Bring back my Barry to me: Nostalgia for Barack Obama and political outcomes

Adam K. Fetterman [a,*], Tim Wildschut [b], Constantine Sedikides [b]

[a] *University of Houston, USA*
[b] *University of Southampton, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland*

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ABSTRACT

The 2016 election of President Donald Trump left over half of the United States' electorate reeling. This contributed to nostalgia for the days of Barack Obama (and his administration), even among some conservatives and Republicans. We hypothesized that individual differences in nostalgia for Barack Obama would predict outcomes in the political arena. Consistent with the hypothesis, in three studies ($N = 904$), Obama nostalgia predicted negative attitudes toward the Trump presidency, stronger political engagement intentions and voting intentions, and actual political engagement, above and beyond competing predictors (i.e., political ideology, prior support for Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election, voting behavior in 2016). The findings reinforce the role of nostalgia for a politician or political administration as an influential predictor of political outcomes. We discuss implications and future research directions.

1. Introduction

On November 8th 2016, over half of the United States' electorate was shocked by the election of the nation's 45th president, Donald Trump. After the first few months of 2017, following a series of controversial decisions by the Trump administration (e.g., travel bans from Muslim countries), the shock, in some cases, turned to nostalgia for the days of Barack Obama's administration. Pictures, podcasts, and sentimental messages about the former president became a staple of social media (Memoli, 2017), coming mostly from liberals, but also some conservatives (Boot, 2018; Brooks, 2016).

Nostalgia, "a sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past" (The New Oxford Dictionary of English, 1998, p. 1266), has become a growing focus of research in personality and social psychology (Baldwin et al., 2015; Sedikides, Wildschut, Routledge, Arndt, Hepper, & Zhou, 2015). An important, and perhaps counterintuitive, finding emerging from this literature is that nostalgia, in response to discontinuities or discomforting states, is associated with, or fosters, approach motivation (Abeyta et al., 2015; Sedikides & Wildschut, 2016) and behavior (Kersten et al., 2016; Wohl et al., 2018). As such, we tested the idea that individual differences in nostalgia for Barack Obama (Obama nostalgia, for short), a result of perceived political discontinuities, is associated with approach motivation in the political domain.

1.1. The motivational potential of nostalgia

Whereas nostalgia was once considered a brain or psychiatric disorder (Batcho, 2013; Sedikides et al., 2004), recent work has indicated that it is a bittersweet, albeit predominantly positive, emotion (Hepper et al., 2012, 2014; Leunissen et al., 2021) that confers numerous psychological benefits or functions (Sedikides et al., 2016; Sedikides & Wildschut, 2019; Sedikides, Wildschut, Routledge, Arndt, Hepper, & Zhou, 2015). The emotion is often triggered by discontinuities or discomfort in one's life, which it subsequently counteracts to reestablish psychological equanimity (Sedikides & Wildschut, 2018; Sedikides, Wildschut, Routledge, & Arndt, 2015; Wildschut & Sedikides, 2020). Crucially, although it pertains to one's past, nostalgia also shapes one's future (Sedikides, Cheung, et al., 2018). It does so through its association with, or kindling of, approach motivation (Sedikides & Wildschut, 2016, 2020).

This regulatory model was documented first by Stephan et al. (2014). They found that aversive experiences, and the ensuing avoidance motivation, are related to or trigger nostalgia; nostalgia, in turn, is related to, or nurtures, approach motivation and, by so doing, downregulates avoidance motivation. We will describe these findings in more detail. In Study 1, Stephan et al. demonstrated that individual differences in avoidance motivation were positively associated with trait

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nostalgia, and that trait nostalgia was positively associated with approach motivation. Then, these authors implemented an experimental-causal-chain approach (Spencer et al., 2005) to test the postulated causal links in the model. Avoidance motivation (compared to control) increased nostalgia (Study 2), and nostalgia (compared to control) increased approach motivation (Study 3). Subsequent to this set of findings, other streams of research indicated that trait nostalgia is associated with attitudes, inspiration, optimism, and goal pursuit (Sedikides & Wildschut, 2020).

Our objective in this article is not to re-test the regulatory model, which has been extensively validated (Sedikides, Wildschut, Routledge, Arndt, Hepper, & Zhou, 2015; Wildschut & Sedikides, 2020). Rather, we use this model as a platform to examine the motivational potency of nostalgia, from an individual differences standpoint. We propose that individual differences in politically-relevant nostalgia relate to approach motivation in the political domain, and, in particular, political attitudes, political engagement, and voting.

1.2. Nostalgia, political attitudes, political engagement, and voting

Nostalgia is related to attitudes. For example, individual differences in nostalgia proneness are linked to more egalitarian (i.e., less prejudicial) attitudes (Cheung et al., 2017; Turner et al., 2018) or more favorable attitudes toward products (Holbrook & Schindler, 2011; Muehling et al., 2004). Moreover, nostalgia is positively associated with intentions to pursue one's goals (Sedikides, Wildschut, & Stephan, 2018) or to purchase a preferred product (Zhou et al., 2019), and with actual behavior such as exercise (Kersten et al., 2016) or food consumption (Zhou et al., 2019). These findings may generalize to the political domain. Nostalgia may be related to political attitudes, and be associated with voting intentions and political engagement.

The regulatory model (Sedikides, Wildschut, Routledge, Arndt, Hepper, & Zhou, 2015; Stephan et al., 2014) provides a rationale for this possibility. Discontinuities in many citizens' lives—such as uncertainty due to change in political leadership (Gillath & Hart, 2010), concern due to reversals of established policies (Nosek et al., 2009), or fear due to unpredictability of future political decisions (Bostdorff, 2017)—might have precipitated seeking refuge in Obama nostalgia. In turn, Obama nostalgia would be linked with approach motivation that should help counteract discomforting states, narrowing the perceived discontinuity gap (i.e., symbolically reconnecting citizens with the Obama era). Specifically, we hypothesized that individual differences in Obama nostalgia would conduce to more negative attitudes toward the Trump presidency, stronger political engagement and voting intentions, as well as actual political engagement and voting.

Nostalgia is not the only predictor of political attitudes, voting intentions, and political engagement. For example, established predictors of political attitudes are (a) political ideology (Jost, 2006), (b) party affiliation (Jost, 2006), and (c) prior attitudes about the relevant political object (Krosnick et al., 2010)—in our case, liberalism, identification as a Democrat, and prior support for Donald Trump, respectively. We controlled for all three variables, exploring whether nostalgia would uniquely predict political attitudes (i.e., negative attitudes toward the Trump presidency). Additionally, an established predictor of behavioral intentions and behavior is prior behavior (Albarracin & Wyer Jr., 2000)—in our case, voting behavior in 2016. Again, we controlled for it, exploring whether nostalgia would uniquely predict political engagement and voting intentions, as well as actual political engagement and voting.

1.3. Overview

We hypothesized that Obama nostalgia would predict political attitudes (i.e., those toward the Trump presidency), political and voting intentions, as well as actual political engagement and voting. We tested this hypothesis in three cross-sectional studies. We measured the relevant constructs shortly after Donald Trump took office in Study 1 (student sample) and Study 2 (adult sample). We measured again the relevant constructs shortly after the 2018 mid-term election in Study 3 (student and adult sample). In each study, we also assessed political ideology, prior support for Donald Trump, and voting behavior in 2016, and used these variables exploratorily as controls. We made the stimulus materials and data available at: https://osf.io/4uvcx/?view_only=352 c8823ff4741c1ac07b37d04c8ade6.

2. Study 1

In Study 1, we created a measure of Obama nostalgia based on an established scale of individual differences in nostalgia proneness which we included, along with assessments of the other primary constructs (political attitudes, political engagement intentions, voting intentions) and assessments of control variables (political ideology, party identification, prior attitudes toward Donald Trump, voting behavior in 2016), as part of a screening session for a psychology department's participant pool in the Spring of 2017. We hypothesized that Obama nostalgia would be negatively related to political attitudes (i.e., attitudes toward the Trump presidency), and would be positively related to political engagement intentions and voting intentions.

2.1. Method

2.1.1. Participants and procedure

The psychology department of a large Southwestern university in the United States recruited 898 (608 women, 267 men) undergraduate students for a prescreening session, dropping those who failed to complete the session. We tested the retained 503 participants (347 women, 156 men; age in years: *Range* = 18–55, *M* = 20.56, *SD* = 4.20). Prescreening consisted of 188 questions pooled from departmental laboratories, and data collection occurred in Spring of 2017—shortly after Donald Trump's election to the office. We only analyzed the measures that were included in the prescreening specifically for our study.

2.1.2. Materials

2.1.2.1. Measures of primary constructs

2.1.2.1.1. Obama nostalgia. To measure nostalgia for Barack Obama, we adapted the 7-item Southampton Nostalgia Scale (SNS; Sedikides, Wildschut, Routledge, Arndt, Hepper, & Zhou, 2015; Wildschut & Sedikides, 2021). In the SNS, participants first read that "nostalgia is defined as a sentimental longing for the past," a definition derived from The New Oxford Dictionary of English (1998, p. 1266). In our case (Appendix), participants read the same standard definition, but also learned about the focus of this study being on nostalgia for Barack Obama, both the former president and his administration. Participants then indicated the personal importance and frequency of their Obama nostalgia (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*).

2.1.2.1.2. Attitudes toward the Trump presidency. Participants rated how they felt (1 = *extremely unhappy*, 7 = *extremely happy*) about (a) the outcome of the 2016 election and (b) the first few months of Trump's presidency. We averaged across the two questions to form an internally reliable measure of attitudes toward the Trump presidency.

2.1.2.1.3. Political engagement intentions. Participants indicated how likely (1 = *extremely unlikely*, 7 = *extremely likely*) they were to (a) take part in political movements (e.g., marches or protests), (b) donate to political organizations (e.g., campaigns), (c) donate to political watchdog groups (e.g., American Civil Liberties Union), and (d) volunteer for political causes (e.g., canvassing, making phone calls, raising funds). Political engagement is relatively independent of voting intentions; most citizens who vote do not necessarily become involved with political movements (Putnam, 2000). We averaged across these four items to create an internally reliable measure of political

motivation.

2.1.2.1.4. Voting intentions. Participants indicated how likely (1 = *extremely unlikely*, 7 = *extremely likely*) they were to vote in (a) the 2018 mid-term elections and (b) the 2020 presidential election. We averaged across these two items to create an internally reliable measure of voting intentions.

2.1.2.2. Measures of control variables

2.1.2.2.1. Political ideology. We measured political ideology using one question (Bonanno & Jost, 2006; Knight, 1999): "Where would you place yourself on this scale?" (1 = *extremely liberal*, 7 = *extremely conservative*).

2.1.2.2.2. Party identification. Participants indicated their party identification based on the United States' two party political system ("Democrat," "Republican," or "Third Party"). We created two dummy-coded variables based on their responses. For the first variable, we gave participants who identified themselves as "Democrat" a "1," and those who identified as the other two categories a "0." This was the "Democrat" variable. For the second variable, we gave those who identified themselves as "Republican" a "1," and those who identified as the other two categories a "0." This was the "Republican" variable. "Third Party" was the reference category.

2.1.2.2.3. Prior support for Donald Trump. Participants indicated whether they supported (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*) Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election, regardless of whether they voted or not. Voter turn-out is low in the United States (https://www.fairvote.org/voter_turnout#voter_turnout_101). Many citizens do not vote due to perceived personal costs outweighing the potential gains (i.e., the voter paradox; Ferejohn & Fiorina, 1974), but they still have candidate preferences (Harder & Krosnick, 2008).

2.1.2.2.4. Voting behavior in 2016. Participants indicated whether they had voted (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*) in the 2016 presidential election.

2.2. Results and discussion

We present descriptive statistics for all measures and inter-correlations in Table 1.

2.2.1. Attitudes toward the trump presidency

To test the hypothesis that Obama nostalgia would predict negative attitudes toward the Trump presidency, we first ran a simple regression with Obama nostalgia as the predictor. Obama nostalgia was a significant and negative predictor of attitudes toward the Trump presidency, $\beta = -0.48$, $t(501) = -12.29$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-0.558, -0.404]. We also examined whether Obama nostalgia would predict such attitudes beyond political ideology, party identification, and prior support for Donald Trump. As such, we entered Obama nostalgia, political ideology, Democrat, Republican, and prior support for Trump as simultaneous predictors of attitudes toward the Trump presidency in a multiple regression. Conservative political ideology was a significant and positive predictor of attitudes toward the Trump presidency, $\beta = 0.11$, $t(497) =$

3.41, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.047,0.174], as was prior support for Trump, $\beta = 0.53$, $t(497) = 15.48$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.461,0.595]. Identifying as a Democrat was a trending and negative predictor of attitudes toward the Trump presidency, $\beta = -0.17$, $t(497) = -1.92$, $p = .056$, whereas identifying as a Republican did not predict attitudes toward the Trump presidency, $\beta = 0.14$, $t(497) = 1.19$, $p = .233$. However, Obama nostalgia remained a significant and negative predictor of attitudes toward the Trump presidency, $\beta = -0.24$, $t(497) = -7.38$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-0.303, -0.175].

2.2.2. Political engagement intentions

To test the hypothesis that Obama nostalgia would predict political engagement intentions, we conducted a simple regression with Obama nostalgia as the predictor. Obama nostalgia was a significant and positive predictor of political engagement intentions, $\beta = 0.42$, $t(501) = 10.30$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.338,0.498]. Further, we examined whether Obama nostalgia would predict political engagement intentions beyond voting behavior in 2016. We therefore entered Obama nostalgia and voting behavior in 2016 as simultaneous predictors of political engagement intentions in a multiple regression. Voting behavior in 2016 was a significant and positive predictor of political engagement intentions, $\beta = 0.12$, $t(500) = 3.09$, $p = .002$, 95% CI [0.045,0.204]. Yet, Obama nostalgia remained a significant and positive predictor of political engagement intentions, $\beta = 0.41$, $t(500) = 10.08$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.328,0.487].

2.2.3. Voting intentions

To test the hypothesis that Obama nostalgia would predict voting intentions, we carried out a simple regression with Obama nostalgia as the predictor. Obama nostalgia was a significant and positive predictor of voting intentions, $\beta = 0.31$, $t(501) = 7.30$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.226,0.393]. Next, we examined whether Obama nostalgia would predict voting intentions independent of voting behavior in 2016. We thus entered Obama nostalgia and voting behavior in 2016 as simultaneous predictors of voting intentions in a multiple regression. Voting behavior in 2016 was a significant and positive predictor of voting intentions, $\beta = 0.33$, $t(500) = 8.26$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.252,0.409]. Obama nostalgia, though, remained a significant and positive predictor of voting intentions, $\beta = 0.28$, $t(500) = 7.02$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.203,0.360].

2.2.4. Summary

As hypothesized, Obama nostalgia predicted negative attitudes toward the Trump presidency, stronger political engagement intentions, and stronger voting intentions. In addition, Obama nostalgia emerged a unique predictor of these political outcomes. Specifically, Obama nostalgia predicted (a) negative attitudes toward the Trump presidency independent of political ideology, party identification, and prior support for Donald Trump; (b) political engagement intentions independent of voting behavior in 2016; and (c) voting intentions independent of voting behavior in 2016.

Table 1
Means, standard deviations, Cronbach's alphas, and inter-correlations in Study 1.

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Obama nostalgia	3.82	1.54	0.93							
2. Attitudes toward the Trump presidency	1.98	1.40	−0.48**	0.90						
3. Political engagementintentions	3.25	1.44	0.42**	−0.07	0.85					
4. Voting Intentions	5.53	1.68	0.31**	−0.05	0.48**	0.80				
5. Political ideology	3.43	1.31	−0.28**	0.35**	−0.14**	−0.06	–			
6. Democrat	0.69	0.46	0.29**	−0.40**	0.14**	0.15**	−0.29**	–		
7. Republican	0.17	0.38	−0.33**	0.47**	−0.18**	−0.10*	0.38**	−0.68**	–	
6. Prior support for Donald Trump	0.11	0.32	−0.32**	0.68**	−0.06	0.02	0.25**	−0.35**	0.47**	–
7. Voting behavior in 2016	0.43	0.50	0.09	0.05	0.16**	0.36**	−0.00	0.01	0.00	0.07

Note. We used M and SD to represent Mean and Standard Deviation, respectively. Cronbach's alphas are on the diagonal. *p < .05, **p < .01. Higher political ideology scores represent more conservatism.

3. Study 2

In Study 1, we obtained support for the potency of Obama nostalgia to predict political outcomes. However, our sample was limited to undergraduate students. We sought to test the replicability of these findings in a sample with a wider range of age, political exposure, and political ideology. Therefore, we recruited participants via Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk), an online platform that typically yields samples more diverse than student participant pools (Buhrmester et al., 2011).

3.1. Method

Participants were 201 (129 men, 72 women; age in years: *Range* = 18–75, *M* = 35.55, *SD* = 11.68) MTurkers from the United States, who had a 90% approval rating. We based our sampling plan on suggestions that correlations stabilize around 200–250 participants (Schönbrodt & Perugini, 2013). Participants completed the same measures as in Study 1 during the Spring of 2018.

3.2. Results and discussion

We present descriptive statistics and intercorrelations in Table 2. Our data analytic strategy was identical to that of Study 2.

3.2.1. Attitudes toward the trump presidency
Obama nostalgia was a significant and negative predictor of attitudes toward the Trump presidency, $\beta = -0.47$, $t(199) = -7.59$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-0.597, -0.351]$. In the subsequent multiple regression analysis, conservative political ideology was a significant and positive predictor of attitudes toward the Trump presidency, $\beta = 0.18$, $t(195) = 3.19$, $p = .002$, 95% CI $[0.067, 0.287]$, as was prior support for Donald Trump, $\beta = 0.51$, $t(195) = 9.99$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[0.409, 0.610]$. Identifying as a Democrat was a significant and negative predictor of attitudes toward the Trump presidency, $\beta = -0.28$, $t(195) = -2.39$, $p = .018$, 95% CI $[-0.514, -0.049]$, while identifying as a Republican was not a significant predictor of it, $\beta = 0.14$, $t(195) = 1.11$, $p = .268$. However, Obama nostalgia remained a significant and negative predictor of attitudes toward the Trump presidency, $\beta = -0.15$, $t(195) = -3.43$, $p = .001$, 95% CI $[-0.232, -0.063]$.

3.2.2. Political engagement intentions
Obama nostalgia was a significant and positive predictor of political engagement intentions, $\beta = 0.45$, $t(199) = 7.06$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[0.323, 0.573]$. In the multiple regression analysis, voting behavior in 2016 was not a significant predictor of political engagement intentions, $\beta = -0.04$, $t(198) = 0.55$, $p = .584$, whereas Obama nostalgia was a significant and positive predictor of it, $\beta = 0.45$, $t(198) = 7.06$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[0.326, 0.579]$.

3.2.3. Voting intentions
Obama nostalgia was a significant and positive predictor of voting intentions, $\beta = 0.17$, $t(199) = 7.06$, $p = .019$, 95% CI $[0.028, 0.304]$. In the multiple regression analysis, voting behavior in 2016 was a significant and positive predictor of voting intentions, $\beta = 0.43$, $t(198) = 6.81$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[0.308, 0.560]$. However, Obama nostalgia was no longer so, $\beta = 0.10$, $t(198) = 1.62$, $p = .107$.

3.2.4. Summary
Study 2 generally replicated the Study 1 results in a more diverse sample. Consistent with the hypothesis, Obama nostalgia predicted negative attitudes toward the Trump presidency, political engagement intentions, and voting intentions. Moreover, Obama nostalgia uniquely predicted negative attitudes toward the Trump presidency and political engagement intentions.

4. Study 3

In Study 3, we sought to move beyond the prior two studies by examining whether Obama nostalgia predicted actual political engagement and voting. As such, we carried out a survey immediately after the 2018 mid-term elections asking participants to report, not only their attitudes toward the Trump presidency, but also whether they had become political engaged since 2016 and whether they had voted in the 2018 mid-term elections. We also assessed, as before, the four control variables: political ideology, party identification, prior support for Donald Trump, and voting behavior in 2016.

4.1. Method

Participants were 200 (113 women, 87 men; age in years: *Range* = 18–72; *M* = 28.17, *SD* = 11.21) undergraduate students from a large Southwestern university or Amazon's Mechanical Turk workers (100 each). We had the same sampling plan as Study 2. We measured attitudes toward the Trump presidency as before. We measured actual political engagement by changing the wording of the political engagement intentions items, so that participants indicated whether they had indeed engaged in political activities since the 2016 election. Further, we measured actual voting by asking participants whether they had voted in the 2018 mid-term elections.

4.2. Results and discussion

We provide descriptive statistics and intercorrelations in Table 3. Our data analytic strategy was the same as in Studies 1–2.

4.2.1. Attitudes toward the trump presidency
Obama nostalgia was a significant and negative predictor of attitudes toward the Trump presidency, $\beta = -0.46$, $t(198) = -7.24$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-0.582, -0.333]$. In the subsequent multiple regression analysis, conservative political ideology was a significant and positive predictor

Table 2
Means, standard deviations, Cronbach's Alphas, and inter-correlations in Study 2.

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Obama nostalgia	3.58	1.50	0.87							
2. Attitudes toward the Trump presidency	3.19	2.16	−0.47**	0.94						
3. Political engagement intentions	3.25	1.44	0.45**	−0.30**	0.81					
4. Voting intentions	5.62	1.70	0.17*	−0.12	0.18**	0.79				
5. Political ideology	3.12	1.43	−0.34**	0.66**	−0.27**	−0.06	–			
6. Democrat	0.52	0.50	0.42**	−0.64**	0.36**	0.15*	−0.64**	–		
7. Republican	0.52	0.50	−0.29**	0.61**	−0.16*	0.05	0.65**	−0.70**	–	
6. Prior support for Donald Trump	0.35	0.48	−0.37**	0.78**	−0.27**	0.03	0.59**	−0.56**	0.57	
7. Voting behavior in 2016	0.75	0.44	0.14*	−0.02	0.03	0.45**	−0.05	0.07	0.13	0.09

Note. We used *M* and *SD* to represent Mean and Standard Deviation, respectively. Cronbach's alphas are on the diagonal. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$. Higher political ideology scores represent more conservatism.

Table 3
Means, standard deviations, Cronbach's Alphas, and inter-correlations in Study 3.

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Obama nostalgia	3.81	1.77	0.96							
2. Attitudes toward the Trump presidency	2.56	1.81	−0.46**	0.87						
3. Political engagement	1.94	1.38	0.24**	0.18*	0.88					
4. Voting behavior	0.67	0.47	0.05	−0.09	0.11	–				
5. Political ideology	2.96	1.20	−0.32**	0.61**	0.02	−0.19**	–			
6. Democrat	0.66	0.48	0.44**	−0.61**	−0.03	0.16*	−0.46**	–		
7. Republican	0.23	0.42	−0.33**	0.61**	0.14	−0.12	0.51**	−0.75**	–	
8. Prior support for Donald Trump	0.20	0.40	−0.33**	0.61**	0.12	0.07	0.42**	−0.39**	0.49**	–
9. Voting behavior in 2016	0.75	0.44	0.02	0.12	0.25**	0.49**	−0.03	0.17*	−0.05	0.03

Note. We used *M* and *SD* to represent Mean and Standard Deviation, respectively. Cronbach's alphas are on the diagonal. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$. Higher political ideology scores represent more conservatism.

of attitudes toward Donald Trump, $\beta = 0.29$, $t(194) = 5.31$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.179,0.391], as was prior support for Donald Trump, $\beta = 0.30$, $t(194) = 5.73$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.199,0.408]. Identifying as a Democrat was a significant and negative predictor of attitudes toward the Trump presidency, $\beta = -0.22$, $t(194) = -3.09$, $p = .002$, 95% CI [−0.360,−0.079], whereas identifying as a Republican was not a significant predictor of it, $\beta = 0.11$, $t(194) = 1.47$, $p = .143$. Obama nostalgia, though, remained a significant and negative predictor of attitudes toward the Trump presidency, $\beta = -0.14$, $t(194) = -2.67$, $p = .008$, 95% CI [−0.235,−0.035].

4.2.2. Political engagement

Obama nostalgia was a significant and positive predictor of political engagement, $\beta = 0.24$, $t(198) = 3.55$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.109,0.380]. The multiple regression revealed that voting behavior in 2016 was a significant and positive predictor of political engagement, $\beta = 0.24$, $t(197) = 3.61$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.109,0.373]. Yet, Obama nostalgia remained a significant and positive predictor of political engagement, $\beta = 0.24$, $t(197) = 3.59$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.108,0.372].

4.2.3. Voting behavior in the 2018 mid-term elections

Obama nostalgia did not predict voting behavior in the 2018 mid-term elections, $\beta = 0.05$, $t(198) = 0.66$, $p = .511$. Although voting behavior in 2016 was a significant and positive predictor of voting behavior in the 2018 mid-term elections, $\beta = 0.49$, $t(197) = 7.87$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.366,0.610], Obama nostalgia was not, $\beta = 0.04$, $t(197) = 0.60$, $p = .548$.

4.2.4. Summary

Study 3 partially replicated and extended the findings of the previous two studies. In accord with the hypothesis, Obama nostalgia predicted negative attitudes toward the Trump presidency (and uniquely so) as well as political engagement (and uniquely so). However, Obama nostalgia did not predict voting behavior in the 2018 mid-term elections.

5. General discussion

5.1. Summary of findings

We hypothesized that, in response to discontinuities in the political domain, nostalgia for Barack Obama would predict several indices of approach motivation in that domain. Consistent with the hypothesis, it did. Obama nostalgia predicted negative attitudes toward the Trump presidency (Studies 1–3), stronger political engagement intentions (Studies 1–2), stronger voting intentions (Studies 1–2), and actual political engagement (Study 3). Inconsistent with the hypothesis, Obama nostalgia did not predict voting behavior in the 2018 mid-term elections. A reason for this inconsistency—aside from the less than perfect relation among attitudes, intentions, and behaviors (Webb & Sheeran, 2006)—may be that the mid-terms elections determine state representation in the two chambers of Congress, and Obama nostalgia may be more

relevant to presidential than congressional elections.

We also explored whether Obama nostalgia could uniquely predict the aforementioned political outcomes. Obama nostalgia predicted (a) negative attitudes toward the Trump presidency above and beyond political ideology, party identification, and prior support for Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election (Studies 1–3), (b) political engagement intentions (Studies 1–2) above and beyond voting behavior in 2016, (c) voting intentions above and beyond voting behavior in 2016 (Study 1), and (d) actual political engagement above and beyond voting behavior in 2016 (Study 3). Nostalgia emerged as a potent predictor of political outcomes.

5.2. Implications

Undoubtedly, there are other predictors of political engagement beyond ideology, political affiliation, and prior behavior. Our interest, however, was not in a detailed analysis of such predictors. Rather, we focused on whether individual differences in politically-motivated nostalgia predict politically relevant attitudes and intentions. Prior work has shown that individual differences in nostalgia proneness are associated with a variety of domain-specific attitudes and behaviors (Sedikides, Wildschut, Routledge, Arndt, Hepper, & Zhou, 2015), including approach motivation (Stephan et al., 2014). Here, we demonstrated that such associations are replicable in the political domain. A burgeoning literature has indicated that concrete emotions (i.e., fear, anger, anxiety) are linked with attitudes toward policy, evaluations of politicians, and political participation (Erişen, 2013; Valentino et al., 2009, 2011). Our work complements this literature by showcasing the influential role of another concrete emotion, nostalgia.

Nostalgia for a particular politician or administration may play a key role in other political settings. Political campaigns constitute a prominent such setting (Brader, 2006). In the case of Obama nostalgia, political ads or speeches that invoke Obama in a nostalgic manner may be efficacious for swing voters (Friese et al., 2012). Relatedly, certain presidential candidates may inspire more Obama nostalgia than others, and, if so, Obama nostalgia would facilitate or impede their political agendas. In 2020, the Democratic primary came down to Joe Biden (Barack Obama's vice president) and Bernie Sanders (a politician critical of Barack Obama). Joe Biden's campaign connecting their candidate to Barack Obama might have improved his polling, whereas Bernie Sander's campaign criticizing Barack Obama might have backfired, especially for voters high in Obama nostalgia.

Our findings also have applied relevance. Scholars have lamented the poor state of civic participation in the United States (e.g., Putnam, 2000). To address this issue, one would need to examine, among other factors, emotional antecedents of civic engagement. Here, a researcher might leverage nostalgia-focused interventions to nudge political engagement (Brader & Marcus, 2013; Groenendyk, 2011).

5.3. Limitations and future directions

Given our correlational designs, we are unable to draw causal conclusions. Future work would do well to manipulate experimentally Obama nostalgia and test its causal consequences. Further, our findings are temporally limited: Nostalgia for Barack Obama is likely to dissipate as election cycles move on. Yet, the post-2016 political environment provided a prime opportunity to test the relevance of nostalgia for politicians or administrations. Such relevance may be long-lasting. For example, nostalgia for Winston Churchill during the Second World War may have contributed to his second term six years later, and nostalgia for Ronald Reagan, nurtured in Republican campaigns (Fahey, 2015), may be associated with support for conservative candidates.

Follow-up work would need to test the generalizability of our findings to other political outcomes (e.g., interest in politics, donations). It would also need to test the boundaries of our findings. For example, in which situations is nostalgia for a political administrations most relevant? It is likely that such nostalgia is stronger when political discontinuities are abrupt (as they have been since 2016; Jones, 2020) rather than smooth (cf. Sedikides, Wildschut, Routledge, & Arndt, 2015). Furthermore, trait-level nostalgia is associated with increased empathy (Juhl et al., 2020) and reduced prejudice (Cheung et al., 2017). This suggests that individuals who are high in general nostalgia (rather than nostalgia for a particular politician) could be more understanding and accepting of an incoming leader and their followers, even when disagreeing with their politics. This is another fruitful direction for future research.

5.4. Conclusion

We set out to examine whether Obama nostalgia is linked to political outcomes. We found that this was the case. Obama nostalgia emerged as an independent predictor of political attitudes, political engagement intentions, voting intentions, and political engagement. Our findings extend the literature on individual differences in nostalgia proneness, and reinforce the motivational potency of nostalgia in the political domain.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Adam K. Fetterman: Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Formal analysis, Resources, Data curation, Writing – original draft, Project administration, Supervision. **Tim Wildschut:** Conceptualization, Writing – review & editing, Supervision. **Constantine Sedikides:** Conceptualization, Writing – review & editing, Supervision.

Appendix A

A.1. Nostalgia for Barack Obama measure

According to the Oxford Dictionary, 'nostalgia' is defined as a 'sentimental longing for the past.' We would like to know how nostalgic you are about former president Barack Obama and his administration (Barack Obama, for short).

1. How valuable is it for you to think back about Barack Obama's presidency?
2. How important is it for you to bring to mind nostalgic experiences regarding Barack Obama?
3. How significant is it for you to feel nostalgic about Barack Obama?
4. Generally speaking, how often do you bring to mind nostalgic memories regarding Barack Obama?
5. Specifically, how often do you bring to mind nostalgic memories of Barack Obama?

6. When you see Barack Obama in the media now, how nostalgic does it make you feel?
7. In general, how often do you talk about Barack Obama in a nostalgic manner to others?

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