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Relative group discrimination and vote choice among Blacks, Latinos, Asians, and Whites

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ABSTRACT

Scholars of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics (REP) have demonstrated that discrimination shapes the political behavior of Blacks, Latinos, Asians, and Whites. This scholarship, however, tends to focus on a single group or employ variables that make intergroup comparisons difficult. Using data from the 2016 Collaborative Multi-Racial Post-Election Survey, we examine individuals' perceptions of the discrimination their racial or pan-ethnic group faces relative to other groups and the relationship between those perceptions and presidential vote choice. We argue that *perceived relative group discrimination* captures group-level perceptions of racial hierarchy in the United States, and present evidence that these perceptions significantly influenced vote choice in the 2016 presidential election. Whites who believe their racial group experiences more discrimination than other groups were significantly more likely to cast a vote for Donald Trump. This finding contradicts similar studies identifying White awareness of their dominance as a catalyst of pro-group behavior. Conversely, Latinos who expressed a greater sense of relative group discrimination were more likely to cast a vote for Hillary Clinton. We replicate these findings across multiple datasets and find that relative group discrimination is associated with partisanship among Blacks, Latinos, and Whites since at least 2012.

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Introduction

Political scientists argue that Donald Trump's 2016 victory emerged from his harnessing of White racial attitudes, including racial resentment (Green and McElwee 2018; Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2019), racial identity (Eckhouse 2018; Jardina 2019), racial consciousness (Berry, Ebner, and Cornelius 2019), and "status threat" (Mutz 2018). Within these works, many White Americans *report* a sense of threat to their economic (Craig and Richeson 2014), cultural (Enos 2017; Parker and Barreto 2014), and political (Jardina 2019) dominance, indicating a potential for White group interest politics catalyzed by fear or resentment of a "new minority" status (Gest 2016). Furthermore, recent scholarship finds that perceptions of discrimination are increasingly prevalent among Whites (Norton and Sommers 2011; Wong 2018) and these perceptions were predictive

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of vote choice in 2016 (Jardina 2019; Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2019). Scholars producing this research suggest that Whites recognize and appreciate their dominant position in the United States (Craig and Richeson 2014; Jardina 2019).

However, this research does not measure perceptions of discrimination relative to other groups or compare Whites to other racial groups. In this paper, by doing both of these, we show that many Whites perceive that their group experiences as much as, or more, discrimination than other groups, and that those perceptions shape their political behavior. To do so, we construct a measure of *relative group discrimination*, by asking respondents how much discrimination Whites, Blacks, Latinos,¹ and Asian Americans face relative to other racial groups. We compare the correlates of relative group discrimination for each group and test its association with partisanship and presidential vote choice in the 2012 and 2016 elections. We find that many White Americans believe that their group faces *as much or more* discrimination than other groups, and that such perceptions have been predictive of Republican partisanship and vote choice since 2012. Furthermore, even though White Americans occupy a dominant position in the United States, Whites' *perceptions* of discrimination are associated with the belief that their group is receiving unfair treatment from society and inadequate political representation. We argue that assessing respondents' perceptions of discrimination relative to other groups is a compelling, novel predictor of political behavior. It captures respondents' beliefs that their group faces a common disadvantage relative to other groups. *Relative* group discrimination identifies individuals' senses of their own group's situation; whereas, absolute discrimination does not, necessarily, capture individuals' belief in relative subordination or advantage.

Furthermore, our comparative-relational approach (Masuoka and Junn 2013) allows us to show that Latinos' perceptions of relative discrimination are increasingly correlated with partisanship and vote choice. Latinos who perceive a greater amount of relative discrimination are more likely to affiliate with the Democratic Party and cast a vote for Democratic presidential candidates. Black partisanship, consistent with prior research, is sorted according to perceived relative discrimination throughout our analyses (Dawson 1994; Philpot 2017; Tate 1994). We do not find significant relationships among Asian Americans.

Below, we draw on social scientists who examine how individuals locate themselves within groups in a stratified polity. These scholars, broadly, find that individuals' perceptions of the American racial hierarchy shape their political behavior. Drawing on this scholarship, we theorize that perceptions of relative group discrimination capture individuals' senses of their groups' position in the American racial hierarchy and influence their political behavior. Specifically, we discuss how the 2016 election would be particularly likely to catalyze perceptions of inequality and discrimination. We employ data from the 2016 CMPS to test those expectations and replicate those tests with data from the 2012 American National Election Study (ANES). Next, we present evidence that relative group discrimination captures individuals' perceptions of the United States' racial hierarchy. Then, we trace the influence of perceived relative group discrimination among Blacks, Whites, Latinos, and Asians across the 2012 and 2016 presidential elections on vote choice and partisanship. In doing so, we present several contributions to the study of political behavior in REP. While a substantial percentage of each group feels their in-group faces equal or greater amounts of discrimination than other

groups, most Americans perceive a similar American racial hierarchy. Rooted in a system that has, over time, come to valorize some racialized groups relative to, and at the expense of others (Kim 2003), this hierarchy situates Whites at the top, followed by Asians, Latinos, and then Blacks. A substantial minority of Whites, however, disagree. Notably, since at least 2012, those Whites who perceive that their group faces equal or greater discrimination compared to other groups are more likely to oppose political candidates and parties who work to ameliorate racial inequality. We also show that Latinos and Whites' perceptions of relative discrimination are becoming more correlated with partisanship, approaching the correlations exhibited among Blacks. Our findings support a growing literature that suggests that concerns for group status influence White political behavior, just as among people of color.

Group discrimination, consciousness, and political behavior

Racial and ethnic minorities' perceptions of discrimination are often studied through the lens of social psychology. Social Identity Theorists (Tajfel and Turner 1979) find that members of disadvantaged groups who perceive greater amounts of discrimination often identify more strongly with their group (Branscombe, Schmitt, and Harvey 1999; Schmitt and Branscombe 2002), potentially to mitigate its marginalizing effects. Because more severe and pervasive discrimination has more damaging effects (Branscombe, Schmitt, and Harvey 1999), the consequences are often greater for disadvantaged groups (Schmitt and Branscombe 2002). These effects have been found in Blacks, Asians, Latinos, and other marginalized groups (Branscombe, Schmitt, and Harvey 1999; Schmitt et al. 2014). Under certain conditions, these relationships generalize to high-status groups (Outten et al. 2012).

Discrimination can strengthen marginalized group identities under some circumstances. Scholars of REP find that discrimination (Barreto and Pedraza 2009; Schildkraut 2010) cultivates group consciousness – the belief that an in-group occupies a distinct position necessitating collective action (Chong and Rogers 2005; Masuoka 2006; Sanchez 2006) – and linked fate – the belief that individual group members' fates are determined by the group's collective fate (Dawson 1994; Masuoka and Junn 2013; Vargas, Sanchez, and Valdez 2017). The link between discrimination and group consciousness or linked fate, however, may require activation from elite co-ethnics who clarify how threats implicate all group members (Lee 2008; Zepeda-Millán 2017). Policy threat (Bowler, Nicholson, and Segura 2006; Zepeda-Millán 2017), hate crimes (Espiritu 1992), xenophobic campaign rhetoric (Garcia-Rios, Pedraza, and Wilcox-Archuleta 2018), personal experiences with discrimination (Chong and Kim 2006; Schildkraut 2010), and stereotypes (Masuoka and Junn 2013) all can activate group consciousness. We agree with scholars who argue that while being conceptually distinct, linked fate is a “parsimonious alternative” for the measurement of group consciousness (McClain et al. 2009, 477; see also Lee 2008; Masuoka 2006; Masuoka and Junn 2013; Smith 2013; Weller and Junn 2018). In sum, we argue that relative group discrimination is a necessary but insufficient precondition for linked fate and group consciousness, which are distinct, but closely related constructs.

Individuals' perceptions of group discrimination, then, can catalyze senses of shared subordinate status, which can enable group-oriented collective action. This link may

require mobilization, often by co-ethnic politicians (Barreto 2010; Lee 2008; McClain et al. 2009). These leaders can activate group consciousness (Chong and Rogers 2005) and, thus, mobilize nonelectoral (Barreto et al. 2009; Espiritu 1992; Shingles 1981; Zepeda-Millán 2017) and electoral activism (Chong and Rogers 2005; Ramirez 2013). Perceived discrimination can increase support for descriptive representatives (Schildkraut 2005, 2017; Tate 1994). It can also shape partisanship, bolstering Democratic affiliation in people of color (Dawson 1994; Nicholson and Segura 2005), and Republican affiliation in Whites (Jardina 2019; Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2019).

Intuitively, experiences of discrimination and their consequences differ across groups. While scholars operationalize racial inequality differently, most scholars agree that Blacks experience the most discrimination, then Latinos, then Asians, with Whites experiencing the least (Chong and Kim 2006; Masuoka and Junn 2013; Sanchez and Vargas 2016).² African Americans' shared history of discrimination has increased group consciousness or linked fate (Dawson 1994; McClain and Stewart 2010; Miller et al. 1981), collective action (Chong and Rogers 2005; Shingles 1981), and support for descriptive representation (Tate 1994), liberal policies, and the Democratic party (Dawson 1994; Smith 2013). Scholars studying Latinos and Asians show that group heterogeneity (e.g., ethnicity, citizenship, and generation) moderates the identity-to-politics link (Fraga et al. 2006; Lee 2008; Wong et al. 2011). Research highlights how discrimination against Latinos and Asians often takes similar forms: stereotypes, xenophobia, and policy threats such as immigration restrictions or English-only legislation (Aoki and Takeda 2008; Garcia-Rios, Pedraza, and Wilcox-Archuleta 2018; Masuoka and Junn 2013; Schmidt et al. 2010). Experiencing such discrimination structures the identity-to-politics link in Asians and Latinos, shaping pan-ethnic identification and consciousness (Masuoka 2006; Masuoka and Junn 2013; Perez 2013; Valenzuela and Michelson 2016; Vargas, Sanchez, and Valdez 2017), and collective action (Barreto et al. 2009; Bowler, Nicholson, and Segura 2006; Espiritu 1992; Ramirez 2013; Zepeda-Millán 2017), often in partisan politics (Barreto and Pedraza 2009; Nicholson and Segura 2005). However, these links are weaker and more context-dependent than among African Americans (Chong and Kim 2006; Junn and Masuoka 2008; Lee 2008; McClain et al. 2009; Sanchez and Vargas 2016).

Until recently, Whites reported lower levels of discrimination (Schildkraut 2010; Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2019), identity, and consciousness (Miller et al. 1981; Sears and Savalei 2006; Wong and Cho 2005) than people of color. While Whites hold racial privilege, a notable minority of Whites increasingly perceives discrimination (Gest 2016; Schildkraut 2017): some now consider anti-White bias a greater problem than anti-Black bias. For Whites, reported discrimination may capture perceived reverse-racism (Norton and Sommers 2011), loss of privilege (Berry, Ebner, and Cornelius 2019; Lipsitz 2006; Parker and Barreto 2014), assault on evangelical beliefs (Wong 2018), or symbolic status loss (Gest 2016; Mutz 2018; Schildkraut 2017). Such feelings may originate in beliefs that immigration and demography are threatening Whites' dominance (Craig and Richeson 2014; Jardina 2019). High White-identifiers may trace their group's dominance to superiority rather than privilege (Branscombe, Schmitt, and Schiffhauer 2007), and thus view policies to ameliorate racial inequality as discriminatory. Recent scholarship on polarization identifies White group interests as a cleavage that catalyzed partisan-political polarization (Green and McElwee 2018; Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2019).

Scholars measure discrimination in numerous ways. Surveys measure personal experiences with discrimination (Sanchez and Masuoka 2010; Smith 2013; Wong, Lien, and Margaret Conway 2005), perceptions of discrimination against one's group (Masuoka 2006; McClain and Stewart 2010; Sanchez 2006; Schildkraut 2010), and differential opportunities (Chong and Rogers 2005; Miller et al. 1981). While some argue perceived group discrimination is more likely to catalyze collective identity and action (Oskooii 2016; Schildkraut 2005, 2017; Wallace 2014), few studies include both measures, making comparison difficult (Sanchez and Vargas 2016; Schmitt et al. 2014). Social psychologists suggest that these constructs measure different considerations. For instance, Postmes, et al. argue that surveying personal experiences (interpersonal discrimination) capture respondents' level of discrimination relative to other in-group members. Group discrimination, conversely, primes group identities, and thus gauges intergroup comparisons. These scholars suggest including a comparison group in the measure, requiring respondents to consider the level of discrimination, and position, of their group in the racial order (Postmes et al. 1999).

We argue that measuring respondents' perceptions of discrimination relative to other groups is an essential, understudied predictor of political behavior. Above all, it tests whether respondents believe their group faces a shared disadvantage relative to other groups. While perceived relative group discrimination has different antecedents and consequences in members of each group, the same is also true of numerous predictors in REP (e.g., class (Chong and Kim 2006), ideology and partisanship (Hajnal and Lee 2011)). Thus, comparing the influence of relative group discrimination provides an important opportunity to examine how individuals' perceptions of group-level stratification shape political behavior. Similarly, scholarship on intergroup conflict finds that groups form attitudes and behaviors in *relation* to other groups, showing the importance of considering each group's position in the American racial hierarchy (Blumer 1958; Bobo 1988; Bobo and Hutchings 1996; Kim 2003; Masuoka and Junn 2013). Comparing groups, moreover, is infrequent in political behavior (and to a lesser extent REP) scholarship, which often elides intergroup differences (Lee 2008; McClain et al. 2009; Sanchez and Vargas 2016). Failing to compare groups also leaves White feelings of minority status (Gest 2016) abstract and untested. Below, we theorize how multiple groups' perceptions of relative discrimination structure their engagement in electoral politics.

Perceptions of relative group discrimination influence political behavior

The scholarship outlined above points to several avenues to advance the study of political behavior. That scholarship shows that perceptions of discrimination flow from contexts and histories within each group. Social Identity Theorists conceptualize group identity as a feeling of similarity to others in the group, which inculcates a shared perspective amongst members (Stets and Burke 2000). Therefore, individuals acting in the context of social structure name one another and identify themselves, and their fellow group members, as occupants of positions (McCall and Simmons 1978; Stryker 2003).

While all groups perceive discrimination, we expect the levels of discrimination reported will be consistent with scholarship on the American racial hierarchy, with White Americans reporting the least, Black Americans the most, and Latinos and Asian Americans somewhere in between. The key to our theory is that individuals

locate themselves in groups within a structured society (McCall and Simmons 1978; Stryker 2003; Turner et al. 1987) and that perceptions of relative discrimination will have generalizable effects across groups: namely, increasing the likelihood of group member engaging in collective action to better their group's status. We expect that such effects will be increasingly predictive of group-oriented collective action, particularly in the form of electoral participation.

We broadly concur with the scholarship we reviewed in the previous section identifying the broad antecedents of discrimination in each group. We add to that scholarship by positing that individuals who perceive more relative discrimination will be more inclined to believe that their group occupies a distinct political position that collective action should redress. *Relative* group discrimination, indeed, offers the key to our argument: it is not clear why an individual who believes all groups experience similar levels of discrimination would pursue an action to better the station of one particular group. Furthermore, accounting for the importance of relative discrimination allows us to show why the numerous Whites who believe their group only experiences a "little" discrimination work to advance White group interests: many Whites believe no other group experiences any.

We argue that individuals who perceive that their group faces more discrimination than other groups will be more likely to support candidates and parties that advance their group's interest. Identity theorists note that when exogenous changes shift to contradict individuals' expectations of group-level status, they act to redress the disturbance (Burke and Stets 1999; Swann 1983). The 2016 presidential race was one of those shifts. By starting his campaign with a xenophobic attack against Mexican immigrants, calling them criminals, rapists, and drug dealers and making immigration a prominent wedge issue, Trump employed rhetoric that primed group consciousness, particularly among Whites and Latinos. Several studies have argued that immigrant status has become one of the key factors in racializing immigrants (Cobas, Duany, and Feagin 2015), and in structuring White anxiety over their future position. Thus, scholars have noted that it was immigration rather than economic anxiety that sorted the White vote in favor of Donald Trump (Reny, Collingwood, and Valenzuela 2019).

Thus, we expect Whites who perceive greater relative group discrimination will report greater support for Donald Trump, and other Republican candidates. On the other hand, among people of color, we expect perceptions of relative group discrimination to be positively associated with support for Hillary Clinton, and other Democratic candidates. Similarly, we expect partisan sorting on issues of racial or pan-ethnic group status when relative group discrimination is considered. We expect that among people of color, greater perceptions of relative group discrimination will be felt among Democrats than among Republicans. We expect the opposite trend among Whites. We lack the data to test a theory on the direction of the relationship and instead contribute to this literature by testing extant theories of sorting along relative group discrimination among Asians, Blacks, Latinos, and Whites.

Data and measures

We utilize data from the 2016 Collaborative Multi-Racial Post-Election Survey (CMPS). The sample consists of 10,145 respondents contacted by e-mail, including large subsamples of Whites (931), Blacks (2,909), Latinos (2,674), and Asian Americans

(2,842)³ (Barreto et al. 2017), making it ideal for inter- and intra-group comparisons. The CMPS includes a measure asking all respondents “How much discrimination is there in the United States today against each of the following groups?” “Whites,” “Asians,” “Latinos,” and “Blacks.” Respondents were allowed to choose between: “A lot,” “Some,” “A little,” or “None.” This question allows us to create a measure that captures not only individuals’ perception of discrimination but also of the intensity of discrimination faced by their racial group relative to other groups.

We construct our measure of relative group discrimination by comparing the amount of discrimination the respondent feels their own racial or pan-ethnic group faces relative to the amounts they report for other groups. We construct an index centered around zero to capture these comparisons. Starting from 0 for each respondent, we add (subtract) 1 for each racial or pan-ethnic group the respondent feels experiences more (less) discrimination than their group. We do not change a respondent’s score when they feel a group experiences the same amount of discrimination as theirs. Individuals who perceive their group experiences less discrimination than all three groups, then, receive a score of -3 ; the most, a score of 3. Respondents who perceive that all groups experience identical levels of discrimination receive a 0. For example, a White respondent who thinks that Whites face less discrimination than Blacks and Latinos, but more discrimination than Asians, would receive a score of 1. A strength of this measure is that it captures individuals’ senses of position in a relative hierarchy, echoing insights from scholars of group inequality cited at the end of our literature review. Figure 1 reports respondents’ understanding of whether their racial or pan-ethnic group experiences more, less, or the same amount of discrimination than other groups.

The figure includes one kernel density plot for each racial/pan-ethnic group, showing the distribution of perceptions in greater detail. Black Americans perceive the most discrimination, while Latinos and Asian Americans report experiencing less. White Americans, broadly, recognize that their group receives the least discrimination, though a substantial percentage of Whites report their group experiences identical, or even greater amounts of discrimination. This suggests a general sense among most Americans that a racial hierarchy existed in the United States in 2016. A substantial portion of Whites, however, locate their group in a radically different position in the racial hierarchy.

We also examine the correlates of relative discrimination among each group, including demographics, socio-economics (SES), political engagement, senses of alienation, and measures of identity. We include more detailed results in the online Supplemental Material. First, as we expected, perceived relative discrimination emerges from different contexts for each group; thus, it is quantitatively *and* qualitatively different across groups. For instance, measures of SES are significant correlates of perceived discrimination for Whites and Blacks, but in opposite directions. Among Whites, perceptions of relative group discrimination correlate negatively with education, income, and positive economic perceptions, suggesting SES is negatively associated with perceptions of relative discrimination. Conversely, Blacks with higher levels of education report greater relative group discrimination than those with lower levels of educational attainment (Dawson 1994). Among Asians and Latinos, immigrant incorporation influences perceptions of relative group discrimination: noncitizens, more recent immigrants, and non-English-dominant speakers report higher levels of relative discrimination than do citizens, those whose family has lived in the U.S. for multiple generations, and

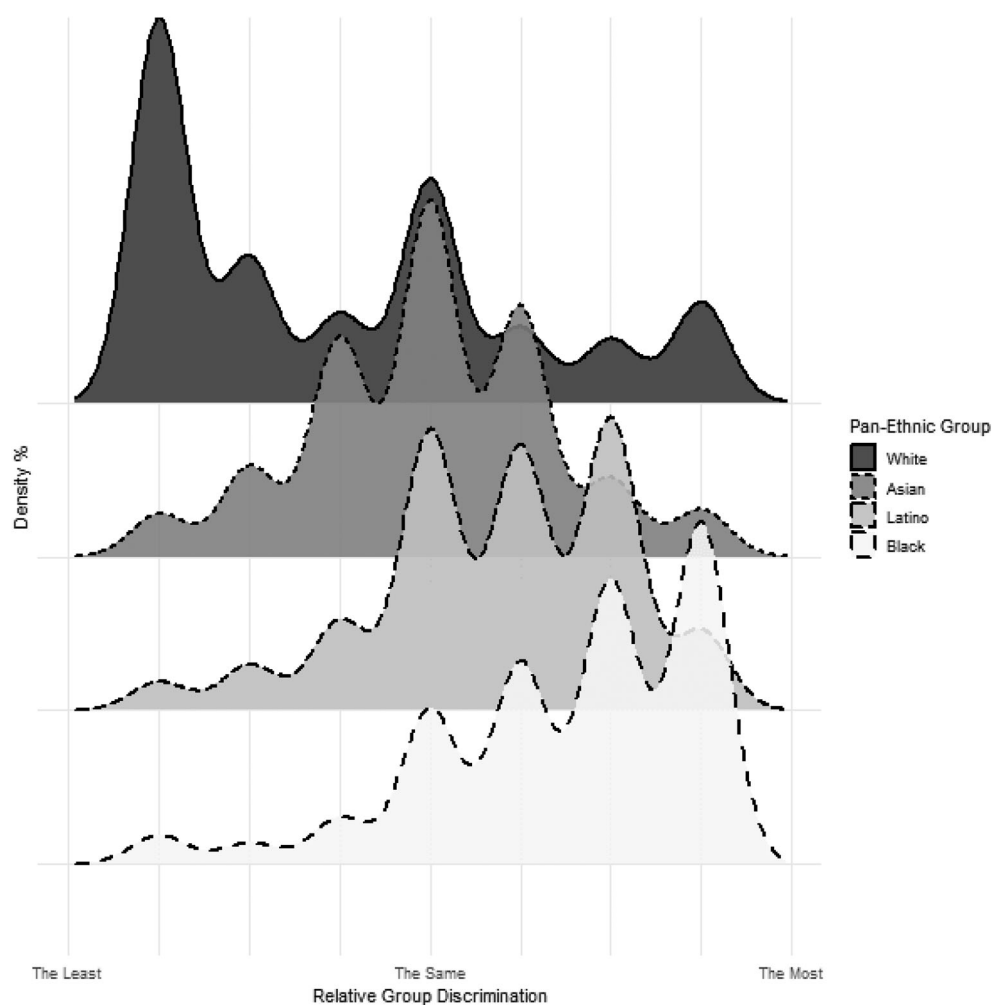


Figure 1. Perceptions of relative group discrimination differ by group, forming a White-Asian-Latino-Black racial hierarchy; though a substantial proportion of Whites perceive their group holds a position equal to, or lower than, other groups.

English-dominant speakers. Second, perceptions of relative group discrimination are positively correlated with racial or pan-ethnic linked fate for Black, Latino, and Asian Americans, and greater immigrant linked fate among Latino and Asian Americans. Third, feelings of mistrust in government (Schildkraut 2010), exclusion (Masuoka and Junn 2013), and low political efficacy are significant correlates of relative discrimination for members of all groups. Fourth, reports of personal experiences with discrimination and perception of relative group discrimination are positively correlated for all groups. Finally, we find evidence that perceptions of relative discrimination are, within groups, increasingly becoming correlated with partisanship. We discuss this in detail in subsequent pages.

We maintain that perceived relative group discrimination captures individuals' perceptions of their group's place in the American racial hierarchy. As we showed above,

the measure captures individuals' identifications (CMPS respondents self-identify their race or pan-ethnicity) with groups that they believe face more (or less) disadvantage than other groups. Thus, comparing groups' perceptions of relative discrimination provides an image of the racial order. Moreover, the correlates of perceived relative discrimination differ between groups, suggesting that different factors produce the responses. However, for members of all groups, relative group discrimination is associated with the belief that their group receives unfair treatment from society and inadequate representation in government. Thus, we examine how groups endorse electoral remedies to redress it. We trace the contours of this collective action in the coming pages by testing the relationship between perceptions of relative group discrimination and vote choice in the 2016 presidential election.

Modeling strategy

We specify logistic models predicting 2016 vote choice in the 2016 CMPS. Our principal independent variable is the measure of perceived relative group discrimination specified above. We model each group separately to examine the unique influence of this variable among Blacks, Latinos, Asians, and Whites.⁴ We estimate models of the respondent's vote (self-reported) for either Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton. In these models, we include standard controls in vote choice models – income, gender, education (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995), ideology, partisanship (Converse 2006), political interest (Zaller 1992), and economic perceptions (Kinder and Kiewiet 1981) – that predict voting behavior and may covary with individuals' senses of relative group discrimination. We avoided over-specifying our model to ensure maximum cross-group comparisons; however, after re-specifying the model with additional controls,⁵ our results do not change substantively. We include a greater discussion of model specification and robustness checks in Appendix C in the online Supplemental Material. We report the relationship between relative group discrimination and vote choice in marginal effect plots and display full regression tables in the Appendix. We include minimum-maximum marginal effects plots to display the substantive impact of our independent variables.

Predicting vote choice in 2016

Figure 2 shows the relationship between relative group discrimination and the probability of voting for Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton respectively. Perceptions of relative group discrimination were significantly associated with vote choice for Whites and Latinos, but not for Blacks or Asians. Whites who expressed more relative group discrimination were significantly *more* likely to vote for Trump: those perceiving the least had approximately a .1 probability, whereas those perceiving the most had approximately a .4 probability of voting for Trump. Conversely, perceived relative group discrimination has a stronger relationship with Whites' likelihood of voting for Clinton, with a .7 probability among those perceiving the least relative group discrimination and only .25 among those who felt that Whites experienced the most. Latinos perceiving the least relative group discrimination were *less* likely to vote for Clinton than similarly situated Whites (.55 predicted probability), whereas those perceiving the most had approximately a .75 probability of voting for Clinton – not significantly different from similarly situated

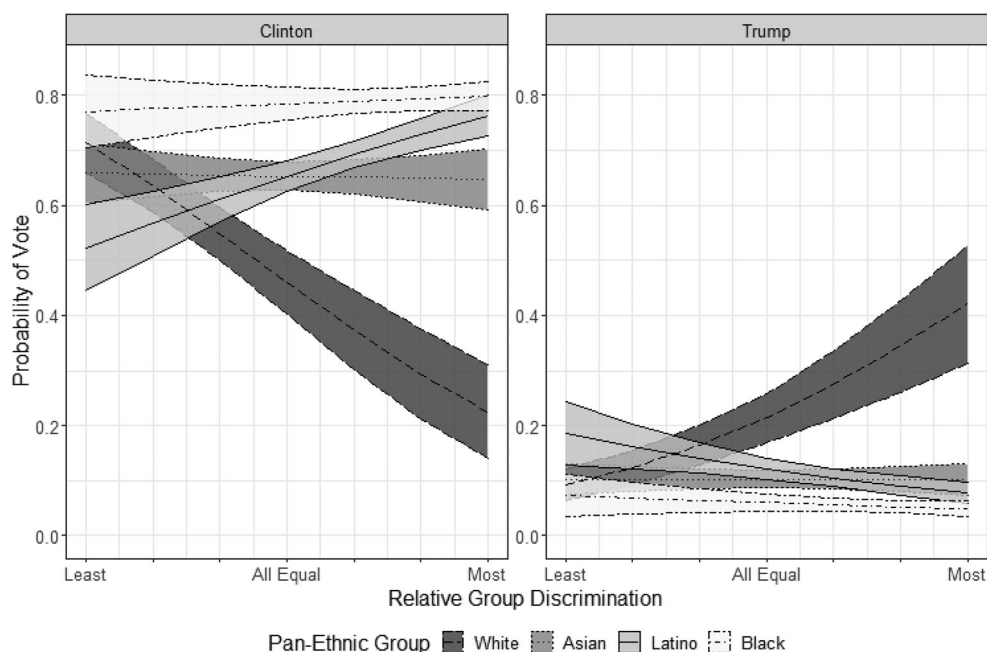


Figure 2. The influence of perceived relative group discrimination on the probability of casting a Clinton/Trump vote. Predicted probabilities from logistic regressions with controls for income, education, gender, ideology, partisanship, and perceptions of the economy. Source: 2016 CMPS.

Blacks. The change is smaller when Trump’s support among Latinos is considered: the shift from “the least” perceived relative group discrimination to “the most” shifts the predicted probability from .2 to about .1. This could suggest that decreased relative group discrimination did not, primarily, drive Latinos to support Trump, but rather to not vote for Clinton. We do not observe significant relationships among Blacks or Asians in 2016.

We argue that the null result for Blacks emerges from *consistency* in Black experiences of group discrimination, reflecting a shared, centuries-long history of marginalization in the United States. Black group interests have sublimated into Democratic and liberal identification for at least half a century (Dawson 1994; Schickler 2016). These trends are exhibited, not contradicted by, broad Black support for Clinton in 2016 (White and Laird 2020). We argue that the uniformity of the relationship prevents us from finding any significant in-group variation. Furthermore, we present evidence of the relationship between perceptions of relative group discrimination and Black partisan choice in the coming pages. Perceptions of relative group discrimination did not significantly structure the vote choice of Asian Americans in 2016. This finding is consistent with much of the research on Asian Americans. Asian Americans often report lower levels of discrimination than other racial minority groups (Kim and Lee 2001) and personal experiences with discrimination are often more impactful on Asian consciousness than perceptions of group discrimination (Masuoka 2006). The group’s extensive diversity – in terms of language, socioeconomic status, immigration history, and ethnicity – and the fact that the majority of Asian Americans arrived after 1965 means that pan-ethnic identity may be latent and context-dependent (Kim and Lee 2001; Junn and

Masuoka 2008), and Asian Americans may emphasize ethnic ties over pan-ethnic ties (Lien, Margaret Conway, and Wong 2004; Wong et al. 2011). Finally, Asian Americans are infrequent targets of political mobilization (Wong 2008) and exhibit weaker partisanship (Hajnal and Lee 2011), meaning that individual perceptions may not catalyze collective support for a party or candidate. Having presented evidence of the predictive power of relative group discrimination on White and Latino vote choice in 2016, we examine, in the coming pages, whether the effect generalizes to previous elections.

Predicting vote choice in 2012

To further examine the relationship between perceptions of relative group discrimination and vote choice, we replicate our analyses for the 2012 election, using the 2012 ANES. We also include analyses of the 2016 ANES in the online Supplemental Material. Our analyses are identical across these replications, save in two ways. First, the level of discrimination against Asian Americans was not asked in the 2012 ANES, so we omit Asians from our analyses in that year. Third, the sample sizes of Blacks, Latinos, and Asians are smaller, which limits our ability to compare minority groups. Finally, we do not control for economic perceptions in 2012 due to the absence of such a variable in the ANES.

We run one model for each candidate (Democrat, Republican) and pan-ethnic group. To render this analysis legible and facilitate comparisons across years and parties, we present the results of the 14 models in the form of min-max predicted probabilities plots. Figure 3 displays the predicted change in the probability of

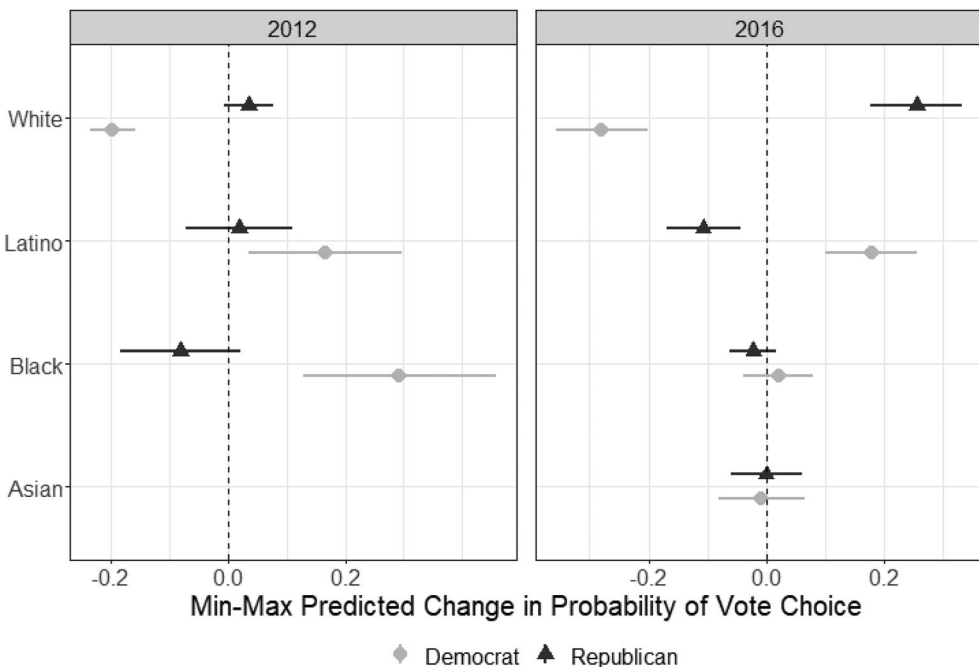


Figure 3. Minimum-to-maximum effect of perceived relative group discrimination on vote choice. Predicted probabilities from logistic regressions with controls for income, education, gender, ideology, partisanship, and perceptions of the economy. Sources: 2012 ANES and 2016 CMPS.

voting for either the Democratic or the Republican party's presidential candidate as a function of perceived relative group discrimination. Specifically, we predict the likelihood of voting for the Democratic candidate (Barack Obama in 2012 and Hillary Clinton in 2016) or the Republican candidate (Mitt Romney in 2012 and Donald Trump in 2016). We do not find a significant relationship between perceptions of relative group discrimination and vote choice among Asians. On the other hand, we find a relationship in 2012 for Blacks, Latinos, and Whites. Blacks and Latinos who perceived that their group faced more relative discrimination were significantly more likely to vote for Barack Obama. Conversely, Whites who perceived their group faced less discrimination relative to other groups were more likely to vote for Barack Obama. Relative group discrimination has no effect on any group's likelihood of voting for Mitt Romney. This suggests that Whites who perceived their group faces the most discrimination opposed voting for Obama but did not necessarily vote for Romney. These findings suggest the relationship between perceptions of relative group discrimination and vote choice predates the candidacy of Donald Trump. We echo numerous scholars who identified the predictive power of racial attitudes in the 2012 Election (Tesler 2016; Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2019). We argue that our models present tentative evidence that, while Trump may have benefited from White collective action to redress discrimination, that effect was likely smaller than the tendency of those perceptions to *depress* support for Clinton in Whites. Thus, we broadly concur with scholarship that maintains that Republicans electorally benefit from perceived anti-White discrimination, in part because it de-mobilizes potential Democratic voters.

Partisan differences in perceived relative group discrimination

Numerous scholars show that the parties have been increasingly polarized – or at least sorted – on racial issues since Obama's inauguration (Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2019; Tesler 2016; Tesler and Sears 2010). Thus, we examine the distribution of perceptions of relative group discrimination in 2012 and 2016 by partisanship (see Figure 4). We find little evidence that groups' perceptions of relative discrimination are growing more polarized since 2012. However, we also examine whether partisan differences in perceived relative discrimination *within* racial or pan-ethnic groups developed concurrently. Consistent with prior research, we find that Black Democrats and Leaners are far more likely to perceive that their group experiences the most discrimination than Black Republicans (Dawson 1994; Philpot 2017). Our findings are echoed among Latinos. Asians, throughout the series, exhibit roughly similar perceptions of relative group discrimination among Republicans and Democrats. This, broadly, suggests that Asian Americans' perceptions of relative group discrimination are unassociated with their partisan choice, which would explain the null results among anti-Asian discrimination in our analyses of vote choice. Alternatively, it could suggest that other identities are more salient (Wong et al. 2011). Whites exhibit partisan differences in perceptions of relative group discrimination, with Democrats consistently perceiving their group as experiencing the least, and Republicans being most likely to perceive all groups as experiencing equal amounts of discrimination.

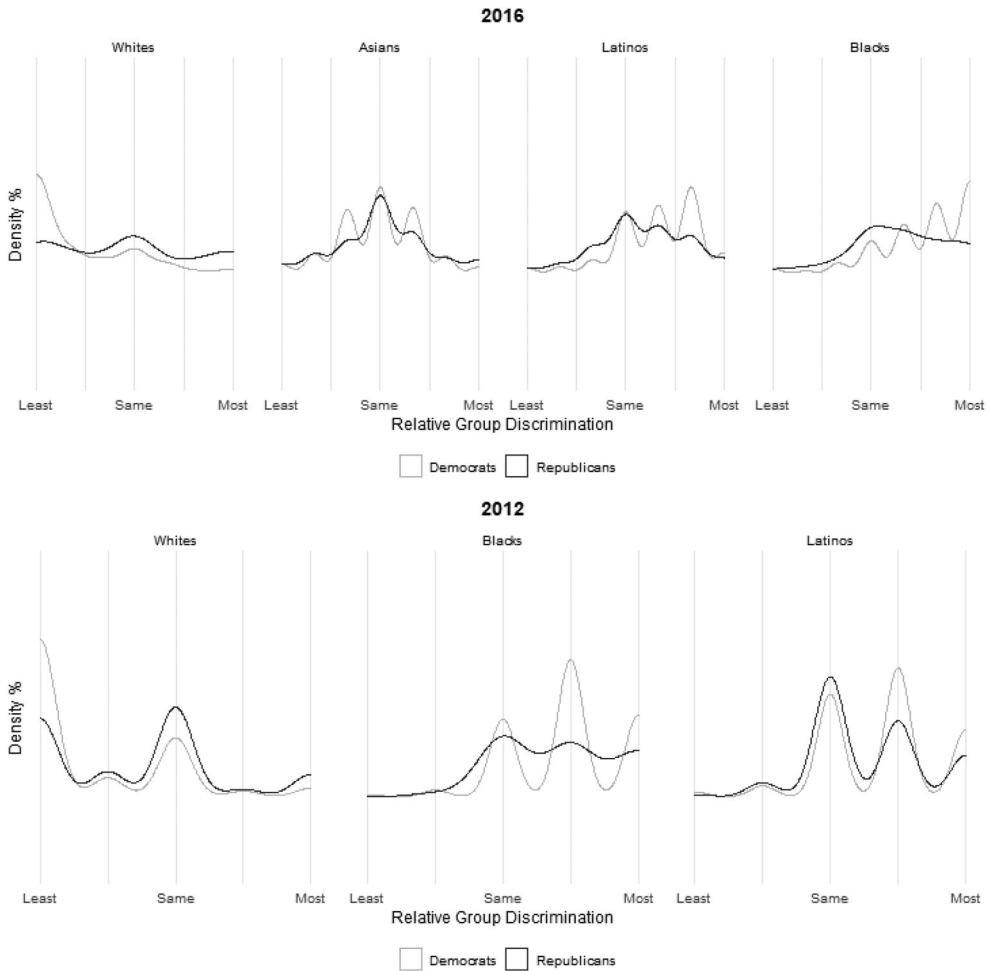


Figure 4. Distribution of perceived relative group discrimination, by group, partisanship, and year. Unweighted kernel density plots for each group, with partisans and leaners indicated by color. Sources: 2012 ANES and 2016 CMPS.

Conclusion

We find that concerns over relative group discrimination are significantly correlated with vote choice among Whites and Latinos in the 2016 presidential election. Furthermore, those concerns are partisan-polarized among Whites, Blacks, and Latinos since at least 2012. A sense of shared discrimination informs the political behavior of Blacks, Latinos, and Whites alike, though in different directions, contingent upon their group's stratified position. Our comparative approach allows us to compare the antecedents of perceived relative group discrimination and its implications on political behavior. Our measure of relative group discrimination captures the degree of discrimination individuals perceive their group faces relative to other groups, which, in turn, captures individuals' perceptions of their group's status vis-à-vis other racial or pan-ethnic groups. We argue that perceptions of relative group discrimination should be utilized,

in the future, as a measure of individuals' perceptions of macro-level group inequality, especially when comparing groups. Furthermore, because this measure is conceptually and analytically distinct from linked fate or group consciousness, modeling the variables alongside each other would, elsewhere, generate new insights about racial and ethnic political behavior. Due to our comparative-relational approach, we opt not to do so here: extensive scholarship indicates that those variables do not have the same meaning in Whites and Asians as in Blacks and Latinos (Gay, Hochschild, and White 2016; Sanchez and Vargas 2016).

Our research yields three findings that advance scholarship on White political behavior. First, Whites who perceive their group faces equal or greater barriers than other groups are more likely to oppose political candidates who work to level the racial hierarchy. Moreover, when these hierarchical positions become contested in a campaign, even an election contested by White candidates can become racialized (Jardina 2019; Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2019). These results show that contestation over racial and pan-ethnic group status in the United States is endogenous to important predictors of political behavior (e.g., partisanship, alienation).

Second, while numerous scholars have shown that senses of newfound minority status (e.g., Gest 2016) inform White political behavior, such claims are often made without explicitly comparing White racial attitudes and political behavior to those of people of color. By explicitly making those comparisons, we identify the relationship between discrimination and White political behavior, in addition to the behavior of people of color. We find that perceptions of relative discrimination among members of all racial and pan-ethnic groups are associated with *the belief* their group receives unfair treatment and inadequate political representation. Yet, perceptions of racial inequality vary considerably across race and pan-ethnicity: Asians, Latinos, and Blacks share an enduring history of discrimination that Whites have not experienced, and are not experiencing. Future research should trace the origins of Whites' illusory claims of racial discrimination; specifically, what experiences are Whites interpreting as discrimination, and what forms of discrimination faced by people of color do Whites not recognize as such?

These findings, then, enable us to present a third contribution to the study of White political behavior. We present evidence that Whites who believe they face equal or greater amounts of discrimination than people of color are more likely to identify as Republicans and vote for Republican candidates. This distinguishes our findings from scholarship that argues Whites *recognize* their dominance but oppose efforts to remediate it (Jardina 2019). This claim advances a growing literature on White identity politics by explicitly comparing Whites' perceptions of discrimination to the amounts they feel other groups face, clarifying *why* some Whites perceive themselves as a "new minority" (Gest 2016). Moreover, we trace these perceptions back to concerns over the group's status *relative* to other groups, a link not yet satisfactorily drawn in the literature on discrimination, despite evidence from social scientists that intergroup conflict and hostility emerges from groups' stratification (Bobo 1988; Kim 2003; Bobo and Hutchings 1996; Blumer 1958; Masuoka and Junn 2013).

The relationship between perceptions of relative group discrimination and political behavior is not monolithic. It is strong among Whites and Latinos, but less reliable for Blacks, due – we argue – to its correlation with other predictors of Black political behavior. It is strongly correlated with partisanship in Blacks, Latinos, and Whites. We find no

relationship between perceived relative group discrimination and either partisanship or vote choice for Asians. Perceived relative group discrimination catalyzes different reactions among groups and emerges from unique contexts. Whites' status concerns stem, in part, from anxieties about immigration and demographic change; here, we show that Latinos recognize these White reactions as threats to their status in the United States, and mobilize on behalf of candidates that reject attacks on immigrants. We argue that the inconsistency of these effects among Blacks emerges because the party system has sublimated issues of group status: while the status of African Americans has influenced the shape of the party system for decades (Schickler 2016). We argue that the perceived status of Whites and Latinos has also begun to divide the parties. Many scholars have noted the meager efforts made by the parties to mobilize new Latino voters (Hajnal and Lee 2011; Wong 2008). Partisan polarization on Latino status could herald an effort by the Democratic party to court this growing constituency. The parties' division on White group status could signal a strategy among Republicans to mobilize low-propensity White voters.

Our findings motivate new lines of inquiry. As above, we argue that researchers should study the origins of White reports of discrimination: what experiences, interactions, or rhetoric fuel these misperceptions? Second, what are the observable political implications of perceptions of discrimination among Whites? Will Whites respond to perceived relative group discrimination with demands for welfare chauvinism, or with a familiar politics of *laissez-faire* individualism? Here, we call for experimental research to examine how perceived White status loss catalyzes support for group-oriented collective action in Whites. Additionally, we maintain that racial and pan-ethnic identities must be thought of as one of an individual's many identities. Identities overlap, contradict, and intersect: how do White Americans' other identities shape their perceptions of group status? Moreover, scholars must leverage the potential for intergroup comparisons: such comparisons make descriptions and inferences about particular groups meaningful. By doing so we can better understand the influence of racial and pan-ethnic group identification *and* stratification on American politics.

Notes

1. Throughout the paper, we favor the term "Latino" as opposed to gender-neutral options such as "Latinos/as" or "Latinxs." Although we understand and recognize the fluidity of identity, including gender and sexual identities, our purposeful use of "Latino" echoes the approaches of scholars like Arlene Davila and Christina Beltran in their analysis and defense of the term "Latino" (Beltran 2010; Dávila 1997). As Beltran (2010) notes: "[...] the use of 'Latino' signifies 'the ubiquitous use of this term by the media and the mainstream press, which neither signals nor marks differences in gender, race, ethnicity, and other variables when making nationwide generalizations (5).'"
2. We acknowledge that numerous other groups exist and that their fates are strongly influenced by discrimination. We focus on these four groups due to data availability. Moreover, we acknowledge that significant intragroup heterogeneity complicates the idea of a group experiencing a single, average, amount of discrimination. Finally, we argue that groups' positions in the American racial hierarchy are the product of ongoing political contestation.
3. We excluded 103 individuals who did not identify as the four groups we discuss. Because we model groups separately, we analyze individuals who identified as multiracial in all races/pan-ethnicities with which they identify.

4. By modeling each group separately, we allow each covariate to take a different value for each racial/ethnic group, enabling us to apprehend variation that models that only “control” for race elide. For other studies that employ such models, see Hajnal and Lee (2011); Masuoka and Junn (2013).
5. We include additional controls for age, the frequency that a respondent attends a house of worship, whether a respondent was interviewed in English, a factor variable capturing religious affiliation, and a factor variable capturing a respondent’s generation. We discuss the results in Appendix C of the Supplemental Material.

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Appendix. Regression tables

Above, we reported min–max effects rather than regression tables. Below, we report the impact of perceived relative group discrimination on Trump vote choice (Table A1), and Clinton vote choice (Table A2).

Table A1. Relative group discrimination's influence on Trump vote.

Variables	Blacks	Latinos	Asians	Whites
Relative discrimination	–0.0524 (0.0576)	–0.150* (0.0445)	–0.000255 (0.0434)	0.318* (0.0498)
Income	–0.0305 (0.0324)	0.0322 (0.0219)	0.0209 (0.0195)	–0.0289 (0.0322)
Education	–0.107 (0.0966)	–0.0501 (0.0670)	0.0767 (0.0627)	–0.143 (0.0966)
Male	0.286 (0.187)	0.0803 (0.136)	0.407* (0.121)	0.390 (0.201)
Ideology	–0.343* (0.0810)	–0.607* (0.0654)	–0.620* (0.0685)	–0.630* (0.107)
Party ID	–0.917* (0.0757)	–1.163* (0.0630)	–1.182* (0.0649)	–1.240* (0.108)
Economic perception	0.228* (0.0722)	0.150* (0.0540)	0.0980 (0.0529)	–0.0425 (0.0812)
Observations	2546	2384	2441	968
Pseudo R^2	0.206	0.361	0.337	0.446

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.

Source: 2016 CMPS. Unweighted logistic regressions.

* $p < 0.05$.

Table A2. Relative group discrimination's influence on Clinton vote.

Variables	Blacks	Latinos	Asians	Whites
Relative discrimination	0.0311 (0.0372)	0.177* (0.0361)	–0.00830 (0.0365)	–0.335* (0.0525)
Income	0.0213 (0.0207)	0.0159 (0.0177)	0.0131 (0.0161)	0.0818* (0.0317)
Education	0.0989 (0.0608)	0.129* (0.0530)	0.0733 (0.0520)	0.120 (0.0949)
Male	–0.238 (0.122)	–0.0791 (0.111)	–0.122 (0.102)	–0.142 (0.196)
Ideology	0.215* (0.0534)	0.366* (0.0517)	0.470* (0.0576)	0.481* (0.0996)
Party ID	0.873* (0.0547)	0.970* (0.0497)	1.003* (0.0539)	1.240* (0.103)
Economic perception	0.153* (0.0452)	0.0903* (0.0427)	0.113* (0.0436)	0.249* (0.0790)
Observations	2546	2384	2441	968
Pseudo R^2	0.170	0.262	0.252	0.433

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.

Source: 2016 CMPS. Unweighted logistic regressions.

* $p < 0.05$.