

Why They Vote Differently: White Identity, Racial Resentment, and the Electoral Behavior of White Working-Class Voters in North America¹

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Abstract:

White working-class (WWC) voters across the Midwest have shifted to Trump. Yet, their counterparts in Ontario remain much more supportive of left-wing parties. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, this paper investigates the degree to which this comparative divergence can be explained by the differential importance of race, a prominent explanation for the rise of Trump in the U.S. that has not been widely examined in Canada. This paper finds that, while racial attitudes and identity have a surprisingly strong connection with right-wing politics in Canada, the greater significance of race as a political factor in the United States helps explain the divergence of the white working-class vote. Qualitative case studies illustrate starkly different racial contexts in a pair of cross-border working-class communities. Experimental evidence shows that non-white candidates receive less support from American WWC voters. Survey data reveals that racial resentment and white identity have greater associations with right-wing voting among Americans.

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Introduction

Separated by the Detroit River, just over one mile apart, are a pair of working-class areas that lie at the heart of the North American auto industry. To the north, making up a prominent part of Metro Detroit and southeast Michigan, is Macomb County. To the south, one of the most southern parts of Canada, is the city of Windsor, Ontario.² These cross-border areas have shared a great deal in common, including economic fates similarly linked to the health of the auto industry, parallel histories of labor activism, overlapping media markets, and even shared cultural ties based on their geographic proximity.³ However, a critical difference that has emerged between these two areas, despite their similarities, is how they vote. In the 2016 election, like other white working-class areas across the American Midwest, Macomb County swung significantly to Trump and the Republican Party. Since then, in both 2020 and 2024, Trump has won the majority of Macomb voters and white working-class support across the Midwest. But by contrast, in recent Canadian federal elections, voters across the border in Windsor, like other white working-class areas in the province of Ontario, have remained decidedly supportive of either the center-left Liberal Party or the social-democratic New Democratic Party (NDP).⁴

A great deal of resources has been expended to try to understand how Trump could be elected. Much of this focus has been directed to the allegiances of American white working-class voters, a group that has been gradually moving to the right (Carnes & Lupu 2021), has shifted further red under Trump (Ternullo 2024), and continued to support Republicans in 2024 (Press 2024). There has been extensive research covering the broader phenomenon of white working-class electoral support for right-wing parties, which has focused on Trump specifically and has

² Windsor is one of the few places in Canada where you look north into the United States.

³ See Table A.1 in the Appendix for background demographics of the two areas.

⁴ See Section A2 in the Appendix for voting figures in Windsor and Macomb County.

also connected his rise to other candidates and parties across Europe (Margalit 2019). Yet, one prominent counterexample to the rightward shift of white working-class voters, which has largely been omitted by comparative research, is Canada. While Trump has won large numbers of white working-class voters in the American Midwest, the same group of voters across the border in the province of Ontario have remained much more supportive of left-wing parties.

The lack of scholarly attention to white working-class voting in Canada represents a missed opportunity, coming with a cost of a better understanding of the rise of Trump in the United States and the realignment of white working-class Americans to the Republican Party. Most American research tends to avoid efforts at comparison. Canada and the United States are, of course, different in important ways. But while this paper focuses on explaining the differences between the two countries, it is the extent of their similarities that make the two ideal for comparison. As Lipset (1990) writes: “knowledge of Canada and the United States is the best way to gain insight into the other North American country...they are probably as alike as any other two peoples on earth.” This paper leverages the similarities of white working-class voters in the American Midwest and the province of Ontario to try to better understand their differences.

Scholarship has long argued that race is a defining cleavage in American politics (Dawson 1994). For white Americans, there is an extensive literature on how racial attitudes and racial identity are important determinants of political behavior (Gilens 1999; Kinder & Sanders 1996; Mendelberg 2001). Scholarship has directly connected race, racial attitudes, and identity politics in the United States to the rise of Trump. Indeed, perhaps the primary explanation for rising levels of support for Trump among white working-class Americans is the importance of these factors (Hooghe & Dassonneville 2018; Jardina 2019; Mutz 2018; Sides et al. 2018). But this work has been missing a counterfactual case. If race, white identity, and racial resentment were less

politically salient, would there be less firm ground for right-wing candidates among white working-class voters?

Behavioral scholarship in Canada has centered on several major factors to explain national voting patterns and partisanship over time. Yet, the importance of racial identity and racial attitudes have traditionally not received significant attention across Canadian research (Thompson 2008). More recent work has begun to look more closely at the ways in which racial attitudes affect Canadian political behavior. But there remains limited work analyzing how the political importance of racial attitudes in Canada compare to the United States, and no work that has analyzed how this might be a key difference between white working-class voters. This paper takes up this comparison, examining the extent to which differences in racial politics, white identity, and racial resentment might help explain differential voting patterns between white working-class voters from Ontario and the American Midwest. Research has shown how politically important race continues to be in the United States, and how important it has been for Trump's support specifically, but we know little about how similar or different the context is just across the border. Are racial differences less politically significant in Canada, and if so, does this extend to white working-class voters and how they make their political choices compared to American white working-class voters?

This project's empirical analysis employs a mixed-methods approach, leveraging the strengths of observational, experimental, and qualitative evidence to produce more sound inferences. Existing survey data comes from the American National Election Study (ANES) and the Canadian Election Study (CES), both of which are used to delineate voting patterns in the subsequent section. Original quantitative data for this project comes from a cross-sectional public

opinion survey of Americans and Canadians.⁵ The survey was fielded to over 7,000 respondents from Canada and the United States from December 2022 to January 2023.⁶ The sample includes a nationally representative selection of 2,000 Americans and 2,000 Canadians, as well as a targeted oversample of white working-class respondents, who live in non-rural areas, in either Ontario or the American Midwest ($n > 1,500$ from each country).⁷ Helpfully, this large sample of white working-class respondents allows for an analysis of a distinct and usually hard-to-reach segment of the population.

Embedded in the survey, I also examine a novel candidate-choice conjoint experiment that measures white working-class preferences in response to experimental stimuli.⁸ The advantage of a conjoint experiment in this context is that it models multi-dimensional decision-making and allows for several treatments to be experimentally manipulated simultaneously, including socially sensitive topics such as a candidate's race (Bansak et al. 2021).

To account for what can be missed by purely quantitative work, I also conducted qualitative fieldwork in paired case studies of Windsor, Ontario and Macomb County, Michigan, which includes evidence collected from over 60 semi-structured interviews.⁹ As Cramer argued in her seminal work (2012; 2016), research on public opinion and behavior should spend more time actually listening to the public. Heeding this call, this paper takes seriously how residents of American and Canadian working-class communities understand, discuss, and make their political

⁵ Survey respondents were recruited by Leger, a Canadian-based firm hired to conduct the online survey.

⁶ To maximize comparability, the wording of survey questions was virtually identical. Only country-specific names or spellings were different.

⁷ In this paper, working class is defined as those with less than a four-year college degree.

⁸ The conjoint experiment was pre-registered at OSF prior to being fielded:

https://osf.io/x7k8a/?view_only=6d9fca1c958f47ff8a628cdbfbce3a76

⁹ I selected these two working-class areas as case studies based on the inferential logic of the most similar method (Seawright & Gerring 2008).

choices, using a local comparison as illustrative of broader patterns that are then investigated thoroughly with quantitative data.

With evidence from the qualitative case studies, this paper first finds that racial attitudes and race-based social divisions are much more salient in Macomb County relative to Windsor. This paper illustrates how there is a considerable difference in the salience of race and racial attitudes locally between these two working-class communities. Racial intolerance and racial bias are not only present in Michigan but might be increasing and becoming more evident on job sites across Metro Detroit. By contrast, the people I spoke to in Windsor, while showing an awareness that the community has not been immune to instances of racism and intolerance, is a more accepting place for ethnic minorities. Interviews with people on both sides of the Detroit River illustrate how the historical legacy of racial division in Metro Detroit still influences the attitudes and behaviors of working-class voters in Macomb County.

Confirming the broader importance of these differences for electoral behavior, experimental evidence shows that non-white political candidates receive a greater electoral penalty, relative to white candidates, from American white working-class voters. Midwestern white working-class voters penalize the vote share of Asian candidates and Hispanic/Latino candidates, whereas white working-class voters from Ontario only penalize Asian candidates and by a smaller margin than their American counterparts. The race of candidates has a greater causal effect on vote share among white working-class voters from the Midwest. Going further, utilizing the original survey data, multiple regression analysis reveals that racial resentment and white identity are strongly correlated with right-wing voting in both countries, but the magnitude of these effects is considerably larger for white working-class voters from the Midwest.

Racial attitudes and white identity drive greater support for the Republican Party among American white working-class voters, but they are not as significant political factors among white working-class voters from Ontario. This difference is a major reason why the white working class is voting differently between Ontario and the Midwest. However, Canadian scholars going forward should also not turn a blind eye to the political importance of white identity and racial attitudes. Racial resentment and white identity are still linked with right-wing voting among white working-class voters from Ontario, just not to the same degree as those from the Midwest.

Electoral Divergence

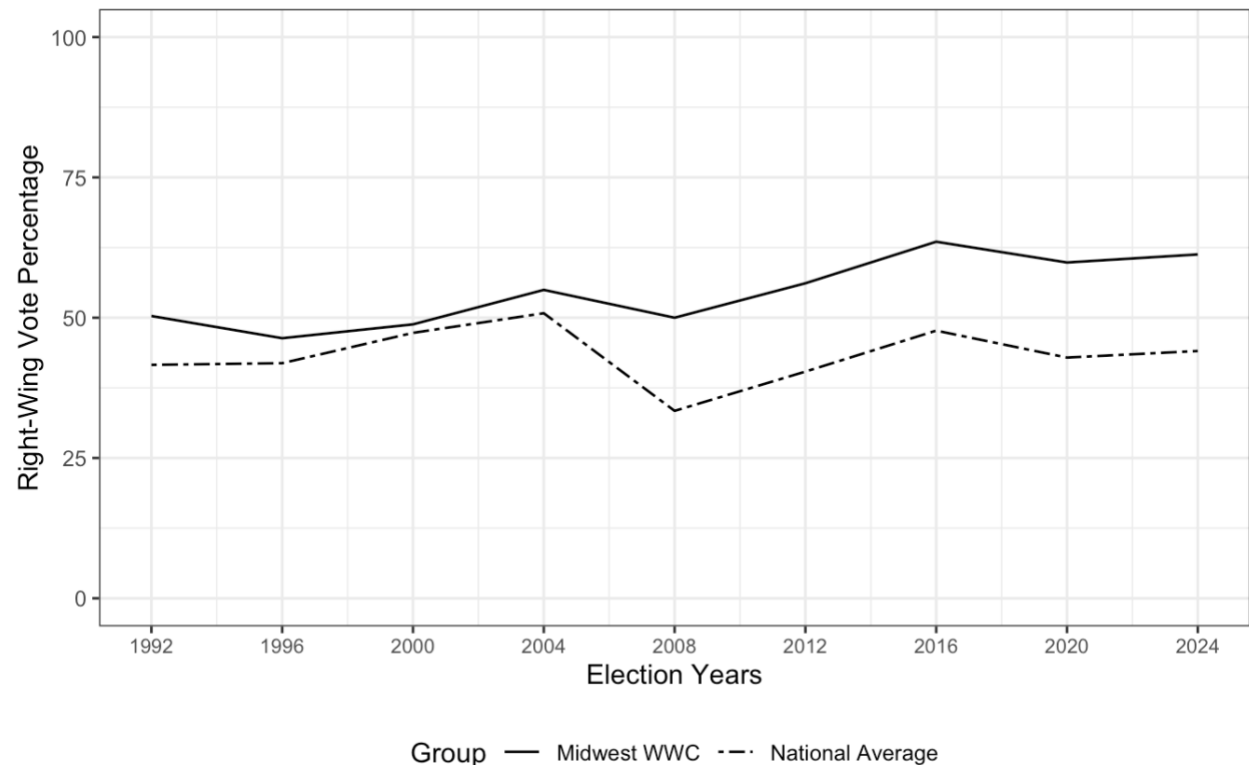
To set the scope of the comparative puzzle, this section utilizes ANES and CES data to detail the contrasts in electoral behavior of white working-class voters in Ontario and the American Midwest.¹⁰ With ANES data, Figure 1 plots the percentage support for Republican presidential candidates from 1992 to 2024 among white working-class Midwesterners relative to the national average in the United States, displaying a pattern that is well documented across American politics research (Carnes & Lupu 2021; Turney et al. 2017).

From 1992 to 2004, white working-class Midwesterners were closely aligned to the national average level of support for Republicans. In 2008, however, with the arrival of Barack Obama's candidacy, a significant gap emerged. While the national vote for McCain plummeted, support among white working-class Midwesterners remained split between the two candidates. In 2012, a considerable majority of these voters supported the Republican party (56.14%) and, in 2016, support for the Republican Party among white working-class Midwesterners peaked (63.54%). While support declined somewhat in 2020, Trump maintained his electoral advantage among this group (59.84%) and significantly outperformed his average level of support across the

¹⁰ The appendix (section A2) shows the divergent voting patterns in Windsor and Macomb County.

country. In 2024, Trump did even better as he carried over 61 percent of Midwestern white working-class voters.

Figure 1: American Midwest WWC vs. National Right-Wing Vote (1992-2024)

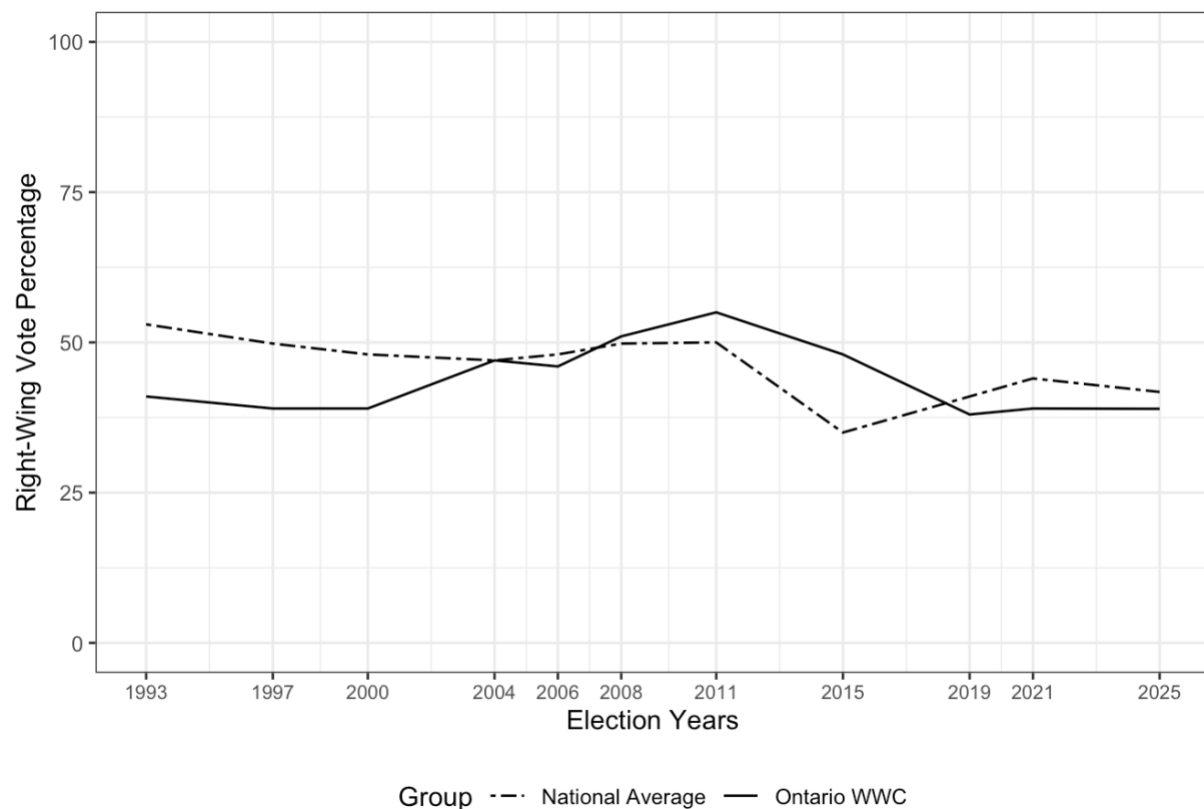


Source: ANES 1992-2024 (stated vote choice, post-election). Sample size for Midwest WWC ranges from a low of $N = 131$ (in 2004) to a high of $N = 655$ (in 2020). Note: Vote percentage based on two-party share of presidential vote. Midwest WWC Respondents = white, no four-year college degree who reside in a Midwestern state (IA, IL, IN, KS, MI, MN, MO, ND, NE, OH, SD, WI)

By contrast, white working-class voters in Ontario have remained more supportive of left-wing parties. Utilizing CES data from 1993 to 2025, Figure 2 shows the national average vote share of Canadian right-wing parties and the level of support that these parties received from white working-class respondents from Ontario. From 1993 to 2006, the majority of white working-class voters from Ontario supported left-wing parties. Notably, left-wing support dropped to 48 percent in the 2008 election and 44 percent in the 2011 election. But an important short-term factor in these elections was the popularity of Liberal Party leaders. Stéphane Dion and Michael Ignatieff, the respective Liberal leaders in 2008 and 2011, had particularly low party-leader approval ratings

and at times struggled to connect with Canadian voters (Ljunggren 2008; Sibonney 2011). Negative sentiments towards these leaders in part drove the considerable decline in Liberal support across the country (Bittner 2018; Gidengil et al. 2012).

Figure 2: Ontario WWC Vs. National Right-Wing Vote (1993-2025)



Source: CES 1993-2025 (stated vote intention, pre-election). Sample size for Ontario WWC ranges from a low of N = 194 (in 1993) to a high of N = 3,722 (in 2019). Note: ON WWC respondents = white, no four-year college degree. Right-wing parties = Conservative, PPC, Bloc, Alliance, PC, Reform.

Importantly, support for left-wing parties quickly rebounded among Ontario white working-class voters. From 2015 to 2025, this voting bloc significantly favored left-wing parties. In the 2019 election, 62 percent of white working-class survey respondents from Ontario favored parties on the left. This is notable given that 2019 was the first year that a far-right party, the People's Party of Canada, was on the ballot. Similarly, in 2021, 61 percent of white working-class voters in Ontario supported left-wing parties. This result is again significant considering that the Conservative Party leader, Erin O'Toole, employed populist appeals to working-class voters on

the campaign trail (Savage & Black 2020). In 2025, a considerable majority of white working-class Ontarians again opted for left-wing parties over the political right.

While white working-class voters shifted to the right in the Midwest, white working-class voters have remained much more supportive of left-wing parties in Ontario. In the 2019, 2021, and 2025 Canadian federal elections, roughly 40 percent of white working-class voters from Ontario favored right-wing parties. By contrast, in the American Midwest, roughly 60 percent of white working-class voters supported Trump in 2016, 2020, and 2024. This paper seeks to answer the question of why this divergence emerged, testing the comparative importance of race, white identity, and racial resentment.

Scholarship on Race and Vote Choice Across the Canada-U.S. Border

It has long been argued that American politics is group centric, and that race is one of the defining social cleavages separating groups in the United States (Mendelberg 2001; Nelson & Kinder 1996; Sides et al. 2018; Sidanius & Pratto 2001). Beyond explicit racism, Kinder and Sanders (1996) argued that some white Americans are prone to believe that Black Americans are lazy and have received too much public support (Kinder & Sanders 1996). This measure of racial resentment, long replicated across American scholarship, shapes a wide array of political opinions and behavior among white voters. The importance of race, racial resentment, and racial identity in American politics has not declined over time, and if anything has become more important in the Trump era. Mason (2018) details how Americans have become increasingly sorted based on their race or social identity into affiliation with a political party. Valentino et al. (2018) show that regardless of whether racial rhetoric is implicit or explicit, the political importance of racial attitudes is large and stable in American politics. Reny et al. (2019) find that tolerance for explicit anti-minority appeals among white people in the United States has increased considerably.

Stephens-Dougan (2016) shows that white politicians receive lower levels of electoral support from white Americans when pictured with a Black person, even if that Black person is portrayed in a positive way.

Scholarship has directly connected racial attitudes and identity in the United States to the electoral rise of Trump. Sides et al. (2018), in analyzing Trump's 2016 victory, argue that the decisive issue was identity. They argue that how Americans felt about immigration, Black people, Muslim people, and the general idea of white Americans being left behind strongly predicted their vote in 2016 (Sides et al. 2018). Americans who held racial grievances were the group with the highest level of support for Trump in 2016 (Sides et al. 2018). Behind these findings, Tesler (2012) found that Obama's presidency primed racial attitudes and considerations in the minds of white voters, which thereby caused the defection of those with racially conservative attitudes to the Republicans following the 2008 presidential election (Tesler 2012). Hooghe and Dassonneville (2018) argue that the most compelling factors for explaining a vote for Trump are racial resentment and anti-immigrant sentiment.

Arguing against more economic-based explanations, Mutz (2018) concludes that the key issues in the 2016 election were immigration, race and how both issues potentially threatened white Americans' perceptions of their dominant group status. Hopkins (2021) shows that anti-Black racial resentment was more predictive of 2016 vote choice than anti-Latino resentment and views on immigration. Jardina (2019) contends that the shift of white voters to the Republican party is best explained by the rising salience of white racial identity. According to Jardina (2019), the perceived dominance of white people has come under threat through immigration, the rising proportion of ethnic minorities in the population, and Obama's presidency. In response to these status threats, white people have grown more attached to their racial identity, and through appeals

to white identity, such as labelling Latino immigrants as criminal threats, Trump has been able to capture the support of many white voters (Jardina 2019).

In Canada, more recent scholarship is emerging on race and politics. Gidengil and her colleagues noted that, throughout the 2000s, those who favored doing less for minorities were more inclined to support right-wing parties, while those who favored doing more for minorities were more supportive of the NDP (Gidengil et al. 2012). But the authors show that this attitudinal split has only modest implications for party vote share (Gidengil et al. 2012). Besco shows that ethnic minority candidates in Canada experience electoral discrimination when they run as members of right-wing parties, but interestingly not when they run as members of left-wing parties (Besco 2020). Hale finds that colder feelings towards ethnic minorities are associated with a lower likelihood of supporting the NDP (Hale 2023). Bouchard (2021) found that Jagmeet Singh's candidacy, the south Asian former leader of the federal NDP, was more negatively perceived in Quebec but that it also led to an increase in affinity-voting for the NDP.

Beauvais and Stolle (2022) measure white Canadians attachment to their racial in-group, and resentment towards Indigenous Canadians. The authors find that higher levels of white identity among Canadians increases support for public pensions, while higher levels of anti-Indigenous resentment lowers support for welfare policies (Beauvais & Stolle 2022). Connecting this to vote choice, Beauvais and Stolle show how white identity and anti-Indigenous, in the 2019 Canadian federal election, are associated with higher support for the Conservative Party (Beauvais & Stolle 2022). Lachance and Beauvais (2024) show how feeling thermometer scores for different groups of people, including ethnic minorities, are becoming more important determinants of right-wing voting in Canada. In terms of comparative work, Harell et al. (2016) find that opposition to helping

an Indigenous person was higher in Canada than opposition to helping a Black person in the United States.

However, Canadian scholarship on the political importance of racial attitudes and identity still has a long way to go (Krashinsky 2025; Thompson 2008). There remains limited work analyzing how the political importance of racial attitudes in Canada compared to the United States, and no work that has analyzed how this might be a key difference between white working-class voters, despite the fact that it is a key explanation for the rise of Trump. This paper poses the question of whether differences in the importance of race, racial resentment, and white identity help to explain the differential voting patterns of white working-class voters in Canada and the United States.

Case Study Evidence: The Comparative Salience of Race

From May 2022 to September 2023, I conducted 64 semi-structured interviews that ranged in length from 1 to 3 hours with people on both sides of the Detroit River. These interviews were done over the phone, on Zoom, or in-person at various bars, cafes, and local union halls across the area. Interview subjects were recruited by leveraging initial connections, cold contacting individuals, and through a snowball sampling method with the goal of balancing perspectives across the communities (Cramer 2016; Ternullo 2024). To gain insights on the working-class background and dominant industry of Windsor and Macomb County, I intentionally sought to interview individuals who worked in the auto industry. The resulting purposive sample of interviewees includes local political leaders, union leaders, union members, political consultants/lobbyists, and other community members. The substantive focus of these interviews was explaining political behavior and group-based politics in Macomb County and Windsor.

In Macomb County, a predominantly white working-class area that borders downtown Detroit, racial tension is far from an artifact of history. It is still reflected in the attitudes, perceptions, and everyday lives of the individuals that I interviewed. Jaren Garza is a third-generation UAW member with Mexican heritage. He believes that racial tension has never decreased in the Metro Detroit area, and that it still motivates how some people vote.

“This town is pretty segregated, man. Still to this day in my eyes. I’m not from here, but it’s got a long history with racism as far as the city of Detroit and how the city is viewed. I’ve met guys up at rock shows who have never been to the city, they just refuse to go to the city. Somebody they know got shot down there and now they won’t go. There’s a lot of history here. There’s still a wall on the west-side of Detroit on 8 Mile that separates black and white neighborhoods. That’s wild to me that the thing is still standing.”

- Jaren Garza. UAW Local 160 Member. Warren, MI.

In many of the interviews I conducted across Metro Detroit, racial intolerance was highlighted as a pressing issue in the area. Nicole Didia is a white woman and a third-generation UAW member. In an interview, she pointedly stated that there is a clear negative bias against people of color in Macomb County and that this bias is evident even at auto plants.

“I would say Macomb County, where we’re at, we have a pretty bad bias against people of color. We’re having that situation at the plants now. It’s a big thing right now. Macomb County is pretty special for that. This county was built on the Big Three, it made these nice big suburbs with these pretty houses and the population was definitely more Caucasian when that all happened. So, there’s definitely a bias.”

- Nicole Didia. Vice President of UAW Local 2280. Sterling Heights, MI.

Darryl Nolen was born and raised in the city of Detroit and is a former UAW leader. He retired in 2020 and currently resides in Sterling Heights, a city in Macomb County. Since he moved to Macomb, he has noticed an uptick in the level of racism he sees and experiences as a Black person.

“It is 100 percent different in Macomb. It’s night and day. In my opinion, there’s more racism on this side of town than what I experienced in Wayne County.”

- Darryl Nolen. Retired UAW leader. Sterling Heights, MI.

On the other end of the spectrum, I also heard clear instances of resentment from some interviewees from Macomb. I spoke with a retired UAW member that spent over twenty-five-years working for Chrysler. This person asked to remain anonymous but discussed his attitudes towards racial equality and politics in Michigan. He insisted that white people in Michigan are now the target of unfair treatment and was an avid supporter of Donald Trump.

“Every time there’s a shooting where a white cop shoots a black guy, there’s a protest. But a white guy gets shot and nothing happens.”

- Retired UAW Local 961 Member. Macomb County, Michigan.

Many of the interviewees that I spoke with, who believed that race was an important issue that needed to be addressed in Metro Detroit, also underlined how they thought racial attitudes are likely predictors of Trump support. Rick Isaacson, a retired UAW leader, is one such example. In breaking down the support for Trump among UAW members in Macomb County, Isaacson argued that racist people are the most likely supporters and that this is motivated by a perceived threat against the white race in America.

“They see Trump as a white guy and thought white people are going to do okay if we elect Trump. When Obama got elected, that scared the piss out of them. The racists, that is. And there’s a shit load of them out there. I sometimes wonder if they see it as ‘we’re becoming extinct, and we got to do something about it’.”

- Rick Isaacson. Retired UAW Leader, former President of Local 540. Macomb County, MI.

In Windsor, the interviews I conducted painted a much different picture of race and racial intolerance in the working-class city. It is not the case that Windsor is an idyllic city uniquely immune to all forms of prejudice. People in Windsor are not simply turning a blind eye to an issue that affects many large communities in North America. However, the scale of the issue is considerably different relative to the American side of the border.

Two such interviews that spoke on the theme of racial divisions were active members of Unifor locals in Windsor, the union that represents autoworkers across Canada. Krysten Lawton

is a member of Unifor Local 200 and is a health and safety trainer at the Ford Assembly Plant in Windsor. J.P. is a member of Unifor Local 195 and a former employee of Syncreon, a recently closed automotive parts company. In contrast to Macomb, the people in Windsor that I spoke with maintained that intolerance towards non-white people is not a significant problem in the city.

"I personally don't see a ton of intolerance in this area, I don't see it as a major issue in Windsor. I honestly believe, especially in our work culture and where we work, that you can't get away with that."

- Krysten Lawton. Unifor Local 200 Member. Windsor, Ontario.

"I don't know if intolerance is a significant problem, I myself don't see it that much. I don't think that's me being naive and turning a blind eye. I have friends from all different countries on the map. I don't understand the whole mentality of hating someone based on how they look. If I dislike someone who is a different ethnicity than me, it's not a blanket statement for everyone from that group. If I don't like someone it's because he's an asshole. He is an asshole, but not the rest of them... I grew up playing sports. You don't get to pick your teammates. Regardless of what they look like or smell like, you're going to stick up for them."

- J.P. Unifor Local 195 Member. Windsor, Ontario.

Rob Mallen has worked for the Labourers local union in Windsor for over twenty years. I asked Mallen, who has been a lifelong resident of Windsor, whether he thought racial prejudice was a problem in the city or whether he ever saw instances of racism on construction sites across the area. His answer was a resounding: 'No'.

"No, I don't think we have a problem with intolerance. I don't hear that. You don't see reports of that in the news. With this being a blue-collar town, people are more understanding of people coming here wanting a better life. I bet the Americans you talk to answer that question very differently. It may only be a small border, but it's a big difference."

- Rob Mallen. Business Representative LiUNA Local 625. Winsor, ON.

This section presents only a small selection of quotes from the fieldwork that was conducted. But the inference from the interviews was clear: racial attitudes and racial divisions are more salient in Macomb County than they are in Windsor. Further supporting this qualitative finding, below I report the results of a difference-in-means analysis showing how white working-

class Midwesterners are more racially resentful and identify more strongly with their racial group compared to white working-class Ontarians. While the size of some of these differences are surprisingly modest, they fit the same pattern as the qualitative findings.

Table 1: Difference-in-Means WWC	American Mean (SE)	Canadian Mean (SE)	Difference (p-value)
Variables:			
White Racial Identity Index	.4571 (.005)	.4418 (.005)	.0153 (p=.0485)
White Racial Identity (Single Variable Measure)	.4155 (.008)	.3663 (.008)	.0492 (p=.0001)
Racial Resentment	.5348 (.007)	.4726 (.006)	.0622 (p<0.0001)
Feeling Thermometer: Whites	.7499 (.006)	.7550 (.005)	-.0051 (p=.4952)
Feeling Thermometer: Non-Whites*	.7196 (.005)	.7106 (.005)	.0090 (p=.2190)
Feeling Thermometer: Blacks	.6950 (.006)	.7142 (.005)	-.0192 (p=.0212)
Feeling Thermometer: Indigenous/Native Peoples	.7551 (.005)	.7057 (.006)	.0494 (p<.0001)
Feeling Thermometer: Asians	.7165 (.006)	.7051 (.005)	.0114 (p=.1591)
Feeling Thermometer: Hispanics	.7068 (.006)	.7126 (.005)	-.0058 (p=.4604)

Source: Original Survey Data (2023). Samples are non-rural, white voters without 4-year college degrees who reside in either Ontario (N > 1,500) or the U.S. Midwest (N > 1,500). Each variable has been recoded between 0-1 to improve comparability. Means are calculated and rounded to four decimal points. Standard errors are reported in brackets. *Mean for non-whites is the average across each non-white racial group.

Table 1 displays the results of a difference-in-means analysis of nine different measures of white racial identity and attitudes between the samples of white working-class Ontarians and Midwesterners. Each variable has been recoded between 0 and 1 to increase comparability. These variables include: the full white racial identity index, the single variable measure of white identity (“How important is being white to your identity?”), the full index measure of racial resentment, and feeling thermometer scores for different racial groups. The feeling thermometer for non-whites was calculated by averaging the scores respondents provided on each of the thermometers for non-

white groups of people (Black people, Indigenous/Native peoples, Asian people, and Hispanic/Latino people).

There are several inferences that can be drawn from Table 1. First, there is only a slight difference in terms of the full white racial identity index between the American and Canadian white working-class samples. On the single variable measure of white identity, the differences between the populations expand. White working-class respondents from Ontario on average say that being white is less important to their identity than those from the American Midwest (just under a .05 difference on a 0-1 scale), but the differences on the other measures of white identity are more modest. However, there is a considerable difference between the samples in terms of racial resentment. The white working-class American sample expressed a higher average level of racial resentment than the corresponding Canadian sample (a .06 difference on a 0-1 scale).

On average, white working-class Ontarians have slightly more positive/warm feelings about white people than their American counterparts. On the aggregated measure of racial affect towards non-white people, the sample of white working-class Ontarians express slightly more negative/colder feelings toward non-white people relative to the Midwest white working-class sample. While neither of these differences are statistically significant, and the magnitude of the difference is negligible, this is still a surprising finding. The feeling thermometers for each non-white group provides additional inferences on how white working-class Ontarians and Midwesterners compare. The white working-class sample of Americans expressed lower average feeling thermometer scores for both Black people and Hispanic people. While the Canadian white working-class sample displayed lower average feeling thermometer scores for Asian people and Indigenous people.

Experimental Evidence: Electoral Backlash to Non-White Candidates

This project's original quantitative design included a paired-profile, candidate-choice conjoint experiment that tested the extent to which a candidate's race influences vote choice among respondents.¹¹ The advantage of a conjoint experiment is that it allows researchers to assess the effects of multiple experimental treatments simultaneously and identify respondents' preferences within and across multiple tested dimensions (Bansak et al. 2021). Respondents were shown two side-by-side profiles of hypothetical political candidates and were asked to choose which candidate they would support.¹² The experiment provided six pieces of information about each candidate, including their party, race, gender, major endorsement received, occupation history, and their number one policy priority.

The setup of the conjoint experiment was identical for both American and Canadian respondents, yet some attribute levels were adjusted for country context. For instance, the party attribute could be Liberal, NDP, or Conservative for Canadians, and Democrat or Republican for Americans. The race attribute could be White, Black, Asian, or Indigenous for Canadians; and White, Black, Asian, or Hispanic/Latino for Americans.¹³ The gender attribute, major endorsement attribute, occupation attribute, and policy priority attribute had the exact same possible levels for both Americans and Canadians.¹⁴ The levels of each attribute were determined randomly with one important exception. To better replicate political conditions in each country, the levels of the policy priority attribute were constrained to certain political parties. Correspondingly, I created an interaction variable ("Party_Policy") for each possible combination of these treatments.

¹¹ The conjoint experiment was ordered randomly in the survey, such that there would be no systematic bias produced from any preceding survey questions. Respondents completed four iterations of the experiment, increasing statistical power (Bansak et al. 2021).

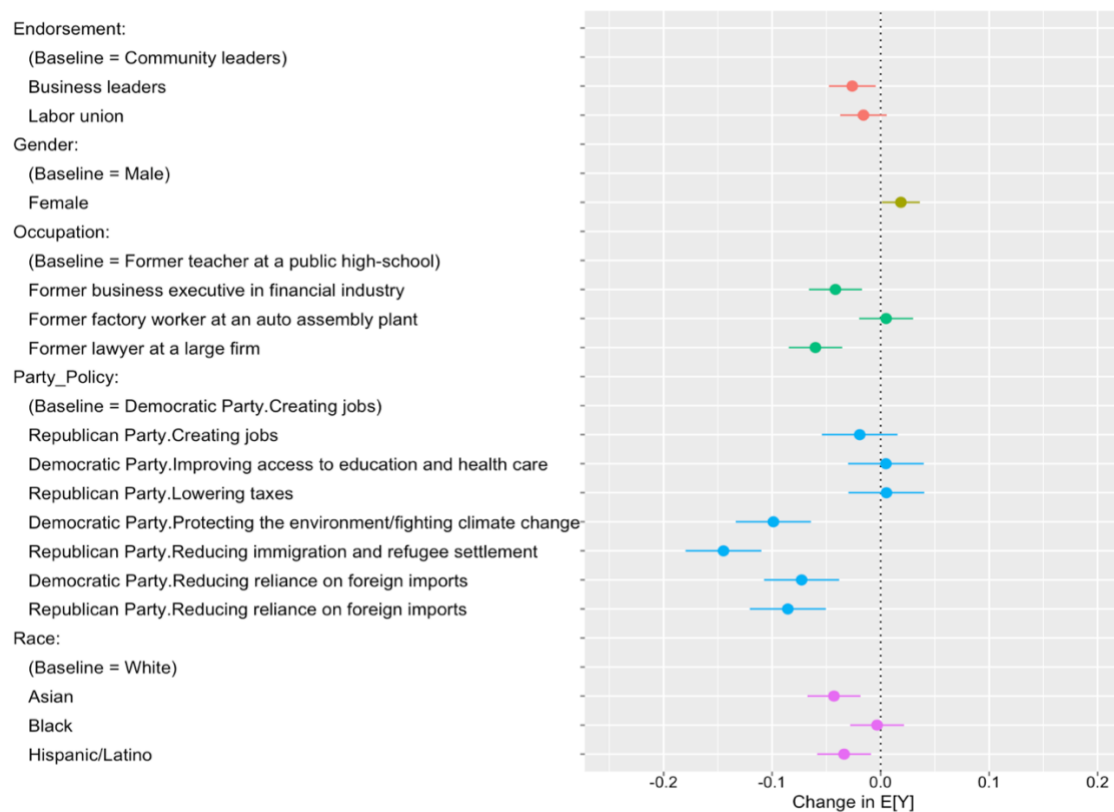
¹² Respondents were also separately asked to rank each candidate on a 1 to 7 scale.

¹³ These four levels were chosen given that they are the four largest groups in each country, respectively.

¹⁴ For a full list of each level that an attribute could take, please refer to the appendix (section A4).

To analyze the results of the conjoint experiment, I estimate Average Marginal Component Effects (AMCEs) for each possible level of the attributes with a given baseline category. The AMCE represents the causal effect of an attribute level (i.e., candidate race = white) against another value of the same attribute (i.e., candidate race = black), while holding equal the joint distribution of the rest of the attributes in the design (Bansak et al. 2021). In the conjoint experiment analyzed here, the AMCE represents the average effect of an experimental treatment on a candidate's vote share, given all the information that respondents have seen about a candidate.

Figure 3: Midwest U.S. WWC Conjoint Results

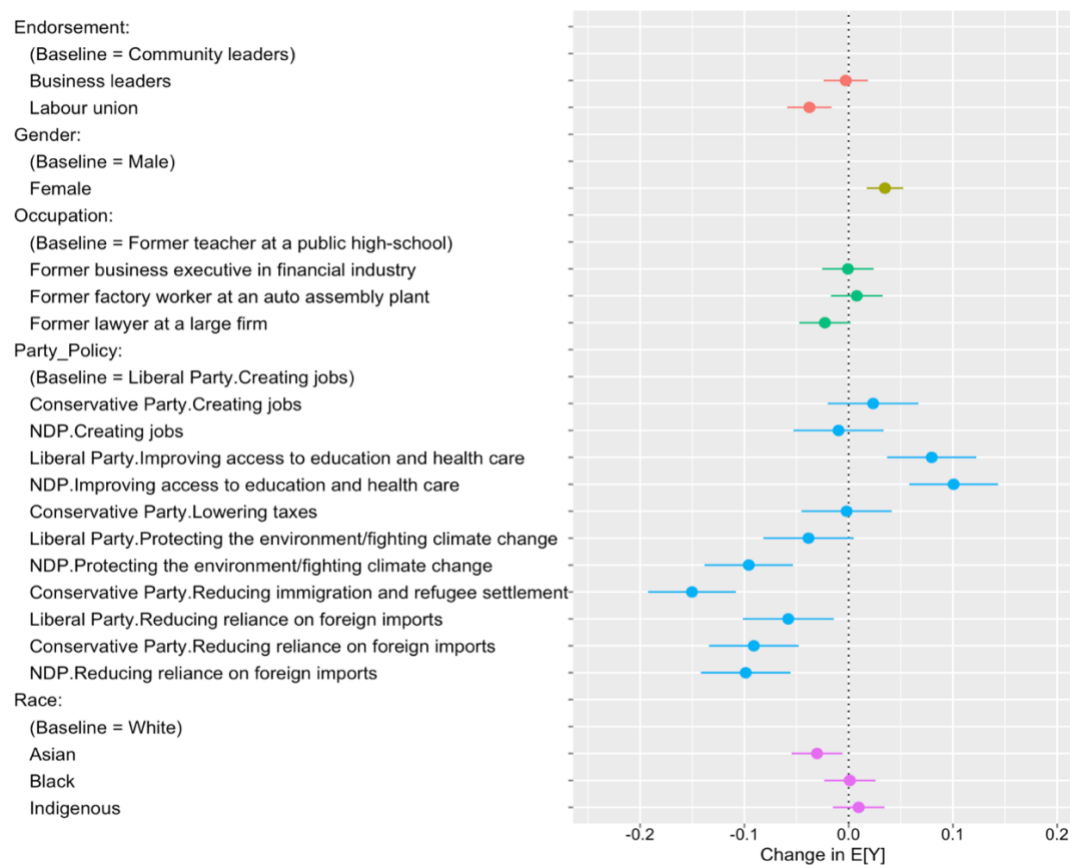


Average marginal component effects of all candidate attributes. Outcome is a binary forced choice variable of which candidate the respondent would vote for. Lines represent confidence intervals. Respondents = non-rural, white Midwest Americans, with less than a four-year college degree. Respondents (N = 1,550) completed four iterations of the experiment with two candidates (effective N = 12,402).

Figure 3 plots the AMCEs of each attribute with confidence intervals from the American conjoint experiment. Figure 3 shows that a candidate's race does affect their respective vote share in the experiment among the sample of white working-class Midwesterners. Candidates randomly

assigned to be Asian received a vote share that was 4.3 percentage points lower than white candidates, and Hispanic/Latino candidates received a vote share that was 3.3 percentage points lower than white candidates.

Figure 4: Ontario WWC Conjoint Results



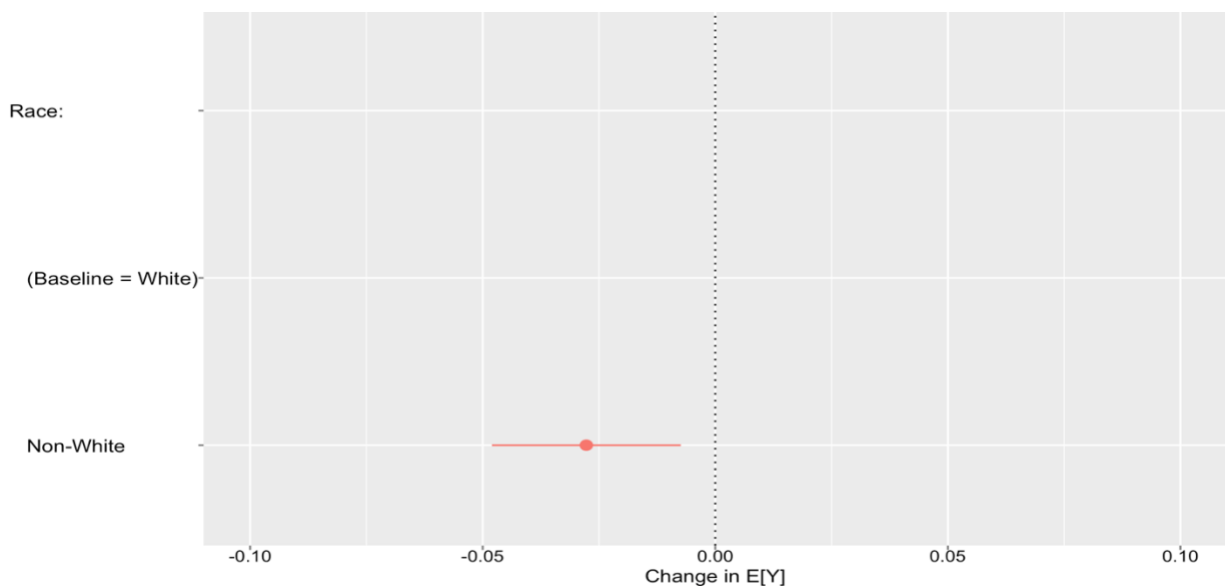
Average marginal component effects of all candidate attributes. Outcome is a binary forced choice variable of which candidate the respondent would vote for. Lines represent confidence intervals. Note: Respondents = non-rural, white Ontarians, with less than a four-year college degree. Respondents ($N = 1,551$) completed four iterations of the experiment with two candidates (effective $N = 12,406$).

Figure 4 plots the corresponding conjoint results among the sample of white working-class voters from Ontario. The race treatments in the conjoint experiment were designed to capture the most theoretically relevant racial categories in each country, while maintaining comparability between the two cross-national working-class samples. The previous results show how Asian candidates and Hispanic/Latino candidates generate electoral opposition from American white working-class voters, while it is only the Asian treatment, and by a more modest magnitude, that

generate opposition among the Canadian white working-class sample. On average, Indigenous candidates and Black candidates perform no different than white candidates among white working-class Ontarians.

But how do attitudes on a candidate's race compare more generally in the experiment? I conducted an additional analysis where each racial treatment was further grouped into either a non-white treatment (Asian, Black, Hispanic/Latino or Indigenous candidates) or the control category (white candidates). Figures 5 and 6 present the results of this alternative specification. Figure 5 plots the results among the sample of American white working-class voters from the Midwest, and Figure 6 plots the results among the sample of Canadian white working-class voters from Ontario.

Figure 5: Midwest U.S. WWC Conjoint Results, Non-White vs. White Candidates

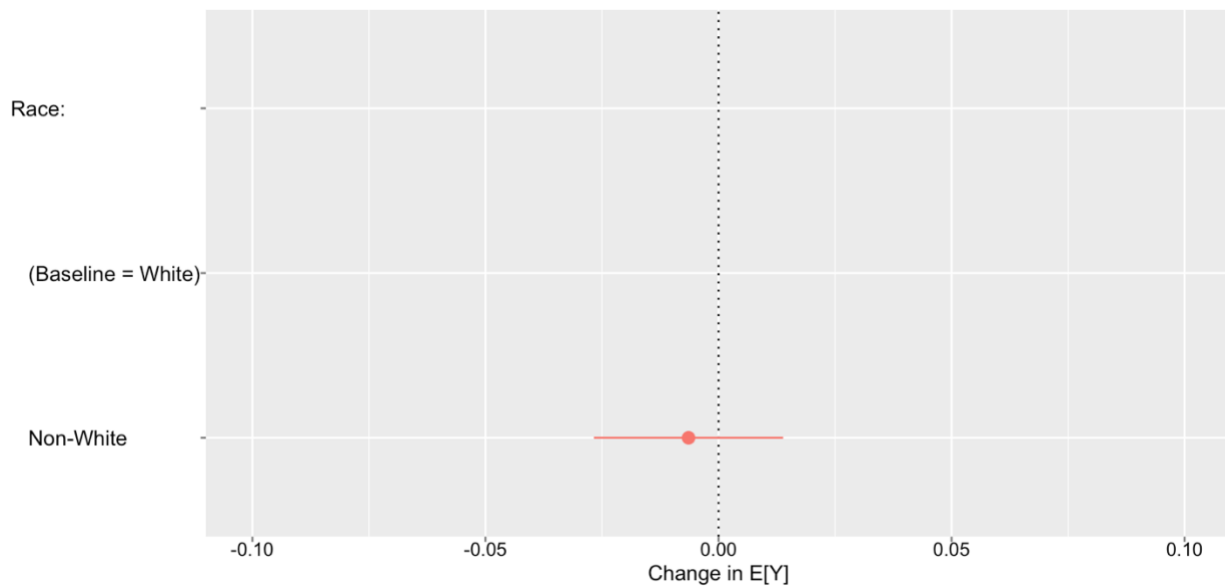


Average marginal component effects of candidate attributes. Outcome is a binary forced choice variable of which candidate the respondent would vote for. Lines represent confidence intervals. Respondents = non-rural, white Midwest Americans, with less than a four-year college degree. Respondents ($N = 1,550$) completed four iterations of the experiment with two candidates (effective $N = 12,402$). AMCE of Non-White Candidates (relative to white candidates) = $-.027$ ($SE = 0.01$).

Holding all other factors constant, Figure 5 shows that the average non-white candidate receives a 2.7 percentage point lower vote share relative to white candidates among the American sample. While this result is somewhat modest in magnitude, it is statistically significant and substantively different from the Canadian results. By contrast, the AMCE for non-white candidates

in the Canadian results (Figure 6, pictured below) is equal to $-.007$ and is statistically indistinguishable from an effect of 0. In short, white working-class voters from the American Midwest penalize the simple presence of non-white candidates, while white working-class voters from Ontario show no observable preference between the average white candidate and the average non-white candidate.

Figure 6: Ontario WWC Conjoint Results, Non-White vs. White Candidates



Average marginal component effects of candidate attributes. Outcome is a binary forced choice variable of which candidate the respondent would vote for. Lines represent confidence intervals. Respondents = non-rural, white Canadians from Ontario, with less than a four-year college degree. Respondents ($N = 1,551$) completed four iterations of the experiment with two candidates (effective $N = 12,406$). AMCE of Non-White Candidates (relative to white candidates) = $-.007$ ($SE = 0.01$).

These experimental findings provide causal support for the argument that racial differences can help explain divergent voting patterns between Canadian and American white working-class voters. On average, candidates randomly assigned to be non-white receive a greater electoral penalty, relative to white candidates, from white working-class voters from the Midwest than they do from white working-class voters from Ontario. Two of the three non-white race treatments received a lower average vote share among the American sample, whereas only one race treatment received a lower average vote share among Canadians. Moreover, for candidates randomly

assigned to be Asian, the electoral penalty relative to a white candidate was larger from the American sample than the Canadian sample.¹⁵

The Observational Effects of Racial Resentment and White Identity

Utilizing this project's original survey data, this section further examines the comparative electoral importance of racial attitudes and identity between white working-class Midwesterners and Ontarians. The survey was fielded to a sample of 1,550 Americans and 1,550 Canadians who are white, have attained less than a 4-year bachelor's degree, live in a non-rural setting, and who reside in either the province of Ontario or the Midwest region of the United States. Data was collected from December 2022 to January 2023. The survey contained a large number of questions to gauge demographics, political preferences, and social identities. White identity is measured, for Americans and Canadians, utilizing Jardina's (2019) index measure. Racial resentment is measured using the traditional four question scale in American research (Carmines et al. 2011; Kinder & Sanders 1996), which Krashinsky (2025) shows is a meaningful measure for Canadians.¹⁶

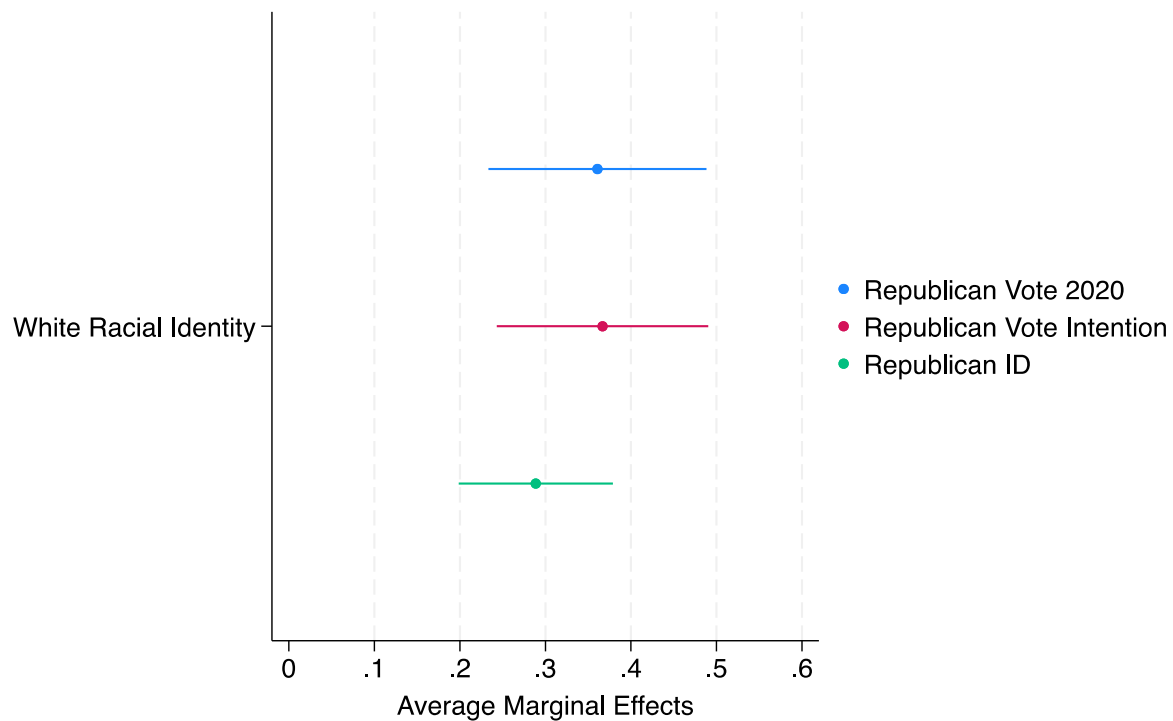
The key outcome variables for the analysis are past vote choice, vote intention, and a scaled index measure of right-wing partisan identity (5-point intensity scale). A wide array of control variables are included in the analysis to limit concerns of omitted variable bias, yet, for conciseness, only the estimates associated with white identity and racial resentment are shown below. The full regression models with the corresponding estimates for each control variable are reported in the appendix. These include standard control variables established by past literature,

¹⁵ In the appendix (section A1), I investigate the marginal means of each candidate attribute among white working-class Americans and Canadians conditioned by a respondent's levels of racial resentment or white identity. This subgroup analysis shows how the effects of a candidate's race are highly responsive to the degree to which a respondent is racially resentful or identifies as white.

¹⁶ See Appendix A6 for full question wording of the white identity and racial resentment scales.

such as age, income, gender, religious affiliation, and religious importance. I included variables for views on free trade (coded into an index labelled “Free Trade Opposition”) and variables for views on the economy/their current financial outlook (coded into an index labelled “Economic Resentment”).¹⁷ An additional control variable was included, labelled “Language Identity”, which measures the stated importance of language to an individual’s identity. Finally, a control variable was included in the Canadian models that measures resentment towards Quebec.

Figure 7: White Racial ID Effects on Midwest U.S. WWC Voters



Average marginal effects for White Racial Identity Index derived from three regression models (full controls included, reported in appendix); confidence intervals denoted with lines. Sample is non-rural, white Americans from the Midwest with less than a four-year college degree. Size of estimated effects, with sample size in brackets: 1) Republican Vote 2020 = .361 (n = 1,062); 2) Republican Vote Intention = .367 (n = 1,217); 3) Republican ID = .289 (1,486).

Beginning with the American data, I ran regression models for 2020 Republican presidential vote (0-1 dummy variable, where 1 is a vote for Trump), 2024 Republican presidential

¹⁷ The variables for economic resentment were modelled after some of the variables used in the prominent article by Gest et al. (2017) on support for Trump.

vote intention (0-1 dummy variable, where 1 is a vote for the Republican presidential candidate), and Republican partisan identification (5-point intensity scale, recoded between 0-1 for ease of analysis). The first two models are logit regressions, the third model for Republican Party ID is estimated with OLS. Each model is run with robust standard errors. Figure 7 shows the average marginal effects associated with white racial identity that were derived from the three models, with confidence intervals.

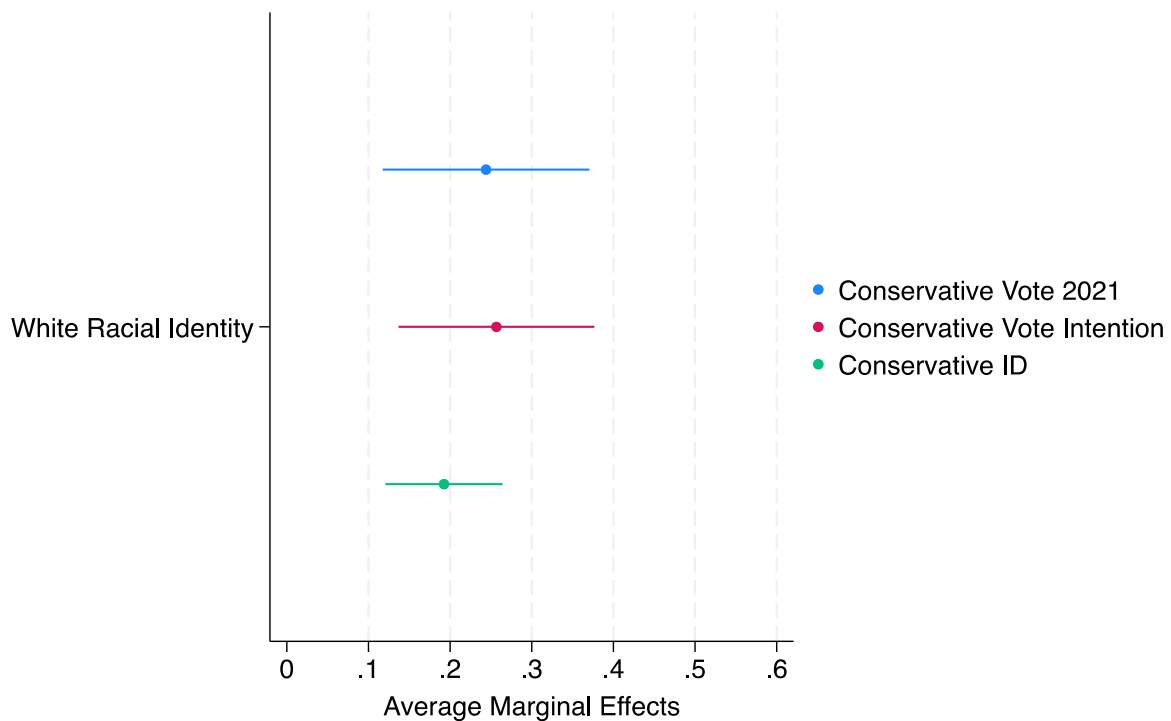
Figure 7 shows that there is a consistently large, statistically significant effect of white racial identity across each of the three models. A one unit increase on the white racial identity scale corresponds to a respondent being 36% more likely to have voted for Trump in 2020 and 36% more likely to state they would vote for a Republican for President in the next election. A one-unit increase in white racial identity translates to a respondent being 29% more likely to strongly identify as a Republican. The effect size of white racial identity on Republican partisan identity is the largest of any independent variable in the estimated model (see appendix section A3). This finding reaffirms the work of Jardina (2019) and the importance of white racial identity for Republican voting and partisanship.

Turning to the sample of white working-class voters from Ontario, I estimate two multinomial logit models for vote choice in the 2021 federal election and vote intention for the subsequent federal election, where each political party was a separate category in the outcome variable.¹⁸ I also estimate an OLS model for Conservative Party identity, measured on the same five-point scale as Republican Party identity (recoded between 0-1 for ease of analysis). Robust standard errors were again employed to protect against heteroskedasticity.

¹⁸ Following established behavioral literature, multinomial logit models are the appropriate estimation technique for multi-party systems where the outcome variable is party vote choice (Alvarez & Nagler 1998; Blais et al. 2004).

Figure 8 shows the average marginal effects of the white racial identity index derived from each model, but with only the Conservative Party outcome level from the two multinomial models.¹⁹ Figure 8 shows that white racial identity is a strong, statistically significant predictor (at the .001 level) of Conservative voting and partisanship. A one-unit increase in white racial identity translates to a 24% increase in the likelihood a respondent voted for the Conservatives in 2021, a 25% increase in intent to vote Conservative in the next federal election, and a 19% increase in the probability that a respondent is a strong Conservative Party identifier.

Figure 8: White Racial ID Effects on Ontario WWC Voters



Average marginal effects for White Racial Identity Index derived from three regression models (full controls included, reported in appendix); confidence intervals denoted with lines. Sample is non-rural, white Canadians from Ontario with less than a four-year college degree. Size of estimated effects, with sample size in brackets: 1) Conservative Vote 2021 = .244 (n = 1,260); 2) Conservative Vote Intention = .257 (n = 1,363); 3) Conservative ID = .192 (1,517).

Crucially, however, the magnitude of the average marginal effects of white racial identity across each model are consistently lower for the Canadian sample than the American sample.

¹⁹ The base category for the first two multinomial models is Liberal Party vote.

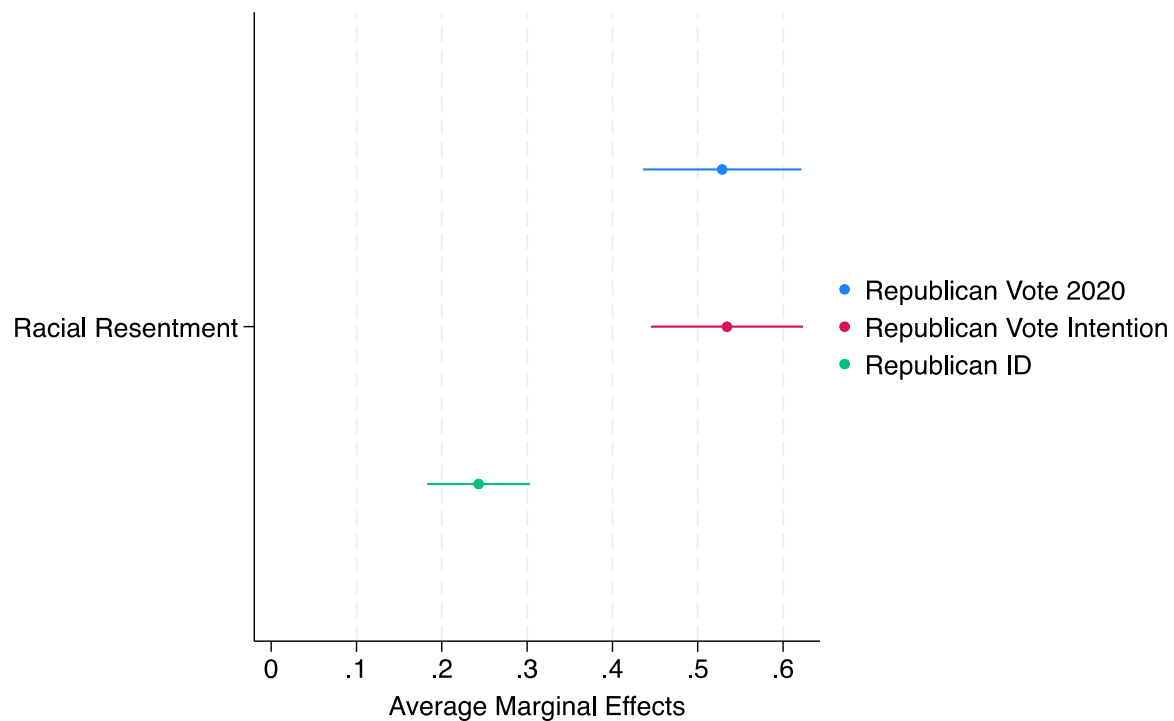
Specifically, the size of the average marginal effects associated with white racial identity are over ten percentage points lower in the Canadian models of Conservative voting and partisanship relative to the American models of Republican voting and partisanship. This is a key result suggesting that differences in white racial identity help explain the difference in voting behavior between white working-class voters in Ontario and those in the American Midwest.

However, this is also a surprising finding in the context of Canadian voting behavior. While it is true that white racial identity had larger effects on right-wing voting and partisanship for Americans, it still has a considerably large effect for Canadian white working-class voters and is evidently an important correlate of Conservative voting and partisanship. This finding suggests that race should be given greater attention by scholars of Canadian political behavior.

Going further, this paper next conducts an analysis with the index measure of racial resentment as the key independent variable instead of white racial identity. This analysis includes identical control variables and the same choice of estimator for each of the regression models as the previous models of white racial identity. For the American results, I estimate logit models for Republican Vote in 2020 and Republican Vote Intention, and an OLS model for Republican ID.

Figure 9 displays the average marginal effects of racial resentment derived from each of these models for the sample of white working-class voters from the American Midwest. Consistent with the findings pertaining to white racial identity, the effect of racial resentment is large and statistically significant in each of the three models. A one-unit increase on the racial resentment scale translates to voters being over 50% more likely to have voted for Trump in 2020 and state that they would vote for a Republican for President in the next election. A one-unit increase on the racial resentment scale translates to respondents being almost 25% more likely to identify as a strong Republican partisan.

Figure 9: Racial Resentment Effects on Midwest U.S. WWC Voters



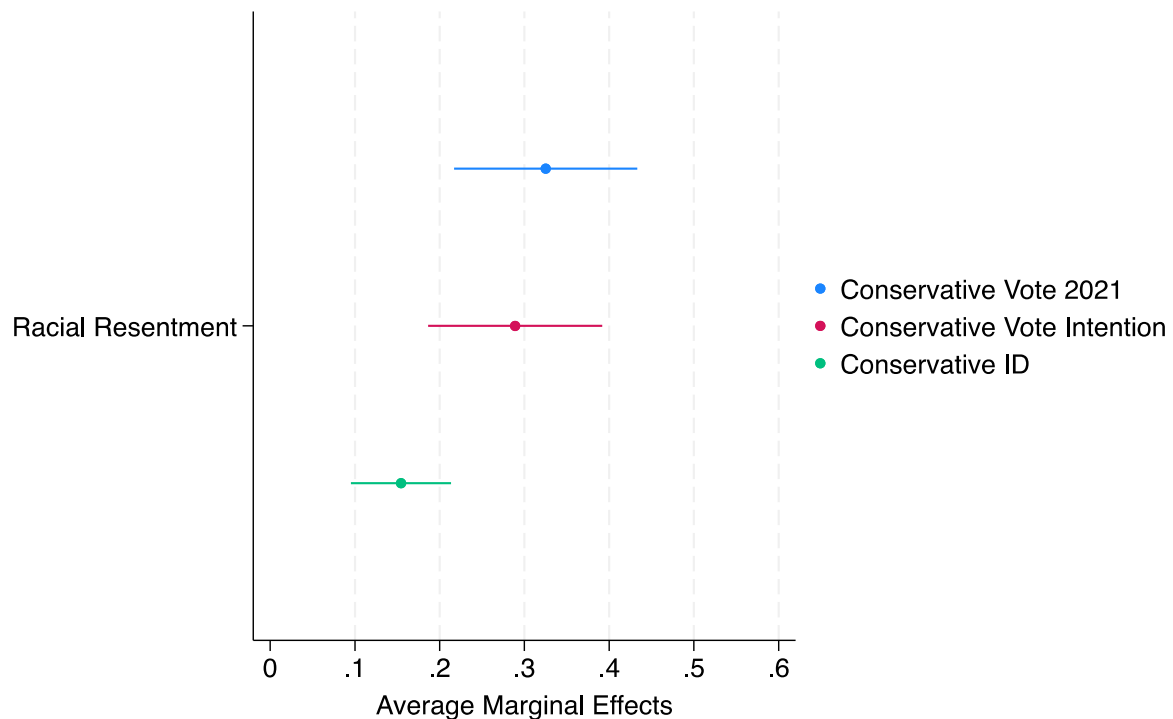
Average marginal effects for Racial Resentment Index derived from three regression models (full controls included, reported in appendix); confidence intervals denoted with lines. Sample is non-rural, white Americans from the Midwest with less than a four-year college degree. Size of estimated effects, with sample size in brackets: 1) Republican Vote 2020 = .529 ($n = 1,063$); 2) Republican Vote Intention = .534 ($n = 1,218$); 3) Republican ID = .243 (1,488).

For the corresponding Canadian results, I again estimate three regression models with racial resentment as the key independent variable. I estimate multinomial logit models for Conservative Vote in the 2021 federal election as well as for Conservative Vote Intention in the next federal election. I also estimate a third OLS model for Conservative Party ID. Figure 10 shows the average marginal effects of racial resentment derived from each of the three models.

For white working-class voters from Ontario, higher levels of racial resentment are positively correlated with each of the three outcome variables for Conservative voting and partisanship. A one-unit increase on the racial resentment scale translates to respondents being 32% more likely to have voted for the Conservatives in the 2021 Federal Election, 29% more likely

to intend to vote Conservative in the next election, and 15% more likely to strongly identify as a Conservative partisan.

Figure 10: Racial Resentment Effects on Ontario WWC Voters



Average marginal effects for Racial Resentment Index derived from three regression models (full controls included, reported in appendix); confidence intervals denoted with lines. Sample is non-rural, white Canadians from Ontario with less than a four-year college degree. Size of estimated effects, with sample size in brackets: 1) Conservative Vote 2021 = .325 (n = 1,261); 2) Conservative Vote Intention = .289 (n = 1,365); 3) Conservative ID = .154 (1,519).

Higher levels of racial resentment are positively correlated with right-wing voting and partisanship among white working-class respondents from both Ontario and the American Midwest. However, like white identity, racial resentment has a consistently larger effect on right-wing voting and partisanship for American white working-class voters. The difference in the effect size of racial resentment between the American and Canadian samples is even larger than it is for the models of white identity. Relative to white working-class voters from Ontario, the estimated effect of racial resentment on right-wing voting is roughly twenty percentage points higher for

white working-class voters from the Midwest, while the estimated effect of racial resentment on right-wing partisan identity is ten percentage points higher.

Conclusion

There has been a significant divergence in electoral behavior between white working-class voters in Canada and the United States. This divergence has occurred locally across the Detroit River between Macomb County and Windsor, and more broadly between white working-class voters in Ontario compared with those in the American Midwest. While Trump has now returned to the white house in part due to continued support from white working-class voters in Midwestern states, this same group of voters in Ontario remain much more inclined to support left-wing parties. However, despite the sharp voting contrast and the promise of comparative inference from Canada and the United States (Lipset 1990), this electoral divergence has been largely omitted from comparative scholarship. Writing on the state of comparative research regarding Canada, Vipond argues that “for most comparativists... Canada remains somewhat off the beaten track...[and] has not attracted broad and deep attention from non-Canadians” (Vipond 2008, p. 14). By posing this comparison, this paper hopes to produce lessons that would otherwise be missed by examining the two countries in isolation of each other.

The defining social cleavage in American politics is race. Scholars have shown that racial identity and racial attitudes go a long way to explaining the rise of Trump and the shift of white working-class voters to the Republican Party (Jardina 2019; Sides et al. 2018). Yet, this work has been missing a counterfactual case. This paper examines if race, white identity, and racial resentment were less politically salient factors, whether there would be less support for right-wing candidates among white working-class voters. In Canada, scholarship on the politics of race and racial attitudes has been much less prevalent than in the United States. While research on the

political importance of race in Canada has expanded, much more work needs to be done, including work from a comparative angle. This paper takes up this inquiry, posing the question of whether differences in race can help explain the electoral divergence of white working-class voters between Ontario and the American Midwest.

This paper leverages multiple methods and analyzes several different pieces of empirical evidence. This includes original survey data, which contains a substantial oversample of non-rural, white working-class voters from both Ontario and the Midwest U.S., a novel candidate-choice conjoint experiment, and qualitative fieldwork in Windsor and Macomb County.

This paper finds that racial attitudes and race-based social divides are much more salient on the American side of the Detroit River. In Windsor, racial attitudes and identity do not animate political divides to the same extent as their American counterparts. Interviews illustrate how the historical legacy of racial divides in Metro Detroit still influence the attitudes and behaviors of working-class voters, whereas in Windsor racial divides are comparatively limited. Zooming back out to the larger comparison of white working-class voters, I conduct a difference-in-means analysis showing how white working-class Ontarians and Midwesterners compare on various measures of white identity and racial attitudes. I find that there are differences in racial attitudes and white identity, but the scale of some of these differences is surprisingly modest. This result strongly suggests that race must be taken more seriously as an important predictor of political behavior in Canada.

The candidate-choice conjoint experiment examines how the race of hypothetical political candidates affects their vote share. It randomly varies whether American and Canadian political candidates belonged to one of four different racial groups. Holding other factors constant, non-white political candidates receive a greater electoral penalty from Midwestern white working-class

voters relative to their counterparts in Ontario. White working-class voters from the Midwest penalize the vote share of Asian candidates and Hispanic/Latino candidates, whereas white working-class voters from Ontario only penalize Asian candidates and by a smaller margin than the American sample.

Utilizing multiple regression analysis, I investigate the comparative effects of white racial identity and racial resentment on political partisanship and voting behavior. I find that white racial identity and racial resentment have a strong, positive correlation with right-wing partisanship and right-wing voting in both countries, even when controlling for other important predictors of electoral behavior. Evidently, these effects are not limited to just Americans. White working-class voters from Ontario who are more racially resentful or identify strongly with their racial group are more likely to identify with and vote for the Conservative Party. But crucially, the magnitude of these effects is considerably larger for white working-class voters from the Midwest relative to those from Ontario.

American politics observers looking for lessons from the Canadian experience on how white working-class support might return to the fold of the Democratic Party may be disappointed by the findings of this paper. While left-wing parties perform better among white working-class Ontarians, much of the differing voting behavior across the Detroit River and between Ontario and the American Midwest comes down to the differing salience and effects of race. The content and prevalence of core social identities, and how they are aligned with particular parties, is not something proven easily manipulable on the campaign trail.

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