

## THE PROSPECT OF ANTIRACISM RACIAL RESENTMENT AND RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

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**Abstract** Racial reckoning in response to racial injustice has compelled individuals, organizations, and institutions to acknowledge and adopt policies that actively challenge racial injustice. A central tenet of this era of reckoning is that it is no longer acceptable to ignore racist behaviors and expressions. To the extent that active opposition to racial prejudice is an effective strategy for individuals to pursue, we examine individual inclinations to act on matters of racial prejudice. We argue that in spite of best intentions, the motivation to act against racism, what we call “antiracism action orientation,” can be disrupted by system-justifying beliefs that raise questions about deservingness, legitimize the status quo, and therefore defend inaction. Survey data from the 2020 Congressional Election Study show that antiracism action orientation is strongest among African Americans, and those with more positive affect toward racial-ethnic minorities, and supporters of change. Among Whites, racial resentment dominates the motivations for antiracism to the point that typical political allies like Democrats, liberals, and those who acknowledge White privilege reduce their antiracism action orientation to lower levels than Republicans, conservatives, and deniers of White privilege. We conclude that most Americans, but especially Whites, have a high bar for change, making racism an ongoing American dilemma because of both racial attitudes and the costs of change.

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## Introduction

As the nation continues to struggle with racial injustice and racial prejudice, efforts to combat derogatory and demeaning expressions directed toward African Americans and other minorities, including a willingness to confront it when it occurs, have received renewed attention. This willingness to confront racism with actions and ideas is conceptualized as antiracism (e.g., [Kendi 2019](#)). To be sure, forms of antiracism actions challenging expressions of racial prejudice are largely effective, as considerable research shows that expressions of racial prejudice can be curtailed when confronted ([Czopp, Monteith, and Mark 2006](#); [Rattan and Dweck 2010](#); [Mallett and Wagner 2011](#); [Gulker, Mark, and Monteith 2013](#); [Chaney and Sanchez 2018](#)). Individuals who are made aware of their racial prejudice often experience feelings of guilt ([Devine et al., 1991](#); [Monteith, 1993](#)), report lower levels of explicit prejudice, use fewer stereotypic responses during a stereotype application task ([Czopp et al. 2006](#)), and are more likely to engage in compensatory behavior toward the individual who has confronted. Confronted individuals report greater negative self-affect, leading to prolonged rumination, and ultimately less stereotype application and behavioral inhibition to stereotypes ([Chaney and Sanchez 2018](#)). In short, antiracism actions in the form of social intervention can be an effective means to social and personal change, and ultimately racial justice.

Despite a voluminous volume of research on racial prejudice confrontation, there is limited research on the psychological motivation to intervene when matters of racial prejudice arise. Antiracism cannot occur without individuals, groups, governments, and institutions working to oppose racially targeted actions when they occur. Opposing racism and prejudice requires pointing it out when it occurs and not always going along with the status quo, but also audacity since confrontation will likely be met with resistance. This is the very essence of antiracism practice. We question the extent to which individuals are inclined (or have an orientation) toward opposing racial prejudice and the factors that are associated with such an orientation.

We define the antiracism action orientation as a psychological state of support for antiracism. Those with stronger antiracism action orientation are open to change and the uncertainty-induced discomfort that change brings about. They are not deterred by the controversies and repercussions of taking an antiracist stance. Those with weaker antiracism action orientation believe that change requires a high bar of direct and experiential evidence that the social order is broken. These individuals likely hold beliefs that the current ways of the world are just, and that on average, people get what they deserve and deserve what they get. Therefore, stronger and weaker antiracism action orientations are likely influenced by beliefs about the extent to which the

status quo state of intergroup racial relations, racial equality, and racial justice deserve change.

We focus primarily on three related system-legitimizing beliefs—resistance to change, racial resentment, and perceptions of racial problems in society—that should theoretically reduce the motivation for antiracism action orientation.<sup>1</sup> Our results will show that those with lower antiracism action orientation are motivated by more than negative affect toward racial groups or group statuses. Instead, antiracism action orientation is primarily influenced by legitimizing beliefs about the unjust costs of racial change, and deservingness considerations that motivate resentments over race. As we will also show, these system-justification effects occur mostly among those who are thought to be antiracism allies or even neutral observers—liberals, Democrats, and those more aware of racial problems. We conclude that even political allies can enable the persistence of racial prejudice through a low antiracism action orientation. It appears that the challenge of being an antiracist may be more difficult than some believe. The phrase “actions speak louder than words” may be an apt mantra, but perhaps the more apt is that “beliefs speak louder than actions.”

In the pages that follow, we provide additional review of our concepts, details of our data and methodology, results from our analyses, and concluding comments that summarize and discuss our findings.

## Antiracism and Action-Oriented Motivations

Antiracism is not a new concept, but it has been seen as a valid strategy in the context of the racial reckoning around recent racial injustice protests. The term antiracist (or antiracism) dates as far back as early anti-slavery writings opposing the maltreatment of Blacks in America. In the early 1960s, antiracism scholars like [McPherson \(1964\)](#) and [Gossett \(1965\)](#) sought to make clear that for civil rights to take hold society must passionately oppose racism.

Antiracism has several definitions, but each suggests an orientation toward action.<sup>2</sup> For example, [Kendi \(2019, p. 13\)](#) defines antiracism as opposing racist policies through “actions or expressed ideas.” [Nelson, Dunn, and Paradies \(2011, p. 265\)](#) conceptualize “bystander antiracism,” defining it as “action taken by a person or persons, who are not directly involved as a target or perpetrator, to speak out about or to seek to engage others in responding against interpersonal or systemic racism.” Nelson, Dunn, and Paradies’s

1. Throughout the paper we use “justifying” and “legitimizing” interchangeably, as they are operationally the same.

2. See [Paradies \(2016\)](#) for a review of the various definitions and debates over antiracism’s conceptualization.

definition focuses on third-party individuals who are witness to racism (i.e., bystanders), but who are not passive. Bonnet (2014) defines antiracism as thoughts and practices that confront, remove, or repair racism to being about racial equality. For Bonnet, antiracism consists of ideologies and practices that facilitate racial-ethnic equality. Finally, Dei, Calliste, and Aguiar (2000) define antiracism as action-oriented intervention targeting racism and systemic oppression, which includes individual transformation.

The most popular work today on antiracism is a book by Ibram Kendi (2019). In *How to Be an Antiracist*, he proposes that antiracism's value is that it articulates direct action. He contrasts being a nonracist with being antiracist, proposing that one saying they are "not racist" is insufficient, and that the opposite of being a racist is being "antiracist." For Kendi and others (e.g., LaCrosse et al. 2021), being an antiracist means actively fighting against racism, making one a part of the solution rather than saying one is not a part of the problem. Under Kendi's framework, there is no neutrality, an authentic antiracist views anything that is in the way of racial equality as racist, and therefore there must be collective political action (i.e., policy) and psychological action (i.e., adopting an antiracist orientation) to confront it. Thus, with direct confrontation as the action, and change (i.e., racial equality) as the goal, the missing piece of antiracism is motivation.

Noticeably absent in the empirical research on antiracism is an understanding of the psychological motivations for action. Motivations, or motives, drive human actions. Motivations initiate, direct, and maintain goal-focused behaviors (DeShon and Gillespie 2005). Goals encompass values, needs, drives, and any other desired standards; they specify the purpose of actions and to a lesser degree the specificity of action (DeShon and Gillespie 2005). Antiracism actions could be characterized as a form of prosocial behavior, those actions which are focused on helping others (Penner et al. 2005). Research on bystander intervention suggests that the extent to which an individual renders help is in part based on a cost-reward model. For example, bystander interventions are more likely when the relative value aligns with the importance of their goal, and the benefits of goal accomplishment are greater than the costs of inaction (Piliavin et al. 1981). In general, individuals must have a motivating orientation to be antiracist in order for their goal of racial equality to come into effect. Thus, while the behavior of confronting racial prejudice is the external component of antiracism, we focus on the internal motivational components.

We conceptualize antiracism action orientation as an inclination, a willingness, to undertake actions against racial prejudice. Rather than merely being motivated to support antiracism, the action orientation likely comes with an awareness that resistance to racial prejudice may involve certain personal cost. The antiracism action orientation should be motivated by intrinsic needs like one's values and broader beliefs about the ethical and racial ordering of

society. Thus, the satisfaction of being an antiracist is hypothesized to correlate with existential, epistemic, and relational needs, rather than external rewards. Since system-justifying beliefs also correlate with internal needs (Jost 2020), we argue that they play a crucial role in facilitating or disrupting antiracism action orientations.

## **System-Legitimizing Beliefs**

System justification is a powerful theory because it can explain a defense of the status quo as a motivation for inaction (e.g., not supporting Black Lives Matter), as well as why the defense may be a more salient motive for action than racial group attitudes. System legitimizing helps to alleviate anxiety and uncertainty so that people can manage negative realities in the short run. Unfortunately, the same beliefs have negative associations with self-esteem, in-group favoritism, and long-term psychological well-being (Jost 2020). For instance, Whites might proclaim that “racism isn’t a problem in society,” and therefore change is unnecessary, because of motivational needs for certainty and guilt reduction more so than personal dislike for racial-ethnic minorities or because they do not see instances of racial prejudice in the media.

Antiracism is antithetical to the status quo—and sympathetic to the changing of the status quo—and thus, individuals who hold stronger system-legitimizing beliefs should have lower antiracism action orientation. This is because system justifiers are motivated by anxieties that come with having to constantly think about the problems of racism and racial inequality, which disrupt the certainty and control of one’s social world. System justifiers will adopt perspectives like “everything happens for a reason,” “we all have problems,” “I’m tired of talking about racism, can’t we all just get along,” and “I don’t see race, I’m colorblind.” Each of these statements arises from motives that resist confronting the negative realities of society by disassociating with them, and thereby reducing the need for change, let alone radical change like eliminating racism.

We focus on three types of system-legitimizing beliefs: resistance to change (via system justification), racial resentment, and perceptions about the prevalence of racial problems in the United States.

### RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

We conceptualize resistance to change as a form of system-justifying belief that the world is just. Research finds that a belief in a just world directly encourages victim blaming (Rubin and Peplau 1975; Appelbaum, 2002). Belief in a just world may affect antiracism action orientation directly through the tendency to believe that the world is just and that “people get what they deserve” or that “bad things (like hostility) happen to bad (rule

breakers) people.” Because humans have a motivation to believe that the world is fair, they will look for ways to explain or rationalize away injustices, often blaming the victim for any negative treatment they experience. This phenomenon protects self-esteem, helps control fear, and allows people to remain optimistic about the world (Lerner 1980). In other words, people high in just-world beliefs are motivated to look for something or someone to blame for unfortunate events, rather than believe there are systemic or structure features that produce them.

Belief in a just world also promotes complacency and a defense of the status quo, whereby justice occurs naturally on its own. Alternatively, those who believe the world is unjust tend to think they can create justice through action; they are take-charge kinds of people, more ready to set aside their short-term self-interests, and better able to stay motivated while working hard to satisfy long-term and less self-serving goals (Lipkus et al. 1996; Zuckerman and Gerbasi 1977). Thus, individuals higher in just-world beliefs should have lower antiracism action orientation, while those holding weaker just-world beliefs should have higher antiracism orientation. The direction of one’s antiracism action orientation is directly related to whether good and bad outcomes occur outside of the system (i.e., the system is fine) or because of it (i.e., the system contains or produces discrimination). This leads to the following hypothesis:

H1: Increases in resistance to change will be associated with decreases in antiracism orientation.

#### RACIAL RESENTMENT

Davis and Wilson (2021) in *Racial Resentment in the Political Mind* challenge the traditional conceptualization and measurement of racial resentment. Whereas racial resentment has been thought of and used traditionally as racial prejudice, Davis and Wilson (2021) maintain that White racial resentment toward African Americans stems from a belief that racial minorities unfairly and unjustly benefit from advantages that come at Whites’ expense and challenge Whites’ advantage.

Davis and Wilson (2021) propose that there are racial attitudes that target groups, and there are racial attitudes that target race. The two overlap (i.e., correlate) because survey items measuring racial attitudes tend to share a psychological target (e.g., African Americans). For example, asking about the state of “race relations” in general is likely to correlate strongly with questions about specific racial groups (e.g., “do you think Blacks face racial discrimination”). This makes disentangling the two targets of race and racial groups challenging, but they argue that for resentment, the theory is the starting point. Davis and Wilson argue that with racial prejudice, the attitude

follows the group no matter what they do, but with resentment, the racial sentiment is tied more to values related to deservingness such that when racial group targets are not perceived to use race as an instrument for influence, it has less influence.

Racial resentment arises from politics. Decisions about who gets what in society mean that authorities and interest groups allocate everything from material resources to statuses and privileges. Just-world beliefs dictate that these distributions, and the processes that apportion them, are fair. White resentment toward African Americans colors political judgements because Whites perceive that African Americans tend to use race unfairly to advance politically; thus, any benefits they receive are presumed to have been achieved by circumventing the traditional rules of merit in some way. This threatens the meritocratic system that Whites use to guide fair play and exchange in society. Thus, the more African Americans proclaim that Whites are racist and therefore African Americans are deserving of restoration, the more Whites feel that their rules and way of life are under attack. This violates their sense of justice and fairness. [Davis and Wilson \(2021\)](#) argue that White resentment toward African Americans leads to insidious motivations to restore Whites' belief in a just world, through retribution, including anti-ameliorative policy positions and also inaction to eliminate racism and prejudice.

Importantly, the existing racial resentment concept does not mean that anti-Black affect or prejudice are irrelevant to motivations for inaction, rather it means that the decisions to intervene or not have differing bases. We argue that the justice-based features of racial resentment enable beliefs that withholding explicit help is the right (i.e., least costly) thing to do. Those higher in racial resentment may reason that recipients of racial prejudice are not necessarily deserving of racism, but are undeserving of the sacrifice that it takes to confront and stop racial prejudice when it occurs. Rather than being satisfied that racial minorities experience racial prejudice, Whites perhaps reason that victims will learn to overcome the derogatory experiences and hopefully they will not be too damaging. This leads to the following hypothesis about the influence of racial resentment on antiracism action orientation:

H2: Among Whites, increases in racial resentment will be associated with decreases in antiracism action orientation.

#### POLITICAL ALLIES

The effects of racial resentment are not solely for traditional political opponents of ameliorative racial policy, like racists, Republicans, and political conservatives. Studies show that Democrats and liberals have lower levels of explicit and implicit prejudice and racial resentment (e.g., [Piston 2010](#)).



Also, Whites who acknowledge their own privilege, confront prejudice, and actively participate in efforts to reduce inequality are motivated by internal moral values and viewed by people of colors as allies (Brown 2015; Sue 2017). Thus, Democrats, liberals, and those Whites who recognize their racial group's privilege are more likely to be viewed as political allies. On the other hand, research also finds that racial resentment has stronger empirical effects among liberals and Democrats than conservatives and Republicans (e.g., Feldman and Huddy 2005; Wilson, Owens, and Davis 2015). Thus, it is possible that ostensible political allies of antiracism may also harbor resentments about race that prompt lower antiracism action orientation.

There is limited theorizing about White allies in the context of antiracism and racial resentment, but some argue that Democrats and liberals have weak principled reasons to oppose racial policies that bring about equality (e.g., Feldman and Huddy 2005). This suggests that without principled reasons to oppose antiracism, the political allies fall back on their early learned beliefs about merit. For example, White liberals may wonder why Blacks do not work harder to overcome their challenges; or they may reason that they are not a part of the problem and that if we "get rid of the rednecks and KKK," racial minorities will not have to worry about race anymore (i.e., and then they can compete). Another hypothesis is that White liberals and Democrats benefit from the existing system, and may reason that giving up what they have earned is unfair because they are not racists. Certainly, White allies could believe something should be done about racism, but they do not see themselves as part of the problem. Another possibility is that White liberals may not hate Blacks and other racial minorities, but they do not know exactly how to navigate racial change within a system that benefits them. Moreover, Black power movements may have threatened White liberals and Democrats because it unfairly cast them in the same bucket as other Whites. Each of these beliefs reflect positions that might reduce antiracism action orientation levels among White allies. We suspect that racial resentments and other system-legitimizing beliefs are powerful enough to operate within antiracism's ally networks, conditioning the effects on action orientations. Thus, we pose the following:

H3a: The effects of system-justifying beliefs (resistance to change and racial resentment) on antiracism action orientation will be stronger among White Democrats than White Republicans.

H3b: The effects of system-justifying beliefs (resistance to change and racial resentment) on antiracism action orientation will be stronger among White liberals than White conservatives.

H3c: The effects of system-justifying beliefs (resistance to change and racial resentment) on antiracism action orientation will be stronger among Whites holding racially conscious beliefs than Whites not holding racially conscious beliefs.



## PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE PREVALENCE OF RACIAL PROBLEMS

System-justification theory proposes that those holding stronger legitimizing beliefs that the status quo is acceptable will tend to adopt beliefs that minimize problems in society. Beliefs that social problems are not so bad function to reduce emotional distress, thereby making it easier to withdraw support for social change and the redistribution of resources (Jost 2020). Recent research on contemporary racial attitudes suggests that perceptions of the awareness of pervasive racial discrimination are vital for empathy (DeSante and Smith 2019). It turns out that Whites who believe that racial problems are rarer tend to have a more general colorblind orientation motivated by denial (Neville et al. 2000). Denial that racial problems are pervasive may reflect low awareness of racial realities, or a politicized view that society makes too much of race. System-justification theory expects that when racial problems do arise, individuals oriented toward support for the status quo will downplay the extent of the issue, attributing any level of discord as exceptions to the rule that the world is a just place. Thus, individuals who are less aware of racial problems are hypothesized to have lower antiracism action orientation than those who are more aware of racial problems.

H4: Decreases in awareness of racial problems will be associated with decreases in antiracism action orientation.

**Other Race-Related Factors**

In addition to the legitimizing beliefs that likely motivate inaction on racial prejudice, we consider two more racial factors: racial affect and racial identification. These factors may complement or explain away any effects due to legitimizing belief systems.

## RACIAL AFFECT

Perhaps the most obvious persons with low antiracism action orientation are those who feel more distant from the group in terms of affect. Individuals who show colder affect (or lower favorability) toward African Americans, Hispanics, and other racial minority groups can be expected to also have low empathy for them and tolerate their mistreatment. Anti-Black affect, typically indicated by social-psychological distance and feeling thermometer measures, reflects both psychological and social disconnectedness (Correll et al. 2010). The greater the connectedness across individuals and groups, the less likely they are to tolerate the maltreatment of those with closer ties, and vice versa. Thus, we expect that those with more negative feelings toward a racial minority group also have lower motivation to help the group in matters involving racial prejudice. Simply put, not liking a group is similar to explicit

racial prejudice and reduces the motivation to be an antiracist. We expect that affect toward majority groups (i.e., Whites) should matter as well. Antiracism could be conceived of as anti-White, perhaps increasing racial group attachment among Whites (Jardina 2019). We expect that those who report more positive feelings toward Whites likely hold positive feelings toward policies and ideologies that defend Whites' group status, thereby decreasing their antiracism action orientation.

H5a: Decreases in (colder) affect toward racial minority groups will be associated with decreases in antiracism action orientation.

H5b: Increases in (warmer) affect toward Whites will be associated with decreases in antiracism action orientation.

## Racial Identification

Racial-ethnic minorities should hold stronger motivations to eliminate racism than Whites, and thus have higher levels of antiracism action orientation than Whites. In addition, among racial-ethnic minority groups, African Americans have been the dominant antagonists to the racial status quo. The same public opinion reports (Pew Research Center 2019) point to African Americans as more likely than other racial-ethnic minorities to perceive high levels of racial disadvantage and racial hostility. Moreover, because the Black Lives Matter movement, and its organization, are thought to primarily represent both African Americans and a desire for change, we suspect that they will have higher antiracism action.

H6: Racial minorities will have higher antiracism action orientation than non-Hispanic Whites.

H7: African Americans will have higher antiracism action orientation than other racial-ethnic minorities.

## Data

We analyze data from the 2020 Cooperative Election Study (formerly the "Cooperative Congressional Election Study [CCES]") conducted by YouGov (see Ansolabehere, Schaffner, and Luks 2020). The 2020 CES data consist of panel respondents from a two-wave (pre and post-election) national stratified sample survey design.<sup>3</sup> The pre-election data are collected in September

3. The CES data respondents come from a recruited online panel. The sample selection for the study uses two-stage matching methodology to yield the total study sample. The first stage uses a sampling frame of US citizens from the 2012 American Community survey, including data on age, race, gender, education, marital status, number of children under 18, family income, employment status, citizenship, state, and metropolitan area. The second stage involves matching

and October, and the post-election data are collected in November. The CES questionnaire consists of Common Content (N = 61,000)—asked of all participants—and Team Content—designed by individual researchers. Our analysis includes survey items from the Common Content, but many of the core measures come from the University of Notre Dame Team Content Study (N = 1,000). Our working data file is based on those who provided a valid racial identification on the survey, and consists of 949 respondents: non-Hispanic White Americans<sup>4</sup> (N = 715), non-Hispanic African Americans (N = 119), Hispanic Americans (N = 87), and Asian Americans (N = 28).

## Measures

The Team Content consists of general American politics subjects (e.g., support for candidates, political preferences, and institutional knowledge), and also some content about racial attitudes. Our primary dependent variable of interest is our antiracism action orientation measure, and our primary independent variables are system-legitimizing beliefs about White resentment toward African Americans (henceforth “White resentment”); resistance to change via system justification items; and a single item measuring the perception that racial problems are rare or not. Additionally, we include feeling thermometer ratings for Whites, Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians, and a single item acknowledging White privilege. We also include a set of demographic variables that provide additional points of understanding the antiracism action orientation and also control for spurious findings.<sup>5</sup>

### ANTIRACISM ACTION ORIENTATION

Antiracism action orientation is conceptualized as a motivation for inaction, or psychological avoidance, when encountering situations involving racial prejudice. After discussions with students, faculty, and staff at our respective institutions, and reviewing literature on disruptors of intervention type

members from a pool of opt-in respondents. Matching is accomplished using a large set of variables that are available in consumer and voter databases for both the target population and the opt-in panel. The matching process selects respondents who are as similar as possible to the selected member of the target sample. This results in a sample of respondents who have the same measured characteristics as the target sample. In essence, the matched sample mimics the characteristics of the target sample. The AAPOR1 response, cooperation, and refusal rates are 61 percent, 86 percent, and 2 percent, respectively. The data contain a YouGov supplied sampling and matching weight for population vote estimates; however, we do not utilize the weight for our analyses of the University of Notre Dame data. Informal difference in estimates tests (see [Hahs-Vaughn and Lomax 2006](#)) did not produce altered results.

4. Henceforth, we refer to non-Hispanic Whites as “Whites.”

5. The full regression model results, bivariate correlations, factor score loadings, and descriptive information are contained in the [Supplementary Material](#).

behaviors (e.g., [Rotunda and Doman 2001](#)), we brainstormed a small set of traits that characterize antiracism behaviors, and then developed a list of items that reflect beliefs about action or inaction. Data reduction techniques to refine the items down to a parsimonious scale led to a three-item scale of our concept. The scale items are assertions for respondents to agree or disagree with on a five-point Likert-type response set. The antiracism action orientation items are:

1. *It is best to keep your feelings about racial prejudice to yourself.*
2. *I want to say something about racial prejudice when I hear it, but the safest thing for me is to be quiet.*
3. *I believe that I will make too many enemies if I were to say something about racial prejudice when I hear it.*

Agreement with these items indicates the opposite of antiracism action orientation, and thus we reverse-coded the responses such that higher values indicated a support for antiracism. [Table 1](#) reports the distribution of responses to the battery of antiracism action orientation questions.<sup>6</sup>

#### MEASURING RACIAL RESENTMENT

We measure White racial resentment toward African Americans using the scale developed by [Wilson and Davis \(2011; also see Davis and Wilson 2021\)](#). The measure contains five assertion items where respondents report their agreement or disagreement on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher values indicating more resentment.

1. *Racial discrimination is no different from other everyday problems people have to deal with.*
2. *I resent any special considerations that African Americans receive because it's unfair to other Americans.*
3. *For African Americans to succeed, they need to stop using racism and slavery as excuses.*
4. *Special considerations for African Americans place me at an unfair disadvantage because I have done nothing to harm them.*

6. Exploratory factor analysis reveals that the set of items have the characteristics of a normally distributed set (Skewness=-0.045, SE=0.078), a single factor (eigenvalue=1.45, percent explained=48.8), and reliable measurement (Cronbach's alpha=0.731). The average responses to each of the items came in around the middle of the response categories, and hence the overall scale response ( $M = 3.29$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ) reflects moderate levels of antiracism action orientation. [Figure SM1 in the Supplementary Material](#) provides the response distribution for the scale.

**Table 1. Question wording and response to indicators of antiracism action orientation**

Silence: It is best to keep your feelings about racial prejudice to yourself.			
Strongly disagree (5)	25.0		
Disagree	18.7		
Neither agree nor disagree	23.9	Mean = 3.23	
Agree	19.1	SD = 1.36	
Strongly agree (1)	13.4		
Threat: I want to say something about racial prejudice when I hear it, but the safest thing for me is to be quiet.			
Strongly disagree (5)	19.2		
Disagree	19.4		
Neither agree nor disagree	27.7	Mean = 3.12	
Agree	22.2	SD = 1.28	
Strongly agree (1)	11.5		
Conflict: I believe that I will make too many enemies if I were to say something about racial prejudice when I hear it.			
Strongly disagree (5)	24.0		
Disagree	21.9		
Neither agree nor disagree	24.1	Mean = 3.28	
Agree	18.2	SD = 1.33	
Strongly agree (1)	11.9		

NOTE.—All variables are coded so that higher values (e.g., 5) indicate higher antiracism orientation positions.

- African Americans bring up race only when they need to make an excuse for their failure.*

These items were only presented to non-African American respondents; however, due to smaller sample sizes among racial-ethnic minorities, we analyze White resentment for non-Hispanic White respondents only. When combined, the five items form a composite scale of White resentment ( $M = 2.93$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ , Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.926$  (and a single factor, with a 3.58 eigenvalue, percent explained = 71.6 percent).

#### RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

To measure resistance to change (system-justifying) beliefs, we used four items, two from the original system-justification scale capturing situational rationalizations of a just world that needs no change (Kay and Jost 2003)

and two additional items related to social threats. These items were presented as assertions for respondents to agree or disagree with on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), with higher values indicating stronger system-justifying beliefs. The items are as follows:

1. *Society is set up so that people usually get what they deserve.*
2. *We must work hard to defend and preserve the way things are.*
3. *Everyone has a fair shot at wealth and happiness.*
4. *Our values and beliefs are constantly under attack.*

The composite of the five items was  $M = 3.06$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ , Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.808$  (and a single factor, eigenvalue = 2.08, percent explained = 52.0 percent).

#### PREVALENCE OF RACIAL PROBLEMS

To assess how individuals perceive the prevalence of racial problems in the United States, we utilize a single item measure of agreement or disagreement on a five-point Likert-type scale—higher values indicating more agreement—with the following assertion: “Racial problems in the U.S. are rare, isolated situations” (all respondents:  $M = 2.41$ ,  $SD = 1.37$ ; non-Hispanic White respondents:  $M = 2.49$ ,  $SD = 1.35$ ). This item measures awareness and prevalence of racial problems, alluding to the extent to which one perceives the system is working (no change is needed) or not (change is needed).

#### AFFECT TOWARD RACIAL-ETHNIC GROUPS

Respondents completed a set of 100-point feeling thermometer ratings of Blacks/African Americans, Latinos, and Whites. For the feeling thermometer ratings, higher and lower values indicate more warmth or coldness respectively toward each group. Traditionally, more coldness toward a group was an indicator of anti-group affect or prejudice, and warmth indicated positive group affect or affection. Our version of the feeling thermometer took advantage of the online design to utilize a graphical click and drag tool to calculate a value. Respondents were given the prompt “We’d like to get your feelings toward some groups and people on something we call the feeling thermometer.” They were then asked to “Please click and drag the thermometer to indicate your opinion.” The rating started at 0, and in order for a score to register, the needle had to be moved to a value ranging from 1 to 100. The actual responses for the entire sample were as follows: ratings of Blacks/African Americans range from 1 to 92 ( $M = 67.34$ ,  $SD = 23.01$ ); ratings of

Latinos range from 1 to 95 ( $M = 69.52$ ,  $SD = 22.71$ ); and ratings of Whites range from 1 to 89 ( $M = 61.38$ ,  $SD = 21.69$ ).

#### POLITICAL ALLY TIES

We conceptualized that antiracism action orientation may be influenced by identification with political ideologies and affiliations, and Whites' recognition of their racial privileged status. Self-reported political ideology is a five-point indicator ranging from very conservative (5) to very liberal (1) ( $M = 3.03$ ,  $SD = 1.18$ ). Political affiliation is measured originally as a seven-point classification of party identification ranging from strong Republican to strong Democrat, with independents in the middle. We recoded this variable, creating three different dichotomous variables of Democrats (strong, not strong, and lean = 1, all others = 0: 48.3 percent), Republicans (strong, not strong, and lean = 1, all others = 0: 36.9 percent), and Independents (= 1, all others = 0; 14.8 percent). Political ideology and party identification are captured for all respondents. Recognition of White privilege is measured by agreement (5) or disagreement (1) on a five-point scale with the assertion "White people in the U.S. have certain advantages because of the color of their skin." Higher values indicate more agreement ( $M = 3.23$ ,  $SD = 1.48$ ; 51 percent somewhat/strongly agree), and thus more recognition of White privilege. In our working data, the White privilege measure is only recorded for White respondents.

#### DEMOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND VARIABLES

We include several background variables in a model predicting racial enabling. Age is measured in years ( $M = 46.29$ ,  $SD = 17.56$ ). Gender (female = 1: 56.4 percent, all others = 0: 43.6 percent), college education ("4 year degree or higher" = 1: 37.4 percent, all others = 0: 62.6 percent) or not, and "new south" residence in the United States (as defined by [Kuklinski, Cobb, and Gilens 1997](#): 1 = AL, AR, FL, GA, MS, LA, NC, SC, TX, and VA: 24 percent, all others = 0: 75.8 percent) are each dichotomous measures that are dummy-coded. Family income is a five-point ordinal measure capturing family income in quintiles; it ranges from \$29,000 or less (1) to \$100,000 or more (5) (Median = \$50,000 to \$69,999). Religiosity is an ordinal variable based on the question "how important is your religion to you?" Responses to this question ranged from "not at all important" (1) to "very important" (4). While these background variables are typically used as statistical controls, they also help to understand who is more or less likely motivated to support antiracism in terms of motivations. Since racial resentment is associated with persons who are older, male, less educated, lower income, more religious, and living in the south ([Kinder and Sanders 1996](#);



Davis and Wilson 2021), we suspect antiracism action orientation will be on the lower side for these groups than their respective demographic counterparts.

## Results

### PROFILING ANTIRACISM ACTION ORIENTATION

Our first task is to examine among whom antiracism action orientation is higher or lower. Table 2 reports the mean antiracism action orientation scores for the demographic variable categories, political orientations, and the ally-aligned opinion that White privilege exists (or not). Among the demographics, we start with examining the mean antiracism action orientation levels across racial-ethnic identification. The analyses show that Whites have statistically lower scores than non-Whites, and African Americans have statistically lower scores than all other racial groups. These findings provide preliminary support for our H6 and H7 expectations. Age, gender, college education, family income, and southern residence categories did not correlate with changes in antiracism action orientation scores. However, we find lower antiracism action orientation scores among those respondents indicating that religion is more important to them. The linear relationship between antiracism action orientation and religiosity indicators aligns with our informal expectations, and existing research showing that stronger religiosity helps satisfy epistemic, existential, and relational needs that motivate system justification (Jost et al. 2014). The bottom portion of table 2 shows that Democrats, liberals, and Whites who acknowledge White privilege each have higher antiracism action orientation compared to their opposite Republican, conservative, and White privilege denial groupings.

### THE EFFECTS OF RACIAL AFFECT ON ANTIRACISM ACTION ORIENTATION

Having established some initial correlational estimates that profile who is more or less likely to have antiracism action orientation, we turn to the question of why. We suspect that stronger system-legitimizing beliefs, especially those related to race, lower the motivation to support antiracism because it reduces one's antiracism action orientation.

We tested this theory by examining correlations among several of our explanatory variables and antiracism action orientation. These results are provided in table 3. Our key variables of interest are the feeling thermometer affect ratings toward African Americans, Latinos, and Whites; respondent race; and system-justification measures for resistance to change, awareness or perception of racial problems, and White resentment (only for White respondents). First, we estimate zero-order bivariate correlations between each variable and antiracism action orientation. Zero-order correlations represent each variable's estimated linear

**Table 2. Antiracism action orientation profile scores for select groups**

Variable	Category	Mean	SD	N
Race-ethnicity F = 4.46, <i>p</i> = 0.004	Whites	3.16	1.05	710
	African Americans	3.54	1.10	117
	Hispanic/Latino	3.12	1.19	85
	Asians	3.12	0.81	28
Minority status t = -2.09, <i>p</i> = 0.036	Whites	3.16	1.05	710
	Non-Whites	3.32	1.09	230
African Americans t = -2.89, <i>p</i> = 0.004	Other racial-ethnic minorities	3.12	1.10	113
	African Americans	3.54	1.10	117
Age F = 1.72, <i>p</i> = 0.143	18–29	3.18	0.99	221
	30–39	3.24	1.09	181
	40–49	3.17	1.07	127
	50–59	3.07	1.11	195
	60+	2.32	1.07	267
Gender t = -1.27, <i>p</i> = 0.203	Females	3.17	1.08	558
	Males	3.25	1.04	433
College education t = -1.85, <i>p</i> = 0.065	4-year degree	3.29	1.05	374
	No 4-year degree	3.16	1.07	617
Family income F = 2.33, <i>p</i> = 0.054	1st ntile (<= \$29,999)	3.08	1.09	197
	2nd ntile (\$30,000–\$49,999)	3.16	1.00	206
	3rd ntile (\$50,000–\$69,999)	3.18	1.07	199
	4th ntile (\$70,000–\$99,999)	3.39	1.11	184
	5th ntile (\$100,000+)	3.23	1.04	205
Southern residence t = 0.94, <i>p</i> = 0.346	South	3.15	1.08	239
	Non-south	3.22	1.06	752
Religiosity F = 6.47, <i>p</i> = 0.00	Very important	3.07	1.11	357
	Somewhat important	3.13	1.00	254
	Not too important	3.31	1.06	159
	Not at all important	3.44	1.01	221
Political ideology F = 59.87, <i>p</i> = 0.00	Liberal	3.76	1.04	279
	Moderate	3.09	1.03	333
	Conservative	2.87	0.97	296
Party ID F = 51.06, <i>p</i> = 0.00	Democrat	3.54	1.05	460
	Independent	3.09	1.01	141
	Republican	2.82	0.98	353
White privilege [exists] <sup>a</sup> F = 33.19, <i>p</i> = 0.00	Strongly/somewhat agree	3.15	1.04	317
	Neither agree/disagree	2.76	0.90	109
	Strongly/somewhat disagree	2.86	0.98	204

NOTE.— Statistical significance tests are two-tailed.

<sup>a</sup>White respondents only.

**Table 3. OLS regression estimates of antiracism action orientation**

	Zero-order correlations		Full model		Full model w/racial resentment (White respondents)	
			Model 1		Model 2	
	Corr	<i>p</i> -value	Part Corr	<i>p</i> -value	Part Corr	<i>p</i> -value
Feeling thermometer items						
Blacks	0.368	0.000	0.066	0.032	0.049	0.158
Latinos	0.355	0.000	0.074	0.016	0.043	0.215
Whites	0.017	0.625	−0.006	0.857	0.007	0.834
Respondent race						
African American (=1)	0.141	0.000	0.088	0.004	–	–
Other racial-ethnic minorities (=1)	−0.042	0.193	−0.029	0.350	–	–
System justification						
Resistance to change	−0.466	0.000	−0.243	0.000	−0.082	0.017
Racial problems are rare	−0.280	0.000	0.008	0.788	0.041	0.230
White resentment	−0.528	0.000	–	–	−0.196	0.000
Model statistics						
<i>N</i>	817		740		580	
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>			0.305		0.316	
SEE			0.891		0.874	

NOTE.—Zero-order correlations, except White resentment, and Model 1 consist of all respondents. Correlations for White resentment and Model 2 consist of Whites only. Dependent variable = “antiracism action orientation.” Part correlation estimates are based on the variables shown in each regression model plus age, gender, college education, family income, religiosity, southern residence, party ID, and political ideology. “Full Model” contains all three feeling thermometer variables in a single regression, and “Individual Models” contain independent regressions with each feeling thermometer rating per row (racial-ethnic group). For respondent race, Whites are the reference category. Statistical significance tests are two-tailed. Full regression models are located in [Supplementary Material table SM1](#).

relationship with antiracism action orientation without the influence of any additional variables. Next, we estimate the part (or semi-partial) correlations between each explanatory variable and antiracism action orientation. The part correlations represent the estimated correlation with antiracism action orientation controlling for the effects of all other variables in the regression model. Part correlations indicate the specific effect of each explanatory variable after the linear effects of all other predictor variables have been removed. Part correlations are similar to the zero-order estimates in that they range from -1.00 to 1.00. All of the models contain background variables for age, gender, college education, family income, religiosity, southern residence, party identification, and political ideology. For brevity in results, the part correlations for these variables are not reported out; the full regression results are provided in the [Supplementary Material](#). Model 1 is a full model consisting of all variables, except White resentment, and is based on all respondents in the working data. Model 2 includes White resentment, and is based on only White respondents.

The results in [table 3](#) show consistent support for our theoretical expectations that antiracism action orientation is heavily influenced by legitimizing beliefs that resist change. First, the zero-order bivariate correlations show that warmer feelings toward Blacks and Latinos, being African American, having less resistance to change, and disagreeing that racial problems are rare each correlate with higher antiracism action orientation. Affect toward Whites does not appear to directly influence antiracism action orientation (not supporting H5b). In Model 1, while most of the variables remain statistically robust, the effects of each are drastically reduced—some to near zero. For example, while low awareness of racial problems is associated with lower antiracism action orientation in the bivariate setting (supporting H4), in Model 1 and Model 2, the correlation is reduced to zero. Thus, awareness of extent of racial problems in society is not a robust predictor of antiracism action orientation.

The bivariate zero-order correlations and estimates in Model 1 both reveal that warmer affect toward Blacks and Latinos increases antiracism action orientation, while warmer affect toward Whites reduces it but only in the multiple regression setting. This suggests that there is some in-group/out-group prejudice at play that can affect motivations to confront racial prejudice. These effects evidence support for H5a but not H5b.

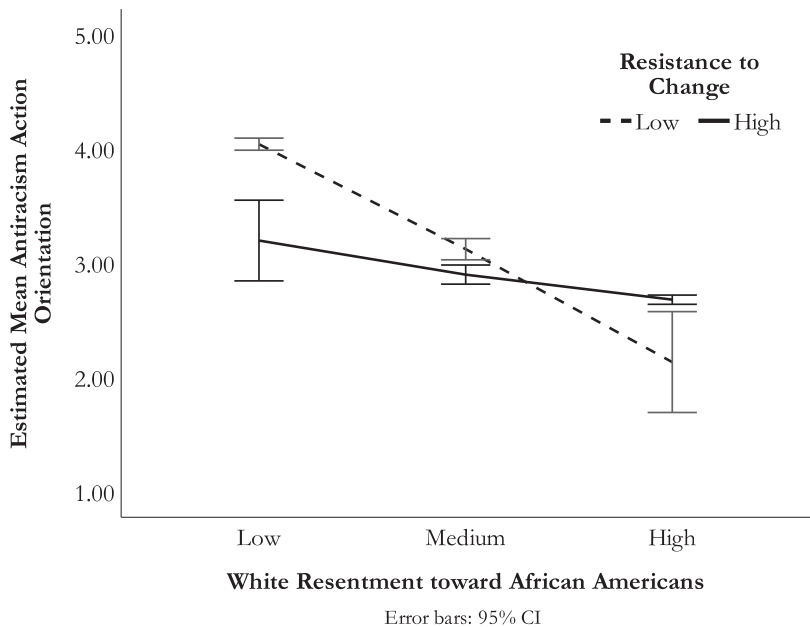
Racial identification as an African American is also a stout predictor of antiracism action orientation. The pattern of African Americans having the highest antiracism action orientation (see [table 2](#)) continues even after feeling thermometer scores and system-justifying beliefs are considered. The results from Models 1 through 4 all show that African Americans have statistically higher levels of antiracism action orientation than both Whites and other racial-ethnic minority groups—who are not statistically different from Whites. These findings provide confirmatory evidence support for H6 and H7.

Among Whites higher levels of racial resentment are associated with lower antiracism action orientation. Among Whites, White resentment has the largest bivariate correlation, and among all respondents, resistance to change has the strongest correlation. Notably, once White racial resentment toward African Americans is included in Model 2, the all effects due to the feeling thermometer ratings among Whites are statistically zero, but the measure of resistance to change holds strong. System-legitimizing beliefs about change and judgments about the deservingness of African Americans for special considerations both statistically reduce antiracism action orientation. These results provide evidence in support of H1 and H2.

Statistical interaction effects among our explanatory variables were mostly absent with the exception of one. We found no interaction effects for the feeling thermometer items, nor did we find any for racial-ethnic identification. However, we did find a statistical interaction effect for resistance to change  $\times$  White resentment toward African Americans ( $b = .15$ ,  $SE = .03$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , 95 percent CI: 0.09, 0.20). The slope effect of White resentment on antiracism action orientation varies by levels of resistance to change. The graphical interaction pattern, shown in [figure 1](#), reveals that among Whites, racial resentment has no statistical effect on levels of antiracism action orientation for those with higher resistance to change ( $b = -0.17$ ,  $SE = 0.11$ , n.s., CI:  $-0.37$ ,  $0.04$ ), but racial resentment does show that strong statistical effect exists for those with lower resistance to change ( $b = -0.56$ ,  $SE = 0.10$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , 95 percent CI:  $-0.76$ ,  $-0.36$ ). Thus, White resentment toward African Americans reduces antiracism action orientation faster among Whites who are less resistant to change (i.e., change is less threatening) than Whites who are more resistant to change (i.e., change is threatening). Stated another way, high racial resentment unifies those who are more and less resistant to change.

This is an extremely important finding, as it suggests that racial resentment has effects even among Whites who are more open to change. It also raises additional questions about antiracism orientation among ostensible political allies (Hypothesis 5) in pursuit of racial inequality. We will explore this question in the subsequent section.

Summarizing the regression results, we find that system-justifying beliefs that motivate resistance to change may depress antiracism action orientation; however, White resentment has a much more powerful effect among Whites. In fact, among Whites, racial resentment even depresses antiracism action orientation among those who are less resistant to change. With regard to affect, warmer (positive) feelings toward African Americans and Latinos appear to increase antiracism action orientation. These effects remain statistically relevant, although weaker after controlling for resistance to change. Among Whites, racial affect has no effect on antiracism action orientation once racial resentment is controlled for. Finally, African Americans have higher antiracism action orientation than Whites and other racial-ethnic



**Figure 1. Racial resentment x resistance to change interaction effect on antiracism action orientation.** Estimated mean antiracism action orientation scores and respective 95 percent confidence intervals for the White resentment toward African Americans x resistance to change interaction. The regression model underlying the figure is located in [Supplementary Material table SM2](#).

minorities, signaling that their epistemic, existential, and relational motivational needs are likely different from others.

POLITICAL ALLIES OR NONRACISTS?

Antiracism requires that Whites, and others, confront racism in all of its forms; thus, the core feature of being an antiracist is motivated action. However, it is not entirely clear that most individuals are willing to disrupt those systems that benefit them because of race. In essence, authentic antiracism may be too costly, even for those who despise racism. Instead, Whites may find it easier to be nonracist, which involves a belief that one should not contribute to racism even if they are unwilling to combat it (Bonnet 2014; LaCosse et al. 2021). One should expect that Democrats, liberals, and individuals who acknowledge White privilege would be committed allies in the push for antiracism as each of them has been shown to have more positive

policy preferences in support of racial equality (e.g., Hutchings 2009; DeSante and Smith 2019), and lower racial resentment toward African Americans (Davis and Wilson 2021). Yet, prior literature (e.g., Feldman and Huddy 2005) finds that racial attitudes and thus system-legitimizing beliefs may have stronger influence among partisan, ideological, and racially conscious White allies. We ask, to what extent are ostensible political allies motivated toward antiracism?

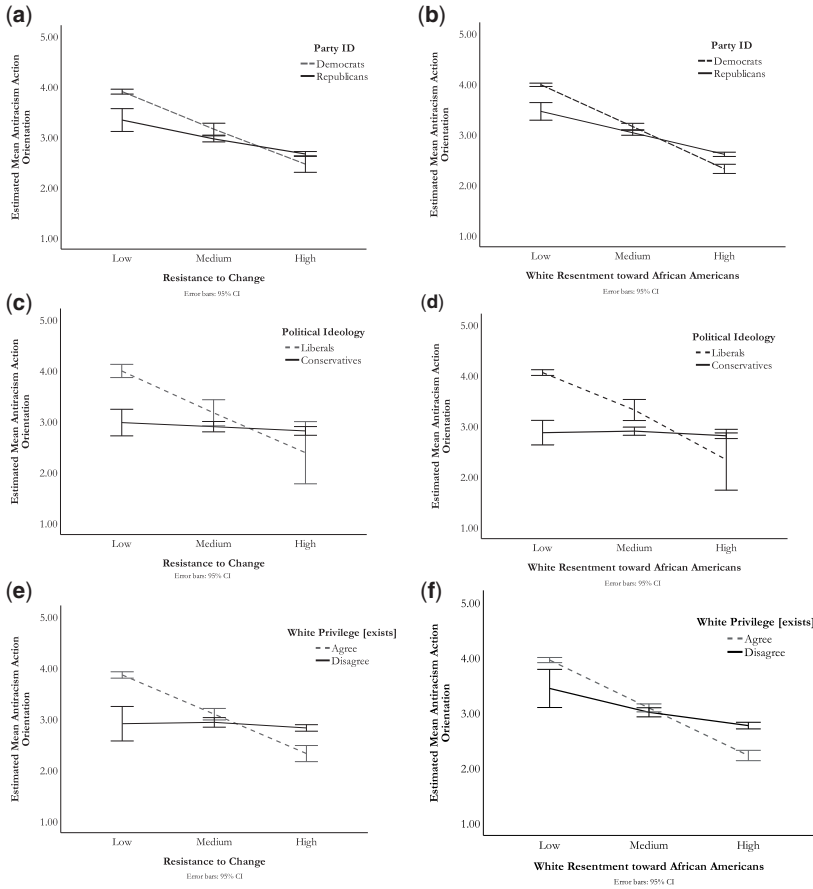
We answered this question with a series of Ordinary Least Squares regression analyses. We separate regressions for Democrats and Republicans, liberals and conservatives, and those who agreed and disagreed that Whites have privileges because of the color of their skin (i.e., White privilege exists or not). Within each of those groups, we regressed antiracism action orientation on resistance to change and white racial resentment toward African Americans, controlling for demographic background variables (i.e., age, gender, college education, family income, religiosity, southern residence, and where appropriate party ID, ideology). We then plotted the estimate mean levels of antiracism action orientation for lower, middle, and upper third ntile levels of both resistance to change and white racial resentment, for each of the separate regressions. The full regression results are provided in the [Supplementary Material](#). The graphical results are provided in [figure 2](#), which contains a total of six subfigures.

We find consistent evidence that Whites who adopt identities, ideologies, and conscious positions that signal they are more supportive of racial equality have lower antiracism action orientation. The system-legitimizing beliefs to resist change and view African Americans as undeserving of special considerations have stronger effects among White Democrats, liberals, and those who acknowledge that White privilege exists than White Republicans, conservatives, and those who deny that White privilege exists. These findings are robust and evidence support for our hypotheses (H3a through H3c). Republicans, conservatives, and White privilege deniers are so universally lower in antiracism action orientation that regardless of their legitimizing ideologies they are not motivated toward action. However, among Democrats, liberals, and those who acknowledge White privilege, those with the highest levels of resistance to change and White resentment toward African Americans, have the lowest levels of antiracism action orientation. These results suggest there is a great deal of diversity even within supposed ally networks to the point where they are dramatically lower in their antiracism action orientation than even ostensible non-allies.

## Discussion

We believe our research on antiracism orientation offers new ground to think about the future of race relations. Using a new measure (cf. [LaCosse et al.](#)





**Figure 2. Effects of system justification beliefs on antiracism action orientation among political allies.** Estimated mean antiracism action orientation scores and respective 95 percent confidence intervals for the legitimizing beliefs x political ally categories. Regression models underlying the figures are located in [Supplementary Material tables SM3a, b, and c](#).

2021), we find that negative racial affect toward African Americans and Latinos statistically lowers antiracism action orientation, but so do non-racial attitudes and beliefs like resistance to change. While the bivariate correlations between negative racial affect are statistically strong, they are reduced substantially in a multivariate setting that includes resistance to change. In addition, our results show that African Americans are particularly likely to hold higher levels of antiracism action orientation, more so than other racial-ethnic minorities and non-Hispanic Whites. Most demographic background

factors—age, education, gender, family income, and southern residence—are not statistically correlated with the orientation. Religiosity is the sole exception among background variables; the more important one believes religion is, the lower their antiracism action orientation. The correlation between religiosity and antiracism action orientation is no longer statistical in the full regression models. In terms of political orientations, Democrats and liberals have the higher levels of antiracism orientation and Republicans and conservatives have the lowest. Overall, among all respondents, higher antiracism action orientation is associated with African American racial identification and holding more progressive partisan and ideological political orientations; however, the stronger correlate, even more so than negative racial affect, is a psychological resistance to change.

Among Whites, the dominant correlates of antiracism orientation are both racial and non-racial system-justifying beliefs, and racial affect has no statistical relationship. Our measure of racial resentment has the strongest bivariate correlation with antiracism action orientation, and when a statistical interaction with the measure of resistance to change is considered, it turns out that even among those with the lowest levels of resistance to change racial resentment produces statistically lower levels of antiracism action orientation. This effect occurs in a full model that includes demographics, political orientations, and racial affect. We find a similarly important pattern among political allies like Democrats, liberals, and acknowledgers of White privilege, all of whom tend to hold higher levels of antiracism action orientation than their Republican, conservative, and White privilege-denying counterparts. Among political allies, both racial resentment and resistance to change statistically reduce levels of antiracism action orientation. These findings may come as a surprise to many; however, much of the literature on racial attitudes suggests such a pattern exists because among Republicans and conservatives, for example, their racial and non-racial principles are more intertwined (Feldman and Huddy 2005) than those for Democrats and liberals.

Our findings lead us to the conclusion that antiracism is more aspiration than coherent program or policy, especially among Whites and, in particular, supposed White political allies of racial progress. Racial change is difficult, and in many instances the costs associated with achieving racial equality and justice require one to take an explicit stand by way of action. Our data show that for many, this is not only difficult, but it is undeserved. The effects of racial resentment are powerful among Whites, more so than negative racial affect. The robust findings suggest that being an antiracist will require more than holding more positive feelings about racial-ethnic minorities, it will require pointing out and confronting racial prejudice when it occurs—even if it is wrongly construed—and not always going along with the status quo, but also audacity, since confrontation will likely be met with resistance.

Future research should build on our limitations. For one, the items comprising our antiracism action orientation scale did not come from an exhaustive list of criteria for the orientation. The question wording, and perhaps reliability, could be improved. Reviewers of the manuscript speculated that the effect sizes among our racial resentment, antiracism, and resistance to change measures might be inflated by correlated measurement error. We found no evidence of a correlated errors problem in our ad hoc analyses; however, researchers should be aware of this potential with data sharing racial content. It is unfortunately the case that in most instances the strongest predictors of racial outcomes (e.g., supporting racial causes) are racial inputs (e.g., beliefs about race). In addition to measurement limitations, our data are not causal. We hope to see more experimental approaches containing treatments that pose solutions or conditions that reduce the costs of believing that African Americans and other racial minorities are deserving of high-cost action against racial prejudice. We encourage scholars to delve into the psychological action orientation of antiracism and other progressive ideologies to better understand the range of costs associated with bringing about racial equality and justice. The social sciences need new measures as well as new thinking about what motivates racial preferences; our data and methods are somewhat limited by both. Without surprise, due to overlapping explanatory content, we find collinearity among the survey measures in our multiple regression (e.g., the feeling thermometers, White racial resentment), although none reach a level of statistical influence (i.e., variance inflation factors [VIF]  $\geq 5$ ), and the results are not altered when collinear variables are removed. Such statistical challenges are common in survey analysis. Still, we hope that our research compels action among the scholarly community that extends the study of racial attitudes beyond prejudice and racism. Some of this work is already in progress (e.g., [Davis and Wilson 2021](#)); but much more needs to be done.

## Conclusion

In February (Black History Month) 2009, then attorney general Eric Holder characterized the challenge of confronting racism in frank terms:

Though this nation has proudly thought of itself as an ethnic melting pot, in things racial, we have always been, and we, I believe, continue to be, in too many ways, a nation of cowards . . . If we're going to ever make progress, we're going to have to have the guts, we have to have the determination, to be honest with each other. It also means we have to be able to accept criticism where that is justified.<sup>7</sup>

7. The full text of the speech can be found at <https://www.justice.gov/opa/speech/attorney-general-eric-holder-department-justice-african-american-history-month-program>.

Holder did not mention antiracism specifically, but his comments reflected both frustration and urgency about direct action to change America's future. Thus, our work is important because it provides insights about the extent to which the public has the motivation, capacity, and courage for change. System-justification explanations motivate individuals to explain away the moral and systemic failures of our social, economic, and political institutions, and derogue challenges, challengers, and alternatives to the status quo. Higher-status group members (e.g., Whites; the wealthy) can be distressed by the presence of racial inequality, and rather than seek to make the system more equal for lower-status groups (e.g., racial-ethnic minorities; the poor), higher-status group members find ways to justify inaction by victim blaming: for example, those with lower status need to work harder to achieve higher status. Victim blaming redirects concerns away from the system and broader institutional arrangements and to the individuals and group members. Thus, system-justifying beliefs, also called "legitimizing beliefs," serve a palliative function by allowing immoral and unethical systems to exist without guilt (Jost et al. 2014). They provide order and structure, which helps reduce uncertainty (i.e., supports epistemic needs); a level of safety and security, which creates a less threatening world (i.e., supports existential needs); and a sense of shared reality with others in society, which helps one confirm and validate their ideas (i.e., supports relationship needs). To fully comprehend what it will take to become an antiracist society, organization, or individual, we must understand both racial and non-racial motivations that serve as barriers.

The conceptualization and study of antiracism deserves empirical attention because it is being widely adopted by institutions in the United States, but also because it is unclear who in society is more likely to be an antiracism ally, antagonist, or neutral observer (Sue 2017; LaCosse et al. 2021).

### Data Availability Statement

REPLICATION DATA AND DOCUMENTATION are available at <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/Q5BRTT>.

### Supplementary Material

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL may be found in the online version of this article: <https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfac016>.

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