calling their

representatives about their concerns to volunteering for political campaigns, to even inspiring them to one day even think about running for political office themselves. The relationship between racial discrimination and political participation holds for Asian Americans across many national origin communities.

In the next chapter, we consider the persisting effects of racial discrimination on Asian American political participation. While moments of anti-Asian hate are still residual and contexts of racial exclusion still persist years later, this exclusionary environment is not as explicit, especially as the spread of the coronavirus is far from rampant now. Years after the onset of the pandemic, do experiences with racism still have the power to mobilize Asian Americans to get involved in politics? We take on the task of finding this out next.

## Asian American Political Participation During Times of Racial Exclusion and Amidst Signs of Inclusion

Excerpts from Chapter 5

The Effects of Racial Discrimination and Political Participation Years After the COVID-19 Era

### *Introduction*

Recognizing the importance of context in structuring the factors that matter for shaping political behavior is at the core of this book. In the previous chapter, we showed that experiences with racial discrimination became a uniquely strong indicator of Asian Americans especially at the onset of the pandemic, relative to times that were less explicitly racially exclusionary before. With attention to context, years later, after cases of the coronavirus stopped surging, now that the public health crisis has subsided and that we have a handle on pandemic-related issues, now that social distancing is a policy of the past, and now that hate against Asian Americans is not as spotlighted, to what extent does racial discrimination still matter for shaping that racial group's involvement in political activities?

We have several options to consider. One possibility is that the relationship between racial discrimination and political participation among Asian Americans has also subsided along with the pandemic and lesser degrees of anti-Asian hate. Another possibility is that the relationship has remained stable - that this once in a generation of racial exclusion during the pandemic has more so solidified the relationship between experiences with racism and Asian American political participation.

Racialized events that structure the factors that shape mass political behavior do not subside easily. Tesler (2016) noted the importance of a landmark event such as the election of our first Black president, President Barack Obama. This election racialized public opinion, meaning that attitudes about race became uniquely powerful in predicting how the public developed their own political preferences. Further, he speculated that the power of racial attitudes would not subside in shaping public opinion, and this was confirmed looking several elections out since he wrote his

book. We are certainly living in a political world centered around attitudes about race, years since Obama has actually stepped out of office. That is identity-related issues, including racial resentment, powerfully shaped the outcome of the how the public voted during the 2020 election (Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2019), and these race-related considerations have still come to shape mass political behavior today (Sides and Tesler 2025).

We noted that racialized events, such as the once in a generation racial othering, have brought to light a key mobilizing factor that has come to shape Asian American political participation during the coronavirus pandemic. However, we have reason to suspect that racialized events in American politics have the capacity to make racialized considerations remain politically salient even after these racialized moments have passed. We take on the possibility in this chapter even through pandemic recovery and through institutional and administrative changes that issues related to racial discrimination still have salience on the political participation of Asian Americans years after the explicit times of racial exclusion during the anti-Asian hate era.

We will take on investigating the political persistence of racial discrimination and Asian American political participation with a series of experiments and contemporary survey data well-passed the exclusionary pandemic period that will demonstrate some evidence that discrimination is still salient for the political behavior of Asian Americans. I will walk through a series of studies that demonstrate this sequentially of when the data was collected.

*Experimental Reminders of Racial Discrimination and Intention to Participate in Political Activities Years After COVID-19 in the Lead up to the 2024 Presidential Election*

The over time cross-sectional results from the Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey series from 2008-2020 demonstrates that in most cases, there has been a strengthening of mobilization to political participation on the basis of direct experiences with discrimination among Asian Americans, especially at the turning point of COVID-19. I investigate if these moments of collective othering still matter in the context of 2024, four years since the onset of the pandemic. In 2024, cases of the coronavirus were down and while the virus can still spread, hospitalizations and deaths were nowhere near what they were at the height of the pandemic. Further, while exclusion because of racialization of the pandemic has not completely subsided and remains an issue, this is certainly not as heightened as it was at the start of COVID-19 in 2020 (Tang and Sanders 2023; Chan, Leung, and Collitt 2024; STOP AAPI Hate 2025). This presents us with the opportunity to investigate whether issues of racial discrimination still matter for shaping the political participation of Asian Americans many years after the pandemic.

To this aim, I fielded a survey experiment that evaluated the possibility that reminders and information about racial discrimination related to the racialization of COVID-19 can still spur on the intention to participate in various political activities among Asian Americans. This follows some research on the impact of historical memories on institutionalized exclusion on Asian American public opinion by Kraus and Vinlaun (2023) - who identified the politically persisting effects of memories about Japanese American incarceration during World War II.

In September 2024, a couple of months before the general election, I fielded an experiment with about 801 Asian American respondents on an online platform called Connect powered by

CloudResearch. Connect is CloudResearch's premier platform for direct survey recruitment online. Direct recruitment, without external third parties, best ensures that only those who provide high-quality data participate in survey-related tasks. Asian American adults, over 18 years of age, were compensated after completing the study, which averaged about 6.5 minutes in length.

With online research platforms that gather research subjects online, there comes challenges regarding data quality and attentiveness of respondents. To protect data quality, Connect (CloudResearch) screens and continuously vets participants regularly. Participants undergo technical and behavioral checks from the moment they sign-up on this platform. Their IP addresses, payment details, and devices are vetted. No participants are thus allowed to have multiple accounts, and no devices can be used for multiple accounts on the same project. Behaviorally, respondents are only allowed into the Connect system until after ongoing attention, honesty, language, and adherence to instruction assessments. In order to prevent the infiltration of fraudulent responses and bots, human judgment and automation checks are also done each month. Connect, powered by CloudResearch, has been demonstrated to strike a balance of response quality, professionalism of survey respondents, and representativeness to the population (Stagnaro et al. 2024).

Table 1 displays an ordering of tasks for the Asian American respondents that completed the experimental study. First, Asian Americans all responded to standard demographic questions to determine eligibility in the study. Following this, Asian Americans were randomly assigned into one of two experimental conditions. 391 were randomly assigned into the Discrimination Treatment Group, and 389 were randomly assigned into the Control Group.

I will start by describing the Discrimination Treatment Group. The goal was to see whether informing Asian Americans about the discrimination experienced by their racial community since the start of the coronavirus pandemic would influence them to participate in various political activities thereafter. Therefore, I developed primes ranging from information about racially-charged rhetoric that elected officials used and continue to use in 2024 as well as primes about anti-Asian hate that were displayed in various manners to Asian Americans in the treatment condition.

**Table 1: Experimental Procedure for Discrimination Study**

Task Order	DISCRIMINATION TREATMENT GROUP (n=391)	CONTROL GROUP (n=389)
1	Demographics	Demographics
2	Reminder Prime A: Memories of the "China Virus" Rhetoric	Dependent Variables: Political Participation Intention Questions and Behavioral Activities
3	Reminder Prime B: "China Virus" Rhetoric and Aftermath of Anti-Asian Hate	Reminder Prime A
4	Reminder Prime C: Current Rhetoric surrounding the "China Virus" in 2024 Presidential Campaign	Reminder Prime B
5	Dependent Variables: Political Participation Intention Questions and Behavioral Activities	Reminder Prime C

In the treatment condition, Discrimination Prime A was created as a subtle reminder to the rhetoric that politicians used that led to the rise of anti-Asian sentiment in the first place at the start of the pandemic. Asian Americans answered the following question: When the pandemic began in 2020, politicians began to call COVID-19 the “China Virus” or “Kung Flu.” How much have you heard about politicians referring to the pandemic as the “China Virus” or “Kung Flu.” Response options included: A lot; Some; A little; or Nothing. The intention of asking respondents to simply answer this question was to prime them to begin thinking back to the roots of the contemporary rise in discrimination against Asian Americans surrounding the pandemic.

Discrimination Prime B then moved forward in the historical timeline by asking the following question to Asian American respondents: After politicians referred to the pandemic as the “Kung Flu” and “China Virus,” how many hate incidents against Asian Americans were then reported from 2020 to 2022? There were four options for respondents to choose between: 5,500; 7,500; 9,500; or 11,500. Expanding on Thompsen’s (2024) experiment about Asian Americans, I prompted respondents to receive various information based on which response option they chose at the time. 11,500 was, indeed, the correct answer. If respondents chose 11,500 hate incidents, they received a transition that displayed as: That’s correct. According to the organization, STOP AAPI Hate, there was a large spike in 11,500 anti-Asian hate acts. However, if the respondents chose 5,500; 7,500; or 9,500, Asian American respondents in the treatment condition received information that corrected them: Not quite. According to the organization, STOP AAPI Hate, there was a large spike in 11,500 anti-Asian hate acts. They received this corrected information as a transition before proceeding.

Discrimination Prime C moved the respondent to think, not just about past discrimination, but continued issues related to discrimination in 2024 - particularly surrounding the current rhetoric of the “China Virus” that is still used today. Asian Americans in the treatment were asked: Do you think that politicians are still referring to COVID-19 as the “China Virus” today, during

the 2024 Presidential Election season? Yes or No. Similar to Discrimination Prime B, depending on their answers, respondents received different bits of information. For example, if the respondent chose Yes, they received a prompt saying: That's correct. However, if they answered No, they received a prompt saying: Not quite. In fact, politicians continue to use the term "China Virus" during campaign events. While I did not want to draw attention to Donald Trump specifically, the prime was realistically created in the aftermath of the 2024 Republican National Convention when Trump specifically used his platform when accepting the Republican Party presidential nomination, to repeatedly reference again COVID-19 as the "China Virus."

Only after these three treatment questions that walked respondents through the origins of pandemic-related discrimination to the present forms of racialized rhetoric and racism that linger years after the onset of COVID-19 were Asian Americans randomly assigned to the treatment condition invited to answer several questions that gauged their likelihood to participate in various forms of political actions. These questions ranged from asking respondents about their future intent in participating in political activities to more direct forms of measuring behavioral intention, which I describe more in the results section.

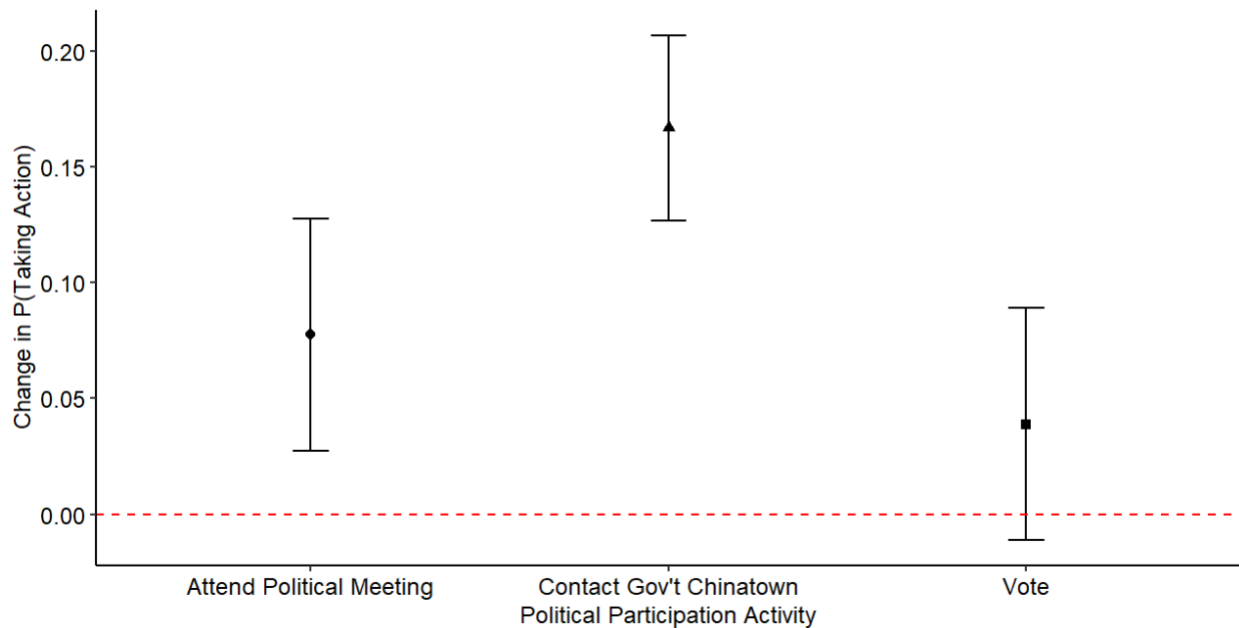
The control group, on the other hand, was sequenced differently. Asian Americans that were randomly placed into the control group answered the political participation intention measures first and then followed these behavioral questions by also receiving identical discrimination and racism against Asian American primes. However, because of the ordering of the condition, the discrimination and racism primes could not affect how Asian Americans in the control group indicate how they might participate in future political participation activities that were already previously measured.

Figure 1 displays the results from difference in means tests, comparing the political participation propensity of Asian American respondents randomly assigned to the discrimination treatment, relative to Asian Americans randomly assigned to the control condition. A positive difference in means represents Asian Americans in the treatment being more likely to indicate future participation, while negative difference in means represent that Asian Americans in the treatment were less likely to say they would participate in said activity in the future, compared to the control.

Turning again to Figure 1, the right-most panel, represents the results where I asked respondents about voting in the, at that time, upcoming 2024 General Election: This year a lot of people are saying that they will NOT vote in the upcoming election because they will be too busy, are not that interested in politics, do not like their choices, or are not registered to vote to begin with. How about you? How likely are you to vote in the upcoming General Election in November 2024? Respondents were given options to report 0% all the way to 100% chance of voting in the upcoming election. I found that while the mean likelihood of turning out to vote in the control group was 74%, 78% of the discrimination treatment group intended to turnout to vote in the upcoming general election. This four percentage-point difference was approaching statistical significance,  $p = 0.12$ . This finding that the discrimination treatment somewhat increased voter turnout propensity, relative to the control is notable, given the high baselines to intend to turn out to vote in the experiment already. The experimental results align with the finding that

discrimination has mobilized even electoral forms of political participation such as voter turnout, even four years since the onset of the pandemic.

**Figure 1: Discrimination Treatment Effects on Electoral Forms of Political Participation**



*Note:* Point estimates represent differences in means of participating in political activity, comparing Asian Americans in the discrimination treatment group, relative to the control group. 95% confidence intervals.

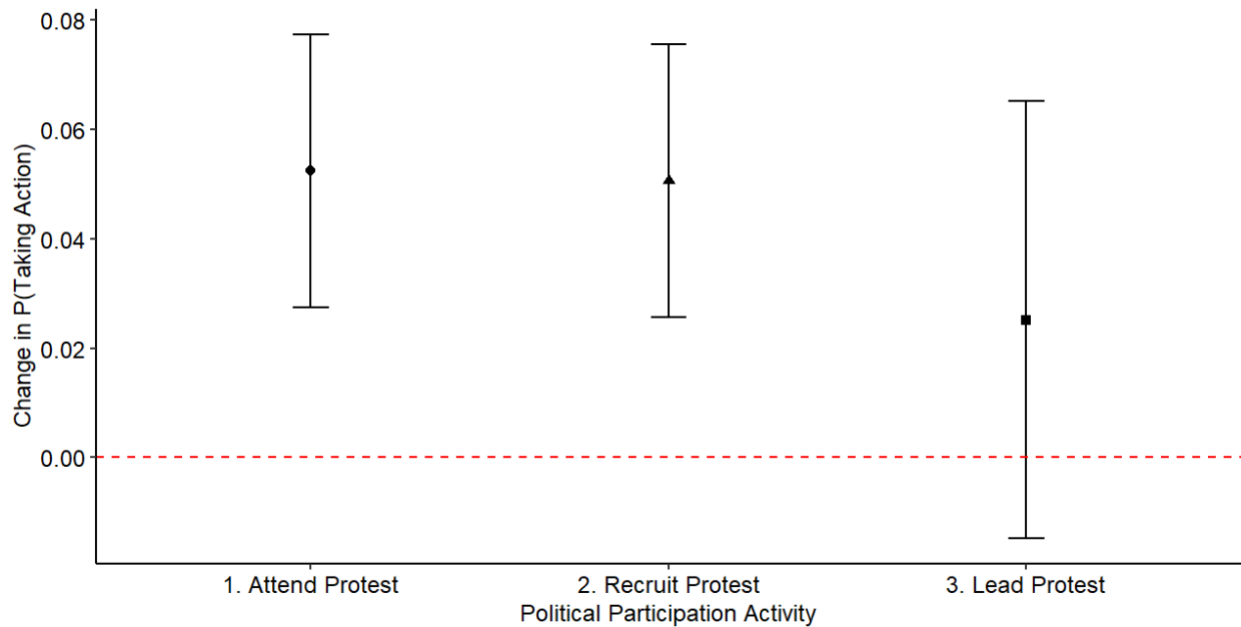
Next, I wanted to gauge other forms of conventional political actions. After random assignment into a treatment or a control - I asked respondents a question about future attendance in political meetings: In the next year, how likely is it that you attend a meeting online or in-person to discuss issues facing your community? The response options ranged from Very likely (1), Somewhat likely (0.75), Neither (0.5), Somewhat unlikely (0.25), or Very unlikely (0). While 29% of the control group indicated future likelihood to attend a political meeting, the discrimination treatment group was about eight-points (37%) significantly more likely to say they would attend a meeting to discuss issues facing their communities.

In a more tangible participation outcome of the experiment, I thought about an actual ongoing issue that is facing some Asian American communities - especially as it relates to the preservation, funding, and development of ethnic enclaves, places of inclusion that are mentioned in Chapter 2. I asked respondents: In the next year, how likely is it that you contact an elected representative or government official, in any way, to pause land development in order to keep Chinatowns open across The United States? I found that the treatment group primed to think about ongoing discrimination against Asian Americans were 17 percentage-points more likely to indicate that they would call their elected officials about this issue of preservation of ethnic communities such as Chinatowns than the control group. In addition to voting, the results suggest that reminders of discrimination have downstream effects on conventional and electoral modes of political participation, especially as it relates to participating in issues that Asian Americans may have a particular stake in.

While my previous cross-sectional over time results indicate that discrimination had a positive association with participating in protests and rallies, results that align with (Wong et al. 2011 and Rim 2009), I wanted to continue to interrogate this relationship and move research in this area forward in several ways. First, in my experiment, I wanted to gauge the propensity of participation in specific types of protests of interest to the Asian American community. Further, I wanted to investigate more into the different ways one can participate in protests. Cross-sectional survey measures often solely gauge attendance in rallies or protests. However, there are other ways to participate that are protest-related that can indicate various depths of political involvement. That is, discrimination might already have been associated with simply attending protests. Yet, there are other intensities of protest behavior that have not been gauged, in terms of discrimination-related influences - especially since the onset of the pandemic.

I started by asking: In the next year, how likely are you to simply attend a protest or rally addressing the continued racial discrimination against Asian Americans? The response options continue to range from Very likely to Very unlikely. I find that while 29% of Asian Americans in the control group indicated willingness to go to this protest, Asian Americans randomly assigned to the discrimination treatment condition were about six percentage-points more likely to report wanting to attend this anti-Asian hate protest in the next year.

**Figure 2: Discrimination Treatment Effects on Different Elements of Asian American Protest Behavior**



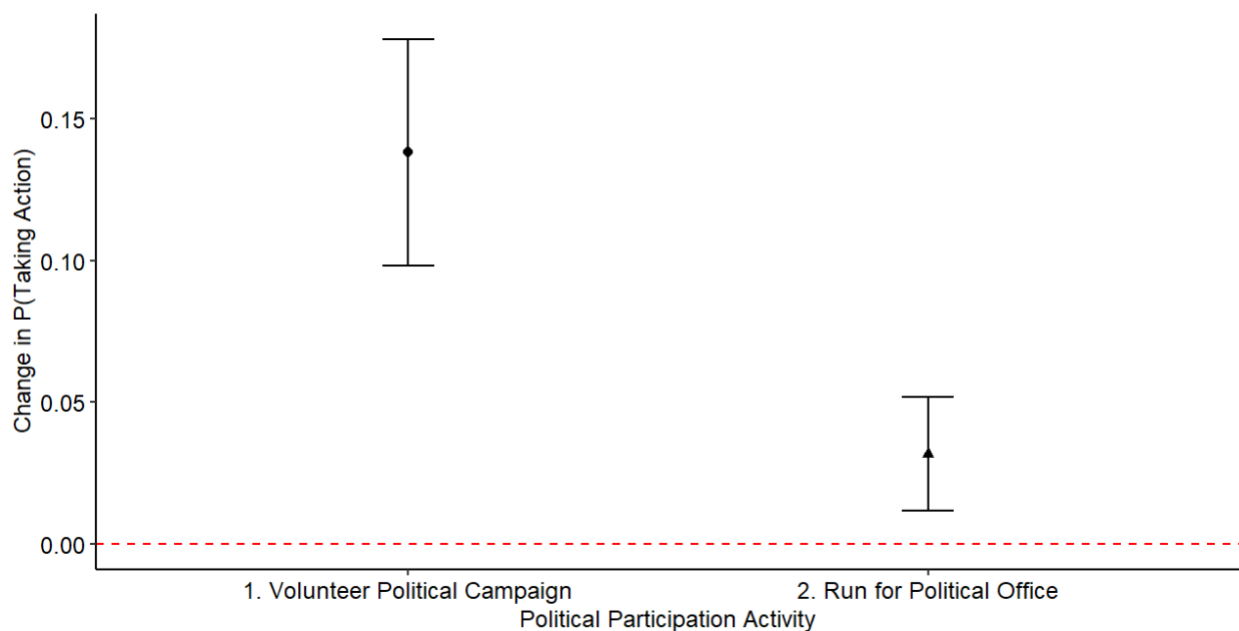
*Note:* Point estimates represent differences in means of participating in political activity, comparing Asian Americans in the discrimination treatment group, relative to the control group. 95% confidence intervals.

In a further test, I asked Asian American respondents about their willingness to invite others to this protest: How likely is it that you would bring any friends or family members to this protest or rally addressing the continued discrimination of Asian Americans? While the baseline

to bring friends or family to this protest was lower, I still found that Asian Americans in the discrimination treatment (30%) were about five percentage-points more likely to say that they would addition bring their family members or a friend to this protest addressing issues pertinent to the Asian American community, relative to the control group (25%).

There are yet further ways to get involved more intensively, such as offering to organize the protest itself. Therefore, in a last measure of protest behavior I asked: In the next year, would you be interested in being a member of a team that organizes an anti-Asian hate rally? Yes (1) or No (0). I found that 17% in the control group indicated that they would want to be on this protest leadership organizing team, while only a slightly higher proportion, 19%, in the discrimination treatment said they would do the same ( $p = 0.37$ ). The experimental results here indicate that while discrimination-related influences might increase participation in protests and motivate Asian Americans to even bring family and friends to these anti-Asian hate rallies, that there are also limits to the mobilization effects of discrimination into more organizationally intensive modes of protest behavior.

**Figure 3: Discrimination Treatment Effects on Asian American Political Campaign Activity**

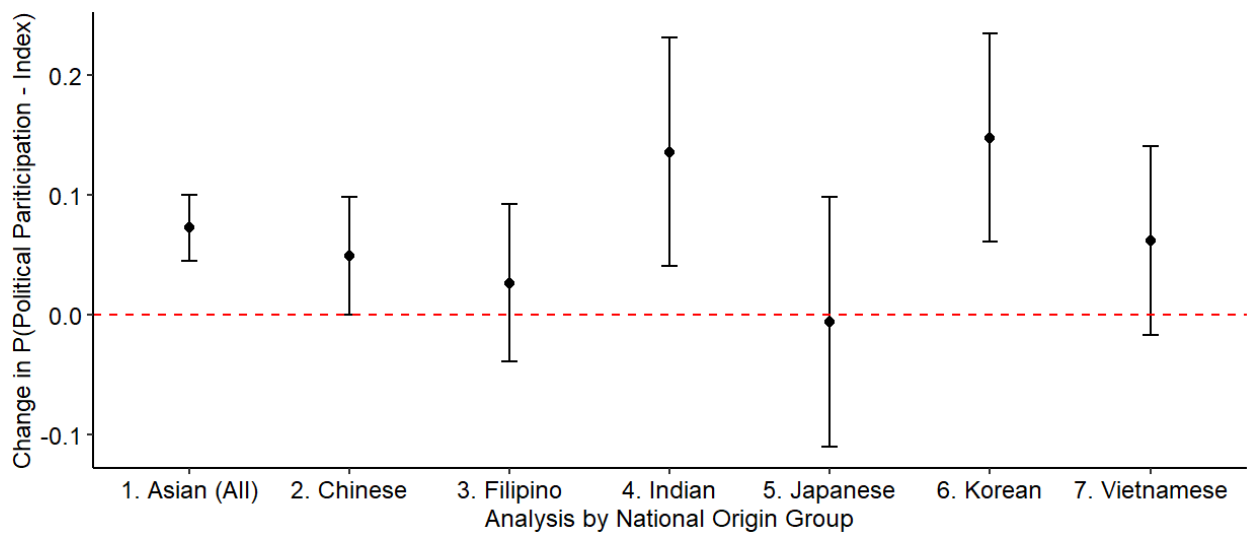


*Note:* Point estimates represent differences in means of participating in political activity, comparing Asian Americans in the discrimination treatment group, relative to the control group. 95% confidence intervals.

As a final outcome, I wanted to measure how willing Asian Americans might be to volunteer for political campaigns, given the - at the time - looming election season. I found that Asian Americans in the discrimination treatment were far more likely to indicate that they would volunteer or work for a candidate, political party, or some other campaign organization in the next year, compared to Asian Americans who were randomly assigned to the control by about 14 percentage-points. In a test to see if the experimental results might match the cross-sectional results on the relationship between discrimination and running for political office, I lastly asked a political

ambition question at the end of this study as well: In the future, how likely is it that you will ever run for political office? I found that while the propensity of Asian Americans seeking political office was relatively low in the control baseline (5%), that Asian Americans in the discrimination treatment condition were about three-points more likely to report that they wanted to run for political office themselves (8%). The results indicate that discrimination-related influences, even five years since the pandemic, have wide-reaching impacts on various modes of political participation. This ranges from voting to other forms of electoral participation, to different protest-related behaviors, to even a desire to volunteer for existing campaigns and running for political office themselves.

**Figure 4: Discrimination Treatment Effects on Political Participation Index by National Origin**



*Note:* Point estimates represent differences in means of index of political participation, comparing Asian Americans in the discrimination treatment group, relative to the control group. 95% confidence intervals. Results are disaggregated by national origin.

Lastly, in a test of whether responses to reminders of racial discrimination about COVID-19 were felt pan-ethnically, we examined treatment effects across Asian Americans' national origin. When examining an index of political actions, identical to the ones that were individually analyzed as outcomes in the behavioral experiment, we find evidence that most Asian American groups, despite differences in national origin across East, South, and to an extent Southeast Asia, responded with greater willingness to participate in political activities. Indian Americans were most willing to participate in political activities after priming them to think about pan-ethnic discrimination against Asian Americans. The mobilization effect was also strong among Korean Americans. Chinese Americans in the discrimination treatment were also substantively more likely to report willingness to participate in political activism, relative to Chinese Americans randomly assigned to the control. There was a positive effect among Vietnamese Americans, albeit it a finding that does not reach conventional statistical significance; the same was the case for Filipino Americans.

Nonetheless, the results from the experiment complement the findings from the cross-sectional over time survey. Reminders of racial discrimination surrounding the COVID-19 crisis can mobilize present day political activism among Asian Americans - not just Chinese Americans - but can be politically meaningful for Asian Americans across the national origin divide.

*Experiences with Racial Discrimination and Asian American Political Participation in the Aftermath of the 2024 Presidential Election*

In the aftermath of the 2024 election, we now test how experiences with racial discrimination shaped whether Asian Americans actually participated in various types of political activities. We analyze this relationship with the most recent wave of the 2024 Collaborative Multiracial Election Survey. While we found that in 2020, experiences with racial discrimination mobilized voting among Asian Americans, this relationship was no longer apparent four years after the racialization of the pandemic. This finding also aligns with our experimental results, that reminders about COVID-19-related discrimination did not sufficiently mobilize Asian Americans to participate at the ballot box.

However, we do find that experiences with racial discrimination were related to a modest increase in political participation apart from voting in 2024. This means that the positive impact of racial discrimination on Asian American political participation remains salient even years after the onset of the pandemic. Asian Americans see political avenues to respond to racial discrimination, just activities not solely at the ballot box.

**TABLE 2: Experiences with Racial Discrimination and Asian American Political Participation in 2024**

		<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
		Political Participation	
		Voter Turnout in 2024 Election <i>logistic</i>	Non-Voting Modes of Political Participation <i>OLS</i>
Experienced Discrimination	Racial	-0.321 (0.310)	0.028*** (0.010)
Perceived Discrimination	Racial	0.161 (0.467)	0.036** (0.015)
Linked Fate		0.113 (0.479)	0.051*** (0.015)
Interest		2.532*** (0.434)	0.095*** (0.014)
Party Strength		1.046***	0.043***

	(0.308)	(0.010)
Recruitment	-0.201	0.066***
	(0.235)	(0.008)
Age	2.254***	-0.164***
	(0.848)	(0.007)
Woman	0.078	-0.025***
	(0.231)	(0.007)
Income	0.521	-0.043***
	(0.429)	(0.014)
Born Outside of U.S.	-0.152	-0.029***
	(0.256)	(0.008)
Religious Attendance	0.169	-0.109***
	(0.332)	(0.010)
Education	0.814	0.050***
	(0.527)	(0.016)
Filipino	0.205	-0.005
	(0.373)	(0.011)
Indian	0.171	0.028**
	(0.385)	(0.012)
Japanese	0.397	0.038**
	(0.632)	(0.017)
Korean	-0.004	-0.037***
	(0.474)	(0.014)
Vietnamese	0.041	0.002
	(0.395)	(0.013)
Taiwanese	-0.225	-0.001
	(0.786)	(0.027)
Other	-0.201	0.030
	(0.411)	(0.014)**
Constant	-2.543***	0.117
	(0.739)	(0.022)***

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Observations	2,522	3,103
R <sup>2</sup>		0.169
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>		0.164
Log Likelihood	-63.563	
Akaike Inf. Crit.	167.126	
Residual Std. Error		0.101 (df = 3083)
F Statistic		33.07... (df = 19; 3083)

*Note:* Logistic or OLS regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. \*p<0.1, \*\*p<0.05, \*\*\*p<0.01.

With attention to heterogeneity, we further disaggregated these results by national origin. The point estimate in Figure 5 represents the change in predicted probability of taking political action, comparing Asian Americans that actually experienced racial discrimination to Asian Americans who had not experienced racial discrimination, after accounting for control variables in Table 2. We find clear evidence that in 2024, racial discrimination had no positive impact on voter turnout among Asian Americans across the national origin divide. Asian Americans, as a whole, were mobilized to participate in alternative modes of political action due to racial discrimination. However, the relationship between having experienced racial discrimination and non-voting political participation was especially driven by Filipino and Vietnamese Americans.

In a contemporary test of discrimination and political participation among Asian Americans, we tested whether experimental reminders of discriminatory experiences during COVID-19 had the capacity to shape future engagement in politics among Asian Americans. We found that these reminders about discrimination and anti-Asian hate during the pandemic mobilized intended engagement in a variety of political activities among Asian Americans - even four years after the pandemic in 2024. Cross-sectional evidence collected and analyzed after the 2024 election cycle suggests that the political salience of racial discrimination has persisted when it comes to political activities apart from voting among Asian Americans but had no impact on voter turnout in the most recent presidential election. This is even though this relationship between experiences with racial discrimination and political participation, although still mobilizing Asian Americans overall, is less consistently felt across national origin groups.

*The Persistence in Salience of Racial Discrimination on Political Participation in Most Recent Times: The Case of Chinese Americans*

Examining a case study of Chinese Americans is especially useful for evaluating whether the political salience of racial discrimination on political participation persisted beyond the height of the pandemic through the present day. This is because Chinese Americans occupied a distinct position in the racialization of COVID-19. Even though anti-Asian hostility had consequences for Asian Americans across the national origin divide and these experiences with racism were impactful across national origin as we demonstrated in Chapter 4, after all, rhetoric from political elites labeled the coronavirus the “China Virus” and directly tied the origins of the pandemic to China. This made Chinese Americans especially vulnerable to anti-Asian hate and to explicit racial exclusion during the time of the pandemic. Examining this case allows us an opportunity to

examine if the political participation impacts from racial discrimination endured across Chinese Americans who likely sat in the center of the processes of racial exclusion or if it was only a short-term reaction to political participation during the pandemic.

### *The State of Chinese American Surveys 2024 and 2025*

Centralizing attention to Chinese Americans that have experienced a disproportionate amount of racism since the racialization of the coronavirus pandemic (McGarity-Palmer et al. 2024), I partnered with a non-profit and non-partisan organization called Committee for 100 to gauge Chinese Americans on issues related to civic engagement and political affairs. As a co-Principal Investigator, worked with their administrative team to develop a series of questions about their experiences with racial discrimination and political participation, with the aim of knowing more about how this relationship manifests specifically among Chinese Americans.

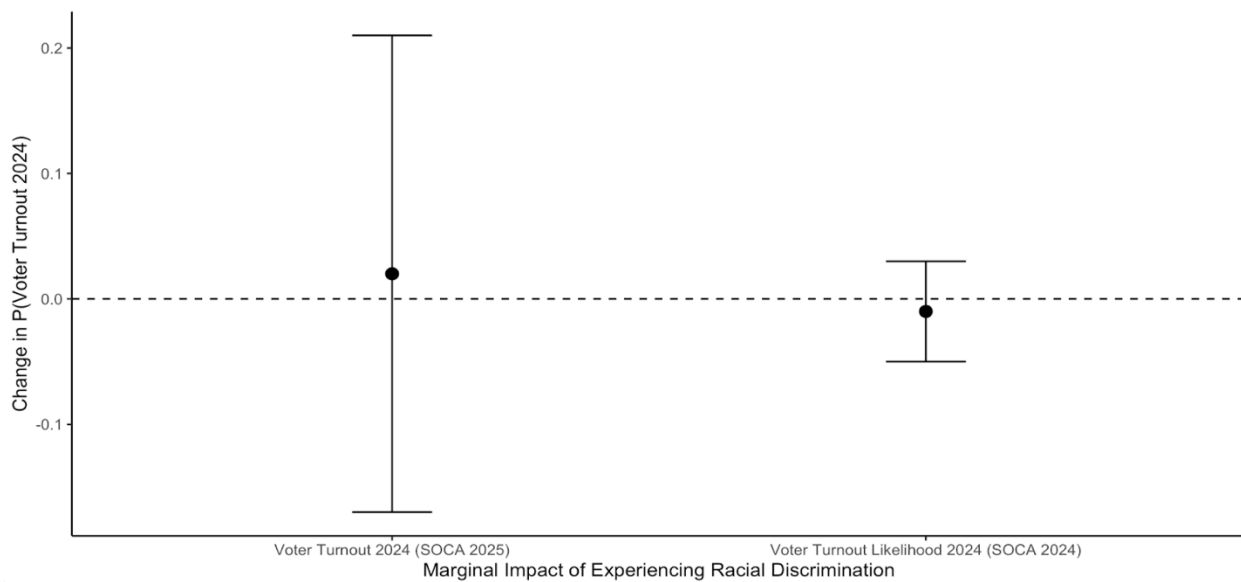
Together, we fielded two original surveys with the help of the public opinion polling firm, NORC (National Opinion Research Center) hosted at the University of Chicago. The State of Chinese Americans (SOCA) 2024 survey was completed between February 29, 2024, to March 26, 2024, (n=1,001 Chinese Americans) and the 2025 survey was completed between May 19, 2025, to June 29, 2025, (n=642 Chinese Americans). It was at this time that NORC was developing their Amplify AAPI Panel, where we recruited Chinese American respondents from this probability-based panel and then supplemented samples from Prodege Panels, which is a non-probability-based panel. The purpose of these studies was to gain as close to a nationally representative sample of Chinese Americans as possible. Surveys were available online or over the telephone by a live interviewer and offered in English or Chinese (both Simplified and Traditional Chinese). The data analysis presented here is weighted by age, gender, region, education, nativity, and age and gender based on benchmarks that were obtained from the American Community Survey (ACS) 2022 5-Year Data.

On both the 2024 and 2025 SOCA, we asked a series of questions to Chinese Americans that gauged their experiences with racial discrimination as follows: “We are interested in the ways you have been treated in your day-to-day encounters in the United States. In an average month, do any of the following things happen to you? Have you been called names or insulted? Have you been threatened or harassed? Have people intentionally mispronounced your name? Have you been spit or coughed on? Have people mocked or made offensive physical gestures towards you? Have you received poorer service than other people at restaurants or stores? Have people acted as if you don’t speak English? Or Have people asked where you are from, assuming you’re not from the U.S.? Compared to the measure in the CMPS waves, we wanted to be clear to respondents about what we classified as different kinds of racial discrimination and assessed how much Chinese Americans encountered these discriminatory behaviors. For the purposes of our analyses to come, we coded an experienced racial discrimination as 1 if respondents had experienced one or any of these forms of discrimination and 0 if respondents had not experienced one or any racial discrimination. Scaled from 0 (lowest) to 1 (highest), the mean level of experiencing at least one form of racial discrimination among Chinese Americans in the 2024 sample was 0.7 and 0.58 in the 2025 sample. This suggests that experiences with racial discrimination is high among Chinese Americans, although the rate of experiences these discriminatory behaviors on a monthly basis was higher in 2024 than in 2025.

Our dependent variables measured likelihood of political participation in various modes of activity. In 2024, since the survey was in the field prior to the presidential election that would come that year, we asked: “There will be a general election for President, Congress, and other offices in November 2024. Are you planning to vote or not planning to vote? If they were planning to vote, we followed-up by asking respondents how certain they would be about voting in the upcoming election in November 2024. We created a variable from 0-1 that gauged range of likelihood of voting in the, at the time, upcoming presidential election in 2024. In 2025, we asked a self-reported retrospective question about turnout: “As it relates to the General Election that occurred this past November 2024, which one of the following statements best describes you? I did not vote in the November 2024 General Election (0); I thought about voting, but I did not (0); I usually vote, but I did not in the November 2024 General Election (0); I’m sure I voted in the November 2024 General Election (1). In addition to voter turnout, both surveys included a battery of political activities that respondents were invited to indicate if they have participated in the last 12 months, ranging from volunteering/working for a candidate or campaign; attending a political protest, march, or demonstration; to contacting elected officials. For brevity, we created a scale of political participation to account for having participated in these various activities.

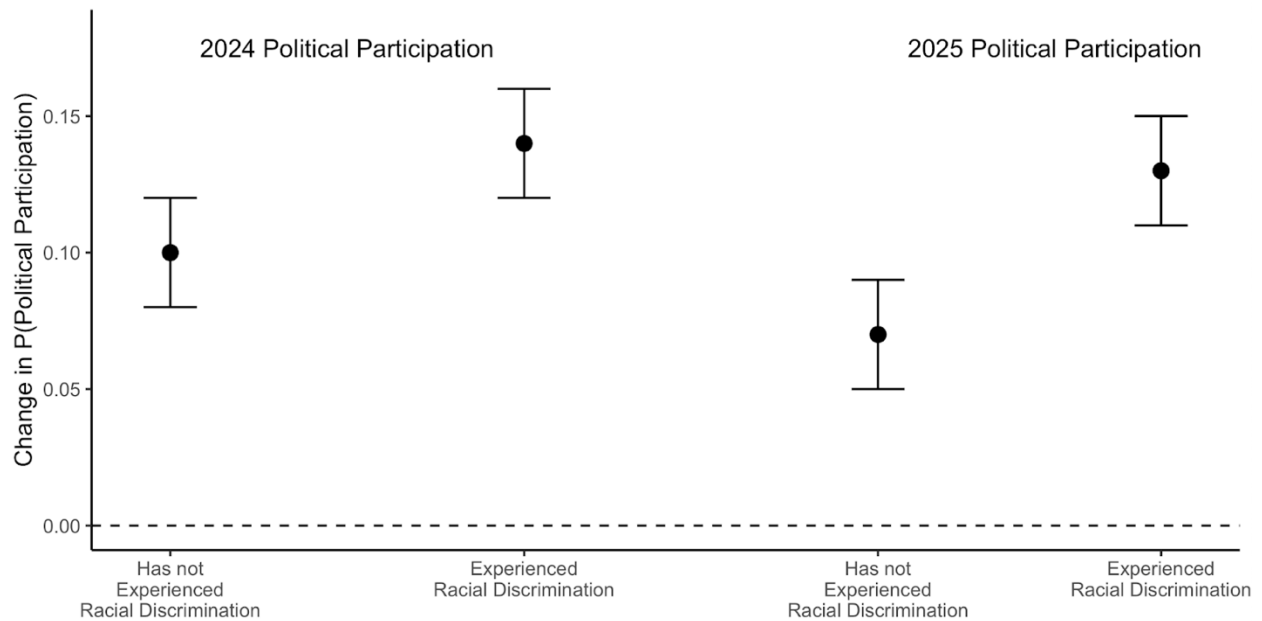
*The Relationship Between Experiences with Racial Discrimination and Political Participation: Sustained or Diminished?*

**Figure 5: Racial Discrimination and 2024 Voter Turnout among Chinese Americans**



*Note:* Point estimates represent the change in predicted probability of voting comparing Chinese Americans that have experienced any form of racial discrimination compared to those who have not, after accounting for all control variables. 95% confidence intervals. Data from 2024 and 2025 State of Chinese Americans Surveys.

**Figure 6: Racial Discrimination and Political Participation Beyond the Ballot Box in 2024 and 2025 among Chinese Americans**



*Note:* Point estimates represent the predicted probability in political activities apart from voting comparing Chinese Americans who experienced racial discrimination to Chinese American who have not experienced racial discrimination, after accounting for control variables. Predicted likelihood of political participation by experiences with racial discrimination computed separately across 2024 and 2025. 95% confidence intervals.

## Conclusion

A once in a generation moment of racial exclusion made personal experiences with racial discrimination more strongly mobilize Asian Americans to get involved in politics during the height of the pandemic. Yet, it is possible that racialized events make race-centered considerations politically persistent. That is, in the case of COVID-19 and Asian Americans, did the relationship between experiences with racial discrimination and political participation persist or did this association wane?

We found suggestive evidence that COVID-19-related era racial discrimination, when made salient in the minds of Asian Americans, can mobilize them to participate in politics even years after the pandemic subsided. An original experiment demonstrated that reminders of anti-Asian hate had downstream effects on Asian American political participation, even five years after the onset of the pandemic. The pandemic, characterized by racial exclusion for the collective Asian American community, might remind the community of their precarious positioning in American society. As a result, these memories of a once in a generation moment of racial exclusion are still a core factor in shaping the political decisions to become involved in politics among Asian Americans and there was stability in how these memories of discrimination during COVID-19

mobilized East, Southeast, and South Asian Americans to further get politically active. Even years after the pandemic concluded, the moment of racial othering was still relevant to their decision-making about participation in political affairs among Asian Americans.

When the dust settled after the events of the 2024 presidential election, we found evidence from the 2024 CMPS that experiences with racial discrimination no longer encouraged Asian Americans to turn out to vote. However, these personal experiences with racism still mattered for mobilizing Asian Americans to participate in politics beyond the ballot box. This is even though the results were not as consistent across national origin groups. The results, nonetheless, demonstrated the potential relevance of experiences of racial discrimination in the election after the coronavirus pandemic.

We further interrogated the persisting relationship between experiences with racial discrimination and political participation by leveraging an important case study of Chinese Americans, who sat in the unique middle position of racial exclusion during the anti-Asian hate era. With two surveys that I fielded in partnership with the Committee for 100 and NORC called the State of Chinese Americans Surveys in 2024 and 2025, I found that experiences with racial discrimination did not shape voter turnout among Chinese Americans. However, these experiences with racism were, indeed, durable when it came to getting Chinese Americans to get active in politics beyond the ballot box. All of the evidence brought forward in this and the last chapter suggests that the relationship between racial discrimination and the political participation of Asian Americans did not subside but, for the most part, remained intact. The pandemic had the possibility of leaving a political imprint in the trajectory of Asian Americans political behavior even years after the pandemic subsided.

In the second major section of the book, we now turn to transition from key moments of racial exclusion to recognizing that these contexts of racial exclusion happen alongside signs of racial inclusion - historic political firsts for Asian Americans in government. That is, while the pandemic and anti-Asian hate was raging, the first Asian American candidate was set to run for president as a major political party's nominee. I take on the idea that these political moments that signal some racial inclusion necessitate that we more fully understand how various dimensions and desires for more descriptive representation influence Asian Americans to get involved in contemporary politics.