Threats to Racial Status Promote Tea Party Support among White Americans

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Abstract

Since its rapid rise in early 2009, scholars have advanced a variety of explanations for popular support for the Tea Party movement. Here we argue that various political, economic, and demographic trends and events – e.g., the election of the first nonwhite president, the rising minority population – have been perceived as threatening the relative standing of whites in the U.S., with the resulting racial resentment fueling popular support for the movement. This "decline of whiteness" explanation for white Americans' Tea Party support differs from prior accounts in highlighting the role of symbolic group status rather than personal experience or economic competition with minority group members in generating perceptions of threat. We tested this explanation in five survey-based experiments. In Study 1 we sought to make salient the president's African-American heritage by presenting participants with an artificially darkened picture of Barack Obama. White participants shown the darkened photo were more likely to report they supported the Tea Party relative to a control condition. Presenting participants with information that the white population share (Study 2) or income advantage (Study 3) is declining also led whites to report greater Tea Party support, effects that were partly explained by heightened levels of racial resentment. A fourth study replicated the effects of Study 2 in a sample of Tea Party supporters. Finally, Study 5 showed that threatened white respondents reported stronger support for the Tea Party when racialized aspects of its platform (e.g., opposition to immigration) were highlighted, than if libertarian ones (e.g., reduced government spending) were. These findings are consistent with a view of popular support for the Tea Party as resulting, in part, from threats to the status of whites in America.

Keywords: Racial threat, Tea Party movement, racial resentment, status, whiteness

The Tea Party movement's emergence was among the swiftest and most powerful of any political movement in U.S. history (Skocpol & Williamson, 2012). Arriving on the American political scene with a smattering of small rallies in the Spring of 2009, just a year and a half later the movement was a critical political bloc in the Republican recovery of the U.S. House in 2010 (Parker & Barreto, 2013), and later played central roles in the 2011 debt ceiling crisis and 2013 government shutdown. Propelled by a vocal grassroots base and investment from elites, the Tea Party is a political force that continues to exert important influence at both state and federal levels.

What explains the sudden emergence, and continuing robust levels, of popular support for this movement? Here we test one mechanism that we propose has been a key factor driving Tea Party support: threats to the status of whites in America. Specifically, we propose that a series of events and trends occurring around the time of the Tea Party's emergence and continuing since – the presidency of Barack Obama, the rising numbers and political influence of minority Americans – have threatened white Americans' sense of their standing in the country's racial status hierarchy. The impact of these threats may have been further magnified by the widespread economic anxiety brought on by the Great Recession. Long accustomed to a privileged position in the racial hierarchy, in recent years white Americans have increasingly found that position precarious, reacting with greater levels of racial resentment and greater support for a political movement seen as favoring white interests over those of minorities.

We draw upon *group position theory* (Blumer, 1958; Bobo, 1999) in arguing that racial antipathy and competition often stem from dominant group members' efforts to defend their group's symbolic position in the racial status hierarchy. According to the theory, where a widely perceived racial hierarchy exists, dominant group members respond to threats to their group's

standing with animosity towards those groups seen as threatening their group's position and the privileged access to economic and material resources that comes with it (Craig & Richeson, 2014a). Further, economic anxiety – such as that brought on by the Great Recession – can amplify racial threat effects by leading dominant racial group members to fear their group is losing economic advantages over subordinate groups and to scapegoat minorities for poor economic conditions (Quillian, 1995).

A substantial literature demonstrates that racial threats can prompt antipathy, violence, and political mobilization by dominant racial group members (Blalock, 1967; Olzak 1994; Soule, 1992; Andrews & Seguin, 2015; Enos, 2016). However, this literature most often emphasizes the effects of local-level economic and cultural threats felt in everyday life, produced by increased rates of minorities in local communities (Enos, 2014; Fossett & Kiecolt, 1989; Giles & Hertz, 1994; Taylor, 1998) and regional labor market competition (Burr, Galle, & Fossett, 1991; Huffman & Cohen, 2004). Here we instead emphasize how macro-level trends and events like the election of the first nonwhite president and the rising size and influence of the nation's minority population can carry symbolic significance (Parker, Sawyer, & Towler, 2009), threatening white Americans' sense of their social standing, over and above any personal experiences of economic or cultural threat they may have also felt. Macro-level events that can threaten racial standing include reductions in the political power, relative economic standing, or population share of dominant groups (Blalock, 1967).

Scholars of group position theory have amassed substantial evidence for an association between perceptions of group-level threat on prejudice and attitudes toward social policies (Bobo, 1983; Bobo & Hutchings, 1996; Bobo & Tuan, 1996; Quillian, 1995; Quillian, 1996). This work has been largely correlational and focused on explicitly racialized issues and policies.

Recently, experimental research has explored the effects of threats to racial status, showing they can increase whites' racial resentment (Outten et al., 2012; Craig & Richeson, 2014a; Abascal, 2015) and support for policies and ideologies that are not explicitly racialized, but which offer dominant group members a means to reclaim group standing (Samson, 2013; Craig & Richeson, 2014b). We extend this work by experimentally testing whether racial status threats can help explain the rise of a major American social movement.

We are not the first to propose that Tea Party support is associated with racial resentment among white Americans. From its earliest days, the Tea Party's largely white membership, strong opposition to Barack Obama, and the centrality of several racialized positions (e.g., opposition to undocumented immigration) to its informal platform have led critics to accuse its supporters of racism. Tea Party members themselves eschew the characterization (Skocpol & Williamson, 2012), saying the movement is based in conservative principles of small government and the protection of American traditions. So far only correlational data link Tea Party support with racial resentment (Parker & Barreto, 2013; Knowles et al., 2013) and other research has failed to find a link (Arceneaux & Nicholson, 2012).

Here we build on this research, hypothesizing that trends and events occurring beginning in late 2008 threatened the standing of whites in America, leading whites to greater resentment of minorities and motivation to support policies and movements that would restore their group's standing. We propose that the Tea Party's positions on racialized issues like the Obama presidency, immigration, and welfare mean that it is perceived as a pro-white, anti-minority movement, making support for the movement attractive to racially-threatened whites motivated to restore the symbolic status of whites in America.

To test our hypotheses, we conducted five survey-based experiments involving diverse samples recruited from online sources (total $n = 1,329$). In Study 1 we tested whether heightening the salience of Barack Obama's African-American heritage would affect whites' Tea Party support. We then tested the effects of presenting whites with data suggesting that white majority status (Study 2), or the white income advantage (Study 3), were declining, including measures of racial resentment to assess its possible mediating role. Our fourth study replicated Study 2 among a sample of Tea Party supporters. Finally, Study 5 manipulated the framing of the Tea Party, testing whether threatened whites would support the movement more when its racialized positions were emphasized than when its libertarian positions were highlighted. All studies were embedded in online surveys and run between October 2011 and January 2015.

Study 1

Our first study investigated whether threats to white Americans' political power in the U.S. might lead them to support the Tea Party more. Scholars have argued that the election of the first nonwhite president has stoked racial status anxiety among white Americans by threatening their sense of control over major political institutions (Parker & Barreto, 2013).[1]

Methods

Participants. Study 1 participants were recruited from two online sources: 1) posts on Craigslist.org websites in 15 U.S. cities, and 2) an advertisement posted on Amazon's Mechanical Turk (hereafter, AMT).[2] Craigslist postings promised respondents a chance to win an

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[1] In addition to the results reported below, we also provide analyses of the robustness of the results in Studies 1-5, including *p*-curve analysis and R-index (see *Supplemental Material).*

[2] Amazon Mechanical Turk (AMT) is an online marketplace in which more than 500,000 individuals – the majority from the U.S. – complete short computer-based tasks for small amounts of money (Amazon Mechanical Turk, 2016). AMT is used as a source for research subjects in psychology, political science, economics, and sociology. Data collected via AMT are typically equally or more reliable as data collected in-person or via other online sources (Buhrmeister, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Weinberg, Freese, & McElhattan, 2014)). While samples of respondents recruited online in this way are not representative of the U.S. population, they nonetheless feature substantial demographic diversity, and are thus preferable to college student samples for research concerning political attitudes.

iPod or a $50 gift certificate in exchange for participation in a short survey, while respondents recruited via AMT were offered a small sum of money to complete the survey.

Because our hypotheses concern white Americans' responses to racial threats, our analyses in all studies focus on white participants (see *Supplemental Material* for analyses of minority respondents). In all, 356 participants (240 women, 116 men) took part in the study, 255 (71.6%) of whom identified as white. Participants were U.S. residents who ranged in age from 18 to 69 ($M = 33.30$ years, $SD = 12.54$).

Procedure. In all studies, participants were recruited to a study of social attitudes that began with a short demographic questionnaire. Study 1 participants next completed a short celebrity identification test. Participants were shown pictures of Jay Leno, William Shatner, and an official picture of President Barack Obama. To make more or less salient his African-American heritage, participants were randomly assigned to see a version of the picture in which Obama's skin was either artificially lightened or darkened (see Figure 1; Messing, Jabon, & Plaut, 2015). Participants were next given a short survey of political attitudes including a "yes/no" item asking participants "Do you consider yourself a supporter of the Tea Party?" Here and in all studies, participants were asked at the end if they had any comments about the study, thanked, and debriefed.

Results

White participants in the Dark Obama Prime condition were significantly more likely to report that they supported the Tea Party (22%) than white participants assigned to the Light Obama Prime condition (12%; $\chi^2 (1) = 4.73$, $\varphi = .139$, $p = .03$). This result supports our prediction that white Americans would be more likely to support the Tea Party if Barack Obama's African-American heritage was made salient to them. These results are consistent with

the claim that Tea Party support derives in part from whites' sense that the election of a nonwhite president threatens the political power of whites in the U.S., and also with our more general argument that Tea Party support is driven in part by perceived threats to whites' standing in society.

Study 2

To establish our effects are general to various forms of racial status threat, we next conducted survey-based experiments testing whether different threats to whites' standing in the U.S. might also lead whites to greater support for the Tea Party. In Study 2 we tested whether threats to white majority status might lead whites to greater Tea Party support. Past work finds that threats to majority status can prompt greater conservatism, racial resentment, and pro-white attitudes (Craig and Richeson, 2014a; Outten et al., 2012; Abascal, 2015).

Methods

Participants. Respondents in Studies 2-5 were recruited solely via advertisements on AMT. In all, 290 U.S. residents (155 women, 134 men, 1 did not report) took part in Study 2 and completed all measures used in analysis. Two hundred and twenty-four (77.2%) of these respondents identified as white. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 82 ($M = 34.62$, $SD = 12.76$). The median respondent earned between $30,000 and $39,999 and 53.4% of respondents had at least a college degree.

Procedure. Participants read and answered comprehension questions about one of two short, demographic reports with past and projected population shares of different racial/ethnic groups that we adapted from US Census Bureau data and projections (US Census Bureau, Population Division 2012). We randomly assigned participants to either a "Majority Stable" condition in which the report emphasized that whites remain the largest ethnic group in the U.S.,

or a "Majority Threat" condition in which the report emphasized that the white majority in the U.S. is steadily declining, with minorities expected to surpass whites in numbers by 2042. The graph in the "Majority Stable" condition showed a modest decline in the white majority from 2000, projected forward to 2020 (see Figure 2a). By contrast, the graph in the "Majority Threat" condition showed a longer time series and projection, from 1960 to 2060, and also included a line for the total "non-white" population share (see Figure 2b). These differences were designed to make the steady decline, and future non-majority status, of the white population highly salient in the threat condition (for further detail see *Supplemental Material*).

Participants next completed a survey of political attitudes. Participants indicated their Tea Party support on 1 ("Not At All") to 5 ("A Great Deal") scales in response to two questions: "To what extent do you consider yourself a supporter of the Tea Party?" and "To what extent do you identify as a member of the Tea Party?" Responses to these items (Cronbach's $\alpha = .95$) were averaged to form a composite measure of *Tea Party support*. Participants also completed a standard measure of *racial resentment* (Henry and Sears 2002) designed to measure individuals' negative stereotypic views of and animus toward black Americans.[3] Participants responded to a series of eight statements (e.g., "Over the past few years, blacks have gotten more economically than they deserve," "It's really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as whites.") on 7-point scales. Responses to these items ($\alpha = .88$) were averaged to form a composite.

Results

White respondents assigned to the Majority Threat condition reported greater support for the Tea Party ($M = 1.62$) than did those participants assigned to the Majority Stable condition (M

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[3] We assess resentment of African-Americans specifically, instead of minorities in general, because a widely used battery exists for this, though this represents a conservative test of our reasoning in Studies 2 and 4 given that the declining white majority results most of all from the expanding Latino population.

= 1.28, $t(222) = 3.01$, $p = .003$, $d = .40$).[4] Whites assigned to the Majority Threat condition also reported higher levels of racial resentment ($M = 3.94$) than did those assigned to the Majority Stable condition ($M = 3.47$; $t(222) = 3.01$, $p = .003$, $d = .40$). As displayed in Figure 3, mediation analysis indicated that racial resentment partially mediated the effect of white majority threat on Tea Party support among whites. Bootstrap analyses (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) found that the 95% confidence interval for the mediation analysis did not include zero (lower limit =.04, upper limit = .23), indicating that the mediation was statistically significant.

These results offer further support for our claim that racial status threats lead whites' to greater support for the Tea Party. In addition, we sought greater insight on the social psychological process driving this dynamic. Consistent with our theoretical reasoning, results of a mediation analysis showed that the effects of racial status threats on whites' Tea Party support were driven at least in part by heightened racial resentment.

Study 3

To further assess the robustness of our claim that threats to white status promote Tea Party support, in Study 3 we tested the effect of threats to whites' economic advantage.

Methods

Participants. In the study, 292 U.S. residents (146 men, 144 women, 2 did not report) took part in the study and completed all measures used in analysis. Two hundred and seventeen (74.3%) of these respondents identified as white. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 65 (M =

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[4] We argue the Tea Party's emphasis on a set of racialized issues makes it particularly attractive to threatened whites. Past work, however, finds that status threats can lead to greater general conservativism among white Americans (Craig and Richeson 2014b), meaning that effects of status threats on support for the Tea Party might be a mere by-product of this more general effect. To assess the unique impact of status threats on whites' Tea Party, in Studies 2-4 we also examined the effect of experimental condition on Tea Party support while controlling for the manipulation's impact on support for the Republican party (see *Supplemental Material*), finding that overall the impact of status threats on Tea Party support was largely independent of the effect on Republican party support.

33.98, SD = 12.19). The median respondent earned between $30,000 and $39,999 and 52.1% of respondents had at least a college degree.

Procedure. Participants read and answered comprehension questions about one of two fictitious reports of trends in income since the beginning of the "great recession" (from 2007 to 2010), broken down by race and ethnicity. Participants assigned to the "Income Gap Expanding" condition were shown a graph in which median income for white Americans held steady from 2007 to 2010, while median income for black and Latino Americans steadily fell (see Figure 4). By contrast, the graph in the "Income Gap Closing" condition showed that black and Latino Americans' incomes held steady during the time period while whites' incomes steadily declined. Participants then completed a survey of political attitudes including the Tea Party support and racial resentment items from Study 2 (α's = .92 and .89).

Importantly, this design addresses a potential confounding factor from Studies 1 and 2, namely that participants may have supported the Tea Party more when shown evidence of large or rapid social change. Here we controlled for the amount of apparent social change – in both conditions racial income gaps are shown to be changing – while portraying whites' apparent standing relative to African-Americans and Latinos as either shrinking or expanding. Note that neither condition corresponds to actual social trends occurring at the time of the rise of the Tea Party. Rather, the study was designed to provide a precise and controlled test of our claim that threats to whites' relative position can increase their support for the Tea Party movement. At the same time, research suggests many white Americans view themselves as losing a zero-sum economic game to minorities in recent years (Norton & Sommers, 2011); thus we aimed to capitalize on this common, though inaccurate, perception.

Results

White respondents assigned to the Income Gap Closing condition reported greater support for the Tea Party ($M = 1.45$) than did those participants assigned to the Income Gap Expanding condition ($M = 1.23$, $t(215) = 2.10$, $p = .037$, $d = .29$). Additionally, Whites assigned to the Income Gap Closing condition reported higher levels of racial resentment ($M = 3.75$) than did those assigned to the Income Gap Expanding condition ($M = 3.30$; $t(215) = 2.60$, $p = .01$, $d = .35$). Finally, a mediation analysis displayed in Figure 5 indicated that racial resentment mediated the effect of threatening the white income advantage on whites' Tea Party support. Bootstrap analyses found that the 95% confidence interval for the mediation analysis did not include zero (lower limit =.03, upper limit = .19), indicating that the mediation was statistically significant. These findings offer further evidence that threats to white status increase Tea Party support, and that they do so by increasing whites' racial resentment.

Study 4

We next tested whether the effects of threatening the white population majority found in Study 2 would obtain in a sample of individuals who identify as Tea Party supporters. The study was the same as Study 2, though with a sample of white participants who previously indicated support for the Tea Party on a short, on-line survey.

Methods

Participants. We fielded an initial demographic survey of 9,515 U.S. resident users of AMT. Among the items was a question asking respondents which of several political groups (including the Tea Party) they supported. Of the 628 participants who indicated support for the Tea Party, we invited to the study the 295 participants who had not previously taken part in studies we fielded on politics or race. Of these, 141 participants took part in the study, and 123 (87.2%) of these identified as white. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 70 ($M = 37.01$, $SD =$

12.91). The median respondent earned between $30,000 and $39,999 and 41.8% of respondents

had at least a college degree.

Procedure. The study was identical to Study 2 but for a few changes. In addition to the

Tea Party support and racial resentment items (α's = .86 and .83), we included a five-item

measure of identification with the Tea Party, and three-item batteries of respondents'

willingness, likelihood, and interest in contributing to the Tea Party movement in the future (see

Supplemental Material).

Results

Consistent with prior results, participants assigned to the Majority Threat condition reported

greater support for the Tea Party ($M = 3.44$) than those assigned to the Majority Stable condition

($M = 2.77$, $t(121) = 3.30$, $p = 001$, $d = .60$). Participants assigned to the Majority Threat

condition reported greater racial resentment ($M = 4.81$) than those assigned to the Majority

Salient condition ($M = 4.59$), but this effect was not significant ($t(121) = 1.10$, $p = .27$, $d = .20$)

so no mediation analysis was conducted. We also included a composite measure of identification

as a Tea Party supporter. Participants assigned to the Majority Threat condition reported greater

levels of identification ($M = 3.87$) than those assigned to the Majority Salient condition ($M =

3.43$; $t(121) = 2.37$, $p = .02$, $d = .43$).

Finally, we also analyzed items measuring Tea Party supporters' willingness, likelihood,

and interest in contributing to the movement (e.g., by attending a rally, signing a petition, or

donating a portion of their study pay to a local affiliate). While participants assigned to the

Majority Threat condition reported greater motivation to contribute on composite measures of

willingness, likelihood, and interest in contributing (M's = 2.78, 3.76, 0.25, respectively), than

did those assigned to the Majority Salient condition (M's = 2.27, 3.17, 0.19; $t(121)$'s = 1.89,

1.96, 1.01; p's = .061, .052, .314, d's = .34, .36, .18), two of these effects were marginally significant and the third was insignificant. A statistical power analysis suggested that this may have resulted from the smaller number of participants we were able to recruit to the study from this narrower population (see *Supplemental Material*).

Study 5

The above studies support our claim that threats to the standing of white Americans can increase their Tea Party support, but what about the Tea Party movement is attractive to threatened whites? We reason that racial status threats lead whites to support the Tea Party movement more because these threats provoke racial resentment among whites (Craig and Richeson, 2014a), and several political positions associated with racial resentment among whites – e.g., opposition to Barack Obama, opposition to federal welfare programs, opposition to immigration, hostility toward Muslim nations – are central to the Tea Party's informal platform. At the same time, the movement is also associated with a variety of libertarian positions that are not racialized – e.g., opposition to high taxes and reduced government regulation of the economy – that we expect are likely unrelated to racial resentment.

In Study 5 we evaluate this reasoning. First, we gave participants information emphasizing that the white majority is steadily declining, as in the Majority Threat condition of Study 2. Then, before surveying participants' views of the Tea Party, we briefly described the movement, listing several positions common to its members. Participants were randomly assigned to either a Racialized Platform or a Libertarian Platform condition, listing either several racialized or several libertarian positions associated with the Tea Party. We expect that racially threatened whites will support the Tea Party more when its racialized platform is salient than when its libertarian platform is.

Methods

Participants. In the study, 268 U.S. residents (151 men, 116 women, 1 did not report) took part in the study and completed all measures used in analysis, 199 (74.3%) of whom identified as white. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 71 ($M = 33.63$, $SD = 12.70$). The median respondent earned between $30,000 and $39,999 and 53.0% of respondents had at least a college degree.

Procedure. All participants were presented with the demographic report from the Majority Threat condition of Study 2. Participants were then told they would be surveyed regarding their views of the Tea Party movement. Participants were told that the Tea Party has no formal agenda but that there are several positions its members have generally advocated for. The policies listed in the Libertarian Platform condition involved reducing the size and influence of government (e.g., "Protect free markets by reducing government regulation of businesses"), while those listed in the Racialized Platform condition were positions which past research finds are often associated with racial resentment (e.g., "Stricter policies against illegal immigration.") (see *Supplemental Material* for full list).

Participants next completed a survey of political attitudes including the Tea Party support items from Studies 2-4 (α's = .91 and .90). Participants were also asked a battery of seven questions assessing how positively the viewed the Tea Party (see *Supplemental Material*).

Results

Consistent with prediction, white respondents assigned to the Racialized Platform condition supported the Tea Party ($M = 1.58$) more than did participants assigned to the Libertarian Platform condition ($M = 1.32$, $t(197) = 2.22$, $p = .03$, $d = .32$). White respondents also viewed the movement more positively in the Racialized Platform condition ($M = 2.19$) than in

the Libertarian Platform condition ($M = 1.94$, $t(194) = 1.79$, $p = .075$, $d = 0.26$), though this effect was only marginally significant.

These results are consistent with our claim that threatened whites support the Tea Party more when its racialized platform was emphasized than when its Libertarian platform was. This offers support for our larger argument that white Americans whose racial status is threatened view the Tea Party more positively because several political positions associated with the Tea Party are associated with racial resentment.

General Discussion

These above findings offer evidence that racial threats lead to greater support for the Tea Party movement among white Americans. Study 4, which specifically targeted Tea Party supporters, demonstrated these effects were robust in a population of particular interest. Finally, in Study 5, threatened whites supported the Tea Party more when its racialized platform was highlighted than when its libertarian platform was. This finding supports our theoretical claim that it is these aspects of the Tea Party movement's platform that are attractive to whites seeking to re-establish their group's standing. Further, Studies 2 and 3 support our prediction that racial status threats increase Tea Party support at least in part by increasing whites' racial resentment.

We found comparable effects for a variety of different racial threats, including threats to whites' political power, demographic majority status, and economic advantage. The common aspect of these is that they all threaten whites' apparent standing in the American racial status hierarchy, consistent with the prediction of group position theory that symbolic threats to the relative position of an individual's racial group can prompt racial antipathy and support for efforts to restore group standing.

While our research most directly tested whether racial status threat shapes levels of Tea Party support, our results also speak indirectly to the historical roots of popular support for the movement. The Tea Party emerged during a period when white Americans' political power was threatened by the election of Barack Obama, their majority status was threatened by a rising minority population that received wide media coverage, and the Great Recession increased their economic insecurity, a factor previously shown to catalyze racial threats. While we can only make indirect inferences, our studies – conducted from 2011 to 2015 – offer experimental evidence that the macro-level events occurring around the time of the Tea Party's rise may have played an important role in fueling white Americans' support for the movement. However, racial threats are not the only factor propelling public support for the movement; research finds that nonracial factors such as concerns about loss of important American traditions and Libertarian economic ideology also play important roles (Skocpol & Williamson, 2012; Arceneaux & Nicholson, 2012). Further, it is important to note that the Tea Party movement was not solely a product of grassroots popular support. Political, media, and economic elite activity were also critical to its emergence (Skocpol & Williamson, 2012; Parker & Barreto, 2013).

Much has been written about how the rising numbers and perceived status of minorities in the US has prompted status anxiety and political backlash among white Americans (Craig & Richeson, 2014a; Norton & Summers, 2011). But this dynamic is difficult to document, and only a few studies have demonstrated it. The present research offers evidence for this "decline of whiteness" explanation of popular support for a major political movement among white Americans. If the relative numbers, political power, and perceived social standing of American minorities continue to increase, we may expect these dynamics to persist or even grow in the years to come.

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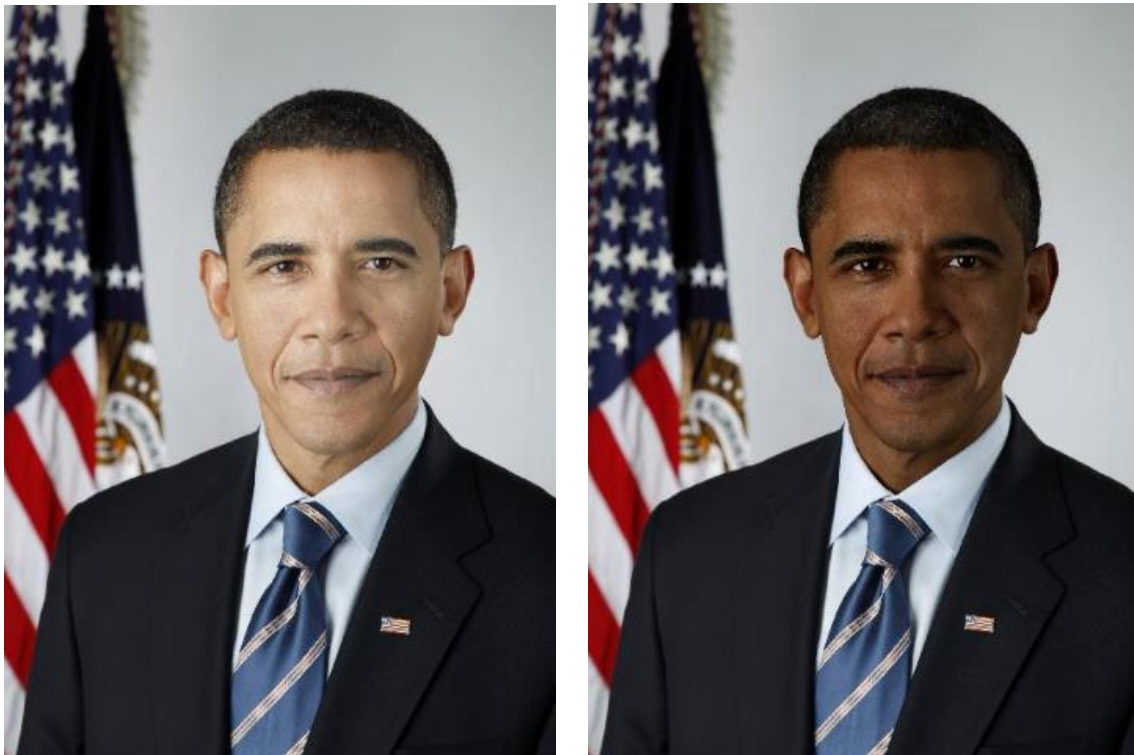
Figure 1. Artificially lightened and darkened photos of President Barack Obama presented to participants in Study 1

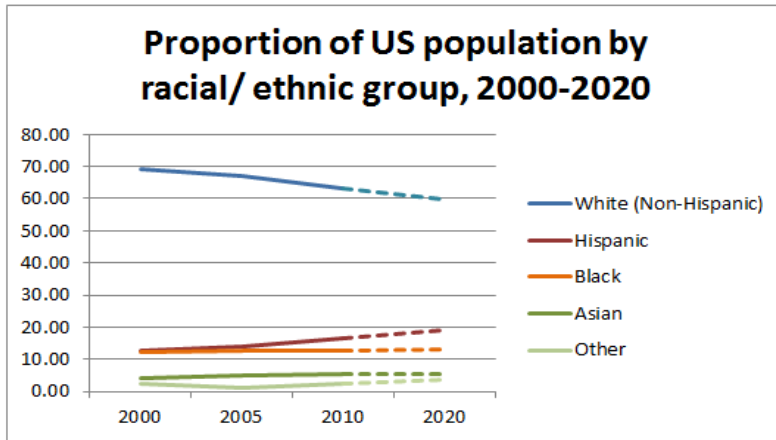**Proportion of US population by racial/ethnic group, 1960-2060**
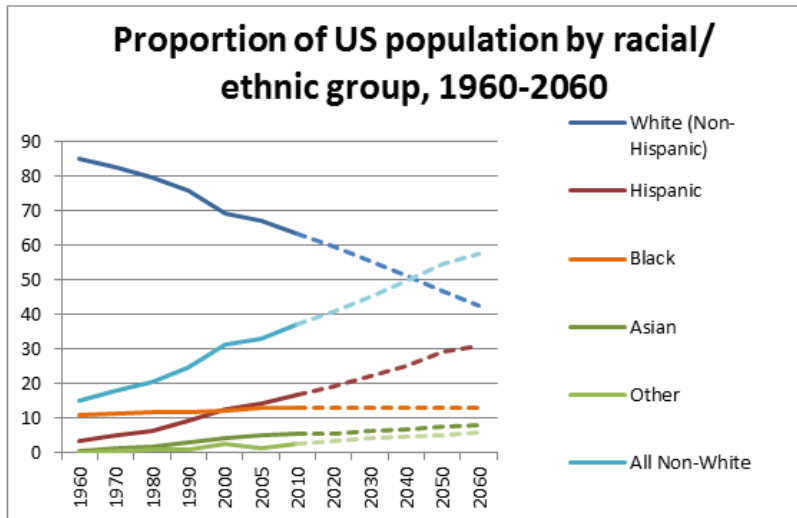
Sources: US Census Bureau, 2011, and University of Virginia Population Study Center, 2012

Between 1960 and 2010, the proportion of white Americans fell from about 85% of the total US population to about 63%. In contrast, the share of the population consisting of members of other racial or ethnic groups has risen steadily from 1960 to 2010, and this rise is projected to continue in the future. Research suggests that white Americans will consist of less than 50% of the total population by about 2040, and fall to about 42% of the population by 2060. The data show that the proportion of Americans who are white has declined, and will continue to decline in coming years. The majority of Americans will be nonwhite in about 25 years.

Figure 2a. Graph and text presented to participants in "Majority Threat condition of Study 2

Proportion of US population by racial/ethnic group, 2000-2020

Between 2000 and 2010, the proportion of white Americans fell slightly from about 69% of the total US population to about 63%. Meanwhile, the share of the population consisting of members of other racial or ethnic groups has risen slightly, and this pattern is projected to continue in the future. Research suggests that white Americans will consist of about 60% of the total population in 2020. The data show that whites are the largest ethnic group in the U.S. There are more than three times as many white Americans as members of any other ethnic group

Figure 2b. Graph and text presented to participants in Majority Salient condition of Study 2
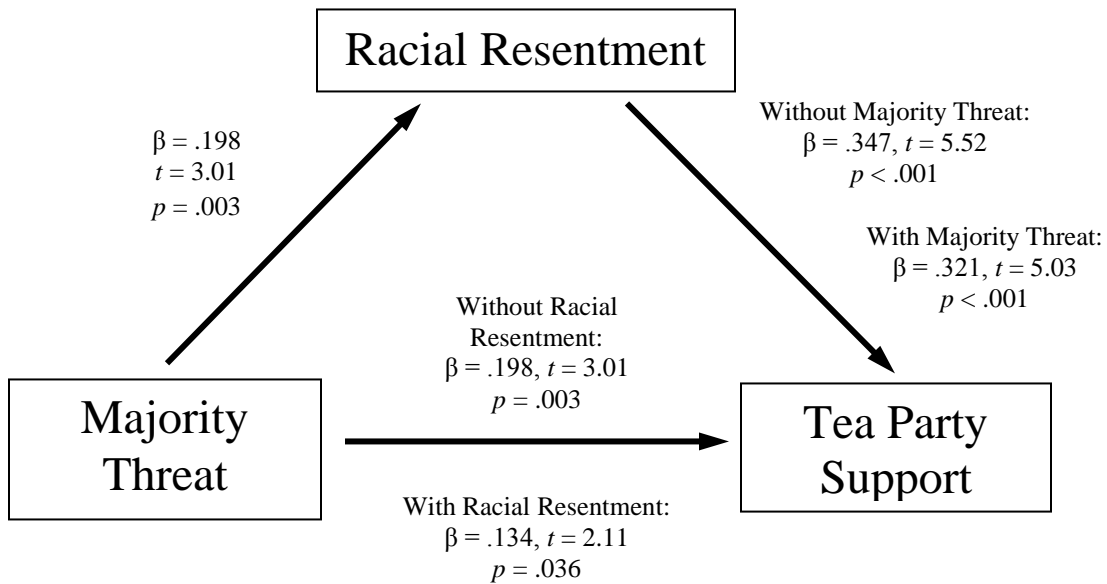
Figure 3. Results of a mediation analysis of the effects of majority threat on whites' support for the Tea Party, with racial resentment as hypothesized mediator (Study 2). Together with bootstrap analyses, results indicate a statistically significant, partial mediation.
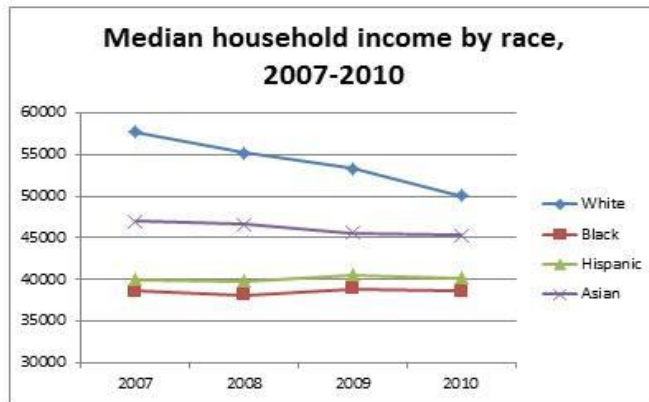
From 2007 to 2010, the median (or typical) household income for white Americans dropped from $57,500 to about $50,000. Median household incomes for black, Hispanic, and Asian households remained roughly constant during the same period. For example, the median household income of black Americans stayed at about $38,500 from 2007 to 2010.
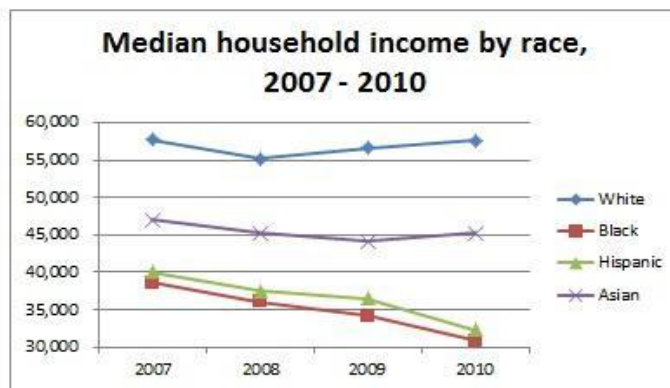
From 2007 to 2010, the median (or typical) household income for white Americans remained roughly constant, staying at about $57,500. Median household incomes for black, Hispanic, and Asian households fell during the same period. For example, the median household income of black Americans dropped from $38,500 to about $31,000 from 2007 to 2010.

Figure 4. Graphs and text presented to participants in Income Gap Closing and Income Gap Expanding conditions of Study 3
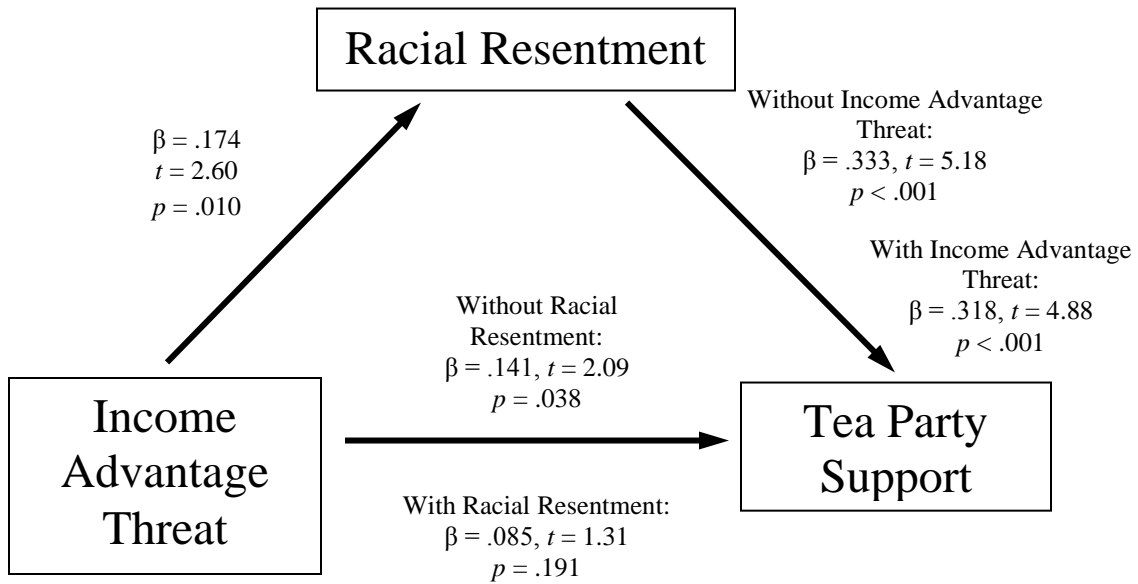
Figure 5. Results of a mediation analysis of the effects of threatening the white income advantage on whites' support for the Tea Party, with racial resentment as hypothesized mediator. Together with bootstrap analyses, results indicate a statistically significant, mediation.

Effects of Condition for Minority Participants. Because our theoretical arguments concern the factors leading whites to support the Tea Party, our above analyses focus on the responses of white participants. In the interests of thoroughness, we here give results for minority participants.

In Study 1, two hundred and fifty-five participants identified as white (71.6%), 40 participants as Latino (11.2%), 23 as Asian (6.5%), 16 as black (4.5%), and 22 indicated another or mixed race (6.2%). Minorities showed less support for the Tea Party in the Dark Obama Prime condition (8%) as compared with the Light Obama Prime condition (19%), though this difference was not statistically significant (χ^2 (1) = 2.72, p = .15).

In Study 2, two hundred and twenty-four participants identified as white (77.2%), twenty-one as Asian (7.2%), twenty as black (6.9%), fifteen as Latino (5.2%), and ten indicated another or mixed race (3.4%). There was no significant difference in Tea Party support between minority respondents assigned to the Majority Threat condition (M = 1.45) and those assigned to the Majority Stable condition (M = 1.52; t(64) = .247, p = .81, d = .40) . Minority respondents also did not express significantly different levels of racial resentment across the Majority Threat (M = 3.24) and Majority Stable conditions (M = 3.61, t(64) = 1.19, p = .24, d = .30).

In Study 3, two hundred and seventeen participants identified as white (74.3%), twenty-four as Latino (8.2%), twenty-three as black (7.9%), twenty as Asian (6.8%), and eight indicated another or mixed race (2.7%). Minority respondents assigned to the Income Gap Closing condition (M = 1.23) expressed somewhat less Tea Party support than those assigned to the Income Gap Expanding condition (M = 1.37; t(73) = .912, p = .365, d = .21), though this effect was insignificant. Minority respondents also did not express significantly different levels of

racial resentment across the Income Gap Closing ($M = 3.15$) and Income Gap Expanding conditions ($M = 3.39$; $t(73) = .76$, $p = .45$, $d = .18$).

In Study 4, one hundred and twenty-three participants identified as white (87.2%), seven as black (5.0%), seven as Latino (5.0%), two as Asian (1.4%), and two as another or mixed race (1.4%). We did not analyze results for minority Tea Party supporters because so few ($N = 18$) participated in the study.

In Study 5, one hundred and ninety-nine participants identified as white (74.3%), twenty-five as Asian (9.3%), twenty as black (7.5%), ten as Latino (3.7%), and fourteen indicated another or mixed race (5.2%). Minorities assigned to the Racialized Platform condition ($M = 1.18$) supported the Tea Party less than those assigned to the Libertarian Platform condition ($M = 1.31$; $t(67) = .91$, $p = .37$, $d = 22$). Minorities assigned to the Racialized Platform condition ($M = 1.57$) viewed the Tea Party significantly less positively than those assigned to the Libertarian Platform condition ($M = 2.00$; $t(66) = 2.08$, $p = .042$. $d = .51$).

Minority participants responded quite differently from white participants, if anything expressing lower support for the Tea Party in the white racial threat conditions in Studies 1-3. One interpretation of this result could be that minorities viewed the racial threat conditions – those portraying Barack Obama as having darker skin, the white majority to be declining, and the white income advantage to be shrinking – as empowering, encouraging minority respondents to greater opposition of a social movement they perceived as supporting white interests, though other interpretations are possible (Abascal, 2015) and further research is needed.

Robustness Analyses. Below we provide the results of two sets of robustness analyses. The first, the *p*-curve analysis, examines the observed distribution of *p*-values and compares it to the theoretical distribution of *p*-values when there is no effect present as well as the theoretical

distribution of *p*-values when there is an effect with 33% power. For more information on *p*-curve analysis, see Simonsohn, Nelson, & Simmons (2014) or p-curve.com. The second set of analyses, the Replicability Index (or "R-index"), is a measure used to evaluate the probability that effects will replicate. For more information on the R-index, see Schimmack (2014) or r-index.org.

Summary list of all analyses involving white participants.

Study 1: $\chi2(1) = 4.73$

Study 2: $t(223) = 3.01$; $t(223) = 3.01$

Study 3: $t(216) = 2.10$; $t(216) = 2.60$

Study 4: $t(122) = 3.30$; $t(122) = 1.10$; $t(122) = 2.37$; $t(122) = 1.89$; $t(122) = 1.96$; $t(122) = 1.01$

Study 5: $t(198) = 2.22$; $t(198) = 1.79$

***P*-curve analysis.**

Generated using shinyapps.org/apps/p-checker (see Figure S1).

1) Studies contain evidential value: $Z = -1.847$; $p = .032$. (*A significant* p-*value indicates that the* p-*curve is right-skewed, which indicates evidential value.*)

2) Studies' evidential value, if any, is inadequate: $Z = 0.01$; $p = .504$

(*A significant* p-*value indicates that the* p-*curve is flatter than one would expect if studies were powered at 33%, which indicates that the results have no evidential value.*)

R-index.

Success rate = 0.6154

Median observed power = 0.5851

Inflation rate = 0.0303

R-Index = 0.5548

        Controlling for Republican Party Support in Studies 2-4. Past research finds that
status threats can lead whites to express greater conservatism in general, suggesting that the
effects we find of status threats on whites' Tea Party support may simply derive from that more
general tendency. This would be inconsistent with our argument that the Tea Party's particular
emphasis on a set of racialized issues makes it a particularly attractive movement to threatened
whites. In Studies 2-4 we included two items assessing support for the Republican Party,
designed to parallel our Tea Party support items, offering us some ability to statistically control
for conservatism. Participants gave their degree of agreement on 5-point scales with two
statements: "To what extent do you consider yourself a supporter of the Republican Party?" and
"To what extent do you identify as a member of the Republican Party?" Responses to these items
(Cronbach's α = .94) were averaged to form a composite measure of *Republican Party support*.
We analyze participants' scores on this composite to assess our claim that there is a unique effect
of status threat on Tea Party support in Studies 2-4.

        First, in Studies 2, 3, and 4 whites assigned to the threat condition (*M*'s = 2.08, 1.76, and
3.12, respectively) reported greater support for the Republican Party than white participants
assigned to the control condition (*M*'s = 1.93, 1.58, and 2.60), however this effect was only
significant in Study 3 ($t(218)$ = .94, $t(212)$ = 1.30, and $t(121)$ = 2.32, *p*'s = .348, .196, and .022,
d's = .13, .18, .42). Thus, we did not find a consistent effect of status threat on Republican Party
support. In addition, we ran a series of multiple regression models analyzing the effect of status
threat on Tea Party support, while controlling for Republican Party support. In Study 2, both

Republican Party support ($\beta = .544$, $p < .001$) and the majority threat manipulation ($\beta = .158$, $p = .005$) significantly predicted Tea Party support. In Study 3, Republican Party support significantly predicted Tea Party support ($\beta = .569$, $p < .001$), but the effect of the income gap manipulation was non-significant ($\beta = .086$, $p = .128$). Finally, in Study 4 both Republican Party support ($\beta = .543$, $p < .001$) and the majority threat manipulation ($\beta = .175$, $p = .020$) significantly predicted Tea Party support. Overall, the effect of status threats on whites' support for the Tea Party remained significant in two of three models in which a control for Republican Party support was added.

Analysis of Statistical Power in Study 4. Even though our sample size was smaller than our other studies, the statistical power for testing whether our manipulation had an impact on our primary dependent variable – Tea Party support – appears to have been sufficient (observed power = .897). However, the smaller sample size may have prevented us from finding statistically significant effects for our additional analyses relating to participants' willingness to, likelihood to, and interest in contributing to the movement. The observed power for these items was .465, .492, and .170, respectively, indicating that our sample size was insufficient to consistently find a significant effect of experimental manipulation on these measures.

Supplemental Methods

Ethics statement

The experiments were approved by the Institutional Review Boards at UC-Berkeley (Studies 1-3) and Stanford University (Studies 4-5). All participants provided informed consent.

Study 1

In the demographic questionnaire, participants also completed a 5-item measure of political knowledge adapted from a widely used battery that included items like "What job or political

office is now held by Joe Biden?" and "Which party currently has the most members in the House of Representatives in Washington" (Carpini & Keeter, 1993). We tested whether the effect of the Obama prime on whites' Tea Party support varied by respondents' level of political knowledge, estimating a logistic regression model including terms for the experimental manipulation, number of items answered correctly on the political knowledge questionnaire, and the interaction of these terms. This analysis showed that the effect of experimental condition on whites' likelihood of reporting support for the Tea Party did not vary by level of political knowledge. In addition, following the manipulation, we assessed participants' positive or negative mood using a standard battery (the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). We found no effects of the experimental prime on either white or minority participants' reported affect.

Study 2

  Stimulus materials. The demographic information was preceded by the following introductory text: "Following the last presidential election, there has been a great deal of discussion about the demographic make-up of the country, how it has changed in recent years and how it may change in the future. As political analysts discuss trends in the racial and ethnic composition of the U.S., it's important for them to know the results of cutting edge research. In some cases, demographic research agrees with what most analysts have been saying, but there are also some important differences between the data and the discussions we see in the media. Below is a graph of the proportions of Americans who fall into different racial and ethnic categories. The left side of the graph gives recent census results. The dashed lines on the right give projections from recent demographic models of American population change (University of

Virginia Population Study Center, 2012)." This text was followed by a graph and additional text given in Figures 2a and 2b.

Following the demographic questionnaire, but prior to the manipulation, participants completed a standard measure of *ethnic identification* adapted from a standard measure of group identification (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992) in which they indicated their degree of agreement on scales ranging from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 7 ("Strongly Agree") with four items: "In general, belonging to my race/ethnicity is an important part of my self image," "Overall, my race/ ethnicity has very little to do with how I feel about myself" (reverse-scored), "The racial/ ethnic group I belong to is an important reflection of who I am," and "My race/ethnicity is unimportant to my sense of what kind of person I am" (reverse-scored)(α = .86). In multivariate analyses including the experimental manipulation, levels of racial identification, and the interaction of these two variables, we found no evidence that the effect of experimental condition on whites' Tea Party support or racial resentment varied by levels of racial identification.

Study 4

Dependent Measures. Items for the composite measure of identification as a Tea Party supporter were adapted from the same standard measure of identification as above (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). Participants indicated their degree of agreement on seven-point scales ranging from 1 ("Strongly Disagree) to 7 ("Strongly Agree") with five statements: "I identify as a Tea Party movement supporter," "Overall, being a supporter of the Tea Party movement has very little to do with how I feel about myself" (reverse-scored), "Being a supporter of the Tea Party movement is an important reflection of who I am," "Being a supporter of the Tea Party movement is unimportant to my sense of what kind of person I am" (reverse-scored), and "In

general, being a supporter of the Tea Party movement is an important part of my self-image" (α = .76).

For our composite measure of willingness to contribute to the Tea Party, participants also gave their degree of agreement on seven-point scales with three statements (α = .76): "I would be willing to recruit a friend or relative to attend an event organized by the Tea Party movement," "I would be willing to donate money to the Tea Party movement," and "I would be willing to sign a petition supporting the Tea Party movement's platform." Our composite measure of participants' reported likelihood of contributing to the Tea Party was based on participants' responses on seven-point scales ranging from 1 ("Not likely at all") to 7 ("Extremely likely") to three questions (α = .89): "How likely is it that you will sign a petition sponsored by the Tea Party movement in the next year?" "How likely is it that you will donate money to the Tea Party movement in the next year?" "How likely is it that you will attend a Tea Party movement protest, meeting, or rally in the next year?"

Finally, our measure of participants' interest in contributing to the Tea Party was pseudo-behavioral, asking participants a series of three "yes/no" questions gauging their willingness to make some form of online contribution to the movement (α = .76): "Would you be interested in receiving information about petitions organized by the Tea Party movement?" "Would you be interested in receiving information about how to donate money to support the Tea Party movement?" "Would you be interested in giving a portion of your earnings from this study to a local affiliate of the Tea Party movement?"

Study 5

Stimulus materials. The survey questions regarding the Tea Party were preceded by the following introductory text: "The next few questions we will ask you concern your views of the

Tea Party. The Tea Party is a conservative political movement that emerged in early 2009. While having no formal agenda, some of the positions that its members have advocated for include:"

Participants assigned to the Racialized Platform condition were shown this list of positions: "1. Stricter policies against illegal immigration, 2. Cuts to welfare benefits to reduce dependence on government, 3. Strong opposition to President Barack Obama, 4. Forceful policies towards Muslim countries." Participants assigned to the Libertarian Platform condition were shown this list of positions: "1. Act aggressively to balance the federal budget, 2. Greatly reduce government spending on everything but national defense, 3. Strong opposition to excessive taxation, 4. Protect free markets by reducing government regulation of businesses."

Dependent Measures. Items for the composite measure of positive views of the Tea Party asked participants their degree of agreement on scales ranging from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 5 ("Strongly Agree") with five statements ($\alpha = .96$): "I think that the Tea Party is a great political movement," "In the last few years, the Tea Party movement has made important contributions to America," "We would be better off without the Tea Party movement," "I have benefited from the political influence of the Tea Party," and "The Tea Party movement represents my political views."

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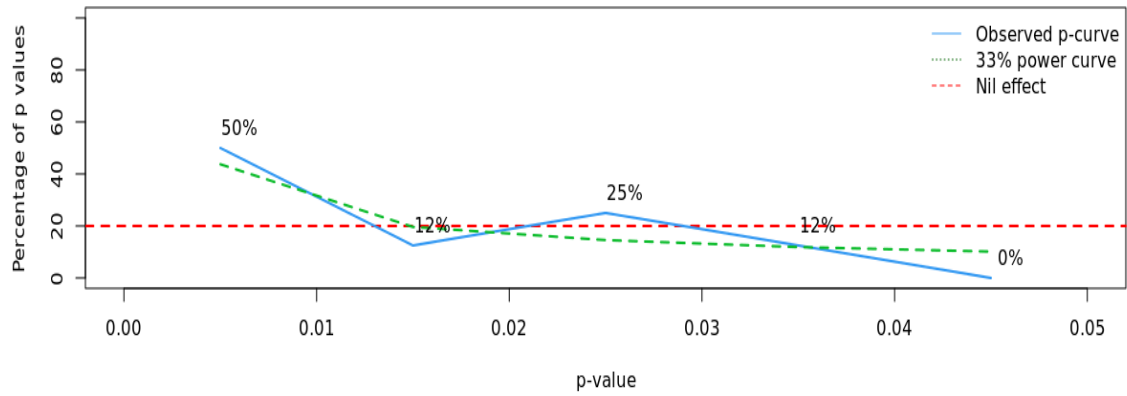
Figure S1. *P*-curve for all effects reported in the present research