Material Status and White Political Identity

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Question

▶ Does actual material status or perceived material status relative to nonwhites drive the propensity of claiming a white identity in politics?

Literature Motivating the Project

▶ Existing work on white political identity has studied the implications of white identity. But comparatively less work has explicitly tested where white political identity comes from.

▶ Although a leading hypothesis is that besides those who harbor racial animus, white political identifiers are those who are concerned about the status of their group (see Jardina 2019, Bunyasi 2019).

▶ Many have made efforts to demonstrate the characteristics of who white identifiers are (see Jardina 2019, 2020, 2021; Willer, Feinberg, and Wetts 2016), but to my knowledge there remains causal tests of where it originates.

Hypotheses

▶ I expect that a number of reality-based indicators of status (i.e. Income, Education, Employment Status) and more perceived community-based (% below poverty), pocketbook (retrospective and prospective evaluation of their financial position) and sociotropic indicators of status (retrospective and prospective evaluations of the economy, feeling that there are opportunities to get ahead, feelings of whether income inequality hampers one's ability to improve their financial status) will drive white identity for those who aren't likely to do so already because of their racial animus. I also am interested to see whether, particularly in 2016, if partisanship or ideology predicts white identity in the face of measures of racial animus and status threat.

| | White Identity Importance | |
	2012	2016
Income	0.002	−0.009*
	(0.003)	(0.004)
Education	−0.107*	−0.006
	(0.024)	(0.004)
Employment Status	−0.147*	−0.152*
	(0.057)	(0.072)
% below poverty	−0.009*	−0.002
	(0.003)	(0.007)
Opportunity to get ahead		0.030
		(0.029)
Retrospective - better off	0.070*	0.039
	(0.024)	(0.033)
Prospective - better off	−0.007	−0.030
	(0.032)	(0.036)
Economy Better - Past	−0.060*	−0.114*
	(0.030)	(0.031)
Economy Better - Future	0.041	0.121*
	(0.033)	(0.033)
Get ahead - Income Inequality	−0.018	−0.050
	(0.029)	(0.030)
Frequency of news consumption	−0.013	−0.019
	(0.010)	(0.015)
Rural	0.106	0.149
	(0.083)	(0.102)
Racial Resentment	0.281*	0.302*
	(0.057)	(0.055)

| | White Identity Importance | |
	2012	2016
Age	0.007*	0.007*
	(0.002)	(0.002)
Female	0.056	0.077
	(0.050)	(0.054)
% White	−0.0002	−0.002
	(0.002)	(0.002)
Party Identification	−0.003	0.050*
	(0.017)	(0.014)
Ideology	0.022	0.002*
	(0.024)	(0.001)
Constant	2.987*	2.743*
	(0.259)	(0.331)
Num. groups: District	407	399
Variance: District(Intercept)	0.01	0.03
Variance: Residual	1.57	1.67
N	2,685	2,368
Log Likelihood	−4,485.413	−4,010.090
AIC	9,010.825	8,062.179
BIC	9,128.734	8,183.345

Source: 2012 and 2016 American National Election Studies.

Coefficients from regression with random intercepts by congressional district.

Standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.05$

Conclusion

▶ It looks like, in the presence of controlling for racial resentment, that there are mixed findings about whether economic threats predict white identity. The results are not consistent from 2012 to 2016.

▶ Interestingly, we see that political factors matter quite a bit in 2016. This seems to show that white identification in 2016 has become a Republican and conservative phenomenon; still need to run analyses on the 2020 ANES to see if this holds.

Questions/Comments

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