

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Solidarity Between People of Color: Two Blockage Experiments Suggest It Is Causal and Resistant to a Divisive Threat

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Abstract

Mounting research finds that shared discrimination boosts solidarity between people of color (PoC), with downstream increases in support for pro-outgroup policies. However, these experiments measure the proposed mediator (solidarity), rather than manipulate it, which raises reasonable doubts about its causal impact. We report two pre-registered experiments ($N = 2,692$) that reassess solidarity's causal influence by “blocking” its downstream effects. We conducted these studies with Black adults – the prototypical person of color who define this mega-group's norms and values. Both studies focus on Black-Latino relations and reveal that manipulating shared discrimination between these groups heartily boosts Black solidarity with PoC ($d \sim .40$). Critically, after solidarity's activation, manipulating differences in the bases of discrimination against Black and Latino people (i.e., slavery versus immigration) modestly reduces its downstream effect on Black support for pro-Latino policies. A pre-registered internal meta-analysis finds this “blockage” effect is modest but statistically reliable ($d \sim .10$), leading us to conclude that solidarity's mediating influence is likely causal and resistant to this divisive threat. We discuss our results' implications for inter-minority politics.

Keywords: Solidarity between people of color; Black politics; measurement-of-mediator design; blockage design

Introduction

The U.S. is a multiracial democracy, with nearly 40% of its population consisting of *people of color* (PoC) – African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos, and other non-Whites (Pérez 2021).¹ This sea change in America's demographics is steering

¹Here, “non-White” refers to all racial groups whose prototypical members are not categorized as White (cf. Waldzus and Mummendey 2004). However, because racial groups are not mutually exclusive, some people of color lay claim to being White. For example, a 2021 Pew Research Center survey finds that 58% of Latinos classify themselves as racially White, even though they are ethnically Latino. Further, some people of color sometimes embrace Whiteness as a political ideology (Pérez et al. 2024).

many social scientists toward better understanding how members of these racial and ethnic groups form coalitions to reach common political goals (Craig and Richeson 2016; Cortland et al. 2017; Sirin et al. 2021). Prior research suggests that a sense of shared discrimination between racially marginalized groups triggers a sense of solidarity with PoC, which then yields greater downstream support for policies that benefit an ingroup that is not one's own (for meta-analytic evidence, see Pérez et al. 2023). For example, when Black adults feel their ingroup is discriminated against similarly to Latinos, their sense of solidarity with PoC is heightened, leading them to express greater support for pro-Latino policies (e.g., more flexible immigration policies). This solidarity mechanism also operates among Latinos, Asian Americans, and Middle Easterners and North Africans.

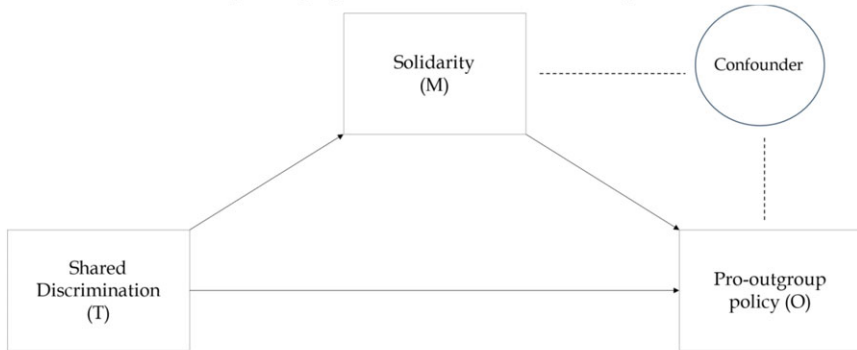
While the evidence affirming this solidarity mechanism is extensive, most of it stems from a *measurement-of-mediator* design (Baron and Kenny 1986). In this setup, researchers manipulate a putative cause (shared discrimination) but measure the proposed mediator (solidarity) and outcomes (policy support). The putative mediator is observed, not manipulated, because researchers believe it is very difficult and/or psychologically unrealistic to directly manipulate. However, this design choice raises the specter of omitted variable bias, which can undermine causal inferences about a measured mediator (Bullock and Green 2021). Analysts have bolstered claims about solidarity's mediating effects through sensitivity analyses (Imai and Yamamoto 2013), but these efforts only help to bound these effects away from zero. Thus, some researchers recommend evaluating mediated treatment effects via experimental designs, rather than through statistical adjustments and/or sensitivity analyses (Pirlott and MacKinnon 2016; Wayne 2023).

Panel A in Fig. 1 below depicts this situation, with dashed lines reflecting the vulnerable path in this framework and the correlated errors implicating a potential third unmeasured variable that might confound this relationship. We revisit this solidarity mechanism and use a *blockage* mediation design that “neutralizes” solidarity's downstream influence on policy support (Pirlott and MacKinnon 2016). The objective is to address the confounding in Panel A, Fig. 1 by manipulating a mediator's downstream influence (W), as depicted in Panel B, Fig. 1. If a *blockage* manipulation reduces solidarity's downstream influence on policy support (relative to a control), then we have more conclusive evidence about this mediator's causality.

We employ this design across two pre-registered experiments and a pre-registered internal meta-analysis of two large samples of Black adults (N~2,692). As the ingroup that is recognized by other non-Whites as the prototypical person of color, Black individuals define the norms and values of the larger mega-group, *people of color* (Chin et al. 2023), and embrace this category because of their racially liberal ideology (Carter, Wong, and Guerrero 2021). This makes our research setting a “most likely” case (Gerring 2001), allowing us to observe solidarity's causal effects in a core population of color as it reacts to another racially marginalized population with whom it often encounters tense political relations (i.e., Latinos) (Wilkinson 2015; Benjamin 2017).²

²Although individuals can be racially Black but ethnically Latino, the average member (i.e., prototype) in each of these two categories is distinct. For instance, the prototypical “Black” person traces their roots to the sub-Saharan continent and possesses several phenotypic characteristics that correlate with these origins.

(a) Mediated Relationship is Highly Vulnerable to Confounding



(b) Mediated Relationship is Less Vulnerable to Confounding

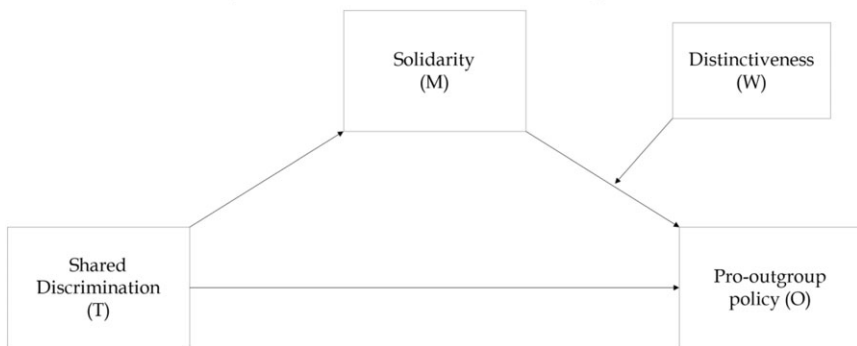


Figure 1. Solidarity Mediates the Impact of Shared Discrimination on Support for Pro-Outgroup Policy. (a) Mediated Relationship is Highly Vulnerable to Confounding. (b) Mediated Relationship is Less Vulnerable to Confounding.

We report three results. First, consistent with prior work, we again find that a heightened sense of shared discrimination causes Black adults to express greater solidarity with people of color ($d \sim .40$) (Pérez et al. 2023). This elevated solidarity level is strongly associated with greater downstream support for pro-Latino policies. Second, our *blockage* manipulation consistently weakens solidarity's downstream relationship with support for pro-outgroup policies. Specifically, calling attention to the unique roots of discrimination against Black and Latino individuals (i.e., slavery versus immigration) modestly reduces solidarity's downstream impact on support for pro-outgroup policies, but this effect is imprecisely estimated in each study. Third, an internal meta-analysis of both experiments finds this *blockage* effect is substantively small but statistically reliable ($d \sim .10$) across both studies, suggesting that solidarity's effects are likely causal and resistant to this divisive threat. We discuss our results' implications for U.S. inter-minority politics.

In contrast, the prototypical "Latino" person traces their roots to Mexico and possesses phenotypic characteristics that correlate with these origins. Thus, despite some overlap between Black and Latino people, the perceived differences between them facilitate intergroup comparisons that can produce intergroup conflict (Tajfel 1981).

Revisiting solidarity's downstream effect through a blockage mediation design

Prior work reveals a robust downstream association between heightened solidarity with PoC and increased support for pro-outgroup policies ($d = 0.79$; Pérez et al. 2023). In a *measurement-of-mediator* design, this downstream path is vulnerable to confounders. One way to minimize this threat by design is to knock off course solidarity's impact on pro-outgroup policies (Pirlott and MacKinnon 2016). If an intervention increases (decreases) its relationship with pro-outgroup policies, we gain more confidence that solidarity's downstream effects are causal, rather than merely correlational.

This is the essence of a *blockage* mediation design, depicted in Panel B in Fig. 1. There, X = shared discrimination, M = our mediator, solidarity between PoC, and Y = support for pro-outgroup policies. To evaluate whether M 's impact on Y is causal, our *blockage* design introduces W = an additional manipulation intended to “block” solidarity's downstream influence. Insofar as W moderates M 's downstream influence on Y , we have more diagnostic evidence that solidarity between PoC is a causal mediator (Pirlott and MacKinnon 2016). Our pre-registered hypothesis (https://aspredicted.org/TKM_D31) is that the interaction between M and W will be negatively signed, suggesting a downstream reduction in solidarity (H1).

We innovated the typical design used to measure solidarity's downstream effects (Pérez et al. 2023) by adding a new manipulation in the path connecting this mediator with support for pro-outgroup policy. Specifically, after we measure solidarity between PoC, we randomly assign Black participants to read about how it is very difficult to compare the discriminatory experiences of Black people with those of Latinos, since each community faces discrimination for unique reasons (i.e., slavery versus immigration)(cf. Zou and Cheryan 2017). We will describe this manipulation in more detail in the next section of the paper, but here we note that this treatment is known to induce *distinctiveness* threat (Pérez 2021) – the sense that the unique attributes and experiences that comprise one's ingroup are in jeopardy (Brewer 1991; Branscombe et al. 1999). This threat operates by undermining the perceived *similarity* between marginalized ingroups (e.g., Black and Latino people), which shared discrimination induces (Cortland et al. 2017). In the context of *people of color*, this *distinctiveness* threat motivates individuals to focus on their own specific ingroup (e.g., Black people) and away from the larger shared group, *people of color* (Craig et al. 2018). This implies that inducing *distinctiveness* threat in the downstream path should reduce solidarity's influence on support for pro-outgroup policies (H1), our primary hypothesis.

Procedures, methods, and estimation

We test (H1) across two pre-registered experiments with Black participants in the context of Black-Latino relations. Both studies shared an identical design but were run on different survey platforms: 1) Dynata (Study 1; $N = 1,719$; November, 2023); and 2) Cloud Research (Study 2; $N = 973$; February 2024). Section 1 in the

supplementary material (SM.1) reports demographics and balance tests for these samples. SM.2 reports our pre-registrations.³

In each experiment, Black adults completed a brief pretreatment schedule of items measuring demographic (e.g., age, education) and political attributes (e.g., ideology) to help characterize our samples. We then informed Black participants that they would be reading some developing news stories, which they would be asked to give their feedback on. At this point, participants were assigned to a control or treatment condition (i.e., manipulation 1). In the control, participants read an article, attributed to the Associated Press (AP), about the declining number of giant tortoises throughout the globe. In the treatment condition, participants read an AP article of comparable length about continued discrimination against Latinos in the United States and how this discrimination is like the one encountered by Black people in the United States. Specifically, the treatment article was titled, ***“Despite Their Presence in the United States for Decades, Many Latinos are Still Treated as Second Class Citizens, As Evidenced by Hate Crimes Data,”*** with the article noting trends in hate crimes toward Latinos. Thus, the structure of this manipulation is one where the title conveys the thrust of our treatment, while the body of the article provides some brief reasoning for that claim. Drawing on a *similarity principle* (Cortland et al. 2017; Pérez et al. 2023), the article concludes by briefly noting how these discriminatory trends toward Latinos are like those of Black people, “many of whom experience a similar sense of exclusion.” The full wording and visuals used in the manipulation are reported in SM.3.⁴

After reading their assigned article, participants completed a manipulation check, which consisted of a true/false item about the thrust of the article they read (Pérez et al. 2023). Passage rates for the shared discrimination manipulation check were 91.27% (Study 1) and 96.12% (Study 2). Immediately following this check, participants then completed three validated items measuring solidarity between people of color, which is the proposed mediator of shared discrimination in this framework (Pérez et al. 2024). Using a scale from 1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree, participants completed each item below:

- 1) I feel solidarity with people of color, which includes Asian, Black, and Latino people.
- 2) The problems of Black, Latino, Asian, and other people of color are similar enough for them to be allies.
- 3) What happens to people of color in this country has something to do with what happens in my life as a Black person.

³We do not assume that Blacks and Latinos are mutually exclusive groups, since there are Afro-Latinos whose lived experiences are distinct from the prototypical Black or Latino person (Hernández 2022; López and Hogan 2021). This implies, for example, that immigration might not be the main way that Afro-Latinos experience discrimination (Zou and Cheryan 2017) or that this issue may not be a source of tension for some Afro-Latinos. The results we report show that despite these allowances, our experiments still operated as theorized, leaving open the question about *when* the presence of Afro-Latinos conditions responses to Black-Latino relations.

⁴The title of each manipulation in both studies is designed to further ensure that participants are in fact treated. The working assumption here is that participants will read the title, which compactly delivers the thrust of each article.

We scale replies to these items (Study 1, $\alpha = 0.728$; Study 2, $\alpha = 0.781$) and transform each one to a 0–1 interval (Study 1, $M = 0.613$, $SD = 0.242$; Study 2, $M = 0.648$, 0.248). This lets us interpret all coefficients as percentage-point shifts.

After assessing solidarity with PoC, Black participants were then randomly assigned to our *blockage* manipulation before completing our outcome variables (see SM.4). Our second manipulation also consisted of a short article characterized as a developing story attributed to the Associated Press, with the title conveying the gist of our treatment and the rest of the brief providing additional reasoning behind the claim in the title.⁵ This article is an adaptation of a treatment that effectively manipulates *distinctiveness threat* among Black, Asian, and Latino adults (Pérez 2021). Specifically, Black participants were randomly assigned to a control group (no information) or a treatment condition where they read a new article titled “***With a Unique History and Set of Political Goals, Black Alliances with Latinos Don’t Always Make Strategic Sense.***” As such, this article induces *distinctiveness threat* by explaining that:

“... it is very hard to compare African Americans’ experience with slavery and its aftermath to the social and political exclusion faced by Latinos. Indeed, the United States continues to marginalize many Blacks as second-class citizens, even though African Americans have been in this country since its founding. Other people of color are not treated in this peculiar way.”

After this *blockage* manipulation, participants responded to a second true/false manipulation check that captured the gist of the article they read. 86.73% (Study 1) and 95.89% (Study 2) of participants passed the check. Then, Black participants reported their support for three pro-Latino policy proposals, each answered from 1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree, which we scale (Study 1, $\alpha = 0.651$; Study 2, $\alpha = 0.632$) and transform to a 0–1 range interval (Study 1, $M = 0.681$, $SD = 0.216$; Study 2, $M = 0.718$, $SD = 0.214$).

- 1) Introducing harsher penalties for hate crimes committed against Latinos.
- 2) Renewing temporary relief from deportation for undocumented Latino immigrants brought to the United States as children.
- 3) Supporting the use of affirmative action for Latinos in jobs and education.⁶

Using these data, we estimate the model in panel B in Fig. 1 in a structural equation modeling (SEM) framework, where we simultaneously estimate the effect of the first treatment (shared discrimination) on expressions of Black solidarity with people of color and the downstream influence of solidarity on Black support for pro-Latino policies moderated by the second manipulation (*distinctiveness threat*)

⁵This article was spaced apart by a manipulation check and several solidarity survey measures, which helps to minimize any expected connection between both articles among participants.

⁶We also fielded a fourth reverse-worded item on increasing border patrol agents on the U.S.-Mexico border. It was weakly correlated with some of our other policy items, so we deviate from our pre-registration and exclude it from our *pro-Latino policy* scale. SM.5 shows our conclusions are unchanged if we include this fourth item in our *pro-Latino policy* scale.

(Hayes 2022). Our design resembles a factorial experiment with varied levels of two manipulated variables (Shadish et al. 2002). However, unlike a standard 2 x 2, our *blockage* experiment has two outcomes of interest (i.e., *PoC solidarity*, *policy support*), with one of those outcomes sandwiched between our pair of manipulations. Thus, one can consider our *blockage* experiment an adaptation of a 2 x 2 with the express goal of altering our mediator's downstream influence. As such, the quantity of interest in both experiments is the interaction term between solidarity and our *distinctiveness* manipulation, which we expect to be negatively signed, indicating a reduction in solidarity's downstream effect on support for pro-Latino policy. Following prior work (Pérez et al. 2023), all estimates include liberal ideology as a covariate to better estimate the impacts of solidarity, which is positively associated with liberal ideology and influences PoC's political attitudes in similar directions (Kam and Trussler 2017). We further evaluate our results through a pre-registered internal meta-analysis, which evaluates any systematic trend(s) across both conceptually similar experiments (Goh et al. 2016). We describe this analysis after discussing Study 1–2's results.

Results

Table 1 reveals that exposure to shared discrimination with Latinos heightens Black adults' expression of solidarity with PoC. In Study 1, this effect increases solidarity by nearly 10 percentage points (.099, SE = 0.001, $p < 0.01$). Study 2 produces a similar effect (.088, SE = 0.015, $p < 0.001$). Transforming these coefficients to Cohen's d values, the average effect across both studies is $d \sim 0.385$, which is considered a medium-sized effect (d values reflect standardized mean differences). These patterns replicate prior work on shared discrimination's effects on expressions of solidarity with PoC (Pérez et al. 2023).

Next, we examine the downstream association between a heightened sense of solidarity with PoC and Black support for pro-Latino policies. Consistent with prior work, heightened solidarity is significantly and strongly associated with support for pro-Latino policies in Study 1 (.424, SE = 0.027, $p < 0.001$) and Study 2 (.355, SE = 0.034, $p < 0.001$). Converting these associations to Cohen's d values, the average relationship between solidarity and our outcome is strong across studies ($d \sim .850$), consistent with prior published studies (Pérez et al. 2023).

Finally, we evaluate the effectiveness of our *blockage* manipulation in reducing the downstream association between solidarity and support for pro-outgroup policies. The relevant coefficients are shaded in grey in Table 1. As hypothesized, the interaction between solidarity and distinctiveness threat is consistently negative but falls short of statistical significance. For example, in Study 1, our blockage manipulation appears to reduce solidarity's downstream relationship with pro-Latino policy about four percentage points (−0.041, SE = 0.037, $p < 0.271$), although this trend is imprecisely estimated. Similarly, Study 2's blockage manipulation decreases solidarity's relationship with pro-Latino policy by about 3 percentage points, but again, this trend is imprecisely estimated (−0.028, SE = 0.047, $p < 0.550$). These patterns suggest our downstream manipulation slightly knocks solidarity's influence off its course, but these effects are statistically

Table 1. Shared discrimination boosts Black solidarity with PoC, while distinctiveness threat reduces its downstream influence on support for pro-Latino policies

	Solidarity (Mediator)		Pro-Latino Policy (Outcome)	
	Study 1	Study 2	Study 1	Study 2
Shared discrimination	0.099 [*] (0.011)	0.088 [*] (0.015)	0.018 [*] (0.009)	−0.011 (0.012)
Liberal ideology	0.033 [*] (0.004)	0.031 [*] (0.005)	0.022 [*] (0.003)	0.040 [*] (0.004)
Solidarity (Mediator)	—	—	0.424 [*] (0.027)	0.355 [*] (0.034)
Distinctiveness threat (Blockage)	—	—	−0.000 (0.024)	0.013 (0.033)
Solidarity x Distinctiveness	—	—	−0.041 (0.037)	−0.028 (0.047)
N	1,719	973	1,719	973

Note: Entries are coefficients from a structural equation model, with standard errors in parentheses. Coefficients reflect percentage-point shifts. Shaded entries represent the effects of our blockage manipulation on solidarity’s downstream influence. Following prior work (Pérez et al. 2023), liberal ideology is included as a covariate to optimize the robustness of solidarity, which is positively associated with liberal ideology and influences PoC’s political attitudes in similar directions (Kam and Trussler 2017).

^{*} $p < .05$, two-tailed.

insignificant at the 5% level in each sample. Despite this, the lower bound of the confidence interval for each *blockage* effect suggests we cannot rule out substantively larger effects than those uncovered here (Study 1: -0.041 , 95% CI: $[-0.113, .032]$; Study 2: 95% CI: $[-0.121, 0.064]$). This pattern is inconsistent with a negligible result (Rainey 2014) and steers us toward further investigating this modest *blockage* effect by capitalizing on the enhanced statistical power of combining both of our experiments.⁷

To this end, we draw on Goh et al.’s (2016) template and use a fixed-effects regression that re-evaluates whether the negative interaction between solidarity and *distinctiveness* threat is reliable in our pooled sample. Given our directional prediction, we pre-registered a one-tailed test for this. Our analysis uncovers a negative interaction term between solidarity and *distinctiveness* threat that is modest in size and statistically significant ($d = -0.070$, $p < 0.029$ one-tailed). More specifically, our meta-analyzed blockage manipulation significantly decreases solidarity’s downstream relationship with pro-Latino policy by nearly one-tenth of a standard deviation. This design-based reduction in our mediator’s downstream effect aligns with an interpretation of solidarity as causal, rather than simply correlational (Pirlott and MacKinnon 2016).

⁷In SM.6 we deviate from our pre-registration and report average direct effects (ADEs) from each treatment to our outcomes.

Implications

In comparison to prior work (Cortland et al. 2017; Pérez et al. 2023), our results further bolster the view of solidarity between people of color as one causal mechanism behind coalition-building efforts between PoC. In this way, our results strengthen the available evidence in favor of solidarity as a mechanism whose effects can be increased and decreased systematically. This does not mean, however, that solidarity is the *only* mechanism connecting shared discrimination to support for pro-outgroup policies: a proposition that requires additional and careful research.

Our findings also suggest that, insofar as solidarity is important to understanding inter-minority politics in the U.S., solidarity's influence is not invulnerable to divisive threats. Although shared discrimination unifies people of color under a banner of heightened solidarity, inter-minority politics is characterized by a dense and cross-cutting information environment where messages to unify these motley groups are often countered by messages to drive a wedge in PoC coalitions (Vaca 2004; Brilliant 2014, Zou and Cheryan 2017).^{8,9} Thus, our findings relay the point that solidarity's downstream effects depend, in a significant way, on the communication environments that people of color encounter. The experimental design we used here provides a flexible template to theorize and evaluate additional threats to the unity that solidarity produces between PoC, thereby providing additional evidence about its causal nature.

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Data availability. The data, code, and any additional materials required to replicate all analyses in this article are available at the *Journal of Experimental Political Science* Dataverse within the Harvard Dataverse Network at <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/UWJYCB>.

Competing interests. We have no conflicts of interest to report for this research.

Ethics statement. These studies were reviewed by the Institutional Review Board at the University of California, Los Angeles (protocol number: 23-001615). This study adheres to APSA's Principles and Guidance for Human Subjects Research.

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⁸Our study focuses on Black participants. In cases involving other non-White groups, the interpretation of Whiteness may be more complex and nuanced than assumed in this manuscript. For example, many Latinos may consider themselves close to Whiteness and adhere to this notion as an ideology (Pérez et al. 2024).

⁹Our study does not examine gender differences among Black participants due to sample size restrictions, which would complicate any further interactive analyses. Nonetheless, it would be valuable to investigate how gender differences shape Black respondents' views of other PoC in the presence of distinct threats to one's ingroup.

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