



# The Association between Party Affiliation and Primary Election Turnout



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## Introduction

- The voter turnout rate by state in the 2020 primary election ranged from 2.6% to 45.7%, which is significantly lower than voter turnout in general elections (Gerber, Huber, Biggers, & Hendry, 2017; Jewitt, 2014; United States Election Project, 2020).
- Research suggests that voters are disillusioned and have varying levels of trust with the political system, and in nominating candidates for public office for primary elections, party leaders can feed into this cynicism, undercutting their influence in the election process (Manento & Testa, 2022).
- Partisanship and party affiliation can shape voter involvement with the political system, and there have been correlations found between party identification and voter turnout in primary elections (Bonneau & Cann, 2015; Gerber, Huber, & Washington, 2010; Jewitt, 2014).

## Research Questions

- Is there an association between party affiliation and primary election turnout?
- Are certain races, in conjunction with specific political party affiliation, more likely to vote in primary elections over others?

## Methods

### Sample

- Non-institutionalized American adults over age 18 (n=8,280) who responded were interviewed pre-2020 general election by the American National Election Studies (ANES).

### Measures

- Primary Election Turnout: whether respondent voted in a primary election or caucus in 2020.
- Party Affiliation: summary of questions related to party identity placed respondents on a scale of 7 response, including Strong Democrat, Not very strong Democrat, Independent-Democrat, Independent, Independent-Republican, Not very strong Republican, Strong Republican.
- Race: self-identified race and ethnicity, coded as White, non-Hispanic, Black, non-Hispanic, Hispanic, Asian or Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic, and Multiple Races, non-Hispanic, which were collapsed into Person of Color, including those who identify as Hispanic.

## Results

### Univariate

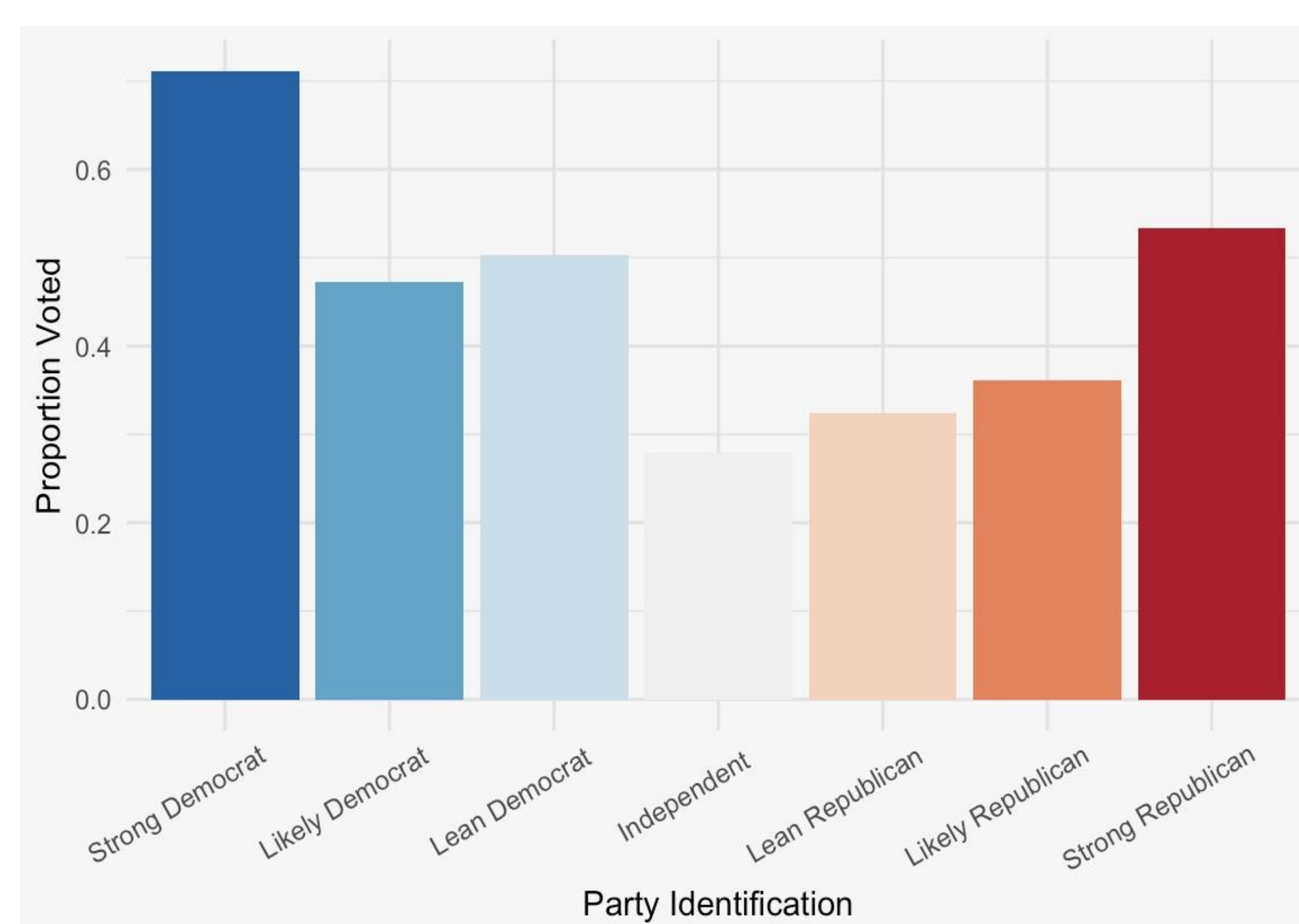
- Less than half of respondents voted in the 2020 primary election (49.66%).

### Bivariate

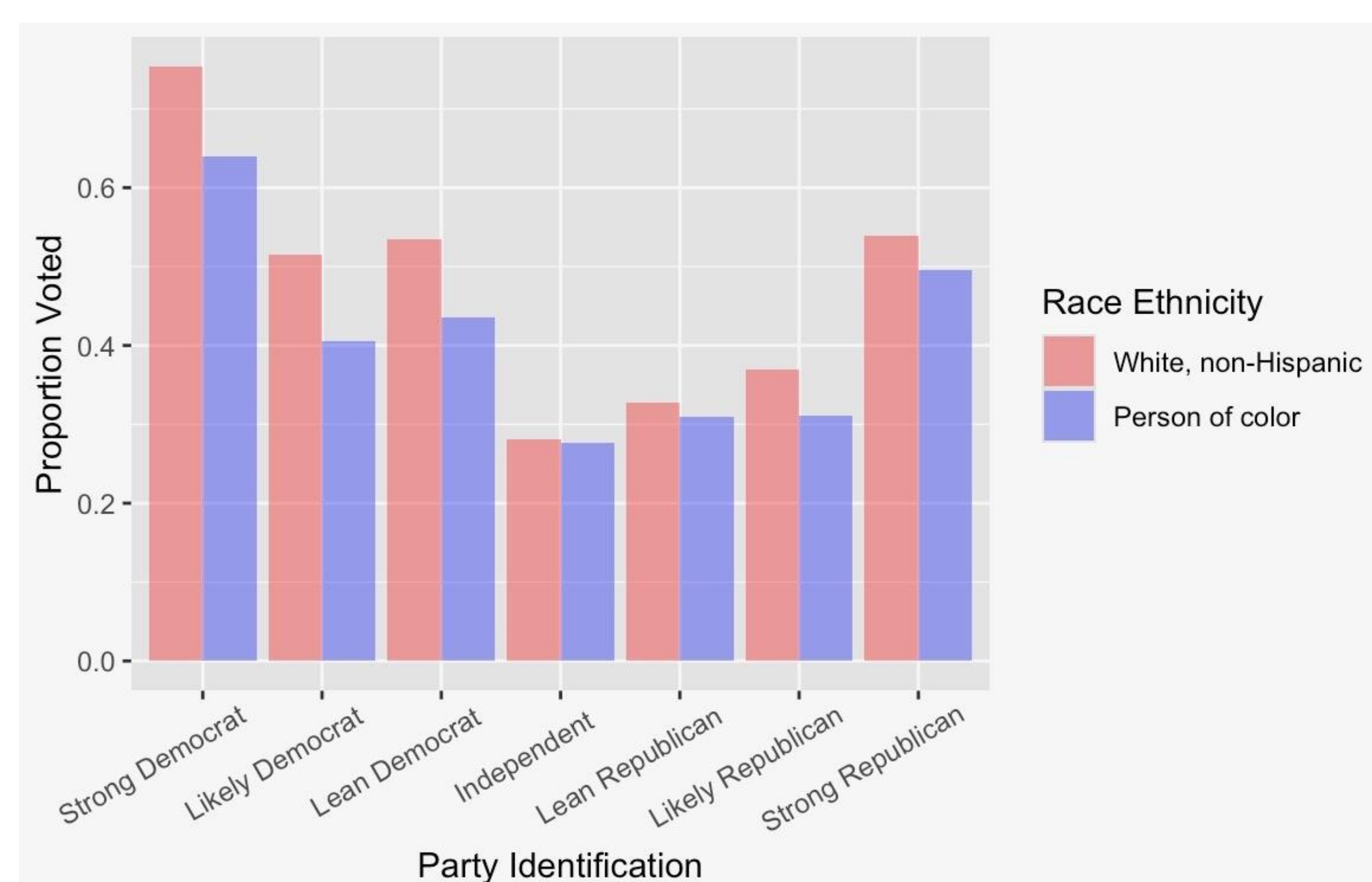
- A Chi-square test of independence revealed that among eligible American voters, party identity and primary election turnout were significantly associated ( $p = 2.2e^{-16}$ ).
- This graph reveals that Americans who associate more strongly with the Democratic or Republican party are more likely to vote in primary elections.

### Multivariate

- Logistic regression analyses comparing Person of color to White, non-Hispanic and Independent voters as another explanatory variable did not find any statistically significant evidence for moderation ( $p=0.8876$ ).
- Race does not significantly moderate the relationship between party affiliation and primary election turnout ( $p>0.05$ ), except for when the respondent was a Likely Democrat and Person of color ( $p=0.0412$ ) or Strong Democrat and Person of color ( $p=0.0039$ ).
- Every party combination with person of color was less likely to vote in primary elections compared to White, non-Hispanic Independent voters.



**Figure 1: Party Identification and Proportion of Respondents who voted in the primary election**



**Figure 2: Proportion of Respondents who voted in the primary election at each Party Identification and Race Combination**

## Discussion

- Party affiliation is significantly associated with primary election turnout, respondents who identify more strongly with the Democrat or Republican party are more likely to vote in primary elections.
- Race is not a moderating variable for party affiliation and primary election turnout relationship.
- These findings may contribute to political science research regarding American primary election turnout and political polarization.
- Further research is needed to determine if changing the primary system to be inclusive to all political parties, such as open primaries, mobilizes more voters and to consider political ideology beyond the Democratic, Independent, and Republican parties and whether having more candidate options could lead to more civic participation.

## References

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