Losing Elections, Winning the Debate: Progressive Racial Rhetoric and White Backlash

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Abstract

Recent years have seen liberals moving sharply to the left on issues related to race and gender, the so-called “Great Awakening,” accompanied by commentary arguing that this has led to a popular backlash against the left. Through a preregistered survey, this study polls a representative sample of white Americans to test the effect of a Democratic candidate, Kirsten Gillibrand, arguing for programs designed to help blacks and declaring the significance of white privilege in American life. Our results show that statements about white privilege decrease support for the candidate, with an effect size that is about equal to a one standard deviation shift to the right in ideology. The effect is concentrated among moderates and conservatives. Advocating reparations and affirmative action has a similar but smaller effect. At the same time, arguing for reparations actually increases support for such policies, and discussing white privilege may decrease some aspects of white identity among conservatives. The results indicate that taking more liberal positions on race causes white voters to punish a Democratic candidate. However, there is no evidence for the hypothesis that white Americans move to the right in response to such rhetoric or develop stronger feelings of white identity.

Introduction

In the years since Donald Trump won the 2016 U.S. presidential election, scholars and pundits have offered various competing explanations as to why. Many voices on the political right, and a few on the left, have argued that the Democratic Party's embrace of progressive rhetoric and policies related to race spurred a right-wing populist backlash. The phrase "this is why Trump won" has since become a cliché, used in response to especially outlandish examples of progressive commentary (Robertson and Stanton 2018). There is existing literature supporting the argument that white support for Trump's nativist, "politically incorrect" campaign can be explained as a reactionary response against progressive efforts to address prejudice and racial inequality. Other data, however, challenge the idea that we are witnessing a backlash against efforts to alleviate racism. For example, public opinion data provide little evidence that white Americans have become more prejudiced in their racial attitudes in recent years (Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2018).

In this study, we conducted a survey experiment to consider how elite discussions of race can influence white Americans in two ways: in their support for a candidate and in their sense of racial identity. Our findings indicate that, although a presidential candidate's progressive statements on race reduce white support for that candidate, they do not otherwise provoke a racial backlash. In fact, such statements may lower feelings of white racial identity and increase support for progressive racial policies.

Literature and Theory

Right-Wing Backlash

Over the past several years, scholars and pundits have expressed great interest in the rightward drift of many Western democracies. Donald Trump's surprise victory in the 2016 presidential election, the "Brexit" referendum's success in the United Kingdom, and a growing number of successful right-wing parties in democracies throughout the world indicate that national populism is currently ascendant (Eatwell and Goodwin 2018). Some scholars suggest we can best understand these developments as a form of backlash against ongoing cultural, economic, and demographic trends (Kaufmann 2019; Norris and Inglehart 2019).

Political scientists have long known that major shifts in a nation's racial makeup or in its racial policies can provoke a right-wing response among some portions of the electorate. Since the 1960s, the Democratic Party in the U.S. has staked out a position as the party of racial liberalism (Carmines and Stimson 1989). Democratic support for civil rights legislation helped the party secure the long-term loyalty of a majority of African American voters, but alienated many of the party's white voters. This led to Republican gains in new areas of the country, especially the South (Black and Black 2002).

Changes to the nation's immigration laws in the 1960s also had long-term political consequences. In 1965, President Johnson signed a bill ending the national quotas system that was biased in favor of Western Europe (Tichenor 2002). This change ushered in an uninterrupted period of large-scale immigration from Latin America, Asia, and Africa. If current trends continue, non-Hispanic whites will cease to be the majority of Americans before 2050. Because large majorities of recent immigrants and their descendants vote for Democrats in most elections

(Hawley 2019), many scholars and pundits have assumed that demographic trends are inevitably leading to a new period of Democratic dominance in the United States (Judis and Teixeira 2002).

Despite the nation's rapid demographic change, the Democratic Party's long-term control of congress and the presidency has been continuously deferred, largely because the party continues losing support from non-Hispanic whites in critical states (Hawley 2014). President Trump's impressive support from whites without a college education was critical to his victories in Midwestern states long thought to be Democratic strongholds. Abrajano and Hajnal (2015) argue that we can attribute the movement of whites toward the Republican Party to demographic changes in the country. Their analysis indicates that as the immigrant population grows, whites become more conservative in their policy preferences and vote choices (see also Enos 2014)

Beyond objective, measurable changes to the nation's demographic makeup, how elites talk about race and ethnicity may also influence attitudes on these subjects. Although conservative pundits have complained for decades about "political correctness run amok," more recently some moderates and progressives have argued that far-left rhetoric about race and immigration can fuel the far right, and partially explain President Trump's political success (Leonhardt 2019; Friedersdorf 2016; Sullivan 2018). Conway, Repke and Houck (2017) found that respondents that were primed to think about "political correctness" became more likely to support Donald Trump. This suggests that cultural norms designed to restrict offensive speech may have unintended consequences. This is congruent with Legault, Gutsell, and Inzlicht's (2011) argument that pressuring people to be less prejudiced may backfire, as these efforts provoke a reactive effect that actually increases prejudice. In fact, according to their research, "strategies urging people to comply with antiprejudice standards are worse than doing nothing at all." (p. 1476) Likewise, Jardina (2017) discovered, just before the 2016 election, that using the

phrases “because it is racist” in an argument about Confederate flags on state buildings or “because he is racist” to refer to Donald Trump significantly increased, respectively, white opposition to flag removal and the likelihood of supporting Trump in the upcoming election. The effects were concentrated among those high in racial resentment – a contested measure which some claim taps attitudes to group claims and fairness rather than race (Carney and Enos 2017; Zigerell 2015). In their consideration of European “hate speech” laws, Van Spanje and De Vreese (2015) concluded that hate speech prosecutions against a right-wing politician led to a boost in public support for his party.

There is also evidence that Republicans benefit when race is a salient issue for whites (Schaffner 2011). Craig and Richeson (2014) found that reminding whites of their forthcoming minority status increases their support for the Republican Party. Finally, Ostfeld (2019) showed that white Democrats that learn about the Democratic Party’s outreach efforts toward Latinos become less supportive of that party. Thus, the Democratic Party’s efforts to persuade and mobilize its Latino supporters may weaken its support among whites.

Leftward Shifts

Although left-wing arguments about race may nudge some elements of the electorate to the political right, it does not follow that overt racial prejudice is always a successful political strategy. Even within the Republican Party, strong opposition to political correctness is not universal, and this is a significant fault line within the party. Kaufmann (2019) showed that, next to immigration attitudes, views on political correctness were the most important predictor of which Republican identifiers supported Trump in the Republican primary. Further, although many Americans clearly think political correctness has gone too far, we should not infer that they reject all social norms when it comes to racial discourse. There are strong norms against

expressions of explicit racial animus from politicians, and thus political actors who wish to appeal to white racial anxieties must use coded language (Mendelberg 2001). The argument that political correctness only fuels intolerance and the far right is also questionable. Blinder, Ford, and Ivarsflaten (2013) argued that anti-racist norms can mitigate the effects of negative stereotypes.

Furthermore, although a great deal of scholarship has emphasized Republicans' move to the right, we also see evidence that other elements of the American electorate are moving to the left, especially in regard to racial attitudes. Non-Hispanic white liberals in particular have moved dramatically leftward on these issues, a development Matthew Yglesias called "The Great Awakening" (2019). This shift is furthermore not simply a reaction to Trump. Goldberg's (2019) examination of public opinion data indicates that these changes began accelerating in 2012.

Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck (2018) showed that Americans' attitudes on race and immigration have changed significantly in recent years, becoming more polarized along partisan lines. However, this shift has occurred almost entirely among Democrats, who have become more progressive. They found little evidence that Republicans have become more reactionary on these issues. Another consequence of the Trump presidency is that Americans have become more favorable toward Muslims and Islam (Telhami 2017; Tesler 2018). If President Trump has led to a resurgence of reactionary racial views among his base, it is not readily discernible in the public opinion data.

Theory

Given the above literature, we expect that white voters will provide lower levels of support for political candidates that endorse progressive views on race (talking openly about white privilege) or that call for specific progressive racial policies (reparations for slavery).

Based on this same literature, however, we can reasonably anticipate that racial arguments will have heterogeneous effects within the white population. That is, one part of this electorate may punish Democrats that move to the left on these issues. Other whites, however, may find the more progressive approach to racial policy compelling, supporting candidates who make these arguments and perhaps even shifting their own views leftward. The inconsistent findings regarding how racial arguments and norms influence attitudes also suggest that racial appeals may have varying effects on different racial views and political actions. That is, a candidate attacking white privilege may enjoy less support from white voters without necessarily causing an attitudinal backlash when it comes to racial issues.

Two views have emerged regarding the historical backlash against the Democratic Party. Symbolic racism is a belief system that represents prejudice towards those of different racial backgrounds. This can include open dislike of the target group or simply a set of stereotypes that affect political preferences. Pioneering work by Kinder and Sears (1981) found that symbolic attitudes towards blacks tended to predict support for policies aimed at reducing inequality better than objective circumstances (see also Kaufmann 2019). Realistic group conflict theory holds that racial prejudice is an evolved response to competition between groups for limited resources (Sidanius 1983). Each of these theories predicts that white Americans will punish a candidate for taking a left-wing position on race, whether in the form of advocating specific policies towards helping blacks or arguing for the abstract existence of white privilege.

Jardina (2019) recently identified white identity as a powerful predictor of many kinds of political preferences. Realistic group conflict theory finds an explicit connection between the salience of race and prejudice towards outgroups, something that may translate into greater white identity (Taylor 1998). Theories surrounding symbolic racism, in contrast, emphasize that “old

fashioned” prejudice in the form of explicit negative attitudes towards minorities has been decreasing, seeing the new, symbolic racism, as a replacement (Swim et al. 1995; Kinder and Sears 1981). The effect that expressing left wing views on race has on white identity thus remains an open question. Making race salient, particularly in the form of a political discussion about redistributing resources, can activate perceptions of threat and increase white identity. At the same time, it may lead white Americans to be repulsed by anything that sounds like explicit bigotry, even as they become more strongly opposed to political candidates that are seen as too far to the left.

Methodology

Recent years have seen the rise of the “preregistration revolution.” (Nosek et al. 2018; Nosek and Lindsay 2018). Driven in large part by the failure of many landmark studies in social psychology to replicate, scholars have begun to preregister their studies, meaning that they set out the hypotheses to be tested and the exact methods to be used before collecting their data (Gelman and Loken 2013). Scholars widely acknowledged that the failure to preregister and explicitly put forward a research plan ahead of time makes it too easy for researchers to subconsciously make decisions about coding and which results to report based on what the data show, increasing the probability of false positives.

This study recruited a nationwide representative sample of 817 white Americans for a preregistered experiment, taking the survey in fall 2019. Respondents were asked basic demographic information and how they identified ideologically. It then presented them with a vignette about Kirsten Gillibrand, the New York Senator who ran for the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination. Three treatments were given. In the first, respondents were told that

Gillibrand was either “not in favor of radical redistribution” or “in favor of much greater redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor, through higher taxes and more social spending.” This treatment is called *redistribute*, with the former position coded as 0 throughout this paper and the latter coded as 1. This variable helps to differentiate between a general backlash to left wing policies and a backlash specifically related to race. The second treatment either gave a generic statement that Senator Gillibrand said she “would help address inequality and raise the wages of all Americans” (*reparations* = 0), or that “many of her policies, such as affirmative action and reparations for slavery, or cash payments to black Americans, would help the African American community.” (*reparations* = 1). Finally half the respondents were given a direct quote from Gillibrand stressing kindness and unity (*white privilege* = 0), while the other half received a quote in which she talks about white privilege and the advantages that white people have over blacks, reading that she told whites that “when their son is walking down a street with a bag of M&M’s in his pocket wearing a hoodie, his whiteness is what protects him from not being shot,” and “when their child has a car that breaks down and he knocks on someone’s door for help and the door opens and the help is given, it’s his whiteness that protects him from being shot.” (*white privilege* = 1) The treatments were fully crossed, which each respondent having an equal chance of receiving one of the two treatments in each category.

Respondents were then asked, among other questions whether they could imagine themselves supporting Gillibrand (6-point scale, with an option for “I don’t know”) and whether they would be worried if she became president. We also gave participants three questions designed to measure white identity (Jardina 2019), and other questions measuring social and political attitudes. See the Online Appendix for registration materials and the exact wording of the prompts and questions given.

Complicating research into these issues is social desirability bias. Seeking to understand attitudes towards sensitive issues such as gender, race, and sexual orientation can pose particular difficulties for researchers, as individuals may be tempted to conceal their true beliefs (An 2015; Janus 2010). In order to deal with this problem, researchers have developed endorsement experiments, in which subjects are asked about their attitudes indirectly (Lyall, Blair, and Imai 2013). For this survey, then, we asked respondents about their attitudes towards President Trump, various racial groups, and political factions. This was for two reasons. First, while respondents might have been uncomfortable answering direct questions about racial attitudes, they may be more willing to indicate a shift in how warmly they feel towards various groups. Second, this allows us to test a broad version of right-wing backlash theory, which says that whites become more conservative across a wide variety of measures when race is made salient (Craig and Richeson 2014)

Based on the discussion above, we made six predictions in our preregistered study. Our first two hypotheses were that *reparations* and *white privilege* would decrease support for Gillibrand among white voters. This is the traditional backlash hypothesis, in which Democrats are punished for promoting left wing views on race. We also predicted that *reparations* would increase white identity while *white privilege* would reduce it, with the latter effect being stronger among liberals. The idea that *reparations* increases white identity is consistent with realistic group conflict theory. We predicted that *white privilege* would have the opposite effect due to social desirability bias, since a politician discussing the concept might stigmatize white identity. This effect could have had a particularly strong effect on liberals, since they are more sensitive to the issue of white racism. Finally, we predicted that the negative effect of *reparations* on

willingness to vote for Gillibrand would be mediated through the increase in white identity we predicted.

Results

Table 1 provides the results of the three regressions discussed in our pre-registration plan. In Model 1, the dependent variable is willingness to vote for Gillibrand on a six-point scale. Respondents were given the option to select “I don’t know,” and those who did so were dropped from the analysis. Including those respondents and coding them as being in the middle of respondents (i.e., a 3 on a 7-point scale, instead of dropped from a 6-point scale), does not meaningfully change the results. The treatments are as described above. *Sex* is coded as 0 for respondents who are male, and 1 for female, while ideology is on a 5-point scale from “Very Liberal” (1) to “Moderate” (3) to “Very Conservative” (5). The second model has the same independent variables as Model 1 but with white identity as the dependent variable. Model 3 has white identity as the dependent variable but includes interaction effects between ideology and the three treatments.

Table 1. Effects of Treatments on Voting Gillibrand and White Identity

<i>Dep. Variable</i>	Vote Gillibrand	White Identity	White Identity
Redistribute	−0.16 (0.12)	0.13 (0.18)	−0.11 (0.56)
Reparations	−0.24* (0.12)	−0.17 (0.18)	0.45 (0.57)
White Privilege	−0.61*** (0.12)	0.03 (0.18)	0.81 (0.57)
Ideology	−0.59*** (0.05)	0.80*** (0.09)	0.97*** (0.17)
Sex	0.06 (0.12)	−0.54** (0.18)	−0.56** (0.18)
Ideol*Redistribute			0.07 (0.17)
Ideol*Reparations			−0.19 (0.17)
Ideol*White Privilege			−0.25 (0.17)
Constant	4.95*** (0.28)	7.82*** (0.43)	7.30*** (0.62)
Observations	676	818	818
R ²	0.18	0.11	0.11

note: $p < .05^$, $p < .01^{**}$, $p < .001^{***}$*

The results confirm our hypotheses about the influence of left-wing rhetoric on race with regards to voting for Gillibrand but not the hypotheses regarding white identity. The effects of *white privilege* in particular are massive, being about equal to a one-point shift on a five-point scale of ideology, which happens to be a one standard deviation shift right. In other words, the effect of talking about white privilege for the Democratic candidate in this experiment is about the effect of an individual going from calling themselves somewhat liberal to a moderate, or from moderate to somewhat conservative. If we treat support for Gillibrand as a binary variable,

about 36 percent would consider voting for the candidate when she does not talk about white privilege, compared to 24 percent when she does, cutting around a third of her support. Her statements supporting reparations and affirmative action reduces dichotomous support from 32 percent to 28 percent, a much smaller but still statistically significant effect.

The effect is concentrated among moderates and conservatives, as Figure 1 shows. The willingness of conservatives to vote for Gillibrand drops from 2.3 to 1.5 on the six-point scale when she discusses white privilege. A similar drop is observed among moderates, 3.2 to 2.4. The white privilege prompt causes moderates to support the Democratic candidate at about the level of conservatives in the reference category. There was a slight decrease in support among those who called themselves somewhat liberal, 3.7 to 3.4, offset by the increase in support for Gillibrand among the very liberal, 3.4 to 4, two effects that cancel one another out across all liberal respondents. Thus, talking about white privilege causes a large loss of support among conservative and moderate whites, while leaving liberals unaffected.

Figure 1. Effect of discussion of white privilege on support for Gillibrand by ideology.

We also asked respondents how worried they would be if Senator Gillibrand became president. This part of the experiment did not involve a prediction that was preregistered, but can serve as a robustness check on the main results of *Reparations* and *White Privilege* on willingness to vote for Gillibrand. The results are consistent with Table 1, in that both treatments led respondents to be more likely to be worried about her in power (*reparations*: $\beta = 0.3$, $p < .05$; *white privilege*: $\beta = 0.53$, $p < .001$).

We did not find any effect of the prompts on white identity, thus showing a lack of support for realistic group conflict theory or social desirability bias. Further exploratory analysis reveals some interesting patterns, however. Among conservatives, those who received the *white privilege* prompt had lower levels of white identity, although the results were just short of conventional measures of significance ($\beta = -0.48$, $p = 0.14$). One of the three questions that

make up the index for white identity is “how important is being white to your identity?”

Conservatives became less likely to agree with that statement after receiving the white privilege prompt ($\beta = -0.28, p = 0.07$). Also, among the entire sample, those who received the prompt in which Gillibrand supported reparations and affirmative action did actually become more likely to support reparations on a 6-point scale, when controlling for the same variables listed in Table 1 ($\beta = 0.33, p = .002$). Gillibrand advocating for reparations increases dichotomous support by 12.6 percent, from 17.3 percent to 27.9 percent. In other words, white Americans in the aggregate punish a candidate for supporting reparations while becoming more supportive of reparations themselves. We also asked respondents whether they support affirmative action, with the effect of *reparations* being positive but not statistically significant.

Figure 2 shows the effect on support for reparations based of the *reparations* prompt by ideology, with support treated as dichotomous (greater than 3 on the 6-point scale). Among conservatives, *Reparations* doubled support for reparations from 7.6 percent to 15 percent. Similar rises from higher base rates are observed among liberals and moderates.

Figure 2. Dichotomous support for reparations based on ideology and prompt showing Gillibrand supporting reparations. Note: $p < .05$ *, $p < .01$ **

These tests regarding white identity among conservatives and the movement towards support for reparations are exploratory, yet tell a consistent story. At the very least, these results provide strong evidence against the second kind of backlash effect, in which left-wing positions and rhetoric on race makes people substantially more conservative on these issues or increase white identity. Left wing positions on race, whether in the form of advocating for specific policies that help blacks or the existence of white privilege, make people less likely to vote for a candidate. The same statements can also shift opinions to the left on the issue of reparations, and perhaps reduce white identity among conservatives.

It is possible that attitudes on white identity and reparations shift due to social desirability bias. In order to determine whether this is the case, we conduct a path analysis through structural equation modeling, with *reparations* as the exogenous variable, *support reparations* as the

mediator variable, and *vote Gillibrand* as the outcome variable. The variables *white privilege*, *ideology*, and *sex* are included as controls but not shown in Figure 3, and standard errors are calculated through the bootstrap method with 200 iterations (Mackinnon and Fairchild 2009).

Figure 3. Mediation Analysis

Note: Mediation analysis, effect of *reparations treatment* on *voting Gillibrand*, with *support for reparations* as the mediator. $p < .01$ **, $p < .001$ ***.

We find that the total effect of *reparations* on *vote Gillibrand* is divided into a positive indirect effect and a larger, negative direct effect. If respondents felt a desire to support reparations out of social desirability bias, we might have expected those who expressed greater support for reparations to then show less support for Gillibrand. That is not what we find; instead, an increase in support for reparations increases support for Gillibrand, but the overall effect of *reparations* on supporting Gillibrand is nonetheless still negative, implying heterogenous effects of the treatment across the entire population. Moreover, if the increase in support for reparations was due to social desirability bias, then we would expect the correlation between voting for Gillibrand and supporting reparations to be lower among respondents who received the *reparations* prompt than among those who did not, since some substantial percentage of the former group would be falsifying their views on reparations. In fact, we find the opposite. The results therefore argue against social desirability bias, and for a model in which

talking about reparations increases support for the policy while still hurting the candidate among white Americans.

The final argument against social desirability bias is the fact that there is no connection between the white privilege prompt and support for Trump, any major racial or religious group asked about, or either of the two major parties. We might expect, for example, more support for President Trump and less support for Democrats if left wing positions on race made white Americans recoil but nonetheless not want to express their true feelings on race related issues. We do not find this, and the white privilege prompt only affects attitudes towards Senator Gillibrand, arguing against any broad form of backlash theory. Figure 4 shows these results, where no clear pattern of approval for various figures emerges based on the reparations prompt.

Figure 4. Individual and Group Affinity

Positive feelings for individuals or group based on white privilege prompt.

Conclusion

Although not definitive, this study may help us understand apparently paradoxical developments in American politics over the last several decades. Our results show that white Americans were less likely to support a candidate promoting an explicitly progressive agenda on race. At the same time, we find no evidence that calls for such an agenda actually provoke a backlash in racial attitudes. In fact, progressive arguments about race from candidates may prompt a softening of racial attitudes and greater support for policies designed to promote equality.

Future research into this topic should further study the ways in which elite discourse on race can shape racial views in the mass public. Although we considered a presidential candidate,

it will be useful to know how, if at all, statements from other recognizable public figures influence these attitudes. It will be important to know if other kinds American elites – such as athletes, business leaders, or other types of celebrities – can successfully promote racially progressive attitudes, thus expanding the possibilities for progressive policies. The importance of elite leadership in promoting tolerant attitudes has been previously demonstrated in the successful struggle for marriage equality and other forms of gay rights (Paul 2018).

Scholars should further investigate the role of candidates' rhetoric on race and subsequent levels of voter support for those candidates. Although this study indicated that left wing statements on race can provoke a drop in support, progressives may reasonably reject the idea that leading candidates should simply remain silent on racial issues to avoid alienating white voters. There may be other rhetorical strategies that allow candidates to in their view honestly discuss questions of racial inequalities without provoking a backlash.

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Appendix for Losing Elections, Winning the Debate: Progressive Racial Rhetoric and White Backlash

This appendix consists of two parts. First, it includes the questions asked for the survey, along with the variable names for each question, thus serving as a codebook. Brackets [] indicate one of two possibilities that may be received by the respondent. Italicized words give the column name for the question in the data. In Part II of this appendix, we present the preregistration plan. The questions from the OSF website are in bold, and our answers are in plain text. We note that, in accordance with the preregistration plan, we only use respondents who passed both attention check questions.

I. Survey Questions

This study is designed to test your opinions on a series of social and political issues. There are not any right or wrong answers, and your answers will be completely confidential. We just ask that you answer honestly.

Brackets [] indicate one of two options for the respondent. Italicized words are there for the sake of the reader, and explain the layout and answers for the questions.

i) We're going to give you the names of four politicians. Please tell us if you have a favorable view of them, an unfavorable view of them, or have never heard of them.

- a) Julian Castro (*castro*)
- b) Kirsten Gillibrand (*gillibrand*)
- c) Kamala Harris (*harris*)
- d) Bernie Sanders (*sanders*)

Options are "unfavorable,"(1) "favorable,"(2) "heard of them, but no opinion,"(3) or "never heard of them"(4)

ii) How would you identify yourself politically? (*party*)

- 1) Strong Republican
- 2) Lean Republican
- 3) Lean Democrat
- 4) Strong Democrat
- 5) Independent
- 6) Socialist
- 7) Libertarian
- 0) Other

ii(a) What is your sex? (*sex*)

- 1) male
- 2) female
- 3) other

ii(b) What is the highest level of education you have completed? (*education*)

- 1) Less than high school
- 2) High school
- 3) Some college
- 4) 4-year college degree
- 5) Master's or other post-college degree
- 6) PhD

ii(c) How old are you? (*age*)

- 1) 18-25
- 2) 26-30
- 3) 31-40
- 4) 41-50
- 5) 51-60
- 6) 61-70
- 7) 71-80
- 8) 81 or above

ii(d) How would you describe your religious views? (*religion*)

- 1) Evangelical Christian
- 2) Mainline Protestant
- 3) Catholic
- 4) Other Christian
- 5) Mormon
- 6) Jewish
- 7) Muslim
- 8) Hindu
- 9) Buddhist
- 10) Atheist or agnostic
- 11) Other

ii(e) How important is religion in your life? (*5-point scale from not at all important to very important*) (*important*)

iii) What is your racial or ethnic background? (*race*)

- 1) White or Caucasian
- 2) Black or African American
- 3) Hispanic or Latino
- 4) Asian or Asian American
- 5) Native American or Alaska Native
- 6) Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- 0) Other

iv) How would you describe your political views?

- a) On social issues I am... (*social*)
 - b) On economic issues I am... (*econ*)
 - c) Overall, I am... (*ideol*)
- One to five scale from “very liberal” to “very conservative”*

Text 1:

We're going to tell you about a presidential candidate. Please read the following and then answer the questions that come after. *[Respondents will be given three phrases. Phrase 1 will portray Senator Gillibrand as moderate or liberal on economic issues. Phrase 2 will either stress her desire to help all Americans or to enact policies aimed at improving the lives of African Americans. Phrase 3 will have Senator Gillibrand either stress common purpose and unity, or talk about white privilege]*

Kirsten Gillibrand is a Senator from New York and until recently was running for President.

The prompt respondents will be given will be a combination of three different phrases, with two possible options for each phrase and the treatments being fully crossed.]

A/B Test 1

Phrase 1:

[[She is considered a moderate on economic issues and is not in favor of radical redistribution.]]

Or

[[She is in favor of much greater redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor, through higher taxes and more social spending.]]

Phrase 2:

[[Senator Gillibrand stressed during her campaign that her policies would help address inequality and raise the wages of all Americans.]]

Or

[[Senator Gillibrand stressed that many of her policies, such as affirmative action and reparations for slavery, or cash payments to black Americans, would help the African American community.]]

Phrase 3

[[Gillibrand emphasized her message of unity, saying that “what we need more than anything is someone to bring us back together and to remind this country that our best moments in our

history, our greatest moments, are when we cared about others, when we treated others the way we want to be treated, lived by the Golden Rule, and cared about the least among us."

]

Or

[She promised to use her position to address white privilege and talk to white people about the advantages they have relative to minorities. Senator Gillibrand recently said that, if elected, she would explain to white parents that "when their son is walking down a street with a bag of M&M's in his pocket wearing a hoodie, his whiteness is what protects him from not being shot," and that "when their child has a car that breaks down and he knocks on someone's door for help and the door opens and the help is given, it's his whiteness that protects him from being shot."]]

v) Please indicate whether you would agree or disagree with the following statements. (Answers will be on a 6 point scale from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," with an option for "I don't know." (0))

- a) I would vote for Senator Gillibrand if I had the opportunity. (*vote*)
- b) I would be worried about the country if Senator Gillibrand became president (*worry*)
- c) Violence in defense of a political cause can sometimes be justified (*violence*)
- d) Sometimes, if one's side has been treated unfairly, it is fine to not adhere to political norms in order to defeat the other side. (*norms*)
- e) People in the government and media may make mistakes, but they generally try to do what's best for the country. (*best*)
- f) Most people can be trusted. (*trust*)
- g) If you are reading this, choose slightly disagree. (*check1*)
- h) I would support the government paying reparations to black Americans to make up for slavery and other forms of discrimination they have suffered. (*support_rep*)
- i) I support affirmative action (*action*)

vi) How important is being white to your identity? (five-point scale from not important at all to very important) (*identity*)

vii) To what extent do you feel that white people in this country have a lot to be proud of? (1 means not so much, 5 means a lot) (*proud*)

viii) How much would you say that whites in this country have a lot in common with one another? (1 means not so much, 5 means a lot) (*common*)

ix) Please tell us how positively or negatively you feel towards the following members or groups in society (six-point scale very negative to very positive)

- a) The alt right
- b) Antifa
- c) Black people
- d) The Democratic Party

- e) Hispanic people
- f) Jews
- g) The Republican Party
- h) Donald Trump
- i) White nationalists
- j) White people

x) Would you be interested in receiving a weekly newsletter on structural and racial inequalities, and how you can contribute to ending such practices? If yes, please leave your e-mail address below. (email1)

xi) The Trump administration is considering letting Americans import prescription drugs from Canada, which will reduce costs. Some regulators worry that letting people import drugs from overseas can cause confusion and harm consumers. How strongly would you support or oppose such a policy? (six-point scale, from strongly oppose to strongly support). (*itrump*)

xii) The American Infrastructure Act is a proposed law that would spend \$100 billion on infrastructure, mostly to help fix and build roads and bridges. Some say that the country cannot afford such a project at this time given our large debt. The bill has the support of the NAACP, the country's oldest civil rights group defending African Americans. How strongly would you support or oppose this bill? (six-point scale, from strongly oppose to strongly support). (*naacp*)

II. Preregistration Plan

Title: Racial Rhetoric and Political Views

Wiki:

This project involves two studies. In the first, we will present a representative sample of white Americans with 3 treatments, with each treatment having two versions of text. Respondents will read about Kirsten Gillibrand and her recently ended candidacy for the presidency of the United States. There are a total of 8 different version of the text, since there are three treatments that are fully crossed ($2 \times 2 \times 2 = 8$).

In the first treatment, we will either say that she opposes radical redistribution or that she believes strongly in redistribution from the rich to the poor.

In the second treatment, the text will emphasize either Gillibrand's desire to help all Americans or her support for reparations and affirmative action targeted at black Americans.

In the third treatment, we will quote Gillibrand either presenting a color-blind message of unity or talking about white privilege.

We will then ask various questions related to views on political issues, including reparations and a three-item survey measuring racial identity.

Our main prediction is that talking about reparations will increase white identity, while talking about white privilege will decrease it. However, this latter effect may be due to preference

falsification, which would be the case if whites became less likely to vote for the politician who talked about this issue.

The survey will also ask about support for the following groups of people: the alt right, antifa, blacks, Democrats, Hispanics, Jews, Donald Trump, Republicans, whites, white nationalists.

We also test for social desirability bias by putting forth two endorsement questions. Respondents will first be told that the Trump administration supports a plan to allow Americans to import drugs from Canada, and asks respondents whether they would support such a plan. They will then be told about an infrastructure bill supported by the NAACP, and asked whether they would support it.

In the second study, respondents once again get a 2 x 2 x 2 matrix, about a group of refugees possibly coming into the country. The treatments are whether they are Venezuelan or Ukrainian, whether they will vote Democrat or Republican, and whether they are high- or low- skilled migrants. We are interested in the question of what drives views towards immigration. We believe that Republicans, but not Democrats, think about the issue in racial and political terms. While Republicans will become more anti-immigration if the immigrants are not white and if they are going to hurt them politically, Democrats will not be affected by such prompts.

Please give a brief description of your study, including some background, the purpose of the study, or broad research questions.

There has been a great deal of research on white identity, and racial attitudes among whites driving political preferences. Our study uses experimental methods to investigate how Democrats talking about racial issues influences political attitudes. We will present respondents with a Democratic candidate for president, and vary what she says about redistribution, reparations and affirmative action, and white privilege.

List specific, concise, and testable hypotheses. Please state if the hypotheses are directional or non-directional. If directional, state the direction. A predicted effect is also appropriate here. If a specific interaction or moderation is important to your research, you can list that as a separate hypothesis.

H1: A Democratic candidate talking about government programs designed to help blacks will cause whites to be less likely to vote for her.

H2: A Democratic candidate talking about white privilege will cause whites to be less likely to vote for her.

H3: A Democratic candidate talking about government programs designed to help blacks will increase white identity.

H4: A Democratic candidate talking about white privilege will decrease white identity.

H5: The effects in H1 will be mediated by change in white identity.

H6: The effects of talking about white privilege in H4 will have less of an impact among conservatives.

Describe your study design. Examples include two-group, factorial, randomized block, and repeated measures. Is it a between (unpaired), within-subject (paired), or mixed design?

Describe any counterbalancing required. Typical study designs for observation studies include cohort, cross sectional, and case-control studies.

We will be using a 2 x 2 x 2 fully crossed randomized unpaired design. Respondents will receive some demographic and name recognition questions, then randomly receive one of eight texts and then be asked questions about their opinions. See the attached document, text 1, pp. 2-3.

If you are doing a randomized study, how will you randomize, and at what level?

There are eight different texts, and through the Qualtrics system each respondent will have a 12.5% chance of receiving any one of them.

If you indicate that you will be using some data that already exist in this study, please describe the steps you have taken to assure that you are unaware of any patterns or summary statistics in the data. This may include an explanation of how access to the data has been limited, who has observed the data, or how you have avoided observing any analysis of the specific data you will use in your study.

There is no existing data.

Please describe the process by which you will collect your data. If you are using human subjects, this should include the population from which you obtain subjects, recruitment efforts, payment for participation, how subjects will be selected for eligibility from the initial pool (e.g. inclusion and exclusion rules), and your study timeline. For studies that don't include human subjects, include information about how you will collect samples, duration of data gathering efforts, source or location of samples, or batch numbers you will use.

We will recruit our sample through Qualtrics, and use their interface in order to carry out the survey.

Describe the sample size of your study. How many units will be analyzed in the study? This could be the number of people, birds, classrooms, plots, interactions, or countries included. If the units are not individuals, then describe the size requirements for each unit. If you are using a clustered or multilevel design, how many units are you collecting at each level of the analysis?

We will recruit 800 respondents who pass the attention checks (see questions v(g) and xvi(d)). More will be added if budgetary factors allow it.

Sample size rationale.

This is based on budgetary constraints.

If your data collection procedures do not give you full control over your exact sample size, specify how you will decide when to terminate your data collection.

We have full control, Qualtrics will recruit the sample and stop at the point that we tell them.

Manipulated variables (optional)

Describe all variables you plan to manipulate and the levels or treatment arms of each variable. This is not applicable to any observational study.

We will manipulate the text that respondents receive, in a 2 x 2 x 2 matrix. See attached documentation, text 1. Everything else will be the same across all respondents.

Describe each variable that you will measure. This will include outcome measures, as well as any predictors or covariates that you will measure. You do not need to include any variables that you plan on collecting if they are not going to be included in the confirmatory analyses of this study.

The variables to be used in the confirmatory analysis are as follows, from the attached document: question numbers ii.a, iv.c, v.a, vi, vii, viii, ix.b, ix.c, ix.f, ix.g, ix.h, ix.i, x, xi, xii.

Indices (optional)

If any measurements are going to be combined into an index (or even a mean), what measures will you use and how will they be combined? Include either a formula or a precise description of your method. If you are using a more complicated statistical method to combine measures (e.g. a factor analysis), you can note that here but describe the exact method in the analysis plan section.

The one index we will use is for white identity. It includes answers to the following three questions. (questions vi, vii, and viii)

- 1) How important is being white to your identity? (five-point scale from not important at all to very important)
- 2) To what extent do you feel that white people in this country have a lot to be proud of? (1 means not so much, 5 means a lot)
- 3) How much would you say that whites in this country have a lot in common with one another? (1 means not so much, 5 means a lot)

Statistical models (required)

What statistical model will you use to test each hypothesis? Please include the type of model (e.g. ANOVA, multiple regression, SEM, etc) and the specification of the model (this includes each variable that will be included as predictors, outcomes, or covariates). Please specify any interactions, subgroup analyses, pairwise or complex contrasts, or follow-up tests from omnibus tests. If you plan on using any positive controls, negative controls, or manipulation checks you may mention that here. Remember that any test not included here must be noted as an exploratory test in your final article.

We will conduct the following tests, determining statistical significance through conventional methods ($p < .1$, .05, .01, and .001).

- 1) In order to test H1 and H2, we will run an OLS model, with willingness to vote for Gillibrand (v.a) as the dependent variable, and with the independent variables being ideology (iv.c), sex (ii.a), and the treatments *Redistribute* (coded as 0 if Gillibrand is against, 1 if she is for), *Reparations* (coded as 0 if Gillibrand is against, 1 if she is for), and *Privilege* (coded 0 if Gillibrand present a non-racial message, 1 if she talks about white privilege).
- 2) In order to test H3 and H4, we will run an OLS model, with white identity as the dependent variable (index of questions vi, vii, and viii), and with the independent variables being ideology (iv.c), sex (ii.a), and the treatments *Redistribute*, *Reparations*, and *Privilege* coded as dummy variables (see Text 1).
- 3) In order to test H5, we will conduct mediation analysis through structural equation modeling, with voting for Gillibrand as the dependent variable (v(a)), white identity as described above as the mediator, and the independent variables being ideology (iv.c), sex (ii.a), and the treatments *Redistribute*, *Reparations*, and *Privilege*. We will derive errors for the purposes of statistical significance through the bootstrap method with 200 iterations.
- 4) To test H6, we will conduct the analysis described in (2) but include interaction effects between ideology and each of the treatments.

Transformations (optional)

If you plan on transforming, centering, recoding the data, or will require a coding scheme for categorical variables, please describe that process.

Categorical variables will be coded as dummy variables.

Inference criteria (optional)

What criteria will you use to make inferences? Please describe the information you'll use (e.g. specify the p-values, Bayes factors, specific model fit indices), as well as cut-off criterion, where appropriate. Will you be using one or two tailed tests for each of your analyses? If you are comparing multiple conditions or testing multiple hypotheses, will you account for this?

We will look for p-values at the thresholds of .10, .05, .01, and .001.

How will you determine which data points or samples if any to exclude from your analyses? How will outliers be handled? Will you use any awareness check?

We have an attention check question, in which we ask "If you are reading this, select somewhat disagree," (v.g) and "For this question, please select slightly agree." (xvi.b)

How will you deal with incomplete or missing data?

We will not have incomplete or missing data, as the firm Qualtrics will only deliver completed responses.

Exploratory analysis (optional)

If you plan to explore your data set to look for unexpected differences or relationships, you may describe those tests here. An exploratory test is any test where a prediction is not

made up front, or there are multiple possible tests that you are going to use. A statistically significant finding in an exploratory test is a great way to form a new confirmatory hypothesis, which could be registered at a later time.

- 1) We will conduct an OLS regression, with the independent variables being ideology (iv.c), sex (ii.a), and the treatments *Redistribute*, *Reparations*, and *Privilege* coded as dummy variables (see Text 1); and the dependent variables being attitudes towards the following groups: alt right, antifa, black people, the Democratic Party, Hispanic people, Jews, the Republican Party, Donald Trump, white nationalists, and white people as the dependent variables (ix).
- 2) We will conduct the analysis described in (1), with indirect endorsement of the Trump administration (xi) as the dependent variable.
- 3) We will conduct the analysis described in (1), with indirect endorsement of the NAACP (xii) as the dependent variable.
- 4) Finally, we will carry out a probit analysis, with the same independent variables mentioned in (1), and as the dependent variable the willingness of individuals to subscribe to a newsletter about reducing inequalities (x).

Other (optional)

If there is any additional information that you feel needs to be included in your preregistration, please enter it here. Literature cited, disclosures of any related work such as replications or work that uses the same data, or other context that will be helpful for future readers would be appropriate here.

The second part of the survey (beginning with Text 2) is not included in this a different component. See project titled “Immigration, Race, and Political Power.”