

White Racial Resentment & Political Cross-Pressures in Nationalized Elections: The Case of the Republican Coalition in the Trump Era

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Abstract

While scholars have found that Trump benefited electorally from racial resentment sentiments among whites, it is less clear how these racial resentment attitudes influence vote-choice across partisan and ideological cleavages in the electorate. It is also unclear whether racial resentment affected voting at the congressional level or electoral outcomes at the aggregate level. Using a novel measure of racial resentment at the subnational level and survey data, we make three clear findings: (1) Trump and Republican congressional candidates benefited from racial resentment both at the aggregate level and among white voters, (2) this electoral benefit for Republicans persisted during the 2018 midterm elections, and (3) the effect of resentment on vote-choice did not significantly vary across partisan and ideological cleavages in the white electorate. Our findings suggest that, even during the era of highly nationalized and partisan elections, racial resentment is still a mechanism by which Republicans can win significant electoral support among Democrats and relatively liberal voters in the white electorate. These findings have implications for the growing salience of racial resentment in the Republican electoral coalition.

Key words: white racial resentment, congressional elections, electoral choice, spatial voting, nationalized electoral contexts

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