

Trust and tribulation: Racial identity centrality, institutional trust, and support for candidates in the 2020 US presidential election

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Some of this research was conducted while Benjamin Blankenship and O.S. were in the Department of Psychology, University of Michigan.

Abstract

We examined how racial-ethnic identity centrality, or the importance of race/ethnicity in people's self-perceptions, affected peoples' support for the Democratic and Republican candidates in the 2020 US election. We explored this association by examining the mediating role of trust in important social institutions. In Study 1, we examined these effects by comparing the pattern of relationships among people of color (POC) and white people, using a sample of 177 Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) participants. In Study 2, we expanded our focus on different racial-ethnic groups, by comparing effects for Black, Latinx, Asian American/Pacific Islander (AAPI), and white participants, using a sample of 530 MTurk workers. Although there were a few findings that ran contrary to our expectations, the two studies generally found that trust in institutions that challenge the status quo, such as the media, explained the relationship between identity centrality and support for candidates among POC, especially Black and Latinx participants. We also found that trust in institutions that uphold the status quo, such as police and courts, explained the relationship between racial-ethnic identity centrality and support for candidates among white people.

1 | INTRODUCTION

In the United States, as in all countries, trust in social institutions is the thread that holds the nation together (Wilkes, 2015). During the 2020 presidential election, those institutions were assailed by then-president Donald Trump and other prominent political figures, as they spread falsehoods about the legitimacy of the election. The country has since experienced a time of tribulation as we reckon with the devastating consequences of institutional delegitimization, such as the insurrection in the US Capitol (Graham, 2021; Rutenberg et al., 2020).

Scholars from various disciplines have studied the consequences and antecedents of institutional trust (Knoll & Gill, 2011; Mayer et al., 1995). In general, there is agreement that trust is built on three distinct components: the perceived *ability of the institutions* to be trusted (i.e., it has the necessary competence to perform its role), the perceived *integrity* of the trustee (i.e., it acts consistently and as expected across situations), and the perceived *benevolence* of the trustee (i.e., it acts in the best interest of the trustor; Colquitt et al., 2007). But what happens when people do not perceive institutions as competent, full of integrity, or benevolent?

Low institutional trust can inhibit the effectiveness of a democratic government (Tavits, 2006) because when trust is absent, citizens have less confidence in one another (Sønderskov & Dinesen, 2016), are less likely to engage in prosocial behaviors (e.g., volunteering, donating; Sønderskov, 2011), and are less likely to participate politically (Bauhr & Grimes, 2014). Partisanship has been explored as an antecedent of institutional trust (Hooghe & Oser, 2017), but recently other identities, like racial-ethnic identities, are also emerging as important factors.

In exploring the role of trust in the 2016 election, Blankenship & Stewart (2019) argued that social power influences institutional trust. Specifically, they suggested that those who hold privileged social identities, like being white¹ or upper class, may be hesitant to trust science and other institutions because they perceive those institutions as threatening privileged groups' social power (e.g., by highlighting systemic racism and class disparities). These findings are supported by system justification theory, which posits that people are likely to defend the status quo because it justifies their place in society (Jost et al., 2004). This preference, in turn, might make the Republican Party, known for upholding so-called traditional values, especially attractive to those who desire to maintain their historical position at the top of the social hierarchy (Steenland & Wright, 2014; Womick et al., 2019). Consistent with that logic, Blankenship & Stewart (2019) found that those who held privileged identities and mistrusted social institutions tended to vote for Trump, the Republican candidate, over Clinton in the 2016 election.

However, since 2016, the context has shifted, including which institutions are the focus of public attention. In the 2020 election, in addition to science and the media, we also saw the court system, the police, and the government apparatus (not just elected officials) itself politicized. Consequently, in the current study, we examine the relation between identity centrality and trust in particular social institutions, and how that affected voting in the 2020 election. However, we expand the hypothesis tested by Blankenship & Stewart (2019) by positing that there are two types of social institutions: those that are viewed as at least potentially creating or providing opportunities for social change (e.g., science and the media), and those that are viewed as designed to maintain the status quo (e.g., the government, the police, and the court system). Thus, we propose in line with the previously supported notion that social power is related to vote preference, that

¹We do not capitalize white as a racial category to decenter whiteness. Also, we use the term "racial-ethnic" rather than race to emphasize the socially constructed nature of racial categories and to note that those categories are always partly defined by ethnicity.

people of color (POC) who strongly identify with their racial-ethnic group will support Biden in the 2020 election. In contrast, we expect that white people who strongly identify with their racial-ethnic group will support Trump. Finally, we posit that the relation between racial-ethnic identity centrality and sentiments toward the candidates will be mediated by trust in social institutions.²

2 | INSTITUTIONAL TRUST AND IDENTITY

Some social identities, such as political orientation, have been found to be antecedent to trust (Hooghe & Oser, 2017), but less is known about the role of other social identities, such as race/ethnicity. Research examining the relationship between race/ethnicity and institutional trust suggests that those with privileged racial/ethnic group identities may be hesitant to trust social institutions associated with social change (e.g., science, media) because they fear that they may decrease their social power. For instance, the media has increasingly highlighted systemic racism and instances of white supremacy (e.g., Powell, 2020; Worland, 2020); thus, those with a stake in upholding white supremacy will likely distrust those institutions that provide information that questions the practices and fairness of their group. Therefore, those with privileged identities will not only distrust these social institutions but will also be likely to support a candidate who endorses the status quo. As such, race/ethnicity is an especially important factor to consider in the context of voting behavior because historical and socio-contextual factors (e.g., racism, voting suppression) affect not only whether one is able to vote and for whom (Combs, 2016), but also whether one is more likely to aim to maintain or disrupt the status quo (Shorey et al., 2002) and to support particular candidates (Hawley, 2019; Ostfeld, 2019).

We do not suggest that members of any racial-ethnic group all approach social institutions or electoral candidates in the same way. Instead, we rely on the substantial literature showing that people's social identities—in this case the degree to which individual members of racial-ethnic groups feel strongly identified with their racial-ethnic group or not—are powerful determinants of their social behavior (Ashmore et al., 2004; Brown, 2000). Racial-ethnic identity centrality (i.e., how important one's racial-ethnic identity is to their self-concept; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992) may play an important role in electoral choices, as those who more strongly identify with their racial-ethnic group tend to be especially cognizant of their group's position in the social hierarchy, for example, perceiving discrimination when it has taken place (Sellers & Shelton, 2003) or developing a sense of group consciousness (Gurin et al., 1980). Therefore, we propose that POC who strongly identify with their group may trust institutions oriented toward social change and may also distrust status quo-maintaining institutions that keep them in a marginalized position (Plutzer, 2013). In contrast, those who strongly identify with a privileged group (e.g., whites) may trust those institutions that work toward maintaining the social hierarchy and mistrust those that are viewed as supporting social change.

2.1 | Trust in institutions associated with the status quo

The government, law enforcement, and the judiciary are institutions that support the status quo by introducing and upholding policies that benefits those groups with higher status in society (white people, men, etc.; Fernandez & Rodrik, 1991; Singhvi, 1978; Tridimas, 2010). Consequently, we expect that POC with a strong identification with their racial-ethnic group will be more likely

²These studies were not pre-registered; data are available from the corresponding author upon request.

to mistrust these institutions, while we expect white people who strongly identify with their racial-ethnic group to be more likely to trust them. Trust in those institutions, in turn, should influence an individual's views of presidential candidates who would either change the nature of the institutions or keep them the same.

2.1.1 | Trust in government

Over time, trust in government in the United States has declined across groups (Avery, 2009; Putnam, 1995). Identity, particularly partisan political identity, plays a significant role in the deterioration of public trust in the government. Specifically, partisanship is argued to lead to feelings of anger and negativity, which then become associated with the government (Webster, 2018). Further, research has shown that trust in government depends on the party that is in charge; for instance, Keele (2005) found that a partisan person's trust increases when their political party is in charge of the government (Dabros et al., 2015; Theiss-Morse et al., 2015; Wilkes, 2015).

In addition to partisanship, research on racial-ethnic differences in government trust suggests that this identity also has an important role, with POC tending to trust the government less than white people (Jamison et al., 2019; Mangum, 2016; Wilkes, 2015), particularly when it comes to issues important to communities of color (Koch, 2019). One reason for greater POC mistrust may be the historical mistreatment that communities of color have faced at the hands of the government (e.g., enslavement, internment, imprisonment). For POC who strongly identify with their racial-ethnic group, this historical mistreatment may be a driving force behind their mistrust of the government. This is in line with previous research findings that those who are more group-oriented (e.g., those who have a stronger racial-ethnic identity) are more conscious of race/ethnicity and are also more likely to be aware of the government's historical and modern-day biases and trust the government less as result (Mangum, 2016). On the other hand, white people have historically been privileged and have had their social status protected by the government (e.g., with redlining, Jim Crow, and anti-immigrant policies). Thus, we expect that the government's association with protecting the status quo would lead white people with a stronger racial-ethnic identity to trust the government more.

2.1.2 | Trust in law enforcement

Police have a complex history in the United States. As an institution, they were formed to patrol enslaved Africans and monitor newly arrived immigrants (Kumanyika, 2020). Even though their job description has evolved to "serve and protect" communities, they do this by enforcing existing laws and upholding the status quo (Sykes, 1985). Further, their history and the continued mistreatment of Black and Brown people have led to a deep lack of trust between communities of color and police (Duck, 2017). Given this relationship, it is not surprising that white people in the United States report more trust in the police than do Black people (Duck, 2017; Krogstad, 2014; Reisig & Parks, 2002).

Trust in the police has been found to influence trust in other social institutions (Alang et al., 2020) and voting behavior (Lerman & Weaver, 2014). Research suggests that those who have disproportionate contact with police (e.g., Black and Brown people) are more likely to attribute these experiences with the police to bias (Wenzel et al., 2003). Walker (2020) argues that these experiences can spill over into the political realm when public officials do not address the police bias

and mistreatment; their lack of attention suggests to the community that public officials accept the status quo, which, in turn, influences community member's voting behavior (Lerman & Weaver, 2014).

Communities of color are more likely to have negative interactions with police officers than white people (Lloyd, 2020), leading to their mistrust of law enforcement as an institution. This is especially true for those with a strong racial-ethnic identity, as this would make their perception of bias more salient. We, therefore, expect that mistrust of the police will be related to attitudes toward the 2020 presidential candidates: those who mistrust the police will feel more warmly toward Joe Biden, the Democratic candidate who promised to address police brutality. By contrast, we expect those who trust law enforcement officials to feel more warmly toward Donald Trump, the candidate who promised to "Back the Blue."

2.1.3 | Trust in the judiciary

The judiciary is another public institution that received a lot of attention during the 2020 election, in part because of the controversy surrounding several of former President Donald Trump's nominees to the federal and Supreme Court (Bush, 2019). This controversy cast doubt on the courts' trustworthiness, which is particularly problematic because the courts "depend on the goodwill of the citizenry to remain viable" (Wenzel et al., 2003, p. 192). If there is no trust, citizens are less likely to respect judges' rulings (Caldeira, 1986; Malhotra & Jessee, 2014).

Previous research has found that US citizens have limited knowledge of the judicial system; still, 75% of the population say that they trust the Supreme Court to make choices that are right for the country, and 62% trust in state courts (Jamieson & Hennessy, 2007). POC, however, are more inclined to perceive the courts as helping to maintain the status quo and mistrust the judiciary as a result of the disproportionate risk of interacting with the court because of systemic bias (Wenzel et al., 2003). According to Citrin and Stoker (2018), perceiving bias in the judiciary can lead one to believe that the court lacks procedural justice (does not make its decisions in a fair and impartial way), which can delegitimize the judiciary. In fact, Matsueda et al. (2011) found that perceptions of injustice in the courts influenced voting; specifically, those who perceived more injustice indicated that they were less likely to vote for Bush over Clinton in a theoretical election.

Thus, we propose that POC with stronger racial-ethnic identities will report more mistrust of the court system, and consequently they will feel more positively toward Joe Biden, who pledged to nominate judges who are more oriented toward social equity. In contrast, white people strongly identified with their racial-ethnic identity and who likely experience fewer interactions with the court system will be more likely to trust the court system and to feel warmly toward Donald Trump, who has a track record of nominating judges with views in line with maintaining the status quo.

2.2 | Trust in institutions associated with change

Not all social institutions work toward maintaining the status quo. Indeed, science and the media have at least sometimes been catalysts for social change, as they have been proponents of progress and describe and discuss social inequities (Happer & Philo, 2013; Thigpen & Funk, 2019). As a result, we expect that those who would most benefit from social change will be more inclined to trust these institutions than those who have a stake in maintaining the status quo. Here, we

propose that those who trust in science and the media will also feel more positively toward the presidential candidate who displays support for the institution (i.e., Joe Biden) than they do for the candidate who opposes the institution (i.e., Donald Trump).

2.2.1 | Trust in science and medical research

The politicization of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has caused some of the public to question the messages and directions they receive from scientists and medical researchers (Agle, 2020). Although recent polls have shown that trust in science remains high overall (Funk et al., 2019), these polls did not examine the public's trust in science, as it relates to specific issues (Cross, 2021), so it is unclear how the COVID-19 pandemic, a primary focus in 2020, may have impacted the presidential election. Still, it is likely that perceptions of the trustworthiness of the scientific community had an influential role in the public's attitude toward either presidential candidate.

Science is often discussed as a vehicle for social progress and change (Gauchat, 2012). Despite the shortcomings of the scientific community (e.g., in the Tuskegee syphilis study or medical bias; Gamble, 1997), scientific progress has improved the lives of many. In this context, the association between science and progress is important to consider because it could affect attitudes toward the scientific community. For example, Blankenship & Stewart (2019) found that mistrust of science was high for those who had a privileged identity that was central to their self-concept, perhaps because science has been understood to be communally produced and equally “owned” by scientists of all backgrounds (Merton, 1973; see also National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine, 2017). As such, science challenges privileged positions in society. Similarly, among those in privileged positions, those who have higher identity centrality are more likely to be cognizant of challenges to their social position; conversely, although it has not been examined, we expect that those with marginalized identities (e.g., racial/ethnic minorities) will be more inclined to trust science as an institution because it operates through open procedures to provide evidence that can be used to challenge the status quo. Consistent with this logic, partisan identity is related to trust in science, with mistrust of science being highest among conservatives, who also tend to be interested in maintaining the current social hierarchy (Funk et al., 2019).

These findings align with our argument that those who have a stake in maintaining the status quo will be more likely to mistrust institutions that are associated with social progress and that this will, in turn, affect their voting behavior. Indeed, Blankenship & Stewart (2019) found that those who reported distrust in science also tended to vote for Donald Trump in the 2016 election. Thus, we expect that those who have privileged identities will report less trust in science, and warmer feelings toward Donald Trump, who echoed those feelings of mistrust during the 2020 election. In contrast, we expect that the potential for progress will also be salient for those with marginalized identities but that they will feel positively about progress and consequently trust science and support the pro-science candidate—Joe Biden—more.

2.2.2 | Trust in the media

Unlike trust in science and medical researchers, trust in the media has been steadily declining for the last decade and is low among all racial-ethnic groups (Citrin & Stoker, 2018; Salmon, 2021). Low media trust can cause people to disengage from the news or to look to alternative

news sources, where there is a higher potential for them to be misled (Lee, 2010; Van Duyn & Collier, 2019). Distrust in the media in the United States allows for other factors like partisanship and racial-ethnic identity to play a role in how media trust relates to voting behaviors (Vercellotti & Brewer, 2006). Still, despite varying levels of trust, the media has a role in constructing the public's political reality; specifically, theorists suggest that what the media talks about and how they frame issues can affect what the public cares about and the position they take, which can lead to social change (Wanta et al., 2004). Thus, support for wars and foreign policy is often increased or decreased by media coverage of the issues at stake (famine, authoritarian regimes, and harm to civilians). These shifts in policy support are evidence of the media's role in shaping public opinion (Christen & Huberty, 2007). Coverage of new developments in science and technology have similarly produced changes in the public's acceptance of those developments (McCluskey et al., 2016). In short, the media communicates new information to the public and thereby can facilitate change (Wilkins & Mody, 2001).

Research has shown that partisanship may influence the relation between media and voting behavior. Researchers have found that when people held negative attitudes toward the media they were more likely to be influenced by their partisan affiliations (Ladd, 2010). Moreover, those who identify strongly as conservatives are the most likely to distrust the media (Lee, 2010). Another factor that can influence how media trust relates to voting behavior is racial-ethnic identity. For example, research has found that Black people tend to distrust the mainstream media because they believe that the media often portrays Black people in negative and stereotypical ways (Vercellotti & Brewer, 2006). This is likely because they are especially cognizant of perceived media slights against their group (Lee, 2010). The media may nevertheless be viewed as providing a space for critiques of the status quo while advocating for progressive change (i.e., "liberal bias" in the media; Blankenship & Stewart, 2019). For this reason, white people who strongly identify as white may view the media as encouraging social change that would negatively affect their position in the social hierarchy, and strongly identified POC may embrace the media for that same reason.

To summarize our arguments, we have emphasized how trust in institutions that uphold the status quo versus those that are aligned with progress are related to voting patterns. Moreover, we described how racial-ethnic identity centrality might affect members of racial-ethnic groups' trust in institutions because the institutions are viewed as upholding the status quo or progressive. We posit that trust in institutions, in turn, influences voting behaviors for all racial-ethnic groups. Because whites dominate the social hierarchy, those who identify strongly with their racial-ethnic identity are expected to trust institutions that uphold the status quo and to demonstrate voting behaviors that align with conservatives. Equally, POC with strong racial-ethnic identification are expected to trust institutions that challenge the status quo and vote for the candidate associated with change.

3 | THE CURRENT RESEARCH

We completed two studies examining the effect of racial-ethnic centrality on the vote, as well as feelings toward political candidates in the 2020 US presidential election. Although previous literature has studied the role of racial-centrality as it relates to political extremism (Bai, 2020) and voting behavior (Jardina, 2019), the role of institutional trust is less clear; thus, this is a contribution of the current study, as we tested trust in institutions as mediating variables and examined whether trust accounts for the relations between racial-ethnic centrality and vote. Finally, we expected that these relations would be different for different racial-ethnic groups, based on each

group's social privilege, the presence or absence of historical and contemporary tensions between their racial-ethnic group and these institutions, and members' individual feelings of identification with their racial-ethnic group. Previous literature has examined this mediating role mostly within white groups. As such, examining both privileged and marginalized groups separately is a contribution to the literature; at the same time, we note that we were not able to adopt an intersectional lens (Bowleg, 2008; Crenshaw, 1990) that might have foregrounded class and gender or other important aspects of social power and privilege.

We expected that POC who saw their racial-ethnic identities as central to how they viewed themselves would be more likely to vote for the Democratic candidate, Joe Biden, since his platform explicitly called for social change and steps toward racial-ethnic equity. Among whites, on the one hand, we expected that group members who saw their privileged racial-ethnic identity as central would tend to support the Republican candidate, Donald Trump, who can be seen as "system justification" personified, in his calls to "Keep America Great," while maintaining the current power stratification between racial-ethnic groups. On the other hand, we expected that privileged group members who saw their racial-ethnic identities as less central would be less threatened by the societal shifts proposed by Joe Biden and the Democrats. Therefore, we expected that they would be more likely to view Biden positively and cast their vote for him.

Finally, we expected the relations between racial-ethnic centrality and vote to be explained, at least in part, by trust in our main social institutions of interest. This is because people do not typically interact with the political candidates directly or in a vacuum. Instead, they interact with various institutions, such as the government, the media, police, and others, which are either actively supported or criticized by those at the highest levels of political power, such as the President of the United States. Therefore, to the extent that people see a particular institution as supporting or challenging the racial-ethnic status quo, they are expected to support a candidate who would enact policies that either support or undermine those same institutions. For instance, we expected that trust in law enforcement and/or courts would explain why white people who saw their race/ethnicity as central to how they view themselves might be less likely to vote for Joe Biden than Donald Trump. In contrast, we expected that trust in institutions like science and the media, which are associated with progress and with an ability to assess evidence, would help explain why POC who saw their identities as important would support Joe Biden for president rather than Donald Trump. We expected these findings because throughout his presidency, Trump tried to delegitimize institutions that support change (e.g., science and the media), and Biden sought to strengthen these same institutions. We test these predictions by assessing the role of trust in institutions as a mediating variable between racial-ethnic identity centrality and political vote, comparing the effects in different racial-ethnic groups. In Study 1, we first tested these effects by comparing POC and whites. In Study 2, we used a more diverse sample to examine separate effects for Black, Latinx, Asian American/Pacific Islander, and white participants. These two studies provide a much-needed analysis of the roles of racial-ethnic identity and attitudes toward social institutions in predicting political behaviors, such as vote, in different racial-ethnic groups.

4 | STUDY 1 METHOD

4.1 | Participants and procedure

We collected data for Study 1 using Amazon Mechanical Turk and the TurkPrime platform. The participants responded to eight waves of surveys from before the 2016 election (July 2016) to after

the 2020 election (November 2020), timed to take place at key pre- and post-election points in the 2016, 2018, and 2020 elections (see Blankenship & Stewart, 2019, for details). After participants provided informed consent, they filled out a number of measures, including those of interest in the current study. Participants then read a debrief page before being redirected to another page to receive compensation. Our participants were compensated for different amounts of time it took to complete the waves, based on the average time it took our pilot testers to complete the surveys. In 2020, MTurk workers were paid \$6.00 for completing the two surveys, equivalent to the US minimum wage.

The current study used data collected in waves that took place before (in September) and after (early to mid-November) the 2020 presidential election. In the current study, participants were only required to have completed the first wave of the 2016 election study (July 2016). The original sample at Wave 1 included 789 participants. In compliance with the original protocol, as exempt by the University of Michigan's Internal Review Board, we asked participants for permission to contact them for future rounds of data collection, using their anonymous worker IDs. Of the 789 participants who successfully completed the first wave of data collection in 2016, 249 expressed interest in participating in the 2020 follow-up study, and 183 of them actually completed all the necessary measures in both surveys for Waves 7 and 8. Of these participants, six failed at least one of our various attention checks, scattered across the waves. This left us with 177 participants for the analyses.

Among the 177 participants, 55% were women ($n = 89$), and the majority (88%) identified as straight ($n = 156$), while the remainder reported themselves as men, or as some type of sexual minority. The majority (80%) of the sample was white ($n = 141$). Of the minority groups, African American, Caribbean American, or Black identified people formed 12% ($n = 22$) of the sample, followed by Asian, Asian American, or Pacific Islanders (5%; $n = 9$), Latinx or Hispanics (5%, $n = 9$), and 3% biracial-identified individuals ($n = 6$). Participants were able to check any race/ethnicity options that applied. In terms of social class, about one-third (38%; $n = 67$) identified as middle class, while comparable segments (28%; $n = 50$) were working-class, and lower-middle class (29%; $n = 51$); and 5% were upper-middle class ($n = 9$).

4.2 | Measures

All measures that were analyzed for Study 1 were presented in Waves 7 (7–21 September 2020) and 8 (9 November–16 December 2020) in the course of the 2020 election season. The centrality and trust variables were measured in the seventh wave, while the vote and relative warmth ratings were measured in the eighth. In the descriptions of both of these studies, we report all relevant measures that were used in data analysis, discuss all instances of data exclusion, and attempt to provide a justification of our sample sizes. These studies are part of a larger study about the 2020 US election, and we, therefore, are not able to provide information about all of our variables from the larger study in this paper.

4.2.1 | Racial-ethnic identity centrality

Racial-ethnic identity centrality was measured by adapting items from the Collective Self-esteem Scale (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992) for participants' racial-ethnic identity groups. The scale included four items, such as "How often do you think of yourself as a member of your racial-ethnic

group?” Participants rated their agreement with these items by using a 7-point Likert scale from (1) “not at all” to (7) “very often.” Scores were calculated by computing the means across the four items. In order to know which racial-ethnic identity they were referring to, we had them fill in a qualitative response box, asking “Which racial-ethnic group were you thinking about?” These fill-in responses were then coded into two groups (POC vs. White) for the moderation analyses. Internal reliability was quite good for whites ($\alpha = .88$) and POC ($\alpha = .94$).

4.2.2 | Trust variables

Trust in government. Trust in government was measured in Wave 1, using four items from the American National Election Studies (2016). This measure asks participants to rate their attitudes about the federal government, using items such as “How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right?,” using five response options from (1) “never” to (5) “always.” In our sample, we observed acceptable levels of internal reliability ($\alpha = .74$) across the items.

Trust in law enforcement and courts. Trust in law enforcement was measured using nine items (Hamm et al., 2019) that assess general attitudes toward the police, such as “Most police officers in my community do their job well.” Participants indicated their agreement with these items, using a 7-point Likert scale from (1) “strongly disagree” to (7) “strongly agree.” The overall scale had very high internal reliability in our sample ($\alpha = .96$).

Trust in courts was measured using a similar set of 10 items (Hamm et al., 2018), such as “Courts protect defendant’s constitutional rights.” Participants indicated their agreement with these items, using a 7-point Likert scale from (1) “strongly disagree” to (7) “strongly agree.” The overall scale had very high internal reliability in our sample ($\alpha = .94$).

Inter-scale correlations showed that these two types of trust were highly correlated in both samples ($r > .64$). Therefore, we combined these two into an overall trust in law enforcement and courts scale ($\alpha = .96$).

Trust in the media. Trust in media was measured using a 16-item scale (Prochazka & Schweiger, 2019). Previously, this scale was found to have a four-dimensional factor structure while also fitting a single construct of trust in the news media. In this study, we treated these items as measuring a singular factor. Items such as “The media pay the necessary attention to important topics” were rated on a 7-point Likert scale from (1) “strongly disagree” to (7) “strongly agree” ($\alpha = .97$). Scores were calculated by taking the mean across all the items.

Trust in science and medical researchers. Trust in science was measured using an existing 21-item scale (Nadelson et al., 2014) with excellent internal reliability ($\alpha = .96$). Participants rated their agreement with items such as “We should trust the work of scientists,” using a 7-point Likert scale from (1) “strongly disagree” to (7) “strongly agree.”

Trust in medical researchers (Hall et al., 2006) was assessed using a four-item scale, including items such as “Medical researchers treat people like ‘guinea pigs.’” This scale asks participants to rate their agreement with these items ($\alpha = .86$), using a 7-point Likert scale from (1) “strongly disagree” to (7) “strongly agree.”

Trust in science and trust in medical researchers were relatively highly correlated with each other ($r > .54$). Therefore, we combined these into a single scale with a high degree of internal consistency ($\alpha > .95$).

4.2.3 | Voting behavior

Voting behavior was measured in Wave 8 by asking participants a series of questions adapted from the American National Election Studies (2016). Those who indicated that they did vote for president in the 2020 general elections were asked to indicate for whom they voted. They were presented with the options for all the candidates, as well as a write-in option. Since we were primarily interested in the differences between those who voted for Trump ($n = 41$) versus Biden ($n = 122$), we only used participants who voted for one or the other (92.1% of the sample) in our analyses, where the vote was the main dependent variable. Overall, this sample voted more for Biden than was true in the national election (79% of the total sample). However, there were significant differences by racial-ethnic group, with whites voting for Biden at a lower rate (75%) than POC (93%), mirroring the pattern in national data, $X^2(1, 163) = 6.09$, $p = .01$, Cramer's $V = 0.19$.

4.2.4 | Relative warmth toward Biden over Trump

When we examined the voting reports by racial-ethnic groups, we found that the sample had very few POC who voted for Trump. Worried about the power of the model and the sensitivity to detect an effect with a binary outcome variable, we also examined a continuous outcome variable. We had assessed participants' warmth toward each of these candidates using feeling thermometers, asking "How warm or cold do you feel toward Joe Biden/Donald Trump?," using two separate items on an 11-point scale from (0 degrees) "most cold" to (100 degrees) "most warm." We then took the difference between these scores, with positive values indicated more warmth toward Biden, while negative values indicated more warmth toward Trump. Values at or around 0 indicated similar warmth ratings for the two candidates. This relative warmth measure was correlated with the vote in both groups (POC, $r = .85$; Whites, $r = .92$), so we assess "support for the candidates" both in terms of participants' reported vote as well as the relative warmth they report feeling for the two candidates.

5 | STUDY 1 RESULTS

To test our hypotheses, we conducted a series of mediation and moderated mediation analyses (Models 4 & 8), using the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2018). All models had racial-ethnic identity centrality entered as the main predictor (X). We ran a simple mediation model (model 4), using only the white participants, to at least test our main hypotheses about differences in vote with this group. The various trust variables were entered as simultaneous mediators (m^1 , m^2 , m^3 , ...) in each of our models. Race/ethnicity (POC vs. white for Study 1) was entered as the sole moderator in the moderated mediation model. Because of the small number of voters for Trump among POC in our sample, we used an alternative measure—relative warmth for Biden over Trump—to test our moderating hypotheses. For visual representations of these models, see Figures 1 and 2.

We provide information about the correlations between key variables and differences between groups as background before assessing the models.

FIGURE 1 Visual representation of mediation for whites-only sample of Study 1

Note. This model uses only white participants ($n = 129$) in Study 1. All a paths were built using OLS regression, while all b paths were built using logistic regression, within the Hayes PROCESS Macro for SPSS (Model 4). Paths of the a series connect racial-ethnic centrality to the trust variables, while paths of the b series connect the trust variables to voting for Biden or Trump

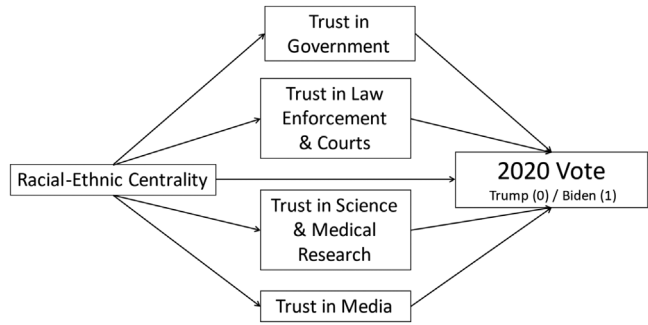
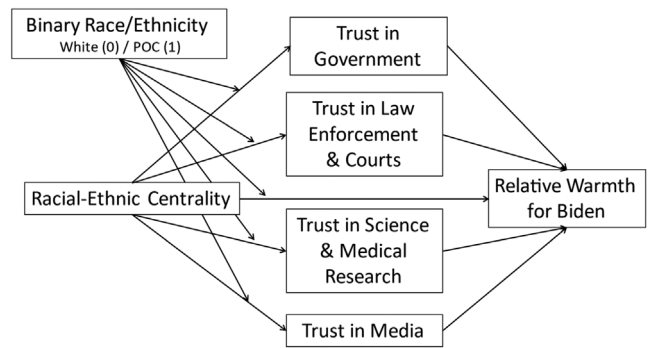


FIGURE 2 Visual representation of moderated mediation analyses (binary race/ethnicity) for study 1

Note. This model uses participants in Study 1 ($n = 177$). Paths of the a series connect racial-ethnic centrality to the trust variables, while paths of the b series connect the trust variables to warmth for Biden versus Trump (feeling thermometers). All paths were built using OLS regression within the Hayes PROCESS Macro for SPSS (Model 8). Binary race/ethnicity (White vs. person of color (POC)) was the moderating variable, which acted on the a paths



5.1 | Preliminary analyses

5.1.1 | Correlations among predictors

We examined the bivariate correlations among the predictor variables separately for POC and whites. Table 1 shows these correlations, with whites below the diagonal and POC above the diagonal. Racial-ethnic centrality is positively correlated with three of the trust variables (government, media, and science, all positively, with no relationship for law enforcement and courts) for POC, and one (law enforcement and courts, positively) for white people.

5.1.2 | T -tests of variables by race/ethnicity

Next, we ran a series of t -tests to examine differences in the predictor variables across racial-ethnic groups. We entered race/ethnicity (white vs. POC) as the independent variable and racial-ethnic centrality and the trust variables as the dependent variables in these t -tests. We only detected a significant difference in ratings of racial-ethnic centrality, $t(175) = -3.77, p < .001$, Cohen’s $d = -0.68$, and a trend toward a significant difference in trust in law enforcement, $t(175) = 1.85, p = .07$, Cohen’s $d = 0.33$. POC, on average, had lower ratings of trust in law enforcement and

TABLE 1 Bivariate Pearson correlations (Study 1, white & people of color (POC))

Variables	Racial-ethnic centrality	Trust in government	Trust in law enforcement and courts	Trust in media	Trust in science and medical researchers
Racial-ethnic identity centrality	–	.42**	.08	.60**	.33*
Trust in government	.06	–	.57**	.73**	.38*
Trust in Law enforcement and courts	.23**	.36**	–	.49**	.25
Trust in media	–.09	.31**	–.05	–	.45**
Trust in science and medical researchers	–.07	.40**	.04	.57**	–

Note: Whites ($n = 137$) are listed below the diagonal, while POC ($n = 40$) are listed above.

* $p < .05$,

** $p < .01$.

TABLE 2 Study 1: Correlations of race and trust in particular institutions with pro-Biden vote and warmth in different groups

Variable	Voted for Biden		Relative warmth toward Biden	
	POC ($N = 34$)	White ($N = 129$)	POC ($N = 34$)	White ($N = 129$)
Racial-ethnic identity centrality	–.00	–.29***	.24	–.23**
Trust in government	–.03	.07	.17	.10
Trust in law enforcement and courts	–.18	–.42***	–.00	–.29***
Trust in science and medical researchers	.12	.51***	.44**	.54***
Trust in media	.25	.68***	.39*	.70***

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$.

courts ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 1.19$) and higher ratings of racial-ethnic identity centrality ($M = 4.98$, $SD = 1.63$) than whites ($M = 4.53$, $SD = 1.27$ and $M = 3.99$, $SD = 1.41$, respectively). There were no other significant differences between POC and whites for any of the other predictor variables. There was also no difference between whites and POC in relative warmth toward Biden, $t(175) = -1.10$, $p = .22$, Cohen's $d = -0.20$.

5.1.3 | Correlations of predictors with vote and relative warmth

In Table 2, we display the correlations of the five predictors (racial-ethnic centrality and the four trust measures) with both voting for Biden and relative warmth toward Biden, for POC and whites separately. There were no significant correlations for POC with vote, which is no doubt largely due to the small sample size and the lack of variance in the vote. In contrast, trust in

science-medical researchers and trust in media were both significantly correlated with relative warmth toward Biden for this sample. Among whites, racial-ethnic identity centrality and trust in law enforcement courts were significantly negatively correlated with both vote and warmth, and trust in science-medical researchers and media were significantly positively correlated with both as well. There was no significant correlation of trust in government with either vote or warmth for either group.

5.1.4 | Sensitivity analysis

Unfortunately, we were unable to find an existing tool/approach that allowed us to assess the power/sensitivity of our proposed final model for the vote (moderated multiple mediation with a binary outcome), but we were able to use existing tools to assess the power of a moderated mediation with a continuous predictor, which approximated our analyses with the feeling thermometers. Using the Pwr2Ppl package for R (Aberson, 2019), we found that our model was adequately powered (power = 0.80) with an average correlation between the variables at or above 0.33, given a sample size of 177.

5.2 | Hypothesis testing

5.2.1 | Mediation analysis predicting vote (white participants only)

Racial-ethnic centrality among whites did not predict trust in government, $B = 0.03$, $p = .47$, trust in science/medical researchers, $B = -0.05$, $p = .46$, or trust in the media, $B = -0.12$, $p = .21$. This meant that there were no significant indirect effects through any of these variables, despite the fact that some significantly predicted vote, including trust in science/medical researchers, $B = 1.54$, $p = .008$ and trust in the media, $B = 1.80$, $p < .001$.

Whites who saw their race-ethnicity as central to how they viewed themselves were more likely to trust law enforcement and courts, $B = 0.23$, $p = .003$, which was then associated with a lower likelihood to vote for Biden, $B = -1.65$, $p < .001$. These two effects resulted in a significant, negative indirect effect of racial-ethnic centrality on the vote, through trust in law enforcement and the courts, $B = -0.39$, 95% Confidence Interval (CI) (1000 bootstrapped samples): $[-20.40, -0.12]$.

White participants who felt their racial-ethnic identity was an important part of how they viewed themselves were also generally less likely to vote for Biden, $B = -0.64$, $p = .03$, apart from any indirect effects through the trust variables.

5.2.2 | Moderated mediation analyses predicting relative warmth toward Biden

Results for POC. Among POC, there was no significant indirect effect through trust in the government, $B = -0.18$, 95% CI (1000 bootstrapped samples): $[-0.49, 0.04]$, or trust in courts/law enforcement, $B = -0.06$, 95% CI (1000 bootstrapped samples): $[-0.39, 0.32]$, on relative feelings of warmth for Biden. We observed that POC who saw their racial-ethnic identities as central to how they view themselves tended to trust science/medical researchers (though not at conventional levels of significance significant), $B = 0.20$, $p = .06$, and the media, $B = 0.46$, $p < .001$, more than

those who did not see these identities as important for how they view themselves. By extension, people who trusted the media, $B = 2.38$, $p < .001$, and science/medical researchers, $B = 1.62$, $p < .001$, reported warmer feelings toward Biden than Trump, which accounted for significant positive indirect effects through trust in science/medical researchers, $B = 0.32$, 95% CI (1000 bootstrapped samples): [0.03, 0.76], and trust in media, $B = 1.10$, 95% CI (1000 bootstrapped samples): [0.52, 1.72], among POC.

Results for white participants. Racial-ethnic centrality among whites predicted greater trust in law enforcement and the courts, $B = 0.17$, $p = .007$. Participants who reported more trust in law enforcement and courts generally felt less warmly toward Biden than Trump, $B = -1.06$, $p < .001$, leading to a significant indirect effect, $B = -0.22$, 95% CI (1000 bootstrapped samples): [-0.47, -0.03]. There were no significant indirect effects through trust in the government, $B = -0.03$, 95% CI (1000 bootstrapped samples): [-0.13, 0.07], trust in media, $B = -0.22$, 95% CI (1000 bootstrapped samples): [-0.71, 0.25], or science/medical researchers, $B = -0.08$, 95% CI (1000 bootstrapped samples): [-0.29, 0.11]. Table 3 summarizes the results of the moderated mediation analyses.

6 | DISCUSSION OF STUDY 1

Study 1 allowed us to look at the pattern of relationships between our variables in heterogeneous groups of POC and whites. As expected, among POC, racial-ethnic identity centrality was related to trust in media and trust in science. Unexpectedly, it was also related to trust in government. Among whites, racial-ethnic identity centrality was related only to trust in law enforcement and courts as expected. We noted that vote was actually very low in variance for POC, so it is unsurprising that trust variables were unrelated to voting for Biden, but trust in science and the media were, as expected, related to relative warmth for Biden. For whites, racial-ethnic centrality, trust in law enforcement, and the courts were related to voting for Trump and relative warmth for Trump as expected. Equally, trust in science and media was related to voting for Biden and relative warmth toward him.

We were unable to test the mediation of racial-ethnic centrality and vote for POC, but we were able to test the mediation model for relative warmth. POC who had higher racial-ethnic identity centrality were more likely to trust in science and media, and trust mediated their feelings of warmth toward Biden. For whites, trust in law enforcement and courts served as a mediator, as was expected. Trust in government played no role as a mediator.

Overall these results supported our general expectations that racial-ethnic identity centrality and trust in social institutions mattered for both groups but in different ways. We were, however, hampered in this study by our inability to separate POC into more meaningful racial-ethnic groups and by the lack of variance in the vote for POC. In Study 2, a much larger and more diverse sample helped us overcome both problems.

7 | STUDY 2 METHOD

In Study 2, we analyzed identical research questions, using the same measures around a similar time period. The main benefit was that this separate sample, which did not participate in the authors' longer 4-year study of US elections, was also recruited to be larger and diverse, allowing

TABLE 3 Summary of significant results for Study 1, moderated mediation analyses (race)

	Trust in government		Trust in law enforcement and courts		Trust in science and medical researchers		Trust in media		Direct effect
	<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	
Relative warmth for Biden	-	-	-	N	-	P	-	P	-
POC	-	-	-	-	P	P	P	P	-
White	-	-	N	P	-	-	-	-	-

Note. P = positive, significant effect. N = negative, significant effect. The *a* paths represent the effect of racial-ethnic identity centrality on each trust variable, split by race-ethnicity. The *b* paths represent the effect of the trust variables on the main outcome (warmth), across all racial-ethnic groups (not moderated). These paths are multiplied to produce each indirect effect of racial-ethnic centrality on warmth through the corresponding trust variable for that racial-ethnic group. Models were tested using Model 8 in Hayes PROCESS Macro.

us to test moderated mediation using more specific racial-ethnic groups than just POC versus white.

7.1 | Participants and procedure

We used TurkPrime panels to recruit a diverse sample, especially focused on different racial-ethnic groups. Although we tried to recruit a sample that included a larger number of different racial-ethnic groups, MTurk only allowed us to recruit robust samples of whites, Latinx, Black, and Asian American/Pacific Islander participants. Therefore, these were the groups we examined. The sampling technique excluded all individuals who participated in any wave of Study 1 from participating in Study 2. In addition, individuals were excluded from participating if they did not provide consent to participate, did not reside in the United States, or were not registered to vote in the United States. Participants were compensated similarly to Study 1, based on the average time it took our pilot testers to complete the waves of the survey (\$6.00 across both waves).

A total of 951 participants provided consent to participate in the first wave of Study 2. Of these individuals, 672 completed the necessary measures in *both* Waves 1 and 2 (pre- and post-2020 election) surveys, with much of this drop-off being a result of attrition between waves. In addition, 59 participants failed the attention checks scattered throughout the two waves. Since we wanted to test separate mediation paths for the specific racial-ethnic groups we targeted, we excluded 25 individuals for indicating they were assessing racial-ethnic centrality for an identity other than the four we specifically sampled. In our final analyses, we had a sample size of 530 since 44 individuals did not vote in the 2020 election and 14 voted for a candidate other than Biden or Trump; we limited the sample to Biden/Trump voters since predicting differences in these voters was our main goal.

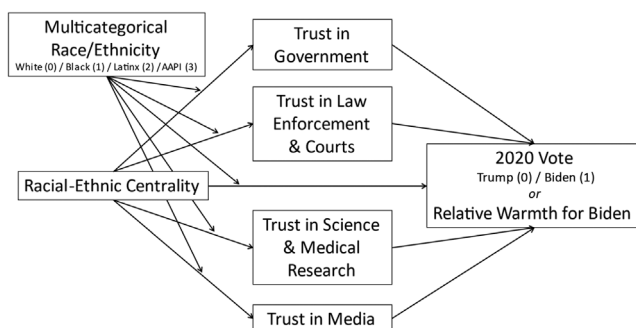
Among these 530 participants, the gender distribution was almost even between women ($n = 266$) and men ($n = 260$), with four individuals who identified as transgender, transsexual, or gender non-binary. The majority of the sample (88%) identified as straight, while 8% identified as bisexual, 3% identified as gay or lesbian, and 1% identified with none of these (fill-in options let them state identities such as pansexual, asexual, and queer). A plurality of the sample (35.3%) identified as white, followed by 25% African American, Caribbean American, or Black identified individuals, 26% Asian, Asian American or Pacific Islander, 18% Latinx or Hispanic, 2% Biracial, and 1% Native American. Participants were able to select multiple options for these racial-ethnic group memberships. For the analyses, we focused on which racial-ethnic identity they indicated that they were thinking about for the racial-ethnic centrality questions, which amounted to comparable percentages as those indicated above. In terms of social class, the majority (47%; $n = 251$) indicated identifying as middle class, followed by 23% ($n = 123$) working-class, 21% ($n = 111$) lower-middle class, 8% (44) upper-middle class, and less than 1% ($n = 1$) upper class.

7.2 | Measures

Study 2 used the same measures as were discussed for Study 1, and they all appeared in the same order specified for Study 1. All reliabilities were similar to those observed in Study 1. Trust in the government had the lowest reliability while still reaching acceptable levels ($\alpha = .78$), with

FIGURE 3 Visual representation of moderated mediation analyses (multicategorical race/ethnicity) for Study 2

Note. This model uses the participants in Study 2 ($n = 524$). Paths of the *a* series connect racial-ethnic centrality to the trust variables, while paths of the *b* series connect the trust variables to either vote for Biden versus Trump or the warmth for Biden versus Trump (feeling thermometers). All paths were built using Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression in the second set of analyses, while the *b* paths were built using logistic regression in the first set. These both used Hayes PROCESS Macro for SPSS (Model 8). Multicategorical race/ethnicity (white, Black, Latinx, and AAPI) was the moderating variable, which acted on the *a* paths



internal reliability in the “excellent” range for: racial centrality ($\alpha = .94$), trust in law enforcement and courts ($\alpha = .95$), trust in science and medical researchers ($\alpha = .95$), and trust in media ($\alpha = .97$).

8 | STUDY 2 RESULTS

In Study 2, we also tested our main hypotheses using Hayes’s PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2018 for moderated mediation (model 8), with racial-ethnic identity centrality as the main predictor (X) and vote as the main outcome (Y). We also ran parallel analyses to Study 1, using a model that predicted relative warmth toward Biden, as the main outcome variable (Y). The various trust variables were entered as simultaneous mediators (m^1, m^2, m^3, \dots) in our models. Race/ethnicity (multicategorical for Study 2) was entered as a moderator. For a visual representation of this model, see Figure 3.

As with Study 1, we present preliminary information about correlations between key variables and differences between groups on the same variables before testing our models.

8.1 | Preliminary analyses

8.1.1 | Correlations between variables

We examined the bivariate correlations separately for each of our racial-ethnic groups. Tables 4 and 5 show these correlations. Racial-ethnic centrality among whites was correlated positively with trust in law enforcement and courts and negatively with trust in science/medical researchers and trust in the media. For Black and Latinx people, it was correlated with trust in the media, while

TABLE 4 Bivariate Pearson correlations (Study 2, white & Black)

Variables	Racial-ethnic identity centrality	Trust in government	Trust in law enforcement and courts	Trust in media	Trust in Science & Medical Researchers
Racial-ethnic identity centrality	–	.06	–.01	.26**	.03
Trust in government	.14	–	.47**	.37**	.23**
Trust in law enforcement and courts	.34**	.35**	–	.25**	.09
Trust in media	–.26**	.16*	–.11	–	.27**
Trust in science and medical researchers	–.31**	.12	–.18*	.49**	–

Note: Whites ($n = 167$) are listed below the diagonal, while Black participants ($n = 132$) are listed above.

* $p < .05$,

** $p < .01$.

TABLE 5 Bivariate Pearson correlations (Study 2, Latinx & AAPI)

Variables	Racial-ethnic identity centrality	Trust in government	Trust in law enforcement and courts	Trust in media	Trust in science and medical researchers
Racial-ethnic Identity Centrality	–	–.01	.08	–.01	.03
Trust in Government	.15	–	.42**	.10	–.05
Trust in Law Enforcement & Courts	–.21*	.40**	–	.15	.13
Trust in Media	.35**	.20	–.30**	–	.32**
Trust in Science & Medical Researchers	.18	–.07	–.06	.25*	–

Note: Latinx ($n = 92$) are listed below the diagonal, while AAPI ($n = 139$) are listed above.

* $p < .05$,

** $p < .01$.

trust in police and law enforcement was only significantly negatively correlated for Latinx people. There were no significant correlations between racial-ethnic centrality and any trust variables for Asian American/Pacific Islanders. Relatively higher warmth toward Biden and vote for Biden were highly correlated in all groups.

In Table 6, we present the correlations of the predictors with both vote for Biden and relative warmth toward Biden. Among Black people, racial-ethnic centrality, trust in science-medical researchers, and trust in media are positively and significantly correlated with both outcomes. Among Latinx participants, racial-ethnic centrality, trust in science-medical researchers, and trust in media are positively correlated with both outcomes, and trust in law enforcement courts is significantly negatively correlated. Among Asian American/Pacific Islander participants, trust

TABLE 6 Study 2: Correlations of race-ethnicity and trust in particular institutions with pro-Biden vote and warmth in different groups

Variable	Voted for Biden				Relative warmth toward Biden			
	Black (N = 132)	Latinx (N = 92)	Asian America/ Pacific Islander (N = 139)	White (N = 167)	Black (N = 132)	Latinx (N = 92)	Asian American/ Pacific Islander (N = 139)	White (N = 167)
Racial-ethnic identity centrality	.19*	.27**	.0	-.43***	.33***	.26*	.02	-.42***
Trust in government	-.01	-.14	-.28**	-.27**	.04	-.18 ⁺	-.30***	-.26**
Trust in law enforcement and courts	-.13	-.47***	-.23**	-.43***	-.10	-.42***	-.21*	-.36***
Trust in media	.48***	.63***	.37***	.57***	.55***	.57***	.44***	.61***
Trust in science and medical researchers	.29**	.33**	.34***	.50***	.26**	.41**	.38***	.58***

**p* < .10

***p* < .05

****p* < .01

****p* < .001.

in law enforcement courts is significantly negatively correlated, while trust in science-medical researchers and media is positively correlated with both outcomes. Trust in government is also significantly negatively correlated with both outcomes, while racial-ethnic identity centrality is uncorrelated with both. Finally, for whites, racial-ethnic identity centrality, trust in government, and trust in law enforcement courts are significantly negatively correlated with both outcomes, and trust in science-medical researchers and media is positively correlated with both outcomes.

8.1.2 | Differences by race/ethnicity

We ran a series of analyses of variance to investigate the differences in the means between the different racial-ethnic groups. The omnibus tests showed significant differences between the race/ethnicity groups in racial-ethnic identity centrality, $F(3, 526) = 35.14, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.17$, trust in law enforcement and courts, $F(3, 526) = 12.92, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.07$, trust in media, $F(3, 526) = 3.59, p = .014, \eta^2 = 0.02$, trust in science and medical researchers, $F(3, 526) = 4.45, p = .004, \eta^2 = 0.03$, and relative feelings of warmth towards Biden and Trump, $F(3, 526) = 10.48, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.06$. There was no significant difference in racial-ethnic groups' trust in the government, $F(3, 526) = 1.41, p = .24, \eta^2 = 0.008$. Examining the Tukey post hoc tests, there were many differences, which supported the importance of examining differences between these groups, beyond simply comparing POC to whites.

Tukey tests of differences in identity centrality. Results showed that whites had the lowest mean levels of racial-ethnic centrality ($M = 3.96, SD = 1.53$) and were significantly lower than Latinx ($M = 4.69, SD = 1.47$) or AAPI groups ($M = 4.71, SD = 1.50$), which were both significantly lower than the levels of racial-ethnic identity centrality reported by Black people, ($M = 5.73, SD = 1.39$).

Tukey tests of differences in trust in institutions. In terms of the status quo-supporting types of trust, whites generally had the most trusting views of law enforcement and courts ($M = 4.54, SD = 1.27$), with their views statistically indistinguishable from AAPIs ($M = 4.27, SD = 0.89$). Asian American Pacific Islanders, as well as both of the other groups, had significantly more trust than Black participants, ($M = 3.75, SD = 1.13$), with Latinx participants' ratings falling in between them ($M = 4.15, SD = 1.05$), and significantly lower than whites'. None of the groups had ratings of trust in the government that were statistically distinguishable from each other, $2.29 < M < 2.43, 0.71 < SD < 0.74$.

In terms of the status quo-affirming institutions, trust in the media was only significantly different and lower for whites ($M = 3.62, SD = 1.40$) than Black participants ($M = 4.03, SD = 1.27$), and Asian American/Pacific Islander participants ($M = 4.04, SD = 1.22$). Latinx participants were not significantly different from any groups ($M = 3.80, SD = 1.31$) in terms of their trust in the media. Black participants reported significantly lower trust ratings for science and medical research ($M = 4.78, SD = .92$) than all the other groups; none of the other groups was statistically distinguishable from each other ($5.13 < M < 5.16; .82 < SD < 1.11$).

Tukey tests of differences in support for candidates. In terms of relative warmth, whites had the smallest difference between warmth toward Biden and Trump, slightly in favor of Biden ($M = 1.74, SD = 7.13$). Their ratings were not significantly distinct from those of Latinx participants, ($M = 3.14, SD = 6.33$) but were significantly lower than AAPIs, ($M = 4.47, SD = 5.00$). Asian American/Pacific Islanders' feelings were not significantly different from the feelings of Black participants, who reported the largest difference between feelings of warmth for Biden and Trump, in favor of Biden, ($M = 5.43, SD = 5.29$).

Overall, this sample voted more for Biden than was true in the national election; 75% voted for Biden in our sample, $X^2(3, 530) = 35.74, p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .26$. However, there were significant differences by racial-ethnic group, with whites voting at the lowest rates for Biden [61%, then Latinx (70%), AAPI (82%), and Black (89%)], mirroring the pattern in national polling data. In comparisons of these groups using Fisher Exact tests ($p < .05$ for those listed), Black people voted more for Biden than white and Latinx participants, and AAPI voted more for Biden than Latinx. White and Latinx participants did not differ significantly from each other, and neither did Black and AAPI participants.

8.1.3 | Sensitivity analysis

Since we were unable to find an existing tool that allowed us to assess the sensitivity of our final models for testing our hypotheses, we assessed the power of a model that approximated ours. Specifically, we assessed the power of a moderated mediation with a continuous outcome (model 8). Using the Pwr2Ppl package for R (Aberson, 2019), we found that the moderated mediation model was adequately powered (.80), given an average correlation (r) at or above .18, based on our sample size of 530.

8.2 | Hypothesis testing

8.2.1 | Moderated mediation analyses

To test our main hypothesis, we first ran two moderated mediation models, with the multicategorical race/ethnicity variable (white, Black, Latinx, and Asian American/Pacific Islander) entered as the moderator. The first set of analyses used the original variable of interest, vote, as the main outcome. The other set of analyses used the other outcome variable, relative warmth toward Biden versus Trump, in order to allow it to be more readily compared to the results from Study 1. Across both models, the indirect effects were comparable in terms of size and direction, with just one difference in the direct effect of racial-ethnic identity centrality on vote for Black participants. Therefore, for the sake of brevity, we only report on all of the significant indirect effects for the model that predicts vote, while noting any meaningful differences between this and the model that predicts the relative warmth outcome. Table 7 presents an overview of the results for the mediation analyses moderated by race/ethnicity.

Indirect effects through trust in status quo supporting institutions. Trust in the government did not mediate the relation between racial-ethnic centrality and vote for any of the racial-ethnic groups, including Latinx, $B = -0.10$ 95% CI (1000 bootstrapped samples): $[-0.24, 0.03]$, Black, $B = -0.04$, 95% CI (1000 bootstrapped samples): $[-0.15, 0.08]$, API participants, $B = 0.008$, 95% CI (1000 bootstrapped samples): $[-0.11, 0.13]$, and white, $B = -0.08$, 95% CI (1000 bootstrapped samples): $[-0.23, 0.02]$. However, trust in law enforcement did successfully mediate in the case of whites only. White participants who saw their racial-ethnic identity as central to how they viewed themselves generally had more trust in law enforcement and courts than those who did not view these identities as central, $B = 0.28, p < .001$. Trust in law enforcement and courts was then associated with a lower likelihood to vote for Biden, $B = -0.82, p < .001$, resulting in a significant indirect effect for whites, $B = -0.23$, 95% CI (1000 bootstrapped samples): $[-0.48,$

TABLE 7 Summary of significant results for Study 2, moderated mediation analyses (race-ethnicity)

	Trust in government		Trust in law enforcement and courts		Trust in science and medical researchers		Trust in media		Direct effect
	a	b	a	b	a	b	a	b	
Vote for Biden		N		N		P		P	
AAPI	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Latinx	-	-	-	-	-	-	P	P	-
Black	-	-	-	-	-	-	P	P	-
White	-	-	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Relative warmth for Biden	Indirect Eff.	a	Indirect Eff.	a	Indirect Eff.	a	Indirect Eff.	a	b
		N		N		P		P	
AAPI	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Latinx	-	-	-	-	-	-	P	P	-
Black	-	-	-	-	-	-	P	P	P
White	-	-	N	N	N	N	N	N	N

Note. P = positive, significant effect. N = negative, significant effect. The *a* paths represent the effect of racial-ethnic identity centrality on each trust variable, split by race-ethnicity. The *b* paths represent the effect of the trust variables on the main outcomes (vote/warmth), across all racial-ethnic groups (not moderated). These paths are multiplied to produce each indirect effect of racial-ethnic identity centrality on vote/warmth through the corresponding trust variable, for that racial-ethnic group. Models were tested using Model 8 in Hayes PROCESS Macro.

–0.10]. There were no differences in the significance or direction of these indirect effects in the model that predicted feelings of relative warmth toward Biden.

Indirect effects through trust in status quo challenging institutions. For trust in science and medical researchers, whites who saw their racial-ethnic identities as central to how they viewed themselves were also less likely to trust this social institution, $B = -0.22$, $p < .001$; however, those who did have more trust in science and medical researchers were more likely to vote for Biden, $B = 0.97$, $p < 0.001$, resulting in a significant negative indirect effect only for whites, $B = -0.21$, 95% CI (1000 bootstrapped samples): $[-0.44, -0.09]$. There were no differences in the significance or direction of these indirect effects in the model that predicted feelings of warmth for Biden versus Trump.

Finally, trust in the media included significant indirect effects for multiple racial-ethnic groups. Black participants, $B = 0.24$, $p = .003$, and Latinx participants, $B = 0.31$, $p = .001$, who saw their racial-ethnic identities as central to how they view themselves were more likely to trust the media than the members of those same groups who did not see these identities as central. Overall, trust in the media was associated with a higher likelihood of voting for Biden than Trump, $B = 1.36$, $p < .001$, resulting in significant, positive indirect effects for Black participants, $B = 0.33$, 95% CI (1000 bootstrapped samples): $[0.12, 0.59]$, and Latinx participants, $B = 0.42$, 95% CI (1000 bootstrapped samples): $[0.17, 0.79]$. There was an opposite effect for whites, $B = -0.24$, $p < .001$, such that those who saw their race/ethnicity as central had lower trust in the media, resulting in a significant negative indirect effect for white participants, $B = -0.32$, 95% CI (1000 bootstrapped samples): $[-0.58, -0.12]$. There was no relationship between AAPI participants' feelings about their racial-ethnic identity being central and their trust in the media, $B = -0.004$, $p = .95$, resulting in no indirect effect, $B = -0.006$, 95% CI (1000 bootstrapped samples): $[-0.27, 0.25]$. There were no differences in the significance or direction of these indirect effects in the model that predicted feelings of warmth for Biden versus Trump.

Direct effects of racial-ethnic identity centrality on support. Black participants were significantly more likely to have warm feelings toward Biden than Trump as a direct result of seeing their racial-ethnic identities as central to how they view themselves, $B = 0.77$, 95% CI (1000 bootstrapped samples): $[0.24, 1.30]$, above and beyond any indirect effects through the trust variables. An opposite effect predicted lower feelings of warmth for Biden among white people who saw their race-ethnicity as central, $B = -0.73$, 95% CI (1000 bootstrapped samples): $[-1.17, -0.29]$. Similarly, white individuals who saw their race as important to how they view themselves were less likely to vote for Biden, $B = -0.48$, 95% CI (1000 bootstrapped samples): $[-0.89, -0.07]$.

9 | DISCUSSION OF STUDY 2

The pattern of relationships between racial-ethnic identity centrality and trust in institutions was broadly consistent with the results of Study 1. Racial-ethnic centrality was positively linked with trust in institutions associated with change (media) among Black and Latinx participants and negatively associated with them for whites. In contrast, racial-ethnic identity centrality was negatively linked with trust in institutions associated with the status quo (law enforcement and courts) among Latinx participants and positively for white participants.

Patterns of relationships with both vote and relative warmth toward Biden were also broadly consistent with those found in Study 1. Racial-ethnic identity centrality for Black and Latinx participants was associated with support for Biden, with racial-ethnic identity centrality among whites associated with support for Trump. Across all groups, those who trusted in change-oriented

institutions were more likely to support Biden, and those who trusted in status-quo-oriented institutions supported Trump.

Tests of mediation supported the role of trust in media, science, and law enforcement and courts as a mediator for Black, Latinx, and white participants. There were few significant associations among these variables for Asian American/Pacific Islanders.

10 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

The results of both of our studies provide clear evidence that racial-ethnic identity centrality played a very different role for racial-ethnic groups that differ in privilege and status, both in its associations with trust in social institutions and in voter preference in the 2020 election. Moreover, the results supported our hypothesis that relative power and privilege associated with racial-ethnic groups played a strong role both in trust in particular institutions and in how trust affected vote preferences. These overall patterns support our hypotheses that racial-ethnic identity centrality and trust were both important predictors of electoral choices in 2020 and that racial-ethnic group membership affected how they mattered.

10.1 | Race/ethnicity group differences

Generally, the differences found in both racial-ethnic identity centrality and trust in institutions followed the patterns we had expected, with marginalized racial-ethnic groups higher in racial-ethnic identity centrality (as in Blankenship & Stewart, 2019) and in trust in institutions associated with change (science and the media); and whites higher in trust in institutions associated with the status quo. These results are consistent with previous accounts (such as Dabros et al., 2015; Krogstad, 2014). The distribution of support for Biden also followed the expected pattern, with white people lowest in voting for him and Black people highest. Although Study 1 showed no group differences in relative warmth ratings, in Study 2, we found a pattern consistent with our expectations, with white people lowest in both relative warmth and actual vote for Biden (though higher than the pattern in the actual election) and Black people significantly higher, with Latinx and AAPI participants in between.

10.2 | Patterns of association between variables

Racial-ethnic identity centrality was positively correlated with trust in media and science-medical researchers among POC in Study 1, as expected, and consistent with Blankenship & Stewart's (2019) findings in the 2016 election; it was also positively correlated with trust in government, to our surprise. Perhaps our crude grouping of POC accounts for this unexpected pattern. Among white people, racial-ethnic identity centrality in Study 1 was, as expected, correlated with law enforcement and courts and uncorrelated with other trust indicators.

In Study 2, racial-ethnic identity centrality was positively correlated with trust in the media among Black people as we expected; no other relations were significant. Among Latinx participants, racial-ethnic identity centrality was also positively correlated with trust in the media as expected and negatively correlated with trust in law enforcement and courts also as expected. Among AAPI individuals, racial-ethnic identity centrality was uncorrelated with any trust

measures, contrary to our expectations. Among white people, as expected, racial-ethnic identity centrality was correlated in opposite directions to those found for any of the other racial-ethnic groups, with a significant positive relation with trust in law enforcement and courts and significant negative correlations with trust in media and science and medical researchers. Overall, these results strongly support our views that examining these relations within different racial-ethnic groups separately was important and that power and privilege affect the relations between racial-ethnic identity centrality and trust indicators.

We wondered if the lack of relations between racial-ethnic identity centrality and trust in institutions in the AAPI group was the result of its greater diversity in underlying ethnic identity than the other three groups. We had asked the following open-ended question after respondents answered our racial-ethnic identity centrality measure: “Which racial-ethnic group were you thinking about (please specify one)?” We coded participants’ responses into the four groups reported in our study, but when we reviewed how many groups respondents named, we found that Asian American/Pacific Islander participants were outliers; they named 17 different terms, while Latinx participants named seven, white participants named four, and Black participants named three. Thus, there is good reason to think that the AAPI sample differed in the diversity of racial-ethnic identity in our sample. Perhaps partly for this reason, Junn and Masuoka (2008) found that among Asian Americans, racial-ethnic identity was a “latent” political identity, in contrast to the more stable, active identity associated with African Americans.

We note that racial-ethnic identity centrality was generally uncorrelated with trust in government across groups. This may suggest, as Dabros et al. (2015) noted, that the ambiguity in the nature of what different participants thought “government” referred to (abstract structures vs. the current administration) led to different judgments. Alternatively, perhaps in this election, racial-ethnic identity was less relevant to individuals’ trust in government than to their trust in media, science-medical researchers, and law enforcement and courts. Research across different elections may help clarify whether these patterns are unique to this election.

In contrast to racial-ethnic identity centrality, trust in institutions was related in parallel ways in all groups in terms of electoral preference (as in 2016; Blankenship & Stewart, 2019), consistent with the previous evidence that votes for Democrats generally are based on a desire for change, while votes for Republicans are based in a desire to support the status quo (Dabros et al., 2015; Gauchat, 2012; Tsifti & Ariely, 2014). That is trust in science-medical research and media related to support for Biden, while trust in government and law enforcement and courts were related to support for Trump. Finally, as a result of the lack of variance in voting among the POC in Study 1 (nearly all voted for Biden), we discovered that relative warmth toward the two candidates served as an excellent proxy. In both studies, the two indicators were very highly correlated in all groups, and they were associated with the other variables in the same way.

10.3 | Results of moderated mediation analyses

We expected trust to play a different mediating role in the groups that differed in terms of power and privilege. Specifically, we anticipated that those indicators of trust in institutions that challenge the status quo (media and science-medical researchers) would mediate the relation between marginalized racial-ethnic identities’ centrality and support for Biden. In contrast, we anticipated that those indicators of trust in institutions that uphold the status quo (government and law enforcement and courts) would mediate the relation between white racial-ethnic identity centrality and lower support for Biden. Blankenship & Stewart (2019) had tested these relations for

media and science only (both challenging the status quo), and these predictions were confirmed for trust in science but not trust in media. In this paper, we examined these relations as well as those for trust in status-quo-supporting institutions of government and law enforcement/police. Further, we examined them in Study 2 in four race-ethnicity groups rather than merely two.

In Study 1, we were only able to test the model in terms of voting for white people, and the results were confirmed for the mediating role of trust in law enforcement and courts between white racial-ethnic identity centrality and lower likelihood of voting for Biden. When we substituted the proxy for voting of relative warmth for Biden than for Trump, we confirmed this same pattern for white people. For the subsample of POC, as expected, both trust in the media and science/medical researchers mediated the relation between racial-ethnic identity centrality and more warmth toward Biden than Trump.

In Study 2, we saw a similar pattern among Black and Latinx participants for trust in the media as we found in Study 1: Trust in the media mediated the relation between racial-ethnic identity centrality and voting for Biden. No other mediation results involving trust indicators were significant. For AAPI participants, there was no significant mediation between racial-ethnic identity centrality and vote for any of the trust indicators. As noted above, trust in institutions was correlated with vote preference in the same way for AAPI participants as for Black and Latinx participants. Racial-ethnic identity centrality played no role though in predicting trust in institutions for AAPI participants. Finally, for white people, as in Study 1, trust in law enforcement and courts mediated vote preference (with those high in racial-ethnic identity centrality more likely to trust and for trust in turn to predict lower support for Biden). In addition, trust in science and medical researchers was a significant mediator for white participants, with those high in racial-ethnic identity centrality less likely to trust these institutions; and those who did not trust them were more likely to vote for Trump than Biden.

All of these results were identical for all four race/ethnic groups when relative warmth for Biden over Trump was substituted. However, we also observed two additional effects among Latinx and white participants. For Latinx participants, trust in law enforcement and courts mediated the relation of racial-ethnic identity centrality and relative warmth for Biden; and for white participants, trust in government was also a significant mediator (with higher racial-ethnic identity centrality and more trust associated with less warmth toward Biden).

Across the two studies, trust in the media was especially relevant in this election as a mediator between racial-ethnic identity centrality and vote choice. This was true for both Black and Latinx people, among whom high racial-ethnic identity centrality was associated with more trust in the media and greater support for Biden; and for white people, among whom racial-ethnic identity centrality was associated with less trust in the media and lower trust, which were in turn related to support for Trump. Trust in government was strikingly unimportant as a mediator except for the sole finding with white participants for relative warmth but not vote. Moreover, trust in law enforcement and courts mediated both warmth and vote preference for white people. Finally, trust in science and medical researchers mediated the relation but only for white people.

Supporting our idea that the mediating role of trust depends on particular election contexts (demonstrated for trust in government in previous elections by Dabros et al., 2015), we can compare these results with those from Blankenship & Stewart (2019) based on the 2016 election contest between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. In that election, in the sample from which the current Study 1 was drawn, they examined two trust indicators—trust in science and trust in the media. Trust in science played a mediating role for white people similar to the one found here. However, trust in the media played no role for either white people or POC. This implies that for white people high in racial-ethnic identity centrality, distrust in science was an important

factor in both elections, while trust in media only emerged for any group by the end of the Trump term—and then for three of the four racial-ethnic groups.

10.4 | Limitations of these studies

First, both studies used heterogeneous racial-ethnic groups, but this problem was particularly acute for Study 1 where we were constrained to examine all participants who were not white together as POC. Even so, we did not have enough participants to test mediation for the POC group, especially since we had so few POC who voted for Trump. However, this limitation did allow us to add a measure of relative warmth toward presidential candidates, assessed with feeling thermometers after the election, and to show that it was a good proxy for vote. Relatedly, we were also unable to conduct exact power analyses for our specific tests and had to rely on tests that only approximated our analyses, in order to justify our sample sizes. Although these approximated tests indicated that our sample sizes were generally adequate, this should be approached with caution since these were only approximations of our models. It is certainly possible that our models were underpowered as is the case for many mediation models tested in psychology (Götz et al., 2021). In general, future research should aim to include even larger, more diverse samples to satisfy these limitations.

Study 2 improved on our ability to look at race-ethnicity in terms of separate groups but still with heterogeneous categories for all four groups—particularly in terms of ethnic/national heritage, class, and gender. Was this heterogeneity a particular problem for the AAPI group and assessment of racial-ethnic identity centrality for that group? We suspect it may have been a factor, but it is also possible that racial-ethnic identity centrality was simply less critical for this group in terms of institutional trust and electoral behavior. Perhaps the salience of the “pan-Asian” identity that we relied on in our measure was less meaningful in this election than the racial-ethnic identity centrality for white, Black and Latinx participants (Junn & Matsuoka, 2008), despite the previously noted invocation of negative stereotypes particularly in the context of the coronavirus and the rise in hate crimes against AAPIs during this period.

In both studies, we relied on self-report survey data, though in both we ask for reports of a behavior (vote) relatively likely to be reported accurately, particularly soon after the election. In addition, both samples were drawn from MTurk, with the usual biases associated with MTurk samples (higher education and more left-leaning than the population as a whole). In addition, both may have included participants who self-selected into the study because of a relatively greater interest in politics than the population as a whole might have. This may be particularly true of those in Study 1, who had persisted in the study through two previous elections (one presidential, one midterm) in the study, and in this second presidential election.

Additionally, because our dependent variables were always assessing *relative differences* in support for Biden versus Trump, we were unable to directly test directional mechanisms for these effects (i.e., were the effects driven by more support for Biden or lower support for Trump?). These two effects cannot be disentangled using survey methodology, but other methods (e.g., random assignment to evaluate candidate profiles) might be better able to clarify the roles of support versus antipathy in producing these effects.

Finally, we did not address potentially important factors, such as political ideology. It is possible that liberal or conservative ideologies predispose individuals toward racial-ethnic identity centrality and/or trust of the institutions we examine here (Dai et al., 2021). Our interest, though, was in establishing that racial-ethnic identity centrality, which can be high or low for both whites

and POC who hold various political views, plays a role in trust in social institutions, and therefore in support for particular candidates. This seems particularly important in a nation in which the diversity of racial-ethnic groups, and differential group identification within those groups, plays such a powerful role in public discourse about politics (e.g., consider the discussions of the Black Lives Matter movement, sexual harassment, and immigration policies.) That said, we do not question the importance—or even the greater importance—of other factors, such as political orientation, particularly in candidate support (Devine, 2015; Hennessey et al., 2015). We note, too, that we can only test the relationships we are interested in as if they certainly work only in one direction since we have longitudinal data in which our racial-ethnic identity and social institutional trust measures precede the election (precluding examination of these relationships as operating in both directions). Nevertheless, we understand that preference for a candidate may shape ideological commitments (Lenz, 2013) including trust in institutions; the likely recursive nature of these different attitudes makes strong causal inferences about the direction of effects unwise.

10.5 | Future directions

We hope other researchers will pursue analyses of the mediating role of institutional trust between racial-ethnic identity centrality and electoral preferences in larger racial and ethnic groups, in order to examine trust in institutions that may be particularly salient in some groups (e.g., institutions associated with immigration policies for Latinx and AAPIs). Larger samples are also critical to further analyze the role of important intersecting identities such as gender and class, as well as other potential factors particular to some groups, such as immigration status, generation in the United States, or country of ancestry.

In terms of measures, we hope future research will clarify the meaning of “trust in government” as either addressing the current administration or our broad governmental “system.” It may also be critical to focus on particular branches (executive, legislative or legal) and levels (national, state, local), when considering particular racial-ethnic groups, despite some evidence that these may all be related. It may also be of value to consider the roles of other social institutions—perhaps particularly religion and education—though we did find some evidence that it is useful to focus on particular institutions that are highly salient in a given electoral context.

11 | CONCLUSION

This pair of studies offers two main contributions: the examination of the role of racial-ethnic identity centrality as a factor in trust in social institutions and vote preference in the United States in the context of the 2020 Presidential election; and use of diverse samples that allowed tests of race/ethnicity as a key moderator of these relations.

Racial-ethnic identity centrality was generally correlated, as expected, with trust in institutions that offer space to challenge the status quo (media, science-medical researchers) for Black and Latinx participants. For whites, it was correlated, as expected, with trust in institutions that uphold the status quo (government, law enforcement/courts). Racial-ethnic identity centrality was not related to trust in these institutions for AAPI participants. Racial-ethnic identity centrality and trust in institutions were generally important correlates of vote and relative warmth in all groups in both studies, with the exception of racial-ethnic identity centrality for AAPI participants.

We also showed that the racial-ethnic group was a crucial moderator. Although two of the three groups with marginalized racial-ethnic identities (Black and Latinx people) showed comparable patterns, they were different from those found for AAPI participants. Among white people, three of the trust indicators mediated between racial-ethnic identity centrality and vote, and all four mediated for relative warmth. Finally, trust in the media played a clear mediating role between racial-ethnic identity centrality and election choices in this election in all groups except AAPI participants. This particularly strong role for trust in media may, again, have been heightened in salience in this election in a unique way. Only the next election will provide an opportunity for us to assess its long or short-term role.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

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