



In-Group Love and Out-Group Hate: White Racial Attitudes in Contemporary U.S. Elections

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Abstract

Over the past two decades, political scientists have demonstrated that racial animus among white Americans is increasingly associated with evaluations of presidential candidates. Like most work on white racial attitudes, these efforts have focused almost exclusively on the out-group attitudes whites possess toward racial and ethnic minorities. Work in social psychology, however, suggests that intergroup attitudes are usually comprised of both an out-group and an in-group component. Nevertheless, political scientists have tended to overlook or dismiss the possibility that whites' in-group attitudes are associated with political evaluations. Changing demographic patterns, immigration, the historic election of Obama, and new candidate efforts to appeal to whites as a collective group suggest a need to reconsider the full nature and consequences of the racial attitudes that may influence whites' electoral preferences. This study, therefore, examines the extent to which both white out-group racial resentment and white in-group racial identity matter in contemporary electoral politics. Comparing the factors associated with vote choice in 2012 and 2016, and candidate evaluations in 2018, this study finds that both attitudes were powerfully associated with candidate evaluations in 2012 and early 2016, although white out-group attitudes overshadowed the electoral impact of in-group racial attitudes by the 2016 general election. The results suggest that there are now two independent racial attitudes tied to whites' political preferences in the contemporary U.S., and understanding the dynamics of white racial animus and white racial identity across electoral contexts continues to be an important avenue for future work.

Keywords Intergroup dynamics · Racial resentment · White racial identity · U.S. electoral politics

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In the years following the election of the nation's first black president, Barack Obama, social scientists provided substantial evidence that Obama was evaluated more negatively and punished electorally by white Americans who possess negative attitudes toward black people (Kinder and Dale-Riddle 2012; Piston 2010; Tesler and Sears 2010). This work confirmed what many scholars had been arguing for decades: Racial conflict is deeply embedded in American politics, and white racial prejudice is a fundamental component of contemporary U.S. electoral politics (Kinder and Dale-Riddle 2012; Tesler 2016; Tesler and Sears 2010). Indeed, it appears that in the past decade, whites' racial animosities, particularly those directed at blacks, have become firmly aligned with their partisan identities, and their political significance continues to grow (Tesler and Sides 2016).

Anecdotal evidence, however, suggests that when it comes to whites' racial attitudes, whites' hostility toward black people and other racial and ethnic minorities might not be the only force at work. Another element of whites' racial attitudes may also have become associated with voting behavior in recent years. For example, three years after the election of Barack Obama, CNN published a story with the headline, "Are whites racially oppressed?" (Blake 2011). Rather than focusing on racial prejudice, the piece highlighted the possibility that some whites see their racial group as a dispossessed minority. This narrative gained further traction after Obama's reelection in 2012. On election night, Fox News' Bill O'Reilly bemoaned, "the white establishment is now the minority" (LoGiurato 2012). These sentiments were reiterated in 2016, with claims that Donald Trump successfully tapped into the anxiety felt by some whites over their group's status in an increasingly racially and ethnically diverse nation. Rather than solely capturing whites' out-group animus, these sentiments also appear to be related to whites' concerns for their in-group. They hint at the possibility that some whites possess a notable degree of solidarity or identification with their racial group—one that may very well influence their political preferences.

The idea that whites' political attitudes and behavior are influenced by a sense of racial identity has largely been rejected by previous work in political science. The overwhelming consensus has been that when racial attitudes are politically relevant among whites, it is in the form of *out-group* attitudes, like prejudice or racial resentment (Citrin and Sears 2014; Kinder and Winter 2001; Sears and Savalei 2006). The logic motivating this conclusion follows the metaphor that just as fish do not see water, whites do not see race. Because of their dominant position over the political, economic, and social institutions in the U.S., and their numerical majority, whites take their racial group for granted. Sears and Savalei describe the prevailing wisdom succinctly: "whites' whiteness is usually likely to be no more noteworthy to them than is breathing the air around them" (2006, p. 901). They conclude, unequivocally, that racial solidarity is not an important component of whites' contemporary political attitudes.

The attention scholars have traditionally paid to white racial prejudice, however, has arguably belied a full investigation of all components of the psychological processes that characterize intergroup relations—processes that may very well matter for our understanding of the political world. Work in social psychology has long posited that intergroup conflict, be it between racial groups or other groups

in society, is generally a product of both in-group attitudes *and* out-group attitudes (Brewer and Gaertner 2004; Tajfel et al. 1971). That is, people tend to feel some sense of attachment with the groups of which they are members and demonstrate in-group favoritism toward those groups. They also sometimes—although not necessarily reciprocally—display a degree of hostility toward relevant out-groups.

Historically, when political scientists have studied the political significance of in-group identities—or the psychological attachment individuals have toward particular social groups—it has often been with respect to black Americans and other racial and ethnic minorities (e.g., Dawson 1994; McClain et al. 2009). At the same time, scholars have dismissed the study of in-group attitudes and identities among white Americans, focusing instead on whites' out-group attitudes in the form of racial prejudice or racial resentment. It is only recently that a small but growing body of work has provided evidence for the potential political consequences of whites' in-group racial attitudes, arguing that the country's growing racial and ethnic diversity has lifted the veil of invisibility from white racial identity (Jardina 2019a, b; Petrow et al. 2018; Schildkraut 2015; Sides et al. 2018). According to many of these scholars, a sizeable portion of whites identify with their racial group, and they are motivated, via this sense of solidarity, to maintain their group's privileged and dominant status at the top of a society in which racial groups are organized hierarchically.

This article builds off this recent work, which has moved away from focusing solely on white racial prejudice, and reconsiders the full scope and significance of white racial attitudes in recent presidential elections. The presidential campaigns of Barack Obama and Donald Trump provide an opportunity to examine the extent to which whites' out-group *and* in-group attitudes are associated with evaluations of presidential candidates and vote choice. Both candidates—Obama, by way of his symbolic position as the nation's first black president, and Trump, because of his explicit, disparaging remarks about racial and ethnic minority group members and his thinly veiled but nevertheless apparent promises to protect white Americans—potentially appealed to both whites' in-group and out-group sentiments. I go beyond existing research to examine the electoral impact of white racial attitudes across recent elections and over time, examining the dynamics of both attitudes not only in 2012 and during the 2016 primaries, as previous work has done, but also during the 2016 general election and then two years later, in 2018. My analysis here also provides a direct test of the distinct effects of in-group attitudes relative to out-group attitudes across these different electoral contexts, differentiating this analysis from some prior work, which has used measures of racial solidarity, like the concept of white consciousness, that combine both in-group and out-group sentiments.

If both in-group and out-group attitudes are indeed associated with candidate preferences, it implies that to the extent that whites' racial attitudes influence their political opinions, it is not merely via hostility toward racial and ethnic minorities. Some whites may also be swayed by their desire to protect the interests of their in-group and to maintain their group's power and privileges. Thus, political candidates may be able to appeal to or activate two distinct, but arguably equally insidious, racial forces in contemporary American electoral politics. I therefore explore whether whites' racial identity and racial animus were independently related to their candidate preferences and evaluations in the 2012 and the 2016 presidential contests, the 2016 presidential primaries, and in

2018, well into Trump's presidency. I compare the degree to which both types of racial attitudes matter relative to other significant factors associated with opinion like partisanship, economic evaluations, and demographic characteristics. I find that both racial resentment and white racial identity were significantly associated with vote choice in 2012 and in the 2016 primaries, with both sets of white voters less supportive of Obama and more supportive of Trump. By the 2016 election, and into 2018, however, white racial identity's relationship to Trump support had been shadowed by the influence of white racial animus. My analysis suggests that candidates tend to either be penalized by or benefit most from the effects of whites' out-group attitudes, but that whites' in-group attitudes may also be independently consequential, particularly if politicians make targeted efforts to appeal to this subset of white voters.

The Psychology of White Racial Attitudes

A number of contemporary psychological theories seek to explain intergroup relations, particularly with respect to matters of race and politics in the United States. The most prominent is symbolic politics theory, which argues that symbolic predispositions, acquired early in life through socialization, exert a powerful and enduring influence over adults' political attitudes (Sears 1993). Under this framework, whites' racial hostilities are characterized by a learned sense of racial resentment—a combination of anti-black affect coupled with the belief that blacks do not subscribe to traditional American values like hard work and patriotism (Kinder and Sanders 1996).

Several alternative theories take a different tack. They argue that we can understand race relations not merely through the lens of beliefs and behaviors acquired through socialization, but instead through the psychology of group interests, group identities, and group categorization. The foundation of theories in this group-oriented vein is social identity theory, which suggests that individuals have a propensity to develop a sense of solidarity with salient social groups and to systematically display in-group favoritism toward said groups (Tajfel and Turner 1979). This propensity to form groups can give way to intergroup competition over interests and resources and can have the most potent political consequences when individuals have an especially strong sense of identity or solidarity with relevant groups (Bobo 1983; Kinder and Sears 2013; Miller et al. 1981). In the U.S. context, especially with respect to race relations, several theories, including group position theory (Bobo and Johnson 2000), social dominance theory (Sidanius and Pratto 1999), and a "racialized social system theory" (Bonilla-Silva 2010), have built off this framework, paying particular attention to the way in which an enduring racial hierarchy has influenced intergroup relations. While they have their differences, implicit in each is that individuals possess strong racial or ethnic identities.

In the study of the relationship between white racial attitudes and political behavior, arguably none of these more group-oriented theories have achieved the prominence of symbolic politics theory and racial resentment, partly because previous scholars have found little evidence that a sense of racial identity among whites is

associated with political attitudes or behavior.¹ Accordingly, white identity has been often characterized as “hidden” or invisible (Doane 1997; Frankenberg 1993), and the study of white racial attitudes has tended to focus almost entirely on out-group attitudes in the form of racial hostility, prejudice, and resentment.²

Reconsidering White’s In-Group and Out-Group Racial Attitudes

Political scientists, I argue, may have too readily dismissed whites’ in-group racial attitudes as a political force for several reasons. First, previous work was limited empirically by the lack of available identity measures on public opinion surveys, and therefore often employed only proximate measures of identity.³ Second, past studies on white identity used data from the 1990s and early 2000s, during a time when whites’ racial identity may not have been particularly salient. Indeed, research indicates that social identities are most politically relevant when groups experience a threat or challenge to their group and its status (Blumer 1958; Bobo 1983; Branscombe et al. 2007; Goren and Plaut 2012). Compared to the previous two decades, many white Americans may now feel that their racial group is threatened by immigration (Ostfeld 2019), the country’s rapidly growing racial and ethnic diversity, and by the election of the nation’s first black president (Abascal 2015; Budak et al. 2016; Craig and Richeson 2014; Danbold and Huo 2015; Outten et al. 2012). There is therefore reason to believe that white racial solidarity is more strongly linked to political opinions today than what early studies observed, and that now, both in-group and out-group racial attitudes are associated with whites’ political preferences.

Prior scholarship may have also been limited in that it tended to treat white in-group attitudes as yet another expression of racial hostility, thereby almost exclusively examining the relationship between white identity and opposition to racialized policies that benefit blacks (e.g., Citrin and Sears 2014; Kinder and Winter 2001; Sears and Savalei 2006). The expectation in these previous investigations is that white identity should be significantly associated with a desire to deny resources or benefits to racial and ethnic minorities. The weak evidence for these associations

¹ Criticisms of racial resentment are largely rooted in whether racial resentment is truly capturing racial animus, or if instead it is conflating racism with ideological conservatism (Sniderman and Carnines 1997).

² Work in sociology has examined the concepts of whiteness and white identity through a very different lens. It has either treated white identity as an implicit attitude (Knowles and Peng 2005), considered whiteness as part of a system of racial inequality (e.g., Guess 2006), or has explored white identity as a progressive reckoning with racial inequality as part of a move toward social justice (Helms 1995). None of this work recognizes white in-group attitudes as I do here, and in a way that is in keeping with a social identity framework—as an explicit psychological attachment to a group that influences explicit attitudes and behavior.

³ When Wong and Cho (2005) undertook their study of white identity, the closeness items were the best proximate measure of identity available on a nationally representative public opinion survey. Scholars have previously argued, however, that the closeness measure captures group affect, rather than identity (Conover 1984; Herring et al. 1999).

contributed to the conclusion that any sense of racial identity among whites was simply politically unimportant.

This impetus to treat white identity and racial animus as two sides of the same coin derives from a number of theories of intergroup attitudes, which argue that perceived threats to whites' power or resources ought to generate out-group hostility.⁴ In fact, according to Brewer, "most contemporary research on intergroup relations, prejudice, and discrimination appears to accept, at least implicitly, the idea that in-group favoritism and out-group negativity are reciprocally related" (Brewer 1999, p. 430). But Brewer argues that this conceptualization is misguided. She draws attention to a long line of often over-looked work demonstrating that in-group favoritism and out-group derogation are separate phenomena and that strong in-group identities do *not* systematically correlate with out-group bias or negativity (Brewer 1979; Herring et al. 1999; Struch and Schwartz 1989).

Accordingly, in this study, I distinguish between two types of white racial attitudes: out-group racial resentment and in-group racial solidarity. In doing so, I treat white identity as a sentiment capturing a desire to protect the in-group and its collective interests, but one not necessarily synonymous with out-group derogation.⁵ This approach does not imply that whites who possess a strong racial identity are dispossessed of racial prejudice, but rather that a desire to protect the in-group and its interests is a force independent of out-group prejudice. I am, therefore, interested in both the effects of white racial solidarity and white prejudice, net one another. I expect to find that white solidarity and prejudice have independent predictive power. Furthermore, I part ways with much of the previous work on white identity and white racism by examining the potential political consequences of white racial solidarity beyond race-targeted policies. White identity may be less associated with policies that are explicitly perceived as benefiting blacks, and instead, more closely tied to political preferences, like evaluations of political candidates, who whites may more easily recognize as harming or benefitting their group.

Racial Attitudes and Candidate Evaluations

I explore the relationship between white identity, white prejudice, and candidate preferences with two expectations. The first is that in keeping with existing work, evaluations of political candidates may be associated with whites' racial hostilities, either because of the candidate's race, or because of the candidate's use of racialized rhetoric (Mendelberg 2001; Valentino et al. 2002, 2018). Numerous studies have already demonstrated that racial resentment is strongly linked to attitudes toward

⁴ See Sumner's theory of ethnocentrism (1906), Blumer's group position theory (1958), and power theory (Blalock 1967; Key 1949).

⁵ Much of the work on the reaction of dominant groups to status threat has focused on the relationship between in-group identity and subsequent out-group derogation (Branscombe et al. 1999; Glaser 1994; Oliver and Mendelberg 2000). A multitude of studies across the social sciences have demonstrated that identity threat can promote out-group derogation, although the relationship is not inevitable (e.g., Branscombe et al. 1999; Brewer 1999; Gibson 2006).

Barack Obama because of his race and to Donald Trump, who repeatedly disparaged racial and ethnic minorities during his presidential campaign and after winning office (Sides et al. 2018).

My second expectation is that separate from their racial animosities, we may also find that some whites identify with their racial group and are politically motivated by a sense of in-group favoritism, one that manifests as an effort to preserve whites' dominant position atop the nation's racial hierarchy. One way that these whites might seek to maintain this status quo is by supporting political candidates they view as protecting their interests and opposing those they perceive as directly challenging them. This does not mean that whites will bring their racial identity to bear on evaluations of all political candidates, but rather those that particularly appeal to or threaten whites' interests, either by way of their race, or by way the signals they send about their intent to maintain whites' status. In other words, we might find that certain political candidates cue whites' racial identity.⁶

Here, I test these expectations, focusing in particular on two political figures: Barack Obama and Donald Trump. I compare the effects of both attitudes with respect to other presidential candidates but argue that Obama and Trump are likely unique in the extent to which they appealed to both whites' in-group and out-group racial attitudes. In particular, racial solidarity, I posit, ought to be especially linked to whites' decision to oppose Barack Obama in the election. For one, Obama is unique in that his electoral success is partly a function of the massive demographic changes the country has experienced, which might very well have made racial identity among whites more politically salient. These trends even prompted some conservative pundits to lament publicly the loss of white influence. For instance, after Obama's re-election, radio host Rush Limbaugh told his listeners, "I went to bed last night thinking we're outnumbered" (Edsall 2012). Furthermore, as the nation's first black president, Obama challenged the nation's racial hierarchy by disrupting the succession of white presidents, and he was especially symbolic of whites' loss of political status.

If the symbolism of Obama's election served as a challenge to whites' dominant status, then in the wake of Obama's presidency and in the midst of significant demographic changes, it is possible that some whites wanted the racial hierarchy restored to its previous order. Accordingly, many may have turned in 2016 to a presidential candidate they hoped would prioritize their group's interests. Donald Trump mounted a surprisingly successful presidential campaign, with support overwhelmingly from white voters, including self-proclaimed white nationalists and white supremacists. While many have suggested that racial resentment and prejudice were the primary motivating forces behind support for Trump (Ingraham 2016), he seems to have capitalized on more than white voters' explicit animosity for racial and ethnic minorities. In particular, Trump made pointed appeals that may have resonated with whites concerned about their group's status and that distinguished Trump from

⁶ In keeping with these expectations, Schildkraut (2015) finds that whites with higher levels of racial identity are more likely to say they prefer political candidates who are white, and Petrow et al. (2018) find that high white identifiers are less supportive of black candidates.

any other presidential candidate in the 2016 race. For instance, immigration was one of the defining issues of Trump's campaign, and he gained immense support among whites significantly opposed to immigration (Tesler 2015).⁷ Immigration arguably poses an exceptional threat to whites' dominance because it introduces foreigners with unfamiliar cultures and languages that may be perceived as threatening to the nation's dominant Anglo-Saxon traditions, and it has contributed to the loss of white Americans' numerical majority.⁸ Trump may have seized on whites' concerns about their status in a country where they are quickly becoming a minority, signaling to whites with higher levels of racial solidarity that he had their group's interests in mind.

Trump was also unique in championing policies that disproportionately benefit whites. In a departure from the traditional Republican platform, he explicitly advocated for expanding Social Security and Medicare—programs that political scientists argue have been historically framed as explicitly associated with whiteness, and support for which is closely linked to white in-group attitudes (Clawson and Jett 2019; Winter 2006).⁹ Thus, many white voters may have viewed Trump as restoring and protecting their group's power and resources. If so, we would expect to see a strong relationship between white identity and support for Trump.

Data and Methods

To examine the relationship between whites' out-group and in-group attitudes and their presidential candidate evaluations, I turn to four national surveys: the 2012 ANES Time Series Study, the 2016 ANES Pilot Study, the 2016 ANES Time series study, and the 2018 Pilot study.¹⁰ The 2012 and 2016 ANES Time Series studies are comprised of a nationally representative probability sample of adult U.S. citizens interviewed face-to-face in the months before and after the presidential elections.¹¹ The 2016 ANES Pilot was conducted over the Internet by the survey firm YouGov between January 22nd and 28th, 2016.¹² The 2018 ANES Pilot was also conducted over the Internet by YouGov, and was fielded between December 6th and 19th, 2018. I measure whites' out-group racial animus using the traditional four-item measure

⁷ Near the end of August 2015, immigration reform was the *only* issue on Trump's campaign website: <https://web.archive.org/web/20150824010152/https://www.donaldjtrump.com/positions>.

⁸ Several scholars and pundits have argued that immigration poses a risk to white American culture (Brimelow 1996; Buchanan 2011; Huntington 2004).

⁹ Winter (2006) argues that political elites intentionally framed such policies as benefits for "hard work" to contrast them with prevailing negative racialized stereotypes about welfare, which has been associated with unearned handouts.

¹⁰ Replication files for all the analyses presented here are available on my personal website at www.ashleyjardina.com.

¹¹ To avoid possible discrepancies across survey modes, I use only the face-to-face ANES samples.

¹² YouGov maintains a panel comprised of a diverse population of respondents who volunteer to complete online surveys. Respondents are selected into the panel by sample matching, which effectively creates a respondent pool resembling the U.S. population with respect to gender, age, race, and education. The analysis here employs probability weights (Rivers 2006).

of racial resentment, which was included on all three surveys (Kinder and Sanders 1996). I use a direct and straightforward measure of white identity, in which white respondents were asked the degree to which their racial identity was important to them (Jardina 2019a, b). Measuring white identity in this way has an important limitation in that it is done with only a single survey measure.¹³ Nevertheless, it has considerable face validity, and employing it is arguably a conservative test of the relationship between white in-group attitudes and more robustly measured constructs like racial resentment.¹⁴ I also note that I make no direct causal claims here; given the observational nature of the data I employ, my conclusions are based on associational relationships. Nevertheless, previous work, much of it experimental, has shown that we can consider both types of racial attitudes as predispositions that directly influence political opinion (e.g., Jardina 2019a, b; Major et al. 2016; Outten et al. 2012). Furthermore, prior work has shown that levels of both types of racial attitudes have been fairly stable among white Americans over time, suggesting that they are not themselves routinely influenced by political preferences, although I do demonstrate later that they are not impervious to political context (Jardina 2019b; Tesler 2016). We can, however, be fairly confident that these attitudes are causally prior to political evaluations, and we should keep in mind that what I am examining here is the activation of these attitudes, rather than overall changes in their levels.¹⁵

Across the three surveys, I find that the distribution of racial resentment is consistently skewed toward higher levels of resentment. Average scores among whites are at or near 0.6 on a scale ranging from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating greater levels of resentment. In other words, a sizeable proportion of white Americans possess some degree of racial resentment. In the 2012 ANES, for example, over 59% of white respondents scored above 0.6 on the resentment scale.¹⁶ Meanwhile, compared to the racially resentful, I find that fewer white Americans possess high levels of white identity, but the percentages who do are still notable. Among

¹³ The measure of white consciousness developed by Jardina and employed by scholars like Sides et al. (2018) has the benefit of being comprised of several survey questions. However, many of the items used to construct the consciousness measure arguably incorporate in-group and out-group attitudes. For instance, one item asks respondents whether they think whites are being denied jobs because employers are hiring minorities instead. Thus, using them would not provide as clean of a test of the relationship between whites' in-group and out-group racial attitudes as proposed here.

¹⁴ There are other measures of group solidarity, including linked fate. Dawson (2009) finds that white linked fate is unrelated to identity as conceived here. In fact, it is associated with more *liberal* positions on racialized policies. Furthermore, other work argues that linked fate may not mean the same thing for non-blacks as it does for blacks (Hochschild and Weaver 2015; Sanchez and Vargas 2016). Thus, I do not use the linked fate measure in analysis.

¹⁵ Because most of the ANES studies measure white identity and vote choice or candidate evaluations on the same survey waves, I account for the possibility that the measurement of white identity is influenced by these other items by also replicating the results from my 2016 analysis using a two-wave study fielded by YouGov in which white identity was measured on wave 1 and vote choice was measured on wave 2.

¹⁶ The distributions of racial resentment and white identity across the four surveys can be found in Online Appendix Fig. A1 and Table A1, respectively.

respondents in three of the surveys, between 30 and 35% of whites indicate that their racial identity is very if not extremely important to them.

I also find that the correlation between racial resentment and white racial identity is fairly low. In the 2012 ANES, the Pearson's r coefficient is .13 ($p=.00$). In the 2016 ANES Pilot, the correlation is .19 ($p=.00$), and in the 2016 ANES Timer Series study it is 0.21 ($p=.00$). These constructs are related, but the size of the correlation coefficient suggests they are far from capturing the same construct or set of latent attitudes. In fact, the weak correlations lead to an important conclusion: Whites who are racially resentful and whites high on racial solidarity are not one in the same, even if these whites may ultimately possess similar political preferences. Thus, politicians who appeal to white out-group hostility and white in-group solidarity may be targeting two distinct set of voters.

In the models that follow, predicting vote choice and candidate evaluations, I control for party identification, measured with the standard seven-point scale ranging from strong Democrat to strong Republican. I also account for employment status (measured as a dummy variable with "1" indicating the respondent was unemployed) and personal economic evaluations (using the ANES item that asks respondents whether their family was doing better or worse economically than a year ago) in the event that more economically vulnerable individuals may have been more or less likely to support either Obama or Trump. In keeping with prior work, I also control for evaluations of the national economy (Kinder and Kiewiet 1981), education level, age, and gender. Furthermore, in the 2012 ANES, I include a control variable for respondents who were interviewed by a person of color to account for any race-of-interviewer effects with respect to levels of white identity among 2012 ANES respondents.¹⁷ All variables in the models are recoded to range from 0 to 1.

Results

Racial Attitudes and the 2012 Election

I turn first to examining the extent to which racial resentment and white identity were brought to bear on support for Barack Obama using the 2012 ANES. I estimate a logit model in which the dependent variable is reported vote choice, with a "0" indicating a vote for Republican candidate Mitt Romney, and a "1" indicating a vote for Obama. The results of the logit model predicting vote choice are presented in Fig. 1, which illustrates the size, direction, and statistical significance of the logistic regression coefficients.¹⁸ We can see that as is usually the case, party identity was one of the most powerful factors shaping vote choice, with Republicans far more likely to vote for Romney and Democrats far more likely to vote for Obama. Employment status was also tied to vote choice in 2012 as well, with unemployed

¹⁷ A race-of-interviewer variable was not available for the 2016 ANES Time Series study at the time of this analysis.

¹⁸ Results from the model are presented in table form in Online Appendix Table A2.

whites favoring Obama over Romney. Personal financial evaluations, however, mattered little. To the extent that economic assessments were significantly associated with vote choice, it was with respect to national evaluations of the economy. Voters with more negative views about the current state of the economy were far less likely to report voting for Obama. Finally, education, age, and gender were not significantly associated with vote choice.

As previous work has demonstrated, racial resentment was also strongly linked to vote choice in 2012, with more racially resentful whites significantly less likely to vote for Obama (Kam and Kinder 2012; Kinder and Dale-Riddle 2012; Tesler and Sears 2010).¹⁹ But Fig. 1 also tells us something new about the attitudes voters brought to bear in 2012. Even after considering the usual suspects in a model of vote choice and controlling for racial animus, white racial identity also mattered. Whites with higher levels of racial identity were much less likely to vote for Obama and far more likely to vote for Romney.

In Fig. 2, we can get a sense of the magnitude of the effects of both racial resentment and white identity on the probability of voting for Obama over Romney. The left panel in the figure presents the predicted probability of voting for Obama at each level of white identity, holding all other variables in the model constant at their mean and gender constant at female. We can see that at the lowest level of white identity (respondents who report that their identity is not at all important to them), the predicted probability of voting for Obama is around 50%. At the highest level of white identity, the probability drops to around just 28%—a 23 percentage point decline.

The effect of moving from the highest to the lowest level of racial resentment is even more dramatic. Among the most racially sympathetic whites—those with a racial resentment score of zero—the probability of voting for Obama is approximately 75%. But at the highest level of resentment, the probability declines to just 21%—a 54 percentage point difference. The change in the predicted probability of voting for Obama is, quite obviously, much greater moving from the highest to lowest level of resentment compared to the difference in voting probability comparing those low and high on white identity. Nevertheless, the important takeaway from the analysis here is that *both* racial resentment and white identity had notable and independent effects on vote choice in 2012. The decision to vote for Romney over Obama was strongly and significantly associated with not only whites' sense of racial hostility, but also with a sense of solidarity for their racial group. What is

¹⁹ Following Kinder and Kalmoe (2017), I do not include political ideology in my main model specification given concerns that ideology often does not capture a meaningful set of attitudes. In Online Appendix Table A2, however, I show that my results are robust to controlling for ideology. I also demonstrate that the effects of white identity on vote choice are robust to controlling for other racial out-group attitudes, including the traditional anti-black stereotype index (as well as evaluations of two other salient racial and ethnic out-groups—Hispanics and Muslims—captured using 101-point thermometer items). Furthermore, I show that the results hold even after controlling for attitudes toward immigration—an issue that has become central to partisan politics in recent years, and which was deeply tied to Trump support (Abrajano and Hajnal 2015; Reny et al. 2019).

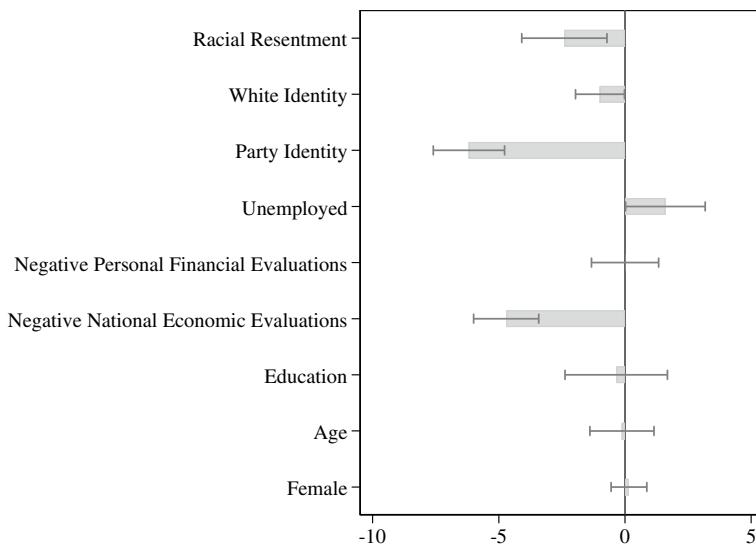


Fig. 1 The factors associated with presidential vote choice in 2012. Bars represent coefficients from a logistic regression in which higher values indicate a vote for Obama as opposed to a vote for Romney. *Source* 2012 ANES

more, both factors were significantly related to vote choice even after controlling for partisanship, economic evaluations, and other demographic characteristics.

The 2016 Presidential Primaries

Next, I examine the effect of white racial attitudes in the 2016 presidential primary contest. The 2016 ANES Pilot study was conducted in January of 2016 during the primary season before Trump or Clinton won the party nominations. The benefit of turning to these data is that I can compare the effect of racial attitudes among a fuller range of presidential candidates both within and across political parties. Recall that above, I argued that whites should not necessarily bring their racial attitudes to bear on their evaluations of all political candidates, but rather those that activate these attitudes via their political messaging. In the 2016 presidential contest, Trump, I hypothesized, likely appealed to whites concerned about their in-group by way of his focus on immigration and support for social welfare policies tied to whiteness. But Trump was also notably disparaging of racial and ethnic minorities during his campaign, and years before he even ran for president, he notoriously criticized Barack Obama, helping to launch the “birther movement,” a racialized attack in which people questioned Obama’s place of birth and therefore his eligibility to be president (Jardina and Traugott 2019; Pasek et al. 2015).²⁰ Thus, we should also

²⁰ The New York Times compiled a list of Trump’s racist rhetoric and behavior: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/01/15/opinion/leonhardt-trump-racist.html>.

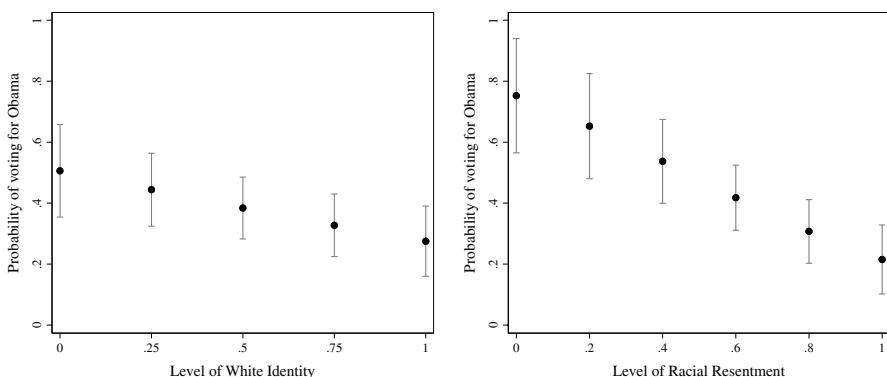


Fig. 2 Predicted vote choice in 2012 by white identity and racial resentment. Points represent the predicted probability of voting for Obama (over Romney) at each level of either white identity or racial resentment, holding all other variables in the model at their means and gender constant at female. Lines represent the 95% confidence intervals. Non-Hispanic whites only. Data are weighted. *Source* 2012 ANES (face-to-face)

expect to find a significant relationship between whites' out-group racial hostilities and their evaluations of Trump.

What might we expect to find when it comes to racial attitudes and the other 2016 presidential candidates? Over the course of her political career, Hillary Clinton advocated for the expansion of Social Security and Medicare, and her promises to protect these programs were central to her 2016 presidential campaign.²¹ We may therefore find that white in-group attitudes were positively associated with support for Clinton in the 2016 primaries. What about the other Democratic front-runner, Bernie Sanders? Some journalists speculated that Sanders successfully tapped into much of the same disenchantment, status-threat, and aggrievement among whites as Trump (John 2016). Furthermore, like Clinton, Sanders also advocated for expanding Social Security. Thus, we might find that whites with higher levels of racial identity evaluated Sanders more favorably as well. On the Republican side, the other presidential front-runners, Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz, were not notable in the extent to which they likely appealed to whites' in-group sentiments.²² Neither focused on immigration to the extent that Trump did, and consistent with the traditional Republican Party platform, they proposed efforts to either cut or privatize Social Security.²³

²¹ In August of 2016, Forbes magazine noted that Clinton and Trump both promised to protect Social Security and Medicare <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nextavenue/2016/08/08/social-security-where-clinton-and-trump-stand/#57c7c7e31904>.

²² Some might wonder whether Cruz and Rubio, by way of their Hispanic ethnicity, might activate whites' negative racial attitudes. This hypothesis is certainly possible, but both candidates notoriously down-play their ethnicity, meaning it might not have been especially salient to most voters.

²³ In 2016, NPR published an article outlining Trump, Rubio, and Cruz's positions on Social Security at <https://www.npr.org/2016/03/12/470130961/fact-check-republican-candidates-on-keeping-or-changing-social-security>.

Prior work by Tesler (2016) provides clear expectations for the relationship between whites' out-group racial animus and candidate evaluations. According to his analysis, in the post-Obama era, racial resentment has become tightly linked to whites' partisan preferences, meaning that whites with higher levels of racial resentment are more supportive of Republican candidates and less supportive of Democratic ones. Thus, we would expect racial resentment to predict more positive feelings toward Trump, Rubio, and Cruz and more negative attitudes toward Clinton and Sanders.

The results in Table 1 illustrate the relationship between white racial resentment, white racial identity, and evaluations of the front-running presidential primary candidates.²⁴ Each row represents the results of an OLS regression in which evaluations of each candidate are regressed on racial resentment, white identity, and the same control variables employed in the 2012 analysis (with the exception of personal economic evaluations, which were not measured on the 2016 Pilot study). Evaluations of the respective candidates are measured with a feeling thermometer, ranging from zero to one hundred, with values above 50 indicating positive attitudes toward the candidates, and values below 50 indicating colder or more negative attitudes.

As we would expect, many of the factors that traditionally predict candidate evaluations were significantly associated with whites' opinions toward the presidential candidates in early 2016. Partisan attachments were, of course, most strongly tied to opinions toward each of the candidates. And those who evaluated the national economy more negatively were more likely to rebuke the Democratic candidates, likely because their party had held the presidency for the previous 8 years. Other demographic factors were only moderately, and often inconsistently, related to evaluations.

What stands out in Table 1 is the extent to which whites' racial hostilities were indicative of their feelings toward each of the candidates. Racial resentment is consistently a strong and significant predictor of presidential candidate evaluations in the contemporary U.S. In each case, racial resentment is tied to either more negative feelings toward the Democratic candidates or to more positive feelings toward the Republican candidates. Evaluations of Trump seem to have been especially buoyed by whites' racial hostilities; moving from the lowest level of racial resentment to the highest is tied to a 40-point positive bump in Trump's thermometer ratings.

From the table, we can also see that whites' in-group attitudes were associated with evaluations of Clinton in early 2016. While whites' out-group racial attitudes were tied to more *negative* evaluations of Clinton, their more positive in-group attitudes were significantly associated with *positive* evaluations of Clinton. Interestingly, white identity was not at all tied to whites' feelings toward Sanders, nor toward Cruz and Rubio. White identity was, however, as expected, significantly tied

²⁴ Online Appendix Tables A3.1–A3.5 demonstrate the model's robustness to inclusion of ideology and other out-group attitudes. The one exception is that the inclusion of the anti-Black stereotype index attenuates the relationship between white ID and Trump evaluations, but this effect is not surprising given that prior work has shown that the stereotype index is itself comprised of both in-group and out-group evaluations (Jardina 2019a, b).

Table 1 Evaluations of leading presidential candidates in 2016

	Clinton FT	Sanders FT	Trump FT	Cruz FT	Rubio FT
Racial resentment	– 0.163*** (0.051)	– 0.370*** (0.047)	0.432*** (0.053)	0.329*** (0.047)	0.173*** (0.042)
White identity	0.105*** (0.029)	– 0.029 (0.027)	0.082** (0.037)	– 0.033 (0.031)	– 0.024 (0.030)
Party identification	– 0.473*** (0.039)	– 0.310*** (0.035)	0.339*** (0.046)	0.364*** (0.038)	0.351*** (0.036)
Unemployed	– 0.007 (0.046)	– 0.019 (0.047)	0.028 (0.046)	– 0.089* (0.049)	– 0.071 (0.044)
Negative national economic evaluations	– 0.371 *** (0.045)	– 0.231*** (0.047)	0.097* (0.058)	0.058 (0.051)	0.003 (0.049)
Education	– 0.022 (0.034)	– 0.065* (0.034)	0.003 (0.042)	0.054 (0.035)	0.070** (0.034)
Age	0.109*** (0.049)	– 0.062 (0.051)	0.139** (0.057)	– 0.036 (0.044)	– 0.002 (0.046)
Female	0.036* (0.022)	0.020 (0.021)	– 0.048* (0.025)	– 0.019 (0.021)	0.006 (0.020)
Constant	0.793*** (0.046)	1.055*** (0.044)	– 0.150*** (0.044)	0.003 (0.043)	0.131*** (0.041)
Observations	839	833	839	835	830
R-squared	0.539	0.466	0.416	0.397	0.299

Source 2016 ANES Pilot Study

Table entries are OLS coefficients. Standard errors in parentheses. All variables in model coded to range from zero to one. Party identification is coded such that higher values indicate stronger identification with Republican party and lower values indicate stronger identification with Democratic Party. Non-Hispanic whites only. Data are weighted

***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.1, two-tailed

to more positive evaluations of Trump. A one-unit change in levels of white identity was associated with an eight-point increase in more positive feelings toward Trump. In short, not all presidential candidates activate white identity, but the singular relationship between Trump support and racial in-group attitudes suggests that politicians with particular policy positions and messaging can uniquely appeal to this subset of voters.

The 2016 ANES Pilot allows us to consider the relationship between whites' racial attitudes and their candidate evaluations from another perspective. Respondents were asked, regardless of whether they intended to vote in the Republican primary that year, which Republican candidate they most preferred. To what extent were racial attitudes associated with a preference for Trump over the other Republican candidates?²⁵ Figure 3 provides an answer. The charts illustrate the predicted probability of preferring Trump over the other Republicans by levels of white identity and racial resentment, respectively.²⁶ Both types of racial attitudes are strongly and significantly linked to a preference for Trump. Moving from the lowest level of white identity to the highest, the predicted probability of preferring Trump changes from .13 to .38. The effect is even more dramatic when it comes to racial resentment. At the lowest level of resentment, the predicted probability of preferring Trump is just .05. At the highest level of resentment, the probability leaps to .43. In short, whites' inclination to support Trump over other Republicans candidates was highly linked with *both* their in-group and out-group racial attitudes.

The 2016 Presidential Election

The 2016 ANES Pilot study provided an opportunity to examine the relationship between whites' racial attitudes and their candidate evaluations early in the 2016 presidential race, well before the field had been narrowed to just two political candidates. In this next analysis, I consider the extent to which whites' in-group and out-group racial sentiments were associated with how they chose to vote in 2016, once their options were essentially limited to the two major party candidates, Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton.

I again model vote choice, employing the same set of controls as in the previous analyses, but this time among respondents in the 2016 ANES Time Series Study, conducted just before and after the general election in November of 2016. The dependent variable in this analysis is coded as "1" if respondents reported voting for Trump and "0" if they reported voting for Clinton. The results are presented in Fig. 4.²⁷ What is immediately obvious is that while white racial resentment was powerfully associated with voting for Trump over Clinton in 2016, white racial

²⁵ Respondents were asked whether they preferred Jeb Bush, Ben Carson, Chris Christie, Ted Cruz, Carly Fiorina, John Kasich, Rand Paul, Marco Rubio, Donald Trump, another candidate, or none.

²⁶ Appendix Table A4 presents the full estimation results and demonstrates the robustness of these results to including ideology, attitudes toward immigrants, and other measures of racial out-group attitudes.

²⁷ Results of the full model are presented in appendix Table A5, which also demonstrates the robustness of the results to controls for ideology, other out-group attitudes, and immigration opinion.

identity was not. Indeed, the results of the model suggest that by the general election, white voters were primarily influenced by the same fundamental factors that seem to generally dominate vote choice across presidential elections (Sides et al. 2018): their racial out-group attitudes, their partisan identities, and their evaluations of the national economy. These three factors were by far the most powerfully associated with vote choice, with more racially resentful voters, Republicans, and those with more negative assessments of the national economy indicating that they voted for Trump.²⁸

White identity appears to have demonstrated its strongest association with candidate preference during the primary process and before the general election, when candidates were perhaps more difficult to differentiate. The tepid relationship observed by the 2016 general election may be because white identifiers felt reassured by Trump's success—particularly in the wake of any threat they may have felt Obama presented—and believed he would protect their group's privileges. Alternatively, Jardina et al. (2019) demonstrate that for the first time since at least 2010, levels of white identity declined notably after the 2016 election—a phenomenon they illustrate was a backlash to Trump and the overtly negative characterizations of white identity in the media, particularly surrounding some high-profile coverage of white nationalist rallies. The distribution of white identity, provided in Online Appendix Table A2, reflects this decline, which likely contributed to a more tenuous relationship between white identity and presidential evaluations after the 2016 election.

Racial Attitudes in the Trump Era

Two years into Trump's presidency, with race and immigration enduring as salient components of Trump's political agenda, one may wonder about the extent to which white racial attitudes remained connected to evaluations of Trump. The 2018 ANES Pilot study allows me to examine these relationships. I model both responses to a question gauging approval of how Trump is handling his job as president and affective evaluations of Trump, captured with a feeling thermometer, as a function of racial resentment, white identity, partisanship, employment status, national economic evaluations, education, age, and gender.²⁹

The results, presented in Table 2, are consistent with those from the 2016 ANES Time series analysis. Racial resentment remains a strong predictor of Trump support; higher levels are associated with greater presidential approval ratings and more positive feelings toward Trump. White identity, however, is no longer significantly

²⁸ I replicated these results using a two-wave panel study fielded by the survey firm YouGov. Wave 1 was fielded in October 2016, before the presidential election, and wave 2 was fielded after the election in November of 2016. White identity was measured on wave 1, and candidate evaluations were measured on wave 2. The results, presented in appendix Table A6, replicate the ANES results presented here, and provide confirmation that we can be confident that levels of white identity were not likely influenced by other survey questions measured on the same wave of the ANES studies.

²⁹ Robustness checks are provided in appendix Table A7. Racial stereotype items were not available on 2018 ANES Pilot Study.

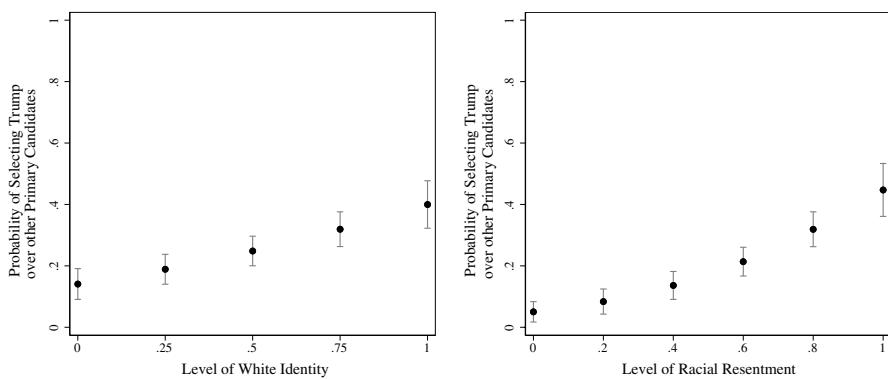


Fig. 3 Predicted probability of preferring trump over other Republican primary candidates in 2016. Points represent the predicted probability of preferring Trump over any other Republican primary candidate at each level of either white identity or racial resentment, holding all other variables in the model at their means and gender constant at female. Lines represent the 95% confidence intervals. Non-Hispanic whites only. Data are weighted. *Source* 2016 ANES Pilot Study

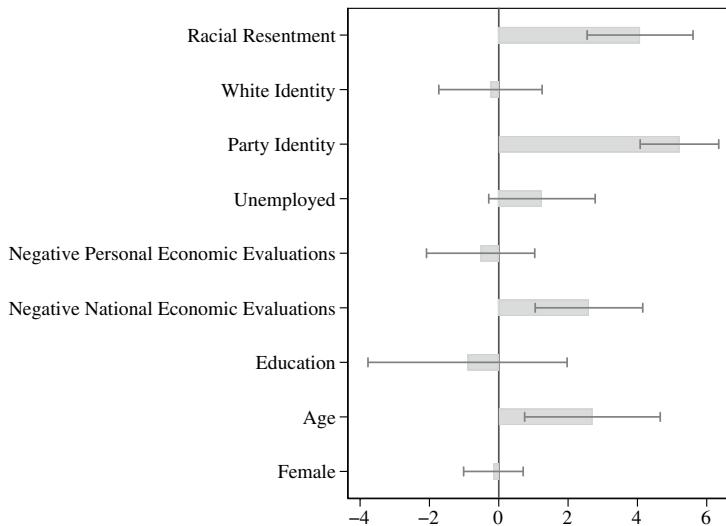


Fig. 4 The factors associated with presidential vote choice in 2016. Bars represent coefficients from a logistic regression in which higher values indicate a vote for Trump as opposed to Clinton. Non-Hispanic whites only. Data are weighted. *Source* 2016 ANES (face-to-face)

Table 2 Evaluations of President Donald Trump in 2018

	Trump approval	Trump feeling thermometer
Racial resentment	0.332*** (0.027)	0.339*** (0.028)
White identity	– 0.003 (0.019)	– 0.007 (0.021)
Party ID	0.422*** (0.028)	0.420*** (0.028)
Unemployed	– 0.059** (0.026)	– 0.040 (0.025)
Negative national economic evaluations	– 0.522*** (0.028)	– 0.498*** (0.029)
Education	– 0.053** (0.021)	– 0.046** (0.022)
Age	– 0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Female	– 0.027** (0.012)	– 0.032*** (0.012)
Constant	0.669*** (0.035)	0.282*** (0.035)
Observations	1851	1843
R-squared	0.749	0.739

Source 2018 ANES Pilot Study

Table entries are OLS coefficients. Standard errors in parentheses. All variables in model coded to range from zero to one. Party identification is coded such that higher values indicate stronger identification with Republican party and lower values indicate stronger identification with Democratic Party. Non-Hispanic whites only. Data are weighted

***p < 0.01, **p < 0.05, two-tailed

tied to attitudes toward Trump. Its effect is dwarfed by racial out-group attitudes, partisanship, economic evaluations, education, and gender.

Discussion

Taken together, the results here suggest that both whites' in-group and out-group racial attitudes have been important elements in contemporary presidential elections. Both were significantly associated with opposition to Obama in 2012 and with a preference for Trump in 2016. There are a few caveats to consider given the limitations of these analyses, however. For one, as I mentioned above, the measure of white racial identity employed here is limited to a single survey item, one that is likely much nosier than the four-item scale that comprises the racial resentment measure. Thus, we should be somewhat hesitant to draw firm conclusions about the magnitude of the effect of white racial identity relative to racial resentment in these models.

We might also be somewhat skeptical about the insignificant relationship between white racial identity and vote choice in 2016. The notable drop in levels of white identity, potentially because of social desirability effects in the wake of critical news coverage around white identity politics and Trump support, might have obscured an effect. Interestingly, however, somewhat lower levels of white identity appear to have persisted well into 2018, and as a result, racial out-group attitudes seem more persistently tied to Trump support than white in-group attitudes.

Nevertheless, the results suggest that two independent white racial attitudes matter in contemporary U.S. electoral politics. White out-group racial resentment is consistently and powerfully linked to evaluations of presidential candidates. White identity has also played an important role in electoral politics, depressing support for Obama and bolstering Trump's success early in his presidential run. Its effect with respect to support for Trump, by 2018, has been diminished by other factors, but that should not lead us to conclude that the larger effect of white identity on political preferences has run its course. White identity remains strongly tied to issues like immigration and may therefore be indirectly influencing Trump support.³⁰ It may also once again help differentiate candidates in the next presidential election if relevant issues like immigration become flashpoints during the campaigns. In short, we should take the changing influence of white identity as a sign that its effects can be contingent, contextual, and dynamic. We should, therefore, continue to study its political effects.

Conclusion

These results lend further support for the notion that whites' racial attitudes are a central feature of American partisan politics. But what we learn from the analysis is that white racial attitudes can come in two distinct forms—in-group and out-group attitudes. Both of these attitudes can be brought to bear on candidate evaluations, and both have clearly mattered, independent of one another, in recent presidential elections. In 2012, racially resentful whites and whites with higher levels of white racial identity were far less likely to vote for Obama and far more likely to support Romney, even after accounting for party identity, national economic evaluations, and demographic characteristics. The centrality of these attitudes with respect to the electoral preferences and behavior of whites persisted into 2016. Racially resentful and high white identifiers were drawn to Donald Trump, a political figure whose messages seem targeted at both groups.

Keeping in mind the noted methodological considerations, it is important to observe that the relationship between racial resentment and candidate evaluations was stronger than between white racial identity and evaluations. White in-group identity also does not appear to be as consistently linked to candidate evaluations as racial resentment. Yet the fact that this in-group solidarity seems to be tied to politicians who appealed to in-group sentiments, either because of their own racial identities, or because of explicit attempts to cater to whites as a group, suggests that as more racially diverse political candidates run for office, and as politicians attempt to replicate and hone Trump's political strategy, we may very well observe a stronger relationship between white in-group attitudes and candidate evaluations in the future. At the same time, the attenuated relationship between white identity and Trump evaluations also suggests that the effect of this identity can be dampened, perhaps by political context and social desirability concerns.

³⁰ Analysis available upon request.

It is also important to keep in mind that in this article, I am specifically interested in testing the independent role of in-group favoritism from out-group derogation. White identity politics, however, is not always purely about in-group attitudes divorced from any out-group orientations. The term, construed more broadly, captures white Americans' desire to protect their group's power, privilege, and status from encroaching out-groups. White identity politics, therefore, can also consist of a sense of *white consciousness*, which is comprised of both a psychological attachment to one's group coupled with the belief that whites are losing out relative to racial and ethnic minorities. White consciousness, therefore, is a concept that takes both in-group and out-group attitudes into account, albeit in a way that is still distinct from conceptions of racial prejudice, like racial resentment. Because in the analysis here I am specifically interested in compares the distinct electoral role of whites' in-group and out-group attitudes, I do not examine the effect of consciousness. Prior work demonstrates that consciousness was strongly associated with a preference for Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election, even after controlling for racial resentment (Jardina 2019a, b).

Revising our Understanding of White Racial Attitudes

One might wonder whether examining white in-group racial attitudes and white out-group attitudes amounts to a distinction without a difference. Indeed, when it comes to candidate evaluations, both seem somewhat likely to pull voters in a similar direction. There are, however, several profoundly significant reasons why we ought to be aware of the potential political power of both types of racial attitudes. For one, the correlation between white racial identity and white racial resentment is relatively small, meaning that there are many racially resentful whites who do not identify with their racial group, and many white identifiers who are not particularly racially resentful. This finding lends further support for the notion that out-group animus and in-group favoritism are not simply different sides of the same coin. When both these constructs are included in a model of vote choice or candidate evaluations, the presence of one does not always eliminate the influence of the other. Thus, when politicians, like Trump, make appeals to either whites' racial hostilities, or whites' sense of racial solidarity—or both—they can be influencing two potentially different sets of white voters.

Put differently, the results suggest that in the contemporary U.S., race matters now in at least two ways, and there are two independent forces at play in electoral politics. The first is the animus that some whites hold toward racial and ethnic minorities, and the second is the desire of some whites to protect their racial group and to maintain whites' power and privileges. The results presented here suggest that white racial resentment is still the more powerful force in American electoral politics, but as the U.S. becomes more racially diverse, and if candidates choose to adopt the political strategies employed by politicians like Trump, we might find that white identity is increasingly activated among the white electorate. In other words, the influence of white racial in-group attitudes need not be limited to the specific circumstances of Obama and Trump. Politicians invoking concerns about immigration,

racial diversity, and the embattled or imperiled status of whites may activate these sentiments to their advantage among white voters in future elections.

These results also suggest a need to revise the dominant and paradigmatic understanding of the nature and role of white racial attitudes in contemporary politics. The theory of symbolic politics has arguably reigned as the central theoretical account of the relationship between whites' racial attitudes and their political preferences. Accordingly, we have come to understand whites' preferences on policies and candidates, to the extent they are racialized, as a result of learned, socialized attitudes—attitudes that can potentially be changed through education, or via counterstereotypic appeals. But the results here, and the work of others examining the prevalence and power of whites' in-group attitudes and identities, suggest that we also need to turn to and build off theories of intergroup dynamics—ones that pay more attention to hierarchy and to the psychological features of group dynamics. In short, a more full and accurate understanding of the psychology of white racial attitudes is one that takes both in-group and out-group attitudes into account.

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