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INTRODUCTION

A critical examination of democracy

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The erosion of democratic norms and institutions continues to be top-of-mind for scholars of race and ethnic politics. In the United States, we witnessed a contested transition of the presidency from Republican Donald Trump to Democrat Joe Biden. Challenges to the 2020 election continue unabated. Democracy and inclusion are also the focus of several of the contributions in this issue of JREP. First, Sara W. Goodman and Hannah M. Alarian show that underlying notions of national identity and who should be included as a member of the polity also shape citizens' preferences for multiculturalism. Across 35 advanced democracies, the authors show that in places where national identity is defined in aspirational not ascriptive terms, the public supports multiculturalism.

Steven V. Miller and Nicholas T. Davis focus the question on the United States, asking whether outgroup prejudice dampens the value that white Americans ascribe to democracy and its institutions. Prejudiced whites are more likely than less prejudiced whites to dismiss the values of separation of powers and even support military rule. Such findings underscore the fragility of American democracy when partisan elites notch up nativist and racist appeals as a means to win elections.

Leveraging data from Latin America, Peter M. Sanchez, David Doherty, and Kirstie Lynn Dobbs further enrich our understanding of the interplay between race and democratic norms. Colorismo, a social hierarchy structured around skin color, has been a central tenet of social organization in Latin America. As a result, individuals who have darker skin tend to experience higher levels of discrimination in these societies. The question that the article focuses on is whether skin color corresponds to less favorable social and political status and furthermore, if this relationship also leads to lower support for democracy. The findings suggest that the effects of colorismo do not extend to people's support for the political system. This finding casts some doubt on the expectation that social inequalities are likely to destabilize governments or undermine their legitimacy.

Shifting the discussion to electoral politics in the United States, Kenicia Wright and Ling Zhu examine the determinants of success of minority candidates in the U.S. states. They find that social capital and social connectedness of minority constituencies play a key role in the electoral success of minority candidates. Conversely, white social capital is a negative predictor of minority candidates' electoral success.

The results suggest social capital is a form of political capital for disadvantaged groups with private benefits for in-group candidates.

Finally, Periloux C. Peay invites us on a visit within the institution of Congress to a critical investigation of Congressional committee structure and its effects on legislative politics. Although more and more people of color become elected in Congress, this has not translated into policy gains for minority communities. Peay argues that this policy stagnation is partly the result of how committees operate to block such legislation. This is aggravated by the fact that relatively few legislators from POC communities hold positions of leadership in Congressional committees which further contributes to a stymied racial justice agenda with important consequences for democracy.