Racial Population Projections and Reactions to Alternative News Accounts of Growing Diversity

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Projections of changes in racial demographics depend on how race is classified. The U.S. Census Bureau makes several different projections of the nation's racial demographic future, but the most publicized version projects our racial future in a way that narrows the definition of race groups to exclude people who are of mixed race or Hispanic. This definition results in projections of many fewer "whites," accelerating the impending decline of the country's white majority and perhaps heightening white audiences' anxiety about demographic change. We conducted an experiment that randomly assigned whites to read alternative news stories based on 2014 Census Bureau projections. One story emphasized growing diversity, a second emphasized the decline of the white population to minority status, and a third described an enduring white majority based on intermarriage and inclusive white identity. Much higher levels of anxiety or anger, especially among Republicans, were recorded after reading the white minority story than the alternative stories of diversity or an enduring white majority.

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How neutral are the U.S. Census Bureau's population projections from the perspective of their plural audiences? Only some are data users—researchers in academia, government, or business—while most are members of the general public who consume news reports about important findings. Demographic changes can hold particular fascination or alarm

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for the different groups being described. This article uses the Census Bureau's release of demographic projections in March 2015 to examine the interplay of choices about how to execute and communicate demographic projections and the way Americans absorb the meaning of a more diverse racial future.

When publicizing some specific projections in 2015, the Census Bureau gave top billing to an attention-grabbing headline: whites would become a minority of the U.S. population in fewer than 30 years.[1] Media coverage spanning the ideological spectrum made this the lede, casting impending decline of the white population to minority status as a simple and imminent fact, even "official."[2] What went unrecognized in the press coverage is that the Census Bureau prepares population projections that account for *six different definitions* of white racial identity. The 2000 census asked respondents to check all racial categories with which they identify and asked a Hispanic "ethnicity" question that was separate from the race question, making two basic tabulations possible. First is an "inclusive" definition of each race that counts all people who say they are of a given race, either alone, or in combination with other race choices. Importantly, this inclusive approach would be sensitive to intermarriage as a widely spreading phenomenon that is reshaping the future population (Alba, this volume). Nonetheless, for reasons to be described, the Census Bureau places emphasis on a more convenient, "exclusive" definition that focuses on single races, excluding cases that combine more than one race, and with the further restriction of excluding from the race categories people who also are of Hispanic origin or heritage. This calculus makes for the smallest count of "whites," and the resultant rapid decline to minority status for the group known as "non-Hispanic white alone." In short, how "white" is defined is crucial to the projected speed of white majority decline, indeed to whether minority status is anticipated at all.

An important question to ask, then, is what definition of "white" is the best choice for projections. Our answer considers three specific purposes for the use of racial projections, with each purpose perhaps better served by a different definition of "white." A second question to ask is how much the outlook of future minority status for whites may have changed in recent years, not only because demographic trends have shifted, but also because the white definition was revised to be narrower. The third question we address is how the definition of "white" majority may impact the attitudes and emotions of whites regarding future population changes. For answers about impacts, we employ an experimental design that tests responses to alternative ways of framing results from the Census Bureau's racial projections.

Goals and Methods of Official Race Projections

What are the goals for producing race projections?

Government agencies appear reticent to discuss the potential uses and purposes of the projections they prepare. For example, the Census Bureau offers only the following: "Projections illustrate possible courses of population change

based on assumptions about future births, deaths, net international migration, and domestic migration."[3]

A broader view is offered by the Population Reference Bureau, a nongovernmental organization based in Washington, D.C., with global coverage:

> Government policymakers and planners around the world use population projections to *gauge future demand* for food, water, energy, and services, and to forecast future demographic characteristics. Population *projections can alert policymakers to major trends* that may affect economic development and *help policymakers craft policies* that can be adapted for various projection scenarios. (Population Reference Bureau 2011, emphasis added)

In practice, governments in urbanized, developed nations often adopt population projections for use in specific functions related to growth planning, such as housing and land use planning, transportation planning, health care planning, schools and higher education planning, workforce and retirement planning, and generally informing local and national policy.

While the most common use of projections is foresight about the future total growth in population, many of the functions also pertain to growth of specific age groups whose service needs vary sharply from one another (e.g., school children, retirees, etc.). The need to plan age-specific services creates demand for specific age group projections. More generally, the core demographic processes of fertility, mortality, and migration vary substantially between males and females, by age group, and by ethno-racial group. Therefore, to improve the accuracy of a total population projection, virtually all professional population projections adopt the cohort-component method of disaggregating the population by age, gender, and race (including Hispanic origin), and developing age-gender-race specific rates of behavior to apply to the corresponding subgroups of the population. This yields a set of highly disaggregated projected subgroups, whose main purpose is to produce a more accurate estimate of future total population when all the resulting subgroups are summed.

From its beginning, the United States has displayed interest in racially classifying its population in a census once every decade, with the original three categories of white, black, and indigenous Native Americans or American Indians expanded over time to more categories that form a database available to shape subsequent social policy, an evolution well described and interpreted in Prewitt (2013). Since the civil rights revolution of the 1960s, there has been legal and policy interest about *current* inequities that exist among racial groups. However, it is not apparent if any explicit governmental purposes demand information about the *future growth* in specific racial groups in the population. Nonetheless, projections of racial subgroups for future years are published as a byproduct of the cohort-component method. Even if no official uses for racial projections are suggested by the Census Bureau itself, nor by any federal agency, these projections do hold keen public interest, and so they are eagerly adopted by the press and the broader political process.

We suggest three objectives as guides for evaluating the utility of different race classification procedures used in reporting projections. These include (1) an aim

of convenience or simplicity in use of the data, (2) an aim to facilitate social justice and equal opportunity policy, and (3) an aim to present a faithful portrait of how Americans view their own racial and ethnic identities and the growing racial complexity of America. The three objectives may overlap or conflict in certain ways, but we will apply them to help evaluate how well the current racial projections circulated to the press stack up against the various alternatives available from the same census data.

Which classification practices serve which objectives?

The Census Bureau has produced several variations of categorization for racial projections that are made feasible from data collected in surveys and the decennial census. All the racial variations to be discussed derive from the same total population and, therefore, share common assumptions about fertility, mortality, and migration. Whereas demographic forecasters devote their attention primarily to future assumptions regarding these input factors, what we focus on in this article are the alternative reporting classifications for projections of people in racial subgroups.

Two principal decisions have given rise to creation of multiple alternatives. The first is whether to separate or combine the information on the separate question about Hispanic origin with the information on racial subgroups. Beginning with the 1980 census, separate racial breakdowns have been produced within the Hispanic and non-Hispanic portions of the population, and sometimes combined in different arrangements, making it more complicated and varied as how to summarize the racial distribution of a given population (Myers 1992, 209–16). The second decision stems from the revision to the census data collection form first used in 2000, and thereafter, inviting respondents to check more than one category of race if so desired. (This was to allow expression of self-identity by individuals, for example, whose parents were of different racial origins.) The effect of these two decisions is to create an overlap of identification, with some people appearing in two or more racial categories and others overlapping between races and Hispanic origin.

A number of alternative tabulations are reported by the Census Bureau that simplify this complexity in different ways. In practice, two classifications emerge that demonstrate fundamentally different approaches made possible by the data collected in the census and that can be projected forward in time. These are illustrated here with data from 2015, the first year of the Census Bureau projection data produced in 2014 (see Table 1). Yet a third classification, one for equal opportunity or social justice, also will be considered, built upon elements combined from the first two.

The first classification in Table 1, which might be termed the "exclusive convenient" arrangement, is most widely used because it excludes overlapping cases and thereby sums to the population total. Although a number of configurations are possible, most commonly the Hispanic number is preserved in total and all Hispanics are subtracted from their individual race categories with which they also identify, leaving only the remainder in each race group that is non-Hispanic.

TABLE 1
Exclusive and Inclusive Racial Classifications Available in United States Population Projections, Census Bureau Vintage 2014

	Alternative Classifications				
	Convenient Exclusive			Inclusive Identity	
	Number	Share of Total Pop.		Number	Share of Total Pop.
NH whites alone	198,354	61.7%	All whites	255,682	79.6%
NH blacks alone	39,782	12.4%	All blacks	46,126	14.4%
NH AIANs alone	2,359	0.7%	All AIANs	6,618	2.1%
NH Asians alone	16,978	5.3%	All Asians	20,534	6.4%
NH NHPIs alone	549	0.2%	All NHPIs	1,486	0.5%
NH multiple races	6,593	2.1%	—		
All Hispanics	56,754	17.7%	All Hispanics	56,754	17.7%
Sum	321,369	100.0%	Sum	387,200	120.5%
Total Pop.	321,369				

NOTE: Numbers in 1000s. "Exclusive" categories report number of people who chose only a single racial or ethnic category. "Inclusive" categories permit people to appear in more than one racial or ethnic category. "NH" signifies Non-Hispanic. "Alone" indicates single race not in combination. "All" signifies inclusive-defined categories containing members selecting this group alone or in combination with other groups. "AIAN" is American Indian and Alaska Native. "NHPI" is Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander.

Further, any non-Hispanic individuals who identify with more than one race category are removed to a category termed "multiple races." This approach restricts all population members into single categories of identity, a convenient solution for both computer programmers and data users, because everything sums to the 100 percent total of the population. This process of exclusion satisfies the first objective of convenience noted above.

In contrast, the second classification, termed here the "inclusive identity" arrangement, takes full account of the overlap across categories by tabulating people inclusively in the multiple categories they choose to select as their racial and ethnic identity. Because of "double counting," this sums to a number that is some 20 percent greater than the total population. That makes this inclusive tabulation uncomfortable for data users who wish to make a pie chart summing to the 100 percent total, even if it better reflects the true *self*-identity of population members. At different moments the same person, such as an African American who is also Hispanic, might wish to be categorized with all African Americans or, alternatively, with all Hispanics. For some purposes, it clearly is desirable to count all people of a race rather than just the non-Hispanic remainder.

In the inclusive formulation, Hispanics are counted exactly as in the first alternative (with 56.7 million) because Hispanics are the only group tabulated

inclusively in the exclusive convenient alternative (Table 1). All the other groups are substantially larger in the second, inclusive alternative. Whites have the largest absolute change between the two classifications, from 198 million to 255 million, increasing from 61.7 percent to 79.6 percent of the total population in 2015.

A third classification, not shown in Table 1, derives from equal opportunity considerations, when minority groups are compared to the white group, which for that purpose is defined narrowly and exclusively as non-Hispanic and not in combination with any other racial group. Minority groups in this equal opportunity approach are defined in terms of their inclusive numbers, for example, maximizing the count of American Indians, whether they also happen to be Hispanic or may have a joint racial identity with whites or any other group. Thus, this third classification can be recognized as borrowing elements from the first two arrangements. It simply combines a category of "whites" using the narrowly restricted white definition in the exclusive convenient classification and categories for all other "minority" groups, each defined broadly as in the inclusive identity classification.

Projecting the racial future of America

As distinctions between racial categories in American society blur (e.g., Hochschild, Weaver, and Burch 2012; see also multiple contributions in this volume), projecting future numbers in fixed categories is increasingly problematic. In fact, the Census Bureau reports six alternatives in their 2014 projections (Colby and Ortman 2014), and the choice to publicize one or another has major consequences for how the public might interpret the country's demographic future. The online published data for the 2014 projections offer a full page (titled "Table 10") that shows how the same population totals can be sorted into six alternatives of ethnoracial classification, spanning years from 2015 to 2060 (too large a table to reproduce here).[4] These include sections that are Hispanic only, non-Hispanic only, and including Hispanics and non-Hispanics together. Each of those is further subdivided into tabulations of each racial group "alone" (the exclusive variation) or "alone or in combination" (the inclusive variation).

The implications of choosing among the alternative definitions could not be greater. Under the most narrow or exclusive definition, the number of people who claim an identity that is non-Hispanic and solely of white race is projected to reach a peak in 2025 of 199.8 million, after which this population will steadily decline in number. Meanwhile other groups will be growing rapidly and will surpass whites in growth. Between 2015 and 2045, Hispanics will increase in number by 73.8 percent, Asians by 82.0 percent and blacks or African Americans by 24.6 percent. Meanwhile the white population will have declined, and the nation will reach a crossing point in 2044 when the white total has fallen below 50 percent of the national population. At that time, the former minority groups, in total, will become the majority.

In contrast, under the more expansive and inclusive definition, people who claim white identity in whole or in part, and are non-Hispanic, will not arrive at minority status until 2054, fully 10 years later. And whites as a whole, regardless

of Hispanic origin, will retain a three-quarters majority, 74.3 percent, of the U.S. population until at least 2060, the latest date in the projections. Other small groups are growing faster, but, of the total growth in population, the broad white majority accounts for at least 50 percent of the growth in every projection period.

Technical projections meet public audience

All projections benefit from historic perspective, because that is how people judge the future numbers. Since 2000 the Census Bureau has substantially changed its racial projections across a number of successive renditions. They revised their racial classifications and methods to accord with changes in the baseline data collection and to account for new methodologies or assumptions about future fertility, immigration, and the like (Hogan, Ortman, and Colby 2015). Accordingly, there have been substantial changes between projection series, and that could yield sometimes startling shifts in racial outcomes. In fact, these changes have generated an unintended exaggeration of the pace of future white decline.

Public perception of rapidly changing demographics is based on casual observation, as well as on reports of national trends. The sense of a greatly accelerated pace of racial change in America after 2000 was due, at least in part, to a method shift between projection series. As summarized in Table 2, the Census Bureau's projections issued in 2000 reported that the "non-Hispanic white" share of the population was projected to become a minority of the total in 2059. That was the first time this racial milestone could be detected within the 60-year horizon used in most projections. Four years later, new projections found that the "non-Hispanic white alone" share, which excludes multiracial whites, would reach minority status fully nine years sooner (2050). Four years after that, in 2008, the "non-Hispanic white alone" share was projected to fall to minority status another eight years sooner than previously expected (2042). This, in effect, communicated to lay consumers of the projections that demographic change was accelerating toward the threshold of a majority-minority society. Thereafter, the reported white decline ceased its acceleration, and the date of minority status actually shifted upward to 2044 in 2014 projections. For comparison, Table 2 also includes the much later date (2054) of white decline to minority status if the non-Hispanic white population were defined more broadly to include people who were multiracial white, either white alone or in combination with another race. And if we use the broadest definition of white, including those who are also white Hispanic, the white population retains a large majority for the rest of the century, as noted above.

By happenstance, two major historic events coincided with the finding in 2008 of a sharp acceleration in white decline. The 2008 election of Barack Obama, a Democrat, to be the nation's first nonwhite president, was an energizing moment for many Americans, and especially for African Americans and other minority groups who felt long disenfranchised. Yet it also engendered anxieties about the nation's future among some whites because it put a human and political face on the nation's racial transition that had been projected (Tesler and Sears 2010). The

TABLE 2
Changing Dates of Projected White Decline to Minority Status: Changes between Projection Series

Vintage Projection	Definition of White	Year Whites Reach Minority Status
2000	Non-Hispanic white	2059
2004	Non-Hispanic white alone	2050
2008	Non-Hispanic white alone	2042
2014	Non-Hispanic white alone	2044
2014	Non-Hispanic white alone or in combination	2054
2014	White alone or in combination	after 2060 or never

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau projections: for 2000: np-t5-g; for 2004: summary/natproj-tab01a; for 2008: summary-tables/np2008-t4; for 2014: NP2014-T10.

other event that unfortunately coincided in 2008 and 2009 was the severe financial crisis that spawned the deep economic anxieties of the Great Recession. The two historic events may have heightened insecurities among many in the nation's white population, now underscored by reports of their coming reduction to minority status. Any reverberations of the projections' publicity were surely unintended.[5]

In hindsight, a more consistent set of methodologies over time for classification and projection would have generated a reported pace of white decline that is more moderate and less shocking. The 14-year span between the 2000 projections of "non-Hispanic white" and the 2014 projections of "non-Hispanic white alone or in combination," amounted to only a 5-year hastening of white decline, as measured by the declining year of lost majority status from 2059 to 2054 (see Table 2). This compared to the 15-year hastening (three times faster) of lost majority in 2044 that was emphasized by the main 2014 projections of "non-Hispanic white alone."

What's the Headline, and Does It Affect Public Reactions?

Expectations of reactions to racial trends

Research on racial threat suggests that the subject of growing diversity and white decline would have particular meaning for an audience of whites. A concern is that publicity of an exaggerated decline according to the exclusive white definition can lead to divisive or discriminatory political actions by white voters who are made to feel anxious and defensive about their impending minority status.

There are at least two reasons to expect that whites would process the white minority narrative more negatively than an alternative account about racial

projections that adopt the "inclusive" definition of whiteness. First, perceived zero-sum competition between groups for status and symbolic or material benefits can exacerbate feelings of threat (e.g., Bobo 1983). Public consumers of population projections often treat them as a horse race: which group is growing most, which is declining, and who will be the majority. All groups in fact may be growing, but the most common presentation is shares of a 100 percent total, and some groups are perceived as "winners" while others are projected as "losers" and may feel threatened by their loss. In the title of Kinder and Kam (2009), it is "us against them." The imminent loss of majority status, especially in a democracy where majorities ostensibly rule, could therefore augment threatened feelings and hostility from the majority group toward the groups that might overtake it. By contrast, an account of projections that casts racial groups as overlapping (the inclusive definition), with fluid boundaries, might soothe these reactions by allaying the perception of a challenge to majority status.

Second, the white minority narrative might lead to exaggerated perceptions of change and accelerated minority population growth. Members of the public are not good judges of actual racial proportions or growth rates, and they often exaggerate the prominence of growing minorities or the fate of declining whites (Alba, Rumbaut, and Marotz 2005; Wong 2007). *Population projections feed these distorted perceptions by telescoping time*—making distant changes, 40 years off, feel salient in the current year. Moreover, there is evidence that rapid growth in the size of minority populations may fuel threatened feelings even more than does the absolute size (Hopkins 2010). If the white minority narrative makes changes in the rising minority group population size seem larger and more rapid than the narrative based on inclusive accounting, we would expect it to fuel threatened feelings. Of important consequence, declining groups often retain a voting majority to act on those feelings for decades after losing a population majority, due to the typically older age and heavier voting participation of longer-established groups (Myers 2007).

Research by Craig, Rucker, and Richeson (this volume) has convincingly demonstrated that exposure to the white minority narrative is capable of inducing these threatened reactions among whites. Our inquiry seeks to gauge whether the alternative "inclusive white" narrative, which can be equally illustrated by the Census Bureau's own data, mollifies these threats. Our theoretical expectation is that it will, decreasing negative emotions such as anxiety and anger toward a news account about the race projections relative to the standard but exclusive "white minority" narrative. The inclusive narrative, we expect, makes the zero-sum implications of rising diversity less salient because whites' majority status is not imminently threatened. It also resembles an assimilationist "melting pot" narrative that still has considerable resonance in American public opinion (Citrin and Sears 2014).

If the Census Bureau projection classifications have neutral effect, the null hypothesis would be that whites feel equally threatened by both accounts. This could occur for a number of reasons. Whites may associate rising ethnic diversity with a threat to their own dominant group position irrespective of framing, or because they have already become too accustomed to the impending minority

frame to be open to any alternative. Whites may also simply disbelieve the inclusive account or reject it as false. Finally, expanding the boundaries of whiteness to include previously subordinate groups, and the loss of racial exclusivity that this entails, possibly may be no less threatening to whites' group status as is the specter of becoming a minority.

Our broader research investigation, beyond what is reported here, also tested two subsidiary expectations: (1) the white minority narrative engenders more opposition to immigration and less sympathy for rapidly growing racial minority groups than does the inclusive white majority narrative, and (2) the white minority narrative promotes greater support for cuts to social services than does knowledge of the inclusive white majority narrative. Here, we confine ourselves to a summary of these findings, focusing on self-reported emotional reactions.

Experimental study

Using an experimental survey design, we tested the emotional impact of alternative narratives constructed from the 2015 Census Bureau projections. Our survey experiment, fielded in summer 2016, randomly assigned a large national sample of whites to either a control group or to one of three treatment groups, namely, to read one of three simulated news stories consisting of information and frames culled from 2015 news coverage of the Census Bureau's projections. One story presented a bare discussion of continued rises in racial diversity, without any references to majority status (*diversity*). A second foretold a persistent or continuing white majority under an inclusive definition of whiteness that counts people from mixed backgrounds as white if they so identify themselves (*inclusive*). A third resembled the dominant media treatment that emphasized the exclusive white definition and forecast a white minority by 2044 (*exclusive*).[6]

We then asked respondents whether they were familiar with the story they had seen and asked how they felt after reading it. We gauged emotional reactions to a story by asking respondents to choose an adjective that best described how they felt. The four choices were anxious, angry, hopeful, and enthusiastic. Interspersed into the rest of the survey were several questions measuring political attitudes about government spending on public goods and services, immigration, and the state of race relations in the United States, all of which the literature on racial diversity and public opinion suggested to us might be influenced by exposure to the different frames of rising diversity.

Results

Consistent with our expectation, and as illustrated in Figure 1 the *exclusive* story, forecasting a coming white minority status, makes white voters substantially more anxious than the news of growing *diversity* on its own. The rise in anxiety is especially pronounced among white Republicans, an ominous sign that fears of whites "losing control" may have played an important role in determining voters' choices in the Republican primary contests and, subsequent to our survey, in the

FIGURE 1
Emotional Reactions to News Stories by White Readers
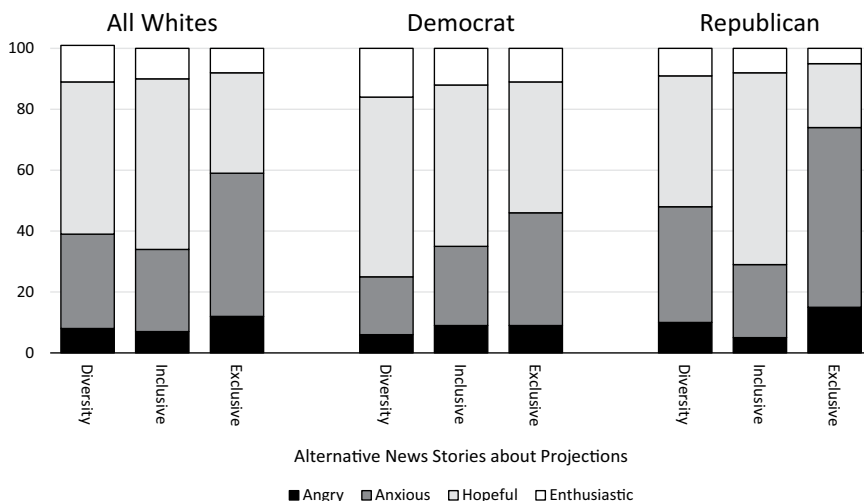
NOTE: "Exclusive" categories report number of people who chose only a single racial or ethnic category. "Inclusive" categories permit people to appear in more than one racial or ethnic category. "NH" signifies Non-Hispanic. "Alone" indicates single race, not in combination. "All" signifies inclusive-defined categories containing members selecting this group alone or in combination with other groups. "AIAN" is American Indian and Alaska Native. "NHPI" is Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander.

general election (see, e.g., McElwee and McDaniel 2017). Reading the impending-minority, *exclusive* narrative greatly increases self-reported anxiety while dampening hopefulness, both by approximately 17 percentage points over the bare *diversity* rising narrative.

Consistent with our expectations, and central to our discussion here, the *inclusive* narrative appears to reverse these effects entirely. Not only is the level of threat lower than in the *exclusive* condition, it appears to be reassuring relative to the bare *diversity* narrative, raising the share of people who report feeling hopeful by about 6 percentage points. In effect, almost a quarter of whites in our sample who react negatively to reading the dominant press narrative about the projections, in which their group becomes a minority within 30 years, would react positively to the alternative account in which the definition of whiteness expands to include Americans with multiple racial and ethnic identities but with whites remaining in the majority.

Also notable is that the response to this *inclusive* account was especially favorable among Republicans. Republicans express considerably more negative feelings about the unelaborated *diversity* narrative than Democrats. Nearly half of Republicans acknowledged feeling negatively disposed about this account, compared to a quarter of Democrats. These partisan differences are exacerbated among respondents who read the *exclusive* account of the projections, though

this account also greatly increased negativity among Democrats. Three-quarters of Republicans who read this account expressed a negative emotion, compared to 46 percent of Democrats. But Republicans' positive response to the *inclusive* narrative was overwhelming, cutting negative reactions by almost 20 points compared to the *diversity* narrative and a whopping 45 points compared to reading the *exclusive* narrative that dominated media coverage. Among Democrats, the *inclusive* account increased negativity relative to the *diversity* account but left it still appreciably lower than in the *exclusive* condition. As a result, partisan polarization in reactions to the narratives about rising diversity in the *inclusive* condition are eliminated, with Republicans expressing modestly (though insignificantly) *more* positivity toward this story than Democrats.

We found no statistically significant differences (not shown) in the emotional effects of these treatments by education, age, and gender. This indicates that accepting attitudes toward the more inclusive definition of whiteness are widely diffused through the population and not confined to the young and well educated. Negative attitudes about future minority status are also widely diffused across demographic categories among whites.

Would the reductions in threatened feelings be accompanied by shifts in racial and political attitudes? Prior research has found that threat leads to the adoption of more hostile attitudes toward the minority group as well as efforts to limit the subordinate group's numbers and economic interests (Blalock 1967; Bobo and Hutchings 1996). Indeed, respondents exposed to the *inclusive* story were more likely than those who read the *exclusive*, minority story to say that Asians and Hispanics faced racism in America (difference in means two-tailed t-test $p < .05$ in both cases), while there were no effects on perceived racism against whites or blacks. Corroborating this finding, the *inclusive* account promoted modest and marginally significant ($p < .1$) reductions in opposition to immigration relative to the *diversity* and minority narratives. And whereas the minority account increased opposition to a hypothetical school bond that would have increased property taxes to fund K–12 education, the *inclusive* majority narrative reduced opposition by nearly half a standard deviation on a *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree* scale (difference in means two-tailed t-test $p < .05$).

Conclusion

Long-range plans require long-range data, and surely trustworthy data about 40-year cumulative demographic changes could lead to vitally needed public investment decisions for current and future generations. Yet as others have shown, different characterizations of the same projections could well lead to distorted perceptions among citizen-voters about relative sizes and rates of change for different subgroups (Alba, Rumbaut, and Marotz 2005; Wong 2007). When the audience for projections consists of voters, distorted perceptions can heighten defensive reactions against perceived threat instead of promoting sound planning.

Despite the availability of a variety of racial classifications prepared by the Census Bureau, the "exclusive" alternative of nonoverlapping categories has been promoted since 2004 in projections for public consumption. That may have advantages of summing to a 100 percent total and lending greater convenience of use. But it also comports with older, now tenuous, assumptions about the rigidity and exclusivity of racial group boundaries. Projections of a population that is increasingly multiracial deserves greater use of an inclusive definition of racial identity. Our experiment shows that whites, especially Republicans, respond more favorably to the inclusive definition of whiteness that accounts for intermarriage and leaves whites in the majority rather than to the exclusive definition that shrinks them to a minority within 30 years.

The choice of racial classification may have unintended but important political repercussions on public audiences. Our research takes a first step toward the important practical aim of illuminating the consequences of different strategies for communicating demographic forecasts to the public. While demographers learn technical skills of projections, virtually no literature exists on crafting the narratives by which population projections of total growth, changing racial shares, and aging should be shared with the public, who may be the subject of study but also are a key audience. This connection is essential in a democracy because members of the public become vital actors (voters and taxpayers) who seek to shape the future in response to the projections they have learned about. More thought and care should be given to how this information is structured for sharing with the public.

Notes

1. The report is available from http://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2015/cb15-tps16.html.

2. See, for example, https://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2015/07/06/its-official-the-us-is-becoming-a-minority-majority-nation and http://www.breitbart.com/big-government/2015/06/25/census-more-minority-children-than-whites-more-whites-dying-than-being-born/, as well as the humorous take in http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/so-youre-about-to-become-a-minority_us_553011f0e4b04ebb92325daf.

3. See https://www.census.gov/topics/population/population-projections/about.html.

4. The full table can be observed here: Table 10, "Projections of the Population by Sex, Hispanic Origin, and Race for the United States: 2015 to 2060"; https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2014/demo/popproj/2014-summary-tables.html.

5. For example, white nationalist Richard Spencer explained prior to the first of two torch-lit rallies during 2017 in Charlottesville, VA: "What brings us together is that we are white, we are a people, we will not be replaced." Quoted in *Washington Post*, May 14, 2017.

6. For more details on these treatments and the survey instrument, please see the authors' working paper that more fully describes the survey protocol and results: "Forecasts and Frames: Narratives about Rising Racial Diversity and the Political Attitudes of U.S. Whites"; see https://dornsife.usc.edu/cf/posc/faculty_display.cfm?Person_ID=1057914.

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