

# Prejudice, Bigotry, and Support for Compensatory Interventions to Address Black–White Inequalities: Evidence from the General Social Survey, 2006 to 2020

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**Abstract:** The General Social Survey (GSS) shows that many self-identified white adults continue to hold racial attitudes that can be regarded, collectively, as a persistent social problem. Similar to findings from the analysis of electoral surveys, the GSS also shows that these racial attitudes have more strongly predicted political behavior since 2012. However, and in contrast to group-identity interpretations of these patterns, the increase in predictive power since 2012 is attributable to a positive development: above and beyond the effects of cohort replacement, support for compensatory interventions to address black–white inequalities has increased substantially, whereas prejudice and bigotry have decreased slightly. Because these changes have been larger on the political left than on the political right, the attitudes have gained in overall predictive power.

**Keywords:** General Social Survey; racial attitudes; prejudice; racial resentment

**Citation:** Morgan, Stephen L. 2021. "Prejudice, Bigotry, and Support for Compensatory Interventions to Address Black–White Inequalities: Evidence from the General Social Survey, 2006 to 2020." *Sociological Science* 9: 1–26.


**Received:** November 15, 2021

**Accepted:** December 12, 2021

**Published:** January 10, 2022

**Editor(s):** Jesper Sørensen, Peter Bearman

**DOI:** 10.15195/v9.a1

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RESEARCHERS who specialize in the analysis of social problems continue to monitor the racial attitudes of white adults. Two characterizations have emerged for the most recent trends. For the first, prejudice and bigotry have declined gradually because birth cohorts raised before the civil rights movement continue to be replaced by birth cohorts of individuals who are more highly educated and more accepting of multiracial and multiethnic diversity. For the second, increasing economic insecurity in an era of globalized trade, alongside divisive partisan politics, has accentuated collective resentment of the socioeconomic progress of nonwhite racial groups.

In this article, I consider how these narratives align with findings from sociology's collective project to measure social change—the General Social Survey (GSS).<sup>1</sup> I also argue for the likely importance of a third source of change since 2012: a resurgence in the movement for racial justice, which has raised awareness among white adults of the many remaining barriers to racial equity. This movement is resonant with a simultaneous increase in support for progressive politics on the left, including greater interest in government intervention to address inequalities of all types.

In the sections below, I first offer relevant background from the literature that is needed to understand the approach that I take. Following an introduction to the data and measures, I then show that prejudice and bigotry remain more prevalent than presumed in lay pronouncements of a postracial United States. Relatedly, support among white respondents remains low for compensatory interventions to

address black–white inequalities in social standing. Consistent with journalistic portrayals since 2014, these measures also predict political outcomes, such as party identification and vote choice in presidential elections, and these relationships have strengthened meaningfully since 2012.

I then step back to consider closely the underlying attitudinal trends that generate current levels and changes in associations. I use a demographic model of change to show that the post-2012 period is distinctive because much of the change observed cannot be attributed to the compositional dynamics generated by cohort replacement. I then argue that the post-2012 period is best characterized by a positive period effect that cumulated progressively between 2014 and 2020. Beyond what would be expected from cohort replacement, white adults became more likely to indicate that they see antiblack discrimination and systemic disadvantage as problems that need to be addressed. Prejudice and bigotry have also declined in this period, although to a smaller degree.

These positive changes should not, however, be overinterpreted, and the article concludes with a discussion emphasizing the following points. Levels of prejudice and bigotry remain too high, and many more white adults oppose government interventions to address black–white inequalities than seems reasonable based on general beliefs about the role of government in promoting equality of opportunity. In addition, attitudes are but one set of measures. It is entirely possible, for example, that an increase in behavioral extremism among clearly prejudiced white adults can occur at the same time that attitudes, on the average, are shifting in a positive direction.

## Conceptual Background

In this section, I discuss enough of the past literature on racial attitudes to orient readers unfamiliar with the prior research. As I present the empirical results, I discuss the most recent literature on how racial attitudes have evolved alongside the increases in multiracial diversity and political polarization of the twenty-first century.

### *Prejudice and Bigotry*

After Du Bois' classic study of the role that race prejudice played in maintaining black–white inequalities in Philadelphia (Du Bois [1899] 1996; see also Bobo 2000), Allport synthesized subsequent studies of prejudice and bigotry in his 1954 masterpiece, *On the Nature of Prejudice*. To introduce his approach, Allport begins with what he claims is the briefest of all useful definitions of prejudice (“thinking ill of others without sufficient warrant”) and then develops the more complete definition of “antipathy based upon a faulty and inflexible generalization” that is “felt or expressed” and that “may be directed toward a group as a whole, or toward an individual” (Pp. 6–9).

In the case of out-groups demarcated by racial and ethnic boundaries, Allport argues that prejudice has multiple sources that arise from interrelated causes, including interest-based responses to economic competition. Prejudice is nearly

always supported by stereotypes that rationalize negative affect, and it can lead to an escalating scale of resulting behavior—from demeaning speech, to acts of discrimination, and finally to violence. The rationalizations of prejudice can be simple and direct, such as ignorant beliefs about human biology, but they can also be less obvious. Allport (1954:515) argues, for example, that “patriotism may be a mask for bigotry” and, on balance, “the superpatriotic nationalist” is “more often than not a thoroughgoing bigot.”

In this article, I will rely on Allport’s classic perspective for the portions in which prejudice and bigotry are the focus of analysis. Although others may argue that Allport’s perspective is deficient in one respect or another (see below), his perspective aligns well with many of the measures that are still in widespread use by analysts of racial attitudes.<sup>2</sup> Antiblack prejudice is commonly measured by stereotype items that ask about biological differences (most commonly differences in intelligence or capacity for work hard), policy preferences for racial separation in public affairs (such as support for segregated schooling and neighborhoods), and personal preferences for race-based social distance (such as objections to a close relative marrying across racial lines).

### *Beyond Prejudice and Bigotry*

In the seven decades since Allport’s synthesis, scholars have debated how best to analyze racist attitudes using survey techniques. The debates consider three challenges: (1) the specific concepts, beyond prejudice and bigotry, that should be measured, (2) the questions that are most appropriate to place on survey instruments, and (3) the interpretations of the answers that are elicited from survey respondents, in light of disagreement over the concepts meant to be measured. The spiral of contestation results as much from the evolving substantive complexity of intergroup relations and our social conventions for discussing them as it does the sort of pure fractal contestation that Abbot (2001) argues is a common feature of scholarly debates.

Bobo et al. (2012) provide a thorough review of these debates as of 2012 with reference to the GSS, including for most of the measures that I will analyze below.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, and at the risk of some oversimplification, it is Bobo and his colleagues’ perspective that provides the most coherent approach to the analysis of racial attitudes. For them, as well as other sociologists who work within a multidimensional framework of interpretation, no single underlying concept or survey measure can be fashioned to capture racism. All measures differ in subtle ways, and an analyst can never be certain that respondents are interpreting survey questions as the survey designers intended. Indeed, in multiple articles and chapters, Bobo has advocated this position with reference to Allport’s warning not to embrace “a sovereign explanation for all human prejudice” when an “eclectic” approach can offer much more insight because of the variation in forms of racism and its intensity (see Allport 1954:207–8).

Within this framework of interpretation, prejudice and bigotry of the sort delineated by Allport is now often labeled “old-fashioned racism” or “Jim Crow racism.” A consensus appears to exist that measures of prejudice and bigotry of this type

can only offer an incomplete picture of racism in the contemporary United States. But exactly how that picture should be filled in has been contested.

In part as a reaction to dissensus within political science over new measures of “symbolic racism,” Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith (1997; see also Bobo and Smith 1998) proposed that analysts consider the rise of “laissez-faire racism.” Two points are key. First, opposition among white adults to compensatory interventions to address existing black–white inequalities is the essence of a new racism. Such opposition is a denial of the need to provide support to those who have been born into an unjust world and for whom many opportunities are blocked. Such views can be racist because, it is argued, they can only flourish strongly among white adults who regard other racial groups as inferior and thus less worthy of concern or assistance.

Second, a strain of laissez-faire racism can be found among white adults who do not object to compensatory interventions, but who nonetheless object to the pace of such interventions and whether they have been extended because of too much pressure. This collective resentment of black progress, as opposed to the denial of racial sympathy, can exist among white adults who profess a genuine desire to eliminate racial inequalities and who offer little or no evidence of prejudice or bigotry. Instead, these individuals appear motivated to preserve their own relative status, either personally or collectively, because they perceive group threat.<sup>4</sup>

Measurement of these new forms of racism remains controversial. The debate is most clear for the prior measures of symbolic racism developed by political scientists. I will discuss these distinctions within the presentation of the results, in direct relation to the measures that I analyze below. For now, it is sufficient to conclude that the sociological approach summarized above is complete enough to motivate the analysis in this article, much as it was for Bobo et al. (2012). The key is to analyze, along with traditional measures of prejudice and bigotry, what I will label support for compensatory interventions to address black–white inequalities.

## Data and Methods

I analyze the cross-sectional samples of the GSS from 2006 to 2018, as well as the 2020 follow-up of the 2016 and 2018 GSS respondents (see Smith et al. 2019; Davern et al. 2021). I provide additional details of weighting procedures in the online supplement, including an attrition adjustment weight for the 2020 follow-up observations (based on the strategy explained in Morgan and Lee [2020]). For this article, I select 2006 as the first year of analysis because substantial design changes to the GSS were all in place by then: a method of subsampling for nonresponse follow-up and a fully implemented Spanish-language questionnaire. In addition, from 2006 through 2018, the GSS field period began in the spring.<sup>5</sup> As I show below, the 2006-to-2012 interval is a period of comparable stability, and it is thus a fitting baseline against which to study results from 2014 to 2020.<sup>6</sup>

### *Race-Ethnic Groups*

I consider four mutually exclusive subpopulations of adults, based on the GSS measures of multiracial and multiethnic self-identification:

1. respondents who identify as white, non-Hispanic, and not multiracial;
2. respondents who identify as black, non-Hispanic, and not multiracial;
3. respondents who identify as Hispanic and nonblack; and
4. respondents who identify as Asian, non-Hispanic, and not multiracial.

I will refer to these four groups with labels such as “white adults,” “white people,” “black adults,” and “black people” (rather than “whites,” “blacks,” “African Americans,” etc.) in order to align with what appear to be coalescing as this decade’s accepted semantics for group referents. I will also use the descriptors of Hispanic and Asian as well, and I recognize the large amount of heterogeneity that is present within these two groups.

Finally, and crucially, these four groups represent only 94 percent of the GSS cross-sectional samples from 2006 through 2018.<sup>7</sup> I do not mean to imply, for example, that non-Hispanic multiracial respondents are not equally worthy of study. Instead, for analytic purposes, my goal is to eliminate objections to the findings below that they could be produced by hidden increases in the prevalence of multiracial and multiethnic identities. Thus, my analysis will be based only on the groups defined above, and especially the first group. Additional, and very worthwhile, work will be needed to determine how much additional change is present, for example, for an expanded “white” category that changes over time because the share of white multiracial respondents is steadily increasing.

## *Outcomes*

Table S1 in the online supplement presents the questionnaire wordings of the key racial attitude items that are present on all GSS questionnaires from 2006 through 2020, and I analyze these items on their own and in scales. I also model two political outcomes: a standard seven-category scale for party identification, from strong Democrat through strong Republican, and a self-reported vote for the Republican presidential candidate in the most recent general election.

## *Other Measures*

During the analysis, I introduce models of change that are structured by both birth cohort and observation year in order to examine how attitude change at the population level results from movement in each dimension of time. For adjustment through a demographic model, I use a two-category gender measure, a five-category educational attainment measure, and an 11-category measure of social class (see Morgan [2017] for details). The GSS offers many other measures of individuals that could be used to adjust results with a demographic model, but the key variation in the analysis is in the outcome measures themselves. Thus, a parsimonious set of race, class, and gender measures, when supplemented by an index of birth cohort, is sufficient to bring out the core pattern of results.

## Model Estimation

I use least squares methods for model estimation. Logit and related models yield nearly identical results, but least squares coefficients, as well as functions of them, are more easily interpreted. All estimated standard errors take account of the survey design.

## Results

Table 1 presents levels of prejudice and bigotry for GSS respondents for the pooled 2014, 2016, and 2018 cross-sectional samples, separately by the groups and subgroups identified in the column headings. These three years of observations are weighted equally to cumulate cases for comparatively small race-ethnic groups, and the results in the table can be interpreted in analogous fashion to a smoothed data point located at the middle year of 2016.

The first four rows present results for the traditional measure of support for social distance and racial separation: relative opposition to interracial marriage. For white-only, non-Hispanic respondents (hereafter, white respondents), opposition to a close relative marrying someone of another race is higher than general opposition to marriage within race. The level of opposition is highest for “a close relative marrying a black person.” Although in-group preferences are present for all groups, the levels of opposition to out-group marriage are higher among white respondents. Opposition is consistently above 10 percent and rises to as much as 23.9 percent among white respondents who identify as Republicans.

For racist stereotypes, the next two rows of Table 1 show that many white respondents believe that black people are less intelligent and lazier than are white people (21.4 and 30.9 percent, respectively). For white Republicans, the percentages are higher still at 25.7 and 40.6 percent.

The final two rows of Table 1, which present results for the attribution of causes of black–white inequalities in housing, jobs, and income, show that 6.6 percent of white respondents believe that they are attributable to inborn ability to learn. A much larger 39.6 percent believe that the inequalities are attributable to a relative lack of motivation. For white Republicans, these attributions are more prevalent, at 7.6 and 50.2 percent, respectively.

One could argue that the measures in the final four rows of Table 1 reveal subtleties about how the words intelligence, hardworking, lazy, and inborn ability are interpreted by survey respondents. But the question wordings ask for attributions in a comparative context (see Table S1 in the online supplement for the “mainly” wording), and the results should be interpreted in this context. Respondents, for example, can believe that black people have less inborn ability to learn while also believing that a lack of motivation is a more important source of black–white inequalities.<sup>8</sup>

Regardless of how best to interpret the differences across the cells of Table 1, it cannot be the case that prejudice and bigotry toward black people is no longer a substantial social problem. On the contrary, many white adults offer answers on surveys that align with characterizations of Jim Crow racism, even in an era when



**Table 1:** Levels of prejudice and bigotry for different race-ethnic groups of GSS respondents, 2014-to-2018 data pooled

	White-only, non-Hispanic				Additional groups for comparison with the "All" column for white-only, non-Hispanic		
	All	Male	No bachelor's degree	Identifies as Republican	Black-only, non-Hispanic	Hispanic, nonblack	Asian-only, non-Hispanic
<b>Preference for racial separation</b>							
Would oppose a close relative marrying a black person (MARBLK)	16.5 (0.8)	19.7 (1.2)	18.8 (1.0)	23.9 (1.6)	2.6 (0.7)	6.6 (1.0)	13.8 (3.3)
Would oppose a close relative marrying a Hispanic or Latino person (MARHISP)	11.1 (0.8)	12.8 (1.1)	13.3 (1.0)	15.5 (1.5)	6.1 (1.0)	2.2 (0.7)	7.3 (2.4)
Would oppose a close relative marrying an Asian American person (MARASIAN)	10.6 (0.7)	12.5 (1.0)	12.4 (7.0)	15.4 (1.5)	7.8 (1.1)	4.4 (0.8)	1.1 (1.1)
Would oppose a close relative marrying a white person (MARWHT)	2.6 (0.4)	3.0 (0.6)	3.2 (0.4)	3.3 (0.6)	7.3 (1.0)	2.3 (0.8)	5.7 (2.1)
<b>Racist stereotypes</b>							
Believe whites are more intelligent than blacks (INTLWHTS, INTLBLKS)	21.4 (0.9)	21.9 (1.3)	24.7 (1.1)	25.7 (1.6)	20.1 (1.9)	29.7 (2.2)	43.6 (5.1)
Believe blacks are more lazy than whites (WORKWHTS, WORKBLKS)	30.9 (1.1)	32.1 (1.5)	34.5 (1.3)	40.6 (1.9)	27.6 (2.3)	47.4 (2.3)	54.2 (5.5)
<b>Attribution of causes of black-white inequalities</b>							
"Because most blacks have less in-born ability to learn" (RACDIF2)	6.6 (0.5)	6.4 (0.7)	8.7 (0.7)	7.6 (0.9)	13.4 (1.4)	10.4 (1.6)	14.3 (3.5)
"Because most blacks just don't have the motivation or will power to pull themselves up out of poverty" (RACDIF4)	39.6 (1.2)	38.3 (1.5)	46.5 (1.4)	52.3 (1.9)	42.8 (2.4)	50.4 (2.2)	43.5 (5.6)

*Notes:* Standard errors in parentheses are estimated taking account of the survey design. Data are weighted to adjust for differential nonresponse by gender as well as to represent each biennial GSS sample equally. Numbers of respondents vary by question due to patterns of missingness (usually "don't know"). The ranges are 3,007 to 3,103 for whites, 692 to 703 for blacks, 690 to 704 for Hispanics, and 127 to 130 for Asians.

it is far less acceptable to publicly denigrate black and Hispanic residents of the United States.<sup>9</sup> Most public opinion researchers believe that responses to questions on prejudice and bigotry are biased downward by social desirability concerns in face-to-face interviews. Accordingly, in the absence of such bias, as would be the case in private conversations among like-minded individuals, higher levels of overt prejudice and bigotry would be expressed. These levels could be higher still if private thoughts, unconstrained by any social conventions at all, could be tapped reliably.

Table 2 presents corresponding results on levels of opposition to compensatory interventions to address black–white inequalities. Two thirds of white respondents believe that no special favors should be given to black people to help them overcome prejudice. One half do not feel that the government has a special obligation to raise the living standards of black people because of past discrimination. For the workplace, 84.1 percent of white respondents oppose the preferential hiring of black adults, while 61.6 percent believe that some white adults are passed over for hiring and promotion by black adults who are less qualified. Opposition to all four types of compensatory support is highest for white respondents without bachelor's degrees and for those who identify as Republicans.

The patterns in Table 2 can be interpreted from different scholarly perspectives. At one end of the spectrum, these questions are direct measures of a new form of laissez-faire racism, for which it is acceptable to signal disapproval and denigration of black people by opposing compensatory policies. This disapproval and opposition can be expressed either as a false denial of remaining blocked opportunities or as a lack of sympathy for how difficult it is to unblock them in the absence of compensatory assistance. At the other end of the spectrum, all responses are indications of principled policy positions against government interventionism and have only a tangential relationship to racial animus. I favor an intermediate position. Some meaningful heterogeneity is present in response to these questions, but nothing in Table 2 contradicts what is already suggested by Table 1. The share of white respondents who have clearly racist attitudes may not be as high as the 60 percent or more that is implied by a rigid laissez-faire racism interpretation of Table 2, but the number is likely much higher than the lowest numbers in Table 1.

### *Increasing Associations between Racial Resentment and Political Behavior*

Political scientists have devoted considerable attention to the effects of racial attitudes on the political behavior of white voters. Most recently, many political scientists have shown that the associations between measures of “racial resentment” and vote choices have increased in recent years, usually based on the analysis of electoral surveys such as the American National Election Studies (ANES). In this section, I present a parallel analysis of these associations, using the GSS data, to show that a general population survey yields a similar pattern. I will then discuss alternative interpretations, from the ones favored in the recent political science literature to plausible alternatives.



**Table 2:** Levels of opposition to compensatory support for different race-ethnic groups of GSS respondents, 2014-to-2018 data pooled

	White-only, non-Hispanic				Additional groups for comparison with the "All" column for white-only, non-Hispanic		
	All	Male	No bachelor's degree	Identifies as Republican	Black-only, non-Hispanic	Hispanic, nonblack	Asian-only, non-Hispanic
<b>General support</b>							
Prefer no special favors be given to black people to help overcome prejudice (WRKWAYUP)	66.3 (1.1)	66.0 (1.6)	73.9 (1.3)	79.3 (1.7)	46.2 (2.5)	69.3 (2.0)	60.3 (4.9)
Disagree that the government has a special obligation to raise the living standards of blacks because of past discrimination and agree that no special treatment should be given (HELPBLK)	52.8 (1.1)	53.0 (1.5)	55.2 (1.3)	73.1 (1.7)	13.9 (1.4)	38.4 (2.1)	33.4 (4.2)
<b>Affirmative action in employment</b>							
Oppose preferential hiring and promotion of blacks (AFFRMACT)	84.1 (0.8)	84.3 (1.1)	86.2 (1.0)	92.9 (1.0)	59.0 (2.5)	73.1 (2.1)	69.0 (4.6)
Believe it is likely white people are passed over for jobs and promotions in favor of less qualified black people (DISCAFF)	61.6	58.6	66.0	67.5	44.2	58.6	42.2

*Notes:* See Table 1. Numbers of respondents vary by question, due to patterns of missingness (usually "don't know"). The ranges are 3,007 to 3,103 for whites, 692 to 703 for blacks, 690 to 704 for Hispanics, and 127 to 130 for Asians.

The GSS does not include all four of the exact ANES measures used by political scientists to construct a scale of racial resentment.<sup>10</sup> The four agree-disagree items on the ANES are as follows:

1. Irish, Italians, Jews and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors.
2. Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for blacks to work their way out of the lower class.
3. Over the past few years, blacks have gotten less than they deserve.
4. 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.

Of these four items, only the first is present on the GSS as WRKWAYUP (already analyzed above in the first row of Table 2). Among the many symbolic racism items that entered the literature in the 1980s, WRKWAYUP was judged the most promising for the GSS because it primed group comparisons, especially among white respondents in the 1990s who could have observed Irish and Italian immigrants overcoming prejudice and working their way up in prior decades. Thus, WRKWAYUP was added to the GSS in 1994 because it could reveal a core feature of new ideas about symbolic racism—resentment that black adults had not worked hard enough to get ahead and were instead relying too much on government assistance—while also aligning with sociologists' longstanding interest in group competition perspectives on racial prejudice.

The other three racial resentment items above are not included on the GSS, but effective scales of racial resentment have been constructed for the GSS using similar items.<sup>11</sup> In addition to WRKWAYUP, Kinder and Kam (2009) and Tesler and Sears (2010), for example, use a scale with two additional GSS measures (see Table S1 in the online supplement): RACDIF1 (for denial of discrimination) and RACDIF4 (for the belief that a lack of motivation and willpower among black people explains disproportionate rates of poverty). To these four variables, Tesler (2016) adds the racial stereotypes on hard work and laziness (WORKWHTS, WORKBLKS). The claim is that these GSS versions of the racial resentment scale have the key features of the ANES scale composed of the four items listed above. In this section, I follow the lead of these scholars to examine the associations of racial resentment with political outcomes in the GSS.

Table 3 presents two coefficients each from 12 separate least squares models estimated for white respondents in the pooled 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016, and 2018 samples. The two outcome variables are a standard seven-point scale for self-reported party identification and an indicator variable for whether the respondent voted for the Republican presidential candidate in the most recent general election (excluding from the sample for these models all respondents who did not vote). Six separate models (by row) are estimated for each outcome. The regression specification has this general form:

$$y_i = \hat{\alpha} + \hat{\beta}_1 attitude_i + \hat{\beta}_2 (attitude_i \times period_i) + \hat{\beta}_3 period_i + \hat{\beta}_4 x_i + \epsilon_i \quad (1)$$

**Table 3:** Results from 12 least squares models of change in the net predictive power of measures of old-fashioned racism and racial resentment for white-only, non-Hispanic respondents

Predictor (in separate models)	Outcome: Party identification scale (1 for strong Democrat to 7 for strong Republican)		Outcome: Voted for Republican presidential candidate (1 = yes, 0 = no)	
	First period regression coefficient (2010–2014)	Difference for second period (2016–2018)	First period regression coefficient (2010–2014)	Difference for second period (2016–2018)
Old-fashioned racism scale (Five categories, MARWHT and MARBLK)	0.244 (0.042)	0.010 (0.060)	0.083 (0.009)	–0.021 (0.023)
Racial resentment scale (standardized)	0.601 (0.047)	0.186 (0.063)	0.198 (0.011)	0.050 (0.019)
<b>Items in racial resentment scale</b>				
Discrimination responsible for black–white differences (RACDIF1)	–0.918 (0.097)	–0.436 (0.147)	–0.297 (0.030)	–0.154 (0.053)
Lack of motivation among blacks responsible (RACDIF4)	0.722 (0.095)	0.266 (0.136)	0.245 (0.028)	0.132 (0.049)
No special favors for blacks (WRKWAYUP reversed)	0.460 (0.035)	0.114 (0.050)	0.151 (0.010)	0.019 (0.017)
Blacks less hard working and more lazy than whites (WORKBLKS, WORKWHTS)	0.121 (0.038)	0.104 (0.059)	0.052 (0.011)	0.034 (0.022)

Notes: See Table 1. All models include an indicator variable for self-identified gender as well as four indicator variables for the five categories of educational attainment (GSS variable DEGREE).

where the focal attitude predictor is interacted with a period indicator and where  $\hat{\beta}_4 x_i$  is a vector of adjustment variables multiplied by a conformable vector of regression coefficients.

For the models in Table 3, the period indicator references 2016 and 2018, in contrast to a reference category of 2010 through 2014. The adjustment variables are indicators for self-identified gender and level of educational attainment. In Table 3, I present the coefficient estimates only for  $\hat{\beta}_1$  and  $\hat{\beta}_2$  from the 12 underlying models.

For the first row, I use the GSS coding of old-fashioned racism proposed by Tesler (2016), which is simply a contrast coding of two of the interracial marriage items from Table 1 above (see the online supplement for details). The first and third columns present values for  $\hat{\beta}_1$  that show that old-fashioned racism is associated with both party identification and vote choice during the reference period of 2010 through 2014. Each increase in Tesler's five-point scale is associated with an increase of 0.244 points on the seven-point party identification scale toward the Republican pole and with an increase of 0.082 in the probability of voting most recently for the Republican presidential candidate. The second and fourth columns present values for  $\hat{\beta}_2$  as 0.010 and –0.021, respectively. These values suggest that these

associations did not change appreciably after 2014. The coefficients indicate only a very slight strengthening and weakening of the net cross-sectional relationships in the later time period, each of which could be the result of sampling error alone.

The second row, in contrast, shows a different pattern for Tesler's racial resentment scale. For the reference period of 2010 to 2014, each standard deviation increase in racial resentment is associated with an increase of 0.601 on the party identification scale toward the Republican pole and with an increase of 0.198 on the probability of voting for the Republican presidential candidate. The second and fourth columns then show that these relationships strengthened considerably after 2014, with estimated coefficients for the cross-product interaction terms equal to 0.198 and 0.050, respectively. The first coefficient is well beyond what one could expect from sampling error alone, and the second is less so (but still larger than conventional cutoffs). The final four rows of Table 3 then demonstrate that the component items of the racial resentment scale align with the expected increases in associations for the scale as a whole, suggesting that no one component of the standardized composite scale is driving the overall increase in the associations with racial resentment.

Although similar patterns have been shown with ANES data and other election surveys (see citations below), the GSS is not an election survey. Two important features should be noted before proceeding. First, the GSS samples the full adult population, not just citizens who have the right to vote. As a result, the party identification variable applies to anyone who chooses to express a party identification, including those who are not eligible to vote (but may expect to become eligible to vote in the future). Second, the GSS is conducted every two years, with most data collection between May and August (i.e., not every four years as with the ANES, and not in close proximity to election day). The spring-summer fielding period results in retrospective reports of vote choice that do not correspond to the election held in that year. For the 2012 and 2016 GSS data, for example, the reported votes are for the 2008 and 2012 elections, respectively. Because of these timing differences, I offer additional results in the online supplement that vary the years in the analysis (2006 through 2018 in Table S2, 2010 through 2020 in Table S3, and 2014 and 2018 only in Table S4). These extended results suggest that a general trend is at play rather than a specific and narrow response to an election cycle, such as the 2016 presidential election.

Overall, the results in Table 3, along with those in the online supplement, are broadly consistent with work in political science that shows an increase in the predictive power of racial resentment in models of political behavior for white voters. How should we interpret the pattern of an increasing association in the GSS and in other data sources?

Several possible interpretations have been proposed, and the most common is associated with the work of Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck (2018).<sup>12</sup> They argue that the key factor is the increased salience of group identity for political behavior, especially the activation of racial identity during the 2016 primary and general election campaigns. Although old-fashioned racism continued to predict political predispositions as expected, Donald Trump succeeded in convincing many white

voters, especially those without college degrees, to adopt a racialized understanding of their own anxieties, whether cultural or economic.

A standard contrarian interpretation from the literature on racial resentment would be based on the claim that the racial resentment scale is a measure of general attitudes toward government intervention and thus ideological conservatism of the small-government form.<sup>13</sup> Although there may be some value in this type of argument for some respondents in some time periods, the recent literature in political science appears to give no attention to this interpretation for the increasing predictive power of racial resentment. Indeed, the same scholars who favor group-identity explanations have shown that the inclusion of direct measures of conservatism and government involvement in multiple regression models (e.g., Sides et al. 2018: Tables A8.1 and A8.2) does not account for the increase in the associations. Accordingly, no one seems to claim that the increasing predictive power of racial resentment since 2012 reflects an underlying increase in pure ideological distance between partisan voters.

A third alternative interpretation is also available, and it requires a discussion of the original measurement motivation of the work in political science. When presenting their scale of racial resentment, Kinder and Sanders (1996:106) explained that “the questions distinguish between those whites who are generally sympathetic towards blacks and those who are generally unsympathetic.” The number of white adults approaching the unsympathetic pole, which Kinder and Dale-Riddle (2012:175) later described as having a “collection of complaints,” has always been larger than the number of white adults approaching the opposite pole, using the standard scaling methods in the political science literature. As such, it was (and remains) appropriate to label the scale racial resentment rather than racial sympathy.<sup>14</sup>

The expectation at the time the resentment label was chosen was that variation along the scale would be related to, but nonetheless distinct from, scales of prejudice. And, at the time, it was unclear whether a group threat perspective was essential to understanding the variation, as sociologists such as Bobo were arguing in other work. In theory, one could have a middling value on the racial resentment scale and not feel any group threat, while also being very different from those at the racial sympathy pole, who would be regarded today as progressive antiracists.

With this understanding of the scale, a complementary interpretation is available, which is suggested by a simple pole-switch in semantics: racial sympathy now has a stronger relationship with political behavior. This contrarian interpretation might be a better interpretation if it is the case that the number of white adults at the racial sympathy pole of the scale has increased at the same time that the association of the scale with political behavior has also increased. A plausible mechanism here could then be that the movement for racial justice has generated more racial sympathy among white adults since 2012 and, furthermore, that the sympathy has accumulated disproportionately on the political left. The key matter to investigate, then, is differential movement along the scale of racial resentment toward the racial sympathy pole.

### *Period Effects Revealed as Departures from a Model of Underlying Demographic Change*

Although the results in Table 3 can be interpreted in a way that is quite discouraging, the GSS permits a balanced analysis of alternative interpretations. The period shifts shown in the *associations* of Table 3 do not reveal underlying change in the *levels* of the predictors. As I foreshadowed in the introduction, the GSS allows for the careful modeling of gradual change through cohort replacement, which is a first step toward assessing whether recent attitude change is distinctive, after which the full pattern of change can then be analyzed.

Because the focus of concern remains the attitudes of white adults, I continue to restrict the analysis to white respondents only in this section (but I offer results in the online supplement for other groups). The approach I have chosen for this section of results has four steps:

1. Use the 2006 through 2012 GSS data to fit a demographic model of change.
2. Use the parameters from the estimated model in step 1 to project counterfactual change in the interval from 2014 through 2020, as if attitudes evolved after 2012 only in ways that can be entirely attributed to the continuing effects of demographic change.
3. Assess whether all observed attitude change after 2012 can be attributed solely to demographic change.
4. If a portion of the observed change after 2012 cannot be attributed to demographic change, then (a) characterize the incremental change as an emergent period effect after 2012 and (b) examine its heterogeneity across individuals.

I demonstrate the first three steps of this approach in detail in the online supplement. For the results in this section of the main text, I present only the third and fourth steps, which deliver the key substantive results.

Table 4 specifies three outcome variables—the same racial resentment scale modeled for Table 3, as well two scales that match the substantive foci used above to differentiate Table 1 on prejudice and bigotry from Table 2 on opposition to compensatory interventions to address black–white inequalities. The coefficients in Table 4 can be directly compared across all columns because all three outcomes have been scaled to have a standard deviation of 1 over the full 2006-to-2020 pooled sample (with each year weighted equally). In particular, the standardization permits relative comparisons, conditional on the total variation within each scale over the full time period. For comparisons of absolute change in the components of the scales, I provide in the online supplement separate models with the specific indicators as the outcomes (see Table S12).

For the models in Table 4, two sets of coefficients are presented for each outcome. The coefficients reported in each “Raw” column are for indicator variables for the relevant GSS years, with the reference year set at 2012. No other adjustment variables are specified for these models, and thus the coefficient estimates reveal observed change over time. The coefficients reported in each “Increment” column have the same regressor specification, but the outcome has been residualized



**Table 4:** Least squares models for period effects on scales of racial resentment, prejudice and bigotry, and opposition to compensatory support for white-only, non-Hispanic respondents, 2006 to 2020

	Racial resentment		Prejudice and bigotry		Oppose compensatory support	
	Raw	Increment	Raw	Increment	Raw	Increment
2006	0.073 (0.060)	0.020 (0.058)	0.061 (0.063)	−0.019 (0.059)	−0.025 (0.042)	−0.055 (0.042)
2008	0.090 (0.061)	0.043 (0.057)	0.071 (0.063)	0.002 (0.059)	−0.022 (0.047)	−0.047 (0.046)
2010	0.015 (0.060)	−0.010 (0.057)	0.031 (0.062)	−0.014 (0.057)	−0.046 (0.045)	−0.053 (0.044)
2012	—	—	—	—	—	—
2014	−0.026 (0.066)	−0.023 (0.063)	−0.066 (0.066)	−0.067 (0.060)	−0.057 (0.045)	−0.059 (0.043)
2016	−0.212 (0.069)	−0.193 (0.066)	−0.141 (0.063)	−0.112 (0.059)	−0.288 (0.045)	−0.279 (0.043)
2018	−0.327 (0.072)	−0.294 (0.068)	−0.225 (0.065)	−0.178 (0.061)	−0.403 (0.049)	−0.381 (0.047)
2020 follow-up	−0.368 (0.075)	−0.317 (0.071)	−0.192 (0.071)	−0.118 (0.067)	−0.443 (0.056)	−0.412 (0.054)
Intercept	0.173 (0.049)	−0.014 (0.047)	0.050 (0.049)	0.008 (0.044)	0.342 (0.031)	0.039 (0.030)
R-squared	0.029	0.021	0.012	0.004	0.032	0.028
N	7,854	7,854	7,849	7,849	11,511	11,511

Notes: See Table 1.

through steps 1 and 2 delineated above. As fully explained in the online supplement, the component of overall change that is attributable to baseline demographic change through cohort replacement has been removed from the outcome for the “Increment” columns. Thus, these models reveal the increment of change that is attributable to the period effect that accumulates after 2012.

The first two columns show decreases in racial resentment from 2012 through 2018, which cumulate steadily after only a small change in 2014. These decreases are reduced in magnitude by approximately 20 percent in 2016 and 2018 after the consequences of baseline demographic change are removed from the trend.

The results in the next four columns are similar, except in the amount of change. The middle two columns show decreases in prejudice and bigotry from 2012 through 2018, which are slightly smaller than for racial resentment. The last two columns show decreases for opposition to compensatory support that are larger than for both racial resentment and prejudice and bigotry. Moreover, proportionately less of the raw change for opposition to compensatory support can be attributed to baseline demographic change through cohort replacement. In other words, the cumulating period effect between 2012 and 2018 is largest for opposition to compensatory support.

Note also that the models in Table 4 fit coefficients for 2020, labeled slightly differently as “2020 follow-up.” These coefficients require additional explanation. In brief, the coefficients refer to the 2020 follow-up of the 2016 and 2018 GSS respondents (see the online supplement for a full explanation). The inclusion of the 2020 observations in the models in Table 4 can be seen as a separable add-on because their inclusion does not otherwise change the other coefficients (i.e., they do not contribute information that affects the comparison of other years to 2012). What the 2020 coefficients show is that the decline through 2018 in prejudice and bigotry may have stabilized in 2020 (as the value of each coefficient is generally midway between the coefficients for 2016 and 2018, suggesting that the 2020 levels are a mixture of the 2016 and 2018 levels that the same respondents reported when they were surveyed at the baseline). For racial resentment and opposition to compensatory support, however, the change appears to have been extended into 2020, as the coefficients are more negative in all cases than the corresponding coefficients for 2016 and 2018.

These 2020 follow-up results are therefore consistent with what is shown for the coefficient estimates for the years 2014 through 2018. For 2020, prejudice and bigotry declined less than did racial resentment and opposition to compensatory support. And more of the decline for prejudice and bigotry by 2020 is attributable to demographic change. The online supplement offers an additional model that focuses on within-individual change only, and it also aligns with this conclusion.

The coefficient estimates in Table 4 do not reveal whether change varies by individual-level characteristics, such as level of education or party identification. Accordingly, Table 5 presents summaries of changes estimated in Table 4 (but dropping the 2020 follow-up data points for simplicity). The summaries in Table 5 are smoothed linear fits to yearly change after 2012, with the reference period set as the pooled 2006-to-2012 sample. In the first two rows, gender differences in change are presented, both for raw change on each scale and for the increment that is not attributable to underlying demographic change.

Gender differences for all three outcomes are modest, and the estimated yearly decline is between 0.04 and 0.06 standard deviations per year, depending on the outcome. These yearly changes cumulate between 2012 and 2018 to total changes in the range of 0.24 to 0.36 standard deviations, aligning with what is shown Table 4.<sup>15</sup>

Differential change by level of educational attainment is more substantial. Individuals in the middle of the distribution appear to be changing the most, and thus they are catching up to the lower levels of racial resentment, prejudice and bigotry, and opposition to compensatory support that are already more common among those with advanced educational degrees.

For clarity, it should be noted that these changes by education level are not adjusted for gender or any other characteristic, except for the second column in each pair in which the incremental change is the focus. For these latter columns, education also contributes to the underlying model of demographic change, which is purged from the outcome. The differences between the columns show how much of the education-related change is attributable to the underlying model and the net incremental change.

Finally, and most important for those interested in changes in racial resentment associations, differential change by party identification is much more substantial,

**Table 5:** Raw and incremental change per year for the period effects on racial attitudes from 2012 through 2018 for white-only, non-Hispanic respondents

	Racial resentment		Prejudice and bigotry		Oppose compensatory support	
	Raw	Increment	Raw	Increment	Raw	Increment
Gender						
Male	−0.065 (0.011)	−0.055 (0.010)	−0.045 (0.010)	−0.030 (0.010)	−0.068 (0.008)	−0.063 (0.008)
Female	−0.059 (0.010)	−0.046 (0.010)	−0.045 (0.009)	−0.026 (0.009)	−0.058 (0.007)	−0.051 (0.007)
Educational attainment						
No high school diploma	−0.008 (0.020)	0.003 (0.020)	−0.018 (0.025)	−0.002 (0.025)	−0.032 (0.016)	−0.027 (0.016)
High school diploma	−0.061 (0.010)	−0.054 (0.009)	−0.054 (0.010)	−0.042 (0.009)	−0.060 (0.007)	−0.056 (0.007)
Some college	−0.062 (0.021)	−0.055 (0.021)	−0.061 (0.021)	−0.049 (0.022)	−0.045 (0.016)	−0.041 (0.016)
Bachelor's degree	−0.077 (0.013)	−0.073 (0.013)	−0.029 (0.012)	−0.020 (0.012)	−0.086 (0.011)	−0.083 (0.011)
Graduate degree	−0.038 (0.020)	−0.024 (0.021)	−0.006 (0.016)	0.014 (0.017)	−0.043 (0.017)	−0.037 (0.017)
Party identification						
Democrat (excluding leaners)	−0.116 (0.015)	−0.099 (0.013)	−0.069 (0.014)	−0.047 (0.014)	−0.118 (0.011)	−0.106 (0.011)
Independents (including leaners)	−0.058 (0.011)	−0.045 (0.010)	−0.041 (0.010)	−0.022 (0.011)	−0.057 (0.009)	−0.049 (0.009)
Republicans (excluding leaners)	−0.033 (0.011)	−0.026 (0.011)	−0.029 (0.012)	−0.018 (0.011)	−0.030 (0.007)	−0.025 (0.008)
N for gender and education	7,122	7,122	7,119	7,119	10,373	10,373
N for party identification	6,887	6,887	6,883	6,883	10,025	10,025

Notes: See Table 1. The base for change is the pooled 2006-to-2012 sample, and the raw and incremental change are calculated by year from this base. See Table S13 in the online supplement for results using the 2010-to-2020 sample.

leading to an accentuation of between-party-identification differences on racial attitudes since 2012. These growing differences after 2012 are not produced by an increase among Republicans in racial resentment, prejudice and bigotry, or opposition to compensatory support. In fact, Republicans are moving toward lower levels of prejudice and greater support for compensatory interventions. Their change is in the range of 0.02 to 0.03 per year, leading to six-year total declines of 0.12 to 0.18 standard deviations. Nonetheless, the change for Democrats is much more substantial, in the range 0.05 and 0.11 per year, leading to much larger six-year total declines of 0.30 to 0.66 standard deviations. Independents are in the middle.

Overall, Tables 4 and 5 suggest some positive period changes in the racial attitudes of white adults. Even after accounting for baseline declines that are attributable to cohort replacement, on average white respondents became less

prejudiced, less bigoted, and more supportive of interventions to address black–white inequalities after 2012. Even those with the lowest levels of education and those who identify as Independents and Republicans trended, on average, in this direction. At the same time, the disparities in attitudes widened across party lines (and, thus, typical voting patterns did as well). The consequences of such widening are manifold, as discussed below, but the results are most consistent with the third characterization of the increasing racial resentment associations suggested above. White adults, on average, became somewhat more racially sympathetic after 2012 (see Table 4), but the increase in sympathy was greatest among white adults who identify as Democrats and smallest among white adults who identify as Republicans (see Table 5). As a result, the scale of racial resentment more strongly predicted party identification and vote choice after 2012 because of differential movement toward the racial sympathy pole of the scale.

## Conclusions and Discussion

The racial attitudes of a large number of white adults remain a social problem. Although it is not possible to determine conclusively the proportion of individuals who have racist attitudes, given a lack of consensus on how to define racism and how to interpret survey responses, it is not too incautious to conclude that more than 30 percent of white adults in recent years are willing to express some attitudes that can be reasonably interpreted as racist.

At the same time, attitude change since 2012 is in an encouraging direction, and this change is not merely a knock-on effect of changing population composition. The prejudice and bigotry of white adults declined meaningfully, on average, beyond the amount that can be attributed to cohort replacement. In addition, their opposition, on average, to compensatory interventions to address black–white inequalities declined even more. A likely catalyst for these changes was the increased attention to the need for criminal justice reform, which activists on the left pushed forward with a higher level of media attention every year after 2012, especially following the death of Michael Brown in a police shooting in Ferguson, Missouri, in August 2014.

### *The Dynamics of Party Identification and Attitude Change*

The results above conclude with the claim that, after 2012, Independents and Republicans became less prejudiced and bigoted and more supportive of compensatory interventions. Nonetheless, because Democrats moved even further in the same direction, the partisan gap in racial attitudes grew after 2012.

When aggregate changes of this type emerge, it is common to consider the thicket of complications that arises from plausible narratives about how both attitudes and party identifications may have moved at the individual level, generating change that is sometimes labeled “party sorting.” For most data sources, including the GSS, we do not have sufficient repeated measurements of individuals, across enough years, to offer empirical models of change that directly model party sorting.

One way to resolve the problem is to ignore it, seizing on a simplistic “polarization” argument driven by political elites. This position is based on the standard

unmoved-mover position from political science: party identification is a powerful predictor of political behavior because it is stable and resistant to change. Accordingly, party sorting that results from shifting party identifications at the individual level can be ignored because individual-level movement is uncommon and evanescent. Instead, changes in beliefs, on average across party lines, are the result of effective persuasion, where individuals adopt the positions of the political elites affiliated with each party. If differences emerge across parties, then they can be attributed almost entirely to changes in the beliefs of the political elites affiliated with each party. Contrary to this position, we have substantial recent evidence of shifts in party identification over time, especially since the 1990s among white adults with lower levels of education and working-class jobs (see Morgan and Lee 2017).

A related and more easily defended position would be to argue that we should focus our interpretations only on the aggregate pattern, pushing aside any underlying dynamism at the individual level. For this position, the focus should remain on point-in-time differences between groups of individuals who consider themselves to be aligned with particular political parties, and we should focus on how such point-in-time differences change as the political environment evolves. In other words, movement in party identification may well be more common than the traditional political science interpretation suggests, but such underlying movement is of secondary interest. Even if one could adjust comprehensively for individual-level movement, one would then be analyzing change across a distorted aggregate pattern of party identification that would not fit the observed world in which political parties make appeals to voters.

Although this second position has some analytic appeal, it is not inconsistent with a careful discussion of what might be unfolding as individuals change their beliefs and identifications. Indeed, I expect that, when all of the evidence is in, a consensus will emerge that a two-phase movement in party loyalties at the individual level is entangled with the pattern of change in racial attitudes across party lines. Individuals have sorted as political elites have polarized, and such patterns have affected the distribution of racial attitudes.

First, it should be kept in mind that the aggregate trends are impossible to ignore, even if party sorting is entangled with subgroup trajectories in attitudes. White adults, in the aggregate, did move toward the racial sympathy pole on the racial resentment scale. The change was strongest for opposition to compensatory interventions, and these changes cannot be attributed to baseline underlying demographic change. Although I have no direct evidence to offer in this article, I believe, as indicated above, that it is reasonable to infer that the campaign for racial justice played a role in generating these changes. Part of the effect of the activism was in forcing politicians to align themselves in relation to it, and so the unfolding political dynamic from 2014 onward was racialized.

As part of that process, two groups of cross-pressured voters changed their political behavior. First, some comparatively prejudiced Democrats and Independents, who saw appeal first in the Tea Party movement and then later in the emergence of Donald Trump as a presidential aspirant, found Democratic candidates less attractive. These individuals became part of the “bandwagon bigotry” that was crucial

for Trump's narrow victory in 2016 (see Morgan and Lee 2019). Second, many Republican voters supported Trump in 2016 because of party loyalty, suppressing their misgivings about his potential presidency. The least prejudiced members of this group became uncomfortable with Trump's approach to race relations, especially after he failed to repudiate the white supremacist rally in Charlottesville in 2017.<sup>16</sup> Any hopes that he would govern as an establishment leader, as suggested by his business background, were dashed by the end of 2017. These voters then began to shift to the left in 2018, as they prepared to vote for centrist candidates in the midterms.

We do not know enough yet about these two groups of cross-pressured voters, in part because we do not know whether their vote-based disloyalty was strong enough to shift their answers to the political identification questions. For the sake of argument, I will assume that they did shift to some degree, moving locally, for example, from traditional party loyalists to leaning Independents.

Under this scenario, Democrats and Independents who moved to the right had racial attitudes similar to those of the typical Republican voter (see Morgan and Lee 2019). As a result, their movement into the group of Republican identifiers would not likely have changed the trajectory of the average racial attitudes of Republicans, all else equal. Nonetheless, their movement to the right would result in a decline in the average prejudice and bigotry among Democrats and Independents, perhaps even more so for support for compensatory interventions. Thus, this compositional shift could have accentuated the observed movement toward racial sympathy among Democrats and Independents, and the size of that accentuation would be a function of the prevalence of such movers.

We know less about individuals who identified as Republicans and Independents in 2016 but whose political behavior moved to the left thereafter. Many appear to believe that these individuals are more highly educated than other recent Republican voters, and results from further analysis of the 2020 election may confirm this inference. If so, this evidence may be enough to assert that departures from solid identification with the Republican party were largest among those who were the least prejudiced and the least opposed to compensatory interventions. Thus, in the absence of this compositional change, Republican identifiers probably would have moved further in the same direction as Democrats, reducing polarization across parties, all else equal.

Altogether, I do not believe that we yet know how this two-phase shift in voting patterns is related to the trends documented in this article. The shifts may or may not have been strong enough to push individuals along the party identification scale. And, even if both were strong enough to shift party identifications, their effects could cancel each other out. We will need further research to assess these possibilities.

### *Caveat Lector*

Any discussion of compositional shifts, such as the party identification discussion just above, must also grapple with the potential for differential nonresponse to electoral surveys, such as the ANES, and general population surveys, such as the



GSS. In an environment of declining survey participation rates, it is possible that the declines have been largest among those individuals who are the least willing to share their attitudes and opinions on contentious matters.<sup>17</sup> To the extent that such individuals have higher than average levels of prejudice, the overall trends revealed by the GSS in this article may be biased toward change in racial attitudes when, in fact, less genuine change occurred.

This possible pattern deserves scrutiny but has been difficult to examine directly. The GSS may be susceptible, but it should be recognized that the GSS departs notably from the random-digit-dialed telephone surveys that are conducted over two or three days by political pollsters and media organizations. The GSS has an extended field period, uses escalating paid incentives, and has honed its nonresponse follow-up protocols since 2000. Nonetheless, these protections may have been insufficient to prevent differential nonresponse, and, if so, then differential nonresponse could account for some of the trends in this article since 2012.

Finally, one should not overinterpret the positive attitude change that is suggested by this article for three reasons. First, it is possible that the positive trends in racial sympathy are superficial. For example, social desirability bias may have begun to shape survey responses to questions on compensatory support for addressing black–white inequalities. More white adults may feel that they are expected to respond in ways that suggest that they support the movement for racial justice, even if they do not genuinely support it. Second, it has long been recognized that genuine changes in attitudes do not necessarily lead to changes in behavior. Instances of everyday discrimination, for example, may not decline by any meaningful amount in response to attitude change. Third, it is possible for racist behavior to increase as racial prejudice and related attitudes, on average, moderate. In such an environment, those who advocate for the preservation of white supremacy might work harder to promote their cause, either because they are emboldened by transitory political dynamics or because they interpret an increase in racial sympathy as growing white disloyalty that must be countered.

Because of these possibilities, it would be naïve to overinterpret the relevance of the positive change reported in this article. The range of plausible trajectories for future intergroup relations is wide, and a full picture will only emerge when we can determine how changes in racial attitudes since 2012 are related to changes in relevant behavior.

## Notes

- 1 The General Social Survey has limitations, and a primary one should be mentioned upfront: its measurement of attitudes toward individuals usually referred to as “black or African American” in survey items is much stronger and more consistent than its measurement of attitudes toward other groups. To some extent, the current racial-attitudes coverage of the GSS reflects the longstanding concern of sociologists with understanding and interpreting the history of black–white inequality in America. It also reflects more recent dissensus among survey researchers on how best to fashion a reasonably compact set of questionnaire items that can disentangle attitudes toward new immigrants from attitudes toward individuals who identify with heterogeneous

race-ethnic groups embedded in the overbroad categories of Hispanic and Asian. This dissensus was reflected most recently in the revisions selected by the GSS Board to the racial-attitudes battery, beginning with the 2018 survey. Rather than attempt to fashion new targeted measures of prejudice and bigotry for a wider range of groups, the Board instead selected a subset of everyday discrimination items, associated with the work of Bonilla-Silva (1997, 2003) and his colleagues. The rationale for the decision was the argument that a complement to traditional measures of prejudice and bigotry among majority white respondents is a set of measures that capture the experience of hostility and discrimination among all members of minority groups, which they experience as microaggressions. See Douds and Hout (2020) for an analysis of these new GSS items.

- 2 Allport is sometimes misrepresented as claiming, above all else, that prejudice is a fixed personality trait. In fact, he focuses very clearly on the social-structural determinants of prejudice, which shape early socialization and then can be a source of dynamism throughout the life course. His book concludes with an assessment of the variable effects of explicit interventions to reduce prejudice.
- 3 For additional reviews from the sociological literature, see Krysan (2000) and Schuman et al. (1998). See also Quillian (2006) for a discussion of how the literature on racial prejudice has evolved alongside the literature on discrimination. And, in part as critique of studies of expressed prejudice, Bonilla-Silva (1997) proposes a structural theory of racism that does not necessarily generate overt prejudice (see also Bonilla-Silva 2003).
- 4 Bobo and his colleagues are clear that many of these ideas can be found in the literature synthesized by Allport. What is new is the prevalence of laissez-faire rationalizations among elites, which emerged at the same time that many survey respondents learned that open support for Jim Crow racism had become socially disapproved.
- 5 The 2004 GSS was fielded five months later than typical, with interviews conducted between late August 2004 through the first few days of 2005.
- 6 I do not use the recently released 2021 cross-sectional sample of the GSS in this article because the push-to-web design that was necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic represents a realized sample that has alternative coverage and response-rate complications that contribute to total survey error. Nonetheless, in my own preliminary analysis of the 2021 cross-sectional data, the changes presented in this article appear to be present in the 2021 cross-section as well. As explained below, I will use the 2020 follow-up of the 2016 and 2018 GSS cross-sections. These 2020 follow-up observations are based on the same base year sampling design, and they have the advantage of enabling models of average within-individual change. With attrition weighting, the 2020 follow-up data are somewhat close to what a traditional GSS 2020 cross-sectional design probably would have yielded, at least close enough to analyze as such when appropriate caveats are maintained (such as minor undercoverage on younger ages).
- 7 The additional six percent of the sample is composed primarily of individuals who select a non-Hispanic multiracial identity, a Hispanic and black identity, any identity that includes Native American or American Indian, or too little information on either ethnicity or race to be coded unambiguously in any broader group.
- 8 As the right-hand panel of Table 1 shows, these racist stereotypes are held, on average, by all four race-ethnic groups, even when they are the reference group of the stereotype. As with past research, it is unclear how to interpret these beliefs—the leading candidates being internalization of a harmful stereotype through repeated exposure, latent conservatism tied to a denial of structural barriers to advancement, or some type of within-group irreverence in response to the survey items, perhaps intended to be disingenuous and thus subversive.

- 9 The attitudes of Asian respondents are most similar to those of white respondents, although estimated with much greater error. GSS respondents who self-identify as Asian, non-Hispanic, and not multiracial are the smallest of the four “big groups” considered in this article, but it is a group of considerable interest, both as a basis for comparisons and because it is growing disproportionately in size. Unfortunately, the GSS has a small undercoverage bias because (as of now) GSS questionnaires are available only in English and Spanish. Because of this undercoverage bias, the results for Asians should be interpreted with caution because of the increment to expected total survey error. Any inferences obtained may be more inaccurate than even a cautious approach to sampling error would already warrant.
- 10 For an explanation of the origins of the scale in the 1980s, see Henry and Sears (2002), which considers a broader range of items (eight of which they propose be utilized). Sears (1988), Kinder and Sanders (1996), Kinder and Kam (2009), and Kinder and Dale-Riddle (2012) explain the history of the fielding of the items on the ANES and how the four items in the main text became dominant by the time analysts turned to a consideration of the 2016 election.
- 11 I focus in this section on the work of political scientists, but sociologists have also contributed to this line of work. Tuch and Hughes (2011), for example, compare the standard ANES scale with an alternative constructed from the GSS items WRKWAYUP, RACDIF1, and RACDIF4. They show that both the GSS and the ANES scales perform similarly, and they do not argue for the superiority of the ANES scale. They argue that racial resentment is a powerful explanation of views toward racial policy items, even when racial resentment is measured in slightly different ways by different surveys. Hout and Maggio (2021) use a similar GSS scale as well as the ANES data in order to show similar trajectories while detailing the partisan deflections through 2018 that were first published for the GSS by media sources (e.g., Clement and Guskin 2019).
- 12 See also Abramowitz and McCoy (2018). Jardina (2019) argues, somewhat differently, that white racial solidarity and consciousness increased during the 2016 election campaign, which provided a source of support for a stronger connection between racial resentment and political behavior.
- 13 The general argument is debated at length in Sears, Sidanius, and Bobo (2000), following the work that began in pieces such as Sniderman and Tetlock (1985).
- 14 Kinder and Sanders (1996:299) indicate that their “new terminology” of “racial resentment” (as opposed to the original “symbolic racism”) was selected to refer to the sort of “moral resentments” investigated in earlier research on suburban white Los Angeles voters. The “collection of complaints” rationale cited in the main text is possibly a better way of explaining what they meant, made necessary by the criticism that they received (see Sears, Sidanius, and Bobo 2000). Characterizing racially unsympathetic white adults as signaling that they are resentful has been harder to justify, in part because dictionary definitions of the word resentful are inwardly directed and focus on one’s own sense of bitterness at having been treated unfairly. Place-based notions of resentment offer a useful comparison. Cramer (2016) argues that individuals in rural areas often resent the lack of investment in their communities, which they regard as unfair relative to the greater investments they feel have been made in urban and suburban communities.
- 15 In the online supplement, I offer additional summaries that include the 2020 follow-up observations as well, and the same basic interpretations emerge. I favor the up-to-2018 results in the main text in order to align with the analysis presented in Table 3. See Table S13 for a parallel set of models that uses the 2010-to-2020 interval (i.e., adding 2020 and dropping 2006 and 2008).

- 16 At that moment, it became clear to many that Trump would adopt a governing posture closer to the “The Program of the Demagogue” summarized by Allport (1954:410–24).
- 17 The decline in the GSS response rate was substantial through 2018, but no decline in sample quality based on demographic characteristics was found (see Morgan 2020). This does not mean that all types of differential nonresponse are absent.

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**Acknowledgments:** I thank the editor and a deputy editor for their wise suggestions.

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