Intergenerational Gaps in Social and Political Attitudes Amongst Asian Americans

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Abstract

Few studies have explored the attitudes of unique diasporas in the Asian American community. We administered a survey of South Asian Indian American college students and their parents across the United States, through which we consider three questions. **First**, do the political and social preferences of Indian Americans vary by generation? **Second**, if intergenerational differences emerge, where are they pronounced? **Third**, in what ways do the beliefs of Indian Americans differ from other Americans? We leverage a parent-child matched-pairs sample to examine attitudes on issues both in the United States and India. We find that Indian Americans display stark generational differences across political, social, and policy preferences. We present evidence that the formation of these beliefs might be linked to information sourcing, political participation, and peer socialization. We also derive comparisons between our sample and comparable representative surveys. These results offer a novel contribution to the literature on intergenerational differences.

Keywords: Asian American politics; Indian American attitudes; political socialization; immigrant political behavior; intergenerational attitudes; intergenerational transmissions.

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Abbreviations

- **SIAA**: Survey of Indian American Attitudes

- **IAAS**: Indian American Attitudes Survey

- **NAAS**: National Asian American Survey

- **ANES**: American National Election Studies

- **ACS**: American Community Survey

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Introduction

In the midst of the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election, the voting behavior of minority groups became the subject of close scrutiny. Much of this increased attention has been attributed to the impressive population growth of these groups — particularly amongst Asian Americans. The number of U.S. residents who identify as Asian Americans has nearly tripled over the past 30 years. Asian Americans are now the fastest growing of the nation's four largest ethnic groups. In 2020, there were 176 U.S. counties with at least 5% of their population identifying as Asian, compared to just 39 in 1990 (Gebeloff, Lu and Jordan 2021). Asian Americans have also begun to emerge as an influential demographic in political spheres, increasing their turnout rate by a record 10% from the 2016 to the 2020 presidential election (Montanaro 2021b).

National polling suggests this group has historically aligned with the Democratic Party, and continued to do so in the 2020 election. Catalist's post-election report found that 63% of Asian Americans voted for Joe Biden, as compared to 31% for Donald Trump (Ghitza and Robinson 2021). However, media polls such as these are often non-representative and do not capture the unique and diverse perspectives of the Asian American community. Recent academic scholarship has helped re-frame Asian Americans as more than a monolithic community, and has underscored the need for more granular analyses of the Asian American community (Montanaro 2021a). Amidst this conversation, Indian Americans (South Asian Indians) are receiving newfound attention (Badrinathan, Kapur and Vaishnav 2020; Ghori-Ahmad and Salman 2020).

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Among the Asian American diaspora, growth in Indian Americans has been particularly pronounced (Gebeloff, Lu and Jordan 2021). As of 2020, there were four million U.S. residents who identified as Indian Americans. This represents a small share of the overall U.S. population (between 1.25 - 1.30%), but an important slice of the voting population. During the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election results in critical swing states were often decided by margins of less than 1 - 2%. Indian Americans played an important role in these outcomes, reporting the highest voting rates among any Asian American group in the 2020 election (Bhowmick 2020; Indian-Americans Reported Highest Rates of Voting in 2020 Presidential Election 2021). The significance of the Indian American vote will soon be compounded by the group's rapidly shifting demographics. They are now one of the fastest growing and largest immigrant groups in the United States, increasing in size by almost 150 percent from 2000 - 2018 (Largest U.S. Immigrant Groups Over Time, 1960 - Present 2019). Furthermore, Indian Americans consistently rank amongst the nation's wealthiest and most educated residents (Igielnik and Budiman 2020).

These shifts in political participation and demographics validate a closer examination of the Indian American diaspora. Like many other Asian American communities, Indian Americans constitute a diverse set of immigrants and U.S.-born residents, whose identities are split across different demographic lines. Understanding these diverse social attitudes and political perspectives will require interested scholars to disentangle complex demographic traits and isolate generational gaps in beliefs and perceptions.

The paper proceeds in the following manner. We first review prior literature around which issues intergenerational gaps emerge and how political preferences are formed across generations — with a focus on immigrant communities. We then outline the value of a matched pairs analysis in

isolating generational effects, and introduce the Survey of Indian American Attitudes. We proceed by reviewing the key findings of our study, framing the results within the broader literature, and concluding with limitations and a motivation for further research.

1.1 Evidence of intergenerational gaps in social and political attitudes

Given the intense polarization of politics in the United States over the past decade, there is reason to believe that political opinions might vary across generations. Many scholars have found evidence of sizable generational political differences across topics related to women's rights (Jennings 2006), LGBTQIA rights (Vaccaro 2009), and political party preference (Fisher 2020; The Generation Gap in American Politics 2018). Pew Research Center's 2018 report also found strong differences in political attitudes across generations of Americans on issues such as racial discrimination, immigration, and national security (The Generation Gap in American Politics 2018). Another Pew report from 2019 suggested that while Millennials and Gen Zers mirrored one another's beliefs across a range of political and social identities, their beliefs were strongly misaligned with the Silent Generation and (more moderately) misaligned with beliefs of Baby Boomers or Gen Xers (Parker, Graf and Igielnik 2019; The Generation Gap in American Politics 2018). In particular, many surveys suggest that Millennials and Gen Zers tend to be more supportive of racial justice, favorable immigration laws, environmental protections, and gun control legislation when compared to their older counterparts (Frey 2020).

On the other hand, multiple studies have reported that information sourcing between Millennials and Gen Zers is varied, with a larger share of Millennials getting their news from newly established social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram (Gen Z & Millennials Have Very Different

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News Sources 2020). Insofar as one's media ecosystem might influence their beliefs, we could anticipate these differences in information sourcing to generate social and political divergence. Demographics between these groups are also distinct. Gen Zers are more racially and ethnically diverse than any prior generation; but are less likely than Millennials to identify themselves as immigrants (Parker and Igielnik 2020). These findings, while useful to understanding the shifting political landscape of the United States, do not specifically investigate whether similar generational differences exist and persist in Asian American communities. They also do not often investigate how generational differences might be different in immigrant communities as compared to the broader U.S. population, nor do they explore how these belief sets are shaped and transmitted.

1.2 Evidence of intergenerational transmissions in immigrant communities

Many scholars have argued that generational flows of ideas and attitudes are closely linked to the family unit (Hyman 1959; Jennings and Niemi 1968; Aggeborn and Nyman 2021). A common debate arises in this scholarship around whether and how these flows are transmitted from parent to child, from child to parent, or in neither of these directions. Jennings & Bower argue that political attitudes in America follow a parent-child transmission model. They find that when a family is highly political, the children are more likely to adopt their parents' political beliefs and leanings (Jennings, Stoker and Bowers 2009). Gidengil, Wass, & Valaste extend this U.S. analysis to Finland, and find that parents' political participation (decision to vote) is highly correlated with childrens' political activity, regardless of key demographics (Gidengil, Wass and Valaste 2016).

On the other hand, McCabe & Thal find that students may instead be politically socialized through peer groups on college campuses, in line with similar findings by Raychaudhuri (Mendelberg,

McCabe and Thal 2017; Raychaudhuri 2018). In this view, parents play a less important role as compared to peer groups. Hatemi and Ojeda also critique the parent-child transmission model, noting that political orientations translate only half the time from parents to children in their study areas (Hatemi and Ojeda 2021). They also note that educational attainment plays an important role in children's willingness to reject parental political attitudes, but does not necessarily improve their ability to understand their parents' underlying belief set.

While these studies are promising, they are hindered by some key limitations. Many of these studies only explore a specific set of channels for belief change (i.e., education, political participation, or peer socialization), rather than a broad set of indicators. Furthermore, the vast majority of these studies have focused on larger demographic groups, who are often native to the country of analysis.

1.3 Formation of political attitudes and preferences across generations

While many scholars have engaged in a contentious debate on if, where, and how political attitudes and opinions differ and flow across generations of native-born majority groups, few studies have focused specifically on intergenerational belief formation in immigrant communities. This group may fundamentally differ from non-immigrant families due to the unique backgrounds and the often disparate upbringings of parents and their children. Immigrant family units are commonly composed of foreign-born parents, who migrated from abroad, and native-born children, who were born and raised in the host country. This difference in life experience may link to unique belief sets and values across these groups.

While the literature in this area is still preliminary, a few scholars have constructed theories on how beliefs flow in immigrant communities. Wong Tseng contend that the transmission of political

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opinions in immigrant communities may be a bi-directional process, whereby children socialise

their parents within the national political context, and parents socialise their children to politics

in the transnational context (Wong and Tseng 2008). However, they do not thoroughly investigate

where children are sourcing their beliefs, but rather how these beliefs once developed are translated

to parents.

Raychaudhuri specifically focuses on the Asian American immigrant community, and explores

the mechanisms through which this group has developed political preferences in support of the

Democratic Party. She finds that first-generation Asian Americans primarily interact with fellow

immigrants from similar backgrounds. These interactions may cause individuals to sympathise with

some conservative ideologies, though they still overwhelmingly vote for Democratic candidates

because of the perceived extremeness of the Republican party. Unlike first-generation Asian

Americans, Raychaudhuri finds that those in the second-generation developed pro-Democratic

and more progressive attitudes through peer-to-peer socialization with racially diverse groups

Raychaudhuri 2018). In proceeding research, Raychaudhuri subsequently develops a theory of

social transmission which is non-dependent on the family unit. She proposes that local contexts,

such as living in liberal metropolitan areas, attending progressive educational institutions, or

engaging with peers from diverse racial groups, influences the diffusion of political views in Asian

American communities more than familial intergenerational transmission (Raychaudhuri 2020).

1.4 Cultural assimilation as a driver of intergenerational immigrant beliefs

The analyses of Raychaudhuri and others suggest that immigrant assimilation, particularly in the

younger generations, may play an influential role in belief formation in the Asian American popu-

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lation. Other studies have reported similar results across a multitude of immigrant communities. A recent review of immigrant literature across Europe and the United States found that despite the differences between the European and American contexts, scholarship across both settings reported a consistent pattern of intergenerational assimilation as related to socioeconomic attainment, social relations, and cultural beliefs (Drouhot and Nee 2019).

Recent data from nationally representative surveys has also supported these findings. The General Social Survey provides nationally representative responses across contentious policy issues including taxation rates and welfare spending. A 2015 analysis of this data found that first-generation immigrants were far more likely than the average U.S. resident to identify as Independents (about the same rates reported a self-identification of Independent status as those who reported Democratic), and far less likely to identify as Republican. The differences between generations of immigrants were generally statistically insignificant, however policy questions related to the degree of government involvement produced substantial differences between the first generation of immigrants, and all subsequent generations. Younger generations were more likely to identify with the perspectives of average U.S. residents of their own generation (Wilson and Nowrasteh 2015).

Another recent study explored the function of the local news ecosystem as a driver of assimilation. The authors structured a series of focus group interviews with recent immigrants to Spain and the Netherlands, and found that the consumption of host county news media was often an intentional effort by immigrants to digest local knowledge and better assimilate into their new setting. Participants' educational background and language skills — as well as their trust in local news sources — influenced the degree to which news media shifted their beliefs. Importantly, immigrants also reported continued engagement with homeland and multicultural country media, viewing these

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global outlets as additional mediums through which to pursue local integration while remaining in touch with homeland politics and culture (Alencar and Deuze 2017).

While the literature regarding immigrant integration has emphasized the role of cultural assimilation in shaping beliefs, it remains unclear how these findings translate to subgroups of the Asian American community. The Asian American immigrant population is one of the world's most diverse — originating from distinct national contexts which differ across political, cultural, social, and economic domains. While some studies have broadly examined effects across the entirety of this diaspora, few have specifically focused on unique subgroups of Asian Americans.

An analysis of data from the 2016 National Asian American Survey provides some indication of conditional divergence in beliefs across subgroups — although these gaps only emerge across a set of specific policy domains. The authors explored intergenerational gaps across distinct subsets of the Asian American diaspora, anticipating a pronounced split in beliefs across generations, which would map onto differences in education and economic background. First-generation immigrants are frequently raised in less privileged settings than their second-generation children, which the authors anticipated would influence their beliefs.

The authors instead report a broad consensus between generations and across subgroups for a large majority of policy issues, but they do find that important gaps emerge between subgroups and generations around certain contentious policy issues. For example, Chinese Americans were the only immigrant group to demonstrate strong and consistent opposition to affirmative action policies; a stance which has only strengthened in recent years. However, within this subgroup of Chinese Americans, attitudes sharply differed across generations. Chinese Americans aged between 18-24 were far more welcoming of race-based affirmative action policies, despite the fact

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that these policies are more directly relevant and potentially consequential to these age groups. A similar pattern was found for policies regarding illegal immigration, with persistent gaps which emerged across both national origin and age (Wong and Shah 2021).

Our study extends this burgeoning literature through a case study of the Indian American diaspora. Some studies have demonstrated that this immigrant community may be particularly influenced by homeland politics, yet it is also clear that local assimilation and peer-to-peer socialization plays an important role in shaping beliefs (Badrinathan et al. 2021). However, the relative importance and interplay of these mechanisms across generations and socioeconomic identities remains unclear.

Materials and Methods

While many studies have examined the political and social attitudes of Indian Americans, few have explored how, or if, these attitudes are translated across generations. This paper attempts to address these limitations using a matched pairs design, which allows for intra-household comparisons between students and their parents. The advantages of matched pairs analysis have been thoroughly documented (Imai, King and Nall 2009; Branson 2018; Stuart 2010; Fowler, Baker and Dawes 2008), but the central benefit for the purpose of our analysis is the ability to isolate the effects of generational status from shared household demographics (including race/ethnicity, geospatial location, religion, etc.). While matched pairs has been used to derive intergenerational effects in the past (Furstenberg Jr, Hoffman and Shrestha 1995; Pais 2021), this paper is the first to apply this technique to a thorough analysis of intergenerational differences amongst Indian Americans.

This study is based on the 2020 Survey of Indian American Attitudes (SIAA), which was administered online between August 2020 and November 2020 in the lead-up to the U.S. Presidential Election.[1] The SIAA is the first matched pairs study to our knowledge which examines generational political differences amongst South Asian Indian Americans. The SIAA sample collected 246 responses across 66 U.S. universities. Only respondents who agreed to participate, identified as Indian Americans, spent at least 10 minutes completing the survey, and completed at least a fifth of the questions were retained. The SIAA constructed its own panel through convenience sampling of students from U.S. four-year colleges, and generated matched pairs using these respondents.

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1. The SIAA was jointly designed with the 2020 Indian American Attitudes Survey (IAAS), which was administered to a probability sample of Indian Americans in partnership with YouGov.

In order to form the matched pairs, students who completed the survey were asked to either email their parents directly or provide a contact for the surveyors. The email contained a unique, anonymized code which was used to link student responses to those of their parents. As a result of this design, there were fewer parent responses (54) than student responses (192). After quality checks, the matched pairs subsample collected 102 responses across 30 universities, or 51 unique parents and 51 unique students. This analysis primarily focuses on these 51 matched pairs, in order to examine intergenerational differences after accounting for within-household effects.

The survey instrument contained 160 questions organized across six modules: demographics; immigration, citizenship, and family background; presidential campaigns and voting; U.S. politics and foreign policy; cultural and social behavior; and Indian politics. Respondents were allowed to skip questions, but were required to complete important demographic questions that determined subsequent questions reliant on their demographic information. Further methodological details can be found in the Supplementary Materials.

Results

3.1 Partisan identification

The SIAA asked all respondents to self-identify their partisan leaning and official party registration, if any. The distribution of responses illustrates the sample's liberal bias. While 74% of respondents identified as Democrats and 16% as Independent, only 2% identified as Republicans (see Figure I).

Figure 1: **Partisan identity**

Partisan Identity
Generally do you think of yourself as a...?

% of Total Count of Political Leaning
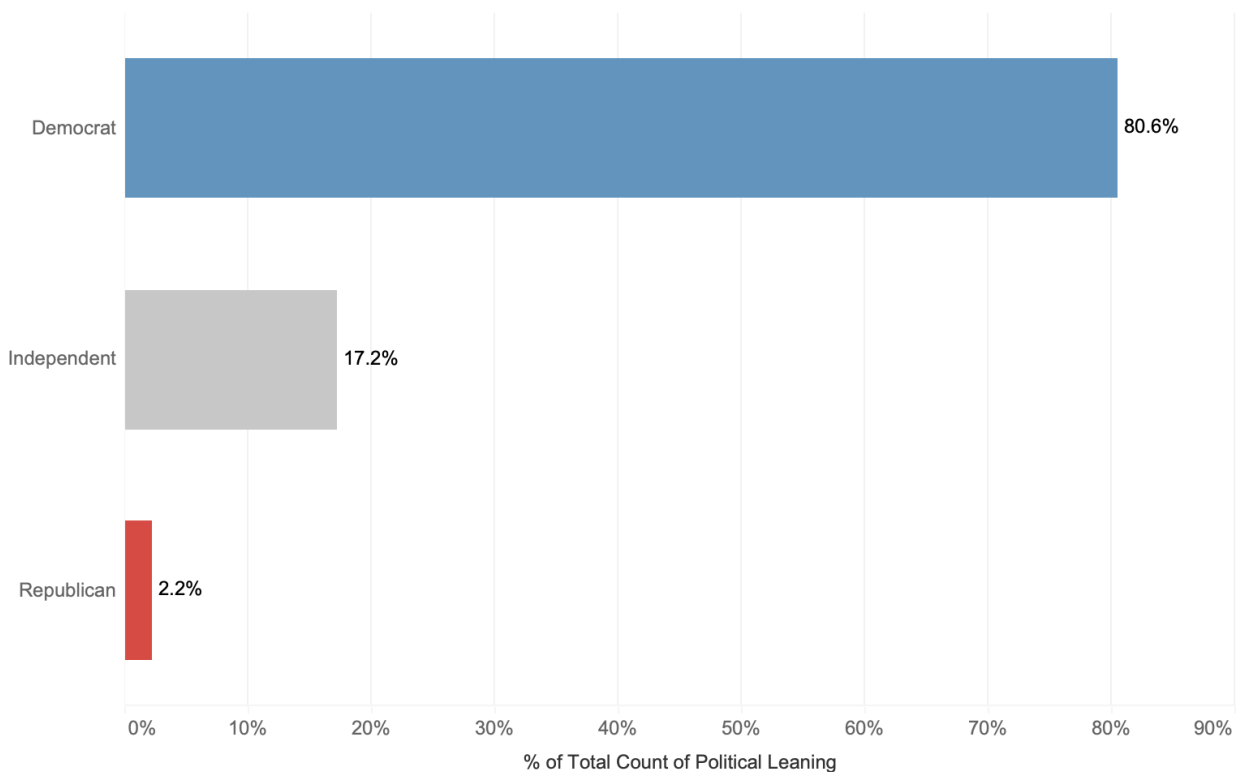
N = 246
Note: Figure Excludes those who chose "other" or "not sure"
Source: Survey of Indian-American Attitudes

The relatively large share of Independents in the sample aligns with results from the 2020 Indian American Attitudes Survey and the 2020 Asian American Voter Survey (Badrinathan, Kapur and Vaishnav 2020; *2020 Asian American Voter Survey (AAVS)* 2020). However, while a sample composed of a disproportionate share of Democratic respondents mirrors results from similar surveys, our sample skews heavily Democratic.

Unlike other survey instruments, the SIAA utilized a convenience sampling design and primarily collected responses from college students, who may tend to have more liberal views (Kuruvilla 2020; Mayhew and Rockenbach 2020; Glatter 2017). We leverage this clear liberal skew in our sample to explore *within-party differences* in political and social attitudes across generations.

Table I provides a demographic profile of the SIAA sample in comparison to the Indian American Attitudes Survey and the 2018 American Community Survey. The SIAA sample is younger, wealthier, and more likely to hold U.S. citizenship, reflecting the disproportionate student share.

3.2 Political ideology and presidential vote choice

The SIAA asked respondents to place themselves along an ideological spectrum, modeled after the American National Election Studies' (ANES) seven-point scale. Respondents who were born in the United States tended to place themselves farther left on the spectrum than those who were naturalized citizens or were not U.S. citizens. Interestingly, despite the young median age of the sample, a majority of respondents identified as liberal rather than extremely liberal (43% vs. 26%). A substantially smaller share identified as either moderate or conservative (26%).

Table 1: **Demographic comparisons with 2020 ANES and 2018 US Census ACS**

Table I. Demographic Comparisons — SIAA, IAAS, & ACS

	2020 SIAA	2020 IAAS	2018 ACS
Has U.S. Citizenship	91.2%	77%	62%
Median Age (Years)	29 years	35 years	34 years
Is Married	51%	65%	73%
Median Household Annual Income	$150,000 - $199,999	$80,000 - $99,000	$120,000

Given the liberal bias of the sample, the respondents' voting choices in the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election are unsurprising. After restricting the sample to registered voters, only 2.07% of respondents reported they planned on voting for Donald Trump, compared to 95.86% for Joe Biden. Less than one percent of respondents did not intend to vote, suggesting the sample demonstrates high levels of political participation. These trends align with voting trends amongst youth during the 2020 election, who voted heavily Democratic, as well as the Indian American population overall (Beadle et al. 2017).

3.3 Animating policy issues

Respondents were also asked to rank their three most important policy issues in advance of the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election. Figure 2 restricts analysis to respondents' selection of their most important policy issue. More than a third of respondents ranked either healthcare or racism first (36.6%), likely influenced by the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and social justice movements at the time. Interestingly, 15% of respondents selected the environment and climate change as their most important issue, which outweighed the economy at 13%. Taxes and terrorism ranked near the bottom, as did U.S. - India relations. The majority of respondents did not select U.S. - India relations as their second or third most important issue in advance of the election.

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Figure 2: **Top issues in advance of the 2020 U.S. presidential election**

Top Issues in the 2020 Election
Which of the following is the most important issue for you personally?

Issue	Value
Healthcare	18.70
Racism	17.90
Environment	15.00
Economy	12.60
Inequality	9.30
Corruption	4.90
Education	2.40
Sexism	1.60
Immigration	1.60
US-India Relations	0.40
Terrorism	0.40
Taxes	0.00
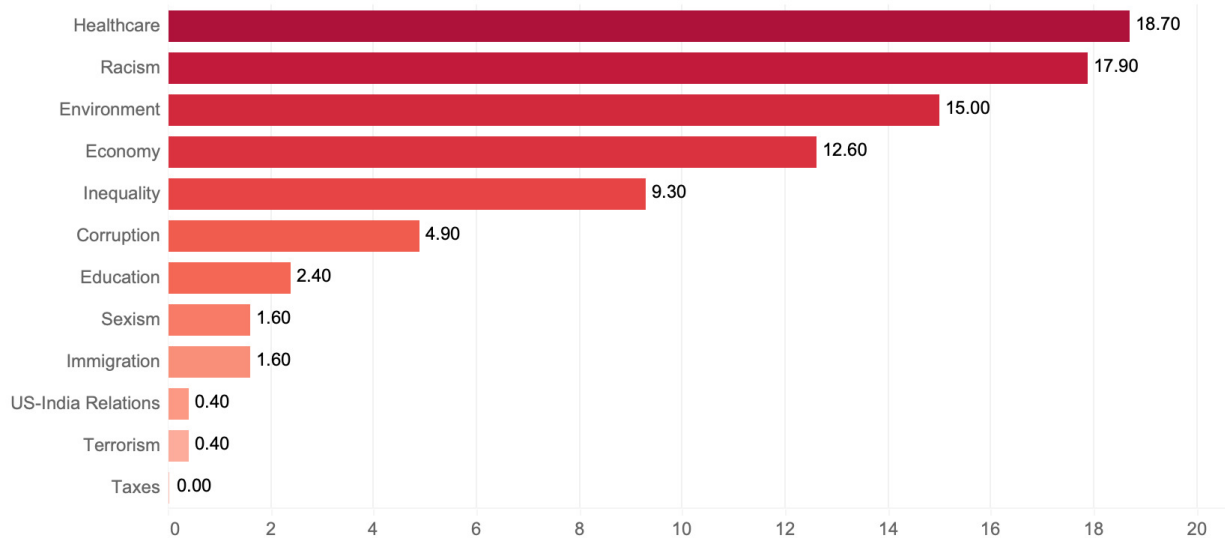
N = 246
Source: Survey of Indian–American Attitudes

3.4 Matched pairs sample demographics

Responses from the overall sample suggest a strong liberal skew and clear partisan preference. However, this apparent homogeneity masks important variation in social and political attitudes across student and parent respondents. By utilizing a subset of parent-child matched pairs (N = 51 pairs; 102 respondents), we are able to explore these differences in greater detail. We first review the demographics of the matched pairs sample, before exploring intergenerational trends.

Within the 51 matched pairs, students and parents shared many demographic and cultural features — likely due to originating from the same household. However, unlike in many prior studies, the identities of our respondents differ by both time period (parent vs. student) and region (U.S. born vs. foreign born). Because of this, we capture distinct political and social climates (i.e. students

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growing up in the United States during the early 2000s are unique from parents growing up in India during the mid to late 1900s) within the same household units.

Table II tabulates student and parent responses by immigrant status and religious beliefs. Nearly 95% of parents were born outside the U.S. (primarily in India). Meanwhile, nearly 75% of students were born in the U.S. This difference is also reflected in immigration status by generation; 85% of parents are naturalized citizens, compared to only 18% of students. Rates of non-naturalized immigrants are similar across parents (10%) and students (8%). Religious beliefs were largely shared across parents and students, although students were more likely to identify as atheist or agnostic, and parents were more likely to identify as religious. In the following section, we begin with our review of intergenerational differences — with a focus on polarization.

Affective polarization and partisan identities are of considerable interest to both scholars and policymakers alike. The SIAA attempted to uncover these trends across generations, and examine whether or not political identities were transferred from parent to student (or vice-versa). We observed striking differences between students and parents on questions related to partisan identity, party alignment, and political polarization.

3.5 U.S. party identification and polarization

When asked who they would vote for in the 2020 U.S. presidential election, the vast majority of both students and parents selected Joe Biden. 88% of students reported they would be voting for Joe Biden, as opposed to 75% of parents. However, when comparing these responses to those on voting choice during the presidential primaries, important gaps amongst students and parents emerge. In fact, this granular analysis suggests students and parents exhibit strong differences in

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Table 2: **Key demographics in the matched pairs sample**

Table II. **Key Demographics in the Matched Pairs Sample**

Demographics	Parents	Students
Immigrant Status		
U.S. Born	5.88%	74.51%
Naturalized	84.31%	17.65%
Immigrant	9.80%	7.54%
Religion		
Hindu	34.69%	27.55%
Muslim	1.02%	1.02%
Roman Catholic	1.02%	1.02%
Atheist	0.00%	4.08%
Agnostic	2.04%	7.14%
Jewish	1.02%	1.02%

their political identities and allegiances. Students were far less enthused with Biden's candidacy during the primaries. Only 19% of students voted for Biden, compared to 71% of parents (see Figure 3). Instead, students supported more progressive politicians, including Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders. 55% of students voted for Sanders, compared to only 25% of parents. Thus, in the primaries, voting choice between students and parents was far more divided, with students tending to select more radical candidates.

Figure 3: **Intergenerational primary vote choice — U.S.**

Primary Vote Choice, by Generation
Percent of respondents who voted for...
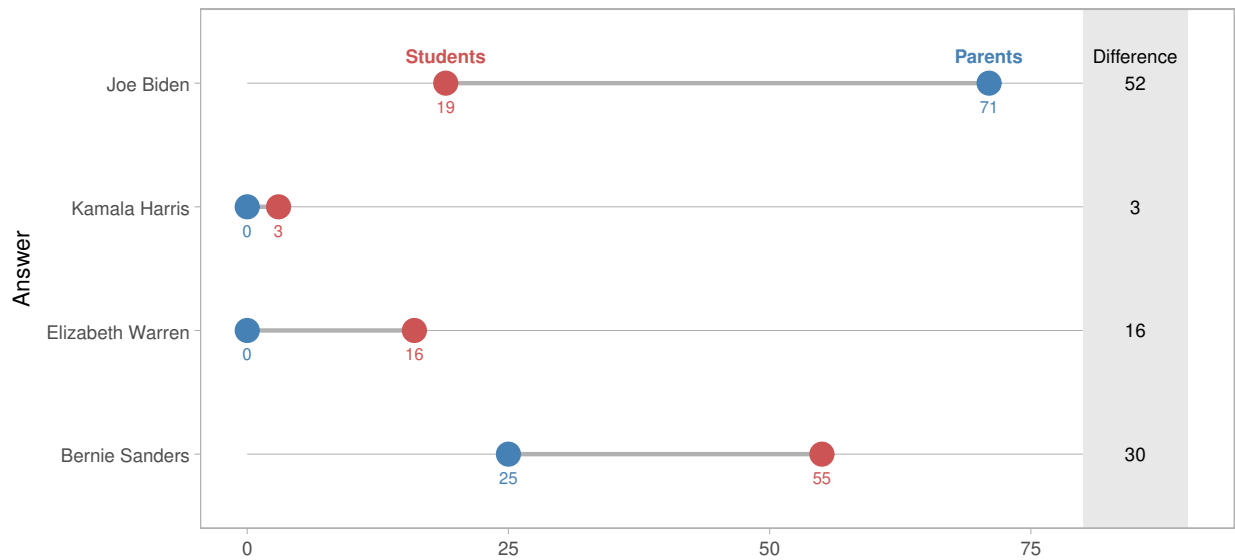
N = 51 Pairs of Students and Parents
Source: 2020 Survey of Indian–American Attitudes

These differences in political preference are mirrored in self-identifications of ideological beliefs. Figure 4 presents the respondents' rankings of themselves across the ANES ideological spectrum (*American National Election Studies (ANES)* 2020). Students tended to skew more liberal, while parents were mostly moderate. 41% of students self-identified as extremely liberal, compared to only 6% of parents. Meanwhile, 37% identified as moderates, as opposed to only 4% of students. Furthermore, parents were more likely to have not given their political leaning much thought,

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while every student was able to identify their ideological allegiances. In total, 12% of the sample identified as either slightly conservative or conservative (8% of parents, and 4% of students).

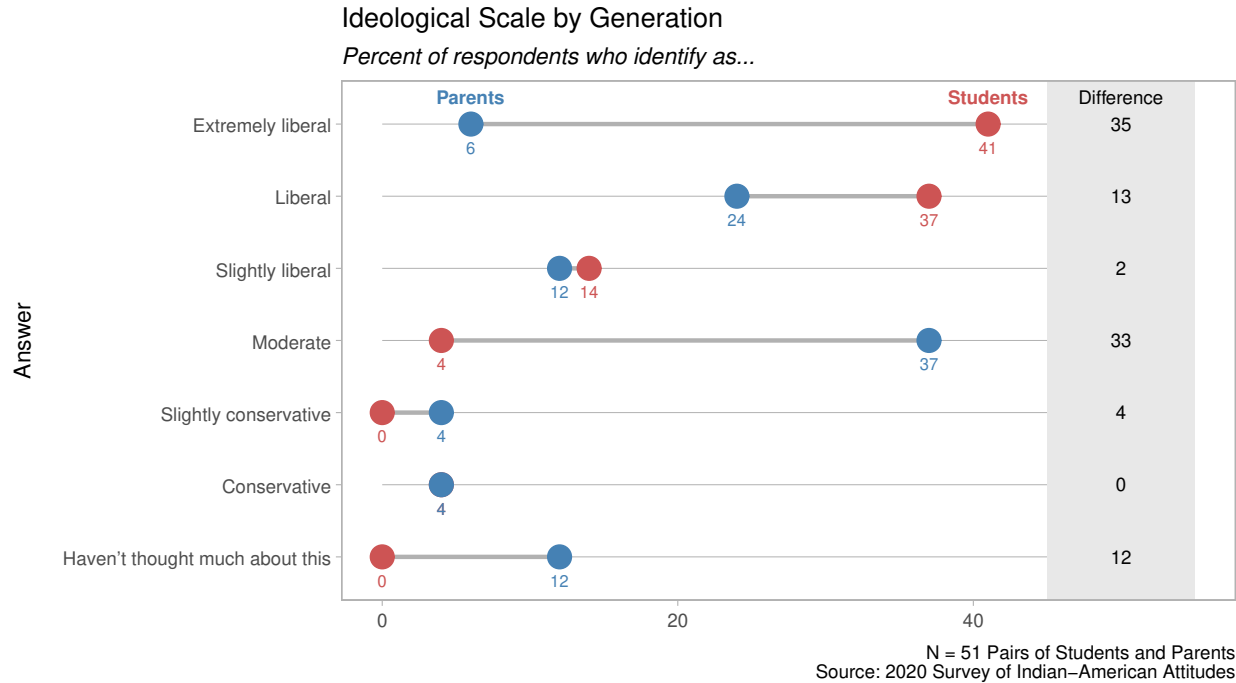Figure 4: **Intergenerational ideological spectrum — U.S.**

Ideological Scale by Generation

Percent of respondents who identify as...

N = 51 Pairs of Students and Parents
Source: 2020 Survey of Indian–American Attitudes

Figure 5 captures generational differences in partisan allegiance through ANES "feeling thermometers," which ask students and parents to rate political parties and individuals on a scale from 0 to 100, where 0-49 represent an unfavorable opinion, while 51-100 represent a favorable opinion. Both students and parents had favorable opinions of the Democratic Party, Joe Biden, and Kamala Harris, but unfavorable opinions of the Republican Party and Donald Trump. This suggests the presence of affective polarization across generations. However, across all categories, students consistently ranked political institutions and leaders lower than parents. This despite their more progressive preferences, which one might expect would fuel a support for strong governance and social programs.

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Figure 5: **Intergenerational polarization — U.S.**

Polarization among Indian–Americans, by Generation

Average feeling thermometer ratings...

N = 51 Pairs of Students and Parents
Source: 2020 Survey of Indian–American Attitudes
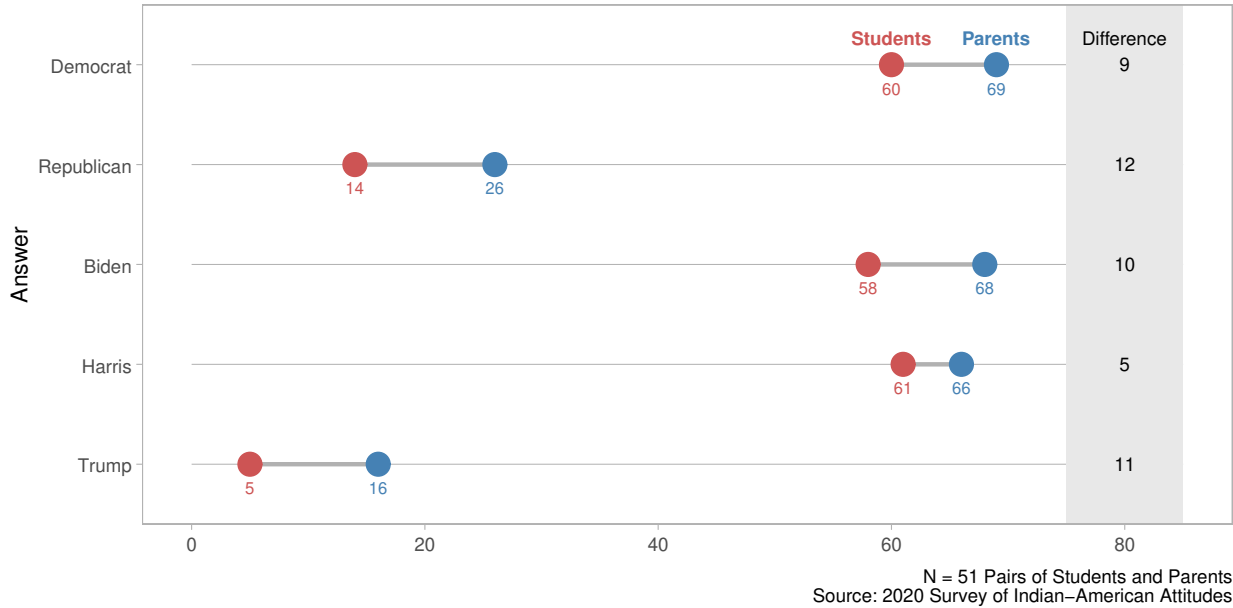
3.6 U.S. policy preferences

Along with party identity and allegiance, the political preferences of respondents were also split
along generational lines. As part of the survey, respondents were asked to indicate their support
or opposition for a series of policy propositions relating to immigration, religious tolerance, media
suppression, police brutality, and racial justice. The questions posed were based on previous
political science surveys, including the ANES and NAAS. Across the majority of questions, students
recorded more progressive responses than parents. For example, while only a small majority of
parents opposed ICE deportation efforts, nearly all students were strongly opposed (see Figure
6). Similar shares of students opposed the Muslim travel ban, deportations, the revocation of
press credentials, and police brutality during the Black Lives Matter protests. Meanwhile, 13%
of parents were not opposed to police brutality, 39% did not oppose ICE deportations, and 26%

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did not oppose the travel ban. More than a third of parents did not support race-based affirmative action or a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants.

Figure 6: **Intergenerational policy preferences — U.S.**

Positions on Contemporary Debates, by Generation
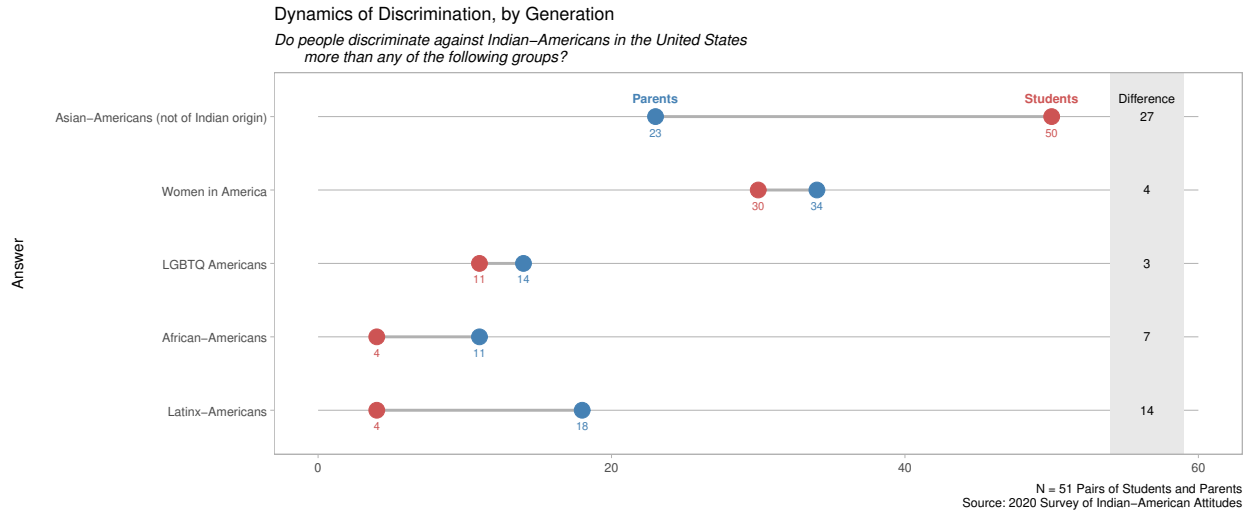*Percent of respondents who...*
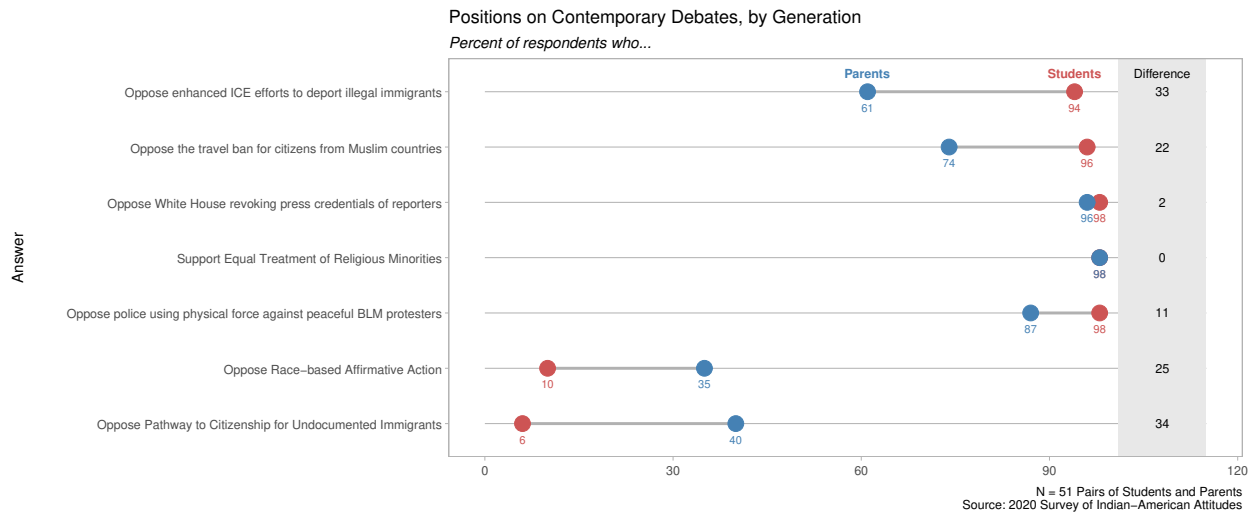
Respondents were also asked whether Indian Americans were discriminated against more than other minorities (Figure 7). Higher values suggest more respondents believed Indian Americans were more discriminated against than another given ethnic group. Parents recorded higher values than students, with the exception of the Asian American category. Parents believed Indian Americans were more discriminated against than women, the LGBTQ community, African Americans, and Latinx populations.

3.7 India party identification and polarization

The SIAA reported noticeable intergenerational differences in the attitudes of students and parents when responding to questions on U.S. partisan identity and political preferences. The survey also asked respondents a similar set of questions relating to Indian politics. Our sample of parents is composed of individuals who are mostly foreign-born, with a large share born in India. Students, on the other hand, are almost entirely native born but many participate in ethnic organizations and

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Figure 7: **Intergenerational attitudes on discrimination — U.S.**

Dynamics of Discrimination, by Generation
*Do people discriminate against Indian–Americans in the United States
more than any of the following groups?*

N = 51 Pairs of Students and Parents
Source: 2020 Survey of Indian–American Attitudes

are involved with local and global politics. As a result, knowledge gaps between these groups might be unique — it is unclear which group would have a better understanding of the Indian social and political climates. Tensions over well-known figures like Narendra Modi and the BJP, as well as associated policies including the CAA, may also be split along generational lines (Citizenship Amendment Act 2019: What is it and Why is it Seen as a Problem? 2019).

Figure 8 visualizes respondents' feeling thermometer ratings for Indian political institutions and leaders. Interestingly, while students consistently ranked the more right-leaning BJP party and its leaders lower than parents — mirroring their opinions of U.S. right-wing parties and leaders — they ranked the establishment party, the Congress Party, and its leaders far higher than their parents. Parents were far more supportive of Modi and the BJP than of the Republican Party and Trump, and consistently ranked Indian liberal institutions lower.

As in the U.S. context, students and parents report substantial differences in Indian policy preferences. Interestingly, while students remained largely liberal in their responses, parents recorded more conservative answers. For example, while 65% of parents supported race-based affirmative

action in the United States, only 49% supported caste-based affirmative action in India (see Figure 9). Additionally, a large portion of parents (50%) supported the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and National Register of Citizens (Raj 2020). This despite a sizable majority of parents supporting religious tolerance in the U.S. (98%).

Figure 8: **Intergenerational polarization — India**

Polarization among Indian–Americans, by Generation
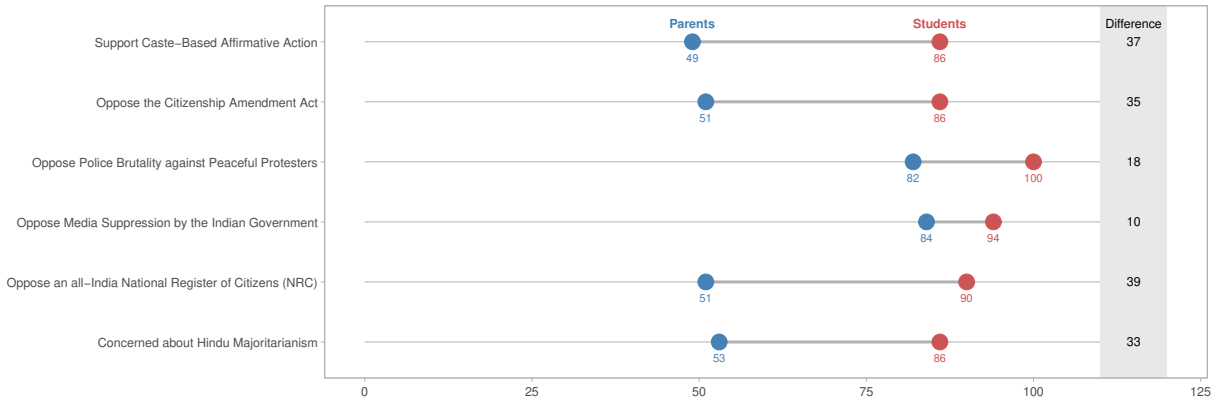
Average feeling thermometer ratings...
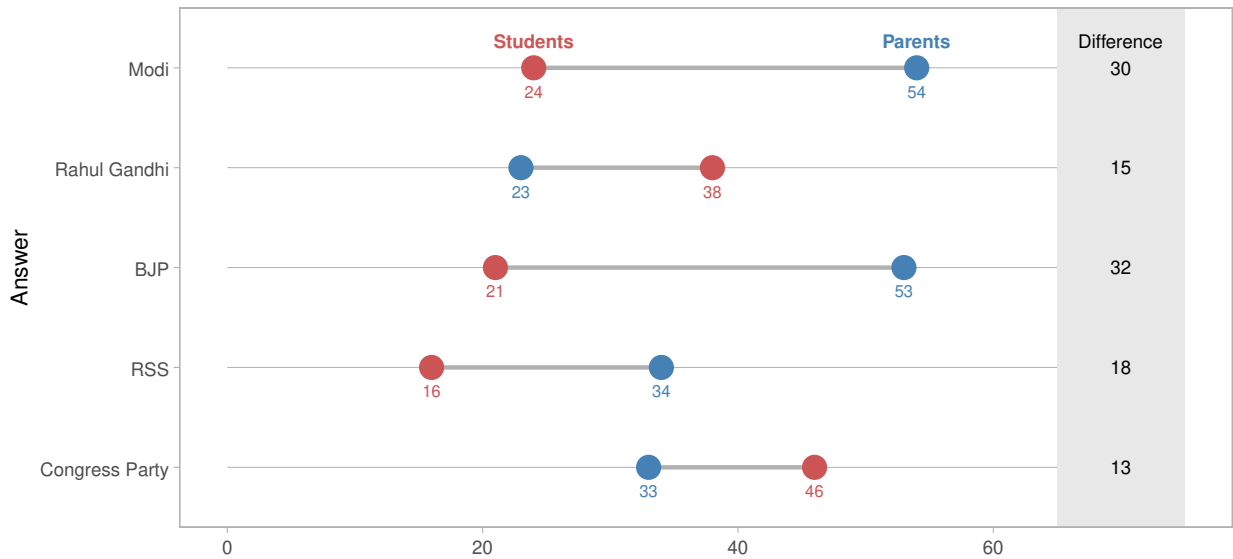
N = 51 Pairs of Students and Parents
Source: 2020 Survey of Indian–American Attitudes

Figure 9: **Intergenerational policy preferences — India**

Positions on Contemporary Debates in India, by Respondent Type

Percent of respondents who...

N = 51 Pairs of Students and Parents
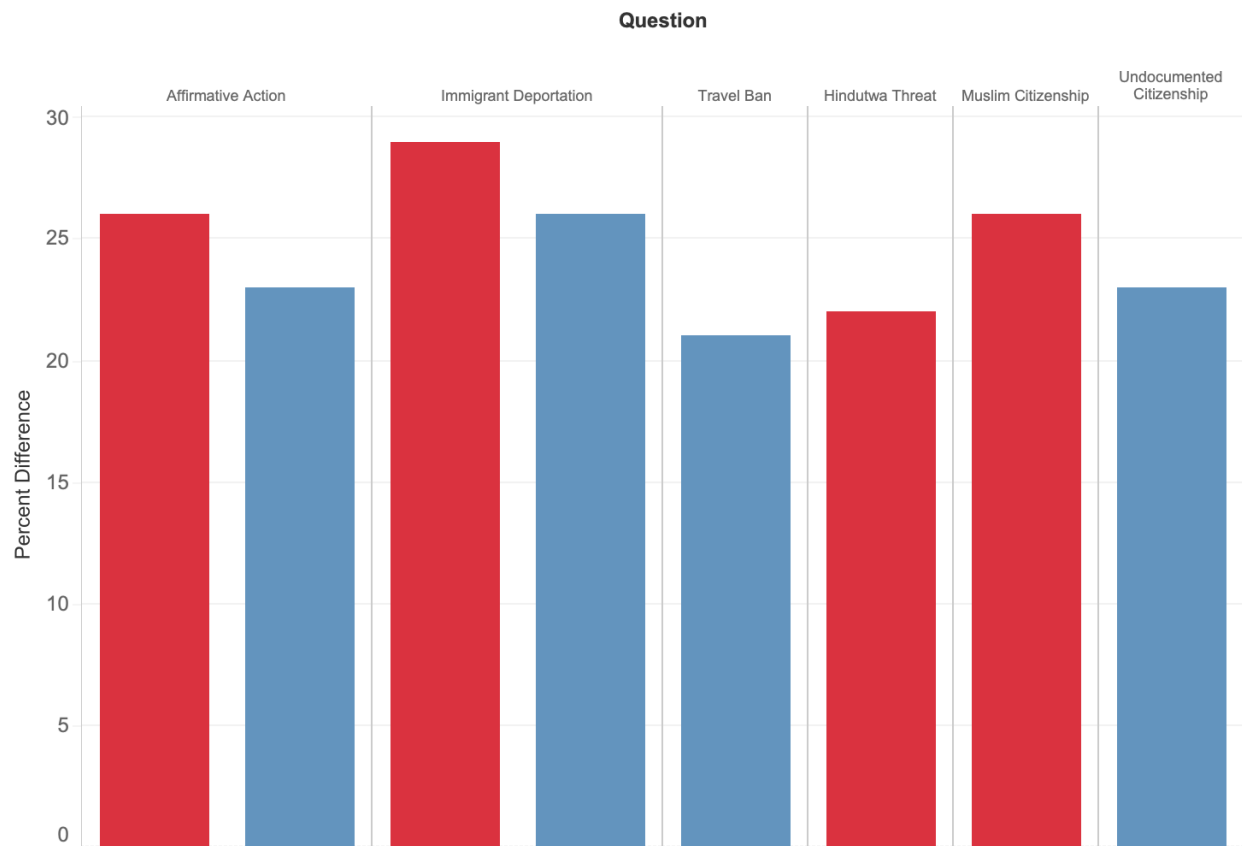Source: 2020 Survey of Indian–American Attitudes

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Discussion

Our results suggest the presence of large gaps in both general sociopolitical attitudes and specific

policy preferences amongst parents and students in the SIAA matched sample. We proceed with a

discussion of how these gaps might have emerged, and the ways in which scholars can link observed

intergenerational differences to formal models of belief formation.

4.1 Shared intergenerational gaps across the U.S. and Indian settings

In addition to understanding where notable differences in political attitudes arise across generations,

we may also be interested in identifying common threads of disagreement across policy issues.

In fact, the largest differences in opinions are on the same few controversial topics across both

Indian and U.S. policy issues. Figure 10 (below) illustrates the consistent and substantial disparities

between parents and students on the contentious topics of affirmative action, immigrant deportation,

and citizenship. Parents and students record more than a 20 percent difference across these issues.

The incongruities between students and parents' opinions also suggests that these differences are

unlikely to be driven by a lack of knowledge about either the Indian or U.S. political context, but

rather a fundamental disagreement on salient policy issues. Indeed, rates of non-response to the

questions on Indian politics were similar across both generations (see Appendix Figure A3).

Figure 10: **Intergenerational differences in social and political attitudes**

Average Percent Difference in Policy Questions by Generation

N = 51 Pairs of Students and Parents
Source: Survey of Indian-American Attitudes

4.2 Examining intergenerational transmissions: information diets and political participation

Thus far, we have established that intergenerational differences do emerge across Indian American parents and students, and that these gaps are most pronounced in a few contentious policy areas. A natural next question might be how these attitudes have shifted across generations. This query links to a broader literature which has attempted to frame the identity of unique generations based on a mix of social exposures and political climates.

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One such framing is that of the *lineage generation*, which considers how one's current social location — age, gender, class, race, ability, religion, sexual orientation, and geographic location — influence identity and belief formation (Mannheim 1970; Stoker 2014). On the other hand, the political generation framing distinguishes groups of people by the social, economic, technological, and/or political environments in which they resided during their impressionable years (Stoker 2014). We leverage these framings to identify potential channels of belief formation across parents and students.

Because the majority of parents in the sample were born in India, while the majority of students were born in the United States, generational gaps emerge across both framings. That is, students and parents differ in both their lineage and political generations due to their nation of birth and upbringing. This distinction has been explored in prior literature which attempts to examine the unique transmission of beliefs in immigrant communities, but not in the Indian American diaspora (Raychaudhuri 2018; Wong and Tseng 2008; Chan, Chong and Raychaudhuri 2021). Literature in this space has referenced multiple outlets linked to the lineage generation framing — including peer socialization and social networks, media ecosystems, and engagement with community settings — as relevant to shaping beliefs.

The SIAA was not constructed with the intent of analyzing belief formation across all of these channels, but the survey does enable us to present preliminary evidence on how students and parents source their information and engage with their local community settings. In particular, the content of information diets, as well as the mediums through which students and parents consume media, may shed light on how gaps in political beliefs emerge.

Figure 11 (below) illustrates noticeable gaps in political news consumption across students and parents. Among students, peer socialization and social media platforms tend to drive political news consumption. In contrast, parents receive most of their news from television and online sources. These differences may indicate that disparate social environments, whether in-person (such as highly liberal college campuses) or virtual (such as social media applications) may be driving political transmission among students, further liberalizing their views. On the other hand, parents' views may be shaped to a larger extent by more moderate framings presented on television and traditional print media.

Figure 11: **Intergenerational news consumption**

Political News Consumption, by Generation
Percent of respondents who are informed by...

N = 51 Pairs of Students and Parents
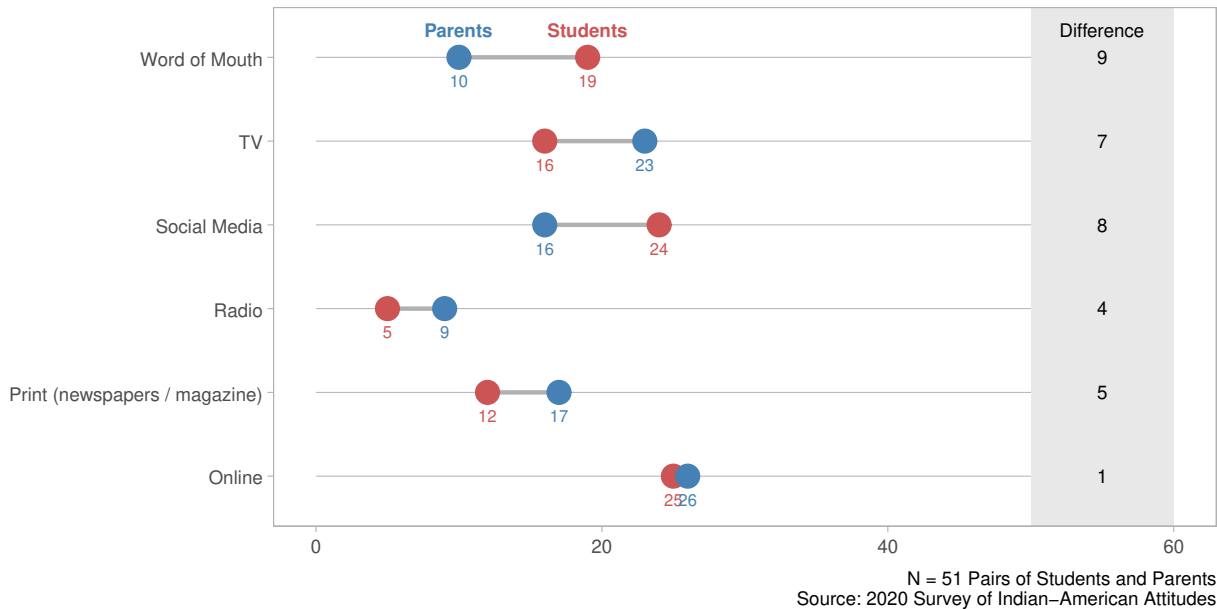Source: 2020 Survey of Indian–American Attitudes

Figure 12 (below) extends this analysis to examine rates and mediums of political participation by generation. Students seem to be participating in political activities across a diverse array of social settings and are more likely to engage in politics outside of their immediate familial or relational

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circle. Parents, on the other hand, seem to participate in politics in a more narrow scope — primarily through interactions with their close social circles or by contributing money to a politician.

Figure 12: **Intergenerational political participation**
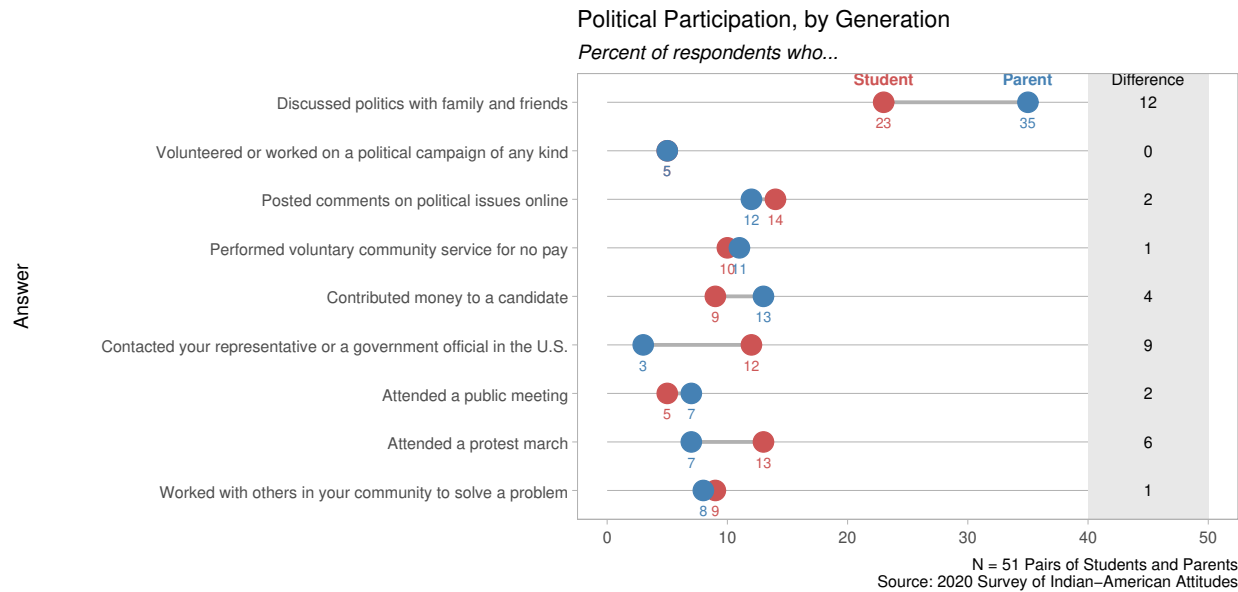
These results tend to align more with Raychaudhuri's theory on social transmission — whereby students are influenced through peer socialization and liberal educational settings, and less with Wong & Tsen's argument — which suggest parents and students are exerting bidirectional influence, particularly in international issue areas (Raychaudhuri 2020; Wong and Tseng 2008). In fact, our results indicate that 82.3 percent of students were U.S. educated while only 5.8% of parents were U.S. educated.

In particular, education, information sourcing and rates, and types of political activity differ amongst students and parents, and could be potential mechanisms through which these gaps in belief sets emerge. These results also support the lineage generation framing, whereby an individual's current social location plays an important role in shaping their value set. However, the political generation theory is also relevant. In particular, the political and social climates of parents' unique upbringing

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in India may continue to modify their current value set — reflected in their more conservative leanings on Indian issues. When interpreting the results of this survey, we consider the intersection of these framings — rather than treat the two as mutually exclusive.

4.3 National comparisons: parallel results from the American National Election Studies

Thus far, this paper has reported large gaps in intergenerational belief sets between younger and older generations of Indian Americans. These discrepancies are most pronounced across a set of contentious policy issues, most notably those related to race, immigration, and affirmative action. In the previous section, an exploratory analysis revealed sharp differences in information sourcing and consumption, as well as in rates of political participation by generation. These channels might explain how beliefs are being translated to the student-parent pairs, and why gaps might begin to emerge as a condition of one's socializing environment. In this section, we explore how the set of observed social and political attitudes amongst Indian Americans in the SIAA compares to the beliefs of respondents from a respected national survey examining broader civil society — the 2020 American National Education Studies (*American National Election Studies (ANES)* 2020).

Figures 13 - 16 are based on the authors' analysis of publicly available survey data from the 2020 ANES, a nationally representative panel of over 8,000 respondents. The ANES does not publish personally identifiable information (such as the race/ethnicity or age of their respondents), which excludes the possibility of generational comparisons. However, they do provide access to demographics related to respondent nativity, and the nativity of respondents' parents. In the following figures, we cut respondent answers by these core demographics to compare differences by country of origin (which, in the SIAA sample, was a strong proxy for generational status).

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Figure 13: **Polarization by respondent nativity**

Differences in Polarization by Respondent Nativity
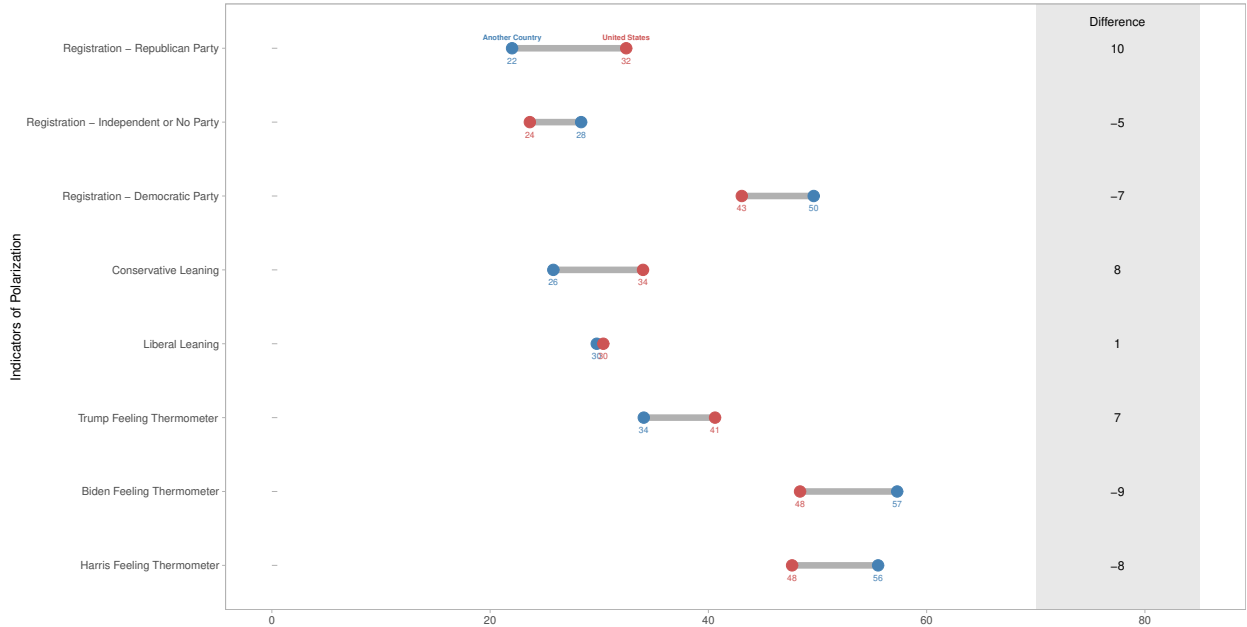*Percent of Respondents Who Reported:*

Indicators of Polarization		Difference
Registration – Republican Party	Another Country 22 / United States 32	10
Registration – Independent or No Party	24 / 28	−5
Registration – Democratic Party	43 / 50	−7
Conservative Leaning	26 / 34	8
Liberal Leaning	30 / 30	1
Trump Feeling Thermometer	34 / 41	7
Biden Feeling Thermometer	48 / 57	−9
Harris Feeling Thermometer	48 / 56	−8

Source: Authors' Analysis of the 2020 American National Election Studies

Figure 14: **Polarization by parental nativity**

Differences in Polarization by Parents' Nativity
Percent of Respondents Who Reported:

Indicators of Polarization		Difference
Registration – Republican Party	Both Parents Born Abroad 20 / Both Parents Born in US 34	14
Registration – Independent or No Party	23 / 28	−4
Registration – Democratic Party	42 / 52	−10
Conservative Leaning	22 / 35	13
Liberal Leaning	30 / 31	−1
Trump Feeling Thermometer	32 / 42	9
Biden Feeling Thermometer	48 / 58	−10
Harris Feeling Thermometer	47 / 56	−9

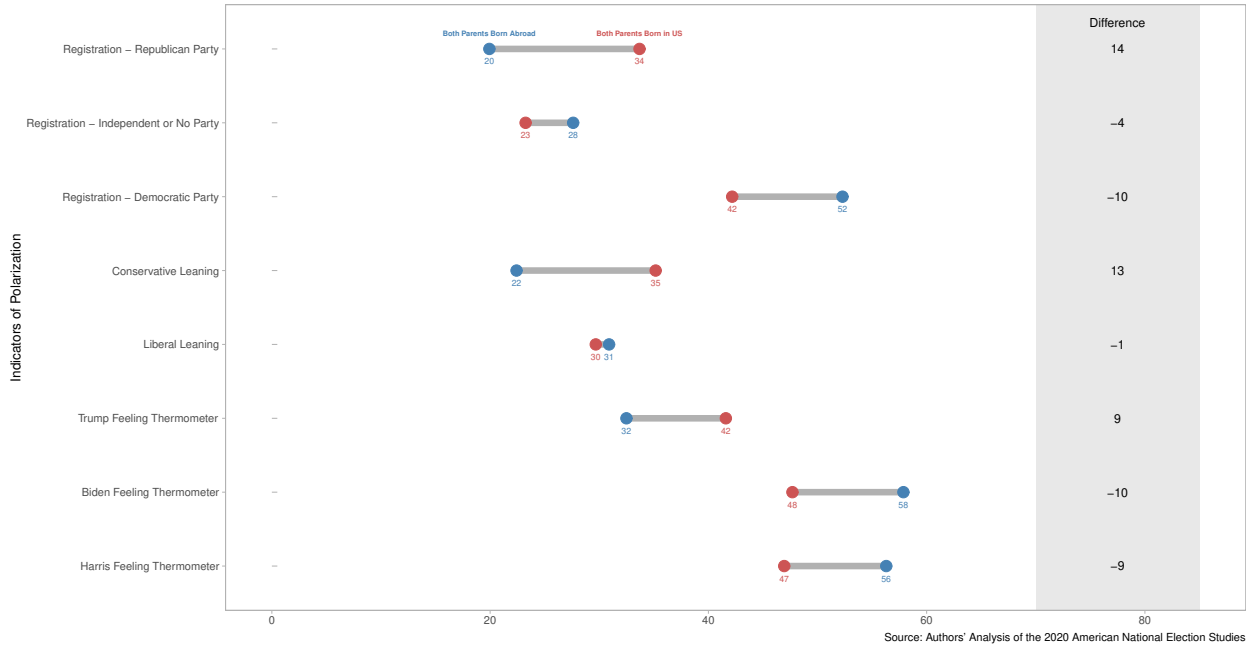Source: Authors' Analysis of the 2020 American National Election Studies

Figure 15: **Policy preferences by respondent nativity**

Differences in Policy Preferences by Respondent Nativity
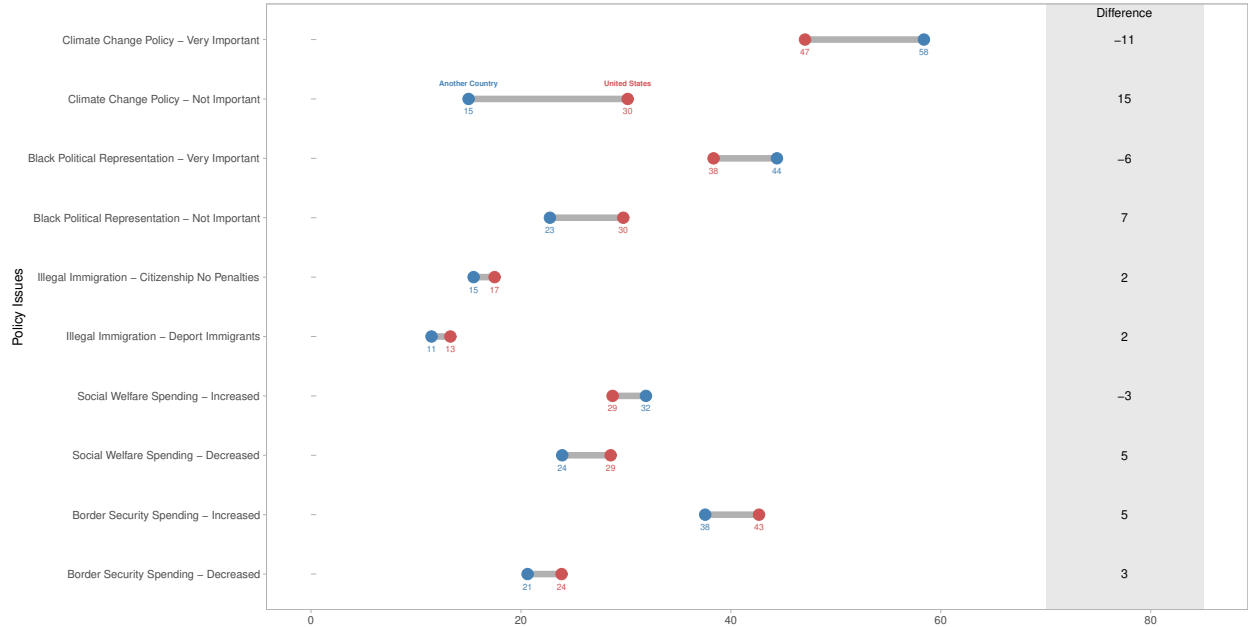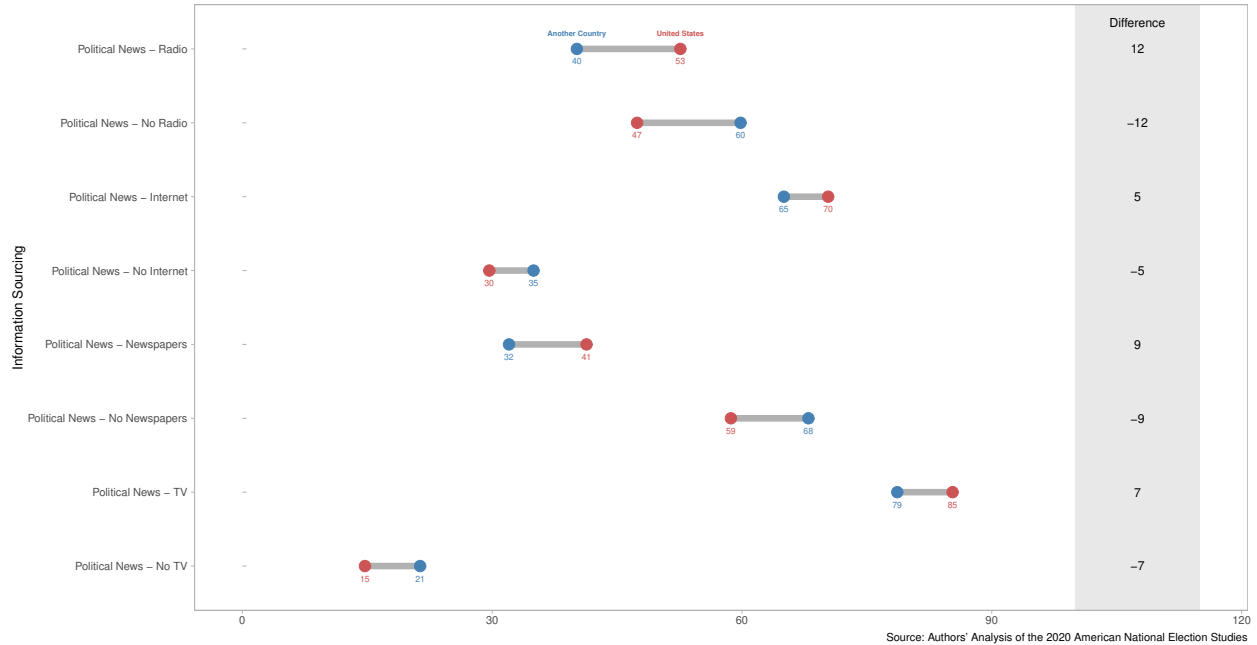*Percent of Respondents Who Reported:*

Figure 16: **Political information sourcing by respondent nativity**

Differences in Political Information Sourcing by Respondent Nativity
Percent of Respondents Who Reported:

Figures 13 and 14 visualize a set of indicators for political polarization by respondent and parent nativity, respectively. Trends are stable regardless of whether respondents' answers are cut by their own nativity, or that of their parents.[2] Nearly a third of respondents born in the United States registered as members of the Republican Party (out of all respondents who self-reported native birth), compared to only a fifth of those who identified as foreign-born. Rates of Independent registration and registration with the Democratic Party were all higher in foreign-born respondents (a finding which strongly aligns with the SIAA). As anticipated, party registration strongly mapped to respondents' ideological beliefs, as well as respondents' feelings about Presidential and Vice Presidential candidates.

These tabulations from the ANES panel provide an important contrast to the SIAA sample. In the SIAA, native-born respondents tended to identify as more liberal, while foreign-born respondents identified as more moderate. However, the SIAA sample was a direct comparison of mostly immigrant parents and their mostly native-born children.[3] In other words, while the ANES captures a broad range of Americans through its representative survey design, the self-selected features of the SIAA — which was purposefully constructed to directly contrast parents and their children — translated to a liberal-leaning, native-born, younger sample of students; and a moderate-leaning, foreign-born, older sample of parents.

Figure 15 extends the ANES analysis to examine core policy issues mirroring those queried by the SIAA. Gaps by respondent nativity are most pronounced in respondents' perceptions of the threats of climate change and the importance of promoting Black political representation in the U.S.

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2. Because of this, we proceed by only visualizing respondent nativity. The supplementary appendix has additional visuals by parent nativity for interested readers. Note, this lack of variation is in itself interesting, as it might suggest relative stability across generational beliefs in ANES respondents.

3. See the survey top line in the Appendix for a detailed breakdown.

The latter policy area dealing with race was also highly contentious amongst SIAA respondents. However, in contrast with the SIAA there were almost no observed differences in respondents' beliefs around illegal immigration, although recommendations for border security funding were slightly more varied. Respondents born in the United States were more likely to hold conservative views across all policy issues.

Figure 16 examines information sourcing on political topics by parents' nativity status. Respondents born in the United States were most likely to source information from the internet or television, although more than half of these respondents reported sourcing information from radio. Amongst foreign-born respondents, information was also most frequently consumed through internet or TV. However, regardless of media source *respondents who were born in the United States reported substantially higher rates of political news consumption*. We might expect this gap to arise based on a number of factors, including one's political palate (foreign-born respondents might be less interested or attuned in U.S. politics, or may instead monitor news in their home country); and political power (foreign-born respondents might not yet have obtained U.S. voting rights). These two explanations are not mutually exclusive; a lack of an ability to vote might drive a disinterest in U.S. politics.

The SIAA sample provides evidence in support of the first channel, but not the second. 66% of matched students voted in the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election, compared to 54% of parents. 100% of the student matched pair samples (excluding four missing responses) reported an eligibility to vote, but so too did 97.78% of the mostly foreign-born parent sample. This result was well predicted by the results of Table 2, which revealed that over 84% of parents are naturalized U.S. citizens with a right to vote. In addition, while voting participation rates in the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election varied

by generation and nativity status, overall rates information consumption was broadly consistent across these groups (see Figure 11). Parents and students both tended to consume political news and engage in political activities, though in different formats. Prior literature supports the notion that such high engagement is well expected in the Indian American diaspora, which is rapidly expanding and becoming increasingly involved with local and national politics.

Limitations

This study provides preliminary evidence of substantial intergenerational differences amongst Indian Americans across a wide range of issue areas. However, we recognize that these results should not be interpreted as causal. Because the SIAA sample was heavily liberal, we are unable to examine responses across the breadth of the ideological spectrum. The SIAA also utilized non-random sampling to recruit college students, and thus our within-party results might suffer from selection bias. For example, those students who took the time to respond to the survey could be more interested in politics than the average Indian American of their age. Additionally, although the survey captured more than 60 universities across the United States, many of these were elite private institutions, thereby reducing geographic and socioeconomic diversity among respondents. These same limitations might apply to the parents of these students, who are linked by a shared household unit.

The timing of the survey also influenced dropout rates. Because the survey was fielded during the start of the Covid-19 lockdowns, most student organizations which were contacted did not respond. Lastly, survey transmission rates between students and parents were low. For every three students who responded to the survey, only one parent followed up with their own response to complete a pair, limiting the matched pairs sample. These limitations are both acknowledged and leveraged in

the analysis of this data. Rather than claiming to identify causal relationships across a spectrum of Indian American identities, this report focuses on probing interesting variations within the SIAA's liberal sample.

Conclusion

The results of the SIAA illustrate pronounced intergenerational differences across respondents' ideologies, policy preferences and social attitudes. This paper uncovers important within-party differences amongst students and parents in the Indian American community. Furthermore, the demographic characteristics of our sample also allow us to provide preliminary evidence on how these gaps emerge across foreign-born immigrants (parents) and U.S. born residents (students). As the Indian-American population continues to grow (both through immigration and native birth), they will begin to account for a larger share of U.S. voting behaviors. Future research should attempt to isolate how political and social attitudes are transmitted generationally across this important demographic and other disregarded diasporas, with a specific comparative of belief formation amongst immigrants, as opposed to native-born residents.

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Competing Interests Statement

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

Funding

Data Availability

The authors may be contacted for anonymized survey data and analysis scripts.

*

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Appendix A

Supplemental Online Appendix

A.0.1 Survey mechanism

Respondents for this survey were recruited directly through the efforts of the primary researchers. Participation was voluntary, and all responses were deidentified. The survey was distributed through a self-constructed online panel, which is not a traditional probability-based survey. We utilized a variety of methods to bolster recruitment, including personal contacts, cold emails and calls, and social media engagement.

A.0.2 Respondent selection and sample design

Our sample includes students and their parents across a broad range of political, social, and demographic profiles. In order to construct the matched pairs, we focused recruiting efforts on college-age students and recent graduates (the younger generation) in the hopes that they would forward the survey to their parents upon completion (the older generation). This decision was based on the relative likelihoods of students responding to the survey as opposed to parents.

We also felt that parents would be more likely to take the survey if their child urged them to do so. The primary driver of student recruitment were South Asian campus student organizations, who we

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contacted directly to distribute the survey among members. Students were recruited directly through our efforts from 450+ student organizations and 56 universities across the United States. Social media engagement and partnerships with umbrella organizations generated additional interest in the survey.

A.0.3 Sample matching

Once students completed the survey, they forwarded a unique link and matched code to their parents to access the survey. The survey instrument contained 160 unique questions, but respondents were allowed to skip most non-demographic questions, or answer "I don't know". Responses were not weighted on demographics or any other sampling characteristics.

The original sample consisted of 435 responses across students and parents. From this raw dataset, we only retained observations for which respondents identified as South Asian, spent at least 10 minutes completing the survey, and answered at least 20% of the questions. The revised sample consisted of 246 observations across 66 universities, out of which 96.34% of respondents answered at least a third of survey questions, 93.9% completed at least half of the survey, and 88.6% answered every question. The matched pairs sub-sample captured 51 unique households, which were used for analyzing intergenerational differences.

A.0.4 Data analysis and sources of error

All analysis was conducted in R statistical software. As this panel was self-constructed and is not grounded in probability-based metrics, we cannot generate a margin of error. Because the sample was constructed by convenience, rather than from a non-random pool of responses, it is both non-

representative and self-selected. It is also important to note that dropout rates from parents were high (one parent response was collected for roughly every three student responses), leading to an over-representation of students in the overall sample. However, the sampling design successfully recruited participants from across the United States across a mix of universities and geographic regions. All data and analysis is available on GitHub for reproduction.

A.0.5 Survey topline

For a comprehensive topline of the overall and matched pairs sample, please see here.

Appendix B

Supplementary Figures

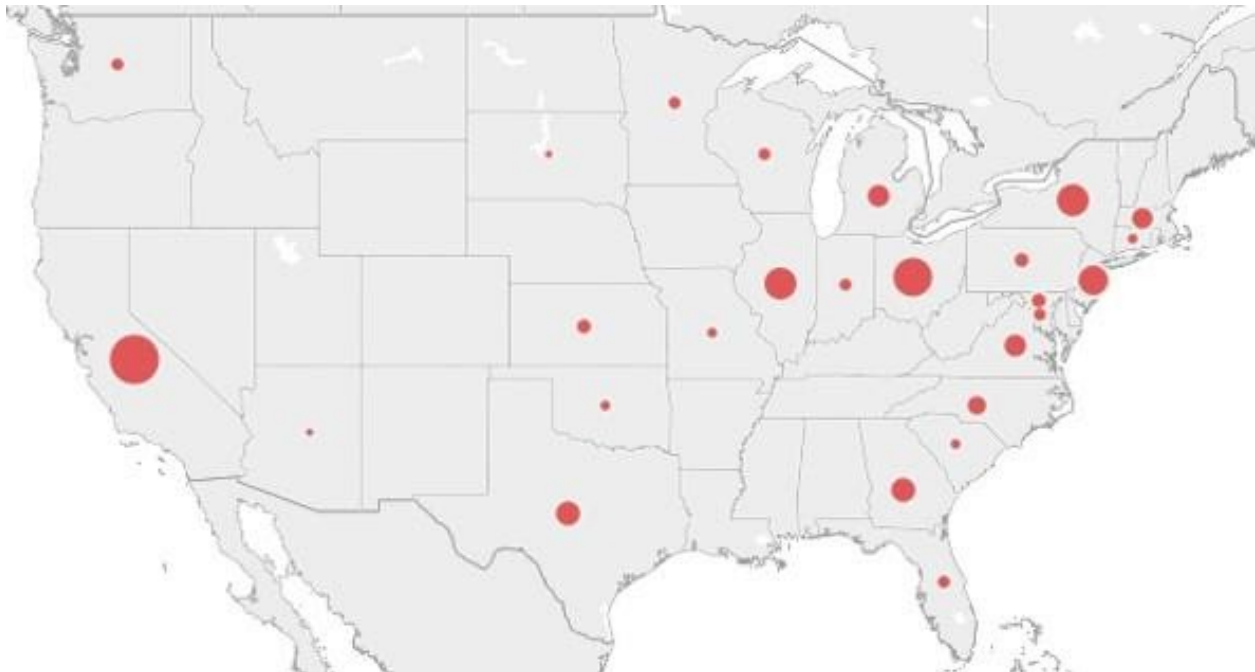Figure B.1: **Bubble map of SIAA matched pair survey respondents**

Figure B.2: **Presidential primary vote choice (overall sample)**

Presidential Primary Vote Choice

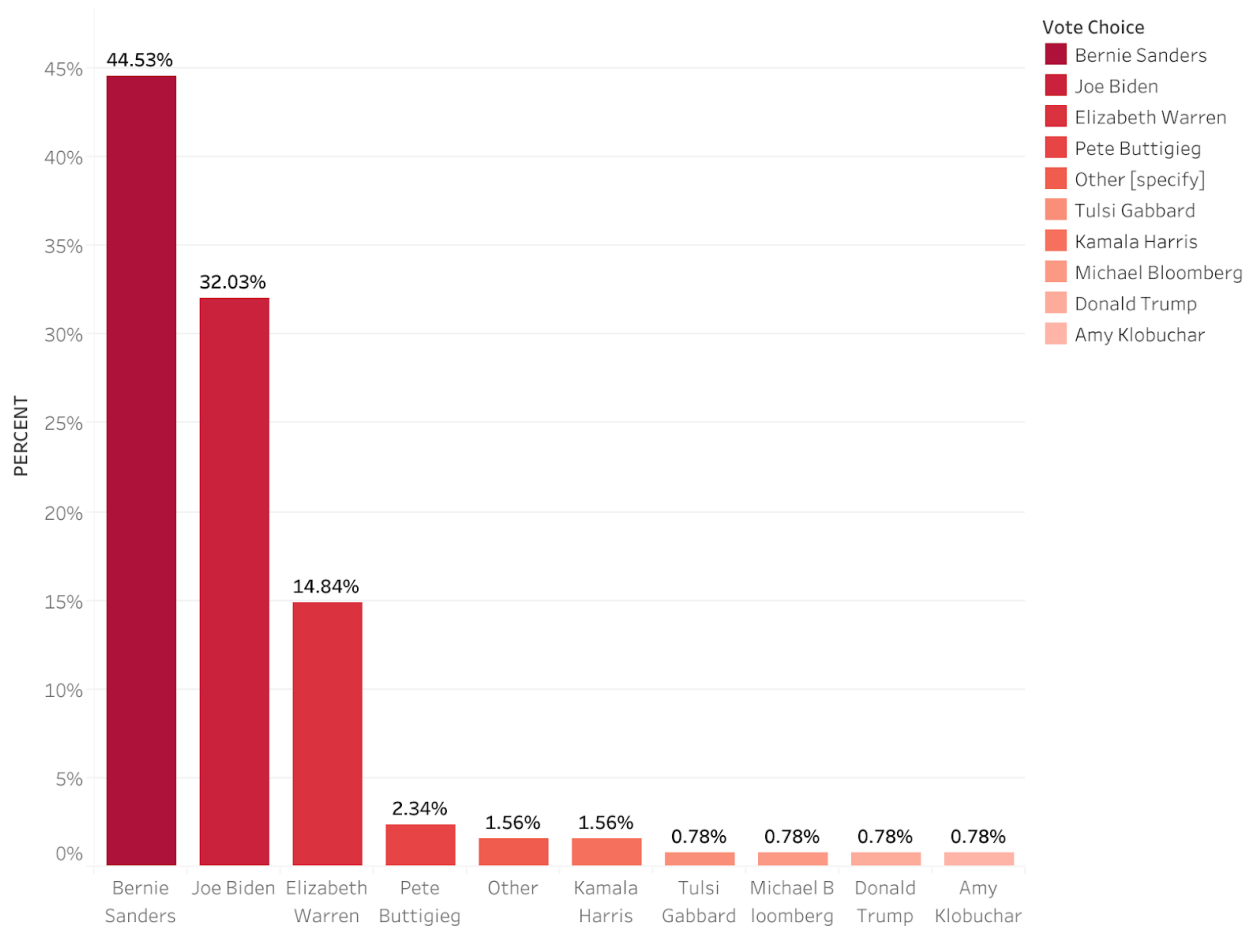*Who did you vote for in the 2020 Presidential Primary?*

Vote Choice
- Bernie Sanders
- Joe Biden
- Elizabeth Warren
- Pete Buttigieg
- Other [specify]
- Tulsi Gabbard
- Kamala Harris
- Michael Bloomberg
- Donald Trump
- Amy Klobuchar

Figure B.3: **Familiarity with Indian politics (matched pairs sample)**

Familiarity with Indian Politics, by Generation
Percent of Respondents who are familiar with...

N = 51 Pairs of Students and Parents
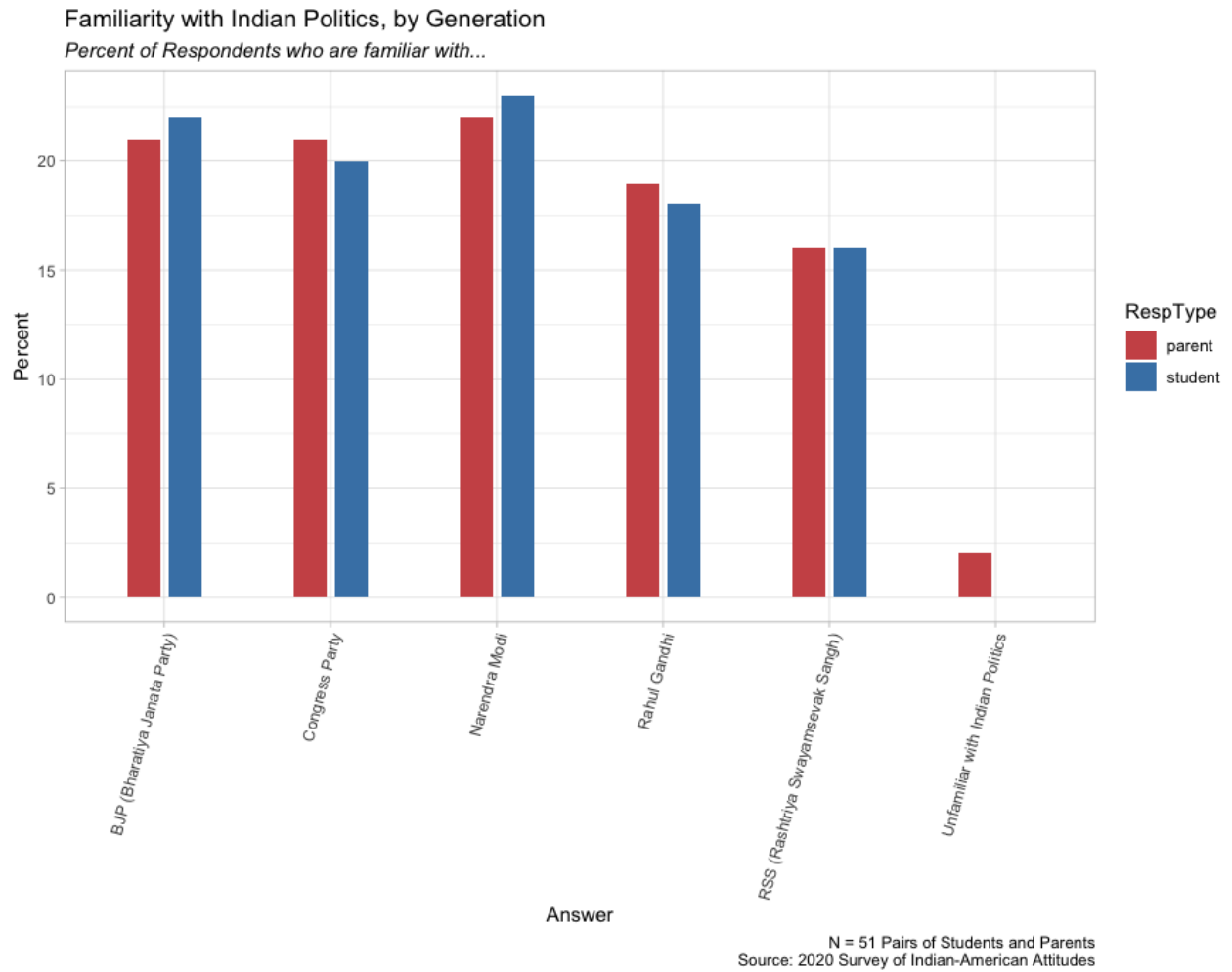Source: 2020 Survey of Indian-American Attitudes

Figure B.4: **Policy preferences by parent nativity**

Differences in Policy Preferences by Parents' Nativity

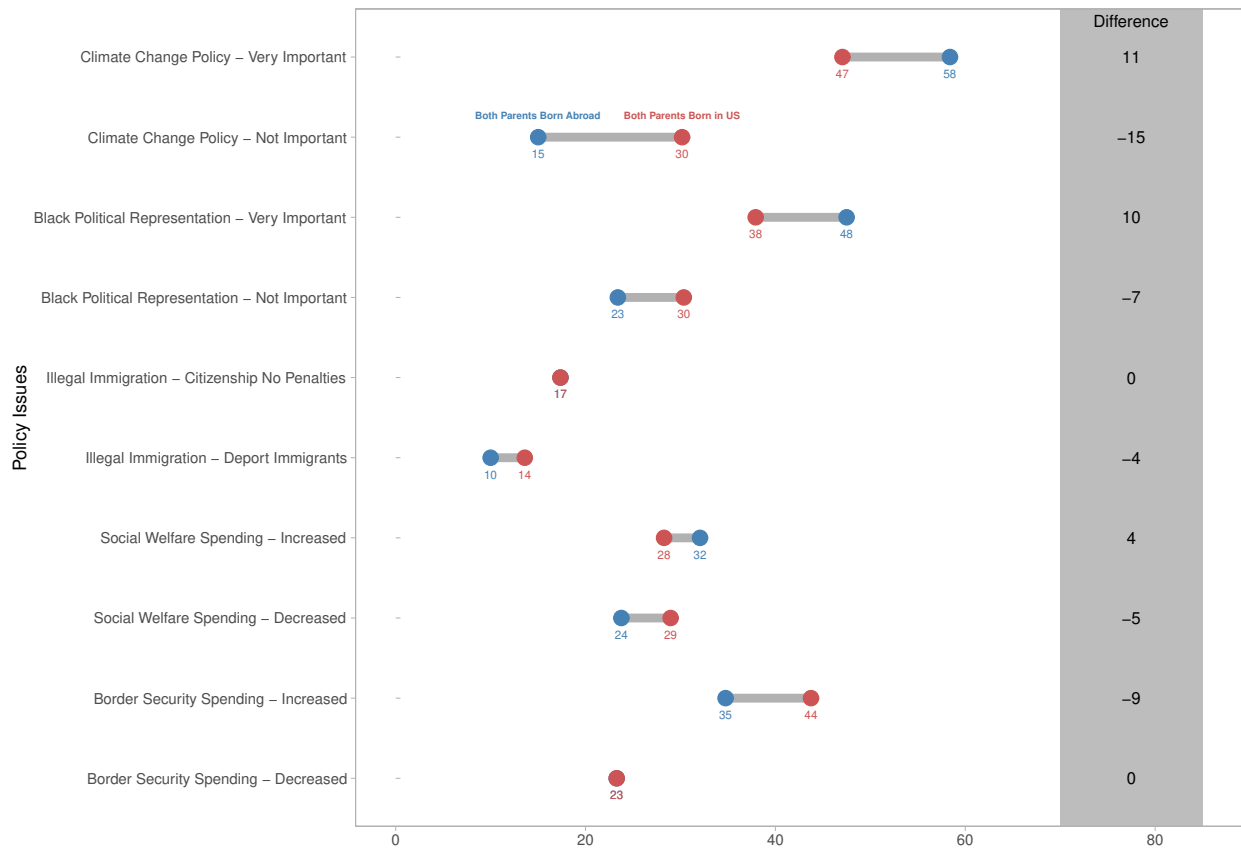*Percent of Respondents Who Reported:*

Figure B.5: **Political information sourcing by parent nativity**

Differences in Political Information Sourcing by Parents' Nativity
Percent of Respondents Who Reported:

Source: Authors' Analysis of the 2020 American National Election Studies