

Review of Roberts “Economic Concerns Appear to be Weak Predictors of White Political Identity”  
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In this manuscript, Roberts seeks to explore the determinants of White political identity, which he—and others—have argued is becoming increasingly salient in our politics today. In particular, he wants to test whether economic or cultural threats drive the salience of White identity among White Americans. He finds that cultural (symbolic) threats are more consistent drivers of White racial identity than economic drivers.

There is a lot to like about this paper. Roberts is asking an important question, especially given that significantly more attention has been given to the consequences of White racial identity and its politicized extension, White consciousness, than to its causes. In other words, more people have used White racial identity as an independent variable rather than placing it under scrutiny as a dependent variable.

Below are a few areas where I think Roberts manuscript—and ultimately his contribution—can be strengthened:

- 1) I think the setup needs to be sharpened and better motivated. Why do we care about White racial identity and not, say, other forms of racial prejudice or resentment? Also, why is it preferred over say its politicized expression: White consciousness? Is this a decision based on theoretical considerations or data availability?
- 2) While I know this paper was written as a research note, I think the front-end literature review could use some more development, as I was a little underwhelmed by it. I am not sure Roberts has fairly characterized the state of the literature on racial attitudes and racial identity. For example, he highlights Jardina’s wonderful contribution to this literature on page 2, but then follows that discussion with “social identity theory, and its offshoots, would suggest an alternative perspective.” However, Jardina’s contribution to understanding white racial identity is grounded specifically in a social identity approach to white racial attitudes. I would suggest another look at chapter 2 of her book to see how she frames her discussion of white identity by couching white racial attitudes into two broad classes of theories: individualizing theories and inter-group theories. McClain et al (2009), which is a great literature review on racial identity construction from the Annual Review of Political Science, might be another good resource here.
- 3) In terms of the empirical test, I worry that Roberts may be putting his thumb on the scales testing the relative effect of economic and symbolic threats. For example, in all his symbolic measures, the respondent is specifically being primed to think about race and diversity. However, the economic indicators don’t have a similar prime. While Roberts is limited due to data availability with the ANES, there is a question in the 2016 and 2020 surveys asking respondents “How likely whites are unable to find jobs because employers are hiring minorities.” This question taps into the economic concerns while priming respondents to think about race and diversity in the same way the cultural threat questions do. At a minimum, I’d consider looking at that question as a robustness check.

- 4) Related to the last point, another thing Roberts could consider is to use the panel data component of the 2020 ANES, which includes a resample of respondents from 2016 to see if economic indicators in 2016 predict white identity in 2020.
- 5) I'm curious about what Roberts thinks is the theory driving the results he observes? He has set up his research note as a horse race between economics and culture, but we know from recent work that when it comes to grievance politics, the two intersect in nuanced and interesting ways. Michael Tesler's work on racialized economics is one such example. Rhodes-Purdy, Navarre, and Utych (2021)'s theory of affective political economy is another.
- 6) Lastly, I am not sure this paper should be a research note. I think Roberts could transform this into a wonderful full-length journal article if he were to maximize the use of the data he has at his disposal. There are essentially 10 years of ANES surveys (2012-2022) asking respondents about white racial identity, including as I said before a panel between 2016 and 2020. This period essentially spans the late Obama and Trump eras, and I think there is a lot of interesting descriptive analysis that can be done even before testing his primary hypotheses. There is a lot about White racial identity we still don't know and this paper could be a major contribution to this emerging line of inquiry, especially given the wealth of data covering a critical juncture in American political history.

Ultimately, Roberts' manuscript offers a great deal of potential, and with some refinement, I think it can provide an important contribution to our understanding of White political identity.