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Black Lives Matter: Is It Political?

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by

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Abstract

The present research focused on fostering greater support for the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement by examining factors that predict support for the movement, and possible mechanisms implicated in this relationship. The BLM movement was founded in 2013 following the death of teenager Trayvon Martin, and reached a remarkable height of media attention in the summer of 2020, following the murder of George Floyd. Since then, support for BLM has fluctuated, becoming a highly politicized movement that has faced much public debate. Our study focused on factors that predict support for BLM in the current political climate. We collected data from 164 undergraduate students at the University of Richmond in the fall of 2023 and the spring of 2024 through a mixed-methods survey to investigate the relationship between self-reported political affiliation and support for BLM. In an effort to explain this relationship, this study hypothesized that participants' beliefs about the existence of racism would influence the relationship between political affiliation and support for BLM. These beliefs were assessed by survey items measuring the state of race relations, systemic racism, white privilege, policing, equal opportunity to succeed, and anti-white racism. Results suggest that greater political liberalism, for both social and economic issues, predicted support for BLM, and that beliefs acknowledging racism partially mediated this relationship. These results shed light on how support for the BLM movement might advance.

Keywords: Black Lives Matter, political ideology, beliefs, racism, movements

Introduction

The Black Lives Matter ("BLM") movement is a grassroots effort which was founded in 2013 following the death of Trayvon Martin and the subsequent acquittal of his killer, George Zimmerman (*Herstory*, n.d.). Activists Alicia Garcia, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi, through BLM, sought to bring awareness to violence against Black Americans, particularly at the hands of police officers, as well as the broader influences of systemic racism in the United States (U.S.)(*Herstory*, n.d.). In the ten years since its founding, BLM has fostered important conversations, public protests, and heated debates.

In view of the continued violence against Black people in America, BLM quickly gained momentum, and the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter became widely recognized on social media platforms as a letter of support. However, public response to the movement has become increasingly polarized (Horowitz et al., 2023). Its advocates call for increased awareness and tangible action, while its opponents view the movement as divisive and unnecessary. Support for and visibility of BLM surged internationally in May 2020, with the murder of George Floyd at the hands of police officer Derek Chauvin. Demonstrations increased across the country, leading to revived calls for racial justice in the United States and increased concerns about violence and police brutality during protests.

The murder of George Floyd revealed that racism in America is clearly alive and well (Roberts & Rizzo, 2020). At the heart of the reality of racism lie two related questions: What are the sources of racist views and why do racist views persist even, and especially, now? The purpose of this paper was to investigate key psychological underpinnings of racism and racial bias in order to better understand how beliefs are interrelated and how they influence support for BLM. Why do some people support racial justice movements and others do not? Can one's

recognition of other social issues explain their support for social justice or lack thereof? Research is needed to address these pressing questions and to better understand the factors that may influence support for social justice movements, such as individuals' beliefs about race relations in the U.S., systemic racism, white privilege, equal opportunity, policing, or whether White Americans can experience racism.

Support for racial justice movements requires recognition that there are problems with race relations in the U.S. Without the understanding that certain groups are marginalized or disadvantaged on the basis of their racial identity, there is no reason to support a movement that aims to ameliorate such issues. Thus, one's perception of social inequality may explain some of the differences in support for social justice movements such as BLM (Lake et al., 2021). The more an individual believes that racial discrimination is a problem in the U.S. the greater their support for BLM. This pattern holds across groups, including Asian Americans (Merseth, 2018), Latinx Americans (Corral, 2020), and African Americans and White Americans (Wouters, 2019).

Beyond perceiving race relations in the U.S. to be problematic, the extent to which an individual believes racism occurs at a *systemic*, rather than an *individual*, level has proven to be influential for support for racial justice movements. Ng and Lam (2020) propose that a denial of systemic racism is a viable explanation for the endurance of racism in the U.S. Relatedly, it seems plausible that rejecting systemic racism enables Americans to deny their responsibility to support collective action movements in the fight for social justice. In fact, two studies provide evidence that denial of systemic racism is inversely related to support for social justice movements, suggesting that an acknowledgement of racism as systemic motivates individual support for collective action (Postmes et al., 1999; van Zomeren et al., 2008). Thus, it seems

possible that increasing awareness of how racism is embedded in our social system, rather than only in individual minds, could foster greater support for collective social justice movements.

People's general perceptions of race and racism in the U.S. represent a potential source of support for BLM. Reducing these perceptions into their more specific constituent components may shed light on how race-related and racist attitudes inform support for racial justice movements. For example, the ways individuals think about white privilege, equal opportunity to succeed, differential treatment at the hands of police, and the possible existence of anti-white racism (so-called "reverse racism," Peucker, 2023) may lay the foundation for overarching beliefs about race and racism.

White Privilege

White privilege has been defined as the "inherent advantages possessed by a white person on the basis of their race in a society characterized by racial inequality and injustice" (*Oxford Languages and Google - English | Oxford Languages*, n.d.). However, in the essay, "What is White Privilege, Really?," Collins (2018) argues that the term "white privilege" lends itself to great misunderstanding and, consequently, ignorance. Importantly, white privilege is *not* the idea that white people have never suffered, nor does it suggest that white people do not have to work for their success. It does not imply that white people can't experience poverty or prejudice. Instead, Collins frames white privilege as the "power of normal," "power of the benefit of the doubt," and as "power of accumulated power." In these ways, white privilege refers to the everyday conveniences that white people don't have to worry about, like having bandages that blend into their skin tone. Beyond this, Collins says white privilege is also the fact that white people are more often presented with positive representations of their racial group, and that they are less likely to be treated as simply a representation of a negative racial stereotype. Finally,

Collins argues, white privilege cannot exist without the systemic racism embedded in our country and, in turn, white privilege is what supports this system.

Whether a white person believes they have white privilege and whether they recognize the ways white privilege is embedded in our social systems may serve as a predictive factor for their level of support for BLM. White privilege is inextricably linked to systemic racism because acknowledging that white privilege is enabled by an imbalance of power on the basis of race relies on an acknowledgement of that power dynamic to begin with. In one study, acknowledging one's own white privilege and the advantages it affords actually enhanced participants' support for and participation in social justice movements (Radke et al., 2020). Radke asserted that this occurs because it fosters a greater sense of responsibility for improving the lives of disadvantaged groups, or those without the same privilege. In another study, awareness of one's own white privilege partially mediated the effect of bearing witness to racial discrimination, suggesting that differing levels of participation in collective social justice efforts are not only explained by first-hand experiences of racism but also the concurrent acceptance of their racial privilege (Uluğ & Tropp, 2021). In both studies, importantly, it was not whether individuals "have" white privilege, but instead, whether they were able to recognize that they do indeed have such privilege and how it influences their lives that predicted their willingness to participate in and support social justice movements, such as BLM. The concept of acknowledging one's white privilege was adopted in the present research, and used in conjunction with other potential predictors of support for BLM, including equal opportunity to succeed, racialized police practices, and anti-white racism. We reasoned that a social system that promotes the pervasive privilege of one group over another undoubtedly denies the possibility for equal opportunity to succeed within that system.

Equal Opportunity

Equal opportunity refers to the ability for someone to succeed in the United States and recognition of the ways in which racial injustice prevents equal access to this success (Gomberg, 2007, 1). Individuals may be disadvantaged by any social categorization, whether it be socioeconomic status, age, gender, or race. It seems that those who believe that all individuals have an equal opportunity to succeed in the U.S. tend to deny the impact of socialized categories and instead, believe that those who are not successful must not be working hard enough. Intuitively, individuals who subscribe to this way of thought are likely to be less supportive of social justice movements, like BLM, because they are unlikely to believe in the very issues such movements aim to ameliorate. In fact, research shows that those who believe everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed argue that women and minority groups make lower wages due to a lack of education or technical skill—not that they are systemically disadvantaged. Importantly, those who made this argument were less likely to support BLM (Holt, 2018). In contrast, believing that not everyone has the same opportunities to succeed due to systemically embedded disadvantages may foster support for social justice movements. Beliefs about equal opportunity may extend beyond economic and employment opportunities, and influence beliefs about systems of law enforcement and criminal justice.

Policing

The fight against police brutality toward Black Americans in the U.S. remains one of the core motivations of the BLM movement. Support for BLM is fundamentally tied to the premise that police treat people differently based on the color of their skin, and that this racialized treatment includes actions such as greater use of force, excessive traffic stops, disproportionate punishment for the same crimes, and racially motivated criminalization of certain crimes in

people of color versus white people (Brunson, 2007). The extant literature on policing and BLM is fairly consistent in demonstrating an inverse relationship between support for the police and support for BLM. One study found that viewing police misconduct as an infrequent issue was one of the greatest predictors of lack of support for BLM, although this study's items regarding police misconduct did not explicitly assess misconduct in terms of racial bias (Ilchi & Frank, 2021). Other research measured perceptions of racialized and differential treatment of Black people at the hands of police directly to support for BLM (Updegrove et al., 2020). Updegrove et al. concluded that those who rated police as likely to treat Black Americans less fairly than White Americans were up to 70% less likely to oppose BLM than those who said police treat Black and White Americans equally fairly. A third study further demonstrated the relationship between differential treatment at the hands of police and support for BLM, finding that participants who rated police–community relations as positive (or not problematic), measured by items such as "*Treating individuals of different racial and ethnic groups equally,*" showed greater support for BLM and BLM demonstrators (Wouters, 2019). Thus, the extant literature provides compelling evidence for a negative relationship between support for police and support for BLM, particularly as support for police relates to believing that police officers treat all people equally, regardless of race (Ilchi & Frank, 2021; Updegrove et al., 2020; Wouters, 2019). Within the context of the potentially racially biased use of force at the hands of police, an examination of who can and cannot experience racism is also critical to understanding the complexities underlying perceptions of racial justice in America.

Anti-White Racism

The belief that white people can or cannot experience racism relies on an understanding of the nuances that separate discrimination, prejudice, and racism. Discrimination "refers to the

unjust treatment of persons based on perceived, categorical differences," thus corresponding to interpersonal behaviors (Fish & Syed, 2020, 3). Prejudice "refers to preconceived, unsubstantiated opinions of persons based on perceived categorical differences," (Fish & Syed, 2020, 3) and therefore corresponds more to beliefs. Racism, on the other hand, relies on and motivates racial hierarchies and their resulting power dynamics (Fish & Syed, 2020). Considering these three constructs, White Americans can certainly experience discrimination and prejudice on the basis of race, for example, if someone explicitly chose not to hire them due to their being white or assumed they were less capable as a result of their being white, respectively. However, recognizing that whiteness is the dominant racial category in the U.S., White Americans cannot experience racism grounded in social and political hierarchies, at least according to the view of racism proffered by Fish and Syed.

Perceptions of race relations, belief in systemic racism, white privilege, equal opportunity, policing, and anti-white racism, are likely predictors of support for BLM, largely because they relate to one's beliefs about race in America. One powerful potential predictor missing from this group of variables is political beliefs. Although political beliefs do not necessarily nor inherently include attitudes towards race or racism, support for BLM has been shown to consistently skew along partisan lines (Arora & Stout, 2019). This paper sought to identify the potentially political nature of support for BLM by measuring participants' political affiliations and their support for BLM, and the beliefs and attitudes about race and racism that they hold, that may mediate this relationship.

Political Affiliation

Political support for BLM falls clearly along party lines. Democratic party alignment is positively correlated with support for BLM, while Republican party alignment is negatively

correlated with support for BLM (Arora & Stout, 2019). More recently, Horowitz et al. (2023) reported that 84% of Americans who lean Democrat expressed support for BLM in 2023, and 82% of those who lean Republican expressed opposition to the movement. Taken together, these studies suggest that political affiliation and support for BLM are linked in ways that require further investigation. In this study, we characterize political affiliation as political conservatism and political liberalism as opposed to Republican or Democrat for the following reasons. First, the aims of this study are geared less towards voting behavior and more towards political ideologies. Erikson and Tedin (2003) define political ideology as a "set of beliefs about the proper order of society and how it can be achieved." To that end, political ideology has remained historically constant, while the sorting of ideological camps into political parties of Democrat and Republican has fluctuated over time, as seen in the highly conservative southern Democrats in the early to mid 1900s (Levendusky, 2010). Further, though much extant literature uses party affiliation as a measure of political beliefs, the notably increasing hostility between Democrats and Republicans (Abramowitz & Saunders, 2008) suggests that political ideology may be less divisive or isolating than party affiliation, allowing participants to more accurately report their political leanings without fear of judgment (Nadeem, 2022).

Beyond our casting of political ideologies as the measure of political affiliation, we also separated political ideology into social and economic liberalism and conservatism. Individuals often report that they lean conservative on some political issues (e.g., a balanced budget) and liberal on others (e.g., women's rights to reproductive choice). This divergence is typically expressed between social and economic issues, hence the popular identity as "socially liberal" yet "fiscally conservative," for example. With the understanding that participants may rate their levels of political conservatism or liberalism differently when presented with various political

topics, the measure of political affiliation in this study used two different items, one for social issues and one for economic issues, to allow participants the opportunity to express differing levels of endorsement along social and economic issues.

The overarching purpose of this paper was to assess whether political conservatism or liberalism is related to acceptance or perceptions of race relations, systemic racism, white privilege, equal opportunity, policing, and anti-white racism, and ultimately, support for the BLM movement. Two hypotheses were tested:

H1: Liberal political affiliation will be positively related to support for BLM.

H2: Beliefs that acknowledge the existence of racism will mediate the relationship between political affiliation and support for BLM.

Method

This research and its procedures were approved by the University of Richmond's Institutional Review Board, in alignment with the ethical standards for human subjects testing.

Participants

This research focused on perceptions of race relations and BLM among college-age students on the University of Richmond's campus in Richmond, Virginia. Responses were collected from students on campus in the fall of 2023 and the spring of 2024. These students were initially recruited from an introductory psychology course (PSYC100) as one opportunity to fulfill a research requirement for the course. We also recruited student participants more widely from disciplines beyond psychology by posting fliers around campus. All participants were registered through the SONA platform and were offered the same time slots each week. Participants who took the survey outside of the PSYC100 pool were compensated with $20.00 in cash following the completion of the survey.

The final sample for this study comprised 164 participants, with 56 participants taking the survey in the fall of 2023 and 108 taking the survey in the spring of 2024. Of these, 106 were from the PSYC100 pool, and 58 were rapid participants. The age of participants in the sample ranged from 18 to 23 years with an average age of 19.57 years. 72% of the sample self-identified as a woman, 24.4% self-identified as a man, 1.8% self-identified as non-binary, 0.6% self-identified as gender fluid, 0.6% self-identified as gender queer, and 0.6% preferred not to give a gender identity. In terms of racial and ethnic breakdown, 70.1% self-identified as European–American, White, Anglo, or Caucasian, 12.2% self-identified as Hispanic, Latino(a,x), Chicano(a.x), or Spanish origin, 9.8% self-identified as African-American, Black, African, or Caribbean, 8.5% self-identified as East Asian-American or East Asian, 6.7% self-identified as Middle Eastern or North African, 5.5% self-identified as South Asian-American or South Asian, 1.8% self-identified as Southeast Asian, 0.6% self-identified as Native American or American Indian, 0.6% self-identified as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 1.2% preferred not to identify. When asked to describe their hometown, 70.1% reported living in a suburban area, 22.6% reported living in an urban area, and 7.3% reported living in a rural area.

Materials

All participants took an online, self-report survey in person on a computer in a research lab in the Psychology Department. The survey was programmed and administered in Qualtrics CoreXM. Completion of the survey took between 45 and 60 minutes for most participants, and a research assistant sat in the room to monitor. Participants' personal belongings were kept outside of the testing room, excluding a water bottle if they chose to have one. When participants were seated, the research assistant briefly reviewed the information on the consent form including the purpose of the study, the anticipated duration, the confidentiality statement, and a note that if

they should have any questions during the survey they may ask, or if they had any questions after the survey, the researcher would provide the faculty research mentor's email contact information. Participants were then instructed to read through the consent form on their own and then continue on to the survey.

There were 74 total questions on the survey that were worded using quantitative and qualitative response formats. Most of the quantitative questions employed a 1-7 or 1-10 Likert scale, or a Yes/No option. Some of the quantitative questions were followed by a qualitative question of the form "Explain why or why not." These qualitative questions provided an opportunity for participants to explain or expand upon a quantitative rating they had just previously given. Other qualitative questions were not linked to quantitative items and several asked participants to define certain terms, such as white privilege. When the participant was finished, the researcher debriefed them by reviewing the purpose of the study and emphasizing the confidentiality of their responses, then asked whether they had any questions at that time. After responding to any questions, the researcher thanked the participant for coming in, and either paid them or had them scan a QR code to receive full PYSC100 credit, and then showed them out of the lab.

Previous iterations

This research project began in 2020 when the faculty mentor for my study, Dr. Jane Berry, sought to investigate age and race differences in attitudes towards the Black Lives Matter movement in the broader Richmond, Virginia community. A questionnaire was developed by Dr. Berry and her research students at the time, including both newly-created and published questionnaire items. Young, middle-aged, and older adults were recruited to complete the survey. Over subsequent semesters and with new student researchers, the survey expanded and

subsequent iterations were released and tested over the next few years among both adults in the Richmond, Virginia community, as well as students on the University of Richmond's campus. In the fall of 2023, this survey was reviewed and updated by Dr. Berry and her lab for its fifth iteration of data collection. This version of the survey focused more exclusively on the student population at the University of Richmond in an attempt to more clearly understand the range of attitudes towards BLM in this population. New items have been included in each iteration. Much of the current survey includes items that were written for and included in the original study.

Measures

Support for BLM was measured by one item worded as "On the following scale, please rate your support or non-support for BLM by selecting a number where 1 = 'I do not support BLM' to 10 = 'I do support BLM." Following this rating, participants were given the opportunity to explain their response by typing in a text box with the label, "Please briefly explain your answer." All qualitative items, like this one, followed the same format and wording.

Perceptions of race relations in the U.S. were measured by four items with the following response format: "Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the statements below, where 1 = 'I strongly disagree' and 10 = 'I strongly agree.'" For this study, one item from this section was selected for analysis, "There are very few problems with race relations in the United States," and participants selected a response option on the aforementioned 1 to 10 scale.

Participants' beliefs about systemic racism were identified using a single measure with a corresponding qualitative response option. The quantitative item was worded as, "To what extent do you believe in systemic racism?" and participants chose from a 7-point scale which was labeled from left to right as "Strongly deny," "Moderately deny," "Mildly deny," "Neither deny nor believe," "Mildly believe," "Moderately believe," and "Strongly believe."

Participants' understanding of white privilege was measured in two ways for the purposes of this paper. First, participants were given a definition of white privilege, which was as follows: "White privilege is defined as the inherent advantages possessed by a white person on the basis of their race in a society characterized by racial inequality and injustice" (Nakintu, 2021). Participants were told to use the definition to answer the subsequent questions. One of these questions is of particular interest for this paper, which was worded as "Please indicate the extent to which you believe white privilege exists." Participants responded on a 10-point response scale ranging from 1 ("It doesn't exist at all") to 10 ("It exists everywhere"). Second, in an effort to examine participants' understanding of white privilege on a systemic level rather than just an individual level, participants were given the directions to "Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statements below," followed by four items from Pinterits and colleagues (2009)'s *The White Privilege Attitudes Scale (WPAS)*. For this study, one item from this section was selected for analysis, "Our social structure system promotes white privilege." Participants responded on a 7-point response scale ranging from 1 ("Strongly disagree") to 7 ("Strongly agree").

Participants' attitudes towards policing were measured by nine Likert-scaled items ranging from 1 ("Strongly disagree") to 7 ("Strongly agree"), each with a corresponding qualitative response option. Participants saw the instructions "Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements." For this study, one item from this section was selected for analysis, "Police treat people differently based on the color of their skin," which participants responded to on a 7-point scale from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree."

Participants' perceptions of opportunity to succeed in the U.S. were measured by a single item which was worded as follows: "Do you believe that everybody has an equal opportunity to

succeed in the US? Please rate your belief on the following scale where 0 = 'No, not everybody has an equal opportunity to succeed' to 5 = 'Yes, everybody has an equal opportunity to succeed.'" This item was followed by a qualitative response option.

Participants' thoughts about whether White Americans are able to experience racism was measured by a single item, worded as "Can white people in America experience racism?" Participants responded by selecting either "No" or "Yes," followed by a qualitative response option.

Participants' political beliefs were evaluated by two related items in order to investigate potential differences comprising economic versus social political affiliations. These two items were worded, respectively, as "Please rate your political affiliation on the following scale with regard to *economic* issues" and "Please rate your political affiliation on the following scale with regard to *social* issues." Participants responded to each item on a 7-point scale, ranging from "Strongly conservative," to "Moderately conservative," to "Mildly conservative," to "Neither conservative nor liberal," to "Mildly liberal," to "Moderately liberal," to "Strongly liberal." Importantly, and as discussed above, these two items asked participants to reflect on their political ideological affiliation, rather than their party affiliation.

To summarize, the seven items described above—perceptions of race relations problems, belief in systemic racism, existence of white privilege, systemic white privilege, equal opportunity, policing, and anti-white racism—were composited into a single measure that we labeled, "Beliefs Acknowledging Race and Racism" (BARR). This measure represents the extent to which one acknowledges or recognizes the systemic influences of racism in the U.S. and how this system advantages some over others on the basis of race. For BARR, higher scores indicate a greater recognition of the systemic influences of racism and its impact.

Results

All of the analyses were run on SPSS 29.0.1.0. The path analyses were run using the Hayes (2022) PROCESS Model 4 (version 4.0) with 95% confidence intervals, determined from 5,000 bootstrap samples. Each of the seven items were rescaled from their original metrics (e.g., 1-7) to 0 to 100, in order to combine them into a single measure (BARR). Accordingly, BARR is reported on a scale from 0 to 100. The other three items—economic political affiliation, social political affiliation, and support for BLM—were also rescaled from 1 to 10 to 0 to 100 for ease of comparison across items.

Correlations were calculated to examine inter-relationships between political affiliation, support for BLM, and conceptualizations of race relations in the U.S., systemic racism, white privilege, equal opportunity, policing, and anti-white racism (see Table 1). Almost all of the correlations were significant. Importantly, both economic and social political affiliation were positively correlated with support for BLM, $r = .53$ (economic) and $r = .50$ (social), both $p < 0.01$. These results support Hypothesis 1, which stated that the more liberal an individual reported themselves to be, the greater their support for BLM. Interestingly, economic and social political affiliation were significantly correlated, $r = .61$, $p < 0.01$. While this correlation is quite high, it is not 1.00, suggesting that these two items measure something related, but not identical.

Reliability analyses were conducted to assess the internal consistency of the seven items that were composited for BARR. These analyses produced a Cronbach's alpha of .78, demonstrating high internal consistency between the items. A principal components analysis of the seven items yielded one factor, further justifying our composite of the items into a single construct, BARR. The factor loadings are presented in Figure 1, on the paths from each item to

BARR. Together, the reliability analysis and the factor analysis indicate that these seven items can be reliably composited into a single measure, BARR.

Path analyses were conducted to test the hypothesized mediation model using the Hayes (2022) PROCESS Model 4 (version 4.0). Additionally, two separate hierarchical regression analyses were performed, one with economic political affiliation as predictor variable and one with social political affiliation as predictor variable, and with BARR as the mediator, and support for BLM as the outcome variable. These two models are presented as a combined model in Figure 1, though these are visual, nonstatistical model comparisons. The analyses of both models revealed support for Hypothesis 2, described below.

The indirect effect of economic political affiliation on support for BLM through BARR was significant, $\boldsymbol{\beta}$ = .22, LLCI = .1338, ULCI = .3117. The initial direct effect of economic political affiliation on support for BLM was significant, $\boldsymbol{\beta}$ = .50, t = 7.37, p < .001, LLCI = .3188, ULCI = .5524. The final direct effect of economic political affiliation on support for BLM was also significant, $\boldsymbol{\beta}$ = .28, t = 3.99, p < .001, LLCI = .1209, ULCI = .3580, indicating support for a partial, but not full, mediation effect. Overall, 40% of the variance in support for BLM was explained by the model. This model is presented in Figure 2.

The indirect effect of social political affiliation on support for BLM through BARR was significant, $\boldsymbol{\beta}$ = .26, LLCI = .1558, ULCI = .3822. The initial direct effect of social political affiliation on support for BLM was significant, $\boldsymbol{\beta}$ = .53, t = 7.95, p < .001, LLCI = .3812, ULCI = .6331. The final direct effect of social political affiliation on support for BLM was also significant, $\boldsymbol{\beta}$ = .27, t = 3.35, p < .001, LLCI = .1051, ULCI = .4068, indicating support for a partial, but not full, mediation effect. Overall, 38% of the variance in support for BLM was explained by the model. This model is presented in Figure 3.

Discussion

The data provide clear support for the hypotheses, specifically, (H1) political liberalism predicted support for BLM and (H2) beliefs acknowledging racism partially mediated the relationship between political affiliation and support for BLM. Further, these results held for both economic and social political affiliation models. Hypothesis 1 was supported such that the more liberal a person is for both economic and social issues, the greater their support for BLM and, vice versa, the more conservative a person is for both economic and social issues, the lesser their support for BLM. Hypothesis 2 was supported such that economic liberals were more likely to support BLM than economic conservatives, and this relationship was partially mediated by BARR, and social liberals were more likely to support BLM than social conservatives, and this relationship was also partially mediated by BARR.

The results for Hypothesis 1 replicate existing findings, such that generally liberal political views are related to greater support for BLM, though current work on BLM tends to employ political parties (e.g., Democrat) rather than ideology (e.g., liberalism) (Arora & Stout, 2019). With regard to social movements overall, though, McCright and Dunlap (2008) found that both political liberalism and identification with the Democratic party predicted greater support for social justice movements, of which the BLM movement is one. In this way, political ideologies are less often examined than political parties, though one study provides evidence for a relationship between political conservatism and support for anti-BLM social media messages (Muldrow & Shearman, 2024).

Given statistical support for Hypothesis 1, we proceeded to test the second hypothesis, meant to elucidate the potential mechanism or mechanisms driving the relationship between political affiliation and support for BLM. Hypothesis 2 was supported: Beliefs that acknowledge

race and racism in America, including evaluations of race relations problems, belief in systemic racism, the existence of white privilege, the systemic support of white privilege, equal opportunity to succeed, policing, and anti-white racism were shown to partially mediated the relation between political ideology and BLM support. These results make a novel contribution to the literature, though other studies have suggested similar mechanisms. For example, Barker and colleagues (2021) found that differences in liberal-conservative ideological values influenced perceptions of the legitimacy of social protests, such that ideological conservatism was negatively associated with levels of protest legitimacy.

Our two models each explained around 40% of the variance in support for BLM. The study by Barker and colleagues (2021) points to other psychological factors that may help to explain additional variance in BLM support. For instance, social dominance orientation has been shown to not only mediate the relationship between intergroup contact and support for social justice movements, such as BLM (Meleady & Vermue, 2019), but to also map onto political ideology (Barker et al., 2021). Further, Miller and colleagues (2021) suggest that "lay conceptualizations of racism" underlie support or non-support for BLM in particular, proposing that the more one views racism as occurring on an individual, rather than systemic, level, the less likely they are to support BLM. Taken together, these studies offer insight into the different types of social and psychological factors that may promote or undermine support for social and racial justice movements and, in this way, bolster the findings of the present study and encourage future directions in this area.

Limitations

There were some limitations to this study. First, the results are limited by the lack of racial diversity of its sample. With a 70.1% white sample, we were unable to analyze whether

race of participant influenced our results. A more diverse sample would have strengthened the generalizability of our results. Although our sample is representative of the University of Richmond's campus and its predominantly white study body, the conclusions drawn from this study are limited to populations similar to the University of Richmond, which is categorized as both a PWI and a selective liberal arts college (SLAC).

Additionally, a more expansive measure of political affiliation may provide insight into more subtle differences in political attitudes across various social and economic issues. For example, future iterations of this study could provide examples of each type of issue and ask participants to rate their political ideology for that issue with the option to respond qualitatively to each. By extending the questions aimed at political affiliation, our study may be able to grasp a more nuanced understanding of how political beliefs map differently onto different issues.

Future Directions

Future work in this research must seek to uncover the roots of political beliefs. The extant literature has pointed in several directions to do just that, although it's possible the development of political beliefs may vary greatly as a result of individual differences in family background, educational experiences, and regional backgrounds. For example, the family unit may be responsible for building the foundation of political beliefs, with political values being transmitted from parent to child (Jennings & Niemi, 1968). Alternatively, it is possible that one's political identity is shaped by their geographical location such that two individuals of the same political affiliation from different geographical places may actually disagree on the same issue (Feinberg et al., 2017). Beyond family and location, Barker-Plummer (1995) proposes that news is a "political resource" that, by portraying social movements in a certain light, deeply impacts public opinions and stances on that movement. In a way, these findings may suggest that the media

portrayal of political parties, officials, and actions may influence how individual members of the public choose to politically identify. Moreover, some work has even suggested that strengthened partisan identity is able to shift individuals' political beliefs and views on certain issues (Gerber et al., 2010). By investigating these various avenues along which political affiliation may be formed, this line of research could reveal the underlying causes of politicized support for racial justice movements, like BLM.

Conclusion

The ultimate goal of this work is to produce evidence-based support for racial justice movements. At its core, racial justice does not require political debate, echoing the sentiment shared at the height of media attention on BLM in 2020, "it's not political" (Zagoria, 2020). Nonetheless, as the results from this study show, BLM has been made to be political, with its support and opposition falling well along partisan lines. By examining the foundation of political beliefs, this line of research could help to disentangle politics from racial justice and potentially inform methods of fostering greater support for racial justice movements, regardless of political ideology.

Tables and Figures

Table 1

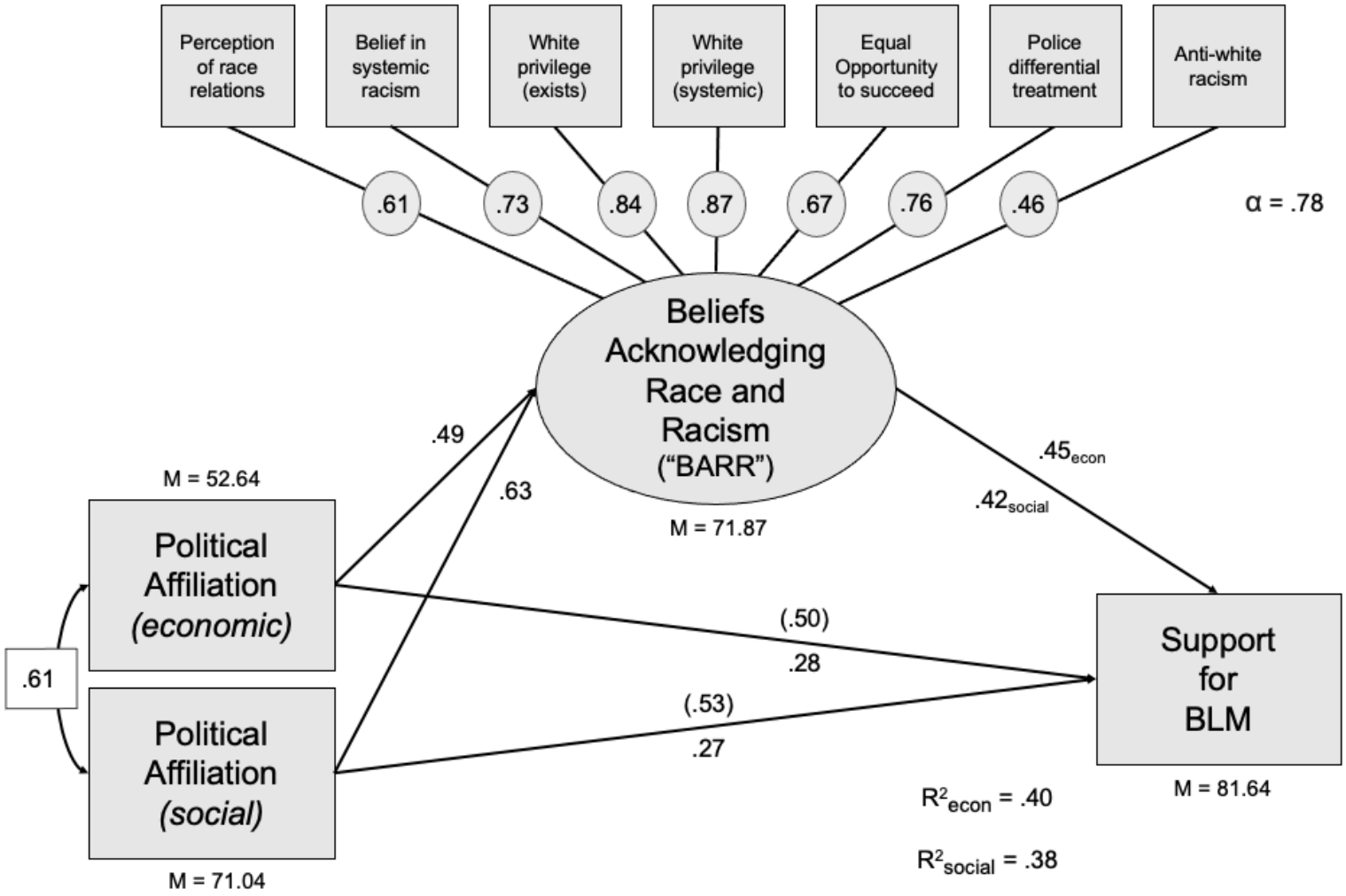
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for items used in analyses.

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Support for BLM	81.64	23.37	1										
2. Political Affiliation (economic)	52.64	26.88	.50**	1									
3. Political Affiliation (social)	71.04	24.41	.53**	.61**	1								
4. Race Relations	84.21	18.09	.24**	.19*	.30**	1							
5. Systemic Racism	81.30	23.12	.45**	.28**	.52**	.28**	1						
6. White Privilege (exists)	78.52	23.36	.60**	.39**	.63**	.41**	.59**	1					
7. White Privilege (systemic)	72.87	22.55	.61**	.45**	.60**	.44**	.62**	.75**	1				
8. Police Differential Treatment	74.13	21.92	.40**	.39**	.46**	.33**	.47**	.61**	.60**	1			
9. Anti-White Racism	37.20	48.48	.30**	.32**	.28**	.15	.22**	.31**	.34**	.278**	1		
10. Equal Opportunity	74.88	27.55	.33**	.36**	.43**	.52**	.37**	.39**	.43**	.42**	.27**	1	
11. BARR	71.87	18.35	.58**	.49**	.63**	.57**	.68**	.78**	.81**	.71**	.66**	.68**	1

Note. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Figure 1

Combined path analysis depicting effects of economic and social political affiliation and beliefs about race on support for BLM.



Note: these are nonstatistical model comparisons.

Figure 2

Path analysis depicting effects of economic political affiliation and beliefs about race on support for BLM.

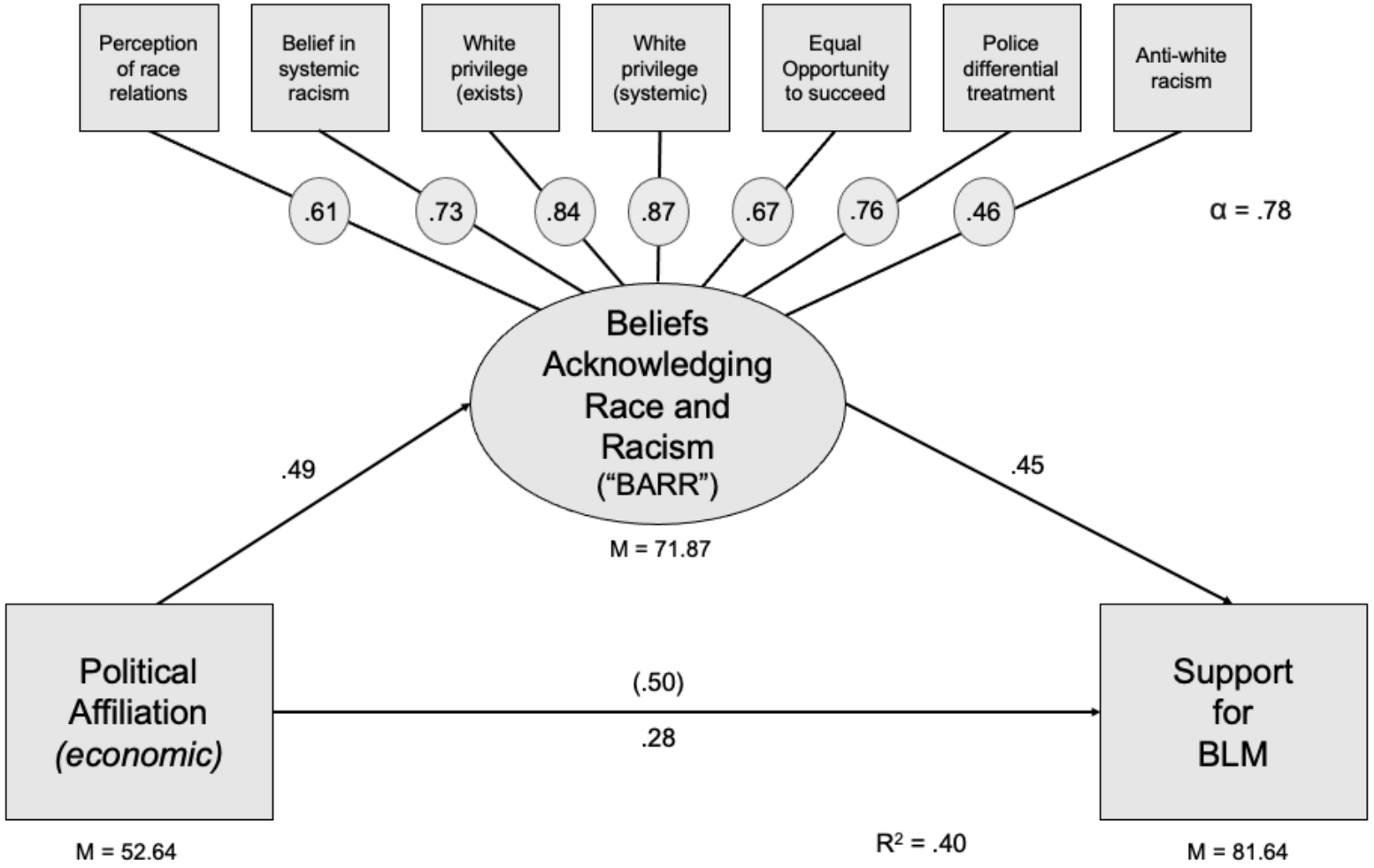
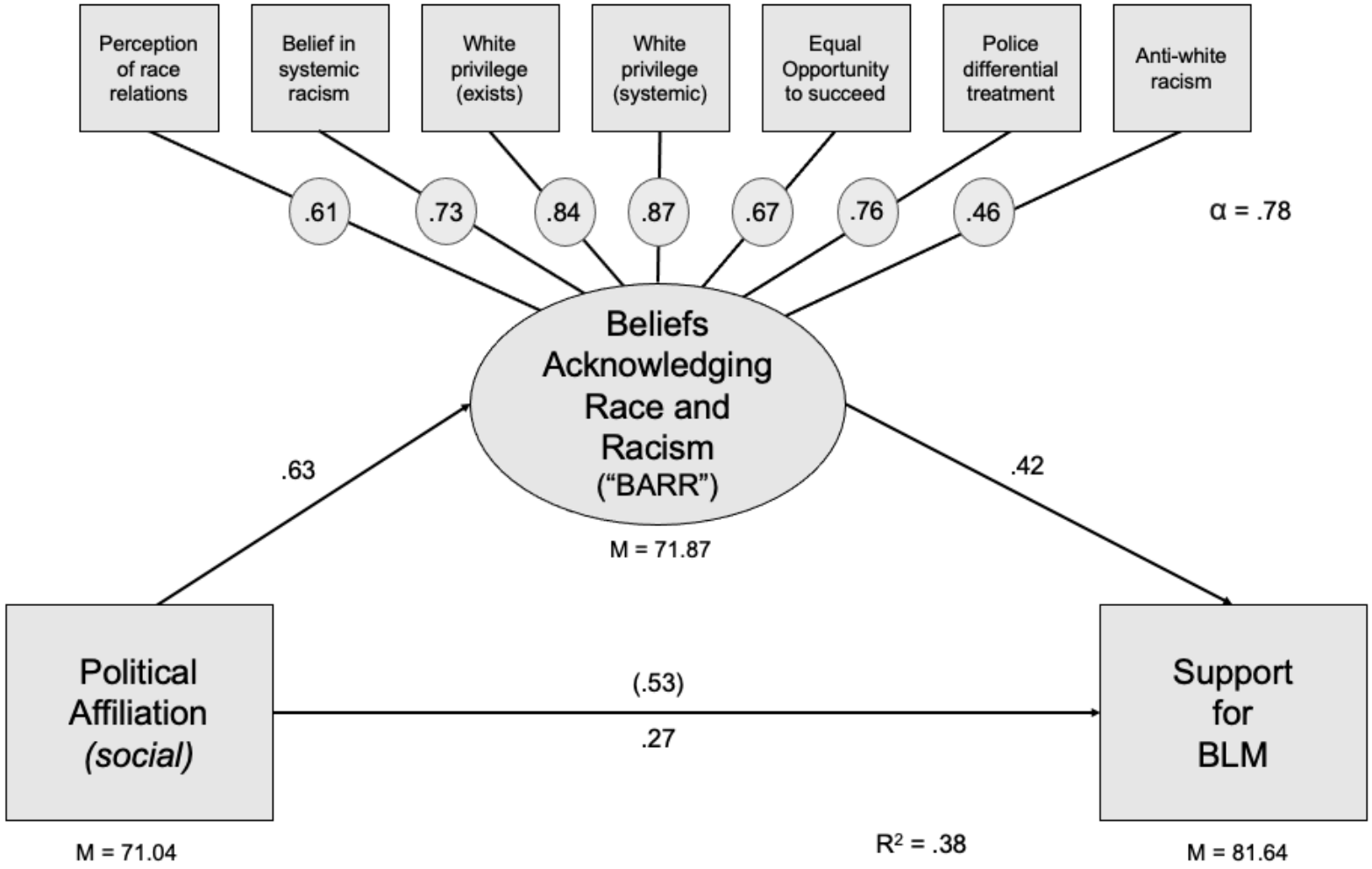


Figure 3

Path analysis depicting effects of social political affiliation and beliefs about race on support for BLM.



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