

Conservatism, Just World Belief, and Racism: An Experimental Investigation of the Attitudes Measured by Modern Racism Scales*

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Abstract

The study of intergroup attitudes is a central topic across the social sciences. While there is little doubt about the importance of intergroup attitudes in shaping behavior, both the psychological underpinnings of these attitudes and the tools used to measure them remain contentious. A focal construct in the theory and measurement of racial attitudes in the United States is Modern Racism. This theory, which is by far the most common way to measure anti-Black prejudice in political science, posits that the attitudes of white Americans toward African Americans are rooted in beliefs that mix social conservatism with anti-Black affect. Despite widespread use, the scales associated with this theory have been argued to conflate political conservatism with anti-Black racism. Such claims have resulted in a longstanding and unresolved debate over the validity of the scales and theory, and have generated general confusion about the role of racism in political behavior. In this manuscript, we refocus this debate by arguing for a common psychological underpinning of both modern racism and conservative belief systems. We also argue that the scales are better suited to capturing racial sympathy than negative racial bias. To demonstrate this, we put the modern racism scales to a simple yet innovative test: we see if responses to modern racism scales change when groups other than African-Americans are included in the questions. We find that responses are, on average, nearly identical, regardless of what groups are included in the questions. The differences that do exist appear to be driven almost entirely by racial liberalism, while conservative responses appear to capture a more general orientation, such as a belief in a just world.

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Measuring intergroup attitudes is centrally important to social science. A tremendous amount of scholarship is devoted to understanding the content and source of these attitudes and their influence on behavior. In the study of American politics, white attitudes toward African Americans are considered to be especially relevant, and a great deal of influential scholarship has focused on refining the techniques used to measure anti-Black prejudice. Perhaps no theory in this area has been more successful than “modern racism” (Sears and Kinder, 1971; Kinder and Sears, 1981; Sears, 1988; Hutchings and Valentino, 2004; Rabinowitz et al., 2009).

Theories of modern racism, also known as symbolic racism or racial resentment, were first postulated more than forty years ago to explain what scholars identified as a unique form of prejudice, rooted in both anti-Black animus and traditional social values. To that end, scholars have shown that racial resentment scales predict attitudes toward racial policies more completely than measures of racial prejudice or ideology alone (Tarman and Sears, 2005; Henry and Sears, 2002). However, modern racism scales have been the subject of heated debate. A number of scholars have called into question what attitudes these scales actually measure, particularly how well they reflect racial animus. Instead, many have argued that modern racism scales represent a set of social values associated with political and social conservatism, or “principled conservatism,” and thereby measure ideology more strongly than they do racial prejudice (Sniderman and Tetlock, 1986; Feldman and Huddy, 2005).

The use of these scales is widespread in social science. In fact, modern racism is by far the most common instrument used to measure racism in political science research. Therefore, the ambiguity surrounding measures of racial resentment poses important implications not only to the study of modern racism, but also to the study of racial prejudice more broadly. If modern racism is not motivated by a particular racial animus toward Blacks, but rather by a broader set of ideological values, then a tremendous amount of scholarship must be

reconsidered; both research specific to modern racism itself and research that uses modern racism scales to measure the impact of racial attitudes on political behavior. As such, debate around the meaning of these scales has continued for decades.

We refocus this long-standing debate, asking not whether modern racism is confounded with principled conservatism, but rather what characteristics of conservative ideology could induce the results we repeatedly observe. We propose that high levels of modern racism are consistent with just world belief (Lerner, 1980), a belief-system that motivates conservatism (Jost et al., 2003). We demonstrate that the attitudes measured in these questions are non-specific to Blacks and are correlated with just world belief. This indicates that responses to modern racism questions are arguably not driven by anti-Black affect, but they nevertheless capture a form of racial attitudes, specifically a failure to recognize the unique historical plight of Blacks. To that end, we argue that if modern racism scales do indeed measure racism, it may best be characterized as a refusal to acknowledge the historical and contemporary injustices experienced by Blacks, rather than targeted anti-Black affect.

To investigate the attitudes underlying modern racism scales, we offer a novel test: we deploy surveys using the exact questions that constitute standard modern racism scales, but we substitute Blacks for other target groups that are not commonly associated with known stereotypes or overt prejudice in the United States. For example, we substitute Blacks for Lithuanians and then measure the difference between mean resentment levels toward Lithuanians and Blacks, respectively. Across multiple groups and multiple samples on different survey platforms, we find a strong and consistent pattern: the results obtained using groups other than Blacks are substantively indistinguishable from those measured when Blacks are the target group. Decomposing this measure further, we find that political conservatives express only minor differences in resentment across target groups, and far greater differences in resentment toward Blacks and other groups can be found among racially sympathetic liberals. In short, we fail to link responses to modern racism questions to any

reliable measure of animus toward Blacks. Rather, we suggest that modern racism scales are primarily capturing two phenomenon: 1) racial liberalism or sympathy and 2) a general political orientation that perceives the world as consisting of people who work hard and those who do not, or just world belief. In doing so, we offer the more general contribution that just world belief should be considered an important feature of intergroup attitudes, and, in the spirit of the original impetus for modern racism theories, that our measures of racism should be updated to reflect the current sociopolitical environment.

Foundations of Modern Racism

The measurement of intergroup attitudes is hindered, in large part, by the uncertain nature of prejudice and the factors that determine it. In addition to theoretical and methodological challenges, much of this difficulty stems from changes over time in how racial prejudice is expressed. Prior to World War II, anti-Black prejudice was overt, primarily rooted in the belief that African Americans were biologically inferior to whites. However, as the Civil Rights Movement unfolded, this “old-fashioned racism” grew less common, and white Americans were markedly less likely to provide biological justifications for prejudicial beliefs (Schuman et al., 1997). As this overt form of prejudice declined, racial attitudes took a more subtle form, and despite rising white support for egalitarian principles and racial equality in abstract, anti-Black discrimination remained strong (Sears and Henry, 2003). To explain this shift in racial attitudes, scholars proposed new theories of racial prejudice, derived from the belief in cultural, rather than biological, differences between Blacks and whites. The theory of modern racism, first introduced by Sears and Kinder (1971), explains the apparent dissonance between white support for equality and their persistent opposition to Blacks, as a new form of prejudice that encompasses a broader set of attitudes than racial animus alone.

Unlike old-fashioned racism, modern racism is a “blend” of anti-Black affect and tradi-

tional values, such as individualism, self-reliance, and Protestant work ethic (Kinder and Sears, 1981; Sears and Kinder, 1971; McConahay and Hough, 1976; McConahay, 1986). The attitudes contained in modern racism are “symbolic,” meaning they are socialized early in life and are not only consistent and stable, but also tend to dominate other attitudes. According to Kinder and Sears (1981) these “deep-seated feelings of social morality and propriety” grant racist attitudes symbolic value, which informs preferences about race and race-related policy. Specifically, modern racism reflects four primary beliefs about African Americans: (1) the unwillingness of Blacks to work hard has prevented their own advancement (2) Blacks demand too much (3) Blacks no longer face discrimination as they once did, and (4) Blacks have received more than they deserve (Henry and Sears, 2002). These themes offer a moralized narrative of racial difference and a justification for racial inequality. By this logic, measures of modern racism allow whites to maintain discriminatory attitudes toward Blacks without expressing blatant prejudice (McConahay and Hough, 1976). More broadly, however, modern racism scales aim to capture a distinct and self-contained form of prejudice not measured by other instruments (Sears and Henry, 2003)

Within this framework, modern racism contains both ideological and racial components, and the instruments used to measure symbolic attitudes must therefore account for both anti-Black affect and traditional social values. Much of the early criticism weighed against modern racism centered on its inconsistent measurement (Tarman and Sears, 2005). Although a number of measures have been used to assess symbolic racial attitudes, this critique has been substantially mitigated by the consistency with which scholars have defined modern racism, in terms of the four main themes outlined above. The exact content of the scales used to measure these attitudes has also become more standardized in the longer symbolic racism scale created by Henry and Sears (2002) and in the commonly used racial resentment scale devised by Kinder and Sanders (1996). The racial resentment scale, which consists of four to eight questions that have been included in the ANES since 1986, is widely used

across studies and will be the focus of our paper.

A number of studies using modern racism scales to assess prejudicial attitudes have shown symbolic racism to be strongly predictive of preferences for race-oriented policies, in many cases overriding political ideology, party identification, and traditional racial attitudes (Tesler and Sears, 2010; Kinder and Sanders, 1996; Sears et al., 1997; Sears and Henry, 2005). In addition to having robust predictive power, modern racism appears to be both internally consistent and stable over time. Not only do individuals respond similarly to different modern racism items, but they also tend to maintain stable racial resentment scores over the course of their lifetime (Henry and Sears, 2009). This is also true on an aggregate level, as average racial resentment in the United States has been strikingly stable since 1986 (Tesler and Sears, 2010).

Due to the predictive strength and consistency of these instruments, modern racism scales have been widely used in social science research to measure racial attitudes. We analyzed four major political science journals, the *American Political Science Review*, the *American Journal of Political Science*, the *British Journal of Political Science*, and the *Journal of Politics*, and found that from 2004 through 2015, nearly 70 percent of articles that measured attitudes toward Blacks used racial resentment scales to assess racial prejudice. We also compiled estimates of citation counts provided by Google Scholar for three well-known scholarly works on modern racism: Kinder and Sears (1981), Sears (1988), and Kinder and Sanders (1996). All three pieces of scholarship have been consistently cited since their publication (1,710 times, 1,211 times, and 1,523 times, respectively) and the number of citations continues to grow by the year, indicating that modern racism remains an influential theory in social science research, especially since the election of Barack Obama (see Figure A.1).

Racial resentment scales have become so commonplace that they are usually used to measure racial attitudes without explicit justification. As Tesler (2012) notes, “symbolic racism and racial resentment have become the focal constructs for explaining the role of

racial attitudes in contemporary American politics” (see Hutchings and Valentino (2004).¹).

The continued relevance of modern racism in contemporary research highlights the importance of valid and effective measures of prejudicial attitudes. Despite their widespread use, modern racism scales remain controversial, as do the role of racial attitudes in American politics more generally. Although most of the debate surrounding modern racism took place twenty years ago, the use of racial resentment scales persisted without resolving much of the disagreement around the scales’ validity. Many have called into question whether these scales actually measure attitudes other than racial prejudice. Sniderman and Tetlock (1986), among others, argue that measures of modern racism more strongly correspond to political conservatism than discriminatory attitudes, since the social values that determine modern racism are contained within conservative ideology (Tetlock, 1994; Sniderman and Piazza, 1993; Kluegel and Bobo, 1993; Zigerell, 2015). Likewise, modern racism scales could capture a broader set of beliefs, such as ethnocentrism, individualism, or antiegalitarianism, rather than a specific anti-Black animus (Schuman et al., 1997; Carmines and Merriman, 1993; Sidanius et al., 1999). Even though increased racial resentment corresponds to negative attitudes toward race-oriented policy, racial resentment is not well-linked to overt forms of prejudice (Bobo, 2000; Sidanius et al., 2000). Further, Kinder and Ryan (2012) find that measures of implicit racism and modern racism are only modestly correlated at best, suggesting that implicit measures and modern racism scales account for two distinct attitudes. In addition to ideological concerns, others have argued that despite the purported utility of modern racism scales to capture a more subtle form of prejudice, individuals may still be discouraged from expressing explicit anti-Black attitudes due to social desirability pressures, thereby preventing accurate measurement of racial prejudice (Sniderman and Carmines, 1997*a*). These and

¹Moreover, measures of modern racism are not restricted to social science publications, but are commonly used in political analysis by scholars and journalists writing in the popular press. For example, a recent piece in Salon used racial resentment to predict attitudes toward government action to reduce inequality (http://www.salon.com/2016/01/16/the_scary_truth_about_inequality_why_the_gop_has_little_reason_to_reconsider_its_dangerous_politics/)

related criticisms have led some scholars to argue that the importance of race in determining political behavior in the United States has declined (Sniderman and Carmines, 1997*b*).

One possible interpretation of modern racism scales is that they reflect opposition to government assistance more broadly, irrespective of racial attitudes. Looking at support for a hypothetical scholarship program, Feldman and Huddy (2005) find that not only do higher measures of racial resentment correspond to increased opposition to the government-funded program, regardless of the race of benefit recipients, but that racial resentment also varies between liberals and conservatives. Liberals who express a higher level of racial resentment are less likely to support scholarships intended for Black students, but their support for scholarships intended for white students remains unchanged. This suggests that liberal racial resentment is indeed motivated by race. Conservatives, by contrast, appear more motivated by ideological beliefs than racial attitudes, and conservatives with a higher level of racial resentment express reduced support for the scholarship program overall, regardless of recipient race.

Tarman and Sears (2005) attempt to address these critiques by comparing measures of symbolic racism to other ideological constructs about social values. When compared to both conservatism and individualism, modern racism offers the best fit to explain observed attitudes toward racial policies. Likewise, Sears and Henry (2005) find that in contrast to individualism or old-fashioned racism, the unique blend of anti-Black affect and traditional values contained in modern racism is more strongly predictive of attitudes than either construct. Informative studies by Tesler and Sears (2010) and Tesler (2012) show that modern racism is correlated with attitudes about Barack Obama and policies supported by Obama. Suggestively, the authors demonstrate that these correlations were not associated as strongly with other Democratic presidential candidates or their policies. However, these findings only indicate that modern racism is part of a unified belief system capable of predicting other beliefs, but do not necessarily establish the extent to which these scales actually measure

anti-Black attitudes. As we argue below, these scales could be capturing a belief system related to policy attitudes and group-based opinions. Furthermore, nearly all of the studies that assert the overall validity of modern racism scales rely on observational data, and while they support the predictive power of modern racism, they do not actually test the underlying attitudes that are measured by the modern racism scales. The distinctiveness of modern racism measures suggests that these scales capture a more robust set of attitudes than conservatism, but the nature of those attitudes remains unclear. In short, while there is little doubt that modern racism is predictive of political behavior and attitudes, an experimental investigation of the underlying properties is needed.

We aim to experimentally assess the attitudinal underpinnings of modern racism. To be clear, we are not challenging the theoretical motivations of the modern racism scales. Symbolic politics has been a tremendously successful theory and there is little doubt that the expression of racial attitudes in the United States has changed over the last half century (Bobo et al., 2012), just as there seems to be little doubt that the nature of racism itself has changed. However, like many successful theories, our instruments may inadequately measure the value of interest, and an inadequate instrument could both fail to capture the role of racial attitudes in politics and falsely identify citizens as racist or not racist. We therefore designed tests to assess the attitudes that constitute these scales. If whites express the same attitudes regardless of the group contained in the question, or if differences in attitudes appear to be driven by racial sympathy rather than racial animus, then the attitudes measured by these surveys would probably not be called racism under many common definitions. However, as we discuss in closing, this may suggest racism in the United States is characterized by attitudes of a different character, chiefly a failure to recognize historical discrimination against Blacks.

Just World Belief and Conservatism

We pivot away from this debate about whether conservatism and modern racism are conflated, and instead engage in a deeper investigation of the two belief systems to better understand the underlying attitudes that compose modern racism and other theories of inter-group attitudes. Because the triangular relationship between modern racism, conservatism, and a host of political attitudes seems empirically robust, we ask: what underlying belief system induces this relationship?

To start, we note that the attribution of stereotypes about inadequate work-ethics to low-status groups can be seen across time and place. Scholars such as Sidanius and Pratto (2001) have even argued that the tendency to legitimize the position of low-status groups is a nearly universal feature of human societies, suggesting that such stereotypes are not uniquely targeted at Blacks, but instead reflect a general orientation toward low-status groups. Manifestations of these claims in modern conservatism can be found, for example, in Mitt Romney's famous remark during the 2012 election that "47 percent [of Americans]...are dependent upon government." This comment was obviously intended to include low-status groups beyond just African Americans. Signals such as those from Romney could, of course, inform the political attitudes of conservative Americans so that they will endorse modern racism questions, regardless of how they feel about Blacks in particular.

Second, we consider the psychological underpinnings of conservative ideology. While debates about modern racism have largely stagnated over the last 30 years, political psychology has made major advances in understanding the nature of belief systems. Much of this scholarly work has focused on the roots of conservatism. In an influential article, Jost et al. (2003) argued that political conservatism is a system of motivated cognition, meaning that individuals adopt a conservative ideology because it satisfies certain psychological needs. Summarizing a meta-analysis of variables that predict conservatism, they state that

“the core ideology of conservatism stresses resistance to change and *justification of inequality*” (Jost et al., 2003, p. 339, emphasis added). The theory behind this justification of inequality is known as “system justification,” an ideological motivation to defend existing social systems against instability, threat, and attack. This motivation draws on a related concept known as “just world theory” (Lerner, 1980). People with high just world belief are motivated to believe that people “get what they deserve.” For example, according to this view, poor individuals are impoverished as a product of their dispositions, and not because of social or political causes. This tendency has been found to be higher in conservatives than in liberals (Rubin and Peplau, 1975; Jost, Burgess and Mosso, 2001; Bénabou and Tirole, 2006).

This belief system has obvious parallels with the modern racism scales, in which subjects are asked to endorse the statements such as “it’s really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as whites.” Drawing on just world theory, we might predict that there is an underlying cause of both conservative belief systems and modern racism. This raises an important question about whether modern racism scales are specific to Blacks *per se*. Political conservatives with high just world belief should be motivated to endorse statements that people could be better off if they just tried harder, regardless of the target group in question, simply because they are motivated to hold this general belief about the world.

We also note that just world belief is consistent with the theoretical underpinnings of the modern racism scales, which asserts that as biological justifications of racism were abandoned, new justifications were constructed to explain the inability of Blacks to achieve socioeconomic parity with whites. Just world, and the related theory of system justification, similarly assert that individuals are motivated to reduce cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) by adopting the belief that people of low social status deserve their status—hence, as biological explanations for justifying the low social status of Blacks declined, a belief in a just

world would motivate people to search for alternative explanations for Black social status, such as a lack of hard work. However, as we noted above, such a belief could be applied to any low status group and is not unique to Blacks or to racial groups more generally.

With these motivations in mind, we designed experiments to test whether the attitudes captured by the modern racism scales are specific to Blacks and the extent to which these attitudes reflect a belief in a just world.

Design

Although some scholars have experimentally manipulated the content of the policy preferences and attitudes that may be predicted by racial resentment scales, little research has directly manipulated the content of the scales themselves (Feldman and Huddy, 2005; Kinder and Kam, 2009; Sears and Henry, 2003). Sniderman and Carmines (1997*b*) offer the only direct experimental manipulation of the modern racism scale of which we are aware, replacing “Blacks” with “new immigrants from Europe” in a single item from the racial resentment scale (see also Neblo (2009)). Responses to this question do not significantly differ when the question is directed toward Blacks rather than the new immigrant target group, which suggests that modern racism scales may not be specific to Blacks. Of course, this investigation and the responses (Sears and Kosterman, 2000) occurred 20 years ago and scholars have identified many changes in the nature of racial attitudes in the time since and over previous 20-year periods (Mendelberg, 2001; Tesler, 2012). Furthermore, while promising, this analysis is limited in several respects. First, by using a single question rather than a complete modern racism battery, this analysis does not reflect the full range of attitudes contained in the racial resentment scale. Additionally, using “new immigrants from Europe” as the relevant comparison group is not only limited in scope, but could also evoke preexisting attitudes toward immigrants that may be conflated with the kind of resentment expressed

toward Blacks. Respondents may therefore express the same level of resentment toward the new immigrant group as they would toward Blacks even if they draw on different attitudes to formulate their response. As a consequence, this question does little to inform us about the beliefs underpinning modern racism. If asked about a more neutral and less politically-charged target group, however, their resentment toward the alternative group may differ from their resentment toward Blacks.

To that end, we designed a simple experiment to test the attitudinal underpinnings of modern racism.² The four-question modern racism scale consists of the following questions:

1. Over the past few years, blacks have gotten less than they deserve.
2. Irish, Italian, Jewish, and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors.
3. It's really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as whites.
4. Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for blacks to work their way out of the lower class.

We suspect that respondents may answer these questions in a consistent manner, regardless of whether the target is Blacks or another group. If conservatives, in particular, respond consistently to these questions by endorsing conservative attitudes toward out-groups regardless of the target, this indicates that a different common belief system other than attitudes about Blacks is motivating responses to these questions. As an example, if white Americans will endorse the statement “It’s really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if Blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as whites” at the same levels they will when the statement is made about Blacks, then it is unlikely that responses to

²This study was pre-registered with eGAP on December 30, 2014, ID: 20150202AA.

modern racism scale are driven by specific attitudes about Blacks; rather, they are likely driven by other psychological features of political conservatives that lead them to endorse these statements across target groups.

Although most research using modern racism scales takes racial resentment to be a measure of negative attitudes toward Blacks, Kinder and Sanders (1996) suggest that that low resentment scores indicate “racial sympathy,” or what we will refer to as *racial liberalism*, rather than a lack of resentment alone. By this view, racial resentment scales “distinguish between those whites who are generally sympathetic toward blacks and those who are generally unsympathetic” (106). Indeed, Tesler and Sears (2010) found evidence that low racial-resentment voters consistently supported Obama over other Democrats. As such, modern racism scales could capture both ends of the spectrum of racial attitudes: resentment and sympathy. By this perspective, if modern racism scales effectively capture racial attitudes, we may expect that liberals will be more sympathetic toward Blacks than other target groups because attitudes toward race and equality are deeply salient to liberal ideology (see also Tesler and Sears (2015); Tesler (2016)). However, if racial resentment questions only capture this racial liberalism and not racial resentment, then this too calls into question the validity of a scale believed to measure general feelings toward Blacks, and suggests that conservatives’ responses are driven by something other than attitudes about Blacks.

To test the hypothesis that similar endorsements will occur regardless of the group targeted in modern racism scales, we conducted a number of trials. In these trials, subjects were asked two primary sets of questions. One set included questions used in the standard racial resentment scale (Kinder and Sanders, 1996) with Blacks as the target group. We designed a second set of questions identical to the first, but with a non-standard target group in place of Blacks. The target group was randomly assigned from a diverse list of groups, such as “Bhutanese” or “Nepalese,” that are unlikely to be associated with stereotypes or racial animus like those expressed toward Blacks. We also included “Hispanic,” “some whites,”

and “Americans” to test whether just world belief is driving responses in a way that would cause subjects to endorse statements about the importance of hard work, even if they have well-formed attitudes about the groups in question. We tested a total of seventeen non-Black target groups, with each subject answering questions about two groups: Blacks and one non-standard target group.³ With this range of groups, we test can test 1) whether subjects have systematically different responses across target groups; 2) the influence of racial sympathy, by observing whether liberals express lower resentment toward Blacks than other low-status groups, including Hispanics; 3) the influence of just world belief, by observing the relationship between a belief in a just world and group attitudes, both toward groups about which the subjects are likely to have weak or no beliefs, such as Bhutanese, and toward groups about which subjects may have strong beliefs, such as Blacks.

Following Kinder and Sanders (1996), we used the four-question version of the racial resentment scale, but in the non-standard set of questions, we included three symbolic racism questions rather than the typical four. We excluded a question about Black slavery since it is not relevant to other groups. In most of our trials, for the set of questions aimed toward Blacks, we randomly assigned subjects to receive either the three non-slavery questions or all four questions usually included in the racial resentment scale. This allowed us to test whether scaled responses were sensitive to the use of three, rather than four, questions.

Response options to standard modern racism questions are a five-point Likert scale from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.” Responses can be scaled into a single score to measure resentment. We refer to scaled scores for the Black target group and alternative target groups questions as Black resentment and non-Black resentment, respectively, with higher means indicating higher levels of resentment. We randomized which set of questions appeared first to allow for both between-subject and within-subject tests. We suspect, how-

³Subjects on two surveys were randomized into either seeing a white target group or one of several other groups, including Black and non-Black groups. This was done to ensure a robust sample of subjects who saw white as the target group.

ever, that within-subject tests may suffer from anchoring or social desirability effects, so while the results we show below are even stronger using within-subject tests, for formal statistical tests, we concentrate exclusively on between-subject comparisons. Following Tesler and Sears (2010), we test all subjects, regardless of their race.

Using 12 separate surveys, we recruited 5,966 subjects using Amazon Mechanical Turk and the Harvard Digital Lab for the Social Sciences (DLABSS)⁴ and an additional nationally representative sample of 733 subjects through Time-sharing Experiments in the Social Sciences (TESS) for 6,699 total subjects.⁵ We used different groups across different trials as we iteratively tested the robustness of our findings. Table A.1 summarizes our trials. In most analyses, we combine all our surveys into a single dataset.

In some surveys, in addition to asking for self-reported ideology, we also included questions about positions on policies that do not contain a racialized component in order to measure ideological orientations. Some subjects were also asked about their views on the death penalty and affirmative action in the hiring of Black employees, which are frequently used in modern racism research to measure how well modern racism scales predict implicit and explicit racial attitudes, respectively. In keeping with recent research on modern racism scales, in some trials we also included questions about Obama, specifically 2012 presidential vote choice, overall approval of Obama and his policies, and support for Obamacare. In some trials, we also administered a Just World Belief Scale (Lipkus, 1991). We also asked a general knowledge question about where in the world the non-Black target group originates. For example, if subjects were asked about “Bhutanese,” they were asked on which continent Bhutan is located.

⁴DLABSS is a volunteer, web-based, survey panel. Similar to Mechanical Turk (Berinsky, Huber and Lenz, 2012), it has been shown to have desirable survey qualities and using the platform researchers have replicated a range of studies (Enos, Hill and Strange, 2016)

⁵TESS recruits subjects through GfK Knowledge Networks. Subjects in this sample were randomly assigned to one of three target groups: Black, Surinamese, or Mauritanian. We choose Surinamese and Mauritanian because they were the least well-known target groups in our previous trials, as measured by questions about the geographic location of the countries.

We also tested two different versions of the modern racism questions: one using the original wording put forth by Kinder and Sanders (1996) and one with “in the United States” added to each question to test if responses changed when groups are placed in context of the United States. This allowed us to be sure that subjects were thinking of Blacks and other target groups as being in the same context.

Our primary test is straight-forward: if modern racism is measuring attitudes specific to Blacks, then average levels of resentment should be higher when Blacks are included as the target group. In case responses to the modern racism scales vary by ideology, as might be predicted by the theories discussed above, in our analysis we also subset our data by ideology.

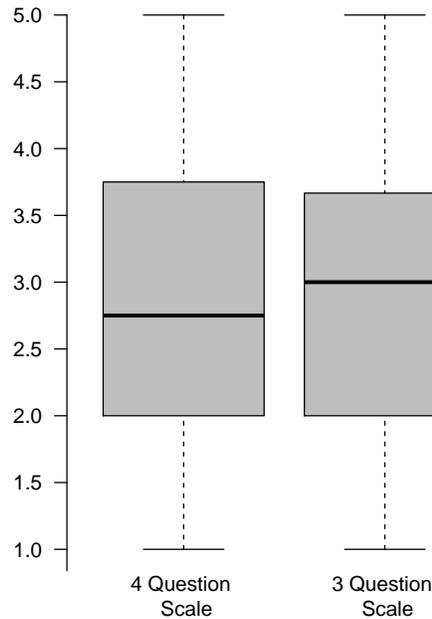
Results

To begin, we establish that the three question modern racism scale, with the slavery related question removed, yields similar results to the four-question scale. In Figure 1 we present the distribution of resentment as a function of the standard four question scale and our modified three question scale across the ten tests in which we ran with both versions. Subjects only saw one or the other version. Mean resentment is nearly identical when measured on both scales (2.83 and 2.86) and the median is actually slightly higher using the 3-question scale.⁶ Cronbach’s Alpha (α) for the four question scale is 0.88 and is 0.84 with the slavery question removed.⁷ As such, in all analysis that follows, we report pooled results for anti-Black resentment, using both three and four question scales. Our findings are unchanged if we instead rely on one or the other of the scales exclusively. We also find

⁶Our mean resentment scores are lower than the mean of 3.44 in 2012 Cooperative Congressional Analysis Project (CCAP), but this should be expected with the over-sample of liberals in MTurk and DLABSS samples. Our averages are also close the historical averages reported by Tesler and Sears (2010). Using only our TESS sample, the mean (weighted by survey weights) is 3.17.

⁷In the 2012 CCAP, $\alpha = 0.86$.

Figure 1: Anti-Black Racial Resentment by Four and Three Question Scales

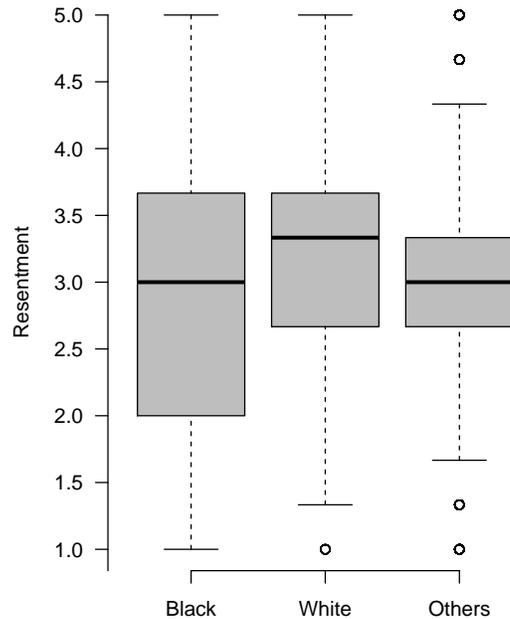


Distribution of Anti-Black Racial Resentment as measured using four question scale (left box) and three question scale (right box).

no meaningful difference in results when the question wording is changed to specify a U.S. context versus the original wording (see Table A.2). We also see no systematic difference across survey platforms (see Figure A.2).

What is the difference in resentment when there is a Black and non-Black target group? Pooling all subjects, we see little to no difference between Black and non-Black resentment. In Figure 2, we display average racial resentment for all subjects toward different target groups, revealing a striking similarity in average racial resentment, no matter what target group is used in the modern racism scale. The figure shows the distribution and median resentment for responses when the target group is Black, white, or all other groups collapsed into a single variable. For all other target groups treated as a single variable, $\alpha = 0.73$. This is, perhaps, strikingly high—despite the disparate nature of these groups, α still reaches

Figure 2: Racial Resentment using Black, white, and All Other Groups as the Target

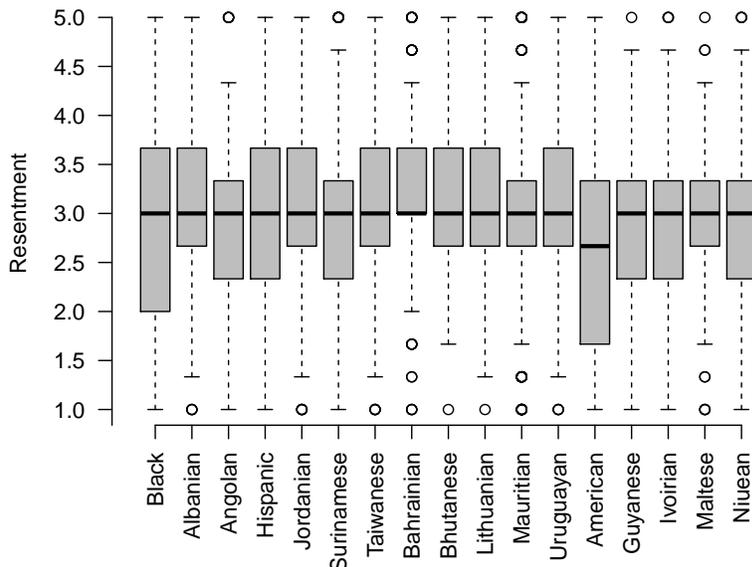


Distribution of Racial Resentment for all subjects using Black, white, and all other groups as the target.

conventional levels of acceptable reliability. This, too, is evidence that answers to these questions may be driven by attitudes independent of attitudes about the target group. The distribution of resentment with Black and other groups as the target groups is very similar, except that the spread of responses for Blacks, especially the bottom quartile, is larger than all other groups, indicating that a higher portion of respondents express low levels of resentment toward Blacks than for other groups. We also see that the median response for the white target group is higher than for the Black target group. As we will see below, these differences in the distributions are largely driven by liberal respondents. In Figure 3, we show the same figure for each group individually. The only target group to have a meaningfully different median is American.

In Table 1, we summarize the results of our formal tests of the difference in responses to

Figure 3: Racial Resentment using Black and Other Groups as the Target



Distribution of racial resentment for all subjects using using Black and each individual group as the target.

Table 1: Tests of Differences of Means in Racial Resentment

	Mean	SD	All			Conservatives					Liberals				
			Diff	p	N	Mean	SD	Diff	p	N	Mean	SD	Diff	p	N
Black	2.82	1.05			2643	3.50	0.87			617	2.45	1.01			1397
White	3.16	0.77	-0.33	0.00	1189	3.52	0.63	-0.03	0.61	233	3.01	0.79	-0.56	0.00	680
Other	2.98	0.76	-0.16	0.00	3233	3.39	0.69	0.11	0.14	743	2.73	0.74	-0.28	0.00	1681

Mean results for all subjects, self-identified conservatives, and self-identified liberals. For each group, we display the mean, standard deviation, difference in means from Black, the p-value associated with a T-test for difference in means from Blacks, and the N. Standard errors are clustered by survey.

the racial resentment scales depending on the target group. We compare responses for non-Black target group against responses for the Black target group using a between-subjects T-test for difference of means, with the standard errors clustered by survey. Note that the between subjects test substantially reduced concerns of social desirability. We group together the responses to all non-Black target groups, other than white. For each group, we report the mean resentment score, standard deviation, the difference of means from Black resentment, the p-value of the T-test, and the N.

Among all respondents, the mean resentment for non-Black target groups and a Black-

target groups are clearly different ($p < .01$ for both whites and other groups), but in the *opposite direction of what might be expected if these questions were capturing anti-Black animus*. Resentment is clearly higher against all other groups. Because resentment against other groups is actually higher on average than anti-Black resentment, these results suggest that modern racism questions are poorly suited for capturing attitudes specific to Blacks.

While these findings are striking, it is also possible that the similarity between levels of resentment toward Black and non-Black target groups could be the result of incoherent attitudes or a lack of knowledge about the non-Black target groups in question. Although we believe the strength of our test lies in the relative obscurity of the target groups we selected, in order to test this possibility, we compared levels of resentment when respondents correctly or incorrectly identified the geographical origin of the non-Black target. Overall, 58 percent of respondents who were asked were able to correctly identify the target group’s geography, and knowledge was consistent among both liberals and conservatives at 58 and 57 percent, respectively. Using geographic knowledge as a proxy for group knowledge, this suggests that the majority of respondents were at least able to recognize the non-standard target groups as a meaningful entity. More importantly, there is no significant difference in our formal tests comparing resentment towards Blacks and non-Black target groups depending on respondent’s preexisting knowledge of the group in question (see Table A.4).⁸

We also compared average resentment toward Blacks to average resentment toward whites, which is both a high-status and a group that is well-known and easily identified

⁸Another possibility is that individuals who simply have no well-formed opinion about a target group are choosing the middle response category of 3 on the Likert Scale (corresponding to “Neither Agree nor Disagree”) on all questions. This is, of course, difficult to separate from subjects who choose the middle response category because of a genuine attitude, but if this behavior is present in the results, it could induce an artificial similarity in resentment between target groups. It is notable that a median result of 3 is found for almost all target groups, including those for which subjects are more likely to have well-formed opinions, like Blacks, as well as for more obscure groups, making it seem less likely that a median response of 3 represents a non-attitude. As a simple test to see if subjects who responded with a default response of 3 were driving the results, we simply reanalyzed the results with subjects who answered 3 to every question removed. The results were unchanged.

by survey respondents. In Table 1, we see that respondents expressed higher average resentment toward whites than toward Blacks. Note also that in Figure 3 the distribution of attitudes when Hispanics are the target group are also similar to Blacks. Since respondents are more likely have preconceived attitudes or stereotypes about whites and Hispanics than they are about another non-Black target group and yet resentment toward whites and Hispanics is similar or greater than resentment toward Blacks, this further suggests that an underlying ideological belief system motivates responses regardless of the target group under scrutiny.

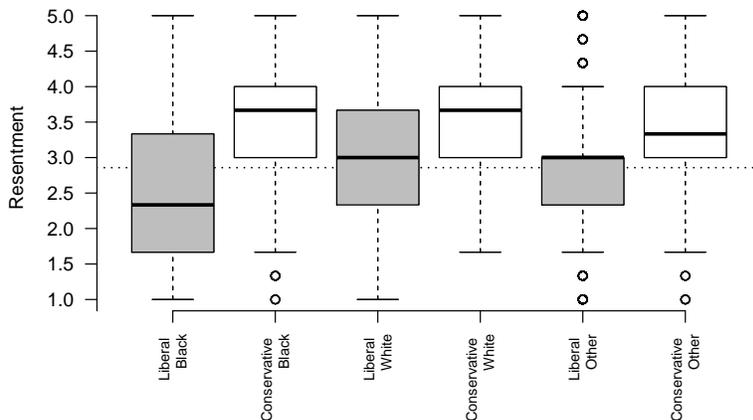
Ideology and Racial Liberalism

These results indicate that, on average, subjects express similar levels of resentment toward Blacks and non-Blacks, which suggests that these scales may capture a latent attitude that is non-specific to Blacks. However, liberals and conservatives may respond differently to the experiment: liberals are expected to be more sympathetic to Blacks, and conservatives may have an underlying belief system that contributes to both ideology and racial resentment. As such, it is important to examine liberals and conservatives separately. Figure 4 displays resentment by target group and respondent self-reported ideology.⁹

The dotted line in this figure represents the mean resentment for all subjects when Black is the target group. Two important features are prominent in this figure: First, for conservatives respondents (white boxes), the distribution of resentment is nearly identical when asked about a white and Black target group. Moreover, the distribution when asked about any alternate group is similar to responses when asked about whites or Blacks, except with a slightly lower median. Second, for liberals (gray boxes), responses for the Black target

⁹In the Appendix, we replicate our primary results using other measures of ideology based on gender attitudes and foreign policy attitudes, and find that the results are substantively unchanged. This helps to demonstrate that the relationship between attitudes about Blacks, non-Blacks, and conservatism, likely does not spring all from attitudes about Blacks, but rather another underlying attitude likely influences both.

Figure 4: Distribution of Racial Resentment by Ideology with Different Target Groups



Distribution of racial resentment using Black, white, and all other groups as the target, by liberal (gray boxes) and conservative (white boxes) respondents. All other racial groups are collapsed together in this graphic. The dotted line represents the mean resentment against Blacks.

group are actually significantly lower than for other groups, indicating that liberals may have greater sympathy for Blacks.

This indicates that the relatively lower average resentment toward Blacks we see in our aggregate results is driven entirely by liberals. We can see this in formal tests too, looking again at Table 1, for conservatives, the differences between responses for the Black target group and whites and the Black target group and all other groups cannot be reliably distinguished from zero ($p = 0.61$ and $p = 0.14$, respectively). For conservatives, the point estimate on the difference between Blacks and other group is also relatively small—the effect is less than half the size of the absolute value among liberals for the difference between resentment toward Blacks and other groups. The standardized effect size of the difference between Blacks and non-Blacks for conservatives is $\beta = .16$, for liberals it is $\beta = .38$.¹⁰ In short, it appears that racial liberalism does much more to shape racial

¹⁰Because the standard errors are clustered by survey, they are larger than conventional standard errors. Clustering is necessary to account for influences to responses that are correlated within surveys. However, this also increases the chances of a false negative on tests of differences. We note that without clustering standard errors, with our N the probability of detecting a “small” standardized effect of 0.20 (Cohen, 1977)

resentment than racial conservatism. This is in line with suggestive evidence that racial resentment effectively identifies whites who are racially sympathetic and supportive of racially progressive policies (Tesler and Sears, 2015; Tesler, 2016).¹¹ Furthermore, the inconsistent results among liberals, in contrast to the consistent results among conservatives, is evidence that a common feature of conservatism and intergroup attitudes is driving responses to these questions. We examine this next.

Belief in a Just World and Modern Racism

As we discussed earlier, we might expect conservatives to have higher levels of racial resentment regardless of the target group, because of a dispositional tendency to believe people “get what they deserve.” By this logic, political conservatives would be willing to endorse any statement that said some group of people would be better off if they worked harder.¹²

at $p < .05$ is 0.96, which is typically considered more than adequate statistical power. If standard errors are not clustered, the p-value associated with a T-test of difference of means is 0.01. This underscores the importance of this effect by examining the point estimate on the difference, like we do here.

In Table A.3 we display the same tests by survey platform and find largely consistent results, especially for liberals. It should be noted though that there is of course, variation between samples, perhaps due simply to sampling variability. Perhaps notably, the results for conservatives are stronger in the TESS sample than other samples; however, our primary concern is the internal validity of the test rather than the representativeness of the sample, and we have no reason to believe that the internal validity varies between platforms (see Berinsky, Huber and Lenz (2012)). These differences also reinforce the need for clustering standard errors when pooling across surveys.

¹¹There is also, of course, the possibility that in our tests liberals are just more sensitive to social desirability than conservatives. However, this would mean that liberals would have to adjust their answers systematically downward for Blacks in response to this social desirability demand while not adjusting their answers for other groups. These results are also found in between-subjects tests so that subjects would need to be able to anticipate what other questions we will ask in order to make this possible. This strikes us as unrealistically sophisticated behavior.

¹²Another possibility is that modern racism scales simply measure *ethnocentrism*, which Kinder and Kam (2009) describe as “a predisposition to divide the human world into in-groups and out-groups (p. 8).” It could be that modern racism scales measure an attitude of in-group favoritism that is especially prominent in political conservatives. This is an attractive theory because it would explain the consistency we see in responses across target groups and might be expected from classic theories of social identity (Tajfel et al., 1971). However, if this were true, we would likely expect white respondents to express lower resentment when whites are the target group, but we do not find this to be the case. We also find that liberal respondents actually have higher resentment toward whites than Blacks. We also note that the ethnocentrism measures developed by Kinder and Kam (2009) would be poorly suited to adjudicate between Black and non-Black

In multiple samples, we included measures of just world belief (Lipkus, 1991). For simplicity, we focus here on the results from the TESS sample. This measure is constructed from a six-point Likert scale asking for agreement with statements such as “I feel that people get what they are entitled to have” (see Appendix for complete scale). We note that just world belief is significantly higher for self-identified conservatives than for liberals (conservatives = 3.75, liberals = 3.07, $t = 16.73, p < .01$), as predicted by theories of conservatism as motivated cognition (Jost et al., 2003).

We treat racial resentment as the dependent variable and examine its relationship with just world belief to see if it varies across target group. We use the racial resentment values generated for the between subjects tests above, so a given subject’s resentment is measured only for the group they were randomly assigned to see first, either Black or a non-Black target group. We show these relationships in Table 2. In columns 1 and 3, we regress racial resentment for all target groups (Black and non-Black) on just world belief and we show that it has a strong relationship for both liberals and conservatives. However, in columns 2 and 4, we interact just world belief with a treatment variable indicating whether the subjects were randomly questioned about a Black or non-Black target group. For conservatives (column 4), the coefficient on the interaction variable is small and statistically insignificant, indicating that conservatives apply this same just world belief, regardless of whether they are asked about Blacks or non-Black groups. This result is consistent with our argument that a part of the conservative world view is the belief that any individual can get ahead with adequate effort, and they will subsequently apply this belief to any group.

For liberals (column 2) on the other hand, the effect of just world belief is strongly conditioned by whether subjects are asked about Black or non-Black targets, with just world belief only becoming important when liberals are exposed to Blacks. This suggests that just world belief does not appear to be a central part of their world view, and, unlike

resentment because the ethnocentrism measures ask specifically about Blacks.

Table 2: Racial Resentment Regressed on Just World Belief and Treatment of Black Target Group

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Liberals		Conservatives	
Intercept	1.98*	2.59*	2.74*	2.74*
	(0.16)	(0.18)	(0.19)	(0.22)
Just World Belief	0.29*	0.12*	0.18*	0.14*
	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.06)
Black Target Group		-2.05*		-0.05
		(0.33)		(0.41)
Black Target Group x Just World Belief		0.57*		0.10
		(0.10)		(0.11)
<i>N</i>	194	194	249	249
<i>R</i> ²	0.15	0.30	0.04	0.11
adj. <i>R</i> ²	0.14	0.29	0.04	0.09
Resid. sd	0.66	0.60	0.64	0.62

*OLS regression of racial resentment regressed on just world belief and treatment of Black target group versus non-Black target for self-identified liberals (columns 1–2) and conservatives (columns 3–4). Standard errors are in parentheses. * is $p < .05$*

conservatives, liberals do not apply this belief to all groups.¹³

The nature of this relationship between just world belief and liberal sympathy for Blacks deserves further investigation to better understand its origins. It could be that the very liberal people at the bottom of the just world belief scale are particularly sensitive to the historical plight of Blacks or it could also be that knowledge about the plight of Blacks has contributed to their belief that the world is unjust. It is also the case that liberals who favor the policies championed by liberals that were historically constructed around helping Blacks, such as affirmative action, might adopt a belief in an unjust world and sympathy for Blacks, in order to maintain cognitive consistency.

In any case, we find that it is liberals, not conservatives, who are most likely to apply just world belief unevenly across groups. This is consistent with theories of conservatism as motivated cognition, and indicates that this belief system is less central to the liberal world view. If just world belief were a central belief among those who do not see the world as just, we might expect that they would believe it is difficult for *any* group to get ahead in the

¹³In two surveys, we asked about the related concept of “System Justification” (Jost and Banaji, 1994), also thought to be related to conservatism, and find consistent results.

fundamentally unfair world, despite hard work and other efforts. However, we do not see this attitude among liberals, rather they appear to reserve this belief especially for Blacks.

Racial Resentment and Policy Attitudes

To further assess the attitudes underlying modern racism, we test whether modern racism scales predict race-related policy attitudes when different target groups are substituted for Blacks. Testing the predictive ability of these questions has been a common technique for assessing whether these measures are capturing attitudes about Blacks. For example Sears et al. (1997) and Sears and Henry (2003), among others, have pointed to the relatively powerful ability of racial resentment scales to predict policy attitudes as evidence that they are capturing racial attitudes. These tests include racial resentment in a regression model with ideology and other control variables, and demonstrate that racial resentment has independent predictive power. Although such evidence is suggestive, it only demonstrates that racial resentment has additional explanatory power beyond ideology, and of course this evidence does not preclude the possibility that racial resentment is capturing attitudes that are non-specific to Blacks. By subjecting racial resentment to an experimental test, we are able to directly test whether attitudes about Blacks specifically are driving policy attitudes or if these attitudes reflect a more general belief system.

Sears et al. (1997) looked at the relationship between racial resentment and preferences for affirmative action, which they call a “race targeted policy.” Using our TESS data, we examine the relationship between racial resentment and attitudes about affirmative action and the death penalty, a policy for which support has also been linked to racial resentment (Unnever and Cullen, 2007). Similar to the findings of Sears et al. (1997), we find that the relationship between Black resentment and attitudes toward the death-penalty and affirmative action is strong even with controls for party identification and ideology included. These results are displayed in Table 3 in columns 1 and 3. However, in columns 2 and 4

Table 3: Regression of Policy Support on Resentment

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Affirmative Action	Death Penalty		
	Black	Non Black	Black	Non Black
Black Resentment	0.46*		0.35*	
	(0.05)		(0.07)	
Non-Black Resentment		0.51*		0.35*
		(0.08)		(0.09)
Conservative	0.20*	0.17	0.10	0.38*
	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.14)	(0.11)
Democrat	0.02	-0.37	-0.29	0.29
	(0.22)	(0.24)	(0.30)	(0.29)
Republican	0.08	0.01	-0.14	0.32
	(0.23)	(0.25)	(0.30)	(0.29)
Intercept	1.55*	1.59*	1.95*	1.41*
	(0.27)	(0.33)	(0.36)	(0.39)
N	251	444	254	446
R^2	0.35	0.22	0.15	0.09
adj. R^2	0.34	0.21	0.13	0.08
Resid. sd	0.65	0.78	0.91	0.96

*Regression of Affirmative Action (columns 1 and 2) and Death Penalty (columns 3 and 4) support on anti-Black resentment (columns 1 and 3) and non-Black resentment (columns 2 and 4). Standard errors are in parentheses. * is $p < .05$*

we substitute non-Black target groups and we find that the estimated relationship between Black resentment and policy attitudes is also remarkably similar to the relationship between non-Black resentment and policy attitudes. This very strongly suggests that the relationship between racial resentment and policy attitudes is not driven by attitudes specific to Blacks, but rather represent a general psychological orientation.

We can also examine the underpinnings of modern racism by seeing how well racial resentment predicts attitudes toward Obama and Obama policy. Although the use of racial resentment as a predictor of policy attitudes has a long history, it has experienced a recent resurgence in light of Obama's historic presidency. Racial resentment has been shown to be strongly correlated with both general support for Obama and support for public policy associated with Obama. Indeed, Tesler and Sears (2010) compellingly demonstrated that racial attitudes predicted support for Obama over Hillary Clinton in the 2008 Democratic Primary. On the face of it, since Clinton and Obama had similar policy attitudes, this seems to be evidence that support was driven by racial attitudes. Of course, policy similarities

notwithstanding, differences in support for Obama and Clinton could also be driven by non-policy related attitudes that are not specific to Blacks, thus the need for an experimental test.

Using our TESS sample, we can look at a battery of ten questions about favorability toward Obama policies that were asked of the survey panel at an earlier time. Each is coded as a binary variable with 1 representing an unfavorable opinion. We performed exploratory factor analysis on these variables and extracted three factors, which roughly correspond to domestic policy, foreign policy, and a third factor consisting of education and environmental policies.¹⁴ We separately scale the variables from each factor into a simple mean.

At first glance, the relationship between Black resentment and attitudes toward Obama seems to support the argument that racial resentment scales are capturing attitudes specific to Blacks, since racial resentment is strongly associated with attitudes toward Obama policies and non-Black attitudes are more weakly associated. For example, we regress Obama foreign policy support on anti-Black racial attitudes, party identification, and ideology and find a coefficient estimate of $\beta = .15$ with $t = 5.98$ on racial resentment. The same model, but with non-Black resentment instead, yields $\beta = .04$ and $t = 1.27$.

However, these linear regressions are deceiving because they obscure the relationship noted above: that liberals seem to have particularly sympathetic attitudes toward Blacks. These sympathetic attitudes appear to spill-over into support for Obama policy. Although the causal direction of the relationship cannot be determined by this test, it appears that liberal attitudes toward Blacks—which are far more positive than are those of non-liberals—are affecting attitudes about Obama’s policies, as argued by Tesler (2012), and this induces a tight-linear relationship between Black resentment and Obama attitudes. However, no such relationship exists for liberal attitudes toward other groups. Conservatives, on the other

¹⁴The foreign policy factor consists of foreign policy generally, immigration, and terrorism. The domestic policy factor consists of health care, the economy, deficit, taxes, and energy.

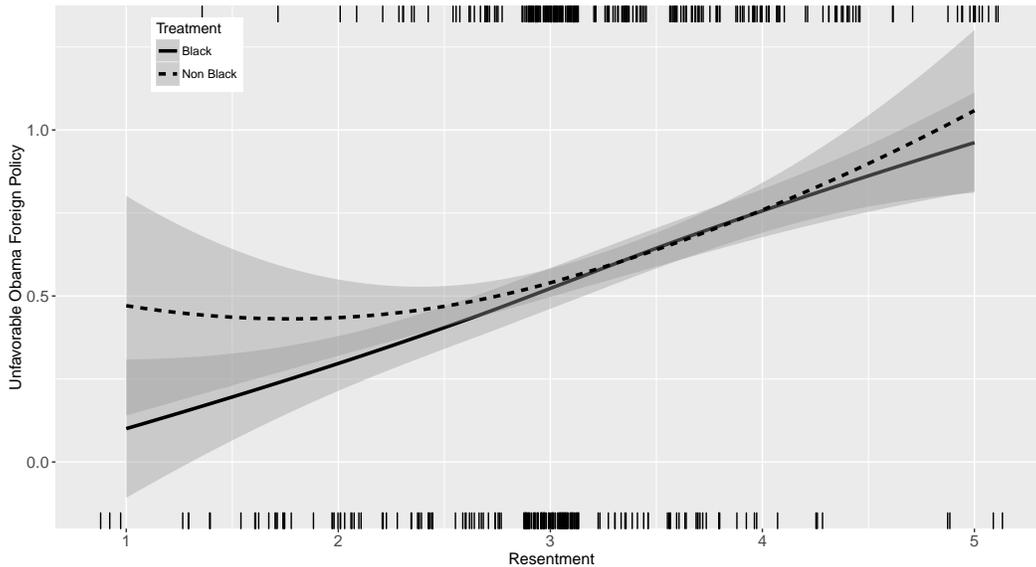
hand, show a consistent relationship between their resentment toward Black and non-Black target groups and attitudes toward Obama policies.

This difference in liberal and conservative consistency in racial attitudes and policy support can be seen in Figure 5 where we graph the relationship between resentment and Obama foreign policy attitudes for all respondents. The solid line represents a lowess curve of Black resentment on support for Obama foreign policy (with higher numbers meaning more unfavorable) and the dotted line represents a lowess curve of non-Black resentment. The distribution of Black resentment among self-identified liberals is plotted along the bottom margin and Black resentment among conservatives along the top margin. The difference in the distributions of resentment for conservatives and liberals is plainly evident, with conservatives clustered at the high end and liberals at the low end. Even when a lowess fit allows the line to freely conform to the data, there is an obvious linear relationship between Black resentment and racial attitudes. By contrast, the relationship between non-Black resentment and Obama attitudes is nonlinear. This difference in the fit between Obama attitudes and resentment is not driven by individuals with higher levels of resentment, but rather by those with low resentment scores. Indeed, individuals who express higher resentment, regardless of the target group in question, are highly consistent in their attitudes toward Obama policies. On the other hand, individuals with low racial resentment—political liberals—appear to be strongly influenced by their attitudes about Blacks in particular.¹⁵

Looking across Obama policy issues, and even at voting for Obama in 2012, we see the same pattern: for conservatives, the relationship between resentment and political attitudes is similar, regardless of the target group, but for liberals, the relationship between Black

¹⁵This figure also displays 95% confidence intervals on the lowess lines for Black and non-Black resentment. At low levels of resentment, the levels of Obama policy support is significantly different, as can be seen in the lack of overlap between the confidence intervals and lowess lines. When we divide the sample into liberals and conservatives and look at separate bivariate OLS regressions of Obama foreign policy support on Black resentment and non-Black resentment, we see that for conservatives the coefficients are quite similar: $\beta = .099$ and $.073$, respectively. By contrast, for liberals, the coefficient on Black resentment is much stronger than for other groups: $\beta = .132$ and $.068$, respectively.

Figure 5: Racial Resentment and Approval of Obama Foreign Policy



Approval of Obama foreign policy relative to resentment toward Black (solid line) and non-Black (dashed line) target groups, with 95% confidence intervals displayed. Racial resentment of liberals is displayed on the bottom axis in and conservatives on the top (both distributions are jittered for visual ease).

resentment and policy attitudes is nearly twice as large as the relationship between non-Black resentment and policy attitudes. Tesler and Sears (2010) argue that the election of Obama saw “two side of racialization,” with opposition against Obama driven by racial resentment and support for Obama driven by racial liberalism. Our findings suggests that modern racism scales better capture only one side of this racialization: rather than measuring racial resentment, modern racism scales appear to capture racial sympathy among liberals.

These results cast serious doubt on using correlations with policy attitudes to defend racial resentment as a measure of attitudes specific to Blacks. While a great deal of research concerning the validity of modern racism scales has drawn on policy correlations as evidence for the scales’ effectiveness, these results demonstrate that measures of association alone are insufficient to identify the mechanism behind modern racism questions, which we believe our experiment is uniquely designed to test. At least with current data, the argument that Black resentment, as measured by modern racism scales, drives policy attitudes is not generally

sustainable. Instead, these correlations appear to primarily capture racial liberalism rather than resentment, and conservatives responses appear to capture a general world view that affects attitudes toward Blacks and non-Blacks alike.

Discussion

In this paper, we have demonstrated that average resentment, as measured by modern racism scales, is generally similar across all target groups, and where it does vary, this variation seems mostly to be caused by liberals expressing sympathy for the unique plight of African Americans. For conservatives, modern racism scales seem to measure a more general orientation, such as a belief in a just world.

One of the central debates around the theory and measurement of modern racism is whether the scales can be properly said to measure racism in the form of anti-Black affect. Our results can speak to this debate. To address this question, it is useful to consider liberals and conservatives separately, because, our results suggest, liberals and conservatives are likely influenced by different belief systems when answering these questions.

Liberals show consistently lower levels of resentment toward Blacks than toward other groups. Given that the correlation between resentment and policies is only present when Blacks are the target group, this seems to indicate that liberals have special attitudes toward Blacks that shape their answers to these questions. The source of these attitudes are also unclear—they could result from a recognition of the historical injustices and ongoing discrimination faced by Blacks, or from an affective or ideological commitment to Black empowerment. Our data does not allow us to separate these causes.

On the other hand, given the consistency of conservatives' responses across target groups, the most obvious interpretation of our results is that modern racism scales do not capture anti-Black affect. Presumably, such affect would cause respondents to react differently to

questions that ask about Blacks than they do to questions that ask about other groups. There is, however, a more complex explanation for the role of anti-Black affect in conservative responses: that it is the presence of anti-Black affect, rather than its absence, that causes conservatives to answer similarly regardless of the target group. This interpretation recognizes the historical discrimination leveled at Blacks, and posits that conservatives choose to ignore this unique history because of a particular affect against Blacks.

Although we cannot directly test for this relationship, we suggest a more parsimonious model, that conservatives are motivated by a belief in a just world. This model is broadly consistent with psychological models of conservatism. Moreover, the overall higher levels of resentment among conservatives that we observe across all target groups is consistent with the idea that just world belief drives responses—conservatives are likely to agree with the statement that if somebody would only work harder they could get ahead, regardless of the group in question.

This belief can, of course, manifest in attitudes that could be interpreted as racism, specifically a denial of the historic injustices and ongoing discrimination to which Blacks have been subject. Indeed, one of the principal attitudes the modern racism scale is designed to measure is the belief that “Blacks no longer face discrimination as they once did” (Tarman and Sears, 2005; Henry and Sears, 2002). If this belief causes people to oppose policies aimed at righting historical injustices, this could arguably be called a racist belief system. From the perspective of promoting racial equality through policy, such as affirmative action, this represents a major hurdle for building support for such policies. Some conservative opponents may oppose the policy not because of an ideological principle, but rather because they disagree with a primary justification of the policy: that historical injustices faced by Blacks impede the contemporary social progress of Blacks.

We do note, however, that from a scientific perspective, labeling consistent responses to these scales as racist raises a thorny issue with using modern racism scales to measure

racism. The scales were designed to measure racism toward Blacks, and decades of scholarly literature have claimed that the responses given by conservatives represented racism *because* the scales were targeting Blacks specifically. However, we show that conservatives give consistent answers regardless of the target group included in the questions, suggesting that these attitudes are not unique to Blacks. If the non-specific treatment of Blacks can *also* be claimed to be measuring racism, then it is not clear if these scales are usefully distinguishing racist from non-racist attitudes. This suggest social scientists should seek new instruments to measure racial attitudes.

Conclusion

Modern racism scales and their motivating theory have been the subject of a tremendous amount of controversy. Although we have not directly engaged with the underlying theory of modern racism, our findings suggest that much of the evidence used to support theories of modern or symbolic racism may not effectively capture the attitudes they are said to represent, or even if these scales were once useful, they no longer capture attitudes specific to Blacks. These debates surrounding modern racism scales were mostly active over twenty years ago, and even though the use of the scales continues unabated in scholarly and popular accounts of American politics, it is likely that racial attitudes and norms of survey response have changed a great deal in the last twenty years. Survey measures that once captured racism may be inadequate for the present time. Indeed, as we stated earlier, the original impetus for the modern racism scales was that the nature of racial attitudes had changed, such that questions designed to measure an old-fashioned type of racism were no longer adequate. A similar shift could also have taken place, in which Blacks are not singled out, at least by conservatives, as targets of the same sort of unique racism to which they were subject over thirty years ago.

Our own reading of literature on intergroup attitudes leads us to believe that white attitudes toward Blacks in the United States most likely include the elements suggested by the founders of Modern Racism Theory. We also believe that white racial attitudes causally affect political behavior—the evidence on this point is overwhelming. However, our findings in this paper indicate that perhaps it is time to rethink how modern racism is measured on surveys and, perhaps, to reexamine the latent attitudes that motivate white racial prejudice. Indeed, as we demonstrated in reviewing the literature around this topic, modern racism scales are the dominant way that race is studied in political science. This demands that scholarly attention turn to testing the validity of these scales and finding a suitable alternative. We believe one potentially fruitful avenue is a refinement of just world belief scales to be more narrowly tailored around racial attitudes. It is possible that a more general measure of racial attitudes, rather than one specifically targeted toward Blacks, will prove useful as other low-status groups, such as Hispanics, become a larger share of the U.S. population.

As argued by Tesler and Sears (2010), racial attitudes occupy a “focal place in modern-day partisan politics (p 16).” To that end, it is crucial that researchers constantly and skeptically examine our instruments of measure for this important topic. In addition to better understanding the components of intergroup attitudes, a goal of this research has been to improve our central measures in these domains, a mission that we hope will remain ongoing.

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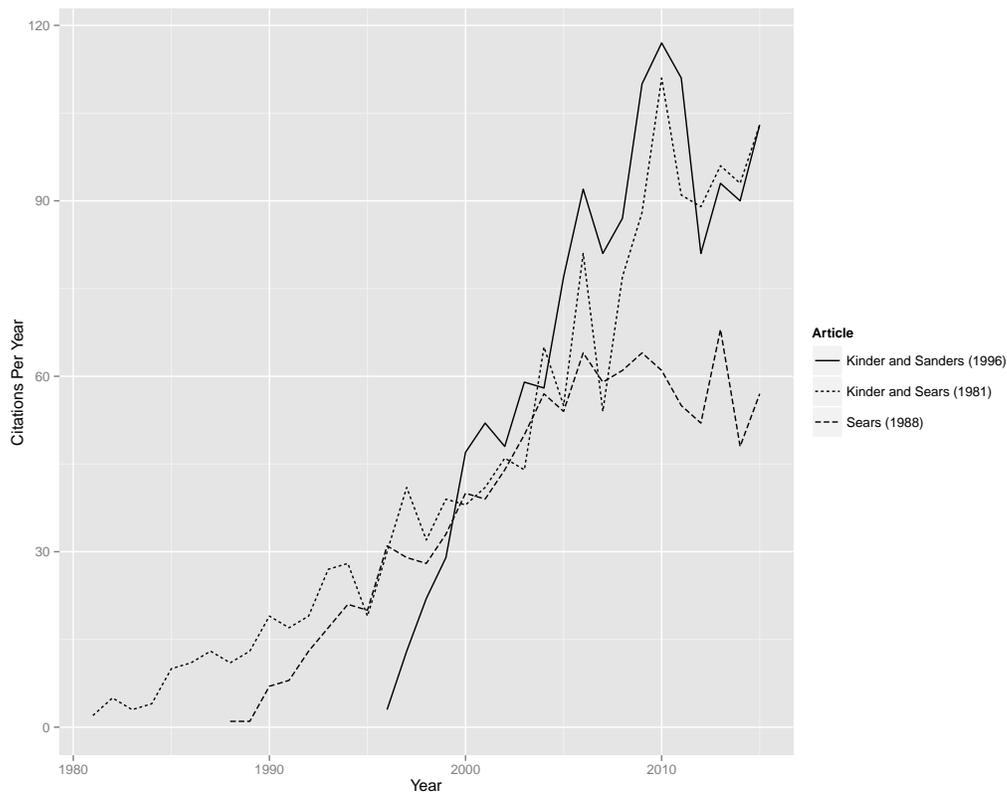
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Figure A.1: Citation Counts for Three Seminal Papers on Modern Racism



Citation counts taken from Google Scholar for three seminal papers on Modern Racism. Counts start on the year of publication for the article.

Appendix

Figure A.1 shows the citation counts for three pieces of scholarship on modern racism, which suggests that modern racism continues to be an influential theory in social science research.

In Figure A.2, we see that average Black and non-Black resentment are largely consistent across survey samples and survey platforms. Black resentment tends to be lower in the DLABSS samples, because of the large proportion of liberals in the sample.

Just World Belief Scale

The following questions constitute the Global Belief in a Just World scale (Lipkus, 1991). Response options are a six-point Likert scale from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.”

1. I feel that people get what they are entitled to have.
2. I feel that a person’s efforts are noticed and rewarded.

Table A.1: Summary of Experiment Trials

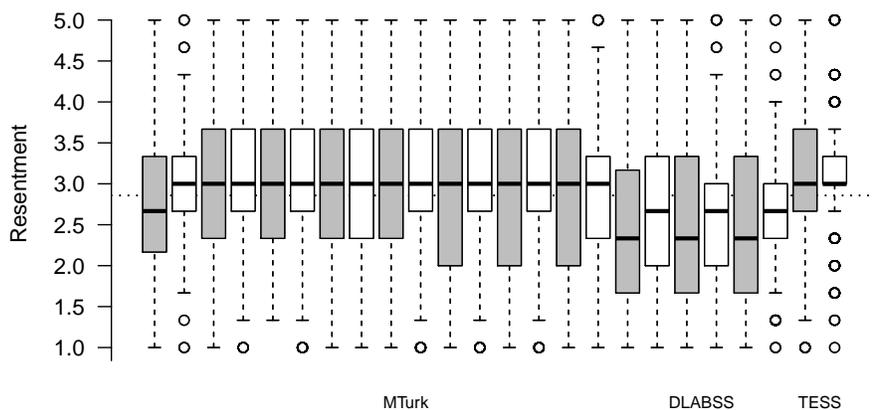
Trial	Platform	N	Groups	Scales	Question Wording	Number of Questions
1	mTurk	204	Black, White, Hispanic, Albanian, Angolan, Surinamese, Taiwanese, Jordanian	None	In US	3- and 4-question scales
2	mTurk	405	Black, White, Hispanic, Lithuanian, Bhutanese, Uruguayan, Mauritanian, Bahraini	Modern Sexism, foreign policy attitudes	In US	3- and 4-question scales
3	mTurk	834	Black, White, Hispanic, Lithuanian, Bhutanese, Uruguayan, Mauritanian, Bahraini	Modern Sexism, Obama approval, support for Obamacare, foreign policy attitudes	In US	3- and 4-question scales
4	mTurk	504	Black, White, Hispanic, Niuean, Ivoirian, Guyanese, Maltese	Modern Sexism, Obama approval, support for Obamacare, foreign policy attitudes	In US	3- and 4-question scales
5	mTurk	445	Black, White, Hispanic, Lithuanian, Bhutanese, Uruguayan, Mauritanian, Bahraini	Modern Sexism, Obama approval, support for Obamacare, foreign policy attitudes	In US	3- and 4-question scales
6	mTurk	508	Black, White, Hispanic, Albanian, Angolan, Surinamese, Taiwanese, Jordanian	System justification, ethnocentrism, Obama approval, support for Obamacare, Obama vote	In US	3- and 4-question scales
7	mTurk	553	Black, White, Hispanic, Albanian, Angolan, Surinamese, Taiwanese, Jordanian	Just World, ethnocentrism, Obama approval, support for Obamacare, Obama vote	In US	3- and 4-question scales
8	mTurk	1,035	Black, Mauritanian, Surinamese	Just World, racial policy attitudes, attitudes toward inequality	Original	3-question scale only
9	DLABSS	188	Black, White, Hispanic, Niuean, Ivoirian, Guyanese, Maltese	Modern Sexism, Obama approval, support for Obamacare, foreign policy attitudes	In US	3- and 4-question scales
10	DLABSS	534	Black, White, Hispanic, Niuean, Ivoirian, Guyanese, Maltese	System justification, ethnocentrism	In US	3- and 4-question scales
11	DLABSS	756	Black, Mauritanian, Surinamese	Just World	Original	3-question scale only
12	TESS	733	Black, Mauritanian, Surinamese	Just World, Obama approval, support for Obamacare, Obama vote, racial policy attitudes	Original	3-question scale only

Table A.2: Differences of Means in Racial Resentment by Question Wording

	In US	Original
Black Mean	2.80	2.85
Black SD	1.06	1.04
Other Mean	3.02	2.92
Other SD	0.80	0.68
N	4175	2524

Mean results for surveys asking about groups “in United States” or original question wording, which did not include this modifier. For each group, we display the mean and standard deviation from the question with a Black target group or other target groups, except for white and Hispanic, and the N.

Figure A.2: Racial Resentment with Black and Other Target Group by Platform



Distribution of Anti-Black Racial Resentment (dark bars) and all other groups collapsed (light bars) across different platforms. Dotted line is mean resentment toward Blacks across all surveys.

Table A.3: Tests of Differences of Means in Racial Resentment by Platform

Platform	All			Liberals			Conservatives			
	Difference	T-value	N	Difference	T-value	N	Difference	T-value	N	
1	MTurk	-0.13	-1.09	184	-0.15	-1.01	112	-0.14	-0.57	33
2	MTurk	-0.18	-1.97	375	-0.31	-2.64	211	0.22	1.13	70
3	MTurk	-0.14	-1.40	710	-0.26	-2.07	416	-0.13	-0.79	133
4	MTurk	-0.05	-0.54	464	-0.10	-0.78	257	0.22	1.42	96
5	MTurk	-0.29	-2.96	432	-0.36	-2.60	228	-0.24	-1.44	100
6	MTurk	-0.11	-1.25	475	-0.31	-2.94	252	0.20	1.30	102
7	MTurk	-0.28	-3.13	486	-0.43	-3.34	226	-0.01	-0.06	118
8	MTurk	-0.04	-0.64	1011	-0.10	-1.31	524	0.03	0.26	232
9	DLABSS	-0.01	-0.08	145	-0.03	-0.16	91	0.55	1.37	14
10	DLABSS	-0.31	-3.00	327	-0.25	-2.16	203	-0.12	-0.62	68
11	DLABSS	-0.14	-1.87	556	-0.22	-2.84	360	0.30	2.26	131
12	TESS	0.10	1.57	711	-0.23	-1.81	198	0.34	3.81	263

Mean results for all subjects, conservatives, and liberals by platform. For each group, we display the between subjects difference in means between Black and all non-Black groups other than whites, the test statistic from a T-test for difference in means from Blacks, and the N. N is only for subjects comparing Black to groups other than whites, so the N is different than the total N for a survey displayed in Table A.1.

3. I feel that people earn the rewards and the punishments they get.
4. I feel that people who meet with misfortune have brought in on themselves.
5. I feel that people get what they deserve.
6. I feel that rewards and punishments are fairly given.
7. I basically feel that the world is a fair place.

Alternative Measures of Political Conservatism

A potential objection to our analysis is that responses to modern racism scales, even when using other target groups, is driven by anti-Black animus because anti-Black animus causes political conservatism in the first place and conservatism drives other attitudes. This could be true, for example, if conservative political ideology is caused by attitudes toward Blacks and, in turn, these conservative political beliefs cause resentment toward other groups, a “Just World Belief,” or a general resentment of “free-loading.” This is an important objection because attitudes toward Blacks have been persuasively argued to be “symbolic attitudes” that are formed early in life and come to dominate other beliefs (Sears, 1993; Sears and Henry, 2003).

While not objecting to the argument that attitudes toward Blacks can spill-over into other domains, we check for the possibility that anti-Black animus is underlying responses to all our questions by measuring political conservatism using variables that are plausibly independent of racial attitudes. If, when political ideology is measured independently of racial attitudes, political conservatives still respond consistently across all groups, this gives us confidence

that political conservatism is correlated with a general tendency to endorse these statements, and that this tendency is driven by something other than anti-Black animus.

We construct alternative measures of conservatism using the “Modern Sexism Scale” created by Swim et al. (1995), which we asked on five of our surveys. This scale is believed to measure underlying sexist attitudes, reflected in the denial of sex discrimination and antagonism toward women’s demands. We coded respondents scoring higher than the median on Modern Sexism as conservative and lower than the median as liberal and replicated our analysis above.

In Table A.5 we display these results, which are very similar to those categorized by self-identified conservatism in Table 1, giving us more confidence that the tendency for political conservatives to endorse these statements, regardless of the target group, is not driven by anti-Black affect.

As an additional robustness check, we constructed another measure of political conservatism, this one based on a simple two-question battery about military spending and U.S. foreign policy. We asked these questions on five of our surveys and we again coded respondents scoring higher than the median as conservative and lower than the median as liberal and replicated our analysis above. Table A.6 displays the results and the pattern is once again broadly consistent, no matter how conservatism is defined.

These results increase our confidence that political conservatism is correlated with a general tendency to endorse the statements on the Modern Racism Scale and that this tendency does not spring from anti-Black animus. We turn next to a brief discussion of the roots of attitudes underlying responses to the Modern Racism Scale.

Table A.6: Tests of Differences of Means in Racial Resentment by Foreign Policy Attitudes

	All			Conservatives			Liberals				
	Mean	SD	p	Mean	SD	Diff	Mean	SD	Diff	p	N
Black	2.86	1.04		3.18	1.04		2.73	1.02			550.00
White	3.16	0.77	0.00	3.26	0.79	-0.08	3.12	0.76	-0.39	0.00	747.00
Other	3.05	0.78	0.00	3.26	0.81	-0.09	2.97	0.75	-0.23	0.00	931.00

Mean results for all subjects, conservative foreign policy, and liberal foreign policy respondents. For each group, we display the mean, standard deviation, difference in means from Black, the p-value associated with a T-test for difference in means from Blacks, and the N. Standard errors are clustered by survey.