

Historical Injustices and Beliefs in Systemic Racism

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How do revelations of historical injustices affect dominant group members' beliefs in systemic racism against an outgroup? The existing literature offers competing accounts, predicting either that such information can encourage attitudinal updating or that it cannot overcome ingrained patterns of defensiveness and indifference. Yet by relying almost entirely on single-wave lab and survey experiments, the existing evidence overlooks the possibility that information about injustices may only temporary shock prior beliefs and thus fail to durably move attitudes once salience and novelty decline. In support of this argument, I document changes in public opinion in a real world case: the unexpected announcements of hundreds of suspected unmarked graves at former state-funded "residential schools" for Indigenous children in Canada in 2021. I find that intense media coverage of this historical injustice strengthened beliefs in systemic racism among non-Indigenous Canadians surveyed just after versus just before the news first broke. Yet attitudes returned to baseline as coverage of this story declined over the following months. A renewed attention to this injustice several months later also failed to cause a similar attitudinal change once people had become sensitized to the issue. These results help delineate the persuasive effects of information about intergroup relations in real world settings.

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INTRODUCTION

As a way to justify their privileged position in society, dominant groups often construct myths about themselves that ignore or minimize injustices that were committed in the past against other groups. Educational curricula underemphasize these uncomfortable histories and everyday forms of commemoration overlook them entirely (Billig 1995; Zimmerman 2005). As a result, dominant group members tend to be less knowledgeable about historical injustices than members of groups that were directly affected by them (Bonam et al. 2019; Nelson, Adams, and Salter 2013). This selective memory can in turn shape beliefs about the victims of past transgressions and the barriers to realizing equity and justice (Hirschberger et al. 2022; Iyer, Leach, and Pedersen 2004).

In this article, I investigate whether exposure to information about a dark history of intergroup relations can influence dominant group members' beliefs in systemic racism toward an outgroup. Experimental evidence suggest that this kind of information can shift attitudes toward an outgroup by triggering emotional responses like empathy or guilt (Doosje et al. 1998; Neufeld et al. 2022) and affecting beliefs about the causes of contemporary inequality (Fang and White 2022). However, skeptics point to how socialization processes and material incentives can discourage dominant group members from acknowledging their privilege, even when confronted with injustices (Hayward 2017; Mills 2007; Phillips and Lowery 2015).

One challenge in reconciling these accounts is the lack of evidence from real world revelations of injustice and research designs that investigate the persistence of short-run effects. I address these gaps in the context of relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada.¹ This is a useful case for studying the effects of historical information because, for generations, non-Indigenous people have been poorly informed about their country's his-

1. Throughout this text, I use the term Indigenous to refer to the original inhabitants of the land that is now called Canada, including First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. I use the term non-Indigenous to refer to those peoples that do not self-identify as members of any of these three groups, including settlers (the European-descended sociopolitical majority), non-Black people of colour (POC), and Black people (see Vowel 2016, Ch. 2). In the empirical analysis that follows, I focus mostly on attitudes among non-Indigenous people as a whole, so I use this terminology throughout the text.

torical mistreatment of Indigenous peoples (Boese, Neufeld, and Starzyk 2017; Schaeffli et al. 2018). Yet over the course of six weeks in 2021, hundreds of suspected unmarked graves were unexpectedly identified at several former state-run “residential schools” for Indigenous children. These shocking revelations resulted in a massive increase in media and popular attention to the unjust history between these two groups.

Triangulating among several pieces of empirical evidence, this article examines how non-Indigenous people’s beliefs about the existence of anti-Indigenous systemic racism changed in the aftermath of these events. I first analyze responses to a nationally-representative survey in which the initial announcement of unmarked graves unexpectedly occurred mid-way through the survey’s field dates. Second, I use repeated cross-sectional surveys to assess the persistence of short-run attitudinal changes. Third, I investigate survey responses before and after a national day of remembrance that triggered a renewed attention to the injustice several months after the initial announcement.

This analysis produces several findings. First, the sudden surge in media attention to a shocking historical injustice caused a significant increase in beliefs about the existence of systemic racism among members of the dominant group. This attitudinal change was short-lived: beliefs returned to baseline levels just four months after the initial news broke. The reversion in attitudes coincided with a significant decline in media coverage of this issue. Yet when attention increased again around a day of remembrance several months after the first revelation, there is no observable shift in systemic racism beliefs. Analyzing the text of news stories around this holiday, it is clear that by this time the subsequent coverage of the injustice was significantly less shocking than the initial coverage. Taken together, these results offer one explanation for the conflicting predictions from prior research: while revelations of historical injustices can improve attitudes, these effects may not persist over time as attention to the story decreases and people become sensitized to what was initially shocking information.

This study makes several contributions. First, it advances our understanding of the role

of information in shaping intergroup attitudes (Paluck and Green 2009; Hopkins, Sides, and Citrin 2019; Williamson 2020). Research on this relationship relies almost exclusively on tightly-controlled experiments rather than real world cases of exposure to new historical information. This approach gives less attention to how learning happens outside of the experimental setting, where changing narratives and competing demands on attention are more prevalent. By contrast, I characterize the nature of real world media coverage on an issue of systemic racism and then estimate its attitudinal effects, paying close attention to over time changes in the informational environment. My findings thus echo recent calls in the media and politics literature to rethink “forced exposure” designs that do not consider how respondents might encounter persuasive information in their everyday lives (Benedictis-Kessner et al. 2019; Egami et al. 2023). Second, I add to an established body of work on the determinants of individual-level racism and attitudes toward racism. Beliefs in the existence of systemic racism and views of an outgroup have generally been treated as stable attitudes associated with early childhood socialization (Katz 1976; Kinder, Sanders, and Sanders 1996; Sears and Funk 1999; Tesler 2015), personality traits (Parker and Towler 2019; Sidanius and Pratto 1999) and long-run historical factors (Acharya, Blackwell, and Sen 2018). By contrast, this study shows that in certain circumstances, these beliefs can change quickly in response to new information (Engelhardt 2023). Finally, this study adds to a nascent literature on how historical awareness shapes intergroup attitudes (Bonam et al. 2019; Haas and Lindstam, n.d.; Fang and White 2022; Nelson, Adams, and Salter 2013). Echoing prior research, I show that information about an uncomfortable history can improve attitudes toward a victimized group. However, much of the existing work in this area only investigates short-term changes from light-touch interventions. I show that the positive effects of historical context can be short-lived, at least when the primary channel of learning is through the episodic nature of mass media coverage.

Before proceeding, as a non-Indigenous academic, it is important to acknowledge my position in this research (Kovach 2021). I do not represent or speak for Indigenous peoples;

I instead bring an expertise in the study of public opinion and intergroup relations. My goal is for this article to advance justice by shedding light on how non-Indigenous people react to information about the history of colonialism and systemic racism.

HISTORICAL INJUSTICES AND OUTGROUP ATTITUDES

This study is concerned with how dominant groups – those that hold a disproportionate share of societal resources, privileges, and power – react to information about historical injustices committed by their group against other groups in the past. Dominant groups offer an informative case study for reactions to past injustices because their members are often deeply uninformed about their groups’ troubled histories (Bonam et al. 2019; Kraus et al. 2019; Nelson, Adams, and Salter 2013). I focus on how historical information affects beliefs in the existence of *systemic racism*. This concept, sometimes used interchangeably with structural racism, refers to mutually reinforcing laws, policies and practices that produce unequal outcomes across groups (Souissi 2022). The group being discriminated against may face barriers to accessing resources like education, employment or public services, or be denied fair treatment under the law. While focusing on belief in systemic racism excludes other important intergroup attitudes, like prejudice, it is informative when examining reactions to historical injustices, which are often the antecedents to contemporary intergroup inequalities.

Correcting Historical Amnesia

Many Indigenous authors have highlighted the role of historical knowledge in shaping perceptions of systemic racism in Canada. Taiaiake Alfred (2005, 152-4), a Kanien’kehá:ka scholar, argues that one of the main barriers to true restitution for the country’s past wrongs is ignorance and denial of historical realities by non-Indigenous society. For Ladner (2018, 248), “Canada not only has to confront its past, it must also confront its mythologized exceptionalism … [of] Canada as the good colonizer, a peaceful nation that did not engage in Indian wars but has instead always dealt justly with Canada’s Indigenous peoples” (see also Logan

2014; Wilson-Raybould 2022). Others have connected the country’s “historical amnesia” to the persistence of racist attitudes among the non-Indigenous population (e.g. Bear and Andersen 2017; Jurgens 2020; Sinclair 2017).

A nascent literature in social psychology lends support to the general argument that dominant group members’ lack of knowledge about historical discrimination can explain their inability to recognize contemporary racism (Bonam et al. 2019; Nelson, Adams, and Salter 2013; Strickhouser, Zell, and Harris 2019). Much of the evidence for this hypothesis is correlational, but several studies have demonstrated that correcting the gap in historical awareness can improve attitudes towards an outgroup through emotional and learning mechanisms. Informational interventions describing the nature of past wrongdoings can trigger feelings of empathy or guilt, with positive downstream effects on attitudes (e.g. Iyer, Leach, and Pedersen 2004; Neufeld et al. 2022; Quinn 2021). Other research has shown that learning the historical context may increase individuals’ beliefs in the systemic – as opposed to cultural or personal – causes of contemporary intergroup inequality (Fang and White 2022). These studies fall under a broader class of informational interventions aimed at correcting misperceptions about outgroups, which have generally tended to result in attitudinal improvements (Bursztyn and Yang 2022; Grigorieff, Roth, and Ubfal 2020; Lees and Cikara 2020; Williamson 2020).

Challenges to Attitudinal Updating

There are, of course, reasons to be skeptical about the persuasive power of information, historical or otherwise. Normative theorists have articulated a problem of “White ignorance” (Mills 2007), in which many Whites are not only unaware of past injustices and contemporary racism, but actively resist acknowledging oppression when presented with evidence (see also Knowles et al. 2014). Dominant group members’ internalized beliefs and assumptions, combined with a psychological investment in maintaining their privileges and a positive self-image, can make it difficult for them to update their beliefs about the marginalization of an

outgroup (Hayward 2017).

Scholars from marginalized communities have long pointed to the challenges of overcoming dominant groups' ingrained beliefs. W.E.B. Du Bois (1940, 175-6) noted that "attitude and action of the white world is ... a matter of conditioned reflexes; of long followed habits, customs and folkways; of subconscious trains of reasoning and unconscious nervous reflexes." In the context of settler colonialism, Albert Memmi (1965) outlines how non-Indigenous groups rely on and perpetuate sanitized accounts of the past to justify their privileges and power over Indigenous peoples (see also Carleton 2021; LaRocque 2010). Stó:lō author Lee Maracle (2017, 25) concludes that "to be a white Canadian is to be sunk in deep denial." Starblanket and Hunt (2020, 67) add that "even when colonial violence is acknowledged ... it is situated as a historical phenomenon that is disconnected from contemporary contexts."

These arguments are reinforced by survey evidence showing that outgroup attitudes are formed early in life, making them especially resistant to updating in adulthood (Katz 1976; Sears and Funk 1999; Tesler 2015). Socialization into a dominant group identity can cause members of these groups to unconsciously discount signals about discrimination against an outgroup as a way to protect their own group-based self-esteem (K. Cole 2018; Hideg and Wilson 2020). Feldman and Huddy (2018) show that exactly this type of motivated reasoning correlates negatively with factual knowledge about historical discrimination. Nyhan and Zeitzoff (2018) similarly find that while correcting Israeli's misperceptions about a historical injustice results in more accurate factual knowledge, it does little to move actual attitudes toward Palestinians. Other research has documented the types of counter-arguments that dominant groups employ to cope with uncomfortable facts about their group. Phillips and Lowery (2015) finds that when presented with evidence of their racial privilege, White Americans claim to have faced more personal hardships in their life. Kendall (2022) shows that when given the opportunity, Britons exposed to negative information about their country's colonial history often engage in historical 'whataboutism' by making deflective comparisons to another country's past wrongdoing.

Attitudinal Updating in the Real World

The existing literature thus offers reasons for both optimism and pessimism as to whether information about historical injustices can shift beliefs in systemic racism against an outgroup. I argue that prior scholarship generates these contradictory predictions because of gaps in the extant evidence base. Most of the experimental literature on the role of information in intergroup attitude updating involves (a) lab and online survey designs and (b) single-wave outcome measurement. Paluck et al. (2021), in a review of prejudice reduction experiments conducted between 2007 and 2019, find that just 6% of studies investigate effects in real world settings and less than 3% test for the persistence of any effects beyond one month.

The near exclusive focus on survey and lab experiments means that most of the evidence supporting information’s positive effects on outgroup attitudes comes from forced exposure interventions seeking to “hit people over the head” with information that has been carefully curated to maximize novelty (Mutz 2011, 83). Novel information is more likely to attract people’s interest and, in the standard Bayesian account of attitudinal updating, plays an operative role in how people adjust their prior beliefs (Coppock 2023; Itti and Baldi 2009; Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral 2018). Experimentalists are therefore advised to avoid studying cases where respondents are likely to have been “pre-treated” in their everyday lives with information that resembles the intervention they want to test (Druckman and Leeper 2012; Gaines, Kuklinski, and Quirk 2007; Kane 2023). As a result, there is considerably less evidence about what happens once dominant groups have become sensitized to information about injustices against an outgroup.

Survey and lab experiments also remove subject’s agency in choosing which information to consume. Forced exposure to an informational treatment ignores the fact that outside of experimental settings, people face competing demands on their attention and prefer to avoid information that portrays their own group in a negative light (Benedictis-Kessner et al. 2019; Knobloch-Westerwick and Hastall 2010; Takahashi 2021; Zillmann 2000). This is a particularly acute problem for external validity given that most real world information

exposure occurs through the mass media. People can selectively choose which stories to consume, opting out of those that are uncomfortable or no longer novel. The media tends to respond in kind, with the initially extensive coverage of a shocking story gradually dissipating over time (Downs 1972). Indigenous communities are deeply familiar with this pattern, often seeing the public's interest wax and wane in response to tragic events that generate transitory media attention (Y. Cole 2010; McCue 2023; Wilson-Raybould 2022).

These temporal changes in issue salience relate to a final gap in the existing literature: most research fails to evaluate whether information produces durable attitudinal changes after the initial novelty wears off (Paluck and Green 2009). The general political science literature suggests that most effects of new information are ephemeral, dissipating within just a few weeks (e.g. Althaus, Bramlett, and Gimpel 2012; Gerber et al. 2011; Hayes and Myers 2009; Hill et al. 2013; Coppock, Ekins, and Kirby 2018). Since intergroup attitudes are held especially deeply, it is reasonable to expect that a reversion to baseline attitudes will be particularly pronounced on questions of discrimination (e.g. De Juan et al. 2024; Lai et al. 2016; Nguyen et al. 2021; Reny and Newman 2021; Roman and Thompson 2023; Vuletich and Payne 2019; although see Oskooii, Nazita, and Loren 2021).

Resolving Contradictions

To evaluate the conflicting predictions in prior research, I consider how public opinion toward an outgroup changed after a real world revelation of historical injustice. I argue that the initial exposure to information about this injustice most closely approximates the kinds of treatments that have positively updated attitudes in existing non-field experimental studies. Yet the considerable literature on dominant group socialization suggests that any short-run effects may be ephemeral as defensiveness and disinterest set in. In the following sections, I look at changes in attitudes several months after the initial revelation and reactions to a national day of remembrance to assess whether this explanation can help reconcile the conflicting implications from past studies.

INTERGROUP RELATIONS IN CANADA

In Canada, Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples have had a fraught history since European colonization began in the 16th century. Non-Indigenous society has stolen the land of Indigenous nations, banned their governmental institutions and sought to destroy their cultures, all while denying Indigenous peoples many of the same rights and privileges afforded to non-Indigenous Canadians. Colonialism and discrimination have resulted in severe disparities in the economic, social and health outcomes of Indigenous peoples relative to non-Indigenous Canadians (Sawchuk 2020). While Canada as a whole ranked 12th globally on the United Nations' Human Development Index in 2016, Indigenous communities would have ranked 52nd, just ahead of Venezuela (Cooke 2019).

Today, both groups perceive a strained relationship: 49% of non-Indigenous Canadians and 60% of Indigenous people describe current relations negatively (Environics 2022). While many non-Indigenous people express support for improving the relationship (e.g. Abacus Data 2021; Reconciliation Canada 2016), anti-Indigenous attitudes also remain a strong undercurrent in non-Indigenous public opinion (Beauvais 2021). Outgroup animus tends to be greatest among those that are older, more conservative, less-educated, Christian and men (see Appendix Figure A1).

The Residential School History

Much of the contemporary tension between these two groups has been animated by a reckoning over the history of Canada's residential school system. Between the 1830s and 1990s, approximately 150,000 Indigenous children were taken from their homes and sent to boarding schools across the country (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015). For most of this period, the schools were run by missionaries and funded by the government. Assimilation was the cornerstone of this policy from its inception: children were given Christian names, stripped of their traditional clothing and hair styles, and forbidden from speaking

their Indigenous languages. As one government official told a parliamentary committee in 1920, “I want to get rid of the Indian problem … our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic” (quoted in Titley 1986, 50).

Survivors describe nearly universally negative experiences at the schools (e.g. Knockwood and Thomas 1992; Sellars 2013). Physical and sexual abuse were common, and over 4,000 deaths have officially been documented, but the true number is likely far higher (Puxley 2015). Children died due to malnutrition, fires, suicide, failed escapes and infectious diseases, although the cause of death remains unknown in at least half of all deaths (TRC 2015, vol. 4). Due to cost considerations, government policy was generally not to transport the bodies of children who died at the schools back to home communities. As a result, the grounds of many former schools contain unmarked burial sites, a large number of which are poorly documented, overgrown and inactive (Hamilton 2021).

Canada began reckoning with the residential school history in the 1990s, but it did not become a national political issue until the early 2000s, when a series of civil litigation cases over abuse at the schools were combined into a class action suit and settled by the government (Miller 2017). The 2006 settlement established a \$1.9 billion compensation package for survivors and a Truth and Reconciliation Commission that would document the history of the residential school system. The TRC began in 2008, the same year that the government made an official apology to survivors in the House of Commons, and issued its final report in 2015.

Awareness of the Residential School History

Despite these official steps toward reconciliation, most non-Indigenous people remain uninformed about the residential school history. When the TRC was first established, it commissioned a survey of Canadians and found that only 51% of non-Indigenous respondents had ever heard of residential schools. That number improved over time, increasing to two-

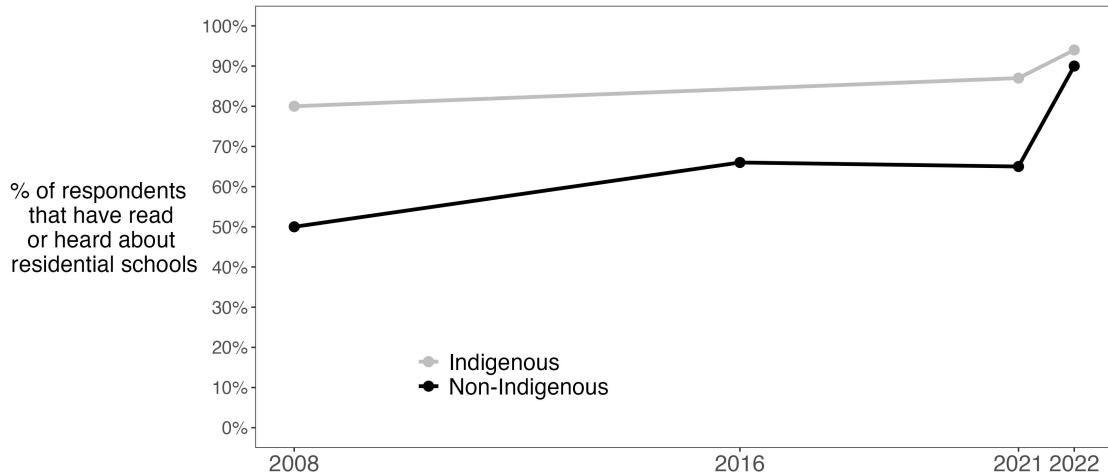


Figure 1: Awareness of residential school history, 2008 to 2022

Plot presents the percentage of respondents that answered “yes” to the question (with small variations in wording), “Have you heard or read anything about Indian Residential Schools?” Note: the 2021 survey occurred prior to the announcements of unmarked graves at former school sites. Data are from four polls: Truth and Reconciliation Commission National Baseline Survey (2008); Environics Canadian Public Opinion on Aboriginal peoples (2016); Canadian Reconciliation Barometer (2021; 2022).

thirds after the Commission released its final report in 2015. As Figure 1 shows, however, non-Indigenous Canadians’ awareness of the schools only caught up to Indigenous peoples’ in 2022, after extensive media coverage of this history in the year prior (see below).

Simply asking whether respondents have heard of residential schools also obscures the fact that few non-Indigenous people have much more than a superficial knowledge of this issue. Beauvais and Williamson (2023) administered a three-item quiz on basic facts about residential schools to members of the general population, finding that 54% of respondents did not know the answers to any of the questions and only 15% correctly answered more than one question. These figures comport with recent research among undergraduate students (Boese, Neufeld, and Starzyk 2017; Schaeffli et al. 2018). Encouragingly, Neufeld et al. (2022) find that students with greater awareness of this history tend to have more empathy toward Indigenous peoples and better understand the ongoing legacies of the schools.

Announcements of Suspected Unmarked Graves

Non-Indigenous Canadians' lack of historical knowledge was suddenly disrupted in 2021. On May 27 of that year, Tk’emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation announced it had identified a suspected 215 unmarked graves at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School using ground-penetrating radar technology. While survivors of the schools had long known about the possibility of such graves, this announcement was wholly unexpected among non-Indigenous Canadians. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission had alerted the country to the likely presence of unmarked burials at former schools in its 2015 report and a small number of Indigenous communities had conducted searches or accidentally uncovered remains at former school sites before 2021. Yet these earlier stories were not widely covered in the media and so few non-Indigenous people were aware of this possibility (see Appendix Figure A18). Just days after the first announcement of suspected graves, 68% of Canadians said they were surprised by the news (Abacus Data 2021).

Over the following six weeks, three more Indigenous communities announced similar findings of suspected children’s remains at former schools and the unmarked graves quickly became the most important news story in the country. To illustrate the media’s sudden and intense interest in this issue, I assembled a corpus of every article published in six of Canada’s largest English-language newspapers over the course of 2021.² I then identified whether each article contained the term “residential schools” (these results resemble estimates from a topic modelling approach; see Appendix D.3).

Figure 2 presents a weekly rolling average of the percentage of articles containing this term over the course of 2021. In the months leading up to the first unmarked graves announcement in Kamloops, the Canadian media almost never discussed the residential schools history. Immediately afterwards, coverage increased more than tenfold, with subsequent spikes in attention coming in response to revelations of unmarked graves at other former school sites. At this time, more than one in every ten articles referenced residential schools in some

2. French language sources were not available in a machine readable format at the time of writing.

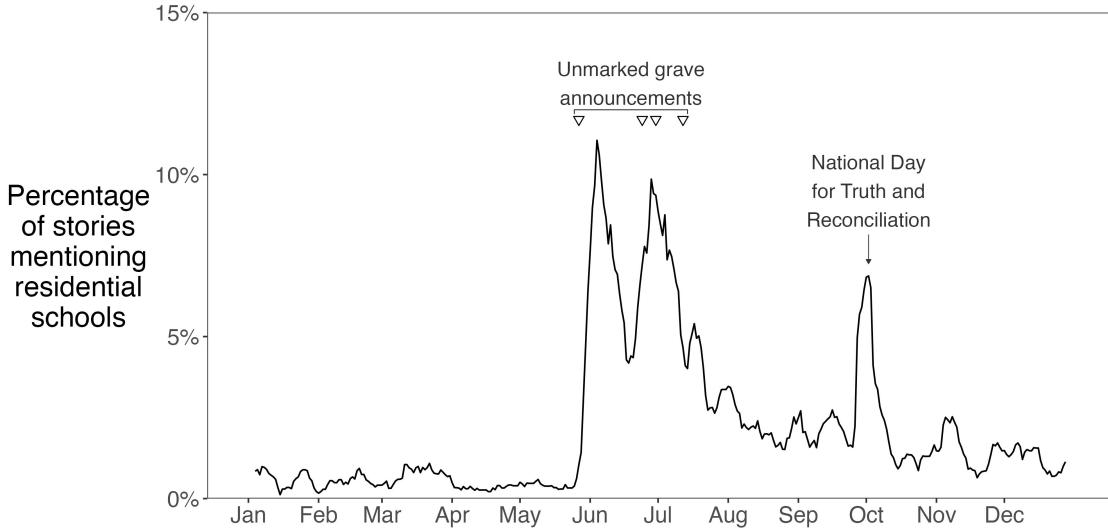


Figure 2: Prevalence of residential schools coverage in Canadian newspapers, 2021

Plot presents a 7-day rolling average of the percentage of news stories in six of Canada's largest English-language newspapers that contain the term "residential school(s)."

context. In Appendix D.4, I look at the prevalence of the residential school history over the preceding two decades and from that data it is clear that this period in 2021 represented the most intense exposure that Canadians ever had to this historical injustice. However, the media's focus on this story declined precipitously as a federal election approached on September 20. Coverage briefly increased again around September 30 to mark the country's first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, a newly created holiday to honour the victims of the residential school system.

While the media's attention to this topic declined over time, the sudden initial increase in coverage captured the attention of the public: shortly after the first announcement of unmarked graves, 93% of respondents said they had heard the news, with over 60% following the story "very" or "quite" closely (Abacus Data 2021). Public displays of mourning then appeared across the country. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau ordered the Canadian Flag to be flown at half-mast indefinitely as Canada grieved the Indigenous children who never returned home. Impromptu demonstrations, vigils and remembrance walks were organized (I identified almost 90 such events from media reports in the two weeks after the first announcement; see

Appendix A.3). Statues that honoured the architects of the residential school system and other symbols of colonialism were torn down in protests.

These public acts of grieving were accompanied by a belief that Canadians were truly and finally reckoning with their history. On June 24, *The Hill Times*, an Ottawa-based newspaper, ran the following headline:

‘This time may be different’: pollsters track ‘record’ shift in core public attitudes and a moral imperative to do something after Indigenous children’s remains found

In the next section, I investigate these claims empirically. How large were these changes in public opinion? How long did they last?

EMPIRICAL ANALYSES

As the previous section documented, non-Indigenous people were deeply uninformed about the residential school system before 2021 and the unmarked grave announcements were a shocking revelation to many of them. In this section, I present the results from several empirical investigations into how non-Indigenous people updated their attitudes toward Indigenous peoples after the injustices became widely publicized. I begin by looking at the short-run effects of the unmarked grave announcements, and then ask whether these events caused persistent attitudinal changes after media coverage declined and people became sensitized to the injustice.

For all of these analyses, my main outcome variable is respondents’ average agreement on a Likert scale with the following two statements:

1. Generations of colonialism and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for Indigenous peoples to work their way out of poverty.
2. Over the past few years, Indigenous peoples have gotten less than they deserve.

These items are part of a larger “Indigenous resentment” scale based on a measure developed in the American context (Beauvais 2021; Kinder, Sanders, and Sanders 1996). While

agreement with these items may correlate with resentful attitudes (i.e. an affective dislike of the outgroup), I argue that endorsement of these statements can be viewed as belief in the existence of systemic racism against Indigenous peoples. The first item taps into the importance of historical antecedents in shaping contemporary intergroup inequality and the second asks about Indigenous peoples' perceived deservingness. Interpreting these items as a belief in systemic racism is in line with recent research treating agreement with these items as a manipulable outcome rather than a stable predisposition (e.g. Fang and White 2022). Moreover, at least in the American context, when respondents are asked to provide open-ended reflections on similar items, they tend to understand them as articulating structural (rather than individualistic) attributions for Black Americans' socioeconomic status (Kam and Burge 2018).

Initial Attitudinal Effects

I begin by looking at how non-Indigenous people's beliefs in anti-Indigenous systemic racism changed in the immediate aftermath of the first news story about the unmarked graves. Using a national survey that was in the field when the unmarked graves were initially announced, I compare responses from those interviewed just before versus just after the announcement. The online survey, fielded by the Consortium on Electoral Democracy (C-Dem) in May and June 2021, collected 3,853 responses from non-Indigenous Canadians in the eight days before and eleven days after the unmarked graves story broke (Harell et al. 2022). Because this event was unexpected, whether respondents were surveyed before or after the announcement is essentially as-if random, providing causal leverage on the effects of the sudden increase in media attention (Muñoz, Falcó-Gimeno, and Hernández 2020). Balance tests confirm that pre- and post-announcement respondents exhibit no meaningful difference in their baseline characteristics, except that those surveyed after the first announcement were marginally younger on average (see Appendix Table A3 and Figure A3). Given the surprising nature of this event, there is no reason to expect that this imbalance is driven by any kind of

endogenous selection; in any case, I control for age using birth-decade fixed effects.

Focusing only on the sample of respondents who do not self-identify as Indigenous, I run the following OLS regression:

$$\text{SystemicRacism}_i = \beta \text{PostAnnouncement}_i + \mathbf{X}_i \gamma + \varepsilon_i$$

where SystemicRacism_i is respondent i 's average agreement with the two systemic racism items above, $\text{PostAnnouncement}_i$ is a binary indicator for whether a respondent was surveyed after the news first broke and \mathbf{X}_i is a vector of pre-treatment covariates used to improve statistical efficiency (see notes to Table 1 for full list of variables). Under the as-if random assignment of respondents to the pre- and post-announcement samples, β captures the causal effect of the event on outgroup attitudes.

Table 1 presents the $\hat{\beta}$ estimates. The outcome has been standardized such that the coefficients measure effect sizes in terms of pre-announcement standard deviations. Regardless of whether I adjust for pre-treatment covariates or not, there is a robust strengthening of beliefs in systemic racism after the announcement. Average agreement with the existence of systemic racism increased by about 10% of a standard deviation. This effect size is comparable to estimates from experiments testing the effectiveness of more interventionist prejudice-reducing methods, like door-to-door canvassing (e.g. Kalla and Broockman 2021). The effects are also larger and more consistent than survey experiments that provide short informational texts about the historical causes of racial inequality in the United States (e.g. Fang and White 2022).

This effect is also probably understating the impact of the news. The initial announcement was made late on a Thursday night, but most media outlets did not begin covering the story intensely until the following Monday (see Appendix D.2). If I instead treat that date as when the informational treatment truly began, effect sizes are around 25% larger (see Appendix Table A4). The survey also only covers the first eleven days after the news

Table 1: Intent-to-treat effects of unmarked graves announcement

	Belief in anti-Indigenous systemic racism		Falsification checks: Feeling thermometers		
	Unadjusted estimates	Adjusted estimates	Racial minorities	Chinese people	Muslims in Canada
Surveyed after graves announcement	0.113* (0.032)	0.096* (0.030)	0.029 (0.031)	0.017 (0.032)	0.047 (0.031)
Observations	3,849	3,752	3,681	3,695	3,687
Controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
R ²	0.003	0.197	0.143	0.111	0.174

Coefficients are expressed in terms of pre-announcement standard deviations. In columns 2 to 5, the following covariates are included but not reported: gender, born in Canada, education, household income, party ID, political interest, religion, language, ethnicity, electoral district Indigenous percentage, province, and birth-decade fixed effects. *p<0.05

emerged. In Appendix B.2, I show that beliefs in structural racism were trending upward over the post-announcement period as the story became more widely known. In fact, a different outcome, public concern about Indigenous issues, continued increasing for at least another five weeks after the initial survey ended (see Appendix C.7). The effects of the initial news reported in Table 1 should therefore be treated as a lower bound.

It is also worth noting that there is also no real evidence of significantly stronger or weaker effects of the announcement for any particular subgroup. For one, the variance of the outcome variable is nearly identical in the pre- and post-announcement samples (F -test $p=0.99$). If the announcement triggered polarized reactions among particular groups, there should be greater variability in responses among those exposed to the news. In Appendix F I also investigate whether the average effects in Table 1 are masking countervailing impacts on, for example, conservatives versus liberals, or newcomer versus multi-generation Canadians. Adopting an inductive approach, I train a causal forest using the survey data around the initial announcement, allowing me to descriptively characterize the determinants of individual-level treatment effects for each respondent in the sample (Wager and Athey 2018). The central conclusion from this analysis is that most people reacted to the news

similarly. The point estimate treatment effects indicate that 90% of the respondents in the sample saw an increase in their beliefs in systemic racism, suggesting there was very little backlash.

The remaining columns of Table 1 report the results of falsification tests assessing whether feeling thermometers toward other, non-Indigenous groups changed after the first unmarked graves announcement. If there was some secular trend in support or empathy toward marginalized groups in general over the survey period, there should also be positive effects of the post-announcement indicator on these outcomes. Instead, movement on feelings toward these other groups is minimal – around 3 percent of a standard deviation on average – and statistically insignificant.

Attitudinal Persistence

The results in Table 1 are in line with existing research showing that novel information about injustices can improve outgroup attitudes. Given the scarcity of tests for persistent effects in that literature, it is important to ask how durable were these attitudinal changes. To answer this question, Figure 3 tracks the average agreement with the two systemic racism items over the course of six cross-sectional surveys commissioned by C-Dem between 2019 and 2023. In total, these surveys include over 35,000 respondents.

The vertical dashed line indicates the timing of the first unmarked graves announcement, with the points directly on either side of that line providing a graphical analog to the results in Table 1. Despite the significant increase in beliefs about structural racism in the immediate aftermath of the announcement, average agreement had essentially returned to pre-announcement levels just a few months later. (The September 2021 mean is only 0.05 standard deviations lower than the pre-announcement sample from May 2021 and barely statistically distinguishable ($p = 0.04$)). No further improvements in beliefs were apparent in the May 2022 or May 2023 surveys. While the results here are not causally identified, they do suggest that the short-run effects were not followed by any persistent shift in attitudes

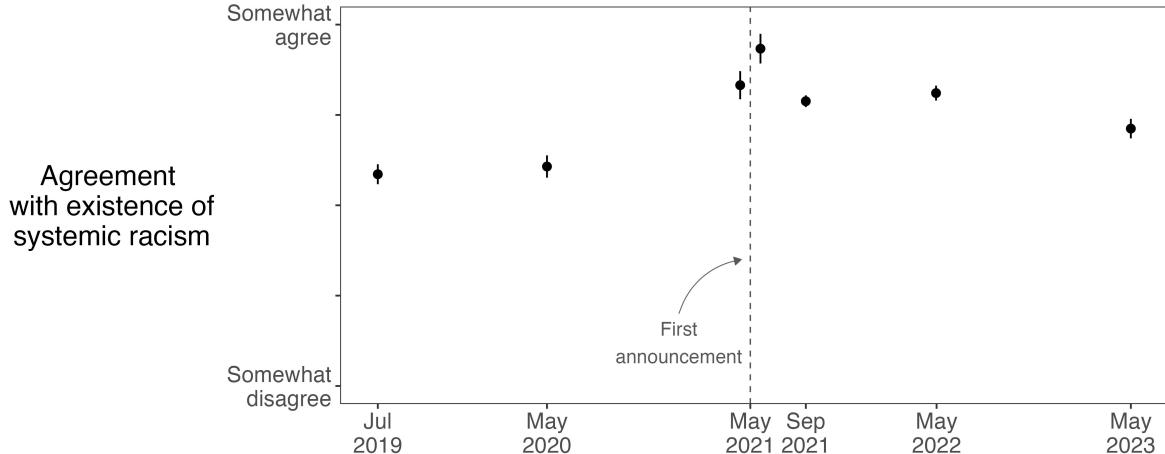


Figure 3: Belief in systemic racism, 2019 to 2023

Plot presents average and 95% confidence intervals for the mean of a respondent-level average of the two items measuring systemic racism beliefs (see Appendix Table A7 for each item plotted separately). In all but the September 2021 survey, this question was asked on a four-point Likert scale. For that specific survey, a five-point scale was used, but responses have been rescaled to match the four-point scale (see Appendix Figure A8 for individual response level prevalence over time). ($n=35,494$)

after the unmarked graves announcement.

There is also little evidence of heterogeneity in these over-time patterns. Conservatives, Christians and White Canadians, for example, might have been expected to have shifted toward more anti-Indigenous positions as attention to the residential school history grew (as in Chudy and Jefferson 2021). However, beliefs in systemic racism returned to group-specific baseline values or slightly worsened for all observable subgroups in the survey four months after the news first broke (Appendix F.3).

Another pattern is important to note in Figure 3. Shortly after the May 2020 survey, the murder of George Floyd in the United States triggered a period of reckoning with racism in Canada. When a new survey was fielded in May 2021, general feelings toward racial minorities had improved (see Appendix C.6), likely producing spillover effects on beliefs about systemic racism against Indigenous peoples. The improved attitudes observable at this time may be due to either (a) a persistent shift in beliefs after George Floyd's murder or (b) the fact that popular attention to this injustice had recently been renewed during the six week trial of the police officer responsible for his death, which occurred in the month

prior to the May 2021 survey field dates.

In either case, this over time pattern is important for two reasons. First, it is possible that the short-run effect I identified in the previous section is merely part of a longer-run time trend. In Appendix B.3, I use a series of placebo time checks to rule out this possibility, showing instead that the attitudinal shift is discontinuous around the initial announcement. Second, the shift between 2020 and 2021 suggests that not all attitudinal shifts caused by revelations of injustice are bound to reverse. There are several differences between the unmarked graves announcements and George Floyd’s murder that might explain these divergent patterns. For one, this moment was potentially less threatening to Canadians’ self-image, given that the relevant injustice occurred in a neighbouring country that many view as more racist than their own (Silver 2021; Thompson 2022). Second, the wave of protests across numerous countries after George Floyd’s murder may have exerted an impact on attitude formation that was less pronounced in the unmarked graves case. Finally, the George Floyd moment occurred early in the Covid-19 pandemic, when public health restrictions meant that more people were following the story (see Appendix C.6 for evidence from Google search data), potentially mitigating against a decline in media coverage over time.

Responses to Non-novel Information

Figure 3 indicates that while the initial unmarked graves announcement had a positive impact on beliefs in systemic racism among non-Indigenous Canadians, attitudes returned to baseline as media attention to the injustice declined. On the one hand, this suggests that the effects of information in previous survey and lab research may be driven in part by researchers making outgroup injustices salient (Zaller and Feldman 1992). But this literature – and the short-run effects in this study – focus on exposure to *novel* information that shocks participants’ prior beliefs. Do dominant group members still react positively to information about injustices to which they have already become sensitized?

To investigate this question, I turn to public opinion data around Canada’s first ever Na-

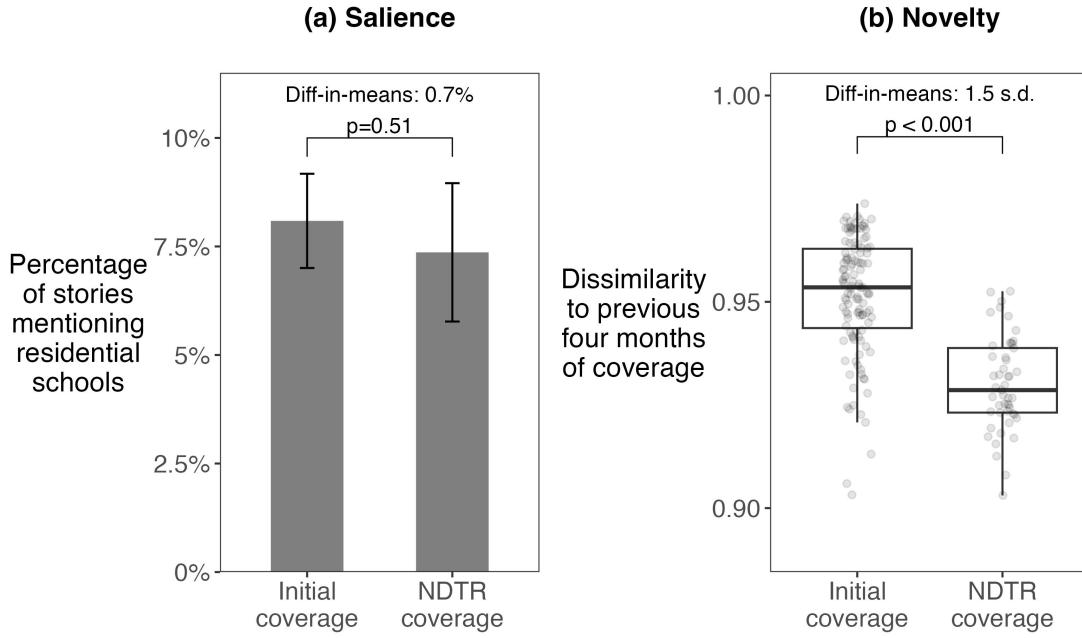


Figure 4: Salience and novelty of initial versus NDTR media coverage

Panel (a) reports the percentage of news stories in six of Canada’s largest English-language newspapers that contain the term “residential school(s)” during the “post-treatment” survey dates of May 27 and June 7 (initial coverage) and September 30 and October 4 (NDTR coverage). Panel (b) presents novelty scores for each residential schools-related article based on the average cosine similarity of the topic distributions for that article versus all articles published in the preceding 120 days (see Appendix E.1 for details) ($n = 169$).

tional Day for Truth and Reconciliation (NDTR). This official day of remembrance, intended to honour the victims of the residential school system, occurred on September 30, eighteen weeks after the first unmarked graves announcement. Coincidentally, this date fell in the middle of the field dates for the second 2021 survey described above, allowing me to again compare those surveyed just before and after attention to the relevant historical injustices suddenly increased.

By this time, media coverage of the injustice had declined to pre-announcement levels: just 2% of articles mentioned the term “residential schools” in the week preceding the NDTR. As Figure 4 Panel (a) shows, however, on the NDTR and in the days following, this figure more than tripled to 7.3% of articles, which is roughly equivalent to the prevalence in the days following the initial unmarked graves announcement in May. The media also paid intense attention to this topic on the NDTR itself, when more than 1 in every 5 stories mentioned

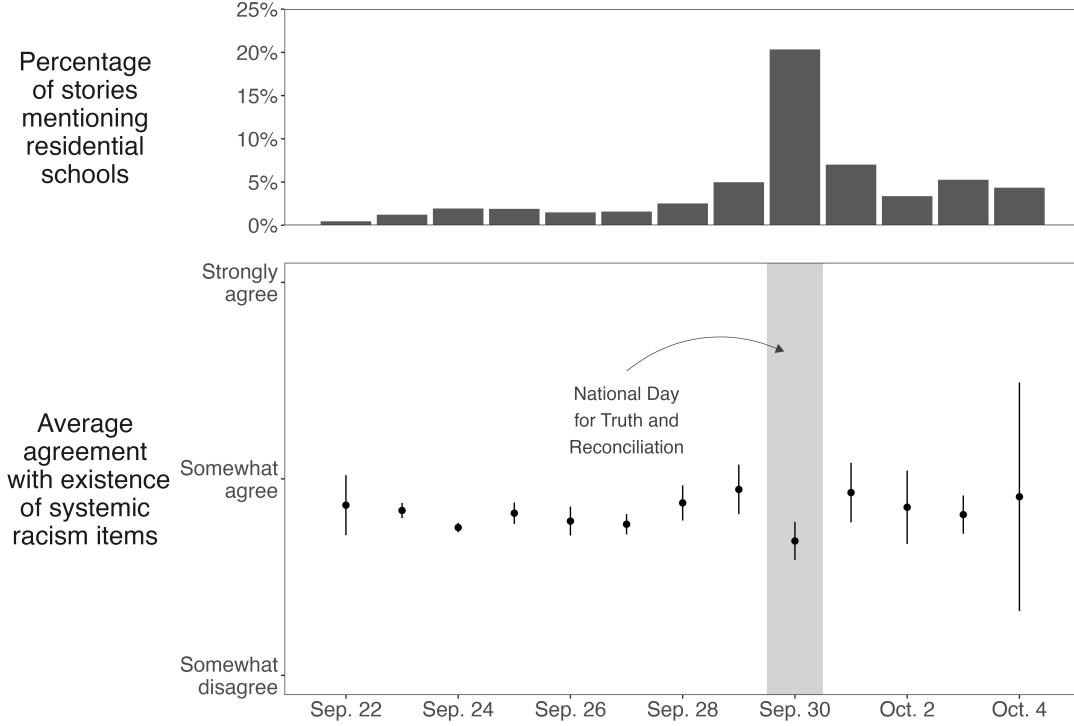


Figure 5: Media coverage and systemic racism beliefs around the NDTR

Upper panel reports the percentage of news stories in six of Canada’s largest English-language newspapers that contain the term “residential school(s)” by survey date in the 2021 Canadian Election Study. Bottom panel presents mean and 95% confidence intervals for the average reported agreement with the existence of systemic racism among respondents for each date. ($n = 13,388$)

residential schools.

Yet this renewed coverage was no longer novel to Canadians. To illustrate this, I identified all articles that were related to residential schools during the survey around the initial unmarked graves announcement and during the survey conducted around the NDTR ($n = 169$). I then estimate each story’s novelty by comparing its distribution of topics (estimated from a Latent Dirichlet Allocation model) against the topic distributions for all news articles that appeared in the preceding four months (Aral and Dhillon 2023; Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral 2018; see Appendix E.1 for details). An article that scores high on this measure is one that is topically dissimilar from the media coverage that came before it. As Figure 4 Panel (b) shows, the initial residential schools-related coverage was, on average, 1.5 standard deviations more novel than what appeared around the NDTR. While the NDTR renewed the

salience of the injustice, coverage at this point no longer represented a shocking break from the media discourse in the preceding months.

In Figure 5, I evaluate how non-Indigenous Canadians responded to the informational treatment around the NDTR. The upper panel demonstrates that the holiday saw an acute increase in the proportion of media coverage referencing residential schools. However, the bottom panel of Figure 5 shows there is no distinct trend or discontinuous change in respondents' average agreement with the two systemic racism items after the NDTR to indicate a positive effect of the renewed media attention. If anything, respondents exhibited greater resistance to the idea of structural racism on the holiday itself, when attention to the residential schools was greatest. In Appendix E.3, I estimate the impact of being surveyed on or after the NDTR, finding only small and statistically insignificant effects. Once the residential schools injustice was no longer shocking to Canadians, renewed attention to this story failed to induce the same attitudinal response observed just months before.

CONCLUSION

This study has investigated how dominant group members react to information about historical injustices committed against an outgroup. Looking at the announcements of unmarked graves at former schools for Indigenous children in Canada in 2021, I demonstrated that non-Indigenous people updated their beliefs in the immediate aftermath of these events. There are meaningful short-run increases in agreement with the existence of systemic racism, although these changes dissipated within just four months. The reversion in beliefs coincided with a decline in media coverage related to residential schools, but a renewal attention to this history months later did not produce any improvement in attitudes once respondents had become sensitized to the injustice.

These findings help reconcile conflicting predictions from prior research. The short-run effects I observe most closely approximate lab and survey experiments showing that novel information about injustices against outgroups can improve attitudes. Yet these studies rarely

look at the impact of information in real world settings, where the salience of an injustice tends to wane over time and people become inured to what was initially shocking information. It is in the periods after the shock has subsided that dominant group socialization, defensiveness and indifference may be most likely to mitigate against the persuasive powers of information.

What then might help overcome these barriers and produce durable attitudinal change? As discussed earlier, actionable evidence on this question is limited by the lack of studies investigating the persistence of treatment effects (Paluck and Green 2009). That being said, informational interventions that encourage active, rather than passive, information processing, as well as narrative persuasion techniques, seem promising (Adida et al. 2023; Broockman and Kalla 2016; Hill et al. 2013; Kalla and Broockman 2021).

But given that dominant group defensiveness and indifference is thought to arise from socialization processes, a more demanding solution is to undermine factually incorrect national mythologies before they take hold. As Murray Sinclair, chair of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, argues, “education got us into this mess; education will get us out” (quoted in Slack 2023). In Canada, the news of the unmarked graves did catalyze educational policy changes that could have longer lasting effects on public attitudes. After the events of 2021, several provincial governments announced plans to update their public school curricula to better represent Indigenous peoples and residential schools. The federal government also signalled its intention to revise the citizenship study guide for new immigrants to include more about the history of Indigenous peoples, although progress on this goal has since stalled (El-Sherif 2023). Of course, these are not the transformative, structural reforms that are needed to fully address systemic racism and colonization (Jewell and Mosby 2021). But, if these efforts can provide non-Indigenous Canadians with the relevant historical context in a more fulsome way, rather than temporarily shocking them with evidence of injustice, there may be more constructive debates over policy action in the future.

Two main scope conditions in this study point to directions for future research. First, at

the time of the revelations, a majority of Canadians already acknowledged the existence of systemic racism. In settings where views of the outgroup are more antagonistic, the short-run effects I document may be less likely to occur (e.g. Nyhan and Zeitzoff 2018). Second, the Canadian media environment is not especially polarized (see Appendix Figure A13). There were only minor differences in content or tone across media outlets of differing ideologies and political elites generally did not offer dissenting opinions about the unmarked graves.

This non-polarized messaging may help explain the lack of heterogeneous responses across subgroups, which has been observed in other contexts. Chudy and Jefferson (2021), for example, summarize attitudes towards Black Lives Matter (BLM) after the murder of George Floyd. Despite an initial boost in support for the movement from partisans across the political spectrum, just weeks later Republicans became much less supportive of BLM than they were at the beginning of 2020. Reny and Newman (2021) and Drakulich and Denver (2022) also find widening partisan differences in racial attitudes after George Floyd's death. Revelations of wrongdoing in the distant past can also exhibit heterogeneous responses. The Jedwabne pogrom, which saw the massacre of hundreds of Jews by ethnic Poles in 1941, was effectively unknown until 2000, when the publication of a history book caused a "moral earthquake" in Poland (Wróbel 2006, 387). Compared to Canada, this sudden revelation was followed by a more polarized debate over the country's self-image and the truthfulness of the history (Charnysh 2022; Michlic 2002). Future research would benefit from investigating when evidence of injustice is likely to trigger more versus less similar attitudinal responses across partisan groups. More generally, researchers should strive to link existing theory to how people are exposed to persuasive information in their everyday lives, where over time changes in the information environment present challenges that are often absent in survey and lab experiments.

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A. CASE CONTEXT

A.1 Timeline

Table A1: Timeline of events, 2021 to 2022

Date(s)	Event
May 27, 2021	215 unmarked graves identified at former Kamloops Indian Residential School
May 30, 2021	Prime Minister Trudeau orders Canadian Flags to be flown at half-mast
June 21 to July 9, 2021	Over 15 Christian churches are targets of arson attacks by unknown vandals
June 24 to July 8, 2021	Unmarked graves announced at schools in Marieval (751), Cranbrook (182) and Kuper Island (160)
July 1, 2021	Canada Day celebrations cancelled or scaled back in several regions; counter-celebrations organized by Indigenous activists and allies
August 15 to September 20, 2021	The 44th Canadian federal election campaign results in the re-election of the incumbent Liberal government
September 30, 2021	Canada's first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation is celebrated
January 25 to June 6, 2022	Additional unmarked grave sites identified at seven former residential schools
March 28 to April 1, 2022	Delegation of Indigenous leaders travel to the Vatican to request an official papal apology
July 24 to 30, 2022	Pope Francis visits Canada and apologizes for the Catholic Church's role in the residential school system

Table A2: List of unmarked grave announcements, 2021 to 2022

School	Date	Potential graves	Notes
Kamloops, BC	May 27, 2021	200	Initial announcement of 215 potential graves later revised to 200.
Brandon, MB	June 20, 2021	104	Searches were conducted in 2018 and 2019, but findings weren't widely covered until June 2021.
Marieval, SK	June 24, 2021	751	
Cranbrook, BC	June 30, 2021	182	
Kuper Island, BC	July 12, 2021	160+	
Williams Lake, BC	January 12, 2022	93	
Fort Pelly, SK	February 14, 2022	42	
St. Philip's, SK	February 14, 2022	12	
Grouard, AB	March 1, 2022	169	
Gordon's, SK	April 20, 2022	14	
Blue Quill's, AB	May 17, 2022	Unknown	Local band announced accidental discoveries of human remains believed to be unmarked graves of former residential school students.
Sandy Bay, MB	May 29, 2022	13	No announcement has been made, but the number of potential graves found is listed in media covering the ongoing searches at the school.
Fort Alexander, MB	June 6, 2022	190	

A.2 Correlates of beliefs in systemic racism

In Figure A1, I summarize the partial correlation between a variety of covariates and belief in systemic racism before the first unmarked graves were announced (see figure notes for model details). Overall, the model reveals several important patterns. First, partisanship is an important correlate of these beliefs: Conservatives report more than a half standard-deviation lower belief in systemic racism compared to Liberals, and even more compared to other left-wing parties. The size of this difference is comparable to the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people on this issue.

The model also highlights that those who are older, earn more, are men, are distrustful of the media, and live in the West or Atlantic provinces or areas with a larger Indigenous population tend to believe less in the existence of systemic racism. Finally, while Catholics report lower belief in systemic racism than non-religious people, their attitudes are not significantly different from other Christians or followers of other religions. That being said, all of the differences described in this paragraph pale in comparison to the huge partisan gap on this question.

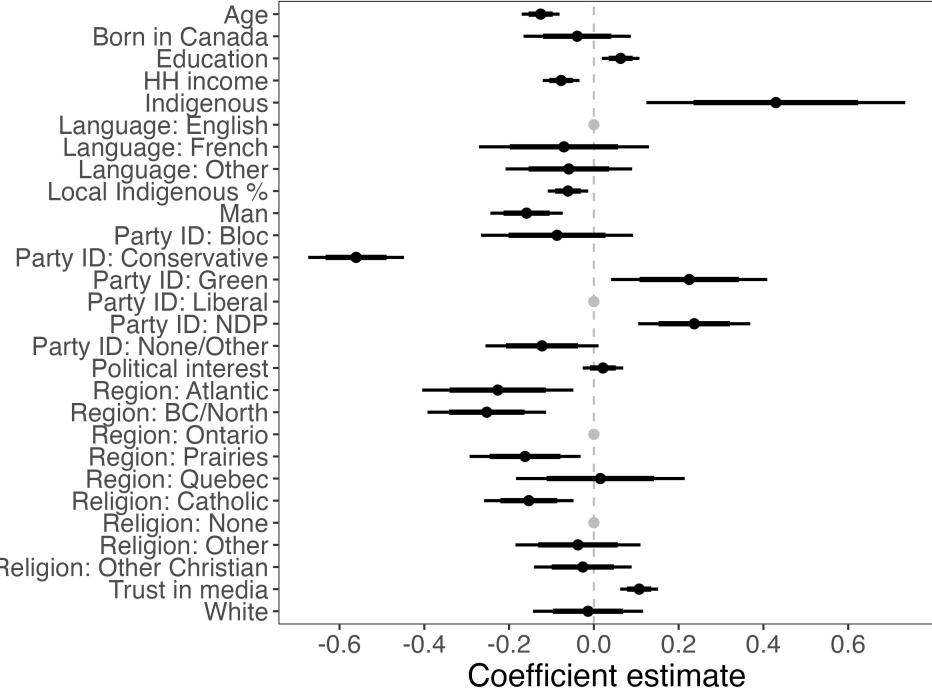


Figure A1: Correlates of belief in systemic racism

Using data from the 2020 and pre-announcement 2021 C-Dem Democracy Checkup surveys, this plot presents coefficient estimates from an OLS model regressing beliefs in systemic racism on the variables listed on the y -axis. Bars indicate standard HC2 95% and Bonferroni-adjusted 95% confidence intervals. The scale has been standardized so that estimates imply effects in terms of standard deviation changes, with higher values indicating stronger beliefs in the existence of systemic racism. All explanatory variables are binary except for Age, Education, Political Interest and HH income, which have been standardized such that the coefficient represents an implied effect of a one-standard deviation change. Reference categories for categorical variables are indicated by grey points. ($n = 4,835$).

A.3 Public mourning after the first announcement

After the first announcement of unmarked graves in Kamloops, Canadians across the country engaged in numerous public acts of mourning. Demonstrations, candlelight vigils, and remembrance walks saw hundreds of people attend in large cities, small towns and Indigenous communities. In many locales, children's shoes were assembled as a memorial to the lives that were lost at residential schools.

To illustrate the magnitude of this public outpouring of grief, I recorded every mention of an event commemorating the deaths of Indigenous children in Canadian cities that occurred in the two weeks after the Kamloops announcement. Figure A2 summarizes the data. Events

were not specific to one region and took place throughout the week as the news gradually became more widely known. In total, I identified almost 90 events in this period, although the true number is likely higher because not all events were described in the media or online.

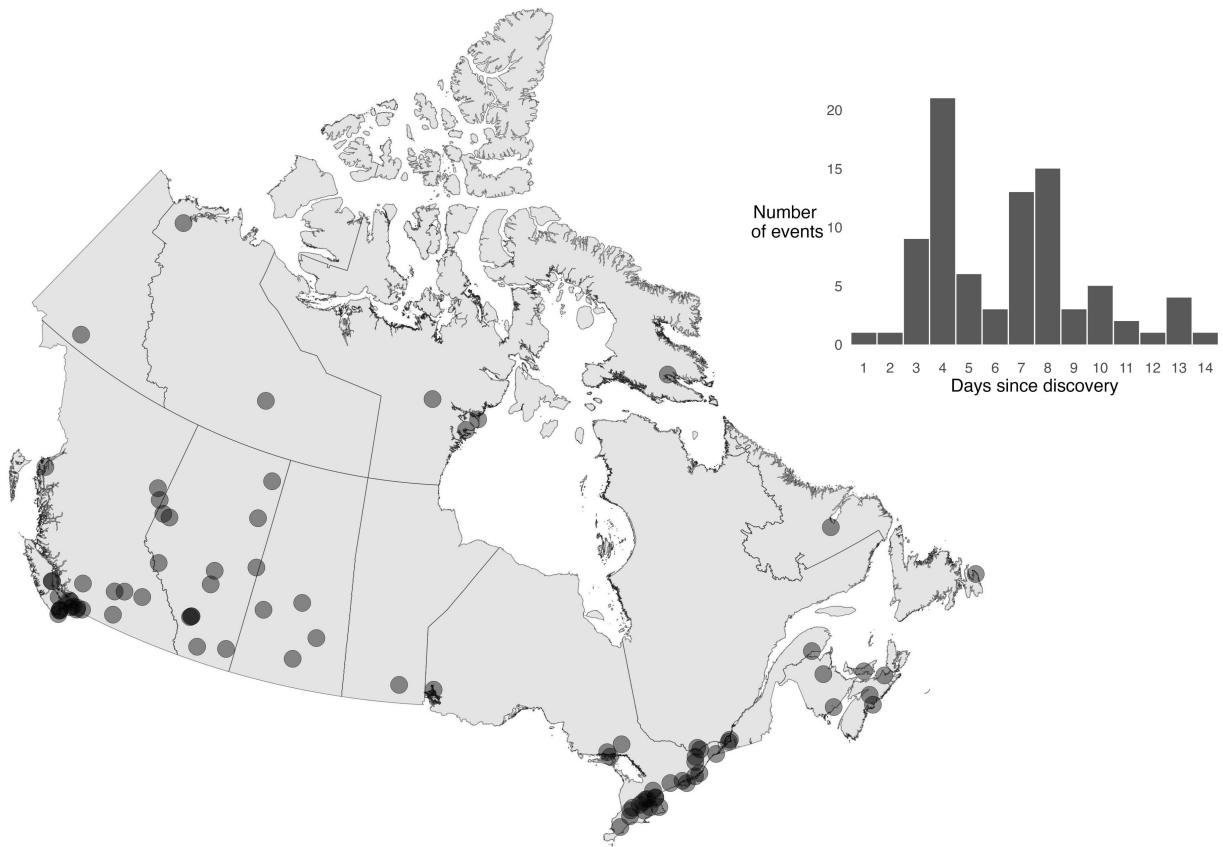


Figure A2: Location and frequency of vigils, May 28 to June 10

B. QUASI-EXPERIMENT

B.1 Balance checks

The fundamental assumption in my analysis of public opinion after the first unmarked graves announcement is that those who were surveyed just before the announcement are similar on average to those surveyed immediately afterwards. To test this assumption, I first compare the means on a host of presumably stable covariates in Table A3. Overall, those in the pre- and post-announcement samples are remarkably similar on these observable dimensions, except those surveyed after the first announcement are about two years younger and have 0.4% fewer Indigenous people living in their electoral district.

I also conduct a separate check by regressing an indicator for being surveyed after the announcement on the same set of covariates to test whether the differences persist after conditioning on other possible sample differences. The standardized coefficient estimates predicting post-announcement status are summarized in Figure A3. The results in this test are qualitatively similar: few variables exhibit meaningful differences between the two samples. Only respondent age and the local Indigenous population percentage are statistically distinguishable from zero and even in those cases, the magnitudes are small: a one standard deviation increase in age and the local Indigenous percentage is associated with a 3 and 2 p.p. lower likelihood of being treated, respectively. The only other notably large coefficients are those associated with speaking French, living in Quebec and supporting the Bloc Québécois, but collinearity among these variables may be inflating the estimates given the balance reported in Table A3. Overall, these analyses suggest there are few discrepancies between the pre- and post-announcement samples and that they are small in size. Nonetheless, I control for all variables reported here in the ATE estimation.

Table A3: Sample characteristics by treatment status

	Average		
	Pre-announcement	Post-announcement	Difference
Man	0.50	0.47	0.03
Age	50.8	48.8	2.00*
White	0.80	0.79	0.01
Bachelor's degree	0.43	0.42	0.01
Household income	\$79,474	\$81,013	\$1,539
Catholic	0.28	0.29	0.01
Other Christian	0.23	0.23	0.00
Not religious	0.39	0.38	0.01
Born in Canada	0.80	0.81	0.01
Political interest (0 to 10)	6.46	6.34	0.12
Region: Ontario	0.39	0.41	0.02
Region: Quebec	0.26	0.25	0.01
Region: BC	0.10	0.11	0.01
Region: Atlantic	0.06	0.07	0.01
Local Indigenous %	0.04	0.04	0.00*
French-speaker	0.24	0.25	0.01
Party ID: Bloc	0.07	0.09	0.02
Party ID: Conservative	0.23	0.23	0.00
Party ID: Liberal	0.33	0.32	0.01
Party ID: NDP	0.14	0.14	0.00
Party ID: None/Other	0.22	0.23	0.01

*p<0.05 in *t*-test for difference-in-means.

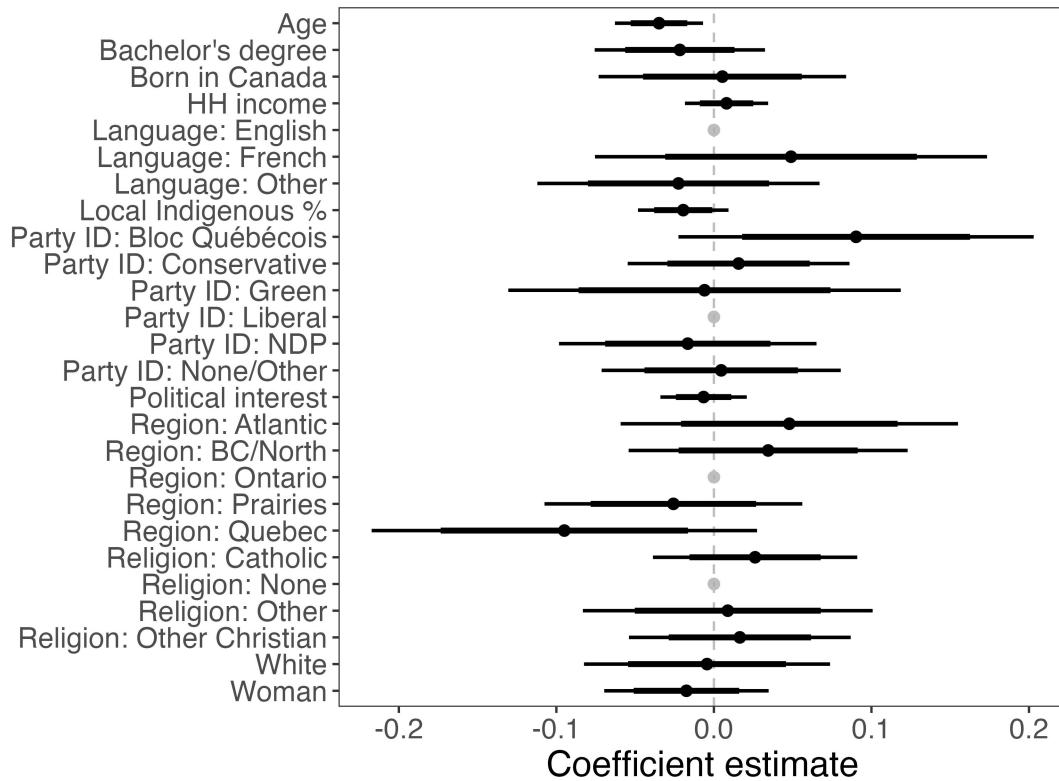


Figure A3: Quasi-experimental balance test

Plot presents coefficient estimates from an OLS model regressing treatment status on the variables listed on the y -axis. Bars indicate standard HC2 95% and Bonferroni-adjusted 95% confidence intervals. All variables are binary except for Age, Political Interest and HH income, which have been standardized such that the coefficient represents the implied effect of a one-standard deviation change. Reference categories for categorical variables are identified by grey points. ($n = 3,756$)

B.2 Belief in systemic racism by survey date

Figure A4 charts the average agreement with the two systemic racism items by survey date.

After the initial announcement on May 27, agreement trends steadily upward as the story became more widely known.

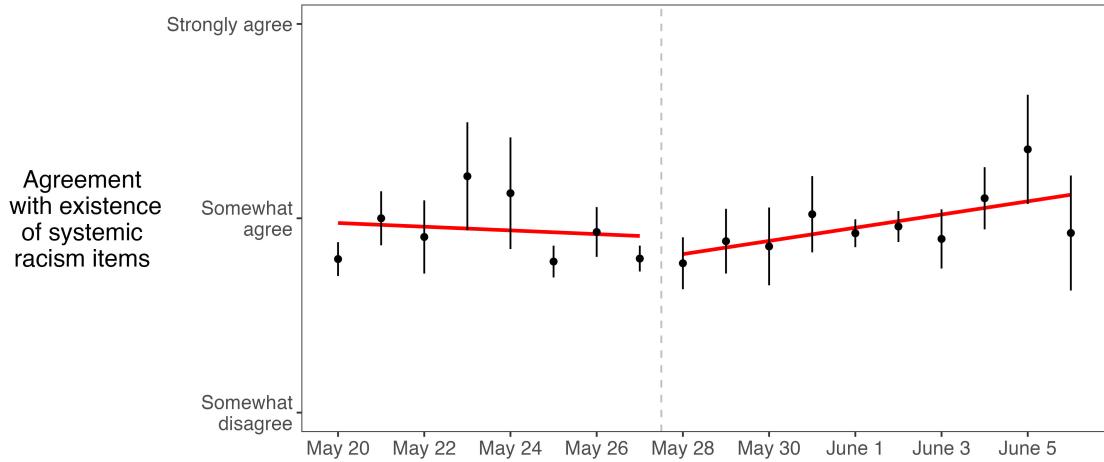


Figure A4: Agreement with systemic racism items by survey date

Plot presents mean and 95% confidence intervals for the average reported agreement with the existence of systemic racism among respondents each day the survey was in the field. Note: the final survey date on June 7 included 4 responses that were combined into the June 6 point in the plot for readability.

Partly this is because the news was first reported late on a Thursday on the west coast. Media did not begin covering the story intensely until after the weekend, mostly beginning on June 1 (see Appendix D.2). In Table A4, I re-estimate the models from the quasi-experiment using this date as the first true day of exposure to the story. Under this specification, the effects of being surveyed after the announcement became widely covered in the media are around 15 to 20% larger than the estimates reported in the main text.

Table A4: Effects of unmarked graves news using alternative exposure date

	Belief in systemic racism	
Surveyed after May 31	0.136*	0.116*
	(0.034)	(0.031)
Observations	3,849	3,752
Controls	No	Yes
R ²	0.004	0.196

Coefficients are expressed in terms of pre-announcement standard deviations. In model 2, the following covariates are included but not reported: gender, born in Canada, education, household income, party ID, political interest, religion, language, White, electoral district Indigenous percentage, province, and birth-decade fixed effects. *p<0.05

B.3 Evaluating pre-announcement time trends

A fundamental assumption supporting the identification of causal effects of the initial announcement is that some other time-varying confounder was not simultaneous changing over the course of the study period (Muñoz, Falcó-Gimeno, and Hernández 2020). For example, if there was a positive, secular trend in attitudes toward Indigenous peoples during the survey dates, the effects of being surveyed after the announcement might not be driven by the announcement itself.

This explanation is implausible for two reasons. For one, as Figure A4 shows, there is no distinct correlation between time and attitudes in the pre-announcement period. Another way to rule out temporal trends is to re-estimate the main models using placebo dates for treatment onset. If the sudden exposure to the relevant information truly triggered a discontinuous shift in attitudes, and not merely a continuation of prior attitudinal trends, then the estimated effects using pre-announcement dates should be small and insignificant.

Figure A5 summarizes the results of such an analysis. Each point and confidence interval

in the plot comes from a separate model in which systemic racism beliefs are regressed on an indicator for whether a respondent was surveyed on or after each date listed on the x -axis. As expected, none of the placebo dates to the left of the unmarked graves announcement (marked by the red vertical line) are substantively or statistically significant. The true date of treatment onset, and all subsequent dates, exhibit the expected pattern.

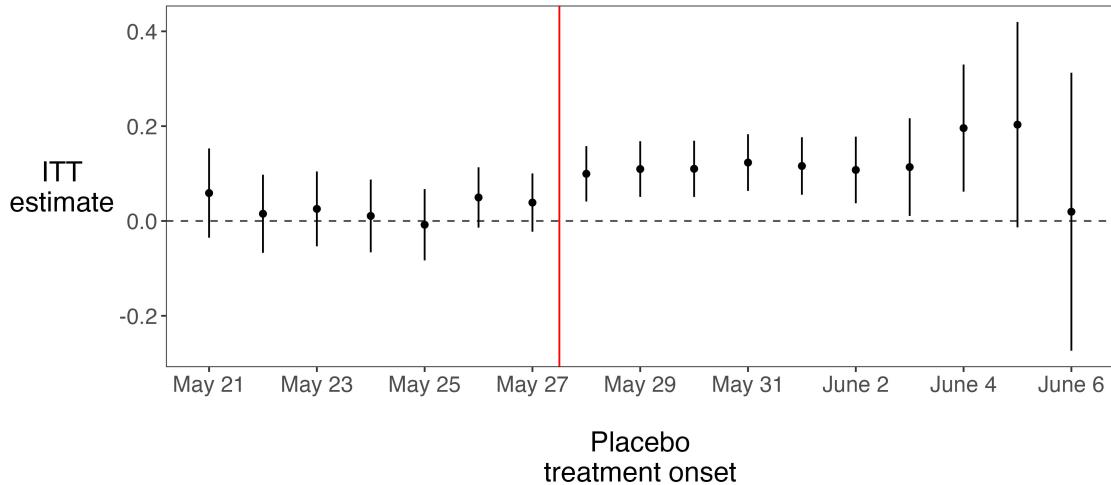


Figure A5: ITT estimates using placebo treatment onset dates

Plot summarizes models in which systemic racism beliefs are regressed on an indicator for whether a respondent was surveyed on or after each date listed on the x -axis. Each point represents the estimated treatment effect and associated 95% confidence interval. The vertical red line indicates the actual treatment onset; dates to the left of this line represent placebo treatment onsets. Models control for the following covariates: age, gender, White, born in Canada, region, religion, party ID, household income, language, education and political interest.

Finally, a note about the null effects of the estimate for being surveyed on or after May 27, the actual date of the announcement. To the best of my knowledge, the report of unmarked graves was first covered by the media at 7pm EST on this day. Of the 686 respondents on May 27, only 17% completed their surveys after the story was first reported. For this reason, I treat May 28 as the first day of true exposure in the main text (see also the discussion of media coverage during the study period in Appendix D.2).

B.4 Effects on individual survey items

Table A5: Unmarked graves announcement and individual systemic racism items

	Belief in systemic racism			
	Colonialism item	Deservingness item		
Surveyed after graves announcement	0.105* (0.032)	0.094* (0.030)	0.104* (0.032)	0.089* (0.031)
Observations	3,852	3,755	3,850	3,753
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
R ²	0.003	0.175	0.003	0.166

Coefficients are expressed in terms of pre-announcement standard deviations. In models 2 and 4, the following covariates are included but not reported: gender, born in Canada, education, household income, party ID, political interest, religion, language, White, electoral district Indigenous percentage, province, and birth-decade fixed effects. *p<0.05

C. OVER-TIME ANALYSES

C.1 Sample details

In investigating attitudinal persistence, I rely on responses to the Indigenous resentment items in the 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023 C-Dem Democracy Checkup surveys and the 2021 Canadian Election Study ($n=4,877; 7,986; 3,853; 7,444; 7,712$; and 18,374, respectively). The sampling strategy is nearly identical in all four surveys, relying on online recruitment and quotas for age, gender, province and language (in Quebec), based on the 2016 and 2021 Canadian censuses. In the 2021 CES, the data includes “oversampled” responses that collected overflow responses from full quotas and in the 2022 Democracy Checkup, an oversample of Quebec respondents was conducted; I exclude both sets of oversample responses in my analyses. Respondents needed to be 18 years of age or older, and Canadian citizens or permanent residents to participate. In all analyses, responses are unweighted.

One noteworthy change in sampling is that for the 2019 and 2020 surveys, C-Dem con-

tracted with Dynata to recruit respondents, while Leger is used from 2021 onwards. The overall level of belief in systemic racism is lower in the Dynata samples, although this is confounded by time. Importantly, the main pattern of interest – a short-term decrease in resentment in the 2021 Democracy Checkup followed by an increase in the resentment months later in the 2021 CES – is observable strictly within the surveys fielded by Leger. These facts help ameliorate any concerns that the over time trends I observe are due to changes in sample characteristics, although I investigate this possibility in more detail below.

C.2 Changes in sample composition over time

One explanation for the changes we observe in beliefs about systemic racism over the last few years – and in particular the reversion in attitudes after the unmarked graves announcements in 2021 – is that the samples of respondents are changing rather than just their reported attitudes. However, the survey is a general omnibus political attitudes poll, not one focused exclusively on intergroup attitudes, so it unlikely that there would be response bias specifically on this issue after the unmarked graves announcements. Nonetheless, to evaluate the extent of changing sample characteristics, I estimate a multinomial logistic regression where the outcome is a categorical variable indicating the survey wave a respondent belongs to and the predictor variables are demographic characteristics. If there are no differences in respondent characteristics across survey waves, the variables should not predict the survey that each respondent comes from. Note that in the Summer 2019 survey, there is no question that identified respondents' race, so this survey is not used in the analyses here. As the plot in the main text showed, however, there was little change in respondents' attitudes between 2019 and 2020.

Table A6 summarizes the model; note that the reference category for the outcome variable is the May 2021 (the field dates of which included the first unmarked graves announcement). The coefficient estimates represent the change in log odds of appearing in the survey in the columns relative to the May 2021 survey given a unit change in the predictor variables while

all other predictors are held constant. The model reveals some notable changes between survey waves: for example, respondents generally became older over each successive wave and, relative to those in the May 2021 survey, those in later surveys were more likely to be born in Canada, have higher incomes, and less likely to be White.

Given these relevant differences in sample characteristics, I attempt to control for all changes over time in respondents' observable characteristics. Specifically, I estimate an OLS model predicting systemic racism beliefs across all survey waves (except 2019; see above) based on the variables in Table A6 and then summarize the model residuals across each survey. Figure A6 presents the results. This plot captures the average belief in systemic racism in each survey after partialing out observable variables. Note that larger residuals indicate a greater belief in systemic racism than would have been predicted by all of the time-invariant pre-treatment covariates. Encouragingly, the plot shows the same pattern as the raw scores in the main analysis: belief in systemic racism becomes stronger after the initial unmarked graves announcements (marked by a dashed vertical line), but return to baseline levels in the later surveys. These results suggest that the reversion in attitudes is not driven simply by a change in sample characteristics over time.

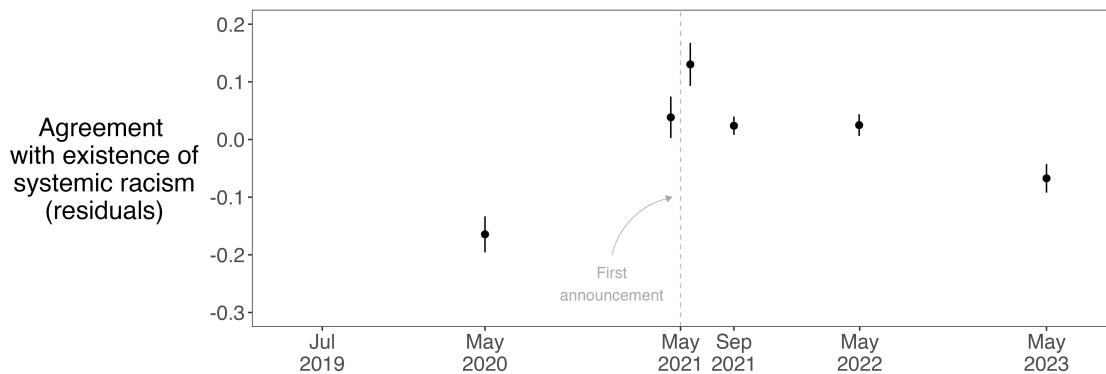


Figure A6: Residualized beliefs in systemic racism, 2019 to 2023

Plot presents average and 95% confidence intervals for respondents' residualized systemic racism scores in each survey wave. Residuals calculated from an OLS model including the following predictors: age, gender, White, born in Canada, region, religion, party ID, household income, language, education and political interest. The vertical dashed line indicates the initial announcement of unmarked graves in 2021.

Table A6: Predicting sample membership
from respondent characteristics

	Survey wave (Reference category is May 2021)			
	May 2020	September 2021	May 2022	May 2023
Age	-0.086* (0.022)	0.207* (0.020)	0.064 (0.022)	0.110* (0.022)
Man	0.085 (0.044)	-0.086 (0.039)	-0.068 (0.043)	-0.065 (0.042)
Born in Canada	0.074 (0.063)	0.761* (0.057)	0.200* (0.061)	0.099 (0.061)
Region: BC/North	0.273 (0.103)	-0.012 (0.093)	0.289 (0.101)	0.253 (0.100)
Region: Ontario	0.003 (0.089)	-0.210 (0.080)	0.038 (0.088)	-0.010 (0.087)
Region: Prairies	-0.010 (0.098)	-0.019 (0.088)	0.069 (0.096)	0.001 (0.096)
Region: Quebec	-0.254 (0.121)	0.084 (0.106)	-0.186 (0.119)	-0.106 (0.118)
Religion: None	-0.101 (0.054)	0.117 (0.048)	0.175* (0.053)	0.264* (0.053)
Religion: Other	-0.022 (0.081)	0.055 (0.073)	0.091 (0.079)	0.275* (0.078)
Religion: Other Christian	-0.068 (0.063)	-0.012 (0.056)	-0.062 (0.062)	-0.025 (0.062)
Party ID: Conservative	0.102 (0.099)	0.044 (0.086)	0.189 (0.098)	0.034 (0.096)
Party ID: Green	0.061 (0.128)	-0.461* (0.117)	-0.191 (0.131)	-0.304 (0.129)
Party ID: Liberal	0.035 (0.094)	-0.077 (0.081)	0.005 (0.093)	-0.169 (0.091)
Party ID: NDP	-0.168 (0.106)	0.153 (0.091)	0.304 (0.102)	0.138 (0.101)
Party ID: None/Other	-0.211 (0.103)	-0.370* (0.089)	0.260 (0.099)	0.128 (0.097)
Household income	0.007 (0.021)	0.068* (0.019)	0.084* (0.021)	0.120* (0.020)
Local Indigenous %	0.015 (0.023)	0.036 (0.020)	0.020 (0.022)	0.009 (0.022)
Education	-0.047 (0.022)	0.045 (0.020)	-0.026 (0.022)	-0.054 (0.022)
Political interest	0.071* (0.023)	0.006 (0.020)	-0.023 (0.022)	-0.047 (0.022)
White	0.078 (0.062)	-0.166 (0.055)	-0.202* (0.059)	-0.186* (0.059)
Language: French	0.119 (0.098)	0.117 (0.086)	0.214 (0.096)	0.084 (0.096)
Language: Other/Multiple	-0.080 (0.074)	1.212* (0.063)	-0.053 (0.071)	-0.212 (0.072)

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*Bonferroni-adjusted p<0.05

C.3 Systemic racism items separately over time

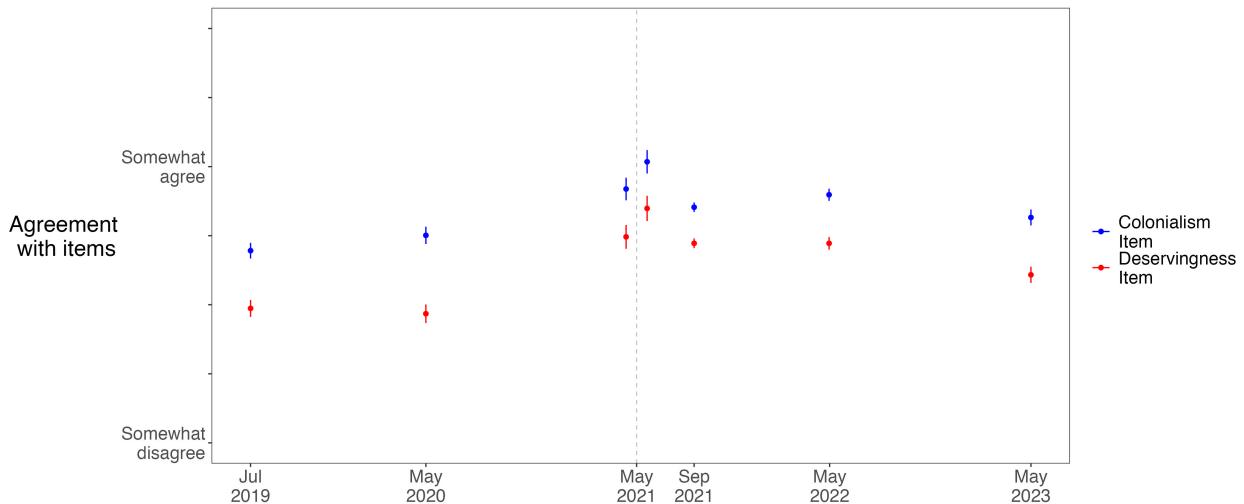


Figure A7: Beliefs in systemic racism, 2019 to 2023

Plot presents average and 95% confidence intervals for the mean for each of the two items measuring beliefs in systemic racism. In all but the September 2021 survey, this question was asked on a four-point Likert scale. For that specific survey, a five-point scale was used, but responses have been rescaled to match the four-point scale (see Appendix Figure A8 for individual response level prevalence over time).

C.4 Response-level frequency over time

The over time comparisons in the main text rely on five different surveys. In all but one of those surveys, the items asking about agreement with the existence of systemic racism are measured on a four-point scale. In the main text, responses from the only survey using a five-point scale (the September 2021 survey) are rescaled to match the other years' data.

In Figure A8, I show that the same substantive conclusions can still be drawn without rescaling the data. The two plots present that proportion of respondents answering with each response level to each systemic racism item in each survey wave. When the grave announcement was first made (indicated by the gray dashed line), all response categories became less prevalent except for the one that indicated strong agreement with the existence of systemic racism. In the September 2021 survey, we again see nearly all response categories becoming less prevalent, but this time because a “neutral” option has been introduced. That being said, more respondents sorted out of the “strongly agree” option than the “strongly disagree”

option between the two 2021 waves, indicating a reversion in attitudes. Finally, when the “neutral” option is again removed in 2022, we do not see many respondents returning to a “strongly agree” position, suggesting possibly that attitudes stabilized after 2021.

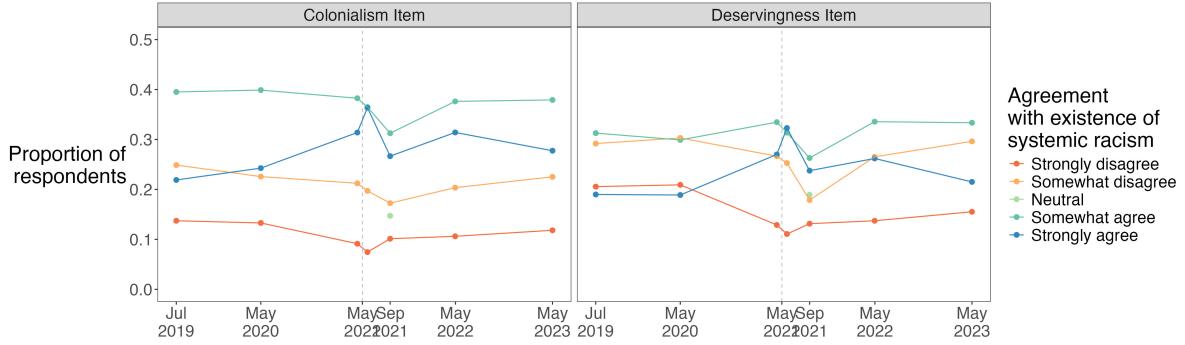


Figure A8: Beliefs in systemic racism by response level, 2019 to 2023

Plot presents the proportion of respondents offering each response level to the two systemic racism items in each survey wave. The colour scale has been defined so that higher values indicate greater agreement with the existence of systemic racism. Except for the September 2021 survey, these items was asked on a four-point Likert scale.

C.5 Indigenous feeling thermometer over time

The main analyses in this study focus on beliefs in systemic racism. In Figure A9 I instead look at a measure of affective attitudes toward Indigenous people over time: non-Indigenous people’s average responses when asked to rate how they feel about Indigenous peoples on a scale from 0 to 100, with larger values indicating more positive views. While this plot only allows for a descriptive look at attitudes over time, one pattern worth noting is that the average score in 2021 after the grave announcements does not appear to be much different than responses among online respondents since 2015. There is no increase in favourable attitudes as a result of the revelation of historical injustices, further corroborating the main analyses’ finding of little long-term attitudinal change.

This data also reveals an important mode effect. In 2015, the Canadian Election Study was fielded both online and over the phone. Those completing the survey online rated Indigenous peoples nearly 11 points lower on the feeling thermometer than those who spoke to an enumerator over the phone ($p < 0.001$). These results suggest that online surveying

may be significantly reducing respondent incentives to provide socially desirable responses (see Breton et al. 2017).

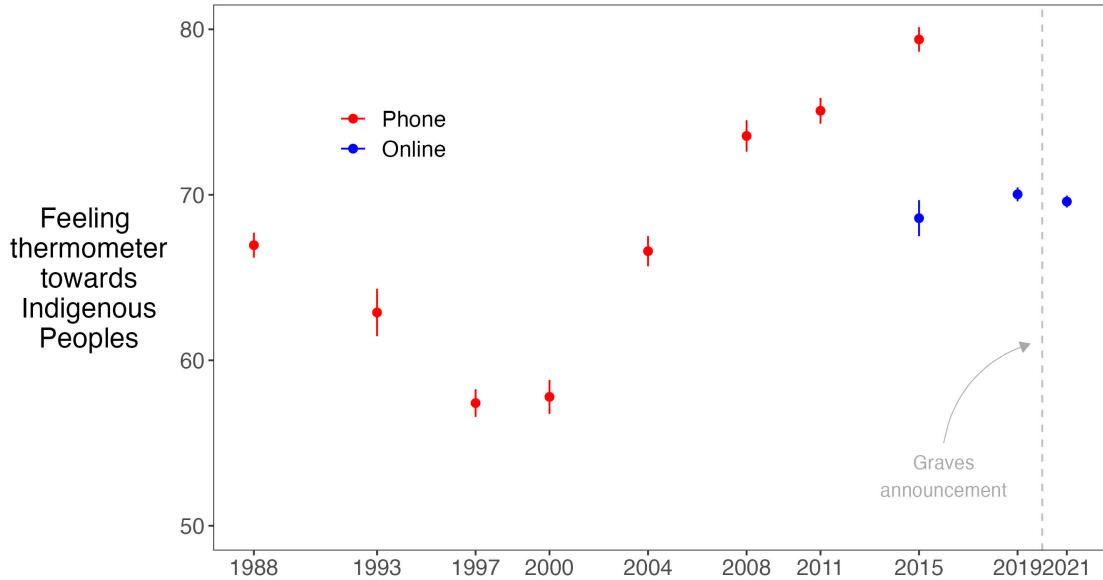


Figure A9: Feeling thermometer toward Indigenous peoples, 1988 to 2021

Plot presents the average and 95% confidence intervals for the feeling thermometer score in each survey year. The specific language of the item changed over time: respondents gave their feelings towards “Native peoples” in 1988, “Aboriginal peoples” from 1993 to 2015, and “Indigenous peoples” from 2019 onwards. In 2019, point represents the pooled average within two surveys: the Canadian Election Study and the Democracy Checkup.

C.6 George Floyd Murder and attitudes toward racial minorities

In the main text, I discuss the murder of George Floyd in the United States and the subsequent protests that occurred both in that country and in Canada as one possible explanation for the increase in respondents’ willingness to acknowledge anti-Indigenous systemic racism in the period *before* the graves were identified. To shed light on this possibility, I report on changes in non-Indigenous Canadians’ attitudes toward “racial minorities” using a feeling thermometer score in Figure A10.

Paralleling the main text findings with regard to beliefs in systemic racism (see Figure 3), there is a simultaneous improvement in attitudes toward racial minorities between May 2020 (just before George Floyd’s murder) and May 2021, before the first announcement.

Feeling thermometer scores improve by 5.1% between these dates, while acknowledgement of anti-Indigenous systemic racism increases by 8.6%. Of course, we should be cautious in drawing conclusions from this analysis because the feeling thermometer is measuring a different underlying concept, and not a different racial group. For this reason, I cannot rule out alternative explanations for the change in pre-treatment attitudes, but given the lack of a trend in systemic racism beliefs between the summer 2019 and May 2020 surveys, George Floyd's murder seems like a plausible explanation.

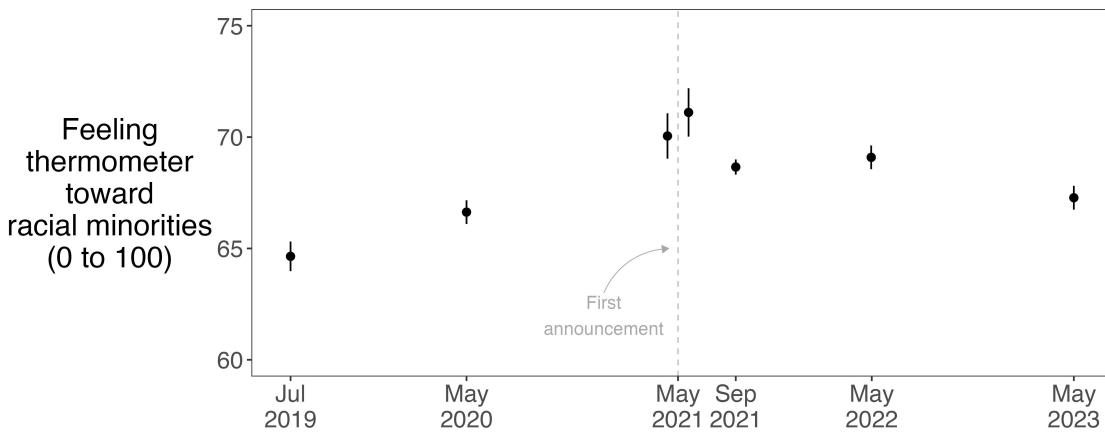


Figure A10: Feeling thermometer toward racial minorities, 2019 to 2023

Plot presents average and 95% confidence intervals for the feeling thermometer score reported by respondents towards racial minorities. The vertical dashed line indicates the initial announcement of unmarked graves in 2021.

If this is indeed the strongest explanation, Figure A10 raises an important question as to why George Floyd's murder was associated with a more durable shift in attitudes toward marginalized groups than the unmarked graves announcements. I discuss several possible explanations, but one is simply that the George Floyd moment and subsequent protests attracted more attention. To investigate this possibility, I track relative Google search volume for several related terms over the course of 2020 and 2021. The results, summarized in Figure A11, indicate that, at its peak, search interest for “residential schools” was just 29% of the maximum search volume for “George Floyd.” This finding provides suggestive evidence that George Floyd’s murder shifted attitudes more durably because it attracted greater attention

from the public.

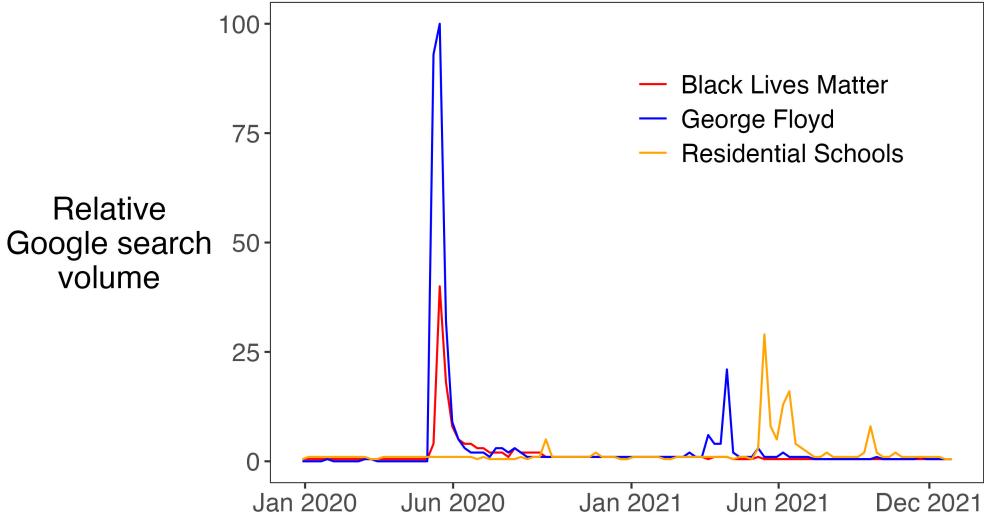


Figure A11: Relative Google search volume for injustices, 2020 to 2021

Plot reports weekly Google search volume for three terms from January 2020 to December 2021, scaled by the maximum search volume during this period.

C.7 Public prioritization of Indigenous issues over time

The main analysis in this paper looks at changes in beliefs about systemic racism. Yet the public’s interest in Indigenous policy issues exhibited a similar pattern over time. I collated data from the Angus Reid Institute, a non-profit, non-partisan research foundation, on the percentage of respondents listing “Indigenous issues” or “reconciliation” among the top three policy issues they care about most when asked in repeated cross-sectional surveys from the past three years.

As Figure A12 shows, around 10% of Canadians provided this response in the months just before the first announcement in May 2021. Immediately after the unmarked grave announcements, this proportion more than doubled. Attention to Indigenous issues had not been as high since early 2020, when Indigenous communities protested against the construction of a natural gas pipeline in British Columbia. In that case, however, interest in Indigenous issues was less related to historical injustices than to conflicts over land rights

and resource development.

Since the policy interest variable can reflect a diversity of viewpoints toward Indigenous peoples, it cannot be used to infer opinion change. However, Angus Reid conducts polls as a higher frequency than the surveys used in the main analysis, so it is useful to examine how attention changed over the study period. After the initial increase in prioritization of Indigenous issues, interest returned to baseline levels within a year and, over the following months, trended even further downward. These findings are generally similar to the results for beliefs in systemic racism. And as with that outcome, the changes are similar across partisan groups: despite significant pre-announcement differences in the importance that supporters of different parties attached to Indigenous issues, the interest levels of each group increased only temporarily before quickly decaying in the months after the announcements.

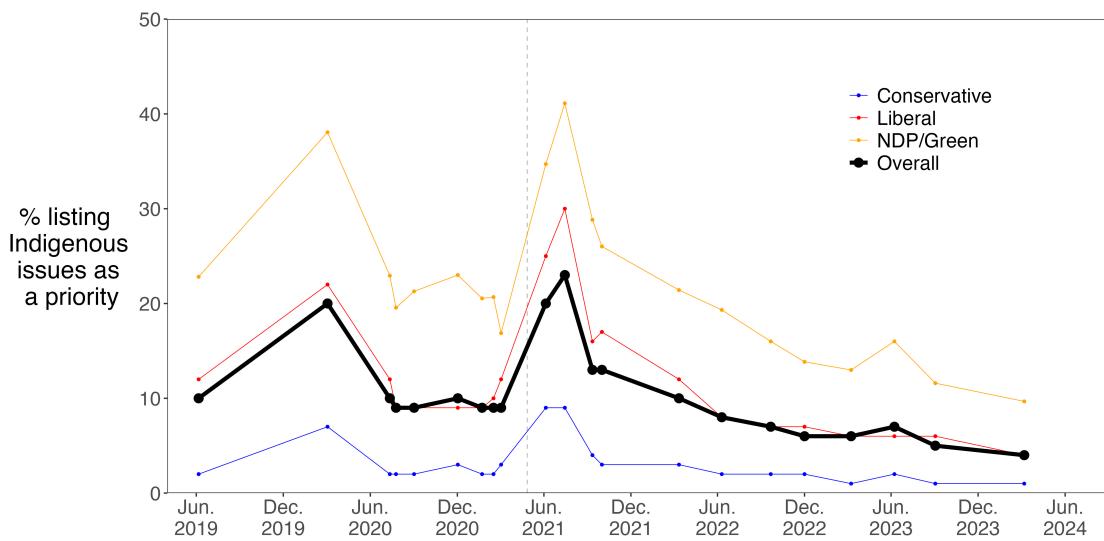


Figure A12: Public attention to Indigenous issues, 2019 to 2023

Data are from Angus Reid Institute public opinion polls; the *y*-axis indicates the percentage of respondents, by party and overall, that selected “Indigenous issues” as one of their top-three choices when responding to the question “Thinking of the various issues facing Canada today, which ones do you personally care about the most?”

D. MEDIA ANALYSIS

D.1 Data sources

The media content analysis in this study is based on all articles published in Canada's six largest English-language newspapers and three major regional newspapers between January 1 and December 31, 2021. The estimated political slant of each outlet is presented in Figure A13, according to data from Media Bias/Fact Check.

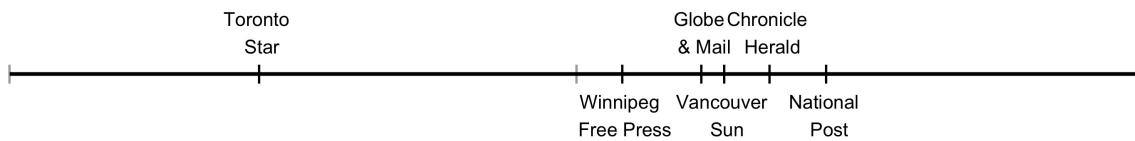


Figure A13: Media source biases

The article data were downloaded as a document-frequency matrix from ProQuest's database, which does not carry French-language Canadian newspapers.

The following pre-processing steps were carried out before estimating topic models:

1. Terms were tokenized into unigrams and converted to lowercase.
2. Stop-words, punctuation, numbers and terms appearing in less than 1% of articles were removed.
3. Articles shorter than 100 words were removed.
4. Duplicate articles were removed in two ways:
 - (a) Duplicate stories appearing in the same outlet on the same date with the same title were removed.
 - (b) A cosine distance matrix was calculated measuring the similarity between each article in the dataset with all other articles. If articles had a cosine similarity score greater than 0.9, a random article among the similar articles was chosen to remain in the dataset and others were removed. This step is necessary because several of the outlets share the same parent company and publish syndicated articles.

After these steps, the corpus comprised 81,544 articles.

D.2 Residential school topic prevalence during quasi-experiment

Figure A14 presents the proportion of newspaper coverage related to the residential schools topic by survey date during the quasi-experiment. After the initial announcement of suspected unmarked graves was made late in the day on Thursday May 27 on the West Coast, coverage steadily increased over the weekend before jumping on June 1. In Appendix B.2 I re-estimate my main models using this alternative date as the onset of exposure to the residential schools information. Note that none of the stories appearing before May 27 are related to the unmarked graves.

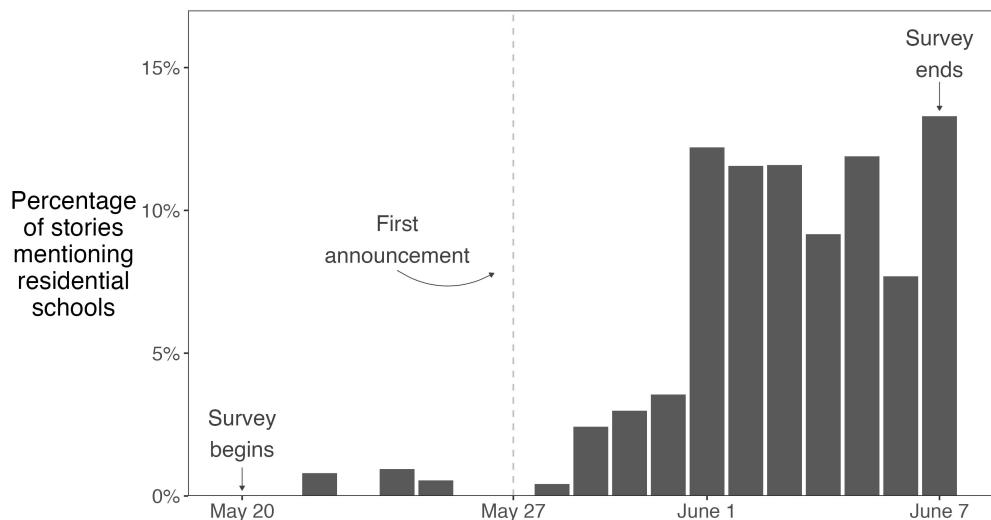


Figure A14: Prevalence of residential school topic during quasi-experiment survey dates
Plot presents the proportion of news stories in six of Canada’s largest English-language newspapers that contain the term “residential school(s)” during the May 2021 survey.

D.3 Topic modelling media coverage

As an alternative to the analysis based on term frequency in the main text, I train a Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) topic model. The model is estimated for 250 topics, which was chosen for its ability to consistently identify a “residential schools” topic that is distinct from a more general Indigenous topic. (Figure A15 plots the terms most associated with the residential school topic, alongside the general Indigenous topic for comparison.)

Figure A16 summarizes the prevalence of the residential school topic over the course of 2021. The patterns over time are broadly consistent with the main results using term frequency.

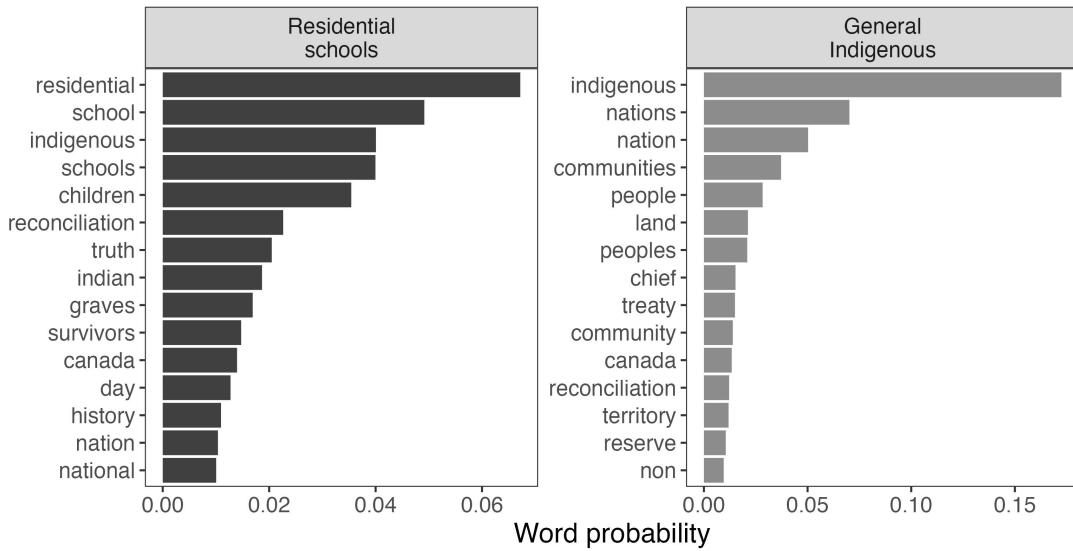


Figure A15: Terms most associated with Indigenous topics in LDA model estimates

Plot presents the fifteen terms that are most associated with the residential schools and general Indigenous topics in the LDA model along with their word probabilities for those topics.

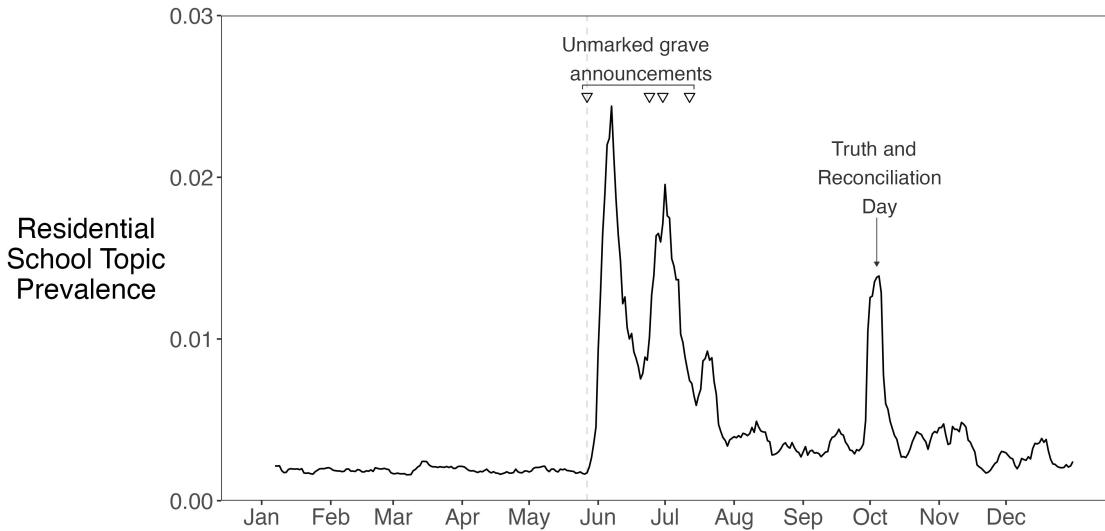


Figure A16: Prevalence of residential school topic in Canadian newspapers, 2021

Plot presents a 7-day rolling average of the residential schools topic prevalence estimated from an LDA topic model on the full-text of every news story in six of Canada's largest English-language newspapers.

D.4 Residential schools and unmarked graves media coverage, 2000 to 2022

In the main text, I focus on the prevalence of coverage related to residential schools during 2021. To look at a longer time horizon, I assembled a separate corpus of every article published in Canada's three largest English-language newspapers between 2000 and 2022.

Figure A17 charts the percentage of news stories each month that mention the phrase "residential school(s)." The plot reveals that Canadians were exposed to the residential school history more intensely after the unmarked grave announcements than at any point in the previous two decades. While coverage increased after the TRC issued its final report in 2015, no other period comes close to the volume of articles referencing this history in the summer of 2021.

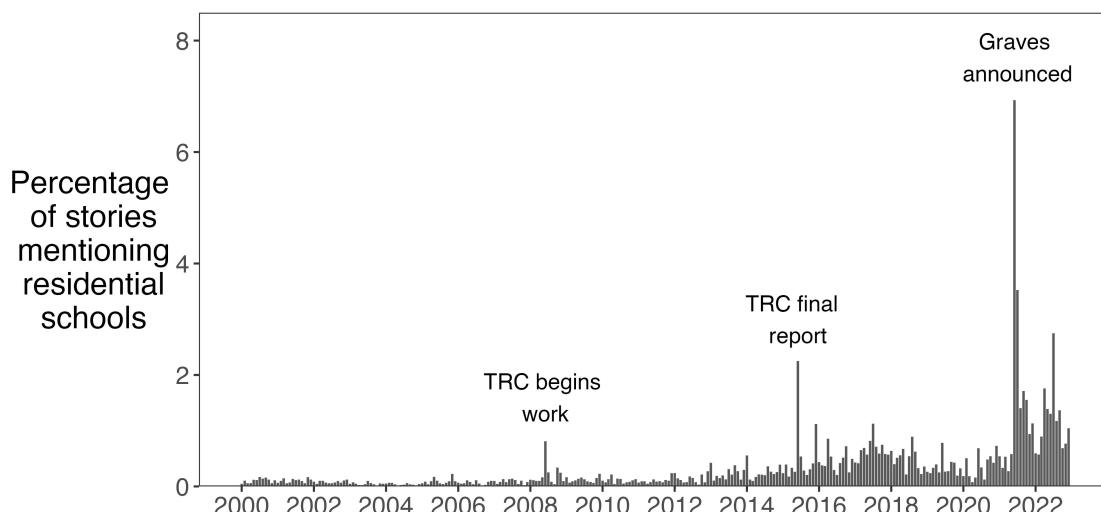


Figure A17: Percentage of newspaper stories mentioning residential schools, 2000 to 2022
Plot presents the percentage of all new stories that mention "residential school(s)" in the *Globe and Mail*, *National Post* and *Toronto Star* by month.

That being said, Figure A17 does show that the residential school history was covered to some degree before the events of 2021. However, the news about unmarked graves represented an entirely new dimension to the story, of which most Canadians were unaware. While the Truth and Reconciliation Commission signalled that graves likely existed at former schools and recommended further action to identify and protect these sites (i.e. Calls

to Action 73 to 76), this information did not appear much in the media before 2021. In Figure A18, I count the number of articles each year that include the words “graves” and “residential school(s)” together in Canada’s largest English-language newspapers. Before 2021, there were essentially no articles discussing this topic, while that number increases dramatically after the Kamloops announcement. Moreover, many of the grave-related residential school articles before 2021 are likely false positives. I hand-coded 20 of the pre-2021 articles mentioning these two terms together and only three of them actually had to do with burials at the schools, while many were accidentally flagged because of phrases like “grave doubts.”

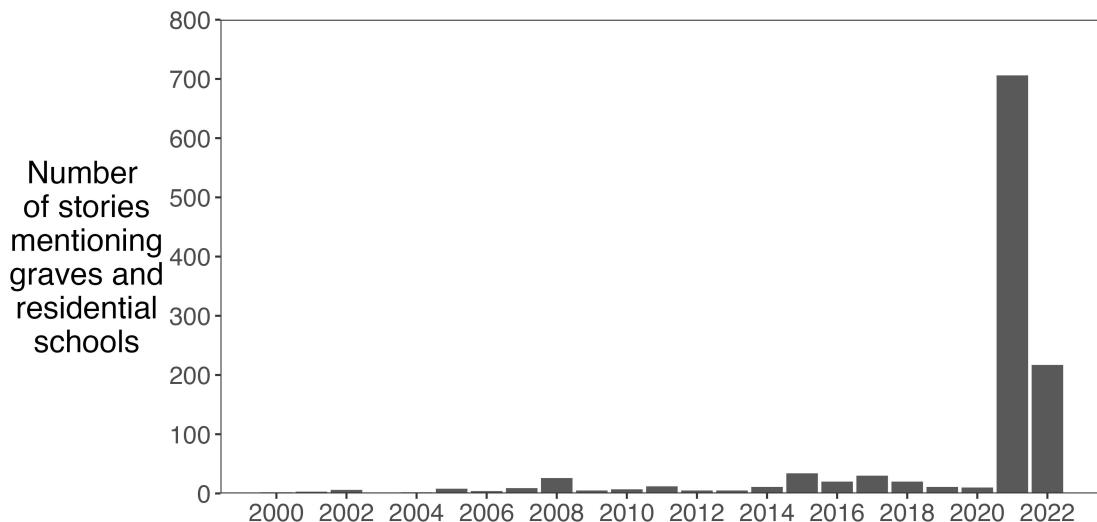


Figure A18: Number of articles mentioning “graves” and “residential schools,” 2000 to 2022

Plot presents the number of all new stories that mention “residential school(s)” and “grave(s)” in the *Globe and Mail*, *National Post* and *Toronto Star* by year.

E. CANADA'S FIRST NATIONAL DAY FOR TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

E.1 Novelty in residential schools coverage

In the main text, I estimate the novelty of residential schools-related articles appearing during the first and second surveys of 2021. To identify these articles, I first selected all stories containing the word “Indigenous” in the six largest English-language newspapers during the two periods. Within this set, I then read each article to determine whether it was primarily concerned with:

- The history or legacies of residential schools
- The Truth and Reconciliation Commission
- Reconciliation for the residential school system
- Personal experiences in the schools
- Residential school denialism
- Policy and symbolic responses to the residential schools issue
- Church responses to the residential schools issue
- Non-indigenous reactions to the residential school history

If an article covered one of the above topics, I used it in the analysis. I did not flag articles as related to residential schools if they were about (i) Indigenous topics not directly related to residential schools, (ii) discrimination and racism against Indigenous people in general, or (iii) Indigenous leaders, community members or community initiatives unrelated to residential schools.

I then calculate a measure of novelty for each residential schools-related article i based on Aral and Dhillon (2023) and Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral (2018), which captures the distance of topic distributions between documents using cosine similarity:

$$\text{Novelty}_i = 1 - \frac{1}{n_j} \sum_j \cos(\Gamma_i, \Gamma_j)$$

where n_j is the number of articles appearing in the period preceding article i , γ_i and γ_j are topic distributions for article i and article j in the preceding period, and \cos is the cosine similarity function $\cos(\mathbf{A}, \mathbf{B}) = \frac{\mathbf{A} \cdot \mathbf{B}}{\|\mathbf{A}\| \|\mathbf{B}\|}$. The summation occurs over all documents j in the preceding period. Higher values of Novelty_i indicate that article i is more novel relative to the preceding period. The topic distributions Γ come from a Latent Dirichlet Allocation model with 250 topics estimated from all articles appearing in 2021 (see Appendix D.3 for details).

E.2 Balance checks

On September 30, 2021, Canada held its first ever National Day for Truth and Reconciliation (NDTR), a federal statutory holiday that was signed into law shortly after the first unmarked graves announcement. Coincidentally, the survey dates of the Canadian Election Study overlapped with this date and, as in the main text, I compare those surveyed just before the NDTR against those surveyed just after in terms of their beliefs in systemic racism. Since the NDTR triggered a renewed attention to the history of residential schools (see Figure ?? below), this comparison seeks to descriptively capture the how an increase in the salience of the same issues correlated with the main outcomes in a naturalistic setting.

While a comparison between those surveyed just before and just after NDTR is not perfectly identified because the date of treatment exposure was not exogenous, it is nonetheless useful to check whether the two sets of respondents are similar in terms of their pre-treatment characteristics. To do so, I first compare the means on a host of presumably stable covariates in Table A7. Those in the pre- and post-NDTR samples are similar on most observable dimensions and many of the differences identified as statistically significant are small in magnitude.

Figure A19 presents a similar analysis, summarizing a model that regresses an indicator for being surveyed after the NDTR on the same set of covariates to test whether the differences persist after conditioning on other possible sample differences. The only notable result

here is that a one standard-deviation increase in household income is associated with around a 1% greater likelihood of being treated. There are some other larger coefficients but they are not distinguishable from a null of no difference. In any case, I control for all variables in Figure A19 in the analyses that follow.

Table A7: Sample characteristics by treatment status

	Average		
	Pre-NDTR	Post-NDTR	Difference
Man	0.47	0.48	0.01
Age	53.4	52.5	0.82
White	0.79	0.82	0.03*
Bachelor's degree	0.44	0.45	0.01
Household income	\$80,576	\$89,422	\$8,846*
Catholic	0.30	0.31	0.01
Other Christian	0.22	0.23	0.01
Not religious	0.38	0.37	0.01
Born in Canada	0.84	0.87	0.03*
Political interest (0 to 10)	6.45	6.47	0.02
Region: Ontario	0.35	0.32	0.03
Region: Quebec	0.29	0.30	0.01
Region: BC	0.11	0.11	0.00
Region: Atlantic	0.06	0.08	0.02*
Local Indigenous %	0.04	0.04	0.00*
French-speaker	0.25	0.28	0.03
Party ID: Bloc	0.09	0.11	0.02
Party ID: Conservative	0.25	0.28	0.03
Party ID: Liberal	0.34	0.32	0.02
Party ID: NDP	0.15	0.15	0.00
Party ID: None/Other	0.23	0.21	0.02

*p<0.05 in *t*-test for difference-in-means.

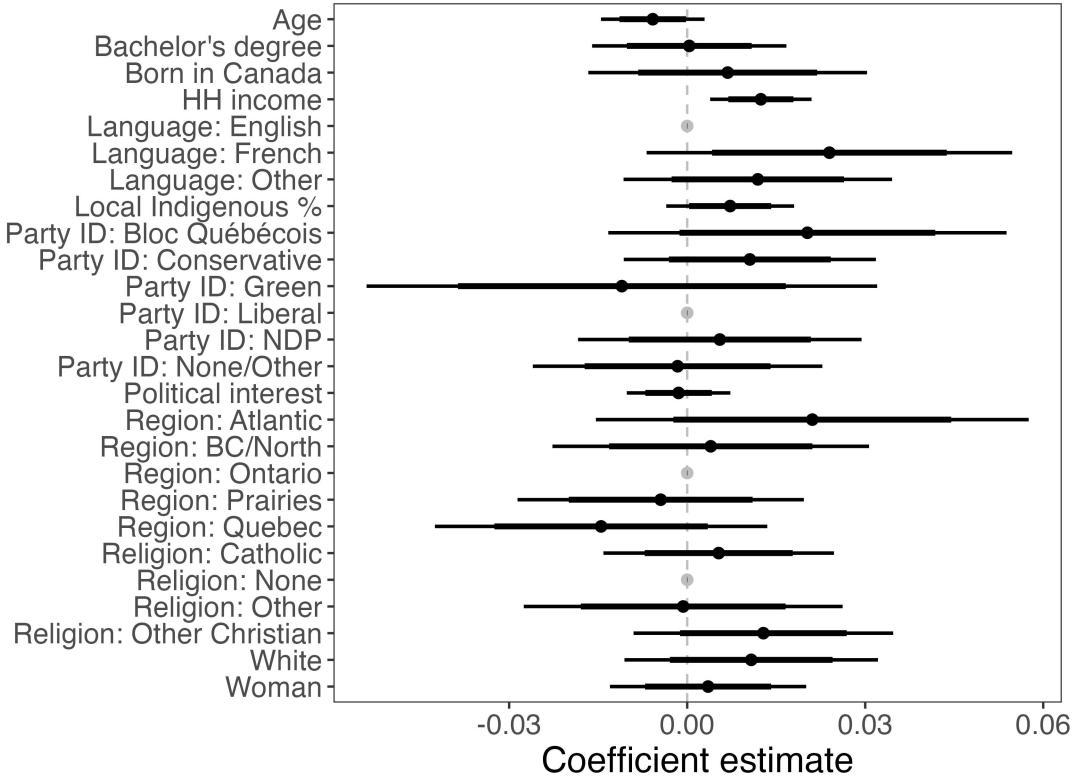


Figure A19: NDTR balance test

Plot presents coefficient estimates from an OLS model regressing treatment status on the variables listed on the y -axis. Bars indicate standard HC2 95% and Bonferroni-adjusted 95% confidence intervals. All variables are binary except for Age, Political Interest and HH income, which have been standardized such that the coefficient represents the implied effect of a one-standard deviation change. Reference categories for categorical variables are identified by grey points. ($n = 11,440$).

E.3 NDTR and beliefs in systemic racism

In Table A8, I evaluate how non-Indigenous Canadians responded to the renewed attention to residential schools around the NDTR. I regress the beliefs in systemic racism outcome on an indicator for whether respondents were surveyed on or after the NDTR. There is no strong indication that attitudes improved as a result of the increased attention. The results are slightly different depending on whether I employ covariate adjustment, but in the model most favourable to identifying an effect, the renewed attention only produced around 4% of a standard deviation stronger beliefs in systemic racism. This point estimate is less than half the size of the effect of the initial unmarked graves announcement and is not statistically

significant, despite a sample size almost three times as large as that used in the earlier analysis.

Table A8: NDTR and belief in systemic racism

	Belief in anti-Indigenous systemic racism	
Surveyed on or after NDTR	−0.004 (0.034)	0.042 (0.033)
Observations	12,369	10,729
Controls	No	Yes
R ²	0.000	0.194

Coefficients are expressed in terms of pre-NDTR standard deviations. In model 2, the following covariates are included but not reported: gender, born in Canada, education, household income, party ID, political interest, religion, language, White, electoral district Indigenous percentage, province, and birth-decade fixed effects. *p<0.05

F. HETEROGENEOUS RESPONSES

F.1 Partisan effect heterogeneity in quasi-experiment

One of the strongest predictors of non-Indigenous Canadians’ beliefs in systemic racism is partisanship (see Figure A1). Moreover, this variable has proven an important determinant of how individuals respond to information related to racism in the American context (e.g. Chudy and Jefferson 2021; Fang and White 2022; Reny and Newman 2021). For these reasons, we might expect that supporters of different political parties may have different responses to news about unmarked graves.

To investigate whether the effects of the grave announcement differ by partisanship, I estimate conditional average treatment effects (CATEs) by interacting party identification with the post-announcement dummy in the specification from Table 1 in the main text. The

results, summarized in Figure A20, indicate that there are no substantively meaningful or statistically significant differences in treatment effects across partisan categories. There is also no evidence of a backlash effect for any subgroup: the announcement improved beliefs in systemic racism for partisans of all stripes. The only notable heterogeneity is the essentially null CATEs among supporters of minor parties and nonpartisans. In the next section, I show that this pattern is unlikely to be driven by differences in political interest.

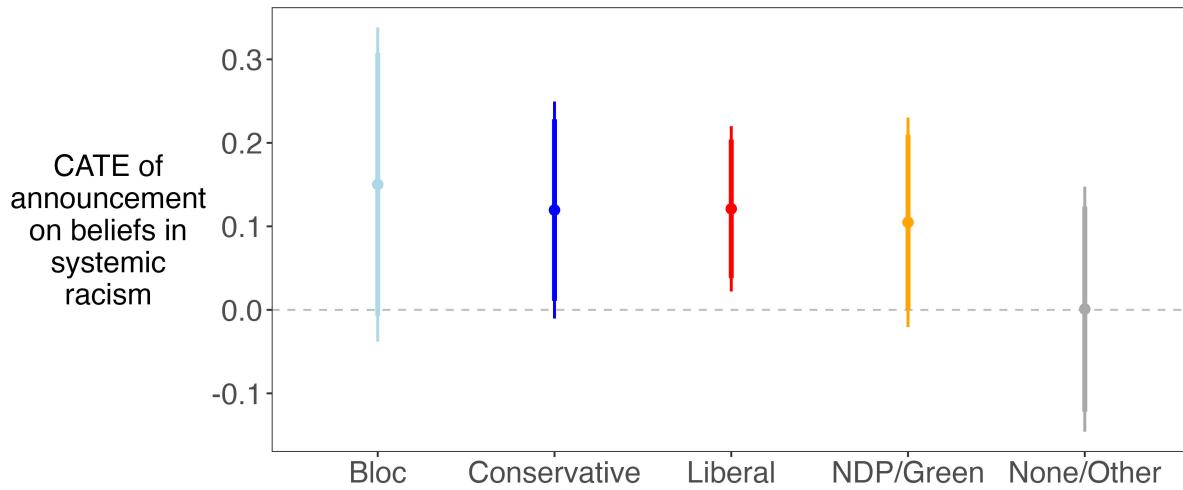


Figure A20: Effects of unmarked graves announcement by Party ID

Plot presents CATE estimates from an OLS model interacting treatment status (i.e. being surveyed after the first unmarked graves announcement) with Party ID. Coefficients are expressed in terms of pre-announcement standard deviations. Model controls for gender, born in Canada, Bachelor's degree, log household income, party ID, turnout in 2019, Christian, language, White, electoral district Indigenous percentage, province, and birth-decade fixed effects. Bars indicate 90 and 95% HC2 confidence intervals. ($n = 3,643$).

F.2 Quasi-experiment causal forest

Section F.1 investigated heterogeneity in responses to the unmarked graves news with respect to partisan identities. Yet there are numerous other subgroups that might be expected to be more or less affected by the news: White people, older people, those with less interest in the news, Catholics, immigrants and so on. I take a data-driven approach to identifying these kinds of heterogeneous treatment effects among various subgroups by training an honest causal forest (Athey and Wager 2019; Wager and Athey 2018). Causal forests are an ensem-

ble method based on aggregating individual tree-based models that recursively partition a “splitting” sample of the data along covariate values in order to maximize treatment effect variation within each leaf (partition of the data). Treatment effects, $\hat{\tau}_i$, are then estimated for each observation in a separate “estimation” sample of the data by assigning the mean differences in outcomes between treated and control observations within each leaf.

Figure A21 summarizes the relationships between these estimated individual-level treatment effects (on the y -axis) and several pre-treatment covariates. There are a few noteworthy patterns. First, in line with the results in Section F.1, there is little difference in treatment effects by partisanship. Second, the most notable heterogeneity can be seen with respect to the percentage of Indigenous people living in one’s local electoral district: the unmarked graves produced essentially no effect on structural racism attitudes among non-Indigenous respondents living in districts where Indigenous people made up more than 10% of the population. In fact, this variable the most important splitting criterion in the causal forest. Third, the news of the unmarked graves appears to have produced more positive effects on belief in systemic racism among those who may have had less exposure to the residential school history before 2021: immigrants, those with lower political interest, less education, and that have less trust in the media and follow the news less closely. It is also the case that men, Whites and those that live in the Prairies updated their views on systemic racism less after the news broke.

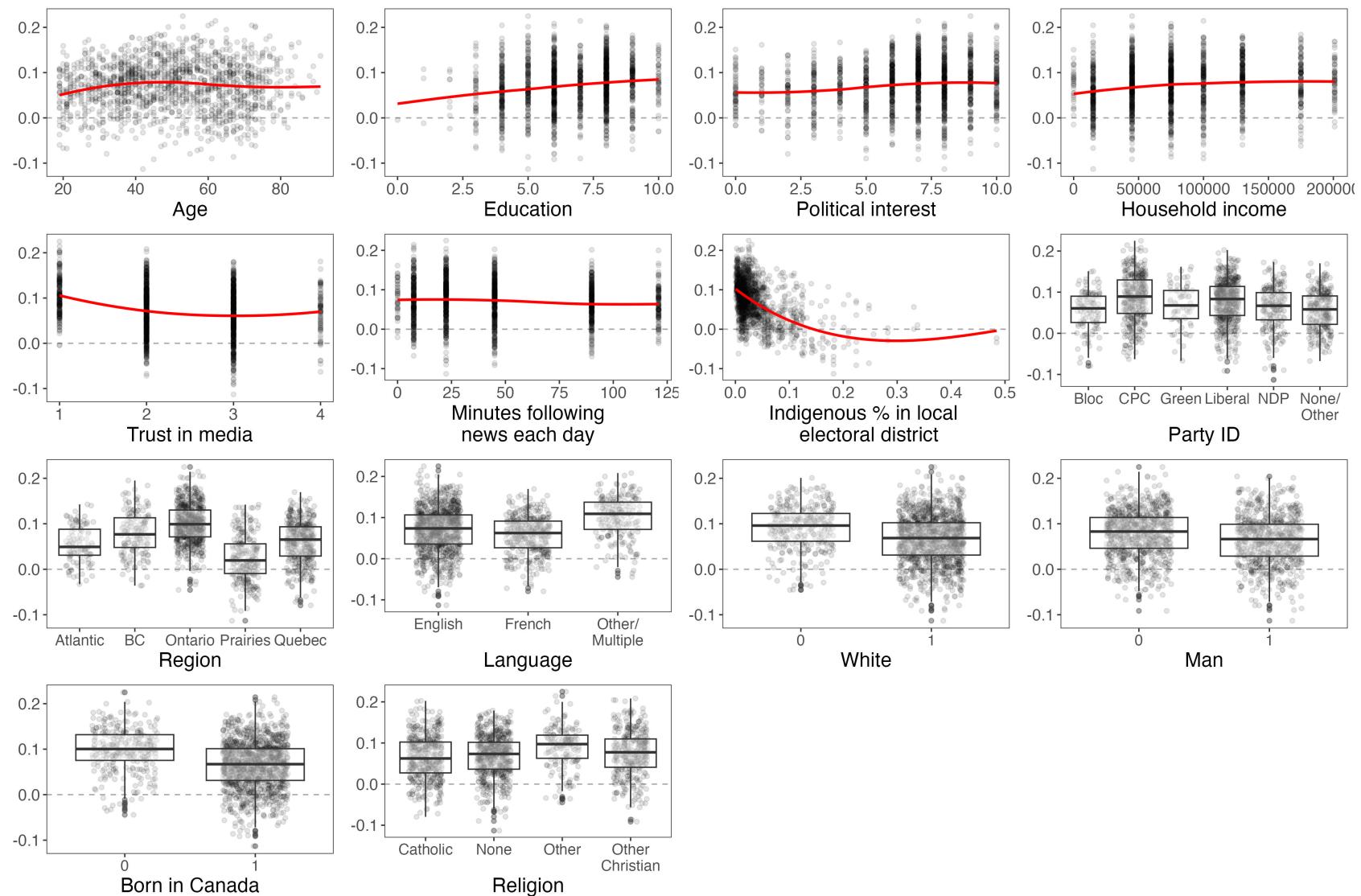


Figure A21: Causal forest estimated treatment effects and respondent characteristics

Plot summarizes the bivariate relationships between covariates and the estimated treatment effects ($\hat{\tau}$) for each observation in the test dataset. The y -axis in each plot is the estimated treatment effect.

That being said, the magnitude of these differences is quite small. Overall, there is actually little variability in units in response to the news of the unmarked graves. Figure A22 summarizes the individual-level estimated treatment effects and their variability. Most $\hat{\tau}$ values fall within 0 to 0.2 s.d. and there is a fair degree of uncertainty around these estimates. Perhaps most importantly, 90% of all observations were estimated to have a positive treatment effect, meaning there is little evidence of backlash among particular subgroups.

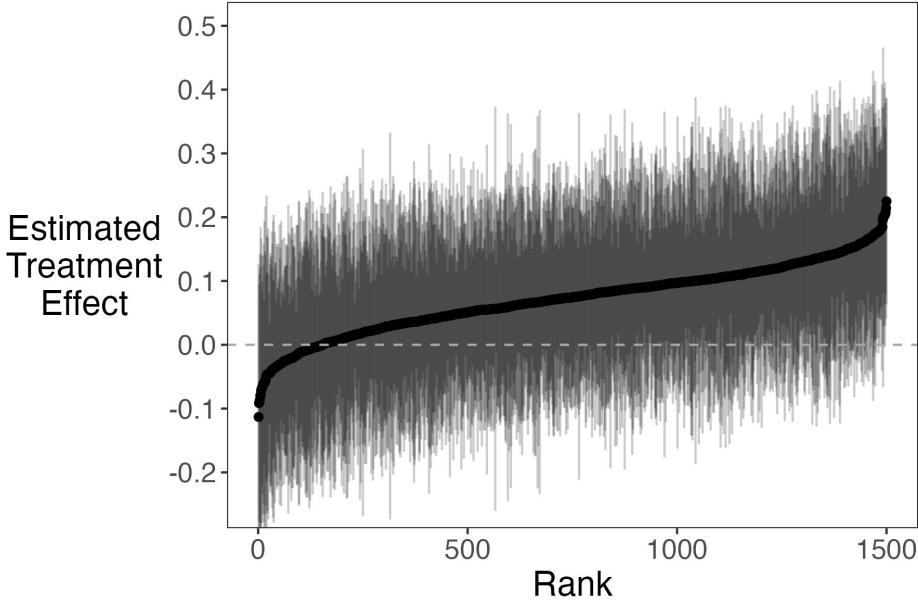


Figure A22: Causal forest estimated treatment effects

Plot presents the estimated treatment effect ($\hat{\tau}$) for each observation in the test dataset, ranked by their $\hat{\tau}$ values.

Finally, the bivariate plots earlier ignore correlations among covariates and do not capture estimation uncertainty. An alternative summary CATE measure is the best linear projection (BLP), a doubly robust estimate of the following linear model:

$$\tau(\mathbf{X}_i) = \alpha + \mathbf{X}_i\beta$$

where $\tau(\mathbf{X}_i)$ is the CATE and \mathbf{X}_i is a vector of covariates. Of course, this modelling approach assumes linearity between the CATEs and covariates, which may not be strictly true given the relationships in Figure A21, but it does offer a useful starting point for characterizing

effect heterogeneity.

Figure A23 summarizes the coefficients from the BLP. Most of the patterns in the bivariate plots hold up in this analysis: while there is not a significant amount of effect heterogeneity, some subgroups do exhibit marginally different responses to the treatment. For example, women were more affected by the news, while those have less trust in the media, lower political interest and have a larger Indigenous population in their area updated their beliefs less positively about the existence systemic racism. Aside from gender, none of these differences are statistically significant.

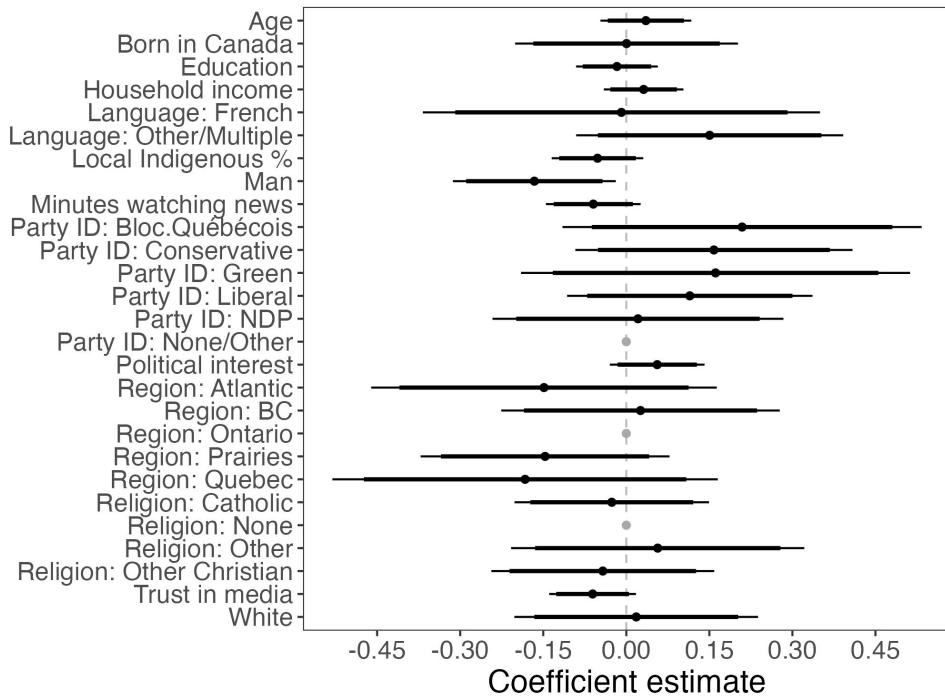


Figure A23: Best linear projection for causal forest estimated treatment effects

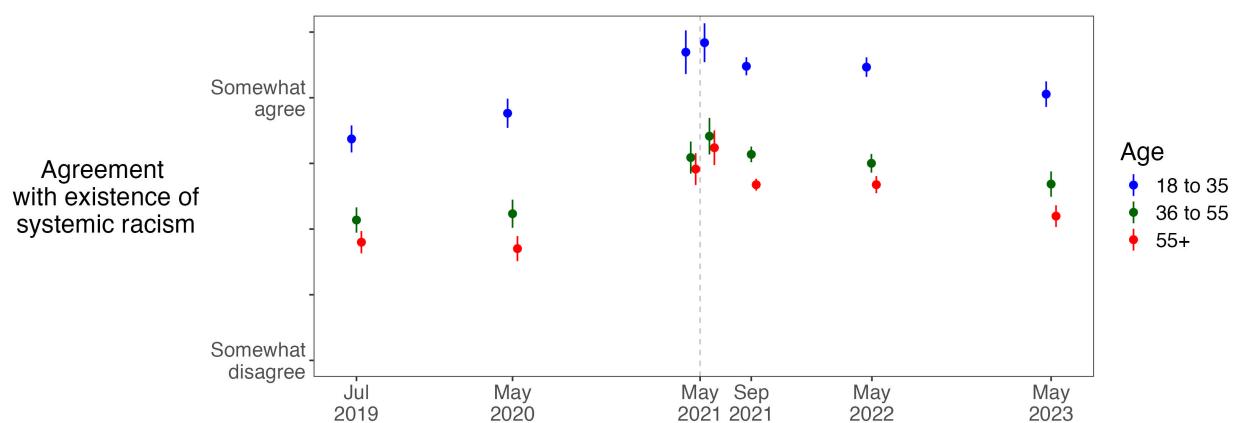
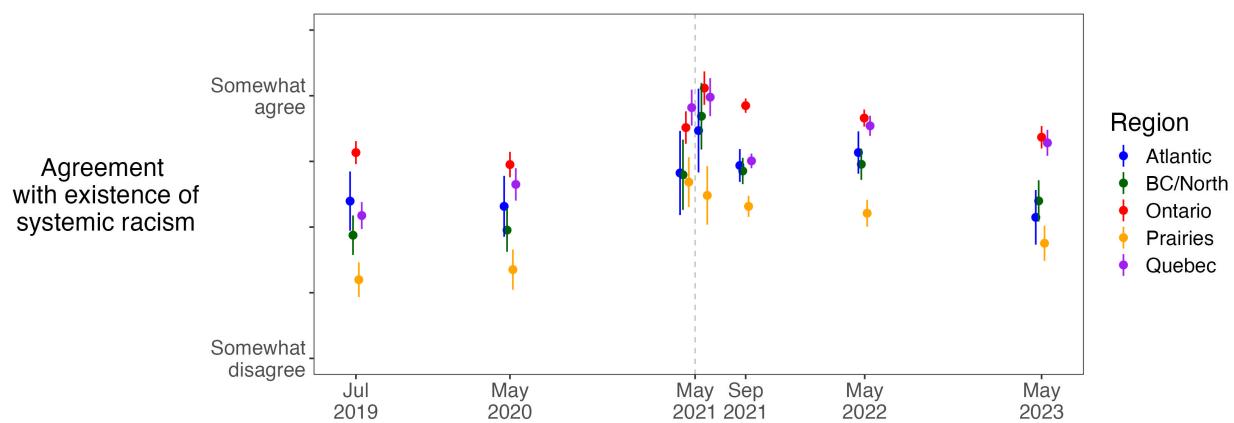
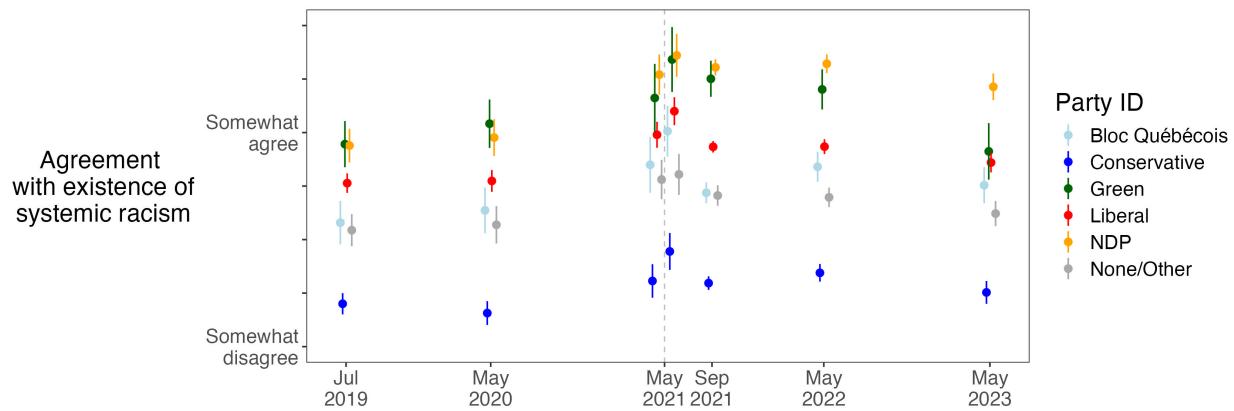
Plot presents the coefficient estimates from a best linear projection of the CATEs on covariates listed in the y -axis. The outcome variable is the estimated treatment effect, $\hat{\tau}$. All covariates are categorical except age, education, household income, minutes watching news and trust in media, which have all been standardized to represent implied effects in terms of standard deviation changes. ($n = 2,251$).

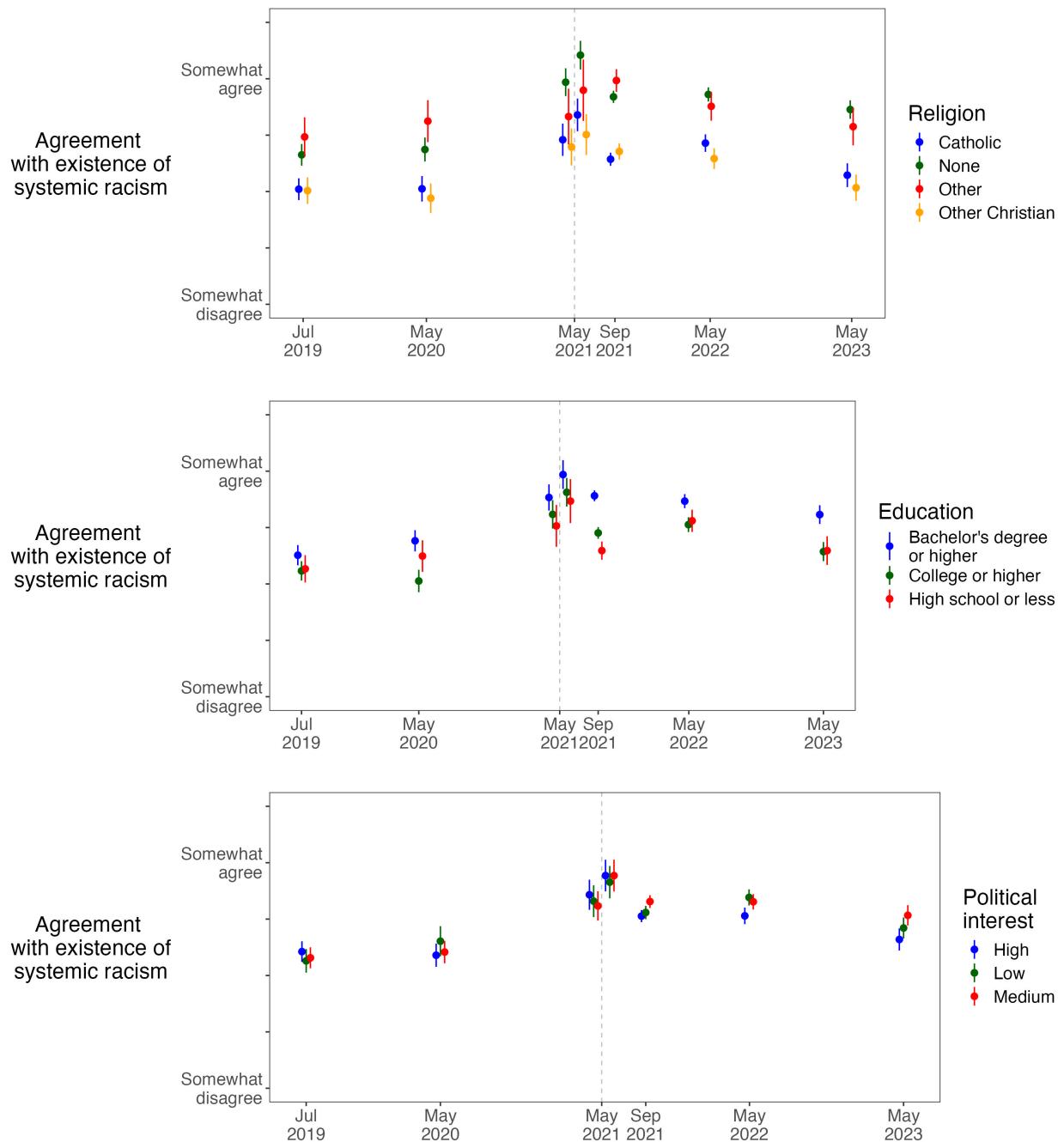
F.3 Heterogeneity in attitudinal persistence

In Sections F.1 and F.2, I show that there is minimal heterogeneity in responses to the initial news of the unmarked graves. In this section I show that there are also no major

differences in patterns of attitudinal persistence across relevant subgroups. Figure A24 plots the average agreement with the two systemic racism items over time separately across values of several different pre-treatment variables. Recall that in Figure 3 from the main text, after an increase in beliefs in the existence of systemic racism after the initial unmarked graves news in May 2021, levels of agreement with the two items returned to baseline and possibly even worsened in a September 2021 survey and did not change in a final survey in May 2022.

Overall, this pattern is generally the case for all subgroups in Figure A24 as well. There are some differences in the magnitude of attitudinal decay or persistence, but almost every group returned to baseline or worse in the September 2021 survey. One exception is the group of atheists and agnostics, but given the number of comparisons being made here, it is not surprising that at least one subgroup would display an unexpected pattern and so it is difficult to know if this result is just noise. The larger takeaway is that on average, non-Indigenous Canadians with various background characteristics responded in the same way to the initial news and then reverted to prior beliefs in similar ways.





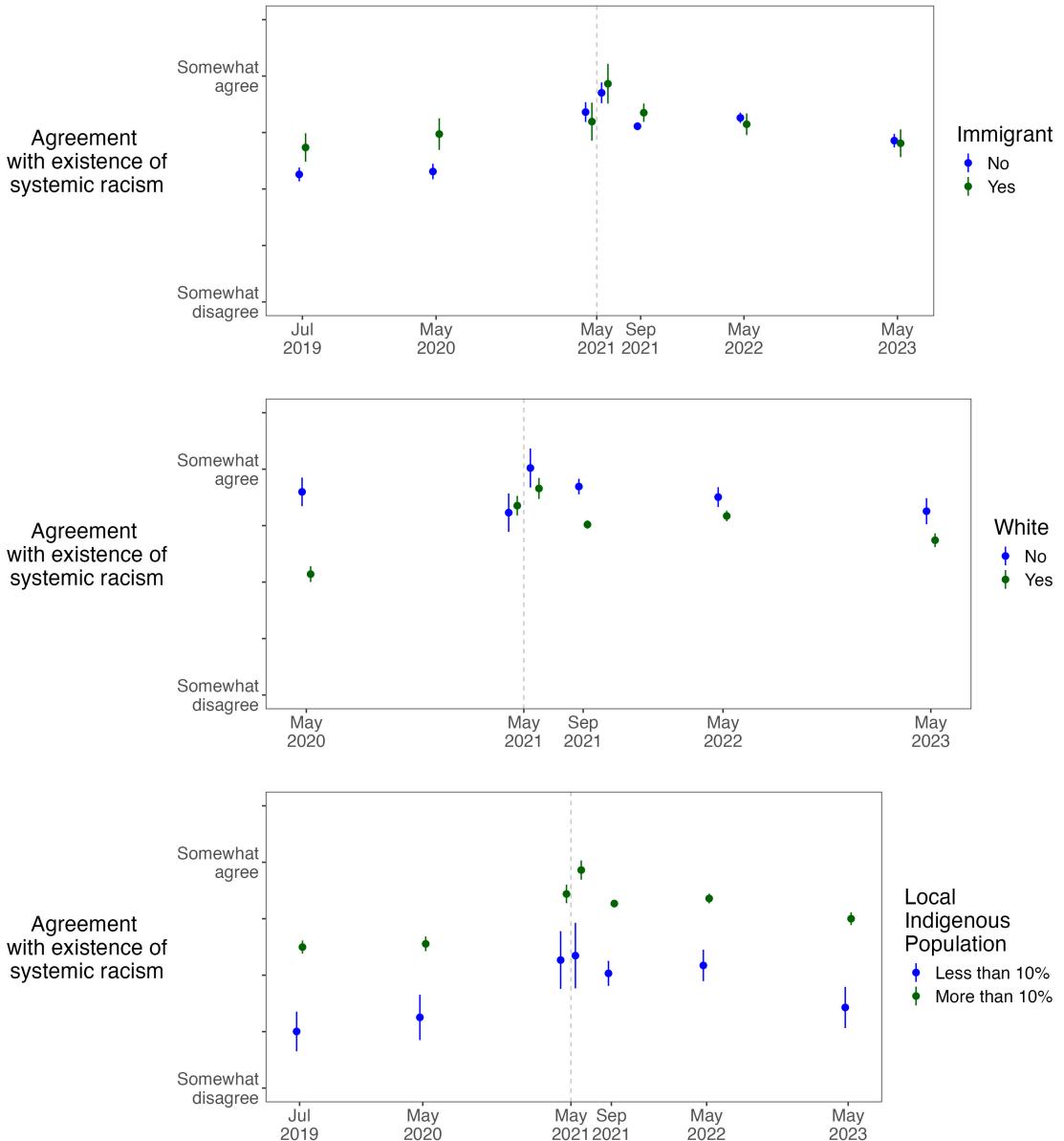


Figure A24: Agreement with systemic racism by covariates, 2019 to 2022

Plot presents average and 95% confidence intervals for the mean of a respondent-level average of the two items measuring beliefs in systemic racism (see Appendix Table A7 for each item plotted separately). Higher values indicate greater belief in the existence of systemic racism. In all but the September 2021 survey, this question was asked on a four-point Likert scale. For that specific survey, a five-point scale was used, but responses have been rescaled to match the four-point scale (see Appendix Figure A8 for individual response level prevalence over time).

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