

# **The Impact of Group Discrimination on Vote Choice and Candidate Evaluation**

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## **Abstract**

Race and ethnic politics scholars have illustrated that racial group membership can shape the political behavior of Blacks, Latinx Americans, and Whites (Dawson 1994; Barreto 2010; Tesler 2016). However, work in this area tends to focus on a single group and/or employs different variables making intergroup comparisons difficult. In addition to the standard determinants of voting, we measure the impact that perception of one's group position has on evaluation of elites and presidential vote choice. We employ data from the 2016 Collaborative Multi-Racial Post-Election Survey, which—with substantial samples of the three largest racial groups—enables us to make comparisons across groups. We find that the amount of discrimination an individual feels their group faces significantly impacted evaluations of former President Obama and was a key determinant of vote choice in the 2016 presidential election. Whites who feel their group faces a lot of discrimination were significantly more likely to cast a vote for Donald Trump, as well as hold less favorable attitudes toward Barack Obama. On the other hand, Blacks and Latinx, who reported higher levels of group discrimination, were both far more likely to hold more favorable attitudes toward Barack Obama, and Latinx were more likely to cast a vote for Donald Trump. Our findings are robust to alternative model

specifications, and consistent across both absolute and relative levels of group discrimination.

## **Introduction**

The 2016 Presidential Election produced a flurry of debate in popular presses about the normalcy of the election, and about the salience of identity politics in both parties (Tesler 2016; Sides, Tesler, and Vavrek (forthcoming); Weller and Junn 2017). Was this election much like any other, in which candidates favored by partisans and few others faced off over a slim set of persuadables? Was either candidate aided (or hamstrung) by an emphasis on identity politics? Below, we argue that individuals' perceptions of discrimination against their own racial/ethnic groups (hereafter perceived group discrimination) provides the key to answering these questions. In the following pages, we utilize data from the 2016 Collaborative Multi-Racial Post-Election Survey (CMPS) that evidences substantial influence of group discrimination in structuring elite favorability and vote choice in African-, Latinx-, and White Americans in the 2016 election. We find that as Whites perceived greater discrimination against other Whites, they held more positive attitudes towards Donald Trump, were more likely to cast a Trump vote (and less likely to vote for Clinton), and were more likely to provide negative evaluations of Barack Obama. Perceptions of group discrimination also played a significant role in African American evaluations of Barack Obama; however, were not a significant factor in voting for either Trump or Clinton. Finally, Latinx who perceived a higher level of group discrimination evaluated Obama more favorably, were significantly less likely to vote for Donald Trump, and more likely to vote for Hillary Clinton.

All told, we maintain that the results we present below present several important conclusions. First, to claim identity politics is the prerogative of a single party or candidate is fallacious: perceived group interests structure support for the most prominent candidates of each party. Second, the influence of group discrimination is robust to controls for partisanship and ideology, and, indeed, exhibits similar magnitude to these important covariates. Finally, despite its widely disparate origins, group threat drives the political behavior of very different groups in similar magnitudes. Taken together, these points present important implications for the study of race and political behavior. Group-based considerations structured the evaluation of elites and vote choice for African Americans, Latinx, and Whites in the 2016 presidential election. Our findings supports a growing literature that suggest that identity is a key determinant of white political behavior, in addition to that of people of color. Perceptions of group discrimination is a meaningful measure in that it enables us to measure individuals' perception of group position, while also allowing us to make meaningful comparisons across groups.

## **Review of the Literature**

### *Principal Determinants of Voting Behavior*

An extensive literature has sought to identify the factors that determine how voters evaluate, and choose between, political candidates. Scholars have pointed to the impact of socioeconomic resources (Miller and Shanks 1996; Brady et al. 1995; Wolfinger and Rosenstone; Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Berry 1996; Petrocik 1987); economic self-interest (Downs 1957; Riker & Ordeshook; Citrin and Green 1999; Kluegel and Smith 1982), evaluations of the economy (Kinder and Kiewiet 1981; Fiorina 1981), and the role of mobilization/recruitment (Verba, Scholzman and Brady 1995; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Gerber and Green 2015). Other scholars stress that *symbolic* politics, as opposed to rational self-interest, play a central role in shaping American political behavior (Citrin, Green, and Sears 1980; Sears, Lau, Tyler, and Allen 1980; Sears et al. 1979; Kinder and Kiewiet). This umbrella term encompasses ideology (Abramowitz 1994; Conover and Feldman 1981; Abramowitz and Sanders 1998; Sniderman and Tetlock 1986; Sniderman and Piazza 1993; Sniderman and Carmines 1997), partisanship (Campbell et al. 1960; Green, Palmquist and Schickler 2002;; Bartels 2000; Huckfeldt, Levine, Morgan, and Sprague 1999), and racial attitudes. The importance of this last variable has prompted scholars to argue that racial attitudes might structure some of the independent variables listed above. Carmines and Stimson, most prominently, argue that party elites have used racial issues to pull reluctant counter-partisans to their side (1989; but see Chen, et al. 2008). Similar elite messaging on race--in the form of subtle campaign messaging--may structure candidate evaluations and policy positions in the electorate (Mendelberg 2001). However, studies based on the population as a whole necessarily privileged variables that explained the behavior of the White majority. As a consequence, decades of subsequent research has

found that the standard determinants of political behavior did not always operate similarly across groups and that additional group-specific variables were necessary to explain the political behavior of people of color. We discuss such scholarship below.

### *The Identity-to-Politics-Link among People of Color*

Empirical work has demonstrated that measures of socioeconomic status and partisanship are less meaningful predictors of Black voting behavior (Tate 1993; Dawson 1994) and that African Americans do not fit neatly onto the traditional left-right ideological spectrum (Hajnal and Lee 2011; Brown and Shaw 2002; Davis and Brown 2002; Harris-Lacewell 2004). Instead, scholarship has identified the unique ways that discrimination and exclusion has structured the political attitudes and behavior of people of color. In *Behind the Mule: Race and Class in African-American Politics*, Dawson argues that an enduring history of social segregation, political disenfranchisement and economic subjugation has developed a strong sense of "linked fate" among African-Americans. African Americans believe that their individual life chances are inextricably linked to the position of their racial group and thus employ "the black-utility heuristic" to evaluate parties, candidates and policies (1994). A rather extensive literature has developed and tested a variety of measures – including identity, group consciousness, and linked fate – to capture the impact race has on the political behavior of African Americans. Among African Americans racial identity or consciousness is a key determinant of voting (Dawson 1994; Gay 2001; Tate 1993; Bobo and Gilliam 1990; Shingles), support for African American candidates (Gurin et al. 1989; Swain 1993; Junn & Masuoka 2008), support for the Democratic party (Dawson 1994; Tate 1993),

additional forms of electoral participation (Chong and Rogers 2005), and participation in protest or disruptive politics (Chong 1998; Lee 2002, McAdam 1982). Even the growing diversity within the Black population as the result of immigration from the Caribbean and Africa has not altered the belief among the majority of Black Americans that they share collective interests and consequently must act collectively (Greer 2013; Rogers 2006; Waters 2000). While scholars in this area disagree over the degree to which “race matters” in politics –suggesting variation over time, policy, context, and how the impact of race is measured –they agree that among Blacks, race remains the central cleavage in American politics (Hutchings & Valentino 2004; McClain et al. 2009).

Building off the literature that highlights the identity-to-politics link among African Americans, scholars have measured the extent to which Latinos express panethnic identity or consciousness, and its impact on political behavior. Panethnic identity and/or consciousness among Latinx Americans has been shown to influence multiple aspects of political behavior including increased voting (Ocampo 2016), voter registration (Sanchez 2006); contact with co-ethnic representatives (Pantoja & Segura 2003); support of co-ethnic candidates (Barreto 2010; McConnaughy et al. 2010; Cain and Kiewiet 1984), and protest (Zepeda-Millan 2017; Barreto, Manzano, Ramirez, and Rim 2009; Rim 2009). Group consciousness tends to have the strongest impact on Latino political behavior when it is tied to support for co-ethnic candidates or issues that are particularly relevant to the Latinx community (Sanchez 2006). Current scholarship suggests that group consciousness among Latinos is more contingent upon environmental factors; group consciousness is often strongest in response to

perceptions of group threat (Vargas, Sanchez, and Valdez 2017; Zepeda-Milan 2017). For instance, anti-immigration legislation and ballot initiatives that specifically target Latinos have been found to increase political attentiveness (Pantoja & Segura 2003), strengthen Democratic partisanship among Latinos, and act as a source of political mobilization (Barreto 2005; Pantoja, Ramirez and Segura 2001; Bowler, Nicholson & Segura 2006). Furthermore, co-ethnic political elites (Barreto 2010; Barreto, Segura and Woods 2004; Shaw, de la Garza and Lee 2000) and Spanish language media (Feliz, Gonzalez, and Ramirez 2008; Ramirez 2013) play an important role in heightening shared consciousness among Latinx and directing it toward political action. While the predictive power of group identification and consciousness have diffused throughout the Race and Ethnic Politics literature, we argue below that such variables remain understudied when explaining White political behavior and that race and ethnic scholars ought to place greater emphasis upon intergroup comparisons.

### *White Racial Attitudes and Voting Behavior*

Initial work exploring the racial attitudes-behavior link found that many Whites, particularly in the South, hold prejudicial attitudes toward African Americans (Blaylock; Blumer; Myrdal; Bobo and Kluegel 1997; Schuman et al. 1997) and that these attitudes played a central role in White voting behavior (Key 1949; Wright 1977; Valentino and Sears 2005). This overt form of racism is typically referred to as “old fashioned racism,” and is rooted in the belief in the biological inferiority of racial minorities and the

importance in maintaining separation between the races. Following the Civil Rights movements, public opinion scholars began to see a decline in the number of White respondents who were willing to espouse old-fashioned racism, at least when surveyed. Nevertheless, institutional embodiments of white supremacy endured.

Scholars seeking to explain the persistence of racial hierarchy given the decreased reporting of “old-fashioned” racism articulated new strains of racism, either due to social desirability (Mendelberg 2001; Jackman 1994; Jackman and Muha 1984), or the adoption of new justifications (Sears and Kinder 1971; Kinder and Sanders 1996). These scholars argued that “new” racists did not subscribe to theories of biological hierarchy, and instead wedded “laissez-faire” attitudes (Bobo, et al. 1997) or preferences for formal equality (Bonilla-Silva) to the belief that unfair policies were responsible for status gains attained by Blacks (Sears 1988; Sears and Kinder 1971; Kinder and Sanders 1996). While other scholars have argued that even these subtler forms of racial prejudice fail--due to social desirability bias--to capture the extent of White anti-Black racism (see: Berinsky 1999, 2002; Gilens et al. 1998; Kuklinski et al. 1997; Tourangeau and Ting 2007, Redlawsk, et al. 2010), these “new” forms of racism remain predictive of white voting behavior. Symbolic racism, or racial resentment, have been found to correlate well with White vote choice (Kinder and Sears 1981; Sears, et al. 1985), especially when Black candidates (Knuckey 2005; 2011; Luttig 2015; Knuckey 2011) or white supremacist candidates (Howell 1994) contest elections, or when the election takes place in the South (Valentino and Sears 2005). Research indicates



Republicans are aware of this link, and have exploited it to attract new partisans (Knuckey 2005; Valentino and Sears 2005).

While some hoped that the election of Barack Obama might decrease the impact of race on voting, and perhaps usher in a post-racial era of American politics, empirical studies suggest otherwise. A multitude of studies, measuring race-based voting in a variety of ways, found that racial prejudice cost Obama votes in both the 2008 (Tesler and Sears 2010; Tesler 2013; Lewis-Beck et al. 2010; Redlawsk et al. 2010; Highton 2011; Jackman and Vavrek 2011; Knuckey 2011; Schaffner 2011; Kinder and Dale-Riddle 2012; Donovan 2012; Hutchings 2009) and the 2012 presidential elections (Tesler 2016; Pasek et al. 2014; Sides and Vavreck 2013). Furthermore, contemporary scholars have found that *old-fashioned* racism cost Obama support (Piston 2010; Pasek, et al. 2009) and votes (Krupnikov and Piston 2015; Stephens-Davidowitz 2013). The effect of subtle and explicit racism on attitudes toward candidates have been strong enough to catalyze *spillover effects*, racializing and diminishing support for policies and candidates associated with Barack Obama (Tesler 2012; Tesler and Sears 2010; Piston 2010).

Despite the depth and breadth of these findings, there are important alternative interpretations of the literature on White racial attitudes. First, there is important evidence that Whites' political behavior can be traced back to in-group favoritism and group status (Petrow 2010; Schildkraut 2017; Jardina 2014), attitudes which inform the political behavior of Whites (Petrow, et al. 2017). This in-group orientation is distinct

from anti-out-group racism, despite being, in consequence, observationally equivalent. Second, some scholars maintain that an emphasis on White prejudice obscures the added explanatory power of White racial liberals, which can drive White support for racially liberal policy, or for candidates of color (Redlawsk et al. 2010; Lopez Bunyasi 2015; Tesler 2016; Tesler and Sears 2010; Croll 2007).

Taken together, these scholars present a formidable case that diverse forms of anti-Black racism in Whites structure their political attitudes and behavior. However, we maintain that, in testing the behavioral impact of variables less sensitive to social desirability bias, new insights into the identity-to-politics link in Whites can be explored. Moreover, given that these questions are predominantly asked of Whites exclusively, they present limited opportunity for substantive cross-group comparison. We argue, therefore, that efforts to understand the role of racial/ethnic identity in politics merits measures less sensitive to survey methods and more capable of traveling across groups. We discuss research that works to accomplish these goals below.

### *Beyond the Black-White Binary*

The impact of racial attitudes on partisan identity, vote choice, and candidate evaluation is not limited to white attitudes toward African Americans. Hajnal and Rivera (2014) find that white attitudes toward Latinx, as well as attitudes toward immigration policy, are significant determinants of partisanship and vote choice (See also Abrejano and Hajnal 2015). Whites who express more negative attitudes toward Latinx or hold more regressive attitudes toward immigration policy are less likely to identify as Democrats or

cast a vote for Democratic candidates. In addition, Non-Hispanic Whites, particularly those who hold negative attitudes toward Latinx as a whole, are less likely to vote for Latino candidates (Kam 2007). McConaughy and her coauthors found that hypothetical candidates with Latino surnames, alter candidate evaluations among non-Hispanic Whites by cueing nativist sentiments and in-group favoritism (McConaughy et al. 2010). On a broader level, the scholarship of Cindy Kam and Don Kinder argues that group based evaluations extend beyond racial prejudice and must instead be viewed through the broader lens of ethnocentrism. They argue that ethnocentrism--"a deep-seated psychological predisposition that partitions the world into ingroups and outgroups"--was a stronger determinant of vote choice in the 2008 election than partisanship, ideology, policy preferences, or perceptions of the economy (Kam and Kinder 2012, p. 326). Recent research, then, provides evidence that ethnocentrism--present in multiple groups--and White prejudice not reducible to anti-Black racism influence political behavior. This, coupled with the measurement challenges associated with measuring racial resentment, suggests that research on the link between political behavior and racial attitudes must move beyond the Black-White binary and focus on measures of group-based considerations that travel across groups. Below, we explore modeling strategies and variables which provide potential to do so.

### *Group-Position Theories*

An alternative set of theories, typically referred to as "group position" or "realistic group conflict" models employ a group-based approach to explain variation in intergroup attitudes and intergroup conflict (Blumer, 1958; Bobo, 1999; Blaylock, 1967). Group

position scholars argue that the best way to analyze American politics is to focus on how meaningful groups compete for power. This approach is grounded in social identity theory which argues that in-groups collectively formulate, diffuse, and maintain collective attitudes toward out-groups (Tajfel & Turner 1979; Huddy 2001, 2003). A group's attitude toward other groups is largely determined by the hierarchical position they hold in society, and is thus "a subjective image of where the in-group ought to stand vis-à-vis the out-group" (Blumer 1958, p. 4). An individual's attitude toward their own group relative to the out-group impacts their attitudes toward political policies, political parties, and candidates and thus impacts political behavior. Furthermore, recent scholarship has adapted the approach in order to explain a society in which multiple racial and ethnic groups compete for power (Bobo and Hutchings 1996; Oliver and Wong 1999; Hopkins 2010; Kim 2003; Masuoka and Junn 2013; Hutchings and Wong 2014). An enduring history of discriminatory policies, ongoing racial stereotypes, and a stratified distribution of resources have placed racial groups into a hierarchy that structures intergroup competition (Masuoka and Junn 2013), both between Whites and people of color and between marginalized races/ethnicities (Kim 1999). Employing a group position approach enables us to more effectively compare how group-based considerations impact the political attitudes and behavior of distinct racial and ethnic groups.

In casting our lot with scholars of group position, the structure of our analysis begins to take shape. Perceptions of discrimination against the subject's racial or ethnic group sits at the forefront of the above literature, both as a close relative to all of the independent

variables considered, and as an important--and, crucially, shared--predictor between people of color and Whites (Chong and Kim 2006; Schildkraut 2017; Kluegel and Smith 1982; Dawson 1994; Masuoka and Junn 2013). Individuals who believe that their race faces higher levels of discrimination are more conscious of their placement in a racial group (but see Tajfel and Turner 1979) as well as the stratified position of their group relative to other groups (Schildkraut 2011; Chong and Kim 2006). Evaluations of elites and intended vote choice will be structured by both the degree to which an individual feels their group is marginalized, as well as the relative position of their group. While we posit that perceptions of discrimination should impact evaluations of elites and vote choice for Whites, Latinx, and Blacks, we predict that magnitudes and directions will vary in intuitive ways for each group considered below.

## **Data**

We utilize data from the 2016 Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey (CMPS) (Barreto, et al. 2017). The sample consists of 10,145 respondents contacted by e-mail<sup>1</sup>, and weighted post-stratification within each racial group to "match the adult population in the 2015 Census ACS 1-year data file for age, gender, education, nativity, ancestry, and voter registration status." These data provide an excellent opportunity to analyze voting behavior across racial and ethnic groups. The subsample of each racial and ethnic group is large enough to facilitate meaningful inter- and intra-group comparative analysis. These data, necessarily, bear the problems of online, low response rate, non-

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<sup>1</sup> Addresses for respondents were obtained via the national voter registration database e-mail sample (in the case of registered voters) and a random selection of further addresses "from various online panel vendors" (in the case of non-registered individuals).

probability surveys (Keeter, et al. 2017). However, the benefits of using the CMPS over any other data-set are enormous. First, the data include substantial sub-populations of African-Americans and Latinx-Americans. The increased size and diversity of the sample allowing us to more effectively analyze variation within and across racial groups. While this over-sampling necessitates abandoning probability sampling, such methods are necessary to analyze these groups in detail, and are very common in studies of racial attitudes.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, the CMPS' innovative invitations and procedures present opportunities to survey respondents of color by a) allowing respondents to self-identify, b) quota-sampling across vital covariates, and, consequently c) providing acute iterative weights (Barreto, et al. 2018). Next, these data ask respondents across all racial group identical questions about perceptions of discrimination and racial identity. Hence, we can make meaningful comparisons between *all* racial/ethnic groups across multiple dimensions of racial identity and stratification, and across measures of candidate evaluation and vote choice. Finally, phone-based surveys, face the dual problems of a high level of non-response, and misreporting due to social desirability bias (Tourangeau, et al. 2000; Groves, et al. 2009; Berinsky 1999; Zaller & Feldman 1992). The threat of social desirability bias has been found to be particularly troublesome regarding questions on sensitive topics such as racial attitudes. As discussed above, questions regarding racial attitudes are particularly sensitive to social desirability bias. Online-only surveys minimize non-response on surveys (Gooch and Vavreck 2016), and may--by diminishing interviewer effects--also decrease misreporting error resulting from

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<sup>2</sup> See: (AAPOR 2013). For analyses of racial attitudes using over-samples/non-probability samples, see: Hurwitz and Peffley 2005b; Citrin, et al. 2014; Barreto, et al. 2009; Banks and Valentino 2012; Gay 2004; Chong and Kim 2006; Callanan and Rosenberger 2011; Gilliam and Iyengar 2000; Schildkraut 2011; Bobo and Hutchings 1996; Kinder and Kam 2009, etc.

social desirability bias (Tourangeau, et al. 2000; Groves, et al. 2009; Sniderman and Stiglitz 2008; Weaver 2012). Ultimately, the disadvantages that come from the non-probability sample we consider here are outweighed by the *advantages* of the nonprobability sample: namely, we are able to apprehend and analyze variation in subgroups that are small in the United States population, but overrepresented here.

*How are perceptions of discrimination distributed across each group?*

Before testing the impact of discrimination on racial and ethnic attitudes toward racialized policies, we describe how perceptions of group discrimination are distributed across the population. Our key explanatory variable is derived from a survey measure that asks respondents' perceptions of contemporary discrimination in American society against their own racial/ethnic groups. The question wording is as follows (asked of all respondents): "How much discrimination is there in the United States today against each of the following groups?" "Whites;" "Blacks;" "Asian Americans;" "Latinos" (Barreto, et al. 2017). The distribution of responses to this question are listed in Table 1.

**(Insert Figure 1. from Appendix Here)**

As can be seen, respondents' perceptions of the level of discrimination against their own race or ethnicity seems—roughly—to place Whites at the top of a racial hierarchy, followed by Asian-Americans, Latinx-Americans, and then African-Americans. The relative levels of discrimination reported by each racial group is consistent with prior work (Chong and Kim 2006; Schildkraut 2011). African Americans, as a group, have

endured a long history of racial discrimination in this country and, as such are more likely to perceive that their group faces higher level of discrimination. The lower levels of group discrimination reported among Latinos and Asian Americans can be partially explained by their recent immigration status, as well as the increased heterogeneity within each group. What is perhaps most surprising is the amount of discrimination expressed among Whites. Less than a third of Whites (31 percent) reported that their racial group faces no amount of discrimination.

When we consider respondents' perceptions of each other group's levels of discrimination (see Figure 2.), a distinct pattern emerges. Groups have similar perceptions of relative discrimination in the contemporary United States. Moreover, each group reports that their group receives slightly more discrimination than others estimate. Nowhere, however, is the disparity as stark as between Whites' perceptions of the discrimination they face, relative to other groups' responses to the same question. It is evident that Whites' perception of their position in society, and the structural factors that support or threaten this position, vary considerably from the perceptions on non-Whites.

**(Insert Figure 2. from Appendix Here)**

### *Who Perceives Discrimination?*

Having demonstrated that perceptions of group discrimination are widely distributed across all of the racial and ethnic groups, we here explore more specifically who reports discrimination against their racial or ethnic group in the 2016 CMPS. Our descriptive



analysis includes a host of socioeconomic, demographic, and political variables. Since our variable measures racial or ethnic discrimination, we also include a variety of racial attitudes.

Socioeconomic variables are mixed in their ability to predict perceived discrimination across racial groups. Increased income and education correspond with decreased perceived group discrimination in Latinx; increased education correspond with increased perceived discrimination in African-Americans—consistent with literature identifying racial consciousness as a link between education and perceived discrimination (Dawson 1994). However, neither measure significantly correlates with White Americans' perceptions. Uniform relationships emerge when we consider sociotropic perceptions of the economy (Kinder and Kiewit 1981). Respondents from all racial and ethnic groups who perceive that the economy at large is getting worse are more likely to report group discrimination ( $p < 0.001$ ). This is consistent with our claim that group discrimination is a good measure of group position—it captures macro-level security and insecurity, rather than individual-level advantage and disadvantage.

The relationship between demographic variables and perceptions of discrimination are also not consistent across groups. Age is a significant correlate ( $p < 0.01$ ) for all respondents of color, but positively so for African-Americans, and negatively so for Latinx Americans. Women of color report more discrimination than men of color ( $p < 0.05$ ). Contextual variables are extremely erratic predictors, with region holding no clear pattern, and correlations with county-level population density proving highly sensitive to

coding and specification of the relationship. Political variables correlate more reliably: as ideologies and partisan affiliations become more liberal and Democratic (respectively), respondents of color perceive significantly more group discrimination. The trend, importantly, moves in precisely the opposite direction for Whites. Trust in government is lower in respondents of color who perceive more group discrimination. However, in all groups, a sense that public officials “care about [them]” is negatively correlated with perceived group discrimination. Finally, for all groups, senses of group identification and status correlate reliably with perceived group discrimination. More perceived discrimination corresponds to diminished senses that a respondent’s race/ethnicity “has a say”, and to increased feelings of shared fate with racial/ethnic fellows. Interestingly, the importance of American identity is a significant correlate with group discrimination for only African-Americans (negative) and Whites (positive). Finally, an individual’s personal experience with discrimination strongly with perceptions of correlate group discrimination. Regardless of one’s race or ethnicity, individuals who report experiencing discrimination are more likely to report that their group faces higher levels of discrimination ( $p < 0.01$ ).

While there seems to be little underlying pattern to perceptions of discrimination against the racial or ethnic groups of our respondents, we draw a few conclusions from these analyses. First, perceived discrimination emerges from different contexts for each group in our sample, rather than from the same source in different proportions. Next, socioeconomic and structural covariates correlate strongly to group discrimination in respondents of color. Those correlations, however, vary in direction across groups.

Finally, Whites' perceptions of discrimination against their own race appear to flow from underlying ideology, rather than the structural determinants discussed above.

### *What Is Discrimination?*

Over and above all else, we maintain that discrimination is an excellent measure of group position for the following reason: both group position and group discrimination depend on the racialized identification of the recipient of discrimination, and of the location of that recipient within a broader racial hierarchy (Blumer 1958, 3).

Furthermore, discrimination carries with it the explicit implication that a group's positionality within the hierarchy is *unfair*, and some political solution should be pursued to redress it (Conover 1988). Within the 2016 CMPS, all respondents self-identified their race/ethnicity; therefore, we can infer that *any* respondent reporting discrimination against their own racial group truly identified with same. Moreover, those who perceived discrimination were significantly more likely to also report shared fate with other members of that race/ethnicity ( $p < .001$  for all groups). In short, perceived group discrimination captures *both* group position and identification.

Moreover, this measure has seen extensive use within the political and sociological literatures to measure forms of hierarchy. Within the population as a whole, discrimination has been identified as a principal determinant of racial (and other) group competition (Bobo and Hutchings 1996; Conover 1988). Within specific racial and ethnic groups, the story is much the same. Discrimination serves as one of the principal mechanisms which binds the individual life chances of African Americans to the fates of

Blacks as a group (Dawson 1994; Gay 2004). Discrimination, furthermore, drives ascribed racial identity in Latinx- (Weitzer and Tuch 2005) and Asian Americans, and, by arousing group consciousness, structures political behavior (Chong and Kim 2006). Even in Whites--in whom discrimination cannot be clearly traced to policy action--perceived discrimination captures economic threat (Kluegel and Smith 1982), identification, and symbolic status loss (Gest 2016; Lipsitz 2006; Schildkraut 2011, 2017). In short, we maintain that group discrimination unites experienced discrimination, and perception of unfair marginalization or status threat, and--most significantly for our purposes--belief that some political action should redress the discrimination.

## **Hypotheses and Method**

As discussed above, we argue that perception of group discrimination is an excellent instrument to study individuals' latent sense of group position, a variable which, as other scholars have found, structures the political behavior of multiple groups. We examine how perceptions of group discrimination structured White, Latinx, and Black political evaluations of former President Barack Obama, as well as, intended vote choice for both Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton during the 2016 presidential campaign.

### *Hypothesis 1 -- The Two Sides of Racialization*

We predict that perceptions of group discrimination will predict evaluations of Barack Obama. As the first African American President, Barack Obama provides a visible and omni-present racial cue (Tesler 2016; Tesler and Sears 2010). As such, racial considerations are elevated, and the evaluation of Obama is driven by an individual's

racial attitudes. Consequently, we expect that evaluations of Obama will be highly racialized. Yet, Tesler and others note “the two-sides of racialization,” meaning that more racially liberal Whites hold a higher opinion of the first Black President (Redlawsk et al. 2010; Lopez Bunyasi 2015; Tesler 2016; Tesler and Sears 2010; Croll 2007). We believe that this prediction will be born out when we measure perceptions of racial group position using group discrimination. We posit that Whites who perceive other whites as facing more discrimination will evaluate Barack Obama *less* favorably, while those who perceive less group discrimination will evaluate the former president *more* favorably. We expect that a similar phenomenon, reversed, will hold for people of color. Respondents of color who believe their race/ethnicity faces higher levels of discrimination will evaluate Obama more favorably than those who perceive lower levels of group discrimination.

### *Hypotheses 2 -- Racial Spillover*

We argue that the campaign rhetoric of--and the salient policies debated in--the 2016 Election were eminently racialized (Garcia-Rios Forthcoming; Weller and Junn 2017; Lieberman, et al. Forthcoming; Hopkins Forthcoming). We hypothesize, therefore, that perceptions of race will *spill over* (see literature review) into vote choice in the 2016 Election. Policies bearing heavily on racial group interests sat at the fore of party platforms in the 2016 Election--and have for decades (Green, et al. 2002)--and we anticipate that voters feeling more or less group threat--measured here with group discrimination--would respond by supporting candidates that they feel will protect or better their group’s position in American hierarchy (Tesler and Sears 2010; Tesler 2016;

Schildkraut 2016). We argue that this will take the form of people of color who perceive more discrimination voting for Hillary Clinton, and opposing Donald Trump--such behavior would represent a validation of the former's endorsement of racially liberal policies, and the latter's noted interest in perpetuating racial hierarchy. Conversely, we argue that Whites will lend support to Trump, who advocated White racial group interests, and opposition to Clinton, the candidate connected to, and advocating for, more racially redistributive

### *Hypothesis 3--The Impact of Campaign Rhetoric*

We expect that the impact of perceptions of group discrimination will be strongest among Whites and Latinx. Donald Trump placed particular emphasis on the plight of White workers and the extent to which Washington no longer represents their interests. In addition, he also further racialized Latinx and identified "illegal" Mexicans as the source of many of the problems that America faced. Due to the rhetoric and messaging of the campaign (see: Vavreck 2016; Mendelberg 2001; Garcia-Rios Forthcoming), we'd expect that perceptions of discrimination would be elevated in the minds of Latinx and Whites and thus would hold greater weight in vote choice.

### *Hypothesis 4-- The Consistency of Black Group Interests*

In addition, we expect that perceptions of discrimination will have a diminished effect on African American vote choice. There is relatively little heterogeneity among African Americans, in terms of partisan identity or vote choice (Dawson 1994; Frymer 1999; Miller and Shanks 1996), and thus we'd expect that perceptions of discrimination to

have a less significant effect. As Dawson and others have convincingly demonstrated, African Americans express a strong sense of linked-fate and thus see their individual fate tied directly to the fate of the group as a whole. We see evidence of this in the lower percentage of Blacks in our sample who report “no” discrimination and the higher percentage who report “a lot” of discrimination, relative to other groups. Consequently, it is unlikely that we will find a significant effect for Blacks. We anticipate that this emerges as a consequence of the lack of variation in our dependent variable, rather than the lack of influence of our explanatory variable.

### *Modeling Strategy*

We test each of these hypotheses by modeling evaluations of former President Obama and intended vote choice for Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton in the 2016 presidential election. In order to examine the unique way in which group discrimination—as well as the remaining covariates in the model—operate among Whites, Blacks, and Latinx, we model each group separately (Masuoka and Junn 2013; Lee 2008; Hajnal & Lee 2011; Schildkraut 2011). First, we estimate ordered logistic models for evaluations of Barack Obama for each group. Next, we estimate logistic models for intention to vote for Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. The key explanatory variable in all of our models is group discrimination. In addition, we include other factors—income, education, gender, ideology, partisanship, political interest, and the perceived state of the economy—that have been found to be predictive of voting behavior, and may covary with perceptions of discrimination. We also include census region fixed effects, the effects of which we do not report in marginal effects plots but do include in regression tables. We include these

covariates to more precisely measure the independent effect of perceptions of discrimination on elite evaluations and vote choice, and compare its effect to more traditional determinants. We follow Kastellec and Leoni (2007) in reporting graphs instead of tables, to aid our readers' interpretation. The completed table of regression estimates for each model can be found in Appendix III.

## **Results**

### *Modeling Candidate Favorability*

Figure 3. estimates the impact of group discrimination on evaluations of former President Barack Obama. Perceptions of group discrimination significantly impacted perceptions of President Obama for Whites, African Americans, and Latinx Americans even accounting for gender, socioeconomic factors, partisanship, ideology, and perceptions of the economy. Among Latinx and African Americans, those who perceived higher levels of discrimination were more likely to evaluate Obama more favorably. On the other hand, Whites who felt their group faces higher levels of discrimination evaluated Obama less favorably. While the impact of group discrimination was greatest among Latinx, the magnitude of the variable rivaled that of partisanship and ideology for all three groups.

**(Insert Figure 3. from Appendix Here)**

Figure 4. plots the predicted level of favorability for Barack Obama across perceived levels of discrimination for each racial and ethnic group. First, it is clear that evaluations of Obama among Whites are highly polarized and that this divisiveness is partially



explained by the degree to which Whites perceive their group faces discrimination. Whites who perceive that their group faces higher levels of discrimination were significantly more likely to hold “very unfavorable” attitudes toward Obama, and less likely to hold “very favorable” attitudes toward him. On the other hand, Blacks and Latinx Americans, as a whole, hold more favorable attitudes toward Obama. Latinx and African Americans who perceive that their group faces more discrimination were significantly more likely to evaluate Obama “very favorable,” as opposed to “favorable.”

**(Insert Figure 4. from Appendix Here)**

#### *Modeling Vote Choice*

In order to further analyze the impact of group discrimination on the political behavior of racial and ethnic groups, we now turn to a measure of vote choice. Respondents in the CMPS were asked who they voted for in the 2016 presidential election. Consequently, our measure of vote choice is a self-reported measure as opposed to an actual vote cast. Similar to our analysis of candidate evaluations, we will first discuss the impact that perceptions of group discrimination had for each racial group, in relation to the other covariates in our models. Figure 5. and Figure 6. report the estimates for the likelihood of a voting for Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton respectively. Perceptions of group discrimination was a significant determinant of vote choice for White and Latinx, but not for African Americans. Whites who expressed a higher level of discrimination were significantly *more* likely to cast a vote for Trump, while similarly situated Latinx, were significantly *less* likely to vote for Trump. Likewise, Whites who expressed more

discrimination were *less* likely to vote for Clinton, and Latinx were *more* likely to vote for Trump. As we saw with candidate evaluations, and intention to vote for Trump, perceptions of discrimination played an insignificant role ( $p > 0.05$ ) in African Americans' decision to vote for either Trump or Clinton. Thus, while evaluations of Obama and candidate vote choice operated in a similar fashion for Whites and Latinx, perceptions of group discrimination was only a significant predictor of evaluations of Obama for Black Americans.

**(Insert Figure 5. from Appendix Here)**

**(Insert Figure 6. from Appendix Here)**

In order to more closely examine the impact of levels of group discrimination on vote choice, we plot the probability of voting for each presidential candidate across each level of discrimination for each racial and ethnic group. Figure 7. shows the impact of group discrimination on the probability of voting for Trump. The figures provide strong support for our hypothesis that perceptions of group discrimination will significantly impact individual vote choice for Whites and Latinx, and that the effect will be conditioned upon the position of each group in the racial hierarchy. Among Whites, perceptions of discrimination increased the likelihood of voting for Trump, while it decreased the likelihood for African Americans (albeit not significantly) and Latinx. Whites who expressed the highest level of discrimination had a 0.22 increased likelihood of voting for Trump than those who expressed no discrimination. On the other

hand, Latinx who reported no discrimination had a 0.34 likelihood of voting for Trump, in comparison to a 0.12 among those who expressed a lot of discrimination. In addition, we find support for our hypothesis that it would have a less significant effect on African American vote choice. While African Americans who expressed higher levels of discrimination were less likely to vote for Trump, the difference failed to reach significance ( $p > 0.05$ ).

(Insert Figure 7. from Appendix Here)

Perceptions of group discrimination also impacted the decision to vote for Clinton (See Figure 8.). Whites who report higher levels of discrimination were far less likely to vote for Clinton, while Latinx were far more likely to vote for her. The impact was greatest among Latinx; Latinx who expressed a lot of discrimination had a 0.31 increased probability of voting for Clinton than those who expressed no discrimination. While African Americans, as a whole, were far more likely to vote for Clinton, we do not find a significant difference among those who report high and low levels of discrimination.

(Insert Figure 8. from Appendix Here)

Our models suggest that group discrimination had a large impact on vote choice among Whites and Latinx Americans in the 2016 presidential election. Only party-identification had a larger impact on vote choice than perceptions of group discrimination for these racial and ethnic groups. In fact, group discrimination rivaled ideology in predicting

whether members of each group voted for Donald Trump. Members of all three groups who more strongly identified as Democratic or liberal were more likely to vote for Clinton and less likely to vote for Trump. Ideology and partisanship was strongest for White Americans. Whites, Latinx, and African Americans who evaluated the economy negatively were also less likely to vote for Clinton. Neither gender, education, nor income exerted an independent effect on vote intention after controlling for the remaining covariates in the model.

## **Conclusions**

In the previous pages, we provided evidence that perceptions of group status and threat--measured with group discrimination--influence the candidate evaluations and vote choice of African and Latinx Americans, as well as Whites. We found that the effect of the relationship was robust to, and comparable to, partialled-out effects of some of the most vital predictors of political behavior. These findings, within the context of academic political science, represent support for a) comparative-relational modeling strategies, which seek to model the causes and effects of racial attitudes in multiple-groups, and b) using measures of perceived group position, which both travel well across groups, and are less sensitive to social desirability bias in Whites.

These modeling choices allow us to make two further claims which move beyond the boundaries of academic political science. First, we argue that these findings destabilizes the dichotomy that separates identity- and non-identity politics. Shared senses of identity and threat inform the political behavior of Whites, African-, and Latinx

Americans in similar magnitudes, though in different directions. In short, those Whites that believe that other Whites face more discrimination are more likely to oppose Black candidates, and White candidates who ally themselves with Black candidates, and with racially progressive policies. Additionally, Whites who believe other Whites face more discrimination prove more likely to vote for candidates who openly espouse racism, and endorse policies to solidify white supremacy. The same pattern works in reverse for respondents of color, in whom increased consciousness of group discrimination corresponds to increased likelihood of supporting racially progressive candidates, and opposing racially reactionary ones. Taken together, these provide evidence of an identity politics that is not the sole prerogative of people of color. Feelings of racial/ethnic identification and threat influence the political behavior of all Americans.

The effects of these feelings, however, are not monolithic. Group position cuts both ways at numerous points in our findings. For example, Latinx Americans who perceive their co-ethnics as facing “no discrimination” were drastically more likely to cast a vote for Donald Trump (even given liberal ideology and Democratic identification) than those who perceived “a lot.” Conversely, Whites who viewed other Whites as experiencing “no discrimination” were between 20% and 30% more likely to vote for Hillary Clinton, and not to vote for Donald Trump. The ubiquitous importance of identity politics across these findings does not, then, translate to a monolithic effect, but, rather, catalyze different reactions among different groups, and in individuals reporting differential levels of group threat. We take this as clear evidence of racialized politics having two faces (Tesler 2016; Tesler and Sears 2016). Moreover, we maintain that scholarship that endeavors

to measure the White grievance politics catapulted to the heart of political discourse leading up to the 2016 presidential election must a) work with measures which can capture the subtleties of White racism in a survey context, and b) capture the extent and effects of differing senses of group threat in *all* Americans.

These findings imply several new lines of research. Several groups, at various points in our data, appear cross-pressured--often between partisan affiliations/ideology and senses of position in the racial hierarchy. Further research should examine the extent to which perceptions of racial/ethnic group position exist at either end of the political spectrum, and its effect on the political behavior of individuals similarly cross-pressured. This research would prove especially useful outside of the context of the Black-White binary, which--as discussed in our literature review--has structured the American party system and political spectrum for centuries. Additionally, we maintain that political science continues, too often, to understand race as an independent, rather than a dependent variable--exactly as we do in our study here (Smith 2004). Further research must examine how senses of group position, and feelings of racial identification emerge as the consequence of external forces. How might existing policies feed back on the population, structuring feelings of racial group membership, privilege, and oppression? How might variations in individuals geographic, social, and economic context catalyze feelings of racial/ethnic closeness, and senses of hierarchy in the United States? We maintain that these questions merit serious consideration from contemporary political science, for several reasons. Political science must work to transcend the Black-White dichotomy, just as demographics in the U.S. have. Moreover, political science must

leverage the comparative potential offered by racial heterogeneity--only in doing so can we begin to understand the influence of racial/ethnic group identification and stratification on American politics.

## Appendices

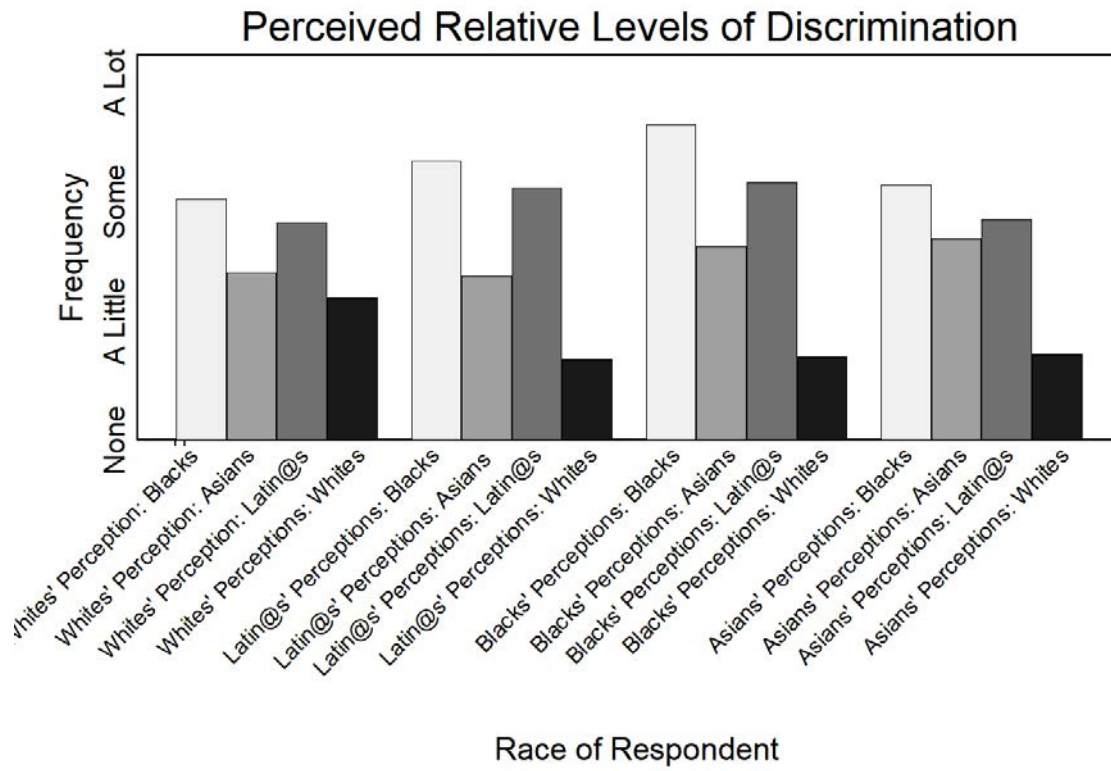
### Appendix I-- Descriptives

#### Figure 1.

Figure 1: How Much Discrimination Does Your Racial Group Face: Weighted Percentages

Amount	African Americans	Latinx Americans	Whites
None	2%	3	31
A Little	3	16	31
Some	19	40	25
A Lot	75	41	13

#### Figure 2.



**Appendix II--Coefficient and Margin Plot**

**Figure 3.**



### Perceived Discrimination and Favorability Toward Obama

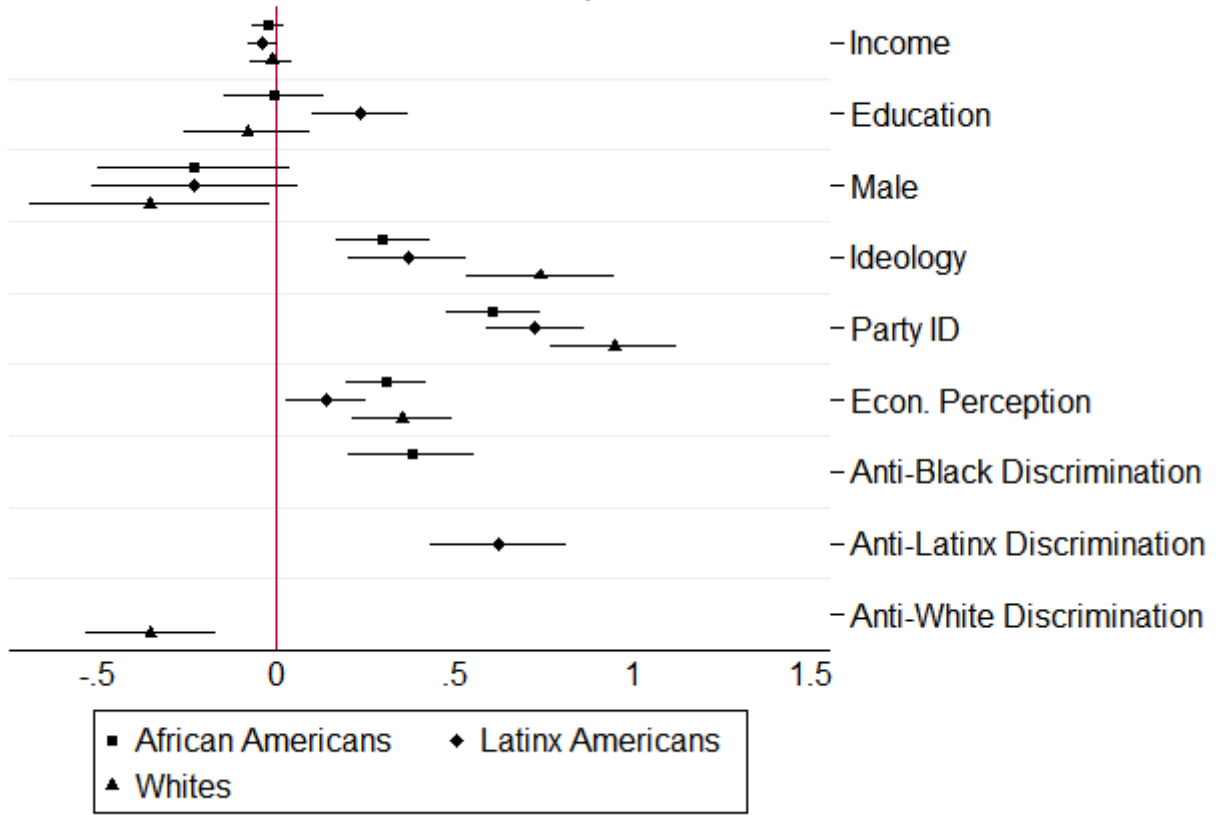
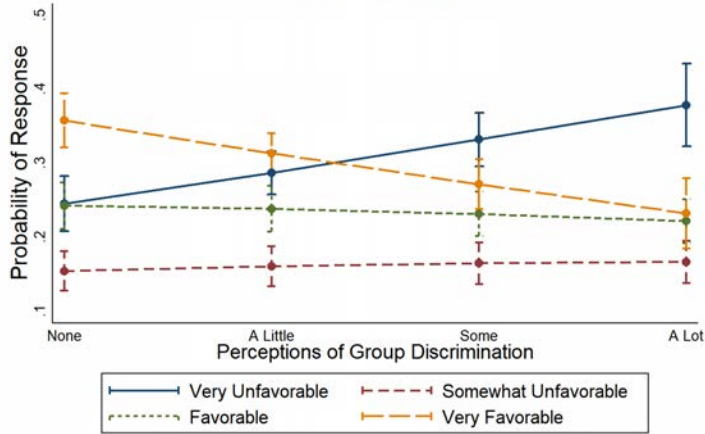
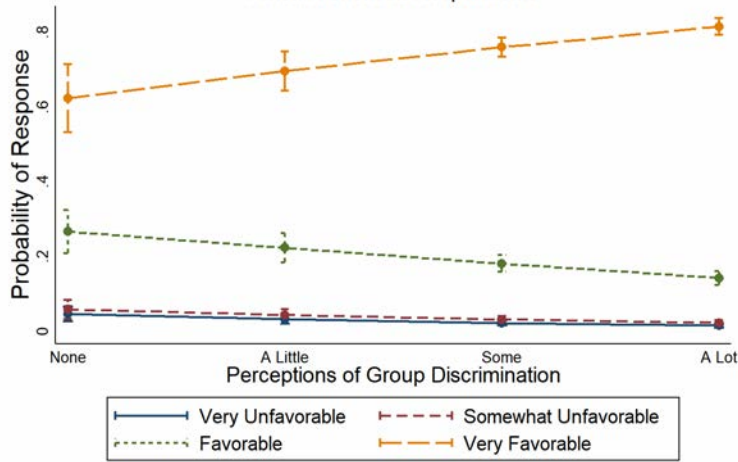


Figure 4.

The Influence of Perceived Discrimination on Support for Obama  
White Respondents



The Influence of Perceived Discrimination on Support for Obama  
African American Respondents



The Influence of Perceived Discrimination on Support for Obama  
Latinx American Respondents

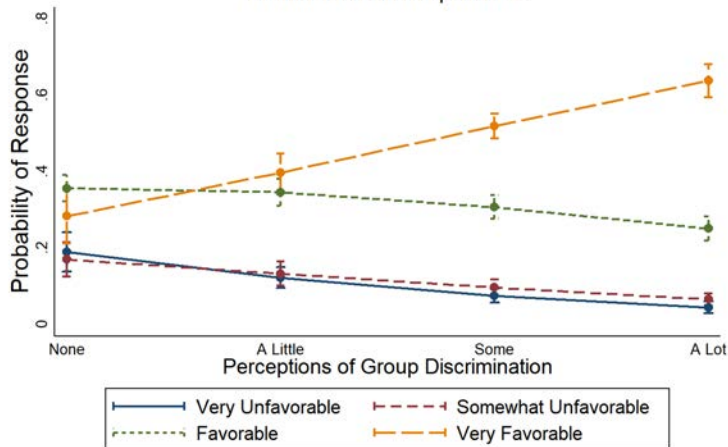


Figure 5.

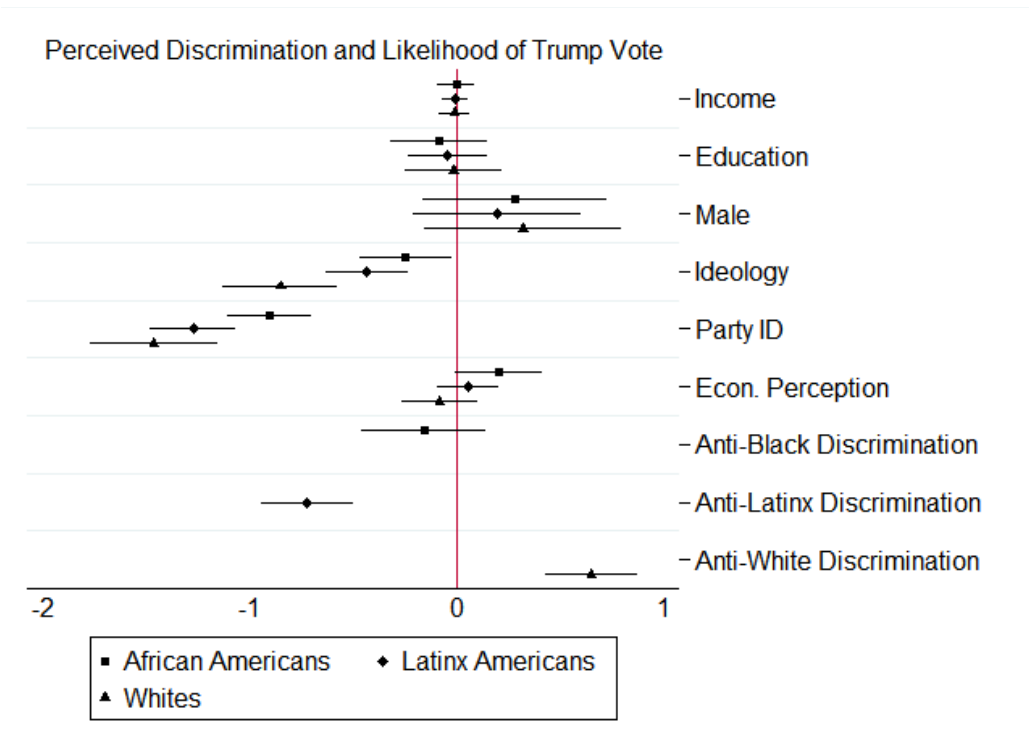


Figure 6.

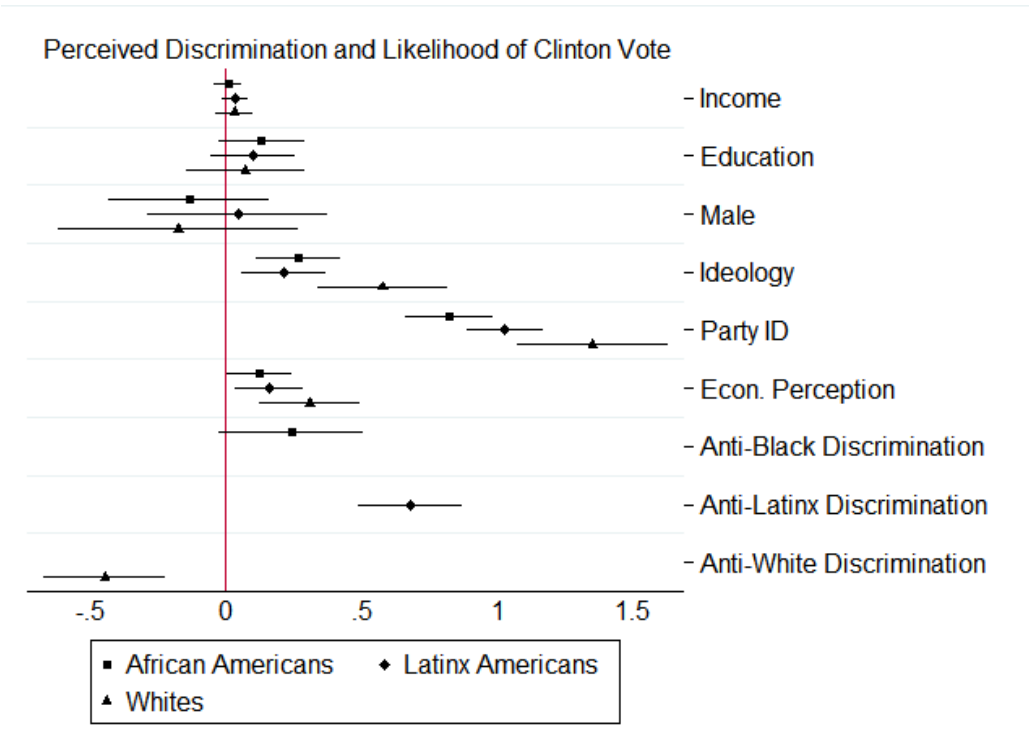


Figure 7.

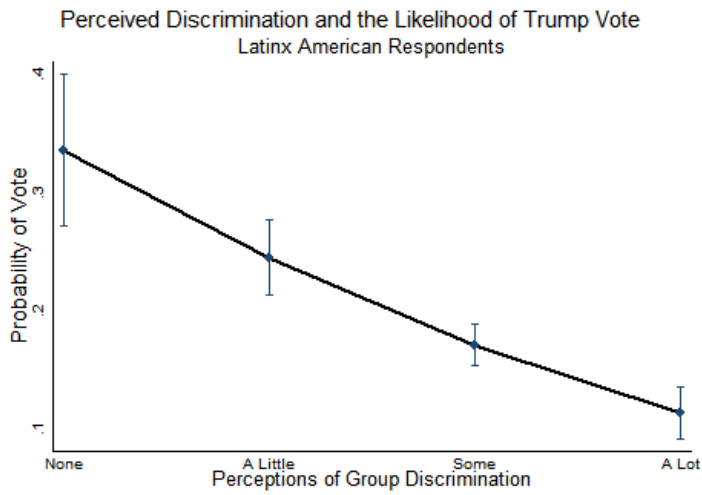
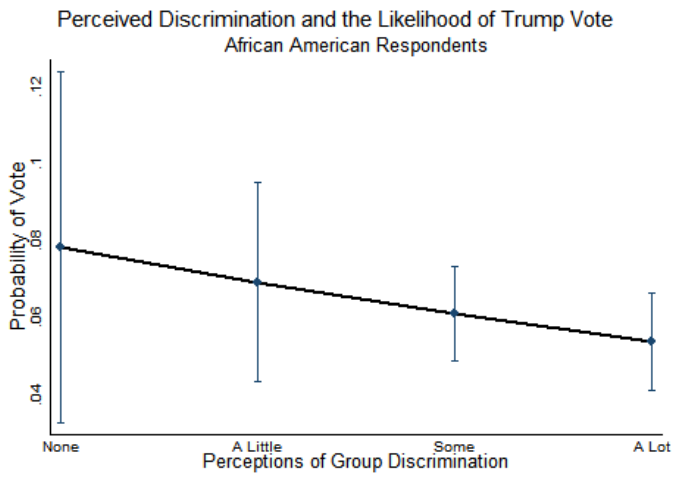
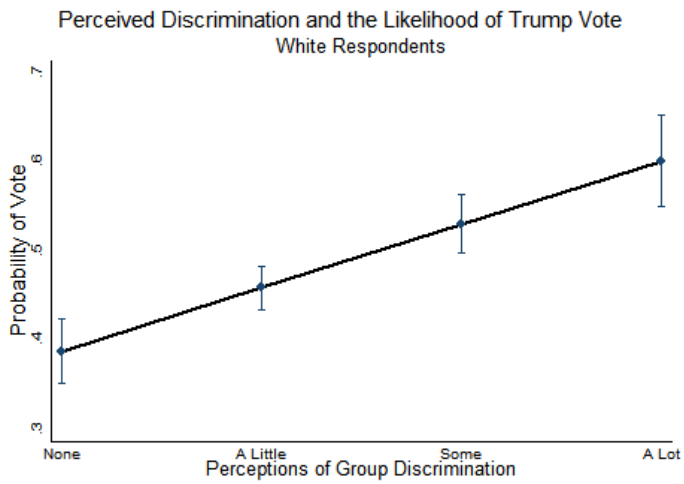
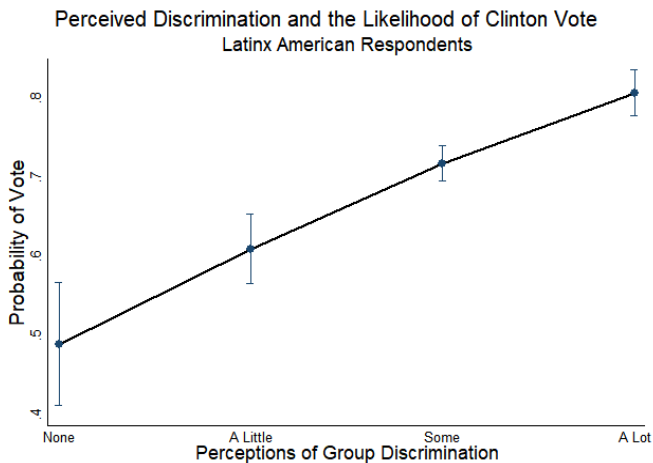
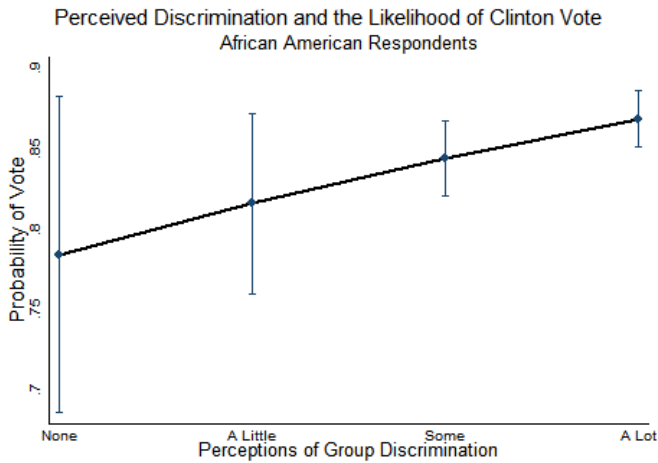
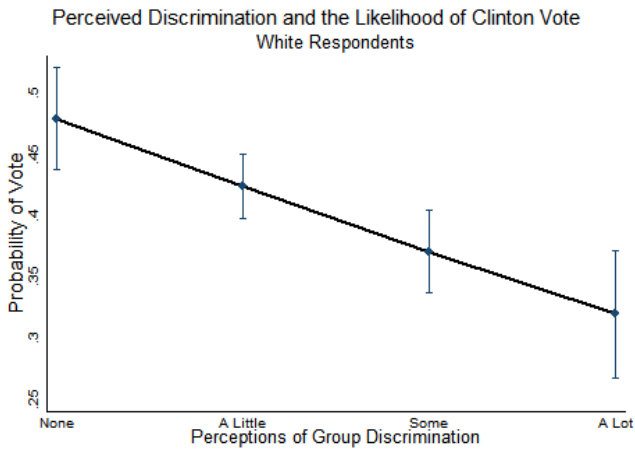


Figure 8.



**Appendix III--Regression Tables**

Table 1: Perceived Discrimination and Favorability Toward Obama

VARIABLE	African Americans	Latinx Americans	White Americans
Anti-Black Discrimination	0.381** (0.0899)		
Anti-Latinx Discrimination		0.624** (0.0975)	
Anti-White Discrimination			-0.350** (0.0941)
Income	-0.0209 (0.0234)	-0.0354 (0.0212)	-0.0102 (0.0298)
Education	-0.00372 (0.0726)	0.236** (0.0695)	-0.0794 (0.0904)
Male	-0.229 (0.137)	-0.227 (0.147)	-0.351* (0.171)
Ideology	0.302** (0.0684)	0.370** (0.0851)	0.741** (0.106)
Partisanship	0.609** (0.0669)	0.728** (0.0702)	0.949** (0.0905)
Perception of Econ.	0.310** (0.0562)	0.143* (0.0579)	0.355** (0.0718)
Mountain West	-0.605 (0.372)	0.419 (0.263)	-0.767* (0.317)
Midwest	-0.251 (0.294)	0.136 (0.218)	-0.151 (0.255)
North Atlantic	-0.0519 (0.264)	0.197 (0.272)	-0.538* (0.268)
South	-0.0198 (0.250)	0.0438 (0.180)	-0.601* (0.272)
Cut1-Constant	0.892 (0.475)	2.939** (0.430)	3.228** (0.512)
Cut2-Constant	1.844** (0.477)	4.047** (0.494)	4.430** (0.523)
Cut3-Constant	3.694** (0.487)	5.932** (0.538)	6.200** (0.544)
Observations	2458	2283	920

Standard errors in parentheses

Data from weighted ordered logistic regressions. Pacific West omitted Census Region category.

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table 2: Perceived Discrimination and Likelihood of Trump Vote

VARIABLE	African Americans	Latinx Americans	White Americans
Anti-Black Discrimination	-0.159 (0.153)		
Anti-Latinx Discrimination		-0.725** (0.112)	
Anti-White Discrimination			0.651** (0.114)
Income	-0.00397 (0.0448)	-0.0107 (0.0312)	-0.0118 (0.0373)
Education	-0.0891 (0.120)	-0.0445 (0.0960)	-0.0187 (0.120)
Male	0.278 (0.228)	0.196 (0.207)	0.320 (0.242)
Ideology	-0.248* (0.115)	-0.437** (0.101)	-0.854** (0.142)
Partisanship	-0.907** (0.104)	-1.279** (0.104)	-1.467** (0.158)
Perception of Econ.	0.206 (0.107)	0.0519 (0.0755)	-0.0846 (0.0938)
Mountain West	1.116* (0.566)	0.457 (0.365)	0.435 (0.430)
Midwest	0.342 (0.481)	0.412 (0.337)	-0.0346 (0.365)
North Atlantic	0.194 (0.482)	0.495 (0.264)	0.751 (0.397)
South	0.288 (0.448)	0.323 (0.255)	0.697 (0.367)
Constant	0.908 (0.716)	4.818** (0.578)	5.649** (0.805)
Observations	2474	2300	922

Standard errors in parentheses

Data from weighted logistic regressions. Pacific West omitted Census Region category.

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table 3: Perceived Discrimination and Likelihood of Clinton Vote

VARIABLE	African Americans	Latinx Americans	White Americans
Anti-Black Discrimination	0.241 (0.136)		
Anti-Latinx Discrimination		0.682** (0.0977)	
Anti-White Discrimination			-0.448** (0.113)
Income	0.00715 (0.0273)	0.0341 (0.0257)	0.0311 (0.0354)
Education	0.130 (0.0809)	0.101 (0.0785)	0.0715 (0.111)
Male	-0.136 (0.152)	0.0440 (0.170)	-0.176 (0.225)
Ideology	0.267** (0.0785)	0.213** (0.0806)	0.579** (0.123)
Partisanship	0.824** (0.0827)	1.030** (0.0719)	1.352** (0.141)
Perception of Econ.	0.123* (0.0617)	0.159* (0.0627)	0.310** (0.0942)
Mountain West	-0.353 (0.394)	-0.0419 (0.287)	-0.0228 (0.405)
Midwest	0.161 (0.320)	-0.326 (0.287)	-0.0338 (0.331)
North Atlantic	0.379 (0.308)	0.268 (0.217)	0.0666 (0.342)
South	0.455 (0.295)	0.191 (0.211)	-0.459 (0.331)
Constant	-3.882** (0.627)	-5.598** (0.502)	-6.982** (0.772)
Observations	2474	2300	922

Standard errors in parentheses

Data from weighted logistic regressions. Pacific West omitted Census Region category.

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$