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How identity influences public attitudes towards the US federal government: lessons from the European Union

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Abstract

This study examines why Americans have positive or negative affect towards the US federal government. Specifically, it draws on existing theoretical and empirical research regarding individual attitudes towards the European Union, examining the effect of ethnocentrism on American attitudes towards the federal government. Relying on this existing research regarding the EU, it is hypothesized that those who are more ethnocentric will be more negative towards the US federal government. To test this expectation, we use longitudinal data from the American National Election Study from 1992 to 2012. We find those who are more ethnocentric are significantly more likely to possess negative attitudes towards the federal government. These findings have important implications for policymaking at both the federal and state levels, as well as party positioning both at the time of and between American elections, and the overall stability of multilevel governance in the United States. Additionally, the findings of this study indicate that theories designed to explain phenomena in the European Union are applicable to the US case.

Keywords Federalism · Multilevel government · Diffuse support · Racial politics · Ethnocentrism · European Union

Introduction

As of late January 2020, more than 50% of Americans disapprove of the job Donald Trump is doing as President (Silver et al. 2020), and less than 30% approve of the job Congress is doing (Jones 2020). More generally, American trust in the government in Washington to “do what is right” has declined steadily for more than fifty years. As recently as September 2019, Gallup reported that only 7% of Americans

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trusted the federal government a “great deal” to handle domestic problems (Gallup 2019). Similar numbers were found for trust in the federal government’s handling of international problems, as well. This declining trust in the federal government has been of particular concern to political scientists for more than forty years (see Citrin 1974; Miller 1974).

While substantial research exists regarding why Americans may feel negatively towards the federal government and how ethnocentrism shapes public opinion, we are unaware of previous research that has sought to connect the two. This study turns to the existing literature regarding public attitudes towards the European Union (see Franklin et al. 1994; Franklin et al. 1995; Gabel and Palmer 1995; Gabel 1998; Anderson 1998; Sanchez-Cuenca 2000; McLaren 2002; Hooghe and Marks 2004; 2005; 2009; Serricchio et al. 2013; Hobolt and de Vries 2016) to forward our understanding of negative attitudes towards the US federal government, and specifically how ethnocentrism may influence those attitudes.

As research has suggested that public attitudes and preferences greatly influence both party position taking (Powell 2000; Adams et al. 2004; 2006; Ezrow et al. 2011; Klüver and Spoon 2014; Williams and Spoon 2015; Spoon and Williams 2017), as well as public policymaking (Miller and Stokes, 1963; Page and Shapiro 1983; Stimson et al. 1995; Wlezien 1995, 2004; Erikson et al. 2002; Soroka and Wlezien 2004; Williams 2016; 2018), negative public attitudes towards the federal government of the United States are not inconsequential. In fact, there is significant reason to believe that negative attitudes towards the federal government could very well lead to changes in party positions regarding federal power, as well as policy changes at both the federal and state levels, which could drastically alter the institutional arrangement, as well as the balance in multilevel governmental powers in the United States.

This study applies lessons learned from the European Union to the US case in order to understand individual attitudes towards the federal government, proceeding as follows. First, a theoretical argument regarding public attitudes towards the federal government is presented. From this theory, we derive a set of hypotheses regarding how an individual’s sense of identity shapes their attitudes towards the federal government. In the EU case, affinity for one’s home country drives opposition to the European Union. Building on the role of identity threat, we posit that greater levels of ethnocentrism, understood as affinity for one’s racial group and animosity towards other racial groups, will drive negative attitudes towards the federal government in the United States. To test this theory, we use longitudinal data from the American National Election Study from 1992 to 2012. We find that Americans who are more ethnocentric, that is, individuals with more of an “inclination to divide the world into in-groups and out-groups, the former characterized by virtuosity and talent, the latter by corruption and mediocrity” (Kam and Kinder 2007, p. 321), are significantly more likely to hold negative attitudes towards the federal government. These results are found to be extremely robust and persist across racial groups—meaning that an individual’s degree of ethnocentrism, regardless of one’s own racial group, strongly relates to attitudes towards the federal government. To conclude, we discuss the implications of these findings for party politics, policymaking, and multilevel governance in the US, as well as the importance of using theories developed to explain political phenomena in the EU to examine the US case.



Applying lessons from the European Union to the United States

While the United States and the European Union have important differences, there are also a large number of similarities that allow us to compare the two systems, and in fact, scholarship has recently argued that the United States must draw lessons from the European case (see Kelemen 2015). The United States is typified by a multilevel governance structure in which states maintain sovereignty; however, the national government has increased policymaking power beginning in the 1930s (Bakvis and Brown 2010). Whether states should be independently sovereign or the federal government maintains supremacy over states was one of the clear fault lines as the US shifted from the Articles of Confederation to the Constitution. Conflicts over federalism have persisted and remain one of the dominant ideological cleavages in American politics. States, as more homogeneous subunits, are better suited to represent majority interests. This is part of why Madison argued for an extended republic in *Federalist #10*—to ensure no one faction was able to tyrannically utilize government to achieve their goals at the expense of others. A unified federal government would promote the common good over the interests of any single faction.

It is the very nature of this “us vs. them” dynamic that we seek to engage and turn to the EU for guidance. The EU has developed in a similar regard. Each member state maintains its sovereignty; however, European policy competences have increased substantially over recent decades, with the EU gaining power over “core areas of statehood” (Cheneval et al. 2014, p. 1). In essence, both the United States and the European Union are systems made up of states that have ceded important policy powers to a higher order of government. As researchers often comparatively study multilevel systems as different as the United States, Canada, Brazil, Spain, Germany, Australia, and Switzerland (see Thorlakson 2009), it follows that the existing institutional differences between the US and the EU do not constitute a large enough system divergence to preclude the migration of theory from the EU case to the US.

The similarities, however, do not end with the basic governmental structure of the US and the EU, but also extend to the publics. Some may argue that the public of the United States has developed an “American identity.” That is, given certain contexts, the US public sees itself as a unified American polity. A common criticism, particularly among the media, is that there is no “European identity.” That is, they are more likely to see themselves as their national identity rather than as European. However, research has indicated that in fact, through generational replacement the European public has developed an identity that is European (Striessnig and Lutz 2016; De Vries and Hoffmann 2015).

In essence, the United States and the European Union have comparably similar governmental structures and polities that maintain common understandings of identity. Therefore, our understanding of why individuals feel negatively towards the United States federal government can benefit from the myriad research examining individual level attitudes towards the European Union and the process of European integration (see Franklin et al. 1994; Franklin et al. 1995; Gabel and



Palmer 1995; Gabel 1998; Anderson 1998; Sanchez-Cuenca 2000; McLaren 2002; Hooghe and Marks 2004, 2005, 2009; Serricchio et al. 2013; Hobolt and de Vries 2016).

Turning to the literature regarding public attitudes towards the EU, the theoretical perspective explaining negative attitudes towards the European Union that is most clearly applicable to the US case concerns the concept of identity threat.¹

In this theoretical view, individuals see the EU as leading to unwelcome societal and/or cultural change (see McLaren 2002; van Klingeren et al. 2013). A person is expected to oppose the European Union if she sees it as threatening the societal and/or cultural status quo. In essence, individuals have a “generalized worry about the changing nature of” society (McLaren 2002; 554), and feel negatively towards the EU because it is viewed as the catalyst for these changes. This effect is particularly strong among individuals who possess a more ethnocentric identity (see Carey 2002; de Vreese et al. 2008). Put simply, when an individual has a particularly ethnocentric understanding of his own national identity, i.e., seeing himself as terminally German, Dutch, Swedish, etc. and viewing that nationality more positively than others, he is more likely to view the EU as a threat.²

Clearly, identity matters in American politics, and thus, the application of the above identity-based theory explaining public attitudes towards the European Union to the US case is possible.³ However, applying this theoretical understanding to the

¹ A second major theoretical approach from the EU literature focuses on utilitarian appraisals or economic calculations (see Gabel 1998; Hooghe and Marks 2004; 2005). This approach argues that European integration has led to economic benefits for some, but not all, people, and those who have benefited will be more supportive of the EU. Due to the different political and economic structures in place in the US compared to the EU, there is less applicability of the utilitarian appraisals theoretical approach to the US case. That is to say, very few people in the United States give thought to the possibility of restrictions on interstate trade within the borders of the United States. Rather, the ability to trade and move between states, and the single currency of the United States are so ingrained in the American psyche, one would not expect those who gain monetarily from these policies to be any more or less supportive of the federal government. However, as the utilitarian appraisal theoretical approach is important in the research on the European Union, we included measures of sociotropic economic evaluations, education level, and household income (see Gabel 1998; McLaren 2002) in our models.

² Importantly, this understanding is not of mere academic concern. In fact, research suggests that the vote in favor of “Brexit” was, in large part, driven by fear of immigration being made easier by the UK’s membership of the EU, and the perceived threat immigrants pose to what it means to be British (Clarke et al. 2017; Goodwin and Milazzo 2017). Europe began experimenting with integration and multilevel governance in earnest in only the mid-twentieth century, when the Treaty of Rome founded the European Economic Community (the predecessor of the current European Union). Because of this particular context in Europe, the identity-based theory explaining attitudes towards the EU discussed above (see McLaren 2002; Carey 2002) focuses on identification with a particular nation-state (e.g., France, Germany, the Netherlands, etc.).

³ While the above theory developed in the EU is applicable to the case of the US, an important distinction should be made. In the European Union, there is a small (about 10% of the European population over time; see Williams and Bevan 2019), but real group of hard Eurosceptics that oppose the existence of the European Union (see Taggart and Szczerbiak (2004) for a discussion of hard Euroscepticism). The percentage of the population that believes the US federal government should not exist is smaller, but not non-existent. For example, in April 2016, a handful of county Republican parties in Texas voted in favor of a resolution calling for Texas independence from the United States to be voted on at the state Republican convention, coming within 2 votes of adding a call for secession to the Texas Republican platform (Fetterman 2017). In June 2016, a hashtag calling for a “Texit,” or Texas exit from the US, began



case of the United States is not necessarily straightforward and simple. The US differs from the European Union in that it maintains a more established centralized government, having used a multilevel system of governance since the late eighteenth century. In line with this long history, identification with a state is not likely the terminal identity for most Americans (Citrin et al. 2001; Theiss-Morse 2009; Schildkraut 2010), despite the possibility that some Americans may self-identify with their particular state before the US as a whole.

Thus, to apply the above theory regarding the effect of identity on support for the EU to the case of the US federal government, we must focus on the underlying causal mechanism: identity threat. Whereas in Europe, individuals feel negatively towards the EU when they fear that their society, culture, and national identity will be eroded by integration, and immigration (McLaren 2002; Carey 2002; van Klingeren et al. 2013), in the United States, the aspect of identity that plays the most central role is race (Citrin et al. 1990, 2001). Therefore, we would expect to see negative affect towards the federal government when people feel that their racial identity is threatened by the federal government. That is, people will hold negative views of the federal government when they see the government's racial integration efforts as undermining their own racial identity.⁴

While the theory being applied to the US case was initially designed for application in the EU in regard to nationality, and there may be some differences between nationality and race, particularly as those in Europe are socialized to perceived the nation as the primary locus of power and those in the US are not necessarily socialized to view race as such, it should be noted, that, as ethnic and racial identity are

Footnote 3 (continued)

appearing on social media (Dart 2016). Additionally, a burgeoning "California secession" movement has grown, particularly after the 2016 Presidential election, with supporters attempting to force a statewide referendum on California leaving the United States. It should also be noted, most people in Europe who espouse Eurosceptic attitudes tend towards soft Euroscepticism (see van Elsas and van der Brug (2015) for a discussion of soft and hard Euroscepticism in the public). Soft Eurosceptics are often understood as being opposed to the policies of the European Union, but not the idea of Europe in general. This fits with what is seen in the United States, where questioning the right of the federal government to exist is less common, and opposition to the policies of the federal government is quite common.

⁴ It should be noted, there is a difference between the EU and the US in that in the EU, the "others" are other countries (or the people of other countries), and therefore explicitly part of the EU. In the United States, the "others" are people of different races. While people of different races are represented by the US federal government, the geopolitical cleavage in society is the state, not the racial group. That is, senators in the US are not elected from the "other" groups, whereas, in the EU, representatives in the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers do represent the "other" groups. This means that those opposed to the "others" in the EU are concerned about the entirety of European governance degrading one's national culture. Whereas those opposed to the "others" in the US are not necessarily opposed to the existence of the federal government degrading one's racial identity. Rather they are concerned about federal-level policies degrading one's racial identity. While this is an important differentiation, it should not greatly affect the expectations of this study. Within the literature on opposition to the EU, the furthering of integration and the furthering of European policy are understood to be, if not the same, extremely similar (see Franklin and Wlezien 1997; Toshkov 2011; Williams 2016). Thus, the distinction between the EU and the US on the role of the "others" in government becomes blurred. Additionally, this differentiation between the EU and the US should not alter the expectations of this study, as opposition to the existence of EU power, and opposition to US federal policy should both manifest themselves in negative affect towards the EU and the US federal government, respectively.



socially constructed, these differentiations may not be of the utmost importance to individuals. The concepts of race and nationality are not substantially different in the EU setting. In Europe, nationality and race are intrinsically linked. In European society, racism focuses around culture and ethnicity (Rzepnikowska 2019). As Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1983, p. 67) write, “[race] may be any group that has been ‘socially’ constructed as having a different ‘origin,’ whether cultural, biological or historical...any group that has been located in ethnic terms can be subjected to ‘racism’ as a form of exclusion.” It follows that the theory applied in this study, which posits that Europeans who feel cultural threat produced by the EU will feel more negatively towards the EU, is referencing race as much as it is nationality.

Further still, research suggests that race is often connected to nationality in the United States as well. For example, in the post-Civil War period, “the Free-Soil and Republican parties attracted many voters who associated American nationalism with the racial destiny of Anglo-Saxons,” and many in the United States embraced “a concept of nationalism that permanently excluded blacks,” (Teed 1995, pp. 144 and 153). Importantly, this understanding of the link between race and nationality is not only an historic relic. As Maskovsky (2017, p. 437) writes, “white nationalism in the United States [derives from] liberal forms of white ethnic identity politics that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, in the aftermath of the Black power and other protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s.” Even further, the combining of race and nationality is not just confined to whites. Robinson (2001, p. 8) writes, regarding black nationalist leader, Marcus Garvey, “[he] anticipated the style of much of the black nationalism that would follow—its principled rejection of American identity, and its notion that black enterprise could somehow lay the foundation for separate statehood.” Put simply, the United States has embraced a “‘civic nationalism’ with a racial qualification,” (Fredrickson 2003, p. iv), thus closely linking nationality and race.

Put simply, race and nationality in both Europe and the United States are deeply connected. Thus, it follows that the application of the above theory developed in Europe to the understanding of race in the United States also follows. Indeed, this identity-based theory clearly relates to US politics today. Identity, and in particular, fear of groups that an individual does not view herself as a member of (i.e., out-groups), plays a large role in the politics and policy of the United States (see Kinder and Sanders 1996; Sears et al. 1997; Tesler and Sears 2010; Tesler 2012). As people identify with various groups, they form an in-group versus out-group bias, or more simply an “us vs. them” bias (Tajfel and Turner 1979; Turner et al. 1987; Kinder and Kam 2009). As an identity becomes more important or more salient for us—this in-group/out-group dynamic becomes a stronger predictor of political attitudes and behavior (Huddy 2013). In the US, we have seen a decline in cross-cutting identities (Mason 2015, 2016), so who is on “our” side and who is on the “other” side has become more consistent and more pronounced. As a result, negative, or affective, polarization is on the rise as we increasingly view politics through a lens of “us vs. them” (Iyengar et al. 2019).

Previous work has found that as the size of minority groups grow, the majority report feeling more at risk (Oliver and Wong 2003; Danbold and Huo 2014). In the US, this dynamic is particularly relevant as the white population is decreasing in size as the country grows more racially diverse (Enos 2014; Craig and Richeson



2014a). This tension between groups, or threat, has the potential to impact attitudes towards other groups (Roccas and Brewer 2002; Branscombe et al. 2007; Craig and Richeson 2014b). Further, the role of identity can shape voting behavior (Tesler and Sears 2010). Donald Trump's recent success was due, in part, to his ability to tap into identity concerns and the fear that government has catered to certain interests and not others (Tesler 2016; Tesler and Sides 2016; Major et al. 2016; Sides et al. 2018). Even further, we have seen these same themes appear in other, less recent elections in the United States. For example, the so-called "Willie Horton" ad of the 1988 Presidential election used identity-based imagery to influence public thinking about politics and policy (Valentino et al. 2002; Mendelberg 1997).

We have seen a clear relationship in the US between racial attitudes and attitudes on a host of domestic and foreign policy issues (Kinder and Sanders 1996). Increasingly, certain policies like welfare and criminal justice reform are viewed as racial policies—where attitudes are shaped by racial resentment (e.g., Gilens 1996, 1999; Hurwitz and Peffley 2005). Additionally, literature has suggested that identity concerns influence public preferences regarding redistributive policy, with prejudice towards out-groups leading to opposition to greater welfare spending (Sears et al. 2000; Gilens 1999; Lind 2007; Luttmer 2001; Bobo and Hutchings 1996).

Kinder and Kam (2009) find compelling evidence that ethnocentrism—broadly understood as this "us vs. them" mentality—strongly predicts attitudes, on a diverse array of issues, including the war on terror, foreign aid, immigration, and welfare reform, for example. In general, fear and perceived group threat drive policy preferences in a more conservative direction—consistent with opposition to a more robust federal government (Hofstadter 1965; Parker and Barreto 2013; Craig and Richeson 2014a). This anger over losing out, and anger directed towards another group shapes attitudes against the federal government—above and beyond any general ideological predisposition (Banks and Valentino 2012; Banks 2014; see Tesler 2016, Chapter 1).

The federal government in the United States has the potential to disrupt the societal status quo. Specifically, through policymaking, the federal government can provide greater rights, and protections to certain groups. They can also use redistributive power to provide greater economic benefits to certain groups over others. These powers to grant or remove rights, protections, and benefits for certain groups, possibly at the expense of an individual's in-group, can lead that individual to fear that he may be forced by the federal government to accept the norms and culture of an out-group. This, in turn, leads individuals to hold negative views of the federal government.⁵

⁵ While it is possible that state and local governments might enact similar policies to those enacted by the federal government, historically, this has not been the case. In fact, movements, such as the "Patriots" and numerous "militias," which have argued for abolition of the federal government, are also virulently racist (see Abanes 1996; Dees 1996; Crawford and Burghart 1997; van Dyke and Soule 2002). The history of the United States is one in which states enacted policies designed to disenfranchise and marginalize certain groups (e.g., Jim Crow). Thus, it is possible that states and local governments create policies that require individuals to accept the norms and culture of out-groups; however, history suggests that the federal government has played this role more often than state and local governments. Thus, one would expect individuals who do not want to accept the norms and culture of out-groups to develop negative affect towards the federal government. If states were historically the level of governance that pushed for racial integration, one might expect to see negative affect towards state government among those who are more ethnocentric. In essence, within a multilevel system, one would expect to see negative affect



Here we posit that identity threat drives antipathy towards the federal government whether this fear is rational or not. Americans that are members of dominant social groups, such as whites and Christians, report feelings of persecution (Jones et al 2016; Jardina 2019) while members of minority groups are able to harbor prejudicial attitudes towards majority groups (Zigerell 2018). As the level of threat—real or perceived—increases, those possessing higher levels of ethnocentrism are more likely to believe that the federal government is providing benefits to others at their own detriment.

Importantly, in line with the literature regarding attitudes towards the European Union (McLaren 2002; Carey 2002; Hooghe and Marks 2004; 2005; de Vreese et al. 2008), this fear is particularly potent among individuals who are more ethnocentric (i.e., more likely to split society into in-groups and out-groups), as they are the least open to accepting out-groups. Thus, one can hypothesize:

H1: Those who are more ethnocentric will feel more negatively towards the US federal government.⁶

Within the US federal system, increasing negativity towards the federal government has the potential to profoundly affect the overall health of American democracy. For example, distrust of government has possible disastrous consequences for the stability and legitimacy of democracy (Bianco 1994). Chanley et al. (2000) find that negative attitudes towards the federal government have led to less support for liberal domestic policies. Hetherington and co-authors have found decreasing positivity to have a persistent impact on support for specific policies (Hetherington and Globetti 2002; Hetherington and Husser 2012), weakened support towards political leaders and democratic institutions (Hetherington 1998), and increased support for devolution—returning more power to the states and away from a centralized national government (Hetherington and Nugent 2001).

At first glance, the likelihood of the federal government granting rights, protections, and benefits to a particular group does not appear to be equal across all groups. If an individual is more ethnocentric, and belongs to a particular group that is more likely to have rights, protections, and benefits granted by the federal government, one may assume that that individual would be more positive towards the federal government. After all, the federal government would be requiring all people, even those identifying with a different group, to be more accepting of one's own group. At the same time, it would follow that those who are being forced by the federal government to accept out-groups having greater rights, protections, and benefits would feel more negatively about the federal government.

However, due to the large number of policies created each year by the federal government, it is possible for individuals belonging to any group, who are more ethnocentric to view the federal government as providing greater rights, protections,

Footnote 5 (continued)

towards the level of government that is most threatening to an individual's identity. However, as states are more homogenous, they are better suited to represent majority interests.

⁶ The opposite of this hypothesis would also be expected.



and benefits to an out-group, while forcing their own in-group to be more accepting of that out-group. Recent research confirms that both racial majority and minority groups believe that their group is discriminated against and that policy ought to protect their interests—not that of the other group (Zigerell 2018; Jardina 2019). That is, since the federal government produces a myriad of policies in different domains each year, it is feasible that a white individual who is more ethnocentric will take note of a specific policy or set of policies that she deems to be more beneficial to an out-group (e.g., blacks, Hispanic-Americans, etc.). At the same time, a black person who is more ethnocentric may focus on a different policy or set of policies that he deems to be more beneficial to an out-group (i.e., whites, Hispanic-Americans, etc.). This same logic also applies to Hispanic-Americans and Asian-Americans.

In essence, the vast array of policies produced by the federal government allow individuals who are more ethnocentric to find grievance with the federal government over perceived unequal treatment of one's in-group, and perceived preferential treatment of out-groups. Moreover, individuals who are more ethnocentric will feel that the federal government is helping out-groups, regardless of the reality of public policies. We argue that this allows ethnocentric individuals in all groups to feel that the federal government threatens their identity. More bluntly, the theoretical process we outline in our first hypothesis extends beyond white animus towards racial minorities—but is a product of ethnocentrism more broadly. Following this logic, it can be hypothesized:

H2: The effect of ethnocentrism on attitudes towards the US federal government is not dependent upon membership in any given racial group.

Research design

To test these hypotheses, we use individual level data from the American National Election Study covering the years 1992, 2000, 2004, 2008, and 2012.⁷ In this section, we discuss the measures for our dependent, independent, and control variables. We then finish with a discussion of our analytical strategy.

The dependent variable used in testing the above hypotheses is an individual's affect towards the United States federal government. This variable is operationalized using respondent ratings of the federal government on a feeling thermometer ranging from 0 (the most negative) to 100 (the most positive).⁸ In the dataset, this

⁷ 1996 is not included as the survey instruments necessary to measure certain variables are not available.

⁸ The text of the feeling thermometer question is "We'd also like to get your feelings about some groups in American society. When I read the name of a group, we'd like you to rate it with what we call a feeling thermometer. Ratings between 50 degrees-100 degrees mean that you feel favorably and warm toward the group; ratings between 0 and 50 degrees mean that you don't feel favorably towards the group and that you don't care too much for that group. If you don't feel particularly warm or cold toward a group you would rate them at 50 degrees. If we come to a group you don't know much about, just tell me and we'll move on to the next one...still using the thermometer, how would you rate the federal government in Washington?."



variable ranges from 0 to 97, with a mean of 48.386, and a standard deviation of 23.307.⁹

The independent variable used in testing hypothesis 1, which posits that those who are more ethnocentric, that is individuals who feel a greater identity threat (McLaren 2002; Carey 2002; Hooghe and Marks 2004, 2005; de Vreese et al. 2008), will feel more negatively towards the federal government, is an additive measure of negative feelings towards out-groups and positive feelings towards a respondent's in-group. Feeling thermometers, similar to those used to measure positivity or negativity towards the federal government, were used in creating this measure.¹⁰ Specifically, feeling thermometers for four races, whites, blacks, Hispanic-Americans, and Asian-Americans were combined.

An individual's score on the feeling thermometer of her own racial group, which is self-identified by the respondent, was combined additively, with inverted values for her out-groups.¹¹ To produce the inverted feeling thermometers, the value each individual provided for an out-group was multiplied by negative 1 and subtracted from 100, meaning an inverted feeling thermometer score of 100 indicates a particularly negative attitude towards a group, while a score of 0 indicates positivity. Thus, if an individual is white, her non-inverted feeling thermometer score for whites was additively combined with her inverted feeling thermometer scores for blacks, Hispanic-Americans, and Asian-Americans. Importantly, this measure is particularly well suited to measure ethnocentrism as it provides a measure of positivity towards one's own group, as well as a measure of negativity towards other groups with which an individual does not identify.¹²

The theoretical range for this variable is 0 (the least ethnocentric) to 400 (the most ethnocentric). The range in the dataset for this variable is 43 to 397. The mean for this variable is 181.091 with a standard deviation of 45.068.

Hypothesis 2 specifies that the effect of ethnocentrism we posit in Hypothesis 1 is not dependent upon or driven by ethnocentrism among one racial group. To test this, we use three multiplicative interactions as our independent variables. Specifically, the above measure of ethnocentrism is interacted with dummy variables indicating an individual's race as either black, Hispanic-American, or Asian-American; white

⁹ For descriptive statistics for all variables in this study in all models, see Table 3 in the appendix.

¹⁰ Kinder and Kam (2009) utilize a similar measure of ethnocentrism operationalized through feelings thermometers.

¹¹ Factor analysis was conducted for the feeling thermometers for each racial grouping, white, black, Hispanic, and Asian-American. The feeling thermometer for each group was factored with the inverted thermometers for out-groups. For whites, the thermometers factored together with absolute values of 0.59 or higher. For blacks, the thermometers factored together with absolute values of 0.53 or higher. For Hispanics and Asian-Americans, the thermometers factored together with absolute values of 0.65 or higher. Further, reliability tests show Cronbach's alpha scores over 0.80 for all groupings. This suggests that these measures can be used as an additive index.

¹² It should be noted, as a robustness check, tests were conducted in which the independent variable was simply an individual's combined inverted feeling thermometer scores (i.e., only negativity towards out-groups). These results were virtually identical to the results of the main test of this study (see Table 4 of the appendix).



serves as the baseline category. For each of these interactions, the theoretical range is 0 (most inclusive) to 400 (most exclusive).

The interaction between ethnocentrism and the dummy variable denoting an individual's identity as black has a range in the dataset of 0 to 397 with a mean of 29.931 and a standard deviation of 69.019. The interaction between ethnocentrism and the dummy variable denoting an individual's identity as Hispanic-American has a range of 0 to 397 with a mean of 25.913 and a standard deviation of 64.238. The interaction between ethnocentrism and the dummy variable denoting an individual's identity as Asian-American has a range of 0 to 297 with a mean of 2.763 and a standard deviation of 22.715.¹³

Beyond the main independent variables, a number of control variables are also included in the below analysis. As research has suggested that economic factors may influence positivity or negativity towards higher levels of government in multilevel systems (Gabel and Palmer 1995; Gabel 1998), a measure of each respondent's self-reported household income is included. Further, there is reason to believe that ideology and party identification will influence an individual's affect towards the federal government. Thus, a measure of conservatism is included in the analysis. Importantly, this measure of conservatism should also control for principled belief in states' right (i.e., subsidiarity) as conservatism is often associated with support for fewer federal powers.

Further, dummy variables indicating if a respondent self-identifies as a Republican or Democrat are also included in the analysis. Additionally, respondents who identify as a member of the same party as the President may be more likely to feel positivity towards the federal government. Thus, a dummy variable indicating if the respondent is of the same party as the incumbent President at a particular time is included.

Moreover, research has suggested that sociotropic measures of economic performance influence public trust in the government (Chanley et al. 2000). Therefore, we include an ordered variable, indicating on a scale of 0 to 2, whether the respondent believes the economy over the last year has "gotten better" (2), "stayed about the same" (1), or "gotten worse" (0).¹⁴

To control for the possibility that there are effects intrinsic to each given year, we include dummy variables for observations that occur in 1992, 2000, 2004, and 2008, using 2012 as the baseline category.¹⁵ Additionally, we included variables indicating

¹³ If an interaction between ethnocentrism and an individual's identification as white were included in the model, the range for this variable in the dataset would be 0 to 397 with a mean of 124.753 and a standard deviation of 92.713. Importantly, this indicates that whites are far more likely to be ethnocentric than non-whites.

¹⁴ As a robustness test, we included an objective measure of economic output, GDP per capita, in our main models along with the sociotropic measure of economic performance. The results of these tests do not change the effects of the main independent variable in any substantive way. We choose to not include GDP per capita in our main models as doing so precludes the inclusion of year dummy variables, which are preferable as they control for any idiosyncratic factors that occurred in a given year (including economic factors), while controlling for GDP per capita does not.

¹⁵ In order to examine the possibility of cross-time variation in our models, we ran a series of robustness checks in which ethnocentrism was interacted with the year dummy variables. The results show that ethnocentrism still maintains the strong negative effect seen in the main models of this study. However,



a respondents' age, sex, marital status, and education level. Age is measured in years with respondents all falling between 17 and 99. Sex is measured as a dummy variable with males coded as 1, and females as 0. Marital status is measured as a dummy variable with individuals who are currently married being coded as a 1, and all other individuals receiving a value of 0. Education level is an ordinal scale ranging from 1 (8 grades or fewer) to 7 (advanced degrees).

Dummy variables denoting an individual's self-identified race are also included. Specifically, we include dummy variables indicating a respondent's identification as black, Hispanic-American, or Asian-American with white as the baseline category.¹⁶

As the dependent variable in this study approximates a normal distribution, ordinary least squares regression is most appropriate. Further, a Breusch-Pagan/Cook-Weisberg test suggests that heteroskedasticity is likely present in the data.¹⁷ Therefore, we use White's robust standard errors.

Results

Hypothesis 1 argues that individuals that are more ethnocentric will be more negative towards the federal government. Model 1 (see Table 1) presents the results of a direct test of this hypothesis. The main independent variable in Model 1, ethnocentrism, is statistically significant at the $p \leq 0.001$ level. Further, the coefficient is -0.074 , which is in the expected direction. This indicates that an increase of 1 in an individual's level of ethnocentrism is associated with a decrease of 0.074 in a

Footnote 15 (continued)

there are definitive cross-time differences in effect as well. Specifically, we see that the negative effect of ethnocentrism on positivity towards the federal government in 2008 is greater than in 2012. Further, we examined the conditioning effect of who was in the office of the President at a particular time on the relationship between ethnocentrism and the different measures of affect towards the federal government. This was done by interacting a dummy variable indicating who was in office at a time with the measure of ethnocentrism. Across 16 tests, only 3 tests (when affect towards the federal government is measured as positivity on a scale of 0–100 during the George W. Bush and Obama presidencies, and when affect towards the federal government is measured as perception of corruption during the Obama presidency) show a statistically significant relationship between ethnocentrism conditioned on Presidential administration, and affect towards the federal government. Importantly, the interaction between a dummy variable for George W. Bush and ethnocentrism shows a negative coefficient, suggesting that those who are more ethnocentric during the George W. Bush presidency were more likely to have a negative view of the federal government. The interaction between a dummy variable for Obama and ethnocentrism shows a positive coefficient when affect was measured as the degree of positivity (0–100) and a negative coefficient when affect was measured as perception of corruption. This suggests that those who were more ethnocentric during the Obama presidency were more positive towards the federal government and less likely to perceive corruption. These findings should not be interpreted as definitive as these findings lack robustness; however, they may be suggestive of an elite discourse effect, as Republican elites are more likely to emphasize a need for less federal power.

¹⁶ Additionally, robustness tests in which a measure of interpersonal trust was included were run. The measure of interpersonal trust has no effect on attitudes towards the federal government. We do not include this variable in our main models as it does not exist for 2012.

¹⁷ The chi-squared obtained through the Breusch-Pagan/Cook-Weisberg test is 2.83 with a p-value of 0.093. While this is marginally significant, using White's robust standard errors produces a more conservative estimate of statistical significance.



person's positivity towards the federal government. This finding supports hypothesis 1.

As the N of this study is over 10,000, which increases the likelihood of establishing statistical significance, it is important to assess the substantive effects of ethnocentrism on affect towards the federal government. Figure 1 plots the marginal effects of ethnocentrism (x-axis) on individual affect towards the federal government (right-hand y-axis) holding all other variables at their mean or median. The solid line is the expected effect, and the dashed lines are the 95% confidence interval. The distribution of ethnocentrism is displayed as a histogram, with the left-hand y-axis denoting the percentage of observations.

As can be seen in Fig. 1, there is a rather stark downward slope in the expected level of positive affect towards the federal government as an individual's ethnocentrism increases. When an individual's value for ethnocentrism is 0 (the least ethnocentric), affect towards the federal government takes a value of approximately 52, which is slightly positive and roughly 4 points above the mean for the sample. At a level of ethnocentrism of 200, an individual's expected affect towards the federal government will be about 37.5, well below the average for the sample. If an individual is the most ethnocentric, her expected affect towards the federal government is approximately 23, which is 25 points lower than the mean for the sample, and 29 points lower than the expected affect for an individual who is the least ethnocentric. Simply put, if an individual is the most ethnocentric, she will be nearly 30% less positive towards the federal government than an individual who is the least ethnocentric.

To check the robustness of the above findings, we developed three additional measures of affect towards the federal government.¹⁸ The first of these measures focuses on trust in the federal government. We operationalized this using the question, "how much of the time can [you] trust the government in Washington to do what is right?" Responses ranged from 0 ("Just about always") to 3 ("None of the time"), meaning that a higher value indicates a more negative attitude towards the federal government. Importantly, this is the inverse of the coding of affect towards the federal government in Model 1, which was coded so positivity is a greater value.

Model 2 (see Table 1) is identical to Model 1, however, the original measure of affect towards the federal government was replaced with the above measure of trust in the federal government. Similar to Model 1, the results suggest a statistically significant and positive relationship between ethnocentrism and negativity towards the federal government, measured as trust in the federal government. Put simply, when individuals are more ethnocentric, they also are less trusting of the federal government.

Figures 2 and 3 graph the marginal effect of ethnocentrism (x-axis), on affect towards the federal government (right-hand y-axis), measured as trust in the federal

¹⁸ While factor analysis suggests the three additional measures load fairly well together, with factor loadings all above 0.48, the measures are examined separately in order to provide a more nuanced understanding of the effect of ethnocentrism on attitudes towards the federal government.



Table 1 Effect of ethnocentrism on affect towards the federal government

DV: Affect towards the federal government	Model 1 Coefficient (Standard Error)	Model 2 Coefficient (Standard Error)	Model 3 Coefficient (Standard Error)	Model 4 Coefficient (Standard Error)
Ethnocentrism	- 0.074*** (0.005)	0.002*** (0.001)	0.003*** (0.001)	0.001** (0.001)
Household Income	- 1.310*** (0.221)	0.067 (0.028)	0.051 (0.025)	0.098*** (0.023)
Ideology	- 0.154*** (0.016)	0.004 (0.002)	- 0.004 (0.002)	0.011*** (0.001)
Republican	1.019 (0.762)	- 0.317** (0.102)	- 0.184 (0.093)	0.087 (0.086)
Democrat	1.881* (0.719)	- 0.231 (0.095)	0.054 (0.087)	- 0.115 (0.079)
ID with President's Party	4.693*** (0.468)	- 0.263*** (0.060)	- 0.364*** (0.056)	- 0.243*** (0.052)
Sociotropic Economic Eval	3.944*** (0.325)	- 0.345*** (0.040)	- 0.290*** (0.038)	- 0.363*** (0.034)
Male	3.105*** (0.408)	- 0.049 (0.053)	- 0.211*** (0.048)	- 0.142*** (0.045)
Marital Status	1.108 (0.448)	0.014 (0.057)	- 0.023 (0.053)	- 0.003 (0.049)
Age	0.047*** (0.013)	- 0.002 (0.002)	0.008*** (0.002)	0.013*** (0.001)
Education Level	- 1.394*** (0.143)	0.072*** (0.018)	0.069*** (0.017)	- 0.033 (0.016)
Black	12.604*** (0.626)	- 0.141 (0.081)	- 0.367*** (0.070)	- 0.211 (0.065)
Hispanic	10.999*** (0.641)	- 0.402*** (0.086)	- 0.546*** (0.068)	- 0.146*** (0.067)
Asian	8.962*** (1.388)	- 0.636** (0.209)	- 0.285 (0.193)	- 0.281 (0.182)
Year 1992	9.300*** (0.620)	- 0.588*** (0.077)	- 0.339*** (0.077)	- 0.400*** (0.068)
Year 2000	12.738*** (0.661)	- 0.939*** (0.079)	- 0.834*** (0.079)	- 0.473*** (0.073)
Year 2004	14.899*** (0.727)	- 1.116*** (0.082)	- 1.242*** (0.083)	- 0.463*** (0.079)
Year 2008	10.308*** (0.658)	- 0.672*** (0.100)	- 0.889*** (0.073)	- 0.232*** (0.072)
Constant	57.187*** (1.836)		1.094*** (0.199)	
N	10,223	69991	10,041	10,230
R ²	0.240			

Table entries for Model 1 are OLS Regression coefficients with White's robust standard errors. The dependent variable in Model 1 is positivity towards the federal government on a scale of 0–100. Table entries for Models 2 and 4 are ordered logistic regression coefficients with robust standard errors. The dependent variable for Model 2 is trust in the federal government. The dependent variable for Model 4 is belief that the federal government wastes tax money. Table entries for Model 3 are logistic regression coefficients with robust standard errors. The dependent variable for Model 3 is belief that the federal government is run by a few interests for their own benefit

***p ≤ 0.001; ** p ≤ .0005; * p ≤ .0.01



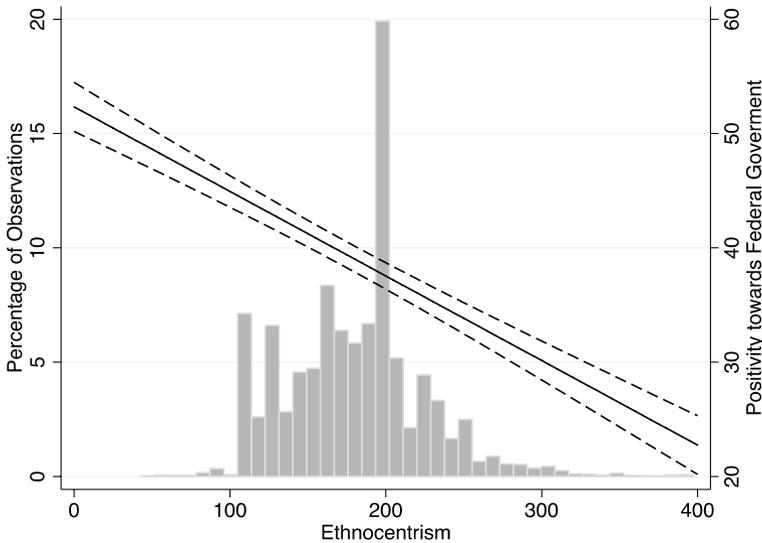


Fig. 1 Marginal effect of ethnocentrism on positivity towards the federal government

government, while holding all other variables at their mean or median.¹⁹ The solid lines are the predicted probabilities of a person saying they trust the federal government most of the time (Fig. 2) or some of the time (Fig. 3), and the dashed lines represent the 95% confidence interval. The distribution of ethnocentrism is displayed as a histogram, with the left-hand y-axis denoting the percentage of observations.

Figure 2 shows a negative slope, meaning that as ethnocentrism increases, the probability of an individual saying they trust the federal government to do what is right most of the time decreases. When ethnocentrism is 0, the probability of an individual saying she trusts the federal government to do what is right most of the time is roughly 23%. However, when ethnocentrism reaches 200, the probability of an individual saying she trusts the federal government to do what is right most of the time drops to about 17%. Moreover, if ethnocentrism is 400, the maximum amount within our measure, the probability of an individual saying she trusts the federal government to do what is right most of the time drops to about 12%.

Figure 3 shows a positive slope, meaning that as ethnocentrism increases, the probability of an individual saying they trust the federal government to do what is right some of the time increases, which is in the expected direction as taken together with Fig. 2. This suggests that people are less likely to say they trust the government *most* of the time and more likely to say they only trust the government *some* of the

¹⁹ The predicted probabilities are only reported for values for trust in the federal government of 1 (trusting the government most of the time) and 2 (trusting the government some of the time). Predicted probabilities aren't reported for values of 0 (trusting the government all of the time) and 4 (trusting the government none of the time), because there is little change in these predicted probabilities as ethnocentrism varies.



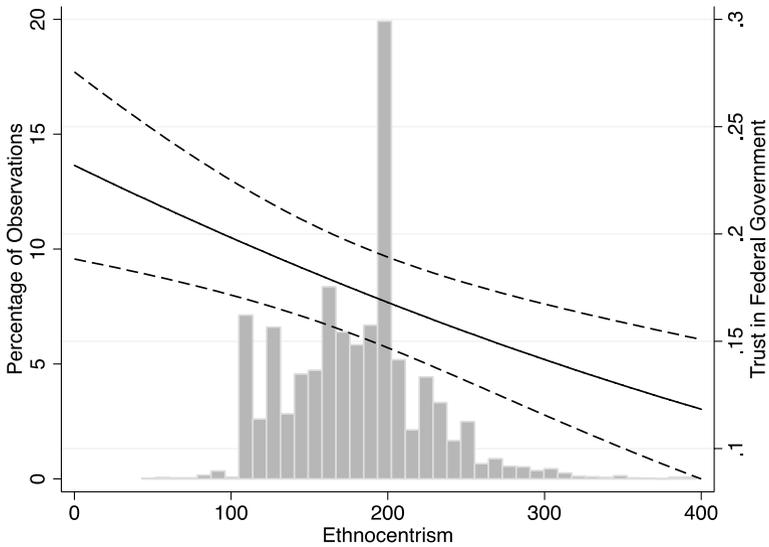


Fig. 2 Marginal effect of ethnocentrism on trust (most of the time) in federal government

time. In essence, people appear to be shifting from the “most of the time” category to the “some of the time” category.

When ethnocentrism is 0, the probability of an individual saying she trusts the federal government to do what is right some of the time is roughly 73%. However, when ethnocentrism reaches 200, the probability of an individual saying she trusts the federal government to do what is right some of the time increases to about 79%. Moreover, if ethnocentrism is 400, the probability of an individual saying she trusts the federal government to do what is right some of the time increases to about 83%. This suggests as ethnocentrism increases, the likelihood of being less trusting of the federal government also increases. These findings combined with the findings in Fig. 2 suggest that those who are more ethnocentric are less trusting of the federal government to do what is right.

The second additional measure of affect towards the federal government is based on the question of whether the government in Washington is run by a few big interests or for the benefit of all people. This is a dichotomous variable, in which a value of 1 indicates that a respondent believes the federal government is run by a few big interests for their own benefit, thus a greater value indicates negativity.

Model 3 (see Table 1) is similar to Models 1 and 2; however, the measure of affect towards the federal government is a dichotomous measure of whether an individual believes the federal government is run by a few interests for their own benefit. Similar to the findings in Models 1 and 2, there is a statistically significant and positive effect of ethnocentrism on negative attitudes towards the federal government. This suggests that those who are more ethnocentric are also less positive towards the federal government.

The substantive effects of ethnocentrism on belief that the federal government works for the few, holding all other variables at their mean or median are displayed



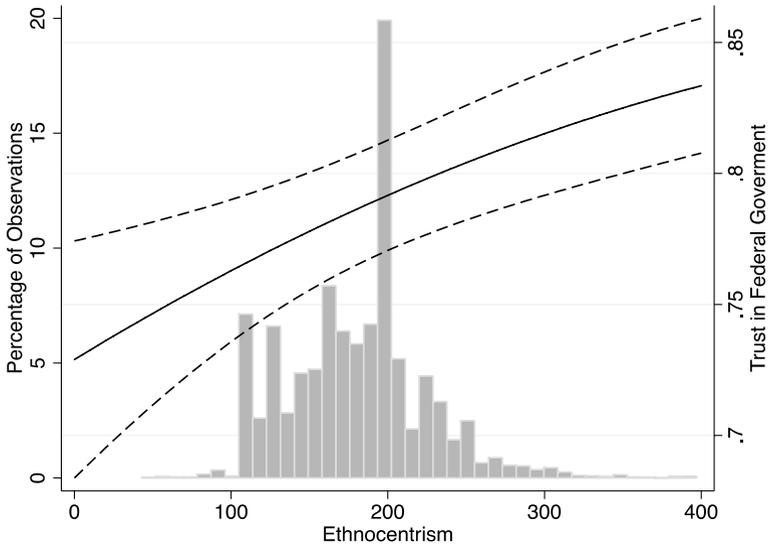


Fig. 3 Marginal effect of ethnocentrism on trust (some of the time) in federal government

in Fig. 4. In this figure, ethnocentrism is along the x-axis, and attitudes towards the federal government are on the right-hand y-axis. The solid line shows the expected effect of ethnocentrism on attitudes towards the federal government, with the dashed lines representing the 95% confidence interval. Further, a histogram of the measure of negativity towards undocumented aliens with the percent of the observations on the left-hand y-axis is also included.

There is a clear positive effect of ethnocentrism on belief that the federal government is run by a few interests for their own benefit. That is, if an individual is more ethnocentric, he is also more likely to believe that the federal government is run by a few interests seeking to help themselves. When ethnocentrism is 0, the probability of believing that the federal government is run by a few interests for their own benefit is 78%. When ethnocentrism reaches 200, the probability of believing that the federal government is run by a few interests for their own benefit is about 87%. Further, when ethnocentrism reaches 400, the probability of believing that the federal government is run by a few interests for their own benefit is about 92%.

The final additional measure of affect towards the federal government is based on the question of how much the federal government wastes tax money. This is an ordered variable, in which a value of 0 is “not very much,” a value of 1 is “some,” and a value of 2 is “a lot.” Thus, a higher value indicates greater negativity towards the federal government.

Model 4 (see Table 1) is similar to Models 1, 2, and 3; however, the measure of affect towards the federal government is the above-mentioned ordered variable measuring belief that the federal government wastes tax money. Similar to the findings in Models 1 through 3, there is a statistically significant and positive effect of ethnocentrism on negative attitudes towards the federal government. This suggests



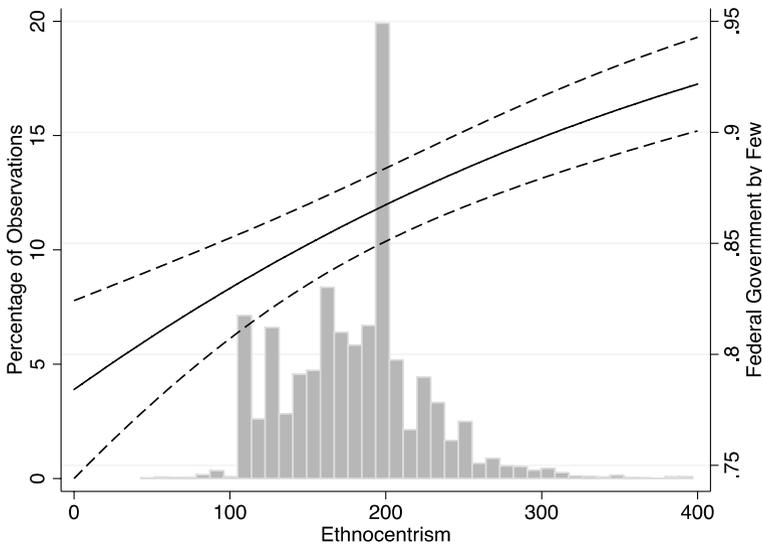


Fig. 4 Marginal effect of ethnocentrism on belief that federal government is controlled by the few

that those who are more ethnocentric are more likely to believe that the federal government wastes tax money.

The substantive effects of ethnocentrism on belief that the federal government wastes tax money, holding all other variables at their mean or median are displayed in Figs. 5 and 6. In these figures, ethnocentrism is along the x-axis, and attitudes towards the federal government are on the right-hand y-axis. The solid lines are the predicted probabilities of a person saying they believe the federal government wastes some tax money (Fig. 5) or wastes a lot of tax money (Fig. 6), and the dashed lines represent the 95% confidence interval.²⁰ The distribution of ethnocentrism is displayed as a histogram, with the left-hand y-axis denoting the percentage of observations.

Figure 5 shows a negative slope, meaning that as ethnocentrism increases, the probability of an individual saying they believe the federal government wastes tax money some of the time decreases. When ethnocentrism is 0, the probability of an individual saying she believes the federal government wastes tax money some of the time is 32%. However, when ethnocentrism reaches 200, the probability of an individual saying she believes the federal government wastes tax money some of the time drops to 26%. Moreover, if ethnocentrism is 400, the probability of an individual saying she believes the federal government wastes tax money some of the time drops to 21%.

²⁰ The predicted probabilities are only reported for values of 1 (belief that the federal government wastes some tax money) and 2 (belief that the federal government wastes a lot money). Predicted probabilities are not report for values of 0 (belief that the federal government does not waste much tax money) because there is little change in these predicted probabilities as ethnocentrism varies.



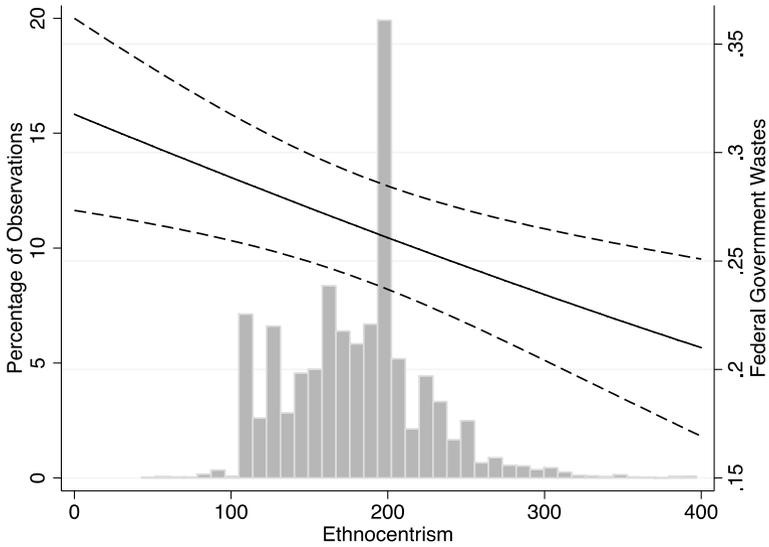


Fig. 5 Marginal effect of ethnocentrism on belief that federal government wastes (some of the time) tax money

Figure 6 shows a positive slope, meaning that as ethnocentrism increases, the probability of an individual saying she believes the federal government wastes tax money a lot increases. When ethnocentrism is 0, the probability of an individual saying she believes the federal government wastes tax money a lot is roughly 66%. However, when ethnocentrism reaches 200, the probability of an individual saying she believes the federal government wastes tax money a lot increases to about 72%. Moreover, if ethnocentrism is 400, the probability of an individual saying she believes the federal government wastes tax money a lot increases to about 78%. This suggests as ethnocentrism increases, the likelihood of believing the federal government wastes a lot of tax money also increases. These effects, combined with the effects seen in Fig. 5, suggest that higher levels of ethnocentrism are associated with people being more likely to believe that the government wastes more money.

The results of Models 1 through 4, and Figs. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 support hypothesis 1, suggesting strongly that individuals who are more ethnocentric do, in fact, hold more negative attitudes towards the federal government, and that there is a significant substantive effect.

Model 5 (see Table 2) presents the results of a direct test of hypothesis 2, which posited that the effects of ethnocentrism are not dependent upon membership in a given racial category. In this model, the three interaction variables discussed above were included. Importantly, the effects of ethnocentrism were not found to vary significantly for those who self-identified as black, Hispanic-American, or Asian-American. Simply put, the effect of ethnocentrism on affect towards the federal



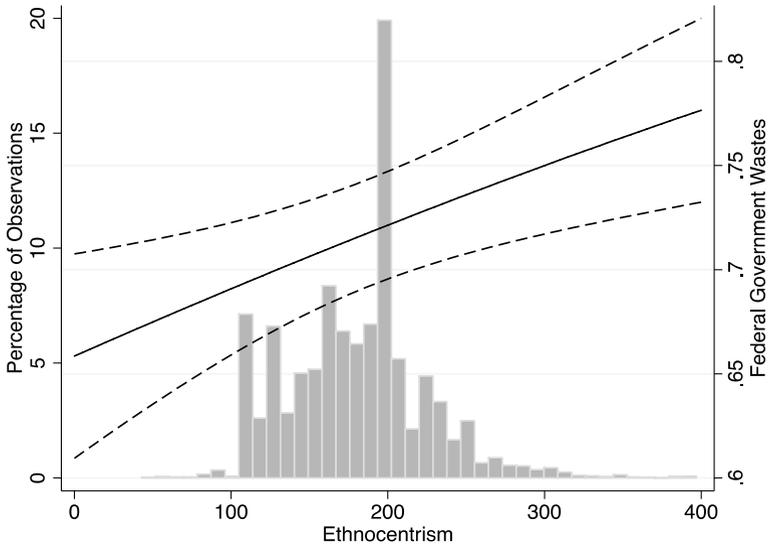


Fig. 6 Marginal effect of ethnocentrism on belief that federal government wastes (most of the time) tax money

government persists for individuals who self-identify as white, black, Asian-American, or Hispanic-American.²¹

As most of the control variables were significant, it is best to indicate which controls did not show a statistically significant effect. Marital status was the only variable to show no statistical significance in any models. Household income and ideology were insignificant in Models 2 and 3. Further, the dummy variable for identification with the Republican Party is not significant in Models 1, 3, 4, and 5, while the dummy variable for identification with the Democratic Party is not significant in Models 2, 3, and 4. The dummy variable indicating if an individual is male or not, and age were insignificant in Model 2. Education level was found to be insignificant in Model 4. Finally, the dichotomous variable indicating a person's race as black was insignificant in Models 2 and 4, while the dichotomous variable indicating a person's race as Asian-American was insignificant in Models 3 and 4.

²¹ It is possible that there are differences in the effect among groups based on who holds the office of the President. To examine this possibility, we ran a series of robustness checks in which Model 5 was run, but the time period was restricted by who was President (i.e., George H.W. Bush, Clinton, George W. Bush, or Obama). Overall, the results are quite similar. The effect of ethnocentrism, however, appears to be greater among Hispanic-Americans during the George H.W. Bush presidency, and among blacks during the Clinton presidency. There are no instances in which the effect of ethnocentrism on affect towards the federal government is lower for a particular group. It should be noted, during the George H.W. Bush and the Obama presidencies there is evidence that Asian-Americans who are more ethnocentric are also more negative towards the federal government, but these findings are based on only 27 individuals during the George H.W. Bush presidency, and 92 individuals during the Obama presidency, and therefore, should be interpreted with caution.



How identity influences public attitudes towards the US federal...

Table 2 Effect of ethnocentrism on affect towards the federal government by in-group

DV: Positivity towards the federal government	Model 5 Coefficient (Standard Error)
Ethnocentrism	- 0.069*** (0.006)
Ethnocentrism *Black	- 0.007 (0.014)
Ethnocentrism *Hispanic	- 0.019 (0.016)
Ethnocentrism *Asian	- 0.094 (0.039)
Household Income	- 1.299*** (0.221)
Ideology	- 0.155*** (0.016)
Republican	0.978 (0.763)
Democrat	1.852* (0.720)
Identification with President's Party	4.724*** (0.468)
Sociotropic Economic Evaluation	3.956*** (0.325)
Male	3.126*** (0.408)
Marital Status	1.097 (0.447)
Age	0.047*** (0.013)
Education Level	- 1.389*** (0.143)
Black	13.833*** (2.615)
Hispanic	14.175*** (2.907)
Asian	25.938*** (7.328)
Year 1992	9.277*** (0.620)
Year 2000	12.703*** (0.662)
Year 2004	14.918*** (0.727)
Year 2008	10.314*** (0.658)
Constant	56.356*** (1.941)
N	10,223
R ²	0.240

Table entries are OLS Regression coefficients with White's robust standard errors

***p<0.001; ** p<.0005; * p<.0.01



Conclusion

This study attempted to apply theoretical constructs designed to explain individual attitudes towards the European Union to the case of the US federal government. We tested two hypotheses: (1) that those who are more ethnocentric should be less positive towards the federal government, and (2) that this effect will be constant across racial groups.

We found strong support for both of these hypotheses. The results suggest that identity is an important factor driving attitudes towards the federal government. Those individuals who are more ethnocentric are substantially more negative towards the federal government. We further find that this effect holds in multiple robustness checks in which differing measures of affect towards the federal government are utilized. Importantly, we find that this effect does not differ significantly across races. Rather, the effects of ethnocentrism on attitudes towards the federal government are similar for whites, blacks, Hispanic-Americans, and Asian-Americans.

These findings have significant implications for political party position taking, as well as governmental policymaking, which in turn could alter the distribution of powers between levels of government in the United States. As previous research has shown that public attitudes drive candidate positioning (Adams et al. 2004; 2006; Benefield and Williams 2019), and the policies made by governments (Stimson et al. 1995; Wlezien 1995), the findings of this research imply that attitudes regarding identity have important effects on the positions political parties in the United States take, as well as the policies that are implemented at both the federal and state levels.

Generally, when a larger percentage of the public is more ethnocentric, they will also feel more negatively towards the federal government. This, in turn, should lead political parties and candidates to take positions that are more opposed to federal power. Importantly, political parties and candidates focusing on a particular issue, such as the perceived proper extent of federal power, can drive public attitudes regarding that issue. Thus, it is not difficult to imagine a situation in which one political party, or even both, attempt to appeal to identity concerns by offering a vision of a vastly deconstructed federal government, which, in turn produces greater negative affect towards the federal government.

At the same time, public policy in the United States could be shaped to a large degree by the exclusivity of identity. As political parties, and the positions they have taken during campaigns, largely drive policy decisions once in power, it is possible that party responsiveness to negative attitudes towards the federal government could result in a significantly reduced size and reach of federal policies. Moreover, policymakers may respond dynamically (see Stimson et al. 1995) to negative public affect towards the federal government even further reducing the size and reach of federal policies.

Put simply, high levels of negative affect towards the federal government spurred by identity threat could lead to political parties and policymakers that are more negative towards the federal government. In turn, this could lead to less federal government spending, reduced policy provision, and devolution of federal duties to the



state level. This, of course, would represent a major change in the size of the federal government, and the distribution of power among the various levels of governance.

Still, there is reason to believe that this cycle of identity threat leading to negative affect towards the federal government, leading to negative party attitudes towards the federal government, thus deepening anti-federal affect, is not entirely deterministic. Whereas, in the case of the European Union, a focus on the collective (i.e., the EU), sparked resentment among those with strong identities based on their country of origin, there is reason to suspect that promoting and highlighting a shared, common identity—like national identity, can reduce identity threat.

Levendusky (2017) found that by priming American national identity, individuals are more likely to view members of the opposing party as “fellow Americans rather than rival partisans.” Applied to the idea of identity threat, it is possible that elites (i.e., parties, candidates, and policymakers) focusing on and discussing those factors that bind Americans together, rather than the differences that divide them, could reduce identity threat, and, in turn, reduce negative public affect towards the federal government. In future research, we intend to examine whether elite messages highlighting shared identities and a national identity reduce the instance of ethnocentrism, and whether this produces greater positive affect towards the federal government.

Of course, this study is only one step in understanding the effects of identity threat and ethnocentrism on attitudes towards government. In the future, it may prove fruitful to examine how attitudes towards race are associated with public attitudes towards both state and local government. Theoretically, one might expect that those who feel a higher degree of identity threat (i.e., are more ethnocentric) would be more likely to support state and local government in more homogenous states and localities that do not make policies pertaining to race.

In this inquiry, we have posited that ethnocentrism, responding to identity threat—real or perceived, drives attitudes towards the federal government. The fact that sub-national units (states) are, by definition, more homogenous than the country as a whole informs our theory here, but future research can examine how the diversity of individual states shapes attitudes towards both federal and state governments. Depending on state characteristics, people who belong to certain racial groups and are more ethnocentric may prefer the federal government to state governments. Likewise, it is plausible that state forces drive identity threat to prioritize state governments. In essence, people may be choosing which level of government they believe should have power based on their racial grouping and level of ethnocentrism.

It should also be noted that, while beyond the scope of this study, future research may want to examine more closely how utilitarian appraisals of the benefits of the federal government influence affect towards the federal government. This study showed that those who see the economy as improving over the last year are more positive towards the federal government, while those who are more educated and with higher household incomes are more negative towards the federal government. Examining this dichotomy may be interesting.

Moreover, an avenue for future research may be the examination of the correlates of change in affect towards the federal government. This study focused on why individuals hold the attitudes they do, an avenue of research that may prove fruitful is an



examination of how attitudes change over time. A study such as this could focus on changes in individual ethnocentrism, as well as changes in utilitarian appraisals.

Future studies may also be interested in understanding how the effects of ethnocentrism vary over time. That is to say, it is possible that the effect of ethnocentrism produces more negative feelings, or even positive feelings, towards the federal government at different time points. Additionally, it is possible that the effects of ethnocentrism conditional on self-identified race may also vary over time. While these questions are interesting, they are beyond the scope of this particular study.

Finally, it should be noted, this study is, to the authors' knowledge, the first to apply a theory developed to explain political phenomena in the European Union to the case of the United States. Much research in the EU has borrowed from the US case. While this suggests that the EU and the US are comparable, this study indicates that the comparability swings both ways. Thus, future research on the United States may be well served to rely more heavily on research and theories developed for the EU case.

Appendix

See Tables 3 and 4.



How identity influences public attitudes towards the US federal...

Table 3 Descriptive statistics

Variables	Obs	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Federal Government Positivity	11,312	48.303	23.307	0	97
Federal Government Trust	7,879	1.659	0.576	0	3
Federal Government for Few	11,100	0.743	0.437	0	1
Federal Government Waste	11,347	1.654	0.525	0	2
Ethnocentrism	11,431	181.091	45.068	43	397
Ethnocentrism *Black	11,431	29.931	69.019	0	397
Ethnocentrism *Hispanic	11,431	25.913	64.238	0	397
Ethnocentrism *Asian	11,431	2.763	22.715	0	297
Ethnocentrism *White	11,431	122.483	94.038	0	397
Household Income	10,732	1.830	1.154	0	4
Ideology	11,121	51.015	17.956	0	97
Republican	11,431	0.356	0.476	0	1
Democrat	11,431	0.518	0.500	0	1
Identification with President's Party	11,431	0.448	0.497	0	1
Sociotropic Economic Evaluation	11,378	0.742	0.801	0	2
Male	11,431	0.529	0.499	0	1
Marital Status	11,431	0.503	0.500	0	1
Age	11,438	47.718	17.182	17	97
Education Level	11,323	4.426	1.660	1	7
Black	11,431	0.169	0.372	0	1
Hispanic	11,431	0.148	0.354	0	1
Asian	11,431	0.015	0.124	0	1
White	11,431	0.667	0.480	0	1
Year 1992	11,431	0.179	0.385	0	1
Year 2000	11,431	0.114	0.338	0	1
Year 2004	11,431	0.085	0.282	0	1
Year 2008	11,431	0.168	0.374	0	1
Year 2012	11,431	0.454	0.495	0	1



Table 4 Robustness check using ethnocentrism without positivity towards in-group

DV: Positivity towards the federal government	Model A.1
	Coefficient (Standard Error)
Ethnocentrism	- 0.081*** (0.004)
Household Income	- 1.347*** (0.219)
Ideology	- 0.157*** (0.016)
Republican	0.820 (0.756)
Democrat	1.558 (0.713)
Identification with President's Party	4.622*** (0.462)
Sociotropic Economic Evaluation	3.900*** (0.325)
Male	2.836*** (0.405)
Marital Status	1.119 (0.443)
Age	0.041*** (0.013)
Education Level	- 1.404*** (0.141)
Black	11.675*** (0.627)
Hispanic	10.321*** (0.640)
Asian	10.532*** (1.348)
Year 1992	9.359*** (0.615)
Year 2000	12.760*** (0.653)
Year 2004	14.695*** (0.717)
Year 2008	10.148*** (0.650)
Constant	53.652*** (1.603)
N	10,264
R ²	0.251



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