

Grief and Anger

Disentangling the Turnout Effects of COVID-19

Kevin Morris

Brennan Center for Justice

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- By the time of the election, more than **8.3 million** Americans had tested positive
- and more than **220 thousand** had died from the virus.
- Importantly, there were big—and widely known—racial disparities in the effects of the pandemic.

COVID-19

"All the News
That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times

Late Edition
Today sunnier and some clouds,
temperatures early high 30s. Brighter, clear
afternoon. In the evening, 30s. High 40s.
Wind variable, moderate. High 50s.
Weather map appears on Page A1.

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ANXIETY MOUNTS WITH RACE AT A BITTER END

CLEVELAND Joseph R. Biden Jr. focusing on Ohio on Monday.

FAYETTEVILLE, N.C. President Trump is in the battleground state.

MONACA, PA. Mr. Biden visited a community college on Monday.

SCRANTON, PA. The president made Pennsylvania a priority.

PITTSBURGH Mr. Biden hopes to flip Pennsylvania this year.

TRAVERSE CITY, MICH. The president aims to hold Michigan.

As Americans Surge to Polls, Trump Contests Some Ballots, Setting Up Fight Over Which Ones Count

This article is by Jim Tankersley, Michael S. Schmidt, Nick Corasaniti and Jennifer Rubin. With the election coming to a close, the Trump campaign has filed lawsuits and contested some of the votes cast in battleground states. It came as a majority of states moved to count all the votes in the coming days, while others waited for more evidence.

The president's legal team has brought lawsuits in four states and has been calling for recounts in three more. In Pennsylvania, the president and his legal team are challenging the voting system used in the state.

In Michigan, the president is asking a federal judge to overturn the results of the election, which he claims were舞弊。The court has rejected that request, which Republicans have appealed to the Supreme Court (see related story).

In key counties, including Philadelphia, public health officials are now racing to get through the backlog of ballots to ensure they can more effectively chase down outstanding ballots as they are processed. In North Carolina, election workers told as he pounded nails into a plywood frame at a storefront in Los Angeles, Fernando Salas, a construction worker, said he was preparing

Pandemic Shadows the Final Appeals From Trump and Biden

By SHANE GOLDMACHER

NEW HOPPE, Pa. — Voters on both sides of the nation's widening political divide prepared on Monday to render a verdict on President Donald Trump, whose last year in office had, in particular, its management of the coronavirus pandemic and the suspended American life for the past eight months.

As Mr. Trump and Joseph R. Biden Jr. raced across the most important battleground states in a frenzied final push for votes, the

2020 election was unfolding in a country with urgent problems: an uncontrolled public health crisis, a battered economy, deep ideological divisions, a national reckoning on race and uncertainty about whether the outcome of the vote will be disputed.

Undeterred by the pandemic, Americans have already displayed an uncommon determination to have their voices and votes heard this year. Nearly 100 million cast their ballots in advance of Election Day, shattering records as they endured long lines at early voting sites or sent in their ballots

by mail.

Much of the country felt on edge, as if the often-predicted "most important election of a lifetime" had finally arrived. Ahead of the polls opening on Tuesday, businesses in cities from Denver to Detroit to Washington, D.C.,

were boarding up their windows with plywood as they readied for the possibility of civil unrest. Some governors were readying the National Guard.

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A Country in Turmoil Sees a Stark Display of Differences

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"Everyone is starting to panic," Fernando Salas, a construction worker, said as he pounded nails into a plywood frame at a storefront in a trendy shopping district near Los Angeles.

Election administrators braced themselves to pull off the twin challenges of holding an election during a pandemic and fending off

Continued on Page A12



A man collapsed and died in Wuhan, China, as the crisis began.

Political Threat

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- White (2016) argues that more aggressive immigration enforcement can increase turnout among Latinos.
- Campbell (2003) documents that threats to Social Security increased political activity among seniors.

Political Threat

- Nichols and Vald  z (2020): “The straightforward notion that racialized threat mobilizes Latinxs is weakened by the literature’s tendency to overpredict political mobilization, overlook individual responses to threat, and disregard the role of mobilization structures.”

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- ...up through contemporary work showing that stressful life events such as divorce (Sandell and Plutzer 2005) and ill health (Pacheco and Fletcher 2015) can decrease turnout too.
- Hobbs, Christakis, and Fowler (2014) is among the only papers to directly study the effect of a familial death on turnout by matching Social Security death records to the California registered voter file. They find that a household death around an election reduces turnout.

From Demobilizing to Mobilizing

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- COVID-19 had the potential to bring such a narrative to life given A) the racial disparities in death (e.g. Garg et al. 2020) and B) the intense reporting of these disparities in both the mainstream press (Kolata 2020) and publications specifically serving Black America (Blount 2020).

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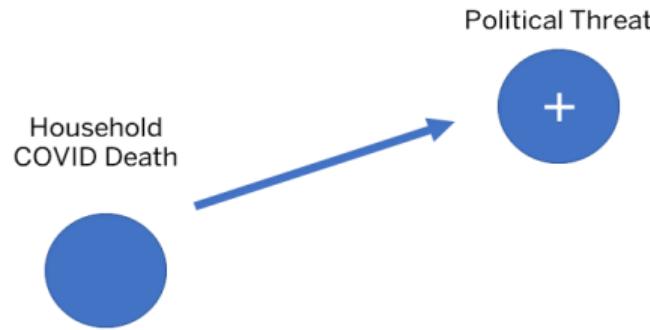
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- Racial minorities with a strong sense of “racial affinity” or “linked fate” are probably more likely to understand COVID-19 and a *racial* policy failure and therefore be mobilized.

Competing Treatments

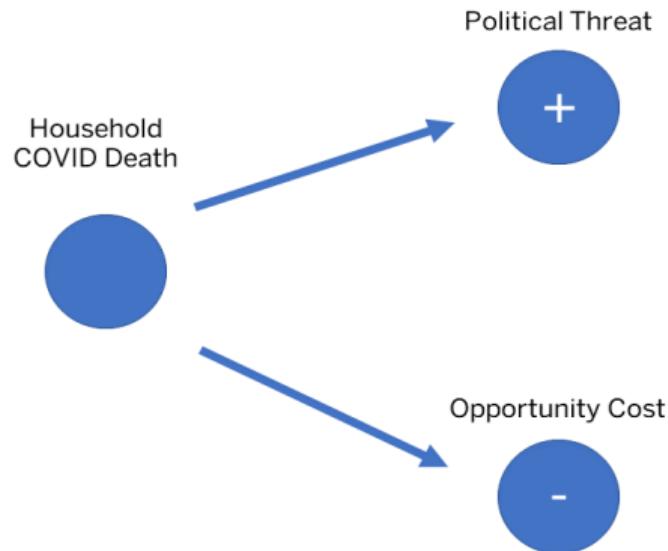
Household
COVID Death



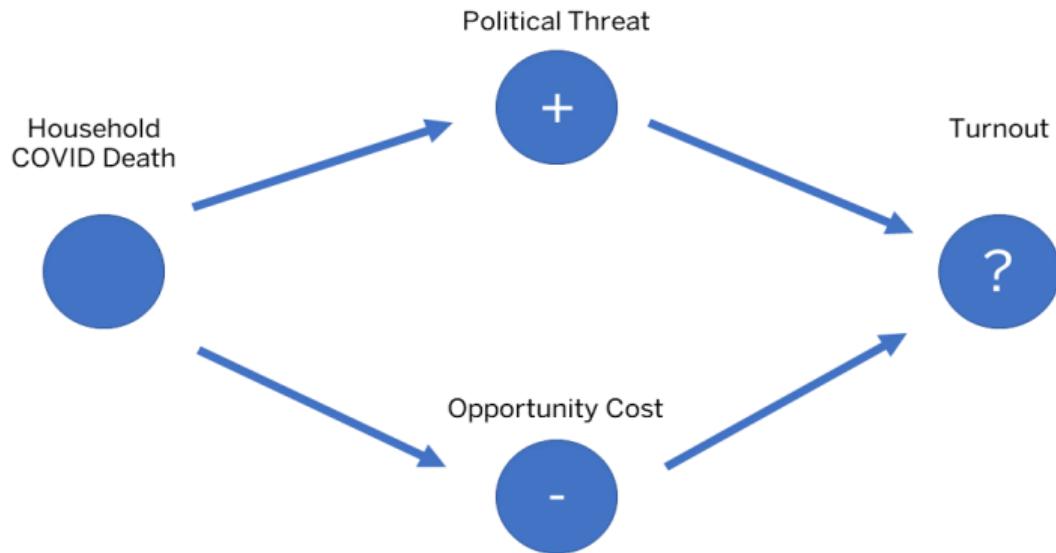
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- I use CCES data to explore whether the turnout effects of COVID-19 contact were moderated by non-white Americans' views on structural racism using a "racial affinity" index.
- *H:* Non-white voters with higher levels of racial affinity were more mobilized by COVID-19 contact than voters without such affinity.

Results

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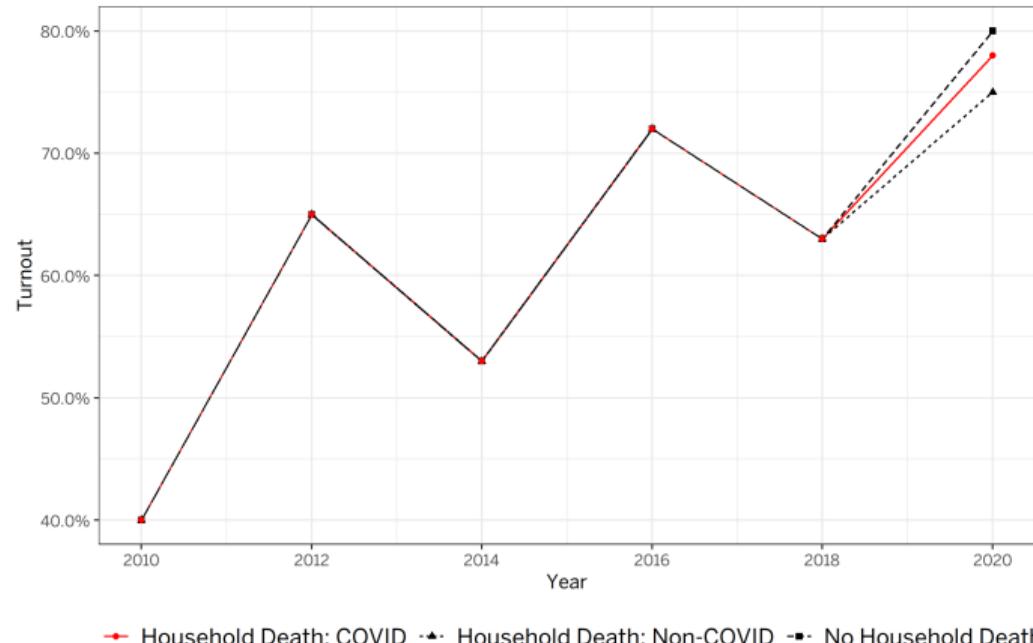
Results

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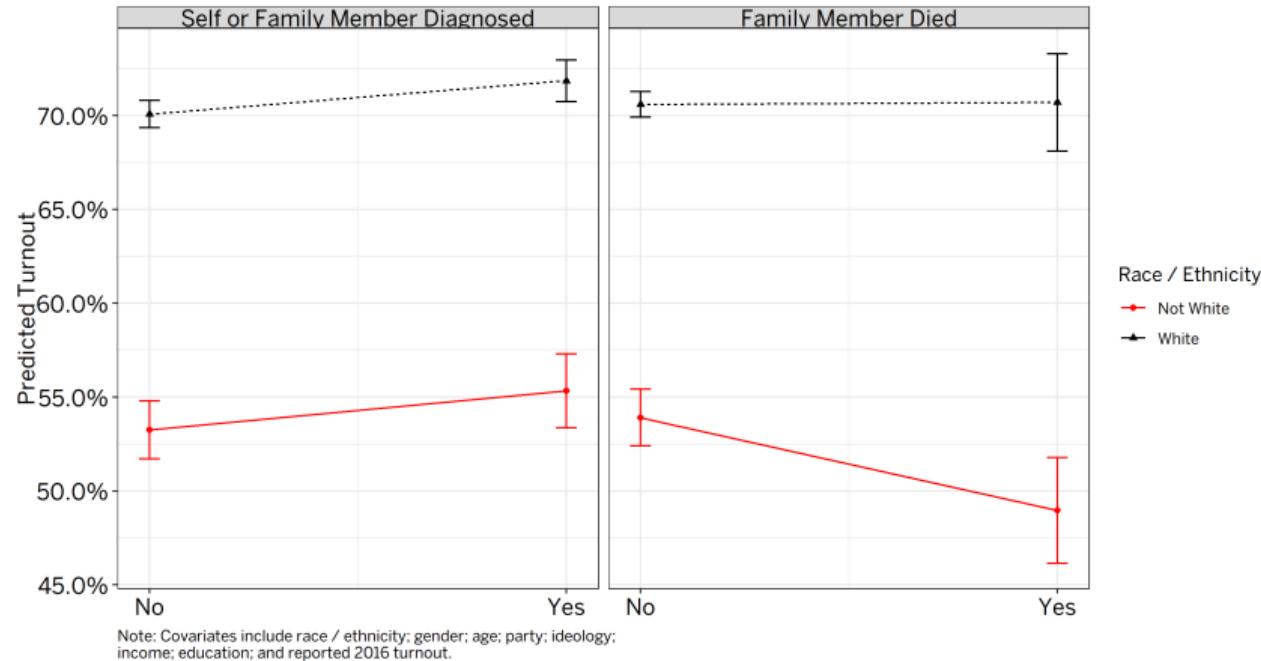
Results

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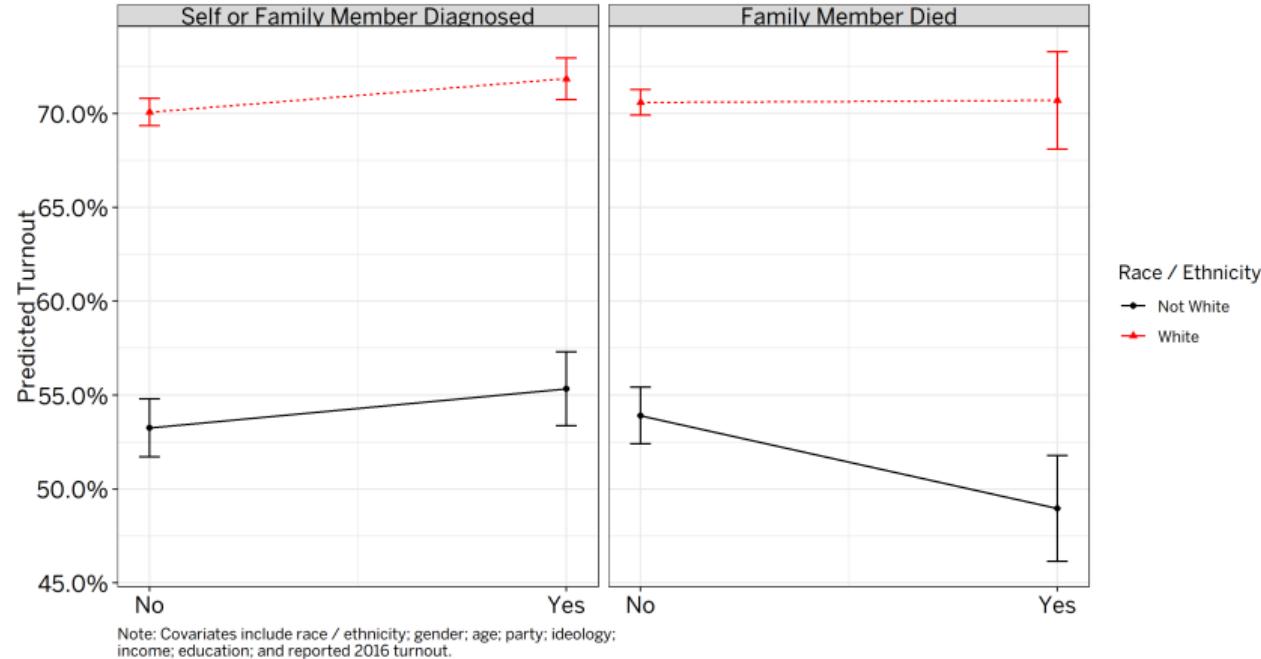
(Here's what this could look like)



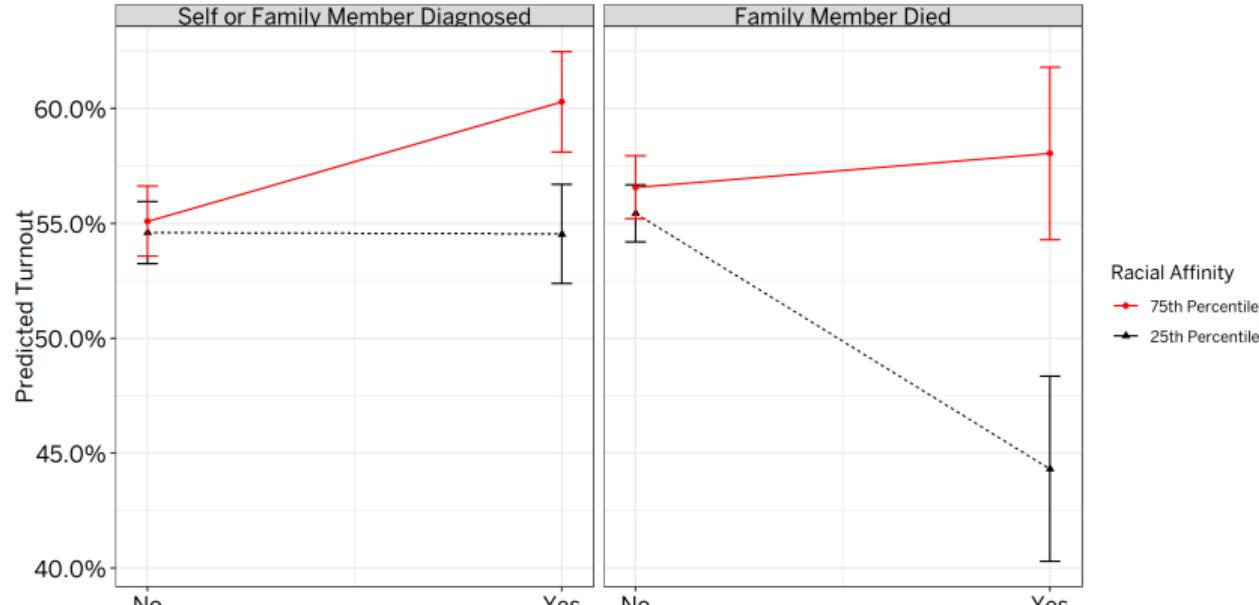
Survey Data: CCES



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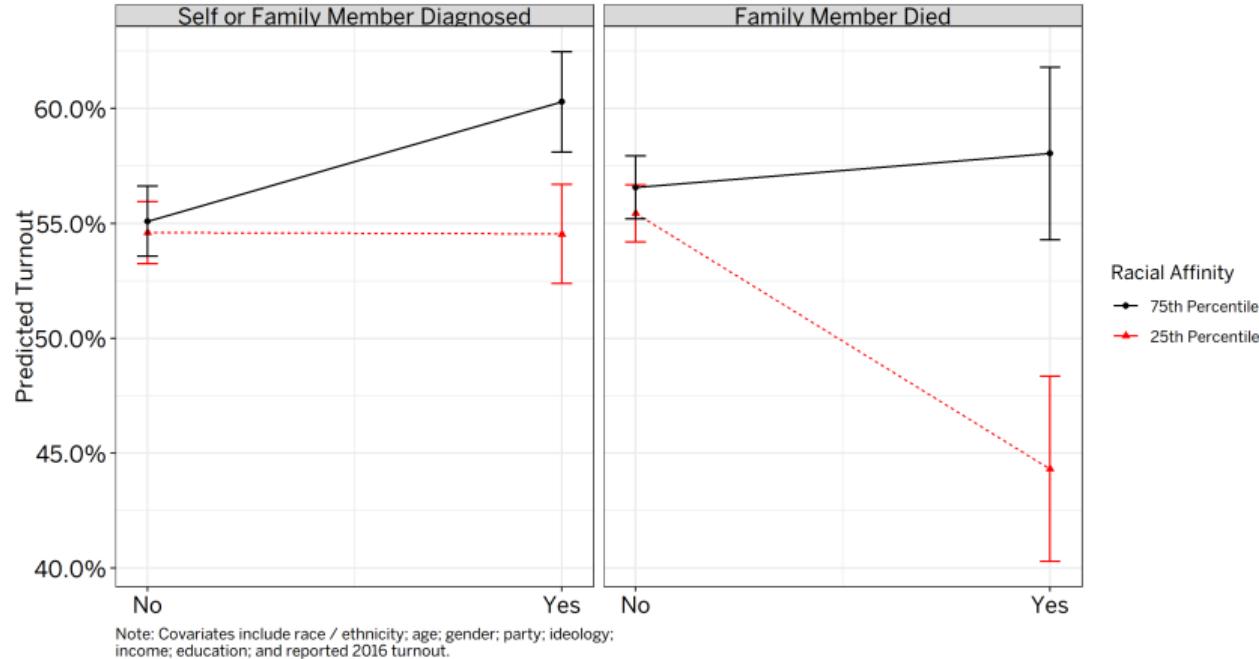


Survey Data: CCES



Note: Covariates include race / ethnicity; age; gender; party; ideology; income; education; and reported 2016 turnout.

Survey Data: CCES



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- But when we explore how this “treatment effect” is moderated by views about structural racism in the United States, big gaps open up in how nonwhite voters responded to being touched by the pandemic.
- When we have treatment effects (potentially) pointing in different directions, we should develop causal models that can disentangle these effects rather than simply adjudicate between competing hypotheses.
- The IRB can be annoying.

Thanks!

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