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We the People. Who? The face of future American politics is shaped by perceived foreignness of candidates of color

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Abstract

Pursuing a more equitable political representation of a country's demographics is essential both as a matter of principle and pragmatism (i.e., realpolitik). As such, the goal of the present study was to replicate and expand on research on the impact of voter race/ethnicity and ideology on voting behaviors and interpersonal judgments of political candidates of color from different racial and ethnic groups. After participants ($N = 282$) saw the same political candidate of color (randomly assigned to identify as Mexican American vs. African American), we assessed interpersonal judgments and behaviors (e.g., expertise, voting intentions), perceived Americanness, and memory for skin tone of the candidate. In support of hypotheses and previous research/theory, white voters expressed more positive interpersonal judgments toward the African American political candidate and rated him to be more American than the Mexican American political candidate. We expanded upon previous research by directly testing the role of perceived Americanness in the differential judgments of political candidates' race/ethnicity by white voters, with evidence supporting partial mediation. Our

findings further showed that judgments toward a political candidate of color were also predicted by voters' political affiliation. Specifically, conservative (vs. liberal) voters generally expressed less positive interpersonal judgments toward the candidates of color and perceived them to be less American and patriotic. Ramifications related to these findings are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

We the People of the United States. These are the first words of the Constitution of the United States that officials swear to protect and defend when they take their Oath of Office. But who exactly is meant by We? One of the clauses in the Naturalization Act of 1790, which the Unites States Congress passed as one of the first pieces of legislation that defined citizenship as something only accessible to a particular group, states that only free white people who had been in the United States for at least 2 years were legally eligible for citizenship (Golash-Boza, 2016). Although criteria for citizenship have since expanded, research has shown that in terms of cognitive associations, even after centuries, to be American still means to be white (Devos & Banaji, 2005).

Although the melting pot metaphor as a symbol of the belief that the nation was created out of many has been central to American identity since the nation's founding (Citrin & Sears, 2014; Schildkraut, 2010), the United States has also had a long history of nativist feelings toward immigrants (Higham, 1955). While considered a nation of immigrants, anti-immigrant sentiment and policy has often been driven by fears that the newcomers would not assimilate into the American culture and change the country's core Brimelow (1996; Portes & Rumbaut, 2014; Tichenor, 2002). Consequently, a diversifying demographic of the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020) may impact the perceived national identity fueling the re-organization of racial stratification in the U.S (Bonilla-Silva, 2004). Recent investigations into subordination of minority groups in the Unites States suggest that their hierarchical positioning occurs along two distinct dimensions: perceived inferiority and perceived cultural foreignness (Zou & Cheryan, 2017). In other words, research suggests that although an African American individual might be perceived as inferior to an Asian person, they may be viewed more positively than a Latino individual who may be regarded as both inferior and more foreign than members of other groups.

The categorization of people of color as not American might be influenced by the perception that brown skin tones are more often associated with certain geographical regions (e.g., Chavez, 2013; Ngai, 2004) and lack of citizenship (Chirco & Buchanan, 2021). The biased association between brown skin tones and an individual's perceived foreignness can have negative, and even deadly consequences. For example, news reports documented brown U.S. citizens being arrested and facing deportation by ICE (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement) because they were misidentified as undocumented immigrants (Mosbergen, 2019). In an even more tragic event, several shoppers perceived as undocumented immigrants because of their skin tone were shot and killed at a Walmart store in El Paso Texas (Bogel-Burroughs, 2019).

This biased processing—associating skin tone and perception of citizenship—not only affects immigrants and ordinary citizens but can have profound implications for the experience of prominent persons of color as well. "I heard it today that [Harris] doesn't meet the requirements…"

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said former President Trump, referring to Vice President Kamala Harris when she announced her run for the position (Rizzo, 2020). In another instance, he raised questions about former President Barack Obama's place of birth and, therefore, his eligibility to hold office in the United States (Kessler, 2011). The pattern of equating darker skin tone with foreignness continued when the former President asked, "Why don't they go back and help fix the totally broken and crime infested places from which they came?" referring to four U.S. congresswomen of color (i.e., representatives Ocasio-Cortez, Omar, Tlaib, and Pressley) implying their lack of American citizenship (Quilantan & Cohen, 2019). In short, immigrants, citizens, and even leaders/politicians of color face discrimination based on the association between their skin color/tone and perceived lack of citizenship.

Choosing a leader: Social identity theory

Leaders/politicians of color face additional hurdles to having their citizenship questioned because of their phenotypical traits. Recent investigations on the relationship between skin tone and interpersonal judgments (e.g., perceived trustworthiness, voting behavior) found that voters' evaluations are influenced by a political candidate's skin tone (Anderson et al., 2020; Chirco & Buchanan, 2022). According to Social Identity Theory (SIT), people define their place and role in society and, by acknowledging a social group (e.g., family, political party) to which they belong (Tajfel, 1972), become emotionally attached to that (in)group, developing prejudice toward other (out)groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). It is therefore unsurprising that, when choosing a leader, people select the leader (or politician) they think best represents them and their group (Hogg, 2001). This mechanism can help to explain why white voters express more positive interpersonal judgments about, and are more likely to vote for, a relatively lighter-skinned political candidate (Chirco & Buchanan, 2022).

Choosing a leader: Leadership categorization theory

Even as the U.S. becomes more diverse—according to the U.S. Census (2020), 61.1% of the U.S. population is white—80% of the most powerful leaders are still white (Lu et al., 2020). Extensive research suggests that these disproportionate racial representations in places of power may be explained by structural factors such as economic inequality (e.g., Kraus et al., 2019) and institutional segregation (e.g., Anicich et al., 2021), interpersonal influences such as outgroup prejudice when evaluating personnel (e.g., Phillips & Jun, 2022), and explicit discrimination in the workplace (e.g., Quillian et al., 2017). Leadership categorization theory provides yet another explanation for the lack of proportional representation in positions of power. This theory argues that when people think of a leader, they envision a prototype and hold a mental image of what a leader looks like to them (Lord et al., 1984). That image is usually associated with whiteness (Petsko & Rosette, 2023; Rosette et al., 2008).

Current research: Aims and hypotheses

While social identity and leadership categorization theory both explain certain mechanisms involved in categorizing and choosing a leader, recent empirical investigations show that the

process may be more nuanced and that relative skin tone and perceived foreignness of political candidate, in tandem, may influence interpersonal judgments and voting intentions (Chirco & Buchanan, 2022). A set of studies suggested that, when political candidates who belong to racially underrepresented groups were presented to constituents with the same skin tone (i.e., brown), white voters expressed more positive judgments toward the candidate who identified as African American than Mexican American (Chirco & Buchanan, 2022). Although not directly tested, given prior research, this finding was attributed to a potential perception of cultural foreignness (Zou & Cheryan, 2017), in that white voters may have perceived the Mexican American candidate as less likely to be a citizen of the United States (Chirco & Buchanan, 2021) and, therefore, not eligible to hold office. Scholarship surrounding colorism and race/ethnicity (e.g., Chirco & Buchanan, 2021, 2022; Devos & Banaji, 2005; Zou & Cheryan, 2017) has repeatedly shown that relatively lighter-skinned African Americans are perceived more positively than individuals with darker skin tones and that Latinos struggle to be recognized as fully American. However, even as past scholarship highlights the independent effects of colorism and race/ethnicity on people's interpersonal attitudes and behaviors, experimental scholarship on the joint impact of voter demographics and the intersection of political candidates' skin tones and their race/ethnicity remains insufficient. Additionally, considering that the racial and ethnic composition of the United States is changing (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020), it becomes increasingly critical to understand attitudes and behaviors that represent barriers to achieving more equitable representations in powerful spaces traditionally occupied primarily by white people. Hence, the goal of the present study was to replicate previous findings (Chirco & Buchanan, 2022) in which people's racial/ethnic group was found to correlate with the perception of their cultural foreignness (e.g., Zou & Cheryan, 2017). That is, researchers proposed that Latinos are often considered as more foreign than, for example, African Americans and that that process might influence attitudes toward that person (e.g., Chirco & Buchanan, 2022). To our knowledge, however, perceived Americanness of an individual has not yet been examined as a possible psychological mechanism that might explain white voters' interpersonal judgments toward the political candidates of color. Consequently, we tested a mediation model positing that perceived Americanness would mediate the relationship between the political candidate's racial/ethnic group and the participants' interpersonal judgments. Specifically, we hypothesized that white participants would perceive the African American (vs. Mexican American) candidate as more American and consequently show more positive judgments toward him.

Although not the primary focus of the current research, we also sought to replicate relevant findings from prior studies (e.g., Chirco & Buchanan, 2022; Kemmelmeier & Chavez, 2014) by examining whether skin tone memory bias (i.e., how light or dark the candidate's skin tone was remembered to be) would predict evaluations of the candidates. We expected that, to the extent that participants remembered the skin tone of the candidate as being relatively lighter, they would rate the candidate more positively. Supported by a previous body of research (e.g., Anderson et al., 2020; Chirco & Buchanan, 2022; Kemmelmeier & Chavez, 2014), we also expected that the voters' political affiliation would relate to our outcomes of interest. In particular, we anticipated that, compared to liberal participants, conservative voters would generally show less positive judgments toward the candidates of color.[1]

All in all, our hypotheses were as follows:

Primary Analyses

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[1] The data set and full materials will be made available upon request. This work was not a part of a preregistered project.

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Hypothesis 1a: White participants will show more positive judgments toward the African American than toward the Mexican American political candidate.

Hypothesis 1b: White participants will perceive the African American as more American than the Mexican American political candidate.

Hypothesis 1c: Perceptions of candidate Americanness will mediate the effect of candidate race/ethnicity on interpersonal judgments for white participants.

Secondary Analyses

Hypothesis 2a: Participants will remember the African American political candidate as having a darker skin tone than the Mexican American candidate.

Hypothesis 2b: The lighter the skin tone of the candidate is remembered to be, the more positive judgments the participants show.

Hypothesis 3: Conservative participants will reveal less positive judgments toward candidate of color.

METHOD

Participants

Assumptions underlying the a priori power analyses were based on the results of previous research (Chirco & Buchanan, 2022), medium effects ($d = .25$), $\alpha = .05$, and power ($1 - \beta$) set at .95. The projected sample size needed with this effect size (G*Power 3.1) was $N = 268$ for a between groups comparison and simple mediation analyses (Faul et al., 2007).[2] We sampled 282 undergraduate students ($M_{age} = 20.63$, SD = 4.50) enrolled in psychology courses at a University in the Pacific Northwest.[3] Most of the participants identified as white (63%),[4] female (67%), and held liberal political views (42%). For detailed demographic information, see Table 1. None of the participants failed to respond accurately to the attention check question and no participant's data point was excluded.

Materials

Facial stimuli

Based on previous research (Chirco & Buchanan, 2021, 2022), we employed facial stimuli created by Stepanova and Strube (2009, 2012) who used software to manipulate both the facial physiognomy and the skin tone of the individual portrayed in the picture: from left of continuum (very light) to right of continuum (very dark). In line with earlier investigations, we presented participants in both conditions with an image of the same man pictured with what is considered a *brown*

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[2] A power sensitivity analysis run through the shiny package on R resulted in an observed power of .97 (Schoemann et al., 2017).

[3] We report all measures, conditions, data exclusions, and sample size determinations.

[4] Other participants identified as Latino/Hispanic (15%), African American (6%), Asian (5%), other (5%), American Indian or Alaska native (3%), and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (3%).

TABLE 1 Demographic information for participants

Characteristic	N	%	M	SD
Age	–	–	20.63	4.50
Gender				
Female	188	67	–	–
Male	80	28	–	–
Other	14	5		
Political orientation				
Liberal	117	42	–	–
Moderate	107	38	–	–
Conservative	57	20	–	–

FIGURE 1 The same image was presented to participants in both conditions. In one condition, the candidate self-identified as African American and in the other condition as Mexican American. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

skin tone (midpoint of skin tone continuum). When it comes to decision-making processes, people tend to evaluate the choices at their disposal and ultimately settle for the option perceived to be more advantageous to them (Von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944). Importantly, however, the choice people ultimately make is influenced by how the options at their disposal are perceived (e.g., Slovic, 1995; Thaler & Sunstein, 2008; Tversky & Kahneman, 1981). The perception of these options can be influenced by labels which individuals use when they need to make a judgment between the options at hand (French & Smith, 2013) and previous associations—positive or negative—with a given label (e.g., Breneiser & Allen, 2011; Kühn & Galliant, 2013; Lee et al., 2006). Accordingly, we used the labels Mexican American and African American to manipulate the candidates' race/ethnicity as part of a short political campaign statement (see Figure 1).

Measures

In line with previous research (Chirco & Buchanan, 2022), while the image and statement of the political candidate was displayed, participants were asked to evaluate the candidate across several interpersonal and behavioral dimensions. Specifically, participants were asked to rate how they felt about the candidate using a feeling thermometer ranging from 0 (*very negative*) to 100 (*very positive*) in 10-point increments, and to express their voting intentions using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*extremely unlikely*) to 5 (*extremely likely*). To assess their views regarding the candidates' attributes and values, participants rated statements such as "This candidate will represent my group well" and "The candidate is an expert in his field" using 5-point Likert-type scales that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).[5]

To directly measure perceived foreignness, we asked participants to rate how American they perceived the candidate in the image to be (Devos & Banaji, 2005). The 7-point Likert-type scale ranged from 1 (*not at all American*) to 7 (*absolutely American*). We also asked participants to rate how patriotic they perceived the candidate to be (Zou & Cheryan, 2017): 1 (*unpatriotic*) to 7 (*patriotic*). In line with prior studies (Chirco & Buchanan, 2022; Kemmelmeier & Chavez, 2014), participants were asked to rate how light they remembered the candidate's skin tone to be by using a thermometer that ranged from 0 (*very light*) to 100 (*very dark*) in 10-point increments.

We measured participants' political orientation using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*extremely conservative*) to 7 (*extremely liberal*) and used these scores to categorize participants as either conservative, moderate, or liberal.

Procedure

We utilized a 2 (Candidate race/ethnicity: Mexican American vs. African American) × 2 (Participant racial group: white vs. non-white) between-subjects design. Participants completed the study electronically on a device at a location of their choosing and, after providing informed consent, were informed about upcoming local elections to fill the spot of District County Commissioner. They were then randomly assigned to see an image of the same man in a *brown* skin tone (Chirco & Buchanan, 2021, 2022) who was labeled as either Mexican American ($n = 144$) or African American ($n = 138$). While the image and a brief politically neutral statement was displayed, participants were asked to rate how they felt about the candidate and how likely they were to vote for him. Next, we assessed the participants' attitudes, their perception of the candidates' Americanness and patriotism, followed by the skin tone gradient measure to assess the participants' skin tone memory bias. Before being debriefed, participants answered demographic questions. All in all, the experimental procedure lasted between 10 and 15 min.

RESULTS

Before moving to our primary data analysis, we conducted a principal component factor analysis of the interpersonal judgment items used by Chirco and Buchanan (Study 3; 2022). Results supported a one-factor solution, with the first eigenvalue of 4.02 and all subsequent λs < .81. Consequently, we standardized and combined the measures to assess the participants' views about

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[5] The complete set of measures can be viewed in the additional materials.
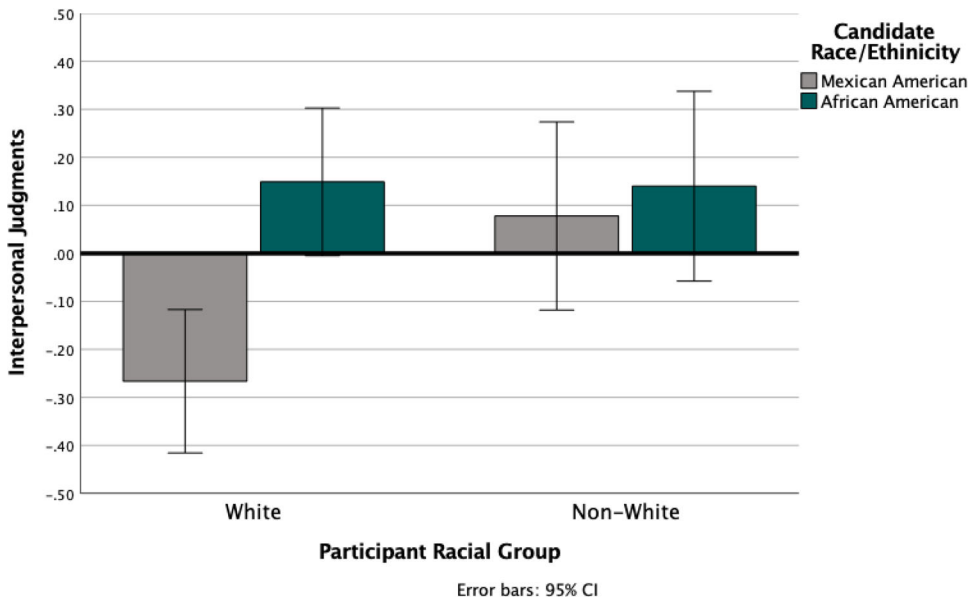
FIGURE 2 Interaction effect between participant racial group (white vs. non-white) and candidate race/ethnicity (Mexican American vs. African American) on interpersonal judgments. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

the candidates' attributes and values (i.e., warmth, voting intention, perceived expertise, perceptions of representing the participants' group and fighting for their rights) into a single index, with higher values signaling more positive interpersonal judgments toward the political candidate (α = .80).

In line with prior investigations, we conducted a two-way ANOVA,[6] to examine the interaction effects of participant racial group and candidate race/ethnicity on interpersonal judgments toward the candidate. Replicating prior findings (Chirco & Buchanan, 2022) and supporting hypothesis 1a, the data pointed to an interaction between participant racial group and candidate race/ethnicity, $F(1, 282) = 3.92$, $p = .049$, $\eta_p^2 = .014$. As can be seen in Figure 2, white voters indicated more positive interpersonal judgments toward the African American ($M = .15$, $SD = .80$) than the Mexican American candidate ($M = -.27$, $SD = .70$), while non-white participants exhibited no such preference ($p = .321$).

In line with prior theorizing (e.g., Chirco & Buchanan, 2022) suggesting that white voters may perceive a Mexican American political candidate as more foreign and consequently not eligible to hold office, we also found support for hypothesis 1b. Indeed, our data showed that white voters perceived the African American candidate ($M = 6.23$, $SD = 1.08$) as more *American* than the Mexican American candidate ($M = 5.52$, $SD = 1.39$), $t(175) = -3.81$, $p < .001$, $d = -.57$. To explore whether these differences in perceived Americanness help explain white voters' preferences for different candidates of color, we conducted a simple mediation analysis using the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013) to examine if perceptions of Americanness mediated the effect of participant race/ethnicity on white voters' interpersonal judgments. In line with our hypotheses, results revealed a positive association between candidate race/ethnicity and perceived Americanness,

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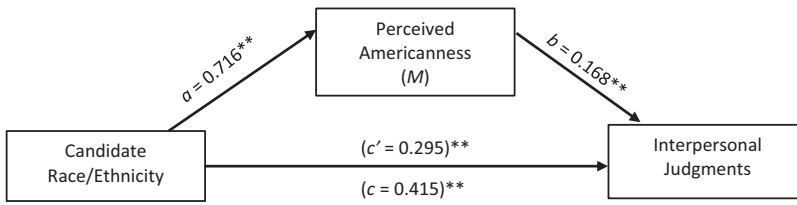[6] All assumptions for this analysis were met (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2013).

FIGURE 3 Mediating effect of perceived Americanness between the candidate race/ethnicity condition and interpersonal judgments. *Notes*: Candidate race/ethnicity condition was coded Mexican American = 1, African American = 2. **$p < .001$.
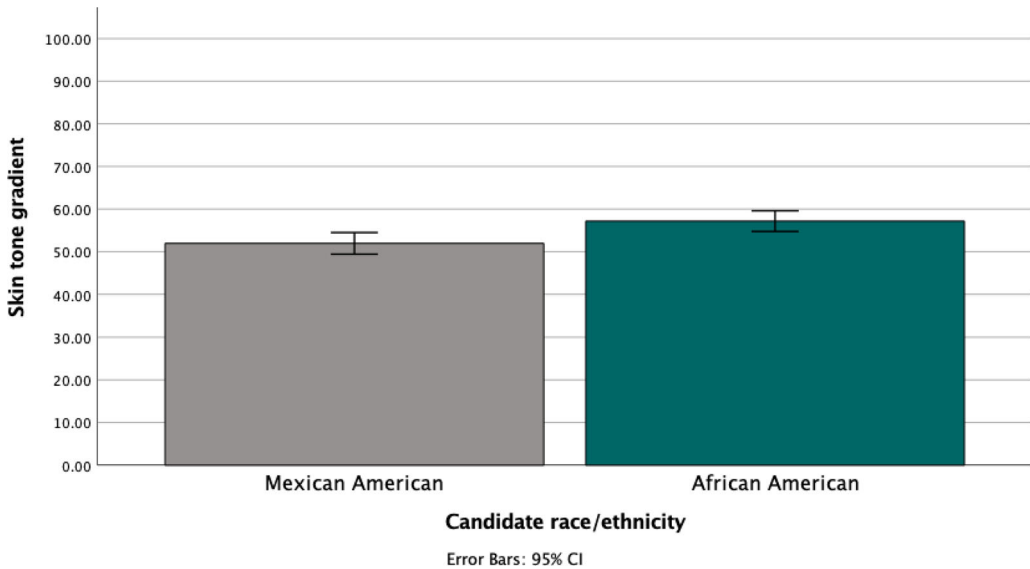

FIGURE 4 Skin tone memory bias displayed by candidate race/ethnicity (Mexican American vs. African American). *Note*. The higher the numbers on the skin tone gradient scale, the darker the skin tone of the candidate was remembered to be. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

and a positive association between perceptions of Americanness and interpersonal judgments, as well as a significant direct link between candidate race/ethnicity and interpersonal judgments (see Figure 3). A 95% bias-corrected confidence interval based on 10,000 bootstrap samples indicated that the indirect effect through perceived Americanness ($a*b$= .120, 95% CI [.0476 to .2115]) was significant. In other words, the pattern of results suggested that perceptions of Americanness partially mediated the relationship between candidate race/ethnicity and interpersonal judgments. Hence, our data supported hypothesis 1c as well.

Next, we explored whether participants would exhibit skin tone memory bias. In line with expectations (Hypothesis 2a) and as can be seen in Figure 4, while seen in the exact same skin tone, the African American candidate ($M = 57.17$, $SD = 14.40$) was generally remembered as having a darker skin tone than the Mexican American candidate ($M = 51.96$, $SD = 15.30$), $t(279) = -2.94$, $p = .002$, $d = -.35$. While we found a significant effect of skin tone memory bias, our data showed that how light or dark the candidate was remembered to be did not significantly affect interpersonal judgments (all $ps > .07$). Hence, we did not find support for Hypothesis 2b.

TABLE 2 T-test results comparing liberal and conservative participants on candidate judgments and outcomes

	Mean con-servative	Mean liberal	Statistic	df	p	d
Perceived Americanness	5.23	5.90	−2.85	94.82	.03	−.49
Interpersonal judgments	−.23	.18	−3.20	.85	<.001	−.56
Perceived patriotism	4.67	5.34	−3.29	117.83	<.001	−.52

Finally, in line with previous findings (Chirco & Buchanan, 2022) and supporting hypothesis 3, our data showed that there was a significant difference between liberals and conservatives for most of our outcomes (see Table 2).[7] Concretely, independent samples t-tests showed that, compared to liberals, conservative participants generally viewed the candidates of color as less American, $t(94.82) = -2.85$, $p = .003$, $d = -.49$, less patriotic, $t(117.83) = -3.29$, $p < .001$, $d = -.52$, and also expressed less positive interpersonal judgments, $t(90.78) = -3.20$, $p < .001$, $d = -.56.8$

DISCUSSION

With the intention of replicating results of previous studies (Chirco & Buchanan, 2022), we hypothesized that, when shown the same political candidate of color in the same skin tone (i.e., brown), white voters would generally express more positive interpersonal judgments toward a candidate described as African American than toward one labeled as Mexican American. In line with previous investigations, the results of the present study showed that, unlike non-white voters, white constituents presented with a candidate of color prefer an African American over a Mexican American politician. It is important to note that the sample size at our disposal only allowed us to compare white and non-white participants. A larger sample size might have allowed us to explore potential differences within the non-white group, as this is a diverse group and is not homogenous in its political attitudes. For example, reports show that Latinos in certain states predominantly support conservative parties and are likely to play crucial roles in upcoming elections (Dominguez-Villegas, 2022). Recruiting from a more diverse pool of participants would also allow scholars to start exploring voting intentions of a changing American demographics (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Important to note is also that the participants in the present study were undergraduate students from the Pacific Northwest and while Gen Z voters greatly impacted the 2020 presidential election (Johnson Hess, 2020), collecting data from older, and possibly more politically engaged individuals, might have yielded different results. However, support for our findings is bolstered by their ability to replicate previous research in which a more age diverse pool of candidates was used (Chirco & Buchanan, 2022).

Previous research has highlighted that Latinos in the U.S. are perceived as more culturally foreign than most other minorities (Zou & Cheryan, 2017). However, empirical investigations on how that perception may influence voting behaviors and political candidates' evaluations remain scarce. To address this gap in the literature, another aim of the present study was to test whether white voters' preferences toward an African American political candidate (vs. Mexican American) might be mediated by the perceived Americanness of the candidate. As anticipated, our data

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[7] Additional moderation analyses by political ideology for all models reported in the present study were not significant (ps ranged from .07 to .89).

confirmed that white constituents considered the African American candidate as more American, and that that psychological process partially explained the relationship between the political candidate's race/ethnicity and those (white) voters' evaluations of the political candidate. Because we used computerized images of politicians of color who were not known by our participants, it is possible that the participants might have distanced themselves from the candidate when expressing their voting behaviors and interpersonal judgments; research does in fact suggest that type of image (i.e., real vs. digitized) may affect categorization processes (e.g., Gaither et al., 2019). However, with the objective of reducing confounding factors (e.g., differences in facial features, attractiveness, familiarity), digitized images have been reliably used in psychological research in the past (e.g., Hugenberg & Bodenhausen, 2003; Stepanova & Strube, 2009; Strom et al., 2012). Regardless, future investigations should address this limitation by increasing the saliency for the participants by presenting them with images of real political candidates of color who are on the ballot in the participants' districts. We would also like to note that using a single image might have influenced the findings in that the idiosyncratic features of a specific image could produce unique results. Although using an array of different images might have increased external and construct validity (Wells & Windschitl, 1999), we remain confident about our results because they, once more, replicate previous empirical work (Chirco & Buchanan, 2021, 2022). Nevertheless, future explorations should consider using different sets of stimuli and consider increasing the number of stimuli by, for example, manipulating the physiognomy of the individual portrayed.

In line with existing research (e.g., Anderson et al., 2020; Chirco & Buchanan, 2021; Kemmelmeier & Chavez, 2014), we also found support for our hypothesis involving voting intentions toward candidates of color and political partisanship. In fact, our data suggested once more that, compared to liberal voters, conservative participants expressed less positive interpersonal judgments and viewed the candidates of color (no matter their racial/ethnic group) as less American and less patriotic.

We also explored whether participants would display the skin tone memory bias observed in previous studies (e.g., Ben-Zeev et al., 2014; Chirco & Buchanan, 2022; Kemmelmeier & Chavez, 2014). Interestingly, while the African American and Mexican American political candidates were shown in the same skin tone, participants tended to remember the African (vs. Mexican) American candidate as having a darker skin tone. While existing work on skin tone memory bias demonstrates that how light or dark a political candidate is remembered to be has an effect on evaluations of that individual (e.g., Chirco & Buchanan, 2022; Kemmelmeier & Chavez, 2014), the data collected in the present study did not suggest such an effect for our aggregate measure of interpersonal candidate judgments. This partial replication might be due to the fact that we did not measure the participants' skin tone memory bias using the same tool used in previous studies (e.g., Chirco & Buchanan, 2022; Kemmelmeier & Chavez, 2014). Instead of using an objective measure such as a pool of images showing the same individual whose skin tone was manipulated, we opted for a more subjective measure and asked participants to utilize a skin tone gradient thermometer to rate how light or dark they remembered the candidate to be. Had we adopted the same skin tone memory bias measure used in previous investigations, we might have had findings consistent with previous research. Consequently, we recommend that researchers further consider differences that emerge between various measures of memory for skin tone.

CONCLUSION

Altogether, our findings replicate and validate previous scholarly work: Firstly, we found confirmation that the racial group to which voters belong (in this instance, white vs. non-white) significantly affects voting intentions toward political candidates of color. Secondly, we found additional evidence that participants' political affiliation significantly influences attitudes and behaviors when they choose a political candidate of color who should represent them. In short, our data suggests that white conservative voters are simultaneously affected by the relative skin tone and the perceived foreignness of political candidates and that these processes may influence the voters' evaluations and candidate choice at the ballot box.

These findings are worthy of note because pursuing a more equitable political representation of a country's demographics is important both as a matter of principle and pragmatism (i.e., realpolitik). On the one hand, the pursuit of equity in government is a matter of social justice. On the other, it is key to ensuring the survival of liberal democracies. While the demographic shift underway in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020) has been fueling a dangerous drift toward populism (Berman, 2021; Craig & Richeson, 2014), a similar phenomenon can also be triggered by a lack of action to realign the makeup of the ruling class with that of the electorate. A country which, in the face of a change in the proportions of its racial and ethnic groups, perpetuates government structures representing a historically privileged minority is more likely to suffer from increasingly violent social conflicts and see the proliferation of radicalized movements (Williams, 1993). In light of the findings of the present study and of the scholarship it reinforces, it remains imperative to explore and understand factors that create more barriers to equitable representations of people of color in leadership roles—political and otherwise.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Data available upon request.

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