Beyond the Trump Presidency: The Racial Underpinnings of White Americans' Anti-Democratic Beliefs[*]

Joshua Ferrer[†] and Christopher Palmisano[‡]

July 27, 2024

Abstract

How closely related are modern anti-democratic beliefs among white Americans, and to what extent do exclusionary racial attitudes undergird these beliefs? Utilizing data from the 2022 Political Unrest Study, the Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey (CMPS), Democracy Fund + UCLA Nationscape, and the Survey of the Performance of American Elections (SPAE), we show that support for voting restrictions, opposition to voting expansions, belief in widespread voter fraud, and support for overturning democratic election results load onto a single underlying dimension. While the overall prevalence of anti-democratic beliefs among white Americans has remained stable over the past decade, these beliefs have become more interconnected over time. We also find that racial resentment, anti-immigrant sentiment, and white racial grievance strongly correlate with anti-democratic beliefs, even after accounting for partisanship, ideology, and Trump favorability. Experimental evidence shows that white Americans react negatively when the racial effects of salient voting reforms are made explicit. Our findings highlight the coalescence of anti-democratic beliefs and their entrenched racialization in the contemporary American political landscape.

1 Introduction

On January 6, 2021, the world watched as thousands of protesters stormed the U.S. Capitol, attempting to overturn the results of a democratic election. This event took place after a months-long campaign by Trump and his Republican allies to delegitimize the results of the presidential election. In his speech to the insurrectionists on that day, Trump connected a wide range of voting reforms to the supposedly illegitimate election outcome: "There's only one reason the Democrats could possibly want to eliminate signature matching, opposed voter ID, and stop citizenship confirmation... because they want to steal the election".[1] This shocking event, and subsequent polling demonstrating widespread support for the insurrection amongst Republicans, laid bare a growing crisis in American democracy: the increasing prevalence and acceptance of anti-democratic beliefs among a significant portion of the population (Barreto et al. 2023).[2] While conventional wisdom often attributes this trend to unwavering loyalty to Donald Trump and his "stolen election" narrative, our research suggests a more complex and deeply rooted explanation.

This study investigates the prevalence, interconnectedness, and racial underpinnings of anti-democratic beliefs among white Americans. We investigate four research questions: (1) Have anti-democratic beliefs become more prevalent among white Americans over the past decade?; (2) To what extent are various anti-democratic beliefs interconnected?; (3) Have these anti-democratic beliefs become more interconnected over time?; and (4) What is the relationship between racial attitudes and anti-democratic beliefs among white Americans? We hypothesize that while the overall prevalence of anti-democratic beliefs may not have significantly increased, they are closely connected and have coalesced over time. Furthermore, we expect there is a strong relationship between racial attitudes – particularly racial resentment, anti-immigrant sentiment, and perceived threats to white status – and anti-democratic beliefs.

To address these questions, we analyze data from several large-scale surveys conducted between 2012 and 2022, including the Political Unrest Study, the Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey (CMPS), Democracy Fund + UCLA Nationscape, and the Survey of the Performance of American Elections (SPAE). Our study combines observational and experimental evidence to

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[1] https://www.npr.org/2021/02/10/966396848/read-trumps-jan-6-speech-a-key-part-of-impeachment-trial
[2] https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2024/01/02/jan-6-poll-post-trump/

provide a nuanced examination of the relationship between racial attitudes and anti-democratic beliefs.

Our findings reveal that while the overall prevalence of anti-democratic beliefs has remained relatively stable between 2012 and 2022, these beliefs have become more interconnected over time. Additionally, we find strong evidence that racial resentment, anti-immigrant sentiment, and perceived threats to white status are key drivers of anti-democratic beliefs, even after controlling for partisanship, ideology, and support for Donald Trump. However, we find little evidence that pro-white racial beliefs, such as favorability towards whites, support for white nationalism, or belief in white replacement theory, explain anti-democratic beliefs (Filindra 2022).

This study builds upon and extends previous research on the racialization of political attitudes in American politics. While scholars such as Tesler (2013, 2016) have demonstrated the increasing link between racial attitudes and partisanship, our work focuses specifically on how these racial attitudes relate to beliefs that undermine democratic norms and institutions. By examining this relationship over time and across multiple datasets, we provide a more comprehensive understanding of how racial attitudes shape support for anti-democratic measures.

The implications of our findings are profound, suggesting that efforts to address the erosion of democratic norms in the United States must grapple with deep-seated racial attitudes among white Americans, especially the perception that they are losing their privileged status in modern society. As the country becomes increasingly diverse, understanding and addressing these underlying racial dynamics will be crucial for preserving and strengthening American democracy.

2 The Prevalence and Consequences of Anti-Democratic Beliefs

Anti-democratic beliefs encompass a range of attitudes and preferences that undermine the core principles and practices of democracy. However, there is no single definition of anti-democratic beliefs that is universally accepted among scholars. Existing research alternatively defines anti-democratic beliefs as including support for violence against political opponents and support for institutions that prevent participation by political opponents (Thompson 2021), democratic norm violation and support for political violence (Holliday et al. 2024), low professed support for democ-

racy combined with support for authoritarian actions (Malka and Costello 2023), and support for unitary presidential action (Touchton, Klofstad, and Uscinski 2023).

The prevalence of anti-democratic beliefs in the United States has been a subject of increasing concern, particularly in the wake of the Trump presidency and the events surrounding the 2020 election. Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) argue that anti-democratic sentiments have increased significantly in recent years, pointing to the erosion of democratic norms and institutions. However, other scholars suggest a more nuanced picture. For instance, Norris (2017) found that while trust in democratic institutions has declined in many advanced democracies including the United States, support for democratic principles remains relatively high. Graham and Svolik (2020) found that while most Americans claim to support democracy in the abstract, many are willing to sacrifice democratic principles when doing so benefits their party. This suggests that the prevalence of anti-democratic beliefs may be context-dependent and influenced by partisan motivations.

Our study builds on this literature by examining the prevalence and trends of specific anti-democratic beliefs over time, focusing on attitudes that undermine core democratic principles such as inclusive participation and acceptance of election results (Dahl 1989; Urbinati and Warren 2008). Specifically, we define anti-Democratic beliefs as the set of attitudes that include support for voting restrictions such as voter ID, opposition to voting expansion such as same-day registration and vote-by-mail, belief in widespread voter fraud, and endorsement of actions that subvert the legitimacy of democratic elections. These measures capture the core idea of support for democracy, including supporting the right and ability of all eligible citizens to vote, supporting the legitimacy of the electoral process, and accepting the results of democratic elections.

Past research has shown that the consequences of these anti-democratic attitudes can be significant. Voter ID laws, often presented as a means to prevent fraud, have been shown to disproportionately disenfranchise racial minorities, low-income individuals, and the elderly (Hajnal, Lajevardi, and Nielson 2017; Barreto, Nuño, and Sanchez 2009). Conversely, policies that expand access to voting have been shown to increase voter turnout and representation (Bonica et al. 2021). Further, when anti-democratic attitudes become widespread, they can threaten the very stability of the political system (Norris 2019).

By examining these anti-democratic beliefs over a decade-long period, our study contributes to the ongoing debate about the prevalence and trends of anti-democratic attitudes in the United

States, offering insights into whether these beliefs have indeed increased and whether they have become more interconnected among those who hold them.

3 The Racialization of White Anti-Democratic Attitudes

A growing body of research suggests that anti-democratic attitudes are deeply intertwined with various racial attitudes among white Americans. The connection between race and voting restrictions in the United States has been well-documented (Keyssar 2009; Bentele and O'Brien 2013), with recent studies showing that support for voting restrictions and belief in fraud claims are heavily racialized (Banks and Hicks 2016; Gronke et al. 2019; Sheagley and Udani 2021; Udani and Kimball 2018; Wilson and Brewer 2013, 2016; Wilson, Owens, and Davis 2011). White racial attitudes can be grouped into two categories: those that deal with negative sentiments towards minorities, including anti-black, anti-immigrant, and racial resentment; and those that deal with sentiments concerning whites, including white racial grievance and pro-white racial attitudes. We examine each in turn.

Studies have shown that voter confidence and belief in election integrity have become increasingly tied to racial and xenophobic beliefs (Appleby and Federico 2018; Buyuker and Filindra 2020; Enders and Thornton 2022; Wilson and King-Meadows 2016). Enders and Thornton (2022) explore the impact of racial resentment on democratic satisfaction, finding that white electoral losers' satisfaction with democracy increases with racial resentment when Republicans win, but decreases when Democrats win. Trump's fraud claims following the 2020 election focused primarily on Black and immigrant voters (Summers 2020), further highlighting the racialized nature of these allegations. Filindra, Kaplan, and Buyuker (2022) show that white Americans' racial prejudices, particularly anti-Black stereotypes, have become intertwined with their distrust in the federal government. Anti-immigrant sentiment has been found to be a significant predictor of support for anti-democratic attitudes and actions. Vaughan (2021) finds that, even after controlling for factors like populism, far-right affiliation, and national-level variables, anti-immigrant attitudes are significantly associated with increased support for illiberal democratic preferences and decreased importance placed on living in a democracy. Further, Barreto et al. (2023) find that negative attitudes toward immigrants significantly predict support for the January 6th insurrection.

In addition to out-group attitudes, recent research has begun to examine the role of white in-group identity and perceived threats to white status in shaping anti-democratic beliefs. Jardina and Mickey (2022) find that white Americans with a strong sense of racial solidarity are more inclined to favor authoritarian leadership, a sentiment rooted in historical efforts to restrict democracy in a multiracial society. Jardina (2021) finds that both out-group racial resentment and in-group racial identity are strongly associated with white Americans' candidate evaluations in recent elections, although out-group attitudes have a larger impact. Major, Blodorn, and Major Blascovich (2018) found that reminding white Americans high in ethnic identification about the projected non-white majority in the U.S. by 2042 increased their group status threat, support for Donald Trump and anti-immigrant policies, and opposition to political correctness in the 2016 presidential election. In contrast, providing white Americans information about their vanishing majority decreased support for Trump and increased support for political correctness among whites low in ethnic identification. Similarly, Bartels (2020) finds that concerns about discrimination against whites and other sources of ethnic antagonism, particularly concern about immigrants, African-Americans, and Latinos, are strong predictors of Republican support for using force to preserve the American way of life. Outten et al. (2012) finds that when white Americans are exposed to projections showing non-white populations becoming the numerical majority, they experience heightened anger and fear towards ethnic minorities and greater sympathy for their own racial ingroup. The perception of the white in-group as threatened in light of future ethnic demographics mediates the effect of the demographic shift condition on these amplified intergroup emotions. Barreto et al. (2023) find that belief in white replacement theory significantly predicts support for the January 6th insurrection. Filindra (2022) shows that white grievance, distinct from measures of white identity/consciousness and racial prejudice, is a significant predictor of doubts about election fairness, even after controlling for outgroup attitudes and demographics. However, they fail to find an independent relationship between pro-white attitudes and belief in a fraudulent election. Thompson (2021) finds that racially threatened Republicans exhibit much higher levels of endorsement for anti-democratic norms and practices, including support for political violence. The effect of white grievance on election skepticism was especially strong among white Republicans in 2020, likely due to elite rhetoric surrounding the "Stop the Steal" conspiracy theories alleging fraud in the 2020 election. These findings underscore the role of perceived white victimization in driving mistrust in democratic processes.

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Building on these findings, our study explores both out-group and in-group racial dimensions of anti-democratic beliefs and attitudes. We find that the strongest and most consistent predictor of anti-democratic beliefs is white racial grievance/status threat, followed by racial resentment and anti-immigrant sentiment. The least consistent predictor of anti-democratic beliefs is pro-white racial attitudes, including support for white nationalism and belief in white replacement theory. Furthermore, we demonstrate that introducing racial frames into voting reforms increases support for restrictions and reduces support for expansions. We conclude by discussing the implications of our results for understanding the racialization of anti-democratic sentiments and what these findings mean for the resilience of American democracy.

4 Data and Methodology

This research combines data from multiple publicly available large-scale surveys of American adults fielded over the past 10 years: the 2020 Cooperative Multiracial Post-Election Survey (CMPS); the January 21–February 3 2021 parallel wave of the Democracy Fund + UCLA Nationscape survey; and the 2012, 2016, 2020, and 2022 Surveys of the Performance of American Elections (SPAE). We also utilize an original large-scale survey of American adults fielded in 2022, the Political Unrest Study (see Barreto et al. 2024 for details). We identified surveys that asked questions about multiple anti-democratic beliefs (belief in widespread voter fraud, support for voting restrictions, opposition to voting expansions, belief in the "Big Lie" of a stolen presidential election, and support for overturning democratic election results) and asked respondents' racial attitudes. Additionally, we aimed to achieve temporal variability in surveys to examine changes in the relationship between various anti-democratic beliefs and in the relationship between anti-democratic beliefs and racial attitudes over time. To our knowledge, we have included every major publically available survey asking extensive questions on both anti-democratic beliefs and racial attitudes.

For all surveys, we subset responses to non-Hispanic white adult Americans. We include survey weights in our analysis to adjust each survey to a representative sample of white American adults. Finally, we standardize both the dependent and independent variables so all results are interpretable as effect sizes.

We run multivariable linear regression models with each anti-democratic belief used as a separate dependent variable. For each survey, we pool the available anti-democratic attitudes into a single index of anti-democratic beliefs, which we also use as a dependent variable. We capture the following racial attitudes in each survey: racial resentment, anti-immigrant sentiment, support for white nationalism, and belief that discrimination against whites is a problem. Controls include a COVID-related proxy measure for conspiratorial beliefs, Trump favorability, party, ideology, education, gender, age, income, and evangelicalism. We also run regressions of survey samples split by Trump favorability to show whether the connection between anti-democratic attitudes and racial beliefs is shaped by favorability towards President Trump.

We measure the relationship between various anti-democratic beliefs using confirmatory factor analysis, Chronbach's alpha, and principal component analysis. We use a framing experiment embedded in the 2023 Political Unrest Study to provide causal evidence for the link between racial attitudes and anti-democratic beliefs.

5 Anti-Democratic Beliefs Among White Americans Have Not Become More Prevalent

Have anti-democratic beliefs concerning belief in fraud, opposition to voting expansions, and support for voting restrictions become more prevalent over the past decade? In this section, we utilize the Survey on the Performance of American Elections (SPAE) to answer this question. The SPAE has asked an identical set of questions about these anti-democratic beliefs in 2012, 2016, 2020, and 2022, allowing us to examine the prevalence of the beliefs among white Americans over time. We construct an index for belief in widespread fraud by combining perceptions of the frequency of illegal multiple voting, ballot tampering, impersonation at the polls, noncitizen voting, absentee mail fraud, and official vote count manipulation. We construct an anti-voting expansions index by combining respondents' opposition to all-mail elections, automatic voter registration, same day registration, an Election Day weekend, and making Election Day a national holiday. Finally, only a single voting restriction was consistently asked in the survey: support for voter identification laws. To construct the indices, responses to all components were added together and then rescaled between 0 and 1. The support for voter ID questions was also rescaled between 0 and 1. Finally, to

construct an anti-democratic index, the three scales were added together and the resultant measure rescaled once more between 0 to 1. This method gives equal weight to each component, regardless of the number of questions comprising each one.

Figure 1 shows descriptive means of the anti-democratic index among white respondents in the SPAE between 2012 and 2022. A 95% confidence interval ribbon is charted but due to the large sample size, it is indistinguishable from the mean values. As is clear in this figure, there is no evidence of an overall increase in anti-democratic beliefs among white Americans over the past decade. In fact, the mean of the anti-democratic beliefs index has inched downward over time, from 0.52 in 2012 to 0.48 in 2022. Figure 2 breaks down the over time trend by component belief. Support for voter ID is high and has increased slightly since 2012. However, the fraud index has inched downward (from 0.33 to 0.30), whereas the index of opposition to voting expansions has significantly decreased (from 0.55 to 0.44).

Figure 3 breaks down these trends further by party to investigate the degree to which they are the result of increasing polarization. There is some evidence of polarization of beliefs. The gap between Democrats and Republicans on both the index of fraud beliefs and opposition to voting expansions has grown from 0.27 to 0.37, and the gap between Democrats and Republicans in opposition to voting expansions has similarly increased from .27 to .37. However, the partisan gap in support for voter identification has actually decreased slightly, from .39 to .36. Additionally, beliefs have moved in the same direction on two of these dimensions. Both Democrats and Republicans have grown more accepting of voting expansions, whereas members of both parties have become more accepting of voter ID laws. The descriptive evidence does not suggest a wholesale partisan resorting based on anti-democratic beliefs.

In summary, there is little evidence for broad increases in white American's anti-democratic beliefs. However, it still might be the case that there has been sorting in the distribution of these beliefs. In other words, those that hold at least one anti-democratic opinion might now be more likely to hold multiple anti-democratic opinions. In the following section, we investigate the extent to which beliefs antithetical to a functioning, inclusive democracy are described by a single underlying dimension and whether they have grown more closely connected over the past decade.

Figure 1: **Average Anti-Democratic Beliefs Among White Americans Is Decreasing Over Time (SPAE, 2012-2022)**. This figure displays averages of the anti-democratic beliefs of Americans using SPAE data from 2012, 2016, 2020, and 2022. The index is scaled to between 0 and 1. Upper and lower bounds signify 95% confidence intervals.
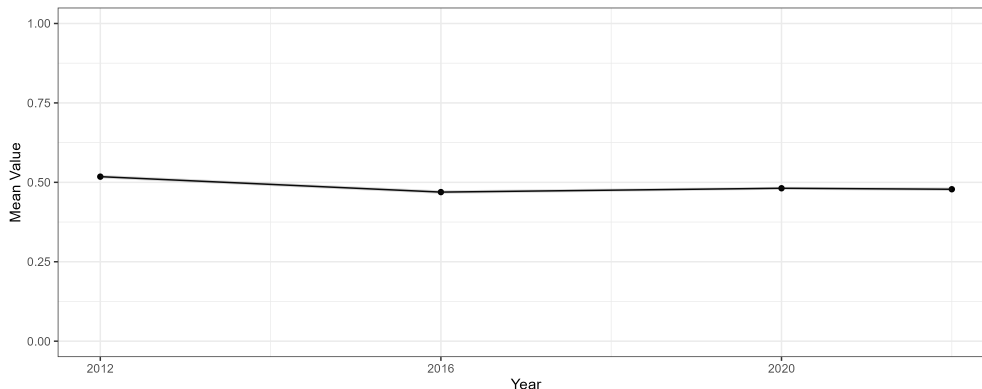
6   Anti-Democratic Beliefs Held by White Americans Have Become More Closely Related

Across four nationally representative surveys fielded over the past four years, our analysis reveals a strong correlation between racial attitudes and support for anti-democratic measures. Table 1 displays the variables tested and results of confirmatory factor analysis metrics for each study. Chronbach's alpha is a measure of internal consistency for a scale, with scores greater than 0.7 generally considered acceptable and greater than 0.8 considered a good score (Peterson 1994). We use five metrics in confirmatory factor analysis to evaluate the quality of fitting a unidimensional model to the data. Root means square error of approximation (RMSEA) and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) are absolute fit indices (Fabrigar et al. 1999). Values of less than 0.1 are considered acceptable and values less than 0.05 are considered good for the fitting of a model assuming a single underlying dimension. The comparative fit index (CFI) and the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) are both incremental fit indices (Bentler 1990). Scores greater than 0.9 for each indicate a well-fitting unidimensional model. Finally, common variance explains how much variance among the set of items is shared (Hair et al. 2019). Values about 50% typically indicate closely-related items. We employ two additional analyses: Eigenvalue decomposition and principal component analysis. A large gap between the first and second Eigenvalues in a decomposition suggests that the variables are unidimensional. We also report the amount of variation explained

Figure 2: **Average Anti-Democratic Beliefs Among White Americans Is Decreasing Over Time - By Index Component (SPAE, 2012-2022)**. This figure displays the three components that make up the anti-democratic belief index using SPAE data from 2012, 2016, 2020, and 2022. The components are a fraud index, an opposition to expansive voting laws index, and support for voter ID. Each component is scaled to between 0 and 1. Upper and lower bounds signify 95% confidence intervals.
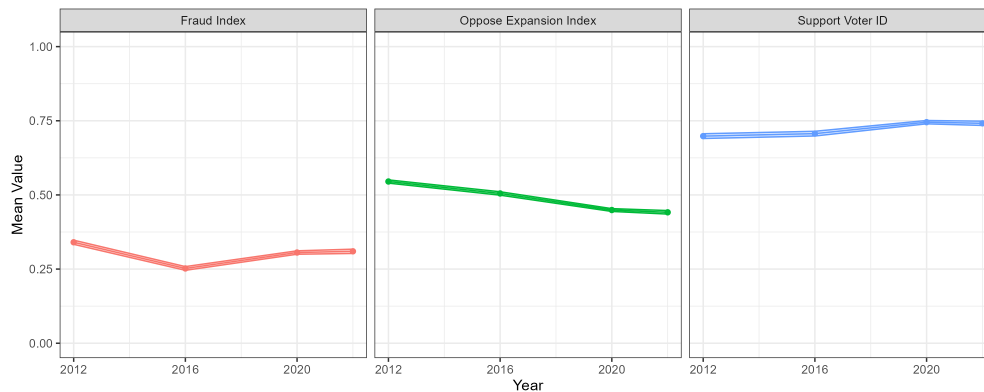
by the first component in principal component analysis, values above 50% indicating a better-fitting unidimensional model.

Table 1: Confirmatory Factor Analysis of A Single Dimension to Anti-Democratic Beliefs

Metric	Criteria	PUS	CMPS	Nationscape	SPAE 2022
Chronbach's alpha	> 0.7	**0.77**	**0.86**	0.55	**0.73**
RMSEA	< 0.1	0.14	**0.09**	0.12	**0.00**
SRMR	< 0.05	**0.05**	**0.02**	0.06	**0.00**
CFI	> 0.9	**0.92**	**0.99**	**0.90**	**1.00**
TLI	> 0.9	0.84	**0.97**	0.80	**1.00**
Common variance (%)	> 50	41.21	**60.66**	29.71	48.48
Eigenvalue 1	-	2.63	2.81	1.88	1.96
Eigenvalue 2	-	0.83	0.51	1.14	0.57
Eigenvalue gap	> 1	**1.80**	**2.29**	0.74	**1.40**
Variation explained (%)	> 50	**52.42**	**70.60**	38.12	**65.39**
Note:		Bolded values meet criteria for unidimensional model.			

6.1 Political Unrest Study

We focus on the relationship between five variables in the 2022 Political Unrest Study: the belief that preventing fraud is more important than ensuring all eligible voters can vote, support for requiring voter ID, opposition to expanding the option for permanent vote-by-mail, the belief that

Figure 3: **Average Anti-Democratic Beliefs Among White Americans Is Decreasing Over Time - By Party (SPAE, 2012-2022)**. This figure displays the three components that make up the anti-democratic belief index using SPAE data from 2012, 2016, 2020, and 2022, broken out by political party identity. The components are a fraud index, an opposition to expansive voting laws index, and support for voter ID. Each component is scaled to between 0 and 1. Upper and lower bounds signify 95% confidence intervals.
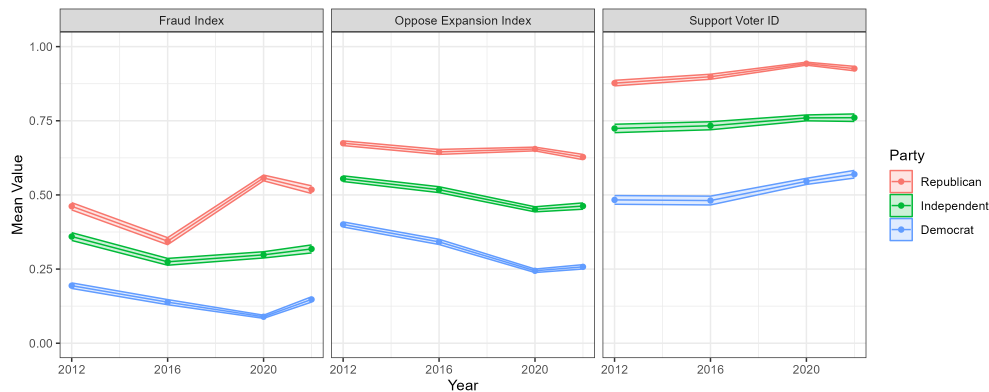
fraud changed the 2020 election results, and support for state legislatures having the power to overturn democratic election results.

To determine if these beliefs load onto a single underlying dimension, we apply several tests. Among white respondents, the Cronbach's alpha of these five variables is 0.771, indicating acceptable internal consistency. We conduct a confirmatory factor analysis to test if the covariance among these variables is due to a single common factor. The diagnostics of this analysis suggest the possibility that the items are unidimensional. We use two absolute fit indices: root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR). A RMSEA of less than 0.1 suggests a close fitting model. In the case of the Political Unrest Study, the RMSEA of these variables is 0.14, which is slightly above the threshold. A SRMR of less than 0.05 is considered a good-fitting unidimensional model; the statistics for these variables is .049. We also use two incremental fit indices: the comparative fit index (CFI) and the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI, also known as the Non-Normed Fit index, or NNFI). CFI and TLI scores of greater than 0.9 are conventionally considered good fits for a unidimensional model. In this case the CFI score is 0.922 and the TLI score is 0.845. A factor analysis reveals that 41% of the variance is shared between these factors.

Two additional metrics are useful for evaluating whether these five anti-democratic beliefs are explained by the same underlying dimension. First, an Eigenvalue decomposition reveals a large

gap between the first and second Eigenvalues: 2.63 and 0.83. This suggests the scale items are uni-dimensional. Finally, principal component analysis reveals that one underlying component explains 46% of the variation across the anti-democratic beliefs, and a second component explains 75% of the variance.

In summary, there is mixed evidence for describing these beliefs as loading onto one underlying dimension in the 2022 Political Unrest Study. The beliefs are without a doubt closely related. Additionally, some conventional thresholds are met for ascribing a unidimensional model as a good fit for the data. Unidimensionality means that belief in the "Big Lie", support for overturning democratic election results, concerns for illusionary fraud above ensuring all eligible voters can participate, support for increasing barriers to voting, and opposition to reducing barriers to participation all tap into the same underlying mental impulse antithetical to an inclusive modern democracy in America. We now move to additional surveys to see if these results hold for different samples of the U.S. adult white population, sampled at various times and with distinct questions tapping into anti-democratic sentiment.

6.2 CMPS

For the 2020 CMPS, we use four variables to capture anti-democratic beliefs: fraud changed the 2020 presidential election results, ineligible votes are worse than eligible people being prevented from voting, the Voting Rights Act is no longer necessary, and the Republican members of Congress who attempted to stop the certification of President Biden's electoral victory were protecting democracy. A Chronbach's alpha of 0.86 indicates good internal consistency. Furthermore, all four indices of fit indicate that a unidimensional model is a good fit for the data. Specifically, 61% of the variance is shared across the four items, there is a large gap between the first and second Eigenvalues in an Eigenvalue decomposition, and principal component analysis reveals that a single dimension describes 54% of the variation in the data.

6.3 Nationscape

Only the January 21–February 3 2021 parallel wave of the Democracy Fund + UCLA Nationscape survey asked multiple questions probing respondents' anti-democratic beliefs, so we use this wave in our analysis. We identify five relevant variables: the belief that fraud changed the 2020 presidential

election results, approval of the events of January 6, 2021, support for requiring voter identification at the polls, opposition to expanding vote-by-mail, and support for leaders bending the rules when necessary. Goodness-of-fit metrics are generally lower than what is observed in the other studies analyzed. However, they still provide evidence suggestive of an underlying single dimension. Chronbach's Alpha of 0.552 indicates poor internal consistency. Two of the four confirmatory factor analysis indices suggest a good fit. 30% of variance is shared across these five beliefs. The gap between the first and second Eigenvalues is smaller than for other studies but still notable (1.88 vs. 1.14). Finally, principal component analysis reveals that 45% of variation is explained by a single component.

In sum, factor analysis of three independent studies show that belief in widespread voter fraud, support for voting restrictions, opposition to voting expansions, and support for overturning democratic election results are all closely related beliefs and may even load on a single underlying dimension. This analysis prompts the question: have these beliefs always been closely held, or have recent events and Trump's inflammatory statements coalesced these beliefs more tightly than in pre-Trump eras?

6.4 Anti-Democratic Beliefs Are Growing More Closely Connected Over Time

To explore whether anti-democratic beliefs have coalesced over time, we utilize the 2012, 2016, 2020, and 2022 waves of the Survey of the Performance of American Elections (SPAE). This survey began in 2007, but the first nationwide wave that featured questions on voting laws and belief in fraud was in 2012. These surveys have asked consistent questions about support for voting expansions and voting restrictions and belief in the prevalence of voter fraud ever since, allowing us to conduct an identical confirmatory factor analysis across a ten-year period. Importantly, 2012 was before Trump became a Republican presidential candidate, enabling us to examine how closely these beliefs were connected prior to his emergence as a central figure in American politics and afterward. Table shows the results for each wave.

We employ similar constructed indices of belief in fraud, opposition to voting expansions, and support for voting restrictions as described in our earlier section on the overall prevalence of anti-democratic beliefs. Rather than adding each question additively then rescaling to 0-1, we stan-

dardize each question before adding them together into indices, which are then standardized once more. We use this procedure to match our analysis of the other surveys.

The internal consistency, as indicated by Cronbach's alpha, has increased from 0.64 in 2012 to 0.74 in the 2022 wave. Goodness-of-fit metrics for a unidimensional model have consistently indicated a good fit, with shared variance across the three factors increasing from 43% in 2012 to 56% in 2020, before going down to 49% in 2022. The gap between the first and second Eigenvalues has also grown. Principal component analysis returns inconsistent results, with a single component explaining 70% of the variation in the 2012 survey, but lower percentages in more recent surveys.

In summary, every SPAE survey shows strong evidence that anti-democratic beliefs are closely related. They also provide some evidence that these beliefs have grown more closely connected over time, with anti-democratic beliefs most intertwined in 2020. This is congruent with the explanation that Trump's rhetoric coalesced anti-democratic beliefs in the minds of his white supporters.

Table 2: Factor Analyais of Anti-Democratic Beliefs in SPAE Over Time

Metric	Criteria	2012	2016	2020	2022
Chronbach's alpha	> 0.7	0.64	0.68	**0.79**	**0.73**
RMSEA	< 0.1	**0.00**	**0.00**	**0.00**	**0.00**
SRMR	< 0.05	**0.00**	**0.00**	**0.00**	**0.00**
CFI	> 0.9	**1.00**	**1.00**	**1.00**	**1.00**
TLI	> 0.9	**1.00**	**1.00**	**1.00**	**1.00**
Common variance (%)	> 50	42.62	46.34	**56.17**	48.48
Eigenvalue 1	-	1.74	1.83	2.12	1.96
Eigenvalue 2	-	0.77	0.74	0.48	0.57
Eigenvalue gap	> 1	0.97	**1.10**	**1.63**	**1.40**
Variation explained (%)	> 50	**59.42**	**63.71**	**70.75**	**65.39**
Note:	Bolded values indicate unidimensional model.				

7 Anti-Democratic Beliefs Held by White Americans Are Racialized

We have demonstrated that anti-democratic beliefs are closely intertwined among white Americans. In this section, we show that the attitudes are also highly racialized. White Americans who are racially resentful, hold negative attitudes about immigrants, and are concerned with discrimination against whites are most likely to espouse anti-democratic sentiments. We show these relationships

across three large-scale surveys: the Political Unrest Study, the Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey (CMPS), and the Democracy Fund + UCLA Nationscape.

7.1 Political Unrest Study

The Political Unrest Study, fielded in 2022, was designed to test the link between opposition to the Black Lives Matter movement and support for the January 6, 2021 capital insurrection (Barreto et al. 2023). As such, it includes a range of questions probing anti-democratic beliefs as well as a suite of racial attitudes. We focus on four explanatory variables of interest: racial resentment, anti-immigrant sentiment, adherence to white replacement theory, and the belief that white discrimination is a problem. We proxy conspiratorial attitudes with a question that probes the belief that COVID-19 was a government conspiracy. In this and all other observational analyses, we include controls for Trump favorability, partisan ID, ideology, education, gender, age, income, and identification as an evangelical. Linear regression results are reported in Table 3. Both independent and dependent variables are standardized, so all point estimates can be interpreted as the effect size of one standard deviation change in the explanatory variable. The maximum variance inflation factor across explanatory variables is 2.24, which is well below the conventional threshold of 5 indicating multicollinearity issues.

We find clear support for a strong relationship between the belief that white discrimination is a problem and support for anti-democratic beliefs. The relationship is statistically significant across all five anti-democratic beliefs–the belief that fraud changed the 2020 presidential election results, prioritizing fraud prevention over ensuring all eligible voters can vote, supporting voter identification laws, opposing vote-by-mail expansion, and supporting the ability of state legislatures to overturn democratic election results–as well as in the pooled anti-democratic belief index (column 5). The effect size in the anti-democratic index is about 0.2, indicating a modest but substantively meaningful effect. Only favorability towards former President Trump is more powerful in explaining support for anti-democratic beliefs, all else equal.

We find less consistent but still strong evidence for racial resentment and anti-immigration sentiment (proxied by the belief that immigrants are a burden on the country). Both variables are explanatory for three of the five dependent variables, and both are also explanatory in the anti-democratic index. The effect size for racial resentment is .167, and is therefore a more ex-

planatory variable than partisan identification or any other control besides Trump favorability. Anti-immigrant sentiment has an effect size of 0.096, and thus is about half as explanatory as the belief that discrimination against whites is a problem.

Notably, we find no evidence that belief in white replacement theory among white Americans explains support for any of the anti-democratic beliefs studied. In fact, the only significant relationship observed is a negative correlation between belief in white replacement and opposition to permanent vote-by-mail; in other words, the more respondents adhere to white replacement theory, the more supportive they are of making vote-by-mail permanent. This is in the opposite direction of expectations.

Table 3: Racial Attitudes Predict Anti-Democratic Beliefs (Standardized)

	Dependent variable:					
	Fraud Changed Results	No Fraud Important	Require Voter ID	Oppose Perm VBM	States Overturn Results	Anti-Dem Index
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Racial resentment	0.044 (0.029)	0.153*** (0.037)	0.177*** (0.037)	0.203*** (0.035)	−0.011 (0.036)	0.166*** (0.031)
Immigrants burden	0.096*** (0.030)	0.079** (0.037)	0.001 (0.038)	−0.021 (0.036)	0.171*** (0.036)	0.096*** (0.032)
Whites being replaced	0.004 (0.029)	0.016 (0.037)	0.030 (0.037)	−0.109*** (0.036)	0.057 (0.036)	−0.001 (0.031)
White discrim problem	0.068** (0.028)	0.191*** (0.036)	0.224*** (0.036)	0.076** (0.035)	0.118*** (0.035)	0.199*** (0.030)
COVID gov't conspiracy	0.146*** (0.027)	−0.008 (0.034)	−0.052 (0.035)	−0.045 (0.033)	0.009 (0.033)	0.014 (0.029)
Trump favorability	0.453*** (0.029)	0.133*** (0.037)	0.106*** (0.038)	0.272*** (0.036)	0.264*** (0.036)	0.361*** (0.032)
Republican scale	0.075*** (0.026)	−0.030 (0.033)	0.012 (0.033)	0.085*** (0.032)	0.011 (0.032)	0.045 (0.028)
Conservative	0.040 (0.027)	0.061* (0.034)	0.080** (0.034)	0.167*** (0.033)	0.042 (0.033)	0.115*** (0.029)
Education	−0.003 (0.024)	−0.005 (0.031)	−0.030 (0.031)	−0.043 (0.030)	−0.037 (0.030)	−0.035 (0.026)
Female	−0.008 (0.021)	0.028 (0.026)	0.060** (0.027)	−0.008 (0.026)	0.009 (0.026)	0.023 (0.022)
Age	−0.009 (0.025)	−0.092*** (0.031)	−0.028 (0.032)	−0.019 (0.030)	−0.098*** (0.030)	−0.072*** (0.026)
Income	0.023 (0.023)	0.057* (0.030)	0.116*** (0.030)	0.012 (0.029)	0.067** (0.029)	0.080*** (0.025)
Evangelical	0.060*** (0.021)	0.087*** (0.027)	0.054** (0.027)	−0.028 (0.026)	0.085*** (0.026)	0.076*** (0.023)
Constant	−0.002 (0.020)	0.014 (0.026)	0.003 (0.026)	−0.030 (0.025)	0.009 (0.025)	0.053** (0.022)
Observations	1,180	1,180	1,180	1,180	1,180	1,180
R^2	0.545	0.268	0.253	0.318	0.323	0.548
Adjusted R^2	0.540	0.260	0.244	0.311	0.315	0.543

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

In Table 4 we investigate the strength of the relationship between racial attitudes and anti-democratic beliefs across levels of Trump favorability. We cut our sample of white Americans into two categories: those that hold very or somewhat unfavorable opinions of Trump (column 1) and those that hold very or somewhat favorable opinions of Trump (column 2). This is similar to an interaction analysis of Trump favorability and all other independent variables. White discrimination and racial resentment are equally explanatory factors for both those who hold favorable opinions of Trump and those who hold unfavorable views of the former president. Additionally, belief in white replacement theory is not explanatory in both groups. Anti-immigrant beliefs are only explanatory for those who hold unfavorable views of Trump. In sum, both racial resentment and belief in white discrimination explain anti-democratic beliefs above and beyond favorability towards Trump. This is evidence that the racialization of beliefs antithetical to an inclusive democracy are not just an artifact of polarization or the "Trumpification" of modern politics.

Table 4: Racial Attitudes Predict Anti-Democratic Beliefs, Regardless of Favorability Towards Trump

	Dependent variable:	
	Anti-Dem Index	
	(1)	(2)
Racial resentment	0.123*** (0.045)	0.161*** (0.042)
Immigrants burden	0.193*** (0.051)	0.027 (0.039)
Whites being replaced	−0.018 (0.051)	0.004 (0.037)
White discrim problem	0.195*** (0.045)	0.151*** (0.040)
COVID gov't conspiracy	0.081 (0.051)	0.025 (0.033)
Republican scale	0.076* (0.040)	0.050 (0.036)
Conservative	0.151*** (0.045)	0.061* (0.035)
Education	−0.077** (0.038)	−0.008 (0.034)
Female	0.019 (0.033)	0.002 (0.029)
Age	−0.228*** (0.038)	0.125*** (0.036)
Income	0.092*** (0.035)	0.087** (0.034)
Evangelical	0.135*** (0.037)	0.019 (0.028)
Constant	−0.162*** (0.042)	0.460*** (0.042)
Observations	582	598
R^2	0.447	0.165
Adjusted R^2	0.436	0.148

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Each column subsets the survey sample to a binary Trump favorability, with 1 being unfavorable and 2 being favorable.

7.2 CMPS

For the 2022 CMPS, our anti-democratic index is composed of four variables: belief in the "Big Lie", privileging reducing fraud over ensuring all eligible voters can vote, the belief that the Voting

Rights Act is no longer needed, and the belief that Republican members of Congress who stopped the certification of Joe Biden's electoral victory were protecting democracy. The controls employed are identical to those used for the Political Unrest Study, except the belief that COVID mask mandates were government attempts at "controlling" the population is substituted for the belief that COVID is a government conspiracy. Additionally, anti-immigrant sentiment is now proxied by a question asking whether immigrants pose a threat and belief in white replacement theory is replaced with support for white nationalism. The maximum variance inflation factor (2.33) is below the conventional threshold indicating multicollinearity issues.

The results, displayed in Table 5, are largely congruent with those in the Political Unrest Study. Racial resentment is the strongest predictor of anti-democratic beliefs among racial variables. It is significant in all regressions and is double the effect size of ideology. White discrimination is statistically significant across three of the four dependent variables and in the anti-dem index. However, it is less explanatory in these regressions than in the Political Unrest Study. Anti-immigrant sentiment is significant in three of the four dependent variables and the anti-democratic beliefs index, but it has a small effect size of 0.04. As with the Political Unrest Study, there is only mixed evidence for a link between white nationalism and anti-democratic beliefs. This variable is significant in two of the four dependent variables but not for anti-dem index, and the effect sizes are small.

All effects are dwarfed by Trump favorability. The degree to which white respondents like Trump is more than twice as explanatory as racial resentment, more than five times as explanatory as white discrimination, and more than ten times as explanatory as anti-immigrant sentiment in explaining variation in anti-democratic beliefs. The strength of Trump favorability in describing these beliefs is may be an artifact of the timing of the survey, which was fielded immediately after President Trump's electoral defeat and the January 6, 2021 insurrection.

Table 5: CMPS also Shows Racial Attitudes Predict Anti-Democratic Beliefs (Standardized)

	Dependent variable:				
	Fraud Changed Results	No Fraud Important	VRA Not Needed	Stop Certification was Protecting	Anti-Dem Index
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Racial resentment	0.072*** (0.016)	0.241*** (0.021)	0.343*** (0.025)	0.063*** (0.022)	0.193*** (0.017)
Immigrants threat	0.040*** (0.012)	0.061*** (0.016)	0.039** (0.019)	0.006 (0.016)	0.043*** (0.012)
Support White nationalism	0.026** (0.012)	−0.002 (0.016)	0.046** (0.019)	−0.005 (0.016)	0.0001 (0.012)
White discrim problem	0.098*** (0.013)	0.040** (0.017)	0.023 (0.021)	0.065*** (0.018)	0.085*** (0.014)
Mask mandate control	0.093*** (0.011)	0.061*** (0.015)	0.041** (0.019)	0.062*** (0.016)	0.089*** (0.013)
Trump favorability	0.569*** (0.016)	0.182*** (0.021)	0.161*** (0.026)	0.547*** (0.022)	0.480*** (0.017)
Republican scale	0.076*** (0.015)	0.084*** (0.020)	0.008 (0.025)	−0.017 (0.021)	0.024 (0.016)
Conservative	0.019 (0.015)	0.151*** (0.020)	0.093*** (0.023)	0.093*** (0.020)	0.107*** (0.015)
Education	−0.020* (0.012)	−0.022 (0.016)	0.025 (0.018)	0.023 (0.016)	0.004 (0.012)
Female	0.024** (0.011)	0.030** (0.014)	0.038** (0.017)	0.035** (0.014)	0.037*** (0.011)
Age	−0.046*** (0.012)	0.028* (0.016)	−0.030 (0.019)	0.010 (0.016)	−0.001 (0.013)
Income	−0.003 (0.012)	−0.001 (0.016)	0.006 (0.019)	−0.006 (0.016)	−0.011 (0.012)
Evangelical	0.041*** (0.010)	−0.046*** (0.014)	−0.021 (0.017)	−0.007 (0.014)	−0.021* (0.011)
Constant	−0.001 (0.011)	0.008 (0.014)	0.048*** (0.017)	0.048*** (0.015)	0.127*** (0.011)
Observations	3,198	3,198	2,312	2,464	1,935
R^2	0.662	0.390	0.378	0.523	0.776
Adjusted R^2	0.661	0.388	0.374	0.521	0.774

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

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As with the Political Unrest Study, in Table 6 we test anti-democratic beliefs separately for those who hold unfavorable (column 1) and favorable (column 2) views of Trump. White discrimination, racial resentment, and anti-immigrant beliefs are all explanatory across Trump favorability. White discrimination is especially explanatory among those with an unfavorable opinion of Trump whereas racial resentment is especially explanatory among those with favorable views of Trump. Support for white nationalism is only statistically significant among those with unfavorable views of Trump, but not for those with favorable views of the former president.

Table 6: Racial Attitudes Predict Anti-Democratic Beliefs, Regardless of Favorability Towards Trump (CMPS)

	Dependent variable:	
	Anti-Dem Index	
	(1)	(2)
Racial resentment	0.157*** (0.023)	0.338*** (0.035)
Immigrants threat	0.040** (0.020)	0.045** (0.020)
Support White nationalism	0.100*** (0.020)	−0.025 (0.022)
White discrim problem	0.134*** (0.021)	0.073*** (0.024)
Mask mandate control	0.173*** (0.025)	0.098*** (0.020)
Republican scale	0.114*** (0.022)	0.026 (0.036)
Conservative	0.062** (0.025)	0.167*** (0.026)
Education	−0.028 (0.017)	0.043* (0.023)
Female	0.021 (0.016)	0.067*** (0.022)
Age	−0.105*** (0.018)	0.131*** (0.025)
Income	0.036** (0.017)	−0.052** (0.024)
Evangelical	0.031 (0.020)	−0.012 (0.018)
Constant	0.038* (0.022)	1.074*** (0.042)
Observations	1,157	755
R^2	0.406	0.411
Adjusted R^2	0.400	0.401

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Each column subsets the survey sample to a binary Trump favorability, with 1 being unfavorable and 2 being favorable.

7.3 Nationscape

We replicate the same analysis on the parallel wave of the Democracy Fund + UCLA Nationscape survey fielded between January 21 and February 3, 2021. We use five dependent variables: belief that fraud changed the results of the 2020 presidential election, support for the January 6 insurrection, support for requiring voter identification to vote, opposition to vote-by-mail, and support for leaders to bend the rules when necessary. Anti-immigrant sentiment is proxied by support for

deporting undocumented immigrants, pro-white beliefs are captured by a white favorability feeling thermometer, and conspiratorial thinking is proxied by an index of responses indicating opposition to government and personal action to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic. As with the other surveys, the maximum variance inflation factor across explanatory variables in Nationscape (1.88) is below the conventional threshold of 5 indicating multicollinearity issues. The results are displayed in Table 7

Racial resentment is significant in all five regressions and is also the most explanatory among the racial variables tested. Its effect size is 0.2 in the anti-democratic index regression (column 6), half the effect of Trump favorability. White discrimination is significant in four of the five dependent variables tested and in the anti-dem index. Although slightly less explanatory than racial resentment, it is still four times as powerful as ideology in explaining anti-demographic beliefs. Anti-immigrant sentiment is significant for three of the five dependent variables and the anti-democratic belief index, though the effect size is. Finally, white favorability is positively correlated with one anti-democratic belief and negatively correlated with two. It has a null effect overall on the anti-democratic belief index.

Table 7: Racial Attitudes Predict Anti-Democratic Beliefs (Standardized - Nationscape)

	Dependent variable:					
	Fraud Changed Results	Support Jan 6	Require Voter ID	Oppose VBM	Support Bending Rules	Anti-Dem Index
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Racial resentment	0.077*** (0.015)	0.122*** (0.024)	0.116*** (0.023)	0.057*** (0.017)	0.199*** (0.021)	0.207*** (0.018)
Deport Undocumented	0.099*** (0.014)	0.029 (0.024)	0.073*** (0.022)	0.072*** (0.016)	0.025 (0.020)	0.086*** (0.018)
White favorability	−0.037*** (0.012)	−0.001 (0.019)	0.069*** (0.018)	−0.032** (0.014)	0.016 (0.017)	−0.005 (0.014)
Whites discriminated against	0.083*** (0.013)	0.169*** (0.021)	0.054*** (0.019)	−0.006 (0.014)	0.139*** (0.018)	0.142*** (0.015)
Anti-COVID index	0.089*** (0.014)	0.028 (0.023)	−0.022 (0.021)	0.241*** (0.016)	−0.134*** (0.020)	0.064*** (0.017)
Trump favorability	0.464*** (0.018)	0.312*** (0.030)	−0.028 (0.028)	0.297*** (0.021)	0.207*** (0.026)	0.440*** (0.022)
Republican scale	0.074*** (0.018)	−0.173*** (0.028)	0.116*** (0.026)	0.113*** (0.020)	−0.075*** (0.025)	−0.002 (0.021)
Conservative	0.018 (0.016)	−0.147*** (0.026)	0.132*** (0.024)	0.076*** (0.018)	0.001 (0.022)	0.035* (0.019)
Education	0.027** (0.013)	0.114*** (0.021)	−0.068*** (0.020)	−0.014 (0.015)	−0.014 (0.019)	0.018 (0.016)
Female	0.004 (0.012)	−0.109*** (0.019)	0.068*** (0.018)	0.010 (0.013)	−0.018 (0.017)	−0.023 (0.014)
Age	−0.005 (0.012)	−0.206*** (0.019)	0.031* (0.018)	0.027** (0.013)	−0.161*** (0.017)	−0.113*** (0.014)
Income	−0.029** (0.014)	0.009 (0.023)	−0.008 (0.022)	−0.023 (0.016)	0.045** (0.021)	−0.008 (0.017)
Evangelical	0.019 (0.012)	0.120*** (0.020)	−0.022 (0.019)	−0.020 (0.014)	0.039** (0.018)	0.053*** (0.015)
Constant	0.035** (0.014)	0.068*** (0.024)	−0.041* (0.022)	0.024 (0.016)	−0.0004 (0.021)	0.100*** (0.018)
Observations	3,196	2,828	3,156	3,133	3,138	2,304
R^2	0.567	0.225	0.145	0.476	0.168	0.601
Adjusted R^2	0.566	0.222	0.141	0.474	0.165	0.599

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 8 splits respondents by Trump favorability. Racial resentment, anti-immigrant sentiment, and white discrimination are all significant for both groups while white favorability is insignificant for both. Only white discrimination varies in strength across those who hold favorable views of Trump and those who hold unfavorable views of the former president. It is twice as explanatory of anti-democratic beliefs in the latter group.

Table 8: Racial Attitudes Predict Anti-Democratic Beliefs, Regardless of Favorability Towards Trump (Nationscape)

	Dependent variable:	
	Anti-Dem Index	
	(1)	(2)
Racial resentment	0.195*** (0.024)	0.170*** (0.027)
Deport Undocumented	0.072*** (0.025)	0.077*** (0.025)
White favorability	0.016 (0.017)	−0.026 (0.024)
Whites discrimnated against	0.176*** (0.022)	0.098*** (0.021)
Anti-COVID index	0.146*** (0.029)	0.051** (0.021)
Republican scale	0.032 (0.027)	−0.0004 (0.032)
Conservative	0.119*** (0.027)	−0.029 (0.027)
Education	−0.030 (0.021)	0.059** (0.024)
Female	0.005 (0.019)	−0.044** (0.021)
Age	−0.084*** (0.019)	−0.117*** (0.021)
Income	0.014 (0.023)	−0.035 (0.026)
Evangelical	0.142*** (0.024)	0.009 (0.019)
Constant	−0.204*** (0.031)	0.616*** (0.037)
Observations	1,245	1,059
R^2	0.380	0.124
Adjusted R^2	0.373	0.114

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Each column subsets the survey sample to a binary Trump favorability, with 1 being unfavorable and 2 being favorable.

8 Framing Experiment Shows Causal Evidence for Link Between Anti-Democratic Beliefs and Racial Attitudes

In order to provide causal evidence for the link between anti-democratic beliefs and racial attitudes, we analyze two framing experiments embedded in the 2022 Political Unrest Study to test whether explicitly racial frames of election policies sway white opinion in an anti-democratic direction. We manipulated the presentation of information regarding limiting Sunday voting and opposing absentee/early voting expansion, introducing race-neutral and explicitly racial frames to the descriptions of these voting restrictions.

The first framing experiment concerns Sunday voting. The control group read the following statement: "Historically, many communities have utilized Sunday afternoon voting as a community empowerment event after attending church. Some state legislatures have tried to block or limit access to Sunday voting. Would you support efforts to limit Sunday afternoon voting?" The treatment group read an identical description, except the word "Black" was inserted before the word "communities". This small change makes the racial connotations of the voting restriction explicit.

In the second framing experiment, we manipulate the presentation of information surrounding absentee and early voting. The control condition read this statement: "Many Americans rely on absentee (vote-by-mail) and early voting, especially elderly voters who have trouble making it to the polls and overseas military personnel serving our country. Would you support making absentee ballots and early voting more accessible?" The treatment condition altered the first sentence to read: "Many Americans rely on absentee (vote-by-mail) and early voting, especially working class communities of color and immigrants, who often do not have time in their day to make it to the polls." As with the first experiment, this treatment introduces an explicitly racial frame into an ostensibly race-neutral policy.

8.1 Experimental Results

Table 9 shows regression results for the effect of treatment on support for the voting restriction. Columns 1 and 2 display univariate regressions and columns 3 and 4 include controls to account for any potential imbalances in the randomized groups. In both experiments, framing the voting restrictions in explicitly racial terms increases white Americans' support for these anti-democratic policies. The results are largely unchanged with the inclusion of a range of political and demographic controls. The point estimates are also substantively meaningful, ranging between 0.1 and 0.2 standard deviations. In other words, clarifying the negative racial impact of these laws moves white opinion in favor of their implementation. This suggests the correlational evidence shown above may be causal in nature. Racially conservative whites do not just happen to hold anti-democratic beliefs, but rather whites who learn about the racial effects of election policies become more supportive of anti-democratic measures.

Table 9: Experiment: Racialized Voting Reform Frames Increase Support for Restrictions

	Dependent variable:			
	Limit Sunday Voting		Oppose VBM Expansion	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Black Treatment	0.113** (0.056)	0.152*** (0.050)		
Immigrant Treatment			0.164*** (0.056)	0.170*** (0.052)
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	1,298	1,180	1,298	1,180
R^2	0.003	0.309	0.007	0.232
Adjusted R^2	0.002	0.300	0.006	0.223
Note:				*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

9   Discussion

We investigate the prevalence, interconnectedness, and racialization of anti-democratic attitudes, such as support for voting restrictions, opposition to voting expansion, belief in voter fraud, and support for overturning democratic election results. We find that, contrary to conventional wisdom, anti-democratic beliefs have not become more prevalent among white Americans over the past decade, nor have they become significantly more polarized. However, anti-democratic beliefs are interconnected and have grown more so over time. Additionally, these anti-democratic beliefs are highly racialized among whites. White Americans who are concerned about white discrimination, who are racially resentful, and who hold negative views of immigrants are most likely to support voting restrictions, oppose voting expansions, believe in widespread fraud, and endorse claims that the 2020 presidential election was stolen. The results hold even after controlling for partisanship, ideology, and Trump favorability. This relationship holds for both supporters and critics of the former president. Taken together, our evidence suggests that opposition to democratic norms and practices is not solely a partisan, ideological, or even Trump issue, but rather is deeply rooted in racial biases.

In survey experiments, the introduction of racial frames in the context of voting reforms exacerbated anti-democratic beliefs. Participants in the treatment group showed increased support for restrictions and reduced support for expansions when these reforms were presented as particularly benefiting Black communities or communities of color and immigrants. These results follow prior scholarship showing negative white attitudes in response to racialized frames of voting reforms (Banks and Hicks 2016; Wilson and Brewer 2013, 2016; Wilson, Owens, and Davis 2011),

and provide experimental evidence beyond the observational studies showing that racial attitudes influence support for anti-democratic measures. In short, racial biases play a crucial role in shaping anti-democratic beliefs.

While we find strong evidence for the relationship between anti-democratic beliefs and out-group attitudes such as racial resentment, racial grievance, and anti-immigrant sentiment, our findings do not support a consistent relationship with white in-group identity (Jardina 2019). This finding aligns with Filindra (2022), who find that those high in white identity/consciousness tend to have greater trust in elections. Our findings suggest that perceived threats to white status play a more significant role in shaping anti-democratic attitudes than in-group identity itself.

Our research highlights the need to consider racial attitudes in discussions about democracy and voting reforms. The demonstrated intersection of racial biases and anti-democratic beliefs suggest that efforts to protect and strengthen democracy must also address underlying racial attidues. By shedding light on these complex dynamics, our study contributes to a deeper understanding of the interplay of race and democracy in contemporary America, offering valuable insights for the ongoing effort to uphold democratic principles in an increasingly diverse society.

Future research should continue to explore the evolving relationship between race and anti-democratic attitudes, particularly in the context of increasing racial diversity and political polarization. Interventions aimed at reducing racial resentment and promoting inclusive democratic values could play a vital role in safeguarding the democratic process. This is especially true considering all indications point to a continued commitment by political elites to undermine the legitimacy of America's democratic elections.[3] In this environment, it is crucial to recognize and address the racial underpinnings of anti-democratic sentiments. Only by confronting these issues head-on can we hope to build a more inclusive and resilient democracy that truly represents and serves all its citizens.

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[3]https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2024/07/11/heritage-foundation-election-war-game

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Online Appendix

Intended for online publication only.

Contents

A.1 Table 9 with Full Regression Output

Table A.1: Experiment: Racialized Voting Reform Frames Increase Support for Restrictions

	Dependent variable:			
	Limit Sunday Voting		Oppose VBM Expansion	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Black Treatment	0.113** (0.056)	0.152*** (0.050)		
Immigrant Treatment			0.164*** (0.056)	0.170*** (0.052)
Racial resentment		0.007 (0.036)		0.224*** (0.038)
Immigrants burden		−0.130*** (0.037)		0.050 (0.038)
Whites being replaced		−0.115*** (0.036)		−0.064* (0.038)
White discrim problem		−0.153*** (0.035)		−0.020 (0.037)
COVID gov't conspiracy		−0.224*** (0.034)		−0.006 (0.035)
Trump favorability		−0.054 (0.036)		0.213*** (0.038)
Republican scale		0.041 (0.032)		0.034 (0.034)
Conservative		0.042 (0.033)		0.135*** (0.035)
Education		0.015 (0.030)		−0.016 (0.031)
Female		0.019 (0.026)		−0.008 (0.027)
Age		0.054* (0.030)		−0.087*** (0.032)
Income		−0.061** (0.029)		−0.029 (0.030)
Evangelical		−0.070*** (0.026)		−0.046* (0.028)
Constant	−0.044 (0.039)	−0.081** (0.035)	−0.088** (0.040)	−0.111*** (0.037)
Observations	1,298	1,180	1,298	1,180
R^2	0.003	0.309	0.007	0.232
Adjusted R^2	0.002	0.300	0.006	0.223

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01