



• -



•

White Identity and Support for Racially Inclusive Political Projects

Geneva Cole

Abstract

What explains white support for racially inclusive political projects, such as welfare, affirmative action, police reform, and movements like Black Lives Matter? I argue that white identity is an important determinant of support in both opinion and behavior. Specifically, I advance a theory of white identity that varies along two key dimensions. The first, consciousness, reflects the cognitive centrality of racial group membership for individuals. The second, valence, indicates how an individual interprets this group membership in the broader social, political, and economic context, and ranges from disadvantage to advantage. Valence, a previously overlooked component of white identity, is an especially powerful predictor of white support for advancing racial inclusion—those with an advantaged valence are more supportive of these political projects while those with a disadvantaged valence remain opposed. To do this, I draw upon a national survey of white Americans from 2022 and an interview evidence from the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area in Minnesota both before and after the 2020 uprising. I find that valence is indeed a

□

□

□

□

□

argue that there is another, and perhaps more important, dimension of white identification that tracks the valence that individuals attach to whiteness, which is consequential for how

3 Racially Inclusive Political Projects

Racial inclusion is an ongoing political project in the United States that animates partisan conflicts and debates at all levels of government and private life. While almost all politics can be sorted based on racial inclusion or exclusion, I define “racially inclusive political projects” as policies and movements that are specifically oriented towards the advancement of racial equality in social, political, and economic realms. This includes social policies like welfare, as well as those that rule education, voting, and immigration. However, in this paper, I focus on a contemporary manifestation of the racially inclusive political project in Black Lives Matter. The Black Lives Matter movement began in 2013 after the acquittal of Trayvon Martin’s murderer. Since then, BLM has worked to “eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes.”^[1] This movement reached a boiling point in 2020 after a Minneapolis police officer was caught on tape murdering a Black man named George Floyd. In the midst of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the streets erupted with crowds protesting police brutality and racial inequality. The movement has been called the largest movement in U.S. history, with the 2020 uprising being whiter, wealthier, and more geographically widespread than previous protests (Buchanan, Bui and Patel, 2020).

Scholarship addressing BLM finds partisanship to be a particularly strong predictor of support, with higher Republican vote share associated with less support (Updegrave, Cooper, Orrick and Piquero, 2020) and higher Democratic vote share associated with more support (Williamson, Trump and Einstein, 2018). Those who hold symbolically racist views and those



tribute to racially inequality and subjugation, such as policing. Black and indigenous men and women, and Latino men face a much higher lifetime risk of being killed by police than whites along with much higher rates of incarceration (Edwards, Lee and Esposito, 2019). Police reform is inextricably linked to support for Black Lives Matter: not only is this a key policy proposal associated with the movement, but Williamson et al. (2018) find that Black Lives Matter protests are more likely to occur in places where police more frequently kill Black Americans. Moreover, the number of BLM protests between 2014 and 2020 in a given state is a reliable predictor of the number of police reforms that were enacted at the state level (Peay and McNair, 2022). Other findings suggest that spatial proximity to these protests increases the efficacy of the protest messages and leads to policy support at the polls (Branton, Martinez-Ebers, Carey Jr and Matsubayashi, 2015; Enos, Kaufman and Sands, 2019; Reny and Newman, 2021). Thus support for police reform is a more specific and more costly component of the racially inclusive political project headed by the Black Lives Matter movement.

Another precise component of the broader racially inclusive political project that I examine in this paper is financial reparations to Black Americans for wrongs of the past and present.



of calls for financial reparations, even when symbolic, such as a formal government apology or establishing a memorial dedicated to victims of slavery (Reichelmann and Hunt, 2021).

There are many reasons to expect that whites have differential levels of support for these racially inclusive political projects across dimensions such as partisanship, ideology, and socioeconomic factors. However, I argue that white identity is also an important predictor of whether and how whites will support racial inclusion. I operationalize these projects with three dependent variables. The first is support for Black Lives Matter³. The second is support for police reform,⁴

□

□

□

□

□

□

□

inclusive political projects. That is, instead of simply estimating the cognitive centrality of whiteness for an individual, these questions go a step further and provide interpretation as to what group membership means. These questions include “to what extent do you feel that white people in this country have a lot to be proud of” and “how likely is it that whites in this country are unable to find a job because employers are hiring minorities instead.” Instead of capturing an attitude about white racial group membership, this scale appears to be capturing racial antagonism. This is supported by the correlations in table 2. The original ANES measurement for consciousness is highly correlated with racial resentment at .524. Thus, the traditional way of measuring white consciousness has an embedded dimension of racial animus which leads to findings that high white group consciousness is equated with racially conservative views.

Table 2: Correlations with Relevant Attitudinal Measures

	Consc (ANES)	Consc (New)	Valence	RacRes	Auth	SDO	Party ID	Ideo
Consciousness (ANES)	1							
Consciousness (New)	0.696	1						
Valence	-0.254	0.100	1					
Racial Resentment	0.524	0.157	-0.478	1				
Authoritarianism	0.330	0.114	-0.217	0.387	1			
Social Dominance Orientation	0.411	0.337	-0.169	0.276	0.255	1		
Party ID	0.229	-0.040	-0.334	0.516	0.201	0.045	1	
Ideology	0.354	0.0257	-0.359	0.546	0.341	0.122	0.717	1

I propose a new measurement for consciousness that takes into account the theory in Section 2.1 and more accurately captures white group consciousness without attributing value to the meaning of group membership. For this new measure, I draw on existing survey questions, and some from the ANES measurement of white consciousness. The core item used in analysis for

□

in this country will have something to do with your life?"⁸ The new proposed measurement for consciousness has strong psychometric properties, including high internal consistency ($\alpha = .629$)⁹ For analysis in this paper, each respondent received a composite score which is standardized between 0 for low consciousness and 1 for high consciousness.

Table 3: Valence Scale and Item Means

Please indicate the extent to which you think being white has affected your life in the following areas, from making things much harder to making things much easier:		Please tell us how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements:	
Item Wording	Mean	Item Wording	Mean
Doing well in school	.5951	Whites in this country generally find their experiences and shared history to be positively reflected in school textbooks and classroom materials.	.6158
Getting a job	.6074	Through no fault of their own, whites in this country are economically losing ground now compared to in the past	.4884
Interactions with the government like police, politicians, etc.	.6212	Whites in this country have a great deal of political power and the government is responsive to the needs of white people	.6005
How you're treated by strangers	.6272	In recent years, whites in this country have been losing the respect and status that they are owed by society	.5951

Next, I draw upon a measurement that is designed to address valence—or how individuals understand their white group membership in a broader social, political, and economic context. To estimate this, I ask individuals the questions in Table 3 about their interpretations of whiteness in the settings of school, work, government, and social interactions. In the left column I designed questions to get at an *egocentric* evaluation of how whiteness shapes individual experiences, and in the right column I designed questions to get at a *sociotropic* evaluation of how individuals interpret whiteness to matter for the group across these contexts.¹⁰ The valence scale has strong psychometric properties, including high internal consistency ($\alpha = .783$) and

⁸Concerns with using white linked fate given the historical and contemporaneous social dominance of the white racial group are addressed in section 2. Although I believe this criticisms are correct, I use white linked fate in tandem with other indicators of group membership here, and find that it contributes to the psychometric scale by estimating an awareness of membership in the white racial group.

⁹Exploratory factor analysis of these items can be found in Table 10 in Appendix A.2



test-retest reliability across multiple studies.¹¹ Importantly, valence does have a strong negative correlation with racial resentment as seen in Table 2 as well as weaker negative correlations with party identification and ideology. This suggests that valence is picking up an element of anti-black affect and Republican and conservative identity. This is to be expected because the measurement for valence is capturing opposing racial narratives which are also picked up and used by political actors who are translating their policy positions to the mass public. For analysis in this paper, each respondent receives a composite score which is standardized between 0 and 1, where a score closer to 0 indicates a negative or disadvantaged valence and a score closer to 1 indicates a positive or advantaged valence. Data used in this analysis are weighted.¹²

5 Analysis

□

□

□

□

□

□

include demographic indicators for age, education, gender, and income.¹⁴ With the inclusion

□

□

□

□

□

□

Table 4: Valence + Consciousness and Support for Black Lives Matter

	Dependent variable:					
	Black Lives Matter (1)	Police Reform (2)	Reparations (3)	BLM (4)	Police (5)	Reparations (6)
Valence	1.012 (0.077)	0.947 (0.070)	0.782 (0.077)	0.171 (0.065)	0.410 (0.079)	0.118 (0.071)
Consciousness	-0.011 (0.055)	0.013 (0.051)	0.145 (0.054)	0.200 (0.044)	0.152 (0.047)	0.327 (0.045)
Republican				-0.126 (0.026)	-0.137 (0.029)	-0.081 (0.023)
Conservative				-0.139 (0.026)	-0.032 (0.028)	-0.021 (0.026)
Racial Resentment				-0.657 (0.039)	-0.451 (0.046)	-0.607 (0.042)
Age				-0.002 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.004 (0.001)
Bachelor's Degree				-0.004 (0.018)	-0.018 (0.021)	-0.030 (0.019)
Female				0.042 (0.017)	0.014 (0.020)	0.004 (0.018)
Annual Income > Min Wage				0.004	-0.034	-

Table 5: Valence x Consciousness and Support for Black Lives Matter

	Dependent variable:					
	Black Lives Matter (1)	Police Reform (2)	Reparations (3)	BLM (4)	Police (5)	Reparations (6)
Valence	1.028 (0.130)	0.935 (0.126)	0.712 (0.128)	0.022 (0.105)	0.291 (0.127)	-0.088 (0.114)
Consciousness	0.012	-0.004	0.046			

□

□
□

□

□

□

here represented by support Black Lives Matter, police reform, and reparations.

5.1.1 Negative Valence

In their own words, many of my interlocutors expressed opposition to not only the Black Lives

valence, but these individuals are extremely important for building a multiracial coalition and advancing racial inclusion. One such respondent, Jasmine, explained that after the 2020 uprising she not only attended protests but created a separate bank account “dedicated to making reparations” to activists in the community and an Instagram educator who she follows to learn more about racism and anti-racism. Jasmine’s position is unique, however, because making reparations is perceived to be more personally costly than something like restructuring or abolishing the police.

6 Discussion

I find evidence that valence, or how whites interpret their white group membership in the

supportive of the Black Lives Matter movement, there was variation in expressed support for specific racially inclusive policies.. This variation supports the quantitative finding of an interaction: those with higher awareness of being white and a positive valence expressed more support for even the specific policies. However, very few respondents, even with high consciousness, turned their expressed support into actual political behavior. This suggests that there is more work to be done to translate support for racially inclusive political projects into actions that further the goal of racial inclusion.

Timing of the survey is also important for interpreting the other main results in this paper, especially as data was collected more than two years after the high-profile murder of George Floyd that resulted in large scale protests and public calls for the policies analyzed here. While

evidence that the previously overlooked dimension of white identity—valence—is a powerful predictor of white Americans' opinion about racial politics.

While this paper brings new insights to the study of white identity, it leaves many unanswered questions that are ripe for future research. Taking a multidimensional approach to

References

- Bai, Hui. 2020. "Whites' racial identity centrality and social dominance orientation are interactively associated with far-right extremism." *British Journal of Social Psychology* 59(2):387–404.
- Berry, Justin A, David Ebner and Michelle Cornelius. 2019. "White identity politics: linked fate and political participation." *Politics, Groups, and Identities* .
- Branton, Regina, Valerie Martinez-Ebers, Tony E Carey Jr and Tetsuya Matsubayashi. 2015. "Social protest and policy attitudes: The case of the 2006 immigrant rallies." *American Journal of Political Science* 59(2):390–402.
- Buchanan, Larry, Quoc Trung Bui and Jugal K Patel. 2020. "Black Lives Matter may be the largest movement in US history." *The New York Times* 3.
- Burke, Peter J. 1980. "The self: Measurement requirements from an interactionist perspective." *Social psychology quarterly* pp. 18–29.
- Cameron, James E. 2004. "A three-factor model of social identity." *Self and identity* 3(3):239–262.
- Chudy, Jennifer. 2021. "Racial sympathy and its political consequences."

Knowles, Eric D and Linda R Tropp. 2018. "The racial and economic context of Trump support: Evidence for threat, identity, and contact e

- Torpey, John and Maxine Burkett. 2010. "The debate over African American reparations." *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 6:449–467.
- Updegrove, Alexander H, Maisha N Cooper, Erin A Orrick and Alex R Piquero. 2020. "Red states and Black lives: Applying the racial threat hypothesis to the Black Lives Matter movement." *Justice Quarterly* 37(1):85–108.
- Williamson, Vanessa, Kris-Stella Trump and Katherine Levine Einstein. 2018. "Black lives matter: Evidence that police-caused deaths predict protest activity." *Perspectives on Politics* 16(2):400–415.
- Wong, Cara and Grace E Cho. 2005. "Two-headed coins or Kandinskys: White racial identification." *Political Psychology* 26(5):699–720.
- Yamamoto, Eric K. 1998. "Racial Reparations: Japanese American Redress and African American Claims." *BC Third World LJ* 19:477.

A Primary Quantitative Appendix

A.1 Additional Descriptive Statistics

Table 6: Summary Statistics

Table 8: Summary Statistics for Valence

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Doing well in school	1,075	3.380	0.801	1	5
Getting a job	1,075	3.430	0.932	1	5
Interactions with govt	1,075	3.485	0.939	1	5
Treated by strangers	1,075	3.509	0.892	1	5
Whites losing econ	1,075	3.463	1.079	1	5
White political power	1,075	2.953	1.154	1	5
Whites losing respect	1,075	3.402	1.203	1	5
White schools	1,075	3.380	1.242	1	5

Valence Survey Items

- Sociotropic School: Whites in this country generally find their experiences and shared



Table 9: Factor Analysis of Valence Items

	Factor 1	Factor 2
--	----------	----------

□

□

A.3 Additional Model specifications

Table 11: Consciousness (ANES) and Support for Black Lives Matter

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Black Lives Matter	Police Reform	Reparations
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Consciousness	0.187 (0.043)	0.137 (0.052)	0.319 (0.047)
Republican	-0.143 (0.021)	-0.142 (0.025)	-0.099 (0.023)
Conservative	-0.144 (0.020)	-0.053 (0.024)	-0.043 (0.022)
Age	-0.172 (0.038)	-0.082 (0.046)	-0.315 (0.042)
Education	-0.045 (0.029)	-0.055 (0.035)	-0.112 (0.032)
Female	0.047 (0.016)	0.005 (0.019)	0.005 (0.017)
Annual Income > Min Wage	-0.014 (0.020)	-0.008 (0.024)	-0.025 (0.022)
Racial Resentment	-0.722 (0.036)	-0.556 (0.043)	-0.673 (0.039)
Constant	0.950	0.855	0.

Table 12: Consciousness (New) and Support for Black Lives Matter

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Black Lives Matter	Police Reform	Reparations
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Consciousness	0.210 (0.034)	0.181 (0.041)	0.321 (0.037)
Republican	-0.143 (0.021)	-0.142 (0.025)	-0.099 (0.022)
Conservative	-0.134 (0.020)	-0.046 (0.024)	-0.026 (0.022)
Racial Resentment	-0.682 (0.032)	-0.530 (0.039)	-0.600 (0.035)
Age	-0.002 (0.0005)	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.004 (0.001)
Bachelor's Degree	-0.017 (0.016)	-0.027 (0.020)	-0.046 (0.018)
Female	0.048 (0.016)	0.006 (0.019)	0.006 (0.017)
Annual Income \geq Min Wage	0.008 (0.020)	-0.013 (0.024)	-0.036 (0.022)
Constant	0.970 (0.031)	0.849 (0.038)	0.808 (0.034)
Observations	1,075	1,075	1,075
R ²	0.568	0.322	0.428
Adjusted R ²	0.565	0.317	0.424
Residual Std. Error (df = 1066)	0.252	0.304	0.274
F Statistic (df = 8; 1066)	175.202	63.390	99.852

Note:

p<0.1; p<0.05; p<0.01

Table 13: Valence and Support for Black Lives Matter

<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
Black Lives Matter	Police Reform	Reparations

B Qualitative Appendix

B.1 Interview Protocols

First Round (N = 40)

- Establishing Political and Social Identities
 - I'm going to start by asking you some questions about your identity and how you view yourself. I'm specifically interested in identities that shape your political life—things like race, gender, religion, sexuality, occupation, class, community membership, hobbies, etc. Things that might have an impact on the way you approach politics or are just meaningful in your everyday life. Given this, how do you identify yourself? Why?
 - What components of your identity are most meaningful to you?
 - What do these identities mean to you? What is important about them, what do you value, how do you feel they affect your life?
 - Do you feel that others identify you in a certain way? Why? What does that mean for your lived experiences?
 - How would you characterize your political identity? Do you see yourself as having an ideological or partisan home?
 - Have you always supported that party or ideology? If not, what changed for you?

- With race now such a big part of the national conversation, do you feel like you are more aware of being white? How and why?

How does being white make you feel?

What do you think white privilege means? Can you give me any examples?

Do you think that structural racism exists? What does that look like?

- Reflections

- Have the events of the past few months, both the COVID-19 pandemic and the racial uprising, changed the way that you think about politics? How?
- Has this affected the way that you participate or plan to participate in politics in ways that can include and go beyond voting?
- Do you plan to vote in the 2020 election?

B.2 Participant Demographics



B.3 Qualitative Coding

I conducted analysis in MAXQDA using the constant comparative method of coding. This method of combines a priori themes with inductive insights and is “designed to aid analysts in generating a theory which is integrated, consistent, plausible, close to the data, and in a form

impact of certain precipitating events. My respondents are categorized in this study based on their type from the time of our initial interviews in February and March 2020.