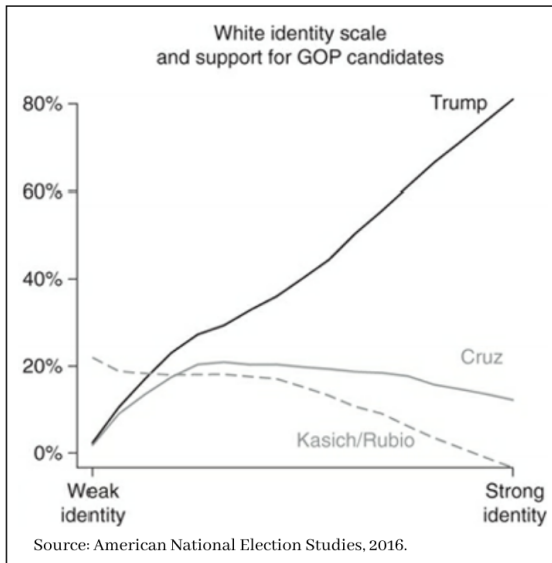


The Rise of White Identity Politics in Modern America

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OVERVIEW

In recent years, appeals to identity have played an ever increasing role in American politics with the idea of "white identity" rising in prominence most recently. As the United States has become more and more diverse, an increasing number of white people are viewing politics through a racial lens and supporting policies and candidates that they view as protecting their status and power. This has been made especially apparent in the years following Donald Trump's entrance into Politics.



Social Groups Case Study

In 1954, psychologist Muzafer Sherif conducted an experiment. He wanted to study the importance of group dynamics by dividing a group of fifth grade boys at a summer camp into two groups designed to be almost identical in every way possible. All the boys were the same race, religion, age, and class, the only significant differences being the arbitrary teams assigned to the boys by the researchers. At first the groups were kept separate where each group developed a sense of resentment for the other without any provocation from the researchers. Eventually the two groups met and after a few days quickly devolved to name calling, burning of the other groups' flags, and eventually violence all within two weeks of the experiments' start. After another week, the boys were tasked with collecting beans on the ground and estimating the amount of beans that the other children had. Routinely, the boys would overestimate the amount of beans their own team members had, while underestimating the amount of beans the other team collected, showing a loss of judgement of reality. This demonstrates that the formation of social groups will almost always lead to conflict and resentment toward out groups, and bias towards those within their group, even when the basis for group formation was arbitrary.

Factors that Contribute to Feelings of White Identity

- Age
 - Those who are older are more likely to have feelings of white identity. This is often due to being in the group longer and therefore feeling more attachment to it.
- Gender
 - Men are more likely to feel aggrieved at gains achieved by women and minorities and therefore more likely to become attached to their racial identity.
- Education
 - Those who are more educated are shown to be less prejudiced, ethnocentric, and more tolerant of others, as well as being less likely to perceive the world as "black and white."
 - Lower amounts of education also often means a lack of economic mobility, which can lead to feelings of resentment towards others who they perceive as taking their jobs.
- Geography
 - Evidence of white identity has been strongest in areas with histories of racial tension (like the South), areas of growing racial diversity (like the Southwest), and rural areas.
- Religion
 - Along with whiteness, Christianity is also a demographic that has been rapidly shrinking. Between 2008 and 2016, America went from 54% of people identifying as Christian down to 43%. The two have often been connected in a desire to preserve the dominant ideologies in America.
- Partisanship
 - 55% of those who scored high on tests of white identity also identified as Republicans compared to 31% identifying as Democrats.
- Personality
 - Those who exhibit an authoritarian personality are more likely to have a strong white identity.

History of White Identity in American Politics Post Civil Rights Act

- After Lyndon B. Johnson, a Democrat, signed the Civil Rights Act into law in 1964, many southern, conservative white Democrats felt betrayed by their party and began to associate more with the Republican Party.
- There have been a few people who have tried to run presidential campaigns centered on the idea of white identity. This includes George Wallace who ran unsuccessfully as a Democrat in 1964, 1972, and 1976 as well as an independent run in 1968 and Pat Buchanan as a Republican in 1992, 1996, and 2000.
- In 2016, Donald Trump became the most successful candidate associated with white identity when he won the election and assumed office in 2017 suggesting that white identity may be a rising force in American politics

Connection Between Donald Trump and White Identity

- One of the first groups to support the candidacy of Donald Trump were white supremacists such as former KKK leader David Duke, neo-Nazi website "The Daily Stormer," and white supremacist SuperPACs.
- A study done by the American National Election Studies found that in February 2012, 58% of Republicans believed there was at least moderate discrimination against whites. This number jumped to 47% in January of 2016 when Trump was gaining more popularity as a Republican candidate.
- There is a strong correlation between Trump support and the belief that white people don't get jobs due to employers preferring to hire minorities.

CONCLUSION

While the idea of white identity is a quickly emerging topic in the study of American politics, there is a lot that can be learned about it by studying social groups, looking back at history, and the factors that correlate to feelings of white identity. When looking at these factors we learn that people often view their identities through their social groups and show strong bias towards their group and resentment for out groups. This is especially true when a threat is perceived, even if the threat is not real. Recently there has been an increase in white people strongly identifying with their social group and showing in group bias and out group resentment. The most common characteristics of those who show a strong propensity to adopt white identity are males in their early fifties with low education. Living in areas with a strong history of racial resentment or increasing racial diversity are also significant factors that lead to someone adopting white identity along with several others. Finally, there is strong evidence to show that individuals who adopt these feelings show a significantly increased chance of supporting Donald Trump.

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