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Colored by Context:

Relative Racial Salience (RRS) and the Politics of Mixed-Race Americans

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in Political Science

by

Gregory John Leslie

2022

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Colored by Context:

Relative Racial Salience (RRS) and the Politics of Mixed-Race Americans

by

Gregory John Leslie

Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science

University of California, Los Angeles, 2022

Professor David O. Sears, Chair

The purpose of this dissertation is to introduce and test a new theoretical framework for explaining and predicting the political behavior of mixed-race individuals I call *relative racial salience* (RRS). Relative racial salience is defined as the relative salience of one of the racial groups within a mixed-race individual's heritage, as compared to the other, within a given social context. Through the RRS framework I argue that racial group boundaries are relatively permeable for mixed-race individuals, meaning they can avail themselves of the different racial identities in their heritage as they vary contextually in fit and accessibility. In the first section, I draw from an unprecedented wealth of new and independently crafted datasets to demonstrate that racial context is indeed a basal component in the construction and expression of mixed-race individuals' racial identity choices, partisanship, political attitudes, and candidate evaluations. In the second section, I use voter files to introduce a unique model of causal assessment that substantiates the likely causal effect of racial context on Biracials' partisanship. In the third and

final empirical section, I leverage ensemble machine learning categorization which takes into account every single variable available in my two largest datasets (800+ variables) to provide the most comprehensive empirical portrait of the general political characteristics of mixed-race individuals to date. In doing so, I demonstrate that Latino-Whites and Asian-Whites are actually more similar to Whites than they are to their single-race minority counterparts (Latinos and Asians, respectively), while Blacks-Whites remain resolute in their resemblance of Blacks. I comport these findings as evidence that the continuation of current demographic trends is likely to lead to fading boundaries between Latinos, Asians, and Whites, and the reification of the racial group boundary separating Blacks from all others as the most salient color line in the United States.

The dissertation of Gregory John Leslie is approved.

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4. Christopher T. Stout, Gregory John Leslie, Davin Phoenix, and Elizabeth Schroeder “How Black Lives Matter Shapes the Rhetoric of Black Elected Officials” *Working Paper.*
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## **Chapter 1:**

### **Introduction**

There are several good reasons why writing a dissertation on the politics of mixed-race Americans is both warranted and timely. First to mention—and perhaps requisite of any project of this sort—is that one cannot help but notice that the only two racial minorities elected to our highest political offices, Barack Obama and Kamala Harris, are both the children of interracial parentage. Barack Obama was famously elected as the first Black president in 2008 and is well known to be the child of one White mother from Kansas and an African father from Kenya (Obama, 1995). Kamala Harris was elected to the executive branch as Vice President in 2020 and is also well known to be the child of a Black immigrant father from Jamaica and a mother who emigrated from India (Harris, 2019). Interestingly, individuals with interracial parentage, despite only comprising a minority of all Blacks, are the only two racial minorities to have been elected to our highest offices. Evidently, the quality of having mixed-race heritage has found itself to have important implications for the study of politics at the elite level.

However, what I am going to try and convince you of in this dissertation is that mixed-race individuals are not only important to the study of politics at the elite level. Rather, at the mass level mixed-race individuals today already account for a fairly large proportion of the American electorate. For example, for the second decade in a row the two-or-more race population has been shown by the census to be the fastest growing demographic group in the United States (U.S. Census, 2020). To be sure, the census in 2020 provides a fairly small estimate of just 2.9% for the proportion of mixed-race individuals within the entire population. However, it is no secret among social scientists that the ways that the census measures race and racial identity are not always up to the standards of how we perceive racial categorization in the

real world. One illustrative example of this problem is that only for the first time in 2020 did the decennial census finally not include the word “Negro” as akin to Black and African American when measuring racial identification (Brown, 2013). However, the census’ major departure from social scientific norms in measuring race is that they continue to comport Latino as an ethnicity rather than as a racial group, which majorly distorts the proportion of individuals who are traditionally considered mixed-race by scholars of race today.

Indeed, the recent Nationscape study from 2020—one of the largest political science surveys in history—has determined that if you measure mixed-racedness in terms of individuals who acknowledge having two parents from different racial groups, the modern proportion of mixed-race Americans is actually 13.3%. Moreover, 13.3% as demonstrated from Nationscape is representative only of the 18 years and older population, and it is well known that children are exceedingly more likely have mixed-racial parentage than adults (Census, 2020). Indeed, demographers map out an exploding mixed-race population in America, with some estimates predicting that as many as one in five Americans will be mixed-race by the year 2050, and one in three by 2100 (Lee & Bean, 2012). Regardless of how you measure it, mixed-race individuals represent a major proportion of the electorate today, an even larger proportion tomorrow, and are highly important to our understanding at the mass level of our political world.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study of mixed-race individuals is also very interesting in terms of the challenges they pose—and therefore, the opportunities they present—with regard to prevailing wisdom about nature of race and racial identity, and the roles they play in impacting American politics. Indeed, the conceptualizing of race in the United States is changing. As a consequence social scientists are charged with expanding our theories of race of to better account for how individuals with membership in multiple racial groups construct and

express their politics. For example, while extant research on the effects of geographic context and demographic change have almost exclusively taken racial ingroup membership as given (Bobo & Gilliam, 1990; Enos, 2017; Fraga, 2018 White & Laird, 2020), it is currently unknown how these forces operate among individuals who have plausible membership in two or more racial groups. By exploring questions like these, my dissertation seeks to update and expand prevailing theories of race to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Finally, while political science is only beginning to provide empirical accounts of how mixed-race individuals reconcile their dual-racial group membership and come to express their political selves, I have identified a missing focus of existing research which I argue is perhaps the single most important force for understanding mixed-race political behavior: racial context. While preceding works have set a tremendous foundation for understanding mixed-race political behavior and have touched upon the subject of racial context at various times (Hochschild et al., 2012; Masuoka, 2017; Davenport, 2018), I assert that racial context plays a much more central role than has previously been considered, and do so by introducing a new framework for understanding the role of racial context I call *relative racial salience* (RRS). As a consequence, my dissertation offers a detailed theoretical and empirical account of how racial context informs mixed-race political behavior, and I demonstrate plainly, and with astounding consistency, that racial context is indeed a basal component in mixed-race individuals' construction and expression of racial identity, partisanship, attitudes, and candidate evaluations.

### ***Background, Terms, and Definitions***

Before moving forward, it is important to define some of the important terms I will use. First, while scholars have predominantly used the word Multiracial to describe the target group



of my dissertation, my opinion is that the word “Multiracial” has come to have diffuse popular meanings. For example, the word Multiracial has at times been used in a manner akin to “racially diverse” in that it is used to describe the quality of including individuals from multiple different racial groups (e.g. describing a context with single-race Blacks, single-race Latinos, and single-race Asians as multiracial or multi-racial). Second, the term Multiracial in my opinion is too closely conflated with the way the census identifies their so called two-or-more-race population—specifically as only those who choose two or more racial labels to describe their own racial identification. While relying on the labels individuals use to describe their own racial identities is of course paramount and should be unambiguously respected in the real world, incorporating this definition into the study of mixed-race individuals is a bit more complicated given that these individuals have the propensity to change the ways they racially identify at different times and in different contexts, and tend to do so quite often (Harris & Sims, 2002; Doyle & Kao, 2007; Liebler et al., 2017 Agadjanian, 2021).

The term I use to describe my target population is “mixed-race” and it denotes the population of all individuals who have or acknowledge two or more racial group heritages among their parents. Moreover, I use the term “Biracial” quite often, which specifically denotes individuals who acknowledge two specific racial groups pairings among their parents. For example, Black-White Biracials are individuals who have indicated in some manner previously that they have either one Black mother and one White father, or one White mother and one Black father. Moreover, it may be helpful to note here that the main subjects of this dissertation will be three Biracial subgroups, specifically Black-Whites, Latino-Whites, and Asian-Whites.

Finally, to add one final layer of complexity, I often use the terms *nominal* and *activated* in conjunction with the terms mixed-race or Biracial to differentiate between the two most

common methods in which mixed-racedness is identified. First, someone who is *nominally* mixed-race or Biracial is someone who may or may not identify personally with two or more groups, but who has previously indicated or in some manner disclosed that they have parents from at least two different racial groups as conceptualized today (e.g. Blacks, Latinos, Asians, or Whites). Also note that the term “nominal” as used here is a borrowing from Kanchan Chandra’s (2012) definition of ethnic group membership in that it denotes an individual who has plausible membership in an ethnic or racial group through shared ancestry, though they might not actively identify with that group. Oppositely, I use the terms *active* or *activated* to denote individuals who actively identify with two or more groups. Explicitly, activated mixed-race or Biracial individuals are those who simultaneously identify with two or more racial groups in terms of their own, personal labels of racial self-identification. It should be stated that throughout this dissertation I spend the overwhelming majority of my focus on the larger group of nominal Biracial individuals—again, those who have indicated that they have two biological parents from different racial groups. However, in chapter three I explore why some nominal Biracials choose to identify personally with only one of the racial groups in their heritage, or with both (activated Biracials).

### ***The Relative Racial Salience (RRS) Framework for Understanding Mixed-Race Political Behavior***

The theoretical contribution made by this dissertation is to introduce a concept I call Relative Racial Salience (RRS). RRS is a framework for explaining and predicting mixed-race political behavior which places racial context at its center. Specifically, relative racial salience is defined as the relative salience of one of the racial groups within a Biracial individuals’ heritage,

as compared to the other, within a given social context. RRS asserts that racial context will be a central component to the construction and expression of mixed-race individuals' racial identities, partisanship, political attitudes, and candidate evaluations.

The RRS framework asserts that racial context will influence Biracials' racial identities and politics through two distinct processes. First, in a set of mechanisms I refer to as the psychological or social identity theory process of RRS, context works by influencing the racialized lens through which mixed-race individuals perceive and evaluate their political world. Specifically, mixed-race individuals should evaluate politics through the cognitive and affective lens of the racial group from their heritage which is relatively most salient within their social context. Second, in a set of mechanisms I refer to as the socialization process of RRS, racial context should affect both the content and frequency of the racialized experiences mixed-race individuals encounter, the information they are exposed to, as well as the social and political values they are likely to inherit along the way.

This first process of the RRS framework is most neatly explained via social identity theory. Just as for single-race individuals, mixed-race individuals desire a positive social identity, and therefore desire membership in the social group they perceive to be of the highest value (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). However, access to different social groups may be constrained by the degree to which one possesses or can attain the prototypical characteristics of that group. If an individual in one group perceives another group to be of higher value, and group boundaries are sufficiently permeable, they will engage in a process of social mobility where they exit one group and enter another. Finally, to connect this process to political attitudes specifically, and as asserted by self-categorization theory, as an individual attains membership in a group or while they are seeking membership they begin to adopt the attitudes and behaviors prototypical of that

group via the process of depersonalization (Turner et al., 1987). Moreover, many of the basic tenets of self-categorization theory reconcile quite well with my characterization of RRS, especially in their framing of group membership as quite labile, meaning different racial group identities can be “switched” on or off as they vary in salience.

Next, the second process of RRS asserts that context works to impact mixed-race individuals’ politics through several mechanisms associated with socialization. As described by Herbert Hyman, one of the originators of the theory of political socialization, “foremost among agencies of socialization into politics is the family” (Hyman, 1959). Through political socialization, parents and other close individuals transmit racial values and partisan dispositions to their children through direct curing, indirect cueing, and via the social milieu (Dalton, 1982). Moreover, and consistent with the impressionable-years hypothesis, RRS holds that the mixed-race individuals are most susceptible to socialization forces during adolescence or early adulthood (Osborne et al., 2011). However, what differentiates mixed-race individuals from single-race individuals is that mixed-race folk in general tend to have both more varied racial contexts than do single-race individuals, as well as more access to varied racial group memberships in those varied spaces than do single-race individuals. Indeed, the key tenet of RRS is that racial group boundaries for mixed-race individuals are permeable than they are for single-race individuals, which allows for varied racial group memberships in different contexts (more on this in just a moment).

Another way that mixed-race individuals’ socialization experiences may differ from those of single-race individuals is in their propensity to experience cross pressuring. Cross pressuring can be described as when an individual receives conflicting or opposing cues on important social, political, or racial topics from their primary socialization agents—typically parents or

close relatives (Jennings & Niemi, 1968; Jennings et al., 2009). Indeed, evidence suggests that mixed-race individuals should be more likely to experience cross pressuring than single-race individuals. For instance, studies describe that families, both White and minority, engage in ethnic-racial socialization where they transmit values that are racial group specific for the purposes of instilling racial or ethnic pride and enhancing self-esteem (Hughes, Watford, & Del Toro, 2016). Moreover, studies also describe that mixed-race individuals are exposed to widely divergent and conflicting political and racial views as a function of having diverse family relatives (Root, 1992; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2007). Additionally, scholars posit that as a consequence of cross pressuring individuals become more likely to acquire the attitudes prototypical of socialization agents outside of the home, such as friends, neighbors, teachers, or coworkers. In this way, mixed-race individuals, in response to racial and political cross pressuring, might be highly likely to look to the racial group most salient in their social space as the reference group from which their own political thinking departs.

To illustrate this point, consider a hypothetical individual who is Biracial by way of having a White mother and a Black father. This Biracial individual may go and visit the Black side of their family on the Sunday night following the murder of George Floyd. During this visit they might hear broadly from their Black grandmother and relatives about how terrible and sad it is that another Black life was taken at the hands of the police, and how inspiring it is to witness the civil activism represented by the Black Lives Matter movement and their peaceful protests. However, this same Biracial individual may go visit their White grandmother on Tuesday, only to hear about how terrible it is that so many looters and rioters are disgracing what it means to be American. Indeed, these types of highly divergent racial and political cues are shown to be quite

common among mixed-race individuals given their exposure to diverse racial contexts (Does et al., 2022; Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2007).

Next, I had asserted previously that the key component of the RRS framework is the that racial group boundaries for mixed-race individuals are more permeable than they are for single-race individuals. Specifically, I have highlighted three general reasons that mixed-race individuals possess enhanced permeability compared their single-race counterparts. First, mixed-race individuals are more likely to wield *dual-racial capital* than single-race individuals, meaning they are more likely to accrue shared racialized experiences and cultural competencies from the different racial groups in their heritage. Dual racial capital most basely denotes the fact that mixed-race individuals possess links to two or more racial groups through their ancestral or genetic lineage, which provides them with authentic connections that substantiate their membership in different racial groups. Moreover, mixed-race individuals are also likely to possess a wide cache of racialized experiences with the different racial groups in their heritage (Sanchez et al., 2009), such as having participated as a chambelan at their cousin's quinceañera, or having learned to make miso soup with their aunt back in Japan. These caches of racial capital are important because mixed-race individuals can draw upon them situationally to provide bona fides for their racial group membership and to ingratiate sameness.

Secondly, mixed-race individuals are likely to have more permeable racial group boundaries than single-race individuals because over the course of their lives they are more likely than single-race individuals to develop *dual-racial affect*. Specifically, mixed-race individuals are likely to develop positive affective dispositions to the two or more racial groups in their heritage through the development of primary group<sup>1</sup> relationships with the members of

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of primary group relationships is a borrowing from sociologist Charles Horton Cooley (1955), which regards relationships with others that are “personal, informal, intimate, and usually face-to-face, and which involves

their component racial groups (Sanchez et al., 2009). Of course, not all mixed-race individuals are likely to develop positive affective dispositions for each of the racial groups in their heritage—indeed some may develop antipathy toward certain groups in response to significant experiences of otherization, or they may develop sufficiently positive dispositions toward one group such that they all but disregard ties to their other racial group heritage(s). Still, previous studies in general demonstrate that mixed-race individuals have a propensity for acquiring at least some positive emotional feelings toward the racial groups in their heritage (Root, 1992; Rockquemore & Brunson, 2007; Hong et al., 2016). These positive dispositions can be primed in different social contexts which causes them to spill over into and affect mixed-race individuals political attitudes and behaviors (Sears, 1984; Tesler, 2016).

Finally, the third reason in which mixed-race individuals should have more permeable racial group boundaries than single-race individuals is because of the relative *ambiguous nature of their visual appearances*. Indeed, the key word here is “relative” because mixed-race heritage is by no means perfectly indicative of having what might be considered a racially ambiguous appearance (nor is having a single heritage indicative of a racially prototypical appearance). However, extant research does demonstrate that mixed-race individuals often possess physical and phenotypic characteristics from the different racial groups in their heritage (Pauker et al., 2018). Moreover, studies show that pictures of mixed-race individuals tend to generate inconsistent racial categorization from external perceivers (Ho et al., 2011; Chen & Hamilton, 2012; Pauker et al., 2009), while pictures of single-race individuals do not. Lastly, perhaps the best evidence that mixed-race individuals are more likely than single-race individuals to have racial ambiguous physical appearances is the scores of qualitative evidence documenting the

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the entire personality, not just a segmentalized part of it.” This concept well characterizes the types of relationships that do the work of influencing multiracials’ politics.

phenomenon among mixed-race individuals where they are asked, “So, what are you?” (Tran et al., 2016). As a consequence, mixed-race individuals on average have a bit more leeway than single-race individuals in terms of the racial group memberships they can assert and have been accepted by others which makes their racial group boundaries more permeable than are single-race individuals’.

Lastly, these two processes of RRS are not meant to be seen as mutually or sequentially exclusive from one another. In fact, they are theorized to work hand in hand. For example, the psychological process of RRS described above via social identity theory is intended to be thought of as the most basic set of mechanisms though they are played out most often through long term racial and political socialization. By this, I mean that it is typically through variation in the contextual preponderance of one of the racial groups from a mixed-race individual’s heritage within their social context that psychologically “switches on” one of their racial group identities, which in turn colors the way mixed-race individuals act, the types of people they hang out with and the spaces they go to, as well as the ways that they perceive those experiences throughout the life cycle. On the other hand, the degree that mixed-race individuals’ membership in one racial group or the other(s) is reinforced through socialization experiences throughout the life cycle should in fact moderate their responsiveness to racial context variation via the psychosocial process of RRS. For example, individuals who receive socialization experiences that predispose them well to both of the racial groups in their heritage should be highly responsive to even short-term variation in their racial context as it relates to their political attitudes and behavior. However, if an individual’s socialization experiences strongly reinforce membership in only one of their racial groups, then that individual is unlikely to be responsive to short-term variation in the salience of the different racial groups in their heritage.



## *Data*

To explore and test the RRS framework, I rely on an unprecedented wealth of new and independently crafted data. Indeed, since the study of mixed-race politics has been heavily curtailed by limited access to data, the creation and arrangement of many of the datasets I use constitute one of the major contributions of this dissertation. For example, over the past few years I have been fortunate to collaborate with UCLA's 2020 Nationscape and the 2020 Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey (CMPS) projects in order to include items on these surveys measuring parent race so that mixed-race participants can be identified. These efforts resulted in the first large-scale, modern portraits of the politics of mixed-race individuals using nationally-representative samples and as such are a major reason this dissertation is possible and mixed-race political behavior can be illuminated.

Second, I constructed the first datasets which identify Biracials using official voting records. Specifically, I applied a unique matching algorithm to the North Carolina and Florida voter files which uses last name, race, gender, age, and address variables to identify racially intermarried family units and Biracial voters. Given my idiosyncratic compartment of these files—specifically the young age of voters and information about the party affiliations and vote histories of their parents—I am able to offer, in chapter five, a new method for stress testing the causal relationship between racial context and outcomes which relies on the conditional independence framework. Moreover, given access to voters' addresses I was able geocode over five million voters' houses so that racial context and socioeconomic variables could be appended from the census at geographic clusters as granular as the block and tract levels. Ultimately, these voter files allow me to test many of the assumptions of the RRS framework and to demonstrate

that context is indeed a highly potent predictor of Biracials' real-world behavior, and not just their responses to survey items.

All told, I rely on an robust repository of five datasets: the 2015 Pew Survey of Multiracial Adults, the 2020 Nationscape, the 2020 Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Study, the North Carolina Statewide Voter File (NCVF), and the Florida Statewide Voter File (FVF) to test the RRS framework. In addition to these publicly available datasets, I also fielded and present the results of an online survey experiment which was designed to mimic the experience of traversing varied racial contexts in order to test some of the causal mechanisms asserted by RRS.

Armed with the near universe of usable survey data<sup>2</sup> on this subject (e.g. datasets that have sufficiently large samples of mixed-race individuals and information relevant to context and politics) my first empirical goal is to show plainly whether or not evidence exists which supports the expectations of RRS. Specifically, in chapters three and four I use regression models which test whether racial context is significantly correlated with the identity choices, partisanship, attitudes, and candidate evaluations of the three Biracial subgroups which are the subjects of this project: Black-Whites, Latino-Whites, and Asian-Whites. Moreover, throughout chapters three and four I do not pick and choose which survey results to present, rather I present the results of each and every dataset in which analyses involving each outcome category are possible in order to provide a transparent and completely informed portrait of the true, observed relationship between context and Biracials' politics. Then, in chapter five I use the voter file data and my

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<sup>2</sup> The only other datasets I am aware of which might also be usable for this type of analysis are The Freshmen Survey (2000-2003) and the Cooperative Election Studies (CES; formerly the CCES). Specifically, I chose not to include The Freshmen Survey because, while this data has been highly beneficial to the study of mixed-race politics in the past, it is limited to only college going and aged individuals, it is now fairly old having been collected 20 years ago, and it does not contain any information on partisanship or political candidates. Moreover, I chose not to include the CES because it does not measure mixed-race heritage in a manner consistent with all of the other surveys I use.

survey experiment to interrogate the causal chain involved in the RRS framework. Finally, in chapter six I put it all together by using every single available variable from the two largest datasets at my disposal to show comprehensively what the politics of mixed-race Americans are and how they compare to those of their single-race counterparts.

### *Chapter Previews*

The proceeding chapters as summarized as follows:

Chapter two presents a detailed literature review of research works relevant to the theory of relative racial salience. Here I catalogue relevant literature on mixed-racedness, primarily as it stems from sociology, psychology, and political science. The specific topics I review are political socialization, symbolic politics theory, social identity theory, self-categorization theory, group consciousness, linked fate, social visions, and a roundup of recent advances in mixed-race studies.

Chapter three is the first empirical chapter and the first part of a two-chapter section which plainly examines whether or not evidence exists of RRS among Biracials political characteristics. Specifically, chapter three explores whether or not variation in racial context is systematically correlated with Biracials identity choices and partisanship through the 2015 Pew Survey of Multiracial Adults, Nationscape, the Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey, and the North Carolina and Florida Voter Files. Over this course of this chapter, I demonstrate with remarkable consistency that Biracials do tend to be more likely to identify singularly with the racial group from their heritage as it increases numerically within their racial space. Using the Pew dataset I display how independent agents of socialization—friends, neighbors, and family—work separately to predict the identity choices of Biracials.

In terms of partisanship, in chapter three I show that Biracials are much more likely to be Democratic in social contexts that are dominated by members of their minority racial group counterparts than they are in White contexts. Moreover, Biracials' propensity to identify as Democrats (or Republicans) tends to statistically approximate the exact propensities of the racial group most salient in their social context, which provides robust evidence of the assertion made by the RRS framework in that Biracials are essentially adopting the attitudes prototypical of the group most salient in their space. While evidence of RRS is highly consistent among both Black-Whites and Latino-Whites, evidence suggests that Asian-Whites may be unique. Specifically, Asian-Whites have some propensity to be pushed in the opposite direction in terms of their identity choices when in highly Asian spaces (i.e. Asian-Whites are less likely to identify as Asian in highly Asian spaces as opposed to White spaces), though this defection is only present in a one of my tests.

Chapter four presents the second half of the analysis which explores the existence of RRS. Here, I use Pew, Nationscape, and the CMPS, since the voter files do not allow for the study of political attitudes or candidate evaluations. First, I demonstrate that, consistent with RRS, Biracials tend to adopt much more racially liberal political attitudes in social contexts dominated by their racial minority group counterparts. Conversely, they are much more conservative, and typically as racially conservative as are single-race Whites, when their social context is predominantly White. Chapter four also explores how Biracials' attitudes toward prominent political figures vary across racial context. Again, with remarkable consistency, Biracials tend to adopt the same levels of support for prominent political figures as is characteristic of the racial group most numerous in their social context.

Chapter five interrogates the degree to which racial context can exert a causal influence on political outcomes for Biracials, as well as provides a deeper analysis into the causal chain associated with RRS. First, I present the results of double robust estimation with machine learning models using my idiosyncratic sample of Biracials from the voter files. The design leverages a conditional independence framework to stress test my observational evidence in order to substantiate the likely causal effect of racial context on partisanship for Biracials. These models are demonstrated to work consistently for both Black-Whites and Latino-Whites, but data is less robust for Asian-Whites' partisanship.

Next, chapter five also presents the results of an online survey experiment which explores 1) whether or not variation in the salience of different racial groups exerts a causal force on Biracials' feelings about their racial identity and political attitudes, and 2) whether identity mediates the effect of context on attitudes, as is theorized by the RRS framework. The evidence shows that the treatment mimicking the effect of variation in racial context does in fact cause variation in identity choice, identity centrality, linked fate, and various racialized attitudes and policies. All of these results work in the theorized direction of RRS, and appear to be driven by increases in the salience of Biracials' White racial group counterparts, rather than their minority racial group. Moreover, Biracials' feelings about their racial identity, specifically the degree to which they feel being Black is central to their overall identity, mediates the relationship between priming White racial group context and racialized attitudes.

In chapter six, I depart from an investigation of the RRS framework and instead engage in analyses exploring how Biracials in general compare to their single-race counterparts in terms of their political attitudes and behavior. Specifically, I engage in ensemble machine learning categorization tasks which are able to take into account the entirety of the CMPS (500+

covariates) and Nationscape datasets to paint incredibly comprehensive and generalizable portraits of how Biracial groups compare to their single-race counterparts in terms of their overall political characteristics. Results show that Black-White Biracials are much more similar to single-race Blacks than to Whites, while Latino-Whites and Asian-Whites are more similar to Whites than to their minority groups (Latinos and Asians, respectively). These results indicate a blurring racial group boundary between non-Blacks and Whites, and the reification of the boundary between Blacks and all others as the most salient color line in the United States.

## **Chapter 2:**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Political Socialization**

Just as for single-race individuals, the basis for the development of racial and political predispositions for Multiracials can be traced back to the home. Hyman (1959) describes that up until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the existence of political orientations and norms of participation had been treated as an abrupt artifact of adult life. His book is the first to synthesize a cohesive theory of political socialization with the premise that, “Foremost among agencies of socialization into politics is the family” (Hyman, 1959). Citing several smaller scale survey studies of high schools and colleges, he presents evidence that individuals’ political attitudes, party affiliations, and participatory patterns develop substantially throughout adolescence and early adulthood, and preeminently through the transmission of values from parent to child.

Though the evidence presented by Hyman (1959) was limited by small, non-representative samples and issues of endogeneity, a surprising amount of its theoretical arguments still hold water in modern political science. Chief among these findings are that partisan affiliation seems to be transmitted from parent to child at a rate much higher than ideology, attitudes, or participation norms. They find that the correlation between children’s partisan preferences and their parent’s is as high as .9, as compared to a correlation of approximately .5 for other political attitudes. Moreover, Hyman asserted that intra-family dynamics were also meaningful for the transmission of political values from parent to child. He provides evidence of an additive effect of parental agreement and participation such that children show a greater likelihood of inheriting a political orientation when both their mother and father agree on that orientation. Children are even more likely to inherit their parents values when their

parents are more active in politics. More participation in political and civic organizations and voting provides more opportunities for parents to display their political values and to provide cues to their children about their political leanings.

Hyman (1959) also alludes to two factors of political socialization that have particular importance for Multiracials. As he assesses the relationship between the politics of parents and their children at different age levels, he comes to the conclusion that the influence of parents wanes overtime as children leave the home and encounter diverse life experiences. As the influence of parents wanes, the influence of schools, peers, friends, co-workers, and spouses become more critical. Hyman acknowledges that when children leave the home, alternative agencies of socialization which are essentially different socio-economic, political and racial contexts become more influential in determining a person's politics. He finds that children whose parents are Democrats become more likely to become independent as they move socially upward and gain wealthier friends and colleagues as their new political reference groups. Similarly, students who migrated from the Democratic South to the North become more likely to become Republican (during a pre realignment period). Children, especially those whose parents have disagreeing political orientations, become more responsive to contextual cues as they leave the household. An interesting question arises here as to whether or not Multiracials, whose parents come from diverging racial backgrounds, might be especially open and reactive to contextual changes as they grow older and encounter different political spaces and experiences.

Jennings and Niemi's (1968) article represents the next major contribution to political socialization literature. This study benefits from the 1965 University of Michigan study which interviewed both high school seniors and their parents, resulting in a total sample size of 1927 parent-child pairs. Ultimately, they corroborate Hyman's findings that party affiliation is nicely



passed down from parent to child. Theoretically, they elaborate on why party affiliation seems to transmit so consistently from parent to child by arguing that objects which are more central to the individual will transmit more easily than others. Correspondingly, they find that attitudes toward racial issues (given that these interviews took place at the height of the civil rights movement) are much more likely to be transmitted from the parent to the child than less salient issues like school prayer or attitudes toward communists. They describe that membership in different social groups also may increase the centrality of certain issues such that they transmit more readily.

Again, echoing Hyman (1959), Jennings and Niemi (1968) find that values transmit more readily from parent to child when the parents agree on those values and when they are highly active in politics. Parents provide information about their political preferences to their children through direct conversations and indirectly through inadvertent cue giving while they participate in politics. In the absence of cue giving, or when parents disagree on a particular topic, ambiguity and instability arises for the child that leads them to seek information elsewhere in order to form a political opinion. Again, these early political socialization literatures hint at an important implication for Multiracials—that the competing socialization processes taking place by virtue of exposure to difference reference or racial groups may create ambiguity or less stable preferences. For example, it could follow logically that a Latino-White Biracial might be transmitted opposing attitude cues from their Latino reference group and their White reference group, which lead them to be less stable and more ambiguous on certain attitudes, and thus more responsive to alternative agencies of socialization, such as differences in context.

In subsequent decades, questions arose as to whether or not the findings from Jennings and Niemi (1968) were due to unique generational properties of the politically charged 1960s. As a follow up to their 1965 study, Jennings, Stoker, and Bowers (2009) re-interviewed the original

respondents in three additional waves (1973, 1982, and 1997) and interviewed the children of the respondents who were high school seniors in 1965. Overall, they find that their original findings hold up well as the transmission of political values from parent to child operated quite similarly in the 80s and 90s as it did in 1965. Again, they provide evidence that objects with high centrality like partisanship and racial attitudes transmit very well, and that more participation among parents is correlated with better transmission rates to children.

After Jennings and Niemi (1968), the next major contribution to socialization literature is likely Dalton's (1982) article which posits that there are in fact two major pathways through which the political socialization process takes place. First, Dalton describes the 'attitudinal pathway' which is similar to the socialization pathway theorized by Hyman (1959) and Jennings and Niemi (1968) in that parents transfer values to their children directly through interpersonal interactions. Through this pathway, deeply-rooted, core beliefs such as partisanship and racial attitudes are learned early on and are persistent and resistant to resocialization throughout the life cycle. Second, and Dalton's major contribution, he argues that a 'social-milieu pathway' exists where parents transmit certain social characteristics such as social class, race, religion, and region which serve as reference groups that individuals draw from as they develop their political selves (see also Dawson & Prewitt, 1969; Verba & Almond, 1963).

As of today, it has been well corroborated that an individual's partisanship and racial attitudes are tightly linked to those of their parents (Alwin, Cohen, & Newcomb, 1991; Dinas, 2014a, 2014b; Franklin & Jackson, 1983; Glass, Bengtson, & Dunham, 1986; Jennings, 2007; Jennings, Markus, Niemi, & Stoker, 2005; Krosnick & Alwin, 1989; Levy, Sears, Huddy, & Jervis, 2003; Niemi & Jennings, 1991; Sears & Funk, 1999; Stoker & Bass, 2011; Tedin, 1974; Westholm, 1999). By the 1990s, political socialization literature had turned its attention toward

investigating theories presented earlier about what effect different agencies of socialization have on individuals at different stages throughout the life cycle. One theory presented was the ‘increasing persistence hypothesis’ which proposed that people are highly responsive to socialization when they are young, but become gradually less and less flexible to contextual influence as they age (Glenn, 1969; Jennings & Niemi, 1981; Markus, 1979; Sears, 1981). In this view, as individuals age they become increasingly focused on their own immediate selves and are less concerned with receiving new information (Gergen & Back, 1966; Glenn, 1969) and overtime they stack their social and professional circles with like-minded individuals to reinforce and stabilize existing attitudes (Newcomb, 1967).

Another theory of socialization throughout the life-cycle, and the one most evidentially corroborated, is the ‘impressionable years hypothesis’. The impressionable years hypothesis argues that individuals are responsive to socialization in adolescence and early-adulthood but become substantially less flexible immediately afterwards (Cutler, 1974; Easton & Dennis, 1969; Hess, 1967; Sears, 1983) rather than gradually as the persistence hypothesis holds. Jennings and Niemi characterize this theory nicely (1991, also see Beck & Jennings, 1975). This work draws upon the first three waves of the longitudinal survey mentioned above from Jennings, Stoker and Bowers (2009) which interviewed high school seniors and their parents in 1965, with follow ups in 1973 and 1982. They find that the relationship between the partisanship of the parents and that of the child is initially quite high when students are in late adolescence (correlation coefficient of .61) but drops precipitously when re-interviewed 8 years later when they are in early adulthood (.38) and remains stable up to mid-adulthood (.38). Here we observe that parents seem to be the primary socialization agents up until the end of adolescence. And, as theorized by earlier literature (Hyman 1959, Jennings and Niemi 1968, Dalton 1982), once children leave the home

they gain new experiences and encounter new references groups which impact their politics up until the end of early adulthood.

Similarly, Alwin, Cohen, and Newcomb (1991) use data from interviews of women who enrolled in Bennington College in the 1930s and 1940s and who were reinterviewed at several intervals over the next 50 years. Their results show that women who came from conservative families exhibited a remarkable propensity to liberalize while attending Bennington College, a change they attribute to the highly liberal social context at the university. 50 years, later, these same women who had been socialized into conservatism by their parents until late adolescence had acquiesced to their liberal social context in early adulthood, and those attitudes persisted for decades into their mid-adult and elderly years. While parents play the primary role up until the end of adolescence, social contextual agents such as peers, friends, teachers, and coworkers seem to take over and dominate the socialization process until it largely stabilizes in one's late twenties.

In the last 30 years, numerous studies have provided further evidence of this impressionable years hypothesis, especially as it pertains to partisanship and racial attitudes. Krosnick and Alwin (1989) use panel data from the National Election Study to directly compare the persistence hypothesis against the impressionable years hypothesis. They find no evidence that responsiveness to socialization decreases gradually past the age of 33. Sears and Funk (1999) similarly use the Terman Longitudinal Study to demonstrate that partisan attitudes are highly stable (correlation coefficient of .65) over a 37-year span. They also find that racial predispositions toward Blacks inherited early in life during the 1940s became increasingly correlated with partisanship and ideology when measured in the 1970s. They attribute this

finding to the priming of latent racial predispositions as they became more salient during the civil rights era.

Though this traditional socialization literature consistently finds strong correlations between parent and child political orientations, authors have been generally forthcoming about the possibility of endogeneity within the parent-child transmission process. To address this limitation, scholars have incorporated studies involving genetic tests to shed light on the specific causal mechanisms and directions involved in the socialization process. Numerous studies actually find that one of the most critical pathways through which parents transmit political attitudes and participation norms to their children is through their genetics (Eaves, et al., 2008; Cesarini et al., 2014; Alford et al., 2008). Cesarini et al. (2014) collected data on voter turnout for children who were given up for adoption, their biological parents with whom they've had no contact, and their adoptive parents. They find that genetic factors account for an equal amount of the variation associated with predicting voter turnout as does socialization and environmental factors. Some studies even suggest that the influence of genetics outweighs the traditional attitudinal pathway theory which posits that parents transmit politics to children directly through cues and interpersonal interactions (Eaves, Hatemi, Prom-Womley, & Murrelle, 2008). Still, these studies acknowledge that social context plays a considerable role in socializing individuals' political beliefs, especially after leaving the home, and most studies find that partisan orientation, apart from attitudes, remains mostly transmitted directly through parental cues and other non-genetic socializing agents (Alford, Funk, & Hibbing, 2008; Hatemi et al., 2009).

Apart from partisanship and political attitudes in general, socialization literature also accounts for specific values and practices that are passed from parent to child as a function of ethnic and racial heritages. Hughes et al. (2016) describes how families, both White and

minority, engage in multiple forms of ethnic-racial socialization where they transmit values that are racial group specific for the purposes of instilling racial or ethnic pride, inculcating resilience in the face of discrimination, or instilling an individualist approach (as is more often the case with Whites). Single-race minority parents are known to engage in cultural socialization when they expose their children to, “culturally relevant books, artifacts, music, and stories; celebrating cultural holidays; eating ethnic foods; and encouraging children to use their family’s native language.” This is thought to enhance self-esteem and teach children about racial barriers or bias they may encounter in life. On the other hand, single-race White parents are known to transmit values to their children which downplay racial difference, instead offering a more individualist or color-blind approach. Since race specific values are known to be transmitted to children by their parents, there are likely important implications to the fact that Multiracial children will likely be exposed to values from multiple races and ethnic groups. As a result, Multiracials may be able to draw upon these multiple racial group values as they construct their racial identities and express political opinions. Alternatively, the downplaying of racial identity among White parents coupled with the transmission of racial specific cues from the minority parent might lead to the types of ambiguous or unstable preferences posited by early socialization scholars, and make context all the more important for tipping the scales.

### **Symbolic Politics Theory**

Building on political socialization literature, scholarly work on symbolic politics theory offers a more precise explanation of the process that takes place when children inherit values from their parents and incorporate them into their identities and politics. Symbolic politics theory holds that people acquire stable affective responses to political symbols early in life from their parents, larger social context, and world events, and these symbolic predispositions persist

into adult life (Sears, 1983, 1984; Sears, Huddy, & Schaffer, 1986; Sears, Lau, Tyler, & Allen, 1980). Political symbols are objects to which we assign emotional or affective valences and which have political implications. For example, the confederate flag may arouse cold feelings and negativity from individuals who view it as a racist relic of the past, or it may inspire positive affect for children whose grandparents warmly recounted their days fighting for states' rights during the Civil War. Groups are also important political symbols. Children largely inherit their affective relationships toward groups like communists or Blacks as political symbols, and these symbolic predispositions have substantial consequences on political attitudes and behavior throughout their lives.

If a political object is associated with a certain political symbol, then an individual's symbolic predisposition is primed such that one's affect toward the symbol is transferred onto the object, thus influencing evaluations of that object (Lorge & Curtiss, 1936; Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955). This process is thought to be relatively unthinking and reflexive rather than through a cognitively taxing cost and benefit analysis (Sears & Funk, 1990). Additionally, symbolic predispositions are distinguished from other affective relationships in that they are 1) highly stable over the course of one's life, 2) yield consistent responses over time, and, 3) are very influential in determining evaluations of attitudes and other objects.

Several studies detail how symbolic predispositions toward racial groups have an immense influence on individuals' political attitudes and that these effects remain highly stable over the course of one's life. Using the 1972 Center for Political Studies election data, Sears, Hensler and Speer (1979) show that symbolic predispositions toward Blacks and Whites wielded a stronger effect on attitudes toward integrated school busing and presidential vote choice than did measurements of self-interest. Similarly, Sears, Lau, Tyler and Allen (1980) show that

symbolic predispositions toward political parties, race, and ideology had stronger effects on a multitude of attitudes such as unemployment, national health insurance, busing, and law and order than did self-interest. In a more recent study, scholars found that Barack Obama's candidacy in 2008 made race exceptionally salient such that preexisting racial predispositions played an unusually strong role in determining vote choice during the 2008 presidential primary and general elections (Tesler & Sears, 2010).

One study which explores the symbolic politics process well and which provides causal evidence for its mechanisms is Tesler's (2012) article on what he calls the 'spillover of racialization.' Using survey experimental data, Tesler randomly assigned respondents to either a neutral condition, a condition where healthcare is framed as associated with Bill Clinton, and a condition where healthcare is framed as associated with Barack Obama. For respondents who received the Barack Obama treatment, preexisting racial predispositions played a much larger role in determining their evaluations of health care policy than did those from the non-racial treatment groups. This provides strong evidence of the transfer of affect component of symbolic politics theory (Lorge and Curtiss 1936, Osgood and Tannenbaum 1955), where individuals' symbolic predispositions strongly color their ratings of associated political objects.

Symbolic politics theory of the development of predispositions has substantial implications for Multiracials. Broadly speaking, single-race Whites are more likely to inherit warmer affective relationships to Whites as a political symbol and less warm feelings toward Blacks, while single-race Blacks develop warmer feelings toward their minority reference group. Since these predispositions are developed early in life and majorly as a function of one's parents and context, it is interesting to consider what the consequences might be for Biracials who are exposed to multiple racial groups. As noted above, socialization literature posits an additive



effect whereby children who have parents that agree on a political value are more likely to inherit that value (Hyman 1959, Jennings and Niemi 1968, Jennings, Stoker, and Bowers 2009).

Alternately, children whose parents provide conflicting cues develop ambiguous orientations that are more responsive to other contextual agents of socialization, such as peers, neighbors, and co-workers in early adulthood. Consequently, it is probable that Multiracials will grow up wielding positive symbolic predispositions to multiple racial groups. When it comes time to make decisions about personal racial identity labels or racially charged political issues, predispositions inherited from parents of different racial groups may compete, leaving an ambiguous orientation that has to rely more heavily on social context or other socializing agents. Moreover, since symbolic prepositions come into play in political thinking when they are primed, the possession of positive affect toward multiple racial groups may make Multiracials particularly responsive to variation in social context or primes such as advertisements that make one racial group more salient than another. While this process might play out in numerous ways, there is ample reasoning to expect that context plays an especially important role in the symbolic politics process for Multiracials.

Surely, there are constraints on the above reasoning. I am not positing that Multiracials always inherit equally balanced affective relationships to the different racial groups in their heritage. It is certainly true of some Multiracial families that one parent is more dominant than the other, or that both parents could agree to transmit racial values prototypical of only one racial group despite Multiracial heritage. What I am suggesting is that Multiracials are *more likely than single-race individuals* to have opportunities to engage in interpersonal contact with and inherit affective predispositions from individuals from multiple racial groups, which gives them a higher propensity to have positive affect for multiple racial groups and potentially more balanced

predispositions. This is a function of Biracials having parents from two racial backgrounds, interactions with relatives from both sides of their racial group heritages, and residing in spaces that tend to be highly racially diverse. Of particular importance is that Biracials are exposed to parents and close family members from multiple racial groups as these intimate relationships tend to carry more warmth and weight as they facilitate the development and transfer of positive affect<sup>3</sup>.

Given exposure to multiple racial groups, the development of predispositions and the process through which they influence identity decisions and political attitudes should play out in a few discernable scenarios. First, Biracials may, through the various socializing agents present in their childhood and adolescence, develop much more positive affect toward one of their racial groups heritages than the other(s). Though a child may be mixed race, they may live in a single parent household, or exist in a community that is heavily populated by only one of their racial poles. Moreover, even parents who are of different races may choose to place more value and esteem in one identity in lieu of the other out of their own personal preferences or institutional constraints. Studies of children with one Latino and one White parent have found that sometimes they emphasize a color-blind approach to their children or even encourage them to identify singularly as White so as to facilitate assimilation (Does et al., 2021). Similarly, Black-White families have traditionally engaged in cultural socialization which prepares their children for entering the world as a Black person, as deemed by traditional rules of hypodescent (Davis, 2010), and they may even demonize Whites. In this case, symbolic politics should play out quite

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<sup>3</sup> The concept of primary group relationships is a borrowing from sociologist Charles Horton Cooley, which regards relationships with others that are “personal, informal, intimate, and usually face-to-face, and which involves the entire personality, not just a segmentalized part of it.” This concept well characterizes the type of friendship and familial relationships we think do the work of providing Multiracials with the credibility needed for accessing multiple groups.

similarly for Multiracials as it does for single-race individuals, in that their preference for one racial group will largely determine their political choices whenever they become salient.

The second scenario that could play out would be one where Multiracials develop either none or little affect toward any of the racial groups in their heritage at all. Psychology literature has documented that some Multiracials who experience exclusion and discrimination from both sides of their racial heritages sometimes adopt a de-essentialized view of race as a coping mechanism (Gelman, 2004; Pauker, Xu, Williams, & Biddle, 2016; Shih, Wilton, Does, Goodale, & Sanchez, 2019). Multiracials who have existed in contexts where they are denied acceptance by multiple racial groups, or who live in a space where racial group stratification is less salient altogether (Pauker, Carpinella, Lick, Sanchez, & Johnson, 2018), might downplay or completely dismiss the importance of race. With little emotional connection to these racial groups, they may be quite unreactive or even oppositional to racial group primes as they pertain to politics.

The third, and most likely scenario, is that Multiracials develop at least some degree of positive affect for each of the racial groups in their heritages. Theorizing affective capacities as a non-zero sum game, Multiracials may develop only somewhat warm feelings toward both of the groups in their heritage, strong positive feelings toward one and mild feelings for the other(s), or even intensely positive predispositions toward both of the racial groups in their heritage. In this scenario, at least the minimum amount of positive affect for each racial group is present such that Multiracials can draw upon them independently or together when primed. As long as affect toward one racial group does not completely outcompete the other, Multiracials in this scenario should exhibit a propensity to think through different affective lenses at different times whenever one racial group is primed or made more salient than the other. The two main political

implications of this scenario are that 1) the feelings of racial identity and political attitudes of Multiracials, who again are more likely than single-race individuals to develop positive affect toward multiple racial groups, can be traced back to their parental and social contexts until mid-adulthood, and 2) primes that make one racial group more salient than the other, such as immediate racial context, should become increasingly influential as one's affect toward both of the racial groups in their heritage becomes more balanced, such that resting predispositions toward one racial groups does not heavily outweigh the other.

### **Social Identity Theory**

Political socialization and symbolic politics literatures provide the theoretical reasoning needed to begin explain how Multiracial develop early orientations toward politics and racial identity. To better flesh out the psychological mechanisms through which these early predispositions interact with context, and to some extent, visual appearance, to produce political outcomes, this review turns to social identity theory.

Social identity theory presents a parsimonious set of mechanisms that are helpful for explaining when, how, and why Multiracials draw upon their multiple racial group memberships as it pertains to politics. Social identity theory began as an opposition to scholars of 'realistic group conflict theory' who had long argued that the source of intergroup conflict was real material competition over scarce or perceived to be scarce resources (Campbell, 1965; Diab, 1970; Sherif, 1966; Sherif & Sherif, 1953). Henry Tajfel pushed back against this argument and proposed that the minimum requirement for intergroup conflict is actually purely cognitive rather than based in economic or material competition. In an experiment he arbitrarily assigned adolescent boys to different groups and found that this minimal feature of arbitrary group assignment led to ingroup favoritism and outgroup derogation (Tajfel, 1970). This is now

referred to as the minimal group paradigm, and scores of studies have since replicated its results and more deeply investigated its nature.

In their seminal article, Tajfel and Turner (1979) outline the base tenets and assumptions of social identity theory. In their view, individuals stratify themselves into multiple social identities based on salient cleavages such as class, race, gender, and other characteristics in order to better make sense of our complex world. Their base argument is that individuals desire a positive social identity derived from membership in the social group they perceive is of the highest status for the purpose of enhancing or maintaining self-esteem (Tajfel 1975; Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). This desire for a positive social identity, rather than for pure economic or material gain, is theorized to be the central source of intergroup conflict. Societies are stratified into higherarchical structures such that some groups are afforded more value or esteem than others. The criteria by which individuals evaluate and compare the benefits of membership in different groups is highly subjective and context dependent. The value of a social identity varies across situations, cultures, even individuals (Brewer, 1991; Brewer & Roccas, 2001; Leonardelli, Pickett, & Brewer, 2010; J. C. Turner et al., 1987). As a consequence, individuals engage in social comparison where they attempt to maximize the prestige of their social group. Individuals and groups are constantly jockeying for positive distinctiveness such that they and others can evaluate their social group more favorably than other related social groups.

Of particular relevance for Multiracials are social identity theory's assumptions about the types of behavior individuals engage in if they perceive that their group is evaluated lower than other relevant outgroups. Tajfel and Turner (1979) noted that individuals who believe they are members of an undesirable social group engage in two distinct forms of behavior: social

creativity and social mobility. Social creativity is described as a process where individuals attempt to increase the prestige of their group by shifting the focus of evaluation to a dimension in which their group performs comparatively well. Alternatively, people may simply swap out the group to which they compare negatively for a different outgroup they perceive as less challenging. Social mobility on the other hand takes place on the individual level where, under specific circumstances, people will opt to abandon one social identity and seek to gain membership in a social group perceived as more favorable. However, an individual's decision or ability to adopt a strategy of either social creativity or social mobility depends on an incredibly important factor: whether or not the boundaries of the social groups at play are permeable or impermeable.

Tajfel and Turner (1979) acknowledge that numerous factors determine whether or not a social identity can be accessed by an individual. First, an individual must personally identify with a given social identity, and second, others in that group must acknowledge that membership. The degree to which one can personally identify and be recognized as a member of a group is moderated by whether or not group boundaries are permeable. Moreover, permeability in part determines whether an individual in a perceived lowly valued group will opt for a strategy of social creativity or social mobility. Permeability is simply described as the possibility that an individual can enter or exit a group (Ellemers, 1993; Haslam & Turner, 1992; Huddy, 2001, 2002; A. L. Mummendey, Klink, Mielke, Wenzel, & Blanz, 1999; Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987). Permeability can be constrained if the characteristics associated with that group are physically or materially unattainable (Haslam et al. 2000), or if the individual lacks the ability to develop those characteristics (Tajfel 1975, Mummendey et al. 1999). If an individual perceives that their social group is undesirable, and if access to other groups is constrained by

impermeable boundaries, they will opt for social creativity and attempt to boost their group's posture. On the other hand, if one is in an undesirable group but the permeability of their initial group's and the desired outgroup's boundaries are sufficiently unconstrained, then an individual will choose social mobility and transgress group boundaries into the more desirable one (Ellemers, 1993; Jackson, Sullivan, Harnish, & Hodge, 1996; A. L. Mummendey et al., 1999; Wright, Wright, Taylor, & Moghaddam, 1990).

Using a laboratory experiment, Jackson et al. (1996) corroborated Tajfel and Turner's (1979) hypothesis regarding which strategy an individual will take to cope with membership in a low-status social group. Subjects were separated into arbitrary, minimal groups using a dot estimation technique (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971) and told that their group was either subservient (low-status) or egocentric (high-status), and that their position was either permanent (impermeable boundary) or changeable (permeable). Subjects in the low-status/impermeable boundary condition were much more likely to rate their in-group favorably and to emphasize the relative advantages of qualities associated with subservience than those in the low-status/impermeable group. Ellemers et al. (1988) uses a similar experiment manipulating the status and permeability of assigned groups and found that subjects assigned to groups of low-status but permeable boundaries were less positive about their in-group and more interested in being reassigned than those for whom exit was impossible. Similar studies have since corroborated the theorized relationship between group status, permeability, and strategies of creativity or mobility (Ellemers, 1993; A. Mummendey, Klink, Mielke, Wenzel, & Blanz, 1999; Taylor, Moghaddam, Gamble, & Zellerer, 1987; Taylor et al., 1987; Wright et al., 1990).

Outside of the laboratory, Mummendey et al. (1999) explored how the above factors relate to the types of identity management strategies taken by individuals through a field study

involving East Germans after the fall of the Berlin wall. Of the 517 East Germans surveyed, the majority agreed that West Germans were better off with relatively higher status than East Germans. Interestingly, East Germans who reported that they believe they could 'pass' or easily be mistaken for someone from West Germany were much less likely to express a belonging to East Germany as a social group than those who said they could not pass. East Germans who believed they could be mistaken for a West German exhibited a higher propensity to desire to leave the East German ingroup and become West German and were more likely to categorize themselves broadly as German rather than as East German. This observational evidence pairs nicely with experimental evidence in corroborating that individuals tend to work toward moving to different social groups whenever it benefits them personally.

From political socialization and symbolic politics literature it seems likely that Multiracials will be more likely than single-race individuals to inherit racial and political values and predispositions from members of multiple racial groups. Social identity theory as outlined here helps explain how and why individuals might draw upon those dually wielded social connections whenever those group identities become more salient or whenever they benefit personally from emphasizing one group membership over the other. Specifically, as a function of having accrued diverse racial values and experiential cache, and having developed positive affect and some sense of connection to multiple racial groups, Multiracials will have more access than single-race individuals to identifying with different racial groups at different times and contexts. Since permeability is defined as whether or not an individual has enough of the necessary traits and characteristics of a group to qualify for membership, this, given dual racial cache and plausible access to two racial groups, Multiracials often have more permeable boundaries than single-race individuals. If a Biracial exists in a social context where one of the racial groups in their heritage



is relatively numerous, they may perceive that that social group is associated with more self-esteem, social benefits, and a more positive distinction than their other racial group(s). If preexisting affective predispositions to the racial groups in their heritages are at least somewhat balanced, then Biracials may both consciously (strategically) and unconsciously engage in social mobility where they begin activating membership with the dominant racial group as it becomes more salient, or work to attain membership in that group in hopes of unlocking that social benefit and a more positive social identity.

### **Social Visions**

In their original article (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), the authors acknowledge that skin color is a salient attribute that characterizes racial group boundaries in the United States. Similarly, in a review of social identity literature, Huddy (2001) notes that in addition to external cues such as language, gender, and cultural practices, characteristics such as skin color, facial and other physical features are also important markers of social groups and contribute to permeability. Given these assumptions, Multiracials who visually appear as racially ambiguous and those who have physical characteristics prototypical of two racial groups likely have more permeable boundaries than single-race individuals or those whose reflected appraisal tends to be single-raced (Sims, 2016).

Research has shown that visual appearance is a powerful external labeling mechanism that reinforces and consolidates racial group identity. Colorism is the phenomenon whereby darker skin tone elicits stereotyped-based treatment from others. Colorism can result in a host of negative consequences for darker skin individuals such as increased discrimination (Hochschild & Weaver, 2007; Maddox & Gray, 2016; R. Turner, 1995), lower life chances and opportunities (M. Hughes & Hertel, 1990; Porter & Washington, 1993), even mental illness (Boyd-Franklin,

1989; Harvey, 1995; Neal & Wilson, 1989). Experiments from social visions demonstrate that just a glimpse of a Black individual can activate an implicit bias and threat response. This can lead to discrimination and even miscategorizing trivial objects as weapons (Allport & Postman, 1947; Correll, Park, Judd, & Wittenbrink, 2002; Devine, 1989; Duncan, 1976; Greenwald, Oakes, & Hoffman, 2003; Payne, 2001). Since visual perception can have such an impact on how single-race minorities or Biracials who appear as minorities are treated, it is highly likely that their lived experience will consolidate their minority identity internally and attenuate racial group permeability.

On the other hand, individuals who appear visually as racially ambiguous are less likely to be easily categorized into discrete racial groups. Pauker et al. (2009) used computer graphics technology to morph faces to appear ambiguously in-between Black and White phenotypes (also see Willadsen-Jensen & Ito, 2006). Racially ambiguous faces such as those of Biracials were much less likely to be remembered than were single-race faces and generated more varied racial label assignments. Moreover, Black single-race subjects were more likely to externally label Black-White Biracials' faces as Biracial (outgroup) rather than as Black single-race (ingroup) when they were not treated with an ingroup inclusion motivation. These findings are of critical importance as they demonstrate that multiracials who appear racially ambiguous do not engender the same amount of external labeling and classifications as those who appear single-race individuals. Moreover, individuals seem to have some flexibility to either racially include or exclude the racially ambiguous, depending on personal or group motivations that may be specific to context (Chen & Hamilton, 2012; Pauker et al., 2018, 2016).

Moreover, there are overarching sociological constraints that contour the processes of external racial categorization depending on the specific Biracial subgroup to which a Multiracial

belongs. Specifically, the one drop rule maintains a persistent influence on categorization as those whose visual characteristics contain both Black and White features are more likely to be categorized with their single-race minority group than those with say Latino and White or Asian and White features. Ho et al. (2011) conducted experiments which use computer graphics technology to morph faces to exhibit varying degrees of racial phenotypes on continuums for Black-White Biracials and Asian-White Biracials. For both Biracial subgroups, a face needed to have a lower proportion of minority phenotypical properties to be perceived by subjects as minorities than did the proportion of White phenotype necessary to be perceived as White. Moreover, Black-White faces needed much less proportion of minority phenotype to be categorized as a minority than did Asian-Whites. Thus, not all visual ambiguities are treated equally among Biracials. It is therefore likely that the part-Black Biracials will be more likely to be treated as a member of their minority racial group throughout their lives than members of other Multiracial subgroups. This increased external labeling suggests part-Black Biracials will have a uniquely constrained or less permeable racial group boundaries than other Biracial subgroups.

However, it is important to note that visual appearance is not the end all be all of determining which racial group identity an individual will adopt. Rather, visual appearance simply moderates the effect of social context on the type of social groups one feels they can access. In fact, there are a few prominent examples of individuals who do not visually appear as the single-race group they espouse membership in (and who may not even have any racial heritage connected to that group), but because they perceive such strong incentives from their social context to join that group, they often try. One interesting example recently covered in the media (Shah, 2019) are the residents of East Jackson, Ohio. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, officials

from a town called Waverly recruited Blacks and poor Whites to work as laborers and housekeepers and arranged for these two groups to live in the same community of East Jackson. Over the next few generations, those Blacks and poor Whites worked and lived together such that even the Whites (even those who did not intermarry nor are the product of intermarriage) began to be perceived by Waverly's law enforcement and other state officials as Black. These individuals with single-race White heritage were categorized as Black in public records and were subjected to racial discrimination. By 2019, though few of the residents have any traceable Black ancestry they still relentlessly assert that they are in fact Black Americans, since that's what their parents told them and the way they are perceived by the community. Though these residents visually appear as single-race White by almost anyone's account, socialization agents have been so overwhelming that they have adopted a Black racial identity despite no physical traces of African American heritage.

Of course, there are many more cases of individuals who look light skin and who could pass as White adopting a singular Black racial identity. Walter White is one such character who headed the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) for more than twenty-five years in the mid-twentieth century. White noted that he identified singularly as Black despite an apparently White looking visual appearance. He describes this in his own autobiography by noting, "I am a Negro. My skin is White, my eyes are blue, my hair is blond. The traits of my race are nowhere visible upon me. (White, 1995)" Still, as the son of two parents who were born into slavery (despite both being of mixed racial heritage themselves), a graduate of a Historically black college or university (HBCU), and someone who spent his entire life consorting with members of the Black community in the South, Walter White's social

context likely compelled him to identify as single-race Black despite White heritage and prototypically White visual appearance.

Another, albeit much more unusual case, is that of Rachel Dolezal who, despite no trace of African-American heritage, personally identified as a Black woman and even deliberately altered her physical appearance to resemble characteristics that engender external validation as Black (Aitkenhead, 2017). Though it is not the subject of this current work to explain why Rachel Dolezal chose to behave in this manner, it is interesting to note that she did grow up with three adopted siblings who were single-race Black, attend an undergraduate university with a large Black student population, attend HBCU Howard University for graduate school, and married a single-race Black spouse. Though it is likely that Rachel Dolezal chose to seek out social contexts which were primarily Black, one can't help but note that her pre-adult and impressionable years era social contexts did perhaps present some incentive for adopting a Black racial identity, which she did attempt to do despite a more prototypically White visual appearance.

The examples above are noted for the purpose of corroborating that visual appearance likely plays a key moderating role in an individuals' propensity to develop connections to different racial groups, though it is far from determinative. Notwithstanding outliers, Multiracials tend to be less easily racially categorized which often allows for some maneuverability in the racial groups they can access. It is important to note that while qualitative studies on Multiracials (to be discussed in a later section) often discuss the importance of visual appearance for auguring acceptance or exclusion from different racial groups, quantitative research yet to develop methods of measuring visual appearance that are widely considered sufficient (Yadon & Ostfield, 2020). As a consequence, a major limitation of this present study will be its inability to

properly analyze the role that visual appearance plays in influencing the identity and politics of mixed-race individuals.

### **Self-Categorization Theory**

Social identity theory helps set a foundation for why and how Multiracials might vary in the degree to which they identify with certain racial groups as a function of context. Finally, self-categorization theory provides a theoretical explanation for the last step in the process connecting context to the politics of Multiracials by describing how group membership links to attitudes and behaviors. An off-shoot of social identity theory, self-categorization theory holds that individuals begin a process of depersonalization when they begin to psychologically identify with a social group or when they are pursuing membership in that group (Huddy, 2001; Lange, Kruglanski, & Higgins, 2011; J. C. Turner et al., 1987; J. C. Turner & Oakes, 1989, 1997). Individuals learn or develop the appropriate, expected, or desirable attitudes and behaviors that are considered to be prototypical of the social group in question. If factors coalesce such that a Multiracial individual fits in and identifies with one racial group from their heritage, they will likely adopt the political attitudes and practices of that group as a way to maintain and ingratiate in-group status. They may also alter or replace their attitudinal and behavioral comportment according to variation in the salience of their racial group identities.

Self-categorization theory perceives identity as particularly labile, in that a social identity can be situationally activated (switched on) as they become salient (Haslam & Turner, 1992). The particular identity hat one wears at any given time is thought to be determined by differing degrees of saliency which is defined in terms of accessibility and fit. Accessibility is described as the readiness that a group with similar characteristics will be coded and identified as a specific and distinct group (Bruner, 1957). Accessibility is determined as a function of contextual factors,

individuals' learned experience throughout life about what goes with what, as well as the current goals and needs of an individual. Generally, social categories increase in their accessibility as their within-group heterogeneity is less compared to the heterogeneity or featural differences between that group and others.

Fit is described as the degree to which the reality of an individual's characteristics actually match the criteria associated with a given category. For example, Oakes (1983) remarks that if an individual does not look, speak, or act in a manner that others perceive as prototypically French, then their fit for French as a social category is low. For Multiracials, especially those who appear visually as racially ambiguous, their affective connections to multiple racial groups and their cache of cultural experiences prepares them to fit well with both of the racial groups in their heritage. As such, we should expect Multiracials to be more likely than single-race individuals to activate or switch on different racial identities as social categories as they become more accessible, and summarily adopt the attitudes and practices prototypical of that group.

### **Previous Research on Multiracials**

This last section of the literature review overviews important works in social science on the subject of Multiracial individuals. While the previous sections outline extant theory and evidence that corroborate my own framework, the following discussion should help clarify how my dissertation fits in and advances contemporary work.

#### *Sociology*

An oft-cited reference for the earliest work on mixed-race individuals comes from Robert E. Parks musings on the 'The Marginal Man' (1928). Park argues that societies must undergo significant cultural and racial intermixing to defend against stagnation and achieve social and

political progress. A consequence of this intermixing, at least temporarily, is what he calls the “marginal man” who are the offspring of members from both the dominant group in society and newly included minority groups. He prophesies bleakly that these individuals, torn between two cultures, are destined to an embittered intellectual life characterized by, “spiritual conflict and instability” (p. 893). He defines the Marginal Man as:

...a new type of personality, namely, a cultural hybrid, a man living and sharing intimately in the cultural life and traditions of two distinct peoples; never quite willing to break, even if he were permitted to do so, with his past and his traditions, and not quite accepted, because of racial prejudice, in the new society in which he now sought to find a place. He was a man on the margin of two cultures and two societies, which never completely interpenetrated and fused (p. 892).

Parks also asserts an argument, which I share, that researchers might very well learn most about the current status and future trajectory of our world from studying these individuals who exist at the intersection of divergent but intermingling societies, or in the present case, Multiracials.

Seven years later Everett Stonequist (1935) expanded on the marginal man theory by typologizing mixed-race individuals based on where society places them within the racial hierarchy. First, he posits that Biracial individuals are often best suited in an intermediary social space as a buffer between the dominant and minority groups. Such was the case for mulattoes during the American slavery era who were afforded slightly privileged status above darker skin Blacks. Alternatively, mixed-race individuals may be alienated completely by the racial groups in their heritage as evidenced among the European-Indian mixed offspring in India during its period of nationalization. Third, he predicted that in some cases, Biracials who have means of



social mobility and regular interaction with the dominant group in society would become especially resentful of their subordinate status, and leverage connections to both racial groups to become leaders for their minority group. Given the recent rise of prominent politicians who identify as Black but whom can be considered Biracial by parentage, this third proclamation assuredly demands further consideration.

While Park and Stonequist characterize the mixed-race population at its incipience, Milton Gordon (1964) lays out a framework of several stages that addresses how societies will eventually absorb and assimilate these individuals. Ultimately, he argues, all minority mixtures will be absorbed into America's 'core society' (which in America's case is Anglo-Saxon Protestant and White) as were the Irish and Italians in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (also see Huntington, 2004). In his view, the first stage of assimilation involves minority racial and ethnic groups acquiring the culture or 'acculturating' to that of America's dominant group. Gordon (1964) draws upon a classic sequence of acculturation proposed by Taylor (1871), beginning with the minority group's adoption from the majority society a, "complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (p. 32). Once acculturated, the minority group's members begin to gain entrance into various formal and informal social institutions in which they develop primary group relationships with members of the majority. The development of relationships between majority and minority group members then inevitably leads to intermarriage and racially/ethnically-mixed children.

In Gordon's view, racial intermarriage between the minority and the core group, or "amalgamation" as described by Robert Park (1930), is the most critical juncture in achieving assimilation. He argues that once marital assimilation has occurred, the minority identity of their

children will be discarded in lieu of the identity of the core society. This decoupling of mixed-ancestry individuals' senses of self from their minority identities is theorized to be a rational decision that facilitates inclusion in the majority ingroup. This "identificational assimilation" paves the road for the final stages of assimilation, which are the decline in prejudice and victimization by discrimination, and greater civic inclusion. Indeed, the data available in this current project allows for a retesting of these canonical assumptions. Surely an examination of the propensities at which some minority racial groups have intermixed with Whites compared to others will yield insight into the status and trajectory of color lines and our racial hierarchy.

In contemporary social science, sociology has continued to be the genre responsible for the majority of contributions to the study of mixed-race individuals. In a prominent early work, Maria Root (1992) presents a consortium of essays that explore the highly complex matter of how mixed-race individuals formulate their feelings about their racial identities. Mixed-race individuals battle overarching social and institutional norms like the one-drop rule and hypodescent, and negotiate their identities situationally and fluidly as they strive for belonging. While many essays note that constantly rearticulating one's racial identity imposes certain psychological tolls on Multiracials (in corroboration with some of Park's hypotheses) some scholars disagree. In particular, Hall (1992) critiques Park and Stonequists' pessimistic characterization by rebutting that Multiracials' diverse set of experiences leads to, "strong people with diverse and positive perspectives on life" (p. 264). In fact, literature in psychology (which will be reviewed shortly) also identify that mixed-race individuals develop unique coping skills as a function of diverse racial group exposure, and cosign the underlying centrality of the fluid and malleable nature of mixed-race identity to the mixed-race lived experience.

Rockquemore and Brunnsma (2002) advanced our understanding of multiarcials tremendously by providing what is, in my opinion, the best typology of the different forms of racial identity held by individuals born to parents of two differing racial groups. Their taxonomy includes four groupings of Biracial identity. First, some individuals possess a “border identity” characterized by feeling in-between the two racial groups in their heritage. Those with a border identity acknowledge membership in both racial groups and adopt some of the characteristics and qualities associated with both groups. Second, she describes a “traditional identity” where individuals with Biracial heritage identify closely with only one of the racial groups in their heritage, and tend to think and display the attitudes and behaviors prototypical of only of their counterpart single-race groups. Third, some Biracials have a “protean identity” named so for their protean ability to transgress racial boundaries. These individuals are those whom this current study perhaps most prominently explores as their ability to active or elide racial identities in different environments makes them an interesting test case for the influence of racial context. Lastly, she described that a smaller subset of Biracials have a “transcendent identity,” where they may downplay or wholly dismiss the notion of racial identity altogether.

Of particular interest to this present study is the emphasis placed on how Biracials’ identities are constantly negotiated in the face of social contextual stimuli, a topic Rockquemore and Brunnsma elaborate on in their book project (2008). They portend that Biracials often possess physical and phenotypic characteristics from both of the racial groups in their heritage and accrue “identity capital” from their life experiences of discrimination and participation in racial group specific cultural activities. As a consequence, they have the ability to ‘code-switch,’ or adopt and shirk different performative racial compartments in different situations. Using a modest sample of survey data including Black-White Biracial respondents they find that pre-

adult racial contextual circumstances (subjectively measured) such as the racial composition of their elementary school, close friends, high school, and neighborhood systematically influence the way Biracials identify and their social predispositions.

Other sociology scholars have similarly used quantitative analysis to demonstrate the close relationship between racial context, variously measured, and the choices of racial identification among Biracials. One important work by Harris and Sim (2002) show just how common fluctuation in identity choice is for Biracials. They find that among adolescents who identified Biracially with two racial groups when surveyed at home, more than half (54%) switch the way they identify to mark only one single-race category when they are at school. These choices are motivated by incentives to best ingratiate with the racial context at hand, such as accommodating both parents' races at home or assimilating to the majority context at school. A number of other studies also corroborate this relationship between context and identity choice. Typically, they find that as the proportion of members from one of the racial groups in a Biracial individuals' heritage increases (measured at the zipcode level in the Census Public Use Microdata Series) the more likely they are to identify singularly with that group (Saenz et al., 1995; Xie & Goyette, 1997).

### *Psychology*

Psychology has likely replaced sociology in terms in the speed at which it publishes research on the mixed-race population today. The chief accomplishments have been to investigate how Multiracials manage dual racial group membership to achieve and maintain self-esteem and well-being, as well as how Multiracials as the objects of studies are perceived and categorized by general populations (as discussed in the preceding 'Social Visions' section). Shortly after it became commonplace to allow for multiple race identification on surveys,

scholars observed a phenomenon in health data which shows that mixed-race individuals tend to have worse physical and mental well-being than do single-race individuals, even single-race minorities (Miller et al., 2019). Specifically, studies show that Multiracials are more likely to smoke and drink than are single-race individuals (Bratter & Mason, 2016), and that they consistently report a higher prevalence of depression, stress, and other psychological health issues (Fisher et al., 2014).

While investigating explanations for this prevalence of health burdens, scholars unearthed a phenomenon that can be described as “racial miscategorization,” which occurs when mixed-race individuals’ personal feelings about their racial identity are incongruent with others’ perceptions of that identity (Does et al., 2021). This process is referenced in several studies as a mental health stressor uniquely pervasive among Multiracials. Some studies have called it “identity denial” and described it as a form of identity threat (specifically an acceptance threat) where Biracials are told that they cannot identify with a certain group that they must identify with only one of their racial groups. An example is a Black-White Biracial being told they must identify as Black on surveys or interpersonally because they are not allowed to claim whiteness (Albuja et al., 2019; Townsend et al., 2009). Additionally, Multiracial individuals are particularly vulnerable to instances of “identity questioning” or “forced-choice dilemmas” where they are interrogated about their racial identity in a manner often perceived as hostile and having an implicit motivation to judge and rebuke one’s response (Franco & O’Brien, 2018). Scholars have found that 87% to 93% of Biracials report experiencing these occurrences (Townsend et al., 2009; Tran et al., 2016)

However, some good news has come from this research. Shih and others (2018) echo Hall’s (1992) argument as they put forth that individuals develop special coping mechanisms that

help them defend against the negative consequences of identity threat. First, Multiracials develop the ability to “switch” between identities, or to alter their performance of race such that it better blends in with the racial group most salient in a given context. Second, Multiracials develop less essentialized understandings of race that allow them to remain psychologically resilient when faced with others’ rejections of their espoused identity. Additionally, researchers find that living in diverse contexts can both decrease the rate at which mixed-race individuals experience conflict via racial miscategorization, and assuage the negative consequences of racial miscategorization by providing a safety net of sorts (Does et al., 2021). Among these studies, it is remarked innumerable that context plays an important role in the shaping of Multiracials’ identities.

Given the emphasis on fluidity, some of the studies I find most interesting are recent experimental works that leverage dual racial group membership to more neatly parse out the linkage between racial identity and outcomes in general. Specifically, Sarah Gaither (Gaither et al., 2015) gathers a modest sample of respondents with one Black and one White parent, and randomly varies whether they are assigned to engage in a writing task that emphasizes the racial identity of their White parent or their Black parent. Remarkably, she finds that Black-White Biracials who’s White racial group was rendered more salient performed significantly better than others on a verbal GRE test. Given that scholars are starting to find linkages between identity fluidity among Multiracials and various outcomes, it is essential to begin investigating how these processes influence their politics.

### *Political Science*

Finally, there have been two major projects which comprise the foundation of research on mixed-race individuals in political science. First, Natalie Masuoka (2017) conducted historical

analysis, qualitative and quantitative inquiry into what the emergence of a mixed-race identity means for the current and future status of racial formation. Theoretically, she argues that the ability to identify as Multiracial hallmarks a shift in social and racial institutional norms away from one reliant on racial classification and toward an emphasis on self-identification and personal agency. She details how race has historically been defined by external classification based on phenotype and “common knowledge” practices (Gross, 2009). Racial labels had been singular and mutually exclusive as a purposive consequence of White Americans’ efforts to maintain and preserve their privileged status. Two changes in the Census method of enumerating race underscore the transition to reliance of self-identification: 1) altering practices such that individuals filled out their own racial identity on a form rather than having it filled out for them (assigned) by census workers, and 2) switching to allow individuals to mark one or more boxes to describe their race. However, she importantly points out that while this self-identification framework ostensibly implies a dismissal of the classification framework, it is still wholly present as we rely on singular classification labels to describe one’s racial identity(s) anyways.

Masuoka threads her identity choice framework throughout several empirical chapters, the findings of which reveal the underlying structure and importance of certain racial institutions. First, she examines the correlates of identifying either as single-race or with multiple racial groups. To name just a few observations, she finds that more resourced individuals such as those who live in wealthier contexts and those who have received lots of education are most likely to identify as Multiracial, as are those who live in more racially diverse geographic contexts. Regarding attitudes, she theorized that if Multiracials exhibited the attitudes of Whites more than single-race minorities, it may signal that identity choices for mixed-race individuals is a personal choice rather than one contoured by the constraints and experiences of discrimination, as is often

the case for single-race minorities. On the contrary, she finds that minority racial heritage continues to play a major role in Multiracials' attitudes. Multiracials with Black heritage are non-different from single-race Blacks in their perceptions of discrimination and attitudes on race conscious policies, and the attitudes of Multiracials with Latino heritage fall somewhere in between those of Whites and Latinos. An exception to these findings which tended to corroborate a racial formation theory, she finds that attitudes for Multiracials with Asian heritage are much more racially conservative and closer to those of single-race Whites than are those of other single-race minorities.

Next, Davenport (2018) similarly investigates the factors that are important for predicting Multiracials' identity choices and political attitudes. Empirically, this book makes a large contribution through its synthesis of regionally diverse in-depth interviews and the use of a survey from education that has over one million respondents. The large size of this dataset is important because it allowed for the quantitative analysis of multiple Biracial subgroups. Theoretically, she characterizes the influence of familial socialization as paramount in informing the identity choices and politics of mixed-race individuals. Parents and extended family transmit racial group specific values and attachments that have a lasting impact on Multiracials identity, and therefore politics. She argues that intermarried couples tend to be more liberal, and thus pass on highly progressive values to their children, which is evidenced in that mixed-race youths are often more socially liberal than even single-race minorities.

Davenport also finds that gender happens to be one of the most important determinants of racial identity choice for those who have parents from different racial groups. She argues that men's lived experiences with racial stereotyping and discrimination consolidate their single-race minority status. She also provides theoretical and qualitative evidence that mixed-race women



are more readily ascribed a mixed-race identity than are mixed-race men, and ties this to beauty standards which favor light skin complexion and Eurocentric features for minority women but not minority men. Furthermore, perhaps her principal finding and one of her major theoretical points is that Multiracials' personal choices of racial identity are reflective of their racial group attachments. The racial attitudes of individuals with parents from two different racial groups tend to fall in between those of their two single-race groups. However, identifying singularly with one of the racial groups in one's heritage signals closer social group attachments and predicts more similar group relevant attitudes.

Throughout the preceding review of literature from sociology and psychology it is apparent that what most distinguishes mixed-race individuals from single-race individuals is the fluid nature of their racial identity. Masuoka (2017) and Davenport (2018) come to a similar conclusion as they emphasize the fluid nature of Multiracial identity in their books. They do this both directly in their theoretical reasoning by describing that Multiracials have an ability to choose how they racially identify, and indirectly their analyses by demonstrating that identity decisions vary systematically according to key determinants. However, my personal exegesis of prior literatures identifies social context, specifically racial context, as perhaps the most dominant factor in informing the identity conclusions of Multiracials. Given the prominence of racial context in these previous literatures, my dissertation hopes to fill a research gap by clarifying how racial context is important for Multiracials' politics.

Specifically, though these works demonstrate that some features of social and racial context are important for Multiracials' identity choice, and that those identity choices in turn are predictive of political outcomes, more work can be done to disentangle whether identity is the single vehicle through which racial context affects politics or whether context impacts outcomes

outside of identity as a mediator. Indeed, optimal distinctiveness literature demonstrates that an individual's self-categorization or specific labeling may not align with the social identity groups they perceive as central to their self-concept (Brewer, 1991; Leonardelli et al., 2010). Thus, it is possible that an individual with one Black and one White parent might categorize themselves Biracially as both Black and White to accentuate their uniqueness when in a predominantly Black context, but at the same time hold attitudes that are entirely prototypical of single-race Blacks. Consequently, more investigation is needed to parse out when identity labeling and racial context are interacting to predict outcomes, and when they are working separately.

Additionally, several dimensions of social and racial context are discussed as important for multiracials' politics such as the racial context of one's household (i.e. minority mother/White father or a White mother/minority father), the racial composition of one's zipcode (as measured by the census), as well as the social milieu (Dalton, 1982) inherited from one's parents' social class which includes the academic and educational attainments and affluence present in one's neighborhood. Still, more can be done to detail how these and other features of context are different in their mechanics and the ways in which they might differently relate to outcomes like identity, attitudes, partisanship, or candidate evaluations. For example, context varies on a scale ranging from those more intimate in nature (e.g, the racial composition and politization of one's parents in the home, the racial composition of one's primary group relationships and immediate neighbors [census block]), to more distal and atmospheric in nature, such as zipcode level racial composition or geographic region. It is possible that intimate features of context exert a stronger influence over more affectively laden outcomes (Sears et al., 1980) such as partisanship or racially-charged policies or candidates. Zipcode level context may better captures the racialized nature of local businesses, architecture, artistic installations, or the racial

composition of people one sees when driving through town. Moreover, geographic region may better capture contextually varied institutional norms such as hypodescent or racial essentialism that constrain the accessibility of certain identity options.

Lastly, it is not well explored whether racial context should work the same for each Biracial group as it predicts their politics. Specifically, it is likely the case that the degree to which racial context will have an effect on the Biracials' political evaluations will increase as the object being evaluated becomes more symbolically or affectively linked to the racial group in question. For example, the partisanship of part-Black Biracials may be more affected by variation in the preponderance of Blacks in their racial space than would say an Asian-White Biracial by an increased preponderance of Asians. This is plausible since we know that Blacks as a political symbol and as a group are tightly linked to the Democratic party, while Asians or other racial groups do not have similarly close partisan attachments. Given this reasoning, I aim to clarify how, when, and why racial context will exert an influence on Biracials' politics. In these ways and more, additional work on the relationships between context, identity, and politics, is surely needed.

## Chapter 3

### Evidence of RRS (Part 1): Identity and Partisanship

#### Evidence of RRS in Identity Choices

To explore the ways in which racial context may be meaningful for the politics of mixed-race individuals, my first endeavor is to shed light on how variation in the racial composition of one's social world relates to the racial self-identities they hold and express. Certainly, it has been no secret among social scientists that identities—racial identity in particular—are powerful vehicles through which people understand their own political selves and orient one another in terms of how they are organized within the mass public (Miller et al., 1981, Dawson, 1994). Identity in some sense is often perceived as the most basic contributing factor to the processes that both shape and motivate of our attitudes and behavior. As a consequence, the subject of this first section of chapter 3 is to investigate whether there exists an empirically identifiable pattern consistent with the RRS framework regarding identity choices.

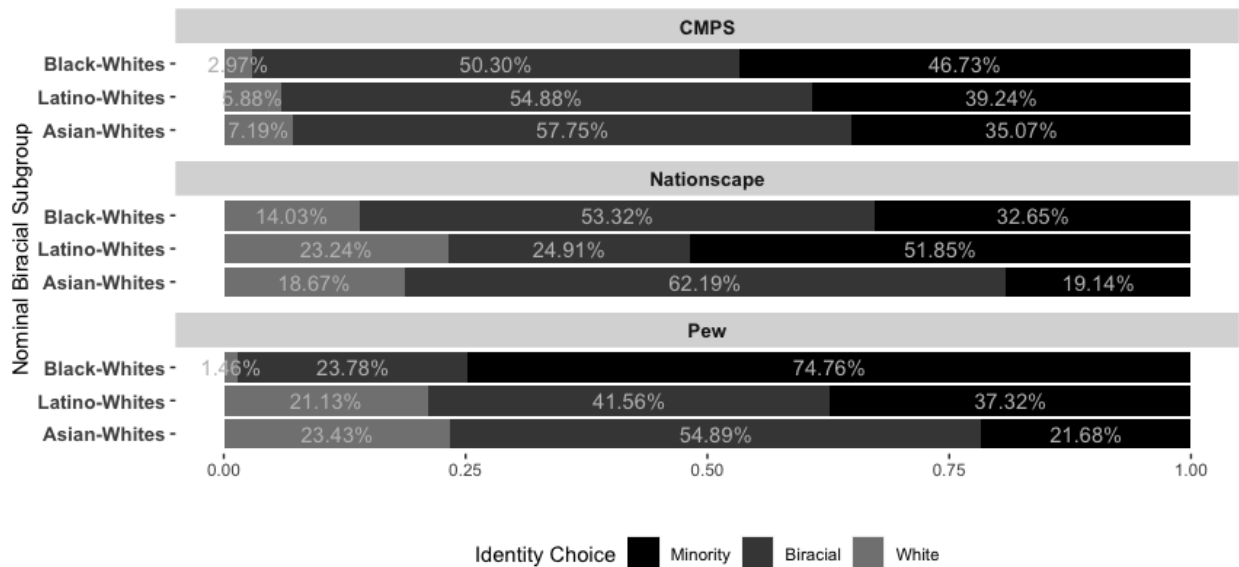
Before the exploration of how context and identity choices correlate among Biracials, it may be helpful to overview the general distribution. Figure 3.1 presents the weighed proportions of each nominal Biracial subgroup's identity choices. These categories are constrained to single-race White, Biracial (actively identifying both with their minority group and as White), and single-race minority<sup>4</sup>. There are several noticeable trends here that are consistent with extant literature. First, consistent with the expectations of hypodescent, Biracials are all more likely to identify singularly with their minority heritage group than as White. Similarly, Black-Whites—those theorized to be most encumbered by hypodescent constraints—are generally the least likely to identify as White, and the most likely to identify singularly with their minority group

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<sup>4</sup> Proportions sum to one because they are constrained to only these three identity choices—the lions share of minority-White Biracials identity choices.

(Gullickson & Morning, 2011). Finally, Asian-Whites are uniformly the group most likely to exhibit hybridity in their identity choices by identifying simultaneously as Asian and White (active Biracials), and generally most likely to identify singularly as White (Davenport, 2016a; Leslie & Sears, 2022).

**Figure 3.1: Distribution of identity choices among nominal Biracials. (Sample: All Biracials; Source: Pew).**



**2015 Pew Survey of Multiracial Adults**

In terms of the whether or not Biracials’ patterns of racial self-identification adhere to what would be expected by RRS, Figure 3.2 presents the first slate of evidence drawn from the 2015 Pew Survey of Multiracial Adults. Specifically, the top row presents the results of logistic regression models which provide information about the variation in the predicted probability that each nominal Biracial subgroup will identify singularly with their minority group (1 = identified singularly with their minority group, and 0 = did not identify singularly with their minority

group). The x-axis on each model represents the variable ‘Minority-White Context’ which denotes the ratio of minorities to Whites within each participant’s racial context, and according to the Biracial subgroup of each plot. For the Pew dataset, context was measured subjectively in that participants were asked in separate questions to indicate how many of their close friends are minority (Black; Latino; or Asian) or White, how many of the people in their neighborhood are minority or White, and how many of the relatives with whom they often have contact are minority or White. Responses for these categories ranged from none, some, most, to all, which are coded from one to four, respectively<sup>5</sup>. For example, Minority-White context for Black-White’s is equivalent to  $(\text{Black}_{\text{friends}} + \text{Black}_{\text{neighbors}} + \text{Black}_{\text{family}}) - (\text{White}_{\text{friends}} + \text{White}_{\text{neighbors}} + \text{White}_{\text{family}})$ . These models hold a basic set of variables at their mean (age, gender, education, and income).

Consistent with the expectations of RRS, we observe that Biracials’ identity choices are indeed very tightly correlated with variation in their racial context. Within all three of the top panels of Figure 3.2, we observe that the probability that nominal Biracial individuals identify singularly with their minority group increases substantially as the trend line flows right across the x-axis which indicates increasing proportions of their minority racial group, and decreasing proportions of Whites among their social context.

For Black-Whites, variation in identity choice is so extreme that racial context seems to nearly perfectly predict whether or not each survey participant will identify singularly as Black. For respondents on the left side of the x-axis (those who indicated that their friend group, neighbors, and relatives with whom they often spend time are entirely White) virtually zero percent identify singularly as Whites. However, as participants report having a higher

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<sup>5</sup> And as always context here is scaled to range between -1 (completely White) to 1 (completely minority)

preponderance of Blacks in their social world (decreasing preponderance of Whites) they become more likely to identify singularly as Black, eventually converging to a rate of 95% in completely Black contexts. While predictive models such as this which seem to have complete determinative properties are quite rare in social science, it is important to remember that racial context here is measured very comprehensively in that it reflects not just the context of the neighborhood in which they live—a space they may or may not have control over their inclusion within—but also the racial composition of their friend group (a space they have likely had much more control over throughout their life) as well as their relatives (arguably the most critical factor for setting the pressures or barriers related to racial identification).

In terms of Latino-Whites and Asian-Whites, while we do observe significant increases in the probability they identify singularly as Latino in highly Latino contexts, it is notable that the probabilities never tend to converge to near 100%. Latino-Whites tend to identify as minorities at a rate of 78% when in the maximum value of Minority-White Context, while Asian-Whites identify as minorities with a rate of 55%. A few possibilities for this may exist. One, it is possible that Black-Whites are more likely to experience acceptance and inclusion from their minority peers when they exist in completely Black spaces than other Biracials do from their minority counterparts. Given that Black-Whites are the Biracial subgroup which has been most salient throughout American history, it is possible that processes of hypodescent and the one-drop rule are so entrenched among other Blacks that they do not differentiate between each other much on the basis of degrees of White heritage (at least in terms of their racial identity). On the other hand, Latino-Whites and Asian-Whites may overall have more access to incorporating Whiteness into their personal feelings about their racial identity in general, and/or they be more likely to be subjected to alienation and questions about the authenticity of their minority ties

when they exist in highly minority spaces. Indeed, considerable qualitative evidence in the past has highlighted that while Black-Whites, especially Black-White men, are relatively less confronted by significant forces of exclusion from their single-race minority counterparts (Curington et al., 2020), Latino-Whites and Asian-Whites are highly likely to be otherized by other minorities, such as being called White washed or derided for not speaking the related ethnic language (Strmic-Pawl, 2016; Does et al., 2021).

Next, given that extant literature demonstrates that Black-Whites overall are the least likely subgroup to identify singularly as White (Liebler & DeRousse-Wu et al., 2012), one might assume Black-Whites will be unlikely to identify as White regardless the racial composition of their social context. However, in the three bottom panels of Figure 3.2 which present the results of models predicting Biracial identification and White, we observe that this is in fact not the case. Though Latino-Whites and Asian-Whites have a much higher probability of identifying as White in general, they are predicted to be less likely to do so than do Black-Whites at the lowest values of Minority-White Context (high proportions of Whites and lowest proportions of their respective minority group). This finding is quite unexpected and stands at odds with much of what we have observed through prior social science evidence.

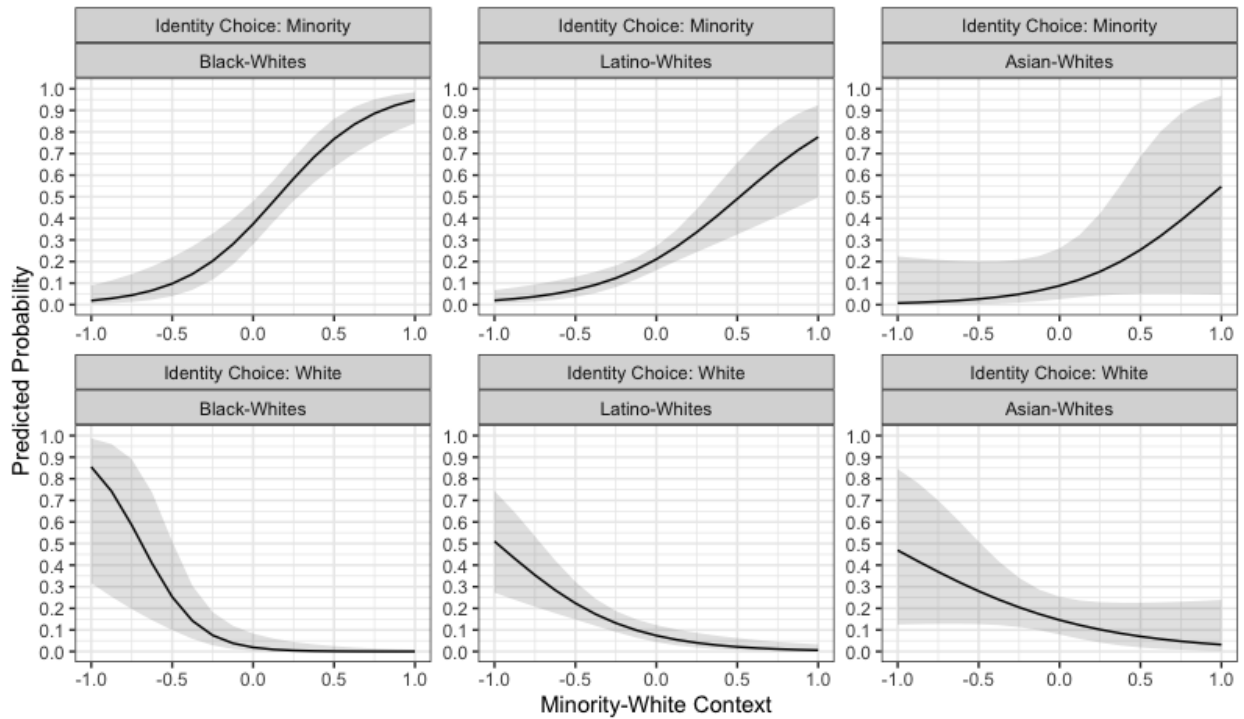
Since Black-Whites are perceived as the Biracial subgroup most consistently subjected to the constraints of hypodescent and the one-drop rule one might expect that they would maintain strong loyalties to their single-race Black counterparts and identify as such, regardless of their racial context. However, the evidence presented here in the bottom left panel of Figure 3.2 shows that Black-Whites in fact can be highly likely to identify as White, *if* they exist in a social space dominated by Whites. This is the first of many subsequent findings that will show that the perception of part-Black individuals as monolithic is inaccurate. While Black-Whites are



typically considered de facto White, a plethora of evidence demonstrates that they in fact often resemble other minority-White Biracial subgroups in their ability to adopt a White identity and related political attitudes when in White spaces.

**Figure 3.2: Identity choice across racial context.**

**(Sample: All Biracials; Source: Pew)**



### **Identity Choice in the Pew Dataset: A Closer Look**

Figure 3.2 shows that Biracials exhibit large variation in their identity choices in relation to changes in their racial context when modeled using an aggregate measure of context (friends, neighbors, and relatives with whom they interact often). However, we are unable to tell from this aggregate measure alone which specific contextual force is driving the apparent relationship, or

whether they are only meaningful when working together. To more deeply explore the relationship between different agents of racial context and identity choices, the next set of plots provide the results of the same models as conducted in Figure 3.2, but which are now disaggregated to show the relationship between the racial composition of one's friends, neighbors, and family each on their own, as they relate to Biracials' expressions of racial identity.

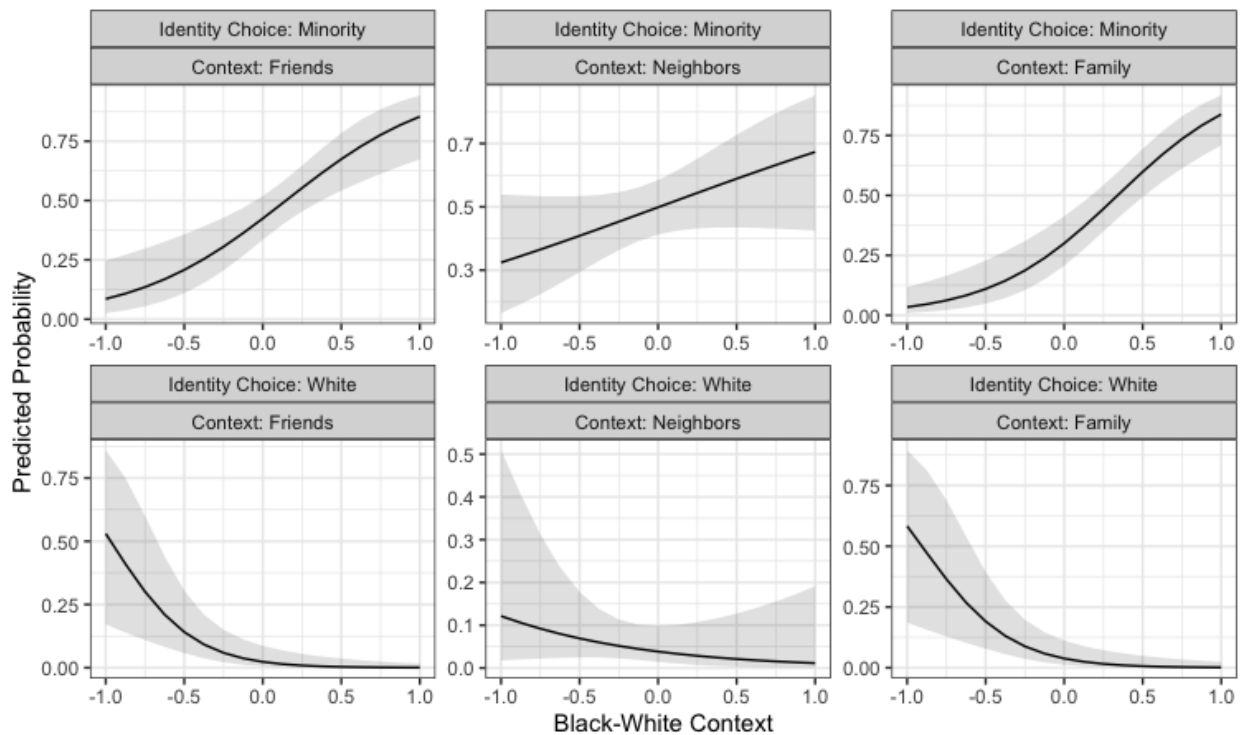
Figure 3.3 below shows the breakdown of how each type of racial context relates to the racial identity decisions of nominal Black-White Biracials. An apparent trend demonstrated here is that two contextual agents in particular, friends and family, correlate with the largest variation in identity choice for Black-White Biracials. The racial composition of a Black-White individuals' neighbors accounts for both less variation in terms of their predicted probabilities differences, as well as the degree to which they can be considered statistically significant in their correlations. Specifically, the top and center panel shows that the predicted probability of identifying as Black varies just 35 percentage points in relation to their racial context, far less than the approximately 80 percentage points associated with variation in their friends and family. The confidence bands surrounding the neighborhood context trend line is also much wider, indicating a less consistent statistical relationship between the context of one's neighborhood and their identity choices than exists for friend group and familial racial contexts.

It is easy to understand why the racial context of one's friends or family might be more central to the processes involved in impacting one's racial identity than their neighborhood context. For one, racial identity is considered a deeply rooted and stable psychological holding that may get ingrained very early in life as a result of the major socialization force in one's life. As is the case for the development of symbolic predispositions toward political parties and racial

groups, contextual agents operating inside the home are most impactful for socializing their children to develop emotional ties to the different racial groups in their heritage (Sears, Huddy, & Schaffer, 1986). Similarly, friends constitute another set of incredibly impactful socializing agents as they represent what sociologists call primary relationships, or those with whom an individual is able to share and interact as their true selves (Cooley, 1955).

**Figure 3.3: Identity choice across racial context, disaggregated for different agents of socialization.**

**(Sample: Black-White Biracials; Source: Pew)**



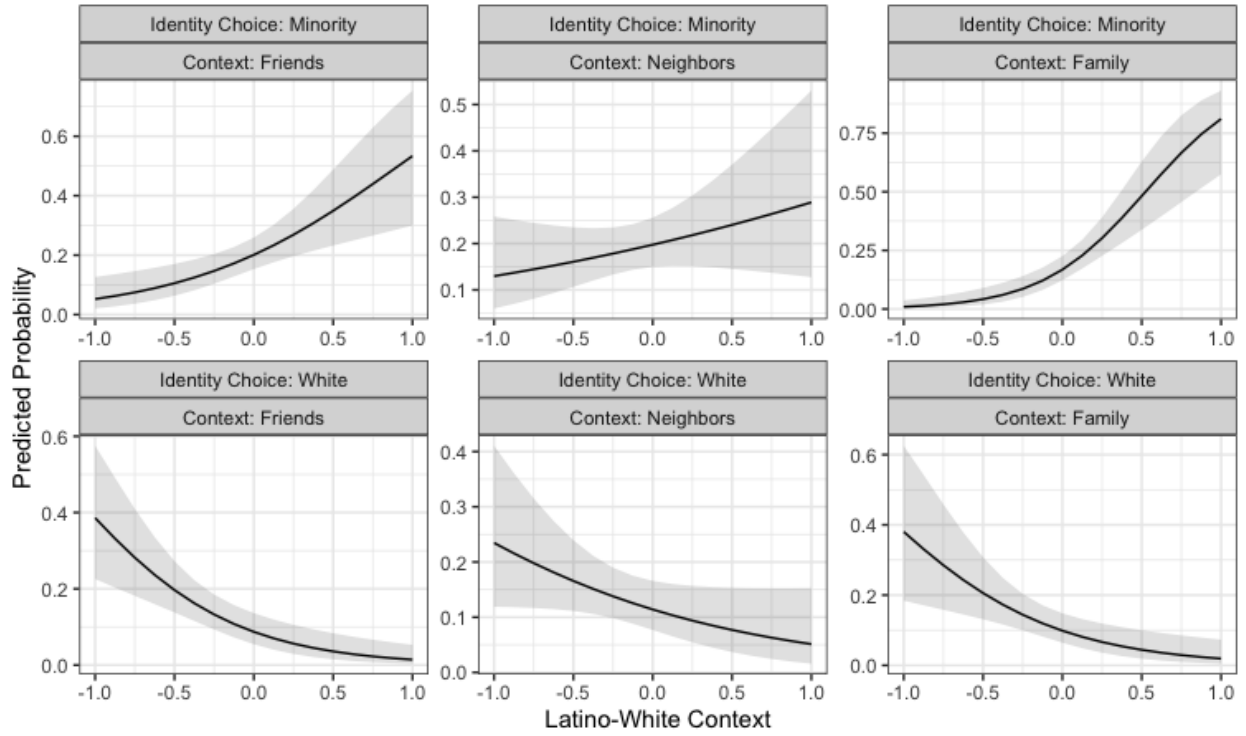
For Latino-Whites and Asian-Whites, the same general pattern as with Black-Whites emerges in that friends and family seem to have a stronger connection to their identity choices than do neighbors. One exception, however, is that the racial composition of the family Asian-Whites spend time with seems to be less predictive of their identity choices that might be

expected given the centrality of familial relationships to socialization processes. In fact, in Figure 3.5 we observe that the racial context of Asian-White Biracials' neighbors are actually more tightly correlated with their probability of identifying as White than is the composition of the family then spend significant time with. Two possibilities for this finding occur. One, it may be the case that Asian-Whites simply have less variation in the racial composition of their relatives.

Relatedly, one of the phenomena we will observe in coming chapters is that Asian-Whites tend to be the Biracial subgroup whom exhibit the most uniqueness in the ways that they relate to context. Specifically, Asian-White Biracials on certain identification and attitudinal outcomes actually demonstrate an oppositional response to increased proportions of Asians in their locale. Specifically, and in a small minority of occasions, Asian-Whites sometimes become more similar to Whites as their context becomes more Asian. One way to think about this is through the lens of prior qualitative literature on the experiences of Asian-White Biracials in the United States. Asian-Whites are known to experience comparatively more social exclusion, isolation, and othering on behalf of their minority group family members than do other Biracial subgroups (Strmic-Pawl, 2016; Does et al., 2021). If this is the case, Asian-Whites with entirely Asian familial relationships may be varied in how they respond to minority dominated familial relationships, with some being pushed away from identifying as Asian in response to feeling excluded, and others doubling down on group norms to better ingratiate themselves and assert their minority heritage among Asians.

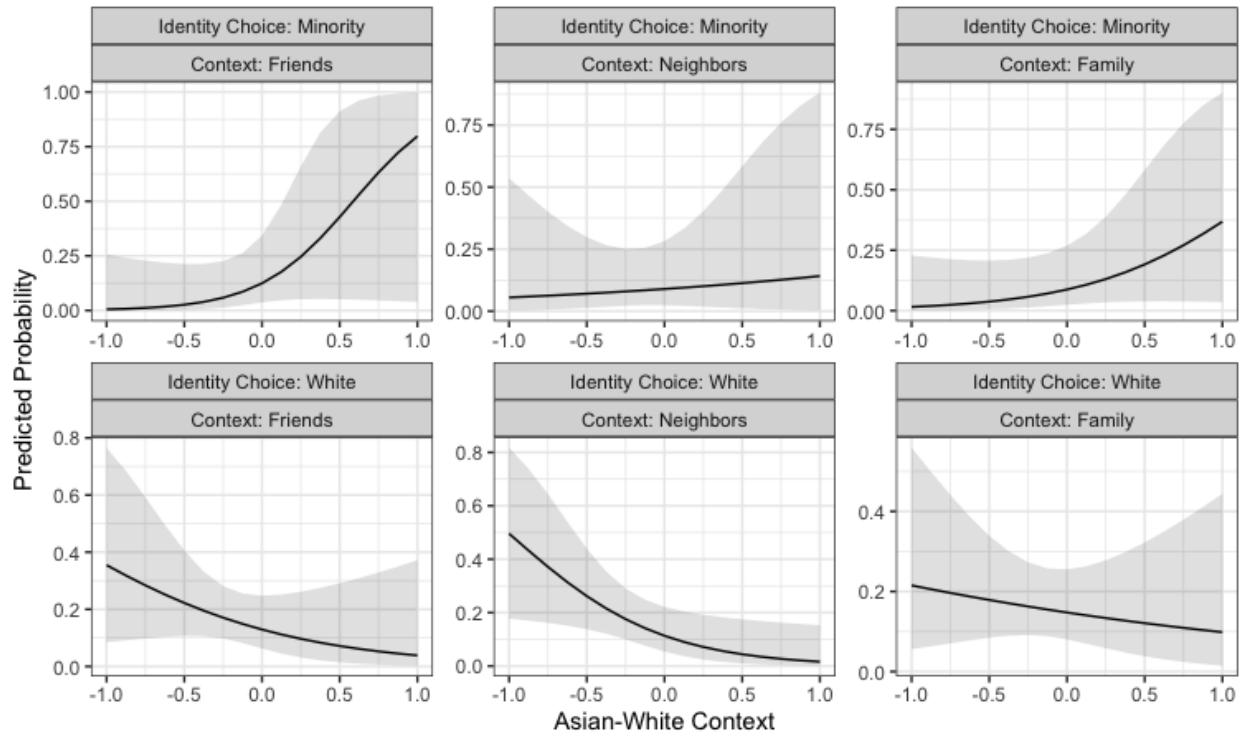
**Table 3.4: Identity choice across racial context, disaggregated for different agents of socialization.**

**(Sample: Latino-White Biracials; Source: Pew)**



**Figure 3.5: Identity choice across racial context, disaggregated for different agents of socialization.**

**(Sample: Asian-White Biracials; Source: Pew)**



### *Nationscape*

The subjective measures of racial context from the Pew dataset demonstrate robustly that context is highly meaningful for the ways Biracials choose to express their racial identities.

Almost without exception, Biracials become more likely to identify with the racial group from their heritage as that heritage becomes more salient in a given social context. However, given that these relationships are based on subjective responses they are likely biased, at least partly, toward reflecting what each participant thinks the racial composition of their social world is, rather than its factual composition. To further explore how variation in racial context relates to identify choices, I next turn to evidence from several other datasets which instead use measurements of racial context as drawn from the census and which can be considered completely objective and accurate depictions of context.

Next, I conduct logistic regression models as above using the Nationscape dataset, and present the results in Figure 3.6. In agreement with what was observed using subjective

measurements in the Pew dataset, nominal Biracials in the Nationscape dataset also exhibit an extreme propensity to racially identify with the racial group that is most salient in their social space. Specifically, the Minority-White Context variables representing the x-axes in Figure 3.6 denote the ratio of minorities to Whites within each participant's zipcode and as drawn from the 2015-2019 American Community Survey: (% Minorities in Zipcode A - % Whites in Zipcode A). Even when using objective measures of racial context, the pattern remains remarkably consistent in that Biacials' choices of identity are very tightly and positively correlated with the salience of the racial groups from their heritage in their zipcode.

One notable difference between the results presented in Figure 3.6 from the Nationscape data and those presented from the Pew dataset is that the variation observed in identity choices across racial context is much smaller in magnitude in the Nationscape data. For example, whereas nominal Black-Whites Biracials in the Pew models exhibit a variation of around 95% in their probability of identifying singularly as Black, in the Nationscape models this variation is much more modest—a difference of 16% between those in completely Black zipcodes (right side of the x-axis and highest values of Minority-White Context) and those in completely White zipcodes (left side of x-axis). The same is true regarding nominal Latino-White Biracials in that they vary more modestly across context in the Nationscape data than in the Pew models (min-max differences of 15 percentage points).

The same is true in terms of models predicting racial identification singularly as White in that nominal Biracials are much less likely to do so as the proportion of their minority peers increases. Again, the variation in identity choice across context is much more modest across the Nationscape models than in Pew which used a more comprehensive and subjective measurement of context. Since neighborhood racial composition is an imperfect measure of one's entire social

world, one might find it surprising to find significant correlations in these models at all.

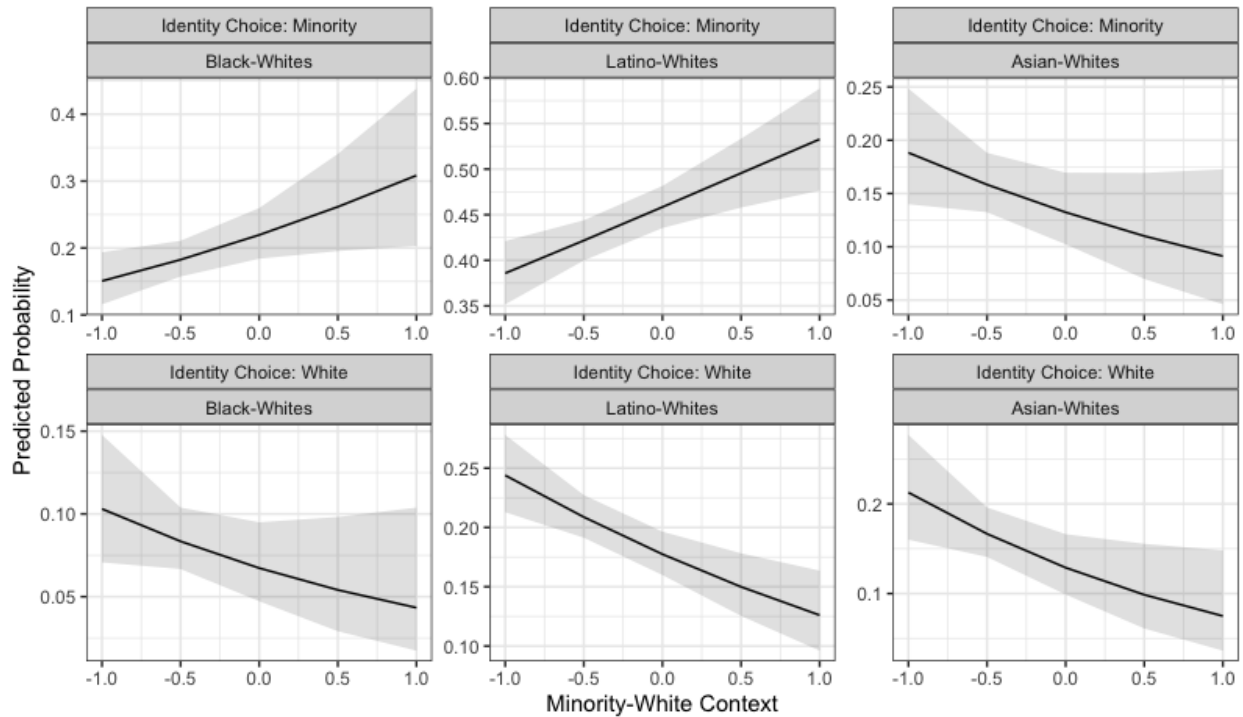
However, the evidence provided here demonstrates that context, even objective measurements of one's zipcode, is very strongly and consistently correlated with Biracials' identity choices.

Another standout difference among the Nationscape models is that Asian-White Biracials are actually *less* likely to identify singularly as Asian as the relative salience of Asian in their zipcode increases ( $p = 0.09$ ). This finding contributes to an emerging pattern in that the increased salience of Asian-Whites minority counterparts does not seem to uniformly lead to increased feeling of connectedness or identification with their minority racial group. Again, it has well-demonstrated in prior literature that Asian-Whites often confront significant otherization from single-race Asians when in heavily Asian social contexts. This alienation might have the effect of driving Asian-White Biracials away from choosing to identify singularly as Asian. However, in the bottom and right panel of Figure 3.6, we observe that Asian-Whites are also less likely to identify singularly as White as their space becomes less White and more Asian. If Asian-Whites are less likely to either identify as Asian or White as the proportion of Asians in their context increases, what identity choice might they be turning to?

**Figure 3.6. Identity choice across racial context.**

**(Sample: All Biracials; Source: Nationscape)**

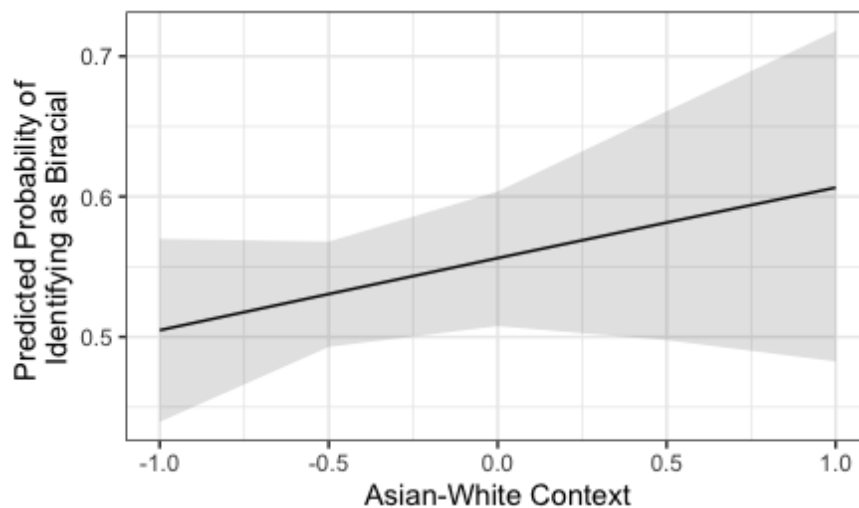




As known from prior literature, the strong majority of Asian-White Biracials—and most Biracial subgroups in general—tend to identify as active Biracials (e.g. actively identifying as both Asian and White simultaneously). Therefore, as nominal Asian-Whites tend to live in increasingly Asian spaces, it might be the case that they abandon singular White identification as Whites become less salient, yet are pushed away from identifying solely as Asian given pushback from their single-race Asian peers. So where do they go? To this question, Figure 3.7 presents the results of logistic regression predicting identification as actively Biracial. Though the finding is not quite statistically significant ( $p = 0.20$ ), we can see that the trend line is increasingly slightly across racial context, suggesting that Asian-White may be less comfortable asserting a singular Asian identity when they exist in contexts dominated by their Asian peers. Instead they may choose to assert their hybridity or differentiate themselves from single-race Asians by identifying as Biracial.

**Figure 3.7: Identification as Biracial across racial context.**

**(Sample: Asian-Whites; Source: Nationscape)**



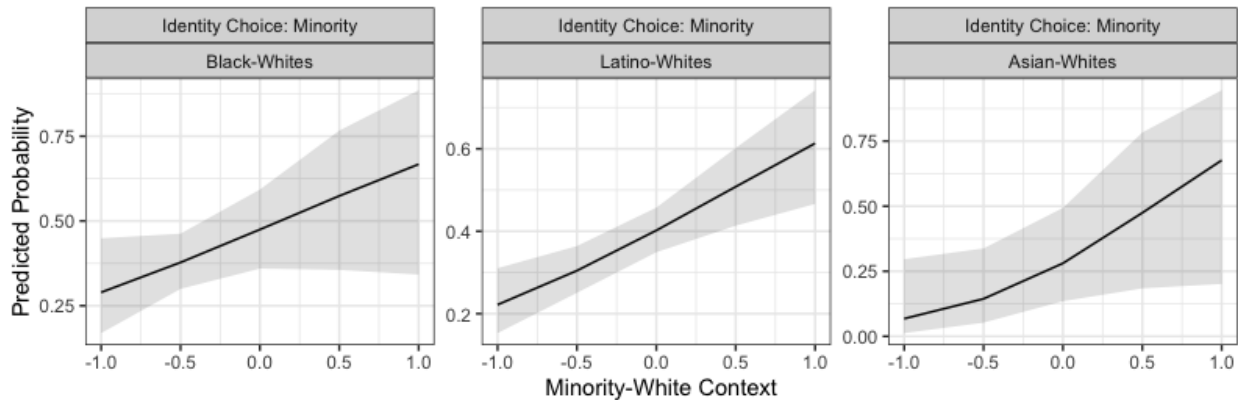
***Collaborative Multiracial Post Election Survey (CMPS)***

Next, I add to the story of how racial context relates to Biracials' identity choices with an examination of the 2020 CMPS. Similar to Nationscape, the CMPS incorporates a measurement of racial context that is derived from the 2015-2019 American Community Survey and which is the difference between the proportion of minorities and the proportion of Whites in a given zipcode (e.g. % Black in Zipcode A - % White in Zipcode A). In Figure 3.8, I present the results of the CMPS models which demonstrate that all three subgroups of nominal Biracials again become more likely to identify singularly as minorities as the proportion of their minority group increases in their social context. Additionally, it also appears that the magnitude of variation is once again quite large. Specifically, the probability that a nominal Biracial individual identifies

with their minority group increases 38 percentage points for Black-White Biracials<sup>6</sup>, 39 points for Latino-Whites, and 61 percentage points for Asian-White Biracials<sup>7</sup> across racial context.

**Figure 3.8: Identification as single-race minority across racial context.**

**(Sample: All Biracials; Source: CMPS)**



One difference between the CMPS and other surveys is that exceedingly few nominal Biracials choose to identify singularly as White (as demonstrated in Figure 3.1). As a consequence, there were little to no significant correlations between identifying as White and racial context within the CMPS dataset. Instead, I repeated the regression models for each Biracial subgroup but this time modeling the probability they would identify actively as Biracials. In Figure 3.9, I present the results of those models which demonstrate that the variation Biracials exhibit across context is majorly comprised of the difference between identifying either singularly with their minority heritage or as Biracial. Across all Biracial subgroups there exists a propensity to be less likely to identify simultaneously with both of the racial groups in their

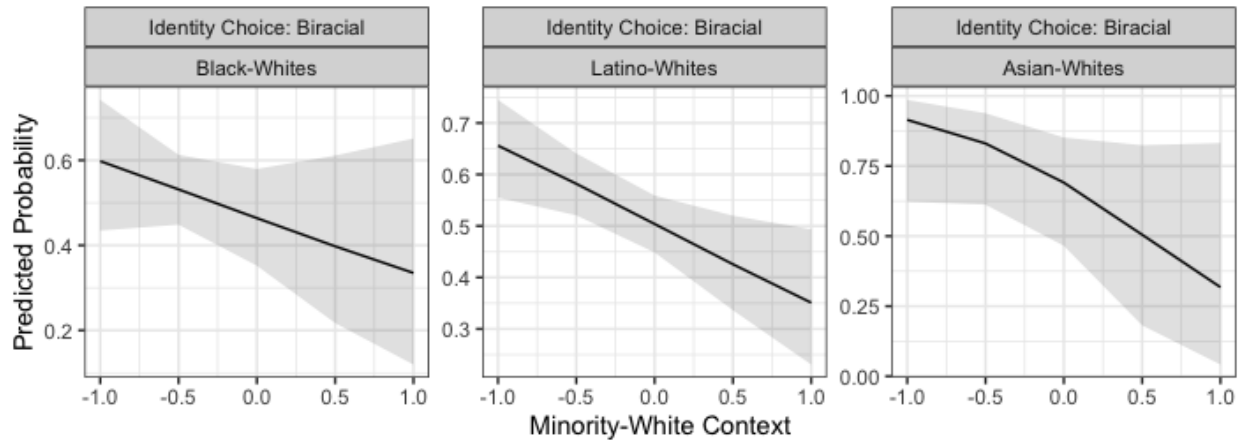
<sup>6</sup> $p = 0.046$  with state fixed effects.

<sup>7</sup> $p = 0.055$  with state fixed effects.

heritage as their minority racial groups become more salient and their White identities less salient.

**Figure 3.9: Identification as Biracial across racial context.**

**(Sample: All Biracials; Source: CMPS)**



***North Carolina Statewide Voter File***

Next, I repeat the previous identity choice models using a modified compartment of the North Carolina Statewide Voter File. An important difference between the models presented below using voter file data and previous models are that racial context is now measured at the census-tract-level as derived from the 2020 decennial census. Specifically, since the voter file contains each person’s individual address, I am able to use geocoding to append a wide variety of variables corresponding to measurements of racial context. Since census-tract-level data is the most granular measurement of context available on the most recent decennial census, the following models will use census-tract-level measurements.

Consistent with the expectations of RRS, nominal Black-White and Latino-White Biracials’ identity choices trend according to the racial group most numerous within their social

context (i.e. the racial composition of their census tract). Specifically, Figure 3.10 demonstrates that Black-Whites are 33 percentage points more likely to identify as Black in heavily Black census tracts than they are in heavily White tracts. Similarly, Latino-Whites in the North Carolina are 22 percentage points more likely to identify as Latino in completely Latino contexts than in White contexts. In terms of White identity, context remains a potent predictor in that Black-Whites are 15 percentage points less likely to identify as White across Black-White Context, and Latino-Whites are 27 points less likely.

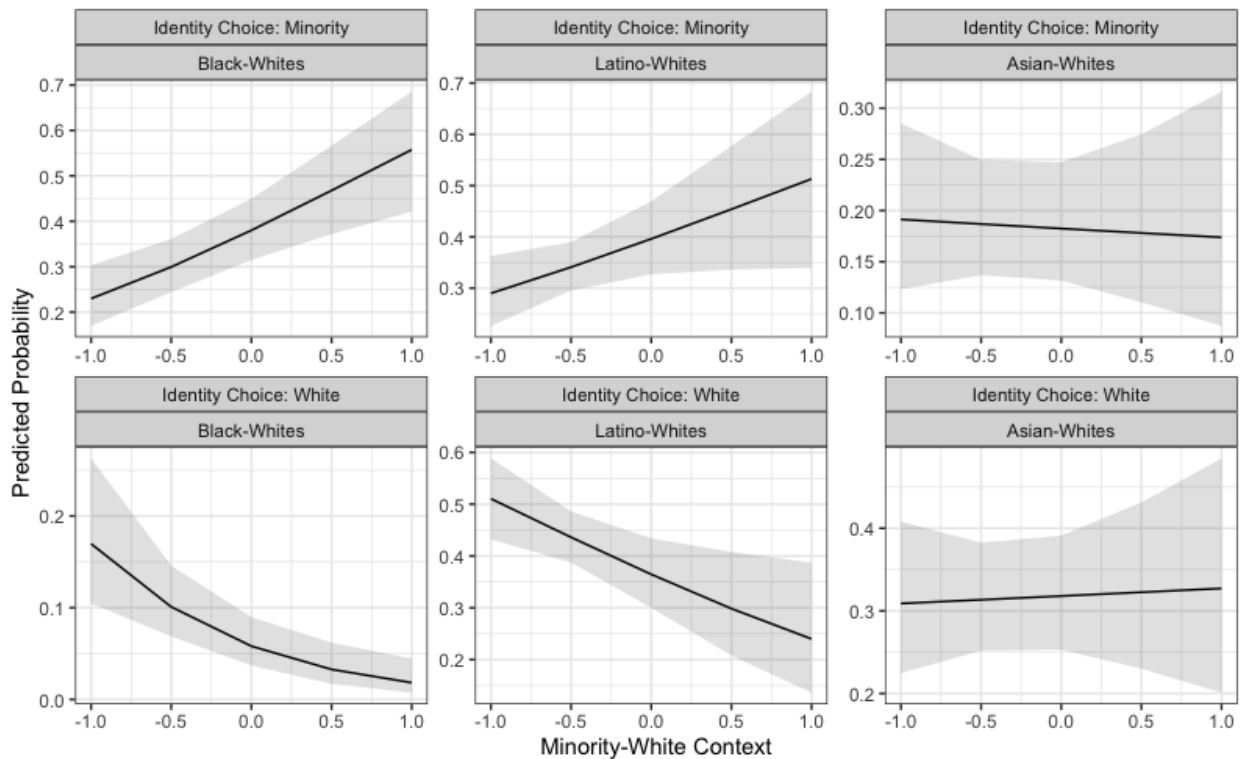
That context is shown to meaningfully predict identification as White among Black-White Biracials in North Carolina may be particularly notable given the expected social and institutional norms regarding race. Residing in the U.S. South, North Carolina possesses a historical legacy of racially regressive heuristics such as the championing of slavery prior to the Civil War and strict adherence to the one-drop rule (O'Connell et al., 2020). Yet, even this southern state which is thought to maintain an allegiance to the practice of hypodescent, Black-White Biracials are still opting to identify singularly as White, and they are doing so in relation to the racial composition of the spaces in which they live. Hence, even in this southern state which is thought to have major constraints in terms of the racial group boundaries part-Black individuals can traverse, these boundaries appear to still be quite permeable for Biracials. This phenomenon is an important one because it is a story that is often lost in aggregate depictions of the characterization of Black-White Biracials, one that has tended to paint a picture of them as uniformly Black despite their obvious heterogenous nature.

On the other hand, Asian-Whites do not appear to vary much in their identity choices as the racial composition of their census tract changes. While we have observed some heterogeneity with respect to the way that context relates to identity choice for Asian-Whites within each

dataset, it is also worth mentioning that North Carolina as a state has relatively few Asian voters, and therefore has very census tracts which are overwhelmingly dominated by Asians. Still, we will see in the Florida file below that the expected trends for Asian-Whites do appear in the south, and often in strong fashion.

**Figure 3.10: Identity choice across racial context.**

**(Sample: All Biracials; Source: North Carolina Voter File)**



***Florida Statewide Voter File***

Lastly, Figure 3.11 presents the results of logistic regressions modeling identity choice using the Florida Statewide Voter File. Here, we observe an absolutely striking pattern in that identity choice is both correlated with racial context at high levels of statistical significance for

all Biracial subgroups. Additionally, each Biracial subgroup seems to vary quite precipitously in their differences of identity choice across racial context. One observation that stands out is that the Latino-Whites have exceedingly small confidence bands. This is in part be due to the fact that there is a large population of nominal Latino-White Biracials in Florida. However, it likely also reflects that Latino-Whites in Florida experience very stark and authoritative social pressures which condition them to make real-world decisions about which racial groups with whom they feel that they belong. These social pressures appear to be intimately linked to geographic context in that neighborhoods and communities which are predominantly Latino exert a strong influence on Latino-White Biracials, incentivizing them to ingratiate sameness by identifying solely with their dominant group.

Lastly, the results from the Florida dataset demonstrates once again that the identity choices of Asian-Whites adhere strongly to the expectations set forth by RRS. Specifically, nominal Asian-White Biracials are shown to be 13 percentage points more likely to identify singularly as Asian and 17 points less likely to identify as White when moving from completely White to completely Asian spaces.

While the robust findings present in the Florida dataset in terms of racial identity are quite supportive of the existence of RRS among Biracials, it is important to acknowledge some of the limitations with regards to empirical inference. Specifically (and as described above and again later) in order to identify Biracials in the voter files I applied a unique matching algorithm which isolated households whom with high probability contain both intermarried parents and their Biracial children. While there is a level of known error associated with identifying these Biracials (e.g. some of those I identify as Biracial may actually be the niece, step-child, adopted child, or grandchild rather than a biological child) and though those errors are evenly distributed

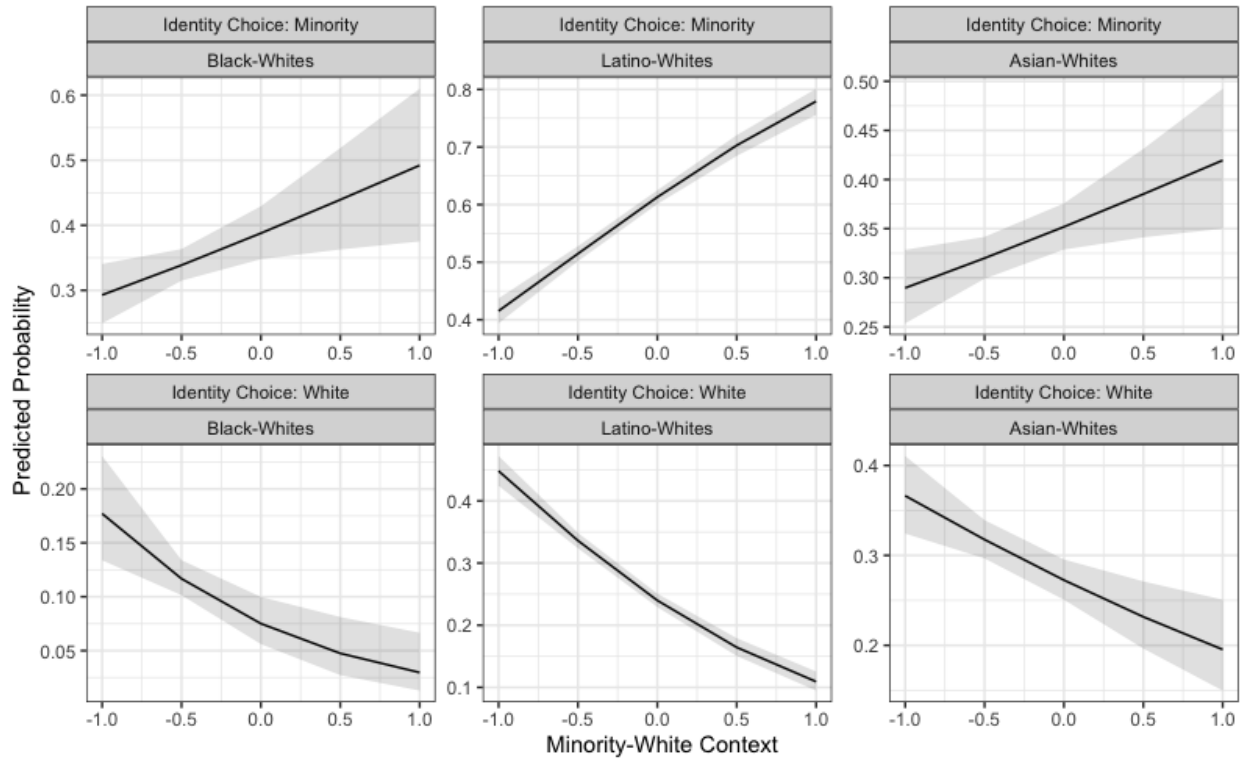
across the sample (i.e. ACS replication shows that an equal proportion of non-Biracials identified through my algorithm are minority and White) those errors rates may not be uniformly distributed across context. For example, it may be the case that voters accidentally identified as Biracial in highly minority spaces are more likely to be minorities than those accidentally identified as Biracial in highly White spaces, which would bias the voter file findings. As a consequence, please keep this limitation in mind when interpreting the voter file and identity results.

Regardless, all told, and with few exceptions, existing evidence quite demonstratively corroborates that racial context is indeed highly related to the identity choice of Biracials, as is the expectation of RRS.

**Figure 3.11. Identity choice across racial context.**

**(Sample: All Biracials; Source: Florida Voter File)**





### Evidence of RRS in Biracials' Partisanship

Now that we have established a strong burden of evidence supporting the presence of RRS in identity choices, the next step is to delve a bit deeper into this concept by exploring the expressly political consequences of racial context among Biracials. Doubtlessly, partisanship is a central feature of political science. Scholars have demonstrated widely the importance of partisanship in political life in that party affiliation is the single best predictor of attitudes and behavior (Huddy, 2013), the most central political value transmitted to children through socialization (Jennings & Niemi, 1968; Jennings, Stoker, & Bower, 2009), and a potent political symbol with ample affective power for contouring individuals' political preferences (Sears, 1983). If racial context is truly important for Biracials' politics, an examination of its relationship on partisanship should be highly informative.

### *2015 Pew Survey of Multiracial Adults*

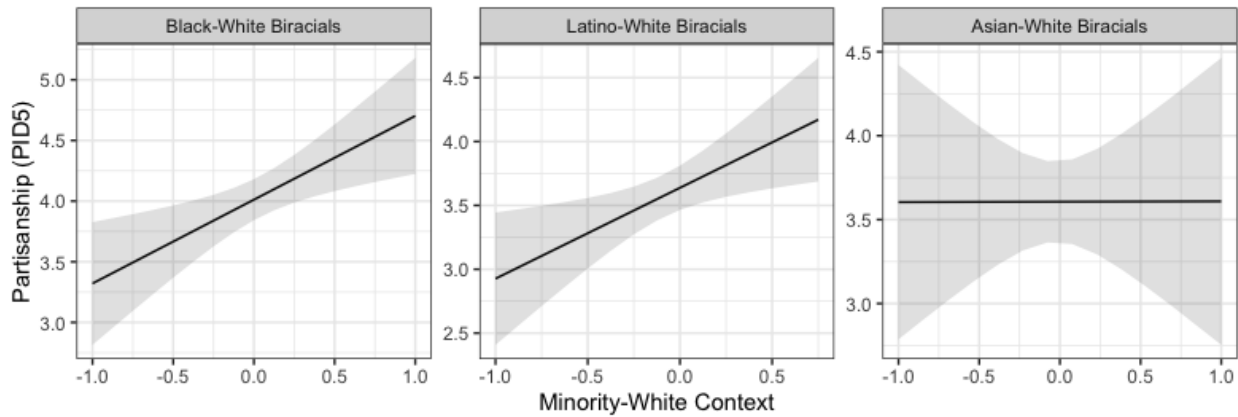
As with the previous section, the first goal of the following analysis is to simply demonstrate the pervasiveness of the RRS framework among Biracials', with a particular focus in this section on partisanship. To this point, the following analysis is not principally concerned with causal identification, rather it endeavors merely to corroborate the broad and consistent presence of the relationship between context and Biracials' partisan affiliations. To do so, I use the Pew, Nationscape, and CMPS datasets to investigate whether each Biracial subgroup indeed varies in their partisanship across racial context and according to the racial group most numerous in their space. To begin, Figure 3.12 presents the results from the Pew dataset which uses the aggregate measure of racial context comprised of participants' own subjective indication of the racial composition of their friend network, neighborhood, and relatives with whom they often spend time. The partisanship outcome included in the Pew regression models is PID5, a five-point Likert scale (5 = Democrat, 4 = Lean Democrat, 3 = Independent or No Party Affiliation, 2 = Lean Republican, 1 = Republican). All partisanship models (as well as attitudes and candidate choice models) hold age, income, education, gender, and ideology at their means as control variables.

As evident in Figure 3.12, both Black-White and Latino-White Biracials are incredibly more likely to indicate that they are Democratic when their racial contexts are dominated by their single-race minority counterparts (Blacks and Latinos, respectively), as compared to when their racial contexts are dominated by Whites. Specifically, Black-Whites vary so tremendously in their partisanship across context that in completely White spaces their modal party affiliation can be described as independent, yet in completely Black spaces they tend to identify solidly as

Democrats. Similarly, Latino-Whites vary a great deal in their partisanship across context, ultimately trending from considering themselves independents in White spaces to being in between leaning and identifying solidly as Democrat in Latino contexts. Asian Whites, on the other hand, do not appear to vary much in their partisanship as a function of racial context.

**Figure 3.12: Partisanship across racial context.**

**(Sample: All Biracials; Source: Pew)**



*Nationscape*

Next, I take a look at how Biracials’ partisanship trends across racial context using the Nationscape dataset. Since racial context is measured in the Nationscape using census data—which is consistent across all participants—I am now able to overlay the predicted partisanship trends for single-race individuals within the same plots as Biracials. This is important because partisanship trends across racial context for single-race individuals serve as important benchmarks that can be used to determine whether Biracials are indeed varying more widely in their partisanship across context than single-race individuals. Additionally, the overlaid trends of single-race individuals will help us visualize whether or not Biracials are converging directly

onto the partisan proclivities of their single-race counterparts, as is the general expectation of RRS.

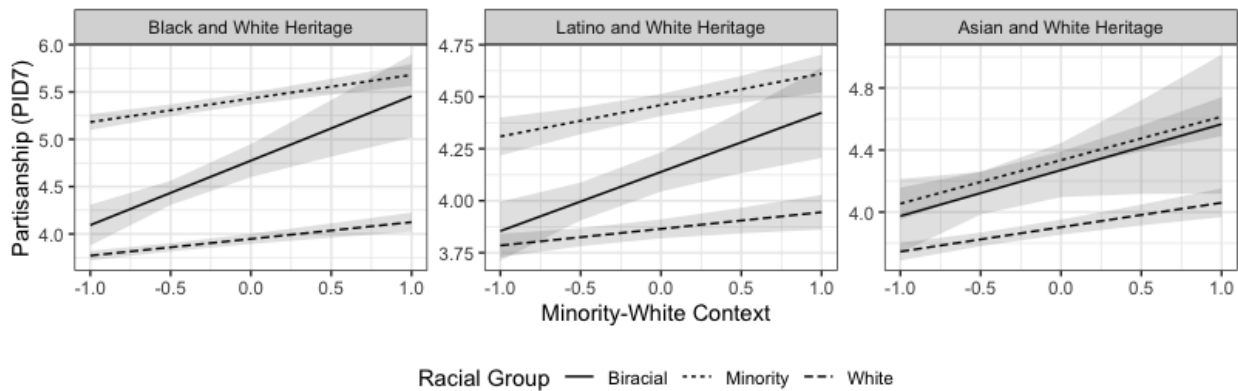
To this point, Figure 3.13 presents the results of ordinary least squares regressions that include interactions between racial context and a factor variable with three levels, one for each racial group (Biracials, minorities, Whites, corresponding to the paired “Minority and White Heritage” group listed atop each plot). Results presented in Figure 3.13 measure partisanship according to PID7 (7 = Strong Democrat; 1 = Strong Republican). Moreover, in Figure 3.13 (as well as the following interaction plots) the solid Black line denotes the trend line for the Biracial subgroup being examined, while the dotted line denotes the trend line for the minority racial group, and the dashed line denotes Whites.

According to Figure 3.13, both Black-White and Latino-White Biracials once again exhibit major variation in their partisan profiles as a function of racial context. Black-Whites in White zipcodes are only slightly more Democratic than single-race Whites, though they both center around the value of partisanship denoting political independence. Black-Whites then trend upward across the x-axis so steeply that they approximate Blacks’ position as solidly Democratic when in completely Black contexts. Latino-Whites are similarly labile in that they trend toward the Republican side of independent to match single-race White’s partisan leanings in White contexts. Latino-Whites then increase in their propensity to lean toward the Democratic party and match the partisan leanings of single-race Latinos in heavily Latino spaces. Moreover, given the large sample size and geographic representativeness of the Nationscape dataset, the evidence provided here is a strong corroboration that the Black-White and Latino-White electorates in the United States do exhibit patterns consistent with RRS in their partisanship.

Lastly, Asian-Whites continue to be the main Biracial subgroup exhibiting some defection from the patterns theorized in the RRS framework. While Asian-Whites are more likely to indicate Democratic tendencies in heavily Asian contexts, they never actually depart from essentially mirroring the partisanship values of their single-race Asian counterparts, regardless of their racial context. Overall, we are developing a picture of trends in partisanship for Biracials in which Black-Whites and Latino-Whites vary extremely and in accordance with their counterpart racial groups, while Asian-Whites do not.

**Figure 3.13: Partisanship across racial context.**

**(Sample: All Biracials; Source: Nationscape)**



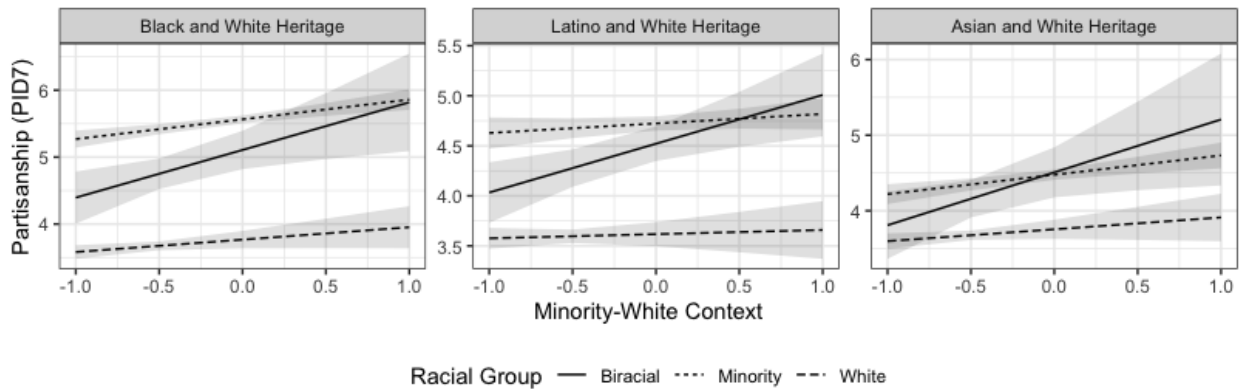
***Collaborative Multiracial Post Election Survey***

Finally, I search for the presence of RRS among Biracials in their partisan tendencies using the CMPS. Figure 3.14 presents the results of the same analysis performed on the Nationscape data, but this time using the CMPS. The patterns observed among participants from the Nationscape and the CMPS datasets are essentially the same, except for the case of Asian-White Biracials. Asian-Whites in Figure 3.14 do show considerably more variation in their

partisanship across context than do their single-race peers. Especially in terms of highly Asian zipcodes, Asian-Whites are much more Democratic in their partisan leanings than are Whites, and statistically non-differentiable from Asians. While the evidence for Asian-White Biracials may be inconsistent, the findings presented here in terms of Black-White and Latino-White Biracials is clear: context matters for Biracials' partisanship.

**Figure 3.14: Partisanship across racial context.**

**(Sample: All Biracials; Source: CMPS)**



## **Chapter 4:**

### **Evidence of RRS (Part 2): Attitudes and Candidate Evaluations**

#### **Evidence of Relative Racial Salience in Political Attitudes**

In the previous chapter I demonstrated that racial context is a highly potent predictor of both identity choices and partisanship among Biracials. The next step, and the subject of the first section of this fourth chapter, is to investigate just how far reaching the consequences of racial context might be on the way Biracial perceive the political world. As a consequence, my next investigation into whether or not consistent evidence exists which substantiates the presence of the RRS framework among Biracials' political attitudes.

#### ***2015 Pew Survey of Multiracial Adults***

I begin again by using the Pew dataset which, though not an expressly political science survey, contains a decent amount of survey items which asked participants about their opinions on both racialized and non-racialized political issues. Moreover, it is important to note that for the Pew dataset—and indeed Nationscape and the CMPS as well—there are far too many political attitude items for me to use while still providing a coherent analysis. As a consequence, I tend to choose and present items which are known to be associated with the different racial groups that comprise each Biracial subgroup's heritage. For example, for Black-White Biracials I will tend to explore attitude objects known to be affectively linked to Blacks. Despite the space constraints within this section, however, note that in chapter five I do engage in machine learning analyses that incorporates each and every last attitudinal and behavioral item from all three of the major datasets of this project, so eventually a comprehensive portrait of Biracials' political proclivities will be presented.

First, Figure 4.1 below presents the mean values for Black-White Biracials, single-race Blacks, and single-race Whites, in terms of several political attitudes which are considered racialized or affectively linked to either Blacks and Whites. The y-axis denotes the mean value on each attitude with all variables rescaled to take values between zero and one, and recoded in such a way that higher values are always indicative of racial liberalism, while lower values indicate racial conservatism. Across each item it is quite apparent that Whites are uniformly more racially conservative than others, single-race Blacks are the most racially liberal, and nominal Black-White Biracials fall somewhere in-between, though consistently more similar to their single-race Black counterparts than to Whites.

Prevailing wisdom that Black-White Biracials are highly similar to single-race Blacks in their racial attitudes appears to be true. Across all seven racialized items, Black-White Biracials are more near their single-race Black counterparts than to Whites in each case. In fact, in only two cases are Black-Whites statistically distinguishable from Blacks in their attitudes (Black-Whites are slightly more racially conservative than single-race Blacks on gun control [ $p < 0.001$ ] and perceptions of discrimination against Blacks [ $p = 0.02$ ]). Yet, how staunchly might Black-White Biracials maintain their resemblance of single-race Blacks when their social worlds are decidedly more White than Black?

**Figure 4.1: Mean racial attitude estimates.**

**(Sample: Black-White Biracials, single-race Blacks, single-race Whites; Source: Pew)**



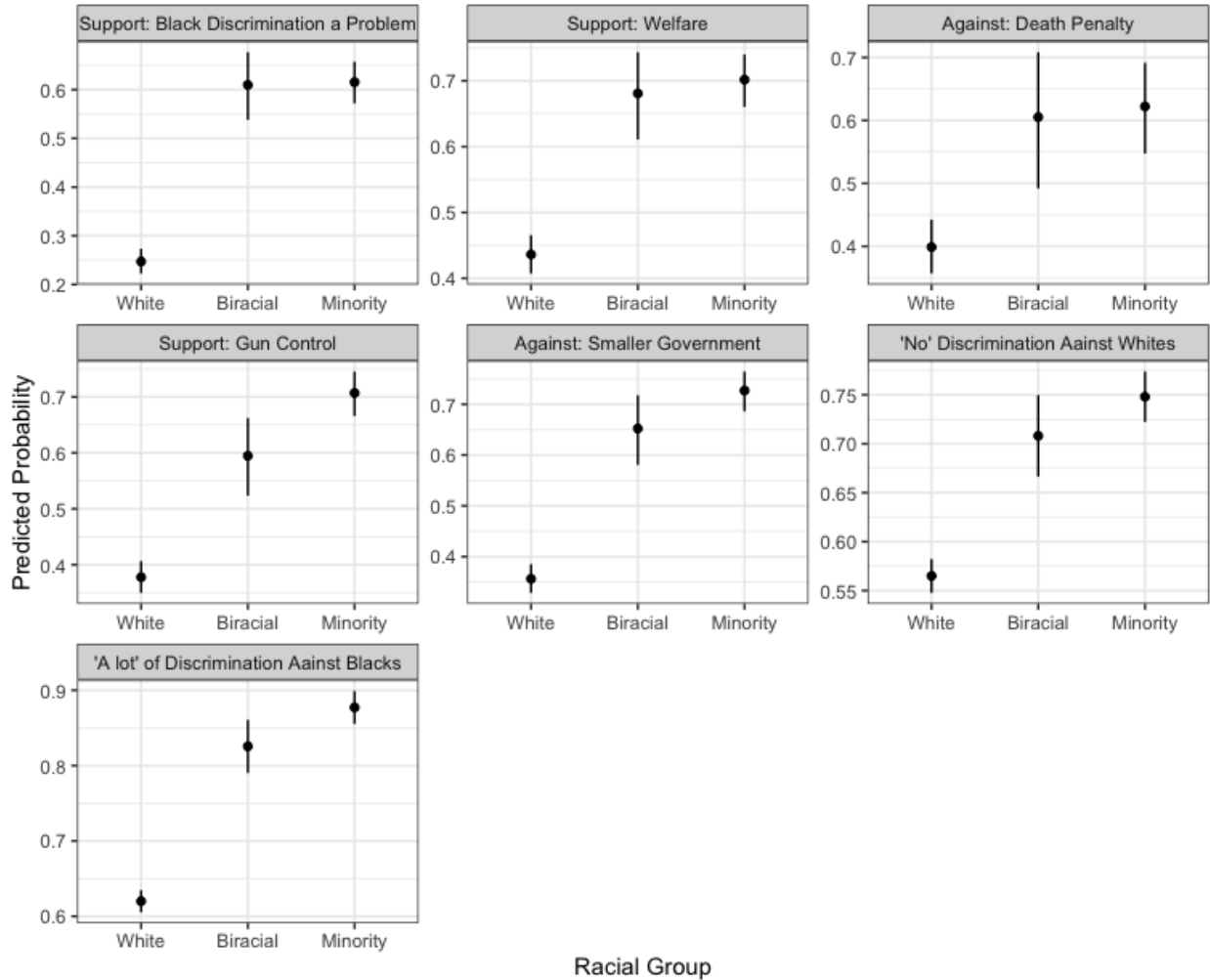


Figure 4.2 below presents the results of logistic regression models predicting racially liberal attitudes as a function of differences in racial context. Each of the models predicting attitudes across context are also computed while holding age, education, income, and ideology as control variables at their means. As with the models in the previous section charting differences in identity choice, the x-axis here becomes increasingly dominated by Blacks (and less dominated by Whites) as one moves to the right and Black-White Context increases in value. Moreover, similar to the models in chapter 3 on partisanship, the way that racial context is measured in the aggregate in the Pew dataset precludes me from being able to comparably

include their single-race peers into the same plots<sup>8</sup>. Context here is once again an indexed measure aggregating responses about the racial composition of participants' friends, neighbors, and relatives with whom they often spend time. Indeed, the findings here complement those found on identity choice and demonstrate that nominal Black-White Biracials not only show a propensity to identify with certain racial groups as they vary in salience, but there are also major political consequences to the shifts occurring across varied racial spaces.

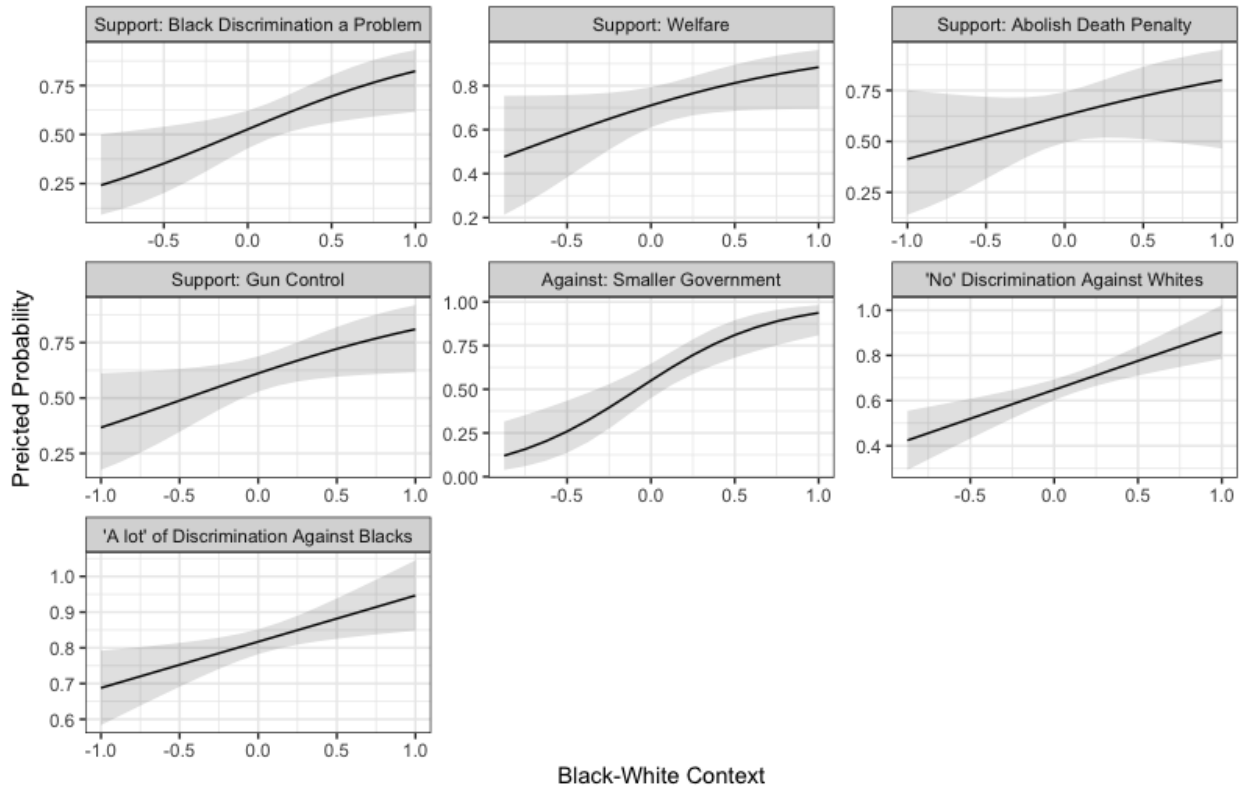
Again, despite being considered for so long as de facto Black, Black-White Biracials show a tremendous propensity to shift toward holding racially conservative values when in White dominated social contexts. One of the most striking results here is that Black-Whites diverge so sharply from Blacks when in White dominated spaces that they are statistically indistinguishable from Whites on important policy topics such as welfare, the death penalty, gun control, and smaller government. That even Black-Whites whom are considered locked behind the most impermeable color lines are capable of adopting the racially conservative policy preferences of Whites, and because they do so consistently on the basis of context, provides immense evidence in support of the potency racial context offers for understanding and explaining Biracial behavior. Another important finding is that the popularized perception that Black-White Biracials and single-race Blacks have identical political opinions is demonstrated plainly here to be a statistical artifact—one that merely sums and averages the diverse opinions of Biracials who vary greatly as they span across different values of racial context. Assuredly, a lack of introspection in to Biracials relationship with context conceals a wealth of heterogeneity in their politics and distorts an accurate depiction of their nature.

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<sup>8</sup> The questions regarding the racial composition of one's family members are asked only to those who indicate membership in each racial group through the initial identification question. Specifically (and for example) since single-race Whites do not get asked about the rate at which they engage with their Asian relatives, I cannot apply the measure of aggregate context in the Pew survey to interaction models.

**Figure 4.2: Racial attitudes across racial context.**

**(Sample: Black-White Biracials; Source: Pew)**



Next, I turn to Latino-White Biracials. When it comes to a Biracials' potential impact on the future of American politics, Latino-Whites are a tremendously important group. As the most populous racial minority group in the United States, Latino are intermarrying with Whites at an incredibly high rate (52% of U.S. born Latinos out-marry a partner of a different racial group; Lee & Bean, 2012) that if trends in the slowing of immigration and the increase in racial intermixing continue, the group we understand as Latino-White Biracials today may come to redefine what it means to be racially mixed in the near future. Accordingly, the ways that Latino-

Whites come to reconcile their racially divergent heritages will have an immense impact on politics.

The wisdom of some scholars has been that Latino-Whites—like Black-Whites—will maintain an allegiance to their minority counterparts and effectively mirror their political dispositions and impact. However, as observed in the preceding section on identity and partisanship, Latino-Whites also possess tremendous lability in the degree to which they can, and do, transgress racial group boundaries. As a consequence, whether or not Latino-Whites today appear to remain more similar to their White or minority counterparts in their politics poses incredibly important implications, as does whether or not context may predict these attitudes.

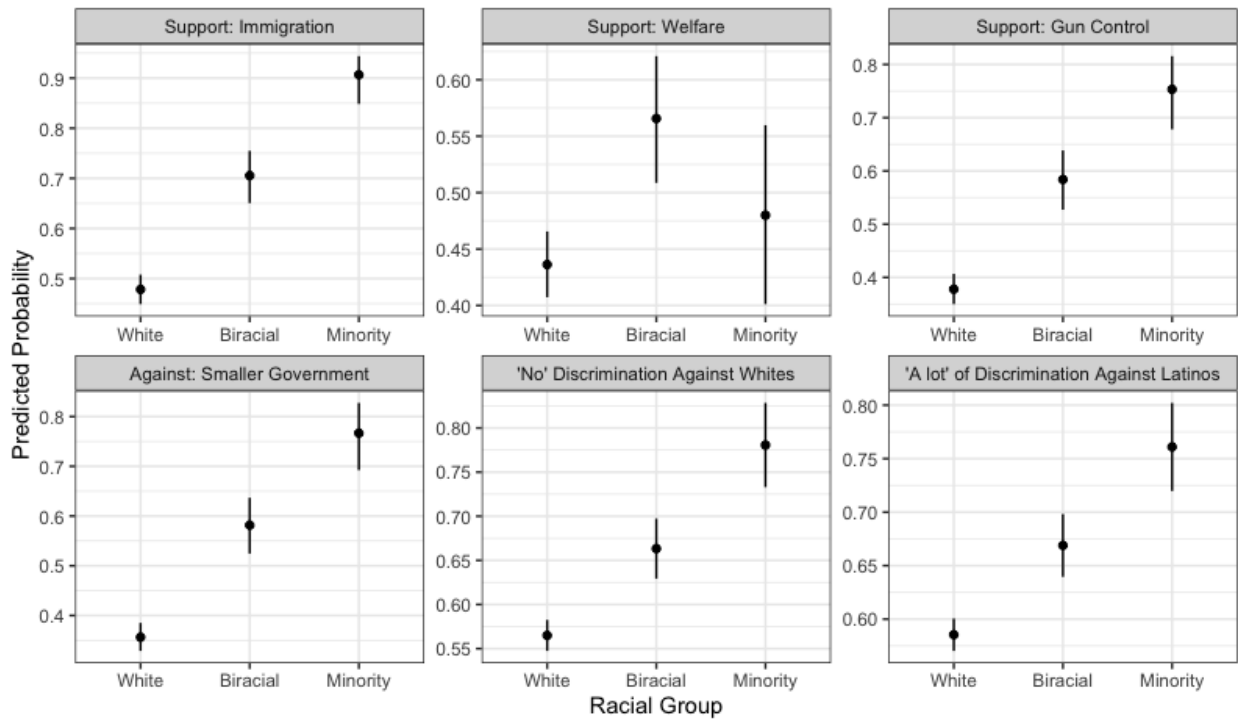
To this point, Figure 4.3 presents the mean values for different racial attitudes central to either Latinos or to Whites. In contradistinction to the pattern observed by nominal Black-White Biracials, who uniformly mirrored their minority counterparts, Latino-Whites actually diverge quite sharply from the attitudes of their single-race minority peers, even without taking racial context into account. At rest, the average racial attitudes of nominal Latino-White Biracials are more racially conservative than Latinos. Another important observation here is that, with the exception of their attitudes toward welfare, Latino-Whites are almost perfectly equidistant in their nearness to their racial heritage counterparts on almost all of their racialized political attitudes.

One might surmise from these mean values that majority of Latino-White Biracials actually hold opinions that are equally encompassing of their loyalty to both of the racial group in their heritage. For example, the typical Latino-White individual may encounter a politician's speech or a television ad discussing immigration which primes their emotional predispositions to both their conservative White Aunt who believes immigrants steal jobs as well as their Latino

cousin who relies on the DREAM Act to remain in school. This individual could feasibly take both perspectives into account and come to a moderate or in-between conclusion in order to hedge their bets on both sides. Is this truly the modal experience for Latino-Whites, or do these “in-between” values belie the true situation in which this in-betweenness is merely a statistical artifact balancing equal sizes of Biracials who hold opposite opinions?

**Figure 4.3: Mean racial attitude estimates.**

**(Sample: Latino-Whites, single-race Latinos, and single-race Whites; Source: Pew)**

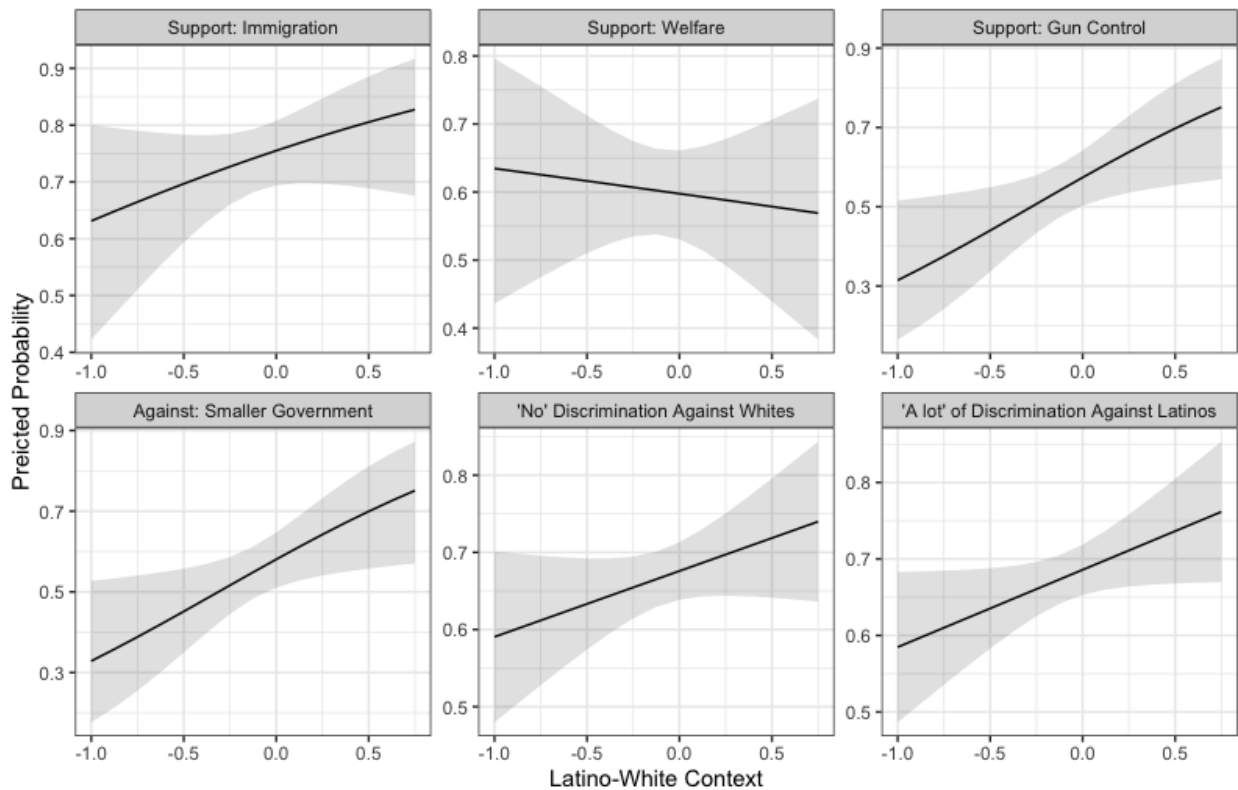


In truth, just as they do in their identity choices, nominal Latino-White Biracials tend to be more prototypical of Whites in spaces dominated by Whites and more similar to Latinos around Latinos. It is not merely the case as one might expect from viewing only the average political attitudes of Latino-Whites that they are centered between Latinos and Whites in their

opinions. Rather, Figure 4.4. presents the results of logistic regression models predicting the racial attitudes of Latino-Whites, Whites, and Latinos as they vary across context. We see that in all but one occasion, Latino-Whites whose social worlds are highly Latino express racialized opinions that are highly supportive of Latino group interests, and in highly White spaces have attitudes akin to Whites. Therefore, it seems that once again the “in-between” depiction of Biracials’ average attitudinal holdings is an obfuscation of the degree to which they actually work quite hard to mirror the same attitudes of the racial group most salient.

**Figure 4.4: Racial attitudes across racial context.**

**(Sample: Latino-White Biracials; Source: Pew)**

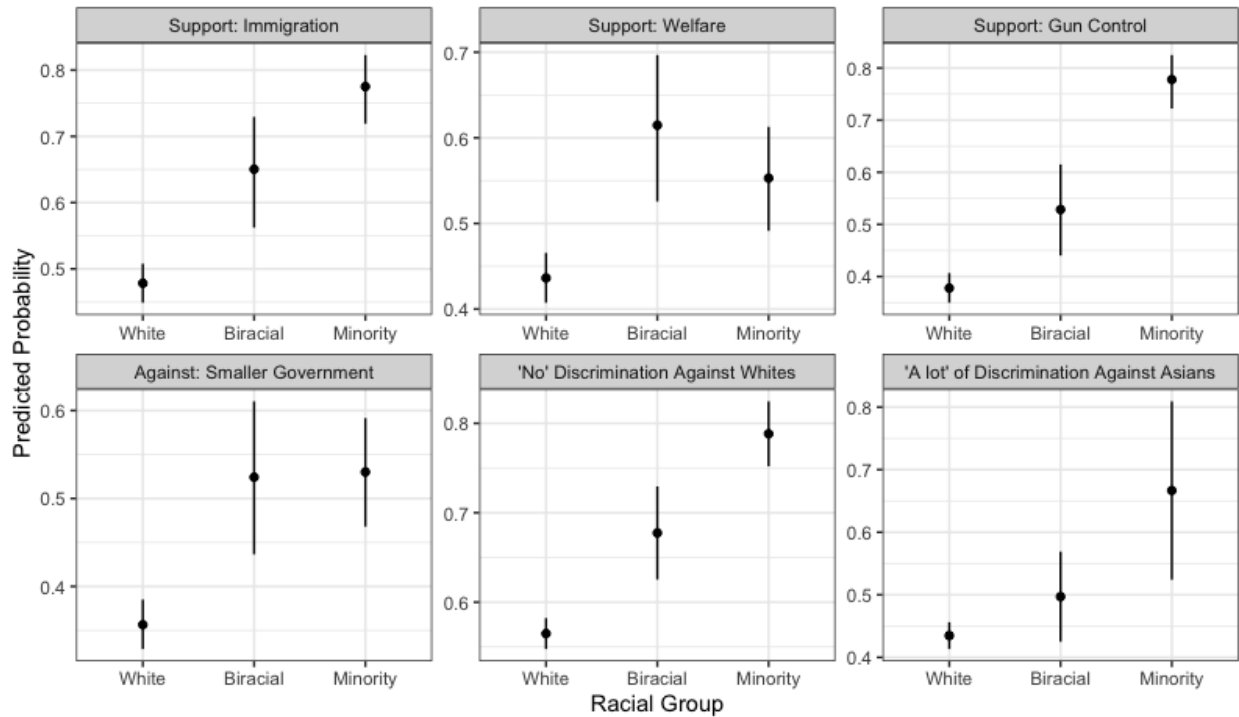


Lastly, how might nominal Asian-White Biracials stack up next to their racial group counterparts? Though not quite as numerous as Latinos, Asian Americans are the fastest growing racial minority group in the United States and are intermarrying with Whites at an even higher rate (i.e. U.S. Born Asians out-marry a partner of a different racial group 72% of the time; Lee & Bean, 2012). As such, their impact on the future of American politics is assured to be monumental.

In Figure 4.5, we observe once again that Asian-White Biracials fall somewhere in between their two racial group poles in terms of their mean values on racial attitudes. However, Asian-Whites on two occasions now are actually showing signs of being more similar to their single-race White counterparts than to Asians. Specifically, nominal Asian-White Biracials are much more similar to Whites in their support of gun control than they are to Asians (Asian-Whites are 15 percentage points more likely to support gun control than Whites [ $p < 0.01$ ] but 25 points less likely than Asians [ $p < 0.01$ ]). Similarly, Asian-Whites are statistically non-differentiable from Whites in terms of their perception of the level of racial discrimination levied on Asians, and perceive much less discrimination overall than do single-race Asians ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**Figure 4.5: Mean racial attitude estimates.**

**(Sample: Asian-White Biracials, single-race Asians, single-race Whites; Source: Pew)**



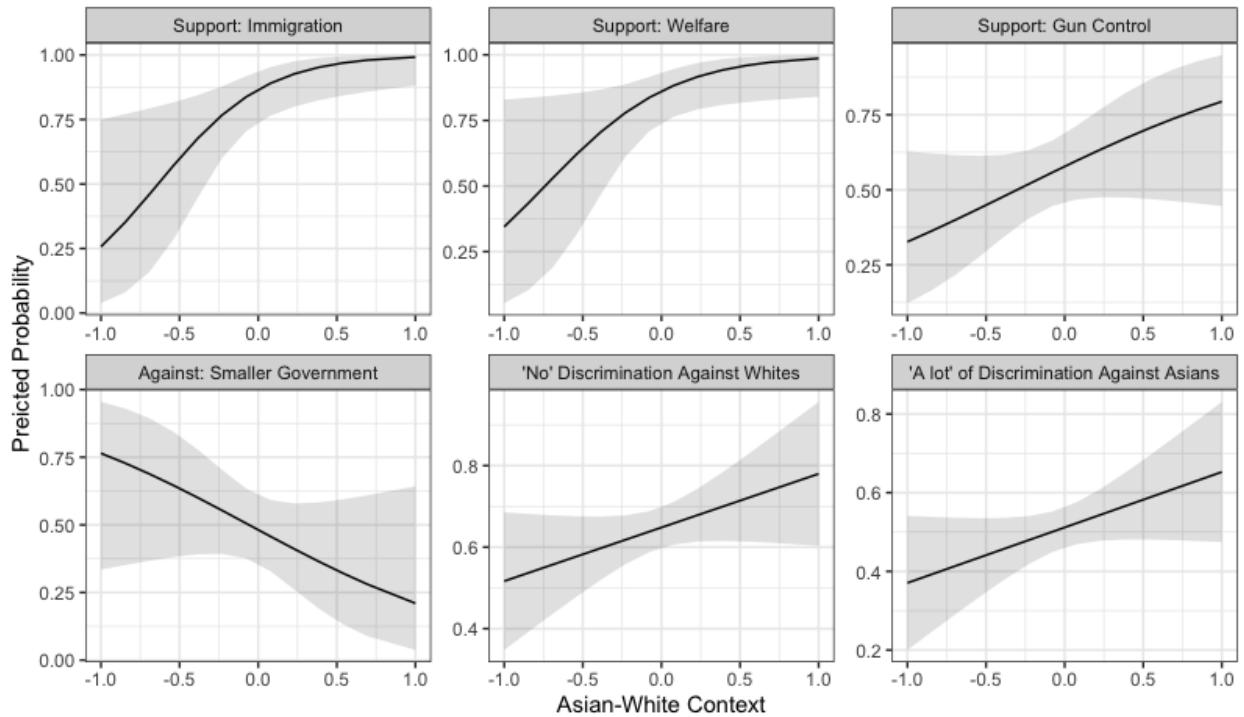
In terms of their attitudes across contexts, nominal Asian-White Biracials are generally more racially liberal in spaces with higher concentrations of their minority group peers than in White spaces, and sometimes much more so. For example, Figure 4.6 shows that the point estimate denoting Asian-Whites' support for immigration in highly White context is lower than the point estimate for single-race Whites. Though the confidence intervals are quite wide, an apparent trend again emerges in that Asian-Whites' attitudes vary widely to fit the dispositions of the more salient racial group. In one startling exception, however, Asian-White are actually less likely to be against smaller government in highly minority spaces than in White spaces. While this relationship is not statistically significant ( $p = 0.18$ ), it demonstrates again that Asian-Whites in some circumstances trend in the opposite direction of their minority counterpart group as members of that group begin to dominate their context. This phenomenon is again similar to what was observed in the Nationscape models regarding identity choice, in which Asian-Whites were less likely to identify as Asian as their context became increasingly Asian (Figure 3.6).



Asian-Whites therefore continue to be somewhat unique in their response to variation in the racial composition of their world. However broader patterns evidenced in the Pew dataset remain concretely adherent to the expectations of RRS.

**Figure 4.6. Racial attitudes across racial context.**

**(Sample: Asian-White Biracials; Source: Pew)**



***Nationscape***

Next, I turn away from the Pew dataset and explore the political implications of the RRS framework using objective measures of racial context in the Nationscape dataset. Once again, unlike in the Pew dataset, the items which measure racial context can be equitably applied to each racial group since it does not rely on questions specific to the racial heritages of each participant. I am therefore able to plot the predicted values of single-race groups' attitudes

simultaneously with those of Biracials. The following plots are therefore the results of regressions which include interactions between Biracial and single-race pairs (e.g. the analysis including Black-White Biracials includes an interaction between Black-White Context and a factor variable with three levels: Black-White Biracials, single-race Blacks, and single-race Whites). A second advantage here is that given the large sample size of the Nationscape dataset, this exploration helps paint a reliable portrait of what the general U.S. population of Biracials thinks about racialized attitude objects as well as how those attitudes vary according to context.

First, Figure 4.6 presents the predicted values for multiple racialized attitude objects for Black-Whites, single-race Blacks, and single-race Whites. In Figure 4.6 (as well as the following interaction plots) the solid Black line denotes the trend line for the Biracial subgroup being examined (in this case, Black-Whites), while the dotted line denotes the trend line for the minority racial group (Blacks) and the dashed line denotes Whites. An interesting pattern emerges. Whereas in the analysis of attitudes using the Pew dataset we are unable to observe directly how the attitudes of Biracials compare to their single-race counterparts, here I find that single-race groups tend to vary either not at all or quite little across the entire spectrum of different racial compositions. Oppositely, Biracials vary quite extremely and consistently hold more racially liberal attitudes in Black dominated contexts, and more racially conservative attitudes in Whites contexts.

The simultaneous display of trend lines for both Biracials and single-race participants is exceedingly helpful for demonstrating some of the more intricate implications of the RRS framework. Specifically, RRS in general holds that Biracials should not only become more or less liberal as the racial composition of their context changes, but their attitudes should generally also converge to approximate the exact racial, political, and social dispositions of the racial

group most salient in their context. More specifically, if the mechanism at hand which influence Biracials' attitudes and behavior is the interplay between transgressing racial group boundaries and the subsequent adoption of characteristics prototypical to that group, then in spaces where one of the racial groups in a Biracial individual's heritage is unambiguously the most salient they should adopt and express the altitudinal disposition most prototypical of that group.

Of course, it is not always the case that individuals who are members of a social group hold opinions which are unwaveringly typical of that group—variation across group members is both normal and expected. However, Biracials, in their pursuit of social belonging and securing their acceptance among different racial groups, should in general approximate the exact attitudes of the racial group from their heritage if it has completely outcompeted the other in terms of its contextual salience. To be certain, some exceptions exist. For example, one such exception is that under circumstances where a Biracial's social space is completely dominated by one of the racial groups in their heritage, but when that Biracial individual's status in the group is unsafe, Biracials may respond in two different ways (Brewer, 2003). First, they may respond by doubling down on their membership by expressing attitudes more supportive of group-specific interests than is considered prototypical. Second, Biracials may respond to alienation by shirking away from the group's prototypical attitudes toward maintaining contrarian attitudes linked to the reason that they are peripheral to that group.

To this point above, in Figure 4.7 we observe that Black-White Biracials' attitudes in four of five cases very nearly approximate the attitudes held by single-race Blacks in zipcodes with high proportions and Blacks and little or no Whites. This pattern is highly consistent with existing research which shows that Black-White Biracials, especially men, experience relatively little exclusion or alienation from their minority group peers (Curington, 2016). Through

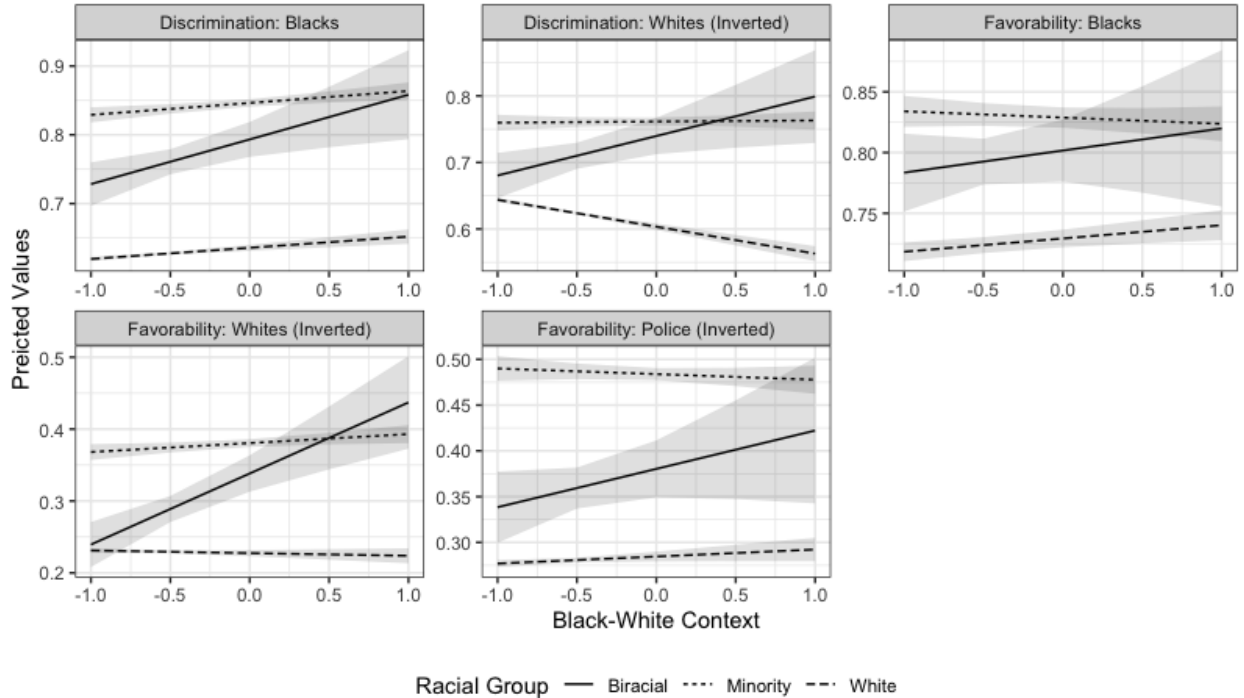
America's history, any individual who possesses at least some Black heritage has typically been considered Black, and so it is understandable that Biracials in highly Black spaces would feel somewhat secure in the safety of their racial group membership. On the other hand, Black-Whites tend to converge to approximately the same attitudes as Whites in only two of the five models. Though it cannot be known for certain, one possible explanation for this finding is that Black-Whites are not quite as easily incorporated within the White racial group boundary as they are among Blacks, but instead experience some forms of exclusion that threaten their membership.

Along these lines, another curious detail here is that the items for which Black-Whites virtually approximate the attitudes of Whites (in White spaces) are the only two which engage directly their dispositions toward Whites, the contextually salient group. Here we are again aided by prior literature which describes that Black-White Biracials in largely White spaces—especially if they are alone or one of few others present—can experience a form of acceptance based in part on tokenism, or the notion that their inclusion within the group is conditional on satisfying the group's need to appear diverse (Rosenfield et al., 1982). If this were to be the case, it is conceivable that Biracials would be enticed to assert their distinctiveness from the group based on the dimension which makes them unique, their Black heritage, and they may do so by maintaining non-prototypical attitudes on Black related objects. Indeed, Black-Whites in White spaces diverge most sharply from Whites on the two items which measure specifically their dispositions toward Blacks. Regardless, it remains quite striking that Black-White Biracials are consistently nearing or approximating the characteristics of Whites, again providing credence to the sheer formative power of racial context for Biracials.

**Figure 4.7: Racial attitudes across racial context.**

**(Sample: Black-White Biracials, single-race Blacks, single-race Whites;**

**Source: Nationscape)**



The story is similar for Latino-Whites. However, Latino-Whites seem to be afforded a bit more versatility in their ability to smoothly transgress group boundaries and adopt the political dispositions of their counterpart racial groups. With tremendous consistency, Figure 4.8 details how Latino-Whites tend to converge quite precisely to the attitudinal estimates of their minority counterparts when in heavily Latino racial contexts. Similarly, Latino-Whites seem to be maneuvering quite deliberately to equate the exact predicted values of their White counterparts when their social context is majorly White.

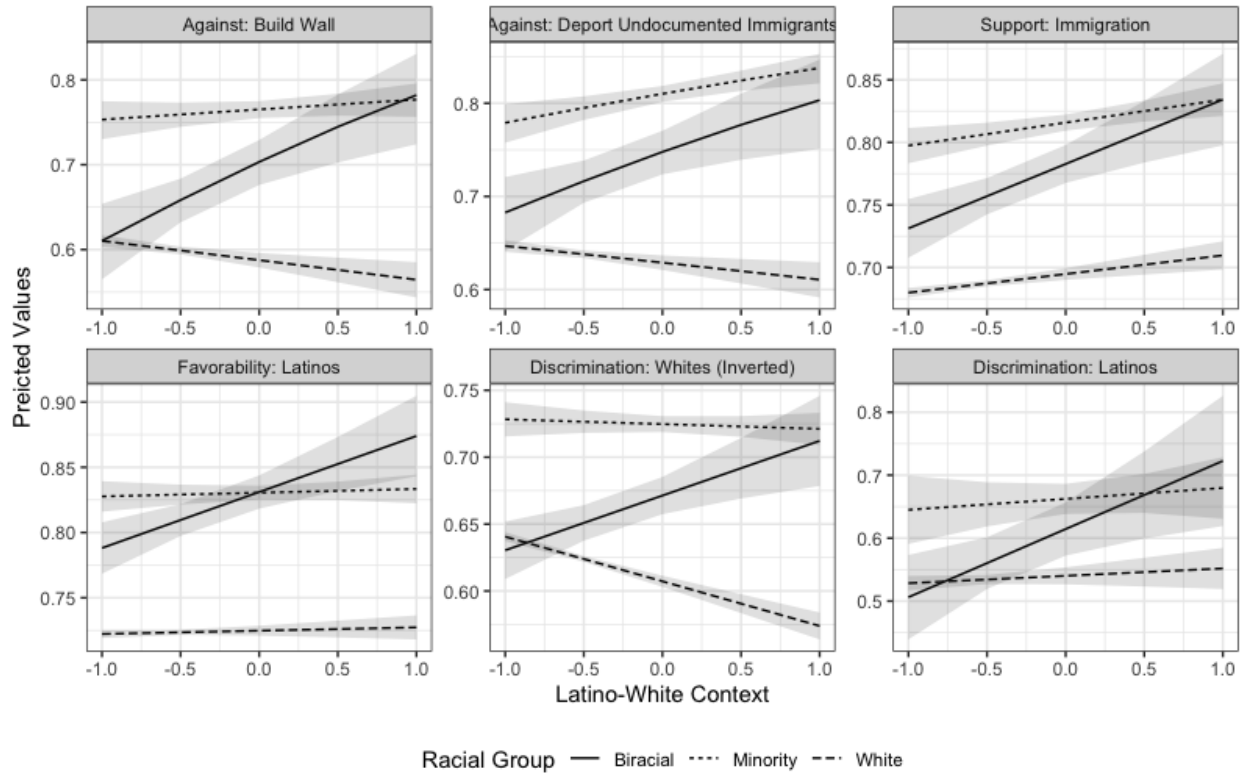
One major implication of the findings shown in Figure 4.8 is that they decisively rebuke the prognosis that Latino-Whites will uniformly remain allegiant to their minority racial groups

as America continues to racially intermix. Specifically, in the top left and top center panels of Figure 4.8, Latino-Whites show themselves to not only be more supportive of highly racially regressive and xenophobic policies—building a wall at the southern border and deporting undocumented immigrants—than are Latinos, they are actually *as* supportive of these policies as are single-race Whites. Given the incredible degree to which these policies have been racially charged in the media and championed by political candidates who openly engage in racist, anti-Latino rhetoric, it is extremely surprising that some Biracials—individuals who have acknowledged in this dataset themselves that they are part-Latino—would adopt a relatively conservative position on these issues, regardless of whatever racial context in which they exist. On the contrary, the data here paints a somewhat uncomfortable picture about the power of the need to belong among Biracials. Though Biracials are expected under the norms of hypodescent and the one drop rule to resemble their minority counterparts, especially when it comes to minority relevant policies, the evidence presented here demonstrates that those assumptions are patently false. Moreover, the propensity for Latino-White Biracials to defect from their expected loyalties minority-interests is in no way unique to that specific subgroup.

**Figure 4.8: Racial attitudes across racial context.**

**(Sample: Latino-White Biracials, single-race Latinos, single-race Whites;**

**Source: Nationscape)**



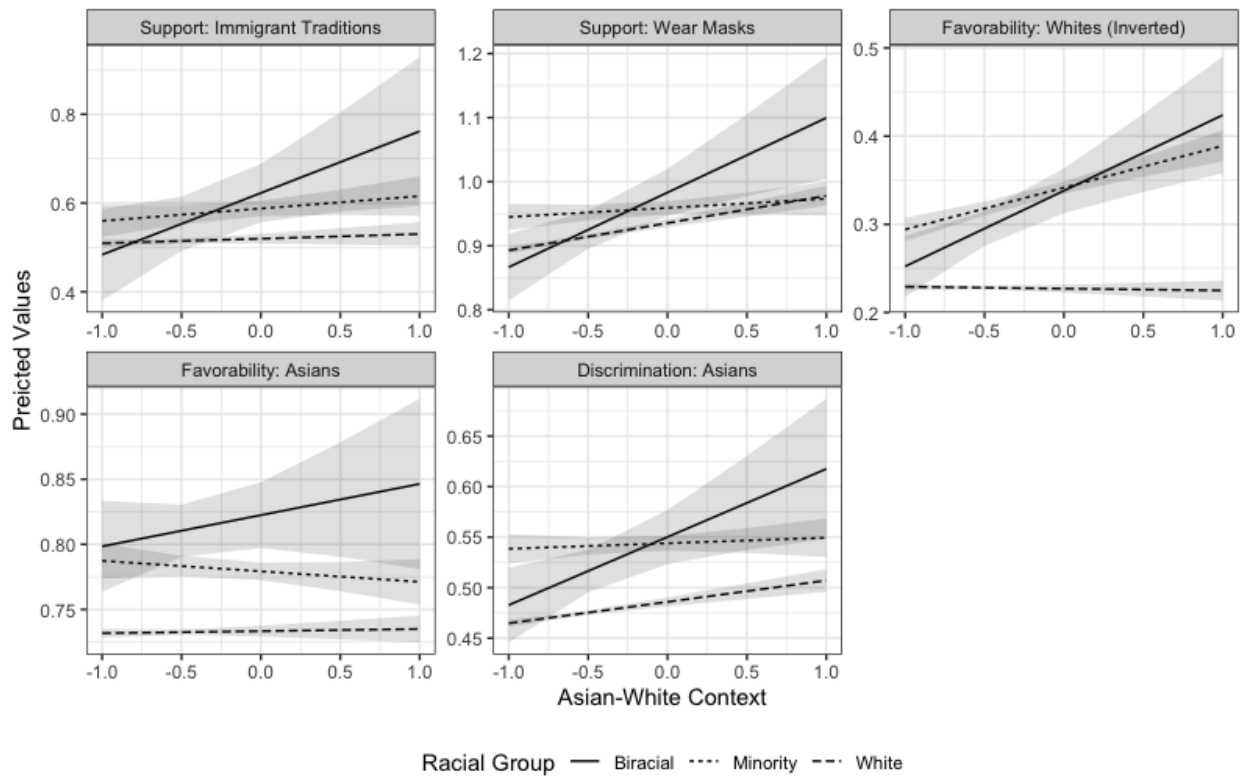
Again, the RRS framework suggests that Biracials who may feel insecure about the safety of their racial group membership may respond by doubling down on group-centric attitudes in order to signal and achieve belonging. Moreover, extant research highlights how Asian-White Biracials experience a bit more exclusionary behavior on behalf of their single-race Asian peers when in heavily Asian spaces than do other Biracials on behalf of their minority group counterparts (Strmic-Pawl, 2016; Does et al., 2021). In corroboration, the patterns observed in Figure 4.8 may be a reflection of this phenomenon. Specifically, in all five of the items explored, Asian-Whites not only become more racially liberal and supportive of Asian-centered objects when in Asian spaces, they actually increase in their support to such an extent that they are more supportive of Asian-centered issues than are single-race Asians when in majorly Asian contexts. Overall, however, nominal Asian-White Biracials in general continue to exhibit the pattern

expected by RRS in that they tend to hold very different racial attitudes as a function of different racial contexts, and always in the direction of the racial group most salient.

**Figure 4.8: Racial attitudes across racial context.**

**(Sample: Asian-White Biracials, single-race Asians, single-race Whites;**

**Source: Nationscape)**



***Collaborative Multiracial Post Election Survey***

The last dataset I use to investigate the presence of RRS in Biracials’ political attitudes is the CMPS. Fortunately, the CMPS contains an extremely vast set of racialized political attitude items which allow for a very broad exploration of the prevalence and nature of RRS among attitudes. The following analysis therefore is by no means an exhaustive list of the political items



for which patterns typical of RRS occur (i.e. when Biracial's predicted outcomes vary according to the racial group most salient in a given context). However, the items selected are illustrative examples given their relevance to the modern political era and to the racial group pairings involved.

To begin, Figure 4.9 shows the predicted values of support for Black-White Biracials, single-race Blacks and single-race Whites at varying levels of racial context. Across each item, Biracials continue to conform in the direction of the racial group most numerous in their social context in terms of whether they hold racially liberal or racially conservative attitudes. The sheer consistency of just this subset of items once again provides very robust evidence that Biracials have much more latitude than single-race individuals when it comes to adopting different political and racial dispositions in different social spaces.

In addition to corroborating the presence of RRS, it is important to explore normatively what some of these findings may augur for the state of race relations in the United States. For example, over the last decade or so the national conversation surrounding police reform has arguably been the most racially charged and contentious issue in recent history. For many years the media has publicized what seems to be a never-ending slew of the murders of unarmed Black women and men at the hands of the police, which has sparked some of the largest protest movements in world history<sup>9</sup>. Despite both the perniciousness of police violence in our country as well as its inextricable centrality the Black experience, Black-White Biracials on several related issues are somehow defecting from their expected loyalties to their minority group and approximating Whites in terms of their racial conservatism. For example, Black-White Biracials in White contexts—as demonstrated in Figure 4.9—are siding with single-race Whites in their

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/03/us/george-floyd-protests-crowd-size.html>

opinions toward Blacks protesting, police reform, reducing inequality, and even in the degree to which they abhor the KKK<sup>10</sup>. If there was ever any evidence to put on supreme display the powerful role that social context can play in shaping human being's thoughts and feelings in this world, is it this realization that even half-Black individuals can, and systematically do, show a perchance for supporting explicitly anti-Black policies when their social contexts are entirely made up of Whites. These and related findings are a drubbing reminder that being part-minority in America is no longer tantamount to caring about minority causes, and that the ways we have conceptualized racial boundaries is being deeply challenged by the emergence of the racially-mixed population of America.

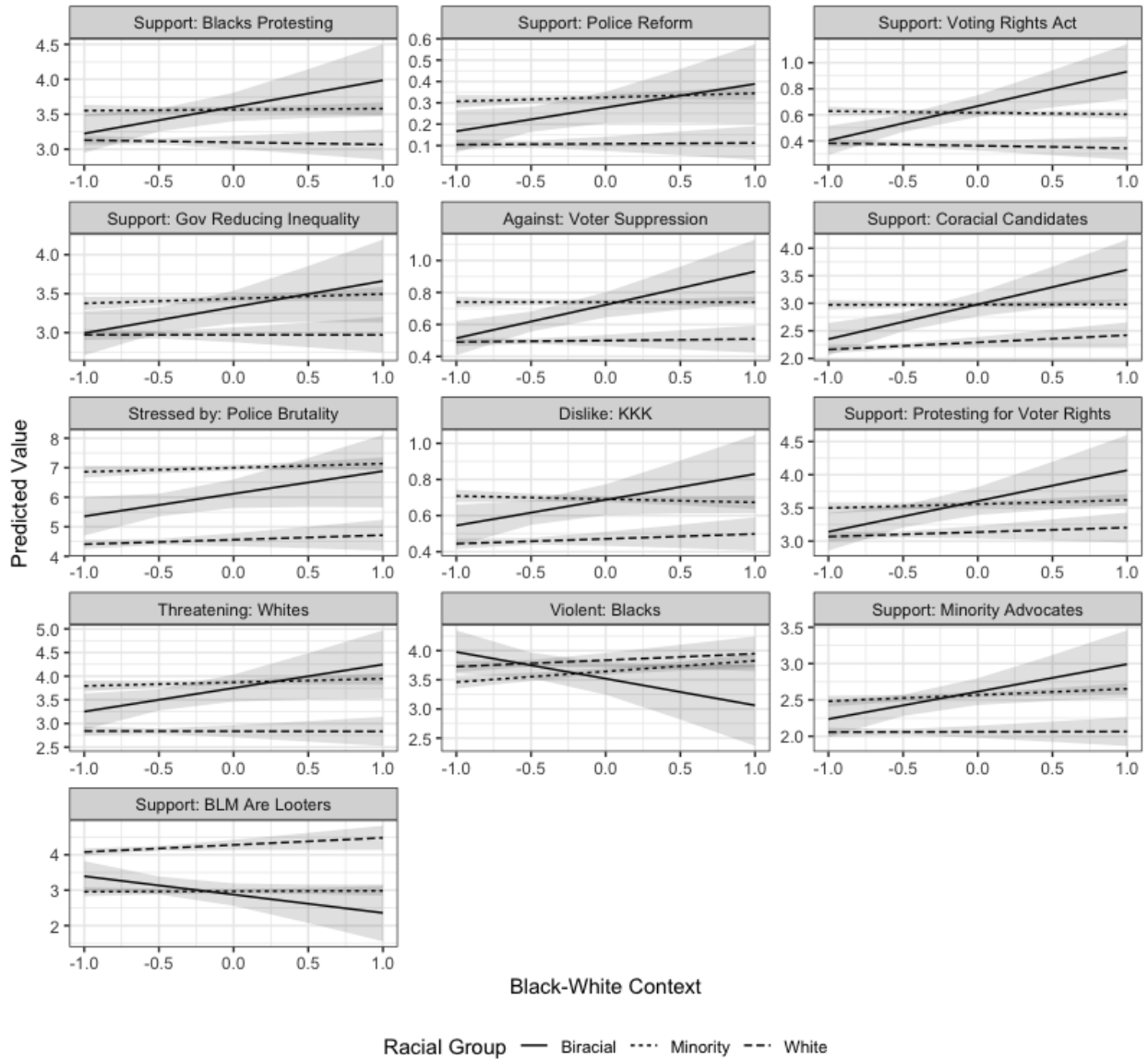
**Figure 4.9: Racial attitudes across racial context.**

**(Sample: Black-White Biracials, single-race Blacks, single-race Whites;**

**Source: CMPS)**

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<sup>10</sup> It is important to note however that the KKK related item is not a feeling thermometer or Likert scale rating. Rather, item responses indicate a participant designating the KKK as one of three (out of a total of six) groups they dislike the most. Other groups were Anti-abortion activists, Black Lives Matter activists, Militant anti-fascists (such as Antifa), Democratic Socialists, and the Tea Party. Still, it is hard to picture any Black-White individual not including the KKK as one of the three out of six possible groups in this scenario that they dislike the most.



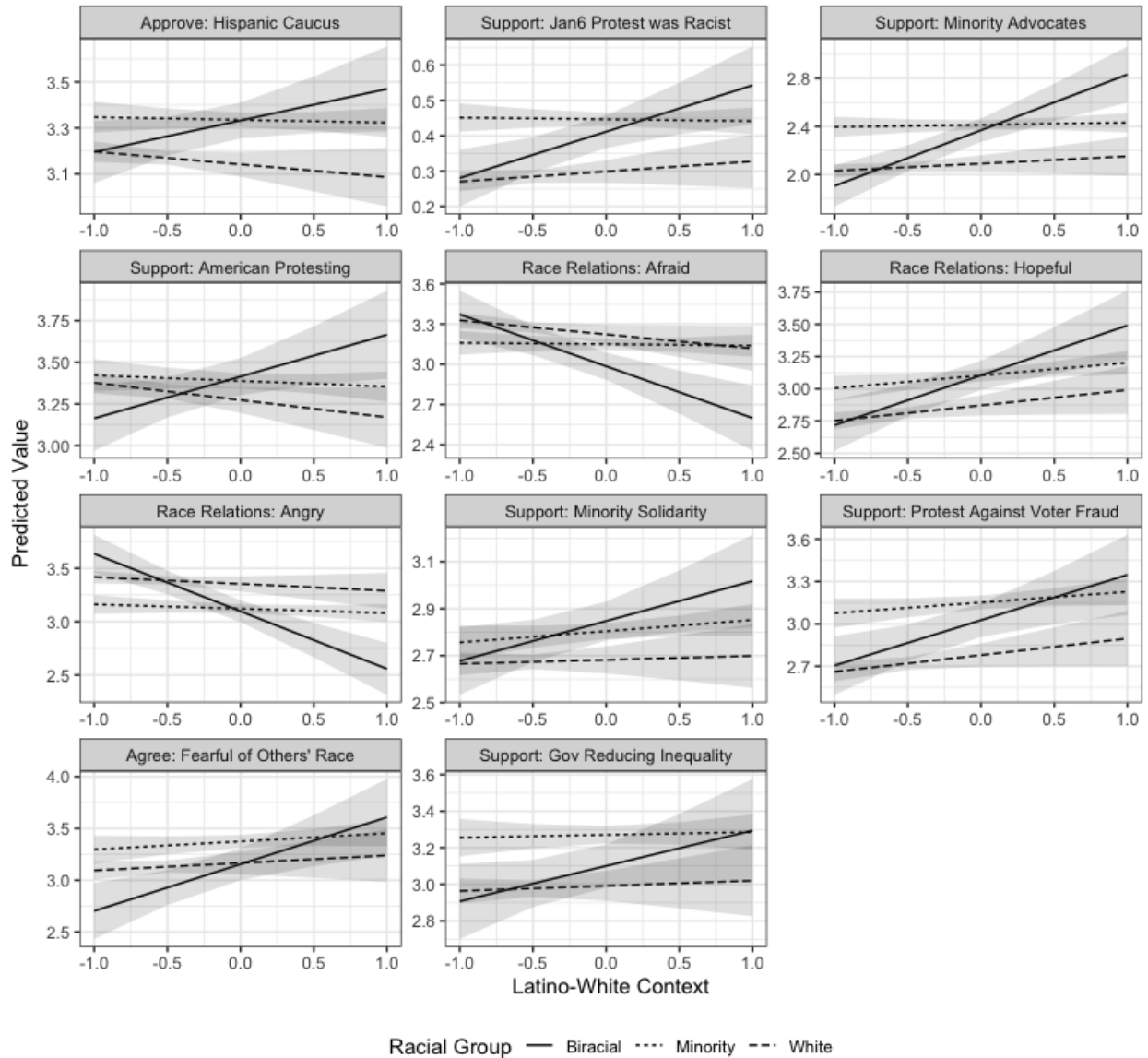
While we have observed elsewhere in the Pew dataset that Latino-Whites tend to join either Whites or Latinos in their policy opinions as their context changes, fortunately many items from the CMPS allow for a more thorough investigation into what may be the root psychological dispositions responsible for the difference in their policy preferences. As demonstrated in Figure 4.10, across a host of questions which interrogated Latino-Whites dispositions toward race relations in the United States, Latino-White appear to be quite varied, and in accordance with the

racial group most salient. For example, when asked about their emotional evaluations of the state of race relations in the United States, Latino-Whites appear somewhat bipolar. In terms of whether race relations made individuals feel afraid, hopeful, or angry, single-race White participants tended to feel uneasy and pessimistic, while single-race Latinos expressed considerably more optimism. Latino-Whites on the other hand appear to be wildly despaired about the way that race relation are going in our country when in heavily White contexts, yet exceedingly positive in Latino spaces.

**Figure 4.10: Racial attitudes across racial context.**

**(Sample: Latino-White Biracials, single-race Latinos, single-race Whites;**

**Source: CMPS)**



Finally, Asian-White Biracials in Figure 4.11 show some interesting signs of increased racial liberalism when in highly Asian spaces. One example which is particularly salient today is their attitudes toward COVID-19 and related restrictions. While single-race Asians tend to be more supportive overall of both government mask mandates and the government doing more to address COVID in general, Whites are a bit less supportive of these measures. Indeed, recent work shows that COVID has become a racially charged political issue associated with Asian Americans (Reny & Barreto, 2022). Public commentary focusing the potential origination of the

virus in China and racist descriptions of COVID by political officials and pundits as the “China Virus” or “Kung Flu<sup>11</sup>” have paved the road for racialization. Given the racialized nature of this issue it is no surprise that Asian-Whites’ attitudes do seem to vary in accordance with the racial group most salient in their context, as demonstrated by Figure 4.11. Moreover, Asian-Whites show some signs of exceeding their minority counterparts in their racial liberalism. This is again consistent with the idea that they may experience some pushback from Asians and attempt to double down by arduously supporting attitudes perceived as prototypical to single-race Asians.

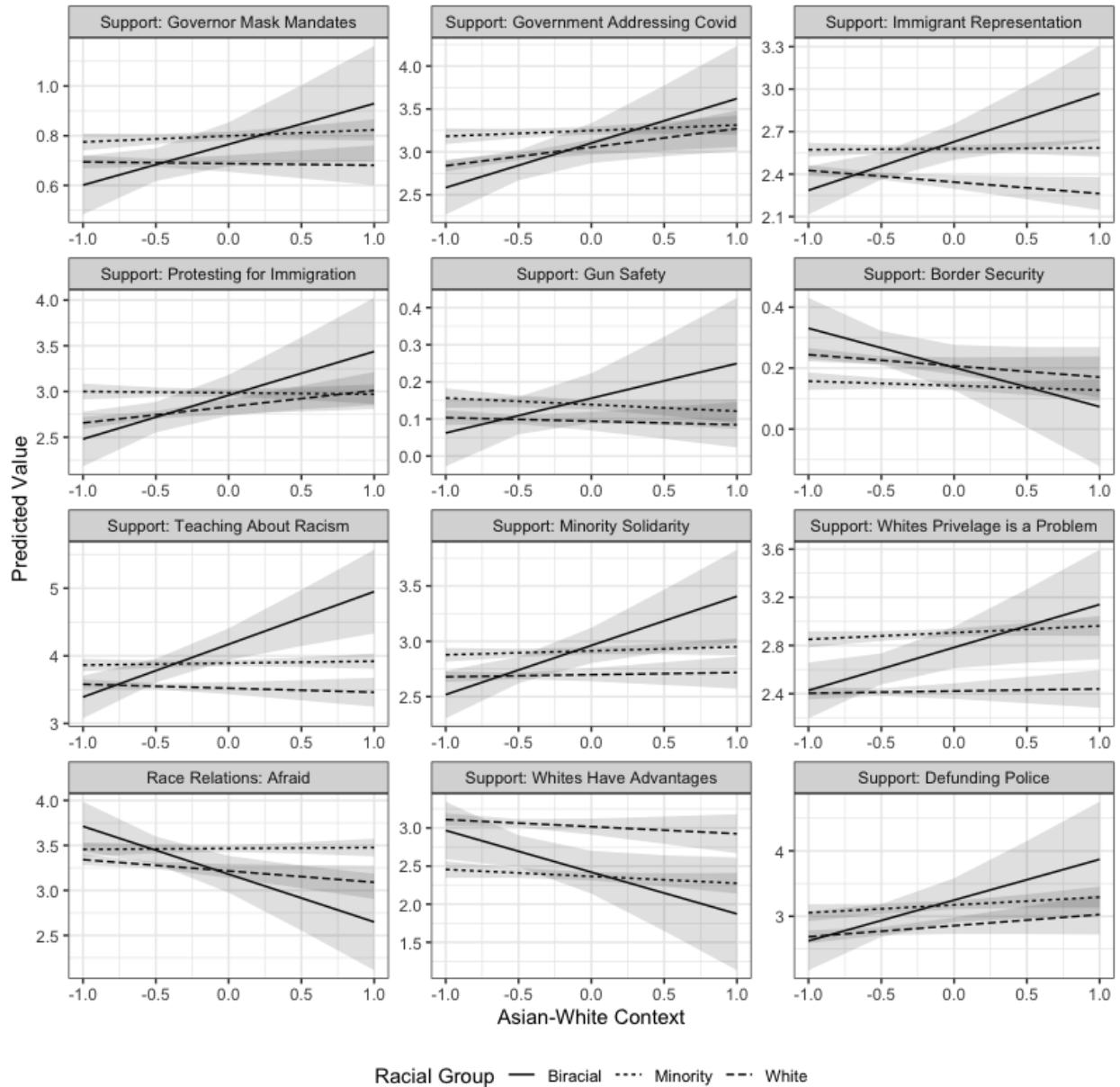
**Figure 4.11: Racial attitudes across racial context.**

**(Sample: Asian-White Biracials, single-race Asians, single-race Whites;**

**Source: CMPS)**

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-us-canada-53173436>



### Evidence of Relative Racial Salience in Candidate Evaluations

It is perhaps an odd truth that throughout the history of the United States, the only two racial minority individuals to have been elected to the executive branch are both the children of interracial parentage. The historic election of Barack Obama in 2008 embodied what many perceived to be a sign of tremendous progress for Black Americans. Though there was certainly

some tertiary grappling with what it meant for Barack Obama to be the half-White in his heritage, the prevailing narrative centered majorly on the characterization—and indeed his own identity choice—as Black. Twelve years later when Kamala Harris was elected as Vice President, the majority of media pundits and scholars alike have focused more on the nature of her ascension as the first woman—more specifically the first Black woman—ever elected to such an high position. Despite the fact that both Kamala Harris and Barack Obama have parents from two different racial groups, it has not been well explored what the consequences of this mixed heritage might be among mixed-race voters.

The success and prominence of Kamala Harris and Barack Obama very fortuitously provide examples of mixed-race politicians that can be used to examine how mixed-race voters might differ from their single-race counterparts. In political science, it has been robustly documented that voters tend to hold preferences for political candidates who share their same race—a phenomenon known as co-racial favoritism or descriptive representation (Stout et al., 2021). Building from the psychological framework of social identity theory and in-group favoritism, voters tend to perceive that candidates who share their same characteristics—especially if those characteristics are based on race—have similar values, morals, goals, and life experiences. As a consequence of this perception of shared fate, voters tend to reward same-race candidates with higher levels of support, based in part on the assumption that those candidates will act in a manner that benefits their shared groups' interest.

However, the emergence of both mixed-race political candidates and mixed-race voters complicates our current understanding of the ways that race and racial identity can be primed to influence candidate support. For example, is it the case that a co-racial specific form of in-group favoritism exists among mixed-race voters? If so, is it the case that mixed-race voters will only



exhibit a tendency toward in-group favoritism for political candidates who share their exact same racial heritages, or is there perhaps some pan-Multiracial boost? Under the RRS framework, I argue that mixed-race voters do not often incorporate a specific Multiracial, Biracial, or mixed-race identity into their political decision-making processes. Rather, they seem to work quite hard to acquire and embody the political identity that is most typical of only one of the racial groups in their heritage, especially as the salience of that identity varies throughout their life cycle. This is not to say that a specifically mixed-race identity cannot be primed or meaningful for the political thinking of mixed-race individuals—and indeed, evidence shows that it can be<sup>12</sup> (Leslie et al., 2022)—however, in spaces where one of the racial groups from a mixed-race persons’ heritage dominates in terms of salience, these individuals are more likely to adopt and express the attitudes of their single-race groups, as has been demonstrated to be the case so far in terms of racial identity decisions, partisanship, and racial attitudes.

In this section, I delve yet another step deeper into the political implications of RRS by exploring how variation in context relates to vote choice among Biracials. In a traditional sense, the choice individuals make in terms of who they vote to elect to public office is the single most impactful way that the average American can have an effect on our democracy. While racial context has been shown to have a powerful relationship with the racial identities Biracial’s adopt as well as their opinions on political parties and important public policies, it may be even more consequential to discover that context also holds some influence over the choices Biracials make in the ways that they vote. To this point, the following section uses both the CMPS and Nationscape datasets to examine Biracials’ evaluations of important political figures.

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<sup>12</sup> Evidence suggests that mixed-race candidates can likely only activate an in-group favoritism among mixed-race voters if they actively identify as mixed-race.

### *Collaborative Multiracial Post Election Survey*

Fortunately, the CMPS includes several questions which ask participants to rate a series of highly prominent political figures in terms of whether they view them favorably or unfavorably. Using a five-point Likert scale (rescaled to between 0 and 1), higher values of each of the following measures indicate higher levels of support and favorability, while lower numbers indicate unfavorable opinions of the political figures. The individuals included in these items are well-varied in terms of their race, political party, and gender. Moreover, with the inclusion of some highly prominent, non-elected political figures—namely Michelle Obama—I am able to isolate whether Biracial individuals (Black-Whites in particular) meaningfully differentiate between political elites who have known mixed-racial parentage, or singular racial parentage.

First, Figure 4.12 presents the results of ordinary least squares regression models predicting levels of support among nominal Black-White Biracials, single-race Blacks, and single-race Whites for various prominent political elites in the United States. Akin to the operationalization of the models predicting racial attitude outcomes, the following models present the predicted values of each regression while using an interaction between context and a three-level factor (with one level each corresponding to Biracials, Blacks, and Whites), and which hold age, income, education, gender, and ideology at their means as control variables.

Overall, a quick glance through Figure 4.12 reveals that the pattern you have become quite familiar with, that which is emblematic of the RRS framework, is majorly present in terms of Black-Whites' evaluations of political candidates. Nominal Black-White Biracials are considerably less likely than single-race Blacks to support each of the five Democratic political elites when their social context is highly White, and increase greatly to nearly approximate the

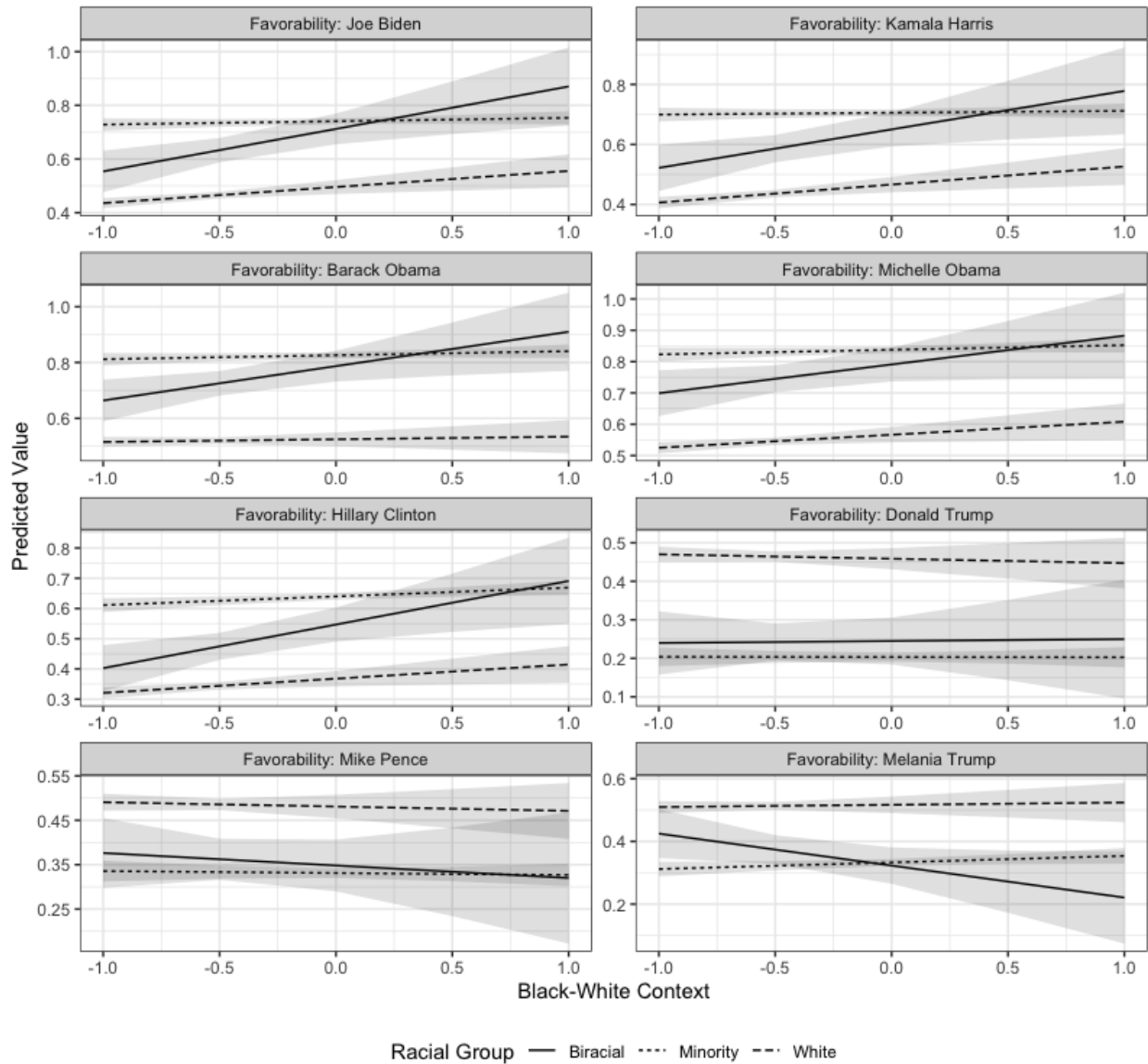
higher levels of support for these figures as do single-race Blacks in contexts where Blacks are the most numerous. However, two exceptions exist to this pattern which are that Black-Whites' evaluations of Republican candidates, Donald Trump and Mike Pence, do not tend to vary according to context but instead remain qualitatively low and resemblant of single-race Blacks unfavorable opinions in all contexts. However, in the case of Black-Whites' evaluations of Melania Trump, the RRS pattern reemerges in that they are considerably more favorable of her when in contexts dominated by Whites, yet less favorable than even single-race Blacks in minority contexts.

Though it may have been reasonable to suspect that Biracials in general might show signs of increased favorability toward political elites with known Biracial heritage, there exists no evidence of this phenomenon within these findings. Instead, Black-Whites show no signs of being more favorable of Kamala Harris or Barack Obama than do their single-race counterparts, even in the completely Black spaces in which we have observed Black-Whites to exhibit their utmost liberal opinions. While the point estimates denoting Black-Whites' favorability ratings of Barack Obama and Kamala Harris do slightly exceed the ratings of single-race Blacks in highly Black spaces, Black-Whites display a larger additional boost of support for Joe Biden, a single-race White political figure, in these same spaces. Additionally, Barack Obama and Kamala Harris—both Biracials—are not rated more favorably among Black-Whites than is single-race Black, Michelle Obama. These findings provide evidence dismissive of the assumption that highly prominent political figures with known mixed-race heritage receive a mixed-race specific co-racial favorability boost among Black-White voters.

**Figure 4.12: Candidate evaluations across racial context.**

(Sample: Black-White Biracials, single-race Blacks, single-race Whites;

Source: CMPS)



For nominal Latino-White Biracials, the pattern expected by RRS is present, but inconsistent. Latino-Whites do tend to become increasingly supportive of Democratic candidates as their social context becomes more heavily dominated by Latinos. However, this pattern is not quite as uniform as is the pattern observed among Black-Whites Biracials. Many reasons for this

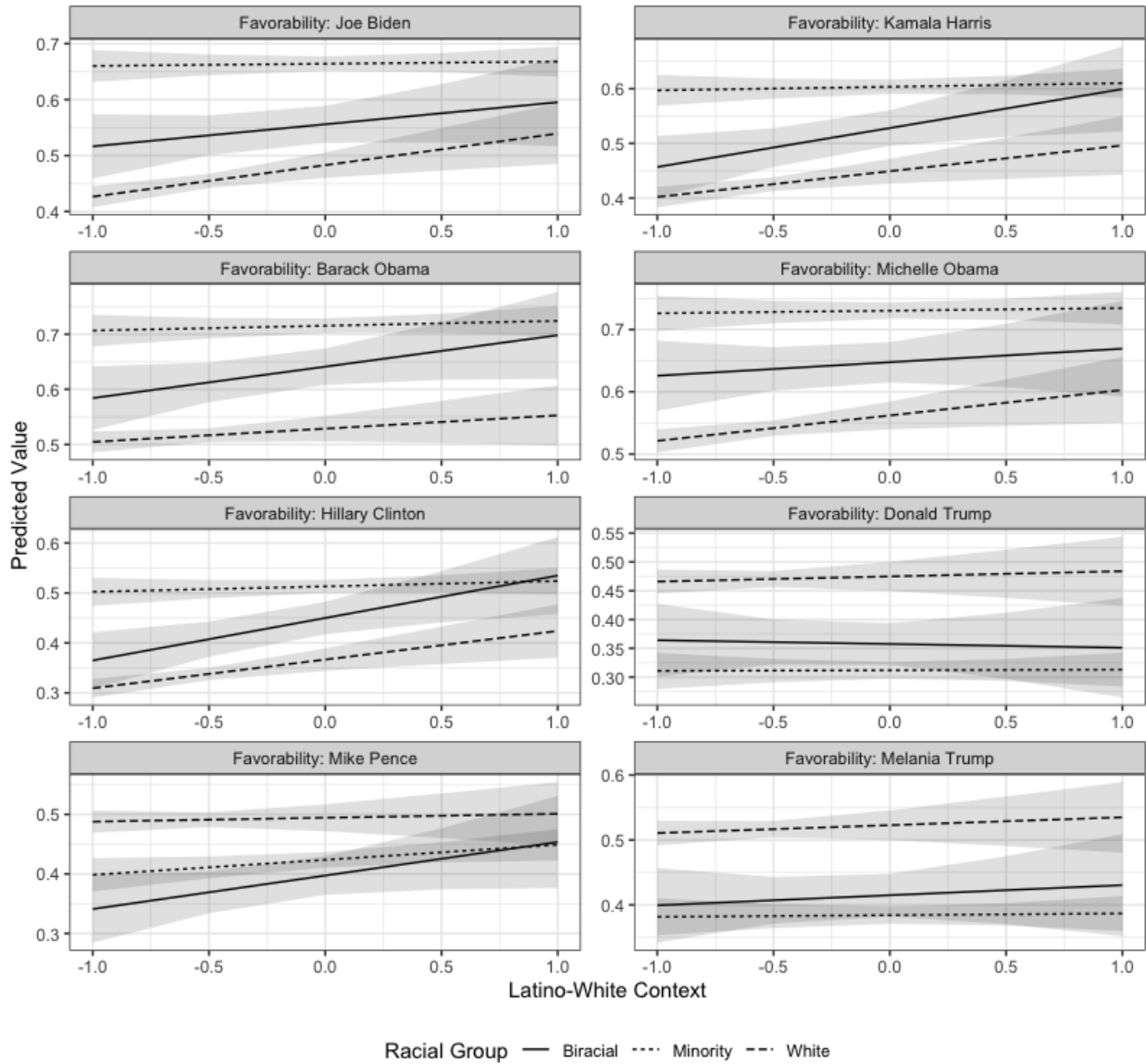
diversion could exist. First, it may be the case that single-race Latinos are simply less homogenous in the degree to which they support the Democratic party, leading to less polarization (and therefore room for Latino-Whites to oscillate) between Latinos' and Whites' support for Democratic political figures (White & Laird, 2020). Second, it could be the case that an absence of prominent mixed-race candidates who share their same racial group heritages is stymying Latino-Whites' propensity to vary in their support of these figures.

However, we do more or less observe that Latino-Whites conform to the evaluations of Latinos when in Latino spaces in terms of their favorability of Kamala Harris, Barack Obama, Hilary Clinton, and to some degree for Joe Biden and even Mike Pence (confidence intervals are quite large suggesting statistical uncertainty as to the veracity of the patterns). Similar to what had been the case with Black-Whites, Latino-Whites show highly unfavorable opinions of Donald Trump overall, and do not vary much in their evaluations across context. Moreover, Latino-White Biracials do not show a propensity to be more supportive of Biracial elected officials than their single-race minority counterparts, indicating that a Biracial or mixed-race specific in-group favoritism is not being activated in these settings. Overall, this analysis of Latino-Whites' candidate evaluations using the CMPS is the area of this exploration which provides the least robust evidence of RRS, though its presence is still identifiable in some way.

**Figure 4.12: Candidate evaluations across racial context.**

**(Sample: Latino-White Biracials, single-race Latinos, single-race Whites;**

**Source: CMPS)**



Lastly, Figure 4.13 reveals, perhaps surprisingly, that Asian-White Biracials actually exhibit the most variation in their evaluations of political elites across racial context out of all three Biracial subgroups examined. Asian-White Biacials are not only more likely to support Democratic political elites when in zipcodes heavily dominated by single-race Asians, they are also the only Biracial subgroup throughout the CMPS data to significantly *decrease* in their predicted values of support for Donald Trump. Interestingly, while Black-Whites and Latino-

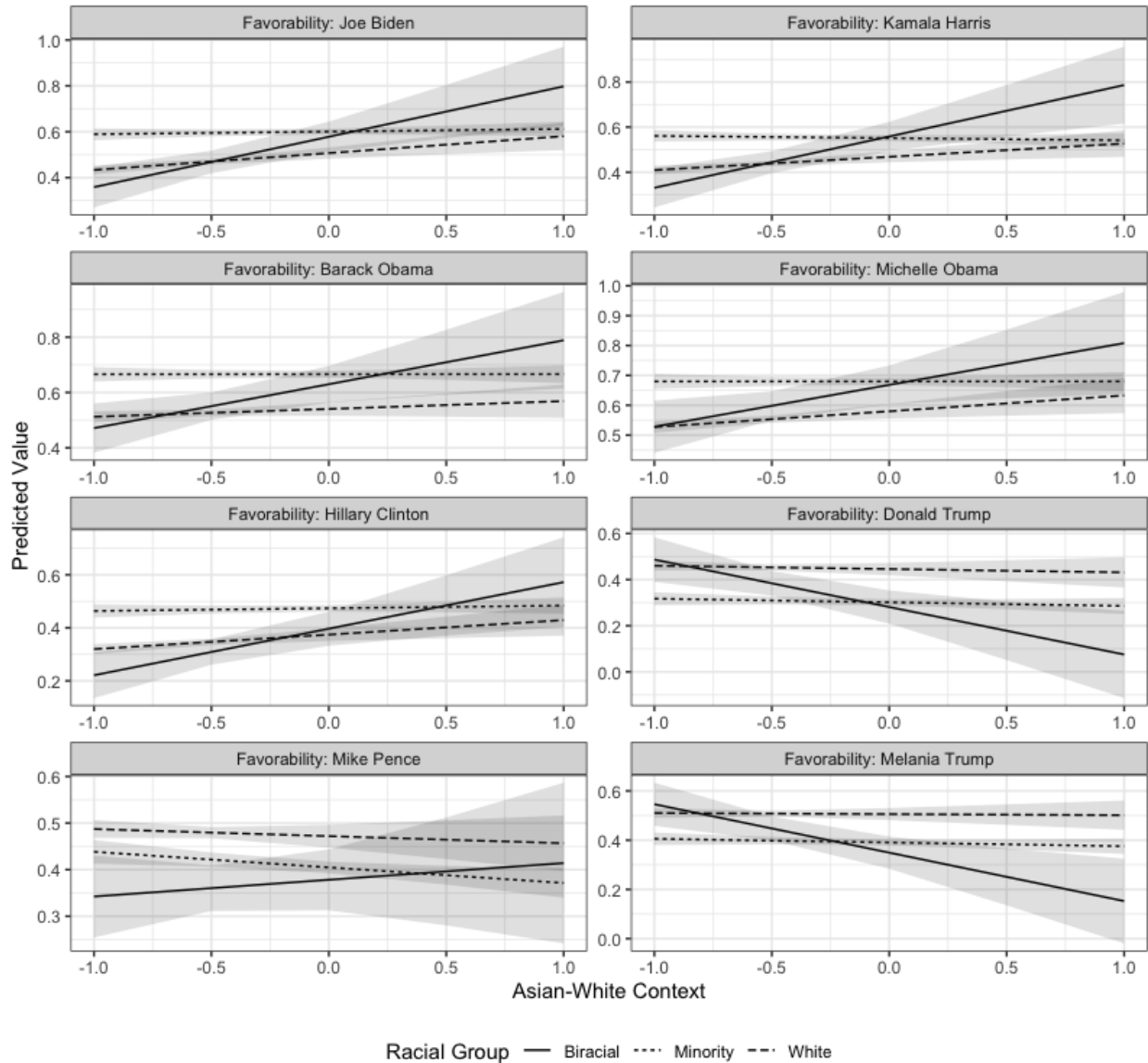
Whites both virtually mirrored their minority counterparts in a supreme distaste for Donald Trump, Asian-White Biracials in highly White spaces actually adopt attitudes comparable to single-race Whites. Moreover, Asian-Whites are the only subgroup here to match the support of single-race Whites in White spaces across nearly every single evaluation item, with the sole exception being in their attitudes toward Mike Pence (again, the confidence intervals are large, perhaps signaling that Mike Pence is either not a strongly polarizing figure or a well-known figure at all).

Perhaps unexpectedly, nominal Asian-Whites Biracials seem to be the Biracial subgroup which conforms best to the expectations of RRS in that they vary the most widely across context in their support for different political figures. This agile variation seems to suggest that Asian-Whites possess an enhanced ability to don the vote-choice dispositions of single-race Whites when that Whites dominates their space. These findings are therefore highly consistent with previous works which argue that Asian-Whites are the Biracial subgroup whom are in general the most likely to feel more closely connected to their White racial group identity than their minority one (Strmic-Pawl, 2016; Alba, 2020; Leslie & Sears, 2022). Consistent with this argument, the racial group boundaries separating Asians from Whites seems to show itself as more permeable than the color line separating Whites from Blacks or Latinos.

**Figure 4.13: Candidate evaluations across racial context.**

**(Sample: Asian-White Biracials, single-race Asians, single-race Whites;**

**Source: CMPS)**



### *Nationscape*

Next, I explore whether evidence of RRS is present among Biracials' evaluations of political elites using the Nationscape dataset. Once again, Nationscape is quite valuable to this analysis because of its large sample size and general representativeness' of the entire United States electorate. One drawback however is that the questions measuring nominal Biracial heritage were not continuously included in the survey, so though many of the survey waves



included items measuring voter's perceptions of other important political elites—such as Kamala Harris or Stacey Abrams—there are not sufficient sample sizes of Biracials to meaningfully examine evaluations of certain prominent political figures. The items presented here are those which were most consistently included for the Biracials included in this analysis: Joe Biden, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump. Moreover, Nationscape differs only slightly from the CMPS in their measurement of favorability in that it uses a four-point Likert scale rather than a five-point scale. Higher values continue to indicate higher levels of favorability while lower values indicate lower levels of favorability.

Figure 4.14 presents the results of ordinary least squares regression models predicting favorability ratings for all three Biracial subgroups, as well as their single-race peers. Given the very large sample size of the Nationscape dataset it is quite easy to identify where patterns of RRS among Biracials exist. In the first row of Figure 4.14, it is apparent that Black-White Biracials indeed tend to vary considerably more than their single-race counterparts across racial context in their evaluations of Barack Obama and Donald Trump. One exception however is that Black-Whites do not seem to differ sharply from single-race Whites in their propensity to become increasingly supportive of Joe Biden as their racial context becomes increasingly minority. Still, Black-Whites as shown here seem to vary so widely in step with variation in context that their predicted favorability ratings are uncannily equivalent to those of Blacks when in Black contexts for both Barack Obama and Donald Trump.

Even more surprisingly, Black-Whites are actually just as supportive of Donald Trump as are single-race Whites in White spaces. Given that only six percent of Blacks voted for Trump in

the 2016 general election<sup>13</sup>, the observation here that Black-Whites would so sharply abandon their expected similarities to their single-race Black counterparts is quite striking.

However, the most consistent demonstration of the RRS framework in Figure 4.14 is observed among nominal Latino-White Biracials in the second row. Latino-Whites vary so widely that their favorability ratings are statistically non-different from the racial group most salient in their social world with remarkable uniformity. While Black-Whites nearly always match their minority counterparts in Black spaces, they do not always approximate the same attitudes as do Whites with the same level of precision as do Latino-Whites. Oppositely, Asian-Whites tend to regularly approximate the political thinking of Whites, though their propensity to mirror the political dispositions of their minority counterparts is less consistent. Latino-Whites therefore are the Biracial subgroup most likely to demonstrate access to adopting the political dispositions of both of the racial groups in their heritage, perhaps suggesting that they are the group armed with the most flexible racial group boundaries.

Lastly, as is evident in the bottom row of Figure 4.14, Asian-White Biracials show little evidence of adhering to the expectations of RRS in their candidate evaluations. Asian-Whites appear to be much more supportive of Joe Biden in highly Asian social contexts. However, they show virtually no signs of change in their opinion of Barack Obama across context, and actually tend to be slightly more conservative in their attitude toward Donald Trump as they approach completely White contexts. The results regarding Donald Trump are therefore another example of how the relationship between racial context and political outcomes may be especially complicated for Asian-Whites. Despite this inconsistency, it has been well demonstrated over the entirety all possible datasets that Biracials' identity choices, partisanship, attitudes, and candidate

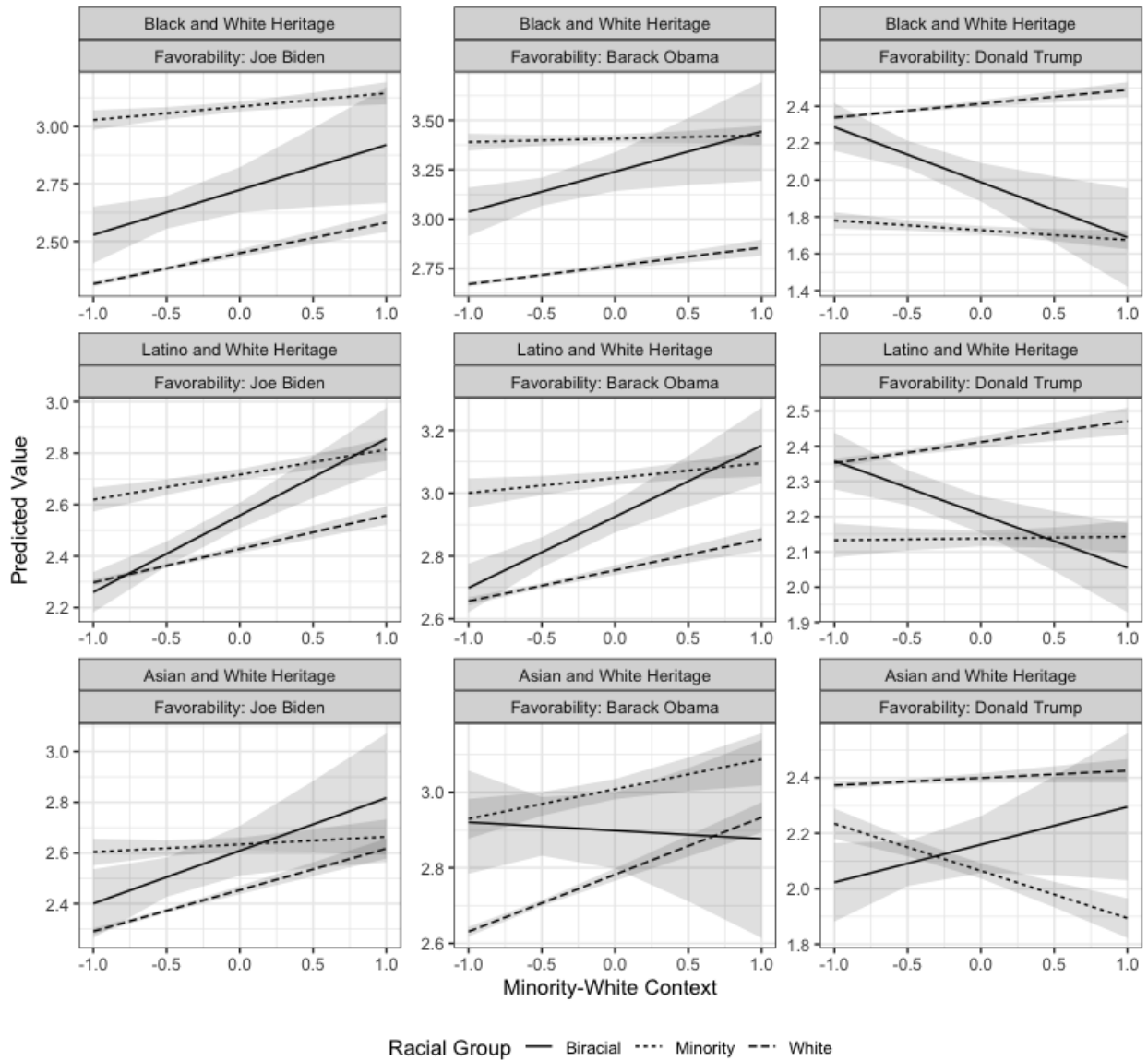
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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2018/08/09/an-examination-of-the-2016-electorate-based-on-validated-voters/>

evaluations are highly correlated with their racial context, and that racial context must be considered a central feature of mixed-race political behavior in future investigations.

**Figure 4.14: Candidate evaluations across racial context.**

**(Sample: All Biracials and single-race individuals; Source: Nationscape)**



## **Chapter 5**

### **Interrogating the Causal Chain**

Until now, the goal of the empirical analysis has been to demonstrate plainly that the phenomenon of RRS is a real feature of our political world. In the preceding chapters, Biracials have been shown robustly to vary widely in terms of their identity choices and politically related outcomes as a function of racial context. However, it is at this point when an investigation into whether variation in context and the relative salience of different racial groups is exerting a truly causal impact on Biracials political thinking, and to parse out how identity, context, and political dispositions interrelate within a causal chain. Specifically, in the first section of this chapter I engage in quantitative analysis which interrogates the claims made regarding the process of RRS via socialization which is that racial context exerts a causal influence on Biracials' partisanship.

In this first section I am able to explore the partisanship of both Black-Whites and Latino-Whites, though I focus primarily on Black-Whites. In the second section, I turn to experimental data which examines the causal chain involved in RRS claims regarding the effects of short-term variation in the salience of different racial identities on political outcomes, as well as the mediating role that racial identity plays. For this second section, I am only able to explore the causal chain among Black-White Biracials, given the available experimental evidence.

#### **Interrogating the Causal Effect of Racial Context on Partisanship**

Doubtlessly, partisanship is a central feature of political science. Scholars have demonstrated widely the importance of partisanship in political life in that party affiliation is the single best predictor of attitudes and behavior (Huddy, 2013), the most consistently transmitted

political disposition to children through socialization (Jennings & Niemi, 1968; Jennings et al., 2009), and a potent political symbol with ample affective power to contour individuals' political preferences (Sears, 1983). When it comes to the centrality of partisanship, Biracials are no different from single-race individuals. The RRS framework asserts that variation in racial context will exert a causal influence on Biracials racial attitudes, policy preference, and candidate evaluations, however, much of the power that context holds in its ability to impact Biracials' political opinions is through its direct effect on their partisanship.

In Chapter 2, I outlined that nominal Biracials individuals possess relatively more permeable racial group boundaries than do single-race individuals, and as a consequence have considerable latitude to enter or exit different racial groups boundaries as they vary contextually in salience. Additionally, I described the mechanism of RRS that is specifically tied to socialization processes in which Biracials acquire their long-term political orientations via the influence of the racial groups which dominate their early life social world. Specifically, what makes Biracials unique compared to single-race individuals is that regardless of whichever racial group may be most dominant in their space, single-race individuals are constrained to membership within the single racial group which comprises their heritage, and are therefore less likely to vary in the racialized nature of their early life socialization agents and experiences. Throughout this long-term process of RRS, via socialization, Biracials adopt highly varied patterns of political party affiliations according the racial contexts in which they grow up, and these party attachments are the driving force for many of Biracials attitudes and preferences.

To explore the causal relationship between context and attitudes, I turn to an in-depth, quantitative assessment of the North Carolina Voter File. In doing so I focus primarily on nominal Black-White Biracials, who I argue are the ideal test group for several reasons. First,

Black-White Biracials have a history in the United States as the most politically controversial mixed-race subgroup and have been the most salient subgroup throughout the nation's history (Du Bois, 1903; Davis, 1991). Second, Black-White Biracials are an ideal group to study how racial context influences changes in political preferences because of the extreme and growing partisan gap between Blacks and Whites (Tesler, 2016, Hajnal & Lee, 2011). Finally, Black-White Biracials provide a particularly tough of the theoretical claims of RRS. Since hypodescent characterizes the boundary between Whites and Blacks as the most durable, evidence of Black-White Biracials' "whitening" in their party affiliations when in White contexts would provide strong support for the argument that racial context exerts a powerful influence. While this section primarily relies on Black-White Biracials as the base example for walking the reader through the methodology, I also conduct the same analysis using Latino-Whites in Florida and present the results at the end.

To following sections are organized as follows. First, I describe the process I use to organize and curate my dataset, the North Carolina Statewide Voter File. This process involves using a unique matching algorithm that leverages last name, race, gender, age, and address in order to identify Biracials voters. Second, I present descriptive statistics demonstrating that racial context indeed a potent predictor of the partisanship of Black-White Biracials. Third, I provide the details of my causal identification strategy which employs a technique known as double robust estimation with machine learning within a conditional independence framework. Here I leverage my idiosyncratic subsample of young voters who have not had the chance to select into context yet in order to elide major confounding issues such as residential self-selection. Fourth, I replicate the findings of the double robust estimation technique using a fully linear method known as covariate balanced generalized propensity score weighting. Lastly, I extend the double

robust estimation and propensity score weighting methods to Latino-White Biracials using the Florida Statewide Voter File.

### ***North Carolina Voter File (Black-White Biracials)***

The dataset used in this section is the North Carolina Statewide Voter File<sup>14</sup> (NCVF). In the NCVF, I implement a unique matching algorithm that leverages last name, race, gender, age, and address to identify Black-White Biracials voters. First, I identify family units by subsetting to households that contain at least three voters but no more than six and who have the same last name. Second, I identify married couples by subsetting to households where the two oldest voters are female and male and 10 years or less apart in age. Third, I identify the children of these couples by subsetting to households where the third oldest voter is at least 17 years younger than the second oldest voter. Fourth, I divide the sample into three categories based on the race pairings of the parents—one with one Black and one White parent, one with two Black parents, and one with two White parents—and I allot their children into my final sample. The result of this process is, to the author’s knowledge, the first sample to identify Black-White Biracials in official voting records and contains 2,457 Black-Whites, 39,566 single-race Blacks, and 229,309 Whites.

To estimate measurement error I repeat this algorithm using the 2015-2019 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year sample (U.S. Census). This returns an 84% success rate at identifying respondents who are indeed the biological children of married parents and who identify (or are identified) by their parents as Black-White Biracials. Not only do these results support that my matching algorithm is largely valid, they are likely a major overestimation of

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<sup>14</sup> Retrieved August 12, 2021 from <https://dl.ncsbe.gov/>

error given that last names, a critical matching variable, are not available in the ACS. Among the remaining 16%, 7% are stepchildren, and 3% each are adopted children and grandchildren. Still, 30% of these non-biological children are identified as Black-White Biracials, and an equal proportion are identified as single-race Black and single-race White, which suggests that measurement error is unbiased in the direction of overidentifying either Blacks or Whites.

A major advantage of using the NCVF for this study is that address identifiers allow me to geocode each voter's residence and append a wide variety of measurements for the main independent variable, racial context. Racial context in this study is operationalized as the difference in the numerical proportion of Blacks and the proportion of Whites in a given contextual unit (e.g. % single-race Blacks in Zipcode A - % single-race Whites in Zipcode A), and is always rescaled between -1 and 1. I refer to these variables as "Black-White Context." I geocoded the addresses of all 270,000 voters to retrieve their latitude, longitude, and complete FIPS code. I was then able to append census variables on racial context ranging from those highly granular such as census block to the obtuse and distal such as county or congressional district. For the dependent variable I rely on a dummy variable indicating registration with the Democratic Party.

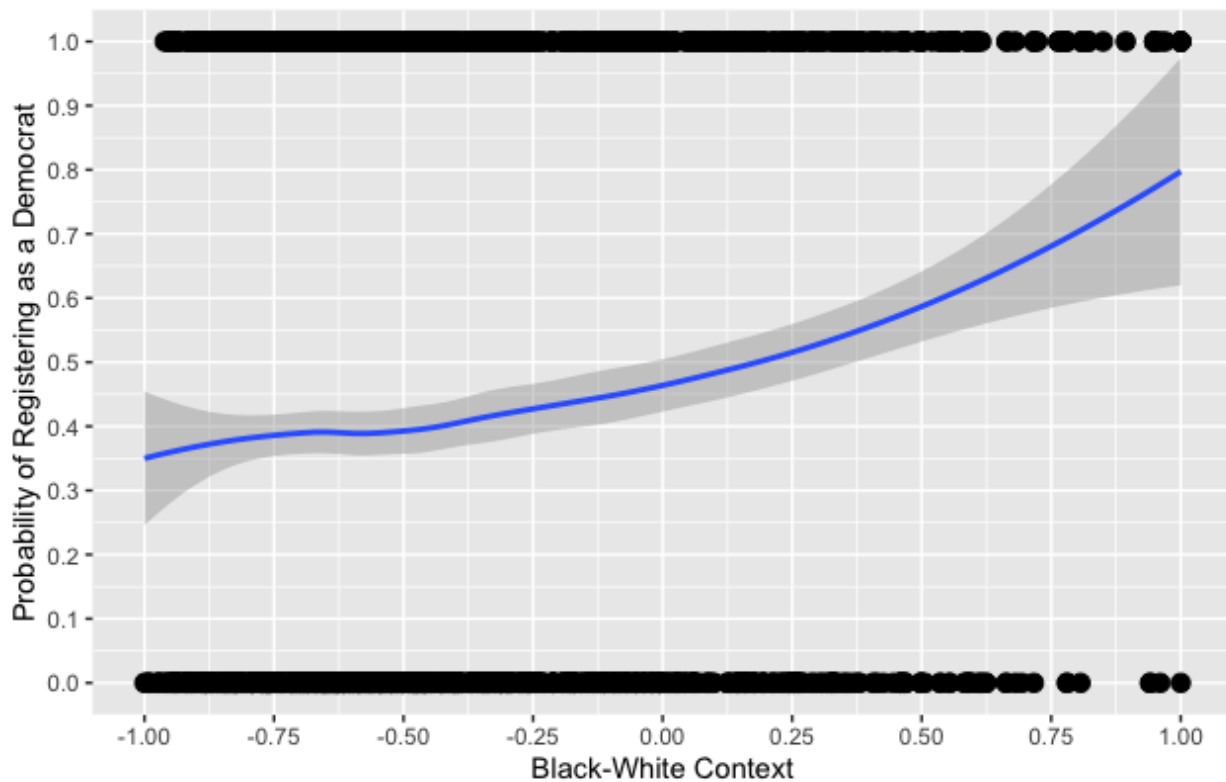
### ***Biracials Partisanship and Context: Raw Data***

The first hypothesis predicts that Black-Whites' partisan affiliations will be tightly correlated with racial context. To begin, I provide a cursory look at the raw data by plotting "Registered as a Democrat" as a function of Black-White Context. Black-White Context here, and unless otherwise stated, is measured at the tract level given that it is the most granular level available in the most recent 2020 census (U.S. Census, 2020). Figure 5.1 demonstrates that



Biracials do exhibit tremendous variation in partisanship in that context accounts for a 45% percent difference. The slope of the loess curve slightly increases around the Black-White Context value of 0 which represents census tracts that have equal proportions of Blacks and Whites.

**Figure 5.1: Loess smoother approximating the probability that Black-White Biracials will register as a Democrat at different values of Black-White Context.**  
(Sample: Black-White Biracials; Source: North Carolina Voter File)



***Identification Strategy: Conditional Independence***

A goal of this study is to explore whether or not racial context exerts a probable causal effect on Biracials' party affiliation (Hernan & Robins, 2010; Pearl, 2019). For example, set.

( $Y_i$ ) equal to the outcome, which in this case is the party affiliation of the Biracials voter. Next, set ( $D_i$ ) as the treatment or exposure variable which in this case is racial context. To satisfy ignorability we would need exogenous or randomized treatment assignment such that exposure is independent of potential outcomes for both the treated ( $Y_1$ ) and non-treated ( $Y_0$ ) groups:

( $Y_{0i}, Y_{1i} \perp\!\!\!\perp D_i$ ). Given that we cannot randomly assign residential context, our task is to identify a set of confounders  $\{Z\}$  associated with both context assignment and partisanship. If we can identify the true confounding set such that accounting for them renders treatment assignment “as if” random, then we can derive unbiased average treatment effects given conditional ignorability: ( $Y_{0i}, Y_{1i} \perp\!\!\!\perp D_i \mid Z_i$ ).

### ***Possible Confounders***

The first major confounder to grapple with is residential self-selection. However, one of the major benefits of the way the NCVF dataset is constructed is that voters are identified in such a way that they live in their parents’ home, so we can be quite confident they do not possess a meaningful or consistent choice in selecting their context. The data is also subsetted to only those age 30 and younger (mean = 23 years old) to ensure voters aren’t “selecting” into context by choosing to remain at home rather than move out. Since I largely elide issue of self-selection, the major confounders confronted in this design are parental traits which may be associated with both the treatment and the outcome.

Research demonstrates that individuals’ political preferences play a major role in where they choose to live (Clark, 1992; Oliver & Wong, 2003; Bishop & Cushing, 2008; Gimpel & Hui, 2015; though also see Mummolo & Nail, 2017) and that parents transmit political values to their children via socialization (Jennings & Niemi, 1968). In fact, socialization literature finds

parental partisanship to be the single greatest predictor of childrens' partisanship (Jennings, Stoker, & Bowers, 2009), and it is passed on more strongly by parents who actively engage in politics. In addressing these concerns, another advantage of the NCVF and its identification of family units is that I can condition on the official party affiliation and voting history of each voter's mother and father. Party affiliation can also be comported here as a useful proxy for parents' racialized values since partisanship and racial attitudes are so tightly correlated (White & Laird, 2020). I also include exact contextual measurements of partisanship at the precinct level (% Democrat, % Republican) as derived from the entire voter file. Conditioning on these variables overcomes major hurdles to estimating effects and is a critical step forward for satisfying conditional ignorability.

Several other factors influence parents' contextual selections such as their socioeconomic status and resources (Lankford & Wyckoff, 2006; Bischoff & Reardon, 2014), the desirability of local schools (Cao et al., 2010), and the availability of work (Van Wee, 2009), to name just a few. As a consequence, I append contextual variables that measure median household income, the proportion of adults with a bachelor's degree, the dropout rate for local high schools, the ratio of parents who send their children to private school, the unemployment rate, and population density, all at the census block group level<sup>15</sup> (ACS 2015-2019). Moreover, socioeconomic resources are known to be associated with both the political and cultural values parents may pass on to their children either through direct cueing or the social milieu (Dalton, 1982; Abramson, 1977; Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2017). Though this is by no means an exhaustive list of confounders, accounting for them will help reveal what might be a causal effect of context. The final conditioning set for this analysis includes the following variables:

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<sup>15</sup> Again, contextual measures are included in each of the main models on the bases that they are 1) the most recent available and 2) the most granular. As of this latest draft, the 2020 census has only published race data.

{Z} = percent democrat (precinct level), percent republican (precinct level), Democrat mother (dummy), Democrat father (dummy), Republican mother (dummy), Republican father (dummy), voted 2020 mother (dummy) , voted 2020 father (dummy), voted 2018 mother (dummy) , voted 2018 father (dummy), voted 2016 mother (dummy) , voted 2016 father (dummy), voted 2014 mother (dummy) , voted 2014 father (dummy), voted 2012 mother (dummy) , voted 2012 father (dummy), log(median household income), unemployment rate, bachelors degree ratio, private school ratio, dropout rate, and population density.

### ***Double Robust Estimation***

In the first part of this analysis I use double robust estimation to measure the potential effects of context on partisanship (Glynn & Quinn, 2010; Bach et al., 2021). Typically, social scientists rely on either treatment-based models such as matching and weighting or outcome-based models such as ordinary least squares to estimate treatment effects. However, a limitation of these methods is that effect estimates tend to be biased if the true functional form of the conditioning set is misspecified. Double robust estimation is advantageous because it allows us to make assumptions about the functional forms of both the treatment and outcome models. This essentially doubles our chances since we will achieve unbiased effect estimates as long as *either* the treatment or outcome-based models are correctly specified.

Still, researchers continue to highlight that identifying proper functional forms can be unrealistic in the social world (e.g. determining which terms to interact, square, cube, etc.: Westreich et al., 2010; Pirrachio et al., 2014). Therefore, I rely on machine learning (Random Forest) for both the treatment and outcome-based models. Recent work demonstrates that

machine learning algorithms like Random Forest are more successful at recovering the true average treatment effect than logistic regression, especially under conditions of high dimensionality or model complexity (Setoguchi et al., 2006; Ferri-Garcia & Rueda, 2020; Pirrachio et al., 2014; Samii et al., 2016; Courronné et al., 2018). Moreover, since logistic regression can be sensitive to even small amounts of misspecification, my first analysis employs machine learning.

I use a form of double robust estimation (DoubleML<sup>16</sup>) designed specifically for the application of machine learning (Chernozhukov et al., 2018; Bach et al., 2021). To summarize this approach, first consider the following partially linear models:

$$\begin{aligned} Y &= D\theta_0 + g_0(Z) + U, & \mathbb{E}[U|Z, D] &= 0 \\ D &= m_0(Z) + V, & \mathbb{E}[V|Z] &= 0 \end{aligned}$$

The first equation here is our outcome-based model which estimates the treatment effect ( $\theta_0$ ), and the bottom equation models the treatment. Here, we see that our confounding variables ( $Z$ ) influence the treatment through the function  $m_0(Z)$  and the outcome via  $g_0(Z)$ .  $U$  and  $V$  are stochastic errors. The first step of this method randomly splits our dataset up into two parts, one we will call the training data and the other the main data. Next, we derive an orthogonalized version of the treatment-based model by partialling out the effect of conditioning set  $Z$  on treatment  $D$ . This gives us the regressor  $\hat{V} = D - \widehat{m}_0(Z)$ , which is derived by applying a given machine learning model to learn the function  $m_0$  using our training data. We similarly apply the same or a different machine learning model to learn the function  $g_0$ . Finally, we estimate the treatment effect by deploying the following double robust estimator using our main data:

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<sup>16</sup> <https://cran.r-project.org/web/packages/DoubleML/DoubleML.pdf>

$$\check{\theta}_0 = \left( \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i \in I} \hat{V}_i D_i \right)^{-1} \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i \in I} \hat{V}_i (Y_i - \hat{g}_0(Z_i))$$

The orthogonalized formulation of the treatment-based model is an advancement over what would be considered “naïve” double robust estimation and helps defend against regularization bias (see Chernozhukov et al., 2017). I also use five cross folds iterated 100 times each to defend against overfitting, and I include the full conditioning set  $Z$  for both models<sup>17</sup>.

Table 1 presents the results of double robust estimation. I repeat this model seven times, each time using a different contextual level of Black-White Context to predict registration as a Democrat among Biracials. While the raw data presented in Figure 5.1 showed a min-max variation of +45 percentage points in the probability of registering as Democrat across context, the results of these models indicate a much more modest potential effect. For example, the coefficient estimate for Black-White Context at the Census Tract level is 0.083, which translates to a min-max change of +18 percentage points in the probability of registering as a Democrat. Four of these measurements of contexts are found to be statistically significant and rather indistinguishable in terms of their potential effect size (min-max mean = +18.25%).

**Table 5.1: Results of double robust estimation with machine learning for Black-White Biracials.**  
**(Sample: Black-White Biracials; Source: North Carolina Voter File)**

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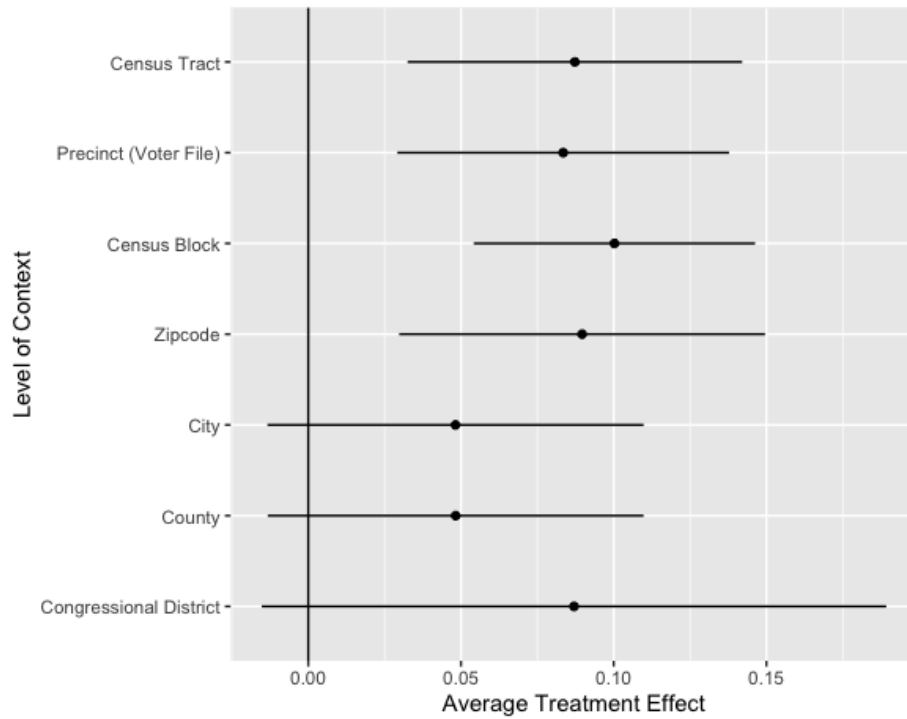
<sup>17</sup> While it would be encouraged to use the minimal conditioning set for completely linear models, research supports including any variable known to affect either the treatment or outcome when using machine learning models (King & Nielsen, 2019; VanderWeele & Shpitser 2011; McCaffrey, Ridgeway, & Morral, 2004; Van der Laan & Rose, 2011). However, in doing so I am assuming that none of the variables I include are excluded instruments which could bias the estimate (Nichols & McBride, 2020).

<b>Level of Context</b>	<b>Coef.</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>Pval</b>	<b>Min-Max</b>
Census Tract	0.0873	0.0279	0.0018	18%
Precinct (Voter File)	0.0835	0.0277	0.0012	17%
Census Block	0.1002	0.0234	0.0026	20%
Zipcode	0.0896	0.0305	0.0033	18%
City	0.0482	0.0314	0.0953	10%
County	0.0483	0.0313	0.1241	10%
Congressional District	0.0870	0.0521	0.1248	17%

In Figure 5.2, I plot the coefficients estimates with 95% confidence intervals for each level of context. One interesting observation is that the potential effect size and standard errors for each level seem to be associated with the relative granularity of the contextual unit. For example, census block tends to be the geographically smallest unit of context available and so garners the largest coefficient estimate and the smallest standard errors. Moreover, the largest contextual units (City, County, Congressional District) have no significant correlation with partisanship. This perhaps suggests that smaller geographic units better capture individuals' actual experiences and interactions with members of each racial group. It also may be of special interest to political scientists to note that Congressional District here appears too obtuse a measurement of racial context to significantly predict partisanship (even among Biracials) despite its propensity to be included in many analyses.

**Figure 5.2: Coefficients plot from double robust estimators.**

**(Sample: Black-White Biracials; Source: North Carolina Voter File)**



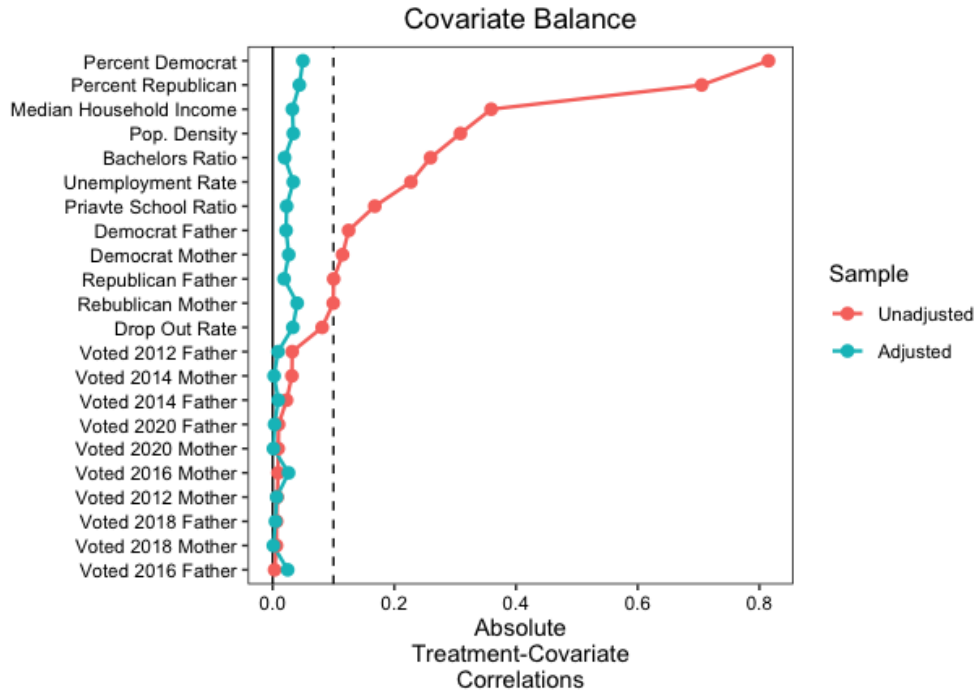
### ***Covariate Balanced Generalized Propensity Scores***

At this point, readers may be concerned that results shown are unique only to the double robust estimation technique. Therefore, I replicate the above analysis with the same conditioning set but use more traditional propensity score estimation. Given the continuous nature of the treatment variable, I rely on a covariate balancing *generalized* propensity score (CBGPS) methodology, in its parametric form, which minimizes the correlation between covariates and the treatment (Fong, Hazlett, & Imai, 2018). Figure 5.3 presents balance statistics and shows that treatment-covariate correlations for each covariate are smaller than the standard .1 threshold (Zhu et al., 2015).

**Figure 5.3: Covariate balance statistics for CBGPS for Black-White Biracials.**



(Sample: Black-White Biracials; Source: North Carolina Voter File)



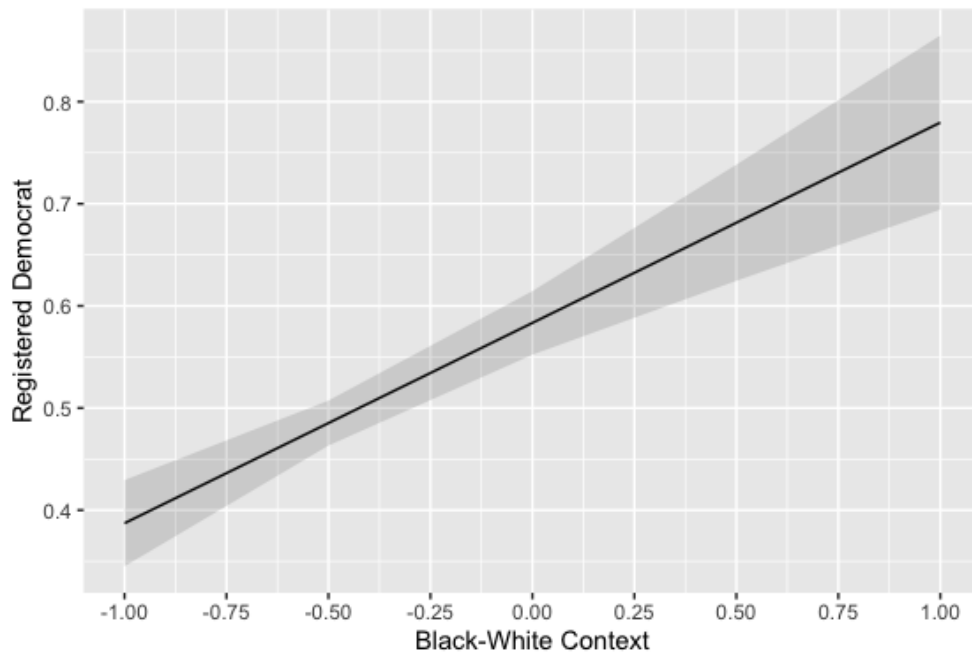
I run a basic OLS<sup>18</sup> model regressing Democratic registration on Black-White Context using propensity score weights. This results in a coefficient estimate of .1961 ( $p < .001$ ) which translates to a min-max difference of roughly 39 percentage points. Figure 5.4 presents these results graphically. While both are statistically significant, it is notable that double robust machine learning estimates are considerably more modest than are those from the propensity score weighted model. Still, all the evidence so far suggests that racial context is a powerful predictor of Biracials’ partisan affiliation. These results are robust to different identification strategies and multiple measurements of context. Biracials who grow up and live in spaces with more Blacks and less Whites are considerably more likely to adopt the partisan leanings of

<sup>18</sup> Note that I rely on OLS rather than logistic regression for simplicity’s sake and to aid in the interpretation of the coefficient estimate and comparison with those from the double robust estimator. This is justifiable given that the substantive results are essentially the same. For an interesting discussion of these concepts see Gomila (2020).

Blacks than are their counterparts in White dominated contexts. Moreover, the analysis does not rule out the possibility that context exerts a causal influence on Biracials' partisanship, but instead suggests a plausible effect.

**Figure 5.4: Predicted probability results from CBGPS model for Black-White Biracials.**

**(Sample: Black-White Biracials; Source: North Carolina Voter File)**



### **Florida Voter File (Latino-White Biracials)**

#### ***Double Robust Estimation***

Next, I repeat the same process as described above for Black-White Biracials in North Carolina, but this time I use Latino-White Biracials as identified through the Florida Statewide Voter File (FVF). While the NCVF was highly suitable to an analysis of Black-White Biracials given the large proportions of that particular Biracial subgroup, North Carolina does not contain many Latino-Whites with which to conduct the same analysis. As a consequence, I performed

the same unique matching formula as described above for the North Carolina file to identify Latino-White Biracials in Florida. This results in a very large sample of 9,063 Latino-White Biracials.

While linking single-race Blacks and single-race Whites to divergent partisan affiliations is fairly straightforward given the racial polarization associated with those parties and racial groups, Latinos in general tend to be less consistently linked to a single political party (Abrajano & Hajnal, 2015). To exacerbate this issue, Florida is somewhat unique in that they contain the largest Cuban population in the country, and Cubans tend to be the ethnic group among Latinos who are the most Republican. To overcome this hurdle, I drew additional data from the 2014-2019 American Community Survey measuring the proportion of Cubans in each zipcode, and subtracted the proportion of Cubans from the total Latino population in each zipcode, therefore creating a new measure in addition to the general Latino-White Context, which I term and define as:

*Latino – White Context (Excluding Cubans)*

$$= (\% \text{ Latino} - \% \text{ Cuban in Zipcode A}) - \% \text{ White in Zipcode A}$$

First, I repeat the double robust estimation models again using random forest. The results of these models are presented in Table 5.2. I do so first for all the equivalent measurements of racial context as shown above for Black-White Biracials in North Carolina. I then repeat the same model using the Cuban subtracted measure of context which is at the zipcode level. In terms of the racial context measurement which have not yet subtracted the proportions of Cubans, I indeed still find that racial context continues to assert a potential causal impact on Latino-Whites' partisanship. Specifically, increases in the proportions of Latinos (decreases in the proportions of Whites) are significantly correlated with Latino-Whites' partisanship at the

zipcode, city, county, and congressional district levels. The average min-max difference according to the original context measurements is about 3%—not nearly as large as is the difference observed among Black-Whites, but still quite meaningful.

On the other hand, when I repeat these models using the modified measurement of context which removes the proportion of Cubans within each census zipcode, the estimated treatment correlation doubles to produce a min-max difference of 6%. Again, the relationship between variation in Latino-Whites’ propensity to register as Democrats as the proportion of their minority racial group increases within their context is shown to be statistically significant even under fully specified models which attempt to account for observable variables which might confound this relationship. As such, these findings provide quite strong evidence that RRS may be operating through a causal pathway between context and Biracials’ partisanship.

**Table 5.2: Results of double robust estimation with machine learning for Latino-White Biracials.**

**(Sample: Latino-White Biracials; Source: Florida Voter File)**

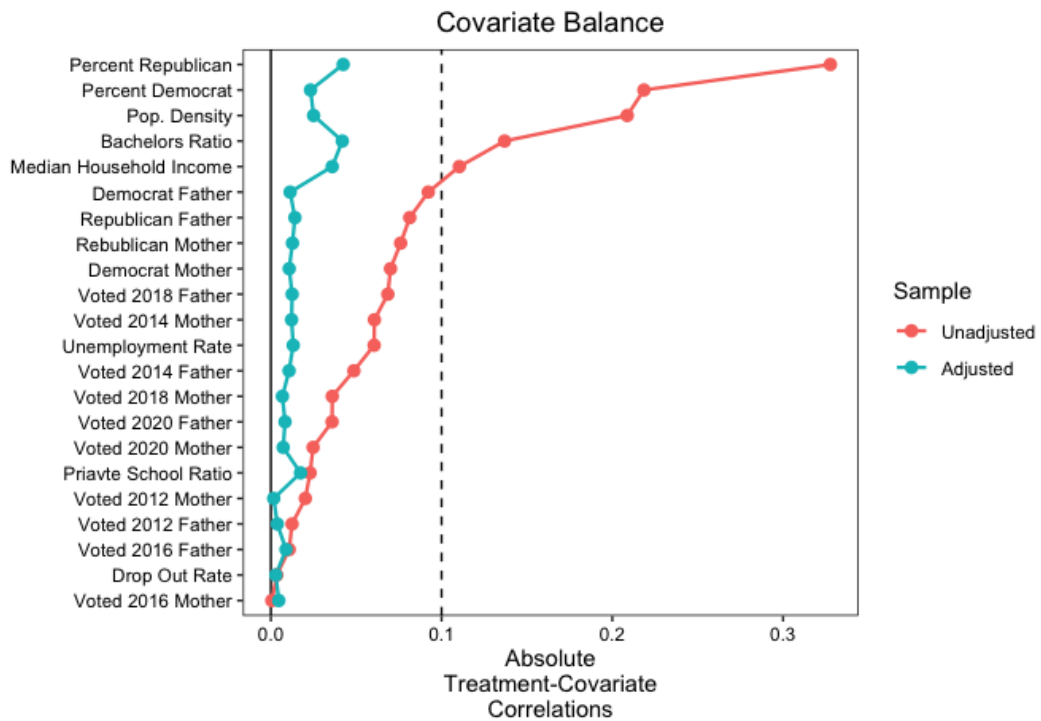
<b>Level of Context</b>	<b>Coef.</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>Pval</b>	<b>Min-Max</b>
Census Tract	0.0130	0.0077	0.0904	3%
Precinct (Voter File)	0.0048	0.0107	0.6550	1%
Census Block	0.0097	0.0079	0.2170	2%
Zipcode	0.0203	0.0084	0.0151	4%
City	0.0166	0.0076	0.0294	3%
County	0.0157	0.0058	0.0070	3%
Congressional District	0.0137	0.0053	0.0104	2%
Zipcode (excluding Cubans)	0.0317	0.0117	0.0065	6%

*Covariate Balanced Generalized Propensity Scores*

Lastly, I repeat the completely linear covariate balanced generalized propensity score models using Latino-Whites in Florida. For these models I am using the modified measurement of context which subtracts the proportion of Cubans. In Figure 5.5 we observe once again that the covariates are sufficiently balanced in that the treatment-covariate correlations for each covariate are smaller than the standard .1 threshold (Zhu et al., 2015). Finally, Table 5.3 presents the results of this model and show that racial context (excluding Cubans) remains a significant predictor of Latino-Whites' propensity to register as Democrats. Moreover, the estimated min-max difference for Latino-Whites in this completely linear model is much larger than the estimated min-max for the double robust model—as was the case with Black-White Biracials—with an estimated 11% increase.

**Figure 5.5: Covariate balance statistics for CBGPS for Latino-White Biracials.**

**(Sample: Latino-White Biracials; Source: Florida Voter File)**



**Table 5.3: Results of CBGPS for Black-Whites and Latino-Whites.**

**(Sample: Black-Whites and Latino-Whites; Source: North Carolina and Florida Voter Files)**

Statewide File	Biracial Subgroup	Level of Context	Coef.	SE	Pval	Min-Max
North Carolina	Black-Whites	Census Tract	0.1961	0.0304	0.0000***	39%
Florida	Latino-Whites	Zipcode (Cubans Excluded)	0.0553	0.0182	0.0024**	11%

Though this section cannot prove a causal relationship, taken together the double robust estimation and propensity score weighting models for Black-Whites and Latino-Whites have shown that a significant relationship continues to exist even after accounting for what most political scientists regard as the major threats to inferring causality in contextual effects using observational data—residential self-selection. As such, these models have failed to rule out causality, and instead suggest a plausible causal relationship. Furthermore, it should be noted that my decision to exclude an analysis of Asian-Whites from this section is not meant to imply that there is no significant causal relationship between racial context and their partisan affiliations. In fact, in repeating the above models for Asian-White Biracials, a significant correlation between Asian-White Context and their propensity to register as Democrats emerged in some cases<sup>19</sup>, albeit less consistently. Moreover, since results for Asian-White Biracials’ partisanship in chapter 3 demonstrate that Asian-Whites also tend to be less different from their minority counterparts in terms of their partisanship as compared to Black-Whites and Latino-Whites, it cannot be demonstrated among these datasets alone that context exerts a unique force on their partisanship as compared to their single-race counterpart peers.

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<sup>19</sup> Double robust estimation and covariate balanced generalized propensity score models for Asian-White Biracials in Florida showed statistically significant results using the 2020 Decennial Census Tract and 2014-2019 ACS Block levels of racial context.

## **Interrogating the Causal Chain: Experimental Evidence on Short-Term Variation of Racial Group Salience**

In this next section, I present the results of an online survey experiment designed to proxy the effects of varying racial context among Biracials. Specifically, the RRS framework theorizes that racial context works to set the level of salience associated with each racial group within a Biracials individuals' heritage, which subsequently primes the degree to which Biracials perceive belonging to and identification with a racial group. Ultimately, closer identification with each racial group should lead to the adoption of political attitudes and behaviors more prototypical of the racial group most salient. Indeed, it is through this process not just that Biracials' feelings about their racial identity and attitudes in the short term vary along with context, rather the process in which variation in context affects the salience of different racial groups is also the mechanism through which the socialization processes of RRS take place. In the long term, context should affect the salience of different racial groups, therefore influencing which racial group Biracials feel they belong to, which in turn influences both the content of their socialization experiences and the ways that they perceive and respond to those experiences.

Now, it has been demonstrated in previous research that identity choices are indeed correlated with different political attitudes among Biracials (Davenport, 2016a). However, it has not yet been explored whether or not identity choices themselves causally precede the formation and expression of political attitudes. Similarly, while earlier chapters have shown that racial context is tightly linked to both identity choice and various outcomes among Biracials, the

specific causal timeline of this process has not been fully explored. As a consequence, the following survey experiment was designed to test 1) whether variation in the salience of different racial group ties can actually have a causal impact on Biracials' identity choices or political attitudes, and 2) whether Biracials feelings about their racial identity mediate the relationship between variation and context and their attitudes.

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

This study included a total of 126 Black-White Biracials participants (*Mean Age* = 33.4, *SD* = 10.5; *Proportion Women* = 0.48) who were recruited to take my survey on Qualtrics using Amazon Mechanical Turk Prime. Each Biracial was included on the basis of having indicated in an online pre-screener that they were 18 years of age or older and that they had either one Black Mother and one White Father or one White Mother and one Black Father, therefore indicating nominal Black-White Biracial heritage. The participant pool was limited to only individuals living in the United States, and this study was conducted in December 2020. Individuals who completed the survey were paid \$4.50, and MTurk Prime was paid \$3.50 per each complete for securing this difficult to identify group of Biracials.

### ***Design***

Participants in this study were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: 1) a treatment priming Black context and racial group salience, 2) a treatment priming White context and racial group salience, and 3) a placebo condition. Specifically, participants assigned to the two active treatment conditions were given the following instructions:



“For the following task, please write as much as you can or continuously to answer the following prompt. Take 30-60 seconds to think of a response, and then begin writing. Time will expire in 3 minutes and 30 seconds and then you may move on to the next section.

Please write about a happy memory or memories that involve your [*White; Black or African-American*] family members, friends, or neighbors.”

Participants assigned to the control condition were given the same instructions, but instead of being asked to write about their White or Black peers they were simply told to write about a happy memory, specifically, “Please write about a happy memory or memories.”

The main goal of these treatment conditions was to mimic what the effect would be of varying racial context for Biracials, as theorized by the RRS framework. However, given the cost prohibitive nature of conducting a large-scale field experiment (especially when using Biracials as subjects), my goal was to leverage survey methodology to most closely approximate the mechanisms I think truly underly the RRS in terms of racial context. Specifically, the theoretical claim posed by RRS is that context ultimately affects Biracials’ identity choices and attitudes through varying the salience of each of the racial groups in a Biracials individual’s heritage, which in turn effects the cognitive lens through which Biracials experience and evaluate the political world. Since the modal mechanism in this process is the salience of racial groups, the treatment used here need only to demonstrate that it effectively manipulates racial group salience in order to achieve sufficient internal validity.

In order to manipulate racial group salience, I choose to borrow from and adapt a technique used commonly in social psychology—one which has been demonstrated to effectively influence the salience of different racial identities among Biracials (Gaither et al., 2015). Indeed, the results section below demonstrates that my treatment does in fact have a causal effect on various racial identity related outcomes among Biracials—therefore verifying the internal validity of the manipulation. Additionally, basing the writing exercise on memories involving family, friends, and neighbors of varied racial heritage—the three socialization agents I characterize as the most potent forces of racial context—incorporates a specifically social contextual element which allows participants to avail themselves of what I argue is a psychological process that is positively and linearly related to actual experiences of varied racial spaces in real-time. In total the final sample included 45 participants in the Black context treatment, 42 participants in the White context treatment, and 39 in the control condition.

### ***Post-Treatment Items***

Upon successful completion of the writing task, participants were first presented with two response modules, the first of which inquired about their feelings about their racial identity. Specifically, the first post-treatment item (Identity Choice) asked respondents to indicate how they racially identify using a mark one or more format. Respondents either identified as single-race Black (Black box marked only), single-race White (White box marked only), or as Biracials (both Black and White boxes marked). Next, participants were then asked to indicate the degree to which being Black, White, or Biracial was central or important to their overall identity

(Identity Centrality<sup>20</sup>). Then, participants were asked to indicate the degree to which they perceive linked fate with those three racial group (Linked Fate<sup>21</sup>).

The second post-treatment response module asked participants to provide their opinions on several racially-charged attitudes and public policies. Using a seven point Likert scale (7 = Strongly Agree, 1 = Strongly Disagree), participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement on the following statements, 1) Racial discrimination is no longer a problem in America, 2) It should be a crime for police to use chokeholds or strangleholds, 3) Federal funding on welfare programs should be increased, and 4) The federal government should do more to control the sale of handguns.

## **Results**

Despite the very limited size of this sample, the results indicate that priming racial context or the salience of different racial groups did in fact exert a causal effect on several outcomes for Biracials—both those related to their feelings of racial identity and to political attitudes. Perhaps the most striking pattern unearthed overall is that the majority of the variation observed among Biracials’ outcomes in this study is a direct consequence of the White racial group context prime, rather than the Black prime. The second most striking pattern is that—again, despite a very limited sample size—Biracials feelings about their racial identities do demonstrate a propensity to mediate the relationship between the context primes and their political attitudes, consistent with the framework of RRS. However, these mediation effects are considerably small in comparison to the direct effect of variation in context, which suggests that

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<sup>20</sup> “How important is being [*White; Black; Biracial or Multiracial*] to your identity?”

<sup>21</sup> “Do you think that what happens generally to [*White; Black; Biracial or Multiracial*] people in this country will have something to do with what happens in your life?”

when it comes to Biracials, context may be influencing their racial and political outcomes through a pathway that is not directly related to the ways that they feel about their racial identity, or at least in terms of how we measure identity on surveys.

### ***Identity***

Table 5.4 presents the first set of the results of this experiment and which compare group means between those in the White context treatment group and those in the control group using two-tailed t-tests. Moreover, it should be noted that given the modest sample size of the survey as well as the absence of precedent,<sup>22</sup> I have opted to include all findings which I perceive as substantively relevant though some do not meet the benchmark of traditional statistical significance via  $p$ -values less than 0.05. Accordingly, those results should be understood as exploratory at best.

In terms of identity outcomes, priming White racial group context exerted a large effect on Biracials' feelings about their Black racial identity. Specifically, those in the White context treatment group were 23 percentage points less likely than those in the control condition to identify singularly as Black ( $p = 0.003$ ). Those in the White context treatment group were also less likely to feel that being Black was important to their overall identity ( $-0.12, p = 0.053$ ) and to perceive linked fate with Blacks ( $-0.11, 0.09$ ). Moreover, the opposite is true in terms of the effect of the White context treatment on Biracials' feelings about their White racial group identity. Specifically, the treatment effect of the White context prime as compared to the control condition was an increase in .12 percentage points in the probability of identifying singularly as

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<sup>22</sup> The lack of previous, similar experimentation provides no benchmarks to which I can compare the magnitude or direction of the results of this study.

White ( $p = 0.057$ ), as well as higher feelings of connectedness with other Whites via White-linked fate ( $p = 0.113$ ).

Table 5.5 presents the results of t-tests comparing the Black context treatment group to those in the control condition. While priming White context seemed to have a strong effect on several identity related items, priming Black context does not exhibit much identity related power. One possible reason for this sparsity of evidence is that Black-Whites at rest already maintain a relatively high level of salience regarding their Black heritage. Consistent with the prior research about the influence of hypodescent, it may be that Black-Whites are nearly ubiquitously aware of their Blackness given the pervasive inculcation of the Black/White color line. Moreover, evidence corroborating this possibility is present in the very results of this study. Specifically, results demonstrate that Black-Whites at rest (in the control condition) do indeed possess high levels of identity centrality and linked fate with Blacks<sup>23</sup>, such that very little room may exist for them to accentuate their Black ties in response to Black context primes.

Another interesting finding is that Black-White Biracials' feelings of linked fate with other Biracials was actually diminished among those in either the White context treatment or Black context treatment groups, as compared to those in the control group. The relevance of this finding is its suggestion that Black-Whites' feelings of connectedness to Biracialism as a racial group is materially antithetical to their feelings of connectedness with their single-race counterpart groups. Since Black-Whites did not necessarily need to identify less strongly in terms of Biracial-linked fate in order to also perceive linked fate with other racial groups, it seems that some Biracials may treat feelings of racial group connectedness as a zero-sum game.

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<sup>23</sup> 87% of Black-Whites in the control condition felt that being Black is either very important or extremely important to their identity. 92% of those in the control condition felt that what happens to Blacks in this country will have some or a lot to do with their own lives.

**Table 5.4: Results of t-tests comparing participants in the White context treatment group to those in the control group.**

**(Sample: Black-White Biracials; Source: Survey Experiment)**

Outcomes	Treatment Effects (White Context Treatment - Control Group)	
	<i>Difference of Means</i>	<i>P-value</i>
Identity Choice: Black	-0.23	0.003**
Identity Choice: White	0.12	0.057+
Identity Centrality: Black	-0.12	0.053+
Linked Fate: Blacks	-0.11	0.090+
Linked Fate: Whites	0.11	0.113
Linked Fate: Biracials	-0.18	0.002**
Racial Discrimination is No Problem	0.15	0.043*
Ban Police Chokeholds	-0.14	0.021*

Note: + p <0.1; \*p <0.05; \*\*p <0.01; \*\*\*p <0.001.  
All variables have been rescaled to between 0 and 1.

### *Attitudes*

Next, the bottom rows of Table 5.4 present the results of t-tests comparing those in the White context treatment group to those in the control group in terms of their racialized attitudes. In both examples, we observe that participants subjected to the White context treatment were ultimately more racially conservative in terms of their racial attitudes and policy preferences than those subjected to the control condition. Specifically, those in the White context treatment group were more likely to agree with the racially regressive statement that racial discrimination is no longer a problem in America (0.15,  $p = 0.043$ ), than were those in the control condition. Similarly, Biracials in the White context treatment group were less likely to agree that police chokeholds should be banned (-0.14,  $p = 0.021$ ). Both of these treatment effects trend in the direction theorized by RRS in that increasing White racial group salience among Biracials leads

to the adoption of attitudes more prototypical of Whites, which in this case denotes relative conservatism.

Finally, priming Black racial group context does seem to exert an impact on Biracials' attitudes. In terms of the comparison between the Black context treatment group and those in the control condition, we actually do observe a few effects on racial attitudes. Specifically, we observe meaningful differences in terms of two racially charged public policies—welfare and gun control. First, Black-Whites Biracials subjected to the Black context treatment were more likely to support federal welfare spending (0.11,  $p = 0.062$ ) than those in the control group. Second, Black-White Biracials in the Black context group were more likely to support gun control (0.10,  $p = 0.070$ ) than were their counterparts in the control group.

While priming memories of Black social contexts does not seem to have a large effect to Black-Whites' identity choices or feelings about their racial identity, the evidence presented here suggests that priming Black context does unlock variation in their political attitudes. Again, while Black-Whites in the control condition tended to already identify fairly strongly with Blacks (perhaps leaving no room for movement after exposure to the Black context treatment) much more overall variation existed in terms of Black-Whites' general responses to attitudinal items. Given more room for movement on the attitude outcomes, increasing the salience of Black-Whites' minority group identity in fact led to positive causal impacts on the degree to which Black-Whites were supportive of Black political interests.

**Table 5.5: Results of t-tests comparing participants in the Black context treatment group to those in the control group.**

**(Sample: Black-White Biracials; Source: Survey Experiment)**

Outcomes	Treatment Effects (Black Context Treatment - Control Group)	
	<i>Difference of Means</i>	<i>P-value</i>
Linked Fate: Biracials	-0.10	0.045*
Increase Welfare	0.11	0.062+
Support Gun Control	0.10	0.070+

Note: + p <0.1; \*p <0.05; \*\*p <0.01; \*\*\*p <0.001.  
All variables have been rescaled to between 0 and 1.

### ***Mediation: The Causal Chain***

This final subsection explores the propensity for identity related outcomes to mediate the effect of racial context<sup>24</sup> on Biracials’ political attitudes. At present, the predominant thinking about Biracials’ racial and political attitudes is that they are the consequences of Biracials’ personal feelings about their racial identity (Davenport, 2016b). However, the causal direction of this relationship has not yet been tested. To explore the relationship between context and political attitudes—and in large part to explore the positioning of racial identity within this causal chain—I employ a causal mediation framework. Figures 5.6 and 5.7 present the results for the only two models (among all possible treatment -> identity -> attitude relationships observed to be significant above) in which identity related outcomes truly mediate the effect of \ context treatments on racialized attitudes.

For my first piece of evidence, Figure 5.6 shows that the effect of the White context prime on Biracials’ support for banning police chokeholds was partly mediated by the degree to which Black-White Biracials felt that being Black was important is important to their overall identity. Specifically, the coefficient between the White context prime and support for banning chokeholds and the coefficient between the White context prime and Black-identity centrality

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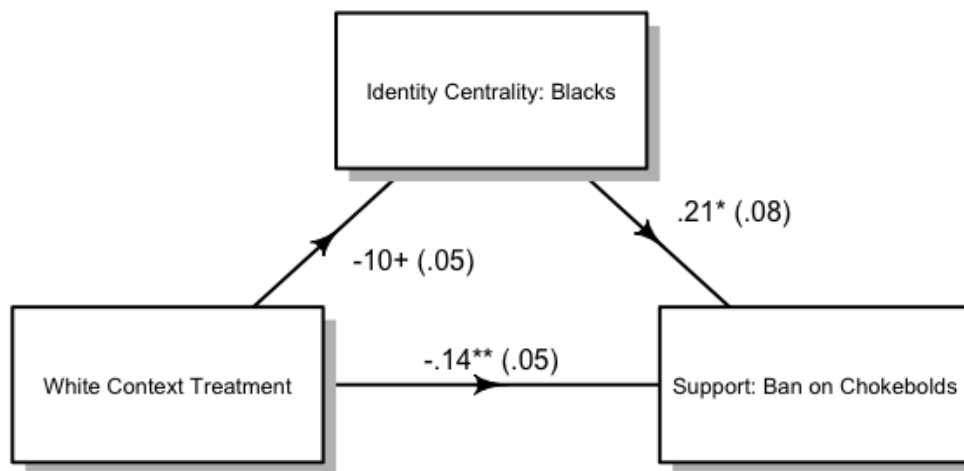
<sup>24</sup> Albeit proxied.



were significant<sup>25</sup>. Ultimately, the effect of the White context prime on support for police chokeholds which was mediated by Black-identity centrality was 0.02<sup>26</sup> ( $[-.10] \times [.21]$ ). Though the effect here is certainly mediated to some degree, it should also be noted that only very little of the effect of White context—about one-fifth—was actually mediated by identity choice.

**Figure 5.6: Indirect effect of priming White racial group salience via context on support for banning police chokeholds.**

**(Sample: Black-White Biracials; Source: Survey Experiment)**



Next, in Figure 5.7 we observe approximately the same pattern with respect to the relationship between the White context treatment, Black-identity centrality, and attitudes toward gun control. In this case, the effect of the White context treatment on Biracials’ support for gun

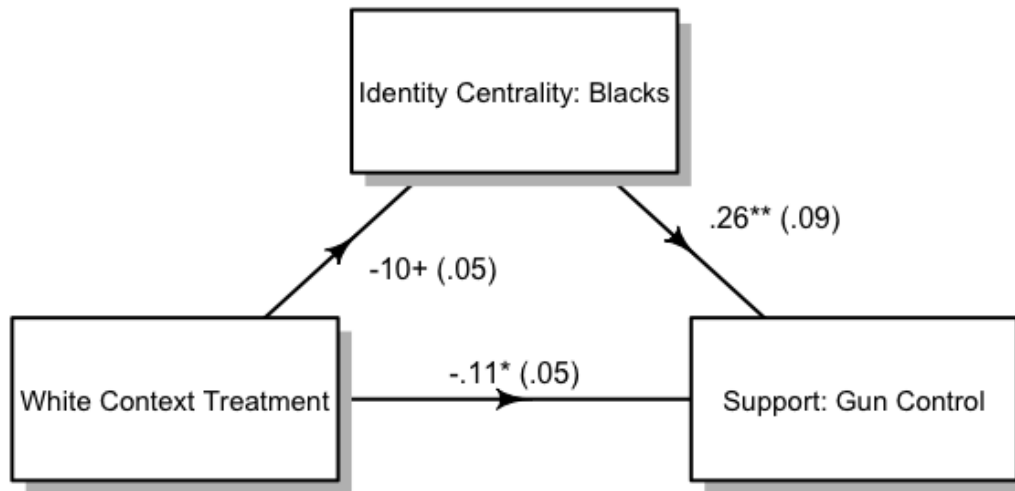
<sup>25</sup> P-value for the correlation between the White context treatment and Black-identity centrality is 0.053, which I’m calling close enough for this occasion. For clarification the mediation models are conducted using the full sample, not just those in the White context treatment and control conditions.

<sup>26</sup> The indirect effect or Average Causal Mediation Effect is -0.02 with a *p*-value of 0.040 using 1000 bootstraps.

control which is mediated by Black-identity centrality is  $0.026^{27}$  ( $[-.10] \times [.26]$ ), or about one-fourth of the total effect of context. While these results support the assumption that context affects Biracials' political attitudes via its relationship with racial identity, the relatively small proportions of the total effects which are mediated by racial identity—as well as the fact that most mediation models were not significant, though I take this with a grain of salt given sample size limitations—actually speaks quite loudly to suggest that context, or at least variation in the salience of different racial group identities, has a capacity to influence Biracials' political thinking through pathways outside of their expressed identificational dispositions.

**Figure 5.7: Indirect effect of priming White racial group salience via context on support for gun control.**

**(Sample: Black-White Biracials; Source: Survey Experiment)**



<sup>27</sup>The indirect effect or Average Causal Mediation Effect is  $-0.03$  with a *p-value* of  $0.056$  using 1000 bootstraps.

## Chapter 6:

### **Machine Learning, Biracials, and the Future of Racial Group Boundaries**

For the first three and a half centuries following European settlement in North America, the racial hierarchy was organized dichotomously with Blacks on one side of the color line and Whites on the other according to the degree of power, prosperity, and prestige each racial group enjoyed (Du Bois, 1903). Then, demographic change in the form of increased immigration from Latin America and Asia during the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century disrupted this bipolar structure, leading most scholars to conceive of our racial hierarchy as having Whites as the hegemonic group on top, followed by Asians, Latinos, and Blacks, respectively (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). While Asians and Latinos are indeed found to be worse-off than Whites in terms of access to prosperity in our society (Alba & Nee, 2003), the scholarly consensus remains that access to assimilation is still uniquely difficult for Blacks due to an impermeable color line, despite advances such as the abolition of slavery in 1863, and the Civil Rights Act or Voting Rights Act of the 1960's (Davis, 1991; Leslie & Sears, 2022).

Today, major demographic shifts are again taking place such that the United States by the year 2046 is expected to change from a majority White nation to one that is majority minority (Frey, 2018). The source of these changes can be found in higher birthrates among minorities, continued (but slowing) immigration, and especially in the rapid growth of the mixed-race population, the lion's share of whom are the children of interracial unions between one White parent and one minority parent (Alba, 2020). Indeed, the impact of mixed-race individuals on the future of American politics is undeniable, given that the rate of racial intermixing is rising so quickly that demographers predict one in five Americans will be mixed-race by the year 2050, and one in three by 2100 (Lee & Bean, 2010). As a result, one of the most prominent topics of

political science inquiry continues to be the study of how demographic change will impact American politics and the structure of the racial hierarchy in the future (Hochschild et al., 2012; Masuoka, 2017, Lemi, 2018; Davenport, 2018; Alba, 2020; Strmic-Pawl, 2016; Lee & Bean, 2012). In particular, a popular commentary has been that increasing proportions of minorities will lead to increased support for the Democratic party and for racially liberal policies (Judis & Teixeira, 2002)—both of which are known to be favored by minority voters today (Stout, 2020).

However, the prediction of a majority-minority future and an era of staunch racial liberalism is based in large-part on two assumptions, both of which may be erroneous (See Also Alba, 2020). First, they assume that Latinos and Asians will remain separated from Whites by stable racial group boundaries and continue exhibiting political loyalty to minority interests. Second, these predictions also assume that individuals born to both one White parent and one Minority parent will unanimously identify as racial minorities and remain politically resemblant of minorities. Indeed, one of the current demographic trends that scholars predicting stable racial group boundaries seem to ignore is that, in addition to slowing immigration from Latin America and Asia in recent decades, rates of intermarriage between non-Black minorities and Whites have skyrocketed. Specifically, among U.S. born Asians and Latinos, 72% and 52%, respectively, out-marry a partner of a different race, compared to just 18% Blacks (Lee & Bean, 2012). As the social boundary separating Latinos and Asians from Whites seems to be fading quickly, I argue that the impact of current demographic trends on the future of American politics may be most clearly assessed through the current characteristics of the mixed-race population.

The goal of this chapter is to take a broad look at the political characteristics of minority-White Biracials and to compare them to their single-race counterparts. Using classic assimilation as my theoretical lens (Gordon, 1964) I argue that examining the politics of Biracials—those

who currently sit at the intersection between two ostensibly discrete and divergent racial groups—allows one to make important inferences about the assimilative trajectories of different racial groups. For example, consider that in a social vacuum, an individual with one White parent and one minority parent might be equally likely to exhibit the political characteristics associated with either or both of the racial groups in their heritage. However, in the absence of that social vacuum, whatever characteristics we actually observe should be a product of society's color line(s), and informative regarding racial minority groups' assimilative trajectories in the future. Hence, by taking a look at how minority-White Biracials (Black-Whites, Latino-Whites, and Asian-Whites in particular) compare to their White and minority counterparts today, I am able to present an empirical portrait of the theoretical thickness of the racial group boundaries separating each racial group, and can take a peek into what the American political landscape may look like in a more racially mixed future.

First, I begin this analysis by simply by examining the degree to which single-race groups (Whites, Blacks, Latinos, and Asians) are similar or different from each other in terms of politically relevant features. Research has tended to show that Blacks are the most homogenous racial group in terms of their politics, often theorized as a function of their uniquely harsh subjection to racial discrimination which activates in-group identification and political solidarity (Dawson, 1994, Miller et al., 1981; Sears, 2015). Latinos and Asians, on the other hand, are often considered to be somewhere in between Blacks and Whites, or to theoretically occupy the middle space on a stratified racial hierarchy. While most studies compare racial groups using individual variables one at a time, my approach uses machine learning categorization which can use hundreds of variables at once to present a more generalized and comprehensive portrait of how similar or different entire racial groups are from one another in terms of their political attitudes

and behavior. Results corroborate prior studies by showing that Blacks are far more “distanced” as a group from Whites than are Latinos and Asians, which suggests more durable racial group boundaries.

Second, this study leverages different subgroups of Biracials (i.e. Black-Whites, Latino-Whites, and Asian-Whites) to take a peek into what racial group boundaries could look like in a more racially mixed future. Here I again use machine learning categorization where I train supervised learning models to predict single-race class outcomes (e.g. to predict whether respondents are single-race Black or single-race White), however I then apply these categorization models to subsamples of Biracials (e.g. Black-White Biracials) to create a theoretical distance measure based on how many times Black-White Biracials are predicted to either be single-race Whites or single-race Blacks. This allows me to quantify how Biracials stack up next to their single-race counterparts on a stratified hierarchy, and can be used as a measure of the relative thickness of the boundaries separating one racial group from another.

## **Method**

In recent decades, social scientists have greatly advanced our understanding of the nature of race and racial identity, as well as the roles they play in shaping American society and intergroup relations. At the same time, recent decades have also observed significant development in terms of quantitative methods such as machine learning and artificial intelligence which are increasingly used to address social science questions. However, despite their simultaneous development, scholarship on race and racial identity has seldom taken advantage of modern methods in machine learning despite the potential they may offer for exploring and testing race-related social theories (Sablan, 2019 and DeCuir-Gunby & Walker DeVose, 2021).

Of course, there may be good reason for the lack of overlap between scholarship on race and racial identity and advanced quantitative methods like machine learning. On the one hand, scholars must remain vigilantly conscientious that race as we know it today constitutes a social construct, and therefore is not a factor which can be easily reduced to a set of quantifiable traits or measurements (Omi & Winant, 1986; Gómez, 2012). On the other hand, it is unfortunately also well documented that race scholars (and minority race scholars in particular) have historically experienced exclusion and isolation from certain mainstream social science milieus, especially those who place a premium on incorporating the newest and latest quantitative methodological tools (Bonilla-Silva & Zuberi, 2008; Buggs, Sims, & Kramer, 2020).

In fact, this apparent separation or lack of communication between scholars has been a major focus of a burgeoning body of research which explores new frontiers in the study of race. This consortium of research and researchers called Critical Mixed-Race Studies (CMRS), argues that scholars who study race and the ways it affects society must engage not only in interdisciplinary citing, but they must also work actively to expand the methodologies they use, or otherwise risk limiting scholarly achievement and discovery (Gaither & Sims, 2022; Daniel et al., 2014). With these sentiments in mind, the goal of this current study is to investigate some of the ways that modern advances in machine learning might provide insight into the nature of racial group boundaries and the racial hierarchy, especially as they pertain to politics.

### *Data*

To investigate the how Biracials might be sorted into the American racial hierarchy in terms of their political characteristics, this study relies primarily on the 2020 Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey and 2020 Nationscape. To begin, the CMPS is uniquely

suitable for this analysis for several reasons. First, as a collaboration of over 200 scholars from over 100 different universities, the CMPS was deployed in 10 different languages which enabled the sampling of large pools of minority respondents (approximately 15,000 Black, White, Latino, or Asian respondents). Second, the CMPS is unique in that in addition to using the “mark one or more” format on the racial self-identification question, it also includes two fairly uncommon items which ask respondents to indicate the race of both their mother and father. These items allow for the enumeration of Biracials both by family heritage and by self-identification. Third, the CMPS contains a nearly exhaustive list of covariates (over 900 variables measuring political attitudes and behavior) which provide machine learning algorithms with a robust set of features to inform their categorical predictions of each respondents’ race.

Similarly, the Nationscape data is unique in that it also measures race and racial identity using the “mark one or more” format and includes questions about participants’ parents races. However, while the Nationscape data is much more limited than the CMPS in terms of the number of political attitudes variable it contains, the sample size of the Nationscape dataset is quite superior, which will provide empirical estimates that can be considered broadly representative of the United States, and with considerable statistical robustness.

### *Participants*

To conceptualize race, I rely on two items which ask, “What is the race of your biological [mother/father]? Mark one or more boxes.” Respondents who are Biracial by heritage are identified as those who marked only one box to indicate the race of their mother and only one box for the race of their father, and who indicated differing races between them. For example, Black-White-heritage Biracials are those who indicated only Black for their father and only



White for their mother, or vice versa. Using this method, for the CMPS my sample includes 189 Black-White-heritage Biracials, 493 Latino-White-heritage Biracials, and 204 Asian-White-heritage Biracials. In Nationscape my sample includes 458 Black-White-heritage Biracials, 1720 Latino-White-heritage Biracials, and 423 Asian-White-heritage Biracials<sup>28</sup>. Similarly, single-race heritage comparison groups are identified on the basis that respondents indicated only one, shared race for both their mother and father. This totals to 2888 single-race White respondents, 3277 single-race Black respondents, 2309 single-race Latino respondents, and 2879 single-race Asian respondents (note that to account for class imbalance [explained below] I randomly undersample each racial group class to match the size of the group with the fewest respondents, Latinos). For Natinscape, my single-race sample size includes 46,179 single-race Whites, 5008 single-race Blacks, 4050 single-race Latinos, and 2760 single-race Asians (undersampled to match 2760 Asian-heritage respondents).

### *Feature Set Selection*

Given that the CMPS contains over 900 different variables for each respondent, this study established guidelines a priori regarding which variables would be included in the following analyses. Moreover, there are some variable I determined beforehand that cannot be used since they may bias the categorization models to provide some racial groups with undue advantage over others in their ability to be correctly classified by the machine learning models. Specifically, it was important to ensure that items included were fielded to each and every respondent and

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<sup>28</sup> Note that the Biracial sample sizes I am able to use for this analysis in particular is smaller than what is used in other cases. This is because, again, not all of the outcomes measured in previous analyses were included in every wave of the survey. In prior analysis I am able to simply remove Biracials from the separate analyses if the are NAs for a particular item, but the ensemble modeling require that there are no NAs for any participant among all of the items I include.

with identical phrasing so that the machine learning algorithms have a standardized set of features with which they can make equitable comparisons across each racial group. This goal is challenged given that 1) some modules of the CMPS randomly split sampled respondents for imbedded survey experiments, 2) some modules were fielded only to respondents who identified as being members of specific racial groups, and 3) some items included imputed responses to tailor the question to specific racial groups (e.g. “How often would you say public officials work hard to help [R’s racial group]?”). To account for these issues, two criteria for inclusion are that only variables which were asked to every respondent are included and only those which were presented identically to each respondent. These criteria similarly extend to the features included in the analysis using the Nationscape dataset.

Next, out of all variables which were fielded to all respondents and which were presented identically, for the CMPS I separate them into three different feature set groupings designed to explore separate aspects of racial groups’ politics. First, Feature Set A includes all variables which measure basely the latent attitudinal dispositions of each respondent as they pertain to politics and society, hereafter referred to as *attitudes*. Examples of attitudes are respondents’ ideology, policy preferences, racial attitudes, gender attitudes, political efficacy, or candidate evaluations, just to name a few. The purpose of Feature Set A is therefore to examine how Biracials stack up compared to their single-race counterparts in terms of the ways that they think about politics. In total, Feature Set A includes 421 different variables.

Feature Set B builds on the attitudinal variables included in Feature Set A but also includes all variables which measure respondents’ political behavior. Here, I make the distinction between active and passive behavior, in that the former denotes instances when a respondent reports either engaging in a specific physical or verbal act or expresses their intent to do so,

while the latter denotes occasions when a respondent reports being the subject of others' actions or behaviors, such as being pulled over by the police while driving or being contacted and encouraged to vote by a civic organization. This distinction between active behavior and passive behavior is important because the goal of Feature Set B is to examine how Biracials compare to their single-race counterparts in terms factors which are under their personal control and which impact American politics. Feature Set B contains a total of 553 variables.

Feature Set C includes all variables in the CMPS that meet the first two inclusion criteria of being fielded to each respondent and in an identical manner. Feature Set C builds on Feature Set B by also including passive behavioral variables as well as sociodemographic and contextual-level variables. The purpose of this final feature set is to provide the machine learning algorithms with the most inclusive and comprehensive dataset possible so that it may perform the broadest generalizations in terms of identifying what separates one racial group class from another in a particular classifying algorithm.

For the Nationscape dataset, I use only one feature set which follows all of the rules for inclusion above and which may be considered most similar to Feature Set C from the CMPS dataset. Given that there are simply not nearly as many covariates in the Nationscape dataset as there are in the CMPS data, it is most appropriate to aggregate them all into a single feature set which basely examines both participants' attitudes and behavior. All told, the Nationscape analysis uses 50 features<sup>29</sup>. These variables represent effectively all available political attitudinal

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<sup>29</sup>favorability\_police,democrat\_support,repUBLICAN\_support,same\_race\_marry,black\_whites\_date,racial\_resentment\_1,racial\_resentment\_2,racial\_resentment,sexist\_1,sexist\_2,sexist\_3,sexist\_4,sexism,build\_wall,against\_citizenship,anti\_dreamer,deport\_undocumented,anti\_immigrant,discrimination\_against\_whites,discrimination\_against\_blacks,discrimination\_against\_asians,discrimination\_against\_women,discrimination\_against\_men,favorability\_whites,favorability\_blacks,favorability\_latinos,favorability\_asians,approve\_trump,consider\_trump\_2020,favorability\_obama,favorability\_trump,favorability\_biden,news\_fox,news\_social\_media,news\_cnn,news\_msnbc,news\_npr,democrat,democrat\_dummy,liberal,political\_interest,democrat\_support,repUBLICAN\_support,own\_a\_gun,registered\_to\_vote,vote\_intent,years\_of\_education,income,female,lgbt.

and behavior variables on the Nationscape waves in which items measuring parent race were also included.

### *Feature Transformation*

Various efforts have been made to prepare the dataset for use with various machine learning algorithms. First, all factor variables have been recoded into numerical dummy variables (with one excluded category), the training and test sets have been randomly shuffled with respect to outcome classes (each training set contains equal numbers of rows pertaining to each racial group class), and each variable has been rescaled to take values either 0 or 1, or in between. Moreover, the original data contained different sample sizes of each racial group class. To account for this class imbalance, I use random undersampling so that there are equal amounts of respondents among each racial group class (Drummond & Holte, 2003; Weiss, 2004). The final sample sizes for under-sampled datasets are 2,309 respondents each who belong to White, Black, Latino, and Asian racial group classes for the CMPS, and 2,760 respondents each who belong to White, Black, Latino, and Asian racial group classes for Nationscape.<sup>30</sup> Undersampling is important here because if some classes have more data than others it may lead to an undue advantage among the larger racial group classes in their ability to be correctly predicted by the machine learning algorithms.

### *Empirical Strategy*

To estimate the thickness of racial group boundaries I employ an ensemble machine learning framework known as SuperLearner which uses cross validation to compute predictive

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<sup>30</sup> In the CMPS, single-race Latinos have the smallest sample size ( $n = 2309$ ), so I undersample each other class to match. For Nationscape, the smallest size is 2760 which represents single-race Asians.

accuracy scores for various candidate machine learning algorithms (Van der Laan, 2007; Polley, Rose, & Van der Laan, 2011). This method operates by separating my original dataset into 10 cross folds and then training various machine learning classification algorithms to predict the racial group class of each respondent (given preselected feature sets as input variables). Next, a specific weight or coefficient is assigned to each output of each model according to its performance on a pre-specified loss criterion terms ‘Risk’ which is the Root Mean Square Error. Such ensemble methods have been increasingly used in political science (Samii, Paler, & Daly, 2016; Grimmer et al., 2017; Broniecki et al., 2022), and are advantageous to using single predictive models for several reasons. Chiefly, the SuperLearner approach elides issues of model selection since it is generally impossible to know beforehand how well any single candidate machine learning algorithm will perform at a given predictive task (Van der Laan & Dudoit, 2003). Moreover, the combined models are consistently demonstrated to perform either as good or better than any single candidate algorithm at predicting out-of-sample outcomes, making it a fairly risk-free alternative to selecting a single algorithm. Specifically, the CMPS analyses uses LASSO, Random Forest, Kernel SVM, and logistic regression (Logit) for comparison. The Nationscape analyses use all of the former but also include Neural Networks and Linear Discriminant Analysis—both of which perform poorly and so are excluded from the high-dimensional CMPS analyses.

For the purposes of this study, I train SuperLearner models to engage in binary classification tasks using only Whites and one other single-race minority group in the training sets. For example, one SuperLearner model is trained on data which contains only—and an equal proportion of—respondents who are single-race Whites and respondents who are single-race Blacks, and the model is given the task of predicting whether the respondent is White or Black. I

then repeat this process by training a second model to predict whether the respondents are White or Latino, and again using a third model predicting whether the respondents are White or Asian. Each model is trained using the training data which is a withheld, randomly sampled 80% of the original dataset which is balanced by racial group class and shuffled.

For the first part of my analysis which concerns only single-race respondents, I apply the trained ensemble models to a test set (20% of observations withheld from the original dataset) to measure their performance at accurately predicting each single-race class. Key here, is that I comport the rate at which machine learning models accurately classify respondents in the test set with their correct racial group class as an empirical proxy for the theoretical distances between those racial groups on a stratified hierarchy. The reasoning behind this approach is that machine learning algorithms are methodologically predisposed to wade through the noise and signals associated with high dimensional feature sets to uncover the optimal functional form among those features to predict each racial group classification. In essence, each SuperLearner model will learn what best differentiates one racial group class from another, such that the degree to which each model can accurately classify members of those racial groups can serve as a measurement for how different or distanced those two racial groups are on a theoretical plane.

For example, if an ensemble model trained to predict class membership as either single-race White or single-race Black correctly classifies each respondent in the test set with a predictive accuracy rate of 95%, then the distance measure I use to quantify the theoretical distance between Whites and Blacks is simply .95. Moreover, it is important to note that ‘.95’ here is not intended to convey that Whites or Blacks in the real world are 95% different from each other, nor is it a meaningful value on its own. Rather this distance measure is only meaningful contextually in comparison to the rates at which other racial groups are differentiable

from Whites. For example, if the model categorizing Whites and Latinos is only accurate 90% of the time, then I would surmise that the theoretical distance between Whites and Blacks is larger (twice as large) as the distance between Whites and Latinos since the model predicting Whites and Latinos misclassified twice the number of respondents. Since each model contains the same sample size for each class and a nearly exhaustive list of covariates to work with, I argue that models which are less effective at properly classifying racial groups are less effective because in the real world these groups are truly more difficult to distinguish from one another in their politics. Using Whites as one of the outcome classes in each model is critical because it serves as the benchmark with which we can compare the relative differences between each racial group after computing the distance measure for each model.

The approach outlined above makes several assumptions which are important to address. First, it is important to acknowledge that this process is not purporting to conclusively grasp the essence of what it means to be a human being and a member of any racial group in general. Rather, this process endeavors merely to capture in some form the underlying differences between respondents who have identified with certain racial groups through certain survey items, and based only on the specific features available in each model. Again, when generalizing about whether some minority groups are more similar to Whites than other minority groups, it is important to emphasize that the inferences drawn are meaningful only with respect to the included set of measurable variables. For these reasons, it is important to remind the reader that the datasets include only items which were asked to each respondent in the exact same manner, and that hundreds of variables (at least for the CMPS) exist such that each model has an ample pool of variables to work with so that it can identify the dimensions that best separate each racial group from one another.

Lastly, this study also acknowledges that, while each respondent is presented with the exact same items, my identification strategy may be biased if, for example, there are more questions on the survey which are salient for Blacks than for Asians. While I acknowledge this possibility, I note that this concern is the main reason for choosing the CMPS as one of the datasets in this study—given that the CMPS includes over 900 variables it represents a nearly exhaustive list of items which are considered important for understanding how people think and act politically. For this reason, I also argue that any imbalance in the amount of questions which may be more salient to one racial group than another still constitutes a fair representation of the real political world since in reality racial groups differ in the amount of policies and attitudes with which they are linked.

For the second part of the analysis regarding Biracials, I similarly construct SuperLearner models trained to predict binary racial group classification (i.e. White or Black, White or Latino, White or Asian), but rather than use single-race respondents in the test data, I instead include only Biracials from the subgroup corresponding to the two single-race classes the model has been trained to predict. For example, after training a model to predict classification either as single-race White or single-race Black, I deploy that model onto a dataset comprised of only Black-White Biracial respondents. I then use the resulting predictions to get a sense for whether Black-White Biracials are characteristically more similar to single-race Whites or to single-race Blacks in terms of the feature set included in each iteration (I then repeat this process for Latino-White Biracials and Asian-White Biracials using the corresponding single-race training pairs). Moreover, the metric I rely on in the results is termed “Percent White” which is the averaged probability score that a Biracial subgroup will be categorized as White. I report Percent White



as a distance measure to guide the theoretical positioning of each Biracial subgroup on a numeric plane in between both of their single-race counterparts on each extreme.

For example, if the ensemble model trained to categorize each respondent as either White or Black provides a mean probability score of 10% for Black-White Biracials (this is akin to saying that the mean probability across all observations in the Black-White Biracial subsample is .1 in the predicted probability they are White), then I would surmise that Black-White Biracials are exceedingly more similar to Blacks than to Whites, and therefore positioned much nearer Blacks than Whites on a stratified line. Furthermore, given the assumptions outlined above in which Biracials may be harbingers for the trajectory of social and political assimilation in the future, this process yields important insight into differential speed at which each minority group is approaching assimilation into the U.S. mainstream.

## **Results**

### ***Part 1: Single-Race Classes and Ensemble Machine Learning Classification***

To measure the theoretical distances between Whites and Blacks, Whites and Latinos, and Whites and Asians, Table 6.1 below presents the results of machine learning algorithms trained to predict racial group classes among single-race pairings using the CMPS dataset. I use three separate paired samples to train the algorithms for binary class prediction. For example, the first column of responses labeled “White or Black” presents the results for machine learning algorithms given data that includes only single-race White respondents and single-race Black respondents, and which was given the task of predicting whether respondents in the test dataset (20% randomly selected and class balanced subset of the original data) were either White or

Black. ‘% Accuracy’ indicates the proportion of respondents that were accurately categorized in the testing data using the ensemble model.

Overall, results indicate that individual machine learning categorization was more successful at accurately differentiating Black respondents from White respondents than they were at differentiating Latinos or Asians from White respondents. For example, when the feature set included only attitudinal variables, 95.1% of respondents in the test set were correctly identified as either White (445/462 96.3% accurate) or Black (434/462 93.93% accurate) by the ensemble algorithm. However, the ensemble model trained to predict either White or Latino class membership was only successful at a rate of 88.0%, and the model trained to predict either White or Asian class membership was successful 90.4% of the time. Once again, each model contained an equal number of respondents from each racial group class, and contained the exact same sets of 420 different input variables that the machine learning models could use to learn how to most accurately differentiate between each racial group (553 variables in Feature Set B and 832 in Feature Set C). By comorting % accuracy as a distance measure, Blacks seem to be spaced farther away from Whites than Latinos or Asians are on a stratified hierarchy.

**Table 6.1: Machine learning classification results for single-race classes. Racial group class membership is measured via indicating two parents of the same racial group identity.**

**(Sample: All single-race individuals; Source: CMPS)**

	ML Algorithm	<u>White or Black</u>		<u>White or Latino</u>		<u>White or Asian</u>	
		Risk	Coef	Risk	Coef	Risk	Coef
Feature Set A: Attitudes	Logit	0.02	0.00	0.03	0.00	0.02	0.06
	Lasso	0.01	0.21	0.02	0.06	0.01	0.20
	Random Forest	0.01	0.07	0.02	0.15	0.02	0.11
	Support Vector Machines	0.01	0.72	0.02	0.79	0.01	0.64
	<b>Ensemble (% Accuracy)</b>	<b>95.1%</b>		<b>88.0%</b>		<b>90.4%</b>	
Feature Set B: Attitudes and Behavior	Logit	0.02	0.00	0.03	0.03	0.02	0.02
	Lasso	0.01	0.20	0.02	0.35	0.01	0.39
	Random Forest	0.01	0.06	0.02	0.08	0.01	0.08
	Support Vector Machines	0.01	0.74	0.02	0.53	0.01	0.51
	<b>Ensemble (% Accuracy)</b>	<b>95.2%</b>		<b>88.9%</b>		<b>90.5%</b>	
Feature Set C: All Variables	Logit	0.00	0.02	0.03	0.00	0.01	0.00
	Lasso	0.00	0.09	0.01	0.30	0.00	0.42
	Random Forest	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.04
	Support Vector Machines	0.00	0.87	0.01	0.69	0.00	0.54
	<b>Ensemble (% Accuracy)</b>	<b>99.0%</b>		<b>95.6%</b>		<b>98.4%</b>	

Next, Table 6.2 presents the results of ensemble machine learning models predicting racial group class membership among single-race participants using the Nationscape dataset. Similar to what was observed in the CMPS results above, the ensemble models are more successful at differentiating Blacks from Whites than they are at differentiating Latinos or Asians from Whites. Specifically, the percent of observations from the test set pertaining to the model predicting single-race Black or single-race White group membership which were accurately predicted was 84%. On the other hand, the models predicting Latino or White racial group membership and Asian or White membership were considerably less accurate, with scores of 71.8% and 77.3%, respectively.

Overall, the results presented in the CMPS and Nationscape datasets regarding the accuracy of machine learning models with single-race prediction demonstrate that Blacks tend to be the most differentiable from Whites. This evidence corroborates the argument that the racial group boundary separating Blacks from Whites is currently the thickest and most salient. Another interesting trend, however, is that while Asians are typically perceived to be more similar to Whites in their racial hierarchical positioning than are Latinos, the evidence presented here actually finds that Asians are more distanced from Whites than are Latinos.

**Table 6.2: Machine learning classification results for single-race classes. Racial group class membership is measured via indicating two parents of the same racial group identity.**

**(Sample: All single-race individuals; Source: Nationscape)**

ML Algorithm	<u>White or Black</u>		<u>White or Latino</u>		<u>White or Asian</u>	
	Risk	Coef	Risk	Coef	Risk	Coef
Logit	0.03	0.00	0.04	0.36	0.04	0.06
Lasso	0.03	0.00	0.04	0.00	0.04	0.00
Random Forest	0.03	0.32	0.04	0.12	0.04	0.26
Support Vector Machines	0.03	0.68	0.04	0.49	0.03	0.64
Neural Networks	0.03	0.00	0.05	0.04	0.04	0.04
Linear Discriminant Analysis	0.03	0.00	0.04	0.00	0.04	0.00
<b>Ensemble (% Accuracy)</b>	<b>84.0%</b>		<b>71.8%</b>		<b>77.3%</b>	

***Part 2: Biracial Classes and Ensemble Machine Learning Classification***

This next part of the analysis—and that which is the core of this chapter—investigates the degree to which Biracials from three subgroups (i.e. Black-Whites, Latino-Whites, and Asian-Whites) are predicted by machine learning algorithms to be classified either as White or with their minority counterpart racial group. In Table 6.3 below which presents the results for the CMPS, each algorithm was trained using single-race respondent pairs corresponding to the Biracial subgroup indicated in the columns below. For example, the algorithms corresponding to the Black-Whites column were trained using a training set of single-race Whites and single-race Blacks to predict whether the respondent was Black or White. However, in the testing phase I swap out data including single-race respondents with a dataset including only Black-White Biracials. In Table 6.3, ‘Risk’ again refers to the average root mean squared prediction error across all 10 cross folds regarding each models’ ability to accurately predict single-race class membership. ‘Coef’ corresponds to the weight applied to each candidate algorithm by the

ensemble learner in accordance with their predictive accuracy. Finally, ‘% White’ is the average of probability scores predicting White classification for all observations within each Biracial subgroup, and I comport this measurement as a distance measure assessing where Biracials stack up next to their single-race counterparts.

The most important take-away from Table 6.3 is that Black-White Biracials are the least likely subgroup to be classified as White. For example, regarding Feature Set B, the average probability score (predicting Whiteness) for Black-White Biracials is only 25.4%, much less than the 44.2% for Latino-White Biracials and 43.1% for Asian-White Biracials. More simply put, the average probability that any single respondent from the Black-White Biracial testing set would be categorized as Black is about three in four. However, Latino-Whites and Asian-Whites are only about six or seven percent more likely than random chance to be categorized with their minority racial group. This evidence suggests that Black-Whites are much more similar to their minority counterparts (and different from Whites) than are Latino-Whites or Asian-Whites. However, within the CMPS results, while Black-Whites are the most different from Whites, Latino-Whites and Asian-Whites are actually still more likely to be categorized with their racial minority groups than with Whites. This evidence could indicate that, for the time being, all three Biracial subgroups do tend to mirror their minority counterparts more, though Blacks simply tend to do so more strongly. However, the following results from Nationscape paint a different picture.

**Table 6.3: Results of machine learning classification models trained to predict single-race outcomes as applied to Biracial samples.**

**(Sample: All Biracials; Source: CMPS)**

ML Algorithm	<u>Black-Whites</u>		<u>Latino-Whites</u>		<u>Asian-Whites</u>	
	Risk	Coef	Risk	Coef	Risk	Coef
Logit	0.06	0.00	0.09	0.03	0.08	0.12
Lasso	0.04	0.00	0.08	0.00	0.07	0.13
Random Forest	0.06	0.13	0.09	0.17	0.09	0.17
Support Vector Machines	0.04	0.80	0.07	0.80	0.06	0.59
<b>Ensemble (% White)</b>	<b>27.0%</b>		<b>42.8%</b>		<b>36.3%</b>	
Logit	0.08	0.00	0.10	0.10	0.08	0.02
Lasso	0.04	0.05	0.07	0.12	0.06	0.40
Random Forest	0.06	0.09	0.09	0.16	0.09	0.13
Support Vector Machines	0.04	0.85	0.07	0.62	0.06	0.45
<b>Ensemble (% White)</b>	<b>25.4%</b>		<b>44.2%</b>		<b>43.1%</b>	
Logit	0.02	0.00	0.10	0.02	0.03	0.00
Lasso	0.01	0.16	0.04	0.40	0.01	0.69
Random Forest	0.03	0.03	0.06	0.03	0.03	0.02
Support Vector Machines	0.01	0.81	0.03	0.55	0.01	0.29
<b>Ensemble (% White)</b>	<b>22.2%</b>		<b>41.6%</b>		<b>31.9%</b>	

Table 6.4 presents the results of ensemble machine learning algorithms which classify Biracials either as members of their minority heritage group or as Whites using the Nationscape dataset. The bottom row of Table 6.4 presents the main results which show strikingly that Black-White Biracials are overwhelmingly more similar to their single-race minority counterparts (Blacks) than to Whites. On the other hand, Latino-Whites and Asian-Whites are not only less similar to their minority group counterparts (Latinos and Asians, respectively) than are Black-Whites, they are now actually more similar to Whites than they are to their minority counterparts.

Specifically, the average probability that any individual Black-White Biracial participant would be classified as White is a mere 22.4%, while the average probabilities that Latino-Whites and Asian-Whites would be classified as White are precipitously higher, a staggering 52.8% and 66.5%, respectively. Given that the original data included from Nationscape is vastly larger in sample size than is the data available from the CMPS, the empirical portrait painted here may be considered a more statistically reliable representation of the real-world Biracial population of

today. As a consequence, the finding here that Black-Whites are more similar to Blacks in their politics while Latino-Whites and Asian-Whites are more similar to Whites provides tremendously important implications for the status and future of racial group boundaries and for the assimilative trajectories of racial minority groups in the United States.

All told, these results support the assertion that the color line confronting Blacks is much more salient than the racial group boundaries separating Latinos and Asians from Whites. Since all respondents in these test sets are equally 50% White in terms of their indicated parentage, the differential rates at which they approximate Whiteness reveals the differential strength with which assimilative constraints are applied to different racial group heritages. The constraints applied to individuals with Black heritage are stronger than those for other racial minorities. Indeed, the color line surrounding Blacks seems likely to endure as the most salient boundary within the racial hierarchy, and foretells of continued exclusion from the politically dominant group in the U.S. as long as that group continues to be predicated on Whiteness.

Latinos and Asians, on the other hand, appear to be assimilating with Whites much more quickly than may have been previously considered. Taken together, the fact that Latinos and Asians are intermarrying with Whites at tremendous speeds and the fact that the children of these unions are more resemblant of Whites than of their minority counterparts, the evidence at hand portends of a future in which what it means to be White or what it means to be Latino or Asian may become increasingly blurred in terms of what they signify politically. Despite heading undoubtedly toward a more racially mixed future, it seems that America may in fact rediscover its passion for dichotomy in its racial and power structure, only having been paused temporarily while different racial groups choose their sides.

**Table 6.4: Results of machine learning classification models trained to predict single-race outcomes as applied to Biracial samples.**

**(Sample: All Biracials; Source: Nationscape)**

ML Algorithm	<u>Black-Whites</u>		<u>Latino-Whites</u>		<u>Asian-Whites</u>	
	Risk	Coef	Risk	Coef	Risk	Coef
Logit	0.03	0.00	0.04	0.36	0.04	0.06
Lasso	0.03	0.00	0.04	0.00	0.04	0.00
Random Forest	0.03	0.32	0.04	0.12	0.04	0.26
Support Vector Machines	0.03	0.68	0.04	0.49	0.03	0.64
Neural Networks	0.03	0.00	0.05	0.04	0.04	0.04
Linear Discriminant Analysis	0.03	0.00	0.04	0.00	0.04	0.00
<b>Ensemble Results (% White)</b>	<b>22.4%</b>		<b>52.8%</b>		<b>66.5%</b>	



## **Chapter 7:**

### **Summary and Discussion**

The goal of this dissertation has been to introduce and investigate a framework for understanding mixed-race individuals' political behavior. In the first chapter, I introduced a theory I call relative racial salience (RRS) which places racial context as one of the central factors of mixed-race individuals' construction and expression of racial identity, partisanship, political attitudes, and candidate evaluations. Over the course of chapters three and four, I used several nationally-representative datasets to confirm the existence of RRS as a real-world phenomenon. Specifically, chapter three examined the relationship between racial context and Biracials' identity choices and partisanship, and demonstrated robustly that Biracials are more likely to identify singularly with one of the racial groups from their heritage as that group increases numerically within a given contextual unit. Secondly, chapter three demonstrated that Biracials also tend to adopt the party affiliations most common to the racial group from their racial heritage that is most salient in their social context, as well as adopt the same levels of support for prominent political figures.

In chapter five I explored the degree to which racial context might exert a causal influence on Biracials' identity choices and attitudes. Using a conditional independence causal identification framework as applied to observational data, as well as a unique survey experiment, I demonstrate that variation in the salience of racial groups does indeed affect Biracials' identity choices and political outcomes according to the expectations of RRS. In the last empirical chapter, I use ensemble machine learning to provide a broad and comprehensive comparison between Biracials and their single-race counterparts. Ultimately, results of the machine learning analysis corroborate that Black-White Biracials are more similar to Blacks, while Latino-Whites

and Asian-Whites are more similar to White in terms of their current political characteristics. These results provide major insight into what the effect of current demographic trends may be on the future of American politics and racial group boundaries.

## **Summary of Empirical Chapters**

### *Chapter Three*

Chapter three begins by laying out the distribution of Black-White, Latino-White, and Asian-White Biracials' identity choices. Consistent with prior literature on identity choices (Liebler et al., 2017), Black-Whites overall tend to be the most likely subgroup to identify singularly as their minority racial group (singularly a Black), and the least likely to identify as White. Contrarily, Asian-Whites are the most likely to identify as White or Biracially (simultaneously as Asian and White). I then begin an investigation into whether or not evidence of RRS is present through the real political world. To do so, I use the 2015 Pew Survey of Multiracial Adults, the Nationscape dataset, the 2020 Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey, and both the North Carolina and Florida Voter files to investigate whether context indeed predicts identity choice, and to determine just how predictive that relationship is.

Using the Pew survey, I demonstrate indeed, Black-Whites, Latino-Whites, and Asian-Whites are all more likely to identify singularly with their minority group counterparts (i.e. as single-race Black, single-race Latino, or single-race Asian, respectively) as their minority group encompasses larger and larger proportions of their overall social context. This pattern repeats across all Biracial subgroups across all of the five datasets used, with two exceptions. First, in the Nationscape dataset, Asian-Whites actually tend to be less likely to identify singularly as Asian when their context becomes highly dominated by Asians. Secondly, Asian-Whites in

North Carolina do not demonstrate any consistent change in their identity choices as the proportions of Asians or Whites in their context varies. Here I present the first pieces of evidence that will reemerge as a pattern suggesting that Asian-Whites have a more complicated and decidedly less monotonic relationship with context than do Black-Whites and Latino-Whites.

Additionally, one of the unique features of the Pew dataset is that it measures context subjectively through participants responses to questions asking them about the racial composition of their friend network, neighborhood, and relatives with whom they spend time. This subjective measurement is in contrast to every other dataset which measures racial context using the census. Given that the Pew dataset provides specific information about each contextual agent, I conduct an analysis exploring the differences in predictive power between friends, neighbors, and family. Overall, one important trend emerges. Specifically, it seems that friends and family tend to have the largest relationship with Biracials' identity choices, while neighborhood context (at least as reported by each participant) is actually the least likely to be significant statistically in its correlation with identity choice. This, I point out, is expected given the centrality of close and intimate relationships such as those with friends and family to the socialization process. However, it is somewhat startling that neighbors have the weakest correlation here given that all non-Pew models in these chapters rely solely on the racial context of neighbors yet still find prove to be statistically related with extraordinary consistency.

The second section of chapter three presents my first foray into exploring the expressly political implications of the RRS framework among mixed-race individuals. Again, the Pew, Nationscape, and CMPS datasets demonstrate that Biracials tend to be increasingly Democratic as their racial context contains more minorities, and increasingly conservative in highly White spaces. Interestingly, results from the Nationscape dataset—which I often comport as the most

representative of the real-world Biracial population give its very large sample size—shows that Black-Whites and Latino-Whites not only vary in their partisanship across context, they actually tend to approximate the exact partisan affiliation estimates of either Whites or their minority group in spaces completely dominated by those groups. This finding helps substantiate the assertion via RRS that Biracials are not merely responding to context by varying in their attitudes, rather, they are essentially adopting the exact attitudes of the group which is most salient in their space.

Again, however, we observe that Asian-Whites tend to be the most distinctive in terms of their relationship with context. In the Pew survey, Asian-Whites have a null relationship with the aggregate measure of racial context (index of measurements of the racial composition of their friends, neighbors, and family) in terms of their partisanship. Moreover, while Asian-Whites in the Nationscape and CMPS do appear to increase in the propensity to be Democrats as their context becomes more Asian, the slope at which they increase across context is not consistently steeper than is the case for single-race Asians.

#### *Chapter Four*

The goal of chapter four was to demonstrate that racial context possesses a strong relationship both with Biracials' racialized attitudes as well as their evaluations of prominent political figures. Specifically, in the first section of chapter four I present the results regarding evidence of RRS among attitudes using the Pew, Nationscape and CMPS datasets. The patterns exhibited in the relationship between racial context and Biracials' attitudes continue to adhere to the expectations of RRS, in that they tend to have attitudes more similar to those of their single-race minority peers when their contexts are heavily dominated by their minority group, and

attitudes similar to Whites in contexts dominated by Whites. However, it is in this section on attitudes that I am able to demonstrate some of the more uncomfortable implications of RRS.

Specifically, in the first section of chapter four I remind readers that the popularized expectation of minority-White Biracials is that they remain allegiant to their minority group's political interests (Davis, 1991; Hickman, 1997; Young et al., 2021). This expectation is borne from the histories of discrimination suffered by racial minorities in the U.S.—histories which Biracials might also feel a connection to either from personal experience or via the experiences of their family members and recent ancestors. However, it is in this first section that I also demonstrate just how sharply minority-White Biracials can diverge from the politics of their minority counterparts. Specifically, in terms of Black-White Biracials the results show that they can be just as unsupportive of Blacks protesting, police reform, the Voting Rights Act, reducing inequality, fighting against voter suppression, or protesting in support of voter's rights as are single-race Whites when they exist in highly White spaces. Moreover, and not to make too much commotion over a single finding, Black-White Biracials are actually found to also be similar to single-race Whites in their evaluations of the Ku Klux Klan<sup>31</sup> when they exist in highly White spaces. Along the same lines, Latino-White Biracials also display a propensity to defect from what might be expected of them via hypodescent in that they are just as supportive of building a wall at the southern border and deporting undocumented immigrants as are single-race Whites when in White spaces.

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<sup>31</sup> It is important to note however that the KKK related item is not a feeling thermometer or Likert scale rating. Rather, item responses indicate a participant designating the KKK as one of three (out of a total of six) groups they dislike the most. Other groups were Anti-abortion activists, Black Lives Matter activists, Militant anti-fascists (such as Antifa), Democratic Socialists, and the Tea Party. Still, it is hard to picture any Black-White individual not including the KKK as one of the three out of six possible groups in this scenario that they dislike the most.

While there have always been racially conservative minorities or even racist minorities, the fact that statistically significant trends demonstrate that Black-White and Latino-White Biracials adopt even the most racially regressive of attitudes both consistency and systematically evokes a particularly visceral response to the implications of the power that context exerts on Biracials' politics. Surely through these findings more than anywhere else it is apparent that racial context indeed is a more powerful factor underlying Biracials' politics than has been previously considered. Moreover, the findings presented here that it is only Biracials who vary so widely in their attitudes across context, and not also single-race individuals, strongly corroborates the permeable nature of racial group boundaries for this emerging group.

Next, the second section of chapter four shows once again that the expectations of RRS are supported among Biracials' evaluations of prominent political figures and elected officials. The expected pattern is broadly consistent across Black-Whites and Latino-Whites, however Asian-Whites again slightly diverge. While Asian-Whites in the CMPS are actually the Biracial subgroup who vary most across context in their evaluations, results from the Nationscape dataset are conflicting and inconclusive. Moreover, this section investigated whether mixed-race voters might be additionally supportive of political figures with known Biracial heritage. However, no evidence exists among these models that mixed-race individuals are indeed especially supportive of mixed-race candidates. Rather, Biracial voters continue to adopt evaluations akin to those of the racial group most salient in their space.

### *Chapter Five*

The goal of chapter five was to explore the veracity of the causal claims underlying RRS. In doing so, chapter five makes several notable contributions to extant research both in terms of

social context scholarship as well as in scholarship exploring the politics of mixed-race individuals. In the first section, I deploy a unique method for testing the causal relationship between context and Biracials' partisanship using voter file data. Specifically, I modify my dataset to include only very young individuals who live in their parents' homes and so have not yet had a chance to self-select into residential contexts. Since issues of residential self-selection are largely elided, I then account for the next most plausible threats to causal identification which are the factors associated simultaneously with each voters' parents' choices of residential selection, as well as those parental traits which might influence their children's' partisanship. Again, given the unique construction of this dataset I am able to account for these two major parental trait confounders by conditioning on both the partisanship and vote propensities of each voter's parents<sup>32</sup>. Additionally, I use double robust estimation with machine learning (random forest) to overcome potential model misspecification issues and to provide a particularly rigorous test of the potentiality of a causal influence of context on partisanship.

Under these rigorous specifications, I not only continue to observe a non-null relationship between context and Biracials' partisanship, I actually observe major potential effects in that young Black-White Biracials are nearly 20 percentage points more likely to register as Democrats in completely Black census tracts than are those in completely White census tracts. Context is also not dismissed as a causal force on Latino-White Biracials' partisanship, though the relationship is much smaller (11 percentage points in min-max difference across context at most, but on average about three). Moreover, while some models did suggest a causal relationship between context and partisanship for Asian-White Biracials, the models were not

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<sup>32</sup> Indeed, given that one of political science's most consistent findings is that partisanship is very powerfully transmitted from parent to child (correlation of .6 approximately), the fact that I observe significant relationships between context and partisanship after conditioning on parental partisanship is highly corroborative of an "effect" of context.

sufficiently consistent such that they warrant inclusion alongside the robust evidence in support of RRS among Black-Whites and Latino-Whites.

In the second section of chapter four I reported the results of a survey experiment designed to mimic the effect of varying the racial composition of Black-White Biracials' social space. My specific treatment borrows from a method used in social psychology which has been demonstrated to prime the salience of different racial group identities among mixed-race participants (Gaither et al., 2015). Moreover, I augment the treatment design to incorporate components I believe are resemblant of the mechanisms at play during real-world contextual interactions. The results show—among other findings—that priming the salience of Biracials' White racial group leads to decreased rates of identifying singularly as Black, lower feelings of Black-identity centrality, weaker Black linked-fate, and more racially conservative opinions on racialized policies such as banning police chokeholds, welfare, gun control, and on attitude toward racism. Moreover, I demonstrate in two examples that racial identity does in fact partly mediate the effect of context (as proxied by the treatment) on Biracials' political attitudes.

### *Chapter Six*

In the final empirical chapter, I depart from an exploration of RRS and instead turn to an investigation of the general consequences of current demographic trends on the future of American politics and racial group boundaries. Specifically, I use ensemble machine learning which incorporates entire datasets to comprehensively compare Black-Whites, Latino-Whites, and Asian-Whites to both single-race Whites and to each Biracial subgroup's minority counterparts (i.e. Blacks, Latinos, and Asians, respectively) in terms of their political characteristics. Using classic assimilation theory as my theoretical lens, I argue that the degree to



which each Biracial subgroup is similar to either Whites or their minority counterparts will be highly revealing as to the status of the racial group boundaries today, as well as the assimilative trajectory of different minority racial groups in the future.

In terms of results, the last analysis of section of chapter six shows that Black-White Biracials are more similar to their minority counterparts (Blacks) in terms of their overall political attitudes and behaviors than they are to Whites. Conversely, Latino-Whites and Asian-Whites are more similar to Whites than they are to their minority counterparts (Latinos and Asians, respectively). Moreover, the analyses conducted in this last chapter take into account every single attitudinal and behavioral variable available in the CMPS and Nationscape datasets, and therefore provide the most robust and comprehensive portrait of Biracials' political characteristics to date. All told, this evidence suggests that the consequence of continuing trends in demographic change will be the diminished salience of the racial group boundary separating Latinos and Asians from Whites, and a reified the color line separating single-race Blacks from everyone else.

## **Discussion**

There are a number of important take-aways that I hope readers have gleaned from this dissertation. First and foremost, my goal has been to demonstrate that racial context is perhaps the single most important variable when it comes to explaining and predicting the politics of mixed-race individuals. Across chapters three and four, the analyses provided show with astonishing consistency that racial context is significantly correlated with Biracials' identity choices and politics. However, even more astonishing is that racial context often accounts for fairly incredible min-max differences between the predicted levels of outcomes at the highest

level of Minority-White Context (completely minority spaces) and the lowest levels (completely White spaces). In my review of existing research on Biracials' political or even social characteristics, I have never seen a variable so determinative in terms of the rates of variance they account for across several items. Accordingly, my hope is that future scholars recognize the importance of taking racial context into account whether endeavoring to conduct empirical investigations into their political behavior.

Moreover, one may find it additionally surprising that Biracials' political outcomes are not only varying in the general direction of the racial group which is relatively more salient in their context, but they regularly vary to exactly match the specific point estimates for each of their racial group counterparts when racial contexts dominated by those groups. This propensity for Biracials to regularly approximate the exact point estimates of their racial group counterparts in different spaces to me suggests that the psychologically-based mechanism asserted by RRS must be somewhat accurate. By this I mean Biracials must likely be exhibiting behavior consistent with self-categorization theory in that they are adopting the prototypical attitudes of the racial group with whom they activate membership.

The second most important take-away should likely be that even though minority-White Biracials in general—Black-Whites in particular—are expected to maintain identificational and political allegiance with their minority counterparts under the heuristics of hypodescent and the one-drop rule, this is not always the case. Indeed, despite increased awareness that mixed-race individuals are a prominent portion of America's population, most studies today continue to conceptualize race using traditionally discrete categories (e.g. Black, Latino, Asian, and White) and do not account for nominal Biracial heritage or even active Biracial identification. Instead, scholars to my knowledge tend to lump all those who checked the box for Black, Latino, or

Asian (even if in addition to checking one or more other boxes to describe their race) into one racial group. This practice is a consequence of the enduring legacy of the hypodescent, which has hopefully through the chapters of this dissertation been shown to be patently misleading. Indeed, even Black-White Biracials—those who might be considered the most arduously subjected to processes of hypodescent—have been shown to hold highly racially regressive, arguably racist, anti-Black political attitudes at times, and they do so consistently and systematically as a function of racial context.

Additionally, the lack of accounting for mixed-race heritage or identification leads me to question how much of what we know about race in political science might be biased. For example, scholars have struggled to reach consensus as to the nature and stability of partisanship among Latinos and Asians (Hopkins et al., 2022)—at least more so than they have for Blacks (White & Laird, 2020). Given the exploding proportion of part-Latino and part-Asian individuals in this country who are also mixed-race, has it been the case that not accounting for potential mixity among these groups has obscured more homogenous trends in their political qualities? Indeed, I find tremendous differences between the political characteristics of single-race Latinos and Latino-Whites and between single-race Asians and single-race Whites, however, I am aware of few studies that do not lump these groups into one. Moreover, the implications of this concern may be even larger for Black-Whites, those whom again are the minorities most likely throughout history and in social science to be assumed to be de facto Blacks. This is not to say that accounting for mixed-race heritage would drastically alter many of the important patterns we have unearthed as political scientists. However, as the mixed-race population increases it will become more and more important to account for these concerns in order to ensure we are extracting accurate inferences from our data.

Lastly, there are clear steps which need to be taken to develop this project. First, much more data collection is necessary in order to fully explore the potential causal relationships between all variables which are part of the RRS framework. Currently, resources available have largely limited me to conducting strenuous conditional independence models on observational data and to a single online survey experiment exploring the causal chain of RRS among only Black-Whites<sup>33</sup>. Therefore, the most crucial next steps are to engage in more survey experimentation which expands the current example to both Latino-Whites and Asian-Whites. Moreover, it would be wise for future survey experiments to also include an acceptance/rejection manipulation in addition to the White context/minority context treatment included in my design. Here, I remind the reader that on few occasions Asian-Whites exhibited a propensity to be pushed toward more racially regressive or Asian-antagonistic attitudes and identities as their context became more Asian. I speculate that this may be due to the known proclivity of Asian-Whites to experience social exclusion and otherization on behalf of their Asian peers when in highly Asian spaces. Incorporating an acceptance/rejection manipulation into the experimental design can help illuminate whether context-based treatment effects may be heterogenous as a function of the more specific nature of social interactions.

Secondly, in order to pinpoint the effect of racial context specifically, it would be wise to engage in field experiments which manipulate the racial composition of Biracials' social context in a real-world setting. While the barriers to such an experiment involving Biracials—a target population which is highly diffuse in their geographic clustering—are myriad, doing so is essential to parsing out the effect of the central mechanism of RRS. All told, I hope this

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<sup>33</sup> Though indeed, I have had my hands full with the sudden materialization of multiple large datasets containing mixed-race participants, and acknowledge that resources were likely available for more experimental testing should I have sought them more diligently.

dissertation lays the groundwork for a future project which displays once and for all the simple notion that racial context indeed is a powerful force for shaping the identities and politics of mixed-race individuals.

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