

# A threat to Trump's support

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This graph indicates that the Black unemployment rate is not a fixed six percentage points higher than the White unemployment rate. For a long time, Republican presidential candidates failed to capture much of the African American vote. In 2008, McCain got 4%. In 2012 and 2016, Romney and Trump each got 6%. In 2020, Trump got 8%. Then in 2024, a big change occurred. Trump got 15% of the Black vote. That percentage is almost three times greater than the percentage of the Black vote garnered by McCain.

So why have Blacks been shifting their support to the Republican Party? I think it is because they realize how closely tied their economic well-being is to the condition of the economy. Consider one measure of economic well-being: the unemployment rate. Since 1972, the average monthly unemployment rate for Blacks was 11.3% and for Whites it was 5.4%. So on average, the Black unemployment rate is almost six percentage points higher than the White unemployment rate. This higher average Black unemployment rate shows up in the accompanying graph. You will notice that the Black unemployment rate always exceeds the White unemployment rate.

But what is interesting about this graph is that the Black unemployment rate is not a fixed six percentage points higher than the White unemployment rate. Instead, when the White unemployment rate was low, the gap between the White and Black unemployment rates was small. For instance, in October 2024, the White unemployment rate was only 3.8%, which is much lower than the full sample's average 5.4% White unemployment rate. In this month, the Black unemployment rate was 5.7%. So the difference between the White and Black unemployment rates was only 1.9 percentage points (5.7% - 3.8%). This is about a third of the size of the gap between the full sample's average unemployment rates.

On the other extreme, when the White unemployment rate was historically high, as it was in January 1983, the gap between the Black and White unemployment rates was high. In January 1983 the gap was 12.1 percentage points. In general, every time the White unemployment rate goes up by one percentage point, the Black unemployment rate goes up by 1.9 percentage points. This implies that an economy that produces high unemployment rates is more harmful to the Black population than it is to the White population – at least in terms of the change in the likelihood of members of these groups losing their jobs.

The relationship between Black and White unemployment rates may explain why Trump did so well among Blacks in his last election. He made the case that he would be better for the economy than his opponent. This seemed to be a reasonable claim since the economy was doing so well under his watch before the pandemic struck in 2020. Unemployment rates were abnormally low. Trump claimed that Blacks would benefit from the favorable economic conditions that his policies would usher in.

However, Trump's second term is much different than his first term. In his second term, many of his policies will probably hurt economic growth, which will cause firms to hire fewer employees and lay off some employees. Both of these actions will increase the unemployment rate, which will increase the Black unemployment rate by more than it will increase the White unemployment rate. If this occurs, Blacks will hear commentators blaming Trump's tariffs, his aggressive deportation policy, and his attack on central bank independence as causes for the recession we may find ourselves in. Or Blacks will just hold the incumbent president, Trump, responsible for the economy's poor economic performance, figuring his policies led to the economy's subpar performance. Then, Black voters will switch their support back to the Democrats, having lost faith that Republicans can deliver good economic times that benefit them so greatly.

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