Universities provide unique opportunities and resources for civic development. Although discriminatory campus climate may negatively affect community engagement, including discriminatory campus climate on campus. In particular, following the 2016 presidential election, racist and discriminatory campus climate may negatively affect young adults of color. Although discriminatory campus climate may negatively affect young adults of color, little is known about its relationship to civic engagement.

Drawing on sociopolitical development theory (Watts et al., 2003), young adult civic engagement, including critical consciousness and community engagement, may be relevant for young adults perceiving discriminatory climate on campus. In particular, following the 2016 presidential election, racist and discriminatory campus climates may have increased (Dess & Najmabadi, 2016), juxtaposed with growing awareness of racism and opportunities for engagement.

This study examined trajectories of critical consciousness and community engagement during, and six months following, the 2016 presidential election. We examined the role of perceived discriminatory campus climate (controlling for personal experiences of discrimination) and participants’ race/ethnicity in these trajectories, to understand how context and individual characteristics worked alongside shifting sociopolitical events.

**Methods**

Data come from a longitudinal study of US university students at two universities (n=286) collected at three timepoints: during election week, inauguration, and 100 days after inauguration.

- Participants (72.5% female) reported White race/ethnicity (56.1%), followed by Latina/o (12.2%), multiracial (11.8%), Asian American (10.8%), and Black (7.3%). Almost half the sample (48.8%) reported family household income of $100,000+.

**Measures**

- **Civic engagement** was assessed via critical consciousness (3 items; α = .81-.84) (Flanagan et al., 2007; Syvertsen et al., 2015) and community engagement (4 items; α = .80-.89) at each timepoint.
- **Discriminatory climate** (1 item) rated overall discriminatory campus climate during election week.
- **Covariates**: age, race/ethnicity (0 = White, 1 = Person of color [POC]), gender (0 = female, 1 = male), family income, and discrimination (17 items; α = .86) (Brombolos et al., 2005; Combrada et al., 2001), to control for individual experiences of discrimination above and beyond perception of discriminatory climate.

**Results**

In R (Version 3.4.1), multilevel growth modeling (two-level, time within people) was used to estimate trajectories of civic engagement (community engagement and critical consciousness) at election week, inauguration, and 100 days after inauguration.

 Growth models of community engagement and critical consciousness (controlling for age, income, gender, and individual discrimination) showed significant changes over time (Table 1).

In particular, years old declined in community engagement, while White students in low discriminatory climate.

![](image1.png)

**Table 1. Growth models of young adult civic engagement**

**Civic Development of Diverse University Students**

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The University of Arizona, Fordham University

Civic Engagement and the 2016 Presidential Election: Trajectories of Climate and Civic Development of Diverse University Students

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Climate predicted higher critical consciousness for students of color when they perceived a discriminatory climate.

- Findings align with sociopolitical development theory (Watts et al., 2003), suggesting that marginalized youth are uniquely positioned to develop critical consciousness.

- For students of color in racially discriminatory climates, critical consciousness development may be a form of resilience to racial marginalization targeting racial-ethnic minorities.

In contrast, climate predicted higher critical consciousness among White students in low discriminatory climate.

- Previous research has not examined sociopolitical development among White youth (Clément et al., 2016), critical consciousness may develop differently among White youth.

- Further, it is unclear why critical consciousness increases only in contexts of low discriminatory climate.

**Implications**

![Figure 1. Interaction between discriminatory climate, race/ethnicity (White or Person of Color [POC]), and critical consciousness](image2.png)