

Black Lives Matter and the Racialized Support for the January 6 Insurrection

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Abstract

Are January 6th insurrection supporters and sympathizers a group of concerned citizens worried that the 2020 election was marred by large numbers of people voting illegally? Or are they racists spurred to action by the highly visible Black Lives Matter protests and Donald Trump's defeat in the 2020 presidential election? We field a large-scale survey experiment to disentangle the link between old and new racial grievances, anti-immigrant beliefs, Black activism, and support for the January 6 insurrection. We find that whites who hold negative attitudes towards immigrants and subscribe to white replacement theory are more likely to support the insurrection. Beliefs about the George Floyd protests also explain January 6 views, above and beyond demographics and other racial and political views. These results are validated by the 2020 CMPS. We also conduct a survey vignette experiment and find support that anti-BLM rhetoric spread by Trump and right-wing news sources soured opinions on the movement, setting the stage for widespread insurrection support.

Introduction

On January 6, 2021 thousands of Donald Trump supporters gathered at the Ellipse in Washington D.C. to promote his false claims of election fraud and protest Joe Biden winning the 2020 presidential election. According to analysis of mass media coverage of January 6th by the Berkeley Media Studies Group, the media initially covered the event as a large pro-Trump demonstration or protest, but as more than 2,000 rioters entered the Capitol building the tone and tenor of coverage soon changed to call it a mob, an insurrection, and a coup (Mejia 2021). While conservative media was slow to call it an insurrection, as demonstrated by prominent Fox News commentator Tucker Carlson going as far as to comment two years post-Jan. 6th that “[v]ery little about Jan. 6 was organized or violent. Surveillance video from inside the Capitol shows mostly peaceful chaos” (Mascaro, Amiri and Jalonick 2023), almost all mainstream media denounced the action on January 6, 2021 as an anti-democratic insurrection.

In this paper, we examine what explains public support for the January 6 insurrection beyond the few thousand who illegally entered the Capitol. Some conservatives, such as Vice President Pence and South Carolina Senator Lindsey Graham, strongly denounced the actions later that same evening. Others, including President Trump and several far-right media personalities, were slow to criticize and even embraced the insurrectionists. We focus our attention on examining motivations for supporting the actions of the January 6 insurrection. We argue that beyond claims of massive voter fraud, pro-white racial attitudes and anti-immigrant sentiment played central roles in explaining why the insurrection took place, why it became violent, and why so many Americans who did not directly participate came to view the insurrection in a positive light. We also argue that beyond normal demographic, ideological, and

racial attitudes, public attitudes towards the George Floyd protests shaped support for the insurrection.

We outline a new theory of racial status impotence in which the events and sentiments directly preceding January 6th activated factors that influenced support for the insurrection. Racial conservatives saw coverage of Floyd protesters taking to the streets, and far-right information channels described them as terrorists, as looters, as Black nationalists, as violent and not American (Hylton 2021; Monroe and Savillo 2021). In contrast to the mainstream news coverage which presented a much more understanding and supportive view of the Floyd protests, far-right coverage attacked, belittled, and criticized BLM protesters by telling their audiences that they were trying to change America, and that real American patriots needed to stand up and fight back (Sullivan 2021).

Additionally, we argue the racial status impotence experienced by whites was motivated by a tumultuous political timeline of events in 2020 and early 2021: the George Floyd protests, the 2020 Presidential election, and the events on Jan 6. This timeline informs our decision to make connections regarding public opinion about George Floyd protests and Jan 6, not comparisons as that is a dangerous false equivalency (Brantley-Jones 2021). We posit that racial conservatives felt powerless to stop the wave of Democratic votes from Black, Latino, AAPI, and immigrant communities which ultimately resulted in Trump's electoral loss. At the same time, accusations and conspiracies surrounding voter fraud, the reinvigoration of white nationalism and pride, and the desperate appeals to keep "American ideals" through far-right news media and elite rhetoric was rampant following the election cycle.

What is normally a formality and a bipartisan ceremony, the certification of the Presidential election results on January 6th, turned into what the FBI called an act of domestic

terrorism, resulting in nine deaths and 138 injured police officers. After the initial shock and horror wore off, we suspect that many Americans harbored feelings of racial status impotence, and grew to empathize, if not support the January 6 insurrection. Using an original national survey, the 2022 Political Unrest Study, we model support for the January 6 insurrection as a function of negative views towards the Floyd protests and feelings of White status anxiety. We do this to demonstrate that among White Americans, strong rejection of BLM, and feelings of Whites being “left behind”, are highly correlated with support for the January 6 insurrection. We control for other highly significant variables including belief in voter fraud, Trump favorability, ideology and social dominance orientation, and system justification to demonstrate that beyond these expected effects, our key theoretical variables related to Black Lives Matter and White racial status impotence have an independent association with January 6 “true believers.” These results are validated with the 2020 CMPS. Finally, in a BLM priming experiment, we demonstrate that far-right critiques did in fact spur White Americans to hold more negative views of the Floyd protests, finding a causal link between language used by personalities such as Tucker Carlson likening the Floyd protests to a tyrannical, oppressive riot (Naughtie 2020), and survey respondents being statistically more likely to believe Floyd protesters were terrorists, black nationalists, rioters and insurrectionists. We argue that the extended negative critique of BLM and Floyd protests in 2020 in particular laid the groundwork for a “protest of their own” by ardent Trump supporters, especially those who denounced concepts like White privilege and embraced concepts like the White replacement theory.

Racial Attitudes, Anti-Immigrant Views, and White Replacement Theory

Since America's founding, Whites have consistently been the majority racial group in power. However, as U.S. demographics continue to diversify, many non-Hispanic whites feel increasingly threatened by these changes (Jardina 2019, Major et al. 2018, Mutz 2018, Schildkraut 2007). This anxiety stems in part from the perceived erosion of their status as the majority racial group.

Whites' reactions to the potential political change from these demographic shifts can be better understood through the lens of identity-based theories. Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory (SIT) and its offshoot, Social Categorization Theory (SCT), suggest that individuals are driven by an innate motivation to maintain positive self-esteem, which can be achieved by forming distinct groups centered around an identity that distinguishes them from other groups. This psychological drive may motivate whites, especially those with a strong racial identity, to privilege their own group and attempt to exclude out-groups in order to maintain positive distinctiveness (Tajfel and Turner 1979; Tajfel and Turner 1986).

One way in which Whites may attempt to reinforce their status as the prototypical racial group in America is by resisting growing racial diversity and policing the boundaries of what might be considered American (Schildkraut 2009; Danbold and Huo 2015; Jardina 2019; Bai and Federico 2020). This is exemplified by some Whites expressing resentment and xenophobia in response to the growing U.S. immigrant population (Abrajano and Hajnal 2015; Ramirez and Peterson 2020). The theory of racial threat posits that the proximity of Whites to large or growing racial and ethnic minority populations can heighten hostility towards out-groups and influence political actions (Key 1949; Enos 2017). This phenomenon has been observed in various settings (Green et al. 1988; Taylor 1998) and among immigrant populations (Hopkins

2010). Additionally, anti-immigrant sentiment has been linked to support for voter restrictions and belief in fraud (Udani and Kimball 2018).

To further protect their status and reinforce their positive group image, Whites may also exhibit intolerant attitudes and prejudice towards out-group members. For instance, support for the Tea Party is rooted in the anxiety some feel as they perceive the America they know slipping away and being replaced by a more diverse and multicultural society (Parker and Barreto 2013). While the candidacy of Donald Trump did not create these fears and sentiments, his campaign and other political leaders exploited them and made the threat more salient to voters. Trump's rhetoric included statements such as "taking back our country," which alludes to reclaiming a White America and promoting anti-immigrant sentiment. By appealing to White voters' fear of replacement and loss of status, and by making both blatant and coded racist remarks, he was able to mobilize the support of high-identifying White voters (Major et. al 2018; Mutz 2018; Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2019). Trump also claimed that the election had been stolen, and that the "radical left" would take control of the country. In response to this perceived threat, he urged supporters to "fight like hell" or risk losing the country altogether (Long 2022). This rhetoric served to connect the perceived threat to specific extremist actions, such as storming the seat of government to prevent the certification of the democratic election.

Trump's Big Lie Rhetoric Focused on Immigrants and Racial Minorities

Trump's efforts to cultivate public distrust in U.S. elections have long centered on the vilification of *illegal* immigrants and minority enclaves (Acosta 2019). This misinformation campaign began in the run up to the 2016 election, a period during which Trump frequently cited a controversial study which concluded that Democrats had benefited in recent elections from non-citizen voting

(Farley 2016; Feldman 2020). In the months following his surprise electoral college win, Trump repeatedly advanced claims about voter fraud, attributing his loss of the popular vote to what he alleged were millions of illegal votes cast by undocumented immigrants. A “Presidential Advisory Commission on Voter Integrity”, established by Trump after his inauguration, disbanded two years later after failing to find any evidence to back up his claims (Tackett and Wines 2018). Even so, Trump recycled these narratives in the wake of his party’s 2018 midterm drubbing – contending that Democratic gains were driven largely by coordinated efforts to mobilize illegal immigrants as voters – and again in the lead-up to the 2020 election. By this point, Trump’s oxymoronic fraud narrative had expanded to encompass alleged “mountains of corruption” that he claimed persisted in Philadelphia, Detroit, and Milwaukee – cities well-known for their large African American populations (Badger 2020). “Detroit and Philadelphia are known as two of the most corrupt political places anywhere in our country – easily,” he offered. “They cannot be responsible for engineering the outcome of a presidential race” (Badger 2020). Trump’s post-election lawsuits also laser-focused on challenging votes in these largely Black, populous cities. Taken together, these tendencies delineate a clear commitment to the practice of thinly veiled race-baiting whereby un-American actors were the direct cause of Trump’s electoral misfortunes.

Trump overlayed these narrative efforts with a sustained practice of soft-pedaling the actions of far-right groups while making clear his disdain for counterprotest movements and the Movement for Black Lives. In response to the deadly 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, VA, Trump assessed that there were “very fine people on both sides,” before offering a full-throated denouncement of what he believed to be “troublemakers” who prevailed among the counter protesters acting in support of removing confederate monuments from public

display. On the eve of a second Unite the Right rally one year later, Trump persisted in his refusal to condemn the actions of white supremacist and Neo-Nazi actors, opting instead to “condemn all types of racism and acts of violence.” Then-President Trump adopted a completely different tone in his response to the 2020 protests following the death of Black Minnesota resident George Floyd, declaring to state and local officials that “if you don’t dominate your city and your state, they’re going to walk away with you,” and “In Washington we’re going to do something people haven’t seen before. Trump’s directive for the Proud Boys and other white supremacist groups to “stand back and stand by,” during the nationally televised 2020 presidential debate preceded the events of January 6, 2021. And in the wake of those events while addressing the very mob that had stormed the Capitol earlier that day, Trump concluded his remarks by telling them, “You’re very special,” thus crystalizing the contrast in his portrayal of right-wing extremists compared with the Black Lives Matter protesters he had often labeled “terrorists,” “thugs,” and “anarchists.”

The Link Between Black Lives Matter, the Big Lie, and January 6

Trump, by proxy, allowed some white Americans to express a signified aggrieved identity distinct from group consciousness-centered considerations like white identity politics (Jardina 2019). Signified aggrieved white selves is a sociological form of racial identity (Khanna and Johnson 2010) describing a sense of self antagonized by non-white people and seeking correction or retribution for this aggrieved status. Hochschild demonstrates this sentiment with white Louisiana Tea Party supporters expressing anger and frustration toward their status in the US during focus groups and interviews. They are angered because despite being hard-working and rule-following Americans they have been denied the American Dream by a government

enabling others to unfairly cut in line (Hochschild 2016). This aggrieved disposition may be associated with gains in governmental distrust and conspiratorial thinking. Central components when considering responses to the 2020 election and likelihood to believe in suspicions of voter fraud (Uscinski and Parent 2014; Wolak 2014). The 2020 election intensified this uncertainty among voters who felt the Trump presidency brought them the retribution they deserved. This uncertainty inspired support for the Big Lie, voter fraud, and most surprisingly the events on January 6th at the US Capitol.

A large majority of Republicans and even more Trump-identified voters believe Trump won the 2020 Presidential election, the so-called “Big Lie.” Even after Congress had certified the 2020 election, majorities of Republicans (51%) and Trump voters (56%) believed that Donald Trump should not concede the election (Jacobson 2021). These polls present overwhelming evidence of the support for the Big Lie and voter fraud within the 2020 Presidential election, but the question remains about why these Trump supporters continued to believe this narrative.

Political psychology scholars suggest partisan-motivated reasoning and dual process models are key to unpacking the belief in the Big Lie. Motivated reasoning is described as developing rhetoric that justifies pre-existing beliefs that another party would view as compelling (Kunda 1990). Several scholars find that motivated reasoning along partisan lines significantly impacts an individual’s acceptance of information because it is signaled by the political elites of their preferred party (Bolsen, Druckman, and Cook 2014; Enders and Smallpage 2019; Strickland, Taber, and Lodge 2011). Additionally, other scholars discuss dual process models, where individuals either employ heuristics or engage with more reflective cognitive processes, which can explain the thinking of Trump supporters and the Big Lie (Kahan 2013; Knobloch-Westerwick, Mothes, and Polavin 2017).

Emotions are also relevant to this discussion of how political psychology explains the support white Republicans and Trump supporters alike afforded the Big Lie as well as the events of January 6th. To focus on the specific effects of emotions on political behavior, anger, for example, is said to trigger political participation and mobilize people to rectify injustices through protests and social movements (Banks, White, and McKenzie 2019; Lambert, Eadeh, and Hanson 2019; Valentino et al. 2011; Weber 2013). According to Affective Intelligence Theory, anger is motivated by continuous threats and is a response within a precautionary behavior inhibition system (Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen 2000). Webster asserts that anger is associated with negative partisanship, a result of the increasingly angry political environment that leads members of a party to go against everything associated with the oppositional party (Abramowitz and Webster 2018; Webster 2020). These theories lead to additional political behaviors associated with anger other than political participation like distrust in government and undermining of democratic institutions (Albertson and Guiler 2020; Webster 2020). Anger is a significant mobilizer for political action and that there is a gap in feelings of anger between Black and white individuals (Phoenix 2019). This anger gap leads white Americans to experience a sense of entitlement to make demands from the US government because it has historically responded to their anger. If white anger generates a sense of entitlement, it is no surprise that a group that feels downtrodden in the United States and has a political leader that is finally responsive to their needs is in jeopardy that they would engage in any means necessary to maintain their preferred leader. In addition, fear over a loss of power or status also has been shown to lead to an increase in racial animus towards racial minorities, as well as strengthens conservative political attitudes (Craig and Richeson 2014a, 2014b).

In this paper, we do not seek to directly compare the events of Jan 6 and the George Floyd protests. Similar to several media pundits, scholars, and activists engaged in the George Floyd protests, we argue there are important distinctions to be made between the events (Brantley-Jones 2021; Morrison 2021). The major distinction is that the George Floyd protests were meant to undermine white supremacy through a global social movement that occasionally turned to violence. On the other hand, the events on January 6th are described as an attack on American political institutions that was intentional and meant to uphold white supremacy. Republican legislators and Trump supporters alike attempted to skew the narrative by comparing the two events and describing George Floyd protestors as violent when an analysis of 7,750 demonstrations across the country found that 93% happened with no violence (Jones 2020; Morrison 2021). This attempt to establish a false equivalency between George Floyd protestors and Jan 6 participants aids the argument that racial status impotence is at play in whites' public opinion response to George Floyd protests. Additionally, it supports the argument that right-wing actors including the media could have effectively influenced whites' sentiments towards Jan 6.

Data and Methods

We fielded an original large-scale representative survey, the 2022 Political Unrest Study, by conducting 1,996 total web interviews in English on the Lucid Marketplace platform from mid-March to April 2022. We drop all respondents who failed an attention check and, for the purposes of this project, we drop all non-white respondents. This left us with a total sample size of 1,340 completed responses from self-identified non-Hispanic whites for our main analysis. We asked respondents a range of questions about their demographics, partisanship, ideology, and attitudes towards immigrant and racial minorities.

It is important that studies examining attitudes about the insurrection supplement standard measures of support with additional “soft” support metrics that indicate affinity or sympathy toward individuals who participated in those events, and cohere with the tradition of manufacturing innocence for actions associated with white men (Mitchell 2018). Public polling has consistently shown low overall approval for the January 6, 2021 insurrection, dating from immediately following the event up to the present day (Lazer et. al 2021; Orth 2023; Gramlich 2022). Even among Republicans, support for the insurrection has generally polled well below established metrics such as overall favorability for Donald Trump, though much more in line with entities such as QAnon. Our research design allows us to consider a wide range of stances that individuals might have towards those individuals and events. Therefore, we probe support for the January 6 insurrection by asking respondents which terms and labels they would associate with both the day’s events and its participants. We do the same for the George Floyd protests. Respondents were provided a long list of potential descriptors they might use to describe the January 6 insurrection and the George Floyd Protests’ events and participants, and were allowed to select however many they desired. Importantly, some of these descriptors were positive and implied tacit approval, such as describing the events as a “revolution”¹ or describing the participants as “patriots” or “protestors”. Others were negative and implied tacit disapproval, including describing the events as a “riot”, “coup”, or “insurrection”, or describing the participants as “rioters”, “insurrectionists”, or “terrorists”. This methodology of evaluating positive and negative descriptors of both events and their participants borrows from the University of Massachusetts Amherst’s April 21-23 poll conducted via YouGov (Nteta 2021).

¹ We make the argument that “revolution” generally takes on a positive connotation since it is typically denoted in the American context with positive historical change, i.e., the American Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, the Agricultural Revolution, etc. While revolution may potentially denote a negative connotation for a few, historical context and usage of the word revolution in American life serve as evidence for our treating the term as a positive.

In addition to this battery of questions, the survey embedded a vignette experiment testing the effect of exposure to information about the Black Lives Matter movement on attitudes towards these protests. Again, we argue that the Black Lives Matter/George Floyd protests, and the way these protests were framed in the media that individuals are exposed to, activated racial considerations and set the stage for the events that transpired on Jan 6th. Participants were randomly assigned into one of four treatment conditions. Each treatment involved reading a short paragraph describing the George Floyd protests and seeing the same photo of Black protestors with signs and raised fists. The four treatment conditions varied the language used to describe these protests: activist praise, mainstream praise, right-wing critique, and extreme critique. These treatments convey either a positive or negative framing of BLM protests to varying degrees. Whereas the mainstream praise and right-wing critique possess more moderate, middle-of-the-road language mirrored in mainstream liberal or right-wing news outlets, the activist and extreme critique conditions pose the strongest and most extreme wording used to describe BLM. The latter two conditions are what we expect to have the greatest impact on our post-treatment dependent variables. After receiving treatment, respondents received both a manipulation and attention check to ensure treatment effectiveness and respondent attentiveness within our survey experiment. Respondents who did not pass the attention check were removed pre-analysis. However, respondents who did not pass the manipulation check were maintained in the analysis given that this matches the reality of news consumers who may be exposed to disparate framing of BLM, but are not attentive enough to have it impact their attitudes.

We use the BLM Mainstream praise condition as a control condition for the experiment because we believe this rhetoric is most similar to how George Floyd's murder and the Black Lives Matter protests that followed were presented in the popular media. This condition presents

sentiments of George Floyd's murder and the Black Lives Matter movement being inspirational to want to encourage valuing human life and wanting to change America for the better. Additionally, it emphasizes that the Black Lives Matter movement embodies American values through its protest to improve policing and the justice system. We argue that these sentiments are similar to what Americans were exposed to by prominent media outlets like CNN, New York Times, NBC News, and Politico following Floyd's passing in May 2020 and up to a year following the events (Burch et al. 2021; Cheung 2020; Garcia 2021; CNN 2021; Politico Magazine 2021; Singh and Lakhani 2020). The common language utilized within the various articles includes referring to the interaction between George Floyd and police officer, Derek Chauvin, as a "killing" or "murder" as well as describing the events Black Lives Matter held in response as "protests" that invigorated a movement about improving "policing" and "racial injustice" in this country. It does not go as far as discussing abolishing the police or disparaging George Floyd, which we use in the treatment conditions.

Following the survey vignette experiment, a manipulation check asked if respondents read an article in support of Black Lives Matter to assess if respondents read and interpreted our experimental manipulation. Respondents within the Mainstream and Activist Praise conditions were expected to respond "True" while those who received the Mainstream and Extreme Critique were expected to respond "False". Aside from the soft support probes of both BLM and January 6th, we include several other outcome measures. These outcomes include voter fraud, voter fraud framed in the context of January 6th, and a voter fraud necessity measure. The voter fraud outcome measures ask about respondents' awareness of voter fraud and belief that it impacted the 2020 Presidential election. Digging deeper into respondents' beliefs about voter fraud, we asked questions that assess if individuals feel elections are rigged to support a specific political

party, if respondents believe their ballot was counted as intended generally and specifically within their state, and if preventing voter fraud is so important that it should make it harder for others to vote. Additionally, we have outcome measures that show support for voting reform and a small experiment about perceptions of Sunday and early voting. Our post-treatment measures include racial resentment, racial resentment scores, anti-immigrant attitudes, COVID conspiracy, external and internal efficacy, replacement theory, conspiracy ideation, social dominance, authoritarianism, and trust in government.

We complement our observational survey findings from the 2022 Political Unrest Study using the 2020 Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey.²

Results

What explains public support for the January 6 insurrection among whites? In Table 1, we display the output of regressions testing the relationship between respondents using positive terms to describe the January 6 capital insurrection and a series of political, demographic, and ideological variables for a white population sample. In all five columns, we employ sampling weights to make the sample representative of the adult U.S. white population. The first four columns employ logistic regressions. Columns 1 and 2 test binary responses to positive descriptors of the January 6, 2020 participants: describing them as “revolutionaries” in the first column, and describing them as “patriots” in the second column. Columns 3 and 4 test binary descriptors for the January 6, 2020 events: column 3, describing it as a “revolution” and column 4, as a “protest”. Column 5 employs a 0-4 count of the number of positive descriptors used to describe the January 6 event and its participants, and is run using a Poisson regression.

² <https://cmpsurvey.org/2020-survey/>

Table 1: Description of George Floyd Affects Description of Jan 6

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>				
	jan_6_revolutionaries	jan_6_patriots	jan_6_revolution	jan_6_protest	jan_6_positive_count
	<i>logistic</i>	<i>logistic</i>	<i>logistic</i>	<i>logistic</i>	<i>Poisson</i>
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Floyd protesters neg count	0.252*** (0.064)	0.368*** (0.063)	0.216*** (0.061)	0.380*** (0.057)	0.157*** (0.021)
Fraud changed results	−0.082 (0.079)	0.400*** (0.078)	−0.031 (0.072)	0.160*** (0.059)	0.068** (0.027)
Trump favorability	−0.026 (0.101)	0.338*** (0.098)	−0.114 (0.093)	0.280*** (0.078)	0.079** (0.034)
Whites being replaced	0.196** (0.089)	0.267*** (0.083)	0.196** (0.083)	0.129* (0.069)	0.107*** (0.029)
Immigrants burden	−0.002 (0.088)	0.172** (0.082)	0.154* (0.083)	−0.023 (0.068)	0.040 (0.029)
Racial resentment	−0.070 (0.116)	−0.181 (0.116)	−0.235** (0.109)	0.069 (0.087)	−0.028 (0.039)
Education	−0.005 (0.069)	0.051 (0.067)	−0.034 (0.064)	0.024 (0.053)	−0.002 (0.023)
Age	0.003 (0.006)	−0.015** (0.006)	−0.002 (0.006)	0.008* (0.005)	−0.001 (0.002)
Female	−0.059 (0.180)	−0.297* (0.172)	−0.153 (0.167)	0.001 (0.137)	−0.053 (0.060)
Income	−0.005 (0.031)	−0.044 (0.031)	0.015 (0.029)	−0.008 (0.024)	−0.002 (0.011)
SDO	0.216* (0.113)	0.042 (0.105)	0.056 (0.105)	0.077 (0.088)	0.053 (0.036)
Conservative	−0.059 (0.079)	−0.010 (0.076)	0.095 (0.072)	0.125** (0.063)	0.033 (0.026)
Republican	−0.030 (0.128)	−0.087 (0.125)	−0.135 (0.119)	−0.177* (0.101)	−0.057 (0.043)
Evangelical	0.293 (0.181)	0.004 (0.169)	0.388** (0.167)	0.047 (0.142)	0.099* (0.059)
Constant	−2.438*** (0.545)	−4.799*** (0.561)	−2.559*** (0.509)	−2.516*** (0.420)	−1.093*** (0.184)
Observations	1,214	1,214	1,214	1,214	1,214
Log Likelihood	−474.667	−477.339	−536.228	−704.607	−1,439.323

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

In all five specifications, we see substantially and statistically significant results for a range of demographic and political variables. Respondents who ascribe to the white replacement theory are much more likely, on average, to positively describe the January 6, 2021 insurrection. Those who think immigrants are a burden may also tend to view the insurrection in a positive light. In three of the five specifications, there is a strong relationship between belief in the Big Lie—that there was enough voter fraud in the 2020 presidential election to change its outcome—and support for the insurrection. As expected, Trump favorability, conservative ideology, and social dominance orientation are also correlated with more positive descriptions of the insurrection. The models also include controls for education, age, gender, evangelicalism, racial resentment, and party identification.

Even after accounting for all of these variables, respondents' views towards the George Floyd protestors powerfully shapes their views towards the insurrection. In every single model, a variable summing together six negative descriptors of the Black Lives Matter movements' participants (as “rioters”, “insurrectionists” and “terrorists”) and events (as an “insurrection”,

“riot”, and “coup) describes a significant amount of the variation in their descriptors of the January 6 insurrection. Respondents’ BLM views are a more powerful and consistent correlate of their insurrection views than their belief in the Big Lie, their political ideology or partisan identity, or even their attitudes towards President Trump.

In Table 2, we also show that respondents’ attitudes towards the George Floyd protests also explain variation in anti-democratic beliefs. Employing the same set of controls and ordered logit regressions, we find that when respondents have more negative attitudes towards the BLM protests, they are more likely to support the Big Lie (“Do you believe there was voter fraud in the presidential election at the level which would have changed the results and made Donald Trump the winner?”) (fraud_changed_results) and agree that state legislatures should have the power to overturn the public vote if there were “too many fraudulent ballots” (state_leg_overturn). As in Table 1, the link persists even after accounting for a range of political and demographic variables.

Table 2: Description of George Floyd Affects Views of Fraud and Overturning Elections

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	fraud_changed_results	state_leg_overturn
	(1)	(2)
Floyd protesters neg count	0.304*** (0.046)	0.314*** (0.045)
Trump favorability	0.916*** (0.066)	0.406*** (0.061)
Whites being replaced	0.085 (0.060)	0.138** (0.059)
Immigrants burden	0.210*** (0.058)	0.196*** (0.058)
Black temp	0.019 (0.076)	−0.016 (0.073)
Education	0.021 (0.046)	−0.057 (0.043)
Age	−0.010*** (0.004)	−0.012*** (0.004)
Female	−0.130 (0.117)	−0.039 (0.113)
Income	0.015 (0.020)	0.044** (0.019)
SDO	0.083 (0.075)	0.138* (0.074)
Conservative	0.133** (0.056)	0.053 (0.053)
Republican	0.208** (0.086)	−0.005 (0.083)
Evangelical	0.346*** (0.122)	0.453*** (0.119)
Observations	1,188	1,188
AIC	2908.802	3222.699

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

We complement these findings by running similar specifications using the 2020 CMPS. In column 1, we run a logistic regression on the binary response to describing January 6 as a protest rather than an insurrection. Columns 2-4 employ Poisson regressions. In column 2, respondents answer whether stopping the certification of results was protecting or harming the democratic process, in column 3 they answer the extent to which Trump was not at fault for January 6, and in column 4 respondents state that January 6 was not caused by white supremacy. Across all columns, positive coefficients indicate support for the insurrection. A variable asking respondents about their opposition to Black Lives Matter is used to capture beliefs about the George Floyd protests. Rather than a question about white replacement theory (“I am worried that non-White immigrants are replacing America’s White majority”), we substitute two similar ones: the belief that white privilege is “OK” and the belief that white nationalists support respondents’ vision of American society. We substitute a question asking whether respondents oppose immigrant citizenship for a question on the 2022 Political Unrest Study describing them

as a burden. Finally, we include a System justification index to test the theory that motivated reasoning about the depiction of the insurrection as overly negative explains positive sentiments towards the event. This index is a composite of three questions: “Racial and ethnic minorities can get ahead in the United States if they work hard”, “Most people who want to get ahead can make it if they are willing to work hard”, and “It is possible to start out poor in this country, work hard, and become well-off”.

We again subset the sample to whites and employ sampling weights to get a representative sample of the adult U.S. population.

Table 3: CMPS also Shows BLM Beliefs Influence Views of Insurrection

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	j6_was_protest	stop_cert_protecting	trump_not_jan6	jan6_not_whitesup
	<i>logistic</i>	<i>Poisson</i>	<i>Poisson</i>	<i>Poisson</i>
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Oppose BLM	0.187*** (0.050)	0.056** (0.023)	0.022 (0.015)	0.042*** (0.015)
Fraud changed results	0.225*** (0.045)	0.164*** (0.022)	0.065*** (0.014)	0.036*** (0.013)
Trump favorability	1.369*** (0.169)	0.755*** (0.089)	0.471*** (0.056)	0.102* (0.053)
White privilege OK	0.336*** (0.062)	0.066** (0.028)	0.032* (0.019)	0.077*** (0.018)
Support white nationalism	0.134*** (0.029)	0.042*** (0.012)	0.012 (0.008)	0.006 (0.008)
Oppose immigrant citizenship	0.130*** (0.039)	0.004 (0.016)	0.016 (0.011)	0.007 (0.011)
Racial resentment	-0.791*** (0.294)	0.190 (0.130)	0.008 (0.086)	0.032 (0.083)
Education	0.048 (0.035)	0.014 (0.014)	0.001 (0.010)	0.001 (0.009)
Age	-0.0005 (0.003)	-0.002 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.002* (0.001)
Female	-0.048 (0.093)	0.013 (0.039)	0.016 (0.027)	0.014 (0.026)
Income	-0.005 (0.015)	-0.001 (0.006)	-0.004 (0.004)	-0.002 (0.004)
System justification	1.015*** (0.250)	-0.010 (0.120)	-0.084 (0.077)	0.011 (0.074)
Conservative	0.359* (0.217)	0.272*** (0.092)	0.108* (0.063)	0.110* (0.062)
Republican	0.126* (0.075)	0.014 (0.038)	0.020 (0.024)	-0.003 (0.023)
Evangelical	-0.249** (0.121)	-0.010 (0.045)	-0.005 (0.032)	-0.034 (0.032)
Constant	-3.475*** (0.370)	-1.543*** (0.163)	0.117 (0.107)	0.307*** (0.104)
Observations	3,199	3,199	3,199	3,199
Log Likelihood	-1,569.201	-3,143.517	-4,094.786	-4,313.348

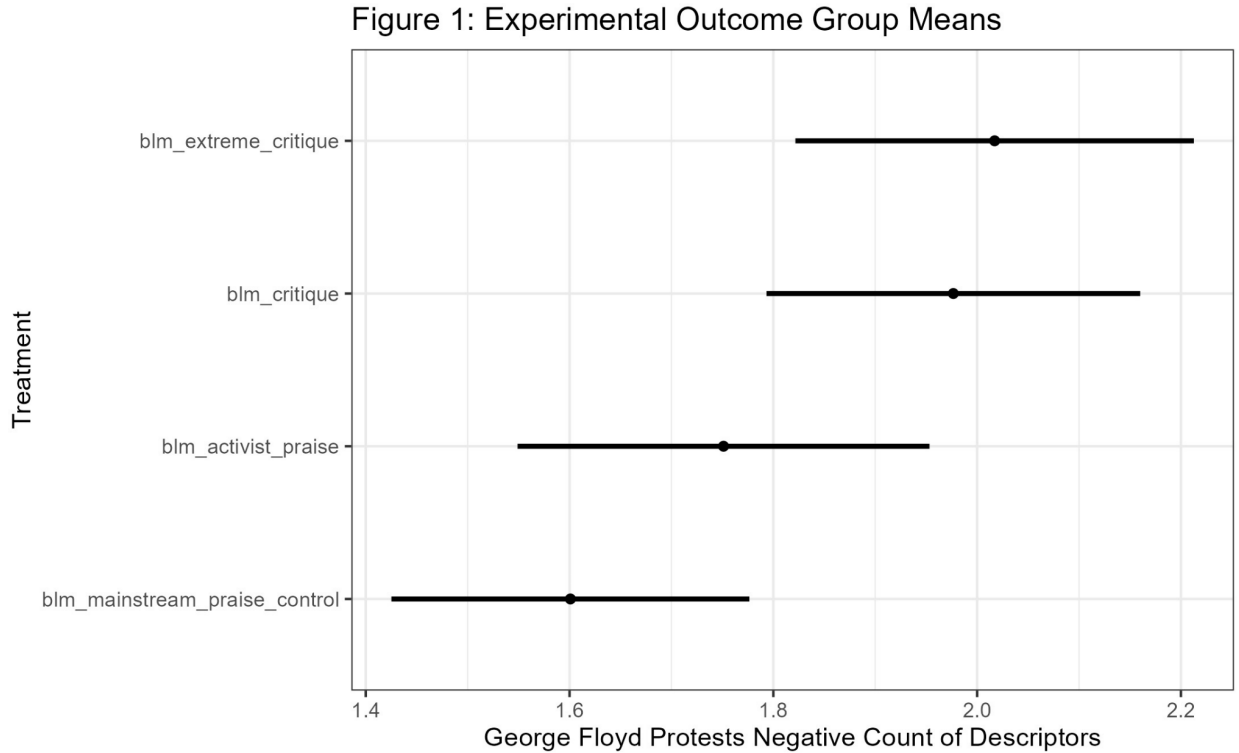
Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

The results are generally similar to Table 1. The belief that white privilege is OK strongly correlated with support for the insurrection across all four specifications. Additionally, support for white nationalism and opposition to immigrant citizenship also correlate with support for the

insurrection. As in Table 1, even accounting for a wide variety of political and demographic variables, opposition to Black Lives Matter strongly predicts insurrection support.

Finally, we ran a survey experiment in the 2022 Political Unrest Study to test whether negative portrayals of the Black Lives Matter protests in the summer and fall of 2020 were key to souring public opinion on the movement and setting the stage for the Big Lie and the January 6 insurrection. As described in our data and methods section, we use mainstream praise language as our placebo, since this is the rhetoric most widely circulated by the news media. In Figure 1, we present the treatment main effects by displaying the main outcome of interest—a count of the number of negative descriptors respondents use to describe the George Floyd protests—grouped by treatment condition, with 95% confidence interval bars. It is clear that respondents receiving the BLM critique and extreme critique conditions were more likely to ascribe negative descriptors to the protest movement.



In Table 4, we show the results of Poisson regressions comparing respondents' average opposition to the George Floyd protests after reading mainstream praise rhetoric to responses after reading three other randomly assigned rhetorical conditions: activist praise for the movement, a critique of the movement as might be found in Fox News, and an extreme critique rhetoric. Column 1 displays output of the treatment effects with mainstream praise as the comparison group and column 2 displays output with the same controls used in Table 1 regressions. The dependent variable is again a summed count of George Floyd protest negative descriptors used in column 5 of Table 1.

Table 4: Priming Experiment Results: Negative BLM Protest Rhetoric Sours Opinions on the Movement

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	george_floyd_negative_count	
	(1)	(2)
BLM activist praise	0.061 (0.071)	0.066 (0.071)
BLM critique	0.223*** (0.069)	0.198*** (0.069)
BLM extreme critique	0.239*** (0.067)	0.225*** (0.067)
Fraud changed results		0.105*** (0.023)
Trump favorability		-0.014 (0.030)
Whites being replaced		0.005 (0.025)
Immigrants burden		0.073*** (0.024)
Black temp		0.259*** (0.032)
Education		0.023 (0.020)
Age		0.005*** (0.002)
Female		-0.008 (0.050)
Income		-0.003 (0.009)
SDO		-0.013 (0.030)
Conservative		0.028 (0.024)
Republican		0.089** (0.038)
Evangelical		0.043 (0.050)
Constant	0.472*** (0.049)	-0.769*** (0.162)
Observations	958	958
Log Likelihood	-1,644.278	-1,445.377
<i>Note:</i> *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01		

We find substantial and statistically significant effect sizes for negative BLM rhetoric. In short, vignettes that criticized the George Floyd protestors soured respondent opinions of the BLM movement. Combined with the observational findings, it appears this negative rhetoric was able to prime a significant segment of the public to distrust racial minorities and immigrants and to respond to Trump’s rhetoric about a stolen election and call to action to stop the certification of Joe Biden’s victory.

Conclusion

We use the 2021 Political Unrest Study, a large-scale original survey experiment, as well as the 2020 CMPS to assess how racial attitudes, and specifically attitudes about BLM protests, affected whether people support the actions of the January 6th insurrection. We find empirical evidence that those who ascribe to white replacement theory, those who express anti-immigrant sentiments, those who believe in voter fraud in the 2020 election, and Trump favorability predict support for the January 6th insurrection. On top of that, we find that even after accounting for

these variables, we still find a positive and statistically significant relationship between views of the George Floyd protests and the insurrection. We find too that respondents with negative views of BLM and the George Floyd protests also correlated with a subscription to anti-democratic beliefs.

Our experiment revealed that the various media framing of the BLM protests impacts respondents' perceptions of BLM. Overall, we find evidence that the media framing of BLM activated existing extreme racial attitudes and sentiment, which helps explain why some continue to support the insurrection. This analysis of George Floyd/BLM protests and Jan 6 is not a comparison. Instead, we posit a connection between the discussion of the George Floyd protests in 2020 in the media to the events on January 6th that increased sentiments of racial status impotence amongst whites. Future analysis should acknowledge the false equivalency that is made between the singular event of Jan 6 and the numerous protest activities within the Black Lives Matter movement that was further emboldened by police killings of individuals like George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. This analysis is especially crucial as the comparison between the two can influence the treatment of Black Lives Matter protestors in the future due to assumptions of violence by police as well as the leniency or lack thereof with the ongoing prosecution of Jan 6 participants. To address the growing extremism in the U.S and throughout the Global North, it is crucial to study how individuals come to support these extremist ideologies, especially in a context of racial empowerment and demographic change.

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