


The Racial and Economic Context of Trump Support: Evidence for Threat, Identity, and Contact Effects in the 2016 Presidential Election

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Abstract

Donald Trump's ascent to the Presidency of the United States defied the expectations of many social scientists, pundits, and laypeople. To date, most efforts to understand Trump's rise have focused on personality and demographic characteristics of White Americans. In contrast, the present work leverages a nationally representative sample of Whites to examine how contextual factors may have shaped support for Trump during the 2016 presidential primaries. Results reveal that neighborhood-level exposure to racial and ethnic minorities predicts greater group threat and racial identification among Whites as well as greater intentions to vote for Trump in the general election. At the same time, however, neighborhood diversity afforded Whites with opportunities for intergroup contact, which predicted lower levels of threat, White identification, and Trump support. Further analyses suggest that a healthy local economy mutes threat effects in diverse contexts, allowing contact processes to come to the fore.

Keywords

diversity, threat, White identification, intergroup contact, Donald Trump

No single factor can adequately explain Trump's expectations-defying rise; rather, his popular appeal likely reflects an interplay of factors ranging from voters' dispositions to the contexts in which they live (Pettigrew, 2017). To date, however, the predictors of Trump support that have received the most attention, both in academia and the media, involve personality characteristics of White people. Support for Trump has been traced to authoritarianism (Choma & Hanoch, 2017; MacWilliams, 2016)—a tendency to crave strong leaders and social order (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950; Altemeyer, 1996)—and to social dominance orientation (SDO; Choma & Hanoch, 2017)—a propensity to believe that some social groups are superior to others (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). Trump support has also been shown to correlate with collective narcissism (Federico & de Zavala, 2017) or a faith in the unparalleled greatness of one's group (Cichocka, 2016; de Zavala, Cichocka, Eidelson, & Jayawickreme, 2009). Such findings help explain why many White Americans are drawn to Trump's rhetoric, which emphasizes the need to "take [their] country back" (Nowicki, 2015), to "make America great again" (Tumulty, 2017), and to put "America first" (Calamur, 2017).

Despite the importance of personality dispositions, we believe insufficient attention has been paid to characteristics of the *social context* that may lead White Americans to perceive external threats, reaffirm their group identity, and—hence—to

support Trump. In the present work, we draw on research in political science, sociology, and psychology to identify ethno-racial and economic contexts that predict Whites' attitudes, identities, and political preferences. Specifically, we trace Whites' support for Trump to Whites' everyday exposure to racial out-groups (Massey & Denton, 1988) and the local economic standing of the in-group (Bobo & Hutchings, 1996).

Diversity and Group Threat

Extensive work in political science and sociology suggests that exposure to a large minority population increases White Americans' perceptions of "group threat" or a sense that their racial in-group is engaged in zero-sum competition with other racial groups (Blalock, 1967; Bobo, 1983; Enos, 2014, 2016; Quillian, 1996). According to Blalock (1967), Whites find large racial minority populations threatening because of their

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potential to sap scarce resources and engage in large-scale political mobilization. Correspondingly, research has revealed positive associations between the size of a region's minority population and Whites' antiminority prejudice (Quillian, 1995, 1996) and feelings of status threat (Fossett & Kiecolt, 1989).

Exposure to large minority populations—and concomitant feelings of group threat—also appears to increase Whites' preference for politically conservative politicians and policies (Enos, 2014, 2016). Indeed, merely envisioning the White in-group as a national minority has been shown to heighten Whites' racial prejudice (Craig & Richeson, 2014a) and political conservatism (Craig & Richeson, 2014b) as well as their support for Trump (Major, Blodorn, & Major Blascovich, 2016). Much of Trump's racial rhetoric (Ross, 2016) seems designed to attract Whites who fear that minorities pose a threat to their safety and economic fortunes. Thus, we expect that living in racially and ethnically diverse environments would predict support for Trump through the exacerbation of group threat.

Diversity and Group Identification

In addition to its impact on perceptions of group threat, research suggests that racial and ethnic diversity may affect Whites' levels of racial identification—and, by extension, their support for Trump. Exposure to large numbers of racial and ethnic minority out-group members can increase the salience of Whites' own in-group identity (Knowles, Lowery, Chow, & Unzueta, 2014; Knowles & Peng, 2005; McGuire, McGuire, Child, & Fujioka, 1978) and their affective attachment to the in-group (Giles & Evans, 1985). Supporting this notion, Knowles and Peng (2005) found that the percentage of non-Whites in the local population correlated positively with explicit and implicit measures of White identification.

High levels of White identification, in turn, have been shown to predict Whites' preference for conservative political positions and a desire to preserve the interests of the White in-group (Knowles et al., 2014; Lowery, Unzueta, Knowles, & Goff, 2006). Given Trump's alignment with the "alt-right" (Altman, 2016)—an ethno-nationalist movement dedicated to advancing the (presumed) interests of White Americans—it is likely that heightened White identification will predict greater Trump support.

Diversity and Intergroup Contact

Thus far, we have described how racial and ethnic diversity can act as a fractionalizing force by enhancing Whites' feelings of group threat and strength of racial identification and how these factors foster support for nationalist policies and politicians. At the same time, significant racial and ethnic minority populations afford Whites with plentiful opportunities for contact with members of other racial and ethnic groups (Pettigrew, Wagner, & Christ, 2010; Schmid, Ramiah, & Hewstone, 2014; Wagner, Christ, Pettigrew, Stellmacher, & Wolf, 2006). Considerable research indicates that greater contact between ethno-racial groups reduces intergroup threat and hostility, while promoting

more positive intergroup attitudes and trust (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner, & Christ, 2011).

The positive effects of intergroup contact are thought to reflect a process of "deprovincialization" (Pettigrew, 1997), whereby interactions with other racial and ethnic groups lead people to reappraise the in-group and recognize that their group's norms and ways of being are not the only valuable standards by which to live (Verkuyten, Thijs, & Bekhuis, 2010). These interactions also tend to *lessen* group threat and encourage distancing from the in-group (Verkuyten et al., 2010). The process of deprovincialization, then, suggests that exposure to diversity may act to reduce White Americans' support for Trump. Consistent with this idea, individuals living in racially integrated areas—which should afford opportunities for intergroup contact—tended not to support Trump (Rothwell & Diego-Rosell, 2016).

Diversity Across Economic Contexts

We have argued that exposure to racial and ethnic diversity can have complex and countervailing effects on Whites' social attitudes and identities: Diversity can enhance group threat and racial identification among Whites but also diminish threat and identification by providing opportunities for intergroup contact. A crucial question concerns the balance between these forces. When (or where) do contact processes "trump" the threatening effects of diversity? Theories of group position (Blumer, 1958) and realistic group conflict (Bobo & Kluegel, 1993) suggest that local economic conditions influence the relative degree to which threat and contact shape Whites' attitudes. These approaches contend that perceptions of group threat stem principally from real or perceived competition over scarce resources (Blumer, 1958) and that members of the dominant racial group will seek to defend their privileged position against encroachment by subordinate racial groups (Samson & Bobo, 2014). As such, challenging economic circumstances might further sensitize Whites to competition from racial minority groups—thereby increasing perceptions of threat and rendering deprovincialization more difficult to achieve.

Research by Quillian (1995, 1996) supports the proposed connection between macro-level economic conditions and Whites' perceptions of group threat. In his 1996 study, Quillian found that differences in per capita income partially explained regional differences in White Americans' levels of anti-Black prejudice. Moreover, in a study of European countries, Quillian (1995) observed an interactive effect of diversity and economic conditions on anti-immigrant prejudice—such that large immigrant populations triggered the most prejudice in nations with a low gross domestic product. Similarly, we expect that economic conditions will moderate the degree to which racial diversity triggers threat in Whites, thereby shifting the balance between diversity's positive and negative attitudinal outcomes.

The Present Research

The present work examines associations between context (regional demographic diversity and economic conditions) and

support for Donald Trump's presidential candidacy among a nationally representative sample of White Americans. Exposure to racial and ethnic minority groups was theorized to exert both upward and downward pressure on Trump support through distinct paths. On the one hand, we expected to observe "provincializing" paths—that is, direct and positive paths from diversity to group threat and White identification. On the other hand, we also posit "deprovincializing" paths—namely, indirect and negative effects of diversity on threat and identification as mediated by intergroup contact. The provincializing and deprovincializing paths were expected to yield stronger and weaker Trump support, respectively.

Critically, our approach also provides an opportunity to address how additional contextual factors tip the balance between the provincializing and deprovincializing paths linking neighborhood diversity to group threat. Research suggests that dominant-group members find ethno-racial diversity most threatening in contexts where concern about group-level economic scarcity is heightened (Quillian, 1995). Thus, we predicted that provincializing paths would be more predictive in areas where the White unemployment rate is exceptionally high. In areas where the White unemployment rate is very low, however, we expected deprovincializing paths to be strongest.

Method

Sample and Procedure

Respondents were 1,728 non-Hispanic White Americans (878 male, 850 female; $M_{\text{age}} = 55.33$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 16.74$) recruited from a national, probability-based panel maintained by the GfK (2013) Internet research firm. Developed using random-digit dialing and address-based sampling, the panel includes respondents typically underrepresented in survey research—including those without landline telephones and Internet access. Households that lack Internet access are provided with a web-enabled laptop computer. Panel members complete an average of four surveys per month in return for free Internet service and other incentives (e.g., cash awards and sweepstakes opportunities). Survey samples are drawn from the panel using weighting procedures that ensure a close match between sample demographics and U.S. population distributions for key demographic variables including gender, education, and geographic region. The present survey was fielded from February 11 to 24, 2016, as Republican and Democratic candidates were campaigning for their parties' presidential nomination.

Individual-Level Variables

Trump preference was gauged using the following survey item: "Who would you support if the U.S. presidential election were held today?" Response options included Trump and all other major candidates in the race as of early February 2015 (i.e., *Hillary Clinton*, *Bernie Sanders*, *Jeb Bush*, *Ted Cruz*, *John Kasich*, and *Marco Rubio*) as well as the options *a different candidate* and *don't know/undecided*. Candidates' names were

presented in random order. Respondents' selections were converted to a binary variable (1 = *Trump*, 0 = *not Trump*).

Group threat was assessed using an item adapted from Bobo and Hutchings's (1996) scale, repeated for each of three racial and ethnic minority groups: "More good jobs for (Blacks/Latinos/Asians) mean fewer good jobs for Whites." Respondents made ratings on a 5-point scale anchored on the left by *strongly disagree* and on the right by *strongly agree* ($\alpha = .93$).

White identification was assessed using 3 items adapted from Leach and colleagues' (2008) social identification questionnaire: "I often think about the fact that I am a White person," "The fact that I am a White person is an important part of my identity," and "Being a White person is an important part of how I see myself." Respondents made ratings on a 5-point scale anchored on the left by *strongly disagree* and on the right by *strongly agree* ($\alpha = .85$).

Intergroup contact was measured using the following item, repeated in relation to each of three racial minority groups: "How often do you interact with (Blacks/Latinos/Asians)." Respondents made ratings on a 5-point scale anchored on the left by *never* and on the right by *very often* ($\alpha = .67$).

Control variables. We also assessed respondents' demographic and ideological characteristics to be used as control variables in data analysis. Demographic controls included respondents' age (in years), gender, household income (19 categories ranging from *less than US\$5,000* to *US\$175,000 or more*), and educational attainment (13 categories ranging from *first, second, third, or fourth grade* to *professional or doctorate degree*). Respondents' political ideology was assessed using the following item: "How would you describe your overall political outlook?" (7-point scale ranging from *extremely liberal* to *extremely conservative*). SDO (Pratto et al., 2000) was assessed using the 8-item short form of Ho and colleagues (2015); sample items include "An ideal society requires some groups to be on top and others to be on the bottom" and "It is unjust to try to make groups equal." Respondents made their ratings on a 5-point scale anchored on the left by *strongly disagree* and on the right by *strongly agree* ($\alpha = .74$).

Context-Level Variables

Context-level variables were derived from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS). The ACS samples approximately 3.5 million American households per year and provides population estimates across various time spans (i.e., 1-year, 3-year, and 5-year averages) and levels of geographic aggregation (e.g., state, county, and census tract).

Neighborhood diversity was estimated by cross-referencing respondents' census tracts of residence with ACS 5-year averages from 2014 to determine the non-White percentage of the population at the tract level. Higher values indicate greater levels of ethno-racial diversity in respondents' neighborhoods.

White unemployment rates in participants' neighborhoods were estimated by cross-referencing respondents' census tracts with ACS 5-year averages from 2014 to determine the unemployment rates for Whites at the tract level. Higher values

indicate higher rates of White unemployment in respondents' neighborhoods.

Data Analysis Plan

After computing preliminary correlations among the relevant variables, we created structural equation models (SEMs) to test our predictions in two stages.

In the first stage of analysis, we created an SEM to predict overall support for Donald Trump's presidential candidacy. Group threat, White identification, and intergroup contact were modeled as latent variables indicated by their corresponding questionnaire items; Trump support and neighborhood diversity were observed variables in the SEM. Design of the model was guided by theoretical considerations outlined previously.

1. Preference for Trump was simultaneously regressed on two factors associated with support for candidates and positions that benefit Whites: group threat (Bobo, 1983) and White identification (Lowery et al., 2006).
2. White identification was regressed on group threat, reflecting the tendency for perceptions of out-group threat to heighten in-group identification (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999; Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999; Schmid & Muldoon, 2015).
3. White identification was regressed on neighborhood diversity, reflecting the positive association between exposure to non-Whites and identification with Whites (Knowles et al., 2014; Knowles & Peng, 2005).
4. Group threat was regressed on neighborhood diversity. Previous work suggests that perceptions of group threat are highest among Whites exposed to large minority populations (Blalock, 1967; Enos, 2014, 2016; Pettigrew et al., 2010; Schmid et al., 2014).
5. We specified indirect paths from neighborhood diversity to group threat and White identification—mediated by intergroup contact. Prior work indicates that diverse environments afford more opportunities for contact with out-group members than do nondiverse contexts (Pettigrew et al., 2010). Intergroup contact, in turn, has the potential to attenuate perceptions of group threat (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011) as well as to lower levels of in-group identification through the process of deprovincialization (Verkuyten et al., 2010).
6. Theoretical considerations did not lead us to posit a direct path from neighborhood diversity to Trump support; nevertheless, we regressed Trump support on neighborhood racial diversity in order to thoroughly test the direct and indirect relationships between neighborhood diversity and Trump support.
7. To ensure that any relationships revealed by the SEM analysis are independent of the potentially confounding effects of respondents' demographic and ideological characteristics, we regressed all endogenous variables on age, gender, educational attainment, income, political conservatism, and SDO.

Table 1. Endorsement of Presidential Candidates.

Candidate	Respondents Endorsing	Percentage of Endorsing (%)
Donald Trump	341	19.73
Hilary Clinton	276	15.97
Bernie Sanders	220	12.73
Ted Cruz	111	6.42
Marco Rubio	104	6.02
John Kasich	98	5.67
Ben Carson	74	4.28
Jeb Bush	43	2.49
Don't know/undecided	418	24.19
A different candidate	35	2.03
No response	8	0.46
Trump	341	19.83
Not Trump	1,379	80.17

In the second stage of analysis, we modified our original SEM to test whether poor economic conditions accentuate the overall diversity–threat relationship (Quillian, 1996). Given our model, there are two ways in which this could occur. First, in line with theoretical considerations outlined previously, poor economic conditions could make diversity more threatening—that is, magnify the direct path from diversity to threat. Second, poor economic conditions might attenuate the degree to which intergroup contact is associated with lower threat either by weakening the positive link between diversity and contact or the negative link between contact and threat. To test the first of these possibilities, we regressed group threat on two additional variables—namely, the White unemployment rate and the interaction between White unemployment and neighborhood non-White percentage. To test the second possibility, we made a pair of modifications to the SEM: (a) regressing intergroup contact on the White unemployment rate and the White Unemployment \times Non-White Percentage interaction and (b) regressing group threat on White unemployment and the interaction between White unemployment and intergroup contact.¹

Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the number of respondents endorsing each presidential candidate, and Table 2 displays means and standard deviations (*SDs*) of, and bivariate correlations between, the modeled variables. SEMs were estimated using Mplus version 7.2 software (Muthén & Muthén, 2015). Twenty-four respondents were excluded from the analysis due to insufficient data. A robust weighted least-squares estimator was selected and probit regression used to test effects on the binary Trump support variable.

Overall, our model predicting Trump support offered a good fit to the data (RMSEA = .029, 90% confidence interval [.024, .35], CFI = .97, TLI = .95). Standardized estimates for this model are summarized in Figure 1.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations Between Modeled Variables.

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Trump support	0.20	0.40	—											
2. Group threat	2.26	1.00	.21***	—										
3. White identification	2.72	1.00	.18***	.31***	—									
4. Intergroup contact	3.05	0.95	-.05*	-.20***	-.11***	—								
5. Non-White percentage	24.66	21.33	.02	.00	.09***	.29***	—							
6. White unemployment	7.48	4.41	.06*	.04†	.02	-.01	.16***	—						
7. Age (years)	55.33	16.74	.00	.00	.11***	-.11***	.00	.03	—					
8. Gender	1.49	0.50	-.08**	-.05*	-.03	-.02	-.01	-.05*	.03	—				
9. Income	12.42	4.24	-.05*	-.17***	-.10***	.20***	.00	-.19***	-.08**	-.06*	—			
10. Education	10.68	1.75	-.17***	-.26***	-.15***	.24***	.05*	-.13***	-.13***	-.02	.42***	—		
11. Conservatism	4.28	1.40	.20***	.16***	.10***	-.10***	-.05*	.00	.08**	-.04†	-.04	-.18***	—	
12. Social dominance	2.53	0.66	.18***	.34***	.14***	-.09***	.01	.00	-.05*	-.10***	-.01	-.11***	.39***	—

Note. Gender is coded as 0 = male and 1 = female. SD = standard deviation.
 † $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

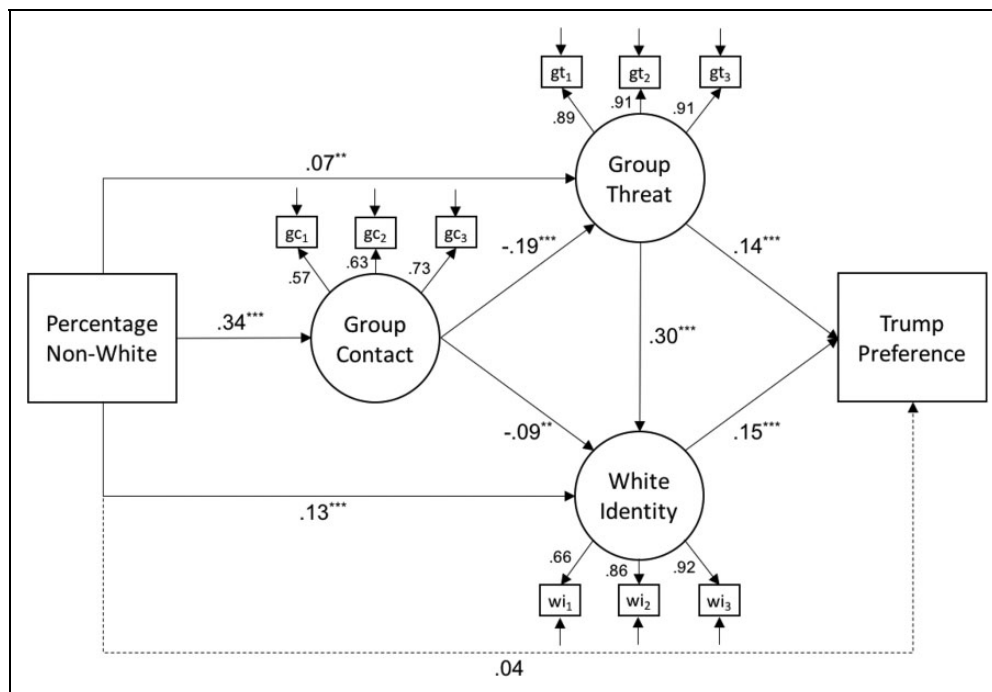


Figure 1. Structural equation model of White support for Donald Trump’s presidential candidacy. Coefficients reflect standardized estimates. Control variables not shown. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Proximal Predictors of Trump Support

The results of this SEM illuminate proximal predictors of support for Donald Trump’s presidential candidacy. Both group threat and White identification constituted independent predictors of Trump support.

Group threat. Trump support was positively associated with the belief that Whites are engaged in competition with Blacks, Latinos, and Asians ($\beta = .14, p < .001$). This finding is consistent with work suggesting that Whites who perceive threats to their group’s status are the most likely to support right-wing political policies and movements (Bobo, 1983; Willer, Feinberg, & Wetts, 2016). More specifically, the connection

between threat perceptions and support for Trump resonates with Trump’s repeated claims that racial, ethnic, and religious minorities endanger citizens’ economic and physical well-being (e.g., Beinart, 2017; Finnegan, 2016; Shih, 2017).

White identification. Identification with the White racial in-group emerged as another proximal predictor of Trump support ($\beta = .15, p < .001$). This pattern echoes previous work indicating that Whites’ endorsement of right-wing political positions covaries with their level of White identification (Lowery et al., 2006). Moreover, the Trump campaign drew significant support from the “alt-right,” a loose network of White nationalists and their sympathizers (Altman, 2016), corroborating suspicions that

Trump is an “ethno-nationalist” politician attractive to highly identified Whites (see Goldberg, 2016). Indeed, given that people frequently (if implicitly) blur the distinction between *American* and *White* (Devos & Banaji, 2005), Trump’s pledge to act on behalf of “America first” (Horsley, 2017) may function as a coded appeal, or “dog whistle” (Haney-López, 2014), to those high in White racial identification.

Group threat and White identification function in concert to predict support for Donald Trump. Beyond its direct association with support for Trump, group threat corresponds with greater Trump support indirectly, through its association with White identification ($\beta = .30, p < .001$). This finding is consistent with the notion that perceptions of group conflict accentuate group identity (Branscombe, Ellemers, et al., 1999; Branscombe, Schmitt, et al., 1999) to potent political effect (Schmid & Muldoon, 2015).

Diversity and Proximal Predictors of Trump Support

Our model also elucidates how ethno-racial diversity relates to White Americans’ support for Trump. The SEM suggests that both proximal predictors of Trump support—group threat and White identification—are shaped by the racial and ethnic makeup of White respondents’ neighborhoods.

Diversity and group threat. Replicating previous work (Fossett & Kiecolt, 1989; Giles & Evans, 1985; Pettigrew et al., 2010), the presence of large racial and ethnic minority populations in respondents’ neighborhoods was directly linked to greater perceptions of group threat ($\beta = .07, p = .003$). This pattern held while controlling for individual dispositions, such as SDO (Ho et al., 2015; Pratto et al., 2000) and political conservatism (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003), making it unlikely that the link between racial diversity and threat reflects ideological sorting processes (e.g., Enos, 2016). Moreover, the significant indirect path from neighborhood diversity to Trump support, via threat ($\beta = .01, p = .018$), suggests that diverse contexts have the potential to elicit group threat, with important political consequences.

Diversity and White identification. Net of respondents’ demographic and ideological characteristics, we also observed a direct association between neighborhood racial diversity and respondents’ levels of White identification ($\beta = .13, p < .001$). This finding replicates previous work (Knowles et al., 2014; Knowles & Peng, 2005) and likely reflects the fact that exposure to a large out-group population may increase the salience of one’s in-group identity (McGuire et al., 1978). Moreover, we observe an indirect path from neighborhood diversity to Trump support via White racial identification—suggesting that diversity, by fostering high levels of racial identification, may have encouraged some Whites to support Trump ($\beta = .02, p = .001$).

The Interplay Between Diversity and Contact

Thus far, our analyses reveal that living in racially and ethnically diverse contexts predicts greater group threat and

racial identification among Whites. However, diverse contexts also provide opportunities for contact with members of ethno-racial out-groups, which is typically associated with lower levels of threat and identification (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Verkuyten et al., 2010). In line with this body of work, our data reveal a positive relationship between neighborhood diversity and Whites’ frequency of cross-group interactions ($\beta = .34, p < .001$).

Studies from several European countries have shown that intergroup threat and contact processes work in parallel, such that exposure to a large out-group population places both upward and downward pressure on threat perceptions (Pettigrew et al., 2010; Schlueter & Wagner, 2008; Schmid et al., 2014; Stein, Post, & Rinden, 2000). The present study replicates this work in showing that greater exposure to racial and ethnic minorities is linked to greater threat through a direct pathway ($\beta = .07, p = .003$) while also linked indirectly through an association with greater intergroup contact ($\beta = -.06, p < .001$). To our knowledge, our work is the first to demonstrate these dual pathways involving racial context and threat in a nationally representative sample of White Americans.

Mirroring these dual processes in relation to group threat, racial context also appears to have both direct and indirect links to Trump support. As noted previously, greater neighborhood diversity is associated with a greater sense of group threat, and greater group threat predicts more Trump support. However, this indirect route from neighborhood diversity to Trump support is diluted by the pathway through intergroup contact: Insofar as neighborhood diversity predicts greater contact, which is associated with lower threat, living in diverse neighborhoods predicts *less* Trump support ($\beta = -.01, p = .001$). This finding suggests that, although recognition of the increasing racial and ethnic diversity of the United States can enhance Whites’ affinity for right-wing politics (Craig & Richeson, 2014a, 2014b; Major et al., 2016), the effects of demographic diversification per se are more complex. While some Whites may lean toward the political right due to the unmediated effects of diversity on threat, others may lean toward more inclusive and progressive political stances as they take advantage of newfound opportunities for contact.

As noted earlier, existing theory and research suggest that intergroup contact can lead to deprovincialization—a process by which individuals come to appreciate the value of other cultures and distance themselves psychologically from an exclusive focus on the in-group (Pettigrew, 1997). Consistent with this work, intergroup contact has been shown to predict lower levels of in-group identification among members of the racial majority group (Verkuyten et al., 2010). An analogous pattern is observed in the present data: Residing in more racially and ethnically diverse neighborhoods predicts greater intergroup contact, and greater intergroup contact predicts lower levels of White identification; these links comprise significant and negative indirect paths from racial diversity to White racial identification ($\beta = -.03, p = .007$) and Trump support ($\beta = -.005, p = .022$). Thus, just as intergroup contact offsets the tendency for neighborhood diversity to foster perceptions of

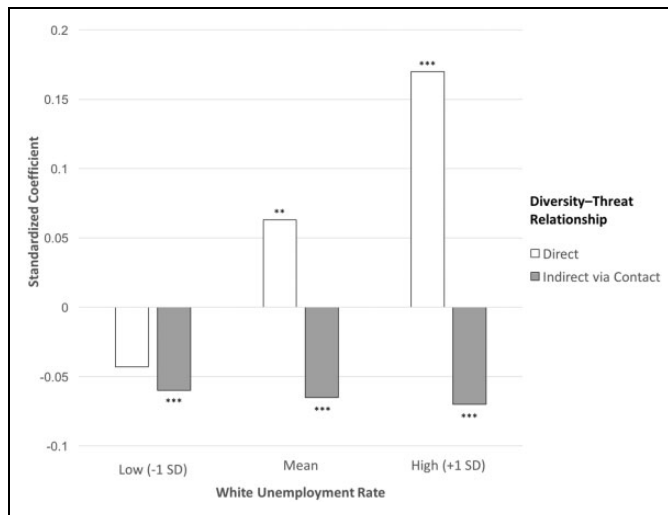


Figure 2. White unemployment rate as a moderator of the relationship between diversity and threat. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

group threat, it also counteracts the tendency of neighborhood diversity to strengthen White identification.

Diversity Across Economic Contexts

In the second stage of our statistical analysis, we modified our original SEM to test whether the White unemployment rate moderated the direct path from neighborhood diversity to group threat or either path composing the indirect route from neighborhood diversity to group threat via intergroup contact. Figure 2 illustrates White unemployment rate as a moderator of the direct and indirect pathways from neighborhood diversity to group threat. Only the interactive effect of neighborhood diversity and White unemployment on group threat was significant ($\beta = .05, p = .01$), indicating that the direct link between diversity and threat is strongest in areas with higher rates of White unemployment. Simple effects testing revealed that, at a high rate of White unemployment (i.e., at 1 *SD* above the mean or 11.9%), the relationship between neighborhood diversity and group threat was positive and strong ($\beta = .17, p < .001$). At low rates of White unemployment (i.e., at 1 *SD* below the mean or 3.1%), the neighborhood diversity–group threat association was no longer significant ($\beta = -.04, p = .46$). The fact that the White unemployment rate failed to moderate the indirect pathway from diversity to threat suggests that intergroup contact effects are stable across weak and strong economic conditions.

At high rates of White unemployment, the total effect of neighborhood diversity on group threat—an index of the balance between contact and threat processes—was significant and positive ($\beta = .10, p = .023$), indicating the primacy of the threat pattern. In contrast, at low rates of White unemployment, the total effect of neighborhood diversity on group threat was significant and negative ($\beta = -.10, p = .042$), indicating the primacy of the contact pattern.

Causal Interpretations

While the theoretical claims we sought to test in the present work are causal in nature, our data are unavoidably correlational. Nonetheless, we believe that a likely explanation for the pattern of associations in our model (see Figure 1) is that racial and economic features of the social context affect Whites' attitudes and identities—which in turn influence support for Donald Trump. Several considerations give us confidence in this interpretation.

It could be argued that the causal arrows from neighborhood diversity to group threat and White identification should be reversed, with Whites sorting into particular neighborhoods as a function of threat perceptions and identities. For example, threatened and highly identified Whites might plausibly select into neighborhoods low in racial and ethnic diversity. However, given that exposure to diversity is *positively* associated with threat and identification, such a process appears unlikely here.

The paths from neighborhood diversity to group threat and White identification could also be spurious reflections of a common “third cause”—namely, respondents' socioeconomic status. Following Enos (2016), low-income Whites might be susceptible to high levels of threat and identification *and* be compelled by economic necessity to reside in ethnically diverse areas. This, too, appears unlikely: Although lower income did predict greater group threat and White identification (see Table 2), income did not correlate with neighborhood diversity.

Concerning the associations between group threat and racial identification and support for Trump, we believe that alternative interpretations are plausible. Our characterization of these associations—that threat and identification affect Trump support—gains credence from experimental work tracing Whites' political and policy preferences to group threat (Enos, 2016) and White identification (Lowery et al., 2006). Nevertheless, it could simultaneously be the case that becoming a Trump supporter increases the likelihood of exposure to rhetoric that encourages threat and racial identification; we would, in fact, conjecture that this is the case (see Achen & Bartels, 2016; Green, Glaser, & Rich, 1998; Knowles, Lowery, Shulman, & Schaumberg, 2013). In a domain as complex as politics, we suspect that many of the relevant processes are likely to influence and reinforce one another.

Conclusion

The present research suggests that the racial and economic contexts in which White Americans live play important roles in shaping their perceptions of group threat, sense of White identity, and support for Trump. On the one hand, Whites' exposure to racial and ethnic diversity predicts greater threat and White identification, both of which are associated with greater support for Trump. On the other hand, racially and ethnically diverse contexts afford White people with opportunities for intergroup contact, which is associated with less threat, weaker White identification, and less support for Trump.

Our results also suggest that group-level economic conditions are critical considerations for understanding the links between neighborhood diversity, group threat, and Trump support. Where Whites are struggling economically, the direct effect of neighborhood diversity on threat overpowers the contact–threat association. Where Whites are faring well economically, neighborhood diversity is not directly linked to greater threat—thereby allowing the contact–threat association to predict significantly less threat and Trump support. Together, our findings offer a nuanced reconciliation of rival accounts regarding the role of racial and ethnic diversity in shaping intergroup relations and political attitudes. More broadly, the present work suggests that reaping the potential benefits of diversity is inextricably linked to the economic conditions that surround relations between racial and ethnic groups.

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Note

1. We did not have theoretical reasons to believe that the White unemployment rate would moderate other links in the structural equation model. Nonetheless, as an exploratory step, we modified the model such that all the paths depicted in Figure 1 were conditioned on White unemployment. These added effects did not approach statistical significance and were thus omitted from the model whose results are described herein.

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