

## **Donald Trump and the Rise of White Identity Politics**

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### **Abstract:**

Ingroup identification is generally less prevalent and politically potent for white Americans than it is for other racial groups. We argue, however, that presidential candidates who appeal to racial threats posed to whites from non-whites, such as Donald Trump in 2016, Pat Buchanan in 1996, and George Wallace in 1968, should activate the dormant political power of white consciousness. We show that white consciousness had a significantly stronger impact on evaluations of Trump than on evaluations of eighteen other political figures in two different 2016 surveys. Furthermore, white consciousness was powerfully associated with support for Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential primaries—much more so than it was for Mitt Romney in 2012. We also show that white consciousness was more strongly associated with vote choice in the 2016 general election than in prior elections and more strongly associated with support for Donald Trump against Hillary Clinton than it was when other Republican candidates were pitted against Clinton in trial heats. Finally, we show that George Wallace’s and Pat Buchanan’s prior presidential campaigns also activated white identity. These results suggest that white consciousness can be a potent force in mass political behavior, and could foreshadow a rising white identity politics in the Age of Trump.

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*“They are trying to take away our history and our heritage.”*  
- Donald Trump, August 22, 2017

It was six months into his presidency, and Donald Trump’s White House was in turmoil. Trump was publicly feuding with his attorney general for recusing himself from the Justice Department’s investigation into Russian meddling in the 2016 election. Trump was also criticizing Republican congressional leaders for not repealing Obamacare. There was so much infighting and turnover among his senior staff that the right-leaning *New York Post* compared the White House to the reality show “Survivor.” And Trump was less popular than any president in the history of modern polling had been at this early stage in his presidency.

Amidst the chaos and unpopularity, Donald Trump has turned again and again to a major theme of his 2016 presidential campaign: white identity politics. Trump has regularly emphasized cultural, economic, and physical threats posed to whites from non-whites. In just one month’s time in the summer of 2017, he gave a speech to law enforcement about the immediate threat to public safety posed by the immigrant gang, MS-13, which was harshly criticized by civil rights groups and the Congressional Black Caucus for using “racially coded” language and advocating police brutality. He announced his support for sweeping immigration reform that would dramatically decrease the number of legal immigrants to the United States by prioritizing high skills and English language ability over family reunification. On the same day, it was reported that the Trump administration was preparing to redirect resources of the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division to investigating and suing universities over affirmative action admissions policies deemed to discriminate against whites. Then Trump defended marchers in a white supremacist rally turned violent for protesting the removal of what he called “a very, very important statue” of Robert E. Lee in Charlottesville —a confederate statue whose removal Trump described as “changing history...changing culture.” President Trump would later defend himself against the media’s criticism of those remarks, saying at an August rally in Arizona that “they are trying to take away our history and our heritage.”

In this paper, we argue that such appeals to physical, material, and cultural threats to whites in the 2016 campaign should have made white identity strongly associated with support for Donald Trump. We show that in 2016 white consciousness was more strongly associated

with evaluations of Trump than evaluations of fifteen other political figures. We show that white consciousness was powerfully associated with support for Trump in the 2016 presidential primaries—much more so than it was for Mitt Romney in 2012. We also show that white consciousness was more strongly associated with vote choice in the 2016 general election than in prior elections and more strongly associated with support for Donald Trump against Hillary Clinton than with support for other Republican candidates when they were pitted against her in trial heat survey questions. Finally, we show that George Wallace and Pat Buchanan’s 1968 and 1996 presidential campaigns activated white identity. We conclude with a discussion of those findings’ implications, including how Trump’s usher in a new era of white identity politics that would make for an especially divisive and volatile political environment.

### **Theoretical Background and Empirical Expectations**

Racial attitudes have long been an important ingredient in white Americans’ political preferences. For example, attitudes about African-Americans are strongly associated with white attitudes toward race-targeted policies like affirmative action and federal aid to communities of color (e.g., Kinder and Sanders 1996; Sears et al. 1997; Kinder and Mendelberg 2001; Sears and Henry 2005). Moreover, political debates and news coverage have often linked ostensibly race-neutral policies with racial groups, making racial attitudes a determinant of public opinion about such policies as welfare, Social Security, crime, taxes, health care, gun control, and voter identification laws (Gilens 1999; Winter 2008; Peffley and Hurwitz 2010; Sears and Citrin 1985; Tesler 2015a; Filindra and Kaplan 2015; Wilson et al. 2014).

Racial attitudes have also become increasingly entangled with white Americans’ partisan preferences. Views of African-Americans were a major reason why the solidly Democratic South became a Republican stronghold (Valentino and Sears 2005; Kuziemko and Washington 2015; Acharya et al. 2016; though see Shaffer and Johnston 2006). Growing differences between the two parties in both their positions on racial issues and their race-related rhetoric also strengthened the association between racial attitudes and presidential vote choice in the 1988-2004 elections (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Mendelberg 2001; Tesler and Sears 2010; Kinder and Dale-Riddle 2012). And after the candidacy and presidency of Barack Obama, white Americans’ partisan identities and vote choice in presidential and congressional elections have all become more polarized by racial attitudes (Tesler and Sears 2010; Piston 2010; Kam and Kinder 2012; Luttig 2015; Tesler 2016a).

Most of this research on the political impact of white racial attitudes has focused on resentment and prejudice towards outgroups in general and African-Americans in particular (though see Winter 2008). There has been much less written about the political impact of white identity, solidarity, and ingroup consciousness. Moreover, extant research on white identity has generally argued that white group consciousness is less prevalent and less politically potent than is Latino and especially African American ingroup consciousness (Miller et al. 1981; Sears and Savalei 2006; Wong and Cho 2005; Dawson 2009; Citrin and Sears 2014; though see Petrow 2010).

One reason is that ingroup identity tends to arise from isolation, deprivation, and discrimination. Ingroup identification is shaped by power relations in society (Dawson 2009), forged from common goals such as securing representation and obtaining symbolic recognition for past achievements (Citrin and Sears 2009). The fact that whites have always been a numerical majority in the United States and had a disproportionate share of political, economic and social resources has thus hampered the development of white identity. Or, as the philosopher Charles Mills (1997, 76) famously put it, “The fish does not see the water, and whites do not see the racial nature of a white polity because it is natural to them, the element in which they move.” Indeed, whiteness is simply conflated with American identity in the minds of many (Devos and Benaji 2005; Schildkraut 2011; Citrin and Sears 2014), which helps explain why most whites in the 1990s identified as “just an American” and did not identify with their racial group (Sears et al. 1999).

White Americans’ numerical, political, social, and economic dominance has not only hindered the development of white identity but also muted its political effects. Because whites have had less reason than minority racial and ethnic groups to organize politically and seek redress for group-based grievances, ingroup identification has had greater political effects for racial and ethnic minority groups than for whites (Dawson 1994; Tate 1994; Sanchez 2006; Sears and Savalei 2006; Hajnal and Lee 2011; Masouka and Junn 2013). Moreover, whites’ resentment of outgroups, including racial and ethnic minorities, has been a stronger political force than their solidarity with the ingroup, i.e., other whites (Kinder and Winter 2001; Sears and Savalei 2006; Wong and Cho 2005; Citrin and Sears 2014; Tesler 2016a).

But all of this could be changing. After eight years of a black president and with demographic changes presaging a majority-minority nation, many whites sense that their dominance is declining. In 2016, more than half of whites (52%), but just 20% of

African- Americans, stated that life is worse for people like them in America than it was 50 years ago (Pew Research Center 2016). Whites' perceptions of discrimination against their group—beliefs that are closely linked to racial consciousness (McClain et al. 2009)—are also on the rise.

Approximately six in ten (57%) white Americans and roughly two-thirds (66%) of non-college educated whites said in June 2016 that “discrimination against whites is as big a problem today as discrimination against blacks and other minorities”—in increase from about 50% in recent years (Public Religion Research Institute 2016). From 2012 to 2016, white Americans' perception of discrimination against their own racial group increased significantly. In American National Election Studies (ANES) Internet surveys conducted in December 2011 and February 2012, 38% of whites thought that there was at least a moderate amount of discrimination against whites. That figure jumped up to 47% in the 2016 ANES Pilot Study.

This growing sense of discrimination and decline among whites could make their racial consciousness more prevalent and more potent. Social identity theory argues that grievances are necessary conditions for group consciousness (Tajfel 1981; Tajfel & Turner 1979), and suggests that external threats enhance ingroup solidarity (see Huddy 2013 and Schildkraut 2014 for reviews). Priming intergroup competition between whites and minority groups significantly increased whites' sense of shared fate with other whites (Fowler 2016) and led to greater ingroup bias (Taylor and Moriarty 1987). Whites' perception of threats from non-white groups also strengthens the relationship between white consciousness and their political attitudes. Jardina (2014) shows that increased immigration in recent decades has made whites' feelings toward their own racial group more strongly associated with opposition to immigration. Similarly, priming economic threat from racial and ethnic minorities activated white identity in disapproval of President Obama (Hutchings et al. 2011). And Petrow and colleagues (2017; Petrow 2010) suggest that threats posed to whites' cultural advantage by African American candidates made ingroup closeness a significant predictor of white opposition to Obama and other black candidates, although our results below find no link between measures of white consciousness and either voting against Obama or rating him unfavorably.

Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign directly appealed to the same economic and cultural threats. He made countless statements about threats posed to Americans from non-white immigrants, circulated inaccurate statistics from white nationalists that purported to show the high prevalence of black-on-white homicide, and was reluctant to disavow support from former

Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke, who told his followers that voting against Trump “is really treason to your heritage.” A July 2016 *New York Times* article, entitled “For Whites Sensing Decline, Donald Trump Unleashes Words of Resistance,” documented how Trump’s campaign “opened the door to assertions of white identity and resentment in a way not seen so broadly in American culture in over half a century.”

Hillary Clinton also made Donald Trump’s appeals and connections to white nationalists a campaign issue. One of her campaign’s videos argued that Donald Trump was the candidate of racists, white supremacists and neo-Nazis. Clinton also devoted an entire campaign speech in August 2016 to this subject, accusing Trump of bringing “an emerging racist ideology, known as the ‘Alt-Right,’ into the mainstream of the Republican Party”—an ideology that Clinton quoted the *Wall Street Journal* as saying, “promotes nationalism and views immigration and multiculturalism as *threats to white identity* (emphasis added).”

Many studies show that that campaigns and media coverage can “prime” or activate voters’ longstanding predispositions in political behavior, especially their loyalties and antagonisms towards social groups (Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Valentino et al. 2002; Mendelberg 2001; Stoker 1993; Tesler 2015b, 2016a). By emphasizing certain issues or speaking directly to certain groups, candidates can make those issues and group identities more salient to voters and more predictive of their choices. Thus, the 2016 campaign should have made white consciousness—a historically dormant force in American politics—a key factor in support for Trump. More specifically, presidential candidates who directly appeal to racial threats posed to whites from non-whites, such as Donald Trump in 2016, Pat Buchanan in 1996, and George Wallace in 1968, should activate the typically quiet force of white consciousness in mass political behavior.

Of course, Donald Trump would not be the first presidential candidate to activate ingroup identity. Michael Dawson (1994) showed that African-Americans who believed that their fate was linked with other members of the race were more supportive of Jesse Jackson’s presidential candidacy in both 1984 and 1988 (see also Tate 1994). Racial solidarity was associated with African-American support for Jesse Jackson’s presidential bids in the 1980s (Kinder and Dale-Riddle 2012). This is consistent with the Jackson campaign’s emphasis on black empowerment and racial equality.

But candidates’ social backgrounds can activate ingroup attachments even when their campaigns do not directly appeal to intragroup solidarity. Despite deemphasizing the importance

of his religion, both Catholicism and strength of Catholic identification were unusually correlated with attitudes toward John F. Kennedy in the 1960 election (Converse et al. 1962; Kinder and Dale-Riddle 2012; Tesler 2015b). Likewise, racial solidarity was associated with support for Obama in the 2008 Democratic primaries despite his campaign's efforts to neutralize the impact of race (Kinder and Dale-Riddle 2012; Tesler and Sears 2010). Ingroup affect was also more strongly associated with African-American support for Obama in 2012 than it was for Bill Clinton in the 1990s, even though Obama rarely discussed race during his first term (Tesler 2016; Gillion 2016).

But it should be harder for presidential candidates to activate support from racially conscious whites. Kennedy's and Obama's historic positions as the first Catholic and black presidents helped activate ingroup solidarity, but up until Barack Obama, co-racial presidents were—to use Mill's terminology from above—as natural to whites as water is to the fish. As such, we would not expect ingroup attitudes to be associated with white Americans' two-party presidential vote choice before 2008.

Group membership, to be sure, is not the only way for politicians to activate ingroup identification. Appeals to group-based interests and threats can also activate ingroup identity (Kinder and Dale-Riddle 2012; Huddy 2013). But with a couple of notable exceptions, in the post-civil rights era presidential candidates before Trump have not explicitly appealed to white identity. Hillary Clinton made this point in 2016, saying, “Of course, there's always been a paranoid fringe in our politics, steeped in racial resentment. But it's never had the nominee of a major party stoking it, encouraging it, and giving it a national megaphone. Until now.”

We argue that such 2016 campaign content should have made white consciousness correlated strongly with support for Donald Trump. This expectation generates several testable hypotheses. First, if Trump's campaign content activated white identity, then measures of white consciousness should be more strongly related to evaluations of Trump than to evaluations of other political figures. Second, because appeals to white identity were more central to Trump's campaign than that of his Republican rivals in the presidential primary, white consciousness should also be significantly linked support for Donald Trump in the Republican primary. Third, because explicit racial appeals were more prevalent in 2016 than in other recent primary elections, white consciousness should be more strongly correlated with support for Trump in the primaries than with support for Republican candidates in recent presidential primaries. Fourth, white consciousness should be more strongly associated with support for Trump in the

2016 general election than it was in prior elections. Fifth, white consciousness should be more strongly associated with support for Trump against Hillary Clinton than it was when other Republican candidates were pitted against her in trial heat survey questions.

Finally, we argue that a similar pattern should emerge for prior presidential candidates who campaigned on threats to whites from minorities. One such candidate is George Wallace, the former segregationist Governor of Alabama. Wallace's third-party presidential campaign in 1968 appealed to white fears of integration in the South and fears of race-related urban violence in the North. Another candidate is Pat Buchanan, who advocated for preserving white Christian cultural hegemony from growing non-white immigration in his 1990s campaigns for the Republican presidential nomination. We expect Wallace and Buchanan's campaigns to have activated support from racially conscious whites in a pattern similar to Trump's. Pro-white attitudes should, therefore, be more strongly associated with support for George Wallace in 1968 and Buchanan in 1996 than with support for other political figures.

## **Method**

To test these hypotheses, we draw on a range of surveys. For the hypotheses about the 2016 primary and general elections, we draw on the January 2016 ANES Pilot Study and the fall 2016 ANES time-series survey. Within the 2016 ANES Pilot Study, we leverage not only the cross-sectional data but also a survey experiment that assigned respondents to different presidential trial heat matchups against Hillary Clinton, allowing us to test the hypothesis that white consciousness was more strongly related to support for Trump against Clinton than it was when other Republican candidates were pitted against Clinton.

For comparisons to an earlier primary election, we draw on the ANES's December 2011/February 2012 Evaluations of Government and Society Survey (EGSS), and the 2012 ANES. For comparisons to earlier general elections, we draw on two cross-sectional surveys—the 2012 ANES and the 2004 National Politics Study (NPS)—as well as an original panel survey, the Views of the Electorate Research (VOTER) Survey, that re-interviewed 8,000 respondents from the 2012 Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project (CCAP). Finally, we use ANES surveys from 1968 and 1996 to estimate the relationship between pro-white attitudes and support for Wallace, Buchanan, and other political figures.

Our central measure of white consciousness combines items developed for inclusion in the 2016 ANES pilot and time series surveys (see Jardina 2015). These items were intended to



go beyond a psychological attachment to one's identity and measure the group consciousness that Miller et al. (1981, 495) argue "involves identification with a group and a political awareness or ideology regarding the group's relative position in society along with a commitment to collective action aimed at realizing the group's interest" (see also Huddy 2003). These items are: (1) "How important is being white to your identity?"; (2) "How important is it that whites work together to change laws that are unfair to whites"; (3) How likely is it that many whites are unable to find a job because employers are hiring minorities instead?"; and (4) "How much discrimination is there in the United States today against whites?" Including perceptions of discrimination against whites enhances the measure's reliability and further captures group consciousness by tapping into perceptions the group's relative position in society and grievances. Table A1 in the appendix presents summary statistics for the white consciousness scale in both 2016 ANES surveys. These four items form a modestly reliable scale (alphas=0.67 and 0.61 respectively).

Because the full white consciousness scale is only available in 2016 ANES surveys, we use other measures to capture white identity in prior years. One is perceived discrimination against whites, which is one of the four items in our white consciousness scale. When perceptions of discrimination are not available, we utilize thermometer ratings of whites as a group. Thermometer ratings are not an ideal measure of ingroup consciousness, but they have been effectively used as measures of ingroup identification and solidarity in prior studies (Sidanius et al. 1997; Sears and Savalei 2009; Kinder and Dale-Riddle 2012; Jardina 2014; Tesler 2016a).

Because we argue that candidates who appeal to threats against whites should prime white consciousness, not just white attitudes toward outgroups, we control for measures that attitudes toward blacks, Muslims, and Latinos. Attitudes toward blacks and Muslims, in particular, were more strongly related to vote choice in the 2016 primary and general elections than they were to vote choice in 2012 (Tesler 2016b, 2016c, Sides et al. 2017, Hopkins 2017). All of those attitudes are correlated with white consciousness, too (Jardina 2015). White consciousness was also correlated with Republican partisanship ( $r=0.28$ ) and conservative ideology ( $r=0.31$ ) in the 2016 ANES time-series study.<sup>11</sup> Thus, our baseline multivariate model

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<sup>1</sup> Jardina (2015) reports that racial resentment and anti-black stereotypes are correlated with white consciousness at  $r=.41$  and  $r=.36$  respectively. Similarly, correlations with white consciousness in the 2016 ANES are as follows: Racial resentment,  $r = .46$ ; Muslim thermometer,  $r = -.36$ ; undocumented immigrant

includes Kinder and Sanders's (1996) racial resentment scale, thermometer ratings of Muslims and Latinos, partisanship, ideology, and demographic variables. We specify below when analyses must deviate from this model because not all of those control variables are available.

### **White Consciousness and Views of Political Figures in 2016**

Our first hypothesis is that white consciousness was more strongly related to views of Donald Trump than to views of other political figures. Figure 1 tests that expectation. The first panel of the display shows the association between the white consciousness scale and thermometer ratings of political figures in the 2016 ANES Pilot Study. Even after controlling for the other factors in the baseline model, the most racially conscious whites rated Trump about 20 degrees warmer than the least racially conscious whites ( $p < .001$ ). This relationship was also significantly stronger for Trump than it was for any other political figure in the survey.

In fact, the white consciousness scale was not significantly linked to support for any political figure other than Donald Trump in the ANES Pilot. Even evaluations of Barack Obama and the Police—evaluations strongly rooted in attitudes about African-Americans both in this 2016 survey and in several other analyses (Peffley and Hurwitz 2010; Tesler 2016a)—were not affected by white consciousness. These results are highly consistent, then, with prior research showing that white consciousness has typically had weak effects on white Americans' political preferences; they also support much prior research showing that the political effects of resentment and prejudice toward outgroups are much stronger for whites than the political impact of ingroup identification and solidarity.

The second panel of Figure 1 presents the results of a similar analysis using the 2016 ANES time-series study. It too confirms our first hypothesis: after accounting for other factors, white consciousness was significantly related to evaluations of Trump, and more strongly so than to evaluations of many other political figures. White consciousness generally had weak associations with evaluations of other prominent politicians, including once again, President Obama.

There were two exceptions, however: white consciousness was significantly related to ratings of Mike Pence and the Republican Party. Those results are important, and parallel prior research showing that attitudes toward African-Americans became more strongly related to views of Joe Biden when he was Obama's running mate and to views of the Democratic Party

when Obama was the party's presidential nominee (Tesler 2016a; Tesler and Sears 2010b). This spillover of racialization from Obama eventually extended to party identification itself during the first term of his presidency (Tesler 2016a). It is possible, then, that white consciousness “spilled over” in a similar fashion in 2016—affecting not only views of Trump but views of political figures closely associated with him.

### **White Consciousness and Vote Preferences in Republican Primaries**

Just because white consciousness was associated with feelings toward Trump did not mean that it would have an influential role in the GOP primaries. While white Republicans are more likely than white Democrats to express racially resentful beliefs (Valentino and Sears 2005; Hetherington and Weiler 2009; Tesler 2016a), racial prejudice tends to play a larger role in shaping the political attitudes of liberals (Sniderman and Carmines 1997; Huddy and Feldman 2005; Sniderman and Stiglitz 2008). It is possible, then, that white consciousness may have been less of a factor in Republicans' support for Trump in the primaries than it was for the entire electorate's evaluations of Trump. At the same time, though, few Republican candidates for president have tried to distinguish themselves from their Republican rivals on matters of race and ethnicity the way that Trump did.

Figure 2 suggests that Trump's efforts mattered. The upper left-hand panel shows a strong relationship between the white consciousness scale and Republicans' support for Donald Trump in the primaries as of January 2016, when the ANES Pilot Study was conducted. Net of other factors, the most racially conscious Republicans were over 60 percentage points more likely to support Trump in the primaries than the least racially conscious Republicans. No other factor in the model was as strongly associated with Trump support. The upper-right panel shows that the relationship between white consciousness and recalled primary vote choice was not quite as strong in the ANES time-series survey, but it was still substantively important and statistically significant ( $p=.002$ ).

The bottom panels of Figure 2 confirm the hypothesis that white consciousness would be more strongly related to support for Trump in the 2016 primary than to support for Republican candidates in previous presidential primaries. More specifically, perceptions of discrimination against whites—one of the four items in white consciousness scale—were more strongly related to support for in the 2016 primaries than it was to support for Mitt Romney in the 2012 primaries. In fact, perceptions of discrimination against whites were actually negatively related

to support for Romney in both the pooled December 2011/February 2012 EGSS surveys (bottom left-hand panel) and in the 2012 ANES (bottom-right). Trump, however, performed about twenty-five percentage points better among Republicans who said that there is a great deal of discrimination against whites than he did among those who do not think whites are currently discriminated against (after controlling for racial resentment, thermometer ratings of Muslims & Hispanics, partisan strength, and demographics).<sup>2</sup>

### **White Consciousness and General Election Vote Preferences, 2004-2016**

It may have been harder for Donald Trump's campaign to activate white consciousness in the general election than it was in the primaries, however. Vote choice for president in general elections is shaped by a few fundamental factors, most notably partisanship and the incumbent's job performance (Campbell et al. 1960; Bartels 2000; Fiorina 1981; Sides and Vavreck 2013), which could have overwhelmed other considerations like white consciousness. Likewise, the strong relationship between out-group animus against blacks and Muslims and voting behavior in the 2008, 2012, and 2016 elections (Tesler and Sears 2010; Piston 2010; Kinder and Dale-Riddle 2012; Jackman and Vavreck 2012; Kam and Kinder 2012; Tesler 2013, 2016; Seth-Davidowitz 2013; Hopkins 2017; Schaffner et al. 2017), could have also mitigated the influence of white in-group consciousness. In fact, that appears to be the case, at least in the 2016 ANES Time Series, whereby racial resentment and negative attitudes about Muslims strongly predicted vote choice for Trump, but the white consciousness scale had little independent influence (see Table XX of the appendix).

Yet, while the white consciousness scale was largely overwhelmed by out-group animus in the 2016 ANES, Figure 3 shows that one of its components—perceived discrimination against whites—was a notably stronger predictor of 2016 vote choice than it had been in the past. The displays show the relationship between perceptions of discrimination against whites and the probability of voting for the Republican presidential candidate in 2004, 2012, and 2016.<sup>3</sup> All else equal, perceptions of discrimination against whites were negatively associated with Republican

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<sup>2</sup> The EGSS surveys do not include thermometer ratings of Muslims and Hispanics, so the analyses in the bottom-right hand panel of ANES internet surveys do not include these controls

<sup>3</sup> The models control for controlling for racial resentment, thermometer ratings of Hispanics and Muslims, party identification, ideology, and demographics. The 2004 NPS does not have thermometer ratings of Hispanics and Muslims. Instead, we use closeness to Hispanics, but omit attitudes from Muslims because there is no suitable proxy. Unfortunately, there is no 2008 survey with a similarly worded question about how much discrimination there is against whites, but views about whether discrimination prevents whites from succeeding were also entirely

vote choice in both the 2004 National Politics Study and the 2012 ANES, controlling for other factors. But in 2016, there was a significant relationship between perceptions of discrimination against whites and support for Donald Trump. Whites who thought there was a lot of discrimination against them were 25 points more likely to support Trump than were whites who did not think there was any discrimination after controlling for racial resentment, thermometer ratings of Muslims & Hispanics, partisanship, ideology, and demographics.

The second panel of Figure 3 uses panel data among respondents interviewed in both 2012 and 2016 to show that perceptions of discrimination against whites were more strongly associated with vote choice in 2016 than in 2012 ( $p=0.08$ ).<sup>4</sup> Trump expanded on Romney's white vote share among those who said that discrimination against whites is as big of a problem as discrimination against minorities. Whites who agreed with that statement were over 10 points more likely to support Trump in 2016 than Romney in 2012.

All told, then, the results for white consciousness and 2016 general election vote choice are somewhat mixed. The full white consciousness scale's independent relationship with 2016 votes was largely submerged by the large influence of outgroup sentiments on the vote. But attitudes about African Americans and Muslims were deeply implicated in public opinion and partisan voting behavior throughout the Obama era, and thus likely almost certainly would have been strongly correlated with 2016 vote choices regardless of the candidates. The more remarkable feature of 2016 voting was that one face of white consciousness—perceptions of discrimination against whites—was related to vote preferences after never doing so in recent elections before Donald Trump's campaign.

### **White Consciousness and Republican Vote Preferences in Trial Heats Against Clinton**

That perceptions of discrimination against whites were more strongly related to voting behavior in 2016 than in prior elections, however, does not necessarily mean that Donald Trump's campaign activated such sentiments. Although white consciousness was more strongly related to feelings toward Trump than to feelings toward other Republicans (Figure 1), it is still possible that it would have guided decisions about whether to support Clinton or a potential Republican opponent, regardless of who that opponent was. So, it is important to compare the

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<sup>4</sup> Because the discrimination item was not measured until the 2016 panel wave, all of the control variables are also from the 2016 wave

relationship of white consciousness to the choice between Trump and Clinton to its relationship to the choice between Clinton and other Republicans. This type of comparison has been useful in previous studies—e.g., in showing that factors like racial attitudes and ethnocentrism were more strongly associated with the choice between Barack Obama and John McCain than the choice between Hillary Clinton and McCain in early 2008 trial heat polls (Tesler and Sears 2010; Jackman and Vavreck 2012; Kam and Kinder 2012; Tesler 2013; Seth-Davidowitz 2013).

The hypothesized pattern with white consciousness emerged in 2016. In the ANES Pilot Study's experiment, some respondents were randomly assigned a match-up between Clinton and Trump, while others were assigned a match-up between Clinton and Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio, or Ben Carson. This allows us to test how different candidates activate different considerations.<sup>5</sup> Figure 4 shows that white consciousness was more strongly related to support for Donald Trump they would not vote or vote for a candidate other than Clinton or the Republican in the denominator against Hillary Clinton than to support for other Republican candidates when matched against her. The relationship between white consciousness and preferences in a Trump-Clinton race was significantly different than its relationship in three of the four other trial heats. In fact, white consciousness was negatively related to support for Ted Cruz, Jeb Bush, and especially Ben Carson against Hillary Clinton.

Although those findings generally confirm our hypothesis, it is important to note some caveats. About a third of the respondents in the survey said they would either not vote in a Clinton-Trump match-up or that they would vote for another candidate if that was the choice presented to them in November. Those respondents were also included in our analysis to boost the statistical power of our split-sample analyses. It is unclear, then, how these results from January 2016 may have changed after this match-up became reality and partisan activation ensured that GOP voters who were initially unenthusiastic about Trump voted for him in November. Nevertheless, the evidence in Figures 1-4 all suggests that Trump's presidential campaign activated the typically dormant force of white consciousness.

### **White Identity and Support for George Wallace and Pat Buchanan**

Thus far, we have shown that white consciousness was unusually strongly related to support for Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election. But our argument is broader:

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<sup>5</sup> Each of the five matchups against Hillary Clinton was asked to less than 350 whites. To boost sample size and thus statistical power, the analyses in Figure 4 included whites who said that they would not vote or vote for a candidate other than Clinton or the Republican in the denominator.

candidates who have made similar appeals to threats posed to white dominance from non-whites should draw disproportionate support from racially conscious whites. If this is correct, then pro-white attitudes should also be related to support for prior candidates whose campaign messages mirrored Trump's.

The two closest comparisons are arguably George Wallace's third-party presidential run in 1968 and Pat Buchanan's runner-up campaign for Republican Party's presidential nomination in 1996. Of course, neither candidate was as successful as Trump, but both candidates had a modicum of success. Wallace won five states in the 1968 election, and Buchanan won four states in the 1996 presidential primaries. Given how much Trump's identity politics message paralleled theirs, Wallace and Buchanan should also have activated white consciousness in support of their presidential candidacies.

To test this hypothesis, we first examine the relationship between thermometer ratings of whites and presidential vote choice in the all-white presidential elections from 1964 to 2004. The first panel of Figure 5 shows that white thermometer ratings were only weakly related to two-party vote preference in the 11 elections between 1964 and 2004. By contrast, thermometer ratings of blacks were strongly associated with vote choice in these elections ( $t=8.1$ ). Those results, once again, confirm the prior finding that white solidarity has typically had weak political effects, while that outgroup prejudice towards blacks has been more potent.

The second panel of Figure 5, however, shows that pro-white attitudes were a significant predictor ( $p < .001$ , see Table XX of appendix) of support for George Wallace's third-party candidacy in 1968. Wallace did not receive much support in that election, winning only 13.5% of the vote. But the support he received was heavily concentrated among whites who rated their own racial group most favorably. Indeed, whites who rated their own group most favorably were four times as likely to vote for Wallace in 1968 than those who rated whites 50 degrees or cooler on the thermometer scale.

The left-hand panel of Figure 6 provides more support for the hypothesis that Wallace's campaign activated white identity. The figure shows the apparent effect of shifting affect for whites from its lowest to its highest point on ratings of political figures in the 1968 ANES. After controlling for several factors, whites with the most favorable view of whites rated Wallace about 20 degrees warmer than whites who evaluated their own group very unfavorably ( $p=.001$ ). This effect was also considerably stronger for Wallace than it was for other political figures in the 1968 ANES, excepting Wallace's running mate, Curtis Lemay.

Our final test concerns Pat Buchanan. The right-hand panel of Figure 6 shows that feeling thermometer ratings of whites were associated with views of Buchanan, and more strongly so than with views of many other political figures, including the GOP's 1996 presidential and vice president nominees, Bob Dole and Jack Kemp. Informatively, there was also a strong negative relationship between feelings toward whites and views of Jesse Jackson. This suggests that politicians who actively campaign against white racial dominance may activate strong opposition from racially conscious whites. This could also help explain the significant negative relationship between white affect and views of Hubert Humphrey visible in the lefthand panel of Figure 6, as Humphrey also had a long record of civil rights activism. But consistent with prior research, feelings toward African-Americans were a stronger predictor of whites' evaluations of Humphrey in 1968 and Jackson in 1996 than were feelings toward whites. By contrast, feelings toward blacks were unrelated to evaluations of Buchanan. Buchanan was the rare candidate whose support was more strongly linked to whites' ingroup solidarity than outgroup prejudice.

### **The Rise of White Identity Politics?**

Our findings show that white identity mattered a great deal for voter behavior in the 2016 election, and this appears tied to Donald Trump's candidacy in particular. Whether it was candidate thermometer ratings, primary vote choice, or general election vote against Hillary Clinton, white consciousness simply mattered more for Donald Trump than has for other GOP candidates. Trump's campaign, like Wallace's and Buchanan's before him, suggests that candidates who campaign on threats posed to whites from non-whites can activate the typically dormant force of white identity in American politics. That finding has some important implications for politics in the US and abroad going forward.

First, Trump's election may usher in a new era of white identity politics. Trump showed that appeals to white grievance have the power to resonate in a multicultural America where whites increasingly feel like an aggrieved minority (see also Jardina 2014). Republican primaries could be an especially fertile ground for white identity politics. Even before Donald Trump's candidacy, most Republicans thought that discrimination against whites was as serious a problem as discrimination against minorities. Trump has continued to appeal to those Republicans even as his poll numbers dipped among the broader electorate. Indeed, significantly more Americans thought that Donald Trump cares about the needs and problems of white people in August 2017



than they did during the campaign.<sup>6</sup> Republican politicians who want to curry favor with both Trump and the party's base may decide to make similar appeals.

There is also a rising white identity politics in Europe. Western Europeans are more concerned about increased diversity than Americans (Pew Research Center 2016), and perceptions of discrimination against whites were a very strong predictor of support for Brexit (see Figure A1 in the appendix).<sup>7</sup> Trump has also aligned himself with European leaders, like Nigel Farage in the UK and Marine Le Pen in France, who emphasize the same type of threats to native whites. It appears that Trump has even become a symbol of white identity politics in Europe. Whites in the UK who perceived a lot of discrimination against whites were over 60 percentage points more likely to be happy about Trump's election than those who perceived a lot of discrimination in favor of whites (see Figure A1).

The most significant implication, though, concerns how much white identity matters to mass opinion beyond Trump himself. Presidential candidates and especially presidents can have a profound influence on their party's images (Green et al. 2002; Jacobson 2015). The Republicans' image as the Party of Lincoln kept African Americans loyal to the party for nearly 50 years after the GOP abandoned Reconstruction (Weiss 1983). John F. Kennedy's presidential candidacy made Catholics identify more with the Democratic Party in 1960 (Tesler 2016a). And Barack Obama's presidency help accelerate and intensify the relationship among race, racial attitudes, and other political beliefs (Tesler 2016a).

In like fashion, Trump could help establish the GOP as the party of white identity politics in the minds of many Americans. Indeed, in 2016, white consciousness was already related to views of the Republican Party. Of course, it remains to be seen how much influence Trump will have on the party's image. But any increased influence of white consciousness on partisan politics is important. As the 2016 election and its aftermath has illustrated, white identity politics makes for an especially divisive and volatile politics.

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<sup>6</sup> Averaging across YouGov/Economist polls conducted during the 2016 campaign, 71% said that Trump cared either "a lot" or "some" about the needs and problems of white people, compared to 80% in August, 2017.

<sup>7</sup> After controlling for party ideology, whites in the 2014-2018 British Election Study Internet Panel who perceived a lot of discrimination against their group were over 60 percentage points more likely to support Brexit than whites who thought there is a lot of discrimination in favor of whites.

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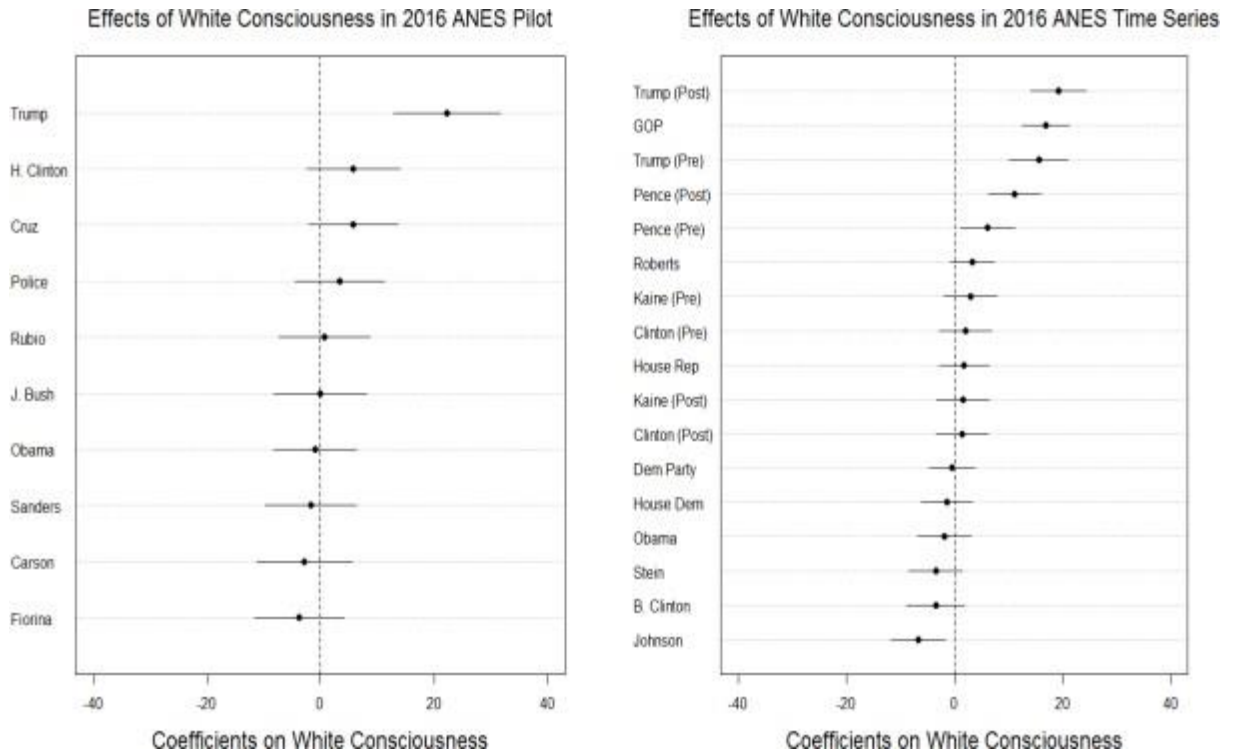


Figure 1: *Relationships between White Consciousness and Thermometer Ratings of Political Figures*. Note: Each dot represents the OLS coefficient with party identification, ideological self-placement, racial resentment, ratings of Muslims, ratings of Hispanics, education, gender, and age included in the model. Dashed lines are 95% confidence intervals. Analysis limited to whites.

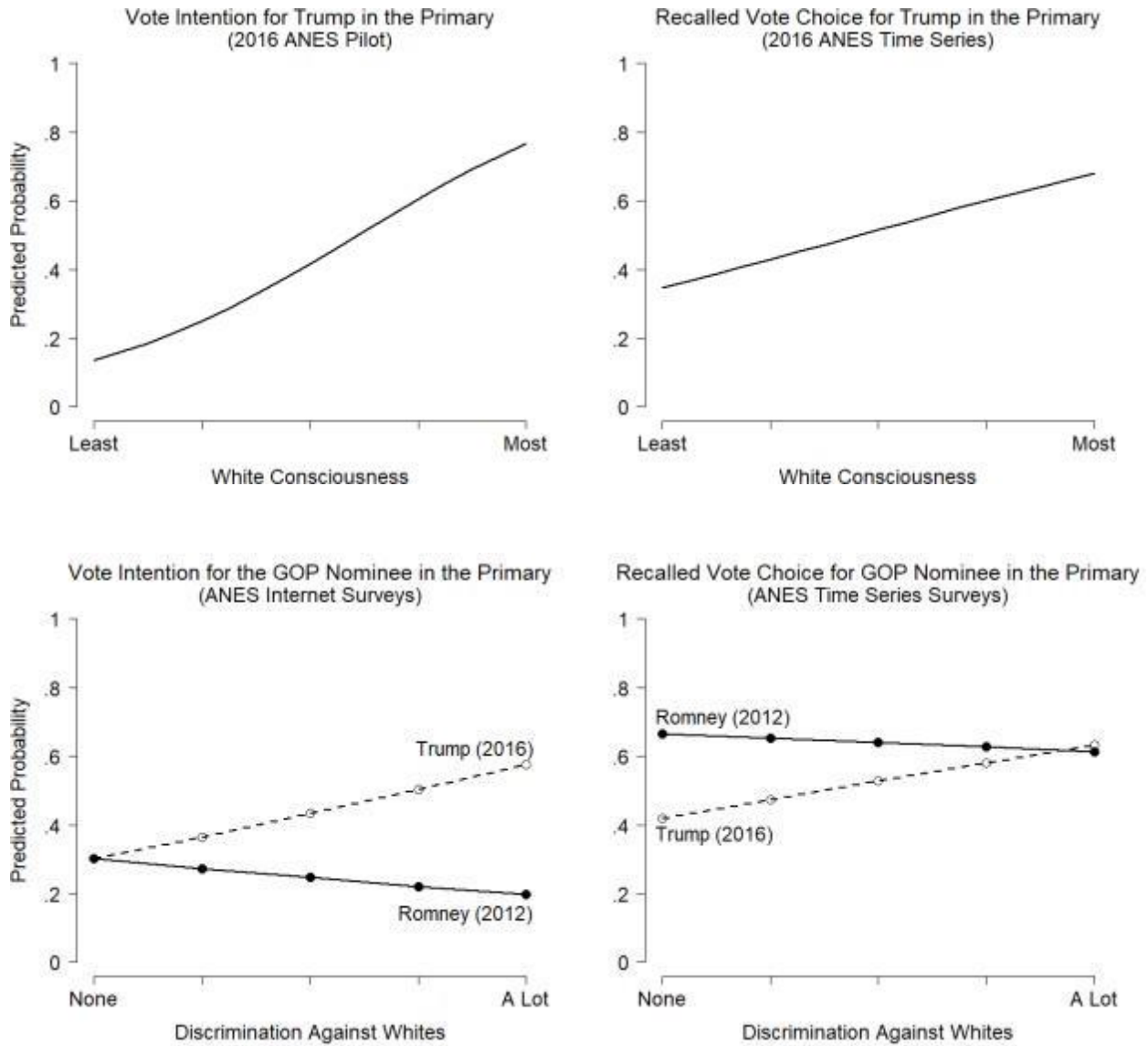


Figure 2: *Vote Preference in Republican Primaries as a Function of White Consciousness.* Note: Predicted probabilities based on logistic regression coefficients in Table A1 the appendix. Probabilities were calculated by setting partisanship, ideology, racial resentment, rating of Muslims, ratings of Hispanics, education, gender, and age to the average Republican primary voter.



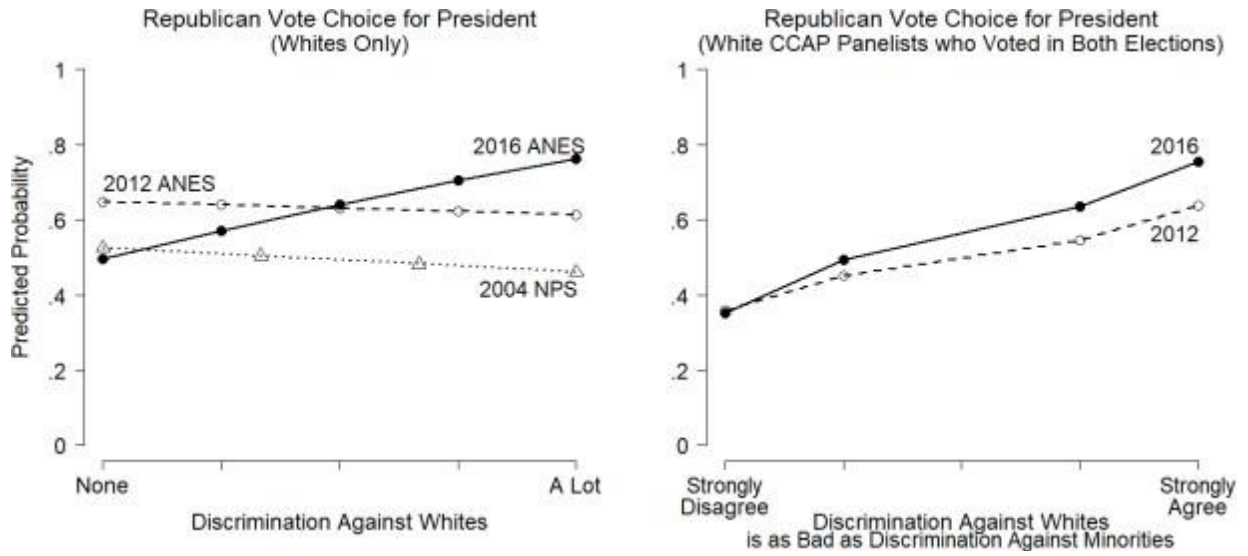


Figure 3: *Republican Vote Preference as a Function of Perceived Discrimination Against Whites*. Note: Predicted probabilities based on logistic regression coefficients in Table A2 of the appendix. Probabilities were calculated by setting partisanship, ideology, racial resentment, ratings of Hispanics & Muslims, education, gender, and age to the average Republican primary

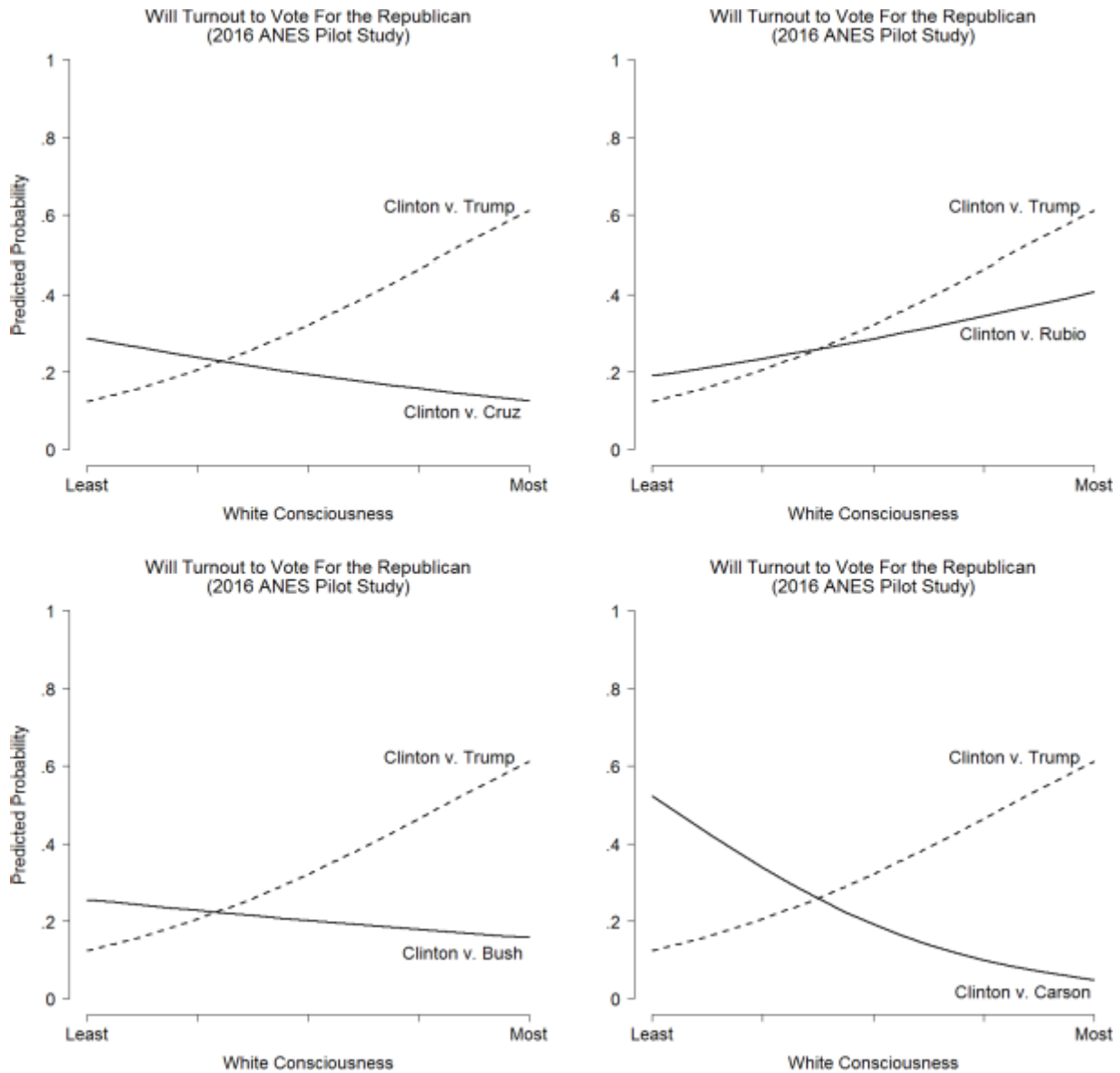


Figure 4: *Republican Vote Preference as a Function of White Consciousness*. Note: Predicted probabilities based on logistic regression coefficients in the appendix. Probabilities were calculated by setting partisanship, ideology, racial resentment, thermometer ratings of Hispanics & Muslims, education, gender, and age to the average Republican primary voter.

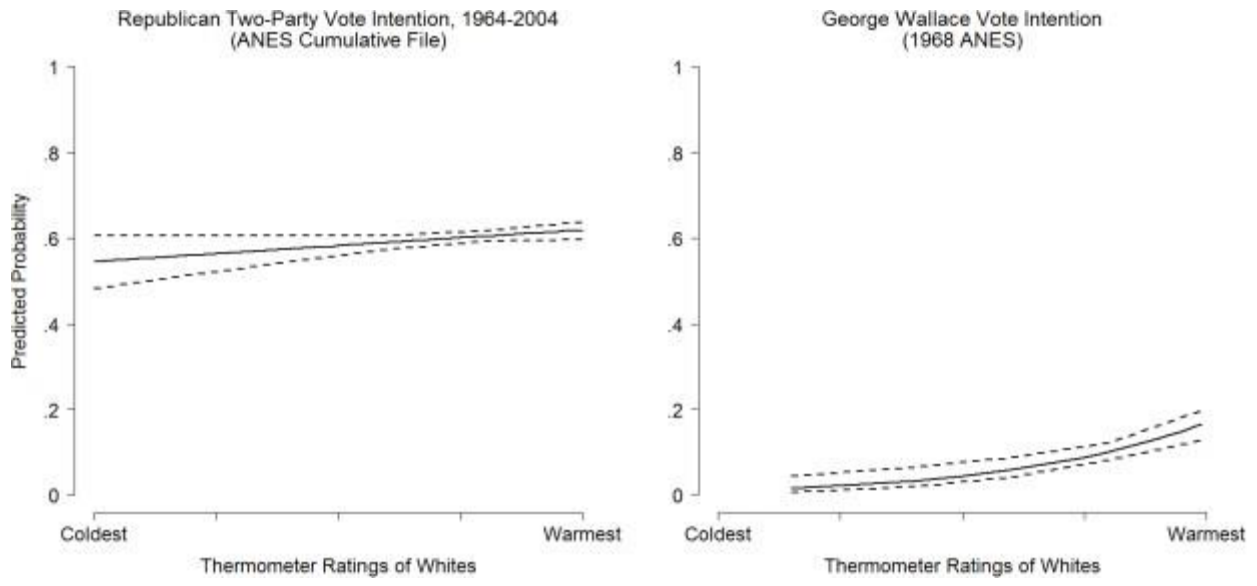


Figure 5: *Vote Intention as a Function of White Thermometer Ratings*. Probabilities based on logistic regression coefficients in the appendix. Predicted probabilities calculated by setting, thermometer ratings of blacks, thermometer ratings of the military, partisanship, age, education,

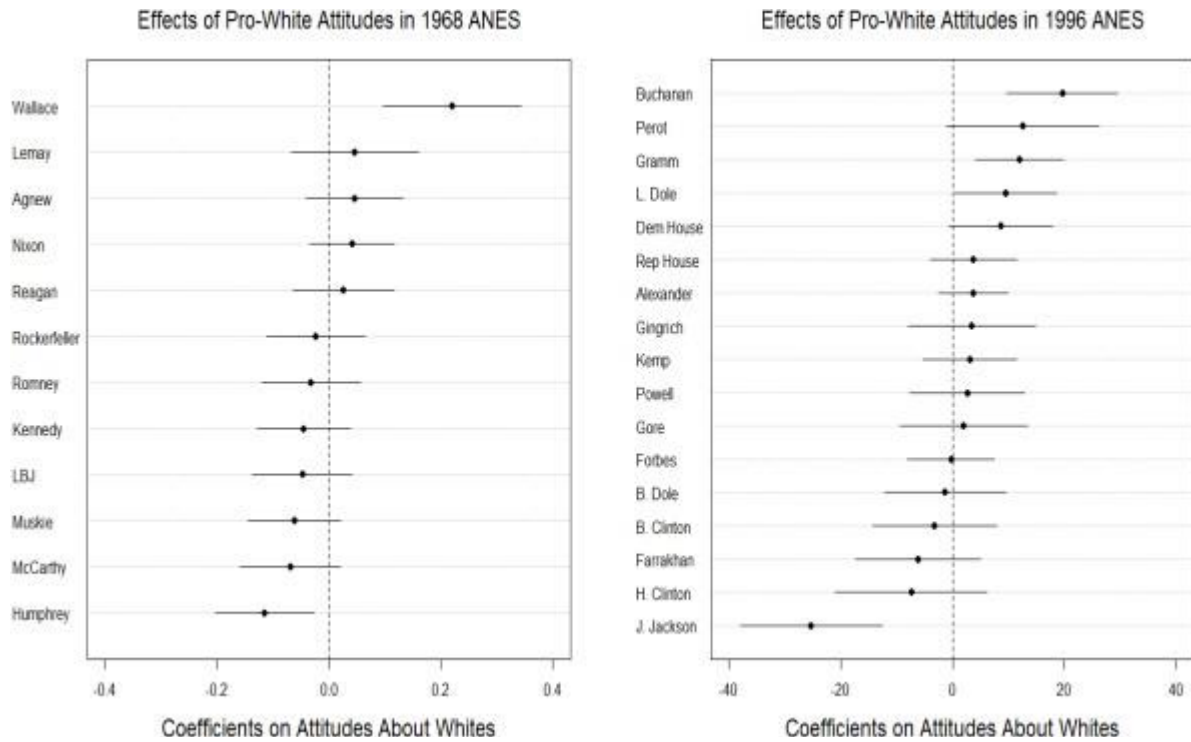


Figure 6: *The Impact of Pro-White Attitudes on Evaluations of Political Figures* in 1968 and 1996. Note: Each dot represents the OLS coefficient with party identification, ratings of blacks (panel 2), ratings of the military, education, gender, and age included in the model. Dashed lines are 95% confidence intervals. Analysis limited to whites.

**Table A1: White Consciousness Scale Summary Statistics**

	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Alpha</u>
<b>Whites</b>			
ANES Pilot	.438	.235	.67
ANES Time Series	.392	.206	.61
<b>Republicans + Leaners</b>			
ANES Pilot	.479	.222	.61
ANES Time Series	.443	.191	.53
<b>Democrats + Leaners</b>			
ANES Pilot	.359	.241	.71
ANES Time Series	.320	.205	.62

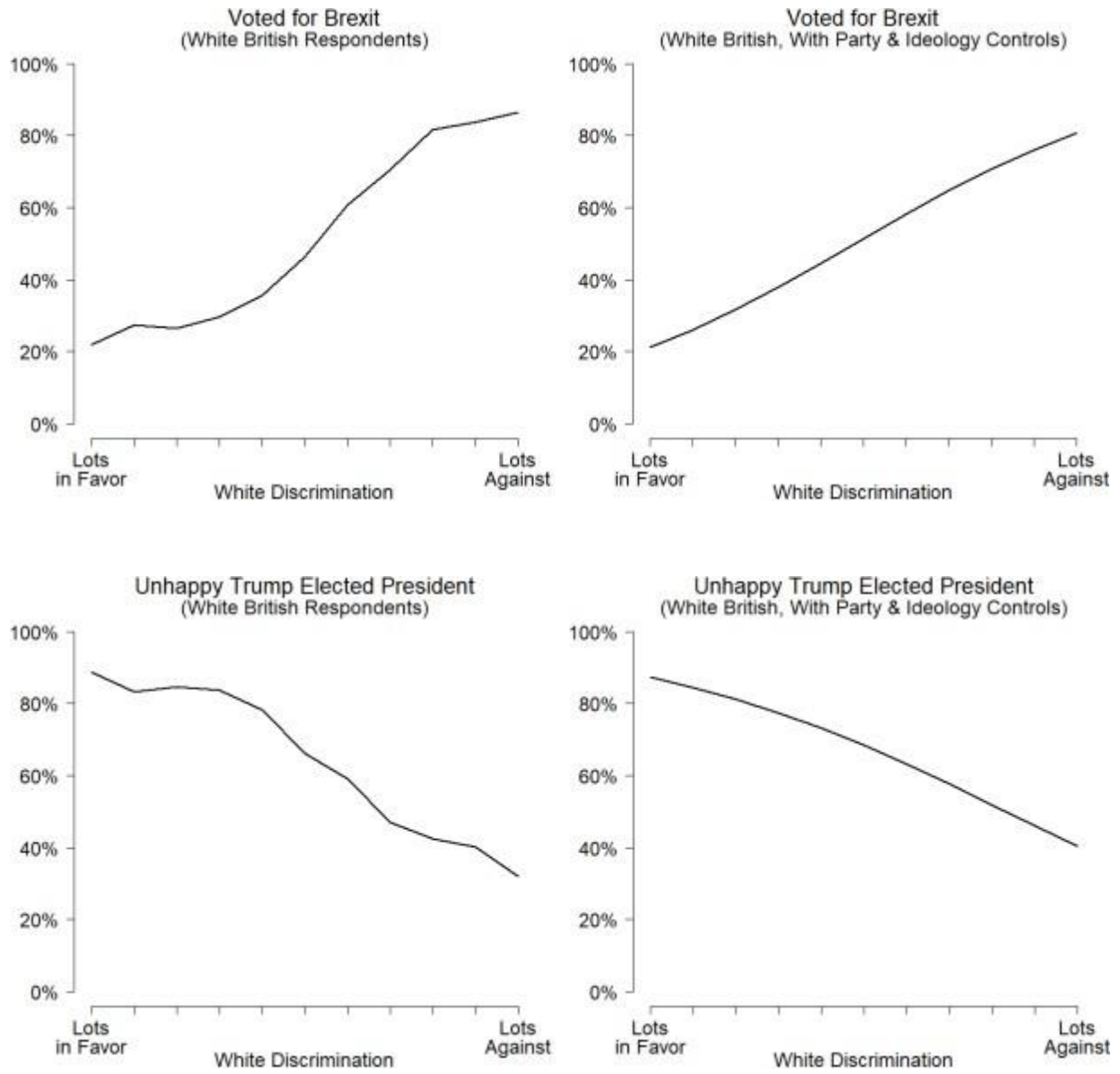


Figure A1: *White British Support for Brexit & Unhappiness with Trump's Election Victory as A Function of Perceived Discrimination Against Whites in the UK.* Source: British Election Study, 2014-2018 Internet Panel