Diversity, Status Threat, and the Challenge of Creating Inclusive & Just Societies

Xanni Brown[1], Salem Sulaiman[2], and Jennifer A. Richeson[2, 3]

[1] Frank L. Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy, University of Virginia

[2] Department of Psychology, Yale University

[3] Institution for Social and Policy Studies, Yale University

Author Note

Xanni Brown ⓘ https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7641-0124

Salem Sulaiman ⓘ https://orcid.org/0009-0001-7081-3619

Jennifer Richeson ⓘ https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4758-3835

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Correspondence concerning this chapter should be directed to Xanni Brown. Email:
xannibrown@virginia.edu

The United States, Canada, and multiple European nations have experienced significant increases in the racial and ethnic diversity of their populations over the past several decades. In the United States, for instance, racial and ethnic minorities will likely make up more than half of the nation's population by 2045, collectively surpassing the number of non-Hispanic White Americans (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). These increases in national racial and ethnic diversity have animated considerable political discussion, often with more politically liberal citizens expressing greater sympathy for these demographic changes and more conservative citizens expressing concern (Kaufmann, 2018; Krogstad, Dunn, & Passel, 2021). Polarized reactions to increasing national racial and ethnic diversity are likely to have consequences for the well-being of members of minoritized racial groups and, perhaps also, for the maintenance of democracy itself. That is because as the White populations of currently democratic nations decline, commitments to governance that is representative of and responsive to the will of now more diverse citizenries may weaken in favor of sustaining the dominance of White populations. This chapter considers the emerging literature bearing on these dynamics. While the research in this chapter is based mostly on examinations of individuals' responses to demographic change in the United States, the psychological processes highlighted apply to and have been observed in multiple national, cultural, and organizational contexts. We assert that these dynamics are broadly applicable to most, if not all, predominately White national and even more local geographic contexts that are currently or have recently experienced significant increases in racial diversity.

We begin the chapter by reviewing research finding that exposure to information about racial demographic change can engender feelings of threat about group status among dominant group members. Here, we identify and discuss the broad set of concerns (e.g., political power,

socio-cultural centrality) that increasing racial and ethnic diversity may trigger among dominant group members. We then consider important individual differences in ideologies and experiences that may moderate these threat responses. After, we review research relevant to the effects of group status threat on individuals' racial and political attitudes and behavior. Most notably, we consider the potential consequences of racial demographic change for individuals' support for democratic principles and practices. Last, we consider parallel and perhaps compounding effects of increasing diversity along dimensions of identity other than race (e.g., religion, sexual orientation). We close with a discussion of the implications of this work for the promise of creating diverse societies that are equitable and just.

Shifting Racial Demographics and Group Status Threat

The nature of intergroup relations can be characterized by the relative social positions of different groups in society. According to Herbert Blumer's (1958) Group Position Theory, these relative positions animate outgroup prejudice. According to Blumer, prejudice involves more than negative attitudes and feelings toward another group—at its core, prejudice is about preserving a societal hierarchy. When the hierarchy—or relative group positions—are perceived as changing or violated, members of dominant groups experience intergroup threat that, in turn, engenders the expression of animus toward subordinate outgroups or those violating the relative group positions. Research within the social psychology literature has similarly noted the vital role of perceived threats to both the material and symbolic standing of one's societal group (Esses, Dovidio, Jackson, & Armstrong, 2001; Stephan, Ybarra, & Morrison, 2009). Consistent with this literature, emerging research suggests that exposure to information about increasing diversity (most notably, information that White people will no longer be a numerical majority in many Western countries in the not-too-distant future) can animate concerns about group status—

that is, racial group status threat—among members of the dominant racial group. These threat reactions, in turn, can lead to a broad array of ingroup-protective, outgroup-derogatory responses, including increased expression of animus and negative emotions toward racial and ethnic minorities (see Craig, Rucker, & Richeson, 2018, for a review).

What is racial group status threat? We define racial group status threat as the concern about an ingroup's position in the economic, political, and/or socio-cultural racial status hierarchy. The relative socio-economic position of the group is clearly relevant to a group's overall status, as is its political power (Blumer, 1958; Bobo, 1999). Dominant racial and ethnic groups may also experience threat due to concerns about their cultural centrality—whether broader societal cultural norms reflect and value the customs and preferences espoused and practiced by their group (Salter, Adams, & Perez, 2018). Danbold and Huo (2015) found that members of dominant groups can experience *prototypicality threat*—concern about the extent to which the ingroup represents the national or other superordinate identity—when exposed to information that the racial and ethnic demographics of society are changing (see also Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999; Wenzel, Waldzus, & Steffens, 2016). Status threat can also emerge as collective angst—concern about the future vitality of one's ethnic group (Stefaniak & Wohl, 2022). The most extreme forms of group status threat may be existential and extinction threat, or concerns that the group will no longer exist (Bai & Federico, 2020; Wohl, Branscombe, & Reysen, 2010). We consider all of these in our conceptualization of (racial and ethnic) group status threat (Brown, Rucker, & Richeson, 2022) as they all reflect concern about the ingroup's standing in society, but we recognize that "status threat" can be broken down into these and perhaps other specific threats, some realistic, some symbolic.

Moderators of Status Threat

As the body of research on the psychological effects of exposure to increasing racial and ethnic diversity grows, scholars have begun to consider the role of individual differences in predicting, if not shaping, which members of the dominant group are most likely to experience status threat in response to this information. Although initial research examining threat reactions in the wake of exposure to information about demographic change found limited evidence of systemic heterogeneity (cf., Major, Blodorn, & Major-Blascovich, 2018), recent work is offering a more nuanced perspective. In this section we review emerging evidence that a number of relevant individual differences can exacerbate or buffer the threat triggered by anticipated or actual racial demographic change.

Hierarchy-Relevant Beliefs & Political Identity

Recent research finds that hierarchy-relevant beliefs and political identity inform dominant group members' reactions to racial demographic change (Brown et al., 2022; see also the chapter by Osborne, Zubielevitch, & Sibley, this volume). In studies of White Americans and White Canadians, for instance, exposure to shifting racial and ethnic demographic information is more threatening to dominant group members who think the societal system (and racial hierarchy) is legitimate (Outten, Lee, Costa-Lopes, Schmitt, & Vala, 2018). Given that political conservatism is highly correlated with social dominance orientation (Ho et al., 2015), it is not surprising that exposure to a "majority-minority" framing of the increasing racial diversity of the nation leads to greater status threat among U.S. White conservatives compared with White liberals (Brown et al., 2022). Taken together, this work suggests that political conservatism may be associated with a more pronounced negative response to racial demographic change (Kaufmann, 2018). We expect that the psychological processes underlying the relationships among political conservatism, endorsement of system-legitimizing ideologies, and status threat

triggered by racial and ethnic demographic change are broadly generalizable, yet they are also likely to be shaped by relevant features of individuals' local contexts.

Similarly, social psychological theory offers reason to expect more muted reactions to increasing racial and ethnic diversity among politically liberal members of dominant racial groups across national and cultural contexts. Research on Aversive Racism Theory (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000), for instance, finds that White individuals with low levels of explicit racial bias, irrespective of their degree of automatic racial bias, are motivated to respond to salient, unambiguous race-related cues in an egalitarian manner; that is, in a manner consistent with their egalitarian values. As projections about national racial demographic change become more commonplace and are contextualized within ongoing debates about racial equity and justice, this information becomes a relatively unambiguously race-related cue. Consequently, more liberal Whites should be expected to express their support for shifting national racial demographics, at least publicly. Consistent with this prediction, Brown et al. (2022) found that White liberals who read about shifting racial demographics in the United States expressed lower levels of racial group status threat than White liberals who read a non-racial control article. Importantly, liberal and conservative White Americans were equally likely to note that status relations between racial groups would change in a more diverse country, but more liberal participants reported significantly lower levels of threat or alarm about the change.

Moreover, the divergence in threat reactions among more liberal and conservative White Americans does not appear to be due to differences in perceptions of the rate of or extent to which the nation is diversifying. In one recent study, White American participants reported the extent to which they expected White Americans to make up a smaller or larger percentage of the U.S. population in 2052, compared to 2022 (Brown, Sulaiman, Shackleford, Kraus, & Richeson,

2025). Interestingly, responses to this item did not differ as a function of participants' political conservatism. Both more liberal and conservative participants expected White Americans to be a smaller percentage of the population in 30 years and to an equivalent degree. Whereas anticipated White population change was not related to White conservatives' racial group status threat, the more that White liberals expected the White population to decline, the *less* status threat they reported. In other words, White liberals appear to accept, if not embrace, the anticipated racial demographic shift.

There is growing evidence that other intergroup beliefs and ideologies also shape reactions to increasing racial diversity, most notably, zero-sum beliefs, or the perception that gains for one group will necessarily result in losses for another (Rasmussen et al., 2022). Indeed, the prospect of racial demographic change has been found to engender higher levels of group status threat in the form of collective angst among White people in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom who believe that opportunities for White people and people of color are zero sum (Stefaniak & Wohl, 2022). Similarly, zero-sum beliefs about the U.S. economy moderate the effect of reading about racial demographic change on support for conservative policies (Perkins, Toskos Dils, & Flusberg, 2022). Specifically, participants with stronger zero-sum beliefs became more conservative in their policy preferences after reading about racial demographic change, while those with weaker zero-sum beliefs about the economy became more liberal. This work is compelling as it is the first (to our knowledge) to reveal evidence of policy positions becoming more liberal after exposure to racial demographic shift information. Future research should examine the extent to which this may similarly be found among politically liberal dominant group members.

Group Identification

The extent to which people identify with the groups they belong to varies both between individual group members and within the same individual, often depending on the situations and contexts they find themselves in (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). Although ethnic identification has primarily been studied to understand the group-relevant behavior of members of minoritized racial groups, it is also relevant to understanding dominant group members' political behavior (Jardina, Kalmoe, & Gross, 2021). Given that group identification shapes group-relevant attitudes and behaviors and reactions to perceived threats to the group (Branscombe et al., 1999), it is not surprising that White Americans who identify more closely with their racial and ethnic group are more threatened by shifting national racial demographics (Major et al., 2018; but see also Stewart & Willer, 2022). Earle and Hodson (2022) similarly found that White Americans' responses to local racial demographic change were moderated by their level of ethnic identification. Specifically, living in a state that had experienced a greater increase in racial diversity was associated with the expression of greater anti-immigrant sentiment among individuals higher, but not lower, in White identification. Further, recent research suggests that the linked fate component of ethnic identification may play a role in White liberals' reduced reports of status threat upon exposure to shifting national racial demographics (Sulaiman, Brown, & Richeson, 2025). While promising, future research is needed to clarify the role or roles of White identification in shaping White Americans' reactions to shifting national racial demographics.

Contact Experiences

Given the increases in racial diversity in the United States and other nations, scholars have begun to study how members of dominant racial groups are responding to actual diversification rather than solely to the prospect of racial and ethnic demographic shifts (e.g.,

Craig & Richeson, 2018; Knowles & Tropp, 2018). On the one hand, living somewhere with an increasing population of members of minoritized racial groups may trigger anxiety, if not status threat, among racial majority group members (Enos, 2014; Quillian, 1995). On the other hand, increasing diversity may create more opportunities for intergroup contact, which in turn, can attenuate discomfort and ultimately reduce prejudice (e.g., Allport, 1979; Ramos, Bennett, Massey, & Hewstone, 2019; Van Assche et al., 2023). Broadly, recent work finds evidence for both these pathways—increases in racial diversity can lead White Americans to express more negative intergroup attitudes, but this effect can be mitigated when increasing diversity is coupled with opportunities for quality contact.

Increasing racial diversity at the local level often exacerbates threat, particularly among those identifying more strongly as White (Craig & Richeson, 2018; Earle & Hodson, 2022). This trend can be further compounded by structural factors including lack of opportunity. For example, in a nationally representative sample of White Americans, having a higher percentage of racial minorities in their neighborhood is associated with greater feelings of status threat and more support for Donald Trump, particularly in areas with higher rates of White unemployment (Knowles & Tropp, 2018). Similarly, county-level growth in the Hispanic population predicts anti-immigrant sentiment among White Americans without a college degree or who lost income (Maggio, 2023). In a study of smaller communities in Canada, a higher share of immigrants was associated with more anti-immigrant attitudes, particularly among those with less education (Esses et al., 2024). Taken together, this evidence suggests that perceived or actual barriers to opportunity increase the likelihood that growing racial diversity produces status threat among majority group members.

Contact, especially high-quality contact, by contrast, can buffer the threat triggered by increasing racial and ethnic diversity (Christ et al., 2014; Van Assche et al., 2023). Knowles and Tropp (2018) found, for instance, that neighborhood diversity was also associated with more frequent cross-racial interactions and that such contact predicted lower feelings of threat. Here too, structural factors play a role. Majority group members in localities with more inclusive policies for immigrant integration are less likely to express negative intergroup emotions or reduce support for immigration policies in response to anticipated or actual increases in racial diversity, compared to majority group members living where laws discourage integration (Kende et al., 2024). Future research is needed to continue to identify the norms, policies, and community designs that can foster healthy intergroup contact and reduce threat in the context of racial demographic change.

Of course, quality interracial contact can only serve as a buffer to threat about increasing racial diversity if such contact occurs, and there currently exist a variety of structural, organizational, and individual barriers to substantive intergroup contact (Richeson, Rucker, & Brown, 2025). At the individual level, people anticipate finding interracial interactions stressful and often seek to avoid them (e.g., Richeson & Shelton, 2007). Moreover, when given the task of structuring a fictional city, White participants preferred to cluster other White people around places that they would live, work, and frequent (Anicich, Jachimowicz, Osborne, & Phillips, 2021). This tendency is further compounded by institutional and other forms of systemic racism (Richeson et al., 2025). As racial diversity continues to increase around the globe, it will be crucial to identify structural factors, organizational interventions, and individual dispositions that promote and those that prevent meaningful contact and its potential to mitigate threat over demographic change.

Consequences of Status Threat

Given the theorized importance of relative group position in the animation of hostile outgroup attitudes (Blumer, 1958), this section first reviews the research examining the effects of increasing racial diversity on dominant racial group members' race-related cognition, perception, attitudes, and behavior. After, we review more recent research examining the implications of exposure to racial shift information for individuals' political attitudes and behavior. Together, these lines of research provide a sobering assessment of the possibility of maintaining a healthy democracy in the wake of increasing ethnic and racial diversification.

Intergroup Relations

Exposure to "majority-minority" racial demographic shift information often triggers negative emotional reactions in members of the dominant racial group. White Canadians, White Americans, and White individuals in several European countries have been found to respond to relevant racial shift information with increased anger and fear toward ethnic minorities, increased sympathy toward White people, and higher levels of collective angst (Outten, Schmitt, Miller, & Garcia, 2012; Stefaniak & Wohl, 2022). Consistent with models of intergroup threat (Stephan et al., 2009), both ambient negative reactions (e.g., anxiety) and threat reactions to salient increases in racial diversity or declines in the White population can, in turn, promote a host of ingroup-protective and outgroup-derisive orientations, perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors among White individuals. For instance, exposure to racial demographic shift information has been shown to increase the extent to which members of dominant racial groups express animus and feel negative emotions toward racial minorities and immigrants (Craig & Richeson, 2014a; Outten et al., 2012; Stefaniak & Wohl, 2022).

In addition to expressing more negative attitudes and emotions toward ethnic and racial minorities, White individuals who are exposed to information about shifting racial demographics (compared to non-race-related control information) show stronger preferences for racial homophily in their social settings and interpersonal interactions (Craig & Richeson, 2014a). Exposure to information about a declining White majority in the population, compared with control information, also led White Americans to express greater support for assimilationist policies and lower support for diversity (Danbold & Huo, 2015). Interestingly, these effects were tied to prototypicality threat—concerns that White Americans will no longer represent the "prototypical American." Further, Zou and Cheryan (2022) found that exposure to shifting neighborhood racial demographics increased White participants' cultural threat—concern that foreign groups will replace current cultural practices and norms—in turn increasing individuals' intentions to move out of the neighborhood. In addition, shifting demographics information increases White individuals' perceptions of and concerns about anti-White discrimination (Craig & Richeson, 2017), consistent with the activation of ingroup-protection motives. Moreover, exposure to racial shift information leads to reduced support for what many would consider equity-enhancing race-related policies, including those supporting immigrant populations and increasing integration (Craig & Richeson, 2014b; Earl & Hodson, 2022).

The ingroup-protective tendencies engendered by exposure to shifting demographics information are also revealed in cognition. Recent work has found, for instance, that exposure to increasing diversity—especially "majority-minority" shift information—can cause White Americans to alter their boundaries for inclusion into the racial ingroup. For example, White Americans were less likely to classify individuals whose race is visually ambiguous as "White" (i.e., as racial ingroup members) and more likely to categorize them as "non-White" when racial

demographic shift information was salient, compared with control (Krosch, Park, Walker, & Lisner, 2022). These and similar findings suggest a cognitive "contraction" of the racial ingroup. In all, this research demonstrates that information about increasing racial and ethnic diversity and, of course, declines in the White population, can cause dominant group members to experience concern over their position in society that, in turn, has important consequences for intergroup attitudes and behavior.

Political Attitudes & Anti-democratic Behavior

Status threat over shifting racial demographics can also lead to downstream consequences for political attitudes and anti-democratic behavior. Exposure to projections of significant racial demographic change leads dominant group members to support racially exclusionary policies designed to uphold the existing racial hierarchy (Blumer 1958; Bobo 1999; Parker, 2021) and endorse more conservative positions on a variety of policy issues, including those related to racial equity (Craig & Richeson, 2014b; Craig & Richeson, 2017). Moreover, status threat triggered by exposure to shifting racial and ethnic population demographics promotes greater support for conservative policies (Bai & Federico, 2020), political parties (Bai & Federico, 2021), and political figures (Major et al., 2018; Mutz, 2018; Parker, 2021). Importantly, exposure to shifting racial demographic information also informs the political attitudes and behavior of members of minoritized racial groups. For example, in the United States, making Hispanic population growth salient for non-Hispanic racial minorities, compared with race-neutral control information, causes greater identification with conservative political parties and more support for conservative policy positions (Craig & Richeson, 2017).

In addition to these more ordinary political dynamics, racial group status threat may also lead to efforts to reduce the influence of the increasing numbers of non-White people on any

number of societal institutions, including those vital to inclusive governance and the practice of democracy. In recent experimental work, for instance, exposure to increasing national racial diversity increased dominant group members' support for political violence, and specifically for extreme-right political violence, such as "I would support the use of physical violence to make illegal immigrants reveal the identity of other immigrants" (Bai & Federico, 2021). Similar patterns emerged in a correlational study examining participation in the January 6, 2021 insurrection in which supporters of Donald Trump in the 2020 presidential election violently stormed the U.S. Capitol in an attempt to disrupt the certification of the American public's vote. Specifically, Pape, Larson, and Ruby (2024) revealed that the degree of White population decline in participants' home counties was a stronger predictor of engaging in this anti-democratic behavior compared with county-level decline in manufacturing (i.e., economic dissatisfaction). In another series of correlational studies, racial group status threat predicted White Americans' support for violating democratic norms, including reducing the number of polling stations in out-party areas, censoring media sources that favor the opposing party, and being more loyal to one's political party than to election rules and the U.S. Constitution (Brown et al., 2025). Taken together, the research reviewed in this section suggests that White population decline can affect a wide range of political outcomes, including some integral to inclusive and representative governance and, thus, the creation and maintenance of multiracial democracy. Given these stakes, it is imperative for social scientists to collaborate across disciplines to understand the many challenges engendered by increasing racial demographic diversity.

Demographic Change and Status Threat Beyond Race

Much of the recent research on the effects of shifting societal population demographics emerged in the wake of actual increases in the racial and ethnic populations of predominantly

White countries that were catalogued and announced by government-based statistical agencies (e.g., Giannakouris, 2010). These population reports quickly garnered attention, especially when they included projections about a so-called "majority-minority" shift (Gest, 2022). Racial and ethnic diversity, however, are not the only dimensions of identity on which the populations of many societies are changing. Indeed, the increase in immigrants is one source of increasing racial diversity in many majority-White nations. Similarly, increases in non-White populations (and immigrants) often simultaneously increase the religious diversity of the population. Moreover, due to changing norms and increased tolerance, there are greater numbers of LGBTQ+ people globally (Twenge, Wells, & Le, 2024). Just like shifts in racial composition, perceived shifts in demographics based on these and other salient identities can also trigger group status concerns and the resultant downstream consequences for intergroup behavior and attitudes toward democracy among members of the corresponding dominant groups (native-born citizens, Christians, heterosexual people, etc.; Blumer, 1958). Similarly, increases in the representation of women in high-status positions in many societies may trigger status threat and backlash among men who are currently and historically overrepresented in these powerful roles. In this section, we review emerging evidence bearing on these demographic trends.

Because growing immigrant populations contribute to the increasing population percentage of racial minorities in the United States, Canada, and most Western European countries, threat over growing immigrant populations is often theoretically and empirically conflated with threat over shifting national racial demographics. Indeed, local growth in Latine immigrants leads to threat, negative attitudes toward immigrants, and support for anti-immigration policies among White Americans (Kaufmann, 2018). Further, growing local Latine populations can also increase White Americans' anti-Black attitudes (Abascal, 2023; Craig &

Richeson, 2014a). Corresponding work in Denmark and Norway finds that believing that Muslim immigrants are "replacing" White Europeans predicts persecution of Muslims and violent behavioral intentions (Obaidi, Kunst, Ozer, & Kimel, 2022). Negative reactions to increasing immigrant populations are driven by both realistic and symbolic concerns (i.e., fears that immigrants will worsen majority group members' economic position and that immigrant groups will not assimilate or will change dominant cultural paradigms; Zárate, Garcia, Garza, & Hitlan, 2004). Local contexts, however, play an important role in shaping reactions to increased immigration; while salient anti-immigrant rhetoric can increase threat in areas experiencing growing immigrant populations (Hopkins, 2010), localities that have policies in place that promote the integration of immigrants experience little to no threat among their residents (Kende et al., 2024).

Similar demographic changes are occurring in the United States and other nations regarding religious identity. Because religious affiliation serves both as a group identity and a moral worldview, it may exert a particularly strong influence on intergroup attitudes (Ysseldyk, Talebi, Matheson, Bloemraad, & Anisman, 2014), especially given that religious identities and practices are central to the dominant culture of many nation states. Jones (2016) argues that Christian Americans are experiencing the decline in the Christian population as threatening and, thus, increasingly support conservative policies, parties, and politicians who are associated with "traditional" values. Consistent with this idea, informing Christian Americans that the number of Christians in the United States is decreasing leads them to experience religious identity threat, or the perception that their religious rights and freedoms are under attack (Al-Kire, Pasek, Tsang, & Rowatt, 2021; Mackey & Rios, 2023).

Much like the decline in individuals who identify as Christian in many countries appears to have triggered religious threat among members of the group, the increasing numbers of publicly-recognized LGBTQ+ individuals may also be perceived as a threat to the social, political, and cultural dominance of Christianity in many nations. Indeed, heterosexual Christians tend to endorse a zero-sum mindset regarding Christian and LGBTQ+ Americans (Wilkins et al., 2022). In other words, heterosexual Christians tend to believe that gains (in rights, influence, recognition, etc.) for LGBTQ+ Americans indicate, if not necessitate, losses for Christian Americans and vice-versa. Indeed, informing Christian Americans that the number of LGBTQ+ Americans is increasing leads to higher symbolic threat and the expression of more homophobia (Mackey & Rios, 2023).

Similar processes of threat and backlash occur in the domain of gender: Though men are not decreasing significantly as a percentage of the population, there are some indications of shifts in socioeconomic status. Women increasingly outpace men in educational attainment, have become more likely to be the primary breadwinners in their household, and movements like #MeToo have challenged longstanding patriarchal entitlements (Hurst, 2024). These shifts can be perceived as threats to men's status and increase opposition to gender equality (Cassino & Besen-Cassino, 2021; Rivera-Rodriguez, Larsen, & Dasgupta, 2022). Further, Ayanian, Uluğ, Radke, and Zick (2024) find that these kinds of masculinity threats can lead to backlash against feminist movements and policies to ensure gender-equity as well as increase violence against women.

Critically, the research reviewed here highlights the overlapping nature of many of these demographic shifts and the compounded impact on specific segments of the population; namely, U.S.-born, White, heterosexual, Christian men. To the extent that individuals identify strongly

with more than one of these dominant identity categories, they may be especially susceptible to experience extreme types or magnitudes of group status threat compared with individuals with only one of these identities. Some research has begun to explore how overlapping dominant identities may shape responses to demographic changes both within and across dimensions of identity (e.g. Al-Kire, Miller, Pasek, Perry, & Wilkins, 2024); however, exploring the effects of shifts on more than one dimension of identity will be pivotal for future work to offer a more realistic account of the broad consequences of increasing diversity. And, research needs to consider how individuals who identify with one dominant group (e.g., Christian, White) but also with a minoritized or otherwise disadvantaged group on a different dimension of identity (e.g., Black, gay) may respond to the dynamic nature of demographic changes in society.

Reflections and Implications

Many majority-White nations are becoming increasingly diverse in terms of race and ethnicity as well as other categories, including immigration status, religious identity, gender identity, and sexual orientation. Each of these demographic shifts raises the prospect of societal changes, which can be threatening to members of groups that are historically and currently in dominant, high-status positions. Research suggests, further, that these threat reactions pose significant obstacles to positive intergroup relations, democratic practices, and, by extension, the prospect of equitable organizations and societies. Indeed, there is every reason to believe that group status threat will increase the extent to which dominant groups consolidate power and exacerbate intergroup inequality.

It is critical to note, however, that the research reviewed here primarily concerns threat reactions to perceived increases in racial diversity. That is, the effects are largely due to anticipated or perceived increases in racial minority populations (declines in White populations),

not actual increases (or declines). Whether these projected shifts will occur, much less by when, is unknown. It is also unclear whether increases in societal racial diversity will meaningfully reduce current racial inequities on any number of outcomes (e.g., educational attainment, income, health). In other words, the group status threat many dominant group members experience at the prospect of shifting racial (and perhaps other) demographics may have a tenuous connection to what is likely to materialize in any future society, irrespective of how racially diverse it becomes (Kachanoff, Sheehy-Skeffington, Ho, Richeson, & Kteily, in press).

Although significant changes in relative group status may not actually come to pass, it is clear that individuals are concerned about the implications of increasing diversity for their groups' positions in society on multiple axes, including cultural centrality, political power, economic resources, and, perhaps also, moral authority (Richeson et al., 2025). Someone who worries about their group losing numerical majority status in the nation, for instance, may also worry that they will no longer be represented in popular media and in legislatures and other government bodies, have opportunities to advance through higher education, obtain lucrative employment, or even openly and conveniently practice their preferred religious and faith traditions. Anticipated losses along any one of these dimensions of hierarchy may result in efforts to reinforce hierarchy in other dimensions. For instance, concern about cultural centrality—or even cultural extinction—among members of dominant racial groups may animate efforts to undermine the political influence of minoritized racial and other groups, for instance, though efforts to restrict voting, if not citizenship.

While the focus of most of the research reviewed here has concerned reactions to demographic changes within relatively large geographic contexts (e.g., nations, states), the dynamics outlined should readily apply to institutions and organizations within societies, be they

private companies, universities, or civic organizations. That is, efforts to increase the racial and

ethnic diversity of historically and majority-White institutions and organizations can trigger

group status threat among dominant group members that, in turn, engenders efforts to limit the

full integration, inclusion, and participation of the relatively new racial and ethnic minority

members. Such efforts may come in the form of interpersonal mistreatment or disregard or,

rather, in policy changes specifically designed to reduce the presence of members of racial and

ethnic minority groups. Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) practitioners, working in tandem

with senior leadership within these organizations, have a vital role to play in creating and

maintaining cultures that can assuage feelings of status threat, including emphasizing the value

of diversity to the organization while acknowledging the reality that change can feel

uncomfortable. Creating opportunities for mutual growth and learning across racial and ethnic

and other divides and shifting away from individualistic, competitive zero-sum cultures to more

collaborative, common-purpose cultures may dampen threat reactions, while also increasing

shared identity and encouraging shared successes. Last, DEI practitioners will be exceptionally

valuable insofar as they can anticipate resistance from members of dominant groups, help to

diffuse it, and implement institutional practices that will protect people from underrepresented

backgrounds from the harms associated with these threat reactions.

  In closing, we believe the research reviewed in this chapter can help us understand many

of the sociopolitical dynamics that have unfolded and continue to unfold in many majority-White

nations over the past few years. It is undeniable that some dominant group members are

concerned about changes in the racial, ethnic, and religious composition of their nations, and

further, the potential implications of those changes. Efforts in the United States to diversify any

number of high-status institutions and broadly increase racial, ethnic, gender, religious, and other

forms of equity in representation and well-being have faced and continue to face severe backlash. Indeed, "diversity, equity, and inclusion" are now synonymous with unjust, antimeritocratic illegality among some very powerful social and political actors in the United States (Speri, 2024). These and other actions can only be understood as efforts to forestall actual progress toward racial and other forms of equality in society, if not fully reinstantiate and legalize segregation and discrimination based on race, creed, sexual orientation, and gender and gender identity. Against this backdrop, we cannot underscore enough the need for rigorous empirical research that may enable nations like the United States to become more diverse yet maintain a thriving democracy that is also cohesive and just.

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