In 2008, America made history when it elected the nation’s first African American president. Barack Obama won the presidency over 138 years after the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment to the US Constitution, which prohibited government from denying citizens the right to vote based on race, color, or previous condition of servitude. He was sworn into office forty-five years, five months, and fourteen days after President Lyndon Johnson signed into law the Voting Rights Act, which aimed to remove legal barriers that state and local government had put in place to prevent blacks from exercising the right to vote established by the Fifteenth Amendment. Obama’s election was a clear indication of the unsteady progress the nation has made in incorporating racial and ethnic minorities into the political system. It was also highly symbolic of a great shift in the nation’s political image; Obama followed a succession of forty-three white presidents, marking a break in the total dominance of whiteness at the level of the nation’s highest elected office.

In previous chapters, I showed that white racial solidarity is associated with a preference for policies that benefit whites and that protect their group’s status. In this chapter, I ask whether white identity is also brought to bear on evaluations of political elites. I begin by examining the relationship between white identity and attitudes toward Obama – a political candidate both deeply symbolic of whites’ loss of political power, and one who was reelected by an increasingly diverse electorate. I also evaluate whether whites with higher levels of racial solidarity are less favorable toward Obama specifically, or if they feel more
generally ambivalent about non-white candidates, such as a hypothetical Latino president. Then, I explore the relationship between white identity and evaluations of the Tea Party – a conservative political movement comprised largely of white Americans that arose soon after Obama’s election. From there, I examine the relationship between white identity and evaluations of Donald Trump, a presidential candidate who not only appealed to whites’ racial animosities but also, I argue, to whites’ desire to maintain their group’s power and status. I also demonstrate that Trump was not alone in his ability to capitalize on these sentiments; long before he appeared on the national stage, other presidential candidates took advantage of whites’ interests in protecting their group.

Finally, I examine whether group consciousness is a politically motivating force. The notion that white racial solidarity influences whites’ political preferences is important, but less powerful if this identity pulls whites out of the political arena. In keeping with prior work on group consciousness among subordinated groups, like people of color and women, however, I presume that white identity is actually related to greater levels of political participation. I put this claim to the test at the end of the chapter.

**Whiteness and the Nation’s Highest Office**

Barack Obama’s victory was initially met with public celebration and optimism about race relations in the United States. The day after the election, the headline on the front page of the *New York Times* read, “Obama,” on its own line, in bold letters larger than the paper’s masthead. Below, a subtitle to the cover story stated, “Racial barrier falls in decisive victory.” Similarly, the cover of the *Washington Post* claimed, “Obama Makes History,” and just below stated, “U.S. decisively elects first black president.” Even conservative outlet Fox News made note of the momentous occasion with positive and conciliatory words. During the cable news channel’s election coverage, Republican political consultant Karl Rove said this of Obama’s win: “an African American candidate who was aspirational and inspirational, who appealed to the better angels of our nature, is very powerful.” Later that night, in his concession speech, Republican candidate John McCain described Obama’s victory as a sign that “America today is a world away from the cruel and prideful bigotry” that it once embraced.
The case for such optimism, however, was short-lived. It was not long before political scientists began chipping away at the presumption that Obama’s election was any indication that racial equality in the United States had been realized. Research uncovered little evidence that Obama’s victory was accompanied by a marked shift in whites’ racial attitudes in a more liberal, tolerant direction. Whites and blacks appeared to be just as divided in their opinions on issues related to race (Hutchings 2009). Studies rolled in revealing the serious impact that racial prejudice had in depressing white votes for Obama in 2008 (Kinder and Dale-Riddle 2012; Lewis-Beck, Tien, and Nadeau 2010; Parker, Sawyer, and Towler 2009; Piston 2010; Tesler and Sears 2010). And work began to ask whether Obama’s election had actually awakened more insidious forms of racial prejudice among whites (Tesler 2012a).

In 2012, support for Obama among whites became noticeably more tepid. He was reelected with only 39 percent of the white vote, compared to the 43 percent he received in 2008.6 In prior presidential elections, modern Democratic presidential candidates have received even fewer votes from whites than Obama did in 2012, although none who did so were victorious. So how did Obama maintain his place in office? He was reelected with strong support from racial and ethnic minorities. In 2012, Obama won 93 percent of the black vote, 71 percent of the Hispanic vote, and 73 percent of the Asian vote. Furthermore, Obama captured the majority of votes among people of color at a time when the share of white voters in the electorate was at a historical low. In 2012, the percentage of white voters, relative to the rest of the electorate, bottomed out at 73.7 percent, compared to 76.3 percent in 2008 and to 81.9 percent a decade earlier in 1998.7 Whites continue to comprise a solid majority of those voting in US presidential elections, but their share of the total electorate is on a steady decline as more racial and ethnic minorities participate in the political process.

In the aftermath of Obama’s reelection, the tone of some news outlets’ election coverage was decidedly different from what it had been in 2008. Many conservative news sources once again highlighted the importance of race in the election, but not in celebration of the nation’s progress toward racial equality. Instead, many pundits and journalists focused on the notion that Obama and his electoral base posed a threat to white Americans. For instance, conservative talk show host Rush
Limbaugh, complaining to his listeners the day after the election, said the following:

I went to bed last night thinking we’re outnumbered. I went to bed last night thinking all this discussion we’d had about this election being the election that will tell us whether or not we’ve lost the country. I went to bed last night thinking we’ve lost the country. I don’t know how else you look at this.8

Presumably, when Limbaugh said “we,” he was referring to conservative white voters. It was not the first time Limbaugh had lamented what he saw as the loss of white Americans’ power and status. In 2009, on his radio show, he went on at length:

How do you get promoted in a Barack Obama administration? By hating white people, or even saying you do, or that they’re not good, or whatever. Make white people the new oppressed minority and they are going along with it, because they’re shutting up. They’re moving to the back of the bus. They’re saying I can’t use that drinking fountain, ok. I can’t use that restroom, ok. That’s the modern day Republican Party, the equivalent of the Old South, the new oppressed minority.9

Limbaugh was not alone in expressing these concerns. On the evening of the 2012 election, as the vote counts rolling in signaled an Obama victory, Fox News host Bill O’Reilly offered an explanation for the outcome: “The white establishment is now the minority. The demographics are changing. It’s not traditional America anymore.”10 A few days later, left-leaning New York Times columnist Maureen Dowd penned a piece in which she suggested that the “white male patriarchy” was in a “delusional death spiral.”11

This narrative continued well after Obama left office and Donald Trump became president. Bill O’Reilly made similar remarks on his television show in March of 2018:

For a long time, skin color wasn’t really much of an issue, in the ‘80s and ‘90s we didn’t hear a lot. Yeah, you always had your Farrakhans and your Sharptons. We always had those people but – Jackson – they were race hustlers, but it was a money thing, an industry thing. But now, whiteness has become the
issue. Whiteness. All right. So if you’re a white American you are a part of a cabal that either consciously or unconsciously keeps minorities down. Therefore, that has to end and whiteness has to be put aside. That’s what the border is all about. The open-border people, and believe me this is behind the movement in California and in the Democratic precincts. Let everybody in. Everybody in. All right. That would diminish whiteness because minorities then would take over, as they have in many parts of California. That’s what that is all about. Getting whiteness out of power.12

It is apparent from these statements that the media were attuned to the idea that a segment of white Americans felt threatened by the election of Obama, by the composition of the electorate that helped keep him in office, by immigration, and by the nation’s racial and ethnic diversity. What is more, many conservative pundits were undoubtedly reiterating this perspective to their viewers. But were white Americans viewing the political world through this lens? Did such beliefs influence the way they thought about Barack Obama in 2012 or Donald Trump in 2016?

I test the proposition that white Americans perceived Obama’s election as threatening to their group and its relative status. As I posited in Chapter 2, white identity should predict opposition to political candidates that white identifiers view as a threat to their group’s dominance. Undoubtedly, Barack Obama serves as the most symbolic displacement of whites’ political power by way of his blackness. Theoretically, however, whites high on racial identity should be opposed, in the abstract, to the election of any non-white candidate to the nation’s highest office, regardless of whether that candidate is black or another non-white race. We should also find, therefore, that whites oppose the possibility of a Latino candidate winning the presidency.

I also argued that white racial identity and consciousness ought to be tied not only to opposition toward candidates they view as threatening, but also to support for political candidates or movements whites see as maintaining or restoring their political power. Shortly after Obama took office, a conservative movement known as the Tea Party gained traction. Initially, the movement branded itself loosely around opposition to government bailouts, lower taxes, and reduced government spending, but eventually it became associated with racism,
and deemed part of the backlash to the election of Obama (Parker and Barreto 2013). Given this characterization, we might expect that Tea Party fans are also whites with higher levels of racial solidarity, especially if the movement’s goals were in fact thinly veiled efforts to restore whites’ political power.

Finally, as Obama’s term neared its end and the 2016 election approached, Donald Trump took the stage as a candidate who signaled to whites an intention to restore whites’ power and privileges. Unlike any other Republican frontrunner, I suggest that Trump took positions that uniquely and powerfully appealed to white identifiers. His promise to promote “white” social welfare policies, his strong position on immigration, and even his campaign slogan all seemed like well-crafted efforts to target whites who desired to protect their racial group’s collective interests.

Donald Trump is not the only presidential candidate who has exploited the concerns whites might have regarding their group’s status in a racially and ethnically changing nation. Other candidates have made similar appeals, and in doing so, they have drawn favor from whites with higher levels of racial solidarity. Most recently, Pat Buchanan ran for president in 1992 on a platform that looked very similar to Donald Trump’s. He too chose immigration as a central issue and campaigned for more restrictive immigration policies while appealing to whites’ fear over a changing nation.

Long before Buchanan made his presidential bid, Alabama Governor George Wallace, Jr. repeatedly campaigned for president, running in 1964, 1968, 1972, and 1976. Wallace was known for his notorious stance on racial integration, refusing orders from President John F. Kennedy to enforce the racial integration of the University of Alabama. For this reason, Wallace has certainly gone down in history as a face of racial prejudice. Yet, as I will describe in more detail, Wallace’s political appeals did not exclusively focus on hostility toward blacks; they were often framed around protecting and preserving whites’ power.

In 1968 and 1972, Richard Nixon followed in Wallace’s footsteps, making similar appeals to southern whites who were resentful of integration. The story of Nixon’s “Southern Strategy” – or his effort to win over southern white Democrats by exploiting their racial grievances – is undoubtedly one rooted in out-group
animus. Nixon was not only appealing to whites’ racial hostilities, however, but also arguably to concerns about their group, its power, and its status in the wake of the Civil Rights. If so, we should find that white in-group attitudes are also implicated in support for Wallace and Nixon.

The Threat of the Nation’s First Black President

I turn first to considering the relationship between white identity and attitudes toward Barack Obama in 2012. The notion that white identity might be a powerful predictor of vote choice in any election is a provocative one. Choosing a presidential candidate is one of the most visible and most common forms of political participation. It is also a domain where predispositions like party identification and ideology play a powerful and durable role. In addition, we also know that racial prejudice, and especially racial resentment, was powerfully linked to attitudes toward Obama (Kam and Kinder 2012; Kinder and Dale-Riddle 2012; Lewis-Beck, Tien, and Nadeau 2010; Piston 2010; Tesler and Sears 2010). These factors were so obviously potent in driving vote choice that we might think it highly unlikely that any other variable could be meaningfully implicated in whites’ voting decisions. Adding yet another account to the fray might reasonably seem like a fool’s errand.

Yet the profound symbolic threat Obama may have presented to whites’ political power is one that we ought to take seriously. Indeed, I posit that when it comes to attitudes toward Obama, many whites were not exclusively driven by racial animus; some were also independently motivated by a desire to protect their in-group and its status. If I am right, then we should see that white identity is significantly tied to vote choice in 2012, such that white identifiers were much less likely to vote for Obama and much more likely to prefer his Republican opponent, Mitt Romney.13

To test this claim, I turn to the 2012 ANES, which included the standard racial importance measure of white racial identity. After the election, ANES survey respondents were asked if they voted and, if so, whether they voted for Romney, Obama, or another candidate. To explore whether white identity was associated with vote choice in this election, I estimate voting for Romney or Obama as a function of
levels of white identity. To this model I also add a host of controls, stacking the deck against white identity. First, I account for partisan identification and political ideology. I also include employment status, evaluations of personal economic circumstances, and assessments of national economic conditions. To this list I then add level of education, as well as age and gender. I also control for the possibility that many whites voted against Obama because they worried that he might expand government too much. Accordingly, I also control for a preference for a more limited government. Finally, previous scholarship has made it abundantly apparent that racial animus, especially in the form of racial resentment, was strongly associated with opposition to Obama (e.g., Kinder and Dale-Riddle 2012; Tesler and Sears 2010). I therefore include the standard four-item measure of resentment in the model of vote choice. 

The results of the model predicting vote choice are presented in Figure 8.1, and they tell an important story. Not surprisingly, party identity was the most powerful factor in shaping vote choice, with Republicans far more likely to vote for Romney and Democrats far more likely to vote for Obama. Political ideology also played an independent role, with self-identified conservatives more supportive of Romney and liberals more likely to vote for Obama. The condition of the national economy also mattered; voters who rated the national economy as worse off than the previous year were also less likely to vote for Obama. Attitudes about the role of government were implicated as well. Voters who reported preferring a more limited government were less likely to vote for Obama. What is more, as expected, racial resentment was strongly and significantly associated with vote choice, such that more racially conservative whites were less likely to vote for Obama. And finally, we see that neither levels of education, age, nor gender were significantly associated with white voters’ preferences, all else equal.

Figure 8.1 also tells us something new about the attitudes voters brought to bear in 2012. Even after controlling for the usual suspects in a model of vote choice, white racial identity also mattered (p<0.05). Whites with higher levels of racial identity were much more likely to vote for Romney over Obama. Figure 8.2 illustrates the magnitude of this effect. Moving from the lowest levels of racial identity to the highest, the predicted probability of voting for Obama declines dramatically, from 0.52 among the low identifiers to 0.25 among the
highest identifiers on a scale ranging from zero to one. In other words, whites who reported that their racial identity is extremely important were 50 percent more likely to vote for Romney rather than Obama compared to whites low on identity.

In short, the effect of white racial identity on vote choice in 2012 is powerful and robust, even after accounting for a number of other factors that might explain whites’ voting behavior. All else equal, whites with higher levels of racial identity were far less likely to vote for Obama. This relationship represents an important revision to our understanding of electoral behavior. While political scientists have been attentive to the power of racial animus, especially in the Obama era, the results here demonstrate that out-group attitudes are not the only factor, or even necessarily the primary factor, motivating voters. Many whites in 2012 also seem especially concerned with protecting their racial group’s status.

Figure 8.1 2012 Presidential Vote Choice

The bars represent the coefficient for each variable in the model. The lines represent the 95 percent confidence intervals. Model also controls for race of interviewer. Estimation results appear in Online Appendix 8A.

Source: 2012 ANES (face-to-face).
Obama as a Threat to Group Interests

The symbolism of Obama’s election as a displacement of whites’ political dominance is hard to dismiss. But many whites might also have opposed Obama not merely because he represents their group’s political displacement, but also because they worried that Obama might, in practice, favor his own racial group at the expense of whites. In other words, whites high on white identity might see Obama as a real threat to their group’s interests and may doubt that Obama represents all groups equally. I investigate this possibility, using the 2012 ANES, which asked respondents to indicate whether they believe Obama favors blacks over whites or whites over blacks. I estimate responses to this question using the same logit model as specified above for vote choice, but this time

Figure 8.2 The Probability of Voting for Barack Obama in 2012

Points represent the predicted probability of voting for Obama over Romney at each level of white identity. The capped lines represent the 95 percent confidence intervals. Predicted probabilities are calculated by holding gender constant at female and all other variables in the model at their mean. Model also controls for party identification, ideology, negative personal and national economic evaluations, employment status, education, age, gender, attitudes about size of government, and racial resentment. Estimates from full model appear in Online Appendix 8A.

Source: 2012 ANES (face-to-face).
with the dependent variable coded at zero if respondents indicated that Obama favors whites over blacks and one for those that think Obama favors blacks over whites.

Figure 8.3 plots the probability of believing Obama favors blacks over whites at each level of white identity. It is first worth noting that most whites in the United States were not overwhelmingly concerned that Obama would favor blacks over their own group. We can see from Figure 8.3 that regardless of levels of white identity, the probability of endorsing this position is not especially large. Nevertheless, the effect of white identity is statistically significant and noteworthy. For whites low on racial identity, the predicted probability of believing Obama favors blacks over whites is 0.06 on the zero to one scale. Among whites highest on identity, the probability
leaps to 0.16. Thus, there is some evidence that part of what may be motivating white identifiers in their negative evaluations of Obama is the belief that Obama will favor blacks, possibly at the expense of whites.

**Opposition to a Latino Presidential Candidate**

As the first non-white US president, the symbolism of Obama’s election was a profound loss to whites’ status. If many whites are worried about their group’s position, it is likely that any non-white candidate would have been – and will likely continue to be – met with resistance on the part of white identifiers. Whites with higher levels of racial solidarity likely prefer white political representatives. Consistent with this argument, Schildkraut (2015) finds that whites who more strongly identify with their in-group prefer candidates who descriptively represent their group. Additionally, Petrow, Transue, and Vercellotti (2018) find that high white identifiers are less supportive of black candidates. The implication of this argument is especially important when we consider the role of white identity moving forward. As the country becomes increasingly diverse, blacks, Latinos, and Asian Americans will continue to seek political incorporation, and they may very well receive pushback from whites who see the political success of non-whites as a threat to the status quo (McConnaughy et al. 2010).

The 2016 ANES Pilot allows us to test this claim more directly. Do whites who possess either greater levels of identity or consciousness feel more negatively about the prospect of non-white political candidates? For instance, how might these whites respond to a Latino presidential candidate? Respondents on the ANES Pilot were explicitly asked the extent to which they would be pleased (or not) with the idea of a Latino person being president of the United States. I estimate the relationship between responses to this item and levels of white identity, while also controlling for attitudes toward Hispanics, demographic traits, party identity, ideology, employment status, and national economic evaluations. Figure 8.4 provides the predicted response to this question across levels of white identity and white consciousness, both of which are significantly associated with lower levels of displeasure over a Latino president. Moving from the lowest level of white identity or white consciousness to the highest produces an approximately...
ten-point change in dismay over a Latino president on the zero to one scale.

The Tea Party Movement as a Backlash to Obama

When Obama took office, the country was reeling from the economic turmoil caused by the financial crisis of 2007 to 2008. Many Americans were dismayed by the massive bailouts banks and auto companies had received as part of the recovery efforts, and they were even more resistant to the costly economic stimulus package Obama and Democrats in Congress passed in 2009.18 In February of 2009, a CNBC television reporter gave these Americans, most of whom identified with the Republican Party, a rallying cry for their consternation. Referencing the historic Boston Tea Party, he invited individuals who wanted to protest the government bailout to a Chicago Tea Party, and the Tea Party movement was born.19

The movement attracted disaffected members of the Republican Party who largely claimed to be focused on economic issues and who

Figure 8.4 White Racial Solidarity and Displeasure over a Latino President

Points and solid line represent the predicted level of displeasure about a Latino president at each level of white identity or white consciousness. The capped lines and shaded region represent the 95 percent confidence intervals. Predicted probabilities are calculated by holding gender constant at female and all other variables in the model at their means. Model also controls for party identification, ideology, negative personal and national economic evaluations, employment status, education, age, gender, and affect toward Hispanics. Estimates from full model appear in Online Appendix 8C.

Source: 2016 ANES Pilot Study.
supported a more limited government, lower taxes, and a reduction in government spending. It is now apparent, however, that Tea Party supporters had adopted political beliefs that went beyond fiscal conservatism and anti-big government. They helped revitalize and remake a brand of right-wing conservatism in the United States that also marginalizes immigrants and people of color.

What motivated Tea Party supporters at the grassroots level? Several accounts have honed in on a running theme espoused by individuals who identified with the movement: the desire to “take the country back” (Hochschild 2016; Parker and Barreto 2013; Williamson, Skocpol, and Coggin 2011). Scholars and commentators studying the Tea Party noted that this mantra was likely a racially charged dog-whistle in response to the election of Obama. In their important book on the rise of the Tea Party movement, political scientists Christopher Parker and Matthew Barreto make this argument directly:

We believe that people are driven to support the Tea Party from the anxiety they feel as they perceive the America they know, the country they love, slipping away, threatened by the rapidly changing face of what they believe is the “real” America: a heterosexual, Christian, middle-class, (mostly) male, white country. We think it likely that they perceive such change is subverting their way of life, everything they hold dear. They not only wish to halt change; if we are correct, Tea Party supporters actually wish to turn the clock back. They hope to return to a point in American life before Barack Obama held the highest office in the land, before a Latina was elevated to the Supreme Court, and when powerful members of Congress were all heterosexual (at least publicly).

(2013, p. 3)

My own claims about the circumstances that have led to the politicization of white identity are similar to the sentiments Parker and Barreto describe as motivating the Tea Party. Is Tea Party support as much about in-group anxiety as it is about out-group animus? Do whites who feel anxious about changes to the racial order in the United States also endorse the Tea Party movement, or are Tea Party sympathizers driven more by their dislike of non-whites?

To see, I examine support for the Tea Party movement using the KN 2010 study, the 2012 ANES, and the 2016 ANES. I model support for the Tea Party – measured either with 101-point feeling thermometer
items or questions that ask about respondents’ degree of support – as a function of white identity, party identity, ideology, employment status, negative personal and national economic evaluations, education, age, gender, attitudes about the size of government, and racial resentment. The results are presented in Table 8.1.

What we see, consistently, is that white racial solidarity is not associated with greater support for the Tea Party. If anything, it is marginally linked to less support, but the effect across each survey is relatively small and often insignificant. In contrast, racial resentment emerges repeatedly as a powerful predictor of Tea Party opinion. More racially resentful whites are far more likely to say they support the Tea Party and rate it more positively. What is more, when controlling for Tea Party support in my model of vote choice in 2012, I find that including this measure only slightly reduces the effect of white identity, but greatly reduces the impact of racial resentment. Thus, while Tea Party support may very well come from disaffected whites who are angry with the racial changes the country has experienced, their feelings are being channeled not through their in-group anxieties, but rather through their racial hostilities.

A White Backlash and the Rise of Donald Trump

If the election of Obama represented a challenge to the racial hierarchy, then we might expect that some whites wanted to see a return to order. Such a reversion to the status quo does not necessarily mean, however, that any white political candidate would be appealing. In order for a political candidate to stand out from a field of other white politicians, and for white identity to be brought to bear on attitudes, such a person would likely need to appear to be prioritizing the interests of whites.

Writing in 2005, Wong and Cho noted that when they analyzed the relationship between white identity and whites’ attitudes toward racialized policies, they found little to report. But they were prescient about the potential relationship between white identity and political preferences. They described one interpretation of their results in this way:

The identity exists and is related to ingroup attitudes, but it has yet to become a politicized identity. If White identity is indeed
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>White identity</th>
<th>Racial resentment</th>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>R-squared</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>p&lt;0.01</strong></td>
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<td><strong>p&lt;0.1</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>0.016</td>
<td>0.328***</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>0.520</td>
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<td>(0.041)</td>
<td>(0.073)</td>
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<tr>
<td>-0.082**</td>
<td>0.200***</td>
<td>706</td>
<td>0.468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.033)</td>
<td>(0.054)</td>
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<tr>
<td>-0.011</td>
<td>0.157***</td>
<td>692</td>
<td>0.361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.022)</td>
<td>(0.037)</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>-0.040**</td>
<td>0.177***</td>
<td>1,952</td>
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<tr>
<td>(0.016)</td>
<td>(0.025)</td>
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<tr>
<td>-0.023</td>
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<td>591</td>
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Note: Table entries are OLS coefficients. Standard errors in parentheses. All variables in model coded to range from zero to one. Data are weighted. Models also controls for party identity, ideology, employment status, negative personal and national economic evaluations, education, age, gender, and attitudes about the size of government. Estimates from full models appear in Online Appendix 8D.

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

Source: 2010 KN, 2012 ANES, 2016 ANES.
unstable but easily triggered, the danger is that a demagogue could influence the salience of these identities to promote negative outgroup attitudes, link racial identification more strongly to policy preferences, and exacerbate group conflict. 

(*p. 716*)

In 2016, Donald Trump mounted a surprisingly successful campaign for the presidential nomination. He drew a great deal of attention for his racially charged remarks, many of which were explicit and disparaging. For instance, Trump made broad and offensive generalizations about undocumented immigrants from Mexico, referring to them as rapists smuggling illegal drugs.\(^2\) He called for an outright ban on Muslims entering the country, uniformly linking members of this group to terrorism.\(^2\) He was one of the most vocal leaders of the birther movement, which questioned whether Obama was born in the United States – a belief largely endorsed by more racially conservative whites (Hughes 2012; Jardina and Traugott in press; Pasek et al. 2015). One need not dig very deep to find examples of Trump making offensive remarks about Jews or Native Americans, either.\(^2\) There is little doubt that Trump appealed to whites’ racial prejudices, and that whites with higher levels of racial animus were among some of his strongest supporters.\(^2\)

Trump was certainly unusual in that his racial rhetoric was explicit and overt (Valentino, Neuner, and Vandenberg 2018), but the notion that a political candidate would attempt to strategically appeal to whites’ racial hostilities is now a forgone conclusion in American politics (Mendelberg 2001). What sets Trump further apart from the long line of politicians who have used race to win white votes is that he capitalized on more than white voters’ animosity for racial and ethnic minorities. He also made pointed appeals that very well may have resonated with whites concerned about their group’s status. Many journalists certainly proposed that support for Trump was motivated by whites’ anxiety about their loss of status in an increasingly diverse nation.\(^3\) They suggested that Trump’s campaign slogan – “Make America Great Again” – was really dog-whistle politics for restoring power to white Americans.\(^2\) Some even likened this slogan and Trump’s political rhetoric more broadly to the language traditionally employed by the Ku Klux Klan.\(^2\) Troublingly, Trump even gained public support from bona fide white nationalists and white supremacists – groups
overtly interested in both maintaining white dominance and in denigrating non-whites.  

Trump’s appeal extends well beyond those individuals who consider themselves members of white nationalist or white supremacist organizations. Nevertheless, we should recognize that many of the same issue positions adopted by members of these more marginalized groups are also held by a broader set of white Americans (Swain 2002; Swain and Nieli 2003). For example, as I described in Chapter 6, like white nationalists (Swain and Nieli 2003), many white Americans more generally are especially concerned with the issue of immigration. Trump began his campaign focusing exclusively on immigration, an issue I argue is central to the increased salience of white identity. Early analysis of Trump supporters showed he had especially strong support among whites who were significantly opposed to immigration. In fact, immigration was so central to Trump’s initial presidential agenda that near the end of August 2015, it was the only issue on Trump’s campaign website. What is more, I find that whites high on racial consciousness were significantly more likely than those low on consciousness to indicate that immigration was one of their top two issues when they were determining which political candidate to support during the presidential primaries.

Trump’s stance on immigration was quite clear. He promised to end illegal immigration to the United States, and to build a wall along the southern border of the country to restrict the flow of immigrants from Mexico. Speaking before a crowd of supporters at a campaign rally in Phoenix, Arizona, Trump claimed:

We will build a great wall along the southern border. And Mexico will pay for the wall. One hundred percent. They don’t know it yet, but they’re going to pay for it. And they’re great people and great leaders but they’re going to pay for the wall. On day one, we will begin working on an impenetrable, physical, tall, power [sic], beautiful southern border wall.

Trump’s strident attention to immigration continued well into the first year of his presidency. In January of 2018, he complained about a bipartisan immigration deal that would protect immigrants from Haiti, El Salvador, and African countries. After deriding immigrants from these countries, he then suggested that the United States should
bring more people from Norway, eerily echoing the very sentiments expressed in the early twentieth century by many lawmakers, who advocated for preserving the “Nordic” character of the nation.33

Trump also appealed to white identifiers in a second important way. He departed from the traditional Republican Party agenda aimed at cutting social spending and reducing the social safety net. Meanwhile, most of his Republican primary opponents adopted the anti-big government position the party has touted for years. At one Republican primary debate, candidate Marco Rubio claimed that he would fight anyone who wanted to expand government. John Kasich boasted that they had shrunk the government in his state of Ohio. Ted Cruz described government as a problem, and argued that less government means more freedom and prosperity. Ben Carson supported raising the minimum age to receive Social Security benefits. In contrast, Trump rejected benefits cuts and promised his supporters that he would preserve Social Security and Medicare.34 In May of 2015, Trump claimed via Twitter, “I was the first and only potential GOP candidate to state there will be no cuts to Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid. Huckabee copied me.”35

Of course, we know from Chapter 7 that Social Security and Medicare are the very sort of racialized policies white identifiers support. By departing from the traditional Republican position of less government, and by loudly and attentively turning to immigration reform as one of the main issues of his campaign, Trump touted a unique and unusual combination of policy positions – ones that happen to align exceptionally well with the preferences of white identifiers.

In light of Trump’s racial ploys and policy positions, it is perhaps unsurprising that in the months before and after the 2016 presidential election, many journalists proposed that Trump was tapping into “white identity politics.” It is worth noting, however, that a number of these articles equated “white identity politics” with racism.36 As I demonstrate, however, white identity politics is not the expression of racial animus, and we should not simply equate it with Trump’s appeals to whites’ racial hostilities; rather, Trump capitalized on white identity because many white voters saw him as restoring and protecting their group’s power and resources.

If this assessment is correct, we would expect to find a strong relationship between levels of white identity, white consciousness, and...
support for Trump. We should also expect to observe these relationships above and beyond measures of racial prejudice. But the notion that Trump supporters were driven largely by racial prejudice is not the only competing hypothesis of concern here. Many also proposed that Trump support could be found among aggrieved working-class whites, and so I also account for individual economic circumstances in my analyses. I note, however, that there has never been support for the notion that Americans vote with their “pocketbook” (Sears and Funk 1990), and previous work has already demonstrated that individual change in financial well-being had little impact on candidate preferences in 2016 (Mutz 2018). Finally, as I describe in more detail below, I also examine whether Trump support was primarily driven by authoritarianism and populism.

To evaluate these relationships, I turn first to the 2016 ANES Pilot Study, which was conducted in January 2016 just prior to the presidential primaries. The study includes the racial importance identity measure and the two items that when combined with identity, serve as a valid measure of racial consciousness. Since consciousness captures a more politicized identity, we would expect it to be a stronger predictor of political preferences than identity alone.

White Identity and Positive Evaluations of Trump before the Primaries

In the general election, we might expect to find that when faced with two candidate choices, Americans were driven primarily by their partisan identities. Considering attitudes toward Trump well before the general election, however, allows me to compare the factors associated with attitudes toward a range of Democratic and Republican political candidates. Thus, I am able to determine whether white racial identity and consciousness were uniquely linked with support for Trump.

I first examine the relationships between identity, consciousness, and affective evaluations of Trump using the 101-point feeling thermometer measure, where respondents are asked to rate how warm or cold they feel toward a particular political figure. At the lowest end of the scale, zero represents the most unfavorable or cold feelings. At the high end of the scale, 100 represents the most positive or warm feelings.
Ratings around fifty degrees capture more neutral assessments. What predicts warmer evaluations of Trump? To find out, I regress thermometer evaluations of Trump on white identity and white consciousness (as two separate models). I also control for party identification, political ideology, employment status, evaluations of the national economy, education, age, and gender. Finally, I account for racial hostility with the standard measure of racial resentment.

The results of the regressions are presented in Figure 8.5. We can see that even after controlling for other factors, white identity was a significant predictor of affect toward Trump in January of 2016. To be clear, racial animus mattered as well, as others have indicated (Schaffner, Macwilliams, and Nteta 2018). But all else equal, whites with higher levels of racial identity evaluated Trump more warmly. Furthermore, when in-group solidarity is measured with the consciousness item, the effect is more potent. Whites high on racial consciousness gave Trump a thermometer score eighteen points higher than did those with the lowest levels of consciousness.

Perhaps, however, Trump was not alone in appealing to racially conscious whites. My speculation might be wrong, and it could be that any Republican candidate, or possibly any white candidate, might draw favor from this subset of whites. In mid to late January of 2016, when the ANES Pilot Study was conducted, the campaign field was littered with potential presidential candidates. Voters had many options from which to choose, and it was not evident that Trump would secure the nomination. Given a choice between all of the Republican candidates competing in the primaries, would high white identifiers prefer Trump over other Republican candidates? To find out, I examine whether white identity and consciousness were associated with choosing Trump above and beyond the other Republican candidates.

I present in Figure 8.6 the predicted probability from two logit models—one with white identity and one with white consciousness—of preferring Trump in the primary over the other nine leading Republican candidates. Just as I did in the previous model predicting affect toward Trump, I control for party identity, ideology, employment status, national economic evaluations, education, age, gender, and racial resentment. In the first panel, we can see that those higher on racial identity were indeed more likely to prefer Trump. Moving from the lowest level of identity to the highest increases the probability...
Figure 8.5 Affective Evaluations of Donald Trump

The bars represent the coefficient for each variable in the OLS model. The lines represent the 95 percent confidence intervals. Estimates from full models appear in Online Appendix 8E.

Source: 2016 ANES Pilot Study.
of selecting Trump from 0.13 to 0.38 on the zero to one scale. The right panel in figure 8.6 that the effect among those high on consciousness is even greater than those high on identity alone. Whites high on consciousness are nearly eight times more likely to choose Trump than those lowest on consciousness.43

Trump may have been viewed favorably among whites high on racial consciousness, but it is possible that these whites might still have had more positive (or notably negative) feelings toward other candidates, potentially on both sides of the partisan aisle. For instance, some journalists have speculated that Democratic candidate Bernie Sanders was successfully tapping into the same sense of disenchantment among whites as was Trump.44 Furthermore, some might contend that white identity ought to be negatively associated with support for candidates Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio, who share a Latino identity, and who therefore, according to my analysis above, ought to be penalized by white identifiers. At the same time, both Cruz and Rubio were candidates who had largely distanced themselves from their Hispanic heritage and who were largely unsupportive of undocumented immigrants. Both candidates made a point of downplaying

![Figure 8.6](https://www.cambridge.org/core/core-image.png)

**Figure 8.6 The Probability of Choosing Trump over Other Republican Primary Candidates**

Points and solid line represent the predicted probability of choosing Trump over other Republican primary candidates. The capped lines and shaded region represent the 95 percent confidence intervals. Predicted probabilities are calculated by holding gender constant at female and all other variables in the model at their means. Model also controls for party identity, ideology, employment status, negative national economic evaluations, education, age, gender, and racial resentment. Estimates from full models appear in Online Appendix 8F.

*Source*: 2016 ANES Pilot Study.
their ethnic identity, and it is therefore possible that many white voters paid little mind to these candidates’ ethnicity.

In Figure 8.7, I present the relationship between white consciousness and feeling thermometer evaluations of the four most successful presidential candidates during the 2016 primary season besides Trump: Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders, Ted Cruz, and Marco Rubio. Looking at the figure, it is immediately obvious that Trump was in fact unique in his appeal to racially conscious whites. White racial consciousness is not a significant predictor of evaluations of Hillary Clinton, nor of Republican candidates Ted Cruz or Marco Rubio. The measure marginally predicts evaluations of Sanders, but in the direction opposite of what we might anticipate. Those higher on white consciousness evaluated Sanders less favorably, not more. In short, across the landscape of political frontrunners, Trump was unequivocally capitalizing on the politics of white identity.
Alternative Explanations for the Rise of Trump: Testing the Robustness of White Racial Solidarity and Attitudes Toward Trump

A number of other scholars have identified several alternative explanations for Trump’s success. One popular and widely covered account for Americans’ support for Trump is the prevalence of authoritarianism in the public mind. Authoritarians desire order, especially when they are fearful or threatened (Hetherington and Weiler 2009). What is more, they not only respond to fear threats, but especially to threats from abroad. Over the course of his campaign, Trump frequently mentioned threats to the nation from overseas, particularly from Iran and from terrorist organizations. Perhaps he was exceptionally successful at activating authoritarianism.

Other research has challenged the claim that authoritarianism was driving Trump support. Analysis by political scientists Eric Oliver and Wendy Rahn (2016) suggests that Trump supporters might have instead been motivated by populism. Unlike authoritarians, who align themselves with those in charge, populists are opposed to elites of all kinds. Accordingly, populism is characterized both by anti-elitist sentiments and by mistrust of experts. To put these claims to the test, I included measures of both these sentiments on the 2016 YouGov Study. I measure authoritarianism with a traditional four-item measure gauging attitudes toward child-rearing. Following Oliver and Rahn, I measured anti-elitism by asking respondents the extent to which they agree or disagree with two statements: (1) It doesn’t really matter who you vote for because the rich control both political parties, and (2) The system is stacked against people like me. I gauged mistrust of experts with the following item, also presented in an agree or disagree format: “I’d rather put my trust in the wisdom of ordinary people than the opinions of experts and intellectuals.”

Finally, some might wonder whether most of the effects I observe with respect to white identity or white consciousness are really being driven by those with especially extreme views. We know from Chapter 3 that the measure of white identity is capturing not just a wide swath of white Americans who feel an attachment to their racial group, but also the much smaller segment of those with especially insidious views – individuals who identify overtly with white nationalist organizations, the alt-right, or white supremacist groups.
To make sure the effects of white racial solidarity I am observing are not primarily driven by these individuals, I also evaluate attitudes toward Trump while controlling for the ratings survey respondents give the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) on a 101-point feeling thermometer measure.

I re-examine Trump support here with two approaches. The first considers the relationship between white racial consciousness, racial animus, populism, and authoritarianism as they relate to affective evaluations of Trump measured with a feeling thermometer. Then, I explore the extent to which each of these factors predicts reported vote choice in the 2016 presidential election. In each case, in addition to accounting for these alternative hypotheses, I also control party identity, political ideology, employment status, education, age, gender, attitudes about the scope of government, and racial animus.

I present in Table 8.2 the results of an ordinary least squares regression controlling for each of these items and white racial consciousness. I focus solely on consciousness, but note that the results for identity are nearly identical. We see in the first columns of the table that, as I have already demonstrated, consciousness is strongly associated with more favorable ratings of Trump, even after controlling for racial resentment. Certainly, resentment matters as well; Trump support is very clearly a product both of white group solidarity and racial animus.

In the second column, I replace the measure of racial resentment with a more explicit measure of racial attitudes—a standard stereotype measure of racial animus, coded as the difference between where whites evaluate their group on two dimensions—either hardworking or lazy, and either intelligent or unintelligent—and where they rate blacks, on average, on those scales. We can see that measured this way, racial animus still predicts Trump support, but the effect of white consciousness remains the same.

Next, I measure racial prejudice with an even more explicit attitude: affect toward the KKK. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, whites high on white racial solidarity do rate the KKK more favorably than whites who are less attached to their racial group. The average thermometer rating among those with consciousness scores in the upper quartile of the scale is twenty-one degrees—a still considerably unfavorable score. Nevertheless, there are some individuals in the sample who rate the KKK more warmly. Approximately 9 percent of whites in the sample give the KKK a thermometer rating at fifty-one degrees or above. Are
these individuals primarily responsible for the significant relationship we observe between white racial consciousness and attitudes toward Trump? The results of the model in the second column of Table 8.2 suggest not. After controlling for attitudes toward the KKK, the effect of white consciousness on Trump evaluations is reduced only slightly, and the relationship remains statistically significant. I note, however, that warm feelings toward the KKK were also significantly linked to warmer feelings for Trump.

In the fourth column, I examine the relationship between evaluations of Trump while also controlling for authoritarianism. The effect of authoritarianism is small and marginally significant, and accounting for it in the model does not reduce the effect of white consciousness on attitudes toward Trump. We can also see in the fifth column of Table 8.2 that neither anti-elitism nor mistrust of experts significantly explains evaluations of Trump above and beyond consciousness. Furthermore, when I control for all four items together, the relationships are largely the same. The results suggest that white consciousness, partisanship, age, attitudes about the size of government, and racial resentment were what primarily account for positive attitudes toward Trump.

Next, I turn to determining whether white consciousness was related to vote choice in 2016, accounting for the same factors as above. In the 2016 YouGov Study, which was conducted in two waves, respondents were asked after the election to report for whom they voted. Were white racial solidarity, racial resentment, authoritarianism, and populism implicated in whites’ vote choice? To find out, I examine the relationship between each of these items and vote choice, and I present the results in Figure 8.8.

Figure 8.8 is generated via the same model as presented in the last column of Table 8.2, except this time I estimate a logit model predicting vote choice in the election, where zero indicates a vote for Clinton and one a vote for Trump. In this model, neither authoritarianism nor populism are significant. Instead, we see that vote choice is a function of white consciousness, party identity, ideology, gender, and attitudes about the size of government. We also observe a small and marginally significant effect for economic self-interest. Unemployed respondents were significantly more likely to report voting for Trump, but the effect does not approach that of white consciousness or party identification.
Table 8.2 *Affective Evaluations of Trump*

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Note: Table entries are OLS coefficients. Standard errors in parentheses. All variables in model coded to range from zero to one. Data are weighted. ***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.1, two-tailed.
Candidate Evaluations and Threat

Throughout this book, I have argued that as a dominant identity, white racial solidarity’s association with political preferences is in part a function of perceived group threat. The results in this chapter lend further support to my argument that politicians can appeal to whites, activating their racial identity, by reminding them of threats to their group’s status and by indicating that they will protect this status. The fact that white racial solidarity so strongly predicts evaluations of Trump, and only evaluations of Trump, is strong evidence for this claim. You might also wonder, however, whether information about demographic change or immigration boosts white identifiers’ support for Trump even more. Recall that, in Chapter 5, I showed that in response to information about their pending numerical decline and of increased immigration in the future, whites with higher levels of identity reported significant negative emotional reactions. Does information about demographic change effect how white identifiers view

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Figure 8.8 White Consciousness and 2016 Presidential Vote Choice

Bars represent the coefficient for each variable in the model. The lines represent the 95 percent confidence intervals. Greater values indicate a preference for Trump. Estimates from full models appear in Online Appendix 8H.

Trump? My examination of this relationship suggests there is some shift, although the results fall short of statistical significance. Whites high on solidarity, when reminded of their impending numerical decline or when told that immigration to the United States is increasing, do tend to rate Trump even more favorably. The effect, however, is not especially large, in part because whites high on racial solidarity already rate Trump so highly. Nevertheless, the confluence of evidence here is important. White racial solidarity is tightly linked to opposition to immigration. It is also significantly tied to attitudes toward Trump, who clearly exploited whites’ anti-immigrant sentiment. Trump serves as a prime example of politicians capitalizing on whites’ desire to protect their group.

The Civil Rights Movement

Donald Trump exploited whites’ concerns in a rapidly diversifying nation, warning them of their impending loss of status due to immigration, globalization, and multiculturalism. Decades before these subtler threats began to bubble to the surface, however, whites were caught in a much more overt, sometimes violent, and certainly explicit fight over their group’s power and status. During the Civil Rights movement, whites’ dominance over racial and ethnic minorities was directly challenged, especially in the US South. The Civil Rights movement certainly highlighted the persistence of white racial animosity in the United States, but it was also indicative of a shift in whites’ absolute power over the nation’s political, social, and economic institutions. We might therefore expect to find that both racial animus and white in-group attitudes were politically relevant in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Unfortunately, public opinion surveys from the time did not include direct measures of white racial identity. Nevertheless, we can turn to more affective measures, comparing the relationship between political preferences and the evaluations whites give their own group above and beyond those they gave to blacks during the time. One way to assess whether whites were bringing their in-group sentiments to bear on attitudes toward the Civil Rights movement is to turn to the ANES Time Series, which asked individuals the following: “Some say that the civil rights people have been trying to push too fast. Others feel they haven’t pushed fast enough. How about you: Do you think that
civil rights leaders are trying to push too fast, are going too slowly, or are they moving about the right speed?" Respondents were asked this question beginning in 1964. Here, I examine the relationship between white in-group attitudes, measured with the white feeling thermometer measure (where whites are asked on a 100-point scale to rate how warm or cold they feel toward their group), whites’ attitudes toward blacks, also measured with the thermometer, and responses to this question during the latter half of the Civil Rights movement and in the years just after its end (1964, 1966, 1968, 1972, and 1974). The dependent variable here is coded to range from zero to one, with “1” representing the belief that leaders were pushing too fast, “0” representing the belief they were moving too slowly, and “0.5” an endorsement that they were moving at the right speed. I also control for party identity, personal financial evaluations, education, gender, age, and residence in the South.

Figure 8.9 plots the coefficients on the white thermometer and black thermometer items from each model for each year. Not surprisingly, how whites felt toward blacks was significantly linked to their belief about Civil Rights leaders. Those who felt warmer toward blacks were also more inclined to report that Civil Rights leaders were going too slowly. It is also important to note, however, that whites’ feelings toward their own group mattered as well, even after accounting for attitudes toward blacks. In each year, whites who rated whites more warmly were also significantly more likely to believe that Civil Rights leaders were pushing too fast.

Were politicians prior to Trump able to capitalize on these sentiments, just as I have argued Trump was able to take advantage of whites’ perceptions of threat about their status today? To see, I explore whether prominent political figures, beginning with Wallace and Nixon, during and just after the Civil Rights movement, and then later Patrick Buchanan, were able to appeal not only to whites’ racial hostilities, but also to their sense of racial solidarity.

George Wallace

Arguably at the forefront of the effort to maintain white power during the Civil Rights movement was Alabama Governor George C. Wallace. He was a strict segregationist, best known for his attempt to block the integration of the University of Alabama as ordered
by President John F. Kennedy. In this respect, Wallace very overtly attempted to maintain the system of Jim Crow segregation that benefited southern whites.

Wallace was first elected Governor of Alabama in 1962. He was sworn into office on January 14, 1963 in a ceremony marked by brazen symbolism. He took the oath of office while standing in the same spot where almost 102 years prior, Jefferson Davis was sworn in as the provisional president of the Confederate States of America. Wallace’s inaugural address was written by Asa Earl Carter, a 1950s leader of the Ku Klux Klan. In the address, Wallace proclaimed, “In the name of the greatest people that have ever trod this earth, I draw the line in the dust and toss the gauntlet before the feet of tyranny … and I say … segregation today … segregation tomorrow … segregation
forever” (Wallace 1963). Of course, when Wallace referred to the “greatest people that have ever trod this earth” he surely meant white Americans.

But Wallace’s speech was not, largely, an explicit attempt to denigrate blacks. Instead, much of his address blatantly pandered to whites, echoing language we have heard before. His words were reminiscent of the same appeals made during the congressional debates over immigration reform in the 1920s. Wallace praised his state as the heart of the “Great Anglo-Saxon Southland.” Most poignantly, like Senator Durant in the 1920s, like Buchanan in the 1990s, and like Trump and others today, Wallace warned that whites were in jeopardy. He cautioned that they stood to be submerged and persecuted globally by a growing non-white minority:

It is the “changing world” of which we are told … it is called “new” and “liberal”. It is as old as the oldest dictator. It is degenerate and decadent. As the national racism of Hitler’s Germany persecuted a national minority to the whim of a national majority … so the international racism of the liberals seek to persecute the international white minority to the whim of the international colored majority … so that we are footballed about according to the favor of the Afro-Asian bloc. (Wallace 1963)

Wallace moved to carry his popularity as governor onto the national scene in 1963, intending to oppose John F. Kennedy for the Democratic presidential nomination. He was unsuccessful, losing the nomination to Lyndon Johnson, who came into office after Kennedy’s assassination. Despite his Democratic partisanship, Wallace’s campaign mirrored many of the themes of Republican candidate Barry Goldwater, who was also notorious for resisting the efforts of the Civil Rights movement, and who campaigned against strong action by the federal government to enforce civil rights.51 Wallace ran again in 1968, 1972, and 1976, continuing his anti-integration agenda and concern over the erosion of white privilege. Much like Trump, he railed against the establishment, against liberal elites, and against black protestors. In short, while support for Wallace was surely driven by racial animus, we might also expect that it was motivated by whites who sought to protect their group and its power.
Richard Nixon

Like Wallace, Nixon also sought to win over southern whites who were resistant to civil rights. Nixon, however, adopted some of Wallace’s more subtle approaches. Rather than explicitly attacking the efforts of the Civil Rights movement, Nixon focused on preserving states’ rights and on “law and order” – terms that, according to scholars, served as dog-whistles, or coded language meant to symbolize a resistance to civil rights (Crespino 2007; Haney-Lopez 2014). Nixon used the language of states’ rights to oppose federal government involvement in busing and integration. Today, we see Nixon’s efforts as part of a larger story about partisan realignment, one where the Democratic Party became associated with civil rights and racial and ethnic minorities while the Republican Party moved to capture the votes of more racially conservative whites (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Schickler 2016; Valentino and Sears 2005). I propose that part of the story was not merely one of Republican candidates’ efforts to appeal to whites’ racial animosities, but also one of candidates appealing to whites’ in-group interests (Bobo 1983; Bobo and Kluegel 1993).

To determine whether attitudes toward Wallace and Nixon were a function of how whites felt about their own group, I turn to the 1968, 1972, and 1976 ANES Time Series studies. I estimate affect toward the major presidential candidates in each of those years, measured with thermometer ratings, as a function of white in-group attitudes (also measured with the thermometer), party identity, personal financial evaluations, education, gender, age, attitudes toward blacks (measured with the thermometer), and a control for southern residence.52

Figure 8.10 illustrates the relationship between whites’ ratings of their in-group and attitudes toward each of the major presidential candidates, as well as Wallace, across the three years. In 1968, white in-group attitudes were significantly related to warmer evaluations of both Wallace and Nixon, but not to evaluations of Democratic nominee Hubert Humphrey. In 1972, the ratings whites gave their group on the thermometer were also significantly associated with attitudes toward both Wallace and Nixon, but not with feelings toward Democratic presidential candidate George McGovern. Finally, in 1976, whites who rated their group more warmly still felt more significantly favorable toward Wallace, and not Democratic candidate Jimmy Carter.53 Interestingly, white thermometer evaluations were also related
Figure 8.10 The Relationship between White Affect and Presidential Candidates, 1968–1976

The points represent the coefficient on the white feeling thermometer in each model of candidate evaluations. The lines represent the 95 percent confidence intervals. Model also controls for party identity, negative personal economic evaluations, education, gender, age, affect toward blacks, and South. Estimates from full model appear in Online Appendix 8J.

Source: ANES Time Series. Analysis was run using the ANES Cumulative File.
to attitudes toward Republican candidate Gerald Ford, although as Nixon’s former vice president, it may not be especially surprising that the same whites who were more favorable toward Nixon also viewed Ford somewhat more positively as well.

**Patrick Buchanan**

Trump is certainly not the first presidential candidate to make immigration an issue front and center to his campaign. In fact, some have claimed that Trump simply borrowed strategies from conservative political advisor, commentator, and politician, Patrick Buchanan. Even Pat Buchanan expressed surprise at the similarities between Trump’s campaign to his own in the 1990s. In an interview, Buchanan remarked about Trump, “I was relatively astonished when he came out against trade and immigration – and to Make America First – that’s on my [campaign] hats.”

Buchanan, a former senior advisor to Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, and Ronald Reagan, ran for president in 1992, 1996, and 2000. His 1992 campaign initially posed a serious challenge to Republican incumbent George H.W. Bush, but ultimately Buchanan did not do well enough in the primaries to move forward. He gained more support in the 1996 campaign, when Bill Clinton sought re-election, winning several of the primaries. He fell, however, to Bob Dole on Super Tuesday. While Buchanan never earned the Republican Party’s nomination, the level of support he did receive is noteworthy.

Like Trump, Buchanan advocated for stringent immigration restrictions. He called for a fence to be built along the border with Mexico, much like Trump’s promise to build a wall that would prevent Mexicans from illegally crossing into the United States. At a political rally speech in Santa Barbara, California in 1996, prior to the Republican Convention, Buchanan said:

> We’re going to go to that convention. We’re going to go to that convention and we’re going to tell that convention we want ... a security fence all along the transit points and if the illegal aliens come into the country we’re going to have Proposition 187 for the United States of America.

*Buchanan 1996*

Buchanan also took a very similar position to Trump on the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Trump railed against
NAFTA, arguing that the agreement was to blame for America’s slow wage growth, low labor force participation rates, and the decline in employment in manufacturing. In the early 1990s, Buchanan more bluntly expressed the idea that NAFTA was a danger to America’s place in the world. He maintained it would introduce “world government” and diminish US sovereignty. He declared that defeating NAFTA would be the “shot heard ‘round the world that the Old Republic is back, that we Americans are, once again, looking out for America first.” When Buchanan talked about “America first” he was unabashedly speaking about white Americans. In his 1992 speech announcing his presidential candidacy, he remarked, “When we say we will put America first, we mean also that our Judeo-Christian values are going to be preserved, and our Western heritage is going to be handed down to future generations, not dumped onto some land fill called multi-culturalism” (Buchanan 1991). He would go on to write several books lamenting the threat multiculturalism and diversity posed to the status of white Americans. He warned his readers that white Americans would soon be the new minority, displaced by Hispanics and other groups in a rapidly changing country (Buchanan 2011).

Buchanan was largely considered a fringe candidate, relegated and dismissed as a member of the radical right, never achieving the success Trump realized in the 2016 presidential election. Of course, the world in which Buchanan was campaigning looked very different from today’s political landscape. At that time, immigration had yet to reach the rates it ultimately achieved in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Buchanan also did not have the opportunity to seize upon the hostility and sense of threat that accompanied the election of the nation’s first black president. Nevertheless, Buchanan’s message resonated with some voters. Perhaps, therefore, he was able to make white identity a salient component of his support.

To investigate this claim, I again turn to the ANES Times Series to evaluate attitudes toward Pat Buchanan in each year he ran for president: 1992, 1996, and 2000. In each year, I compare the relationship between the white feeling thermometer and evaluations of Buchanan with attitudes toward other presidential candidates, controlling for party identity, personal economic evaluations, education, gender, age, attitudes toward blacks, and whether the respondent lives in the South.

We can see from the results presented in Figure 8.11 that white in-group sentiments were predictive of support for Buchanan in each
Figure 8.11 The Relationship between White Affect and Presidential Candidates, 1992–2000

Note: The points represent the coefficient on the white feeling thermometer in each model of candidate evaluations. The lines represent the 95 percent confidence intervals. Model also controls for party identity, negative personal economic evaluations, education, gender, age, affect toward blacks, and South. Estimates from full model appear in Online Appendix 8K.

Source: ANES Time Series. Analysis was run using the ANES Cumulative File.
of the years he ran for president. The higher whites rated themselves on the white thermometer item, the more warmly they rated Buchanan. The thermometer evaluations were not predictive of any other presidential candidates — including other Republican candidates — in these years, with the exception of George Bush in 1992. It is not entirely evident why white in-group attitudes would be especially linked to Bush, but it is worth noting that it was in May of 1992 that Bush condemned the race riots in Los Angeles in the wake of the brutal beating African American Rodney King received during his arrest in 1991. He used familiar “law and order” language, pledging to restore order in Los Angeles, potentially appealing both to whites’ racial hostilities and their in-group concerns.

This analysis provides some suggestive but important evidence that politicians can make racial appeals that not only take advantage of the hostilities whites feel toward racial and ethnic minorities, but also ones that appeal to whites’ desire to protect and preserve their group’s power. Trump is not alone in having successfully tapped into whites’ in-group sentiments. George Wallace, Richard Nixon, and Pat Buchanan clearly took advantage of both in-group and out-group racial attitudes. We may therefore expect that future political candidates may try to do the same.

**Political Mobilization**

Over the course of this chapter, I have demonstrated that politicians can successfully exploit whites’ sense of racial solidarity. Certainly, for Donald Trump, appealing to whites’ animosities and anxieties was an overwhelmingly successful strategy. But were these whites actually more likely to show up at the polls? Are whites with higher levels of racial consciousness more likely to participate in politics? Previous work on group consciousness more broadly indicates that the construct is one of the more powerful predictors of political participation. In fact, this domain is one where the distinction between identity and consciousness clearly emerges, and scholars often use consciousness to predict political participation more generally (Chong and Rogers 2005; Miller et al. 1981). After all, group members high on consciousness believe that their group must work within the political system to address group disparities (Miller et al. 1981). Does this pattern hold for
whites as well? Previous work would suggest some skepticism, arguing that whites are primarily driven by socioeconomic model of participation, in which their economic resources, levels of education, and political knowledge motivate their political engagement. Here, I examine whether they are driven by a sense of group consciousness as well.

I construct a scale of political participation using six items in the 2016 ANES Pilot. Respondents were asked how likely they were to attend a political meeting, give money to a political organization, and distribute advertisements supporting a political group or figure. They were also asked whether they joined in a protest march or rally in the past four years, and whether in the past two months they wore campaign paraphernalia or donated money to a political party or candidate. The average of these six items forms a reliable measure of political participation.59

In Figure 8.12, I present the relationship between white identity, white consciousness, and reported levels of political participation, controlling for other factors likely to be associated with political participation, including partisanship, ideology, employment status, income,

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**Figure 8.12** The Relationship between White Identity, White Consciousness, and Levels of Political Participation

Points and solid line represent the predicted level of political participation at each level of white identity or white consciousness. The capped lines and shaded region represent the 95 percent confidence intervals. Predicted probabilities are calculated by holding gender constant at female and all other variables in the model at their means. Model also controls for party identity, ideology, employment status, negative national economic evaluations, income, education, political knowledge, age, gender, and racial resentment. Estimates from full model appear in Online Appendix 8L.

*Source: 2016 ANES Pilot Study.*
education, and political knowledge. We can see that after controlling for these factors, white identity is only marginally significant; consciousness, in contrast, is significantly linked to political participation. Whites high on racial consciousness report an intention to participate in politics at a much greater rate than those low on racial consciousness. Compared to whites with the lowest level of consciousness, those with the highest degree have participation scores 1.6 times higher.

These results add an important nuance to our understanding of political behavior among whites. Political participation among whites, it seems, is not merely a function of socioeconomic resources (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). Similar to the pattern we observe among blacks (Chong and Rogers 2005; Miller et al. 1981; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995), group consciousness among whites is strongly associated with greater levels of political participation. Racial consciousness, as expected, pulls people into the political world.

**Conclusion**

The evidence presented in this chapter shows that white identity can play a powerful role in one of the most visible and significant expressions of political preferences – presidential vote choice. In 2012, white identifiers were far more likely to vote for Romney than Obama, even after accounting for racial animus. These results suggest that Obama represented a clear challenge to whites’ dominance, and therefore the lack of support for Obama among whites was not merely, exclusively, or even primarily a result of racial hostility. Many whites opposed Obama because he represented their group’s loss of power and privileges. White identity was significantly associated with the belief that Obama favors blacks over whites, further indication that Obama was viewed by some whites as a threat to their in-group. Interestingly, however, not all backlashes to Obama are rooted in white racial solidarity. Support for the Tea Party movement, which many consider a direct response to Obama’s election, is not associated with whites’ in-group attitudes. Instead, more favorable views toward the Tea Party are overwhelmingly linked to white racial resentment.

We also saw that white identity was significantly associated with opposition to a Latino president, providing further evidence that non-white political candidates more generally are viewed as threats
to whites’ political power. These results suggest that as the electorate becomes more diverse, and more non-white political candidates run for office, whites high on racial identity are likely to be especially discontent.

Obama represents a case in which white identity is brought to bear on evaluations of a political figure viewed as a challenge to whites. But I have also argued that white identity should predict support for political figures whites view as protecting their group, or restoring the racial order. In this chapter, I demonstrated that Donald Trump emerged as a candidate who directly appealed to white identifiers, and even more so to those high on white consciousness. Not only did Trump promise to protect their group by insulating US workers and severely restricting immigration – one of the greatest sources of threat to whites – but he also supported many of the racialized social welfare policies that, as I and others have suggested, whites see as benefiting their group. Throughout his campaign, Trump appealed to these whites by pledging to protect Social Security and Medicare – policies strongly supported by white identifiers.

Trump effectively activated white identity by leveraging threats to whites’ status. As a result, white identity predicts support for Trump and only Trump in 2016. Furthermore, I demonstrate that white identity predicted Trump support above and beyond traditional measures of racial animus. Yet one should not walk away with the conclusion that this aspect of Trump’s appeal is somehow more innocuous than racially charged language directed at racial and ethnic minorities. Throughout his campaign, and in the early part of his presidency, Trump worked to position himself very much in opposition to Barack Obama. Many of his policy positions seemed intended to dismantle policies and programs that had been established by Obama, including health care reform, climate change, and criminal justice reform. Trump’s success came not merely from disparaging people of color, but from positioning himself as the antidote to any threat posed by the nation’s first black president. In doing so, he was, and is, seeking to maintain the dominance of whiteness in the United States.

Other politicians have, in the past, been able to make similar appeals. Politicians like George Wallace, Richard Nixon, and Patrick Buchanan sought political support by playing on whites’ fears and anxieties over their potentially waning status in the nation and the world. In keeping with this possibility, white in-group sentiments are
significant predictors of attitudes toward both these political figures in the years in which they ran for US president. Not only do these results demonstrate the potential for white identity to be leveraged by political candidate, but they also provide important evidence that white identity has mattered politically during periods of time in which whites felt threatened.

These results also offer insight into future elections. It is likely that in the years to come, the electorate will continue to diversify. The same demographic shifts that are putting some whites on edge are only exacerbating the feeling that whites are losing out. Barack Obama would not have won his second term if it were not for the Latinos and blacks who turned out in great numbers to vote for him. All signs suggest that these profound changes to the political and social landscape of the United States will increase, and racial and ethnic minorities will continue to gain more positions of political, economic, and social power. As a result, the power of white racial solidarity is likely to persist well into the future of electoral politics. We can see that whites who feel this sense of attachment to their racial group can be politically mobilized. Whites with higher levels of consciousness also report higher levels of political participation. The political milieu of 2016 suggests that whites will increasingly think of themselves as a political group with cohesive interests, a sentiment that surely other politicians will attempt to exploit long after Donald Trump.