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# How Wide is the Arc of Racial Solidarity? People of Color and Middle Easterners and North Africans

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## Abstract

Emerging work suggests that Blacks, Asians, and Latinos sometimes share a strong sense of solidarity as *people of color* (PoC), which unifies their political opinions on issues that strongly implicate some of these racial groups (e.g., Black Lives Matter). Yet much uncertainty remains about whether other non-White groups, beyond these traditional three, are compelled to engage in politics as PoC via this same mechanism. We investigate this with two studies focused on Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) individuals: a minoritized group with deep U.S. roots, but sparse theoretical and empirical attention in political science. Study 1 draws on in-depth interviews with MENA adults (*N*=20), who suggest that, insofar as they sense solidarity with other *people of color*, it is because they feel racially marginalized as *foreigners*. Study 2 builds on this insight with a pre-registered experiment on MENA adults (*N*=514), which randomly assigned them to read an article about *Latinos*, who are also marginalized as *foreign* (vs. control article). We find that exposure to treatment reliably heightens MENAs' expression of solidarity with other PoC, which then significantly boosts support for flexible policies toward undocumented immigrants (which implicate Latinos, but not MENAs) and reduces belief in negative stereotypes of Latinos.

The 2020 U.S. Census has made one thing crystal clear: America is significantly more racially diverse than it was 10 years earlier.[1] Although much media attention has focused on the observed decline of non-Hispanic Whites, there has been an even more remarkable increase in the proportion of *people of color* (PoC), with African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos now representing 37% of the United States population (Bahrampour and Mellnik 2021). Many White individuals believe this increase in PoC augurs greater political power for minoritized groups *at the expense* of Whites (Knowles, Tropp, and Mogami 2021; Jardina 2019). Yet prior work suggests that political unity among *people of color* is difficult to harness toward civic ends because Blacks, Asians, and Latinos hail from distinct groups who arrived to the U.S. under different conditions; are treated in assorted ways by U.S. society; and, have varied political priorities (e.g., Carter 2019; Benjamin 2017; Wilkinson 2015; Mora 2014; Masuoka and Junn 2013; Kim 2003; Tuan 1998).

One mechanism that seems to achieve greater political unity among PoC is intraminority *solidarity*: a sharpened sense of bond and commitment to an ingroup in an immediate situation, which is "associated with approaching the ingroup and group-based activity" (Leach et al. 2008: 147). Here, a greater sense of camaraderie between Asians, Blacks, and Latinos is triggered when these groups recognize some of the similar ways they are marginalized, such as the stereotyping of Asians and Latinos as *foreigners* (Zou and Cheryan 2017; Cortland et al. 2017 Craig and Richeson 2012). In light of increased solidarity, PoC become more supportive of policies that implicate other minoritized groups beyond their own (Pérez 2021a, 2021b; Pérez et al. 2021).

While this evidence highlights the viability of this intergroup mechanism, less certain is whether the observed

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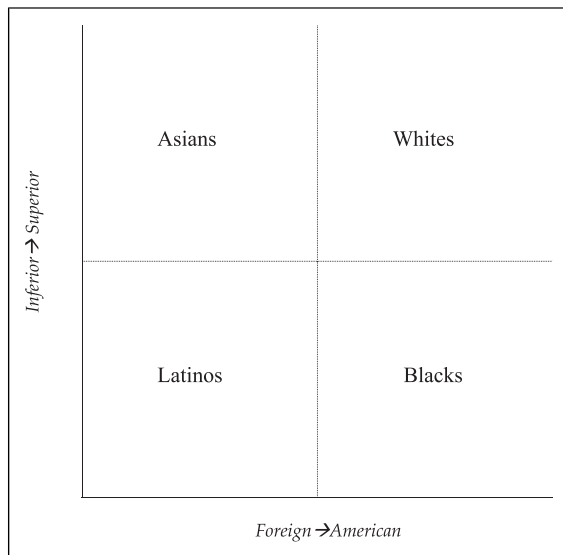Email: perezeo@ucla.edu

**Figure 1.** Two axes of subordination. *Note:* Adapted from Zou and Cheryan's (2017) racial position model (RPM).

solidarity between *people of color* is a function of the three traditional groups—Asians, Blacks, and Latinos—who are often studied in this work or whether this pathway from similar marginalization, to solidarity, to interminority unity is broadly applicable to other racially minoritized groups (e.g., Middle Easterners and North Africans). Two major obstacles limit scholars' ability to clarify this blind spot.

First, there is the challenge of conceptualization. Although it has long been established that PoC are socially, economically, and politically disadvantaged with respect to Whites (Bobo and Hutchings 1996; Sidanius et al. 1997; Kim 2003; Masuoka and Junn 2013), newer work suggests that the sources of this marginalization vary between these groups (e.g., Pérez 2021a, 2021b). As Zou and Cheryan (2017) explain, people of color in the U.S. are generally marginalized along two dimensions in America's racial hierarchy: how *inferior-superior* and how *foreign-American* are they considered to be?

As depicted in Figure 1, Whites are ranked as the most *superior* and *American* racial group. In turn, while Black and Latino individuals are both stereotyped as *inferior* with respect to Whites, Black people are construed as a more *American* minority than Latinos and Asians (Carter 2019). In turn, while Asian Americans and Latinos are both stereotyped as *foreigners*, Asian individuals are considered more *superior* than both Latinos and Blacks, as indicated by the *model minority* myth: the stereotype that all Asian individuals are socio-economically well-off and less impertinent than other non-Whites (Tuan 1998; Kim 2003; Xu and Lee 2013).

This differentiation in social rankings implies that America's hierarchy contains some keys to achieving

greater solidarity between people of color. For example, although Asian Americans are deemed a *superior* minority and Latinos are construed as an *inferior* group, individuals from both communities are similarly stereotyped as *perpetual foreigners* (Tuan 1998; Kim 2003; Zou and Cheryan 2017; Lacayo 2017; Reny and Barreto 2020). For this reason, Zou and Cheryan (2017: 698) suggest that "[s]olidarity may be easier to achieve between groups that…have similar resulting experiences with prejudice"—a prediction borne out by some research (Craig et al. 2021; Pérez 2021a, 2021b; Pérez et al. 2021).

Nevertheless, this work is less clear about whether this psychological process generalizes to other non-White groups who receive less theoretical and empirical attention than African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos. Consider the case of Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) individuals, whose exact location in America's racial order is a focus of ongoing research (Chaney, Sanchez, and Saud 2021; Lajevardi 2020).[2] While the label MENA is of more recent vintage, individuals from this broad region have been immigrating to the U.S. since at least the late 1800s (Tehranian 2008; Naff 1985). Across this time span, MENA people have been racially classified as *White*, but without the full privileges of being categorized into this racial majority (Lajevardi 2020; Maghbouleh 2017; Cainkar 2008; Abdulrahim 2008). This pattern began in the early 1900s when some MENAs were legally categorized as *White* (Jacobson 1998), but socially ostracized like the many southern and eastern European immigrants settling in the U.S. at the time (King 2000). This trend has become more acute following the Twin Tower attacks of September 2001, after which many MENA individuals became lightning rods for anti-terrorism policies and Islamaphobic stereotypes and sentiments (Lajevardi 2020; Lajevardi and Abrajano 2019; Lajevardi and Oskooii 2018; Terman 2017; Powell 2011; Jamal 2008; Shaheen 2003).[3]

This liminal status of MENAs as formally *White*—but informally racialized as outsiders—suggests that similar to Asian Americans, MENAs are ranked in the racial order as *foreign*, but socially *superior* to their Latino and Black peers. Other work, however, suggests that some MENAs (e.g., Arab individuals) are construed as both *foreign* and *inferior*, similar to many Latinos (Zou and Cheryan 2017). Although the exact ranking of MENAs in America's racial hierarchy is still a matter of investigation, what is clear is that they are systematically marginalized as *foreigners* and *un-American* (e.g., Lajevardi 2020; Lajevardi and Abrajano 2019; Naber 2000), despite their official categorization as *White*. This status may therefore lead MENA individuals to view themselves as a minoritized group. If true, then this sense of *foreignness* might encourage a belief that one is a person of color, comparable to Blacks, Asians, and Latinos (e.g., Pérez 2021a, 2021b; Perez et al.

2021; Sirin, Valentino, and Villalobos 2021; Merseth 2018; Simon and Klandermans 2001).

But even with testable propositions about how being marginalized as *foreign* affects the racial politics of MENA individuals, empirical appraisal of these claims is severely handicapped by a lack of rich data on MENAs. Similar to other minoritized groups (e.g., Native Americans, Asian Americans), MENA individuals are a hard-to-reach population due to a lack of clear sampling frames and/or high financial cost to survey them (see Lajevardi 2020). These hurdles are often used to explain why MENAs are sparsely attended to by various literatures, including political psychology, political behavior, and even race/ethnicity and politics (Chaney et al. 2021; Lajevardi 2020: 11–14). Moreover, MENAs' legal classification as *White* complicates this trend, as it encourages the erasure of this minoritized group from studies of race, ethnicity, and politics in the U.S. (Naber 2000). But with the growth of people of color, obtaining an empirical grasp of MENA politics in interminority settings is critical to our collective understanding of American politics more generally (Pérez 2021a, 2021b).

In this paper, we undertake a systematic effort to improve on these conceptual, theoretical, and empirical blind spots involving MENA individuals in the U.S. In terms of conceptualization, we undertook a small set of in-depth interviews with MENA adults to sharpen our sense of how MENAs view themselves racially and how they see themselves with respect to other *people of color*, such as African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos. These conversations suggest that MENAs recognize their classification as "barely" *White* and *foreign*, and that this marginal status is precisely what instills in them a sense of grievance as a minoritized group (cf. Simon and Klandermans 2001; Pérez and Vicuña in press).

We used these qualitative insights to develop Study 2: a pre-registered experiment with MENA adults, conducted on a national online sample. Here, MENA participants read an article describing how another group, Latinos, is still marginalized as *foreign*, similar to MENA people (vs. control article). Post-treatment, participants answered items gauging their solidarity with *people of color*, their support for policies that implicate MENAs (i.e., anti-terror policies), their endorsement of policies that implicate Latinos (i.e., undocumented immigration), and their belief in stereotypes related to both MENAs and Latinos. We find, consistent with our in-depth interviews, that exposure to treatment significantly increases a sense of solidarity with *people of color* among MENAs, which then substantially increases their support for policies that implicate Latinos and reduces their belief in negative stereotypes about this racial outgroup. We conclude by discussing the implications of these results for theory-building as it relates to knowledge about interminority politics in the U.S.

## Study 1: In-Depth Interviews with MENA Individuals

Although in-depth interviews cannot yield a broadly representative portrait of any population (Charmaz 2014; Rubin and Rubin 2012), we follow the lead of other qualitative researchers by using these conversations to sharpen our conceptualization of MENAs' perceptions of themselves vis-à-vis other *people of color*, such as African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans (e.g., Carter 2019; Zepeda-Millan 2017; Parker 2009). We view these in-depth interviews as a way to refine our understanding of the category, *people of color*, in terms of its intension and extension (Adcock and Collier 2001; Sartori 1970). Intension refers to the meaning of a concept (e.g., *people of color*) and extension refers to the range of cases it applies to (e.g., Blacks, Latinos, MENAs). Prior work suggests that non-White individuals claim to being a *person of color* is based on a sense that their own ingroup is racially disadvantaged with respect to Whites (Pérez 2021a, 2021b). However, most of this work centers on African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos, which makes it unclear whether other non-White groups (e.g., MENAs) view *people of color* as a category that is applicable to them. If we find affirming evidence in these interviews, then we will infer that the meaning of *people of color* is preserved even as it is extended to include other non-White groups such as MENAs.

Study 1's sample consists of 20 interviews with self-identified MENA adults, who were recruited via a snowballing technique by the first author during late fall 2020 and early winter 2021. Section 1 of the supplementary information (SI) contains a breakdown of basic demographics for these individuals, as well as the instrumentation that the first author used to guide each dialogue. Table SI.1 indicates this sample is primarily female, consisting of generally young, U.S.-born MENAs from varied national origins. Whether the conceptual insights that emerge here apply more broadly to MENAs is a topic we address directly in Study 2. All these interviews were IRB-approved and conducted virtually, via Zoom, to adhere to local public health protocols related to the COVID-19 pandemic (cf. Rosenfeld et al. 2021). In our discussion of these conversations below, we attribute our remarks to individuals who are identified by a pseudonym (to protect their privacy), their national origin, and nativity.

### Study 1 Results

What do we learn from these conversations? One theme that emerged is how our interviewees apply the label, *people of color*, to themselves. According to some individuals in our sample, they believe MENA people merit the label *PoC* because they are often treated as *foreigners*

in the U.S., manifested most sharply in their stereotyping as *terrorists*, especially after the 9/11 attacks. This yoking of *foreign* and *terrorist* stereotypes onto MENA individuals aligns with prior work (e.g., Lajevardi 2020; Terman 2017; Powell 2011; Jamal 2008; Shaheen 2003). What is new here is the direct link established by some of our interviewees between being marginalized as *foreign* and one's self-categorization as a *person of color*.

For example, Hussein Khoury (Lebanon, U.S.-born) explained that he sees himself as a *person of color* because he has "hardships just like other PoC," including the stigma of speaking Arabic and directly experiencing Islamophobia. Hussein is the only male in our sample, but his viewpoint was affirmed by females like Seyyedeh Ahmadi (Iran, U.S.-born), who observed that, although the U.S. Census classifies her as racially *White*, "I'm not given the same privileges as a *White* person, which is why I consider myself *PoC*." This was echoed by Marwa Ahmed (Egyptian, U.S.-born), another female, who shared that "your experience as Egyptian in the U.S. is quite different from a White person's."

While these insights imply that some MENAs consider themselves *people of color* because they are marked as *foreign*, the individuals just quoted are, in fact, all U.S.-born children of MENA immigrants. This highlights how "sticky" the label *foreigner* is for a heterogeneous community like MENAs, some of whom can trace their arrival to the U.S. to the early 1900s (e.g., Naff 1985; Jacobson 1998). This stigmatization as *outsiders* allows some of our MENA interviewees to cognitively connect themselves to other *PoC*. For example, Amal Saad (Lebanon, U.S.-born), Eman Abu (Saudi Arabia, immigrant), and Iman Awad (Palestine, U.S.-born) all linked MENAs' immigrant experience to *people of color*, with Iman saying that what qualifies her as *PoC* is "coming to America from a non-European nation or if your parents are immigrants." For Iman, this complicates things for U.S.-born MENA like her because it's unclear "how many generations you have to be in the U.S. before you stop being an immigrant," thus highlighting how challenging it is for some MENA individuals to escape this stigma (Miller and Major 2000).

Nevertheless, it is important to point out that establishing a link to the category *PoC* is not the same thing as personally identifying as a *person of color*. Indeed, we observed substantial variation in the degree to which *person of color* is central to our respondents' sense of identification (Ellemers et al. 1997). This pattern aligns with our view of an identity as an individual-level difference, where some identify more strongly with a category, others less so, and still others somewhere in between (Pérez and Vicuna in press). For example, consider Marwa Ahmed (Egyptian, U.S.-born), who expressed that "I do think of myself as a *person of color*"

because it is a category that she views as encompassing anyone in the U.S. "who is not White." This meshes with the outlooks of Iman Awad (Palestine, U.S.-born), who expressed that "I identify as a *person of color*," a label that applies to "anyone who is not European"; while Amal Saad (Lebanaon, U.S.-born) said "I would include Arabs and Middle Eastern folks in that group, *PoC*." Finally, Amal Saad (Lebanon, U.S.-born) simply went one step further and stated that "while I don't identify as *White*, I do identify as a *person of color*."

Amal's specific contrasting of *Whites* against *PoC* fits with prior work (Pérez 2021a, 2021b) and resonates with MENAs' historic classification as racially *White*, despite not being treated fully as such (Chaney et al. 2021; Maghbouleh 2017; Cainkar 2008; Abdulrahim 2008; Tehranian 2008). Although some might be tempted to conclude that MENAs actually identify (rather than just self-classify) as *White*, Amal's, Marwa's, and Iman's comments suggest many MENAs more likely identify as a minoritized group, with grievances around their perceived disadvantages, which revolve around the alleged *foreignness* of all MENAs. Consistent with this view, in 2015 the U.S. Census conducted an internal study that tested a MENA option in that bureau's traditional racial classification menu, similar to the Latino option now provided (Mora 2014). Although eventually not adopted, the study yielded clear evidence that, in absence of a MENA option, roughly 86% of sampled individuals who trace their ancestry to this region classified themselves as *White*" (Mathews et al. 2017). Yet with a MENA option available, that figure plummeted to 20%. This sharp decline is inconsistent with the notion that most MENAs self-classify *and* identify racially as *White*, but it affirms the view that MENAs generally see themselves as a unique minoritized group, which is a key consideration for many people of color (Pérez 2021a, 2021b). Furthermore, new work by d'Urso (2021) indicates that non-Hispanic Whites *do not* cognitively associate MENAs with the category, *White* (see also Chaney et al. 2021), which underlines the marginalization of MENAs as *foreign* and outside of the highest-status racial group in America's racial order (Zou and Cheryan 2017).

Even so, the embrace of the category *PoC* was not straightforward for all of our interviewees. When asked whether they personally identify as a *person of color*, Fatima Khaled (Syria, U.S.-born) equivocally answered "yes and no." This tension was driven by several forces among our interviewees like her. One is simply that self-classifying as *White* via the census and other state agencies comes with relatively less risk of being labeled an *outsider*, which helps some MENA to cope with their ethnic group's stigma (Miller and Major 2000). This is why Zahra Mohammadi (Iran, U.S.-born) shared that "on paper, I always check off the White box, even if I don't get

as many privileges as real Whites." This broad sentiment is known to undermine the cohesion of minoritized groups (Major and Schmader 1998) and often encourages members to narrowly focus on their own ingroup at the expense of coalitions with other similarly stationed outgroups (Tajfel and Turner 1986).

Beyond this instrumental reason to dissociate from *PoC* (cf. Tajfel and Turner 1986), other MENA interviewees lamented that Blacks, Asians, and Latinos don't really understand the unique struggles of MENA people, a common criticism leveled by people of color at other minoritized groups (e.g., Carter 2019; Pérez 2021a, 2021b). For instance, Alexandra Sargsyan (Armenia, U.S.-born) noted how her peers at a primarily Latino high school "didn't even know that Armenia was a country, so that would make me really angry." For reasons like this, Seyyedeh Ahmadi (Iran, U.S.-born) said it is unsurprising that "when *people of color* are mentioned, other racial minorities, besides MENA, come to mind." This observation is consistent with work showing that a feeling that one's ingroup is disrespected or undervalued limits the ability for some individuals to engage in collective action with others (e.g., Huo, Binning, and Begeny 2014; Huo and Binning 2008). Taken together, these insights highlight the challenge of achieving greater political unity among various *peoples of color*, who differ in terms of their arrival and trajectory in the U.S., and who more often feel that their group is distinctive from other minoritized groups (Pérez 2021a, 2021b), even if they share some social disadvantages.

We close our discussion of these in-depth conversations by highlighting one last theme: how our MENA interviewees perceive their position among *people of color* and their rank within America's racial hierarchy. Many of our interviewees were quick to identify African Americans as the best exemplar of a *person of color*, which echoes reports from Asian and Latino individuals (Pérez 2021a, 2021b). When asked who they think of first when they hear the label, *people of color*, Zahra Mohammadi (Iran, U.S.-born) said "I think about Black people first," while Lauren Grigoryan (Armenian, U.S.-born) said "I definitely think African American, and then like indigenous people," and Leila Hosseini (Iran, immigrant) said "African American people." This implies that, although these interviewees deem themselves a minoritized group, they do not see themselves as disadvantaged as their African American counterparts (Pérez 2021a, 2021b).

This sense is partly rooted in reality. Many MENA individuals, like some Asian Americans, consist of descendants of immigrants, some of whom arrived here in the late 1800s and some who entered more recently. Many MENA families are spearheaded by immigrant parents with more socio-economic capital, such as education, than other minoritized groups, such as Latinos. For example,

according to estimates from the 2017 American Community Survey, reported by the Arab American Institute, the household income in Arab households was $60,398 that year, similar to the median household income for all U.S. households. However, average *individual* income for Arab Americans was 26% higher than the national average. These results, along with our interviewees' insights, point to MENAs as an ethnic group that is ostracized as *foreign* and *un-American*, but possibly one whose perceived social *inferiority* is less intense, which would complicate their ability to express solidarity with other *people of color*, like Latinos and African Americans, who are considered the most socially *inferior* groups in the U.S.

## Discussion

Study 1 affirms some elements of prior work, while also sensitizing us to a possible conceptual relationship between MENA individuals, their lived experience, and their sense of connection with other *people of color*. In particular, a belief that MENA individuals are marginalized as *foreign* lead some adults in our sample to establish a direct cognitive link between themselves and *people of color*. This implies that the raw material to forge a tighter political connection between MENAs and *people of color* exists, although it is not a constant, as indicated by the hesitation that some of our interviewees expressed about bonding with other non-White groups. In Study 2, we extend this insight and test whether MENA adults can sense more solidarity with PoC under certain conditions.

## Study 2: Testing When and Why MENAs Unify with PoC

In June 2021, we partnered with Dynata, an online survey platform, to recruit MENA adults to a pre-registered survey experiment of ours (see SI.2). We designed this experiment to test two hypotheses: (H1) exposure to information about another non-White group that is similarly marginalized as *foreign* will heighten MENAs' sense of solidarity with other *people of color*; and (H2) an increase in solidarity with *PoC* will motivate MENA adults to express more generous political attitudes toward communities of color that are not their own. These hypotheses presume that MENA individuals see themselves as a distinct minority group that is racialized along religious and linguistic lines, which aligns with growing work on MENA individuals (e.g., Naber 2000; Chaney et al. 2021; d'Urso 2021).

We asked Dynata to make our survey experiment available to all known panelists who are MENAs, which we confirmed with an initial question asking about their family's national origins. SI.3 lists all MENA countries

that were eligible for inclusion. Our efforts yielded $N$=514 MENA adults with roots in various nations across this broad region. S.4 shows that not one national origin prevails among our participants, with 66% of our sample tracing their origins to Algeria, Egypt, Kuwait, Oman, and Yemen (see also Lajevardi 2020). SI.4 further reveals a sample of primarily U.S.-born (86%), relatively educated (48% with college degree or higher) MENA individuals, with rich variation in gender (44% female) and age (mean age, 48 years). All interviews were completed in English. Thus, we can think of any results here as generalizing toward self-identified MENA who are primarily U.S.-born, comparable to other minoritized groups, such as Latinos. We return to this issue in the conclusion when we discuss the implications of our results.

After consenting to participate, MENA respondents answered a few demographic questions (e.g., age, gender, education, and nativity) and two attention checks (see SI.5 for full instrumentation and balance checks). After this, participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions. Drawing on prior work (Hopkins et al. 2020), our control group exposed participants to an article depicting the gradual extinction of giant tortoises. In contrast, participants in the treatment condition read an article of comparable length that described continued discrimination against Latinos on the basis of their alleged *foreignness* (see SI.5).

Our manipulation was presented as a news brief about "Latinos' Decades-Long Exclusion in the U.S." The article discusses the continued prejudice and discrimination that Latino individuals experience as *perpetual foreigners*, comparable to many Middle Eastern and North African individuals. In this way, we manipulate a sense of *similarity* in discrimination experiences between groups, not similarity in identity, which aligns with our proposed mechanism and is consistent with prior work showing how highlighting intergroup similarity is sufficient to trigger a sense of commonality between diverse individuals (e.g., Cortland et al. 2017; Pérez 2021a, 2021b). Hence, our treatment article overwhelmingly centered around the Latino experience with racism, while making two passing connections to a similar experience among Middle Eastern and North African people. More specifically, in a paragraph consisting of 247 words, 6 of them refer to "Middle Eastern individuals," which is 2% of the total. In order to ensure that participants were treated, MENA participants completed a manipulation check asking them to indicate whether "The information I read highlighted how Latinos are still viewed as *not fully American*." Forty-two (42) participants failed this manipulation check, which is about 8% of our sample. We exclude these participants from our analyses, per our pre-registration.

In the wake of our manipulation check, participants completed two (2) statements designed to capture our mediating variable, solidarity with *people of color*, with one item being reverse-worded in order to mitigate possible biases (e.g., acquiescence, social desirability) and ensure wide variance in opinions (Tourangeau et al. 2000). This particular statement read "The problems of Blacks, Latinos, Asians, and other minorities are too different for them to be allies or partners." Both items were answered on a scale from 1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree. We code and scale them so that higher values reflect a stronger sense of solidarity with PoC.[4]

Following appraisal of our mediator, we administered a pair of three-item batteries gauging support for more flexible polices toward undocumented immigrants, a domain that strongly implicates Latinos (Abrajano and Hajnal 2016; Pérez 2016); as well as a battery of items gauging opinions about anti-terrorism polices, a domain that implicates MENA individuals (Lajevardi 2020; Terman 2017; Huddy et al. 2005). One of the items gauging support for more flexible policy toward unauthorized immigrants asked participants to indicate their degree of agreement with "a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants from Latin America." This wording, we believe, taps into the connection between unauthorized immigration and Latinos in the public mind (Pérez 2016). In the realm of anti-terrorism, one of the items captured support for "putting stronger restrictions on immigrant visas for individuals from Middle Eastern countries who wish to enter the U.S." All policy items were completed on a scales from 1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree (see SI.5. for full wording). Item batteries were counter-balanced across participants.

In addition to policy preferences, we also administered batteries of negative stereotypes toward Latino and MENA individuals. These items were all answered on a 7-point scale, with Latinos being rated in terms of how *unintelligent* and *untrustworthy* they are believed to be, while MENA individuals were rated in terms of how *violent* and *extreme* they are perceived to be. These stereotype items were also counter-balanced. In our analyses, all variables run along a 0 to 1 interval, thus allowing us to interpret our OLS coefficients as percentage point shifts.

## Study 2 Results

In our analysis here, the essential step is establishing the connection between our treatment and expressed solidarity between people of color, which is our mediating variable. Without this crucial step, there is no relationship between expressed *solidarity* (mediator) and our outcomes to further investigate (Zhao et al. 2010). We hypothesize that exposure to our treatment will increase expressions of solidarity with people of color. However, at least two alternative patterns are also plausible. The first is that our treatment simply fails to manifest any effect on

**Table 1.** *Foreigner* Treatment Increases Solidarity with PoC, Which Then Influences Downstream Opinions and Beliefs.

| | Solidarity w/PoC | Oppose border patrol | Support citizenship pathway | Support benefits (Undoc.) | Oppose singling out MENAs | Oppose Surveilling MENAs | Support MENA visas | Endorse MENA stereotypes | Endorse Latino stereotypes |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Solidarity w/PoC | — | 0.246** (0.070) | 0.216** (0.067) | 0.774** (0.071) | 0.438** (0.076) | 0.618** (0.072) | 0.599** (0.072) | -0.573** (0.065) | -0.196** (0.049) |
| Foreigner | 0.053* (0.021) | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| N | 424 | 421 | 420 | 420 | 420 | 415 | 417 | 404 | 404 |

*Note:* Entries are OLS coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. All variables display a 0-1 range. **$p < 0.001$, *$p < 0.05$, two-tailed.

solidarity. The second is that our treatment could, in principle, induce a backlash effect where participants strive to keep their ingroup distinct from similarly stationed outgroups (Brewer 1991). In the former case, we should observe a null a result. In the latter case, we should observe a negative treatment effect.

Table 1 displays the key result for this part of our analysis. Relative to the control, MENA adults who read about the continued marginalization of Latinos as *perpetual foreigners* reliably increased their expression of solidarity with *people of color* by 5 percentage points (0.053, $p < 0.013$): a measurable effect that is in line with those previously found among other *people of color*, such as Asian Americans and Latinos (e.g., Pérez et al. 2021). This effect is robust to inclusion of liberal ideology as a covariate, which is known to increase pro-minority opinions among (non-) White individuals (Pérez 2021a, 2021b). This helps to increase confidence in the observed pattern, while providing initial support for our reasoning about MENA solidarity with people of color.[5]

What happens in light of this increase in solidarity with PoC among MENA adults? As the remaining columns in Table 1 reveal, this heightened sense of solidarity spurs MENA adults to substantially increase their support for our suite of more flexible policies toward unauthorized immigrants. More precisely, a unit increase in expressed solidarity with *people of color* is associated with an increase in MENA opposition to a stronger border patrol presence along the U.S.-Mexico border (0.240, $p < 0.001$, two-tailed); greater support for a path toward citizenship for undocumented immigrants (0.242, $p < 0.001$, two-tailed); and increased support for allowing the children of unauthorized immigrants to receive government benefits and services (0.759, $p < 0.001$, two-tailed). We visually depict these mediated effects in Figure 2, where each panel corresponds to one of our policy outcomes. In SI.6, we provide additional evidence that each of these indirect paths (through solidarity) are distinguishable from zero.

This generosity of spirit observed among MENA adults also manifests itself in their support for policies that

implicate their own ethnic group. As Table 1 shows, a unit-increase in solidarity with PoC leads MENA adults to report substantially more support for not singling out MENA immigrants for special attention (0.429, $p < 0.001$, two-tailed); not placing MENA under special surveillance (0.637, $p < 0.001$, two-tailed), and weakening restrictions on immigrant visas for MENA nations (0.615, $p < 0.001$, two-tailed). Figure 2 depicts these mediated effects, with SI.6 showing that each indirect path (through solidarity) is reliably different from zero.

Beyond policy support, does a heightened sense of solidarity with PoC reduce MENAs' endorsement of negative stereotypes regarding *people of color*? Table 1 provides some evidence to this effect. In particular, it demonstrates that the influence of inter-racial solidarity spills over into MENA perceptions of Latinos and themselves. Table 1 shows that in light of our treatment's impact on solidarity with *PoC*, a unit increase in this bond with *people of color* is negatively associated with MENAs' belief in negative stereotypes about Latinos (as *unintelligent* and *untrustworthy*) by about 21 percentage points (−0.212, $p < 0.001$, two-tailed). This directional impact is similarly manifested for MENAs endorsement of negative stereotypes toward individuals like themselves, with solidarity reducing belief in stereotypes of MENA as violent and extreme by 56 percentage points. We again graph both of these mediated effects in Figure 2, with additional tests in SI.6. establishing that these indirect effects (through solidarity) are statistically distinguishable from zero.

## Discussion

Study 2 affirms the insights in Study 1 and extends them to establish the feasibility of one mechanism that guides MENA individuals toward greater political unity with *people of color*. In particular, Study 2 reveals that exposure to another non-White group that is similarly marginalized as *foreign* (e.g., Latinos) causes MENA adults to express more solidarity with *people of color*
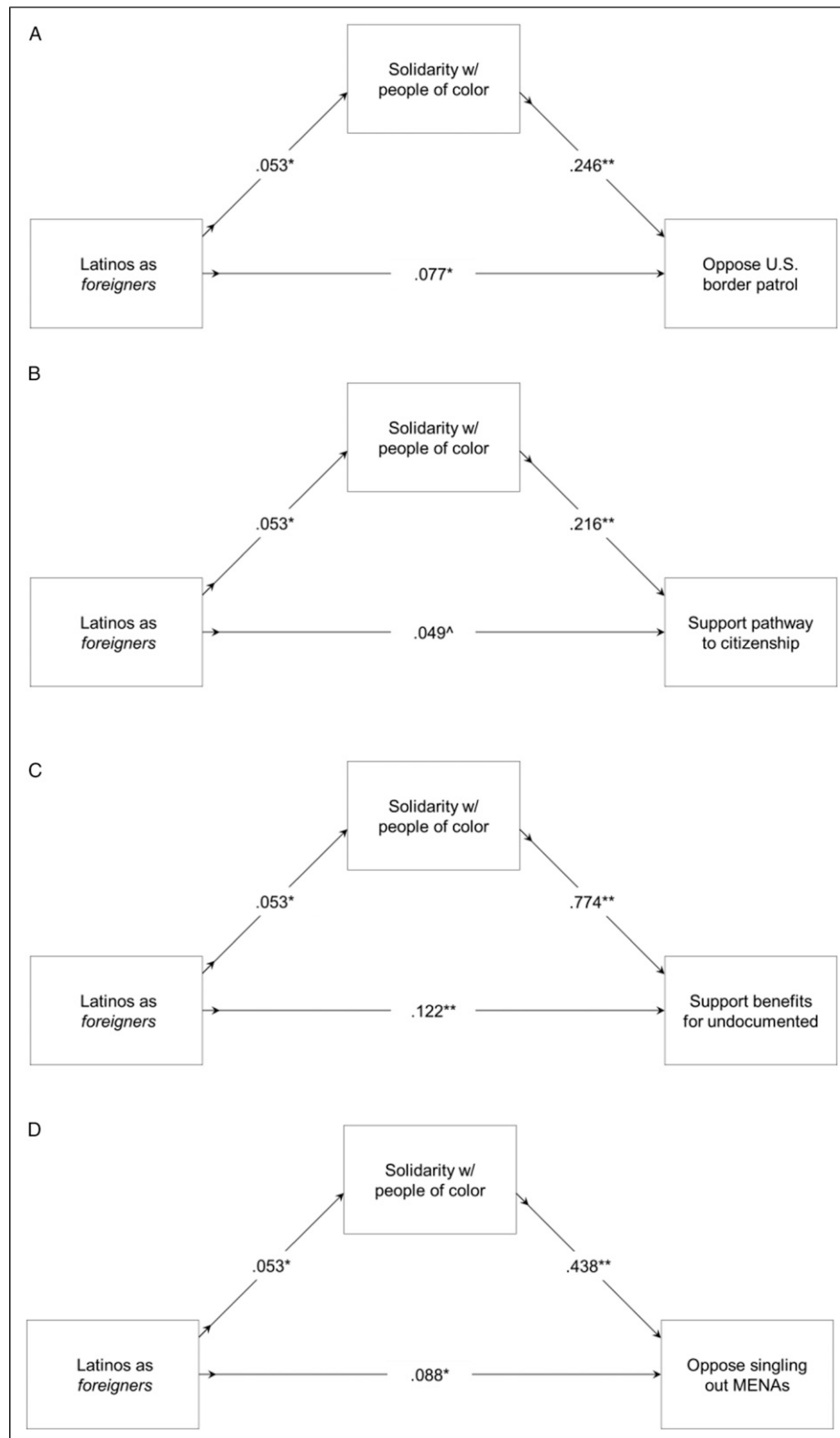
**Figure 2.** Solidarity with people of color motivates support for more liberalized policies and beliefs about Latinos and MENAs (Study 2).
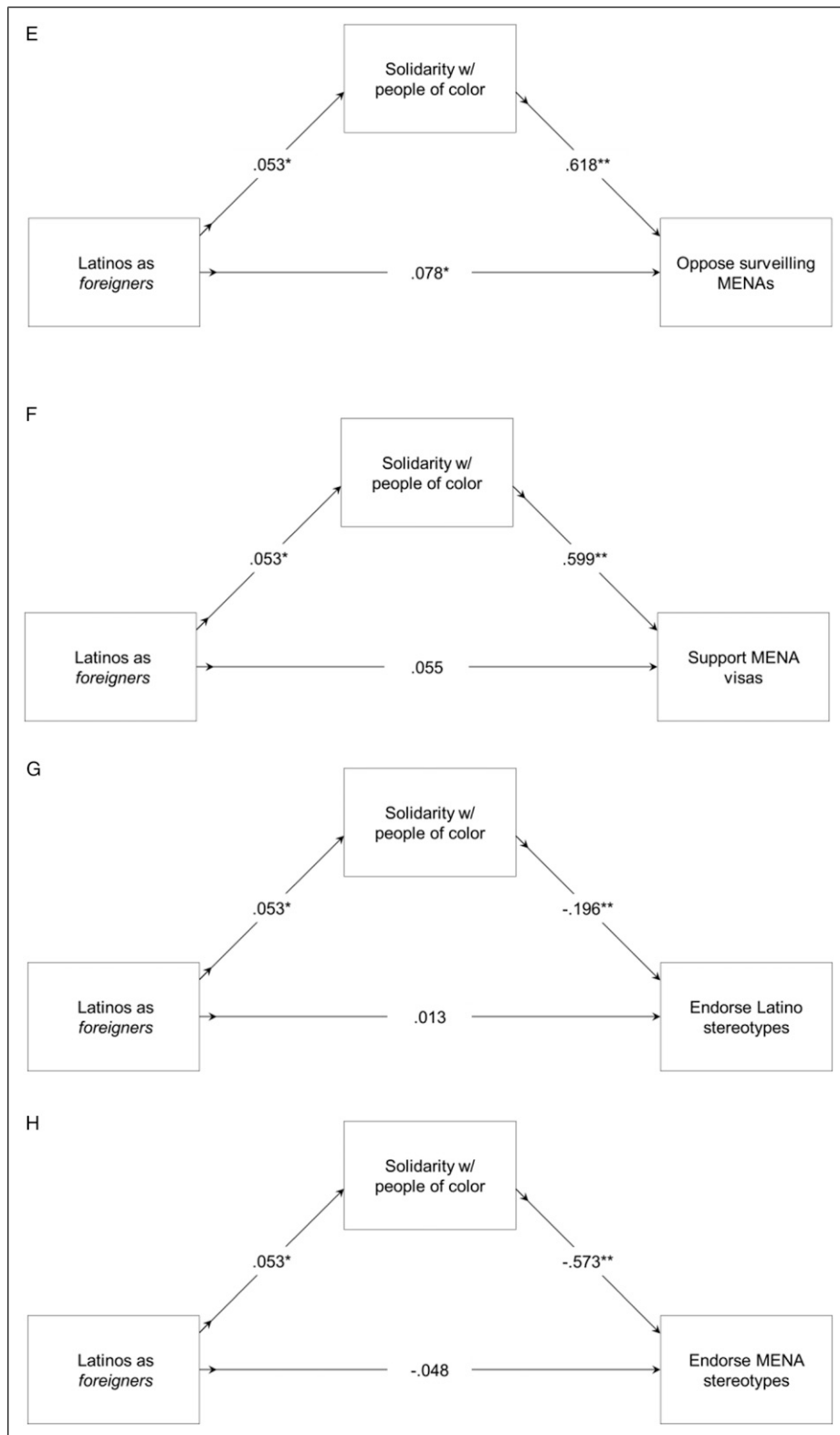*Note:* \*\**p* < 0.001, \**p* < 0.05, two-tailed.

**Figure 2.** Continued.

more generally. In turn, this increase in solidarity is associated with political opinions and beliefs that indicate greater unity with other people of color. More specifically, a heightened sense of solidarity with *people of color* spurred MENA individuals to report significantly more support for flexible policies toward unauthorized immigrants (which implicate Latinos), while also reducing their endorsement of stereotypes of Latinos as *unintelligent* and *untrustworthy*. In the next section, we combine these insights with those from Study 1 to discuss what they suggest about MENA individuals and their role in interminority politics in the U.S.

## Implications

Across two studies, we yielded evidence that illuminates the capacious reach of solidarity between people of color. Although research on inter-racial solidarity typically focuses on one (or some) of the major three minoritized groups in the U.S.—that is, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos—we find that another group that is typically omitted from these analyses—MENA individuals—can also be motivated to express greater solidarity with minoritized groups who are not their own. This provides fresh insights into the menu of options for new allies in interminority coalitions engaged in politics.

The reason that MENAs express more solidarity under some conditions can be traced to the systemic stratification of people of color on the basis of how *foreign* and *inferior* they are perceived to be. In the case of MENA individuals, the belief that they are, to paraphrase Lajevardi (2020), "outsiders in their own home," is enough to catalyze greater solidarity with people of color on the basis of this stigmatization. Perhaps most telling, at least to us, is that this stigmatization as *foreign* is sufficiently galvanizing among MENA individuals who are U.S.-born—that is, at least one generation removed from the immigrant experience itself. This underlines the burdensome weight of *foreignness* as stigma, while outlining how this particular disadvantage can be converted into a strength in greater efforts toward collective action by non-Whites.

What do these findings suggest for knowledge about intraminority politics? One major implication of our findings is that marginal "Whiteness" is not an insurmountable barrier against coalition-building. Previous literature on MENAs generally underscores how they are, in essence, "honorary Whites" (Bonilla Silva 2004). The idea here is that they are not as disadvantaged as other minoritized groups, such as African Americans and Latinos. Yet our findings reveal that a group like MENAs, which is positioned liminally between people of color and Whites, can be persuaded to join collective efforts—on the basis of solidarity—to remedy ethnoracial injustices and

discrimination. The key here is to shift these groups' frame of mind, from one of relative advantage vis-à-vis non-Whites, to one of relative *disadvantage* with respect to Whites. Doing the latter, our experiment showed, conjures up a shared subjective experience (as *foreign*) that propels a liminal group like MENAs to close ranks, politically, with people of color.

Our findings also add to our growing understanding of political coalition-building in an increasingly diverse polity (e.g., Craig et al. 2021). In elections where partisanship is a major political axis, our results suggest the psychological process we uncovered can be used to galvanize the support of voters of color. Although many people of color generally identify as Democrats (White and Laird 2020; Fraga 2020; Anoll 2020), identification with a party is not the same as mobilization on its behalf. This is especially true among Democrats, which is a widely heterogeneous party shared by (non-)Whites, and which sometimes underperforms electorally due to internecine political conflicts (Pérez et al. 2021). This suggests that heightening a sense of solidarity among people of color through perceived similarity can help mitigate these conflicts in order to better ensure that non-White Democrats feel like true stakeholders in their party's fortunes.

This anticipated electoral benefit is especially promising in non-partisan local elections (e.g., Benjamin 2017). In the absence of strong partisan cues, candidates must devise strategies that mobilize potential voters on the basis of non-partisan attributes. In major cities, where such electoral contests take place, various communities of color often comingle and compete for political representation, typically on the basis of their own unique racial or ethnic group (Kaufmann 2003). Thus, campaigning on political issues that tap into a sense of similar marginalization (e.g., police surveillance of non-White communities, underserved students of color) can help steer interminority politics away from a conflictual course and more toward a cooperative path, including one that increases the number of elected officials of color.

How broadly can the circle of solidarity be drawn? The principle behind the observed effects in this paper is one of perceived similarity in terms of discrimination experiences (e.g., Cortland et al. 2017). Yet similar to *does not* mean exactly as. Rather, it is the comparability of group experiences with discrimination that provides the psychological flexibility which enables disparate groups to become more unified for political purposes. One useful extension here, then, is to see whether this similarity principle can be used to build broader coalitions of non-Whites by drawing on groups who are not typically construed as *foreign*. For example, although African Americans are stereotyped as the least *foreign* minority in America's racial landscape (Zou and Cheryan 2017), such

stereotypes, by definition, minimize variance in this attribute. However, accumulating research finds that the very contours of the African American population have expanded to include increasing numbers of Caribbean and African immigrants (Watts Smith 2014; Greer 2013; Deaux 2006). This heterogeneity lends itself to further coalition-building between immigrant minorities that cuts *across* racial or ethnic categories (e.g., African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos), with perceived similarity in discrimination experiences as a linchpin.

Where might political scientists go next with these new insights? There are both methodological and theoretical answers to this question. We start with a methodological perspective. Our use of qualitative and quantitative approaches was spurred by a relative lack of conceptual and empirical clarity about the views that MENAs hold in relation to other people of color. Having established a sturdier beachhead on this front, a logical next step would be to re-appraise the patterns we found in larger, richer, and more heterogeneous samples of MENA individuals. This is more than just about replication. Indeed, it is about deepening the amount of empirically-based knowledge we have about a segment of the population that is often rendered invisible by omission and commission (e.g., Naber 2000; Lajevardi 2020).

In terms of theory-building, we close with three potentially fruitful avenues. The first one involves the range of outcomes in which solidarity with people of color can spur greater political engagement among a minoritized group like MENAs. We uncovered evidence that such solidarity can affect MENAs' political views and stereotypical beliefs. But does this spillover into actual *behavior*? This is not just an academic question, for collective action among people of color often demands steps that are personally risky and potentially disappointing, as recent social movements around racial injustice reveal (e.g., Zepeda-Millan 2017; Rodríguez-Muñiz 2021).

In addition, although we uncovered evidence that a sense of *foreignness* can, in fact, cause a greater sense of solidarity with people of color among MENA individuals, a pressing theoretical concern revolves around who, exactly, can trigger this sense of being stigmatized as *foreign*. Here, the role of political elites—both White and non-White—seems like an obvious choice, since they are often engaged in winning the hearts and minds of MENAs and other Americans (e.g., Benjamin 2017). With the U.S. continuing to diversify in ethnoracial terms, these theoretical questions are more than intellectual curiosities. Alas, they are becoming incredibly urgent as a *practical* matter, as politics continues to take on a more multi-racial perspective (e.g., Wilkinson 2015; Craig et al. 2021; Pérez 2021a, 2021b). We sincerely hope that other political scientists will continue obliging us in this important effort.

Finally, despite unearthing evidence of a specific pathway behind MENAs' sense of solidarity with *people of color*, it is plausible that this mediation process is, itself, moderated by other factors that are specific to the internal diversity of a group like Middle Eastern and North Africans (Hayes 2021). One candidate to consider here is religion, with the differences between Muslim and Christian MENAs as a variable that can intensify (or weaken) the link between perceived similarity in discrimination experiences and expressions of solidarity with other racial and ethnic minorities (Lajevardi 2020; Naber 2000). This is a possibility that awaits more intricate research designs than the ones we produced, but for the sake of greater theory-building in this domain, we hope that other colleagues will throw additional light on this matter.

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## Funding

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## Supplemental Material

Supplemental materials and replication materials for this article are available with the manuscript on the *Political Research Quarterly* (PRQ) website.

## Notes

1. The data to reproduce our reported findings can be accessed at *Harvard's Dataverse* by using the following link: https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/FHZBMC
2. We use the term MENA throughout this paper, which is an internally diverse category in terms of religion (e.g., Christians, Muslims), language (e.g., Arabic, Persian), and race (e.g., Black, non-Black). Although MENA is often conflated with the categories Muslim and Arab, the latter two are religious and linguistic subsets of the broader MENA category, respectively. As Naber (2000) and others (Lajevardi 2020) observe, this means MENAs are racialized as non-White in terms of their religion (e.g., Muslim) and/or their language (e.g., Arab), even though this racialization obscures, more than it clarifies, the boundaries and content of this pan-regional category. We use MENA instead of alternatives (e.g., Southwest Asian and North African, or SWANA) given its regular use in academia and some government agencies.
3. While some of this literature focuses on Muslim individuals and other work centers on Arab people, both are key

segments within the larger MENA population. Still, we stress that while there is some overlap between these categories (i.e., *Muslim, Arab*), they are not fully interchangeable with each other.

4. These items correlate positively, but modestly ($\rho = 0.13$), likely because of the reverse-worded item. Nonetheless, we scale these items based on their prior validation (cf. Leach et al. 2008) and because we expected them to correlate positively, which they do, albeit weakly (SI.2). Directionally, our predicted effects generally emerge if we only use the reverse-worded item, which displays superior variance.

5. Specifically, when liberal ideology is included as a covariate (0.124, $p < 0.001$, two-tailed), the effect of our treatment on solidarity hardly changes (0.053, $p < 0.013$, two-tailed versus 0.051, $p < 0.017$, two-tailed).

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