Received: 16 April 2024 | Revised: 7 July 2025 | Accepted: 19 July 2025

DOI: 10.1111/1745-9125.70032

CRIMINOLOGY

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

How do people react to policy reform? Group cues and persuasion in criminal justice

Dvir Yogev

Criminal Law & Justice Center, University of California Berkeley, Berkeley, California, USA

Correspondence
Dvir Yogev, Criminal Law & Justice Center, University of California Berkeley, Berkeley, CA, USA.
Email: dyo@berkeley.edu

Abstract

Criminal justice policy reform is crucial for a nation grappling with public safety concerns and decades of mass incarceration, which increased racial disparities. In this article, I develop a theory of cognitive relatedness between race and criminal justice to explain why people support different policy responses to crime. This study investigates the factors shaping public attitudes toward criminal justice policy reform, focusing on dispositional racial attitudes and political and racial group cues. Employing a conjoint design and a follow-up survey experiment, I demonstrate that people's dispositions toward racial and political groups affect their criminal justice policy preferences. Both people of color and White respondents follow cues from Black voters, with racial attitudes playing an important moderating role. Furthermore, I find little evidence for an influence of partisan cues on support for reform. These findings have fundamental implications for political activists and their efforts to support criminal justice reform campaigns.

KEYWORDS

criminal justice reform, group cues, policy preferences, racial justice

1 | INTRODUCTION

Political communication about criminal justice reform is abundant in current American politics. Former President Biden promised voters to "reform our criminal justice system,"[1] while during his first presidency Trump signed the First Step Act in December 2018, announcing it would "give former inmates a second chance at life."[2] Both ran ads in their 2020 campaigns that depicted Black Americans discussing reforming the penal system.[3] In addition, social movements and political activists such as Black Lives Matter (BLM) and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) joined the call to adopt policies that restrict the power of police officers and empower prosecutors and judges to hold officers accountable after highly publicized instances of police brutality, often against Black Americans. Political interest groups raise millions to influence voters' attitudes toward supporting criminal justice reform.[4] Yet, despite the enormous political effort and financial fortune invested in favor of progressive reform by various groups, we know little about how group identity and persuasion strategies shape public attitudes in this political context. This article shows that potential voters follow cues from racial minorities when deciding whether to support progressive criminal justice reform. I argue that this results from identifying criminal justice reform with racial justice.

In an environment saturated with information about the connections between race and crime, this article explains how racial groups matter for evaluations of policy reform. I argue that support for progressive criminal justice reform is closely tied to support for racial justice. Signals about the relationship between racial groups, racial attitudes, and the criminal justice system are common (Gilliam Jr. & Iyengar, 2000). In 2022, for example, Los Angeles City Council President Nury Martinez made these remarks while speaking about Los Angeles County District Attorney George Gascón: "F– that guy … He's with the Blacks."[5] Trump's campaign ad for criminal justice reform echoed the style of the Freedom and Civil Rights movement media from the 50s and 60s, linking criminal rights with civil rights ideas.[6]

Previous research has predominantly focused on public support for "getting tough on crime" to comprehend the political triumph of stringent law enforcement policies. But successfully transitioning away from punitive politics in which "the tougher, the better" requires understanding progressive policy preferences (Wozniak, 2023). Contemporary movements advocating for criminal justice reform receive millions of dollars in donations to support progressive criminal justice campaigns.[7] The progressive movement emphasizes alternative strategies to achieve safety, such as reducing police presence and incarceration rates instead of adopting nonrepressive, rehabilitative disciplinary measures. Given the limitations of relying on factual information to nudge preferences toward progressive change (Esberg et al., 2020), exploring the impact of attitudes toward social groups on shaping these preferences becomes crucial.

This article combines two studies to find that Black and White Americans are more likely to support progressive criminal justice reforms if they learn that Black voters support those reforms,

[1] Biden campaign.

[2] Trump announcement.

[3] Trump 2020 Super Bowl ad; Biden 2020 "Shop Talk" ad.

[4] For example, RealJusticePAC.org, ColorofChange.org, and Moveon.org publish their donations information, available here: opensecrets.org.

[5] LA Times.

[6] Trump 2020 Super Bowl ad.

[7] See, for example, Real Justice donors, Color of Change spending by election cycle.

conditional on positive racial attitudes. Study 1 utilizes a conjoint experimental design to causally gauge the marginal influence of varying policies and group cues on respondents' advocacy for reform. Study 2 expands the analysis of group cues and racial attitudes and narrows the focus to the study of progressive reform.

2 | WHY RACIAL GROUP CUES MATTER?

Understanding what affects the public's support for reform is crucial yet challenging; Dunbar (2022) finds that support for reform is not influenced by moral arguments and is mainly limited to nonviolent convicted offenders. This article theorizes that attitudes toward other social groups and their interests significantly shape preferences for criminal justice reform. Unnever and Cullen (2009) proposed that support for punitive policies could be understood through "Empathetic identification," where a person's ability to "take the role of" an imagined offender influences their punitive attitudes. This article extends this concept to the social group level, arguing that support for criminal justice reform is closely tied to one's political and racial attitudes. While Unnever and Cullen's empathetic identification theory focuses on individual-level empathy toward offenders, the related justice theory extends this framework to group-level dynamics. Rather than emphasizing personal identification with individual offenders, related justice theory examines how group identities and intergroup attitudes shape policy preferences in criminal justice reform. This shift from individual to group-level analysis better reflects the current political landscape, where criminal justice reform is increasingly framed as a systemic rather than an individual issue. Particularly among White Americans, research indicates that Democrats and those with liberal ideologies have shown decreasing racial animosity (Engelhardt, 2019; Hopkins & Washington, 2020; Krysan & Moberg, 2016). Additionally, there is growing recognition of the harms inflicted by a discriminatory criminal justice system on minority communities (Brenan, 2020; Pew Research Center, 2015, 2020a, 2020b). These two points are the basis for the argument that supporting criminal justice reform is related to supporting the elevation of minority citizens' civil and social rights. This aligns with evidence regarding support for the BLM movement (Drakulich et al., 2021).

Citizens' policy preferences rarely hinge on perceptions of their material interests, and when it comes to crime, citizens seldom hold the correct knowledge about crime (Esberg & Mummolo, 2018); instead, citizens often depend on loyalties to social groups (Converse, 2006; Krosnick et al., 2010). Further, people can infer a group's position on policy, even when not explicitly known, and support a policy (Brady & Sniderman, 1985; Elder & O'Brian, 2022) if they feel positively toward the social group that would benefit from it (Nelson & Kinder, 1996). Thus, this article relies on group cues and heuristic projection theories (Broockman et al., 2024; Bullock, 2020) to extend the knowledge of criminal justice reform support, suggesting that exposure to the preferences of Black voters may influence other voters' decisions on their desired policy. The following sections explain, first, the differences in criminal justice attitudes between racial groups and the relationship to racial attitudes, and second, the effect of out-group cues on in-group attitudes.

2.1 | Factors related to racial identity and attitudes

Public opinion is "the central consideration in the making of penal policy" (Gottschalk, 2006, p. 12). The prevalent theory suggests that changes in public punitive sentiment significantly impact policy, predicated on findings showing that policy responsiveness evolves from lawmakers'

anticipation of the general policy direction—rather than the exact policies—that the public prefers (Bartels, 1992; Stimson, 2004; Stimson et al., 1995). The American public's punitive sentiment is known to move in parallel trends when accounting for race, political ideology, and gender (Duxbury, 2021b; Enns, 2016; Ramirez, 2013). Ramirez (2013) found highly correlated trajectories in punitive sentiment for Blacks and Whites, men and women, and different age groups at the national level. However, public opinion on crime and justice is far from homogeneous, even if it changes in parallel over time (Duxbury, 2021a, 2021b). Researchers find significant gaps exist when accounting strictly for the difference between groups in cross-sectional studies (Jefferson et al., 2021).

Racial differences in punitive sentiment and trust in the police are notably stark (Boudreau et al., 2019; Jefferson, 2023; Wozniak, 2023). Between 1953 and 2006, only 11% of Black respondents in 34 national polls supported capital punishment for convicted murderers, in contrast to 89% of non-Blacks (Shirley & Gelman, 2015). Black Americans are not a homogeneous, one-dimensional group, and there is a gamut of opinions and attitudes regarding punitive policies (e.g., Dawson, 2001; Forman Jr., 2017; Jefferson, 2019; Jefferson et al., 2021). Yet, evidence on heterogeneous racial reaction to racial and partisan group cues is sparse (Stephens-Dougan, 2021). Given the historical intersections of racial and criminal justice in America, it is unsurprising that racial attitudes are interrelated with punitive attitudes (Dunbar et al., 2022; Pager, 2008; Tonry, 2011). As civil rights reforms altered racial dynamics, crime became a pivotal battleground for those seeking to maintain the racial status quo. In 1960, 37% of America's prison population was African American. By 1995, it was 50%. As of 2022, Black people make up approximately 32% of the total prison population (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2023); however, including jails and other correctional facilities for adults,[8] the Black population is 40% of the total population, despite representing only about 14% of the overall US population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). This significant overrepresentation highlights ongoing racial disparities within the US criminal justice system. In 1960, the incarceration rate per 100,000 people was 126. In 2006, it was 943. Among Black males, the number was 3042. Among Black males in their late 20s, the rate exceeded 7000. In 2017, there were 1549 Black prisoners for every 100,000 Black adults—nearly six times the imprisonment rate for Whites (272 per 100,000) and almost double for Hispanics (823 per 100,000). Notably, 32% of the US population is African Americans and Hispanics, compared to 56% of the US incarcerated population. If African Americans and Hispanics were incarcerated at the same rates as Whites, prison and jail populations would decline by almost 40%. There are different crime rates in different demographic groups, but differences in crime rates do not account for the entire difference in the incarceration rate (Ghandnoosh & Barry, 2023).

It remains unclear if racial identity similarly influences attitudes toward progressive reform (Boudreau et al., 2022). Reform-oriented politicians have succeeded mainly in urban areas characterized by racial diversity and liberal political leanings (Boudreau et al., 2019). Indeed, the persistent racial gaps in punitive sentiment and trust in the police, and more recently support for the BLM movement (Drakulich et al., 2021), reveal a structure of group association in which Black Americans are less supportive of a punitive legal system.

Furthermore, people's support for tough-on-crime policies in America is intricately interwoven with racial attitudes (Dunbar et al., 2022; Pager, 2008; Rice et al., 2022; Tonry, 2011). The racial animus model is the most consistent and robust predictor of punitive attitudes (Unnever & Cullen, 2010); it contends that negative racial attitudes mediate a preference for punitive policies. After the civil rights movement, politicians effectively linked race and crime in the public's mind

[8] 2022 American Community Survey – Survey Group Quarters Definitions.

(Weaver, 2007). Empirical research consistently supports the correlation between racial animus and oppressive attitudes toward punishment, demonstrating the significance of the racial divide in shaping attitudes toward justice and punishment. This association is evident across various domains, including support for the death penalty (Barkan & Cohn, 1994; Messner et al., 2006; Trahan & Laird, 2018; Unnever et al., 2008), abstract approval of "get tough" politics (Brown & Socia, 2017; Buckler et al., 2009; Morris & LeCount, 2020; Unnever & Cullen, 2010), perceptions of criminal guilt (Rice et al., 2022), and the role of group threat and racial social divides in promoting excessive punishment in America (Chiricos et al., 2020; Duxbury, 2021a; Smith, 2004).

In recent years, there has been a decline in negative racial attitudes among White Americans, mainly White Democrats (Engelhardt, 2023; Jardina & Ollerenshaw, 2022). In line with current trends of diminished racial animus, politicians reduced their use of racialized signals to advance "tough-on-crime" policies (Mendelberg, 1997; Thielo et al., 2016). This shift has prompted calls for a broader consideration of positive racial attitudes (Chudy, 2021). This article, therefore, extends the discourse by examining both negative and positive racial attitudes' relationship to criminal justice politics. It seeks to enrich our understanding of how positive racial attitudes may be linked to support for progressive reform in the criminal justice system. Importantly, whether a trend of decreased negative racial attitudes results in prevalent positive racial attitudes is irrelevant to the theory presented in this article, which focuses on the role of racial attitudes in shaping criminal justice reform, regardless of whether race relations have significantly changed.

2.2 | Factors related to group cues

Group cues are messages about which group supports which positions (Coppock, 2023; Leeper & Slothuus, 2014; Zaller, 2012). A group can be a political group (most commonly parties), a religious group, a racial group, or any other social group a person might feel related to based on gender, age, education, or geography. It is important to note that people have many overlapping group identities.

Notably, group cues are distinguished from implicit priming. Implicit priming in the form of racialized rhetoric (or racial priming) proved to be effective in influencing preferences for social policies (Hurwitz & Peffley, 2005; Mendelberg, 2017; White, 2007). However, group cues rely on explicit signaling of social groups, do not include reasoning, and are also processed orthogonally to persuasive information (Tappin et al., 2023). As such, it was proposed that they work as a heuristic mechanism, allowing people to take a shortcut toward policy positions without the hard work of learning about the policy (Brady & Sniderman, 1985). Moreover, from a psychological perspective, it was suggested that conforming to one's group attitudes leads to pride and a sense of belonging, while deviance has the opposite pernicious effect (Suhay, 2015).

The effect of group cues, for example, information about where a political party stands on an issue, depends on group membership (Agadjanian et al., 2023; Barber & Pope, 2019; Cohen, 2003). If a person is a member of a group, then they may follow the group position, but if a person is not a member of that group, the group cue might have a negative effect. The strength of an in-group and out-group cue depends on group membership, the relationship between that group and the policy issue cued, and possibly other personal predispositions (Cavaillé & Neundorf, 2023; Mason, 2018). Research on party cues found that they have the expected heterogeneous effect—increasing policy support for the in-group and decreasing policy support for the out-group (Cohen, 2003; Conover, 1984; Nicholson, 2012; Suhay et al., 2020). Researchers have also replicated these findings outside the United States to varying degrees (e.g., Arriola et al., 2022; Nordø, 2021). Importantly,

researchers found evidence that in-party leader cues influenced partisans' attitudes but that these group cues were integrated independently of nonpartisan persuasive messages, suggesting that party cues and information are conceptually different (Tappin et al., 2023).

Studies about the effect of cues from other groups are less common. Generally, research suggests that people's political attitudes are affected by various social groups (Conover, 1988; Green et al., 2004; Miller et al., 1991) and the attitudes of their social network (Sinclair, 2012). More specifically, studies show that church membership affects political behavior (Adkins et al., 2013; Djupe & Gilbert, 2008). We know much less about explicit policy endorsements by racial groups and their effect on political behavior.

In understanding public support for criminal justice reform, the influence of group cues has not been adequately explored. For instance, a study focused on attitudes toward police accountability found that the positions of Black lawmakers versus those of law enforcement on police reform sparked a very modest polarizing effect among partisans, compared to a baseline of broad bipartisan support (Boudreau et al., 2022). Democrats tended to align their opinions with Black legislators' support and Republicans with law enforcement opposition. However, this polarizing effect was marginal. In another study that examined the impact of factual corrections on policy opinions, the imperative determinant for criminal justice policy preferences was found to be in-group pressure, not the corrected information itself (Esberg et al., 2020). These two studies indicate the influence of group cues, but they provide only a fragmented understanding. Political science can expand on studying the role of group cues to equip policy advocates with the insights necessary to devise effective interventions.

3 | RELATED JUSTICE: RACIAL AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE LINKAGE

The aggregate trend over time suggests a linear decline in punitive attitudes with a matching increase in support for progressive reform (Ramirez, 2013).[9] For instance, evidence from Texas, often deemed a "red state," suggests a nascent consensus favoring rehabilitation, prison downsizing, and alternatives to incarceration (Thielo et al., 2016). Despite empirical evidence and publicized events that bolster the case for reform, past research reveals the inherent challenge of altering criminal justice policy preferences (Boudreau et al., 2022; Esberg et al., 2020). Factors that previously bolstered political support for punitive policies, such as racial animus, necessitate fresh conceptualization and empirical scrutiny to formulate a blueprint for progressive reform support.

Previous scholarship has provided insights into the genesis of the prison boom. However, our understanding of the emerging progressive trajectory (policies and legislation that promote decarceration, police accountability, and alternative sanctions) remains underdeveloped. One exception is a study that finds high bipartisan support for police accountability policies, conditional on citizens' attitudes toward the BLM movement (Boudreau et al., 2022). When public policy is associated with a racial group, voters' viewpoints toward that group influence their political convictions (Elder & O'Brian, 2022). As hostile racial attitudes decline and recognition of institutional racism has escalated (Engelhardt, 2023), it could be inferred that the link between

[9] See also Gallup (41% say justice system is "not tough enough," while 21% say it is "too tough," but compared to Gallup's initial reading of 83% in 1992 it is half of what it was); ACLU (voters express support for politicians that have a reform agenda); PEW (support for reducing spending on police has fallen significantly); PEW (support for the death penalty is still strong).

the positive shift in racial perspectives and the downturn in hardline crime attitudes is due to the relatedness of criminal and racial justice in the public mind.

This article extends the literature by testing the theory of racial and criminal justice relatedness ("related justice"). This article tests whether public support for criminal justice reform is fundamentally linked to attitudes toward racial justice through two mechanisms: (1) a cognitive association between criminal justice reform and racial equity, and (2) a tendency to defer to groups perceived as most affected by the policy domain. This theory predicts that individuals' support for criminal justice reform will align with their racial attitudes and their responsiveness to racial group cues, particularly from Black voters who are often perceived as most impacted by criminal justice policies.

3.1 | Hypotheses

This article proposes a theory of the relationship between racial and criminal justice by revisiting the racial animus model and extending its theoretical framework to include positive racial attitudes within the context of reform. The theory of racial and criminal justice relatedness (or "related justice") argues that attitudes toward criminal justice reflect underlying attitudes toward racial justice.

Hypothesis 1. A negative relationship exists between support for criminal justice reform and negative racial attitudes (Study 1).

Hypothesis 2. A positive relationship exists between support for criminal justice reform and positive racial attitudes (Study 1).

Hypothesis 3. Racial minorities' support for reforms will follow cues from their racial group (Study 1) and Black voters (Study 2).

Hypothesis 4. White respondents' response to racial group cues on reform depends on their racial attitudes (Study 2).

These hypotheses aim to test the core tenets of the related justice theory, exploring the interconnections between racial attitudes, perceptions of justice, and support for criminal justice reform. By examining these relationships, I explain the factors driving the emerging progressive trajectory in criminal justice policy preferences and the potential for sustained support for reform.

4 | STUDY 1

Throughout the prison expansion period, public opinion mostly supported and contributed to the rise of mass incarceration (Baumgartner et al., 2023; Stinchcombe et al., 1980). However, the transferability of research on tough-on-crime politics to progressive reform politics is uncertain (Wozniak, 2023). It is necessary to shift the dependent variables to understand the process of political change. Here, I contrast punitive and progressive alternatives instead of relying solely on existing concepts of punitive sentiments.

Study 1 scrutinizes the impact of diverse policy parameters on public preferences: contrasting punitive and progressive policies, employing varied rationales to frame the reform, accounting for costs, and examining the extent to which political, social, and interest group endorsements influence these preferences. Importantly, I explore the moderating effect of racial attitudes. Here, progressive reform is defined as policies that advocate for reducing the extensive and intensive margins of the criminal justice system: policies that shift the state's resources toward decriminalization, less severe punishment, or increased scrutiny of law enforcement. This contrasts with punitive policies that increase reliance on incarceration, capital punishment, and public spending on law enforcement (Duxbury, 2021b; Enns, 2016; Ramirez, 2013).

4.1 | Data

A total of 1433 Americans were recruited from Amazon MTurk during August 2021 (Table 1). Whether researchers should use weights in survey experiment analysis depends on the type of generalization the researcher seeks to achieve (Egami & Hartman, 2023) and on whether we can identify covariates that predict both treatment heterogeneity and selection into the sample (Miratrix et al., 2018). In this study, the difference in the composition of units in the experimental sample and the target population (voting-age Americans) does not raise generalization issues because selection into the experiment and treatment effect heterogeneity are unrelated to each other (Egami & Hartman, 2023): In the Supporting Information, I show that I detect only minor treatment effect heterogeneity on the partisanship and gender covariates, thus controlling for the pretreatment covariates can fulfill the ignorability of sampling and treatment effect heterogeneity assumption (Cole & Stuart, 2010; Egami & Hartman, 2023).

To overcome concerns regarding sample quality, this study incorporated policy positions from the Cooperative Election Study (CES) 2020 survey (Schaffner et al., 2021; questions CC20_334a-h). The analysis presented in full in the Supporting Information tests the hypothesis that the true difference between the mean value of each policy in CES and my data are different from zero (Section B.2); the null hypothesis cannot be ruled out across all eight comparisons between my estimations and the CES 2020 estimates, providing further confidence in the quality of my data. As Coppock and McClellan (2019) note, convenience samples recover political attitudes of the US population well (see also Coppock, 2023; further discussion of this article's decision to rely on convenience samples is in the Supporting Information, B.1).

4.1.1 | Analytical strategy

Study 1 employs a conjoint experimental design, a methodological approach that allows for the identification of specific attributes' effects on respondents' preferences. A foundational method in marketing and product design, it is increasingly utilized by social scientists, especially in the study of electoral politics, but also concerning crime and justice (Bansak et al., 2021; Doherty et al., 2022; Hainmueller et al., 2014). The conjoint design, unlike other methods, enables the grouping of individual policies to simultaneously estimate the effect of the policy domain (such as policing, bail, prison sentencing, and fines) and policy agenda (progressive vs. punitive) on preferences. The analysis groups 21 punitive and 21 progressive policies into punitive and progressive categories.

In this study, I utilize a "single profile" conjoint design. The single profile design was selected for its enhanced ecological validity. When voters vote on policies, most commonly in the ballot

TABLE 1 Summary table.

	Overall ($N = 1433$)
(a) Age	
Mean (SD)	38.6 (11.8)
Median [Min, Max]	36.0 [19.0, 83.0]
Missing	1 (0.1%)
Female	585 (40.8%)
In another way	4 (0.3%)
Male	844 (58.9%)
Conservative	306 (21.4%)
Liberal	402 (28.1%)
Moderate	298 (20.8%)
Not sure	3 (0.2%)
Very conservative	220 (15.4%)
Very liberal	204 (14.2%)
Democrat	746 (52.1%)
Independent	264 (18.4%)
Republican	405 (28.3%)
Something else	18 (1.3%)
Asian	100 (7.0%)
Black	169 (11.8%)
Hispanic	67 (4.7%)
Middle Eastern	3 (0.2%)
Mixed	25 (1.7%)
Native American	28 (2.0%)
Other	3 (0.2%)
White	1038 (72.4%)
I own a home	862 (60.2%)
I rent	514 (35.9%)
Other	57 (4.0%)
Associate degree or bachelor degree	816 (56.9%) high school
Master's degree or higher	358 (25.0%)
No formal schooling	1 (0.1%)
Prefer not to answer	4 (0.3%)
Some college, no degree	155 (10.8%)
Missing	2 (0.1%)
(b) Income	
Above avg	228 (15.9%)
Avg	691 (48.2%)
High	76 (5.3%)
Low	438 (30.6%)

proposition process, they do not choose between competing policies (as they often do when voting for political candidates). Moreover, to further increase ecological validity, the ballot propositions information environment was used to design the conjoint (see Section A in the Supporting Information for examples of the official voter guide, which includes a short description, cost, arguments, official supporters, and opponents).[10]

Conjoints are regularly analyzed using the average marginal component effect (AMCE), which estimates the average effect of each attribute level on the respondent's preferences while accounting for the presence of all other attribute levels in the profiles. The AMCE analysis estimates the average change in the probability of a profile being chosen or rated higher when a specific attribute level is present compared to when it is absent, averaging over all possible combinations of the other attribute levels. Positive AMCE coefficients indicate that an attribute level increases the likelihood of a profile being preferred, while negative coefficients suggest a decrease in preference. I cluster standard errors at the respondent level because each respondent evaluates multiple policies, creating a within-subject correlation in responses. Failing to account for this correlation through clustering would underestimate standard errors and potentially lead to incorrect statistical inference.

In conjoint designs, profiles can be distributed either uniformly (equal probability for all combinations) or targeted (weighted toward realistic combinations; Bansak & Jenke, 2025; De la Cuesta et al., 2022). The theoretical distribution of interest is modeled in Section C.3 in the Supporting Information. Of the 9880 possible profiles in our design, I identified realistic combinations based on two criteria: (1) logical consistency between policy type and supporter type (e.g., police unions supporting progressive policies would be unusual), (2) higher probability of cues about non-White voters' preferences appearing alongside policies endorsed by the Democratic party, mitigating the potential for erroneous signaling of bipartisan or consensus support. This approach yielded 8309 realistic profiles used in our main analysis, though results remain robust when including all profiles (see Supporting Information: Section C.3).

4.1.2 | Design

The respondent views a table featuring the proposed policy and indicates whether they support or oppose it (1). Each iteration has its unique set of possible policies (not shared between iterations), and a single policy is drawn randomly for presentation. Respondents go through seven iterations of the conjoint table (Figure 1).

Independent variables: Informational persuasion. The first four iterations display policies adapted from real-world policies (new legislation being proposed across the United States). Each iteration draws from a distinct pool of policies. The first iteration randomly displays one policy related to bail, the second related to fines and misdemeanor punishment, the third related to policing, and the fourth related to maximum sentences. The last three iterations use policies adapted from CES surveys on minimum sentences, violent crime, and policing. I used a manipulation check for the respondent's subjective judgment on the policy's direction of change: more or less punitive than the status quo; the relationship between the classification of the policy as punitive and the respondents' assessment of the policy indicated a significant association between the researcher's classification and the respondents' assessments,

[10] For example, see this website for voter information, and all California official pamphlets.

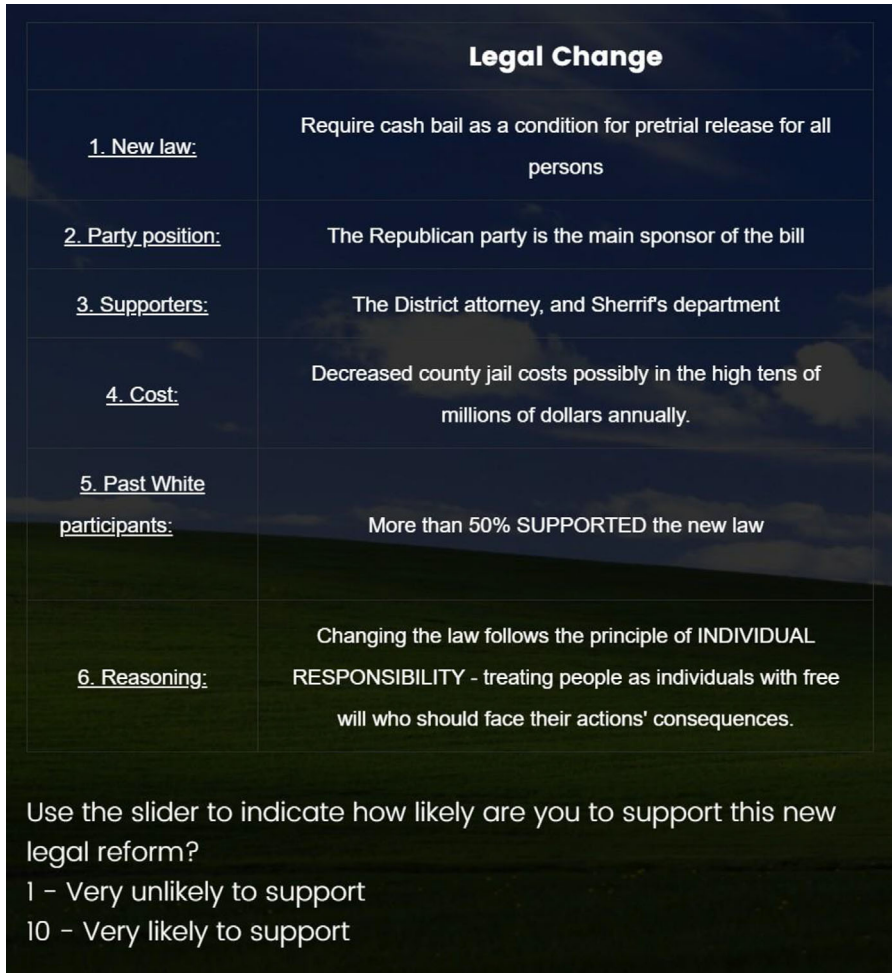


FIGURE 1 Conjoint screen. *Note*: Participants were presented with seven iterations. Half were randomly assigned not to receive the "Party position" attribute. The reported race of the participant was inserted in the "Past [reported race] participants" attribute. Participants could not receive the same policy twice or view the progressive and punitive versions of the same policy. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

$\chi^2(1,\ n = 8156) = 664.09,\ p < 0.001$ (contingency tables in the Supporting Information: Section C.2).

The process resulted in a total of 42 policies, which are all presented in Figure 2 along with their average independent favorability. The most popular policy, all else equal, is to require police officers to wear body cameras while on duty. The least popular policy was to prohibit suing a police officer for damages.

Independent variables: Group cues, and racial attitudes. Each iteration presented the respondent with a randomized set of policy supporters: party, interest groups, administrative officials, and racial groups (Table 2). Regarding the measurement of racial animus, the most dominant scale is racial resentment, also known as symbolic racism (Kinder & Sanders, 1996). The scale can also suggest the prevalence of positive racial attitudes for those scoring low on the battery of questions (Agadjanian et al., 2023).

FIGURE 2 All policies. *Note*: This figure presents all the policies considered in Study 1 ($N = 1433$), categorized as either progressive or punitive, and by domain: six for fines and misdemeanors; 20 for policing; 10 for prison sentences; six for bail. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

4.2 | Results

Study 1 supports a theory of group cues in understanding attitudes toward reform. Respondents' dispositional attitudes (partisanship and racial resentment) moderated their preferences (H1). Party cues and racial group cues had significant effects on preferences: Respondents follow their racial group (H3), and when a policy is supported by the opposite party, it decreases respondents' support.

Figure 3 presents the AMCE analysis. The log odds from the AMCE were converted to a probability scale, making it easier to interpret. The effect of group cues from the respondent's reported racial group was significant and crucial in decision-making (the relative weight of each attribute is discussed below and presented in Figure 4), in both the positive direction (same race group supports the reform) and the negative direction (same race group opposes the reform; H3). When the opposite party supports the policy, the support probability is lower than the control (no information about party position); the negative effect of opposite-party endorsement is stronger than the positive effect of in-party endorsement (not statistically significant compared to the control condition).

TABLE 2 Conjoint experiment: attributes and levels.

Type	Supporters	Cost	Reasoning	Group	Party
Progressive policy (49.9%)	African American Chamber of Commerce (19.4%)	Decrease costs (50.7%)	Individual responsibility (25.4%)	Opposed by respondent's racial group (50.9%)	Control (50.5%)
Tough-on-crime policy (50.1%)	Black Lives Matter movement, and the ACLU (20.0%)	Increase costs (49.3%)	Outcomes (25.2%)	Supported by respondent's racial group (49.1%)	Supported by respondent's party (23.2%)
	Crime victims association (20.6%)		Principles (24.5%)		Supported by the opposite party (26.3%)
	Police unions and prison guards union (20.0%)		Social responsibility (24.9%)		
	The District attorney, and Sherrif's department (19.9%)				

Note: Total profiles: 9880 | Number of respondents: 1433.

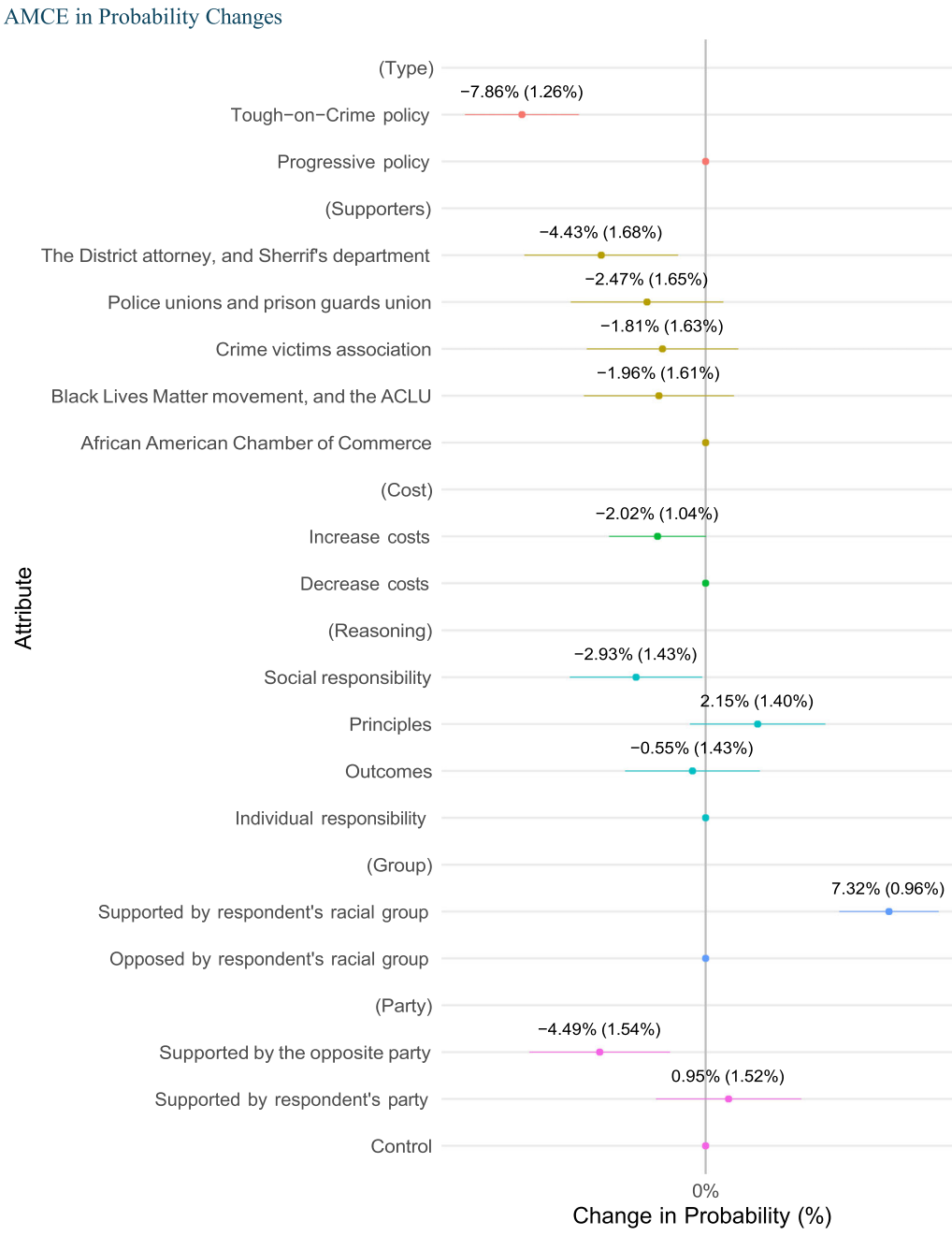


FIGURE 3 Average marginal component effects (AMCEs) plot showing changes in probability. *Note*: This plot uses a generalized linear model (GLM) with a binomial family ($N = 1433$). The displayed coefficients represent the change in the probability of the dependent variable occurring, expressed as percentage points, for a one-unit change in the independent variable, holding all other variables constant. Error bars represent the standard errors of these probability changes. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

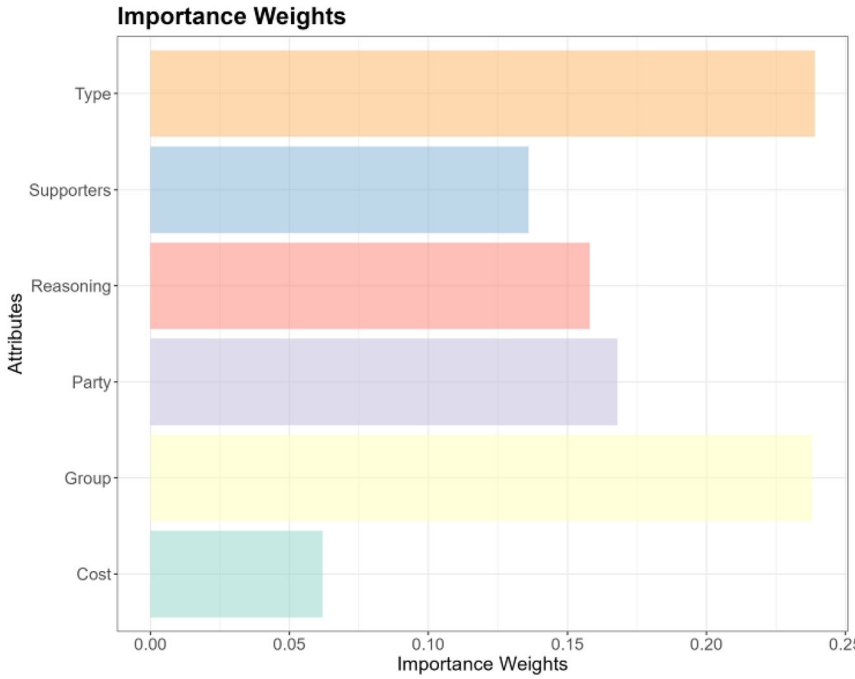


FIGURE 4 Importance weights of attributes from the conjoint analysis. *Note*: These weights are calculated using an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression-based method ($N = 1433$). Each attribute's range of part-worth utilities (i.e., the contribution of each attribute level to the overall preference) is computed. The weights are then the ranges for each attribute, normalized to sum to 100, representing the relative importance of each attribute. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

Figure 4 presents the importance weights for the study's attributes. Importance weights elucidate the relative importance of different attributes in decision-making processes. These weights represent the change in preference for a unit change in an attribute, holding other attributes constant. Calculating importance weights in conjoint analysis involves dividing the range of part-worth utilities for each attribute by the sum of ranges across all attributes. For instance, if the Party attribute has part-worth utilities ranging from −2 to +2 (a range of 4), and the sum of ranges for all attributes is 10, the importance weight for Party would be 4/10 or 40%. The higher the weight, the more significant the attribute influences preference within the range of levels tested in the study. It is crucial to note that importance weights are derived from each attribute's range of part-worth utilities, not directly from regression coefficients. These weights are normalized to sum to 1 (or 100%), making them a relative measure rather than an absolute one. Due to their nature as relative, normalized measures, it is inappropriate to associate variances with these weights or perform significance tests on them directly. Instead, they provide a comparative view of attribute importance in the overall preference structure.

The two most influential attributes were whether the policy is punitive or progressive and the cue regarding past racial group support of the policy.

Figure 3 shows that progressive policies affect support positively, compared to tough-on-crime policies. A breakdown of support by domain, using a marginal means analysis (Leeper et al., 2020),

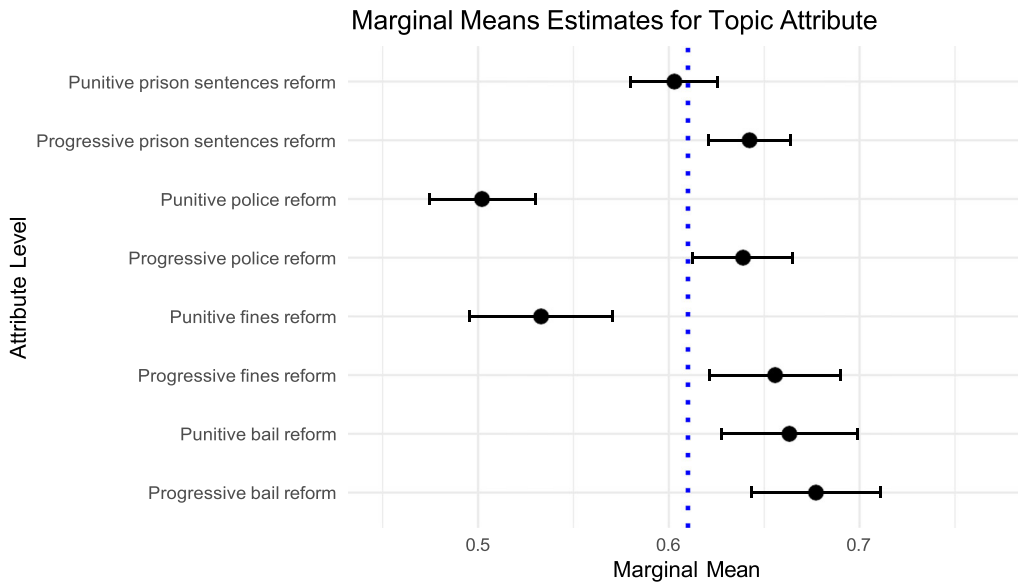


FIGURE 5 Marginal means (MM) plot. *Note*: In this analysis, I show the marginal means ($N = 1433$), representing the mean outcome across all appearances of a particular conjoint feature level, averaging across all other features. Marginal means analysis provides a description of the preference structure for each attribute level. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

revealed that most of the progressive support was driven by respondents' dislike of punitive police reform and punitive fines reform (Figure 5).

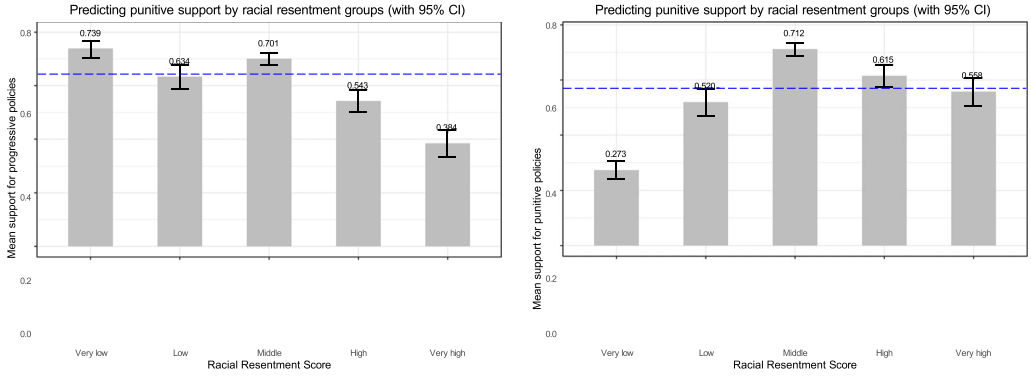
In terms of moderators (H1), compared with those low on the racial resentment scale, White participants who scored high on racial resentment[11] were more supportive of tough-on-crime (Figure 6b) and less supportive of progressive reform (Figure 6a).

These results clearly show that racial resentment is a powerful predictor of both a preference toward tough-on-crime policies and opposition to progressive policies. This is also apparent in the analysis of differences in conditional marginal means (Leeper et al., 2020), as shown in Figure 7, which also demonstrated that racial resentment moderates attitudes toward endorsement by BLM and the ACLU.

An analysis of differences in conditional marginal means (Leeper et al., 2020) revealed that Republicans are significantly more likely to support tough-on-crime policies (12.9 percentage points more than Democrats) and significantly less likely to support progressive policies (7.7 percentage points less; Table F.3).

To conclude Study 1, I find evidence for the importance of following group cues, both racial and partisan. Study 2 extends these results to out-group racial group cues, specifically regarding progressive reform. It will also explore how positive racial attitudes relate to progressive reform support. Finally, to investigate a possible mechanism, Study 2 examines whether respondents associate the impact of progressive criminal justice reform with minorities.

[11] For an analysis based on the racial resentment score I use only participants reporting White identity (Kam & Burge, 2018).



(a) (b)

FIGURE 6 Reform preferences by racial resentment scores. (a) Support for progressive reforms. (b) Support for punitive reforms. *Note*: The mean support for policy-group by racial resentment subgroups, with 95% confidence intervals (CIs). Racial resentment subgroups are calculated by grouping White respondents between these mean scores on the scale: 0.2, 0.4, 0.6, and 0.8. The dotted line is the average support for the group of reforms. Left panel (progressive reforms): $N = 1028$; Right panel (punitive reforms): $N = 1010$. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

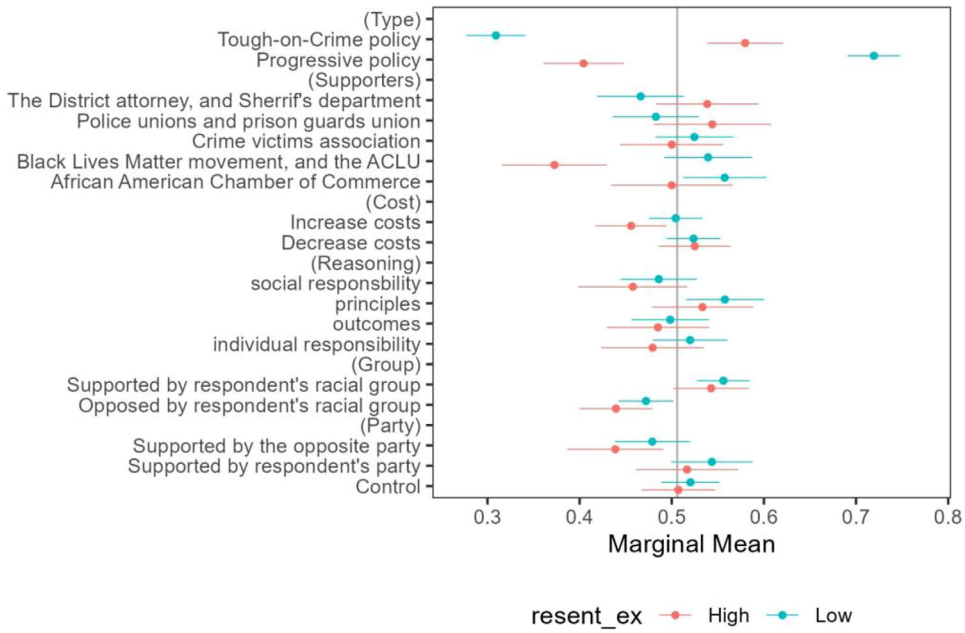


FIGURE 7 Subgroup marginal means (MM) analysis. *Note*: Figure displays differences in marginal means ($N = 530$), representing average treatment effects for each conjoint feature level while averaging across all other randomized features. Points indicate point estimates with horizontal lines representing 95% confidence intervals. Statistical significance can be inferred when confidence intervals do not overlap with the zero line. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

5 | STUDY 2

Study 2 extends the analysis of racial group cues beyond the respondents' groups. I examine how group cues regarding White voters differ from Black voters' group cues.[12] In addition, racial attitudes continually evolve—changing from generation to generation and through time (DeSante & Smith, 2019; Engelhardt, 2023; Lee, 2002; Valenzuela & Reny, 2021). Importantly, we do not know how positive racial attitudes affect people's perceptions of crime and justice. Hence, Study 2 extends the study of racial attitudes to positive racial attitudes and asks whether respondents believe progressive reform would impact mostly minorities.[13]

5.1 | Data and design

The sample comprises both an MTurk sample ($N = 226$) and a Lucid Theorem sample ($N = 284$) (Table 3).[14] Lucid Theorem employs quota sampling to produce samples matched to the US population on age, gender, ethnicity, and geographic region; recent research demonstrates the suitability of the Lucid platform for evaluating social scientific theories (Coppock, 2023; Coppock & McClellan, 2019). The use of weights in survey experiment analysis hinges on the researcher's intended generalization and the ability to identify covariates that predict both treatment heterogeneity and selection into the sample (Egami & Hartman, 2023; Miratrix et al., 2018). In this study, the design assumes treatment heterogeneity based on reported race and political identity. The difference in the composition of units in the experimental sample and the target population (voting-age Americans) is a concern for the MTurk sample solely, which might compromise external population validity but not treatment validity (Egami & Hartman, 2023), which is the validity of interest in this study. Thus, the assigned and target treatments generate identical average treatment effects in expectation. All participants gave their explicit consent to participate in the research study. The study was fielded in February 2022.

5.1.1 | Materials and dependent variables

Respondents read four policies and answered: "Do you support this policy? How would you vote if you could?" The policies were chosen to represent different domains of criminal justice and four different baselines of support based on the results of Study 1. The policies were: (1) "The policy would make it possible for convicted felons to reduce up to 50% of their sentence, using 'good time credits'" (56% mean support in Study 1); (2) "The policy would make it possible for people sentenced to one (1) year in jail or less, to apply for substituting the remainder of their sentence with a fine" (60% mean support in Study 1); (3) "The policy would make it possible for people waiting for their criminal trial to apply for immediate release, without paying cash bail" (64% mean support in Study 1); (4) "The policy would allow some

[12] In Study 2, non-White, non-Black respondents were always provided with an "out-group" racial cue.

[13] Study 1 also found that learning that the opposing party supports a policy has a negative effect on preferences when compared to no party cue present. Thus, Study 2 focuses on this finding to understand the effect of out-party support, reported in the Supporting Information, Section F.0.1.

[14] This allows my findings to be robust for systematic differences between the samples. See more regarding utilizing MTurk and Lucid in the Supporting Information, Section B.1; and Section 5.1.

TABLE 3 Summary table.

	Lucid Theorem ($N = 284$)	MTurk ($N = 226$)
Age		
Mean (SD)	47.6 (16.8)	38.3 (10.3)
Median [Min, Max]	47.0 [20.0, 81.0]	36.0 [24.0, 68.0]
Female	146 (51.4%)	94 (41.6%)
Male	135 (47.5%)	131 (58.0%)
In another way	3 (1.1%)	1 (0.4%)
Very liberal	36 (12.7%)	46 (20.4%)
Slightly conservative	21 (7.4%)	24 (10.6%)
Neither liberal nor conservative	76 (26.8%)	23 (10.2%)
Somewhat liberal	29 (10.2%)	31 (13.7%)
Slightly liberal	38 (13.4%)	31 (13.7%)
Somewhat conservative	34 (12.0%)	29 (12.8%)
Very conservative	50 (17.6%)	42 (18.6%)
Independent	61 (21.5%)	38 (16.8%)
Democrat	127 (44.7%)	132 (58.4%)
Republican	75 (26.4%)	55 (24.3%)
Something else	21 (7.4%)	1 (0.4%)
White	207 (72.9%)	179 (79.2%)
Asian	12 (4.2%)	13 (5.8%)
Black	32 (11.3%)	12 (5.3%)
Hispanic	11 (3.9%)	8 (3.5%)
Native American	4 (1.4%)	9 (4.0%)
Mixed	14 (4.9%)	4 (1.8%)
Middle Eastern	2 (0.7%)	1 (0.4%)
Other	2 (0.7%)	0 (0%)
I own a home	172 (60.6%)	142 (62.8%)
I rent	97 (34.2%)	77 (34.1%)
Other	15 (5.3%)	7 (3.1%)
Master's degree or higher	50 (17.6%)	62 (27.4%)
High school	57 (20.1%)	19 (8.4%)
Associate degree or bachelor degree	117 (41.2%)	124 (54.9%)
Some college, no degree	55 (19.4%)	19 (8.4%)
Prefer not to answer	3 (1.1%)	2 (0.9%)
No formal schooling	2 (0.7%)	0 (0%)
$10,000–$39,999	64 (22.5%)	52 (23.0%)
$90,000–$139,999	38 (13.4%)	26 (11.5%)
More than $140,000	46 (16.2%)	12 (5.3%)
$40,000–$89,999	95 (33.5%)	129 (57.1%)
Less than $10,000	41 (14.4%)	7 (3.1%)

nonviolent drug offenders to avoid mandatory minimum sentences" (72% mean support in Study 1).

Finally, all respondents were asked a final question before the end of the experiment: "If you had to guess, would you say these policies will have the most impact on which racial group? Choose as many as you like."

5.1.2 | Treatment conditions: Group cues and positive out-group attitudes

Respondents were randomly assigned with equal probability to receive one of five possible group cues. Racial group cues included five randomized conditions: "The policies we want your opinion on were previously SUPPORTED [/OPPOSED] by the majority of White [/Black] voters in [inserting the respondent's region in the United States]. They believed these policies can [/can't] lower crime and increase safety." The fifth condition was a control: "The policies we want your opinion on are new attempts to lower crime and increase safety."

Partisanship cues included four conditions: "The policies we want your opinion on are part of the Democratic party's [/Republican /bipartisan] new criminal justice reform campaign." The fourth condition was a control: "The policies we want your opinion on are part of a new criminal justice reform campaign." Respondents also must demonstrate they understand which party backs the reform before proceeding.

Attitudes. For positive racial attitudes, I use an adapted version of the FIRE scale (DeSante & Smith, 2020) and the sympathy scale (Chudy, 2021; Cullen et al., 2021; full wording in the Supporting Information, Table F.4). Racial sympathy is a form of affect whereby Whites, because of their discontent with the plight of Black Americans, will be inclined to support policies that benefit them. Racial sympathy is distinct from a more general sympathy, as it does not shape opinion related to other groups (Chudy, 2021). A 2019 YouGov survey showed that racial sympathy is significantly related to the view that capital punishment is discriminatory and was positively associated with the idea that rehabilitation is the main goal of prison (Hannan et al., 2022).

5.1.3 | Analytical strategy

Study 2 used a simple survey experiment and relied on the chi-square test of independence for categorical variables to test for the effect of treatment conditions on the outcome. In addition, to directly test for the differences in the effects between the two groups (based on reported racial identity), I test the significance of the interaction terms in a pooled model. My analysis used the following interaction model:

$$\begin{aligned}\text{Vote}_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Race group cue}_i + \beta_2 \text{Reported race}_i + \beta_3 (\text{Race group cue}_i \times \text{Reported race}_i) \\ + \beta_4 \text{Demo graphics}_i + \beta_5 \text{Attitudes}_i + \beta_6 \text{MTurk}_i + \varepsilon_i\end{aligned}$$

Similar to Study 1, standard errors are clustered at the respondent level because each respondent evaluates multiple policies, creating a within-subject correlation in responses. The analyses employ linear probability models with standard errors clustered at the respondent level to account for the nonindependence of observations from the same individual evaluating multiple policies.

TABLE 4 Racial group endorsement effects on policy support: Interaction model testing differential effects by respondent race.

	Interaction model
(Intercept)	0.61 (0.21)**
White support	0.16 (0.08)
Black opposition	0.17 (0.08)*
Black support	0.22 (0.08)**
White opposition	0.15 (0.08)
Non-White respondent (binary)	0.30 (0.11)*
White support * non-White respondent	−0.26 (0.14)
Black opposition * non-White respondent	−0.51 (0.16)**
Black support * non-White respondent	−0.20 (0.14)
White opposition * non-White respondent	−0.39 (0.14)**
R^2	0.15
Adj. R^2	0.12
Num. obs.	1012
F statistic	20.53
RMSE	0.46
N clusters	253

Note: Sample size variations across tables reflect the experimental design where respondents were randomly assigned to either racial group cues ($N = 253$) or party cues ($N = 252$) treatments. The number of observations ($N = 1012$) represents the total number of policy evaluations (4 policies × 253 respondents), while N clusters indicates the number of unique respondents. Each respondent evaluated multiple policies, necessitating clustering at the respondent level for accurate standard error estimation. The interaction model tests the impact of all variables and their interaction effects on the outcome. Each cell provides the estimated effect size and the SE, controlling for all other variables (demographics, attitudes, and sample source) in the model; full statistical results are reported in the Supporting Information, Section F.2.

***$p < 0.001$; **$p < 0.01$; *$p < 0.05$.

Sensitivity analyses using logistic regression models produced substantively identical results (see Supporting Information Tables 7.7 and F.8).

5.2 | Results

First, for respondents identifying as "non-White," the racial group cues treatment was statistically significant according to a chi-square test of independence for categorical variables ($\chi^2 = 11.723$, df = 4, $p = 0.019$). For White voters, the treatment had a statistically significant effect ($\chi^2 = 25.077$, df = 4, $p < 0.0001$).

The primary analysis utilizes an interaction model because I am interested in how different cues about racial group behavior affect people reporting different racial groups and attitudes. Study 1 finds that a respondent's response to a cue can be positive or negative, depending on their racial attitudes. Thus, the interaction model holds racial attitudes constant to estimate the experiment's effect. Table 4 presents the estimated coefficients for the interaction terms between racial group cues and reported race (coded as "1" for reporting non-White identity and "0" for White); the control group is the reference category.[15]

[15] Full statistical results are reported in Supplementary Information, Section F.2.

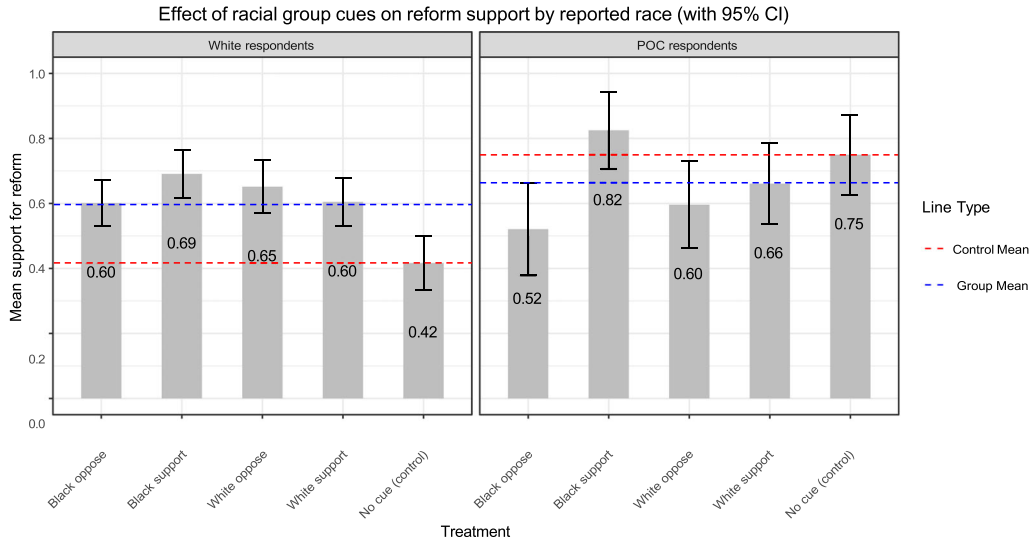


FIGURE 8 Racial group cues. *Note*: Mean support for the four progressive policies by racial group cues with 95% confidence intervals (CIs). Left panel (White respondents): $N = 776$; Right panel (people of color [POC] respondents): $N = 244$. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

The noninteraction coefficients in Table 4 estimate the difference in progressive support likelihood between the control group (no cue) and the other conditions for respondents reporting a White identity. Study 2 finds that for respondents identifying as White, a cue about Black voters' attitudes had a statistically significant effect on a decision to support a progressive policy, compared to no cue (Table 4).

The interaction terms ("… ∗ *non-White respondent*") estimate how these differences change when the reported respondent identity becomes non-White. For example, *Black Opposition* ∗ *non-White respondent* is the interaction term for receiving a cue about Black citizens' preferences and reporting a non-White identity. The negative coefficient indicates that the effect of this cue (compared to the control group) decreases the likelihood of supporting progressive reform when respondents report a non-White identity (compared to reporting a White identity). The significant negative coefficient for "White Opposition ∗ non-White respondent" (-0.39, $p < 0.01$) reveals that when non-White respondents learn that White voters oppose progressive criminal justice reforms, they become significantly less likely to support these policies compared to White respondents in receiving the same cue. This result highlights the complexity of how racial cues operate across different demographic groups and warrants further investigation in future research.

The secondary analysis visualizes treatment conditions with 95% confidence intervals (CIs) by racial group (Figure 8) and within the White respondents' group only (Figure 9). In Figure 8, we notice stark differences in baseline progressive reform support in the control conditions (about 40% vs. 75%). For non-White respondents, information about Black opposition had a significant negative effect (H3). White respondents were the most likely to be swayed by cues indicating the preferences of Black voters (H3). Notably, all racial cues—regardless of the racial group mentioned or its stated position—appear to increase the likelihood of White respondents supporting progressive policies compared to the no-cue condition. This consistent positive shift suggests that making racial dimensions salient may prime White respondents to express more progressive criminal justice positions, particularly when racial attitudes are controlled for in the model.

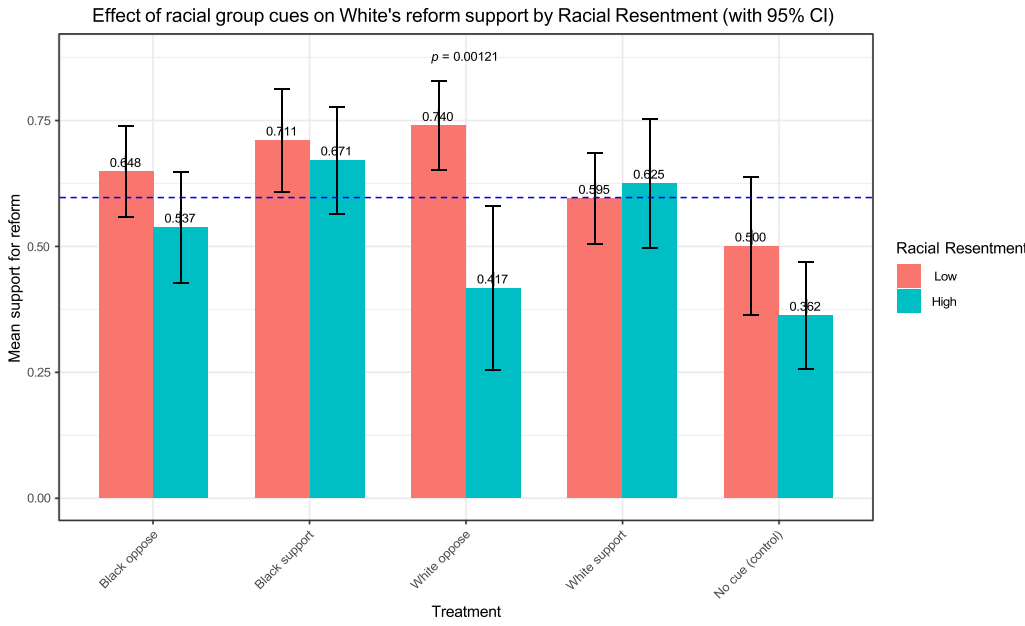


FIGURE 9 Racial group cues—White respondents by racial resentment score. *Note*: Mean support for the four progressive policies by racial group cues with 95% confidence intervals (CIs). Total $N = 776$, with treatment conditions administered equally through random assignment. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

However, the theory predicts heterogeneous treatment effects according to racial attitudes; thus, Figure 9 separates White respondents by their pre-existing racial attitudes and reveals the heterogeneous treatment effects for White respondents (H3 and H4). White respondents with low racial resentment scores (less than the median in the sample) always supported criminal justice reform more than their counterparts high on the racial resentment scale (except for the "White voters support" treatment, which is expected, yet the sample might be too small to detect significant differences in this group). Notably, when receiving the "White voters oppose" treatment, the difference between the two groups is stark and significant ($p = 0.001$). White respondents with low racial resentment show the highest support for reform (0.74), precisely when they are told that other White voters oppose these reforms. This suggests these respondents are responding *against* the White opposition cue, potentially because they infer that such opposition might be racially motivated. This directly supports the central theoretical argument that racial justice and criminal justice attitudes are cognitively connected. Indeed, White respondents with high racial resentment follow the White opposition cue, showing significantly reduced support (0.417) for the reforms when told other Whites oppose them.

Crucially, this study finds that high-resentment White respondents showed significantly higher support for progressive policies when told Black voters supported them ($M = 0.671$) compared to the control condition ($M = 0.363$). I perform a direct statistical comparison (t-test), using Welch's two-sample t-test to compare policy support between the two high-resentment groups; the difference in means was 0.309 (95% CI [0.157, 0.460]), $t(153.9) = 4.03$, $p < 0.0001$. To further ensure robustness using a method tailored for binary outcomes, I also performed a logistic regression analysis predicting policy support within this same subgroup (high-resentment Whites, comparing "Black voters support" to "Control"). This analysis strongly confirmed the t-test findings: the

TABLE 5 The comparative impact of racial sympathy, racial resentment, and FIRE attitudes on progressive policy support.

	Predicting progressive policies support
Racial sympathy	0.27***
	(0.07)
Racial resentment	−0.14
	(0.09)
FIRE scale	−0.13
	(0.13)
R^2	0.10
Adj. R^2	0.08
Num. obs.	2020
RMSE	0.47
N clusters	505

Note: The table displays the results of an OLS regression analysis with standardized coefficients. The dependent variable is a binary vote in favor of progressive policy reform (0 = oppose, 1 = support). All three racial attitude scales (racial sympathy, racial resentment, and FIRE) are standardized (mean = 0, SD = 1) to directly compare effect sizes. The model includes demographic controls, treatment condition indicators, and participant recruitment sources, not shown here. The number of observations ($N = 2020$) represents the total number of policy evaluations (4 policies × 505 respondents), while *N* clusters indicates the number of unique respondents. Each respondent evaluated multiple policies, necessitating clustering at the respondent level for accurate standard error estimation.

***$p < 0.001$; **$p < 0.01$; *$p < 0.05$.

odds of supporting the progressive policy were significantly higher for those receiving the "Black voters support" cue compared to the control condition (odds ratio = 3.59, 95% CI [1.87, 7.04], $p = 0.00015$).

In terms of reform predictors, scoring high on racial sympathy predicts support for progressive reform (H2), controlling for all other covariates and experimental conditions (Table 5). Moreover, the predictive effect of racial sympathy is the only racial attitude related to progressive reform support.

Finally, about half of the respondents believed progressive criminal justice reform would benefit racial minorities. Hence, people might follow minorities more because they think the reform concerns them more. When asked whether the policies presented would benefit White people—or other groups of people of color (POC), about 48% of respondents (231 respondents) indicated they believed a criminal justice reform would benefit POC.[16] On the other hand, approximately 34% of respondents (164 respondents) indicated they believe the same reforms would benefit White people. Further, I find that respondents who believe reform would benefit POC do not believe it would also benefit White people, and vice versa; there is a statistically significant association between beliefs about the benefits of criminal justice reform for POC and White people (χ^2 (1, $N = 477$) = 231.74, $p < 0.001$; complete distribution in Table F.9 in the Supporting Information).

I find a perception gap: A belief that reform would benefit one group does not coincide with the belief that it would benefit the other. This gap suggests a cognitive mechanism for this article's findings. People might follow minorities more because they believe the reform concerns them more. When a policy is linked to a racial group, voters' attitudes toward that group shape their

[16] There is no difference in these responses between the racial and party group cues treatments.

TABLE 6 Summary of hypotheses and key findings.

Hypothesis	Key finding	Supporting evidence
H1: Negative relationship between reform support and negative racial attitudes	Supported: Higher racial resentment predicts lower support for progressive reforms	Study 1: Figure 6 shows declining reform support as racial resentment increases
H2: Positive relationship between reform support and positive racial attitudes	Supported: Higher racial sympathy predicts greater reform support	Study 2: Table 3 shows significant positive effect of racial sympathy
H3: Racial minorities follow cues from their racial group and Black voters	Partially supported: Strong response to Black voter cues, mixed response to own-group cues	Studies 1 and 2: Figures 3, 8 and 9 show significant effects of racial group cues
H4: White respondents response to racial cues depends on racial attitudes	Supported: Racial attitudes moderate White respondents' response to group cues	Study 2: Figure 9 shows heterogeneous effects by racial resentment levels

political beliefs (Elder & O'Brian, 2022). Indeed, moderated by positive (and negative, as per Study 1), both POC and White people are more likely to align with Black voters' support of a policy than any other information on group preferences (Table 6).

6 | DISCUSSION AND LIMITATIONS

This article's main findings are that criminal justice reform preferences are affected by respondents' information on their racial group preference and, conditional on respondents' pre-existing racial attitudes, general deference to Black voters. Unnever and Cullen (2009) connected punitiveness and individual empathy; in turn, the related justice theory emphasizes identifying with *a group's political cause*. Possibly, Whites' support of racial justice relates to their ability to identify with individuals who they perceive to be most affected by criminal justice disparities, a topic for future research. While empathetic identification theory focuses on individual-level psychological processes of identifying with offenders, this article's findings demonstrate the distinct mechanisms of related justice theory operating at the group level. Rather than personal empathy driving reform support, I find that perceptions of group-level impacts and racial justice considerations shape policy preferences. The effects of racial group cues and racial attitudes, combined with respondents' perception that reforms primarily benefit racial minorities, suggest that criminal justice reform support stems from broader intergroup dynamics, perhaps in addition to individual-level empathy. This group-level mechanism is directly supported by my finding that respondents view criminal justice reform through a group lens—48% believed reforms primarily benefit POC while only 34% saw benefits for White people, with almost no overlap between these perceptions.

This article's findings align with emerging research on the explanatory power of racial identity and attitudes in portions of the political criminal justice reform movement. On the one hand, support for reform relates to attitudes toward BLM (Boudreau et al., 2022; Jackson et al., 2023) and racial attitudes (Dunbar, 2020). On the other hand, providing participants with information about racial disparities in the prison population has no impact on their support for related policies (Dunbar, 2020). Similar to this article's results, Laterzo-Tingley and Christiani (2024), find that Democrat voters follow the Black candidate but not the White candidate's attitude on criminal justice reform. Democratic voters do not punish Black mayoral candidates for being tough

on crime, yet their White counterparts get penalized if they do not support reform. In addition, Laterzo-Tingley and Christiani (2024) also find evidence that deference to Black people's positions on crime policy is related to the perception that Black communities are disproportionately affected by the criminal justice system. More broadly, this article's findings are supported by recent findings regarding political mobilization; when an advantaged group had a supportive role in a political movement while disadvantaged group members led the movement, disadvantaged and advantaged group observers increased their support (Kutlaca et al., 2022). This effect was absent when the advantaged group members had a leadership role.

According to legal scholar Derrick Bell, racism in America is a permanent component of American society that has been institutionalized to maintain social hierarchy (Bell, 1992). Bell's theory of "interest convergence" posits that racial progress for Black Americans occurs only when it converges with the interests of White Americans and the broader power structure (Bell, 1980), suggesting that apparent advances are often conditional and reversible. This article is not *wholly* aligned with this more pessimistic view. The empirical findings presented here suggest that, under certain conditions, policy reforms—such as those in criminal justice—can garner genuine cross-racial support from White voters with low racial resentment who may perceive shared interests with racial minorities (Bobo & Thompson, 2010; Enns & Ramirez, 2018; Morris & LeCount, 2020). Even racist Whites may support reform, not out of solidarity, but because the reform is understood in a way that appears to serve their own goals, maintain social stability, or reinforce their group's status (Hutchings & Jardina, 2015). Indeed, these "peaks of progress" might be incremental and temporary, per Bell's theory.

The main limitations and avenues for future research include the need to keep tracking changes in racial attitudes as they evolve alongside a complex and dynamic political and social environment. Longitudinal studies can reflect how changes in racial attitudes relate to external events and impact political attitudes on criminal justice. Further, when using experimental conditions, respondents do not have real stakes in their judgments. I also focus on single group cues presented in isolation; Investigating how individuals process such conflicting information, and whether one cue source consistently dominates another, particularly among different subgroups based on racial attitudes, remains a crucial avenue for future research, which should strive to leverage real-world cues to estimate their effect on voting behavior.

7 | CONCLUSION

I show a positive relationship between support for criminal justice reform and racial justice attitudes. Possibly, because people believe that criminal justice reform would benefit racial minorities, people with positive racial attitudes will follow cues made by Black voters.

These findings have practical implications for criminal justice reform advocates and policymakers. First, reform campaigns might benefit from connecting their proposals to racial justice goals while highlighting support from Black voters. Second, organizations should consider that the effectiveness of their messaging may vary based on their audience's racial attitudes, suggesting the need for targeted communication strategies. Third, coalition-building efforts might be more successful when led by Black communities while maintaining support from other groups rather than attempting to build support primarily through partisan or other social group affiliations. Future research should examine how these strategies perform in real-world reform campaigns and electoral contexts.

Changes in racial attitudes matter most for the politics of criminal justice reform (Boudreau et al., 2019). As racial attitudes have become less hostile and awareness of the systemic racism in political and legal institutions has grown in some segments of the population (Engelhardt, 2023), future research should consider whether the correlation between positive changes in racial attitudes and the decline in tough-on-crime perspectives over time may be the result of criminal and racial justice relatedness in the public's mind. This is aligned with previous findings that support for police reform is tightly related to support for the BLM movement, surpassing and overcoming any effect of partisanship or elite (Black lawmakers and law enforcement agencies) cues (Boudreau et al., 2022). Furthermore, given the variance in racial attitudes among White respondents compared to non-White respondents, future research should investigate the heterogeneous effects on White respondents to better understand the role that racial attitudes play in supporting criminal justice reform.

An increasing number of political organizations now focus on transforming criminal justice politics. Therefore, understanding the "politics of downsizing" is crucial for advocacy organizations and activists developing a politically viable alternative to excessively harsh penal policies (Petersilia & Cullen, 2014). The potential success of progressive crime policies hinges on recognizing that voters do not rely on cost concerns, accurate information about crime rates, or straight-forward partisanship cues (Esberg et al., 2020). Racial attitudes and beliefs about the relationship between criminal justice and racial justice may be vital to achieving political reform.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Approved by the CPHS Protocol: 2021-06-14412; 2021-12-14903. The authors have no financial or nonfinancial interests to disclose and did not receive support from any organization for the submitted work. All the materials and preregistration are available online at: Study 1; Study 2.

ORCID


Dvir Yogev https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0466-9804

REFERENCES

Adkins, T., Layman, G. C., Campbell, D. E., & Green, J. C. (2013). Religious group cues and citizen policy attitudes in the United States. *Politics and Religion*, *6*, 235–263.

Agadjanian, A., Carey, J. M., Horiuchi, Y., & Ryan, T. J. (2023). Disfavor or favor? Assessing the valence of white Americans' racial attitudes. *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, *18*, 75–103. https://doi.org/10.1561/100.00021119

Arriola, L. R., Choi, D. D., & Gichohi, M. K. (2022). Increasing intergroup trust: Endorsements and voting in divided societies. *The Journal of Politics*, *84*, 2107–2122.

Bansak, K., Hainmueller, J., Hopkins, D. J., Yamamoto, T., Druckman, J. N., & Green, D. P. (2021). Conjoint survey experiments. In J. N. Druckman & D. P. Green (Eds.), *Advances in experimental political science* (pp. 19–41). Cambridge University Press.

Bansak, K., & Jenke, L. (2025). Odd profiles in conjoint experimental designs: Effects on survey-taking attention and behavior. *Political Analysis*, *33*(4), 315–338. https://doi.org/10.1017/pan.2025.1

Barber, M., & Pope, J. C. (2019). Does party trump ideology? Disentangling party and ideology in America. *American Political Science Review*, *113*, 38–54.

Barkan, S. E., & Cohn, S. F. (1994). Racial prejudice and support for the death penalty by whites. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, *31*, 202–209.

Bartels, L. M. (1992). Public opinion in America: Moods, cycles, and swings, by James A. Stimson, *Political Science Quarterly*, *107*(2), 364–365. https://doi.org/10.2307/2152684

Baumgartner, F. R., Caron, C., & Duxbury, S. (2023). Racial resentment and the death penalty. *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics*, *8*(1), 42–60. https://doi.org/10.1017/rep.2022.30

Bell, D. A. (1980). Brown v. Board of Education and the interest-convergence dilemma. *Harvard Law Review*, *93*, 518.

Bell, D. A. (1992). *Faces at the bottom of the well: The permanence of racism*. Basic Books.

Bobo, L. D., & Thompson, V. (2010). Racialized mass incarceration: Poverty, prejudice, and punishment. In H. R. Markus & P. M. L. Moya (Eds.), *Doing race: 21 essays for the 21st century* (pp. 322–355). Norton.

Boudreau, C., MacKenzie, S. A., & Simmons, D. J. (2019). Police violence and public perceptions: An experimental study of how information and endorsements affect support for law enforcement. *The Journal of Politics*, *81*, 1101–1110.

Boudreau, C., MacKenzie, S. A., & Simmons, D. J. (2022). Police violence and public opinion after George Floyd: How the Black Lives Matter movement and endorsements affect support for reforms. *Political Research Quarterly*, *75*, 497–511.

Brady, H. E., & Sniderman, P. M. (1985). Attitude attribution: A group basis for political reasoning. *American Political Science Review*, *79*, 1061–1078.

Brenan, M. (2020). Amid pandemic, confidence in key U.S. institutions surges. Retrieved October 30, 2023, from https://news.gallup.com/poll/317135/amid-pandemic-confidence-key-institutions-surges.aspx

Broockman, D. E., Kaufman, A. R., & Lenz, G. S. (2024). Heuristic projection: Why interest group cues may fail to help citizens hold politicians accountable. *British Journal of Political Science*, *54*(1), 69–87. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123423000078

Brown, E. K., & Socia, K. M. (2017). Twenty-first century punitiveness: Social sources of punitive American views reconsidered. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, *33*, 935–959.

Buckler, K., Wilson, S., & Salinas, P. R. (2009). Public support for punishment and progressive criminal justice policy preferences: The role of symbolic racism and negative racial stereotype. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, *34*, 238–252.

Bullock, J. G. (2020). Party cues. In E. Suhay, B. Grofman, & A. H. Trechsel (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of electoral persuasion, Oxford Handbooks* (pp. 129–150). Oxford Academic. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190860806.013.2

Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2023). Statistical tables on U.S. prisoners. Retrieved August 21, 2024, from https://bjs.ojp.gov/document/p22st.pdf

Cavaillé, C., & Neundorf, A. (2023). Elite cues and economic policy attitudes: The mediating role of economic hardship. *Political Behavior*, *45*, 1355–1376.

Chiricos, T., Pickett, J. T., & Lehmann, P. S. (2020). Group threat and social control: A review of theory and research. In C. Chouhy, J. C. Cochran, & C. L. Jonson (Eds.), *Criminal justice theory: Explanations and effects* (pp. 69–92). Springer.

Chudy, J. (2021). Racial sympathy and its political consequences. *The Journal of Politics*, *83*, 122–136.

Cohen, G. L. (2003). Party over policy: The dominating impact of group influence on political beliefs. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *85*, 808–822.

Cole, S. R., & Stuart, E. A. (2010). Generalizing evidence from randomized clinical trials to target populations: The ACTG 320 trial. *American Journal of Epidemiology*, *172*, 107–115.

Conover, P. J. (1984). The influence of group identifications on political perception and evaluation. *The Journal of Politics*, *46*, 760–785.

Conover, P. J. (1988). The role of social groups in political thinking. *British Journal of Political Science*, *18*, 51–76.

Converse, P. E. (2006). The nature of belief systems in mass publics (1964). *Critical Review*, *18*, 1–74.

Coppock, A. (2023). *Persuasion in parallel: How information changes minds about politics*. University of Chicago Press.

Coppock, A., & McClellan, O. A. (2019). Validating the demographic, political, psychological, and experimental results obtained from a new source of online survey respondents. *Research & Politics*, *6*(1), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1177/2053168018822174

Cullen, F. T., Butler, L. C., & Graham, A. (2021). Racial attitudes and criminal justice policy. *Crime and Justice*, *50*, 163–245.

Dawson, M. C. (2001). *Black visions: The roots of contemporary African-American political ideologies*. University of Chicago Press.

De la Cuesta, B., Egami, N., & Imai, K. (2022). Improving the external validity of conjoint analysis: The essential role of profile distribution. *Political Analysis*, *30*, 19–45.

DeSante, C. D., & Smith, C. W. (2019). *Racial stasis: The millennial generation and the stagnation of racial attitudes in American politics*. University of Chicago Press.
DeSante, C. D., & Smith, C. W. (2020). Fear, institutionalized racism, and empathy: The underlying dimensions of whites' racial attitudes. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, *53*, 639–645.
Djupe, P. A., & Gilbert, C. P. (2008). *The political influence of churches*. Cambridge University Press.
Doherty, D., Dowling, C. M., Miller, M. G., & Tuma, M. D. (2022). Race, crime, and the public's sentencing preferences. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *86*(S1), 523–546.
Drakulich, K., Wozniak, K. H., Hagan, J., & Johnson, D. (2021). Whose lives mattered? How White and Black Americans felt about Black Lives Matter in 2016. *Law & Society Review*, *55*, 227–251.
Dunbar, A. (2020). Follow the money: Racial crime stereotypes and willingness to fund crime control policies. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, *26*, 476–489.
Dunbar, A. (2022). Arguing for criminal justice reform: Examining the effects of message framing on policy preferences. *Justice Quarterly*, *39*, 1524–1544. https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2022.2038243
Dunbar, A., Kupchik, A., Hughes, C., & Lewis, R. (2022). Fear of a Black (and poor) school: Race, class, and school safety policy preferences. *Race and Justice*, *12*, 344–367.
Duxbury, S. W. (2021a). Who controls criminal law? Racial threat and the adoption of state sentencing law, 1975 to 2012. *American Sociological Review*, *86*, 123–153.
Duxbury, S. W. (2021b). Whose vote counts for crime policy? Group opinion and public representation in mass incarceration, 1970–2015. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *85*(3), 780–807.
Egami, N., & Hartman, E. (2023). Elements of external validity: Framework, design, and analysis. *American Political Science Review*, *117*(3), 1070–1088.
Elder, E. M., & O'Brian, N. A. (2022). Social groups as the source of political belief systems: Fresh evidence on an old theory. *American Political Science Review*, *116*, 1407–1424.
Engelhardt, A. M. (2019). Trumped by race: Explanations for race's influence on whites' votes in 2016. *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, *14*, 313–328.
Engelhardt, A. M. (2023). Observational equivalence in explaining attitude change: Have white racial attitudes genuinely changed? *American Journal of Political Science*, *67*, 411–425. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12665
Enns, P. K. (2016). *Incarceration nation*. Cambridge University Press.
Enns, P. K., & Ramirez, M. D. (2018). Privatizing punishment: Testing theories of public support for private prison and immigration detention facilities. *Criminology*, *56*, 546–573.
Esberg, J., & Mummolo, J. (2018). Explaining misperceptions of crime. Unpublished manuscript. Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=3208303
Esberg, J., Mummolo, J., & Westwood, S. J. (2020). The stability of criminal justice policy views: Evaluating the effects of factual corrections and appeals to social identity. Unpublished manuscript.
Forman, J. Jr. (2017). *Locking up our own: Crime and punishment in Black America*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
Ghandnoosh, N., & Barry, C. (2023). *One in five: Disparities in crime and policing*. The Sentencing Project. Retrieved from https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/one-in-five-disparities-in-crime-and-policing/
Gilliam, F. D. Jr., & Iyengar, S. (2000). Prime suspects: The influence of local television news on the viewing public. *American Journal of Political Science*, *44*, 560.
Gottschalk, M. (2006). *The prison and the gallows: The politics of mass incarceration in America*. Cambridge University Press.
Green, D. P., Palmquist, B., & Schickler, E. (2004). *Partisan hearts and minds: Political parties and the social identities of voters*. Yale University Press.
Hainmueller, J., Hopkins, D. J., & Yamamoto, T. (2014). Causal inference in conjoint analysis: Understanding multidimensional choices via stated preference experiments. *Political Analysis*, *22*, 1–30.
Hannan, K. R., Cullen, F. T., Butler, L. C., Graham, A., Burton, A. L., & Burton, V. S. Jr. (2022). Racial sympathy and support for capital punishment: A case study in concept transfer. *Deviant Behavior*, *43*, 780–803.
Hopkins, D. J., & Washington, S. (2020). The rise of Trump, the fall of prejudice? Tracking white Americans' racial attitudes via a panel survey, 2008–2018. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *84*, 119–140.
Hurwitz, J., & Peffley, M. (2005). Playing the race card in the post–Willie Horton era: The impact of racialized code words on support for punitive crime policy. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *69*, 99–112.
Hutchings, V. L., & Jardina, A. E. (2015). Experiments on racial priming in political campaigns. *Annual Review of Political Science*, *18*, 401–419.

Jackson, J., Fine, A., Bradford, B., & Trinkner, R. (2023). Social identity and support for defunding the police in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, *26*, 833–858.

Jardina, A., & Ollerenshaw, T. (2022). The polls—Trends: The polarization of white racial attitudes and support for racial equality in the U.S. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *86*(S1), 576–587.

Jefferson, H. (2019). Policing norms: Punishment and the politics of respectability among Black Americans *(Doctoral dissertation)*. University of Michigan.

Jefferson, H. (2023). The politics of respectability and Black Americans' punitive attitudes. *American Political Science Review*, *117*, 1448–1464. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055422001289

Jefferson, H., Neuner, F. G., & Pasek, J. (2021). Seeing blue in Black and White: Race and perceptions of officer-involved shootings. *Perspectives on Politics*, *19*, 1165–1183.

Kam, C. D., & Burge, C. D. (2018). Uncovering reactions to the racial resentment scale across the racial divide. *The Journal of Politics*, *80*, 314–320.

Kinder, D. R., & Sanders, L. M. (1996). *Divided by color: Racial politics and democratic ideals*. University of Chicago Press.

Krosnick, J. A., Visser, P. S., & Harder, J. (2010). The psychological underpinnings of political behavior. In S. T. Fiske, D. T. Gilbert, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *Handbook of social psychology* (5th ed. pp. 1288–1342). Wiley.

Krysan, M., & Moberg, S. (2016). *Trends in racial attitudes*. University of Illinois Institute of Government and Public Affairs.

Kutlaca, M., Radke, H. R., & Becker, J. C. (2022). The impact of including advantaged groups in collective action against social inequality on politicized identification of observers from disadvantaged and advantaged groups. *Political Psychology*, *43*, 297–315.

Laterzo-Tingley, I., & Christiani, L. (2024). The 'tough-on-crime' left: Race, gender, and elections of law-and-order Democrats. *Research & Politics*, *11*(3), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1177/20531680241261765

Lee, T. (2002). *Mobilizing public opinion: Black insurgency and racial attitudes in the civil rights era*. University of Chicago Press.

Leeper, T. J., Hobolt, S. B., & Tilley, J. (2020). Measuring subgroup preferences in conjoint experiments. *Political Analysis*, *28*, 207–221.

Leeper, T. J., & Slothuus, R. (2014). Political parties, motivated reasoning, and public opinion formation. *Political Psychology*, *35*, 129–156.

Mason, L. (2018). *Uncivil agreement: How politics became our identity*. University of Chicago Press.

Mendelberg, T. (1997). Executing Hortons: Racial crime in the 1988 presidential campaign. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, *61*, 134–157.

Mendelberg, T. (2017). *The race card*. Princeton University Press.

Messner, S. F., Baumer, E. P., & Rosenfeld, R. (2006). Distrust of government, the vigilante tradition, and support for capital punishment. *Law & Society Review*, *40*, 559–590.

Miller, A. H., Wlezien, C., & Hildreth, A. (1991). A reference group theory of partisan coalitions. *The Journal of Politics*, *53*, 1134–1149.

Miratrix, L. W., Sekhon, J. S., Theodoridis, A. G., & Campos, L. F. (2018). Worth weighting? How to think about and use weights in survey experiments. *Political Analysis*, *26*, 275–291.

Morris, R. C., & LeCount, R. J. (2020). The value of social control: Racial resentment, punitiveness, and white support for spending on law enforcement. *Sociological Perspectives*, *63*, 697–718.

Nelson, T. E., & Kinder, D. R. (1996). Issue frames and group-centrism in American public opinion. *The Journal of Politics*, *58*, 1055–1078.

Nicholson, S. P. (2012). Polarizing cues. *American Journal of Political Science*, *56*, 52–66.

Nordø, Å. D. (2021). Do voters follow? The effect of party cues on public opinion during a process of policy change. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, *44*, 45–66.

Pager, D. (2008). *Marked: Race, crime, and finding work in an era of mass incarceration*. University of Chicago Press.

Petersilia, J., & Cullen, F. T. (2014). Liberal but not stupid: Meeting the promise of downsizing prisons. *Stanford Journal of Criminal Law and Policy*, *2*, 1–43.

Pew Research Center. (2015). More Americans say changes needed to achieve racial equality. Retrieved October 30, 2023, from https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2015/08/05/across-racial-lines-more-say-nation-needs-to-make-changes-to-achieve-racial-equality/

Pew Research Center. (2020a). Amid protests, majorities across racial and ethnic groups express support for the Black Lives Matter movement. Retrieved October 30, 2023, from https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/06/12/amid-protests-majorities-across-racial-and-ethnic-groups-express-support-for-the-black-lives-matter-movement/

Pew Research Center. (2020b). Majority of public favors giving civilians the power to sue police officers for misconduct. Retrieved October 30, 2023, from https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2020/07/09/majority-of-public-favors-giving-civilians-the-power-to-sue-police-officers-for-misconduct/

Ramirez, M. D. (2013). Punitive sentiment. *Criminology*, *51*, 329–364.

Rice, D., Rhodes, J., & Nteta, T. (2022). Same as it ever was? The impact of racial resentment on white juror decision-making. *The Journal of Politics*, *84*, 1202–1206.

Schaffner, B., Ansolabehere, S., & Luks, S. (2021). Cooperative Election Study Common Content, 2020 [Data set]. Harvard Dataverse. https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/E9N6PH

Shirley, K. E., & Gelman, A. (2015). Hierarchical models for estimating state and demographic trends in U.S. death penalty public opinion. *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society: Series A (Statistics in Society)*, *178*, 1–28.

Sinclair, B. (2012). *The social citizen: Peer networks and political behavior*. University of Chicago Press.

Smith, K. B. (2004). The politics of punishment: Evaluating political explanations of incarceration rates. *The Journal of Politics*, *66*, 925–938.

Stephens-Dougan, L. (2021). The persistence of racial cues and appeals in American elections. *Annual Review of Political Science*, *24*, 301–320. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-082619-015522

Stimson, J. A. (2004). *Tides of consent: How public opinion shapes American politics*. Cambridge University Press.

Stimson, J. A., Mackuen, M. B., & Erikson, R. S. (1995). Dynamic representation. *American Political Science Review*, *89*, 543–565.

Stinchcombe, A. L., Adams, R., Heimer, C. A., Scheppele, K. L., Smith, T. W., & Taylor, D. G. (1980). *Crime and punishment: Changing attitudes in America*. Jossey-Bass.

Suhay, E. (2015). Explaining group influence: The role of identity and emotion in political conformity and polarization. *Political Behavior*, *37*, 221–251.

Suhay, E., Grofman, B., & Trechsel, A. H. (2020). *The Oxford handbook of electoral persuasion*. Oxford University Press.

Tappin, B. M., Berinsky, A. J., & Rand, D. G. (2023). Partisans' receptivity to persuasive messaging is undiminished by countervailing party leader cues. *Nature Human Behaviour*, *7*(4), 568–582.

Thielo, A. J., Cullen, F. T., Cohen, D. M., & Chouhy, C. (2016). Rehabilitation in a red state. *Criminology & Public Policy*, *15*, 137–170.

Tonry, M. (2011). *Punishing race: A continuing American dilemma*. Oxford University Press.

Trahan, A., & Laird, K. (2018). The nexus between attribution theory and racial attitudes: A test of racial attribution and public opinion of capital punishment. *Criminal Justice Studies*, *31*, 352–367.

Unnever, J. D., & Cullen, F. T. (2009). Empathetic identification and punitiveness: A middle-range theory of individual differences. *Theoretical Criminology*, *13*, 283–312.

Unnever, J. D., & Cullen, F. T. (2010). The social sources of Americans' punitiveness: A test of three competing models. *Criminology*, *48*, 99–129.

Unnever, J. D., Cullen, F. T., & Jonson, C. L. (2008). Race, racism, and support for capital punishment. *Crime and Justice*, *37*, 45–96.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2023). American Community Survey 2022, 1-year estimates, Table S2603. Retrieved from https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2022.S2603?q=S2603

Valenzuela, A. A., & Reny, T. T. (2021). Evolution of experiments on racial priming. In J. N. Druckman & D. P. Green (Eds.), *Advances in experimental political science* (pp. 447–467). Cambridge University Press.

Weaver, V. M. (2007). Frontlash: Race and the development of punitive crime policy. *Studies in American Political Development*, *21*, 230–265.

White, I. K. (2007). When race matters and when it doesn't: Racial group differences in response to racial cues. *American Political Science Review*, *101*, 339–354.

Wozniak, K. H. (2023). *The politics of crime prevention: Race, public opinion, and the meaning of community safety*. New York University Press.

Zaller, J. (2012). What nature and origins leaves out. *Critical Review: A Journal of Politics and Society*, *24*, 569–642.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

How to cite this article: Yogev, D. (2025). How do people react to policy reform? Group cues and persuasion in criminal justice. *Criminology*, 1–32. https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9125.70032

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Dvir Yogev is a postdoctoral researcher at University of California Berkeley's Criminal Law & Justice Center. He holds a PhD in Jurisprudence and Social Policy from UC Berkeley.