

Introduction to the American Political Process

Class 24: White Identity, Rural Politics, and the Rise of Populist Movements

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May 3, 2022

MIT

1. Readings

Cramer, *The Politics of Resentment*

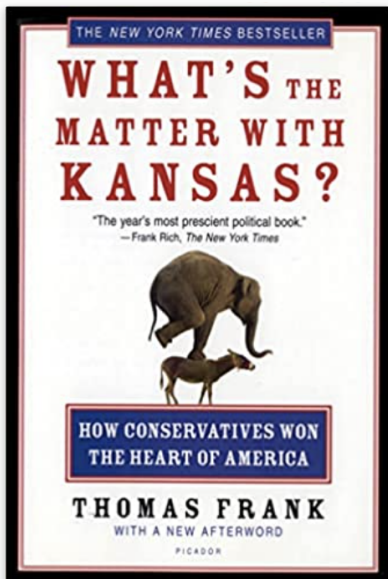
Jardina, *White Identity Politics*

Readings

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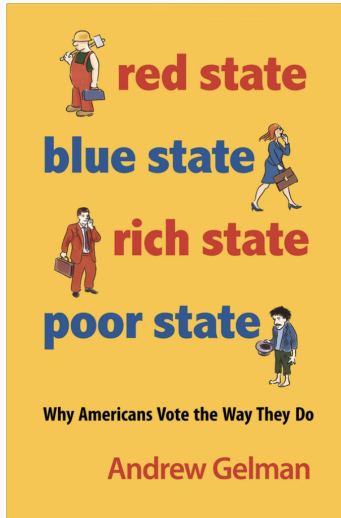
Cramer, *The Politics of Resentment*

Why Don't Poorer (White) Americans Support Redistribution?



Some Answers

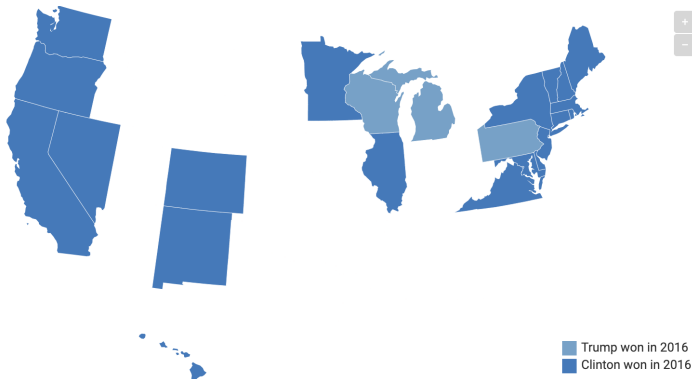
1. They do.



Or Do They?

Solidly blue states from 1992 to 2020; Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania went Trump in 2016.

The Blue Wall



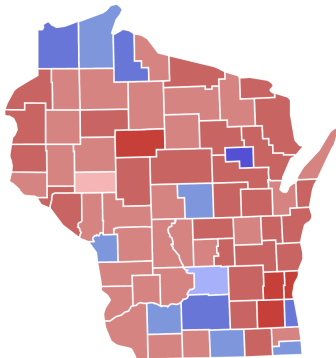
Some Answers

2. Recall *Follow the Leader* (Lenz): partisanship as social identity
→ adoption of that party's viewpoints
3. Others?

The Walker Gubernatorial Recall Election (2012)

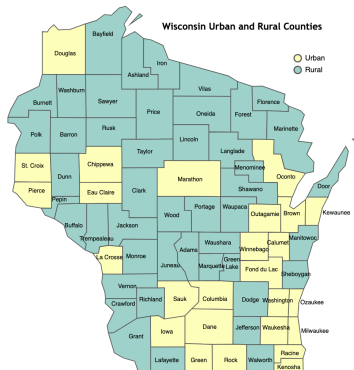
- Spurred by Walker's curtailing of collective bargaining rights for state employees
- Walker retained office by a 3-point margin
- Turnout: 57.8 percent, highest for a gubernatorial election not on a presidential ballot in Wisconsin history

The Walker Gubernatorial Recall Election (2012)



County results

Walker: 40–50% 50–60% 60–70% 70–80%
Barrett: 40–50% 50–60% 60–70% 70–80%



Rural Consciousness

Cramer argues that **rural consciousness** explains these patterns, and is a powerful force in contemporary U.S. politics.

Rural consciousness includes:

1. a belief that rural areas are ignored by decision makers
2. a perception that rural areas do not get their fair share of resources
3. a sense that rural folks have fundamentally distinct values and lifestyles, which are misunderstood and disrespected by urban folks
4. resentment directed toward: urban elites + racial minorities + government

From social psychology, we learn that people with a political group consciousness:

1. Prefer their in-group
2. Are dissatisfied with group status/believe that group members are not getting fair treatment
3. Perceive the state of affairs as the product of systematic decisions, not just chance or individual behavior

Discussion

1. What is the role of **place** and **geography** in Cramer's account and how does it differ from others we've encountered in this class (e.g. Rodden's *Why Cities Lose*)?
2. What is the political phenomenon of **resentment**? What are its core features?
3. What does Cramer add to our understanding of American politics that is missed by race and class alone?

Readings

Jardina, *White Identity Politics*

White Identity

For the most part, scholars have argued that racial solidarity among whites has been invisible and politically inconsequential. Whites, by nature of their dominant status and numerical majority, have largely been able to take their race for granted. Sears and Savalei (2006) describe this position well:

In general, whites remain dominant in American society — numerically, socially, economically, and politically — and overt, explicitly racial conflict is now relatively rare. As a result, whites' whiteness is usually likely to be no more noteworthy to them than is breathing the air around them. White group consciousness is therefore not likely to be a major force in whites' political attitudes today.

From out-group prejudice to in-group solidarity

Jardina argues that white identity is not the same as:

- White supremacy, discrimination against racial minorities
- (White) working class consciousness

White identity can be mobilized by:

- Challenge to white numerical majority
- Threat to white dominance in social and political institutions

Measuring White Racial Solidarity

White Identity

- How important is being white to your identity?
- To what extent do you feel that white people in this country have a lot to be proud of?
- How much would you say that whites in this country have a lot in common with one another?

White Consciousness

- How likely is it that many whites are unable to find a job because employers are hiring minorities instead?
- How important is it that whites work together to change laws that are unfair to whites?

Measuring White Identity

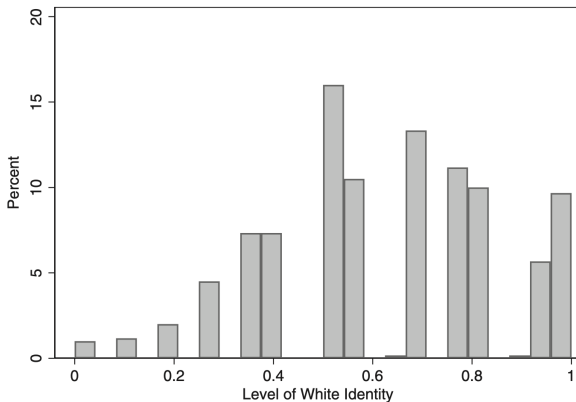


Figure 3.1 The Distribution of the White Identity Scale

The graph shows frequency of responses across range of three-item white identity scale, which is coded to range from zero to one, with higher values indicating higher levels of group identity. Mean of white identity=0.62.

Source: 2016 YouGov.

Measuring White Consciousness

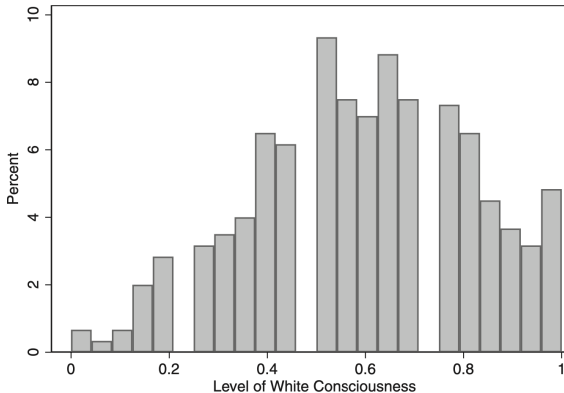


Figure 3.2 The Distribution of White Racial Consciousness

The graph shows frequency of responses across range of five-item white consciousness scale, which is coded to range from zero to one, with higher values indicating higher levels of group consciousness. Mean of White Consciousness=0.59.

Source: YouGov 2016

Correlates of White Identity

Table 4.1 *The Relationship between White Identity and Age, Gender, and Education*

	ANES 2012 (Face-to-face)			ANES 2016 (Web)		
	Low ID	High ID	All whites	Low ID	High ID	All whites
Age (mean)	47 years	51 years	50 years	48 years	52 years	49 years
Male	54%	43%	48%	49%	44%	48%
Female	46%	57%	52%	51%	56%	52%
High school graduate (only)	35%	42%	37%	21%	40%	28%
College graduate	34%	29%	33%	38%	27%	34%
No college	65%	71%	67%	62%	73%	66%

Note: Percentages are rounded. Data are weighted.

Source: 2012 ANES, 2016 ANES.

Correlates of White Identity

Table 4.2 *The Relationship between White Identity and Geographic Context*

	ANES 2012 (%) (Face-to-face)			ANES 2016 (%) (Web)		
	Low ID	High ID	All whites	Low ID	High ID	All whites
“Confederate” South	24	29	27	20	23	21
Deep South	4	10	6	7	9	7
Northeast	15	21	20	18	19	19
North central	28	27	28	–	–	–
South	30	33	32	25	31	27
West	26	18	20	25	19	23
Rural	16	28	20	–	–	–

Note: Percentages are rounded. Data are weighted.

Source: 2012 ANES, 2016 ANES.

Table 4.5 *The Relationship between White Identity and Partisanship and Political Ideology*

	ANES 2012 (%) (Face-to-face)			ANES 2016 (%) (Web)		
	Low ID	High ID	All whites	Low ID	High ID	All whites
Democrat	43	31	39	44	33	39
Republican	50	55	52	41	55	47
Independent	7	14	9	15	12	14
Liberal	40	28	34	34	24	29
Conservative	51	57	54	41	50	45

Note: Percentages are rounded. Data are weighted.

Source: 2012 ANES, 2016 ANES.

Correlates of White Identity

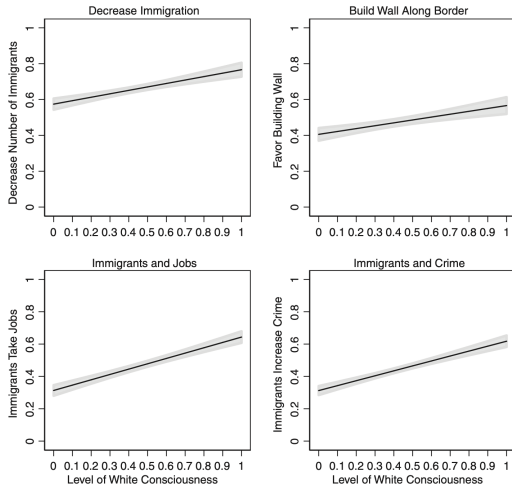


Figure 6.4 The Effect of White Consciousness on Immigration Opinion

Correlates of White Identity

However, people with strong attachment to white identity **do not** necessarily oppose programs that benefit minorities (e.g. affirmative action).

They generally **do** support the advancement of in-group interests:

- Social Security and Medicare
- Protection of domestic jobs
- White-identifying political candidates (Romney, Trump)

Discussion

- Can Jardina's work and Cramer's work be understood as part of the same phenomenon, or are there contradictions between the two?
- Returning to the role of agency discussed last class: are these stories about (deterministic) social psychology? Political entrepreneurs? Rational choices?
- Do these frameworks fail to account for any important facts on the ground?