The Distinctness of Social and Economic Identities

Suzanna Linn[1], Jonathan Nagler[2], and Jan Zilinsky[3]

[1]Penn State University
[2]New York University
[3]Technical University of Munich

May 13, 2022

Abstract

Evidence suggests identity politics shapes voters' evaluations of politicians and issues. We ask whether identity politics influences views on an important political consideration: economic performance. We introduce the concept of "economic identity" – who people think of when evaluating the economic performance of "people like you" – and examine the extent to which social identities translate into economic identities. We find little overlap between the groups people say are important to their social identity versus their economic identity. While social identity may be a lens through which people evaluate much of politics, it is not a lens which people necessarily use in evaluating economic performance. We also examine, and find no support for the claim that Donald Trump increased the level of ethnic group identity among less educated, white Americans. However, we do find that Trump increased the salience of ethnic group identity, both social and economic, for voting.

Keywords: identity, identity politics, economic identity, economic voting, populism, polarization, public opinion, economic evaluations, 2016 election

1

Interest in the interaction of politics and social identity – "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1974, 69) – has ballooned with the rise in political polarization and the entrance of Donald Trump on the political scene. Social identity has been linked to issue positions (Shayo, 2009), candidate evaluations (Achen and Bartels, 2016), political participation (Fowler and Kam, 2007; Huddy, Mason and Aarøe, 2015), party identification (Campbell et al., 1960), and vote choice (Sides, Tesler and Vavreck, 2019). Perhaps most provocatively, Mason (2018) has argued that social identities increasingly overlap with each other and with party identification, contributing to the political polarization so heightened in the current political environment by making it more likely that people view politics from an "us" versus "them" perspective.

If social identity serves as the basis for evaluating politics, we might expect that social identities provide the lens through which people evaluate economic performance. Indeed, drawing on evidence that individuals cite group economic outcomes when asked what they like about the political parties, Huddy (2018, 8) suggests that people are "likely to judge politics based on their group's relative [economic] outcomes," and that this may be "be especially true for those who hold a strong group identity." Further, Sides, Tesler and Vavreck (2016, 52) claim that the link between social identity and economic evaluations was particularly strong in the 2016 election. They contend that Donald Trump's campaign rhetoric – that less educated, working class, white voters were being left behind by establishment politicians – led social identities grounded in ethnicity to be "more potent predictors of their opinions about the economy [in 2016]."

In this note, we develop a measure of *economic identity* analogous to social identity by asking what group people see themselves a part of when they think of how the economy is doing for *people like them*. Using this measure, we examine the extent to which social and economic identities overlap in recent elections and consider whether that overlap increased with Donald Trump's rise on the political stage. We focus on a highly salient social identity, ethnicity (Jardina, 2020; White and Laird, 2020), and we consider a social identity more obviously linked to economic identity: career. Finally, we assess whether Trump increased the proportion of adults who emphasized ethnicity as part of their social identity, and compare the role of social and economic identity in Trump's electoral performance.

The extent of overlap between economic and social identities has important implications. If more and more identities overlap, there is a danger that individuals adopt a myopic and mono-dimensional view of politics. In addition, significant overlap could contribute to political polarization, fortifying Mason:2018 claim. The implications for democratic accountability would also be troubling. If people see themselves in economic conflict with other social groups and evaluate economic outcomes myopically based on siloed social groups, politicians would have incentives to pursue something closer to clientelism than sound economic policy.

As it turns out, social and economic identity are not synonymous. In fact, we

show that social identity does not translate especially strongly to economic identity, even among those who say their ethnicity or career is important for their social identity. The disconnect between these two identities suggests that people are capable of evaluating political outcomes independent of their social identity and that there are cross-cutting cleavages that are overlooked by a singular focus on social identity. Thus whereas Mason's argument suggests that polarization is all but inevitable, our finding suggests that the existence of the two distinct identities could provide a counterweight to the drift toward political polarization.[1]

We also show that less educated, white adults were no more likely to have adopted an ethnic social identity in 2016 than in 2012. Yet we show that social and economic identity among whites were stronger predictors of voting for Trump than Romney. This suggests that Trump did raise the salience of both identities for voting in 2016. While both identities predicted vote choice, social identity was a stronger predictor of voting Republican than was economic identity in both 2012 and 2016.

In the analysis that follows, we draw on data from nationally representative surveys conducted in 2012, 2016, 2018 and 2020 to measure social identity and economic identity.[2] We then assess: (1) the extent to which particular groups are the basis for economic identity; (2) the extent to which economic and social identities overlap; (3) whether Donald Trump's appeals to less educated whites raised their level of ethnic social identity; and (4) whether Donald Trump received relatively more support than Mitt Romney in the voting booth because of voters' levels of ethnic social identity or their economic identity.

1 Economic Identity

What does economic identity look like? To answer this question we first asked respondents two traditional economic performance questions. We asked how the national economy was doing, and we asked how their personal finances (i.e., "you (and the family members in your household)") were doing compared to a year ago.[3]

We then asked two additional questions. First, we asked "Now thinking not of yourself (or your own family), but thinking of people like you, do you think that people like you are better off, the same, or worse off financially than they were three years ago?" The phrase "people like you" was intended to elicit an economic identity group: the set of people respondents thought about when forming economic evaluations. Second, to identify the *economic identity* of respondents, we followed the group economic evaluation

---

[1]This would be contingent on the political parties offering recognizably different economic platforms, which they appear to be doing in the U.S. at this time.

[2]Our primary analysis comes from surveys conducted by YouGov in 2016, 2018, and 2020 that were commissioned by the authors and the Center for Social Media and Politics at NYU. We also utilize data from ANES for 2012 and 2016. Information on the YouGov surveys can be found in Appendix Table A1.

[3]Detailed question wording is given in the Appendix.

question with: "When you answered the last question, what kind of people were you thinking of?" Respondents could select: 'People with similar education to you,' 'People with similar income to you,' 'People in your neighborhood,' 'People in similar jobs,' 'People in your ethnic group,' 'People in your age group.'" They could rate each group's importance as 'not at all,' ' a little bit,' 'somewhat,' 'quite a bit,' or 'very much.' Because respondents could say they were thinking of all groups offered 'very much,' they could identify multiple groups as central to their economic identity. If respondents stated they were thinking of a group 'quite a bit' or 'very much', then we coded that group as being important to their economic identity.

If economic identity is meaningful, we expect many respondents would have different perceptions of how their chosen economic group is performing than how the national economy is performing. We show in Table 1 that in each year over a third of respondents perceive their group's economic performance differently than national economic performance, with generally twice as many respondents saying their group did worse than the national economy than saying their group did better than the national economy.[4] Thus, respondents do have an economic identity, they are able to distinguish between how the overall economy is doing and how members of their group are doing.

Year	Group doing worse than national economy	Group doing same as national economy	Group doing better than national economy	N
2016	22.4	64.8	12.8	2522
2018	25.7	64.2	10.1	5285
2020	24.0	64.0	12.0	3742

Cell entries give the weighted percentage of respondents whose distinct evaluations of national economic performance and of their group's economic performance implied that they felt that their group was doing (worse, the same as, better) than the national economy. The N indicated in the final column is the number of respondents for each year who answered both the group evaluation and national evaluation questions.

Calculations are weighted to be nationally representative by gender, age, race, and education.

Source: NYU-CSMaP-YouGov.

Table 1: Evaluations of Group Economic Performance Relative to National Economic Performance

We next examine the extent to which respondents associate different characteristics – education, income, neighborhood, jobs, ethnicity, and age – with their economic identity. In column 1 of Table 2 we show the distribution of responses for all respondents saying they were thinking of each group as an important part of their economic identity. We find respondents were more likely to name income as important to their

---

[4]The percent of respondents on the off-diagonal in each year (with their 95% confidence intervals) are: 35.2% (33.3%-37.1%), 2016; 35.8% (34.5%-37.1%), 2018; and 36.0% (34.5%-37.5%), 2020.

economic identity than any other characteristic in all three years, followed by age. Surprisingly, 'people of similar ethnicity' was the least popular answer in all three years. Columns 2 to 4 of Table 2 report the results separately for whites, Blacks, and Hispanics. We might expect members of ethnic minorities to be more likely than whites to identify with members of their ethnic group as their economic identity group. We do find that Black respondents are substantially more likely than white respondents to say their own ethnic group is important to their economic identity.[5] And Hispanics were more likely than whites, but less likely than blacks, to name their own ethnic group as important to their economic identity.[6] However, even for Black respondents an income-based economic identity was more common than an ethnic economic identity in two of the three years.[7,8]

2   The Translation of Social Identity to Economic Identity

To what extent are different social identities translated to economic identity? The values in columns 2 thru 4 of Table 2 discussed above were based on respondents' demographic characteristics. However, demographic categories are not the same thing as social identities. To answer this question, we use a direct measure of respondents' sense of ethnic social identity. In the 2016, 2018, and 2020 YouGov surveys, respondents were asked "How important is being (*race*) to your identity?" Response options included 'extremely,' 'very,' 'moderately,' 'a little,' and 'not at all important.' Column 5 of Table 2 shows the distribution of economic reference groups named by those who said race was extremely important to their social identity. Even among those who said that their race was extremely important to their social identity, respondents were more likely to rate income and age as important parts of their economic identity than any other characteristic, *including* their ethnic group. Across the three elections, the percentage of these respondents who said their ethnic group was important to their economic identity ranged from 38% (2018) to 42.6% (2016). While this is considerably higher than the percentage for the entire sample or among particular ethnic demographic groups, for the majority of respondents for whom race was extremely important to their social identity, race was *not* central to their economic identity. *Even with freedom to say that any or all groups were important to their economic identity, in each election the majority of those for whom race is extremely important to their social identity chose not to say race was important to their economic identity.*

In the final column of Table 2 we examine a group of voters whose social iden-

---

[5]These differences were statistically significant at the 95% level in 2018 and 2020, and at the 90% level in 2016.

[6]The Hispanic versus white differences are statistically significant at the 90% level in each of the three elections, the Hispanic versus Black differences were significant at the 95% level in 2018 and 2020.

[7]These differences were not statistically significant.

[8]See Appendix Tables A.2 and A.3 for the relative importance of different groups to economic identity based on respondents' education, income, and age. Survey demographics for respondents reporting an economic identity are given in Appendix Table A.4.

Named Group[a]	All	Whites	Blacks	Hispanics	Respondents Who Said Race is Extremely to Important to Social Identity[b]	Respondents Who Said Race is Extremely Important to Social Identity: Whites HS or Less[c]
2016						
Similar income	42.9	45.5	37.7	36.6	47.9	52.7
Same ethnic group	25.1	22.1	31.7	33.0	42.6	50.5
Similar education	31.5	31.1	28.8	34.1	38.9	41.2
Same neighborhood	30.6	30.2	23.5	40.3	39.1	39.5
Similar jobs	32.1	32.2	25.5	38.2	37.3	48.1
Same age group	39.0	42.0	35.4	34.3	46.8	61.3
N	1,763	1,268	208	149	436	123
2018						
Similar income	45.1	45.8	45.8	44.4	47.8	50.4
Same ethnic group	25.8	22.0	41.8	28.6	38.0	39.3
Similar education	32.1	32.0	32.3	25.3	34.6	36.2
Same neighborhood	34.8	34.1	38.9	36.9	40.6	43.4
Similar jobs	31.6	32.9	32.3	23.5	32.1	28.7
Same age group	37.7	37.1	41.7	33.4	44.4	44.4
N	2,729	2,082	256	192	617	133
2020						
Similar income	43.5	46.9	39.8	37.0	42.2	39.1
Same ethnic group	27.4	24.5	42.1	31.0	41.1	36.1
Similar education	32.7	34.9	31.2	28.6	36.1	34.7
Same neighborhood	31.4	31.7	31.7	29.2	34.2	31.9
Similar jobs	34.6	35.1	37.9	30.5	37.3	29.1
Same age group	37.5	38.0	33.9	38.5	42.6	36.8
N	3,940	2,876	407	372	859	213

Cell entries give the weighted percentage of respondents of the column-group who identified with the row-group "quite a bit" or "very much" when answering who they thought about in their economic evaluations of "people like you".

[a] Groups given as options for economic identity.

[b] Percentages identifying with the row group among people who said that race was extremely important to their *social identity*.

[c] Percentages identifying with the row group among whites with a high-school education or less who said that race was extremely important to their *social identity*.

Source: NYU-CSMaP-YouGov US Election Panel.

Table 2: The Relative Importance of Different Groups to Economic Identity

tity was heavily emphasized in coverage of the 2016 election: white voters with a high school education or less. This column looks at responses among members of this demographic group who said that race was extremely important to their social identity. This group was particularly likely (50.5%) in 2016 to say their ethnic group (i.e., whites) was important to their economic identity. This value was over twice the value of all whites that year (22.1%). In fact, this is the only example where a majority of a group listed their ethnic group as important to their economic identity.[9] We return to an analysis of Trump's potential impact on identity below.

The 2016 YouGov surveys also asked respondents to rank the importance of seven groups to their social identity.[10] Two of these choices were also response options to our economic identity question: 'My race/ethnicity' and 'My career.' Columns 1 and 2 of Table 3 present the percentage and number of respondents saying their ethnic group was important to their economic identity, contingent on how the respondent ranked the importance of ethnicity for their social identity (i.e., the row variable). Columns 3 and 4 of Table 3 give the percentage and number of respondents saying their job was important to their economic identity contingent on how they ranked the importance of their career to their social identity. The most striking observation from these results is that the translation between social and economic identity is relatively weak. Only 26% (95% confidence interval of 20.8% to 31.2%) of those selecting ethnicity as *the most* important contribution to their social identity claimed their ethnic group was an important part of their economic identity. And only 41.5% (95% confidence interval of 33.3% to 49.6%) of those selecting their career as *the most* important component of their social identity stated that their job was an important part of their economic identity. Thus however we choose to measure social identity, there is only moderate overlap between social and economic identity.

3   Donald Trump

The 2016 election featured a campaign in which Donald Trump attempted to prime particular social identities and link them to economic performance. According to Lamont, Park and Ayala-Hurtado (2017), "Trump's electoral speeches ... resonated with the yearning for recognition of white working-class Americans wishing to raise their relative status in relation to groups they judge as less worthy." As early as March 7, 2016, Trump claimed "...the middle class and the workers of this country, who really built the country, they haven't had a raise in 12 years" (FoxNews). Of course it was widely believed which workers Trump was referring to. As Brownstein (2016) wrote in *The Atlantic* "Trump's core promise is to return to *white* [emphasis added], working-class Americans

---

[9]In Appendix Table A.5 we consider the relationship between ethnic social and economic identity in more detail, showing the level of economic identity associated with different levels of social identity among different groups of the population. Appendix Table A.6 shows the distribution of responses to the social identity question. Appendix Table A.7 gives the demographics of respondents who answered both identity questions.

[10]See Appendix for full question text.

Rank of the column variable as a Social Identity	Ethnicity is an Economic Identity	N	Job is an Economic Identity	N
Ranked first	26.0	277	41.5	145
Ranked second	35.9	216	34.4	163
Ranked third	27.5	164	32.6	187
Ranked fourth	17.1	151	28.8	143
Ranked fifth	9.1	134	42.8	129
Ranked sixth	32.4	104	29.8	132
Ranked seventh	19.6	57	24.6	126

Cell entries give the weighted percentage of row respondents saying the row variable (ethnicity or career) mattered 'quite a bit' or 'very much' to their *economic identity*.

Rows give the rank of importance of the column variable (ethnicity or career) to the respondent's *social identity*.

Source: NYU-CSMaP-YouGov US Election Panel.

Table 3: The Relationship Between Ranking Ethnicity or Job as Social Identities and Economic Identities

what they feel they've lost."[11] How successful was Donald Trump at convincing white voters, particularly those with less education, to adopt an ethnic economic identity?

While we do not have a measure of respondents' social identity in the YouGov data for 2012, the ANES asked respondents "how important is being white to your identity?" in 2012 and 2016. This allows us to assess the extent to which Trump succeeded in priming ethnic social identity by comparing the distribution of responses to this question across the two elections. Respondents could give one of five responses: 'extremely,' 'very, moderately,' 'a little,' or 'not at all important.' We display the distribution of responses to this question in both years, both for all whites and for whites with a high school education or less, in Table 4. There is no evidence that Trump's campaign led to an increase in the proportion of whites for whom race was extremely or very important to their social identity: in fact while not statistically significant at traditional levels, we observe a slight *decrease* in the percentages from 2012 (11.6% and 19.3%) to 2016 (10.7% and 16.9%) saying race was extremely important or very important, respectively. Looking at the group of whites Trump allegedly targeted — those who did not attend college — we see similar values and a similar trend: 15.5% and 22.0% in 2012 versus only 13.5% and 19.8% in 2016. Thus, contrary to widely accepted wisdom, there is no evidence that Trump elevated the importance of race to social identity in 2016 compared with 2012.

Although he did not increase the percentage of the white population that consid-

---

[11]We note that initial accounts asserting Trump's strong appeal among working-class whites are now being questioned: see Carnes and Lupu (2021).

Importance of Race to Identity	Whites		Whites HS or Less	
	2012	2016	2012	2016
Extremely Important	11.6	10.7	15.5	13.5
Very Important	19.3	16.9	22.0	19.8
Moderately Important	27.4	25.7	26.0	25.3
A little Important	18.8	16.8	14.8	13.9
Not at All	22.8	30.0	21.7	27.5
N	4027	2891	1353	665

Cell entries give the weighted percentage of white respondents giving the row response to the question 'How important is being (self-reported race) to your identity?' in each election year.

Source - American National Election Study, values computed by authors.

Table 4: Importance of Race to Social Identity: 2012 vs 2016

ered race very important to their social identity, did Trump convince whites to say their ethnicity was important to their economic identity? Did he successfully forge a link between these two identities? If so, we should see more whites saying race is part of their economic identity in 2016 than in 2012. Table 5 gives the percentage of respondents saying their ethnic group was important to their economic identity. While our sample size in 2012 is too small to draw a robust statistical inference, we do not observe any increase in the data for white respondents from 2012 to 2016.[12]. Among white respondents, 26% listed race as important to their economic identity in 2012, and only 22.1% did so in 2016. We see a similar pattern among whites without a college education: 24.5% listed ethnicity as an important part of their economic identity in 2012, but only 22.5% did so in 2016. Thus, similar to our finding on race and social identity, we find no evidence that Trump was successful in priming race as a component of economic identity in 2016.

An alternative view of what Trump may have accomplished is that rather than changing the nature of economic identity in 2016 to make it more closely tied to ethnic identity, he may have raised the salience of economic identity among the set of voters whose economic identity was tied to their ethnicity. In other words, Trump may have amplified the importance of economic identity for voters with an ethnic-based economic identity in choosing the Republican candidate (Trump) in 2016 compared to the Republican candidate (Romney) in 2012. To assess this, we compare the difference between the vote for Trump in 2016 and Romney in 2012 among people with weak versus strong ethnic economic identity. We report these results in the top half of Figure 1.

We see that Romney had a 5 percentage point advantage among white voters with strong ethnic economic identity compared to white voters with weak ethnic economic identity (64% versus 59%). Trump, however, enjoyed a 12.9 percentage point advantage

---

[12]For sample sizes, see Appendix Table A.8

Year	White	Non-college White	College educated White	Black	Hispanic
2012	26.0	24.5	26.5	40.6	53.5
2016	22.1	22.5	24.7	31.7	33.0
2018	22.0	24.4	21.2	41.8	28.6
2020	24.5	24.3	26.3	42.1	31.0

Cell entries give the weighted percentage of respondents for the column ethnic group in the row year saying that they were thinking 'quite a bit' or 'very much' about their ethnic group when answering about economic conditions for 'people like you'.

Source: NYU-CSMaP-YouGov US Election Panel.

Table 5: Ethnic Economic Identity by Ethnic Group

between the two groups (73.5% versus 60.6%). These results are consistent with the view that Trump increased the salience of their economic identity to voting among white voters with an ethnic-based economic identity.[13]
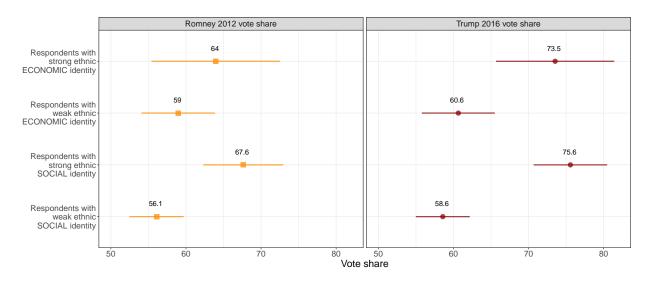

Figure 1: Republican Vote Share Among White Voters in 2012 and 2016: segmented by strength of ethnic economic and ethnic social identity

Weak ethnic economic or ethnic social identity means the respondent listed race as 'moderately,' 'somewhat,' or 'not at all important' to their economic or social identity. Strong ethnic social and economic identity means the respondent listed race as 'very important' or 'extremely important' to their identity. Sample: All white respondents in the 2016 survey who voted in both elections. The reported vote for Romney is based on respondents' self report when interviewed following the 2012 election.

In the bottom of Figure 1 we also compare voting for Trump and Romney among

---

[13]The Trump net advantage relative to Romney on the economic identity dimension is 12.9 - 5.0 = 7.9 percentage points (95% confidence interval: 1.8%-14.0%).

people with weak versus strong ethnic social identity. We see that Romney enjoyed an advantage of 11.5 percentage points among white people with strong ethnic social identity compared to white respondents with weak ethnic social identity (67.6% versus 56.1%). For Trump, the comparable figure was 17 percentage points (75.6% versus 58.6%). So we see that Trump was better than Romney at translating both economic identity and social identity into votes. Further, for both Republican candidates, social identity was more important than economic identity in predicting vote choice.[14]

4 Conclusion

Social identities are clearly important. A strong view of the importance of social identity in politics suggests that the lines between 'us' and 'them' have become sufficiently salient to become the basis for political evaluation. But we find that there is relatively weak translation of social identity to economic identity. Among a set of respondents who said that their ethnicity was extremely important to their (social) identity, ethnicity was frequently *not* offered as an important part of their economic identity. While we are not the first to note that social identities may be context specific, our work helps to identity an important limit to the role of social identity in politics: even among people with a strong ethnic social identity, they tend not to reference that identity when thinking about the bread and butter issue of economic performance.

We also showed that in contrast to popular wisdom, Donald Trump's rhetoric did not raise the level of ethnic social identity from 2012 to 2016. Using our new measure of economic identity, we also showed that he did not raise the level of ethnic economic identity among the group he targeted, relative to other voters. He did, however, capture more support than Mitt Romney from whites with both an ethnic economic identity and, especially, an ethnic social identity. This result suggests he may have raised the salience of economic identity among the set of voters whose economic identity was tied to their ethnicity, as well as having raised the salience of social identity among those voters whose social identity was tied to their ethnicity.

Our work provides cause for some optimism. While there is some overlap between economic identities and social identities, social identity does not necessarily always supersede all other identities: the political object of evaluation matters. People may consider economically relevant factors outside the realm of their *social* identity when forming their *economic* identity. Our findings suggest people bring multi-dimensional perspectives to political evaluations. This, we think, is a positive sign in a highly polarized environment. Political polarization may be mediated simply by the varied economic performance of different groups. While Jane Doe might share a social identity with John Smith, if Jane's *economic identity* differs from John's, and if the group that is the basis of Jane's economic identity performs well while John's economic group performs poorly

---

[14]The Trump advantage on the social identity dimension compared to Romney is 5.5 percentage points (95% confidence interval: 1.5%-9.4%).

— then Jane and John are capable of forming different views of the economy, and thus may choose to vote for different candidates. So the Madisonian view of factions may be alive and well, or at least not dead, even in an era of heightened political polarization.

References

Achen, Christopher H and Larry M Bartels. 2016. *Democracy for Realists: Why Elections Do Not Produce Responsive Government*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ.

Brownstein, Ronald. 2016. "Trump's Rhetoric of White Nostalgia.". https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/06/trumps-rhetoric-of-white-nostalgia/485192/, accessed 2022-01-07.

Campbell, Angus, Philip E Converse, Warren E Miller and Donald E Stokes. 1960. *The American Voter*. University of Chicago Press.

Carnes, Nicholas and Noam Lupu. 2021. "The White Working Class and the 2016 Election." *Perspectives on Politics* 19(1):55–72.

Fowler, James H. and Cindy D. Kam. 2007. "Beyond the Self: Social Identity, Altruism, and Political Participation." *The Journal of Politics* 69(3):813–827.

Huddy, Leonie. 2018. "The Group Foundations of Democratic Political Behavior." *Critical Review: A Journal of Politics and Society* 30(1-2):1–16.

Huddy, Leonie, Lilliana Mason and Lena Aarøe. 2015. "Expressive Partisanship: Campaign Involvement, Political Emotion, and Partisan Identity." *American Political Science Review* 109(1):1–17.

Jardina, Ashley. 2020. "In-Group Love and Out-Group Hate: White Racial Attitudes in Contemporary U.S. Elections in Contemporary US Elections." *Political Behavior* pp. 1–25.

Lamont, M., B.Y. Park and E. Ayala-Hurtado. 2017. "Trump's Electoral Speeches and His Appeal to the American White Working Class." *The British Journal of Sociology* 68(1):S154—S180.

Mason, Lilliana. 2018. *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity*. University of Chicago Press.

Shayo, Moses. 2009. "A Model of Social Identity with an Application to Political Economy: Nation, Class, and Redistribution." *American Political Science Review* 103(2):147–174.

Sides, John, Michael Tesler and Lynn Vavreck. 2016. "The Electoral Landscape of 2016." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 667(1):50–71.

Sides, John, Michael Tesler and Lynn Vavreck. 2019. *Identity Crisis*. Princeton University Press.

Tajfel, Henri. 1974. "Social Identity and Intergroup Behavior." *Social Science Information* 13(2):65–93.

White, Ismail K and Chryl N Laird. 2020. *Steadfast Democrats*. Princeton University Press.

Online Appendix

All surveys were conducted by YouGov.[15] YouGov gained consent of all respondents for their anonymous participation in research studies. The authors never had any personally identifying information about the respondents. YouGov compensated all respondents appropriately. There was no deception in the study. The questionnaire was carefully evaluated, and asked about common political attitudes and issues in the United States. There was no expectation that any of the questions would elicit painful emotional or psychological responses from participants.

Year	Date of Collection	Sample Size
2016	April 9 - May 2, 2016	3500
2018	October 4 - December 3, 2018	5573
2020	January 23 - February 18, 2020	4000

Table A.1: YouGov Survey Dates

---

[15]We applied to NYU IRB, and the IRB deemed that the studies were exempt from Human Subjects Review (NYU IRB 12-9058) because the anonymized survey data was collected by a third party vendor (YouGov), and the researchers never had access to non-anonymized data.

Named Group[a]	Education		Income		
	High School Graduate (or less)	Some College or more	Low income	Middle Income	High Income
2016					
Similar education	34.2	26.1	28.4	28.3	37.2
Similar income	45.4	45.7	39.2	52.8	45.4
Same neighborhood	30.5	29.7	30.1	30.4	29.8
Similar jobs	31.6	33.3	25.9	36.1	37.6
Same ethnic group	21.9	22.5	23.1	21.0	22.3
Same age group	41.5	42.6	39.8	47.3	37.5
N	419	849	438	311	416
2018					
Similar education	32.5	31.2	28.0	32.7	39.0
Similar income	47.8	42.5	48.5	44.6	47.7
Same neighborhood	34.7	32.9	31.3	36.6	36.1
Similar jobs	35.9	27.6	29.2	33.1	41.0
Same ethnic group	20.7	24.4	20.3	22.9	25.7
Same age group	37.0	37.2	40.4	34.6	37.8
N	521	1,561	647	645	602
2020					
Similar education	37.3	30.4	27.2	34.8	43.8
Similar income	50.6	40.0	43.3	47.6	50.9
Same neighborhood	32.5	30.1	27.6	31.3	36.8
Similar jobs	38.6	28.6	29.4	35.9	40.9
Same ethnic group	24.5	24.3	20.7	25.5	27.0
Same age group	39.6	35.0	37.5	39.4	38.3
N	941	1,935	867	896	844

Cell entries give the percentage of respondents of the column-group who identified with the row-group "quite a bit" or "very much" when answering who they thought about in their economic evaluations of "people like you".

[a] Groups given as options for economic identity.

Source: NYU-CSMaP-YouGov US Election Panel.

Table A.2: The Relative Importance of Different Groups to Economic Identity by Education and Income

| Named | Age | | | |
Group[a]	18-29	30-44	45-64	65+
2016				
Similar education	28.4	30.1	35.5	29.8
Similar income	38.4	45.7	43.6	42.4
Same neighborhood	23.7	31.1	34.2	30.5
Similar jobs	24.2	38.0	34.6	27.4
Same ethnic group	21.8	28.2	28.3	18.4
Same age group	36.0	34.0	40.2	46.6
N	226	490	731	316
2018				
Similar education	34.0	33.6	31.9	28.4
Similar income	41.4	48.6	46.5	41.5
Same neighborhood	34.1	37.2	33.6	34.4
Similar jobs	26.8	36.0	34.4	25.7
Same ethnic group	21.0	27.8	25.6	28.3
Same age group	37.5	37.3	34.5	44.1
N	201	644	1,192	692
2020				
Similar education	31.1	32.3	34.1	32.4
Similar income	41.8	42.5	45.7	42.8
Same neighborhood	22.9	29.8	34.1	35.3
Similar jobs	30.5	41.1	35.2	29.3
Same ethnic group	29.4	25.8	29.2	25.1
Same age group	41.0	37.0	33.5	41.6
N	428	1,093	1,537	882

Cell entries give the percentage of respondents of the column-group who identified with the row-group "quite a bit" or "very much" when answering who they thought about in their economic evaluations of "people like you".

[a] Groups given as options for economic identity.

Source: NYU-CSMaP-YouGov US Election Panel.

Table A.3: The Relative Importance of Different Groups to Economic Identity by Age

Year	Characteristic	Unweighted N
2012	White	361
2012	Black	63
2012	Hispanic	38
2012	All with known economic identity	489
2012	White college graduates	135
2012	White respondents with at most high school education	101
2016	White	1268
2016	Black	208
2016	Hispanic	149
2016	All with known economic identity	1763
2016	White college graduates	419
2016	White respondents with at most high school education	419
2016	Respondents for whom race is an extremely important social identity	436
2016	White respondents (HS or less), race extremely important as social identity	123
2018	White	2082
2018	Black	256
2018	Hispanic	192
2018	All with known economic identity	2729
2018	White college graduates	879
2018	White respondents with at most high school education	521
2018	Respondents for whom race is an extremely important social identity	617
2018	White respondents (HS or less), race extremely important as social identity	133
2020	White	2876
2020	Black	407
2020	Hispanic	372
2020	All with known economic identity	3940
2020	White college graduates	1070
2020	White respondents with at most high school education	941
2020	Respondents for whom race is an extremely important social identity	859
2020	White respondents (HS or less), race extremely important as social identity	213

Cell entries are the unweighted sample size (i.e. the number of respondents who answered the economic identity question), though calculations reported in the paper are weighted to be nationally representative by gender, age, race, and education.

Source: NYU-CSMaP-YouGov US Election Panel.

Table A.4: Survey Demographics of Respondents Reporting an Economic Identity

	All Respondents	Less Educated Whites[a]	Whites	Blacks	Hispanics
Importance of Ethnicity to Social Identity					
2016					
Extremely important	42.6	50.5	43.0	44.9	48.6
Very important	22.6	10.1	20.7	20.9	28.6
Moderately important	21.6	18.3	20.8	13.7	23.4
A little important	17.6	8.2	17.7	17.7	26.1
Not important at all	12.6	11.6	11.9	7.7	23.1
N	1,745	415	1,259	202	148
2018					
Extremely important	38.0	39.3	36.1	50.3	31.0
Very important	35.0	27.7	31.6	33.7	34.6
Moderately important	22.4	22.3	23.2	35.2	18.2
A little important	15.1	17.6	13.9	22.1	27.7
Not important at all	13.6	12.5	13.7	24.7	14.6
N	2,715	516	2,069	256	192
2020					
Extremely important	41.1	36.1	40.8	47.1	34.8
Very important	33.4	21.4	28.5	40.5	42.4
Moderately important	23.2	29.5	25.4	22.0	15.1
A little important	19.5	16.1	19.4	59.4	16.3
Not important at all	17.5	15.3	17.5	30.4	21.8
N	3,915	932	2,858	405	369

The row group identifies the importance of the respondent's own ethnicity to *social identity*, the column identifies the ethnicity and/or education level of respondents.

Each cell entry shows the weighted percentage of respondents in the row group, i.e., those with specific views of the importance of ethnicity to their social identity, thinking of their own ethnic group quite a bit or very much when evaluating economic fortunes of people like themselves (i.e., the percent of the column-row group having a strong sense of ethnic *economic identity*).

[a]Less educated whites refers to whites with a high school-degree or less.

Source: NYU-CSMaP-YouGov US Election Panel.

Table A.5: The Importance of Ethnicity to Economic Identity Based on the Importance of Ethnicity to Social Identity

Social identity: Race	All (N)	All (%)	Whites (N)	Whites (%)	Blacks (N)	Blacks (%)
2016						
Extremely important	833	24.0	425	16.6	216	55.2
Very important	547	15.8	343	13.4	89	22.8
Moderately important	801	23.1	645	25.2	47	12.0
A little important	425	12.3	372	14.5	16	4.1
Not important at all	861	24.8	775	30.3	23	5.9
2018						
Extremely important	1252	22.6	637	14.9	322	63.0
Very important	808	14.6	537	12.6	94	18.4
Moderately important	1198	21.7	1001	23.5	54	10.6
A little important	720	13.0	655	15.4	14	2.7
Not important at all	1550	28.0	1432	33.6	27	5.3
2020						
Extremely important	870	22.0	401	13.9	255	61.6
Very important	586	14.8	331	11.5	92	22.2
Moderately important	865	21.8	686	23.8	46	11.1
A little important	458	11.6	402	13.9	4	1.0
Not important at all	1180	29.8	1062	36.8	17	4.1

Cell entries are either counts, or percentages of a column group giving the row-answer to the question 'How important is being (self-reported race) to your identity?'

Source: NYU-CSMaP-YouGov US Election Panel.

Table A.6: Importance of Race to Social Identity.

Year	Characteristic	N
2016	White	1259
2016	Black	202
2016	Hispanic	148
2016	All with non-missing economic and social identity	1745
2016	White college graduates	418
2016	White respondents with at most high school education	415
2016	Respondents for whom race is an extremely important social identity	436
2016	White respondents (HS or less), race extremely imp. as social identity	123
2018	White	2069
2018	Black	256
2018	Hispanic	192
2018	All with non-missing economic and social identity	2715
2018	White college graduates	876
2018	White respondents with at most high school education	516
2018	Respondents for whom race is an extremely important social identity	617
2018	White respondents (HS or less), race extremely imp. as social identity	133
2020	White	2858
2020	Black	405
2020	Hispanic	369
2020	All with non-missing economic and social identity	3915
2020	White college graduates	1064
2020	White respondents with at most high school education	932
2020	Respondents for whom race is an extremely important social identity	859
2020	White respondents (HS or less), race extremely imp. as social identity	213

Cell entries give the unweighted number of respondents who answered the economic identity question *and* the question on the importance of race to social identity (though calculations reported in the paper are weighted to be nationally representative by gender, age, race, and education).

Source: NYU-CSMaP-YouGov US Election Panel.

Table A.7: Survey demographics of Respondents Reporting an Economic Identity and the Importance of Race to Social Identity

Year	Whites	Low Education Whites	White college grads	Blacks	Hispanics
2012	360	101	135	63	38
2016	971	320	337	140	108
2018	2078	520	876	255	192
2020	2858	930	1065	405	371

Cell entries are unweighted umber of respondents per category who provided group economic evaluations, and their economic group identity.

Source: 2012 CCES Survey; 2016-2020 NYU-CSMaP YouGov US Election Panel.

Table A.8: Sample Size for Group Economic Evaluation and Economic Identity

Online Appendix - YouGov Survey Questions

```
National Economy Retrospective

Would you say that OVER THE PAST YEAR the nation's economy has...

Gotten much better
Gotten somewhat better
Stayed about the same
Gotten somewhat worse
Gotten much worse
Not sure


#####
Personal Finances Retrospective

Would you say that you (and the family members in your household) are better off
or worse off financially
than you were a year ago?

Better
Worse
Same



#####
Group Finances Retrospective

Now thinking not of yourself (or your own family), but thinking of people like you,
do you think that people like you are better off or worse off financially than
they were a year ago?

Better
Worse
Same
```

#####
Economic Identity

When you answered the last question, what kind of people were you thinking of?
People who are like you in terms of:

ROWS

People with similar education to you
People with similar income to you
People in your neighborhood
People in similar jobs
People in your ethnic group
People in your age group

COLUMNS
     1 Not at all
     2 A little bit
     3 Somewhat
     4 Quite a bit
     5 Very much

#####
Social Identity

How important is (RESPONDENT'S RACE) to your identity?

1 Extremely important
2 Very important
3 Moderately important
4 A little important
5 Not important at all

#####
Social Identity - Rank

People's overall "identity" is sometimes thought of as the combination of
multiple different characteristics. Please rank these characteristics by
placing each of them in the box in the order that they contribute to
your identity. If there is a characteristic that doesn't contribute
to your identity at all, don't move it to the box.

My race/ethnicity
My career
My partisan affiliation
My gender
My religious beliefs
My ideology
My sexual orientation

ANCHOR LEFT: Most important characteristic
ANCHOR Right: Least important characteristic

ANES Identity Question

```
Social Identity

How important is being White to your identity?
extremely important, very important, moderately important, a little important,
or not at all important?

Not at all important
A little important
Moderately important
Very important
Extremely important
```