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White Racial Identity and Its Link to Support for Far-Right Groups: A Test of a Social Psychological Model

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Abstract: Prior research indicates that far-right political groups tend to be disproportionately composed of and supported by white people. Drawing off the group identity and developmental literature, we add theoretical clarity to this relationship. We argue that a salient white racial identity motivates people to explore social contexts that affirm the value of being white. Many of these contexts (e.g., conservative media) reinforce and instill beliefs in conspiracies, perceptions of racial threat, and a legitimization of group hierarchies, which are defining features of far-right ideologies. As people develop a strong white racial identity, they should thus view far-right groups more favorably. Drawing off survey data from a national US sample of 903 white young adults, we tested a mediation model positing that the effects of a strong white racial identity with support for four far-right groups (the January 6 protesters, QAnon, the Proud Boys, and the Oath Keepers) would be mediated by enhanced levels of conspiratorial ideation, perceived racial threat, and social dominance orientation. We found that the effects of white racial identity with support for all four groups were mostly or completely accounted for by these three mediating factors. We discuss the implications of this research for the racial identity and far-right groups literatures.

Keywords: white identity; racial identity; social dominance orientation; conspiratorial ideation; racial threat; far-right groups

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Citation: Grindal, Matthew, and Kristin Haltinner. 2023. White Racial Identity and Its Link to Support for Far-Right Groups: A Test of a Social Psychological Model. *Social Sciences* 12: 369. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci12070369

Academic Editor: Nigel Parton

Received: 23 April 2023
Revised: 12 June 2023
Accepted: 16 June 2023
Published: 25 June 2023

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1. Introduction

On 6 January 2021, a mass of protestors stormed the United States Capitol building, interrupting a joint congressional session over which Vice President Mike Pence presided. The insurrection occurred following a series of statements—written and spoken—by outgoing President Trump. In a rally earlier that day, Trump had called on Vice President Pence to reject the electoral victory of President Joe Biden. Ending his speech, Trump stated: "We're going to the Capitol . . . we're going to try and give them the kind of pride and boldness that they need to take back our country". While Trump returned to the White House, his supporters did, in fact, proceed to the Capitol.

This insurrection provides clear evidence of the emboldening and growth of right-wing activism during the Trump Administration. Scholars have pointed to three themes among far-right organizing: anti-intellectualism/anti-elitism, white nationalism, and authoritarianism (Bonikowski 2019), all of which Trump capitalized on during his campaign and term as President. In appealing to these perspectives through overt rhetoric such as casting Mexican migrants as criminals, Latino judges as biased, African nations as "shit hole countries", and mocking people with disabilities, President Trump created mainstream space for far-right movements.

Even after President Trump lost reelection, the far right continues to hold disproportionate power in national politics. For example, in January of 2023, the House of Representatives was due to select a speaker. In an atypical display of party division, far-right Republicans blocked the nomination of Kevin McCarthy, whom they viewed as too

mainstream. This move forced him to make concessions to this wing of the party, which others see as "just the beginning" of what House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries calls the "extreme MAGA [Make America Great Again] Republican agenda". Ultimately, after 15 rounds of voting and multiple concessions, McCarthy eventually secured the speakership (Mueller 2023).

Concurrent with the increase in the political presence of the far right is an increase in scholarly attention to the phenomenon. Cas Mudde, for example, in the 2019 book *The Far Right Today*, examines what Mudde calls "the fourth wave" of far-right mobilization in post-war America. The author examines the ideologies, organizations, key figures, activities, and foci of contemporary far-right mobilization. Other scholars examine the impact of social forces regarding culture, inclusion, and unity in the United States and shifting demographics and ideology on right-wing mobilization (Cooper and Lamont Jenkins 2019), while others focus on online discourses (Duvall 2020) or resistance to such movements (Mirrlees 2021). One notable theme from this literature is the fact that nearly all people who endorse far-right beliefs are white (Mudde 2019). This may be due in part to ideologies such as white nationalism, present in far-right groups, affirming the value of their racial identity (Blee and Creasap 2010; Perliger 2020).

In our paper, we build on this existing literature by examining the social psychological mechanisms that account for why white people with a strong racial identity show greater support for groups on the contemporary far right. We draw on social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979), developmental models of identity (Phinney 1989), and recent work on white identity (Jardina 2019) to argue that people attain a strong racial identity through an exploration process motivated by a desire to affirm the value of their racial group. Within the current U.S. context, we argue that, for white people, this entails selectively navigating social and political contexts that foster greater levels of conspiratorial ideation, perceived racial threat, and social dominance orientation—three traits that prior research indicates are especially salient among people who support (and are members of) far-right groups (Ekman 2022; Haltinner and Hogan 2018; Van Assche et al. 2019). Thus, people with a strong white racial identity should exhibit greater support for far-right political groups due to having enhanced levels of conspiratorial ideation, social dominance orientation, and perceived racial threat. Drawing off a national U.S. sample of white young adults, we use regression analyses to test this mediation model with respect to support for four far-right groups (the January 6th protestors, QAnon, the Proud Boys, and the Oath Keepers). By doing so, we theoretically elaborate on the literature examining the impact of a strong white racial identity in the current U.S. political context (Armaly et al. 2022; Jardina 2019; Long 2022).

2. Relevant Literature

Research on right-wing mobilization has identified a series of social identities and ideologies central to such engagement. These belief structures include an adherence to a conspiracy citing an urgent need to protect the United States and its sovereignty from actors seeking to undermine it—most notably "global elites", the United Nations, or other potential threats (Diamond 1995; Blee and Creasap 2010; Haltinner 2018). A second perspective central to right-wing mobilization is the belief in an idyllic past—a time in which life was better for middle-class white men—and a need to preserve it (Diamond 1995; Blee and Creasap 2010; Haltinner 2018). In part, the perceived threat to the relative power of white men is blamed on the advances of people of color during and following the Civil Rights Movement, leading many adherents to argue that white people are victims of this societal advancement to a more egalitarian society.

As we examine here, participation in far-right mobilization has been associated with adherence to certain conspiracies and a sense that white people are hurt by societal advances. In our work, we assess both perspectives in contemporary far-right mobilization but also consider the degree to which one's identification as white (racial identity) and one's

acceptance of and support for sustained social hierarchies (social dominance orientation) affects these perceptions and subsequent support for far-right mobilization.

2.1. Who Supports Far-Right Groups?

Certain demographic factors are correlated with membership in or support for far-right movements. Support for far-right mobilization is disproportionately found in rural communities (Kimmel and Ferber 2004). Adherents and supporters are more likely to be lower middle class, straight, white, and men (Kimmel and Ferber 2004; Mudde 2019). They also tend to have lower levels of education (Mudde 2019). Age is one area in which scholars identify variation. Groups outside the political system tend to have younger members, while far-right political parties tend to be dominated by older men (Mudde 2019). Religion is difficult to associate with far-right support in that it varies based on the organization. Militia and Patriot groups tend to attract supporters who are less religious, while pro-life groups attract people who strongly identify with their religious practices (Mudde 2019; Perliger 2020).

The leaders of these groups tend to, like their adherents, be white, straight, men. They also tend to be older, express authoritarian traits, use crude language, and support violence (Mudde 2019). People associated with committing violent acts in association with far-right ideologies also tend to be young white men (late 20s) without children who had prior criminal records (Perliger 2020).

2.2. Conspiratorial Ideation

Conspiratorial ideation is the predisposition to believe that socially and politically influential events are being controlled and manipulated by a small group of individuals acting in their own self-interest (Uscinski et al. 2016). Conspiratorial ideation has been studied as a part of far-right social movements. In 1965, historian Richard Hofstadter published a widely read article in Harper's Magazine titled "The Paranoid Style in American Politics". In this essay, Hofstadter (1965) reflects on the time period's rise in right-wing extremism and, what he sees as "exaggeration, suspiciousness, and conspiratorial fantasy". Hofstadter traces the history of such "paranoia", looking at such phenomena as the anti-Masonic movement and associated Illuminati conspiracies and anti-Catholicism of the 1800s. He identifies a shared sense of dispossession in these movements and the right-wing extremism of the 1960s.

Daniel Bell, a contemporary of Hofstadter, writes further on this phenomenon. In his well-renowned essay "The Dispossessed", Bell reflects upon a perception of the 1960s radical right that the United States government was conspiring to facilitate a communist takeover. He attributes this to a perception amongst adherents that they are losing power in society—a situation they blame on those who have the ability to dispossess others (Bell 2017).

The belief in a global conspiracy was perhaps most clear in the Patriot and Militia movements of the 1990s and 2000s. For decades, to that point, far-right adherents had feared a "New World Order"—a belief that elitists of varying types sought to undermine American sovereignty. Berlet and Lyons (2000) highlight the variety of agents identified by groups as organizing these conspiracies—federal officials, law enforcement, Jewish people and institutions, abortion providers, environmentalists, gay rights organizers, people of color, immigrants, and other entities.

While the threat to U.S. sovereignty has remained a central conspiracy among the far right, there are other associated conspiracies in operation as well. Adherents fear a "gun grab" by the political left (Berlet and Lyons 2000). They subscribed to the Y2K conspiracy that global computer systems would crash when the year changed to 2000 (Perliger 2020). The narrative of anti-immigrant militia movements entailed members of the U.S. government conspiring with global elitists for a possible requisition of the U.S. southwest by Mexico (Haltinner 2016; Shapira 2013). The Tea Party Patriots contended that environmentalists and other "elitists" were conspiring to take over the United States by

enacting restrictive environmental laws (Haltinner and Hogan 2018). Finally, contemporary climate change skeptics believe that climate change is a myth to allow global elitists such as Al Gore and/or the United Nations to gain wealth, power, and control in the United States (Sarathchandra and Haltinner 2021).

2.3. Perception of White People as Victims

Beyond claiming that the United Nations, global elitists, and others are involved in a conspiracy to undermine U.S. sovereignty and the associated rights of citizens, right-wing movements blame those with less social power as well. These groups have roots in repressive populist organizing in which movements use their antipathy toward and scapegoating of "socially oppressed groups" to explain the sense that they are disadvantaged in society, claiming they are threatened by the social, political, or economic advancements of historically marginalized populations in American society (Lipset and Raab 1970). This sense then serves as justification for their efforts to maintain or strengthen privilege and power (Berlet and Lyons 2000, p. 1). As a result, right-wing activists broadly seek "preservationism" and aim to halt or reverse perceived social changes (Lipset and Raab 1970, p. 19). Adherents perceive things such as immigration, demographic shifts, and the associated decline in the relative size of the white population as a vital threat to white people (Bai and Federico 2021; Isom et al. 2021b).

This finding—that right-wing movements adhere to an ideological perspective that seeks to "preserve" an untenable past—remains at the core of research on right-wing social movements today (McVeigh 1999; Ferber and Kimmel 2004). In the contemporary moment, this perceived victimhood of white men leads right-wing activists and sympathizers to support a regressive political agenda. This is perhaps best illustrated in Donald Trump's campaign slogan—"make America great again"—which nearly mirrored Ronald Reagan's slogan—"let's make American great again". Far-right movements seek to preserve a vaguely defined idyllic past in which white supremacy, heterosexuality, and patriarchy were dominant (McVeigh 1999; Ferber and Kimmel 2004; Diamond 1995; Blee and Creasap 2010; Haltinner 2018).

This narrative is continued in the contemporary moment and is embraced by the political right (Neiwert 2017). Far-right support for President Trump's presidency latched on to his promises to improve the lives of middle- and working-class white people through overt discrimination against people of color. Trump's comments that he would deport Muslim people, his encouragement that people "rough up" members of the Black Lives Matters movement, and the language he used to describe migrants make up what Neiwert (2017) calls "eliminationist rhetoric", which he identifies as the "backbone of Trump's appeal" to his supporters. He extends this by directly capitalizing on the sense of victimization held by the mostly white population who support him.

This narrative—that white people are victims of advancements or conspiracies by historically marginalized populations, the left, or international entities—is also evident in the rhetoric of contemporary right-wing political movements. For example, the January 6th protestors claimed to be the victims of Democrats, the Black Lives Matter Movement, and others, all of whom (they perceive) sought to steal the election and take power away from white conservatives (Grant 2022). Similarly, members of the Oath Keepers view the federal government (primarily) and immigrants, Muslims, and others (secondarily) as seeking to undermine the rights of "patriots", such as themselves (Jackson 2020). The Proud Boys, too, cite people of color, feminists, and gay people for their perceived loss of power (Park 2022; Stern 2019). Finally, QAnon began by touting the conspiracy that satanic, international elites sought to take over the United States through a secret government operative called "Q" (Forberg 2023).

2.4. Preference for Group Hierarchies

Research in the social dominance theory literature indicates that supporters of far-right groups also have a preference for group hierarchies. Social dominance orientation (SDO) is

a personality construct that taps into one's support for group-based hierarchies (i.e., white supremacy), most notably those that favor their own ingroup, and policies that reinforce those vertical rankings (Pratto et al. 1994). Since race forms a basis for social and economic hierarchies (Melamed et al. 2019), it should come as no surprise that it is correlated with SDO. Prior research finds white people have higher levels of SDO than people of color (Schmitt et al. 2003).

A central tenet of social dominance theory is that SDO should be more prevalent among those who identify as politically conservative (Pratto et al. 1994). Many of the social and economic beliefs held by mainstream political conservatives, such as support for free market capitalism and the maintenance of traditional gender roles, tacitly legitimize inequality and group hierarchies (Pratto et al. 1994). Indeed, prior research has found an association of SDO with political conservatism and politically conservative stances (Duriez and Van Hiel 2002; Pratto et al. 1994; Wilson and Sibley 2013).

It is thus not surprising to see a link between SDO and support for far-right ideologies and groups, which explicitly advocate for group-based inequality with ideologies such as white supremacy (Hartzell 2018) and male supremacy (Park 2022). Research consistently finds a strong, robust relationship between social dominance orientation and belief in right-wing authoritarian practices and principles (Duriez and Van Hiel 2002; Mirisola et al. 2007; Roccato and Ricolfi 2005 Van Hiel and Mervielde 2002). In addition, in a meta-analysis, Van Assche et al. (2019) found SDO was associated with an assortment of far-right indicators (i.e., support for far-right candidates and policies) across five countries. Examining more extremist principles associated with the far right (Sweeney and Perliger 2018), SDO has been linked to an endorsement of political violence and a greater willingness to legitimize radical political action (Vegetti and Littvay 2022) as well as overtly racist attitudes (Van Hiel and Mervielde 2005).

2.5. Theoretical Model

Drawing off identity development frameworks, social identity theory, and recent work in white identity, we propose a theoretical model that examines the collective impact of white racial identity, perceived racial threat, social dominance orientation, and conspiratorial ideation with support for far-right groups.

According to social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel and Turner 1979), one's racial identity is more than a categorical label. It reflects the prevalence of one's race in their self-concept—typically conceptualized along three dimensions: cognitive (importance of one's race compared to other identities), emotional (affective ties to other racial group members), and evaluative (positive or negative feelings for one's racial group) (Cameron 2004; Tajfel and Turner 1979). SIT posits that people are driven by a self-enhancement motivation to view themselves favorably compared to others (Tajfel and Turner 1979). Thus, when a racial identity is salient and the primary self-referent, people with a strong racial identity will view their racial group favorably compared to others. Under conditions of hostility and threat to one's racial group, this ingroup bias may generate feelings of hostility and resentment for other racial groups (Brewer 1999).

Identity development scholars have elaborated on this enhancement process by discussing how racial identities form and emerge within social contexts (Cross 1991; Phinney 1989). When the value of one's racial identity is under threat with negative evaluations, people may explore the meanings of their racial group membership to restore clarity and affirm the value of their racial group (Phinney 1989). This process has been most notably studied with people of color, whose social status often exposes them to frequent prejudice and discrimination (Quintana 2007). White people, on the other hand, have historically been insulated from such threats (Jardina 2019). Despite holding a dominant position in the U.S. racial hierarchy, this race-based privilege has been legitimated and mainstreamed through conservative ideologies such as colorblindness, meritocracy, and laissez-faire capitalism (Bonilla-Silva 2006), which minimize the salience of whiteness in the lives of white people and make their race largely an invisible attribute (Jardina 2019). As such, it should

come as no surprise that people of color have typically reported stronger racial identities than white people (Phinney and Alipuria 1990; Stets and Fares 2019).

Recent scholarship, however, suggests a shifting trend in white identity (Jardina 2019). With more profound structural threats to the U.S. racial hierarchy, the status of white people's racial identity is coming into question. Jardina (2019) identifies three structural factors responsible for this shift: the election of Barack Obama, increased immigration from Latinx and Asian countries, and the changing racial demographics of the United States where white people are projected to be in the statistical minority by the middle of this century (Vespa et al. 2020). In addition, there has been a growing social movement asking white people to understand and confront their racial privilege, often dispelling the ideologies that have legitimized the U.S. racial hierarchy from which they benefit (DiAngelo 2018). With these structural and cultural challenges, the racial identity of white people is becoming increasingly visible and salient (Jardina 2019).

Consistent with models of identity development, we suggest that white people are increasingly responding to these threats by exploring social and political contexts that restore clarity and value to their white identity, in particular conservative media (Grindal et al. 2023). In addition to reinforcing the legitimatizing beliefs that tacitly justify the U.S. racial hierarchy from which white people benefit, conservative media have increasingly platformed far-right extremist ideologies and groups (DiMaggio 2021). As such, many of the ideological features of far-right groups detailed above (conspiratorial ideation, perceived racial threat, and social dominance orientation) are being legitimated through these news outlets. Prior work indicates that trust in conservative media is correlated with a greater social dominance orientation and perception of discrimination against white people (Isom et al. 2021a), and that conservative news media offer coverage of political and social events that reinforces the ideas of white people being mistreated (DiMaggio 2021; Ekman 2022) and a distrust of institutional elites (e.g., scientific, educational, and governmental) consistent with conspiratorial ideation (Cassino 2016).

One prominent narrative that exemplifies the emergence of all three ideological features in conservative media is the "great replacement theory". This narrative argues that political and social elites are shrewdly increasing their own political power by using immigration policy to "replace" white people and European culture with people of color and non-European culture (Obaidi et al. 2022). Once confined to the fringes of the far right, this narrative is now being embraced by mainstream political leaders and the conservative media, most notably by well-known journalist Tucker Carlson (Ekman 2022). This narrative first and foremost creates the impression that white people and European culture are experiencing an existential threat (perceived racial threat). Further, this threat is being propagated by a small group of political elites furthering their own power at the expense of traditional U.S. values (conspiratorial ideation). Lastly, it tacitly assumes that the existing racial hierarchy under threat is not racist, but rather a natural product of colorblind processes (e.g., the free market) (social dominance orientation).

In sum, we argue that with growing structural and cultural threats to the existing racial hierarchy in the United States, white people are perceiving a threat to their racial identity. For many white people, this has triggered an exploration into the meanings of their racial group through social and political contexts (most notably conservative news media) that bring clarity and value to being white. This process entails exposure to content that reinforces and amplifies one's sense of perceived racial threat and fosters feelings of conspiratorial ideation and a stronger social dominance orientation, thus making those stronger in racial identity more supportive of the far right. Analytically, this model proposes that, for white people, the effect between racial identity and support for far-right groups is indirect and mediated by perceived racial threat, conspiratorial ideation, and social dominance orientation. That is, racial identity is associated with support for far-right groups only insofar as it enhances the levels of these three mediator variables. The conceptual model is illustrated in Figure 1 (Mai et al. 2022). Thus, we hypothesize:

H1. *Racial identity is positively associated with perceived racial threat.*

H2. *Racial identity is positively associated with conspiratorial ideation.*

H3. *Racial identity is positively associated with social dominance orientation.*

H4. *Perceived racial threat is positively associated with support for far-right groups.*

H5. *Conspiratorial ideation is positively associated with support for far-right groups.*

H6. *Social dominance orientation is positively associated with support for far-right groups.*

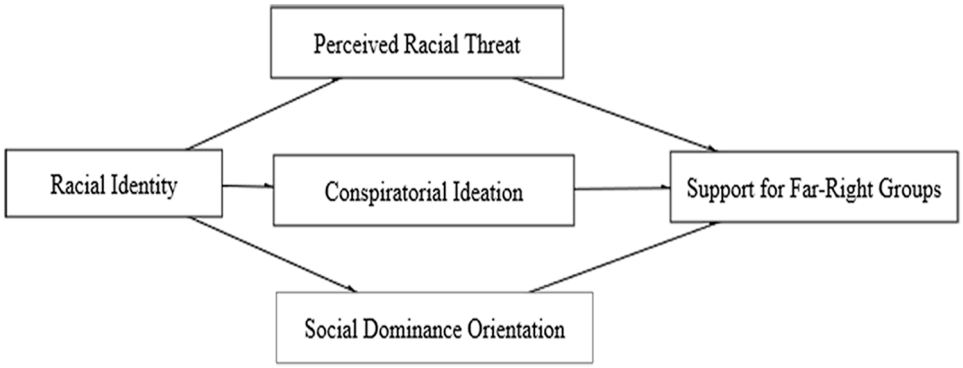

Figure 1. Conceptual model.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Data and Sample

The survey data are drawn from a national study examining how constructs related to ethnicity and race (e.g., ethnic-racial socialization and ethnic-racial identity) influence a variety of psychological, political, and behavioral outcomes of white young adults (this dataset was previously used and described in Grindal et al. (2023). Due to the specific nature of the research questions being addressed by the team collecting the data, they used a purposive sample, which only included people who self-identified exclusively as white, were raised by white parents, were between the ages of 18 and 25, were born in the United States, resided in a US state, and were not adopted. Qualtrics was contracted to distribute the survey after the research team secured IRB approval. Qualtrics distributed the self-administered survey to people in their online panels in January and February of 2022. Qualtrics scrubbed the data several times during data collection to remove bad cases (e.g., straightlining and abnormally fast completion times). Qualtrics delivered the anonymized dataset containing 1009 respondents shortly after the completion of data collection.

Of the full sample of 1009 respondents, 905 provided complete data for our measures: attitudes toward the four far-right groups, racial identity, perceived racial threat, social dominance orientation, conspiratorial ideation, and the control variables. These respondents served as our analytical sample (N = 905). In terms of gender makeup of the sample, 55% identified as women, while 45% identified as men. Respondents had a median education level of high school, while median levels of parental education varied between high school (father) and vocational/associates degree (mother). The mean age was 21.71 (SD = 2.30). About 15% were married, and 23% identified as evangelical Christian.

3.2. Measures

Support for Far-Right Groups: We measured support for four far-right groups that have received heavy media coverage over the past 2–3 years and would thus be most familiar to the survey respondents: the January 6th protestors, QAnon, the Proud Boys, and the Oath Keepers. Respondents were asked, "How strongly do you support or oppose the beliefs and actions of the following groups?". Each of the four groups was listed, and respondents were given six response options. Five response options were measured with a Likert scale ranging from "strongly support" (5) to "strongly oppose" (1), with a higher score reflecting greater support for the group.

In addition, a sixth option stated, "I'm not familiar enough with this group to have an opinion". Respondents who said they were not familiar enough with a given group to have an opinion were excluded from the analyses for that group. The following subsamples were included in the analyses for each group: January 6th protesters (n = 670), QAnon (n = 567), the Proud Boys (n = 451), and the Oath Keepers (n = 584).

Conspiratorial Ideation: We used a previously validated scale to measure conspiratorial ideation (Uscinski et al. 2016). The scale measures an orientation toward believing in conspiracies generally as opposed to belief in a specific conspiracy (e.g., "Big events like wars, and the outcomes of elections are controlled by small groups of people who are working in secret against the rest of us"). Each item had five response options, ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). The four items were averaged into a scale ranging from 1–5, with a higher score indicating stronger conspiratorial ideation ($\alpha = 0.74$).

Social Dominance Orientation: Social dominance orientation was measured with a previously validated four-item scale (Pratto et al. 2013). Respondents first read the following preamble: "There are many kinds of social groups in the world: men and women, racial groups, ethnic and religious groups, nationalities, political factions. How much do you support or oppose the following ideas about groups in general?". The respondents then answered two items showing a preference for group hierarchies (e.g., "Superior groups should dominate inferior groups") and two items showing a preference for group equality (e.g., "Group equality should be our ideal"). There were five response options for each item, ranging from "strongly oppose" (1) to "strongly support" (5). The two items reflecting a preference for group equality were reverse-coded to reflect a preference for group hierarchies, or a stronger social dominance orientation. The items were then averaged to create a scale ranging from 1–5, with a higher score reflecting a stronger social dominance orientation ($\alpha = 0.77$).

Perceived Racial Threat: We measured perceived racial threat with a modified version of a previously validated 16-item perceived discrimination scale (PEDQ-CV; Brondolo et al. 2005). The items measured four dimensions of racial discrimination experienced directly by the individual respondent: exclusion/rejection (e.g., "Someone made you feel like an outsider because of your appearance"), stigmatization/devaluation (e.g., "Someone hinted you were dishonest"), discrimination at work and school (e.g., "Your boss or supervisor was unfair to you"), and threats/acts of aggression (e.g., "Someone threatened to hurt you"). Respondents first read the following preamble: "Over the past three months, how often did you have the following experiences because of your race?" This was followed by the 16 items. Each item had five Likert-scale response options, ranging from "never" (1) to "very often" (5). The items were averaged into a scale ranging from 1–5, with a higher score reflecting greater levels of perceived racial threat ($\alpha = 0.97$).

Racial Identity: Racial identity was measured with a six-item scale modified from prior social identity theory research (Cameron 2004). The scale measured the degree of strength of one's racial identity along three dimensions: cognitive, affective, and evaluative. Two items measured the importance of race to one's self-concept (e.g., "In general, being a member of my racial group is an important part of my self-image"). Two items measured the affective ties with other people in one's racial group (e.g., "I feel strong ties to other members of my racial group"). Two items measured the positive or negative evaluation of one's racial group (e.g., "Generally, I feel good when I think about myself as a member of my racial group"). Each item had five response options, ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). The items were averaged to create a scale ranging from 1–5, with a higher score indicating a stronger racial identity ($\alpha = 0.76$).

Controls: The following variables were included in the multivariate tests as demographic and theoretical control variables: conservatism, religiosity, identification as an evangelical Christian, gender, parental education, respondent's education, age, and marital status. Conservatism was measured with a single question asking what best described the respondent's political ideology, with response options ranging from "strongly liberal" (1)

to "strongly conservative" (7). Religiosity was measured with a single question asking how often the respondent attended religious services, with response options ranging from "never" (1) to "more than once a week" (9). Identification as an evangelical Christian was measured dichotomously (no = 0, yes = 1). Given the small number of respondents who identified outside the gender binary, gender was measured dichotomously with men as the reference group (men = 0, women = 1). Age was measured in years. Marital status was measured dichotomously (not married = 0, married = 1). Education, mother's education, and father's education were measured with the same ordinal response options, ranging from "Less than eighth grade" (1) to "Masters degree or higher degree" (6). Parental education was measured as an additive scale of mother's and father's education, with a value ranging from 2–12.

3.3. Analytical Strategy

We performed OLS regression and seemingly unrelated regression to test the theoretical model for each of the four far-right groups. The analytical steps were identical for the analysis of each group. First, we used OLS regression to test the direct effect of racial identity on support for the given far-right group net of the control variables and excluding the three mediators. Although we hypothesized the presence of an indirect effect between racial identity and support for far-right groups, this first step provided evidence of a baseline association between racial identity and support for each far-right group, thus warranting further theoretical elaboration and a consideration of the mediating effects of conspiratorial ideation, social dominance orientation, and perceived racial threat.

Second, we ran seemingly unrelated regression (Zellner 1962) to test the direct pathways in the mediation model for each of the far-right groups. Seemingly unrelated regression simultaneously estimates multiple regression equations and correlates each equation's error term with those of the other equations. For each far-right group, we estimated four equations: (a) conspiratorial ideation as a function of racial identity and the controls, (b) social dominance orientation as a function of racial identity and the controls, (c) perceived racial threat as a function of racial identity and the controls, and (d) support for the given far-right group as a function of racial identity, conspiratorial ideation, social dominance orientation, perceived racial threat, and the controls.

Third, we calculated and tested the indirect effects of racial identity on support for each of the four far-right groups via conspiratorial ideation, social dominance orientation, and perceived racial threat. We calculated each indirect effect by multiplying its two constituent pathways. We then used Sobel (1982) tests to calculate the statistical significance of the indirect effects.

4. Results

4.1. Summary Statistics

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviations of the study variables. Overall, the respondents had low-to-moderate levels of support for the far-right groups: January 6th protestors (M = 2.27, SD = 1.27), QAnon (M = 2.42, SD = 1.35), Proud Boys (M = 2.67, SD = 1.32), and Oath Keepers (M = 2.28, SD = 1.32). Concerning the theoretical variables, respondents reported moderate levels of racial identity (M = 3.07, SD = 0.78) and conspiratorial ideation (M = 3.18, SD = 0.79), and low levels of social dominance orientation (M = 2.22, SD = 0.87) and perceived racial threat (M = 1.83, SD = 1.00).

4.2. Tests of Theoretical Model

Table 2 shows the test of the theoretical model of support for the January 6th protestors. The first column shows the test of the baseline association between racial identity and support for the January 6th protestors without accounting for any of the mediators. This analysis showed a positive association between racial identity and support for the January 6th protestors (b = 0.26, $p < 0.001$). The next three columns show the effects of racial identity, with each of the three mediators. Racial identity was associated with increased

conspiratorial ideation ($b = 0.13$, $p < 0.01$), social dominance orientation ($b = 0.12$, $p < 0.01$), and perceived racial threat ($b = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$). The last column shows the effects of the three mediators and racial identity on support for the January 6th protestors. The three mediators were each found to increase support for the January 6th protestors: conspiratorial ideation ($b = 0.16$, $p < 0.01$), social dominance orientation ($b = 0.32$, $p < 0.001$), and perceived racial threat ($b = 0.29$, $p < 0.001$). In addition, after accounting for the mediators, racial identity continued to be directly associated with greater levels of support for the January 6th protestors ($b = 0.11$, $p < 0.05$).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables.

	Mean	SD	Min	Max	N
Support for Jan 6th Protestors	2.27	1.27	1	5	670
Support for QAnon	2.42	1.35	1	5	567
Support for Proud Boys	2.67	1.32	1	5	451
Support for Oath Keepers	2.28	1.32	1	5	584
Racial Identity	3.07	0.78	1	5	905
Conspiratorial Ideation	3.18	0.79	1	5	905
Social Dominance Orientation	2.22	0.87	1	5	905
Perceived Racial Threat	1.83	1.00	1	5	905
Conservatism	3.97	1.77	1	7	905
Religiosity	3.06	2.52	1	9	905
Evangelical	0.23	0.42	0	1	905
Gender (Woman)	0.55	0.50	0	1	905
Parental Education	7.88	2.11	2	12	905
Age	21.71	2.30	18	25	905
Education	3.63	0.96	1	6	905
Married	0.15	0.36	0	1	905

Table 2. Test of Theoretical Model for Support for the January 6th Protestors: Coefficients from Regression Analyses ($N = 670$).

	Outcome Variable				
Independent Variable	**Support for January 6th Protestors**	**Conspiratorial Ideation**	**Social Dominance Orientation**	**Perceived Racial Threat**	**Support for January 6th Protestors**
Racial Identity	0.26 ***	0.13 **	0.12 **	0.31 ***	0.11 *
Conspiratorial Ideation	-	-	-	-	0.16 **
Social Dominance Orientation	-	-	-	-	0.32 ***
Perceived Racial Threat	-	-	-	-	0.29 ***
Controls					
Conservatism	0.20 ***	0.08 ***	0.11 ***	0.04	0.15 ***
Evangelical	0.13	0.08	0.20 *	0.23 *	−0.01
Religiosity	0.01	−0.01	0.02	0.03	0.00
Gender (Woman)	−0.05	0.04	−0.14 *	−0.07	0.01
Parent Education	−0.12 ***	−0.04 *	−0.07 ***	−0.12 ***	−0.06 ***
Education	−0.03	−0.03	−0.01	0.08	−0.04
Married	0.15	0.07	0.20 *	0.12	0.04
Age	−0.03	0.02	−0.02	−0.05 **	−0.02
R^2	0.22	0.08	0.19	0.15	0.37

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

The coefficient for racial identity dropped from 0.26 to 0.11 once the mediators were introduced, indicating that about 58% of the association of racial identity with support for the January 6th protestors could be attributed to greater levels of conspiratorial ideation, social dominance orientation, and perceived racial threat. When broken down by individual mediator, racial identity indirectly increased support for the January 6th protestors by enhancing conspiratorial ideation ($b = 0.02$, $p < 0.05$), social dominance orientation ($b = 0.04$, $p < 0.01$), and perceived racial threat ($b = 0.09$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 3 shows the test of the theoretical model of support for QAnon. The first column shows the test of the baseline association between racial identity and support for QAnon

without accounting for any of the mediators. This analysis showed a positive association between racial identity and support for QAnon ($b = 0.24$, $p < 0.001$). The next three columns show the effects of racial identity with each of the three mediators. Racial identity was associated with increased conspiratorial ideation ($b = 0.17$, $p < 0.001$), social dominance orientation ($b = 0.15$, $p < 0.01$), and perceived racial threat ($b = 0.36$, $p < 0.001$). The last column shows the effects of the three mediators and racial identity on support for QAnon. The three mediators were each found to increase support for QAnon: conspiratorial ideation ($b = 0.15$, $p < 0.01$), social dominance orientation ($b = 0.35$, $p < 0.001$), and perceived racial threat ($b = 0.49$, $p < 0.001$). In addition, after accounting for the mediators, racial identity was no longer directly associated with support for QAnon.

Table 3. Test of Theoretical Model for Support for QAnon: Coefficients from Regression Analyses ($N = 567$).

	Outcome Variable				
Independent Variable	**Support for QAnon**	**Conspiratorial Ideation**	**Social Dominance Orientation**	**Perceived Racial Threat**	**Support for QAnon**
Racial Identity	0.24 **	0.17 ***	0.15 **	0.36 ***	−0.01
Conspiratorial Ideation	-	-	-	-	0.15 **
Social Dominance Orientation	-	-	-	-	0.35 ***
Perceived Racial Threat	-	-	-	-	0.49 ***
Controls					
Conservatism	0.14 **	0.07 ***	0.13 ***	0.06 *	0.06 *
Evangelical	0.35 **	0.11	0.19 *	0.17	0.18
Religiosity	0.03	−0.02	0.03	0.04 *	0.00
Gender (Woman)	−0.03	0.05	−0.12	−0.05	0.03
Parent Education	−0.12 ***	−0.03	−0.07 ***	−0.13 ***	−0.03
Education	−0.04	−0.05	0.01	0.10 *	−0.09
Married	0.25	0.08	0.21 *	0.09	0.12
Age	−0.04	0.02	−0.02	−0.04 *	−0.02
R^2	0.17	0.09	0.22	0.18	0.42

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

The coefficient for racial identity dropped from 0.24 to −0.01 once the mediators were introduced, indicating that the association of racial identity with support for QAnon was fully mediated by greater levels of conspiratorial ideation, social dominance orientation, and perceived racial threat. When broken down by individual mediator, racial identity indirectly increased support for QAnon by enhancing conspiratorial ideation ($b = 0.03$, $p < 0.05$), social dominance orientation ($b = 0.05$, $p < 0.01$), and perceived racial threat ($b = 0.18$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 4 shows the test of the theoretical model of support for the Proud Boys. The first column shows the test of the baseline association between racial identity and support for the Proud Boys without accounting for any of the mediators. This analysis showed a positive association between racial identity and support for the Proud Boys ($b = 0.21$, $p < 0.01$). The next three columns show the effects of racial identity with each of the three mediators. Racial identity was associated with increased conspiratorial ideation ($b = 0.25$, $p < 0.001$), social dominance orientation ($b = 0.10$, $p < 0.05$), and perceived racial threat ($b = 0.28$, $p < 0.001$). The last column shows the effects of the three mediators and racial identity on support for the Proud Boys. The three mediators were each found to increase support for the Proud Boys: conspiratorial ideation ($b = 0.18$, $p < 0.01$), social dominance orientation ($b = 0.37$, $p < 0.001$), and perceived racial threat ($b = 0.45$, $p < 0.001$). In addition, after accounting for the mediators, racial identity was not directly associated with support for the Proud Boys.

The coefficient for racial identity dropped from 0.21 to 0.00 once the mediators were introduced, indicating that the association of racial identity with support for the Proud Boys was completely mediated by conspiratorial ideation, social dominance orientation, and perceived racial threat. When broken down by individual mediator, racial identity indirectly increased support for the Proud Boys by enhancing conspiratorial ideation

($b = 0.05$, $p < 0.05$), social dominance orientation ($b = 0.04$, $p < 0.05$), and perceived racial threat ($b = 0.13$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 4. Test of Theoretical Model for Support for the Proud Boys: Coefficients from Regression Analyses ($N = 451$).

	Outcome Variable				
Independent Variable	**Support for Proud Boys**	**Conspiratorial Ideation**	**Social Dominance Orientation**	**Perceived Racial Threat**	**Support for Proud Boys**
Racial Identity	0.21 **	0.25 ***	0.10 *	0.28 ***	0.00
Conspiratorial Ideation	-	-	-	-	0.18 **
Social Dominance Orientation	-	-	-	-	0.37 ***
Perceived Racial Threat	-	-	-	-	0.45 ***
Controls					
Conservatism	0.13 ***	0.08 ***	0.13 ***	0.06 *	0.04
Evangelical	0.32 *	0.13	0.20 *	0.16	0.15
Religiosity	0.04	−0.01	0.03 *	0.04 *	0.01
Gender (Woman)	−0.10	0.00	−0.11	0.02	−0.06
Parent Education	−0.14 ***	−0.04 *	−0.06 **	−0.11 ***	−0.06 *
Education	0.01	−0.02	0.00	0.10	−0.03
Married	0.33 *	0.08	0.25 *	0.15	0.16
Age	−0.06 *	0.03	−0.02	−0.06 *	−0.03
R^2	0.17	0.15	0.21	0.14	0.41

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 5 shows the test of the theoretical model of support for the Oath Keepers. The first column shows the test of the baseline association between racial identity and support for the Oath Keepers without accounting for any of the mediators. This analysis showed a positive association between racial identity and support for the Oath Keepers ($b = 0.22$, $p < 0.01$). The next three columns show the effects of racial identity with each of the three mediators. Racial identity was associated with increased conspiratorial ideation ($b = 0.20$, $p < 0.001$), social dominance orientation ($b = 0.14$, $p < 0.01$), and perceived racial threat ($b = 0.35$, $p < 0.001$). The last column shows the effects of the three mediators and racial identity on support for the Oath Keepers. The three mediators were each found to increase support for the Oath Keepers: conspiratorial ideation ($b = 0.19$, $p < 0.001$), social dominance orientation ($b = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$), and perceived racial threat ($b = 0.35$, $p < 0.001$). In addition, after accounting for the mediators, racial identity was no longer directly associated with support for the Oath Keepers.

Table 5. Test of Theoretical Model for Support for the Oath Keepers: Coefficients from Regression Analyses ($N = 584$).

	Outcome Variable				
Independent Variable	**Support for Oath Keepers**	**Conspiratorial Ideation**	**Social Dominance Orientation**	**Perceived Racial Threat**	**Support for Oath Keepers**
Racial Identity	0.22 **	0.20 ***	0.14 **	0.35 ***	0.00
Conspiratorial Ideation	-	-	-	-	0.19 ***
Social Dominance Orientation	-	-	-	-	0.42 ***
Perceived Racial Threat	-	-	-	-	0.35 ***
Controls					
Conservatism	0.20 ***	0.07 ***	0.13 ***	0.07 **	0.10 ***
Evangelical	0.35 **	0.09	0.26 **	0.27 **	0.13
Religiosity	0.05 *	−0.02	0.04 **	0.04	0.03
Gender (Woman)	−0.12	0.03	−0.15 *	−0.05	−0.05
Parent Education	−0.13 ***	−0.04 *	−0.07 ***	−0.12 ***	−0.05 *
Education	0.04	−0.04	0.00	0.08	0.02
Married	0.23	0.08	0.14	0.03	0.14
Age	−0.03	0.02	−0.01	−0.03	−0.01
R^2	0.25	0.11	0.26	0.20	0.45

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

The coefficient for racial identity dropped from 0.22 to 0.00 once the mediators were introduced, indicating that the association of racial identity with support for the Oath Keepers was fully mediated by conspiratorial ideation, social dominance orientation, and perceived racial threat. When broken down by individual mediator, racial identity indirectly increased support for the Oath Keepers by enhancing conspiratorial ideation ($b = 0.04$, $p < 0.01$), social dominance orientation ($b = 0.06$, $p < 0.01$), and perceived racial threat ($b = 0.12$, $p < 0.001$).

To address concerns that the analyses were potentially biased by excluding people who reported not knowing enough about each far-right group to hold an opinion, we reran the tests of the theoretical model to include these respondents. In the reanalysis, these cases were recoded as the neutral/middle category on support for the corresponding far-right group (i.e., neither support or oppose), thus using the full analytical sample ($N = 905$) for the analyses of each group. In these analyses, all of the hypothesized effects were significant and in the right direction, consistent with the main analysis. That is, racial identity was positively associated with perceived racial threat, social dominance orientation, and conspiratorial ideation, which were, in turn, positively associated with support for all four far-right groups. Like the main analysis, the baseline effects of racial identity on support for the four far-right groups were either partially or fully mediated by perceived racial threat, social dominance orientation, and conspiratorial ideation. The one deviation from the main analyses was the baseline effect of racial identity on support for the Proud Boys, which was only marginally significant in the reanalysis ($p = 0.073$). However, like the others, this effect was mediated by enhanced social dominance orientation, perceived racial threat, and conspiratorial ideation.

5. Discussion

White people make up a disproportionately large number of people who belong to far-right groups (Mudde 2019). To add further clarity to this relationship, this paper brought in principles from social identity theory, developmental models of identity, and recent work on white identity to test a theoretical model. We argued that perceived threats to the U.S. racial hierarchy have increased the salience of the racial identity of white people. For some white people, this has triggered a period of exploration through select social and political contexts to bring clarity and positive affirmation to being white. These contexts, most notably conservative media, foster feelings of social dominance orientation and conspiratorial ideation as well as reinforce feelings of perceived racial threat, which are features that typically mark support for far-right groups. Thus, as white people develop a stronger racial identity, we expected to see an increase in their levels of social dominance orientation, conspiratorial ideation, and perceived racial threat. In turn, we expected to see these three mediating variables increase support for far-right groups. Our research found support for this theoretical model across four far-right groups (January 6th protestors, QAnon, the Oath Keepers, and the Proud Boys). Those with a stronger racial identity showed greater levels of perceived racial threat, conspiratorial ideation, and social dominance orientation, all three of which were associated with increased support for the far-right groups.

We also examined the extent to which our theoretical model could completely explain the effect of racial identity on support for the four far-right groups. The baseline effect of racial identity on support for the far-right groups (absent the mediators) ceased to be significant for three of the four groups (the Proud Boys, the Oath Keepers, and QAnon) once the mediators were entered into the full model. This suggests that these three causal factors fully accounted for why those with a strong racial identity exhibited stronger support for these far-right groups. That is, a strong racial identity was associated with greater support for these three far-right groups only insofar as it enhanced levels of social dominance orientation, conspiratorial ideation, and perceptions of race-based threats.

The one exception was for the January 6th protestors, in which the baseline effect of racial identity was reduced but remained significant when the mediators were entered into the full model. Some other mediating process, or combination of mediating processes,

appears to be at play. The explicit demonstrations of violence and lawlessness by the January 6th protestors may have distinguished this group in the eyes of those with a strong racial identity. It may be that for those with a strong racial identity, some combination of these three mediators is required to endorse violence (and thus support this group). For instance, high levels of perceived racial threat in conjunction with high conspiratorial ideation may trigger a degree of outrage that either mediator by itself cannot. In this case, the perception that one's racial group is under threat because of conspiratorial elements may enhance the desperation felt by strong racial identifiers and lead them to support violence and lawlessness.

This study contributes to the literature on white racial identity and political attitudes by elaborating on the processes underlying why strong racial identifiers hold more favorable attitudes toward far-right groups. Strong racial identifiers adopt political beliefs that establish "positive distinctiveness" of the ingroup (Tajfel and Turner 1979), which for white people entails policies that protect their collective interests and dominant position in the racial hierarchy (Jardina 2019). Our findings indicate that white racial identity increases one's social dominance orientation, and thus an endorsement of the U.S. racial hierarchy from which white people benefit and establish positive distinctiveness. This social dominance orientation, in part, helps explain why strong racial identifiers more strongly support far-right groups where this endorsement is more explicit (Hartzell 2018).

Jardina (2019) argues that a strong white identity only leads to opposition to race-based policies when those policies are perceived as a threat to the collective interests of white people (e.g., immigration). Given recent research findings that a strong white racial identity (and in particular, positive feelings about being white) leads to greater opposition to racial policies benefitting historically marginalized groups (Hunt and Reichelmann 2019; Reichelmann and Hunt 2021), it appears that these policies are increasingly seen as threatening by strong racial identifiers. Our findings support and add nuance to this point. A strong racial identity reinforced and enhanced perceptions that one is under attack because of their race and that social elites are secretly conspiring against the interests of common people. These ideological themes historically associated with far-right groups are now increasingly commonplace in mainstream conservative media—which, since the emergence of Donald Trump, have increasingly embraced distrust of institutional elites as well as economically, socially, and politically isolationist rhetoric that often portrays people and countries of color as threats to traditional American values (Cassino 2016; DiMaggio 2021). Insofar as white people explore these conservative contexts to restore positive distinctiveness to their racial group, it appears they are embracing beliefs of perceived racial threat and conspiratorial ideation, which then enhance their support for far-right groups.

These findings also suggest that white racial identity is important to much of contemporary right-wing political organizing. Groups that have historically centered their grievances toward perceived government overreach, such as the Oath Keepers (Jackson 2020), or international conspiracies, such as QAnon (Forberg 2023), appear to also be driven by a sense of perceived race-based victimization. That white racial identity is central to right-wing political organizing adds complexity to previous work suggesting typologies of right-wing groups. Haltinner (2018), Blee and Creasap (2010), and Berlet and Lyons (2000) have organized right-wing political movements according to the primary targets of their ire. Perhaps, though, the importance of white identity suggests a novel approach to understanding right-wing organizing along a continuum of the salience of group adherents' white racial identity. This approach may provide a greater understanding and nuance of the ways that right-wing ideologies intersect and manifest in associated frames, discourses, and demands.

Our work also invites continued examination of how we understand politics at the perceived ends of the political spectrum. In their innovative analysis of fringe political mobilization, Uscinski et al. (2021) assess the ideologies and traits of people who fall on what is often referred to as the "ends" of the political continuum. In doing so, they consider

what these frameworks have in common and suggest a potential need to re-envision our perception and operationalization of fringe political efforts. Instead of seeing them as "far right" or "far left", Uscinski et al. (2021) explain the ways that both of these groupings share antiestablishment perspectives and associated "support for populist candidates". They see the fundamental challenge of a corrupt establishment vs. the people but differ in the ways that these sentiments cause them to "take aim at outgroups". Our work further examines the ways that racial identity can operate in fringe ideologies and opens the discussion for further analysis of extremist populist movements.

For instance, in our study, even though we found that conservatism was associated with support for far-right groups, the effects in our theoretical model operated as hypothesized even after controlling for conservatism. It is possible that holding a strong racial identity, generally, enhances perceptions that one's racial group is under threat and of a general distrust of people in mainstream institutions who are perceived as perpetuating this threat. For strong racial identifiers from historically marginalized racial groups, the sense of perceived racial threat and conspiratorial ideation might enhance the appeal of fringe political groups (including those on the far left) whose antiestablishment sentiments reinforce the validity of these perceptions. Future research testing the link between racial identity and support for both far-left and far-right groups, across multiple racial categories, would be welcome and add further theoretical clarity to this field of study.

6. Limitations and Conclusions

There are some limitations to this study that future research can build upon. We used cross-sectional data to test a mediation model, which assumed change over time. While the theoretical logic and time order of the hypothesized relationships were grounded in prior work on identities, our coefficient sizes might have been embellished by feedback effects. For instance, we argued that perceived racial threat increased the salience of white racial identity, which, with increasing development and strength, further enhanced perceptions of threat. However, given the cross-sectional nature of the data, we were only able to measure the single association. Similarly, some have argued that people with a strong social dominance orientation are more likely to embrace high-status group identities from which they benefit (Jardina 2019). For white people, this would include their racial identity. Lastly, this study used a non-probabilistic, purposive sample targeting specific demographic segments in the United States (e.g., young adults). Thus, any generalization of these findings should be made cautiously and limited to the demographic segments from which the sample was drawn.

We also used a measure of perceived racial discrimination to measure perceived racial threat. Although people who frequently perceive personal attacks motivated by their race are likely to also believe their racial group is being threatened, these are two distinct concepts. Measures that tap into a respondent's direct assessment of whether the status of their racial group is under threat would be optimal. It would also be constructive to distinguish between realistic status threats tied to being white (e.g., more competition for existing resources, declining white population) from symbolic status threats tied to being white (e.g., cultural challenges that emerge with increasing cultural diversity) (Riek et al. 2006). It is possible that one source of perceived racial threat might have a more pronounced mediating influence in our model than the other. In all, future research that can test our model with longitudinal data, probabilistic samples, and use more precise measures of perceived racial threat can add greater confidence and nuance to our findings.

Despite these drawbacks, this study helps elaborate on the relationship between white identity and support for far-right political groups. With the increasing salience of white people's racial identity, our findings indicate that the current political climate is fostering enhanced perceptions of racial threat and greater levels of social dominance orientation and conspiratorial ideation among strong white racial identifiers, all of which increase their support for far-right groups. These findings add further insight into the study of far-right

groups and help us understand the nature of the relationship between white identity and political beliefs more broadly.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, M.G. and K.H.; data collection, M.G.; funding acquisition, M.G.; methodology and formal analysis, M.G.; writing, review, and editing, M.G. and K.H. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding. It was funded by a University of Idaho, College of Letters, Arts, and Social Sciences (CLASS) grant from the CLASS Excellence Fund.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Idaho (IRB Protocol # 21-220, approved on 20 December 2021).

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Access to data can be obtained by contacting the corresponding author.

Acknowledgments: We would like to thank Tanya Nieri, who assisted in the development of the survey questionnaire.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest. The funders had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analysis, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript, or in the decision to publish the results.

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