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#### Recommended Citation

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## *Economic Anxiety or Racial Predispositions? Explaining White Support for Donald Trump in the 2016 Presidential Election*

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In this article, we examine the degree to which White support for Donald Trump is driven by economic anxiety or racial resentment. Given Donald Trump's rhetoric surrounding racial and ethnic minorities during the 2016 presidential election, it is perplexing that the influence of racial attitudes has been ignored in explaining his electoral success. We argue that Whites with high levels of racially resentful attitudes should be more likely to support Donald Trump and that racial resentment should be a greater determinant of support for Trump than variables measuring economic anxiety. Relying on a logistic regression analysis, we utilize data from the 2016 American National Elections Survey. The findings support our expectations: White respondents with high levels of racially resentful attitudes were significantly more likely to indicate support for Donald Trump. Additionally, the model demonstrates that racial resentment is a far greater predictor of White support for Donald Trump than measures that capture economic anxiety.

**Keywords:** Racial Resentment, Economic Anxiety, Presidential Election

### INTRODUCTION

Is White support for Donald Trump driven by racial resentment or concerns about the U.S. economy? The driving factors behind racially resentful attitudes have been subject to extensive debate among scholars. There is a substantial body of scholarship that has found empirical links between racial resentment and opposition to race-targeted policies such as affirmative action, the American Affordable Healthcare Act, African American candidates, and its spillover into mass public opinion (Knuckey, 2011; Tesler, 2012a and 2012b; Maxwell *et al.*, 2013; Wilson and King-Meadows, 2016).

A number of studies examining the role of racial resentment during the Obama presidency show that the Obama presidency brought in a political era in which racial attitudes spilled over into mass public opinion on a host of issues that were not even directly related to race, making the political environment ripe for the influence of racial attitudes (Tesler, 2015). According to these studies, the impact of racial attitudes has spilled over into (1) Whites' evaluation of political leaders (e.g. Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden) that have been associated with Barack Obama (ANES 2016 Pilot Study, 2016); (2) partisan attachments (Tesler, 2013 and 2015); (3) Obama's legislative agenda (Knoll and Shewmaker, 2014); (4) the voting behavior of Whites in congressional districts where House members supported Obamacare (Tesler, 2013); (5) assessments of the U.S. economy (Chen *et al.*, 2014) and (6) even attitudes towards the president's water poodle (Tesler, 2012b). The implications of these studies suggest that the political environment in a post-Obama America may be significantly more susceptible to the influence of

racial attitudes for years to come.

While the presence of racially resentful attitudes has been extensively documented, there has been extensive debate about what these attitudes mean, how to interpret these attitudes, and factors driving the re-emergence of racial resentment. Scholars engaging in this debate usually fall into two schools of thought. On the one hand, there is a group of scholars who contend that racial resentment is not rooted in racism and is instead a manifestation of principled politics (Sniderman and Carmines, 1997; Sniderman *et al.*, 2000). Scholars embracing this approach argue that race-targeted policies violate fundamental American values such as individualism, leading many Whites to oppose such programs. Under this view, Whites oppose policies such as affirmative action not because of racism or prejudice but because these policies represent an ideological violation of their core political values. On the other hand, there are scholars who contend that Whites' opposition to race-targeted policies are a direct function of racial prejudice and are not linked to ideological considerations (Kinder and Mendelberg, 2000; Kinder and Sears, 1981; Sidanius *et al.*, 1996; Jackman, 1994; Sidanius and Pratto, 1999). Some scholars even suggest that "ideology itself has become entwined with racial prejudice so that a racially tinged form of individualism now fuels opposition to racial programs to a far greater extent than opposition to other government efforts to assist the poor" (Feldman and Huddy, 2005, 168).

The 2016 presidential election presents a significant opportunity to investigate the degree to which racial resentment may have spillover into the U.S. presidential election. Specifically, this election allows us to investigate factors driving White support for Donald Trump empirically. In the aftermath of the 2016 election, many leaders from both Democratic and Republican parties, political commentators, and analysts suggested that Hillary Clinton failed to advance a message that spoke to the economic anxiety of White working-class voters in areas such as the Midwest. Proponents of this line of reasoning contend that with the rampant expansion of technology and globalization, many Whites in rural areas of the United States felt forgotten due to the closing of several industries which resulted in the loss of jobs, wages, and their overall well-being. What is perplexing about this assessment is that it diminishes the role that race and racial predispositions played in the election. Unlike previous Republican candidates, Donald Trump engaged in one of the most racially divisive campaigns in modern U.S. history. Many of Donald Trump's actions were explicit racial appeals. His rise to political prominence came when he advanced the racist "birther" claim, which essentially questioned the legitimacy of America's first African American President. On June 16, 2015, he sent shock waves across the nation by arguing that Mexican immigrants were "drug dealers" and "rapists." During the course of the campaign, Donald Trump claimed that Judge Gonzalo Curiel, who was born in the United States, was incapable of being fair to him because of the judge's Mexican heritage. On the eve of the southern Republican presidential primaries, Donald Trump refused to unequivocally disavow David Duke, a former member of the Ku Klux Klan. He even called for a complete travel ban on Muslims to prevent them from entering the United States. In addition to making explicit racial appeals, he also engaged in implicit appeals by declaring himself the "law and order" candidate. These tactics employed by then-candidate Donald Trump raise the question: to what degree was his White support driven by economic anxiety among a segment of voters who felt forgotten, or was his support driven by racial predispositions?

In the days following Donald Trump's election, White Supremacists and anti-Semitic groups celebrated his victory. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, there were sig-

nificant increases in incidents that involved hate crimes targeting racial and religious minorities following Trump's election. Trump's movements between explicit and implicit racial appeals, in addition to the narrative suggesting that much of his support among White voters was because of economic anxiety, present an ideal opportunity to empirically investigate the degree to which racial predispositions motivated his support. While the narrative that many of Trump's supporters were worried about the economy has been given much credence, it is essential that this particular narrative is placed within the proper context of the facts. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, when President Obama took office in 2009, the unemployment rate was 7.8 percent, compared to 4.7 percent when Donald Trump took office. There is a well-documented body of research which suggesting that Barack Obama's candidacy and presidency activated strong levels of racial resentment among White voters. If, as the empirical record demonstrates, Barack Obama in fact activated strong levels of racial resentment among White voters (see, for example, Peterson and Riley, 2017), and he did not even overtly take on issues of race, then it is plausible that Donald Trump's racially divisive rhetoric could have mobilized racially resentful Whites in a political environment already ripe for racial resentment. Providing some level of support for this assertion, the experimental study by Luttig *et al.*, (2017,1) finds that "White Trump supporters randomly exposed to a Black man in the context of soliciting their support for housing assistance policy were more opposed to the policy, angrier about the policy, and more likely to blame the beneficiaries for their situation." Although this study does show that White support for Donald Trump is highly linked to racial animosity, the study does not give serious consideration to the role of economic anxiety. For example, the researchers control for individual unemployment, but they do not control for the participants' individual assessments of their economic status or the national economy as a whole.

This article unfolds as follows. First, we review the relevant literature concerning racial resentment, racial appeals, and economic voting. Second, we present our data and methodological approach used for addressing the research question. Finally, we present the findings and conclude with a discussion of the implications of our findings and where this study fits within the literature.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Racial Resentment and Vote Choice*

Both racial resentment and economic voting have been subject to extensive research within the literature that investigates determinants of vote choice. An inquiry into the academic literature provides a theoretical justification for the explanation that Donald Trump's White support could have been influenced by racial resentment or concerns about the economy. There is a well-documented body of literature that examines the relationship between opposition to African American candidates and racial resentment (Orey, 2001; Knuckey, 2012; Maxwell *et al.*, 2013). What scholars have found is that strong levels of racially resentful attitudes are significant predictors of both evaluations of African American politicians and vote choice among Whites. Although political scientists have engaged in extensive research on the degree to which racially resentful attitudes impact African American candidates, what is unclear is the extent to which racial resentment functions when there are two White candidates on the ballot. Studying this relationship is especially important given that one of the major party candidates

engaged in explicit racial appeals, and the other candidate supported ethnic and racial minorities in the campaign.

The election of Donald Trump in 2016 was interpreted by many as one of the greatest political upsets in modern political history. Even though preliminary polling data indicated that Trump supporters held strong negative racial attitudes, many suggested the Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton failed to advance a message that spoke to the economic concerns of White working-class voters. In describing Donald Trump's electoral victory, CNN Commentator Van Jones said, "This was a White-lash against a changing country... It was White-lash against a Black president in part. And that's the part where the pain comes." Jones was describing what many empirical studies have found: that at both the national and regional levels, racial resentment has primed Whites' reaction to Barack Obama (Ford *et al.*, 2010). Similarly, other studies show that racial resentment had a more significant influence on vote choice in 2008 than in any previous election (Kam and Kinder, 2012; Knuckey, 2011; Tesler and Sears, 2010a).

It is not unreasonable to expect that racial attitudes exerted a significant influence on vote choice in the 2016 presidential election, given the nation's troubled history with race and how these negative racial attitudes had implicitly been primed in prior presidential elections. The racial resentment thesis is predicated on the notion that older forms of racism such as overt racism (i.e., Jim Crow) have evolved into a new form, known as racial resentment. Although Jim Crow rests on the idea that Blacks are morally inferior and are therefore not worthy of sharing the same public facilities and residential areas, racial resentment is based on "a blend of anti-Black effect and the kind of traditional American moral values embodied in the Protestant Ethic" (Kinder and Sears, 1981, 416). Racial resentment contends that prejudice in the evaluation of Black candidates stems from the denial of the continued struggle for equality among African Americans, and that African Americans are demanding undeserved favors from the government (Henry and Sears, 2002; Kinder and Sanders, 1996; Kinder and Sears, 1981; McConahay and Hough, 1976). The opposition from Whites who are racially resentful rests in symbolic racism rather than a real threat to White political interest (Henry and Sears, 2002). Sears asserts that racial resentment is "a mixture of anti-Black feelings with the finest and proudest of traditional American values, particularly individualism" (1988, 54).

Kinder and Sears first introduced the framework of symbolic racism in a 1981 study that investigated the impact of White racial attitudes on vote choice in the Los Angeles mayoral election of 1969. They argue that symbolic racism is developed early in life, and stems from negative ideas toward African Americans intersecting with conservatism (Kinder and Sears, 1981). Additionally, several studies have found that symbolic racism is a strong predictor of White opposition to Black candidates and is indirectly related to nonracial issues such as welfare, busing, and crime (Peffley and Hurwitz, 2007).

Scholars have linked the emergence of racial resentment to two primary issues: race riots in the 1960s, and African American demands for formal equality (Kinder and Sanders 1996). Political elites such as Richard Nixon, George Wallace, and Ronald Reagan primed racial resentment with their racially subtle rhetoric that suggested African American failure was not a result of the lasting legacy of White Supremacy, but was instead a result of African American failure to take advantage of opportunities. According to Kinder and Sanders "a new form of prejudice has come to prominence... at its center are the contentions that Blacks do not try hard enough to overcome difficulties they face, and they take what they have not earned. Today, we say, prejudice is expressed in the language of American individualism" (1996, 105–106).



In essence, racial resentment is nothing more than a politically correct way of expressing racial prejudice (McConahay and Hough, 1976). Kinder and Sanders support that racial resentment “is not an automatic part of American political discourse or public opinion... How deeply resentment infiltrates our policies depends importantly on decision made by elites” (1996, 258). For example, political leaders must prime racial resentment with racial appeals through campaigns, advertisements, speeches, etc., in order to influence voting decisions (Mendelberg, 2001; Valentino *et al.*, 2002).

Tali Mendelberg (2001) offers one of the most comprehensive theories of racial appeals in political campaigns. She asserts that “racial messages are communicated most effectively when no one notices its racial meaning” (4). Simply put, she contends that effective racial appeals must be implicit. Mendelberg states:

politicians convey racial messages implicitly when two contradictory conditions hold: (1) they wish to avoid violating the norm of racial equality, and (2) they face incentives to mobilize racially resentful White voters. White voters respond to implicitly racial messages when two contradictory conditions hold: (1) they wish to adhere to the norm of racial equality, and (2) they resent Blacks’ claims for public resources and hold negative racial stereotypes regarding work, violence, and sexuality. (2001, 6–7)

Although the 2016 presidential election did not feature the presence of an African American as a candidate, one could very well argue that the political environment was ripe for the influence of racial resentment on vote choice. Consider the fact that scholars such as Michael Tesler have empirically demonstrated that

mass politics had become more polarized by racial attitude since Barack Obama’s rise to prominence. That is, the election of President Obama helped usher in a “most racial” political era where racially liberals and conservative Americans were more divided over a whole host of political positions than they had been in modern times. (2016, 3)

Similar to the riots of the 1960s that led to the rise of racial resentment, it is conceivable to think that the rise of mass protests over the killing of several unarmed Black men would spark resentment among some segments of the White community. While Barack Obama was not a presidential candidate in the 2016 presidential election, in many ways Hillary Clinton represented an expanded version of Obama’s incumbency. She ran her campaign on “Stronger Together,” vowing to dismantle the legacy of racial and economic inequality. She openly stated that Black lives matter. It could very well be argued that both her association with Barack Obama and her endorsement of his health care policy could have caused Hillary Clinton to be racialized in the eyes of White Americans.

Even though Tali Mendelberg (2001) offers one of the most comprehensive theories of racial appeals, her theory is not applicable to Donald Trump because she assumes that racial appeals only work if the candidate is concerned about violating the norms of racial equality. But what happens when political elites do not care about breaking the norms of racial equality and

rail against political correctness to justify their objectively racist actions? In the case of Donald Trump, he vigorously used his campaign platform to engage in objectively bigoted statements, and when the media attempted to hold him accountable, he discredited the press for being politically correct. Research indicates that political elites have often primed racial attitudes and that political elites often send cues to the masses by taking specific positions (Valentino, 1999). We assert that Donald Trump's constant racially charged rhetoric may have strategically mobilized White voters with racially resentful attitudes in a political environment already ripe for racial resentment.

### *Economic Anxiety and Voting*

The idea that economic concerns rather than racial resentment may drive White support for Donald Trump is not unreasonable given the historical influence of the economy in presidential elections. The expansion of globalization, technology, and policies such as NAFTA have resulted in the closing of a number of industrial plants and factories, leaving many Americans without jobs or forcing them into low-paying jobs. A central factor that has received extensive attention within the political science literature is the extent to which national economic conditions impact voters' decisions in U.S. elections (Erikson, 1990; Kiewiet and Rivers, 1985; Fair, 1978; Tufte, 1978). As strategic actors, voters use many different indicators to make assessments about the performance of the U.S. economy, and either reward or punish the party in power. Scholars generally agree that voters do give consideration to the national economy; however, the exact factors that voters give attention to have been subject to much debate.

An assessment of the academic literature uncovers both the relationship between the health of the national economy, vote choice, political participation, and measures that scholars use to gauge economic anxiety. Some of the early empirical inquiries that have used aggregate data demonstrate that the conditions of the national economy are significant predictors of electoral outcomes in presidential elections (Fair, 1978; Tufte, 1978; Hibbs, 1987). Similarly, studies relying on survey data have found that voters give more consideration to micro-level factors such as family income, unemployment, and individual assessments of the overall economy and their economic well-being when making judgments about the national economy. Under these circumstances, voters often reward the incumbent party when their finances are sound and punish them when they are bad (Fiorina, 1978; Kiewiet, 1983; Markus, 1988). One of the critical areas that scholars have challenged is whether or not variables such as GDP and per capita income growth are useful for gauging voters' perception of economic performance. Scholars raising this point suggest that individual voters might not be sophisticated enough to understand the complexities of variables such as the GDP and per capita income growth, and instead may use a wide variety of economic indicators such as income, employment status, and concerns about the stability of the market to make judgments about the national economy (Erikson, 2001).

Investigating the role of economic anxiety in the 2016 presidential election requires a critical assessment of proxies that tap into economic anxiety. Because there are no standard or consistent measures of economic anxiety, it is essential that clear distinctions are made between economic hardships and economic anxiety. While economic hardship and economic anxiety are similar, financial hardships reflect an individual's current economic situation, such as earnings, employment status, poverty, and foreclosures. Economic anxiety, on the other hand, reflects an individual's concern or worries about future prospects, such as potential layoffs, sav-

ings, economic recessions, and the future stability of the overall economy. Measuring economic anxiety requires an examination of not just unemployment or income, but also an individual's assessment and perception of the economy as a whole.

Now that we have discussed economic anxiety it is important to examine how anxiety impacts human behavior. Psychology literature provides insights on how anxiety affects human behavior and emotions. Some studies show that anxiety has a negative impact on cognition because it causes one to give greater attention to stimuli that reinforce a perceived threat (Eysenck, 1992.) Others have also found that anxiety results in a person perceiving a higher likelihood of risk. Lerner and Keltner (2000, 2001) find that anxiety produces a strong sense of uncertainty. Schaller *et al.* (2003) found that anxiety increases the likelihood of stereotype activation. The psychological effects of anxiety hold significant consequences for human behavior, and it is not unreasonable to contend that these consequences are likely to influence an individual's political behavior and attitudes.

The 2016 presidential election presents an ideal opportunity to examine the role of racial resentment and economic anxiety on vote choice. Despite significant improvements in the national economy, Donald Trump used his campaign to discredit the truthfulness of the U.S. economic performance indicators. For example, when the U.S. Department of Labor released a report indicating that overall unemployment had decreased to 4.9 percent and that the median income in the U.S had increased by 5.2 percent, Donald Trump called the numbers "phony" and "disastrous." By several indicators, the national economy was performing relatively well during the course of the 2016 presidential election, yet despite these facts, Donald Trump cast doubt over the accuracy of the economy's performance. Given that past empirical studies have indicated voters may not understand the complexities of national economic measures, it becomes even more important to rely on individual voters' assessments of their own economic status when making assessments about the economy.

## HYPOTHESES

We will investigate two main hypotheses to determine the relative impact of economic anxiety and racial resentment on voter support for Donald Trump.

H<sub>1</sub>: Respondents with higher levels of racial resentment are more likely to support Donald Trump.

H<sub>2</sub>: Racial resentment is a greater determinant of the vote for Donald Trump than economic anxiety.

## DATA AND METHODS

The data for this empirical analysis were taken from the American National Election Studies Survey (ANES) with a pre-election survey administered during September and November 2016, and a post-election survey administered to as many of the same respondents as possible in November 2016 and January 2017. Researchers used both face-to-face interviews and the internet to survey respondents. These data collection methods yielded a total sample size of 4,271 with 1,181 via face-to-face interviews and 3,090 via the internet. Because we are interested in explaining White support for Donald Trump, we restrict our statistical analysis to White respondents, which include 3,038 respondents.



*Who are Trump Supporters?*

Describing Trump supporters paints a picture of those who may feel marginalized, but who also have troubling racial preconceptions. Respondents who supported Trump were less educated, more likely to be conservative, and more likely to be Republican than those who did not support Trump. In order to get a more complete picture of Trump supporters, Table 1 shows the percentage of people who voted for Donald Trump across a number of categories including gender, party, ideology, and race. The percentages indicate the percentage of people within that category who said they supported Donald Trump. While this descriptive information does not address the hypotheses, it does allow us to have a better idea of the typical Trump supporter. As shown in Table 1, an overwhelming 81 percent of conservative respondents indicated they supported or planned to support Donald Trump in the general election. As expected, Republicans seemed to be loyal in the 2016 election, as they have been in other elections. In fact, 85 percent of those who identified as Republican also supported the election of Donald Trump. Conservatives and Republicans overwhelmingly supported the Republican candidate.

**TABLE 1. WHO ARE TRUMP SUPPORTERS**

|                      |                   |
|----------------------|-------------------|
| Republican           | 85%               |
| Conservative         | 81%               |
| Non-White            | 20%               |
| White                | 52%               |
| Women                | 40%               |
| Men                  | 47%               |
| Mean Income Category | \$55,000–\$59,000 |
| Unemployment anxiety | 32%               |
| Economy Anxiety      | 56%               |

The 2016 year was unique for many reasons. One of the most profound, and perhaps disturbing, critiques of this election was Donald Trump's alleged treatment of women and minority groups. While female opponents, critics, and journalists were often denigrated by candidate Trump, many believed women would reject his candidacy to vote for the woman candidate, Hillary Clinton, instead. After the election, it was surprising to learn that many women supported Donald Trump in spite of his recorded comments about grabbing women. Although Table 1 shows women are less likely than men (40% to 47%) to support Trump, this percentage represents a much larger number than many would have expected given the controversial candidate's comments. At the least, this reality challenges the presumption that women will reject a candidate who is painted as sexist. The same can be said for those who were non-White. Twenty percent of non-White respondents supported Donald Trump despite his position on a Muslim ban, reference to Mexican rapists and building a wall, and his claim that Blacks are living in hell. While this 20 percent is much less than the 44 percent that Trump received overall, it suggests that many non-Whites may have been willing to overlook Trump's missteps when making their decision in the election of 2016.

Although family income does not measure economic anxiety, it is still useful for describing those most attracted to Donald Trump. The family income of Trump supporters is between

\$55,000 and \$59,999. The average family income for Trump supporters is slightly higher than the family income for others, but the means are not statistically different from each other. This economic indicator does not help us much when gauging the economic anxiety people may have had that caused them to be attracted to Trump. In fact, there does not seem to be a big difference between respondents who supported Trump and respondents who did not support Trump. More rigorous analysis is necessary to discern the importance of economic variables in explaining support for Donald Trump. Economic variables such as family income are helpful, but they do not capture the perceptions people have regarding the economy. In other words, it is very likely, in fact probable, that people will have perceptions that do not reflect their own reality. To address economic perceptions, we measure respondents' assessment of the economy by the question, "How about people out of work during the coming 12 months? Do you think there will be more unemployment than now, about the same, or less?" and their perceptions of the economy as a whole by the question, "What about the next 12 months? Do you expect the economy, in the country as a whole, to get better, stay about the same, or get worse?" Both of these measures require respondents to assess their beliefs about the future economy, which we believe exposes their anxiety. Table 1 indicates that when looking at individual perceptions of the economy, about a third (32%) support Trump. Only a small portion of those who may see themselves economically doing worse in the future support Trump. At the same time, a little more than half of those who have negative perceptions about the national economy supported him. Regardless of the state of the economy, people who hold economic anxiety may penalize the incumbent party, as suggested by previous scholars (Erikson, 1990; Kiewiet and Rivers, 1985; Fair, 1978; Tufte, 1978). We will use more rigorous testing to decipher the relationship between economic anxiety and support for Donald Trump.

Given the explicit racial appeals of Trump's campaign, it is no surprise to find that his supporters have distinct attitudes when it comes to stereotypes and discrimination. Carmines *et al.* (2011) alert us to the errors in assuming that racial stereotypes and racial resentment measure the same concept. As a result, we believe it is essential to know whether Trump supporters hold prejudicial attitudes. We looked at three categories of questions to gauge the level of stereotypical and prejudicial attitudes of Trump supporters: how much discrimination do groups face, which groups are lazy, and which groups are violent. The results from these questions can be found in Table 2. Questions asking respondents if groups are violent and lazy are comprised of ordinal scales that range from 1 to 7. Responses indicating a 5, 6, or 7 on the violence scale have been placed in the violent category. Similarly, those who indicated a 5, 6, or 7 on the lazy scale have been placed in the lazy scale. The left column shows the percentage of Trump supporters who give that response.

TABLE 2. TRUMP SUPPORTERS AND RACIAL PREJUDICE

|  |        |
|--|--------|
| Blacks are violent?                              | 76%    |
| Black are lazy?                                  | 62%    |
| Blacks face no discrimination at all.            | 76%    |
| Hispanics are violent?                           | 50%    |
| Hispanics are lazy?                              | 51%    |
| Hispanics face no discrimination at all.         | 74%    |
| Muslims are violent?                             | 67%    |
| Muslims face no discrimination at all.           | 72%    |
| Whites are violent?                              | 13%    |
| Whites are lazy?                                 | 30%    |
| Whites face no discrimination at all.            | 24%    |
| Whites face a lot of discrimination.             | 70%    |
| Women face no discrimination at all.             | 78%    |
| Gays and Lesbians face no discrimination at all. | 83%    |
| Men face no discrimination at all.               | 38%    |
| Men face a lot of discrimination.                | 58%    |
| Racial Resentment mean                           | 8.06*  |
| Racial Resentment mean Trump supporters          | 13.49* |

Note: The t-test calculated using the Levene's Test for Equal Variances indicated that the two racial resentment means were statistically different from each other with  $p < .001$ .

According to Table 2, it is clear that Trump supporters are more likely to have negative beliefs about Blacks, Hispanics, Muslims, and women, yet they are more likely to have positive feelings about Whites and men. When claiming various groups are violent, Trump supporters are more likely to have this negative evaluation. According to them, Blacks are most likely to be violent, with 76 percent of the people who agree with that statement supporting Trump. Feelings about Muslims are a close second, with 67 percent of those who agree that Muslims are violent supporting Trump, but surprisingly, only 50 percent of those who say Hispanics are violent support Trump. We notice very different attitudes when asking about Whites. Trump supporters make up only 13 percent of those who say Whites are violent. According to Table 2, beliefs about the laziness of groups show a similar pattern. Of those who say Blacks are lazy, almost two-thirds (62%) supported Trump in the 2016 election, and 51 percent of respondents who say Hispanics are lazy supported Trump. Compare this to the 30 percent of those who judge Whites to be violent and supported Trump. There is an unmistakable difference between Trump voters and those who supported other candidates. Tuch and Hughes conclude that racial resentment helps explain "Whites' continued reluctance to support meaningful racial policy change" (2011, 159). Donald Trump likely tapped into the lingering beliefs about race that have been a historical artifact of how the American electorate evaluates Black people and the policies directed at Black people.

Questions about discrimination can often unveil the various beliefs people have that shed light on why they might make their respective political decisions to alleviate discrimination. According to Table 2 above, people who believe Blacks, Hispanics, Muslims, women, gays, and lesbians face no discrimination are more likely to support Donald Trump. An astounding 83 percent of those who say women face no discrimination, 78 percent who say gays and lesbians face no discrimination, 76 percent who say Blacks face no discrimination, 74 percent who say Hispanics face no discrimination, and 72 percent who say Muslims face no discrimination also

said they were supporting Trump. This means that although there have been numerous reports of the discrimination against these groups, Trump supporters believe this discrimination is fictional. Moreover, when respondents say Whites or men face a lot of discrimination, they are more likely to be Trump supporters, 70 percent and 58 percent respectively. It is clear that Trump supporters have a view that men and Whites are being marginalized in the current political climate, while the traditionally and documented marginalized groups are seen as having a level playing field. For Trump supporters, it might make more political sense to find ways to create a level playing field for White men, rather than making the country less discriminatory.

Racial resentment is another distinct way of gauging the attitudes people have regarding Blacks in the United States (Kinder and Sanders, 1996). All of the above indicators show Trump supporters have some of the most prejudicial attitudes regarding Black people. The racial resentment measure is made up of four questions: Blacks should try harder; Blacks get less than they deserve; the past slavery makes life harder for Blacks; and Blacks should work their way up. The racial resentment scale was created by taking the responses of the above questions and recoding them in a way that lower scores mean the respondent has the least racially resentful attitudes, while higher scores mean the respondents are the most racially resentful. Each new measure of racial resentment includes four different response options, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The middle category, indicating the respondent neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement, was not included in this new measure. These four variables were then compiled to create one variable for each respondent. Respondents could earn a score ranging from a 4 (if they have the least racially resentful response to all four measures) to a 16 (if they have the most racially resentful response to all measures). As displayed in Table 2, the mean resentment score for respondents who did not support Donald Trump is 8.06. In contrast, the mean for Trump supporters is 13.49. There is a clear difference between the resentment Trump supporters have and that of the rest of the country.

The reality of Trump supporters is that they display some of the traditional attributes of those who vote for Republican candidates: they are Republican and conservative. At the same time, those who supported candidate Trump added a level of complexity that could not be predicted: on the surface, they are not better off financially, they hold attitudes that display racial prejudice, and they have racial resentment.

### ***Model***

Since our dependent variable is dichotomous, we are limited by the methods available for testing the effects of racial resentment and economic anxiety on voting for Donald Trump. We use logistic regression to explain the White vote for Donald Trump, therefore limiting our cases to White respondents. The following is our model.

$$\text{Trump Vote} = b + b_1 \text{Racial Resentment} + b_2 \text{individual employment outlook} + b_3 \text{national economic outlook} + b_4 \text{Partisanship} + b_5 \text{income} + b_6 \text{education} + b_7 \text{Gender}$$

### ***Variables***

The dependent variable for this analysis is the *presidential vote choice* coded as (1=Trump, 0=Other Candidates). We are interested in explaining White support for Trump, so support for any other candidate is in one category. This means our results are not appropriate for a

discussion of support for Hillary Clinton.

Two attitudinal concepts are at the heart of our work: racial resentment and economic anxiety. Using the measures created by Kinder and Sanders (1996), four response items taken from the ANES operationalize our measure of racial resentment. Respondents are asked to agree or disagree with the following questions:

Denial of Continued Discrimination

- Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for Blacks to work their way out of the lower class.

Blacks Should Try Harder

- It's really just a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if Blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as Whites.

Blacks Should Work Way Up

- Irish, Italian, Jewish, and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors.

Undeserved Advantages

- Over the past few years, Blacks have gotten less than they deserve.

Since all of these questions measure the same concept, as with previous research we created one scale that measures racial resentment (Peterson and Riley, 2017). The racial resentment scale was created by taking the responses to the above questions and recoding them in a way such that lower scores mean the respondent has the least racially resentful attitudes while higher scores mean the respondents are the most racially resentful. As indicated above, the respondents' scores range from 4 to 16. They earn a 4 if they give the least racially resentful response to all four measures, and a 16 if they provide the most racially resentful response to all measures.

Our second concept of interest measures the respondent's economic anxiety. We measure the economic anxiety in two ways, economic anxiety regarding unemployment and economic anxiety regarding the national economy. Interviewers asked two questions that we found especially important for measuring economic anxiety. One question asked about the individual's perception of unemployment, while the other asked about perceptions of the national economy. More specifically, respondents were asked if they thought unemployment would be better or worse in the future and whether they thought the economy would be better or worse in the next twelve months. When referring to expectations about future unemployment, the respondents' answers were recorded as: there would be more unemployment, the same unemployment, or less unemployment in the future.

Similarly, respondents could answer that they expected the national economy to be better, the same, or worse in the next twelve months. These measures are consistent with the research of scholars such as Kinder and Kiewit (1981), which suggests that it is important to understand how respondents feel about the national economy. These feelings about the national economy, whether accurate or not, may drive political decisions.

Similar to previous research, we control for several variables. The first control variable is partisanship. Since the research of Campbell *et al.* (1960) there has been an unmistakable impact of partisanship on how people vote. Our variable measures the respondent's identification as a Democrat, Independent, or Republican with higher numbers indicating identification with the Republican Party. To address gender, we created a dummy variable which measures whether the respondent self-identified as female: a value of 0 indicates male, and a value of 1



indicates female. Although Kaufman's work (2006) suggests the gender gap may be declining, others such as Norrander and Wilcox (2008) argue the gender gap has become more complex, with a diversity emerging among women. Scholars such as Brooks and Brady (1999) find that family income influences how voters make their decisions, so we use family income as another control variable. Finally, we control for education, coded with higher numbers meaning more education.

## ***ANALYSIS***

**TABLE 3. EXPLAINING SUPPORT FOR DONALD TRUMP**

| Variable                  | B (SE)            | Wald Test | Probability |
|---------------------------|-------------------|-----------|-------------|
| <i>Racial Resentment</i>  |                   |           |             |
| Racial resentment scale   | .262*** (.069)    | 14.404    | .000        |
| <i>Economic Variables</i> |                   |           |             |
| Unemployment anxiety      | -.729* (.378)     | 3.727     | .054        |
| Future economy anxiety    | -.063 (.323)      | .038      | .845        |
| <i>Control Variables</i>  |                   |           |             |
| Income                    | .015 (.028)       | .267      | .605        |
| Education                 | -.216** (.095)    | 5.166     | .023        |
| Partisanship              | .887*** (.130)    | 46.484    | .000        |
| Gender                    | -.053 (.426)      | .015      | .902        |
| Constant                  | -2.390*** (1.697) | 1.983     | .159        |
| Nagelkerke Pseudo R2=.74  |                   |           |             |
| N=272                     |                   |           |             |

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Predicted probabilities calculated for each significant variable, not shown above. The Wald column shows the Wald statistic which tests whether the parameter value is equal to zero. \*p < .10., \*\*p < .05., \*\*\*p < .01

Table 3 displays the logistic regression output for our hypotheses. The table includes the independent and control variables with the calculated parameter ( $B$ ) and standard error values. The Wald statistic and probability values are listed in the third and fourth columns. These values tell whether the parameter value is different from zero. Unlike the parameter values with ordinary least squares, the parameter estimates ( $B$ ) in logistic regression cannot be easily interpreted, therefore predicted probabilities are calculated to estimate the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The positive  $B$  value for racial resentment supports the first hypothesis that higher levels of racial resentment lead to more support for Donald Trump. Figure 1, where the predicted probability of support for Donald Trump is plotted along the vertical axis, and racial resentment is plotted along the horizontal axis, is a visual representation of the ability of racial resentment to predict support for Donald Trump.

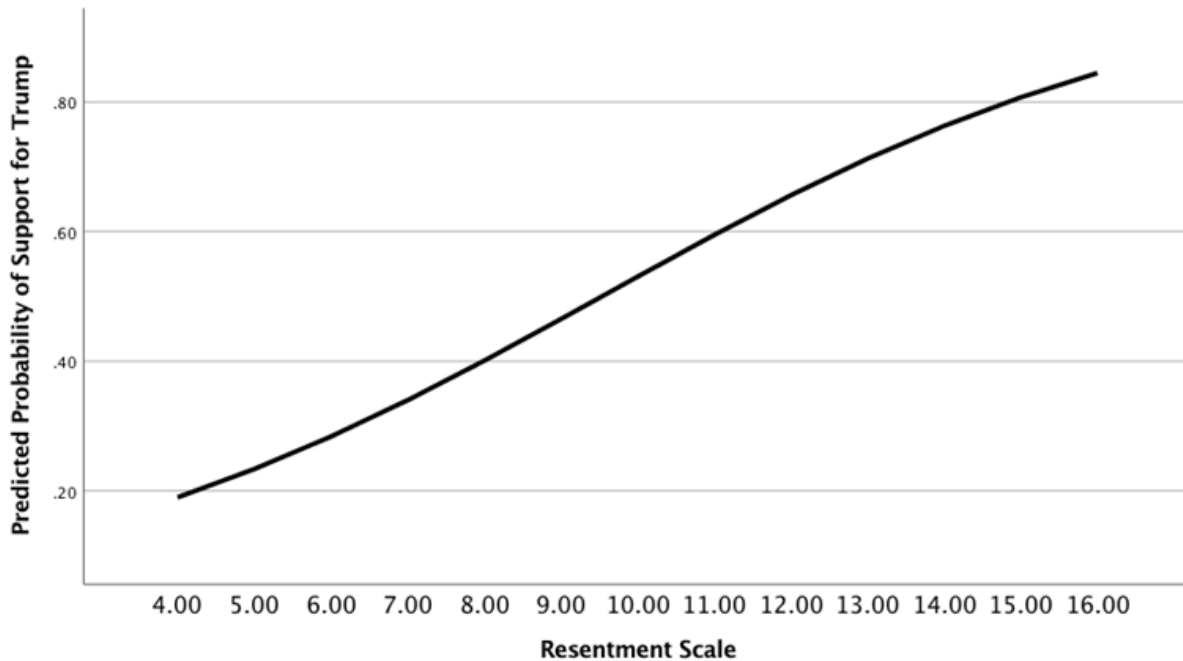


Figure 1. Predicted Probability of Those with Racial Resentment Supporting Trump

Although there is less than a .19 probability that someone who gets a 4 on the racial resentment scale will support Trump, those with a 16 have a probability of about .85. In fact, when a respondent earns a 10 on the racial resentment scale there is more than a .50 probability that they will support Donald Trump. Those with the highest racial resentment score have a .85 probability of supporting Donald Trump. That is an extremely high probability of supporting Trump. This figure is a striking representation of the relationship between racial resentment and support for Trump, supporting our first hypothesis that respondents with higher levels of racial resentment are more likely to support Trump.

When comparing racial resentment to the economic anxiety measures, a more complex picture emerges. The first economic variable measuring economic anxiety—perception about the future economy of the nation—is not significant in the model. Although it seems to be in the right direction, with the negative value suggesting that respondents who perceive the economy will be worse in the future are more likely to support Donald Trump, we cannot make that claim because the variable failed to reach significance. Any speculation about the influence of this variable cannot be supported with this model. On the other hand, unemployment anxiety is a significant predictor of Trump support in this model. The direction of the relationship is as expected: those who believe unemployment will be worse in the future are more likely to support Trump, indicated by the negative *B* value in Table 3. The predicted probabilities reflect this relationship with about a 34-point difference between those who say unemployment will be worse and those who say it will be better, .42 versus .76 probability of supporting Trump (see Table 4). Even when people believe unemployment will be better in the future, there is a .42 probability that they will support Trump, a difference of .34 between the extremes of those who think the unemployment will be better in the future and those who believe it will be worse. This is certainly much less than the .65 difference between the racial resentment extremes. Again those with the highest resentment have a .84 probability of supporting Trump, while those with economic anxiety have a .76 probability. This finding sup-

ports our second hypothesis, that racial resentment is a greater determinant of Trump support than a respondent's economic anxiety.

**TABLE 4. PREDICTED PROBABILITIES**

| Racial Resentment Value | Predicted Probability |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| 4.00                    | .1899                 |
| 5.00                    | .2335                 |
| 6.00                    | .2836                 |
| 7.00                    | .3397                 |
| 8.00                    | .4007                 |
| 9.00                    | .4649                 |
| 10.00                   | .5303                 |
| 11.00                   | .5947                 |
| 12.00                   | .6560                 |
| 13.00                   | .7125                 |
| 14.00                   | .7630                 |
| 15.00                   | .8071                 |
| 16.00                   | .8447                 |
| Economic Anxiety Value  | Predicted Probability |
| 1.00                    | .7580                 |
| 2.00                    | .6018                 |
| 3.00                    | .4216                 |

Partisanship and education are also significant variables in the model. The negative *B* values indicate that respondents with less formal education are more likely to support Trump. Similarly, as one would expect given the impact of partisanship, Republicans are more likely to support Trump. Gender is not a significant variable in the logistic regression model.

## CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate whether White support for Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election was driven by racial resentment or economic anxiety? Although political scientists have devoted significant attention to the rise of racial resentment during the Obama era, we still know very little about how racial attitudes might continue to polarize mass public opinion in a post-Obama America. This analysis presents one of the first empirical tests that demonstrate the spillover effects of racial attitudes into the 2016 presidential election. Using a representative sample of White respondents from the 2016 American National Elections Survey, we relied on a logistic regression model to answer our research question. Our findings indicate that racial resentment was a significant predictor of vote choice for Donald Trump and those respondents who indicated support for Donald Trump held many stereotypical views

about racial and ethnic minorities. Furthermore, the findings show that racial resentment was a far stronger predictor of White support for Trump than economic variables.

The findings presented in this work hold important implications for scholars examining the influence of racial attitudes on vote choice. Recent studies examining racial attitudes during the Obama years have analyzed the spillover effects of racial attitudes into mass public opinion and have asked if these attitudes will impact American politics after the Obama era (Tesler, 2015; Knuckey, 2011; Tesler, 2012b; Maxwell *et al.*, 2013; Wilson and King-Meadows, 2016). The findings of this article provide one of the first answers to this question. It appears that racial attitudes did in fact spillover into the 2016 presidential election and were a strong predictor of White support for Donald Trump. These findings also maintain essential implications for scholars studying racial appeals. One of the most important implications of this study is that the study challenges the assertion that Donald Trump's electoral success was solely tied to concerns about the economy. Our findings indicate that while racial resentment is a far greater predictor of White support for Donald Trump, one of our proxies for economic anxiety is also a statistically significant predictor of White support. What scholars know about the psychological impacts of anxiety makes it likely that racial resentment and economic anxiety may be reinforcing each other. Several factors make this possible; for example, we know that anxiety diverts cognitive functioning to threatening stimuli, activates stereotypes, and elicits anger. Given the racial appeals of Donald Trump during the campaign and a political environment that had been primed for racial resentment during the Obama presidency, it is possible that White voters' anxiety about the economy became racialized. At the very heart of the racial resentment model are attitudes about economic resources. If, as the literature suggests, anxiety diverts attention to threatening stimuli and activates stereotypes, that would explain why Trump supporters hold negative racial stereotypes about racial and ethnic minorities. In this view, racial and ethnic minorities are a direct threat to the economic status and future prospects of Whites. Still, our findings indicate that even when controlling for economic anxiety, racial resentment is a stronger predictor of the White vote in 2016, suggesting that White support for Trump is inherently linked to negative racial predisposition.

Although we find considerable support for our hypothesis, it is important to discuss the limitations of our study. The first limitation concerns the sample size. Although the ANES data contains a large sample of White respondents, several respondents did not answer specific questions and as a result were dropped out of the regression model. Having a larger sample of Whites would undoubtedly increase both the strength and predictability of our model. A second limitation concerns conceptualizing economic anxiety. While we find economic concerns about the future economy drive White support for Trump, we recognize a need for more robust measures of economic anxiety. For example, the development of an economic anxiety index may help scholars gauge a better understanding of how respondents evaluate the economy. Academic scholarship must also be clear in how economic hardship and economic anxiety are different. Future scholarship must create measures that rely on aggregate and individual-level data to investigate the role that financial well-being has on how people make voting decisions. Because we are using data from ANES we are restricted to the questions asked in the survey. A final limitation of our study is that we are unable to draw inferences about the attitudes of respondents who may have supported Hillary Clinton.

Finally, we agree with Ronald M. Walters (2003) that White Nationalism has taken root as the equilibrium of mainstream American politics. Moreover, we believe the election of Barack

Obama violated the racial equilibrium, causing the 2016 election to call for a return to White Nationalism. This new White Nationalism was bold enough to emerge in the explicit and implicit appeals of candidate Donald Trump as an appeal to both old-fashioned and new racism. Although many refuse to acknowledge the influence of White Nationalism in how Whites made their decision at the voting booth, our work unequivocally shows that racial resentment was not detached from their political decision. Future work should continue the exploration of what this equilibrium will look like during and subsequent to the Trump presidency.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Note: There are a total of 28 categories for income ranging from under \$5000 to over \$250,000. The mean for Trump supporters is \$55,000–\$59,999, and the mean for all respondents is \$50,000–\$54,999. The t-test calculated using the Levene's Test for Equal Variances indicated that the two means were not statistically different from each other with  $t = -.289$  and probability  $= .773$ .

<sup>2</sup>Although racial resentment is a standard measure of White racial attitudes it has not come without criticism. Scholars have questioned its validity and whether it is a manifestation of racism and not just merely conservatism. Despite this criticism, many of the studies challenging the racial resentment model have been rebutted, and scholars have found the conceptualization of racial resentment to be empirically valid. The work of Tarman and Sears (2005) has led the way in defending the use of racial resentment measures. Racial Resentment has also been criticized by scholars citing that it has a strong association with White racial policy preferences only because the items used to capture both concepts are similar in content. The major questions concerning critics of racial resentment centers around the question, is racial resentment a “distinctive and independent belief system or is it merely redundant with older concepts that have traditionally been used to explain racial attitudes, such as political conservatism, old fashion racism, individualism, or anti-egalitarianism?” The empirical test does not support this critique; in fact, Tarman and Sears find that in both the 1986 and 2000 NES data, the items used to measure racial resentment are due to a factor other than ideology and party identification.

<sup>3</sup>Because the more recent literature underscores the ideological realignment, we do not include ideology in the model. We opted to include partisanship instead of ideology.

<sup>4</sup>The predicted probabilities were calculated using SPSS. The parameter values and means for each of the variables were inserted into the regression equation, while the predicted value of the variable of interest was calculated using the following equation  $predicted\ probability = \frac{Exp(Constant + X1b1 + X2b2 + X3b3 + X4b4 + X5b5 + X6b6 + X7b7)}{1 + Exp(Constant + X1b1 + X2b2 + X3b3 + X4b4 + X5b5 + X6b6 + X7b7)}$ .

<sup>5</sup>See Table 4 for Table of Predicted Probabilities.



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