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Cultural Disempowerment:

What Most Unites and Animates Modern Republican Voters

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

In Political Science

by

Thomas A Sherrer

2020

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Cultural Disempowerment:

What Most Unites and Animates Modern Republican Voters

by

Thomas A Sherrer

Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science

University of California, Los Angeles, 2020

Professor David O Sears, Co-Chair

Professor Lynn Vavreck Lewis, Co-Chair

In this paper, I use survey experiments to try to better understand attitudes around political correctness, shifting cultural power, and competing standards for what constitutes racism/discrimination (all highly polarized issues at present). I find no evidence that cultural threats nudge attitudes in a conservative direction the way racial, demographic threats have been shown to do. However, in a separate experimentally manipulated scenario, I find that Democrats are more sympathetic to racial minorities, while Republicans are roughly equally sympathetic to whites and racial minorities complaining about a racially offensive event. This suggests that Democrats tend to consider the historical plight of groups when making judgements about speech norms and what is considered legitimately offensive while Republicans do not. Additional basic survey items support the notion that Democrats and Republicans conceive of racism and discrimination in highly divergent ways, making productive dialogue across partisan camps difficult on these issues, even assuming good faith on all sides.

The dissertation of Thomas A Sherrer is approved.

Christopher N Tausanovitch

Efren Osvaldo Perez

Lynn Vavreck Lewis, Committee Co-Chair

David O Sears, Committee Co-Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2020

Table of Contents

II. Introduction	Page 1
Background and Research Questions	Page 1
Literature Review	Page 4
Economic Anxiety vs Racial Resentment	Page 5
Status Threats	Page 8
Political Correctness	Page 13
Cultural Disempowerment	Page 17
II. Demographic vs Cultural Change as a Threat	Page 20
Background	Page 20
Methods	Page 24
Randomization Check	Page 29
Results	Page 30
Implications of Findings	Page 34
III. Political Correctness	Page 36
Background	Page 36
Study 2	Page 38
Methods	Page 38
Results	Page 39
Study 3	Page 47
Methods	Page 47
Randomization Check	Page 49
Results	Page 50

Table of Contents Continued

Implications of Findings	Page 57
IV. Race Versus Cultural Issues	Page 59
Additional Survey Items from Study 3	Page 59
Two Additional Experimental Survey Items	Page 60
Different Conceptions of Racism Across Partisan Camps	Page 61
Cultural Views on Issues Involving Race	Page 65
Genuine Efforts to Redress Racial Wrongdoing or Political Correctness?	Page 67
Nationalism and Identity Across Partisan Camps	Page 69
Cultural Disempowerment	Page 72
V. Limitations, Implications and Final Thoughts	Page 75
Limitations	Page 75
Implications and Final Thoughts	Page 76
Appendix	Page 80
References	Page 81

List of Figures and Tables

Table 1: Distribution of Key Demographic Traits	Page 30
Table 2: White Pure Independents	Page 32
Table 3: White Democrats	Page 33
Table 4: Common Words and Phrases in Explaining Political Correctness	Page 41
Table 5: Distribution of Key Demographic Traits	Page 50
Figure 1: Democrats	Page 51
Figure 2: Independents	Page 52
Figure 3: Republicans	Page 54
Figure 4: Republicans	Page 56
Figure 5: Who Faces a lot of Discrimination Today?	Page 63
Figure 6: Deep Partisan Disagreements on Discrimination	Page 64
Figure 7: Which Historical Narratives to Emphasize	Page 65
Figure 8: Reflect Carefully or Move Part Racial History?	Page 66
Figure 9: Replace Andrew Jackson with Harriet Tubman?	Page 68
Figure 10: Rename Columbus Day as Indigenous Peoples' Day?	Page 68
Figure 11: Personal Feelings on Criticisms/Disrespect for Flag	Page 71
Figure 12: Is Popular and News Media Biased Against People Like You?	Page 74

THOMAS A. SHERRER, MS

PROFESSIONAL SUMMARY

Over five years of experience as a teaching assistant/associate/fellow to include six different courses I designed and taught, over four years of experience in military intelligence, and a year of experience as an academic and career adviser.

EDUCATION

PhD , Political Science UCLA; Los Angeles, CA	Expected 2020
MS , Applied Psychology U of South Alabama; Mobile, AL	2008
BS , Psychology Troy University; Troy, AL	2006

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Teaching Assistant/Associate/Fellow ; UCLA Experience teaching lectures, seminars and discussion sections — Graded all exams, papers and assignments — Created and presented original lecture/discussion materials — Created original assignments — Created two seminar courses including reading lists, tests and all other graded assignments — Designed and implemented student surveys to determine which exercises and strategies were most effective	2015 – Present
Cryptologic Linguist , US Army; Various Duty Stations Identified, decrypted and analyzed foreign communications — Wrote detailed intelligence reports summarizing technical findings in order to streamline leadership decision making — Coordinated with other branches and agencies to fulfill common mission goals — Trained other soldiers and civilian personnel on job-related skills	2009 – 2013
Career Advisor , U. Of South Alabama; Mobile, AL Provided career and academic advising to students based on student interests and current employment trends — Administered and interpreted career related interest and aptitude tests — Edited resumes, cover letters and personal statements — Managed and analyzed job database through coordination with employers	2007 – 2008
Case Manager , Helping Families Program; Mobile, AL 2006 — 2007 Independently counseled students referred to program for behavioral concerns — Consulted with parents and teachers to	

develop action plans for the students — Conducted assessments of students’ wellbeing at home and in school — Measured end of service outcomes for students to determine progress made and need for continuing services

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- America in the 1960’s, Teaching Assistant 2015 - 2019
- Media Technology and Society/Politics, Seminar Instructor 2015 - 2019
- Intro to American Politics, Instructor Summer 2017
- Three different Summer ESL Courses, Instructor 2018 & 2019
- Political Polarization in American Politics, Seminar Instructor 2020

RESEARCH FELLOWSHIPS

- Political Psychology Fellowship 2019
- Graduate Summer Research Mentorship Fellowship 2015 & 2016
- Edwin W. Pauley Fellowship 2014

PAPERS AND PRESENTATIONS

- “Cultural Disempowerment” Dissertation/Working Paper
- “The Tea Party and the Supreme Court” Conference Presentation at WPSA
- “Women in Politics: Competitiveness and Running for Office” Qualifying Paper
- “The Effects of Graphic Images on Political Attitudes” Qualifying Paper
- “Sharp Minimum Wage Increase could Reduce Opportunity for most Vulnerable Workers” 2014 Published in Forbes Online (9/03/2014)
- “The Politics of Journalism Students” 2008 Graduate Thesis

I. Introduction

Background and Research Questions

Since the 2016 presidential election, political scientists and researchers in similar fields have debated what best explains Donald Trump's surprising ascendance to the presidency, and to a lesser extent, what these trends mean for American politics in the near to midterm future. Much of the debate has centered around whether economic anxiety or race/identity based attitudes played a larger role in Trump's rise, with most of the evidence tilting toward the latter.

I see this project not as an attempt to undermine or question the robust literature showing that racial resentments and other race and identity related attitudes best explain Donald Trump's appeal (or that those attitudes bind Republican partisans together more than others), but more of an attempt to add context to those findings and try to better understand what they mean for the near to midterm future of American politics. More specifically, I try to investigate the role that cultural attitudes play – and in particular, a sense of cultural disempowerment among modern Republicans – more or less independent of racial attitudes. This project centers on the following three basic research questions:

1. Can threats that are purely cultural nudge white voters toward more conservative policy preferences and the Republican Party the way that racial, demographic threats have been shown to do in experimental studies?
2. Do frustrations toward political correctness (particularly among Republicans) reflect negative evaluations of restrictive norms on speech and annoyance over sensitivity in

general, or do they merely reflect annoyance that historically marginalized groups have made gains relative to whites and Christians in determining appropriate norms on speech?

3. Do Democrats and Republicans conceive of racism and discrimination differently, and if so, is that partly what makes race and identity issues so contentious and difficult to navigate in the current political landscape?

To try to answer these questions, I designed and completed three online survey studies. In Study 1, I ran a simple survey experiment very similar to Craig and Richeson (2014), which found that informing whites that they are projected to make up less than 50% of the U.S. population in the next three decades nudged their policy and party preferences in a slightly more conservative direction. In addition to a demographic threat similar to the one Craig and Richeson used, I included a treatment condition informing participants that Christian self-identification has declined rapidly in the U.S. recently, a treatment condition informing participants that popular television shows have shifted sharply away from rural settings to favor urban settings in recent decades, and a control condition. Survey participants were randomly assigned to one of the three treatment conditions or the control condition. The purpose is to test whether the cultural “threats” in treatments two and three can nudge whites toward more conservative policy preferences and better evaluations of the Republican Party the way that racial, demographic threats have been shown to do.

In Study 2, I simply asked an open-ended question instructing survey participants to define “political correctness” for someone unfamiliar with the term. I also asked participants if they think political correctness sometimes goes too far, and if so, to explain their answer. The purpose

of this study was primarily to gain insight into how Democratic and Republican partisans think about political correctness, and I compare word usage and phrasing across the two partisan camps in analyzing the results.

In Study 3, I again randomly assign survey participants to different “treatments” similar to Study 1, but this time participants read one of two scenarios involving a controversial fundraiser on a local college campus. In the first scenario, a student group holds an “affirmative action awareness bake sale”, and in the second scenario, a group of students holds a “white privilege awareness field day.” In both scenarios, some of the students who attend the event report to the school administrators that they felt offended, but the racial identity of the complaining students is different across the scenarios (students of color complain in the affirmative action bake sale scenario while white students complain in the white privilege field day scenario). Otherwise, I made the two scenarios as identical as possible, and survey respondents in both groups were presented with the same four questions after reading the scenario assigned to them. The purpose of this study was to experimentally test whether negative attitudes toward political correctness reflect a principled opposition to restrictive speech norms and annoyance over perceived oversensitivity in general, as opposed to annoyance that historically marginalized groups are perceived to have too much protection now, due to these speech norms.

Before describing these studies and their findings in more detail, I begin here by reviewing several prominent explanations for Trump’s unlikely ascendance to the presidency and what most animates Republican voters today, with particular emphasis on the two dominant competing explanations: economic anxiety versus racial and identity-based attitudes. Additionally, I briefly discuss the divergent implications of each explanation in terms of future

impact on national politics in the U.S. Finally, I describe my own theory of cultural disempowerment, which I define as the sense among white conservatives and white Christians of having lost their cultural dominance in the contemporary U.S. More specifically, they feel they have largely lost the ability to emphasize their preferred narratives in American history, to elevate their particular core values, and to determine the standards for polite public discourse. I also attempt to explain how this theory relates to, but is distinct from other theories.

Literature Review

Unlike every president before him, 2016 presidential hopeful Donald Trump had never served in the military and never held an elected office before becoming president. But, of course, that was far from the only distinction that made him an unusual presidential candidate, let alone a major party nominee and eventual president. Literally within a few minutes of officially announcing his candidacy for president, he said of Mexican immigrants, “They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people” (Reilly 2016). On the campaign trail he called for a “total and complete shutdown” of Muslims entering the U.S. (Johnson 2015). Numerous times he said that the United States should have “taken the oil” in Iraq (Geraghty 2015). He repeatedly promised to build a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border that he would force Mexico to fund (Qiu 2019). During a televised presidential debate he threatened to put his opponent in jail if he won the election (Wilkinson 2016). And only weeks before the 2016 election, a leaked audio tape from 2005 revealed Donald Trump bragging about his ability to sexually assault women with impunity (Fahrenthold 2016). To say that Donald Trump behaved outside the norms of modern presidential politics in the U.S. would be a rather

glaring understatement. Even aside from what is documented here, much of his rhetoric during the campaign was so extreme that even leaders within his own party frequently rebuked his comments as racist and sexist (see, for example, PBS 2016; Schreckinger 2015).

Yet, despite his extreme rhetoric and policy proposals, despite his lack of experience, despite all odds, Donald Trump the rogue outsider *did* become president. Needless to say, that outcome has spurred a vast amount of debate about what best explains Trump's surprising ascendance, both in political science and in popular media. Moreover, given that Trump broke sharply not only with rhetorical norms of presidential politics, but also with much of the orthodox policy positions within the Republican Party (on so-called entitlements, trade, foreign policy, etc.), we are left to wonder what lasting impact he will have on American politics going forward.

Economic Anxiety vs Racial Resentment

Initially, economic anxiety emerged as a popular explanation for Trump's rising popularity during the Republican primaries. Headlines like, "How the China Shock, Deep and Swift, Spurred the Rise of Trump" appeared in the Wall Street Journal (Davis and Hilsenrath 2016), and then after his upset presidential victory, "How Trump Won: The Revenge of Working-Class Whites" and "Where were Trump's votes? Where the jobs weren't" appeared in the Washington Post and the New York Times respectively (Tankersly 2016; Porter 2016). This seemed plausible since Trump had focused much of his energy railing against globalization and free trade during the campaign, particularly in states that had formerly been home to large manufacturing and natural energy sectors. Moreover, the economic anxiety explanation implied that while voters may have been willing to tolerate Trump's extreme rhetoric on race and identity issues, they

were primarily drawn to him for his economic message. Had the economic anxiety narrative held, it would be easy to foresee party politics at the national level returning to its polarized but less sensational baseline, to include a greater emphasis on economic points of partisan disagreement (as was the case in most recent presidential elections) as opposed to an intense focus on race and identity based issues (as was the case in 2016) (Sides, Tesler and Vavreck 2018).

However, more rigorous analyses have largely cast doubt on the economic anxiety hypothesis and settled on race/identity based attitudes as better explaining Trump's rise. That is not to say that economic anxiety had no impact on the 2016 election, but that race and identity based attitudes were more salient and had more impact on the outcome. For example, the probability of voting for Trump was shown to be much more highly correlated with hostile sexism and low acknowledgment of racism than economic dissatisfaction (Schaffner, MacWilliams and Nteta 2018). A separate study testing whether "protest" sentiment - defined as low political trust and satisfaction with democracy - could explain Trump's election found that anti-immigrant attitudes and racial resentment were more predictive of voting for Trump than protest sentiment or economic assessments (Hooghe and Dassonneville 2018). Trump voters tended to be higher on racial resentment (Tesler and Sides 2016; Tesler 2016) and to hold more negative attitudes toward minority groups relative to those who preferred other candidates (Sides, Tesler and Vavreck 2018; Hopkins 2016; Flitter and Kahn 2016). In a related vein, negative views toward immigration and expanding minority populations in the U.S. were also strong predictors of Trump support (Nteta and Schaffner 2016). Newman, Shah and Collingwood (2018) found that residing in high Latino growth areas was predictive of Trump support, particularly after he made

his infamous “rapists” comment about Mexican immigrants. Even among white voters who switched from Obama to Trump between 2012 and 2016, negative attitudes toward racial minorities and immigration seem to have been more influential than economic concerns (Reny, Collingwood and Valenzuela 2019). To the extent that a consensus formed among political scientists and academics in related fields on the question of what best explained Donald Trump’s election to the presidency, it seems to have formed around race and identity based attitudes.

These more robust findings linking Trump’s support to race/identity based attitudes arguably suggest a more fundamental shift in American politics in the near to mid-term. For one, the mere fact that Trump was able to pull off such a surprising upset may incentivize Republican elites to return to the well, so to speak. Secondly, Republican voters and voters who lean toward the GOP appear most united around race/identity related attitudes as opposed to economic or other policy related attitudes. For example, among Pew Research’s 10 ideological consistency items - which asks survey respondents to choose either a liberal or conservative view as closer to their own on a range of 10 issues - as of 2017, Republican voters and leaners were in greatest agreement that blacks who can’t get ahead in the U.S. are mostly responsible for their own condition, even above items asking more traditionally fundamental left-right questions about the appropriate size and scope of government (Pew Research 2018). If attitudes about race and identity are what most unite the GOP base, party elites may be unwilling or unable to refocus their rhetoric and electoral strategies around economic or other policy arguments. In a recent study exploring the areas of greatest tension between Democrats and Republicans by the Democracy Voter Fund, Drutman (2017) summarized their first key finding this way:

“The primary conflict structuring the two parties involves questions of national identity, race,

and morality, while the traditional conflict over economics, though still important, is less divisive now than it used to be. This has the potential to reshape the party coalitions.”

Status Threats

Aside from explicitly race/identity based attitudes, however, a few other explanations for Trump’s rise have emerged recently. For one, concerns over loss of status among whites appear to have been highly related to Trump support. Diana Mutz (2018) identified perceived status threats — defined as whites dwindling as a share of the U.S. population and the U.S. slipping as a global superpower — as the strongest motivating factor for Trump support among whites. As Mutz explains: “The declining white share of the national population is unlikely to change white Americans’ status as the most economically well-off racial group, but symbolically, it threatens some whites’ sense of dominance over social and political priorities.”

While status threat defined in these terms is obviously related to race/identity based attitudes, since whites declining as a share of the U.S. population means by definition that people of color are making gains as a share of the population, it is perhaps distinct from some of the aforementioned more direct measures of race/identity attitudes in that it does not necessarily imply explicitly negative views toward outgroups as much as angst over lost social status and cultural power relative to other groups. Mutz is not alone in this diagnosis. Speaking of the Republican Party more broadly, political scientists and *How Democracies Die* authors, Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt (2019), recently described the situation like this in the New York Times:

“White Christians are losing more than an electoral majority; their once-dominant status in American society is eroding. Half a century ago, white Protestant men occupied nearly all our country’s high-status positions: They made up nearly all the elected officials, business leaders and media figures. Those days are over, but the loss of a group’s social status can feel deeply threatening. Many rank-and-file Republicans believe that the country they grew up in is being taken away from them. Slogans like “take our country back” and “make America great again” reflect this sense of peril.”

Citing cultural and status frustrations as important influences in American politics, particularly in explaining right wing and extremist movements, is not new. More generally, citing status concerns as a primary motivation for human behavior is not new, either. As the Nobel Laureate Economist John Harsanyi wrote in 1980, “Apart from economic payoffs, social status (social rank) seems to be the most important incentive and motivating force of social behavior.” In fact, dating back at least to the 1950’s, a group of sociologists and historians posited that a major distinction existed between “class politics” and “status politics”, and that class politics dominated in times of economic distress, while status politics came to the fore in periods of economic growth and low unemployment. Sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset described the dynamic this way in a 1955 essay titled “The Sources of the ‘Radical Right’”; it is perhaps worth quoting him at length here:

“Any analysis of the role of political extremism in the United States must recognize two fundamental political forces operating under varying historical conditions of American society. These forces may be distinguishable by the terms *status politics* and *class politics*. Class politics

refers to political division based on the discord between the traditional left and the right, i.e., between those who favor redistribution of income, and those favoring the preservation of the *status quo*. Status politics, as used here, refers to political movements whose appeal is to the not uncommon resentments of individuals or groups who desire to maintain or improve their social status. In the United States, political movements or parties which stress the need for economic reform have usually gained strength during times of unemployment or depression. On the other hand, status politics becomes ascendant in periods of prosperity... The groups which are receptive to status-oriented appeals are not only those which have risen in the economic structure and who may be frustrated in their desire to be accepted socially by those who already hold status, but also those groups already possessing status who feel that the rapid social change threatens their own claims to high social position, or enables previously lower status groups to claim equal status with their own.”

Historian Richard Hofstadter made a very similar argument in a 1955 essay, *The Pseudo-Conservative Revolt*:

“In a country where physical needs have been, by the scale of the world’s living standards, on the whole well met, the luxury of questing after status has assumed an unusually prominent place in our civic consciousness. Political life is not simply an arena in which the conflicting interests of various social groups in concrete material gains are fought out; it is also an arena into which status aspirations and frustrations are, as the psychologists would say, projected... We have, at all times, two kinds of processes going on in inextricable connection with each other: *interest politics*, the clash of material aims and needs among various groups and blocs; and *status*

politics, the clash of various projective rationalizations arising from status aspirations and other personal motives. In times of depression and economic discontent — and by and large in times of acute national emergency — politics is more clearly a matter of interests, although of course status considerations are still present. In times of prosperity and general well-being on the material plane, status considerations among the masses can become much more influential in our politics.”

Returning to Lipset (1955), he goes on to distinguish the consequences of the two categories of politics:

“The political consequences of status frustrations are very different from those resulting from economic deprivation, for while in economic conflict the goals are clear — a redistribution of income — in status conflict there are no clear-cut solutions. Where there are status anxieties, there is little or nothing which a government can do. It is not surprising, therefore, that the political movements which have successfully appealed to status resentments have been irrational in character, and have sought scapegoats which conveniently serve to symbolize the status threat. Historically, the most common scapegoats in the United States have been the minority ethnic or religious groups. Such groups have repeatedly been the victims of political aggression in periods of prosperity, for it is precisely in these times that status anxieties are most pressing.”

Sociologist Daniel Bell echoed this sentiment in a 1962 essay, “The Dispossessed”, but broadened the argument somewhat to include general social and technological change as contributing to the sense of status loss among many on the right in American politics. He also

distinguished his argument from the others in suggesting that the loss or “dispossession” of one’s perceived social position is especially psychologically painful.

“What the right as a whole fears is the erosion of its own social position, the collapse of its power, the increasing incomprehensibility of a world — now overwhelmingly technical and complex — that has changed so drastically within a lifetime... Social groups that are dispossessed invariably seek targets on whom they can vent their resentments, targets whose power can serve to explain their dispossession.”

It does not require much imagination to see how well these theories of politics (and in particular, right wing politics) map onto the current political landscape in the U.S., to include President Trump’s frequent, explicit appeals to what he calls “the forgotten men and women of our country”. The general status loss theory also provides a tidy explanation for how, in the span of a few years, the same country could elect its first black president and then a white president using the most inflammatory racial and gender based rhetoric in modern American politics. As Lipset and Hofstadter argued decades ago, status concerns tend to come to the fore during relatively strong economic periods, with class or “interest” politics dominating during periods of economic downturn. In the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, economic issues and concerns were overwhelmingly salient during the 2008 presidential campaign. With economic indicators favoring his party, Barack Obama was able to win the general election relatively easily, thus becoming the first person of color president in American history, an outcome that seemed highly unlikely at best even a decade or two prior. In 2016, by contrast, after a long period of steady economic growth and falling unemployment, Lipset and Hofstadter’s theory would predict that

status concerns would come to the fore, and indeed race/identity issues became much more salient. Trump's controversial, headline-grabbing racial and gender based rhetoric, as well as his campaign rival Hillary Clinton's relative willingness to engage him in that arena, served to heighten the salience of race and identity issues. Moreover, the mere fact of Obama's race seems to have also increasingly raised the salience of race and identity attitudes across his two terms as president leading up to 2016 (Tessler and Sears 2009).

Political Correctness

Aside from economic anxiety, race/identity based attitudes and status threats, concerns over political correctness seemed strongly linked to support for Trump, and it is an issue in which Republican voters share strong agreement. Trump himself frequently criticized the concept during his campaign, suggesting that it harms the country's ability to deal with serious problems. Among many other instances, he had this to say about political correctness during a primary debate with other Republicans candidates in 2015: "I think the big problem this country has is being politically correct. I've been challenged by so many people, and I don't frankly have time for total political correctness. And to be honest with you, this country doesn't have time, either" (New York Times 2015). In the aftermath of a 2016 mass shooting in Orlando, Florida, in a prepared speech then candidate Trump said, "The current politically correct response cripples our ability to talk and to think and act clearly... They have put political correctness above common sense, above your safety, and above all else. I refuse to be politically correct" (Healy and Kaplan 2016). Trump has also suggested political correctness is the real motivation behind efforts ostensibly aimed at redressing historical racial injustices. Trump called the push to

replace Andrew Jackson with Harriet Tubman on the twenty dollar bill, “pure political correctness” (Wright 2016).

A few pundits and at least one academic study have pointed to a backlash against so-called political correctness as largely fueling Trump’s rise. For example, Robby Soave (2016), an editor at the libertarian magazine Reason, wrote this in the immediate aftermath of the 2016 election: “Trump won because he convinced a great number of Americans that he would destroy political correctness.” Conway, Repke and Houck (2017) argued that a significant number of voters chose Trump “as a cultural revolt” against perceived political correctness, and they showed that priming norms around political correctness predicted Trump (but not Clinton) support, and that voters who consistently reacted negatively to political correctness norms were more likely to support Trump, even controlling for political ideology. A Clearthinking.org analysis of 138 survey items found that, after party identification, negative attitudes toward political correctness were most predictive of intention to vote for Trump over Clinton (Greenberg 2016). A June 2016 Quinnipiac Poll of registered voters asked respondents which response was closer to their point of view, that there is too much political correctness in the U.S., or that there is too much prejudice in the U.S. Among Republican voters, 86% responded that there is too much political correctness while only 16% of Democrats chose political correctness (80% chose too much prejudice).

The Clearthinking and Quinnipiac survey results suggest that attitudes around political correctness are almost uniquely polarized across partisan camps in the U.S. The roughly 70 point gap between Democrats and Republicans on whether political correctness or prejudice is a bigger problem in the U.S. is significantly larger than the partisan gap observed on any of Pew’s

10-item ideological consistency scale, for example, which asks similar dichotomous choice questions. On other national surveys like the ANES, although asked in different terms, traditional left-right survey questions such as whether the government should do more to reduce income inequality and whether the government should offer fewer/more services, observed partisan gaps are significantly smaller than on the political correctness vs prejudice item (ANES 2016). Moreover, Republicans in particular are strongly unified in their belief that political correctness is a significant problem. The 86% of Republicans agreeing that political correctness is a bigger problem than prejudice is a larger percentage for a particular response than observed on any of the 10 items on Pew's ideological consistency scale, and indeed as large or larger than any single survey item of which I am aware. Not only that, but the extremity of this issue position appears to be quite high as well. In my own surveys (which are admittedly smaller and less nationally representative), I find that among 41 survey items with eight-point scales on a wide range of political, policy, and identity based issues, Republican respondents felt more strongly about political correctness being a problem than any other attitude save for the belief that middle income Americans should pay lower taxes.

Taking all of this together, it seems clear that attitudes around political correctness are a flash point in current American politics, particularly across partisan lines, but it is not entirely clear what this attitude is measuring. People may have different conceptions of what political correctness means as well as what qualifies as politically correct behavior and speech. In fact, attitudes around political correctness appear to vary dramatically depending on how survey questions are worded. In a large 2019 Morning Consult survey experiment, half of the respondents were asked whether they considered themselves politically correct, and half were

asked whether they, “Avoid saying and doing things that could be perceived as insulting to people who are different than you.” Overall, only 34% of respondents in the first group answered that they considered themselves politically correct, but in the second group, when presented with a basic definition of political correctness (without the label), 75% agreed that they try to avoid potentially offensive behavior and speech. There was a larger gap between those in the first and second groups of the survey experiment among Republican respondents (32% vs 75%) than Democrat respondents (46% vs 79%), but both groups were much more likely to describe themselves as trying to avoid offending others than describing themselves as politically correct. Perhaps political correctness is simply a loaded term that carries negative connotations and is widely understood to be overly restrictive, and therefore respondents are reluctant to associate themselves with the label.

Another potential explanation is that people are not so much opposed to being mindful of potentially offensive speech and behavior, but they are opposed to the perceived special protections for particular groups granted by so-called political correctness.

In the studies from this project, I try to investigate whether survey questions about political correctness prompt survey respondents to consider the ways in which American culture and norms around public discourse have changed in recent decades. In particular, these questions may remind white conservatives and white Christians (both groups that overwhelmingly favor the Republican Party today) of a certain kind of status loss, the loss of cultural dominance in the U.S. By that, I mean that modern Republican voters may feel they no longer enjoy the same numeric dominance they did just a few decades ago, but more importantly, they may perceive themselves as having lost their dominant position in establishing the standards for polite public

discourse, elevating their particular core values in public sphere, and emphasizing their preferred narratives about the country's history.

Cultural Disempowerment

Most modern nation states have distinct cultural characteristics (norms, beliefs, values, customs, etc.), and so it is with the United States. For example, compared to the citizens of other wealthy nations, Americans tend to be more tolerant of economic inequality, more skeptical of government programs aimed at redressing social and economic inequality, more individualistic, and more religious. This has been true historically, and it still applies today when comparing the U.S. to other wealthy countries. International surveys on public opinion consistently bear this out. For instance, Pew Global Attitudes surveys find that Americans are much more likely to disagree that “success in life is pretty much determined by forces outside our control” and much more likely to say it is very important to work hard in life to get ahead compared to citizens in other wealthy countries (Pew Research 2015). The U.S. also stands out in its high religiosity relative to other wealthy countries; in fact, in 2018, the U.S. was the only nation among 102 surveyed that was above average in both per capita GDP and average frequency of prayer (Pew Research 2018). Still, relative to its own history, American culture has changed fairly dramatically and relatively quickly in recent decades. This includes a significant drop in reported religiosity, but also a shift in a wide range of cultural and political norms, most of which modern Republican voters oppose.

I posit that a sense of cultural disempowerment may be what most unites and animates modern Republican voters in the U.S. That is, Republicans may believe their country is not only

changing too quickly, but changing in ways they disagree with and cannot relate to. The kinds of change I am referring to can be divided into a few categories. First, norms around social discourse (i.e. political correctness) have evolved relatively quickly in recent decades, and as the previous review of survey data suggested, Republicans are almost uniquely united around strong disapproval of the current perceived norms. Secondly, Republicans do not believe that their core values are reflected in the public sphere to the extent they were in the past. From their perspective, the country has largely abandoned its so-called Judeo-Christian core values in favor of religious and cultural pluralism. Moreover, they sense that their moral values are not only no longer expressed as much in the public sphere, but have also been cast as close-minded if not outright bigoted. Thirdly, modern Republicans are sensitive about efforts to highlight the historic collective sins of the United States, especially anything related to the mistreatment of minority and marginalized groups. Given that Republican voters overwhelmingly believe that historical discrimination toward such groups has both vastly diminished today and has little impact on current group outcomes, they likely find any shift toward greater recognition of those sins frustrating.

Potentially adding to the frustration among Republican voters over these cultural shifts is a sense that these changes did not occur organically or in a democratic fashion, but that they were forced on the country by so-called elites. Political elites, such as major elected representatives, are certainly included in this lot, but so is anyone else perceived to have disproportionate power in bringing about cultural change, such as prominent leaders in business, popular media and entertainment, news media, academia, and non-profit organizations. From the perspective of conservative America, “out of touch” elites have pushed their own values and cultural

preferences onto the rest of the country and simultaneously tried paint the dominant views of white Christians and white conservatives not merely as misguided, but also bigoted. The changes I have described certainly play out in the political arena and in national elections, but I argue that frustrations over cultural changes occurring largely outside the realm of political conflict are also funneled into our national politics. After all, what avenues besides politics do people have to make their cultural frustrations felt, especially when they believe they have little to no representation among elites in most fields?

One last note is appropriate at this point. Cultural change is not new in the United States. Since the founding, what has been deemed acceptable in politics, public discourse and popular culture has evolved over time, as have most if not all of the specific issues I have mentioned. And while I think there are good reasons to suggest much of this change has accelerated in recent years, I do not mean to oversale that argument. Likewise, conflict over cultural change is nothing new, either. What is different now, and what has made these changes and the surrounding conflicts more impactful in recent American politics, is that these conflicts more neatly map onto the two major political parties *and* voters understand how these conflicts map onto the two parties much more clearly than in the past. In other words, conflict over cultural change (and even a disconnect between the public and elites) is not new. What is new is that average voters can much more easily identify which party generally agrees with their side on these cultural issues compared to the past. That is in part because the parties themselves have internally become much more ideologically consistent, and also because the last few presidential elections in particular have helped to clarify cultural dividing lines across the two parties.

In subsequent chapters, I examine each of these three categories of cultural change in significant detail using existing survey data, historical sources, as well as my own experimental survey data. In the discussion section I argue that this theory of cultural disempowerment is consistent with other theories of human motivation within economics and social psychology, and I discuss future implications for American politics more broadly.

II. Demographic vs Cultural Change as a Threat

Background

Around 2008, Yale Psychologist Jennifer Richeson first heard on NPR radio that a Census Bureau report projected that racial minorities would grow to represent over 50% of the U.S. population by 2050, and she remembers thinking to herself, “this is probably freaking somebody out” (Resnick 2017). Her subsequent research would largely validate that intuition. A few years later, Richeson and then graduate student Maureen Craig began conducting experiments testing whether presenting whites with reports of demographic changes might actually change their views on cultural and political issues. In one of the early experiments, Craig and Richeson (2014) found that white political independents who were randomly assigned to read a report stating that California had become a racial minority majority state reported leaning more toward the Republican Party relative to white independents in a control condition. In a subsequent study they found that presenting whites with reports of their impending decline relative to other racial groups in the U.S. nudged survey respondents toward slightly more conservative positions on

race *and* non race-related policies relative to a control group (Craig and Richeson 2014). They also found that perceived group status threat was heightened in the group exposed to the demographic threat condition relative to the control group.

Subsequent survey experiments have found very similar results (see, for example, Outten et al. 2015). Recall also that Mutz (2018) largely defined “status threat” — which was shown to be the strongest motivating factor among whites for Trump support — as whites’ declining as a share of the future U.S. population. These findings suggest that at least a marginal number of whites in the U.S. perceive the Republican Party as offering protection from the threat of coming demographic changes, and it appears that demographic shifts are playing and will continue to play a significant role in American politics.

In this study, I wanted to test whether other, more cultural trends in American life might have similar effects on political and social attitudes. We know, for example, that self-identified Christians have been declining and very likely will continue to decline as a share of the U.S. population. We also know that, at least among whites in recent years, Christians have trended heavily toward the Republican Party. In fact, the GOP has made significant gains among white Evangelicals, Mainline Protestants, Catholics relative to the Democratic Party in recent decades. Today, to include party leaners, 77% of white Evangelicals, 53% of white Mainline Protestants, and 54% of white Catholics favor the GOP (Pew Research 2018).

Republican Party elites have not shied away from explicit appeals to Christians, either. Speaking at a small Christian college in Sioux Center, Iowa in January 2016, then candidate Donald Trump told the audience, “I will tell you, Christianity is under tremendous siege, whether we want to talk about it or we don’t want to talk about it.” After lamenting that Christians don’t

exert the power that they should, given their numbers, Trump went on to promise, “Christianity will have power. If I’m there, you’re going to have plenty of power, you don’t need anybody else. You’re going to have somebody representing you very, very well. Remember that” (Dias 2020).¹ More recently, President Trump has said that his 2020 Democratic campaign rival Joe Biden would “hurt the Bible. Hurt God”, that Biden is, “against God”, and that in a Biden presidency there would be “no religion, no anything” (Conant 2020). As a presidential candidate in 2016, GOP runner up to Trump, Senator Ted Cruz was fond of warning about “a war on faith” and said, "If we cannot worship God, if we cannot live according to our faith... all other liberties fade away" (Zezima 2015).

If exposing whites to projections of an increasingly racially diverse demographic makeup in the U.S. nudges them toward the GOP and conservative policy views, might exposing them to Christianity’s relative decline in the U.S. elicit similar reactions? After all, white Christians in the U.S. have trended heavily toward the Republican Party in recent years. It seems logical to conclude that, to the extent that Christianity’s relative decline in the U.S. is perceived to be a threat similar to the way demographic changes are perceived as a threat, exposing voters to that information may similarly nudge them toward the GOP.

I was also curious whether an even more subtle cultural nudge might have a similar effect. Similar to the gains the GOP has made among white Christians in recent decades, they have also overwhelmingly become the party choice for more rural voters. Political Scientist Jonathan Rodden, author of *Why Cities Lose*, has shown that population density has increasingly

¹ Evangelical white Christians in particular seem to have heeded Trump’s promises; about 81% of them voted for him in 2016, and while his approval among the group has slipped somewhat, about 82% report that they plan to vote for Trump again in 2020 (Lipka and Smith 2020).

correlated to presidential election Democratic vote share in recent decades, reaching its peak in 2016. Moreover, the cultural identities of rural/urban areas have largely been grafted onto the two party system in the U.S. As Rodden puts it, “American geographic polarization has emerged in large part because our political institutions have created a strict two-party system that has gradually come to reflect a set of social cleavages that are highly correlated with population density. All the social changes that have pulled cities and rural areas apart since the 1930s have come to be expressed in the party system” (Rodden 2018). Given this, might voters (and particularly white voters, who are more likely to live in rural areas) also be nudged toward the GOP and conservative policy positions by being exposed to information suggesting urban areas have gained exposure and influence in popular culture at the expense of rural areas? According to Brookings Institute Fellow Jenny Schuetz, “TV shows have become consistently more urban over time... In the 1950s and 1960s, fewer than 30 percent of shows were set in central cities... The urban share increased to about half in the 1970s and 1980s, then to around 60 percent by the 2000s” (2018). It certainly seems like a more subtle nudge than demographic changes or declines in Christian identification, but if cultural identities are increasingly mapping onto the two-party system in the U.S., it seems reasonable to think this kind of information might also nudge white voters in the direction of the GOP.

In short, if cultural trends like the decline of Christian identification and a shift away from rural settings and rural values in popular culture are indeed projected onto national politics (in the same way that the declining white population relative to other groups is projected onto national politics), this experiment should be able to identify that phenomena.

Methods

To test these questions, I ran a simple survey experiment very similar to Craig and Richeson (2014) in which survey participants were randomly assigned into one of four groups that included three “treatment” conditions and a control group. In total, I recruited 1575 survey participants using Prolific (formally called Prolific Academic), an online crowdsourcing survey research platform similar to Amazon’s Mechanical Turk. According to Peer et al (2017) Prolific survey participant samples are more naive (i.e. less familiar with taking academic oriented surveys), less dishonest, more diverse, and they generate data of equal quality compared to Mechanical Turk. Like Craig and Richeson, I limited my analysis to whites (N: 1138, mean age: 35.5, age standard deviation: 11.9), but unlike Craig and Richeson, I analyzed results across Democratic and Republican identifiers, in addition to political independents. I used the randomizer function in Qualtrics’ survey software to randomly assign participants one of four survey links, which corresponded to one of the three treatment groups or the control group. I also selected the “evenly present elements” option within the Qualtrics randomizer, which ensures that roughly an equal number of participants are assigned to each group.

Each of the four group assignments included an initial excerpt citing a research report, and all excerpts were brief and of roughly equal length (ranging from 139 words to 204 words). In addition to a demographic threat similar to the one Craig and Richeson used, I included a treatment condition informing participants that Christian self-identification has declined rapidly in the U.S. recently, and a treatment condition informing participants that TV shows have shifted sharply away from rural settings to favor urban settings in recent decades. The purpose is to test whether the cultural “threats” in treatments two and three can nudge whites toward more

conservative policy preferences and better evaluations of the Republican Party the way that racial, demographic threats have been shown to do.

The first treatment group read an excerpt from a Brookings blog post citing Census Bureau demographic data and projecting a minority white result by 2045, very similar to the treatment condition in Craig and Richeson (2014). That excerpt read:

The US will become ‘minority white’ in 2045, Census projects

New census population projections confirm the importance of racial minorities as the primary demographic engine of the nation’s future growth, countering an aging, slow-growing and soon to be declining white population. The new statistics project that the nation will become “minority white” in 2045. During that year, whites will comprise 49.7 percent of the population in contrast to 24.6 percent for Hispanics, 13.1 percent for blacks, 7.9 percent for Asians, and 3.8 percent for multiracial populations.

The shift is the result of two trends. First, between 2018 and 2060, gains will continue in the combined racial minority populations, growing by 74 percent. Second, during this time frame, the aging white population will see a modest immediate gain through 2024, and then experience a long-term decline through 2060, a consequence of more deaths than births.

The second treatment group read an excerpt from a Pew Research Center report citing declines in Christian self-identification and church attendance in the U.S. That excerpt read:

In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace

The religious landscape of the United States continues to change at a rapid clip. In Pew Research Center telephone surveys conducted in 2018 and 2019, 65% of American adults

describe themselves as Christians when asked about their religion, down 12 percentage points over the past decade. Meanwhile, the religiously unaffiliated share of the population, consisting of people who describe their religious identity as atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular,” now stands at 26%, up from 17% in 2009... The data suggests that Christians are declining not just as a share of the U.S. adult population, but also in absolute numbers.

The data shows that just like rates of religious affiliation, rates of religious attendance are declining. Over the last decade, the share of Americans who say they attend religious services at least once or twice a month dropped by 7 percentage points, while the share who say they attend religious services less often (if at all) has risen by the same degree, a 14 percentage point net swing.

The third treatment group read an excerpt from a Brookings blog documenting how television show locations have shifted from rural to urban over time and how large cities like Los Angeles and New York are overrepresented relative to their share of the U.S. population while the south as a region is underrepresented. That excerpt read:

Cities have become more popular on TV. The South has not

TV shows have become consistently more urban over time... In the 1950s and 1960s, fewer than 30 percent of shows were set in central cities. The urban share increased to about half in the 1970s and 1980s, then to around 60 percent by the 2000s. Suburban shows occupied about one-quarter of TV real estate from the 1960s through the 1990s. Over one-third of shows in 1950 were set in small towns or rural areas, mostly Westerns and comedies. The rural/small town share declined steadily through the 2000s.

About 15 percent of TV shows have been set in both New York City and Los Angeles, although each city contained on average four percent of the country's population over this time period. Slightly fewer shows have been set in the Midwest than its population share, while the South has represented a much smaller share of TV shows (15 percent) than population (33 percent). The South's share of scripted TV shows has grown only slightly since the 1950s, while population share has increased substantially. Moreover, 40 percent of Southern TV shows were set in the Baltimore or Washington, D.C. metropolitan areas, which are part of the South geographically but culturally more aligned with the Northeast.

Finally, the fourth group (the control group) read an excerpt from a Brookings blog citing geographic mobility/moving rates in the U.S. This is very similar to the control condition Craig and Richeson (2014) used, presumably because it contains Census Bureau data but does not map onto partisan politics or activate racial attitudes in any obvious way. The excerpt read:

For the first time on record, fewer than 10% of Americans moved in a year

For the first time since the Census Bureau began recording annual migration statistics, fewer than 10% of Americans changed residence in a single year, according to just-released data for 2018-19.

The new migration statistics draw from the Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement, which has tracked American relocations since 1947. They allow for analyses of different kinds of domestic moves over that 72-year period, chronicling a continued deterioration of American mobility. Especially noteworthy are the migration declines for the nation's young adult population, now mostly occupied by millennials.

The trends in U.S. migration show a fairly consistent decline since the late 1940s to 1960s period, when roughly one-fifth of Americans changed residence annually. This decline has affected both local moves (those within counties) and longer-distance moves (those across counties), with the downturn sharpening since the recession and post-recession period.

For all four groups, I included links to the full report/blog post in case survey respondents wished to further explore the issue, and no deception was used. That is, all excerpts presented were real and none of the factual information was manipulated. After reading the different excerpts, survey participants in all groups answered the same battery of questions. I adopted the same five policy questions from Craig and Richeson (2014) plus an item on perceived white status threat, since they found responses on that particular item to be elevated in the treatment group in one of their experiments. The first three policy items related to race issues and included an item asking if the time required to become a U.S. citizen should be shortened or lengthened, an item asking whether the number of immigrants allowed in the U.S. each year should be reduced or increased, and an item asking whether the participant supports affirmative action policies. The last two items are considered to be race neutral and ask whether defense spending should be reduced or increased and whether the government should guarantee healthcare. The item on white status threat asked whether increases in the status of racial minorities will reduce the status of white Americans. Additionally, I asked participants to rate both major political parties on an eight-point scale where one represented a completely negative view and eight represented a completely positive view. Lastly, I asked participants how willing they might be in the future to vote for a Democrat/Republican in a presidential election, vote for a

Democrat/Republican in a non-presidential election, and register as a member of the Democratic/Republican Party. For consistency and ease of analysis, all items were presented in eight-point scales.

Randomization Check

To check that the Qualtrics randomizer did not assign treatment conditions/control status to participants in a way that over or underrepresented key demographic traits among the survey sample, I tabulated the proportion identifying as female, the proportion with a college degree, median education level, proportion self-identifying as Christian, median population density for the participants' hometown/home city, and age statistics for each of the four groups in the study (reminder: this is among whites only). Table 1 below shows that key demographic traits were indeed distributed roughly evenly across the four groups, especially in respect to median education, median population density of hometown/home city, and age.

Table 1: Distribution of Key Demographic Traits Across Treatment/Control Conditions

<u>Group</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>% Female</u>	<u>% With</u>	<u>Median</u>	<u>% Christian</u>	<u>Median</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>SD</u>
			<u>College</u>	<u>Education</u>		<u>Pop</u>				
Demographic Threat	278	44	64	Bachelors	44	50-100k	33	37	13.3	
Christianity Decline	297	52	64	Bachelors	47	50-100k	33	37	10.5	
Rural/Urban TV Settings	280	49	67	Bachelors	45	50-100k	33	37	13.3	
Control/Mover Rate	283	47	56	Bachelors	41	50-100k	34	40	12.1	

Results

Overall, survey results suggest the various treatment conditions had little to no effect on reported policy positions or any of the party rating items relative to the control group. I analyzed survey results by party preference (the standard seven-point party identification item), and across all three self-reported party designations (Democrat, independent, Republican), I find no evidence that any of the treatment conditions nudged policy position responses or party ratings in a conservative direction (or a liberal direction). This is true whether I categorize independents who lean toward one of the parties as independents, or if I only categorize so-called true

independents in the independents category (therefore assigning the “leaners” to their respective party categorization). Table 2 below reports results for white pure independents (in keeping with Craig and Richeson 2014), and it includes mean survey responses, standard deviations, difference in means from the control group, the p-value associated with a T-test for difference in means from the control group, and the number of participants in the pure independents group for the three race related policy items.

Table 2: White Pure Independents

Decrease or increase time to citizenship?					
Group	Mean	SD	Mean Diff	P	N
Demographic Threat	3.62	1.69	0.46	0.17	55
Christianity Decline	3.87	1.56	0.21	0.51	54
Rural/Urban TV Settings	4.06	1.48	0.02	0.95	58
Control/Mover Rate	4.08	1.68	—	—	52
Decrease or increase number of immigrants each year?					
Group	Mean	SD	Mean Diff	P	N
Demographic Threat	4.51	1.67	-0.18	0.56	55
Christianity Decline	4.68	1.53	-0.35	0.24	54
Rural/Urban TV Settings	4.54	1.6	-0.21	0.48	58
Control/Mover Rate	4.33	1.51	—	—	52
Oppose or support affirmative action policies?					
Group	Mean	SD	Mean Diff	P	N
Demographic Threat	4.62	2.05	-0.27	0.51	55
Christianity Decline	4.4	1.92	-0.05	0.9	54
Rural/Urban TV Settings	4.92	2.04	-0.57	0.16	58
Control/Mover Rate	4.35	2.2	—	—	52

Note: SD: Standard deviation; Mean Diff: the control mean minus the mean response for the given group; P: P-value from a T-test. All items were presented on eight-point scales.

As Table 2 demonstrates, none of the treatments nudged policy responses in one direction or another relative to the control group among independents. In fact, the only results that even begin to approach statistical significance (demographic threat treatment on the item about time to

citizenship and the rural/urban TV setting treatment on the item about affirmative action) run in the *opposite* of the expected direction. That is, the responses among the treatment groups on those two items were slightly more liberal than the control groups, although obviously not reaching traditional standards of statistical significance. And again, if I expand the definition of “independents” to include participants who say they are independent but lean toward one of the parties, the results remain almost completely unchanged.

The story is much the same with self-identified Democrats and Republicans. There is simply no evidence of significant movement among any of the treatment groups on any of the policy items, the rating scales for the two parties, or the willingness to vote for candidates or register as a member of the two parties relative to the control group. In fact, the only survey item in which a treatment group differed significantly from the control group was among white Democrats on status threat to whites. Those results are shown below in Table 3.

Table 3: White Democrats

Increases in racial minorities' status will reduce white Americans' status.

<u>Group</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Mean Diff</u>	<u>P</u>	<u>N</u>
Demographic Threat	3.18	2.03	-1.03	0.00	145
Control/Mover Rate	2.15	1.82	—	—	162

Note: SD: Standard deviation; Mean Diff: the control mean minus the mean response for the given group; P: P-value from a T-test. All items were presented on eight-point scales.

Note that a higher mean response on this item indicates greater agreement with the statement, “increases in racial minorities’ status will reduce white Americans’ status”. While Democrats generally disagree with this statement more so than independents and Republicans, they were the only group whose mean responses were significantly higher in the demographic threat treatment relative to their fellow partisans in the control group.²

Implications of Findings

While I find no evidence that more subtle cultural prompts nudge survey participants toward more conservative policy positions or change perceptions of the two parties, I was also not able to replicate previous studies showing that demographic threat prompts can change policy and party preference positions. There are a few potential reasons for this. First, as is unfortunately the case with most online convenience samples, my sample in this study skewed younger, more educated, and less religious than the general population. Given that we know that these demographic traits correlate to more liberal/progressive views, particularly on social issues, it is quite possible that this sample of survey respondents simply will not react to these “treatments” in the same way a more representative sample might. Secondly, it is possible (perhaps even very likely) that the public is more familiar with coming demographic changes by this point relative to 2014-2016. I included an item asking if participants were previously aware of the trends they read about in their given treatment condition, as well as an item asking how surprising the participants found the trend to be. Among those in the demographic threat group, 38% said they

² Independents in the demographic threat treatment also showed somewhat elevated mean responses on this item relative to the control group (mean of 3.72 vs 3.08 respectively), but with a T-test p-value of .11 it does not reach conventional statistical significance. However, it should be noted that the sample size for independents was easily the smallest of the three political designation groups.

had heard of this trend/projection before, and 66% rated it as unsurprising (including 38% who found it “completely unsurprising”). If more people are familiar with this projection relative to a few years ago, this information likely has less ability to influence these policy and political views in the aggregate. Lastly, it may simply be the case that American politics, and in particular, views around race and immigration, have become more polarized and stable relative to 2014-2016. Given the 2016 presidential election and the subsequent Trump presidency that has unfolded since then (with immigration and race issues central to so much of his rhetoric), that seems entirely possible as well.

It is notable that the only significant differences between treatment/control groups within any political designation was on the item specifically asking about whites’ status relative to minority groups’ status, and this difference was only observed among the demographic threat treatment group. It would be interesting to see whether a similar result might have been observed if I had included items asking about the status of Christians or people who live in more rural areas (which would map more clearly onto the other two treatment conditions in this study). But alas, tradeoffs between sample size, the number of questions to be asked and the cost of the study had to be made. To the extent that perceptions of group status are important factors in our current politics, future research could further explore these questions, even if the so-called treatment nudge is not strong enough to change explicit policy positions or party preferences.

III. Political Correctness

Background

In the introductory chapter, I spent considerable time showing how strongly attitudes around political correctness correlate to current partisanship and vote choice. Recall that some of the strongest correlations for intention to vote for Trump in 2016 among a large variety of survey questions were observed on items asking about political correctness. Recall also that among Republican identifiers, there is very strong agreement (86%) that political correctness is a bigger problem than prejudice in the U.S. today. I cannot find another attitude or survey item in which agreement among Republicans is that high.

Still, while attitudes around political correctness are pretty clearly highly polarized by party identification and presidential vote choice, it is not completely clear what people mean by the term. More specifically, it is not clear whether those most opposed to modern political correctness norms are generally annoyed at perceived over-sensitivity in general (or overly restrictive speech norms in general), or if they are simply bothered by historically marginalized groups gaining more cultural influence and therefore cultural protection from some of the language that might have been acceptable decades ago. There is at least *some* evidence for the latter explanation. For example, a 2019 Pew Research poll found that 58% of Republicans believe that it is unacceptable for athletes to speak out publicly on political issues (Gramlich 2019). Not that it is inappropriate. It is *unacceptable*. This is not what we would expect to see if Republicans are merely concerned with overly restrictive speech norms, independent of the group or individual (or cause) in question for a given case. Meanwhile, only 17% of Democrats

said it is unacceptable (80% say it is acceptable). This is arguably reminiscent of Stouffer's (1955) classic study of support for free expression, which, among other findings, showed that while public support of free expression in the U.S. was quite high in principle, in practice that support depended largely on the group in question. For groups perceived as radical or threatening (communists and atheists, for example), public support for free expression was drastically lower than the proportion of the public in favor of it more generally and in the abstract.

To try to answer the question of what people mean when they say "political correctness", I asked survey participants to define the term in their own words for someone unfamiliar with the concept. Additionally, I asked participants if they think political correctness sometimes goes too far, and if so, to explain their response. Those results are covered below in Study 2. To attempt to answer the question of whether those who find modern political correctness to be a serious problem are more concerned with oversensitivity and overly restrictive speech norms, or if they are more frustrated that particular groups now have more cultural protection and say over those norms, I randomly assigned survey participants to read one of two scenarios and then asked them to answer a short set of questions. In one scenario, students of color complain about being offended by an "affirmative action awareness" fundraiser on a college campus, and in the other scenario, white students complain about being offended by a "white privilege awareness" fundraiser on a college campus. The follow-up questions are designed to measure survey participants' sympathy for, and general agreement with, the students of color relative to the white students in scenarios one and two respectively. Results from the two randomly assigned scenarios are covered below in Study 3.

Study 2

Methods

For this study, I elected to use Amazon's MTurk (Mechanical Turk) to collect study participants. MTurk is an internet-based platform convenient for recruiting and paying workers to complete surveys and other online tasks; survey research is just one of many tasks that can be posted to MTurk. Compared to other forms of participant recruitment, MTurk is an extremely inexpensive and convenient way to gather survey responses (Berinsky, Huber and Lenz 2012). As the popularity of using MTurk workers for social science research has increased in recent years, new research has highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of using the service. First, MTurk workers are generally more representative of the U.S. public than convenient in-person samples – like college undergraduates – but less representative than online panels or large probability samples (Berinsky, Huber and Lenz 2012). MTurk samples tend to be better for experiments and correlational analyses than for obtaining point estimates of public opinion among the general population. Huff and Tingley (2014) recently elucidated many characteristics of MTurk workers of particular interest for political scientists. They found that while MTurk samples tend to underrepresent the elderly, African Americans and married people, MTurk workers are similar in voting behavior, proportion of rural-urban residence and occupation compared to large national surveys. Overall, samples from MTurk are less than ideal, but they are powerful in that they allow convenient and inexpensive collection of large, reasonably representative samples in a short period.

In total, I recruited 695 participants for this study. Overall, the sample is younger, more educated, and more liberal than the general population. Latinos are underrepresented in the sample while whites are somewhat overrepresented and black respondents slightly underrepresented. About 61% of respondents reported having at least a Bachelor's degree, and the mean age of the participants was 38.1 with a median age of 35.

As mentioned above, the main purpose of this study was to allow survey participants to articulate their views on political correctness in an open-ended fashion, in their own words, with the objective of better understanding the way people think about and define the term. The first question asked survey participants how they would describe political correctness to someone unfamiliar with the term. On the second item, I asked respondents if they think political correctness sometimes goes too far, and if so, to explain their response. To compare across groups, I divided survey participants by party identification, and I report the findings from Democrats and Republicans.

Results

On open-ended questions probing attitudes about political correctness, in some ways Democrats and Republicans answered very similarly. For example, when asked how they might explain political correctness to someone unfamiliar with the term, Republicans and Democrats used words like “offend”, “careful”, “race” and “gender” at about equal rates. Roughly 50% of all respondents mentioned “offend” or “offensive” in their response (47% among Democrats; 53% among Republicans). Both groups were largely in agreement that political correctness aims

to avoid offending people, and for the most part they agreed that race and gender³ issues are the primary areas where potential offense can occur. Answers like these two, the first from a Democrat and the second from a Republican, were quite common:

- 1) Saying things in a way not to offend a group or race or sex.
- 2) Political Correctness is making sure you do not say anything that is offensive to another race or gender or religious identity.

There were important differences, however, once the answers moved past basic definitions. Table 4 displays some of the words and phrases where Democrats and Republicans most diverged. Percentages simply indicate the number of instances a word or phrase was used, divided by the total number of responses for each group.

³ Interestingly, Republicans were about twice as likely to mention religion, although it was mentioned at a relatively low rate for both groups (two percent among Democrats and four percent among Republicans).

Table 4: Common Words and Phrases in Explaining Political Correctness

	<u>Democrats</u>	<u>Republicans</u>
Avoid	13.3%	7%
Sensitive/Sensitivity	6%	4%
Respect	5.2%	0
Consider	5%	1.5%
Culture	4.7%	2.5%
Aware	2.5%	1%
Mindful	1.5%	0
Have to	0.2%	2.5%
Censor/Police	0.2%	3.5%
Total number of responses:	405	200

Note: Percentages calculated by dividing the number of times a word or phrase was used by the total number of responses for each group.

Democrats were much more likely to use particular words like “sensitive”, “respect”, “consider”, “mindful” and “aware”, suggesting that Democrats are more likely to see norms of political correctness as morally legitimate, and that the foundation for the norms of political correctness is based on respect and consideration for diverse experiences and backgrounds. Moreover, the way Democrats talk about political correctness suggests they are more likely to internalize the norms of political correctness and to voluntarily adhere to them relative to Republicans. Republicans were more likely to talk about political correctness as a way of stifling free speech and honest feelings, imposed by some external entity rather than a legitimate set of social norms that have evolved organically and that they have internalized. Take the following examples, both of which use the word “polite” (which was used in similar proportion among both groups at about three percent). The first two are from Democrats, the second two from Republicans.

Democrat Responses using “polite”:

- 1) It means being polite and respectful to other peoples’ racial and gender differences.
- 2) It means using words that are polite or using words that are not intended to hurt anyone's feelings.

Republican Responses using “polite”:

- 3) To say things that are not always true to be polite and not to hurt someone’s feelings.
- 4) Some believe that political correctness refers to simply being polite but that isn't what it is really about. Political correctness is about controlling the thoughts of others. It is an outgrowth of Marxism via Postmodernism (aka, Postmodern Neo-Marxism).

It is important to point out that most Republicans did not use words like “control”, “police” or “censor”, but relative to Democrats, they were much more likely to talk about political correctness in those terms. That is, they were more likely to describe it as being imposed by an external source with the ulterior motive of controlling speech and restricting freedom, suggesting that they do not personally see it as morally legitimate or necessary.

In addition to the item asking respondents how they would explain political correctness to someone unfamiliar with the term, I ask them if it sometimes goes too far, and if so, to explain their answer. The first thing to note in terms of differences across party identification is that Republicans were much more likely to answer “yes”, it does sometimes go too far. Almost 66% of Republicans said “yes” compared to about 43% of Democrats. Further, Republicans were more likely to use absolute terms like “every” (10%) and “always” (five percent) compared to Democrats, who used them in seven and three percent of their responses, respectively. This suggests that Republicans tend to view the norms of political correctness as more rigid and burdensome compared to Democrats. While both groups used “honest” in about equal rates, Republicans were about twice as likely to use “truth” or “true”, suggesting that they are more likely to see political correctness as obscuring the truth. See these two examples, both from Republicans and both using “truth” or “true”:

- 1) Some things are almost always true about people, and lying just to be politically correct sometimes skews the truth, which may be needed in certain situations.
- 2) Yes, I think sometimes people need to tell the truth and the truth may not be easy or nice but it needs to be said. Political correctness prohibits the truth from being spoken.

Interestingly, however, Democrats were much more likely to say “too sensitive” in their responses than Republicans (three vs about a half of one percent), suggesting that while they largely believe the norms of political correctness are legitimate, they do believe there are cases where people are overly sensitive. Consider these two responses mentioning “too sensitive”, both from Democrats:

- 1) For as much as I think some people can be a bit too sensitive, I also think others use NOT wanting to be politically correct as a disguise to be rude and offensive to others. So yes and no, on both ends.
- 2) Yes, people are too sensitive now, like when someone is talking about a stereotype, even a positive one, and even a true one people will get insulted. People can ignore the truth and get offended quickly.

While some Democrats expressed frustration with political correctness in some circumstances, Republican frustration tended to be more consistent and to be worded in more extreme terms. The following two responses were from Republicans, and while these were relatively rare among either group, Republicans tended to word their criticisms in a harsher tone and to target specific groups in their criticisms.

- 1) Yes, very much too far as it is just being used to name and shame people even if their comments are perfectly reasonable. It is commonly used to attack white males and stop us discussing issues involving minorities that need attention. It has given BLM and LGBT groups far too much power as they can go around doing and saying whatever they

want and branding anybody who rationally questions them as racists, transphobic, bigots etc.

- 2) Yes, completely changed the meaning of the phrase. It's now used as a template to force or push a political agenda of a minor group onto the majority.

The following responses are from Democrats, and as mentioned before, about 43% of Democrats said that, “yes”, political correctness sometimes goes too far. While their criticisms tended to be a little milder in tone, and they tended to give more qualifiers like “sometimes”, frustrations with political correctness were fairly common:

- 1) Yes. It has gone past the point of being respectful and entered the territory of being a weapon used by some groups against others. It is used as a shaming tactic and some new terms, such as those in gender and identity, have reached the point of seeming to be ridiculous to most people but anyone who does not use these terms is accused of being ignorant or a bigot. It has become a joke and lost all meaning.
- 2) Yes. As a Latina, I don't care if it is Latino/Latina. The Latinx term is stupid. I also think that the occasional joke about race is not out of the question. I don't get offended when I hear a light-hearted joke about stereotypical Hispanics. If it is meant to be offensive and is overtly racist, I will be offended but I don't think being PC is always necessary. Some people are simply not raised in diverse environments and don't know better and should not be punished by the hardcore PC people for not knowing better. I wouldn't expect a rural Montana native to realize Hispanics eat more than tacos. I also have gay friends that

don't really get offended when stereotypes about them are made or the occasional joke. I think it all depends on the context. Being PC should be flexible according to the situation.

Lastly, as a few Republicans expressed the belief that norms of political correctness are really a covert form of control by the left, a few Democrats opined that conservative opposition to political correctness is really an indirect protest against social progress and equality. The following two responses are from Democrats:

- 1) Political Correctness to me is a buzz word for conservatives that feel the need to express their racism, sexism and xenophobia, without consequence. If they can't express their opinion or more likely implement laws to discriminate or racially profile, they feel that they are "shut down" under the idea of "political correctness." They use "political correctness" as a shield to hide the need to express their bigotry.
- 2) On occasion yes, but I think that overall the idea of "political correctness" is a buzzword invented by conservatives to delegitimize attempts at social progress.

I discuss the implications of these findings in the final section of this chapter, and after the methods and results from Study 3 below.

Study 3

Methods

To try to answer the question of whether negative attitudes toward political correctness is more about restrictive norms or annoyance toward particular groups, I have survey respondents read one of two scenarios involving an incident at a “local college”. As I did in Study 1, I again used Qualtrics randomizer function to assign participants into one of the two groups, and I recruited 782 survey participants through Prolific who were evenly assigned into one of the two groups (more on the demographic breakdowns in the randomization check section). In the first scenario, a student group holds an “affirmative action awareness bake sale”, and in the second scenario, a group of students holds a “white privilege awareness field day” on the campus of a local college. In both scenarios, some of the students who attend the event report to the school administrators that they felt offended, but the racial identity is different across the scenarios (students of color complain in scenario one while white students complain in scenario two). Otherwise, I tried to make the two scenarios as identical as possible, and survey respondents in both groups were presented with the same four questions after reading the scenario assigned to them.

Scenario one read:

Recently a student group advertised and then held a bake sale as a fundraiser in the common areas of a local college. When students showed up to the event, they realized that the bake sale was labeled as an “affirmative action awareness bake sale”, which had not been previously advertised. To make their point about affirmative action and how it is unfair to give minority

groups advantages, different prices were set and advertised according to the race of the student purchasing the food (for example, the price for cupcakes was set at \$2 for one racial group and \$5 for a different racial group).

Some of the students of color who attended the bake sale later complained to the college's administrators, explaining that they felt misled and offended to have their racial identity highlighted in a negative way. In response, the college administrators sent an email to all students at the college urging more sensitivity when holding public events, and they also privately issued a warning to the student group who held the bake sale, instructing them not to hold another event like this one in the future.

Scenario two read:

Recently a student group advertised and then held a field day of outdoor games as a fundraiser in the common areas of a local college. When students showed up to the event, they realized that the games were labeled as "white privilege awareness games", which had not been previously advertised. To make their point and to demonstrate the unearned advantages that white people have on average in the U.S., the student group set up the games so that some students were given an advantage and some were disadvantaged in the games based on their race (for example, some students only had to throw a ball from 10 feet into a basket, while others had to throw from 20 feet).

Some of the white students who attended the event later complained to the college's administrators, explaining that they felt misled and offended to have their racial identity highlighted in a negative way. In response, the college administrators sent an email to all

students at the college urging more sensitivity when holding public events, and they also privately issued a warning to the student group, instructing them not to hold another event like this one in the future.

After reading one of the two scenarios, all survey participants were asked to answer four questions, which included a question asking whether the administrators should have ignored the students who complained, a question asking whether the administrators were too easy or hard on the group who held the event, a question asking whether the students who complained were being too sensitive, and a question asking whether the student group who held the event should be more sensitive to possibly offending other students. As in Study 1, all items were presented on eight-point scales, and I again analyzed results by self-reported political identity (Democrat, independent, or Republican).

Randomization Check

Just as I did in Study 1, I checked to make sure key demographic traits were roughly evenly distributed across the two survey groups. Those distributions are included in Table 5 below. Again, the Qualtrics randomizer distributed participants with key demographic traits about evenly across the two groups.

Table 5: Distribution of Key Demographic Traits Across Survey Groups

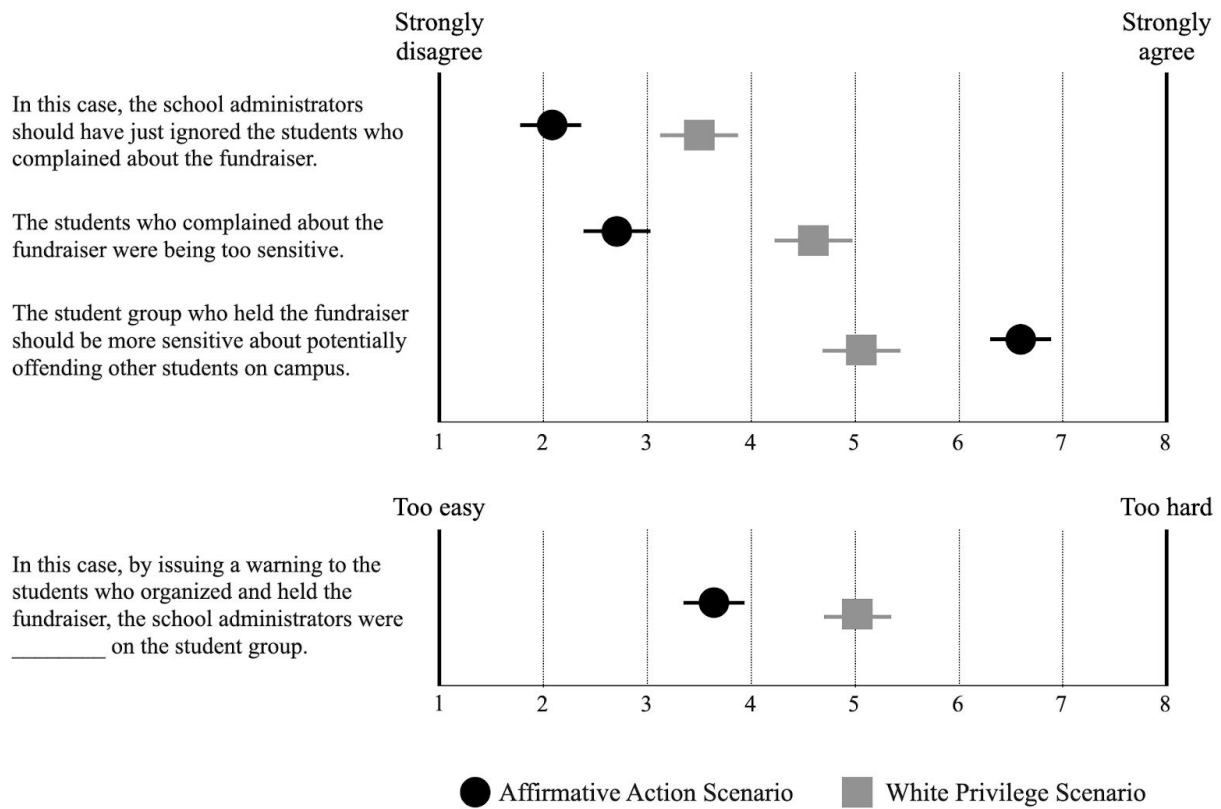
<u>Group</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>% Female</u>	<u>% With College Degree</u>	<u>Median Education Level</u>	<u>% Christian</u>	<u>Median Pop Density</u>	<u>Median Age</u>	<u>Mean Age</u>	<u>Age SD</u>
Affirmative action scenario	392	48	60	Bachelors	50	50-100k	41	43	16.1
White privilege scenario	390	51	63	Bachelors	54	50-100k	45	45	16

Results

Overall, mean responses across the two scenarios were significantly different among participants in all of the three political self-identifications on at least some of the items, although, as might be expected, the differences ran in different directions for Democrats and independents compared to Republicans.

Figure 1 below shows the large differences in mean responses across the two scenarios among Democrats. Means are represented by the dots and squares and the bars represent +/- one standard error from the mean.

Figure 1: Democrats



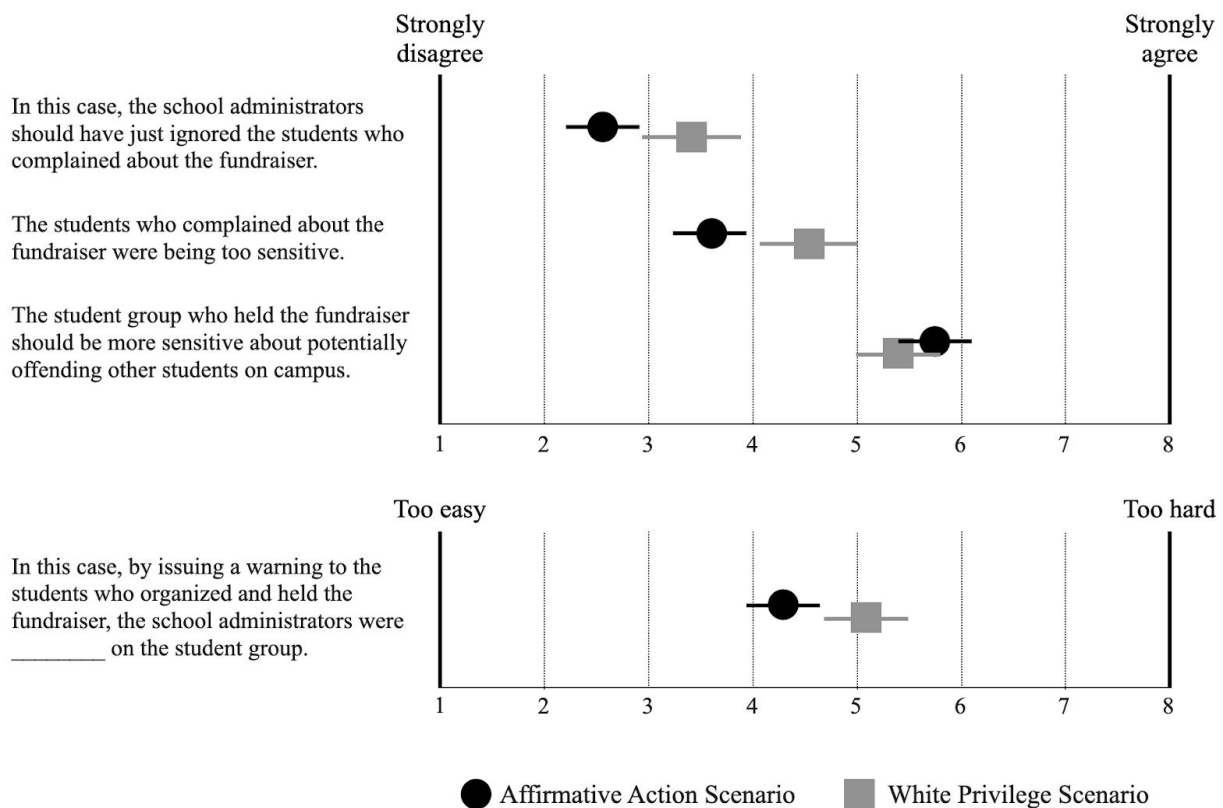
Note: The circles and squares represent mean responses to each item for participants in the affirmative action and white privilege scenarios respectively, and the bars represent +/- one standard error from the mean. Affirmative action scenario N: 226; White privilege scenario N:232

For Democrats, a clear take away from this survey experiment is that they are significantly more sympathetic toward students of color relative to whites on issues of expression and racial sensitivity (at least, as measured here). For all four items, differences in mean responses easily meet conventional standards of statistical significance as measured by the T-test (p-values are < .001 for all four items), and on all items, average responses indicate greater sympathy for the students of color in the affirmative action awareness scenario compared to the white students

who complained in the white privilege scenario. I will return to this after reviewing results from independents and Republicans.

Mean responses among independents resembled the mean responses from Democrats, except the differences were less pronounced (and not quite as polarized). Like Democrats, they too were generally more sympathetic to the students of color who complained in the affirmative action scenario relative to white students complaining in the white privilege scenario. Figure 2 below shows mean responses from independents.

Figure 2: Independents

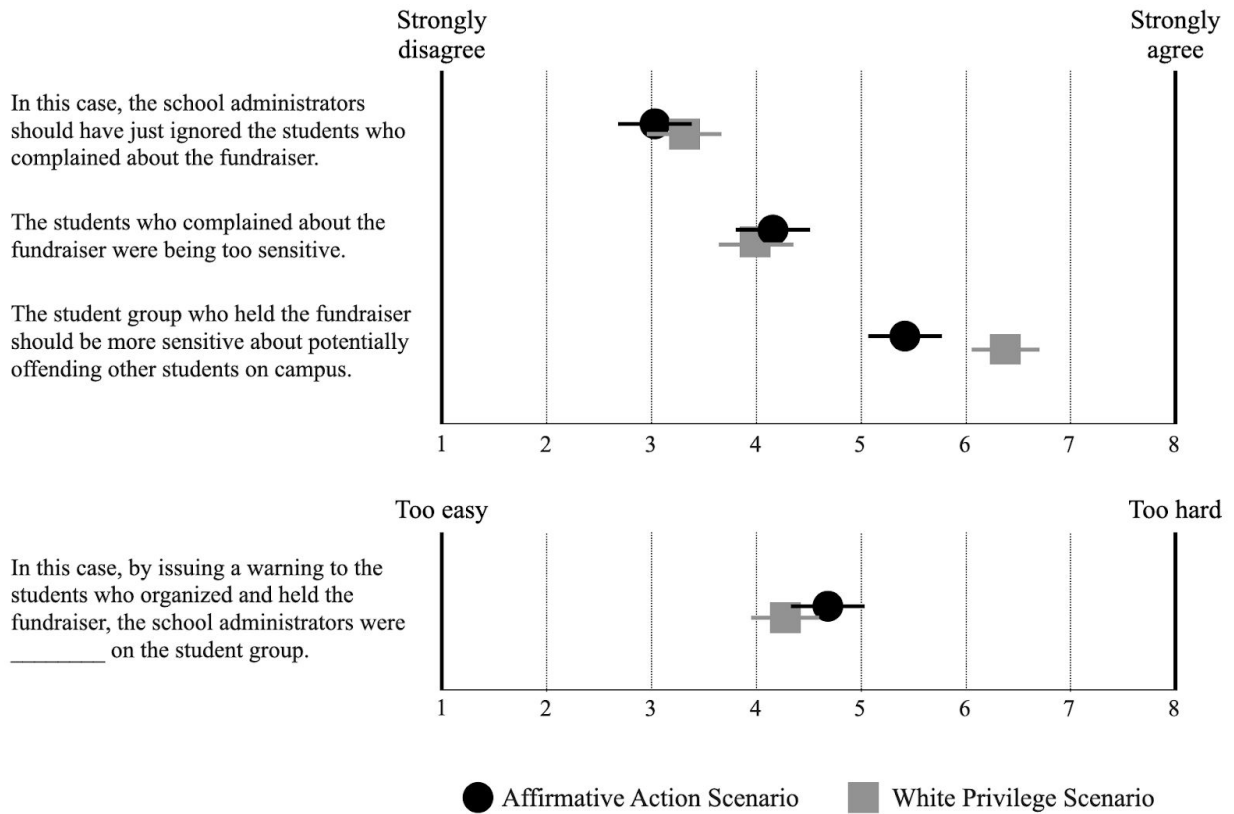


Note: The circles and squares represent mean responses to each item for participants in the affirmative action and white privilege scenarios respectively, and the bars represent +/- one standard error from the mean. Affirmative action scenario N: 39; White privilege scenario N:54

In terms of statistical significance, the difference in means on the item about the school administrators ignoring the students approaches the traditional benchmark (p-value: .086; in a one-tailed T-test, it meets the threshold; p-value: .043) as does the question of whether the students were being too sensitive (two-tailed T-test p-value: .088; one-tailed T-test p-value: .044) and the differences in mean responses meet the standard on the question of whether the administrators were too easy or hard on the students holding the event (p-value: .041). It should be noted here as well that the sample size among independents was much smaller than among the other two political designations.

Lastly, Republicans were the only group whose mean responses did not suggest more sympathy for the students of color, and on at least one of the questions, they expressed more sympathy for the white students who complained about being offended. Figure 3 below shows mean responses from Republicans across the two scenarios.

Figure 3: Republicans



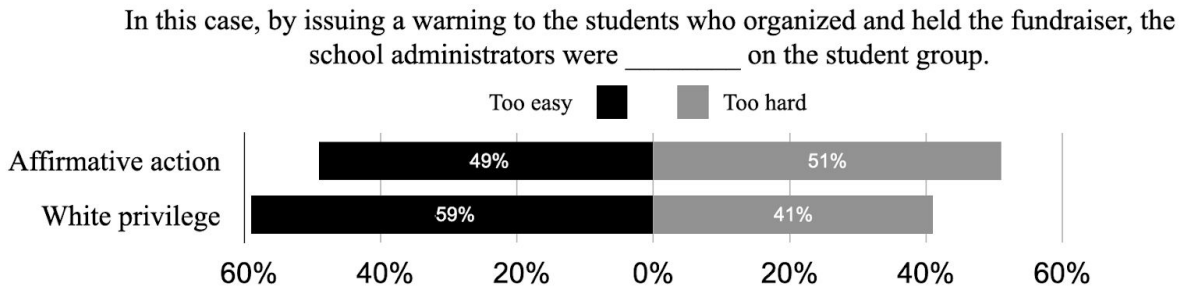
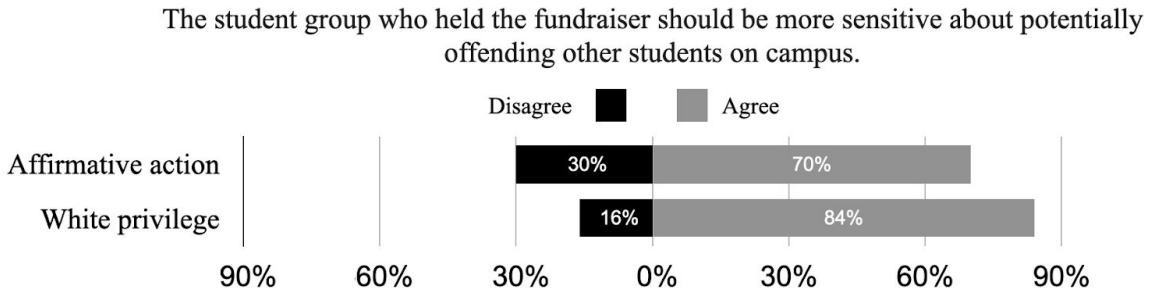
Note: The circles and squares represent mean responses to each item for participants in the affirmative action and white privilege scenarios respectively, and the bars represent +/- one standard error from the mean. Affirmative action scenario N: 124; White privilege scenario N:105.

On the questions of whether the school administrators should have ignored the students and the question on whether the students who complained were being too sensitive, mean responses were very similar across the two scenarios (and most Republicans disagreed on both questions across the two scenarios, suggesting a similar level of sympathy for students of color and white students). Similarly, mean responses did not differ significantly on the question asking whether administrators were too easy or hard on the students holding the event, at least by the mean response to the question (more on this in this next paragraph). On the question of whether the

students who held the event should be more sensitive to possibly offending other students on campus, Republican mean responses showed significantly more agreement when white students were the ones who had been offended (T-test p-value: .001).

Comparing mean responses is not the only way to assess these survey results, however. Another way is to compare the proportion of respondents within a group who disagree/agree across the two scenarios. Because there were an even number of survey response options on each item (recall that all items were presented on an eight-point scale), participants had to choose a response that at least leaned in one direction, even if it was near the center of the scale. Looking at the responses this way, as a dichotomous choice, in effect makes the survey responses categorical (i.e. no/yes, agree/disagree, too easy/too hard, etc.). When looking at responses in this way, two rather than just one of the items stand out among Republican participants. The floating bar graphs in Figure 4 below show the proportion of Republicans who disagreed/agreed on the question of whether the students holding the event should be more sensitive to possibly offending other students and the proportion who said too easy/too hard on the question about the administrators' response to the student group holding the event.

Figure 4: Republicans



Note: Affirmative action scenario N: 124; White privilege scenario N:105

As with the T-test, a chi-square test reveals that the proportions of disagree/agree responses on the question of whether the students holding the event should be more sensitive to possibly offending other students differed significantly across the two scenarios (chi-square p-value: .015). On the question of whether the administrators were too easy or hard on the student group who held the event, a chi-square test did not quite reach conventional levels of statistical significance ($p < .05$), even though Republican survey participants were more likely to say administrators were too hard on the student group holding the affirmative action event relative to the scenario in which students held a white privilege awareness event by 10 percentage points (chi-square p-value: .136).

Regardless of how I analyze these results, however, Republican responses to these questions obviously stand out relative to responses from Democrats and independents, who consistently indicated greater sympathy toward students of color in these scenarios.

Implications of Findings

In Study 2 that included the open-ended questions on political correctness, partisans in both camps seemed to define the concept of political correctness similarly. Democrats and Republicans both described political correctness in terms of taking care not to offend groups or individuals. However, the language that Democrats used seemed to suggest that they largely accept and internalize those norms as morally justified and well intentioned. Republicans, on the other hand, used language that suggested they were more likely to see political correctness norms as barriers to speaking the truth, and that the norms perhaps are imposed on society to stifle open dialogue.

One take away from Study 3 was that Democrats and independents appear to think about political correctness (i.e. norms around what is legitimately considered offensive to groups or individuals in public discourse) very differently compared to Republicans. More to the point, Democrats, and to a slightly lesser degree, independents, seem to consider the history of race relations and power dynamics in this country when trying to determine when, for example, someone is being too sensitive or when an action or remark was legitimately offensive. Presumably, because whites have traditionally been so numerically, economically, politically and culturally dominant in the U.S., Democrats and independents tend to be more sympathetic to people of color relative to whites in scenarios like the ones included in this study.

Republicans, on the other hand, seem to view these issues in a vacuum so to speak, without much regard for history. It was not that Republicans were overtly discriminatory against people of color (at least on most of the questions here), but that they were no more sympathetic to people of color than whites. Moreover, I think this provides at least some evidence that Republicans are legitimately annoyed with what they perceive to be overly restrictive norms around expression, i.e. so-called PC culture, somewhat independent of overt racial animus.

In a working paper that closely examines modern racial attitudes, Carney and Enos have findings that I think are very similar to these. They take the four Racial Resentment survey items and, in addition to asking the questions as they exist with blacks as the racial group of focus, they substitute other groups in the place of blacks. They find that among self-described conservatives, there is little to no difference in mean levels of resentment regardless of the groups in question. Self-described liberals demonstrate significantly less resentment when blacks are the group in question relative to other groups. So again, we see that Republicans are not so much demonstrating overt racial animus or prejudice as they are, as Carney and Enos put it, demonstrating “a failure to recognize the unique historical plight of African Americans.” This perhaps begs the question: is it racist to ignore the specific historical plight of racial groups? That will largely depend on how one defines racism. In the next section, I explore that issue both through existing survey data and additional survey items I asked in this study, and I think I show that in large part, racial issues are so politically divisive at the moment precisely because Democrats and Republicans conceptualize and define racism so differently. Issues and events that are clearly racial in nature to Democrats may seem largely or even completely cultural to Republicans.

IV. Race Versus Cultural Issues

Additional Survey Items from Study 3

In addition to the survey experiment involving the two scenarios on the local college campus described above from Study 3, I asked survey participants 48 other cultural and political issue questions, 10 of which included Pew Research's Ideological Consistency Scale items. Pew's scale comprises 10 cultural and political issue items, and when Pew presents these items, respondents can only choose one of two options that is closer to their own view, a more conservative or a more liberal response. Pew has used this battery of questions primarily to track the proportion of Democratic and Republican partisans over time who consistently choose positions that align with their party identification (i.e. Democrat Party preference/liberal positions; Republican Party preference/conservative positions). I asked the same 10 questions but allowed survey respondents to choose a point along an eight-point scale so they can additionally indicate their *level* of agreement with the two positions offered, as opposed to merely indicating which of the two views is closer to their own. I used the same methodology on the 38 additional survey items I created and asked.

In this chapter, I primarily report descriptive results from selected survey questions, simply showing the proportion of Democratic and Republican partisans taking one side or the other. However, in the final chapter I discuss the extremity of some of these issue positions as well, as measured on the eight-point scales.

Two Additional Experimental Survey Items

Within two of the 38 survey items I created, I changed some of the wording to again experimentally test whether racial attitudes might come into play on questions that are ostensibly more cultural in nature. In one question, I asked whether priority should be given to prospective immigrants to the U.S. from Christian majority countries, and I list three countries as examples. In one version of the question I listed white majority countries (Germany, Italy and Norway) and in the second version I listed countries in which people of color make up the majority (Zambia, Ecuador and the Democratic Republic of Congo). In the second experimental survey item I asked if Americans should or should not celebrate holidays that have distinct origins in other countries; the first version asked about Cinco De Mayo (Mexican origin), and the second version asked about St. Patrick's Day (Irish origin).

As in the randomly assigned college scenarios, I again assigned half of the participants to see one form of these two questions and half to see the second form of the questions. For these two items, no significant differences in responses were observed across the two different forms of the questions. This is true overall among all survey participants as well as within different party identifications (Democrats, independents and Republicans). Again, at least on these items, I find no evidence of overt racial discrimination against people of color, and in this case, no evidence that Democrats and independents were more sympathetic toward people of color. Survey participants were generally in agreement that immigration priority should not be granted on the basis of religion and that Americans should celebrate the holidays they want.

Different Conceptions of Racism Across Partisan Camps

In February of 2019, Republican Congressman Mark Meadows was looking for a way to demonstrate that President Trump was not a racist. President Trump's former personal attorney, Michael Cohen, was testifying before Congress, and among the many accusations he made against his former boss, he explicitly called Trump a racist and said that Trump had remarked to him, "black people would never vote for him because they were too stupid" (Karni 2019). Congressman Meadows responded to Cohen's claims by inviting a black woman, Lynne Patton, a Trump administration appointee at the Department of Urban Housing and former Trump Organization employee, to testify that President Trump was not in fact a racist. After standing in silence behind Meadows for a few moments while he argued that President Trump's loyalty to her meant that he could not be a racist, she left the chamber without ever speaking herself. This prompted Democratic Representative Rashida Tlaib to respond, "just because someone has a person of color, a black person working for them, does not mean they aren't racist. And it is insensitive that, some would even say, the fact that someone would actually use a prop, a black woman in this chamber, in this committee, is alone racist in itself" (Rogers and Serfaty 2019). Meadows, clearly upset, then appealed to black Democratic Congressman Elijah Cummings, called him "one of my best friends", and then pointed out that he himself has nieces and nephews who are people of color (Rogers and Serfaty 2019).⁴

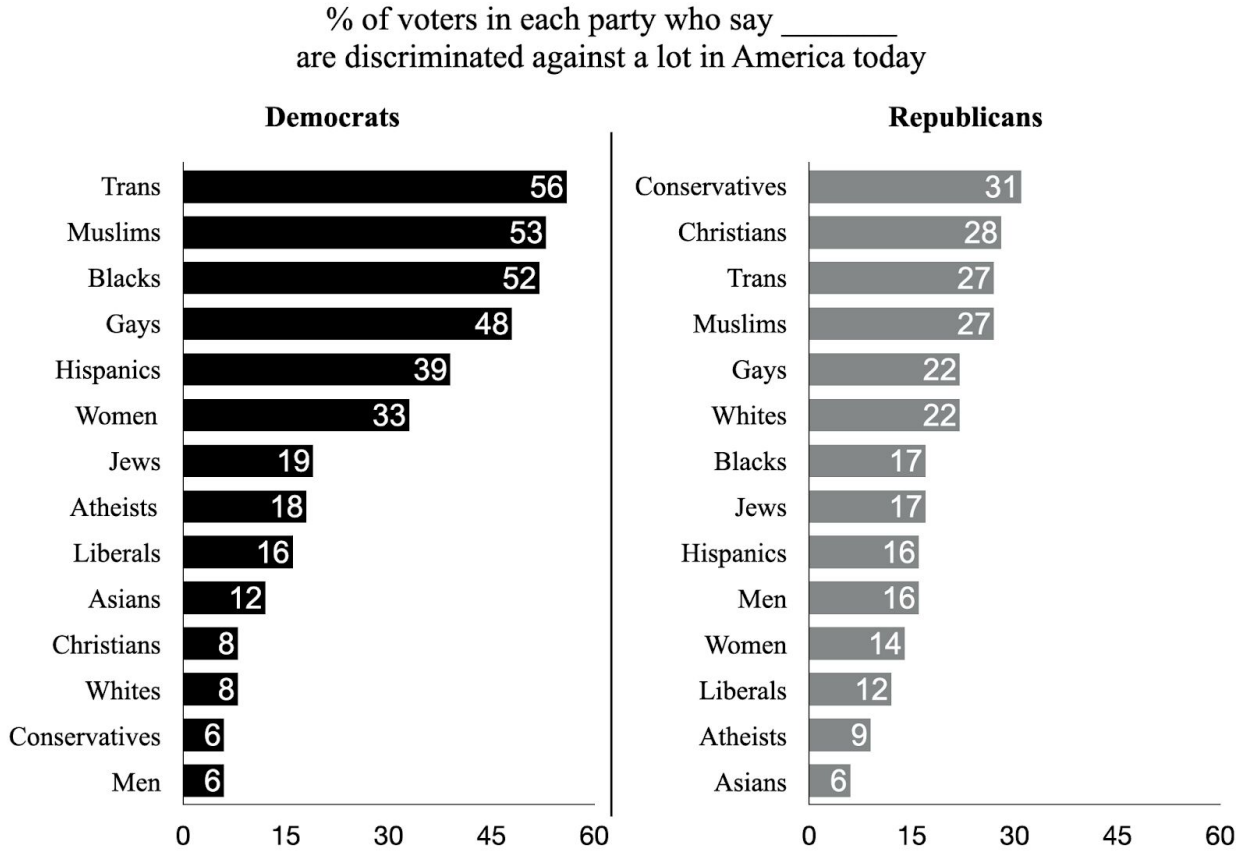
It is of course not possible to know what a person is really thinking, but Meadows was at least willing to suggest publicly that because President Trump had maintained a long term professional relationship with a black woman, he could not really be racist. Perhaps

⁴ When running for office in 2012, on at least two occasions, Meadows told audiences that together they would send Obama "back to Kenya" if elected (Rogers and Serfaty 2019).

Congressman Meadows does not really believe in that standard (that kind or even professional behavior toward one member of a group precludes the possibility that a person can be prejudiced against the group more generally), but he must have at least thought that a significant number of people would accept the standard, since he decided to make the case on live television in a Congressional hearing. Moreover, the fact that he quickly cited the existence of people of color in his extended family when it was suggested that his act was racist suggests that he really believes in that standard. One is perhaps tempted to wonder how Meadows could have failed the people-of-color-in-his-family test of racism. Presumably, he would have had to try to intervene to stop his siblings from having or adopting the children of color? And presumably, for President Trump to fail this test of racism, he would have to be prejudiced and unkind to *all* black people in *all* circumstances? One is perhaps tempted to wonder if Congressman Meadows – now President Trump’s Chief of Staff – may at some point argue that President Trump cannot possibly be sexist, because after all, his own mother was a woman. In any case, the whole exchange was emblematic of the heated racial dialogue common to Trump’s presidency, but I think it also gave insight to the very divergent ways that partisans define and conceptualize racism in the United States.

A great deal of survey research has established how dramatically perceptions of discrimination and racism differ between Democrats and Republicans in the U.S. in recent years. Consider these findings from a 2019 Hill-Harris X poll, for example. Figure 5 below shows the percentage of Democrats and Republicans who say various groups face a lot of discrimination today.

Figure 5: Who Faces a lot of Discrimination Today?

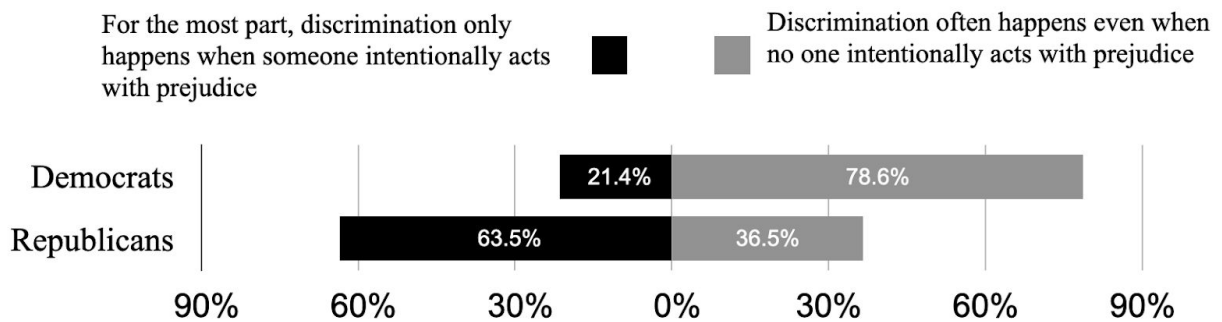


Source: Hill-HarrisX Daily Poll, March 1-2, 2019 among 1003 registered voters.
Margin of error: 3.1 percentage points.

Democrats see much more discrimination in general compared to Republicans, but perhaps more remarkably, Republicans were most likely to say that conservatives and Christians face a lot of discrimination today, groups that Democrats were *least* likely to say face a lot of discrimination. Similar surveys from the Public Religion Research Institute and Pew Research document the same trends on perceived discrimination across partisan camps, but to my knowledge, very little survey or qualitative data exist on how Democrats and Republicans define and conceive of racism. If public debates around race and discrimination, and survey results like

those shown above are any indication, partisans simply do not have the same ideas in mind when thinking about racism (or discrimination more broadly). To try to better understand how these conceptions might differ, one area within this line of inquiry that I was interested in testing was whether partisans believe *intentional* prejudice must be at play in order for discrimination to occur. The floating bar graph in Figure 6 below shows responses to that particular survey item, with responses broken out by party identification.

Figure 6 - Deep Partisan Disagreement on Whether
Discrimination Happens without Intentional Prejudice



Note: Democrats N: 455; Republicans N: 222

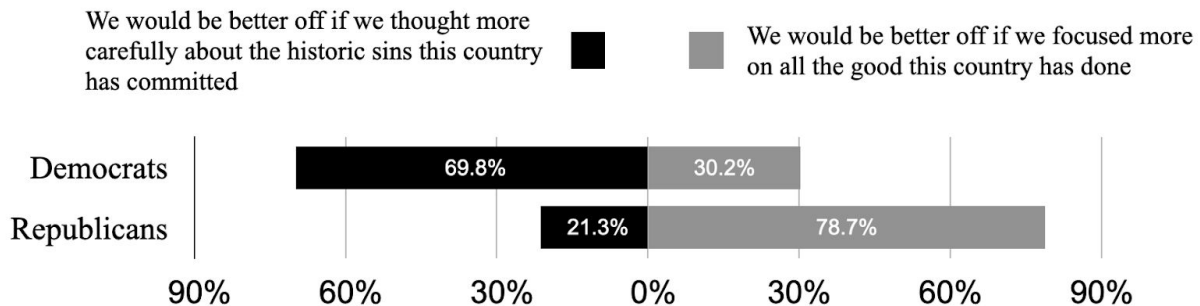
By a ratio of nearly four to one, Democrats believe that discrimination can happen even when no one intentionally acts with prejudice. This is arguably the foundational idea behind the concept of systemic or institutional racism, i.e. that systems and institutions designed in the distant past can still inflict discriminatory harm today, even in the absence of consciously or intentionally prejudiced actors. Democrats overwhelmingly accept this concept, but among

Republicans, the vast majority do not believe discrimination happens to a significant degree without intentional prejudice. Such drastically divergent views on racism and discrimination across partisan camps – it is not difficult to imagine – make it difficult if not impossible to have a productive dialogue, even if we assume good faith on all sides.

Cultural Views on Issues Involving Race

Many of the most contentious partisan disagreements in national politics today revolve around cultural and racial issues (as opposed to, say, disagreements over economic policy), but many of them are difficult to categorize as purely cultural or purely racial in nature. Consider these questions, for example: What kinds of historical narratives and events should we as a country focus on most today? Are we better off to think carefully about the historic sins of this country, or are we better off to focus on all the good this country has done? And moreover, does this question reflect a purely cultural preference or does it also tap into racial attitudes? Figure 7 below shows responses among Democrats and Republicans on the question of which historical emphasis is more productive for the country today.

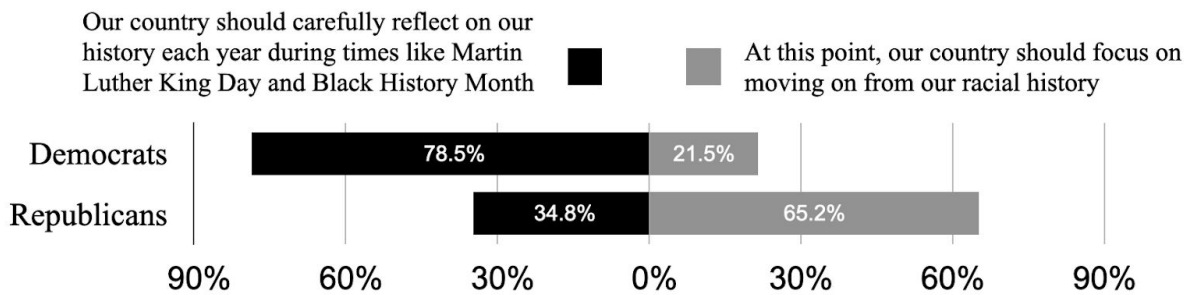
Figure 7: Which Historical Narratives to Emphasize



Note: Democrats N: 454; Republicans N: 223

Unsurprisingly, there are deep partisan divisions over which historical narrative to emphasize today. Democrats overwhelmingly say we should think more carefully about our nation’s historic sins, while to an even greater degree (a ratio of nearly four to one) Republicans say we are better off to focus on all the good this country has done. To try to parse out whether this attitude is reflective more of a cultural preference or racial attitudes (since presumably many respondents thought of treatment toward Native Americans, slavery, Jim Crow and other racial issues), I asked a similar question in the survey but framed it more specifically as a racial issue. Results are shown below in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Reflect Carefully or Move Past Racial History?



Note: Democrats N: 453; Republicans N: 223

Interestingly, while deep partisan divisions remain on this question, and Republicans still overwhelmingly chose the option that avoids focusing on racial history/sins of the past, both Democrats and Republicans were more likely to agree that we should carefully reflect on our history during times like Martin Luther King Day and Black History month *relative* to their responses on the previous item that simply asked about sins of the past. In other words, while

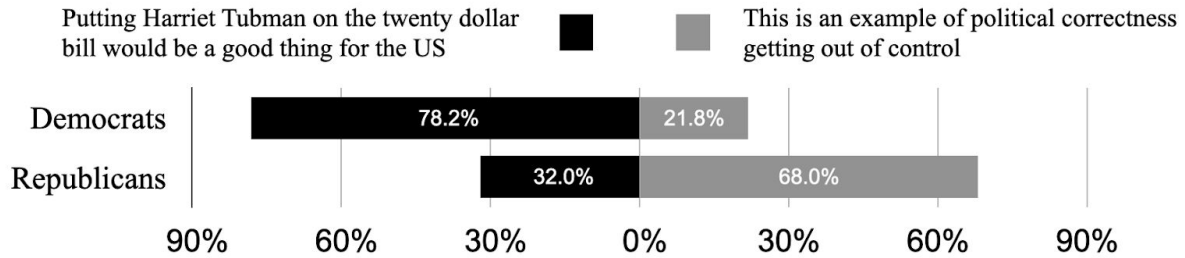
deep partisan divisions remain, with Democrats much more willing to reflect on our racial history compared to Republicans, both partisan camps indicated more willingness to focus on historical wrongdoing when framed specifically as a racial issue relative to the item framed simply as sins of the past in general.⁵

Genuine Efforts to Redress Racial Wrongdoing or Just Political Correctness out of Control?

You may recall from the introductory chapter that President Trump has sometimes suggested that efforts ostensibly aimed at redressing historical racial wrongdoing are really motivated by political correctness, as when he said that the effort to put Harriet Tubman on the twenty dollar bill was “pure political correctness” (Wright 2016). As shown below in Figures 9 and 10 below, I asked survey respondents whether putting Harriet Tubman on the twenty dollar bill and renaming Columbus Day as Indigenous People’s Day would be good things for the U.S. or merely political correctness getting out of control. Before the two response choices shown below in Figure 9, I included this sentence on the survey: “Some people in the US believe Harriet Tubman - a black woman remembered for helping runaway slaves reach freedom through the Underground Railroad - should replace former President Andrew Jackson on the twenty dollar bill.”

⁵ In retrospect, the second of these two items could have been worded more carefully to allow for a more straightforward comparison of a general cultural preference vs a racial attitude, i.e. the two choices on the right hand side probably should have been worded more similarly. Still, I think they are probably close enough to suggest a real difference in attitudes across the two framings.

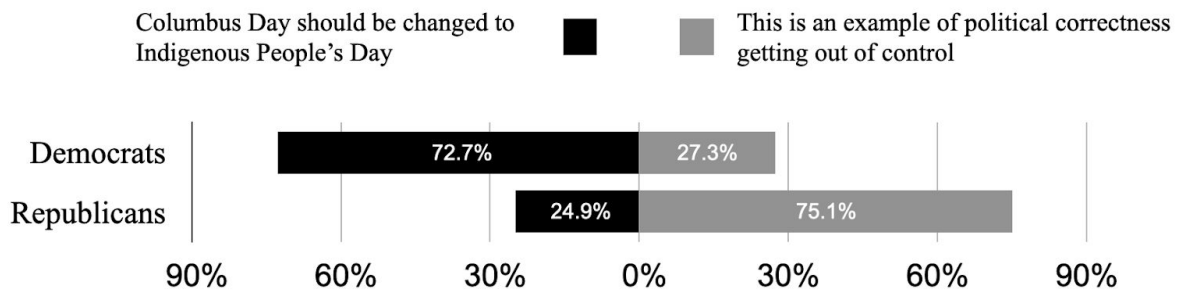
Figure 9: Replace Andrew Jackson with Harriet Tubman?



Note: Democrats N: 455; Republicans N: 222

And before the two response choices shown below in Figure 10, I included this sentence on the survey: “Some people say that Christopher Columbus Day should be officially changed to Indigenous People’s Day to honor the Native people rather than the European explorers.”

Figure 10: Rename Columbus Day as Indigenous People’s Day?



Note: Democrats N: 455; Republicans N: 222

Again, we observe dramatic partisan divides on these questions. Democrats overwhelmingly support these efforts to celebrate Tubman and Indigenous Peoples rather than Jackson and

Columbus respectively, while Republicans overwhelmingly see such efforts as political correctness getting out of control. Taken together, these last several survey items paint a picture of stark divides between Democrats and Republicans on which historical narratives are more important to emphasize and whether the U.S. should revise the historical figures we celebrate. Almost certainly, divergent racial attitudes play a critical role in shaping the divides we see on these issues across partisan camps, but could patriotism and certain forms of nationalism shape these views as well?

Nationalism and Identity Across Partisan Camps

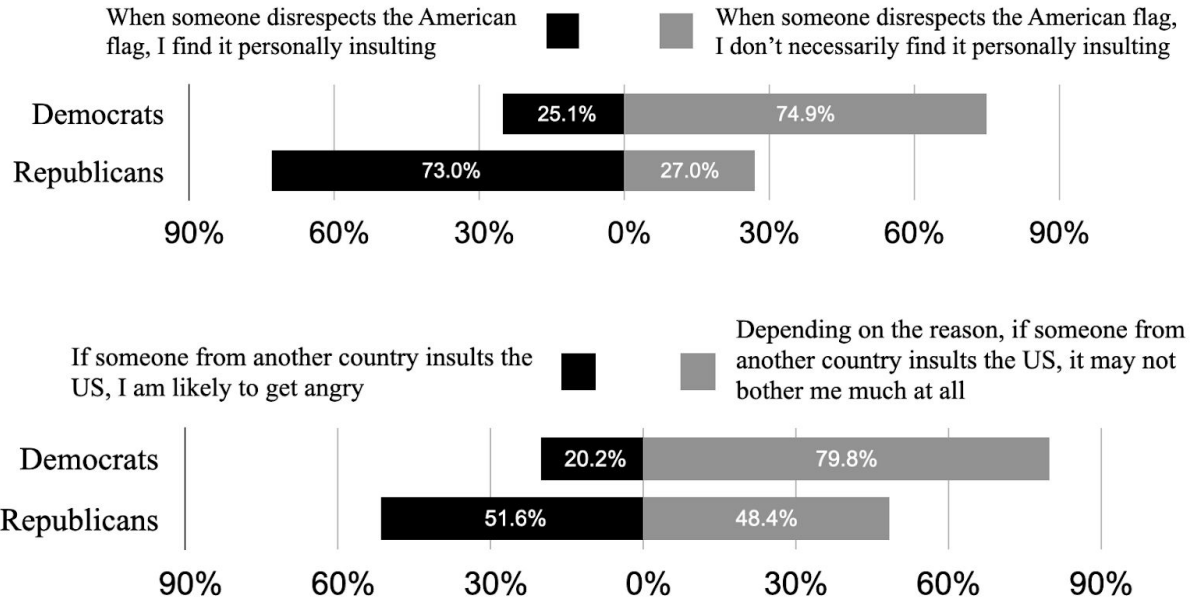
It is well documented that whites, and in particular white Republicans, score higher on certain measures of patriotism and nationalism (for example, see Citrin and Sears 2014; Monikowski and DiMaggio 2016). Citrin and Sears (2014) find that whites score higher than blacks and Latinos on positively worded measures of patriotism like, for example, the strength of their self-reported love of country and the flag. On the other hand, whites do not necessarily score higher on items considered chauvinistic (or blindly nationalistic) like, for example, the belief that the U.S. should pursue its interest even if it causes conflicts and the belief that Americans should support their country even when it is wrong. More recent polling has found even larger divides on questions of patriotism between Democrats and Republicans than between racial groups in the U.S. (Rakich and Mehta 2018). For example, 72% of Republicans compared to only 40% of Democrats called themselves “very patriotic” in a 2018 YouGov poll. Self-identified Republicans are much more likely than Democrats or Independents to say that they are extremely or very proud to be an American (Gallup 2019). Republicans are also about twice as likely to say

that American stands alone above other countries in the world (41% of Republicans give this response), as opposed to being among the best countries or that there are other countries that are better, compared to Democrats (19%) (Pew Research 2017). Taken together, this suggests that Republicans think of their own identity as being tied to the character of the country.

Going beyond self-reported levels of patriotism, Republicans demonstrate less tolerance for criticism of the country in terms of what they consider patriotic behavior. For example, while 52% of Democrats said someone can criticize U.S. leaders to foreigners and still be considered patriotic, only 35% of Republicans agreed. On another survey item, 34% of Democrats compared to only 10% of Republicans said a person can still be a patriot even if he or she burns the American flag in protest (Rakich and Mehta 2018).

Returning for a moment to my own survey items covered in the previous section, is it possible that stronger feelings of patriotism and lower levels of tolerance for national criticism can explain the unwillingness among Republicans to focus on and redress historical racial wrongdoing in the U.S.? In other words, is it possible that Republicans simply are more sensitive to any serious criticism of the U.S. relative to Democrats, whether or not that criticism involves a racial issue? After all, less tolerance for someone criticizing America or someone burning the American flag is not obviously racial in nature. While I do not have survey or experimental items that can directly test that question, I did ask two questions designed to measure emotional reactions to criticisms/disrespect toward the U.S. and the flag. Results from those two items are displayed in Figure 11 below.

Figure 11: Personal Feelings on Criticisms/Disrespect of the U.S. and Flag



Note: Democrats N: 455; Republicans N: 222

Consistent with other recent public opinion surveys and polls, we again see large divides between Democrats and Republicans on these measures, with a large majority of Republicans indicating that they feel personally insulted by disrespect toward the flag and a slim majority indicating that they would get angry if someone from another country insulted the U.S. That said, I was trying to measure something beyond basic patriotism or established categories of nationalism. Using latent class analysis on General Social Survey data, Bonikowski and DiMaggio (2016) found that survey respondents could be classified into four distinct categories on issues of nationalism: ardent (defined by very high levels of pride in country), disengaged (very low in pride), restrictive (exclusionary in what makes one truly American) and creedal nationalists (conceiving of national identity in terms of principles and norms).

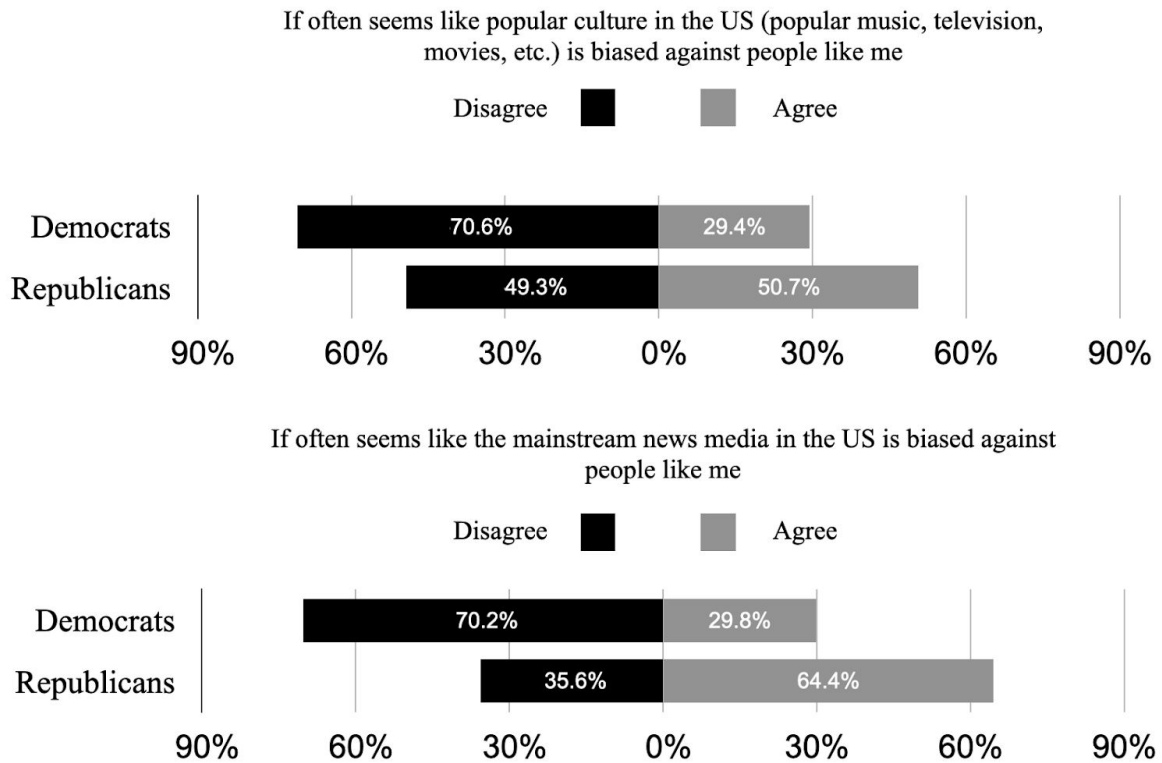
I do not think the questions I asked here map onto Bonikowski and DiMaggio's categorizations very neatly, as I was trying to measure something closer to an emotional connection, or a defensive instinct toward the country. That is, I was trying to measure the extent to which partisans themselves feel negative emotions (personally insulted and angry) in response to disrespect toward the flag or insults from outsiders. This does not of course definitively answer my previous question of whether racial attitudes or a particular form of nationalism better explains Republicans' relative unwillingness to focus on and redress historical racial wrongdoing, but I think it suggests that Republicans have a more emotional defensive posture toward national criticism, whether the criticism be racial or not.

Cultural Disempowerment

Lastly, I want to return briefly to the focus of Study 1 from this project, the issue of cultural disempowerment. Recall that in Study 1 I tested whether cultural threats like the decline of Americans identifying as Christian and the shift away from rural settings on popular television shows might nudge whites to adopt more conservative views and lean more toward the Republican in the way that demographic changes have been shown to do. I was not able to detect any movement at all on policy positions or party evaluations across any of the experimental threats or "treatments" in that study (nor was I able to replicate findings from previous studies in which demographic threats moved policy and political positions), but in this survey I included two items that asked survey participants whether they often feel the popular media and the news media in this country are biased "towards people like me."

The decline in trust for the news media among Republicans has been well documented in recent years. The General Social Survey has been asking survey respondents how much confidence they have in the press periodically since 1972. Beginning in 1972, the percentage of survey respondents saying they had “a great deal” or “only some” confidence in the press steadily declined from around 80% down to about 60% by the late 1990’s, but over that period the differences between Democrats and Republicans were small. Starting in the late 1990’s, the partisan gap began to widen and then split dramatically between 2014 and 2018, with a sharp rise among Democrats and a similarly sharp decline among Republicans. As of 2018, about 74% of Democrats said on the GSS that they have “a great deal” or “only some” confidence in the press compared to only about 31% of Republicans. That being said, I wanted to go beyond trust or perceptions of basic fairness in the news media to ask whether survey respondents feel like news media and popular media are biased against *them* personally. This arguably taps into a more personal and cultural perception of the broader media landscape in the U.S. Responses from my two media related survey items are shown below in Figure 12.

Figure 12: Is Popular and News Media Biased Against People Like You?



Note: Democrats N: 454; Republicans N: 223

Among Democrats, there is overwhelming agreement that popular and news media do not seem biased against them personally. Republicans are evenly split on the question of whether popular media often feels biased against them (although there is a roughly 20 percentage point gap with Democrats on the item), but they overwhelmingly agree that news media does often seem biased against them. I think this taps into the sense of cultural alienation Republicans feel from the popular media and news media in the U.S., especially compared to Democrats. Certainly part of the reason Republicans have become so overwhelmingly distrustful toward the news media is related to their perception that it is biased against President Trump – as well as

Trump’s aggressive, blunt attacks on the news media – which is not terribly surprising in a highly polarized political climate. But I think these survey items also suggest a more general feeling of cultural alienation and a sense that elite institutions in the U.S. do not reflect the dominant beliefs and values of Republican partisans.

V. Limitations, Implications and Final Thoughts

Limitations

The most significant limitation of these studies is that they all drew on online convenience samples for participants, and online convenience samples are not the most representative of the total U.S. adult population. As I have mentioned, these samples tend to be younger, whiter, more liberal, and more highly educated than the general public. For experimental studies, it is generally considered acceptable to use convenience samples like these, assuming the limitations are stated openly, but more skepticism in order when dealing with non-experimental survey questions that purport to estimate attitudes or beliefs of the total population. In all studies covered in this research project, I have tried not to overstate the degree to which attitudes and positions captured on survey items represent accurate estimates for the total population, and instead I tried to focus on comparisons across groups *within* the samples I recruited. Moreover, through Prolific’s survey participant recruitment platform, I paid extra for so-called “representative samples” in Study 3, in which I asked non-experimental survey items. And indeed, the sample in that study more closely reflected key demographic trends in the broader

public (especially in respect to age) compared to the samples recruited in the other two studies. Additionally, I wanted to create original survey items (both experimental and non), and as mentioned previously, tradeoffs must be made when operating with modest funding sums. Still, a word of caution is in order any time you are unable to recruit a true random sample.

Implications and Final Thoughts

I stated in the introductory chapter that I see this project not as an attempt to undermine or question the robust literature showing that racial resentments and other race and identity related attitudes best explain Donald Trump's surprising rise, but more of an attempt to add context to those findings and try to better understand what they mean for the near to midterm future of American politics. I think that, to the extent this project makes a contribution to the current literature in American politics, the most important findings are as follows:

1. Republicans do seem to be bothered by restrictive speech norms, i.e. political correctness, mostly independent of the group taking offense.
2. Democrats and independents tend to be more sympathetic to racial minorities on matters of political correctness and when considering what constitutes legitimately offensive speech/behavior.
3. There are large gaps between Democrats and Republicans in their willingness to focus on the historic sins of the past in the U.S., and Republicans are much more resistant to efforts to redress racial historical wrongdoing, even those that are largely symbolic (like changing the name of a holiday or changing the person featured on the twenty dollar bill).

4. Republicans are more likely to take *personal* offense to insults toward the U.S. and the flag, even on issues not clearly tied to race, suggesting that their reluctance to focus on past racial sins could be a product of a specific form of nationalism as much as racial resentments.
5. A key difference in the way that partisans conceive of racism and discrimination is that Republicans overwhelmingly say that discrimination primarily occurs when someone acts with intentional prejudice, while Democrats overwhelmingly say that discrimination often happens even in the absence of intentional prejudice.
6. Republicans also seem to feel a sense of alienation from not only the news media, but relative to Democrats, also from popular media in the U.S.

As for the first two findings on political correctness, recall that after party identification, negative attitudes around political correctness were shown to be the *most* predictive of intent to vote for Trump among more than 130 items in a large 2016 survey project (Greenberg 2016), so understanding these attitudes in more detail seems paramount in the current political climate.

Also, as I mentioned before, I think the results from this survey experiment are very similar to results found in Carney and Enos's working paper that experimentally manipulated the Racial Resentment battery of questions by replacing blacks with other racial groups. They also found that liberals exhibited less resentment when the group of focus was blacks relative to less advantaged groups (just as Democrats were more sympathetic to the students of color in my experiment), while conservative survey respondents showed similar levels of resentment regardless of the group of focus (as Republicans showed mostly the same sympathy for white

and students of color in my experiment). To me, this all suggests that modern racial resentments, which are certainly higher among Republicans than Democrats, largely reflect Republicans' tendency to deny or ignore the particular historical plight of racial groups while Democrats seem to take those into consideration when judging, for example, what is legitimately racially offensive or what is a legitimate reason that a particular group may lag behind another on some outcome.

In terms of willingness to focus on America's historic sins, it is not terribly surprising that Republicans are less enthusiastic about this idea. This is true for both race and non-race related issues, but interestingly, Republicans indicated slightly more willingness to engage with historic sins when they were framed as specifically racial. This along with their higher levels of emotional/defensive attachment to the country may suggest they are simply defensive about serious critiques of their country regardless of the particular issue or event in question. A way to test this in the future might be to compare military failures (not obviously racialized) to racial sins to see whether differences emerge.

Before concluding with final implications for American politics more broadly, I want to turn briefly to prospect theory, because I think it has applications for the findings in this project. Nearly two decades after Bell's essay on the dispossessed, Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky (1979) put forward what they called "prospect theory" as a critique of standard utility models in economics. According to the traditional economic utility models, consumers should be indifferent to gains/losses and merely calculate the expected value of a bet or exchange, but Kahneman and Tversky were able to show experimentally that consumers viewed potential economic losses as more painful than potential gains, i.e. they displayed loss aversion. In other

words, according to prospect theory, to have ownership and then to lose something of value is more psychologically painful than to never own it and fail to gain it. The concept of loss aversion has proven to be a powerful explanation for economic decision making, particularly in the fields of finance and insurance (see, for example, Barberis 2013). More relevant to this project, prospect theory and loss aversion appear to affect political decision making as well, particularly in the contexts of candidate and policy preferences (see, for example, Quattrone and Tversky 1988; CharitÈ, Fisman and Kuziemko 2014; Alesina and Passarelli 2019). However, to my knowledge, the logic of prospect theory/loss aversion has not been directly applied to losses and gains in social status or general cultural power, but it seems intuitive that, to the extent particular groups have enjoyed dominant status and cultural power within a society and then believe they are losing their dominant position, the loss will be acutely painful. In fact, at least within economic contexts, larger stakes and singular decisions/exchanges tend to exacerbate the activation of loss aversion (Camerer et al 1997; Haigh and List 2005), two conditions that arguably apply to a large perceived shift in status and cultural power, not to mention demographic tipping points. As Daniel Bell suggested nearly 60 years ago in “The Dispossessed”, perceived status loss may be particularly painful for the groups experiencing it, and thus may be a potent source of political motivation. In terms of its impact on American politics, this also suggests that groups who perceive themselves as losing status and cultural power will be more motivated to act on that loss relative to groups who feel they are still being denied equal opportunities and access to status and power. After all, prospect theory tells us that it is psychologically more painful to have something and lose it than to never gain it in the first

place. This could explain, at least in part, why Republican voters are more animated by cultural than policy issues relative to Democrats.

Lastly, I chose to focus on political correctness and similar cultural attitudes because they appear almost uniquely polarized (even in a highly polarized political environment). It is remarkable that among the 48 survey items I asked, the top five issues for Republicans both in terms of the percentage who took the conservative view and in terms of the degree to which they agreed with a view (as measured on the eight-point scales), four of those issues were cultural in nature as opposed to views related to policy or political philosophy. That is, Republicans simply seem to feel more strongly about opposition to renaming Columbus Day than they do about healthcare, tax rates, or the appropriate size and scope of government (issues on which their views are more mixed and more moderate).

For Democrats, the opposite is true. Four of the top five issues in which there was the most agreement and in which they felt most strongly involved issues of policy (healthcare and climate change) and political philosophy (the belief that wealth inequality is a major problem even if absolute living standards rise across the income distribution). This, along with other findings reviewed here, suggests that it will be difficult to even agree on which issues should be debated in national politics. Republicans have an incentive to highlight cultural issues (in which Democrats are more divided) and Democrats have an incentive to highlight economic and policy issues (in which Republicans are more divided). Moreover, because Democrats and Republicans have very different conceptions of how discrimination works and why current so-called politically correct norms of expression exist, it is difficult to imagine our national political dialogue getting better any time soon.

Appendix

Links to all Survey Forms:⁶

Study 1: <https://forms.gle/11SMQgYmtypSe2GQ8>

Study 2: <https://forms.gle/UYVQbb7Yt7qsKqNK6>

Study 3: <https://forms.gle/nG8XnaGoJDZpBSsCA>

Studies were approved by UCLA IRB (IRB#18-000331) and certified exempt.

Study funding came from a Political Psychology Fellowship (\$2000) and a Political Science departmental fellowship related to Covid-19 (\$2000). The total survey costs slightly exceeded \$4000, and I used some extra VA funding to cover those costs.

⁶ I originally planned to include the full survey forms here, but that would have added over 50 additional pages to the manuscript. Given that, I simply include links here, which I will keep active.

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