

# How Do Californians Want to Cast their Ballots During the COVID-19 Crisis?

## New Electorate Study

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# Research Approach

- Online survey - sample of 12,276 eligible voters
- Allowed us to study CA's largest racial and ethnic groups and key counties in future analyses
- Survey fielded from April 8-22
- Measure public opinion under different scenarios for the pandemic
- The full report can be found here:  
<https://sites.google.com/ucsd.edu/newelectorateproject/home>

# Research Approach

- We randomly divided our respondents into three groups
- We presented two of these groups with truthful summaries of the projections of two widely-cited teams of scientists
- One team projecting a peak of the public health crisis in the spring of 2020
- Second team projecting that its impact will peak in the fall
- The third group did not read any projections from us

## Scenario Text

1. The **spring peak** scenario: “While no one can be certain how the COVID-19 outbreak will progress in the United States, one well-respected team of scientists at a leading university has projected that if social distancing measures are widely adopted, the effects of the virus will reach their peak in April, then gradually decline throughout the spring and into the summer.”
2. The **fall peak** scenario: “While no one can be certain how the COVID-19 outbreak will progress in the United States, one well-respected team of scientists at a leading university has projected that if social distancing measures are widely adopted now but are lifted during the early fall, a new surge in cases will come and the effects of the virus will reach their peak in November or December.”

# How Do Californians Want to Cast Their Own Ballots?

- 51.7% said that they would prefer to vote by mailing in their ballot
- Another 18.9% selected the option of dropping off a ballot that had been automatically mailed to them a month before election day
- At the same time, about 30% say they want to vote in person at a voting site

# How Do Californians Want to Cast Their Own Ballots?

- Preferences to vote by mail were highest among those who read projections about a fall peak (53.4%)
- Read projections about a spring peak - (51.9%)
- 49.7% preference among those who were not exposed to a COVID-19 projection

# Personal Preferences on How to Cast a Ballot, by Race and Ethnicity

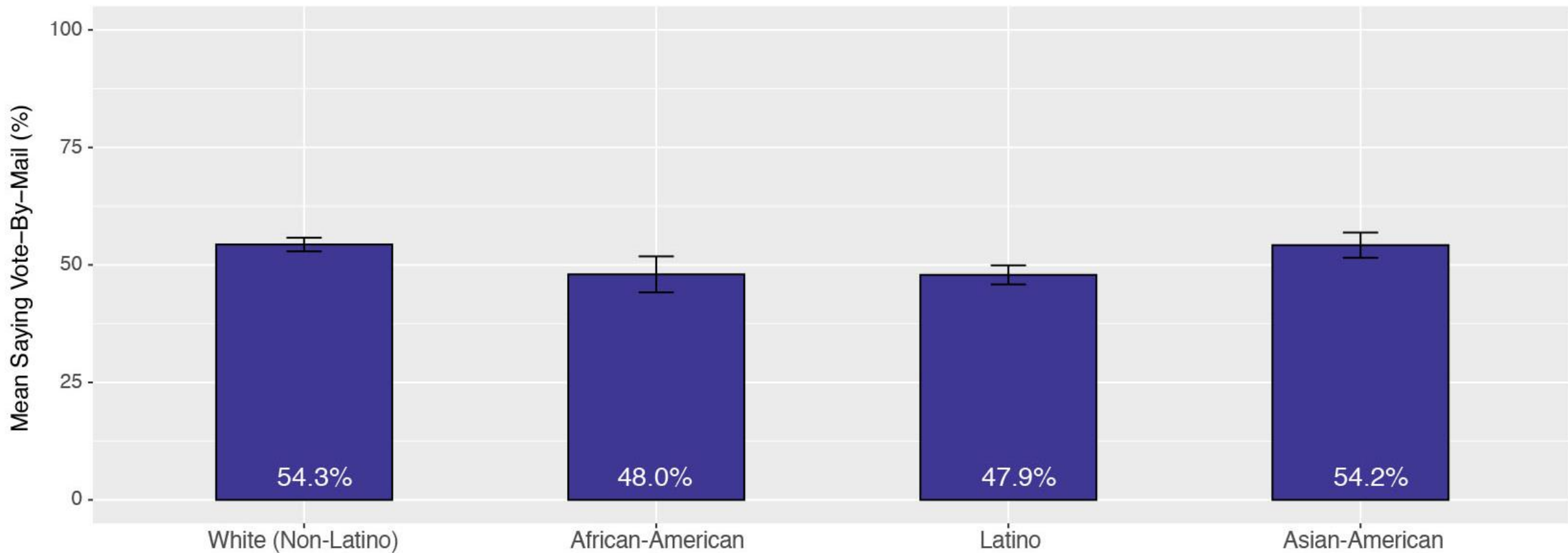
Significant differences in preferences among eligible voters in selecting voting by mail as their top option:

- 54.3% of non-Latino whites
- 54.2% of Asian American
- 48.0% of African Americans
- 47.9% of Latinos

These differences suggest that if any voting options are made completely unavailable to eligible voters, such changes could have a disparate impact across groups

# Personal Preferences on How to Cast a Ballot, by Race and Ethnicity

In the upcoming November 3 election, if you had the ability to cast a ballot in any way you wished, what would be your most preferred way to cast a ballot?





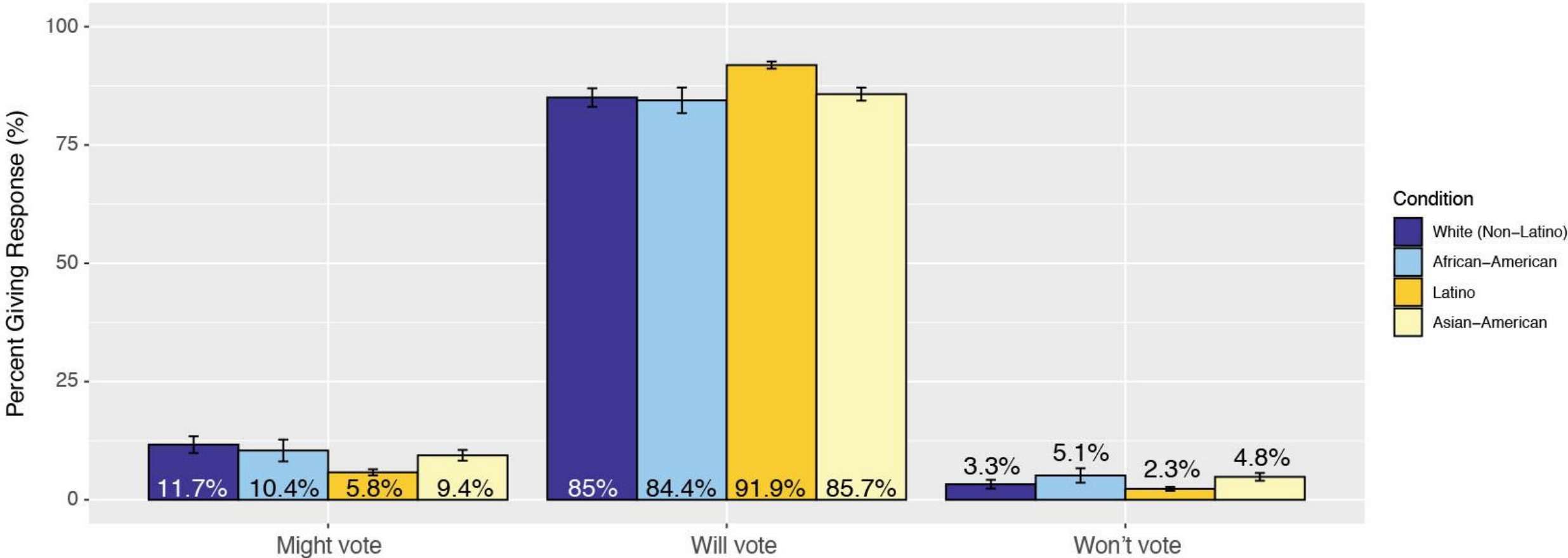
# Personal Preferences on How to Cast a Ballot, by Race and Ethnicity

When we asked if they would vote if a mail ballot was their only option:

- 5.1% of African Americans said that they would not vote
- 4.8% of Asian Americans
- 3.3% of non-Latino whites
- 2.3% of Latinos

# Personal Preferences on How to Cast a Ballot, by Race and Ethnicity

In the upcoming November 3 election, if your only option to cast a ballot in your county was to vote by mailing in a ballot, how likely would you be to cast a ballot?



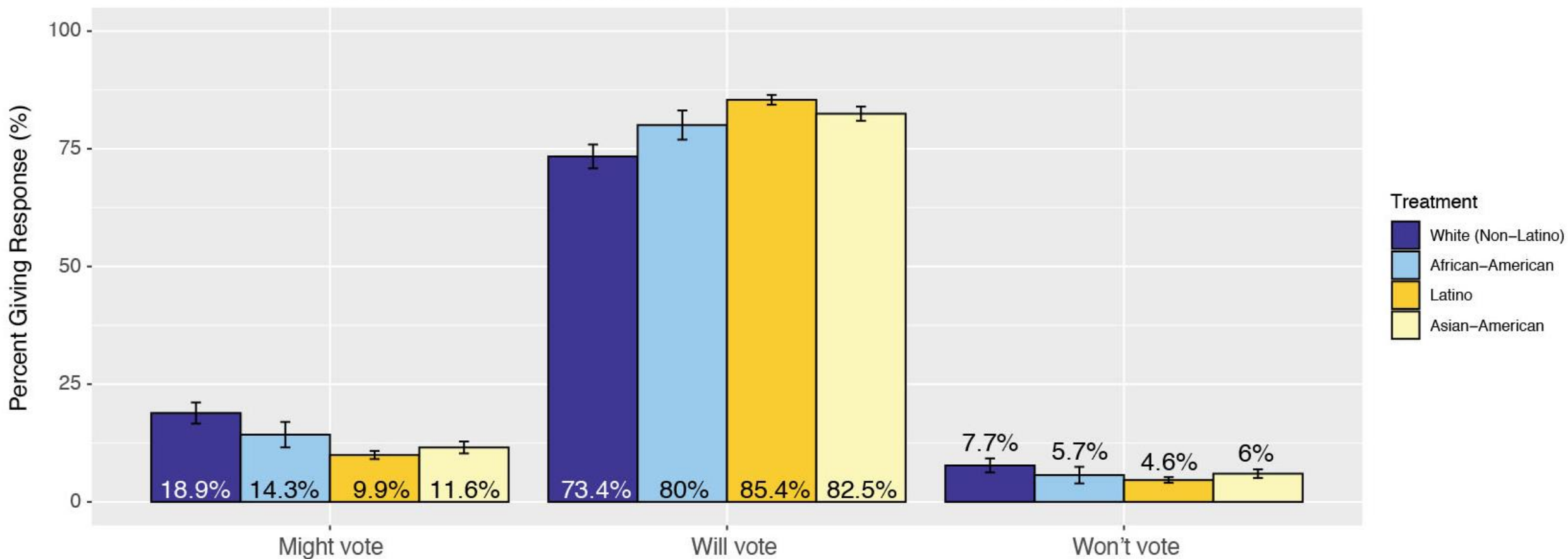
# Personal Preferences on How to Cast a Ballot, by Race and Ethnicity

When we asked likely voters whether they planned to cast a ballot if voting in person was their only option:

- 7.7% of non-Latino whites
- 6.0% of Asian Americans
- 5.7% of African Americans
- 4.6% of Latinos said that they would not vote

# Personal Preferences on How to Cast a Ballot, by Race and Ethnicity

In the upcoming November 3 election, if your only option to cast a ballot in your county was an in person option such as a traditional polling place or a professionally staffed county elections office, how likely would you be to cast a ballot?



# Comfort at Polling Places w/ and w/out Social Distancing

We also asked eligible voters about their comfort levels with waiting in line at a polling place or working as a poll worker, either with or without social distancing measures implemented at the polling place...

# Comfort at Polling Places w/ and w/out Social Distancing

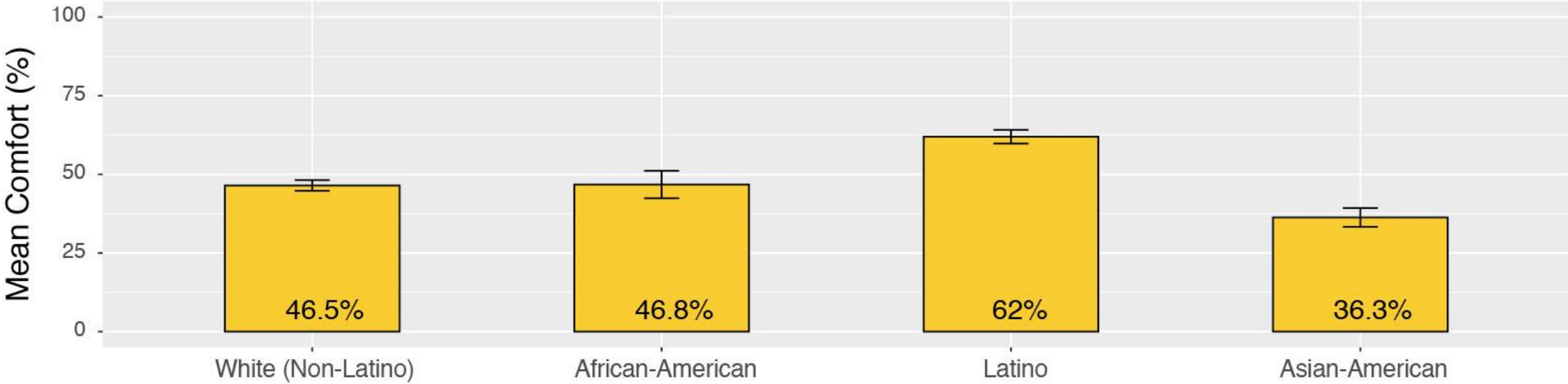
Half of those surveyed said that they would be comfortable at a polling place waiting in line that did not implement social distancing

35.7% of respondents overall would feel comfortable being a poll worker in a polling place without social distancing

Much more comfortable with waiting in line (68.7%) or working at a polling place (47.4%) which adhered to a social distancing protocol, based on a set of recommendations provided by the NAACP

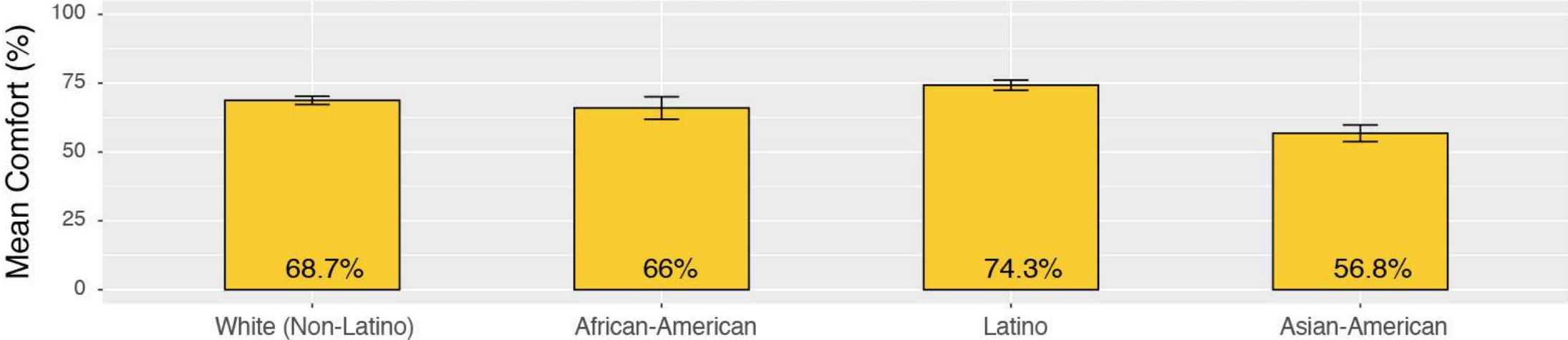
# Comfort Waiting in Line w/out Social Distancing, by Race/Ethnicity

In the upcoming November 3 election, would you be comfortable waiting in line at a polling place, if there were no social distancing measures implemented at that polling place?



# Comfort Waiting in Line with Social Distancing, by Race/Ethnicity

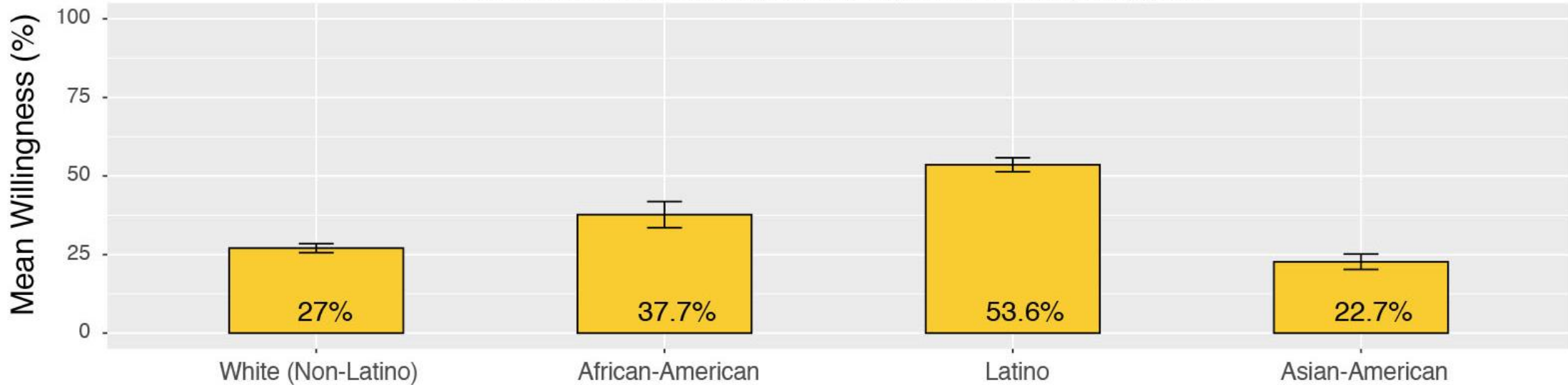
In the upcoming November 3 election, would you be comfortable waiting in line at a polling place, if the polling place was reconfigured in order to adhere to social distancing protocol, creating additional space between voting booths, poll workers, and voters standing in line, and to take other measures to protect the public's health?





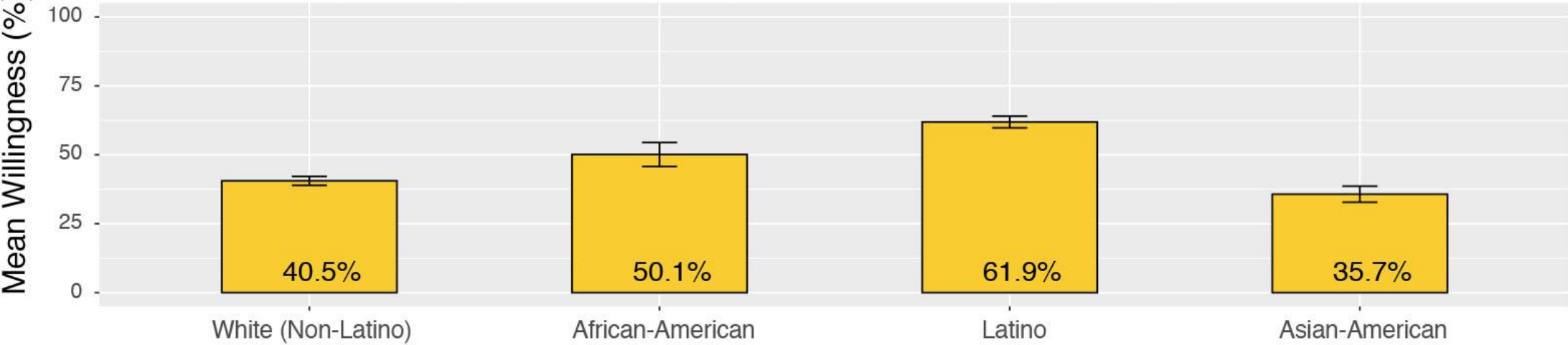
# Comfort as Polling Place Worker w/out Social Distancing, by Race/Ethnicity

In the upcoming November 3 election, would you be willing to work as a poll worker, if there were no social distancing measures implemented at that polling place?



# Comfort as Polling Place Worker with Social Distancing, by Race/Ethnicity

In the upcoming November 3 election, would you be willing to work as a poll worker, if the polling place was reconfigured in order to adhere to social distancing protocol, creating additional space between voting booths, poll workers, and voters standing in line, and to take other measures to protect the public's health?



# Conclusions

- Overall, a strong majority of California's eligible electorate would prefer to cast a ballot by mail in November's election
- But not all Californians favor this option – choices about how to cast ballots vary significantly across the diverse racial and ethnic groups in our electorate
- Some voters say that they would not participate in the election if it is conducted either exclusively through the mail or exclusively through in-person options

# Conclusions

- When thinking about in-person voting experiences, voters who read scientific projections about a scenario in which the COVID-19 crisis peaks in the fall were more uncomfortable at the prospect of waiting in line or working at a polling place
- There were also significant differences by race and ethnicity in comfort levels
- But voters of all types under all scenarios became much more comfortable with casting ballots in a polling place that adheres to social distancing protocols

# Conclusions

- It is important to note that these are their survey responses... rather than measures of behavior
- Whether the preferences that they expressed about how to cast ballots shapes their participation will be revealed in November, 2020

# Thank you!

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*View my Tedx Talk on the Power of the Youth Vote!*

