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White Racial Identity and Preferences for (Non) White Immigrants in the United States

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Abstract

Fueled by decades of immigration, the United States is on a path to becoming a "majority-minority" nation, in which non-Hispanic Whites no longer represent a majority of the population. Such demographic changes have prompted a reexamination of White Americans' racial attitudes, particularly regarding whether a politically consequential sense of racial in-group solidarity or "White identity" has emerged. Recent work shows that such a White identity has indeed emerged and that it is powerfully linked with opposition to immigration. However, we know little about whether the relationship between White identity and immigration support varies across groups. Specifically, it is not clear whether White identity is uniquely "activated" by Latino/Hispanic immigrants, a large and fast-growing minority group, and (2) how White identity is linked to support for allowing immigration from Europe, a region of the world that is predominantly White. I test this using panel data from the 2016–2018 Voter Study Group (VSG) survey. I find that White identity is associated, to an approximately equal degree, with opposition to immigration from: Africa, China, India, Mexico/Latin America, and the Middle East, but that White identity is not significantly associated with support for increased immigration from Europe. Overall, these findings help us to better understand the nature of American public opinion toward immigration and the political consequences of White racial identity in a changing America.

Keywords

public opinion, immigration, white identity, United States

On January 11, 2018, then-President Donald Trump (in)famously remarked during an Oval Office meeting with lawmakers that "we should have more people from places like Norway" and asked, in reference to immigrants from Haiti and Africa, "why do we want these people from all these shithole countries here?"[1] While shocking at the time, Trump's statement does speak to an important debate in the politics of immigration, that being how public opinion differs depending upon the immigrant group under consideration. It also speaks to whether the White native-born American majority reacts differently to immigration from Europe, which was the largest source of U.S. immigration in the 19th and early 20th centuries, versus non-European countries, which have been the largest source of immigration in the mid 20th and early 21st centuries.[2]

As a result of increased immigration, predominantly from non-European countries, the United States is on a path to becoming a "majority-minority" country by the middle of the 21st century (Frey, 2018). Combined with the election of Barack Obama, the country's first Black president, and Donald Trump's political rise, which was fueled in part by an intense backlash to such changes (Norris & Inglehart, 2019; Sides, Tesler, & Vavreck, 2019; Tesler, 2016), White racial attitudes have undergone a reexamination. Rather than focusing on the nature and consequences of White attitudes toward Blacks (e.g., Davis & Wilson, 2021; Kinder & Sanders, 1996) and other racial/ethnic minority groups such as Latinos (e.g., Abrajano & Hajnal, 2015; Ramirez & Peterson, 2020), greater attention is now being paid to Whites' attitudes toward their own racial group and whether a sense of White racial solidarity is now a consequential force in contemporary American politics (Jardina, 2019).

Here I build on this work by considering how White identity, defined as "a sentiment capturing a desire to protect the in-group and its collective interests" (Jardina, 2021, 1540), shapes American public opinion toward immigration. While existing work demonstrates a robust link between

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White identity and general support for immigration (Jardina, 2019, Chapter 6), we know little about whether this relationship varies based upon the immigrant group under consideration. This is an important oversight, given that mass opinion toward immigration is powerfully shaped by the demographic characteristics of immigrants/refugees (e.g., Bansak, Hainmueller, & Hangartner, 2016; Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2015; Valentino et al., 2019), and stereotypes about various migrant groups and their countries of origin (e.g., Hartman, Newman, & Bell 2014; Hopkins, 2015; Newman and Malhotra, 2019).

I contribute to a robust literature on American public opinion toward immigration and to a growing literature on the consequences of White in-group racial attitudes by specifically testing (1) whether White identity is uniquely "activated" by Latinos/Hispanics, i.e., whether it matters significantly more when people are asked about immigration from Mexico/Latin America and (2) whether White identity is still negatively associated with immigration support when people are asked about immigration from Europe.

I do so by using panel data from the 2016–2018 Voter Study Group (VSG) survey. These data allow me to test whether the relationship between White identity and immigration support varies depending upon the group under consideration, i.e., whether it matters significantly more when White Americans are asked about their attitudes toward Latino/Hispanic migrants, the group at the center of the "majority-minority" narrative in the United States (Frey, 2018), and whether this relationship is negative for European migrants. Existing work in the United States has not been able to adequately answer this question. Much of this is due to a paucity of appropriate survey questions. For example, the gold-standard American National Election Studies (ANES) typically asks about general preferences for more versus less immigration, or asks about specific kinds of policies, differentiating between those that address the undocumented population versus those that ask about security measures on the U.S.-Mexico border.[3]

In contrast, the VSG not only measures White racial identity (in 2016 and 2017) but also (in the 2018 wave) queries immigration attitudes toward the following regions/countries: Europe, Africa, China, India, Mexico/Latin America, and the Middle East. This permits a statistically valid test of *when* White identity matters for immigration support and whether all potential migrant groups equally "activate" this sentiment, as a result of the potential threats they may pose to the native-born White American majority.

Overall, I find that White identity is negatively associated, to a substantively significant and approximately equal degree, with decreased support for allowing immigration from Africa, China, India, Mexico/Latin America, and the Middle East. In short, immigrants from Mexico/Latin America do not appear to uniquely "activate" White identity. I also find that White identity is weakly and non-significantly associated with support for allowing immigration from Europe. Rather than stronger White identifiers viewing European migrants as source of individuals who could bolster the cultural, economic, and political power of their racial group, or viewing European migrants as a threat, these findings are consistent with a theoretical account in which European migrants simply fail to "activate" White identity, as a result of this group not posing a threat to the native-born White American majority.

In the following sections, I lay out my theoretical argument regarding when, how, and why I expect White identity to matter for immigration support, articulate my research design and empirical approach, and discuss my substantive findings and overarching conclusions. Overall, these results help us to better understand the nature of immigration attitudes among the White American mass public, a group that still, as of 2024, represents the largest share of the electorate. These findings also help us to better understand which groups represent a "threat" to the dominant racial/ethnic group in a polity, and to understand the political consequences of White racial in-group attitudes.

White Identity and Support for Immigration

In recounting passage of the Immigration Act of 1924, which imposed a quota system that discouraged immigration from outside of Western and Northern Europe, Jardina (2019, 156) notes that "the history of immigration in the United States is intricately tied to the notion of whiteness" and argues that immigration is an issue that should be likely to "activate" White identity and thus make it a relevant attitude upon which people can draw when they are evaluating political objects, here immigration policy. This is due to the fact that immigration, by changing the demographic make-up of the country, represents a threat to the existing racial/ethnic hierarchy. This is particularly true when immigrants disproportionately arrive from non-White/non-European countries, as has been the case since the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 repealed the restrictive "pro-White/pro-Europe" immigration quota system put in place in the 1920s.

Since 1965, several immigration dynamics have occurred. First, the total size of U.S. foreign-born population has skyrocketed. According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau and the Migration Policy Institute (MPI), the U.S. foreign-born population was approximately 9.5 million, which represented 4.7% of the total U.S. population in 1970. These numbers respectively increased to 19.8 million and 7.9% by 1990, and to 40 million and 12.9% by 2010. Moreover, the share of the foreign-born population that was born in Europe *decreased* dramatically. In 1970, approximately 59.7% of the U.S. foreign-born (immigrant) population came from Europe. This decreased to 22.0% in 1990, and to just 12.1% in 2010. In short, both the size and nature of the foreign-born immigrant population in the United States, be these individuals "documented" or "undocumented," has changed considerably in recent years. It has become both larger in size and "less White" in terms of its composition.

Such demographic changes represent potential challenges to the idea of a singular American national identity (Citrin & Sears, 2014; Huntington, 2004; Schildkraut, 2014), but also to the existing racial/ethnic hierarchy of the United States (Abrajano & Hajnal, 2015; Gest, 2016; Jardina, 2019). This is because allowing such immigrants to live and work in the United States would, as a result of such individuals putting down roots and/or having children, change the demographics of the country. If aggregate population growth is disproportionately driven by new immigrants and their children, this will result in the White native-born majority losing its numerical superiority and societal clout. A growing immigrant share of the population could also incentivize ambitious reelection-minded politicians (Aldrich, 1995; Mayhew, 1974) to adjust their campaign strategies and appeal to a rising share of the electorate, rather than focusing their electoral appeals on the White majority (Abrajano, 2010; Barreto & Segura, 2014)[4]. Furthermore, a growing immigrant population will also likely result in new customs permeating American society, potentially upending the culture of the once dominant "White American majority" (Gest, 2016).[5]

Latino versus Non-Latino Immigrants

Media coverage of immigrants and immigration typically focuses on Latinos and often does so in a disproportionately negative manner, by focusing on crime and illegality (Chavez, 2001; Farris & Mohamed, 2018; Mohamed & Farris, 2020). Accordingly, the native-born White majority in the United States tends to have Latinos in mind when they are thinking about immigrants (Abrajano & Hajnal, 2015). Additionally, the "majority-minority" narrative about immigration-fueled demographic change in the United States is often constructed with Latinos in mind (Frey, 2018). Accordingly, it seems likely that Latino immigrants would be especially likely, relative to other immigrant groups, to represent the greatest threat to the power and status of the White native-born majority, and thus be the most likely immigrant group to "activate" White identity, that is, to make it a relevant consideration when people are forming their opinions on immigration policy questions. Past work has not adequately tested this, however. This is due to a lack of appropriate survey questions asking about preferences for allowing immigrants from different regions/countries of the world to come work and live in the United States. I address this oversight here by using survey data (from the VSG) that asks such questions. This permits a valid test of whether White identity matters significantly more when people are asked about Latino/Hispanic immigrants versus other groups.

While media coverage of immigration justifiably focuses on Latin America, nearly 50% of the contemporary U.S. foreign-born population comes from other parts of the world. Table 1 illustrates the contemporary foreign-born population in the United States. While the largest proportion comes from Latin America (50.3%), nearly 3 in 10 U.S. immigrants come from Asia, 1 in 10 come from Europe, 1 in 20 come from Africa, and approximately 1 in 50 come from elsewhere (this includes Canada). In short, many, but far from all, immigrants in the United States have Latin American origins. Given this, and because Latinos are often at the center of the "majority-minority" narrative (Abrajano & Hajnal, 2015; Frey, 2018), it is important to test whether White identity matters for a variety of immigrant groups or if it is uniquely "activated" by Latino/Hispanic immigrants.

What about White Immigrants?

As Jardina (2019, 156) argues, "immigration is an issue that cuts to the heart of Whites' concerns about their group's status atop the nation's hierarchy." Jardina (2019, 156) further writes that "Americans have routinely resisted opening the country's borders to foreigners, especially when those arriving are not, by the current standards, considered white." As such, White racial solidarity and stronger in-group identity should be negatively associated with support for immigration. However, the logic underlying this relationship is constructed with non-White immigrants, and specifically Latinos, in mind. This makes sense, given that the large majority of immigrants come from such countries and because media coverage of immigration often focuses on Latinos and the dynamics of U.S.-Mexico border (e.g., Branton & Dunaway, 2009; Valentino, Brader, & Jardina, 2013). But it is also important to note that the "average" negative relationship observed between White identity and immigration support may not be the same for all immigrant groups. In particular, it may differ substantially when the immigrant group under consideration is White.

In short, White Americans who more strongly identify with their racial in-group, that is, Whites for whom "being White" is a more important part of how they see themselves are, on average, less supportive of accommodating and welcoming "pro-immigration" policies (Jardina, 2019,

Table 1. Distribution of the U.S. Foreign Born Population, 2022.

	Latin America	Asia	Europe	Africa	Other
%	50.3	31.1	10.2	6.0	2.4
N	(23,233,834)	(14,349,080)	(4,728,948)	(2,752,965)	(1,117,262)

Note. Shows the distribution of the U.S. foreign-born population (this includes all people living in the U.S. who were not citizens at birth; total *N* = 46,182,089), across various regions of the world. Source is the 2022 American Community Survey (ACS); data compiled by the Migration Policy Institute (MPI).

Chapter 6). However, if a potential immigrant group is less likely to threaten the existing racial/ethnic "hierarchy," and more specifically less likely to threaten the social, economic, and cultural status of the White native-born majority, then we should observe that White identity has a weaker relationship with people's support for allowing such groups to come live and work in their country.

Extending this logic, it is possible that White identity might have the reverse relationship, that is, stronger White identity might be *positively* associated with immigration support when the migrant group under consideration is also White. The logic for such an argument rests on the idea that White immigrants are not only less likely to pose a threat to the native-born American White majority, but also that permitting more of these people to immigrate could potentially bolster the cultural, economic, and political power of the native-born White majority. If this is the case, then we would expect there to be a *positive* relationship between White identity and support for allowing more immigrants from Europe, while the relationship should be *negative* for non-European immigrants. Alternatively it is possible that Whites with a stronger sense of racial in-group solidarity are less likely to favor immigration, regardless of the country because immigrants are, by definition, a threat to the status of the native-born White majority. Finally, it is possible that a negative relationship exists for non-White immigrant groups, all of whom "activate" White identity, but that a substantively weak and non-significant relationship exists for White immigrants, a group that simply fails to "activate" White identity. While some may question the utility of focusing American public opinion toward European migrants, it is valuable to do so because a non-trivial proportion of the U.S. foreign-born population comes from this region of the world. A second reason is because doing so can help us to better understand the political consequences of White racial identity in the United States.

In short, existing work has not sufficiently tested (1) whether the relationship between White identity and immigration support is uniquely "activated" by Hispanic/Latino immigrants and (2) how the relationship between White identity and immigration support may differ when people are asked about European migrants. I conduct such tests here. I formally do so by using panel data from the 2016-2018 Voter Study Group (VSG) survey.

Data and Methods

I test my expectations with panel data from the 2016–2018 Voter Study Group (VSG) survey. The Voter Study Group (VSG) survey is a multi-wave online panel study conducted in partnership with YouGov. The VSG is a non-probability sample that is, via weighting and bench-marking to data sources such as the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) on characteristics such as age, gender, race, and education, intended to reflect the adult U.S. citizen population.[6]

The VSG sample I examine here was originally drawn from a group of Americans who were first interviewed in December, 2011 and then interviewed again between January 1 and November 8, 2012 as part of the 2012 Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project (CCAP). A total of 8,000 of these respondents were then re-interviewed again from November 29 to December 29, 2016, following the presidential election. This formed the first wave of the Voter Study Group (VSG) panel. Many of these individuals were then re-interviewed several additional times through the 2020 presidential election.[7]

In short, my sample here consists of White, non-Hispanic Americans who were interviewed on three separate occasions, in 2016, 2017, *and* 2018. I focus on these three years because they are the panel waves that contain valid measures of concepts of interest, as well as a battery of theoretically appropriate control variables.

Importantly, the panel structure of the data means that I can establish temporal ordering and measure my independent variables of interest *before* my dependent variables of interest. Specifically, the VSG permits me to measure respondents' White identity in 2017, one year prior to their immigration attitudes. This can help to assuage one endogeneity concern, that being "reverse causality," in which immigration policy support shapes White racial identity rather than the reverse, as I argue here. This does not mean that my analyses can yield a precisely estimated causal effect nor that I have solved all issues of endogeneity, but this approach can make some improvements over a purely cross-sectional design in which the independent and dependent variables of interest are measured contemporaneously.

Dependent Variables

My dependent variables are preferences for allowing different groups to immigrate to the United States. These questions were asked in the 2018 wave of the VSG panel study. As previously mentioned, these types of questions are not asked on traditional U.S. academic surveys such as the American National Election Study (ANES), which typically only query general support toward immigration policy. As such, this wave of the VSG is uniquely able to test *how* and *when* White identity matters for immigration attitudes.

There are a total of six questions that I examine. Each of them were asked in the 2018 wave of the VSG panel study. The text that respondents see is as follows (the text inside the square brackets, i.e., the country/region is what varies) *should immigration from the following parts of the world [Europe, Mexico & Latin America, Middle East, India, China, Africa] be increased, decreased, or kept the same?* The valid response options to each immigration question are coded as follows (1 = decreased; 2 = kept the same; 3 = increased). Given the ordinal nature of this variable (ranging in ascending

order from 1 to 3), I use an ordered probit regression model in my analyses[8].

Main Independent Variable

My main independent variable of interest is White racial identity; this is measured in the 2017 wave of the VSG panel study. As previously mentioned, White identity is defined as "a sentiment capturing a desire to protect the in-group and its collective interests" (Jardina, 2021, 1540).[9] This was measured in the VSG survey via the following question (the text inside the square brackets is what varies, depending on a respondent's self-identified race) *how important is being [race of the respondent] to your identity?*. I restrict my analyses to non-Hispanic White Americans, meaning that these individuals were specifically asked, in the survey, how important being *White* is to their identity.

The valid response options (for the White identity question) presented to respondents are as follows: *not at all important*, *a little important*, *moderately important*, *very important*, *extremely important*. This variable ranges from 1 to 5, with higher values indicating a stronger White racial identity. I re-scale responses to this question to range between 0 and 1 (mean = 0.401; sd = 0.349; for non-Hispanic Whites in 2017). White racial identity was asked in the 2016 and 2017 waves of the VSG panel; I use the 2017 measure in my main analyses. As previously mentioned, this approach ensures that my independent variable of interest temporally precedes my dependent variables, which are measured in the 2018 wave of the VSG panel study.

Control Variables

The panel data I employ notwithstanding, which permit me to assuage some concerns about "reverse causality," my research design cannot, owing primarily to a lack of a randomly assigned "treatment," yield a precisely estimated causal estimate. Moreover, the observational nature of this design leaves it vulnerable to omitted variable bias. While I cannot fully address this problem, I can account for a battery of theoretically appropriate control variables to help assuage *some* concerns about endogeneity. To do so, I draw on a variety of past work to identity relevant correlates of both White identity and immigration support. I also leverage the panel structure of the VSG and ensure that all of my attitudinal control variables are measured in either 2016 or 2017; this is *prior* to my dependent variables, which are measured in the 2018 wave of the VSG panel.[10]

I first control for respondents' partisanship and ideological self-placement (strong Democrat/very liberal → strong Republican/very conservative; both measured in 2017; both are re-scaled to range from 0 to 1), given that White Americans who identity as stronger Republicans and/or conservatives may be more likely to adopt a stronger White identity and be less likely to support accommodating pro-immigration policies (Jardina, 2019). I also account for Whites' attitudes toward Donald Trump (low → high; job approval + favorability; measured in 2017; re-scaled to range from 0 to 1), given that both White identity and immigration attitudes are strongly linked with Trump support (Sides, Tesler, & Vavreck, 2019).

I also account for a variety of psychological predispositions that may predict both White identity and immigration support. These are: authoritarianism (low → high; 4-item scale; $\alpha = 0.687$; measured in 2016), a measure of how much people prioritize social order and conformity, egalitarianism, a measure of how much people prioritize equality of outcomes and opportunities (low → high; 4-item scale $\alpha = 0.828$; measured in 2016), nationalism, a measure of the extent to which people think the United States is superior to other countries/cultures (low → high; 3-item scale; $\alpha = 0.607$; measured in 2016), populism, a measure of how much faith people have in elites and government in general (low → high; 4-item scale; $\alpha = 0.674$; measured in 2017), and social trust, a measure of how much people think others can generally be trusted or not (low → high; 3-item scale; $\alpha = 0.789$; measured in 2017). Each of these factors (or reasonable proxies of them in surveys) have been linked by past work to immigration support (e.g., Branton et al., 2011; Macdonald, 2021; Newman et al., 2015). Moreover, several of these factors, particularly measures of authoritarianism and nationalism (Jardina, 2019), may also correlate with people's degree of White racial identity[11].

Beyond these, I also control for both egotropic and sociotropic economic evaluations to account for the role of economic considerations in shaping immigration attitudes (e.g., Citrin et al., 1997; Gerber et al., 2017). I do so by respectively using questions that ask respondents to evaluate their satisfaction with personal income and their satisfaction with the local economy (both are asked in 2017 and range from very dissatisfied → very satisfied). As previously mentioned, I re-scale all of these variables to range between 0 and 1.

Finally, I account for a small set of demographics (age, gender, education, and marital status; all measured in 2018) to account for differences in my sample of non-Hispanic White individuals' life experiences and general socialization processes. I also include state fixed effects (a 2018 dummy variable for the state in which each respondent reports living) to account for any objective state-level factors such as the unemployment rate or the size of and/or changes in the foreign-born population, that may correlate with both White identity and immigration support.[12]

Main Results

I display the main results in Table 2. Overall, my analyses of the 2016–2018 VSG show that White identity is negatively associated, to a substantively and statistically significant degree, with support for allowing immigration from: Africa,

Table 2. White Identity and Support for Allowing Various Groups to Immigrate.

	DV = support for immigration (ranges 1–3; measured in 2018)					
	Europe	Africa	China	India	Mexico	Mideast
White identity$_{(2017)}$	−0.040	−0.673***	−0.359***	−0.526***	−0.502***	−0.400***
	(0.072)	(0.078)	(0.080)	(0.079)	(0.081)	(0.080)
Partisanship$_{(2017)}$	−0.033	0.005	0.062	0.128	0.029	0.020
	(0.092)	(0.104)	(0.083)	(0.099)	(0.082)	(0.096)
Ideology$_{(2017)}$	−0.167	−0.342**	−0.293**	−0.232	−0.470***	−0.336**
	(0.141)	(0.145)	(0.137)	(0.145)	(0.149)	(0.164)
Trump attitudes$_{(2017)}$	−0.282***	−0.697***	−0.530***	−0.527***	−0.950***	−1.015***
	(0.102)	(0.071)	(0.077)	(0.099)	(0.094)	(0.082)
Authoritarianism$_{(2016)}$	−0.434***	−0.405***	−0.424***	−0.490***	−0.375***	−0.407***
	(0.063)	(0.076)	(0.071)	(0.083)	(0.107)	(0.090)
Egalitarianism$_{(2017)}$	0.170	0.828***	0.471***	0.580***	0.888***	1.089***
	(0.123)	(0.146)	(0.116)	(0.132)	(0.122)	(0.161)
Nationalism$_{(2016)}$	−0.235*	−0.490***	−0.277*	−0.114	−0.389***	−0.601***
	(0.133)	(0.117)	(0.149)	(0.136)	(0.117)	(0.131)
Populism$_{(2017)}$	−0.159	−0.300**	−0.458***	−0.296**	−0.617***	−0.474**
	(0.117)	(0.151)	(0.171)	(0.124)	(0.153)	(0.191)
Social trust$_{(2016)}$	0.320***	0.443***	0.319***	0.356***	0.360***	0.424***
	(0.053)	(0.044)	(0.054)	(0.059)	(0.064)	(0.074)
Local economy$_{(2017)}$	0.105	0.291***	0.313***	0.318***	0.258**	0.289***
	(0.099)	(0.100)	(0.086)	(0.105)	(0.108)	(0.100)
Personal income$_{(2017)}$	−0.104	0.173*	0.083	−0.017	0.150	0.261**
	(0.070)	(0.093)	(0.085)	(0.110)	(0.123)	(0.105)
Age$_{(2018)}$	0.001	−0.006***	−0.005**	−0.001	−0.004*	−0.011***
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Female$_{(2018)}$	−0.248***	0.064	−0.050	−0.058	−0.011	0.018
	(0.050)	(0.046)	(0.053)	(0.038)	(0.049)	(0.042)
College $_{(2018)}$	0.294***	0.115***	0.121***	0.259***	0.075	0.108*
	(0.043)	(0.043)	(0.047)	(0.063)	(0.065)	(0.062)
Married$_{(2018)}$	−0.154***	−0.056	−0.042	−0.048	−0.076**	−0.038
	(0.048)	(0.041)	(0.040)	(0.042)	(0.036)	(0.058)
Constant cut1	−1.153***	−1.060***	−0.916***	−0.617***	−1.290***	−1.010***
	(0.178)	(0.201)	(0.203)	(0.224)	(0.221)	(0.271)
Constant cut2	1.015***	1.307***	1.241***	1.598***	0.838***	1.048***
	(0.173)	(0.197)	(0.202)	(0.229)	(0.226)	(0.244)
State fixed effects (2018)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	2,846	2,843	2,848	2,844	2,845	2,844
Pseudo R^2	0.096	0.249	0.164	0.167	0.283	0.323

Note. Dependent variables are measured in 2018 and asks about preferred immigration allowance from different countries/regions of the world (1 = decrease; 2 = keep about the same; 3 = increase). All independent variables (except for age, gender, education, marital status, and state fixed effects) are measured in 2016 or 2017 and range from 0 to 1. Sample consists of Americans who identity as White, non-Hispanic (in 2016, 2017, *and* 2018). Ordered probit coefficients with robust standard errors clustered by state in parentheses. ***$p < 0.01$, **$p < 0.05$, *$p < 0.1$, two-tailed test. Source is the VSG Panel Study.

China, India, Mexico & Latin America, and the Middle East. Holding the various other variables constant, stronger White identity is negatively associated with allowing immigration from these places. Interestingly, the coefficients for these non-European countries/regions of the world do not differ significantly from one another. All of them are negative and roughly approximate in terms of the magnitude of their relationship with immigration support. Moreover, the coefficient for White identity when people are asked about immigration from "Mexico" (which technically refers to "Mexico & Latin America) is not significantly stronger (in terms of its magnitude) than the coefficient for White identity when people are asked about allowing immigration from any of the other five non-European countries/regions of the world.

This suggests that Latin American/Hispanic immigrants are not uniquely nor solely able to "activate" White identity, i.e., via them posing a uniquely strong challenge and/or especially powerful threat to the status of the White

native-born American majority. In terms of immigration from Europe, the coefficient is negative, substantively small, and is not statistically significant at conventional levels. This finding is consistent with a theoretical argument in which European immigrants (many of whom are White) fail to "activate" White identity because they do not, in the mind of many White Americans, pose a threat to the dominant status of the native-born White American majority.

The other variables in the model are largely associated with immigration support as expected, with ideological conservatism, authoritarianism, nationalism, and populism being generally negatively associated, and egalitarianism, social trust, and college education being generally positively associated. Consistent, with past work (e.g., Citrin et al., 1997), subjective sociotropic economic evaluations (here of the local economy) appear to be more strongly and consistently related to immigration support than a subjective egotropic measure of one's personal economic situation.[13] Interestingly, Trump attitudes, rather than partisanship, appear to be a far more powerful driver of immigration attitudes. While this may reflect partisanship operating *through* Trump attitudes, it is also consistent with the idea that presidents are uniquely able to shape mass opinion (Jacobson, 2023) and that there may be a powerful "Trump effect" in contemporary American politics (e.g., Essig et al., 2021).

The results in Table 2 are coefficients from an ordered probit regression model. As such, they are not directly interpretable. To better understand the magnitude of the relationship between White identity and immigration support, I illustrate the main results in terms of predicted probabilities in Figure 1. Holding all of the other variables constant at their observed values, I show how the probability of favoring *decreased* immigration levels for each group (vs. kept the same or increased) changes when White identity shifts from its minimum to its maximum value (from 0 → 1; not at all important → extremely important). Overall, the results in Figure 1 show that White identity is significantly associated, to a roughly approximate degree, with support for decreased immigration levels from: Africa, China, India, Mexico, and the Mideast. Importantly, White identity does not appear to matter uniquely more (Δ pr = 0.13) when people are asked about immigration from Mexico/Latin America than for other countries/regions (Africa, China, India, and the Middle East), with changes in the predicted probabilities of favoring decreased immigration levels (Δ pr) ranging between 0.10 and 0.18. The "Europe" model is small in magnitude (Δ pr = 0.01) and is not statistically significant (p-value = 0.578). This suggests that Whites with a stronger "in-group" racial identity are not meaningfully nor significantly more likely to support decreasing immigration levels from Europe. This is consistent with an argument that this immigrant group, which makes up a small but non-trivial proportion of the total U.S. foreign-born population, fails to "activate" White identity and thus does not reflect a perceived threat to the U.S. racial/ethnic hierarchy. However, stronger White identifiers also do not appear to want to bolster their political, cultural, and/or economic power by increasing immigration from Europe, a region of the world that is much more likely to speak English and "look like" a stereotypical White American. Rather, stronger White identifiers appear to support restricting

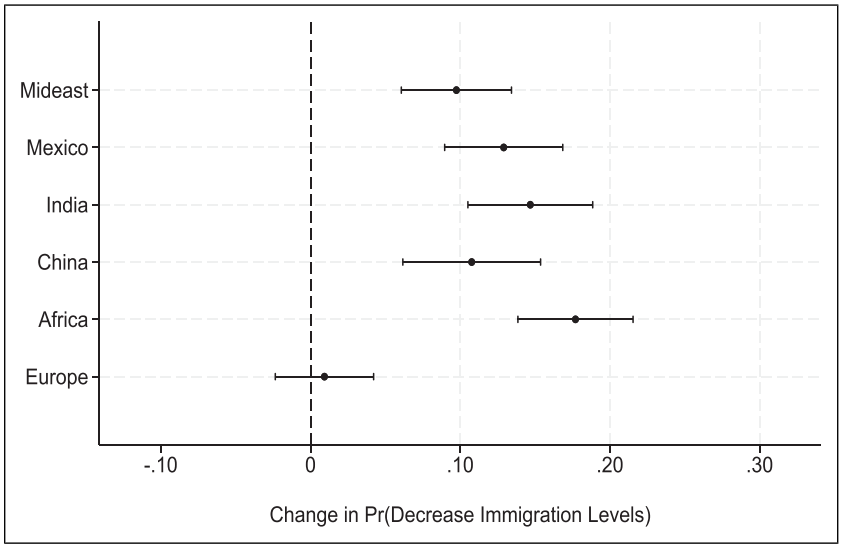

Figure 1. White racial identity and support for decreasing immigration levels.
Note. Shows the change in the predicted probability of favoring a decrease in immigration levels (vs. keep the same or decrease) from various countries/regions of the world when White racial identity is shifted from its minimum to its maximum value (0 → 1). Point estimates are changes in the predicted probability; horizontal lines are 95% confidence intervals. Based on the ordered probit regression model in Table 2 (all other variables are held constant at their observed values).

immigration from outside of Europe broadly, and appear willing to tolerate immigration from inside Europe.

In Figure 2, I further illustrate the main substantive results. I do this by plotting the predicted level of support for each response option to the six questions I examined asking about preferred immigration levels (1 = decreased; 2 = kept the same; 3 = increased), for each country/region of the world (Europe, Africa, China, India, Mexico, Mideast). Overall, these results show that the mean level of support for increasing or maintaining immigration levels are generally higher, among White Americans, for European immigrants. This is consistent with existing work in the United States, which finds that White and/or European migrants are generally viewed more favorably by the mass public (e.g., Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2015; Newman & Malhotra, 2019). The relevant finding here, however, is that the predicted level of support for (dis)allowing European migration does not meaningfully change across the observed range of White identity. In other words, White Americans who do (not) consider "being White" to be an important part of their identity are no more (less) likely to support increasing immigration levels from Europe.

The results are also not uniquely powerful for immigration from Mexico/Latin America, suggesting that this group is not uniquely capable of "activating" White racial identity. In terms of other regions, the magnitude of the White identity coefficient was smaller than one might expect for the Middle East. One [speculative] possibility for this finding could be that Donald Trump's bombastic anti-Muslim rhetoric during the 2016 election and the Trump administration's "travel bans" in 2017 and 2018 made Whites' attitudes toward Trump "matter more" and, as such, White identity simply had

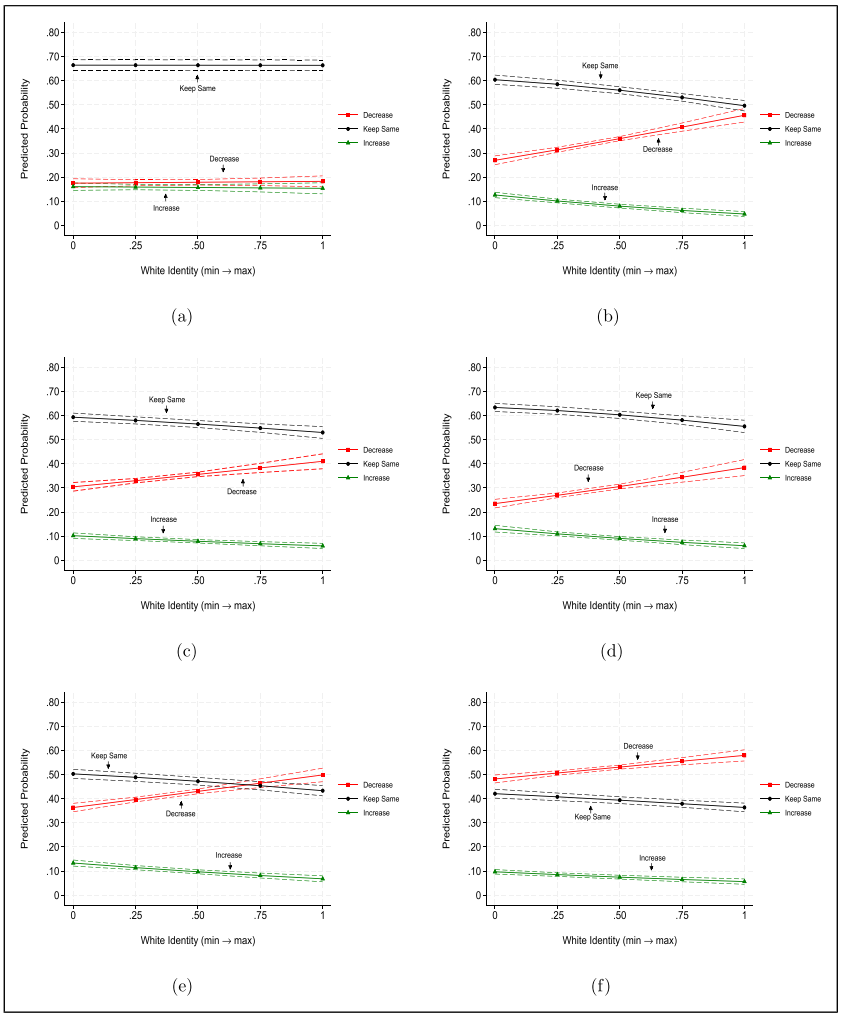

Figure 2. White racial identity and support allowing various groups to immigrate. (a) Europe. (b) Africa. (c) China. (d) India. (e) Mexico. (f). Mideast.

Note. Shows the probability of choosing each immigration policy choice (increase vs. keep the same vs. decrease levels) across the observed range of White racial identity (ranges from 0 to 1) for the following countries/regions of the world: Europe, Africa, China, India, Mexico & Latin America, and the Middle East. Solid lines are predicted probabilities; dashed lines are 95% confidence intervals. Based on the ordered probit regression model in Table 2 (all other variables are held constant at their observed values).

somewhat "less room to matter" in shaping public opinion toward immigration from the Middle East.

Robustness of Main Findings

I also conducted a series of additional analyses to help shore up the robustness of my main findings. I present these additional results in Supplemental Appendix B.

I first show that the results are similar when using a 2016 measure of White identity. The 2017 VSG panel wave was conducted a few weeks before the August, 2017 "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, where a group of White Nationalist/Neo-Nazi protesters were responsible for the death of Heather Heyer, a counter-protester, and after which then-President Donald Trump infamously said that there were "very fine people on both sides." The subsequent bi-partisan condemnation of the White nationalist/Neo-Nazi protesters and of Trump's remarks initially defending them, could have resulted in some people choosing to "reject" a stronger White identity out of a sense of disgust (Jardina, Kalmoe, & Gross, 2021). Given when the 2017 wave of the VSG was conducted, the events of Charlottesville seem highly unlikely to have biased the results in any way, i.e., resulting in White identity mattering more or less for immigration attitudes. In short, using a 2016 measure of White identity instead of a 2017 measure (the former also being measured before Trump took office) does not meaningfully change the overall results.

I next show that White identity remains a significant predictor of allowing immigration from Africa, China, India, Mexico, and the Mideast, when accounting for: feelings toward Black people (for the Africa model), Asian people (for the China and India models), Hispanic people (for the Mexico model), and Muslim people (for the Mideast model). These are feeling thermometer ratings (all measured in 2017) and are intended to help assuage concerns that any relationship between White identity and immigration support is not simply being driven by "out-group" attitudes among Whites that are not being sufficiently captured by the various control variables included in Table 2.[14]

Conclusion and Political Implications

Using panel data from the 2016–2018 VSG survey, I have conducted a series of tests to better understand *when* and *how* White racial identity is linked with American mass support for immigration. Overall, I found that White identity is negatively and significantly associated with allowing a variety of groups to immigrate, be these groups Latino/Hispanic or not. I have also found that White identity is *not* significantly associated with support for allowing immigration from Europe.

Collectively these findings suggest that White identity, a consequential factor in American mass politics (Jardina, 2019), matters broadly for Whites' immigration attitudes and that it is not uniquely "activated" by Latinos/Hispanics, who represent the largest share of the U.S. foreign-born population and who occupy a central place in the "majority-minority" narrative regarding demographic change in the United States. These findings also suggest that stronger White identifiers, that is, people for whom "being White" is a more important part of "who they are," do not appear to desire more immigrants from Europe as a means of maintaining and/or increasing the power and status of their racial/ethnic group, that being the native-born White American majority. However, the main results (Table 2) also show that attitudes toward Donald Trump were negatively associated with support for allowing immigration from all regions, albeit the most weakly for Europe. This suggests that Trump supporters, and potentially supporters of right-wing nativist/populist candidates more broadly, might not fully absorb nor accept messages that differentiate between immigrants from "desirable" versus "undesirable" countries. Future research would do well to theorize about and test when and why anti-immigrant politicians deviate from blanket opposition to immigration, and the circumstances under which their supporters support versus oppose such policy stances.

Future work would also do well to build upon these findings to more comprehensively examine which immigrant groups elicit opposition from stronger White identifiers and if there are any instances in which stronger White identifiers may support immigration of particular groups, perhaps by experimentally varying factors such as the gender, religion, language skills, and/or employment status of potential migrants (e.g., Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2015). It would also be useful to further probe if there is a partisan component at play. For example, it is possible that stronger White identifiers would be more amenable to immigration if they were informed that these prospective immigrants may be more right-leaning and/or more likely to vote Republican. This is also something that could potentially be tested experimentally and which merits, in my view, additional research.

Finally, it would also be valuable to extend this analysis to Europe, another region whose politics have been powerfully shaped by immigration (Dancygier & Laitin, 2014). For example, it would be valuable to test whether the U.S. concept of White identity, as discussed by Jardina (2019), has a parallel in different European countries, and how such a concept may shape support for allowing different groups to migrate and/or seek asylum.

Overall, these findings help to better understand the nature of American public opinion toward immigration and

further illustrate the political consequences of White identity, a factor with consequences for mass politics in a changing America.

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Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. This was documented by numerous media sources and was not explicitly refuted by the White House.
2. See, for example, the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) for greater information. The MPI is a valuable source of U.S. immigration statistics both over time and in the contemporary (21st century) United States. https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/us-immigration-trends.
3. The European Social Survey (ESS) consistently asks about attitudes toward different immigrant groups, e.g., such as whether respondents favor an increase versus decrease of immigration from countries that are "the same as their country's ethnic majority," "different from their country's ethnic majority," "low-skilled?" or "high-skilled?" Analogous surveys in the U.S. do not, unfortunately, consistently ask such questions.
4. See, e.g., Stephens-Dougan (2021) for a broader review of the literature on racial appeals in American political campaigns.
5. This is not to say that all scholars nor political observers believe that a single American identity is superior to multiple traditions/views of American identity (e.g., Schildkraut, 2007) nor that immigration will necessarily pose a threat to such an identity (e.g., Citrin et al., 2007). My larger point is simply that growing immigration is likely to engender societal and cultural changes that increases the likelihood that we will collectively need to reconsider what it means to be an "American."
6. See the following link for the codebook, questionnaire, and information on sample sizes, panel attrition, and weighting (specifically pages 1–4). https://www.voterstudygroup.org/data/voter-survey.
7. Subsequent interviews were conducted in the following time frames: (1) November 29 - December 29, 2016; (2) July 13 - July 24, 2017; (3) April 5 - May 14, 2018; (4) November 17, 2018 - January 7, 2019; (5) November 22 - December 2, 2019; (6) August 28 - September 28, 2020; and (7) November 13 - December 7, 2020. The valid sample in some VSG panel waves consists of both new individuals and people who had been interviewed before in previous waves, while in other panel waves it only consists of people who were being re-interviewed.
8. In my various tables and figures, I abbreviate the "Mexico & Latin America" label to "Mexico" and abbreviate the "Middle East" label to "Mideast." I also put the non-Europe countries/regions in alphabetical order; in the text here I put them in the order they appear in the VSG codebook.
9. An alternative measure focuses on the concept of White racial consciousness. This refers to "both a psychological attachment to one's group coupled with the belief that Whites are losing out relative to racial and ethnic minorities" (Jardina, 2021, 1555). Unfortunately, the VSG does not have the necessary questions to construct such a scale (e.g., Jardina, 2019, Chapter 3). As such, I use a single-item measure of White racial identity in my analyses.
10. I re-scale all attitudinal variables to range between 0 and 1. See Supplemental Appendix A for detail on variable coding and creation.
11. One might be concerned about multicollinearity, given that many of the explanatory variables are correlated with one another. However, a test of this, based on the Variance Inflation Factors (VIF), using the Stata command vif, suggests that this is not a problem for my results.
12. I cluster my standard errors by state to account for the fact that I am including both individual and geographic predictors in my models. That said, conventional robust standard errors yield substantively similar results, that is, in terms of statistical significance. The results are also broadly similar regardless of whether I cluster my standard errors or employ the survey weights (instead of relying on the inclusion of relevant demographic control variables) in my regression analyses instead.
13. This does not mean that economic self-interest never matters for immigration policy preferences (see e.g., Malhotra, Margalit, & Mo, 2013), but underscores the need to think carefully, data permitting, about how best to operationalize this concept and how to measure it in surveys.
14. While one could argue that this is "over-controlling," that is, essentially regressing a variable on itself, these supplemental analyses demonstrate that the main results and conclusions still hold up, albeit somewhat attenuated in magnitude, when including these additional controls.

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