

Hispanic Support for Donald Trump in 2020: The Centrality of Race & White Identity

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Despite his anti-immigrant rhetoric, Donald Trump improved his performance among Hispanics in the 2020 election. Though most Hispanic voters supported Joe Biden, a sizable minority lent their support to Trump. Using data from the 2020 Cooperative Congressional Electoral Study, we demonstrate that denial of racism and racial resentment were some of the strongest indicators of Hispanics voting for Trump in 2020. These beliefs about race were stronger predictors of support than alternative indicators including partisanship, ideological self-placement, policy preferences on immigration, or demographic characteristics including country of origin. These views were particularly prevalent among Hispanics who prioritized a White over a Hispanic identity, suggesting that these voters saw themselves as aligned with a different ethnic group. These findings help quantify heterogeneity in the Hispanic electorate and highlight the centrality of attitudes about race and White identity in shaping this group's voting behavior.

Keywords: Hispanic voting; 2020 presidential election; race; White identity; racial resentment

In the 2020 presidential election, Donald Trump received a higher proportion of Hispanic votes than any Republican candidate since George W. Bush in 2004 (Drucker 2020). In doing so, Trump increased his share of Hispanic voters from 28 percent in 2016 to 38 percent (Pew Research Center 2018; 2021). In the aftermath of the election, a plethora of narratives emerged to explain this improved performance among Hispanics, including that the group had been “taken for granted” by the Biden campaign (Medina and Lerer 2021) in part due to the group’s historic support (Saavedra Cisneros 2017), were put off by the Democratic Party’s perceived connections to socialism (Gamboa 2021), or supported Republican policy choices regarding lockdowns and COVID-19 (Lauter 2021). Both media narratives and academic scholarship explaining heterogeneity in Hispanic voting behavior both before and during the Trump era have largely focused on demographic and economic characteristics such as age, gender, country of origin, and income (Alvarez and Bedolla 2003; Garcia 2021; Gouin 2021; Hill and Moreno 1996; Medina 2020; Segura 2012).

We take an alternative approach to explain the increased Hispanic vote share of a candidate who was in part defined by his xenophobic appeals against Mexicans in particular and Hispanics in general (Lamont, Park, and Ayala-Hurtado 2017). Building on literature examining Hispanic voting behavior in 2016 (Alamillo 2019) and the power of racist beliefs in determining White voting behavior (Schaffner, Macwilliams, and Nteta 2018), we test the degree to which attitudes about race—including racial resentment (Kinder and Sanders 1996) and denial of racism (Neville et al. 2000)—were predictive of Trump support. Using data from the 2020 Cooperative Congressional Electoral Study (CCES) (Ansolabehere, Schaffner, and Luks 2021), we demonstrate that racial attitudes were among the strongest explanations of Trump support, with higher predictive ability than alternative measures including partisanship, views on immigration, ideological self-placement, income, education, or demographic characteristics.

Given recent literature centering White identity as a force mobilizing electoral support in the modern Republican Party (Jardina 2019; Sides, Vavreck, and Tesler 2018; Takahashi and Jefferson 2021), we further demonstrate that the prioritization of a White rather than a Hispanic identity was strongly associated with more racist attitudes. Identifying as White therefore served as one mechanism through which an important minority of Hispanic voters held racist beliefs (Gans 2012; Murguia and Forman 2003; Warren and Twine 1997), which in turn motivated their support for Trump.

This research uses new sources to extend previous findings (Alamillo 2019; Hickel et al. 2020) into the 2020 electoral cycle. The empirical results are important for our understanding of Hispanic voter behavior as a heterogeneous phenomenon, and the role of White identity in structuring the political preferences of demographic groups other than Whites. Hispanics are the fastest growing proportion of the U.S. electorate, meaning these findings also have important implications for trends of demographic change and future electoral outcomes.

We proceed as follows. First, we outline the social identity framework used to explain Hispanic support for Trump. Drawing on the linked fate literature (Dawson 1994), we argue that an increasing share of this group respond to racial discrimination by dissociating from their ethnic group and trying to pass as members of a higher-status group. Next, we present our data and approach, followed by our results, which demonstrate the importance of racial attitudes in predicting Hispanic support for Trump in 2020. Then we discuss the implications of these findings by advocating for a more nuanced understanding of the Hispanic electorate, for whom questions about race and identity are no less central than for other groups in American politics (Hutchings and Valentino 2004).

A Social Identity Approach to Hispanic Electoral Behavior

In this section, we consider a theoretical framework to help explain Hispanic electoral behavior in the 2020 election. Building upon social identity theory (SIT) (Tajfel and Turner 1979) and previous applications to these voters (Hickel et al. 2020), we discuss why Hispanics may vote for a candidate who expresses open hostility to their group identity.¹

Linked fate was originally used to explain the political behavior of African Americans, where Blacks perceive that their individual life chances are linked to the racial group interests, which in turn affect how they evaluate political choices and shape their partisan evaluations (Dawson 1994). As individuals' sense of positive self-conception is derived from their social groups, they may try to improve the standing of the group in face of discrimination. In turn, the social standing of the group determines whether its members can access economic, political, and social resources, making group interest a proxy for self-interest and where the destiny of the individuals is inextricably linked to the membership of their group (Dawson 1994).

The tendency of Hispanic voters to support the Democratic Party has often been explained through similar linked fate behavior, where the belief that the destiny of the individual depends on the destiny of the other in-group members (Sanchez and Masuoka 2010; Vargas, Sanchez, and Valdez 2017). Since the policies championed by the Democratic Party have been comparatively supportive of their group, Hispanic voters with a heightened sense of linked fate are more likely to support the Democratic Party (Morín, Macías Mejía, and Sanchez 2021; Saavedra Cisneros 2017). Hispanics who believe that what happens to

¹ In our discussion of White identity, we lean heavily on Hickel et al.'s (2020) work connecting Latinx voting with U.S. American identity.

immigrants in the United States will relate to their outcomes are also significantly more likely to view Trump very unfavorably (Gutierrez et al. 2019).

Trump’s strongly anti-immigrant rhetoric was often directed at those entering the U.S. by crossing the country’s southern border, most clearly expressed in the desire to construct a wall between the U.S. and Mexico. Linked fate would therefore suggest one possible mechanism why Hispanics would vote *against* Trump, whose messaging could have increased the salience of a racialized Latino-immigrant identity (Gutierrez et al. 2019) resulting in lower support for a candidate who directly threatens the group position (Sanchez and Gomez-Aguinaga 2017). However, individuals react to discrimination in different ways, where some may try to ‘pass’ into a more positively distinct group if they are not satisfied with the social identity linked to their group (Tajfel and Turner 1979). For instance, individuals believing in the tenets of social mobility are more likely to leave, or dissociate from, their existing group, especially when the “objective and subjective prohibitions to ‘passing’ are weak” (Tajfel and Turner 1979).

Experimental studies have shown that individuals with low identification with their social group have been shown to retain commitment only when their individual goals and outcomes correspond with those of the group, whereas high-identifiers value the social group intrinsically (Doosje, Spears, and Ellemers 2002). Low-identifiers also demonstrate less commitment to their group and a stronger preference for individual mobility than high-identifiers when belonging to a low-status group (Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje 1997). The linked fate argument therefore tells only part of the recent story of Hispanic voters. Though most voters believe their fates are related, an increasing share of Hispanics selectively dissociate from their ethnic group and instead perceive themselves as members of a higher-status group, i.e., Whites (Hickel et al. 2020).

Immigration has been perceived by many Anglo-Americans as a threat to cultural identity and core values, fueling anti-Hispanic sentiment and support for restrictionist policies even before Trump (Branton et al. 2011). This development materialized and intensified during the Trump era, where xenophobia was one of the strongest predictors of voting for Trump among the general electorate (Baker, Perry, and Whitehead 2020; Buyuker et al. 2021; Farley 2019). Hispanic immigrants were often characterized by Trump as a potential threat to the American people, i.e., a threat to White standing in the social hierarchy (Canizales and Vallejo 2021; Lamont, Park, and Ayala-Hurtado 2017). A more hostile political environment towards immigrants challenged Hispanics' status and legitimacy. In accordance with SIT, Hispanics responded to this challenge in distinct ways. Most rejected Trump's xenophobic remarks and were motivated to vote for Democratic candidates to prevent him becoming president (Sanchez and Gomez-Aguinaga 2017). Many Hispanics were active in their mobilization against Trump, helped organize to compete as a united front in electoral contests, and tried to improve their standing as a social group (Canizales and Vallejo 2021).

Yet, other Hispanics had begun employing strategies to disassociate from their social group even prior to Trump, trying to disassociate from Hispanic immigrants by blaming them for the negative social standing of their group among Whites (Bedolla 2003). High-identifying members have long tended to engage in political efforts to assert the group's positive value, while low identifiers dissociate, such as by rating Hispanics less favorably (Pérez 2015). Dissociation from their group identity has led some Hispanics to support restrictionist immigration policies and candidates, where prioritizing a U.S. American over a Hispanic identity has become a strong predictor of support for conservative immigration policies and Republican candidates (Hickel et al. 2020). This identity prioritization can be

understood as a social mobility strategy used by many Hispanics to disassociate from their group and ‘pass’ as a member of a higher-status group.²

Hispanics have applied several social mobility strategies for racial passing, which are all based on the assumption that by mimicking Whites’ perceived behavior, Hispanics can reduce the social space between themselves and Whites in a process of ‘whitening’ (Gans 2012), i.e., the deracialization of some minorities, in this case the inclusion of some Hispanics into the White social category. The whitening of the Hispanic population is not uniform where some, especially the light-skinned and wealthy, are more likely to be ‘whitened’ than dark-skinned, poor Hispanics (Gans 2012). These differences, combined with the colonial history of Latin America, help explain why skin color influences how Hispanics feel towards Anglos, with light-skinned Mexican Americans (Murguia and Forman 2003) and other Hispanic groups (Wilkinson and Earle 2013) having higher affective views of Anglo-Americans than darker-skinned counterparts.

One strategy used by Hispanics to reduce the social space between them and Whites is denying the existence of racism, with a belief that the U.S. has become a color-blind and post-racial society (Bonilla-Silva 2017). In a series of interviews, Rojas-Sosa (2016) finds that, in the face of discrimination, Hispanic students tend to: (1) avoid identifying their antagonists; (2) dissociate themselves from negative statements of immigrants by distinguishing ‘good’ from ‘bad’ immigrants; (3) show tolerance towards anti-immigrant positions and justify their antagonists’ arguments, and; (4) echo common ideologies about race, in which racism is no longer a social problem. Denial of racism might therefore serve as a strategy of minority groups to prevent being perceived as ‘un-American’ (Rojas-Sosa

² Anglos are generally seen by Hispanics as having “significantly higher status” than other Hispanics (Huddy and Virtanen 1995).

2016). Alamillo (2019) demonstrates that Hispanics who deny the existence of racism were more likely to vote for Trump in 2016. As a result, we expect that denying the existence of racism will be a strong predictor of support for Trump in 2020.

Some Hispanics have also adopted ‘symbolic racism’ or racial resentment (Kinder and Sanders 1996).³ This belief is rooted in the idea that Blacks lack the moral values of individualism, hard work, discipline, and self-sacrifice that are central to American society (Kinder and Sanders 1996). Studying the Mexican American experience, Murguia and Forman show that the immigrant identity of Hispanics often translates into dislike of Blacks, “whom they perceive as not embracing the achievement ideology” and who encompass “all that they hope not to become” (2003, 76–77). Other studies find that stereotypes of Blacks by Hispanics are more negative than White respondents (McClain et al. 2006), and that Hispanics are no different to Whites in their negative perceptions of Blacks regarding work ethic and intelligence (Krupnikov and Piston 2016). A self-reinforcing dynamic might exist, where already-believed stereotypes are reinforced by the desire to differentiate from minorities perceived to have lower status (Gans 2012), and Blacks serving as a defining ‘other’ (Warren and Twine 1997). Accordingly, we expect that racial resentment will be a further predictor of 2020 Trump support.

Denial of racism and racial resentment therefore form the basis of H1:

H1: Beliefs about race, namely the denial of racism and racial resentment, will be more predictive of voting for Donald Trump among Hispanics than alternative explanations.

³ Though the term is now widely accepted in the literature, it is not without its critics (see e.g., Carmines, Sniderman, and Easter 2011; Schuman et al. 1998) who claim that the scale is merely an alternative measure of conservatism.

According to this framework, we expect that Trump’s immigration policies and xenophobic rhetoric elicited heterogeneous responses from Hispanic voters. Most Hispanics rejected Trump. However, for others, the hostile environment towards immigrants represented an opportunity to show their allegiance to a higher-status social group, i.e., Whites. These voters embodied White social behavior and, in accordance with the literature discussed above, denied the existence of racism in U.S. society, and displayed racial resentment towards Blacks. Whereas the former serves the needs of distancing from socially undesirable racist beliefs and actions to preserve a positive self-identity and not be perceived as “un-American” (Konrad 2018; Rojas-Sosa 2016), the latter signifies Hispanics’ allegiance to values commonly associated to (White) American culture, such as hard work and sacrifice (Kinder and Sanders 1996).

We therefore expect that Hispanic voters who prioritize a White rather than Hispanic identity will be more likely to hold the racist attitudes discussed in H1, leading to H2:

H2: Prioritizing a White identity over a Hispanic identity will be positively associated with holding racist beliefs.

Data & Research Design

To test these hypotheses, we use data from the 2020 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES), a nationally representative survey of American adults (Ansolabehere, Schaffner, and Luks 2021). Out of 61,000 respondents in total, 5,180 respondents identified as Hispanic in response to the question “What racial or ethnic group best describes you?”. The CCES asked a second question to capture Hispanics that do not identify primarily as such: “Are you of Spanish, Latino, or Hispanic origin or descent?”. A total of 1,798 Americans

responded affirmatively to this question. Out of these 6,978 Hispanic respondents, 4,260 cast a ballot in the 2020 presidential election and constitute our sample for analysis.⁴

Dependent & Key Independent Variables

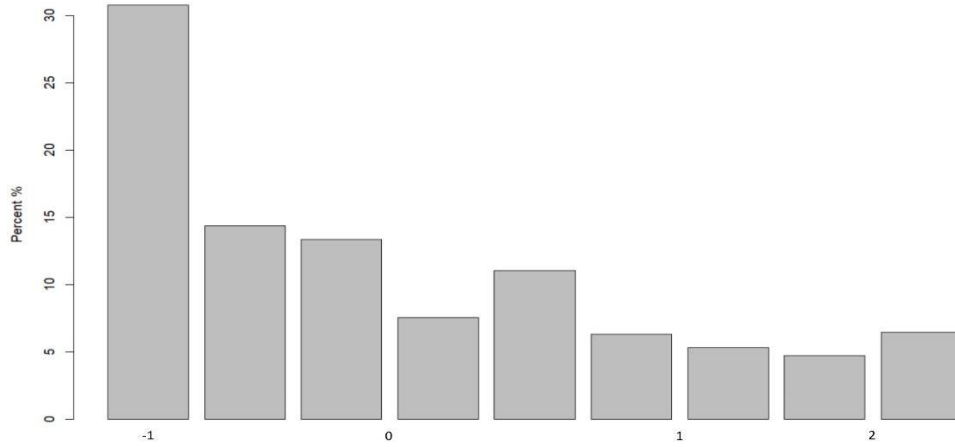
For H1, our dependent variable is the vote for president in the 2020 election. Given our interest here, we recode this variable such that 1 represents a vote for Trump and 0 for any other candidate. In this hypothesis, we are interested in the degree to which beliefs about race are predictive of support for Trump, operationalized as denial of racism and racial resentment. Denial of racism is operationalized in the CCES by measuring the belief that race does not affect one's life chances, as drawn from the colorblind racial attitudes scale (Neville et al. 2000). Participants are asked to respond to the following statements using a five-point scale (strongly agree; somewhat agree; neither agree nor disagree; somewhat disagree; strongly disagree):

- 1) White people in the U.S. have certain advantages because of the color of their skin.
- 2) Racial problems in the U.S. are rare, isolated situations.

These responses were scaled and standardized to have a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one. The measure was coded such that high values represent a higher denial of racism. The alpha value for this scale is 0.774, indicating high internal consistency. Figure 1 shows the distribution of the measure for our sample, indicating that thirty-one percent of Hispanic voters strongly acknowledge the existence of racism in U.S. society, and just six and a half percent strongly deny it, as shown on the right side of the graph. Sixteen percent of voters in our sample score more than 1. The median of the measure is -0.22 , reflecting its positive skewness (0.73).

⁴ This is a much larger sample than the closest comparable study by Hickel et al. (2020) who have a total of 1,459 respondents to two waves (2012 and 2016) of American National Election Studies (ANES) data.

Figure 1: Denial of Racism Distribution

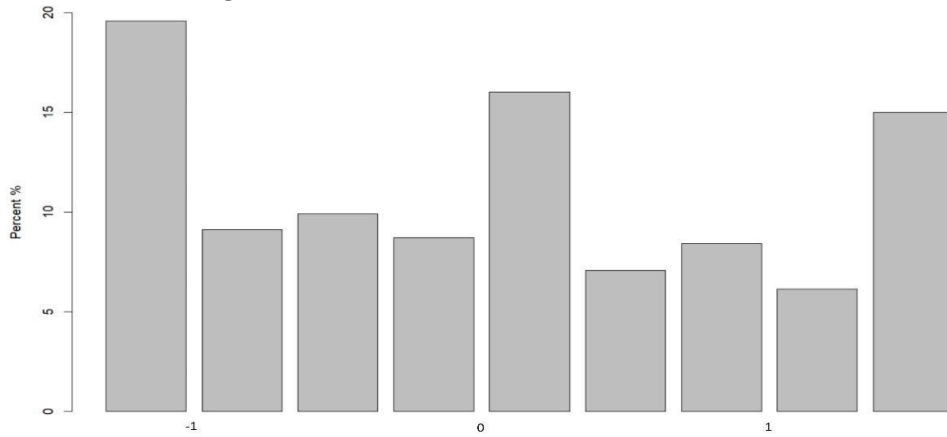


We also include racial resentment in our first hypothesis. Racial resentment measures the belief that Blacks lack the moral values of individualism, hard work, discipline, and self-sacrifice that are central to American society (Kinder and Sanders 1996). The questions used in the CCES to measure racial resentment are:

- 1) Irish, Italians, Jewish and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors.
- 2) Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for Blacks to work their way out of the lower class.

Respondents answered these statements using the same scale as above. Again, answers were standardized and scaled such that high values represent greater levels of racial resentment and anti-Black animus. The alpha value for this measure is 0.807, again indicating high internal consistency. Figure 2 shows the distribution; the median is 0.11.

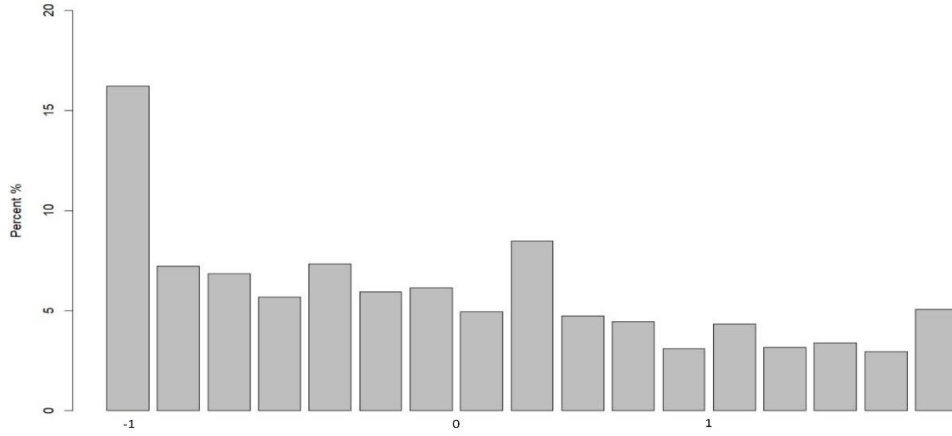
Figure 2: Racial Resentment Distribution



As with the denial of racism scale, the modal response was to reject both statements. Twenty percent of the sample are at the negative end of the scale, indicating an acknowledgment of systemic racism. Roughly sixteen percent of the sample are scaled at the middle of the sample, likely because they “neither agree nor disagree” with both statements. More notably for our purposes here, fifteen percent of the sample are positioned at the highest end of the scale, these respondents can be said to reject arguments that systemic conditions make it more difficult for Black Americans to succeed in American society.

We collapse these two measures into a single dimension, which can be understood as an approximation of beliefs about race. This measure captures both whether a respondent believes racism plays a role in American society and whether Black Americans share values such as hard work. As with the other measures, answers were standardized and scaled such that high values represent higher levels of racist beliefs. The alpha value for this measure is 0.868, indicating high internal consistency, with the distribution shown in Figure 3. Most Hispanics score towards the lower end of this measure, with sixteen percent strongly rejecting and only five percent strongly supporting, with most respondents somewhere in the middle. The median for this measure is -0.047 , reflecting its positive skewness (0.41). For H1 we present our results with both individual components of this scale, and this combined measure; for H2 this measure serves as our dependent variable.

Figure 3: Measure of Racism Distribution



Our operationalization of White identity also comes from the CCES and serves as our key independent variable for H2. As stated above, respondents are asked to first select what race they identify primarily as, of which Hispanic, White, and Black are possible answers. Respondents who indicate that they do not identify primarily as Hispanic are then asked if they have Hispanic ancestry. We include all respondents who indicate they have Hispanic ancestry in answer to the second question in our sample. Our independent variable for H2 is therefore whether a respondent identifies primarily as White in answer to the first question, with Hispanic serving as the reference category. Respondents who identify primarily as Black are also included in this model.

Control Variables

In both models, we include several additional controls that might predict these outcomes for reasons other than our indicators of racism (H1) or prioritization of a White identity (H2). These controls largely follow the established literature on Hispanic voting behavior. Most obviously, we include traditional controls for partisanship and ideology, with ‘Independent’ and ‘Moderate’⁵ used as the respective reference categories (Abrajano and Alvarez 2011;

⁵ We recognize the burgeoning literature around this term (see e.g., Fowler et al. 2022) with moderates described as cross-pressured (Treier and Hillygus 2009), ideologically innocent (Kinder and Kalmoe 2017), or with preferences that are poorly captured by a single dimension (Broockman 2016). We do not seek to contribute to this literature but use partisanship as a control to better isolate the effects of our key variables in question.

Alvarez and Bedolla 2003; Collingwood, Barreto, and Garcia-Rios 2014; Segura 2012). Heterogeneity based on country of origin is also well documented, with, in particular, Hispanics of Cuban origin tending to be both more conservative and more politically aligned with the Republican Party (Alvarez and Bedolla 2003; Gouin 2021; Hill and Moreno 1996; Segura 2012). We therefore include country of origin as a further control.⁶

We also control for respondents' gender. Differences in the voting behavior and political views of Hispanic men and women are well documented, both generally (Bejarano 2013; Galbraith and Callister 2020; Monforti 2017; Montoya 1996) and in specific application to the 'macho' appeals of Trump (Garcia 2021; Medina 2020). Higher-income Hispanics are said to favor Republican candidates (Alvarez and Bedolla 2003) and hold less prejudiced attitudes (Carvacho et al. 2013), meaning we include income as a further control. Based on CCES responses, this variable is coded as a factor variable of 'low', 'middle', and 'high' income (see also Alamillo 2019). We use middle income as the reference category in our models. Being of multiple races may also affect the voting behavior of Hispanics, meaning we include an additional control for 'two or more races', though we note that some Hispanics struggle to identify using the CCES race question (see also Hickel et al. 2020). As with the population at large, education may be a further important determinant of vote choice and participation (Alvarez and Bedolla 2003; Arvizu and Garcia 1996), meaning we control for whether the respondent holds a college degree.

Both age and the number of generations since a family migrated to the U.S. are important factors shaping the identities and attitudes of Hispanics (Bejarano 2014; Pew Research Center 2004). We therefore include age as a continuous variable, with a further

⁶ In the CCES, respondents can indicate many countries as their country of origin, meaning we do not factorize this variable or have any single reference category.

factor variable based on the number of generations a respondents' family has been in the country, with 'third generation or more' as our base category. Given that religion is an important determinant of Hispanic behavior (Morales, Rodriguez, and Schaller 2020), we also include controls for denomination and religiosity, scaled using respondents' answers to the question "how religious are you?" in the CCES.

Perhaps most importantly given the subject at hand, we also control for views on immigration. Immigration is a particularly important issue for Hispanic voters (Morales, Rodriguez, and Schaller 2020), and we are eager to isolate the specific effects of the denial of racism and racial resentment scales above and beyond positions on this issue, which may be motivated by beliefs not connected to race. We control for beliefs about immigration using respondents' answers to the five immigration questions on the CCES.⁷ We recoded responses to these questions such that higher values signify opposition to immigration, then aggregated them to produce a single indicator of immigration views which we then scaled and standardized. Including this variable makes for a harder test of our theory as it is likely that some denial of racism and racial resentment will manifest in the form of preferences for stricter controls on immigration.

Results

We present the results of our two hypotheses in turn. Given the primacy in the literature of several of the alternative explanations used as control variables in these models, we present our full results with the inclusion of all controls for each hypothesis. Our dependent variable for H1 is dichotomous, meaning we use logistic regression to estimate the likelihood of voting for Trump in the 2020 election. Our dependent variable in H2 is our continuous combined measure racism, meaning we use OLS to determine the relationship with White identity.

⁷ CC20_331grid

Trump Support (H1)

We start by analyzing the impact of our racism measures on the likelihood of support for Trump (H1). Table 1 includes our full models, first with the denial of racism and racial resentment scales included separately, and second as a combined measure. In both models, these beliefs about race are substantive and highly significant predictors of voting for Trump. Indeed, going up a single point on the five-point combined measure is a stronger predictor of voting for Trump than any of the alternative explanations included as control variables except partisanship. As indicated in the separate model, roughly two-thirds of this effect comes from the denial of racism (1.199), with a further third due to racial resentment (0.581).

Table 1: H1 Results

	Separate Model	Combined Model
Denial of Racism	1.199*** (0.110)	-
Racial Resentment	0.581*** (0.114)	-
Measure of Racism (combined)	-	1.671*** (0.118)
Liberal	-0.582** (0.224)	-0.548* (0.223)
Conservative	0.181 (0.187)	0.181+ (0.186)
Democrat	-2.351*** (0.198)	-2.343*** (0.195)
Republican	2.020*** (0.200)	1.947*** (0.199)
Male	-0.282+ (0.158)	-0.225 (0.157)
Low Income	0.381+ (0.203)	0.407* (0.203)
High Income	-0.056 (0.178)	0.097 (0.177)
College Degree	-0.186 (0.164)	-0.154 (0.163)
White Identity	-0.205 (0.220)	-0.191 (0.219)
Black Identity	-0.817 (0.569)	-0.738 (0.557)
Two or More Races	0.249 (0.410)	0.310 (0.404)
Mexican	-0.041 (0.182)	-0.028 (0.181)
Puerto Rican	-0.159 (0.230)	-0.153 (0.230)
Cuban	-0.193 (0.297)	-0.082 (0.294)
South American	0.452 (0.283)	0.509+ (0.283)
Age	-0.005 (0.005)	-0.008 (0.005)
1 st Generation	0.159 (0.219)	0.167 (0.218)
2 nd Generation	0.142 (0.187)	0.158 (0.186)
Immigration Views	0.960*** (0.096)	0.963*** (0.096)
Protestant	0.280 (0.260)	0.304 (0.258)
Catholic	-0.096 (0.225)	-0.133 (0.224)
Religiosity	0.357*** (0.105)	0.338** (0.104)

Coefficients are odds ratios with robust standard errors in parentheses
***p<0.001; **p<0.01; *p<0.05; +p<0.1

As logistic regression results can be difficult to interpret substantively, we present the marginal effects of the statistically significant variables in Table 2.⁸ Moving from the lowest to the highest end of the combined measure of racism scale makes an individual roughly eighty-five percentage points more likely to vote for Trump. Respondents at the lowest end of this scale were very unlikely to vote for Trump (four percent), yet almost nine in ten (eighty-nine percent) Hispanic voters at the highest end of this scale cast their ballot for him.

Table 2: Marginal Effects on Likelihood of Trump Vote

	Separate Model			Combined Model		
	From	To	Change	From	To	Change
Denial of Racism	0.09	0.81	0.72***	-	-	-
Racial Resentment	0.13	0.45	0.32***	-	-	-
Measure of Racism (combined)	-	-	-	0.04	0.89	0.85***
Liberal	0.25	0.16	-0.09**	0.23	0.15	-0.08*
Conservative	0.25	0.28	0.02	0.23	0.26	0.03
Democrat	0.25	0.03	-0.22***	0.23	0.03	-0.20***
Republican	0.25	0.71	0.46***	0.23	0.67	0.44***
Immigration Views	0.11	0.65	0.54***	0.10	0.63	0.53***
Religiosity	0.16	0.33	0.17***	0.15	0.30	0.15**

Predicted effects of moving from minimum to maximum values, holding other variables at their mean or referential value

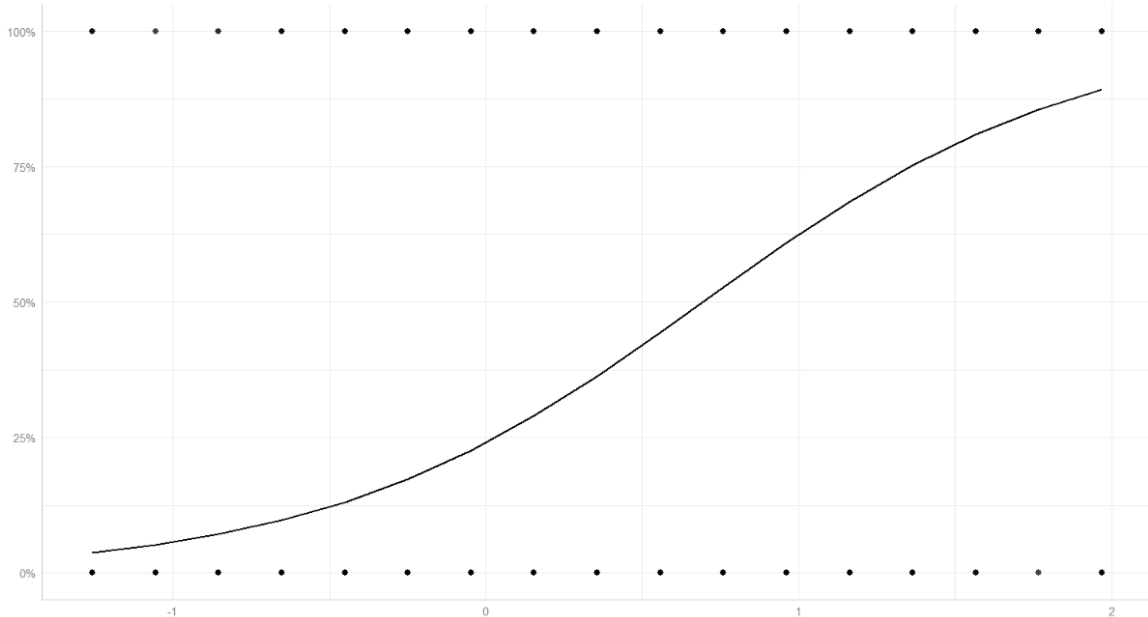
***p<0.001; **p<0.01; *p<0.05; †p<0.1

Our combined measure of racism is associated with greater change in the likelihood of voting for Trump than any of the alternative variables, even the combined change of moving from being a Democrat (three percent likelihood of voting for Trump) to being a Republican (sixty-seven percent likelihood) is smaller than the change from the lowest to the highest end of the combined measure, or denial of racism scale. The influence of ideology is far smaller, where moving from self-identifying as a liberal to a conservative aligns with an eleven (combined model) or twelve (separate model) percentage point increase in likelihood of voting for Trump. Views on immigration are strongly associated with voting

⁸ The logic of this approach is to understand how much the outcome changes across each independent variable, holding all other variables at their mean (for continuous variables) or reference values (for factors).

behavior, with a greater than fifty percentage point difference between respondents at the lowest and highest end of this scale.

Figure 4: Probability of Voting for Trump Across the Measure of Racism Scale



Controls are held at their means or reference category as per Table 1

For further clarity about the relationship between racial attitudes and likelihood of Trump voting, we present the marginal effect of the combined measure of racism across all its values in Figure 4. To reiterate, most Hispanics do not score highly on this measure and were therefore unlikely to vote for Trump, with a predicted probability below twenty-five percent at the median value of this scale (-0.047). However, Hispanic voters who scored above average on this measure became disproportionately more inclined to vote for Trump. Given the low levels of Trump support among most Hispanics, many of those who cast their ballot for the incumbent president were at this end of the scale. For example, going from 0.36 to 0.76 on the scale aligns with a twenty-one-percentage point increase. For comparison, a twenty-one-point increase is almost identical to the change from the lowest end (-1.26) to the scale's median. In short, this is where most Trump voters are located on this scale, and their beliefs about race are closely aligned with their voting behavior.

Attitudes about race do not have a linear relation to the likelihood of voting for Trump (Figure 4). Most Hispanic voters acknowledge the existence of racism in U.S. society, believe that Blacks share values such as hard work, and did not vote for Trump. Yet, those who dispute the role of racism in American society, or have a higher racial resentment, disproportionately voted for Trump. This relationship is strongest at the highest end of the scale.

Predicting Racial Attitudes (H2)

Given that racial attitudes were a prominent determinant of Trump support among Hispanics in our sample, we next consider what makes voters in this group more likely to hold racist beliefs. As hypothesized above, holding other factors constant, we expect that Hispanics who identify as White will score more highly on our combined measure of racism scale (H2). We present our results using only the race and identity variables (1), including demographic controls (2), and including political preferences (3) in Table 3. The dependent variable in all models is our combined measure of racism. Again, given their prominence in the literature we present the coefficients for all our control variables in this main model.

As expected, prioritizing a White rather than Hispanic (reference category) identity was a statistically significant indicator of respondents' position on our measure of racism scale in all models.⁹ White identity was substantively similar in size to the effect of being first generation or of being of Cuban descent in its alignment with the measure of racism. The only variables in the political model (3) that are substantively larger indicators of racial beliefs than White identity are the ideology and partisanship factor variables in the theorized directions, and holding particularly restrictionist immigration views. Identifying as White is therefore one of the most important predictors of the racial attitudes of Hispanic voters. This

⁹ Prioritizing a Black identity was not significantly different to Hispanic identity.

finding aligns with scholarship indicating that Hispanics who prioritize a U.S. American identity support more conservative immigration policies and the Republican Party (Hickel et al. 2020).

Table 3: H2 Results

	(1) Race	(2) Demographic	(3) Political
White Identity	0.236*** (0.044)	0.232*** (0.043)	0.086** (0.030)
Black Identity	-0.175+ (0.100)	-0.171+ (0.095)	-0.109 (0.067)
Two or More Races	-0.296*** (0.069)	-0.157* (0.068)	-0.089+ (0.051)
Low Income	-	-0.089* (0.039)	-0.009 (0.028)
High Income	-	0.071* (0.034)	-0.032 (0.024)
Male	-	0.227*** (0.030)	0.013 (0.022)
College Degree	-	-0.160*** (0.031)	-0.077*** (0.022)
Age	-	0.003*** (0.001)	0.000 (0.000)
Cuban	-	0.229*** (0.062)	0.084+ (0.044)
Mexican	-	-0.082* (0.034)	-0.024 (0.025)
South American	-	-0.065 (0.057)	-0.010 (0.041)
Puerto Rican	-	-0.177*** (0.043)	-0.057+ (0.031)
1 st Generation	-	0.098* (0.046)	0.084* (0.032)
2 nd Generation	-	-0.061+ (0.035)	0.014 (0.025)
Protestant	-	0.193*** (0.052)	-0.060 (0.037)
Catholic	-	0.065 (0.042)	-0.010 (0.030)
Religiosity	-	0.283*** (0.019)	0.070*** (0.014)
Immigration Views	-	-	0.508*** (0.013)
Liberal	-	-	-0.295*** (0.027)
Conservative	-	-	0.227*** (0.033)
Democrat	-	-	-0.177*** (0.027)
Republican	-	-	0.162*** (0.035)
Observations	4,171	3,863	3,592
R ²	0.014	0.164	0.604
Adjusted R ²	0.013	0.160	0.601

Standard errors in parentheses
***p<0.001; **p<0.01; *p<0.05; +p<0.1

Discussion & Conclusion

Our results highlight the importance of racial attitudes, including racial resentment and the denial of racism, in determining Hispanic vote choice in the 2020 presidential election. Prioritizing a White identity was strongly predictive of these racial attitudes, offering one potential mechanism through which some Hispanics supported Trump. These findings suggest that though Trump's, often targeted, xenophobic rhetoric was not appealing to most Hispanic voters, he held particular appeal for an important minority with distinct beliefs about the role of race in American society.

Trump's vitriolic language was not the origin of Hispanic discrimination in U.S. politics but rather their continuation and evolution (Branton et al. 2011; Canizales and Vallejo 2021), meaning these findings will remain important for future elections regardless of whether Trump is on the ballot. Given the likelihood that some politicians will continue to vilify immigrants, we offer one avenue through which some Hispanics will be inclined to support them. Indeed, our results suggest that some Hispanic voters support these candidates *because of* rather than despite this rhetoric, in a similar manner to the White population. Among Hispanics, such voters are concentrated at the high end of the denial of racism and racial resentment scales.

Extending the both theoretical framework and empirical findings from previous studies and election cycles (Alamillo 2019; Hickel et al. 2020), we demonstrate that Hispanic voters who prioritize a White identity tend to hold markedly different racial attitudes. Though most Hispanics do not score highly in terms of their racial resentment or deny the existence of racism in U.S. society, those who identify as White more commonly hold these views. This likely represents a social mobility strategy where, as the political environment has become more discriminatory, some Hispanics have selectively disassociated from their

ethnic group and instead aligned with a group that they perceive has higher status (see also Hickel et al. 2020). The ability to respond in this way is likely highly conditional on both economic and demographic factors, where whitening is more accessible for light-skinned, wealthy Hispanics (Gans 2012). That some Hispanics place a high value on whiteness is likely connected to the history of colonialism in Latin America (Murguía and Forman 2003).

The whitening of the Hispanic electorate has important consequences both for understanding the evolution of Hispanic identity and in analyses of this group's political behavior. A crucial question for the future of U.S. electoral politics is how the fastest growing demographic group will align in terms of partisanship. Appealing to White identity enabled Trump to successfully court some Hispanic voters in 2020. These findings also have consequences for scholarly understanding of Hispanic politics and future electoral contests. Though many analyses now go beyond considering Hispanic voters as a monolithic group, continued focus on the diversity of racial attitudes and self-identification will likely help better understand heterogeneity in electoral behavior. These results suggest that race and identity are just as central determinants of Hispanic voter behavior as for White and Black voters.

Acknowledgements

We thank the attendees to the 2022 Annual Meeting of the Political Science Section of the German Association for American Studies for their feedback on a previous version of this article.

Funding Details

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Disclosure Statement

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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